

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

Traps and Discoveries at the Globe

ANDREW GURR

University of Reading

NEAR THE CLOSE OF *As You Like It*, Rosalind tells Orlando how Celia and his brother fell in love: they ‘no sooner met but they looked; no sooner looked but they loved; no sooner loved but they sighed; no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason; no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy; and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage which they will climb incontinent or else be incontinent before marriage’. *As You Like It* was the first play explicitly written for the new Globe, with its two stair turrets taking you up into the degrees on which the elevated audience in the galleries sat. The ascent into marriage by other degrees than those cited by Ulysses is one of many forms of climbing in that play. My subject is a few of the other manifestations of the different social altitudes in Tudor England, and their reflection in the vertical sociology of the Globe auditorium. In the process it is concerned, both metaphorically and literally, with the discoveries and the traps that come from studying the original venue for the plays.

To begin with metaphor, I am forced to stand somewhere between the discovery of the problematic and the trap of the speculative, gored by both horns of the theatre historian’s current dilemma, where to the scholar ‘speculative’ is a severe pejorative, while to the critic ‘problematic’ is a term of praise. We recognise that for the historian there is no such thing as a fact that exists without a personal agenda and a subjective valuation attached to it, but that way life is too short. We all have to make some concessions to the illusion of factuality, refusing,

Read at the Academy 25 April 1996. © The British Academy 1997.

however transitorily, to admit that history is nothing more than Hayden White's fiction. To rejoice in the problematic means that negative capability rules, and speculation is everywhere, if not every thing. But the trap in Keats's concept of Shakespeareanism is that it inhibits any form of action, so no discoveries can be made. I used to enjoy speculating about the design of the original Globe, in the days when I was not being called on to advise the architects about actual details, or to assess the balance of probabilities in the exercise of best-guessing the evidence so as to reach some at least plausible conclusion that might help the architects to settle details such as where on the stage the two posts upholding the heavens were actually located.

For that reason if no other, so far as the current attempts to retrieve something of the original Shakespearean staging are concerned, I have had to abandon my own traditional preference for the problematic in favour of a distinctly irritable reaching after fact and reason. It is a positive capability that is forced on anyone who tries to tell architects and engineers what they ought to build. It concentrates the mind wonderfully into positive fact-finding, however fictional is the basis for so many of the facts, and however problematic the facts themselves may turn out to be.

The essence of the dilemma whose horns I have called the speculative and the problematic is partly a historical one. We have had nearly 400 years to develop our thinking about the verbal texts, even with the dubiously reliable forms in which they have survived. That has given us ample grounds for doing the kind of thing that Harry Berger celebrates so ardently, revelling in the self-evident riches which come from identifying the multitude of possible meanings that we can squeeze out of the basic words.¹ The 'pre-texts', the plays as originally staged, survive in no such detailed record, and they have until very recently been given far less attention. Above all they face the problem of being, in the current terminology, reductive. On stage, whether you are a bright young director inventing a new way of staging the old plays or are painstakingly trying to reconstruct Shakespeare's original concept, you have to make constant choices. Prince Hal's multivalent 'I do, I will' to pleading Falstaff had to be spoken originally in only one of its seven possible ways. Isabella, offered the Duke's hand twice without responding in the printed text, had to make her choice explicit in the pre-text staged at the Globe in 1604.

¹ In *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Page and Stage* (Berkeley, 1989).

The pursuit of such questions is not a reconanising activity. Even if we could get enough confidence in the exercise to claim that we have identified the original staging of this or that scene or event in the plays, it can have only a limited value in today's theatres. The most we can do is to identify what collectively now seems to be something like the first ideas about the staging. In so doing we identify only the best shape, the best guesses, in the current calculations, marinated in both the speculative and the problematic, part of a historical process of readings that will change and will and should go on changing. We can choose to ignore the authorial presence on stage and the author's authority behind the staging of *Measure for Measure* in 1604. We can choose to ignore the original staging of the end of *King Lear*, though I think that if we do we lose a lot of ripe speculation, a matter to which I will return at my own ending. If we ignore the intended staging, we forsake the pursuit of one distinctive reading of the plays, a reading which has its own value provided we do accept that there was a coherence and consistency in the mind that wrote all those plays, and that worked harmoniously in the original play-making team.

The metaphysical nature of the traps in this game, whatever discoveries it might be thought to offer, is fairly obvious, and I will not dwell on the pitfalls which lie in wait for us there. The practical discoveries are another matter. By using the new Globe stage on Bankside we are likely to learn a lot more about modern acting than we will about the original Shakespeare company's practices, but some of the questions are certainly getting sharpened, and framing a good question is an essential prerequisite to any sort of useful answer. But are they the right questions? We might illustrate a few of the more metaphysical discoveries by going through some of the practical traps and discoveries that lie in wait at the Globe.

In all this irritating reaching after fact and reason the essential problem with the texts themselves is that, given only the written record, we have to use at least some speculation to fix the uses that were originally made, or expected by the author to be made, on the stage—and that has its own problems. As Alan Dessen has frequently warned us, you might argue that when in *Richard II*, III. iii. 50, Bullingbrook says that his soldiers will 'march / Upon the grassy carpet of this plain' while he waits for Richard to respond from the castle, the stage floor must have been carpeted with green rushes, to signify grass. Or, equally speculatively, you could argue that it would not, because the words are there to signal what the audience's thoughts must piece out

from the stage's imperfections. Still, we can assemble some pseudo-facts which might help us to determine which are the better and which the worse speculations.

To begin with, we know something about the sociology of the Globe auditorium, and its social orientation. We still tend, though, to underrate what one might call the vertical sociology, the physical affirmation of social differences which the design of these amphitheatres embodied. Those creatures for whom Hamlet invented the term 'groundlings'² walked into the playhouse at ground level, and stayed there, in the yard, for the play. Until 1600, a 'groundling' was a small ling or fish, a ground-feeding freshwater loach, with a huge mouth for sucking algae from stones. The small body behind the huge mouth made a wonderfully patronising name for the gapers in the yard. Everyone else in the Globe's auditorium rose above them, literally, through Rosalind's 'pair of stairs' (the two stair turrets and their narrow doors through which everyone exited when the Globe caught fire), by and to the 'degrees', the benches in the galleries. From there they literally looked down on the understanders. Even the players had the groundlings at their feet, five feet below them. To the majority of playgoers paying to sit in the galleries, the yard was the place for porters and carters, servingmen and apprentices. You stood to watch the play only if you could not afford a seat and a roof over your head. The yard might even have a family of beggars in it, as John Taylor the water poet noted: 'Yet have I seene a beggar with his many / Come in at a Play-house, all in for one penny'.³

Opposite and high above that presence was the stage balcony, where, as Marston's cousin Everard Guilpin put it, you can 'See . . . him yonder, who sits o're the stage, / With the Tobacco-pipe now at his mouth', the gallant, the earl, the ambassador and his party. The best and most costly seats in the circuit of galleries, including what in the Fortune contract Henslowe called the 'gentlemen's rooms' to distinguish them from the 'lords' rooms' on the stage balcony, were grouped close to and above the stage. With the citizenry and the middle level of affluence ranged round behind the yard in the 'twopenny galleries', the 'middle region', there was a clear hierarchy of affluence and social importance. Fletcher, writing *The Prophetess* in 1622 for the second

² *OED* cites Hamlet's as the first time the term was used to describe the audience standing in the yard. At about the same time, in a translation published in 1601, Holland's *Pliny* also identified the word as meaning a ground-feeding loach.

³ John Taylor, *The praise, antiquity, and commodity of beggery, beggers and begging*, (London, 1628).

Globe, made Geta the clown talk of becoming the emperor or a senator in vertical terms:

We Tilers may deserve to be Senators;
 And there we step before you thick-skin'd Tanners,
 For we are born three Stories high; no base ones,
 None of your groundlings, Master.⁴

His three storeys are the Globe's three levels of galleries, topped with the tiles which in 1614 had replaced the thatch of the first Globe. His joke echoes *Hamlet's* gravedigger with his down-to-earth reference to the survival value of tanners' corpses. 'Groundlings', starting with Hamlet, became the standard term for Dekker and many others in subsequent years. Beaumont and Jonson, in calling the people in the yard 'understanding men', were more derisive but less actually dismissive. It is a nice question how far the lordly Hamlet, using the term in the midst of his sermon to the professionals on how they should act, was at the same time being quietly put in his own presumptuous place.

Socially, in the Globe auditorium the important customers were behind and above the stage, while the lowest level was around what we think of as the front. It was a steeply vertical sociology.⁵ This raises such questions as whether the modern terminology, frontstage and backstage, is at all appropriate. Neither is a Shakespearean term. We know that 'upstage' and 'downstage' come from proscenium-arch days with their raked stages. But where is the 'front' of a circle, even one with such a vertical wall and a focal stage? The sociology of the Globe's auditorium suggests that we should question the cinematic terminology of 'front' and 'back', 'upstage' and 'downstage', and think rather of socially up and down, inside a cylinder.

The Inigo Jones drawings of about 1616 for an indoor playhouse, probably the Cockpit,⁶ with its boxes flanking the stage and its degrees for equally privileged seating flanking the central music room on the balcony, reflect the Globe's auditorium apart from the yard rather more

⁴ Fredson Bowers (ed.), *Beaumont and Fletcher, Dramatic Works*, 12 vols. (Cambridge, 1966-), ix, p. 238 (l. iii. 26-8).

⁵ This question extends into the three gallery levels. The topmost level at the Globe needed a steeper rake and fewer benches than the lower levels, and was unlikely to have been as superior metaphorically as it was literally. But the middle gallery, which may or may not have been the 'middle region' where army captains might seat themselves (Henry Fitzgeoffery, *Satyres, and Satyricall Epigrams* (London, 1617), E8^v) was where Henslowe located the 'gentlemen's rooms' at the Fortune, and they ranked next to the 'lords' rooms' on the stage balcony.

⁶ See John Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 3.

closely than we usually allow. They certainly affirm the grouping of the socially elevated around the sides and ‘back’ of the stage. So we should ask more carefully than we have up to now, which way or ways did the actors face? De Witt showed them in the Swan at what we call the ‘front’ of the stage, the lady and her waiting-woman sitting facing the crowd in the yard, and her steward making a leg to her from even closer to the understanders at the ‘front’ edge of the stage. De Witt’s drawing is of a linear staging, and apart from the depth of its square stage on which the figures stand and its concern to feature the main architectural elements might have done for a proscenium stage. Paper is two-dimensional, whatever use we make of perspective. The *Roxana* and *Messallina* illustrations of the 1630s use the same disposition, influenced though they may have been by continental and ‘proscenium’ kinds of theatre. But was it normal at the Swan and the Globe for the players to place themselves with their backs to their best customers? Given the early auditorium’s pricing and seating priorities, is our thinking not too linear, too shaped by the two dimensions of pictorial illustrations?

There is ample evidence that the early stages were thought of as having sides, but not much to say which was the back and which the front. The octavo of Jonson’s *The New Inn*, written for the Blackfriars in 1629, and published in 1631 for the reader, has only one stage direction doing more than just tell us who Jonson wanted on stage for that scene. It launches the courtroom scene, III. ii., with this entry direction:

Prudence usher’d by the Host, takes her seat of Judicature, *Nurse*, *Franke*, the two Lords *Beaufort*, and *Latimer*, assist of the Bench: The *Lady* and *Lovel* are brought in, and sit on the two sides of the stage, confronting each other.⁷

The judicature and its associated bench is central, and the two contestants are in flanking positions facing inwards. But was the central position meant to be facing what we would call the front, backed by the *frons scenae*, or backwards, towards it?⁸ The ranks of seating alongside Juliet’s balcony at the Globe, like the ‘degrees’ shown in

⁷ *The New Inn*, III. ii. 1, in Jonson, *Works*, eds. C. H. Herford and P. & E. Simpson (Oxford, 1925–52), vi, p. 451.

⁸ We might appeal to courtroom scenes shown on title-pages, like the woodcut on the title-page of *Swetnam the Woman Hater* (London, 1620), where the judge’s chair is set with its back to a blank wall. We might adduce De Witt’s view of the Swan’s stage, with actors up ‘front’, forward of the stage posts, and nothing but a two-doored wall behind. However, the Globe and the Blackfriars stages had no blank wall, and a central opening in the *frons*.

Inigo Jones's plan, together with the flanking boxes at the Blackfriars, must have inhibited any sense that the standard viewing position had to be from the yard, or from the gallery places facing the tiring house where De Witt seems to have been positioned. The new Globe has already shown that De Witt's position was acoustically one of the worst in the whole house.

A vertical sociology and three-dimensional acting is nothing like so easy as pictorial staging and two-dimensional acting to camera, when the actors know where they have to face and direct their speech. At court, where Shakespeare's company performed at least twice every Christmas from 1594 up to the building of the Globe, with only one other company ever admitted to that lordly assembly, performing was easier than in the public playhouses. The royal target of the entertainment was always seated in 'front', facing the stage, marginalising the lords and ladies on the scaffolding at the sides. There was no such easy focus at the Globe. Since the top of the social hierarchy was grouped closest to the *frons scenae*, we ought to speculate whether at least some major set-piece scenes, and especially the plays-within-plays such as Hamlet's 'Mousetrap', might not have been staged facing away from the yard. Such a possibility has interesting implications for the mental alignment of the first audiences.

One of the largest questions about the symbolic or iconic functions of the original stage at the Globe is the use of the central opening in the *frons*. It is now normally called the 'discovery space' or 'alcove', but I prefer 'central opening', because it seems less value-loaded. Its apparent functions have changed since the Cranford Adams period of 'inner stage' theory, and thanks to the evident use for it in several plays it has survived all attempts to deny its existence on such grounds as that De Witt shows no such place at the Swan. There is good evidence from both the Globe and the Blackfriars that Shakespeare's company routinely used three openings in the *frons*.⁹ It is logical to see it as the place normally fronted by the stage hangings, the arras through which spying Polonius is stabbed. Galatea in *Philaster*, another Globe play, uses it to peep through and to enter by, like Volpone at the Globe when he uses the hangings for his spying.

⁹ *The Devil's Charter*, staged at the Globe in 1606, needs a 'study' and two flanking doors for its fourth scene. It makes more use of the central opening for shows and Alexander's 'study' than any other Globe play. See Bernard Beckermann, *Shakespeare at the Globe 1599–1609* (New York, 1963), p. 84.

The most obvious question about the central opening is its use for players to enter and exit by. Two references, one from 1592 and the other from 1638 or so, at opposite ends of the time-scale, suggest that clowns used to enter by first sticking their heads out through the hangings that fronted the central opening.¹⁰ What that prompts me to ask is whether this tradition became a deliberate opposite, a carnivalesque parody, of the opening's normal use for ceremonial and portentous entrances and exits by authority figures. It is very tempting to see the many plays which used opposing sides, Yorkists and Lancastrians, Montagues and Capulets, Oberons and Titania, as employing the two flanking doors for entries and exits by each side. That would have freed the central opening for the authority figures, the Duke of Verona, and Oberon with Titania once they had reunited, to signal the new unity by exiting at the close hand-in-hand through the central opening. The ending of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* makes the same signal: 'Our day of marriage shall be yours', says Valentine to Proteus, 'One feast, one house, one mutual happiness', and an arm-in-arm exit. By contrast, the departures in *Love's Labours Lost*, 'You that way, we this way', signal the absence of marital harmony by separate exits through the flanking doors in the closure of that disjunctive comedy.

Such possibly iconic uses of the central opening raise a question which can be tested by trying them out on a play which makes intriguing use of oppositional parties, *Hamlet*. It includes the question where Claudius and Gertrude sit to view the 'Mousetrap', a question the answer to which has quite substantial repercussions through the rest of the text and its staging. Since nothing is said about it in the stage directions, the original positioning must have been routine, so we can look to other plays for a precedent. This is the unmarked country of practices that were too standard to be worth noting then, but which have been obscured by our own routine and unquestioning practices. Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, also a Globe play, has a scene in Act I just like the staging of the 'Mousetrap' where a masque celebrates the marriage of the king's mistress, Evadne, to the young Amintor. Written in about 1611, probably for staging at both the Globe and the Blackfriars (its First Quarto in 1619 specified staging at the

¹⁰ Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, 1592, 'A Tale of a wise Justice', in *Works*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (London, 1904–10), i, p. 188; *Praeludium* to Thomas Goffe, *The Careless Shepherdess*, 1656, quoted in G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1940–68), ii, p. 541, and iv, pp. 501–5. Goffe died before his play was restaged. The *Praeludium* was written for the revival at Salisbury Court playhouse in about 1638.

Blackfriars), its directions are distinctly more explicit than Shakespeare's for *Hamlet*. Knowing how intimately Beaumont and Fletcher played with their Shakespeares, their signifiers give us a fairly unambiguous measure for how the characters were disposed on the stage.

To start with, there are clear signs about where the ladies and the royal party were to be placed. The scene starts with old Calianax, performing the chamberlain's duties, making a fuss about keeping the crowd back behind the doors. A knock at one door heralds Melantius, calling for admission from 'within'.¹¹ He enters with a lady, and is told 'The ladies are all plac'd above, save those that come in the Kinges troope'. Melantius then exits with her by the 'other dore', and then returns into some by-play over keeping the crowd out, Calianax re-entering at the same time by the second of the two doors flanking the central opening. He quarrels with Melantius for placing his lady 'So neere the presence of the King'. Offstage hautboys then signal the arrival on stage of the king and his party, including Evadne and the forlorn maid Aspatia. Where the royal party position themselves on the stage to view the masque is the question which I believe the subsequent stage directions answer, and which should have copied the 'Mouse-trap's' positioning.

The king on his chair of state orders 'Begin the maske', and after a few more lines of dialogue both of the substantive texts supply a heading 'The Maske', followed by the stage direction 'Night rises in mists'. Night, that is, enters via the stage trap. Cynthia enters subsequently, not by the trap, while later Neptune also 'rises' like Night through the trap ('let me know / Why I ascend', he says to Cynthia). The next entrant, however, is Aeolus 'out of a Rock'. This is evidently not the trap but a stage-level door or much more likely Polonius's arras. The central opening was the only space not used by the masque's spectators, and being curtained was the main resource for feature localities. Otherwise, one of the flanking doors would have had in some way to be signalled as a rock. Neptune orders Aeolus off to command the winds. He exits 'into the Rock', and returns by the same opening with three of the winds. After the music and bridal songs to Hymen 'Neptune descends, and the Sea Gods' through the trap, and

¹¹ I use the text as given by Robert K. Turner Jr, in Fredson Bowers (ed.), *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, 1970), ii, pp. 35–46. Most editors have adjusted the stage directions on the grounds that they are deficient, notably Theobald, in *Works*, eds. Theobald, Seward and Sympson (London, 1750).

Night and Cynthia then depart separately, Night saying, 'He vanish into mists', down the trap, and Cynthia, 'I into day', out of a stage-level door. To this the Second Quarto adds '*Finis Maske*'.

Night's and Neptune's use of the trapdoor at stage centre, while Cynthia entered and left by a stage door in the *frons scenae*, not to mention Aeolus using the curtained central opening, raises the question where Beaumont and Fletcher expected the royal throne to be placed for viewing this spectacle. It was not, evidently, in front of Aeolus's rock, facing out from the *frons* towards the trapdoor. So where was it?

Melantius took his lady offstage onto the balcony, where Calianax objects to her being 'so neere the presence'. That suggests the king's seat was close to the *frons* balcony. Calianax, however, is using status, vertical sociology. A soldier's common stale does not belong amongst the great in the royal 'presence', capable of looking on the king's face. I can only see the king's throne placed at what we with our two-dimensional thinking call the front of the stage, but facing 'back' towards the *frons*. The royal party is a substantial one, the entry direction specifying 'King, Evadne, Aspatia, *Lords and Ladies*', which must have meant at least three ladies and two lords standing or sitting alongside the king on his throne, plus Amintor and Melantius, who have entered already. That makes a stage audience of at least eight ready for the masque. They are evidently at a distance from the masquers, since Night when he arises in the mists (smoke?) from the trapdoor at centre stage says to Cynthia 'send a beame upon my swarthie face, / By which I may discover all the place / And persons and how many longing eies, / Are come to waite on our solemnities'. The stage audience is too many to be set inside the 'discovery space' or central opening, especially if that was required for Aeolus's entry from the rock. Even if not, the various entries of the masquers from the *frons* indicate that the royal party must have been positioned well clear of the *frons*, and so presumably not far from where King James customarily sat to view his masques, in the centre of the auditorium, facing the stage and its *frons*. That would place the royal party for *The Maid's Tragedy* in the nearest equivalent position on the stage, at the 'front' edge facing 'back', to the *frons*.¹² The position of the dais and throne there would entail a

¹² A similar disposition of stage audience for masques can be seen in other plays, such as *The Gentleman Usher*, II. i., where a carpet is laid down for the throne to stand on.

substantial loss of view for the groundlings, of course.¹³ But that was another mark of the vertical nature of the society in the auditorium. It would give the nobles and gentry around the back of the stage a prime frontal view, not of the masque but of the king.

The texts of *Hamlet* give no help at all over its staging. In III. ii. 85–6, Hamlet tells Horatio to watch Claudius during the ‘Mousetrap’, and when he hears the trumpets and drums announcing the king’s arrival says ‘They are coming to the play. I must be idle. / Get you a place’. It is likely that the dais with its two chairs of state would be carried in as part of the royal procession, the guards carrying torches for the night scene, and attendants setting down the chairs for Claudius and Gertrude.¹⁴ But where? Where does Horatio take his ‘place’ to watch Claudius, and where do Ophelia and Hamlet sit? With such numbers, it would work best in a setting like the *Maid’s Tragedy* masque, with the royal party facing the *frons*, from which the players ‘Enter’ for their dumbshow and play. Ophelia would be on the flank of the royal party, with Hamlet at a stage post by her and Horatio on the opposite side. Such a position would allow the elevated audience by the *frons* to see Claudius’s face as Horatio does. More potently, it would reinforce the metatheatrical element that is so strong throughout the play, with the play-king now standing in the real king’s place while the ostensibly real king joins the audience. The implications of such a positioning would be strengthened if for the first court scene, I. ii., Claudius’s throne had been set in the stage centre or near the *frons* facing towards the yard, the position now taken by the players for the ‘Mousetrap’. For a normative court scene, the elevated would have been behind the throne, seeing the king in his usual authority position, reflecting the view that any real courtier would have had at Elizabeth’s real court. The second court scene, the ‘Mousetrap’, would displace him, putting actors in his place, so that the same courtiers in the audience can now study what they

¹³ There is other evidence about the standard practice for such scenes. The opening of *Perkin Warbeck*, with its entry of the king in state, reports ‘*the King supported to his throne by Stanley and Durham*’. This was not a discovery, though it might have been a central entry from the hangings, since it requires some distance walking if the sickness of the king is to be made visible. Presumably it was an effortful struggle to reach a chair of state already positioned centrally or even ‘forward’, away from the *frons*. That says nothing about which way the throne would have faced, towards the yard or towards the lords’ rooms.

¹⁴ For an assessment of the chair of state, see A. Gurr, ‘The “State” of Shakespeare’s Audiences’, in Marvin and Ruth Thompson (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Sense of Performance* (Newark, 1988), pp. 162–79.

know to be his false face. The elevated gentry would confront the king, not the 'Mousetrap'.

And what, then, about the third court scene, the finale with its other piece of play, Hamlet's duel? If for that Claudius was placed facing the *frons* as for the 'Mousetrap', with the duel conducted in the space between him and the *frons*, it would appear exactly like another mere piece of entertainment. If he returned to his official position facing the yard, as in the opening, with the duel staged between his throne and the edge of the stage fronting the yard, it would be the serious occasion that Claudius and Laertes know it to be. With less confidence than for the other two, I would guess it was the former.

Those three shifting positions are my reading of the staging intended for the main court scenes in *Hamlet*. They give priority to the great and their positioning. They admit the need for the groundlings to shift their positions in the yard if they wanted to view faces as Horatio is instructed to do. Most important, they make allowance for the lack of homogeneity in the different sections of audience at the Globe. The sociology of the Shakespearean audience was inevitably complex, as King James complained in *Basilikon Doron* when he spoke of the 'Hydra of diversely-enclined Spectatours',¹⁵ the many-headed monster with one mind but unstoppably diverse in how, what, and where it saw everything. That diversity must have been reflected in the original staging. Or must it? Slippage from the literal to the metaphorical is all too evident in readings like these.

Now from discoveries to traps, and the diverse functions of the Globe's trapdoor in *Hamlet*. Few scholars doubt that it was used in both the first and the last acts of the play, as the entry-point for the ghost, and as Ophelia's grave. It was not directly employed at any other time in the play, but there is a case to be made that its symbolic presence was there throughout. It is, I would argue, significantly absent through the middle acts of the play. Stanley Wells¹⁶ has sensibly questioned the common assumption that ghosts routinely came up through the trapdoor. He notes the procession of ghosts in *Richard III* which visit both of the sleeping commanders before Bosworth. Those eleven historic ghosts, including the innocent young princes, did not need the specific and traditional association of the trapdoor and its

¹⁵ *The Political Works*, ed. C. H. McIlwain (Cambridge, Mass., 1916), p. 9.

¹⁶ Stanley Wells, 'Staging Shakespeare's Ghost', in Murray Biggs (ed.), *The Arts of Performance in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 58–65.

underworld with hell, and would more easily march on and offstage by the standard entry doors than come up out of the trap and back down once their speeches were delivered. He notes that these ghosts are unconventional, or at least not Senecan revenge figures, and suggests that their presentation may equally have been unconventional. On Caesar's ghost he agrees with Bernard Beckerman that an entrance through a door is more likely than through the trap, noting that it is premonitory rather than revengeful.

Over Hamlet's ghost he makes a strong case for a similar form of entry to those in *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*. Even for the initial appearance, he argues that the soldiers and Horatio would sit at the front of the stage as far as possible from the tiring-house, so that the ghost can enter from there unobserved while Barnado is calling attention to 'yon same star that's westward from the pole'. Here I have to disagree. For the two soldiers and Horatio to sit and talk at the front of the stage with their backs to the ghost's entry would allow the ghost to emerge from the central trapdoor as readily as from the 'back' wall. If nothing else, his voice from under the stage ('old mole') in the final scene of the act while Hamlet is making the others swear to keep their knowledge secret, makes his exit downwards most likely, and therefore his entrance too. When first addressed, he stalks out of a door, and returns from it later, but his final exit when the morning light appears is down the trap. I would argue that the final act reaffirms that location for the ghost, when the trapdoor returns to play its part in the finale.

I think Wells's view that the ghost enters to Hamlet in Gertrude's closet through a normal stage door is correct, and that his exit from that scene 'out at the portal' marks a departure through the central opening where Polonius is still lying. The 'night-gown' that the ghost is wearing according to the First Quarto goes with a more normal, marital, patriarchal form of access than those of the first Act, although stepping past the corpse of Polonius would have been oddly resonant: murder has been domesticated. Portals in Tudor architectural language were impressive arched doorways, often not hung with doors, an image which best fits the central opening.¹⁷ When Hamlet subsequently lugs Polonius's guts into the neighbour room he most likely follows the same route, closing the arras behind him. All three texts give Gertrude

¹⁷ Shakespeare used the word twice before *Hamlet*, in *Richard II*'s reference to 'the fiery portal of the east' (III. iii. 64), and in Adonis's 'ruby-coloured portal . . . / Which to his speech did honey passage yield' (*Venus and Adonis*, 451–2).

no subsequent exit before Claudius enters to her, so she must remain behind for his hurried entry through a flanking door, which would keep the geography intact. The closet scene is an internal, domestic night scene, quite unlike the first appearance of the ghost in armour outdoors after midnight in the bitter cold. In her own chamber, Gertrude is the only person to whom he appears who cannot see or hear her husband. That obscuring is what serves to emphasise his supernatural character in this scene. Otherwise the domestic setting goes with his normal form of entry and exit. The domesticity is underlined by the undomestic corpse, and the night-capped husband who is a ghost.

A similar contrast of setting appears in the fifth Act's reuse of the trap for the gravediggers, who work in normal daylight. The scene works its way through different patterns of the ignorance which generated all the spying and lying of the first Acts. As usual, the audience is kept ahead of the actors. We can tell that the grave is Ophelia's, though Horatio, who has so oddly failed to tell Hamlet the news of her suicide, does not seem to realise it. The gravedigger comments on her right to Christian burial, anticipating the truncated ceremony of which Laertes later complains, and the similar interment of her father in huggermugger. Laertes invokes the stage's hierarchy of hell under the ground and the heavens over it when he tells the priest that 'A minist'ring angel shall my sister be / When thou liest howling'. She belongs above, not below. When he leaps into the grave-trap, all three of the Polonius family are joined as victims below ground.

There is a special feature of what follows on which I have commented before,¹⁸ but it needs some reiteration here. Hamlet, witnessing Laertes plunging into hell, remembers where he first encountered the ghost. This prompts him to claim a new identity as his ghostly father by declaring 'This is I, / Hamlet the Dane!', the dead king of Denmark. So as a fell revenger he must take his father's place and join Laertes in hell.

It is easy to misread this claim and this encounter, and the role the trap plays in it. Osric for one misunderstands it, along with most editors, taking Hamlet's declaration that he was his father's ghost to be a claim that he should be the new King Hamlet, which is why he irritates Hamlet by keeping his hat respectfully in his hand when he comes to offer him the duel with Laertes. We cannot refuse to see these events in terms of Tudor iconography. Murder and revenge are hellish matters

¹⁸ See A. Gurr, 'Shakespeare and the Visual Signifier', in A. J. Hoenselaars (ed.), *Reclamations of Shakespeare*, DQR Studies in Literature (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 11–20

which belong below ground. News of murder first comes from below. Hamlet makes himself a murderer by killing Polonius, so in the final Act he belongs with revenging Laertes and self-murdering Ophelia, down the grave-trap. We might speculate what that does to the final scene, where the only failed revenger, Fortinbras, in his ignorance of the reality of events, orders Hamlet to be carried upwards, 'to the stage'. The Second Quarto makes him order all the bodies to be carried off thus, an obvious processional convenience given the quantity of corpses on stage by then. But we should wonder why the Folio and First Quarto both specify only Hamlet's body. Is he the only one not left to go down to hell? The stage, like the poetry of the sonnets, can claim to confer immortality, and 'the stage' is an apt term for his final resting-place. But, elevated above the ground where the trap and the graves were dug, it denies Hamlet's own expectation that as revenger he must lie in hell. Is this 'stage' ground-level, is it elevated above the groundlings, is it better than an underground grave? Verticality rules, even for corpses.

Let me conclude by offering a perspective in the form of a test case. Harry Berger claims that there are better riches to be found by reading the text than in the performance of Shakespeare. My claim is that the original performances contained more riches than Berger can be aware of. To illustrate that, I offer the use of coronets in the first stagings of *King Lear*, in 1605 and rather differently in 1611.

Crowns and coronets in *King Lear* provide a particularly challenging instance of the way the printed text inhibits the modern reader's access to the visual signals that do not appear in the original scripts. In the formal court scene that opens the play, Lear enters wearing the crown of his office, and sits on his throne as royal judge in his courtroom. The Quarto text supplies this stage direction: '*Sound a sennet, Enter one bearing a Coronet, then Lear, then the Dukes of Albany, and Cornwall, next Gonerill, Regan, Cordelia, with followers.*' The object carried before the king is a coronet, not a crown. Dukes wore coronets. The dukes of Cornwall and Albany would already have their own coronets on for this scene.¹⁹ This extra coronet is Lear's game-play, a third piece of headgear for the surprise third ruler of the divided kingdom, whose arrival he announces at the outset: 'Know we have divided / In [not one, nor two, as Kent and Gloucester had been speculating,

¹⁹ For a comment on the 'local' application of Shakespeare's renaming the old *King Leir's* Kings of Cambria and Cornwall into the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, see Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 148–53.

but] THREE our kingdome.’ Dukedoms had died out under Elizabeth, so the existence of ducal coronets was new to England under James. By 1605 he had given one to his Scots cousin Lennox, and one each to his sons—the duchy of Cornwall to Henry, and of Albany, a Scottish title, to the infant Charles, giving them all precedence over Elizabeth’s English earls. Shakespeare well knew the difference between a regal crown and a ducal coronet. In *The Tempest*, I. ii. 135, Prospero, when telling Miranda about what led to their being exiled on the bare island, notes the difference between his own ducal coronet as ruler of Milan and Alonzo’s crown as king of Naples. The deal that Prospero’s brother Antonio makes with Alonzo is to ‘subject his [Antonio’s] coronet to his [Alonzo’s] crown.’

It is the lesser ‘coronet’, after Cordelia has annulled his plan to marry her to France or Burgundy and then split the realm between three coronet-wearing dukes, that Lear flings angrily down in front of the two remaining sons-in-law, Albany and Cornwall, as a visible icon for the impossibility of his plan. Splitting a golden circlet into two makes it unwearable. England is to be carved up impossibly between the Duke of Wales and the Duke of Scotland.

The insignia of this vertical sociology was something the Stuarts, and Shakespeare, knew better than we do. One of the marks of this play is the declension of authority from the crowned king in I. i. to his appearing in a hunting hat in I. iv. to being ‘unbonnetted’ in the storm in Act III, and then crowned with mad flowers. The crown disappears after I. i. as authority symbol, replaced by the two coronets of the dukes, before it descends at the close into the offer made by the sole remaining coroneted duke, Albany, to two coronetless earls, Kent and the new Gloucester. Albany’s ducal offer to the earls at the end is a macabre renewal of Lear’s opening division of the kingdom. It also marks a decline that is visible in the headgear, because while Albany’s coronet was, in the original performances, visible on his head as a pale shadow of Lear’s crown, the two earls have nothing golden on their heads. English earls did not wear quasi-regal headgear.

In the 1605 text it is coroneted Albany who makes the final speech, which implies that Edgar does not accept his offer after Kent has withdrawn. That would be sensible of Edgar, knowing what happened the last time such an offer was made, but it also leaves the remaining coronet firmly on the head of the Scottish duke, a fair reflection of the situation over the union of the two kingdoms in 1605. If it is Edgar who accepts the offer and makes the final speech, as in the 1611 or Folio

version he does, the decline in authority from a single Scottish ruler to an English earl continues, and the local political application of the story to the question of union is lost. By 1611 that would have been tactful.

Even without getting entangled in the question of the two versions, we can see in this a visible on-stage record of the declension of status in rule through the play. Wherever we place the play in time, knowledge of the headgear used in the early performances can strengthen our sense of its local and specific application to its time. Harry Berger's point still has its application. By merging the discovery of early performance practices with knowledge of the text we augment the understanding that we can get from reading the text. Such insights would be lost on the modern stage. Modern audiences are trapped in ignorance of the Tudor and Stuart rules about royal and ducal headgear, and to restage the play using the original headgear would not tell audiences much that they might not already know from reading the text. But then, nobody has yet paid any attention to the declension from king to dukes to earls in the play, and that discovery, if discovery it is, I would claim has come from looking at the original staging. Every little helps.

There are traps and discoveries in any academic exercise. The circularity between the Globe's stage trap and the discovery-space, and the equivalent circuitousness both of access and of argument, make an exemplar for the games we use in which to exercise ourselves. Whether Hamlet's ghost leaves by the central 'portal' because he feels himself to be at home in Gertrude's chamber, and whether Hamlet is truly play-acting his father when by the trapdoor he calls himself Hamlet the Dane, are parts of the larger question of how symbolic we think the original staging of *Hamlet* was, and in consequence how we read so many of the indirections by which we have struggled for so many years to find directions out. I do think we learn more about the play, and about Shakespeare's mind, by studying such things than we do by rationalising the argument of the 'To be' speech, or even by identifying what is rotten in Denmark as a criticism of the royal chair. On such stage properties and their kin I rest my case.