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978-0-521-87778-7 - Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment

Edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper

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INTRODUCTION

Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper

Globe performativity enables a direct expression of the Shakespearean past and its articulation in the present.¹ (W. B. Worthen)

New Globe productions have emphasised and valorised the popular elements of the plays and of the play-going experience, both of which have become too gentrified and 'cultured' . . .

The 'construction of the audience' as 'playful, popular and participatory' . . . has been designed to offer an historical and personal experience of authenticity.² (Rob Conkie)

Scholarly discussions on the Globe have proliferated in the last five to six years with several book-length studies finding their way into university presses. This discursive activity demonstrates the growing interest in Shakespeare's Globe as a site for intense critical enquiry. What these quotations show is the capacity for Globe productions, through an interaction with audiences, to produce a variety of complex meanings. Scholars have attempted to identify particular 'Globe conventions'³ and interpretive strategies such as the spatial intimacy of the actor/ audience relationship, the responses such proximities produce and the dominant style or aesthetic of the productions that has emerged in the first ten years of the theatre's work (regarded critically as an attempt at 'authenticity', which Rob Conkie's study, cited above, focuses on at length). Some of these conventions are highlighted in academic reviews of plays, such as those in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, written by scholars with backgrounds in either performance studies, theatre history or literary studies. Academic reviews, distinguishable from theatre reviews, are important and critically rigorous exercises, but are discussions inevitably focusing on a particular production or a season of productions, so are unable to provide a thorough understanding of the developmental nature of performance practices at the Globe. Ways of writing/talking about the Globe have undoubtedly developed from the early architectural discussions to encompass more complex, theoretical analyses of

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the theatre's current practices and social position, as well as the meaning-making processes of the Renaissance period.

Mark Rylance as Artistic Director of the Globe Theatre during this developmental period has been very aware of the relationship initially established between the Globe and the academic community:

Those in the academic community who had supported the project, long before many in the theatre world were able to see what Sam [Wanamaker] saw, were able to celebrate all of their careful research which ensured that this was the most considered reconstruction possible in 1997. Subsequent discoveries made while playing in the space in later years would lead us to revise several of the Globe's features.⁴

Rylance's respectful awareness of the early scholarly investment in the space is coupled with his assertion of a distinct shift in terms of who is responsible for making the 'discoveries' on the Globe stage. Rylance suggests that it is the theatre practitioners who have played an increasingly significant part in determining how the architectural features will develop, using their practice as a body of research. The editors of this volume see this shift as crucial to, but also a part of, the ongoing debate or dialogue about Shakespeare's Globe and the role of scholarly work within it.

Before setting out what this book aims to do, it is important to situate this study within a wider discourse on Shakespeare's Globe. Critical work addressing the Globe project has developed in three stages: beginning with the active involvement of scholars in research into reconstruction and projected aims; followed by early responses to theatrical experiments as well as attempts to usefully document this work; and culminating in a critical engagement with the new theatre practices developed, including the increased role of the audience and an analysis of the social positioning of this theatre within a theatrical and broader cultural context. It should be noted that to date there has been virtually no critical engagement with the idea that Shakespeare's Globe acts as a combined centre for education, research and theatre.

Scholarly debate on the Globe began as a historical discourse focused on playhouse architecture, staging practices and documentary evidence for the purpose of reconstruction. Emerging from this debate is a number of very valuable compilations of scholarly papers given at conferences on the reconstruction project. As early as 1979, scholars were gathering and publishing papers considering the uses and dynamic potential of the proposed reconstructed Globe. Very early on in this discussion, John Russell Brown uses the term 'experiment' in his essay 'Modern Uses for a Globe Theatre', acknowledging the exploratory nature of the project from the outset: 'we would have the Globe, but we would still have to learn to use it; we would have to explore, experiment, and create'.⁵ Brown's use of the pronoun 'we'

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intriguingly suggests not only exploration but a close, collaborative relationship between the scholar and the actor. Did Brown imagine a scenario in which the scholar would sit and observe the players, guiding and instructing them in early modern staging practices? There is no question that he saw the process as uniquely collaborative: 'we shall have to exchange views . . . we shall have to collaborate in many kinds of practical work'.⁶ He recommends that not only the Globe's architecture be replicated as accurately as possible, but also the conditions of playing, including the 'close backstage quarters of the Globe . . . in order that we may know what it is like for an actor to step out of that busy, thriving, darkened world onto the empty platform'.⁷ The beginning of this debate therefore established the centrality of two key principles: the experimental approach and the collaboration of scholars and practitioners. However, the feasibility and desirability of such conditions from a modern actor's point of view was not taken into consideration in these early discussions. At this point it is the scholars setting up the expectations, and what emerges is the expression of a desire for first-hand involvement by scholars in the theatrical experiments.

In Franklin J. Hildy's edited collection, *New Issues in the Reconstruction of Shakespeare's Theatre: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Georgia*, essays by Alan Dessen and Hugh Richmond set forth the academic expectations by the early 1990s when the project was becoming a reality. These conversations continued to situate the reconstructed Globe as a 'laboratory' or 'testing ground where actors and scholars working together can investigate how Elizabethan plays could or would have been staged'.⁸ Like the scholars in the 1970s, Dessen's optimism about the collaborative endeavours of scholars and practitioners working together is coupled with a seriousness of intent, giving grave importance to the future experiments into Elizabethan staging. Dessen argues that 'if the processes that underlie the use of the new Globe (whether mental, physical, or commercial) are tainted from the outset, the results of any tests or experiments will also be compromised or contaminated'.⁹ Again such expectations demonstrate a remarkable ambition for the scholar him or herself to be involved directly in the process of theatre-making.¹⁰

Similarly, Hugh Richmond highlights the notion of the scholar as integral to experimentation on the Globe stage. While recognising the impossibility of an absolute 'reconstitution' of the 1599 Globe, Richmond nevertheless sees the potential in 'a close approximation', which may be 'all that is needed for many effective performance experiments'.¹¹ Richmond also predicts that the Globe will have difficulty transposing 'devices' that originate in the Globe's 'theatrical environment'.¹² By the time his essay was written, it was clear that the reconstruction itself would be a 'close approximation' or 'best guess' (to use Andrew Gurr's phrase), rather than the early romantic dream of an exact replica that was arguably one of the driving forces behind the scholarly support for the project. With this in mind, Richmond

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carefully argues for an investigation into how modern 'production techniques' could be 'modified advantageously by the broad conventions of Elizabethan staging rather than by an attempt at universal duplication of the circumstantial conditions provided by any single Elizabethan theatre'.¹³

Once the theatre was built and performances were produced on the stage for the first time, early responses to the experiments began to assert problems with the building itself as well as demonstrate the difficulties inherent in the somewhat naively anticipated, collaborative dialogue between actors and academics. Initially, the structural features of the building were called into question by critics such as Paul Nelsen, who asks:

(1) What authoritative, or at least significantly persuasive evidence is there to validate the presence of pillars at the first Globe; (2) if stage posts were an integral part of the 1599 Globe's architecture, where might they have been located?¹⁴

Enquiries such as this increased the sense that the building itself was becoming more of an unreliable marker of early modern playhouse architecture. Added to the concerns of unfaithful replication of the architecture were concerns about the use of the space. Lois Potter's review of the 1998 season questioned not the structural features of the stage but rather the modern theatre professional's ability to use it:

The directors and actors do need to play to the audience on the sides of the stage, not just to those out front; some of the actors do indeed need to improve their delivery; and there is no excuse for freezing the important bits of action between the pillars.¹⁵

Potter in her critical review suggests that in the late 1990s when the Globe began its theatrical experiments the gap between 'original practices' and modern practices in the theatre was vast. Once the theatre was in operation the intimate relationship imagined between the scholar and the stage disappeared and the debate between the practical imperatives of the space – 'what works' – and the theoretical imperatives – of 'what ought to work' or at least 'what ought to be tried' – emerged.

Scholars working at the Globe were encouraged to describe rather than to engage in debate with the practical experiments. Pauline Kiernan's *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* (1999) is a culmination of her work as a post-doctoral fellow in Andrew Gurr's Research department at the Globe in the late 1990s. Her analysis of staging practices at the Globe has no interrogative tone and so is a departure from the theoretical essays that take into account the compatibility of the modern actor and the Globe's architecture. Her work on the *Globe Research Bulletins*, in which she documents the early experiments by recording the discussions at rehearsal and interviews with the cast members, is enlarged in her book as she takes into account the 'experiments' conducted in the first season. More objectively critical perhaps is Cynthia Marshall's essay in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (2000), which takes into account

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the audience as part of the performance. She argues that the Globe is a 'radical theatre space', suggesting that accounts of the theatrical experiments to date are reluctant to consider the impact of the audience on the meanings produced by the productions. Discussing the Globe's production of *Henry V* (1997), she argues that it 'worked, primarily through auditory interactions, to animate the audience'.¹⁶

The role of the audience in the production of meaning at the Globe Theatre has become of increasing interest to scholars as the practical experiments on the stage have developed. Critical enquiries that include the involvement of the audience provide a more thorough reflection on the all-encompassing experience of seeing a play at the Globe. Chantal Schutz, also formerly of Globe Research, suggests that by 2001 audiences were beginning to respond in new ways to Globe performances:

At the Globe, a new dynamic is created: audience attitude oscillates between the uninhibited enthusiasm of football matches and the dilettante snobbery of classical concerts, but with the added dimension of self-consciousness born from its idea of what Elizabethan audiences may have been like; it results in something completely new.¹⁷

Catherine Silverstone's analysis of the 1997 production of *Henry V* points out that 'spectators are certainly encouraged to play along . . . presumably in an effort to simulate the imagined experience of early modern playgoing'. But she registers too an anxiety on the part of the Globe about appropriate audience behaviour. She cites the findings from the Workshop Season in which it was discovered that many groundlings would sit in the yard; 'this behaviour was not sanctioned by the theatre management who wanted the yard audience to stand. So before performances in the Prologue Season the yard was sprinkled with water to encourage standing'.¹⁸ Commenting on the Globe's early teething problems with regard to audience expectations, Silverstone argues that the Globe's combined use of radical encouragement and 'disciplinary measures' to regulate the behaviour of the audience forces the spectators to 'exhibit a range of responses from complicity to resistance'.¹⁹

W. B. Worthen's theoretical analysis of a phenomenon he terms 'Globe performativity' might be seen as the culmination of this period of increasingly distanced critical engagement. Continuing a critical narrative that highlights the unique participatory nature of the audiences, Worthen argues that the multifaceted nature of Shakespeare's Globe as a tourist site, an icon and as a theatre, characterises 'the distinctive force of Globe performativity, which arises not merely from the play performed there but in the embodied expectations, enactment, and experience of the Globe's performers – actors and audience'.²⁰ Worthen's argument that the audience at the Globe also performs suggests that, by 2003, the codes of conduct for audiences were well established. He refers to the 'groundling groupies' as having 'developed their own rituals, behaviour that is readily played by the actors on

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stage'.²¹ What this more recent criticism reveals primarily is the gulf that increasingly exists between the actor and the academic. Thus, over the period of critical engagement with this theatre the position of the academic has shifted, from the early enthusiastic and romantic participation of the scholar, to the involvement of the scholar as chronicler, to the placement of the scholar outside the experimental process as an 'objective', critical observer, standing in the yard and watching his or her fellow-spectators as well as the performers on the stage.

What this volume aims to do is to re-establish a dialogue between the scholar and the practitioner, juxtaposing their observations and discoveries of the first ten years of the Globe's performance practice. By doing so we hope to narrow the gap that has increasingly divided these two approaches. The first aim, then, of this volume, which is addressed in Part I, is to document the material conditions and theoretical parameters of production at Shakespeare's Globe and in particular to analyse the premises of cultural materialism and apply them to the theatre of Shakespeare's period. In Part II we hope to demonstrate that experiment-led thinking did not confine itself to theatrical practice at the Globe by highlighting the significant interventions that Globe Education has made, not only in Shakespeare studies but in educational practice nationwide. The Globe project began both as an educational and a theatrical endeavour and often criticism loses sight of how these two creative bodies were designed to work alongside each other. In order to suggest a critical way forward, Part III of this volume will return to the early principles that united scholars and theatre practitioners by attempting to review the lessons learned through practical experimentation over the entire developmental period of the first decade of the theatre's operation.

Therefore, this volume poses three separate but related questions. First, what can a practical approach to the cultural production of the Renaissance period contribute to an understanding of that period for scholars and audiences? Second, what can an experimental approach to learning tell us about our own creative practice as teachers and researchers? And finally, what have we learned in concrete terms from the coming together of Shakespeare's plays and the Globe's architecture in the present period? In order to address the opposing forces of the literary push of the reader into the period, and the dramatic pull of the text towards a present audience, we have brought together a wide range of the participants in the project. The body of experience and expertise that Shakespeare's Globe encapsulates is unprecedented. This volume hopes to replicate the engaged debate that daily enlivens the Globe centre when a range of experts gather to discuss the aims and outcomes of this endeavour. Rather than flattening opposing positions, we have set up a structure that highlights differences in approach in order to propose a new kind of criticism that can incorporate a more complex understanding of the results of the theatrical and educational experiments the Globe has generated.

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There is a great deal of ground to cover and this volume will certainly not attempt to present an exhaustive account of the findings of this theatre. It will also not attempt to dissolve the 'fifth wall' that Hunter and Lichtenfels say stands between academics and practitioners. Rather, this study will attempt to make that divide more transparent on the assumption that greater understanding of working practices may help to lead to more productive collaboration.²² Given that Shakespeare's Globe was set up as both a theatre and an education centre, with experimentation at the heart, it seems essential to write up the experiment. Scientific vocabulary has been derided by Paul Menzer when describing this project but this criticism, like many of the project, seems to be generated by a misunderstanding of the methods of theatre practitioners by literary scholars.²³ The methods of theatrical experimentation are not taken from the science laboratory but from centuries of theatrical practice. The workshop, the staged reading, the rehearsal process, the design process, all have established methods that take a creative approach to the practical, yet critical, problem of developing a theatrical interpretation of the plays. To negate this history of practice by eliding it, as funding bodies have, with the scientific method, is to misunderstand the tradition that is under discussion.

This volume aims to tackle a range of similar popular misconceptions about this project. Too many assessments of the work have been singular in their aims, drawing conclusions about the project as a whole from a viewing of individual performances of a particular production or several productions within one season. In order to introduce a more rigorous approach to criticism of this work it is essential to provide adequate detail regarding the principles which have guided the work. It is also necessary to compare the outcomes of this project with the intentions of its creators, rather than with critics' preconceptions and idealised theoretical projections. Shakespeare's Globe is not the only reconstructed Renaissance theatre and it is not the only theatre to have an educational component. What makes this centre unique, however, is its location and its educational work, as well as the extended applied approach taken over the first ten years of operation to 'original practices' productions. Recent scholarship, educational practice and contemporary theatre trends have all influenced the way this project was undertaken. It seems sensible, therefore, to gather together scholars, educators and practitioners to make an assessment of the work thus far in order to think positively about the nature of future critical work.

The book considers the first decade of activity in the Globe Theatre, spanning the entirety of Mark Rylance's reign as Artistic Director. Occasional reference is made to the first two years of Dominic Dromgoole's work as Artistic Director primarily as a marker of the possibility and the actuality of change. The period under discussion has been dominated by a single artistic team. The primary subject of this analysis is the extended collaborative research project that came out of the work of Director

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of Design Jenny Tiramani, Music Director Claire van Kampen and Artistic Director Mark Rylance. Their combined approach to 'original practices' has helped to define a new generation of scholarship on this subject. As Dominic Dromgoole has noted, there may never again be a coming together of three such talented and dedicated practitioners to work in a rigorous way over an extended period of time within such an extraordinary building; 'like any good artistic aesthetic or movement, it was a result of the coincidence of very extraordinary personalities at a particular moment in their lives . . . and beyond that a broad consensus in the academic community. And such things are very rare and very special when they happen.'²⁴ The question which arises out of this statement must be: is the specific expertise and experience developed by these theatre artists crucial to experimentation in 'original practices' at the Globe? This study will try to address this and other questions about the development in critical thinking about 'original practices' as a scholarly tool by providing an analysis of this experiment in a way that will both reassess the history of the Globe Theatre to date and structure further debate.

Therefore, this book aims to influence the way writing on this subject is formulated in the future. It is essential to acknowledge that Shakespeare's Globe is many things to many people. The work of the exhibition space is beyond the scope of this book and will not be addressed here. The work of Globe Education will be described in a way that relates specifically to the relationship between theatre practice, learning and research. The view presented is particular and is focused almost entirely on the development of a critical debate between theatre artists and scholars from different disciplines, who can all learn from the experimentation that has taken place and can help to direct the experimentation of the future. Two additional questions which arise from this study must be: who can claim ownership of the outcomes of the first period of experimentation and who will direct the future of those experiments?

While it is essential to acknowledge differences of approach, there remain a number of areas where theatre practitioners and literary and dramatic scholars can easily agree. In fact, one of the key outcomes of this experimental process has been to create a greater understanding between practitioners, educators and academics of their respective methodological approaches, something which will become apparent in the essays included in this volume. The key area of agreement is about the direct relationship between the texts of the plays and the architecture of the building. Performed in their natural environment, stripped of technology, these plays present fundamental questions to practitioners and scholars alike. Standard acting training becomes inadequate, even detrimental, in this space. The role of the director in the modern theatre is entirely undermined in this quite uncontrollable environment. Similarly, editorial practices are faced by real challenges when the underlying assumptions of those practices are tested on this stage. The practitioners

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who have dedicated themselves to working in this space have also dedicated themselves to relearning their craft in order to address the demands of this building. Audiences, similarly, have come to understand the physical and intellectual commitment that is required to participate fully in a performance at the Globe Theatre. It seems that criticism has some way to go to replicate the kind of rethinking that engaging in a collaborative way with the Globe Theatre requires.

The Globe Theatre has been a disappointment to many scholars. It has not told them what they wanted it to and it has not involved them as they had hoped. But some of the initial visions of recreating a historical moment through the harmonious collaboration of practitioner and scholar must be seen to be a romantic ideal. Instead, what this theatre has offered up to the scholarly community is a real understanding of the possibilities of practical experiments that are historically and critically informed. This theatre has in many important ways highlighted the limitations of current approaches to performance, teaching practices, literary criticism and editorial practice. Theatrical, educational and scholarly practices are in a period of transition. The work of these seemingly separate professions is increasingly beginning to overlap and inform one another. Similarly, the disparate disciplines of theatre history, literary and performance criticism have come to influence each other within the Academy over the decade under discussion. This book is part of that process of integration of approaches and therefore does not propose any scientific distance or objectivity. The collection conscientiously includes the practitioners and the scholars who have been most involved in the Globe's developmental process in order to illustrate the kinds of criticism that are possible when the experiments are addressed from a position of real understanding. Scholars who do not have a direct involvement with Shakespeare's Globe, but are perhaps no less invested in these changing means of understanding our critical position, have also been included. What we hope to illustrate is that an informed criticism is necessary in order to reflect the complexity of the original aims of the project and the developmental nature of its outcomes.

In order to provide an opportunity to engage with what has undoubtedly been a fairly closed debate, this book both documents the process as recorded by those involved and tries to move the critical debate about the work forward. The aim is to acknowledge the rigour of the approach taken but also the necessary selectivity of that approach. If we can move away from complaints about what cannot be recreated in the space it will be possible to gain from the very real lessons that have been learned. By highlighting our misconceptions about the period, the experiments may be producing profoundly important outcomes.

Possibly the most productive experiment to take place in terms of the discoveries of 'original practices' was the movement of *Twelfth Night* from Middle Temple Hall to the Globe Theatre. This comparative approach allowed for a re-examination of

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the findings of the experiments that were based in only one of these spaces. The fact that Shakespeare's Globe is planning to build an indoor theatre, while the Blackfriars Theatre in Staunton, Virginia, is planning to build a replica Globe, says quite a bit about the desirability and potential of such practical experiments. A comparative approach to space has been matched by an understanding of a practical contextual exploration of the work of other writers of the period, the potential of which has been rigorously explored through Patrick Spottiswoode's *Read Not Dead* programme. The Globe centre as a whole has moved towards an immersive contextual model for the work of Shakespeare, building up a picture of all of the activity that surrounded this iconic playwright.

Beyond any judgements about the quality of any particular performance presented at the Globe it must be acknowledged that a body of experience and a pool of expertise about the period exists in connection with this centre which is unparalleled. The *Lively Action* and *Read Not Dead* programmes, for example, have developed a group of theatre and Globe Education Practitioners with an extensive familiarity with the language as well as the social and theatrical conventions of the period that has not been replicated elsewhere. To demonstrate the wide range of non-Shakespearean drama that has been staged by Globe Education, we have included a comprehensive list in the Appendices detailing the year, play, playwright and co-ordinator of each of the *Read Not Dead* staged readings. An initial engagement of this kind with the period has often led the co-ordinators and actors involved in the project to want to learn more, which has helped them to articulate and document their own discoveries in more formal ways than previously – James Wallace's chapter in this volume acts as a concrete example of this. As a result, a movement towards understanding and appreciation can be witnessed on either side of the increasingly transparent dividing 'fifth wall'.

In order to convey a sense of the full range of activity but also the level of expertise involved at Shakespeare's Globe, this book has been carefully structured to document first the practical and theoretical parameters of the 'original practices' project, then the work undertaken by Globe Education and finally the practical outcomes of the discoveries on the stage that might help to inform future scholarship. The work of scholars is interwoven with the accounts of the educators and practitioners in order to place the work of this theatre in a wider context both practically and critically. To provide a context for this specific case study of practical experimentation Franklin J. Hildy, whose involvement with the Globe project spans three decades, begins the volume with an overview of the history of reconstruction. Part I of the book then details the four key areas involved in the 'original practices' project: stage action, stage appearance, music and sound and the actor/audience relationship, juxtaposing practitioners and scholars discussing each topic. Part II provides an account of the work in Globe Education, contextualising and mapping