

**CUTTING SHAKESPEARE**

PROMPTBOOK PRACTICE AT THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY,

1961 – 2021

by

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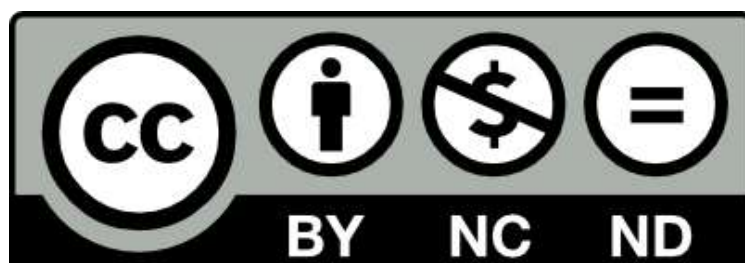
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## Abstract

For decades, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) has kept promptbooks from past productions, in particular Shakespearean productions, housed in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT)'s archives. The accretion of stage, sound and light queues, casting documents, rehearsal notes and so on in a promptbook renders it a fascinating artefact by which the ephemeral (live theatre) is rendered permanent in print. It is also notable for capturing the process and the product of how the production has cut Shakespeare. Directors at the RSC, particularly under the artistic directorship of Gregory Doran (2012-2022), have often turned to these promptbooks to understand how previous directors cut the play for performance, as part of preparing their own cut for productions on the stage. Scholarship has, by-and-large, overlooked the relationship between cutting and shifting approaches to Shakespeare's works. This thesis looks to use these promptbooks as a means of understanding how the process of cutting Shakespeare has evolved over time, specifically during the first sixty years (1961-2021) of the RSC's history.

Chapter One of the thesis weighs up two of Shakespeare's "tragic texts", *Hamlet* and *King Lear* – the two most towering tragedies, which also happen to survive in multiple variant texts – and specifically how directors have approached (or ignored) the variant texts in preparing their cuts, and what that reveals about the relationship between textual and theatrical editing. Chapter Two moves on to three of Shakespeare's comedies – *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It* and *Measure for Measure* – each of which is often perceived now as complicated by various outdated modes, be they of language, gender expectations, or humour. In Chapter Three, I consider theatrical abridgement in the three *Henry VI* plays, compared with how directors approach *King*

*John* (as an infrequently performed, stand-alone history play). I will then elucidate how modern theatrical intervention in the history plays is part of a wider tradition of alterations made in the name of historical fiction, in which Shakespeare himself was taking part. Finally, in Chapter Four, I look to the fringes of Shakespearean canon and stage history, to three barely performed and co-authored plays: *Pericles*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Marginalised from the canon, from the stage in general, and often from the RSC's main Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST) stage to their smaller Swan Theatre stage, the approach to these plays reveals much about how directors approach both Shakespeare and not-Shakespeare. Bookending these four chapters are an Introduction, which explores the intertwined histories of promptbooks and cutting and lays out the key strands of the thesis, and a Conclusion, which ties together these strands to establish a rough "Grand Unified Theory of Cutting Shakespeare", while also considering whether any kind of discrete cutting practice can be identified at the RSC.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Promptbook: Preparation, Progression, Production	4
The Thesis: Teleology, Methodology, Terminology	22
Not The Thesis: Omissions, Alterations, Deletions	30
 1 – Tragic Texts: Cutting Textual Variants in <i>Hamlet</i> and <i>King Lear</i>	 33
Side by Side (by Side): The Three Texts of <i>Hamlet</i>	39
Double Vision: Two <i>King Lear</i> s	63
Foolish Texts & Words (Words Words)	91
 2 – Complicated Comedies: Balancing Comicality with Complicity in <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> , <i>As You Like It</i> and <i>Measure for Measure</i>	 97
Language Over Time	107
Structural Tensions	123
Happy Ending / Prioritise Punchlines	155



3 – Hefty Histories: Historical Fact and the Art of Abridgement in 1-3 <i>Henry VI</i> and <i>King John</i>	159
A Histories History (in brief)	166
<i>Henry VI</i> : The Trilogy in the Tetralogy	171
Standing Alone: Katie Mitchell’s <i>Battle for the Throne</i> (1994)	182
Exercises in Abridgement (Introducing <i>Edward IV</i> )	188
<i>King John</i> : Solitary King or Joker in the Deck	202
4 – >/< Shakespeare: Understanding Co-Authorship and Obscurity in <i>Pericles</i> , <i>Timon of Athens</i> and <i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>	218
‘Impossible’ <i>Pericles</i>	221
At the ‘Freak Show’ with <i>Timon of Athens</i>	250
<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> : ‘Almost-But-Not-Quite’	265
‘All Bets Are Off’	279
Conclusion	283
‘Now to my word’: A Grand Unified Theory of Cutting Shakespeare	285
‘A king of infinite space’: Divided Kingdoms and Artistic Dictatorships?	300
‘To hear the rest untold’: Future/Cut	305
Appendix: <i>Pericles</i> , <i>Timon</i> and <i>Kinsmen</i> Cuts by Scene by Co-Author	311
Bibliography	317

# Introduction

In a basement in Stratford-upon-Avon, less than half a mile from the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), exists a vital collection of ephemera: the RSC's promptbook collection, housed in the archives of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT). These promptbooks, records of the individual texts prepared for each theatrical production, are uniquely fleeting, prepared as the production progresses, used by stage managers to run the show each night, and then invariably boxed away, preserved because the SBT and the RSC evidently see some value in their existence. These promptbooks will be unearthed from time to time, often by researchers who are trying to understand previous productions: perhaps to understand production elements through technical cues, or else to get an understanding of a director's style and vision, or even the practice of stage management. But these promptbooks are also immediately useful for their reflections of how Shakespeare's playtexts have been treated in performance. They illuminate which words and lines are spoken (and, in absentia, unspoken); they are a product and reflection of what Shakespeare's text meant to its director, cast, crew, and ultimately the audiences that received it. They are the summation of a director's overall cut and their individual cuts. This thesis hopes to understand the RSC's "promptbook practice" as it has developed over a period of time, from its founding in 1961 to 2021, and what the process of cutting Shakespeare might reveal in both academic and theatrical terms.

## The Promptbook: Preparation, Progression, Production

In diary entries dating from 1965, Susan Sontag was writing about film. On the cutting aspect of filmmaking, she writes:

“The ellipsis”  
in time  
in space                      this is what cutting is.<sup>1</sup>

Here Sontag is unpacking the artistry of film, and finds in cutting an ellipsis (...), a gap in duration (time) and narrative (space) which is visibly marked, as an ellipsis might be used in writing to elide an irrelevant passage, to signal what is *not* there. The same could be said of theatre, the historical antecedent to film: what is cut for the stage is a mark of what must be lost to time and space, duration and narrative.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the year after these diary entries, Sontag would first publish her essay ‘Theatre and Film’ in *The Tulane Drama Review*, which opens with her musing: “Does there exist an unbridgeable gap, even opposition, between the two arts? Is there something genuinely “theatrical”, different in kind from what is genuinely “cinematic”?”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in an episode of *The Simpsons*, Bart creates a bloated and maligned movie adaptation of a comic book. Faced with financial and critical ruin, he heeds Lisa’s advice, which is that he should cut his work into a short film, the medium through which, she reminds him, several successful film directors cut their teeth. Easily convinced, he grabs a roll of film and a knife, shouting gleefully: “Let’s start cutting!”<sup>4</sup> In its shortened (cut) iteration, the film goes

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *As Consciousness is Harnessed to Flesh: Diaries 1964-1980*, ed. by David Rieff (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 92-3.

<sup>2</sup> Though these are not perfectly analogous, the parallels are helpful for understanding the history of theatrical cutting from the abbreviation of old theatrical scripts to present.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘Theatre and Film’, in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 99-122 (p. 99).

<sup>4</sup> *The Simpsons*, Season 22 Episode 14: ‘Angry Dad: The Movie’ (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2011).

on to be a huge success. Between Sontag and *The Simpsons* is the essence of cutting: a practice to elide, and a practice to create new forms from what is preserved, uncut. Arguably in both forms the goal is seamless: a cut where the eye (or ear) does not snag unduly on any ellipsis. In a way, this is one answer to Sontag's question about the "unbridgeable gap": both forms depend on the cut itself as well as its smoothness and subtlety.<sup>5</sup>

Filmmakers purposely shoot too much footage, and so cutting has always been a necessity of the form. As for theatre, specifically Shakespearean theatre, Andrew James Hartley's vital work, *The Shakespearean Dramaturg: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, is one of the first to lay down clearly and convincingly the necessity of the cutting process, as well as an indication of what should go into it. Hartley recaps "some of the reasons why the dramaturg *must* edit Shakespeare for performance", reasons which underpin the basic undercurrents of this thesis:

First, many of the plays are simply too long for conventional production today (and probably were too long as printed for the Renaissance stage too) and thus require trimming to bring the show in under two and a half hours [...] Second, the plays are the products of their period and are thus littered with archaism and contain, even where the actual diction is familiar, a poetic density that can prove baffling to an audience that no longer hears the language as the playwright's contemporaries did. The plays are shot through with topical references to incidents, places, bodies of thought or belief that, though still potentially quite clear in their wording, remain opaque or lacking in significant nuance for the modern audience, which does not grasp the original association. Finally, strict adherence to the text limits the range of interpretive possibilities in ways at odds with both what we know of how those texts came into being and were originally used, and with the transformatively and constructively creative energies of theatre.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The obvious exception to this being where a jarring cut is used intentionally, drawing attention to itself.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew James Hartley, *The Shakespearean Dramaturg: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 89.

Length, archaic languages and references, and unnecessary dramatic restriction: these are reasons that the text should be cut, and are starting places for the cut. Further, they are all aspects that would have applied to their original performers: if the production was running too long, or if references became no longer topical, or if something was restricting the theatrical power of the play, cuts could and would be made. Though Hartley's argument relates specifically to the role of the dramaturg (a role that has historically not been implemented in Shakespearean productions at the RSC), the points stand even in the absence of a dramaturg: the obligation falls onto whoever else is preparing the cut, in all likelihood the director.

The promptbook is a record of the cut, and has been around for as long as modern English theatre has – which means that, regardless of its evolution or presentation or reception, so has the cutting process. The modern promptbook can be traced back to historical playhouse manuscripts which were used, in the theatres of Shakespeare's times, to run the show. According to John Jowett, these manuscripts “would typically be a fair copy prepared by the author or a scribe that had been annotated for use in the theatre”.<sup>7</sup> Jowett notes that “the same manuscript was used from one production to the next. For several revivals minor alterations were made by way of annotation.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, for a long time, following the popularising of the term promptbook by W.W. Greg in 1942 (“the two most important sources of the extant texts are probably the author's foul papers and theatrical prompt-books”), these manuscripts were popularly known as promptbooks.<sup>9</sup> As Jowett explains, “it has been criticized as a

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<sup>7</sup> John Jowett, *Shakespeare and Text: Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> Jowett 2019, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> W.W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 156.

misleading and anachronistic word”.<sup>10</sup> Paul Werstine further elucidates this problem of “the existing fashion of using “promptbook” as a transhistorical term for theatrical MSS of plays, even though the term would not come into existence until late in the eighteenth century”.<sup>11</sup> As he notes, the anachronism “is easily demonstrated. The earliest use of “promptbook” appears to date from 1772”.<sup>12</sup> Terminology aside, Greg observes that these manuscripts / historical promptbooks do “contain many passages deleted or at least marked for omission, and less frequently other passages substituted or inserted”, and that “there is as a rule no evidence that these alterations were not made in the course of preparing the play for the original production”.<sup>13</sup> Whether for the original production or subsequent ones, historical documents suggest not only the basis of the modern promptbook but of the cutting process in general.

The transmission process from written text to performed text has always been characterised by interference and intervention. In Shakespeare’s time, aside from the annotation mentioned above, the written text was also mediated by the disseminating of parts to the actors, as well as state censorship. And, as David Scott Kastan notes:

Even Shakespeare, a sharer in the company for which he wrote during most of his career, would have had his plays altered as they remained in the repertory – cut, revised, modified for specific playing locations and occasions – alterations that may or may not have originated with him or have even received his approval. Certainly as the plays stayed in the repertory after his retirement from the company around 1612 and death in 1616, hands other than his own determined what was played.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jowett 2019, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Werstine, *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Werstine 2013, p. 141n.

<sup>13</sup> Greg 1942, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 14-15.

Alteration is stitched into the process. Further intervention happens almost immediately, and very perceptibly, with the Restoration. As Bruce R. Smith writes, “Controversy over cuts flares today but, strictly speaking, “cuts” were never made to Shakespeare’s plays in his own time – or for many years afterward. [...] “omissions” became “cuts” only in the 1670s, more than two generations after Shakespeare’s death”.<sup>15</sup> Putting aside Smith’s devotion to etymological accuracy, a particular penchant for playing with Shakespeare’s texts in the form of “excisions” or “cuts” has survived, passed down from the Restoration to us. And perhaps this is not surprising: as Michael Dobson notes, “so many of the conceptions of Shakespeare we inherit date not from the Renaissance but from the Enlightenment”, from “the performance of his female roles by women instead of men” to “the reproductions of his works in scholarly editions, with critical apparatus”, all the way to Shakespeare’s presence on the curriculum, in monuments, and at Stratford-upon-Avon, “a site of secular pilgrimage”.<sup>16</sup> Just as we continue to expand casting from what it was in original practices, and just as we continue reproducing, ad nauseum, scholarly editions to re-present Shakespeare’s work, so too do we continue that other inherited practice of cutting.

Between the Restoration and now, other interventions range from prominent figures (e.g. David Garrick) adapting Shakespeare’s written texts to suit shifts in contemporary sensibilities, to the now centuries-long tradition of textual editorship,

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<sup>15</sup> Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare / Cut: Rethinking Cutwork in an Age of Distraction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 3. (The significance of Stratford-upon-Avon to Shakespeare’s cult status comes to bear on this thesis: is it the role of the RSC, situated in the spiritual and literal home of Shakespeare, to *preserve* him, rather than merely to evoke him? Can we cut even a single line from his plays if we wish to preserve him properly?)

from the printing and eventual editing of the First Folio to modern single-play editions from a variety of publishers and editors. The plays move from Shakespeare's stages through to Shakespeare's printers, into the hands of our editors, and then finally back to the stage. Holger Schott Syme writes that, in turning "printed volumes (back) into promptbooks, the theatre created its own palimpsestic textual objects", closing the loop and returning to the past.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, J. Gavin Paul asserts that "every printed playtext bears the markings of its own unique performance history", and the promptbook reflects this ongoing conversation.<sup>18</sup> Many would argue that this constant flux, the lack of textual fixity coupled with the amassing performance history, is part of the formula behind cementing Shakespeare's legacy. "Shakespeare was thriving in the theater," writes David Scott Kastan, "but only by having his texts reshaped according to aesthetic standards largely irrelevant and inhospitable to the originals. The alterations were made with no commitment to the intentions of Shakespeare's originals and with little, if any, embarrassment about their violation."<sup>19</sup> Kastan clarifies: "Shakespeare survived precisely by being accessible and pliant in the hands of his lovers"; his texts "were plays to be performed and had always yielded to the exigencies of theatrical necessity", and, when considered "as theatrical scripts, Shakespeare's texts received the precise treatment they requested. They were modified – as indeed they always had been – to play successfully on the stages of the time".<sup>20</sup> Perhaps we are duty-bound to tinker and tamper with Shakespeare's plays: perhaps this truly honours the spirit of his work.

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<sup>17</sup> Holger Schott Syme, 'Book / theatre', in *Shakespeare / Text: Contemporary Readings in Textual Studies, Editing and Performance*, ed. by Claire M.L. Bourne (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 223-244 (p. 225).

<sup>18</sup> J. Gavin Paul, *Shakespeare and the Imprints of Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.3.

<sup>19</sup> Kastan, 2001, pp. 85-6.

<sup>20</sup> Kastan, 2001, p. 88.



The texts have always been – have always had to be – changed in order to succeed. A Shakespeare for *each* time, perhaps, rather than for *all time*, as Jonson envisaged. This brings to mind Linda Hutcheon’s comments on the enduring popularity of adaptations, of which the directed production surely is a subset: “Part of this pleasure [...] comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, the uniqueness of the cut is an opportunity for pleasure. Hutcheon goes on to argue, having compared adaptation to translation, that “Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation [...] Transposition to another medium, or even moving within the same one, always means change [...] And there will always be both gains and losses”.<sup>22</sup> Without getting mired in the semantics of whether or not productions are, in the strictest, purest terms, *adaptations*, Hutcheon’s argument rings true: going to see a new production of *King Lear*, we want and hope to be reminded of what we love about it, while also being surprised by something new. We must accept the change inherent to the process of moving from one (printed, static, enduring) medium to its (living, moving, transient) opposite. They will be different because they are different, their needs are different.

It is apparent that the promptbook, a record of the adaptation both as “the process and the product”, as Hutcheon designates them, is both a tool and an artefact rooted in the past, and that Shakespeare’s plays have been in a constant state of flux,

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Hutcheon 2013, p. 16.

not least in their preparation for performance on the stage.<sup>23</sup> The two are often intertwined: Greg's observation quoted above, that promptbooks reflect deletions, insertions and substitutions, suggests that a promptbook indicates the extent and particulars of the cut of a specific production. Arguably it is the best historical record of the cut, even more than film recordings of productions. The promptbook indicates not just the final result of the process but frequently offers a glimpse into the process as well: like a school-book showing the working out as well as the final answer. This is achieved through the text that the promptbook takes as its source, and all the changes made to it: deletions before the promptbook is made, subsequent crossings out, additions, and notes. A promptbook is like a performance edition, in that it "bears witness" to "the temporary, ephemeral status of the performance(s)", as Peter Holland has it.<sup>24</sup> The transient made permanent, it captures something of (the end result of) a specific production, but it moves through time as the embodiment of the three phases from page to stage: preparation, progression, and production.

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To begin with the preparation of the promptbook: this has evolved over time, and evolves even over the sixty year period covered by this thesis. In 1961, there were two *de facto* methods for preparing a promptbook. The first involves manually typing the script, on a typewriter, based on a printed source. The second involves using the source directly, by cutting pages from printed, published editions of plays and pasting them

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<sup>23</sup> Hutcheon 2013, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Holland, 'Theatre editions', in *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. by Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 233-248 (p. 238).

together into the desired cut. This is not a new approach: Jean-Christophe Mayer writes of examples of “early printed editions annotated for the theatre in or around the Restoration”.<sup>25</sup> Directors now, in the 2020s, might elect to use the first edition they find in their local bookshop or on Amazon, or the edition they studied at school; they might opt for the Arden third series edition, for its thorough glossing, or for the Penguin edition, for its tendency to keep notes at the back of the book, not interfering so visibly on each page.<sup>26</sup> Much like in film, where directors and editors would literally cut frames and sequences in and out of their work, scissor-work literalises the cutting process.

By 2021, the end of the period covered by this thesis, some directors still use the cut-and-paste method, though with less frequency. The successor to the typewritten method, which is pages typed on a computer / word processor, has become the predominant method of preparing a text for promptbooks. It is cheaper to print copies this way, and arguably easier to prepare, as a text can be acquired (for free) from a number of websites, copied in its entirety into a document, and edited on the computer before it is ever even sent to print. With tools like Microsoft Word’s Track Changes, directors can keep a record of their edits as the process develops. When something is cut erroneously, it is easy to add it back in. Ctrl-Z is much quicker than rooting around for physical cast-offs and painstakingly gluing scraps back together.

The base or source text, once selected, can be prepared for the rehearsal room: directors will most often undertake this process before a first table-read, largely to expedite the process.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, they may ensure the lines they cut are completely

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Christophe Mayer, ‘Annotating and transcribing for the theatre: Shakespeare’s early modern reader-revisers at work’, in *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. by Kidnie and Massai, pp. 163-176 (p. 163).

<sup>26</sup> The significance of the chosen edition is expanded upon in Chapter One.

<sup>27</sup> The process may even be done before the casting process, so that actors being offered parts are given an accurate sense of the role they may be signing up for.

absent from the script by the time rehearsals begin and promptbooks start being used (again, easier with a typed-up script), or they may leave the lines with crossings-out, easier then to re-insert where necessary.<sup>28</sup> Additions and rearrangements could be made to the text before it is printed or assembled, or could be made over the top in pen / pencil or by attaching additional print-outs / paper scraps.<sup>29</sup> Once the rehearsal process begins, subsequent changes will invariably be made over the top of the existing physical text, again in pen or pencil, as the production settles into its required rhythm on its feet. It may continue to change right up until Press Night, maybe even beyond that.

The differences in process outlined above point to one reason why the director's source or base text can be important; the other is to do with the quality of the text itself and the layers of textual intervention and editorship that have already coated the printed text. Many pieces of information and scholarship could intermediate between the director and text in their preparations: footnotes and frontispieces, forewords and other paratexts: each of these factors can influence the cut, and that is to say nothing of the emendations made by the editor, and editors before them. Where the source edition in question cannot be discerned when revisiting a promptbook, it raises certain questions: is an emendation made to the text the result of textual editorship or directorial intervention? In the case of textual variants, has a director simply chosen an edition which favours one text? And if their text uses interpolations from multiple variants, whose decision is that? These questions and more can be vital in establishing

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<sup>28</sup> That said, making these aspects visible to actors may be perceived as a problem for directors who do not want to quibble over cut lines with their cast, nor for cut lines to have undue influence over an actor's reading of the part.

<sup>29</sup> There are other, more discrete processes too: sometimes a digital script will be finessed with edits through rehearsals before going to print as a definitive promptbook for performances.

anything concrete about the promptbook practice at the RSC, both presently and as it has developed over the last sixty years.<sup>30</sup>

The other aspect of promptbook preparation which is vital – though less known – is a question of legacy. The performance-equivalent of Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence”, directors will always be directing in the wake of their predecessors.<sup>31</sup> At an institution like the RSC, many of their core audience are locals who have been coming to plays for years, decades – maybe even since the RSC first opened its doors in 1961. They are apt to know the differences between, say, Simon Godwin’s 2016 production of *Hamlet* and David Farr’s 2013 production. They might also recall Matthew Warchus’ famously abridged *Hamlet* of 1997, or even Buzz Goodbody’s 1975 *Hamlet* in The Other Place. Perhaps their knowledge and memory go back as far as Peter Wood’s 1961 production.

If an audience is aware of a production’s history, it might behove a director to acquaint themselves. It may be that they are aware of some or all of the productions; but to get the clearest sense of both the wider picture and the microscopic details of each cut, consulting the promptbooks may be the most effective way. Archival recordings, reviews, programme notes and so on can also be instrumental in understanding prior directorial choices. The director who chooses to familiarise themselves with past productions can do so in one of two ways: either ahead of preparing their own cut, as a potential jumping-off point, or after preparing their own cut, as a sort-of course-corrective. This second method would likely be preferred for avoiding any unintended mimicry or replication. That said, a director may well wish to

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<sup>30</sup> These questions will come to bear particularly in the first chapter of this thesis, outlined below.

<sup>31</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

repeat the past, where it worked; they may also wish to break new ground, particularly where past productions came up short. In any event, an awareness of past productions can be easily obtained from consulting promptbooks, and this awareness can be beneficial for any director, as they will inevitably be absorbed into a play's production history either way. Whether directors wish to access this resource, or even hire someone else to do so, is another matter. It is by no means a universal process.

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How have directors at the RSC approached this starting point? Gregory Doran, Artistic Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company for the final ten years covered by this thesis, and whose work as a director is considered in all four of its chapters, discussed his promptbook practice with me at length. Doran was actually the first RSC artistic director, and arguably the first RSC director, to openly advocate the study of multiple archival promptbooks to assist with preparing the cut for a new production.<sup>32</sup> Doran first started seriously consulting the promptbooks in 2000, while working on *As You Like It*. "I took my copy up to the archive with a series of different coloured pencils and went through the text noting what [each director] cut. It was fascinating".<sup>33</sup> He is quick

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<sup>32</sup> This is distinct from directors who consciously chose to replicate a specific director's previous cut. Doran himself observed the difference in approach from each previous artistic director *as directors*: "I noticed an interesting pattern emerge: if you look at the Peter Hall and particular John Barton cuts – often involving rewrites – Trevor Nunn then would seem almost religiously to take John's cuts. Terry Hands would use his own cuts but there would be coincidences and similarities. Michael Boyd was an original cutter, and Adrian Noble had seemed to avail himself of past cuts" (Gregory Doran, interview with the author, 20 August 2019). One aim of this thesis is to consider whether any specific trends emerge across the tenures of the various artistic directors of the RSC. Though each AD will of course have their own approach *as a director*, the following chapters will build towards an understanding of whether trends develop during the tenure of each AD, or over time as each AD is succeeded, from Peter Hall and John Barton right up to Gregory Doran.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory Doran, interview with the author, 20 August 2019.

to clarify that he had done his own cut first, as “a sort of rubric: do your cut first, from your own criteria – whether that’s simply length of running time or because you have a particular take on the play – and then look at the different versions”.<sup>34</sup> As such, these promptbooks serve as a kind of course-corrective, a means of asking (after an initial cut is prepared) if there is anything that has been missed. If there are lines or scenes that are *never* cut, perhaps there is a reason; likewise for lines or scenes *always* cut. Where a director has unwittingly gone against the grain, there could be consequences which may not manifest themselves until the rehearsal process.

Doran reports that he “became fascinated by who cut what and why”, and as such saw the wider, instructional value of the promptbooks, incorporating this when he took over as artistic director in 2012.<sup>35</sup> He sees the promptbooks as akin to “having a conversation” with the various directors about their past cuts, and as “we had all these prompt copies in our archive, we had this resource, which we weren’t really using, my first instinct was that they should be made available to directors”.<sup>36</sup> Director Kimberley Sykes, whose production of *As You Like It* is critical to the discussion in the second chapter of this thesis, has a process not too dissimilar from Doran’s:

I’ll often look to work with somebody who is interested in looking at lots of different other recent productions. I put together a list of the productions I want to know more about, to get hold of the prompt copies from wherever they’re archived, to then compile a script with all the different edits other directors and dramaturgs have done, from directors and productions that were quite radical, to those that played it quite safe: a scope of different approaches.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Kimberley Sykes, interview with the author, 7 July 2022.

She goes on to tell me that she follows this process “at any other theatre”, not just at the RSC. When directing at the RSC, Sykes is wary of getting stuck in the feedback loop of its own history, noting that while the RSC “has its own history and heritage, it’s important the work does not become internal. It’s part of a wider history, part of theatre practice around the world. I’m looking at the most influential productions and directors, and I want the productions most recently in the audience’s minds”.<sup>38</sup> Influence, success and familiarity are key criteria for determining which of the multitude of prior productions Sykes wants to consider, just as much as the institutions at which the productions played. Similar to Doran, Sykes prepares her own initial cut before consulting anyone else’s, and uses the historic cuts as a course-corrective. She also unknowingly echoes Doran when she says that this process allows her to “be in a dialogue” with other directors and productions.<sup>39</sup> But the key to good dialogue is in not always agreeing. Sykes concedes that if all previous directors have cut something, “it’s usually telling you it doesn’t need to be there and it’s going to be hard for an audience to understand”, but that is not to say there isn’t an opportunity to diverge, to be challenged: “sometimes I do wonder, maybe I *can* make it work?”<sup>40</sup>

As artistic director, Doran did not choose to impose any strict edict about cutting, though he did have oversight of the directors’ cuts before and during the rehearsal process. Ultimately Doran was wary of a homogeneity of approach: “I want to employ directors who will do it not in the way that I do it. There should be a variety of

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<sup>38</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Sykes 2022.



approaches. Sometimes they get highly conceptual on one end of the spectrum, to a sort of non-interventionist approach on the other end of the spectrum”.<sup>41</sup>

Simon Godwin, whose RSC productions of *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens* will be explored in this thesis, exemplifies this variety. Godwin cuts differently from his *Hamlet* in 2016 (in most ways a fairly conventional cut – see Chapter One) to his *Timon of Athens* in 2018 (in which he restructured and rewrote portions of the text and made borrowings from other plays – see Chapter Four). Further, his relationship to archival promptbooks, and therefore his cutting preparations, varies greatly from Doran’s. Godwin sees the promptbooks as both “too personal and too detailed”, though he is still in touch with past productions, looking at them and their reception specifically “to understand the traps of the text. What are the tropes that people consistently complain about?”<sup>42</sup> From here he is able to understand “which parts I must try to solve, what traps I must avoid falling into”.<sup>43</sup> And similarly to Doran, he prepares his cut *first*, before considering the past complaints and asking “have I solved this?”; he believes in seeking “a textual answer to a perceived flaw” in the text wherever possible.<sup>44</sup> Though Doran stays on the side of less intervention compared with directors like Godwin, Doran is adamant that “they’re all valid approaches, and in a way they keep Shakespeare alive” – a multiplicity that speaks to Kastan’s comments (above) on how and why Shakespeare’s pliability is key to his survival.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Doran traces the process of cutting back in time: he argues that cutting was originally “part of the process” of Shakespeare and his company, and that it

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<sup>41</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Simon Godwin, interview with the author, 31 August 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Doran 2019.

is only by understanding that “the text is fluid rather than sacrosanct” that a director is able to effectively work with it.<sup>46</sup>

One of the clearest preoccupations behind cutting, as Doran sees it, relates to time. In recalling Jonathan Bate asking him, “when have you ever come out of a Shakespeare play wishing it was longer?”, Doran reveals that one of the key reasons to intervene in Shakespeare’s texts is to present something that an audience can sit through with relative comfort.<sup>47</sup> Doran notes that, as far back as Terry Hands’ artistic directorship, there was an idea that if a director could get their show to “come down before 10:30pm they would be fine; at 10:30pm it could go either way; and after 10:30pm every additional minute would have to justify itself”.<sup>48</sup> During Boyd’s artistic directorship, says Doran, “there was a definite moment where it was suggested that shows should come down by 10:45pm at the outside; most people appreciated the fact that audiences get twitchy after 10:30pm”.<sup>49</sup> With this in mind, Doran outlines how the question of cutting becomes “a mathematical equation: Shakespeare goes at about 900 lines an hour, spoken *trippingly on the tongue*. If you go up at 7:30 and you want to be done at 10:30, and you need an interval in there of 20 minutes, then you’ve got around about 2400 lines to play with”.<sup>50</sup> An uncut Shakespeare play might then run anywhere from two hours (*The Comedy of Errors* at approx. 1800 lines) to over four and a half hours (*Hamlet* at approx. 4000 lines). Most Shakespeare plays are between 2600 and 3600

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<sup>46</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Doran 2019. Doran recites these numbers from memory. Doran also appends a coda to the target of 2400 lines by pointing out that “only seven of Shakespeare’s plays are as short as or shorter than that; most are much (some much, much) longer”. The seven plays, starting with the shortest, are *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Tempest*, *Pericles*, *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*.

lines long – meaning running times between three and four hours. These numbers and times guide Doran’s hand in preparing his cuts: they are the first factor, the overarching force that determines how much or how little he *needs* to cut, before he thinks about what specifically he will cut.

Though the cut is generally figured out before the rehearsal process, it is not set in stone. As Toby Malone and Aili Huber argue, “Nearly all scripts evolve in some way or another in rehearsal and performance, and the stage manager will carefully record these changes in their “bible”, or prompt book”.<sup>51</sup> Through table-reads and rehearsals and even into previews, lines can still be cut, and lost lines retrieved. Some directors might encourage a more collaborative way of cutting, and one that shifts in rehearsals, but often there are limits imposed. Aside from the risk of wasting too much rehearsal time quibbling over precious lines, Doran is aware of the potential fragility of his “mathematical equation” if every actor is wanting to add back in their favourite lines. And so, presenting his actors with the cut, he tells them: “you can put back any line you want, we can negotiate that, just tell me which line you’re going to cut to replace it”.<sup>52</sup> Particularly in plays like *Hamlet* or *King Lear* or *Richard III*, where every line risks pushing the limits of the audience’s patience, awareness of the time taken up by each line is crucial. Sykes has a similar openness to finessing the edit, and a similar rule for her cast:

if in rehearsals an edit doesn’t feel right, I’m always open to going back to it, studying it with the actors, looking at it again, and maybe changing something. But I also have a rule going into rehearsals – because I have to be conscious of running time, and I’m making work for a contemporary

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<sup>51</sup> Toby Malone and Aili Huber, *Cutting Plays for Performance: A Practical and Accessible Guide* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Doran 2019.

audience – that an actor is completely allowed to argue for something to go back in, but they have to offer for something else to go back out.<sup>53</sup>

Further, Sykes is open about how and why her cutting process is not solitary. She states happily that she “worked very closely on *Rosalind* in the edits” with actor Lucy Phelps, who played the character in Sykes’ *As You Like It* (2019).<sup>54</sup> And this is in keeping with how she views the cutting process in general, seeing “editing and cutting Shakespeare as a dramaturgical process, rather than as a process of authoring something as an individual; going on a dramaturgical process with a play feels more collaborative”.<sup>55</sup> She sees her “relationship with Shakespeare the same as a living writer, with the same level of respect and understanding of what the playwright is trying to do”.<sup>56</sup> The playtext is neither dead nor inanimate; the process of engaging with the text should then be suitably lively.

The promptbook is a composite of every aspect of the cutting process, from choosing the edition which will act as a source or base for the cut, to making and refining the cut before the rehearsals, through to changes made during the rehearsal process and as the play goes into production.

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<sup>53</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Sykes 2022.

## **The Thesis: Teleology, Methodology, Terminology**

Music journalist Jonathan Lethem wrote that “the drummer is the band”.<sup>57</sup> Elaborating on this, musician and writer Tracey Thorn writes that “Like a heartbeat, a pulse, if the drummer stops, everything stops. The band flatlines.”<sup>58</sup> The cut is the drummer of the theatrical production: a heartbeat, it sets the tempo, the rhythm; it signals life. As well as driving all other elements forward – concept, casting, staging, like the guitar, the bass, the keys – it anchors them, brings them into sync. To understand the cutting process, then, is to understand the heart of theatrical production – this process sits at the centre of theatrical anatomy. This thesis looks to dissect the theatrical heart, to consider cuts made to productions at the Royal Shakespeare Company over the first sixty years of its operations: cuts made by different directors to different plays, under the stewardship of different artistic directors, guided by different historical, political, and philosophical sensibilities, all to different ends. In doing so, it reveals wider implications about cutting for the theatre, as well as how Shakespeare’s ubiquity endures not only in spite of but because of evolving shifts in how we perceive and present him as theatremakers and receive him as theatregoers.

I have adopted what I hope to be a straightforward teleology for this thesis, which moves simultaneously through the intersections of different genres and different directorial preoccupations. Following this introduction, which looks to give a brief outline of not only the thesis itself but the history of promptbooks and theatrical cutting, the thesis moves into four chapters each with a different generic focus and accompanying conceptual lens. The first three chapters adhere to the three genres used

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<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Lethem, ‘Open Letter to Stacy (The Go-Betweens)’, in *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, etc.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), pp. 330-334 (p. 334).

<sup>58</sup> Tracey Thorn, *My Rock ‘n’ Roll Friend* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2021), p. 229.

to organise the First Folio (though out of their original order). In the first chapter, using the doubleness of the phrase “tragic texts”, I will focus on *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, two of Shakespeare’s towering tragedies, which also happen to survive as multiple and distinct variant texts. Exploring how directors have responded to and worked around these multiple texts, I will consider how historical and critical concerns do or do not influence the directors of these plays. Further, I am interested in the tension between the textual multiplicity of these great tragedies and their cultural ubiquity: they are plays that many people know very well, and yet certain iconic lines and scenes (“To be or not to be” in *Hamlet*, the mock trial scene in *King Lear*) are destabilised by the textual instability.

The second chapter examines past productions of three of Shakespeare’s comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It* and *Measure for Measure*, which range in popularity and performance frequency, but each of which could be considered problematic, particularly around notions of comedy/comicality. *Measure*, for instance, has long been considered a “problem play” (as posited by Frederick S. Boas).<sup>59</sup> This is notably for its uncomfortable ending, which a post-#MeToo audience may feel even more ambivalence towards – an aspect shared by *Taming*. Meanwhile *AYLI*, in its insistence on hegemony and heteronormativity, no longer reads as the grand celebration of free love it might once have. Further, all three plays are full of jokes, references, and physical gags which perhaps do not play as humorously as they once did, because of shifts in language, culture, and/or political sensibilities. George Bernard Shaw was arguing as early as the late nineteenth century that *Taming* was, particularly in its last scene, “altogether disgusting to the modern sensibility”, a sentiment which

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<sup>59</sup> Frederick S. Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (London: John Murray, 1896). Boas’ assertions about the play will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

has only been exacerbated over time.<sup>60</sup> Not only has an evolving collective cultural consciousness made certain aspects of Shakespeare's plays unpalatable, but the industry of Shakespeare, and the profitability of producing his plays on stage, relies on preserving Shakespeare as a symbol of cultural capital and enlightenment. Part of this depends on not seeing Shakespeare as a figure of complicity in acts of (dramatic) oppression and the sustaining of a patriarchal, heteronormative, colonial status quo. This chapter then serves as a clear contrast with the first, expanding the focus to look at more external or worldly pressures.

Turning my attention to Shakespeare's history plays for the third chapter, I will address questions of abridgement around the three *Henry VI* plays, and how the interrelatedness of these plays complicates not only the possibility of staging them, but also the process of cutting them, as well as how more extreme cutting can actually make these plays *more* stageable. The three parts of *Henry VI*, when they are (infrequently) staged at the RSC, are either abridged into two plays, or performed as three separate plays, but almost always as part of a tetralogy or trilogy, a larger sequence of plays (to include *Richard III*). The sole exception to this rule is Katie Mitchell's 1991 production of *Part 3*, subtitled *Battle for the Throne*, which was a stand-alone production in The Other Place. The overall examination of the *Henry VI* plays counterpoises with *King John*, a play unaffiliated with any tetralogy, infrequently performed, and the shortest history play by line length – yet still, as recently as 2012, subject to an intensive cut from director Maria Aberg in the Swan Theatre. Specifically, John Barton's approach to the *Henry VI* plays in his productions with Peter Hall in 1963, and his approach to *King John*

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<sup>60</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'Chin Chon Chino' (1897), in *Dramatic Opinions & Essays*, 2 vols (London: New York, Brentano's 1906), II, pp. 360-364 (p. 364).

with Barry Kyle in 1974, will illuminate much about his personal practice as a director and an artistic director, and his personal practice establishes a clear contrast with other, less intrusive directors. Another significant lens for this chapter is that of historical fiction, and how its principles guide not just today's directors approaching the plays, but Shakespeare himself when he was adapting his historical sources, for instance *Holinshed's Chronicles* (amongst others).

The fourth chapter of the thesis is only incidentally concerned with genre, in that the three plays explored – *Pericles*, *Timon of Athens* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* – all happen to be late plays and, particularly for *Pericles* and *Kinsmen*, tragicomedies or romances.<sup>61</sup> The other key factors that unite these plays interest me more than their purported genres: they are amongst the least performed Shakespearean plays, they are each co-authored with other Jacobean playwrights, and they occupy a somewhat fringe position in the Shakespearean canon, with *Pericles* and *Kinsmen* having been excluded from the First Folio and only over time becoming accepted into the list of Shakespeare's plays. They are also side-lined in space, on the RSC's stages, as all three plays are more often performed on the RSC's intimate Swan stage rather than in the larger RST. This chapter is concerned with how co-authorship might determine a director's approach to these plays, as well as questions around artistic licence with lesser-known plays. These plays are known for being difficult to perform (and watch); *Pericles*, for instance, is described by Ruth Nevo as "impossible".<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile Gary Jay Williams considers directors who tackle the play (having been such a director himself) "unwisely brave, if

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<sup>61</sup> Given the subjectivity of the generic labels for these late plays, and the fact that their genre is not a key part of their inclusion in this thesis, I will not be exploring or arguing for their generic designation.

<sup>62</sup> Ruth Nevo, 'The Perils of Pericles', in *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*, ed. by Kiernan Ryan (London: Longman, 1987), pp. 61-87 (p. 63).



not perverse”.<sup>63</sup> This emboldens directors to intervene more in the plays’ dramaturgy; yet there is a difficult tension, as their infrequency imbues directors with a potential duty of care to the integrity of the play.<sup>64</sup> That said, where drastic changes to the text of well-known plays like *Hamlet* or even *As You Like It* are likely to draw attention and criticism, drastic changes to the text of plays like *Timon of Athens* will likely go unnoticed, or else will be taken favourably, for patching gaps in a famously difficult text. In this sense, I will consider how cutting can spare these plays from languishing in obscurity and critical disdain.

Though each of the four chapters in this thesis may seem markedly different in nature, they build on, and bounce off, one another: textual questions raised around *Hamlet* and *King Lear* will come to bear on some of the co-authored plays; shifts in sensibilities affect not only how we perceive comedy but history too. And of course there are certain facets of cutting that apply to every production, Shakespeare or otherwise, in particular duration and narrative: Sontag’s time and space. And so, to conclude the thesis, I will consider the overlap that has accrued in my separate explorations, as well as more general questions around whether a discrete practice can be identified at the RSC – either a fixed one, or one that advances with each new artistic director. Further, I will lay out an argument for two distinct kinds of cuts, ideological and pragmatic, and a third kind, conceptual, which straddles the two. These categories encompass micro-cuts (individual words) and macro-cuts (whole scenes or even characters), cutting

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<sup>63</sup> Gary Jay Williams, ‘Stage History, 1816-1978’, in Rolf Soellner, *Timon of Athens: Shakespeare’s Pessimistic Tragedy* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1979), pp. 161-185 (p. 161).

<sup>64</sup> If a play is only being staged every ten to twenty years (*Pericles*, *Timon*), or even every thirty years (*Kinsmen*), these productions could for many people become definitive: if Barry Kyle’s 1986 *Kinsmen* cuts a scene from the play, that scene could be absent from the play, in memory, for thirty years, until Blanche McIntyre’s 2016 production – such is the director’s bind.

archaic or foreign languages (or archaic foreign languages, such as Latin), structural rearrangements and rewriting. These form part of an attempt towards a praxis of cutting. Lastly, I will attempt to briefly situate these cuts made to Shakespeare's works, and their findings, in a wider tradition of cutting for the stage, which is a field attracting increasing scholarly attention.

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The movement through these four chapters is the teleology, the trajectory, of the thesis, moving straightforwardly through different representative clusters of Shakespeare's works. The methodology, I hope, is also straightforward. I have examined as many promptbooks for the above productions as time, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and coronavirus-lockdown allowed. I have noted where directors have cut from the play, and where they have added to it, and where they have rewritten and restructured it. To analyse and contextualise these promptbooks, I have relied on resources from reviews to programmes to interviews with directors, some of which were conducted by others prior to my research, some of which were conducted by myself for the specific purpose of illuminating certain aspects of this thesis. I have interviewed Gregory Doran (about his and the RSC's cutting practices generally) Simon Godwin (about his productions of *Hamlet* in 2016 and *Timon of Athens* in 2018), Kimberley Sykes (about her production of *As You Like It* in 2019), and Owen Horsley (about his productions of the *Henry VI* plays, which were supposed to be staged in 2020 and eventually opened, in a different form

than planned, in 2022)).<sup>65</sup> As well as a general overview of how cut or otherwise a play is, I have tried to pay careful attention to the specifics of the cuts: not just how many lines were cut, but which, and what the specific effect is. That said, the fourth chapter is singularly concerned with numbers and percentages: as this chapter focuses on authorship and attribution, fields which often rely on percentages and datasets to make their cases, my approach to the cuts explored in this chapter often reflects this mathematical preoccupation.

Finally, this thesis relies on specific terminology which could easily become overstretched and overburdened, eventually meaningless. To begin with, I refer to “promptbooks” as the physical artefact outlined above, while the overall edit made to the text is the “cut”. For instance, “the promptbook for the 2016 production of *Hamlet* is held in the archive, and reveals director Simon Godwin’s cut of the play”. But the term “cut” is multi-faceted; as a noun, it refers not just to the overall edit to the text, but also to individual excisions: “in her cut of *As You Like It*, Kimberley Sykes makes numerous cuts”. As a verb, it refers specifically to the act of removing individual words, lines, scenes: “Gregory Doran cuts ten lines from this scene”. There are other key terms for different types of directorial intervention: “substitute”, to replace one word for another, usually for the purpose of modernisation or clarity; “rearrangement” or “transposition”, the act of moving lines or scenes from one place in the play to another; “reallocation”, to change the assignation of lines from one character to another. “Deletion” is self-explanatory. An “insertion” is any word, line, speech or scene that is added into the text

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<sup>65</sup> The situation with Horsley’s *Henry VI* plays is explored more fully below, and again in Chapter Two.

by the director. An “interpolation” would be a light, subtle borrowing or even a barely visible influence, from another text or source.

At the intersection of terminology and methodology, there are units of measurement for examining cuts; a “line” refers to a single verse-line or prose-equivalent, and “speech” to a longer section or grouping of lines by a single character, while a “scene” is, broadly, the unit of action as per the printed editions of Shakespeare’s work.<sup>66</sup> It is worth noting that there is an inevitable discrepancy with line-counting. The presence of half-lines, and passages of prose which are difficult to universally number, make it difficult to say with exactitude how many lines are in each play to begin with, let alone how many have been cut. With that in mind, any line counts provided in this thesis are given with a relative degree of caution: they are accurate only to the fullest possible extent. Further, when discussing estimated running times (of uncut texts, or cut texts *before* performance), I am generally using the Brubaker method to estimate: the total number of lines multiplied by .06 equals the approximate running time in minutes.<sup>67</sup> Or, a thousand lines an hour.

There are a number of phrases which occur frequently throughout the thesis and which refer to general, broad practices of cutting. The first is “thinning” or “thinning out”, a proportionate method of cutting by which longer scenes and speeches are moderately pared down, a way of shortening the play evenly, with minimal intrusion. Imagine a haircut: if you are blessed with thick but perhaps unruly hair, you might ask your barber to “thin it out”. This does not necessarily mean you cannot achieve the same

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<sup>66</sup> Not all editions agree on what *constitutes* a scene, but I hope my usage of the term will be clear enough throughout.

<sup>67</sup> Edward S. Brubaker, *Shakespeare Aloud: A Guide to His Verse on Stage* (Lancaster, PA: Brubaker, 1976). Brubaker’s 1000 lines an hour is not too dissimilar to Gregory Doran’s estimated 900 lines an hour.

style – you might not even notice the difference unless you’re up close, running your hands through it. And at the intersection of process and product are terms like “abridgement” (a highly condensed version of a play or more frequently multiple plays) and an “uncut” text (somewhat obviously, an edit wherein the director does not cut any lines, and may not even alter any words). Uncut Shakespeare plays are quite the rarity, and not just at the RSC: as we’ve seen already, textual meddling has been the mainstream practice since at least the Restoration.

### **Not The Thesis: Omissions, Alterations, Deletions**

For everything that this thesis is, there is another thing it is not; every choice made for inclusion of one thing is a choice made for exclusion of others. The overarching theme of this thesis, in its early days, was “promptbook practice at Stratford and beyond”, a theme conceived by the Shakespeare Institute (University of Birmingham) and the Royal Shakespeare Company in partnership with Midlands4Cities, who funded this research as a Collaborative Doctoral Award. It became necessary very quickly to start narrowing my sights: the decision was made very early on to stay in Stratford-upon-Avon, and specifically at the RSC. The RSC’s predecessor, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, has many surviving promptbooks; while they no doubt contain further fascinating insights both academically and theatrically, this treasure trove is too cumbersome to be included here. Similarly, I am disregarding productions touring in London or nationally.<sup>68</sup> To further refine my scope, I excluded non-RSC productions

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<sup>68</sup> To be clear, if these touring productions have originated or played in Stratford-upon-Avon, I have considered the promptbook from the Stratford-upon-Avon run, and neglected any tour-specific promptbook.

(i.e. visiting productions, which happened to play at the RSC without being created or co-created by the company), as well as productions which formed part of such initiatives as First Encounters, the RSC's pedagogically oriented programme for introducing Shakespeare to children. That said, I have tried in each chapter to feature at least one counterpoint production, from other major theatres/companies, including the Almeida, the National Theatre, the Old Vic, the Donmar Warehouse, the Globe, and Cheek by Jowl. Revivals of productions are considered only where it is clear, as is the case with Michael Boyd's 2006 revivals of his 2000 *Henry VI* trilogy, that the promptbooks indicate significant differences between the cuts for the original productions and their revivals. If the revival promptbooks indicate a fresh cut has been made, or that a cut has been significantly altered or finessed in some way, this is vital in establishing how a director's cutting approach has changed over time.

As for the promptbooks themselves, this project has always fundamentally focused on the act of cutting: the words and lines of the text, Shakespeare's or otherwise, are the primary material for my investigations. Other facets of promptbooks include, but are by no means limited to, lighting and sound cues, stage directions and actor cues, notes for stage management, information about props and costumes, costume changes, call-times. These features, for the most part, do not feature in my discussion, except where necessary. For instance, it is difficult to write about the problematic endings to *Taming* or *Measure* without considering stage directions: the cut of the final lines could be directly impacted by whether or not Kate hears any or all of the wager in *Taming*, or on how Isabella's silence is played out in *Measure*.

This thesis bridges sixty years of theatre history, from 1961 to 2021; it is admittedly convenient to have such a neat, round number of years to study, but it makes sense

from a practical perspective too.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, as Gregory Doran's plans to stage each individual play from Shakespeare's Folio were nearing completion in the early years of my thesis, productions of *Pericles* (dir. Blanche McIntyre) and the *Henry VI* plays (dir. Gregory Doran and Owen Horsley) would have been staged in 2020 and 2020/2021 respectively, had complications from the pandemic not led to the cancellation of McIntyre's *Pericles* and the delay of the *Henry VI* plays. As a cut was prepared for Doran and Horsley's *Henry VI* plays, and I was able to discuss this with Horsley in 2020, it is the final production, chronologically, to be considered in this thesis. After that, no other plays explored in the course of this thesis were staged again by the RSC before the end of 2021, nor indeed the end of Gregory Doran's tenure as Artistic Director in 2022. With that in mind, 2021 seemed an ideal cut-off for an expansive, six-decade-long review into the RSC's promptbook practice.

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<sup>69</sup> Though this thesis is submitted in 2024, my study period concluded in 2022, by which point an initial draft was completed, and I have been in writing-up since, enhancing the existing draft.

# 1

## Tragic Texts: Cutting Textual Variants

### in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*

Douglas Bruster opens his book *To Be Or Not To Be* with a simple thought experiment: you are “in the Shakespeare Museum”, passing through galleries devoted to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Macbeth*, and other notable plays, artefacts including “editions, portraits and costumes”, all while “listening to Shakespeare’s words”.<sup>70</sup> Eventually “you catch sight of the most arresting thing of all... [in] the Museum’s expansive *Hamlet* wing, [...] an entire gallery devoted to the ‘To be or not to be’ speech”.<sup>71</sup> His vision of this room is overwhelming, because of course the play and its most famous speech have such an extensive legacy. His overarching point about the legacy of *Hamlet* (and Hamlet, and “To be or not to be”) amounts to a dramaturgical “anxiety of influence”, to borrow Harold Bloom’s famous phrase.<sup>72</sup> Readers, audiences, actors, directors – all who come to a Shakespearean text, let alone the supposed pinnacle of *Hamlet*, must contend with centuries of history, performance, criticism, and iterations / interpretations in popular culture. It amounts to an endless store of memes: both in the colloquial sense (i.e. social media, “an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, [...] copied and spread rapidly by internet users”) and in the philosophical sense (i.e. as coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976, as “a cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population [...]

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<sup>70</sup> Douglas Bruster, *To Be Or Not To Be* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Bruster 2007, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Bloom 1973.



considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene”).<sup>73</sup> Bruster neglects to include, within his theoretical gallery exhibitions, a key component of each live performance’s material legacy: the promptbook, the physical artefact reflecting interpretations of its director through the production’s cut of the text.

Now for a different thought experiment. You are a theatre director, and the Royal Shakespeare Company has asked you to direct the next production of *Hamlet*. You are at least the fourteenth director of *Hamlet* at the RSC in the sixty years since it was founded, and you are following in that essential line of succession, a rite of passage. Indeed, all the theatre’s artistic directors (excepting Terry Hands) have directed the play during or not long before their tenure as Artistic Director. You are almost certainly aware of their presence, and you might understandably be a little nervous to be directing a play that has been directed so many times, by so many great directors. This is a play well known in the collective consciousness in general, let alone in Stratford-upon-Avon, where many theatregoers are local, and have been attending the theatre for years. They compare productions of the same play, argue over who directed the best *Hamlet*, who played the best Hamlet. They can be critical, and they might remember past productions fondly through filters of nostalgia. Never have Max Beerbohm’s words seemed so true: “The play is dead. The stage is crowded with ghosts. Every head in the auditorium is a heavy casket of reminiscence.”<sup>74</sup> The odds are stacking up against you.

You know you must cut down the text considerably, as an ‘uncut’ *Hamlet* will take over four hours. Your task is made even more difficult by the vague knowledge that there are three separate surviving versions of the text of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Their

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Meme’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/meme\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#12875159](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/meme_n?tab=meaning_and_use#12875159)>.

<sup>74</sup> Max Beerbohm, *Around Theatres* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p. 9.

lengths vary – the longest, Q2, is “over 4000 lines long... unlikely to have been staged in full”, as Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen posit.<sup>75</sup> The Folio text is only some 150 lines shorter, while Q1 is half of that, the only text of the three to be a performable length; yet Q1 is garbled, and widely considered to be unplayable (or at least undesirable) as a text.<sup>76</sup> So, in preparing your production, there is a choice to make between these three texts, a choice that will inform the production from a number of perspectives, even beyond its runtime. With your aforementioned “vague knowledge”, you understand that each text contains something totally unique and useful, and that a choice has to be made. Even abdicating from choice (for instance, by blindly selecting a published edition, with no regard for how they approach variant texts) is a choice. You understand that a single text offers a wide array of possibilities for cutting, rearranging, rewriting, additions. Doubling or tripling the number of texts only increases your options accordingly – choice paralysis could soon set in. You must juggle this textual quandary with *Hamlet*’s rich critical and theatrical histories, and the play’s history at the RSC specifically, and concerns about its unwieldy length. With all this to consider, you must prepare your cut. Are you feeling any anxiety yet, “of influence” or otherwise?

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This chapter will consider two of Shakespeare’s most prominent tragedies, titans of stage and study for at least the past century or two: *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, which are also two of the most frequently performed plays in the RSC’s sixty-year history. While

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<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, eds., *William Shakespeare: Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), p. 1923.

<sup>76</sup> Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., *Hamlet*, revised edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p.83.

Bruster has given an indication of *Hamlet*'s status, for *Lear*, look no further than Stanley Wells, who calls it the "greatest tragedy written by the greatest dramatist of the post-classical world" and "one of the monuments of Western civilization".<sup>77</sup> Despite being two of the most popular plays in the canon, they are also two of the most complicated textually, as both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* survive in multiple substantive texts. *Hamlet* has three key texts – the First Quarto (Q<sub>1</sub>, 1603), the Second Quarto (Q<sub>2</sub>, 1604), and the First Folio (F, 1623) – while *King Lear* exists as two key texts – similarly it appears in the First Folio (F, 1623), but also in a markedly different version in its First Quarto (Q<sub>1</sub>, 1608).<sup>78</sup> This tension between the prominence of these two tragedies and their textual instability is a potential concern for the contemporary director, and is the key focus of this chapter. It will focus on a selection of RSC productions from the lengthy production histories for both plays. For *Hamlet*, this includes Peter Wood (RST, 1961), Peter Hall (RST, 1965), Buzz Goodbody (TOP, 1975), John Barton (RST, 1980), Ron Daniels (RST, 1989), Adrian Noble (RST, 1992), Matthew Warchus (RST, 1997), Steven Pimlott (RST, 2001), Michael Boyd (RST, 2004), Gregory Doran (Courtyard, 2008), and Simon Godwin (2016).<sup>79</sup> And for *King Lear*, Peter Brook (RST, 1962), Buzz Goodbody (TOP, 1974), Cicely Berry (TOP, 1988), Nicholas Hytner (RST, 1990), Yukio Ninagawa (RST, 1999), Trevor Nunn (Courtyard, 2007), and Gregory Doran (RST, 2016).

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<sup>77</sup> Stanley Wells, 'The Once and Future *King Lear*', in *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 1-23 (p. 3).

<sup>78</sup> The differences, which will be laid out in greater detail throughout the chapter, are such that modern editors have seen the value in publishing multiple editions for these two plays, such as the Arden Third Series' *Hamlet* editions covering all three texts, the inclusion of both *King Lear* texts in the Oxford Shakespeare, and the Cambridge Shakespeare's folio editions of both *Hamlet* and *Lear*.

<sup>79</sup> Adrian Noble's production was largely uncut: I will only make reference to Noble's production where pertinent.

The pre-eminence of these two tragedies is matched by the significance of their titular characters, which often attract a high wattage of star casting, being seen as something of a milestone for a truly successful serious actor. *Hamlet* in particular, in the less-enthusiastic view of Beerbohm, became “simply a hoop through which every very eminent actor must, sooner or later, jump. The eminent actor may not have any natural impulse to jump through it, but that does not matter.”<sup>80</sup> And yet, despite their stalwart status, the textual history of these plays is amongst the most fraught of Shakespeare’s whole canon. To quote Anthony B. Dawson,

One clear manifestation of the undermining of stability has been the demise of the unified text. It used to be that *Hamlet*, like other Shakespeare plays, was a single, recognizable object. This is no longer so. We now have a number of competing texts, none of which is ‘authentic’, i.e., none of which represents exactly ‘what Shakespeare wrote’; furthermore, the grounds on which a text may be said to be authentic are themselves in dispute. The idea that a particular early text may be closer to Shakespeare’s hand or his intention than another is no longer a guarantee of its superiority or value. Indeed, the idea of intention implies something like a unified subjectivity, a stable ‘Shakespeare’ as source of the text, a notion that is no longer taken for granted.<sup>81</sup>

This question of “what Shakespeare wrote”, and how it relates to ideas of stability and a unified text, governs much of textual study; yet its provenance in the theatre is questionable, given that directors have a greater duty to their (hopefully many) audience members than they do to the late playwright. Alan C. Dessen writes that “problems in for-the-stage text work are comparable to yet different from those facing the on-the-page editor. One major difference is the question of length, for editors [...]

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<sup>80</sup> Beerbohm, *Around Theatres*, p. 36.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony B. Dawson, *Hamlet: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

are not under pressure to reduce the number of lines in their texts, whereas directors must worry about running time and playgoers' staying power".<sup>82</sup> This underscores the obvious but crucial point that a director's duty is not to "what Shakespeare wrote" but rather "what the audience can endure", an issue no more relevant than in plays such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear* which are as long as they are emotionally demanding. This tension should always be borne in mind when considering how directors approach the texts.

While many plays in the Shakespearean canon have textual variants, few have variants with such pronounced and challenging differences. These differences raise many questions about the texts as they might have been first written and performed – and as they could be performed now or in the future. The specifics of the textual variants themselves, as well as how they are approached by different RSC directors during the cutting process, provides the primary focus of this chapter, explored through sections on *Hamlet* and *King Lear* in turn. In terms of where the multiple texts come from, and why they are different, much of this information has been extrapolated over time through different modes of scholarship, and as such there isn't always consensus – but there are generally a handful of popularly accepted working theories to explain the three *Hamlet* texts and the two *King Lear* texts. The theories for *Hamlet* are different than those for *King Lear*, so each will be summarised in their respective sections.

This chapter will attempt to paint a comprehensive but not exhaustive picture of directorial approaches to these two towering tragedies throughout the Royal Shakespeare Company's sixty-year history. Specifically, it will consider how directors

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<sup>82</sup> Alan C. Dessen, 'The Director as Shakespeare Editor', *Shakespeare Survey*, 59, ed. by Peter Holland (2006), 182–192 (p. 182).

have approached the textual variants of both *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, and how this bears upon, and is affected by, questions of length/runtime, conceptual vision, and the “anxiety of influence” evoked by Bruster’s aforementioned “*Hamlet wing*”. Crowded and noisy, it is a room which might suggest new ways of performing plays with such legacies. Hopefully, in understanding the RSC’s treatment of these plays to date, some thoughts on future directions can be elucidated – further exhibits to be opened in Bruster’s museum.

### **Side by Side (by Side): The Three Texts of *Hamlet***

Firstly, allow us to consider the tri-text *Hamlet*. It is widely regarded that the texts from the First Folio and the Second Quarto are the more authoritative texts: the dubbing of the First Quarto text as “the bad quarto” speaks to its relative status. Though the former two have a lot in common, “F lacks about 230 of Q2’s lines, while Q2 lacks about 70 of F’s lines.”<sup>83</sup> Q2 is thus the longest of the three texts and contains many key passages omitted in F – including 4.4.8-65, which has Hamlet’s well-known “How all occasions do inform against me” speech (31-65) and helpful exposition for the Fortinbras subplot. Meanwhile, there are several passages exclusive to F, such as the exchange between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at 2.2.238-67, which includes Hamlet’s famous declaration that “Denmark’s a prison”. It is immediately apparent that, in opting for a Q2 or F exclusive reading of the text, a director would lose at least one famous line from the play.

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<sup>83</sup> Thompson and Taylor 2016, p. 83.

Q<sub>1</sub>, that so-called “bad quarto”, is a different entity. Formed of seventeen distinct scenes (as opposed to Q<sub>2</sub> and F’s nineteen), it is just over half the length of Q<sub>2</sub> in terms of line numbers, and includes various other signs of being supposedly lesser than Q<sub>2</sub>/F.<sup>84</sup> The nature of these differences has led some to regard Q<sub>1</sub> as an early draft, and others as a memorial reconstruction. Kathleen O. Irace’s argument, pervasive to this day, is that Q<sub>1</sub> was prepared for performance by someone(s) in the play’s cast, representing both a botched memorial reconstruction and an extensive cut for a touring production of the play.<sup>85</sup> Irace specifically notes how Q<sub>2</sub>/F speeches belonging to the minor character Marcellus, and to others who are on stage at the same time, fare comparably well in Q<sub>1</sub>. Supposedly, this indicates that the actor playing Marcellus was involved in the reconstruction of the text. Tiffany Stern, meanwhile, takes the “memorial reconstruction” idea in a different direction: that Q<sub>1</sub> represents a *noted* text, collated by people in the audience who saw the play, perhaps repeatedly, and noted down the text.<sup>86</sup> Irace and Stern’s arguments are both rooted in ideas of post-performance reconstruction (be it memorial or notational), either of which would account for many of the errors and inconsistencies in the Q<sub>1</sub> text, as well as its correct sections.<sup>87</sup>

Lukas Erne, in his book *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, specifically challenges Irace’s idea of memorial reconstruction as “unfeasible”, while surveying the history of

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<sup>84</sup> Its dialogue is different, and in places includes garbled versions of speeches; its metre is frequently irregular and jarring, both on the page and when spoken; and even its cast of characters is altered, Polonius becoming Corambis, Guildenstern becoming Gilderstone.

<sup>85</sup> Kathleen O. Irace, *Reforming the “bad” Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1994).

<sup>86</sup> Tiffany Stern, ‘Sermons, Plays and Note-Takers: *Hamlet* Q<sub>1</sub> as a ‘Noted’ Text’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 66 (2013), 1-23.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, in the case of characters whose lines are mostly perfectly rendered in Q<sub>1</sub>, Irace would argue that the actors playing these characters had involvement in the reconstructing of the text, while Stern would argue that more experienced notetakers were responsible for noting down these parts.

this theory in relation to the study of “bad” quartos.<sup>88</sup> Erne argues that too much of Irace’s argument hinges on Marcellus, and is unconvinced by the idea that a shorter text necessarily indicates its use for a touring production: “an uneconomic scholarly hypothesis about what would have been an uneconomic theatrical practice”.<sup>89</sup> Erne’s own argument depends on the economy of time: not just with regards to learning and remembering two versions of a role, but in terms of stage time, positing a diametric contrast between “the short version for the stage and the long version for the page”.<sup>90</sup> Echoing Erne, Charles Adam Kelly and Donna Leigh Plehn note that critical consensus now leans towards replacing “the ‘derivative text model’, most commonly thought to be by ‘memorial reconstruction’, with the theory of Q<sub>1</sub> *Hamlet* as ‘an earlier text in some state’”.<sup>91</sup> Kelly and Plehn round up existing theories and, by a process of elimination, posit theirs as the most likely, rather than the most directly provable. Meanwhile Terri Bourus, something of an outlier, argued that Q<sub>1</sub> represents a first authorial draft by Shakespeare, and that “*Hamlet* was repeatedly revised by its author”.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere, she asserts that the “ethical” judgement of “bad quarto” pertaining to Q<sub>1</sub> is unfounded, that it is “a good quarto, a well-made quarto, printed and sold by ethical, reliable professionals”.<sup>93</sup> Though her views on the nature of Q<sub>1</sub> are not widely shared, Bourus’ point that “For most Shakespeare scholars, Q<sub>1</sub> *Hamlet* is not good enough, not worthy

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<sup>88</sup> Erne, Lukas, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 220.

<sup>89</sup> Erne 2013, p. 234.

<sup>90</sup> Erne 2013, p. 259.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Adams Kelly and Donna Leigh Plehn, ‘Q<sub>1</sub> *Hamlet* and the Sequence of Creation of the Texts’, in *Hamlet: The State of Play*, ed. by Sonia Massai and Lucy Munro (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 151-174 (p. 153).

<sup>92</sup> Terri Bourus, *Young Shakespeare’s Young Hamlet: Print, Piracy and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 210.

<sup>93</sup> Terri Bourus, ‘The Good Enough Quarto: *Hamlet* as a Material Object’, *Critical Survey*, 31.1/2 (Spring/Summer 2019), 72-86 (p. 82).



of our idealised Bard” is useful, not least for how it might challenge both scholars and theatre practitioners to reconsider Q<sub>1</sub>, not just to dismiss it outright.<sup>94</sup>

Clearly, there are several theories surrounding the Q<sub>1</sub> text, although the critical consensus from most involved scholars – including Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the editors of the Arden Third Series’ three-text *Hamlet* – is that Q<sub>1</sub> is almost certainly some sort of reconstructed text, whether from an actor’s memory (Irace) or an audience member’s noting (Stern), or even a deconstructed text (Erne; Kelly and Plehn). To the contemporary director, the distinction may be immaterial, as what the various theories all speak to, in one way or another, is that Q<sub>1</sub> has some relation to how *Hamlet* was staged – either how it was adapted for the stage or how it was perceived (and noted) by the audience. Q<sub>1</sub> speaks to the shape of *Hamlet* on the Early Modern Stage, and it is an informative text: we learn as much about the essence of *Hamlet* from what is missing in Q<sub>1</sub> as we do from what is present. It offers a unique iteration of *Hamlet* and as such is immeasurably useful, though often underestimated and dismissed. Margrethe Jolly writes that “We can be amused by the descriptions of Q<sub>1</sub> as a “mutilated corpse,” and of its “To be” speech as a “farrago of nonsense,” but perhaps we should be more suspicious of those rhetorical flourishes when practitioners see Q<sub>1</sub> as the skeleton of Q<sub>2</sub>, as dynamic, and as having distinct energy.”<sup>95</sup> Maxwell E. Foster also champions Q<sub>1</sub>, in which “we are in a different world.”<sup>96</sup> The textual history is complicated and has been widely researched; such complications are partly responsible for the comparative lack of presence that Q<sub>1</sub> has had on the modern stage (and page, in terms of published

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<sup>94</sup> Bourus 2019, p. 83.

<sup>95</sup> Margrethe Jolly, *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet: A New View of the Origins and Relationship of the Texts* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014), p. 141.

<sup>96</sup> Maxwell E. Foster, *The Play Behind The Play: Hamlet and Quarto One*, ed. by Anne Shiras (Pittsburgh, PA: Davis and Warde, 1991), p. 21.

editions). But this complicated history may only be of cursory interest to the director. Q<sub>1</sub> is a version of the play that exists, regardless of its origins or its “badness”, and may be ripe with opportunities for fresh, novel through roads into a knotty and well-known play.

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What is of interest to the director? To what extent is the director generally invested in the textual question? It must be remembered that few-to-no directors (or readers, students, etc.) are ever approaching the text without someone else’s layers of intervention and reading already applied to it. Most people do not turn to facsimile reproductions of Shakespeare’s texts, but rather modern, printed editions (as much for their availability and affordability as their accessibility, offering clean, readable English and often helpful glossing). So the work of editors shapes the text that directors are using as their starting point for preparing their cut. And not just the editor of that specific edition, but all involved in the rich, centuries-long editorial history that has led to the curation and publication of this version of the text. In the case of *Hamlet*, the text printed by a publishing house generally represents an amalgamated text whereby its editor has taken either Q<sub>2</sub> or F as the starting point and incorporated readings/variants from the other text to create a text that is fuller. In this sense, directors are engaging in the variant texts of *Hamlet* only passively, maybe without even realising at all. It isn’t strictly *necessary* to engage any further – these printed editions will solve problems such as having to choose between “How all occasions do inform against me” and “Denmark’s

a prison” by conflating the texts; in the case of variant words, they will decide on one, the (subjectively) better one, and spare a director the effort.

The promptbooks make it clear that directors are relying on printed texts. The promptbook for Peter Wood’s 1961 production visibly derives from John Dover Wilson’s Cambridge University Press edition, first published in 1934, which states explicitly that the “*textus receptus* is based upon that of the First Folio and ‘improved’ by incorporation of a large number of readings from the Second Quarto, a few from the first Quarto, and a score or more arrived at by emendation”.<sup>97</sup> Peter Hall’s 1965 promptbook is formed of printed pages from the 1963 Signet Classics edition, edited by Edward Hubler.<sup>98</sup> The editor explains that “Because the Second Quarto is the longest version, giving us more of the play as Shakespeare conceived it than either of the others, it serves as the basic version for this text” though it was “necessary”, because of printer errors, “to turn to the First Folio for many readings”.<sup>99</sup> In 1975, Buzz Goodbody used the same edition to prepare her text. John Barton’s 1980 production is based on T.J.B. Spencer’s 1980 Penguin edition – in later printings, the Penguin edition carried the RSC’s logo on the back cover, proclaiming: “Used and recommended by the Royal Shakespeare Company”.<sup>100</sup> Adrian Noble’s largely uncut production of 1992 uses the 1986 Cambridge edition as its source, edited by Philip Edwards; of his conflated text, Edwards says that the “ideal version of the play does not exist in either of the two main authoritative texts [...] but somewhere between them”.<sup>101</sup> Later productions indicate a tendency towards

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<sup>97</sup> John Dover Wilson, ed., *Hamlet* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. xxvi.

<sup>98</sup> The small printed pages are cut out of the printed edition and stuck to A4 sheets, allowing space for annotation, and edits are made to the edition by hand, likely before and during the rehearsal process.

<sup>99</sup> Edward Hubler, ed., *Hamlet* (Signet Classics) (London: The New English Library, 1963), p. 177.

<sup>100</sup> T.J.B. Spencer, ed., *Hamlet* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), back cover.

<sup>101</sup> Philip Edwards, ed., *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), p. 32.

digitally prepared texts (i.e. Greg Doran's 2008 computer-typed text), likely for the relative ease of access they introduce to the director's editing process.<sup>102</sup>

So does a director *need* to engage in the textual question for *Hamlet*? The editor has arguably done that work for them, amalgamating the two "good" texts into one, casting off what is ostensibly bad or just superfluous, and the director can happily sift through the bounty of the hybrid text to prepare their own cut. This certainly seems to be the case for many who have directed *Hamlet* at the RSC, based on how they have responded to some of the significant Q2/F variants. For instance, they cut widely from two substantial Q2-only variants in the play's long, final scene at 5.2: the conversation between Hamlet, Horatio and Osric at 92-120, and the conversation with the Lord at 174-86. The Q2-only portion of the Osric scene is described by Philip Edwards as "not essential [...] almost entirely fun at the expense of Osric's diction".<sup>103</sup> G.R. Hibbard argues the passage is deliberately excised in F "to rid the play of a piece of over-elaboration", and suggests that "the lines may have been almost unintelligible to many in an Elizabethan audience".<sup>104</sup> As for the Lord's scene, though Thompson and Taylor suggest that these lines are important insofar as they are "giving notice of the approach of the royal party, [and] they do contain the Queen's message to Hamlet", this message is never directly addressed again, and the plot would function well without either of

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<sup>102</sup> These do complicate the matter of tracing the text back to its source, but regardless must originate from somewhere. The most popular online texts come from the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Complete Works, and Project Gutenberg. Each of these digital texts is based on a version of the text prepared by editors. It can be difficult to know which digital text has been used as a source. Whichever online source a director opts for, the text is filtered through individuals and/or organisations before it reaches its end user – just as we have seen with the printed editions.

<sup>103</sup> Edwards 1985, p. 242.

<sup>104</sup> G.R. Hibbard, ed., *Hamlet: Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; repr. 1994), p. 366.

these pieces of information.<sup>105</sup> Although directors do tend to thin down the Hamlet, Horatio and Osric exchange *overall*, they don't tend to cut all twenty-eight lines that are exclusive to Q2, with the exception of Warchus. Except for Warchus, who visibly engages with textual variants elsewhere, it is possible that the other directors may not be fully aware that this exchange is a variant – it is hardly well known. Warchus also fully cuts the Lord's appearance, that second Q2-only variant in 5.2, but doesn't stand alone in that decision – Hall, Goodbody and Daniels cut this exchange before Warchus, while Pimlott, Boyd, Doran and Godwin all cut it after him. Wood and Barton, in their 1961 and 1980 productions respectively, cut *from* this passage quite extensively, although Wood allocates some of the Lord's lines to Osric (still erasing the character of the Lord entirely), and Barton retains the Lord in this scene, though his presence and speaking time is diminished.

There are F-only passages which function similarly to the Q2-only passage above, and it does not appear that the directors are favouring one text over another. One well-known F-only passage is the long exchange between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at 2.2.328-60 (F1, TLN.1376-1408), in which they discuss the children's acting companies and the so-called "war of the theatres".<sup>106</sup> The reference does not feel particularly topical over 400 years later, nor even in 1961, when the RSC was founded. Harold Jenkins suggests the lines may have been excluded from the Q2 text due to having "had less point or more risk or both" at the time of printing.<sup>107</sup> Jenkins goes on to say that these "undramatic conversational exchanges" may seem "candidates for

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<sup>105</sup> Thompson and Taylor 2016, p. 476n.

<sup>106</sup> Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 242.

<sup>107</sup> Harold Jenkins, ed., *Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 45.

cutting”.<sup>108</sup> Toby Malone and Aili Huber support this view, noting that today, even “the most erudite of audiences will see this as a contemporary reference, a historical nod which engenders no humor whatsoever”, and therefore could be cut as “it doesn’t help the narrative, and most of your audience won’t understand it”.<sup>109</sup> It is no surprise that almost every director cuts, if not the entire variant, then most of it, in particular the lines referring to the child acting companies. The Rosencrantz and Guildenstern interactions are routinely thinned down throughout the play, so it is no accident that this textual variant elicits such a consistent response: it is unnecessary detail that means nothing to a modern audience. Its consistent absence in productions only confirms this fact.

With these examples as a model, there is no obvious division in how the directors view Q2-only variants versus F-only variants – directors cut, or cut from, both types of variants as frequently and as freely. And they are just as likely to cut from other parts of long scenes (Hamlet, Horatio and Osric; Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) as they are from the shorter variant passages. Directors are cutting the variants not necessarily knowing that they are variants, but rather because their nature as variants is indicative of their disposability. Since they do not massively impact upon the plot or logic of the play in their inclusion or their removal, they are a natural target for cuts. And more than that, no director is adding Q2- or F-only passages into texts that excise them: they rely on the edition used as the source text. Perhaps then the Q2/F differences are not always so informative for a contemporary director – but what about Q1?

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<sup>108</sup> Jenkins 1982, p. 44.

<sup>109</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 19.

As is clear even from the brief accounts the editors provide of their processes for conflating the texts of *Hamlet*, they do not generally lean on Q1. A director who uses anything specific to the Q1 text must be engaging with it specifically, rather than merely following suit from the editor of their source text. One such aspect of Q1 which often guides directors of *Hamlet* pertains to the “To be or not to be speech”, arguably not only the most famous speech of the play but of the entire Shakespearean canon and, arguably, the Western dramatic canon too. Ben Crystal pithily observes that it is the “most famous speech in history. Throw a rock in a room full of people and you’d be lucky to hit someone that didn’t know the first line of The Speech.”<sup>110</sup> Its status as the most famous speech, in the *most famous* play by the *most famous* playwright, explains why Bruster makes it the centrepiece of his aforementioned “Museum of Shakespeare”. The speech carries much attendant pressure for directors and actors in new productions, and certain expectations amongst audience members. In Lyndsey Turner’s 2015 production at the Barbican Theatre, star Benedict Cumberbatch was forced to stop and restart in the middle of the speech after noticing the red lights of smartphones and cameras recording the speech from the audience.<sup>111</sup> The speech obviously carries a great

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<sup>110</sup> Ben Crystal, *Springboard Shakespeare Hamlet: Before, During, After* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>111</sup> Christine Hauser, ‘Benedict Cumberbatch to Fans: No Cellphones Please’, *The New York Times*, 10 August 2015 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/arts/benedict-cumberbatch-to-fans-no-cellphones-please.html>>. To give an indication of the profile this performance/production had, the production was described, in the introduction to the NT Live broadcast, as “the fastest selling event in London theatre history”.

amount of cultural capital – it is known, and every actor must find a way not only to do it justice, but to make their own mark on it.<sup>112</sup>

Given its fame, it might upset and/or confuse audience members to hear the Q<sub>1</sub> reading of the first line: “To be or not to be – ay, there’s the point”. But even across the “good” variant texts, the speech is not uniform, and these differences expose the speech to a lack of fixity, which runs counter to its iconic status and may therefore cause alarm or suspicion. As such, this speech provides a nexus for some of the difficulties and possibilities introduced by the existence of variant texts. The textual differences between the Q<sub>2</sub> and F versions of the speech are minimal – though some of them do impact meaning and delivery. For instance, there is the metrical irregularity of Q<sub>2</sub> 3.1.82, “Thus conscience does make cowards”, which in F 3.1.83 is a full pentametric line: “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all”. Notably, though Q<sub>1</sub> is a largely botched version of this monologue, it concludes with a correlative to the conscience/cowards line: “Ay, that – O, this conscience makes cowards of us all” (Q<sub>1</sub> 7.136). This line is also metrically irregular, although it would only be five metric feet were it not for the inelegant “Ay, that” (such irregularities are symptomatic of Q<sub>1</sub> generally). And aside from that discrepancy, the line is close to that of F, specifically in its inclusion of the phrase “of us all”. Two texts uphold “of us all” – perhaps the Q<sub>1</sub> text could be used as a control in this instance.

There are other slight differences between Q<sub>2</sub> and F: Q<sub>2</sub>’s “proud man” is F’s “poor man” (Q<sub>2</sub> 3.1.70; F 3.1.71); “despiz’d love” is “disprized love” (71; 72); “great pitch and moment” becomes “great pith and moment” (85; 86), and “currents turn awry”

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<sup>112</sup> A sketch from the RSC’s *Shakespeare Live!* TV special, in which famous actors all deliver the opening line in their preferred intonation, is a perfect microcosm of how a kind of “anxiety of influence” weighs upon actors who come to the role. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEs8rK5Cqt8>>.



becomes “currents turn away” (86; 87). Strangely, Q2 asks, in a metrically regular line, “Who would fardels bear”, while F adds an eleventh beat: “Who would these fardels bear” (75; 76). Overall these minor differences may not seem radically useful, though a director who might be favouring a performance based on F might not like such an unusual word as “disprized”, or perhaps might object to the noticeable extra syllable caused by the aforementioned “these”. The two texts serve as counterpoints for one another, where this speech is concerned. Meanwhile, Q1 remains the outlier; while Q2 and F provide two similar speeches to choose from, Q1 is something else entirely, especially in terms of its length, being 22 lines compared to Q2/F’s 33 lines. This means that the “To be or not to be” speech in Q1 is exactly two-thirds the length of its doppelgängers in Q2 and F. And yet, for all these differences, a rare moment of uniformity emerges amongst all productions considered here: each director preserves the text of the speech as it appears in their source edition, which usually favours the Q2 reading, and intervenes only sparingly, to restore metre or sense: Godwin, for instance, uses a Q2 reading of the whole speech, though he interpolates from F just once, in re-adding the “of us all” after “conscience does make cowards”. Warchus amends his majority F-based text from “pith” to “pitch”.

Arguably, while the differences (especially in Q1) are considerable, they are not particularly significant – they do not expand or improve upon the meaning or delivery of the iconic speech. But the aspect of the speech which is most significant in Q1, and most likely to attract a director’s attention, is its location – the location of the speech in Q1 directly impacts more productions than any other facet of the variant text. Q1 places the speech earlier than it appears in Q2/F, in the middle of what is 2.2 in Q2/F, rather than in 3.1 where it generally appears. So in Q1, the speech appears *before* the business

with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the Players, rather than after. In 1961, the newly formed Royal Shakespeare Company staged its first production of *Hamlet*, directed by Peter Wood, who controversially moved the speech to its Q<sub>1</sub> position. This decision was so scandalising in its time that Walter H. Waggoner's review in *The New York Times* foregrounded Wood's editorial decision, even in its headline: "STRATFORD SHIFTS 'HAMLET' SPEECH".<sup>113</sup> Abigail Rokison-Woodall points out another radical choice, as favoured by Peter Brook, who "famously moved it to Act 4, leaving some people wondering whether he had cut the most famous speech in the play".<sup>114</sup> When Lyndsey Turner directed Benedict Cumberbatch as Hamlet, she famously "moved [the speech] to the very beginning of the play during the previews" – even further forward than its placement in Q<sub>1</sub>, it is worth observing – yet this decision clearly did not pan out, with Turner "subsequently moving it back to 3.1".<sup>115</sup> Perhaps it was just that Turner moved it to the wrong place – perhaps if she had moved it to its Q<sub>1</sub> position, it would have stayed there – but the fact that it defaulted back to its Q<sub>2</sub>/F position suggests a preference, conscious or otherwise.

At the RSC and elsewhere, the location of the speech is not sacred; it has become more common to lean into the lack of fixity, as "a number of modern productions have chosen to use the Q<sub>1</sub> placement... in otherwise Q<sub>2</sub>- or F-based texts".<sup>116</sup> According to Rokison-Woodall, there is a "lack of a firm location for the speech", which is what allows for a degree of flexibility in its placing, a degree which (perhaps excepting Turner's high-

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<sup>113</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, 'STRATFORD SHIFTS 'HAMLET' SPEECH; 'To Be' Soliloquy Is Moved in Peter Wood's Staging -- Ian Bannen Stars', 12 April 1961 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1961/04/12/archives/stratford-shifts-hamlet-speech-to-be-soliloquy-is-moved-in-peter.html>>.

<sup>114</sup> Abigail Rokison-Woodall, *Hamlet: Arden Performance Edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. xxxv.

<sup>115</sup> Rokison-Woodall, *Hamlet: Arden Performance Edition*, p. xxxv.

<sup>116</sup> Rokison-Woodall, *Hamlet: Arden Performance Edition*, p. xxxv.

profile production) gives directors a relative amount of leeway in where they place the famous speech.<sup>117</sup> Directors at the RSC have been fairly split between moving the speech to its Q1 location (as Wood did in 1961, Daniels in 1989, Warchus in 1997, Boyd in 2004, and Doran in 2008), or leaving it in 3.1 (as Peter Hall did in 1965, Buzz Goodbody in 1975, John Barton in 1980, Adrian Noble in 1992, Steven Pimlott in 2001, and Simon Godwin in 2016). David Tennant, who starred in Doran's 2008 production, has spoken at length about the decision to move the speech. Tennant, who was cast in the role at the height of his *Doctor Who* fame, suggests a number of benefits to moving the speech:

there is something interesting from an acting point of view about a character who seems certain and then changes his mind and drifts away again, but it goes against the drama of the story-telling [...] of course, what Shakespeare intended we will never know [...] The fact that there were the two versions meant that we allowed ourselves to consider both, and quite quickly both Greg [Doran] and I and most of the company felt that it was better. [...] the play is so well known and so well worn, how do you create any dramatic tension? [...] It does strike me as a thriller, and with the more traditionally accepted texts, the Players' scene coming where it does stops it being a thriller, it stops the forward momentum. Whereas if you do it with "To be or not to be" in its location in the First Quarto, it just seems to make more sense [...] and it made it more linear [...] we were talking about it as a thriller all the time and talking about keeping it fresh, [...] to subvert expectations – not that it's not been done before many times, but we were always looking for opportunities to be a bit free with it.<sup>118</sup>

His wide-ranging thoughts on the matter reveal that moving the speech: challenges what we know about Hamlet's character; improves the play's "forward momentum"; reveals something about the play as a "thriller" (a concept that will be important later);

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<sup>117</sup> Rokison-Woodall, *Hamlet: Arden Performance Edition*, p. xxxv.

<sup>118</sup> Abigail Rokison-Woodall, 'Interview: David Tennant', in *Shakespeare on Stage: Thirteen Leading Actors on Thirteen Key Roles*, ed. by Julian Curry and Trevor Nunn (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), pp.292-304 (pp. 297-8).

creates “dramatic tension”; “subvert[s] expectations”; “keep[s] it fresh”; makes the play “more linear”. He is also vocal about important considerations for theatre-makers that do not apply to editors. Shakespeare’s intentions are unknowable, *Hamlet* is known and worn (even productions with the speech moved have “been done before many times”), and in the theatre there is a sense of duty to “the drama of story-telling” that supersedes any kind of blanket deference to Shakespeare or his texts.

It is telling that Tennant and Doran (and the company) collectively wanted to experiment with the multiple texts, to keep things fresh (openly aware of its ubiquity), and to improve the pace of the play (equally aware of its length and momentum). The RSC has seemingly not staged a production with “To be or not to be” taking place somewhere *other* than 3.1 or 2.2. Perhaps Turner’s production at the Barbican is something of a cautionary tale; perhaps there is only so much room for directors to experiment with “the most famous speech”. Directors at the RSC have not yet seemed interested in deviating beyond textual precedents in the speech’s placement, or beyond the accepted configuration of the speech itself, the specific words favoured by editions that hybridise Q2/F. The speech’s fame, on a compositional level, supersedes its structural position; its differences across the three texts are reduced only to the structural matter. Responses to Q1’s “To be or not to be” set the precedent for a more general point: directors are not as interested in Q1’s words as they are in its form. Returning to Erne, “the linguistic texture [Q1 is] made of seems to be of minor interest for the purposes of modern performance.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Erne 2013, p. 218.

Another significant aspect of Q1's form is its inclusion of Scene 14, which provides a great provocation to directors. The scene is an interaction between Gertrude and Horatio which arrives quite late in the play: it is the fourth-to-last scene in the Q1 text. It is wholly absent, in any form, from Q2 or F (the only such scene) and it affects not only the pacing of the play but also the perception of Gertrude's character, potentially redeeming her and making her presence in the play's conclusion more purposeful – maybe even heroic. Then there is the text's structure and length: its seventeen scenes clock in at just over *half* the length of Q2. Of the three texts, Q1 is the text whose shape and length (if not for the garbled content) would have been best suited to being performed in its entirety at the time it was written.<sup>120</sup> This no doubt gives *some* credence (albeit limited) to certain arguments outlined earlier, such as Irace's suggestion of the possibility that Q1 was memorially reconstructed for a touring production, or Erne's suggestion that Q1 is the "theatrical text" to Q2/F's "literary text". In the sense that Q1 might suggest something about how the play can be effectively streamlined for performance, Q1 is not necessarily the impediment or impurity it has often been seen as; especially for a contemporary director, Q1 is a gift, a four-hundred-odd year old guide to a faster-paced *Hamlet* (and arguably a more decisive Hamlet, who has less time to pontificate and vacillate over his need for revenge).<sup>121</sup> "Q1 tells us nothing reliable about

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<sup>120</sup> I have written in my introduction to this thesis on performance length in the Early Modern period and now. In terms of *Hamlet*, Gregory Doran wrote in *The Times* in 2008 about the importance of cutting it down. Citing the fact that "plays at the original Globe started at around 2pm, and [...] had to be over between 4pm and 5pm", Doran goes on to say that Q1's runtime would be just over two hours, and Q2/F around four hours, meaning an "uncut" *Hamlet* would be at least four hours, longer if based on a conflation of Q2 and F. Doran recounts the infamous "Eternity" *Hamlet* staged in Stratford by Frank Benson in 1899 as a cautionary tale. Gregory Doran, "To cut or not to cut Hamlet: there's the rub", *The Times*, 4 August 2008 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/to-cut-or-not-to-cut-hamlet-theres-the-rub-sh7wqxvv2vv>>.

<sup>121</sup> Albert B. Weiner, in the introduction to his edition of *Hamlet: The First Quarto of 1603* (New York, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1962), observes "deliberate and thoughtful abridgement" in the Q1 text (p. 53).

Shakespeare's contribution to the text, but it may tell us something about theatre history – namely how the play may have been acted. [...] It also makes theatrical good sense in respect of its cuts", as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note.<sup>122</sup>

In Q1's Scene 14, Gertrude and Horatio discuss Hamlet's whereabouts – his escape from England and return to Denmark – and, given Horatio's status as Hamlet's only consistent ally in the play, this moment of confidence between the two might well suggest that Gertrude has come around to Hamlet's side, and suspects Claudius of Old Hamlet's murder.<sup>123</sup> Lukas Erne has some ideas about what this scene is doing in Q1; Erne points out a number of passages "which are all narrative rather than dramatic" and "considerably slow down the pace of the action":

All these intricate events take place offstage between act four, scene four, when Hamlet is leaving Denmark, and the beginning of act five when we see him back in his country. They are not directly dramatized but narrated in several instalments: act four, scene six has a sailor deliver Hamlet's letter to Horatio, who learns from it part of the story. The following scene opens with the King and Laertes still unaware of Hamlet's escape until another letter arrives from the Prince. At the beginning of act five, scene two, finally, another sequence has Hamlet tell Horatio those events which he did not communicate in the letter.<sup>124</sup>

Further, Erne claims that the threat posed by these scenes to the action of the play "seems to have been taken into account when the play was prepared for the stage":

After Ophelia's second madness scene (act four, scene five in modern editions), Q1 inserts the only scene that has no equivalent in the long texts. It has been believed that the reporter or reporters who undertook the memorial reconstruction failed to remember substantial parts of the

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<sup>122</sup> Thompson and Taylor 2016, p. 87.

<sup>123</sup> That, of course, is the more sympathetic reading; it is possible to view Gertrude as merely jumping ship, seeing Claudius' grip weakening, or even as playing both sides.

<sup>124</sup> Erne 2013, p. 261.

original play and consequently had to invent a new scene. It is more likely, however, that the scene is part of a conscious reworking designed to shorten and speed up the play in preparation for the stage.<sup>125</sup>

Erne is quite effusive about Q1 Scene 14, and what it does to address the above issues: “In little more than thirty lines, the scene sums up all the necessary information that the long texts spread out over different passages. All of these narrative passages, accordingly, have been omitted from the short text”.<sup>126</sup> Erne argues that the “fusion of several sequences into one short scene considerably condenses the action where Q2 and F slow it down, thereby allowing for a swift, action-packed and exciting finale.”<sup>127</sup>

We have already heard from David Tennant that the play is a thriller – Erne’s argument supports the idea that Q1’s structure, facilitated by Scene 14 and the scenes omitted in its place, lends itself more to the potential of the play as a thriller. Ben Crystal, meanwhile, defends the Q1 exclusive scene on short, simple grounds, namely that it “radically changes Gertrude’s character in the final act [...] and makes the standard Horatio Letter Scene version of 4:6 redundant”; he goes on to say that he likes it “for three reasons: there are some beautiful lines in it [...] generally, letter scenes are dramatically less interesting than a conversation [and] it provides a reason for Horatio to have stayed in Court after Hamlet has left”.<sup>128</sup> Crystal’s arguments about characterisation make a good case for seriously considering this scene, while his point about what is “dramatically interesting” echoes Erne’s comments about how the scene could make the play more “swift, action-packed and exciting”.

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<sup>125</sup> Erne 2013, p. 261.

<sup>126</sup> Erne 2013, p. 262.

<sup>127</sup> Erne 2013, p. 262.

<sup>128</sup> Crystal 2013, p. 93

Yet its presence on stage is not extensive. At the RSC, only two directors have included the Q<sub>1</sub>-exclusive scene: Matthew Warchus in 1997 and Michael Boyd in 2004. Yet both directors offer up a *version* of the scene, again suggesting that directors are not as interested in the *words* of Q<sub>1</sub> as its shape, even as its famously exclusive scene is transplanted into productions based on Q<sub>2</sub>/F texts. While Boyd completely cuts the letter Horatio reads in 4.6 in favour of Scene 14, Warchus incorporates a condensed version of the letter into his version of Scene 14, so that Horatio reads it to Gertrude rather than himself/the sailors.<sup>129</sup> This allows Warchus to make the scene even snappier, cutting twenty-four of the scene's thirty-four lines, and replacing them with just twelve lines of Hamlet's letter as it appears in Q<sub>2</sub>/F. By incorporating the (supposedly better) words of Q<sub>2</sub>/F into the Q<sub>1</sub> passage, it arguably blends the scene into the overall text, allowing for a lingering sense of familiarity. Boyd also cuts some of the lines from this short scene, though just six and a half lines compared to the twenty-four Warchus cuts (twelve, minus the 4.6 lines he incorporates). And both directors freely adjust words and rearrange the lines to tidy up the dialogue. The scene is used more for its function than its aesthetic, and tweaking it to bring it more into line with the style of Q<sub>2</sub>/F – to make it coherent within a predominantly Q<sub>2</sub>/F-based text – seems perfectly justifiable. Interest in the Q<sub>1</sub>-only scene continues into more recent productions: Robert Icke's 2017 production of *Hamlet* at the Almeida Theatre, starring Andrew Scott, also used the Q<sub>1</sub> only scene.<sup>130</sup> This was one of the most high-profile productions since the

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<sup>129</sup> In Q<sub>1</sub>, Horatio summarises the letter to Gertrude rather than reading it to himself or anyone else.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Icke, ed., *Hamlet* (London: Oberon, 2017), pp. 91-92.



Turner/Cumberbatch *Hamlet* in 2015, given Scott's popularity, demand for tickets, the eventual reviews, and its later life when it was broadcast on BBC Two in 2018.<sup>131</sup>

Icke's cut of the play was published to coincide with the production, its cover proclaiming "a performance text adapted by Robert Icke, edition prepared by Ilinca Radulian".<sup>132</sup> Icke penned a two-page introduction for this edition, in which he begins by explicitly acknowledging that "there is no such thing as a 'complete' *Hamlet* or a 'full text' *Hamlet*", as there are actually "three different printed texts", whose "status" and "authority" over one another is not known.<sup>133</sup> After a swift summary of the three texts, Icke opines that "Perhaps the only conclusion to draw is that productions of Shakespeare have cut and adapted Shakespeare since Shakespeare", and that "thematically, *Hamlet's* instability as a text is echoed oddly by the play itself [...] the play draws attention to its own status as simply a collection of words words words – a play of plays on words – and words that are plays on plays".<sup>134</sup> Icke explains certain aspects of his editorial decisions (removing the "traditional act and scene divisions", removing punctuation, in the hopes of making the play like "sheet music for actors to act"), as well as his initial process: "The production we made [...] was the result of three years' worth of meetings between Andrew Scott and I, and as we worked, I started to prepare this text", which "includes things from all three texts, including a scene only printed in the First Quarto, and is gently modernised in places for clarity".<sup>135</sup> Icke succinctly establishes his choices as deliberate, hints at Scott's involvement, and makes clear to readers that

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<sup>131</sup> 'Andrew Scott's *Hamlet* – review round-up', *WestEndTheatre*, 16 June 2017 <<https://www.westendtheatre.com/53148/reviews/andrew-scotts-hamlet-review-round-up>>.

<sup>132</sup> Icke 2017. Icke explains within his introduction to the edition that Radulian "prepared the text for publication from our rehearsal draft", p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> Icke 2017, p. 6.

<sup>134</sup> Icke 2017, p.7.

<sup>135</sup> Icke 2017, p.7.

he has incorporated from the supposedly “bad” text, and why. The inclusion of Scene 14 is important enough to mention specifically.<sup>136</sup> Like Boyd at the RSC, Icke retains the majority of the scene as it appears in Q<sub>1</sub>, and does not interpolate the letter from 4.6 of Q<sub>2</sub>/F. Icke’s production had a long runtime, clocking in at three hours and forty-five minutes including an interval and a short “pause”.<sup>137</sup> His decision to use this snappy section of Q<sub>1</sub> and cut (as per Erne, above) the letter-reading scene at 4.6, the Claudius-Laertes letter section in 4.7, and the beginning of 5.2 (which Icke does not cut entirely, but thins down significantly) functions beyond textual or even aesthetic considerations and into the very practical – even the slightest shortcut helps keep that runtime under four hours.<sup>138</sup>

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To egregiously paraphrase Hamlet, the denouement’s the thing wherein the (narrative, but also textual) knot shall be untied.<sup>139</sup> To summarise the threads: there are three texts

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<sup>136</sup> An editorial quirk makes the scene particularly fascinating to see on the page, which is Icke/Radulian’s use of underlining and numbered endnotes to explain both textual variants and Icke’s own interventions. The Gertrude-Horatio exchange from Q<sub>1</sub>, which falls in the middle of Scene 17 in Icke’s edition (pp. 91-2), is almost entirely underlined, and peopled with numbers directing to the endnotes. It draws attention to the reader that this scene has been heavily edited, firstly in terms of its overall inclusion (the underlining), and then in terms of the slight changes made from Q<sub>1</sub> to Icke’s version (examples including changing “whereas” to “wherein”, or “he is arrived” to “Hamlet returns”). Icke 2017.

<sup>137</sup> When Icke’s production transferred to Broadway in 2022, David Cote’s Observer review declared the runtime “punitive”. David Cote, ‘Production of ‘Hamlet’ Misguidedly Embraces the Prince’s Incel-Nature’, *Observer*, 30 June 2022 <<https://observer.com/2022/06/review-robert-ickes-production-of-hamlet-misguidedly-embraces-the-princes-incel-nature>>.

<sup>138</sup> Given Andrew Scott, in a promotional appearance for the production, declared his and Icke’s view that Shakespeare should not be an unpleasant necessity, like “eating your vegetables”, one must wonder if staging *Hamlet* as akin to a feat of endurance theatre was the right approach. (Scott’s vegetable comment originates in this BBC interview: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/entertainment-arts-40816428>.)

<sup>139</sup> A dénouement, deriving from the French “to untie”, is literally an “unravelling” specifically “of the complications of a plot in a drama, novel, etc.”. ‘Dénouement, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/denouement\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#7122747](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/denouement_n?tab=meaning_and_use#7122747)>.

of the play, one of which is shorter, faster-paced, and introduces various possibilities for structural reform (such as in the placement of the “To be or not to be” speech, the inclusion of Scene 14); two famous lines from the play, both of which relate to public/political dimensions of the play (“How all occasions do inform against me”, “Denmark’s a prison”), do not appear in the same source text; and it is evident that the play is long, but it should still be a thriller. The play’s ending, which in all three texts magnifies the Fortinbras subplot and unites it with the main plot, is largely responsible for determining the tone of the play. It is a revenge tragedy, but also a political one: the turmoil of the family spills over into the state. But there is another possibility, which is to treat the play as a *domestic* tragedy. Adapting *Hamlet* to that end brings the previously outlined threads of this chapter (*Hamlet*-as-thriller; its pacing; its structure; its national and political references) together.

*Hamlet* as a “domestic tragedy” would revolve around the Royal family and their household rather than the entire nation of Denmark: domestic in the personal sense, the family-as-home, rather than the national sense, the country-as-home. As Imogen Stubbs notes, summarised by Michael Dobson, “the real core of the play [...] is its depiction of a particular crisis in a particular family.”<sup>140</sup> Amongst other cuts, this primarily necessitates cutting the character (and narrative thread) of Fortinbras: the almost-conflict with Norway, and the Norwegian invasion of Poland, all of which brings Fortinbras through Denmark at the end of the play. Warchus eradicates the Fortinbras plotline (both his early appearance at 4.4 and his entrance at the end of 5.2 in which he resolves the play). Ending with a mashup of Horatio’s speeches following the death of

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<sup>140</sup> Michael Dobson, ‘Gertrude’ with Imogen Stubbs, in *Performing Shakespeare’s Tragedies Today: The Actor’s Perspective*, ed. by Michael Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 28-39 (pp. 30-1).

Hamlet allows the play to retain its sense of intimacy, the drama confined to the family and its closest friends; further, it means the play ends almost immediately after Hamlet's death, its audience not having to sit through the triumph of Fortinbras before they can finally stretch their legs again. Surprisingly this has not been a common choice at the RSC; only Gregory Doran has taken a similar stance in erasing the Fortinbras subplot, perhaps motivated again by that idea of *Hamlet* as a "thriller".

Earlier directors – Wood, Hall, Goodbody, Barton, Daniels – leave Fortinbras almost entirely intact. Even Boyd – who uses the Q1 Gertrude/Horatio scene, who cuts most of the "How all occasions" speech, and just generally thins out the play at any opportunity – includes Fortinbras. Perhaps this has something to do with the play's continuing political associations, which are greatly tied up in the Fortinbras subplot and the political dimension of the play. Nichole Royle writes that "No Shakespeare play has more obvious topicality or urgency in terms of thinking about nuclear war (what used to be called 'mutual assured destruction' or MAD), the deadly logic of revenge calling forth revenge (the Middle East, the war on terror), or the terrible ironies of 'success' at the cost of losing one's own life (the suicide bomber)."<sup>141</sup> He goes on to describe how "Other events of national and international significance are happening around Hamlet", from the arrival of Fortinbras to "strange sounds suggestive of further trouble".<sup>142</sup> Hamlet's final request of Horatio, his "ultimate and presiding concern [...] is with ensuring that Fortinbras is acquainted with everything that has happened", as if the new world cannot succeed the old without some lesson being learned, sense made.<sup>143</sup> Hamlet's self-destructive revenge is for nothing in a purely domestic context – two

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<sup>141</sup> Nicholas Royle, *How To Read Shakespeare* (London: Granta, 2005), p. 68.

<sup>142</sup> Royle, p. 69.

<sup>143</sup> Royle, p. 69.

whole families wiped out to avenge the already-dead. But in a wider political context, Hamlet has rid his country of a King who came by his power through murder and injustice and ruled accordingly. Boyd's production, in 2004, came after 9/11, the invasion of Iraq, the war on terror Royle specifically mentions.

In fact, since World War II, there has been a near-constant sense of trouble abroad and at home, spanning the RSC's sixty years, with various subsequent and overlapping conflicts and/or sociopolitical issues internationally (Cold War, Vietnam, Middle East) and nationally (the Troubles, the UK's involvement in the war on terror, the recession, Brexit). Many of these conflicts and issues play out on an increasingly visible global stage, particularly with the proliferation of media and the internet.<sup>144</sup> If the world and the nation are constantly in or acutely aware of great political conflict, that dimension of *Hamlet* is surely an easy shortcut to *relevance* for a modern director. To answer the question "why stage *Hamlet* now", a director can say: "look at what it tells us about this recent war / that recent political commotion". As Lois Potter notes:

Hamlet can be used to diagnose and criticize apathy – political or generational – and advocate a cult of violence, or (particularly through its treatment of Fortinbras) it can attack the assumption that military action and the imposition of a new dictatorship can rescue an evil society. A Japanese translator in 1995 pointed out that Hamlet, a play about going abroad, speaks to 'a peculiarly modern sense of powerlessness', both individual and national.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> As I redraft this chapter, in 2024, Ukraine is under siege, Palestine is under siege, and endless images and facts about these wars are beamed from warzones into my phone at all times of the day. Audiences are more internationally aware than ever thanks to the internet/social media.

<sup>145</sup> Lois Potter, 'Performance History', in *Hamlet: a Critical Reader*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 53-81 (p. 64).

Aside from Warchus and Doran, who conclude their productions with Horatio's famous lament of Hamlet, other directors introduce Fortinbras and give him the final word. For all its advantages in terms of trimming an already-long play and tightening the action, *Hamlet* is rarely performed as a sleek domestic tragedy on the RSC's stage. The explicitly political dimension is inevitable.

### **Double Vision: Two *King Lear*s**

The "undeniably political" nature of the ending of *King Lear* makes for an interesting comparison with *Hamlet* and will shape much of the discussion in the rest of this chapter. However, that other shared feature – the complex history of its multiple texts – vitally informs any exploration of *Lear*'s possible endings. *King Lear* has two principal texts to *Hamlet*'s three: the older Quarto text, first printed in 1608, and the later Folio text, which appeared in the First Folio in 1623.<sup>146</sup> The Quarto text lacks over 100 lines from the Folio text, and the Folio lacks over 300 from the Quarto. Many of the changes, individually at least, are minor, but overall speak to a greater tonal shift that seems to guide the revision of the Q text into its F counterpart. The relationship between these two texts is perhaps a little more straightforward than that of the three *Hamlet* texts. Though Michael Warren describes the texts as "sufficiently dissimilar" in their style and their substance, the *Lear* Quarto isn't thought to be a "bad" text like *Hamlet*'s First Quarto.<sup>147</sup> Even though Wells thinks the later text is "more regular and consistent in

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<sup>146</sup> Martin Wiggins suggests that the texts were likely written in 1605 and 1610, respectively, in his and Catherine Richardson's *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, 9 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), V, pp. 252-253.

<sup>147</sup> Michael Warren, 'Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar', in *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1978), edited by David Bevington and Jay L. Halio, pp. 95-107 (p. 97).

spelling and punctuation”, such facts do not discredit the earlier text: it is just an earlier, still-good but less-good version of the play, revised over the next few years into the more polished Folio text.<sup>148</sup> As MacDonald P. Jackson has it, the changes from the earlier to the later text simply indicate a sense of artistic development in Shakespeare’s craft, a “graph of one man’s efficiency”.<sup>149</sup> The virtues of the later text are frequently extolled, with Gary Taylor going so far as to claim that “in no other play are the changes so broad and deep, so extensive or integral to the dramatic structure”.<sup>150</sup>

This sense of progression affects how the texts fare over time. P.W.K. Stone argues that “Most editors seem to have agreed that, when Q<sub>1</sub> differs from F (which is very frequently), F more often than not preserves the better reading, even when – as sufficiently often happens – both readings make acceptable sense. Compared with the text of F, that of Q<sub>1</sub> appears distinctly less satisfactory.”<sup>151</sup> As a result, and despite its few “anomalies, [...] scholars have almost unanimously agreed that F is the more authentic text of the two, and that where it diverges from Q it does so in the vast majority of instances on good authority. Editors of the play have, almost without exception, used F as the basis of their editions.”<sup>152</sup> William C. Carroll seems to reinforce Stone’s argument, positing that the Folio is “privileged over the Quarto because the Folio has the benefit of theatrical insight – and more, the hindsight of a theatrical genius”.<sup>153</sup> As such, it is

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<sup>148</sup> Wells 1983, p. 3.

<sup>149</sup> MacDonald P. Jackson, ‘Fluctuating Variation: Author, Annotator, or Actor?’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 313-351 (p. 320).

<sup>150</sup> Gary Taylor, ‘The Date and Authorship of the Folio Version’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 351-469 (p. 355).

<sup>151</sup> P.W.K. Stone, *The Textual History of King Lear* (London: Scolar Press, 1980), p.2. (Though Stone refers to *Lear*’s first quarto as Q<sub>1</sub>, since it does have later quartos, I opt instead for Q, as this discussion does not consider any of the other quartos, since they are not major texts in the same way.)

<sup>152</sup> Stone 1980, p. 6.

<sup>153</sup> William C. Carroll, ‘New Plays vs. Old Readings: *The Division of the Kingdoms* and Folio Deletions in *King Lear*’, *Studies in Philosophy*, 85.2 (Spring 1988), 225-244 (p. 228).

perhaps surprising that the popular editorial trend when dealing with the two texts of *King Lear* – not dissimilar to the approach behind the Q2/F texts of *Hamlet* – is to conflate them, creating what Randall McLeod calls the “super-*Lear*”, the fullest possible version of the text, which exists sometimes in spite of its own contradictions.<sup>154</sup> Arguably there must be something in Q that still attracts editorial (and as a result, likely theatrical) attention. Perhaps it is the cutting down of Kent’s part, which loses the “deep human feeling and profound moral concern” he has in the Q text.<sup>155</sup> There may be something to be learned about editorial decisions from directorial decisions, when it comes to *Lear*. After all, as Abigail Rokison-Woodall points out, “Many argue that the changes improve the play theatrically and are likely to represent Shakespeare’s own revisions, made on the basis of theatrical experience”.<sup>156</sup>

As with *Hamlet*, directors tend to rely on published editions of the text when preparing their productions. Buzz Goodbody and Cicely Berry both rely on G.K. Hunter’s New Penguin text. Hunter explains that the “present text is based on the Folio; but all the variants to be discovered in the Quarto (corrected and uncorrected) have been considered, and have been admitted if a good enough argument for superiority could be discovered”.<sup>157</sup> Peter Brook uses George Ian Duthie and John Dover Wilson’s Cambridge edition, wherein the former editor writes “I have carefully considered every Q/F variant. In my judgement, sometimes Q and sometimes F is preferable. It seems to me that [the F variants] are very much more numerous than [the Q variants], Thus

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<sup>154</sup> Randall McLeod, ‘Gon. No More, the Text is Foolish’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 153-195 (p. 153).

<sup>155</sup> Michael Warren, ‘The Diminution of Kent’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 59-75 (p. 67).

<sup>156</sup> Abigail Rokison-Woodall, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Nicholas Hytner* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 69.

<sup>157</sup> G.K. Hunter, ed., *King Lear* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), p. 321.



where there appears to me to be absolutely nothing to choose between a Q and an F reading, I must follow F.”<sup>158</sup> Nicholas Hytner meanwhile uses Kenneth Muir’s edition, which “is based on F” but does “accept Q readings not only where the F readings are manifestly corrupt, but also where Q seems palpably superior”.<sup>159</sup> Thus most of the texts used by directors at the RSC have been F-preferring texts with interpolations from Q.

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Even the most minor textual variants can shift meaning. A minor but well-known example in *King Lear* is a single word which appears (or not) in one of Goneril’s speeches, at 1.1.291: “The observation we have made of it hath (not) been little”. The word “not” only appears in the earlier Q text – Foakes supposes it was “no doubt omitted from F by oversight”.<sup>160</sup> The full line in Q implies that Goneril and Regan have been attentive and careful in observing their father, while the omission in F implies the exact opposite. Though Lear’s eldest daughters are not sympathetic characters, inattentiveness does not suit their characters, their ambition. It is therefore an important word, as an aspect of their character and their relationship to their father hinges on it. As Horace Howard Furness surmises, the omission in F perplexes editors. There are some who are in favour of it. “Schmidt, while acknowledging that the ‘not’ may have dropped by mischance from [the Folio], thinks that a good sense may yet be extracted from that line by making ‘have’ emphatic”; yet “Dyce says that the [omission

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<sup>158</sup> George Ian Duthie and John Dover Wilson, eds., *King Lear* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 139.

<sup>159</sup> Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. xvii.

<sup>160</sup> R.A. Foakes, ed., *King Lear* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 178n.

in F] defies common sense”.<sup>161</sup> Though some editors (Rowe, Knight, Delius, Schmidt) have favoured the F reading in their texts, most do not. The editions which Brook, Goodbody and Berry use as their source text all include the Q-only “not”, and none of these directors deviated from their source texts by cutting the word. Ninagawa, Nunn, and Doran solve the problem by cutting the line altogether. Hytner is an outlier: though his source text includes the Q-only “not”, he cuts it, restoring the line to its F iteration.

It is Hytner’s text (and production) which bears the most scrutiny in this discussion, given the specific and self-proclaimed textual exercise Hytner undertook for this production. It marked, in the words of Peter Holland, “the first time in England a major production of *Lear* took full account of recent textual scholarship”, for which Holland himself helped Hytner “to prepare the text”.<sup>162</sup> Hytner “wanted to use a Folio text”; Holland retrospectively summarises the “use of the Folio text” to be “entirely convincing, providing, as I had always expected it would, a slightly leaner, more purposive form than the conflated text allows for”.<sup>163</sup> And yet there was one crucial aspect of the Q text which Hytner could not exclude, “the only major incursion”: the mock-trial scene (3.6.17-55), which only appears in the earlier text. At thirty-nine lines long, it is also a noticeably long variant, and so a logical cut for directors interested in streamlining the play or thinning it down. As R.A. Foakes usefully sums up:

Debate continues as to whether the F version of the play is better or worse for the omission of this mock-trial sequence. Structurally it seems to me better, since (a) the same motif occurs at 4.6.108-14, where Lear tries Gloucester; (b) the Fool has been increasingly distanced from Lear, and the

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<sup>161</sup> Horace Howard Furness, *King Lear: A New Variorum Edition* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1880), p. 40.

<sup>162</sup> Peter Holland, ‘Shakespeare Performances in England, 1989-90’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 44 (1991), 157-90 (p. 179).

<sup>163</sup> Holland 1991, p. 179.

omission of the mock-trial makes his role in his later scenes as a general sardonic commentator more consistent; and (c) the mock-trial is too theatrically powerful in relation to the climax of this sequence of scenes in the blinding of Gloucester in 3.7. Directors like to include it, even when generally following the F text, because it is good theatre, and enhances our sense of Lear's madness.<sup>164</sup>

Foakes' argument, offered as a personal opinion, is sound: the play is quicker without the sequence, and does not depend on its inclusion. Compromises are often made: although Brook, Ninagawa and Doran leave this scene untouched, Goodbody cuts about ten lines, Berry and Nunn a handful each. Hytner's decision to include this Q-only section, also uncut, is significant: his production was emphatically based on the Folio text, seemingly determined to break away from the trend of conflation.

But Hytner's choice was proactively informed and retroactively defensible. Abigail Rokison-Woodall writes that both "Hytner and Wood [who played Lear] felt that the mock-trial in Q was essential to the scene, arguing that its omission in F may not have been one of design but of censorship".<sup>165</sup> Holland defends the choice ardently: "Hytner argued that Folio 3.6 is weak dramatically, the scene seeming to lack shape and purpose" without the mock-trial.<sup>166</sup> And especially given the arguments about potential censorship affecting the text upon revision, "the dramatic and theatrical argument for including [the mock-trial] was convincing".<sup>167</sup> Gary Taylor, however, does not agree with the censorship argument: it "offers, at first sight, a rather more tempting target for censorship [...] But [...] more has been omitted from the Folio than can be attributed to the censor", and "Even in the mad trial itself, most of what has been omitted in the Folio

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<sup>164</sup> Foakes 1997, pp. 287-8.

<sup>165</sup> Rokison-Woodall, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Nicholas Hytner*, p. 70.

<sup>166</sup> Holland 1991, p. 179.

<sup>167</sup> Holland 1991, p. 179.

contains no political or social comment whatsoever”.<sup>168</sup> And yet for Holland the ends justify the means, as he argues that the mock-trial in Hytner’s production “became a crucial mark of dramatic shaping, the mid-point of the play’s journey, a sign of the distance traversed and that yet to come”.<sup>169</sup>

This in fact justifies the existence of so many conflated texts in published editions: even the most fervent champions of the F text see the Q-only mock-trial as essential to the play’s dramatic character. The mock-trial, though gratuitous and long and a very easy cut to make, practically speaking, is too loved by theatre-makers, and too known by audiences; further, as Hytner demonstrated in his version of the scene, which functioned as a “nightmarish reworking” of the play’s opening scene with Lear and his daughters, this scene is an effective means of setting the tone of where the play is headed, both in terms of Lear’s personal decline and in the general decline in justice and civility.<sup>170</sup> In its way, this invokes Roger Warren’s observation that “The whole topsy-turvy situation seems intended to express Lear’s vision of injustice”.<sup>171</sup> Ultimately its inclusion demonstrates that, even in a production overtly concerned with the question of textual variants, choices may be made that belie the ostensible practice. The mock-trial scene must be an exception that proves the rule.

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<sup>168</sup> Gary Taylor, ‘Monopolies, Show Trials, Disaster, and Invasion: *King Lear* and Censorship’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 75-119 (p. 88).

<sup>169</sup> Holland 1991, p. 181.

<sup>170</sup> Holland 1991, p. 179.

<sup>171</sup> Roger Warren, ‘The Folio Omission of the Mock Trial: Motives and Consequences’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 45-57 (p. 46).

The two texts of *King Lear* represent different problems in plot and tone to those of *Hamlet*, and present no less a challenge, despite there being one fewer text. Much like *Hamlet*'s ending, the final moments of *King Lear* determine the overarching tone of the play – yet even more considerably than *Hamlet*, its ending is wrapped up in questions of textual variants, variants which directly alter the play's trajectory. Consider Lear's final speech in the Folio text:

And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life!  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life  
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never.  
Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.  
Do you see this? Look on her: look, her lips,  
Look there, look there! (F1, TLN.3277-3283)

The Quarto text is missing some elements of this speech: the first line finishes with just two “no”s (as in “No, no life”), the fourth line omits two of the five “never”s, and the final two lines (“Do you see... look there!”) are omitted. Q is perhaps more exclamatory, with five “O”s not found in F – the third line becomes “O, thou'lt come no more”, and after the fifth line, instead of speaking the final two lines found in F, Lear lets out a dying groan, “O, o, o, o”. A.C. Bradley suggests the final two (F-only) lines show “the agony in which [Lear] dies is not one of pain but of ecstasy”, as he dies thinking Cordelia is breathing.<sup>172</sup> The tone of the ending, of Lear's death, is evidently affected by the textual variants.

Grace Ioppolo's appraisal of this moment is succinct, noting that “In Quarto 1, Lear dies believing that Cordelia is dead, and the Duke of Albany speaks the play's final,

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<sup>172</sup> A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (second edition, London: Macmillan and Co, 1905) p. 291.

reconciliatory lines. In the Folio, with the addition of the lines ‘Do you see this? Look on her, look her lips, / Look there, look there!’, Lear dies believing that Cordelia is still breathing, and thus alive, and Edgar offers the play’s final lines.”<sup>173</sup> (Ioppolo’s construction here links Lear’s hopelessness in Q with Albany’s role at the end, and Lear’s hopefulness in F with Edgar’s role – this will be significant shortly.) René Weis, noting that the difference in this moment hinges on uncertainty, writes that Lear’s additional line in F introduces “a tantalizing ambiguity: does Lear, like Gloucester, die in a paroxysm of happiness [...] because he mistakenly assumes Cordelia to be alive, or is it from sheer grief because she is truly dead? Q’s text affords no such mixed comfort to the audience, but Lear’s drawn out moan, followed by his final recognition of defeat, uncompromisingly spell out the despair of this devastating moment in the play.”<sup>174</sup>

Lear’s lines are ambiguous, in that the “this” he refers to could easily be perceived as life on her lips or utter stillness; and even if it is the former, Lear dying with the belief that his daughter lived is ambivalent itself, given the inherent despair of false hope, but also the sense that perhaps Lear died without truly realising the consequences of his actions. As Thomas Clayton notes, “Lear’s passing is a moment of extraordinary dramatic intensity and complexity [...] it is not surprising that [Shakespeare’s editors] have preferred the Folio’s readings. At the time and for the purpose of his revisions, Shakespeare evidently preferred them, too.”<sup>175</sup> Clayton seems to be arguing that the fact of Shakespeare’s revision is what makes editorial trends “not surprising”, though arguably the magnification of the tragedy achieved in Lear’s dying hope also makes its

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<sup>173</sup> Grace Ioppolo, ed., *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on William Shakespeare’s King Lear* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 173-4.

<sup>174</sup> René Weis, ed., *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition* (Essex: Longman, 1993), pp. 12-13.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Clayton, “Is this the promis’d end?: Revision in the Role of the King”, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren pp. 121-141 (p. 138).

inclusion “not surprising”. However the lines are interpreted, their presence represents a choice that a director (and ultimately their actor) would need to make. And directors of Shakespeare evidently follow suit from editors of Shakespeare: the directors of every production considered in this chapter favour the Folio version of Lear’s final speech, in line with their source texts.

Beyond Lear’s final speech, the *play*’s final speech becomes a cause for textual contention, not because of what is said, but because the allocation of these lines varies across the two texts, and this variation can impact the tone of the play’s final moment (as hinted towards by Ioppolo above). The closing speech – which in the Folio text is allocated to Edgar, and to Albany in the Quarto text – is imperative and didactic, as close as Shakespeare comes to an outright proclamation of any kind of “point” or moralising message to this play:

The weight of this sad time we must obey,  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
The oldest hath borne most; we that are young  
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

In addition to functioning as a mouthpiece of the play, there is much to be said of the structural dynamic of the final speech; as Jonathan Bate argues, “the conventions of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy” are such that “the senior remaining character speaks the final speech; that is the mark of his assumption of power. Thus Fortinbras rules Denmark at the end of *Hamlet*, Lodovico speaks for Venice at the end of *Othello*, Malcolm rules Scotland at the end of *Macbeth*, and Octavius rules the world at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*” – so, Bate asks of *King Lear*, “who rules Britain?”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Jonathan Bate, ‘Shakespeare’s Tragedies as Working Scripts’, *Critical Survey*, 3.2 (1991), 118–127 (p. 118).

The difference between Albany and Edgar as a ruler of Britain is significant for reasons which are at odds with one another. Both Albany and Edgar have exhibited signs of cowardly behaviour: Albany in his (in)action around Goneril, Edgar in fleeing to become Poor Tom early in the play. Both characters come back around to occupy more heroic and redemptive roles. Nonetheless, Albany operates silently in the shadows, while Edgar takes a more active role in caring for the wandering Lear and, later, his blinded father Gloucester – and Edgar is the one who steps up to fight Edmund, the one who comes closest to saving the day. Edgar is also redeemed by his suffering throughout the play, having been made into the first visibly wretched, abject figure in the play (pre-empting Lear’s decline and Gloucester’s). Thus Edgar undergoes a kind of contrition for his running away. Albany’s character arc is much less developed, less moving. However, while Albany is officially the most high-status figure surviving at the end of the play, he is also emblematic of the old guard – Lear’s son-in-law, yes, but often portrayed as being generationally closer to Gloucester and Kent (and thus to Lear) than to Edgar (Edmund, Cordelia). Therefore concluding the play with Edgar speaking – and so (as Bate suggests) ruling Britain – might suggest a more overt sense of renewal and redemption, a sense that something has actually changed.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> In recent years, particularly in the UK, *King Lear* has often been presented as a play overtly concerned with the “generational divide”; this was very apparent in the Old Vic’s production in 2016, directed by Matthew Warchus and starring octogenarian and formerly-retired actor Glenda Jackson as Lear and 27-year-old Harry Melling – best known for his role in the Harry Potter films – as Edgar. As part of the Old Vic’s event programming around this production, there was a live-streamed debate called “Is Ripeness All? Should the older generation be trusted with the future?”. The event description, as per the production’s programme, says “The Brexit vote has ignited a rhetoric of the old versus the young. This debate will pit millennials against baby boomers to ask, who should be responsible for the future?” Clearly that final question of responsibility and the future is an echo of the ending of *Lear*, and a question that occupied Shakespeare as a writer and reviser over four hundred years prior. As factors like the global pandemics, climate change, and so-called “culture wars” continue to divide generations, the tension between these two variant texts may only become more relevant for future directors of the play.



As observed above, Ioppolo aligns Lear's hopelessness or hopefulness at the moment of his death with the final speaker of the texts, Albany and Q for hopelessness, Edgar and F for hopefulness. Weis draws attention to the fact that "Albany's part is one of the shortest in *Lear*", that "The differences between the two texts' portrayals of Edgar are in themselves of a less radical nature than the changes in the presentation of Albany", and that "There is no question that F's Albany is a greatly impoverished character even though his political stature is not adversely affected by the cuts".<sup>178</sup> As for Edgar, Weis argues for the presence of a "deliberate reshaping of the end of the play" in F, with "Edgar's supplanting of Albany [...] part of a wider conceptual transformation".<sup>179</sup> Weis also notes that "Whereas Albany's part is one of the shortest in *Lear*, Edgar's is the second-longest in both Q and F versions of the play. Edgar is also the character in the play who after Lear suffers most, and his importance is recognized by Q's title-page", supporting the idea that Edgar's plight makes him a worthier candidate to conclude the play.<sup>180</sup>

And yet this cannot be taken for granted: Michael J. Warren follows a different path, arguing that "In neither text is the prospect for the country a matter of great optimism, but the vision seems bleaker and darker in F, where the young Edgar, inexperienced in rule, faces the future with little support."<sup>181</sup> Perhaps this is fundamentally a question of ideology, of whether or not one believes that a lesser man with more experience is a better leader than a virtuous man with no experience, as

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<sup>178</sup> Weis 1993, pp. 8-11.

<sup>179</sup> Weis 1993, p. 13.

<sup>180</sup> Weis 1993, pp. 8-9.

<sup>181</sup> Michael J. Warren, 'Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar', in *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's King Lear*, edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom (New York; New Haven; Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1987), pp. 45-56 (p. 55).

Warren seems to believe. His observation that neither text has an upbeat ending is blatantly true, yet he downplays the potential for difference in an audience's reception to the ending(s) in performance. Jan Kott, considering the bleakness of the ending to Peter Brook's production, wrote that "There will not be another king. The stage remains empty. Like the world."<sup>182</sup> But of course this is only one grim vision and version of the ending: the stage need not remain empty, nor the world, and the promise of generational progress is a believable solution to nihilism.

The very fact of Shakespeare's revision of the play's ending suggests at least the possibility that Edgar emerged as a superior choice to lead into the future. Bate argues that this:

alteration to the ending marks the climax of Shakespeare's subtle but thoroughgoing revision of the roles of Albany and Edgar in his two versions of *King Lear*. We do not know exactly when the revision took place, but it is a fair assumption that it was as a result of experience in the playhouse and with the collaboration of the company. Presumably there was dissatisfaction on the part of dramatist and/or performers with the way in which the two roles had turned out, so various adjustments were made. Shakespeare's plays were not polished for publication; they were designed as scripts to be worked upon in the theatre. To be cut, added to, and altered.<sup>183</sup>

And so, naturally, the modern director is left with Shakespeare's choice between Albany and Edgar. Of the productions studied here, not a single director concluded the play by allocating the lines to Albany; Hytner obviously prefers the Folio reading, while Ninagawa's typeset script initially allocated the final speech to Albany, and was later

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<sup>182</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. by Boleslaw Taborski, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 297.

<sup>183</sup> Bate 1991, pp. 118-9.

amended (by hand, in the promptbook) to give the lines to Edgar. Goodbody's decision to allocate this speech to Edgar was somewhat inevitable from the beginning of the play: part of her process for presenting such a streamlined version of the play was to cut Albany's character completely. This combination – his lack of eminence at the end of the play across fifty years of stagings, and the ease with which a director could excise him from the play altogether for the purpose of speed and ease – does not exactly vouch for Albany's character elsewhere in the play. Furthermore, Berry, Ninagawa, Nunn and Doran all cut some crucial lines from Albany's short final (in the F-text) speech (5.3.317-319): they each cut Albany's "Our present business / is general woe", and all but Ninagawa cut the preceding half-line, "Bear them from hence". The effect on Albany's character, and on the tone of the ending, is quite clear – in losing the declarative statement about woe, Albany is not able to set an emotional tone here; in losing the commanding "Bear them from hence", Albany is not able to exert any kind of authority in the play's closing moments. His character is made even more minor.

While these lines are not textual variants, their alteration is inseparable from questions around the variant allocations of the final speech. In addition to the factors above, the allocation of the final speech makes or breaks Albany's character. Steven Urkowitz's influential 1980 study considers Albany's alternate forms deftly, noting how "half of Albany's speeches are noticeably different in the two texts, variants occurring within the speeches themselves or in their immediate contexts."<sup>184</sup> What this says about Albany as a character and as a role is not to be underestimated. Even though the "role of Albany [...] is a small one", "variants in the Folio text related to this role raise crucial

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<sup>184</sup> Urkowitz 1980, p. 81.

dramatic issues for readers and performers of the play.”<sup>185</sup> Urkowitz is fair to Albany, who “is thought of by critics as a good man in a difficult marital and political situation who carries himself honorably throughout the painful action of the play”, but is upfront about how the “only question related to Albany that has aroused much critical discussion concerns the last speech of the final scene.”<sup>186</sup> Urkowitz, contemplating why readers “believe that Albany is simple and honest and good”, observes that “he proclaims his own innocence on several occasions, [...] is outraged by Gloucester’s blinding, [...] defends Britain against “foreign invasion,” and [...] presides over the trial that brings Edmund to justice”; yet, from a textual perspective, “not one of these virtuous acts is presented unequivocally by Shakespeare. Each is the locus of significant variants.”<sup>187</sup> Albany is in many ways a small, straight-forward character, but his significance is greatly expanded, and his characterisation complicated, by the possibilities of that final speech, and the nature of the revisions Shakespeare made to his part, throughout the play, from Q to F.

A key Q-only variant occurs at 5.1.23b-27, in which Albany addresses Regan and Edmund regarding the encroachment of French powers. The full speech (with the Q-only passage in italics) is as follows:

Our very loving sister, well be-met.  
 Sir, this I heard: the King is come to his daughter,  
 With others whom the rigour of our state  
 Forced to cry out. *Where I could not be honest*  
*I never yet was valiant. For this business,*  
*It touches us as France invades our land,*  
*Not bolds the King, with others whom I fear*

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<sup>185</sup> Urkowitz 1980, p. 80.

<sup>186</sup> Urkowitz 1980, p. 80.

<sup>187</sup> Urkowitz 1980, p. 127.

*Most just and heavy causes make oppose.*

This is significant: it presents Albany as being in-the-know; it allows him to speak to his own character (linking his truthfulness to his bravery, and excusing his ostensible lack of both with the bind he is in); and it portrays Albany as a character concerned with justice, “fearing” the “just and heavy causes” of Lear and his cohort. Further, the line that immediately follows this extended Q speech is also Q-only, spoken by Edmund: “Sir, you speak nobly.” It is possible that Edmund is being sarcastic, or else flattering Albany to manipulate him; but it is also possible that Edmund is in fact impressed by Albany’s oration, flattering him out of something like deference. Excluding the possibility of sarcasm (especially since the line isn’t thought to be an aside), whether Edmund wishes to flatter Albany out of deference or deception, it indicates that Albany is still a figure of status who needs to be either respected or controlled (or both). For that reason, it is surprising that Brook, Berry, Ninagawa and Nunn all retain these Q-only lines in their productions – particularly the latter three, who strip Albany of much import just two scenes later at the play’s close. Perhaps this relates to another advantage of these lines – a short speech is more than doubled in the Q text, which gives the actor playing Albany more to do. This is important, given that Albany’s role is diminished by over thirty lines in the Folio text – and that is before a director would make any kinds of intervention. It is worth noting that, in further cementing the political context of the world within the play, the lines do also serve a narrative purpose.

There are two other notable Q-only variants for Albany which occur in the second half of the play (at 4.2.30-51 and 63-70), which are long and would give the actor a more decently sized part, while also adding more dimension to Albany’s role, given that this

scene is so pivotal for Albany and his relationship with Goneril: “For the first time in the play since Cordelia’s chastisement of her at the end of 1.1, Goneril faces judgement. We have had little opportunity to examine Albany’s character before this scene [...] Here, perhaps surprisingly, he becomes the play’s moral spokesperson”.<sup>188</sup> Yet these variant passages are cut by Hytner, trimmed down by Ninagawa and to a lesser extent Nunn, and to an even lesser extent Berry, each of whom retained the (much shorter) Q-only passage above. (Brook, however, retains all three of these Q-only variants for Albany.) In Q 4.2.30-51, the following exchange takes place between Goneril and Albany (with the large Q-only passage, 32-51, in italics):

**ALBANY**

O Goneril!

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind  
Blows in your face. *I fear your disposition:  
That nature, which contemns its origin,  
Cannot be bordered certain in itself;  
She that herself will sliver and disbranch  
From her material sap, perforce must wither  
And come to deadly use.*

**GONERIL**

*No more; the text is foolish.*

**ALBANY**

*Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile:  
Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?  
Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?  
A father, and a gracious aged man,  
Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick,  
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.  
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?  
A man, a prince, by him so benefited!  
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits*

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<sup>188</sup> Ioppolo 2003, p. 157.

*Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,  
It will come,  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep.*

Goneril has one short line exclusive to Q in this speech, and the other eighteen and a half lines belong to Albany. Though Doran cuts the entire variant, Ninagawa, Nunn, and Berry retain it, albeit with some pruning. Ninagawa cuts from “I fear your disposition” to “Filths savour but themselves” – seven and a half lines from Albany, and the sole line from Goneril. Nunn, meanwhile, is more selective, cutting the three lines from “She that herself will sliver and disbranch” to “And come to deadly use” from Albany’s first speech, as well as the three lines “Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick” and “Could my brother suffer you to do it? / A man, a prince, by him so benefitted?” from the second speech; Berry, nineteen years before Nunn, also cuts the three lines from the second speech, but only those lines. This is consistent with the general tendency of trimming that directors rely upon especially in plays as long as *Lear*.

A short while later, at Q 4.2.63-70, the following exchange between Albany and Goneril (and, towards the end, a messenger) is also mostly retained by Ninagawa and Nunn, and kept in its entirety by Berry:

**ALBANY**

Thou changed and self-covered thing, for shame,  
Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness  
To let these hands obey my blood,  
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear  
Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,  
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

**GONERIL**

Marry, your manhood, mew! –

*Enter a Messenger*

**ALBANY**

What news?

Ninagawa cuts the first one and a half lines (“Thou changed ... not thy feature.”) while Nunn cuts the final one and a half lines of Albany’s speech (“Howe’er thou art ... doth shield thee.”), and Doran cuts all but Goneril’s final line (which, as it happens, diminishes Albany’s character in a different way). Otherwise, the exchange is left intact. This all seems less to do with keeping a proportion of Albany’s role and more to do with character dynamics. Albany’s speech is an overt reference to Goneril’s villainy, which also redeems Albany’s character from his passivity, even though it smacks of excuse: he would rip Goneril apart “were’t my fitness”. Goneril’s line then makes a mockery of his masculinity (arguably to further cement the difficulty of Albany’s situation), while Albany’s focus shifting to the messenger, and being the person who demands the news (rather than just passively receiving the news as an interruption, as in F), once again speaks to his status within the play. Including this Q-only exchange, albeit with minor changes, allows both director and actor to communicate more about his character.

As much as Albany’s character and role are tied up in these variants, leading up to the final and most significant variant, Edgar’s character and role are also greatly (and in the last variant, inextricably) impacted. A key Q-only monologue (3.6.99-112) finds Edgar alone on stage at the end of the scene, speaking directly to the audience.

When we our betters see bearing our woes,  
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.  
Who alone suffers suffers most i' the mind,  
Leaving free things and happy shows behind:  
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'er skip,



When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.  
 How light and portable my pain seems now,  
 When that which makes me bend makes the king bow,  
 He childed as I fathered! Tom, away!  
 Mark the high noises; and thyself bewray,  
 When false opinion, whose wrong thought defiles thee,  
 In thy just proof, repeals and reconciles thee.  
 What will hap more to-night, safe 'scape the king!  
 Lurk, lurk.

These fourteen lines are, in the words of Foakes, a “rhyming moralizing speech”, which is used to illicit pathos for Edgar.<sup>189</sup> The speech, in which he breaks from his Poor Tom disguise to address the audience directly, “adds nothing to the action”.<sup>190</sup> Yet, to quote Weis, “There are sound dramatic reasons for Edgar’s being given a soliloquy as in Q, not the least of which is the way his presence alone on stage at the end of 3.6 links up with his entry on his own at 4.1.”<sup>191</sup> Further, the omission of this speech in F could arguably diminish the connection between the audience and Edgar, and diminishes the scope of his role by at least one notable speech. Brook and Goodbody, predictably, cut the speech completely, while Berry cuts just a few lines (from “When false opinion” to “safe ‘scape the king”). Ninagawa, who ordinarily thins out these passages, cuts the entirety of this passage, which perhaps speaks to its general expendability; meanwhile Nunn continues the practice of thinning, offering up a condensed version of Edgar’s speech:

Who alone suffers suffers most i' the mind,  
 But then the mind much sufferance doth o'er skip,  
 When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.  
 How light and portable my pain seems now,  
 When that which makes me bend makes the king bow,

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<sup>189</sup> Foakes 1997, p. 142.

<sup>190</sup> Foakes 1997, pp. 293n-294n.

<sup>191</sup> Weis 1993, p. 25.

What will hap more to-night, safe 'scape the king!  
Lurk, lurk.

Nunn's cuts, as well as improving the pace of the scene, reduce the repetitive rhyming of the original speech to just two couplets, while still giving Edgar his moment with the audience. Doran thins the speech even more, to just two and a half lines, but does not see fit to cut it entirely. Arguably this is an important moment in establishing Edgar's dramatic arc: even Hytner's F-only production incorporated this speech from Q, one of the only Q variants to inform his productions, after the mock-trial. Though Edgar does not need the extra lines in Hytner's production, this moment is crucial to his character and foreshadows his ascent.

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Questions of structure and tone cannot be addressed without exploring another well-known textual variant, the conclusion to 3.7, which in the Quarto text concludes with three servants binding Gloucester's eyes. The absence of this interaction in the Folio text is one of the factors behind Abigail Rokison-Woodall's observation that the "Folio text is not only tighter but also bleaker than its quarto counterpart".<sup>192</sup> Peter Brook's 1962 production was notable for its partial omission of this variant – partial, since the characters remained on stage, as they would in the Q text, but did not help him. Instead the scene ends on "the old man blindly stumbling into the servants, who push and shove him, then leave him to grope off alone", as Dennis Kennedy describes.<sup>193</sup> Alexander

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<sup>192</sup> Rokison Woodall, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Nicholas Hytner*, p. 71.

<sup>193</sup> Dennis Kennedy, 'King Lear and the Theatre', in *Educational Theatre Journal*, 28 (1976), 35-44 (p. 42).

Leggatt, discussing how “Cutting can slant a production one way or another”, states that “Peter Brook was accused of unfairly darkening the play by cutting the servants who comfort the blinded Gloucester”.<sup>194</sup> This word “unfairly” is telling, suggesting that the manipulation of the text to evoke tone is some kind of injustice to the play itself (or perhaps its writer).

Brook’s treatment of this scene is significant, because it is pivotal to his production, and so pivotal to *King Lear*’s treatment in the theatre, if we accept Grace Ioppolo’s opinion that “It was not until Peter Brook’s revolutionary production of the play in 1962 [...] that these seemingly irreconcilable views of *King Lear* as both horrible and brilliant were portrayed as intrinsically compatible and absolutely necessary. Ever since 1962, the play has taken its rightful place as the finest of Shakespeare’s plays and the most representative of his genius as a poet and a playwright.”<sup>195</sup> Weis also sees this moment as critical to the play’s overall atmosphere: “Shakespeare’s play pulls towards chaos at every juncture, notably in its apparently random plotting and in the cruelty of the blinding of Gloucester.”<sup>196</sup> Kennedy asserts that “Shakespeare (in the Quarto text) provides us with an indication of the moral norm and of the persistence of human dignity in the dialogue” that Brook cuts out.<sup>197</sup> This, coupled with other cuts (including “the speech in the final scene in which Edmund repents his order for the deaths of Lear and Cordelia”), points towards a general trend for Brook, in which the characters

tend to be dehumanized, were often treated as puppets or automatons. The impulse of the production was to remove the audience’s sympathy for the

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<sup>194</sup> Alexander Leggatt, *King Lear: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 10.

<sup>195</sup> Ioppolo 2003, p. 1.

<sup>196</sup> René Weis, ‘Introduction: *King Lear* 1609-2009’, in *King Lear: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (London; New York, NY: Continuum International, 2011), pp. 1-25 (p. 5).

<sup>197</sup> Kennedy 1976, p. 42.

characters, especially for the King himself, in order to achieve a sense of ‘epic objectivity’: we are all playthings of the gods. The point is that Brook narrowed the range of Shakespeare’s theme in order to make coherent theatrical sense. [...] If our century did not respect Shakespeare so much, Brook’s version might have received less violent criticism.<sup>198</sup>

So much can hinge on the treatment of a single textual variant: it can define not only a production, but also the play itself, ever in a flux of perception.

Notwithstanding Leggatt’s above charge of “unfairness”, subsequent directors after Brook have not been deterred, with Buzz Goodbody replicating this cut in her whiplash-speed production a decade later, and Hytner favouring the cut too, once again abiding by the F-only project. While Nunn includes the servants’ exchange in its entirety, Berry, Ninagawa and Doran all cut some of the servants’ lines. While the specifics of the exchange between the servants is negligible, their inclusion itself is vital in setting a tone less bleak than Brook’s or Hytner’s. Hytner’s cutting of the servants differs from Brook’s largely because of what immediately proceeds it. Regan asks “How is’t my lord?” to the blinded Gloucester, rather than Cornwall, in what Rokison-Woodall describes as “a moment which suggested genuine concern and tenderness but also derangement [...] The audience was thus left at the interval, with an uneasy sense of a deterioration of relationships, morals and mental stability”.<sup>199</sup> Hytner builds on his exclusion of the Q-only servants exchange by redirecting Regan’s address, magnifying the bleakness of the play: bleak not just in its action, but in that “deterioration” of mind. Whether or not that bleakness is desirable is another matter; Ioppolo, decrying the “definitive, fixed, and unredemptive conclusion offered in so many recent theatre and

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<sup>198</sup> Kennedy 1976, p. 42.

<sup>199</sup> Rokison-Woodall, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Nicholas Hytner*, p.71.

film productions”, observes that the play’s “circularity may offer more redemption, and less bleakness”.<sup>200</sup> But perhaps the bleakness of everything leading to the ending is what allows for *more* redemption: without the bleakness, what is there to redeem?

There is another nexus of bleakness, character and structure in the figure of Kent, whose role and characterisation are affected by numerous textual variants. Michael Warren argues that, though in dramatic terms Kent “functions in the same way in each text”, F “has no room for Kent’s choric utterances or for the maintenance of serious interest in his functionless disguise”.<sup>201</sup> Perhaps this explains a major textual variant, the Q-only scene between Kent and a Gentleman at 4.3, the only scene that is present in just one of the two texts. Jonathan Bate notes that the information provided in this scene “is to say the least a halting explanation, which is perhaps one reason why Shakespeare cut the whole” of it.<sup>202</sup> Another major variant which affects Kent is his speech to the Knight/Gentleman at 3.1.17, which diverges at 3.1.21 onwards in the two texts, presenting two entirely different speeches.<sup>203</sup> According to Foakes, “Q and F differ markedly here at the only point in the play where there are two different versions of a substantial speech”.<sup>204</sup> Abigail Rokison-Woodall and Simon Russell Beale neatly summarise: “F offers a rather vague account of English spies conveying information to the French. Q1 provides the information that the French have landed on English shores, prepared to fight, and instructs the Knight to go to Dover”.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ioppolo 2003, p.174.

<sup>201</sup> Michael Warren, ‘The Diminution of Kent’, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, pp. 59-73 (p. 60-63).

<sup>202</sup> Bate 1991, pp. 120-121.

<sup>203</sup> The Gentleman in 4.3 is “presumably” the same one he spoke to in 3.1 (Foakes 1997, p. 317n).

<sup>204</sup> Foakes 1997, p. 393.

<sup>205</sup> Abigail Rokison-Woodall and Simon Russell Beale, ‘Introduction’ to *King Lear: Arden Performance Edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 23-62 (p. 28).

The first four and a half lines of this speech are, with minor variants, the same across the two versions of the text, while the rest of the speech is in flux. The Folio version contains a further eight lines, while the Quarto version has a further thirteen lines, and Kent delivers different information across the two versions:

Sir, I do know you,  
And dare upon the warrant of my note  
Commend a dear thing to you. There is division,  
(Although as yet the face of it be cover'd  
With mutual cunning) 'twixt Albany and Cornwall:  
Who have, as who have not, that their great Stars  
Thron'd and set high; Servants, who seem no less,  
Which are to France the Spies and Speculations  
Intelligent of our State. What hath been seen,  
Either in snuffs, and packings of the Dukes,  
Or the hard Reine which both of them hath borne  
Against the old kind King; or something deeper,  
Whereof (perchance) these are but furnishings. (F 3.1.17-29)

Sir I do know you,  
And dare upon the warrant of my Arte,  
Commend a dear thing to you, there is division,  
Although as yet the face of it be cover'd,  
With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall  
But true it is, from France there comes a power  
Into this scatter'd kingdom, who already wise in our negligence,  
Have secret feet in some of our best ports,  
And are at point to show their open banner.  
Now to you, if on my credit you dare build so far,  
To make your speed to Dover, you shall find  
Some that will thank you, making just report  
Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow  
The king hath cause to plain,  
I am a Gentleman of blood and breeding,  
And from some knowledge and assurance,  
Offer this office to you. (Q 3.1.17-33)

Foakes observes that “From 1733, when Lewis Theobald’s edition appeared, to the 1970s, nearly all editions of the play conflated the two passages to give Kent a long, unwieldy speech”.<sup>206</sup> A full spectrum of responses to this “unwieldy” speech occurs at the RSC. Where Goodbody includes neither variant (cutting the whole speech along with the rest of 3.1), others offer up one or the other: Hytner of course presents an uncut F-only version, and Ninagawa, despite having no stated bias for the Quarto, offers an uncut Q-only version of the speech. But conflated versions of the speech abound: Brook, Berry and Nunn cut from conflated versions of the texts (as amalgamated by the editors of their source texts).

Brook’s treatment of this speech (and indeed of Kent throughout) necessitates a closer look:

Sir, I do know you,  
 And dare upon the warrant of my note  
 Commend a dear thing to you. There is division,  
 Although as yet the face of it be cover'd  
 With mutual cunning 'twixt Albany and Cornwall:  
<sup>F</sup>Who have, ~~as who have not, that their great Stars~~  
~~Thron'd and set high;~~ Servants, ~~who seem no less,~~  
 Which are to France the Spies and Speculations  
 Intelligent of our State. ~~What hath been seen,~~  
~~Either in snuffs, and packings of the Dukes,~~  
~~Or the hard Rein which both of them hath borne~~  
~~Against the old kind King; or something deeper,~~  
~~Whereof (perchance) these are but furnishings.~~<sup>F</sup>  
<sup>Q</sup>~~But true it is,~~ from France there comes a power  
 Into this scatter'd kingdom, ~~who already~~  
~~Wise in our negligence, have secret feet~~  
~~In some of our best ports, and are at point~~  
~~To show their open banner.~~ Now to you,  
 If on my credit you dare build so far,  
 To make your speed to Dover, you shall find

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<sup>206</sup> Foakes 1997, p. 393.

Some that will thank you, ~~making just report~~  
~~Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow~~  
~~The king hath cause to plain,~~  
I am a Gentleman of blood and breeding,  
And from some knowledge and assurance offer  
This office to you.<sup>Q</sup>

That “vague” account of spies from the F-only portion has visibly been trimmed: the key information (that servants of Albany and Cornwall are relaying information to France) is retained, while the four and a half lines which speculate aimlessly about “what hath been seen” are cut, as well as the unclear image of “their great Stars / Thron’d and set high”, and two similar (and similarly unnecessary) quantifiers (“as who have not”, “who seem no less”). Thus far the effect of the cuts has been to make the speech snappier and clearer. The cuts to the Q-only lines continue this project: arguably “from France there comes a power” sufficiently conveys the imminence of France’s invasion without the convoluted expansion “who already / Wise in our negligence, have secret feet / In some of our best ports, and are at point / To show their open banner”, which Brook cleanly cuts. The rest of the speech urges the knight/gentleman to Dover, and retains only the information pertinent to that request, cutting the overly emotional language of “making just report / Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow / The king hath cause to plain”.

The streamlining is obvious and effective, but in stripping Kent of his more descriptive and emotive lines, Kent’s nature as a sensitive and humane counter to much of the senseless cruelty of other characters is somewhat diminished. Brook is one of the few directors to cut completely the 4.3 textual variant (the conversation with the Gentleman mentioned above). His cut improves the pace of the play but at the expense of Kent’s embeddedness in the drama and, again, his thoughtful nature. In cutting this



whole scene, Kent asking if his letters “pierce[d] the queen to any demonstration of grief” (4.3.9-10) and if the news “moved her” (4.3.15) is lost, as well as some lines of insight and poetry: “It is the stars, / The stars above us govern our conditions” (4.3.33-4), “the poor distressed Lear” (4.3.39), “A sovereign shame so elbows him. His own unkindness / That stripped her from his benediction, turned her / To foreign casualties [...] these things sting / His mind so venomously that burning shame / Detains him from Cordelia” (4.3.43-8).<sup>207</sup> Though Kent’s lines here may be guilty of telling rather than showing, and largely summarise what the audience already knows, they also foreground the role of emotion in Lear’s and Cordelia’s actions, psychologising the characters, and in doing so establish Kent as an emotional compass in the play. The loss of these lines continues to strip away from Kent’s heart, in keeping with the overall darker tone of Brook’s production, which is commented on at length elsewhere in this chapter. Some reviewers considered this change in Kent extreme: Kenneth Tynan’s review for the *Observer* singled out the scene in which “Kent takes his revenge on Goneril’s uppish steward”, and noted that Kent not only “loses his laughs” but was also shown “as an unreflecting bully”, symptomatic of “the alienation effect in full operation: a beloved character seen from a strange and unlovely angle”.<sup>208</sup> Brook’s cutting of Kent’s more redeeming facets is therefore part of his wider project of darkening the play.

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<sup>207</sup> The speech also ends with Kent extending compassion and hospitality to the Gentleman, which further demonstrates his better nature.

<sup>208</sup> Kenneth Tynan, Review of *King Lear*, *Observer*, 11 November 1962 (republished in *The Guardian*, 24 January 2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jan/24/kenneth-tynan-paul-scofield-peter-brook-king-lear>>. Further, in most productions I have seen where Kent is a sympathetic character, his toying with Goneril’s steward is indeed played (successfully) for laughs.

### Foolish Texts & Words (Words Words)

*King Lear* is a play about division; it is a play divided into two texts, and it is a play whose multiplicity now divides directors and scholars alike. Goneril's words from 4.2 come to mind: "No more, the text is foolish". Maybe not foolish, exactly – it is unstable, but that instability is a cause for excitement, a symbol of possibility, and a source of potential renewal for such a well-known play. Not every combination of the variants has been staged before, and further experimentation can only yield new ways of staging, watching, and thinking of *King Lear*. To quote Jonathan Bate,

There are two Lears [...] They are not a right and a wrong text, they are just different texts. [...] We are in the business of difference, of argument, of debate and constructive disagreement. We have always granted a plurality of opinion and of interpretation in our dealings with Shakespeare. But those pluralities used to depend on deference to a single authoritative text. Now, however, we know that the texts themselves are plural. Another form of 'authority' has been overthrown. That, I suggest, is cause not for dismay but for celebration.<sup>209</sup>

This occlusion of another form of authority can hopefully go a long way towards freeing the modern director from some of the burdens associated with editing *King Lear* for performance, moving beyond questions of "what did Shakespeare want?" to "what does Shakespeare need, right at this moment". As Urkowitz notes, "Variants in the Folio text introduce complex changes in characterization, as well as simpler adjustments in the rhythms and the sense of dialogues. Major variants also create new designs for individual scenes and for the succession of scenes."<sup>210</sup> These variant texts are not a problem to overcome but an opportunity to reframe the known play.

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<sup>209</sup> Bate 1991, p. 127.

<sup>210</sup> Urkowitz 1980, p. 17.

*Hamlet*, though the nature (and number) of its major texts is markedly different, is no less freed by its own multiplicity. It is vital – not least for a play so blatantly concerned with its own “words words words” – to engage not only with those words but with their legacy. Bruster’s Museum of Shakespeare analogy indirectly warns against staleness, complacency: a prominent position in that crowded room depends on the director and actor and their ability to conjure something new, iterations that have not already got their own plinth and plaque. When thinking about the multiplicity of *Hamlet*, directors would do well to keep Lois Potter’s optimism in mind, as well as her evoking of John Caird:

Because *Hamlet* is long, and what survives of it is the purely verbal dimension, there is always likely to be a conflict over the extent to which the words should dominate a production. There is no longer such a thing as a standard performance text. Each director (or dramaturg) usually creates a new *Hamlet*, and the director of a non-English production will often commission a new translation to fit the intended interpretation. [...] When the play is cut, as it usually is, it can express a directorial view; thus, John Caird has said that to play the full text is ‘to shirk the responsibility to make the evening coherent.’<sup>211</sup>

It is therefore the responsibility of the director to make sense of the playtexts themselves, be it *Hamlet*’s trio or *King Lear*’s pair, and to present them to an audience in a coherent fashion, so that the audience need not do the work in real-time, and instead can enjoy their position as spectators, not scholars.

This echoes Alan C. Dessen’s comments on the differing duties of the director and the editor:

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<sup>211</sup> Potter 2016, pp. 76-77.

Unlike the on-the-page editor, whose goal is to offer readers a text that preserves and clarifies the original, the director's goal is to make that text comprehensible so that it can come alive for playgoers who are both viewers of onstage activity and auditors of verse in early modern English. Moreover, the director must achieve this goal without exceeding the limits imposed by the available resources, an imperative not faced by the editor. A director will not stay a director for very long if he or she misjudges the capacity and tastes of that targeted audience or the practicalities of the situation.<sup>212</sup>

The textual variants of *Hamlet* and *Lear* throw into sharp relief the task of the director as a type of editor of Shakespeare, a task which transcends the text itself, and must incorporate what is and isn't there. As Maria Macaia argues, "staging a play, directors create a vision for their production starting from the text but also moving beyond that, by making decisions on what *isn't* in the text".<sup>213</sup> This is true of *Hamlet* and *Lear*, and in fact any Shakespeare play, regardless of how many versions of the text there are. The materials may change, but the craft remains the same.

Simon Godwin, discussing his process of preparing a text for *Hamlet*, reveals a kind of detached awareness of the textual question:

I think as a director I've been quite insensitive to textual variants. [...] There's probably a feeling of being intimidated by the amount of options available to one, and sometimes an anxiety that one will get taken down a kind of academic rabbit hole [...] the hall of mirrors that might be a variety of textual editions [...] I think I've been underconfident about steering my way through that, and I've tended to quickly settle on the Arden edition, because that's the one that has a brand recognition, and settling into that, and quite quickly wanting I suppose to create my own variant.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Dessen 2006, p. 192.

<sup>213</sup> Maria Macaia, 'The Cast Speaks: The 2006 Cast of Actors From The London Stage', in *Hamlet: Shakespeare in Performance*, advisory editors David Bevington and Peter Holland (London: A&C Black, 2007), pp. 325-338 (p. 325).

<sup>214</sup> Godwin 2022.

Though he is aware of “things like the Quarto and the Folio, or should the scene with Gertrude and Horatio be included”, his instinct is towards putting such concerns from his mind where he can. He goes on to describe how “the god that I have followed in editing these plays tends to be very much a production god, rather than an editorial god”.<sup>215</sup> Godwin sees the process as being “pragmatic”, often concerned with how to “make it of an appropriate length”, and how to “cut things that seem jarring in terms of modern sensibilities, as well as unhelpful in the story telling”.<sup>216</sup> Given how much Godwin’s cut shared with many of the others, it is not much of a leap to assume that other directors may have felt similarly.

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There is much overlap between the processes for cutting these tragedies, both colossal in length, in status, and in textual complexity. In broad terms, directors are less interested in the variant texts on a word or sentence level, and more interested in the structural level, and in how the variants impact upon more famous speeches and set-pieces (from “To be or not to be” in *Hamlet* to the mock-trial in *King Lear*). The fact that most modern published editions of the play – sources for their production in the theatre – offer conflated versions of their texts, to offer every available line and speech, allows directors to avoid direct engagement with the textual question altogether. Directors are more likely to make their cuts, in particular with these two plays, with conceptual vision in mind, including the desire to keep the play fresh. And of course there is that

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<sup>215</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>216</sup> Godwin 2022.

overarching concern for most directors: keeping the runtime down so their audiences do not have to choose between catching the end and catching the last train home. Of course there are useful variants that many published editions may occlude, and directors may therefore not be as immediately aware of: from the existence of Q<sub>1</sub> *Hamlet*'s Scene 14 (with Gertrude and Horatio) to the open-endedness of *King Lear*'s bleakest moments (Gloucester's blinding and the final speech).

In a way, *Hamlet* might be an easier group of texts to cut than *King Lear*, especially because *Hamlet* has Q<sub>1</sub> to serve as something of a rubric for a shorter, faster cut, and the sizeable Fortinbras subplot which can be systematically, surgically excised, while *Lear* seemingly has no such rubric. That said, as Goodbody demonstrated, it is possible to cleanly cut characters like Albany, and textual variants like the mock-trial, to achieve a similar result. Both plays have key structural questions raised by their variant texts. One of the most pervasive textual issues arising from the two *Lear* texts is around characterisation and the instability it introduces – but this could give directors and actors more to think about, more ways to refresh familiar characters. The textual variants for both texts are as much a burden as a boon; there is more material for the director to play with, which may seem daunting, but it can open more doors, especially to help shorten two of Shakespeare's longest plays.

Grace Ioppolo describes Shakespeare as “a deliberate, consistent, and persistent reviser who worked in an infinite variety of ways”. Should a director not seek to engage with the texts in a similar way? If the five years between Shakespeare's Q and F texts warranted such extensive revision, wouldn't the next four centuries?<sup>217</sup> Paul Menzer

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<sup>217</sup> Grace Ioppolo, *Revising Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 5.

describes “a rubble of “textual debris”” resulting from early modern theatre practices.<sup>218</sup>

Is it not the job of the director to sift through that debris to find the best possible, most performable version of the play? *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, twin zeniths of the canon, reveal much about the general practice of cutting for the stage: because they are textually complicated, and long, and difficult, yes, but because, in the right hands, the work involved in cutting can yield palpable, memorable results.

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<sup>218</sup> Paul Menzer, *The Hamlets: Cues, Qs, and Remembered Texts* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 17.

## 2

### Complicated Comedies: Balancing Comicality with Complicity

#### *In The Taming of the Shrew, As You Like It and Measure for Measure*

Although big-C Comedy (the genre) does not de facto necessitate small-c comedy (the discipline or practice of being comedic/comical), modern expectations exceed historical or scholarly parameters of Comedy.<sup>219</sup> In historical and theatrical terms, a Comedy is primarily “a drama written in a light, amusing, or satirical style and having a happy or conciliatory ending. More generally: any literary composition or entertainment which portrays amusing characters or incidents and is intended to elicit laughter”.<sup>220</sup> A further clarification on that definition is given: “the genre was established in Elizabethan theatres. Comedies from this period typically feature ordinary characters (as opposed to the elevated protagonists of tragedy) who encounter or create amusing difficulties which are finally happily resolved, often through marriage”.<sup>221</sup> This differs from comedy in that more “general” sense indicated above, which is also defined as “a funny or farcical incident, action, or predicament”, or “humour; humorous invention; the action or quality of being funny or amusing”.<sup>222</sup> In any case, though the genre and the humour are not always related, their shared etymology engenders conflation, and where one sees a Comedy advertised, they expect comedy. An audience today attending *The Comedy of*

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<sup>219</sup> Throughout this chapter, references to the genre will be capitalised (Comedy), while references to the more general term will be in lowercase (comedy).

<sup>220</sup> ‘Comedy’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/comedy\\_n1?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#8978505](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/comedy_n1?tab=meaning_and_use#8978505)>.

<sup>221</sup> ‘Comedy’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], as above.

<sup>222</sup> ‘Comedy’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], as above.



*Errors* is expecting to laugh at some errors more than they are to witness a marriage-as-resolution to said errors. Plot conventions and tropes – including the play’s form, setting, ending – underpin Comedy, but humour is still admittedly a part of it. And even if the audience isn’t *expecting* to laugh, the comparative density of jokes in the Comedies (as opposed to the Tragedies) is telling, and it’s hard to imagine a successful staging of a Comedy without sufficient comedy, especially in a climate increasingly sceptical of the relevance and/or effectiveness of Shakespeare’s humour.<sup>223</sup>

Is Shakespeare funny, and does it matter? B.J. Sokol writes that jokes matter because “discord threatens to disrupt encounters between persons of diverse outlook or culture, and jokes are used to help rescue dialogue”.<sup>224</sup> And yet this rescue method itself is fraught, because “joking is not a simple matter. Across time or culture, and sometimes just across subcultures, jokes can be confusedly received or even mistakenly detected”.<sup>225</sup> This is further complicated by the shifting of sensibilities over time: “Distance in time, and perhaps also a new puritanism, may create particular problems for the interpretation of Shakespeare’s jokes”.<sup>226</sup> Though Sokol is writing specifically

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<sup>223</sup> Notable theatre director Sir Richard Eyre, speaking at the Chalke Valley History Festival and quoted in an article in the *Telegraph*, observed that “a lot of Shakespeare’s jokes aren’t very good [...] Because they’re topical, you know. Comedy dates very, very quickly. [...] He clearly made the audience laugh and still some Shakespeare plays are supremely funny when performed well.” Ben Crystal, in agreement with Eyre, notes that some jokes fail because today’s audiences are “losing our love and practice of rhetoric and word-play that Shakespeare’s audience delighted in”, though “There are certainly plenty of jokes that simply don’t make sense any more - these context-relevant jokes aren’t funny because they’re social commentary gags, and even with a broad understanding of Shakespeare’s society, they’re smirk-worthy at best”. Crystal goes on to state that some “socially relevant gags, physical comedy, word play, black comedy, and farcical moments” may still be funny, but “Like all good comedy, it takes work to make them work. It also takes a great performer with terrific timing, a serious understanding of how funny works, and one who trusts the text to do a lot of the work for them”. (Quotes by Eyre and Crystal from Hannah Furness, “William Shakespeare’s jokes are just not funny, Sir Richard Eyre admits”, *Telegraph*, 23 June 2015 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/11694297/William-Shakespeares-jokes-are-just-not-funny-Sir-Richard-Eyre-admits.html>>).

<sup>224</sup> B.J. Sokol, *Shakespeare and Tolerance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>225</sup> Sokol 2008, p. 2.

<sup>226</sup> Sokol 2008, p. 3.

about jokes (or “jests”, as Shakespeare would have known them), the point applies to Shakespeare’s humour or comicality more generally.<sup>227</sup> Successful interpretation of a joke is rarely if ever guaranteed, and this is compounded by shifts in time, language, sensibility. And though, in print at least, we have glosses and footnotes, it is harder to explain jokes in performance; furthermore, as the old adage goes, “if you have to explain it, it’s not funny”.

Whatever the merit of Shakespeare’s humour, the distinction between Tragedy and Comedy for the average person today can be summed up in the cultural meme of the two drama masks, one crying and the other laughing: a Tragedy is a sad play and a Comedy is a funny one. The extent to which the success of Shakespeare’s Comedies now depend on their comedy is, as I will show in this chapter, integral to cutting Shakespearean Comedy for performance. Various other c’s guide this chapter, and the selection of plays for its discussion: comicality, complexity, complications, complicity – even coherence, cohesion.

*The Taming of the Shrew* is a largely humorous play, containing the potential for farce and physical comedy, with many amusing characters and comical plots unfolding throughout: there is a reason its plot and structure was used as the source for well-known and much-loved ’90s romcom *10 Things I Hate About You*. Yet beneath that is a politically ambivalent narrative with sharp edges. Carol Chillington Rutter, reflecting on conversations with three actors who have played the supposed titular “shrew” Kate, wrote that they all agreed “the play is full of traps”.<sup>228</sup> Of course Rutter and the actors (Fiona Shaw, Paola Dionisotti and Sinéad Cusack) are referring to traps *for a performer*

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<sup>227</sup> Sokol 2008, p. 4.

<sup>228</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare’s Women Today* (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), p. 1.

, and yet the statement rings true for the reader, spectator, director, critic. Much of the humour of the play is mired in misogyny and abuse: Kate is married seemingly against her will, is denied her voice and agency, is starved, gaslit (if I can be permitted the anachronism), and tortured by Petruchio (with the complicity of several men around her, not least her own father) until, by the end of the play, she is such a dutiful wife to Petruchio that she puts other wives to shame. This ending is particularly challenging. Kate is finally allowed to speak at the end of the play – uninterrupted for over forty lines – and chooses (insofar as she has a choice) to speak about subservience to the husband, the ultimate obligation to “do him ease” (5.2.185). Of Kate being abused and manipulated into submission to Petruchio and patriarchy at large, George Bernard Shaw wrote indignantly that “the last scene is altogether disgusting to the modern sensibility”.<sup>229</sup>

Brian Morris was at pains to argue that Shakespeare’s main inspiration for the play was “in Shakespeare’s experience of Warwickshire, of the town houses of mercantile London, of the taverns and streets, and of all sorts and conditions of women, their expectations, frustrations, conquests and surrenders”.<sup>230</sup> Much critical thought seems to cast the play as sympathetic to women, and yet there is no sense of justice or retribution: in the text, Petruchio is not punished, Kate is submissive and then silent forever. This tension anticipates some of the questions that must be asked of *Taming* when it is staged centuries later: how does it relate to – what does it say, fundamentally, about – the conditions of women (their expectations, frustrations etc.) *now*? The play, and particularly its difficult ending, often serves as “a terrible indictment of a system of

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<sup>229</sup> Shaw 1897, p. 364.

<sup>230</sup> Brian Morris, ed., *The Taming of the Shrew* (London: Methuen & Co, 1981), p. 69.

patriarchy so strong it is unchangeable *even for its own good*”, says actor Fiona Shaw, who played Kate in Jonathan Miller’s 1987 production.<sup>231</sup>

*Measure for Measure*, on the other hand – what Coleridge described as a “hateful work”, and the “single exception to the delightfulness of Shakespeare’s plays” – is arguably less comical throughout.<sup>232</sup> It relies on specific characters and scenes (largely Lucio and Pompey, and the bawdy scenes) to generate much of the humour, counterposed with the darker moments that dominate the plot (Isabella, Angelo, Mariana, the Duke, Claudio). Reviewer Iris Fanger said of *Measure* that “Although the play has been billed a Comedy, perhaps because none of the major characters dies at the end, there is little to laugh at, even while the clowns are performing their shenanigans [...] really, what’s so funny about ills that continue to afflict society?”<sup>233</sup> For Fanger, in 2015, Comedy as a genre/concept is inseparable from humour, comicality. She also sets up that the topicality of *Measure*’s complications and complexity (moral hypocrisy in our leaders; sexual transgressions and abuses of power) surely must interfere with our ability to laugh.<sup>234</sup>

As far back as 1753, Charlotte Lennox said of the play that “Shakespeare made a wrong choice of his subject, since he was resolved to torture it into a comedy, [...] he was obligated to introduce, in order to bring about three or four weddings instead of

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<sup>231</sup> Fiona Shaw, quoted in Rutter 1988, p. 24.

<sup>232</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Table Talk’ (1835), in *The Table Talk and Omniana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), pp. 33–321 (p. 67).

<sup>233</sup> Iris Fanger, ‘Measure for Measure’, *TheaterMania*, 20 January 2015 <[https://www.theatermania.com/news/measure-for-measure\\_71384](https://www.theatermania.com/news/measure-for-measure_71384)>.

<sup>234</sup> Though not always. Russian activist and anti-Putin dissident Nadya Tolokonnikova writes extensively and persuasively in *Read & Riot: A Pussy Riot Guide to Activism* (London: Hachette, 2019) about the importance of humour and mockery, “laugh[ing] in the face of your wardens”, as a form of activism and resistance. Sometimes we *must* laugh at what is abhorrent to strip it of its power.

one good beheading”.<sup>235</sup> Lennox is arguing that it can be hard to come away from *Measure* satisfied if, rightly, you think Angelo should be sentenced to a more severe punishment than marrying Mariana. In fact, *Measure* was one of the few plays originally grouped together by Frederick S. Boas as the “problem-plays”.<sup>236</sup> These are “Dramas so singular in theme and temper” that they “cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies”; “we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised *preclude a completely satisfactory outcome*” (italics mine).<sup>237</sup> Though Boas does not advance such an argument, this definition may apply to *Taming*, given the ambivalent feeling in the audience he describes and the lack of a “completely satisfactory outcome”.<sup>238</sup>

*As You Like It* may initially seem like something of an outsider to this discussion, but I believe that, in spirit as well as in effect, there is something of the problem-play about it. “As its title declares”, says Helen Gardner, “this is a play to please all tastes. It is the last play in the world to be solemn over”.<sup>239</sup> And yet, as M.C. Bradbrook has it, it is “a literary play, even a literary satire of a particularly light and airy kind” and in any event “certainly not the dish of melting sweetness that is sometimes served up to the modern audience; or the pretty picture that is so often presented as safe reading to the

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<sup>235</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories, on Which the Plays of Shakespear Are Founded, Collected and Translated from the Original Authors. with Critical Remarks. in Two Volumes. by the Author of the Female Quixote* (London, 1753), I, p. 28.

<sup>236</sup> Boas 1896, p. 345. As well as *Measure*, Boas includes *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and (perhaps most curiously) *Hamlet*.

<sup>237</sup> Boas 1896, p. 345.

<sup>238</sup> Though the “problem-play” designation is not so frequently used now – and when it is, it is used in a broader sense than Boas set out for it – I use it in this discussion to highlight that a) certain qualities about these plays are seen as constituting a “problem”, and b) such a problem sets each play aside from more traditional understanding of Comedy as a genre.

<sup>239</sup> Helen Gardner, ‘*As You Like It*’, in *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. by John Garrett (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 17-32 (p. 17).

upper forms of our schools”.<sup>240</sup> Indeed, it seems that perhaps Gardner missed something of the irony in the title and in the play, the challenges to order that the play offers up. Juliet Stevenson, who played Rosalind, “always suspected that there’s a much more dangerous play in *As You Like It*. A subversive play, one that challenges notions of gender, that asks questions about the boundaries and qualities of our ‘male’ and ‘female’ natures”.<sup>241</sup> *As You Like It* is a play, much like *Measure* and *Taming*, that one cannot watch, especially now, without being drawn into contemplation about gender norms and expectations and the politicisation of bodies. Further, the tonal shift between the opening court scenes and the literal breath-of-fresh-air Arden scenes, which anticipates the structural and genre shifts in some of Shakespeare’s later romances/tragicomedies, subtly complicates the play further, as I will demonstrate later in the chapter.

I want to consider these obstacles to C/comedy in the above three plays by surveying directorial interventions in productions of each of them. For *Taming*, I will be considering cuts made in productions by Maurice Daniels (RST, 1962), Trevor Nunn (RST, 1967), Clifford Williams (RST, 1973), Michael Bogdanov (RST, 1978), Barry Kyle (RST, 1982), Jonathan Miller (RST, 1987), Bill Alexander (RST, 1992), Gale Edwards (RST, 1995), Gregory Doran (RST, 2003), Conall Morrison (Courtyard, 2008), Lucy Bailey (RST, 2012) and Justin Audibert (RST, 2019). For *As You Like It*, productions by David Jones (RST, 1967), Buzz Goodbody (RST, 1973), Trevor Nunn (RST, 1977), Terry Hands (RST, 1980), Adrian Noble (RST, 1985), John Caird (RST, 1989), David Thacker (RST, 1992), Steven Pimlott (RST, 1996), Gregory Doran (RST, 2000), Dominic Cooke (RST, 2005), Michael Boyd (Courtyard, 2009), Maria Aberg (RST, 2013), and Kimberley Sykes (RST,

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<sup>240</sup> M.C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry: A Study of His Earlier Work in Relation to the Poetry of the Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 220.

<sup>241</sup> Juliet Stevenson, quoted in Rutter 1988, p. 97.

2019). And for *Measure*, productions by John Barton (RST, 1970), Keith Hack (RST, 1974), Barry Kyle (RST, 1978), Adrian Noble (RST, 1983), Nicholas Hytner (RST, 1987), Trevor Nunn (TOP, 1991), Steven Pimlott (RST, 1994), Michael Boyd (RST, 1998), Roxana Silbert (Swan, 2011) and Gregory Doran (RST, 2019).<sup>242</sup>

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A director of these plays on the RSC's stage is increasingly required to balance their production on a very specific tightrope. As the RSC is a publicly-funded and world-leading theatre company, they have various obligations – to preserve and present Shakespeare and his work accurately, of course, but also to ensure he is not consigned to dark corners due to any perceived prejudice. They have an obligation to entertain and invite audiences, not to offend or alienate; though they may be wary of overcompensating, making Shakespeare “woke” (as the 2020s culture-war parlance goes), and thus alienating in a different way. This balancing act teeters on presenting the oppression of the culture *in which these plays were written*, without then perpetuating or upholding the oppression and discrimination *now*, or seeming to advocate outdated values, or to garner cheap laughs by punching down at marginalised

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<sup>242</sup> This is clearly an extensive list, and the longest in this thesis. Some of the productions will be considered more glancingly, particularly in the “language over time” chapter, where they are evoked for how they cut a single word. Other productions are explored more thoroughly. As the key interest of this chapter is on modernity, and where political sensibilities lie *today*, I will be paying especially close attention to the most recent productions of each of them. Audibert's *Taming*, Sykes' *AYLI*, and Doran's *Measure* were all staged in 2019, in a single season, in repertoire; as such, the intersection of these three plays, especially in these simultaneous productions, is given a new dimension. My analysis of Sykes' work in particular will be aided and illuminated by an interview I conducted with her for the purpose of this thesis. In any case, with this chapter I am not attempting an all-encompassing survey of every production, but rather a synoptic overview, with occasional zooming-in, of the major RSC productions and a few minor ones for contrast.

people or communities. Whitewashing either Shakespeare or history could be counter-productive and certainly dishonest, but our click-economy, prioritising instant hot takes and outrage, does not always make room for nuance. Further, intervening in this oppression can make it harder to uphold the plot of these plays, given that the narrative often itself hinges at one point or another on oppression.

Elizabeth Schafer observes that “prompt copies in general also offer great potential for analysis of the way that comedy [...] can work”.<sup>243</sup> Though Schafer is writing more specifically about physical comedy, which will not be explored in this chapter, her overall point rings true, especially in her awareness that “what is funny and what is not changes over the years and is culturally specific”.<sup>244</sup> Schafer suggests that “Editions which privilege performance can elucidate for those of a cerebral disposition how jokes have worked in the past”; and again, though I am not as interested in the “broad comedy” she is writing about here, the point rings true, insofar as studying directorial interventions towards *what is meant to be funny* reveals what is and is not funny.<sup>245</sup> On the subject of the types of comedy that fall outside the scope of this chapter, another key example would be jokes that are deliberately *unfunny*, i.e. where Shakespeare writes a joke into the mouth of a character in order to emphasise to the reader and/or spectator that the character is unfunny. Though directorial interventions on physical/broad comedy and deliberately unfunny jokes/characters would no doubt serve as fruitful areas of further exploration, they fall too far outside of the other key aspects of this discussion.

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<sup>243</sup> Elizabeth Schafer, ‘Performance Editions, Editing and Editors’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 59, ed. by Peter Holland (2006), 198–212 (p. 206).

<sup>244</sup> Schafer 2006, p. 206.

<sup>245</sup> Schafer 2006, p. 206.



In sum, in this chapter I will explore how directors address the C/comedy dichotomy and its notions of complexity and complicity, primarily by scrutinising the tension between genre tropes and humour. I apply this scrutiny firstly on a microcosmic level, through the play's language. The evolution of language over time means that humour is impacted by language becoming archaic both in terms of meaning and in terms of sensibility.<sup>246</sup> Humour is also impacted on a macrocosmic level by structural questions which intersect with ideas around Comedy. The overall structure (especially of plays such as *AYLI* and *Taming*, whose respective structures often invoke the subject of metatheatres), and perhaps most significantly the endings of all three plays in this discussion, are tonally complicated by the inherent values of their genre. The endings, which may be unsavoury to a modern audience due to evolving sensibilities and awareness surrounding issues of discrimination and abuse, serve to compound the proliferation of jokes or language throughout the plays that might be considered discriminatory and/or problematic. This compounding is directly affected by the tone of the play's conclusion: if the ending is happy for the wrong people, and presented without any kind of critique of them, so that the audience is meant to share that unearned happiness, does it follow that certain behaviours or attitudes are necessarily being condoned?

This chapter will explore these issues through certain key passages, phrases, and scenes in each of the three plays, in three sections. The first will look at the microcosmic level and how directors address shifts in language, meaning, and sensibility. The second will look at the macrocosmic level and how directors respond to the various structural

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<sup>246</sup> The phrase "language over time", which recurs in this discussion, is borrowed from Abigail Rokison-Woodall's *As You Like It: Language and Writing* (Bloomsbury: London, 2021).

quandaries (or opportunities) of the plays in pursuit of that Comedic hallmark, the “happy ending”. The third and final section of the chapter gestures towards some overarching observations about the most important rule of C/comedy: “make ‘em laugh”, as Cosmo Brown sang in *Singin’ in the Rain*, though this doesn’t have to be in opposition to “study[ing] Shakespeare and be[ing] quite elite”, as the song has it.<sup>247</sup>

## Language Over Time

### I: Sense and Meaning

Shakespeare’s writing is not always friendly to modern audiences. The shift from Early Modern English to Modern English is obvious, exacerbated by the stylistic affect that goes into writing a play, from verse constraints and rhetorical devices to the artifice of dialogue. Language does, naturally, evolve over time, and we are only slightly closer in time to Shakespeare’s Early Modern English than Shakespeare was to *Beowulf*’s Old English. The average person today would not be expected to understand the sentence “Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum”.<sup>248</sup> Language and its quirks can become archaic, obsolete. At what point do we accept that the average person might also have trouble parsing “I’ll feeze you, in faith”, the first line of *Taming*? Indeed, as Peter Hall observed, after pointing to our inability to understand even Chaucer now: “Language must change or die. And Shakespeare’s language will not always be comprehensible; he will soon need translating”.<sup>249</sup> Is Shakespeare strengthened by removing or transliterating (perhaps a more accurate word than Hall’s) archaic language which may be an obstacle

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<sup>247</sup> *Singin’ in the Rain* (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952). The song ‘Make ‘Em Laugh’ was written by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown.

<sup>248</sup> The opening sentence of *Beowulf*, by Unknown. Readers might find an Old English sentence even harder to parse if it has a thorn (þ) or an eth (ð) in it.

<sup>249</sup> Peter Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players* (London: Oberon, 2003), p. 10.

for modern audiences? For the purpose of this chapter I am looking at a selection of words and contexts from the comedies that have fallen out of common usage and/or fashion, and how directors have cut out or modernised these trickier expressions.

In *Taming*, strange expressions abound: the first that comes to mind may be Bianca saying “I mean to shift my bush” (5.2.47), a line which is funny now largely due to the euphemism of “bush” for pubic hair. If the line is a *double entendre*, the first *entendre* may be lost on a modern audience, i.e. the hunting/arrow/bird conceit which Bianca establishes in her short speech (in response to Petruchio threatening her with jests). But one particular character serves as a goldmine of archaisms: Gremio, the rich old suitor to Bianca. Many of his words and phrases may be difficult for a modern audience, including the above. His first words in the play are a perfect example: “to cart her, rather” (1.1.55). It is immediately apparent that Gremio is punning on Baptista’s previous line, “to court her [Kate] at your pleasure” (1.1.54). As David and Ben Crystal note in their Glossary, cart as a verb means to “drive around in a cart”, a practice which was “usual punishment for a prostitute”.<sup>250</sup>

A modern audience has no way of understanding such an obscure, historical reference, and without understanding it, they fail to understand the nuance, which is that Gremio is comparing Kate to a prostitute for being “too rough” (1.1.55). So initially it may seem strange that directors at the RSC have never cut or changed this line. But the line also immediately sets up the misogynistic undertones (and, frankly, overtones) that define how Kate is discussed throughout the play, so perhaps the preservation of this line is unsurprising from that perspective. Arguably, Gremio’s expression also

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<sup>250</sup> ‘Cart (v.)’, in David Crystal and Ben Crystal, *Shakespeare’s Words: A Glossary & Language Companion* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 66.

recalls the more familiar one, “to cart [someone] off”, meaning “to carry or convey in a cart”, often “over a long distance or with considerable effort; to carry or take unceremoniously”.<sup>251</sup> Though this is not the same meaning that the line would have had in Shakespeare’s time, it is indeed still an effective meaning that establishes the misogyny and, more specifically, the reluctance to marry Kate.

Later, Gremio becomes seemingly more nonsensical: “we may blow our nails together and fast it fairly out. Our cake’s dough on both sides” (1.1.107-8). The language itself is familiar enough, but the combined meaning is unclear: Barbara Hodgdon needs three footnotes to explain these two lines, a visual indicator of their obsolete meaning and unclear references.<sup>252</sup> These lines are also uncut on the RSC’s stages, with the exception of Gale Edwards cutting the first part (“we may blow our nails together and fast it fairly out”) in her production. The cake analogy stays in every production. And yet there may be an advantage to leaving some of Gremio’s archaisms, such as the cake line. Given that he is an old man, his being out-of-touch with the audience can reinforce how distant he is from the young Bianca, whom he attempts unsuccessfully to woo, even from Hortensio, a rival wooer typically played as younger than Gremio. The language being out of touch to us can helpfully render an unsympathetic character out of touch to us (and other characters), too. And a lack of understanding can, itself, be funny.<sup>253</sup> It’s all in how you play it – a question that sometimes escapes the promptbook, the text.

There is a particular archaic word in *Taming* – another Gremio-ism – that recurs in *AYLI*: “cony” / “coney”, as in “cony-catched” occurring at 5.1.90 in *Taming*, and

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<sup>251</sup> ‘Cart’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/cart\\_v?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#9999483](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/cart_v?tab=meaning_and_use#9999483)>.

<sup>252</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, ed., *The Taming of the Shrew* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 167n.

<sup>253</sup> Can these archaisms be used to show an old man spouting nonsense, somewhat (humorously) senile, like Grampa Simpson wittering away?

“coney” (mountain rabbit) at 3.2.327 in *AYLI*. It is an antiquated word for “rabbit”, as the footnote of any modern edition will tell you. The context is different between the two uses; in *Taming*, Gremio says “Take heed, Signor Baptista, lest you be cony-catched in this business”, warning that Baptista may be implicated, like a rabbit in a trap, in the deception being perpetrated by Tranio against Vincentio. Meanwhile in *As You Like It*, Rosalind says, in response to Orlando asking if she is native to Arden, “As the coney that you see dwell where she is kindled”, i.e. “as the rabbit that you see living where she is conceived”. The former use of “cony” is routinely uncut and unaltered, never modernised on the RSC stage; only Williams cuts the archaism, as part of a wider, streamlining cut to Gremio and Baptista’s exchange. Meanwhile, the word appears unchanged on the RSC stage until 2019, when Sykes changes the word to “rabbit”. Perhaps of interest is the fact that Polly Findlay cut the line entirely from her National Theatre production in 2016, the last major UK production of the play before Sykes. Perhaps this will set a precedent for directors going forward – as Rokison-Woodall points out, noting other modernisations made to both Sykes and Findlay’s productions, “These changes are broadly justified on the basis that productions want to be inclusive, ensuring that they make sense to everyone and that all audience members can access key information and jokes”.<sup>254</sup>

Indeed, as Dusingberre notes, the line has a long history of being cut, though for a different reason. The sexual undertones of the line – from the coney/cunny/cunt punning to the suggestion of conception – caused the line to be “often cut in nineteenth-century editions as improper”.<sup>255</sup> (The editorial tradition of cutting Shakespeare to make

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<sup>254</sup> Rokison-Woodall 2021, p. 115.

<sup>255</sup> Juliet Dusingberre, ed., *As You Like It* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p.259n.

him “proper” of course is intimately bound with the theatrical tradition.) Modern audiences however do not face the same problem. Benjamin H. Smart’s “proper for solemn reading” standardising of “coney” in his *New Critical Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language* (1836) means that we do not read or even hear the sexual parallel.<sup>256</sup> Thus, as Kevin A. Quarmby notes, “this bawdy allusion is now lost to both editor and performer alike”, not to mention the audience.<sup>257</sup> As for the unaltered “cony-catched” in *Taming*, arguably the expression is easier to parse. “Catched” (as an audible stand-in for “caught”) is the key part of the speech: Baptista will be caught in the business. Again, directors retain Gremio’s archaism, reinforcing his character’s age, while surprisingly achieving both textual fidelity and the continuance of sense.

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Sense and meaning in language affect the comedies both on a word-by-word level as above, and on a more overarching level, such as in *Taming*’s use of Latin in the Lucentio-Bianca wooing scenes, or the bawdy humour in *Measure*, particularly between Pompey and Lucio, and in the character of Mistress Overdone.

To the Latin first, and *Taming*. Lucentio is posing as a teacher to woo Bianca, and this scene opens, after a disagreement between Lucentio and Hortensio, with Lucentio using a Latin lesson as an opportunity to reveal his true identity and intentions to Bianca, who rebuffs him but tells him not to lose hope. The Latin phrase is uttered first

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<sup>256</sup> ‘Coney’, etymology, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/coney\\_n1?tab=etymology#8302753](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/coney_n1?tab=etymology#8302753)>.

<sup>257</sup> Kevin A. Quarmby, “‘As the cony that you see’: Rosalind’s risqué rabbits in *As You Like It*”, *Shakespeare*, 6.2 (June 2010), 153-164 (p. 161).

by Lucentio (“*Hic ibat Simois, hic est Sigeia tellus, / Hic stetera Priama regia celsa senis*”, 3.1.28-29), and then again by Lucentio, with his confession to Bianca uttered, usually *sotto voce* on stage, in between Latin phrases. Bianca then mirrors this back to him, alternating between loudly reading each Latin phrase to deceive Hortensio, and whispering her response to his confession. Arguably, it is funny even without understanding the Latin: it is the farcical element of the stage whispering and the deception, and Hortensio’s obliviousness, that really get the laugh, and the understanding of the Latin is quite secondary. Directors do not cut the Latin: in fact, only Alexander and Bailey intervene at all in this exchange – this runs counter to how directors treat Latin in certain other Shakespearean plays, as I will outline in later chapters.

Alexander’s edit is merely to cut a short portion of Lucentio’s confession and lesson: “*regia*, bearing my port / *celsa senis*, that we might beguile the old pantaloon” (3.1.35-36). The effect is that Bianca noticeably interrupts Lucentio mid-lesson and mid-confession, which gives her initial rebuffing a more deliberate, even assertive feeling. Bailey, meanwhile, cuts most of the first recitation of the Latin, leaving only the first three words, “*Hic ibat Simois*” (3.1.28). Bianca again is allowed to interrupt Lucentio, telling him to “conster them”, even before laying out the full quote. The effect is fourfold: firstly and most obviously, it makes a slight improvement to the pace; secondly, as with Alexander’s cut, it makes Bianca more assertive; thirdly, it cuts down the amount of Latin the audience has to listen to; and finally, it renders the full phrase unimportant. Arguably, the Latin spoken is immaterial. Shakespeare has chosen this passage to recall Penelope fending off the suitors while waiting for Ulysses, showing off to the more educated amongst his initial audiences – but the number of audience

members now who might appreciate (or even smile wanly) at the reference has dwindled.

One comedic “bit” in *Taming* which may have become less practical over time occurs in 3.2. Baptista, Katherina and others are awaiting the arrival of Petruchio for his wedding to Katherina, when Biondello arrives. After a mildly humorous exchange about Petruchio being *en route*, Biondello launches into a long speech about Petruchio’s wedding outfit:

Why, Petruchio is coming in a new hat and  
an old jerkin, a pair of old breeches thrice-turned; a  
pair of boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled,  
another laced with two broken points, an old rusty  
sword ta'en out of the town-armory with a broken hilt  
and chapeless; his horse hipped – with an old mothy  
saddle and stirrups of no kindred – besides, possessed  
with the glanders and like to mose in the chine; troubled  
with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of  
wingdalls, sped with spavins, rayed with yellows,  
past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers,  
begnawn with the bots, swayed in the back and  
shoulder-shotten, near-legged before and with, a half-  
cheeked bit and a headstall of sheep’s leather which,  
being restrained to keep him from stumbling, hath  
been often burst and now repaired with knots; one  
girth six time pieced, and a woman’s crupper of velour  
which hath two letters for her name fairly set down  
in studs, and here and there pieced with packthread.<sup>258</sup>(3.2.43-61)

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<sup>258</sup> I have quoted this speech from the Arden Third Series edition, edited by Barbara Hodgdon. She follows Malone and Johnson in moving the phrase “with two broken points” to the location above, where in the Folio text these four words appear after “chapeless”. Most RSC productions have used base texts which leave the phrase in its original F location.



The passage is breathless, one long running sentence unfolding over nineteen lines of prose, clauses disordered, and bursting with details. In addition to drawing out this already-long scene (often right before the interval), the passage is also full of archaic words and phrases (“chapeless”, “with the glanders and like to mose in the chine”, “lampass”, “wingdalls”, “spavins”, “crupper”), most of which stipulate very specific costume and prop requirements for Petruchio’s next entrance. The line “possessed with the glanders and like to mose in the chine” is especially difficult to decode, and likely reflects an error either of Biondello or of the text itself. “Glanders” may refer to a glandular disease in horses, but “to mose in the chine” is unclear. Hodgdon argues that it might be an error for “mourn of the chine”, which “refers to the terminal stages of glanders”, and that both terms are “obscure” as per the OED.<sup>259</sup>

Between the logistics of duplicating the specific costume and props, and the potential to confuse audience members with various obscure terms in a speech that is surely meant to be funny, Biondello’s speech seems a prime candidate for cutting or at least extensive editing. Yet of the productions considered in this chapter, most do not cut the speech at all: Daniels (1962), Nunn (1967), Williams (1973), Bogdanov (1978), Kyle (1982), Miller (1987), and Alexander (1992) all present the speech uncut. Only in 1995 does the speech get cut by Gale Edwards, along with much of the subsequent conversation between Baptista, Biondello and Tranio, immediately before Petruchio’s arrival. This includes the subsequent speech about Petruchio’s “lackey”, described in a similarly long, convoluted manner, and a short exchange that ends with Biondello’s odd pseudo-limerick: “Nay, by Saint Jamy, / I hold you a penny, / A horse and a man / Is

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<sup>259</sup> Hodgdon 2010, p. 227n.

more than one, / And yet not many” (3.2.79-83). Edwards prioritises a swift movement towards the wedding (and arguably freedom of costuming constraints), the scene now moving more directly from Biondello’s arrival to Petruchio’s:

**BIONDELLO**

Why, Petruchio is coming. (3.2.43)

*Enter Petruchio and Grumio*

**PETRUCHIO**

Come, where be these gallants? Who’s at home? (3.2.84-5)

Here Edwards condenses the action of the scene, as well as losing the convoluted description. This is consistent with how Edwards cuts elsewhere, for instance from Grumio and Curtis at the beginning of the play’s fourth act: essentially paring down some of the uglier aspects of the world-building that happens around Petruchio.

After Edwards, Gregory Doran (2003) does not cut the speech (in keeping with his minimal intervention elsewhere in the play). Lucy Bailey (2012) meanwhile offers a cut-down version of the speech without cutting the speech entirely:

Why, Petruchio is coming in a new hat and  
an old jerkin, a pair of old breeches thrice-turned; a  
pair of boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled,  
~~another laced with two broken points, an old rusty~~  
~~sword ta'en out of the town-armory with a broken hilt~~  
~~and chapeless;~~ his horse hipped – with an old mothy  
saddle and stirrups of no kindred– besides, possessed  
with the glanders and like to mose in the chine; troubled  
with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of  
wingdalls, sped with spavins, rayed with yellows,

past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers,  
 begnawn with the bots, swayed in the back and  
 shoulder-shotten, near-legged before and with, a half-  
 cheeked bit and a headstall of sheep's leather which,  
 being restrained to keep him from stumbling, hath  
 been often burst and now repaired with knots; ~~one~~  
~~girth six time pieced, and a woman's crupper of velour~~  
~~which hath two letters for her name fairly set down~~  
 in studs, and here and there pieced with packthread. (3.2.43-61)

Though the lines Bailey cuts would be relatively easier for a modern audience to parse than certain other lines which remain uncut (“like to mose in the chine”), they are nonetheless deliberate. Cutting the above lines specifically removes the need for certain aspects of Petruchio’s costume (one laced shoe, a rusty sword) and elements of his horse’s equipment (a saddle strap, the “girth”, and a tail strap, the “crupper”). Again, this has advantages from a logistical perspective, in that it removes the need of the costume and props departments to procure these very specific items, which do not add much to the already-ridiculous outfit as described elsewhere.

There are compelling reasons to leave the speech either entirely or mostly intact: arguably the speech is not about what is said, but the nature of the speech itself. Russ McDonald names Biondello (and, incidentally, Pompey from *Measure*) when discussing characters who “seem uncommonly devoted to the making of lists [...] represent[ing] a specific manifestation of the generally paratactic structure of Shakespearian prose, with clauses strung together by means of conjunctions or linked by nothing more than parallel structure”.<sup>260</sup> McDonald goes on to argue that this “familiar comic turn also

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<sup>260</sup> Russ McDonald, ‘Here Follows Prose’, in *Shakespeare’s Comedies*, edited by Emma Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 87-111 (p. 97).

animates Biondello's recitation of Petruccio's wedding costume and his pitiful horse".<sup>261</sup> The phrase "familiar comic turn" is telling: the description is not funny because of its content, but because of its structure. Justin Audibert (2019) also leaves the speech uncut, changing only gendered nouns and pronouns as per his gender-swap concept. In performance, after Biondella delivered this frantic, breathless speech, fully preserved (archaisms and all), the audience erupted in laughter and applause mid-scene.<sup>262</sup> Generally, in past performances at the RSC and elsewhere, where the speech is preserved, the response is similar: laughter and applause for the speech as a feat of both memory and breath control.

The final aspect I want to briefly consider in this section is the bawdy humour in *Measure*, as it will lead shortly into the next section and thread of the conversation, exploring cutting for political correctness. The bawdy humour in *Measure for Measure* sits squarely at the intersection of "politically incorrect" and "largely archaic", and so serves as a helpful pivot for this discussion. The bawdy scenes in particular involve Pompey and Mistress Overdone, as the bawdy characters, as well as Lucio. There is a historical tendency to cut bawdy humour, given that it interfered with images of Shakespeare's genius; consider for instance the way that Eric Partridge claims "Shakespeare appears never to have had a venereal disease: it is unlikely that he should have consorted, except conversationally, with prostitutes, for he possessed an exquisitely fastidious nature".<sup>263</sup> Now, directors are more likely to be concerned with how an audience will understand the material, rather than how it reflects (or not) on

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<sup>261</sup> McDonald 2004, p. 97.

<sup>262</sup> This was my experience of the audience when I attended the press performance of Audibert's production myself in 2019, and is also demonstrable on the live broadcast recording for the production.

<sup>263</sup> Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London: Routledge, 1947), 2001 Routledge Classics edition, p. 21.

Shakespeare. Directorial treatments to these scenes vary across the board: Kyle and Pimlott both make extensive cuts to Pompey and the bawd scenes, whereas Barton and Silbert both only trim or thin Pompey quite sparingly. Nunn, Hytner and Blatchley all make noticeable – though not extensive – cuts to Pompey and related characters. Boyd, on the other hand, leaves Pompey and his scenes very much intact. Where directors are streamlining this material, they seem less concerned with sanitising Shakespeare than they do improving the pace and focus of an already-difficult play, by paring back the comic material that can often seem at odds with the Isabella-Angelo plot.

## II: Political Correctness

The bawdy humour in *Measure* overlaps with another key concern around the development of language (and humour) over time: the impact of “political correctness”.<sup>264</sup> As much as our language has evolved over four-hundred years, so too has the general public sensibility: what was funny, let alone palatable, to Shakespeare’s audience will not always align with what we consider funny (or even palatable) now. Evolving attitudes towards discrimination, particularly based on gender, race, sexuality, religion, nationality, and other protected characteristics, often preclude things from being funny to increasing proportions of the general public, who are themselves likely to be victims of such discrimination, or else to feel strongly about it. I laid out earlier in the chapter how the plays explored herein are problematised by shifts in understanding, often around misogyny.

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<sup>264</sup> Though this phrase is often brandished by conservative types to dismiss even valid attempts at holding people accountable for abusive/derogatory language/jokes/behaviours, I use it here in good faith, as it has become an easily recognisable catch-all for this debate around evolving public sensibilities.

This idea of political correctness can be critical to the present-day director of Shakespeare's work: increasingly, directors and theatre companies are aware of how it might for instance impact upon casting, due to changing attitudes towards both representation and racial appropriation. *Othello* should be performed by a person of colour, *Shylock* by an actor who is Jewish, *Richard III* by an actor with a disability.<sup>265</sup> And aside from questions of representation, the debate around political correctness can bear greatly on content. Is the language derogatory? Are people from oppressed communities being gratuitously abused on stage, or made the uncontested butt of the joke? Are problematic views, formerly accepted as the status quo, simply being portrayed and historicised by their re-enactment on stage, or are they being perpetuated, glorified? Returning to B.J. Sokol, he notes that according to "derision theories laughter is always caused by ridicule, and the targets of ridicule are always persons or human types that are ugly, absurd, inferior, or unworthy".<sup>266</sup> In the context of the plays in this chapter, it is the perception of "inferiority" and "unworthiness" that matters: are we laughing at characters because they are "less than"? If so, how do we reconcile that with the fact that the inferior characters, the butt of the joke, are often women? And what of the verbal subjugation of people of colour that often permeates Shakespeare's lexicon?

Even used incidentally these terms often invite directorial intervention in modern settings. There is a short speech in *AYLI*, belonging to Rosalind, that contains three distinctly problematic phrases, each of which is largely incidental (i.e. the phrase is discriminatory, but is not aimed at the person being discriminated against, but rather

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<sup>265</sup> At the RSC, for instance, this is true of the most recent productions of these three plays (*Othello* 2015, *The Merchant of Venice* 2015, *Richard III* 2022).

<sup>266</sup> Sokol, 2008, p. 5.

is used for rhetorical effect. This speech therefore offers a clear nexus for exploring how directors cut problematic language for purposes of political correctness. The speech in question is spoken by Rosalind (as Ganymede) to Silvius; Rosalind is increasingly frustrated with Phoebe, who attempts to woo Ganymede through Silvius. The most questionable part of Rosalind's outburst is the exasperated declaration:

Why, she defies me,  
Like Turk to Christian. Women's gentle brain  
Could not drop forth such giant-rude invention,  
Such Ethiop words, blacker in their effect  
Than in their countenance. (4.3.32b-35a).

Defiant Turks, gentle-brained women, and Ethiop-black words; three phrases with negative connotations that implicitly denigrate marginalised people. "Ethiop words" is particularly contentious, its association between the cruel (dark) words of the letter and Blackness evidently racist, part of a long tradition of associating Blackness with evil. Yet this line is not directed to a Black character, nor is it in any way *integral* to the plot of *AYLI*.<sup>267</sup> This reflects a similar line in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Romeo says of Juliet that "she hangs upon the cheek of night / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (1.5.44-45); again, while the intent behind the line is illustrative and visual, its associations, particularly in a post-empire, post-slavery world, are racist. J. Barry Webb's *A Shakespeare Lexicon of Colour* (2001) is particularly informative for how Shakespeare uses racially loaded terms.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Shakespeare could just have easily made a comparison, for instance, between the colour of ink, the night sky, and the darkness of the words' effect without bringing race into the equation.

<sup>268</sup> J. Barry Webb, *A Shakespeare Lexicon of Colour* (East Sussex: The Cornwallis Press, 2001). Webb lists terms that relate to colour, including such racially pejorative terms as "blackamoor" and "Ethiope". Under each respective entry Webb gives numerous examples of where else the terms appear in Shakespeare.

So “Ethiop words” seems like a straight-forward, easy cut: Hands, Noble, Caird, Thacker, Pimlott, Doran, Cooke, Boyd, Aberg, and Sykes all cut the “Ethiop words” line from their productions of *AYLI*. Hands, Pimlott, Doran, Cooke, Boyd and Aberg cut the entire speech (and much of the surrounding discussion too), thinning the scene while also removing its least palatable speech. Goodbody cuts “Ethiop words” and “women’s gentle brain”, but not “Like Turk to Christian”. Caird and Doran cut both racially charged lines but leave the potentially misogynistic one. The second-ever RSC production of the play, directed by David Jones in 1967, cut the Turk to Christian line but left the rest. Clearly, each of the three references are targeted for cuts: often all three, often two of the three, sometimes just one. Seemingly, only Nunn leaves the three lines untouched in 1977. This inaction may have been conceived as a politically neutral stance. But, as Schafer notes regarding editors who take a similar stance of non-action, “The risk then is that, for example, editors who choose not to challenge the anti-feminism (and racism, and homophobia, and classism, etc.) of the play texts themselves may radically influence the reader’s or actor’s interpretation, without the politics in play being fully acknowledged”.<sup>269</sup> In presenting offensive language without any kind of challenge, in casualising it, a director may well be (unconsciously or not) perpetuating, on a linguistic level, the prejudice that informs Shakespeare’s language.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Schafer 2006, p. 212.

<sup>270</sup> There is also something to be said of how addressing these issues can appeal more to younger audiences. Erica Whyman, in an interview about race and representation in her production of *Romeo and Juliet*, notes that “the show was greeted with such recognition by young audiences that it almost felt like creating a generational divide in some houses on some nights. Because for them, those definitions of class and race are familiar, but they are also dissolving in a way that they are not for an older audience”. (David Ruiter, ed., *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Social Justice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 32.)



Simon Godwin, though he has not directed any of these three plays at the RSC, spoke to me about these incidental lines that betray a politically incorrect leaning from Shakespeare's time. In terms of cutting language that is potentially incendiary, he says that he looks for "what is jarring, and what pulls you out of the narrative in a way that Shakespeare himself would not have wanted? I have to believe that if Shakespeare was here today, he'd not put that in, because it's not what the scene is about. There are other ways of conveying the same spirit, here".<sup>271</sup> He expresses a wariness of "whitewashing" Shakespeare's texts, due to its "connotations of blanket violence to the text".<sup>272</sup> Clearly what guides Godwin is a desire for the language not to become a distraction, to detract from the story, to undercut the effect sought by the text.

Alan C. Dessen has written about offensive passages in such plays as *The Merchant of Venice* being "regularly omitted" in performance for reasons of "political correctness" and mitigating "potentially offensive" material.<sup>273</sup> This is clearly not a new area of exploration: as we can see from a single speech in *AYLI*, directors have invariably been intervening in potentially problematic lines for almost as long as the RSC has been staging Shakespeare – and since Goodbody cut "Ethiop words" in 1973, the phrase has only been uttered once (in Nunn's 1977 production) on the RSC's stages. The potential for humour in the lines is eclipsed by their problematic nature. Toby Malone and Aili Huber observe that "Some language, especially that which is racially charged or

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<sup>271</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>272</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>273</sup> Dessen 2006, p. 183.

misogynist, can be traumatic for actors to say and hear, night after night” – and, of course, for the audience.<sup>274</sup>

## Structural Tensions

### I: Happily Ever After, or Happily Enough

At the end of *King Lear*, most characters are punished in one way or another, just as most characters are flawed in one way or another, and one of the least-flawed characters (Edgar) seems also to be among the least-punished (notwithstanding his losses). In *Hamlet*, the evil Claudio is exposed and killed, whatever the cost. In *Romeo and Juliet*, though the titular couple die young and needlessly, the two warring families are resolved to “glooming peace” (5.3.305) by the play’s conclusion, having learned their lesson; indeed, the third-to-last line is “Some shall be pardoned, and some punished” (5.3.308).<sup>275</sup> This extends beyond the tragedies: in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the unpleasant Sir John Falstaff is humiliated and learns a lesson. In such examples as *Merry Wives*, one can see what R.W. Maslen describes more generally as the “notion that comedy corrects the vices of its audience by holding them up to ridicule”, a fundamental part of C/comedy’s moralising function.<sup>276</sup>

Another aspect of Comedy-as-genre, related to this idea of “correcting vices”, is the idea that Comedy involves something going wrong, and being put right again. From earlier comedies like *The Comedy of Errors* through to later, more generically complicated efforts like *The Winter’s Tale*, something goes wrong (often mistaken

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<sup>274</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p.101. They draw on Lavina Jadhvani’s ‘Dismantling Anti-Black Linguistic Racism in Shakespeare: A Field Guide’ to understand cutting racist language for performance: <[https://docs.google.com/document/u/o/d/1Kpq3nTAUVKwTrY\\_XLiH6aCr3agUMu-pSCe87fg8DYQM](https://docs.google.com/document/u/o/d/1Kpq3nTAUVKwTrY_XLiH6aCr3agUMu-pSCe87fg8DYQM)>.

<sup>275</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by René Weis (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

<sup>276</sup> R.W. Maslen, *Shakespeare and Comedy* (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 18.

identity or mistaken infidelity) and is eventually rectified by the truth: in *The Winter's Tale*, the restoration of truth and the return of the lost child even serve to undo a previous wrong by bringing the dead back to life. But sometimes what is “wrong” is not morally wrong, not evil, but rather a subversion of the status quo: in *Twelfth Night*, Viola pretending to be a man is a problem rectified by the denouement, as is Malvolio’s habit of forgetting his place in the class hierarchy. Magda Romanska and Alan Ackerman write that “Humour generated by comic irony deflated the pretensions of those who block the happiness of others. Satirical Comedy exposes affectation and aims, more or less overtly, to correct vice.”<sup>277</sup> On this subject of correcting vice, they also note how in certain classical forms of Comedy, “laughter at others’ misfortunes became central to the very structure of the comic narrative, and it was often considered a didactic tool to hold up vice to ridicule”, which echoes Maslen (above).<sup>278</sup> Shakespeare is obviously writing into this existing tradition.

*Twelfth Night* is arguably part of Shakespeare’s movement away from the more straightforward comedies of his early career to more ambivalent comedies – including *As You Like It* and, of course, *Measure for Measure*. Malvolio’s punishment in *Twelfth Night* destabilises the comedic principle, as it begs the question: does the punishment fit the crime? Or rather, does the degree of suffering seem appropriate for the dramatic transformation required? This tension between hierarchy and social advancement is explored by Karin S. Coddon, who notes that “the refusal of the play’s closing to recuperate two of its most disorderly subjects – Malvolio and Feste – suggests rather

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<sup>277</sup> Magda Romanska and Alan Ackerman, eds., *The Bloomsbury Reader in Comedy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 9.

<sup>278</sup> Romanska and Ackerman 2017, p. 57.

less than a wholesale endorsement of the privileges of rank and hierarchy”.<sup>279</sup> Jackie Watson goes so far as to argue that the play’s early audiences, including Middle Temple lawyers in 1602, may have “shared key responses” to the play, namely “empathy” for Malvolio, given his precarious social status and ambition to advance up the hierarchy.<sup>280</sup> Ultimately Coddon’s argument applies across to other Shakespearean works, with *Measure* and *Taming* serving as vivid examples, wherein “disorderly subjects” (Angelo; Petruchio) may not be “recuperated” to an audience’s satisfaction, destabilising the tendency of the plays towards moralising and didacticism. The plays and their endings “[fall] short of the thorough restoration of order that the plot and genre seem to dictate”, as Coddon writes of *Twelfth Night*.<sup>281</sup>

This relates to another expectation of Comedy: regardless of the restoration of order or ending with marriage or engagement, Comedy ultimately should be funny. Maslen argues that “any discussion of Shakespeare and C/comedy must begin with the acknowledgement that he inherited a theatrical tradition that was dominated, in all its hybrid kinds and monstrous metamorphoses, by laughter”.<sup>282</sup> This means that tragedy as well as Comedy is indebted to and enmeshed in laughter. One can read forwards from this too: a modern audience cannot conceivably escape the modern sense of Comedy as denoted by the comical, by laughter. As such, the modern expectation of the Comedy to be funny is also significant, and the ending is a vertice at which what is or should be funny intersects with other generic functions.

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<sup>279</sup> Karin S. Coddon, “Slander in an Allow’d Fool”: *Twelfth Night*’s Crisis of the Aristocracy’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 33.2 (Spring 1993), 309-325 (p. 309).

<sup>280</sup> Jackie Watson, ‘Sense and community: *Twelfth Night* and early modern playgoing’, in *Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, ed. by Simon Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 224-244 (p. 225).

<sup>281</sup> Coddon 1993, p. 322.

<sup>282</sup> Maslen 2005, p. 38.

Ultimately, the ending of the play cements its overall tone; if the end of the play is not in keeping with the humour and mood of the rest of the play – if no one is laughing or smiling at the ending – its success as a C/comedic endeavour is in jeopardy (for a modern audience). All three of the plays discussed in this chapter face perhaps their toughest tonal challenges (and, as a result, a key challenge to their comedic nature) in their endings. Each play ends with one or more pair of characters married off or set to be married. In *As You Like It* and *Measure for Measure*, political order is largely restored; in *AYLI*, exiles are ended, threats rescinded, while in *Measure for Measure* lives are saved, harsh sentences overturned. In both, mercy reigns – though in *Measure*, the question of mercy versus justice rankles when it comes to Angelo.

In all three plays explored in this chapter, arguably the comedic principle of righting wrongs is *in some way* adhered to. But often the wrongs which are righted (or not) can seem problematic. Do we see Kate's rudeness, indicative of her independence and free-thinking – her very nature as *untameable* – as a problem to be overcome? Who is it a problem *for*, and why must she be “restored” (to return to Coddon's term) and not Petruchio? The same can be said of Rosalind's gender-bending as well as her retreat from the court, both problems overturned by the play's conclusion. This is despite the fact, as Julie Sanders astutely observes, that in Rosalind we see “a forceful recognition of the pastoral convention by which exile, enforced or otherwise, usually into some sort of greenwood or analogous space, can provide the occasion for self-discovery and the specific empowerment and agency afforded a female character by the act of cross-

dressing”.<sup>283</sup> And in *Measure*, can we really see Isabella’s vocation and chastity as a problem to be overcome by the Duke’s proposal of marriage?

Each of these plays features a wilful female protagonist who endeavours to be independent and who is effectively silenced by the play’s ending and forced into submission. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, even Kate’s final speech, the longest in the play, merely reinforces the ways in which she has been broken and domesticated. Rosalind is the most substantial role in *AYLI*, and through the epilogue (a rarity in Shakespeare’s plays, rarer still for being spoken by an actor playing a female character), she has the play’s final word.<sup>284</sup> Though this seems like the opposite of silencing, in the self-conscious epilogue she is as much Rosalind as she is the boy actor originally playing the role. Rosalind, before the epilogue, is unable to escape the demands and expectations placed upon her as a woman and as a woman of status. And Isabella, who suffers so greatly, seems duty-bound to marry the Duke and forsake her vow to God, her silence at the play’s end potentially indicative of acquiescence to the Duke.<sup>285</sup> In the post-#MeToo age, how are these silences to be received by an audience, particularly women?<sup>286</sup> How will they receive the erosion of Rosalind’s freedom potentially signified by the imminent return to the court, or her (albeit willing) marriage to Orlando? The happiest ending of all three plays involves four (heterosexual) marriages happening

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<sup>283</sup> Julie Sanders, *The Cambridge Introduction to Early Modern Drama, 1576-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 116.

<sup>284</sup> As Tiffany Stern’s work in *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) suggests, the rarity of Shakespearean epilogues, and greater rarity of female epilogues, may not suggest that these texts did not ever exist; rather, as these texts were separate, physically detachable from the play, they were prone to being lost.

<sup>285</sup> Of course, there are ways around this silence, which will be explored later in this discussion.

<sup>286</sup> See this article for more on the explicit cultural connection of #MeToo and *Measure*: Tara Isabella Burton, ‘What a lesser-known Shakespeare play can tell us about Harvey Weinstein’, *Vox*, 15 November 2017 <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/11/15/16644938/shakespeare-measure-for-measure-weinstein-sexual-harassment-play-theater>>.

simultaneously, with marriage seen as the great resolver of each of these plays – which may be received differently now, in an increasingly secular, post-marriage society.<sup>287</sup>

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For *Taming*, then, it is the Kate and Petruchio plot that causes the ending to come unstuck. There is a possible solution (or complication) in the form of the seemingly-unfinished Christopher Sly framing device, which the final section of this chapter will explore in greater detail. But as it stands, the text of the play ends not with Sly but with the Kate / Petruchio storyline, meaning that neither Sly nor the play-within-a-play can adequately deflect from the ending of Kate's arc. And so even greater tonal consideration must be given, with no character or device remaining to comment on the drama, no interlocutor between audience and director. For the play to retain its sense of comedy with modern audiences, Kate's marriage to Petruchio *must* be a good thing for her, a partnership that she willingly consents to, and somehow the abuse he subjected her to elsewhere in the play must be recontextualised. Otherwise, the play arguably collapses *as a Comedy*, and veers sharply into tragedy. Perhaps it is because of the moral and dramaturgical hoops that must be jumped through, and the inevitability of damaging the dramatic tension of the Kate / Petruchio plot, but no director at the RSC has attempted to textually mitigate Kate's treatment at the hands of Petruchio. A popular tactic in performance, which requires no textual intervention, is to give Kate the upper hand at the end of the performance, loading her final monologue, a speech of

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<sup>287</sup> For more on our post-marriage society, see Frank Young, 'Marriage is Disappearing from Britain', *Institute for Family Studies*, 31 May 2023 <<https://ifstudies.org/blog/marriage-is-disappearing-from-britain>>.

submission and subsumption, with ironic detachment or even muffled rage. Other productions, such as Conall Morrison's in 2008, have Kate in a state of post-torture, hardly able to stand. It is possible to have Kate overhear the wager and thus to be in on the bet, to ham up the speech to win her and Petruchio both the wager. At the end of Doran's 2003 production, they both take the winnings (and distribute some to the audience).

There is, perhaps surprisingly, a distinct lack of *textual* intervention in the final scene at the RSC. Daniels makes no changes in 1962, nor does Bogdanov in 1978, Miller in 1987, Alexander in 1992, Edwards in 1995, Doran in 2003, nor Audibert in 2019. Bailey in 2012 cuts just a single line from Kate's monologue: "Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe" (5.1.163), which arguably has little-to-no impact on the overall tone and message of the speech. Nunn, Williams, and Kyle, in 1967, 1973, and 1982 respectively, make somewhat more interesting changes. All three directors cut lines from one of *Petruchio's* speeches in the final scene, shortly before Kate's monologue: they all cut "And show more sign of her obedience, / Her new built virtue and obedience" (5.1.129-30), and Nunn also cuts the next two lines, "See where she comes and bring your froward wives / As prisoners to her womanly persuasion" (5.1.131-2). Perhaps they cut the double "obedience" line because it sounds like a clunky attempt at a couplet; perhaps they are just slightly *too* patriarchal to redeem.

Nunn and Williams both make the same cut to Kate's monologue, the most notable cut made to this scene in the RSC's history, by excising these four lines:

Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,  
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,  
But that our soft conditions and our hearts  
Should well agree with our external parts? (5.1.177-80)



These lines depict Kate and indeed womankind as insipid, lesser and resigned; aside from portraying them with dripping sarcasm, it is hard to imagine how they in particular could be spoken without inviting the charge of sexism. While the entire monologue is sexist, necessarily so for the reason Kate is saying it, these lines may be overkill, a step too far. Kyle also makes a cut to Kate's speech, but one that is less obvious: "Such duty as the subject owes the prince / Even such a woman oweth to her husband" (5.1.167-8); arguably this is just another example of trimming some of the gratuitous sexism of the speech. Arguably it makes the speech feel more contemporary too, as the analogy with royal obedience may not resonate with modern audiences who are used to having a largely ceremonial monarch. In all three instances, it may just be that the directors were trimming for time, and felt the cut lines were unnecessary.

The speech represents a catch-22: Kate being allowed to speak for so long uninterrupted saves her from silence, but the speech condemns her to submission; it reeks of misogyny, but to cut it too extensively would be to detract from the material conditions and expectations of the misogynistic society in which Kate must survive. And, most importantly, the speech seems deliberately overdone: as Queen Gertrude would say, "the lady doth protest too much". As indicated, there is the option in performance for the actor to take the speech to places the written text can't access, the heights of anger and irony; there is also the option to play the monologue for tragic effect, to rely on a degree of psychological realism to show Kate's subjection not as the comical ending as written but as a chilling end-point to misogyny, gaslighting and abuse: a tragic ending. Here is the C/comedic tension at its knottiest point.

I want to conclude this portion of the discussion of *Taming* by considering Audibert's 2019 production, which is less notable to this discussion for what it cuts than for its overall concept, which was to offer an entirely gender-swapped production of the play.<sup>288</sup> Audibert set his production in a sort of alt-history Elizabethan England wherein the women were in charge. Kate's final monologue appeared uncut, spoken by a man for the benefit of his wife, the cruel Petruchia, to whom he ends up very literally underfoot, on his knees. No doubt this should feel subversive, highlighting the ridiculousness of the gender-swap conceit to expose the ugliness at the heart of the play's final image of subservience. Its success must surely be a subjective matter, but what is clear is that Audibert is seeking a solution to the play's problems *outside* the text. As this chapter unfolds, we will see many such examples of this.

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The comedic arc of *As You Like It* is surely pleasant and straightforward. At the beginning of the play, most characters are unhappy, and circumstances immediately worsen, but through the transformative middle of the play, everyone can come through to the final act happier and with a fitting place in the world. Julie Sanders observes in *AYLI*:

a classically shaped fifth act of resolution and containment. Rosalind is noticeably returned to her woman's attire and the threat of her agency achieved through cross-dressing, according to some critics at least, defused.

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<sup>288</sup> On the one hand, Audibert has taken a non-interventionist approach to the text; very little is cut aside from the Sly material. But on the other hand, he has applied much pragmatic intervention to service his gender swap: "gentlemen" become "mistresses", "husbands" "wives", and so on; pronouns are switched, metre abandoned, but everything else is kept largely intact.

Everyone, it is supposed, is changed for the better by their experience. There is even a dance to emphasise the restoration of harmony, although one character noticeably dissents from this action: Duke Senior's man Jaques declares 'I am for other than for dancing measures' (5.4.191), and sounds a striking note of discordance even at the comedy's denouement.<sup>289</sup>

There are three interwoven sites of contention, then, for an audience's satisfaction with the ending of *AYLI*, which I will explore in this discussion: Rosalind's identity, the four marriages in the play's final act, and the promised (threatened?) return to the court. Each aspect impacts the comedic and comical nature of the play's conclusion in disparate ways: Rosalind could be seen as losing her identity either through heteronormativity (marriages) or status (the court); generally speaking the marriages and the return to the court both reinforce the status quo, including its weighted gender and sexuality dynamics, and threaten the sense of individual freedom earned in Arden. So while the shape of *AYLI* seems to adhere more closely than *The Taming of the Shrew* to something C/comedic, its ending is nonetheless troubled, and given the role of the ending in determining a production's final, overarching tone, it invites intervention.

Rosalind's identity is determined at the end of the play by both her marriage to Orlando and her return to the court: she will be Rosalind once more, her time as a man a brief sojourn, and what's more she will return to her rightful role, Rosalind the Duke's daughter, and also to her inevitable future role, Rosalind as wife. By all accounts this is indeed a happy ending – she has not had to endure any abuse from her new husband, and she is restored to her rightful status. At the risk of pitting women against one another, she is faring much better than Kate at the end of *Taming*. So what's the problem? For starters, as Sanders argues, "ambiguity is the keynote of the cross-dressing

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<sup>289</sup> Sanders 2014, p. 118.

plotlines”, and a loss of ambiguity is advantageous to the homogenising forces of society, from the heteronormative institution of marriage to the rigid class strictures of the court.<sup>290</sup> Modern audiences may feel uncomfortable with Rosalind’s “happy ending” being predicated on her willingness to cast off or suppress parts of her identity that were so instrumental to her character arc.

The question of identity has higher stakes still. For cross-dressing characters and the characters who love them, what does gender mean? What does sexuality mean? Rosalind finds herself in a different gender, and Orlando seemingly falls in love with *him*, i.e. Ganymede. Viola-as-Cesario, Orsino and Olivia in *Twelfth Night* form an even queerer love triangle. As Carol Thomas Neely points out, the “destabilizing [of] gender formations” in *Taming* as seemingly somewhat at odds with “eroticism remain[ing] mapped onto gender” in *AYLI*.<sup>291</sup> Cross-dressing is crucial to the plot in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Cymbeline*, and what’s more is a vehicle through which women characters can express agency and also come to some profound understanding about themselves. Will Stockton notes that although “there is no such thing as heterosexual identity” in the Renaissance, there are still “moral norms and social expectations against which sexual relations can be judged deviant, and which are hardly absent from contemporary heterosexual ideology: first, that reproduction is the purpose of sex, and second, that young men and women will grow up and get married”.<sup>292</sup> The ending of comedies like *AYLI* were satisfactory when the default position was against so-called deviance, as it

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<sup>290</sup> Sanders 2014, p. 122.

<sup>291</sup> Carol Thomas Neely, ‘Lovesickness, Gender and Subjectivity: *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*’, in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, ed. by Dymphna Callaghan (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016) pp. 294-317 (p. 295).

<sup>292</sup> Will Stockton, *Playing Dirty: Sexuality and Waste in Early Modern Comedy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 47.

was four-hundred years ago. Now, in a Western climate in which “deviance” is more widely accepted under the LGBTQ+ banner, the default position would be more along the lines of “live and let live”, or, in the language of pride, “be / love yourself”. It is no wonder, then, that the neat flattening of variant identities is less satisfying to a modern audience.

This of course is magnified by the other key heteronormativity-enforcing dimension of *AYLI*: the quadruple marriage that resolves the main plot and various subplots, and precedes the resolution of the political dimension to the play (the promised return to the court). I want to pay particular attention to Sykes’ 2019 production, which is so overtly concerned with this question. Sykes was clear that her production of *As You Like It* had to speak to our times. “It felt very modern, the setting, and my understanding of what Shakespeare was doing with the play and identity, sexuality, gender. He was really exploring what that meant, which I’m sure felt very radical for the time”.<sup>293</sup> In choosing to honour the play’s radical spirit, Sykes was forced to confront numerous areas where the play seemed to fall short of the modern, progressive sensibilities she alluded to. One of these was that a play seen as emblematic of love in various forms ends with four heterosexual unions. Sykes says she wanted her audience “to come out with a more open understanding” and that if she wanted “to reach a contemporary audience”, then she “could not have these four couples all be heterosexual at the end. It did not sit comfortably with me”.<sup>294</sup> One of the four couples in particular was a problem for Sykes: “at the end of the play, one of the big problems – every time I’ve watched a production I’ve hated it – is Phoebe and Silvius, as a

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<sup>293</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>294</sup> Sykes 2022.

heterosexual couple. Nobody explains, Shakespeare doesn't explain, why Phoebe suddenly agrees to marry Silvius after spending the whole play refusing".<sup>295</sup>

But Sykes saw this moment of giving in might be redeemed if viewed in a new light, whereby Phoebe is accepting her latent homosexuality, inspired by Rosalind's own acts of self-acceptance: hence the change in Sykes' production from Silvius to Silvia. "Changing Silvius to Silvia really worked, and I couldn't figure out why they hadn't done that before", said Sykes of her gender-swap.<sup>296</sup> There are alternatives to the grand project of heteronormative patriarchy: Phoebe now marries Silvia, and the part of Hymen's speech addressed to Phoebe, originally "You to his love must accord / Or have a woman to your lord" (5.4.131-132), accordingly becomes "You to *her* love must accord / *And* have this woman to your lord". A homosexual marriage is sanctified rather than used as a threat into heteronormative submission.<sup>297</sup> Though Jacques was also portrayed by and as a woman, it was the Silvius/Silvia change that really seemed to make the most overt comment on gender and sexuality. Without interfering (beyond pronouns etc.) in the text, Sykes was able to somewhat queer the ending of a play that feels queer in spirit elsewhere but is often disappointingly lacking in queerness at the end. Sykes sums up the tension thus: "it had to make sense dramatically as well as socially; I can't force that onto a play".<sup>298</sup> This stance is a compelling one, and in a sense recalls Simon Godwin's comments (quoted in the introduction to this thesis) about seeking "a textual answer to

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<sup>295</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>296</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>297</sup> It is perhaps similarly significant that Sykes also cuts Rosalind's line "To you I give myself, for I am yours", which she speaks twice, first to her father and second to Orlando (5.4.114-115), removing the association of a woman giving herself to men, of a woman as property.

<sup>298</sup> Sykes 2022.

a perceived flaw”.<sup>299</sup> The challenge is to work within the means of the play to solve any issues it may harbour.

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Unlike *Taming*, whose ending is difficult but worked towards the entire play, and *AYLI*, whose ending is loaded but not overtly egregious, *Measure for Measure* has a famously challenging ending, as far as C/comedy is concerned. Juliet Stevenson, discussing her role as Isabella in Adrian Noble’s production, said that Noble:

wanted it to end as comedy – he meant comedy as defined by a resolved ending. But we discovered that a resolved ending really depends on the Duke. He’s the one who has set in motion everything that has happened [...] the one who has manipulated the whole sequence of events, and most of the characters. The last act is a trial that exposes everyone but also gives them a chance to redeem themselves. The last character to be put on trial is the Duke. [...] But you know, there isn’t a fixed end to a play. The *script* ends. The words run out. But the *ending* – that’s something that has to be renegotiated every performance. Shakespeare gives Isabella no words at the end. Maybe because she doesn’t know what to say to the Duke’s proposal [...] The status quo has been restored. Men are organising things. So what should Isabella say or do? I used to take a long, long pause, in which I looked at everyone – drawing in the collective experience in a way. Then I took the Duke’s hand.<sup>300</sup>

In Stevenson’s recollection of the production, she lays out the problem (and a solution) in a nutshell. The problem is the lack of convincing resolution, the lack of *words* towards

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<sup>299</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>300</sup> Stevenson, quoted in Rutter 1988, p. 52.

a resolution; the solution is supra-textual. She cannot speak a solution, only act it. The key obstacle, then, is Isabella's silence.

The Duke proposes marriage twice in the play's final scene: firstly with "Give me your hand and say you will be mine" (5.1.492), as he pardons Claudio, and again in his final speech of the play: "I have a motion much imports your good, / Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline, / What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine" (5.1.535-537). A final couplet follows this proposal ("So, bring us to our palace, where we'll show / What's yet behind, that's meet you all should know", 5.1.538-539), and without any further dialogue or stage direction the play is concluded. In the forty-three lines between the two proposals, the only character other than the Duke to speak (for nine of those lines) is Lucio. Isabella, as Stevenson observed, is silent throughout these proceedings.<sup>301</sup> It is the unexpectedness of the Duke's proposal that sours it. At no point in the text does Isabella, a novice nun, indicate any desire to leave her religious order, her vocation; at no point previously, even in his asides, does the Duke hint at any romantic intentions. The fact that he has to ask twice, implying no overt acceptance from Isabella the first time, further muddies the mood in this scene.<sup>302</sup>

Isabella – whose suffering throughout the play is so extreme, in direct contrast with her devotion – is most visibly short-changed by the ending: after suffering abuse

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<sup>301</sup> From a feminist perspective, the fact that Isabella's final lines are to plead for Angelo's life further complicate the tone and mood of this ending.

<sup>302</sup> In the absence of both setup and follow-through, we are left with the following plot: after a would-be nun refuses to trade her virginity for her brother's life to a cruel man flagrantly abusing his (borrowed) power, a more powerful man saves the day, acts cruelly (in allowing Isabella to believe her brother killed), doles out punishment and reward, and makes a marriage proposal to the aforementioned would-be nun, now in his debt. And that is to say nothing of the other threads: Angelo, the ostensible villain of the piece, is chastised, and must marry the woman he abandoned, but otherwise escapes real, meaningful punishment for his various abuses of power (if anyone in the play should be imprisoned...). Mariana is (albeit willingly) exploited for a plot and then (again, willingly) married to a man who firstly abandoned her and then showed his penchant for misogyny and abuse. Her exploitation, and the trick played on Angelo, both have problematic implications for modern ideas of sexual consent.



from Angelo, pressure from her own brother Claudio, and the (moral, physical) exertions of plotting against Angelo, she is made to believe (by the Duke's contrivance) that she has failed anyway, and that Claudio is dead, despite her best efforts. Then, once the trick is revealed, the man who tricked her – who could have settled the entire matter by just dropping his disguise several acts previously – suggests that they should marry, effectively eradicating not just her will but her intended vows to God. In an era of popular feminism and #MeToo, *Measure* is often read as a play about the silencing of women at the hands of men in power, men who clearly and unambiguously abuse that power. Its stark, even prescient dramatization of these issues in the Isabella / Angelo storyline imbues the Comedy with highly tragic stakes, and moralises against the abuses of power. Yet its ending, lacking any sense of conviction or condemnation around the Duke and the final instance of Isabella's silencing, deflates the earlier moralising.

The injustice to which Isabella is subjected, particularly through her silencing (by the Duke as much as Shakespeare) at the very conclusion of the play, evokes Pompey's clever tautology earlier in the play, that his trade would be lawful "if the law would allow it" (2.1.217). The bleak conclusion of *Measure* seems to be an indictment of power structures, their arbitrary whims and their reach above all that they claim to protect or venerate; nothing is sacred, not freedom nor justice nor God. Indeed, this would be a strong, satisfying conclusion to a tragedy, but it jars against what we think of as both Comedic (what is wrong is set right) and comical, as set out in the introduction to this chapter. This fact is redolent of a phenomenon observed by Jason Crawford: "the moral resolutions of Comedy have become impossible to separate, in this

emerging economy of judgment, from the moral violence of tragedy”.<sup>303</sup> Such plays as *Measure for Measure* complicate the idea of Comedy and Tragedy existing at opposing ends of a moral resolution vs moral violence spectrum, especially as modern sensibilities shift, and with them, definitions of terms like “violence”. An obvious solution, then, would be to play *Measure* as tragic, to lean into the moral violence. Otherwise, to reclaim the play in its own comedic terms, a director must un-silence Isabella, or else mute the Duke: they must cut or interject or in some other way mitigate his indecent proposal.

Yet no director at the RSC has ever cut the proposal from the text. The final couplet, “So, bring us to our palace, where we’ll show / What’s yet behind, that’s meet you all should know” (5.1.538-539), has been cut thrice, first by Keith Hack in 1974, then by Michael Boyd in 1998, and lastly by Roxana Silbert in 2011. The only other directorial, textual intervention in the final speech is also by Boyd, wherein he cuts the Duke’s insistence to Isabella that his proposal “much imports your good” (5.1.535b), which only makes the tone murkier. Alan C. Dessen argues that, for Boyd’s production, “A mere listing of cuts and changes, however, cannot explain the controversy, for what matters most is the nature of such alterations and their overall effect upon the story being told. Put simply, what made this show so distinctive was its beginning and ending”, pointing to its “final and highly controversial example of rescripting”.<sup>304</sup> The production militarised the setting with Angelo attempting a coup (and also, perhaps conceptually

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<sup>303</sup> Jason Crawford, ‘Shakespeare’s Comedy of Judgment’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 52.3, September 2022, 503-531, (p. 507).

<sup>304</sup> Alan C. Dessen, *Rescripting Shakespeare: The Text, the Director, and Modern Productions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 91.

incongruous with the coup, drew parallels with the Bill Clinton sexual scandal).<sup>305</sup> The Duke was a dubious leader who regained power at the end of the play and wielded it to sentence everyone to life (marriage), even Isabella. Isabella accepts the proposal with a kiss, seemingly compliant and complicit. All of these elements, which mitigate the silence, are outside of the text, echoing Juliet Stevenson (above).

Paola Dionisotti, who played Isabella in Barry Kyle's production, sees a (potentially radical, discomfiting) solution in the text, or its absence: "that Shakespeare doesn't script Isabella's answer to the Duke's proposal but just leaves it with his line [...] tells me she *doesn't* give him her hand. I think it's quite clear. Shakespeare is leaving an extremely big void there, a figure who goes completely silent and makes no commitment".<sup>306</sup> Doran's 2019 production similarly worked *with* rather than *against* the play's tonal uncertainty, also without altering the text. At the moment of Angelo's second proposal, just before the play's close, ensemble actors on stage applaud his proposal, but the other couples look uneasy, and cannot bring themselves to look directly at Isabella or the Duke. Lucy Phelps' Isabella, clad in her simple novice dress, looks around, wild and confused. As the Duke speaks his final couplet, he keeps his hand outstretched to Isabella, and all other characters slowly leave the stage. When they are gone he lowers his hand and looks at her pointedly. Isabella's face is contorted with angry grief, holding back tears, and her body slumps in furious resignation as the lights go out. Both Kyle and Doran find that one solution is simply *not* to solve, but to lean in: the play, the ending, *is* ambivalent and difficult. Why pretend otherwise?

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<sup>305</sup> Pascale Aebischer, 'Silence, Rape and Politics in *Measure for Measure*: Close Readings in Theatre History', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26.4 (Winter 2008), 1-23 (p. 6).

<sup>306</sup> Paola Dionisotti, quoted in Rutter 1988, p. 40.

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined how Comedy was defined in part by “ordinary characters” who experience “amusing difficulties which are finally happily resolved”. Though each play reaches a resolution, the extent to which the “difficulties” of the characters are *happily* resolved is contentious. Kate and Isabella especially seem still imperilled by personal, social adversity, and Rosalind by conformity. As they apparently lose their freedoms, even themselves, to the whims of men by the ends of their respective journeys, a modern audience, even one with the most vaguely feminist leanings, is likely to struggle recognising the humour and/or happiness in such conclusions.

## II: Metatheatre, Means and Ends

Both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *As You Like It* contain specific structural challenges which can affect the comedic and comical options available to a director.<sup>307</sup> These challenges arise from the overt inclusion of metatheatrical elements – inclusions which in both plays are inextricable from their endings. ‘Metatheatre’ has been subject to various definitions and applications since Lionel Abel coined the term in the 1960s, though for the most part his original vision of the term still permeates:

theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized [...] the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them. [...] on the other hand, unlike figures in tragedy, they are aware of their own theatricality.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Although *Measure for Measure* has some structural issues which are frequently of interest to contemporary directors, these do not pertain as much to the issue of C/comedy, nor of metatheatre, and therefore *Measure* has been omitted from this portion of the discussion.

<sup>308</sup> Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 60.

Sarah Dustagheer and Harry Newman note that Abel attempts “to distinguish metatheatre as a distinct genre different from tragedy”, but of course this isn’t always helpful – several Early Modern tragedies, for instance, could (albeit anachronistically) be thought of as metatheatrical.<sup>309</sup> In any case, this chapter is concerned with metatheatre as less rigid, more stylistic – what Dustagheer and Newman snappily call “self-conscious theatre” – as well as not being restricted to the tragedies.<sup>310</sup> I use the adjectival “metatheatrical”, then, as a catch-all with a greater remit than its origin in Abel’s work, informed by sixty years of evolving understanding (and co-opting) of the “meta” prefix. Elodie Paillard and Silvia Milanezi, though they are bridging twenty-first century thought with ancient theatre, have a more expansive summary view of the metatheatrical, “variously understood as theatricality, reflexivity, auto-referentiality, forms of theatrical illusion, or what is called play-within-the-play”, as well as “the breaking of the theatrical illusion or the crossing of the fourth wall”.<sup>311</sup>

*The Taming of the Shrew* is a play-within-a-play, thanks to the Christopher Sly induction narrative, but the meaning of its metatheatre is obscured by the incompleteness of the metatheatrical device itself. *AYLI* can certainly be described as “self-conscious”, most famously in its *theatrum mundi* declaration that “all the world’s a stage”. As Nicholas Royle writes, *AYLI* “is very much a play about itself, and about the limits (or not) of the stage”.<sup>312</sup> The Forest of Arden, where that famous sentence is

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<sup>309</sup> Sarah Dustagheer and Harry Newman, ‘Metatheatre and Early Modern Drama’, in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 36.1 (Spring 2018) 3-18, (p. 4).

<sup>310</sup> Dustagheer and Newman 2018, p. 4.

<sup>311</sup> Elodie Paillard and Silvia Milanezi, “‘Theatre’, ‘Paratheatre’, ‘Metatheatre’: What Are We Talking About?”, in *Theatre and Metatheatre: Definitions, Problems, Limits*, edited by Elodie Paillard and Silvia Milanezi (Berlin / Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2021), p. 1.

<sup>312</sup> Royle 2005, pp. 38-9.

uttered, is a place rich in metatheatre. But a key structural problem (the back-and-forth between Arden and the court in the second and third acts) poses a risk to the effectiveness of this space in facilitating said metatheatre. The knowingness of theatre's constraints and capabilities bears upon the question of how Shakespeare's comedies and comicality is understood on the modern stage. Metatheatre can act as a proxy, an intermediary which allows performers to double-down on the performed nature of any language or behaviours which may now be deemed problematic, thus either mitigating or providing commentary on an issue, as opposed to merely perpetuating dated attitudes. Either way, a necessary distance can be installed between the overarching production and the play itself, if the directors can reckon with the plays' unique challenges hinging on the structural-metatheatrical axis. Modern productions are often as much commentary on as realisation of the playtext.

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*The Taming of the Shrew* presents one of the very well-known structural (and textual) issues among Shakespeare's plays: the Christopher Sly framing device which complicates the play twofold: firstly, in establishing the Kate / Petruchio narrative, what is commonly understood to be the "plot" of *Taming*, as a mere play-within-a-play, and secondly, in failing to close the frame. After opening the play with two short induction scenes, Sly is only present in the text once more, at the end of 1.1. After this point, Sly and the induction narrative dissolve completely in the text; there is no indication of what is to become of Sly, of how or when the characters of the play-within-a-play should reveal their deception to Sly, or whether or not they do; every word of dialogue after 1.1,

even every stage direction, is of the play-within-a-play. There are three obvious dramaturgical options for handling this in performance, which guide the following study. A director can:

1. leave the text as it is, with the half of the framing device we have;
2. cut the induction/Sly scenes entirely, allowing the play to stand not as play-within-play but play in-and-of-itself; or
3. add their own epilogue to the play to close the Sly framing device and further emphasise the metatheatrical aspect of the play overall.

This last option, as I will explore shortly, is largely aided by the existence of *The Taming of a Shrew*, an anonymous play published in Quarto in May 1594. *A Shrew* serves as a potential solution to the Sly problem because it offers up a *version* of the play in which the problem does not exist.

The first option, then, is the least-invasive approach. Presenting the play as it stands textually would have the framing device and its characters, particularly Sly, peter out into non-existence after 1.1. This approach is taken just twice at the RSC: firstly by Barry Kyle in 1982, the fifth director to stage *Taming* since the RSC began in 1961, and secondly by Lucy Bailey in 2012, the tenth director to stage *Taming* at the RSC. An obvious though unsatisfying justification for this approach is a kind of textual purity, a refusal to interfere with the sacred text; yet both Kyle and Bailey do not show particular reverence, making cuts not just throughout the play but to the induction scenes too.<sup>313</sup> Arguably, preserving this textual mess is one way of implicitly acknowledging the general mess of *Taming*: the ending of the Kate / Petruchio narrative is often not very

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<sup>313</sup> Both Kyle and Bailey cut, for instance, the Lord's lines in Induction 1: "And hand it round with all my wanton pictures: / Balm his foul head in warm distilled waters"; such a low-stakes cut as this shows a willingness to trim the textual chaff.

satisfying, and mirroring that in the lack of resolution of the Sly narrative may refract some of the frustration, as the overall inscrutability makes it harder to come to such broad conclusions as “Shakespeare was a misogynist”, “*Taming* is misogynistic”, and so on. It makes the play more ambiguous, because of the extent to which we can view the Kate-Petruchio narrative as exaggerated entertainment for a drunk, as opposed to any kind of representation of truth or reality.

Leaving the text as-is invites its audiences in the theatre to come to terms with complications, with a worldview of uncomfortable grey and a lack of certainty. A subset of this dramaturgical option was famously undertaken by Michael Bogdanov in his 1978 production, which adapts the two induction scenes into a modern and even more explicitly metatheatrical context, wherein Christopher Sly is a drunken interloper directly confronted by the actor playing Kate, who at this moment appears as an RSC Front of House staff member. Sly intrudes on the stage, and eventually is made to watch the drama unfold. Bogdanov cuts the interjection at 1.1, and Sly’s presence – on a verbal level, at least – fades to nothing: he has no further lines, he does not speak at all. The actor playing Sly, Jonathan Pryce, doubles as Petruchio, and the rest of the play exists as Sly’s dream.<sup>314</sup>

The second dramaturgical option, enacted only three times at the RSC, is to completely cut the Christopher Sly content, offering up *Taming* as a drama in-and-of-itself: Jonathan Miller did this in 1987, followed eventually by Gregory Doran in 2003, and again by Justin Audibert in 2019. Where the first option was the least invasive, this option is perhaps the easiest: cutting the two induction scenes and the brief exchange

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<sup>314</sup> Subsequent productions, including Toby Frow’s 2012 production at the Globe, have echoed Bogdanov’s famous intervention: Frow had Sly come on stage dressed in an England football shirt and cause a disturbance in the crowd, before then doubling as Petruchio.



at the end of 1.1 does not necessitate any other dramatic intervention, as the framing device does not impact any other scene in the play; making these few cuts is therefore a quick, seamless, superficial act of textual surgery. The play then becomes the story of Kate and Petruchio, Bianca and Lucentio, and so on, rather than the story of Christopher Sly *watching* the story of Kate and Petruchio and co. Though *Taming* is not particularly long to begin with, cutting the framing narrative also has the advantage of further speeding up the action and shortening the runtime.<sup>315</sup>

The third dramaturgical option, and the most common on the RSC's stages, is not only to keep all or most of the Sly material in Shakespeare's plays, but also to expand it, and to therefore *close* the frame. This method is deployed by Maurice Daniels in 1962 (whose promptbook is based on John Barton's 1960 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre production), Trevor Nunn in 1967, Clifford Williams in 1973, Bill Alexander in 1992, and Gale Edwards in 1995, each of whom include the induction scenes, and later round off the Sly narrative (and in doing so the play itself) with an added epilogue. The epilogue in Daniels, Nunn, Williams and Alexander (all but Edwards) is derived from the anonymous play *The Taming of A Shrew*, printed in 1594: it is a play "intimately bound up with" Shakespeare's, as Barbara Hodgdon notes.<sup>316</sup> The epilogue of *A Shrew* unfolds:

#### **TAPSTER**

Now that the darksome night is overpast,  
 And dawning day appears in crystal sky,  
 Now must I haft abroad. But soft, who's this?  
 What, Sly? O wondrous, hath he lain here all night?  
 I'll wake him. I think he's starved by this,  
 But that his belly was so stuffed with ale.

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<sup>315</sup> *Taming* is Shakespeare's thirteenth-shortest play, at 2600 lines (meaning a playing time of just under three hours).

<sup>316</sup> Hodgdon 2010, p. 7.

What ho, Sly? Awake for shame.

**SLY**

Sim, gi's some more wine. What's all the players gone?  
Am not I a Lord?

**TAPSTER**

A Lord with a murrain! Come, art thou drunken still?

**SLY**

Who's this? Tapster? Oh Lord, sirrah,  
I have had the bravest dream tonight  
That ever thou heardest in all thy life.

**TAPSTER**

Ay marry, but you had best get you home,  
For your wife will course you for dreaming here to-night.

**SLY**

Will she? I know now how to tame a shrew.  
I dreamt upon it all this night till now,  
And thou hast waked me out of the best dream  
That ever I had in my life.  
But I'll to my wife presently,  
And tame her too, and if she anger me.

**TAPSTER**

Nay tarry Sly, for I'll go home with thee  
And hear the rest that thou hast dreamt tonight.<sup>317</sup> (Scene 15)

Nunn and Wiliams present this epilogue, as printed above, almost in its entirety: they merely omit the first six lines. Alexander, meanwhile, presents a version of the same section of the epilogue, but translated into modern English, as with the Induction scenes. Daniels presents the same text from the epilogue as Nunn and Williams, but

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<sup>317</sup> Anonymous, *The Taming of a Shrew: The 1594 Quarto*, ed. by Stephen Roy Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 125-6.

also includes the preceding lines “What? Sly? I think that he is starved by this, but that his belly was so stuffed with ale”. These changes all have the effect of lampooning Sly.

Edwards, meanwhile, takes a different approach, using the text of *A Shrew*, but the otherwise unused opening lines only, opting to cut Sly’s conversation upon waking.<sup>318</sup> These opening lines are as follows:

**LORD**

Now that the darksome night is overpast  
And dawning day appears in cristall sky  
Now must we hast abroad: go take him gently up  
And put him in one apparel againe,  
And leave him in the place where we did find him.

*The Lords restore Sly to his original apparel, and leave him where they found him. Exit. -THUNDER- Enter Constable and Hostess.*

**CONSTABLE**

What how, Sly, awake for shame.

*Hostess approaches Sly and rings his ears or beats him. Sly smiles in recognition that she is, thankfully, unchanged.*

So Edwards is also unlike Daniels, Nunn, Williams and Alexander in that she completely cuts Sly’s lines at 1.1, as Sly is folded into the action of the play, going on to play Petruchio. Alexander, on the other hand, goes further than any other director in his efforts to expand on the Sly framing device, making additions to 1.2, 4.4 and 5.1, in addition to the above epilogue, to show Sly’s sustained presence and also to show his increasing immersion in the drama, which he goes on to write off as a dream in the

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<sup>318</sup> The epilogue printed in the promptbook is much more extensive, but has been struck through by hand, suggesting it was cut in rehearsal.

epilogue. Like popping a misogynistic thought bubble, Sly (and the audience) are awakened from grim misogyny: whether Sly learns a lesson is anyone's guess.

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*As You Like It*, meanwhile, is a play of two parts, perhaps anticipating such genre-defying two-part plays as *Timon of Athens* and *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>319</sup> The first part, set in the court of Rosalind's uncle, who has usurped the dukedom from Rosalind's father, is oppressive and perilous, and more closely aligned in tone to a tragedy. Once the main characters (Rosalind, Celia, and their Fool) move to the forest of Arden, the play becomes immediately more comical, lighter, playful. Most importantly, it becomes more metatheatrical.<sup>320</sup> The effectiveness of Arden's metatheatrical realm is threatened, however, by a quirk in the structure: while the first act is entirely set in and around the world of the court, the second act, which introduces Arden, cuts back and forth between the two locations: 2.1 is set in Arden with Duke Senior, 2.2 in Frederick's court, 2.3 in the same orchard as 1.1, 2.4 finds Rosalind and co in Arden, and 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 take place over various locales within Arden. 3.1, however, returns to Frederick's court, before Arden fully takes over the play from 3.2 onwards.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Admittedly the first section of *As You Like It*, set in the court, is much shorter than the Arden section, and so the split is much less defined than in the other, later plays. That said, if *As You Like It* is an early attempt at that splitting, it makes sense for it to be less pronounced.

<sup>320</sup> The declarations of its characters to the presence of the written word and the craft of writing love stories (symbolised in Orlando's love notes); the hyper-performance of gender and identity (Rosalind-as-Ganymede, or even better, actor-as-Rosalind-as-Ganymede).

<sup>321</sup> As the orchard location of 1.1 and 2.3 could be either abstract enough or natural enough to invoke Arden, 2.3 is less of a problem to the play's structure than 2.2 and 3.1.

Many directors are not particularly fazed by this, finding solutions in the RSC's large performance space to conjure multiple locations at once, or else setting 2.1 and 2.4 in more liminal spaces (i.e. between Arden and the court). There is also an argument to be made that this slow unveiling of the Forest of Arden may be more dramatically rewarding, as the detours back to the court build tension and also ensure a more intricate threading of the play's multiple storylines. But several directors have found the back-and-forth to run counter to their dramatic intent, and therefore have initiated some structural changes, reordering the above scenes to streamline the movement to Arden. Thompson's 2003 production moved 2.2 to be part of Act 1, while Thacker's 1992 production and Doran's 2000 production both moved 2.2 and 2.3 to after 1.3.

Meanwhile Sykes' 2019 production reorders even further, from 1.3 – 2.3 – 2.2 – 3.1 – 2.1 – 2.4 – 3.2. In doing so Sykes stages all non-Arden scenes swiftly before the introduction of Arden (first with Duke Senior in 2.1, then with Rosalind in 2.4). Sykes was acutely aware of the structural issue and how it impacted her concept and her reading of the play more generally:

I really wanted to have a huge metatheatrical transition between the court and the forest. So huge it was beyond just a scene change, and trees growing out of the stage. My trees were the audience and it was about lighting them; and it was about the world of theatre and about saying "hello, let's stop pretending we're not in a play here". I took it to quite an extreme there and it was very hard to go back to the world of the court. Not just the difficulties of *staging* going back to the court – though it is difficult to go back to the previous world when you've done everything to get yourself into this world, and you've made such a bold theatrical staging. But also emotionally: what does it do to the audience to go back to that world? Once you're there, you kind of just want to stay there. It feels very strange to be sending the audience back and forth. And the court is such a horrible place to be, so

oppressive and no one's breathing! As soon as we went into the forest, it was like, what a relief!<sup>322</sup>

Sykes is sensitive to the fact that her vision of the play complicated this back-and-forth, and was cognisant of its treatment by directors in the past, who similarly opted to rearrange some of the scenes in this stretch of the play.<sup>323</sup>

Sykes clarifies that “it was a staging challenge, and if there was a strong argument I would have found a way to do it, but I couldn't see a strong enough argument; and dramaturgically, where I wanted to take the audience, I wanted to keep them in the world of the forest rather than mess with their heads again, to keep them on that journey”.<sup>324</sup> As Rokison-Woodall notes:

For Sykes, the move to Arden not only represented a change of locale, but also a stylistic transformation – a movement from a type of theatre defined by Peter Brook as ‘Deadly’ to one conceived as ‘Rough’ or ‘Holy’, a space in which the workings of the theatre were exposed and where the relationship between actor and audience became central. Once achieved, this movement into a new form could not reasonably be reversed.<sup>325</sup>

The visual and practical elements of this locational shift are therefore inseparable from the stylistic and tonal elements. Rokison-Woodall elsewhere elucidates how the overall production hinges on the moment enabled by the reordering of scenes above; in terms

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<sup>322</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>323</sup> The most recent major production of the play in the UK before Sykes' was Polly Findlay's NT production in 2016, which similarly reordered the scenes, and featured a large-scale set change for Arden, whereby the trappings of the courts (computers and desk chairs and the like) were pulled into the void of the stage and eventually suspended, vine-like, to constitute the Forest. The court is abstracted and appropriated in an act of metatheatricality, indicating how theatre and performance borrows from – wanders below – real life.

<sup>324</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>325</sup> Rokison-Woodall 2021, p. 119.

of Sykes' approach to metatheatre, the line "All the world's a stage" appears to have inspired her whole production:

particularly the Forest of Arden which became a highly metatheatrical space. The transition into the forest was signalled by a shift into a 'backstage' space, with actors in various states of undress, picking their costumes off a rail and discarding their outfits and wigs from the court [...] the house lights, which remained on (at various levels) for the remainder of the production, plac[ed] the audience and actors in a single democratic space, similar to that of the Elizabethan theatre.<sup>326</sup>

With this in mind, it is easy to see why Sykes felt that a return to the oppressive (and house-lights-off) world of the court might be jarring for her audience.

Metatheatre exerts a great deal of force on the play's epilogue, too, as a moment where the actor both is and is not their character in a direct address to the audience, commenting directly upon the play and its nature as a performance. Paillard and Milanezi's definitions of the metatheatrical ring true in this one short scene/speech. The epilogue matters less to the fates of the characters and more to a somewhat nebulous sense of the play's lingering tone, an audience's very final impressions of what has just been seen. Alison Findlay observes "the nature of epilogues in relation to judgement of a play" – the epilogue tone is often one of reflexivity and justification.<sup>327</sup> This epilogue is unusual to Shakespeare: firstly, few of Shakespeare's plays have one, and fewer still (none of the others) are spoken by a female character. It is also strange (vis-a-vis Shakespeare's canon) for the content of the speech itself, a kind of meta-epilogue (opening with "It is not the fashion to see the lady the / epilogue") which serves to

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<sup>326</sup> Rokison-Woodall 2021, p. 54.

<sup>327</sup> Alison Findlay, 'Epilogues and last words in Shakespeare: Exploring patterns in a small corpus', *Language and Literature*, 29.3 (August 2020), 327-346.

comment on the epilogue as a dramatic trope.<sup>328</sup> And yet despite its relative strangeness (within Shakespeare's canon), despite its fleeting relevance (for all the allusions to Early Modern theatre practice), it is routinely included in modern productions of the play.

Sometimes, though, there is some intervention: in 1973, Buzz Goodbody stripped some of these references from the epilogue by cutting certain lines:

but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue. If it be true  
that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue;  
yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove the better  
by the help of good epilogues. (5.4.173-176)

Goodbody also cuts part of the line "If I were a woman", likely in acknowledgement of the fact that now Rosalind is no longer played by a boy actor pretending to be a woman, but by an actual woman. (In 1992, David Thacker merely changes the line to "As I am a woman".) Ultimately what remains of the epilogue is a wink at the audience, inoffensive gender commentary, and an appeal for applause – brief and to-the-point. On the other hand, in 2009, Michael Boyd rewrote a large portion of the epilogue, in the most extensive intervention to the epilogue at the RSC.

Sykes was also aware of the problems with the epilogue in her 2019 production, partly to do with the form itself (what is it doing, why is it there) as well as with the meaning of the speech, and the way it relies on not only gender stereotypes but gendered language. And in a way, the Epilogue was a vehicle for Sykes to address some

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<sup>328</sup> Some, such as Waldo McNeir, argue that the epilogue appears in thirteen of Shakespeare's thirty-eight plays: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *The Tempest*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The extent to which these are epilogues rather than merely closing speeches is debatable. (See Waldo McNeir, 'Shakespeare's Epilogues', *CEA Critic*, 47.1/2 (Fall-Winter 1984), 7-16.)



of the other reservations she had about the ending: “Rosalind’s language is very heteronormative here. After exploring so much in terms of gender it goes back to binary terms, which we really questioned”.<sup>329</sup> Sykes points to cutting the reference to good beards, for example, “because that made it about the men in the room”.<sup>330</sup> She actively tried to “make the gender more neutral in the Epilogue”, stating that:

it felt very important for me and Lucy [Phelps, playing Rosalind] that Rosalind at the end of the play hasn’t made a decision about male and female... it felt very strange that she would become very feminine again, and that she wouldn’t take something of Ganymede with her, especially because Orlando has fallen in love with Ganymede. So Ganymede has to be part of that relationship.<sup>331</sup>

Sykes sees this as instrumental in queering (or at least un-straightening) Orlando. Yet, with all that said, Sykes does not want to simply solve away all of the problems and present a play with no residual friction. “Anything in Shakespeare that makes us feel uncomfortable or strange, those are the moments we should be paying attention, whether it’s in the language, the character, the rhythm or scansion... Shakespeare is doing something intentional and we need to listen to it”.<sup>332</sup> The same goes for queering Phoebe and for realigning the Epilogue: these problems only need be solved so far.

The risks inherent in the ending of *AYLI* are perhaps more subtle than in *Taming* and *Measure*: there is no overt misogyny on display, no unpunished problematic male protagonists, no helpless female protagonists trapped in marriage. But, as Sykes was particularly aware of, it is a play about love in all its forms – as the title suggests, to suit

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<sup>329</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>330</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>331</sup> Sykes 2022.

<sup>332</sup> Sykes 2022.

all manner of “likes” – and yet it seems dismissive of an important segment of the population and what love might mean to them. The astuteness of directors like Sykes in addressing this possible flaw is that it serves as a reminder: Shakespeare really can be for everybody.

### **Happy Ending / Prioritise Punchlines**

Everyone loves a happy ending. Discussing Paola Dionisotti’s problems with *Measure*, Carol Chillington Rutter notes that “Paola can’t find the happy ending in the text”.<sup>333</sup> Meanwhile Fiona Shaw, discussing *Taming*, asks of Rutter: “What happy endings? [...] You can’t celebrate the outcome for Kate and Bianca”.<sup>334</sup> And, writing on *AYLI*, Alan Sinfield observes that the “happy ending is not defined by the spirit of pastoral, but by the return of the exiles to their property and status in the proportions that they held before”.<sup>335</sup> In the former two examples, there is no happy ending to be found; in the latter one, the happy ending is one that feels somewhat void of meaning or depth. But it is important: the ending, in many respects, makes the Comedy.

As I have hopefully illustrated above, directors have made numerous types of interventions to mitigate unpalatable aspects of the plays and to emphasise happier ones. Often, with these complicated comedies, the solution lies outside of the text: problems with the text do not always have recourse within the text. On the other hand, sometimes the specificity of the text *is* the solution, as we have seen with the silence in *Measure*. Assuming a need for palatability is perhaps condescending to modern

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<sup>333</sup> Dionisotti, quoted in Rutter 1988, p. 40.

<sup>334</sup> Shaw, quoted in Rutter 1988, p. xxvii.

<sup>335</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 36.

audiences who are still capable of – and might be actively seeking – more nuance than a straightforward Comedy. And with a play like *Measure*, audiences either know the plays' problems or don't: in either case, embracing the lack of resolution is not likely to scandalise, though may indeed provoke a response. As Rutter argues, "Reactions are frequently as eloquent in Shakespeare as actions; silence may speak loudest of all on his stage".<sup>336</sup> It takes faith in the source material, and the audience, for a director and their actors to make the bold decision that less is more when it comes to directorial intervention in these plays. Meanwhile, particularly with *Taming* and *AYLI*, emphasising the metatheatrical aspects of the play can help generate distance from the less palatable aspects, or else allow the production to more clearly pass comment on the play.

In all three plays, the C/comedic stakes are bound up in gender, an issue no less contentious now than ever. And playing with gender is often part of the solution as well, from Sykes' Silvius becoming Silvia, to Audibert's entirely gender-swapped *Taming*. A notable production of *AYLI*, directed by Declan Donnellan in 1991 (revived in 1994) for Cheek by Jowl, featured an all-male cast. As Peter Holland says in an interview with Donnellan, this casting decision "was most visibly and immediately apparently" what the production was about, and the production therefore "had an extraordinary seriousness about what the consequences of gender were".<sup>337</sup> James C. Bulman further argues the production was "suffused with a gay aesthetic that politicized the production

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<sup>336</sup> Rutter 1988, p. xxv.

<sup>337</sup> Declan Donnellan, 'Directing Shakespeare's Comedies: In Conversation with Peter Holland', *Shakespeare Survey*, 56 (March 2007), 161-166 (p. 163).

in a manner consistent with queer advocacy in late 1980s and early 1990s Britain”.<sup>338</sup> Here again is an example of directorial intervention to illuminate, rather than obscure, the tensions at play within the text, while simultaneously speaking to modern contexts.

One of the most extreme uses of re-gendering *and* cutting that I have encountered in a major production of Shakespeare’s work was in Josie Rourke’s *Measure* at the Donmar Warehouse in 2018. The production offered a supercut of *Measure*, condensed right down to about an hour. This was performed straight through, and then performed a second time with key characters having swapped gender: namely Isabella, Angelo, and Mariana. The first iteration was staged in period dress, while the second was in modern dress. This internal flipping of the play allowed it to ask bold and difficult questions about gender and the abuse of power in the twenty-first century, as well as to confront some of the ambivalences within the play as written.

To succeed, Rourke’s vision required extensive cutting – over half the play. As well as a general thinning, she points out: “I have made some internal cuts and cut some scenes in *Mistress Overdone*’s brothel-house, and the prison. The main part of the original plot that has been excised is the Duke’s attempt to avoid Claudio’s execution by finding and temporarily substituting the severed head of another prisoner”.<sup>339</sup> Putting aside the fact that such changes also impact the way the Duke is received by an audience and the severity of his imposition upon Isabella, the other stuff that Rourke cuts is revealing: much of it relates to Pompey, Lucio and Claudio, arguably part of a comic-relief strand of the play. Though she does not highlight this herself in her note

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<sup>338</sup> James C. Bulman, ‘Bringing Cheek by Jowl’s *As You Like It* Out of the Closet: The Politics of Queer Theatre’, in *Shakespeare Re-dressed: Cross-gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by James C. Bulman (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008), pp. 79-95 (p. 89).

<sup>339</sup> Josie Rourke, ‘Note on the Text’, in *Measure for Measure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 3.

on the text, she also completely cuts the comic-relief character Elbow. Rourke's approach to the complexity of the play's C/comedy is to excise more of it, leaving only the "double act" of Pompey and Overdone.<sup>340</sup>

In all three of the plays, directors show a keen awareness of the need for the comical. Comedic relief characters are frequently uncut, with the exception of Elbow. Unfunny language is often modernised – although where unfunny language, particularly archaic language, can itself be funny (as is the case with Gremio), directors hardly intervene at all. Audiences may not be laughing for the same reasons as Shakespeare's audiences would have; rather than laughing at a clever pun or reference, they might be laughing at the ludicrousness or strangeness of a character or their words. But laughter is laughter; as B.J. Sokol opines: "laughter in some cases [might] increase sympathy or reduce the likelihood of hatred or conflict".<sup>341</sup> It sustains the C/comedic spirit that these plays need, particularly (in the case of *Taming* and *Measure*) if they are to leave today's audiences feeling anything other than ambivalence or distaste.

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<sup>340</sup> Rourke 2018, p.3.

<sup>341</sup> Sokol 2008, p.8.

### 3

#### Hefty Histories: Historical Fact and the Art of Abridgement

##### in 1-3 *Henry VI* and *King John*

It is November 2020, and the English public, press, and political apparatus are rallying together to defend their monarch and monarchy from an insidious threat: a Netflix TV drama. *The Crown* (2016-2023), created and largely written by Peter Morgan, came under intense scrutiny with the premiere of their fourth season, which covered contentious subjects like the Falklands, Lady Diana, and Margaret Thatcher. It sparked such an uproar over questions of its historical accuracy that UK culture secretary Oliver Dowden expressed his “plans to write to Netflix and request a ‘health warning’ is played before *The Crown* so viewers are aware that the historical drama is a work of fiction”.<sup>342</sup> Putting aside obvious questions about political overreach, one must wonder if Netflix should be expected to pander to audience members who do not understand that Olivia Colman, beloved as she rightfully is, is sadly not (nor has she ever been) the Queen of England.<sup>343</sup> But perhaps this is ungenerous: modern media literacy is such that the average viewer may not understand the difference between fact and fiction, and historical fiction may blur that fact further. Simon Jenkins wrote in the *Guardian* that the show had become “reality hijacked as propaganda, and a cowardly abuse of artistic

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<sup>342</sup> Lanre Bakare, ‘UK culture secretary to ask Netflix for ‘health warning’ that *The Crown* is fictional’, in *The Guardian*, 29 November 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/nov/29/the-crown-netflix-health-warning-fictional-oliver-dowden>>.

<sup>343</sup> Historian and *Guardian* columnist Alex von Tunzelmann quipped on X (formerly Twitter) that “Netflix already tells people that *The Crown* is fiction. It’s billed as a drama. The people in it are actors. I know! Blows your mind.” <<https://x.com/alexvtunzelmann/status/1332991454168436737>>.

licence”, in a piece whose headline equated the show’s “fake history” with “fake news”.<sup>344</sup> This controversy acts as an illuminating example of some of the tensions in the history plays, both as Shakespeare was writing them (adapting from historical sources), and as directors stage them, reworking Shakespeare’s reworking of someone else’s narrative of history.<sup>345</sup> History is always mitigated through a number of perspectives and tellers; a true, objective history is a slippery concept.

So what is the difference between subjective history and historical fiction? Novelist and memoirist Sarah Moss, in an interview for *The White Review*, was asked about her view towards history and fiction in light of comments made by a character in one of her books, that “History is the enemy of fiction”, and that “Fiction is history with ethics”.<sup>346</sup> Moss disagrees with her character, though goes on to say that “the risk of history is that you tell it as if it has ethics. That’s what you mustn’t do. Fiction needs an ethics of some kind, I mean it needs a structure.”<sup>347</sup> Life may imitate art at times, but by and large life does not adhere to plot, or neat didacticism. Foreshadowing is coincidence and denouement is just one moment in time amidst many others. Moss goes on to lay out a poignant, instructive, and open-ended definition of historical fiction:

I think historical fiction is always from and for the moment of its writing, rather than the moment it’s describing. It’s a kind of meta-history about how we narrate the past, what we want to inherit. [...] At best, it’s a reflection on the stories that don’t make it, and it challenges the reader to think about their idea of the past, but of course you can change the past completely, because you can tell a different story about it.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Simon Jenkins, ‘The Crown’s fake history is as corrosive as fake news’, *The Guardian*, 16 November 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/16/the-crown-fake-history-news-tv-series-royal-family-artistic-licence>>.

<sup>345</sup> What is *The Crown* if not a history play for the streaming generation?

<sup>346</sup> Sarah Moss, ‘Interview’, in *The White Review* 27 (March 2020), p. 12.

<sup>347</sup> Moss 2020, p. 12.

<sup>348</sup> Moss 2020, p. 12.

Moss goes on to say that, in the “post-Truth”, post-Trump climate, “it’s really important that everyone’s absolutely clear that there is truth and there are lies, and they’re different [...] there are certain historical realities that it’s imperative to recognise”.<sup>349</sup> Some truth is important, but so is invention, and reconstituting the past “from and for the moment of its writing”. It must speak to the present as well as talking back to the past.

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What the history plays are doing in and of themselves is integral to what can be gleaned from exploring how they are cut for performance. For the purpose of this discussion, I will explore the *Henry VI* plays and, as something of a coda, *King John*. The tension between history and narrative in these plays is mediated when it is understood as potential rather than hindrance. To quote Nicholas Grene, “the plays, themselves constructions from the chronicles, are open to continuous reconstruction on the stage”.<sup>350</sup> Or, to put it another way: since Shakespeare played it fast-and-loose with history, can we play it fast-and-loose with history, *and* with Shakespeare’s fast-and-loose version of it? Shakespeare adapted the *Henry VI* plays from Edward Hall’s *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* as well as *Holinshed’s Chronicles*.<sup>351</sup> *King John* uses *Holinshed’s Chronicles* as well as another pre-existing play,

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<sup>349</sup> Moss 2020, p. 12. Moss cites Holocaust denial as something that cannot be excused by historical fiction.

<sup>350</sup> Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare’s Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.

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<sup>351</sup> The plays’ sources are well documented in modern editions.



*The Troublesome Reign of King John* (c.1589), likely by George Peele. Shakespeare is not just turning these sources from prose to dialogue (or, in the case of *Troublesome Reign*, from dialogue to dialogue): he is crafting a narrative *from* the narrative that already exists. As the form changes so must the shape, structure. What is satisfying on the page may not be satisfying on the stage – this point, which underpins cutting in general, rings truer than ever when considering adaptation.<sup>352</sup>

The plays are written to speak to their time as much as to the past. John Dover Wilson wrote of *1 Henry VI* that “a topical play asks haste, since national excitements are at all times short-lived”.<sup>353</sup> This suggests that the play would have been topical *at the time of its writing*, meaning audiences in the 1590s, well over a hundred years after the events it depicts. It also suggests a directorial imperative to maintain topicality and haste. Though they are histories, they are also plays, meaning they are open to readings. Joel B. Altman argues that one “illuminating way to study the grasping at and wresting of power” in the *Henry VI* plays “is to consider [them] as, literally, a struggle for self-substantiation”.<sup>354</sup> He relates this struggle, through images of blood in the plays, to topical issues around Catholicism and the Eucharist. He goes on to opine that “the struggle for legitimacy” in *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI* “is resumed in a new elegiac vein” in *3 Henry VI*: “who is the true inheritor of grief, who of power, privilege, and

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<sup>352</sup> Consider the modern equivalent of the book-to-screen adaptation. An example that comes to mind is S.J. Watson’s 2011 novel *Before I Go To Sleep*, which featured a woman with amnesia writing diary entries to help retain her memory. The diary is integral to the plot, but would not have translated well to the screen for the 2014 film adaptation, directed by Rowan Joffé. (Who wants to watch a woman sat down writing for the majority of a 90 minute film?) Rightly, the diary was reconceived as a video diary, a medium which fit naturally in film but would have been more jarring than a written diary in the novel. In the same way, the order of history for a written chronicle is not dramatically viable.

<sup>353</sup> John Dover Wilson, Introduction to *The First Part of King Henry VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. ix-l (p. xxi).

<sup>354</sup> Joel B. Altman, ‘Virtual Presence and Vicarious Identity in the First Tetralogy’, in *Shakespeare Up Close: Reading Early Modern Texts*, edited by Russ McDonald, Nicholas D. Nace and Travis D. Williams (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 234-244 (p. 239).

pleasure?”<sup>355</sup> Altman brings those terms, his terms, to the text. Shakespeare, in making history topical, was doing the same thing. Historical inaccuracies (deliberate diversions rather than accidental oversights) abound in the plays. Adrian Noble, whose abridgement of the *Henry VI* plays as *The Plantagenets* (1988) will be explored in this chapter, argues:

Shakespeare is telling the story of his race. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Shakespeare was *creating* the story of his race. [...] throughout the tetralogy there are numerous incidents of historical inaccuracy: for example, men being killed in battle who were, in fact, hundreds of miles away at the time; several historical figures being merged to create one dramatic figure. There are many reasons why Shakespeare did this; the clear narrative convenience of reducing the number of protagonists the audience is asked to follow (a process which we have continued [...]); the dramatic advantages of shape and focus achieved by running several events into one (again, a process of elision which we have taken further in *The Plantagenets*); the need to simplify the actuality of politics both to enhance and illuminate the dramatic structure of an individual and also to marshal the events in order to achieve a particular dramatic effect.<sup>356</sup>

We see Noble rationalising his approach to cutting and abridging the plays by relating the aspects of his practice to how Shakespeare adapted *his* sources. There is a collapsing down, a truncating, of history, which is necessary for the text to become not just a historical narrative but a drama. His abridgement is, essentially, an extension of Shakespeare’s own practice.

This chapter will be focusing on the three *Henry VI* plays to explore how directors, in the spirit of Shakespeare himself, exercise artistic licence in prioritising dramatic satisfaction over historical fact when directing Shakespeare’s history plays. I

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<sup>355</sup> Altman 2012, p. 243.

<sup>356</sup> Adrian Noble, ‘Introduction’ to *The Plantagenets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. vii-xv (p. viii).

intend to look at how this relates to the art of abridging plays (by which I mean the practice of cutting three plays down into two, or two into one). There are three different ways the *Henry VI* plays have been staged at the RSC: the first is to stage them together, as three distinct plays in sequence, usually as part of a tetralogy that concludes with *Richard III*. The second is to stage any of the plays on their own, as single, discrete dramatic entities, and the third is to abridge them into fewer-than-three plays. The trajectory of this chapter is to move through these three options in turn: first I will consider the directors who have staged the *Henry VI* plays as three distinct plays, part of a sequence or tetralogy with *Richard III* (Terry Hands in 1977, and Michael Boyd in 2000 and again with a new cut in 2006). This will be followed by a study of Katie Mitchell's 1994 stand-alone production of 3 *Henry VI* in *The Other Place* – the only one of the *Henry VI* plays to be staged as a stand-alone.<sup>357</sup> From there, I will look to the notable abridgements made at the RSC, from John Barton and Peter Hall's 1963 *The Wars of the Roses*, to Adrian Noble's aforementioned 1988 *The Plantagenets*, to Owen Horsley's planned 2020/21 *The Wars of the Roses*, with Gregory Doran.<sup>358</sup> Finally, this chapter concludes by considering *King John* as something of a wildcard, a relatively well-known (or at least known of), once-respected, solo-authored and free-standing history play. In doing so I will further elucidate what is unique to the *Henry VI* plays vs what is characteristic of history plays more widely. This look at *King John* will also illuminate

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<sup>357</sup> Mitchell's production was titled *The Battle for the Throne*; I will discuss this at length in the relevant section of this chapter.

<sup>358</sup> *The Wars of the Roses, parts one and two*, directed by Owen Horsley with Gregory Doran, were first scheduled to open in the RSC's Swan Theatre in Autumn 2020, before moving to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in early 2021. The plays were postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic and long-term theatre closures; eventually, 1 *Henry VI* was "staged" as an online, "open rehearsal performance" project, directed by Gregory Doran with Owen Horsley, and 2 *Henry VI* and 3 *Henry VI* opened finally in the RST in 2022 directed by Horsley alone. These productions, no longer abridged with 1 *Henry VI*, fall outside of the remit of this thesis and will not be considered. Instead, I will be considering Horsley's planned abridgement, which was kindly provided to me digitally by Horsley before it was scrapped.

John Barton's overarching textual practice as a director. I hope to assemble not only a historical understanding of the RSC's relationship to staging and cutting the lesser-known histories, but also to unpack a variety of overlapping aspects that come to bear upon the cutting of such plays.

Other noteworthy areas of intervention include approaches to Latin and other languages in the plays, as well as single word-changes which reflect either the use of variant texts or editorial emendations, or a desire by a director to modernise the language. This is common in cases where archaic words might obscure wider meaning. This of course bridges some of the themes covered in the preceding two chapters of this thesis. How a director cuts individual characters is not only one of the most illuminating paths to how a director understands the text and its historical context, but is often the place wherein the director might be most clearly making their statement clear. Questions around line share, power and agency, will be particularly relevant to directorial treatment of the few major women characters in the plays. When directors cut powerful female characters like Joan Puzel and Queen Margaret, is their respective textual eminence respected, or downplayed? What does that do to power dynamics? In terms of the bigger picture, how these directors have approached certain dramaturgical and structural rearrangements is also crucial: not just for the abridgements, but even for the more standard productions, where rearrangements can be about textual practicality as well as dramatic intent.

Before I can consider the productions of these plays, I must situate them in their performance and textual histories, and address the question of their authorship.

### A Histories History (in brief)

A vital attribute of the *Henry VI* plays which renders them ripe for abridging at the RSC is their patchy stage history. John Barton, in an introductory essay to the published edition of his and Peter Hall's *Wars of the Roses* trilogy, outlines the RSC's policy to "present the lesser-known plays in the canon", while also pointing out that "the number of rarities we include in our repertory in a given year" must be limited.<sup>359</sup> "Economically, it is essential for the company to play to large audiences", Barton elaborates; "For this reason alone, to have performed the three *Henry VI* plays as they stand was out of the question".<sup>360</sup> But these plays were not always consigned to the outer margins of Shakespeare's canon. In fact, as John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen note, the "earliest reference we have to any play by Shakespeare (either in whole or in part) is in the form of three allusions in 1592 to two of the *Henry VI* plays in the theatre", allusions which were made by theatre manager Philip Henslowe and writer Thomas Nashe.<sup>361</sup> Cox and Rasmussen also point out 3 *Henry VI*'s "initial burst of popularity", in contrast with the fact it went on to become "performed less frequently than other history plays" before achieving "unprecedented success in the second half of the twentieth century".<sup>362</sup> Whichever play Henslowe recorded in his register was "one of Henslowe's major financial successes", as Edward Burns notes.<sup>363</sup> And Thomas Nashe writes of "ten thousand spectators at least" attending one of the plays.<sup>364</sup> Their textual history, which

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<sup>359</sup> John Barton, 'The Making of the Adaptation', in John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses* (London: BBC, 1970), pp. xv-xxv (pp. xv-xvi).

<sup>360</sup> Barton 1970, p.xvi.

<sup>361</sup> John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen, eds., *King Henry VI: Part 3* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>362</sup> Cox and Rasmussen 2001, pp. 2-3.

<sup>363</sup> Edward Burns, ed., *King Henry VI: Part 1* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>364</sup> Thomas Nashe, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by R.B. McKerrow, rev. F.P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: 1958), I, pp. 212-13.

I will outline shortly, also suggests they were popular plays in the years immediately following their appearance on the stage.

Barton and Hall's *Wars of the Roses* trilogy "came to be regarded as the crown of the RSC's achievement in the 1960s", as Ronald Knowles observes.<sup>365</sup> Cox and Rasmussen point out that, in spite of Barton's earlier comments about the economic risk of the lesser-known plays, *Wars of the Roses* was a "success" which "indeed rescued the RSC financially".<sup>366</sup> This led to Terry Hands' decision to risk staging them as three separate plays fourteen years later, and Adrian Noble's attempt at another abridgement eleven further years after that. Aside from Mitchell's stand-alone *3 Henry VI*, the plays were seen as being a package-deal. Barton and Hall's adaptations largely influence the increased popularity of these plays, but other factors are at play too. As Hall argues, "We were in the middle of a blood-soaked century. I was convinced that a presentation of one of the bloodiest and most hypocritical periods in history would teach many lessons about the present."<sup>367</sup> Knowles similarly points to "revived critical interest in the postwar years" leading to more productions of both adaptations and "the full text" – he opines that "At last the *Henry VI* plays proved themselves in modern revival as great drama of the Renaissance period".<sup>368</sup>

And yet they are still not popular. They are less frequently performed, at the RSC and elsewhere, than *Richard III*, which follows the three *Henry VI* plays and caps off the "Wars of the Roses" tetralogy. The *Henry VI* plays are also less frequently performed than the two *Henry IV* plays, no doubt in part because of *1 Henry IV*'s place in UK

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<sup>365</sup> Ronald Knowles, ed., *King Henry VI: Part 2* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), pp. 11-12.

<sup>366</sup> Cox and Rasmussen 2001, p. 23.

<sup>367</sup> Peter Hall 'Introduction', in John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses* 1970, pp. vi-xiv (p. xi).

<sup>368</sup> Knowles 1999, p. 33.

curriculum.<sup>369</sup> As Grene notes, “I had never heard of the *Henry VI* plays, much less read them... The one Shakespeare history play that I did know, and know well, was *1 Henry IV*, because it was a prescribed text for A-level”.<sup>370</sup> The performance history mutually correlates with how well the plays are known – unsurprising, given that popularity of plays in the theatre fosters knowledge of them outside the theatre, and a knowledge of them outside the theatre fosters their popularity in production. At the RSC, the Histories are less frequently staged than their tragic and comedic counterparts; and, amongst them, the *Henry VI* plays are rarely staged, barely known.

It would do a disservice to Shakespeare’s work and legacy to pretend that it is a mystery as to why the three *Henry VI* plays still constitute a lesser-performed, lesser-known portion of his output. The *Henry VI* plays can be difficult theatre; though their potential is often realised on the stage, their exciting battle scenes can be weighed down by their historical contexts, excessive character counts, geographical fluctuations, and dry political parley. It is widely accepted that the *Henry VI* plays form part of Shakespeare’s earlier dramatic ventures, and that there is an element of co-authorship at work behind at least two of the three parts. On *3 Henry VI*, Gary Taylor notes that “Shakespeare’s authorship of the entire play was doubted as early as Lewis Theobald (1733), and Christopher Marlowe was named the most likely second author in the late eighteenth century by both Joseph Ritson and Edmund Malone.”<sup>371</sup> Since then, “recent claims for Marlowe’s hand [...] are corroborated”, as Santiago Segarra, Mark Eisen,

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<sup>369</sup> The existence of a well-known character like Falstaff, and their relation to the beloved *Henry V*, and the fact that there are only two plays compared to *Henry VI*’s three, probably contribute to their greater popularity, too.

<sup>370</sup> Grene 2002, p. 1.

<sup>371</sup> Gary Taylor, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works, Modern Critical Edition*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 333.

Gabriel Egan, and Alejandro Ribeiro argue; “independent teams of investigators find this to be the case using entirely different methods that are, as far as we can tell, impervious to mere literary impersonation”, and though “how this came about cannot be determined”, the persuasive argument now is that the Marlowe’s presence is “undeniable”.<sup>372</sup> Meanwhile, writing to *1 Henry VI*’s specific status of the “ugly duckling of Shakespeare’s earliest dramatic offspring”, David Bevington observed “the charge implicitly levelled at all ugly ducklings, of having resulted from questionable or promiscuous fathering”.<sup>373</sup> Brian Vickers even argues “it has a good claim to be the most disorganized play in the canon”.<sup>374</sup> As for *2 Henry VI*, Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane note that since at least the early twentieth century there are claims for the part-authorship of Marlowe, George Peele, Robert Greene, and possibly Thomas Nashe or Thomas Lodge, “largely on the basis of verbal parallels”, and that more recently “the hypothesis for the play’s co-authorship has gained greater support and is approaching acceptance”.<sup>375</sup>

Like *Hamlet* and *King Lear* (as explored in Chapter One), two of the three *Henry VI* plays survive in multiple texts.<sup>376</sup> *2 Henry VI* was first printed in Quarto in 1594 as *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*,

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<sup>372</sup> Santiago Segarra, Mark Eisen, Gabriel Egan, and Alejandro Ribeiro, ‘Attributing the Authorship of the *Henry VI* Plays by Word Adjacency’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67.2 (Summer 2016), 232-256 (p. 249).

<sup>373</sup> David M. Bevington, ‘The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI*’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 2 (January 1966), 51-58 (p. 51).

<sup>374</sup> Brian Vickers, ‘Incomplete Shakespeare: Or, Denying Coauthorship in *1 Henry VI*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58.3 (Fall 2007), 311-352 (p. 324).

<sup>375</sup> Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane, ‘The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Works’, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 417-602 (p. 495).

<sup>376</sup> As I devoted much of that first chapter to considering how textual variants were approached by directors, I will not spend too much time doing the same in this chapter. Where I will draw on the textual history, it will be to touch on how directors lean on these variants at times as part of a wider pattern of enhancing these plays with borrowings from the variant texts and other sources.



*with the death of the good Duke Humphrey*. Before eventually receiving the title we would now recognise when it was printed in the 1623 Folio, it was reprinted in a second Quarto (1600) and third Quarto (1619). *3 Henry VI*, meanwhile, was first known as *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York* in its initial Octavo printing of 1595. It was similarly reprinted in two subsequent Quarto editions in 1600 and 1619. *1 Henry VI* did not appear in print until the First Folio in 1623.

The extent to which the story of *Henry VI* was originally “intended” (by Shakespeare or his collaborators) to encompass three plays is uncertain. Most scholars agree that the first play written was *2 Henry VI*, and that its success prompted *3 Henry VI*. These were first written around 1591, and eventually, when the plays were being revived sometime later, probably around 1595, *1 Henry VI* was written so that the plays could function as a trilogy of sorts; *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* were subsequently redrafted, and by the time they appeared in the First Folio of 1623, they bore the titles we would recognise now.<sup>377</sup> Once we acknowledge that *2 Henry VI* was written first, it becomes easy to imagine how *3 Henry VI* and then *1 Henry VI* could have been tacked on to the back and the front, respectively. If *2 Henry VI* opened to acclaim, a follow-up could easily be written and performed due to demand; following the success of the duology, a prequel is not unimaginable.

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<sup>377</sup> Chronology based on *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*. Taylor and Loughnane note that “All scholars agree that [*2 Henry VI*’s] composition preceded that of *3 Henry VI*, and many believe that both plays preceded composition of *1 Henry VI*” (p. 494), and cover, at length, the evidence for this belief.

### Henry VI: The Trilogy in the Tetralogy

*Henry VI* survives as three plays with a complex relationship and compositional chronology. Helen Mirren, who played Margaret in Hands' productions in 1977, observed that "One isn't playing in three plays, one is playing in a single long play".<sup>378</sup> One of the options for producing the *Henry VI* plays in modern theatres is to stage all three – usually alongside *Richard III*, form a tetralogy of history plays broadly covering the Wars of the Roses saga. The Royal Shakespeare Company have done this thrice, with two directors: Terry Hands' Royal Shakespeare Theatre productions in 1977, and Michael Boyd's Swan productions in 2000, followed by his 2006 production, staged in the buildup to 'The Glorious Moment'.<sup>379</sup> Though each of these sets of productions (all as part of respective tetralogies) present cut versions of the *Henry VI* plays, they are the closest the RSC has been to performing the plays in their entirety. With that in mind, the decisions that lie behind the cutting of these plays by Hands and Boyd is very specific: unlike the productions examined later in this chapter, these productions do not need to reduce three plays into the running time of two, and so do not require as many cuts. The cutting in these productions predominantly fall into the following categories: "thinning", role distribution, titles, word changes (in particular modernisation), archaic languages, and dramaturgical rearrangements. Their use of antecedent textual variants is also noteworthy, and will be discussed shortly.

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<sup>378</sup> Helen Mirren, quoted in Homer D. Swander, 'The Rediscovery of *Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29.2 (Spring, 1978), 146-163 (p. 152).

<sup>379</sup> Michael Boyd's 'Glorious Moment' was a performance of all eight plays in Shakespeare's two tetralogies (*Richard II*, 1 *Henry IV*, 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V* for the first, 1 *Henry VI*, 2 *Henry VI*, 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III* for the second) over a four-day weekend at the RSC. For more on this "form of Extreme Shakespeare not for the faint of heart (or hind)", see Alice Dailey's 'The RSC's 'Glorious Moment' and the Making of Shakespearian History', *Shakespeare Survey*, 63, ed. by Peter Holland (November 2010), 184-197.

As a general overview, both Hands and Boyd frequently “thin” scenes, cutting lines proportionately to how long the scenes are, and to who has the most lines (or the least contextually crucial lines) within a given scene. The appeal of this method is obvious: it reduces the play’s running time, but the proportional cuts will allow an audience to retain a seamless feeling of the play, even if they are aware of the play’s plot and text before watching it. The action stays repeatedly moving, and long scenes comprised mainly of dialogue don’t run on too long. Toby Malone and Aili Huber express this process as “liposuction (subtle, granular cuts)” as opposed to “amputation (large-scale cuts)”.<sup>380</sup> They note that “liposuction is preferable to amputation”, and that “you can get away with more when you trim the text by a little bit from lots of places than by removal of big chunks. You’re also less likely to do unexpected damage to the structure”.<sup>381</sup> Liposuction, or as I call it “thinning”, is clearly the most obvious approach to cutting, and one that tends to guide directors overall, when they do not have other concerns (variant texts, political correctness) overriding their decision process.

The other key dimension to their cuts is character, especially the female characters. Unsurprisingly, the male-centric history plays (including the *Henry VI* plays) do not have many female parts or lines to dole out to women actors. Admittedly, Joan Puzel is the second largest role in *1 Henry VI*, and Queen Margaret takes about ten per cent of both *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*. This makes Margaret’s role roughly equal to Suffolk’s in *2 Henry VI*, and the fifth largest role in *3 Henry VI*, after Edward, Warwick, Richard/Gloucester and King Henry VI, the key figures vying for power within the

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<sup>380</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 48.

<sup>381</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 48.

play.<sup>382</sup> While the female lead parts may hold up against their male lead counterparts, they are invariably outnumbered, and women characters take up a mere ten to fifteen per cent of each play's line total.<sup>383</sup>

Joan Puzel (or La Pucelle) is a fascinating character, not least for how she dominates a play that, at least in name, is not about her.<sup>384</sup> Much critical attention has been paid to her. Leah S. Marcus makes a convincing case that the "figure of Joan brings into the open a set of suppressed cultural anxieties [of Shakespeare's time] about the Virgin Queen, her identity, and her capacity to provide continuing stability for the nation".<sup>385</sup> Nancy A. Gutierrez meanwhile considers Joan's "theatrical presentation" as among "the many critical problems resulting from the uncertain text".<sup>386</sup> Joan also has her acolytes on the stage: Janet Suzman, who played Joan in Barton and Hall's *Wars of the Roses*, could still understand her appeal almost fifty years later: "La Pucelle's protestations about being pregnant, her terrible lying, her cowardice, somehow rang very true to me, the response of a terrified child. [...] the wiliness and spiritedness [...] rather took me. I rather liked her guile".<sup>387</sup> Her very first appearance in *1 Henry VI* at 1.2 sees her, armed, proving herself to male characters. In Hands' production, Charles, Reigner, Alencon and the Bastard of Orléans all have a share of their lines cropped

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<sup>382</sup> That said, such secondary female roles as the Countess of Auvergne (*1 Henry VI*), Eleanor (*2 Henry VI*), and Lady Elizabeth Grey (*3 Henry VI*) pale in comparison, each of these three roles being a third smaller than the key female character in their respective plays (Joan in *1 Henry VI*, Queen Margaret in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*). And, after those secondary characters, there are hardly any named female characters, and none with even a single per cent share of the lines in each of the three plays.

<sup>383</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, pp. 1104-1107.

<sup>384</sup> As I quote from the Arden edition, I uphold Edward Burns' editorial choice to name the character as Joan Puzel, in keeping with what he perceives to be the play's mocking of the French.

<sup>385</sup> Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 53.

<sup>386</sup> Nancy A. Gutierrez, 'Gender and Value in *1 Henry VI*: The Role of Joan de Pucelle', *Theatre Journal*, 42.2 (1 May 1990), 183-193 (p. 183).

<sup>387</sup> Janet Suzman, *Not Hamlet: Meditations on the Frail Position of Women in Drama* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), p. 111.

before Joan, who throughout the play has a larger presence than any of them, even enters the scene. Boyd, on the other hand, cuts only a portion of Alencon's lines in both 2000 and 2006: "Froissart... now may this be verified" (1.2.29-32), and five lines from Reigner either side of Alencon's speech in 2006 only: "The other lords... their hungry prey" and "I think by some... so as they do" (1.2.27-8, 41-3). So while Hands has already been working on thinning the scene before Joan's entrance, Boyd seems less concerned.

And yet Boyd does not cut more from Joan here to compensate: in 2000 he cuts just two lines, "Decked with five flower-de-luces on each side, / The which at Touraine, in Saint Katherine's churchyard" (1.2.99-100), while in 2006 he cuts two further lines as well: "Dispersèd are the glories it included: / Now am I like that proud insulting ship" (1.2.137-8). Hands cuts as much in Joan's second speech alone: "Heaven and our Lady gracious hath it pleased / To shine on my contemptible estate" and "Ask me what question thou canst possible, / And I will answer unpremeditated" (1.2.74-75, 87-8). Hands also removes Joan's self-comparison to "that proud insulting ship", as well as the obscure references to "five flower-de-luces" and "Touraine, at Saint Katherine's churchyard". How many audience members now would be able to parse what was being described to them? And if Joan is a heroic character (for whom an audience might root), it would make sense to have her reference points be as accessible as possible: perceived pretension may not be a sympathetic quality. Overall, the cutting towards Joan here is the same as elsewhere for both directors: a slight thinning in response to her pivotal status as second in the play's line-share, which still preserves much of her ferociousness and spirit. If anything, they seem concerned with rescuing Joan from the threat of tedium.

The other key female character, Queen Margaret, is another matter entirely. She is introduced just as Joan is being written out of the plays (and of life), and continues to be present right through the rest of the *Henry VI* plays. She and Joan are symptomatic of the fact that the women in this play, to quote Marilyn L. Williamson, “are represented in a paradoxical double bind: they are despised for powerlessness, but even more for their strength because they should not seek power or compete with men”.<sup>388</sup> Graham Holderness views their enduring status in terms related to their rejection of gender expectations, as “apparently powerful and aggressive women – such as Joan of Arc or Queen Margaret [...] may more appropriately be considered as male impersonators who unsex themselves in order to ape the violence and cruelty of men: though they participate in history, they do not participate in history *as women*”.<sup>389</sup> But Kathryn Schwarz argues almost exactly the opposite, that characters like Margaret, *as women*, embody “conventionally feminine obligations and transgressions that locate her in the midst of English nationalist obligations, not despite but because of their aggressively domestic terms. [...] the disruptive effect of women [...] stems not from any rebellion against convention but from full participation in it”.<sup>390</sup> She is a divisive character and can act as a conduit for feminist concerns as well as wider socio-political interrogations on stage.

More interesting than any other set of productions in the context of cuts to Margaret’s lines are Terry Hands’ 1977 productions, featuring Helen Mirren as the steely

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<sup>388</sup> Marilyn L. Williamson, “‘When Men Are Rul’d by Women’: Shakespeare’s First Tetralogy”, *Shakespeare Studies*, 19 (January 1987), 41-59 (p. 42).

<sup>389</sup> Graham Holderness, ‘Introduction’, in *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. by Graham Holderness (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>390</sup> Kathryn Schwarz, ‘Fearful Simile: Stealing the Breech in Shakespeare’s Chronicle Plays’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.2 (Summer 1998), 140-167 (p. 154).

Queen. Mirren's performance came at the height of her theatre career, specifically a theatrical apotheosis of her time with the RSC.<sup>391</sup> Mirren obviously had some star-power then, and no doubt it was clear this star-power would only increase over time; so how did Hands cut these plays to reflect an actress of Mirren's calibre? After all, Margaret takes home a significant ten per cent of the lines in both *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, but not even a single per cent in *1 Henry VI*, wherein Margaret appears only in 5.3 her character and presence seemingly intended more to bolster Suffolk's machinating status than to introduce a future queen. As it happens, Hands seems to be protective of the small but crucial appearance of Margaret in *1 Henry VI*. In her sole appearance, Margaret's thirty-one lines are kept almost entirely, with the exception of a single half-line: "Yes, my good lord" (5.3.188). This agreement is perhaps too acquiescent, and maybe even a little obvious, given the surrounding lines and impending kiss. It seems that this minor cut would rather *strengthen* Margaret's character for Mirren, while hardly interfering with her presence in this scene. On the other hand, the cutting of Suffolk and Reignier is not so restrained, each of them losing a handful of lines throughout the scene. As a result, due to Hands' careful cut, Margaret is able to dominate this one crucial scene despite her otherwise-scant presence in this play.

Hands' cut of *2 Henry VI* continues his preoccupation with retaining much of Margaret's role: Margaret gains a line ("An usurper, thou would say") at 1.3.24 when losing three lines of her subsequent monologue. This is an almost negligible cut, and Margaret loses no further lines until the third act, when a long monologue of hers is

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<sup>391</sup> She was already noteworthy after several successful performances in the theatre, but had not yet achieved the "national treasure" status she enjoys now (which arguably began first with her role in the TV show *Prime Suspect* from 1991-1996 and 2003-2006, and reached its apex with her role as Queen Elizabeth II in acclaimed film *The Queen*, directed by Stephen Frears and released in 2006).

stripped of some of its rhetorical flourishes by eleven lines, a necessary, pragmatic instance of thinning the scene. Wherever Margaret loses lines in the play thus far, it only happens where everyone else's lines are being cut down (thinned) proportionately. Margaret loses a handful of largely insignificant lines to thinning, such as the half-line "How fares my lord?" (3.2.33), somewhat redundant as Henry is swooning when she says it. Further, it is a line she repeats later anyway, in "How fares my gracious lord?" (3.2.38). Indeed, all is straightforward thinning until Margaret loses a more significant number of lines while pleading for Suffolk. Given that she is relying on mercy for her argument, it makes sense to have Margaret more silent than usual in this scene. Margaret then retains almost all of her lines in the rest of the play, as her and Henry tighten their grip on power. This is a prelude to how Hands uses cuts to accentuate the rise-and-fall of Margaret's status in 3 *Henry VI*.

In Hands' production of 3 *Henry VI*, cutting to Margaret's lines is largely proportional, at least at first. Though she loses six lines in her brief first appearance (1.1), these lines are couched in several long speeches, and the cuts surely lessen the risk of Margaret's pontificating becoming a drag for the audience. That said, Margaret's next appearance in 1.4 features even lengthier speeches, and even more of them, yet not a single line is cut. Arguably, as she and her associates get ever closer to killing York at the end of this scene, Hands allows Mirren to retain a verbal stranglehold over this entire scene. So as Northumberland, Clifford, and even York find themselves stripped of swathes of lines throughout this scene, Margaret's monologuing becomes relentless. But as Margaret's political power in the play starts to slide, her character becomes more and more prone to line cuts: by 3.3, Margaret is losing multiple passages of three, four, even seven lines at a time. And, as if to further emphasise this fluctuation, not a single



line is cut from Margaret towards the end of 3.3 (once the character of the Post delivers the letters that reveal Edward's treachery to Warwick/Lewis/Lady Bona, and Queen Margaret once again enjoys a position of power over those around her).

Finally, in the fifth and final act of 3 *Henry VI* – and indeed the end of the *Henry VI* sequence of Hands' tetralogy – Margaret's position is less clear. In 5.4, Margaret loses just six lines, thinning her long thirty-eight-line speech by about sixteen per cent. Though these are the only lines cut in this scene, it hardly challenges Margaret's dominance. Cut lines include: "From shelves and rocks that threaten us with wreck. / As good to chide the waves as speak them fair" (5.4.23-4) and "More than with ruthless waves, with sands and rocks" (5.4.36), too obvious and too defeatist in a speech that calls Edward "a ruthless sea", Clarence "a quicksand of deceit", and Richard "a ragged fatal rock" (5.4.25-7). Indeed, half of the lines which are cut contain images of waves, rocks, and peril, sentiments which perhaps are already better expressed elsewhere in the long speech. The rest of her lines, as she encourages her men into battle, are retained. This is a mirror image of the start of 5.5, both showing Margaret clinging to her steely resolve. But in 5.5, after the death of her son, Margaret's lines are again cut down, specifically from the emotional speech mourning the death of her son. It seems counterproductive to cut such lines as "How sweet a plant have you untimely cropped" (5.5.62), and yet the stripping away of Margaret's space to grieve is in itself an infringement on her power and rights, the final brutal sign that hers and Henry's reign has ended.

Clearly, Hands is sensitive not only to Mirren's prowess as a performer but also to Margaret's dramatic possibilities, preserving and foregrounding as much as he can with what little he has to work with in 1 *Henry VI*. Perhaps Margaret is preserved here

too for the potential she has to unify the four plays in the tetralogy. Hands only proportionately thins the character in *2 Henry VI* (particularly in long speeches and long scenes where other characters are proportionately thinned too), an approach which remains consistent in *3 Henry VI*. In all, the overarching and most significant point is that Hands uses Margaret's textual dominance or marginalisation as a kind of barometer of her power throughout the events of the play. Instead of leaving the role entirely uncut, Hands makes careful and slight cuts, gentle pruning, but enough to continually indicate when Margaret's status is threatened and ultimately compromised entirely. Yet perhaps this speaks as much to Margaret's potential as a dramatic role as it does the actor playing her: Boyd's approach is not that much different.

Boyd does not cut down Margaret's role at all in *1 Henry VI*, which of course would be unnecessary even for a director engaging in the systematic thinning he demonstrates elsewhere in *1 Henry VI*. One would, as he does, start with more preeminent characters. In *2 Henry VI*, Boyd cuts hardly any of Margaret's lines until the long speech in 3.1, where he – like Hands – pares back some of Margaret's rhetorical flourishes. But, as the play progresses, he engages in a clearer thinning of the part than Hands – global, in that it cuts frequently and proportionately, rather than Hands' local cuts, which become increasingly specific. *3 Henry VI* continues this trend, which occurs in both his 2000 and 2006 productions (though it should be noted that his 2006 productions thin much more liberally than his 2000 productions, including the character of Margaret). For Boyd, it seems that Margaret is a useful character whose lines should be preserved. Her verbal presence is overbearing and compelling, in line with how her character is written as one of the key figures of the *Henry VI* plays (and, indeed, the tetralogy, given her reappearance in *Richard III*). Meanwhile, for Hands,

Margaret is key to subtly communicating aspects of the power struggle, with the added benefit of being a useful character for showcasing a particular actor's capabilities. The fact that she is unmatched as a female character in the histories is perhaps incidental; the cutting, however, does not suggest otherwise. Presentations of women are key concerns across these plays. Carol Banks specifically unites them based on their female leads: "Joan la Pucelle in *1 Henry VI*, the dowager Queen Eleanor in *King John*, and Queen Margaret in *3 Henry VI* [...] are amongst the women who lead armies and play their part in the physical action".<sup>392</sup> And yet sometimes these women characters shore up the flaws: G.K. Hunter argued that the *Henry VI* plays do not link up, and that "Each Margaret [...] is in fact a different Margaret, accommodated to a different structure and operating in terms of a different range of relationships and effects".<sup>393</sup> In either case, much hangs on a director's treatment of these characters.

In Boyd's 2000 production of *3 Henry VI*, Aislín McGuckin, a female actor, played Rutland, the youngest son of the Duke of York.<sup>394</sup> While Rutland is significant in terms of the plot, as his death spurs much of the action and is key to many character arcs (including Clifford's, Queen Margaret's, and most of the House of York), his part is minor.<sup>395</sup> Boyd cut very few of Rutland's lines in 2000, but his final line in particular is of interest: "Di faciant laudis summa sit ista tuae" (1.3.47), a Latin line from Ovid's

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<sup>392</sup> Carol Banks, 'Warlike women: 'reprooffe to these degenerate effeminate days?', in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. by Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves & Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 173.

<sup>393</sup> G.K. Hunter, "The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays "Henry VI"", *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1978), 91-108 (p. 93).

<sup>394</sup> It is not uncommon, at the Royal Shakespeare Company and elsewhere, for the roles of child characters to be played by women (when having a child actor is impractical or undesirable), as differences in size and voice largely set the performer apart from adult characters/performers.

<sup>395</sup> He appears only in the third scene of *3 Henry VI*, where he speaks approximately twenty-three lines before being murdered by Clifford.

*Heroides* that translates as “The gods grant that this may be the height of your glory”.<sup>396</sup>

In Boyd’s 2000 promptbook, the line was marked for deletion in pencil, after the initial cut was prepared.<sup>397</sup> It makes sense to cut Latin lines; in his 2006 production, Boyd again cuts this Latin line. Hands, who cuts seven of Rutland’s lines, elects to keep Rutland’s Latin line, while Mitchell’s 1994 stand-alone production of 3 *Henry VI* (which will be considered in greater detail shortly) renders the line into English thus: “God grant that this may be thy glory’s peak!”, a translation that is more metrically fitting with Shakespeare’s verse. As Latin lines fall increasingly out of vogue in performance, the options remain to cut them, or to translate them, or to gloss them (i.e. to read them in Latin and English). Boyd’s decision to retain this line for his female Rutland therefore seems deliberate and weighted.

From leading to minor characters, through singular word choices and attitudes towards a dead language like Latin, Hands and Boyd are engaged in a forensic method of cutting these plays. There is less of an obligation to cut for time, as the plays are not as long as many others, so the cutting that is done is generally more selective, and is often done with a view to the fact that these plays are sitting in dialogue with one another when they are staged together in sequence. But what might it look like to cut one of the *Henry VI* plays without worrying about how these cuts will hold up in sequence?

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<sup>396</sup> Cox and Rasmussen 2001, p. 211n.

<sup>397</sup> Perhaps the initial uncertainty about cutting this line – if that is indeed what these pencil markings suggest – comes from the fact that its origin is in Ovid’s book of Greek heroines, which might have resonated with McGuckin/a feminine Rutland.

### Standing Alone: Katie Mitchell's *Battle for the Throne* (1994)

The *Henry VI* plays do not generally invite productions of the three plays in their entirety. Indeed, the plays were not performed at the RSC for over fifteen years following Michael Boyd's 2006 revivals. Doran programmed the plays somewhat by necessity, as part of his mission to stage every canonical work by Shakespeare during his tenure as artistic director. Practicalities (such as the financial risk of staging three lesser-known works in a single season) are predominantly what make all three parts of *Henry VI* an infrequent choice for staging. Yet even less common, at least within the RSC, is the decision to stage just one of the three plays as a stand-alone history play. One might assume, given that it was the first play of the three to be written and the only one that was written to stand independently, that it would be 2 *Henry VI* that would or should be staged most frequently on its own. Yet the RSC have only once staged a production of just one of the *Henry VI* plays on its own, and it was 3 *Henry VI*.

Katie Mitchell directed this production of 3 *Henry VI* in 1994 in *The Other Place*, advertised as *Henry VI: The Battle for the Throne*. In addition to being the first (and thus far only) stand-alone production of a *Henry VI* play, it also "marked the first time that a woman had directed 3 *Henry VI* on stage in England", as Cox and Rasmussen note.<sup>398</sup> Perhaps the most interesting aspect of its reception is that, as critic Paul Taylor admits, Mitchell's venture was obviously a gamble: "Mounting it on its own, as though it were a clean, free-standing work, has scarcely been done before and is an activity hedged about with both opportunities and liabilities".<sup>399</sup> 3 *Henry VI* begins more *in media res* than

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<sup>398</sup> Cox and Rasmussen 2001, p. 31.

<sup>399</sup> Paul Taylor, 'An Eye For The Small Print', *Independent*, 10 August 1994 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-an-eye-for-the-small-print-katie-mitchell-has-chosen-to-cut-her-shakespearian-teeth-on-henry-1382536.html>>.

other plays, likely since it was written for crowds that had recently seen 2 *Henry VI*. Arguably, when 3 *Henry VI* was written, Shakespeare and his collaborators felt they could rely on the audience being familiar with the characters and events already established in the popular predecessor.

But this is not necessarily a hinderance to directing 3 *Henry VI* as “a clean, free-standing work” (as per Taylor’s phrase above); indeed the fact that it assumes some foreknowledge from its audience frees the opening of the play from excessive exposition. And while much historical context could be lost without the two preceding plays, Mitchell trusted 3 *Henry VI* to stand on its own. This title change is important: to just stage something with “part three” in the title might deter uninitiated audiences. Responding to her production, and summing up the tension of Mitchell’s endeavour, Russell Jackson quipped that 3 *Henry VI* is “much harder to sell to the public without adaptation or spectacle”; he then asks, in parenthesis, “who wants to see Part Three of anything?”<sup>400</sup> In losing that aspect of the title, and presenting the play as a self-contained story, Mitchell was free to jettison as much of the history as she saw fit in order to speak to the contemporary and concurrent civil wars happening globally in 1994.<sup>401</sup>

So how did Mitchell handle the “opportunities and liabilities” Taylor alluded to? A good place to start is with Richard III – or Gloucester, as he is then known, not long before he achieves both his regal and eponymous status in *Richard III*. The importance

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<sup>400</sup> Russell Jackson, ‘Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1994-95’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46.3 (Autumn 1995), 340-357 (p. 349).

<sup>401</sup> Again, Shakespeare was acting similarly when he adapted the chronicles: he brings the mid-1400s to the 1590s, through his own contemporary lens. Mitchell brought it along to the 1990s with her own lens, another step down the line of historical aberration, the line which Shakespeare himself (along with his collaborators) first stepped.

of his character builds throughout *3 Henry VI*, as though Shakespeare was perhaps already thinking about the play he would go on to write a few years down the line, maybe already eyeing up a (retroactive) sequence. A crucial moment arrives at the end of 3.2, when Gloucester delivers a 72-line speech alone on stage, in what would be his first soliloquy. While this may not have been significant to *3 Henry VI*'s original audience, who had no immediate *Richard III* to look forward to, it certainly matters in the context of the tetralogy. Richard III's character is largely defined by his soliloquising charisma, his interpersonal skills with the audience that make him a love-to-hate character.<sup>402</sup> This speech of Gloucester's in *3 Henry VI* (in 3.2) is the pivotal moment where Gloucester (as we mostly think of him based on our knowledge of Richard III, both the person and the play) starts to show through. Hands and Boyd (in both 2000 and 2006) leave this speech with hardly a finger-print, only swapping out the occasional textual variant. For the purpose of their ventures-at-large – namely their tetralogies – this is a moment rich with significance. Between the character objective of “So do I wish the crown” (3.2.141) and the thematic allusion to “the murderous Machevil” (3.2.194), this speech is a handy precursor to *Richard III*, allowing a director to get some foreshadowing out of the earlier histories before the big finale.

Katie Mitchell breaks from convention, and it's easy to see why. The following nine lines are cut from this speech in Mitchell's production:

Saying, he'll lade it dry to have his way:  
So do I wish the crown, being so far off,  
And so I chide the means that keeps me from it,  
And so I say, I'll cut the causes off,  
Flattering me with impossibilities.

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<sup>402</sup> The fact that he is the inspiration for more modern creations such as Tyrion Lannister in *Game of Thrones*, an audience-favourite, indicates something of Richard's magnetism.

[...]  
 Like to a chaos or an unlicked bear-whelp,  
 That carries no impression like the dam.  
 [...]  
 I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk,  
 I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,  
 (3 *Henry VI*, 3.2.140-144, 162-3, 188-189)

There's much to say about the decision to cut these nine lines in particular. The final two lines seem an obvious choice; in the days before *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), how many audience members would be familiar with the word "basilisk", and familiar enough to know that a basilisk killed by its sight? Nestor, a figure in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, may be too obscure for a 90's audience. Yet Mitchell leaves the next line in place: "Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could" (3.2.190). Ulysses, famous and famously cunning, is an allusion that can stay, while Nestor is an allusion too far. The previous pair of lines are less clear: while "chaos" might refer to the primordial void, or "khaos", in Ancient Greek, this convenient thread across over 25 lines seems unlikely, given there are no overt references to Greek mythology before or after "chaos", until Nestor. So since chaos is meant more generally (as per Bate and Rasmussen's footnote, as a "shapeless mass"), the rest of these two lines must also be fairly devoid of allusion.<sup>403</sup> But is a reference to an outdated belief (that "bear cubs were thought to be licked into shape by their mothers", as per Bate and Rasmussen again), alongside the double-helping of unfamiliar terms "bear-whelp" and "dam", an image that will actually convey its meaning to most people? That seems immediately unlikely.

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<sup>403</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 1269.



So these lines of Gloucester's are arguably not the most useful. Though they might enrich Gloucester's character for an audience with enough learning to decipher the allusions and syntax, these lines could obscure from a neat understanding of Gloucester's intentions and character. Mitchell can cut more freely from Gloucester because she is free *from* Gloucester, and his character both before and after the events of *3 Henry VI*. Paul Taylor's "opportunities" are writ large here. Mitchell is able to break from convention and, in not being weighed down by the Richard-to-come, actually frees this speech from some of its inherent impediments. And yet this is also a fine example of Taylor's supposed "liabilities": Gloucester's notoriety-to-come in *Richard III* is something of a conceptual risk for a director who is staging *3 Henry VI* without also staging a) the preceding parts which further establish his historical context and b) *Richard III*, in which the characterisation begun in *3 Henry VI* pays off so well for an audience. It is this balance of opportunity and liability, freedom and expectation, which Mitchell treads quite deftly.

Mitchell is not risk-averse in her production, and deviates from the norm frequently. Though, as I have already noted, she anglicises Rutland's Latin line, she does not shy away from multilingualism. The first forty-five lines of 3.1 (seventeen per cent of this 268-line scene), wherein Queen Margaret visits King Lewis XI and Lady Bona, were spoken entirely in French, seemingly taken from a French edition of the play. What is the effect of transposing a sizeable portion of a relatively long scene into a language that might be unfamiliar for much of the audience? Firstly, this seems to fall in line with Mitchell's interest in illuminating global struggles and the fact there is a world outside of the Anglo-centric; secondly and perhaps more importantly, the use of French dialogue between just two characters creates a palpable sense of intimacy and

camaraderie that might be difficult to evince in other ways. Lewis and Margaret speak in French from the opening of their interaction right through until Lewis greets the arriving Warwick. There is a wonderful moment where, as Warwick is already entering or has already entered the stage, Lewis' line "What's he approacheth boldly to our presence?", and Margaret's reply "Our Earl of Warwick, Edward's greatest friend" (3.3.44-5), are still spoken in French. The effect is two-fold, firstly to further suggest their easy friendship and trust in the face of outside parties, and secondly to further alienate the incoming Warwick, who may not speak fluent French but would at least be able to detect his own title, and Edward's name, to know that he was being spoken about in a way designed to exclude him.

The greatest achievement for Mitchell here is how this French dialogue refreshes the rest of the scene. Lewis will acquiesce to Warwick's promises, an even more visceral and somehow less predictable betrayal, after his closeness with Margaret has been so strongly intimated. Then, when he learns he and Lady Bona have been slighted, he will return to the side of Margaret (from where, an audience might feel, he never should have faltered). All this tension culminates at the end of the scene, wherein everyone on stage is united *against* Edward (at which point Mitchell tantalisingly places her interval). So while it may seem a rogue choice to have such a lengthy exchange happening in another language, especially for the director who elsewhere translates Latin lines into English, its payoff is arguably greater than the two minutes of potential confusion. Where Shakespeare's Latin often feels antiquated at best and pretentious at worst, Mitchell's use of French seems imbued with dramatic intent and rewards even the non-French-speaking viewer almost immediately after. Mitchell's ultimate victory in directing *Henry VI: The Battle for the Crown* is that she emancipates a sometimes-

difficult play from a lot of its difficult context, and in doing so allows it to stand – and do battle – on its own. *3 Henry VI* feels like a fresh and timely comment on power, war and nationhood, rather than the third part in a saga that is mostly just building towards *Richard III*. It begs the question: could the same be done with the others?

There is another way, popularised *by* and popular *at* the RSC, of recontextualising this complex trio of plays: abridgement, making three plays two – or more accurately, making four plays (including *Richard III*) three, a neat trilogy that eschews some of the bulk of *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI* and builds teleologically to the famous and beloved *Richard III*. This approach, first undertaken at the RSC by John Barton and Peter Hall in 1963, and then favoured and retooled by Adrian Noble in 1988, perhaps reveals something about why Mitchell had faith in *3 Henry VI*. In both Barton/Hall and Noble's trilogies, the *Henry VI* play that is cut the least during abridgement is *3 Henry VI*. Its dramatic potential – at least over *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI* – has been apparent to RSC directors for some time. Mitchell's stand-alone rendering of *3 Henry VI* therefore sits alongside the wider narrative of this abridgement tradition.

### **Exercises in Abridgement (Introducing *Edward IV*)**

In Autumn 2019, Shakespeare's Globe staged a production of *Henry VI*. There was no overt indication of precisely which *Henry VI* play or plays this production was based on, aside from a three-and-a-half-hour running time and two intervals. The impression might easily have been given that this vision of *Henry VI*, co-directed by Ilinca Radulian and Sean Holmes, was an amalgamation of all three texts, a titan effort of abridging the three plays into one (relatively) swift production. An article by Hailey Bachrach was posted to their website, linked from the production's page. Titled 'Editing Shakespeare's

*Henry VI* into one play', its first line read "How do you slim three plays down to one?".<sup>404</sup> The answer is to cut one of them out entirely – in this case, *1 Henry VI* – both an obvious solution and one that feels like cheating. As Alfred Hickling quipped about the plays in 2013: "When is a trilogy not a trilogy? When it's a matter of editorial convenience."<sup>405</sup> Radulian and Holmes cut *1 Henry VI* completely – according to Hailey Bachrach, *1 Henry VI* is full of "exciting and essential stuff... sort of", but feels "more like an after-the-fact Hollywood prequel than the play meant to kick off the new franchise".<sup>406</sup> Bachrach's qualitative "sort of" speaks volumes as to the eminence of *1 Henry VI*.

The Royal Shakespeare Company has not attempted an endeavour quite like this one before, but they have presented significantly abridged versions of the *Henry VI* plays twice, with a third planned (and ultimately retooled) for 2020/2021, to be directed by Owen Horsley with Gregory Doran.<sup>407</sup> Barton and Hall's 1963/4 productions of *The Wars of the Roses* represented the first time that the RSC had staged the *Henry VI* plays. Barton and Hall redefined the plays with *The Wars of the Roses*, a generationally definitive set of productions. Taking the three parts of *Henry VI*, along with *Richard III*, Barton and Hall distilled the tetralogy into a trilogy, with the three parts titled *Henry VI*, *Edward IV*, and *Richard III*. The first play encompassed the events of the first two parts of *Henry VI*, the second play (*Edward IV*) consisted of the tail end of *2 Henry VI* and the entirety of *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III* stood entirely on its own as the third play.

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<sup>404</sup> Hailey Bachrach, 'Editing Shakespeare's *Henry VI* into one play', *Shakespeare's Globe*, 6 November 2019 <<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2019/11/06/editing-shakespeares-henry-vi/#:~:text=by%20Dr%20Hailey%20Bachrach&text=We%20went%20through%20a%20variety,a%20rich%20and%20exciting%20story>>.

<sup>405</sup> Alfred Hickling, 'Henry VI – review', *Guardian*, 11 July 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jul/11/henry-vi-review>>.

<sup>406</sup> Bachrach, as above.

<sup>407</sup> As indicated above, Horsley's cuts discussed herein relate to the planned abridgement to be known as *The Wars of the Roses*, which was retooled after the pandemic into productions of *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, which opened in 2022 – outside of the scope of this thesis.

This concept survived in Adrian Noble's 1988 trilogy, *The Plantagenets* – even the titling convention (to name the respective parts *Henry VI*, *Edward IV*, and *Richard III*) was carried over from Barton and Hall to Noble.

In the planned 2020/2021 productions from Owen Horsley with Gregory Doran, the tetralogy would once more have become a trilogy, but with notable differences. Firstly, the trilogy was not intended to be promoted as a single entity in the same way: while the three *Henry VI* plays would have again been condensed into two, titled *The Wars of the Roses, parts one and two*, they were being marketed separately from *Richard III*, and would have opened separately too. The directorial team was to be shared, with Gregory Doran taking the lead on *Richard III* as Horsley led on *The Wars of the Roses*. The cast were set to reprise their roles across the three productions. So, while Horsley and Doran would have used Barton and Hall's famous title, it would only have applied to the two-part *Henry VI* abridgement, rather than the three-part adaptation of Shakespeare's tetralogy. According to Horsley, it was agreed with the marketing department that the introduction of *Edward IV* as a title may only confuse and complicate matters.<sup>408</sup>

Horsley understood *1 Henry VI* in similar terms to Bachrach, endeavouring to treat it "as an action film prequel", something which could be cut down to an hour and fifteen minutes and played straight through without an interval, the first of six "chapters" of his bipartite *Wars of the Roses*.<sup>409</sup> Proportionately, *1 Henry VI* would have taken up the least space in Horsley's abridgement. Noble and Barton/Hall's

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<sup>408</sup> Owen Horsley, interview with the author, 19 June 2020. When Horsley's productions of the two plays did open in 2022, they were titled *Henry VI: Rebellion* (for *2 Henry VI*) and simply *Wars of the Roses* (for *3 Henry VI*).

<sup>409</sup> All references to Owen Horsley's cuts to *Henry VI* are taken from the March 2020 draft of his edited script for *The Wars of the Roses, parts one and two*, provided to me by Owen Horsley over email.

abridgements were the same. Such similarities in their approaches reflect an overarching dramaturgical, narratological inclination – a uniform approach to the *Henry VI* plays that relies on a logical process, and a prioritising of the plot at the expense of literary aesthetics or any kind of fealty to “Shakespeare’s genius”. In fact, Peter Hall’s own proclamations on the plays – and his and Barton’s approach to them – reflect an even more nuanced relationship between these plays and Shakespeare’s veneration. “We believe that there is a difference between interfering with the text of mature Shakespeare and with the text of the *Henry VI*’s”, he asserts (with “mature Shakespeare” referring primarily to such seminal plays as *King Lear* and *Hamlet*).<sup>410</sup> The *Henry VI* plays “do not work in unadapted form”, Hall states unequivocally.<sup>411</sup>

A clear preference for content underpins these abridgements/adaptations. In all three adaptations, 3 *Henry VI* is the least affected play, almost allowed the running time of a full-length play, and thus cut down much less. (Meanwhile 1 *Henry VI* is reduced to anywhere between a third and a half of the running time of a full-length production, and thus is cut down by more than half.) This, perhaps, is not surprising: we know from Katie Mitchell’s production that 3 *Henry VI* can stand on its own, and has a special status given its aforementioned relationship with *Richard III* – which Barton/Hall, Noble, and (to a lesser extent) Horsley all depend upon. 2 *Henry VI* is important for bridging the other two very different parts, and for setting up the conflict and characters of the

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<sup>410</sup> Hall 1970, p. vii. (Hall’s point is made as he justifies why his and Barton’s interference relates to “consciously join[ing] the despised ranks of the men who knew better than Shakespeare”, but does not put them “in quite [the same] class” as Nahum Tate or “the anonymous adapter of *Hamlet*”. Hall, in his mission to make these plays more watchable so as not to undermine Shakespeare’s mastery, sees himself and Barton as akin to Brutus: “it’s not that we loved the *Henry VI* plays less, but that we loved Shakespeare more”. Plays which reflect “apprentice work, uneven in quality”, and of which “we cannot be sure that Shakespeare was their sole author”, clearly *demand* directorial intervention with the text in a way that mature, sole-authored plays do not.)

<sup>411</sup> Hall 1970, p. vii.

sequence. The disparate treatment of the three plays reveals a directorial bias in favour of *3 Henry VI*.

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For the remainder of this section, I will look at *1 Henry VI*, the most severely cut play, as a nexus of abridgement for all three adaptations which have been programmed for the RSC's stages.<sup>412</sup> Owen Horsley has some illuminating observations about the plays which are also reflected by Noble and Barton/Hall's work. Firstly, when asked where he started approaching the cuts in *1 Henry VI*, Horsley observed that Gloucester's character seems wildly inconsistent, "earthy and good" in the second part but "petulant" in the first.<sup>413</sup> For such a key character, this "disparity" was too noticeable, and thus "a good indication" of where to start cutting.<sup>414</sup> Gloucester is the second character to speak in *1 Henry VI*, and even his first speech is a site of character-correction. Immediately following Bedford's opening speech – which Barton/Hall, Noble, and Horsley all leave entirely intact, the only change being Horsley reassigning the speech to Essex as part of his efforts to slim down the cast – Gloucester speaks for nine lines. Horsley reduces this to the first two, Noble to the first four and the final line, and Barton/Hall to the first two and the final line. The two lines which recur in all three cuts are Gloucester's open declaration about Henry V, his late brother: "England ne'er had a king until his time. Virtue he had, deserving to command". The rest of the description is entirely erased by Horsley, and greatly elided by Noble and Barton/Hall; perhaps because it merely extols

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<sup>412</sup> Horsley's programmed-but-cancelled productions included.

<sup>413</sup> Horsley 2020.

<sup>414</sup> Horsley 2020.

the virtues of the late king through numerous piled-up images which do not necessarily enhance one's view of Henry V, and perhaps because they set up the character of Gloucester too strongly, as a character too concerned with images of conquering.

Horsley cuts seven scenes entirely from *1 Henry VI*, and the first is 1.3, which is similarly cut entirely by both Adrian Noble and John Barton/Peter Hall. In this scene, Gloucester first comes to "survey the Tower", "fear[ing] there is conveyance" (or theft), berating the warders while flouting his own reach: "whose will stands but mine? / There's none Protector of the realm, but I. / [...] / Shall I be flouted thus by dunghill grooms?" Gloucester decries "Faint-hearted Woodville" and "Arrogant Winchester, that haughty prelate" who is "no friend to God, or to the King", and is addressed shortly thereafter by Winchester as "ambitious Humphrey". Gloucester continues in this scene to be violent and derogatory towards those around him, particularly the Bishop of Winchester, to whom Gloucester eventually replies "I will not answer thee with words, but blows". This volatile character is not in keeping with the quiet, almost scholarly Gloucester of *2 Henry VI*, whose first appearance in *2 Henry VI* involves him dropping a paper he was reading before lamenting, courteous and fragile: "Pardon me, gracious lord. / Some sudden qualm hath struck me at the heart / And dimmed mine eyes, that I can read no further."

In his footnotes for the Arden edition of *1 Henry VI*, Edward Burns observes how the source for this play, Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York*, portrays (and simplifies) a rivalry between Gloucester and Winchester.<sup>415</sup> Burns also observes that Hall "fixes the image of the 'good', trusty

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<sup>415</sup> Burns 2000 p. 108n.



Gloucester, largely created by Gloucester's own skill in 'self-glorification and propaganda'.<sup>416</sup> This is largely in keeping with what Burns observes about the play's nature as akin to Hollywood prequel, "a dramatic piece that returns for ironic and challenging effect to the narrative roots of an already familiar story", a view which originates from the knowledge that *1 Henry VI* was written last.<sup>417</sup> Burns' observations are particularly helpful as they so clearly illustrate a tricky point: *1 Henry VI* is an effective prequel when it *returns* to the "already familiar story". In modern productions, mounted immediately before *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, it does not have the same "ironic and challenging effect" – it merely establishes something that becomes contradicted in the next play.<sup>418</sup> Horsley, Noble, and Barton/Hall, in cutting out this scene, continue to simplify Gloucester's character and his relationships with others, in order to keep him consistent with the Gloucester of *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*.

Who or what is exempt from these streamlining efforts? Perhaps unsurprisingly, two characters seem to be more carefully preserved than any others. First Joan Puzel, who dominates the action as much as – if not more than – she did in the original play, and Margaret, who only appears as the action of *1 Henry VI* is wrapping up and giving way to *2 Henry VI*, but whose arrival is a key juncture for the dramatic action, coming immediately after Joan's death. It may seem extraordinary that these two female characters – the only female characters, in fact, aside from the Countess (who has been cut by Barton/Hall, Noble, and Horsley) – who remain so unscathed despite their

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<sup>416</sup> Burns 2000, p. 108n.

<sup>417</sup> Burns 2000, pp. 4-5.

<sup>418</sup> Perhaps a modern analogy would be those who ardently declare that the *Star Wars* films should be watched in the order they were released in, not the order in which they are set in; i.e., the prequel trilogy should always be watched afterwards.

minority status. It may be due to their minority status (in terms of gender politics), as well as their narrative significance, that they enjoy such security.

When the Shakespeare's Globe team were putting together their cut of *Henry VI* they observed, as per Hailey Bachrach, that "the real action seemed to kick in the moment we arrived at the first scene of 2 *Henry VI* – and the abbreviated version of Joan we'd have had room for didn't quite feel connected to that action."<sup>419</sup> What is really illustrated here is that Joan's storyline is a driving force behind the action in 1 *Henry VI*, and that without it, you do not have enough dramatic action to justify inclusion of anything else from 1 *Henry VI*. As the Globe demonstrated, if you lose Joan, you may as well lose 1 *Henry VI*. But this also reveals a slight weakness in the "trilogy", which is that the events surrounding Joan don't always feel pertinent to what happens later, but rather feel episodic and removed. Horsley referred to the Joan and Talbot storyline as the "major conflict" of 1 *Henry VI*, which he was keen to preserve as much as possible.<sup>420</sup> Perhaps the effect of this not only in Horsley's cut, but also in Noble's and Barton and Hall's – both of which approach Joan slightly differently but still in a way that centres the narrative around her – is that she becomes a kind of precursor to the Cade storyline. (Hugh Craig relates this to the authorship question by noting the "Marlovian theme" of Cade, like Joan, being "of humble parentage but aspiring to supreme political power".<sup>421</sup>) Her arc seems like a brief historical episode running adjacent to the action, but that ultimately facilitates the greater plot. It shows the wider machinations of Henry VI's

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<sup>419</sup> Bachrach 2019.

<sup>420</sup> Horsley 2020.

<sup>421</sup> Hugh Craig, 'The three parts of *Henry VI*', in *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, ed. by Hugh Craig and Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 73.

rule and court, while also establishing the vital context of the French conflicts and the contentious ceding of lands that ultimately plays a part in undoing Henry's reign.

Of course, Margaret is a partial inversion of Joan's narrative instrumentalism; while *1 Henry VI* would work perfectly fine without Margaret's late-in-the-game introduction, it bears so directly upon the rest of the plays – and in particular some of the central conflicts which dismantle Henry's court from within in *2 Henry VI*, and which lead to the expulsion of Suffolk.<sup>422</sup> It is well-known that Margaret propels the plots of both *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, and that her interventions in the plot directly come to bear upon not only Henry's tumultuous reign but also on Richard III's ascent to (and eventual fall from) the throne. Margaret is the only character to appear across all four plays of the tetralogy (which Barton/Hall, Noble, and Horsley/Doran have adapted into trilogies). There have been a number of adaptations named in her honour, such as Jeanie O'Hare's *Queen Margaret*, or Elizabeth Shafer and Philippa Kelly's *Margaret of Anjou*, which have sought to centre the narrative more specifically around the vicious, vengeful Queen. And, when asked about titling the plays from a marketing perspective, Owen Horsley half-jokes that the most fitting retitling of the plays would be *Queen Margaret*. She is crucial, she is enduring and cockroach-like in her refusal to die within the span of the tetralogy, and she is compelling, from her first appearance as the ingenue, to her final appearance as a still-grieving and discomfiting old crone. A lynchpin like Margaret is a useful starting point for directors looking to abridge these plays.

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<sup>422</sup> Returning to the Hollywood analogies, it seems akin to a post-credit scene, cueing up / teasing the major players in the sequel.

In many ways, the approaches taken by each directorial team when cutting *1 Henry VI* are carried forward and reflected in how they cut the next two parts; there is a process of thinning throughout, cutting down some of the longer speeches to preserve the pace and action of these plays as written. While whole scenes and passages are cut out most frequently from *1 Henry VI*, and hardly at all from *3 Henry VI*, the tendency towards thinning endures. But on the whole, *1 Henry VI* is cut much more radically, and tends to reveal that not only does it function as a sort of prequel to *Henry VI*, but that most of *Henry VI* functions as an extended prequel to what audiences want and directors are most interested in: Richard III, before and after assuming the throne in his own titular play. There is a reason, as Hall observes, that they hardly cut any of *Richard III* in their otherwise ruthless *The Wars of the Roses* trilogy, and it is not only an effect of the supposed ambivalence towards Shakespeare's "early work". As Richard's presence in the *Henry VI* plays increases, the amount of cutting and other directorial interventions decrease. Barton and Hall's approach is most telling, in fact: Barton famously added in swathes of non-Shakespearean writing – what Hall refers to as "pastiche early Shakespearean verse" – throughout many of his productions, including but not limited to *The Wars of the Roses*.<sup>423</sup> Usefully, in the published edition of *The Wars of the Roses*, these newly written passages are italicised, Barton's intervening hand visible on the page.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Hall 1970, p. ix.

<sup>424</sup> The increasing reduction in the number of italicised passages as the plays progress towards *Richard III* is clear to the naked eye, even one without an extensive knowledge of the original text.

When a director is abridging these three plays into two, with the endgame being that they open a trilogy concluding with *Richard III*, the duty of care is less to Henry VI (or even Edward IV) than it is to Richard. Interrogating the cuts is not always a matter of asking “how is this facilitating the story of *Henry VI*”, but rather of asking “how can we make the story of *Henry VI* best facilitate *Richard III*”. Even at the Globe, as they staged *Henry VI* – with a title suggesting completion, indicating no other part in existence – they were staging *Richard III* in tandem, with the same creative team involved, and with Sophie Russell carrying the role of Richard over from one play to the next. “How do you slim three plays down to one?”, they had asked themselves. Their answer may largely have been “cut one of them out entirely”, but their methodology was more nuanced. Pledge an editorial fealty to *Richard III*, to the famous and beloved conclusion: put that first, and get there as quickly and simply as you can. Perhaps, in their own disparate ways, each directorial team took advice straight from the mouth of Richard III: “an honest tale speeds best, being plainly told”.

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One final consideration I would like to make is a comparison between these abridgements of the three plays and Katie Mitchell’s stand-alone production of *3 Henry VI*. In Mitchell’s production, the two preceding plays need only be referenced when it enhances the meaning of *3 Henry VI*, and otherwise such extraneous context can be left behind. For this reason, cuts made to Mitchell’s *3 Henry VI* have their parallels in abridged productions like Barton and Hall’s *Wars of the Roses* (and Adrian Noble’s *The*

*Plantagenets*). The opening scene is heavily cut by Mitchell, right from its opening lines (1.1.1-20), which are cut entirely:

**WARWICK**

I wonder how the King escaped our hands.

**YORK**

While we pursued the horsemen of the north,  
He slyly stole away, and left his men;  
Whereat the great Lord of Northumberland,  
Whose warlike ears could never brook retreat,  
Cheered up the drooping army; and himself,  
Lord Clifford and Lord Stafford, all abreast,  
Charged our main battle's front, and breaking in,  
Were by the swords of common soldiers slain.

**EDWARD**

Lord Stafford's father, Duke of Buckingham,  
Is either slain or wounded dangerous.  
I cleft his beaver with a downright blow.  
That this is true, father, behold his blood.

**MONTAGUE**

And, brother, here's the Earl of Wiltshire's blood,  
Whom I encountered as the battles joined.

**RICHARD**

Speak thou for me, and tell them what I did.

**YORK**

Richard hath best deserved of all my sons.  
But is your grace dead, my Lord of Somerset?

**NORFOLK**

Such hope have all the line of John of Gaunt.

**RICHARD**

Thus do I hope to shake King Henry's head.

As *3 Henry VI* begins *in media res*, almost immediately following the battle of St Albans which concludes *2 Henry VI*, these opening lines exist specifically to establish the continuity between the two parts. Take for instance the opening line, “I wonder how the King escaped our hands”, which directly recalls part of York’s final speech in *2 Henry VI*: “the King is fled to London / To call a present court of parliament. / Let us pursue him ere the writs go forth” (5.3.24-6). York’s first speech in *3 Henry VI*, meanwhile, closes the brief gap between “Let us pursue” and “how the King escaped”, while the rest of the section Mitchell cuts establishes the identities and/or deaths of various characters from *2 Henry VI* (Northumberland, Clifford, Stafford, Buckingham, Wiltshire, Somerset, “the line of John of Gaunt”), an act of character-count housekeeping that is necessary for establishing continuity / tying up loose ends between the two plays.

Barton and Hall cut the same 20 lines, and the next four (the first lines of Mitchell’s production): “And so do I. Victorious Prince of York, / Before I see thee seated in that throne / Which now the house of Lancaster usurps, / I vow by heaven these eyes shall never close” (1.1.21-4). This brief declaration by Warwick opens Mitchell’s production, which is fitting, given the emphasis Mitchell places elsewhere on Warwick’s character arc; it is much less important to Barton and Hall’s massively streamlined iteration. Where Mitchell was free to cut the opening exposition by not staging the preceding plays, Barton and Hall are freed by their abridgement. *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* run seamlessly into one another following the first seven scenes of their *Edward IV*, but they crucially cut the last two scenes of *2 Henry VI*, the battle of St Albans which bridges the two plays as written. Without the need to establish continuity, or to remind audiences of what they may have seen when they watched *2 Henry VI*, this is a sensible place to begin the cutting of *3 Henry VI* for Mitchell and Barton/Hall alike. Noble’s *The*

*Plantagenets* makes the same cuts to the beginning of 3 *Henry VI* as Barton and Hall, and similarly forsakes the last two scenes of 2 *Henry VI*. Meanwhile, Boyd and Hands, who stage the three *Henry VI* plays individually, retain the final scenes of 2 *Henry VI* and the opening exchange (albeit with some slight pruning) of 3 *Henry VI*.

Elsewhere in this opening scene, Mitchell is keen to pare back expository dialogue. She cuts Henry reminding Northumberland and Clifford (and perhaps the audience) that “Earl of Northumberland, he slew thy father, / And thine, Lord Clifford, and you both have vowed revenge / On him, his sons, his favourites and his friends” (1.1.54-6). Mitchell later cuts Northumberland’s redundant summation of the King’s southern power (“Of Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk nor of Kent”, 1.1.156), and she cuts Norfolk and Montague declaring their various destinations when exiting the scene, after York and Warwick have already done the same, and before Henry does, reducing five instances of the same type of declaration to three (1.1.208-9). Later, Queen Margaret describes various character’s new roles (“Warwick is chancellor”, 1.1.237; “The Duke is made protector of the realm”, 1.1.239), which is undoubtedly helpful for the audience in placing characters going forward. But Mitchell does cut Margaret’s line “Stern Falconbridge commands the narrow seas” (1.1.238), undoubtedly because Falconbridge does not appear as an on-stage character in the play, nor is he referenced elsewhere; again, the aim seems to be reducing confusion.

Aside from her consistent approach to pruning this opening scene, Mitchell makes a noteworthy addition to the end of the scene, giving to Exeter a number of lines which originate from *Richard III* and *Richard II*:



Miserable England. (Richard III, 3.4.102-4)  
 I prophesy the fearfull'st time to thee  
 That ever wretched age hath looked upon.  
 The blood of English shall manure the ground (Richard II, 4.1.138-45)  
 And further ages groan for this rash act  
 Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels  
 And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars  
 Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound:  
 Disorder, Horror, Fear and Mutiny  
 Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd  
 The field of Golgotha and dead man's skulls.<sup>425</sup>

As Mitchell was not staging 3 *Henry VI* with a view to pre-empting *Richard III*, she was free to borrow lines from the later play (and elsewhere). Mitchell allocates additional lines to Exeter throughout her production, expanding the role and turning him into something of a prophetic figure (from the overt mention of “prophesy” and the future conditional tense, to the dark imagery culminating in an apocalyptic reference to the site of Jesus’ crucifixion, Golgotha). In addition to being freed of heavy context from the preceding and subsequent history plays, Mitchell is also able to expand characters and their functions, to bring her own invented contexts. History, once again, is malleable.

### **King John: Solitary King or Joker in the Deck**

“Somewhere between the two tetralogies”, writes Virginia Mason Vaughan, “lies Shakespeare’s *King John*, neglected because it does not fall within the broad scope of a series, and scorned as unpopular and untheatrical”.<sup>426</sup> *King John* occupies a unique space in the canon of Shakespeare’s plays generally, and histories especially. It is also obscure

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<sup>425</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. by James R. Siemon (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), and *Richard II*, ed. by Charles R. Forker (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

<sup>426</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, ‘Between Tetralogies: *King John* as Transition’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35.4 (Winter 1984), 407-420 (p. 408).

despite not suffering from many of the same afflictions as the *Henry VI* plays. As A.J. Piesse succinctly notes, “the fact that the play does not fall clearly into any sequence, either in terms of chronology of historical representation or in terms of compositional chronology, further exacerbates the issue of comparison and contrast across the canon.”<sup>427</sup> Jesse M. Lander and J.J.M. Tobin express that, “Surprisingly, *King John* is the first Shakespeare play to appear on film”.<sup>428</sup> This hints at the play’s sporadic performance history and occasional significance, while simultaneously undercutting its sometime-significance (“surprisingly”). Horace Howard Furness argued that of all Shakespeare’s “English Histories it has never been one of the favorite or stock-plays”, and that “Various are the reasons assigned for this, but chiefly that the titular hero is not the protagonist”.<sup>429</sup> Perhaps this might be true, in some way, of the *Henry VI* plays too: their unsatisfying protagonist, and their relegation as a result.

Piesse notes the lack of “consistent attention or of a clear pattern of evolution in thinking about the play” in both its performance history and its critical history.<sup>430</sup> Describing the “extraordinarily variegated” afterlife of *King John*, which was likely popular in its time before fading in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Lander and Tobin observe that in 1730 “the play rose in public esteem; it was then performed regularly through most of the nineteenth century. Subsequently it fell from prominence, appearing infrequently over the better part of the twentieth century, eventually becoming a watchword for Shakespearean obscurity: unread, unperformed

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<sup>427</sup> A.J. Piesse, ‘*King John*: changing perspectives’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 126-140 (p. 126).

<sup>428</sup> Jesse M. Lander and J.J.M. Tobin, eds., *King John* (Bloomsbury: London, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>429</sup> Horace Howard Furness, *The Life and Death of King John: A New Variorum Edition* (London: J.P. Lippincott, 1919), p. x.

<sup>430</sup> Piesse 2002, p. 127.

and unloved.”<sup>431</sup> Its nineteenth-century prevalence no doubt comes from its supposed virtue. As Adrian Poole writes, “Victorian nerves were particularly touched by the scene between young Arthur and his guardian Hubert, who has been charged with putting out the lad’s eyes”.<sup>432</sup> Its sensibilities align neatly with those of the Victorians.

In the RSC’s history, it has been staged six times between 1961 and 2021; of these productions, only John Barton and Barry Kyle’s has been staged in the RST, in 1974. This makes it one of only a few Shakespeare plays more frequently staged on the RSC’s secondary stages than in the RST.<sup>433</sup> It took thirteen years for the RSC to stage a full-scale in-house production of *King John*.<sup>434</sup> Regardless of whether one considers Goodbody’s or Barton/Hall’s production the first legitimate *King John* at the RSC, a significant amount of time passed before the play was staged. This is perhaps surprising, considering the play had been held in such high esteem in the previous century and had been performed a handful of times by the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.<sup>435</sup> The other productions of the play which will be discussed here were directed by Deborah Warner (TOP, 1988), Gregory Doran (Swan, 2001), Josie Rourke (Swan, 2006), Maria Aberg (Swan, 2012) and Eleanor Rhode (Swan, 2019).

The play is in an unusual position for having been directed by more women than men at the RSC. Perhaps it is worth invoking Phyllis Rackin here, who comments that “the less admired Shakespearean history plays, such as *King John*, *Henry VIII* and the

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<sup>431</sup> Lander and Tobin 2018, p. 65.

<sup>432</sup> Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 51.

<sup>433</sup> *King John* is also one of the very few sole-authored plays of Shakespeare which has been staged more frequently in the Swan than in the RST.

<sup>434</sup> In the interim, Buzz Goodbody directed a production in 1970 as part of the RSC’s Theatreground programme, a touring initiative with a focus on stylistic and experimental approaches. Their production played primarily in London and on a UK tour, with some performances in the RST. It will not form part of this discussion.

<sup>435</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 768.

*Henry VI* plays, do include female characters who intervene in the historical action.”<sup>436</sup> Rackin’s centring of the female characters may account for *King John*’s provenance amongst female directors.<sup>437</sup> Of the seven productions since 1961, four have been in the last nineteen years.<sup>438</sup> This new proliferation of RSC productions is perhaps not so surprising. Stuart Hampton-Reeves observes, as early as 2002, that “there has been a revival of interest in *King John*”, partially due to two separate 2001 productions, one of which was Gregory Doran’s “acclaimed *King John* for the RSC in the Swan, which had only recently been vacated by Michael Boyd’s *Henry VI* trilogy”.<sup>439</sup> Michael Billington’s review for this production in *The Guardian*, which Hampton-Reeves also cites here, is telling: “*King John* has suddenly moved from unloved orphan to teacher’s pet”.<sup>440</sup>

Doran’s 2001 production signalled a new epoch for *King John*, not quite a return to the darling of the Victorians, perhaps still “unread”, but certainly not “unperformed and unloved”.<sup>441</sup> Hampton-Reeves attributes this to “the play’s comic dimension [...] In the run up to a controversial general election, the recovery of *King John* as a black political satire was a timely reinvention of the relationship between Shakespeare’s history plays and contemporary political discourse.”<sup>442</sup> I return to the relationship between the history plays and historical fiction and the need to speak to the present

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<sup>436</sup> Phyllis Rackin, ‘Women’s roles in the Elizabethan history plays’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, pp. 71–85 (p. 76).

<sup>437</sup> Yet the *Henry VI* plays, which Rackin mentions alongside *King John* for their women roles, are not so frequently directed by women at the RSC: Katie Mitchell’s stand-alone production of *3 Henry VI* is the only one to have been directed by a woman.

<sup>438</sup> This 2000s frequency rivals some of the more frequently performed plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, outdoing the three 2000s performances of *Measure for Measure*, and nearly matching *Hamlet*, which had only five productions between 2001–2021.

<sup>439</sup> Stuart Hampton-Reeves, ‘Theatrical Afterlives’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, pp. 229–244 (p. 243).

<sup>440</sup> Michael Billington, ‘*King John* – review’, *The Guardian*, 30 May 2001 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2001/mar/30/theatre.artsfeatures2>>.

<sup>441</sup> Lander and Tobin 2018, p. 65.

<sup>442</sup> Hampton-Reeves 2002, p. 243.

moment: as Cathy Shrank wrote, *King John* “invokes England not to rouse Shakespeare’s compatriots to patriotic indignation against the Roman Church, but to interrogate what is meant by England”.<sup>443</sup> “What is meant by England” will always be a fruitful question, just as long as there is an England. As quoted above, Rackin wrote that the play has been “less admired”, and certainly it has seen periods of neglect; but its political relevance is widely apparent. *King John* is obviously a political play: Michael Hattaway observes that the play “addresses not just character conflict but the role of the monarchy in a newly emergent state”, a factor which surely speaks to its relevance approaching a fraught election.<sup>444</sup> The play is explicitly about political tensions specific to the time of its setting, but the intervention of a foreign power in English politics was relevant to the time of its writing, and to the periods of its recurring popularity.

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As discussed earlier in this chapter, John Barton and Peter Hall’s textual manipulation of the *Henry VI* plays in 1963 is famous, both now and in its day; Barton’s cut for *King John*, directed with Barry Kyle over a decade later in 1974, reveals much about where Barton’s textual practice around history plays went next, having been tried, tested and refined. As well as illuminating the practice of a singular director, Barton’s cut speaks more generally to *King John*’s place as a history play whose contemporary productions have a relative degree of freedom in the scope of their respective approaches. And

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<sup>443</sup> Cathy Shrank, ‘Formation of Nationhood’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 571–586 (p. 576).

<sup>444</sup> Michael Hattaway, ‘The Shakespearean history play’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, pp. 3–24 (p. 22).

finally, *King John* – in its aforementioned place as an early, infrequently performed, stand-alone history play – speaks also to *Henry VI* and attitudes towards cutting the histories, not only by John Barton and his collaborators but by other directors throughout the RSC's history.

John Barton is evidently deeply engaged in the cuts and textual edits made to his productions when co-directing with others, such as Peter Hall on *The Wars of the Roses* and Barry Kyle on *King John*. Barton's cutting practice with lesser-performed history plays had already been tested and somewhat sharpened by the time he came to work on *King John*. As such, it is no surprise that – as well as writing his own verse throughout his and Kyle's production – he opens the play with a prologue and an extended introduction, interpolating from non-Shakespearean texts like George Peele's *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and John Bale's *Kynge Johan* (1538). The first words – the first seventy-three lines in fact – of Barton and Kyle's *King John* were thus not written by Shakespeare. After this prologue and introduction, around 1.1.15, Barton and Kyle introduce the following passage:

A small request: belike good Philip thinks  
That England, Ireland, Poictiers, Anjou, Maine  
And Touraine are as nought for me to give:  
I wonder what he means to leave for me.

This is based on a similar passage from *Troublesome Reign*, though Barton and Kyle have made some seemingly minor changes to Peele's text, which originally read:

A small request! Belike he makes account  
That England, Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine  
Are nothing for a king to give at once.

I wonder what he means to leave for me.<sup>445</sup> (Scene 1, 36b-39)

The overall sense of these lines is unchanged, but crucially the metre and rhythm of the lines is brought into (mostly iambic) pentameter, bringing Peele's lines more into Shakespeare's style. This is in line with Barton's general approach with these lesser-performed plays, carving and reshaping Shakespeare's texts into something as slick as – if not slicker than – the original; the challenge that Barton seems to set himself is to make his interventions seamless, so that most of the audience fail to notice that the performance they're watching isn't the Shakespeare of the page, but still feel the wonder of the language and style that defines Shakespeare's work in the modern day.

Given the play's absence in performance for the early years of the RSC, it is significant that this first production contained intensive intervention; a textually "faithful" production was not staged until 1988 – incidentally the next time *King John* was staged at all at the RSC, fourteen years since Barton/Kyle, this time by Deborah Warner at The Other Place. Warner's cut represented a diametric pivot, as the play was presented entirely uncut. The extent of Warner's textual interference is minimal, especially when compared to some of the more extreme cutting seen elsewhere with *King John*, and also the *Henry VI* plays; both Barton and Kyle's *King John* and Barton and Hall's treatment of *Henry VI* are almost sacrilegious compared with Warner's restraint. Warner engages with some minor substitutions and line reallocations, but only in the case of established textual variants: for example, "this expedition's charge" (1.1.49), the Second Folio reading, becomes "this expeditious charge" as per the First

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<sup>445</sup> George Peele, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, ed. by Charles R. Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

Folio, and lines typically attributed to King Philip (as per editorial emendation from Smallwood and Theobald) are reallocated to Lewis, as per the First Folio reading (2.1.1-11,18). None of these changes – all of which have precedence in textual and editorial practice – serves to “cut” or reduce the play, or fundamentally alter its plot or character. Even changes which do not seem to derive from textual variants seem incidental, and again, they do nothing to the wider flow or running time of the production on the whole.

The next production after Warner’s is Gregory Doran’s Swan production in 2001. Arguably, Doran is building on Warner’s work, engaging in similar editorial interventions. There are some differences – for instance, though the speech at 2.1.1-11 which Warner reassigns to King Philip as per the First Folio is similarly reassigned by Doran, 2.1.18 (“A noble boy! Who would not do thee right?”) is allocated to Lewis. The impact of these changes is minimal, further suggesting the extent to which both Doran and Warner may have sought to be as unintrusive as possible. Elsewhere Doran makes a couple of textual rearrangements – moving a few lines earlier in the scene – and a handful of cuts to longer speeches, such as removing six and a half lines from Salisbury’s speech at 5.2.8-39:

[...] O, and there  
Where honourable rescue and defence  
Cries out upon the name of Salisbury!  
But such is the infection of the time,  
That, for the health and physic of our right,  
We cannot deal but with the very hand  
Of stern injustice and confused wrong. (5.2.17-23)

These lines, which partly incriminate Salisbury in bloodshed and injustice, are easily cut, as they form a discrete and easily extractable thought, while also echoing much of



what Salisbury has already said in the immediately preceding lines (e.g. “heal[ing] the inveterate canker of one wound / By making many”, 5.2.14-15). Further, this particular articulation of Salisbury’s guilt isn’t necessarily that clear, relying on an understanding of what is meant by “physic”, as well as the concept of “a somewhat circumlocutive version of homeopathic medicine”, as Lander and Tobin have it.<sup>446</sup> Cutting these lines therefore makes Salisbury’s overarching point clearer, while also thinning down a long speech by about twenty per cent. This is indicative of Doran’s entire approach to *King John*.

The Complete Works Festival at the RSC in 2006 allowed a reduction in waiting times between productions of *King John*, with Josie Rourke’s production gracing the Swan’s stage. And, just as the Complete Works Festival disrupted the trend of infrequent performances for *King John*, one must wonder if the play would have been staged again in the 2010s – after Aberg’s production – were it not for the demands of Artistic Director Gregory Doran’s plan to stage all of Shakespeare’s First Folio works between 2013 and 2023. As it happens, a still-lengthy seven years passed between Aberg’s production and Eleanor Rhode’s, which opened in the Swan in 2019. The productions by Rourke, Aberg and Rhode, a middle-ground of intervention, sit together between Warner and Doran’s conservatism and Barton/Kyle’s more radical approach. The three productions are also all staged within thirteen years of one another – fourteen years passed between Barton/Kyle and Warner, another thirteen years between Warner and Doran. The sudden uptick in productions by women directors suggests a play about an insufficient king and masculine tension could well be in vogue for modern society.

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<sup>446</sup> Lander and Tobin 2018, p. 302n.

Beginning with Aberg, as the more severely cut of the three: her approach throughout the play depends on cutting out huge swathes of text, mostly from longer speeches, part of the systematic thinning that is deployed time and again as a form of proportionate cutting, a measure mostly used to both limit the running time and to also prevent scenes from featuring too much dialogue at the expense of sufficient action. But Aberg's cuts, though frequent, are not too eyebrow-raising in and of themselves (especially given the above justifications) – that is, until the final few scenes, from 5.4 onwards, wherein the extensive cuts are coupled with textual rearrangements and interventions bordering upon adaptation. Aberg's conclusion to *King John* is built upon echoes, loops and obscurity, characters moving through “part of the field” (as per the original stage direction left intact), which is “simultaneously a nightmare, or a hallucination”, as per Aberg's newly added stage direction.

Meanwhile, Rourke's cut represents a clear stepping stone from Doran's sparse hand to Aberg's experimenting. Rourke cuts very little from the scenes which Aberg was particularly liberal with from 5.4-7, though there are minor changes to individual words (e.g. swapping “again” for “now” at 5.5.11), and the reallocation of lines between Hubert and the Bastard at the start of 5.6, as observed by Warner earlier. 5.6 also has eight lines cut between their exchange later into the scene, making their interaction just a little bit pacier than before. Finally, the last scene of the play contains just two key interventions: Pembroke's speech at 5.7.6-9 (“His highness yet doth speak, and holds belief / That, being brought into the open air, / It would allay the burning quality / Of that fell poison which assaileth him.”) is given to Essex instead, and shortly thereafter a single line is cut, from the newly present Prince Henry: “In their continuance will not feel themselves” (5.7.14). The effect of this cut is simple: the preceding half-line/start of the

sentence, “Fierce extremes”, becomes a stand-alone phrase, declarative and pained, removed of the slightly verbose and impenetrable mention of “continuance”. As for the reallocation of those four lines, this picks up on Rourke’s earlier work giving Bigot’s lines to Essex, assumedly to bulk up the size of the role for the actor playing Essex, simultaneously stripping away lines from the minor character of Bigot. Yet this does raise the question of why Rourke left any of Bigot’s lines to him instead of just erasing the character altogether eliding him with another nobleman. Also, as Pembroke speaks later in this final scene (5.7.11-12), it seems likely that Rourke was merely giving Essex something to say, and thus to necessitate his presence in this final scene.

Lastly, Rhode’s production is similarly willing to play with the text, without going full-Barton. Rhode combines 5.6 and 5.7 into a single short scene; many of the lines of 5.7 are reallocated, with the character of Prince Henry entirely removed from the play, some of his lines cut, most given over to Hubert. Except, that is, for the question “How fares your majesty?” (5.7.34), allocated to the Bastard instead, the clear protagonist of the final scene. This is further evinced by Rhode cutting 5.7.81-109, so that the play concludes not only with an elongated speech from the Bastard, but with greater silence from the others in the scene following the death of King John. Rhode cuts many more lines than Rourke in this scene (and Rourke’s one cut line, “In their continuance will not feel themselves”, remains even as Prince Henry is cut, the line given to Hubert as part of the speech it takes place within). But Rhode’s cut does not aim for the same stylistic edginess of Aberg’s, wherein language and action break down altogether. Rourke makes the play moderately shorter to increase its performability, but beyond that is minimalist in her cutting. Meanwhile both Aberg and Rhode leave their fingerprint on the play – more markedly so for Aberg – without deploying the extensive

intervention first seen in the work of Goodbody and Barton/Kyle. And all three of these most recent directors have broken from the middle phase of textual conservatism in *King John*.

It has been nearly two whole decades since Doran's sparsely cut production and thirty-two years since Warner's uncut production. If Rourke, Aberg and Rhode occupy a similar space as Goodbody and Barton/Kyle, in terms of the extent of the cutting, then perhaps these productions signify a plateau in approaches to *King John*, a happy medium of textual intervention. Or, perhaps a conservative swing is in store by a director who realises that a more straightforward *King John* has not been directed since 2001; or a more radical swing by a director interested in how distant Barton and Kyle's production is to us now. The play is fertile ground still.

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A director is freer with a play that stands on its own, as *King John* does, than with the more complex and loaded *Henry VI* plays. No doubt a director approaching any of these four history plays must be aware that even as they cut one play or three plays concurrently, they are cutting into a historical-dramatic tapestry that is just as likely to show up any careless tears and holes in plot, context or character as it is to reward a seamless cut. Staging the *Henry VI* plays as three discrete productions requires a great commitment and leaves the imperfect plays open to their flaws and vulnerabilities, as the potential to cut out the weaker content is reduced. Though stand-alone productions of single *Henry VI* plays are not common, the success of Katie Mitchell's *The Battle for the Throne* (aka *3 Henry VI*) is a beacon of hope that these relatively unusual plays might

be allowed more often in the future to be met on their own terms.<sup>447</sup> And of course the possibility of abridgement allows for further readings and stagings still.

As *King John* shows, even a history play that stands alone still stands alongside history itself, and is as full of potential – and approached with as much variation – as the *Henry VI* plays. It is an antidote to the “cycle” that the *Henry VI* plays necessitates through their interconnectedness and near-insufficiency as free-standing plays; much like Mitchell’s stand-alone 3 *Henry VI*, productions of *King John* allow the deconstruction of history-as-genre in a way that is also exciting to watch, organic to the text rather than being shoehorned in. *King John* is less burdened by interconnectedness – not just of plot but of history, two threads that both exist to be utilised to whatever ends the director and company so choose. It is a play concerned with the “tension between form and content”, as Piesse notes.<sup>448</sup> Lander and Tobin see it as “the history play that is most self-conscious about its status as a play, the play that most persistently queries its sources, raising perplexing questions about the status of history and our understanding of it.”<sup>449</sup> Shakespeare was inventive when writing these plays, and was not strictly interested in telling a story that was historically accurate, but rather one that was dramatically rewarding, thematically developed. Yet often now audiences expect something *based on* history to *be* history.<sup>450</sup> This may even be exacerbated by the fact that, for some, Shakespeare’s plays act as their only exposure to certain pockets of history – particularly English monarchical history. As such, the plays have come to stand

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<sup>447</sup> Undoubtedly the removal of “part 3” from the title, or even the addition of a subtitle or alternate title (a la *Wars of the Roses*) goes a long way towards mitigating concerns that an audience are only getting part of a story.

<sup>448</sup> Piesse 2002, p. 138.

<sup>449</sup> Lander and Tobin 2018, p. 3.

<sup>450</sup> See, for instance, the controversy around *The Crown* that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

in as factual representations of history. Shakespeare's own audience would have known more about the relatively recent Wars of the Roses, and the events of the *Henry VI* plays, than a twenty-first century audience.

The lens of historical fiction is helpful in understanding what the history plays can and probably should do. On *King John*, David Scott Kastan argues that "The play declares its fictionality" in the final scene, the titular monarch describing himself as "a scribbled form, drawn with a pen" (5.7.32).<sup>451</sup> It does this "not simply to announce itself as play – few need reminding – but because Shakespeare in *King John* discovers all along his subject in the histories has been in a sense not history but fiction. Kingship and kingdoms, Shakespeare comes to see, are no less artifacts created and preserved by human effort and will than the plays that represent them".<sup>452</sup> Generally, Gary Taylor argues that the history play "answers the question 'Who were we?' and its causal corollary 'Why are we?', defining 'we' not as 'human beings in general' but as 'a particular community to which the spectators belong'. The genre explores collective identity, not individuality".<sup>453</sup> The events of *King John* precede the time of its writing by hundreds of years, almost four hundred years – which is about the same distance as we are from the time of *King John* being written. So the question this poses is clear: if Shakespeare could take liberties with the chronicles and history of four-hundred years prior, why can't we take liberties with *his* liberties of four-hundred years prior, and of history eight-hundred years prior to now?<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> David Scott Kastan, "To Set a Form upon that Indigest": Shakespeare's Fictions of History', *Comparative Drama*, 17.1 (Spring 1983), 1-16 (p. 15).

<sup>452</sup> Kastan 1983, p. 15

<sup>453</sup> Gary Taylor, 'History • Plays • Genre • Games', *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 47-63 (p. 53).

<sup>454</sup> This explains the success of productions like Aberg's and Rhode's. They are extensively cut (to differing levels), but they are largely well received and enjoyable to watch *because* they're not burdened down by

What is clear from this discussion is that these plays are amongst the trickiest in the canon, simultaneously burdened and liberated by their chequered performance and critical history, as well as their interconnectedness and logistical demands. One of the key difficulties for directors seems to be a lack of awareness of the nature of the *Henry VI* plays, in the words of Stuart Hampton-Reeves: “not [as] a unified, complete work... [but] a set of works on a shared theme”.<sup>455</sup> By this logic, perhaps Hands and Boyd have a better grasp on the plays than Barton and Hall, Noble, and Horsley, who obscure the “set of works” concept quite significantly by blending them together. Yet even Hands and Boyd were staging their plays in sequence, establishing a sense of unification that isn’t always evident in the differing styles of the plays. From there, it is not a stretch to see how Mitchell staging 3 *Henry VI* as a stand-alone play was not only rewarding, but in some respects a necessary exercise for re-evaluating the status of these three plays. Perhaps the other productions are burdened by false unification, by always cutting one play with the other plays in mind – while Mitchell, in contrast, was free to cut for the good of the one single play in front of her. But Barton and Hall, Noble, and Horsley were also intuitive in their abridgement approach. By having to cut so extravagantly,

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history. The play is allowed to function as a discrete narrative, historically-influenced – more akin to a movie “inspired by/based on true events” than a biopic or documentary. Further, it is interesting that figures like *Cymbeline* or *Macbeth*, known figures from British history, don’t receive the same historicist treatment quite so frequently (from a directorial perspective at least), and nor does *Lear*, which when it was first published in Quarto bore the phrase “true chronicle historie” on its title page. Notable too is the fact that many of these plays originate from the same source(s), especially *Holinshed’s Chronicles*. No doubt the Folio genre distinctions play greatly into this unique dilemma for *King John*, the *Henry VI* plays, and the *Histories* more widely.

<sup>455</sup> Hampton-Reeves 2002, p. 229.

reconfiguring the arrangements, names, and very nature of these three plays, these directors were able to amplify the “shared theme”, and in doing so could create a more “unified, complete work”.

In many ways, the questions surrounding the process of cutting the *Henry VI* plays (and *King John*) for performance articulate a kind of nexus of the issues at stake elsewhere in this thesis, picking up on questions of variant texts in the “big” and well-known tragedies, as addressed in the first chapter, and picking apart notions of relevance vs obscurity for modern audiences, as well as present-day palatability, that emerge from an exploration of some of the more problematic comedies considered in the second chapter. The questions raised about “lesser-known” and “lesser-performed” plays, and about productions staged primarily outside of the main stage (the Royal Shakespeare Theatre) – alongside issues of authorship and canonicity – will be further considered in the following chapter, considering some of the least-known, least-performed plays: *Pericles*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, each of which is known to be co-authored by Shakespeare with another writer. In the next and final chapter, building on the groundwork of this and the preceding chapters, I will consider whether these lesser-known and co-authored plays are cut in a way that is reflective of their unique status within Shakespeare’s canon. Once more unto the breach(es)...



## 4

### >/< Shakespeare: Understanding Co-Authorship and Obscurity in *Pericles*, *Timon of Athens* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

Collaboration is a common practice in art and exists in several different models: in modern entertainment there are large-scale collaborative structures, like the TV writing room, and more intimate artistic partnerships, like cinema duos Powell and Pressburger, the Coen Brothers, or Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. Collaboration is not a new phenomenon either: in the world of the visual arts, Meredith A. Brown and Michelle Millar Fisher observe how it has been “a component of art making for centuries – from ancient Greek potters and painters” to present day art collectives.<sup>456</sup> Today, collaboration can be a volatile space. In the world of pop culture/music, two collaborations from the last decade show a form in flux, sensitive to the demands of the public: Lady Gaga’s collaboration with R Kelly, ‘Do What U Want’ (2013), and Taylor Swift’s collaboration with Lana Del Rey, ‘Snow On The Beach’ (2022). In 2019, due to increasingly public allegations against R Kelly, Lady Gaga removed the collaboration from streaming platforms.<sup>457</sup> In the six years before this official removal of the song, which had caused controversy from the beginning, other (and more palatable) versions of the song appeared online, from a solo version to a re-record with Christina Aguilera

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<sup>456</sup> Meredith A. Brown and Michelle Millar Fisher, ‘Introduction’, in *Collaboration and its (Dis)contents: Art, Architecture and Photography since 1950* (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2017), pp. 12-19 (pp. 12-13).

<sup>457</sup> Mark Savage, ‘Lady Gaga breaks her silence on R Kelly’, *BBC*, 10 January 2019 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-46808599>>.

(in place of R Kelly).<sup>458</sup> Meanwhile, fans of Swift and Del Rey, dissatisfied with a perceived lack of Del Rey's presence in their collaboration, were eventually rewarded when Swift released 'Snow On The Beach (feat. More Lana Del Rey)' (2023) at their request.<sup>459</sup> On the one hand, the excision of an undesirable or lesser collaborator; on the other, the amplification (in this case literally) of a beloved collaborator. Collaboration can be a site of contention not just for the creatives but for their audience, and this can feed back into, and change the shape of, the collaboration itself.

Collaboration is by no means a new concept, and occurred frequently in Early Modern theatre. Gary Taylor, writing on the "making of early modern plays" as a collaborative act", observes that "*The Collected Works* identifies 42 per cent of Middleton's surviving scripts for the commercial theatres as the products of collaborative labour, and in the *New Oxford Shakespeare* we identify Shakespeare's as the only hand in fewer than two-thirds of the surviving plays that Shakespeare had a hand in."<sup>460</sup> Of the thirty-eight plays widely accepted in the Shakespeare canon (the thirty-six First Folio plays plus *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*), collaborative plays include: *Titus Andronicus* (with George Peele and maybe Thomas Middleton); *Henry VI, parts two and three* (with Christopher Marlowe and another playwright); *Henry VI, part one* (written by Thomas Nashe, Marlowe, and another, and adapted by Shakespeare); *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Macbeth* (adapted by Middleton); *Timon of Athens* (with Middleton); *Pericles* (with George Wilkins); *All Is True*; or *King*

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<sup>458</sup> Michael Love Michael, 'Lady Gaga's 'Twisted' Road to Speaking Out About R. Kelly', *Paper Mag*, 10 January 2019 <<https://www.papermag.com/lady-gaga-r-kelly#rebelltitem16>>.

<sup>459</sup> Daniel Kreps, 'Hear Taylor Swift Update 'Snow on the Beach' With Extra Lana Del Rey', *Rolling Stone*, 26 May 2023 <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-snow-on-the-beach-lana-del-rey-midnights-deluxe-1234742442>>.

<sup>460</sup> Gary Taylor, 'Artiginality: Authorship after Postmodernism', in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*, eds. Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan, pp. 3-26 (p. 23).

*Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (with John Fletcher). The first four of these are written between 1591-4; the other seven between 1603-1613. Evidently Shakespeare collaborated on a number of plays, especially in the early and late years of his career, and many of these plays are less frequently performed. What happens to these plays on the stage now? Are directors tempted to excise lesser collaborators and/or amplify Shakespeare's contributions? Do directors feel more freedom to cut plays that aren't solely by Shakespeare? Does the infrequency of performance increase that freedom, or does it put more pressure on the director to stage a definitive version? What other factors determine the cutting process for these distinct, co-authored plays?

This chapter will explore three of Shakespeare's collaborative plays in turn — *Pericles* (1607, with George Wilkins), *Timon of Athens* (1607, with Thomas Middleton), and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613, with John Fletcher). In addition to being co-written, each of these plays is infrequently staged (at the RSC and elsewhere) — as such, this chapter will consider every RSC production staged for each play from 1961-2021. All of these plays had their most recent RSC productions in the Swan Theatre, and both *Kinsmen* (2016) and *Timon* (2018) were subject to extensive cutting and textual manipulation.<sup>461</sup> There are various points of difference between the plays: the exact (in)frequency of performances of each play, the history of their induction into Shakespeare's canon, and the related history of attribution studies for each play. The collaborator of each play differs, as does the extent and collaborative model adopted by the co-authors, and the state of the surviving texts for these plays. In considering what

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<sup>461</sup> The RSC had planned a production of *Pericles* for their main stage in 2020, directed by Blanche McIntyre, but this production was postponed indefinitely due to the pandemic. Press release for the planned Summer 2020 season: <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/press/releases/royal-shakespeare-company-announces-2020-summer-season>>.

the three plays share, and where they diverge, this chapter will explore how directors have cut these plays over time in relation to the scenes thought to be Shakespeare and not-Shakespeare. Given their relegated status (*Pericles* and *Kinsmen* being excluded from the First Folio; all three plays being so infrequently performed at the RSC and elsewhere; all three being more common on the RSC's smaller stages than its main house), these plays may well be seen as "less than Shakespeare". As such, one might expect that there will be more freedom or artistic licence to cut-at-will, and that directors might be more inclined to cut lines not written by Shakespeare.

### **'Impossible' *Pericles***

Ruth Nevo argued that "The story of *Pericles* is, of course, impossible".<sup>462</sup> "Impossible" is only half of her assertion; "of course" is the other, implying the difficulties of *Pericles* to be inevitable. Perhaps this explains the precarious position *Pericles* has occupied for the last several centuries: initially loved, then lost, then a prodigal son returning to a lukewarm reception, and eventually welcomed back more and more into the family of canonical plays, occupying a comfortable position near the outer edges. It resists occlusion better than *Timon of Athens* or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, but only barely. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen state plainly how the "frequency of editions and subsequent allusions suggest that the play was a popular success".<sup>463</sup> Suzanne Gossett elaborates on the play's early status:

the play's popularity continued during the interregnum. [...] When acting resumed in 1660, *Pericles* was immediately revived. [...] *Pericles* was the first Shakespeare play presented since 1642; it is the only one known to have

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<sup>462</sup> Nevo 1987, p. 63.

<sup>463</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2325.

been performed by Rhodes's company of young players at the Phoenix in Drury Lane [...] Then silence. The play [...] disappeared from the stage for almost two hundred years.<sup>464</sup>

As for its more recent status, MacDonald P. Jackson notes that “during the twentieth century the merits of *Pericles* – obvious enough to its early seventeenth-century audiences, with which it was exceptionally popular – began to manifest themselves to critics [...] The 1970s saw over twenty productions, the 1980s over thirty, and the 1990s over fifty”.<sup>465</sup>

While these numbers still pale in comparison with the more enduringly popular plays of the last half-century, like *Hamlet* or *Much Ado About Nothing*, its resurgence is undeniable, and the positive reception that Jackson refers to is significant – why, if it has such potential, was it neglected for so long? Why is it still languishing in relative obscurity, still so infrequently performed?<sup>466</sup> Its two centuries of obscurity have much to do with its authorship and its textual provenance, as well as the scholarly debate surrounding both; J.R. Mulryne, writing about the “slight” interest of the theatre in *Pericles* up to 1979, argued that “reluctance to stage *Pericles* might be traced initially to uncertainties about authorship: no one knows how much of the text was written by Shakespeare, and the peripheral status this confers may possibly have deterred managements”, and that “directors may have hesitated due to the corrupt state of parts

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<sup>464</sup> Suzanne Gossett, ed., *Pericles* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 4-5.

<sup>465</sup> MacDonald P. Jackson, *Defining Shakespeare: Pericles as Test Case* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>466</sup> The most recent production at the Royal Shakespeare Company – its fifth – was staged in 2006. Though a production was planned for 2020, this was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. It was one of only two Shakespeare plays not to be performed during Gregory Doran's tenure as Artistic Director, alongside *Henry VIII*.

of the text”.<sup>467</sup> Therein lie two key sticking points for the canonicity of *Pericles*: authorship and textual provenance.

According to Brian Vickers, “the first commentator to suggest that *Pericles* was not wholly Shakespeare’s creation was Nicholas Rowe” in 1709.<sup>468</sup> Likely related to *Pericles*’ absence on the stage for two centuries, it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that its attribution was more properly considered, starting with John Payne Collier first suggesting George Wilkins as a collaborator in 1857.<sup>469</sup> Then, as Vickers notes, “Modern study of the authorship of *Pericles*” began with the work of Nikolaus Delius in 1868.<sup>470</sup> Authorship studies of *Pericles* continue to this day. Among the more recent and comprehensive studies of authorship across the canon is *The New Oxford Shakespeare* in 2016, particularly its accompanying *Authorship Companion*. Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane attribute the play accordingly: Shakespeare is thought to be the writer of 3.0 – 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6 – Epilogue, while Wilkins is thought to have authored the beginning of the play, 1.0 – 2.5, and mixed authorship is suspected of the ‘brothel scenes’, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6.<sup>471</sup> These scenes are “primarily Shakespearean, but possibly mixed authorship [...] here Shakespeare may have adapted passages originally composed by Wilkins”.<sup>472</sup> Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, in their *British Drama 1533 – 1642: A Catalogue*, posit the same designation of scenes.<sup>473</sup> Vickers, in his *Shakespeare*,

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<sup>467</sup> J.R. Mulryne, “‘To Glad Your Ear and Please Your Eye’: *Pericles* at the Other Place [1979]”, in *Pericles: Critical Essays*, ed. by David Skeeel (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 288-296 (p. 288). Originally published in 1979 in *Critical Quarterly* 21.4.

<sup>468</sup> Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 291.

<sup>469</sup> J. Payne Collier Esq., ‘Introduction’, in George Wilkins, *Pericles, Prince of Tyr: A Novel*, ed. by Professor Tycho Mommsen (*Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling*, 1857), pp. xxvii-xxxvi.

<sup>470</sup> Vickers 2002, p. 293.

<sup>471</sup> Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane 2017, p. 571.

<sup>472</sup> Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane 2017, p. 571.

<sup>473</sup> Martin Wiggins, in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533 – 1642: A Catalogue*, 9 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), V, pp. 412-417.

*Co-Authored*, suggests a similar breakdown, and does so through a detailed examination of his predecessors.<sup>474</sup> Authorship has clearly been a problem for *Pericles* for some time, and this is inseparable from the issue of the text itself, each of which informs and reinforces the other.

The question of textual provenance recalls some of the difficulties of *Hamlet* from the first chapter of this thesis, though *Pericles* presents a different problem altogether: while *Hamlet* has two “good” texts to choose from, and a “bad” text to draw inferences from where desired, *Pericles* only has one text, and a “bad” text at that. It was initially published in quarto form, in 1609, and all subsequent editions derive from the 1609 quarto. *Pericles* does not appear in the First Folio of 1623, perhaps due to its questionable textual status (with swathes of prose printed as verse, and verse as prose) or its collaborative nature. It was eventually inducted into the Third Folio, in 1664, but it does not have a more authoritative text than the early quarto. The textual question is one part of the impediment to asserting the play’s provenance; there is also a palpable stylistic gap within the play itself, between the first two acts and the latter three, a gap which greatly spurred the authorship debate surrounding *Pericles*.

Jackson writes that although “Acts 3-5 affect every knowledgeable reader as substantially the work of the mature Shakespeare, Acts 1-2 do not”.<sup>475</sup> Bate and Rasmussen argue that the unusual split in authorship, as opposed to the more common form of collaboration in which playwrights would mostly alternate scene-by-scene, “suggests that Wilkins began the play and abandoned it halfway through, leaving

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<sup>474</sup> Vickers 2002, p. 327.

<sup>475</sup> Jackson 2003, p. 25.

Shakespeare, the company dramatist, to finish it (and perhaps to apply some polish to the first half).<sup>476</sup> David F. Hoeniger is especially thorough and decisive:

About one matter there can at any rate be no doubt: Shakespeare wrote most or all of Acts 3-5. His hand is most obvious in 3.1, the scene of the storm and the casting overboard of Thaisa's body, and in 5.1, the first recognition scene. The two brothel scenes are also clearly by him, even if the Victorians disliked them [...] They resemble parts of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well* [...] Shakespeare's late style is likewise evident in most other scenes of Acts 3-5 [...] These observations will be shared by every sensitive reader. They require no defence.<sup>477</sup>

Unlike some other collaborative plays, *Pericles* seems to wear the marks of its collaboration proudly on its sleeve: the stylistic gap is inextricable from the authorship question, and each has exacerbated the other throughout history, leading to *Pericles*' clear neglect and the slow pace of its resurgence. Coupled with the formal / structural quirks of the play, especially its episodic nature, it becomes unwieldy with its baggage.

Yet, since George Steevens condemned the play as "little more than a string of adventures so numerous, so inartificially crowded together and so removed from probability" in the eighteenth century, the critical eye has taken a more generous glance at *Pericles* and its unique composition.<sup>478</sup> Stanley Wells writes that its "complex textual background [...] should not be allowed to draw attention away from the merits of this dramatic romance".<sup>479</sup> Russ McDonald notes that "the main business of the play consists of deviations and adventures encountered along the way [...] Surprising actions and new

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<sup>476</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2324.

<sup>477</sup> F. David Hoeniger, ed., *Pericles (The Arden Shakespeare)* (London: Methuen, 1963), p. liv.

<sup>478</sup> Edmund Malone, ed., *Supplement to the Edition of Shakespeare's Plays Published in 1778*, 2 vols. (London: printed for C. Bathurst etc., 1780), II, p. 164.

<sup>479</sup> Stanley Wells, introduction to *Pericles*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 1059.



narrative directions challenge the attention and expectations of the audience in the same way that elements of the protracted, complex verse sentences do”.<sup>480</sup> Peter Kirwan argues that although “many critics have been moved to comment on the stylistic disparities between the first two and latter three acts, these might also be indicative of the different needs of the play’s two halves”.<sup>481</sup> Suparna Roychoudhury writes of the play’s “marine chaos” and “sloshing narrative rhythm”, linking the sea, the structure, and the play’s wider themes.<sup>482</sup> As the textual problems are addressed in printed editions, the structural problems can be addressed in theatrical productions which perceive them increasingly as opportunities. The play offers fertile ground for a less familiar offering from the most familiar playwright. And, as Peter Kirwan summarises, “its treatment of refugees from Syria shipwrecked in the Mediterranean, its frank discussion of abuses of power, and its concern with reconciliation and reunion have all generated fresh interest in recent years.”<sup>483</sup> *Pericles* has faced stormy seas, but sails ever onwards into relevance and renewal.

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MacDonald P. Jackson argues of *Pericles* that “Regardless of the play’s authorship and date, a director, exploring the script’s potential in performance, will strive for a unified production that provides a theatre audience with a satisfying evening’s

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<sup>480</sup> Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare’s Late Style*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 155.

<sup>481</sup> Peter Kirwan, ‘A Painful Adventure?’, programme note, *Périclès, Prince de Tyr*, dir. Declan Donnellan, Cheek by Jowl, 2018.

<sup>482</sup> Suparna Roychoudhury, ‘Mental Tempests, Seas of Trouble: The Perturbations of Shakespeare’s *Pericles*’, *ELH*, 82.4 (Winter 2015), 1013-1039 (p. 1028).

<sup>483</sup> Kirwan 2018.

entertainment.”<sup>484</sup> Certainly this is the job of the director, as it applies to *Pericles* and to the plays explored throughout this chapter. The phrase “unified production” could be interpreted in a number of ways, but one type of unification would be to reinforce the play’s Shakespearean quality, primarily by stripping it of that which is not Shakespearean: the passages by Wilkins, which form the entire first two acts of the play. R.F. Yeager follows this thought to its endpoint:

what is not thought Shakespeare’s is fairest game for cutting or transforming by directors always on the lookout for ways to put their own mark upon the Bard. Indeed, over the years those portions of the play most tampered with onstage have been the first two acts – the “Wilkins acts”, as many [...] would have it – with consequent repercussions upon the shape of the “Shakespearean” (by agreement) latter three.<sup>485</sup>

Given what we know of the authorship question, and the fact that such debate largely arose from perceived differences between the earlier (Wilkins) scenes and the later (Shakespeare) scenes, we might expect the play to be cut differently in the first two acts than in the last three. Particularly for an institution like the Royal Shakespeare Company, one might expect priority to be given to retaining Shakespeare’s text, and so if the play is to be streamlined, it would likely happen in the first two acts. Jackson argues that Wilkins “deserves our gratitude for starting off Shakespeare’s chimerical masterpiece and ushering in the late romances” – yet extending this gratitude to the text in performance is another matter entirely.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Jackson 2003, p. 3.

<sup>485</sup> R.F. Yeager, ‘Shakespeare as Medievalist: What It Means for Performing *Pericles*’, in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings*, ed. by Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), pp. 215-231 (p. 215).

<sup>486</sup> Jackson, 2003, p. 189.

*Pericles* has been staged in five major productions at the RSC, directed by: Terry Hands (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1969), Ron Daniels (The Other Place, 1979), David Thacker (Swan Theatre, 1989), Adrian Noble (RST, 2002), and Dominic Cooke (Swan, 2006). Looking at an overview of the cuts made to each production, it is very apparent that, regardless of whether each director has known about theories of authorship, the sections written by Wilkins face the greater proportion of cuts. The most liberal cut comes from Adrian Noble, who cuts a total of 458 lines, with over seventy-one percent (328 lines) of those lines coming from the play's first eleven scenes. Even the most conservative cut, from Dominic Cooke, which saw 382 lines cut, has a similar proportion of cuts: just under seventy percent of the cuts are taken from the Wilkins-authored scenes. Terry Hands' cut has the narrowest proportion, with over sixty-four percent of his cuts coming from Wilkins. Even at the narrowest margin, a two thirds majority of the cut lines are from scenes thought to be authored solely by Wilkins.

While most of Wilkins' scenes (excepting the Gower scenes) are freely cut from at the RSC, there are three scenes whose extensive cuts are noteworthy, and all three scenes take place in Tyre. The first is 1.2 in which Pericles returns to Tyre, discussing the danger from Antioch and his intention to leave Tyre. It is cut down by about two thirds in 1969, 1979, 1989 and 2002 (and by about a third in 2006). The second is 1.3 (Thaliard arrives in Tyre to kill Pericles, and speaks with Helicanus), which was fully cut from the play in 1969, 1979 and 1989 (and cut by almost fifty percent in 2002; about twenty-five percent in 2006). The third is 2.4, a fifty-seven-line scene in which Helicanus and Escanes discuss Antiochus' fate, and contemplate the return of Pericles in conversation with three lords. It has been cut in its entirety in all five productions the RSC has staged, its lines unspoken for over six decades. Meanwhile 1.1, the longest Wilkins scene by

number of lines, is noteworthy for *not* being cut much. Given its length, and the fact that its Antiochus-heavy storyline dissipates quite quickly (even quicker when the first act is cut so extensively), it seems a likely candidate for cutting down both to generally thin the play, and to specifically thin Wilkins.

But there are good reasons to retain the bulk of 1.1: it is the catalyst for the play's overall plot, in that it establishes the context which drives Pericles away from his home in Tyre, and sets him on his turbulent journey. It is telling that one of the lines that has never been cut from this scene is Pericles' final line before leaving the stage and Antioch: "By flight I'll shun the danger which I fear" (1.1.143). This is also a crucial scene for setting the tone of the play, perhaps even more so than Gower's prologue. This is evident in some of the other lines that are never cut: "Yon sometimes famous princes, like thyself, / Drawn by report, adventurous by desire" (1.1.35-6), Antiochus says to Pericles, useful exposition on the Prince of Tyre's character. In response Pericles thanks Antiochus, "who hath taught / My frail mortality to know itself, / And by those fearful objects to prepare / This body, like to them, what I must " (1.1.42-5), introducing themes of mortality, the human body constantly assaulted by the harshness of a chaotic world. G. Wilson Knight summed up Pericles' fate as "a repentance for no guilt of his own but rather for the fact of mortality in a harsh universe", notably distinct from the suffering of Lear for instance, and the first scene of action in the play immediately begins to construct this injustice, and to establish Pericles as one of Shakespeare's more sympathetic heroes.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 73.

The central drama of this scene is vital too: though Antiochus and his incestuous relationship with his daughter is not directly important to the plot beyond the first act (aside from being the catalyst), it evokes other important parallels and layers operating within the wider text. Henry Tyrell wrote that “The brief but beautiful description of the sinful daughter [...] creates in the mind a pleasing and favourable impression, [...] and immediately afterwards we are told she is vile, degraded, and unnatural”.<sup>488</sup> W.B. Thorne likewise observed that the play “begins with a striking contrast between the barrenness of death in the riddle scene and the spring imagery used to describe the daughter of Antiochus”, and “sets up immediately the pageant opposition between life and death, summer and winter”.<sup>489</sup> This “pageant opposition” runs throughout the play, on wide structural levels, and this first non-Gower scene is crucial to it: the dark sexual politics anticipate the brothel scenes in Mytilene, for instance, and the King/daughter relationship in Antioch is an inversion of the more wholesome relationship between Simonides and Thaisa in Pentapolis. The correct ordering of the nuclear family in Ephesus in the fifth act resolves a play whose first conflict is the incestuous usurpation of the familial order. Further, it anticipates Dionyza, whose “envy rare” compels her to plot Marina’s murder, so that her daughter Philoten “might stand peerless” (4.0.35-40), an act that once again threatens familial structures (with Dionyza as Marina’s sole parental figure/guardian), and in turn leads to the destruction of Dionyza’s actual family at the hands of the people of Tarsus, over whom Cleon is also a guardian, as their governor. These parallels and recurring images, the mechanisms of justice and resolution which conclude the play, are hinted at in this early scene.

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<sup>488</sup> Henry Tyrell, *The Doubtful Plays of Shakespeare* (1853), p. 44.

<sup>489</sup> W.B. Thorne, ‘*Pericles* and the “Incest-Fertility” Opposition’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 22.1 (Winter, 1971), 43-56 (p. 48).

1.2, on the other hand, would be much easier to cut from the play: the most essential line from this scene, in terms of the plot, is in Pericles' final speech: "Tyre, I now look from thee then, and to Tarsus / Intend my travel" (1.2.113-4). Not coincidentally, these one and a half lines have never been cut at the RSC – in fact, the only other universally uncut lines in this scene are Pericles' first direct question to Helicanus, "What wouldst thou have me do?" (1.2.63), and portions of one of Helicanus' following speeches: "my lord, since you have given me leave to speak [...] Antiochus you fear, / And justly too, I think [...] Therefore, my lord, go travel for a while, / Till that his rage and anger be forgot, / Or till the Destinies do cut his thread of life" (1.2.99-108), which also establish the play's trajectory, and move Pericles forward into the action in Pentapolis.<sup>490</sup> These lines help with the plot, and it makes sense to retain Helicanus' sole interaction with Pericles in the first half of the play: otherwise, when he appears in the play's final act, he is like a *confidante ex machina*.

Thacker and Noble cut Pericles' opening monologue from 1.2 entirely, and Thacker, along with Hands and Cooke, insert a number of lines from Gower's Act 2 scene, while also making extensive cuts and rewrites to the opening of the scene. Daniels also introduces substantial rewrites to parts of Pericles' opening monologue in this scene. Hands and Daniels massively thin out the scene, with Hands' cut (the very first) being the most revolutionary. In some ways it is the most straightforward, and in some ways perplexing, particularly as it uses Gower, doubled as Helicanus:

**GOWER [/HELICANUS]**

Here have you seen a mighty king  
His child, I wis, to incest bring;

(2.0.1-4)

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<sup>490</sup> Hands does substitute the word "Destinies" with "Fates" in 1969, but otherwise these lines are intact in each of the five productions.

A better prince and benign lord,  
That will prove awful both in deed and word.

**PERICLES**

Why should this change of thoughts, (1.2.1b-19)  
The sad companion, dull-eyed melancholy,  
Be my so us'd a guest, as not an hour,  
In the day's glorious walk or peaceful night,  
The tomb where grief should sleep, can breed me quiet?  
Here pleasures court mine eyes, and mine eyes shun them;  
And danger, which I feared's at Antioch,  
Whose arm seems far too short to hit me here;  
Yet neither pleasure's art can joy my spirits,  
Nor yet the other's distance comfort me.  
Then it is thus: the passions of the mind  
That have their first conception by misdread,  
Have after-nourishment and life by care;  
And what was first but fear what might be done  
Grows elder now, and cares it be not done.  
And so with me: the great Antiochus,  
'Gainst whom I am too little to contend,  
Since he's so great can make his will his act,  
Will think me speaking though I swear to silence;  
With hostile forces he'll o'erspread the land, (1.2.24-29)  
And with th'ostent of war will look so huge  
Amazement shall drive courage from the state,  
Our men be vanquish'd ere they do resist,  
And subjects punished that ne'er thought offence;  
Which care of them, not pity of myself.  
Makes both my body pine and soul to languish, (1.2.32-33)  
And punish that before that he would punish.  
What would'st thou have me do? (1.2.63)

**GOWER [/HELICANUS]**

My lord, since you have given me leave to speak, (1.2.99-101)  
I will do so. Antiochus you fear,  
And justly too, I think; [your mind is troubled, [addition]  
And your spirit fraught with wondring  
On the perils which you know.]  
Therefore, my lord, go travel for a while, (1.2.104-6)  
Till that his rage and anger be forgot,

Or till the Fates do cut his thread of life.

**PERICLES**

Tyre, I now look from thee then, and to Tarsus (1.2.113-5)  
Intend my travel, where I'll hear from thee;  
And by whose letters I'll dispose myself.

**GOWER [/HELICANUS]**

Be quiet then, as men should be, (2.0.5-8)  
Till he hath passed necessity.  
I'll show you those in troubles reign,  
Losing a mite, a mountain gain.<sup>491</sup>

It is immediately apparent that the scene has been massively thinned-down – ignoring the eight lines re-allocated from Gower's subsequent speech in 2.0 and the two and a half lines added by Hands into Gower's middle speech, the scene has been reduced from one hundred and twenty-two lines to just thirty-seven lines. What is perplexing at first about Hands' edit is the allocation of Helicanus' speech to Gower, which turns Gower from a non-diegetic chorus into an active participant in the drama. But Hands' production played heavily with doubling, and Emrys James played both Gower and Helicanus.<sup>492</sup> So this scene is crucial for solidifying and also winking at the doubling, as Emrys Jones would be able to slip in and out of the two roles: Gower to narrate, Helicanus to interact with Pericles. The dramatic structure of the removed chorus is retained, and Helicanus is elevated in status, his character implicitly associated with the

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<sup>491</sup> I have preserved the punctuation and alignment of Hands' script. I have also given on the right-hand side the line numbers for each section as they correspond with the published play (Arden 3 edition).

<sup>492</sup> Some of the doubling serves as character commentary, as is the case for Morgan Sheppard playing both Antiochus and Boulton, Geoffrey Hutchings as Cleon and Pandar, Brenda Bruce as Dionyza and Bawd. Thaisa and Marina, until the final scene when they appear together, are played by Susan Fleetwood, which would no doubt make the reunion scene at 5.1 more affecting, as Pericles' lost daughter looks like his lost wife.



omniscient narrator. As Mulryne observes, “Gower speaks Helicanus’ lines, so extending the freedom and flexibility of the stage-fiction”.<sup>493</sup>

Hands swiftly conveys the key exposition to Pericles’ wilful exile from Tyre, circumventing a problem caused by this scene in the original text: it stalls the play, disrupting Pericles’ travels, and arguably boring an audience by recapping what they have already witnessed while, Hamlet-like, Pericles hesitates (and soliloquises) before acting. Retaining some of Pericles’ monologue, before then skipping to his question to Helicanus (/Gower), then brief highlights of Helicanus’ dialogue, and finally the important expository lines that Pericles concludes with, the entire sense of the scene has been conveyed but in a quarter of the total lines. The pace is improved, and Pericles is emphasised as being a character tossed constantly to-and-fro, with little time to stand still and adjust. Meanwhile, bookending the scene with pairs of Gower’s couplets further cements Gower’s presence as a narrator throughout the production.

A survey of the lines Hands expunges from this scene affirms the astuteness of his cuts. “Nor boots it me to say I honour him / If he suspect I may dishonour him. / And what may make him blush in being known / He’ll stop the course by which it might be known” (1.2.20-23) over-explains the Antiochus dilemma which has already been sufficiently laid out elsewhere. Pericles’ self-appraisal “Who am no more but as the tops of trees / Which fence the roots they grow by and defend them” (1.2.30-31) is convoluted and adds little that isn’t already expressed by “care of them, not pity of myself” (1.2.29). Hands then cuts the exchange with the Lords, which mostly just exists to set up a juxtaposition between their sycophancy and Helicanus’ blunt lack of flattery, which is

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<sup>493</sup> Mulryne 1979, p. 292.

arguably unnecessary when the rest of the scene establishes Helicanus as a reliable advisor. The next cut Hands makes is substantial, some thirty-five lines (1.2.64-98); two of these lines are spoken by Helicanus, the rest by Pericles in two long speeches, most of which summarise what happened in Antioch (“Attend me then: I went to Antioch, / Where, as thou knowst...”, 1.2.68-9). If Helicanus already knows, and the audience already knows from having witnessed it and from Gower’s narration, what need has Pericles to repeat himself? Further, at 1.2.100, which Hands retains, Helicanus sums up Pericles’ concerns back to him: “Antiochus you fear”. Hands has clearly taken great care to cut repetitive information for the sake of time and speed, without jeopardising any crucial knowledge.

The other two scenes singled out earlier – 1.3 and 2.4 – also involve Helicanus, are similarly set in Tyre, and are also “more expository than dramatic”, as Mulryne has it.<sup>494</sup> 1.3 was completely cut by Hands, Daniels and Thacker, cut down by half by Noble, and cut down by a quarter by Cooke. This is unsurprising, given the treatment of the previous scene: another scene that delays Pericles’ action, as well as delaying the geographical movement of the play, seems less than essential. Furthermore, little action takes place in the scene: Thaliard arrives to kill Pericles, speaks with a very diplomatic Helicanus, and then leaves. Thaliard’s brief story arc is never again relevant, and Helicanus has little to gain as a character here (compared with the Pericles-centred interaction of 1.2 which enfolds Helicanus into Pericles’ trust). The latter scene, 2.4, is the only scene in *Pericles* to have never appeared in an RSC production. It is the third and final of Helicanus’ appearances before 5.1, and it is also another diversion from the

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<sup>494</sup> Mulryne 1979, p. 291.

plot, a return to Tyre that disrupts the otherwise united action in the second act, and the onward geographical momentum. Pericles arrives in Pentapolis in 2.1 (his interaction with the fishermen generally trimmed by directors), and then interacts with Simonides and others in 2.2, 2.3 and 2.5, culminating in his betrothal to Thaisa. Removing Helicanus' scene, in which he merely discusses Pericles' whereabouts and the state of Tyre with a number of lords, does not take anything away from the plot, but sustains the play's mounting tension and stakes, allows the focus to remain on Pericles and his travels, and turns the second act into a more discrete, single-focus episode.

The cutting of 2.4 also allows for dramatic seamlessness: 2.3 ends at night and 2.5 begins the next morning, both in the same location. To bridge these scenes, every production replaces the cut 2.4 with a new, additional scene in its place: a scene which differs somewhat in each production, but in which Pericles invariably sings a song. Despite the slight variations, these interpolated episodes largely seems to derive from the same source: the 1608 novel *The Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre*, written by none other than Shakespeare's collaborator George Wilkins.<sup>495</sup> Stanley Wells (in *The Oxford Shakespeare's* brief introduction to *Pericles*) says of the novel that Wilkins "drew heavily on *Pericles* itself. Since the play text is so corrupt, it is quite likely that Wilkins reports parts of it both more accurately and more fully than the quarto", an argument that does hinge somewhat on Wells' earlier argument, offered with little substantiation,

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<sup>495</sup> To briefly summarise what each director adds in place of 2.4: Hands and Daniels use the same structure and (prose) dialogue around different songs. Thacker also uses a different song, and only uses a (modified) portion of the scene that Hands and Daniels include. Hands, Daniels and Thacker are drawing borrowing directly from Wilkins' novel. Cooke's scene is *similar* to the scene included by Hands and Daniels, only in verse rather than prose. Though Cooke is not drawing directly from Wilkins' novel, he is instead using a scene (8a) that Gary Taylor adds into his 1986 Oxford Shakespeare edition – a scene *based on* the same passage from Wilkins' novel. So directly or otherwise, Wilkins' novel has influenced these four productions here. Noble uses yet another different song, though without dialogue.

that the “manifestly corrupt text [...] gives every sign of having been put together from memory”.<sup>496</sup> Wells uses these arguments to justify altering the text of *Pericles* in Gary Taylor’s 1986 Oxford Shakespeare’s Complete Works edition: “Our attempt to reconstruct the play draws more heavily than is usual on Wilkins’s novel, especially in the first nine scenes (which he probably wrote)”.<sup>497</sup>

Wells and Taylor were clearly not the first to meddle with Wilkins’ novelisation of *Pericles*, given directors like Hands and Daniels were borrowing from Wilkins’ novel in the decades leading up to Taylor’s edition. David Skeeel considers Hands a pioneer of the textual reconstruction of *Pericles*:

by far the most intellectual treatment the play had ever received on stage, one that both incorporated the work of previous scholars and anticipated the work of future scholars. As a first step, Hands engaged in some textual detective work, aiming to cement over some of the play’s apparent gaps in logic by retrieving what he believed to be lost text [using Wilkins’ novel].<sup>498</sup>

Meanwhile J.R. Mulryne, writing specifically about Daniels’ production, notes the difference in approach between Daniels and Hands:

Daniels doesn’t follow Hands’s text slavishly; new songs are introduced [...], a small number of very short new interpolations are made, and a few passages deleted by Hands are restored – the tendency of the Daniels text is to be slightly more conservative than Hands. That something has to be done lies beyond dispute; even academic text-editors feel compelled to intervene in *Pericles* to an extent they would not contemplate with other Shakespeare plays.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Wells 1986, p. 1059.

<sup>497</sup> Wells 1986, p. 1059.

<sup>498</sup> David Skeeel, *Thwarting the Wayward Seas: A Critical and Theatrical History of Shakespeare’s Pericles in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cranbury, NJ; London: Associated University Presses, 1998), p. iii.

<sup>499</sup> Mulryne 1979, p. 290.

So Daniels is known to have actively borrowed from Hands' cuts. Mulryne notes a particular "brief insertion found in Daniels's text, but not in Hands", which is "based on theatrical considerations of a different kind" surrounding Thaisa's character.<sup>500</sup> This shows that Daniels engages directly with the 1608 novel, as Hands did before him.

Aside from the effect that Hands and Daniels' work had upon the stage, this is an exciting instance of modern theatrical work influencing critical work, which would then further influence theatrical work. Later, when Roger Warren edited his 2003 edition of *Pericles*, he used *The Oxford Shakespeare* as his base text but made some changes, noting: "where there are major differences [...], my decisions have been influenced by the practical use of Oxford's reconstruction in rehearsal and performance, so that this edition has been even more influenced than my earlier ones in this series by theatrical considerations".<sup>501</sup> Warren also observes that Taylor's edition represented "the first sustained attempt [by textual editors] to use Wilkins more extensively", and that "again, theatre led the way. No production of *Pericles* known to me has ever performed the Quarto text exactly as it stands, because of its manifest defects, so directors have regularly drawn on passages from Wilkins to provide themselves with a more performable script".<sup>502</sup>

Not everyone is convinced by these interpolations and reconstructions: Bate and Rasmussen pointedly argue that, while "Wilkins' novelization assists in the interpretation of some passages" of the Quarto, "since we do not know the exact status

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<sup>500</sup> Mulryne 1979, p. 291.

<sup>501</sup> Roger Warren, ed., *Pericles, Prince of Tyre: Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 80.

<sup>502</sup> Warren 2008, p. 3.

of his treatment in relation to Shakespeare's, it is unsafe to incorporate its readings into the text, as some editors have done".<sup>503</sup> Vickers similarly observes how a number of textual editors "accused theatrical directors of having 'rearranged... and Wilkinsised' the play".<sup>504</sup> Regardless of this scepticism, and this apparent desire to protect Shakespeare's text, it is undeniable that this intervention enjoys great success in the theatre, and often yields new and exciting ways of staging Shakespeare. Roger Warren argued that Gary Taylor's text gave a 1986 production of the play in Stratford, Ontario "the means of playing some scenes which had seemed unplayable, and greatly increased the theatrical impact of others".<sup>505</sup>

But what is the Wilkins-influenced insertion in place of the cut 2.4 doing? Well, firstly, Simonides commends Pericles' singing in 2.5.24-5 ("I am beholding to you / For your sweet music this last night"). Considering 2.3 ends with Simonides bidding everyone to rest, and 2.5 begins in the morning, the occasion of a song in between would help make sense of Simonides' praise. And while Simonides' lines, and the ensuing exchange, could simply be cut, there are certain advantages to keeping these lines, and including the song. Warren argues that "by presenting Pericles as expert warrior, dancer, and singer, he is dramatized as the Renaissance universal man, [...] this helps to bind the otherwise straggling Pentapolis sequence together".<sup>506</sup> This perspective perhaps explains why, across the board, there is more rearrangement and shuffling of scenes and lines in the second act than elsewhere in the play.

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<sup>503</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2325.

<sup>504</sup> Vickers 2002, p. 330.

<sup>505</sup> Roger Warren, *Staging Shakespeare's Late Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1990), p. 209.

<sup>506</sup> Warren 2008, p. 143n.

The other aspect of the song's inclusion is that music plays an integral role in the play, particularly in the latter, Shakespearean half, and so by including more music in the first half, a greater sense of cohesion can be developed, and the play can be made to feel less jarring in its overall tone.<sup>507</sup> Catherine Dunn's thoughtful and philosophical consideration of music in Shakespeare's late plays is particularly helpful to understanding this, her overall argument that "the play makes consistent and specific use of philosophical concepts of music".<sup>508</sup> The philosophical concepts she refers to, via Boethius, are *musica humana*, "the rapport existing between the parts of the body and the faculties of the soul, particularly the reason", and *musica mundane*, "the order and proportion of the heavens and the elements".<sup>509</sup> Dunn argues for the presence of both of these types of music throughout the play, particularly in its final act. Of Shakespeare's romances generally, Dunn observes that "the final transformation and reconciliation of the characters is frequently effected by music, just as it is usually paralleled or symbolized by changes in the physical universe and in the accompanying music"; in reinforcing the significance of music at the end by establishing a throughline with music elsewhere in the play, *Pericles* becomes increasingly Shakespearean.<sup>510</sup>

Further, given that Simonides "calls on dancing as a remedy" at the end of 2.3 (to quote Dunn), the potential for the song in place of 2.4 to be restorative is significant: it is a turning point in the plot (towards brief happiness for Pericles), and it reinforces Dunn's observation of "the power of music to achieve physical and psychological

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<sup>507</sup> There is also the more mundane consideration that an audience might enjoy some music on either side of all the harrowing tragedy.

<sup>508</sup> Catherine Dunn, "The Function of Music in Shakespeare's Romances", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Autumn, 1969), 391-405 (p. 405).

<sup>509</sup> Dunn 1969, p. 392.

<sup>510</sup> Dunn 1969, p. 394.

cures”.<sup>511</sup> Marina’s song in 5.1 is restorative to Pericles, and to borrow from Dunn again, when “his soul is in perfect tune with the universal order [just after the reunion], and only then, Pericles hears the music of the spheres”.<sup>512</sup> This moment leads directly to his vision of Diana and, therefore, directly to Thaisa, to the second part of the reunion, and the play’s final sense of renewal and resolution.<sup>513</sup> In all, music is inseparable from the play’s emotional climax – if Pericles’ recovery is in three stages, the first two relate directly to music, as Marina’s song revives him and the music of the spheres leads him to Thaisa. As such, it is unsurprising that there is a tendency to give additional time and emphasis to song. Sarah Beckwith argues that “the recovery of voice [is] so central to the rehabilitation of Marina and Pericles”, and “Shakespearean romance offers the slow discovery of the [...] occasional miracles of human communication”; what better occasional miracle of communication is there than song?<sup>514</sup>

Thus far it is clear that Wilkins’ scenes present a variety of challenges, and the response is unanimously to cut out as much Wilkins as possible, while still retaining most of the play’s overall structure, and many of its tonal signposts. Additions made from/based on Wilkins’ novel are few and brief. Shakespeare’s scenes are not substantially cut until the play’s longest and most pivotal scene: the aforementioned reunion with Marina in 5.1. Of the scene’s 249 lines, Hands, Daniels and Thacker each cut about a fifth, while Noble and Cooke cut about a tenth. For the most part, this could

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<sup>511</sup> Dunn 1969, p. 394.

<sup>512</sup> Dunn 1969, p. 397.

<sup>513</sup> Perhaps this explains why Hands, Thacker, Noble and Cooke all cut a certain line in this reunion scene – Lysimachus, dismissing the sanity and composure of *Pericles*, “It is not good to cross him. Give him way.” (5.1.218). Removing this line allows the religious mystery, and the sense of restoration and cure through music, to be preserved.

<sup>514</sup> Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 103.



be justified as simple thinning, given that this is the play's lengthiest scene. But perhaps there is something more at stake, impediments to the most affecting scene in the play – and, according to some, one of the most affecting scenes in all of Shakespeare, with Bate and Rasmussen writing of *Pericles* that “there are certain speeches of quite extraordinary beauty and power” and the “most revelatory of all is the reunion of father and daughter, which recapitulates yet somehow goes beyond the reunion of Lear and Cordelia. Shakespeare never wrote a more moving scene”.<sup>515</sup> They also observe that “The fifth act's inversion of the first act's perversion”, referenced earlier, “suggests that, episodic though it may be, the play has its own unity [and] the stitching together of the plot was effectively done” between Wilkins' and Shakespeare's respective sections.<sup>516</sup> The reunion scene is thus vital in making sense of the play overall, both in terms of its tone and its structure.

On this theme, Richard Hillman writes of “the pattern of suffering and redemption in *Pericles* – a pattern universally perceived, however variously interpreted”.<sup>517</sup> Hillman also argues that the “suggestion of a new order premised on spiritual renewal, achieved through exaltation of the good and purging of the wicked”, particularly in its fifth act, “brings the play in line with the typical Shakespearean romantic movement”.<sup>518</sup> This corresponds with Howard Felperin's writing on the final act, which Felperin relates to the question of godlessness addressed briefly above. “The salvation that Marina and Thaisa bring to Pericles is absolute and enduring, a beatific love-vision realized on earth, while the gods, previously indifferent, hostile, or non-

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<sup>515</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2324.

<sup>516</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2323.

<sup>517</sup> Richard Hillman, ‘Shakespeare's Gower and Gower's Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36.4 (Winter, 1985), 427-437 (p. 430).

<sup>518</sup> Hillman 1985, p. 432.

existent in Shakespeare, become benevolent, working inevitably to bring that final fulfilment about.”<sup>519</sup> And so it is unsurprising, perhaps, that much of the trimming directors make to this scene happens in its first half. Every RSC director has cut the opening exchange with the Tyrian Sailor and Helicanus (each to different degrees and in different ways); every RSC director has applied the bulk of their cuts to the exchanges that take place before Marina’s entrance. Both Hands and Daniels cut through some of the back-and-forth between Marina and Pericles, streamlining the interaction without lessening its depth – the actual moment of recognition and reunion is largely untouched, though of all the directors Hands interferes with it the most. Thacker, meanwhile, makes a third of his cuts to this scene right at the end, after Pericles has had his vision of Diana, so that everything after “Celestial Dian, goddess Argentine, / I will obey thee” (5.1.237-8) is completely cut from the production. The virtue of such a cut is clear: Pericles has his vision, declares his intent to obey, Gower speaks briefly, and immediately Pericles arrives at Ephesus. The pace of the final act picks up, creating a palpable sense that Pericles has suffered enough, that he and the fates are ready for resolution.

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The Gower framing device presents a specific set of opportunities and challenges to directors. Gower is a functional, largely expository character/device, who takes up much of the play’s line share (thirteen percent of it, second only to Pericles’ twenty-five

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<sup>519</sup> Howard Felperin, ‘Shakespeare’s Miracle Play’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 18.4 (Autumn 1967) 363-374 (p. 373).

percent, and immediately ahead of Marina's eight percent).<sup>520</sup> His character and function could easily be cut to bring the running time down. Declan Donnellan's 2018 French-language production for Cheek by Jowl, *Périclès, Prince de Tyr*, ran for an hour and forty-five minutes straight through, with no interval. In addition to extensive cuts throughout the play (including reducing the Wilkins scenes to less than forty minutes), the production entirely cut the presence of Gower, in favour of another framing device, which saw Pericles in a hospital throughout the production, reliving his memories before the recognition of Marina in 5.1. Eliminating Gower obviously helped with the runtime, but also allowed the production a certain freedom with the episodes, for them to bleed more loosely from one into the other, without the need to over-explain the action (on- or off-stage) to the audience.

Yet much less is cut from Gower than one might expect. In fact, there are only two scenes across the play's twenty-eight scenes which have never been cut on the RSC's stages: 5.0 and 5.2, both of which are Gower's scenes. Gower's final speech/scene (the Epilogue) was left entirely intact by Hands, Thacker, Noble and Cooke, while Daniels cut just two lines: "In Helicanus may you well descry / A figure of truth, of faith, of loyalty". Between the archaic "descry" and the bad rhyme with "loyalty", as well as Cooke's downplaying of Helicanus' significance throughout the text, this is not a surprising cut. And clearly the tendency is towards preserving Gower's scenes, particularly as the play progresses, though throughout the play, in each production, cuts to Gower's scenes are generally minimal. The exception is in 3.0, the first scene in the play sequentially to be written by Shakespeare, in which every director made a number

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<sup>520</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2325.

of cuts and/or rearrangements to the scene, though many of the cuts are made to the portion of Gower's speech which recaps the first two acts, such as Pericles fleeing from Antiochus and befriending Simonides.

So while Gower, the monologuing narrator, may seem an easy place to start for effective thinning out of the play, directors at the RSC have appeared uninterested in the easy opportunity. Yet there may be good reason for that: as much as Gower can be read as an un-Shakespearean quirk, he is integral to the very fabric of the play. Not only does he relay much of the history between episodes, "guiding the audience through the story, asking us to hold in imagination the wanderer's ship, two great storms and a series of landfalls", to quote Bate and Rasmussen, he also seems to exist in the same realm of chaos and wonder as the rest of the play.<sup>521</sup> This is a play that is as much about storytelling as the story itself. As Richard Hillman writes,

To assume that the creation of Gower simply followed from an artistic need for a chorus is to reverse this emphasis. What confronts us in *Pericles* is not merely an unusually sophisticated choric function, but the most sustained literary allusion to be found in Shakespeare. I believe that approaching the role of Gower in these terms can illuminate both the playwright's handling of his principal source and the final achievement of the play itself.<sup>522</sup>

The voice and function of Gower are bound up in his origins and his uniqueness. Stephen J. Lynch sums up the Gower issue: "The presence of so ancient a figure as Gower in so late a play as *Pericles* poses a series of immediate questions. Why, so late in Shakespeare's career, does he resort to a chorus? Why John Gower as chorus? Most

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<sup>521</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2323.

<sup>522</sup> Hillman 1985, p. 428.

importantly, what is the relationship between the choric Gower and the text of the play?”<sup>523</sup>

Firstly, only one other Shakespearean play has such a sustained choric device, and that is *Henry V*, in which the chorus is “the voice of history”, which Steven Mullaney compares with the voice of “history’s occlusion or antithesis” in Gower.<sup>524</sup> F. David Hoeniger argues that “as the scenes develop [...] he controls the presentation of the whole play”, which may also explain why this choric device solidifies and increases in presence as the play progresses, rather than dissipating as the Prologue/Chorus in *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance.<sup>525</sup> And Stephen J. Lynch writes that “a chorus seems requisite [in *Pericles*] in part because of the very nature of the material as Shakespeare received it”.<sup>526</sup> And it should not be underestimated that Gower is helpful to the audience: as Rory Loughnane notes, Gower’s “presence seems a quintessentially retrogressive nod to earlier literary modes, but also creates a complicated framework for playgoer response to the play. The choric device [...] alerts playgoers to the disjunctive relationship between what is displayed and the truth that is shrouded”.<sup>527</sup> As Kelly Jones argues that “the liminality of Gower’s role as the living agent of the play’s performance exhibits a playful concern with the unstable, vulnerable, and unreservedly performative nature of authorship itself”, it would make sense for a director to fully utilise Gower, particularly if they were interested in drawing the audience’s attention to

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<sup>523</sup> Stephen J. Lynch, ‘The Authority of Gower in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*’, *Mediaevalia*, 16 (1993), 361-378 (p. 361).

<sup>524</sup> Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 148.

<sup>525</sup> F. David Hoeniger, ‘Gower and Shakespeare in *Pericles*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33.4 (Winter 1982), 461-479 (p. 464).

<sup>526</sup> Lynch 1993, p. 361.

<sup>527</sup> Rory Loughnane, ‘Semi-choric devices and the framework for playgoer response in *King Henry VIII*’, in *Late Shakespeare: 1608 – 1613*, ed. by Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 108-123 (p. 112).

the complicated nature of authorship and canonicity surrounding *Pericles*, rather than away from it.<sup>528</sup>

Furthermore, though “drama can dispense with a narrator, and it usually does so”, as Barbara Hardy notes, there are plenty of reasons, even aside from novelty and basic function, to preserve a narrator like Gower.<sup>529</sup> Hardy observes that the “presence of a narrator in drama is specious or misleading, deliberated to create an undramatic weight before we are released into dramatic freedom. An unusually and heavily weighted narrative introduction [...] is interesting because it seriously or playfully subverts the norms of its genre, flaunting rule through exception”.<sup>530</sup> Gower’s Epilogue, in which he serves as didact, espousing the fates of both the bad and the good characters, not only rounds out the narrative with denouement upon denouement, but also emphasises the meta focus on storytelling, especially in how Gower’s final words, “Here our play has ending” (Epilogue, 18), and the general sense of the story being utterly resolved and final, contrasts with Pericles’ final lines: “we do our longing stay / To hear the rest untold” (5.3.84-5). As Hardy says, Pericles “announces the exit into more storytelling”.<sup>531</sup> Richard Meek explores this tension, writing that by “inviting us to imagine a narrative retelling of the play we have just experienced, these endings serve to continue as well as to complete the play”, suspending the narrative moment in

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<sup>528</sup> Kelly Jones, “‘The Quick and the Dead’: Performing Gower in *Pericles*”, in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings*, ed. by Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray, pp. 201-215 (p. 203).

<sup>529</sup> Barbara Hardy, *Shakespeare’s Storytellers: Dramatic Narration* (London: Peter Owen, 1997), p. 24.

<sup>530</sup> Hardy 1997, p. 25.

<sup>531</sup> Hardy 1997, p. 81.

time.<sup>532</sup> In this sense, Gower becomes essential to the play not just for filling in a few gaps, but for setting its overall tone, and encompassing the chaos in meaning.

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Certain facts surrounding the directorial treatment of *Pericles* as a text are undeniable. The play is known to be challenging for directors, and perhaps not the biggest commercial draw, and these factors coupled with its fraught history have kept it firmly on the margins of performance, its staging frequency very low (particularly at the RSC). Even so, it has been performed more frequently than *Timon of Athens* at the RSC, a play which is fraught in its text and authorship but enjoys the security of its inclusion in the First Folio. And it has been performed much more frequently at the RSC than *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the other non-First Folio play to be eventually enfolded in Shakespeare's canon (another co-authored play, though a much more straightforward and accepted case of collaboration, and with a much less questionable text). To fix *Pericles*, directors have long been borrowing from other texts, particularly Wilkins' novel, to address some of the issues found in the play (and this has, subsequently, informed some academic, textual editors). Directors of *Pericles* seem largely aware of the textual problems and the authorship debate, and uniformly cut much more from the earlier Wilkins scenes than from the latter Shakespeare scenes, even though Shakespeare's scenes represent the greater bulk of the play. Certain elements of the play are relatively sacrosanct: the majority of the reunion scene, for instance, or Gower's several choric interjections.

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<sup>532</sup> Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 182-183.

If *Pericles* is a challenging play to read and to stage, its mysteries can evidently be unlocked in watching a good production. Mulryne praises (with caveats) Ron Daniels' production of 1979 in *The Other Place*: "It would be foolish to claim that Ron Daniels has restored the original play-experience. The understanding behind the performance is distinctly modern; it may not fit the original at all points. But Daniels has released the play's energies, for actors and audience, by a bold acceptance of the truths, familiar and strange, that constitute dramatic romance".<sup>533</sup> So although it may not be possible (or even desirable) to "restore the original play-experience", it is possible to create something that intimates why it was so immensely popular in its early heyday. And certainly, as Kirwan pointed out, the play's themes suggest that it is becoming increasingly relevant to a world wrapped up in issues of refuge, climate, and authority. And, as Julie Sanders notes, writing about recent novel adaptations of *Pericles* by Ali Smith (*Spring*) and Mark Haddon (*The Porpoise*), "The play is, despite its sometimes-dark heart, still hopeful about the values of 'harbourage' [...] and the importance of hospitality. The creative and ethical engagement with the play that [...] Smith and Haddon perform therefore share, evolve and augment these profound investigations of what constitutes humanity in complex circumstances".<sup>534</sup> This contrasts greatly with the always-dark heart of *Timon of Athens*.

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<sup>533</sup> Mulryne 1979, p. 290.

<sup>534</sup> Julie Sanders, 'What is Shakespearean adaptation?: Why *Pericles*? Why *Cloud*? Why now?', in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation*, ed. by Diana E. Hendersen and Stephen O'Niell (London: Bloomsbury / The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), pp. 56-75 (p. 71).



### At the ‘Freak Show’ with *Timon of Athens*

Gary Jay Williams – after directing it himself – wrote that “The director who chooses *Timon of Athens* is apt to be regarded as unwisely brave, if not perverse.”<sup>535</sup> Williams’ point is hard to disagree with: the play is even less frequently performed than *Pericles*, despite its inclusion in the First Folio, and its problems are more difficult to address in performance. As such, it is not surprising that it might be cut differently. The play has been staged four times at the RSC in the last six decades, by John Schlesinger (RST, 1965), Ron Daniels (TOP, 1980), Gregory Doran (RST, 1999), and Simon Godwin (Swan, 2018). In proportional terms, the cuts made to these four productions of *Timon* are generally unlike the overall culling of the Wilkins sections in RSC productions of *Pericles*. Directors at the RSC make a minority of their cuts to the Middleton scenes in *Timon* – from 17.86% in 1965 to 40.17% in 2018 – with the remaining 82.14% to 59.83% coming from scenes authored by Shakespeare, or with mixed authorship. Though each production in turn cut more from Middleton’s scenes than their predecessors, this pales in comparison to directors of *Pericles* unanimously making between 64.66% and 71.62% of their cuts from Wilkins’ scenes.

The first prominent divergence relates to the specifics of its status as a collaborative play. Though *Timon* has long been thought to be collaborative, and Thomas Middleton long suspected of being Shakespeare’s collaborator, the approach to collaboration for *Timon* would have been strikingly different to the approach for *Pericles*. *The New Oxford Shakespeare*’s editors, the Arden third series editors (Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton), and Wiggins and Richardson all argue for slightly

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<sup>535</sup> Williams 1979, p. 161.

different breakdowns of authorial attribution, though there is much overlap.<sup>536</sup> Overall consensus appears to be that Shakespeare wrote 1.1, 2.1, 3.7.25-104, 4.1, 4.3.1-452, and 5.1-5.3, and Middleton 1.2, 3.1-3.6, 3.7.1-24, 3.7.105-115, 4.2.30-51, and 4.3.453-531. Mixed authorship is uniformly suspected of 2.2 and 4.2.1-29. Brian Vickers observes that pre-2002 trends would largely agree with the above allocation, and argues that “studies of Knight, Delius, Fleay, Wright, Wells, Sykes, Lake, and Jackson, drawing as they did on an extensive knowledge of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, using a varied set of approaches, and synthesizing impeccably scholarly work by other writers, have established Middleton’s co-authorship of *Timon* beyond any doubt.”<sup>537</sup> Further, Vickers feels strongly enough about the issue to assert that “newer statistical methods build on, and should be taken in conjunction with, older approaches through verse styles, verbal collocations, and linguistic preferences”, and that “All these methods agree in assigning to Middleton a substantial part of *Timon*”.<sup>538</sup> It is easy to accept three things as most likely true: firstly that Shakespeare collaborated on *Timon*, secondly that this collaborator was Middleton, and thirdly that the attribution of scenes more-or-less follows the consensus outlined above.

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<sup>536</sup> Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane break down the attribution of *Timon* thus: Shakespeare is thought to be the writer of scenes 1, 3, 11.33-92, 12, 14.1-441, 15, 16 and 17; Middleton of scenes 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.1-21, 93-101, 13.30-51 and 14.442-521; and mixed authorship is assumed for scenes 4 and 13.1-29 (Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane 2017, pp. 561-564). Wiggins and Richardson, meanwhile, assign an almost identical distribution: “The authorial shares divide roughly as follows: Shakespeare: sc.1, 3, 11b, 12-13a, 14a, 15-19; Middleton: sc.2, 5-11a, 11c, 13b, 14b. Sc.4 is of inextricably mixed authorship” (Wiggins 2015, V, p. 385). The primary difference is that the New Oxford Shakespeare editors see mixed authorship in 13.1-29, where Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson do not. Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, in the third Arden edition, follow a similar line of attribution: Shakespeare is thought to have written 1.1, 3.7a-b, 4.1, 4.3a and 5.1-5, with Middleton being given 1.2, 3.1-6 and 3.7b, and mixed authorship suspected of 1.2, 2.1-2, and 4.2 (Arden, pp. 402-407).

<sup>537</sup> Vickers 2002, p. 281. See also pp. 270, 277.

<sup>538</sup> Vickers 2002, p. 290.

So in this respect, *Timon* is similar to *Pericles* – the fact of co-authorship, the identity of the co-author, and the distribution of the work have been mostly established (despite some naysayers) for a long time, and gradually refined. But whereas the writing of *Pericles* was almost entirely split into two even halves, this collaboration is much more sporadic, except for Middleton's straight run from 3.1 – 3.6 and Shakespeare's from 5.1 – 5.5. Unlike with *Pericles*, *Timon* does not suffer from a less-coherent first half. Further, *Timon* is a much more unified play in narrative as well as in authorship: where *Pericles* has an episodic plot, *Timon*'s plot is tighter and more cohesive, with just one major shift from the first to second half. It also lacks a clear subplot, except for the poorly developed Alcibiades storyline, which is unrelated to much of the narrative (until it converges crucially at 5.5, making it difficult to cut altogether). Further, Middleton's scenes contain not just exposition but plot. Altogether, it may present more difficulties for the director to primarily make cuts or alterations to Middleton's scenes than it did Wilkins' scenes in *Pericles*.

Other aspects of the text related to its co-authorship are important and come to bear on its performance history – namely that its quality has led to certain suppositions about whether it was ever finished by Shakespeare. E.A.J. Honigmann writes that “If *Timon* was regarded by Shakespeare as properly finished and was ever performed in his lifetime, it must have aroused a unique response”, and assumes that any theoretical audiences “would have been so ‘disengaged’ from *Timon* that it might well have wondered, in many scenes, whether it was watching a tragedy or a freak show”.<sup>539</sup> Rolf Soellner, writing in the late 70s, is less taken with Honigmann's line of reasoning:

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<sup>539</sup> E.A.J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1976), p. ix

According to the presently prevailing opinion, the text of *Timon* in the First Folio reflects a not-quite-finished manuscript of Shakespeare. [...] Implications have crept in that somehow *Timon* is not worthy of the critical attention given to other plays and does not warrant a faithful rendering on the stage.<sup>540</sup>

Soellner's overarching point is that the popular belief that *Timon* is unfinished is credible on the surface, though not conclusive enough, and should in any event not preclude the play from being considered as worthy of critical or theatrical attention: "the text is not as bad as it is sometimes made out to be".<sup>541</sup> He then goes on to say that "It is unfortunate that the textual problems have generally been discussed with the underlying conviction that the play was never performed in the theater".<sup>542</sup>

In fact, regardless of these closely related suspicions about the play's completion and Shakespeare's audience, *Timon* holds up well with modern audiences, and has done for some time. J.C. Maxwell writes that "*Timon* has not been a popular play on the stage, though [...] adaptations by Shadwell and others, not more drastic than those to which some of the major plays were subjected, were performed oftener than might have been expected."<sup>543</sup> Its early, post-Restoration stage history, as with much of the Shakespearean canon, takes the form of adaptations generally carried out to address shifting sensibilities. But its modern stage history is not insignificant, despite a brief period of lesser popularity. Gary Jay Williams notes that "*Timon* has been one of the least produced plays in the canon" as of the 70s, and yet "There have been more

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<sup>540</sup> Soellner 1979, p. 186.

<sup>541</sup> Soellner 1979, p. 187.

<sup>542</sup> Soellner 1979, p. 194.

<sup>543</sup> J.C. Maxwell, ed., *Timon of Athens: New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. xxii.

productions of *Timon* in the last thirty years than there were in the last one hundred and thirty.”<sup>544</sup> The play clearly experienced an uptick in performance frequency, and continues now to enjoy occasional theatrical success, in spite of Maxwell’s assertion that *Timon* “certainly lacks many of the qualities which make for theatrical success, and it is natural that it should have had more interest for readers than for theatregoers”.<sup>545</sup> This supports A.D. Nuttall’s diplomatic, understated assertion that “although I grant that *Timon* is an untidy, ill-finished piece of work, I do not concede that it is a bad play.”<sup>546</sup>

Francelia Butler observes that “the process of familiarizing audiences with *Timon* began with the production of the play by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in the summer of 1965. Popular criticism of this production suggests the variety of opinion still extant as to the meaning of the play”.<sup>547</sup> Butler also references comments made by Norman Sanders on the production, which point to the 1965 *Timon* being received better in some circles than Peter Hall’s *Hamlet* of the same year. A.D. Nuttall, writing of Ron Daniels’ 1980 production, says “I saw Richard Pasco play the part of Timon at the Other Place in Stratford. It was an immensely exciting performance, operating equally on the emotions and the intellect”.<sup>548</sup> Meanwhile, Abigail Rokison-Woodall, writing more recently, observes that despite *Timon*’s relative unpopularity on the stage, it “has seen some remarkably successful productions in modern times”, and singles out Gregory Doran’s 1999 production.<sup>549</sup> Most recently, Simon Godwin’s 2018 production in the Swan Theatre

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<sup>544</sup> Gary Jay Williams, in Soellner 1979, p. 161.

<sup>545</sup> Maxwell 1957, p. xxii.

<sup>546</sup> A.D. Nuttall, *Timon of Athens: Twayne’s New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1989), p. xxii.

<sup>547</sup> Francelia Butler, *The Strange Critical Fortunes of Shakespeare’s Timon of Athens* (Ames, IA: The Iowa State University Press, 1966), p. 147.

<sup>548</sup> Nuttall 1989, p. xi.

<sup>549</sup> Rokison-Woodall, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Nicholas Hytner*, p. 148.

earned an assortment of positive reviews.<sup>550</sup> Demonstrably, *Timon* is a play that surprises its audiences (and reviewers), despite (or perhaps because of) its obscurity.

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Criticisms of *Timon of Athens* suggest a variety of aspects that directors may seek to redress in their cut. Abigail Rokison-Woodall, noting that *Timon* is “one of [Shakespeare’s] most rarely performed” plays, argues that it “lacks key human relationships” and “finishes anti-climactically with the title character’s offstage death”; these reasons and more render it “an unpopular choice for the stage”.<sup>551</sup> John Jowett critiques the “apparently untheatrical device” in the play’s (largely Shakespearean) second half, of “having almost a third of its action made up of the single sequence in which Timon, dwelling statically in the woods, is visited by a succession of Athenians”.<sup>552</sup> Based solely on the proportion of lines cut from 4.3 (the first woods visit scene) to the play’s end, all four directors would appear to agree with these criticisms. They each make extensive cuts to the latter portion of the play, especially Godwin. Both Godwin and Schlesinger make a number of rewrites to these scenes, with Schlesinger’s rewrite amalgamating some of the action from 4.3-5.2, and cutting 5.3 entirely. Godwin, in rewriting much of 5.2 and cutting all of 5.3 and 5.4, remedies some of the staccato

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<sup>550</sup> Positive reviews include those by Ian Shuttleworth in the *Financial Times*, Dominic Cavendish in the *Telegraph*, Michael Billington in the *Guardian*, and Michael Davies in *WhatsOnStage*, linked respectively: <<https://www.ft.com/content/af865316-ff94-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521>>, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/timon-athens-review-rsc-swan-stratford-upon-avon-kathryn-hunter/>>, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/dec/14/timon-of-athens-review-kathryn-hunter>>, and <[https://www.whatsonstage.com/stratford-upon-avon-theatre/reviews/timon-of-athens-swan-rsc-kathryn-hunter\\_48183.html](https://www.whatsonstage.com/stratford-upon-avon-theatre/reviews/timon-of-athens-swan-rsc-kathryn-hunter_48183.html)>.

<sup>551</sup> Rokison-Woodall *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Nicholas Hytner*, pp. 147-8.

<sup>552</sup> John Jowett, ed., *Timon of Athens: Oxford World’s Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.

feeling to the play's conclusion, while Doran's tactic of cutting the Soldier scene at 5.4 and most of the preceding scene – thus allowing 5.2 to run directly through a fragment of 5.3 and into 5.5 in one single dramatic unit – seems to be an alternative attempt at addressing this issue.

Godwin's rewrites of *Timon* are significant, particularly in the places where he interpolates from other plays, a tradition he traces back to Nicholas Hytner's NT production of the play. After Timon's death and epitaph are announced, Alcibiades mourns Timon and addresses his followers and the Senators. Here, Godwin cuts two lines from Alcibiades' final speech in the text, and expands it with text from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (5.4.164-167) and *Henry V* (3.3.42-44, 49-50), albeit with some edits. Godwin's edit is reproduced below, with lines originating from *Two Gentlemen* denoted by (\*), and lines from *Henry V* by (^).

#### **ALCIBIADES**

Though thou abhorr'dst in us our human griefs  
Scorn'dst our brain's flow and those our droplets which  
From miserly nature fall, yet rich conceit  
Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye  
On thy low grave, on faults forgiven.  
Entombed upon the very hem of the sea  
She shall be laid.

\*These rebel ones that I have kept withal\*

\*Are men imbued with worthy qualities.\*

\*Forgive them what they have committed here\*

\*And let them be recalled from their exile.\*

^What say you? Will you yield and then avoid?^

^Or guilty in defence be thus destroyed?^

#### **LUCIA [a friend of Timon]**

^Our expectation hath this day an end^

^Enter our gates, dispose of us and ours^

^For we no longer are defensible.^

Bring me into your city,  
And I will use the olive with my sword,  
Make war breed peace, make peace stint war.

be this certain,  
If thou conquer Athens, the benefit  
Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name  
Whose repetition will be dogg'd with curses;  
And remain to the ensuing age abhorr'd.

These re-writes also relate to other, lesser-considered problems with the play's structure, for instance in the bulk of its third act (written almost entirely by Middleton). Though it contains much that is useful (the rejection of Timon's pleas from his friends must be kept largely intact to elicit any kind of sympathetic response for his character trajectory), it functions as a mirror of the structural issue in the play's second half,

257



though rather than a static procession, it presents a procession in rapidly shifting settings that is nonetheless repetitive, as Timon's betrayal is compounded. Godwin, recognising the pacing problem of the first half of the third act, combines 3.1 – 3.3 into a single scene. The three scenes are cut down and spliced together, so that the three primary interactions happen simultaneously, one bit of conversation between two characters in one location followed by the same thing with other characters in another location, and so on.<sup>554</sup> Godwin removes the need for three distinct locations at three distinct times: the repetition is less drawn out, but the betrayal is made even more palpable than before. The other flaw in the third act is the long Alcibiades scene which, as discussed earlier, was cut in its entirety by Godwin, further streamlining this act, and shortening the time before the interval. Directors are inclined to make (noticeable) textual and structural changes to *Timon* due to its problems and its relative obscurity. Godwin, years after his production, considered from memory the significant changes made to his production to include "importing text from other plays, for example *Coriolanus*", and "re-arranging the visits of the friends to cut between those rather than having them sequentially".<sup>555</sup> These interventions were indeed significant.

Another key problem with the play relates back to both Rokison-Woodall's and Jowett's criticisms of the play's anti-climactic end and the static build-up to it. It is commonly suspected that the play is unfinished; as Rolf Soellner writes, "The theory of *Timon* as in some manner unfinished [...] goes back to Ulrici and was developed by

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<sup>554</sup> This is an example of what Toby Malone and Aili Huber describe as a "useful structural innovation [...] to merge scenes together, in an "interleaved" style which can highlight similarities in theme or structure. This allows the audience to effectively see two scenes at once, juxtaposed in real time" (Malone and Huber 2022, p. 54).

<sup>555</sup> Godwin 2022.

Wilhelm Wendlandt in 1888”.<sup>556</sup> Key to this argument are the three contradictory epitaphs attributed to Timon in the final two scenes of the play. The first is in the scene with the soldier’s short monologue at 5.4, wherein he reads out a two-line epitaph:

Timon is dead, who hath outstretch'd his span:  
Some beast rear'd this; there does not live a man. (5.4.3-4)

The play concludes in the next scene with the titular character’s offstage death, and the relaying of two more epitaph couplets:

Here lies a wretched corse, of wretched soul bereft:  
Seek not my name: a plague consume you wicked caitiffs left!  
Here lie I, Timon; who, alive, all living men did hate:  
Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay not here thy gait. (5.5.70-1)<sup>557</sup>

Not only do the 5.5 epitaphs not match the 5.4 epitaph at all, but their internal contradictions (“Seek not my name” vs. “Here lie I, Timon”) make them largely incompatible together. The lack of clarity here may be accounted for by textual problems: there are similar instances in plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*, in which repetition seems indicative of textual revision, and either Shakespeare or a compositor accidentally showing their working, as it were, on the way to the final version. This is what E.A.J. Honigmann would call a “false start”, wherein Shakespeare’s first attempts are accidentally left in; he echoes H.J. Oliver in singling out Timon’s

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<sup>556</sup> Soellner 1979, p. 187.

<sup>557</sup> In the Arden third series edition, Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton remove the first couplet as it “contradicts” the latter. They also argue that “it is omitted in most performances” even though most textual editors leave it in place. Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, eds., *Timon of Athens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 338n.

epitaphs as a clear example.<sup>558</sup> As Honigmann, Oliver, Dawson and Minton unanimously point out, the two epitaphs in 5.5 represent two different versions of the epitaph recounted by Plutarch, suggesting that Shakespeare and Middleton were unsure of which epitaph to use, included both as a placeholder, and for some reason both were retained into the printing process. This would support the unfinished text theory.<sup>559</sup> Schlesinger leaves all three epitaphs in place; both Daniels and Doran leave the two contradictory epitaphs in 5.5 but cut the whole soldier scene (5.4); and Godwin is the only director at the RSC to cut all but one epitaph (the third).

This further explains why so much attention is paid to cutting and rearranging the play's latter acts, despite the prominence of Shakespeare's hand in writing them. In terms of the problematic epitaphs, further to Schlesinger tidying up the Soldier's speech (overtly declaring an intention to relay the news to Alcibiades, and referencing the wider plot *vis a vis* the threat to Athens) and Daniels, Doran and Godwin cutting it outright, further attention is also paid to the epitaphs in 5.5. Doran allows Flavius to read the epitaph, while Godwin allocates both the immediately preceding "Timon's dead" speech, and the epitaph itself (though abridged to just the latter couplet), to Flavius. In both scenarios, this seems an attempt to correct the oddity of such a removed non-character from discovering and relaying the news of Timon's death (particularly if this Messenger in 5.5 is the Soldier from 5.4), and of the epitaph being read out by Alcibiades, who hardly interacted with Timon on stage (especially compared with

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<sup>558</sup> E.A.J. Honigmann, 'Shakespeare's deletions and false starts, mark 2', in *Shakespeare's Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and Reception*, ed. by Richard Meek, Jane Pickard & Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 165-183 (p. 168).

<sup>559</sup> That said, A.D. Nuttall offers an alternative reading, that "what in Plutarch is a nice contrast" becomes, in Shakespeare and Middleton, "a simple contradiction, or something very close to contradiction" (Nuttall 1989, p. 137).

faithful Flavius). Doran and Godwin seem invested in imbuing an anticlimactic ending with greater emotional depth, to compensate for its lack of spectacle. To further this effect, Godwin's staging had Timon's body carried out onto the stage, rendering her death undeniable.<sup>560</sup>

This difficult ending relates implicitly to one of the greatest problems the play has to address in performance: is it a tragedy, and if so, exactly what kind of tragedy is it?<sup>561</sup> Larry S. Champion, who explicitly includes it in the late tragedies, observes the fault in *Timon's* claim to tragedy as resulting from Timon's characterisation being "too rigid in its movement from prodigality to misanthropy", and sees the flaws of *Timon* as reflecting "the difficulties resulting from Shakespeare's shifting tragic perspective".<sup>562</sup> *Timon* as an imperfect tragic figure, and *Timon* as an imperfect tragic play, are closely related concepts. Other factors include the balance of the tragic and the comic; as Susan Snyder notes, in "*Romeo and Juliet* through *Hamlet* and *Othello* to *King Lear* [...]" traditional comic structures and assumptions operate in several ways to shape tragedy."<sup>563</sup> What is the comic underpinning of *Timon*? The brief appearance of a Fool in the play's second act, as discussed above, is hardly celebrated by critics (and generally cut from performance); and though Timon's proto-trolling of the senators in 5.2 is a good bit, it is not sustained throughout the play. In many ways, the tone is bleaker than such a tragedy as *King Lear*, despite having a much lower body count and fewer tragic

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<sup>560</sup> Timon, in Godwin's production, was played by Kathryn Hunter, and pronouns were changed throughout the play to she/her/hers, and titles to reflect Lady Timon (or, where metre prohibited, gender-neutral words like "honour" in place of "lordship").

<sup>561</sup> In terms of Shakespeare's development as a tragic playwright, the play is difficult to place: scholarly volumes on the "middle tragedies" tend to stop short of *Timon*, whereas similar volumes on the "late tragedies" pick up just after *Timon*, rendering it in the grey space between the two.

<sup>562</sup> Larry S. Champion, *Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1976), pp. 201-2.

<sup>563</sup> Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 4.

occurrences. E.A.J. Honigmann's also expresses ambivalence towards *Timon*, and notes it "differs profoundly from the tragedies of the same period", having "more in common with *Troilus and Cressida*, another play whose genre is hard to define".<sup>564</sup> As I have illustrated in the earlier, genre-specific chapters, genre is an important contextual apparatus to guide the cut: if a director wants to stage a tragedy, they must shape the play accordingly in their cut.

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Many of the cuts made to *Timon* in the last sixty years have reflected the play's notorious generic, textual, authorial, and structural difficulties. And yet directors seem keen not to fully eradicate *all* of these difficulties, despite smoothing over some of them. Clearly there is something about *Timon*'s texture that is wrapped up in its ambiguity. Much critical thought has been spent on what Maxwell refers to as *Timon*'s "most obvious structural peculiarity [...] its division into two sharply contrasting halves".<sup>565</sup> Though of course this is not unusual for Shakespeare's plays – earlier plays, including *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as such later plays as *The Winter's Tale*, seem to be split, generically speaking, down the middle, with the first half of the play occupying one generic space and the second half another. Rather than a "structural peculiarity", such a feature is regarded as intentional, even experimental, in those other, better known plays. Champion argues:

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<sup>564</sup> Honigmann 1976, p. ix.

<sup>565</sup> Maxwell 1957, p. xxiv.

the play lacks coherence and consequently fails to achieve either the power or the significance of Shakespeare's earlier works. [...] The protagonist's final moments, unrelieved by even the slightest suggestions of insight into the human condition, are increasingly aberrational; as his attitude grows progressively more extreme and illogical, the spectators' dislocation becomes complete.<sup>566</sup>

But the play's shift need not be seen as jarring: in fact, as Coppélia Kahn posits, it "cannot be said [...] that the misanthrope of the play's second half commands more sympathy or credibility than the universal benefactor of its first half. Both his states of mind seem rooted in primitive fantasy rather than being rational responses to reality".<sup>567</sup> Thus, we are led to be detached from Timon throughout, not just in his move away from civilisation – both positions he occupies are lofty, characterised by superiority over all others, initially benign, later malignant. Not only does this facet not impede the play's success, it determines it: many of Shakespeare's tragic figures have similar throughlines in their characters. Timon's motivations are not too dissimilar from Lear's, at their base.

It is unsurprising that no director at the RSC has attempted to reconcile this supposedly problematic duality within the play; further, there may be an unfashionable, Victorian attitude in seeking to improve the play's latter portion, with Gary Jay Williams noting a nineteenth-century "theatrical revival" of the play, in which a "moral case could be earnestly advanced as compensation for the play's defects, so long as the necessary considerations of propriety were met and the second half of the play curtailed".<sup>568</sup> There is something to be said for finding a way to perform (and spectate) within the difficult tension between the play's disparate elements, its fractious halves, its noticeably

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<sup>566</sup> Champion 1976, p. 217.

<sup>567</sup> Coppélia Kahn, 'Shakespeare's Classical tragedies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 218-239 (p. 236).

<sup>568</sup> Williams, in Soellner 1979, p. 162.

different styles resulting from collaboration. John Jowett, in a programme note for the RSC's most recent production (Godwin, 2018), notes that:

Where the play is not quite seamless, there is a disjunction between two authors. The harsh comedy of gift-giving, loans and debt is Middleton's leading contribution to the play. [...] But the play was probably Shakespeare's idea in the first place. If he invited Middleton to bring in the element of city comedy, he himself took on the task of forging the play as a fiercely reductive version of tragedy. There's no escape from it: when Timon is uttering his most offensive misanthropy, he is speaking Shakespeare's words. [...] As a collaboration between Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens* is unique: an imperfect, vibrant and disturbing dialogue between two distinctive, contesting and complementary voices.<sup>569</sup>

And so the grey areas that characterise *Timon*, which are widely seen as obstacles for the director as well as the scholar, may in fact be its unique selling point.

Generally, the similarities between all four productions occur on the macro scale: while the specifics differ, there are overall trends that endure at the RSC. Each director primarily thins the play slightly, for concerns of length and pace: longer scenes are cut more extensively, and generally proportionally, and little is done to the play's overall structure. Where structural changes occur, it is generally with the intention of tidying up the first and final acts, with Schlesinger and Godwin taking on this work much more extensively than Daniels or Doran. There is not a single scene that remains entirely uncut by every director – but most of the scenes which are uncut by several directors are scenes thought to be by Middleton, while Shakespeare's scenes are consistently more drastically cut. Perhaps this is unsurprising in a play where Shakespeare is thought to have written over fifty per cent of the lines, and Middleton about thirty-five per cent

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<sup>569</sup> John Jowett, 'Vibrant Voices', programme note, *Timon of Athens*, dir. Simon Godwin, Swan Theatre, RSC, 2018.

(with just over a tenth of the play being of ostensibly mixed authorship). Many of Middleton's scenes are important to the play's logic, and therefore require more careful preserving. 1.2 and 2.2, with Middletonian and mixed authorship respectively, contain key plot elements, while Middleton's third act sequence, as discussed above, cements the betrayal of Timon by his friends. In order to achieve maximum sympathy for Timon's emotional journey in the play's second half, these signposts must be preserved.

One final consideration is that, as *Timon of Athens* is one of Shakespeare's shortest plays, it requires relatively less cutting for running time; indeed directors are clearly able to freely make additions to the text, without cutting masses, and without then instigating an untenable running time. The same can be said of *Pericles*, a similarly short play which is cut in similar ways and to similar proportions. As with *Pericles*, a play that is similarly lesser-known, lesser-performed, and maligned due to its nature as a co-authored play, there is some consensus in the RSC's practice to cutting *Timon of Athens*, though it is not as straightforward or predictable. This is at least partially rooted in the play's complex generic assignation, a problem shared by another collaborative play – and Shakespeare's last – *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

### ***The Two Noble Kinsmen: 'Almost-But-Not-Quite'***

Shakespeare's final known play is also the last one to appear in print. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was first published posthumously, in a quarto of 1634, and its title page makes explicit reference to its two authors, John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, both pre-deceased. This title page renders *Kinsmen*, in the words of Lois Potter, "the only



acknowledged Shakespeare collaboration”.<sup>570</sup> Vickers elaborates that “The co-authorship of this play was affirmed by the very first document mentioning it, the entry in the Stationers’ Register for 8 April 1634”.<sup>571</sup> Like *Pericles*, *Kinsmen* was excluded from the First Folio, and the two plays are now the only non-Folio plays to be widely inducted into Shakespeare’s canon. Their being excluded from the Folio is a key determining factor in their minor status. Potter explains how “most readers had never seen *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and probably never would see it” in 1997, when it was “the only Shakespeare play (if we ignore *Edward III* and *Sir Thomas More*) never to have been filmed or televised.”<sup>572</sup> Despite being generally accepted (now) as a Shakespearean play – and perhaps in part because of Shakespeare’s minority status in contributing to this play – it does not enjoy the level of popularity of Shakespeare’s other plays (even the other obscure titles). For the five RSC productions of *Pericles* and four of *Timon of Athens*, there have only been two of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, both in the Swan Theatre: the first, by Barry Kyle in 1986, and the second, by Blanche McIntyre in 2016.<sup>573</sup>

The unfavourable situation with attribution for *The Two Noble Kinsmen* explains some of its relative obscurity. The authorship situation was for a long time a contentious issue and one with little consensus. Paul Bertram sought “to establish that *The Two*

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<sup>570</sup> Lois Potter, ed., *The Two Noble Kinsmen: Revised Edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 148.

<sup>571</sup> Vickers 2002, p. 402.

<sup>572</sup> Potter 2015, p. 164.

<sup>573</sup> It was a deliberate choice to programme it exactly thirty years later. In his opening programme note for the 2016 production of *Kinsmen*, RSC Artistic Director Gregory Doran points to McIntyre’s production, alongside Loveday Ingram’s production of Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*, as “mark[ing] the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Swan Theatre [...] Both were part of the Swan’s opening season in 1986”. Were it not for this occasion, *Kinsmen* could still have been waiting for an RSC revival; in Doran’s ongoing project of staging the whole canon by 2023, to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of the First Folio, it could easily have been overlooked, due to its absence from that collection. The other Shakespeare plays staged at the RSC from Autumn through to winter 2016/17 include *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, each play coming from the last ten years of Shakespeare’s life, and associated with his more mature period of writing. Thus, by virtue of programming, *Kinsmen* joined a conversation with these other plays to explore the latter years of Shakespeare’s career, at the end of the fourth centenary of his death.

*Noble Kinsmen* was written entirely by Shakespeare and at the same time to show that this play” shared much with “Shakespeare’s finest works.”<sup>574</sup> On the other hand, Donald K. Hedrick argued for the exact opposite, that Shakespeare had absolutely no involvement in the writing of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: “the play thematically explores the nature of artistic rivalry, in such a way as to suggest strongly that one of its collaborators was not, as is customarily thought, Shakespeare”.<sup>575</sup> Referring to the 1634 Quarto title page, A.F. Hopkinson writes that “Shakespeare’s name occupies second place. Most critics are agreed that Fletcher is responsible for a great part of the work; the doubtful or disputed point is whether Shakespeare had or had not any hand in the composition whatever.”<sup>576</sup>

Michael D. Bristol explains how Shakespeare’s canonical authority primarily derives from the First Folio, which is why *Kinsmen* is particularly difficult: “the First Folio establishes the principle of closure and offers the guarantee that it will put an end to the sporadic appearance of more plays by Shakespeare [...] *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is still regarded as almost-but-not-quite canonical, neither definitively included nor definitively excluded.”<sup>577</sup> Bertram’s argument that Shakespeare was the sole author upholds the genius, while denying his involvement, *à la* Hedrick, upholds the First Folio. This knotty issue may relate to why the play is so infrequently staged, as Hugh Richmond sets out:

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<sup>574</sup> Paul Bertram, *Shakespeare and The Two Noble Kinsmen* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>575</sup> Donald K. Hedrick, “Be Rough with Me”: The Collaborative Arenas of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Charles H. Frey (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), pp. 45-77 (p. 46).

<sup>576</sup> A.F. Hopkinson, ed., *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (London: M.E. Sims & Co, 1894), p. ii.

<sup>577</sup> Michael D. Bristol, ‘*The Two Noble Kinsmen*: Shakespeare and the Problem of Authority’, in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Charles H. Frey, pp. 78-92 (p. 79).

Several [...] plays have suffered critical disfavor from assumptions of incoherence or inferiority because of the possibility of shared authorship between Shakespeare and some lesser, supposedly incompatible playwright. These suspicions of their unity and worth have discouraged the plays' production or speciously justified condescending or openly contemptuous review. For these reasons few major companies have risked production of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; indeed, it never appeared on the public stage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>578</sup>

Though its performance history has improved somewhat since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is still much neglected.

Once the play is agreed to be collaborative, the split of its collaboration must be ascertained. Again, consensus was initially hard to come by. In 1989 Charles H. Frey observed that "Some say Shakespeare wrote all of it; some say he wrote none of it; many divide the play between Shakespeare and Fletcher, but few agree as to the precise division."<sup>579</sup> The "precise division" seems more widely agreed some thirty years later. *The New Oxford Shakespeare* editors allocate the scenes as follows: for Shakespeare, 1.1-4, 2.1, 3.1-2, 5.1.18-68 (from the exit of Theseus to the end of the scene), 5.2, 5.3, 5.5, and 5.6; Fletcher is given 2.2-6, 3.3-6, 4.1-2, 5.1.1-17 and 5.4, while 1.5 and 4.3 are of mixed/disputed authorship, and the editors note that "certain errors and inconsistencies in the quarto text suggest that the play has been subject to revision".<sup>580</sup> Wiggins and Richardson largely agree.<sup>581</sup> This jumbled split recalls the distribution in

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<sup>578</sup> Hugh Richmond, 'Performance as Criticism: *The Two Noble Kinsmen*', in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Charles H. Frey, pp. 163-185 (p. 163).

<sup>579</sup> Charles H. Frey, 'Collaborating with Shakespeare: After the Final Play', in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Charles H. Frey, pp. 31-44 (p. 31).

<sup>580</sup> Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane 2017, p. 590.

<sup>581</sup> Wiggins 2015, VI, p. 340. They note that "The authorial shares were: Fletcher: 2.1b-5, 3.3-6, 4.1-3, 5.1a, 5.2; Shakespeare: Prologue, 1.1-5, 2.1a, 3.1-2, 5.1b, 5.3-4, Epilogue."

*Timon* more than *Pericles*. John Jowett, writing in a programme note for McIntyre's 2016 production, perfectly sums up the consensus around who authored what:

In the scheme of relationships in *Kinsmen*, Shakespeare occupies the position of Theseus, as senior authority figure, but also of kinsman, as friend and equal. This tension is exactly reflected in the author's contributions. Shakespeare wrote the monumental, ceremonial, linguistically dense, imagistically strange scenes over which Theseus presides at the beginning and end of the play. The lighter and more airy scenes, showing Palamon and Arcite's rivalry in love for Emilia, involved both writers. Despite the echoes of Ophelia in the madness of the Jailer's Daughter, Fletcher was responsible.<sup>582</sup>

Jowett is not alone in seeing the act of collaboration mirrored in certain aspects of the play's plot and themes.

This also pre-empts approaches to cutting the play in the two productions the RSC has staged in the last sixty years. Both Kyle's 1986 production and McIntyre's 2016 production make the majority of their cuts to Shakespeare's sections, albeit by a very thin margin for McIntyre. Where cuts in *Pericles* are made mostly to Wilkins' sections, and cuts in *Timon of Athens* are made mostly to Shakespeare's sections, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is much more aligned with *Timon*. Unlike *Timon*, Shakespeare wrote *less than half* of *Kinsmen*, and yet receives – particularly for Kyle – the lion's share of the cuts. Even McIntyre's cut leaves Fletcher with over two hundred and fifty lines more than Shakespeare; Kyle's cut has Shakespeare's portion of the play some four-hundred and fifty lines shorter, reduced from forty-three per cent of the overall play to about thirty-seven per cent. Even the more dramatic cuts made to *Timon* retain Shakespeare's status

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<sup>582</sup> John Jowett, 'Shared Imagination', programme note, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, dir. Blanche McIntyre, Swan Theatre, RSC, 2016.

as the foremost writer of the piece; for *Kinsmen*, it seems there is no draw for the director to reverse what has often been seen as a problem for scholars, that Shakespeare did not write most of the play. I propose that this relates directly to the narrative threads of the play that Jowett outlines above. His expansion of how the play's thematic concerns manifest themselves in scene attribution is helpful in clarifying why Shakespeare's scenes are more extensively cut. It may well make sense to cut more of Shakespeare's scenes if they are so "monumental, ceremonial, linguistically dense, imagistically strange", and to preserve as much of the "lighter and more airy" scenes.<sup>583</sup> Meanwhile, the "echoes of Ophelia" is the key to understanding how and why the Jailer's Daughter's scenes are cut for performance.

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The purpose of this chapter has been to explore how directors might cut the co-authored plays differently; cutting according to who authored which scenes has been the most significant test of that. *Kinsmen* is a tricky test subject to begin with, due to a small sample size of only two productions making it harder to establish trends of recurring directorial interventions. That said, the limited evidence available, some of which I will lay out here, supports the overall argument that this chapter is building to: that the authorship question is largely a question for scholars, and that it is secondary to theatrical concerns. Much of Wilkins is frequently excised from *Pericles* because his sections are generally thought to be weaker in the quality of their writing and their

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<sup>583</sup> Though Jowett seemingly gives a blanket-attribution of these scenes to both authors, many of them are thought to be solely by Fletcher.

necessity to the plot. The same was clearly true of *Timon*, where significant problems with the extant text – in Shakespearean and Middletonian scenes alike – demand more attention than the authorship question. *Kinsmen* is different on a very basic level: the text is in good shape and does not require the same radical attention. Cuts are therefore made in service of plot and taste, and this is why Shakespeare finds himself more frequently cut out of *Kinsmen* than his collaborator Fletcher. The Arcite/Palamon scenes form the play’s A plot, while the Jailer’s Daughter scenes are the B plot. The (“linguistically dense”) Theseus storyline, written by Shakespeare, mostly frames the A plot. The Palamon/Arcite scenes, the (initially “lighter and more airy”) core of the play, are somewhat divided amongst the playwrights, though more often than not Fletcher is the primary hand. And Fletcher is entirely responsible for the Jailer’s Daughter subplot. A director may well want to thin the political framing (Theseus) so the interpersonal drama comes to the fore.<sup>584</sup> To tie this discussion together, I am going to look briefly at key examples of how each of the narrative threads of the play are cut: the Jailer’s Daughter, Palamon/Arcite, and Theseus, and how Theseus relates to the Prologue and Epilogue.

Why does the Jailer’s Daughter subplot receive far less pruning than the main plot? For starters, the subplot is well-written and *feels* quite Shakespearean. In the words of Bate and Rasmussen, the scenes with the Jailer’s Daughter are “written by Fletcher in the style of Shakespeare”.<sup>585</sup> If the scenes are *in the style of* Shakespeare, it would make sense to preserve them, especially at the RSC. To allow an audience likely familiar with Shakespeare’s style to hear the Jailer’s Daughter is to allow them a sense

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<sup>584</sup> This is comparable to productions of *Hamlet* which, as we saw in Chapter One, cut Fortinbras in order to refocus the play as a domestic tragedy.

<sup>585</sup> Bate and Rasmussen 2007, p. 2356.

of familiarity with the play; and the echoes of Ophelia in the Jailer's Daughter may well resonate, further connecting this play to Shakespeare's canon. As gender imbalances in Shakespeare are increasingly scrutinised, the Jailer's Daughter – with her numerous scenes and speeches, and a through-line from the play's second act to its final act – may even supersede Ophelia. McIntyre's production was concerned with this dynamic; in a short essay for the programme, Ruth Goodman illustrates how the characters of Emilia and the Jailer's Daughter reflect "popular notions of female experience in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century", an idea which directly relates back to the main storyline of the two feuding men: "For women in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, love and attraction were dangerous things: strong enough to lead men to fight each other; powerful enough to send women mad."<sup>586</sup> Thus the Jailer's Daughter's plight is inextricable from Emilia's grief, and both women's emotional journeys wrapped up in the Palamon/Arcite storyline. Further, not only did the role unarguably launch Imogen Stubbs' career when she performed it in Barry Kyle's 1986 production, but, as Dieter Mehl notes, "many found Imogen Stubbs's portrayal of the Jailer's Daughter to be the most memorable feature".<sup>587</sup> Clearly this is a character with exceptional dramatic potential, as well as a much-needed female voice in a play dominated by male desires.

The most drastic change that Kyle makes to the Jailer's Daughter scenes is moving the soliloquy scene at 3.4 to the end of 3.2, merging the two separate soliloquy scenes into one, and having the dramatic action of 3.3 run straight into 3.5. On a dramaturgical level, this makes sense: if one of the issues with the Jailer's Daughter

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<sup>586</sup> Ruth Goodman, 'Women In Love', programme note, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, dir. Blanche McIntyre, Swan Theatre, RSC, 2016.

<sup>587</sup> Dieter Mehl, 'The Two Noble Kinsmen: A Modern Perspective', in *Folger Shakespeare Library: The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), pp. 273-292 (p. 290).

subplot is that it disrupts the main dramatic thrust of the other scenes, consolidating two interruptions into one minimises the halting back-and-forth that particularly troubles the third act, and allows both A and B plots the space they deserve. Kyle also makes a number of cuts to these speeches. In 3.2, the first half of the speech is untouched, but the second half is reduced significantly (with strikethrough denoting Kyle's cuts):

[...] I'll set it down  
 He's torn to pieces; they howled many together,  
 And then they fed on him; ~~so much for that.~~  
~~Be bold to ring the bell.~~ How stand I then?  
 All's charred when he is gone. No, no, I lie.  
~~My father's to be hanged for his escape;~~  
~~Myself to beg, if I prized life so much~~  
~~As to deny my act, but that I would not,~~  
~~Should I try death by dozens.~~ I am moped;  
 Food took I none these two days;  
 Sipped some water. I have not closed mine eyes  
 Save when my lids scoured off their brine. Alas,  
 Dissolve, my life! Let not my sense unsettle,  
~~Lest I should drown, or stab, or hang myself.~~  
~~O state of nature, fail together in me,~~  
~~Since thy best props are warped!~~ So, which way now?  
~~The best way is the next way to a grave;~~  
~~Each errant step beside is torment. Lo,~~  
~~The moon is down, the crickets chirp, the screech owl~~  
~~Calls in the dawn. All offices are done~~  
~~Save what I fail in. But the point is this—~~  
~~An end, and that is all.~~ (3.1.17b-38)

Kyle cuts references to “death”, to the Jailer’s Daughter “drown, or stab, or hang[ing]” herself, and finally to “an end”. He also cuts concern with her father’s fate, and the mounting sense of pressure, which serve to contextualise the character’s mental deterioration. The reference to drowning herself is particularly evocative of Ophelia;



these cuts cumulatively may well be part of an effort to distance the character from Ophelia comparisons, particularly because, unlike Ophelia, the Jailer's Daughter does not actually drown by the play's end. Redemption is still possible. Further, lines he moves over from 3.4 serve a similar function, and so the effect is expediency.

McIntyre, meanwhile, cuts nothing from 3.2; the Jailer's Daughter is generally not cut much in McIntyre's production. In addition to preserving female voices, the Jailer's Daughter is also important as a conduit between the action of the play and the emotional response of the audience, especially in these scenes: no other character addresses the audience so intimately. McIntyre does cut four lines from 3.4: "he would tell me / News from all parts o' th' world; then would I make / A carrack of a cockleshell, and sail / By the east and northeast to the king of pygmies, / For he tells fortunes rarely." This is a sensible cut, as not only do these lines not contribute much to the meaning of the speech overall, but audience members may not be aware of what "a carrack of a cockleshell" is, and the term "pygmy" may be seen as politically incorrect.<sup>588</sup>

Pragmatic cuts often impact the Palamon/Arcite scenes too. There are two incidental, almost throwaway lines that affect portrayals of Palamon and Arcite, towards which a director arguably must pay particular attention. The first is at 2.1.51-2, where the Jailer's Daughter observes that "Arcite is the lower of the twain", and the second is at 4.1.82, where the Wooer describes the Jailer's Daughter saying "Palamon was a tall young man". Arguably the characters are being described by contrast: Palamon is tall, and Arcite is shorter than Palamon.<sup>589</sup> Naturally these references may contradict casting

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<sup>588</sup> Consider, just three years before McIntyre's production, the controversy that arose from a Conservative MP using the term to patronise protestors, covered at length in this piece on *The Guardian*: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/08/is-the-word-pygmy-racist>>.

<sup>589</sup> There are other references, though, to the two men being perhaps interchangeable in appearance and/or stature: Emilia's long soliloquy at the start of 4.2 is one example, in which she first describes

decisions, and so, as Kyle did in 1986, it may be more sensible to cut both of these lines. McIntyre, meanwhile, cuts only the second mention (as part of a general streamlining of the Wooer's longer speeches here / the scene in general), which means that Palamon is no longer described as being tall, but Arcite is still described as being the "lower" of the two. Though there is another reading of that line, and it depends on staging more than casting: where the two are positioned in relation to one another in 2.1 when the Jailer and his Daughter are watching and commenting on them. Furthermore, 2.1 is thought to be written by Shakespeare, 4.1 by Fletcher; establishing such continuity in a very minor aspect of the characters seems unlikely. Cuts made to Palamon and Arcite generally throughout the play, as well as to the heavily cut Theseus sections, may be the flip-side to preserving the Jailer's Daughter in the interest of gender parity.

But again, practical concerns abound. The play's third longest scene, 1.1, written by Shakespeare, is cut by over a third (Kyle) and over a fifth (McIntyre). This is a higher proportion of cuts than Fletcher's scenes faced. Yet this is very easily explained without considering authorship: the first scene contains a lot of exposition, and though it is necessary to setting up the context of the play, it delays the arrival of the titular kinsmen. Authorship questions must take a back-seat to more immediately pressing theatrical concerns. The play's final act, unsurprisingly, is thinned too, the dramatic action enlivened by a more frantic movement towards the conclusion. Of the four long

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Palamon as merely a "foil" to Arcite (line 26), "swart and meager" (line 27), and shortly thereafter decries Arcite as "a changeling to [Palamon], a mere gypsy" (line 44). Neither Kyle nor McIntyre cut these descriptors, even though they appear to be contradictory, or else to suggest that they the two men are quite similar ("swart" as in swarthy, "gypsy" as in dark, like an Egyptian). These descriptions are both tools for a director and potential obstacles: clearly there is something that the play is trying to illustrate about these characters, but a director risks confusing an audience, or making humour where there shouldn't be any, if for instance a short, a hairless man played either character. McIntyre's casting of James Corrigan and Jamie Wilkes was important, as though facially they looked quite different, both actors have dark features, similarly long hair, and are a similar height. (This also relates to similar discrepancies in description which occur in *As You Like It*, with Celia and Rosalind.)

scenes (173, 112, 146 and 137 lines long in 5.1-4 respectively), the first, third and fourth face moderate-to-severe cuts by both directors (Kyle cuts 36, 5, 58, and 49 respectively; McIntyre cuts 38, 7, 26, and 13.5). Though 5.2 is the shortest scene of the four, the difference in cuts is not proportional. 5.1 (with the exception of its first seventeen lines), 5.3, and 5.4 were all thought to be written by Shakespeare, with 5.2 by Fletcher – his only scene in the final act, and the least cut, generally and proportionally. Clearly, again, authorship is not the guiding principle of the cut. As it happens, 5.2 largely concludes the Jailer's Daughter's story, with the exception of the appearance of the Jailer in 5.4 and his exchange with Palamon; at any rate, it is her final scripted appearance on stage. Given the systematic care paid to this subplot, it is unsurprising that Kyle and McIntyre would both ease off the cuts for a single scene, particularly given how emotionally fraught this scene can be. Further, the cuts that are made elsewhere in the fifth act largely mirror the cuts made to the beginning of the play, paring down the political framework to foreground the personal.

One cannot consider how the play's opening and closing scenes are cut without paying some attention to the play's Prologue and Epilogue – neither of which have been staged at the RSC, having been cut by both Kyle and McIntyre. Cutting these (likely Shakespearean) speeches has more to do with tone than authorship. The Prologue, for instance, opens by equating "New plays and maidenheads" and heaps praise on Chaucer (the author of the play's source). It ends with a reference to "two hours' travel" (Prologue 29) (not dissimilar to the Prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*), as well as a typical apology: "If the play do not keep / A little dull time from us, we perceive / Our losses fall so thick, we must needs leave" (Prologue 31-32). There are several reasons to cut the thirty-two lines of the prologue for these lines alone: a play four-centuries old is hardly new, and

comparing its reception with virginity is unlikely to ring true to us now. Chaucer is a lesser-known figure now than he would have been at the time *Kinsmen* was written; it makes sense to remove those references accordingly. Similarly, the reference to “two hours’ travel” may draw unwanted attention to the play’s runtime.

In terms of the pre-apology, prologues/epilogues acting as intercessor between the writer(s) and audience may have been a trope at the time the play was first written/performed, but this reflexivity is no longer the mode *du jour*. This is also supported by Tiffany Stern’s work on prologues and epilogues, in which she argues “prologues and epilogues from after around 1600 [...] are generally for first performances, not all performances, and [...] were regularly changed, lost, found, and printed elsewhere, as befits manuscripts written outside the playbook and not necessarily intended to survive with it”.<sup>590</sup> These paratexts have always been ephemeral. Furthermore, the play already opens with plenty of exposition in 1.1, and to compound this with a prologue may only exacerbate some of its overall difficulties. Without the preamble, the audience is thrown much more abruptly from the opening masque into the chaos of the arrival of the three queens – arguably helpful for immediately grabbing the attention of an audience most likely unfamiliar with this strange play.

The Epilogue, meanwhile, has overlapping issues: “let him hiss, and kill / Our market” is another particular reference to the commercial state of the company at the time, and the opening gambit of the Epilogue, “I would now ask ye how ye like the play, / But, as it is with schoolboys, cannot say”, returns to the trope of directly addressing the audience in the hopes of ascertaining approval. The Epilogue may detract from the

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<sup>590</sup> Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 82.

emotional intensity of the ending, in terms of the death of Arcite, the unity of Palamon and Emilia, and the spectre of madness that lingers in the Jailer's Daughter's subplot.<sup>591</sup> Further, the Epilogue lacks some of the charm and flourish that characterises the Epilogues from *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*, the latter of which is commonly thought to be Shakespeare's final speech, a farewell and swan-song ending with "As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free." Inducting *Kinsmen* into the Shakespeare canon, given its chronology, effectively usurps this honour from *The Tempest*, and so perhaps directors would be keen to avoid ending the last play in such a manner.

For both Kyle and McIntyre, and the audience members unlikely to have seen other productions of *Kinsmen*, Theseus' speech concludes the play. Harold Bloom argued that "Theseus seems to have vanished and Shakespeare himself says goodbye to us forever [...] and what remains is Shakespeare and ourselves".<sup>592</sup> Both Kyle and McIntyre conclude their productions with a cut version of this speech: one notable facet of these cuts is that Theseus' final sentence, "Let's go off / And bear us like the time", which evokes several of Shakespeare's well-known and well-loved later plays, from *King Lear* to *The Winter's Tale* to *The Tempest*, was cut from both productions, and therefore has never been spoken on the RSC's stages. McIntyre also cuts the immediately preceding lines "Let us be thankful / For that which is, and with you leave dispute / That are above our question", the lines that Kyle ends his production with; McIntyre therefore ends her production on "For what we lack / We laugh, for what we have are

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<sup>591</sup> It also makes sense to cut the Epilogue once the Prologue is cut: though one or the other is not uncommon in Shakespeare's work (*Romeo and Juliet* has no Epilogue, *As You Like It* no Prologue), the two here do seem to be effectively doing the same thing.

<sup>592</sup> Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), p. 713.

sorry, still / Are children in some kind”, an articulation of innocence and bewilderment that may disarm Theseus somewhat and distance him from his worse moments elsewhere in the play. And though “Let us be thankful / For that which is” serves as a meaningful way to conclude the play for Kyle, a reminder for the surviving characters to be happy with their respective lots and not to dwell on loss, it does speak to the tyrannical and insensitive side of Theseus, which may explain McIntyre’s cut here.

### ‘All Bets Are Off’

Regarding the conflict between *Kinsmen*’s flaws and virtues, Charles H. Frey sums up (and attempts to resolve) the knotty subject: the “currents of sadness, harshness and cynicism” make for “a most problematic final play”, particularly compared to *The Tempest*, but in recent years “the play has been mounted in well-received productions that demonstrate a very distinct theatrical viability and even modernity”.<sup>593</sup> The theatrical viability may not be well evidenced by the few-and-far-between performances at the RSC. But what is clear is that *Kinsmen*, in functioning sometimes as a pastiche or even the “Shakespeare’s greatest hits” B-side to *Cymbeline*, allows a director the scope to focus on the elements of the story – and the Shakespearean tropes – that most appeal to them, and to their vision of the play. Michael D. Bristol writes of *Kinsmen* as an “epilogue, supplement, and [...] a possibility for new beginnings” which “demands a critical reorientation toward the complexity of collective life”, compared with *The Tempest*, an “ideal candidate for nomination of Last Play”.<sup>594</sup> This is a play that inherently rejects sole-authority, welcoming the “collective life” of collaboration and

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<sup>593</sup> Charles H. Frey, ‘Introduction’, in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Charles H. Frey, pp. 1-2.

<sup>594</sup> Bristol 1989, p. 92.

intervention; the modern director is just the latest collaborator. As Frey writes: “Let Shakespeare collaborate and merge with his collaborators. Let us collaborate and collaborate with Shakespeare. After the final play, what else is left?”<sup>595</sup>

Returning to *Timon of Athens*, Simon Godwin’s comments about the strangeness and obscurity of the play are illuminating for the wider argument of this chapter. He is under no illusions about *Timon*’s place in the Shakespearean canon:

For me it’s clear why *Timon* is not done very often. It has a deeply strange and, in a way, unrewarding stumble towards a conclusion, which is peculiar. In a way it’s a great play to work on, because it feels like you’ve got carte blanche to change it, because an audience isn’t following it line-by-line like they might do with some of the famous plays. They are themselves discovering it afresh. All bets are off.<sup>596</sup>

While some directors might feel duty-bound to present a definitive production to an audience that could easily never see another production of an obscure play like *Timon*, Godwin leans into the freedom, the shared sense of discovery. This is as a direct result of its co-authored status, with Godwin admitting that his “understanding [of the co-authorship] was highly significant” in his approach.<sup>597</sup> Since it was “already a very impure text” (“a text of *threads and patches*”, he says, quoting *Hamlet*), he felt he could “be equally impure in the edit: its multiplicity of authorship was very encouraging”.<sup>598</sup> That said, Godwin’s egalitarian approach to the Shakespeare/Middleton division is also key to working well with the text. Though he finds it “interesting to speculate” about whether or not we can “tell what Shakespeare wrote or what someone else wrote”, based

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<sup>595</sup> Charles H. Frey, ‘Collaborating with Shakespeare: After the Final Play’, in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Charles H. Frey, p. 44.

<sup>596</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>597</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>598</sup> Godwin 2022.

on “which bits are heavy or clunking, or have flow or energy”, ultimately he sees this as more of “a fun parlour game” than a rewarding directorial exercise.<sup>599</sup> He says “it is difficult to know definitively [who wrote what], and what matters is our loyalty to the show now. This is the bundle of words we’ve been given to start with”.<sup>600</sup> It is unsurprising then to see how his cuts unfold, with little demarcation between approaches to Shakespearean vs Middletonian scenes.

This I think can be applied indirectly to the other plays and productions explored in this chapter. Each presents its own unique challenges to any director: we have seen how directors respond to the various structural and stylistic problems that come with these collaborative plays, as well as very specific textual, generic and artistic deficits the plays are thought to have. But with great risk comes great reward, the chance to stage truly exciting, original productions of Shakespearean plays that are much less known. The “carte blanche” freedom Godwin refers to is key here. Richard Proudfoot points out that “Collaborative playwriting was the norm rather than the exception in the public playhouses of Shakespeare’s lifetime.”<sup>601</sup> Collaboration as a historical concept, and as the genesis of these three plays especially, encourages (even subliminally) the director to expand the scope of the work and its creation beyond the monolithic “author”. If Shakespeare can work with Wilkins, and Middleton, and Fletcher, why not with us? James Purkis points out, through a surviving manuscript of Thomas Heywood’s *The Captives*, that collaboration was not just visible in the Writing of these plays – the conceptual, artistic practice – but also in the writing, the physical, manual process of

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<sup>599</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>600</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>601</sup> Richard Proudfoot, *Shakespeare: Text, Stage & Canon* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p. 67.



recording the work on paper.<sup>602</sup> With scissors, glue, pen, ruler, today's directors enter into this historic and immediate practice , in a place where they have always belonged.

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<sup>602</sup> James Purkis, *Shakespeare and Manuscript Drama: Canon, Collaboration and Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 60-64.

# Conclusion

On the penultimate page of a promptbook for Gregory Doran's 2003 *The Taming of the Shrew* – most of which is taken up with the first three quarters of Katherine's long final monologue – a stage manager has doodled a potted plant in the right-hand margin, which starts in the bottom margin of the page and finishes in the top margin. The plant is mostly spindly vines with fine leaves, a few flowers here and there, all circled by bees. It is a visual distraction from this beautiful, challenging, politically ambivalent monologue, the climax of a loud play and the lynchpin on how it is likely to be received. I wonder if the stage manager was doodling in homage to perceived beauty, or to compensate for a perceived lack. Maybe their mind was just wandering, late in the play. In Leslie Ferreira's "practical, how to book" *The Stage Director's Prompt Book*, "designed primarily for the beginning director", Ferreira lays out a richly varied list of everything a promptbook is.<sup>603</sup> From a "blueprint" and "road map" to an "insurance policy" and "cheat sheet", "structural method" to "database", Ferreira determines that it "contains the play but is not the play", and is "the repository of all of the director's research, artistic ideas, musings, imaginings and plans for the play [...] the single most important tool that a director brings into the rehearsal room".<sup>604</sup> It is also "the place to investigate the text, and it is the place to organize one's analysis and interpretation".<sup>605</sup> It is also, as I

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<sup>603</sup> Leslie Ferreira, *The Stage Director's Prompt Book: A Guide to Creating and Using the Stage Director's Most Powerful Rehearsal and Production Tool* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), p. 2.

<sup>604</sup> Ferreira 2023, p. 1.

<sup>605</sup> Ferreira 2023, p. 2.

have seen and hopefully demonstrated, a composite of individual wills over time, and a reflection of what goes into alchemising a play-text into a performed play.

Across the four chapters of this thesis, I have shown Ferreira's generously holistic view of the promptbook to be well-founded: from reverse-engineering decisions based on promptbook details to discussing directorial practice with the directors themselves, a wide array of gleanings has emerged from each promptbook studied, magnified by comparisons. We have seen the process and the product of directors "investigating the text", as Ferreira said above. The promptbook achieves a blend of sorts between a printed edition of the play and a performance, being the last site of the transition, or transmutation, from the former to the latter. David Scott Kastan wrote that the text "lasts on the page in a way it cannot in the theatre", and that "the printed text fixes in time and space the words that performance releases as the very condition of its being".<sup>606</sup> Through the study of the promptbook we understand more about that conditional moment of release, in what is said as much as what is not said. We are given an understanding of the *text* as performed, if not necessarily *the play*.

Each chapter in this thesis has served, for the most part, as a stand-alone study of promptbooks for past productions of sets of related plays. I will now attempt to pull key threads from these chapters together, to set these disparate plays and ideas in conversation with one another. From doing so, I will attempt to construct a theory behind the RSC's general directorial practice for cutting Shakespeare, based on the wide array of what is frequently cut and why. I will follow this up with thoughts on how both

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<sup>606</sup> Kastan 2001, p. 7.

performance spaces and artistic directorship shapes cutting practice at the RSC, and finally give an indication of future directions of cutting at the RSC.

### **‘Now to my word’: A Grand Unified Theory of Cutting Shakespeare**

#### **I. Cuts Universal**

“Very rarely are cuts universal.”<sup>607</sup> Toby Malone and Aili Huber note this in their guide to cutting plays for performance, and it rings true. Time, preference, context – everything is in flux. No two plays are the same, no two directors, no two productions. But is there, amidst the vast universe of cutting, anything universal that emerges? Before laying out a theory on the general practice of cutting Shakespeare, I want to take a moment to thread together some of the ideas and cuts explored, separately and in turn, throughout this thesis. The structure – by genre, by play – has somewhat limited my chances of showing any cross-pollination of thought until now. But each chapter has been a string to the larger bow.

I opened with a chapter on *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and how directors have responded to (or ignored) the issue of variant texts. Questions of textual history have far-reaching implications, beyond just plays like these, with well-known and significant variant texts. Textual awareness underpins how plays like *Timon*, thought to be incomplete, are understood and approached. It is also the foundation for remedial approaches: here I am thinking again of Simon Godwin’s use of text from other Shakespearean plays to patch holes in *Timon*, what he calls “a textual answer to a perceived flaw”. Godwin notes that there was “a certain trend” taking shape, as “one

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<sup>607</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 97.

directorial practice then affected so many others – Nicholas Hytner really crossed that Rubicon when he put some *Coriolanus* into *Timon of Athens* at the National Theatre. That gave permission to a different generation of directors to follow and feel they could be equally audacious in their changes.”<sup>608</sup> Hytner did not invent this audacity – John Barton was doing it long before Hytner, and even the Restoration dramatists were partial to rewrites. But in popularising that, especially to salvage something as challenging as *Timon*, and in an institution like the National Theatre, Hytner clearly signalled the way for future directors. Godwin goes on to say, of his own practice, that “having started with the obscure plays, and discovered the benefits of alteration and textual change, I’m now interested in applying that to the more canonical plays of Shakespeare, to see if they can also benefit from the same treatment”.<sup>609</sup> Godwin is clear in his intention with such overt intervention:

For those who don’t know the play, the changes hopefully strengthen the play’s message, and for those who do know the play well, it’s quite nice to go back to a play you know well and discover that it can also shift and grow and metamorphose in a way that I hope is true to the spirit of Shakespeare’s own writing, he was borrowing and changing and adapting, it was a living breathing tradition. [...] I suspect for Shakespeare to continue to live with relevance, and to continue to be performed at the major producing theatres of our relative cultures, these changes help him to stay prescient, rather than damaging Shakespeare – if we get them right.<sup>610</sup>

Godwin says his hope is “that we remain true to the spirit if not to the letter”.

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<sup>608</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>609</sup> Godwin 2022. His interest was particularly evident during his 2022 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the National Theatre, where one of Shakespeare’s sonnets was incorporated quite effectively and seamlessly into the text through song, as well as songs that appear in *The Tempest* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

<sup>610</sup> Godwin 2022.

We have seen instances of “textual answers” in each chapter of this thesis, answers which aim to be “true to the spirit” of Shakespeare’s work. Some directors have used *A Shrew* to fix the unresolved Christopher Sly induction scenes in *Taming*; John Barton interpolated from *The Troublesome Reign of King John*; directors frequently borrow from George Wilkins’ novelisation of *Pericles*. Cutting is inherently an exercise in text, and the impulse of directors to look to variant texts, related texts, or similarly written texts seems obvious in this light. And then there is the matter of abridgement, turning three plays into two, as we saw in Barton/Hall and Noble’s approaches to the *Henry VI* plays. This approach falls on one end of a spectrum, on which Warner’s uncut *King John* lies at the other end. Either the text is so malleable even its most obvious boundaries – the shape of it as a play, its skin – can be breached, or so rigid that an editorial pen cannot penetrate. These questions are also rooted in text.

At the intersection of text and drama are issues around the structure in various plays, or in auxiliary texts such as prologues and epilogues. We have seen, in *As You Like It*, an awareness (articulated well by Kimberley Sykes) of the problems posed to the drama by scenes in the second and third acts which return to the world of the court, problems ranging from audience frustration and anticlimax to staging logistics and concept. The scenes are rearranged to flow better.<sup>611</sup> This is not about cutting out but cutting and pasting back together, collaging within the play for dramaturgical gain. As for the prologues and epilogues, we have seen instances of light rewriting to salvage their relevance, as in the case of Sykes’ *AYLI*; we have seen modernising of text and context in Bogdanov’s *Taming*. The prologue and epilogue to *Pericles*, meanwhile,

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<sup>611</sup> Though this was outside the scope of their respective discussions, such scene rearranging also happens frequently in *Measure for Measure*, with the bawd and prison scenes, and with *Pericles*, sometimes with the bawd scenes, sometimes with the Thaisa / Cerimon scenes.

remain largely uncut and untouched, owing in no small part to being more enmeshed in the play, part of the Gower thread that holds the whole play together. *Pericles* is a clear and marked instance of prologue and epilogue being an inherent part of the structure rather than something seemingly tacked on. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, both Barry Kyle and Blanche McIntyre cut the prologue and epilogue entirely, opting instead for the drama to stand on its own, without the need for an outside voice to contextualise or apologise for it. This may also be a question of vogue: Rosalind said in her epilogue that “It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue”, but by today’s standards we might abridge that: “it is not the fashion to see the epilogue”.

In cutting the prologue and epilogue from *Kinsmen*, Kyle and McIntyre are also cutting two (albeit minor, functional) characters from the script. We have seen other instances of character cutting throughout these chapters, including Goodbody’s removal of Albany in *King Lear*, or Warchus excising the entire Fortinbras subplot (and associated characters – namely, of course, Fortinbras) from *Hamlet*. In the *Henry VI* plays we see character cutting as well as character amalgamating. Cutting characters is clearly a significant aspect: it has so many logistical bearings (cast numbers and cost chief amongst them) but has to be done carefully so as not to jeopardise the texture of the play. That said, in instances like cutting Albany or Fortinbras, changing the texture is the whole point: especially with Fortinbras, whose removal changes the play entirely from a tragedy of state to a tragedy of the family, a revenge tragedy. There is an opposite process to this, of course, in directors who do not cut certain characters, compared to others, in order to foreground their voices or increase their parts. We can see this in the

comedies with Kate's final monologue, as well as the histories, with Joan and Margaret so often receiving minimal cuts.<sup>612</sup>

This may well at times be part of an effort to sanitise or even white-wash Shakespeare, to make him more palatable and/or relevant to a modern audience. We see this inclination take root in several aspects of the plays. One of the most obvious is the frequent tendency to cut down (or even out) the bawd scenes in *Measure* and *Pericles*, part of a long tradition of removing what might be unseemly from Shakespeare's work. Of course, directors have a duty to the audience not to bore or confuse them unnecessarily. It is inherent to this duty that the director addresses jokes that just don't land, especially where this is because of shifts in sensibilities or language. This was a focus of the second chapter in this thesis, wherein I demonstrated how directors over time, culminating in a 2019 season, have approached difficult aspects of comedies. But it has come up throughout. In *Hamlet*, there is a textual variant cracking a joke at the expense of the children's theatre, which holds no cultural or comical relevance now (and may indeed have become outdated even between the printing of the texts). On the other end of the scale, Kyle and McIntyre retain the comedic spirit in *Kinsmen's* much-needed lighter moments.

It is not just outdated humour that gets cut, but outdated language in general, language lost to time between Early Modern English and twentieth- and twenty-first-century English. Latin, a dead language more associated today with pretension than erudition, is often retained for comedic (or plot) effect in *Taming*. But in the *Henry VI*

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<sup>612</sup> Malone and Huber write further about examples, particularly with Margaret's character in *Richard III*, where directors use the cut to foreground women's voices by cutting the male characters more: "instead of silencing the women, she turned down everyone else. [...] The cut shifted the power in the story, but didn't fight the source material" (Malone and Huber 2022, p.115).



plays and *Pericles* directors often cut it, or else gloss it for the audience's benefit. Sometimes language barriers and a lack of understanding might work to the play and the director's advantage, such as the use of French in Katie Mitchell's take on 3 *Henry VI*. The textual survival of Shakespeare's work has always hinged on these types of intervention: "Efforts were made to rectify words or phrases in the first folio that were apparently corrupt", notes David Scott Kastan.<sup>613</sup> As well as emending "the flawed Latin" as seen in plays like *Love's Labour's Lost*, "Similarly, English words are replaced with others that seem to yield better sense, though again without any indication that the emendations were suggested by anything more than a thoughtful reading of the text".<sup>614</sup> Again, directors can be seen as taking part in editorial traditions which have kept Shakespeare alive for centuries.

The final chapter of this thesis considered three of Shakespeare's collaborative plays, each of which occupies a different status in the canon, and on the stage. A certain amount of unfamiliarity with the play, as with *Timon*, encourages directors like Godwin to be more bold in their cut. On the other hand, when a play is produced once a generation, as with *Kinsmen*, there seems to be a greater sense of responsibility to the text, to honouring the idea of a play that its audience will be unlikely to see again any time soon. *Pericles* in particular proves a fascinating example, given that it is the clearest, most consistent site of directors uniformly cutting the parts of the play (its first two acts) thought not to be by Shakespeare vs the parts that are. The aforementioned bawd scenes are often suspected of mixed authorship, which makes their frequent

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<sup>613</sup> Kastan 2001, p.81.

<sup>614</sup> Kastan 2001, p.81.

cutting all the more symptomatic of this desire to preserve or even protect the essence of Shakespeare within his collaborations, even above his collaborators.

## II. A Necessary Detour: Shakespeare's Intentions

This speaks, as many of these disparate concerns do, to an overarching aspect of the cutting process that comes up time and again: Shakespeare's intent. What was Shakespeare trying to do? What was he trying to make his audience's think and feel? How would he approach his own texts now? Between bardolatry and contempt are a myriad of ways to respond to these questions, to incorporate them into the work of cutting. Of course, Barthes posited the death of the author in 1967: "Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature [...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author".<sup>615</sup> And, before Barthes, the New Criticism movement was breaking similar ground, with W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M.C. Beardsley's 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy" tracing the recent history of scepticism around authorial intent before arguing for the fact that the poem (as emblematic of the literary work) is "detached from the author at birth" and subsequently "belongs to the public".<sup>616</sup> They aim towards an "evaluation of the work of art [which] remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author".<sup>617</sup> Such was Barthes' project, too: to "birth" a reader independent of an author.

But perhaps intentionality is helpful when contemplating the transition from written text to performed text. Shakespeare's intentions are certainly vital to Sykes'

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<sup>615</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image – Music – Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 148).

<sup>616</sup> W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M.C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Sewanee Review*, 54.3 (July-September 1946), 468-488 (p. 470).

<sup>617</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, p. 477.

approach to cutting his works: she notes that “we have this idea that it’s set in stone, what Shakespeare wanted – but who said that? Where in Shakespeare’s play does he actually say that? I’m trying to declutter my assumptions, to understand what he’s doing as a theatre-maker, and as a human being – not as a god who can’t be questioned.” For Sykes, the paramount consideration is “trying to achieve the same effect” upon her audience as Shakespeare was seeking for his, while being cognisant of the differences between these two sets of people across time. And even though his intentions are ultimately unknowable, an interest in what they might have been is non-negotiable for Sykes:

if you’re not interested in what Shakespeare wanted, don’t do the play. Do another play! What he wanted is so exciting: he understood human beings, like an arrow that goes straight through to your heart. And there’s his economy with language, his ability to select words that prick us into these huge understandings of universal human existence... that’s extraordinary, and that’s why I love doing Shakespeare. It’s a digging process, I’m carving away trying to get to that arrow. I’m not interested in what costumes he wanted, or how he wanted to stage it, what he wanted the production to be, but what effect he wanted to have on the audience. I think with any writer, Shakespeare or a living playwright today, if you’re not interested in what they want the audience to think and feel, don’t do their play. For me, as a director, that’s my job. I really care about that.

Sykes is not too worried about “certain traditional audiences” who get “very bothered by doing things differently: changing genders, ethnicities, accents”. She brings this back to Shakespeare’s intentions, exclaiming: “show me where Shakespeare says this is the way it has to be!” Finally, Sykes evokes the late Peter Brook, when she says, summing up her approach to cutting, that “a director, when cutting a play, especially a Shakespeare play, needs to cut like a surgeon, really carefully... if you snip at the wrong

place it could be catastrophic... and when you do snip, you've got to snip strong, you've got to go for it". Sykes' work can be summed up by this decisive approach that still honours the spirit of Shakespeare for the modern day.

Even though Shakespeare's intentions may not always be knowable or even desirable, directors (at the RSC, at least) clearly feel a sense of obligation to an *essence* of Shakespeare. Godwin, who intervenes in the text more freely than many other directors, is (perhaps surprisingly) quite deferential to Shakespeare, and acknowledges the importance of meeting Shakespeare's works on their own terms:

I am curious about what Shakespeare wanted, the effects he was trying to grapple with, the atmospheres he was trying to create, the cognitive dissonance he was trying to build in, the multiple truths of his writing, and his obvious deep curiosity about dramaturgy and its relationship to both the actors performing it and crucially to the audience. And yet because he is writing in a different culture, over 400 years ago, the gap between his time and ours needs to be bridged. A lot of the textual changes are essentially serving this aim: how do we bridge his period and ours? Whether it's the length, the vocabulary, the clarity of storytelling, the clarity of terminology and semantics, all of those things carry importance for me as I try to prepare a new text for contemporary performance. But I do think those texts are best prepared coming from a deep love of Shakespeare rather than a sort of impatience or dislike.

Sykes is trying to "dig" through to the "arrow" of Shakespeare's dramatic effect; Godwin wants to "bridge his period and ours". It all amounts to the same project, and clearly underpins directorial practice at the RSC. Even the most interventionist cut explored in this thesis has stayed true to the heart of the play in question, and so to Shakespeare. John Lyon wrote of *The Tempest* that it showed "how little Shakespeare is interested in

explanation or in closing the gaps”: his work is deliberately open-ended.<sup>618</sup> The worst way to engage with his work would be in a closed-off, authoritarian manner.

Gregory Doran’s approach to cutting, which trusts but does not fully defer to the text, is emblematic of the general approach favoured at the RSC and, I suspect, elsewhere: “I tend to fillet rather than to cut whole chunks or scenes. You don’t always know why a particular scene is there but you certainly won’t know until you get it up on its feet and try it. I tend to follow that as a process. Sometimes it can just speed up a thought.” This speaks to the method of thinning referenced throughout the thesis: just taking a little off the top.<sup>619</sup> Doran’s careful interventions avoid tampering with Shakespeare on a micro-level. “I tend not, or try not, to change or replace words. The danger is, if you change the words you’ll change the rhythm, and the rhythm has a powerful effect on the audience too.” It is one thing to remove a line, a speech, a scene; it is another entirely to compete with Shakespeare linguistically. This idea of the preserved *effect* is inseparable from the preserved *intent*.

But authorial intent is so profoundly impossible to establish that its prioritisation in theatrical approaches is particularly dubious. As Stephen Orgel observes, “the author, in the modern sense, is an anachronistic concept in the early modern period”.<sup>620</sup> This is because the author as a fixed point of origin – the singular genius – had yet to emerge or at least become *de facto*, as it would in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the rise of Romanticism. The Shakespearean text is the direct result of so many hands and so many layers of intervention, as David Scott Kastan explains when pointing out

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<sup>618</sup> John Lyon, “Too long for a play’: Shakespeare beyond page and stage’, in *Shakespeare’s Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and Reception*, ed. by Richard Meek, Jane Pickard and Richard Wilson, pp. 241-254 (p. 251).

<sup>619</sup> Director Antoni Cimolino compares thinning cuts to “a haircut”, in Malone and Huber 2022, p. 5.

<sup>620</sup> Stephen Orgel, ‘What is an editor?’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 24 (January 1996), 23-29 (p. 28).

that “What is sought are the intentions of the writer, but the drama, of all literary forms, is the least respectful of its author’s intentions”.<sup>621</sup> He elaborates:

Plays always register multiple intentions, often conflicting intentions, as actors, annotators, revisers, collaborators, scribes, composers, printers, and proofreaders, in addition to the playwright, all have a hand in shaping the play-text: but *editions* of plays tend to idealize the activity of authorship, actively seeking to remove it from the conditions of its production, from the very social and material mediations that permit (both authorial and nonauthorial) intentions to be realized in print and in performance. In itself, the focus on authorial intention is, of course, neither an inappropriate nor an unprofitable concern. The author’s intentions are certainly one of the interpretive horizons of the play and, however evanescent, undeniably a historical one at that.<sup>622</sup>

The texts are unstable, interpretations of intention are unstable. These instabilities are unavoidable in performance: “the play as performed is not a single or stable thing. It would, of course, vary with the circumstances of every performance, and no company’s promptbook could anticipate the changes that specific performances might demand”.<sup>623</sup> Kastan uses the promptbook as shorthand for the composite of work done to turn a play-text into a performed text. Further, he seems to see performance as the key to being freed from oppressive ideas of intentionality: “Released into the context for which it was intended, the play text becomes thoroughly malleable, responsive to various shaping intentions competing with those of the author [...] in the professional theater the playwright’s intentions are inevitably subordinated to the demands of performance”.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 63.

<sup>622</sup> Kastan 1999, p. 63.

<sup>623</sup> Kastan 1999, p. 65.

<sup>624</sup> Kastan 1999, pp. 66-7.

Kastan elaborates on these 1999 statements in his 2001 book on *Shakespeare and the Book*: “I am not suggesting that authorial intentions are unimportant, only that in Shakespeare’s case they are unavailable, and in every case they are never solely determining of the play either as it is performed or printed. But I do believe they matter.”<sup>625</sup> Authorial intentions are unknowable but important, directly related to but superseded by the play in performance. Richard Meek argues that Shakespeare’s “works themselves explore the relationship between text and performance, and even dismantle the distinction between the two [...] there is a kind of absence in both reading *and* performance [...] both are constructed through language [...] both require an imaginative leap of faith”.<sup>626</sup> It is in these various intersections between the play as written and as performed that intention can be best discerned, or, paradoxically, jettisoned in favour of *possibility*: not what the play was *meant* to do, but what it *can* do. The process of cutting, the vital mediation phase between text and performance, is as much about engaging in suppositions about intention as it is hopes for possibility, a multiplicity of meanings.

### III. A Grand Unified Theory

I have so far explored a number of cutting overlaps across the plays and themes considered in this thesis, as well as the question of how Shakespeare’s intentions – whatever they are assumed to be by a given individual or institution – govern or guide the cutting process. I will now unite these various ideas in a “grand unified theory” of cutting Shakespeare. A “grand unified theory” is a scientific term referring to “a theory

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<sup>625</sup> Kastan 2001, p. 121.

<sup>626</sup> Richard Meek, “Penn’d speech’: seeing and not seeing in *King Lear*’, in *Shakespeare’s Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and Reception*, pp. 79-102 (p. 97).

in which the strong, the weak, and the electromagnetic interactions between particles are treated mathematically as different manifestations of a single force”.<sup>627</sup> I am however re-borrowing this phrase via the essayist Leslie Jamison, whose essay ‘A Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain’ seeks to present, via fiction, criticism, culture, conversations, anecdote and more, a holistic view of female pain and the “wounded woman” who has become “romanticized” in a myriad of socio-cultural settings.<sup>628</sup> Interactions between particles; representations of and approaches to female pain; in both instances a person and their theory are tying together a number of (at times directly oppositional) threads to theorise towards something. My own “grand unified theory” is that, when cutting Shakespeare, there appears to be two discrete rationales behind cutting, ideology and pragmatism, as well as a third, concept, which bridges the two primary rationales.<sup>629</sup> Every type of cut can be categorised accordingly, be they micro-cuts (such as single words or phrases) or macro-cuts (such as entire speeches, set-pieces, or scenes, as well as characters or plot-lines). This includes the cutting of unfamiliar language (be it archaic terms, foreign languages, or a mixture of the two), as well as dramaturgical rearrangements and instances of rewriting.

Ideological reasoning is steeped in intellect or emotion: from what has been explored in this thesis, this would most obviously include cutting for political correctness. This is an expansive field: cutting for scholarship purposes, for instance

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<sup>627</sup> ‘Grand unified theory’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/grand-unified-theory\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#2666710100](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/grand-unified-theory_n?tab=meaning_and_use#2666710100)>.

<sup>628</sup> Leslie Jamison, ‘A Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain’, in *The Empathy Exams* (London: Granta, 2015).

<sup>629</sup> There is a hint of grandeur in the grand title, which I think is befitting the somewhat hubristic act of forming such a theory, even more so when the exploration is confined to a single theatrical institution. I hope that, along with my other research into cutting – the directors I have interviewed, the non-RSC productions I have referenced throughout – it is not too bold to make this attempt at a theory that is overarching and cohesive (or grand and unified!).



with textual variants, or lines and scenes by secondary authors, can be deemed ideological, as well as cutting to preserve Shakespeare's supposed intent. Marxist readings, feminist readings, any socio-political reading that is mapped onto the production and its cut is an ideological lens: it becomes concept (as I will illustrate shortly) only as part of a wider and more intrusive application. Pragmatic reasoning may seem more obvious: cutting for time, cutting words or lines that do not reflect casting, or setting. Under pragmatism, I would also include cuts made for making sense of the play: cutting one of Timon's epitaphs, for instance, or references that have no resonance to a modern audience, dead languages, unfunny jokes. In this we see what Peter Holland observes as "the transformation of the text for reasons that have nothing to do with the labours of Shakespeare's scholarly editors and much to do with the practicalities of attracting audiences into the theatres".<sup>630</sup> The plays must continue to speak to contemporary audiences if Shakespeare is to survive.

At the middle of the Venn diagram of ideological and pragmatic rationale for cuts sits concept. A concept, in theatrical terms, relates most to the sense of the word meaning "an idea underlying or governing the design or content of a product, work of art, entertainment, etc".<sup>631</sup> But definitions of its other senses both current and historic illustrate two useful facets about concept as a term, the first that it is often rooted in the personal and the subjective ("personal opinion, judgement, or estimation"), the second that it is not always firm or fixed ("disposition, frame of mind"). Concept is not exactly distinct from ideology but, in encompassing or being informed by ideology, is greater than it, a sum greater than one of its parts. For instance, a director might want to

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<sup>630</sup> Holland 2015, p. 238.

<sup>631</sup> Concept, OED.

approach one of Shakespeare's plays, say *Macbeth*, with a Marxist lens: this is ideological. The director taking that lens and deciding to set the play during the 2008 financial crash to encompass a Marxist view would be conceptual. The concept is a way of keeping the play relevant, or of performing it for the umpteenth time in a way that is still new.<sup>632</sup> Certain challenging plays often invite concept as a form of intervention; as Gregory Doran observes, there are "some plays you go to *expecting* a concept of some kind or other, like *The Taming of the Shrew*: directors don't so much direct *Shrew* as think they have to solve it."<sup>633</sup> Speaking of *Taming*, Audibert's gender-swapped production in 2019 is surely a concept-driven production. Audibert's elimination of the Christopher Sly induction scene is ideological, a choice to present the play as it is rather than as metatheatre; meanwhile the cuts and word changes he makes to suit the gender-swapping are evidently driven by the necessary practicalities *of the concept*. This is a neat example of the ideology-pragmatism Venn diagram in action.

So the grand unified theory of cutting is that cuts made to Shakespeare are either done out of ideological, practical, or conceptual inclinations, with conceptual factors often combining the ideological and practical elements. Cutting with variant texts, and incorporating rewrites or interpolations from other texts, is often ideological (and occasionally conceptual); in the case of using the final scene of *A Shrew* at the end of *Taming*, it is also pragmatic, in that it is a simple solution to the textual problem of Sly's evaporation. Cutting obscure language and thinning dense historical detail is pragmatic. Cutting for theatre space or cast size (or even certain cast members,

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<sup>632</sup> Of course, a concept, when unoriginal, can make the play seem even more stale than any kind of period-accurate staging would. I have personally seen one too many productions of *Hamlet* set in a surveillance state, and of *The Winter's Tale* that set the first half in the early 1950s so that the Bohemian section can evoke the sixties and the summer of love.

<sup>633</sup> Doran 2019.

especially stars) are further examples of the pragmatic end of the cut. In fact, *most* of the cutting that goes into a Shakespeare play at the RSC is concerned with the most practical element of all, the overarching concern that Doran was so emphatic about in the introduction to this thesis: the runtime. Nobody – not even Shakespeare – wants to see a four-hour *Hamlet*, however rewarding it may be to *read*.

### **‘A king of infinite space’: Divided Kingdoms and Artistic Dictatorships?**

When I first approached this project, broad as its suggested scope was, I wondered: is there a difference in how directors cut between the RSC’s different spaces? The RSC boasts three permanent theatres, used in varying ways since their various openings. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST) is its main auditorium: with over a thousand seats it is a large space to fill with paying theatregoers, and the large thrust stage plus deep area behind the proscenium makes it a large space to fill with action and scenery, too. The Swan, which the RSC describes as “a favourite space for many actors, directors and audiences”, is an intimate theatre with seats for just under 500 people; its thrust stage is like the RST’s in miniature, and allows for much more intimate performances.<sup>634</sup> The Other Place (TOP), meanwhile, “began life as a tin shed rehearsal room” before being “converted into a studio space for adventurous and experimental work” as the “brainchild of Buzz Goodbody”.<sup>635</sup> The way the RSC themselves describe these spaces is revealing as to the intentions behind their programming. Today, Shakespeare’s plays are not staged in TOP; but when they were, cuts ranged from the liberal (Goodbody’s *King Lear*) to the extremely conservative (Warner’s *King John*). Colin Chambers has

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<sup>634</sup> RSC. <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/your-visit/swan-theatre>>.

<sup>635</sup> RSC. <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/your-visit/the-other-place/the-history-of-the-other-place>>.

written a detailed and illuminating history of the RSC and its theatres which covers this progression in more detail.<sup>636</sup>

In some ways, it is hard to reach definitive conclusions about performance space when the sample size is so small, and when the overriding approach has been to direct the majority of Shakespeare productions in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Nonetheless, some points seem clear. The Swan, in its frequent use for plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries, becomes something of a proving ground for alternative approaches to Shakespeare, be that Maria Aberg's daring *King John*, a play that has ebbed in popularity in recent decades and has only ever been staged on the RST stage once, to plays like *Pericles*, *Timon*, and *Kinsmen*, plays marginalised for their status as something not always worthy of Shakespearean canonicity, by dint of being co-authored, excluded from the First Folio (in the case of *Pericles* and *Kinsmen*), and textually extremely fractious and difficult, in particular *Timon* and, to a lesser extent, *Pericles*. *Pericles* has been staged in the Swan twice (versus twice in the RST, once in TOP); *Timon*, though only staged once in the Swan, was also staged twice in the RST and once in TOP. *Kinsmen*, on the other hand, which has only ever been staged twice at the RSC, has only been staged in the Swan. There is no overt difference in how directors approach the same plays across different spaces (e.g. *Pericles* is not cut particularly different between the RST and the Swan).

Godwin comments of his often interventionist approach to the text that he is "happy to take on these interrogations, be it on the big or smaller stages", and notes that, since the only major differences between the RST and Swan stages are the size and

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<sup>636</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

the number of people watching, he would see little reason to approach the cutting process differently between the two venues.<sup>637</sup> This echoes Owen Horsley's comments on the scrapped plan to open his and Doran's *Wars of the Roses* plays in the Swan first before moving them to the RST, that the only changes would be "insofar as logistics mandated".<sup>638</sup> Reflecting on the difference between staging Shakespeare in the RST and Marlowe in the Swan, Sykes noted the difference in programming and expectation between the two theatres:

a lot of people would say that in the Swan you've got a lot more freedom, and I'd agree. I feel like in the Swan I had much more freedom to not feel such a heavy weight of responsibility. The RSC have cultivated an audience expectation in the Swan that feels more open-minded: you can be really bold in there. In the RST, there's a lot more stress, more money, the seat numbers are higher, it's the big Shakespeare the tourists are going to come and see, your die-hard traditionalist audiences with certain expectations, but they're all different, so you can't know or pander. There were different challenges and more requirements working in the RST, but I was generally still given freedom by Greg Doran and Erica Whyman to make the show I wanted to make.<sup>639</sup>

Though directing in the Swan might encourage freedom more innately, the RST can still be a freeing space, if the director is willing and able to use it accordingly. Is the RSC a divided kingdom, with Shakespeare treated differently according to the laws of each jurisdiction? Probably not.

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<sup>637</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>638</sup> Horsley 2019.

<sup>639</sup> Sykes 2022.

Another early, major consideration I had was that, in establishing any kind of “promptbook practice” at the RSC, it would be necessary to consider whether or not cutting evolved over time and under the tenure of different artistic directors. Any artistic director could easily have issued a mandate to prescribe a distinctive approach or practice for cutting: it is abundantly clear that, at the RSC at least, artistic directors have not sought to do this, and have in fact encouraged not only artistic freedom but multiplicity in approach. Throughout the history of the RSC, since its official founding in 1961 to the present, the Company has welcomed an array of approaches to cutting. The theatre’s first co-artistic directors, Peter Hall and John Barton, were constantly intervening in the text: their *Henry VI* abridgements in *The Wars of the Roses*, and their *Troublesome Reign* borrowings in *King John*, both of which are discussed at length in chapter three, indicate a strong belief in the text as malleable. They presided over a number of directors during their tenure, many of whom were more cautious with Shakespeare’s text than they were: Peter Wood (*Hamlet*, 1961), Maurice Daniels (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1962), David Jones (*As You Like It*, 1967), John Blatchley (*Measure for Measure*, 1962), John Schlesinger (*Timon of Athens*, 1965).

Trevor Nunn, meanwhile, a more conservative cutter than his co-artistic director predecessors, was in the top position at the time of Buzz Goodbody’s work at the RSC, including her heavily cut *King Lear*. He also presided over the theatre during famous updates and interventions to Shakespeare’s text, such as Michael Bodganov’s new induction scene for *Taming* in 1978. Terry Hands, who was for several years co-artistic director with Nunn (during the last few years of Nunn’s tenure) and then sole artistic director from 1986-1991, oversaw the theatre during Nicholas Hytner’s production of *King Lear* in 1990, hugely important for its engagement not only with the variant texts

of *King Lear* but with textual scholarship itself. Hands was also in charge when Deborah Warner staged her uncut production of *King John* in 1988. Adrian Noble, meanwhile, whose production of *Hamlet* was largely uncut, was also present as artistic director for Matthew Warchus' streamlined, Fortinbras-free *Hamlet* in 1997. Michael Boyd, artistic director from 2003-2012, oversaw productions ranging from Dominic Cooke's *Pericles* in 2006, more lightly cut than any prior production of the play, to Trevor Nunn's barely-cut *King Lear* in 2007, to Roxana Silbert's more generously cut *Measure* in 2011.

Gregory Doran, himself on the record as being usually minimally-interventionist towards the text, championed the work of fearless cutters like Simon Godwin (on *Timon of Athens* in 2018) and Maria Aberg (on *King John* in 2012 and *As You Like It* in 2013).<sup>640</sup> Doran spoke about this explicitly when I interviewed him:

I want to employ directors who will do it *not* in the way that I do it. There should be a variety of approaches. Maria Aberg is going to direct *The Duchess of Malfi* or *As You Like It* very differently to the way I'm going to do it. And I think that's the point. There are a variety of approaches, sometimes they get highly conceptual on one end of the spectrum, to a sort of non-interventionist approach on the other end of the spectrum. And they're all valid approaches, and in a way they keep Shakespeare alive.

Clearly there is neither a need nor a desire to be too prescriptive for other directors: the point of hiring a variety of directors to work at the RSC is the variety of approaches they will bring.

Simon Godwin elaborates on the relationship between artistic directorship and the cutting practices of an individual director. "When I started at the RSC, Greg didn't

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<sup>640</sup> Aberg also notably directed bold cuts of a number of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries, including Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (Swan, 2016) and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (Swan, 2018).

really want *versions* of the plays; there was a wish to remain essentially faithful to the plays as written. He wasn't so keen on supporting an editor or dramaturg."<sup>641</sup> This corresponds to what Doran said to me in our interview. Godwin goes on:

as the productions continued there, culminating in *Timon*, he had gone on a journey as well and could see the value of a more and more radical approach to the text. The National Theatre and the RSC became more aligned in my practice; through the cross-fertilisation of methodologies, the processes became more similar than distinct. Those days of the RSC perhaps feeling like it was the purer of the schools as opposed to the National are now dwindling, and the RSC is facing the question of its next artistic director, and what their view will be on these questions, and how the RSC situates itself with the Globe, the National.<sup>642</sup>

Ten years of artistic directorship is a long time, and much has changed, in the theatre as in the world. Sixty years of cutting practice have been elucidated here: the RSC could turn that practice on its head at any time. As in the world, order and the status quo are not enshrined or ordained. There may be revolutions, progressive or regressive. For now at least, and for the time so far, the artistic directorship has not become a dictatorship. The fertile multiplicity that sustains Shakespeare's legacy is carefully fostered.

### **'To hear the rest untold': Future/Cut**

So where might the RSC's promptbook practice lead to next? At the time of my concluding this thesis ahead of submission, in May 2024, new Co-Artistic Directors Daniel Evans and Tamara Harvey have recently taken over at the helm of the RSC. Tamara Harvey is weeks away from starting rehearsals for her RSC directorial debut,

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<sup>641</sup> Godwin 2022.

<sup>642</sup> Godwin 2022.



*Pericles*, which opens in the Swan on 26 July 2024. Several months previously, she expresses an interest in getting a researcher to explore prior cuts to this famously challenging play: before long, she is put in touch with me. I share my research on the play and cutting for co-authorship; she shares ongoing drafts of her cut, which become increasingly singular, unafraid of intervention.<sup>643</sup> Two months before rehearsals begin, Harvey invites me to join the production as a credited textual consultant, a role which does not seem to have existed so clearly on Shakespearean productions during previous artistic directorships.

Harvey is interested in what past promptbooks and directors have to teach us, but also seems keen to address existing textual problems with new, untried approaches. After wrestling with the dramaturgical problems posed by the narrator, Gower – an unusual figure who would not be widely known by a modern audience, see Chapter Four – she determines part of the solution could lie in doubling the role with another. Where Terry Hands' 1969 production doubled Gower with the sensible authority figure of Helicanus in the actor Emrys Jones, Harvey has determined a new direction, an original approach: the actor who plays Gower will also be playing Marina.<sup>644</sup> Gower beseeches his audience "To learn of me, who stand i' the gaps to teach you / The stages of our story": and who in the play stands more in the gap than Marina? With Marina-as-Gower, the future generation survives to tell the story. Gower becomes less of a metatextual vehicle and more of a metatheatrical one, ideal for a play about storytelling and the redemptive power of narrative. This harkens back, in its way, to Kimberley Sykes'

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<sup>643</sup> Harvey has also been discussing her cuts with Alfred Enoch, who was the first actor cast in the production (as the titular role).

<sup>644</sup> These details are shared with the permission of Tamara Harvey. As the production has not yet gone into rehearsal by the time of my writing this, let alone into performances, the discretion of the examiners in not sharing these details is greatly appreciated.

observations about the end of *As You Like It*, and putting the younger characters in charge, as well as the arguments for allocating the final lines of *King Lear* to Edgar rather than Albany. There is a desire to pass the baton narratively as a gesture of hope; perhaps Harvey's willingness to work so collaboratively on the text indicates a similar desire, to trust in the promise of a new approach.

David Scott Kastan writes that "Shakespeare's texts remain unnervingly (exhilaratingly?) fluid in spite of over 375 years of editorial efforts to stabilize them".<sup>645</sup> Clearly, the more editors have tried to stabilise Shakespeare, the less stable he has become. Today's director is not attempting to *stabilise* anything: they are knowingly offering their take on it, and though one might colloquially determine a production to be definitive, there is no such thing in reality. It is surely the role of institutions like the RSC to ensure the survival of Shakespeare's work and legacy, a continued engagement and awareness in public consciousness – anything less risks an institution like the RSC making itself redundant. In championing fresh and exciting approaches to the text in performance, the RSC builds on Shakespeare's multiplicity and ensures his proliferation over time.

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Cutting has become something of an open secret in non-contemporary theatre, especially Shakespeare. The average theatregoer will not know they are about to watch and hear *a version* of Shakespeare's text, just as many will not know that some of the

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<sup>645</sup> Kastan 2001, p. 124.

plays, such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, don't even have a definitive text. Under Adrian Noble's artistic directorship, programmes at the RSC provided an account of how many lines had been cut from a particular production.<sup>646</sup> Doran explains why this practice stopped eventually: "there was an argument about whether this advertised some kind of perceived short-changing of the audience. I think most people assume that they're not cut, and don't understand that, and therefore might feel short-changed if they discover they're seeing *Hamlet* and 1000 lines have been cut."<sup>647</sup> He is keen to point out that it is not "a hidden thing", and audiences "can look at the promptbooks if they want to, if they know they are there".<sup>648</sup> Many theatregoers may not know – but what is to be gained from changing that?

Bruce R. Smith writes about cuts as "excisions of Shakespeare's texts in the service of theatrical performance, a practice regarded by many people as breaches in integral works of art".<sup>649</sup> Toby Malone and Aili Huber describe "people in the audience who followed along with their Penguin (or similar) editions. These audience members can be difficult to convince of the validity of text cuts".<sup>650</sup> But elsewhere, Malone and Huber note that "Most spectators are unaware that nearly all productions of classical plays are cut or adapted".<sup>651</sup> The link between these statements is in another made by Malone and Huber: "Although rarely acknowledged publicly, cutting is almost

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<sup>646</sup> Further, as Peter Holland notes of the "shifting, unstable, and usually unmarked morphing of the text", the RSC "used regularly to announce in its theatre programmes how many lines had been cut from the text, [but] it noted neither which lines were cut nor what redistributions had taken place" (Peter Holland 2015, p. 238). This further points to a lack of transparency which, as a result, mystifies the process somewhat.

<sup>647</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>648</sup> Doran 2019.

<sup>649</sup> Smith 2016, p. 25.

<sup>650</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 129.

<sup>651</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 10.

universal”.<sup>652</sup> This “rare acknowledgement” is what engenders suspicion in purists and a certain uncritical ignorance in the average theatregoer: the former think it an aberration, and the latter are simply unaware that they are not watching *pure, unfiltered* Shakespeare (nor would they likely really want to). As cutting studies such as mine continue, and texts such as Malone and Huber’s “practical and accessible” guide continue to be published and read by theatre practitioners, and more directors consider the use of promptbooks as a vital instructor in the practice of cutting a text for performance, I believe the push for greater transparency about this practice will increase. It will spill over from academia and behind-the-scenes of theatre practice into programme notes, public engagement, and perhaps most importantly, credits for cutting consultants. As Malone and Huber write:

This is more than a simple ego advertisement. Credit normalizes the importance of text cuts to most productions of public domain plays, and reminds companies and artists this is a role which cannot be underestimated. Cutting is more than a matter of a few slashes before you call it a day: it is responsive, active, detailed work just as important in pre-production as sourcing props or hemming costumes.<sup>653</sup>

Much of the work I have seen in these promptbooks corroborates Malone and Huber’s faith in the “responsive, active, detailed work” of those who engage in cutting, especially in an institution as devoted to preservation as the RSC.

Earlier I quoted Malone and Huber as saying that “rarely are cuts universal”, and just above, that “cutting is almost universal”. I think the repetition of “universal” in such different contexts is important: a process and an array of processes, ubiquity without

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<sup>652</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, p. 5.

<sup>653</sup> Malone and Huber 2022, pp. 128-9.

conformity. Cuts are everywhere and anything. A richness of meanings to discover and study; an inexhaustible future to keep these plays alive.

**Appendix**  
***Pericles, Timon and Kinsmen Cuts by Scene by Co-Author***

The following tables provide a scene-by-scene breakdown of the number of lines cut in each RSC production of *Pericles*, *Timon of Athens* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* explored in Chapter 4 of this thesis. This information is presented alongside the suspected primary author of each scene, and overall statistics for each of the productions.

I have based the total line numbers for each play on the Arden Third Series editions which are referenced throughout the thesis. All numbers are approximate to some extent, as differences in counting prose lines affects the overall numbering. Furthermore, the number of cut lines has been adjusted where relevant for additions/rewrites made in place of deleted lines.

<i>Pericles</i> (1 of 2)					
Scene	Author	Total Lines	Terry Hands (RST, 1969)	Ron Daniels (TOP, 1979)	David Thacker (Swan, 1989)
1.0	Wilkins	42	0	0	0
1.1	Wilkins	171	36	27	44
1.2	Wilkins	122	90	89	84
1.3	Wilkins	38	38 (entire scene)	38 (entire scene)	38 (entire scene)
1.4	Wilkins	106	21	13	27
2.0	Wilkins	40	7	7	1
2.1	Wilkins	162	12	22	29
2.2	Wilkins	57	1	1	4
2.3	Wilkins	112	3	17	19
2.4	Wilkins	57	57 (entire scene)	57 (entire scene)	57 (entire scene)
2.5	Wilkins	89	3	1	3
3.0	Shakespeare	60	10.5	4	19
3.1	Shakespeare	79	3	2	4
3.2	Shakespeare	110	10	0	9
3.3	Shakespeare	42	3	0	20
3.4	Shakespeare	16	16 (entire scene)	16 (entire scene)	16 (entire scene)
4.0	Shakespeare	52	4	4	2
4.1	Shakespeare	98	11	0	2
4.2	Mixed	142	3	16	0
4.3	Shakespeare	50	5	0	7
4.4	Shakespeare	51	11	10	0
4.5	Mixed	7	0	0	7 (entire scene)
4.6	Mixed	194	0	2	2
5.0	Shakespeare	24	0	0	0
5.1	Shakespeare	249	48	45	51
5.2	Shakespeare	20	0	0	0
5.3	Shakespeare	85	22	22	6
Epil.	Shakespeare	18	0	2	0

Total: 2293

Wilkins 996 lines, 43.44% / Shakespeare 954 lines, 41.60% / Mixed 343 lines, 14.96%

Wilkins Cuts	268	272	306
Shakespeare Cuts	143.5	105	136
Mixed Cuts	3	18	9
Total Cuts	414.5	395	451
Wilkins Cuts %	64.66%	68.86%	67.85%
Shakespeare Cuts %	34.62%	26.58%	30.15%
Mixed Cuts %	0.72%	4.56%	2.00%
Proportion of Play Cut %	18.08%	17.23%	19.67%

<i>Pericles</i> (2 of 2)				
Scene	Author	Total Lines	Adrian Noble (RST, 2002)	Dominic Cooke (Swan, 2006)
1.0	Wilkins	42	8	4
1.1	Wilkins	171	33	42
1.2	Wilkins	122	83	40
1.3	Wilkins	38	18	9
1.4	Wilkins	106	28	22
2.0	Wilkins	40	8	11
2.1	Wilkins	162	35	26
2.2	Wilkins	57	18	26
2.3	Wilkins	112	22	23
2.4	Wilkins	57	57 (entire scene)	57 (entire scene)
2.5	Wilkins	89	18	6
3.0	Shakespeare	60	21	15
3.1	Shakespeare	79	12	6
3.2	Shakespeare	110	7	4
3.3	Shakespeare	42	12	5
3.4	Shakespeare	16	0	0
4.0	Shakespeare	52	2	6
4.1	Shakespeare	98	0	2
4.2	Mixed	142	13	16
4.3	Shakespeare	50	4	3
4.4	Shakespeare	51	22	24
4.5	Mixed	7	0	0
4.6	Mixed	194	6	7
5.0	Shakespeare	24	0	0
5.1	Shakespeare	249	28	26
5.2	Shakespeare	20	0	0
5.3	Shakespeare	85	3	2
Epil.	Shakespeare	18	0	0

Total: 2293

Wilkins 996 lines, 43.44% / Shakespeare 954 lines, 41.60% / Mixed 343 lines, 14.96%

Wilkins Cuts	328	266
Shakespeare Cuts	111	93
Mixed Cuts	19	23
Total Cuts	458	382
Wilkins Cuts %	71.61%	69.63%
Shakespeare Cuts %	24.24%	24.35%
Mixed Cuts %	4.15%	6.02%
Proportion of Play Cut %	19.97%	16.66%



<i>Timon of Athens</i> (1 of 2)				
Scene	Author	Total Lines	John Schlesinger (RST, 1965)	Ron Daniels (TOP, 1980)
1.1	Shakespeare	290	37	1.5
1.2	Middleton	257	9 (scene reworked)	27
2.1	Shakespeare	34	0	2.5
2.2	Mixed	234	76	77
3.1	Middleton	61	0	0
3.2	Middleton	90	4	10
3.3	Middleton	42	13.5	1.5
3.4	Middleton	100	2	1
3.5	Middleton	12	0	0
3.6	Middleton	116	11.5	5
3.7, 1-24	Middleton	24	0	0
3.7, 25-37	Shakespeare	13	0	0
3.7, 38-104	Shakespeare	67	5.5	3
3.7, 105-115	Middleton	11	0	0
4.1	Shakespeare	41	0	7
4.2, 1-29	Mixed	29	0	1.5
4.2, 30-51	Middleton	22	3.5	6
4.3, 1-452	Shakespeare	452	79	43
4.3, 453-531	Middleton	78	8	10
5.1	Shakespeare	113	31	7
5.2	Shakespeare	113	7	29
5.3	Shakespeare	17	17 (entire scene)	11
5.4	Shakespeare	10	2	10 (entire scene)
5.5	Shakespeare	83	28.5	23

Total: 2309

Middleton 813 lines, 35.21% / Shakespeare 1233 lines, 53.40% / Mixed 263 lines, 11.39%

Middleton Cuts	51.5	60.5
Shakespeare Cuts	207	137
Mixed Cuts	76	78.5
Total Cuts	334.5	276
Middleton Cuts %	15.40%	21.92%
Shakespeare Cuts %	61.88%	49.64%
Mixed Cuts %	22.72%	28.44%
Proportion of Play Cut %	14.49%	11.95%

<i>Timon of Athens</i> (2 of 2)				
Scene	Author	Total Lines	Gregory Doran (RST, 1999)	Simon Godwin (Swan, 2018)
1.1	Shakespeare	290	11	27
1.2	Middleton	257	15	45
2.1	Shakespeare	34	13	2
2.2	Mixed	234	62	75
3.1	Middleton	61	0	60 (scenes interleaved)
3.2	Middleton	90	14	
3.3	Middleton	42	8.5	
3.4	Middleton	100	40	17
3.5	Middleton	12	0.5	0.5
3.6	Middleton	116	8.5	116 (entire scene)
3.7, 1-24	Middleton	24	0.5	0
3.7, 25-37	Shakespeare	13	0	1
3.7, 38-104	Shakespeare	67	0.5	12
3.7, 105-115	Middleton	11	0	2.5
4.1	Shakespeare	41	0	0
4.2, 1-29	Mixed	29	0	2
4.2, 30-51	Middleton	22	1.5	0
4.3, 1-452	Shakespeare	452	38	136
4.3, 453-531	Middleton	78	5	0
5.1	Shakespeare	113	21	19
5.2	Shakespeare	113	9	24
5.3	Shakespeare	17	13	17 (entire scene)
5.4	Shakespeare	10	10 (entire scene)	10 (entire scene)
5.5	Shakespeare	83	29	34

Total: 2309

Middleton 813 lines, 35.21% / Shakespeare 1233 lines, 53.40% / Mixed 263 lines, 11.39%

Middleton Cuts	93.5	241
Shakespeare Cuts	144.5	282
Mixed Cuts	62	77
Total Cuts	300	600
Middleton Cuts %	31.17%	40.17%
Shakespeare Cuts %	48.17%	47.00%
Mixed Cuts %	20.66%	12.83%
Proportion of Play Cut %	12.99%	25.99%

<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> (1 of 1)				
Scene	Author	Total Lines	Barry Kyle (Swan, 1986)	Blanche McIntyre (Swan, 2016)
Prologue	Shakespeare	32	32 (entire scene)	32 (entire scene)
1.1	Shakespeare	234	80	50
1.2	Shakespeare	116	68	25
1.3	Shakespeare	97	23	7
1.4	Shakespeare	49	13	14.5
1.5	Mixed	16	4	10 (just the song cut)
2.1	Shakespeare	56	14	9
2.2	Fletcher	280	48	58
2.3	Fletcher	76	18	24
2.4	Fletcher	33	3	0
2.5	Fletcher	64	19	11
2.6	Fletcher	39	14	5
3.1	Shakespeare	123	63	32
3.2	Shakespeare	38	13	0
3.3	Fletcher	53	0 (a section moved)	1
3.4	Fletcher	26	3 (moved to end of 3.2)	4
3.5	Fletcher	157	21	31
3.6	Fletcher	308	61	56
4.1	Fletcher	153	30	33
4.2	Fletcher	156	55	13
4.3	Mixed	100	28	9
5.1, 1-17	Fletcher	17	2	8
5.1, 18-68	Shakespeare	51	5	1
5.1, 69-136	Shakespeare	68	21	28
5.1, 137-173	Shakespeare	37	8	1
5.2	Fletcher	112	5	7
5.3	Shakespeare	146	58	26
5.4	Shakespeare	137	49	13.5
Epilogue	Shakespeare	18	18 (entire scene)	18 (entire scene)

Total: 2792

Fletcher 1474 lines, 52.79% / Shakespeare 1202 lines, 43.05% / Mixed 116 lines, 4.16%

Fletcher Cuts	279	251
Shakespeare Cuts	465	257
Mixed Cuts	32	19
Total Cuts	776	527
Fletcher Cuts %	35.95%	47.63%
Shakespeare Cuts %	59.92%	48.77%
Mixed Cuts %	4.12%	3.61%
Proportion of Play Cut %	27.79%	18.88%

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All promptbooks consulted are from the collections of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Archival recordings of certain productions, and recorded live cinema broadcasts of others, were also watched to support the primary research from promptbooks. Every production referenced from 2014 onwards I have also seen in person.

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***(All hyperlinks included throughout the thesis were last accessed 31 May 2024 and were accurate as of that date.)***

### **Secondary Material: Programmes**

*Périclès, Prince de Tyr*, dir. Declan Donnellan, Cheek by Jowl, 2018.

*Timon of Athens*, dir. Simon Godwin, Swan Theatre, RSC, 2018.

*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, dir. Blanche McIntyre, Swan Theatre, RSC, 2016.

### **Secondary Material: Film & Television**

20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, *The Simpsons* (1989 -)

Joffé, Rowan, dir., *Before I Go To Sleep* (2014)

Kelly, Gene, and Stanley Donen, dirs., *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)