

Portable Shakespeare: Exigencies and “Magic” in Five-Actor Productions

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Starting in the mid 1970s, groups of five British actors began to visit U.S. colleges and universities for one-week residencies in which they taught classes and provided public performances.¹ In Fall 1983 these ACTER (now AFTLS) troupes stopped presenting as those performances scenes and passages from the Shakespeare canon modeled on “The Hollow Crown” and turned instead to renditions of full length plays. By Fall 2010, U.S. campus audiences had witnessed fifty-three such shows, a list that includes six productions of *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, five of *The Tempest* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, four of *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter’s Tale*, three of *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *King Lear*, and one of *All’s Well That Ends Well*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Othello*. This change from “anthology” to complete play brought with it new excitement, fresh insights, and some attendant problems. And thereby hangs my tale.

Obviously, productions generated by any theatrical company, whether of five or twenty-five actors, are subject to a number of variables: skill levels; experience; enthusiasm for the task at hand; collegiality. To participate in an ACTER-AFTLS tour, moreover, is not only to take on multiple roles (e.g., Benedick-Conrade-Dogberry, Ferdinand-Sebastian-Trinculo) but also to take on the responsibility of teaching classes during the one-week residency, a task that some actors initially find daunting (though many, as I can attest, prove to be excellent at the job). That these shows have no director or designer is another major consideration. The absence of such authority figures is a major plus for those actors who chafe at their lack of autonomy in the normal rehearsal room but can also lead to stressful situations when decisions large and small must be made by committee. Gender-related casting politics also come into play. Many of the initial

five-actor troupes had four men and one woman (as befits the limited number of female roles in a typical Shakespeare play—so that in Fall 1988 an actress played both Beatrice and Hero), but more recently most productions have had two women (the exception is *The Tempest* where the lone actress plays Miranda and Ariel)—and the Spring 2000 *All's Well* had the distinction of having three women (Helena-Duke of Florence-interpreter, Countess-Widow-Dumaine, Diana-Dumaine-Lafew).

Views from the Inside

As a playgoer and a scholar, I have no backstage or rehearsal room experience, so I queried veterans of this program about what they view as pros and cons.² Not surprisingly, several issues repeatedly surfaced in their reactions: the absence of a director; group dynamics; the hurdles to be overcome in touring. One old hand told me with some conviction that “the pros of our company far outweigh the cons,” but went on to cite “one ‘con’ that has been subject to many a debate,” the absence of a director. “We can all find the ‘pros’ in not having a director and, as we know, when it works, it is Shakespeare who is ultimately the director.” Problems can arise, however, when “fundamental decisions can be made that will take the playing of a production in a particular way that may not have been the intention of the players.” As an example, this actor notes:

I found myself on one tour completely “at sea” as to a very important choice I should make in a particular scene. I had two choices—whichever one I made would have very different consequences as to the dynamics of the scene and the effect it would have on the other characters in the scene. It would also reflect my judgment and compassion (or lack of) that I had for those around me in that scene. This choice could only be made from that organic process that we have in rehearsals. In a conventional set-up, one would discuss this with the director who would have an overall view of the production. Unfortunately, if the group of five is not as cohesive or receptive to the importance of major decisions, then it is left to the actor playing the part to decide and that is where the “con” comes in. Sometimes, it is very difficult to be both subjective and objective—so having that outside eye is a “pro” at times. I must stress that it depends entirely on the group of actors involved and until the rehearsal process begins one cannot foresee as to what form that process will take.

In conclusion, this actor noted a recent tour as “the ideal company,” for here “every actor took the responsibility of being the ‘outside eye’ as a given. Every choice was discussed openly within the group which meant

we were really working together.” When the process works in this way, “the magic created by five actors is unique.”

Another old hand described the company credo as “almost ascetic” in that “there is no director, no designer, and virtually no budget.” Rather, “there is a fierce democracy of players who probably for the first time in their careers are severally and jointly responsible for everything that their young audiences will see.” What follows is “not an easy process. It requires a tricky combination of assertiveness and humility, as well as a rigorous discipline. But at the end of a tour there is a huge sense of achievement too.” One potential down side, however, is that “by the end of eight or ten weeks on the road, playing and teaching on a different campus each week, virtually all the relationships in the troupe come under strain. Moody silences have turned into furious rows, fists have been raised, decades-old friendships have crumbled, and actors have even delayed their return flights home to avoid being on the same plane as a now hated colleague.”³

Another veteran of the program (whose informed comments I will quote at length) cited two major differences between setting up such a five-actor show and working for the RSC or some comparable company. First, the emphasis in many a full-scale production “is either ‘how do we make it different from so-and-so’s preceding production’ or perhaps even worse ‘how do we make this play “accessible” to modern audiences’ (and often that patronizing word ‘kids’ is not long in surfacing)?” The result is a directorial concept: “his/her production will be novel, different, wackily memorable.” In contrast, ACTER-AFTLS provides no director, so that “the chances of five actors working for five weeks in a room by themselves agreeing to set *Much Ado* in Mussolini’s Italy or *Romeo and Juliet* in the American Civil War are slim.”

At the outset the actors may not know each other, so that “the one uniting factor is the work in hand, for now, the play” (one thing they can agree on is “let’s just make the play clear”). “The implicit fear driving them is that in a little over five weeks they will be before an audience” so that, “at the very least they will want to avoid egg on their faces when that time comes.”

They will be awed in different degrees by the demands ahead: to faithfully present a great play. Increasingly an unseen authority emerges in the room—Shakespeare himself or more precisely the script and its different versions. Their arbiter will be so often “what does the TEXT say.” And so by happy stages the group comes to feel the responsibility of finding out what Shakespeare had in mind when he wrote the play.

Since each actor will be playing multiple roles, “his/her loyalty will come to be to the play rather than a part.” As opposed to a conventional production where “an actor might be tempted to ask ‘why isn’t my part bigger?’, here he/she might ask ‘why is this character in the play at all?’ and so, ‘what function does this character fulfill in the play?’” Such questions in turn encourage “deep-digging into the text.”

This actor went on to comment shrewdly on Shakespeare’s invocation of the playgoer’s “imaginary forces.” “The five actors know they will be traveling around the US with just what the five of them can carry and no stage management. They know they will be performing in all sorts of different spaces from thrust stages to sit-up-and-beg proscenium theatres, from 2000- to 200-seaters.” A standard practice during the rehearsal period is to “mark out a 20-foot square or a 20-foot diameter circle or simply be bound by the dimensions of the rehearsal room” so that “they will not be dictated to by the spaces where they will ultimately perform.” In a conventional production, even one that will tour, a designer will craft a set for a “home” theatre, but “here there is no designer. The space is a neutral space.”

It might be argued that architecture has been the bugbear of many a Shakespearean company, that plays written to be “heard” now have to be “seen.” Here the words are the star. Spectacle is just not possible. The actor finds out very soon in rehearsal that all he/she has are the words; they alone must “do it” for him/her, along with whatever clues can be given by voice and body. Soon the actors are bound to swap horror stories of having been trapped in preposterous costumes or tripped by preposterous sets. Now they feel free. They are just acting. They are in fact actors pure and simple, acting purely and simply. The sky is the limit *IF* they are guided by Shakespeare and all he instructs them to do. They dig deeply into the text to find what that is. The verse becomes a guide, the words a delight. They leave behind the temptation of so many conventional productions to make the language “modern.” And so by happy stages the language becomes current, immediate, powerful.

This actor concludes that actors who have worked for ACTER/AFTLS have been changed or “(to use a rather hackneyed word) empowered by the experience. Certainly they see Shakespeare differently having been so intimately involved with him. The work is unique.”

Script-doctoring, Costumes, and Properties

As an outsider who has seen forty-five of these productions, my goal in what follows is to build upon such comments and provide observations and formulations of my own. In doing so I hope to avoid any extravagant claims about the virtues of this genre, for to out-minimalize Shakespeare is to take various risks and to create, for both actors and playgoers, a series of problems. I will also sidestep discussion of the interpretation of individual roles or related issues that would pertain to any production of a given script regardless of the number of personnel. My main concern is: what is gained and what is lost in this portable genre by which a small corps of five actors brings a complete Shakespeare play to a U.S. college campus?

To start with several nuts-and-bolts issues, decisions must be made before the start of rehearsals, in particular: 1) the allocation of parts, including assignment of all but the smallest roles (messengers, attendant lords, children) and 2) any major cuts in the script. The actors' contracts specify in advance a line of parts, though, as already noted, those casting assignments have evolved over the years thanks to the advent of a second actress among the five. Even with two actresses the assignments are often cross-gendered. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* actors play Tybalt-Friar-Lady Capulet and Romeo-Lady Montague whereas the two actresses play Nurse-Paris-Prince and Juliet-Benvolio-Apothecary.

Those who administer the program have encouraged full scripts, so that many shows, particularly of the shorter plays (several of the comedies, *Macbeth*) have been presented uncut. However, some performances are matinees or morning shows for younger audiences that are bussed in, so that a maximum of three hours running time (including the intermission) is required. The streamlined second *Romeo and Juliet* was roughly twenty minutes shorter than the nearly uncut first while a third version was even shorter. The first *Hamlet* production (Fall 1986) used a full script and ran well over three hours (so that to board their bus a group of students seated in front of me had to leave reluctantly in the middle of the graveyard scene), whereas the second (Fall 1993) cut material omitted in the Folio (e.g., Hamlet's last soliloquy) and pared back other elements.

Experience has shown that significant adjustments to such long scripts is best done by an outside party before the actors have actually met so as to forestall play-doctoring by committee. The actors may choose to make additional cuts, often for logistical reasons and most commonly in ensemble scenes when a switch to what seems a negligible one-line speech

may require an awkward move by an actor playing one or more other roles. The only line omitted in the Fall 2002 *Much Ado* was Antonio's "Farewell, my lords, we look for you tomorrow" (5.1.328–29),⁴ because 1) this end-of-scene line (addressed to Don Pedro and Claudio) was deemed insignificant and 2) in this sequence the Antonio actor was also playing Claudio and Borachio.

Still, what one group finds to be an unsolvable problem turns out to be do-able by another, so that script doctoring has varied according to the tastes and chemistry of a given troupe. In the first *King Lear* (Fall 1985) the Lear actor decided he could not take on Albany and Cornwall in addition to the title role, so that those two figures disappeared as speaking parts, whereas in the second *King Lear* (Spring 1989) the Lear actor did play both roles albeit with some Cornwall-Albany lines omitted. The first *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Spring 1988) cut some of Demetrius' lines after the death of Pyramus, whereas in the second (Fall 1991) Pyramus rolled over to "become" Demetrius, then rolled back. Similarly, the actors in the first *As You Like It* (Spring 1985) omitted Hymen from the final scene, in part because one actor would have had to play Hymen-Jaques-Silvius-Jaques de Boys (along with Adam and Le Beau earlier), but subsequent shows have included Hymen.

A good example of script-doctoring as a result of exigencies can be seen in the Fall 1994 *Macbeth* played with a nearly full script. The major omission (the English doctor sequence in 4.3) is an item rarely included in any production, but the rationale behind this and a few smaller cuts in 4.3 was unusual. Elsewhere in their show this group of actors surmounted the usual logistical problems, as when the same actor has to play Banquo-witch in 1.3 or Lady Macbeth-Malcolm in 2.3. The three subsequent troupes for this script had two actresses, so that the second actress could play witch-Malcolm-Lady Macduff-murderer, but the Fall 1994 group had four men and one woman (Holly Wilson). Before the intermission Wilson was no busier than her colleagues in taking on Lady Macbeth, Malcolm, Fleance, and a witch, but that situation changed radically after the caldron scene where in rapid succession she played three intense and demanding scenes centered around three very different figures: Lady Macduff in 4.2; Malcolm in the England scene (4.3); and Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene (5.1). As a matter of theatrical exigency, the actors decided that some paring back of the long and potentially draining 4.3 was necessary to reduce Wilson's emotional and psychological marathon.

Each troupe makes its own decisions about costumes and properties. Some shows are more “prop-py” than others or have more distinctive costumes, but all are limited by having recourse only to what five actors can carry with them from one airport to another or what they can expect to find in their weekly venues (e.g., a ladder for the Fall 1998 *Tempest* and Spring 2004 *Romeo and Juliet*). Getting swords for *Romeo and Juliet* through airport security as done in Fall 1995 has been impossible after 2001, so that other options have been invoked, as in the Fall 2006 *Hamlet* where gloves replaced swords in the 5.2 fencing (and the envenomed glove-weapon was yellow). Some groups opt for no props at all—no letters, weapons, rings, lights—thereby leaving all such items to the pantomimed action of the actor and the “imaginary forces” of the playgoers. Most of the six Bottoms did not use an asses’ head and most of the six Malvolios had no trace of yellow in their stockings. The Spring 1985 *As You Like It* had no bloody napkin, no papers with verses, no chain for Rosalind to give Orlando, and no sword for Orlando in 2.7, but the Fall 1990 version incorporated many properties (bloody napkin, sword, and verses) and plentiful costume distinctions (I term them *signatures*): a pipe for Corin; a rose worn differently for Audrey and Celia; a cap for Silvius; jacket, cap, and vest to distinguish among the two dukes, Touchstone, and Oliver. Included also was an all purpose trunk and a mat that served not only as a basis for the wrestling but also, when rolled up, as the deer carried by the foresters in 4.2. Some shows use a combination of real and to-be-imagined properties. The Fall 1993 *Hamlet* made adroit use of costume signatures, chairs, and properties (swords, books, letters, a bell, a skull, a recorder, a goblet-chalice, a large red velvet cloth), but also presented some “imaginary” items (the sentries’ partisans in 1.1, a torch in 1.4, flowers in 4.5 and 5.1).

Staging Conventions

Over the years troupes have developed various conventions.⁵ Before the actors appear the playgoers usually see a semi-circle of eight to ten chairs (with props, musical instruments, and water bottles visible on the floor) placed around a white rectangle (or circle) taped to (or chalked on) the stage floor. Given such a configuration, to move outside the designated area and sit on a chair (or sometimes on the floor) is to be “offstage.” Most of the shows have started with a cast list wherein, after announcing the play’s title, each actor takes a turn bodying forth the name and a description of his or her various personae (e.g., “Prospero, the banished duke of Milan”; “Antonio, his usurping brother”) in the voice, posture,

and distinctive look to be used—and in the comedies the naming of the cross-gendered personae often elicit an initial laugh to set the mood. As a variation, in the Fall 2003 *Measure for Measure* the personae were broken down into groups (government, church, law, lovers, and lowlife), so that the actress playing a swaggering Lucio stepped forward for each of the first four only to be pushed back by her colleagues and then had to be pushed forward unwillingly as a “lowlife.”

As aids in telling the story the actors resort to a variety of devices. Occasionally to accomplish a daunting switching of roles they resort to an onstage stop-action. With the same actor playing Lucentio-Gremio-true Vincentio, a major highlight of the Spring 2008 *Taming of the Shrew* was the arrest of the latter in 5.1. The actor as Vincentio was surrounded and constrained, emerged as Gremio to circle the now frozen group, returned to the mix, then moved upstage to resolve the situation as Lucentio, each time adjusting his signature scarf. Another recurrent technique when an actor is needed for another role within a sequence is the holding up of a hat or other item of clothing by another actor to signify that a figure is still present or the placement of a scarf, cloak, or other object on the stage floor to signal that a figure is dead, sleeping, or unconscious. Examples of the latter are Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.1 who rises to play Lady Capulet; a swooning Lady Macbeth in 2.2 who rises to play Malcolm or Donalbain; and Hero in *Much Ado*, 4.1 who rises to play Leonato. In Spring 2005, the bodies of Desdemona and Emilia were signaled by their respective shawls when the two actresses rose to play other parts, and Desdemona’s white shawl was wrapped inside her rolled-up “bed” (a waterproof sheet) that in turn was lifted by Othello as her “body.”

In shows that feature few properties actors substitute mimed actions with much use of their hands, as in the Spring 1996 *Macbeth* where Lady Macbeth read her hand in 1.5 rather than a piece of paper and Malcolm and others held their hands before their faces for “leavy screens” from Birnam Wood (5.6.1). Similarly, in the Fall 1988 *Much Ado* the actors used their hands for the men’s masks in 2.1 and women’s masks in the final scene, and in 2.3 Benedick hid behind a tree by peering through his spaced-out fingers. Another distinctive bit of theatrical shorthand was provided in the Fall 1997 *Measure for Measure* where instead of real or imagined manacles the arrest of Claudio in 1.2 was signaled by his pulling his trousers down to his ankles. Also used to good effect have been a wide variety of sounds and music, sometimes amounting to a soundscape for special effects or moments (e.g., the Forest of Arden)—and several groups have provided a *whoosh* for the wielding of to-be-imagined swords.

With costume adjustments widely used to signal shifts from one figure to another, how then can an actor signal that the same figure has taken on a disguise? In the Spring 1986 *Measure for Measure* the actors introduced commissions, warrants, and other portable objects and items of clothing (scarves, sashes, a red handkerchief) to distinguish among various roles played by the same actor. In 1.3 where the duke asks the friar for a disguise, the friar handed over the sunglasses he was wearing. In the final scene, Lucio “discovered” the duke behind his Friar Lodowick disguise by pulling off these glasses, at which point the four remaining actors knelt in sudden recognition. The moment was as effective as it has been in any production I have seen, because the discovery was keyed not to the disguise itself (always an act of faith by the spectator) but rather to the reactions of others on stage.

Consider a basic problem for any production of *As You Like It*: how to distinguish between court and forest and how to characterize Arden for the spectator? A full-scale production will have costume distinctions, properties, and usually onstage greenery. Lacking sets or “forest” properties, the Elizabethans would have relied primarily upon costumes, sound effects, and portable properties such as weapons or shepherds’ crooks.⁶ To realize their equivalent to such effects (then or now) a five-actor troupe must be inventive (and elicit the playgoer’s participation). In Fall 2000 the bad duke and his courtiers wore dark glasses. In Spring 1985 the actors set up “the court” in 1.2 by means of whispering, bowing, and other courtly behavior and reinforced the image in 2.2 (where Duke Frederick calls for the arrest of Oliver) by a lock-step image of military marching to suggest a fascist take-over. In both shows I always knew when I was “at court.” Arden has been evoked in a variety of ways. In Spring 1985 the actors provided sound effects, shivered during the banished duke’s famous speech in 2.1, and mimed a crossing of a brook on stones in 2.4. To present Orlando posting his verses (3.2) in Fall 2000 four actors stood on chairs to serve as “trees”—and this show began its first Arden scene (2.1) with one falling leaf. A sense of Arden *was* strongly evoked in these renditions, an Arden that could be understood both as a geographical arena for the action and as a state of mind or mythic place where discoveries could take place.

Those familiar with the often-cited choric passages in *Henry V* will recognize such devices as a response to comparable problems faced by the Lord Chamberlain’s or King’s Men in the 1590s and early 1600s wherein playgoers were asked to *suppose* or *imagine* what cannot be represented in performance. The Prologue apologizes for the limits of “this unworthy

scaffold” in conveying “So great an object” as Agincourt; still, the players can “On your imaginary forces work” if the viewers are willing to “Suppose,” to “make imaginary puissance” by dividing one man into a thousand parts, to “Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them / Printing their proud hoofs i’ th’ receiving earth,” in short, to “Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts” (8–15, 18–19, 23–27). Again, the Chorus to Act 3 pleads with the audience to “Suppose,” “behold,” “do but think,” “Grapple your minds,” “Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege,” and, finally, “Still be kind, / And eche out our performance with your mind” (3, 7, 13, 18, 25, 34–35). Before Agincourt, the Chorus to Act 4 apologizes in advance for disgracing this great event “With four or five most vile and ragged foils / (Right ill dispos’d in brawl ridiculous)” but asks the audience: “Yet sit and see, / Minding true things by what their mock’ries be” (49–53). Repeatedly, this choric spokesman asks the audience to accept a part for the whole, to supply imaginatively what cannot be introduced physically onto the open stage.

According to theatre historians Shakespeare scripted his plays for eleven to sixteen actors (not counting supernumeraries), so that reducing that number to five places an even greater burden upon both the ingenuity of the performers and the “imaginary forces” of the audience. The overriding problem confronting the actors (as is evident from the first day of rehearsal) is therefore how best to tell the story clearly and effectively with limited resources to a mixed audience that will include everything from academics and knowledgeable students who are studying the play to playgoers unfamiliar with the particular script (a common situation, especially for plays such as *All’s Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Winter’s Tale*). As one of my colleagues put it succinctly, “this is definitely *not* entry-level Shakespeare.” Through the 1980s and early 1990s the program copy supplied to participating schools did not include a plot summary, but that practice has subsequently changed in the hope of making the presentation more user-friendly. Given blank verse, early modern English, and challenging syntax, any Shakespeare play can prove daunting to an untutored viewer or auditor, but the extra hurdle provided by the actors’ role-switching between scenes or even within the same scene can add to the degree of difficulty—and here younger audiences seem quicker to make the necessary adjustments than senior citizens.

Special Effects

A few troupes have supplied their version of special effects. The Fall 1998 *Tempest* had no costume signatures and only a few props: a step-

ladder, some books and a staff for Prospero, a rope for the 1.1 storm, a Gordon's Gin bottle for Stephano. Of particular interest was an all purpose white sheet. The show started with the five actors appearing from behind the hanging sheet; in 1.2 Caliban's "rock" was placed behind the sheet which, taken down, served as the gabardine in 2.2, a log in 3.1, and, when carried in by two actors, a table for the banquet in 3.3. Later in 3.3 Ariel appeared as a harpy upstage on the ladder with the sheet corners up to create a wing-like effect. Most impressive was her final exit, for at Prospero's "Then to the elements / Be free, and fare thou well!" (5.1.318–19), this Ariel leaped backwards and was pulled headfirst through a hole in the sheet, a highly theatrical vanishing that drew gasps from the playgoers. The Spring 1997 *Romeo and Juliet* provided many costume signatures (primarily color-coded scarves to distinguish different figures) but no props (no osier basket, weapons, vials, money, or paper for Peter in 1.2). A particularly distinctive feature was a large red cloth that appeared after the intermission when four actors held it up and Juliet ran through it to begin 3.2. At the beginning of 3.5 the playgoer saw Romeo and Juliet wrapped in this red cloth so as to convey the union of the two lovers; after taking the potion in 4.5 Juliet then draped herself in this cloth so that she could roll off the stage at the end of the scene, leaving it behind.

With no access to an acting area above, a five-actor ensemble must be inventive in playing scenes that involve height. In the Spring 1999 *Merchant of Venice* Jessica's appearance above in 2.6 to throw down a casket to Lorenzo was displayed by having an actor hold a large empty frame through which she looked down and having Lorenzo look up, with both of them on the same stage level. In the opening scene of the Spring 2005 *Othello* Brabantio stood on an upstage chair to signal his position above, while Iago and Roderigo downstage delivered their lines facing the audience. For the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, in Spring 2004 Juliet was placed at the top of a ladder; in Fall 1995 she was hoisted up and carried by two actors (who turned her away from the playgoers when she had to depart in mid scene). In Spring 1997 she started by standing on a chair, so that Romeo could take her on his back. The subsequent dialogue was delivered facing forward towards the playgoers though the two actors did manage to preserve a sense of height by looking up and down at each other. In the latter two shows no height was available in 3.5 for Romeo's descent from Juliet's window, so that in Fall 1995 (with a knotted red scarf as his "rope") Romeo retreated upstage for a to-be-imagined drop to the ground; in Spring 1997 he stood on a chair to simulate going through a window; and in Spring 2004 he climbed and then descended the ladder.

Height is not the only problem. Lacking a trapdoor, the Fall 1986 *Hamlet* still provided a sense of a graveyard for 5.1 by means of two rows of chairs with a skull under one of them, so that one gravedigger with a spade could stand on one chair and the other kneel on the floor. In the tomb scene of the Spring 1997 *Romeo and Juliet* Romeo began by kneeling over Juliet's body, but she rose (wrapped in the red cloth) to stand behind him while he was still addressing her body on the ground. This Romeo then died erect, not on the stage floor, as did Juliet moments later, so that they remained together leaning against each other (as if they were being seen by an overhead camera) while the other three actors looked forward at the playgoers. Particularly inventive was the Fall 2002 *Much Ado*. Here the place for the abortive wedding ceremony (4.1) was established by having paper programs placed on the floor so that five actors as wedding guests could enter, sit, and anticipate the ceremony before the appearance of the friar and others. The preparation for that wedding (3.4) was displayed by having Hero stand on a chair and behold herself in an imaginary mirror. Most telling were the two eavesdropping scenes (2.3, 3.1) presented as if in a mazed garden with winding alleys, so that in 2.3 the three men either moved up and down imaginary rows or stood on chairs to get a glimpse of Benedick in hiding.

Problems and Solutions

Some situations add to the difficulties in storytelling. A particular hurdle for a playgoer is the appearance of a new figure late in the action (e.g., Mariana who first appears in 4.1 of *Measure for Measure*) or the reappearance of a less than central figure who has not been seen for some time (Egeus in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1; Oliver in *As You Like It*, 4.3;⁷ Antonio in *Much Ado*, 5.1). When Mariana appears for the first time in *Measure* the playgoer at a full-scale production recognizes a "new" female figure and either remembers the duke's speech describing Mariana to Isabella (3.1.209–30) or waits for clarification. But if Mariana (who is not identified by her name in the dialogue until 4.1.48) is played by a man who has been playing Pompey-Escalus-Claudio (Spring 1986), that playgoer can easily be confused. A related problem occurs at the first appearance of Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, 2.1 (he is not named until line 16), for the playgoer is confronted with an actress playing Sebastian just seen playing Cesario accompanied by an Antonio actor just seen as Sir Toby.

The actors have found ways to minimize such problems. One solution (sometimes at the expense of the iambic pentameter line) is to insert the

character's name or some other signal to identify a “new” figure, as when at the outset of *Much Ado*, 5.1 the script is adjusted so that Leonato addresses his interlocutor as “brother” or when Antonio's name is inserted early in *Twelfth Night*, 2.1. At one of the first performances of the Spring 1996 *Macbeth* I was conscious at the beginning of the England scene (4.3) of other playgoers consulting their programs (“who are these two guys?”), so that I can understand why the actors subsequently chose to add “Malcolm” to the first Macduff speech and “Macduff” to the second Malcolm speech—and in 2.3.89 “Dear Duff,” the first dialogue reference to this figure's name, was expanded to “Macduff.”

The most obvious problems arise in the presentation of ensemble scenes (often but not always final scenes) where five actors have to strain to body forth ten to fifteen roles, most of them with lines to deliver (that Helena and Hermia have no lines to speak in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1 can frustrate actresses in a full-scale production but is a boon in a five-actor show). The actor who plays both Prospero and Antonio can create the illusion of a second brother in the final sequence by directing the Prospero speeches to a well-defined empty space, but missing for the playgoer are any clues in Antonio's expression or posture about his acceptance or rejection of the offered reconciliation. In Fall 1999 Cesario was strongly affected by Feste's song in *Twelfth Night*, 2.4, but no comparable reaction was visible for Orsino because the actor was playing Feste. In *Othello* (Spring 2005) the actresses playing Desdemona and Emilia rose from the dead to become Montano and Gratiano, but Cassio disappeared from the final sequence since that actor was also playing Lodovico. Several of Cassio's lines were therefore spoken by Montano, sometimes with adjustments, as when “I never gave you cause” (5.2.299) became “he never gave you cause.”

As seen in *Othello*, ensemble scenes can pose formidable problems when staging a tragedy. When Lear is driven out into the storm in *King Lear*, 2.4, a five-actor troupe cannot convey the diminishing number of Lear's supporters as opposed to the swelling ranks of the opposition, for not only are there no supernumeraries but also Kent must double with Gloucester, Lear must double with Cornwall, and Regan must triple with the Fool and Oswald. Inevitably, the absence of bodies to swell a stage will diminish the overall effect of such a scene. In addition, some of the doubling and tripling of roles sets up links that are best ignored. The murder of Banquo (*Macbeth*, 3.3) involves five figures, four of whom have been seen previously (Banquo, Fleance, the two murderers), so that in Spring 1996 the much discussed third murderer was of necessity played

by the Macbeth actor whether or not the playgoer was to find significance in that link.

Along with ensemble scenes, the other major challenges are generated by moments when an actor must engage in dialogue or other interaction with himself or herself. Such moments recur several times in every script—sometimes early, sometimes considerably later. When such rapid back-and-forth switching of roles comes early, particularly in a comedy (as when the same actor plays Egeus and Demetrius at the outset of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), a playgoer can catch on to what is happening and make the necessary adjustments, although having such an alternation at the very outset of a show can be daunting, particularly at the opening of *King Lear* where the same actor plays both Kent and Gloucester. When such a highly visible moment occurs for the first time late in the action, however, that playgoer may be surprised, even confused.

Here I confess to being an atypical playgoer-consumer, for, as one who knows the scripts reasonably well and can anticipate what is coming, I look forward to, even relish the actors' responses to such challenges (making a virtue of necessity), responses that often become highlights of a given performance. In the Spring 1999 *Merchant of Venice* the same actress played Nerissa, Jessica, and Salerio, so that near the end of the third casket scene (3.2) as Salerio she delivered Antonio's letter to Bassanio (234–36), then moved to Gratiano's side for his "Nerissa, cheer yond stranger" (237), then crossed the stage to "become" Jessica for a moment, and then delivered Salerio's "I would you had won the fleece that he hath lost" (242), all within a few seconds. Similar challenges face the actor playing Feste-Fabian-Orsino at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, 5.1 (in Spring 1994 the actor flipped a coin as Orsino and caught it as Feste) and the actors playing Caliban-Gonzalo, Trinculo-Sebastian, and Stephano-Alonso at the end of *Tempest*, 5.1. One of the highlights of the Fall 1993 *Hamlet* was Jonathan Guy Lewis' tour-de-force presentation of both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (along with Horatio, Laertes, and the third player) by means of clear visual distinctions between the two figures. Rosencrantz sported a white glove and a more fawning look (keyed to "gentle Rosencrantz") and Guildenstern a black glove and a Prussian heels-clicking demeanor; each time he "changed" Lewis not only varied his speech and posture but also did a half-turn (with one hand behind his back) so that the alternate glove was concealed from the playgoer. Never before in *Hamlet*-viewing have I looked forward eagerly to the next R & G scene.

Having an actor play part of scene talking to her- or himself does not emerge as the major problem one might expect. In five-actor productions of *King Lear* a series of actors have effectively brought off the Edgar-Edmund double, including the one-on-one encounters (1.2, 2.1) and even the climactic fight (5.3). In *The Winter's Tale* the same actor plays Polixenes, Florizel, and Autolycus and therefore in 4.4 must first perform an intense father-son confrontation that builds to “Mark your divorce, young sir” (417) and later act out an exchange of clothing between Florizel and Autolycus. Both moments have proved to be do-able, even theatrically exciting. Similarly, in *Twelfth Night* what would seem to be another insurmountable hurdle—having the same actor play both Malvolio and Sir Andrew in the box tree scene (2.5)—regularly turns out to be one of the highlights of the performance. Actors delight in these challenges.

Sometimes five-actor exigencies lead to configurations that heighten elements in the script or take on added punch—as in Fall 1993 when the Hamlet-actor took on the role of the messenger who enters to Claudius and Laertes and stated: “Letters, my lord, from Hamlet” (4.7.36). One of my favorite moments in the Winter 1987 *Tempest* came when an actor twice made the switch from the Boatswain to Alonso with a speech that seemed to have been designed to heighten the effect: “These are not natural events, they strengthen / From strange to stranger” and “This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod” (5.1.227–38, 242). Owing to the exigencies of casting *The Winter's Tale*, the same actors play Hermione-Perdita and Polixenes-Florizel. As a result, when Leontes in 5.1 welcomes Florizel and Perdita “As is the spring to th' earth” (152) he is welcoming a visible version of the two figures (Hermione and Polixenes) he had rejected and plotted against in the winter part of this romance. Some of Leontes' lines therefore take on special resonance (e.g., his assertion to Florizel that “Your father's image is so hit in you / (His very air) that I should call you brother”—127–28). In a five-actor *Othello* the same actress plays Desdemona and Bianca, so that Bianca's appearances in 3.4 and especially 4.1 (where Othello sees her bringing in the handkerchief) can add another dimension to the confusion in Othello's mind whereby, tainted by Iago's poison, he can see no distinction between the two women.

In the comedies and romances, the actors' shifts and inventive solutions can be a distinctive asset, often reinforcing that sense of wonder or amazement signaled in the dialogue. A delightful moment in the Spring 1992 *Much Ado* was the binding of Conrade and Borachio in 3.3 with two of the three watch (the binders) also playing the two figures being bound. Each of the four actors who has played both Orlando and Charles

in *As You Like It* has found a distinctive and crowd-pleasing way to wrestle himself. In Fall 1990 the conclusion of this match yielded a high comic moment, for in response to the duke's "How dost thou, Charles?" Le Beau, standing between an erect, out-of-breath Orlando and the empty space on the floor where we are to imagine the body of the defeated Charles, looked intently at that to-be-imagined figure and replied: "He cannot speak, my lord" (1.2.219–20), a reply that brought down the house. In the Spring 1985 version of this script Jaques finished his account of the seven ages of man ("second childishness, and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing"—2.7.165–66) with an expansive gesture that extended his arms horizontally, at which point he collapsed backwards into the arms of an entering Orlando so as to "become" old Adam. The ironic counterpointing already present in the script (where Jaques' cynicism is played off against Orlando's care for Adam) was here heightened in a manner that was moving and, in its own way, "magical."

The role-shifts and surprises that often enhance the spirit of a comedy or romance, however, can have the opposite effect in a tragedy. The disposition and removal of bodies in death scenes pose problems in any production but can be especially troubling when the "dead" figure is required to rise and play another part. The assignment of roles for productions of *Romeo and Juliet* is founded on the stipulation that once "dead" the actors playing the two title roles should not rise to play someone else. Therefore the other three actors play Prince Escalus (Nurse-Paris-Old Capulet-Friar John), Capulet-Balthasar (Mercutio), and Friar Laurence-Lady Capulet-Montague-Paris's page (Tybalt-Peter). The same principle, however, could not apply to *Hamlet*. Both times I saw the Fall 1993 *Hamlet* I was distracted from Hamlet's "fell sergeant Death" speech (5.2.332–40) by Laertes' rising from the dead to become Horatio, though I had no problem a moment later with a recumbent Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude rising, moving upstage, and returning as Fortinbras and two attendants.

Staging Magic and the Supernatural

A final category is of special interest to me as a theatre historian: the presentation onstage of magic and the supernatural. Here a portable five-actor rendition would seem to be at a huge disadvantage lacking the resources and special effects available in many traditional productions to present ghosts, riddling apparitions, and a disappearing banquet. In my playgoing experience, however, the opposite has been the case, for I have regularly seen full-scale productions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*

flounder during such scenes, whereas some of these moments have been very effective when done by five actors.

A good example is the Fall 1993 *Hamlet* where to stage the ghost the actors built skillfully upon their own resources and the playgoer's imagination. In the cellarage scene (1.5) the ghost (still wearing a signature cowl) delivered the series of “swear” lines while seated in view but “offstage,” but Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus “heard” the voice as if it came from beneath the stage and reacted accordingly so as to convey the strangeness of the moment as forcefully as I have ever seen it done. Also compelling was the opening scene where each appearance of the ghost was preceded by a blast of cold (as signaled by the actors); at its second departure the two sentries tried to stop it with their imaginary weapons, but it literally walked through their blows in eerie, magical fashion so as to yield an impressive effect.

Another telling example is the use of all purpose scarves in the Spring 2002 *Macbeth*. In this largely prop-less production, the scarves, held in two hands and stretched tightly, served as swords for the various fights in Act 5 and as a tool to saw off Macbeth's head in the final sequence. Elsewhere used adeptly they could serve as the leafy boughs, Macbeth's severed head, Lady Macbeth's body during her “faint” in 2.3 (at this point the actress had to rise to play Donalbain), and Macbeth's armor put on and taken off in 5.3. A striking theatrical effect was achieved early in 1.3 when during their dialogue the witches weaved their scarves into a pentagram which they held up before the playgoers at “the charm's wound up” (37). Of special interest was the staging of the procession of kings viewed by Macbeth in 4.1, a sequence that in my experience rarely works in the theatre. Here the Banquo actor weaved his way in and out of spaces created by the three witches who held up their scarves and pivoted after each passage, thereby providing the sense of multiple figures progressing through a series of gates; the sequence ended with a smiling Banquo standing downstage behind a kneeling Macbeth and holding up his hand as a mirror. As a result of a series of such choices, the presentation of the supernatural element in this script was as successful as I have seen in any full-scale production.

Staging *The Tempest* poses significant problems in any rendition, particularly in 1.1 (the storm on board a ship), 3.3 (the harpy and disappearing banquet), and 4.1 (the wedding masque and spirit-dogs). With five inventive actors, the opening storm scene has consistently been a great success; if the sense of storm is provided primarily by vocalized sound and movement of bodies, the show gets off to a lively and exciting start,

and the dialogue can be heard by the auditor (and in Spring 1993 Ariel stayed in place throughout 1.1 as the prow of the ship). The 4.1 wedding masque rarely works in any production,⁸ so that the troupes have tried a variety of solutions: dancing around a May-pole (Spring 1987); small white masks for the goddesses and the Pachelbel Canon in D (Fall 1992); large colored sheets capped with masks for the goddesses (Spring 1993). In a five-actor show, if Ferdinand and Miranda are to remain seated on the stage floor as viewers, the three goddesses will then be played by the other three male actors (including the Prospero actor), and the dance of nymphs and reapers will include the young couple. Indeed, in Fall 1992 they were the only dancers, whereas in Spring 1993 the two danced with imaginary figures, then each other. The most inventive staging was in Fall 1998 where the three actor-goddesses wore red kerchiefs over their heads, then one danced with Ferdinand, another (the Caliban actor) with Miranda. As Prospero looked on, the kerchief came off to reveal Caliban (with a deformed hand and a hunched look) simulating having sex with Miranda so as to generate Prospero's interruption of the masque and his "Our revels now are ended" speech.

Of particular interest is the sumptuous banquet that is to appear and disappear in 3.3. Here inventive choices can yield some theatrically exciting effects. In Spring 1987 a second actor standing behind Ariel produced an impressive four-handed harpy; in Spring 2003 the actors presented the "*several strange shapes*" that bring in the banquet (3.3.19) as tiny figures that could be held in the palm of one's hand and then made effective use of sound effects at the removal of the banquet. However, none of these groups could provide a tangible, visible banquet table, something apparently "real" that could at the key moment disappear. For me, one of the major images of the scene and the play was therefore diminished, for I did not come away with a sense of evanescence—of the seemingly substantial melted into thin air—so as to set up Prospero's "revels" speech an act later.

In a five-actor *Tempest*, however, the loss of one or more images is more than compensated for by a strong and very meaningful sense of "magic" on the island. With no high tech effects possible, any sense of that magic has to arise from the signals provided by the actors *and* the imaginative participation of the audience. In Spring 1987 (for me the most magical of the five productions) the special quality of the isle was conveyed not by set, lighting, or special effects but by the humming of the actors to convey a sense of spirits or bee-like electricity, by the poetry, by concerted acting (as with the storm of 1.1 or the four-handed harpy), and by some highly

successful acting shifts (especially the actress’ nimble hummingbird-like transitions from Miranda to Ariel). In most cases the audience helped to supply the magic, the invisibility, and the wonder without the aid of elaborate props or sets.

A final choice for a five-actor *Tempest* is how to stage the Epilogue. In most of the shows the four actors other than Prospero were upstage, but in Spring 1987 these actors stood directly behind Prospero during his Epilogue, so that the appeal for “the help of your good hands” (Epilogue, 10) was on behalf of the entire troupe and, by extension, the concept behind the performance. In response to Prospero’s (or the actor playing Prospero’s) final line (“Let your indulgence set me free”—20), the playgoers who applauded were setting free not only one but all five actors and were affirming their own pivotal role (along with the actors) as participants in the imaginative process that had created such theatrical magic from so few resources. In making that affirmation, those playgoers were acting out their approval of this unusual approach to the script and, implicitly or explicitly, were saying through their applause: Long Live Five-Actor Shakespeare!

Theatrical Magic

When dealing with five-actor presentations of Shakespeare’s plays, questions about the staging of moments involving ghosts or magical events bleed into a vaguer but nonetheless significant feature of these shows when successful—a form of what I have been terming theatrical “magic.” Another way to approach this topic is the question: when is an exigency (limited number of personnel, absence of special effects such as a disappearing banquet) not a limitation but an asset? As already noted, ensemble scenes pose obvious problems, so that a particularly strong challenge to the actors’ inventiveness regularly comes in the final moments of a given show when, especially given the pairing off of couples in the comedies, they must provide a final *exeunt* that takes into account eight or more individuals. In the Fall 1989 *Winter’s Tale* Hermione “touched” Perdita (her other role in the scene) at her exit while Polixenes (who also played Florizel) exited with his arms extended as if to escort the two young lovers, so that the presence of figures not actually seen was strongly signaled, as was an emphasis in the script upon the joining of hands even when no second actor was available to complete the joining. A comparable extending of a hand to Sebastian by Olivia is needed at the end of a five-actor *Twelfth Night* where three actors must portray four

lovers (the same actress is playing Cesario and Sebastian). That Silvius of necessity is absent as a visible figure for most of the final sequence of a five-actor *As You Like It* (because the actor is playing several other roles) is a limitation, but if a sense of Silvius is present (as in Fall 2000 thanks to a distinctive signature belt held by Phoebe) the result can be delightful and much in keeping with the comic resolution in the script.

Consider as an alternative a small choice in the Spring 1991 *As You Like It*. When Hymen said of the four couples to be married “Here’s eight that must take hands” (5.4.128), the four actors other than Hymen got a laugh by looking around the stage for the missing people. The moment as played was good fun and certainly in keeping with the spirit and logistics of this inventive production, but going for and achieving this particular laugh had much to do with the absence (for me) of romance “magic” or wonder at the end. To gain a good if fleeting comic moment the actors here encouraged the playgoer to chuckle at four playing eight rather than encouraging that playgoer to wonder at or admire the eight-ness of the four (and the balance between wonder and reason is the focus of the conclusion of Hymen’s speech: “Feed yourselves with questioning; / That reason wonder may diminish / How thus we met, and these things finish”—138–40). In contrast, in the Spring 1985 production (in which the same actress played three of the four women), the last scene placed far greater demands upon the playgoer and hence, for some in the audience, was more jarring, but (despite the cutting of Hymen as a separate entity in that show) I found the 1985 climax more satisfying—more comedic—because the actors from the outset had consistently built upon the playgoer’s participation so as to achieve a very strong pay-off at the end.

A Magical Dream

For me the most “magical” of the five-actor shows remains the Fall 1991 *Midsummer Night’s Dream* as performed by Bruce Alexander, Geoffrey Beevers, Sam Dale, Joanna Foster, and Eunice Roberts. Other ACTER-AFTLS renditions of this script may have been funnier, but this show was special in a variety of ways. Repeatedly, the obvious liabilities (e.g., thirteen figures are onstage at one time in 5.1) were turned into assets so as to produce one of the most successful renditions of this script I have ever seen.

First, in contrast to the four in the 1991 *As You Like It* who joked at not being eight, these five consistently “created” larger numbers. In a small but telling moment at the end of 1.2, Bottom called for a joining of

hands to end the scene (“Enough; hold, or cut bow-strings”—111). Since Eunice Roberts was playing both Starveling and Snug, she provided a hand for the former (as did the other four mechanicals) and then, as the group was almost complete, a second hand appeared to represent Snug’s commitment as well. Early in the play, this brief gesture therefore set up the six-ness of the five.

A more obvious problem is generated in 5.1 where the actress who had played Hermia (again, Eunice Roberts) is needed for Philostrate, Moonshine, and Lion, and Joanna Foster, who had played Helena, is needed for Quince and Hippolyta. For most of the scene, Hermia and Helena were unseen, so that their presence was “created” by the motions and attentive gestures of Lysander and Demetrius who squired them in, placed them in chairs, and attended to them. After the Bergomask,⁹ the three courtly couples did their own dance in which Helena initially did not take part (with Foster playing Hippolyta); eventually, however, she did join in so that, by having first Theseus and then Demetrius dance for a moment with his partner, the circle of five actors created a sense of six. For the final Theseus speech and *exeunt*, Hippolyta was imagined, not seen, but Helena and Hermia were embraced by their men. Again, the six-ness of the five was signaled strongly and was much appreciated by an audience by now attuned to this convention that had been set up as early as 1.1 by Bruce Alexander’s effective switch from a scowling, hunched over Egeus to an erect, embarrassed Demetrius.

Throughout this production such magic-wonder (as in the delight at the six-ness of the five) was repeatedly generated by the actors’ creative staging and by their trust in both the script (not a word was cut) and the playgoer. Particularly effective was the sense of the fairy world and the magical woods established by means of the poetry, some distinctive movements, the interactions between characters, and actor-generated sound effects (e.g., forest whistles and chirps, magical whooshes). After a very “human” and funny 1.2 (the first mechanicals’ scene), the switch to the fairy kingdom in 2.1 was set up adroitly by having the first fairy (Joanna Foster) downstage, crouching, drawing a fairy round and Puck (Geoffrey Beevers) upstage behind her, seeking to control her (and eventually rubbing out the traced round with his foot). The electricity generated by the two actors’ handling of the verse rhythms and by their distinctively non-human movements made this introduction to the fairy world as effective as I have ever seen. The subsequent more formal and regal entry for Titania and Oberon at opposite ends of the stage with stylized hand movements (reminiscent of preening birds) then furthered this alternative

fairy world look. These latter graceful movements were visible again in 4.1 as Oberon (Sam Dale) and Titania (Eunice Roberts) signaled their new amity by a fairy union expressed through a stylized dance and a matching of hands.

The most distinctive fairy world effect came at the outset of 2.2 when three actors, blending their voices in *a cappella* harmony, sang Titania to sleep (to an exquisite rondel melody provided by Colin Sell), while at the same time weaving in the air a protective web or cocoon for the fairy queen (and the weaving of this to-be-imagined web was paralleled by the weaving together of the voices in song). A strong answering effect was then achieved when Oberon zapped the fairy sentinel who had been left behind and, with little effort, broke through the protective web, so that the delicacy of this invisible creation (one facet of the fairy world) was countered by a force or brutality that could not be denied. That side of Oberon was evident also at the end of 3.2 when he punished Puck by pulling him painfully by the ear—although that pulling was done magically from a distance with no direct physical contact.

Several other moments gained added “magic” from the very absence of “real” properties or verisimilar staging. When Puck delivered the love-in-idleness flower to Oberon, he carried no object visible to the playgoer; rather, he tossed this to-be-imagined flower into the air so that its slow movement across the stage to his master (as we were encouraged to imagine it) could defy gravity. Indeed, a “real” flower in this situation would have entailed a diminution of the magic. A more telling moment came at the end of 3.2, the final confusion in the fog or dark, where the actors invoked no variation in the lighting. With all four lovers intertwined onstage, Demetrius and Lysander emerged in turn out of the scrum (although held back and discomfited by the others—as if hampered by bushes and briars), so that Puck could put them to sleep one by one. This highly successful epitome of confusion in the darkened woods was generated not by lighting and dry ice but by the skills of the actors and the willing participation of the playgoers.

Again, as in the Spring 1987 *Tempest*, the Epilogue was delivered by Puck with the other four actors close at hand. The speaker of this Epilogue, moreover, was clearly actor Geoffrey Beevers, not Puck (so that Beevers reverted briefly to his puckish face and stance at the first reference to Puck). The extended applause that followed (indeed, standing ovations each time I saw this show) was a hearty response to the obvious effort of the actors (in an overheated auditorium given unusually warm late October weather) but also a reaction to the concept behind the performance

and an implicit reassertion of the playgoers' role in making it work. Those who applauded had been participants in the magic and wonder.

To note such successes is not to deny some obvious problems, for the five-actor limit *can* change the script even when not a line is cut. In particular, Shakespeare's theatrical “imagery” can be changed or blurred when items that *are* scripted in a Quarto or the First Folio (e.g., a disappearing banquet) are *not* visible but must be imagined by the playgoer. To acknowledge this and other limitations an often-used program note disclaims any attempt to present a five-actor rendition as “Shakespeare's play,” for, “as Shakespeare did not write for five actors,” the playgoers are to see “in one major sense, a play about five actors doing *Twelfth Night*.” To some extent all theatrical events implicitly rely on an appeal to the playgoers to use their “imaginary forces” to make a show work, but five-actor Shakespeare makes unusually severe demands on its audiences.

However, when this process does work, the “magic” created by five actors is or can be theatrically exciting, so that fine acting and creative staging not only tell the story effectively but also generate for the playgoers a sense of wonder linked to an appreciation of seemingly insurmountable obstacles overcome. In my experience, success in this genre is linked to *trust*: the actors' trust in the script; the actors' trust in their playgoers to “Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts”; and the playgoers' trust in the process unfolding in front of their eyes in which they too are participants. That the genre does not work for everyone, particularly those who would rather look than listen (as evidenced by newly empty seats after an intermission), is testimony to the truth of the Archbishop of York's observation: “What trust is in these times?” (*2 Henry IV*, 1.3.100). I prefer to side with Paulina who tells Leontes that to regain that which has been lost “It is requir'd / You do awake your faith” (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.94–95). Or, to close with Prospero's verdict: “It works” (*The Tempest*, 1.2.494).

Notes

¹This program was started in the mid 1970s by Homer Swander in conjunction with actors Patrick Stewart, Tony Church, Bernard Lloyd, and Lisa Harrow. Tour arrangements were handled by Professor Swander from his home base, the University of California, Santa Barbara, and participating actors were recruited in London. Early tours were run under the rubric AIR (Actors in Residence), but soon the program became known as ACTER (A Center for Teaching, Education, and Research). In 1994 the U.S. base of operations moved to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (Director Alan Dessen, General Manager Cynthia

Dessen), and in 2001 moved to the University of Notre Dame where the name was changed to AFTLS (Actors from the London Stage). For thirty-five years the format has remained the same: in separate Fall and Spring tours, a different group of five actors spends one week in residence at a series of colleges teaching a wide range of classes, giving solo presentations (one-handers) of their own devising, and as their major public performance providing either an anthology program of scenes and passages or, starting in Fall 1983, a complete Shakespeare play.

²I have benefited from the comments of a number of actors, but in what follows I am especially indebted to Jane Arden, Gareth Armstrong, and Bruce Alexander.

³In two different tours I saw the final performances and spoke individually to several actors who no longer were speaking to each other offstage

⁴Citations from Shakespeare are from the revised Riverside edition, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston and New York, 1997).

⁵The idea for a five-actor Shakespeare play as opposed to anthology programs came from a six-actor *Cymbeline* in 1983 directed by Mike Alfreds. I did not see this show but did see this director's production of the same script at the London Globe in 2001 with six actors and two percussionists. One of Alfreds' devices not used by ACTER-AFTLS is to have (as an aid in telling the story) the actors speak aloud many of the stage directions. Costume signatures become less important if the appearance of an actor in a new role is accompanied by a spoken "*Enter Cymbeline*."

⁶For a fuller account of the staging of such forest scenes in the first performances see Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 32–34.

⁷As John Meagher argues ("Economy and Recognition: Thirteen Shakespearean Puzzles," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34 [1984]: 19–20) a playgoer watching *As You Like It* in 1599 would have seen in 4.3 "the same actor who played Oliver" but that actor "is now wearing different clothes; his manner is entirely different; his voice and bearing are probably changed." A playgoer "used to recognizing the same actors reappearing in quite different roles within a single play" will expect in such a situation ("when an actor enters in such a different guise") "to be informed what character he is now playing, either by an overt identification or by some reliable clues." In this case, however, "no adequate hints have been given in advance and no identification is forthcoming along with the entrance" so that "the appropriate supposition is evidently that this is a new character, and we must wait to learn who." For Meagher, this inference is true and not true in that Oliver is not "new" but this Oliver *is*—"a radically reformed and transformed Oliver" whom we finally recognize. The problem for those first playgoers as set up by Meagher is compounded when an actor playing the "new" Oliver has also been seen as Touchstone-Duke Senior-Duke Frederick. What may have been a clever twist in the first performances becomes a narrative puzzle when done in a five-actor show.

⁸For an account of the problems in staging some key scenes in *The Tempest* drawn from my playgoing experience see Alan C. Dessen, *Rescripting Shakespeare: The Text, the Director, and Modern Productions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 149–54.

⁹Less “magical” but deliciously theatrical was the Bergomask in Fall 2001 presented as a Riverdance number with much kicking and stamping. At one performance after the onstage courtiers had applauded, playgoers thought that the show was over, so that these five actors to my knowledge were the only ones to get a standing ovation before they had finished.

