

# 'So Many Speaking Pictures'

## Model Characters in Shakespeare's England

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*Nick Blackburn*

The primary meaning of a word develops over time, and before the twentieth century if I had asked you to model something for me I would have been surprised to turn round and find you wearing it. Before the nineteenth century, if you told me you were a model I might want to agree, but I would want to know what you were a model *of* or a model *for*. Tracing the etymology of words is not always good fun (pity the children of James Murray who had to sort paper slips for what would become the *Oxford English Dictionary* before they'd get pocket money, although they grew up to be very good at crosswords<sup>1</sup>) but it is firm ground to start on. This is an essay about how characters began to be discussed in theatrical texts: moreover it is a search for firm ground on which to stage a response to those discussions.

There is a sizeable body of critical material on the treatment of character in Shakespeare.<sup>2</sup> Instances of the word 'character' have been incorporated into explorations of both real and dramatised selfhood in the period. These are big topics, and they have engendered some lively criticism. The boundaries between the stage and the audience have been tested with increasing sensitivity. Michael D. Bristol formulated a lively response to the suggestion by L. C. Knights that there is no point in asking questions of fictional characters ('How many children had Lady Macbeth?') as if they were real people: 'Full engagement in make-believe is part of a larger commitment to ethical and political reflection.'<sup>3</sup> This is something that Shakespeare's texts clearly demanded of their audiences, as Gabriel Harvey acknowledged when he wrote, probably in the first decade of the seventeenth century, that *Hamlet* and *Lucrece* 'haue it in them, to please the wiser sort.'<sup>4</sup> The frame is still there but its reach must be wider than a single text when the language, politics and philosophy of that text are coextensive with the period in which it was written, performed and printed. This essay addresses a more specific problem, but one which presses upon these larger issues. Karen Newman begins her consideration of Shakespeare's comic characters as follows:

Even a cursory look at the history of Shakespearean criticism, from Dryden and Johnson, to Schlegel and Bradley, to recent psychoanalytical approaches, suggests that readers perceive his characters as lifelike. The persistence of such judgements, from the seventeenth century to the present day, suggests that we cannot simply dismiss them as culturally determined by a particular period or even ideology which values the 'realistic.'<sup>5</sup>

Judgements of this kind do persist in material 'from the seventeenth century,' but not from the beginning of the seventeenth century. The earliest surviving account which praises Shakespeare for the realism of his characters was written by Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, in 1664.<sup>6</sup> Earlier accounts, including several unpublished manuscripts, demonstrate different priorities: how Shakespeare was working with characters based on stock templates, or characters whose actions conformed to particular patterns. This was an increasingly fashionable critical mode from the 1580s to the 1630s, to the extent that figures like Gabriel Harvey were employed as professional readers, paid to study military and historical texts in order to derive precepts that influenced governmental policy.<sup>7</sup> Some of the critical activity of the period used these tools to formulate responses to Shakespeare's work; an enterprise not without its problems. Ignoring the usual focus for critical enquiry into character, the development of the early modern subject, the present enquiry surveys the contemporary accounts which treated Shakespeare's characters as a certain kind of object.<sup>8</sup>

Charactery was a popular literary genre in the Jacobean period, marketed as a primitive incarnation of the self-help manual. Early modern readers intent on personal improvement could compare their own traits to those of model characters, learning by example those aspects of themselves they should nurture, and those they should detest and cut away. It was a time in which, at least in certain echelons of society, authority was increasingly mobile, available, and, for the first time, marketable. Shakespeare's Jacobean plays would have met an audience to whom the profit-minded were now eager to peddle alternatives to the rigid, linear system of inherited authority which the medieval Gower would have understood, and this is not an endeavour to which the plays respond uncritically. Excerption facilitated the appropriation of venerable *sententiae*, their provenances established by precedent and interrelation, in a manner which did not demand that their owners share the provenance of the authorities who had once set them down. The publishers of character-books sold their readers a chance to emulate (and to eschew) personality patterns acquired by a lifetime's experience: they were

marketing templates by which readers might seek to live their own exemplary lives. As access to excerpted knowledge increased, authority became a quality that was increasingly easy to perform. But even in the 1590s, Shakespeare's plays contained matter enough to leave audiences with a palpable sense of the challenges and essential limitations that such a performance could involve.

Shakespeare also made use of generic patterns in the construction of his plays. One idiosyncrasy of *Love's Labour's Lost* in the 1598 quarto text is its rendering of the names of the rustics both in terms of their names and the generic roles which they embody.<sup>9</sup> Costard is sometimes 'Cost.' and sometimes 'Clowne'; Armado sometimes 'Arm.' and sometimes 'Braggart'; Dull sometimes 'Constable'; Jacquenetta sometimes 'Maide'. This occasionally occurs on the same leaf (C4<sup>v</sup> for example). A blurring between names and roles is only one among many idiosyncrasies of Shakespeare's foul papers. The additions ascribed to Shakespeare in the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* contain similar variants.<sup>10</sup> On f.8<sup>r</sup>, Ralph Bett's lines are twice attributed to him both in terms of a name and a generic role: 'betts clow' (line 7) and 'Clown · betts' (line 16).<sup>11</sup> The movement from named role to generic role in the first example may be partly an effort to distinguish Ralph from his brother George Betts, also present in the scene. But a movement in the opposite direction in the second example is not. There is nothing which would suggest a chronology for this thinking on the part of Shakespeare: that he *began* his work with a series of stock characters and then slowly built up more nuanced roles. But it evidently seemed natural for Shakespeare to think about his creations in this generic manner (as well as identifying certain characters by the name of the actor he wanted to play the part: 'Kemp' occurs at several points in the character-attributions of his plays). The precedent for readings which favoured generic types did not originate with Shakespeare's readers.

The writer's own debts are difficult to weigh, but Jacobean readers were keen to interpret Shakespeare's characters in terms of those established by character. The British Library's Lansdowne collection contains a contemporary manuscript table-book which includes the King's description of Bertram's father in *All's Well That Ends Well* under the heading 'Character of a Courtier' (f.4<sup>v</sup>).<sup>12</sup> Beginning 'He did look far / Into the service of the time' and continuing for a further eighteen lines (1.2.26-45), the extract removes the relationship between speaker, audience and the character referred to, pressing the King's description into use as exemplary traits, which sit next to other passages of non-specific import: 'Of Love,' 'Of

Virginity.’ In his accounts of *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter’s Tale*, Dr Simon Forman frequently reminds himself both to observe and to remember what he had seen, and his recollections of past performances also focus upon preceptual behaviour.<sup>13</sup> Forman had good reason to pay close attention to formal patterns: he was an astrologer. Indeed, he was one whose work it has been suggested could well have brought him into contact with Shakespeare himself.<sup>14</sup> On the apparently non-Shakespearean play he calls ‘Richard the 2,’ in which Lancaster hangs a wise man for telling him it is not he but his son that will one day be king, Forman concludes with the following observation:

This was a pollicie in the comon wealthes opinion But I sai yt was a villaines parte and a Iudas kisse to hange the man. for telling him the truth Beware by this Example of noble men / and of their fair wordes & sai lyttell to them, lest they doe the Like by thee for thy good will /

Forman’s reference to ‘Example,’ and the lessons which he seems to feel need to be remembered and carried away from a performance, brings with it echoes of Thomas Overbury’s character of ‘An excellent actor.’<sup>15</sup>

In Overbury’s hands the exemplary actor is one who is himself skilled in the presentation of exemplary characters:

By his action hee fortifies morall precepts with example; for what wee see him personate, wee thinke truely done before us: a man of a deep thoght might apprehend, the Ghosts of our ancient *Heroes* walk’t againe, and take him (at seuerall times) for many of them. He is much affected to painting, and tis a question whether that make him and excellent Player, or his playing an excellent Painter. (M2<sup>r</sup>)

‘He adds grace to the Poet’s labours: for what in the Poet is but ditty, in him is both ditty and musicke.’ Forman’s apparent interest in knowledge transferable from the play to the outside world easily reads as a personal quirk or a small detail of a source valuable largely as a novelty to Shakespeare enthusiasts. On its own Overbury’s presentation of an actor might be judged in similar terms. But together they begin to illustrate a particular view of renaissance stagecraft. In choosing to interpret a performance of *The Winter’s Tale* as a warning against jealous men, Simon Forman connects Shakespeare’s work with the popular character literature which dealt more explicitly with moral and immoral patterns according to which a life might be lived.

In the same year that Forman went to see *The Winter's Tale*, he would also have had the opportunity to buy Joseph Hall's book *Characters*, whose 'Premonition To The Reader' situates its own method in relation to existing approaches to what it terms 'moral philosophy.'<sup>16</sup> Here the qualities of individuals speak with immediate lucidity:

while some spent themselves in deepe discourses of humane felicitie and the way to it in common; others thought best to applie the generall precepts of goodnesse or decencie, to particular conditions and persons: A third sort in a meane course betwixt the two other, and compounded of them both, bestowed their time in drawing out the true lineaments of euery vertue and vice, so liuely that who saw the medals, might know the face: which Art they significantly termed Charactery. Their papers were so many tables, their writings so many speaking pictures, or liuing images, whereby the ruder multitude might euen by their sense learne to know vertue, and discerne what to detest. (M2<sup>r</sup>)

But in *Macbeth* the comparison between men and 'pictures' is one which applies only to 'the sleeping and the dead' (2.2.51). In Shakespeare's work the ability justly to distinguish the characters of virtue and vice is not something that is easily bought.

To describe a dramatic character in terms of a stock type is always, to some extent at least, to deny the implications of a richer and more developed whole. When Hall penned his character of 'The Vaine-Glorious,' he may have been thinking of an earlier Shakespearean braggard, Don Armado, or his Italian precedent in the commedia dell'arte figure of Capitano:

To conclude, hee is euer on the stage, and acts still a glorious part abroad, when no man carries a baser heart, no man is more sordid and carelesse at home. Hee is a Spanish souldier on an Italian Theatre; a bladder full of winde, a skin full of words, a fooles wonder, and a wise-mans foole. (K6<sup>r</sup>)

There is evidence that stock characters were being used as a structuring device in Shakespeare's work, but as the applicability of the above quotation to Don Armado might imply, this presents a problem for contemporary readers. Excerpting Shakespeare's lines can be either a filtering of texts or a source with which to generate new discourse, but extracts which read his characters in terms of generic types meet significant resistance in the text.

At least one annotator seems to have encountered this problem in the course of his studies. When in BM Lansdowne MS. 1185 the same reader of *All's Well That*

*Ends Well* turned to scanning *The Tempest* for commonplaces, the relationship between Prospero and Antonio evidently caused him problems. In a manuscript in which crossings-out are not common, the passage covering the change in the Duke's brother beginning 'Having both the key of officer and office' has the beginnings of another character identified in the margin. The author has written 'a false,' as if to begin 'a false courtier,' 'a false servant' or 'a false brother,' but has decided against the epithet, and put a single diagonal line through the word 'false.' Difficulty in reading the nature of his brother's character was apparently not restricted to the text, but Shakespeare's work contains numerous examples in which character appraisals are frustrated by the events of the drama. It had also been a considerable problem in *Measure for Measure*. The Duke's confidence in his temporary replacement is couched in terms of the ease by which his character might be read:

Angelo:  
There is a kind of character in thy life,  
Which to th'observer doth thy history  
Fully unfold. (1.1.26-9)

But as Angelo's meditation on 'place' and 'form' would later make clear, a wedge has been driven between the outward form and the man within:

O place, O form,  
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,  
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls  
To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood.  
Let's write "good angel" on the devil's horn,  
'Tis not the devil's crest. (2.4.12-17)

*Riverside* glosses those final two lines in terms of the difference between an heraldic crest which would be a 'true mark of his identity' and the arbitrary ascription of 'good angel' (2.4.17n). The emphasis the Duke places on Angelo's character has near-tragic consequences.

Knowledge in *The Winter's Tale* is won at still greater cost, and the circumstances of Hermione's return to life are such as to focus the audience on a spectacle that is unique and not generic. Readers of Greene's *Pandosto* are likely to be surprised by the way in which Shakespeare's adaptation ends.<sup>17</sup> Neither the Queen nor her jealous husband ends up dead: this is not supposed to happen. This discrepancy has an important effect, locking the audience (and the attentive reader)

into the moment of performance, urging against the excerptable, universal, significance of the words and gestures that passed between characters at a particular moment in the play. An event, at least in the closing moments of a particular late play, is not something that can be universalised without a pejorative effect on the material:

That she is living,  
Were it but told you, should be hooted at  
Like an old tale. But it appears she lives,  
Though yet she speak not. (5.3.115-8)

Part of the strength of the play lies in its assured flirtation with its generic sources, that Shakespeare should be able to take strands from the ‘silliest stuff’ (MSND, 5.1.210) of ever popular romance and weave them into stories which are both poignant and believable. When Shakespeare’s third Gentleman warns his companion that what he is about to relate will be like ‘an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep and not an ear open’ (WT, 5.2.61-2), the audience is invited to share in the irony of the circumstances of utterance. In a subtler mode it is also invited to share some of the wonder of the characters on stage at Hermione’s return to Leontes. Our focus is drawn away from the generic: from Hermione as the figure of a Queen, or of a statue come to life, and solidly into the realm of the specific.

As Imogen had observed in *Cymbeline*, ‘experience [...] disprov’st report’ (4.2.34). ‘Old wiues and Starres are his counsellors,’ writes Hall of the superstitious. In early modern romance it is these old wives who are prone to tell winter’s tales, and one of the circumstances which might effect a superstitious character would strike a chord with those of his readers familiar with a certain late play: ‘If hee heare that some sacred block speaks, moues, weepes, smiles, his bare feet carrie him thither with an offering’ (90). Hall is probably thinking of Catholic imagery. But Hermione is not ‘sacred,’ indeed Paulina takes pains to distinguish her apparent reanimation of the dead from necromancy, the work of ‘wicked powers’ and ‘unlawful business’ (with good reason in a society that burns witches at the stake), and the true nature of the event we are witnessing is made deliberately hard to interpret. The scene hovers, as would later be the case with Prospero’s art in *The Tempest*, in an uncertain state between artistic, demonic and divine creation, while deftly eluding the necessity of commitment to one or the other. At the end of *Pericles*, Gower comments on the restoration of circumstances

in which people also conform to type. It is a speech which establishes these types within carefully defined limits:

In Helicanus may you well descry  
A figure of truth, of faith, of loyalty.  
In reverend Cerimon there well appears  
The worth that learned charity aye wears.  
(5.3.91-4)

But Gower's speech is from an epilogic standpoint: this is a privilege which is afforded to an audience who have watched the whole play. The experience which allows characters to be 'well' described is not something that was made available at the outset. Helicanus and Cerimon are mentioned, but with the notable absence of the main characters of the drama. A comfortable image of order-restored may befit the ending of a play, but its employment of reliable and exemplary figures is not a technique which it suggests has a universal relevance. Reading is not necessarily a process which leads the reader to a point of understanding.

In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo voices an analogy which compares his government of Vienna and his approach to texts. This connection between reading and statecraft has implications for real as well as figured readers.

When I would pray and think, I think and pray  
To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words,  
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,  
Anchors on Isabel; heaven in my mouth,  
As if I did but only chew his name,  
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil  
Of my conception. The state, whereon I studied,  
Is like a good thing, being often read,  
Grown [sere] and tedious; yea, my gravity,  
Wherein (let no man hear me) I take pride,  
Could I, with boot, change for an idle plume,  
Which the air beats for vain. O place, O form,  
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,  
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls  
To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood.  
Let's write "good angel" on the devil's horn,  
'Tis not the devil's crest. (2.4.1-17)

Here the familiarity of 'place' and 'form' breeds a complacency in text and state, both grown '[sere] and tedious.' Heath's conjecture 'sere' modifies 'feard' in F1 (see *Riverside*, 620). This seems to work: 'sere' (dry) has a sympathy with 'tedious' which 'feard' does not. Authority inheres in the execution of the sentence:



the performance of the *sententia*. Those words can give clues to facilitate that performance – pithy *sententiae* are eminently performable – but they are not the performance itself. Poor readings lack the authority promised by the script on which they apparently rely. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hippolita's appraisal of the start of a famously bad performance also contains a word which might refer the reader to matters of state:

*The.* This fellow doth not stand upon points.

*Lys.* He hath rid his prologue like a rough colt; he knows not the stop. A good moral, my lord: it is not enough to speak, but to speak true.

*Hip.* Indeed he hath play'd on his prologue like a child on a recorder—a sound, but not in government.

*The.* His speech was like a tangled chain; nothing impair'd, but all disorder'd.  
Who is next? (5.1.118-126)

Peter Quince can read the words of the text, but his inability to punctuate them (literally to observe 'the stop[s]'), alters the meaning of his lines. The language employed by his staged audience points to the wider implications of his errors: as Angelo's metaphor suggests, speech of a kind that is both authoritative and 'true,' or that possesses one but lacks the other, is not a concern peculiar to readers. Both in terms of the communication of meaning and the performance of authority, an inadequate transmission is 'a sound but not in government.'

These are concerns that give an early comedy unexpectedly far-reaching resonance in the early modern period. The news which Marcade brings to Navarre precipitates a momentary crisis of authority, and it is fitting that in the uncertain minutes which follow the exit of that sombre messenger, in the last scene of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Berowne should hit upon a dramatic metaphor. 'Worthies away, the scene begins to cloud' (5.2.721), is on one level a pragmatic move. Neither their idiosyncratic presentation of the nine Worthies nor the near-brawl which it had become are appropriate spectacles for a grieving princess: someone has to get Moth, Costard and Don Armado off the stage. But Berowne's line also gives the theatre audience an opportunity to consider the various levels on which a 'scene' is being played out. It is a self-referential moment which reminds us that courtiers (and people) as well as actors have parts to play. He dismisses a group of less-than-perfect actors, but as Anne Barton has noted, 'the word itself springs from a memory of their performance.'<sup>18</sup> The line attributions of the quarto text echo a more complex shift: after Marcade has left, the Princess is referred to as 'Quee[n]'. Once the news of her father's death has reached Navarre this is of course literally

the case. But it is interesting that her change of role should be reflected so specifically in the dramatic text. Even before that Queen says she does not understand what Navarre is trying to communicate to her, there is a sense that Marcade's news has left the rest of the characters on stage struggling to keep up the presentation of unfamiliar roles.

In an attempt to salvage the situation, Berowne urges the Queen to concentrate on words as if they were a certain kind of object. 'Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief, / And by these badges understand the king': Berowne would like the Queen to interpret the words which follow as if they were an emblem by which he, and therefore his good intentions, might be recognised. But when Dumaine and Longaville voice similar sentiments – that both their 'letters' and 'looks' showed 'much more than jest' – Rosaline reminds them that such outward shows depend upon the interpretation of their spectators: 'We did not cote them so'. The Riverside text here glosses 'cote' as 'quote': both texts and gestures are subject to the actions of their readers, upon whom rests the burden of interpretation. Neither language nor gesture is adequate for the task of providing a vocabulary which does not vary according to context. If the king is to be understood, there must be a complicity between his words and their readers. His own character is not yet sufficiently credible to establish the context for his words that he would like. Twelve months of virtuous living will, it is suggested, give to the lives of four merry bachelors a pattern which will allow their promises of enduring love to be read with more authority.

In *The Tempest*, the difficulty of assigning the 'true' value of what characters see is made explicit. Prospero uses the same word as Berowne to refer the assembled courtiers to patterns by which their companions' characters might be read: 'Mark but the badges of these men, my lords, and say if they be true' (267). Stephano and Trinculo are wearing stolen clothes, so the association between their garments and their characters is literally difficult to read. But the remark comes hard upon Antonio's final comment of the play ('mark' immediately after 'marketable'), and there are manifestly two groups of traitors to 'mark' on the stage. The audience are privileged to have seen the entire drama unfold, but the characters within that drama have not: the immediate history of those 'men' is not something they have had the opportunity to 'mark.' Prospero's use of 'but' is significant. He misjudged Caliban, his own brother, and almost underestimated the potential threat of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo as they head for his cave.

Prospero's questioning of the drunk Stephano's authority as ruler, 'You'd be king of the isle, sirrah?' (288) is to comic effect: 'I should have been a sore one then,' Stephano replies; drunk, scratched and physically tormented by Prospero's goblins. But as effective ruler of Milan, Antonio inhabited the position with more authority than the Duke himself, with near-tragic consequences for Prospero and his daughter. The ability to inhabit a role in a way that is 'true' or believable has serious consequences in government as well as on the stage. This is apparently a piece of knowledge that it is difficult to learn in the abstract. Prospero was evidently not able to glean it from his studies.

Only a few lines into the play, the Boatswain doubts Gonzalo's ability ever to play his role of 'counsellor' with sufficient authority to tame the sea:

You are a councillor; if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more. Use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have liv'd so long, and make yourself ready for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap. (1.1.23-6)

Only Prospero's 'command' (5.1.48), now potent enough even to raise the dead (or so he says), is enough to still the tempest. As Love's labour, and the labour of Navarre, are lost on the grieving queen of the earlier play, so here is 'all lost' (1.1.52), if only temporarily, by the actions of a sea in no mood to pay attention merely to 'the name of king' (1.1.17). That phrase uttered by the mariners occurs again as Prospero laments his inability to civilise Caliban: 'on whom my pains, / Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost' (4.1.189-90). Far from being inalienable constants, authority and respect are transactions that must be adapted according to context. Identifiable though their templates might be, universal forms are all too easily 'lost.' There are more numinous pieces of wisdom to be drawn from this: that the moment that an idea finds realisation in an object is the moment at which it can be stolen or misplaced. It is a movement that in Shakespeare often leads to tragedy – most memorably the handkerchief in *Othello*. The last plays as a group appear to resonate with Imogen's phrase from *Cymbeline*: 'Experience, o, thou disprov'st report!' (4.2.34). It is fitting that in this environment in which the credentials of received wisdom are so severely tested, a once and future statesman should profess a desire to drown his book.

There are undoubtedly moments in which the drama is engaging its spectators with concerns relevant to those who would leave the theatre and go back to their libraries, some of whom followed Shakespeare's performances on both stage and

page. There is a more far-reaching metaphor to be constructed from Prospero's books, and it is one that has been pre-empted in part by studies of *The Tempest* which observe that Prospero's loftier ambitions are undercut by the circumstances of a Jacobean performance. When Miranda mistakes Ferdinand for a 'spirit' (1.2.412), Prospero is quick to correct her: 'No, wench, it eats, and sleeps, and hath such senses / As we have—such' (1.2.413-4). The stage directions themselves seem pointed to venture a similar restorative. Pauline Kiernan has noted that if the F's positioning of the stage direction 'Iuno descends' is respected, her slow descent over thirty lines could make for an awkward theatrical spectacle.<sup>19</sup> Rather than evidence for an error in the text, she suggests that this may be part of a more widespread exploration of how spiritual (and theatrical) ambitions are compromised by physical constraints. If this is the case it finds a number of analogues in the play: the spirits that vanish 'heavily' after the masque, but also in smaller details of the spoken text. Ariel promises to effect Prospero's command 'to th'syllable' (1.2.501). It is an attention to the specific constitution of the words of that command that might require us to examine the preceding sentence again: 'Thou shalt be as free / As mountain winds; but then exactly do / All points of my command' (1.2.499-501). Those 'points' could be specifically linguistic as well. The *OED* suggests that a point may be 'a separate or single article, item, or clause in an extended whole [...] an individual part, element, or matter, a detail, a particular; sometimes, a detail of nature or character, a particular quality or respect.' As in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a 'point' was also the sentence defined by a full-stop. Conveniently, this locates us once more in the domain of discourse constituted by character and *sententiae*: of a drama that must reconcile the ambitions of its imaginative limits with the capacities of the forms from which it is constructed. We are reminded of the crucial inflections that context places upon words and actions.

In a moment of crisis, Berowne offers a theatrical image. But 'to cloud' is a verb that suggests a kind of indistinctness that not even the innovations of the Jacobean theatre could bring adequately to the stage. G. R. Hibbard describes a twentieth-century directorial decision which appears to address the same change of mood, but here is something very different from the breathtaking, but nonetheless substantial, cloud-effects employed by Inigo Jones: 'Peter Brook chose to herald the messenger's coming with a slow dimming of the lights and a long pause, a method that for a long time became almost a tradition'.<sup>20</sup> The folio stage directions are instructive: when spirits vanish in Shakespeare's play, they do so 'heavily'

(5.1.138). The banqueting table has to disappear, but the ‘quaint device’ (3.3.52) which sustained the illusion was mechanical rather than sorcerous. Popular theatrical spectacles: magic and descending gods, were made possible by hefty means. In Prospero’s great speech on theatrical artifice, *Riverside* glosses ‘rack’ (4.1.156n) as ‘wisp of cloud.’ Stephen Orgel goes further: ‘perhaps also with a suggestion of the cloud effects of masque scenery.’<sup>21</sup>

A member of the audience with a fondness for language might have cause to go further. The *OED* is a tool for reading etymologically and intertextually that dwarfs those available in the renaissance, but two of the other meanings it supplies also resonate in Prospero’s speech. The first, which neither edition admits, is physical pain (n<sup>4</sup>). This would recall Prospero’s earlier line to Caliban, ‘I’ll rack thee with old cramps’ (1.2.367). It is to be hoped that a death that is like a ‘sleep’ will be one freed from the torments of the body. But that ‘pain’ also inheres in the physical means which underlie mortal existence: the performance of being alive. The second meaning of ‘rack,’ which is stronger and partly intimated by Orgel’s gloss about masque scenery, is the kind of physical framework that would be used to support a pageant or the stage-properties which went to make up a scene. The *OED*’s fourth definition of n<sup>2</sup> suggests ‘a framework (varying greatly in form as used for various purposes) in or on which articles are placed or suspended.’ It seems fitting that Prospero’s vision for a smooth dissolution into nothingness should be compromised by the reminder of a physical structure which underpinned the spectacle.

This essay has used the evidence of commonplace-books and the work of contemporary annotators as a reminder of the structures which early modern readers perceived in the texts they encountered. Comparing the forms gathered from Shakespeare’s drama with the texts themselves is to gain an insight which informs the place excerpted-from as well as that excerpted-to. Statements of authority stolen without an eye for context are destined to be clouded by experience. If we cease to revise our models of the world their usefulness quickly degrades, and this can have tragic consequences: matters of concern for statesmen as well as readers.

*Nick Blackburn was born in Manchester, England, and is currently a Ph.D. research student at Cambridge University, where he teaches classes on Shakespeare and Literary Criticism. This article developed out of his M.Phil. research on unruly models and archetypes in the Early Modern period; a continuing preoccupation as he attempts to place gnomic and explanatory markings in renaissance playtexts back into the context of readerly and printing-house practices. He directed The Winter’s Tale for FLEET in December 2004.*

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- <sup>1</sup> See K. M. Elizabeth Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words / James A. H. Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 179-80.
- <sup>2</sup> Most notably Christy Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Karen Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric of Comic Character* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985); Richard Hillman, *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997).
- <sup>3</sup> Michael D. Bristol, 'How many children did she have?' in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John J. Joughin (London: Routledge, 2000), 18-33, 33. Knights, L.C., 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism, Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 1-39.
- <sup>4</sup> Gabriel Harvey, annotation to Speght's edition of Chaucer (1598), fol. 394<sup>v</sup>. Extract transcribed in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1965. All subsequent references to Shakespeare will be to the act, scene and line numbers of this edition.
- <sup>5</sup> Newman, *Shakespeare's Rhetoric of Comic Character*, 2.
- <sup>6</sup> See *Riverside*, 1973-4.
- <sup>7</sup> See Antony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, "'Studied for action": How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy' in *Past and Present* 129 (1990).
- <sup>8</sup> Over the last ten years cultural materialism has encouraged work on the early modern object: see Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass, eds *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). David Hillman and Carla Mazzio's collection *The Body in Parts* (New York: Routledge, 1997) focussed these concerns specifically upon parts of the body. Jonathan Goldberg's *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) uses the connections between handwriting and the physical hand to explore the territory in which subject and object are indistinct.
- <sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Pleasant Conceited Comedie Called Loues labors lost. As it was presented before her Highnes this last Christmas. Newly corrected and augmented By W. Shakespere* (London, 1598)
- <sup>10</sup> BM Harleian MS. 7368, *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*. A facsimile and transcript of the passages attributed to Shakespeare are included in *Riverside*, 1775-98.
- <sup>11</sup> See also Anne Barton, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
- <sup>12</sup> British Library, MS. Lansdowne 1185. Written at some point between 1610 and 1630.
- <sup>13</sup> See *Riverside*, 1966-8.
- <sup>14</sup> See A.L. Rowse, *Simon Forman: sex and society in Shakespeare's age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974). Rowse suggests that Forman was the astrologer to Shakespeare's landlady and to Emilia Lanier, Rowse's (now largely discounted) candidate for the poet's Dark Lady.
- <sup>15</sup> Sir Thomas Overbury, *His Wife, with Addition of New Characters* (London, 1611).
- <sup>16</sup> Joseph Hall, *Characters* (London, 1611).
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Greene, *Pandosto, the Triumph of Time* (London, 1588).
- <sup>18</sup> Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 111.
- <sup>19</sup> Pauline Kiernan, *Shakespeare's theory of drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90.
- <sup>20</sup> *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 181.