

Sowing the *Dragon's* Teeth: Amateurism, Domesticity, and the Anglophone Audience for Shakespeare, 1607-2007

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This essay probes the established history of how Shakespeare developed a worldwide audience by placing it alongside the hitherto neglected history of how his works have been performed by non-professional groups. It singles out three key dates in the received history of Shakespeare's reception—1623 (which saw the publication of the Folio), 1774 (which saw the publication of the first fully academic monograph about Shakespeare) and 1932 (which saw the opening of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC and of the rebuilt Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford)—and considers how our sense of their importance might be altered by the consideration of less widely-studied firsts from the same years, namely the first recorded non-professional production of a Shakespeare play on British soil (at Surrenden in Kent), the first recorded all-female production of a Shakespeare play (in the Cathedral Close in Salisbury), and the opening of the first Shakespearean theater to be designed, owned and built by a woman (at Minack in Cornwall).

September 5, 2007 marked a momentous anniversary in the spread of Shakespeare around the world. On that day it was exactly four hundred years since *Hamlet* was staged on board the East India Company's ship the *Dragon*, off Sierra Leone, at the instigation of its captain William Keeling. (On September 30 the crew followed this up with a rendition of *Richard II* too, and they repeated *Hamlet* later in the voyage, on March 31, 1608). Given the level of recent scholarly interest in the participation of Shakespeare's works in the development of colonialism, it isn't surprising that this event has been much studied (by Gary Taylor, among others); this

was the first performance of Shakespeare in (or off) Africa, the first trace in the historical record of a merchant adventurer stowing some play quartos among the gunpowder and the ship's biscuit. In their excitement over this pioneering instance of Shakespeare being taken beyond Europe, however, commentators on Captain Keeling's *Hamlet* have tended to overlook the fact that it marks another major first too, for this was not just the first recorded maritime expatriate colonialist performance of Shakespeare but the first recorded non-professional performance of Shakespeare of any kind. Four centuries on, with the global market for *Hamlet* now fairly well established, does Captain Keeling's production belong most squarely to the history of the compulsory British Empire, or to that of the voluntary British amateur dramatic society? To put it another way, have the intervening four hundred years of Anglophone culture been primarily interested in Shakespeare for money, or for love?

In what follows, I intend to approach the strangely unexplored cultural domain of non-professional Shakespeare by way of the question of historicism in Shakespearean interpretation and performance as a whole, and thereby the nature and role of reception studies, that branch of Shakespearean criticism which purports to describe the history of everyone else's Shakespeares. I am interested, as usual, in the kinds of stories we have told about how and why Shakespeare has gone on mattering, from the Renaissance to the present, and to what kinds of audience. What I'll mainly be doing is offering a condensed account of the entire reception history of the Shakespeare canon as currently understood, in exactly six paragraphs, and then I'll be calling the adequacy of that understanding into question by supplying a parallel, supplementary history of my own.

It would probably be fair to say that the history of Shakespeare since Shakespeare has throughout been characterized by a tension between two different impulses towards Shakespeare's pastness, which have been associated with live audiences and with readerships respectively. One is the desire to bring Shakespeare into the present, most obviously through performance; the other is the desire to explain Shakespeare in the context of his own times, most obviously through scholarship. It is these two impulses which inform the reception history of the Shakespeare canon as we have come to know it, a history which as told to date has for the most part been a tale of two enduring and often lucrative businesses, sometimes opposed, sometimes colluding: namely the making of shows out of Shakespeare (at an ever-growing number of venues worldwide and across an ever-widening range of media) and the making of books out of Shakespeare—at first just

editions, but then biographies, and dictionaries of quotations, and historical novels, and criticism, and textbooks, and York Notes, and Guides, and Companions, and all the rest of it. Both have from the outset been premised on making claims to a special understanding of Shakespeare's historicity, even during periods when both have ostensibly denied that historicity's importance.

If one were to summarize the development of the global audience for Shakespeare at ridiculous speed, singling out only three dates between Keeling's shipboard *Hamlet* in 1607 and the completion of the RSC's Complete Works Festival in 2007, one could do a lot worse than choose 1623, 1774, and 1932.¹ In 1623 the First Folio, the first collected edition of the plays, made Shakespeare for the first time into a large up-market book, its publishers buying up copyright in the earlier quartos so that its appearance had the paradoxical effect of making some of the plays less accessible rather than more so. The Folio also declared Shakespeare's art, for the first time, to be a matter of national import: "Triumph, my Britain," urges Jonson's prefatory elegy. Despite its status as a piece of cultural nationalist library furniture, however, the Folio's conflicted identity as at once a new literary product and the funerary monument to a seven-years-dead man of the theater is also visible throughout these preliminary materials. Heminges and Condell commend the volume "To the great variety of readers," famously calling the Shakespeare canon's consumer readership into being as such with the words "But whatever you do, buy," but the "readers" their dedicatory letter imagines are in fact long-experienced playgoers who have already approved in performance the plays they are now revisiting in print. Ben Jonson's elegy at first consigns Shakespeare to his now past lifetime—calling him the "Soul of the age," whose plays "so did take Eliza, and our James"—but changes its mind at the end to bequeath the writer to an indefinite future—"He was not of an age, but for all time!"

The more distant the age of Eliza and our James became, however, the more work it took to allow Shakespeare to participate in that imagined future, and hence the parallel and opposed development of the two businesses I have already mentioned over the century and a half that followed the Folio's

1. In singling out 1932 I am of course, not unusually, following in the footsteps of Terence Hawkes; see especially *That Shakespearean Rag* (London: Routledge, 1986) and *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992).

publication. In the theater, Shakespeare's texts needed adaptation (to bring them up to date, for potentially uncomprehending and unwilling present-day performers and audiences), while in print they needed annotation (to explain them, in terms of the social and linguistic usages of their own time). As I have described at tedious length before, these apparently contradictory practices happily co-operated in the elevation of Shakespeare to his status as national poet—the more cultural work he occasioned, the more he must be worth—and they often co-existed in a single career: Lewis Theobald, for example, was at once the greatest textual editor of the early eighteenth century and the author of a distressingly sentimental rewrite of *Richard II* (1719). By the time of our next key date, 1774, both the modernizing and the historicizing of Shakespeare were well established, and furthermore they were well established as colleagues. In the theater, cultivated playgoers could see the ageing Garrick performing his rewritten *Hamlet*, decorously rid of the Gravediggers, while at home in their libraries they could weigh up the rival attempts to date the original text(s) of the play, identify its sources and gloss its phraseology recorded in the accumulated footnotes to the Johnson-Steevens variorum edition, published the previous year. Garrick's authority to rewrite *Hamlet*, however, was in part based on precisely the same claims to antiquarian expertise as the edition. He could and did boast that he had amassed the largest collection of Elizabethan and Jacobean playbooks then in existence, guaranteeing that his on-stage liberties with Shakespeare's words were based on a thorough understanding of their now defunct original contexts, and it was this body of textual evidence about Shakespeare's vanished culture which Garrick shared with Johnson and Steevens so that they could use it when preparing their editions.

The official great first of 1774, though, was the publication of the first properly academic monograph about Shakespeare, a book which helped get interpretation onto a par with adaptation and annotation by pointing authoritatively to what has remained the chief terrain where the exploration of Shakespeare in the theater and in the study has been able to converge. This was, of course, *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*, by William Richardson, Professor of Humanity at Glasgow University.² Because he could claim to understand

2. I am ruling out William Hawkins's *Praelectiones Poeticae* (Oxford, 1758) as a contender for the title of first proper academic monograph on Shakespeare on the grounds that this was merely the text of some lectures given on the subject, and given entirely in Latin (right down to the quotations, which Hawkins translated) at that.

Shakespeare's period thoroughly as an authorized historian and philologist, Richardson felt qualified to treat the manners of Shakespeare's now two-centuries past time as mere incidentals, and its linguistic particularities as the mere "dress" of Shakespeare's thought, as had stage adaptors such as Garrick before him. His book identified the domain of character, the treatment of the speaking subject-positions who people Shakespearean drama as ethical and psychological case-histories equally applicable to all periods, as the natural home of Shakespearean criticism, and hence literary criticism could now discuss both theatrical performance and textual scholarship, while professing a sort of moral superiority to them both. *A Philosophical Analysis* paved the way for the centrality of this sort of treatment of Shakespeare in print (from Richardson it isn't far to Hazlitt, and Bradley, and for that matter Bloom), and, furthermore, in the subsequent state-sponsored development of professional English studies south of the Border a hundred years later.

With this shift towards character in criticism, the impulse to historicize Shakespeare, paradoxically, now spread from criticism into the theater. Once the likes of Richardson and his successor Maurice Morgann had granted Shakespeare's dramatis personae a sort of honorary freedom from history, in the theater they could be consigned back into it, forbidden to wear modern dress for the best part of the ensuing century. The writing was already on the pasteboard castle wall the year before Richardson's book appeared, when Charles Macklin first mounted his controversial "Old Scottish"-look *Macbeth* at Covent Garden, but the insistence that even live Shakespeare should look and feel like a reanimation of a lost feudal past, a living monument to the loyal chivalric heart of the British constitution, would become *de rigueur* after Planché's post-Sir Walter Scott mise-en-scène for Charles Kemble's *King John* in 1823. Whether via adaptation (now turning the plays into fashionably spectacular and illusionistic costume drama), or via annotation (producing ever larger variorums), or via interpretation (reading the characters as embodiments of perennial types or ruling passions), Shakespeare was now definitely part of a national heritage, a shared past that needed moralizing and curating by professional experts in order to serve and secure a shared present.

Cut from 1774 to 1932, and adaptation, annotation and interpretation are all still thriving, albeit with slightly different interrelations. The official Shakespearean novelties of 1932, being two large and sturdy buildings, are still very much with us, though one has by now had most of its original foundations dug out to make room for more books and the other was not

long ago threatened with demolition by a treasonous faction of its own management. By 1932 Shakespeare was so national that he had not only come to occupy the core of the new school discipline of English, but he had also become American, supplying the cultural legitimacy for the next Anglophone world empire in the queue. Hence the overwhelming majority of surviving copies of the First Folio were now housed in the first of these two new buildings, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. With resources like this at its disposal and a growing number of universities to subsidize and support it and produce a demand for its products on both sides of the Atlantic, textual scholarship was in 1932 enjoying something of a renaissance in the quasi-scientific form of the New Bibliography. Historical criticism, too, was alive and well, with modern critics such as the young E.M. Tillyard considering T.S. Eliot's recent claim that Shakespeare's was the last golden period of English culture before "a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered." (I know I haven't.) This distinctive mid-twentieth-century blend of the nostalgic and the modern was visible in the theater too.

In 1932 the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre opened in Stratford, with all the national and imperial pomp its name implies: in overall configuration it resembled any Victorian proscenium-arch theater, and there were colourful pictures of medieval kings and queens on its carpets. But it was also famously reminiscent of a more modern cultural icon, the Odeon cinema, and among its first productions were several with highly stylized modernist designs by Komisarjevsky. Renamed the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, this building would in 1960 be declared the headquarters of a new entity, the state-sponsored Royal Shakespeare Company, and in 2007, on the eve of a revamp and relaunch, it remains as fitting an emblem as any of the uneasy truce and collusion between adaptation and annotation which we still inherit. School parties fill the cheap seats, in the hope that watching performances will help them write Richardsonian essays about the plays' characters at the behest of the GCSE boards; the shop in the foyer is well-stocked with academic editions; and in the programmes the musings of professional Shakespearean critics (mainly Jonathan Bate) vie for space with the biographies of the actors (biographies which, placing the performance side of the present-day Shakespeare industry in its full commercial and institutional context, detail each player's seemingly inevitable progress from RADA to *The Bill* and then onwards via Stratford to that final longed-for accolade, a cameo in *Midsomer Murders*). And so here we are reading the latest professional journal in Shakespeare studies: all of us having in one way

or another been recruited by one State or another into the great industry of managing the world's cultural capital, most of us having done time in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, many of us wishing we could afford to do more time in the Folger or among the quartos which Garrick bequeathed to what is now the British Library; some of us wanting to treat Shakespeare as a lamentable symptom of his times, some still wanting to explore his anachronistic ability to affect or interpret other times altogether; but all of us obliged to profess some sort of duly tested and registered knowledge of Shakespeare's times and their idiom as one major qualification for doing either.

So far, obviously, I haven't strayed very far from the path set out in Gary Taylor's *Reinventing Shakespeare* or Mike Bristol's *Big Time Shakespeare* in the 1980s and 1990s. Shakespeare's works, they suggest, which as some of the first products of early modern cultural entrepreneurship got in on the ground floor of the Western economy's spiralling growth, have been enabled to maintain their value through the cumulative and ever-renewed efforts of their adaptors, curators and vendors, managed as a useful resource not just for the making of shows and books but for the making of subjects. Despite the commodified status of Shakespeare's works, however, the presence of Bardolatry within post-Renaissance culture is nonetheless often taken as the sign of the persistence of the feudal within the bourgeois, a special space in the cultural sphere where the lingering emotional tug of absolute monarchy and the dynastic family can be at once cherished and made safe for an otherwise democratic age.³ The persistence of the Bard over the last four centuries remains at the same time hopelessly implicated in Western imperialism, with Shakespeare peddled by showmen and scholars alike as the universal export, Britain's insidious undercover cultural agent *par excellence*, still on her majesty Eliza's secret service after all these years. (As usual, in short, all roads lead to Judi Dench. And long may they continue to do so.)

The familiar story I've outlined, though, as you may have noticed, concentrates entirely on the Shakespeare of the professionals: the narrative I have summarized is that of the Shakespeare of the Tonson publishing monopoly, the Shakespeare of the Theaters Royal, the Shakespeare of the National Cur-

3. The Folger, famously, both literalizes and trumps the feudal-relic-lurking-at-the-heart-of-bourgeois-democracy view of Bardolatry by enshrining its relics of the superseded Old World at the very nerve-center of the New, in the middle of Washington, DC.

riculum, a creature of large-scale commerce and of big institutions. What I want to do now is to go back to those key dates and look at some of what has been left out, and see what difference it makes.

1623, for example, may have been the year of the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, but it marked another major first too. In 1623 Sir Edward Dering duly bought a copy of the First Folio, along with 164 other play-books, but he also bought a set of wigs and false beards, and hired a scribe named Carrington to copy out an adapted version of both parts of *Henry IV*. 1623 was, in short, the year of the first recorded non-professional performance of Shakespeare to take place on British soil, at Dering's house, Surrenden, in Kent. Captain Keeling may have beaten Dering to the title of first non-professional producer of Shakespeare, but Dering's *Henry IV* is the first domestic specimen we know of this enduringly popular social activity. The manuscript that survives as its principal trace is highly revealing: unlike most later commentators on these two plays, what Dering valued most in *Henry IV*, to judge from his deep cuts, was not the character of Falstaff but Shakespeare's depiction of a lingering constitutional crisis.⁴ The performances Dering and his friends gave in the hall at Surrenden must have resembled a semi-public debate about the rival claims of aggrieved peers and a dubiously legitimate monarchy, appropriately enough given that Dering was born in the Tower of London and would die, in 1644, as a member of the Long Parliament, at the very center of the English civil war. Dering actually prepared his acting text not from the Folio but from the more conveniently-sized quartos (Q5 of part 1 and Q1 of part 2), and for subsequent domestic productions of plays by other writers he saved on the scribe's fees by buying multiple quarto copies and cutting them up. Within a few years of Dering's death, indeed, the amateur-dramatic niche for Shakespeare in the playbook market, which he seems to have been the first to discover, would be explicitly catered for, with the publication of *The Merry Conceited Humours of Bottom the Weaver* (1661). "Lately privately presented by several apprentices for their harmless recreation, with great applause," this abbreviation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is recommended by its publishers on the grounds that it "may easily be acted," even by a small cast if the same players take the roles of Theseus and Oberon and Hippolyta and Titania. Here, at the far end of both the book-production and the stage-production

4. See George Walton Williams and Gwynne Blakemore Evans, eds., *The History of King Henry the Fourth, as revised by Sir Edward Dering, bart.* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1974).

industries from the Folio and the Theaters Royal, the amateurs seem to have beaten the professionals to what is now an almost mandatory piece of economical thematic doubling by about three centuries.

If 1623 might be celebrated for the birth of homegrown amateur Shakespeare as much as for the publication of the Folio, what about 1774, the year of the academic monograph? This was the year of another major first, equally unsung: the first recorded all-female production of a Shakespeare play.⁵ There had been all-female productions of works by other dramatists in the professional theaters long before this: in the 1660s the King's Company, for instance, put on a novelty one-off girl-on-girl rendition of *Philaster*, among other plays, and sporadic women-only *Beggar's Operas* were staged in the London theaters at various points during the eighteenth century. But the first all-female Shakespearean production took place not in London but in Salisbury, in the Chapel Room above St Anne's Gate in the Cathedral Close, carefully adapted to accommodate a three-foot high stage, a small orchestra and an audience of about forty or fifty. The play was the second item on a double bill, repeated seven times in late November 1774, and was chosen as a light afterpiece to follow David Mallett's tragedy *Elvira*, given by the same cast. The Shakespeare play singled out in Salisbury to be the first ever enacted by an all-female cast was, remarkably enough, *The Winter's Tale*, albeit as abbreviated by Macnamara Morgan and retitled *Florizel and Perdita: or The Sheep-Shearing*. The chief players and moving spirits in this show were Gertrude Harris, who is described in family correspondence as its "*impresario*" and who also played the Young Shepherd, and her younger sister Louisa Harris, who played Perdita, incidentally enhancing the role for the first and perhaps only time by equipping the royal shepherdess with a harp. "I intend introducing the harp at the drawing up of the curtain which I think will have a good effect," she wrote, and Gertrude subsequently reported that "Louisa acted well; & in the farce gained much applause by her harp which was very well introduced" (Burrows and Dunhill 777-82). The Harrises were, in fact, one of those well-nigh unbearably musical families still to be found here and there in English cathedral cities, the center of a social circle perfectly well-enough equipped with accomplished

5. For a more detailed account of this production, see Michael Dobson, "Theatre for nothing" in *Playwrights, Players, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660-1800*, ed. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007). Since this production is even less well-known than the Dering manuscript, I felt it deserved some space here too.

young women to stage full-scale musical and theatrical entertainments at regular intervals. In 1770 the sisters and their friends had already staged an all-female production of William Whitehead's tragedy *Creusa*, adapted from Euripides's *Ion*, starring Louisa as Prince Ilyssus and Gertrude as the Priestess of Apollo. As an afterpiece they had staged their own father James's pastoral operetta *Daphnis and Amaryllis*, its chorus only slightly padded out with borrowed cathedral choristers.

The long-delayed vengeance on the all-male theatrical conventions of Shakespeare's day represented by a girls-only *Winter's Tale* did not go unremarked, in some instances scandalously. Some commentators simply understood the whole production as a deluxe form of courtship display, a ravishing parade of nuptial eligibility. The Dean of Salisbury Cathedral himself, for example, was one of many local worthies to be moved to verse by the occasion. Gallant to the point of titillation, and causing tremendous embarrassment when subsequently printed in *The Salisbury Journal* on March 27, 1775, his well-nigh salivating poem about Laetitia Wyndham, who took the roles of Elvira and of Dorcas, concludes its tribute to her exquisite shape (apparently animated quite irresistibly by "tenderness and love"), with the respectably conventional wish, "Oh! may you soon perform, in real life, / The tender mother, and the faithful wife." (It's a wish which would, admittedly, have been more respectable in 1775 if the rhyme had not obliged the Dean to put the projected motherhood before the imagined marriage.) But to others, these all-female productions spoke of desires either beyond the scope of marriage or actually inimical to it. In 1770, for instance, one Mr Tobin had dashed off the following lines "On Miss Louisa Margaret Harris in the Character of Ilyssus":

In her own beauteous form Louisa can
Secure the heart of each admiring man,
But anxious still fresh conquests to pursue
Lovely Ilyssus charms the women too.
(Burrows and Dunhill 579)

After the *Elvira/Florizel and Perdita* double bill in 1774, the *Salisbury Journal* of November 28, 1774 took an indulgent if defensive view of the cross-dressing taking place in the Cathedral Close, commenting that

Great judgement and elegance of fancy appeared in the choice of [costumes]; particularly the dresses of those who personated men; their habits were well-suited to their characters, and at the same time appeared so well-contrived, as to leave no room for censure, had they been viewed by the most evil eye.

It was the rival *Bath Journal* which took the opposing stance, and which took the occasion to invoke historicism against this nest of thespians by looking wistfully back to Shakespeare's own culture. On Queen Bess's Day itself, November 17, 1774, its editors printed the following poem, signed "Leo":

In good Queen Elizabeth's reign,
 In a decent and virtuous age,
 That they ne'er might give modesty pain,
 No female appeared on the stage.

But lo! what a change time affords!
 The ladies, 'mong many strange things,
 Call for helmets, for breeches, and swords,
 And act Senators, Heroes, and Kings.

The following issue (December 1, 1774) printed something even more hostile "To the Ladies of Salisbury," this time signed "An Old Maid":

Happy dames, ye have found a plan
 To learn what outwardly belongs to man.
 Follow the lucky thought, encore, encore;
 The Fates decree ye never shall know more.

(This malicious prophecy may in one case have come true, in so far as Louisa Harris, however advantageously displayed to the admiration of potential husbands with her harp, chose never to marry.) What the *Bath Journal* would have said had the cast of *The Sheep-Shearing* instead included members of the opposite sex we can only imagine: presumably one reason for keeping some amateur productions single-sex this long after two-sexed productions had become the norm on the professional stage was precisely to forestall that sort of criticism, to quarantine these maidenly performers from everything that was waiting to happen in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* a generation later.

But there is surely more to the Salisbury performances than safe single-sex *de facto* school plays or marital advertisement, and I would argue that what is more interesting than the mingled excitement and disapprobation occasioned locally by the all-female *Winter's Tale* is the whole milieu for Shakespeare which it makes visible, and the understanding of this particular play which it implies. James Harris, the girls' father, was a musician, a dilettante, and a great friend of Thomas Warton (who even helped design the costumes for *Creusa*): he was nicknamed "Hermes" Harris after his treatise on linguistics, and his writings refer to the after-dinner reading aloud and dis-

cussion of Shakespeare's plays as a customary activity among friends and family. He corresponded with Garrick (who staged *Daphnis and Amaryllis* at Drury Lane), and was a friend of Elizabeth Montagu, and he later associated with Charles and Frances Burney (who describes him admiringly in her *Journal*). Above all he was known as a champion of women's education—unusually, despite having a son as well as daughters.⁶ Hermes Harris's wife Elizabeth, whose letters to James junior about these productions are among the wittiest and best records we have of non-professional theatrical performance in the Enlightenment, was related to the Ashley-Coopers, the Earls of Shaftesbury, and thereby to the late Susanna Ashley-Cooper, who had been the leading light of the Shakespeare Ladies Club thirty years earlier. In fact the Harris circle—which overlapped with that of another political family with local connections and a deep commitment to home theatricals, the Foxes—seems to have lived exactly the attitude to Shakespeare promulgated by the Shakespeare Ladies Club back in the 1730s and 1740s, seeing Shakespeare as above all a native, moral and domestic writer worthy of special praise for his depictions of female friendship. From the Harrises it is a short step to the hearthside Shakespeare of the Austen household and many others, and thence the Shakespeares of Victorian parlour games, or of Pollock's toy theaters. In 1774, in the hands of the Harris girls, the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale* became a text less about anxieties surrounding male bonding and male bloodlines than a display of female talent and female solidarity, a continuation of the crucial intimacy between Hermione and Paulina by other means. The most touching as well as the most telling trace of this pioneering Salisbury production, then, has to be the poem composed by Louisa Harris for her friend Miss Hinchman, who played Florizel, written on the last night:

No more shall we with trembling hear that bell,
 Which shews me, Perdita; thee, Florizell.
 Thy brilliant eyes no more with looks of love
 Shall in my bosom gentle pity move.
 The curtain drops, and here we both remain,
 You without love, I free from mimic pain.
 Grant me this favor, though our drama ends,
 Lett the feign'd lovers still be real friends.
 (Burrows and Dunhill 782)

6. This son, James junior, who was away in Berlin on diplomatic service in 1774, later became the Earl of Malmesbury, and it is thanks to his fortune that the family papers are preserved.

Which constitutes the most representative trace of Shakespeare's place in Enlightenment culture, this poem, or William Richardson's critical book? Given the choice, in 1774, between re-reading *A Philosophical Examination and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* and seeing Louisa Harris as Perdita, I know which one I would choose.

Cut once again to 1932, the year that saw the inauguration of the Folger and of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and we find another major unsung first in the reception history of the Shakespeare canon. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre was not the only auditorium purpose-built for the performance of Shakespeare to open in 1932. That year also saw the opening of the first Shakespearean theater to be both designed and built by a woman; a theater established by a non-professional and for non-professionals, which so far from imitating the proscenium-arch auditoriums of the previous century instead imitates the amphitheaters of the previous archaeological era. I refer of course to Minack, the very temple of English non-professional Shakespeare: a theater hewn into the granite cliffside at Porthcurno, near Land's End in Cornwall, by Rowena Cade, aided only by her gardener,



The audience arriving to see the "Tempest" performance at Minack in 1932.

during the harsh and stormy winter of 1931-1932.⁷ Cade had become involved in local amateur dramatics in 1929, when she had designed and made the costumes for an outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at nearby Crean, and after the show was revived in 1930 she decided to adopt non-professional Shakespeare as the crowning social stunt of her menage at Minack House. She bought the rocky headland at the bottom of her garden for £100 specifically in order to convert it into an irresistibly spectacular venue for a follow-up production of *The Tempest*, and that production—lit, in the evenings, by detached car headlamps and a few electric lightbulbs run on strings of interlinked extension leads from the house—opened in August 1932. Inaugurated as it was during the great age of outdoor Shakespeare, and indeed of outdoor everything else, the venue immediately caught the popular imagination—*The Tempest* was eagerly reviewed in *The Times*—and it has flourished ever since, soon adopted as one of the key cultural centers for its county (in the wake of the Festival of Britain it was actually taken over and run for a while by Cornwall County Council). It now plays host to a 17-week summer season of (predominantly) amateur productions of (predominantly) Shakespeare plays, rehearsed elsewhere during the winter. I don't know how the account books of the Minack Theatre Trust compare to those of the Royal Shakespeare Company (which despite being part-funded out of the public purse are kept a good deal more secret), but there can be few financial documents at once more poignant and more triumphant than Cade's own handwritten, pencilled totting-up of the balance-sheet after Minack's 1937 production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. This small piece of paper records, as one of its chief expenses (completely vindicated by box-office returns), the purchase of one hundred pairs of sandals from the Penzance branch of Woolworths.

Cade could only achieve what she did at Minack, however, because by the early 1930s the whole country, right to its extreme south-western tip, had been swept by the tide of what is now referred to as the Little Theatre Movement. Voluntary non-commercial theater groups had been springing into being since the last decade of the previous century, and the anxiety to sustain community life through participation in drama was by the 1910s so pervasive that many local employers were actively setting up their own works amateur dramatic societies. (It was at this time, for example, that the telegraph station at Porthcurno, now part of Cable and Wireless, became a cen-

7. I have written at more length about Minack in "Shakespeare Exposed: Outdoor Performance and Ideology, 1880-1940" in *Shakespeare, Memory, and Performance*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256-80.

ter of amateur theater, a center which Cade was later able to co-opt for Minack). This movement was especially strong in the North East: in 1919, for example, a keen amateur performer from Darlington was hired as a “welfare officer” by the personnel department at a Shredded Wheat factory down south in Welwyn Garden City, where her duties included running a drama society in a converted hall. She subsequently abandoned this promising career in the breakfast cereal industry, however, and became a professional actress, under her own name, Flora Robson.

The Shakespeare of the Little Theatre Movement owed far more to the example and guidance of touring actor-managers like Frank Benson and Ben Greet than it did to the modernist designer Shakespeare soon on view in what would become the RST, which has to date dominated academic accounts of twentieth-century live performance. The underlying ideal of twentieth-century amateur Shakespeare, derived ultimately from Ruskin and Morris, was the restoration of the organic society, the return to an imagined collective artisan life of unalienated labour: impassioned local volunteers were to keep Shakespeare alive as an antidote to mass-produced forms of entertainment such as the cinema. An older and sadder H.V. Morton, for example, remembered a crucial encounter with Frank Benson himself, during a visit to Stratford:

I remember him telling me, as I sat worshipping him . . . that only through Stratford, the common meeting place of the English-speaking world, could we heal the pains of Industrialism and make England happy again. We were to make the whole world happy, apparently, by teaching it to morris-dance and to sing folk songs and to go to the [old] Memorial Theatre. With the splendid faith of Youth we pilgrims believed that England could be made “merrie” again by hand-loomers and young women in Liberty gowns who played the harpsichord. (Morton 250)

That this particular form of Shakespearean nostalgia served wider social purposes than those of the educated crankishness affectionately derided by Morton, though, may perhaps be indicated by another case history, this one again from the North East. In 1932, while Cade was making Minack, the Middlesbrough Little Theatre were rehearsing *Henry V*. Directing and playing the Chorus was an accountant and Christian Socialist lay preacher called John Berriman, a man who already enjoyed the twin distinction of having turned down the job of goalkeeper at Everton FC (on the grounds that it was on the wrong side of the Pennines), and of having been involved in the first ever non-professional rendition of Shaw’s *Saint Joan*.

(He regarded this play, in the best Fabian manner, as a utopian prefiguration of the overturning of worldly authority.) This Middlesbrough *Henry V* isn't described in any extant histories of twentieth-century Shakespeare, and I've no idea whether Berriman was any good in it, though surviving photographs bear witness to some striking part-modern costuming. But I can at least assure you from personal recollection that he never forgot the lines: he was my own grandfather, and his eldest daughter met my father through the amateur dramatic society which he ran after the war in nearby Stokesley. I mention this not as some sort of senile autobiographical ramble (or not only as such) but to exemplify something that had decisively changed since Dering and the Harrises: amateur Shakespeare had become an arena for interaction between the sexes as well as within them. Unlike inter-war amateur sport, with its anxiety to promote male bonding across the middle classes in a gentlemanly ethos derived from the public schools (all joining selective clubs and gamely playing up together in the face of creeping Bolshevism), amateur drama had become a social space in which men and women participated together in the sphere of culture, and not just in the mixed doubles either: amateur dramatic societies have famously provided a home at the heart of English civic life at once for heterosexual courtship and for sexual dissidence. The Shakespeare of local amateur drama is above all the Shakespeare of the comedies, the Shakespeare of marriage and also of masquerade: this is a Shakespeare not only performed by local community groups but overwhelmingly interested in their dynamics as a subject, and in 2007 his defining competitor is not Marlowe or Jonson but Alan Ayckbourn. According to all the figures I have been able to collate from the Little Theatre Guild, the National Association of Operatic and Dramatic Associations and elsewhere, it is Ayckbourn who enjoys the distinction of being the second most performed playwright in Britain, only just behind the Bard. To close this brief sketch of an alternative amateur reception history of Shakespeare with another representative case: very recently the St Peter's Players of Upper Wolvercote (a village in Oxfordshire on Shakespeare's commuting route between Stratford and London) celebrated the 50th anniversary of their founding charter by staging a gala evening in the village hall, including in the first half a one-act Ayckbourn and in the second an abbreviated Shakespeare, *Bottom's Dream*—a compilation of exactly the same material first recommended to amateur groups in 1661 as *The Merry Conceited Humours of Bottom the Weaver*. I now possess a trace of this production which constitutes a perfect example of the overlap between national culture and domesticity represented by

such performances: the costume worn by Snout as Wall, which has visibly been made by cutting extra holes in a duvet cover, dying it brick red and then marking on mortar lines with a felt pen.

What light does all this massively under-studied amateur Shakespearean activity shed on our established history of Shakespeare's acquisition of a worldwide audience? To some extent, I think, it reinforces in other registers some of the conclusions already widely accepted. If the persistence of Shakespeare in commercial and institutionalized public culture represents an ideological survival of the feudal into a bourgeois age, then the history of amateur Shakespeare represents an even more literal one, since the second story I have outlined has often been dominated by acts of private patronage. It is salutary to recognize how far the dissemination of Shakespeare, however much academics may stress the importance of the book business, the professional theater and the educational system, has nonetheless been influenced and sustained by private property, albeit in domestic and familial contexts: whether Dering's hall at Surrenden in 1623 or the Harrises theater in Salisbury in 1774 or Rowena Cade's headland in Cornwall in 1932. (At a more banal level, amateur societies which perform Shakespeare outdoors, like the ones that perform at Minack, are usually dominated politically by the person who hosts their rehearsals in a large private garden.) But then again that is true of the professional history I outlined too: in 1932 the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was largely paid for by the Flower brewing family, who still retain a presence on the board of the RSC, and the Folger Shakespeare Library was paid for by the estate of Henry Clay Folger; in 1774 Garrick owned his own mini-Folger, by which he could patronize his old schoolteacher Dr Johnson; and in 1623 the Folio, for all its appeal to the great variety of readers, was dedicated to that most noble and incomparable pair of brethren, William Earl of Pembroke etc. and Philip Earl of Montgomery etc., whose generosity is credited with enabling the book's contents to have been written at all. And even among the less well-off, a dedication to Shakespeare, like property, is often not distributed in the public sphere but passed down within families.

Equally, the history of amateur Shakespeare makes it very obvious how central to the reception of the canon have been the talents and aspirations of middle-class women, from Robson and Cade back through the Harrises, in a way which again usefully underlines their presence in the established official story too. In 1932 the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was itself de-

signed, albeit anonymously, by a woman, Elisabeth Scott, and the Folger was built not by Henry Clay Folger himself but by his widow, Emily Clara Jordan Folger, who had shaped its collections, and who had imbibed her enthusiasm for Shakespeare at a women's college, Vassar, whose ethos, not a million miles from that of the Shakespeare Ladies' Club, owed much to the use of Shakespeare in vernacular education for the many pioneered by William Richardson in 1774. If the amateurs have been less interested in the manufacture of historical glosses than the professionals, they have not been on a different planet, however thoroughly the chroniclers of Shakespeare's popularity to date have preferred to concentrate on famous actors and famous editors as if no-one else's uses of Shakespeare counted.

What the amateur examples I have cited also suggest is that for an enormous proportion of Shakespeare's readers and playgoers over the last four centuries his work represents neither an opportunity for profit, nor a field for the devising of public examinations, nor an instance of social oppression. The Folio contains many other phrases than "whatever you do, buy," and the authority it began to confer on Shakespeare has usually been one in which his readers have been able to share, often as performers, rather than one exerted at their expense. Above all, I think, the history of non-professional Shakespeare helps to confirm Shakespeare's identity as a playwright far more interested in the social than in the sacred, someone whose work both depicts and convenes societies: if there are two categories our established reception history has tended to overlook, they are the local and the civic, two things which Shakespeare himself never underestimated. After all, he probably first saw plays at all under the auspices of Stratford council, while his father was responsible for licensing visiting companies, and his own work never depicts professional playwrights but only schoolmasters who compose dramatic entertainments for particular groups and occasions. Officially, as liveried servants of the Lord Chamberlain who were supposed to perform in public only on the side, his company, outside any guild, weren't what we would call professional at all. If the Shakespeare cult represents a survival, it is surely the survival not just of the feudal within the bourgeois but of the civic and the voluntary within the national and even the global. One more point: if the Shakespeare industry of today is really a massive, prestigious department of international capitalism, then why are professors of Shakespeare studies paid at the rates that they are? Whatever we may say to make ourselves feel more important, publications like the present issue of *GRAMMA* and *Shakespeare Survey* and *Shakespeare Quarterly* are only fanzines, and even the most august international Shakespeare conferences are only social

gatherings of people who choose to participate in doing Shakespeare, in whatever manner or capacity; people who, if they were primarily interested in making money or serving the status quo, would surely do something else instead. Perhaps the history of this business called Shakespeare has all along been a story about amateurs; and perhaps our ideas about exactly which audiences it has principally served and why have, ever since William Keeling, been all at sea.

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