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## Shakespeare's Myriad-Minded Stage: Propositional Spaces of Cultural Hybridity

The concept of hybridity is predicated on an assumed notion of purity, fixity or clarity. Arguably, this is profoundly ingrained in logocentric epistemologies that assert such cultural constructs as the unity of a text, authorship, ownership, or an identity of sorts. Martin Procházka's and Zoltán Márkus's essays in this issue theorise the complexities and faultlines of Shakespearean hybridities and the questions of *appropriation* and *appropriability* in a textual and authorial sense (Procházka), and in a cultural and specifically postcolonial one (Márkus). Complementing their approaches, this essay aims at capturing a different type of hybridity – one that takes place in the very moment of performance in the act of the audience's perception and understanding the play. On the example of Shakespeare's plays, this essay addresses the question of (i) truth value and fiction in performance, elaborating on the notion of theatrical reality; (ii) the propositionality of the stage as a space and as action; and (iii) the shift in performance as an oral medium from logocentric textuality to social interaction arguing that the epistemic basis of performance is not the spoken word but human interaction as social facts. This approach introduces hybridities of a different kind.<sup>1</sup>

### (i) The Truth and Fiction of Shakespearean Performance

A theatrical performance is in more than one way both true and untrue, and at the same time outside the alethic space of truth value. Philip Sidney, in *The Defence of Poesie*, compares the art of the (dramatic) poet to the arts of other thinkers. Unlike the poet, the others are bound by the givens of Nature:

So doth the Astronomer looke vpon the starres, and by that hee seeth, setteth downe what order Nature hath taken therein. [...] The naturall Philosopher thereon hath his name, and the Morall Philosopher standeth vpon the naturall vertues, vices, and passions of man; and followe Nature (saith hee) therein, & thou shalt not erre. The Lawyer sayth what men haue determined. The Historian what men haue done. (*The Defence of Poesie* 1595, C1r)<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to all the scholars – who “become Actors and Players as it were, of what Nature will haue set forth” (C1r) – the poet is not limited by Nature:

onely the Poet, disdayning to be tied to any such subiection, lifted vp with the vigor of his owne inuention, dooth growe in effect, another nature, in making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe formes such as neuer were in Nature, as the *Heroes*, *Demigods*, *Cyclops*, *Chimeras*, *Furies*, & such like: so as hee goeth hand in hand with Nature, not inclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging onely within the Zodiack of his owne wit. (C1v)

<sup>1</sup> This essay developed from discussions and conference panels with Martin Procházka and Zoltán Márkus, held at the 2014 International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford and the 2017 ESRA Conference in Gdańsk. Many thanks to them and to Veronika Ambros, Rui Carvalho Homem, Christy Desmet, David Drozd, Campbell Edinborough, Diana Henderson, Lisa Hopkins, Pamela Howard, Tomáš Kačer, M. J. Kidnie, Friedemann Kreuder and Eva Stehlíková for their advice, help and inspiring insights. The article is also a development of and a companion piece to “Shakespeare's Myriad-Minded Stage as a Transnational Forum: Openness and Plurality in Drama Translation”, in a special issue of *Shakespeare Studies* 46 (2018) entitled *Shakespeare and Cultural Translation: A Forum*, edited by Rui Carvalho Homem (pp. 35–47).

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<sup>2</sup> *The Defence of Poesie*. By Sir Philip Sidney, Knight. London. Printed for William Ponsonby. 1595. Available at *Early English Books Online* (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>).

The way Sidney defines the specific art of the poet in relation to reality or fact (what he calls the divine Nature) induces a specific modality in relation to truth. The poet is not *deliuering forth* that which is true but that which is "may make the too much loued earth more louely" (C1v). In an obscure passage Sidney tackles this complex alethic reflection:

for any vnderstanding [which] knoweth the skil of the Artificer, standeth in that Idea or fore-conceite of the work, & not in the work it selfe. And that the Poet hath that Idea, is manifest, by deliuering them forth in such excellencie as hee had imagined them. Which deliuering forth also, is not wholie imaginatiue, as we are wont to say by them that build Castles in the ayre. (C2r)

Sidney contrasts the *work itself* from the *Idea or fore-conceit of the work*. This *fore-conceit*, not unrelated to the proverbial *castles in the air*, is the poet's fare. It is not to be subject to the same laws of nature but the poet's *owne invention doth grow, in effect, another nature* with a specific rules of truth and untruth.

In the final scene of *As You Like It*, Touchstone expounds on the subjunctive mode of speaking "vpon the seuenth cause" of a lie (5.4.47–48) and the quarrel that is appeased by being predicated only on *if*'s: "Your *If*, is the onely peace-maker: much vertue in *if*" (5.4.85). On Touchstone's part (or Shakespeare's?) this is more than a rhetorical *tour de force* but also a dramatic trick that prepares for the return of Rosalind and the nuptial god Hymen. As Maura Slattery Kuhn has argued, it may have been in preparation for a possible theatrical magic: "What if [...] Rosalind and Celia come in very much as they went out[?]" (42).<sup>3</sup> What Touchstone's set piece may be doing theatrically is the opening up of the indeterminate, subjunctive mode – everything we are going to see in front of our eyes is only a *what if*. After Hymen's song, the dialogue remains in the subjunctive mode of *if*:

Rosalind. To you I giue my selfe, for I am yours.  
To you I giue my selfe, for I am yours.  
Duke Senior. If there be truth in sight, you are my daughter.  
Orlando. If there be truth in sight, you are my *Rosalind*.  
Phebe. If sight & shape be true,  
Why then my loue adieu.  
Rosalind. Ile haue no Father, if you be not he:  
Ile haue no Husband, if you be not he:  
Nor ne're wed woman, if you be not shee.  
Hymen. Peace hoa: I barre confusion,  
'Tis I must make conclusion  
Of these most strange euent: (*AYL* 5.4.98–109)<sup>4</sup>

The theatrical opportunity that offers itself here as a tool of maximising the effect of the performance is to embrace the elusiveness of the embodiment and representation, the imaginary *castles in the air* that the poet has created. These are neither true, nor untrue – only the performative, subjunctive *what if*.

The complexity within a performance of a Shakespeare play are even greater. Given the *myth* that Shakespeare's works carry with them globally almost irrespective of whether audiences know the

<sup>3</sup> Maura Slattery Kuhn, "Much Virtue in *If*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977), pp. 40–50.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare's works are cited from *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works. Critical Reference Edition*. General editors Gary Taylor et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

play in question or not, the dynamics of the subjunctive mode and its alethic qualities. The play in question simply *is* a cultural fact and it cannot be extricated from its canonicity.<sup>5</sup> In more than one way a Shakespearean performance is an iteration of the known and a physical manifestation of the Shakespearean myth. In other words, it is a subjunctive *what if* event within a fictional world, and at the same time a re-enactment of a part of cultural memory. The latter perspective brings in an alethic dimension to the play – it becomes either a true, or a false record of the Shakespearean memory – a *rehearsal* in its medieval and early modern sense (see OED *rehearsal*, 1a and 1b). When performing Shakespeare in translation, this sense of a possible re-enactment is further enhanced in that, as spectators, we are aware (though perhaps not always actively so) that the words we are hearing are a step or two removed from the Shakespearean original. Arguably – and in keeping with the specific truth value that Sidney advocates for the poet's art – the truth of this *record* pertains to reality and its alethic qualities in figurative sense.

## (ii) The Propositionality of the Onstage Space and Action

The manuscript convolute *Quodlibetica*, volume II (dated 1680–1699) deposited in the Premonstratensian Monastery of Prague<sup>6</sup> contains diverse notes, accounts and stories, as well as occasional dialogues and plays in German or Latin, with the vernacular Czech surfacing here and there.<sup>7</sup> Apart from an adaptation of Andreas Gryphius' *Absurda Comica*, itself an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), the volume also has a section entitled

*Niektere Smiešne Pohatky, a skazky* [Several Funny Riddles and Sayings]

NB. *Haec jocosa aenigmata, etsi in propositione sua indecentia et turpia esse videantur, in expositione tamen sua nihil indecens demonstrant.* (299r)

[Here are funny riddles, though they may seem in proposition to be indecent and vile, but in the outcome are shown to have nothing indecent in them.]

These rhymed riddles are often explicitly bawdy, playing with the vulgar (popular) usage of certain words – nowadays mostly retaining only their bawdy meaning. In the answer, which is provided after each riddle, alongside a chaste explanation, all possible bawdiness is wiped out, and the moral status quo is reasserted.

15. Když se smrká, tam se strka,

Když se svita, on výstrka.

Rx: *To gest Zawora, na nocz on se zastržzi, Rano se výstržzi.* (300v)

[15. When it gets dark [with a pun on *smrákat* = to get dark, and *smrkat* = to drive], it is thrust in,

When it dawns, he pulls it out.

*Answer:* That is a door latch; for the night it is thrust in; in the morning it is pulled out.]

The listed two dozens of riddles and several other logical teasers<sup>8</sup> follow the same pattern:

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the *myth* in relation to M. J. Kidnie's and Christy Desmet's research in particular, see Drábek, "Shakespeare's Myriad-Minded Stage as a Transnational Forum", pp. 39–40.

<sup>6</sup> The manuscript is available at *Manuscriptorium: Digital Library of Written Cultural Heritage* ([www.manuscriptorium.com](http://www.manuscriptorium.com)).

<sup>7</sup> This section was first presented as part of my conference paper "Einen grünen Hering in der Hand?: Mixed Response in Itinerant Plays of Seventeenth-Century Germany", given at the Theater Without Borders conference "Mobility, Hybridity and Reciprocal Exchange in the Theatres of Early Modern Europe" at New York University Madrid, May 2011.

<sup>8</sup> It is of interest that among the riddles the manuscript cites that of Antioch, deciphered by Apollonius, King of Tyre, alluding to Antioch's incestuous relationship with his daughter (302r–302v).

they flirt with the bawdy and the publically suppressed before providing a plausible and morally innocent explanation. The riddles come in two steps:

- 1) triggering imagination, a free play of associations (the *propositio* phase: *in propositione sua indecentia et turpia esse videantur*);
- 2) rooting the connotations in a chaste and decent ground (the *expositio*, moralistic phase: *in expositione tamen sua nihil indecens demonstrant*).

The first phase, *propositio*, evokes possibilities – the subjunctive *what if* – and coincides with the cognitive process of understanding of what actually goes on. The individual words used, indeterminate in themselves, open up *spaces of indeterminacy* (as Roman Ingarden would call it), an array of possibilities, interpretations and outcomes. The second phase, *expositio*, narrows down this array somewhat – more or often less, in the case of open-ended stories. Naturally, it is the first phase that constitutes the heart of these riddles, while disclaiming any alethic and ethic assertions made in that phase.

Arguably, the two-step process – formalised here in rhetorical terminology as *propositio* and *expositio* – is not only present but consciously and artistically deployed in performance. It extends into an action in space that is intentionally *propositional* – often signalling its elusive and unfixed nature. While the above instance from *As You Like It* is one particularly pronounced example, the entire presence of Rosalind in Arden in the “false” shape and “untrue” identity of Ganymede is probably capitalising on the physical qualities of the boy actor for whom the role was written:

*Rosalind.*                                      Were it not better,  
Because that I am more than common tall,  
That I did suite me all points like a man[?] (*AYL* 1.3.103–105)

Rosalind’s disguise is introduced by a propositional *what if* (“Were it not better *etc.*”) and the boy actor crossdresses back into his biological sex. In scenes that follow, the self-referential, metatheatrical perspective is present as a potentiality and can be worked with both within the fiction as well as in the propositional performance action *ad hoc* – here and now. Naturally, with a female actor playing Rosalind, the dynamics is different and, I would argue, perhaps even more complex in that another layer of propositional complexity – a role originally written for a tall boy actor is played by a female actor acknowledging the difference between the Shakespearean script and the theatrical performance here and now.<sup>9</sup>

Shakespeare’s plays often conjure up this representational hybridity – very often in moments of heightened emotional upheaval. This is done probably to dislocate the audience’s experiencing of the story (*the play*) from its imperfect onstage presentation:

*let vs [...]*  
*On your imaginarie Forces worke. [...]*  
*Peece out our imperfections with your thoughts:*  
*Into a thousand parts divide one Man,*

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<sup>9</sup> My own theatre-making experience with gender-blind and cross-gender casting supports this assertion. Generally, performing in an acknowledgedly elusive mode of heightened propositionality is a powerful theatrical tool for enhancing the effect of performance: the actor is no more than metaphorically proposing the embodied action and the fiction that is built on it; in so doing, the discrepancy between what is perceived and embodied on stage on the one hand, and what is experienced as the play in one’s imagination on the other, is a powerful aesthetic creation in its own right.

*And make imaginative Puissance.*

*Thinke when we talke of Horses, that you see them (Henry V Prologue 17–26)*

The Prologue to *Henry V* invokes the audience's *imaginative powers* and effectively conjures up the propositional perspective: what presents itself to the naked eye, is *not* the true essence of the story. In other words, the onstage space and the onstage action are in hybrid states – figurative and imperfect renderings (records) that mediate between the physical and the metaphysical states.

In a similar vein, after the assassination of Caesar, the conspirators pause in what comes as a counterintuitive course of action. While they bathe their hands in Caesar's blood, the dialogical exchange between Cassius and Brutus invokes the propositionality of their action, culminating in its ideological rooting:

*Cassius.* Stoop then, and wash. How many Ages hence

Shall this our lofty Scene be acted ouer,

In [States] vnborne, and Accents yet vnknowne?

*Brutus.* How many times shall *Cæsar* bleed in sport,

That now on *Pompeyes* Basis [lyes] along,

No worthier then the dust?

*Cassius.* So oft as that shall be,

So often shall the knot of vs be call'd,

The Men that gaue their Country liberty. (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.113–120)

It is all the more estranging that it is the ever-serious Brutus to dislocate the action through a comical comment – *bleed in sport* – as if in acknowledgement of the elusive representation of this notorious moment in world history. A similar trick is deployed in *Antony and Cleopatra* at the point of the Egyptian queen's death.

Otakar Zich, in his seminal theatre theory oeuvre *The Aesthetics of Dramatic Art* (*Estetika dramatického umění*, Prague 1931), devises what has become known as the *actor triad* – differentiating between (1) the *actor* and his/her *role*; (2) the *stage figure* (*herecká postava*), which is the result of the actor's creative efforts, done with the help of stage direction, interaction, scenography etc.; and (3) the *dramatic character* or *persona* (*dramatická osoba*), which is a product of the spectator's imagination based on the sensory perceptions of the performance.<sup>10</sup> As spectators we are very conscious of the materiality and specifics of (1) and (2) – a particular actor portraying a particular role. On a more immediate level, the individual actions the actor takes may or may not contribute to the play; there are lapses, technical movements, slips of the tongue or even unconscious blunders, which we as spectators sift out and select. This level of hybridity in the onstage action is an indelible part of the experience and is often navigated half-consciously, as if without noticing. At the same time, the fictional play (3), the product of our selection, experience, judgment and imagination is interpolated from the hybrid perceptions of the propositions offered by the onstage action.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, the onstage space and the onstage action are not only exempt from alethic judgment but also are elusive as embodiments of anything immanently

<sup>10</sup> Otakar Zich, *Estetika dramatického umění* (Praha: Melantrich, 1931), p. 52. Zich's *Aesthetics of Dramatic Art* is being edited for publication (forthcoming in 2019). For an English-language commentary on the triad, see David Drozd, Tomáš Kačer and Don Sparling (eds), *Theatre Theory Reader: Prague School Writings* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2016): pp. 20 and 619–620. See also Michael L. Quinn's "The Prague School Concept of the Stage Figure" in Irmengard Rauch and Gerald Carr (eds), *The Semiotic Bridge: Trends from California* (The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988): pp. 75–85; and *The Semiotic Stage: Prague School Theater Theory* (New York and Berlin: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> For alternative approaches to theatrical reality and perception see Campbell Edinborough's *Theatrical Reality: Space, Embodiment and Empathy in Performance* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016); or Ted Cohen's *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

tangible: they operate in a hybrid of propositionality that often forestalls an objectively verifiable meaning.

### (iii) From Logocentric Textuality to Social Interaction

Shakespeare's plays are works of literature – more than four centuries of readership have enjoyed and appreciated it as great and fundamental literary creations. This does not take away from their theatrical qualities but rather the opposite: their literary qualities can and often are enjoyed as one of the important components of their theatrical performance. However, this fact does not uproot or invalidate the essential basis of the plays as the textual rendering of an oral medium: the live performance. While the debate over the relation between stage-centred *vs.* text-centred Shakespeare criticism seems to be ongoing,<sup>12</sup> it should be recognised that the plays exist in two epistemologically incompatible, though complementary modes: (1) the logocentric literary approach that takes the written, chirographic *word* as the basis of its significance; and (2) the performance approach that operates within an oral medium; the epistemic basis of this mode is not the word and its meaning but social interaction with the *social fact* at its core.<sup>13</sup>

The dying words of King Lear are beautiful poetry: bleak, heart-rending and humbling. However, in performance, the words take on yet another quality. They are not the be-all-and-end-all of the act of reading, but verbal action woven into a complex, hybrid tissue of gestures, movements, attitudes, breaths and affects. In the First Folio version, Lear's last words are these:

[Lear.] Do you see this? Looke on her? Looke her lips,  
Looke there, looke there. *He dis. (KL F1, ff3r)*

As John Russell Brown has observed,<sup>14</sup> there are a number of ways in which the actor playing Lear can perform this crucial moment. Lear may be pointing at the dead Cordelia's lips: in such a case, he would be dying with the delusional hope that she may be alive. Alternatively, Lear may be pointing at invisible lips somewhere in the distance – perhaps the most merciful and hopeful gesture to conclude the play with: there is hope of reunion with Cordelia in another world. Or, Lear may be pointing in a disenchanted way at a spectator; this, in turn, would probably be the harshest conclusion of the tragedy: a total shattering of the play's world. It is Lear's – that is, Lear's actor's – gesture that creates the propositional *social reality*: the behaviour that gives meaning to ending of the play. Lear's words – unchanged, or more or less so, if we consider translation – are counterpointing the stage action. In good performance, those words will ring true once they grow from a firm basis of the onstage action.

Otakar Zich argued vehemently that the dramatic text is no more than a component of the theatre as a whole – in tandem with scenography (set, costume, lighting, sound), acting, direction and other departments.<sup>15</sup> While his critics have argued the prominence of the dramatic text

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<sup>12</sup> For an exemplary instance of a cultured dispute see R. A. Foakes's "Performance Theory and Textual Theory: A Retort Courteous", *Shakespeare* 2:1 (2006), pp. 47–58; and W. B. Worthen's "Texts, Tools, and Technologies of Performance: A Quip Modest, in Response to R. A. Foakes", *Shakespeare* 2:2 (2006), pp. 208–19. For a compromising approach, see M. J. Kidnie's *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> For a theory of orality and literacy, see Walter J. Ong's *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967), and *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, a 3rd edition with additional chapters by John Hartley (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare Dancing: A Theatrical Study of the Plays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); for this particular line in *King Lear*, see pp. 70–71 and 150.

<sup>15</sup> Zich, *Estetika* (1931), pp. 43–47, and Chapter 4, pp. 73–111.

among the components,<sup>16</sup> the epistemic basis of performance is non-textual but rooted in social interaction – for the purposes of staging rendered in the textual form, one that effectively fails as an objective record of the theatrical art. The script captures “*No more than the words of the characters* – that is, *what* they speak, but not the speech itself and *how* it is spoken, let alone their play, their facial expressions or the stage business”.<sup>17</sup>

If we accept, in Zich's sense, *social interaction* as the epistemic basis of performance – rather than the traditional logocentric view perpetuated in much Anglo-American criticism and Shakespeare studies – a novel type of hybridity emerges: on predicated not only on the Shakespearean script in its endless variants (including translations and adaptations) but also, crucially, on the social gestures and propositional actions and spaces created by performers. The latter are further complicated and multiplied by the autochthonous variants of the Shakespearean myth, the artistic missions and ambitions of the theatre makers and their own myths (celebrities).<sup>18</sup> With this in view, Cassius's lines that self-reflectively acknowledge the historical momentum of the assassination acquire an additional level profundity – *as if* aware of the hybridity of the theatrical stage:

*Cassius.* [...] How many Ages hence  
Shall this our lofty Scene be acted ouer,  
In [States] vnborne, and Accents yet vnknowne? (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.113–115)

It is the *states unborn* (both *states* as countries and *states* as situations and mindsets) and *accents yet unknown* (both languages and intonations) that open up the myriad-mindedness of the possible renderings and propositional embodiments of the Shakespearean play text. These are the quicksands of the hybrid Shakespearean stage that invokes our *imaginary forces* and takes for granted that on stage

a crooked Figure may  
Attest in little place a Million (*Henry V* Prologue 15–16)

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<sup>16</sup> Most importantly Jiří Veltruský; see Drábek, “Shakespeare's Myriad-Minded Stage as a Transnational Forum”, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Zich, *Estetika*, p. 90; translation mine.

<sup>18</sup> For the special dynamics of celebrity acting, see Michael L. Quinn's “Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting”, *New Theatre Quarterly* 22:6 (1990), pp. 154–161; and Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), particularly Chapter 3 “The Haunted Body”, pp. 52–95.