

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

Beginning in the Middle

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If you have never attended an opera and the following chapters should create in you a desire to do so, please stay long enough to enjoy an intermission! It's often the best part of the evening.¹

MY TITLE COMES, OF COURSE, from the Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare's reformulation as a matter of digestion, a stomachful, of Horace's advice to the poet to start *in medias res*, or, as Jonson would translate it, '[t]he middle of his matter':²

Beginning in the middle, starting thence away
To what may be digested in a play.³

My concern is, unlike the Prologue's, only with middles and not with where a play might begin. Like Dante, whose journey in *The Divine Comedy* began in the middle, 'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita', I am often going to find myself 'per una selva oscura', 'in a dark wood'.⁴

On 11 December 1992 Alan Bennett was taking his friend Anne Davies's three children to his version of *The Wind in the Willows*:

Read at the Academy 4 May 2000.

My thanks to the many people whom I annoyed with requests for information about intervals. Not all of them can be acknowledged in the notes that follow.

¹ Victor Borge and Robert Sherman, *My Favourite Intermissions* (1971), p. 8.

² Horace, *Ars Poetica*, line 148; Ben Jonson, 'Horace, His Art of Poetrie' in Ben Jonson, *Works*, ed. C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1925–52), vol. 8, pp. 314–15.

³ Prologue, lines 28–9. All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor *et al.* (Oxford, 1986).

⁴ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. I. Inferno*, ed. John D. Sinclair (Oxford, revd. edn., 1948), p. 22.

TREVOR: How long does it go on?

ME: It finishes at ten.

ROBIN: Are there any of those things when they let you out for a bit?

BEN: He means intervals.

ME: Just one.

ROBIN: Oh. Those are the bits I like best.⁵

Robin Davies is not alone. For many people, intervals offer the possibility of escape from the constrictions of the auditorium, from the prison of the play. As the character called The Monster says, tempting the audience at the end of Act 1 of George Bernard Shaw's *Too True to be Good*: 'The play is now virtually over; but the characters will discuss it at great length for two acts more. The exit doors are all in order.'⁶

Intervals are a crucial part of the audience's experience of performance but they have been virtually ignored in all forms of performance analysis. As Gary Taylor puts it, in his excellent analysis of act-intervals in early modern theatre after 1609,

Modern criticism encourages us to read between the lines of Shakespeare's plays, but not between the acts: to pick out the local significance of pauses and silences in the texture of dialogue, but to ignore the four longer silences between the five acts; to probe the sub-text implicit in a character's failure to act or speak, but to disregard the un-text of those four intervals, when all the characters collectively stop acting and speaking, and the play itself hesitates.⁷

It should be no surprise then that there is no appropriate entry in Patrice Pavis's otherwise outstanding *Dictionnaire du théâtre*⁸ which claims to offer all the terms and concepts necessary for theatre analysis or that most manuals of playwriting that I have looked at say nothing whatsoever about such a crucial part of dramatic structure beyond, for example, a recommendation that '[s]ince most theatres do include an interval you should check that there is an artistically suitable point in your script for a break in the action'⁹ or a passing recognition that '[j]ust before the intermission is traditionally a "high" moment ("Make them want to come back for more")'.¹⁰

⁵ Alan Bennett, *Writing Home* (revd. edn., 1997), p. 268.

⁶ George Bernard Shaw, *Too True to be Good, Village Wooing & On the Rocks* (1934), p. 48.

⁷ Gary Taylor, 'The Structure of Performance: Act-Intervals in the London Theatres, 1576-1642' in Gary Taylor and John Jowett, *Shakespeare Reshaped 1606-1623* (Oxford, 1993) pp. 3-50 (p. 3).

⁸ (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980).

⁹ Christopher Beddows, *Successful Playwriting* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 96.

¹⁰ Jean-Claude van Itallie, *The Playwright's Workbook* (New York, 1997), p. 48; see also Sherwood Collins, 'The Intermission, a Corner-Block in Play Construction', *Drama Critique*, 10

Intervals in Shakespeare production encapsulate many things: the exchanges of authority over the text between audience and production, the social processes of theatre, the precision of the audience's self-definition of communality, the tension between the audience's attention and their corporeality, the tensions between Shakespeare's text and the necessities of performance in historically altered conditions of performance. They are plainly moments that can constitute one of theatre's sharpest means of defining interpretation, controlling articulation. Hence, for instance, modern audiences watching most productions with one interval have an awareness only of a two-act structure, as, Emrys Jones argues, audiences in early modern theatres had as well.¹¹ Whatever kind of coherence a Shakespeare play embodies, the assumption of seamlessness is contradicted by the intervals: they become the visible seams of the text in performance, the moments at which the discontinuities of process become present.

To think of them in those terms places the authority for their existence, their frequency and their placing into the hands of the production. But they may also be a means of satisfying the audience's own demands, creating their own control over the text. When Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* was about to open on Broadway, he found that the play had to be cut to accommodate the criterion of what he dubbed "Broadway Bladder" (a term . . . which refers to the alleged need of a Broadway audience to urinate every 75 minutes).¹² It was with the same thought in mind that Gareth Lloyd Evans ended his long, four-column review of John Barton's RSC *Hamlet* in 1980, after praising the superbly easy performances of a number of the actors, with the following comment:

Perhaps . . . it was with slightly different thoughts of ease that the RSC decided to give us two intervals instead of what had seemed to be becoming the statutory one. Without, I hope, betraying too much unseemly enthusiasm, may I say that even with a production as splendidly absorbing as this—"for this relief, much thanks".¹³

(1967), pp. 71–6. For a more extravagant sense of the meaning of intervals, see Fred Moramarco, *Life As a Two Act Play (with Intermission)* (Santa Cruz, 1989) and Nicolas Abraham, 'The Phantom of Hamlet or the Sixth Act: preceded by the Intermission of "Truth"', *Diacritics*, 18. 4 (1988), pp. 2–19; the latter, which is analysed by Nicholas Rand and Esther Rashkin in articles in the same issue, is convincing proof that practitioners of psychoanalytic literary criticism should never attempt to be dramatists, let alone write pastiche Shakespeare.

¹¹ Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford, revd. edn. 1985 [1971]), pp. 66–88.

¹² Letter to Philip Gaskell, October 1975, quoted in Philip Gaskell, *From Writer to Reader* (Oxford), p. 260.

¹³ Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 1 July 1980. I am grateful to Victoria Stec for this reference.

Stoppard was producing a non-gendered generalisation: the 75-minute rule is not, of course, a need of all members of a Broadway audience but especially of middle-aged men with prostate problems. Shakespeare's Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida* may be offering the whole play as a commodity of appetite and consumption but the consequences of having consumed may feature largely in the audience's need for and experience of intervals. For many women at almost any theatre, the interval is usually entirely taken up with standing in a queue for the lavatory.

The provision of WCs is a regulated and gendered matter; it was, for instance, set out in the Greater London Council's 1968 technical regulations for 'Places of Public Entertainment'. These assumed that 'the public . . . consists of equal numbers of males and females' and, for an audience of 1,000, required two WCs and twenty urinals for men and only three WCs for women.¹⁴ Current advice in technical handbooks is more generous to women, though not to men, one manual recommending two WCs and ten urinals for men and eleven WCs for women,¹⁵ while another suggests two WCs and sixteen urinals for men and thirteen WCs for women.¹⁶ But, whatever current advice, it does nothing to alter provision in earlier buildings and the consequential queues.

Such queuing is a new phenomenon. Shaw complained about the brutal cutting of the plays in Irving's Shakespeare productions at the Lyceum into

shreds and patches which Irving and his predecessors tore out of his plays and tacked crudely together for performances which were interrupted four or five times by intolerable intervals, during which the women in the audience sat in silent boredom whilst the men wandered about the corridors and refreshment bars.¹⁷

In Shaw's description men leave the auditorium (not least, though unstated, to smoke) and women remain. Middle-class women were assumed not to need lavatory facilities in public places like theatres and were trained from childhood to observe such proprieties. Tracy Davis's extraordinary study of sanitation in Victorian theatres emphasises that, while taking chamber pots to public entertainment had been practised since Imperial Rome, the absence of assigned seating in the pit and gallery

¹⁴ 'Places of Public Entertainment—Technical Regulations' (GLC, 1968), p. 6. I am grateful to Tim Furby for advice and references.

¹⁵ Patricia Tutt and David Adler, eds., *New Metric Handbook* (1979), pp. 339–40.

¹⁶ Alan Williams, ed., *Specification 93: Technical Volume* (1993), p. 532.

¹⁷ Christopher St. John, ed., *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw. A Correspondence* (1949), pp. xxix–xxx. I am grateful to Paul Prescott for this reference.

meant that ‘vacating a seat in order to go relieve oneself—assuming that there was somewhere to go—meant losing the seat’ and many ‘relieved themselves on the spot, as is implied by the lead lining ordered in 1837 for “the Floor between the front seat and front of the Gallery . . . to prevent Nuisances” at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle’¹⁸ This was no idle anxiety: of London theatres in 1855, for instance, the Victoria Theatre, with a capacity of 2,200, had only one WC for the entire audience, restricted to the use of those in the boxes, the Surrey (capacity 3,000) also had only one for the boxes, Sadler’s Wells two for the boxes while the Haymarket’s provision of ten for the boxes and pit seems positively lavish. None of these theatres had any lavatories for the galleries.¹⁹ If one of the major functions of an interval in modern theatres is to enable the audience to go to the lavatory, that is a mark of a social change in the habits of urination and excretion. Intervals were not needed for such a purpose earlier.

A second—and oddly connected—function of the modern interval for the audience is to have a drink. Theatres’ finances rely on the significant sums of money made from their bars and restaurants and the interval generates the major part of bar income. Michael Kahn, artistic director of the American Shakespeare Company at the Lansburgh Theatre in Washington, estimated in 1997 that the bar takings were worth about \$30,000 in the course of the run of a play and hence that he could not contemplate a production without an interval.²⁰ It was mockingly suggested that the production of Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman* at the Royal Opera House in March 2000 had three intervals rather than the usual one precisely in order to increase restaurant takings and that the opera house had become ‘an expensive restaurant providing bites of opera or dance between courses’.²¹ In Stratford, the catering is run by a separate company paying a rent on revenue to the RSC. The recent *Macbeth* performed without an interval in the Swan, playing for eleven weeks, cost the caterers £45,000 in lost revenue while an interval-less *Julius Caesar* in the main house, playing sixty-eight performances, cost them in excess of £120,000.²² The loss is magnified by current employment legislation which

¹⁸ Tracy C. Davis, ‘Filthy—Nay—Pestilential: Sanitation and Victorian Theaters’ in Della Pollock, ed., *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), pp. 161–86 (p. 161).

¹⁹ Davis, pp. 178–81.

²⁰ Private conversation, Washington, April 1997.

²¹ Quoted by Jonathan Romney, ‘To be continued . . .’ *The Guardian*, 5 April 2000, G2, p. 15. My thanks to Michael Corder for this reference.

²² I am most grateful to Mr Mellini, the Managing Director of RST Restaurants, for his kindness in providing these figures.

prevents the company saving on the wages bill by putting staff onto a shorter working week. Even a few years ago, part-time staff were losing income whenever there was no interval. In earlier theatres and music-halls, patrons were allowed to take drinks into the auditorium, if they dared leave their seats, as is still the practice at, for instance, the Hackney Empire where one could enjoy a much-needed drink while watching the Almeida production of *Hamlet* starring Ralph Fiennes in 1994.

There is a third aspect of interval behaviour to be noticed at this point: talk. In modern theatres spectators do not talk during the performance or are hissed at by others if they do. The silent audience is, I take it, a consequence of the darkened auditorium, that pernicious invention of Wagner at Bayreuth and the interval itself may emerge from the need for the audience both to see itself and hear itself in the post-Wagner conditions of performance. Quiet is now a matter of theatre etiquette but a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that toured New York neighbourhoods in 1964 had to cope with audiences that were distinctly talkative, not least because they had not learned the conventions of theatre. One audience member commented on the noise level of conversation, 'No one really did it on purpose. The people had to do something during the play. Most of them had come out of curiosity and couldn't follow the plot,'²³ and researchers suggested that for future productions "social controllers" [be] strategically seated in various parts of the house [to] reinforce the norm of quiet. They can act as professional "shooshers."²⁴

Earlier audiences had no need to apologise. A rejected epilogue to Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* pleads, with mock desperation,

Ye beaux and belles, that form this splendid ring,
Suspend your conversation while I sing.²⁵

Pepys extensively records conversations that took place around him in the theatres of the 1660s and Fanny Burney, finding herself sat next to her father during Handel's *Messiah* on 28 May 1790, noted that the performance 'gave me three hours conference with my dearest father', records the conversation in detail and says nothing whatsoever about the music.²⁶

²³ Richard Faust and Charles Kadushin, *Shakespeare in the Neighborhood: Audience Reaction to 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream' as produced by Joseph Papp for the Delacorte Mobile Theater, A Report* (New York, 1965), p. 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁵ Oliver Goldsmith, *Poems and Plays*, ed. Tom Davis (1975), p. 207.

²⁶ Quoted by V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, *All Right on the Night* (1954), p. 80; see his entire chapter 4 'Conversation in the Theatre', pp. 73–85.

Audiences now reserve to the intervals their conversation on all manner of topics but one topic is obviously the performance. If the effect of interval drinking or urinating is to increase the physical comfort of the audience during the second half of the performance, the effect of conversation, whether participated in or overheard, is to transform the nature of audience members' response thereafter, confirming them in their opinion so far or altering it, enabling them to feel more or less confident about their own view of the play and the production, encouraging them to observe something others deem worthwhile or discouraging them by indicating their lack of perceptiveness.²⁷ Where other interval activity (drinking and urinating) produces a physical ease that might otherwise interfere with perception, conversation changes perception, reinscribing the individual in her/his relationship to the group either through the possible reuniting of the individual, relieved of the anxiety of separate perception, into the community of response or, through the antagonism of the members of the group in the confrontation of their differing but asserted reactions, fragmenting the audience further. For an audience that talks during the performance the interval is not necessary in such a transformative critical function.

Modern audiences may also read their programmes during the interval, again changing, intensifying or confirming their view of the performance. The radio tradition of the interval talk about the play is in part an extrapolation of that experience of live performance; hence Owen Lee's suggestion that each of his commentaries on operas 'should be read during the first intermission of the opera it discusses'.²⁸

In their negotiations of the defined and foreknown time-span of the interval, a temporal constriction that enforces an urgency on all the interval activities I have been describing, not least through the disembodied voice that warns the audience, as it does not through the rest of the performance, that the time of freedom is slipping away, the audience is anxiously aware of the imminent ending of this brief respite over which they might appear to have control. Intervals are, internally as well as in their location within the continuum of performance, spaces of marked time. As Ronald Pelias defines the interval,

²⁷ Compare Sam Smiley, *Playwriting: The Structure of Action* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971): 'The most typical intermission conversation has to do with questions about how to respond to the performance, though these are seldom consciously posed. Most people think they should be critical, negatively or positively, but they want to be sure that they generally agree with their peers' (p. 260). See also Romney, art. cit.: 'I just feel uncomfortable standing around at a loss for intelligent comments about what I've not yet digested.'

²⁸ See M. Owen Lee, *First Intermissions* (New York, 1995), p. vii.

Time to make an assessment, to look back and to speculate about what is to come. Time, if needed, to catch your breath. Time, if needed, to rub sleep from your eyes. Time to get something to drink and to attend to private matters. Time to see what others are thinking, what others are whispering. Time to decide if you want to continue.²⁹

My discussion so far has been about one specific form of interruption of the process of performance, one in which members of the audience leave the space they share with the performers. This event, now called an *interval* in England and an *intermission* in the United States (from where, significantly, the UK has borrowed the word specifically to describe the rare occurrence of an interval in the screening of a film),³⁰ can be separated from the kind of interruptions in earlier theatres where intervals in this sense were unknown. When Pepys records in his diary on 12 August 1667, that he ‘addressed myself to [Mrs Pierce and Mrs Knepp] and talked to them all the intervalls of the play’,³¹ he is more restrained than Fanny Burney but the conversation takes place during pauses between the acts in the performance of Suckling’s *Brennoralt*, during which music, ‘act-music’, would have been played. These hiatuses in the play would not now be thought of as intervals. The diary entry is cited by the OED for definition 1.a: ‘The period of time between two events, actions, etc., or between two parts of an action, performance’ and I find it pleasing that ‘Interval’ is the first head-word in volume 8 of OED2, thereby coming after the interval between two volumes. French uses the same word, *entr’acte*, to cover both these forms of event, the pause filled by music and the lengthier gap which separates audience from the play (now separated historically in the language of English theatre), reserving the use of *intervalle* for the more restricted English sense of *interval*. German, like French, uses *pause* for both. I cannot yet date the moment at which in English theatre practice spectators made a mass exit during the interval but all the evidence seems to indicate that it is not much earlier than Irving and hence may indeed be directly connected with and consequent on the darkened auditorium. Not a single one of the 579 occurrences of the word ‘interval’ in the extensive corpus of English drama that can

²⁹ Ronald J. Pelias, *Writing Performance: Poeticizing the Researcher’s Body* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois, 1999), p. 121.

³⁰ Though see also the frequent use of ‘intermission’ to mean a Pinteresque pause, fourteen times in all, in Leonard Willan’s *Orgula* (1658), a very rare use of pause markings in early modern drama.

³¹ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (1970–83), vol. 8: p. 383.

be searched on the Chadwyck-Healey *Literature Online* data-base aligns with the modern British usage.

Intervals as interruptions to the continuity of the performance of the play-text's fiction effectively seem to have begun in the West with Aristophanes' last plays, at the point when Old Comedy modulates into Middle Comedy. Where in his earlier work, as in the extant corpus of Greek tragedy, the chorus's lyrics are integral to the action of the play, in the *Ecclesiazusae* (*The Assembly Women*) and the *Ploutos* (*Wealth*), a new mark begins to appear in the early texts, 'Χορον', indicating some kind of event performed by the chorus which is not scripted or defined by the dramatist. The chorus does have other scripted lyrics in both these plays but one of Aristophanes' late comedies, the lost *Aeolosicon*, seems to have had 'no choral lyrics at all'.³² Later defined as an 'Ἐμβολιμος', an interpolation, such a moment in the performance is explicitly disjunctive, a separation from the continuum of performance, the mark of a pause which, as Maidment defines it, 'had no part in the development of the plot at all'.³³ The fragmentary evidence for Middle Comedy makes it impossible to be sure what happened in this phase of comic form but, by the time of Menander and New Comedy, the activities of the chorus had become reformed as a series of interruptions of the action, marking the text's divisions into five acts. At the end of the first act, a character looks off-stage and warns the others that 'There's a horde of rather drunken young men / Approaching'—this example comes from the *Perikeiromene* (*The Girl with Her Hair Cut Short*)³⁴—or that 'I can see these people coming here, / Right here, some rather drunk Pan-worshippers. I think / It would be tactful not to clash with them'—this from the *Diskolos* (*The Grouch*).³⁵ At each successive act-interval, the revellers reappear and perform, indicating a passage of fictive time, an off-stage event as, for example, someone making a journey to fetch something. The chorus, either of tipsy revellers or dinner-guests, are thus tied extremely loosely to the play's fictional world, reminders of the play's setting at a time of festival and mediating between 'the real and represented worlds

³² Michael Silk, 'Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet', *Yale Classical Studies*, 26 (1980), pp. 99–151 (p. 150 n.).

³³ K. J. Maidment, 'The Later Comic Chorus', *Classical Quarterly*, 29 (1935), pp. 1–24 (p. 8). On this transition, see also R. L. Hunter, 'The Comic Chorus in the Fourth Century', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 36 (1979), pp. 23–38; and his summary in *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 9–10.

³⁴ W. G. Arnott, *Menander* vol. 2 (Loeb Classical Library; Camb., MA, 1996), p. 387.

³⁵ W. G. Arnott, *Menander* vol. 1 (Loeb Classical Library; Camb., MA, 1979), p. 219.

of the performance'.³⁶ This drunken chorus marks a cyclical end for Greek drama: the chorus which had emerged as a group celebrating Dionysus ends in the same way or, as Maidment phrases it, 'the comic chorus . . . begins as κῶμος and ends as κῶμος'.³⁷

But there is a further crucial implication of Menander's practice. It is clear that Menander is working to a five-act form: none of his plays show any evidence of more or fewer μέρη, parts or shares, the word that will become our sense of an act. Legrand went so far as to suggest that the five-act rule might better be termed 'the rule of four *entr'actes*' since the latter are the determining controls.³⁸ Modern theatre similarly assumes that any drama longer than two hours requires an interval (with *Macbeth* as a rare exception). Hence Menander constructed his drama with typical brilliance to allow for and give reason for both the clearing of the stage and the passage of time marked by the chorus's performance. The act-division as temporal gap became markedly common in mid-nineteenth-century plays, where the word 'interval' is frequently used to refer to a gap not in performance but in the fiction. In Westland Marston's *Borough Politics* (performed in 1846) the audience is informed that 'an interval of more than two months is supposed to have elapsed between the 1st and 2nd acts'³⁹ while in Bulwer Lytton's *The Rightful Heir* (1868) the text announces 'Time occupied—In the first four acts, one day. Between the 4th and 5th acts the interval of a year.'⁴⁰ The connection between the concept of interval and the time-gap in the fiction is as acute in Menander as here. But Menander invented or created the fictive circumstances for each act-division, each interval.

George Colman's notes to his translation of Terence's comedies in 1765 are recurrently concerned with the ways in which intervals are formed, temporal gaps in the action are created and the five-act form is justified. Of the *Phormio*, for instance, he comments,

I hope it is needless to observe, that Phormio's retiring in order to wait for the coming forth of the old men, leaves the stage vacant, where I have ended the fourth act, and forms a proper interval between that act and the fifth.⁴¹

³⁶ David Wiles, *The Masks of Menander* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 5.

³⁷ Maidment, p. 24.

³⁸ Quoted by George Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton, NJ, 1952), p. 99 n.

³⁹ Westland Marston, *Borough Politics* (n.d.), p. 14.

⁴⁰ Bulwer Lytton, *The Rightful Heir* (1868), p. 3.

⁴¹ George Colman, *The Comedies of Terence* (1761), p. 604 n. Compare his comments on the way 'all these circumstances are with much greater propriety made to fill the interval between the two acts' (*Hecyra*, Colman, p. 477 n.)

Colman accepts that it is the task of the ‘just and skilfull playwright’ to make sure that the interval is ‘interwoven with the subject’ and that ‘the supposed employments of the characters, in their absence from the stage, [be] made conducive to the fable’, to ‘contrive his intervals with the like art’.⁴² But Colman is imposing a form on the plays which the performance conventions of Roman theatre did not have.

Though, as Shakespeare would have known, Terence’s plays had come to be divided into five acts—those act-divisions appear as early as the fourth century AD in the Bembinus manuscript—and though as early as Horace a five-act theory was assumed to be law, the plays simply will not divide effectively in such a way. If a new act, rather than a new scene, is, as in Menander, to be defined by a clear stage, then both the *Rudens* and the *Adelphoe* have eleven acts and, in any case, many of the clear stages do not indicate a gap in fictive time. Equally, many of the act-divisions marked in Donatus’ commentary occur without a clear stage, in effect in mid-scene: three in the *Andria* and three in the *Phormio*, for instance.⁴³ All the evidence indicates that continuous performance was the practice with Roman theatre. Those moments where a play by Terence or Plautus seems to indicate an act-pause are much more likely to indicate the Greek play underlying the Roman one than to suggest a technique of act-pauses, of hesitations for *entr’acte* music, even where a character calls for the ‘tibicen’.⁴⁴

Whatever Shakespeare might have known about five-act form—and the evidence accumulated by T. W. Baldwin in that maddeningly gargantuan book *Shakspeare’s Five-Act Structure* convincingly suggests he must have known a fair amount⁴⁵—he also must have encountered at school plays that had been awkwardly constrained to fit a form which they did not obey, a Procrustean bed of academic theory imposed onto a performance text, as his own plays would be reshaped by modern theatre practice, a different form of imposition. The clash between five-act theory and theatre practice is replicated in early modern drama. I have no need to here re-examine the evidence for act-pauses in early modern theatres. Gary Taylor’s meticulous consideration is quite sufficient to

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 252 n. (from the *Heauton Timoroumenos*).

⁴³ See Henry L. Snuggs, *Shakespeare and Five Acts* (New York, 1960), p. 22.

⁴⁴ See Duckworth, p. 99 n.

⁴⁵ T. W. Baldwin, *Shakspeare’s Five-Act Structure* (Urbana, IL, 1947); see also his *On the Act and Scene Division in the Shakspeare First Folio* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois, 1965); W. T. Jewkes, *Act Division in Elizabethan and Jacobean Plays 1583–1616* (Hamden, CT, 1958) and Snuggs, *op. cit.*

show conclusively that continuous performance was the norm for adult companies working in the public theatres until around 1609, that thereafter they gradually adopted the procedure of music intervals that had been customary in the private theatres prior to that date and that there was no practice of continuous performance a decade after that date.⁴⁶ Nothing more completely indicates the irrelevance of five-act form to many Shakespeare plays than the last scene of *Love's Labour's Lost* (5. 2) which, at over 900 lines, amounts to well over a third of the whole play, a massive continuous sequence that denies any kind of division or segmentation.

But, while continuous performance and the absence of act-intervals was the norm, that is not, of course, the same thing as the absence of a possible perception of five-act form in some Shakespeare plays. *Henry V* is obviously a play whose form explores the tension between the chorus-defined five-act structure and the historical materials out of which the play is created; though the chorus tries to order and control the events, they prove uncontainable, requiring disconcertingly awkward anticipations and descriptions of movements to and fro across the Channel in the Choruses to Acts 2 and 5. In *Romeo and Juliet* the action careers increasingly out of control and the chorus's intervention at the start of Act 2 can be seen as a last attempt to impose order on the mounting chaos. *Pericles* questions whether five is necessarily the right number for a play's acts, since Gower's interventions create seven segments which, as Martin Wiggins perceptively notes, grow 'progressively shorter as the story accelerates towards its redemptive climax'.⁴⁷ Nor is such a device restricted to Shakespeare: Wiggins has also suggested that Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* plays a joke on the absence of a choric intervention at the moment which ought to be the end of Act 3 since Revenge has fallen asleep, making Act 3 disproportionately long, lasting until Revenge wakes up 'and reasserts his dominance'.⁴⁸

In one sense, of course, performances in the late Jacobean theatres were still continuous: the playing of music between the acts could be an effective part of performance. One of the few things we positively know about the act-pauses in Jacobean theatres is that they could be of differing lengths: I find this sufficiently proven by the annotation 'Long'

⁴⁶ See Taylor, *passim*. For earlier stages in the argument see, for instance, Mark Hunter, 'Act- and Scene-Division in the Plays of Shakespeare' *RES*, 2 (1926), pp. 295–310 and J. Dover Wilson, 'Act- and Scene-Divisions in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Rejoinder to Sir Mark Hunter', *RES*, 3 (1927), pp. 385–97.

⁴⁷ Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time* (Oxford, 2000), p. 82.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

written by Hand A alongside his indication of the beginning of Acts 2 and 4 in the manuscript of Massinger's *Believe As You List*⁴⁹ and the similar marking at the start of Act 2 in a copy of *The Two Merry Milkmaids*, prepared for performance.⁵⁰ The longer stretches of act-music suggest either a theatrical need—a substantial costume change, for instance—or an interpretative effect in which the longer music marks a different kind of transition that the audience needs to make between the acts. In either case the longer interval is producing an effect on the audience's experience of the performed play.

Taylor argues persuasively that the cutting of the music during the reunion of Lear and Cordelia in F might have been balanced by its relocation to the playing of harmonious music during the interval between Acts 4 and 5 which immediately follows this scene and that it might therefore have appeared as a transformation of the sound of the storm which could have continued throughout the pause between Acts 2 and 3. '*Storme still*' is a marking that might also reflect a cut, here of eight of the gentleman's lines describing the storm which would be unnecessary if the audience had heard the storm at length.⁵¹ But what is most striking about the fact of music being played between the acts in Elizabethan private theatres and in public theatres later is the infrequency with which any indication of the nature of the music is marked. This absence of detailed marking for the music makes John Marston's *Sophonisba*, performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1606, all the more remarkable because the published text carefully states the nature of the inter-act music, for the extensive detail of which Marston apologised: 'After all, let me entreat my reader not to tax me for the fashion of entrances and music of this tragedy.'⁵² Act 1 ends with 'the cornets and organs playing loud full music for the act', Act 2 had 'Organ mixed with recorders', Act 3 'Organs, viols and voices'.⁵³ When, at the end of Act 4, Syphax enters 'the canopy as to Sophonisba's bed' with, as he thinks, Sophonisba, 'A bass lute and a treble viol play for the act',⁵⁴ after which he discovers, at the beginning of the next act, that he has been with the disguised Erichtho, so that the music works as commentary on the sex-scene which takes

⁴⁹ See P. Massinger, *Believe as You List*, ed. C. J. Sisson (Oxford, The Malone Society, 1928), pp. 20 & 59.

⁵⁰ See Leslie Thomson, 'A Quarto 'Marked for Performance': Evidence of What?', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 8 (1996), pp. 176–210 (p. 190).

⁵¹ Taylor, pp. 49–50.

⁵² John Marston, *The Malcontent and Other Plays*, ed. Keith Sturges (Oxford, 1997), p. 373.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 265, 275.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

place in the time-interval between the acts and the immediate re-entrance of the same characters to reveal the deception ironises the act-music. If, as I assume, the choices of act-music were Marston's, then he is brilliantly using the pause to create extraordinary theatrical effects for his plot.

Act intervals could also be marked by some onstage event, as for instance in the Folio marking at the end of Act 3 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where the lovers 'sleepe all the Act'.⁵⁵ The act-pause that took place here sustains the audience's perception of the four sleepers, a moment whose original musical accompaniment in later performances at the Globe and Blackfriars would not, I suspect, have been radically different in effect from Mendelssohn's 'Nocturne' in his incidental music. Again, though, this moment is remarkable because exceptional; hence the need for the stage-direction in F1.

In the transition from the continuous performance of earlier theatrical practice to the act-marked conventions of the theatres after, say, 1610, the division of earlier texts seems not to have posed an especial problem. But two texts intrigue me. The first is a copy of Q2 of *Romeo and Juliet* now in the Elizabethan Club at Yale marked up for performance probably between 1620 and the 1660s. Taylor asserts that the markings were for a performance that would 'almost certainly have been provincial'⁵⁶ but Edward Langhans, the great scholar of Restoration promptbooks, suggests it might have been linked to a Duke's Company production at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1662.⁵⁷ Not having any evidence to work from in the continuous text of the quarto, the annotator marks the acts consistently in what we might see as—or at least the tradition asserts to be—the wrong places: Act 1, for instance, ends as Juliet heads down for the Capulet party (after 1. 3) rather than after it, so that the Chorus to Act 2, which was not cut but was accompanied by music throughout, is in the middle of the Act; Act 2 ends after the balcony scene (2. 1), in the movement from night to the dawn of the Friar's entry that now opens Act 3; Act 3 ends as the Nurse is sent by Juliet to find the banished Romeo at the Friar's cell (3. 2), while the last act starts, after a moment in which there is intriguingly no call for act-music, only as the grieving Paris approaches Juliet's tomb (5. 3. 1).⁵⁸

The annotator of this copy of *Romeo and Juliet* seems to have acted with confidence. The person responsible for marking up the acts in

⁵⁵ See the note ad loc. in my edition (Oxford, 1994), p. 212.

⁵⁶ Taylor, art. cit., p. 6 n.

⁵⁷ Edward A. Langhans, ed., *Restoration Promptbooks* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois, 1981), p. 40.

⁵⁸ Taylor's description is incorrect; see Langhans, pp. 40–2.

A Midsummer Night's Dream in a copy of F3 for the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin late in the seventeenth century had terrible trouble. Though his text had act-divisions, they clearly did not accord with his view of performance conventions. The start of Act 4 is transferred to the middle of 3. 2, after the confused lovers have left and before Oberon tells Robin 'This is thy negligence' (3. 2. 346) so that Oberon's accusation and Robin's excuse are dissociated from the action they describe. The annotator had three goes at finding the start of Act 3, writing and deleting it in the middle of Titania's first meeting with Bottom in 3. 1 and at the start of 3. 2 before finally settling on the traditional moment.⁵⁹

As Dr Johnson stated so firmly in considering his practice of editing, there is often a tension between Shakespeare's plays and a set of later theatrical conventions:

I have preserved the common distribution of the plays into acts, though I believe it to be in almost all the plays void of authority . . . The settled mode of the theatre requires four intervals in the play, but few, if any of our authour's compositions can be properly distributed in that manner.⁶⁰

Whatever else may have determined the placing of the division into acts, one possible reason may have been the need to trim and replace the candles in indoor theatres, a severely practical reason for keeping acts reasonably short.⁶¹ But the luckless annotator of the Smock Alley promptbook of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is facing the same problems that Johnson faced in suggesting that the first scene of Act 3 of *Henry IV Part 2* ought really to belong to the previous act 'but that it would shorten the next act too much, which has not even now its due proportion to the rest'.⁶² Johnson's concern over shapeliness and balance is evident in his comments on the act-divisions in *Romeo and Juliet* but so too is his recognition that the acts are not fixed entities:

The acts are here properly enough divided, nor did any better distribution than the editors have already made, occur to me in the persual of the play . . . some future editor may try, whether any improvement can be made, by reducing them to a length more equal, or interrupting the action at more proper intervals.⁶³

⁵⁹ See the facsimile in G. Blakemore Evans, *Shakespearean Prompt-books of the Seventeenth Century*, 8 vols. to date (Charlottesville, VA, 1960–), vol. 7 part 1 and Evans's notes on pp. 29–31, 38, and 42.

⁶⁰ Arthur Sherbo, ed., *Johnson on Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, vols. 7 and 8; New Haven, 1968), vol. 1, p. 107.

⁶¹ See Keith Brown, 'More Light, More Light', *Essays in Criticism*, 34 (1984), pp. 1–13 (p. 8).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1: 505; compare his comment at the start of *Titus Andronicus* 2. 2: 'There is here an interval of action, and here the second act ought to have begun' (*Ibid.*, 2: 747).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2: 954.

While Johnson's predecessors were willing to move scenes between acts—Pope, for instance, altering Rowe's positioning of the start of the last act of *Antony and Cleopatra*—modern critics have allowed assumptions about early modern theatrical practice to emerge from their perception of dramatic form as if the two must necessarily harmonise. There is not really much to choose between Crompton Rhodes arguing in 1922 that the division of the central events of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into three acts 'is obviously arbitrary, and pauses during its course cannot have been permitted under any rational system of stage-management'⁶⁴ and the attempts by such sensitive critics as G. K. Hunter and Emrys Jones to argue for particular performance styles. Dr Johnson's understanding of act-division as both arbitrary and disconnected from early modern theatre practice has not been taken to heart. Hunter has argued energetically for four act-pauses as Elizabethan public theatre convention because he perceives the plays as observing a five-act form while Jones hypothesises a single central interval because he perceives a powerful division of the action at this point.⁶⁵

It is certainly the case that a very few early plays did have a single interval. Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrez* breaks in the middle with speaker A realising that the audience cannot be kept longer from their dinner:

And therefore we shall the matter forbere
 And make a poynt evyn here
 Lest we excede a mesure,
 And we shall do our labour and trewe entent
 For to play the remenant,
 At my lordis pleasure.⁶⁶

It is also the case that there was a performance of *Pericles* on 20 May 1619 for the French ambassador, divided in two as Sir Gerald Herbert wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton:

In the Kinges great chamber they went to see the play of Pirracles, Prince of Tyre, which lasted till two a clocke. After two actes, the players ceased till the French all refreshed them with Sweetmeates brought on chynay voiders, and wyne and ale in bottelles. After, the players begann anewe.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ R. Crompton Rhodes, *The Stager of Shakespeare* (Birmingham, 1922), p. 71.

⁶⁵ See G. K. Hunter, 'Were There Act-pauses on Shakespeare's Stage?' in Standish Henning *et al.*, eds., *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran and Mark Eccles* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois, 1976), pp. 15–35 and Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford, revd. edn. 1985 [1971]), pp. 66–88.

⁶⁶ *Fulgens and Lucrez*, lines 1427–32 in Alan H. Nelson, ed., *The Plays of Henry Medwall* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 67; see also Medwall's *Nature*, lines 1427–1438 (ed. cit., pp. 126–7).

⁶⁷ Quoted by F. D. Hoeniger in his edition of *Pericles* (1963), p. lxvi.

But the mere fact that Herbert noted it suggests its unusualness. Jones moves easily from such weak evidence to assuming that Shakespeare had and used an interval in the play's middle, rather than seeing that modern intervals starkly reveal a two-part form in ways that would have been impossible in the performance structures of the early modern stage. He goes too far in suggesting that

[w]hat Shakespeare often does it to treat the interval as a licence to himself to make considerable changes in the substance and presentation of his material, changes which otherwise—that is, without an interval—might seem inadmissibly abrupt.⁶⁸

Or rather, Jones's acute and perceptive experience of Shakespeare's plays in late twentieth-century performance have led him to read that structuring back onto the play and its early mode of performance.

In any case Jones's intervals can move. The right perception of *Hamlet's* form cannot be with an interval after Act 1 and another later for 'it is highly unlikely that at a point so close to the beginning of the play an interval would be arranged' and there must therefore be a single interval 'in the usual position: at about the end of the third act.'⁶⁹ But Jones also argues that '[a]ll Hamlet's soliloquies occur before the interval' thereby placing the interval later, after the Fortinbras scene, in the conflated text he analysed and he praises Peter Hall's RSC production of 1965 where, because it was acted through to the end of 4.4 'without interruption . . . it comes across with unusual clarity'.⁷⁰

I can do more now than glance at the range and implications that mark twentieth-century British theatre practice in the placing of intervals in Shakespeare. Every production in effect makes a statement on the subject. Cakes can be cut in many different ways but theatre practice means that only one way of dividing the play up can be visible at any one time, though Bridges-Adams' Stratford production of *King Lear* in 1932 announced in the programme that 'The play will be given in five acts, with an interval of ten minutes after act three',⁷¹ dropping the curtain to indicate the act-form, as he had done as early as 1921 in his *Antony and*

⁶⁸ Jones, pp. 71–2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷¹ All references to programmes and promptbooks for Stratford productions are taken from material in the RSC Archive at the Shakespeare Centre Library.

Cleopatra, played with two intervals but with the curtain marking five-act form.⁷²

The length of intervals has changed over the last century. Shaw may have complained about Irving's long act-breaks, echoing Flaubert's definition of an *entr'acte* in his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: 'toujours trop long'.⁷³ But the evidence suggests that to us the intervals would have seemed remarkably short, often as little as four minutes, even shorter than the 'waits' between acts in the continuous performance convention of Kemble nearly a century earlier.⁷⁴ Our now standard form of a fifteen or twenty minute break was unknown. Even in the exceptional circumstances of a tour in America when there had been far too little time for the stage-crew to become accustomed to the demands of a new theatre, the longest interval in Irving's *Much Ado About Nothing* was only fifteen minutes, during which a massive and complex set representing the cathedral at Messina was put in place for the start of Act 3.⁷⁵

The longest interval I have come across was in Basil Langton's production of *Hamlet* at the Birmingham Rep in 1942. Langton played what was understood to be a full-text but spread it over two evenings, creating an interval of about twenty-one hours. The first night ended with the play scene but the second began with the play scene repeated,⁷⁶ an effect oddly similar to Jean Cocteau's *Orphée*, subtitled with deliberate paradox a 'tragedy in one act and an interval'. At the end of scene 8, Cocteau directs that the curtain should fall slowly and then immediately rise, after which scene 8 is repeated.⁷⁷ But Langton's interval creates an attempt through repetition to elide the seam of the interval, winding back the unrolling action in order that the gap should be bridged by seeing how the continuity is managed. In little, the most brilliant use of this device that I

⁷² See on his *Antony and Cleopatra*, Richard Madelaine, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra* (Shakespeare in Production. Cambridge, 1998), pp. 75–6.

⁷³ Quoted in Frédéric Maurin, 'Les Entractes à géométrie variable de Robert Wilson', *Cycnos*, 12 (1995), pp. 91–103 (p. 91).

⁷⁴ Alan Hughes, *Henry Irving, Shakespearean* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 268 n. 32; for Kemble, see, for example, the timings for his *Coriolanus* (2 hours 50 minutes plus 20 minutes for the 'waits') in Charles H. Shattuck, ed., *John Philip Kemble Promptbooks*, 11 vols. (Charlottesville, VA, 1974), vol. 2, introduction to *Coriolanus*, p. iii.

⁷⁵ See Joseph Hatton, *Henry Irving's Impression of America*, 2 vols. (1884), vol. 2, pp. 268–9.

⁷⁶ See T. C. Kemp, *Birmingham Repertory Theatre: The Playhouse and the Man* (Birmingham, 1943), p. 114.

⁷⁷ See Jean Cocteau, *Orphée. The Play and the Film*, ed. E. Freeman (Oxford, 1976), pp. 289; Cocteau comments in his notes on staging: 'Lorsque le rideau de l'intervalle tombe, attendre un peu avant de relever si les spectateurs applaudissent pour que ce tour de cartes abstrait ne prenne pas l'apparence d'une fausse manœuvre' (p. 8).

have encountered was in Sam Mendes's production of Jonson's *The Alchemist* at the Swan Theatre in 1991: as the members of the 'venture tripartite' counted their money, there was, predictably, a knock at the door and all three turned to sniff out the new arrival;⁷⁸ the immediate black-out marked the interval and the second half could regain momentum simply by repeating the knock, the turn and the readiness for the new gull.

The placing of the intervals in modern productions is arrived at through a combination of conventions and traditions as much as by a fresh perception of the play. In *King Lear*, for instance, the interval is now most often placed after the blinding of Gloucester, whether with servants helping Gloucester as in the Quarto,⁷⁹ or without as in the Folio, a new tradition that scandalised reviewers when Peter Brook cut the servants in 1962, though it had been done by Bridges-Adams in 1932 and Komisarjevsky in 1936.⁸⁰ Earlier custom had been for the blinding of Gloucester to be the first scene after an interval, thereby, it is said, allowing those of a nervous disposition to remain in the bar until the scene was over.⁸¹

While it is common practice now at the RSC for the Stage Manager to telephone the Shakespeare Centre Library to ask where the interval was put in the last few productions of a particular play,⁸² there are cases where the investigation of the placing is a sustained inquiry during rehearsals. On the first day of rehearsals for Peter Hall's 1987 production of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre, Hall invited suggestions for 'the appropriate break for an interval'.⁸³ By the end of the second week, Hall was still anxious, worrying 'where to put it without rapping the muscles of the play', well aware that audiences begin 'to get restless at 1 hour 25 minutes', a curiously exact sense but a distinct difficulty when the production will run nearly four hours.⁸⁴ It was not until the sixth week of rehearsals that Hall decided where the interval should be. Conceiving the

⁷⁸ See stage-direction 'one knocks' at 3. 3. 75 in Jonson, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 350.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Devine (SMT, 1953), Byam Shaw (SMT, 1959), Nunn (RST, 1968), Nunn (RST, 1976), Berry (The Other Place, 1988).

⁸⁰ See also, for example, Goodbody (The Other Place, 1974), Hytner (RST, 1990), Noble (RST, 1993). The two promptbooks for Brook's production are significantly different: in the Stratford promptbook one servant 'helps Gloucester rise X C/S with him. Then directs Glouc through "doorway"' but the promptbook for London and for the US tour shows Gloucester buffeted to and fro five times by the servants. Brook's vision of this famous moment seems to have become progressively bleaker as the production continued.

⁸¹ See, for example, Komisarjevsky (SMT, 1936), Granville Barker (Old Vic, 1940), Cresswell (SMT, 1943), Quayle (SMT, 1950).

⁸² I am grateful to Sylvia Morris of the Shakespeare Centre Library for this information.

⁸³ Tirzah Lowen, *Peter Hall Directs 'Antony and Cleopatra'* (1990), p. 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

structure of the play as ‘two quite defined movements—the period where Antony is in the ascendant . . . followed by the downfall and suicide’, Hall ended the first half after Octavia’s return to Rome (3. 6), so that Caesar’s reaction to the desertion of Octavia was counterpointed after the interval by the first sight of Antony reunited with Cleopatra. As Tirzah Lowen, who observed rehearsals, comments, ‘the interval break now seems surprisingly self-evident, in terms of the narrative, the build-up of dramatic tension, the strength of the opening of the second half and, not least, the timing’ since each half will run approximately the same length.⁸⁵ During a run-through in the tenth week, Hall told Sally Dexter (Octavia) and Tim Pigott-Smith (Octavius) that their reunion, clasped in each other’s arms, ‘truly justified the placing of the interval’.⁸⁶ Hall had needed to translate his perception of a two-movement dramatic form into a possible divide and then find a way for the actors to make the meaning of the break apparent, not least by creating a strong ‘curtain’ image for the audience to take out into the interval. Yet all this fresh investigation and anxiety produced an interval break exactly where it had been placed by, for instance, Peter Brook at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 1978 and Adrian Noble at *The Other Place* in 1982, the two major productions immediately prior to Hall’s.

John Caird’s 1992 RST production would break in the middle of 3. 6, allowing Caesar’s furious description of the public appearance of Antony and Cleopatra and their children, ‘I’th’common showplace’ (3. 6. 12), to be echoed by an onstage grouping with Cleopatra ‘In th’habiliments of the goddess Isis’ (17), so that, when all Caesar’s attendants, rather than just Maecenas, cried ‘Let Rome be thus informed’, the theatre audience already had been, leaving the auditorium with this glorious visual image of the Egyptian family firmly imprinted on their minds. Stephen Pimlott’s 1999 production took the interval later, with Antony and Cleopatra reconciled after Actium. After Antony’s bravado (‘Fortune knows / We scorn her most when most she offers blows’ [3. 11. 73–4]), the lovers’ kiss as they exited was watched dubiously by the others, a clear mark of the imminent catastrophe.

Such interval placings are explicitly thematic, reading the play in terms of the consequences of performance division. Earlier choices were often driven by other concerns. Beerbohm Tree’s production, cut into four acts and only thirteen scenes, a quite extraordinary achievement of com-

⁸⁵ Tirzah Lowen, *Peter Hall Directs ‘Antony and Cleopatra’* (1990), p. 67.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

pression for this play above all, made sure that each of the first three acts ended with Antony, played of course by Tree himself, firmly centre-stage while Tree also made sure that there was little to follow his character's silencing, the whole of what remained of Act 5 being played as part of the scene of Antony's death with his body still on stage.⁸⁷ Tree had had the same brilliant success with his cutting of *Julius Caesar* into three acts and only eight scenes, again with each ending on an image of himself as Antony and with the Forum scene, a huge spectacle, left as the only scene of Act 2, which closed with no fewer than three carefully crafted tableaux, each focused on Antony, the last of which showed Antony 'standing at Head of body with arms extended as though praying—then slowly plac[ing] hands on the forehead of Caesar'.⁸⁸

Tree shaped *Julius Caesar*, as Hall would shape *Antony and Cleopatra*, to ensure there is a proper 'curtain' image. *Punch* once suggested two questions on an examination-paper for an Academy of Dramatists:

A—For the Classical Side Only.

1. What is a 'curtain'; and how should it be led up to?

B—For the Modern Side Only.

1. What is a 'curtain'; and how can it be avoided?⁸⁹

But such effects—and Shakespeare being a 'classical' dramatist in *Punch's* taxonomy—are not restricted to the early twentieth century. Byam Shaw's 1955 *Macbeth* sent the audience out for the second interval, as Michael Mullin describes it, with

powerful visual images, carefully composed by Shaw, depicting Macbeth's ruined kingship: the empty thrones with the hideous Ghost between them, the frozen terror of the guests, Macbeth's frenzied leap up onto the table, and the desolation of the empty hall, the wasted wine and meat.⁹⁰

Bill Alexander's *Richard III* (RST, 1984) ended its first half with a full-blown coronation scene in which Richard's naked hump was revealed and Richard clawed his way to the throne 'like a slithering lizard', leaving one

⁸⁷ See *Antony and Cleopatra as arranged for the stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (1907). My thanks to Russell Jackson for lending me his copy of this rare souvenir edition.

⁸⁸ Quoted by John Ripley, '*Julius Caesar*' on Stage in England and America, 1599–1973 (Cambridge, 1980), p. 167. See also *Julius Caesar as arranged for the stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (1898)—my thanks again to Russell Jackson.

⁸⁹ Quoted by William Archer, *Play-making. A Manual of Craftsmanship* (Boston, 1912), p. 328. See pp. 326–30 for Archer's thoughts on 'curtains'.

⁹⁰ Michael Mullin, ed., '*Macbeth*' Onstage: An Annotated Facsimile of Glen Byam Shaw's 1955 *Promptbook* (Columbia, MO, 1976), p. 115.

reviewer salivating at its 'sheer orgasmic bad taste, with that wonderful vile touch of the exposed deformity'.⁹¹

Similarly a too emphatic ending to a scene close to the point at which the audience might expect an interval can confuse perception. In *Coriolanus*, for instance, it is almost inevitable that an interval will be taken before Coriolanus appears at Antium (4. 4), especially as the scene between Nicanor and Adrian (4. 3) is so often cut and, even if not, serves as an expository moment as the audience settle into their seats. The main interval was placed at the end of 4.2 in the Stratford productions by, for example, Hall (1959), Barton (1967), Nunn (1972), Hands (1989) and Thacker (1994). But at the first preview of Hall's production at the National Theatre in 1984 the entrance of the tribunes for the start of 4. 2 was so slow that some of the audience assumed that Coriolanus' exit to banishment was the true mark of an interval and started to leave, destroying the next scene's effect.⁹²

Disturbing the traditional interval can often be powerfully effective. Most productions of *Othello* with a single interval break at the end of the 'temptation scene', on Iago's line of triumph 'I am your own forever' (3. 3. 482). But Terry Hands in 1985 ended much earlier, at the close of Act 2; something of reviewers' recognition of the terrifying pace of that production seems consequent on the early break. Richard Eyre in 1979 broke in mid-scene as Othello and Desdemona left together, while Emilia 'watches them go, then turns and stares at the hanky', so that the audience was left teetering on the brink of the next action and the second half started with 'Emilia in position as at the end of [the previous scene]. She Xs to hanky, picks it up and stands DC.'⁹³ Trevor Nunn seems to have learned the lesson and broke at the same point in his production at The Other Place in 1989 but, in that intimate space, he could elaborate the danger: Emilia left with Othello and her mistress but Desdemona returned, not, as the audience hoped, to pick up the fallen handkerchief but to retrieve her watch that she had placed in front of Othello to summon him to dinner so that the handkerchief was portentously visible throughout the interval.

Equally, intervals can literally alter perception. Dominic Dromgoole's brilliant student production of *Timon of Athens*⁹⁴ predictably made the

⁹¹ Quoted by Julie Hankey, ed., *Richard III* (Bristol, revd. edn., 1988 [1981]), p. 195.

⁹² See Kristina Bedford, 'Coriolanus' at the National: "Th' Interpretation of the Time" (1992), pp. 111, 274, and 324 n. 1.

⁹³ Promptbook, ad loc.

⁹⁴ Trinity Hall Lecture Theatre, Cambridge, 1984.

transition from Athens to the woods across the interval. But where the first half had been played in promenade, with the actors walking through and around the standing audience, the spectators returned for the second half to find that the auditorium had been reconfigured and there was now seating around a clearly demarcated central area, so that the play's transformation of place was also a transformation of the audience's mode of perception. The interval can itself also become a space used for interpretative definition: in *The Merchant of Venice* at the Globe in 1998 Marcello Magni as Lancelot Gobbo spent the interval onstage, playing jokes with the audience, his superb comic business denying the seriousness of the rest of the play. It certainly pleased the groundlings and was much more enjoyable and effective than anything in the rest of the performance but it also suggested the production's assent to a comic context for the action.

A single interval in *The Merchant of Venice* is now routinely placed at the end of the Shylock and Tubal scene (3. 1),⁹⁵ leaving a strong image of Shylock as its 'curtain' image whether he was seated on the ground chanting in Hebrew as Sher did in 1987 or stood crying to heaven like Voss in 1997. William Poel argued against such a break a century earlier:

Shakespeare rarely cares to draw breath until he has reached the crisis . . . And to halt for talk and refreshments on the eve of a crisis is to play havoc with the story. The crisis comes in 'The Merchant of Venice' at that part of the play marked in the folio, Act III. Scene I.⁹⁶

Ben Iden Payne's 1942 Stratford production was unusual in delaying the interval until after Bassanio has chosen the lead casket (3. 2), even though his programme neatly announced that 'The action of the play will be *interrupted* once by an interval of twelve minutes' (my emphasis). But the crisis for Poel and Iden Payne was in the Portia narrative; now it is with Shylock. David Thacker's 1993 production broke at the now usual point but it re-ordered the last scene before the interval (3. 1) to make its point. By reversing the two halves of the scene, playing Shylock's dialogue with Tubal (3. 1. 74–121) before Shylock confronted Solanio and Salerio, it allowed the audience to see that, as Shylock committed himself powerfully to the imitative lesson of revenge ('and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction' [67–8]), Tubal walked out, rejecting his fellow Jew who was so firmly denying the ethics of Judaism and leaving Shylock

⁹⁵ See, for example, for Stratford productions, Webster (1956), Langham (1960), Hands (1971), Barton (1981), Caird (1984), Alexander (1987), Doran (1997).

⁹⁶ William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (1913), pp. 42–3.

conspicuously isolated from this point on. The effect here of sharply dividing Shylock from his community where the performance is divided by the interval is no different in its theatrical effect from the way in which, in productions of *As You Like It*, the weather in Arden is often noticeably better after the interval, shaping the performance by meteorology, manifest by a sudden blossoming on stage, reflecting designers' unhealthy fascination with florists' shops—or at the RSC in 2000 with embroidery.

Thacker's *The Merchant of Venice* apart, rewritings and reorderings to create an interval effect are surprisingly uncommon. A few productions re-arrange material just after the interval. Komisarjevsky's *King Lear* in 1936 had done a certain amount of re-arranging in the first half, including establishing a relationship between Goneril and Edmund surprisingly early by inserting some lines from Act 4 into the first act.⁹⁷ But after the interval (placed before the blinding), Komisarjevsky then began a substantial reconstruction of the sequence of the play, reminding the audience of the sisters by first playing Goneril's scene with Albany (4. 2) and Regan's with Oswald (4. 4). It is as if he were teasingly delaying the inevitable horror of the blinding itself, making the audience tensely wait for the appalling event.

Audiences can be made to wait for their interval too, forced to endure their increasing discomfort until the director agrees to release them, to let them out as Alan Bennett's young charge Robin Davies wondered. The longer the play, the more acute the difficulty. Emrys Jones may have praised Peter Hall's 1965 *Hamlet* for playing through to the end of the Fortinbras scene and Hamlet's last soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me' but the audience was warned in the programme that the first act lasted two hours thirty minutes (and the second only one hour ten minutes). Such disproportion was also found in Stephen Pimlott's *Julius Caesar* (RST, 1991) where the second act, starting after the action of the play had left Rome (interval as geography), lasted only 35 minutes, on some occasions shorter than the interval because of the difficulty in dismantling the massive columns that Tobias Hoheisel had designed in the first half to stand for the monumentality of Rome.

When *Hamlet* used to be performed with two intervals, the first came after the arrival of the players and Hamlet's triumphant and excited couplet: 'The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.'

⁹⁷ 4. 2. 21–6 is placed after 1. 4. 7 (the sequence runs: 1. 4. 1–7; 4. 2. 21–6; 1. 3; 1. 4. 9 to end); 3. 3 was moved to precede 3. 1. The production is analysed by Ralph Berry, 'Komisarjevsky at Stratford-upon-Avon', *Shakespeare Survey*, 36 (1983), pp. 73–84 (pp. 78–81).

(2. 2. 606–7).⁹⁸ As Michael Pennington comments, at this point, '[t]he actor's heart is beating faster, and he knows a good deal about the performance's chances on the night. He may also, with luck, be allowed an interval.'⁹⁹ Hall in 1965 continued past the first interval, past the point where a break came if there was only one interval (after the 'nunnery' scene and Claudius' 'Madness in great ones must not unwatched go' [3. 1. 191]),¹⁰⁰ and on to the normal second interval. But such a demand on the audience's stamina was clearly too much for London: when the production moved to the Aldwych in 1966, the programme now announced 'there is a short break after the play has been running 45 minutes; the main interval of 15 minutes is 1½ hours after the short break.' The short break was at the end of the usual Act 1, still allowing a vast central arch to the play, a technique that Trevor Nunn repeated in his 1970 production. Noble in 1992, similarly delaying the only substantial interval until after 'How all occasions,' tried a pause after the play scene and found that the audience left for the foyer and toilets and could not be persuaded back into the auditorium; the pause lasted for much longer than he had intended. In such matters, audiences have a knack of voting with their feet.

The tendency of modern production is to aim at the minimum of disruption to the play's forward momentum, to avoid the multiplying segments that intervals or curtains enforce—or rather to make its single disruption massively portentous. This marks a decisive change in theatre practice. William Poel's first production of Q1 *Hamlet* in 1881 used act-drop curtains seven times in this brief play, dividing it into eight scenes.¹⁰¹ Casson's production of *Macbeth* in 1926 had only three acts, where Irving in his 1888 acting edition had had six,¹⁰² but, James Agate angrily

⁹⁸ See, for example, Iden Payne (SMT, 1936), Benthall (SMT, 1948), Byam Shaw (SMT, 1958), Wood (SMT, 1961), Barton (RST, 1980).

⁹⁹ Michael Pennington, *Hamlet: A User's Guide* (1996), p. 76. But see Alec Guinness's comment that, if the action is uninterrupted at this point, the audience gets 'the greater part of Hamlet's character stripped bare before them . . . all in the space of fifteen minutes' (quoted by Robert Hapgood, ed., *Hamlet* (Shakespeare in Production: Cambridge, 1999), p. 174).

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Langham (SMT, 1956), Daniels (RST, 1989) and, with a slight adjustment at the end of 3. 1, Warchus (RST, 1997). John Gielgud took an interval after 3. 1 in New York in 1936 (see Rosamond Gilder, *John Gielgud's Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1937), p. 25); when he directed Richard Burton in the role in 1964 there were originally two intervals (after 3. 1 and after 4. 4) but the second was 'eliminated after the preview performance in Toronto on February 25' (see Richard L. Sterne, *John Gielgud Directs Richard Burton in Hamlet* (1968), p. 8).

¹⁰¹ See Rinda F. Lindstrom, *William Poel's Hamlets. The Director as Critic* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984), pp. 22–8.

¹⁰² See Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 and 251; Irving started the fifth act with the 'English' scene (4. 3) and made the sixth act the climactic battle.

noted, ‘the curtain still descends some two and twenty times, which gravely disperses the interest instead of concentrating it’.¹⁰³ Agate spent a considerable portion of his second review of the production analysing the act form as pattern, convinced, for instance, that the sleep-walking scene, which Casson had put at the end of his act two,

must be the beginning of the last act. Only so is the pattern preserved . . . Lady Macbeth’s defeat by conscience withdraws the murderer’s last support, and its withdrawal should *immediately* precede his fall.¹⁰⁴

Komisarjevsky at Stratford in 1933 had three intervals (of five, fifteen, and ten minutes respectively), Iden Payne (1938) and Robert Atkins (1944) only one. More recent productions, following Nunn’s lead in his 1976 version in *The Other Place*, have occasionally managed without an interval at all.¹⁰⁵ Byam Shaw in 1955 followed the common division into three, breaking after the discovery of Duncan’s murder and the ‘banquet’ scene, a structure which he thought

the best way to divide the play from the story point of view, which I consider the most important, but it does mean that Part III is considerably longer than Part II. That is a danger and we must do everything we can to keep the third part moving along at the right tempo.¹⁰⁶

But it is with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that theatre convention and structural form are most completely in tension. Just as the Folio’s divisions had to negotiate with sleeping lovers, modern one-interval productions have to divide the run of scenes in the wood. Placing the interval after Titania meets Bottom (at the end of 3. 1) has become standard, whether the interval image is of the two copulating on a bed or in an inverted umbrella.¹⁰⁷ It is not only the power of the moment that suggests this as a natural pause but also the way in which Oberon’s soliloquy (‘I wonder if Titania be awaked, / Then what it was that next came in her eye, / Which she must dote on in extremity’ [3. 2. 1–3]) and his conversation with Robin goes over the action so far in this strand of the plot, acting effectively for audiences after the interval as a reminder of what has just happened. Recapitulation as a reminder is a useful way of bringing the audience back into the action, a light beat before an iambic stress in the

¹⁰³ James Agate, *Brief Chronicles* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943) pp. 217–18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Noble (RST, 1986), Doran (Swan, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Mullin, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ See Boyd (RST, 1999), Noble (RST, 1994); see also, for the same break but not the same image, Atkins (Regent’s Park, 1936, and SMT, 1944), Hall (SMT, 1959).

rhythm of performance; here the text functions to the same effect as, for instance, the comic business in Gregory Doran's 1998 *Merchant of Venice* when, with the house-lights still up, Lancelot Gobbo played with the caskets for a few minutes, picking the locks to show, in case we had forgotten, that Bassanio needed to choose lead. It is not exactly the kind of approach that respects the audience's intelligence and it undervalues the Oberon and Robin dialogue to treat it purely in this way.

Significantly, Bridges-Adams, sensitive as so often to the text's complex structural rhythms, continued, in his 1932 production until the scenes in the wood were complete. If this preserves the wood scenes as a unity it also merges them with Act 1. Harley Granville Barker, in his revolutionary production at the Savoy in 1914, sharply separated out the wood scenes from the rest of the performance. At the end of Act 1, as Dennis Kennedy records, '[t]hrough less than 400 lines of the play had passed, Barker took a five-minute break . . . , then ran the entire night in the wood uninterrupted'; only then did he allow a fifteen-minute interval and a brilliant new set for the last act.¹⁰⁸ Granville Barker's presentation of theatrical form demonstrated how the two acts in Athens frame a continuum of action in the wood, the intervals serving to reinforce the perception of structure that the set-changes also emphasised. The paralleling of Acts 1 and 5 enabled by his shaping of the form through the intervals resisted the nineteenth-century fascination with the journey back to Athens, staged by Augustin Daly (New York, 1888), for instance, against a moving cyclorama; Granville Barker's discontinuity sharpens the audience's perception of the play's balanced shape.

But, characteristically, Granville Barker regretted this expedient. In his preface to the acting edition, he left the division of the play until the very end:

Finally, I divide the play into three parts. I don't defend the division; it only happens to be a convenient one. I can't defend any division, and some day I really must ask a modern audience to sit through two hours and a half of Shakespeare without a break; the play would gain greatly. This is less absurd, that is all, than the Jonsonian five act division of the Folio, for which, of course, there is no authority.¹⁰⁹

Unfair though it may be to blame Jonson for the transfer of the shaping he had used for his *Works* in 1616 into the Shakespeare Folio seven years

¹⁰⁸ Dennis Kennedy, *Granville Barker and the Dream of Theatre* (Cambridge, 1985) pp. 163 and 166. It is not clear how 4. 2 was played but it was probably a drop-scene after the interval before the court set was revealed.

¹⁰⁹ Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (1963–74), vol. 6, p. 39.

later, Granville Barker's comment signals the provisionality, the indefensibility and the necessary failure of all such divisions imposed onto the plays. At the same time the convenience of the solution—and, as I have suggested, the theatrical clarity it provides in communicating dramatic form—is something Granville Barker accepts. He is quite prepared to see that 'as good a dramatic case' can be made 'for a pause' after 3. 1 or at the end of Act 2 or at the end of Act 3.¹¹⁰ His comments are made by a scholar and theatre-worker, someone who perceives how to make the dramatic theatrical within the terms of contemporary convention and at the same time yearns for a different kind of attention span. Experiments along these lines have been tried at the new Globe theatre on the Bankside: the 1997 opening production of *Henry V* was played with four intervals of varying lengths and with none at all; the actors preferred interval-free performances when it was easier to maintain the pace.¹¹¹

Granville Barker returns to the question of segmentation in almost every one of his prefaces. Of *Twelfth Night*, for instance, he comments, 'If one must have intervals (as the discomforts of most theatres demand), I think the play falls as easily into the three divisions I have marked as any.'¹¹² *Macbeth* can be divided into three as well: 'the achievement of Macbeth's ambition . . . his wielding of power . . . [and] the process of retribution'.¹¹³ But Granville Barker sees the difficulty of division as a reflection of Shakespeare's own problems:

One need not spend time contending [the arrangement] was Shakespeare's. For is Shakespeare's discoverable? Upon what basis of dramatic advantage or practical convenience was it founded?¹¹⁴

'Convenience' of the dramatist and of the performers is something Granville Barker understands but he also knows that the procedure matters to the audience. F1's marking of a pause in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* after Act 3 while the lovers sleep Granville Barker calls 'formal acceptance':

By it the dramatist marks a certain rhythm in the play's action. An interval, in which an audience disperses or talks, has a further importance. In a modern theatre this relaxing of attention, the breaking of the spell of emotion, an

¹¹⁰ Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (1963–74), vol. 6, p. 99.

¹¹¹ Even in these performances there were two-minute pauses between the acts 'for "costume" changes'; see Pauline Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 121.

¹¹² Granville-Barker, p. 27.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68 n. 10.

opportunity to make the passing of time seem more valid, are things to be seriously considered.¹¹⁵

Granville Barker sees what can be done, understands the opportunities intervals provide, appreciates that ‘a short formal pause of relaxation’ at the end of an act is different in its effect from ‘a prolonged interval in which an audience can move about and the sympathetic contact established with the actors will be broken’.¹¹⁶ Sensing ‘[t]he punctuating power’ of different kinds of break,¹¹⁷ he requires that in a consideration of act-division ‘[w]hat we should look for, surely, . . . is some definite advantage to the play’s acting’ and if, in this case, *Romeo and Juliet* cannot be acted without a break, even though

everything seems to point to Shakespeare having *planned* the play as a thing indivisible . . . If ‘this will overtax the weakness of the flesh—the audience’s; for actors will profit by the unchecked flow of action and emotion—some sacrifice of effect must be made. The less then, the better.’¹¹⁸

Above all, the question of the differing lengths of intervals is, for Granville Barker, a matter of control: ‘Shakespeare and his immediate inheritors were masters enough in a theatre of their own making for that.’¹¹⁹

Granville Barker emerges as a kind of hero in the perception of intervals, the figure who could move from the possibilities and necessities, the practicalities and conventions of early performance to their modern implications, in a way that would have mystified, say, Bradley whose lecture on the construction of the tragedies is so strenuously unaware of performance.¹²⁰ Barker did not need to confront one paradox of the intervals in modern theatre: why a play lasting near to three hours must have an interval while a film of the same length so rarely does, as I suggested earlier. The difference between attention and concentration, comfort and expectation, rigour and desire between the two forms of performance is nowhere more clearly marked.¹²¹

Intervals can have a further advantage to the audience, one that even Granville Barker did not observe: they allow the audience to leave unobtrusively. And that is why, of course, this lecture has had no interval.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99 n. 4.

¹¹⁶ Preface to *Othello*, Harley Granville-Barker, *Preface to Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (1958), vol. 2, p. 97.

¹¹⁷ Preface to *Coriolanus*, *ibid.*, p. 294.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 326–7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹²⁰ See A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1991) pp. 52–75. On Bradley, see also Jean E. Howard, *Shakespeare’s Art of Orchestration* (Urbana, IL, 1984), pp. 136–9.

¹²¹ See also Jonathan Romney, ‘To be continued . . .’, *The Guardian*, 5 April 2000, G2, p. 15.

