

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRE-SHOW IN ENGLISH SHAKESPEAREAN PERFORMANCE,
1932-2014

By

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PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Productions of Shakespeare's plays often feature an interpolated opening scene or 'pre-show'. My thesis examines this phenomenon. Proposing threshold theory as a framework, I consider the interfaces between the classic text, the enacted play and the audience. Previous studies of modern pre-shows suggest three key purposes for the pre-show: narrative, concept, and theatricality, which I adopt as the structure of the second half of my thesis. Studies of early prologues and inductions trace cultural and artistic developments that pre-figure developments I trace in modern production.

I consider in some detail Shakespeare's own pre-show and introductory strategies and the problems they present to modern directors, before examining the earliest pre-shows of modern productions, in the 1930s to 1950s, the cultural and artistic circumstances that gave rise to them, and their reception among reviewers and scholars. Thereafter I trace the development of narrative pre-shows and the staging of embedded narratives, the rise of conceptual pre-shows and their origin in design and the New Criticism, and changing pre-show relationships with, and impact upon, audiences, ranging from the political to the commercial. I conclude that the pre-show is a significant innovation that has both accompanied and led a remarkable renaissance in Shakespearean performance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Why study the pre-show?

This introduction will offer a rationale for my study of the pre-show as directors have used it in productions of Shakespeare in the last 80 years. The first section explains the nature of the topic, the questions I seek to answer, and the parameters I choose to work within, together with an exploration of terms. Next I examine some theoretical aspects of the work done by pre-shows as mediators of and thresholds to Shakespearean productions, and explore the field more widely through an examination of previous studies of the topic: essays on contemporary pre-textual performance by Robert Smallwood, Jean-Marie Maguin and Michael Dobson, and studies of early modern equivalents of the pre-show by Dieter Mehl, Thelma L. Greenfield, Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann, and Tiffany Stern. Finally I reflect on the cultural place of the performance of Shakespeare's plays in contemporary England, and its bearing on the uses of the pre-show over the period of my study, to give an outline of the shape of the chapters that follow.

In 2005 I began seeing RSC productions of Shakespeare fairly regularly. My previous experience of Shakespeare had been predominantly via text, with little opportunity to see performances, so only now did I start to take account of differences between the two experiences, and to apprehend the long-running dispute and debate between textual and performed drama, or rather the particular Shakespearean branch of that debate. As my theatre-going experience advanced, I was particularly struck by the number of productions whose opening moments could not be represented by '*Enter [characters A, B, C...]*', followed by the opening speech of the text. As some examples: in 2005, Nancy Meckler's *Romeo and*

Chapter 1

Juliet had a large group of actors in modern dress assembling onstage as the audience arrived, and a sequence involving rifles, sticks, and a ritualistic dance, before the familiar Prologue was spoken, and Dominic Cooke's *As You Like It* began when a group of characters in winter coats marched swiftly from upstage towards the front where they gathered to sing 'Under the Greenwood Tree', Christmas-carol style, before Orlando began his complaint to Adam as in the text. In 2006, Cooke directed *The Winter's Tale* as a promenade production: 'prommers' were offered a glass of bubbly as they arrived and invited to join a reception already underway, which metamorphosed into the Sicilian court festivities entertaining Polixenes on an imaginary New Year's Eve. In 2007 the audience for Neil Bartlett's *Twelfth Night* found the Courtyard stage set with a number of tall mirrors and a white grand piano suspended from the flies, while a number of black-clad maidservants swept and tidied and a manservant in black tie moved among them as though supervising operations, before summoning the piano to descend, seating himself to play some entertaining jazzy phrases, then pulling a mike to his mouth to announce, '*Twelfth Night, or What You Will*'.

Responses among my fellow play-goers and in press notices to these and other instances of initial non-textual performed activity varied from paying no attention at all to critical discussion, inter-performance recognition, irritation, bewilderment, dismissive amusement and – occasionally – pleasure, leading to quite strongly opposed responses to each production as a whole, and prompting me to pay more attention to such openings as a feature in their own right. What is their role, purpose and effect in the productions they introduce? How seriously are we meant to respond to them? If we ignore them, what difference does it make? What sort of mediation do they provide between the world of the audience and that of the play? Then there are considerations of theatre history. How

widespread is or has been their use? Why, and in what ways, have directors chosen to use invented materials as an interface between the world 'outside' the play and the 'play proper'? Further questions concern the place of Shakespeare in twentieth century culture and society. What impact have pre-textual openings had on the reception of the performed plays, and how clear is it to an audience that they are not part of the text, not, strictly, 'Shakespeare', at least as popular culture and basic school education understands the name? Looked at over an extended period, does the use of such openings offer some insight into the uses of 'Shakespeare' in the wider cultural context? My thesis seeks to address these questions through an examination of accounts of productions in England since 1932, a year I choose as starting point for 'modern' performance because the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre opened then, marking a consciously new departure in Shakespearean performance. I choose to limit my enquiry to England, since a wider range would risk being too vast and too diffuse. I am very aware of the porous boundaries around both these choices: although the SMT was new in 1932, the Old Vic in London was the established unofficial national centre for Shakespearean performance, and much more influential than Stratford's regional festival. Besides, theatre in England is open to influence from further afield, and directors and designers move fluidly across national borders. Occasionally, too, I cannot ignore some prototype pre-shows before 1932. These inputs, however, are not excluded, but rather form an important element in my findings.

One of the first problems I encountered was what to call the phenomenon I was investigating. In one of the few previous studies of this topic, Robert Smallwood called it the 'little directorial dumbshow (and sometimes not altogether dumb) that so often begins the

evening'.¹ Twentieth-century reviewers often use 'dumbshow', usually with a certain tone of disdain, as with Gordon Crosse on Peter Brook's *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1946 and J.W. Lambert reviewing Trevor Nunn's *Winter's Tale* in 1969.² The term is still used in recent reviews, such as Michael Dobson on Declan Donnellan's *Othello* in 2004, and Michael Billington on Samuel West's *As You Like It* in 2007.³ Directors sometimes favour 'prologue' despite a lack of spoken content: the promptbooks for Howard Davies' *Troilus and Cressida* in 1985 and Gregory Doran's *Merchant of Venice* in 1997 use 'Prologue' to head the various cues and wordless actions at the opening of the productions. Reviewers also use this word: Donald Hutera describes a 'wordless prologue' to Frantic Assembly's *Othello* in 2008⁴, and Irving Wardle notes 'a prologue' introducing Donnellan's all-male *As You Like It* in 1991.⁵ 'Prelude' appears in 1951, 1991 and 2007.⁶ Smallwood also uses the term 'induction' for the sort of opening that allows 'time to absorb' an idea before the speaking begins.⁷ More recently I find the term 'a pre-show' is used by theatre practitioners: the first such use I heard was by my former co-supervisor, herself an experienced director, Jaqueline Bessell. The word is listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* only as an adjective,⁸ and is used as such in some discussions of Shakespearean adaptation: Margaret Jane Kidnie uses 'pre-show tableau' and 'pre-show sequence'⁹ and Kawai Shoichiro discusses Yukio Ninagawa's use of a

¹ Smallwood (1993) p. 73. I discuss Dieter Mehl's monograph on the dumbshow in early modern drama below, pp. 21-22.

² Crosse *Theatrical Diary*, p. 155; *Times*, 16 May 1969.

³ Dobson (2005a), p. 285; *Guardian*, 8 February 2007.

⁴ *Times*, 25 September 2008.

⁵ *Independent*, 8 December 1991.

⁶ *Scotsman*, review of Michael Benthall's *Tempest*, 28 June 1951; *New York Times* review of Donnellan's *As You Like It*, 26 July 1991; Michael Billington, review of Conall Morrison's *Macbeth*, *Guardian*, 18 April 2007.

⁷ Smallwood (1993) pp. 77, 75. I discuss Thelma L. Greenfield's monograph on inductions below, pp. 22-24.

⁸ *OED* online consulted 19 Jan 2015.

⁹ Kidnie (2008) pp. 78, 116, discussing Djanet Sears' prequel to *Othello*, *Harlem Duet* as performed at the Shakespeare Festival, Ontario (2006) and the BBC's *Much Ado about Nothing* in *Shakespeare Retold* (2005).

‘pre-show warm-up’ to his *Tempest* in 1987.¹⁰ Reviewers also use the adjective: ‘pre-show wrestling’,¹¹ ‘pre-show Elizabethan hospitality’.¹² An early appearance of ‘pre-show’ as a noun occurs in the promptbook for Doran’s 1997 *Merchant of Venice*, which also uses ‘Prologue’. In reviews it has begun to appear only in very recent years. I find it on the RSC Young People’s Forum where Luke Harris, ‘age 22’, comments on an ‘entertaining and energetic pre-show’ in Rupert Goold’s *Merchant of Venice*;¹³ Paul Prescott also uses the noun in reviewing the same production,¹⁴ and Carol Chillington Rutter describes ‘a fifteen-minute long pre-show’ to Propellor’s *Richard III*.¹⁵ Among all these terms, only ‘pre-show’ refers specifically to the contemporary pre-textual presentation, whether dumb or verbal, long or short. I have therefore decided to use ‘pre-show’ as the most unambiguous for the phenomenon I am investigating.

I shall examine the material, phenomenological properties of pre-shows in detail in the body of my thesis. At this stage I want to consider the functional and ideological work performed by the pre-show, its place in the architecture of the production as a whole.

What is the role of a pre-show in a production of a Shakespeare play?

Any pre-show is intended to provide an entry point into the play, but since the plays are already provided with entry points that the playwright presumably crafted for the purpose, it is truer to say that a pre-show is intended to provide an entry point into the *production*, the particular presentation of the play to which it is a preface. The distinction is not always

¹⁰ Shoichiro (2008) p. 273.

¹¹ Fiona Mountford on *Julius Caesar*, *Evening Standard*, 27 May 2009;

¹² Dobson (2003) p. 257.

¹³ RSC Blogspot, 20 May 2011.

¹⁴ Prescott (2012) pp. 252, 253.

¹⁵ Rutter (2011) p. 347.

well understood, but even among defenders of the classic text a pre-show that stimulates or illuminates is often forgiven for its presumption. On the other hand, it may draw little attention to itself, performing its function almost subliminally.

1. How seriously are we meant to respond to pre-shows? If we ignore them, what difference does it make?

I will argue that we *are* intended to take notice of pre-shows, even when they seem undemanding or inconsequential, and that if we ignore them, or arrive too late to give them any attention, we will have a diminished experience of the productions they precede. Shakespeare's plays are in a unique category by virtue of his pre-eminent place in British – and world – drama. Other British writers may arguably have comparable prestige in the culture, but none is a playwright, a writer whose work is intended for stage production. Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, for example, might rank somewhere in the same league, being encountered on school and exam syllabuses, and providing cultural property such as phrases and characters in everyday use, and material for lavish performance on national television, but performance of their work is necessarily an adaptation of the original. With Shakespeare it is otherwise in England, where he is not only extremely well-known, at least in a few key plays, but also performed more-or-less in 'the original', or in what the general public with an average, non-specialist education, would assume to be the words written by the man himself. This being so, a pre-show that clearly differs from the textual opening – a *Macbeth* that does not start with three witches, or a *Henry V* beginning without a Chorus, for example – is likely to cause a certain *frisson* of surprise (or frown of irritation), some recognition that the text has not been adhered to, that the approach or 'way in' has been altered. While the

fact of interpolation may be of limited interest to some, increasingly so where the play in question is less familiar, there will invariably be some in the audience – reviewers, scholars or enthusiasts – who will register that surprise. This element of shock increases with the level of prestige or profile of the production in question, as the degree of interest generated among commentators of cultural or educational distinction rises. As W.B. Worthen notes, ‘the questions posed by Shakespearean drama are distinctive’:

Given the literary and cultural status of Shakespearean drama, the production of a Shakespeare play generates intense and informed debate about the relationship between texts and stage production, a debate that usually centers on issues of legitimacy, power, tradition, and cultural hegemony.¹⁶

I contend that the same questions are much less likely to be raised in relation to the work of any other dramatist, and for this reason I suggest too that the performance of a pre-show before the textual opening of a Shakespeare play carries a certain degree of provocation, asks to be noticed, intends to make a statement about the play, or about the production in question. For full engagement with these intentions, a pre-show should not be ignored.

This raises the question of what might make a pre-show ignorable. The answer lies in its liminality, which I discuss more fully in the next section. The pre-show occupies a mediating position on the one hand between the performance and the non-performance world, and on the other between the performance and the text. To the extent that a pre-show lies rather indeterminately between the audience’s ‘reality’ and the fiction of the play, members of the audience may ignore a pre-show simply by not noticing it. This is particularly likely to

¹⁶ Worthen (1997) p. 38.

happen with pre-shows that precede the scheduled opening time while the audience take their seats. Although 'pre-7.30' pre-shows are often sufficiently engaging or arresting to command attention, this is not always true, or not necessarily seen as significant. Even where a pre-show occurs at the scheduled opening time, before any speaking begins, its purpose is not necessarily clear or unambiguous, and spectators may suspend their response until they feel they are following the story. Play-watching has a relentless forward trajectory, so that a pre-show is sometimes simply discounted once the play is underway. As a result, just as with my experience of group play-going, I find productions where some reviewers take account of a pre-show that others omit to mention, making for some fascinating differences of view.

The other liminal aspect of the pre-show is its interposition between the text and the performance, its transgressing of the textual boundary. For the play-goer who knows the text, such intrusion is not always welcome, and he or she may choose deliberately to ignore any pre-textual business, or to make a clear distinction between such business and the 'play proper', a phrase I encounter frequently in reviews and accounts of performance. This sort of spectator holds the text to be authoritative, with jurisdiction over the performances that it gives rise to. As a part of the performance that precedes the words of the text, particularly if it differs markedly from the scene in which the textual opening might occur – heath or royal palace, say – such action can be seen by some as misleading, presenting an adaptation and not truly 'Shakespeare'. The spectator who knows the text and has turned up to see a performance of it will feel as cheated as an audience member going to hear Beethoven's 5th and *not* hearing the expected 'Da-da-da-Daah' as the first sound after the conductor raises the baton. (This different possibility between 'classical' music, even the musical *drama* that

is opera, and classic drama serves to point up the striking freedom with the text that is open to the latter.) For such a textual puritan – not commonly found today, perhaps, but certainly encountered in the early years of my study – these preliminaries are distractions or sweeteners for the uninitiated, which the knowledgeable attendee can safely ignore while waiting for the known beginning.

If as I argue above, the pre-show demands attention, surely there is a responsibility on the performers to make their intention plain, to *earn* that attention rather than leave open the option of ignoring it? Of course the unavoidable unreliability, or variability, of audience attention on the one side and of ambiguous directorial intention on the other lies at the heart of live performance, which usually seeks to distinguish itself from the directed gaze of film or the dogmatism of documentary. Nonetheless I find this is indeed an issue that directors and designers grapple and experiment with. The development of pre-shows, their variety and frequency, and the responses they call forth, reflect the changing culture of theatre, 'Shakespeare', and the arts, and from these more widely also the shifts in political and social culture of England through the period.

2. What sort of mediation do pre-shows provide between the world of the audience and that of the play?

The world of the audience in this situation encompasses both their knowledge and awareness of the text as cultural artefact, and their everyday reality beyond the theatre.

The pre-show performs two quite distinct mediations, on these two intersecting axes of the play as artefact, and the play as spectacle. On the first axis it offers a way in to the production as *version* of the play, as distinct from the *textual* play. It mediates, that is,

between the (relatively) stable, known artefact of the *text*, and the current, new, unfamiliar *performance* of the play. On the second axis it mediates between the everyday world beyond the theatre and the represented, fictional world of the performance. In the main body of my thesis I examine in detail the dual strands of this work of mediation as it appears in the content of pre-shows and the performances they mediate. A further consideration is the genre of the pre-show itself, as a theatrical device available to a director.

Phenomenologically the pre-show acts as both a moment in itself and an introduction to something beyond itself: it is both threshold and entry-point. In this introduction I shall now examine this more theoretical, generic matter, the nature of the pre-show.

3. The pre-show as threshold

The pre-show is self-evidently *liminal*, a threshold between play and performance, fiction and 'reality'. In his seminal study of liminality in theatre and tribal culture, *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner identifies a number of characteristic attributes of the liminal which offer helpful frameworks for my enquiry. These are the ludic and experimental, the creative and innovative, and the transgressive and resistant. I shall explore these in turn as aspects of liminality, so as to shed light on the types of work done by pre-shows.

i. The ludic and experimental

Turner likens aspects of theatre performance to *liminality* in African puberty rites, as defined by Arnold van Gennep: periods of 'physical separation... from the rest of society', during which the novitiates "'play" with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them'.¹⁷ For

¹⁷ Turner (1982) p. 27.

Turner liminality is characterized by ‘the analysis of culture into factors and their free or “ludic” recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird’. These ludic behaviours of the period of separation are distinguished from the mainstream culture for which they are preparation precisely by their anarchic breaking of convention. When ‘implicit rules begin to appear which limit the possible combination of factors to certain conventional patterns, designs, or configurations,... we are seeing the intrusion of normative social structure into what is ... in principle a free and experimental region of culture’.¹⁸ In this definition the liminal is distinguished from the ‘normative’ or mainstream in cultural phenomena by the *absence* of restricting structures and rules, by the full use made of the liberty to try out new, unexpected, unprecedented forms. Equally importantly, the materials for this free play are not themselves new, but drawn from the normative structures against which the liminal is defined.

These features are equally of the essence of the pre-show in Shakespearean performance, in the selection and free play with elements of the text, whose normative, stable status stands against the pre-show’s free-playing indeterminacy. A pre-show may use design to present symbolic or metonymic representations of elements of the text’s imagery such as a crown, as in Douglas Seale’s *Henry V* (Birmingham Rep, 1957), a mirror, as in Ralph Koltai’s set for Terry Hands’s *Much Ado* (RST, 1982), or an architectural structure, as with Theodore Komisarjevsky’s *Lear* enthroned at the top of a high terrace (SMT, 1937). Or it may present actors in ritual or enigmatic business, drawing from and playing freely with some element from the text such as an aspect of character, as Trevor Nunn did in presenting Leontes trapped in a spinning box (RST, 1969). The pre-show period is a space in which the director

¹⁸ Turner (1982) p. 28.

and/or designer can experiment with 'performance' of all sorts, with the visual, aural, kinaesthetic elements of the stage, riffing on textual material, but free of the defining limits of prescribed speech. This use of 'pure' performance has increased and become more elaborate and experimental over the period of my study, at first on the fringe and in the avant-garde, then after the Second World War with interest in European and Russian performance techniques influencing approaches to movement and, paradoxically, to speech training with the shift in emphasis from 'beautiful' speaking of poetic text to the embodied, physically derived vocal training of Cicely Berry and the field of voice work she has inspired.¹⁹ Later still 'performance' itself has developed into a distinct discipline in contradistinction to 'drama', in turn altering and influencing the experience of actors and their relation to text. As the text has been subjected to increasing interrogation and physicalisation in performance, the range of the ludic, or of what is subjected to experimentation, has grown, shifting the centre of attention from the play as artefact – its tone, meanings, themes – to the play as a prism through which to explore aspects of wider society and history, and thence to the audience and its relationship with the play.

ii. The creative and innovative

Turner's observations on liminal situations lead him to see them as 'seedbeds of cultural creativity'.²⁰ Arising directly from the ludic and experimental is the corollary: liminality is 'a region where not only new elements but also new combinatory rules may be introduced – far more readily than in the case of language'.²¹ In tribal societies this innovative, rule-

¹⁹ See, for example, Berry (1973; 1987; 2001; 2008)

²⁰ Turner (1982) p. 28.

²¹ Turner (1982) p. 28.

changing possibility is necessarily limited to 'a subversive flicker', 'held in check from innovative excess... by "taboos", "checks and balances", etc.',²² but in the longer term it may indeed result in change. The 'tribal liminal' is

a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, or societal change, in a way that the central tendencies of a social system can never quite succeed in being, the spheres where law and custom, and the modes of social control ancillary to these, prevail. Innovation can take place in such spheres, but most frequently it occurs in interfaces and limina, then becomes *legitimated* in central sectors.²³

The pre-show too has these characteristics: new elements may be introduced, where a pre-show places the action in a setting not previously attempted, or combines a character or society from the play with a new outlook or configuration – another way of saying it presents a new 'reading' of the text – which is then adopted in future productions. For example, Peter Hall's 1967 pre-show to *Macbeth* that featured a Satanic inverted cross spawned productions of the play by Trevor Nunn and Adrian Noble with similar pre-show images and interpretative approaches.²⁴ Some years later a new 'norm' has brought children forward from their place in the text into the pre-show to explore psychological states or causes linked to childhood and succession. In Noble's 1986 *Macbeth* the witches uncovered a boy hidden beneath a cloak as they scavenged on the battlefield; in 1993 at Glasgow's Tron Theatre Michael Boyd's witches were 'three weird children'²⁵, an idea he

²² Turner (1982) p. 44.

²³ Turner (1982) p. 45, original emphasis.

²⁴ Nunn's at the RST, 1974, 1975, and *The Other Place*, 1976; Noble's at the RST, 1986.

²⁵ Michael Coveney, *Observer*, 9 May 1993.

reused at the RST in 2011; Conall Morrison staged a pre-show in which Macbeth strangled a baby and the witches 'taunt[ed] [him] with the sight of puppet-infants'.²⁶ In an interpolated pre-show coronation in Josie Rourke's *King John* at the Swan in 2006 the king's insecurity was represented as the boy Arthur 'skip[ped] mockingly around John and [sat] defiantly in his throne'.²⁷ The boy Mamillius has become something of a fixture in pre-shows to *The Winter's Tale*: examples include Trevor Nunn (1969), Adrian Noble (1992), Nicholas Hytner (2001), Edward Hall (2005), and Lucy Bailey (2013). A twentieth-century war setting has featured in pre-shows to plays ranging from the histories to *Troilus and Cressida* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Each creative innovation runs the risk of disapprobation, of critical or box-office failure, but some break through to become 'legitimated' by imitation in subsequent performances.

An objection may be made here, that the innovative work was done in the rehearsal room or in interactions between director and designer, long before the pre-show reached the stage. Turner himself finds the theatrical parallel to ritual liminality in the rehearsal workshop, rather than in the finished performance. The seedbed for innovation is indeed in the seeds of the performance rather than in its fully grown structure. In what senses does the pre-show performed in the finished production offer the innovative creativity of its liminal status? I suggest that it *performs* the work of innovation, brings it to public attention, as a means to highlight the ways the whole production will present that creative re-construction. It asks the audience to enter the play through a new portal, so to speak, from which a new perspective is opened up on the text. In this way it invites spectators to see and respond to

²⁶ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 18 Apr 2007.

²⁷ Dobson (2007) p. 309.

the playfulness and hence to seek new meaning. Performance theory indeed insists on the essential role played by the audience, its work of creating meaning being necessary to complete any given performance. In some interactive pre-shows, with peripatetic or promenade audience involvement, there is also the opportunity for participation in the creativity together with the meaning-making, such as with Peter Hall's *Coriolanus* (1984) or Max Stafford-Clark's *Macbeth* (2004), although the creative parameters are controlled by the performers. To the extent that such pre-shows are experimental, they seek the endorsement of an audience in breaking through to legitimate status, making that audience participants in the innovative process.

iii. The transgressive and resistant

Turner finds a close relation between tribal rituals that 'invert or parody' reality and the 'lavish scope' given in industrial cultures to 'authors, poets, dramatists, painters... "makers" generally' to 'generate not only weird forms, but also... models ...that are highly critical of the *status quo* as a whole or in part'.²⁸ What is latently subversive but ultimately suppressed in agrarian cultures apparently develops in industrial cultures into *un*suppressed critique. There is no *requirement* that the liminal should subvert, and indeed 'many artists... also buttress, reinforce, justify, or otherwise seek to legitimate the prevailing social and cultural mores and political orders', a situation that offers a closer parallel to tribal rituals, which 'invert' for the ultimate purpose of returning to the 'traditional order', rather than seeking to critique cultural norms. However, there is a cultural link between the liminal and somatic performance on the one hand and the conventional and textual on the other, a link already

²⁸ Turner (1982) p. 40

evident in early modern drama in the performance of clowns, with their tendency to hover in the liminal and ludic zone of 'damnable faces',²⁹ provoking those anxious for the play to 'begin' to complain of transgression of the 'necessary question of the play'.³⁰ Irritation with pre-shows for delaying the textual beginning or transgressing the 'Shakespearean text' is found throughout the period of my study.

Of course, the status quo that is immediately transgressed in a pre-show is the text, rather than the systems, conventions and institutions of the wider culture. Over the period since 1932 the stability of that text has itself been challenged by scholarship, its apparent unitary origin in the mind of the genius 'Shakespeare' shown to be notional, a cultural construct. Scholarship has thus strengthened the case for performative flexibility in the use of texts: it has needed no innovatory seed-sowing pre-show to establish this new norm. Rather, the pre-show has been the site of introduction to the performance in question, to what it offers that is new, much as the Prologue was the site of introduction to a new play in the early modern theatre, charged with the task of making its audience receptive to what they were about to see. An important function of the liminal moment, in both its transgressive and supportive variations, is rhetorical, or perlocutionary, designed to persuade the audience by its performative force of its coherence as entry point into the play.

One scholar who has responded to the ludic and transgressive qualities of the pre-show is Robert Smallwood, who drew attention to the phenomenon of the pre-show in 1992, in a paper delivered at the Vienna conference of the Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft West,

²⁹ See *Hamlet* 3.2.240. (all references to Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor et al, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon, 2005)

³⁰ See *Hamlet* 3.2.41-2.

and published in their *Jahrbuch* the following year. For Smallwood the opening 'little directorial dumb-show'³¹ is a recently created, rather transgressive theatrical space, replacing earlier theatrical means of entry into 'the play's world of make-believe' such as the use of an overture or the raising of the curtain, the disappearance of which has made 'the moment of transition... much less clear-cut'.³² The indeterminate space thus opened up has become an opportunity, 'an area of infinite fascination, endlessly exploitable by directors',³³ as Smallwood goes on to explore in 14 RSC productions ranging from 1978 to 1992.

Smallwood's response confirms my analysis of the liminal qualities of the pre-show, in particular its ludic and transgressive elements. He positions himself somewhere between defender of the authority of the text and champion of its playful (ab)use by exuberant directors. Ideologically he is accustomed to regarding 'the play' as 'the text', but the certainty of that boundary is disrupted by pre-shows, prompting him to ask of these productions: 'where, after all, does a Shakespeare play begin – when one first enters the theatre and begins to contemplate what is presented to one's attention, or when the first line of the text is spoken?'³⁴ His language suggests a sort of subversive excitement about this new playground, a 'free space' that directors create for themselves 'before the authorial text comes along to restrict that freedom and to cramp [their] style'.³⁵ The 'authorial text' is cast unambiguously in the role of a disciplining authority cheekily, if not dangerously, flouted by scenes of 'pure invention' (Smallwood's emphasis), or even by 'the creation of a time-gap' between the entries of characters listed *together* in an opening stage direction – invention

³¹ Smallwood (1993) p. 73.

³² Smallwood (1993) p. 74.

³³ Smallwood (1993) p. 74.

³⁴ Smallwood (1993) p. 84.

³⁵ Smallwood (1993) p. 73.

‘less pure but still inventive’,³⁶ as though names appearing together in the text ought not to be separated in performance. And yet, despite this firmly text-centred expectation of Shakespearean performance, Smallwood generally enjoys the results. The variety of directorial ‘readings’ that can be made without altering the text, but simply playing an attitude that the text leaves ambiguous, clearly excites and interests him, and he exemplifies his point with three *Much Ados* set in very different, contrasting societies and psychological contexts, all setting up their conceptual idea in the ‘opening few minutes, *before Shakespeare started writing*’.³⁷ He finds ‘*pure invention*’ illuminating where it offers a plausible completion of a gap in the textual narrative. Nunn’s *Measure for Measure*, inventing a filling-out of Angelo’s broken engagement to Mariana as a social scandal collected in newspaper clippings, may have ‘left out much that academic criticism has at different times found there’, but ‘within its own chosen terms it was entirely coherent, convincing, and impressive’.³⁸ Even the productions that boldly invent new text, the *Shrews* with additional inductions, are admired, first implicitly, by Smallwood’s lively retelling, and finally explicitly, for weaving their conceptual idea through the whole production.³⁹

Having responded to the ludic and transgressive, Smallwood subsequently seems to accept the *innovative* aspects of the pre-show’s liminality by assimilating their ludic transgressions into (his academic) mainstream culture. Three years after this paper he develops his ideas in an article that switches his focus from the question of where the play begins to the phenomenon of ‘Directors’ Shakespeare’, which he sees exemplified in pre-shows, and in

³⁶ Smallwood (1993) p. 73.

³⁷ Smallwood (1993) p. 75, original emphases.

³⁸ Smallwood (1993) p. 75. I discuss this production more fully in Chapter 6.

³⁹ Smallwood (1993) pp. 79-80.

their counterparts at endings. For the former he reworks his analysis of the three productions of *Much Ado* from his previous paper, concluding, 'Here were three productions of *Much Ado*..., each postponing the entry of the messenger for a few seconds to create directorial space that would present a strong interpretative angle on the play'.⁴⁰ 'Directors' Theatre' and 'Directors' Shakespeare' are terms implying a critical distance, even a certain scholarly disdain, but Smallwood accepts the phrase and seeks to explain and rehabilitate the concept it names. 'Directors' Shakespeare' in Smallwood's analysis, found where a production deviates from the textual beginning by some interpolation of the director's own devising, derives 'from the great expansion of the academic Shakespeare industry over the last half-century and more',⁴¹ with influential directors often Cambridge English graduates. Such an opening announces that the production 'is not only going to present Shakespeare's play; it is also going to offer something of an interpretative essay on it, showing its awareness of other critical essays, academic and theatrical'.⁴² Thus Smallwood recuperates directorial invention as literary criticism, indeed, locates its origin in scholarly methodology, and finds the pre-show, together with the ending, a focal area for its deployment. This deftly retains the text, particularly the text as object of scholarly interpretation, apart from and unscathed by performance, and legitimates the pleasure of the pre-show by making it no more subversive than an audacious but insightful piece of literary criticism.

Smallwood's account of the pre-show as opening gambit to a critical essay is useful up to a point. In this model the mediation on offer is that between audience and text, serving the important function of *meaning*, of alerting the audience to a particular interpretative or

⁴⁰ Smallwood (1996) p. 193.

⁴¹ Smallwood (1996) p. 177.

⁴² Smallwood (1996) p. 177.

thematic emphasis made by the production in question. However, it assumes an audience of academics, who come to the theatre with a knowledge and pre-formed critical view of the text, and whose expectation of the theatrical experience is identical with that of the scholarly essay. He speaks, in other words, only for people like himself. While his is an important constituency for Shakespearean performance in England, it is much narrower than the one envisaged by the performing team, who have also to provide a mediation for the non-specialist with a more basic awareness of the text, and a mediation between everyday reality and the fiction of the play. My next section examines an alternative model.

4. The Pre-show as entry-point

In the traditional curtained proscenium-arch theatre the moment of the curtain's rise is the entry-point, a sort of minimal threshold moment:

an interfacial region or... an interval, however brief, of *margin* or *limen*, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.⁴³

Angela Carter memorably describes this moment in *Wise Children*, through the eyes of a seven-year-old in pre-war London:

It was almost too much for me and Nora. We were mute with ecstasy. The plaster cherubs lifting aloft gilt swags and crystal candelabra on the walls; the red plush; ... and the wonderful curtain that hung between us and pleasure, the curtain that, in a delicious agony of anticipation, we knew would soon rise and then and then... what

⁴³ Turner (1982) p. 44.

wonderful secrets would be revealed to us, then?... The lights went down, the bottom of the curtain glowed. I loved it and have always loved it best of all, the moment when the lights go down, the curtain glows, you know that something wonderful is going to happen. It doesn't matter if what happens next spoils everything; the anticipation itself is always pure.⁴⁴

The curtain demarcates the (temporary) end of one world and the beginning of the other, but, as Carter's account explores, that boundary has temporal as well as material substance: the fact of the moment of curtain-rise is 'an instant of pure potentiality when everything trembles in the balance', creating a tension of uncertainty and speculation that is intensified by the changes in lighting that signal the approaching opening.

The curtain rise, however, carries no meaning or interpretative suggestion of its own. Its function as *limen* is as marker of the moment, holding back the performance world until a given signal for that world to emerge. During the period of my study this readily understood moment of beginning disappears quite quickly somewhere around the 1950s, making way for a blurring of the threshold into the play and opening up the point of entry as a space in which directors can 'play' with pre-show performance, as Smallwood explores with his question of *where* the play begins. One interesting but short-lived combination of curtain and pre-show uses the curtain as a canvas for the designer to make symbolic suggestions about the production's interpretative approach, as I explore in Chapter 5.

The enacted pre-show is not, however, purely an innovation of the curtainless stage. On the contrary, it has a long history in the opening action *after* the curtain goes up. In the days of

⁴⁴ Carter (1992) p. 54.

late-Victorian spectacle the procession or pageant was popular, and continues well into the (curtainless) present as an arresting call to attention, as happened in Trevor Nunn's 'Roman' season in 1972 and his *King Lear* in 2010. It also offers a certain embryonic presentation of characters by their costume, bearing or physical presence. A lower-key alternative might set the scene for a few moments with some character-appropriate but inconsequential behaviour or activity, less a call to attention but equally a chance to absorb something of character, relationship or society, before the story begins. These offer a quasi-realistic entry into the play, conveying the audience from their everyday reality into the fiction, and also offering some interpretative introduction in the way Smallwood describes. Such pre-shows are particularly suited to the proscenium, lighted-box type of production where the audience sits in the dark complying with the convention that they are invisible, voyeurs on an entirely separate world from their own.

The pre-show, or pre-textual activity, by contrast with the curtain-rise, carries meaning, *introduces* rather than *demarcates*. As entry-point the pre-show shares some features of the paratext, as Gérard Genette calls those introductory or framing devices of the novel that act as threshold, such as the title, preface or dedication.⁴⁵ In Genette's formulation, the paratext is 'in effect, always bearer of an authorial commentary', and 'constitutes, between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not just of transition, but of *transaction*',⁴⁶ since it has 'illocutionary force', performing with particular intentions on the reader that vary from simply informing to imparting an interpretation⁴⁷ or assigning a genre.⁴⁸ As Genette's

⁴⁵ See Genette (1991).

⁴⁶ Genette, p. 261.

⁴⁷ Genette, p. 268.

⁴⁸ Genette, p. 270.

translator, Marie Maclean, notes in the case of one paratextual form, the title: 'in every case, the title offers guidance, attempts to control the reader's approach to the text, and the reader's construction of that text'.⁴⁹ Although Genette's account applies to the novel, and the parallels between his paratextual forms and the pre-show are rather tenuous, the generic characteristics overlap strikingly, offering a useful model for my enquiry. The pre-show is a zone of both transition and transaction, *steering* the spectator into the text, particularly into the performance's *approach* to the text. In place of the novel's author, or of the author's surrogate such as the editor, the pre-show is 'authored' by the director, or his or her surrogate such as the designer, imparting an interpretation or a genre, a *way in* to the performance, in both the literal threshold sense, and the interpretative sense of beginning to follow a narrative thread.

One scholar who has considered the opening moments to Shakespeare productions as entry points is Jean-Marie Maguin, in a short article called "'Once upon a time...," or How to Start the Play in Performance'. Maguin's terms show he thinks of the opening into the fictional world as liminal in Turner's sense. Taking as model the story-teller's 'Once upon a time' convention, the phrase itself acting 'like a spell, conveying us from the real world to a land both near and far...', Maguin asks first how the *playwright* 'convey[s] us across the invisible frontier between reality and the play-world', how in fact the playwright-story-teller in his 'more complex' medium effects 'the rite of passage'.⁵⁰ He identifies three distinct ways in which Shakespeare's *textual* openings perform this function – the first, the Prologue, 'poses as story-teller', the second, the *in medias res* opening, 'plung[es] us into the middle of the

⁴⁹ Maclean (1991), p. 275.

⁵⁰ Maguin (1988) p. 47.

dramatic action with a studied neglect of preparation', and a third, more 'neutral' method opens with a 'public speech or private remark' that has 'been extricated from the dramatic bustle' and so gives us 'time to catch up on the situation'.⁵¹ For Maguin, in this last type of opening, which he identifies in just nine plays (*1 Henry VI*, *Twelfth Night*, *Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King John*, *Merchant of Venice*; *1 Henry IV*, *All's Well*; *Winter's Tale*), '[i]t is not language but theatre which is left to handle the "Once upon a time"'.⁵²

Unlike Smallwood, Maguin sees a distinction between text and performance, finding lacunae in the former: in his view, Shakespeare has left no clear instructions, but allowed creative scope to the performers, 'left [it] to the stage director's, designer's and actor's imagination' to find the 'sort of theatrical configuration', the 'sort of action or stage-business' that will 'validate the linguistic opening'.⁵³

Maguin goes on to examine the opening moments of five productions at Stratford-upon-Avon between 1972 and 1986. In each case he describes the pre-show he saw as an audience member, and selects for comment the use of a theatrical device or a feature of the staging: a 'tableau' in John Barton's *Twelfth Night* (1972); a 'dumbshow' in Barry Kyle's *Two Noble Kinsmen* (1986); transparent veil curtains in Adrian Noble's *As You Like It* (1985) and Terry Hands's *Winter's Tale* (1986), and actors in tracksuits in Hands's *Henry V* (1975). Each of these, for Maguin, operates in some way as the 'Once upon a time' of story, conveying the audience into that indeterminate time in the past or in the imagination that is set apart from the reality of here and now. Kyle's dumbshow 'summ[ed] up the prehistory of the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta', and Barton's tableau '[stood] for the "Once

⁵¹ Maguin, pp. 47-48.

⁵² Maguin, p. 49.

⁵³ Maguin, p. 48-49, my emphasis.

upon a time..." of the performance... comparable to the still picture blurring into life and movement on the cinema or TV screen'.⁵⁴ Behind veil curtains Noble made visible the waiting set, and Hands showed a stylised dance, each allowing a view into 'the land of that indefinite time out of which the story is born', the 'germination of the play-world: the time that was so that the story could be'.⁵⁵

Maguin's analysis focuses on the pre-show as mediator of the fiction, in contradistinction to Smallwood's focus on the mediation of interpretation. Where Smallwood views the play as an artefact, subjected in performance to interpretative labour and made to *mean*, Maguin views it as a story given complete coherence only in performance, made by the performers' creative completion to explain its temporal and causational shape. In this model the creative and innovative aspect of the pre-show's liminality is a *requirement* rather than an option, made necessary by the gap left by the playwright. He conceives of the fiction of a play as having a life-span, owing its being to germination and birth, with directionality, duration and causation. The task of pre-shows for Maguin is to take the audience over the threshold into the story world to its point of origin, from where they can follow its growing to maturity, 'making the dramatic action presented the fruit and heir of its own hypothetical past'.⁵⁶ Maguin's model sees the director's task as conceiving – by 'imagining' – the past that the playwright omitted, as telling a story that is linear and explanatory, events following in a direct line from a point of origin, to which they are finally traceable.

⁵⁴ Maguin, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Maguin, pp. 50, 51.

⁵⁶ Maguin, p. 49.

Hands's tracksuited actors in 1975 present Maguin with a very different case, however, as Hands refused the analogy with story-telling by crossing the threshold in a determinedly theatrical way that played with and transgressed the story-telling convention. The opening in casual clothes implied at the start that rehearsal was still going on, and the first scenes of the play continued in similar mode, so that the impression was given that the play 'had not yet really started, that this was nothing but a last minute rehearsal and that the passages rehearsed would be gone over again "properly", that is to say, respecting the propriety of the rite of passage into the world of the play'.⁵⁷ In the event there was no such rerun, the English party continuing in their tracksuits until the preparations for the French wars, when they changed into armour. Maguin does note here a hermeneutic possibility, that the tracksuits of the English denoted 'hearts as simple and pleasantly humble as their clothes' by contrast with the 'arrogance of the French party... expressed through their decorous costume'.⁵⁸ His real interest, however, is in finding a fit for his 'Once upon a time' model, which he locates in the clothing itself presenting the time not of the story but of the rehearsal room. The tracksuit acted as 'the "Once upon a time..." of the succeeding armour which denoted the war-like King whose story was being presented', showing 'how rehearsing *is* the prehistory of the polished performance'. Hands, in Maguin's model, did indeed present a point of origin, not of the *story*, but of the *performance*. I discuss this production more fully in chapter 6.⁵⁹

Maguin's analysis usefully focuses on a single aspect of the pre-show – that of time. He makes clear that a crucial function of the pre-show in conveying the spectator over the

⁵⁷ Maguin, p. 49.

⁵⁸ Maguin, p. 50.

⁵⁹ See p. 252.

threshold into the play is the establishment of a temporal perspective. The possible perspectives are multiplied by the dual aspect of live performance as *story* (once upon a time) and as *event* (now), both of which have antecedent times out of which they grew. These two possibilities helpfully define a further two functions served by pre-shows: *narrative* and *theatricality*, which, together with *meaning* as defined by Smallwood's article, provide the triad of functions on which I structure Chapters 3-6. However, Maguin's temporal framework is rather reductive, in taking no account of the world beyond the theatre, where the director's initiative and creative choices are made, where, in fact, the ludic, innovative, transgressive work of the pre-show is itself germinated. Where Smallwood locates the play in the text, Maguin locates it in its story. There is a further dimension to consider: the play in the world.

The place of Shakespeare in twentieth century culture and society: what impact have pre-shows had on the reception of the performed plays?

Michael Dobson examines this dimension of the pre-show in his article 'Writing About [Shakespearean] Performance',⁶⁰ in which he explores a current issue of critical interest – 'how performances exceed texts' – through two productions that 'supplement and overflow their respective texts' in their openings.⁶¹ In each case the opening moments, before 'any of Shakespeare's lines'⁶² was spoken, acknowledged the audience's interactive presence and culturally driven desires by presenting a spectacle intended to rouse applause, followed by a brief hiatus to allow the response. These pre-shows, or 'preludes', were the entry

⁶⁰ Dobson (2005).

⁶¹ Dobson, p. 160.

⁶² Dobson, p. 162.

respectively of Dame Judi Dench, at the acme of her career as the nation's favourite actress, playing the Countess of Rousillon in Gregory Doran's *All's Well* at the Swan in 2003, and of the amateur cast of a *Merchant of Venice* in all the finery of their lavishly made costumes. While the amateur production duly received its warm applause in customary admiration of the costumes, Dench's arrival, already expressing the emotional state of the character in a sort of 'wordless soliloquy', was greeted in silence, against the pressure of the audience's desire, in obedience to an unwritten contract by which 'we were all to pretend that Dench's... performance was completely subordinate to the play'.⁶³

Dobson's fascinating analysis of the complex cultural codes lying behind these pre-shows and their reception demonstrates the sort of work that can be required to link performed Shakespeare to its moment of performance. In ways that Smallwood and Maguin do not consider, audiences have multiple viewpoints and cultural expectations, and enact sometimes convoluted performances of their own, particularly in the opening moments of watching a Shakespeare play with all it carries of status, knowledge and expectation. While journalist- and scholar-reviewers sometimes acknowledge audience positions in making their own responses and assessments, Dobson adopts the *persona* of an audience-member to provide a thick description of the opening moments of Doran's *All's Well* that covers the theatre furnishing, the messages requesting the silencing of electronic devices, and the changes in lighting that 'transport' the audience from auditorium to fictional world, before slipping into a sort stream-of-consciousness account where detailed sense impressions blend into interpretation and the first attempts at personal story-telling, registering finally the thrill of recognition of the star performer herself, and with it, an awareness of that recognition all

⁶³ Dobson, p. 165.

over the auditorium around him. In accounting for the effect of this opening Dobson considers principally, not Shakespeare's *text*, although he notes the alteration made in having Dench enter alone before other characters follow, but Dench's place in the total cultural experience of the *audience*, encompassing theatre, television and film, spanning more than the lifetimes of many, and endowing her with the familiarity and love almost of a family member. In addition, he notes two theatrical conventions: one whereby the role of the Countess is a valedictory performance by a great Shakespearean actress, and the other that triggers 'spontaneous' applause at the first appearance on stage of the major performer the audience have paid particularly to see. Finally he adds the third theatrical convention, adopted only by the more discerning audiences who come to see professional 'Shakespeare', according to which they suppress their desire to applaud in recognition of the more restrained formality due to an occasion of high cultural status: 'The production tempted us to be vulgar enough to greet her with applause, and then congratulated us on saving it all up for the curtain call'.⁶⁴

The use of a pre-show to introduce a star performer is of course as exceptional as the presence of such extremely famous actors in Shakespearean productions. The transfer of major celebrity from stage to cinema takes place during the period of my study, somewhere around the 1960s, making one of the cultural climate changes against which the pre-show in Shakespearean performance develops. What is significant to all pre-shows, however, is the complex cultural negotiation they perform at the interface of text, performance and audience, and the requirement to find some correlative of each of these in order to proceed successfully into the main body of the play. Dobson points out that both these productions

⁶⁴ Dobson, p. 165.

were ‘very cosy pieces of work’, ‘formally and ideologically highly conservative’.⁶⁵ The ludic, innovative, even the transgressive potentiality of the pre-show is not necessarily or only at the service of new ‘readings’, nor of the origins of the ‘story’ in either its internal narrativity or its external theatricality, but also a vital tool to help bridge the space between the performance of the textual artefact and the cultural moment in which it occurs.

Considerations of theatre history: How widespread is or has been the use of the pre-show?

As I suggested above, the pre-show was already a feature of Shakespearean production long before 1932, for example in the elaborate pageants and processions beloved of the great actor-managers in the 19th century, when the idea of *faithful* Shakespearean performance applied rather to accurate setting in the period of the play’s events than to authenticity of staging or textual delivery. That is, the pre-show has probably always been an accepted part of Shakespearean performance, and it is only in comparatively recent times, since, in fact, the idea, or the ideal, of ‘authentic’ performance occurred to William Poel in the late 1870s, that the interpolated pre-show might be considered anomalous or noteworthy. Poel, and those most closely associated with his ideals – Nugent Monck, Harley Granville-Barker and Edward Gordon Craig – focused mainly on ‘Elizabethan staging’, that is, on a bare or uncluttered apron stage and no curtain between scenes; while they also aimed at an ‘exaggerated naturalness’⁶⁶ of delivery of the uncut text, the focus was on speaking the *whole* text, which required much greater speed than the previous norm and gave less time to ‘business’. The text was expected, and often found, to convey the play’s meaning more clearly in these conditions, and no extra elucidation or underlining, such as a pre-show might

⁶⁵ Dobson, p. 167.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Londré and Berthold (1999), p. 490.

provide, would be likely in such an ideology. Modern design, however, seems to have been deployed. Granville-Barker used stylised scenery to convey symbolic or atmospheric meaning, and Craig created symbolic, expressionistic effects with lighting, gauzes, screens and blocks. Thus design changed from painted 'realistic' scenery using perspective *trompe l'oeil* effects, and became more interpretative or suggestive, but remained important even in what was regarded as 'Elizabethan' staging. The pre-show use of design is an important element in the early and middle periods of my study, and continues to play a part today.

While design is a means of directing an audience's attention to an interpretative approach, and of deploying the ludic, innovative and transgressive features of the liminal, its performative force is much less than that of the acting body on stage. In the early part of my study the pre-show involving stage activity is mostly limited to pageant and procession, so that the few examples of enacted pre-show scenes are particularly note-worthy, and regarded as innovative or transgressive by commentators. In the opening season of the newly built Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1932 the Russian director Theodore Komisarjevsky variously startled, delighted and irritated those who wrote about the harlequin dance that opened his *Merchant of Venice*, and Peter Brook at the very beginning of his career offended some by appending a short mime to open *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1946, as I discuss in Chapter 3. The progression from these early active pre-shows to the near-normalisation in the 21st century of extended onstage activity before a Shakespearean word is heard is the matter of my thesis.

Looked at over an extended period, does the pre-show offer some insight into the uses of 'Shakespeare' in the wider cultural context?

Of course there are examples of comparable stage practices in early modern drama, on which Shakespeare drew and to which he in turn contributed. Dumbshows, prologues and inductions were familiar and available introductory elements at the time of the plays' original performances, and have received some scholarly attention.⁶⁷ Critics often use these terms in describing the opening moments of modern productions,⁶⁸ suggesting that modern usages are unproblematically conventional, or, more disparagingly, outmoded or derivative. I shall consider these studies of early modern pre-play devices briefly, to explore points of comparison and development.

In his seminal study on the Elizabethan dumbshow, Dieter Mehl takes an historical approach, seeking origins and exploring the uses of the dumbshow in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He considers the dumbshow as having evolved from the need ultimately to fuse the 'two basic elements of drama': speech and action.⁶⁹ The dumbshow or pantomime already existed as a lively supplement to rhetorical speech in sermons and processions, pageants and spectacles, a common feature of secular and religious, civic and courtly

⁶⁷ Mehl (1965), Greenfield (1969), Young (1969), Bruster and Weimann (2004), Stern (2004, 2009).

⁶⁸ Eg on Charles Kean's *King Lear*, 1858: 'an Euripidean prologue... introducing to the audience the principal figures of the tale so arranged as to furnish the mind with a starting point.' (*Times* reviewer, quoted in Bratton 1987, p.57); on Peter Brook's *Love's Labour's Lost*, 1946, 'the impertinent opening dumb show' (*Royal Leamington Spa Courier* 3 May 1946), 'a brief dumbshow prologue' (*Punch* 22 May 1946); on Trevor Nunn's *As You Like It*, 1977: 'an operatic prologue' (Trewin, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29), 'a seemingly extraneous prologue' (Roger Warren, *Shakespeare Survey* 31); on Barry Kyle's *Two Noble Kinsmen*, 1986: 'opened... with a dumbshow summing up the prehistory of the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta...' (Maguin 1988); Nunn on his *Twelfth Night* film, 1996: 'I introduced a prologue' (*Cineaste* 1998); on Deborah Warner's *Richard II*, 1997: 'opening dumb show behind gauze...' (Rutter 1997) p.319; on Jonathan Munby's *Comedy of Errors*, 2005: 'dumb show voyage' (Dobson 2006).

⁶⁹ Mehl, p.3.

presentations,⁷⁰ so that its use in early drama appears an organic development, both in its form and in its purpose, which is primarily allegorical: ‘pantomimes, like the early dumb shows, often had a double meaning and had to be interpreted in the light of current events by the audience themselves’.⁷¹ The medium for this interpretative task was partly emblematic, via allegorical or mythological character-types, and partly verbal, via explicatory speeches or ‘arguments’ spoken by a Chorus figure.⁷² As the drama developed the dumbshow was variously adapted to be more integrated into the narrative, notably by the replacement of allegorical characters with figures from the drama itself, and by its adoption for purposes of narrative shortcut, or the creation of atmosphere.⁷³ However, the semiotic force of a dumbshow remained set apart from the main body of the spoken drama, its very wordlessness compelling interpretation. Moreover, its popularity seems characteristic of its time and place: ‘In no other country did [dumbshows] become such a widespread tradition and such an integral part of drama as in England’, arising from ‘an allegorical habit of mind’, ‘a characteristic ... desire to make abstract spiritual experiences and conflicts visible as concrete scenes and to impress a moral idea on the spectators by appealing directly to the senses’.⁷⁴

Does Mehl’s account of the rise of the dumbshow offer any insight into the modern pre-show? As a genealogical model it is of dubious value, given the gulf – or rather rupture – that now exists between sacred and secular purposes of presentation, the intervening closure of theatres, and the decline of the dumbshow’s use even before that closure.

⁷⁰ Mehl, pp.4-8.

⁷¹ Mehl, p.8.

⁷² Mehl, pp.9-10.

⁷³ Mehl, p.20-22.

⁷⁴ Mehl, p.17.

Modern critics' use of the term 'dumbshow', other than applied to early modern examples and the consciously archaic pastiche of *Hamlet's* 'Murder of Gonzago', tends to carry an ironic archaism, even when it is applied to the production of an Elizabethan play. The implication is that newly-coined dumbshows are self-consciously antiquated, akin to the wearing of Elizabethan costume. The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms the word as applicable to 'early drama', and, in its secondary definition of 'significant gesture without speech', offers a quotation from 1888 as its most recent example.⁷⁵ Mehl's study also shows that the dumbshow was from the beginning not confined to an introductory function, but equally used for continuity or narrative contrast in the body of the play. Thus, although a pre-show may be wordless, 'dumbshow' alone does not define it, but would need further definition as introductory or preparatory.

Nonetheless, Mehl's examination of the purposes and effects of dumbshows is interesting for my enquiry at the level of function or operation. In Mehl's model, the spoken word comes first, and its illustration by 'simultaneous silent action' follows: early dumbshows were devised to serve pageants, public presentations and plays.⁷⁶ That is, the *message* to be conveyed – pomp, moral precept, narrative content – is already a given, and the dumbshow action is devised as a secondary, physicalized or embodied means of conveying it. Thelma L. Greenfield, studying the Induction in Elizabethan drama, by which she comprehends dumb and spoken inductions, also finds these elements serving prior text, calling them 'curious playlets in which the author dramatized some statement about his play'.⁷⁷ The modern pre-show similarly plays a serving, or at least subservient, role to a prior text, although its service

⁷⁵ *OED* online, consulted 19 Jan 2015.

⁷⁶ Mehl, pp. 3-4

⁷⁷ Greenfield, p.xiii

comes some 400 years after the text it serves, and so presents whatever 'statement' or introductory gesture it makes about the play from outside, without the authority, that is, of the author or the author's cultural context. Just as the early induction or introductory dumbshow served to explain or comment on the play to follow, the modern pre-show prepares or orientates the spectator towards an understanding, however selective or idiosyncratic, of the textual play, even as it plays with, subverts or simply capitalises on that text.

Where Mehl adopts an objective stance vis-à-vis theatre history in tracing the development of the dumbshow over a period of time, Greenfield situates herself squarely in her own context, from which she seeks a broad synthesis of the function of inductions. Writing in 1969, she straddles the line between puzzlement to make sense of a 'dramatic art' that seems deliberately to undermine its own purpose – the creation of 'dramatic illusion' – and sympathetic grasp of the otherness of the Elizabethans, who were 'not especially dependent on our modern tacit agreement to accept the play as the real thing and ourselves, the audience, as invisible or even non-existent'.⁷⁸ The induction, 'the little drama which Elizabethan playwrights sometimes used to set their big drama going',⁷⁹ while apparently perversely taking 'particular cognizance of the audience',⁸⁰ existed in Greenfield's view not to begin the process of creating illusion, but 'to say something about the play, about its story, its themes, its method, or its very existence'.⁸¹ Greenfield takes a taxonomic approach, classifying inductions according to the means they use to draw attention to their own artifice

⁷⁸ Greenfield, p.xi.

⁷⁹ Greenfield, p.xvi.

⁸⁰ Greenfield, p.xiii.

⁸¹ Greenfield, p.xvi.

– through their use of supernatural characters and personifications, stylistic distinctness, actors playing their own performance preparations, frame-play spectators – and finds that the Elizabethan concept of ‘reality’ was, not illogically, directly opposed to that of her own time, inhering in the world in which the play is performed, not the world within the play’s narrative. By means of the induction, dramatists ‘imply a connection between the play and other realms and reflect the relation between the play and its audience. They make explicit the ties that link shadow and substance’.⁸²

The specific types of induction found in Greenfield’s study, like Mehl’s on dumbshows, are of little direct relevance to my thesis: few modern pre-shows introduce supernatural or allegorical figures, conduct ironic critiques of audience morality or crassness, or comment chorically on the action. Where inductions perform similar story-telling tasks, such as scene-setting or sketching back-story, they are much more direct and explicit about doing so than modern pre-shows, and this is even more true where they offer a moral viewpoint or invite a ‘universal’ parallel.⁸³ What is more interesting for my thesis is Greenfield’s ‘discovery’ of distinct Elizabethan cultural expectations and norms, which invite parallels with Raymond Williams’ ‘dominant’ cultural forms, or with Hans Robert Jauss’s ‘horizon of expectations’.⁸⁴ I shall extend my own discussion of pre-shows as theatrical devices to consider issues of culture and reception: to explore insights into the place of Shakespeare in the modern cultural context. In this sense the pre-show is a site of hermeneutic density, as it was in its older formats of dumbshow and induction.

⁸² Greenfield, p.12.

⁸³ Greenfield, p.150-1

⁸⁴ Williams (1977), Jauss (1982).

Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann's 2004 study of Prologues in early modern drama traces developments in prologues and inductions from the classical, through the medieval, to the early modern, culminating in Shakespeare's various prologues and choruses. Although their study is of written text that precedes performance, rather than, as mine, theatrical presentation that precedes spoken text, its analysis of the threshold to performance in a period of rapid cultural change sheds interesting light on my project. In 2004 it is no longer surprising to encounter the non-illusionistic nature of Elizabethan drama, but Bruster and Weimann's discovery is remarkably similar in cultural and theoretical focus to Greenfield's: that the prologues imply in their content 'not only a "poetics", but, in many cases, a poetics of theatre, even of culture', that they 'define the contours of theatrical representation in early modern England'.⁸⁵ They find, as did Greenfield, that this focus on the liminal introductory space straddling the worlds within and outside the play served to foreground the non-naturalistic, theatrical nature of play performance, making them sites rich in discourse *about* the nature and authority of representation.

Their analysis is based on the sources of authority from which the playwrights, in the voice of their prologue speakers, derive validation for their plays, authority that passes from the external – scripture, history, the monarch – to within the self-authoring, market-driven theatrical realm itself during the Elizabethan period. Here Bruster and Weimann find that a contest develops between playing, the business of "'furnish[ing] out our show'",⁸⁶ and writing, as the university 'wits', Marlowe, Peele and Greene, trumpet the authority of their own skill and mastery of the classics they draw on over the "'jigging veins'" characteristic of

⁸⁵ Bruster and Weimann, p.2.

⁸⁶ Bruster and Weimann, p. 74, quoting from Robert Wilson, *The Three Ladies of London*, c 1581.

the 'unruly temper of popular dance and sport'.⁸⁷ It is a contest, that is, between the writer's rhetorical skill and the player's performance, between *presentation* and *representation*. The ultimate failure of these educated wordsmiths' claims to exclusive authority is traced via Lyly, whose prologue to *Midas* acknowledges the authority of the class-mixed, 'mingle-mangle' audience in shaping plays, ultimately to Shakespeare, whose Chorus to *Henry V* represents the culmination of this evolution, by sharing the play's full realisation between players' unworthy efforts and audience's 'imaginary puissance'. Bruster and Weimann's pursuit of a line of development in the sources of authority in prologues is particularly interesting for my project, which finds a parallel development, traceable in the pre-show, from a writer-centred authority to increasingly theatre-centred, and finally audience-focused, validation. The authority claimed for 'high astounding terms' (Marlowe, *Tamburlaine*), 'kingly harp' and 'iron pen' (Peele, *David and Bethsabe*), and of course Greene's contemptuous dismissal of the 'upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers' who dared attempt to 'bombast out a blank verse' (Greene, *Groatsworth of Wit*) offer a remarkable parallel to the insistence, prevailing in the early part of my study, on Shakespeare's plays as 'verbal masterpieces',⁸⁸ poetic texts rather than theatrical scripts, to tamper with which by interpolating pre-show material is a new sort of upstart behaviour.

Over the broader early modern period, Bruster and Weimann find a further area of development, relating to changing ideas of the proper line between the world of the play and the world of the audience, ideas, that is, of the nature of the threshold itself. Where early prologues spoke in the distinct voice of the writer, or his representative, in the later

⁸⁷ Bruster and Weimann, pp. 79-80.

⁸⁸ Evans (1968), p.119-120.

sixteenth century the author function and the player function merged. Thus by the time of *Romeo and Juliet* in the mid 1590s 'Authority ... flows both ways: contact and interaction among writing and playing (and viewing) is taken for granted. Relations between text and performance are, like those between actors and spectators, reciprocal'.⁸⁹ Yet in the next few years such presentational devices became outmoded as tastes developed for darker dramas: 'there was beginning to prevail, in 1590s London, a feeling that any such extemporal, self-authorized voicing of the play's opening consorted poorly with the more self-contained space for representation in tragedies'.⁹⁰ The line between inside and outside the play comes into clearer focus, and largely remains so in narrative theatre to the present, so that Greenfield's twentieth-century expectation of complete separation between play- and external worlds perhaps dates back to this shift. Shakespeare's later prologues such as those to *Pericles* and *Henry VIII*, and the figure of Time as prologue to Act 4 of *The Winter's Tale*, were more consciously separate from the plays they introduced, belonging to the time of the performance as distinct from that of the play's story. Seeing these shifts in the cultural uses of prologues offers a view of changing theatrical culture and convention, making the prologue 'both a seismograph of cultural change and itself a changeful vessel of theatrical convention'.⁹¹ This fluctuating picture offers me a helpful model for the changes I find in the uses and constituent elements of pre-shows during the eighty years of my study, from straightforward narrative backstory to insertion and displacement of 'embedded' narrative elements, and from design as semiotic medium to the semiotic deployment of acting bodies and audience interactivity.

⁸⁹ Bruster and Weimann, p. 114.

⁹⁰ Bruster and Weimann, p. 114.

⁹¹ Bruster and Weimann, p. 115.

Bruster and Weimann examine their chosen prologues from the perspective of twenty-first-century scholars whose interpreting vision gathers several centuries into one complex but discernible line of development. By contrast, Tiffany Stern, in her study of the 'documents of performance', attempts to recreate the position as it might have appeared to theatre personnel at the time of first performance, or delivery, of early modern prologues. Like Bruster and Weimann, Stern finds that prologues, together with other separable elements of early modern plays such as epilogues, 'arguments' and songs, occupy a place apart from the main body of the play, its dialogue. She further finds, however, that prologues might commonly be written by someone other than the playwright, and might indeed have a purpose specific to the first performance or the revival of a play, to appeal for its audience's approval and acceptance, or modification, and so assure its continued performance.⁹² Stern's suggestion that '[p]lays in performance... were differently packaged depending on the stage of production they had reached'⁹³ and that audience response could lead directly to 'reformation and change'⁹⁴ makes the strong case that plays of Shakespeare's period, far from having any particular textual integrity or writer's authorisation, were already a sort of patchwork and subject to alteration from their earliest performance, and that the introductory moments of performance were an expected site at which such mutability might be focused. This possibility finds a strong parallel in modern pre-shows, which are devised separately from the text, and often designed to enhance or ease the spectator's entry into the play, even to ensure the production's approval by offering an attractive or inductive

⁹² Stern (2009) p. 81.

⁹³ Stern, p. 82.

⁹⁴ Stern, p. 82.

beginning. They may often also contribute to or undergo adjustments in the course of a production's run, particularly during its 'preview' period before press night.

To conclude my survey of scholarly work on early modern equivalents of the pre-show, it is clear that early modern prologues, inductions and dumbshows addressed spectators as members of the public, whose position as theatregoers was often an explicit element in the content. By contrast the modern pre-show is more various and indirect in its address, eliding or erasing completely its exteriority to the textual drama, liminal less in *breaking* than in *disguising* the boundary, in being the first enacted or in-role behaviour the spectator encounters, whether onstage in illusionistic manner, à la Greenfield, or venturing, as with Cooke's 'promenade' *Winter's Tale*, into the public hinterland of the stage – the auditorium, front-of-house, or beyond. That is, theatregoers in modern times are treated more in the manner Greenfield expects, drawn into the make-believe, sometimes fully by effectively erasing their identity in the anonymity of the auditorium, or, more recently with the move toward the thrust stage and the recreated Shakespeare's Globe, asked rather to suspend their identity somewhere between everyday reality and self-conscious playgoer. These changes in attitude to and expectation of the plays of Shakespeare in performance are similarly traced in the pre-shows of the last eight decades. Where early modern performers largely pioneered the enacting of narrative events in enclosed playhouses, those of the 1930s were consciously attempting 'faithful' performances of classic texts while struggling to define the authenticity they sought. Contemporary theatre companies play to audiences with, by and large, a wide experience of enacted drama on small and large screens, of extended textual narrative, and of a core selection of the plays of Shakespeare. Acting techniques have developed and evolved in subtlety, tending always closer to mimicking the

behaviour of 'real' life,⁹⁵ and the expectations of dramatic performance have shifted enormously, greatly altering the relationship between performers and spectators. Although Shakespeare in performance has carried high cultural valuation throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the terms of that valuation over the period have undergone considerable change, which I shall trace in the uses of and responses to the pre-show.

In the chapters that follow I have arranged my examination of the modern pre-show into four sections. Chapter 3 examines the earliest interpolated pre-shows, starting in 1932. Chapter 4 uses narrative theory to examine pre-show story-telling, a much older pre-show type with examples reaching back into the nineteenth century. Chapter 5 considers the origins of the conceptual pre-show in design, and the emergence of the semiotic force of the acting body. Chapter 6 explores the developing pre-show use of the audience. Before this examination of the modern pre-show, I consider in Chapter 2 the uses made of pre-show material in the texts of Shakespeare himself, to ask how the play texts offer thresholds and entry-ways for their original audiences, how, in effect, Shakespeare himself used pre-shows, and in what ways these might need to be altered for modern performance.

⁹⁵ see eg. Roach (1993)

CHAPTER 2: SHAKESPEARE'S PRE-SHOWS

In my consideration in Chapter 1 of the sort of mediation pre-shows provide between the world of the audience and that of the play, I defined two distinct play worlds: the play as (already known) cultural artefact and the play as (about to unfold) story or spectacle. In turning now to examine the opening gambits in the play texts themselves I have to adjust the focus slightly, since the texts are not, of course, aware of themselves as cultural artefacts, although they do contain moments of awareness of their *potential* artefactual status, for example in the assassination of Julius Caesar or in Henry V's speech before Agincourt where they imagine future re-enactments. Shakespeare typically wrote plays based on already known stories – English and Scottish history, Italian legend, Greek epic, folk tales and songs. His play openings, therefore, have to mediate, where appropriate, between previous versions of the stories they tell and their own new retelling. Some of the same questions then apply: how does Shakespeare begin his plays? That is, what use does he make of opening or preliminary devices to take the audience into the story they may already know, and into the story they are about to be told? How do these opening devices work? What is the relationship between the opening device and the whole (potential) performance? What problems or opportunities might these openings present to a director of the plays in modern times, and how have these directors used or departed from them?

These questions form the structure of my enquiry in this chapter. I group the opening devices into two types: prologues and other textual introductions, and active introductions as indicated by stage directions or in the course of the opening dialogue. Then for each I explore first, the impact of the openings on the immediate context of the opening of the

drama, bearing in mind my exploration of liminality, and of the triad of pre-show functions of *meaning*, *narrative* and *theatricality* as outlined in Chapter 1, and second, the resonating impact of the opening throughout the unfolding performance, in particular on a hypothetical audience in a theatre. In exploring this last aspect I necessarily indulge in some speculation about the responses of Shakespeare's first audiences, using the dates of first performance listed in the *Database of Early English Playbooks*.⁹⁶ From this analysis I consider in turn the implications for directors of productions in modern times.

The Prologue

The most obvious opening device is the prologue, a monologue spoken by a representative of the players, called Prologue or Chorus, or in one case Rumour. Although these appear in Shakespeare's plays rather sparsely, in just 7 out of the 38 plays, or roughly one in 5, they cover almost the entire span of his writing life: *Romeo and Juliet* (first performed in 1595-6), *Henry IV Part 2* (1597-8), *Henry V* (1598-9), *Troilus* (1602), *Pericles* (1608), *Henry VIII* (1613) and *Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613-14). However, the authorship of the last three is uncertain, and in each of these the opening in particular is considered unlikely to be Shakespeare's writing, but rather that of his collaborator (George Wilkins for *Pericles*, John Fletcher for the other two). The extant prologues, however, may simply be the survivors among unknown others, given their apparently separate status from the plays to which they are attached: of the four, only Rumour is present in both Quarto and Folio texts of *2 Henry IV*; the Prologue for *Romeo and Juliet* is omitted from the Folio text, the Chorus is absent from Q1 of *Henry V*,

⁹⁶ *Database of Early English Playbooks*, <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/sources.html>; Based on *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, 3rd edition, ed. Alfred Harbage, Samuel Schoenbaum, and Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (London: Routledge, 1989); Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (1987; New York: Norton, 1997).

and the prologue for *Troilus and Cressida*, absent from the two variant first Quartos (1609), appears in F1 as an apparently late addition on 'a spare recto before the start of the play'.⁹⁷ Moreover, Tiffany Stern argues that prologues and epilogues were only performed at the first performances of early modern plays, with the specific task of opening the play up to the audience's approval or rejection, although since this is less likely for plays before 1600, and still uncertain before around 1620,⁹⁸ the position for Shakespeare's plays cannot be confidently asserted.

I am interested not so much in enumerating Shakespeare's use of different devices, however, as in investigating opening gambits for their apparent designs on the audience, even if that was a one-off audience. I ask what dramatic purpose appears to be served by the Shakespeare prologues we have, not out of interest in the device *per se*, but as part of an exploration of Shakespeare's methods of drawing the audience into the experience of the play, and of the sort of attitude or perspective that audience is steered towards in relation to the play. Another way to look at the question is to ask what characteristics of a play might fit it to being prefaced by a prologue beyond the mere request for a kindly hearing. Just as the *Pyramus and Thisbe* staged by the Athenian mechanicals acquired a prologue because of certain aspects of the play deemed to require special introduction, so I shall ask what aspects of *Romeo and Juliet*, *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* or *Troilus* are mediated by their prologues. The question itself brings into focus the inverted experience of the play for the dramatist, who composes the prologue *last*, or at least *later*, as compared with the spectator, who hears it *first*. This belatedness situates the prologue in a position of observation or

⁹⁷ Stern (2004), p. 174.

⁹⁸ Stern (2009) p. 93.

perspective on the play as a whole, and so sets it apart as some sort of index of the writer's purpose in presenting its narrative as he does. In this, the modern director devising a pre-show shares some common ground with the playwright or writer of the prologue, and may indeed be using a practice much commoner than is usually assumed in Shakespeare's time if indeed, as Stern argues, many more prologues were used than have survived.

In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, I argue that Shakespeare seems to have wanted to focus attention on the cultural and moral context of the play's events. The story itself was popular from Italian and French mythology,⁹⁹ and in particular from the English versions of it that were Shakespeare's main sources, Arthur Brooke's long poem, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, published in 1562 and again in 1587, and William Painter's 'Rhomeo and Julietta' (1567), a translation of a French version of the story. The story's very familiarity perhaps makes a prologue desirable, as a means of indicating the writer's or company's purpose or 'slant' in telling it again, very much as all retellings and theatre revivals of classical texts must do. This purpose is clear if we compare the play with the story the original audience may already have known, Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*, which also began with a sonnet, entitled 'The Argument', that tells the outcome of the story in advance: the lovers' secret marriage and early deaths. Brooke's – or his narrator's – language conveys his censure of the lovers' sexual gratification: they are 'inflamèd', and 'both do grant the thing that both desire', and although they marry, they do so 'in shrift', after the event. In the encounter with Tybalt it is *Romeo's* 'ire' that is actively 'provoked', while Tybalt's 'rage' is simply a given fact. All the excessive passions are laid at the door of the lovers, whereas the response of the family, 'offer[ing]... new marriage', sounds almost appropriate. Brooke's

⁹⁹ Blakemore Evans (1984) calls it a 'separation-romance' with 'roots in folklore and mythology' (p.6).

‘Argument’ sonnet is preceded by a much more direct address ‘To the Reader’, focusing on the ‘couple of unfortunate lovers’ who bring about their own ‘unhappy death’ by ‘thrilling themselves to dishonest desire; neglecting the authority and advice of parents and friends’.

In Brooke’s moral framework, the lovers’ sexual incontinence is condemned as filial and cultural disobedience, by no means forgiven by a subsequent dishonourable marriage performed in a Catholic, hence corrupt, church of ‘superstitious friars’ who promote ‘whoredom and treason’ by offering a superficial-sounding ‘auricular confession’.¹⁰⁰

Shakespeare, however, gives the love story a tragic moral perspective. Rather than an initial summary of events, he changes the detail of what is pre-revealed, offering only the fact that the lovers die. The actual events, the ‘fearful passage of their death-marked love’,¹⁰¹ which constitute the whole of Brooke’s sonnet, are held in reserve for the ‘two hours’ traffic’¹⁰² of the stage. Instead Shakespeare frames their story within the context of the families’ enmity, out of which it arises – ‘From forth the fatal loins of these two foes’¹⁰³ – and which it in turn transforms – ‘doth with their deaths bury their parents’ strife’.¹⁰⁴ At this initial moment the impact is to suggest innocence destroyed by hatred, recalling perhaps the father-son killing episode depicted in *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry the Sixth*,¹⁰⁵ which Pembroke’s Men had played some four years earlier. The balance of censure and pity in the familiar story has shifted, locating the excessive behaviour in the families rather than in the lovers.

¹⁰⁰ Brooke (1562), p.2.

¹⁰¹ 1 Chorus, 9.

¹⁰² 1 Chorus, 12.

¹⁰³ 1 Chorus, 5.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Chorus, 8.

¹⁰⁵ 2.5.55-122.

There is here a clear parallel with the innovative and subversive characteristics of the *limen* that I discussed in Chapter 1. Seen in juxtaposition with Brooke's prefaces, Shakespeare seems to confront his source's judgemental didacticism with a pitying, sympathetic attitude to doomed love, and a corresponding judgement of the evils of civil feuding. The prefatory space takes on some of the characteristics of a debating chamber, a site on which to contest the moral orientation of the narrative. This is akin to the transformational work done on the Shakespeare 'text' by the modern director who prefaces a play with his or her own devised pre-show. Like Shakespeare, the director presents for an audience in his or her contemporary world a performance of a known narrative text, framing it conceptually to focus on a particular moral or political context that carries resonance for the time in which it takes place. In part, the play's very familiarity demands this new perspective as a reason to re-experience a narrative whose constituent details are already known.

Shakespeare's Chorus prologue does not appear in the Folio, lending some support to Stern's argument that it might have been intended only for the first performance, where an outline of the plot – effectively an 'Argument' but delivered in spoken form – and an appeal for a 'gentle' hearing and 'kind' judgement were the order of the day. Nonetheless it is usually included in modern performance, giving a director the problem of how to stage it. Some, like Peter Brook in 1947, use the beautiful verse-speaking of an actor, while others, like Trevor Nunn in 1976, divide the prologue's lines among the company. In 2000 David Tennant, who played Romeo, spoke the prologue from beyond the grave as it were, and in 2010 Rupert Goold had the Chorus spoken as a recording in various languages on a tourist audio guide. No longer required to serve its original purpose, it becomes its form: a self-

conscious sonnet, a slice of mellifluous verse. Any playfulness or experimentation is limited to the method of mediating the culturally resonant voice of 'Shakespeare'.

Shakespeare's next (extant) use of a prologue, *Henry IV Part 2*, takes this complication of moral judgement further, and in doing so, deploys the ludic/subversive liminal strand.

'Rumour, painted full of Tongues' is not the disembodied voice of the writer, but a morality figure, identified by both costume and discourse as a sort of Vice, a character type with a ready-made set of wicked and devious propensities, and with the comic potential of a Lord of Misrule. Elizabethan culture abounded in personifications of this sort, both from classical literature and in emblem books, art works and pageants,¹⁰⁶ so that Shakespeare's audiences would probably have had a familiar understanding of Rumour's appearance, his style of address and the moral framework of his self-presentation. As the sole speaker opening the play he resembles Richard III, although he is not a historic character. As with Richard and his hunched back, particular attention is drawn to a significant, indeed *signifying*, aspect of Rumour's anatomy, the multiple tongues painted on his cloak. By talking directly to the spectators, most likely from the closest downstage *platea* area useful for such exchanges,¹⁰⁷ and by explaining who he is and what he intends, he gives the audience both the comic appeal of a complicit deviousness, and a privileged insight into the events at the opening. Like Richard, he provides a brief description – or rather, a *version* – of the 'story so far', as well as taking a particular attitude to it which the audience is invited to share, while simultaneously knowing it is not the attitude they *ought*, morally, to have. Thus a number of dramatic and PR purposes are served to draw the audience over the threshold into the play's

¹⁰⁶ See Kiefer (2003), pages 63-100 for a full discussion of these as they relate to Rumour.

¹⁰⁷ See Weimann (1988) p. 409.

world, first taking a playfully immoral attitude to wider 'reality' in which rumour plays a disruptive and entertaining role, before carrying that role over into the play's world, and in the process recapitulating the main event, the battle of Shrewsbury, which is the connecting link into the play.

The Rumour prologue works in the opposite way to the *Romeo* prologue in this manner of drawing the audience into the play's world. As (a version of) the voice of the playwright, the *Romeo* Prologue summarises the story and its context, then invites the audience, *qua* audience, into the experience of the play as a commodity. Rumour, by contrast, approaches the audience as a force of their own (alleged) human nature, the personification of a universal principle, then gathers the audience into that principle as integral components of it before accompanying them, bringing them along as accomplices, via a brief reminder of plot, into the play-world. Where *Romeo* was a distinct world needing a negotiated entry, *2 Henry IV* is an extension of the audience's world, inviting participation. For an audience who might well have seen *Part 1* the previous season,¹⁰⁸ Rumour invites the pleasure of recognition, of rejoining events recently experienced together. Perhaps more importantly, for the audience who had *not* seen *Part 1*, an important reprise function is served: the spectator is drawn in, quickly brought up to speed with the recent battle, and filled in on its details in the course of hearing the various accounts that arrive at Northumberland's ears in the first scene. In Bruster and Weimann's terms, Rumour exemplifies the development from the writer-centred authority of the *Romeo* Chorus to a theatre-centred, audience-focused validation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Database of Early English Playbooks* records the year of first production of *1H4* as 1596-7, and of *2H4* as 1597-8. Based on *Annals*. See <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/sources.html> (accessed 2 November 2011).

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 1, p. 38-39.

This development has parallels in modern practices of continuity between episodes or parts of a series or cycle.

For the (speculative) audience returning to see *Part 2*, the figure of Rumour must have seemed close in disposition and style to Falstaff.¹¹⁰ He shares the outlandish appearance and prominent display of anatomical attributes, his tongues advertising his meaning as Falstaff's belly does. The 'continual slanders'¹¹¹ that lie upon those tongues recall Falstaff's habitual oath-filled language, and his 'Stuffing the ears of men with false reports'¹¹² recalls Falstaff's accounts: of the robbery at Gadshill with its multiplying numbers of men in buckram suits, and of the long hour he took to fight and slay Hotspur by Shrewsbury clock.¹¹³ Falstaff's popularity must have been a principal draw for the second play, making a comic introduction in Falstaff's style a shrewd choice, and a practice very recognisable today.

To speculate a little further, I suggest that Shakespeare's first audience might well have seen another theatrical allusion in 'Rumour painted full of tongues': the outlandish figure of Prince Hal in the very popular *Famous Victories of Henry V* as performed by the Queen's Men at the Bull Inn,¹¹⁴ possibly with Shakespeare in the cast.¹¹⁵ In Scene vi of that play, at the climax of his 'madcap' phase, the prince appears in a 'cloake... full of needles' and 'ilat-holes', of his 'owne devising', which he insists upon wearing when he goes to Court, as 'a

¹¹⁰ Wiegandt (2007) also notes the parallel between Rumour and Falstaff: 'Associating Falstaff with rumour enables Shakespeare to dramatise a further dimension of rumour that is of high structural relevance to the play: its double nature in regard to reputation'. (unpaginated.)

¹¹¹ Rumour, 6.

¹¹² Rumour, 8.

¹¹³ *I Henry IV*, 2.5.158-244; 5.5.142-150.

¹¹⁴ See Gurr (2004), p. 236.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, G.M. Pinciss (1974) 'Shakespeare, Her Majesty's Players and Pembroke's Men', *Shakespeare Survey* 27, pp.129-136.

signe that I stand upon thorns, til the Crowne be on my head'.¹¹⁶ Until that scene in the play, the prince behaves much more outrageously than in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, robbing his father's receivers, boxing the ears of the Lord Chief Justice and speaking with as foul a mouth as Shakespeare's Falstaff, who takes over many of the notoriously dissolute habits of the Hal of the *Famous Victories*. As such he is much closer to the apparent character of Rumour. Since Shakespeare transformed Hal, making him merely act the part of his reputed wild youth to generate more wonder on his transformation, there is perhaps a comic deficit which Rumour partly offsets, and partly serves as a reminder of. The echo in the painted tongues of the needle-filled cloak might, however, also serve to remind spectators of Hal's change of heart, as it directly prompted his repentance when his father wept, saying 'ther is neuer a needle in thy cloke, but it is a prick to my heart, neuer an ilat-hole, but it is a hole to my soule'.¹¹⁷ For the alert spectator a signifying costume might be capable of several meanings. To the extent that this is so, the use of costume, like the expansive appearance of Falstaff, serves an allegorical purpose, a theatrical means of conveying an abstract meaning, which we shall encounter again in the *Troilus* Prologue.

Shakespeare's allegorical figure presents the modern director with the problem of whether, and if so how, to present Rumour. Some seek a contemporary correlative. In 1951 Michael Redgrave staged a remarkable, tense pre-show battle scene out of which Rumour emerged as a quasi-soldier, as I discuss more fully in Chapter 3, and in 1964 Peter Hall and John Barton's *Wars of the Roses* version presented Rumour as 'a pox-stricken scarecrow from *The*

¹¹⁶ Praetorius (1887), p.18.

¹¹⁷ Praetorius (1887), p.20.

Beggar's Opera'.¹¹⁸ Adrian Noble in 1991 memorably chose the choral approach with 'a brilliant version of Rumour' as 'a swirling, furtive, eager crowd, the entire cast, the people of England, whispering, chanting, alternating between unison chorus and single voices as the news whirls from one to the other',¹¹⁹ a technique, Smallwood points out, 'pioneered in *Nicholas Nickleby*'.¹²⁰ In 1955, by contrast, Douglas Seale dispensed with Rumour, filling in the backstory reminder of Hotspur's death in battle by means of a steadily tolling bell as the play opened, then cutting the opening dialogue to the single, rumour-free report to Northumberland, effectively removing altogether Shakespeare's highlighting of his 'rumour' theme. Clearly the dominant modern style of realism makes an allegorical figure an uncomfortable fit, but some of Rumour's function is still found useful.

Shakespeare himself perhaps sees the need to encourage some extra effort from his audience when he has his next prologue-figure, the Chorus to *Henry V*, instruct them in the developing of their imaginations. Although some critics have suggested that the Chorus was not performed at the play's first performance in 1599, since it is absent from the first Quarto of 1600, the reference in the Act 5 Chorus to 'the General of our gracious Empress' expected to bring 'rebellion broachèd on his sword'¹²¹ has long been identified as the earl of Essex's still ongoing campaign in Ireland, whose ignominious failure in September 1599 rendered such heroic reference thereafter entirely unthinkable.¹²² In addition, James P. Bednarz argues convincingly that echoes of Shakespeare's Chorus in Thomas Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* and *Old Fortunatus* played by the Lord Admiral's Men later in 1599 show familiarity

¹¹⁸ Speaight (1964) p. 388.

¹¹⁹ Smallwood (1992) p. 342.

¹²⁰ Smallwood, p. 342.

¹²¹ Act 5 Chorus, lines 30, 32.

¹²² See Gurr (1992) p. 1.

with it that could only have come from seeing it performed,¹²³ and incidentally suggest an active culture similar to our own, freely playing with and recycling creative material, including, perhaps especially, pre-show material. That first audience would have found in the *Henry V* Chorus a very different figure from Rumour. Although he guides the audience over the threshold into the world of the play, he does so like the *Romeo* Chorus, as the writer's or the players' representative, from a position between the external 'reality' inhabited by the audience and the fictional-historical world of the play. In Robert Weimann's terms, he 'presents' what the players 'represent'.¹²⁴ The *Henry* Chorus's most famous attribute is this mediating role in which he offers, not simply like the *Romeo* Chorus the company's 'toil' to 'mend'¹²⁵ any shortcomings in the performance, but a frank admission of their inadequacy to represent the particular events of the play. This audience is asked not merely to 'attend' with 'patient ears',¹²⁶ but to make an effort akin to Rumour's 'Open your ears!',¹²⁷ to 'Suppose', 'Piece out... with your thought', 'make imaginary puissance', 'Think... that you see'.¹²⁸ What *here* shall miss will not be mended by the players' toil, but by the spectators' thoughts, actively setting events in motion, 'deck[ing] our kings,/ Carry[ing] them here and there'.¹²⁹ On the face of it, the play treats of events too grand and too expansive to stand alone without the escort of the Chorus acting as a sort of tour guide. This is borne out by his reappearance at the opening of each new Act to fill out the picture and feed the audience's imagination.

¹²³ See Bednarz (2012).

¹²⁴ Weimann (2000), p.11.

¹²⁵ 1 Chorus, 14.

¹²⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 1 Chorus, 13.

¹²⁷ 2 *Henry IV*, Rumour, 1.

¹²⁸ Prologue, 19, 23, 25, 26.

¹²⁹ Prologue, 28-9.

For an audience accustomed to the conventional Chorus who prepares humbly for their disappointment, this colourful variation offers instead the excitement of active participation. Not normally asked to do anything until the time for giving or withholding applause, they are given specific tasks of response to verbal stimuli. This heightened excitement makes the *Henry* Chorus tonally more like Rumour, stirring the audience into a state of active involvement. His appearance at the opening, if dressed according to convention in black velvet cloak and wreath of bay leaves, and carrying a book or scroll,¹³⁰ while generic across much contemporary performance, may in this instance also have reminded regular followers of the Lord Chamberlain's Men of Rumour, especially if, as seems not unreasonable, he was played by the same actor. Such recognition would facilitate the sense of alliance he seeks to foster: like Rumour, he appeals to human attributes that he shares with them, and which he requires for his project to work.

In doing so the *Henry* Chorus places his audience firmly in his own present moment at the expense of the historical past moment of the play's events, in a way strongly paralleled by modern productions that set the play in a modern context such as World War I. Crucial to this Chorus's project is a fervent view of the historical events about to be enacted, and he invites the audience to participate in the play, not only by activating their imaginations as directed, but also by sharing his view of the history of Henry V and the Battle of Agincourt. His invocation of 'a Muse of fire that would ascend/ The brightest heaven of invention',¹³¹ opens his address on a dizzy rhetorical high, stirring his listeners for the first 7½ lines with a vision of transcendent splendour that befits the famous story of the victory over the French.

¹³⁰ See Bruster and Weimann (2004) pp. 24-6.

¹³¹ 1 Chorus, 1-2.

Like Rumour regarding the audience as his 'household',¹³² the Chorus includes his listeners as fellow-worshippers of 'the warlike Harry',¹³³ sweeping them along with his hyperbole. The extravagance of his enthusiasm is the very reason why all enactment is already inadequate: the audience's imaginations are required *because* they too are presumed to judge the play's events as an epic, nation-defining moment.

As representative of the players, however, Chorus cannot uphold both this ecstatic stance and the work of theatre: he requires 'A kingdom for a stage, princes to act/ And monarchs to behold the swelling scene',¹³⁴ which would amount to obliterating dramatic art, replacing representation with the thing itself. Perhaps the converse position is hinted at, however, when 'the warlike Harry, like himself',¹³⁵ is both the historical person and the actor personating him: only drama has the power to *recreate* historical events in the present. And no *real* presence can do what verbal art can – whether heard or read – when, drawing on its pictorial counterpart, it provides the metaphorical image that enables Harry's command of 'famine, sword and fire' to be imagined 'at his heels,/ Leashed in like hounds'.¹³⁶ At a more subtle level, then, Chorus's apology for the inadequacy of playing is disingenuous, a rhetorical ploy that uses a stance of humility to activate in his hearers a response that both forgives and capitulates (making him, in a different way from Rumour, a close cousin to Falstaff).

For a theatre audience this hyperbole is likely to register as the elevated language of fervour, rather than as the violation of logical possibility that a (close-)reader's analysis reveals. The

¹³² 2 *Henry IV* Rumour, 22.

¹³³ 1 Chorus, 5.

¹³⁴ 1 Chorus, 3-4.

¹³⁵ 1 Chorus, 5.

¹³⁶ 1 Chorus, 6-7.

play *is* being performed, in spite of the impossibility of performing it. The point is that the Chorus is looking back on a historic event judged in retrospect and transformed from its original human scale to something legendary and superhuman. The 'warlike Harry' is seen from the perspective of the future, already imbued with the heroic qualities before the action begins that in reality he acquired after and as a result of its completion. The players recreating the events, however, have to imagine the time before and out of which they grew. This, indeed, is what we might expect a pre-show to attempt, in order to help the audience imagine their own way back to the 'time before', Maguin's 'once upon a time'. The *Romeo* prologue, for example, prepares the ground for the tragedy that will unfold by presenting the 'time before', the context of the feuding families, and Rumour similarly displays himself as the cause of the confusions to follow. With the *Henry V* Chorus, however, Shakespeare creates the paradox of an introductory *retrospective* view that invites the spectator to see history already assimilated, shaped into the form that temporal distance and multiple retellings have forged.

The Chorus, in other words, is a figure of the present, introducing an audience of the present to a moment of the past, and as such opening up space for the ironic distance between his generalising enthusiasm and the human scale of the depicted events for which the play is noted. As an opening stance his is of little help in escorting the audience over the threshold into the world of the play. He offers no sense of the historic moment as Rumour does when he reminds the audience of the battle of Shrewsbury. Instead he raises expectations of action and glory, of seeing heroism in the making. As a result the first scene is disorientating, its two clerics arriving out of nowhere, unexplained, discussing matters on a quite different plane from the Chorus's pictures of numberless troops and charging horses.

On the other hand, perhaps no particular help was needed when the Chorus was written. For Shakespeare's first audiences Henry V was a familiar character, his historical identity reworked and redefined by chronicles, ballads, songs and plays, in particular the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V* and more recently by Shakespeare's two *Henry IV* plays.¹³⁷ In these plays Harry 'the mirror of all Christian kings'¹³⁸ was seen in his pre-Agincourt character, the madcap prince, his 'brow' 'stain[ed]' by 'riot and dishonour'.¹³⁹ This view was so well-known as to be redundant in any prologue to *Henry V*. It must also have made the Chorus's tone an extraordinary leap into the future for any spectator coming to see the sequel of 2 *Henry IV*. In expecting the audience to share his jingoistic view of Henry V the Chorus asks them to abandon their memories of Hal's Cheapside life, his escapades with Falstaff and his companionship with Nym, Bardolph and Poins. It is the sort of denial of the past that the newly-crowned king pronounced when in the hearing of all his court he refused to 'know' Falstaff, telling him to 'Presume not that I am the thing I was'.¹⁴⁰

Through the use of the Chorus, then, Shakespeare helps his audience to make the transition from the *Henry IV* plays to *Henry V*. The familiar Hal of the previous season (or the earlier play) has not yet metamorphosed in the public's mind into the 'mirror of all Christian kings', but nor has he yet proved himself worthy, in his stage representation, of history's accolade. The spectator is thus placed in the intermediate position, still smarting perhaps from the

¹³⁷ The *Database of Early English Playbooks* records the date of first production of *Henry V* as 1598-9, a year after *2H4*, and two years after *1H4*. It estimates the date of first production of *Famous Victories* as 1588. <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/sources.html> accessed 2 November 2011.

¹³⁸ 2 Chorus, 6.

¹³⁹ 1 *Henry IV*, 1.1.84.

¹⁴⁰ 2 *Henry IV*, 5.4.47, 56

cruelty of Hal's rejection of Falstaff, yet aware of the transformation wrought finally by Agincourt. The unfolding play maintains this intermediate position throughout, alternating the Chorus's retrospective enthusiasm with an ideologically contrasting, sometimes flatly contradictory, view as seen from *before* the triumph of the battle. As with *Romeo and Juliet* it seems Shakespeare has wished to challenge an accepted valuation and present a moral reassessment.

It seems worthy of remark that Rumour and the *Henry* Chorus, both representatives of the audience as much as of the players in seeming to view events from somewhere beyond the unfolding action, occur in consecutive plays. Given the relative scarcity of (surviving) prologues in Shakespeare's plays, it seems significant that the *Henriad* should have such a large share, and that the speakers of their prologues should have something more than a prologue's character. Perhaps there is no surprise to find that history plays should be given parallel treatment: there are also parallels of a different sort in the openings of the first trilogy, the *Henry VI* plays, as I discuss a little later. Then as now there might have been an interest in emphasising the grouping of these plays, and these prologues serve, as I have shown, to point both backwards and forwards, steering their audiences to recall the last as they anticipate the next in the series. Similar links are to be found in modern cycles or groups of plays: Trevor Nunn opened each of his 'Roman' plays in 1972 with a similar processional march, and Christopher Luscombe's *Much Ado*, renamed *Love's Labour's Won*, in 2014, recalled the end of its 'predecessor', *Love's Labour's Lost*, in which the men had marched off to the trenches, with the same set now housing hospital beds.

In modern times the *Henry V* Chorus is almost never omitted, its stirring rhetoric and metatheatrical appeal one of the most treasured passages of poetry in the canon, quite apart from its place in introducing a performance of the play. Like the *Romeo* Chorus it is often given resonant delivery by an actor of substance, making it difficult to play its ironic undercutting in the body of the play with conviction and thus perpetuating the play's reputation for stirring national pride. Examples include Bernard Hepton (1957) as '[l]ow voiced and persuasive,... set[ting] the tone of the production',¹⁴¹ and Tony Britton (1994) as 'a stiff-backed veteran of the First or Second World War' acting as 'our guide to some kind of "Agincourt Experience"'.¹⁴² On the other hand, the Chorus's appeal to the audience's imaginative faculties becomes the central fascination around the mid-twentieth century leading directors to experiment with rehearsal and 'poor' performance, as appeared in Glen Byam Shaw's production at the Old Vic (1951) with Roger Livesey as Chorus 'in undress and with the inadequate resources of his stage exposed behind him',¹⁴³ and as Maguin noted of Hands's *Henry V* (1977).¹⁴⁴

Shakespeare's only remaining extant prologue, considered by Heminges and Condell important enough to preserve in the Folio, also introduces a history: a part of the Trojan war. Although this prologue, like the *Henry V* Chorus, appears only in the Folio (1623) and not in the two Quartos (1609) it seems at least to have been intended for performance¹⁴⁵ since the speaker indicates his costume: he is 'armed' to take part in the war. As will appear in my discussion of that costume below, this would seem to fit better with its date of first

¹⁴¹ Cochrane (1987) p. 264.

¹⁴² Jackson (1995) p. 342.

¹⁴³ David (1952) p. 125.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 1, p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ I do not go into the long-standing debate about the play's unexplained early performance history, which is helpfully summarised by Ramsey (1970).

performance, 1602, than with any later revival, a position consistent also with Stern's argument that prologues belonged, perhaps exclusively, to first performances. Like the *Henry V* Chorus, this Prologue is aware of the size of task posed by historical subject-matter to a players' company, but instead of apologising for inadequate resources, he indicates that the subject-matter has been scaled down to fit theatrical resources, 'Beginning in the middle, starting thence away/ To what may be digested in a play'.¹⁴⁶

The task of the *Troilus* Prologue is principally to provide historical and cultural context. The stories of Troilus and Cressida and of the Trojan War must have been familiar to the more educated in the audience, to judge by the literary nature of Shakespeare's main sources, Chapman's *Seauen Bookes of the Iliades* (1598), Caxton's translation of the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (c.1475), and Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde' (in an edition by John Stowe of 1561), and they enjoyed wide circulation, in particular around the turn of the century. Jarold W. Ramsey considers that 'Of the story materials of all the 36 plays, excepting perhaps the English histories and the Roman tragedies, those relating to Troilus were the most completely popular by the time Shakespeare took them up'.¹⁴⁷ Theatre audiences might well also have seen a play now lost, Henry Chettle and Thomas Dekker's *Troilus and Cressida*, apparently performed at the Rose by the Admiral's Men in 1599.¹⁴⁸ Whatever the public's previous awareness of the story, Shakespeare's Prologue gives a short résumé of the onset of the Trojan War and of its cause, up to the point where hostilities are about to begin. Like the *Henry V* Prologue, it creates images for the listeners to convert to imagined pictures. In

¹⁴⁶ Chorus, 28-9.

¹⁴⁷ Ramsey (1970), p. 235.

¹⁴⁸ Information from the British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/troilus.html>, accessed 4 Nov 2011.

two verse-paragraphs it presents what might make a storyboard for the opening sequence of a modern film, from the Greek 'princes orgulous' mobilising their ships, 'Fraught with the ministers and instruments/ Of cruel war', to their arrival and encampment 'on Dardan plains' outside Troy, whose six named gates with their huge staples and bolts are pictured in close-up, and with a cut to the adulterous bed that is the cause of the war.¹⁴⁹ The sequence pauses on the cusp of the action, where 'expectation, tickling skittish spirits.../ Sets all on hazard' (20-22), at which point the speaker breaks off to present himself, 'A prologue arm'd' whose task is to fast forward the action with the information that the play will leap ahead to begin in the middle of the war, 'To what may be digested in a play' (26-29).

On the face of it, this is a very economic explanatory prologue of the 'once-upon-a-time' variety, filling in just enough backstory to prepare the audience for the sort of context and characters about to appear. In modern times the sort of pre-show that prepares the narrative will attempt something similar with set, music and costume rather than text. There is, however, one striking aspect of this prologue-figure, as I mentioned earlier. He is

arm'd, but not in confidence

Of author's pen or actor's voice, but suited

In like conditions as our argument.¹⁵⁰

Like Rumour, this Prologue is not clothed in the conventional black cloak. His appearance in armour, as if to participate in the war, signifies that the play treats of war – 'in like conditions as our argument' – in contradistinction to 'confidence' of writer or player. The

¹⁴⁹ Prologue, 2, 4-5, 13, 15-19, 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ Prologue, 23-25.

armed Prologue or Epilogue was topical at the time of *Troilus*' first performance: a feature of the plays that participated in the 'War of the Theatres', (1598-1602) signifying 'a speaker who visibly expected the worst from a critical audience',¹⁵¹ such as the Prologue to Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (1601) which the first audiences of *Troilus and Cressida* might have seen the year before. Jonson's Prologue explained his garb thus:

... know, 'tis a dangerous age:

Wherein who writes, had need present his scenes
Forty-fold proof against the conjuring means
Of base detractors, and illiterate apes,
That fill up rooms in fair and formal shapes.
'Gainst these, have we put on this forced defence:
Whereof the allegory and hid sense
Is, that a well erected confidence
Can fright their pride, and laugh their folly hence.¹⁵²

This Prologue is armed against the attacks of 'base detractors and illiterate apes', his armour signifying a counter-offensive 'confidence' 'erected' in a phony war of rival poets.

Shakespeare's *Troilus* Prologue makes witty use of this recent convention by subverting it, using it literally. For spectators 'following' the War of the Theatres this allusion offers some topical humour by rising (or appearing to rise) above the controversy – perhaps it is itself a sort of salvo in those hostilities. It offers another instance of prologue as site for topical intertextual exchange and 'ludic recombination'.

¹⁵¹ Stern (2009), p. 114.

¹⁵² *Poetaster*, Pro, 6-14. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5166/5166-h/5166-h.htm#link2H_4_0002

More durably, however, the Prologue's war-ready costume carries resonance into the body of the play, where states of arming and, more often, disarming, track states of honour and dishonour. The purpose of the arming is to defend a stolen woman for the enjoyment of Paris, who idles unarmed – or rather, in Helen's arms, at whose behest he stays home – while his brother Hector, who rates her not worth the fight, leads the armed action. Most of the key warriors, apart from a post-battle procession across the stage observed from above¹⁵³ by Pandarus and Cressida,¹⁵⁴ appear disarmed or disarming until well into Act 5 of the play: Troilus, battling his frustrated desire for Cressida, finds Helen 'too starved a subject for my sword'¹⁵⁵ and Achilles, bored and cynical, seeks no armour beyond 'ribs of steel'¹⁵⁶ to defend his frame against splitting with laughter at Patroclus' mocking impersonations of the Greek generals. The first threat of armour we see among the Greek camp is the elderly Nestor's offer to

hide my silver beard in a gold beaver

And in my vambrace put this withered brawn¹⁵⁷

if no champion comes forward to meet Hector's challenge. Only Hector 'was harness'd' 'Before the sun rose',¹⁵⁸ but a desire to *unarm* him is voiced in both Greek and Trojan camps: Achilles longs 'To see great Hector in his weeds of peace'¹⁵⁹ so that he can see his face; Paris fantasises about Helen helping to unarm Hector, partly for the sensuality of her 'white enchanting fingers' touching 'his stubborn buckles', partly for the mockery of having her 'do

¹⁵³ The stage directions '[above]' and '[below]' are editorial additions. See s.d.s in 1.2 before lines 1, 37, 182, 184, 195, 206, 214, 223 and 237.

¹⁵⁴ 1.2.

¹⁵⁵ 1.1.93.

¹⁵⁶ 1.3.177.

¹⁵⁷ 1.3.293-4.

¹⁵⁸ 1.2.8.

¹⁵⁹ 3.3.232.

more/ Than all the island kings,—disarm great Hector'¹⁶⁰; and Andromache and Cassandra wail their prophetic warnings with a repeated chorus of 'Unarm'¹⁶¹. Finally the great Hector, the only consistent warrior in this play prologued with armour, is killed by Achilles' cowardly trick at the moment he unarms himself at the end of battle.¹⁶²

The prologue's curt couplet defining the origin of the war in sexual theft and possession is an apt epithet for its moral grounding:

The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen,
With wanton Paris sleeps; and that's the quarrel.¹⁶³

Neither side is deluded about Helen's worth: in Hector's polite terms she is 'a thing not ours nor worth to us';¹⁶⁴ in Thersites' earthier discourse, she is 'a placket':¹⁶⁵ 'all the argument is a whore and a cuckold; a good quarrel to draw emulous factions and bleed to death upon'.¹⁶⁶ Hector's lone enthusiasm for battle arises from a sense of honour and Trojan solidarity that overrides the violation of the 'moral laws/ Of nature' in keeping Helen: 'For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence/ Upon our joint and several dignities'.¹⁶⁷ The war is for him an honourable sport, each individual episode a matter of personal combat prompted by some independent justification: anger against Ajax,¹⁶⁸ courtly challenge,¹⁶⁹ or response to Achilles'

¹⁶⁰ 3.1.150-1.

¹⁶¹ 5.3.3, 25.

¹⁶² 5.9

¹⁶³ Prologue, 9-10.

¹⁶⁴ 2.2.21.

¹⁶⁵ 2.3.19.

¹⁶⁶ 2.3.71-3

¹⁶⁷ 2.2.183-4, 191-2.

¹⁶⁸ 1.2.10, 32-4.

¹⁶⁹ 1.3.257-80.

insult.¹⁷⁰ Even Menelaus, the cuckold himself, stops Hector's report of his 'quondam wife': 'Name her not now, sir; she's a deadly theme'.¹⁷¹ Only Troilus, who parallels Menelaus's experience when Cressida defects to the arms of a Greek lover, finds the impetus to fight in deadly earnest over a faithless woman.

Again, modern performance has to work out what to do about the *Troilus* Prologue, and the solutions show the same negotiation between *presentation* and *representation* that Bruster and Weimann noted as developing in the 1590s and 1600s.¹⁷² In 1985 Howard Davies staged a notable pre-show set in the Crimean war, in which a soldier wounded in a battle raging offstage is carried on by his comrades who try to revive him, fail, and cover his face, whereupon one of their number stands to deliver the Prologue, the entire scene witnessed in desultory fashion by Pandarus. In discovering its prologue speaker from a group of soldiers it recalls Michael Redgrave's *Rumour* of 1951. Others give the prologue to one of the play's characters, creating a sort of narrator or presenter of the play. In 1990 Sam Mendes had his Pandarus (Norman Rodway) speak the prologue, "'armed" in a medal to which he pointed with a challenging twinkle',¹⁷³ thus offering a modern take on the play's ironic attitude to arming, and completing a narrative frame when he speaks the epilogue. In 2008 Declan Donnellan foregrounded the play's sardonic sexual theme by giving the prologue to his Helen (Marianne Oldham), depicted as a glamorous celebrity posing before

¹⁷⁰ 4.7.137-44.

¹⁷¹ 4.7.63,65.

¹⁷² See Chapter 1, p.37.

¹⁷³ Smallwood (1996) p. 354.

and enjoying the military masculinity of the soldiers fighting for ownership of her. Delivering the prologue she 'summoned up the horrors to come in lines she spoke like seduction'.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion: Prologues

My investigation of Shakespeare's prologues has shown them to be important signposts to the plays they preface: for the attentive listener at the early performances they offered the pleasure in themselves of stirring or thought-provoking scene-painting, the delight of inclusion among the regular theatre-going public via recognition of earlier plays, and the challenge of a new moral and thematic framework. While they each make the customary appeal to the audience for a successful verdict, their omission after the first performance, as Tiffany Stern argues was possibly the case, would have made a substantial difference to the story told: *2 Henry IV* and *Troilus and Cressida* are both given helpful narrative preparation, and *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* an enriched moral perspective. For the modern director these prologues present opportunities to vary the orientation or perspective of view given to the audience at the opening, and as such suggest a certain endorsement of the modern newly-devised pre-show as continuing an original practice that expected variation in a new retelling of a familiar story.

The Induction

The Taming of the Shrew is the single example that Robert Smallwood offers in his analysis of the pre-show¹⁷⁵ of Shakespeare's own 'interest in' confusing the moment when the play begins. It is the unique instance in Shakespeare's oeuvre of a dramatic induction, a device

¹⁷⁴ See Rutter (2009) p. 383.

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter 1, p. 17.

which Ann Thompson points out was briefly popular around 1590,¹⁷⁶ citing Thelma N. Greenfield's discussion of a number of earlier plays with inductions, including Greene's *James IV* and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.¹⁷⁷ Shakespeare does not seem to have thought of it as a separate block added to the play, however: the label 'Induction' is not used in the Quarto or Folio texts of *Shrew*, but introduced first by Pope.¹⁷⁸ The contribution of the Christopher Sly narrative to the *Shrew* play is, of course, key to the play's presentation, putting quotation marks around its much despised misogynistic tale in somewhat similar fashion, though to very different effect, to the distancing work done by the *Henry V* Chorus. Unlike that Chorus, however, the Sly layer of narrative is not, apparently, detachable in the way later production has often assumed; that is, both the Quarto (*A Shrew*) and 1623 Folio (*The Shrew*) texts begin with the Sly Induction, only varying in the use made of it thereafter: in the Folio *The Shrew* it is only an introductory section, returned to glancingly just once, whereas in the Quarto *A Shrew* it is a complete frame, reappearing periodically during the inset play, and at the end. Leaving aside the long-standing debates about the authorship and order of composition of the two versions,¹⁷⁹ whatever Shakespeare's intention might have been in providing the Sly opening to *The Shrew*, it seems clear that the introduction of the play as a performance to the drunken, abusive Sly was intended to draw attention to its content as a 'pleasant comedy', implying simply 'mirth and merriment',¹⁸⁰ but understood to be a sort of instructive folktale directed at a particular spectator in need of 'taming'. The corrective taming involved, moreover, although applied in the main plot to a woman, is rather a

¹⁷⁶ Thompson (2003) p. 10

¹⁷⁷ Greenfield (1969) pp. 2-6.

¹⁷⁸ See Thompson (2003) p. 54.

¹⁷⁹ See Thompson (2003) p. 2-3.

¹⁸⁰ Induction 2, 126, 131.

transformation from uncontrolled anti-social habits of behaviour to refined and moderate manners, effected in both cases by 'supposing' the bad behaviour to be a falsification of the 'real' character: the hunting Lord plans to make Sly 'forget himself' by having him

Wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,
A most delicious banquet by his bed,
And brave attendants near him when he wakes';¹⁸¹

Petruchio's wooing plan is similarly to 'suppose' deferential admiration:

Say that she rail: why then I'll tell her plain
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale;
Say that she frown; I'll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly wash'd with dew',¹⁸²

and his taming plan that inflicts deprivation 'all... done in reverend care of her'.¹⁸³

The inclusion of a third plot-strand, the wooing of Bianca, with its own string of 'supposes' in the form of disguises and falsification of 'real' identity, strongly suggests that Shakespeare's project was the comic, and virtuoso, bringing together of three quite different source stories linked by their central use of 'supposing'.

In modern performance, however, that overarching structure is overridden by the play's misogynistic central plot, itself overbalanced by the final wager scene and Kate's submission speech with its appalling concluding image of her hand presented to her husband's foot.

Modern performance of the Induction has tended to expand Sly's misogyny, seen as

¹⁸¹ Induction 1, 39, 36-8.

¹⁸² 2.1.170-3.

¹⁸³ 4.1.190.

incipient in his drunken abuse of the Hostess, notably in Michael Bogdanov's 1978 production where Jonathan Price as Sly began among the audience shouting defiance at the female usher, a production I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. The provision of a scolding Mrs Sly in the final scene of *A Shrew* is often adopted in modern performance, insisting on gender-wars as connecting theme at the expense of the transformation theme. In 1995 Gale Edwards's production began 'not with a drunken Sly arguing with 'Marian Hackett...', but with an aggressively drunken Sly arguing with one of those intriguing unseen figures in Shakespeare, Mrs. Sly',¹⁸⁴ and Edward Hall's production in 2006 cast the arriving audience in the foyer as guests at Sly's wedding.¹⁸⁵ In 2008 Conall Morrison riffed on the anti-feminist theme by staging an elaborate drunken stag night with blow-up sex dolls and a pole dancer as part of the entertainment in a particularly seedy ale-house.¹⁸⁶ More unusually, Bill Alexander in 1992 foregrounded class rather than misogyny in an induction whose hunting party were young aristocrats intent on humiliating Sly.¹⁸⁷

Shrew with its Induction, then, is mysterious as to its original design and early variants, and proves controversial in modern production, whether or not that induction is used, with directors who include it using it to confront the play's contentious aspects rather than what may have been its original comic make-believe.

¹⁸⁴ Holland (1997) p. 255.

¹⁸⁵ Smout (2007) p. 248.

¹⁸⁶ Rutter (2009) p. 364.

¹⁸⁷ Holland (1994) p. 175.

Non-textual openings

1. Dumbshow

Of the opening gambits available in the drama of his day, Shakespeare clearly eschews the dumbshow. The one example of a preliminary dumbshow among the 37 plays appears in the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*, 'The Mousetrap', and serves in its artifice and stylisation as a sort of throw-back to an earlier period. As Dieter Mehl shows, the explanatory dumbshow belongs to a morality tradition that is obsolete by Shakespeare's day, although it continues to evolve as a more integrated device in plays of Shakespeare's time and later.¹⁸⁸

It is a commonplace in modern times to use elements of Hamlet's 'advice to the players' as evidence for Shakespeare's attitude to and opinion on theatrical practice, and his view of dumbshows as 'inexplicable' ranks alongside his deploring of the sort of bad acting that 'tear[s] a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings'.¹⁸⁹ Despite this censure, the players bring on an unexpected dumbshow that appears to mime the whole plot in outline, and Hamlet does not make any objection to it.¹⁹⁰ When it is being performed, Ophelia seems to expect it to convey some meaning, but she is not able to fathom it out for herself, and is not in the least enlightened by Hamlet's answer to her question: that it is 'miching malhecho' and 'means mischief'.¹⁹¹ She surmises from the usual form of dumbshows that 'belike' it 'imports the argument of the play', but she is unsure

¹⁸⁸ See Pearn (1935), Dieter Mehl (1964).

¹⁸⁹ 3.2.12, 10-11.

¹⁹⁰ J Dover Wilson argues, however, that Hamlet is irritated by it, and fears it will give away Claudius's guilt too early. See Wilson (1918), p. 155.

¹⁹¹ 3.2.131.

whether the players will 'tell us what this show meant'.¹⁹² Claudius, who might be expected to be alarmed by its subject-matter, does not respond in any way indicated by the text. It is rather as if the dumbshow is so conventional as to be disregarded, or so veiled as to need verbal explanation by some figure such as a Chorus or 'presenter'.¹⁹³ This incomprehensibility of the dumbshow seems to confirm Hamlet's earlier dismissive view of dumbshows as 'inexplicable', suitable only to excite those seeking spectacle, and so failing to reach Claudius's comprehension.

The problem of the *Mousetrap* dumbshow presents much that remains true of wordless pre-shows in modern performance: the perplexing gap between intention and reception. As written down, this dumbshow is perfectly clear, so much so that scholars in the early twentieth century debated how Claudius could have come to sit impassively through it: either he was actually innocent of Hamlet's deluded charge and the Ghost a liar,¹⁹⁴ or he was not watching but engaged in talk with Gertrude.¹⁹⁵ Only if the dumbshow is imagined as *performed* rather than *read* is it possible to think of its not being understood.¹⁹⁶ Ophelia apparently watches it closely yet has to ask afterwards what it meant. Until the words are added and the players 'tell all' even the most apparently transparent meaning is obscure, and there is always the possibility, even the likelihood, as happens in the theatre today, that the audience will not pay any attention until the 'play proper' begins.

¹⁹² 3.2.133, 136.

¹⁹³ See Mehl (1965) p. 11.

¹⁹⁴ Greg (1917).

¹⁹⁵ Wilson (1918).

¹⁹⁶ Gray (1919).

2. Pageantry

Although Shakespeare does not use dumbshows to open any of his plays, he does begin several with a pageant or procession, providing not only the delight of spectacle but also valuable pointers as to narrative and meaning. This is most noticeable in the History plays where royal characters make the first entry of the play. Some of these processional entries are explicitly called for in the stage directions, sometimes accompanied by appropriate music. Clearly the declamatory music and the number of bodies processing on to the stage make a certain spectacle, and call the attention of spectators to the stage, perhaps a necessary signal where the whole performing-spectating space is in unchanging natural light. Even where no music is called for, the entry of unspecified numbers of 'soldiers', 'attendants', or simply 'others' seems designed to create a ceremonial or processional impact, since all must enter by the two doors at the back of the stage. Not so evident from stage directions, but making a great impact on the stage, must have been the costumes, which as Andrew Gurr shows, were of spectacular showiness and colour, range of fabrics and textures, and one of the theatre's major expenditures.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, Elizabethan sumptuary laws meant that the symbolism of dress was widely, if not universally, understood, making it effectively an instrument of characterisation, identifying the personae as much as their behaviour and actions would do. The same symbolism also underlined the ever-present awareness of the stage's symbolic nature: 'the magnificence of playing apparel ... made the

¹⁹⁷ See Gurr (2004) pp. 193-200.

players common symbols of the distance between appearances and reality in Elizabethan society'.¹⁹⁸

There seems to be some development over time in Shakespeare's use of such processional openings. It is noticeable that the early *Henrys* have the most elaborate opening stage directions, including spatial and visual detail in the Quarto texts, particulars of the music required in the Folio texts, and larger numbers of named and speaking characters onstage than later History plays (see Table 1). Later Histories seem to leave the pageantry more implicit in the numbers of supernumerary bodies entering. There is also considerable simplification of the opening stage directions in the changes from Quarto to Folio versions, implying perhaps less focus on grandeur, or an audience of readers rather than performers or spectators in the reduction of names from full titles to single names ('King Henry the sixth' to 'King'; 'The Duke of Norffolke' to 'Norfolke', etc) . The practice that appears in some stage directions of bringing characters onstage who have no speaking part suggests a wish to make an impression of courtly pomp, or in some cases to show the presence of particular individuals in a factional group who will feature at a later stage, such as the young Rutland in the *True Tragedy* or Lord John of Lancaster in *Henry IV*.

¹⁹⁸ Gurr (2004) p. 194.

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Table 1: Opening stage directions to History plays

Play	Text	First performed	Stage direction [Note: <i>Music directions in italics</i> Characters with no speaking part in small letters (my additions)]	No of named characters
<i>1st Part of the Contention...</i>	Q 1600	1591	Enter at one doore, King Henry the sixt, and Humphrey Duke of Gloster, the Duke of Somerset, the Duke of Buckingham, Cardinall Bewford, and others. Enter at the other doore, the Duke of Yorke, and the Marquesse of Suffolke, and Queene Margaret, and the Earle of Salisbury and Warwicke.	10
<i>Henry VI Part 2</i>	F 1623	1591	<i>Flourish of Trumpets: Then Hoboyes.</i> Enter King, Duke Humfrey, Salisbury, Warwicke, and Beauford on the one side. The Queene, Suffolke, Yorke, Somerset, and Buckingham, on the other.	10
<i>True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York...</i>	Q 1595	1591	Enter Richard Duke of Yorke, The Earle of Warwicke, The Duke of Norffolke, Marquis Montague, Edward Earle of March, Crookeback Richard and the yong Earle of Rutland, <i>with Drumme</i> and Souldiers, with white Roses in their hats.	7 (6 speaking)
<i>Henry VI Part 3</i>	F 1623	1591	<i>Alarum.</i> Enter Plantagenet, Edward, Richard, Norfolke, Mountague, Warwicke, and Souldiers.	6
<i>Henry VI Part 1</i>	F 1623	1592	<i>Dead March.</i> Enter the Funerall of King Henry the Fift, attended on by the Duke of Bedford, Regent of France; the Duke of Gloster, Protector; the Duke of Exeter, Warwicke, the Bishop of Winchester, and the Duke of Somerset.	6 (4 speaking)
<i>Richard II</i>	Q 1597; F 1623	1595	Enter King Richard, Iohn of Gavnt, with other Nobles and attendants.	2
<i>King John</i>	F 1623	1596	Enter King Iohn, Queene Elinor, Pembroke, Essex, and Salisbury, with the Chattylion of France.	6 (3 speaking)
<i>Henry IV Part 1</i>	Q 1598; F 1623	1596-7	Enter the King, Lord Iohn of Lancaster, Earle of Westmerland, with others.	3 (2 speaking)
<i>Henry V</i>	Q1 1600	1598-9	Enter King Henry, Exeter, 2. Bishops, Clarence, and other Attendants	5 (4 speaking)

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The earliest of these ‘processional’ openings, *Henry VI Part 2*, is not simply a royal parade, but carries some vestigial meaning and narrative input in the manner of a dumbshow: two groups of characters enter simultaneously at two separate doors. The groups centre respectively on King Henry VI and Queen Margaret who are meeting each other for the first time following Suffolk’s mission to France to procure Margaret as Henry’s queen. The appearance of the two groups from opposite parts of the stage gives the initial information that they derive from different places, and also associates the king and queen each with a particular group of courtiers, one of whom is their closest supporter, as the opening dialogue then reveals: Duke Humphrey is Lord Protector of the king, and Suffolk the ambassador or ‘procurator’ who married the princess on the king’s behalf. Thus the opening spectacle of bodies in regal costume, moving in formal patterns from entry point to their positions for the first speech, serves as a visual image on which the spoken drama will build its narrative and moral or hermeneutic sense.

Titus Andronicus (1592) also opens with an entry like a brief dumbshow in its use of space. It begins with three groups entering symmetrically, one above and two below, to offer a pattern of the 3-way centres of power on which the action is built:

Table 2: Opening stage directions to *Titus Andronicus*

Q1: 1594	F1: 1623
Enter the Tribunes and Senatours aloft: And then enter Saturninus and his followers at one dore, and Bassianus and his followers, <i>with Drums and Trumpets</i> .	<i>Flourish</i> . Enter the Tribunes and Senators aloft. And then enter Saturninus and his Followers at one doore, and Bassianus and his Followers at the other, <i>with Drum and Colours</i> .

All three major purposes of a pre-show – meaning, narrative and theatricality – are served: the addition of ceremonial music to the formal simultaneous processions makes a rousing transition into the fictional situation even as it conveys the necessary solemnity for the Roman political and military culture of the play's events. As with the English Histories, the use of costume must have contributed greatly to the spectacular impact while also distinguishing the various groups on class lines: the imperial Saturninus, patrician Bassianus and Senators, and the plebeian Tribunes, plus the military costume of the 'followers', who are clearly soldiers when they are dismissed later in the scene. The famous but disputed Peacham drawing shows the use of what might be Roman-style plumed helmets and axe-head spears, and a toga-like costume for Titus: although both the styles and the identity of the play depicted are uncertain,¹⁹⁹ the contribution of the costumes to spectacle and character-function is evident. The speeches that follow in formal rotation set out the contending positions, as each of the leaders at stage level argues his political claim. Further movement follows as the gathered soldiery are dismissed and the two leaders below climb to the upper level, clearing the stage for the processional entry of Titus with his dead sons and his war captives, emblems of both his sacrifice and his prowess. By visual and verbal means the audience are presented with a highly complex 'once-upon-a-time' political situation: class structure, election contest, ideological difference, military factions, foreign conquest, heroism, state service and personal loss.

After these early examples Shakespeare seems to have abandoned such stylised opening uses of the stage space for well over a decade, when *Timon of Athens* (1605) opens with the sequential procession over the stage of the various artisans making a living off Timon, and

¹⁹⁹ See Schlueter (1999) for a useful discussion.

another 8 years later *Henry VIII* (1613), after its prologue, has Buckingham and Norfolk meet from opposite doors to signify Norfolk's return from France. He still, however, makes considerable use of processional entries and pageantry, but begins to delay their appearance, preceding them with some more intimate or private scene on a small scale (see Table 3). This alters the purpose of the opening moments significantly, from helpful guidance into the narrative to nuanced attitude to political events – from *narrative* or *theatricality* to (alternatives of) *meaning*. This is particularly noticeable in the case of *Henry V*, since the first quarto begins with a processional entry, but the later quartos and Folio insert first the Chorus, and then the scene in which the two bishops plan their support for the French wars. Only then does the King enter in the formal processional manner of the earlier histories. *Hamlet* similarly delays the entry of Claudius's court until after the secretive scene on the battlements of Elsinore, *King Lear* delays the appearance of the King and court with the short scene where Gloucester introduces Edmund to Kent, and *Antony and Cleopatra* offers first the short account Philo gives to Demetrius of Antony's behaviour in Egypt. In each case the audience is given a point of view from within the play, rather than directly from the yard or gallery, of the characters in power who present themselves in public procession. As with the prologues, this new device offers scope for a complex or ironic view of the characters in positions of power, by offering first an attitude to, or a variant version of, the situation through the experience of some lesser character(s). Rulers and powerful people are seen being manipulated (Henry V) or judged (Antony), or the subject of some political speculation by their inferiors (Claudius, Lear). The effect in each case is to qualify the splendour of the pageantry, making it less the focus of audience

wonder or pleasure – serving *theatricality* – and more contingent or precarious within the world of the play – serving *meaning*.

Table 3: Opening stage directions showing pageantry

	Text	1 st performance	Opening	Delayed pageantry	No of named characters
<i>Henry V</i>	F1 1623	1598-9	Chorus, then Bishops	Enter the King, Humfrey, Bedford, Clarence, Warwick, Westmerland, and Exeter.	7
<i>Hamlet</i>	F1 1623	1600-1	Barnardo, Horatio etc	Enter Claudius King of Denmarke, Gertrude the Queene, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, and his Sister Ophelia, Lords, Attendants.	6
<i>King Lear</i>	Q1 1608	1605-6	Glo, Kent, Bstd	<i>Sound a Sennet</i> , Enter one bearing a Coronet, then Lear, then the Dukes of Albany, and Cornwell, next Gonorill, Regan, Cordelia, with followers	6
<i>King Lear</i>	F1 1623	1610	Kent, Glo, Edm	<i>Sennet</i> . Enter King Lear, Cornwall, Albany, Gonerill, Regan, Cordelia, and attendants	6
<i>A&C</i>	F1 1623	1606	Philo and Demetrius	<i>Flourish</i> . Enter Anthony, Cleopatra her Ladies, the Traine, with Eunuchs fanning her	2

Modern directors have ample theatrical material in the openings of these plays to use the texts closely. Processions and ceremonial pageantry then as now make effective means of crossing the threshold into the world and narrative of the play. In 1951, for example, reviewing Anthony Quayle's notable cycle of History plays, Alice Venezky commented that '[m]ost of the productions in the ... series beg[a]n and end[ed] with pageantry'.²⁰⁰ In 1955 Peter Brook opened his celebrated *Titus Andronicus* with a 'procession of green-clad priests

²⁰⁰ Venezky (1951a) p. 341.

into the monument of the Andronici, bearing aloft the armour of Titus's dead sons'.²⁰¹ In Nicholas Hytner's 2005 *1 Henry IV*, 'Henry and the court processed slowly and sombrely down [a wooden] ramp, the wasteland [depicted in the set] and female mourners an urgent reminder of "civil butchery"'.²⁰² So strong is the attraction of such openings that they often displace Shakespeare's contrasting smaller-scale first scenes. Trevor Nunn is particularly fond of bringing Scene 2 processions to the beginning. In 1968 his *King Lear* opened with a 'splendid parade of barbaric splendour',²⁰³ while his *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1972 presented '[o]ur first view of [the lovers, played by Richard Johnson and Janet Suzman], dressed as Egyptian god monarchs... in a pageant which precedes the opening dialogue'.²⁰⁴ In 1974 Nunn opened his *Macbeth* with a sombre ceremony involving the Scottish court: 'a funeral procession of men in black cassocks assembling in their pews around Duncan, a living, yet already sanctified, symbol of the divine monarchy'.²⁰⁵ *Richard II* is often given a ceremonial opening to fill out the basic stage direction in the 1597 Quarto: 'ENTER KING RICHARD, IOHN OF GAVNT, WITH OTHER Nobles and attendants'. Terry Hands' 1980 production began with the King standing 'before a costly panel of gold inlay and don[ning] his crown with a gesture that [spoke] wordlessly of his divine right',²⁰⁶ and Deborah Warner's production in 1995 began with 'servants... robing Richard in his royal regalia' in a 'space lit by wall-mounted candles'.²⁰⁷ In 2005 Trevor Nunn staged an elaborate ceremony of robing and

²⁰¹ *Stage*, 17 Aug 1955.

²⁰² Tatspaugh (2006) 325.

²⁰³ Evans (1969) p. 137.

²⁰⁴ Charles Lewsen, *Times*, 16 Aug 1972.

²⁰⁵ Michael Coveney, *Plays and Players* 22.3 (Dec 1974) p. 18.

²⁰⁶ B.A. Young, *Financial Times*, 4 Nov 1980.

²⁰⁷ Holland (1997) p. 263.

crowning Richard (played by Kevin Spacey) to 'the triumphant strains of Handel's Zadok the Priest'.²⁰⁸

Over the twentieth century such processional openings have become ever more ludic and inventive, interpolating ideas and actions with no direct source in the text. Nunn's *Titus* in 1972 opened 'with the bringing on of a life-size statue of the late Emperor, half-clad on a couch, eating grapes',²⁰⁹ and in 1973 David Jones opened *Love's Labour's Lost* with a funeral procession in which Navarre and his companions tossed their hats, cloaks and swords into the empty coffin.²¹⁰ In 2007, in Rebecca Gatward's *Merchant of Venice* at Shakespeare's Globe, '[a] complicated opening tableau before Antonio's first entrance... offered a busy picture of a Venice that never was, with a little part-early-modern, part-present-day Catholic procession, offstage Jewish singing, and a band of ice-cream advert Italian street musicians in silly hats'²¹¹. Peter Hall opened his *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Rose Theatre in 2010 with an interpolated ceremonial entry of Dame Judi Dench as Elizabeth I to her deeply curtsying court.²¹² Edward Hall's *Henry V* in 2012 began with a procession of 'bedraggled soldiers making their way through the aisles from the back of the auditorium, singing Irish and Scottish marching songs'.²¹³ Gradually, too, the ceremonial opening has become subversive of ceremony, introducing a casual or irreverent element. In 1990 Deborah Warner had Lear (Brian Cox) 'pulled onstage in a wheelchair by Albany and Cornwall as part of a high-energy family party that included paper crowns, noisemakers and frenzied

²⁰⁸ Tatspaugh (2006) p. 323.

²⁰⁹ Thomson (1973) p. 148.

²¹⁰ Thomson (1974) p. 146.

²¹¹ Dobson (2008) p. 340.

²¹² Rutter (2011) p. 352.

²¹³ Kirwan (2013) p. 261.

activity'.²¹⁴ Gregory Doran staged a consciously botched ceremony to open *King John* in 2001, with the French ambassador kept waiting while a fanfare sounded without the expected entry, and two lords 'came on with a table and documents' before 'high-pitched laughter and applause were heard offstage and the half-dressed, stick-thin figure of the king... was seen running across the back. Another trumpet blast and John finally arrived'.²¹⁵

The processional or ceremonial entry, then, remains a significant opening device of remarkable adaptability to contemporary tastes, events and circumstances.

3. Demotic Spectacle

Spectacle and pageantry is one way of making a rousing opening, particularly fitting for histories and plays about royalty. Another theatrically arresting opening is bustle and action, where many bodies burst upon the stage, rather than process in with dignity. In the Roman political plays, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare brings a large group of citizens onstage with much clamour and the threat of chaos. In the case of *Julius Caesar* the stage direction first hints at the sheer numbers and the spread of their activity with the word 'over':

Enter Flavius, Murellus, and certain Commoners over the Stage.

A certain amount of action, noise and movement is inevitably called for to colour and justify Flavius's opening command,

Hence: home you idle Creatures, get you home:

Is this a holiday?²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Dessen (1991) p. 222.

²¹⁵ Jackson (2002) p. 546.

²¹⁶ 1.1.1-2.

The exchanges and implicit setting indicate a lively ludic, transgressive *limen* as both threshold and entry-point into the play. The costume must be colourful, plebeian holiday clothes, since Flavius complains that the commoners are not wearing the statutory 'sign' of their 'profession'²¹⁷ but their 'best apparel'.²¹⁸ The dialogue that follows, full of subversive and insubordinate word-play, seems to call for raucous behaviour and laughter, and the activity clearly continues:

Flavius: Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?

Cobbler: Truly sir, to wear out their shoes, to get myself into more work.²¹⁹

The stage direction for *Coriolanus* gives a more explicit idea of the action called for:

Enter a Company of Mutinous Citizens, with Staves, Clubs, and other weapons

which must occupy some time to complete and involve accompanying noise. Their state of presentation is suggested by the poverty they complain of, the 'leanness that afflicts' them and that serves as 'an inventory to particularize [the patricians'] abundance'.²²⁰

This sort of spectacle of common people is extraordinary in the prominence it gives at the start of the plays to low-born characters, perhaps suggesting that Shakespeare wished to establish a point of contact between his Roman setting and contemporary England.

Theatrically these openings offer a demotic theatrical pleasure, and perhaps a reminder of travelling plays in provincial settings. The scenes depicted come close to the lives and situations of many in the original audience,²²¹ and indeed the costumes and language make

²¹⁷ 1.1.4-5.

²¹⁸ 1.1.8.

²¹⁹ 1.1.28-30.

²²⁰ 1.1.18-20.

²²¹ The company and theatre of the first production are listed as the King's Men and the Globe in the *Database of Early English Playbooks*, see <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/sources.html> (accessed 2 November 2011).

the spectacle belong to that audience rather than to ancient Rome. The tribune Flavius chastises the *Julius* commoners for breaking rules about working-day attire and behaviour that belong equally to Elizabethan England: as Richard Wilson points out, this opening scene parallels the situation for working men attending theatrical performances on a 'labouring day', situating the opening scene 'explicitly within the contemporary debate' about the 'value or "idleness" of popular culture'.²²²

Such references to the world outside the theatre not only entertain by their very topicality, but link the world of the play with contemporary life, prompting the expectation of parallels between the two in the moral and political events depicted on the stage. As with the prologues, this opening with its blend of multifaceted contemporary allusion and historical representation attests to a dominant Elizabethan habit of allegorical or hermeneutic thinking: of seeing the present in 'presented' instances. In ways that might now seem heavy-handed, popular performances offered to 'signify'.

Coriolanus similarly blends the topical with the presented history. The theatrical presentation of its mutinous citizens at the opening must be coloured by the content of the scene that follows, to suggest both the people's desperation and anger, but also their reasonableness and intelligence, including a fair level of education – they are not a mindless mob. They are in rebellion against shortage of corn, which has reduced them to a state of near-starvation, and which they blame on the hoarding practised by their social masters. Shakespeare seems to have focused on the corn shortage to create a focus for the audience's sympathy and recognition, simplifying his source material and deploying

²²² Wilson (1987), p. 32.

contemporary reference in the detail and language of the discourse. E.C. Pettet points out the extent to which Shakespeare adjusted the information given by Plutarch, reducing a range of grievances – a hike in usury, and proposals to ‘drain off sedition’ by renewed war and colonization – to the single grievance of the corn famine, which historically occurred *after* the Volscian war.²²³ R.B. Parker shows how close some of the wording of the citizens’ complaint is to the 1607 petition from ‘The Diggers of Warwickshire to all Other Diggers’, and to ‘a vocabulary of “moral economy” complaint against enclosure and grain hoarding’ through the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.²²⁴ Richard Wilson notes the parallels between the Roman citizens’ understanding of the manipulation of market prices, and the finding in the Privy Council’s *Book of Orders* that greed-driven hoarding to raise prices led to ‘the great oppression of the poor’.²²⁵ Moreover, the complaint of the play’s citizens about proliferating laws to imprison the poor ‘clearly alludes to the Elizabethan vagrancy acts and repeal of laws protecting tillage’.²²⁶

The citizens are particularly active and articulate, with an understanding of market economics and of their status as *citizens* of Rome, possessed of the right to protest and to seek political representation. In this opening scene they stand their ground against the oily persuasiveness of Menenius. In contrast with the uses of the same fable in other renaissance texts, as Cathy Shrank notes,²²⁷ the 2nd Citizen remains sceptical of Menenius’s Belly story: he interrupts him, and makes his own catalogue of the virtues of the other body-parts in an unexpected show of oratorical skill (‘Fore me, this Fellow speaks!’). He resists the

²²³ Pettet (1950), p. 36.

²²⁴ See Parker (1998) pp. 35-6.

²²⁵ Wilson (1991), p. 112.

²²⁶ Wilson (1991), p. 112.

²²⁷ Shrank (2003), p. 414.

patrician's allegorical reading of the belly's benevolence ('the cormorant belly... the sink of the body') and finally maintains his original scepticism ('It was an answer. How apply you this?').

This introduction to the articulate mob prepares for the central role they will play as legitimate participants in political debate in the play's central action, the downfall of Coriolanus. In this opening scene Caius Martius's 'pride' is so hated as to seem itself the cause of their hunger – but not by all. On the page it is hard to distinguish characters named merely '1 Citizen', '2 Citizen', but in performance the physical presence of actors taking these parts must show more clearly that Shakespeare presented them as individuals. Citizen No 1 singles out Martius as 'chief enemy to the people' whose death will lead to 'corn at our own price'; No 2 forces the group to consider Martius's service to the state, just as he later challenges Menenius. In later scenes different groups of citizens, identified only by number, engage in the election debate, weighing the worth of Martius's wounds against his malevolent disdain for the poor.

Directors of these plays in the last sixty years have exploited the theatrical value of these crowded opening scenes. In 1959 Peter Hall made a strong visceral impact with the opening of his *Coriolanus*, as Stanley Wells reports:

[T]he lights dimmed on the uncurtained set, to be followed by a racket of bells, shouts, crowd-noises, and beating sounds working up to a climax as the mob broke through the gates on to the stage. It was a 'thrilling opening' (A Pryce-Jones, *Observer*, 12 July), causing Frank Granville-Barker to write: 'From the moment... that the Roman mob

surged on to the stage - vomited, as it seemed, from the very bowels of the earth - my attention was gripped.'²²⁸

The well-known binaries of Roman social structure tempt post-war directors to provide clear moral compasses at this opening moment. In his *Coriolanus* in 1972 Trevor Nunn chose to stress class difference in modern terms, highlighting the ruthless power of the ruling class, and poverty and oppression rather than articulate rebellion in the plebeians. His production opened with

a massed entry, a downstage march and a brief mime of Romulus and Remus suckled by the She-Wolf. At the dispersal of the silent scene, a patrician trampled on the ill-clad body of a starving plebeian. Smeared with Lancastrian grime, and costumed in grey rags, the Plebeians were placed in a kind of dirty shanty-town.²²⁹

His *Julius Caesar* of the same season preceded the textual opening scene with an interpolated ceremony: 'deafening drum-beats, the unrolling of a wide red carpet, a massed entry, and a mime of Brutus [sic] crowning Caesar with laurel. There followed a raised-arm salute and the shout of "Caesar!"'.²³⁰ Outrageous dictatorial power was also foregrounded in David Thacker's *Coriolanus* in 1994, in which

²²⁸ Wells (1977) p. 22.

²²⁹ Thomson (1973) p. 142.

²³⁰ Thomson (1973) p. 145.

[t]he Napoleonic figure of Caius Martius (Toby Stephens) was first glimpsed at the back of the stage, scowling as grain poured from above into a pit at centre stage. The store was covered before the starving common people could get their hands on it.²³¹

Other directors, however, depict the power of the citizenry to take collective action, using imagery from a variety of modern instances. In 1991 Michael Bogdanov's *Coriolanus* had

'Democratie' [emblazoned on] a large banner unfurled across the stage for the opening demonstration. The crowd, chanting 'Give us this day our daily bread', were broken up by sirens, tear gas, riot police and beatings.²³²

In 2005, the opening of Deborah Warner's *Julius Caesar*, 'before any dialogue had been spoken',

perfectly captured the mood at the end of a long day of public demonstrations – metal barriers near the wide steps of some public building, a lone skateboarder watched by anxious security men, a drunken girl in a cheap fur coat with a balloon walking unsteadily homewards, noises off of walkie-talkies and distant sirens.²³³

The problem of crowding the stage with extras has led some directors to experiment with using the spectators: Peter Hall used an onstage audience in his 1984 *Coriolanus*, as I discuss in Chapter 5, and at the start of his 1999 *Julius Caesar* at Shakespeare's Globe Mark Rylance

²³¹ Jackson (1995) p. 345.

²³² Holland (1992) p. 132.

²³³ Dobson (2006) p. 329.

‘dot[ted] his actors around the audience’²³⁴ and brought the tribunes forward to address their challenges ‘provocatively [to] the groundlings’.²³⁵

4. Supernatural Spectacle

These Roman openings with their heightened excitement of crowd behaviour are unlike any other opening gambits in Shakespeare’s plays. Similarly set apart are two plays of Shakespeare’s maturity – first performed in 1606 and 1611 respectively – that present a non-human, natural or supernatural spectacle: *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.

The brief appearance of the Weird Sisters that opens *Macbeth* offers opportunities for spectacular stage effects, costume and bodily decoration: in Maguin’s terms, a ‘once-upon-a-time’ rapidly creating a strange, other-worldly setting; in Turner’s terms, deploying the ludic, innovative and subversive resources of the acting company. The stage direction calls for ‘thunder and lightning’, which as Leslie Thomson shows, is itself a convention for the introduction of supernatural events,²³⁶ while the sisters themselves, by Banquo’s description, are ‘withered and... wild in their attire’ and ‘look not like th’inhabitants o’th’ earth’.²³⁷ Played by men or boys, they are dressed as women but have beards, and have ‘skinny’ lips and ‘choppy’ fingers.²³⁸ While some of these effects might conceivably have been left to verbal description, the physical presentation must have had enough to startle and raise fear, or the equivalent of fear in audience response where knowledge of the fictional nature of performance is not in doubt, and where thanks to convention ‘the

²³⁴ Anthony Holden, *Observer*, 30 May 1999.

²³⁵ Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 27 May 1999.

²³⁶ See Thomson (1999)

²³⁷ 1.3.38,39.

²³⁸ 1.3.43,42

audience was almost invariably prompted to expect the supernatural – and got what it expected'.²³⁹ The incantatory rhythm and rhyme of the witches' opening words, core theatrical resources, seem, too, to call for whatever visual properties were associated with witchcraft and the practices of demonic intimacy with familiar spirits, and to suggest accompanying movement and gesture. As an introduction to a narrative this gives nothing away, detached as it is from normal human behaviour and social context: it operates primarily on the theatrical level, and secondarily on the level of meaning, projecting forward into the play's themes of evil and the supernatural.

The *Tempest* opening similarly offers scope for arresting theatrical and supernatural effects in the production of a storm at sea: for Andrew Gurr it is 'a remarkably bravura piece of staging', 'an exceptional audacity'.²⁴⁰ Moreover, since it is later revealed to be artificially produced, the storm can legitimately show its theatricality, although the first audiences should, presumably, not have expected the narrative twist that reveals it as staged by characters in the play – as a 'performance within the play'. The theatrical means available to Shakespeare's company at the Globe and Blackfriars theatres for producing thunder and lightning were, according to Gurr, well established by 1611: 'Thunder from a "roul'd bullet" (a metal ball trundled down a metal trough) and "tempestuous drumme" were standard accessories on both types of stage. Fireworks or rosin for lightning flashes were available at the amphitheatres [although] unpopular at the halls because of the stink',²⁴¹ which perhaps explains the stage direction's indication that the 'tempestuous noise' is merely 'heard'.

Keith Sturges also notes possible 'sound effects from a sea machine (small pebbles revolved

²³⁹ Thomson (1999), p. 14.

²⁴⁰ Gurr (1989), p. 95, 96.

²⁴¹ Gurr (1989), p. 95.

in a drum) and a wind machine (a loose length of canvas turned on a wheel)'.²⁴² By comparison with earlier theatrical storms offered apologetically by a Chorus's verbal description, such as before Act 3 of *Henry V*, and Thomas Heywood's Chorus to Act 5 of *The Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* (probably performed at the Red Bull in 1604),²⁴³ the *Tempest*'s opening storm seems designed partly to show the technical facilities available to the King's Men.

Much more than this, however, and resonating on into the unfolding play, the opening storm offers within its spectacle a properly subversive *limen*, a realistic situation where the *socially* powerful are helpless and require to be ruled, and even rebuked, by labouring men. The allegorical convention by which a tempest signifies disruption and reversal of the natural order is staged simultaneously with a depiction of just such a reversal, as Alonso and Antonio attempt to command the Boatswain and are ordered to 'keep your cabins' because 'You mar our labour' and 'assist the storm'.²⁴⁴ The Boatswain is initially confident enough, ordering the mariners to 'Take in the topsail' and 'Tend to the master's whistle': the storm can blow itself out 'if room enough'.²⁴⁵ But the interference of his royal passengers endangers the mariners' work, demonstrating at the opening of the play not only how tenuous is the power of the ruling class – 'What cares these roarers for the name of king?'²⁴⁶ – but how apt such power is to overthrow itself by its own misapplication. Thus the depiction of the king and

²⁴² Quoted in Lindley (2002), p. 91.

²⁴³ See Gurr (1989), p. 91. Gurr gives the likely date of first performance as 1609-10. 1604 is the date suggested in *DEEP*, based on *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, 3rd edition, ed. Alfred Harbage, Samuel Schoenbaum, and Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (London: Routledge, 1989). <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu>, accessed 13th Nov 2011.

²⁴⁴ 1.1.12-13.

²⁴⁵ 1.1.6-7.

²⁴⁶ 1.1.15-16.

the duke endangering the whole ship by challenging the rightful command of the Boatswain proves as the play unfolds to be an allegorical version of their act of usurpation.

These 'supernatural spectacles' show how far Shakespeare has developed the ludic, subversive pre-show or introductory movement from the early stylised pageantry of the *Henry VI* trilogy and the morality-style prologue. On the level of narrative preparation they are enigmatic rather than explanatory or ironic. As spectacle they operate primarily on a theatrical level, but in their supernatural content they project divergent hermeneutic resonances into the bodies of their narratives. *Macbeth's* Witches extend a malevolent evil through the effect of their words alone into the courtly world where violence distorts and then destroys the centre of power: the supernatural is shown to be almost normal, an integral part of the natural. By contrast *The Tempest's* shipwreck extends a benign, magically harmless effect through a highly physical intervention, leading to reconciliation and restoration of the centre of power: the supernatural remains an aberration from reality, and is discarded once it has achieved its purpose.

As with Shakespeare's other opening devices, the supernatural spectacle has invited a vast range of theatrical treatments in modern times. The weird sisters have been presented with ghoulish or anti-religious symbols such as a 'corpse-hung gibbet'²⁴⁷ (Douglas Seale, 1958), an upside-down cross (Peter Hall, 1967), and juxtaposed with a ceremonial church service with a saintly Duncan and organ music (Nunn, 1974). A more recent trend for *Macbeth* productions has been opening with a child or children as part of the supernatural plot (Adrian Noble, 1986; Michael Boyd, 1993 and 2011), and the ludic experimentation becomes

²⁴⁷ Byrne (1959) p. 546.

ever more inventive with Max Stafford-Clark in 2004 marshalling his audiences at gun-point to the back-stage areas of the theatre, and with Rupert Goold in 2007 presenting battle-field nurses who morph into the witches, echoing the battle-field opening of Theodore Komisarjevsky in 1934 where the witches were scavenging old women. The storm that opens *The Tempest* has in turn been given theatrically exotic treatment (dancers gyrating in green leotards, Michael Benthall, 1951; full-blown Inigo Jones-style effects and three Ariels, Trevor Nunn, 2011) and simple realism (a swinging lantern, Brook, 1957, repeated by Sam Mendes, 1993), or a combination of the two (Ian McKellen manipulating a small voodoo ship and dolls, Jude Kelly, 1999; Prospero conjuring a violent storm by sheer force of will, Declan Donnellan, 2011).

Conclusion

Shakespeare clearly saw the value of using, and of varying, pre-show, or introductory, performance. Audiences need to be brought to some sort of order, to have the various activities and distractions of their 'real' lives channelled in ways that stimulate wonder or delight, or interpretative or imaginative participation. Often this is achieved through the ear, by means of words, but there needs too to be a visual and kinaesthetic dimension that is often overlooked in commentary on Shakespeare's drama, as I have tried to show. In addition Shakespeare sometimes makes use of topical allusion, both for its immediate pleasure in ways still well understood, and as a means to draw parallels or connections between the depicted events and contemporary life. In deploying similar resources in modern times, directors may be taking liberties with the text, but they are surely not inventing a new practice.

Chapter 2

In the following chapters I examine in more detail ways in which contemporary directors shape and update Shakespeare's plays using a vast range of opening gambits. That Shakespeare was using these techniques offers in itself a legitimacy to modern practices with pre-shows, and shows the tradition of *theatre*, rather than of literature, as continuous in its creativity and innovation.

CHAPTER 3: MODERNIST APPROACHES: EXPRESSING THE TEXT

In this chapter I explore Shakespearean pre-shows from 1932-1958, a period that spans the transition between two modernising moments: the technical excitement of the new modernist Memorial Theatre in Stratford in 1932 and the social ferment of the new writing at the Royal Court Theatre in London in the 1950s. I explain how I came to define this period as the beginning of my study, and explore some of the problems of evidence I face in gathering and comparing data, before examining the specific examples that demonstrate the emergence of the pre-show against the cultural background of the time.

In the early decades of the twentieth century English Shakespearean performance was slowly moving away from two theatrical norms that had dominated for much of the nineteenth century: leadership by actor-managers and elaborate pictorial staging. Theories of Elizabethan staging set in motion by William Poel, and of stagecraft developed by Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, brought new approaches and expectations that gradually side-lined the central character-actor in favour of a central controlling mind: the director, called at first the producer, closely aided, or influenced, by the designer. Innovation in Shakespearean performance was developing in two directions: towards simplicity of staging on the one hand, and textual clarity and speed of delivery on the other. The first of these aimed to pare back the excesses of realistic painted scenery; the second, to replace sonorous, operatic delivery with naturalistic, pacy verse-speaking. There seemed little urgency to change the first, however: as Dennis Kennedy observes, in the 1920s 'the general

approach remained closer to Tree than to Craig' in contrast to the wave of modernist experimentation with expressionistic design taking place in Europe and Russia.²⁴⁸

Since the use of a pre-show is itself a creative addition to performing the text it is unsurprising that my researches found almost no mention of any instances in the nineteen-teens and -twenties, nor that the first significant use of pre-shows is by a Russian. My evidence, from reviews in journals and newspapers, and from accounts of productions in books and articles, shows that descriptions of pre-shows or of opening moments were extremely rare before the 1960s. This rarity may not necessarily equate to an absence of pre-show presentation: newspaper reviewers in this early period typically focus almost exclusively on assessments of acting and actors, with some description of set and costume design; neither the point of entry into the play nor the early scenes are taken to be significant: rather the reviewer's viewpoint is that of an *aficionado* looking out for the salient points he (rarely she) already knows well. One exception to this pattern – Sir John Martin-Harvey's *Hamlet* at Covent Garden in 1919 – highlights the problem of gathering evidence from sources that are scant at this distance of time. *The Times* judged Martin-Harvey in the usual actor-focused manner as failing to 'put over' the character of Hamlet in so large a theatre, and compared his performance unfavourably with an earlier one.²⁴⁹ However, a scholarly article twenty years later, assessing 'Recent Trends in Staging', quotes another, unidentified, reviewer who departs from the usual formulaic assessment, offering instead a description 'in the moment': waiting at the opening of this performance for 'the usual introductory music', instead 'all the lights went out and a deep bell suddenly began to toll',

²⁴⁸ Kennedy (2001) p. 109.

²⁴⁹ 'Mr Martin Harvey's "Hamlet"', *Times*, 27 December 1919.

evoking an impression of 'the sea... beating against the rocky foundations of Elsinore' before the action began.²⁵⁰ With its creation of mood this pre-show moment both surprises the reviewer by breaking with the traditional overture and takes its spectators over the threshold into its particular world, a world not authorised by the text but imagined by the designer.

While this narrowness of focus in reviews may mask the existence of pre-shows left unrecorded, the few instances when pre-show, or pre-textual, activity is described make clear how exceptional it is, and that it is associated with the artistic innovation, subversion or discovery of the non-acting director. In each case the play in question is given a new reading, focused into the pre-show or opening moments, and expressed in non-verbal theatrical terms such as design, music, and activity or 'business'. The newness of view is in some cases an overturning of expected or conventional understanding of the play, in others a discovery of theatrical potential in a play considered at the time to be inferior or downright unplayable. The text is given new expression, and the use of a pre-show is found to be the vehicle to transport spectators into its new world. The first director to use a noted Shakespearean pre-show in an English theatre was the Russian, Theodore Komisarjevsky, guest-directing at the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1932. In this chapter I discuss the pre-shows to his *Merchant of Venice* (1932), *Macbeth* (1933) and *King Lear* (1936). The same theatre saw the pre-show as tool of innovation develop over the following twenty years in the early work of Peter Brook, whose *Love's Labour's Lost* (1946) and *Titus Andronicus* (1955) I examine next. Two further remarkable pre-shows stand out in the later years of the Memorial before its metamorphosis into the Royal Shakespeare

²⁵⁰ Linton (1940) pp. 315-6.

Theatre, and are the focus of my third section: Michael Redgrave's *Henry IV Part 2* (1951) and Tony Richardson's *Pericles* (1958). I examine the reported content of each pre-show closely, both to form a detailed analysis of it as entry to the play's narrative world, and to assess its impact in its cultural moment. That is, I consider how it mediates along the two axes of the play as spectacle – its narrative and theatrical world – and the play as artefact – the known text of which the production is a version.²⁵¹

Komisarjevsky's *Merchant of Venice*, 1932

When William Bridges-Adams invited Komisarjevsky to be the first guest director in the newly opened Stratford Memorial Theatre in 1932 he was clear that he wanted 'to use him as a *machine de guerre*. His function must be to tickle the liver of Stratford'.²⁵² The Stratford Festival was considered provincial and second-rate, a 'citadel of the old Shakespearean theatrical traditions'.²⁵³ It was felt both that some innovation was needed to rejuvenate the Stratford festival, and that 'a child of the Continent, ... free from the Shakespeare-worship which has stultified dramatic development in this country for so long',²⁵⁴ could inject something of the vitality lacking in English theatre.

Komisarjevsky's first Stratford production, *The Merchant of Venice*, was true to this expectation, notably in breaking with the convention established by Henry Irving in 1879 of treating the play as a quasi-tragedy with Shylock a flawed but sympathetic hero,²⁵⁵ playing it instead as specified in the 1623 Folio, as a comedy. Unconventionally too, he played it

²⁵¹ See Chapter 1, p.9.

²⁵² BBC broadcast, 'The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre' 1959, quoted in Mennen (1979), p. 387

²⁵³ Mennen (1979) p. 387

²⁵⁴ W.H.B., *Birmingham Gazette*, 26 July 1932

²⁵⁵ See Mennen (1979), p. 386; (Berry (1983), p. 74

‘virtually uncut’, following the text ‘meticulously’, including the ‘Shakespearean scene order’.²⁵⁶ Komisarjevsky also designed the sets himself, as he did for all his productions at Stratford. A further innovation was the introduction of a striking interpolated pre-show.

The promptbook mentions simply an overture and a preliminary dance, evidently by a dancing troupe rather than members of the cast, as ‘dancers’ are listed among the actors called for the beginning.²⁵⁷ A much fuller impression emerges from the descriptions of reviewers, most of which give some attention to this opening scene, showing how significant a place it had in the whole. For most reviewers it is Komisarjevsky’s set design that calls forth the first interpretative description. Breaking with traditional ideas of the play, it offers the Venice of carnival, not of high finance, stressing *Venice* but veiling *The Merchant*. The *Birmingham Mail* describes it as ‘Venice in carnival time. A setting of canal and bridge, the latter crossed by a flight of winding stairs, the whole warmly tinted under a glowing rose-pink sky’.²⁵⁸ The Venice it suggests has a wild, unreal quality: Ivor Brown calls it ‘a world of hey-go-mad’,²⁵⁹ and the *Times* reviewer finds it fanciful and stylised, ‘the histrionic Venice of the untravelled Elizabethan, a place where youth may flaunt itself under the sparkling lights of gaiety, frivolity, and idleness’.²⁶⁰ For W.H.B. of the *Birmingham Gazette* it is weirdly distorted or out of focus, ‘the Venice of popular dreams’, with a ‘mass of broken Bridges of Sighs’.²⁶¹ As a way in to the play it conveniently, and wittily, confirms its setting for spectators by means of a rather cartoonish, even drunken representation of the city’s most recognisable landmarks, where bridges are ‘set at the eccentric angles a man might view

²⁵⁶ Berry (1983) pp. 74, 75.

²⁵⁷ Promptbook, RSC archives, Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon.

²⁵⁸ *Birmingham Mail*, 26 July 1932.

²⁵⁹ Ivor Brown, *Weekend Review*, 30 July 1932.

²⁶⁰ *Times*, 26 July 1932.

²⁶¹ *Birmingham Gazette*.

them from late at night',²⁶² 'St Mark's leaned drunkenly against a nightmare Venetian tower', and 'scenery swayed tipsily'.²⁶³ For the *Birmingham Mail*, the style is unsurprising: 'was there ever a Russian producer who did not see architecture as an affair of crookedness?',²⁶⁴ Design, then, is integral to the semiotics of this pre-show, mediating both the fiction and the spectacle: it intimates to the audience that the play-world is to be not realistic but an extravagant fantasy, and as spectacle it is to break the traditional mould, to give a new perspective, inflected by the director's Russian background.

Semiotic exploitation of design is of course not new in 1932. The early years of the twentieth century had seen a flourishing of expressionist and futurist theatre design in Russia and Europe which had an impact in England. The set and costume designs of Edward Gordon Craig, although barely used in actual productions, were influential on Harley Granville Barker's three Shakespeare productions at the Savoy in 1912 and 1914; some visually spectacular ballet and theatre productions of Max Reinhardt toured to London from Berlin, and from Russia the set and costume designs of Leon Bakst, designer for the Ballet Russes, were exhibited in London in 1912 and 1913. But in spite of these modernist undercurrents, directors of Shakespeare in general resisted the continental, Craigian approach that used design expressively, or expressionistically: such artistic innovation as was attempted in Shakespeare production was focused rather on reducing or removing scenery, on recuperating 'Elizabethan' bare stage conditions. The favoured style for contemporary theatre was realistic naturalism, and this was also the effect aimed at for Shakespeare through simpler staging, allowing the text to speak directly and uncomplicatedly – by

²⁶² *Birmingham Gazette*.

²⁶³ L.L.H., *Daily Express*, 26 July 1932.

²⁶⁴ *Birmingham Mail*, 26 July 1932.

implication, naturalistically. Komisarjevsky, by contrast, considered that 'The real function of the theatre is not to copy life, but to interpret plays, in which life and characters are recreated by the imagination of the dramatist, and to find for each of them a suitable form of artistic expression on the stage'.²⁶⁵ Presenting an 'interpretative' design at the opening with the intention to 'win through to the secret' of the play,²⁶⁶ becomes an important directorial tool, as I discuss in Chapter 5, and Komisarjevsky is its pioneer in England.

Also pioneering in this pre-show is Komisarjevsky's presentation of a *commedia*-style dance. Like the design, the dance and costumes at the opening present an interpretation or an imaginative recreation of the world of the play, signalling a change of genre from a serious semi-tragedy of the confrontation between Christian and Jew into what the reviewers called a 'musical comedy',²⁶⁷ with 'C.B. Cochran quality',²⁶⁸ that is, suggesting a musical revue or music hall show. Onto the lopsided set enters a Harlequin, 'fantastic in striped clothes and yard-high hat',²⁶⁹ 'a product rather of Russian ballet than of Shakespeare's England',²⁷⁰ arriving not by conventional means but 'hand over hand down a rope hung from a proscenium balcony'.²⁷¹ He summons a group of 'scampering... pierrots',²⁷² 'grotesque figures', 'dressed ... with an extravagance of plumes, ruffs and cloaks',²⁷³ who 'pirouette'²⁷⁴ along the bridges and 'dance grotesquely for a few moments, then scamper off to make way

²⁶⁵ Komisarjevsky (1929), quoted in DiPietro (2006) p. 131.

²⁶⁶ Craig (1908), quoted in DiPietro (2006) p. 112.

²⁶⁷ *Birmingham Gazette*.

²⁶⁸ *Birmingham Gazette*.

²⁶⁹ *Birmingham Mail*.

²⁷⁰ Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*.

²⁷¹ W.A. Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 July 1932.

²⁷² Brown, *Weekend Review*.

²⁷³ *Daily Express*.

²⁷⁴ *Birmingham Gazette*.

for the first actors'.²⁷⁵ Many reviewers call the dance a 'masque'²⁷⁶ in view of the style and costumes. Its comic impact is supported by the choice of music: Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor played 'by a concealed orchestra'²⁷⁷ accompanied the opening masque, adding a layer of subversive comedy to the semiotics of the pre-show. Originally composed for organ, the work was arranged for orchestra by Leopold Stokovski in 1927 and his recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra on 78rpm became a bestseller. There is no record of the arrangement made for this production, but Richard E. Mennen says it was 'humorous' and contributed, with the 'bright colors' and "'intoxicated" perspective', to the 'carnival mood heightened by the opening dance'.²⁷⁸ Like the production itself, it recasts a familiar classic in a new, more colourful mode. It seems a striking choice to accompany a masked dance: its famous opening phrases – short ornamented rhetorical runs punctuated by silences, and melodramatic arpeggios – emphasise the ludicrous comedy of the dance, particularly with their irreverent new scoring.

Against the background of this design and music, the general response is to the establishing of a mood: a 'high-spirited ... key at the start',²⁷⁹ 'revealing the gay life of the young Venetian nobles'.²⁸⁰ The 'key' struck is generally seen as energetic, youthful and carefree, and reviewers' descriptions carry a variety of moral and aesthetic judgements that give a glimpse of prevailing values, particularly with regard to the behaviour and style of young, fashionable society. R.C.R. in the *Birmingham Post* enjoys the 'appearance of freshness' given to the

²⁷⁵ *Birmingham Mail*.

²⁷⁶ Eg., Alan Parsons, *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1932; *Midland Daily Telegraph* 26 July 1932; *Scotsman*, 26 July 1932; B.P., *Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1932; Ivor Brown, *Weekend Review*, 30 July 1932.

²⁷⁷ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 26 July 1932.

²⁷⁸ Mennen (1979), p. 389.

²⁷⁹ B.P., *Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1932.

²⁸⁰ *Scotsman*, 26 July 1932.

production by the masked dancers, which imbues ‘the whole comedy’ with ‘this festival spirit with all its gaiety.’²⁸¹ It is this joyful, ludic quality that seems to have given the production its immense popular appeal. The *Scotsman*, for example, reports that ‘the production was given an enthusiastic reception... The new theatre was packed, and Komisarjevsky’s departure from tradition commanded a lively interest throughout a performance which was compelling and rich in entertainment’.²⁸² Some reviewers, however, object on a variety of aesthetic grounds that mask strikingly paternalistic, even puritanical, ideas of the cultural value of Shakespeare. The *Times* reviewer is ambivalent, offering some limited praise but betraying the sort of conventional view that Bridges-Adams hired Komisarjevsky to challenge. He finds the opening masque ‘in itself a charming thing. Certainly it sets before us the histrionic Venice of the untravelled Elizabethan, a place where youth may flaunt itself under the sparkling lights of gaiety, frivolity, and idleness, and where even trade has about it the glamour of the East’. But for this reviewer the aesthetic is ‘charming’ *because* the world depicted is unreal, the sort imagined by ‘the untravelled Elizabethan’. This distance from reality allows youthful ‘gaiety, frivolity and idleness’ to ‘flaunt itself’, the hint of censure kept in check by the allowed ‘charm’ of myth. But this careful corralling off of allowed foolery where aesthetic values can temporarily displace moral ones is found faulty after all, since:

... the spectacle does work which Salarino and Salarino are later to do better in words, and there is something to be said, as Shakespeare thought, for beginning with strict

²⁸¹ R.C.R., *Birmingham Post*, 26 July 1932.

²⁸² *Scotsman* 26 July 1932

realism the telling of stories as incredible as the stories of the pound of flesh and the caskets.²⁸³

Although this reviewer's argument is kept within the aesthetic realm, criticising the attempt to present in theatrical form that which Shakespeare has rendered – better – in words, there is a veiled hint of disapprobation toward all forms of irreverent behaviour, from interfering with the Shakespearean text to youthful frivolity, and from *showing* such frivolity in preference to politely *describing* it – a disapprobation that frowns even on Shakespeare's choice of incredible stories that are only redeemed by his having the good sense to begin them with 'strict realism', as though the playwright himself disapproved of them. Alan Parsons of the *Daily Mail* similarly disapproves of the 'irrelevant masque', the sort of device guilty of 'mistaking bustle for business'. Parsons' complaint is a common one among critics objecting to 'fussiness' or onstage representation of what is rendered in Shakespeare's words: it may derive in part from the Elizabethan revivalist school that sought to banish pictorialism and to allow the text to speak; more likely it is indicative of its time, when the values of Shakespearean performance were led by the Old Vic, where Lilian Baylis's 'combination of Victorian idealism and absolute trust in God' made for 'a distrust of the visual', an 'emphasis on traditional literary values', and a 'prejudice against elaboration'.²⁸⁴ In addition to his complaint of redundancy, Parsons finds the mood set by the masque all wrong because it violates an established, conservative aesthetic expectation: it 'introduces to us Antonio dressed, not in the usual black, but in gay, foppish clothes',²⁸⁵ clearly garb Parsons considers unsuitable for the sober, respectable merchant of convention. W.A.

²⁸³ *The Times*, 26 July 1932.

²⁸⁴ Kennedy (2001) p. 122.

²⁸⁵ Alan Parsons, *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1932.

Darlington in the *Daily Telegraph*, similarly conservative, disapproves both aesthetically and morally of a *Merchant* 'fantasticalised... beyond all knowledge'. Particular moral repugnance attaches to the presentation of Antonio, whom 'For no apparent reason [Komisarjevsky] has turned ... into a depraved exquisite'.²⁸⁶ This depiction of Antonio as extravagantly ostentatious overturns the accepted rendering of his character as melancholic and self-denying in contradistinction to Bassanio's other friends, the 'Salads', Gratiano and Lorenzo. Komisarjevsky includes Antonio in the group of debauched, amoral youth, a social group he based on the 'dissipated, fast, bright young ... crowd we have in London today',²⁸⁷ and even extends the group by having *three* Salads: the promptbook names Salerio, Salanio and Salarino, and a blocking sketch groups them around Antonio at the start, emphasising their comic indistinguishability and the large network of high-living young nobles that they form. Darlington's vocabulary also hints at a vein of homosexuality, too scandalous to name: homosexual acts would not become legal in England and Wales for another 35 years, and homosexuality is not explored in theatrical depictions of Antonio until much later in the twentieth century.²⁸⁸

Some reviews note that the dance not only begins but also ends the production, and one critic realises that this amounts to a framing device that makes the performance a play-within-a-play:

[The mummers] dance grotesquely for a few moments, then scamper off to make way for the first actors in a comedy which is to be played as part of the revels – the comedy

²⁸⁶ W.A. Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 July 1932

²⁸⁷ *Daily Mail*, 7 July 1932, quoted in Mennen (1979), p. 391.

²⁸⁸ See Bulman (1991, 2003).

of *The Merchant of Venice*. Harlequin also disappears, but we see him later as a character in the comedy, under the style of Launcelot Gobbo... And at the end, when the play is over, it is Harlequin Gobbo who makes the final exit, yawning and stretching in relief that his labours are over.²⁸⁹

This account is forward-looking in its grasp of the significance of the pre-show to the whole production: Shakespeare's play is placed in quotation marks, offered as a '*show*' presented by a group of performers in stylised costume on a stylised set. The ludic device enables Komisarjevsky to present the play as a comedy, obeying the logic and laws of a purely theatrical genre and so exempt from the rules of representational realism and the prevailing morality. He appears to take his key idea from textual clues: the 'Clown' Launcelot Gobbo, the revels planned by Bassanio and his friends, and the masque that provides cover for Jessica's elopement. However, Mennen believes that his first intention for the production may have been to present a Shylock with 'strong comic dimensions', but that Randle Ayrton, 'a powerful and dignified actor of the "old school"',²⁹⁰ was 'appalled' and refused to play the part comically. Komisarjevsky accordingly had to rethink, but not abandon his vision.²⁹¹ If this was so, it suggests that the whole pre-show may have been devised to achieve this and to foreground Bruno Barnabe as the Harlequin Gobbo.

Komisarjevsky, then, imposes a strong directorial control on his production. He uses the pre-show as an entrance into his vision of the world of the play, a stylised fantasy world akin to those of modernist ballets like *Petrushka*. Distancing the play from realism and from

²⁸⁹ *Birmingham Mail*, 26 July 1932.

²⁹⁰ Mennen (1979) p. 394.

²⁹¹ Mennen (1979) p. 394.

theatrical traditions, he subverts social and performative conventions, but also makes a successful theatrical experience out of a play considered at the time to be inferior, 'one of the technically least skilful of Shakespeare's plays',²⁹² 'preposterous' and 'infantile'.²⁹³ The characters in the pre-show introduce not only the play 'proper', but also its style and genre: *all* the characters are stock figures of the *commedia*, their dress and behaviour arising from a combination of Shakespeare's text and conventions outside that text, conventions, moreover, of a Continental theatre tradition unfamiliar to British audiences, as is indicated by Gordon Crosse's comment that Lancelot was 'made up as a pantomime clown' and 'played something like the part of the Vice in mediaeval drama'.²⁹⁴ It is a reading that in some ways anticipates C.L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) and Robert Weimann's *Shakespeare und die Tradition des Volkstheaters* (1967), and suggests that later critical work linking drama with anthropological studies, which I allude to in Chapter 1,²⁹⁵ might have antecedents in twentieth-century performance. And of course it anticipates Brook's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which may owe more to this theatrical precursor than to the work of scholars.

Komisarjevsky's *Macbeth*, 1933

Komisarjevsky's 'visual statement' for his *Macbeth* is stylistically the opposite of his *Merchant* one, and equally subversive of convention: where he had fantasticalised the *Merchant*'s realism, his *Macbeth* displaces what in the text is magical or supernatural with a modern, naturalistic alternative deriving from the material and psychological circumstances

²⁹² *Birmingham Gazette*.

²⁹³ Brown, *Weekend Review*.

²⁹⁴ Crosse (1953), p. 95.

²⁹⁵ See Chapter 1, pp. 10-15.

of war. The reviewers find this in the opening scene, in the lighting and set, the portrayal of the witches, and the introduction of other characters. Their accounts of the opening are remarkably descriptive and analytical, and the inventiveness of their prose shows them engaging strongly with the earliest moments of the production as they try to convey its mood and meaning, beginning with colour and the abstract impressions created by theatrical materials. The first scene 'opens in a mysterious, almost awesome twilight, with remarkable effects of low, flying storm clouds'²⁹⁶ in a sky that 'glows with red and gold... veined like marble'.²⁹⁷ Lighting effects are intensified by the set, which is built 'entirely of metal, so that in the light of the stage it gleams with a silvery brightness which possesses the luminosity of a colour film, though for the most part the shadows are as strong as the points of light'.²⁹⁸ When representational details emerge, one reviewer notes the absent convention, finding 'no blasted heath', but instead 'what might be a scrap-iron yard in a munitions works' with 'long guns on one side of criss-cross staircases' and on the other side 'huge sheets of twisted aluminium set endways'.²⁹⁹ Other reviewers move across the genre threshold into a sort of narrative account of the stark depiction of war, finding in the aluminium set 'a ruined castle or fort in Flanders',³⁰⁰ or a 'chateau that has been ruined by artillery', with only 'a few broken columns... left standing'³⁰¹ where 'stark barrels of howitzers [finger] the skies'.³⁰²

²⁹⁶ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1933

²⁹⁷ R.C.R., *Birmingham Post*, 19 April 1933

²⁹⁸ R.C.R., *Birmingham Post*, 19 April 1933.

²⁹⁹ S.R.L., *Morning Post*, 19 April 1933.

³⁰⁰ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1933.

³⁰¹ R.C.R., *Birmingham Post*, 19 April 1933.

³⁰² W.H.B., *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 April 1933.

In a passage explaining his approach to set design Komisarjevsky describes how he uses real, 'three-dimensional and *material*' elements such as 'wood, glass, metal, genuine tissues',³⁰³ to transport the audience into the world of the play as he has creatively envisaged it. The elements of the set of *Macbeth*, he says, may have looked to some critics 'like nothing on earth' and having 'no meaning', but in fact

had a most important meaning: they assisted the spectators to re-create in their minds the creative work of my irrational self. The synthesis of these 'meaningless' elements with those elements which were rationally real, and even familiar to the spectator, made Shakespeare's tragedy in my production stand firmly on a basis of real life, detached from anything symbolical and at the same time projected it into the eternity of time.³⁰⁴

The objects and participants in that world are themselves transported by the same means:

The scenery must reflect the lighting and its colour and live under it the same realistically-imaginary life as the actors live while acting their parts.³⁰⁵

In this expressive, expressionistic set are revealed Komisarjevsky's *Weird Sisters*, not witches as conventionally portrayed, but 'thoroughly human old hags, with strong Scottish accents' who 'crouch over a booted skeleton'.³⁰⁶ The responses of reviewers suggest the success of Komisarjevsky's method in generating emotion and drawing spectators into the play-world.

³⁰³ Komisarjevsky (1935) p. 24.

³⁰⁴ Komisarjevsky (1935) pp. 23-24.

³⁰⁵ Komisarjevsky (1935) p. 24.

³⁰⁶ S.R.L., *Morning Post*, 19 April 1933

Many respond strongly to these 'horrible old women',³⁰⁷ not only for their naturalness, but for their callous ease among the dead of apparently many, or all, wars, 'haunt[ing] the battlefields seeking valuables on the bodies of the dead',³⁰⁸ 'gleefully rifling'³⁰⁹ and 'plundering not only corpses, but skeletons'.³¹⁰ The world they inhabit is both realistic and imaginary: they share the stage with 'steel-helmeted soldiers carrying rifles' as they 'pass on into the battle',³¹¹ while '[p]risoners in chains clatter over steps'.³¹²

Some reviewers seek to account for Komisarjevsky's decisions, finding conceptual purposes, and also a modernising pragmatism in the face of contemporary culture. W.H.B. of the *Birmingham Gazette* grasps Komisarjevsky's expressionistic method, but rather reductively, reading in the design a directorial intention to convey a single, rather literary, meaning: he suggests that Komisarjevsky

said to himself: '*Macbeth* is a play in which the abstract quality, ambition, is dramatised. The problem is to suggest ambition in a concrete form – in scenery, in costume, in accent, in everything'.

He imagines the director choosing the 'steely quality' of aluminium and adding 'a few mediaeval shields', the 'staccato rattle of machine guns', and 'everything in armaments that gleamed and baked' to suggest 'in material form the abstract idea of ambition'.³¹³ For I.B. of the *Manchester Guardian* these choices create 'a kind of metallic nightmare', which

³⁰⁷ *Times*, 19 April 1933

³⁰⁸ W.H.B., *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 April 1933

³⁰⁹ M.K.F.K., *Birmingham Mail*, 19 April 1933

³¹⁰ *Times*, 19 April 1933

³¹¹ *Times*, 19 April 1933

³¹² S.R.L., *Morning Post*, 19 April 1933

³¹³ W.H.B., *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 April 1933

‘communicate[s] the idea of little mortals beset by oppressive and confining destiny’.³¹⁴

More in keeping with what now looks a complacent ‘modern’ sense of superiority, both reviewers, impatient with some of Shakespeare’s ‘sillier’ stories as they were with *The Merchant*, suggest Komisarjevsky is sensibly bringing the Bard up to date with modern consciousness: ‘[t]he twentieth century will simply laugh at ghosts and witches’;³¹⁵ ‘modern people are not interested in magic spells and witchcraft’, and ‘all this incantation stuff seems childish nowadays’.³¹⁶

For some the abandonment of conventional staging amounts to betrayal – or liberation – of the text as they, like W.H.B., have learned to understand it. The *Times* critic, his discourse sonorous with rhetorical, quasi-religious cadences, evokes the gentlemanly world of Victorian literary criticism and the respectable Stratford audiences that Bridges-Adams wanted to rattle, as he wonders ‘whether these sordid creatures [the witches] can replace the shadowy beings of convention with their tremendous suggestion of lawless human nature, elemental avengers, as Coleridge calls them, without sex or kin’.³¹⁷ The reviewer of the *Daily Express*, by contrast, seems delighted by the subversive modernity of the concept, and has fun with the gritty masculine lexis of war: gleefully invoking the spirit of Shakespeare, he wishes he could have seen the dramatist’s face ‘as the curtain rose on the blasted heath – transformed to the steely glitter of a shell-proof fort caparisoned with anti-aircraft guns’.³¹⁸ Although he concludes it unlikely that Shakespeare ‘would have minded’, this is not because the production serves the text, but because ‘Shakespeare would know

³¹⁴ I.B., *Manchester Guardian*, 20th Apr 1933

³¹⁵ W.H.B., *Birmingham Gazette*, 19 April 1933

³¹⁶ I.B., *Manchester Guardian*, 20th Apr 1933

³¹⁷ *Times* 19 April 1933

³¹⁸ *Daily Express*, 20 April 1933

that an author seldom recognises his play after the producer and the actors have finished with it', remarks that suggest a certain anti-theatricality prevalent at the time, and commonly found throughout the twentieth century. His only complaint is that it is 'typically English that we should have to employ a Russian to re-interpret our national dramatist'.

Rejecting, then, Shakespeare's supernatural world in *Macbeth* and his own realm of pure theatre in *Merchant*, Komisarjevsky evokes a firmly recognisable world still clear in the memory of an audience in 1933, 15 years after the Armistice, using properties and costumes adapted from modern war. This world is also being kept in the public's mind by cinematic representations derived from the writing of combatants, and critics draw comparisons with these and other contemporary films. The *Birmingham Mail* reviewer finds the soldiers' costumes remind him of 'the troops in *All Quiet*, and sometimes of the workers in *Metropolis*'; for W.A. Darlington the film that comes to mind is *Journey's End*.³¹⁹ By means of these contemporary images, Komisarjevsky confronts his audience with the familiar and the unfamiliar, asking them to envisage as the first impression of his *Macbeth*, not the well-known satanic conspiracy where weird bearded women speak a language of incantations and commune with spirits from hell, but a theatre of war just beyond the wings, on the fringes of which some old women find pickings.

From this prelude Komisarjevsky can depict what unfolds as entirely the working of Macbeth's mind: the first encounter between the witches and Macbeth, with Banquo also present, has all the preceding incantation cut, removing the suggestion of supernatural

³¹⁹ M.F.K.F., *Birmingham Mail*,; W.A. Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*, both 19 April 1933. *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang, was released in 1927; *All Quiet on the Western Front*, directed by Lewis Milestone, and *Journey's End*, directed by James Whale, were released in 1930.

powers, and thereafter any supernatural events are depicted unequivocally as Macbeth's overworking imagination. This makes the opening in effect another framing device: as with his *Merchant*, Komisarjevsky locates the action of the play in a particular world, with its own conventions and images, and its own logic of cause and effect. For the *Midland Daily Telegraph*, this amounts to 'an entirely new vision of this great tragedy'.³²⁰ In using a pre-show to foreground war as key to understanding the behaviour of the play's protagonists, Komisarjevsky anticipates a significant feature of productions throughout the next eighty years, as psychological understanding of the traumatic effects of combat becomes culturally dominant.

Komisarjevsky's *King Lear*, 1936

For his *King Lear* at Stratford in 1936 Komisarjevsky as central artistic auteur again proposed, or imposed, a play-world that suggested a psychological dynamic. The production opened with a strong visual statement: a modernist, symbolic set using vertical space. The principle structure was 'an un-localized stage of semi-circular steps' against a background 'expanse of sky',³²¹ where Lear was discovered at a dizzying height above his court and subjects, elevated by the set's architecture, its splendour and opulence, and by heraldic royal trumpets:

The opening scene, built up on a series of steps arranged in geometrical pattern and in kaleidoscopic colours, presented Lear installed on a wonderful golden throne, silhouetted against a deep, rich background, and attended by trumpeters with long

³²⁰ *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1933.

³²¹ *Times*, 21 April 1936.

golden trumpets – a spectacle which, as its full glory dawned on the senses, drew applause from a crowded house.³²²

Many reviewers mention the three main elements of this opening set: the tall flight of steps (15, according to the *Morning Post*³²³), the golden throne, and the huge trumpets. Most are impressed by the spectacle, calling it ‘magnificent’,³²⁴ ‘splendid’ and ‘dazzling’,³²⁵ and reaching for suitably awesome comparisons: a cast ‘grouped motionless as statuary’,³²⁶ the scene ‘glow[ing] like some mediaeval illuminated missal’.³²⁷ This last brings in a fourth element: colour. The stage is ‘steeped in colour’,³²⁸ the steps in ‘kaleidoscopic colours’,³²⁹ the scene ‘a dazzling affair in its red and gold’,³³⁰ the Court ‘robed in brilliant colourings’.³³¹

Such consensus as to visual detail is not translated into unanimity of response, however, with assessments of the production’s meaning and value distributed more widely according to the reviewer’s predisposition. W.A. Darlington of the *Daily Telegraph* is not to be dazzled by spectacle, rendering the scene in slightly acid terms as though he is all too familiar with European-influenced effects of the sort used by Craig and Granville Barker and finds them rather ludicrous:

The setting consists of a flight of steps, so dear to the moderns, erected against a plain background. When the curtain first goes up it is to reveal a great golden throne at the

³²² M.K.F.K., Publication not noted, 20 April 1936

³²³ *Morning Post*, 21 April 1936

³²⁴ *Sheffield Telegraph*, 21 April 1936

³²⁵ *Morning Post*

³²⁶ *Daily Mail*, 21 Apr 1936

³²⁷ A.E. Wilson, *Star*, 21 April 1936

³²⁸ Wilson, *Star*

³²⁹ M.K.F.K.

³³⁰ *Morning Post*

³³¹ *Sheffield Telegraph*

back of the steps, flanked by clumps of long trumpets which look like convolvulus flowers....³³²

One can almost hear the 'harrumph' at the spontaneous applause this elicited. But while Darlington seeks out deflating language, seeing the opening scene in a stolidly literal perspective, and without any evident hermeneutic impact on the whole production, other reviewers range over the whole play, allowing the visual to inform their interpretative responses, and finding the depicted play world making sense of the story in a new way. Here again, though, the sense made is entirely idiosyncratic, encompassing opposite possibilities, and shows, as with *Merchant* and *Macbeth*, an impatience with aspects of the play deemed silly, as though part of a director's remit is to overcome the shortcomings of Shakespeare's less sophisticated times. For the reviewer of the *Morning Post*, the disproportion of height, size and colour signify a loss of normal sense: Lear is 'already, apparently, quite mad', and 'the whole thing is so far removed from any natural semblance that one accepts the preposterousness of the catechism of the daughters and partition of the kingdom almost better than one otherwise would'.³³³ The *Scotsman* reviewer finds rather a rational, clear-headed Lear, whose elevated enthroned position and gilded splendour 'suggested a majesty not yet fallen and a King still possessing the capacity for kingship. The subdivision of the kingdom is seen, therefore, as an act of will of one still in full possession of his faculties, accomplished with something of the coolness of a man making a

³³² W.A. Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 1936

³³³ *Morning Post*, 21 April 1936

settlement to escape death duties, and not as a rash whim or a decision proceeding from senility'.³³⁴

These responses and others like them, reveal the fluidity of the space between image and meaning at the opening moments of a production, and the autonomy of the spectator in his or her construction and forward projection of narrative sense. The opening moment offers a space into which the director can insert his or her key idea that will underpin the production's concept, making it a particularly rich site for the transmission of information as to how the production can best be read. But it is a busy confluence, and the public gathered there for the enactment of the story contributes its own disparate knowledge, experience and cultural awareness, and its varying attentiveness, to the hermeneutic process.

Whatever the director hoped to convey, the meanings made, and the details selected to construct them, survive only in the words of the reviewers, so that a healthy divergence among these is the only record of the open possibilities generated at that opening moment.

More remarkable, however, is to find much detail of the opening moments at all. In the 1930s the main focus of reviewers' attention was on the actors' depiction of character, with design and staging given some secondary consideration. Komisarjevsky's Stratford productions, intended from the outset to break tired conventions, drew particular attention to the opening, by flouting expectation in a fairly elaborate way in *Merchant* and *Macbeth*, and by presenting a striking, expressive image in *Lear*, so that critical explorations were compelled to take account of the origins of their own construction of meaning, whether

³³⁴ Berry (1983), p. 79, referring to *The Scotsman*, 13 June 1936

accepting or rejecting it as a valid reading of the text. A remarkably similar picture emerges with Peter Brook's early Shakespearean productions at Birmingham and Stratford.

Peter Brook's early Shakespeare productions

After the notable pre-shows of Komisarjevsky's 1930s productions the next significant examples are in productions directed by Peter Brook. Brook's early productions at Stratford have been linked for quite different reasons to Komisarjevsky. Both directors made reputations as *enfants terribles*, largely through their unconventional productions of Shakespeare and their integrated approach to design. Sally Beaman comments that 'Brook's *Love's Labour's* of 1946 was the spiritual heir of Komisarjevsky's 1932 *Merchant*,'³³⁵ and Dennis Kennedy considers Brook to have 'followed central and eastern European traditions with Shakespeare more than those of Britain'.³³⁶ Brook himself saw an 'unbroken line' from Komisarjevsky to his own 1955 production of *Titus Andronicus*, because it was 'a *show*', relying on 'the totality – the sound, the visual interpretation, everything interlocking'.³³⁷ Like Komisarjevsky, Brook in the 1940s approached Shakespeare from a *theatrical* rather than a literary starting point, and his own creative reimagining of the text was 'dictated by the expressive requirements of the script'.³³⁸ He declared that 'the producer [ie, director] must be able to discriminate between [conventions] and the essential living heart of the play – the poet's inner dream – for which it is his job to find theatrical correlatives'.³³⁹

³³⁵ Beaman (1982), p. 176.

³³⁶ Kennedy (2001) p. 164.

³³⁷ Shaw (1990) p. 31.

³³⁸ Brook (1949) p. 144.

³³⁹ Brook (1949) p. 144.

Komisarjevsky triumphed with new readings of plays in the regular theatrical canon: a shift of genre for *Merchant*, of register for *Macbeth*, and of scenography for *Lear*. By contrast, Brook achieved his greatest early successes in Shakespeare by staging the then lesser-known plays, with *King John* (1945), *Love's Labour's Lost* (1946), *Measure for Measure* (1950), and *Titus Andronicus* (1955), giving disappointment only with *Romeo and Juliet* in 1947, mainly because the principal actors were deemed weak.³⁴⁰ It seems that plays without a large body of ready-made expectations, particularly of the sort generated by scholarly reverence such as for the tragedies, proved particularly fruitful for Brook's creative conceptualisation. In defending his conception of *Romeo and Juliet* Brook saw the controversy it had aroused as 'some measure of our success': like Komisarjevsky 25 years earlier, he was attempting 'a clean break with the accepted style of Shakespearean production',³⁴¹ and his early productions show how already he was drawn to seek what he called a 'visual correlative',³⁴² an expression of the play's essence in visual design. As with Komisarjevsky, he used the pre-textual opening moments to establish this visual metaphor. His *King John* at Birmingham Rep in 1945 opened with a hint of the political culture of King John's court in a pre-show that reviewers called a 'bacchanal',³⁴³ 'a mime designed to suggest the underlying weakness of a King who was strong only in seeking his immediate advantage'.³⁴⁴ His *Love's Labour's Lost* at Stratford in 1946 was much praised for its use of Watteau-inspired design as a sort of visual correlative of the play's elaborate and obscure euphuistic word-play, but reviewers also commented on the unexpected opening. The reviewer of *Punch* was impressed: 'The

³⁴⁰ Brook's choice of the very young Laurence Payne and Daphne Slater as Romeo and Juliet did not yield convincing performances.

³⁴¹ Peter Brook, interview with Arthur Soutter, *New Theatre*, vol.3 no.12, June 1947, p. 8.

³⁴² Brook (1949) p. 144.

³⁴³ *Birmingham Post*, 17 Oct 1945, J.C. Trewin (1971) p. 21.

³⁴⁴ *Birmingham Gazette*, 17 Oct 1945.

originality of Mr. Peter Brook's production is immediately evident in a brief dumbshow prologue showing the tearful women of Navarre confronted by their royal master's ungallant proclamation'.³⁴⁵ It is not clear where the reviewer feels the originality of this prologue lies, whether in its deployment of an antiquated device, its depiction of non-textual 'backstory', or its focus on the women. Other reviewers and historians also found it unconventional: the *Royal Leamington Spa Courier* delighted in the 'impertinent opening dumbshow', and Sally Beauman comments that the play 'began with insolent aplomb by confronting the audience with a gigantic drop on which was painted a great barred gate and the words of the King of Navarre's proclamation banning women, writ large like a song-scroll in a pantomime'.³⁴⁶ For the conservative, and now elderly, Gordon Crosse, however, such departure from textual authority made for an 'unsatisfactory' production, 'from the Prologue in dumbshow of village girls being driven out of the Park by Dull to the cuckoo song to the wrong tune at the end'.³⁴⁷

Whether approving or complaining, all these comments note an element of subversion – of the text by inventing new material, or of theatrical convention by suggesting pantomime. There is perhaps also a subversion of social decorum: although none of these responses seems overtly aware of it, Brook's 'tearful women' were themselves unconventional: the production promptbook lists them as 'Whores', and refers to 'Whore Music', playing as the lights fade in on the women. Dull's entrance is to a cymbal crash. The music seems to have subliminally suggested a sexual sauciness and an anti-authoritarian humour in the activity of the dumbshow, which may account for the epithets 'impertinent' and 'insolent'.

³⁴⁵ *Punch*, 22 May 1946

³⁴⁶ Beauman (1982), p. 176

³⁴⁷ Crosse *Diary* xviii, p. 154

Apart from the theatrical pleasure of its subversive element, this pre-show works by presenting a *general* background scene through a highly *particular* but oblique situation. Where more conventional openings such as processions and pageants and even scenes of public activity create a general backdrop which can be left behind once the action is underway, having no important visual information to impart, Brook's dumbshow *invents* a small narrative that illustrates the impact of that background on peripheral characters, and that comments on, or helps the spectator adopt an attitude to, the action before it begins.

In addition, the promptbook offers a hint that Brook grappled with the problem of this entry-point into the narrative, as the pre-show seems to be a later addition: four 'Pages' are listed among the beginners, then scored out, and Dull and Whores are added in a different pencil.³⁴⁸ The pre-show appears to have been devised to simplify the opacity of the text for his contemporary audience. By presenting in easy-to-understand visual form what the opening speech refers back to – the oath of three years' world-renouncing study – it helps the audience not simply over the threshold into the play, but over the barrier of early Shakespearean language, culture and genre, simultaneously explaining and entertaining. Part of the 'insolence' perceived by the reviewers is perhaps this presumptuous familiarity with the text, and the invitation to the audience to interact so easily with it rather than have to grapple with its difficulties. The shift away from the Old Vic puritanism and academic custodianship of the text is beginning to be felt in Brook's Shakespeare at the beginning of the post-war era.

³⁴⁸ *Love's Labour's Lost* 1946, Promptbook, RSC archives, Shakespeare Centre Library.

When Brook directed *Titus Andronicus* in Stratford in 1955, with the undoubted trump card of Laurence Olivier as Titus, the play belonged firmly in the category of inferior Shakespeare. Many critics noted that its last performance at Stratford had been some 75 years previously. T.C. Worsley considered it one of 'the great Unstageables and the great Unstaged',³⁴⁹ Evelyn Waugh described his derision and disgust on reading it,³⁵⁰ and J.C. Trewin commented on the play's reputation as 'of too little worth to stage'.³⁵¹ Their responses to the production itself, however, diverge strongly, Worsley hoping to see its 'grizzly, senseless map of horror... roll[ed] up again for another fifty years', while for Trewin it confirms that a text that 'looks dire... can flame in the theatre', and Waugh finds himself at the opening 'rather suddenly realis[ing] that we were in for something of rare quality'.

For *Titus*, Brook adopted Komisarjevsky's practice of being his own designer, and also composed his own music. The controlling directorial mind is again associated with the emerging pre-show. Recalling Komisarjevsky's similarly impressive, semiotically rich opening to *Lear*, *Titus* opened with a very short pre-show, a dynamic tableau held for a moment before the text and action begin. The promptbook and photographs show a stylised opening, strongly patterned to create a visual and aural impression of a powerful, militaristic Rome and the three factions claiming its leadership. A drumbeat starts in the darkness, then on a cymbal sound the stage lights come up to show a curtain of stern vertical bars referred to as the 'grille', set a little behind the proscenium arch, with pillars covered in the same vertical bars angled out from the proscenium towards the auditorium at either side. The

³⁴⁹ T.C. Worsley, 'Grand Guignol', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 29 August 1955, p. 240, reprinted in Sandra L. Williamson, ed., *Shakespearean Criticism* Vol.17, p. 441

³⁵⁰ Evelyn Waugh, 'Titus with a Grain of Salt', *Spectator*, 2 September 1955, pp. 300-1, reprinted in Sandra L. Williamson, ed., *Shakespearean Criticism* Vol.17, pp. 443-4.

³⁵¹ J.C. Trewin, 'All the Works', *Illustrated London News*, 27 August 1955, pp. 357-8, reprinted in Sandra L. Williamson, ed., *Shakespearean Criticism* Vol.17. pp. 442-3.

forestage has a low set of steps across its entire width, similarly angled in front of the side pillars. The effect is a grim and uncompromising symmetry, 'a setting fit for high tragedy'.³⁵² The actors have entered in the blackout, and are revealed now in a 'statuesque frieze':³⁵³ Marcus Andronicus at centre; Bassianus on the top step stage left with four citizens ranged on the steps below facing toward him; Saturninus and four citizens in the same positions stage right. Only after Saturninus has begun to speak does the grille curtain rise to reveal the tomb of the Andronici, and there follows a processional entry of priests into the tomb.³⁵⁴

As with Komisarjevsky's *Merchant*, music is an integral semiotic element, which Brook famously devised himself, seeking an expressive, 'barbaric' soundscape rather than 'melody and counterpoint'.³⁵⁵ This additional aural meaning is noted by many, together with its powerful impact on their responses and understanding: in Richard David's account the production's overture is 'a roll of drum and cymbal, the dirge for the slain Andronici, so strange and powerful, no more than the first two bars of *Three Blind Mice*, in the minor and endlessly repeated',³⁵⁶ and J.C. Trewin finds the music 'invaluable in its summoning of atmosphere'.³⁵⁷ One (anonymous) reviewer notes the narrative and conceptual purpose of this opening in '[helping] to prepare the way for what is to come'.³⁵⁸

Popular response to this production was overwhelming, which clearly has an impact on the reviewers, many of whom seek to convey its effect as a totality, in particular its remarkable

³⁵² Trewin, pp. 442-3.

³⁵³ Alex Walker, *Birmingham Gazette*, 17 August 1955.

³⁵⁴ My description from the promptbook and production photographs, RSC archive, Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

³⁵⁵ Barker (1955), p. 50. See Barker, pp. 50-1 and Scuro (1970), p. 46, for a discussion of Brook's music for the production

³⁵⁶ David (1957), p. 127.

³⁵⁷ J.C. Trewin, *Lady*, 1 September 1955

³⁵⁸ *Nottingham Guardian Journal*, 17 August 1955

solemnity and tragic dignity in contrast with the laughably crude bloodbath of the play's reputation. It is in this context that they describe the opening, locating the production's hold on the audience's attention as starting, for Desmond Pratt, '[f]rom the impressive opening tableau of Roman soldiers and tribunes set against the stern exterior of an Andronicii tomb',³⁵⁹ and for Trewin 'from the processional entry to Rome'.³⁶⁰ The reviewer of *The Stage* considers that '[t]he procession of green-clad priests into the monument of the Andronici, bearing aloft the armour of Titus's dead sons, sets a note of classical dignity which is maintained throughout...'³⁶¹ For Alex Walker the stylised, ritual nature of the opening informs the whole production, infusing it with unexpected emotional charge. In his account, the opening 'frieze' startles by *not* being what at first it seemed, the prelude to 'a masque which would leave one's emotions untouched but delight one's sensibilities': instead, 'soldiers, priests and prisoners thaw, spring into action, and then freeze again, so that wherever one looks there is a little cameo betokening horror, fear or surprise', and this becomes a pattern 'wove[n]... through the texture of the whole play'.³⁶² For all these reviewers Brook disrupts convention, by taking a despised play seriously, finding a consistent, integrating style, and hence wrong-footing their expectations of a Grand Guignol. By contrast, T.C. Worsley *does* find the opening 'conventional' as it seems to place the action 'in one of the Roman plays'. For him this is a fault, not because it is conventional, but because, for this classics scholar and schoolmaster, ancient Rome is too civilised for Shakespeare's 'meaningless assault on the sensations': 'in that [Roman] world this abomination of cruelty seemed simply unthinkable', and a more appropriate context would

³⁵⁹ Desmond Pratt, *Yorkshire Post*, 17 August 1955

³⁶⁰ Trewin, *Lady*, 1 September 1955

³⁶¹ *Stage*, 17 August 1955

³⁶² Alex Walker, *Birmingham Gazette*, 17 August 1955

have been 'a world nearer that of Dr. Caligari than of Coriolanus'.³⁶³ Worsley's response shows the resistance that firm assumptions, and scholarship in particular, can make to new interpretative approaches. Increasingly through the twentieth century, however, audiences and their reviewers grow accustomed to the place of the threshold opening in shaping and pointing toward the particular concept of a production, and the old guard who seek what they already know fade from the picture.

Michael Redgrave's *Henry IV Part 2*, 1951

Michael Redgrave was primarily a highly successful actor; his directing experience was limited, his *2 Henry IV* at Stratford in 1951 the only Shakespeare he directed (apart from productions in which he also played the lead as a schoolmaster at Cranleigh School),³⁶⁴ and he probably only did so to give Anthony Quayle the chance to play Falstaff while also directing the other three plays in the cycle that formed Stratford's contribution to the Festival of Britain. In staging a creative pre-show that contextualised Rumour in a battle scene Redgrave was thus not in the tradition of innovative directors I have traced beginning with Komisarjevsky and Brook. He did, however, have particular thoughts about Shakespeare's openings. In his essay, 'Mask or Face', he laments that 'English actors, so patient and cunning in understatement in modern plays, are so prone to over-emphasis in the dark corners of Shakespeare's chiaroscuro', and advises that actors must 'avoid at all costs making exposition sound like exposition' in a play like *King Lear*, whose 'short opening

³⁶³ T.C. Worsley, 'Grand Guignol', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 27 August 1955, p. 240, reprinted in Sandra L. Williamson, ed., *Shakespearean Criticism* Vol.17, p. 441.

³⁶⁴ Redgrave (1983) pp. 239-247.

passage was deliberately muted to throw into relief the splendour or mystery of [its] chief characters' first appearance'.³⁶⁵

Although Redgrave could not assume his audience had seen Part 1 in the cycle, which was getting rave reviews for Richard Burton's performance as Hal, he could at least assume they had some awareness of it and access to written introductory material such as media coverage, publicity, and programmes, where the cycle's auteurs emphasised their belief in it as a unified composition. The threshold into this production, in other words, was already a little cluttered. Redgrave's pre-show suggests he wanted not only to find a re-entry point into the story that would bring on board those new to it, as I suggest Shakespeare himself might have done,³⁶⁶ but to do so without making 'exposition sound like exposition'. He also had to solve the problem of Rumour: how to make him a credible character or 'type' for an audience with limited understanding of allegorical figures. The pre-show plunges the audience into the middle of a mini-drama. In Barbara Hodgdon's description – the only report I have found of this opening, contemporary reviewers paying it no attention – it presents

an elaborate dumb-show representing the aftermath of the Shrewsbury battle in *Part One*... [F]aint thunder replaced the customary overture and... as the lights came up, spectators saw a fiery cresset, smoke, and Northumberland's tattered battle flag blowing in the wind. Lanterns and torches pierced the darkened stage, a wounded man was brought in, and a drunken soldier entered, singing over the wind. As swords were drawn and a scuffle began, one of the figures held up a lantern to reveal

³⁶⁵ Redgrave (1958) p. 33.

³⁶⁶ See Chapter 2, pp. 49-50.

Rumour's face - a ghastly white mask - and his fantastically coiffed hair; when he laughed, exposing a long, lolling red tongue, all on stage froze and, at a thunder-clap, he moved to the steps to speak. Echoed offstage in disunison, his words were punctuated with trumpet fanfares and, at his mention of the 'crafty-sick' Northumberland, by tympani and a roll of drums, signalling the verbal rush of Shrewsbury rumours into the play's first scene...³⁶⁷

Like Brook's invented prologue to *Love's Labour's Lost*, this pre-show creates a background situation that directly affects a group of peripheral characters, out of which the textual opening emerges. Where Brook's was audacious in a firmly theatrical way that suggested pantomime, Redgrave's is tense and rather cinematic, its slow revealing of the battle scenario like the opening of a film, suggesting camera work by its gradual move from formless sound and shape to decipherable activity. Its replacement of 'the customary overture' with sounds of the scene depicted is clearly an innovation,³⁶⁸ effectively abandoning an overtly theatrical framework for a more realistic-looking opening that blurs the boundary between the real and play worlds, as films tend to do. Rather than inviting the audience over the narrative threshold into the make-believe world of the play, this sort of pre-show refuses to explain itself fully or easily, using technical effects to veil onstage activity, to build tension, then to shock and terrify by the sudden intrusion of strongly theatrical effects: the freeze and Rumour's grotesque *commedia* make-up, hair and lolling tongue. While such theatrical terror has its own pleasure, particularly in the *commedia*

³⁶⁷ Hodgdon (1993) pp2, 28. Hodgdon does not give her source for this description, although she refers to both preparation and prompt copies in the RSC archives, Shakespeare Centre Library.

³⁶⁸ although Sir John Martin-Harvey opened *Hamlet*, 1920, at Covent Garden, with a solemn tolling bell rather than an overture; see above, p. 96.

genre, there is no suggestion of humour here, but rather a surreal macabre quality as the opening realism abruptly switches to theatricality. For an audience including young men with very recent experience of combat³⁶⁹ such a scene set into a realistic battle zone might have had a particular nightmarish power.

In its mixture of genres this is perhaps an even more audacious opening than Brook's, but it serves a similar purpose in demystifying the deferred textual opening with its unfamiliar medieval stock-figure, Rumour. By inserting Rumour among the supernumerary soldiers at the battle of Shrewsbury Redgrave gives the morality figure a realistic context, one, moreover, that lends it a contemporary allegorical force. At the same time he delivers a brief visual reprise of events in the preceding play that explains the context of the opening action, Northumberland's decision to renew rebellion. Part of the audience's labour of deciphering the language is eased, but it is replaced by the more contemporary labour of deciphering an action sequence.

These shifts in the method of drawing the audience into the opening scenario coincide with a particular critical anxiety about verse-speaking. As with the earlier responses to Komisarjevsky, the twin influences of the Old Vic and of Elizabethanism held the apotheosis of Shakespeare's cultural value to lie in his poetry, and the move toward more natural speech that elides the meter and 'music' of the verse is usually deplored by newspaper reviewers. For the more conservative among this generation of critics the pleasure of performance lay in the sound of the words, and presumably in following their sense, whether at the moment of hearing, or, more likely, in earlier reading and study of the text.

³⁶⁹ true also of theatre performers: see Quayle (1990), pp.201-303, 313.

This was an 'educated' pleasure, its very difficulty and dependence on prior initiation helping to guard it from the easier mass entertainment associated particularly with cinema. A newer audience, however, was learning a new range of skills in the cinema, discovering the pleasure of decoding visual signifiers, and was ready to respond with them in the theatre. Moreover, practitioners, Michael Redgrave prominent among them, were increasingly performing in films between theatre work, and in spite of their professional investment in the very verse-speaking loved by the critics, were also involved in creating the new visual language drawn on in the *2 Henry IV* pre-show. This visual language increasingly becomes the medium of interpretative negotiation between the Shakespearean text and its modern audience, and the introductory pre-textual activity is a key area for its deployment.

Redgrave's Rumour pre-show follows Komisarjevsky's *Macbeth* in staging a realistic battle as the world from which the story emerges, which as I suggested earlier becomes a significant device in later decades. Like that *Macbeth*, this staging occurs in a post-war period when film is popularly obsessed with the recent conflict and audiences are acutely responsive to the tension and psychology of battle. The depicted stand-off between two groups of soldiers, apparently pure invention drawing from contemporary film, in fact brings that contemporary imagery into dialogue with the Shakespeare text, reimagining the uncertainty and suspicion that Rumour specialises in:

I speak of peace while covert enmity,
Under the smile of safety, wounds the world;
And who but Rumour, who but only I,
Make fearful musters and prepar'd defence,

Whiles the big year, swoln with some other grief,
Is thought with child by the stern tyrant war,
And no such matter...³⁷⁰

Rumour's manic laugh and ghastly white face captures the mind-loosening horror of encountering death repeatedly at close hand, and prepares the audience for – while reminding them of – the cycles of treachery depicted in the two plays. For the twentieth century spectator such visual representation increasingly works, and sharpens the interpretative faculties, more directly than words, marking a shift from the verbal and aural towards the visual as central to theatrical response.

Tony Richardson's *Pericles*, 1958

In a move remarkably similar to that of Bridges-Adams' invitation to Komisarjevsky in 1932, Glen Byam Shaw, Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, invited Tony Richardson to direct *Pericles* in 1958. As associate to George Devine at the Royal Court, where the two had headed the English Stage Company from its inception in 1955, Richardson was a central figure in the experimental, alternative theatre project that quickly rose to prominence with his production of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, a play that came to define a generation and to prove a watershed in British theatre history. The Royal Court project as envisaged and developed by Devine and Richardson leaned toward the European, non-commercial art theatre, and focused on a search for new writing. Their vision was experimental and exploratory, in keeping with the studio ethos of Michel Saint-Denis and the London Studio Theatre of Devine's background, and developing from their overwhelming

³⁷⁰ Prologue, 9-15

visit to Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in 1955. Initially Devine 'envisaged a Royal Court that would house an eclectic international programme, be based on a permanent company playing in rep and use spare, rigorously beautiful design'.³⁷¹ They sought plays from established non-dramatic writers in the hope of forging a new British drama to revitalise a form in decline, threatened from within by a moribund conservatism, and from without by the rise of television. They imagined a poetic drama would emerge, but in the event, particularly with *Look Back in Anger*, it became clear that the writing driving the new direction came from outside the social and regional establishment, and gave utterance to voices previously unheard.³⁷² Many of the writers who worked for the Royal Court at that time report an unusual sense of being supported and valued in the face of a wider general hostility. John Osborne considers the support of Devine and Richardson 'a great act of faith', and Richardson's belief in his play 'unequivocal', while Ann Jellicoe declares simply 'George Devine cherished writers'.³⁷³

These elements of the Royal Court project can, I think, be seen in Richardson's approach to *Pericles*. The search for new writing involved reading a great many scripts with a mind open to their staging possibilities and their freshness of outlook and subject matter. Such an approach may have fed in to Richardson's reading of the text of *Pericles*, of which he comments, many years later:

[I]t's not often performed. Some scholars have even questioned whether it's all by Shakespeare. I think they're wrong. It was written when Shakespeare himself had

³⁷¹ Billington (2007) p.96.

³⁷² Doty and Harbin (1990) p. 31.

³⁷³ Findlater (1981) pp.21-2, 52.

fallen out of fashion and the theatres had moved indoors, where, in a court atmosphere, emphasis was on scenery and effects – the great days of Inigo Jones. On one level it's a comic-strip adventure fable (almost a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or *Romancing the Stone*) but underlying this are all the great themes of the 'late' plays – wanderings and loss, innocence and reconciliation, music and the sea – and they're what transforms cartoon to poetry.³⁷⁴

Richardson defends and champions the play text as if it had received rejections from other directors before arriving at the Royal Court. He blames 'fashion' for its lack of popularity, and finds in it both linguistic richness ('great themes', 'poetry') and non-establishment quirkiness ('comic-strip adventure fable'). The juxtaposition perhaps adds a Brechtian alienation effect, or a genre-mixing piquancy characteristic of the avant-garde: his production 'was planned as a showcase for the younger members of the company – and for a new director'.³⁷⁵ His background in television and film may also contribute to his stylistic appreciation of comic-book elements, equated here with fantasy adventure films.

Pericles is still a play that gives problems in performance, and Richardson's 1958 production was only 'the third time it has been produced at Stratford'.³⁷⁶ Its low status as a literary text parallels this avoidance: reviewers of Richardson's production describe the play as 'this episodic and extravagantly improbable tale',³⁷⁷ 'meandering', 'absurd' and initially 'dull'.³⁷⁸ For the director, just as for Redgrave with 2 *Henry IV* and Brook with *Titus*, there is a problem that staging needs to solve to make the play work in the theatre, and again a pre-

³⁷⁴ Richardson (1993) p.99.

³⁷⁵ Richardson (1993) p. 99.

³⁷⁶ Byrne (1958) p. 520.

³⁷⁷ Byrne (1958) p. 520.

³⁷⁸ *Times*, 9 July 1958.

show is key to the solution. The pre-show's extensive use of non-verbal theatrical media – music, light, structural set design, and the physicality of actors – can be seen in the promptbook, which describes quite an elaborate 'Prologue'. An orchestra of 'Ancient and Exotic instruments'³⁷⁹ plays in the initial black-out, while six actors take their places on rowing perches at the extreme sides of the stage. Grouped separately as tenors and basses, itself suggesting a certain richness of sound, they begin rowing and singing a shanty-like song:

Way, aye, oh! aye, oh! roll and go,

Aye oh! aye oh! roll and go³⁸⁰

during which the lights fade up, first on the rowers, then through a gauze onto an upstage construction of vertical rope-ladders, where various actors perform 'ladder-business'. One shouts 'Up!', and the gauze is drawn away on either side, so that a richly textured scene is developed, merging play work with real stage-work. A sailor coiling a rope is Gower, who begins his tale as the action subsides and the other sailors gather round him.

Muriel St. Clare Byrne describes her view of the opening:

To a strange music ... on 'Ancient and Exotic instruments' ... the play opens in complete darkness. Low down, at stage level, we become aware of flickers of light: the darkness dissolves... lifts... we have been watching the glint of the gilded blades of six great long-handled sweeps. Downstage, almost in the proscenium arch, to right and left, there are stepped and bulwarked rostrums, suggesting the beak and stern of a rowing galley.

³⁷⁹ Programme note.

³⁸⁰ Promptbook, RSC archives, Shakespeare Centre Library.

Rowers, three a side, pull steadily to the rhythm of a sea-shanty tune... In the background there is a patterning of cordage and sails and spars against open sky; and downstage, with the six rowers, is Edric Connor, the West Indian singer and actor, who sings and speaks Gower's linking narrative to this more intimate audience, not to us the theatre audience.³⁸¹

In what is at this period an unusual attention to an opening sequence, Byrne evokes the fascination and suspense of that labour particular to an audience, making sense of the first moments of the performance: she notes the sensual details one by one, registers the exoticism in the music, the shapes gradually forming, the patterns and movements combining into a situation the spectator (for whom she speaks) can understand and begin to follow.

For many newspaper reviewers of this *Pericles*, the play's rambling structure and outlandish episodes confirm its status on the fringes of 'real' Shakespeare. W.A. Darlington comments disparagingly on its 'Arabian Nights' narrative,³⁸² and the reviewer in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* describes the production as 'one of those better-class pantomimes they like to call a fairy tale with music'. Byrne, though, finds not just coherence, but a plausible framework, 'anchor[ing] the rambling yarn to an atmosphere, and enabl[ing] us to see it all through the eyes of the seamen's crude and unsophisticated but vivid imaginations'. T.C. Worsley similarly notes the 'problem... of imposing a unity on the whole series of scattered scenes', to which Richardson finds a 'highly ingenious' solution:

³⁸¹ Byrne (1958), p. 521.

³⁸² *Daily Telegraph*, 9 July 1958.

Mr Richardson imagines his Gower to be talking not to us but to a group of sailors on board ship; and then as he unfolds each scene to them, we see it through their eyes, as it were. And so, because they are simple men with vivid and crude imaginations, we are ready to accept from them the crudity of the whole conception... This makes it seem right that the tale is roughly fashioned and that it is told in the most violent of primary colours.³⁸³

For these audience members, then, the interpolated opening solves one of the text's intractable difficulties: how to give coherence to a script seen as damagingly fragmented and puerile. In effect, it gives a hitherto marginal play a new performability.

In *Pericles'* brief stage history two trends had emerged: one responding to the exotic locations in the text with scenic splendour and vibrantly colourful costume, the other reflecting the play's apparent narrative naiveté in an 'Elizabethan' simplicity of staging in the manner of Poel and Granville Barker.³⁸⁴ Richardson's production seems to belong in the first camp: Loudon Sainthill's design is described by Desmond Pratt as 'a series of pages from a lavishly illustrated picture book',³⁸⁵ and by Kenneth Tynan as 'pictorially magnificent, a restless Oriental kaleidoscope'.³⁸⁶ The play's narrative naiveté, however, also appears, not in Poelesque spareness, but in the framing conceit that made Gower a sort of singing narrator of an ancient folk-tale, and performing not to the audience but to an onstage group of sailors. The decision to make such a central figure of Gower is itself innovative. The part, always cut in productions since the Restoration, was first played in 1921 by Robert Atkins, in

³⁸³ *Financial Times*, 9 July 1958.

³⁸⁴ Skeele 2000, p.27.

³⁸⁵ *Yorkshire Post*, 10 July 1958.

³⁸⁶ *Observer* 13 July 1958.

his own austere, Poelesque production at the Old Vic. Atkins played the role as a wry old poet offering a comic critique of the absurd fairy-tales he was narrating, a reading he intensified into 'full-blown parody of the play's more outlandish elements' in his revival of the play at Regent's Park in 1939.³⁸⁷ But where Atkins's readings gave the audience a way to respond to the 'outlandish elements', distancing them with mockery, Richardson's embraces the exoticism of the tales, presenting them through the eyes of men who listen intently. His Gower belongs within the play, rather than acting as an intermediary between the play and the audience. His casting a black singer-actor in the role offers a view of Gower, not as an ancient telling a bygone tale, but as an embodiment of a living tradition of story-telling still to be found in the singing and 'spontaneity' of the black actors he worked with at the Royal Court, as I discuss below. This rethinking of the role of Gower within the play gives the production a frame, as Komisarjevsky's Harlequin Gobbo did, but in this case the frame belongs not in a purely theatrical world, but in an imagined real world, adding a 'back-story' and a motivation. This fictional framing world, moreover, is imported from the director's imagination. Unlike any of the pre-show play-worlds discussed above, this one is not drawn from the text but superimposed on it. Where Komisarjevsky and Redgrave brought modern war into dialogue with the wars in their texts, Richardson proposes a modern social world as metaphor for that of the text. It is a strategy increasingly used in the following decades.

Of particular interest is Richardson's use of the West Indian singer, Edric Connor, in the role of Gower. He had originally wished to cast Paul Robeson, not only for his skills, but because he

³⁸⁷ Skeele 1998, pp. 98,102.

had been ostracized, maligned and discriminated against for years, and it seemed a wonderful opportunity to make restitution for some of the suffering he'd endured, and a wonderful role for him to make a comeback in.³⁸⁸

As with the playtext, Richardson seems to see his role as supporting the oppressed, or as rehabilitating the marginalized, in the production decisions he makes. He does, however, also have artistic reasons for choosing a black actor:

Back at the Court, in May 1958, we staged a fascinating play by a West Indian, Barry Reckord. Clumsy in its construction, *Flesh to a Tiger* had at moments a passion of language which was extraordinary, especially in its evocation of the brutalities of slavery. It was a first, and a first too for the principal actress, Cleo Laine... At the time there were very few trained or talented black actors in English, and the cast I assembled had a wild variety of accents, ranging from Trinidad to Brooklyn. When we were rehearsing or improvising – especially improvising – there was a life and spontaneity in their performances which, maddeningly, I was never able to recreate on stage. The play itself intimidated the cast and they became stiff, awkward and, with a few exceptions, amateurish, but the attempt to make it work was wonderfully worthwhile.³⁸⁹

The black actor, then, had particular abilities, or potentialities, that Richardson saw it as his purpose to nurture, even if the outcome was less than he had hoped for. He had a similar missionary zeal in his use of music:

³⁸⁸ Richardson (1993) p.100.

³⁸⁹ Richardson (1993) pp. 98-9.

I hit on the idea of having Gower's lines set to music (by the splendid, now almost forgotten and underrated Roberto Gerhard) and sung.³⁹⁰

Richardson's artistic decisions seem inextricably bound up with the promotion of artists undervalued by the mainstream.

Richardson's response to his commission, and his attitude to issues of text, music and casting, then, appear to feed in to the creation of the opening sequence, in ways not evident in, or even relevant to, its impact on the reviewers. Where they, like the author-doubting scholars, saw the text as a problem to be solved, Richardson saw no problem, but rather a different sort of text – and an opportunity. For him it was not a question of interpretation or concept, but of adopting and believing in the maligned – text and actor – in a deliberately political, counter-cultural gesture, and involving a willingness to play with, experiment and reimagine the performative possibilities of the text.

This playfulness is evident too in his account of working with the designer, Loudon Sainthill, whom he describes as 'a gentle Australian with an exotic and luxuriant talent':

We planned to do the play on a kind of ship, whose elements – bridges, decks, forecastle, holds – could be instantly transformed into the myriad settings the play needs as Pericles wanders in exile and in search of his lost daughter.³⁹¹

The partnership was creative and practical, largely influenced, apparently, by Sainthill's particular gifts. They assimilated the figure of Gower with that of Pericles in a wholly unproblematic way, bypassing the narrator-poet's liminal status in the text, and simply

³⁹⁰ Richardson (1993) p. 100.

³⁹¹ Richardson (1993) p. 99.

regarding him as a character in the action. Richardson's delight in the production's success was based on his team's somewhat upstart young status:

It worked wonderfully, the play was a great success – the hit of the season – and the whole experience was a great pleasure, marred only by a bit of jealousy on the part of Michael Redgrave when, envious of the lesser players' success in 'his' season, he tried to undermine their confidence in Loudon's costumes.³⁹²

There is no hint of having solved a *textual* difficulty, but rather of finding a simple practical solution to a *staging* difficulty – and of rather gratifyingly irritating the establishment.

To conclude this exploration of pre-shows in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, I find the device as yet sparsely used, and deployed as a tool either to subvert convention or to provide entry to an innovative reading, providing corroboration for Robert Smallwood's argument³⁹³ that the pre-show is part of the armoury of 'director's Shakespeare', and hence associated with those directors who seek particularly to re-conceptualise the ways the texts have been understood or judged. In terms of play-as-fiction, this re-conceptualisation is focused through a key expressive image presented in the pre-show, where its signifying power is foregrounded by virtue of its threshold position, giving spectators an entry-point or signpost into the world of the production. As concerns the play-as-artefact, the cultural phenomenon of the play in its time, these pre-shows sometimes adjust the genre or cultural context of the play as a way to defamiliarise and sharpen theatrical pleasure, as with Komisarjevsky's *Merchant* or Brook's *Love's Labour's Lost*. In some cases, however, they make use of the audience's expected

³⁹² Richardson (1993) p. 99.

³⁹³ See Chapter 1, pp. 16-18.

Chapter 3

awareness of their own and recent times, introducing an emotional correlative that may itself defamiliarise by startlingly *familiarising*, as with Komisarjevsky's *Macbeth* and Redgrave's *2 Henry IV* (an effect achieved by other means in modern dress productions). At this middle part of the twentieth century a shift of focus is occurring from individual and exceptional character to integrated sense-making, and from actor to director, and the shift can be seen in a new critical attention on openings, not merely as spectacle, but as crucial for the construction of meaning and judgement. The following decades see this focus on beginnings becoming increasingly important.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE FUNCTION

In this chapter I turn to pre-shows that give a particular point of entry into the *narrative* of the play by offering a first story-fragment, what Jean-Marie Maguin called the equivalent of the story-teller's 'once upon a time'.³⁹⁴ Shakespeare's plays of course tell stories, and a theme of many presentations and workshops by directors is the central concern of the acting company to *tell the story*.³⁹⁵ In traditional conceptions of narrative theory novels *tell* stories, by diegesis, whereas drama *shows* them, by mimesis, and the critical swing during the twentieth century toward theatrical performance rather than print as the proper medium for Shakespeare's plays would seem to embrace this theoretical distinction. The picture is, however, much more complex than this simple binary allows for.

In my exploration of the narrative pre-show I make use of three theoretical models of narrative: Roland Barthes's 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives',³⁹⁶ underpins my discussion of the pre-show as it impacts on the structure of onstage storytelling, and Barbara Hardy's and Rawdon Wilson's work on embedded narrative in Shakespeare's plays informs the use of such narratives in some pre-shows that I discuss in the second part of this chapter.³⁹⁷ The third model, which shares some of the features of Barthes's structural theory of narrative, is that of the 'narreme', as applied to Shakespearean drama by Helmut Bonheim;³⁹⁸ it is this that informs my discussion of two Trevor Nunn productions. I finish the chapter with a consideration of a 'failed' narrative pre-show.

³⁹⁴ See above, Chapter 1, pp. 18-22.

³⁹⁵ Examples include a recent Symposium by the Propeller Theatre Company at Wimbledon School of Art, 30th-31st January 2015.

³⁹⁶ See Barthes (1977).

³⁹⁷ See Hardy (1997) and Wilson (1995).

³⁹⁸ See Bonheim (2000).

In Barthes's model, narrative is constructed in 'narrative units' along a horizontal, or temporal, axis, with each unit received by the reader/auditor to make provisional meaning in an accumulating totality: 'meaning is not "at the end" of the narrative, it runs across it'.³⁹⁹

This model shows that narrative has a *fractal* construction: its component parts are smaller types of the whole structure, micro-narratives grouped together to make a whole narrative.

Barbara Hardy's model of Shakespeare's plays is similar: 'there is the story, or stories, narrated by the play as a whole... and there are stories and fragments of story within these over-arching narratives'.⁴⁰⁰ Barthes comments that 'To understand a narrative is not merely

to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its construction in "storeys"'.⁴⁰¹

His word here is *étage*,⁴⁰² 'storeys', but the pun in translation on 'stories' is apt: a story is constructed of stories.

The narrative pre-show, then, has the task of locating a point of departure for the story that is itself a story. In its brief scene it presents a situation in a fictional(ised) life, which will have a bearing on what follows in that life and its surrounding world. Jean-Marie Maguin, as I discussed in Chapter 1,⁴⁰³ considers this aspect of performance openings as fulfilling the 'Once upon a time' purpose found in narrated stories.⁴⁰⁴ In Barthes's model, it 'sows' a 'seed' that will 'come to fruition' in the course of the unfolding narrative: it will 'have as correlative' the point later on which, on looking back, makes sense of its appearance there. Meaning ranges forward and backward in the reader's/ spectator's mind as they 'project the

³⁹⁹ Barthes (1977), p. 87.

⁴⁰⁰ Hardy (1997), p. 13.

⁴⁰¹ Barthes (1977), p. 87.

⁴⁰² Barthes (1966), p. 5.

⁴⁰³ See pp. 23ff.

⁴⁰⁴ Maguin (1988).

horizontal concatenations of the narrative “thread” onto an implicitly vertical axis’,⁴⁰⁵ or in Hardy’s terms, ‘the particularised story’ is something ‘we accumulate, looking before and after, as we follow the play’.⁴⁰⁶ Where the symbolic level, such as in Komisarjevsky’s throne-topped steps for *King Lear*, is concerned with meaning and interpretation, and hence with the relationship between the performed play and wider systems of signification above or beyond it, the narrative level, such as in Brook’s locked-out women of Navarre, is concerned with the temporal and causative elements of the play’s fictional (or fictionalised) events, with what leads to what, and hence with the relationship of the elements of the performed play to each other. And where the symbolic pre-show presents its sign(s) as pre-figuration of a developing *signification* in the ensuing performance, the narrative pre-show presents a micro-narrative, a story-fragment, containing the *causal or explanatory kernel* of events to follow in the ensuing performance. Of course any individual pre-show may have elements of both types; occasionally confusion between them can have a significant impact on reception, as I explore in the final section of this chapter.

The playwright has of course considered his own point of departure in choosing the play’s beginning, as I explored in chapter 2, and as Hardy discusses in a short chapter.⁴⁰⁷ Although the modern director often seeks some point of entry of his or her own, the simplest, and some would say the most authentic, way in is to begin as the text does, following the stage directions provided: ‘Enter x and y...’ and the speaking begins. For some reviewers, particularly in the early years of my survey, this is the only correct way to begin, and directors are still faulted for not ‘trusting’ the text, although, as I showed in Chapter 2, the

⁴⁰⁵ Roland Barthes (1977), p. 87.

⁴⁰⁶ Hardy (1997), p. 143.

⁴⁰⁷ Hardy (1997), pp. 65-71.

notion of such authenticity is called into question by Shakespeare's own practice of varying the narrative entry-point of his source texts, and perhaps also of different versions of his own texts. The nature of theatres and the theatrical experience, moreover, has always tended to intervene between the text and performance, so that even the simplest use of the textual opening, by adding the bodily fact of the speakers to the spoken words, begins to tell a story. In this sense the most basic pre-show is the actor's person, in combination with the costume worn, in the moments before any words are spoken. In addition to the embodied character, some narrative communication is made by the stage itself: any scenery or props suggest setting or context, and even a bare stage makes its own communication of bareness. These concrete elements of the actor's body and the physical staging make their impact in what Barthes calls a complex 'polyphony', a 'density of signs',⁴⁰⁸ from which each spectator constructs a provisional story-kernel, what Stanton B. Garner calls a 'narrative *gestalt*' which audiences create in response to 'a play's opening moments'.⁴⁰⁹ In the following section I focus on the narrative contribution of *design* in this broad sense, and come in a later section to the narrative function of pre-show *action*.

Design as narrative pre-show

The narrative use of pre-show design is not a new phenomenon in the way the first clearly interpolated pre-shows I discussed in Chapter 3 were new, and so I have found earlier examples in this category than 1932, my starting date for the interpolated, active category. In discussing design as narrative 'pre-show' I am in some senses examining a precursor to the interpolated pre-show, but I immediately qualify this by pointing out that the emergence

⁴⁰⁸ Barthes (1979), p. 29.

⁴⁰⁹ Garner (1989) p. 14.

of the pre-show in no wise supplants this precursor: on the contrary, design continues to the present day as a powerful pre-show element. Nonetheless, given the norms of theatre reviewing in the early part of my study, it is rare to find commentary on a performance opening, suggesting that where it does appear the pre-show moment was unusually striking. A very early example of the narrative use of pre-show design appears in 1858. Here the *Times* reviewer of Charles Kean's *King Lear* shows full awareness of the opening tableau as point of departure, and as participating in a tradition dating back to Greek theatre of preliminary presentations called 'prologues', which he uses to construct a narrative of a loving patriarchal family, almost recognisable as a Victorian ideal but for its positioning in a period of history he deems primitive ('rude') and volatile:

The 'room of state' of King Lear's palace, hung round with the heads of deer and hunting implements, carries us back to a day when misfortunes of the rude character that fell upon the head of Lear might seem within the range of possibility. Lear himself on his throne, with his three daughters grouped around him, is not only a pleasing picture to the eye, but it serves the purpose of an Euripidean prologue, in introducing to the audience the principal figures of the tale so arranged as to furnish the mind with a starting point. Here are King Lear and his daughters a happy family party, bound together by ties of apparent affection. All the information required for the due comprehension of what is to follow is thus told completely and at once.⁴¹⁰

⁴¹⁰ *Times*, 26 Apr 1858.

Here is a (perceived) use of pre-show visual narrative, assisting the spectator's entry into the world of the play with both something familiar to identify with, but also something strange to intrigue and create anticipation.

Design, then, can convey an initial view of the play's world in both its culturally familiar and its culturally distanced perspectives. One example is Robert Helpmann's *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Old Vic in 1957. Its designer, Loudon Sainthill, became noted in the 1950s for his evocative designs, and a case in point is his 'impressive but simple setting' for Helpmann's production, which in Muriel St Clare Byrne's description seems to tell its own story of the protagonists' legendary and exotic status. What appears to have evoked the ancient world for Byrne is a sense of wide open space, as of 'the very curve of this great globe and its limitless horizon', created by 'seven Egyptian obelisks, sized and spaced to help the illusion of cycloramic vastness and distance'.

Plate 1



ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA by Shakespeare: Margaret Whiting as Cleopatra; Directed by Robert Helpmann; Set design by Loudon Sainthill; at the Old Vic Theatre, London, UK; 1957; Credit@ University of Bristol Theatre Collection/ ArenaPAL; www.arenapal.com

In a remarkably similar way to Kean's 1858 *Lear*, this production used its opening scenery to set its story in a culturally distanced but recognisable world. Not only did this design place its characters into an apparently vast framework of time and space, but it served subsequently to enhance the visual impact of those characters at moments 'when the producer ... placed either Antony or Cleopatra standing alone against this background which

matched the very poetry for lyrical feeling'.⁴¹¹ Conveying thus, for Byrne at least, a visual correlative for the tonal resonance of its verse, this production defined its genre, setting 'from curtain-up' a tone of 'romantic tragedy, with stress on the sensual appeal of the world's greatest love-story'.⁴¹² (I discuss the pre-show *action* of this production, as distinct from its design, in the next section.⁴¹³)

Some Shakespeare plays of course give instructions for their own opening scenic effects, as I discussed in Chapter 2. *The Tempest* calls for a pre-show auditory spectacle⁴¹⁴ in its opening stage direction:

*A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard. Enter a
Shipmaster and a Boatswain.*

The instruction asks for nothing more than sound effects, but combining this with the content of the opening scene, producers and directors from the seventeenth century onwards have taken the textual opening as an invitation to use any available theatrical resources to depict the storm and shipwreck in pre-show. Among these, Peter Brook's 1957 production at Stratford sought to begin the narrative *as* narrative, to draw the audience swiftly into the story. The means he deployed were stunningly theatrical: a pre-show that Caryl Brahms later described as one of 'three great *coups de théâtre* which will remain with me forever'.⁴¹⁵ But in making its impact this pre-show sought rather to elide its theatricality.

⁴¹¹ Byrne (1957), p. 472.

⁴¹² Byrne (1957), p. 474.

⁴¹³ See p. 163.

⁴¹⁴ I'm aware that 'spectacle' should be visual, but have adopted the phrase 'auditory spectacle' for lack of a suitable word.

⁴¹⁵ Brahms (1970) 'Toddling on to triumph', *Guardian*, 19 Sep 1970.

The language of reviewers' descriptions of what they had seen and experienced shows their absorption in the *story* rather than interest in its theatrical *means*:

'The curtain rises upon darkness. Then a ship's lantern swings heavily across in the curve of a roiling vessel. Another follows the same path. There has been thunder and now a fierce light breaks on the scene. Orders are bawled, a confusion of men run to the swaying ratlines, bend to the oars... No *Tempest* I have seen has started off with such a storm'.⁴¹⁶

'The opening shipwreck has a swiftness and a dash that almost brings out the handkerchief to wipe away the salt spray'.⁴¹⁷

'[The] opening shipwreck with wildly-swinging navigation lights is as exciting as *Moby Dick* in Cinema-Scope'.⁴¹⁸

Yet the stage effects used were basic, as the sparse details in these accounts suggest, and as one reviewer notes:

...some of Mr. Brook's effects can be remarkably simple. His shipwreck is a matter of swinging ropes and swaying lamps.⁴¹⁹

The focal point of the lantern seems in particular to have rendered synecdochically the whole storm:

⁴¹⁶ *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 14 Aug 1957.

⁴¹⁷ *Oxford Mail*, 14 Aug 1957.

⁴¹⁸ Derek Granger, *Financial Times*, 14 Aug 1957.

⁴¹⁹ *Nottingham Guardian* 14 Aug 57.

... a single lantern placing a slow arch in the night in the high wide proscenium of the Stratford-upon-Avon stage, from wing to wing, then returning retracing the arch. That was all, but Peter Brook's *Tempest* had begun.⁴²⁰

Brook himself apparently aimed simply to tell the story of the shipwreck, without seeking to foreground its theatrical means or any symbolic resonance, as he agreed with Caryl Brahms: "You knew... that it was a ship in a storm at night".⁴²¹

Design is particularly useful to narrative function in conveying the social context of the opening scene, so that the action when it begins already has some story-telling behind it, the equivalent of a descriptive opening to a novel. This function is perhaps most helpful in the comedies, where the nuances of the protagonists' social positions shape character and drive events, prompting designers to seek a visual correlative of that society from within the range of their audience's reference. For example, H.K Aylliff's *Taming of the Shrew* at Birmingham Rep in 1928 had a back-cloth 'revealing the glowing bar-parlour window of a traditional English ale-house complete with a hanging sign of "The Swan",⁴²² Denis Carey's *Much Ado* at the Old Vic in 1957 opened with its elegantly-dressed characters ranged against a display of 'roses' and 'greenery', a 'low balustrade' and a 'hammocky chaise longue',⁴²³ and Lila de Nobili designed 'a panelled hall straight out of Nash's *English Mansion*' for Peter Hall's *Twelfth Night* at Stratford in 1958-60.⁴²⁴ 'Narrative' design of course extends to costume, helping to tell the back-story at the opening, such as in John Dexter's *As You Like It* at the National Theatre in 1979 with its 'homespun servants, including an unkempt Orlando,

⁴²⁰ Brahms (1970).

⁴²¹ Peter Brook, quoted by Brahms (1970).

⁴²² Cochrane (1987), p. 155.

⁴²³ Byrne (1957), p. 468.

⁴²⁴ Speaight (1960), p. 449.

laboriously gathering up bundles of hay from the rough slatted boards which formed [the] set'.⁴²⁵ In particular, *All's Well that Ends Well*, with its frank address of natural mortality, class and female choice that have led to comparisons with late nineteenth century 'realistic' dramas such as Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and the general label 'Chekhovian',⁴²⁶ appears repeatedly in this category, and I now discuss three productions of *All's Well*: H.K. Aylyff's at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1927, Tyrone Guthrie's at Stratford in 1959, and Trevor Nunn's at Stratford in 1981.

In 1927 the Birmingham Repertory Company followed up its notorious modern-dress *Hamlet* of 1925 with an 'almost ignored' modern-dress *All's Well*.⁴²⁷ The opening set suggests the gracious expansiveness and hauteur of contemporary French upper-class life in which a young cad, inheriting his title while still a minor and setting off to meet his new guardian, the King, might naturally disdain a mere gentlewoman. The promptbook specifies 'a terrace before' the Count's palace at Rossillion, depicted on a back-cloth by central double doors between two windows, and by an upper rostrum two steps up from the main stage, with chairs and a table tastefully arranged.⁴²⁸ It was a set that might have suited a contemporary play of society and manners, as the reviewer of the *Manchester Guardian* suggests, finding the production a 'very strange mixture... at once up to date and old-fashioned'.⁴²⁹

Aylyff 'believed that *All's Well* could be seen in a modern framework as "a typically French play"', and Barry Jackson 'recalled [that] "*All's Well* opened in a delightfully French

⁴²⁵ Warren (1980a), p. 179.

⁴²⁶ See, for example, Waller (2007), pp. 8-9: 'Since the rise of expressionistic, socially oriented, drama (Chekhov, Ibsen, Shaw himself, for instance) Helena has struck many as resembling an Ibsenite or Shavian heroine – articulate, determined, adaptable and representing something akin to Shaw's Life Force'.

⁴²⁷ Cochrane (1993), p. 120.

⁴²⁸ Cochrane (1987) p. 155.

⁴²⁹ J.S. 'In Modern Dress', *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Apr 1927.

atmosphere with the Countess swathed in the crepe so beloved of Gallic widows, and Helena in a very simple dress to indicate her position as a dependent”’.⁴³⁰ The association with George Bernard Shaw, who attended the opening night at Birmingham, was noted by ‘at least two’⁴³¹ reviewers finding similarity between Helena and Ann Whitfield in *Man and Superman*, and Claire Cochrane speculates that the first night of this production might even have been ‘a Shavian command performance’.⁴³²

Guthrie’s 1959 *All’s Well*, designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, set the opening of the play in a world where ‘stable men in Edwardian livery [carry] modern suitcases’ onto the stage, giving this reviewer of *The Times* a reassuring, or dull, feeling that ‘we know what we are in for’.⁴³³ Byrne, however, felt she had ‘never seen the atmosphere of the opening and of its first movement so subtly yet firmly established before’, and she went on to write a novelistic description of the design that both constructs an opening narrative and accounts for all that follows in the development of character and plot:

An elegiac sadness broods over the neglected garden of Rossillion. Brown, withered leaves and broken branches droop mournfully in a classic urn in a niche of the deserted summerhouse: there is the melancholy of autumn in the clear pale light. It is a moment of departure. Rossillion is dead; his widowed Countess, in delivering her son to the King's wardship, 'buries a second husband': the King himself is dying: Helena's father, the physician who might have wrought his cure, is dead. Life is ebbing away from the great house, leaving the women behind. It

⁴³⁰ Quoted in Cochrane (1987) p. 154.

⁴³¹ Cochrane (1993), p. 121.

⁴³² Cochrane (1993), p. 121.

⁴³³ *Times*, 22 Apr 1959.

is prologue to the desolation of Helena's unattainable love, and to the shadow of mortality which hangs over the King's Court. It is also the perfect dramatic contrast for setting off the upsurge of her ardent will and the vitality which nerves her to find remedy in action.⁴³⁴

John Russell Brown, critical of Guthrie's modernising adaptations to the text, describes the set at the opening – 'an elegant Chekhovian mansion' – in terms that show a similar readerly construction of the cultured society in decline out of which the narrative grows:

...in a tender, brownish light, a grove of bare and slender trees bend gracefully, from both sides of the stage, towards a summer-house, and, while its inhabitants are voguish and precise in dress, from classical urns dead leaves and tendrils hang untended...⁴³⁵

although for him the narrative line is subsequently confused by inconsistency of period detail and trivialised by its very modernity.

Nunn's 1981 *All's Well* at Stratford, designed by John Gunter, opened in remarkably similar fashion, in that highly readable theatre setting, 'a Chekhovian world of wicker chairs, towering fern and chiming clocks'.⁴³⁶ For Irving Wardle the set and the way the characters are disposed around it fill out the now standard Edwardian upper-crust society and the incipient psychology of its characters:

⁴³⁴ Byrne (1959), p. 558.

⁴³⁵ Brown (1960), p. 140.

⁴³⁶ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 18 Nov 1981.

...the first sight we get of the Rossillion Estate suggests the opening of *The Cherry Orchard* – a glass and metal work conservatory... with a large Edwardian family and their staff hurriedly preparing to take leave of the departing Bertram, with the love-sick Helena, black-dressed like Marsha [*sic*] with keys at her waist sitting dejectedly by the Countess as Bertram hovers at the door eager for his getaway.⁴³⁷

Nicholas Shrimpton felt this Rossillion, ‘very much provincial France, hot, dusty and contentedly remote’, with the sleepy soundscape of ‘a distant bell and a twitter of bird song’, enabled a deeper psychological probing of character, making it ‘possible to feel a degree of sympathy for Bertram’ as ‘an overgrown adolescent desperate to escape from home and mother, and to live in a world of men’.⁴³⁸

To conclude this section on design as narrative, I have shown how directors have used the visual elements of staging in constructing the first narrative kernel out of which the story of the *production*, as distinct from the *play*, grows, or rather, is seen to grow in the reports of reviewers. I turn now to uses of stage *action* that sow the first narrative kernel.

Stage action as narrative pre-show.

Most of the pre-shows I have found that have a narrative purpose derive from some element in the text. The production I explored at the end of the last section, however, Nunn’s *All’s Well*, is an exception. Although the reviewers describe its opening set and project the forward narrative from it, only one, Nicholas Shrimpton, mentions, almost as an

⁴³⁷ Wardle, *Times*, 18 Nov 1981.

⁴³⁸ Shrimpton (1983), p. 149.

afterthought, that there was an enacted pre-show, a 'prologue', perhaps easily discounted because, rather nebulously, it 'had shown two shadowy figures waltzing together'.⁴³⁹ There is no textual equivalent for this little scene, and no clear narrative told by it: rather it is the sort of pre-show that suggests in broad outline some aspect of a society without identifying the protagonists, and without impressing on spectators any need to remember or decipher what it shows. Shrimpton, however, has the multiple viewings and expanded response possible in writing for an academic journal, which allows him to 'read' the performance closely like a text, revisiting the opening waltz as it is recalled at the end:

It combined excitingly with the final tableau to suggest a couple both together and apart.⁴⁴⁰

In Shrimpton's reading the beginning and end form a frame that helps to fill out the production's story as the journey of complex characters and their growth towards maturity. Such a reading, however, is clearly a construction of the reviewer. The narrative-fragment told by this pre-show is not related in any clear way to the opening of the 'play proper', and most reviewers take no account of it in responding to the whole narrative told by the production.

Most narrative pre-shows, however, relate clearly to the play's opening, often by staging some element of the opening scene. This is particularly helpful with plays such as the early comedies, which begin with what now seems a difficult weight of wordiness: Egeon's tale of the division of his family at the start of *The Comedy of Errors*, or the elaborate euphuistic

⁴³⁹ Shrimpton (1983), p. 150.

⁴⁴⁰ Shrimpton (1983), p. 150.

word-play in the opening scenes of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. These have been performed with pre-shows that stage something told in that wordy opening. Peter Brook's *Love's Labour's Lost* at Stratford in 1946, as I explored in Chapter 3, prefaced the opening with 'a dumb-show prologue in which Navarre's tearful women read the King's ungallant proclamation'.⁴⁴¹ In 2005 Nancy Meckler staged a 'silent tableau of Egeon's arrest' and Jonathan Munby created a 'dumb show voyage' at the openings of their productions of *The Comedy of Errors*, at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the Sheffield Crucible respectively.⁴⁴² In 1996 Tim Supple offered a similarly narrative introduction to the opening of *Errors* in his production at The Other Place in Stratford, confronting the incoming audience with a scene telling quite a detailed story before the 7.30 start time. The set, by Robert Innes Hopkins, depicted both scene and cultural location, as Robert Smallwood's description shows:

a brick floor backed by a wall with central double doors, a window with a grille, and a bell in a niche above — the simplest of suggestions of a sunlit square in Greece or Turkey.⁴⁴³

Added to this, costume, an acting body, and sound began to tell a story of brutal detention in some dictatorial regime, with even the hint of its coastal location:

As one entered the theatre one encountered an elderly man dressed in a dirty, ragged cloak and chained to a grid in the centre of the floor, alternately slumped

⁴⁴¹ Trewin (1971), p. 26.

⁴⁴² Dobson (2006), p. 300, 301.

⁴⁴³ Smallwood (1997), p. 216.

in despair or pacing in anguish and frustration to the limit of his chain. The sound of breaking waves could be heard in the distance...⁴⁴⁴

For Russell Jackson the story this told was that 'there was nothing romantic or picturesque about his plight',⁴⁴⁵ although the soundscape suggested an idyllic setting, creating an uneasy contrast:

[A]s 7.30 approached the music that would accompany the production began faintly, hauntingly, on that Turkish equivalent of the lute, the *ud*...⁴⁴⁶

This gentle sound was sharply interrupted by a ringing bell, the start of the 'play proper', at which point:

the old man stood up, and, accompanied by a gaoler carrying a great sword and a blindfold, in strode Leo Wringer's crisply dapper Solinus, a black man in a white, high-buttoned military suit, a whiff of Caribbean dictatorship about him, to order, not without a touch of contempt, 'Merchant of Syracuse, plead no more'.⁴⁴⁷

The opening action thus set up the sense that soon developed when Egeon told his story that '[t]his Ephesus ... was a dangerous place to be if your face or passport didn't fit'.⁴⁴⁸ After such an uncompromising beginning, suggestive of tragedy rather than comedy, the gradual 'thaw' into humour⁴⁴⁹ and the twin confusions seemed welcome assurance of a

⁴⁴⁴ Smallwood (1997), p. 216.

⁴⁴⁵ Jackson (1997), p. 214.

⁴⁴⁶ Smallwood (1997), p. 216.

⁴⁴⁷ Smallwood (1997), p. 216.

⁴⁴⁸ Jackson (1997), p. 214.

⁴⁴⁹ Jackson (1997), p. 214.

happy ending. The seriousness of the opening also signalled that the comedy was not merely formulaic: 'Supple found a refreshing sense of the characters as individuals rather than counters in a comic game'.⁴⁵⁰

These pre-shows to early comedies find an introductory narrative from within the opening scene of the play, developing in visual form what is implicit or reported in the text.

Embedded and reported narratives appear frequently in Shakespeare's plays, and theorists of narratology have begun to examine these. In particular, Barbara Hardy and Rawdon Wilson discuss the uses of embedded narrative and character-narrators in Shakespeare's plays.⁴⁵¹ Directors, however, have for some time used embedded narratives as material for narrative pre-shows. Brook's short scene of the women reading the King's proclamation at the park gates⁴⁵² replaces the textual opening, the 'narration of young men's vows',⁴⁵³ with an imagined enactment of a much briefer embedded story, told in passing in the course of the onward sweep of that narrative opening:

Biron. (*reads*) 'Item: that no woman shall come within a mile of my court.' Hath this been proclaimed?

Longaville. Four days ago.

Biron. Let's see the penalty. 'On pain of losing her tongue.' Who devised this penalty?

Longaville. Marry, that did I.

Biron. Sweet lord, and why?

⁴⁵⁰ Jackson (1997), p. 214.

⁴⁵¹ Hardy (1997); Wilson (1989, 1995), *passim*.

⁴⁵² See above, p. 119.

⁴⁵³ Hardy (1997), p.66.

Longaville. To fright them hence with that dread penalty.⁴⁵⁴

This practice of appropriating an embedded narrative for the pre-show subtly alters the initial impact of the story by bringing forward some element that Shakespeare delays. Here, for example, in Shakespeare's version the King's banishment of women, and the complicity of the other lords, are unknown until this question arises, and the brief, piecemeal way they emerge has great comic impact, particularly in coming directly after Berowne's word-play on tropes of courtly love. By opening his production with tearful banished women Brook ensures that the prohibition on love is already brought to the fore, and suggests perhaps, in contrast to the text, that Berowne, as the only one unaware of the proclamation, is less rather than more sharp than the others.

The practice also reflects something of the production's cultural circumstances. Thus, for example, Brook's opening suggests a society behind the court of Navarre, and a life of women who use the amenity of the royal park – a life thoughtlessly cut across by the king's academic project. By extending the impact of that project to wider society, and especially women, Brook helps his audience to grasp the nature of the opening sequence of vow-taking, and in the process brings the production closer to the concerns and expectations of his own time. It is a powerful way both to make sense of what is strange – the oddness of a world-renouncing vow – and to make strange what is familiar – the text, to those audience members who know it – to overcome what might be readerly and automatic by suggesting a new, embodied context for an already known story.

⁴⁵⁴ 1.1.119-126.

Like the narrative use of design, this practice of bringing forward to the opening some embedded story or story-fragment that Shakespeare delays revealing is not a new phenomenon, suggesting that audiences have (apparently) needed help to access the (perceived) difficulty of beginnings, or that actor-managers, like modern directors, have always sought to vary or 'improve' Shakespeare's openings. As with the 'difficult' early comedies, these pre-shows seem to 'assist' the audience to grasp the situation at the start of the play. For example, the textual *Othello* is undoubtedly confusing at first. Barbara Hardy brackets *Othello* with *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* as opening with 'a conspicuous gap in exposition'.⁴⁵⁵ Other critics note that *Othello*, like some other mature plays of Shakespeare, begins *in medias res*.⁴⁵⁶ This starting in mid-action is often characterised by the use of deictic language, 'pointing' or referring to something already under discussion before the action starts:

'I take it much unkindly...that thou... shouldst know of *this*' (*Othello*)

'*This* dotage of our general's' (*Antony and Cleopatra*)

'I will make a Star-chamber matter of *it*' (*Merry Wives*)

'I learn in *this letter*' (*Much Ado*)

'If you shall chance, Camillo, to visit Bohemia, on *the like occasion whereon my services are now on foot*' (*Winter's Tale*), etc. (All my emphases.)

Perhaps this is why a number of productions of some plays present rather similar pre-shows: the deixis, as referent to a narrative that unfolds or unfolded elsewhere, not only blocks the audience's immediate understanding but positively invites prior embodiment or

⁴⁵⁵ Hardy (1997), p. 201.

⁴⁵⁶ See, for example, Maguin (1988), p. 48, and Elam (1984), p. 89.

representation in dumbshow, and where this approach is used spectators often find that Shakespeare in performance is revelatory or makes the language apparently much easier than their schoolroom experiences of it.

Such pre-shows, of course, make subtle alterations to the impact of the narrative, both in the initial direction the story takes, and in the effect of the moment in performance when the delayed story or revelation appears. In an early example of this practice, Oscar Asche opened *Othello* at His Majesty's Theatre in 1907 'with Roderigo and Iago witnessing the flight of Desdemona from her father's house'.⁴⁵⁷ Shakespeare opts to delay explaining this element of the story, leaving Roderigo's 'this' for another 64 lines in favour of Iago's rant about serving Othello; even then the fact of the elopement is left to emerge obliquely and obscurely:

Roderigo:

What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe

If he can carry't thus!

Iago:

Call up her father,

Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight,

Proclaim him in the streets...⁴⁵⁸

The situation seems much clearer to an audience who has seen first what the argument is all about.

⁴⁵⁷ Hankey (1987), p. 138.

458 1.1.66-9.

In Shakespeare's version, however, the first mention of the clandestine marriage is depicted for the audience as ugly and voraciously sexual by the bestial language of Iago's riddle to the bride's father:

'Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tupping your white ewe'.⁴⁵⁹

Asche, by contrast, opens with the lovers themselves, allowing their human passion, and the 'nobility' and 'charm' of their physical presence and behaviour,⁴⁶⁰ to tell their own story first. When Iago's version is told, the audience already has a favourable or sympathetic image of the protagonists that contrasts with Iago's coarseness, so that the story sets off from a more idealistic, romantic point of departure, simplifying by ennobling the character of Othello, directing, in fact, the audience's allegiance.

In 1935 Robert Atkins's *Henry IV Part 1* at His Majesty's also opened with an element that the Shakespearean text delays, beginning 'with a procession of the King returning from church'.⁴⁶¹ In the textual *1 Henry IV* the King alludes obliquely to a topic – 'new broils/ To be commenced in strands afar remote'⁴⁶² – that is then deferred and left unexplained while he expresses his anxious desire to end civil war:

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood...⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁹ 1.1.88-9.

⁴⁶⁰ *Times*, 8 Nov 1907.

⁴⁶¹ *Crosse Diary* xv, p.36.

⁴⁶² 1.1.3-4.

⁴⁶³ 1.1.5-6.

Indeed, the first 18 lines are entirely concerned with the conduct and effect of fighting, contemplating horrific civil war images of mass slaughter and a kingdom in turmoil whose only relief is the hope of a different, *foreign* war. Not until line 21 does the king name clearly his plan to travel 'as far as to the sepulchre of Christ' to wage a *holy* war. These opening images of war are necessarily given a very different colour in Atkins's production, contrasting with a background of piety that suggests a king more inclined to pray than to fight, a soul in torment for his kingdom whose pacifist feelings have been the focus – or the result – of his religious observance. Or, more interestingly for a modern audience by adding a layer of complexity – inclined to *appear* so. Such a reading may indeed have enriched the story-telling in this production, to judge by Ivor Brown's response to John Drinkwater's *King* as 'that sanctimonious bandit with a twinge of conscience'.⁴⁶⁴

This type of narrative pre-show, then, presents a deferred or second element of the opening scene before the first. In this way the audience is given help to lead them into that second element when it arrives. When Henry turns his attention to the desire to transport the fighting to 'the sepulchre of Christ', the audience who first saw him leaving church may be helped to grasp the distinction, and so to understand the narrative strand about the king's conscience. Similar use of a second element is often made in productions of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Iden Payne opened his *Antony and Cleopatra* at Stratford in 1935 'with a flourish of trumpets and the entry of Antony and Cleopatra and her ladies amid a blaze of torches', posing the protagonists 'magnificently against the glittering pageantry of Roman Egypt'.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Ivor Brown, *Observer*, 3 Mar 1935. Brown is here reviewing *Part 2*, so his comment reflects the cumulative effect of Drinkwater's portrayal.

⁴⁶⁵ *Times*, 16 April 1935

Thus it was clear what Philo was complaining of to Demetrius when he spoke his opening words - the 10 lines that *precede* the entry of the lovers in the 1623 Folio text:

Philo: Nay, but this dotage of our Gneral's
O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front...⁴⁶⁶

In 1957, Robert Helpmann opened his *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Old Vic, whose set design I discussed in the last section,⁴⁶⁷ with a tableau, described in some detail in the promptbook. As the curtain rises the attendants at Cleopatra's court are presented at their decadent ease – sitting idly on the floor or leaning against pillars, two playing dice, one asleep – while Cleopatra reclines on a couch. Mardian stands ready with a tray of goblets. A group on stage laugh, the signal for the entry of Philo and a character called Scarus, listed as Roman friends to Antony. The onstage court appears to ignore the new arrivals: Charmian 'eases back into Alexas's arms', and Antony kisses Cleopatra's hand, then takes a goblet and drinks before handing it to Cleopatra, who drinks and returns the goblet to Charmian. Cleopatra then draws Antony down to her and they kiss, just as Philo crosses to centre stage. Now Cleopatra pushes Antony to his feet, and Philo and Scarus 'ease to below [a] pillar'.⁴⁶⁸ The sequence is a micro-story, telling in dumbshow that this is an indolent society focused from

⁴⁶⁶ 1.1.1-6.

⁴⁶⁷ See above, pp. 145-7.

⁴⁶⁸ Promptbook, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Old Vic 1957: microfiche in Shakespeare Institute Library.

highest to lowest on pleasure and ease and contrasting sharply with the Roman arrivals, who are made to seem out of place and uncomfortable. The movements of Charmian, Antony and Cleopatra seem provocatively languid and sensual, performing 'Egypt' for the Romans expressly, it seems, to arouse the disgust voiced in Philo's opening speech. In this way the audience is helped to understand the opening speech by already having an image of what that speech alludes to. The production, in other words, first *shows* and then unambiguously *tells*.

As Wilson and Hardy show, the texts frequently 'embed' narratives by making reference to events that happen 'offstage', such as the execution of the Thane of Cawdor, or that remain in the imaginative or dream realm without 'happening' at all – at least within the play – such as Cleopatra's dread of future performances of her story by 'some squeaking ...boy'⁴⁶⁹.

These too have proved fruitful material for pre-shows. There is however a marked difference between pre-show enactments of this sort derived from *early* in the text, and those culled from later.

The dramatized *early*-textual moment, like the embodied deictic type, helps an audience onboard the narrative, both at the level of linguistic comprehension and of narrative structure. Such an opening promotes clarity: as the language and culture of Shakespeare's time recede and become harder for modern audiences to access, a pre-show enactment of something that will shortly be rendered in words can give early confidence that the show will be within spectators' range of comprehension. It also acts as an early point of reference for the unfolding narrative, by quickly giving confirmation that the story is moving in a certain

⁴⁶⁹ 5.2.216.

direction. Patrick Mason's touring *Twelfth Night* in 2005 began 'with a tableau of Olivia's household processing in black under umbrellas to mourn briefly at her brother's grave ...before these so-far silent mourners dispersed, and ... Orsino arrived with his entourage to listen to 1.1's music'. The events depicted are explained in – and help to explain – Valentine's report soon after the beginning, establishing the narrative strand of Olivia's mourning:

So please my lord, I might not be admitted,
But from her handmaid do return this answer:
The element itself, till seven years' heat,
Shall not behold her face at ample view,
But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine – all this to season
A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting in her sad remembrance.⁴⁷⁰

Another *Antony and Cleopatra*, Andrew Hilton's at Bristol's Tobacco Factory in 2009, established the narrative structure in exactly this way for Elizabeth Mahoney of the *Guardian*. It began, in her description, 'with the powerful lovers saucily enveloped, his legs wrapped around her',⁴⁷¹ taking their cue from – and confirming – Philo's image of Antony as 'the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gypsy's lust'⁴⁷². For Mahoney, the effect of the opening

⁴⁷⁰ 1.1.23-31.

⁴⁷¹ Elizabeth Mahoney, *Guardian*, 7 Apr 2009.

⁴⁷² 1.1.9-10.

extends forward into the whole performance, acting as a continuing point of reference that drives her interpretation: 'You think back to this moment of sensual liberty throughout Andrew Hilton's production, as political ambition, empire-building and the ravages of war trample on the possibility of establishing a personal bond between Rome and Egypt.'

A very different effect is made by pre-show dramatization of material that occurs later in the text. By the very fact of its reference forward, this sort of pre-show sets up an echo, a resonance to be re-sounded when the textual moment arrives. This strategy tends to offer more interpretative challenge to the audience, and hence to overlap considerably with the theatrical or symbolic pre-show which I discussed in Chapter 3. Two examples illustrate this type of pre-show: *Macbeth* staged by Shakespeare At The Tobacco Factory, Bristol, directed by Andrew Hilton in 2004, and *Antony and Cleopatra* by Northern Broadsides, directed by Barrie Rutter in 1995.

Hilton's *Macbeth* at Bristol in 2004 staged as pre-show an event that occurs in the text around 100 lines later, and added some extra business: 'Cawdor's execution, during which two witches attempted to strangle a third'.⁴⁷³ The interpretative possibilities of this pre-show are multiple, and, apart from the interpolated strangling, arise directly from its large distance from its 'proper' place in the play. It might be considered a symbolic pre-show, prefiguring the executions and retaliations that the play treats of. However, it also dramatizes an event that occurs later in the action, where it is given in reported form, and at a strikingly double remove, as Malcolm's report of a report:

⁴⁷³ Tatspaugh (2005) p. 459-460

Duncan: Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not

Those in commission yet returned?

Malcolm:

My liege,

They are not yet come back. But I have spoke

With one that saw him die, who did report

That very frankly he confessed his treasons,

Implored your highness' pardon and set forth

A deep repentance. Nothing in his life

Became him like the leaving it. He died

As one that had been studied in his death

To throw away the dearest thing he owed,

As 'twere a careless trifle.⁴⁷⁴

Not only is the textual event not staged, but its physical brutality as the outcome of treachery is decisively distanced from the stage and replaced by a poetic rehabilitation – a repentance and a hint of grace. Nor is its performance necessary for an audience's grasp of the narrative: indeed, far from giving a helping hand to enter the story, Hilton confuses the narrative's causal and temporal line by suggesting connections that the text omits. At a straightforward level it could seem to 'explain away' the play's supernatural element, by showing the witches' quite *natural* knowledge of an event that they later make seem supernatural to Macbeth and Banquo. Alternatively, when Duncan orders Cawdor's execution in 1.2, it might seem that the witches have foreseen the event, giving the audience an experience akin to Macbeth's shock at finding an apparent prophecy come true.

⁴⁷⁴ 1.4.1-11.

As a third possibility, the pre-show could suggest a flash forward, with the opening 'proper' returning to an earlier point. The interpolated and unexplained violence of two witches toward the third is also more symbolic than narrative, a semiotic thread spun perhaps from hints of the witches' cruelty in peripheral elements of the text such as the sailor's wife story of 1.3 or the Hecate scene, 3.5, but adding an unnecessary narrative complication by introducing a subplot of satanic conflict. What it undoubtedly does provide is an arresting visual and theatrical image that startlingly is *not* the familiar weird sisters of this most familiar of texts, a strategy it perhaps shares with my next example.

Barrie Rutter's *Antony and Cleopatra* with Northern Broadsides in 1995 opened, in Peter Holland's account,

with the most startling contrast. A bare-chested comic spoke as Philo, acting as Master of Ceremonies, as a trolley was wheeled out with a parodied Antony and Cleopatra on it, both male, both sharp mockeries of the lovers, speaking their opening dialogue in 1.1. Watched by a single onstage spectator, Caesar, the action aggressively offered the image that Cleopatra later envisages... Then, without a break, the 'real' Antony and Cleopatra bounded onto the stage and, in a single line, the parody was shown up for its lying fictionality, fully vanquished by their power and resonance.⁴⁷⁵

This pre-show perhaps serves the narrative by enacting the report that Philo will take to Caesar, or rather, its aftermath, transformed into grotesque satire – the mocking, disgusted Roman-eye view of Antony's behaviour. Its contribution to the unfolding narrative may be

⁴⁷⁵ Holland (1997), p.253.

clear to those audience members who know the text well enough to recognise the allusion to Cleopatra's horror of the 'quick comedians' who '[e]xtemporally will stage'⁴⁷⁶ the lovers in Rome, and the single onstage spectator may be recognisable as Caesar for a few in the audience by his clothing or demeanour, or by knowing the actor taking the role, but for most that recognition will have to wait until 1.4, more than 400 lines or around 20 minutes⁴⁷⁷ into the production, when Caesar appears again. A further narrative contribution may be to show the dual experiential viewpoints in the play-world, the Roman and the Egyptian, each making a very different judgement of the same events, the one watching them with voyeuristic detachment, the other living them to the full.

For the audience, however, this opening serves rather as an arresting *coup de théâtre*, a theatrical rather than a narrative pre-show. The responses of reviewers who mention this pre-show suggest, indeed, that its effect was tonal, steering the reading toward genre rather than narrative line. The assistance it offered was not so much in understanding what was going on as in reassuring that it would be funny and unstuffy. It was a 'spoof',⁴⁷⁸ setting a 'sceptical frame that allows, for once, the possibility that the ageing lovers are indeed a little ridiculous'.⁴⁷⁹ This company's ethic is 'work ... characterised by ... vitality and humour', and an acting style that is 'far less "mannered" than conventional theatrical productions'.⁴⁸⁰ Their *Antony and Cleopatra* was 'listed in the comedy section' of the Edinburgh Fringe

⁴⁷⁶ 5.2.213.

⁴⁷⁷ Based on a rough rule of thumb used by directors, that a 2 hour performance needs cutting to between 2200 and 2400 lines. Thanks to Dr Jacqueline Bessell for this information.

⁴⁷⁸ Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 5 Oct 1995.

⁴⁷⁹ Jeffrey Wainwright, *Independent*, 6 Oct 1995.

⁴⁸⁰ http://www.northern-broadsides.co.uk/?page_id=29, accessed 6 Feb 2012.

programme, and this pre-show is surely intended to signal that it would stress the 'humour of the piece'⁴⁸¹ and bring '[b]uffoonery... always fascinatingly and dangerously close'.⁴⁸²

Nunn's pre-empting narratives

A third type of narrative pre-show, much favoured by Trevor Nunn, arises from a trend towards detailed realism that Stanley Wells and Peter Holland highlight in their theatrical reviews in *Shakespeare Survey* around the turn of 1990. Wells notes 'an attempt to explore and realize the emotional reality of individual characters'⁴⁸³ as something of a discernible trend in productions of the late 1980s, and a particular 'wealth of social detail' in Trevor Nunn's *Othello* in 1989, such that 'a fully written account... would read like a Victorian novel'.⁴⁸⁴ Holland takes up this theme two years later, finding that Nunn's work has developed

a recognizably fixed style: emphatically naturalistic acting as if the plays were Ibsenite social dramas, consequently a phenomenal density of detail, a certain literalism with the text and above all a belief in the plays' explicability. Nothing now could be left enigmatic or inexplicit and the process of explication was doggedly rooted in the material reality of the design and the style.⁴⁸⁵

Nunn's use of narrative pre-shows at this time and later bears out these observations. Finding an embedded narrative fragment late in the play, introduced there by Shakespeare without prior preparation but rather as a device to solve a story-telling problem, Nunn

⁴⁸¹ Colin Affleck, *Scotsman*, 30 Aug 1997.

⁴⁸² Jeffrey Wainwright, *Independent*, 6 Oct 1995.

⁴⁸³ Wells (1990) p. 148.

⁴⁸⁴ Wells (1991) pp. 191, 192.

⁴⁸⁵ Holland (1992) p. 134.

supplies it with a pre-show antecedent, so that, as Holland puts it, nothing is 'left enigmatic or inexplicit'.

In his article exploring Shakespeare's 'narremes', a term used in narratological theory to refer to 'recurring patterns of action, place and time' in narrative texts, Helmut Bonheim points to differences between Shakespeare's time and our own in the shapes and styles of narreme available: for example, playwrights after Shakespeare's time 'hardly use the separation-and-reunion narreme', and 'narremes of closure today are not those of Shakespeare's time'.⁴⁸⁶ Bonheim's model offers me a framework for thinking about Nunn's realistic pre-shows here: narremes that cause a radical new direction in the narrative, or that offer explanation from the time before the depicted action, have altered, such that today they cannot satisfactorily arise as if from nowhere. To modern consumers of stories, such late-appearing fragments seem contrived and artificial, produced to bring about a resolution (as with Angelo's betrothal to Mariana) or jarringly out of keeping with the genre (as with the messenger Mercade's sudden appearance), and hence they present a problem for the modern director. The solution found by Nunn is to prepare them in the pre-show. In Barthesian terms such a pre-show supplies the narrative 'seed' that Shakespeare failed to sow.⁴⁸⁷

Two striking examples of Nunn's use of this technique occur in 1991, when his *Timon of Athens* opened with the burying of the stolen gold that would later be found by Timon in Act 4, and his *Measure for Measure*, whose pre-show prepared the ground for the Mariana plot-strand. He uses the technique again in his *Love's Labour's Lost* (2003) with an opening in war

⁴⁸⁶ Bonheim (2000) p. 1.

⁴⁸⁷ See Barthes (1977) p. 87, and above, p. 2.

that is explained at the end of the play as the future which Berowne encounters after the abrupt departure of Rosaline with the French Princess on the death of her father the king. All three develop the late-appearing fragment into a fuller narrative that spans across the first half of the play or frames it entirely, and that answers to a much more recent requirement that narratives should be fully explainable. I now examine these last two productions.

Nunn's *Measure for Measure*, at The Other Place in Stratford, again in Nunn's signature style, sported two pre-shows. The production opened with 'couples dancing' to 'the strains of a Strauss waltz',⁴⁸⁸ establishing a basic trope of Viennese society, updated to the more familiar nineteenth century, and providing a realistic setting readily recognised by a late twentieth-century audience. Details of the dancing filled in more of the story, politically or socially: Martin Hoyle found Nunn's use of 'Strauss's *Kaiserwalzer*... [caught] the moment when the Habsburg empire collapsed in on itself and Vienna found a new role as the nerve centre of Europe',⁴⁸⁹ and Robert Smallwood read the dancing as indicative of low-life Vienna: for him the music, 'wheezily rendered' in a 'half-lit café', suggested a broken-winded performance in insalubrious surroundings, from which the couples 'depart[ed], it seemed clear, to more intimate environments where the activities Angelo is so keen to curb could take place'. This first pre-show element served a further narrative purpose of structure: as with Nunn's *All's Well* a decade earlier⁴⁹⁰ the dancing that opened the show reappeared at the end to frame the play and remind spectators of the beginning, 'wrapping up' the story neatly and shaping it as a (well-made) story.

⁴⁸⁸ Smallwood (1992) p. 353.

⁴⁸⁹ *Independent on Sunday*, 22 Sep 1991.

⁴⁹⁰ See above, p. 154.

The second pre-show element faded in from the first. As the pre-show dancers exited a lighting change switched to 'Philip Madoc's middle-aged, bespectacled, bearded Duke, sitting on a couch examining some scraps of paper in a folder'.⁴⁹¹ For many reviewers this added further detail to the time-place narreme which they filled out for themselves, or with the aid of the programme, where a helpful photograph of Sigmund Freud and a few brief quotations on repression and fathers were reproduced. For John Peter it was '1900s Vienna, the city of Freud, Schnitzler and Schiele',⁴⁹² for Michael Billington, 'a transitional, early twentieth-century Vienna where Strauss waltzes linger in the air and Freud is obviously penning *Psycho-pathology of Everyday Life*'.⁴⁹³ In Martin Hoyle's view, 'The Duke is bearded like Dr Freud; the dandies of café society are Puccini's Bohemians grown up and made good'.⁴⁹⁴ With the Duke established as Dr Freud, attention now focused on his current case. According to the promptbook he is 'looking at a photo of Mariana' as the lights go up. He then 'picks up [a] book (from [the] chaise)' on which he is sitting and reads text transposed from much later in the play:

He who the sword of heaven would bear
Should be as holy as severe,
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand and virtue go,
No more nor less to others paying
Than by self-offences weighing.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹¹ Smallwood (1992) p. 353.

⁴⁹² *Sunday Times*, 22 Sept 1991.

⁴⁹³ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 20 Sep 1991.

⁴⁹⁴ Martin Hoyle, *Independent on Sunday*, 22 Sep 1991.

⁴⁹⁵ 3.1.517-22. *Measure for Measure* promptbook, handwritten before the start of the text.

While the identity of the person in the photograph cannot be known to the audience, the lines of poetry serve as suggestive hints about the role of the Duke as ruler, bearer of 'the sword of heaven', and psychoanalyst, in pursuit of self-knowledge, his own and that of his subject/clients. A narreme, a conventional or recognisable type of embedded narrative, is set up: an enigma involving this ruler/doctor and the case he is absorbed in which, in Barthes's terms, will 'have as correlative' the point later on which, on looking back, makes sense of its appearance there. This is all that is offered for now: the Duke 'Puts [the] photo and cutting in [the] book and puts [them] in his coat pocket'.⁴⁹⁶ The entry of Escalus for the first scene serves to interrupt the narreme, leaving it hanging for future clues. These are delayed until 3.1, when, 'explaining the history of Mariana to Isabella, the Duke produces the cuttings as verification of his story'.⁴⁹⁷

There is a notable difference between the newspaper reviewers and the scholars in the accounts given of this explanatory narrative strand. The journalists seem not to register it at all as 'seeded' in the pre-show, although Jeremy Kingston commends Nunn's use of 'invention [that] gives life to almost all the problem areas', among them 'when the Duke... shows Isabella photos of Angelo's past'.⁴⁹⁸ Stephen Wall and Charles Spencer allude to it obliquely in that the Duke's motives are clarified, but say nothing of its extra-textual interpolation: Wall finds that 'the motives behind the Duke's exposure of Angelo as a 'seemer' emerge as more personal than doctrinal',⁴⁹⁹ and Spencer recognises that answers are provided to questions that the textual play leaves unclear:

⁴⁹⁶ Promptbook.

⁴⁹⁷ Holland (1992) p. 135.

⁴⁹⁸ *Times*, 19 Sep 1991.

⁴⁹⁹ *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 Sep 1991, p. 23.

The Duke's decision to hand over control to his cold, authoritarian deputy Angelo is presented as a psychiatric experiment, an attempt, in the Duke's own words, to discover 'what our seemers be.'⁵⁰⁰

The scholar reviewers, however, with their greater reflective and analytical space and brief, observe Nunn's interpolation as beginning with the pre-show. Holland, indeed, reflects on the sense-making process he went through as a spectator connecting the opening of the show with its subsequent development:

[The Duke] looked at and carefully pocketed some newspaper cuttings and a photograph. These... seemed easy to interpret, objects defining his own life, mementoes he wanted to carry with him; [however], the explanation was shown to be inadequate. In 3.1, explaining the history of Mariana to Isabella, the Duke produced the cuttings as verification of his story; the photograph, needless to say, proved to be of Mariana. What in Shakespeare is troublingly discontinuous — when after all *does* the Duke know about Angelo's treatment of Mariana and should that have affected his decision to leave Angelo as his deputy? — was now in Nunn's version completely apparent. The entire feigned disappearance had no cause other than the need to test out Angelo.⁵⁰¹

Robert Smallwood's account similarly connects the separated strands of the Mariana narreme:

⁵⁰⁰ *Telegraph*, 20 Sep 1991.

⁵⁰¹ Holland (1992) pp. 135-6

the lights went up on [the] Duke, sitting on a couch examining some scraps of paper in a folder – press cuttings they were, several of them, and they would appear again later as the Duke told Isabella the story of Angelo and Mariana and their broken betrothal. Retrospectively, one saw how the Duke was very deliberately engaged in a psychological investigation of Angelo.⁵⁰²

For Smallwood, not only the cuttings but the entire pre-show, its décor, historical setting and transposed text – which he registers somewhat sarcastically as not textually authorised – contributed in retrospect to this explanatory narreme:

The couch, the choice of period, even, to some extent, Madoc's appearance, were all part of this Freudian allusion. The idea of an experiment on a ruler was pointed by the Duke's thoughtful, quizzical reading, as it were from his own notebook anthology of verse, of the textually problematic lines from Act 3 asserting that 'He who the sword of heaven will bear/ Must be as holy as severe'. His mind thus determined on the Angelo investigation, we finally arrived at what we have traditionally tended to regard as the beginning of the play...⁵⁰³

By completing Shakespeare's narrative fragment of the Mariana story into a fully developed narreme, Nunn clearly alters the narrative balance of this 'problem' play, solving its problem, so to speak, resolving its enigmas of character and motive. Reviews reflect this completion in a widespread sense of satisfaction:

⁵⁰² Smallwood (1992) p. 353.

⁵⁰³ Smallwood (1992) p. 353.

Nunn's precise, deliberate production... psychologically intense and emotionally exacting;⁵⁰⁴

...this complex and devastating play gets from Nunn the most searching and engrossing production of it I've seen: a thriller, a parable and a psychological earthquake;⁵⁰⁵

...a mesmerising exploration of repressed sexuality... psychologically satisfying;⁵⁰⁶

The conclusion of this problem play is usually seen as wilfully strained, the imposition of neat comic patterning on to material too dark and complex to be tidied up in this way... Trevor Nunn's magnificent new production builds, by contrast, to a powerful affecting finish;⁵⁰⁷

...psychological coherence ... is everywhere apparent in this outstandingly intelligent and theatrically absorbing revival.⁵⁰⁸

While a few demur, most reviewers seem implicitly to find Nunn's production improves on the play they know, and Michael Billington recently declared it one of the two best productions of *Measure for Measure* in his entire experience.⁵⁰⁹

The terms used by these reviewers are markedly of the twentieth century: the genre of 'thriller' and the narrative pleasure of 'psychological coherence' are notably not 'Shakespearean', but recast the play as audaciously as any modern-dress production. Rather as Rutter's *Antony and Cleopatra* altered the play from tragical-historical to an arguably

⁵⁰⁴ Andrew St George, *Financial Times*, 20 Sep 1991.

⁵⁰⁵ John Peter, *Sunday Times*, 22 Sep 1991.

⁵⁰⁶ Charles Spencer, *Telegraph*, 20 Sep 1991.

⁵⁰⁷ Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 20 Sep 1991.

⁵⁰⁸ Stephen Wall, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 Sep 1991.

⁵⁰⁹ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 28 Apr 2014.

more palatable comic, Nunn altered *Measure for Measure* to suit modern tastes for full psychological accountability and narrative closure.

The opening of Nunn's *Love's Labour's Lost* in 2003 also strongly disrupted reviewers' expectations of the play they knew. According to Charles Spencer, 'For the first couple of minutes, you may fancy you have wandered into the wrong auditorium. The action begins with a deafening, bewildering, First World War battle scene. This, you realise with a start, is the hero Berowne's present reality'.⁵¹⁰ Benedict Nightingale reacts to the noise, speed and confusion of the story apparently told as the play begins, including its rupture with his expectations of style and character: 'There are bangs, flashes, and into the forest murk rush soldiers, among them a subaltern (Joseph Fiennes), who is due to play that elegant wit, Berowne. He falls. Is he dying?'⁵¹¹ Nicholas De Jongh similarly finds the courtly, mannered tone he expects bewilderingly confounded by the pace and violence of the opening, noting too some anticipation of the end of the play:

At first there's no sign of Navarre's king encouraging three young Lords into a vow of monastic, academic life. Instead, fleeing soldiers rush across a wintry landscape. Amid explosions and gunfire, Joseph Fiennes's Berowne falls wounded or dying. A black-costumed figure, a premonition of the messenger Mercade and death, now appears.⁵¹²

The visceral nature of the opening scene strikes many:

⁵¹⁰ *Telegraph*, 22 Feb 2003.

⁵¹¹ *Times*, 24 Feb 2003.

⁵¹² *London Evening Standard*, 24 Feb 2003.

[the performance] starts with a cacophony of explosions and ends in a similar barrage of gunfire;⁵¹³

[Nunn's] powerful opening scene is set on a battlefield ignited by gunshots and explosions;⁵¹⁴

it takes some time for the smoke and smell of sulphur to dispel;⁵¹⁵

[the opening scene is] a battle... in which we see young men killing and being killed.⁵¹⁶

The physicality of these responses shows the extent to which the narrative of the production varied from that of the textual play, both in terms of the story being told, and of its genre.

An apparent war story replaces the comedy specified by the play's title and reputation.

Nunn clearly achieved a memorable theatrical effect with the sheer force and unpredictability of this opening, but his purpose proved to be narrative rather than purely theatrical when the end of the play returned to the battle, 'making the whole a flashback memory of the apparently dying Berowne'.⁵¹⁷ From a tiny narrative kernel in the text –

Rosaline's injunction to Berowne to

Visit the speechless sick and still converse

With groaning wretches, and ...

⁵¹³ *The Herald (Glasgow)*, 25 Feb 2003.

⁵¹⁴ Mark Shenton, *Sunday Express*, 2 Mar 2003.

⁵¹⁵ <http://www.curtainup.com/loveslabour2003.html> accessed 14.4.14

⁵¹⁶ *London Theatre Guide*, 22 Feb 2003.

⁵¹⁷ Gerald Berkowitz, <http://www.theatreguidelondon.co.uk/reviews/loveslaboursNT03.htm> accessed 14 Apr 2014.

With all the fierce endeavour of your wit

To enforce the pained impotent to smile⁵¹⁸

Nunn develops a future scenario featuring 'groaning wretches' and 'the pained impotent' from which the play is staged as flashback. The hero's future maturation experience among the sick becomes a much fuller *narreme* in which the hero has already undergone this experience and made his return to claim the trophy of his beloved. The parallel perhaps hinted between that proving ground and its effete, comic counterpart of academic reclusiveness is thus brought forward to the opening, and with it the shock impact of Mercade's message in the play's closing moments, an impact that some reviewers appear to value as the play's distinguishing feature: the 'black cloud [that] come[s] to darken a golden day',⁵¹⁹ 'the dawn of a new seriousness'.⁵²⁰ Many note the change this makes to the overall tone of the play, a change specifically wrought by the spectator's own understanding of the 1914 war *narreme*:

By briefly bringing on that cloud at the start, along with the French messenger of death, Nunn gives what follows a more elegiac feel. It is still sweet, maybe even sweeter now that we sense the fragility of these aristocrats. Soon they will emerge from their European Brideshead to learn the meaning of death.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ 5.2.837-40.

⁵¹⁹ Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 24 Feb 2003.

⁵²⁰ Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Feb 2003.

⁵²¹ Nightingale.

So Nunn's *Love's Labour's* becomes a moribund reverie of the last summer of aristocratic peace and plenty, of love in arcadia before the 1914 war.⁵²²

For some the tonal change is unwelcome, specifically because they value the *absence* of preparation for it in the text: for Billington 'the framing-device is gratuitous and even pre-empts one of the most magical moments in all Shakespeare: the entrance of Mercade, the messenger of death, into the final revels',⁵²³ and John Gross judged it 'one of those superficially bright ideas that simply creates a distraction, [blunting] the effect of the sudden irruption of death... in the play'.⁵²⁴ Heather Neill objected to the flashback for its very explanatory completion, suggesting an audience is better served by *not* being prepared, by having, in effect, a different story from the one known to the actors. For her it was 'a directorial trick probably more illuminating in the rehearsal room than for the audience. The play now says explicitly what Shakespeare perhaps hinted: the best-laid plans of human beings may be subverted'.⁵²⁵

Nunn's pre-empting narrative pre-shows, then, borrow a narrative fragment from late in the text and subject it to considerable development and modernisation, to pay back much later, in – to extend the economic metaphor – a sort of 'value-added' approach that helps the spectator over a stylistic barrier to modern expectations of a well-made, fully explainable story. Like the Northern Broadside *Antony and Cleopatra*, Nunn's productions offer reassurance that audiences will not be baffled, that the play adds up psychologically, both in its characters and in its demands on them, the followers of the narrative clues. His is a

⁵²² Nicholas De Jongh, *Evening Standard*, 24 Feb 2003.

⁵²³ *Guardian*, 22 Feb 2003.

⁵²⁴ *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 Mar 2003.

⁵²⁵ *Times Educational Supplement*, February 28, 2003.

problem-solving strategy, tracing the play's narrative to an explanatory point of origin, as Maguin describes, but an origin whose details are expanded, even invented, far beyond those offered in a text that is implicitly found wanting in the present day.

Pre-show narrative confusion

The narrative pre-show of course has immense potency in setting a production off from a point of departure that will make sense, not only of the *story*, but of the social or psychological interpretations that the director has made, and the meanings that the audience will make in its turn, which may or may not concur. My final example demonstrates the confusion and misunderstanding that can arise when narration and meaning-making collide, highlighted for me by my own disagreement with the reviewers.

Conall Morrison's *Macbeth* at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 2007 began with what Paul Taylor described as 'a savage, invented prelude':

Half-crazed from battle, Patrick O'Kane's brawny, shaven-headed Macbeth leads a brutal, throat-slitting raid on a household of distraught civilians. The lone survivor is a squalling baby, whom Macbeth picks up and soothes, but the tender hug soon turns into the crush of strangulation... When he's gone, the three murdered women jerk back to life and become the witches.⁵²⁶

John Peter is more terse:

⁵²⁶ Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 19 Apr 2007.

Here is how Conall Morrison's production begins. A room; 12 chairs; three women with children. Enter Macbeth and soldiers; they butcher everybody. But the women rise again and become the witches. In other words, this is a revenge play;⁵²⁷

while Charles Spencer fills in a little more detail:

Morrison begins with a scene undreamt of by Shakespeare, in which Macbeth startles a group of refugees and slays them in a sadistic killing spree that might make Quentin Tarantino feel nauseous. He snogs one woman before snapping her neck, then picks up a baby, briefly cuddles and coos at it before breathing so hard into its mouth that its lungs burst. At the end of the scene, however, when Macbeth has made his exit, three slaughtered women rise from the dead, and we realise that these suffering mothers have been transformed into voodoo-practising weird sisters. No wonder they want to trick Macbeth into destruction. He's exterminated their families with manifest relish.⁵²⁸

Even Benedict Nightingale, who, unlike his fellow-reviewers, later finds much to admire in the performance, asks whether it was wise 'to start by bringing onstage the battle against Norway, at least if it shows Macbeth slaughtering a baby and the witches mourning dead children and friends'.⁵²⁹ Each reviewer here reads the pre-show as a literal narrative, a representation of the events immediately preceding the play's first scene, and to varying degrees they find this back-story not just unwise but hopelessly flawed, confounding their previously established 'truths' about the play:

⁵²⁷ John Peter, *Sunday Times*, 22 Apr 2007.

⁵²⁸ Charles Spencer, *Telegraph*, 19 Apr 2007.

⁵²⁹ Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 19 Apr 2007.

It suggests 'that Macbeth is a ruthless killing machine *even before unfolding events have devastated his psyche*'.⁵³⁰

This leaves '[h]is tragedy, which is that he's destroyed by evil forces who corrupt his secret heart, ...nowhere'.⁵³¹

'How can we measure *the distance between the Macbeth of the early scenes and the Macbeth who authorises the slaughter* of the pregnant Lady Macduff and her little son, if we have seen him sunk in degradation before the play proper begins?'⁵³²

For Peter, the switch to 'revenge play' is a genre-changer to an inferior category; all these reviewers, well-schooled in A.C. Bradley, have come to the theatre to experience what they have always known, the playing of Macbeth's tragic flaw and the audience's cathartic purgation. By reading what happens on stage as back-story narration, explanatory of the play's action, they illustrate the currently dominant realist, linear narrative tradition. And yet there are non-realistic ways of reading that are relatively available, such as the dream sequence, or the subconscious landscape. Cinematic tradition has taught us to read techniques such as slow-motion, merged shots and wavering focus as non-literal, depicting an altered mind or a subconscious memory, and theatre has developed versions of these in movement and special effects. Morrison's opening sequence used smoke, mime, slow motion, and an effect like close-up when the *melée* melted away leaving Macbeth alone with the crying baby: these effects could have invited non-narrative reading, or, if narrative,

⁵³⁰ Nightingale, *Times*, my emphasis.

⁵³¹ Peter, *Sunday Times*, my emphasis.

⁵³² Taylor, *Independent*, my emphasis.

a non-linear presentation such as flash-forward. The play itself, after all, suggests the weird sisters belong in multiple time-dimensions as they predict the future.

Being in the audience with a psychoanalyst may have influenced me to read psychoanalytically. For me, the opening sequence had elements of dream or nightmare, suggesting a compressed picture of Macbeth's mind. It featured non-realistic theatrical elements – overpowering sound and musical effects of battle, stylised movement, close crowding of the thrust stage, a looming sense of horror – which, together with the pre-show position of the sequence, seemed to invite a non-narrative or conceptual view. As theatrical phenomenon it belonged in the realm of the allegorical dumb-show as proposed in Dieter Mehl's analysis, arising from a 'desire to make abstract ... experiences and conflicts visible as concrete scenes and to impress a moral idea on the spectators by appealing directly to the senses'.⁵³³ In more modern terms, it foreshadowed the events we know the play contains, the equivalent of an operatic overture. At the end of the sequence three women rose from apparent death to segue into 'When shall we three meet again'. If there seemed a narrative element here it was not at the level of events, but of moral commentary, suggesting that immersion in violence gives birth to violent mental disturbance, embodied symbolically by the witches, who are manifestations of Macbeth's mind rather than literal external beings, or hover indeterminately between these. Rather than creating a revenge play as Peters suggested, it focused the action on the play's society as a régime built on war and its military leaders as mentally scarred by living with violence.

⁵³³ Mehl, p.17, see above, p. 22.

Knowing Morrison's Irish provenance made these meanings, for me, particularly apt, giving him an authority in the experiential field that cut no ice with the English broadsheet reviewers, who included among the production's faults 'a mix of Irish and West Indian accents'⁵³⁴ and a 'Scotland... relocated in ... the Donegal area of a Jamaica where antique thanes mix with lackeys from a topically Islamic Morocco'. These critiques suggest a cultural differentiation that disqualifies the Irish experience from the sort of serious psychological consideration allowable in more distant arenas of atrocity. A comparison with Max Stafford-Clark's much more violent, stylistically eclectic, and critically praised touring production of 2004, which I discuss in Chapter 6, confirms this bias, and suggests that Morrison failed to differentiate clearly enough the sort of pre-show he was staging, and hence the ways to interpret the production meaningfully. Such stylistic confusion or over-crowding is a risk factor for the pre-show, as I explore in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Drawing the threads of this chapter together, I have ranged over the ways in which directors use their resources to transport spectators into the story of their *production*, as distinct from the story of the *text*. Design and, increasingly elaborately, the acting body are used to provide narrative points of departure, and to assist or steer audiences into the production's narrative world, with varying degrees of reflection or variation on the textual equivalent, and with a tendency in more recent times to consider an audience's difficulty in engaging with the text. I have shown how performance inevitably interposes from its opening moments between the text and its story-telling, and that directors have increasingly seen this

⁵³⁴ Taylor, *Independent*.

embarkation point as legitimate territory from which to vary, modernise and ‘improve’ the textual play’s narrative trajectory and overall shape. I have found that the space opened up between text and performance in the pre-show has been configured in quite distinctive ways to suit the time and circumstances of staging. In particular, narrative pre-shows have impacted on the presentation of the main protagonists, on genre, style and structure, reflecting a gradual shift from text-centred to audience-centred presentation. Finally, I have shown how *narrative* can undermine a pre-show that aims toward the *conceptual*, the topic of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: NEW CRITICAL THINKING AND THE CONCEPTUAL PRE-SHOW

In this chapter I turn to pre-shows used to signal interpretation, or what is often, usually pejoratively, referred to as the director's concept. The period I explore overlaps that of Chapter 3, ranging from 1950 to 1969, and shows directors using the opening threshold moment to signal some interpretative idea, at first by design – set, lighting and, briefly, the curtain itself – but later adding the hermeneutic possibilities of the acting body. The conceptualising of performed Shakespeare reflects the infiltration of university English and the New Criticism into performance, as graduates become directors and scholars begin to take a belated interest in performed Shakespeare. Reflecting society itself, the conceptual ideas stimulated by pre-shows to the productions I discuss undergo quite profound changes in these two decades, from the broadly conservative custodianship of a tradition dominated by literary values to challenges to and refusal of such deference and a new appropriation of Shakespeare for the value systems of a younger generation.

A major factor determining my start date for this chapter is the launch in 1948 of *Shakespeare Survey* and in 1950 of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, peer-reviewed academic journals which include performance criticism by Shakespeare scholars, greatly extending the analysis and comparison of performed Shakespeare at the major theatres in England (and further afield in the latter case). I have repeatedly noted the possibility that reviewers in the local and national press might have ignored pre-shows, having their standard areas to cover of principle actors and 'mounting' or set and costume design. The first academic reviewers add a new link to scholarship, measuring Shakespearean performance against standards such as faithfulness to the text, 'Elizabethan'-style and bare staging, and technical delivery of verse,

all with the expansive writing-time and column-space made possible by the format. They set, or consolidate, quite stringent requirements, which offer the theatre historian insights into the dominant cultural expectations and responses of this admittedly select but articulate part of the contemporary audience: early reviews repeatedly fault non-textual aspects of performance such as ‘spectacle’⁵³⁵ or ‘cumbersome’ sets,⁵³⁶ and are scathingly dismissive of stage business: ‘tiresome and frivolous “business”’,⁵³⁷ ‘elaborations of “business”’,⁵³⁸ ‘that over-emphasis on “business” which I have already denounced as the fatal Siren of modern producers’.⁵³⁹ The new amplitude of print space and longer deadlines open up the opportunity to comment on opening moments and to consider how a performance grows from its beginnings; at the same time the firmly-held opinions about scenic and acting elaboration make pre-shows something of a provocation, challenging the critics to take account of them. Over the following two decades a number of significant shifts in these expectations occur, reflected in responses to the threshold moment and its function in the production it introduces.

The new scholarly attention to performance analysis coincides with an increasing application of New Critical scholarship to performance, as the new directors emerge from university dramatic societies like OUDS and Cambridge’s Marlowe Society, and academically trained in the analysis and speaking of poetic texts. From this time forward there is a flowering of directing that exploits imagery, rhetoric and the performative possibilities of verse-form, followed a little later by a developing political and social emphasis as these textual

⁵³⁵ Bennett and Rylands (1948), p. 109.

⁵³⁶ Venezky (1951a), p. 338.

⁵³⁷ Bennett and Rylands (1948), p. 109.

⁵³⁸ David (1952), p. 123.

⁵³⁹ David (1951), p. 137.

explorations reveal potent parallels between Elizabethan England and post-war Britain and Europe. The orthodoxy of 'Elizabethan' staging set in motion by Poel in the late nineteenth century, with its uninterrupted flow of scenes and its struggle with unsuitable performance spaces, barely has time to become established in the theatre, although reviewers and performance analysts continue to seek its fulfilment, before a new post-war agenda of 'relevance' to contemporary political and social life and the youthful overthrow of wartime ideals hurry Shakespearean performance away from tradition, convention and Christian certainties into something much more radical.

Active pre-shows such as those I explored in chapter 3 are extremely rare at this period, but just as I found with narrative pre-shows in chapter 4, the move to use the opening or pre-opening moments to signal a key meaningful element of the play, or to offer clues to the production's interpretative approach, appears first in the uses some directors make of design. This is already clear with Komisarjevsky's productions:⁵⁴⁰ the painted story-book Venice of the *Merchant* suggested the playful, comic genre before the Harlequin entered, and in *Macbeth* the stage properties set the opening action in a war zone. His *Lear* pre-show was entirely played out in the design, subverting not so much the interpretative norm – Lear's fall from power – as the norm of majestic realism and respect for Lear's status as heroic figure. Pre-show by design is generally less likely to be subversive, as it does not of itself replace the opening of the text in the way interpolated action may do. On the contrary, design is often an opportunity to illustrate and reinforce the text, to *confirm* rather than subvert expectations. Such was the case with John Gielgud's *King Lear* (Stratford, 1950) whose 'unit set' (by Leslie Hurry) suggested to Alice Venezky in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 'a

⁵⁴⁰ See chapter 3.

great tree trunk dividing into two branches at the top... stressing the grouping and divisions of the characters'⁵⁴¹ placed either side of the central throne. The symbolism of this was readily interpreted by the reviewer in *Theatre World*: the set divided the stage 'into three equal parts by the likeness of a great tree or rock, split down the middle and forced asunder',⁵⁴² a design both pleasing and unsettling in an ideal combination – 'picturesque and rather symbolic' – giving an initial intimation of the play's major theme of 'violent partition... before a word is spoken'.⁵⁴³

Plate 2



King Lear 1950; Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, set showing Lear's Palace, Act 1.
Photographer Keith R. Ball. Reproduced by permission of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

⁵⁴¹ Venezky (1951), p. 76.

⁵⁴² *Theatre World*, 2 Aug 1950.

⁵⁴³ *Theatre World*, 2 Aug 1950.

Similarly, Michael Northen's design for Gielgud's *Macbeth* (Stratford, 1952) communicated an appropriate, generalised sense of discomfort, while also keeping decorously in the background: Clifford Leech in *Shakespeare Quarterly* traces the design back 'to Gordon Craig in manner and effect', 'a place of tall dark masses', establishing 'a mood' that 'echoed the general purport of the words but in no way presumed on our attention'.⁵⁴⁴ Clearly these reviewers are attuned to reading the semiotics of set design, however imprecisely, and find productions enriched by their deployment, although there is a low tolerance of design deemed obtrusive, as 'the effect of the play as a whole is blunted if the eye is dazzled throughout'.⁵⁴⁵ For such critics, what matters most is always the words, but pre-show visual symbolism, used with discretion, can point towards them.

A change in journalists' and scholars' reviewing can be seen during this period to follow changes in the emphasis of performance: the depiction of character and the speaking of the verse begin to give way as matters of central interest, as interpretation and abstract themes stimulate visual representation onstage and command critical attention on the page. These changes in turn open up new opportunities for essayist-reviewers to account for their responses by reconsidering the beginning and the early scenes for insight into the director's interpretation. Not all take the adjustment happily, and a vein of disapproval runs through the period alongside the pleasure in innovation. Increasingly, too, their accounts become 'writerly': intriguing, descriptive, interpretative, but also caustic or colourfully uncomprehending. The differences between generations become more visible. My

⁵⁴⁴ Leech (1952), pp. 353-4.

⁵⁴⁵ Leech, p. 354.

exploration of pre-show elements has to take into consideration the idiosyncrasy and variety of these responses, as well as the objective facts of the staging.

In the 1950s and 1960s the salient theme to which design drew attention was typically that of power: the political, religious or moral centre of power or influence at work in the play was given symbolic visual form in the opening moments of the production. For this symbolic purpose it was clearly preferable that the design be simple and readable, and indeed reviewers who remark these visual first impressions – and many do not – generally also see them as clues to interpretation. With Glen Byam Shaw's *Julius Caesar* (Stratford, 1957) the chosen symbolic feature was a monolith, which in the view of Roy Walker in *Shakespeare Survey* gave a crucial indication of the director's reading: 'Byam Shaw's interpretation began at the beginning of the play. The curtain rose on a stage dominated by a larger-than-life statue of Caesar, raised on a tall plinth in the centre of the stage'.⁵⁴⁶ In Walker's view, Shaw's interpretation was particularly notable, prompting him to analyse it back to this originary point, because it overturned a stage tradition dating back to Hazlitt by which Caesar was a 'diabolical dictator' and his overthrow a 'democratic' act;⁵⁴⁷ instead Shaw's production rehabilitated Caesar as a great ruler. This presentation of the title character was cumulative, strongly pointed by the design, as though the opening grandeur alerted the spectator to the semiotic force-field of the production's design, so that magnificence of costume, actor's bearing and central positioning on the stage, and 'massive fluted monoliths of light grey stone', all contributed to Walker's sense of Caesar as 'the incarnation of an

⁵⁴⁶ Walker (1958), p. 132.

⁵⁴⁷ Walker (1958), p. 132.

immutable and pivotal principle of order'.⁵⁴⁸ Muriel St Clare Byrne concurs in this assessment and in her admiration of Byam Shaw's production for its insight that 'the rest of the play is diminished unless we have had a Caesar who can for his brief moment really touch the imagination as "the noblest man/ That ever lived in the tide of times"': the question is much more interesting and important than 'whether Brutus or Caesar is the "hero" of the play'.⁵⁴⁹ Like Walker, Byrne registers the unusual nature of Byam Shaw's interpretation in 'the hint of surprise which greeted this unexpected "greatness" and "authority" and admitted that this Caesar was indeed a possible master of the world'.⁵⁵⁰ She does not, however, make any mention of the opening or the set in producing this effect but finds it entirely in the acting of Donald Eccles as Caesar,⁵⁵¹ suggesting how subliminal, or merely supportive, that threshold moment can be. Indeed, it may pass the reviewer's notice altogether: the reviewer in *The Scotsman* shows no awareness of anything unusual in the balance of power or sympathy, but seems to get what he expects in Alec Clunes's 'thoughtful' and 'stoic' Brutus, 'Shakespeare's favourite character', and his commendation of 'the simple designs of Motley' is not linked to characterisation, but rather to flexibility: 'Those solid-looking blocks of gleaming white masonry... permit themselves to be adjusted... smoothly and conveniently' and 'permit a celerity of action which is admirable'.⁵⁵² Whatever Byam Shaw intended to convey in the opening set design, it is clear that audience response is variable and disparate, and attention to the threshold moment can by no means be counted on.

⁵⁴⁸ Walker (1958), p. 132.

⁵⁴⁹ Byrne (1957), p. 485.

⁵⁵⁰ Byrne (1957), p. 485.

⁵⁵¹ Byrne saw Eccles who was understudying Cyril Luckham in the part; she remarks that 'Luckham's notices made it clear that he brought to the part something quite out of the ordinary' in the same vein: 'Both, obviously, established [Caesar's] unquestionable greatness, and at the same time made him human'. Byrne (1957), p. 485.

⁵⁵² *Scotsman*, 10 July 1957.

A similar focus on a public symbol of the centre of power appeared in a number of English History plays during the 1950s. According to theatre historian Claire Cochrane, Douglas Seale presented a spot-lit throne on an empty stage at the start of *Henry VI Part 3* (Birmingham Rep, 1953), and similarly at the opening of *Henry V* (Birmingham Rep, 1957):

As the curtain rose on the performance, a single shaft of light pin-pointed the crown lying on a simple wooden table centre stage. Bernard Hepton as the Chorus entered by the top flight of stairs to the rostrum and then came down to sit on a bench beside the table. He spoke quietly the opening words 'O for a Muse of fire'. On 'so great an object' he picked up the crown. Low voiced and persuasive, Hepton set the tone of the production.⁵⁵³

I have not found any contemporary reviews that mention this opening use of symbolic prop, but Cochrane's account shows Seale's intention to use its physical presence to focus the theme, perhaps helped by the actor's very non-bombastic, self-effacing delivery.

A similar focus on monarchical power was created by the prominent placement of a throne at the beginning in Anthony Quayle's cycle of *Histories* (Stratford, 1951). Most unusually, the cycle had a single 'Elizabethan' set for all four plays in the cycle (*Richard II*, both parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*). According to T.C. Worsley, writing in the expansive space of a retrospective chapter in a commemorative book about the cycle, the permanent set, designed to emphasise the unity of the cycle, had the same 'permanent feature – the throne, set down at the side by the proscenium arch', which '... was the first thing which was gradually illuminated to mark the beginning of each play', serving to highlight it as the centre

⁵⁵³ Cochrane (1987), pp. 250, 265.

of 'the political business of the plays'.⁵⁵⁴ The device effectively replaced any individual king as the thematic heart of the production, particularly so with each successive play, making a similar design-focused cumulative effect to the one I noted above in Byam Shaw's *Julius Caesar*.

Ironically – and tellingly – just at the moment when 'Royal' status is first granted to a British theatrical establishment, these rather abstract, symbolic affirmations of power are firmly overthrown. Peter Hall and John Barton's *Histories* cycle, *The Wars of the Roses* in 1963-4 (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford) highlight power not as illustrated in a single revered object but as an urgent human drive, violent, physical and bodily. Margaret Shewring comments that Hall and Barton changed the narrative of the histories from 'grand design' to 'the exploration of... the crisis in which the nation finds itself as power changes hands. For Hall, *The Wars of the Roses* did not offer an answer. What was offered was a demonstration of a problem'.⁵⁵⁵ In these productions, which introduced the political criticism of the Polish Jan Kott to English Shakespearean performance, power as Shakespearean theme took on a new radical physicality. John Russell Brown noted in these and other contemporaneous productions a change to 'a determined realism' that he felt was 'meant to awaken in the audience a recognition of actuality'. In the case of Hall and Barton's cycle this realism took the form of 'a continuous emphasis of violence and of the shallowness of politicians' pretensions', making the plays 'a relentless horror comic'.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Worsley (1952), p.31.

⁵⁵⁵ Shewring (1996), p. 103.

⁵⁵⁶ Brown (1965), pp. 147, 149.

The new physicality altered the relation between the actor's body and design, greatly enlarging the symbolic scope of pre-show design. In the account by Robert Speaight in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, the opening set for the Hall/Barton *Henry IV Part 1* 'brilliantly emphasized' the '[never-to-be-realized] voyage to the Holy Land' by presenting a 'gaunt, overhanging Crucifix and... toy paladins on the floor'.⁵⁵⁷ By contrast with Quayle's spotlighted throne and Seale's crown these symbolic objects are playful, ironic, out of scale, making them more clearly symbols rather than stage properties: the crucifix hanging above and the toy soldiers like children's playthings on the floor suggest both the oppressive weight of the king's unfulfilled oath and the impotence in its perpetual deferral, making the king already at the opening a prefigurement of 'the shallowness of politicians' pretensions' that Brown found in the production as a whole.

The actor's body as emanation of power comes into play as an integral element of the design in one account of Trevor Nunn's *King Lear* (Stratford, 1968): Robert Speaight found the symbols of political power made an astoundingly impressive opening, incorporating not only design but also the actor's bearing and facial features:

Nothing in this production became it better than its birth – the great sword, the golden map, the hieratic throne. Here was kingship incarnate, and [Eric] Porter had in every wrinkle of his face what Kent recognized as authority.⁵⁵⁸

Filtered through Speaight's response, not only are the wrinkles of Porter's face productive of meaning, but the onstage objects are imbued with attitude, representing not simply the

⁵⁵⁷ Speaight (1964), p.384.

⁵⁵⁸ Speaight (1968), p.369.

monarchical power structure they symbolise for the audience's intellect, but also the overwhelming weight of that power, its rooted timeless force, for the audience's emotional understanding. The very opposite of Brechtian, at least in its effect on Speaight, this pre-show presentation draws spectators into the force-field of an apparently god-like king as the opening impression of the production.

Hall returned to a single, religious power motif for *Macbeth* (Stratford, 1967, designer John Bury). The arriving audience saw a huge white veil spread from the flies to the floor, and, in the account of Marvin Rosenberg who observed rehearsals, 'as the lights went down, to cracks of thunder, a series of frightening lightning flashes caught the witches behind the veil, and silhouetted them: one holding an upside-down cross, the others huddling below her'.⁵⁵⁹ Robert Speaight felt this 'pointed brilliantly the sinister implications of the Witches' nocturnal rites,' an effect he found satisfyingly cumulative in what followed: 'The cross carried behind Duncan and, later, behind Malcolm made the antithesis doubly clear. When Macbeth appeared in the white robes of consecrated kingship, the blasphemy was shocking'.⁵⁶⁰ A similarly disturbed view of the centre of power was rendered in Michael Langham's *Hamlet* (Stratford, 1956) by Michael Northen's design, which Strix (pseudonym of Peter Fleming) saw as combining darkness and an enigmatic set, as he describes with some relish in *The Spectator*:

The centre of the stage is occupied by a low, irregular, two-tiered wooden rostrum, like the stump of an enormous tree which has been sawn very close to the ground.

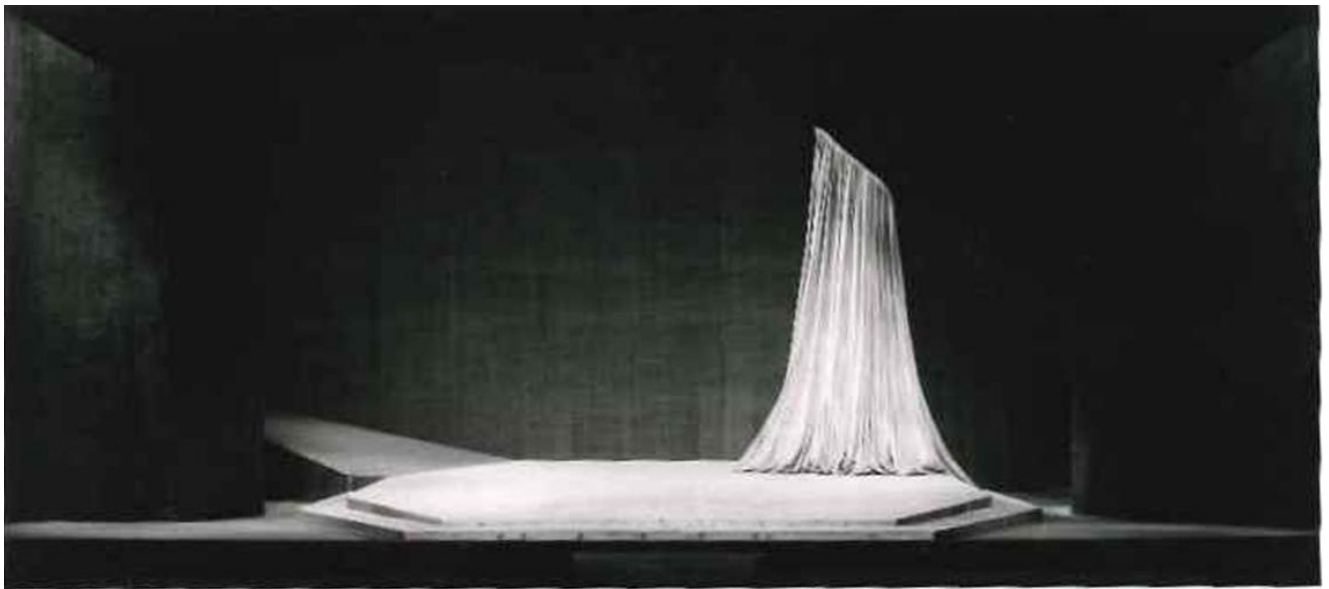
From one point on its perimeter, like a sliver of timber left by the falling stump, juts up

⁵⁵⁹ Rosenberg (1973) p. 114.

⁵⁶⁰ Speaight (1967), p.394.

a slate-coloured, ectoplasmic swag of draped cloth, suspended in the nipping and the eager air by no visible means. There is no other scenery; the back and sides of the stage are an inky void. This austere spectacle, suggesting a cavity in some gigantic and dreadfully decayed tooth, confronts the audience from the moment they enter the theatre until the moment they leave it; for the curtain is never lowered.⁵⁶¹

Plate 3



Hamlet, 1956, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, set. Peter Streuli © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Fleming here is impelled to decipher the set, and in reading it semiotically to link it to phrases of the text. There is a certain mocking, bathetic tone in his syntax ('suspended... by no visible means') and lexis ('ectoplasmic swag'), that suggests Fleming reserves his own judgement as to the freakish designs of his day, hinted at in his final remark on the (still

⁵⁶¹ Strix, 'The Prince of Limbo', *Spectator*, 20 Apr 1956.

remark-worthy) absence of a curtain, but there is also a sense of finding the design ideas thought-provoking and effect-producing, not least because of the opportunity they afford for colourful and witty copy.

Onstage design was not the only way directors found to offer spectators a semiotic challenge. In the 1950s there seems to have been a small vogue for exploiting the potential of the curtain or the drop-cloth as a canvas for symbolic display. In 1951, Loudon Sainthill designed both a painted drop-curtain and a gauze for Michael Benthall's *Tempest* at Stratford. The reviewer of *The Scotsman* found a certain performative force in the 'grey title page curtain', which acted as a 'prelude' to the play, and belonged to 'the Rex Whistler

Plate 4



The Tempest 1951, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, detail of drop curtain.
Photographer Keith R. Ball. Reproduced by permission of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

school with hourglass, astrolabe, and books of magic set in the foreground', ⁵⁶² calling to mind Whistler's book-cover illustrations with their extravagantly ornate pictorial frames, so that the painted design performed something like the paratextual function of book-jacket

Plate 5



REX WHISTLER: Venice, Original illustration for Edward James: 'The Next Volume'. <http://www.lja.uk.com/index.php?page=818>

art. For the critic of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* the production began *after* the front curtain went up revealing the painted gauze: there was a 'most masterly opening', with a 'transparency curtain, evocative... of grey-green fathoms and voyages to the "still-vexed Bermoothes"', which then 'dissolves into the stranded ship'. ⁵⁶³ This painterly effect was a deliberately ornamental contrast to Tanya Moiseiwitch's sternly austere, uncurtained unit set used for all four plays of Anthony Quayle's *Henry IV* History cycle in the same season: programming context has its part to play in design decisions. In Douglas Seale's *Richard III* (Old Vic, 1957), designed by Leslie Hurrey, Richard spoke his opening soliloquy, in Muriel St Clair Byrne's account, with his back to the audience, silhouetted against a curtain painted with what might have been 'either the Plantagenet badge of the sunburst – "this sun of

⁵⁶² *Scotsman*, 28 June 1951.

⁵⁶³ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 5 July 1951.

York” – or else a gigantic spider’s web’,⁵⁶⁴ making a pictorial representation of key images from the text. The image is then used repeatedly as one or other symbol in the course of the production, helping to illustrate the moral state of play: ‘Whenever during the progress of the play this enormous backcloth is illuminated it is clearly seen to be the spider’s web. When the youthful Richmond, glorious in golden armor and his red dragon helm, has won the day, there is no doubt at all about the sunburst that heralds the Tudor dawn’.⁵⁶⁵ For Margaret Webster’s *Measure for Measure* (Old Vic, 1958), designed by Barry Kay, the arriving audience was greeted by ‘a drop curtain painted in black, white and grey’, as described by Mary Clarke in the commemorative book for the year’s productions. Sadly, the archive has no photograph of Kay’s painted curtain, which presented a sort of overview of the moral world of the play: ‘a pattern of figures, as from an old morality, representing the virtues and the vices that would be at war throughout the play’.⁵⁶⁶ For Peter Hall’s *Twelfth*

Plate 6



Twelfth Night 1958, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Show gauze (detail).
Tom Holte Theatre Photographic Collection © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

⁵⁶⁴ Byrne (1957), p. 477.

⁵⁶⁵ Byrne (1957), p. 477.

⁵⁶⁶ Clarke (1958), unpaginated.

Night (Stratford, 1958) Lila de Nobili designed a painted curtain, whose central feature, as described by Roy Walker, was 'a silvery aureoled figure in clown's costume descending into a dark world in which the faces of other characters seen in shadow were touched with the radiance'.⁵⁶⁷ For Walker, this quasi-mythological figure drew the arriving audience's attention to Hall's 'focus on Feste', alerting them to a reading not yet familiar to theatre audiences more accustomed to seeing Malvolio as the star part; Walker, however, notes that academic discussion had argued for Feste as the central character of the play, giving this reviewer an insight that might have been less available to most spectators. I discuss this production further in the next section. Hall and Barton, again with designer Leslie Hurry, applied the painted curtain idea upstage in their *Troilus and Cressida* (Stratford, 1960), with a more abstract design, according to Robert Speaight: a 'bloodshot backcloth, more than a little reminiscent of Graham Sutherland'.⁵⁶⁸ Speaight does not elaborate on the significance of this likeness, but as Sutherland had been an official war artist during World War II, the curtain was perhaps designed to foreground the war setting and evoke the memories and associations of that still-recent conflict.

Design, then, is a sort of precursor to the pre-show as an opening device regularly used to steer the audience over the threshold into the interpretative sphere of a production, suggesting that directors saw their designers as essential partners in ushering spectators into the world of the play. As the search for innovation proceeds, other creative partners contribute, or their contribution comes to be noticed more particularly: lighting designers, musicians, choreographers and movement directors. It is these last, involving the acting

⁵⁶⁷ Walker (1959), p.127.

⁵⁶⁸ Speaight (1960), p.451.

body in making symbolic or thematic meaning, that shift the opening or pre-show presentation from a matter of design to the fully staged, mostly non-verbal pre-show preceding, and exceeding, the words of the text. My earliest examples, however, are not fully pre-textual in that they form part of the first scene of *The Tempest* and *Macbeth*, openings where Shakespeare provided a textual pre-show, as I discussed in Chapter 2.⁵⁶⁹ Their use of bodies is, however, worth examining as part of the development of the pre-show, for the ways they bring the acting body into play as an integral part of the design, combining the kinaesthetic with the visual to create not only the supernatural effects that Shakespeare calls for in the opening scene but also, for some reviewers, a suggestion of meaning or symbolism to be borne out in the production as a whole. The productions involved are two I discussed above: Michael Benthall's *Tempest* (Stratford, 1951), with the painted curtain by Loudon Sainthill, and Peter Hall's *Macbeth* (Stratford, 1967), with the inverted cross.

The reviewers of *The Scotsman* and *Truth* describe with some relish how Sainthill's design for Benthall's set for the *Tempest* was supplemented by choreography, costume and makeup: according to the *Scotsman* reviewer, the 'swirling waves' of the opening shipwreck were depicted by 'a score of actors',⁵⁷⁰ described in *Truth*, more picturesquely, as 'spectral coryphées'.⁵⁷¹ '[H]igh-water mark [was] decked with giant whelk shells and smooth boulders from beneath which crawled sinister, gargoyle-faced goblins',⁵⁷² and 'Stationary figures of sea-deities c[a]me to life as the storm move[d] to a climax and wildfire play[ed]

⁵⁶⁹ See chapter 2, pp. 89-93.

⁵⁷⁰ *Scotsman*, 28 June 1951.

⁵⁷¹ *Truth*, 6 July 1951.

⁵⁷² *Truth*, 6 July 1951.

over the vessel'.⁵⁷³ The reviewers of this production in the academic journals give quite contrasting responses to this balletic opening sequence. For Clifford Leech the 'stridency' of these 'embellishments' arises too much from 'the impulse to compromise with a suspect public taste'.⁵⁷⁴ Alice Venezky finds a more interpretative directorial reading that illuminates the character of Prospero and highlights the play's moral system: for her the opening scene in which 'the tempestuous sea comes alive as the furious movement of greenclad nymphs', is the first of many instances throughout the production where 'spirits of the four elements' are presented 'in counterpoint to ... Prospero, who in controlling the elements is learning to control himself'.⁵⁷⁵

In Hall's *Macbeth*, the witches emerged in a striking opening sequence described in vivid narrative-present tense by Ronald Bryden in *The Observer*:

Lightning silhouettes three figures like skinny trees on a blood-red ground of matted heath or fur. One scrambles prone, a second slowly inverts a cross over her and trickles a phial of blood down its shaft into her mouth, while the third crouches, obscenely straining her hairy cheek to the drinker's. The moss heaves, rises: humps itself into a ring of shaggy warriors with spears and acorn helmets. One separates himself terribly from the rest, a sergeant swaying forward with news from the north; a Janus with half his face human, the other blinded by a bestial mask of streaming gore.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ *Scotsman*, 28 June 1951.

⁵⁷⁴ Leech (1952), pp. 356, 355.

⁵⁷⁵ Venezky (1951a), p.335.

⁵⁷⁶ Ronald Bryden, *Observer*, 20 Aug 1967.

Bryden's account shows two parts to this opening sequence: a witches' scene that uses the single emblematic object of the inverted cross along with appropriately grotesque costume and make-up, and a floor-level perturbation made by the hidden bodies of actors. The first, as I discuss above,⁵⁷⁷ deploys a symbolic visual aid; the second adds writhing bodies to the design, making the ground move – B.A. Young says it 'pullulates of itself in a most eerie fashion',⁵⁷⁸ – as prelude to the appearance of quite natural and identifiable soldiers from the battle. The two parts are linked by the ghastly flow of blood, and by location, the Scottish soldiers almost being born from the witches' womb-like forest floor, firmly suggesting a supernatural 'cause' to what follows. Gareth Lloyd Evans responded to the opening for its 'effective if self-conscious visual symbolism', finding its meaning elusive or suggestive rather than precise, and, incidentally, remembering the detail a little differently, in that the bodies emerging from beneath the flooring are not soldiers but witches:

A huge white canopy (the white radiance of eternity? Innocence? Good?) hid all from view, but fluttered away at the first flash of lightning and roll of thunder. It revealed the bloody carpet which heaved as the witches emerged from under it... [and] antic'd with a small inverted cross from which presumably Christ's blood streamed.⁵⁷⁹

In Evans's view, this pre-show presents the play's moral landscape in visual, aural and kinaesthetic terms, predisposing him to seek symbols in the presentation as a way to interpret and judge the production. Like Venezky, Evans is writing in the context of a scholarly review of a whole season of performance, where analysis and interpretation are

⁵⁷⁷ See p. 198.

⁵⁷⁸ *Financial Times*, 17 Aug 1967.

⁵⁷⁹ Evans (1968), p.119-120.

central purposes. Bryden in the *Observer*, however, while enjoying using his descriptive powers to recapture the opening, also applauds the interpretative and illustrative power of its 'brilliant opening symbols', despite a general distaste for 'gimmickry' of this sort: here he finds the production's 'frankly archaeological... attempt to expose the pre-Renaissance foundations of Shakespeare's imagination' entirely fitting, so that 'the opening directorial inventions seem not gimmicky but apt'.⁵⁸⁰

In spite of their roused interest here, Evans and Bryden, like Speaight and Strix, have reservations about the shift in the sort of theatre experience spectators are being offered, a shift first associated with the removal of the curtain, which itself arose from the drive to (re)create an Elizabethan stage. In 1969 Evans explores the phenomenon of staging without a curtain when he observes 'an increasing use of lengthy and entirely visual introductions and episodes to accompany what are, after all, verbal masterpieces'. His binary scheme, visual/verbal, with prestige strongly located in the verbal, had dominated approaches to Shakespeare since the Romantics. Evans adopts it here as self-evident ('after all'), and places the visual side-by-side with ('to accompany') rather than as integral to the verbal in performance, relegating the theatrical elements of performance to a superfluous redundancy. His remarks, together with complaints such as Bryden's of 'gimmickry', form a continuous strand from earlier reviewers and theatre enthusiasts such as Gordon Crosse, who complained of 'unnecessary embroidery' when Robert Atkins' *Henry IV Part 2* (His Majesty's, 1935) began with 'a procession of the King returning from church', and T.C. Kemp, who disliked Peter Brook's 'fussiness' in opening *King John* (Birmingham, 1945) with a 'bacchanal'. In spite of their condemnations, however, we see them occasionally responding

⁵⁸⁰ Ronald Bryden, *Observer*, 20 Aug 1967.

to the new interpretative possibilities of these interpolations, even as they protest at the phenomenon becoming known as ‘directors’ theatre’.

The phenomenon and its ‘fussiness’ were, however, becoming a new norm, and pre-show ‘business’, as Evans points out, was increasingly taking up the space between the audience’s arrival and the first spoken words of the text. At Stratford-upon-Avon Peter Hall’s early productions mark a transitional moment between symbolic pre-show design and the fully fledged enacted pre-show, as I examine in the next section.

Peter Hall

The arrival of Peter Hall at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in the mid-50s seemed in many ways a similar moment to the appearance of Peter Brook a decade earlier. At 25 he was strikingly young, and he had entered professional theatre via Oxbridge, making his directing debut at Cambridge where Brook’s had been at Oxford. He too had acquired a certain avant-garde cachet, most famously as the director of the first English production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1955. And like Brook, Hall directed the little-played comedy, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, as his first play at Stratford in 1956. Although Hall makes some use of pre-textual business, particularly in *Cymbeline*, his early productions make their impact mainly through design rather than through a framing or controlling opening viewpoint.

Hall’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* was anticipated as a ‘young man’s’ play, the newspaper reviewers commenting on the youthfulness of Shakespeare at the time of writing (around 28), of Hall as ‘producer’ at 25, and of the cast, in particular Geraldine McEwan, 24, as the Princess of

France. Notwithstanding Brook's much-admired production exactly ten years previously,⁵⁸¹ and another well-received Old Vic production by Hugh Hunt that played in Bristol and London between 1946 and 1954,⁵⁸² the reviewers still talk of the play itself as barely worthy of performance, 'often absurdly contrived',⁵⁸³ 'Shakespeare's earliest – and very nearly his worst – comedy',⁵⁸⁴ at best 'a bright budding' but not 'Shakespeare's comedy at full bloom'.⁵⁸⁵ With this unpromising material Hall seems not to have attempted to clarify the narrative. His production is generally judged to have delighted the eye in every respect, and the ear in some respects, but to have taken some time to get into its stride or to make understandable sense. One reviewer considered that the production had 'a flattish start',⁵⁸⁶ and another that 'the difficulty of making the obscurity intelligible to modern audiences without weighing it down with too much deliberation, is not always surmounted.' For a third, 'the players had to go on a long time before the audience showed the first glimmers of understanding what was happening'.⁵⁸⁷

The reviews of the production⁵⁸⁸ offer no evidence of any pre-show, although John Russell Brown does complain that the set 'ignored the references in the text to the King of Navarre's park and consisted of a spreading, curving staircase arranged for the display of a succession... of Elizabethan costumes'.⁵⁸⁹ The promptbook does, however, describe a brief bit of business at the opening before the text begins. As the curtain rises, the courtly group

⁵⁸¹ See chapter 3, pp. 118-120.

⁵⁸² According to information on <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/theatreollection/oldvic.html> visited on 16th April 2010.

⁵⁸³ Anthony Carthew, 'Peter has left his Hallmark', *Daily Herald*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁸⁴ 'Hall-Marked – a Gem', *Daily Sketch* 4th July 1956.

⁵⁸⁵ G.R.A., *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁸⁶ Norman Holbrook, 'Mr Hall does it Again', *Birmingham Evening Dispatch* 4 July 1956.

⁵⁸⁷ S.D.L., 'A Polished Production at Stratford', *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, 4 July 1956.

⁵⁸⁸ in the collection at the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon.

⁵⁸⁹ Brown (1956), p. 407.

is discovered arranged on the set: Navarre is on the bottom step of a broad, elaborate stair that sweeps grandly round from the left half of the stage to traverse the whole upstage area. A number of courtiers stand on the stairs behind him, and further courtiers or guards stand on a continuation of the stairs that curves downward below the traverse. Berowne, Longaville and Dumaine, discovered at curtain-rise standing stage right facing Navarre, now step forward toward him and kneel. A courtier then ceremoniously takes the cloak off Navarre, who proceeds to sign the declaration held for him, whereupon another courtier puts a gown on him and gives him a book. Navarre now begins the opening speech, and at intervals specified in the text the three lords go through the same ceremony, signing and receiving their gown and book.

Unlike Brook's interpolated opening to his *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1946, with the women of the town reading the declaration on the park gates, this opening invents nothing that is not implicit in the text. Where Brook had imagined a scenario at an oblique angle to the main action, Hall simply adds behaviour and accessories, human and material, to accompany and help to explain the action implied by the spoken words. Brook's debarred women gave a glimpse of a wider society in the hinterland of Navarre's court and affected by its edict against normal social and sexual encounters, but Hall's focuses attention on the court itself, its narcissism and self-importance suggested in the grandeur of the set, the sumptuous Elizabethan costumes, and the mock-importance of the signing and academic accoutrements. The reviewers, however, find little or no satire in the production. Although G.R.A. comments on the 'sharp, laughing eye the young Shakespeare must have turned on the fashions of the time' and his mockery of "'taffeta phrases'" and "'three-piled hyperboles'", he finds that Hall's production 'does not underline the play's satire', which

‘since it is satire at the expense of a kind of cloud-cuckooland of intellectual conceit ... is no longer a necessary target’.⁵⁹⁰ The comedy in the production is found rather in ‘broad pantomime pleasure’,⁵⁹¹ and ‘a large amount of broad farce... some of the fun being at the expense of pedantic schoolmasters and of simple but cunning country-folk’.⁵⁹² The opening scene, then, takes the audience into the court of Navarre on its own courtly terms, to enjoy the luxury of its opulence and aspirations, but not to find anything to mock in its youthful pretensions and aristocratic ideals.

The responses of reviewers show that the production as a whole was indeed implicit in this opening attitude, with beauty of design, pattern and movement making the main impression. For *The Times* reviewer this approach is a failure of reading, a shallowness of response: Hall is ‘shy of trying to convey the ecstasy and agony of youthful love which may be felt through much of the fashionable Euphuistic verse. These are serious inhibitions and in attempting to escape them Mr. Hall has done little more than present a pretty spectacle’.⁵⁹³ Neville Gaffin, however, suggests that this spectacle is actually the point: ‘Hall’s theme ... is clearly the line that “Navarre shall be the wonder of the world”’,⁵⁹⁴ and many are more than content to have ‘the eye ... treated to a feast of splendour the like of which can seldom have been seen, even at Stratford’,⁵⁹⁵ one enthusing that it was ‘worth going to this production just to look. The costumes of James Bailey and the symmetrical groupings and curtseys of Mr. Hall were among the prettiest sights I have ever seen in the

⁵⁹⁰ G.R.A., *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁹¹ G.R.A., *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁹² Alan Dent, *News Chronicle*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁹³ *Times*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁹⁴ Neville Gaffin, ‘Fantasy – and riotous comedy’, *Birmingham Gazette*, 4 July 1956.

⁵⁹⁵ ‘A Feast of Splendour at Stratford’, *Gloucester Echo*, 4 July 1956.

theatre'.⁵⁹⁶ Surely the most enraptured reviewer was C.L.W., who describes an enchanted evening of ubiquitous pink roses, beginning in the Bancroft Gardens outside and continuing in the motif on the theatre curtain, in the set and on the dresses, even echoed in Peter Strueli's lighting which was 'oft invested with a rose-pink glow', and in Raymond Leppard's music which 'fell sweetly upon the story and the ear like the petals of pink roses'.⁵⁹⁷ The *Scotsman* reviewer also placed the roses at the centre of Hall's conception, finding not only immediate sensual pleasure but hints of period political meaning: he notes that Bailey, 'taking a hint from the references to roses in the play, had woven a rose motif into the décor which was partly Tudor', underlining the 'feel of the Elizabethan Court at a time when the sonneteering vogue ran high and the Queen was troubled by the amorous proclivities of her courtiers and Maids of Honour'.⁵⁹⁸

The suggestion of unprecedented visual pleasure in these comments shows how far expectations had by this time moved away from sumptuousness on the stage and toward something 'cleverer' – interpretative or historical insight, emotional depth or subtlety, for example. Hall's innovation seems here to be the bold affirmation of sensuality, of pleasing the eye without having to 'mean'. The *Scotsman* reviewer indeed seeks that additional signifying strand but it is clear that the production makes no historical commentary. This production, then, offered no innovative reading of the play, but rather focused on theatrical experience as sensual delight, a celebration of beauty in youth, design and music. Where the productions with pre-shows that I have considered so far have shifted the focus from character to narrative, and from actor to director, Hall's *Love's Labour's Lost* brings the

⁵⁹⁶ S.D.L., 'A Polished Production at Stratford', *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, 4 July 1956.

⁵⁹⁷ C.L.W., *Birmingham Mail*, 4th July 1956.

⁵⁹⁸ *Scotsman*, 5th July 1956.

designer to the forefront alongside the performers, relegating the difficulties of the narrative to a lower importance rather than seek to solve the problems it presents. As such it needs no pre-show to alert or guide the spectator as to its focus, but a comparable purpose in terms of spectacle is perhaps served by the woven-rose design of the drop curtain that greeted the arriving audience and by the patterned ceremony of the opening business.

With Hall's production of *Cymbeline* in 1957, a rather similar picture emerges. The promptbook has the outlines of a fairly elaborate pre-show, but the reviews make no mention of it, registering a general impression of story-book romance that owes its principal effects to the design. The scenery is variously described as 'sensational',⁵⁹⁹ 'overwhelming',⁶⁰⁰ 'a mixture of forest, pantomime grotto, and cathedral ruin',⁶⁰¹ featuring 'three huge oak trees cast ... from local Stratford trees'.⁶⁰² For Derek Granger, Hall either treats the play with mocking disdain, considering the play 'such a tissue of nonsense anyhow that it can only be treated as a blithely romantic exercise in theatricality', or else retreats into long-abandoned pictorial excess, as he 'seems determined to give us a taste of what it must have been like at the old Her Majesty's with the curtain going up on some opulent Shakespearean evening with Beerbohm Tree'.⁶⁰³ W.A. Darlington, describing the setting as 'an indeterminate mixture of platforms, staircases and bits of architecture all festooned and draped with opulent boskage which even swathes the proscenium arch,' similarly feels that Hall 'has given up the play as a bad job and is doing anything that occurs to him to distract

⁵⁹⁹ John Barber, 'Send this around the world', *Daily Express*, 3rd July 1957.

⁶⁰⁰ Norman Holbrook, 'Cymbeline has its moments', *Birmingham Evening Despatch*, 3rd July 1957.

⁶⁰¹ John Barber, 'Send this around the world', *Daily Express*, 3rd July 1957.

⁶⁰² *Times*, 3rd July 1957.

⁶⁰³ Derek Granger, *Financial Times*, 3 July 1957.

our attention from it'.⁶⁰⁴ Like the *Times* reviewer of Hall's *Love's Labour's*, Darlington considers mere sensual pleasure a lower order of theatricality, the play for him being a self-contained, coherent *verbal* entity from which visual elaboration is a 'distraction'.

Here a tension surfaces between an older generation impatient of spectacle and 'mere' entertainment, and a younger director for whom the visual austerity of the Poelite 'Elizabethan' staging revolution is already out of date. Where their elders had despised such non-realistic elements as *Macbeth's* witches or the *Merchant's* caskets, the coming generation refused to be limited to 'mere' realism, partly perhaps in rebellion against the militaristic sternness of their parents, as Jimmy Porter despised that of his veteran father-in-law. Many reviewers of Hall's *Cymbeline* find story-book and fairy-tale the key idea: J.C.Trewin, for example, finds framing devices in the use of gauzes that 'melt away before the play can begin', and in 'the two great oak trees in which the designers... have framed their stage, with the interlaced boughs as canopy', creating an 'odd mixture of Snow-White and Boccaccio'.⁶⁰⁵ The aesthetic language is reminiscent of Loudon Sainthill's picture-book design for Michael Benthall's *Tempest* six years earlier, and suggests how daringly Hall was here rejecting the prevailing orthodoxy of bare-stage austerity.

While design was clearly the element that most struck the reviewers, whether favourably or otherwise, none comments on the opening pre-show, nor indeed on any aspect of the *unfolding* of the narrative, as distinct from its *style*. The promptbook does, however, have two inserted sheets, one with various technical cues that include what appears to be an extended overture, and another marked 'Opening', listing an elaborate sequence of

⁶⁰⁴ W.A.Darlington, 'Sweetness and Warmth from Dame Peggy', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1957.

⁶⁰⁵ J.C.T. *Birmingham Post*, 3 July 1957.

movements across and up and down the stage by a large cast of court retainers: four ladies, three pages, four guardsmen, a General, a Lawyer and a Bishop, Cornelius and Pisanio, the two gentlemen who ultimately speak the opening scene, and two extra servants belonging to the second gentleman. The behaviour listed suggests a scene-setting narrative designed to cue in the audience to the court atmosphere. The soldiers cross and recross the stage as if on guard, and the General, Lawyer and Bishop talk briefly to Pisanio. The ladies and pages enter and move across in choreographed groups, and the two gentlemen make their own separate entries. They are picked out in distinctive ways. The first gentleman enters alone upstage right and crosses towards downstage left, and as he passes the soldiers they 'circle', suggesting some disruption of their march, or perhaps suspicion of him. The second gentleman with his accompanying servants are the only people to enter at stage centre or to occupy the centre, as if visiting from elsewhere which seems to expose them as 'other'. As the second gentleman approaches the Bishop, General and Lawyer they exeunt, and the same happens when he approaches a group of ladies and pages, as if none in the court want to speak to the outsider. There are a further two such approaches and avoidances until all the various courtiers have exited, leaving the soldiers on guard as the two gentlemen come together and finally begin the text. There is, of course, no indication of the pace of movement, or the atmosphere created, but the marching guards and the behaviour of the groups of courtiers seem designed to suggest a watchful unease and demonstrate the first gentleman's opening words:

You do not meet a man but frowns. Our bloods

No more obey the heavens than our courtiers

Still seem as does the King

and as he relates the story of Imogen's marriage the two gentlemen move closer and further downstage, as if confidentially.

As with the brief pre-show in *Love's Labour's Lost*, this one seems designed to gather the audience's attention and help them make sense of the beginning, filling out the text's opening directly with interpolated behaviour depicting the moments immediately before. It goes a little further than *Love's Labour's* by raising more questions and requiring more interpretative work from the spectator, but once it is over and the text begun, the lack of comment from the reviewers suggests it has done its work. I suggest it might serve some other purposes, however. On the theatrical level it offers orientation, giving spectators time to take in the complex set, directing their attention to all parts of the stage and to various places where actors can enter and exit, setting up associations for different areas. On the level of interpretation it foregrounds the political situation and anticipates the military threat from Rome, potential 'key ideas' for the production. Once these are absorbed and the play is underway, however, it is the element of fairytale that reviewers find dominant, and it is the design, including the opening use of gauzes, rather than the opening action, that is instrumental in conveying it.

Visual opulence was again a key feature of Hall's *Twelfth Night* in 1958, whose painted curtain I discussed above, but now his emerging political radicalism is more discernible, largely through what seems to reviewers a mismatch between the elements of the production, that is, the design, the acting and the text. His designer was again Lila de Nobili, and again her effect on the production struck most reviewers strongly. Many remarked upon a richly painterly quality, particularly in the costumes:

The [Caroline] scenery and costumes ... rather suggest the French court of the Three Musketeers ... and the un-Illyrian impression is confirmed by a Watteauesque light playing through the gauze settings.⁶⁰⁶

Lila de Nobili seems to have had in mind the purple and golden-brown portraits of Van Dyck for her gentlefolk and the rosy and yellow hues of Rubens for her roisterers.⁶⁰⁷

Here was a *Twelfth Night* in mid-seventeenth century costume and setting as it might have been visualised by a Victorian painter of Royal Academy 'story' pictures.⁶⁰⁸

[Dorothy Tutin as Viola] looks strikingly like the little Cavalier boy in 'When Did You Last See Your Father?'⁶⁰⁹

...the Gainsborough's Blue Boy appeal of Miss Tutin's Viola.⁶¹⁰

Some reviewers located this artistic impact in the beginning, suggesting an opening scene that impressed the significance of art on the whole production, both as romantic setting and as comment on its courtly society and the character of Orsino:

That Illyria upon which the curtain rose...reflects the pictorial England of Charles II, heavy with foliage, with theatrically overcast skies, golden sunrises and drinking parties in walled gardens.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁶ Cecil Wilson, 'Twelfth Night comes twice in a month', *Daily Mail*, 23 Apr 1958.

⁶⁰⁷ Alan Dent, 'Van Dyck colours give designer some ideas', *News Chronicle*, 23 Apr 1958.

⁶⁰⁸ Felix Barker, 'Peter Hall misses the gay touch', *Evening News*, 23 Apr 1958.

⁶⁰⁹ Alan Dent, 'Van Dyck colours give designer some ideas', *News Chronicle*, 23 Apr 1958.

⁶¹⁰ Cecil Wilson, 'Twelfth Night comes twice in a month', *Daily Mail*, 23 Apr 1958.

⁶¹¹ Rosemary Anne Sisson, 'This *Twelfth Night* an urbane and golden comedy', *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 25 Apr 1958

The opening scene fades in through gauze on a long gallery perspective, a string quartet playing upstage, while down right a Rembrandtesque artist sketches Orsino.⁶¹²

As with *Love's Labour's* and *Cymbeline*, this visual opulence struck reviewers as out of key with their understanding of the play. In particular they found the depiction of character inappropriate to the style of design or to the text. One felt that Hall 'has seemed determined to resist tradition whenever possible and to give an unromantic "modern" reading, with no restraint on farce', juxtaposing period costume and design with 'the bold marching on of stage hands with scenery and props', and offering the 'strange casting' as Olivia of Geraldine McEwan, whose 'baby-voice intonation, ... facial mannerisms, and ... throw-away playing for laughs are totally foreign to the character of this dignified, melancholy lady'.⁶¹³ Another feels that modern dress would have suited the production better, characterising Sir Toby as an irascible stock-broker on a golf course and Sir Andrew as a 'passé landlady type', concluding that 'The immigration authorities in this Illyria have been a little too lax; they have let too many types in'.⁶¹⁴ W.A. Darlington faults the decision to dress Maria as a 'peasant', a 'serving-wench', contrary to her status in the text of gentlewoman.⁶¹⁵ For J.C. Trewin, however, McEwan's 'gawky, giggling' Olivia, so clearly having nothing 'to do with Orsino's Olivia who "purged the air of pestilence"', makes new sense of Orsino's state of being 'in love with love for its own sake', which is 'as much of an affectation as Olivia's grief'.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹² Byrne (1958) p. 526

⁶¹³ A.M., 'Peter Hall's modern *Twelfth Night*', *The Stage*, 24 Apr 1958

⁶¹⁴ R.P., *Manchester Guardian*, 25th Apr 1958.

⁶¹⁵ W.A. Darlington, 'Maria – a Maid without an Apron', *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 28 Apr 1958.

⁶¹⁶ J.C.T., *Birmingham Post*, 23 Apr 1958.

The contradictions in these responses suggest that Hall wished to set modern behaviour against the mannered artificiality of the past as depicted in art. The acting required is Brechtian in its artificiality, and clearly an innovation for McEwan. Two reviewers comment that she was following Hall's direction rather than her own reading of Olivia's character. John Wain suggests she was merely doing her job, as Hall had 'presumably told her to be coy and simpering',⁶¹⁷ and Muriel St Clare Byrne claims to understand that an Olivia 'socially demoted from the Elizabethan great lady to the Jacobean citizen-heiress, with the coquettish airs and urban graces of upstart rank' was not McEwan's idea of the character.⁶¹⁸

There is a sort of visual pre-show that helps make sense of Hall's political or ideological purpose in the production: the gauze drop-curtain I discuss above.⁶¹⁹ Walker's interest is in Hall's apparent placing of Feste as the 'main' character, since his image 'met the audience entering the theatre', and the lighting radiated from the Feste figure to 'touch' the other characters. For Walker, Feste was presented as a sort of master-mind or controlling figure, able to move around the story's locations at will, and possessing physical attributes suggestive of powers beyond normal human scope:

With his ass's ears he might well have been a disguised Mercury whose winged cap enabled him to go into whatever part of the universe he please with the greatest celerity.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁷ John Wain, 'Stratford Razzmatazz', *Observer*, 27 Apr 1958.

⁶¹⁸ Byrne (1958), p. 526. Byrne is writing at the end of the season, however, and does refer to a number of newspaper reviewers, so may have gained this idea from Wain's review.

⁶¹⁹ See pp. 202-3.

⁶²⁰ Walker (1959) p. 127.

The performance itself began as 'music sounded' and 'a front spot focused on this coolly glowing figure, which dissolved as lights came up behind to make the curtain transparent.'⁶²¹

This silent focus on a Puck-like Feste whose radiance illuminates each character in turn suggests a subtle direction to the audience to see the whole production as filtered through, or emanating from, the mind of the mercurial jester, rather as Komisarjevsky's Launcelot Gobbo master-minded his 1932 *Merchant*.⁶²² As a controlling idea Nobili's curtain motif may help to make sense of a rather pitiless, even misogynistic view of Olivia and a heavily satirical depiction of the high-born characters of Orsino, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. In this view, Maria as 'serving-wench' rather than gentlewoman helps to divide the characters along class lines as understood in mid-twentieth century when 'gentry' has become a relic. Feste as 'artistic creator' of the show appears to mock and manipulate the pretensions of the upper classes he both serves and thrives off. Led by this visual pre-show, the production offers an ideological reversal of traditional readings of the play, making the lower orders both the narrative viewpoint and the smarter, quicker minds, in essence giving them the ascendancy. In this, Hall's *Twelfth Night* anticipates his and John Barton's *Wars of the Roses* four years later, and shows a cultural allegiance with Tony Richardson's *Pericles* from a year earlier.⁶²³

Trevor Nunn's *Winter's Tale*, 1969: appropriating the contemporary

From around 1970 the practice of opening a Shakespeare production with an enacted mini-scene becomes almost commonplace, and there is a change in its relationship to the text. In general, the design-led pre-show displays I discussed in my first section pointed visually to

⁶²¹ Walker (1959) p. 127.

⁶²² See chapter 3, pp. 105-6.

⁶²³ See chapter 3, pp. 129-138.

some abstract meaning or theme, notably that of power. Then Peter Hall made design and visual display a central purpose of performing Shakespeare, while introducing a note of cultural subversion that eluded and mystified many reviewers, and using pre-shows mainly as illustrative introductions to the opening scene.

In 1969 Trevor Nunn in *The Winter's Tale* at Stratford-upon-Avon broke new ground by staging a pre-show that combined design and the lead actor's body with a range of other theatrical means – lighting, music, textual transposition and stage machinery – in a new, complex and multi-faceted presentation that reached far into the body of the production as a whole. Reviewers responded with a range of mystification, irritation and delight; none could ignore some element of it or see through it transparently to the 'play proper'.

Perhaps the production's most striking feature was that it set the pastoral episode of Act 4 as a rock musical in the style of *Hair*, the hippie anti-Vietnam show that had arrived from New York the year before just as soon as the Theatres Act (1968) abolished theatre censorship. Nunn's pre-show gave no hint that this was to come, although Patricia Tatspaugh says that sitar music, associated at that time with the Beatles and 'flower power', played gently before the house lights dimmed and continued into the opening moments of the performance.⁶²⁴ This music seems to have made no impression on contemporary reviewers, however, as it goes unmentioned. Some reviewers make no mention, indeed, of the pre-show itself, but find significance in the design. For Evans and Speaight, reviewing the season for the by now well established *Shakespeare Survey* and *Shakespeare Quarterly*,

⁶²⁴ Tatspaugh (2002), p.34.

the show began with the 'first' or 'opening' scene, and used set design to alert the audience to the psychologically significant theme of childhood:

The first scene is like a white-hued visual aid to the Freudian notion that in childhood lies the source of adult complex. Leontes and his world are seen in a nursery whose equipment is either a slightly larger or slightly warped version of the real.⁶²⁵

For Evans the opening presented an explanatory framework for Leontes' character, suggesting an arrested development and offering a sort of psychological source of his jealousy: 'He lives a Peter Pan inner life; his wife, friend and child are almost part of the nursery furniture of which nothing more is expected than that it should continue to perform an unchanging function'.⁶²⁶ Speaight found rather a prefiguring of the main tragic movement of the plot:

In the first place the whole movement of the opening scene, set in Mamillius' nursery, suggested the happiness which was about to be destroyed – with the hobby-horse in the middle, symbolic both of innocence and lust.⁶²⁷

The newspaper reviewers, however, reported an earlier beginning, a pre-show visual spectacle that featured an audacious textual transposition. J.W. Lambert in the *Times*, evidently waiting expectantly for the familiar exchange between Camillo and Archidamus, found instead that the performance opened

⁶²⁵ Evans (1970), pp.133-4.

⁶²⁶ Evans, p.134.

⁶²⁷ Speaight (1969), p.437.

not with the amiable conversation with which Shakespeare strikes a note of sociable content, but with the hollow and informatively incomprehensible voice of Time, and with a man spinning helplessly in a glass box under one of those flickering lights which are becoming a cliché; and he, symbol of self-pity, is swiftly changed into a toy.⁶²⁸

For Lambert, Nunn's prologue-like use of the Time speech from Act 4 confuses the flow of narrative information, and usurps Shakespeare's authority by ignoring what he considers Shakespeare's carefully judged narrative purpose. Lambert's impatient belittling of the spinning man as helpless and self-pitying, and of the lighting effects as an irritating fad, suggest he considers Nunn has impertinently ignored or failed to grasp Shakespeare's intention. Whatever Nunn was attempting with this pre-show, Lambert has no interest in fathoming it out, because it alters what he expects already from his knowledge of the text, and his expectation is narrative, not hermeneutic or theatrical.

His account, however, offers detail of great use for my project. There are four elements to this pre-show: a voice-over of the Time prologue to Act 4, stroboscopic lighting, a man in a spinning glass box, and a switch from man-size to toy-size. All these elements are extended forward into the production in some way, making this a pre-show of multiple signposts, some thematic and some theatrical, added to which the first scene itself presents the psychological symbolism described by Evans and Speaight.

Ronald Bryden's account of it focuses on the visual elements, and shows how it blends into the first scene:

⁶²⁸ J.W. Lambert, *Times*, 18 May 1969.

Leonardo's drawing of a standing man... revolves in a box of glass, flashing on-off, on-off, like one of those black-and-silver clover-leaves in a vacuum which they used at school to demonstrate kinetic energy... The lights go up, and it is now a miniature: one of the toys in a nursery where a regally fashionable young couple are playing touch-last with their guests and children.⁶²⁹

Bryden is more neutral than Lambert, recording what he saw without either interpretative or judgemental comment. His stance is, however, distant and uncomprehending, the comparison with school physics experiments offering the pleasure of his own descriptive conceit but no semiotic insight. Sheila Bannock is more open to theatrical wonder, and prepared to consider what Nunn might be inviting the audience to ponder:

At the beginning of the play the speech comes to us disembodied, amplified through the theatre... while the eye is invited to look upon the foundations of humanism in a representation of Leonardo's drawing of a man, encased in a great transparent cube, upon which a stroboscopic light plays.⁶³⁰

It is that back-up device, the programme, that perhaps gives the best idea of Nunn's complex hermeneutic project and an innovative approach to total production design in which peripheral elements (programme, posters, etc) are 'themed' to tie in with, and contribute to, the concept of the production.⁶³¹ Its cover is all white, offering, as Speaight puts it, 'a clue' to the production. A major focus, as with the textual transposition in the pre-show, is Time. A double-page image depicts Time across the generations, from infancy to old age, and text

⁶²⁹ Ronald Bryden, *Observer*, 18 May 1969.

⁶³⁰ Sheila Bannock, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 23 May 1969.

⁶³¹ Speaight (1969), p.438.

around this image gives information about the play's source and stage history, prompting a further time link across the history of the play itself. There are pictures from earlier productions ranging from 1847 to 1960. Another double page, headed 'in this wide gap of time...', presents T.S. Eliot's lines from 'Burnt Norton' on 'time present and time past', and a variety of scholarly extracts discussing Shakespeare's preoccupation with Time, redemption and seasonal renewal.

The second theme from the pre-show, the man in the spinning box, uses a human body – that of Barrie Ingham who played Leontes – as a symbol of Nunn's humanist reading of the play, in the way earlier productions had used set design. This is made clear in the programme in an article by Nunn reflecting on Shakespeare's humanism, which he identifies as the source of his varying appeal across time, and which for Nunn, still only 29, is entering a new stage of relevance for his generation:

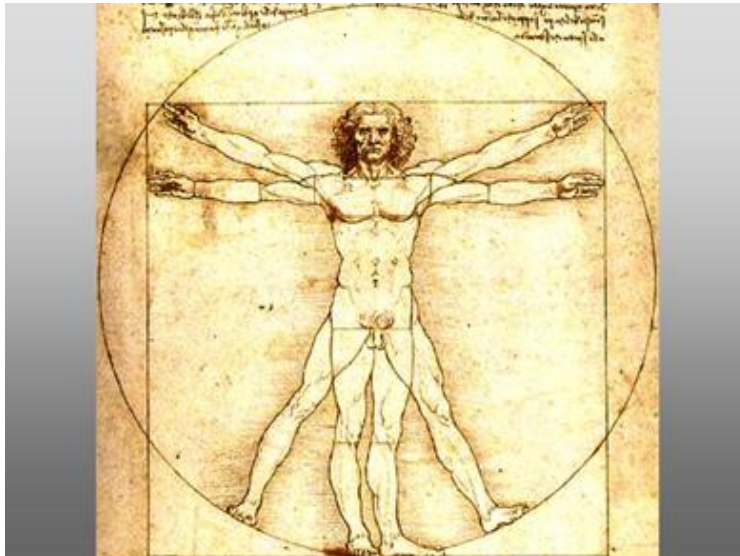
Shakespeare's humanism dominates, the plays will always be accessible, they don't require a specific political or religious climate in which to function, but our sense of humanist values, our moral sense, changes almost imperceptibly from age to age, from generation to generation... so that a neglected area of the canon can suddenly become sharply relevant.

Nunn selects Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is a man' as in his view 'the fulcrum of Shakespeare's thought',⁶³² embracing both pessimism such as the mid-twentieth century nuclear age was suffering, and 'a kind of optimism... that life endures'. Taken with these comments, the pre-show man serves as a symbol of humanist philosophy, of man as

⁶³² Nunn, programme.

bounded, tragically and heroically, by the proportions of his earthly life, suggesting not only Leonardo's Vitruvian Man enclosed within a circle and a square, but also Hamlet's image of his life 'bounded in a nutshell'.

Plate 7



Leonardo, 'Vitruvian Man', reproduced in programme for *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Trevor Nunn, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1969

Nunn's article is an indication that he intended this production, in common with the other late plays performed in the same season, *Pericles* and *Henry VIII*, to be read symbolically. These plays 'are not naturalistic... They are parables, they work both as fables and allegories'.⁶³³ Here, explicitly, is Nunn's approach to these plays, and hence his use of the pre-show with its emblematic image, designed to alert the audience to seek, as S.L. Bethell argues the play itself demands, 'for inner "meanings"', to observe the subtle interplay of a

⁶³³ Nunn, programme.

whole world of interrelated ideas'.⁶³⁴ Nunn intends, in fact, a rehabilitation of the late plays, which 'constantly break new ground, and the old rules', and show that, in contrast with the prevailing view, Shakespeare was 'in no sense... exhausted by his tragedies and turning to escapism. As always he was interpreting life to his audience and at the same time offering a challenge'.⁶³⁵

Nunn's project, then, mobilises Shakespeare as spokesman for the baby-boomer, hippie generation, who were 'breaking new ground and the old rules', proclaiming the power of love to redeem the repression and destructiveness of their fathers' authoritarianism and its result: 'two global wars, the invention of a weapon capable of destroying all life, and consequently a period of cynicism'.⁶³⁶ Among the cynics is the theatre critic Milton Shulman, whose critique of the *Pericles* production earlier in the same season is quoted from at the end of the programme:

The programme note [on the late plays of Shakespeare] by Trevor Nunn pompously interprets this popular nonsense as some profound allegory about a search for love through suffering and ultimate redemption. I suggest the Bard would have had hilarious hysterics at such an interpretation.⁶³⁷

Above all, the young generation is withdrawing its deference towards its elders. Alongside the Shulman quotation, offering an audacious and direct challenge to it, is an extract from 'Sir John Harington (1591)' defining allegory as 'one kind of meat and one dish, to feed diverse tastes':

⁶³⁴ S.L. Bethell, quoted in programme.

⁶³⁵ Nunn, programme.

⁶³⁶ Nunn, programme.

⁶³⁷ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, quoted in programme.

For the weaker capacities will feed themselves with the pleasantness of the history, and the sweetness of the verse; some that have stronger stomachs will, as it were, take a further taste of the moral sense; a third sort more high-conceited than they, will digest the Allegory.⁶³⁸

Nunn's theatrical means thus focus strongly on the visual and aural language of the young. The other two elements of the pre-show, the stroboscopic lighting and the switch from full-size man to toy man-in-a-box, draw on the technology of lighting more familiar from discos and nightclubs. Lambert dismisses the strobe as 'becoming a cliché'.⁶³⁹ Bryden also calls the strobe a 'modish... trade-mark of avant garde intent', 'the umpteenth' such use he has seen in that season, but he finds Nunn's use in this production more than simply modish:

For months I've been waiting for a director who could use it meaningfully, as expressive tool rather than toy, promising myself to hail him first and most intelligent in his generation. I should have guessed it would be Trevor Nunn.⁶⁴⁰

Bryden describes the way stroboscopic effects are used in the nursery scene itself to suggest alternate points of view, switching between 'innocent' and 'guilty' versions of Hermione's manner with Polixenes to suggest Leontes' distorted subjectivity:

The young father kindles with pride in his small son. His wife, the shape of a coming child swelling her white gown, glows like a pearl with contentment as she watches them play. Suddenly, but this time in slow motion, the lights flicker again. The air darkens, gestures are frozen as in those photographs of the Dallas crowd lining Deeley

⁶³⁸ Sir John Harington (1591), quoted in programme.

⁶³⁹ J.W. Lambert, *Times*, 18 May 1969.

⁶⁴⁰ Bryden, *Observer*, 18 May 1969.

Plaza when the first bullet flung Kennedy's hand in the air. In that pause the world looks different. The young wife's murmuring to her husband's guest, pressing him affectionately to stay longer, takes on a sickening intimacy. Time, whose movement is the alternation of light and dark, has turned its black face, and Leontes knows only that something is conspiring to bear away his happiness.⁶⁴¹

For Bryden these effects prompt a satisfying psychological reading that complements and draws complexity from the acting. Evans writing in the *Guardian* similarly notes the use of freeze frames 'to symbolise the freezing up of Leontes' sickened mind',⁶⁴² and John Barber finds 'the nervous tension inside Leontes' mind ... suggested by lowering the lights and distorting the action'.⁶⁴³ Most reviewers found these effects stimulating but Lambert, while appreciating 'some brilliantly executed cameos in which, in slow motion and eerie lighting, Hermione and Polixenes act out the amorous nightmares which cram Leontes' mind', complains of 'things unnecessarily spelt out', asking, 'Do we really need these? In Shakespeare's own day the explanatory dumbshow had become a bit of a joke'.⁶⁴⁴ Nunn, like Hall before him, apparently was determined to dispel the cynicism of the establishment that had decided which Shakespeare plays and which staging techniques were worth admiring, and which could be considered risible.

Taken together with the psychological semiotics of the lighting effects, the spinning man of course points not only to the rather rarefied abstractness of humanist thought, but more directly to Leontes' mental imprisonment within his own diseased misapprehension. Again

⁶⁴¹ Bryden, *Observer*, 18 May 1969.

⁶⁴² Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Guardian*, 17 May 1969.

⁶⁴³ John Barber, *Telegraph*, 17 May 1969.

⁶⁴⁴ Lambert, *Times*, 18 May 1969.

the programme supports this reading, in a section reflecting on the psychology of emotions and human needs. It offers extracts from Greene's *Pandosto* on jealousy, Hilaire Belloc on the life-long need for affection, and Bertrand Russell on the pessimistic nothingness beyond life. By setting the opening not in the Sicilian court but in the private domestic context of Mamillius' nursery, Nunn focuses on the individuality and the vulnerable humanity, rather than the royalty, of Leontes. Christopher Morley's costumes dress the royal characters 'in what approximated to Carnaby Street gear',⁶⁴⁵ stripping them of any evident status higher than hip members of Nunn's generation.

This complex, polyphonic pre-show with its hermeneutic reach into the body of the play, is the first in my study to have as purpose the presentation of a director's agenda that is more personal than Shakespearean: Nunn sets out to justify his own generation's break with the past, to reject the old guard and affirm the new, using the Shakespearean text as means to achieve his personal political aims. As Patricia Tatspaugh comments, the production 'bridged the gap between the world of the play and the restlessness of the 1960s',⁶⁴⁶ although the gap, as I have argued, is rather between that restlessness and the (perceived) complacency and cynicism of the older generation. Previous precocious directors had innovated and uncovered hitherto unseen possibilities in the plays, notably Komisarjevsky, Brook and Tony Richardson, but their primary purpose was to serve the text, to give a hitherto maligned or disregarded play a new playability. With Nunn the innovation is to use a well-respected text to serve his political agenda. The spinning man under the flickering lights is an every(young)man imprisoned by a psychological suppression deriving from his

⁶⁴⁵ Barber, *Telegraph*, 17 May 1969.

⁶⁴⁶ Tatspaugh (2002), pp.33-4.

repressed childhood; he will ultimately be released by the power of a redeeming love. He is an abstraction not so much of something central to the play as central to 1969, so newly celebrating throwing off sexual repression, illegal abortion, and deference to authority.

Nunn's staging of the Act 4 pastoral section as a rock-musical-within-the-play makes the connection complete, and it too has its commentary in the programme: alongside extracts from E.M.W. Tillyard and Sir Thomas Overbury on the virtues of the pastoral life is a piece by Stuart Hall explaining the Hippie philosophy of love from the 'Hippie alphabet', which resonates with Nunn's vision of *Winter's Tale*:

In the Hippie alphabet, Love stands for something wider and more inclusive than sex. It is a complex affirmation. It has a widening circle of resonances. First, it is a liberation from the repressive taboos of middle class life which surround sexual experience. Secondly, love stands for the physical and spiritual community between men and men. Thirdly, love stands for an inclusive and receptive tenderness to others, a sacred respect for personal relationships (in a world where personal relationships are fragile and contingent). Fourthly, there is the all-embracing love for mankind, naïve and vulnerable in its apparent simplicity, but transformed, in Hippie philosophy, into a sort of silent power.⁶⁴⁷

Nunn's *Winter's Tale*, then, represents something of a turning point in its use of a pre-show that is hermeneutically complex, integrated into the whole production, and setting an agenda that is in some ways parasitic on the text, rather than purely organic to it. Central to the theatrical means of its pre-show is the symbolic, non-naturalistic use of the actor's body,

⁶⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, quoted in programme.

taking its place alongside more conventional means such as lighting, costume and design.

From this point forward the pre-show appears regularly as a normal, even expected device in performance of a Shakespeare now liberated from the old verbal-textual constraints, set free to be put to contemporary use for the director's personal agenda.

Two recent appropriations of the contemporary

Two productions of the twenty-first century offer a view of how contemporary directors follow Nunn in appropriating Shakespeare plays to explore aspects of their own day. Lucy Bailey's *Midsummer Night's Dream* at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre (2002) and Frantic Assembly's touring *Othello* (2008, 2014) both used extended pre-shows to foreground their contemporary setting in ways that shocked and entertained, and in particular, offered no concession to 'traditional' or 'heritage' ideas of Shakespeare.

Bailey's *Dream* used a popular film aesthetic that dispelled any hint of tradition, beginning

with a bang. There is the sound of James Dean-style driving, a screech of tyres, the sound of a crash and shattering glass. As the smoke and dust clear, a woman clad in black leather is seen staggering down a road in the middle of a wood, pursued by a man. Hippolyta and Theseus are having a lovers' tiff. And no production of Shakespeare's play of love and transformations has ever begun in quite this way.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁸ Lyn Gardner, *Guardian*, 13 March 2002.

This 'interpolated sequence, as if before the opening credits',⁶⁴⁹ made audacious use of the theatre: 'Paul McEwan's Oberon vanquished Hilary Maclean's leather-catsuited Titania at the culmination of a pastiche 007 car-chase around the back of the Exchange's circular auditorium'.⁶⁵⁰ It offered a backstory, drawn from the embedded narrative in the opening dialogue:

...I wooed thee with my sword,

And won thy love doing thee injuries'⁶⁵¹

translated into the terms of action films of the 1950s and 60s in which romance flares – usually briefly – from the arousal of enmity and struggle for supremacy between impossibly skilled and beautiful men and women. The genre reference offers a ready shorthand for certain categories of character and situation, and promises the pleasure of high-speed action and thrilling surprise. Used in the theatre, rather than in the more familiar medium of film, this action draws attention to the liveness of theatre, and heightens the pleasure by its incongruity and excess. It also helps an audience, perhaps in particular an urban audience of the early twenty-first century, to feel secure that they will understand the action and be entertained.

Central to the production's startling modernity and a much remarked feature of this pre-show was the set by Rae Smith, which with its 'deserted B-road'⁶⁵² running 'right through the auditorium'⁶⁵³ ousted any sort of stylised fictional or theatrical play-world in favour of a

⁶⁴⁹ Dobson (2003) p. 264.

⁶⁵⁰ Dobson, p. 264.

⁶⁵¹ 1.1.16-17.

⁶⁵² John Peter, *Sunday Times*, 7 April 2002.

⁶⁵³ Dominic Cavendish, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2002.

starkly realistic contemporary Britain. It was a world shorn of beauty or idealism: for Dominic Cavendish it 'channel[led] dystopian modernity into the heart of the play',⁶⁵⁴ while Michael Dobson found it 'neither a post-modern empty space nor a would-be Elizabethan one, but a mimetic representation of a present-day disused stretch of road, still boasting a single streetlight, on the edge of scrubby woodland'.⁶⁵⁵ This set extended into the foyer, where, according to the production's education pack, its express pre-show purpose was to provoke a sense of inclusion and participation in the physical and emotional world of the production:

A road leads from the outside hall into the theatre, bringing on the actors and the action and somehow leading us, too, into the confusion of love, the dark, sometimes vicious, fascination of this play and reminding us that imagination has no boundaries.⁶⁵⁶

The emphasis on realism in this pre-show was central to Bailey's aim to tailor the production to Manchester: when she 'sat down to read the script ... with thoughts of how the play might take shape at the Royal Exchange Theatre, she was startled by the images and ideas that crackled from the lines', and concluded that it was 'not a play... of pretty fairies and wistful magic, but full of darker and more dangerous shadows that suddenly electrify and bristle with energy'.⁶⁵⁷ Dobson located the production's spirit in 'contemporary Mancunian life and contemporary mass art', and its setting 'in the disreputable hinterland between city and

⁶⁵⁴ Cavendish, *Daily Telegraph*.

⁶⁵⁵ Dobson (2003) p. 264.

⁶⁵⁶ 'MSND older student pack.pdf', found on 22 Feb 2013 at <http://www.royalexchange.co.uk/page.aspx?page=733&nId=89>, p. 7

⁶⁵⁷ 'MSND older student pack', p. 2.

country, [where] Bailey's cast were free to pick up, play with and discard the miscellaneous debris of popular culture.'⁶⁵⁸

Frantic Assembly's *Othello* began equally unexpectedly, with 'a ballet around, on and over a snooker table'⁶⁵⁹ in a set depicting a tacky pub. This pre-show dance clearly delivered both the embedded narrative of Othello's relationship with Desdemona and the contemporary setting: 'For the first ten minutes, there's no dialogue, just ear-piercing music',⁶⁶⁰ and a 'long wordless ... sequence, during which Othello gives Desdemona that all-important handkerchief [and] the men brandish their pool cues like weapons of intent while the three women strut provocatively about in their tight designer tracksuits'.⁶⁶¹ For Susannah Clapp the production was 'a triumph of narrative dance', the physicality and pumping soundtrack supporting the language, as the players 'snap into the verse as if it were a necessity, as if they suddenly had no alternative but to speak rather than dance. Northern-inflected, they make the most pungent expressions sound like something spat from the streets'.⁶⁶² Her response must have pleased the directors, Scott Graham and Stephen Hoggett, who told a features journalist that a Channel 4 documentary, 'Seven Sins of England' had been 'key' to their use of Shakespeare. "'People who exemplified modern sins, ... binge drinking, rudeness, sluttishness and so on – presented this beautiful, florid, archaic text in their own environment"'⁶⁶³.

⁶⁵⁸ Dobson (2003) p. 264.

⁶⁵⁹ Quentin Letts, *Daily Mail*, 7 Nov 2008.

⁶⁶⁰ Claire Allfree, *Metro*, 10 Nov 2008.

⁶⁶¹ Fiona Mountford, *Evening Standard*, 7 Nov 2008.

⁶⁶² Susannah Clapp, *Observer*, 9 Nov 2008.

⁶⁶³ James Jackson, 'Ere, are you looking at my Desdemona?', *Times*, 16 Sept, 2008.

Conclusion

I have found that the conceptual pre-show has developed remarkably from its beginnings in design. The 1960s cultural revolution that ended censorship and liberated the actor's body for expressive use opened a channel for ludic recombination and experimentation that increasingly brings the audience's world face-to-face with the plays' own, a topic I examine more fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: USING THE AUDIENCE

In this chapter I explore ways in which directors use the pre-show, first to change, then to exploit the relationship between the performance and the audience. Where the New Criticism had driven design-led pre-shows, drawing theatrical practice, and with it audience attention, toward interpretation of the classic text, this later movement engages with political and ideological theories of performance. Favouring non-naturalistic presentation, it aims to blur, and finally even to erase, the line between the onstage action and the real world outside the theatre. Theatrical innovation and radicalisation from Europe and beyond – Brecht, Grotowski, Boal – join similar cultural movements in Britain and Ireland, as directors with both international and regional popular and working-class theatrical experience are drawn into directing Shakespeare. This shift from textual focus to theatrical innovation and rediscovery generates a new playfulness and experimentation with the body of the actor, creating pre-shows that insist on audience awareness of the performance process and of their own relationship to the situations depicted in it.

A number of productions between 1970 and 1980 followed Trevor Nunn in presenting the actor at the opening of the performance in ways that undermined or denied his (and it was always male) functional identity with character by openly showing him *as* an actor before his transformation into character. Having established the actor as identical with himself first and foremost, a new development beginning in the late 1970s plays with his equivalence to the audience member, as directors seek to bring the audience ever closer to the play-world, to suggest, and finally to insist on, the spectator's implication in the onstage action, or some fundamental connection between the play-world and real world. The pre-shows I explore in

this chapter show directors playing increasingly with the live audience, both distinguishing it as 'live' in a world becoming saturated with screen performance, and insisting on its participation in the construction of the performance's range of meanings. The responses of reviewers show scholars and journalist critics increasingly ready to record both their mystification and their involvement and excitement at the challenge, although the tendency to 'protect' or champion 'the text' is still heard in the earlier years of this period.

The actor as actor

After Nunn's pre-show Vitruvian man⁶⁶⁴ directors begin to use the pre-show space to draw attention to the naturalistic acting body, that is, the body in its task of representing character, of being an actor playing the part of a character. When Nunn presented Barrie Ingham's body in the rotating box as an abstraction, representing the concept of humanism, he used the ludic space of the pre-show to separate the actor's body from its (provisional) identity with character. Indeed, at this period, after the 1956 and 1965 visits of the Berliner Ensemble to London, directors of Shakespeare are fascinated with the Brechtian presentation of the actor as actor, as embodying an abstraction or an idea of a character, and with the presence of metatheatricality in Shakespeare's plays. It seems to have taken time for this particular theatrical innovation to penetrate 'mainstream' production of Shakespeare,⁶⁶⁵ perhaps because the 1960s found more resonance for Shakespeare in the Kott-inspired political uses of the plays and the bareness of the Beckett-inspired aesthetic, and expressed these in pre-shows largely through design. In the 1970s there emerges a

⁶⁶⁴ See Chapter 5, pp. 220-232.

⁶⁶⁵ Christopher J. McCullough comments on differences among British theatres' staging of Brecht plays, noting that between 1933 and the late 1970s the subsidised and fringe theatres staged the overwhelming majority of Brecht productions that took place in Britain, while his work was all but ignored in the commercial theatre. See McCullough (1992), p. 122.

vogue for pre-show presentation of the actor displaying the artifice of performance, or in the process of transforming himself into role, of inducing what Cary Mazer calls 'one of the key features of the anti-illusionary Brechtian idiom: the audience's constant awareness of the actor as someone nonidentical to the role he or she is playing'.⁶⁶⁶ The pre-shows of this sort that I discuss are all RSC productions: Peter Brook's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970), John Barton's *Richard II* (1973) and *Hamlet* (1980) and Terry Hands' *Henry V* (1975).

At the beginning of this period, in 1970, the production that has entered the history books as a turning point in twentieth century Shakespearean performance, Peter Brook's *Midsummer Night's Dream*,⁶⁶⁷ put performance and theatricality strongly in the foreground. The production was remarkable for focusing its theatricality and symbolism in the bodies of its actors: Irving Wardle considered that it 'provides the greatest extension so far of the company's efforts to develop bodies as well as voices'.⁶⁶⁸ Brook, as Shomit Mitter argues, was an 'admirably astute assimilator... of other people's ideas and techniques', who 'wanted performances that could fluctuate deftly between conventions':⁶⁶⁹ here he draws on the work of Michel Saint-Denis, whose training studio in Stratford ran from 1962-5, the last of the line of his influential studios in France, London, the USA and Canada. Brook's production incorporated circus tricks and acrobatics as the medium for the fairy characters, combining

⁶⁶⁶ Mazer (2008), p. 135.

⁶⁶⁷ J.L. Styan calls it a 'landmark production' (1977), p.6, Michael Billington 'one of the most celebrated Shakespeare productions of modern times', (2007), p.175, and Colin Chambers 'arguably the RSC's most celebrated production' (2004), p.58.

⁶⁶⁸ Wardle, *Times*, 28 Aug 1970.

⁶⁶⁹ Mitter (1992), pp. 3, 4.

the 'real' and magical worlds, the earthbound and the airborne, making a place where it was 'natural ... for characters to fly'.⁶⁷⁰

Although the production had a short pre-show, the reviewers traced their first impressions to Sally Jacobs' empty white set, making it perform the sort of design-led pre-show function I discuss in the previous chapter. Jacobs' set drew precisely on Brook's formulation in *The Empty Space* published two years earlier:

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.⁶⁷¹

In J.C. Trewin's description the set prepares an expectancy for direct, real physical action rather than the mysteries or revelations of story-telling:

On that first night at Stratford the audience saw a set like a white-walled, bevelled cube, a bare empty space under a strong light. It might have been a cross between a gymnasium and a clinic.⁶⁷²

This openness then permeated the production: reviewers were struck by its freshness and freedom from time-worn conventions. Wardle found Brook's whole approach 'implicit in the bare white setting':

It is an empty canvas, a statement of the irreducible theatrical minimum, with which Brook returns once again to the beginning.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ Wardle, *Times*, 28 Aug 1970.

⁶⁷¹ Brook (1968), p. 11.

⁶⁷² Trewin (1972), p.247.

Nothing is mentioned of any pre-show, however, in preparing or introducing the production's effects, but rather the reviewers find these effects distributed through the whole production: Trewin felt that Brook 'examined the text of the comedy... as if it had come newly that day from the author's hand',⁶⁷⁴ and John Barber found the spectators' imaginations released 'from the tired chore of suspending disbelief in cardboard trees and gossamer wings made of muslin and wire'.⁶⁷⁵ Just one, Irving Wardle, traces Brook's concept back to an early moment, the entry of Theseus, who ventures 'into the dazzling light carrying one burning candle'. Wardle finds this 'an image of the potency of make-believe in the midst of surrounding reality'.⁶⁷⁶ It is a presentation that uses the same principle as in Nunn's *Winter's Tale*: the actor's plain body in an expressive gesture, set in an empty box.

Wardle traces the production's concept back to this entry of Theseus, but the promptbook for the production tour in 1972 shows that Theseus is handed the lighted candle by Philostrate at the end of a brief pre-show:

'Full company on at start of drums, juggling, tumbling, etc. Then all exit except The[seus], Hip[polyta], Lys[ander], Dem[etrius], and Phi[lostrate]. Company goes above on gallery level. Phi[lostrate] hands candle to The[seus]'.⁶⁷⁷

This pre-show makes a generalised intimation that *all* the actors are a sort of circus troupe capable of using their bodies in extraordinary ways, and that those not performing in a scene actively observe from the gallery above. These elements of circus, vertical use of space, and

⁶⁷³ Wardle, *Times*, 11 June 1971.

⁶⁷⁴ Trewin (1972), p.247.

⁶⁷⁵ John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Sep 1970.

⁶⁷⁶ Wardle, *Times*, 11 June 1971.

⁶⁷⁷ Loney (1974), p.7a.

integration of the different 'worlds', dominate the reviews. The pre-show, though visually and dynamically interesting, is purely introductory, like the key to a map showing how it is to be read, and once understood, of no intrinsic interest. Its fitness for purpose, however, is reflected in the ease with which critics such as J.C. Trewin found they slipped into the show's mode:

[Brook] asks us to use our imaginations. Once we do, it is easy. We accept every sudden efflorescence of invention from the moment that the company enters in its swirling cloaks.⁶⁷⁸

Those 'swirling cloaks' were, it turns out, a key element in the pre-show strategy. In a recent talk at the RST, Sally Jacobs confirmed that the ease of reading noted by Trewin was indeed the purpose of the pre-show. Late in rehearsals the company played the show to its assistant directors, among whom John Barton observed a need to initiate the audience into the production's 'alphabet', its 'language' of circus. He suggested that, rather than wait to fly in the elements of circus – the huge red feather of Titania's bed and the trapezes – these should be on display from the outset, and that the whole troupe should perform an introductory dance that would show their circus costumes beneath swirling cloaks. It appears that the swirling drew the eye to the costumes half-concealed beneath: they certainly caught Trewin's eye and he made the connection to the show's 'every sudden efflorescence of invention' as Barton intended. The idea then was not Brook's nor part of the original design, but found to be pragmatically necessary or desirable. Jacobs

⁶⁷⁸ J C Trewin, *Birmingham Post*, 28 Aug 1970.

commented that the amendment was ‘clever’ and clearly successful.⁶⁷⁹ It has some of the characteristics of the Brechtian alienation device, both ‘inhibiting the psychological processes of identification between actor and character’⁶⁸⁰ that Brecht sought, and guiding the audience in its use. But it has none of Brecht’s political purpose; its aim is purely theatrical, ‘all for... delight’, stripping away the cerebrality of ‘meaning’ and of conventions that have become tired and tiresome to replace them with the lightness and physicality of extraordinary bodies. Brook’s *Dream* is an interesting indication of a changing dynamic between performance and audience, in which experimentation and playfulness in rehearsal lead in unexpected or unplanned directions, both opening new non-literal levels of meaning and in doing so using spectators’ capacity to make meaning, or meaningful response, from non-verbal, purely theatrical presentation.

Brook’s Brechtian pre-show was conceived as a late addition to cue the audience into the production’s key concept, but John Barton, whose idea it was, built a much bolder pre-show display of actor-playing-a-role as cue to his production concept of alternating his two principal actors, Richard Pasco and Ian Richardson, as Richard and Bolingbroke in *Richard II* in 1973. Barton, however, seems to have pre-empted his pre-show by extending his ‘cue’ into the pre-show publicity, bringing the role-swapping to the notice of the theatre-going public, who were thus already forced to consider more than they usually might what sort of relationship exists between an actor and the character he or she plays. Where the main roles are switched for each performance, the artifice of acting and the skill required, areas of

⁶⁷⁹ Sally Jacobs, ‘Designing the Dream’, RST Sunday Talk, 4 Sept 2011.

⁶⁸⁰ Esslin (1966), p. 65.

a certain mystique to non-actors, effectively overtake the story itself as the focus of audience interest in the production.

Unsurprisingly, then, the alternating roles were the main focus of comment in reviews, prompting a variety of interpretative responses. At one level the interchangeability of roles offered the conceptual proposal that there was little to choose between the two characters, suggesting that their fates, values and symbolic stature are alike. On the other hand, the play itself presents the two characters as precise opposites of each other, moving in opposite directions in direct proportion, the one rising as the other falls. In Michael Billington's view, the production developed both the parallel and the opposition between the protagonists by showing each character undergo a similar but reverse transformation, Pasco's Richard from 'mercurial tyrant' to 'genuine dignity in defeat', and Richardson's Bolingbroke tracking counterwise from 'injured innocence' to 'guilty wreck'.⁶⁸¹ For Irving Wardle the concept affirmed Shakespeare's image in 'the "two buckets" speech',⁶⁸² showing the two characters to be 'fatal twins', '[u]tterly opposed in temperament' but 'forever bound together in fortune; each gaining and losing according to what he takes from the other'.⁶⁸³

The pre-show, then, rendered redundant by the advance publicity, was little remarked by reviewers, or, just as happened with Brook's *Dream*, it offered a transparent threshold pointing unproblematically to the concept it cued. It offered a signal of the 'fatal twins' concept, but more than this, it foregrounded the production's metatheatricality and use of Brechtian alienation in a mime where the actors arrived in rehearsal clothes and were

⁶⁸¹ Billington, *Guardian*, 11 Apr 1973.

⁶⁸² Wardle, *Times*, 11 Apr 1973.

⁶⁸³ Wardle, *Times*, 11 Apr 1973.

assigned their role and costumes for the night. Stanley Wells and James Stredder each made special studies of the production,⁶⁸⁴ to which I am indebted for my analysis. Wells' description of the set at the opening shows that design carried some of the pre-show semiotics. Simultaneously symbolic and explanatory, it signalled both 'the play's concerns' and 'the symbolic method by which they were to be presented', with a 'narrow, escalator-like structure... on each side of the stage' spanned by a bridge, and a central 'pyramid of golden steps' on which 'the King's robe, surmounted by a mask and a crown' hung on 'a kind of scarecrow'.⁶⁸⁵ His account of the opening action that followed shows first how the opening mime preceded the darkening of the auditorium, locating it outside the play's narrative, in a sort of temporal equivalent of Robert Weimann's spatial *platea*,⁶⁸⁶ and further, how clearly Barton intended to convey the theme of performance by a ritual display of the playwright, playbook and costumes:

Before the house lights dimmed there appeared a figure resembling Shakespeare, carrying a book resembling the First Folio... He contemplated the robed scarecrow, opened the book, and signalled for the appearance of the actors. They filed on in two columns, one headed by Ian Richardson, the other by Richard Pasco. They all wore rehearsal costume. The leaders of the company joined Shakespeare at the dais, each holding one side of the book. Shakespeare mounted the pyramid, took from the scarecrow the crown and the mask, and placed them on the open book. The two actors held the crown and mask high between them; Shakespeare bowed to the

⁶⁸⁴ See Wells (1977), Stredder (1976).

⁶⁸⁵ Wells (1977), p. 66.

⁶⁸⁶ See Weimann (1978), especially pp. 73-84; (1988); (2000)

actor who was to play Richard at that performance, and gradually the actors took on their costumes and wigs, in view of the audience, assuming the appearance of the characters they were to play.⁶⁸⁷

At this point, by a simple theatrical sleight, the dual identity of actor/role doubles again as role/king, slipping from the actor's performance as the character Richard to the character's performance as King Richard:

The robing of Richard was a kind of coronation ritual; the court knelt to him, chanting words not in the text: 'God save the King! Long live the King! May the King live forever!' Richard faced the audience, echoed 'May the King live forever!' and removed his mask.⁶⁸⁸

The audience is compelled to notice the slip from watching a performance to entering the world of the play, a Brechtian alienation effect that presents the theme and its metatheatricality in the pre-show, before allowing any immersion in the story. The responses of reviewers show how readily this pre-show purpose was understood, and assimilated into the body of the production. For Billington the 'deliberately stylised pageant in which we are constantly reminded of the theatrical framework' presented the 'key' to the production: 'the Shakespearean parallel between actor and king'. He found that Pasco's Richard 'ravenously seizes every opportunity for flamboyant show', and that '[i]n true Brechtian tradition we are always reminded we are simply watching a play'.⁶⁸⁹ This is not merely a director's conceit of keeping the artifice of performance continuously visible, but of

⁶⁸⁷ Wells (1977), pp. 75-6.

⁶⁸⁸ Wells (1977), pp. 76.

⁶⁸⁹ Billington, *Guardian*, 6 Apr 1973

finding the play's essential nature in that artifice, including, according to John Peter, through the 'mannered' delivery of its 'mannered language', giving a new insight into what the play itself might 'mean':

The result is a revelation. You realise that past attempts at naturalism have quite missed the point. What the play needs is our old friend the 'alienation effect'. The characters do not impersonate grief or anger; they display formal signs of it.⁶⁹⁰

For Peter, Barton's production 'peels off encrusted layers of convention from the play', giving 'not so much a sense of a new interpretation but of discovering Shakespeare's intentions'.⁶⁹¹

The responses of the journalist reviewers show this section of the audience, at least, receptive to, and excited by, innovations in Shakespearean production that deploy the non-naturalistic, overtly theatrical techniques that were beginning to distinguish performance from academic study. Barton's concept clearly opens their eyes to aspects of the text that they knew cerebrally, but now found conveyed somatically, extending their ideas of what performance can achieve. J.W. Lambert finds a new subtlety of expressiveness in comparing the small differences between the two players:

Merely to say that Pasco and Richardson alternate... is nothing. What gives this exchange its depth and fascination is that they do not simply play each role in their own way; given a few tiny variations they play each role in exactly the same way – with the same reactions, the same business. But their individuality is in no way

⁶⁹⁰ John Peter, 'Peeling off the layers', *TES*, 27 Sep 1974.

⁶⁹¹ Peter, 'Peeling off the layers'.

undermined; it is focussed, channelled, not splurged in 'self-expression,' and from their near-identical actions emerge utterly different characters.⁶⁹²

John Peter similarly finds new, paradoxical insight into subtextual levels of meaning in what appears on the surface to be stylised:

A speech of ceremonious submission, declaimed with all the gestures of allegiance but in a tone of carefully veiled anger, invests both text and character with a new richness.⁶⁹³

Some academic reviewers and commentators, however, are scathing about Barton's use of heightened theatricality. Robert Speaight in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, while appreciating what he saw as Barton's point that the play is 'about kingship before it is ... about those competing for the crown', felt that 'the same idea could have been conveyed in a straightforward historical production, which might have been none the worse for challenging tradition less stridently'.⁶⁹⁴ His alienation is clear, both as emotional detachment and as seeing directly to the political point:

The play was stated before it was performed. Actors in a kind of plain, subfusc, Elizabethan uniform stood or sat in rows, [and] walked now and again on stilts to emphasize the pressures of feudal power,

but Speaight confesses that although 'the stylization of method, and monochrome of décor and costumes, left the spectator free from the distractions of the picturesque... one

⁶⁹² J W Lambert 'Crowning glories', *Sunday Times*, 22 Sep 1974.

⁶⁹³ Peter, 'Peeling off the layers'.

⁶⁹⁴ Speaight (1973), p. 400.

occasionally missed its pleasures'.⁶⁹⁵ Helen Gardner, writing about 'Shakespeare in the Director's Theatre' almost a decade after this production, recalls it as the one that 'best illustrates the various means by which a Director can reduce a beautiful and moving play to a mere theatrical entertainment by imposing on it a simple, rigorous conception of the play's theme and structure, and psychological interpretation of its central character'.⁶⁹⁶ For Gardner the foregrounding of role-playing in the production was a device 'to make Richard consistent psychologically' as 'childishly theatrical', and had to be applied also to Bolingbroke merely 'to make Bolingbroke balance him':

Both actors had to perform the difficult feat of acting persons who were only acting, and so not to be taken seriously.⁶⁹⁷

The opening was simply to give

the note of pure make-believe, in accordance with the fashionable belief that, as art is an illusion, the audience need to be reminded of this by the destruction of the illusion.⁶⁹⁸

Only Peter Thomson, writing in *Shakespeare Survey*, sees that theatre's task differs importantly from academic analysis. Regretting the recently growing 'breach between universities and the theatre' and the prevalent view that 'The greater the director..., the greater the danger that he will rival rather than serve Shakespeare's text',⁶⁹⁹ he warns fellow-scholars not to 'test what is done on stage against their habitual view of what *should*

⁶⁹⁵ Speaight (1973), p. 400.

⁶⁹⁶ Gardner (1982), p. 73.

⁶⁹⁷ Gardner (1982), p. 75.

⁶⁹⁸ Gardner (1982), p. 75.

⁶⁹⁹ Thomson (1974) p. 143.

be done'.⁷⁰⁰ In his view, although 'it would be easy to make... Barton's production... sound gimmicky and gratuitously theatrical, merely by listing some of its ingredients', it 'was *not* gimmicky. On the contrary, it was the passionately sensed and consistently argued presentation of a vision'.⁷⁰¹

The conceptual supremacy of the abstraction, 'kingship', over particular individuals, 'those competing for the crown', seems not to have been at the centre of Barton's original conception for the pre-show, which focused rather on theatricality alone. James Stredder's study offers insight into the process of devising the opening mime, showing that Barton first planned the onstage allocation of roles and the donning of costume, but that the need for a controlling figure then arose. His ideas ranged over various possible off-stage centres of theatrical power – 'an Elizabethan prompter, the Lord Chamberlain, even himself (as the play's Director)' – before deciding on an authority figure who embodied both the theatre and the originator of the play's abstract theme: 'the figure of Shakespeare contemplating the idea of kingship'.⁷⁰² With Shakespeare came the use of the Folio-like book, which Barton still planned to use as symbol of *theatre*, but as the symbolic possibilities began to proliferate, a process of refinement was required:

Originally Barton planned to remind the audience of this Elizabethan players motif during the play: the book Shakespeare held at the beginning, for example, was to have been consulted by the actors as their text, but the idea was not retained. The book, in fact, became a somewhat unmanageable device,

⁷⁰⁰ Thomson (1974) p. 144.

⁷⁰¹ Thomson (1974) p. 152.

⁷⁰² Stredder (1976), p. 30.

because it attracted such a variety of ideas for its use (for example as bible, chronicle, law book etc), some of which remained in the production. Richard, for example, in the first speech of the play used the book to check the names of Hereford and Mowbray.⁷⁰³

Stredder's point here demonstrates one of the problems of the symbolic pre-show: symbolic proliferation. This becomes particularly acute where the acting body is added to design in the director's symbolic armoury. Brechtian devices applied to Shakespeare can invite ridicule and the charge of redundancy, as Speaight shows in his comment on the pair of stairways that looked like escalators:

They did not move, and it was only rarely that anyone moved up or down them. They served, however, to facilitate the descent of an inconvenient bridge representing the battlements of Flint Castle... One reflected that the upper level of the Elizabethan stage would have solved the problem far more neatly.⁷⁰⁴

The director seems to have seen Speaight's point. When this production moved from Stratford to London, the design underwent considerable refinement and simplification, with removal of the staircase and bridge, and instead of the scarecrow, 'a golden cloak hung high above the stage as a sun symbol',⁷⁰⁵ leaving the acting bodies to make the main conceptual point.

⁷⁰³ Stredder (1976), p. 30.

⁷⁰⁴ Speaight (1973), p. 400.

⁷⁰⁵ Wells (1977), p. 66.

Barton's *Richard II*, then, stages a pre-show whose semiotic force is centred in the bodies of its actors, as prelude to a strongly conceptualised production that divides scholarly reviewers from those more theatrically aware. As cueing device it supplies too many signs and undergoes some necessary simplification in the course of its run. It is notable that when Barton presents another Brechtian production that highlights the artifice of performance, his *Hamlet* of 1980, he strips the pre-show cue down to a minimum. Before then, however, his colleague, Terry Hands, makes extended use of the actor-as-actor device at the opening of his *Henry V* in 1975, the pre-show Jean-Marie Maguin defined as the 'Once upon a time' of the performance.⁷⁰⁶

Where Barton had his actors arrive in rehearsal clothes and change into costume as the staged event of the pre-show, Terry Hands in his *Henry V* in 1975 had the company onstage in rehearsal clothes as the audience arrived. This time the journalist reviewers paid the opening full attention, giving a detailed and colourful picture of the pre-show action, set, and audience response, and providing me with my only material for this pre-show as the promptbook records nothing of it. They found the cast 'standing about wearing track suits, jeans, and sneakers'⁷⁰⁷ or 'glumly sitting about the place':⁷⁰⁸ their physical demeanour – their bodily performance – belonged with their off-duty clothing rather than with the play-world. To emphasise the unpolished state of the performance the stage was 'ostentatiously bare'⁷⁰⁹ and the actors apparently far from ready for their roles: Nicholas de Jongh picks out 'a bishop in a blue track suit and the king in gym shoes and late twentieth century

⁷⁰⁶ See Chapter 1, p 26.

⁷⁰⁷ Herbert Kretzmer, *Daily Express*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷⁰⁸ Nicholas de Jongh, *Guardian*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷⁰⁹ De Jongh, *Guardian*, 9 Apr 1975.

trousers’;⁷¹⁰ Jack Tinker notes that ‘King Harry, in a sloppy sweater and specs, had more the appearance of a candidate for the National Union of Students presidency than the thrones of England and France’.⁷¹¹ Clearly effort was put into performing that state of unreadiness, but David Chapman questioned whether the audience understood the conceptual point, couching his doubt in the context of their expectation for this particular play: ‘whilst the cast eyes the puzzled audience taking its seats, the audience eyes the cast, wondering just what Hands has done to this normally regal production’ [sic].⁷¹²

Foregrounding the production’s theatricality by showing sub-standard resources is of course one of the play’s celebrated themes, voiced by its Chorus, a figure that lends itself to presentation in modern dress. As presenter of the production, making apology for its inadequacies, showing the spectators how to use their imaginations, then accompanying them with interpretative comments as the show progresses, the Chorus belongs in the same time-space as the audience, readily signalled by dressing him in clothes they might wear themselves. The choice of casual contemporary clothes for the Chorus had also been made fifteen years earlier, in 1960 at the Old Vic. In that production John Neville dressed his Chorus, John Stride, according to *The Times*, in ‘a raincoat over jeans and an open-necked shirt’,⁷¹³ bringing him onto a stage ‘bared to its back wall’ with, in uncompromising display of the basic theatre environment, a huge ‘No Smoking’ sign beside ‘something that looks like an elegant French window left over from *What Every Woman Knows*’.⁷¹⁴ Hands, however, develops the casual clothing and under-prepared performance considerably further. Not

⁷¹⁰ De Jongh, *Guardian*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷¹¹ Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷¹² David Chapman, *Express and Star*, *Wolverhampton*, 10 Apr 75.

⁷¹³ Anon, *Times*, 1 June 1960.

⁷¹⁴ *Times*, 1 June 1960.

only is the whole cast in its rehearsal clothes, but they start the play itself without getting dressed up:

On an empty stage the actors, wearing the casual sweater, track-suits and jeans of a rehearsal, unselfconsciously declaimed the Bard's opening scenes.⁷¹⁵

Any anticipated heroics are thus insistently withheld, with the intention, it seems, of focusing the audience's minds on the implications of the Chorus's words, deferring the entry into the play-world. Committed use of Brechtian effects, however, does not always work as envisioned. For Milton Shulman the intended effect risked backfiring if the audience could not make sense of it:

Those unfamiliar with the play would have found it impossible to sort out a Canterbury in brown velvet slacks from a Henry in a heavy black sweater⁷¹⁶

and Peter Thomson in *Shakespeare Survey* made the same point, commenting that Hands's

interpolated lines were not sufficient to advise an unknowing audience that the two first actors were the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely.⁷¹⁷

The journalist reviewers' responses were mixed, and reflect both an expectation of something rousing in this play, and a certain weariness with theatrical innovation as applied to Shakespeare, perhaps especially when recognising, and dismissing, 'a bit of left-over Brecht'.⁷¹⁸ Many reviewers were unsettled by the effect, finding the opening gambit

⁷¹⁵ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷¹⁶ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷¹⁷ Thomson (1976), p. 156.

⁷¹⁸ F.W.D., *Oxford Times*, 11 Apr 75.

‘daunting’⁷¹⁹ or ‘awkward’;⁷²⁰ J.C. Trewin saw no purpose of any sort in it and gave Hands a school-masterish ticking off for indulging himself with such an opening, the production’s ‘only silliness’:

There is no excuse for this, or for letting Emrys James’s Chorus wear casual jacket and corduroy throughout.⁷²¹

Many enjoyed the opportunity to comment on the current parlous state of the economy, suggesting the lack of costume might be ‘a dig at the RSC’s unfortunate financial predicament’,⁷²² or ‘the ultimate appeal to the Arts Council and the Chancellor’.⁷²³ For Nicholas de Jongh, [I]ittle could more powerfully have suggested a theatrical future when no money was available for costumes or sets’.⁷²⁴

However, a few were impressed by Hands’s concept. Frank Marcus felt at once that

Excitement mounted. Were we really going to have to exercise our imaginations, as the author intended?⁷²⁵

and recognised that Hands intended a theatrical challenge: the effect when costumes were finally donned was ‘not unlike that of the Noh Theatre’.⁷²⁶ For Marcus the pre-show clearly cued into Alan Howard’s portrayal of Henry: ‘Here was an actor playing a man playing a king:

⁷¹⁹ B.A. Young, *Financial Times*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷²⁰ Don Chapman, *Oxford Mail*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷²¹ J.C. Trewin, *Birmingham Post*, 10 Apr 1975.

⁷²² David Chapman, *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 10 Apr 1975.

⁷²³ W. Stephen Gilbert, *Plays and Players*, June 1975, p.22.

⁷²⁴ Nicholas de Jongh, *Guardian*, 9 Apr 1975.

⁷²⁵ Frank Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 Apr 1975.

⁷²⁶ Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 Apr 1975.

an exercise in introspection'.⁷²⁷ Harold Hobson recognised the unfitness for the mid 1970s of the play's 'pageantry', 'shining armour' and 'banners', with which 'today ... we are instinctively unsympathetic'. For Hobson, *Hands* 'has dealt with our imperfect sympathy by an invention as daring as it is brilliant', a deliberate ploy to warm the audience up for the action to come, to make them crave some colour and hence grasp something of the difference between political and theatrical uses of spectacle:

He begins the performance by putting his cast into sweaters, football gear and jeans: and then at the precise moment when the audience is utterly weary of this drabness he changes them into costumes that illumine the theatre.⁷²⁸

W. Stephen Gilbert also responded to the theatricality of *Hands*'s concept, finding it dynamic and colourful in itself, an invitation to a popular entertainment that points up the ironic social distance between actor and role while also hinting at the labour involved in the actor's work. For him 'the first scene is a rehearsal': not only is the cast in active clothing, but they do 'a bit of pondering here, a touch of calisthenics there', while the pair playing *Canterbury* and *Ely* – Derek Smith and Trevor Peacock – are 'a potential music hall double-act', and the lead actor, Alan Howard, 'a king in modern motley'.⁷²⁹ Dismissing suggestions of parsimony or 'Beckettian extremity', Gilbert finds that *Hands* has 'let the muse of fire invade his production gradually as if our imaginations have summoned costumes, props, business,

⁷²⁷ Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 Apr 1975.

⁷²⁸ Harold Hobson, *Sunday Times*, 13 Apr 1975.

⁷²⁹ W. Stephen Gilbert, *Plays and Players*, June 1975, p.22.

visual grace and power'.⁷³⁰ Moreover, the very lack of a set or a sense of finish effectively demonstrated the performative power of Brook's concept of the 'Empty Space':

In the opening tableaux [sic] – casual, static – all emphasis is thrown on the text. A single gesture becomes momentous.⁷³¹

Ultimately, when the time comes for costume and scenery,

our imaginations, as it were, summon a real prop, the gold casket. Soon we hear a sennet, a gorgeous canopy is unfurled, a vast cannon hauled on and the low comics appear in costumes of grey, brown and white, with the splash of colour in Pistol's hat trimmings suggesting the splendour that will follow.⁷³²

For some reviewers, then, this pre-show, with its extension into the early part of the play, supports the Chorus's demand that the spectator contribute imaginatively to the play, but ultimately even these enthusiasts require the reward of the boisterous theatricality that replaces it. Brechtian effects are all very well for a while, but their austerity does not lead to a war-sceptical political reading of the play; rather it ensures that the colour and excitement of war comes as welcome relief. For Herbert Kretzmer this splendour is still the point of *Henry V*, 'a reminder of national greatness', and, despite starting 'deceptively and discouragingly', this 'is a gutsy, reviving production at a time of national adversity. And, boy, do we need it'.⁷³³ Among the scholarly reviewers, Robert Speaight makes the same judgement of the production's political stance, finding no Brechtian cue in the opening. For

⁷³⁰ W. Stephen Gilbert, *Plays and Players*, June 1975, p.22.

⁷³¹ W. Stephen Gilbert, *Plays and Players*, June 1975, p.22.

⁷³² W. Stephen Gilbert, *Plays and Players*, June 1975, p.22.

⁷³³ Herbert Kretzmer, *Daily Express*, 9 Apr 1975.

him 'A Chorus in modern dress... was an excellent idea, but I could not understand why the opening scene should be similarly costumed', and Alan Howard's Henry 'showed one every facet of Shakespeare's patriot King, and silenced for the time being any doubts about the morality of that war of aggression'.⁷³⁴

If Hands's withholding of theatrical splendour was most appreciated for highlighting its value when it finally appears, John Barton took a tougher Brechtian line with his *Hamlet* in 1980, beginning in 'rehearsal' conditions and repeatedly emphasising performance and role-play, refusing any final entry through a fourth wall into delightful illusion. The opening set by Ralph Koltai provided the key for most of the reviewers. In Irving Wardle's account it was not so much a set as 'a stage: a raised timber platform flanked by benches for spectators, and rehearsal lights illuminating a background area containing a property basket, a thundersheet and all the other equipment necessary for the night's events'.⁷³⁵ Other reviewers' descriptions are similar, adding further details of the necessary equipment, a disjointed, synecdochic collection of the play's key images that displays the whole laid out at a glance: 'a table for the swords, a huge draped suit of armour for people to hide behind',⁷³⁶ 'candle-sticks, a royal goblet'.⁷³⁷ Prominent in these accounts are the raised 'stage upon a stage'⁷³⁸ and the naked light bulbs that are generally understood to denote rehearsal.

The overtly theatrical pre-show action that ensues is brief, offering just enough to signal the theme, as with Barton's suggestion for the display of clown costume at the start of Brook's

⁷³⁴ Speaight (1976) p. 20.

⁷³⁵ Wardle, *Times*, 3 July 1980.

⁷³⁶ Billington, *Guardian*, 3 July 1980.

⁷³⁷ Moore (1981), p. 404.

⁷³⁸ Robert Cushman, *Observer*, 6 July 1980.

Dream. With the theme established in the set design, Barton now brings in the actor to act the part of an actor assuming his role, just as he had done at the beginning of *Richard II*:

[A]t the start, Francisco appeared upstage, getting ready for his entry rather than on patrol.⁷³⁹

Robert Cushman finds the departure point of this role-play in the onstage donning of costume, which recalls the way Pasco and Richardson dressed for their assigned roles at the beginning of *Richard II*:

[T]he first man on collects his helmet, cloak and spear before our eyes - gets into character, in fact - before embarking on sentry-go.⁷⁴⁰

This is the totality of the pre-show action. As with *Richard II*, a simple theatrical device denotes the switch from self-conscious performance mode to play mode, in this case, a change of lighting, clearly indicated in the promptbook and described by Roger Warren:

[T]he performance proper began with a sudden change from rehearsal lighting to stage lighting at Barnardo's 'Who's there?'⁷⁴¹

For Wardle the switching device came when Marcellus arrived 'drawing on a glove', suggesting he was just finishing costuming-up, at which point 'the lights narrow focus', Marcellus 'flings open a downstage trap and up clanks Raymond Westwell's exceptionally solid Ghost to the watchers' wholly believable amazement'. The moment clearly had a forceful impact, helping to delineate the switch from outside the play to inside: Wardle

⁷³⁹ Warren (1981), p. 151.

⁷⁴⁰ Cushman, *Observer*, 6 July 1980.

⁷⁴¹ Warren (1981), p. 151.

comments that he has 'rarely seen a stage heat up so fast'.⁷⁴² In fact the promptbook shows that Wardle conflates two separate moments at the opening, giving an interesting illustration of the tricks played by memory in audience response: it is not the Ghost who enters from a downstage trap but Francisco and Barnardo simultaneously from two adjacent traps, making the opening exchange tense with the shock of their sudden banging open. Marcellus and Horatio enter 9 lines later – 4 of the longer lines are cut, making the beginning, as Wardle notes, exceptionally fast, and further extensive cuts bring the Ghost's entry (downstage right) very quickly thereafter.

Although this switch into the play-world came quickly after the opening, the reviews show that the production kept an 'alienating' theatricality constantly in view. The naked light bulb from the opening reappeared for the Players' arrival, and at the end 'when Hamlet finally performs his part and kills the king',⁷⁴³ drawing together the beginning, middle and end to form a framework of overt theatricality.

Wardle considers that Barton 'lays his cards on the table' with his opening, as he proceeds to '[ransack] the text for disguisings and routines, ... always allowing the spectator a full view of the concrete instruments that create the sense of illusion'.⁷⁴⁴ Among these instruments was the body and identity of the actor. Warren found the acting generally understated in a "'neutral" approach' to character that avoided 'conjuring up any "world" other than that of the stage itself'.⁷⁴⁵ J.C. Trewin, hoping for something more memorable – he was 'collecting' 'great' Hamlets – found the opening 'oddly matter-of-fact', and Michael Pennington's

⁷⁴² Wardle, *Times*, 3 July 1980.

⁷⁴³ Warren (1981), p. 151.

⁷⁴⁴ Wardle, *Times*, 3 July 1980.

⁷⁴⁵ Warren (1981), p. 152.

performance of Hamlet ‘unstrained, civilized acting’ that one would hardly ‘recall in years ahead’.⁷⁴⁶ The use of space was stylised to focus attention on important monologues, and perhaps to offer the audience a model of careful listening: according to Don D. Moore, ‘whenever an actor had any speech of length, centre stage was his alone while the other actors sat on the benches and listened attentively’.⁷⁴⁷ A different stylisation left centre stage unoccupied during ‘significant dialogue’, when ‘the actors often remained on the benches talking back and forth’⁷⁴⁸ or ‘philosophized across wide open space as if they had no part in the events.’⁷⁴⁹ Wardle’s word ‘philosophized’ suggests the distanced, neutral effect identified by Warren. The strangeness of this literal distancing effect is clear in Moore’s examples of episodes that were played via these cross-stage dialogues: Polonius ordering Ophelia to avoid Hamlet, and Claudius planning the deadly duel with Laertes. Moore also describes moments when this refusal of dramatic naturalism resulted in an extraordinary passivity, even disengagement: the court ‘patiently watched Ophelia take the centre to sing of St. Valentine’s Day’, Hamlet and Horatio sat on the bench for the gravedigger’s song, and the Ghost ‘took a seat to watch Hamlet berate Gertrude’.⁷⁵⁰

The scenes with the Players participated in the same understated theatricality. The Players themselves seemed intended to mirror Barton’s own cast. Roger Warren found them ‘sober, unextravagant professionals’, ‘dignified and accomplished’, who ‘avoid[ed] the extremes of ranting and naturalism’. They too were shown switching between performance and non-performance mode, and ‘making unconcealed use of artifice’:

⁷⁴⁶ J.C. Trewin (1980), p. 165.

⁷⁴⁷ Moore (1981), p. 404.

⁷⁴⁸ Moore (1981), p. 404.

⁷⁴⁹ Wardle, *Times*, 3 July 1980.

⁷⁵⁰ Moore (1981), p. 404.

Aeneas' tale to Dido was at first quiet and measured; as it grew more intense, the other Players added external 'effects', rattling the thunder-sheet and building to a climax by wailing Hecuba's 'instant burst of clamour', cut off as the First Player ended the speech but held the mood, until, at Polonius's comment, he smiled and switched off the performance, to Polonius's laughing admiration.⁷⁵¹

Irving Wardle also was struck by the 'conspicuous modesty' of the First Player's speech, and felt that during the play scene itself the Players had 'taken Hamlet's advice to heart: they are speaking with the voice of nature'.⁷⁵² However, this 'modesty of nature' was overstepped in one important respect, to throw into relief the Danish court with its melodrama of fratricide, usurpation and revenge: Wardle felt that in the Mousetrap scene '[t]heatre and life uncannily change places, ... the courtiers are the actors, guilty creatures acting in a play'.⁷⁵³ Pennington's Hamlet seemed to Cushman to be working on his role, 'keen to get his own performance right', and delivering 'the pep-talk to the players without looking at them; he is really giving notes to himself'.⁷⁵⁴ At moments of heightened tension histrionics threatened to break his 'modesty of nature': Moore found Hamlet's 'striking of Ophelia and other momentary flashes of emotion seemed surprising to us and sometimes to him';⁷⁵⁵ Warren noted his 'increasingly abusive interruptions' and 'frenzied rattling of the thunder-sheet' as the play approached the climactic walk-out;⁷⁵⁶ and for Billington, Hamlet seemed to regard 'killing a king as melodramatic excess':

⁷⁵¹ Warren (1981), p. 152.

⁷⁵² Wardle, *Times*, 3 July 1980.

⁷⁵³ Wardle, *Times*, 3 July 1980.

⁷⁵⁴ Cushman, *Observer*, 6 July 1980.

⁷⁵⁵ Moore (1981), p. 404.

⁷⁵⁶ Warren (1981), p. 152.

"Now could I drink hot blood," he cries lasciviously fingering his sword like a Marlovian hero. But then he instantly checks what he sees as a fatal tendency to lapse into old-fashioned bombast.⁷⁵⁷

Here then was a very brief pre-show using the actor's body to foreground the principal theme of the production: the artifice of acting. As with Barton's pre-show to Brook's *Dream*, its very brevity seems to have made the point more successfully than Hands's elaboration of the same theme that opened his *Henry V*. More experimental, however, was the working out of the theme in the main body of the production, undercutting the mimetic force of some of the play's key scenes by favouring a Brechtian distancing that some reviewers found alienating in the 'lay' sense of the word. The reviewer who made most satisfying sense of this production, Roger Warren, took the pre-show as a directorial 'key', cueing the spectator in to the production's mode of signification.

As a group these three productions of Barton and Hands use the same pre-show strategy – the actor preparing to switch into role – to play with the boundary between the world of the spectator and that of the play. Their purpose is broadly the same in each case: to cue the audience into the theme of theatre and acting which the production then develops, just as Brook's whirling clowns cued circus. The reviewers show widespread resistance to such play where it extends beyond the most brief introductory moments, and impatience with innovation in itself, but the most interesting responses explore the theatrical effects and the conceptual ideas generated. The directors too make adjustments and discoveries, making this a time of dynamic experimentation and of changing relationships between audience and

⁷⁵⁷ Billington, *Guardian*, 3 July 1980.

performers. One final step in this experimental direction is to start before the actor even arrives for work, before he slips into his role as an actor.

The actor as audience member: Michael Bogdanov's *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1978

In many ways Bogdanov's *Taming of the Shrew* with its pre-show marks the culmination of the development of the symbolic acting body in this period. Brook's whirling clowns showing the style of the performance about to begin were mediators between the real and fictional worlds. Barton's interchangeable Richard and Bolingbroke, and then Hands's whole cast, began as actors in the 'real' world of the audience, and transformed themselves into their respective fictional figures. These 'acting' actors remained figures of the performance, and their 'common' status as citizens of the real world served to highlight the transformative skill of their work in the presentation of the play's action. With Bogdanov's production of *The Taming of the Shrew* the actor in the 'real' world begins among the audience, and is indistinguishable from them, and this makes the political force of his dual appearance apply not simply within the play, but equally in the real world to which he belonged with the audience. His behaviour among them replicated the behaviour about to be depicted, and thus asked the audience to consider its continued presence in contemporary society.

In Michael Billington's picturesque account of this pre-show,

A surly yobbo starts a row with an usherette in the front stalls. 'I'm not having any bloody woman telling me what to do,' he cries. He then scrambles drunkenly on to the Stratford stage pulling down bannisters, and toppling pillars like some berserk Samson.

Lights explode; the stage fills with harassed backstage staff; and gullible patrons start making for the exit to call the police.⁷⁵⁸

This 'stunning *coup de théâtre*'⁷⁵⁹ struck the critics on two different levels. Jonathan Pryce's behaviour as unruly interloper was heart-stoppingly convincing, but more immediate was Chris Dyer's rather anomalous set, which made the first impact for the arriving audience, because it implied a very different sort of production, indeed was possibly, for 'spectators of the old school',

a sight for sore eyes. There is, regrettably, no curtain, but there is everything else: plywood pilasters, wobbly loggias, a perspective street scene framing a beefy classical statue.⁷⁶⁰

Dennis Kennedy, from the historical perspective of his book written some two decades after this production, describes it as 'a setting... that would have seemed proper in sixteenth-century Italy, taken almost directly from Serlio's example of the correct and decorous design for comedy'.⁷⁶¹ For the more sceptical contemporary reviewer, however, it was

one of those tacky, pastel-flavoured, Italian Renaissance confections, complete with proscenium arch, we used to associate with touring-company Shakespeare.⁷⁶²

Clearly it did not attempt to be anything other than a 'cheap and pretentious set',⁷⁶³ and indeed was carefully designed for choreographed destruction: the windows strategically cut

⁷⁵⁸ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁵⁹ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁶⁰ Irving Wardle, *Times*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁶¹ Kennedy (2001), p. 1.

⁷⁶² Schoenbaum (1984), p. 138.

⁷⁶³ J.C. Trewin (1979), p.153.

out of the falling flats ensured that Pryce 'remained unscathed'.⁷⁶⁴ Once demolished, what was left was 'the bare back and side walls of the stage, with an elaborate metal scaffolding in front',⁷⁶⁵ whose stark modernity struck Billington as 'a combination of the west wing at San Quentin and Paddington Station',⁷⁶⁶ and Wardle, more acidly, as 'the usual open spaces of this company's house style'.⁷⁶⁷

The differences between contemporary views and later assessments are instructive. Looked at as historical event, this active use of design in the pre-show presented the production as the work of Bogdanov the '*enfant terrible* of British theatre':⁷⁶⁸ it symbolised the stand-off between the traditionalists and the radicals, by offering 'a view of what it might have been but deliberately was not',⁷⁶⁹ and suggesting the violent replacement of pictorialism with the uncompromisingly stark emptiness of post-Brechtian theatre. In Dennis Kennedy's retrospective analysis:

the strategy required the audience to deconstruct the visual text in their minds, for in order to understand the meaning of the production it was necessary to understand the oppositional meaning of the two sets. The scenography, therefore, was a visualization of Brecht's 'Not...but' process: not then but now, not illusion but truth, not painted perspective but hard iron railings, not Serlio but Dyer.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁴ Kennedy (2001), p. 2.

⁷⁶⁵ Kennedy (2001), p. 3.

⁷⁶⁶ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁶⁷ Irving Wardle, *Times*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁶⁸ Kennedy (2001), p. 1.

⁷⁶⁹ Kennedy (2001), p. 3.

⁷⁷⁰ Kennedy (2001), p. 3.

However, such smart reading of Bogdanov's symbolic intention was not much in evidence at the time, to judge by the reviews, which were either directly or indirectly hostile, or joyously excited, but not evidently awakened to new theatrical subtlety. J.C Trewin's response is a flat, factual description of the event that seems, if anything, to approve of Pryce's destructive behaviour:

[A] noisy personage in front of the stalls was heard to argue rudely with a program-seller. Presently he leapt upon the stage and started, with enthusiasm, to tear down a cheap and pretentious set that had certainly seemed out of tune with Stratford methods. The one-man demolition squad proved to be Christopher Sly. When he had finished his work nothing remained but a familiar RSC acting space.⁷⁷¹

The fact that the fracas in the stalls proved to be part of the performance seems not to interest him, and the elements of drunkenness and sexism are not mentioned. He seems, in fact, not to be engaged in meaning-making at this pre-show stage at all, dismissing it rather impatiently:

At the beginning, once the set had been destroyed *and the play could proceed*, the hunting party threw a fox's pelt over Sly, who soon became the night's principal huntsman.⁷⁷²

For Trewin the hunt motif is the point of the production, intended 'presumably...to italicise the cruelty of the narrative', and underlined rather unnecessarily at the end, when 'the

⁷⁷¹ Trewin (1979), p. 153.

⁷⁷² Trewin (1979), p. 153, my emphasis.

horns were heard again to ensure that we had taken the point.’⁷⁷³ Wardle was also disappointed in the purpose implied, or the lack of it: he felt unceremoniously ‘dumpe[d]’ back in the unpleasantly empty set, with no evident theatrical justification beyond that of giving Pryce ‘the chance to play both Sly and Petruchio’, a transition that ‘does not make much sense’⁷⁷⁴ to this sense-seeking reviewer. Billington appreciated the ‘ingenious way’ the opening ‘pluck[ed] Christopher Sly... from the audience on to the stage’, but he found theatricality ill-served by the wild opening because, quite simply, ‘it also proves a hard act to follow’.⁷⁷⁵ Those readier for pure fun, however, saw the chaos as an end in itself and were bored later when the ‘message’ got serious. J.W. Velz thought the pre-show served to allow an ‘anything goes’ aesthetic, a ‘wild romp sometimes more reminiscent of “*Hellzapoppin*” than Shakespeare’s play,’⁷⁷⁶ but ‘there were dreadfully slow moments in Act V’.⁷⁷⁷ James S. Bost, reviewing the production’s revival the following year, relished the ‘mayhem’ by which Bogdanov ‘merrily exploded’ traditional Shakespeare ‘into the twentieth century’, acknowledging merely that ‘the purist may understandably object’:

They've been tearing down the scenery at the Aldwych throughout the summer of 1979. Statuary has been toppled, baskets of flowers have been hurled into the wings, flats have fallen on and through actors, painted drops have crumpled to the floor, and Juliet-styled balconies have plunged crazily to their demise. Add to this the sound of

⁷⁷³ Trewin (1979), p. 154.

⁷⁷⁴ Wardle, *Times*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁷⁵ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁷⁶ Velz (1978), p. 102.

⁷⁷⁷ Velz (1978), pp. 102-3.

sirens, the whirling red lights of police wagons, and actors running amuck, and you have the most glorious opening to hit the West End since *Oh, Calcutta!*⁷⁷⁸

The violence of the pre-show sequence, although theatrically provocative and iconoclastic, also on the political or social level pointed to the misogynistic attitude of its perpetrator, performed in Pryce's persona of audience member as he abused the woman ostensibly trying to control his behaviour into the appropriate format for respectable British theatre-going. In other words, its significance lay not simply in what the actor *did*, but in what he *embodied*: endemic and violent sexism, the central theme of the production. The reviewers readily agreed that the pre-show made 'the play's relevance plain',⁷⁷⁹ accurately pre-figuring Bogdanov's intention to confront *Shrew* as 'an ugly play',⁷⁸⁰ to show it up as 'barbaric and disgusting' rather than 'softening its harsh edges like most recent directors'.⁷⁸¹ Indeed, in the body of the play itself, Bogdanov developed the cruelty of Kate's treatment at Petruchio's hands to an acute degree. Billington found his 'sheer brutality almost unbearable', and for Wardle Pryce's performance was so 'alarming' that 'direct physical violence comes almost as a relief': 'what really rivets the tension is the fear of what he may do next'. For Schoenbaum the production suggested that 'Bogdanov despised the play for its sexist values',⁷⁸² a view that reached a climax in Kate's submission speech, delivered, according to Velz, with such 'solemn seriousness' that Petruchio was suddenly ashamed and 'move[d] uncomfortably and respectfully away when she trie[d] to kiss his foot'.⁷⁸³

Billington's view of this moment is more nuanced: for him Paula Dionisotti's 'tart, stabbing

⁷⁷⁸ Bost (1980), pp. 123, 122.

⁷⁷⁹ Warren (1980), p. 201.

⁷⁸⁰ Wardle, *Times*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁸¹ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁸² Schoenbaum (1984) p. 139.

⁷⁸³ Velz (1978), p. 103.

irony' in the submission speech while Pryce 'shame-facedly grinds his cigar butt and runs his fingers through his hair' showed Bogdanov's concept at last paying 'handsome dividends' in 'the best interpretation of this scene I remember', although 'one has to wade through a lot of wife-beating to get to it'.⁷⁸⁴ In Schoenbaum's view, however, any such dividends were forced, not won:

What Bogdanov is up to has the character of a manifesto... [W]hat troubled me most was the combination of brutality with soft-core sentiment. Petruchio's change of heart lacks any preparation. It is rather like the last-minute conversion at the end of an eighteenth-century sentimental comedy; this *Shrew* is less razzle-dazzle with-it than Bogdanov would have us believe.⁷⁸⁵

Here, then, was a director refusing to collude with the prevailing view of Shakespeare as national genius, beyond reproach or tampering; in the headquarters of bardolatry, Bogdanov's pre-show set an unbeliever among the worshippers to preach a new, perhaps forced but uncompromising message for its own time, rather than that of the fiction.

This examination of one of the period's most memorable pre-shows reveals how performance of Shakespeare changes alongside changes in expectations of theatre in the wider culture. Trewin's review, written very soon after the performance, has no tools as yet to consider the meaning projected forward onto the production by its opening business, but he is alert to symbolic intentions in the director's choices, and inclined to distrust them or be bored by too obvious an emphasis. The hermeneutics of performance remains firmly within

⁷⁸⁴ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1978.

⁷⁸⁵ Schoenbaum (1984) p. 139.

the bounds of the play-world, so that the signifier 'hunting' maps onto the signified 'cruelty of the narrative'. Kennedy is writing more than a decade after the performance he describes, and with a historian's eye rather than a reviewer's. For him, the impact of all that lies beyond the text, including the history of scenography, theatrical styles and norms, and the attitudes and behaviour of the audience spectating, contribute to the meaning-making process. The hermeneutics of performance has spilled out beyond the play-world, and interest now lies strongly in what the play can be made to say to the culture in which it is performed.

Involving the audience

In the development of the pre-show use of the acting body to convey meaning, the relationship between stage and auditorium, performer and spectator, has undergone profound change. Impatience with the separation between these two sectors, the active and the (apparently) passive, has been a constant element throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first as theatre practitioners have sought to challenge, stimulate, disturb and jolt their clients into taking some of the responsibility for the meaning and experience generated during performance, and hence for the significance of the *production* (as distinct from the *play*) in its cultural context. Audiences have been required to go beyond merely 'watching, vicariously though empathetically, the experience of the characters'⁷⁸⁶ telling the play's story: they have had to learn to read symbolic and theatrical meaning in bodily action, and to sustain the dual awareness of actor and character, performance and play. With the surreptitious arrival of the performer among the spectators, as one of them, the audience is

⁷⁸⁶ Mazer (1998-9), unpaginated

no longer sheltered behind an invisible dividing line from the fictional action, but suddenly, unwittingly *participating* in that action. As the alarmed responses of some audience members to Jonathan Pryce's anti-social behaviour show, the meaning readable in the acting body shifts from the vicarious and empathetic to the visceral and personal, from outside the spectator to inside. It is a small step then to make the spectator an actor.

There are two possible means of using the body of the spectator to convey meaning to the spectator: one is to make them pseudo-actors in the drama and observed by their fellow spectators, the other draws them in as unwitting actors within the dramatic action and experiencing the events from the inside, as participants rather than observers. These uses of spectators are related to the early work of Jerzy Grotowski, whose experiments in 'Poor Theatre' sought to transgress 'accepted stereotypes' such as previously fixed notions of the separateness of actor and audience, and to vary performance-audience relationships as much as possible. Among his possible variants:

The actors can play among the spectators, directly contacting the audience and giving it a passive role in the drama ... Or the actors may build structures among the spectators and thus include them in the architecture of action, subjecting them to a sense of the pressure and congestion and limitation of space.⁷⁸⁷

In the pre-shows I discuss now, John Caird and Silviu Purcarete adopt the first of these variants, bringing their actors among the spectators, Peter Hall attempts something like the second variant, making a section of his audience part of the action. Max Stafford-Clark and Adrian Jackson bring their spectators without warning among the actors before the show

⁷⁸⁷ Grotowski et al. (1967) p. 63.

begins, making them fully active, rather than passive, participants in the action. For the sake of chronology I alter the order of these three variants, dealing with Hall's first.

The audience as actors: Peter Hall's *Coriolanus*, 1984

In the Thatcher years of cut-backs in subsidies for the arts Sir Peter Hall, wanting a Roman crowd on stage for *Coriolanus*, hit on the idea of using a section of the ready-made crowd sitting in the auditorium. He would seat some of the audience on the stage to use as a mob when the action required. The idea was innovative: the presence onstage of terraced seating occupied by ordinary audience members represented at the time a radical departure from normal practice, although Hall, with unabashed pragmatism, considered there was a precedent that made his idea 'faithful to the spirit of the Elizabethan original, recalling... the theatrical tradition of providing stage seats for the aristocracy, ... observed until Garrick's renovations in the mid- eighteenth century'.⁷⁸⁸ Despite the work of Grotowski, Hall's experiment is strictly utilitarian, not avant-garde.

The onstage presence of bodies that were clearly not actors was among the first impressions made as spectators arrived. Their everyday clothing struck reviewers as having influenced the choice of costume design, not without some jarring. Stephen Wall felt that 'The professional players['] ... everyday clothes ... [allow] them to mingle with the amateurs from the terraces without too much sense of discrepancy',⁷⁸⁹ but Irving Wardle found that the 'aggressive combination of Roman and modern dress... takes some swallowing'.⁷⁹⁰ For aficionados of Hall's directorial style this opening was inconsistent: Wardle felt that

⁷⁸⁸ Bedford (1992) p. 42.

⁷⁸⁹ Stephen Wall, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 Dec 1984.

⁷⁹⁰ Wardle, *Times*, 17 Dec 1984.

‘Followers of Hall’s classic work’ would be surprised to find the ‘spectators are getting a piece of the action’, and Kenneth Hurren commented that Hall was ‘fl[ying] recklessly in the teeth of his expressed view that modern dress in Shakespeare creates more problems than it solves’.⁷⁹¹

Hall’s intention in using the paying public onstage seems to have been to provide a genuine crowd when required without using theatre resources, and to aim at a sort of theatrical ‘authenticity’: of effect (by having a crowd), and of class (by selecting, by ticket-price, a proletarian public as his crowd). Kristina Bedford, who made a special study of the production from its first rehearsals onwards, explains Hall’s rationale:

[T]he audience viewing the production from promenade seats are ... an integral part of the director’s vision of the play; Hall did not wish to overburden the stage with a crew of extras, but felt that certain scenes would be enhanced by occurring within the context of a crowd. Hence the decision to construct a series of stands to either side of the inner circle, in order to house those spectators who come down onto the central playing area when so instructed by the actors. ... [T]he promenade seats are sold at a reduced rate, thus attracting a broader cross-section of society into the theatre.⁷⁹²

Bedford felt that the use of the onstage audience was ‘most effective in the opening sequence’, and that its effect was made by their behaviour and directed interaction with the professional actors onstage, establishing ‘the requisite atmosphere of uncertainty and civil discord long before the first words are spoken’.⁷⁹³ The promptbook⁷⁹⁴ list of pre-show

⁷⁹¹ Kenneth Hurren, *Mail on Sunday*, 23 December 1984.

⁷⁹² Bedford (1992), pp. 42-3.

⁷⁹³ Bedford (1992), p. 46.

actions shows how it depicts elements of a public demonstration, at first in a fairly stable way as if setting up, but becoming more dynamic and threatening as the signal for start-time. The 'audience and company' begin to 'collect on stage' around 20 minutes before the starting time. Thus the citizens are 'on stage before [the] start of [the] play mingling with [the] audience'. A sound cue is instructed 'to be running for 10 min[utes] before [the] show'. This sound, not explained in the promptbook, seems to have included 'the wail of sirens'⁷⁹⁵ and 'shouts and alarms punctuated by intermittent bursts of gunfire'.⁷⁹⁶ Three actor citizens are 'handing out leaflets', two are 'carrying placards', one carries a 'union banner' and one 'sprays [a] door with "Corn at our own price"'. Towards lights up [one] strikes [the] placard to the s[tage] l[eft] corner'. The actor playing the soldier is 'on [the] ramparts watching [the] crowd'. At starting time the first citizen picks up a 'sack of weapons' that has been lying on the stage, and the citizens '[cross] to him [and] pick out [a] weapon'. The soldier on the ramparts exits at this point. On line 4 ('Citizens: "Resolved, resolved"') the sound cue is instructed to stop at the same moment as a light cue (not described, but a change of lighting) and a cue for a large torch to 'flash... at [the] company... from backstage', suggesting gunfire explosions somewhere off stage.

Although Bedford felt this opening sequence was effective in presenting 'all the ingredients of a modern demonstration... in this single image, which translates the Renaissance riot into a recognizably twentieth-century event',⁷⁹⁷ this optimistic assessment is not replicated in the 'Diary of the Rehearsal Process' which makes up the second half of Bedford's book. Hall's

⁷⁹⁴ Promptbook in National Theatre archive, London.

⁷⁹⁵ Michael Coveney, *Financial Times*, 17 Dec 1984.

⁷⁹⁶ Bedford (1992), p. 46.

⁷⁹⁷ Bedford (1992), p. 46.

envisaged use of spectators encountered some unexpected setbacks. The audience on the first run-through in the theatre was confused about 'when to sit down', some going back to the stands before they were meant to. Their sheer numbers seem to have come as a surprise, resulting in a 'massive crowd on stage' mingling with the actors, making the 'sightlines ...somewhat chaotic'⁷⁹⁸ – an outcome that would surely have excited Grotowski but was not at all what Hall had in mind. There were still similar difficulties of audience control as late as the third preview performance. Hall found it necessary to cut the number of scenes in which the crowd participated, making a final reduction as late as 21st February, some two months into the run, from an initially planned eight to just three scenes – the opening rebellion (1.1), the trial (3.3) and the assassination (5.6).⁷⁹⁹ On the other hand, perhaps with some wishful thinking, Bedford felt that 'some initial embarrassment' among the stage audience added a certain authenticity, working 'for, not against the actors, as during any riot there is a key group of movers and a large body of those who don't know why they are there or what is going on'.⁸⁰⁰

The presence of ordinary members of the public on stage, however, served to point up the acute differences in appearance, demeanour, and behaviour between actors and non-actors, exposing theatrical naturalism as far more illusory than Hall, at least, apparently expected. For Alan Dessen, 'these temporary "actors" were not professionals, so that the kind of onstage decorum we take for granted in the good production was always at risk'.⁸⁰¹ A Jonathan Pryce can merge convincingly with a theatre audience, but Hall's theatre audience

⁷⁹⁸ Bedford (1992), p. 264.

⁷⁹⁹ See Bedford (1992), pp. 43-44.

⁸⁰⁰ Bedford (1992), p. 295.

⁸⁰¹ Dessen (1987), p. 5.

‘never for a second look more than patrons of the National Theatre doing the backstage tour’.⁸⁰² For many reviewers, what Bedford found reflective of reality in their ‘initial embarrassment’ simply failed in the focal glare of the theatre. G.M. Pearce found that while ‘some reluctant participants... may have added a touch of realism’, they ‘were awkward to the point of being conspicuous and distracting’.⁸⁰³ Michael Ratcliffe’s language pinpoints the inadequacy of scale in the spectators’ behaviour: they ‘shuffle forward’ and then ‘shuffle back to their seats’, their movements and projected attitudes simply too small for the demands of the dramatic context, prompting him to ask, ‘Was the intention to say that the people were so wet, so indifferent, so dim?’⁸⁰⁴ For other reviewers this inadequacy of scale included the audience’s bourgeois accoutrements and self-effacing anonymity, suggesting the pricing policy failed to attract the expected proletarian element. ‘Tweed skirts and zip-up jackets’,⁸⁰⁵ ‘handbags’ and ‘programmes’,⁸⁰⁶ together with self-conscious exposure to the gaze of others, gifted to reviewers the opportunity for witty simile: they looked like ‘a coachload of tourists’,⁸⁰⁷ ‘shoppers at a bargain counter’,⁸⁰⁸ ‘a demonstration in a Home Counties village against a proposed motorway’.⁸⁰⁹

To some extent the production divided opinion among reviewers. Bedford reports that ‘The debate on the relative value of the stage audience’s contribution raged among critics, theatregoers and members of the company alike for over two months’.⁸¹⁰ Some reviewers admired Hall’s political concept and were able to overlook, or to look beyond, any infelicities

⁸⁰² Michael Ratcliffe, *Observer*, 23 Dec 1984.

⁸⁰³ Pearce (1985), p. 94.

⁸⁰⁴ Michael Ratcliffe, *Observer*, 23 Dec 1984.

⁸⁰⁵ Irving Wardle, *Times*, 17 Dec 1984.

⁸⁰⁶ Shrimpton (1987), p. 191; Francis King, *Sunday Telegraph*, 23 Dec 1984.

⁸⁰⁷ Shrimpton (1987), p. 191.

⁸⁰⁸ Benedict Nightingale, *New York Times*, 6 Jan 1985.

⁸⁰⁹ Francis King, *Sunday Telegraph*, 23 Dec 1984.

⁸¹⁰ Bedford (1992), p. 44.

of theatrical naturalism. Michael Coveney found the '90 paying customers... who bolster the crowd... generally, rather excitingly, part of the action'.⁸¹¹ For Michael Billington the crowd of spectators 'Not only ... help to fill the stage. They also underline Hall's message', which for Billington is thoroughly moral and politically balanced:

The brute power of a Coriolanus leads to autocracy. But popular demagogues are equally proud, vengeful and manipulative. Good government finally depends on compromise.⁸¹²

Clive Hirschhorn similarly found Hall's production an ideal 'middle' between political extremes,⁸¹³ and Peter Hepple commended Hall for finding an 'ambivalen[ce] ... in keeping with our times', correcting a Marxist view of the play that had prevailed '[s]ince Brecht got hold of it in the 1950s'.⁸¹⁴

Hall's experiment with using audience members as acting bodies in a pre-show, then, had some success at the level of the production concept, helping to perform aspects of the play's political parallels with the production's own time, but finding in the process that the acting bodies of spectators 'off the street'⁸¹⁵ exert their own influence on production decisions, and possess their own unruly semiotic force that sits aslant the production's own. When subsequent directors incorporate spectators in the introductory action they make very different choices about the role in which they cast them.

⁸¹¹ Michael Coveney, *Financial Times*, 17 Dec 1984.

⁸¹² Billington, *Guardian*, 17 Dec 1984.

⁸¹³ Clive Hirschhorn, *Sunday Express*, 23 Dec 1984.

⁸¹⁴ Peter Hepple, *The Stage*, 28 Dec 1984.

⁸¹⁵ See Shrimpton (1987), p. 191; Dessen (1987), p. 5.

The actors among the audience: John Caird's *As You Like It*, 1989

Like Bogdanov's *Shrew*, John Caird's *As You Like It* merged the auditorium and stage worlds for the arriving audience. Like that *Shrew* it also divided critical opinion, in ways that show with unusual clarity how attention to the pre-show may crucially affect reception of a performance. In Robert Smallwood's account, 'One had to arrive exceptionally early not to find most of the cast onstage when one entered the theatre, dancing to music of the 1930s, mostly South American rhythms'.⁸¹⁶ During this pre-show arrival period, cast members, front-of-house staff, Duke Frederick and a group of 'baboon-like, gum-chewing security men with dark glasses and walkie-talkies'⁸¹⁷ moved freely between auditorium and stage, and some of the dancers 'wore the uniforms of ushers and usherettes [so that] one was unsure whether they pursued their ushering profession at Duke Frederick's court or the Royal Shakespeare Theatre'.⁸¹⁸ For Smallwood this pre-show activity defined the production's concept:

Boundaries between playing areas and auditorium were indiscernible: 'all the world's a stage.' The girl we were later to recognize as Rosalind danced with one of the court/theatre ushers; her companion (Celia) with a frail-looking court butler, later to emerge as Adam.⁸¹⁹

The set, designed by Ultz, pointed in exhaustive detail to the same idea, 'reproduc[ing] the thirties decor of the public areas of the theatre itself, the art deco marquetry panelling, chaises longues, and lamps of the dress circle bar, the huge silver-figured clock of the foyer

⁸¹⁶ Smallwood (1990), p. 491.

⁸¹⁷ John Peter, *Sunday Times*, 17 Sept 1989.

⁸¹⁸ Smallwood, p. 491.

⁸¹⁹ Smallwood, p. 491.

showing the correct time and dominating the stage in the middle of the panelling below the proscenium arch'.⁸²⁰ Audiences could be in no doubt that their world was being mirrored onstage.

Although the fictional world of the stage and the real one of the theatre were blended in this pre-show, there was no sense as there was with Bogdanov's *Shrew* that this involved the audience in any personal alarm or embarrassing confusion. Spectators remained spectators, *watching* rather than participating: the 'confusion about where the real world ended and the stage world began' was 'carefully engineered',⁸²¹ a puzzle to be worked out, perhaps, requiring an audience *gestalt* rather than their momentary fear of the show's collapse. Smallwood's account shows him engaging in the process, fitting the various elements of the performance into the explicit theatricality of the concept, elements such as the extensive doubling: in Arden all the characters except Orlando became transformations of their previous selves: 'Clifford Rose doubled both dukes; his armed bodyguard [became] ... the deer-slaying foresters; ... Le Beau, master of the dancing ceremonies,... Jaques',⁸²² and so on. There was just one moment when the audience were required to take a role, and had to decide whether to be inside the performance or remain outside looking in:

For the wrestling scene there was a grand processional entry down the central aisle of the stalls, to a pompous ducal anthem, the armed bodyguard threateningly requiring

⁸²⁰ Smallwood, p. 491.

⁸²¹ Smallwood, p. 492.

⁸²² Smallwood, pp. 491, 492.

the theatre audience to stand as Duke Frederick took his seat in the royal box (situated in the dress circle slips).⁸²³

It seems the audience was 'remarkably obedient to this demand', but of the few who stayed seated, Smallwood rather optimistically remarks that this 'did not necessarily mean failure of response to the production: it might also signal an involvement so deep that one could not allow oneself to stand for the usurper'.⁸²⁴ The Forest of Arden had little to do with trees, but was staged as a sort of deconstruction of Duke Frederick's court, Duke Senior's party making their first entrance by breaking through the stage floorboards to reveal a sort of forest floor beneath, and progressively dismantling the floor plank by plank 'in a process of transition and revelation' throughout the first half. Rosalind entered the forest by pushing against the panelling, breaking the great clock in two, thus effecting a kind of magical escape from the tyrannical court, and ensuring that there would be 'no clock in the forest'. Apart from some reservations about comic excess in the second half, Smallwood ultimately found intelligence and coherence in the production, and saw a line of progression from the stiffly formal pre-opening dance to the 'uninhibited energy and freedom' of the final wedding dance.⁸²⁵

Peter Holland, reviewing the same production in *Shakespeare Survey*, makes no mention of the opening activity. The first action he covers is the wrestling match, which he describes, in tones that suggest the contempt for popular spectacle prevalent much earlier in the century, as conforming to a sort of moronic theatrical trendiness:

⁸²³ Smallwood, pp. 491-2.

⁸²⁴ Smallwood, p. 492.

⁸²⁵ Smallwood, p. 492.

Audiences have grown accustomed now to seeing the [wrestling] contest blown up into a farrago with all the theatrical showiness of the television form. This time was no exception. I should have known what to expect when Duke Ferdinand's entry was accompanied by the playing of a fake national anthem with the audience encouraged to stand respectfully. Most of the audience meekly did what they were told and I was made to feel unduly curmudgeonly for sitting firmly in my place. For the fight itself some of the cast joined the audience in the stalls and shouted encouraging suggestions like 'Give him a good kicking' or 'Go on, Charlie-boy', suggestions designed to encourage not the wrestlers but the audience.⁸²⁶

Holland, unlike Smallwood, refuses pointedly to engage in the playfulness offered. For him the production fatally lacked coherence, but instead tried 'vainly... to cover up a lack of intelligent thinking about the play', offering only 'a succession of cheap theatrical clichés'. The overacting that for Smallwood pointed to the production's overt theatricality is faulted by Holland as a series of 'tedious devices', and the doubling of roles is conveyed simply as objective fact without suggestion of meaning, although his illustrative details offer added insight when placed alongside Smallwood's reading:

The production used numerous doubles between the two courts including the Dukes themselves (Clifford Rose). The whole world seemed a show put on for his benefit; indeed, at times he took a seat in the front of the stalls to watch the parade of folly, leaping back onto the stage... for instance... to help Touchstone get married.⁸²⁷

⁸²⁶ Holland (1991), p. 161.

⁸²⁷ Holland, pp. 162-3.

Where Smallwood found a stimulating connecting idea, Holland sees only 'endless, meaningless elaboration'. For him, the real-time clock too predictably 'warned those who knew the play that there was to be no clock in the forest', and allowed 'those who were bored to calculate exactly how long the play had been running'. Where Smallwood found the gradual removal of the stage flooring contributed to the stage-reality metaphor, for Holland 'Duke Senior and his co-mates... arrived from the cellarage by breaking up the stage floor and spending a disproportionate length of time stacking it on the side of the stage'. By seeing only the literal unmediated by any symbolic possibility, Holland effectively refuses to do the audience's work, to let his 'imaginary forces' be worked on in the service of making meaning. Partly this is a matter of his familiarity with the play and his over-exposure to certain comic devices, but I suggest that in part his disgust arises from his discounting, or perhaps arriving too late to see, the preliminary action out of which Smallwood constructed a coherent concept.

The actors among the audience: Silviu Purcarete's *Tempest*, 1995

The Romanian director, Silviu Purcarete, made sure that his audience saw and participated in the pre-show to his *Tempest*, by casting them as unwitting subjects to a usurping king. His touring production at Nottingham Playhouse in 1995⁸²⁸ began in the foyer among the gathering spectators. '[T]he King of Naples in his wheelchair'⁸²⁹ and 'the usurping lords travelling from the Carthage wedding'⁸³⁰ 'process through the theatre's bars and lobbies,

⁸²⁸ A joint production: Nottingham Playhouse and Theatr Clwyd in collaboration with Hebbel-Theatre, Berlin. See <http://www.desingel.be/en/programme/theatre/5655/Nottingham-Playhouse-Silviu-Purcarete-The-Tempest>

⁸²⁹ Ian Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*, 18 Oct 1995.

⁸³⁰ Michael Coveney, *Observer*, 17 Sept 1995.

assembling at the doors of the auditorium'.⁸³¹ Meanwhile the audience is held back like a crowd at a Royal Progress, permitted to enter only after the 'royal' party has processed through. Purcarete's idea seems to be that the audience first experiences at close range the autocratic presence of the usurping King and his party, both to prepare them for the story Prospero will tell Miranda in the second scene – an 'embedded' narrative often seen as problematic in performance and perhaps helped by pre-show depiction⁸³² – and to 'induct' them into the world of the play: as the audience find themselves 'usurped' in their role of spectators, the proper inhabitants of the auditorium, and having to give precedence unexpectedly to a group of actors 'lording' it over them, they may feel for themselves something of the outrage visited on Prospero.

They are inducted also into the play's setting. As they pass from the foyer into the auditorium the social division between audience and actors set up in the foyer is suddenly dispelled as the spectators and the usurping king and lords alike find themselves in a sea-changed world. The storm, conveyed by sound and music, breaks just as the lords make their entry: an initial 'crash' followed by 'slow chords' which, for Alix MacSweeney, 'immediately suggest the controlling mind, and warn us that things are not what they seem'.⁸³³ The scene introduces the atmospheric use of light and sound that is deployed throughout the production, creating a sense of ethereality noted in many of the reviews. Paul Taylor describes the play-world as 'compulsively watchable, mysterious and music-haunted',⁸³⁴ and for Michael Coveney the stage is 'bathed in shafts of light and swim[ming]

⁸³¹ Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*.

⁸³² See Chapter 4, pp. 111ff., on embedded narratives.

⁸³³ Alix MacSweeney, *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 Oct 1995.

⁸³⁴ Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 19 Sept 1995.

in an atmosphere of aqueous whisperings'.⁸³⁵ The royal party participate in the sense of wonder thus created, adding to it in their turn by the incongruity of their costume and demeanour: as the storm plays out, the 'group of bowler-hatted city gents, white fans a-flutter, with Alonso in a wheelchair, proceed very slowly left to right, unperturbed, spellbound, while the words of the opening scene are heard in a slowed down, monotonous, amplified whisper'.⁸³⁶

The threshold from foyer to auditorium is thus a gateway into a magical world with its own normality and range of possibilities, somewhat akin to Peter Brook's circus-world in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Purcarete's audience enters the auditorium, their experience necessarily varies depending on how quickly they follow the 'royal' party, but a feature noted by most reviewers is the mysterious delivery of the opening dialogue, not by the sailors and travelling royalty, but by a voiced-over Ariel: it is his 'disembodied voice' that, according to Robin Thornber, 'takes the audience to their seats',⁸³⁷ and that Michael Coveney recalls '[breathing] the first dialogue ... along the sound system intercut with ... songs'.⁸³⁸ In Ian Shuttleworth's account, the entering audience 'find the tempest itself in full spate: a bare, sparsely lit stage, occasional eerie blares of music and the boatswain's lines being whispered to an empty stage by an invisible Ariel'.⁸³⁹

Having Alonso, Antonio and the rest looking on as their opening words are spoken by Ariel gives an early suggestion of the controlling mind and observing eye, even the script-writing pen, of the as-yet-unseen Prospero: the tempest and the arrival of the shipwreck victims are

⁸³⁵ Coveney, *Observer*.

⁸³⁶ MacSweeney, *Times Literary Supplement*

⁸³⁷ Robin Thornber, *Guardian*, 12 Sept 1995.

⁸³⁸ Coveney, *Observer*.

⁸³⁹ Ian Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*, 18 Oct 1995.

‘his volition, his imagining’.⁸⁴⁰ This staging of the first scene prepares the audience both for the magician’s use of Ariel’s aerial powers, and for Purcarete’s bodiless depiction of Ariel throughout: he remains invisible, ‘a voice-over’,⁸⁴¹ whose ‘whispery taped contributions are a literal case of “his master’s voice”’,⁸⁴² since it is Michael Fitzgerald’s Prospero who ‘utters Ariel’s lines on tape’.⁸⁴³ Thus not only is Ariel insubstantial, but he is also an emanation of, and a conduit for, Prospero’s art, becoming a mouthpiece for the roles Prospero has prepared for the shipwrecked party. This double remove of the speaking voice from the agent of the speech is underlined by the ‘slowed down, monotonous, amplified whisper’ of the taped voice, creating an ‘atmosphere of trance, dream, hallucination’ that ‘charges all that follows’.⁸⁴⁴

Having no body, he takes instead a musical form. According to Michael Coveney he is represented ‘by seven musicians in powdered wigs playing violins and cellos’,⁸⁴⁵ or, more disconcertingly in Alix MacSweeney’s account, by ‘a shuffling bunch of bewigged masked flunkies who play fragmentary snatches of Mozart in a repetitive and nightmarish dislocation’.⁸⁴⁶ According to Jeremy Kingston, there are ‘anything between five and ten Ariels on stage at a time, misshapen, masked, bubble-haired manikins, resembling the creatures that lurk in the corners of a Beardsley drawing’.⁸⁴⁷ The set itself participates in the musical representation of Ariel’s element: his music ‘hums through a multiplied stave of

⁸⁴⁰ MacSweeney, *Times Literary Supplement*

⁸⁴¹ Robert Butler, *Independent*, 31 Mar 1996.

⁸⁴² Taylor, *Independent*.

⁸⁴³ Coveney, *Observer*.

⁸⁴⁴ MacSweeney *Times Literary Supplement*.

⁸⁴⁵ Coveney, *Observer*.

⁸⁴⁶ MacSweeney, *Times Literary Supplement*.

⁸⁴⁷ Jeremy Kingston, *Times*, 12 Sept 1995

steel wires'⁸⁴⁸ that '[stretch] over the stage'⁸⁴⁹ and 'catch the light to form patterns of notes on a score' in a 'visual equivalent of an Aeolian harp'.⁸⁵⁰

Purcarete's involvement of the audience at the pre-show, pre-auditorium stage, then, is a process of initiation into a particular, stable society, one ruled by a tyrant, at a moment just before it undergoes a transition that will destabilise it and alter it irrevocably. The audience is captured before it has quite become an audience and made to experience the sea-change simultaneously with the tyrant and his party. The alternative rules of physics that apply in the strange new world of Prospero's island do not need explanation so much as simply observation and acceptance. In contrast to Hall's onstage audience, that is the end of their role in the performance: delivered over the threshold into the world of the play, they take no further part but become simply spectators – experiencers – of the show.

The audience in the action: two promenade performances

Max Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint theatre company similarly involved the audience in an initial inductive experience at the opening of *Macbeth* which toured nationally and internationally in 2004-5. Like Purcarete, Stafford-Clark aimed to give spectators a taste of life in a dictatorial regime, but where Purcarete's *Tempest* proved ultimately magical and benign, and the audience were allowed to become enchanted spectators, Stafford-Clark's *Macbeth* grew increasingly sinister and terrifying, and his audience were never allowed to relax into simple spectation, but repeatedly made to take part in the play's events, almost to become 'Spect-Actors' as Augusto Boal sought to do in his 'Theatre of the Oppressed',

⁸⁴⁸ Coveney, *Observer*.

⁸⁴⁹ Taylor, *Independent*.

⁸⁵⁰ MacSweeney, *Times Literary Supplement*.

although the political action implicitly required of them was beyond, rather than during, the performance.⁸⁵¹

Stafford-Clark's audience involvement began, like Purcarete's, in the theatre foyer, where spectators were confronted by cast members in the character of African soldiers shouting "'Go, go, go!'"⁸⁵² to order them out into another part of the theatre building. Where Purcarete's actors treated his audience with haughty disdain, Stafford-Clark's positively intimidated them, even terrorised them. The soldiers who 'herd[ed them] out of the theatre'⁸⁵³ were 'ferocious-looking',⁸⁵⁴ 'aggressive black youths',⁸⁵⁵ 'menacing, muscular men and wiry children brandishing AK-47s',⁸⁵⁶ whose guns 'seem real, particularly when jabbed in your face in the menacing shadows of the neon-lit tropical setting'.⁸⁵⁷

This was a touring production, so the space to which the audience were led for this first action varied depending on the venue, but in each case it seems that the intention was to disorientate spectators, to blur the boundary between abduction and performance. At the Oxford Playhouse they were taken to a 'paint-shop' or 'workshop' at the back of the theatre,⁸⁵⁸ at the Arcola in Hackney a 'cellar' or 'basement' reached by a 'side door',⁸⁵⁹ and at Wilton's Music Hall 'upstairs' on the 'balcony' or 'gallery'.⁸⁶⁰ When it played in Edinburgh's India Buildings on the Cowgate, it was 'the cavernous space created by the

⁸⁵¹ Boal (2000) pp. xx-xxi.

⁸⁵² Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Sep 2004.

⁸⁵³ Sam Marlowe, *Times*, 18 Oct 2004.

⁸⁵⁴ Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 12 Jan 2005.

⁸⁵⁵ Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*.

⁸⁵⁶ Marlowe, *Times*.

⁸⁵⁷ Nick Awde, *Stage*, 21 Oct 2004.

⁸⁵⁸ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 23 Sep 2004; Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Sep 2004.

⁸⁵⁹ Ian Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*, 21 Oct 2004; Victoria Segal, *Sunday Times*, 24 Oct 2004; Sam Marlowe, *Times*, 18 Oct 2004.

⁸⁶⁰ Georgina Brown, *Mail on Sunday*, 23 Jan 2005; Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 12 Jan 2005; Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Jan 2005.

overarch of George IV Bridge'.⁸⁶¹ Reviewers who describe the opening found the space of this first scene hostile and uncomfortable, most unlike any kind of theatre auditorium. For Michael Dobson at the Oxford Playhouse, for example, the room – 'rough, cavernous' and 'piled with crates' – was 'emphatically not our territory'.⁸⁶²

It is here, and not in the designated theatrical space, that the performance begins. From this disorientating, ambiguous start, somewhere between reality and nightmare, spectators must at some point have become aware that this was indeed the prelude to the play. The dancing and 'chanting'⁸⁶³ of these gun-toting soldiers and their womenfolk began to shape itself into a ritualistic performance, a 'dangerous post-battle derangement'⁸⁶⁴ 'led by a shaman sporting body paint and a bra',⁸⁶⁵ a dress-code that was explained in the programme as based on 'Liberia's transvestite warriors'⁸⁶⁶ 'who believed cross-dressing gave them a charmed life on the battlefield'.⁸⁶⁷ Shakespeare's play emerged as the dance intensified with an 'escalating abandon' that 'summoned' Macbeth and Banquo.⁸⁶⁸ Out of this 'voodoo ritual' the witches emerged as witch-doctors who 'perform[ed] incantations in colonial French'⁸⁶⁹ to 'plant thoughts of regicide in Macbeth's mind'.⁸⁷⁰

The opening, then, sought to give spectators a frightening and disorientating experience of uncertain reality. Like Hall and Purcarete, Stafford-Clark cast the audience in an unaccustomed role, bringing them much closer into the heart of the action than is usual in

⁸⁶¹ Bill Dunlop, www.edinburghguide.com, published 27 Oct 2005, accessed 11 July 2012.

⁸⁶² Dobson (2005a), p. 288.

⁸⁶³ Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Sep 2004.

⁸⁶⁴ Segal, *Sunday Times*.

⁸⁶⁵ Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Sep 2004.

⁸⁶⁶ Billington, *Guardian*.

⁸⁶⁷ Kate Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*, 17 Oct 2004.

⁸⁶⁸ Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 14 Oct 2004.

⁸⁶⁹ Marlowe, *Times*.

⁸⁷⁰ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 23 Sep 2004.

British classical theatre. This opening, however, did not deliver the audience safely into their usual position outside the play-world looking in, but prepared them for more of the same, for the discomfort and disorientation to feature throughout the performance. By devising this as a promenade production Stafford-Clark took the further step of keeping his public out of their comfortable, safe seats for any length of time, moving them roughly as before, so that they were 'constantly on their feet, pushed around the plot, sometimes at gunpoint',⁸⁷¹ 'bullied from room to room'.⁸⁷² The rooms themselves were the dark hidden spaces of the various theatres where audiences never normally go, and scarily inhospitable, conscripting the theatre buildings themselves into the performance of terror: at the Arcola, 'a warren of scarred, windowless chambers in this ex-factory building',⁸⁷³ and at the India Buildings, 'the venue's ramshackle cavernous interior'.⁸⁷⁴ At 'Wilton's crumbly old Music Hall'⁸⁷⁵ in Hackney the alienation came rather from its 'ghostly, semi-derelict'⁸⁷⁶ state. In each venue audiences were brought disturbingly close to events, 'forc[ed]...to promenade into the thick of things to bear witness to matters both public and private',⁸⁷⁷ which continually transgressed their role as normal theatregoers: Billington felt that 'Instead of spectators we are apprehensive participants'.⁸⁷⁸

Stafford-Clark seems to have wanted to blow apart the passivity and complacency of spectation and to replace audience pleasure with didactic assault, to make a physical and moral impact by sheer visceral shock. In an education pack produced to accompany the

⁸⁷¹ Susannah Clapp, *Observer*, 17 Oct 2004.

⁸⁷² Mark Shenton, *Sunday Express*, 24 Oct 2004 at the Arcola.

⁸⁷³ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday* at the Arcola.

⁸⁷⁴ Neil Cooper, *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Oct 2005.

⁸⁷⁵ Quentin Letts, *Daily Mail*, 11 Jan 2005.

⁸⁷⁶ Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Jan 2005.

⁸⁷⁷ Cooper, *Herald*.

⁸⁷⁸ Billington, *Guardian*.

production he explains that he decided to use 'site-specific venues' and a 'promenade style' in order 'to transcend' the 'contract between the actor and the audience' that obtains in the 'traditional auditorium' whereby 'accepted barriers define the ownership of the space'. He wanted to 'remove the audience from its comfort zone', because '[v]iolence on the stage... has been devalued' and 'audiences are no longer affected by it'.⁸⁷⁹ The responses of the reviewers show how successfully the strategy worked. Dobson recalls Danny Sapani's Macbeth 'pacing among the audience and eyeballing individual spectators as he thought aloud about the possibility of killing ... Duncan',⁸⁸⁰ an engagement Clapp felt was so direct, 'as if asking advice', that 'you can't help but feel complicit'.⁸⁸¹ At the banquet the audience were treated as guests, offered 'slices of fruit',⁸⁸² and 'canapés',⁸⁸³ and even a chance 'to sit among the guests of honour and share the wine'.⁸⁸⁴ This hospitality put spectators off their guard for what followed: a 'deferred and terrifying irruption',⁸⁸⁵ of Banquo from within the table that 'produce[d] gasps of genuine terror',⁸⁸⁶ and gave Benedict Nightingale 'the shock of [his] life'.⁸⁸⁷ It also raised audience participation to new areas of symbolic involvement in the fictional events: many reviewers found their closeness to the action not only gave a 'palpable sense of evil',⁸⁸⁸ but seemed to implicate them. Lady Macduff and her children were 'audibly raped and hacked to death in an adjoining room',⁸⁸⁹ and the audience

⁸⁷⁹ http://www.outofjoint.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Mac_pac1.doc, p. 2, accessed 16 July 2012.

⁸⁸⁰ Dobson (2005a), p. 288.

⁸⁸¹ Clapp, *Observer*.

⁸⁸² Clapp, *Observer*.

⁸⁸³ Georgina Brown, *Mail on Sunday*, 23 Jan 2005.

⁸⁸⁴ Dobson (2005a), p. 288.

⁸⁸⁵ John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 Jan 2005.

⁸⁸⁶ Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Jan 2005.

⁸⁸⁷ Benedict Nightingale, *Times*, 12 Jan 2005.

⁸⁸⁸ Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 14 Oct 2004.

⁸⁸⁹ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

immediately offered, for 'some extra cash', a chance 'to queue to see the ... carnage',⁸⁹⁰ making them 'guilty collaborators in the blood-drenched action',⁸⁹¹ 'no longer just an innocent audience, [but] eager voyeurs'.⁸⁹²

Although Stafford-Clark explains his purposes in terms of the cultural sclerosis of the theatre, the complacency and passivity of audiences signalling for him a need to shock and terrify, his original purpose lay outside the theatre, in the contemporary world where he had been 'disturbed by the incomprehensible savagery' of contemporary Africa. Rather than commission a new play about 'child warriors, genocide' and the horrific bodily mutilation inflicted in the brutality accompanying 'a collapsed state', he considered that 'Shakespeare... had captured this brutality. It seemed there was a play ready. *Macbeth*'.⁸⁹³ 40 years after Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* it seems that the impulse to use Shakespeare as a medium for the exposition and debate of contemporary political situations has found new tyrannies to work with.

Indeed, a production with similar Boal-like inspiration from the previous year had perhaps anticipated Stafford-Clark's in using a Shakespeare play to substitute for a new one that might tackle a contemporary evil.

Adrian Jackson, artistic director of Cardboard Citizens which works with homeless people, found in *Pericles* a play that spoke of the uprooted lives of contemporary refugees and asylum seekers, a political theme much closer to home than Stafford-Clark's. Jackson had also created a promenade production, and chosen his venue for its site-specific contribution

⁸⁹⁰ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

⁸⁹¹ Clapp, *Observer*.

⁸⁹² Georgina Brown, *Mail on Sunday*, 23 Jan 2005.

⁸⁹³ Mac_pac1.doc, p. 1.

to the inductive experience he aimed to impart: not a theatre, but a 'vast aircraft hangar-like'⁸⁹⁴ warehouse in south-east London. The area itself is intimidating, 'a long, depressing walk from Elephant and Castle down the Old Kent Road' and 'along a soulless strip of similar industrial-estate buildings'.⁸⁹⁵ The arriving audience are 'treated as detainees in an asylum-processing centre':⁸⁹⁶ first made to '[queue] behind a chain-link fence', then 'allocated a numbered badge and strict instructions about how to behave by a scary, hatchet-faced camp guard'.⁸⁹⁷ Kate Bassett described her spectator-experience in an evocative present-tense narrative:

I'm being told to stand behind the white line. They want to know where I was born. And why have I come here? I am here to see Shakespeare's late romance, *Pericles*, which is strange because I seem to have wandered into some industrial no-man's land, just off a spaghetti junction in South London. The white line where I'm being registered for entry - as though an asylum seeker - is in a vast warehouse, all corrugated steel and dirty concrete. The place looks suspiciously like a cattle market for herds of human beings.⁸⁹⁸

Bassett's account shows the narrow line negotiated by this pre-show between being a performance, a play for an audience ('I am here to see... *Pericles*') and being an experience, a realistic abduction by government officials ('I'm being told... They want to know...'). The treatment of the arriving spectators was clearly intimidating, described variously as being

⁸⁹⁴ Dominic Cavendish, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 2003.

⁸⁹⁵ Cavendish, *Daily Telegraph*.

⁸⁹⁶ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 28 July 2003.

⁸⁹⁷ Sam Marlowe, *Times*, 26 July 2003.

⁸⁹⁸ Kate Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*, 3 Aug 2003.

‘herded’,⁸⁹⁹ ‘shepherded’,⁹⁰⁰ ‘commanded’,⁹⁰¹ ‘marshalled’⁹⁰² to a room of ‘shabby desks’ and made to ‘fill in a seemingly endless Home Office form’.⁹⁰³ The experience was nothing like spectating at a play, but ‘more like a raw performance art installation’,⁹⁰⁴ ‘a means of confronting the experience of asylum-seekers by being forced to become one’.⁹⁰⁵

Having begun in such an alienating, un-performance-like way, the pre-show moved into a performance mode, but still delayed the Shakespeare play. After inducting his audience into the experience of the asylum speaker, Jackson now began the story-telling, not Gower’s Prologue, but a series of personal testimonies, ‘heartrending tales of political persecution, family dispersal and personal tragedy’.⁹⁰⁶ These were spoken briefly and hurriedly by individuals, each given a heartlessly short allowance of time ‘before a buzzer cuts them off’,⁹⁰⁷ and one of the story-tellers, ‘the only one who is not a contemporary figure’,⁹⁰⁸ was Pericles. Before his story developed into the main narrative, however, there was a further extension of the inductive experience, as the ‘officials’ delivered instructions for would-be immigrants: a series of ‘ludicrous mini-lectures on how to tell a story of persecution (“please try to avoid too much torture... include some jokes”)',⁹⁰⁹ and on ‘the virtues of Shakespeare, English and the royal family’.⁹¹⁰

⁸⁹⁹ Susannah Clapp, *Observer*, 27 July 2003; Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 31 July 2003; John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 Aug 2003; Robert Hewison, *Sunday Times*, 3 Aug 2003.

⁹⁰⁰ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 28 July 2003.

⁹⁰¹ Dominic Cavendish, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 2003.

⁹⁰² Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

⁹⁰³ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

⁹⁰⁴ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

⁹⁰⁵ Hewison, *Sunday Times*.

⁹⁰⁶ Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 31 July 2003.

⁹⁰⁷ Taylor, *Independent*.

⁹⁰⁸ John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 Aug 2003.

⁹⁰⁹ Ian Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*, 30 July 2003.

⁹¹⁰ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 28 July 2003.

The responses of reviewers show that Jackson's pre-show took great risks in treating spectators so realistically. Ian Shuttleworth initially found 'these tactics' left him 'thoroughly annoyed and alienated',⁹¹¹ Michael Billington reported 'a sense of the shock of being a stranger at the mercy of a vast bureaucratic machine',⁹¹² and Kate Bassett found she 'want[ed] to cry almost instantly'.⁹¹³ Shuttleworth quickly reflected, however, 'that this meant they were succeeding in conveying the brutality of the administrative machine',⁹¹⁴ and Bassett recovered to conclude that '[t]his is a refreshing, adventurous project'.⁹¹⁵ As agitprop theatre it succeeded, despite considerable unevenness in the acting. For Michael Dobson, however, 'the central point of the show wasn't what it could do with *Pericles* proper but its incorporation of the first-person stories of real-life present-day asylum seekers'.⁹¹⁶ More even than Stafford-Clark, Jackson's purpose in directing the play lay outside the theatre in the real lives of the displaced people – real 'Spect-Actors' – performing with him.

Conclusion

In this exploration of pre-show uses of the acting body I have found a clear development in the ways performed Shakespeare has been made to speak to successive times. The relationship between stage and audience has moved decisively in the direction of closer contact and a certain blending of the two, with audiences challenged first cognitively, then bodily, to contribute to the meaning created in the moment of performance. The pre-show provides a crucial theatrical space for the director in which to prepare and induct audiences

⁹¹¹ Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*.

⁹¹² Billington, *Guardian*.

⁹¹³ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

⁹¹⁴ Shuttleworth, *Financial Times*.

⁹¹⁵ Bassett, *Independent on Sunday*.

⁹¹⁶ Dobson (2005b) p. 24.

into what will be required of them, both in terms of how the performance is to be read and of the role they will play in collaborating in it.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I consider the implications of my research. Returning to my initial experiences of pre-shows to performed Shakespeare, and the accompanying proliferation of responses to them, it seems important to grasp two developments that have taken place in the eighty-two years of my study. The first is that theatricality has superseded textuality as the vital core of Shakespearean performance, and the second, that narrative coherence has superseded character depiction as its driving force.

The rise of theatricality

The pre-show is first and foremost of the theatre. It asserts theatre as its medium and answers to the laws and dictates of that medium, and in doing so it calls forth responses to its theatricality. Moreover, the theatre it asserts is primarily visual and kinaesthetic, in partnership with the verbal, in contradiction of the popular assertion that early modern drama was an aural, linguistic medium and that its audiences came to *hear* rather than to *see* a play. Whether or not that is true, Bruster and Weimann, as I discussed in Chapter 1, found early modern prologues already tracing a development from a textual, author-centred authority to a theatre-centred, audience-driven authority. My study of the modern pre-show traces a remarkably similar trajectory from textual to theatrical and then audience-focused authority. The theatre as it is produced and consumed in modern times insists on its appeal primarily to the eye and on physical action with embodied speaking as the means of transmitting the classic text, and as such it also insists on exceeding that text. What has

changed over the period of my study is the relationship between the classic text and the theatre, a relationship in which the centre of power has swung strongly from the verbal/textual to the theatrical. Of course I do not mean by this to suggest that the performance of text is not theatrical, but rather that the balance of power has shifted away from the text to other performative elements.

Not only does the pre-show assert theatre as the medium by which the text is accessed, but it also asserts spectators as the focus of performance, by giving them both what they want and what they do not want, or do not know (yet) that they want. Theatre audiences can never be relied on from one performance to the next but circulate constantly in a marketplace for entertainment, distraction, stimulus and social contact. Shakespeare audiences, however, are in a rather different category, and it seems this fickleness was not always true for them. When Robert Bridges-Adams sought out Theodore Komisarjevsky to ‘tickle the liver of Stratford’ he was pushing against a weight of habit and ‘Shakespeare-worship’⁹¹⁷ that was perpetuating a provincial mediocrity, making Shakespeare in his home town predictable and unchallenging. At London’s Old Vic too, the 1920s project to perform all the Folio plays was completed with a sense of relief that normal service could then be resumed. Innovations in staging in the early decades of the twentieth century focused on approximating Elizabethan conditions (apron stages, bare or minimal sets, discovery spaces and galleries) and on modern dress, and although initially resisted, these became increasingly influential. Both helped the development of the pre-show: the bare apron stage invited it, and modern dress made it natural, even helpful. Perhaps too, by moving in

⁹¹⁷ W.H.B., *Birmingham Gazette*, 26 July 1932

essentially opposite directions, they both helped the proliferation of the directorial and design approaches that underlie the pre-show.

Neither Elizabethan staging nor modern dress, however, generated the pre-show itself, which must stand as a separate innovation. Unlike Elizabethan staging, and more than modern dress, the pre-show still, indeed, more than ever, has the power to shock, to shake expectations and signal innovation, experimentation and playfulness. Looking across this eight-decade time-span at how the pre-show has developed in its use of theatrical resources, content and purpose, I have found that it maps broad cultural shifts in the ways in which Shakespeare is used, integrated, revered, made to mean, in English life. Not only does it reflect these shifts, but it is integral to them, a key tool in the armoury of innovation and change.

I distinguish three phases in this shifting 'Shakespeare': in the early period 'Shakespeare' was the selection of 'great' texts, the 'canon', and the task of stage performance was to *express* the text in such a way as to do justice to that greatness. The second period sought to *free* the text from its literary and judgemental straitjacket, making the task of performance to illuminate the text with contemporary meaning, to make it work theatrically in the present, particularly where that text had previously suffered cultural disapproval. The third period sees the text as a fluid and multifarious resource to be mined for modern profit, whether of the moral, political, social sort, or the fund-attracting, career-making, box-office sort. Thus 'Shakespeare' shifts from the possession or care of a highly trained priest class, to emancipation and re-possession by young rebel forces, and finally to the status of quality commodity in a cultural stock-exchange, endlessly recyclable for new audiences. As these

shifts occur, the pre-show offers directors a means first to innovate, or to signal innovation, and then to establish their position in relation to the dominant code in which they are working, as I now analyse further.

In the early period of high modernism and at the height of the New Criticism, valuations of Shakespeare were established by scholars intent on 'calibrating and maintaining Shakespeare's work as a permanent and unassailable art, freed from the discontents of a debased modern world'.⁹¹⁸ By this judgement, 'Shakespeare' consisted of a small group of supreme poetic texts, that is, the 'great', or mature, plays in each of the 'single' generic categories of tragedy, comedy and history, and the task of stage performance was to *express* these as close to perfectly as possible, cognate with the performance of a symphonic or operatic score. This dominant cultural code can be seen in the prevalent pre-show method used, design, where a clear correlation can be found between a feature of the set and a theme in the text. The frame of reference for such pre-show design is contained in the text itself, with no overt suggestion of a parallel in the contemporary world. Anthony Quayle's pre-show throne, Gielgud's 'tall dark masses' and Komisarjevsky's vertiginous throne⁹¹⁹ are seen by their contemporary reviewers as expressions of elements in the text (even if a modern reviewer might see a topical contemporary comparison). Implicit in this sort of pre-show is a view of the text as supreme, self-sufficient and inviolable, and of the task of performance as illustrating or portraying what that text contains in such a way as to honour its position of cultural pre-eminence. Pre-shows in this tradition help to guide audiences to see the salient aspects of theme or character, or to grasp the first element of the story, and

⁹¹⁸ Dessen (1998) p. 61.

⁹¹⁹ See above, pp. 195, 192, 113.

their designers are key (co-)interpreters of the text, charged with illustrating the textual imagery selected as salient for the production. This is not to say that these pre-shows or the performances they preface are necessarily oblivious to any parallels or relevance to their contemporary world, but rather that they leave the finding of such references to their audiences, expecting the playing of the text itself to prompt or stimulate any such applications. By comparison with later practices, they see no need to be didactic, if only because they consider Shakespeare's moral-religious-humanist 'message' to be generally accepted and agreed upon. In reception, though, there is some resistance to certain applications that might imply an uncomfortable human truth, as can be seen in the *Times* reviewer's desire to see the witches as distanced from normal humanity, 'elemental avengers... without sex or kin', rather than the 'sordid creatures' of Theodore Komisarjevsky's 1933 *Macbeth*.⁹²⁰ Closely related to the view of the text as self-sufficient and inviolable is the prevailing condemnation of 'pure' entertainment, spectacle and allowing the eye to be 'dazzled', deflected from the all-important words of the text. These cultural norms can be demonstrated where commentators reject the 'un-Shakespearean' in Shakespeare – the silly and supernatural, the bloodbath, the unpoetic or banal – and where they fault pre-shows that 'pander to' the populism of spectacle.

The second period I identify challenges this select, élite view of Shakespeare and seeks to free the texts from those agreed-upon valuations on the one hand, and those rejections on the other. The complication, and the excitement, for my project, is that the first pre-shows to make this challenge are also the earliest in my study, Komisarjevsky's *Merchant of Venice* in 1932 and *Macbeth* in 1933. The challenge, that is, brings about the first notable pre-

⁹²⁰ See Chapter 3, p. 111.

shows, or put another way, the pre-show is the means by which the challenge is first made, is, from the first, an indicator of a new direction. As was evident even at the time, the challenge came from another culture, and made little impact at first on the native, established position. Komisarjevsky's cartoonish Rialto and pirouetting pierrots were clearly designed to free the play from the English-Stratford convention of the *Merchant* as a quasi-tragedy, to explore instead its *commedia* elements, offering stock characters instead of citizen characters and a metatheatrical framework instead of a Christian morality framework. Doubly transplanting Launcelot Gobbo, from his textual first appearance – some twenty-five minutes into the play at Act 2 Scene 2 – to the opening, and from the play's fictional world into the audience's own as compère to the play they were watching, turning it into a 'show' that made its first appeal to the eye and the pleasure-receptors, Komisarjevsky liberated the play from all previous conceptions, offering a new viewpoint from which to see it. Equally, though contrastingly, designing the Weird Sisters as types of contemporary old woman and the blasted heath as a near-contemporary war zone liberated *Macbeth* from semi-mythological medieval storyland and suggested instead how its events might arise realistically in a community whose moral compass has been skewed by a bloody war. In both cases the moral certainties by which the plays and their protagonists were hitherto judged were brought close up for scrutiny in the searching light of an outsider's point of view.

Peter Brook, whose roots are also in Russian culture, sought to free a different group of plays from the quite other convention by which they were judged inferior, Shakespeare when he was not 'Shakespeare'. Both Brook and Komisarjevsky rejected the actor-manager approach via character to follow, rather, an integrated personal vision: for Brook, a visual

‘correlative’ of the total play, for Komisarjevsky, the ‘creative work of my irrational self’. In choosing, like Komisarjevsky, to be the complete *auteur* of his productions, directing, designing and, for *Titus*, composing the music himself, Brook asserted his authority as transmitter of the text, interposing the directorial mind between the (writer of the) text and its performance. From this position of control he could create his vision of the whole, reconceiving the text as performance piece and bypassing previous judgements of its literary or theatrical (de)merits. It is striking that these newly conceived approaches to text are both *expressive* of it, in idiosyncratically personal terms, and *liberating* of it, from accreted convention, and that both make their mark at the pre-show moment: that is, reviewers of these productions, unusually, have something to say about the opening moments. The pre-show is the means of making, or of signalling the making of, the challenge.

After these pioneering pre-shows the way is open for directors to play with the opening moments, to innovate and experiment with ways the play about to start can be apprehended kinaesthetically, in theatrical rather than literary terms. Already where pre-show design expressed a conventional interpretation or accepted ‘theme’, a shift had occurred from using staging transparently, as a fairly literal setting in which the text could be delivered and the acting would focus on character ‘reading’. First designers, alongside directors, then directors themselves, claimed the task of conveying their inner ‘vision’, playing the text in order to transform it rather than reproduce it, and used the pre-textual moment to communicate some element of that vision. Much has been written by theatre scholars such as John Russell Brown, Alan Dessen, H.R. Coursen, J.L. Styan, and by directors themselves, such as Brook, Hall, Komisarjevsky and Richardson, about this shift from the literary to the performative, but these pre-shows and the productions they precede shed

light on the practical ways in which this was done. Where their predecessors had fetishized the text, the new generation of directors violated its impregnability in order to emancipate it to speak in theatrical terms, insisting on its theatricality and refusing to concur with judgements that limited excellence to literary standards. The pre-shows of this movement meant not only that extraneous action preceded the delivery of the text, but also that audiences were treated more indulgently, given something theatrical in excess of the all-sufficient text, entertained, even dazzled, by 'spectacle', or helped to understand the text's difficulties. This shift marks a decisive move away from the élitism and the high value set on difficulty of the modernists.

The cultural revolution that gave the audience a role grew naturally and by increments from this emancipation, leading to the third period, when the text is often appropriated for contemporary use. The pre-shows of recent years play ever more freely with elements in the text and in the wider circulating culture, mixing these provocatively to suggest connections across the expanse of time between the text's composition and its present-day performance. Although it is now taken for granted that Shakespeare's play texts can be subjected to as much alteration and variation as their world-wide directors have imagination to engender, that it is effectively free at the point of use, its cultural valuation is as important as it was to the modernists and New Critics, except that this valuation now is directed toward extracting not so much the text's meaning, as its relation to the contemporary world. The politically charged promenade productions of Max Stafford-Clark and Adrian Jackson are extreme examples of such appropriation, but more theatre-bound productions increasingly vary the social or political context from that of the text, as with Lucy Bailey's *Dream* and Frantic Assembly's *Othello*. Productions such as those by Rupert

Goold, a most fascinating user of the pre-show, exemplify this shift. His *Tempest* in 2006, which reconceived Prospero's tropical island as an Arctic wasteland, signalled its innovative concept in a pre-show that foregrounded contemporary fragments to denote a storm at sea: a filmic 'close-up' of a ship's porthole and the playing of a radio shipping forecast. More spectacularly, his *Merchant of Venice* in 2011 with its elaborate pre-show of a fully operational Las Vegas casino, signalled to arriving audiences that this would be a production to challenge all preconceptions of the play and to entertain with spectacle, notably when it climaxed with a live Elvis impersonation. The centenary of the outbreak of World War I saw directors bringing Shakespeare to the task of commemoration. Perry Mills directed his King Edward's School boys in a *Henry V* played as 'an act of remembrance',⁹²¹ opening with a schoolmaster as Chorus marking the exercise books of current boys while reading letters from past ones now in the trenches, whose uniform-clad photographs hung behind him. Christopher Luscombe paired *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Much Ado*, reimagined as *Love's Labour's Won*, with the life-altering time between the two played as World War I, captured in the pre-show design to *Much Ado* in which rows of beds awaited the demobbed soldiers returning to a Charlecote Park requisitioned as military hospital. Such productions challenge audiences to make connections between the text and a world familiar in contemporary life, recycling a Shakespeare both capable of entertaining and thrilling like any new play or stage show, and in some sense foreknowing the modern world and the hearts of modern people. As Terence Hawkes pithily expressed it over twenty years ago, 'Shakespeare doesn't mean: we mean *by* Shakespeare'.⁹²²

⁹²¹ Rutter (2014) p. 417.

⁹²² Hawkes (1992) p. 3.

The rise of narrative coherence

The second development I trace across the eight decades of my study is the decline of character 'study' and the rise of narrative coherence as the driving force of Shakespearean performance. I do not mean to suggest that character is no longer studied or a crucial aspect of production: rather it is no longer the principal focus, but has had to move aside to accommodate the multiplicity of theatrical foci, and has indeed been modified by the imperative to tell a story as coherently as possible, including all the *dramatis personae*, the social and historical milieu, and the psychological and temporal trajectories that go to make up the play's narrative. In large part, of course, this shift has emerged from the style of realism that has dominated mainstream theatre during the period, driven by the 'method' of Konstantin Stanislavsky, in which 'characters ... imagined as psychologically coherent entities with consistent narratives driven by their needs and desires' are created by 'the realist technique of generating backstory, ... using "the *past* as justifying the *present* of [a] scene"'.⁹²³ In spite of the tendency of Shakespeare's playtexts to resist such consistency, with their frequent anachronisms and temporal and narrative inconsistencies and lacunae, the prevailing expectation of realism in modern performance culture has driven an imperative to make them conform. The pre-show has been an indispensable tool in this process as the natural repository of back-story. The earliest pre-shows I discovered were of the narrative type, telling by showing a kernel of story or 'Once upon a time' origin out of which the unfolding narrative told by the performance was to grow. At this early point of the twentieth century that narrative origin was usually derived from early in the text, matching closely the narrative departure point selected by Shakespeare, and matching too

⁹²³ Cornford (2013) p. 711.

the conceptions of the principal characters that had been developed by the great actor-managers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the sensuality of Cleopatra or the aged dignity of Lear. The directors of the pre-1950 decades, Komisarjevsky and Brook, created pre-shows that proposed a different narrative origin: an oddly deranged Lear; a group of women living in the shadow of the court of Navarre. The even earlier pioneer, Barry Jackson, and his co-directors at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, displaced the 'Shakespearean' or 'Elizabethan' narrative setting by using contemporary dress, setting the narrative off from a new historical and social point of departure: a gentlemen's club Danish court; a recognisably French rather than a story-book Rossillion. They proposed a new narrative kernel out of which a previously-known story would grow, whose causative sequence could be traced back to a different origin. Where actor-managers had approached the plays through the eyes of the main protagonist and his (sic) developmental journey, the new independent directors viewed the plays through the prism of narrative and its trajectory. Pre-shows became invaluable as means to situate the events, and hence the character 'journeys', about to unfold.

The exploration of embedded stories in Shakespeare's playtexts clearly helped to drive the use of narrative pre-shows, offering a rich source to plunder for introductory business that made good show openers, particularly as the curtain was abandoned in favour of open, 'Elizabethan' and thrust stages. Shakespeare's use of embedded stories has received minimal scholarly attention, as I discussed in Chapter 4, but it is unsurprising to find it the focus of considerable theatrical and practical use. Performers, after all, have to find how to play these third-party, unstaged narratives, to overcome the problems they pose of *undramatic stasis*, and of modern audience attention-spans greatly reduced from their early-

modern counterparts. Solving the staging problems of embedded stories in Shakespeare's playtexts by transforming them into action may well have helped to drive the use of narrative pre-shows. These narrative back-stories or flash-backs were helpful as arresting calls-to-attention for the audience, but also as Stanislavskian grounding for character development, useful to actors and audiences alike. The technique is as prevalent today as in the early twentieth century: Simon Godwin's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in 2014 staged as pre-show a street café where Proteus and Julia made 'first' eye contact, helping the actors to flesh out their characters while allowing the audience to see the narrative origin of their story and be ready at once to follow the parting of the friends at Valentine's departure in the opening scene. In due course directors ventured to make pre-shows out of embedded stories from later in the text, complicating and ironising the narrative trajectory, or varying the tone or genre of the play, as with Northern Broadsides' ingenious pre-show staging of a Roman re-enactment of Antony and Cleopatra's affair. Trevor Nunn's pre-emptive use of such embedded stories to create fully coherent narratives that account for almost all enigmas of character or plot represents the apex of this realistic imperative. Gregory Doran's *Richard II* in 2013 similarly offered a narrative explanation referred to but omitted from the text, in a pre-show representation of the funeral of the Duke of Gloucester, the textually obscure cause of the dispute in the opening scene between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, adding antecedent to the antecedent that initiates Richard's downfall, and with it a more complete explanation and rationale for that downfall and for the character of Richard portrayed by David Tennant.

The common factor riding across this sweep of innovation is viewpoint. Each pre-show in effect asks its spectators to view the play from an unusual perspective – that is, one that

varies from the opening viewpoint set up by Shakespeare in his own opening gambit, or, perhaps, one that introduces a situation or character recognisable in the modern world rather than from the text. Shakespeare himself similarly varied the viewpoint of his source narratives, as I show in Chapter 2. In the modernist period the reader's, and hence viewer's, point of view was fairly fixed, coinciding with that of the (white, educated, well-to-do) man of letters. The focus of a Shakespeare play was on the main character, or pair of characters – the tragic or historic hero and his partner (Lady Macbeth, Falstaff) or adversary (Iago, Bolingbroke): effectively, the parts played by the star player(s). All the theatrical and narrational innovations I outline above bring into play a new perspective from which the play's events may be considered: the showmaster Gobbo, the common soldier and the marginal populace surviving in the thick of war, commoners, women, children, play-actors, refugees, citizens and bystanders. The great cultural shift of our time has been the emergence into significance of the unexceptional person. During the phase I have characterized as *freeing* the text the liberated small people were those participating in the cultural struggles of the mid-twentieth century, Richardson's West Indian Gower, Nunn's rebellious Carnaby-Street-wearing youth, Hands's struggling actors in tracksuits. Set in social context with these people, Shakespeare's main protagonists acquired a fuller psychological and social depth, an ironised dimension and a back- or surround-story that removed their élitist mystique. The tone of Shakespearean production turned politically radical and iconoclastic, both rejecting the authoritarian values that uphold rulers or simple binaries of good and evil, and embracing the non-rational parts of Shakespeare that had hitherto been dismissed as laughable or unstageworthy. In the more recent period I characterize as *appropriating* the text, an even wider range of common and uncommon people, situations

and cultures come into view as valid Shakespearean participants and contexts, drawing on images, music and the many ephemeral tropes of contemporary, usually urban, metropolitan life: power, for example, is often relocated from royal courts to city businesses or criminal organisations, and pageantry and pomp are replaced by cocktail chic. Even as thrust stages become a near-norm, pre-show scenes are filled with detail, each body onstage behaving as a fully realised character inhabiting a personal narrative with some degree of back-story. Audience participation is almost invited: spectators may be offered direct stares (*Richard III*, Propeller 2010), foyer encounters (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Manchester 2002), musical entertainment inviting foot-tapping and applause (*Two Gents*, RSC 1992; *Pericles*, Globe, 2005; many Globe performances), even ice-creams (*Two Gents*, RSC 2014).

This new proliferation of pre-show-led viewpoint has immeasurably enriched and renewed cultural valuations and uses of Shakespeare, amounting to a sort of Renaissance. Reviewers of Shakespeare productions, particularly scholarly ones, routinely trace interpretation back to the way the performance began, and a snapshot count using reviews in *Shakespeare Survey* suggests the habit is expanding: Robert Smallwood's review of 1999 performances, covering fourteen productions, describes seven pre-shows, Michael Dobson's review of 2005 describes fourteen pre-shows out of twenty-four productions, and Carol Rutter's review of 2013 covering some twenty-one productions, describes fifteen pre-shows and two significant set designs, with only four of the total receiving no reference to the opening. These accounts of pre-shows are invariably not simply descriptions but a tracing of interpretation, identifying the source of analysis of the production involved: in effect, locating the 'Once upon a time' origin of the production's narrative in all its complexity of social, psychological, cultural context.

Of course pre-shows do not always work as intended. In my examination of a great range of pre-show-prefaced productions I have occasionally made reference to partially 'failed' pre-shows, where critical reception has been partly or largely disparaging. A pre-show may confuse with excess detail, as with the original season of John Barton's *Richard II* (1973), or come too early for late-arriving reviewers, as with John Caird's *As You Like It* (1989). It may imply a narrative sequence rather than an intended conceptual dumbshow, like Conall Morrison's *Macbeth* (2007). It may expect too much of its audience, as when Peter Hall asked them to stand in for Roman citizens in *Coriolanus* (1984), or proposed Feste as the controlling mind of the production via his image on a painted curtain (*Twelfth Night*, 1967). In this century of experimentation with viewpoint, both that within the play and that required of the audience, a great shift in flexibility has been required, and critical opinion has moved at varying pace in adjusting to it, as is shown in the range of reviewer responses that have been my primary sources.

As Shakespearean performance becomes increasingly inclusive and globally significant, playing in an England that is itself experiencing unprecedented cultural proliferation, fragmentation and flux, the pre-show is increasingly valuable and necessary as threshold, bridge, meeting-point, challenge, agenda-post and, fundamentally, performance space. It may not always 'work' or be 'successful', may overreach or mystify, but its effort to transmit a meaningful engagement with the Shakespearean text deserves to be met with attention. Lying behind its ultimate appearance before an audience, whether as 'pure' entertainment, back-story, ingenious design, or 'conceptual' activity, is a whole creative team-process of

exploration, experimentation, research, movement and language-work, behind all of which is the underpinning activity of reading. That this reading is now in the service of the world at large rather than of the study is one of the triumphs of our age, and the source of Shakespeare's continuing cultural pre-eminence.

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