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## Shakespeare's Theatre Games

"Il faut entrer le jeu; il ne supporte pas le scepticisme."  
-- Paul Valéry

"All hid, all hid; an old infant play."  
--Love's Labours Lost

To imagine a "pre-modern" Shakespeare we need first to decide what or how "modern" Shakespeare is. We need to identify some qualities or traits that mark "the modern," which Shakespeare or some aspect of him can be said to precede. This is not an easy task, as "the modern" is a category very difficult to identify clearly. The requirement of "preceding" is also marked by an ambiguity: does it merely indicate coming before, in the sense that, say, a dinosaur precedes a primate? (For there may be some element of whatever it is that is before "the modern" that is merely prior to it without in some way leading to it or serving as its forebear or foundation.) Or does the "pre-modern" in some way adumbrate modernity, if we take the prefix to indicate continuity as well as discontinuity? Are we looking, that is, for an aspect of Shakespeare's work that affronts modernity, whose separation from it is stark and whose heritage in it is null? Or are we looking rather for a view of his work on the horizon of which glimmers what will one day be "modernity"?

The formulation of a "pre-modern Shakespeare" also engages several other ways of framing that which precedes modernity that are or might be current. "Pre-modern Shakespeare" carefully sidesteps a more aggressively counter-traditional claim for a "medieval Shakespeare," a banner that no one seems to have taken up in any absolute sense.<sup>i</sup> Discussion of Shakespeare's relation to "the medieval" has been frequent, yet usually in terms of what Shakespeare "inherits" or some such locution, implying that a transition, even a death, has already taken place. "Pre-modern Shakespeare" also issues a deliberate challenge to the recently prevailing, perhaps too familiar, language of an "early modern Shakespeare" that locates the playwright firmly within the broad margins of modernity. Is a "premodern Shakespeare" also a "pre-early-modern Shakespeare"? Or does the former replace the latter, moving the finish-line of modernity further from the runner?

In all of this, one has to choose one's "modernity" carefully. Shakespeare as an early harbinger of the Industrial Revolution, surely a key component of "modernity" under any description, probably will not get commentators very far. Shakespeare as a wrestler with the spectre of Capital, on the other hand, is a well-traveled path, but some historians, such as E.P Thompson, have argued that the history of Capital in England runs squarely back into centuries before Shakespeare, who joins it well into the game.<sup>ii</sup> There may even be strands of "modernity" – or at least of whatever succeeds and is distinct from "premodern Shakespeare" -- that have now themselves passed over into something else (I do not especially mean into that vexed bookend, "postmodernity"), strands that, in doing so, have found Shakespeare alive and well on the other side.

In what follows, I want to look at one of these latter instances, an aspect of Shakespeare, entwined with other aspects to be sure, that seems to me to mark a way of proceeding as a dramatist that comes to him from earlier plays and theatrical habits, that recedes or is pushed aside in "the idea of the theatre," in Francis Fergusson's phrase, that succeeds his work, and that may have more recently come into view in a renewed way.<sup>iii</sup> This aspect of Shakespeare would therefore be "pre-modern" in both of the senses above: it falls away across a boundary marking the modern on one hand, and yet reappearing with another, more recent, moment of "the modern" on the other. The aspect of Shakespeare's work I wish to examine is its recurrent habit of play.

## I.

In the third act of Hamlet, as the Danish court is assembling to watch a visiting troupe perform "The Murder of Gonzago", Hamlet turns from sparring with the King to ask Polonius about his stage career:

**HAMLET** My lord, you play'd once i' th' university, you say?

**POLONIUS** That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

**HAMLET** What did you enact?

**POLONIUS** I did enact Julius Caesar. I was kill'd i' th' Capitol; Brutus killed me.

**HAMLET** It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. Be the players ready?

**ROSENCRANTZ** Ay, my lord, they stay upon your patience.

(3.2.98-106)<sup>iv</sup>

Commentators have seen a company joke here, referring to the roles taken by these same actors in recent performances of Julius Caesar. Along with that, however, there seems to be a small game of words over what to call what stage performers do. Hamlet remarks that he has heard that Polonius “played once i’ th’ university”. But Polonius replies that he was “accounted a good actor”, replacing the implied “player” with another, Latinate term. Hamlet ripostes with an even nicer term, perhaps edged with slight mockery, which Polonius adopts: “What did you enact?” “I did enact Julius Caesar.” But when Hamlet, having again dispatched Caesar, turns back from old university memories to the show at hand, he reverts to his earlier term “Be the players ready?”<sup>v</sup>

Polonius’s preference for avoiding the vocabulary of players and playing here suggests something, I think, about the contest between two sets of terms for the theatre around 1600, a contest that has since been settled in his favour.<sup>vi</sup> A quick inspection of Shakespeare’s use of the terms “player” and “actor” reveals, as one might expect from Polonius’ preference, that “player” and “playing” is the usual professional term, while “actor” tends to designate an amateur, especially a learned amateur.<sup>vii</sup> Perhaps related to this distinction, and building on the difference in prestige attached to it, “actor” also tends to occur in Shakespeare in situations of praise, “player” of dispraise. On the one hand we find “a well-graced actor” (Richard 2), “our Roman actors” (Julius Caesar), “a good actor” (Hamlet); on the other, there are “these harlotry players” (1 Henry 4), “merely players” (As You Like It), “a strutting player” (Troilus), “a poor player” (Macbeth).<sup>viii</sup> Plays in which both terms occur are interestingly concentrated in the middle of Shakespeare’s career (As You Like It, Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, Julius Caesar), and, although the sample is not large enough to be clear, it appears “actor” may be taking over from “player” over the course of Shakespeare’s writing.<sup>ix</sup>

In these details of Shakespeare’s usage, we seem to encounter a significant transition in the vocabulary of the theatre, from player to actor. The former term associates theatrical activity with playing and other forms of the non-serious, recreational or gamesome. The latter, emerging term dignifies the theatre, associating it with the world of real events, of deeds and “actions”.<sup>x</sup>

Hamlet himself, typically, is poised between the two, and speaks on his first appearance of “actions that a man might play” (1.2.84).

I want to focus here on the suggestiveness of the older vocabulary for a view of plays or aspects of plays as play, and argue that the notion of the theatre as a form of play or an event which includes various kinds of games or play-routines is very much a part of Shakespeare's sense of what players do and what plays are made of, even as another vocabulary is growing through that notion and may be confronting it with another for which play is less central. This element of Shakespeare's drama seems to me a vital part of the construction and appeal of his work, one that derives from and develops older kinds of drama, even as he raises them to new levels of complexity and resonance. It also seems to me to be a form of what Jean Cocteau called “la poésie du theatre” which declined or disappeared from the more mimetically oriented theatre, one we might call “modern” and which certainly saw itself as reforming, that emerged over the seventeenth century.<sup>xi</sup>

## II.

The case for a picture of medieval playing as a form of “play” was first fully articulated by V. A. Kolvé in his book on the medieval mystery cycles, The Play Called Corpus Christi. In that book, Kolvé laid out an argument that specifically sought to rescue what had been viewed as the crudenesses, incongruities and failures of tone in medieval drama by placing them instead under the rubric of the playful, a mode of dramatic presentation that enjoyed and shared with its audience its exploration of the seriously non-serious and made no dangerous claims to mime or participate in what it presented:

The aim of the Corpus Christi drama was to celebrate and elucidate, never, not even temporarily, to deceive. It played action in “game” – not in “ernest” – within a world set apart, established by convention and obeying rules of its own. A lie designed to tell the truth about reality, the drama was understood as significant play.<sup>xii</sup>

Kolvé frames his picture of the “play” of drama in terms borrowed from Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens, terms that lead back to a picture of aesthetic activity as disinterested playful enjoyment

deriving from Kant and Schiller.<sup>xiii</sup> The seriousness of this implicit lineage no doubt derives from Kolvé's quite reasonable objection to the then-established view that the medieval drama had no theoretical picture of itself and its purposes but was, as it were, a kind of naïvely happy upgrowth. But as O.B Hardison Jr. points out, the theoretical scaffolding adopted from Huizinga is not really necessary to Kolvé's argument, and Kolvé himself does not deploy it aggressively.<sup>xiv</sup> A moment's reflection will suggest that almost any form of drama that is not altogether sacramentalised has to admit somewhere in its account of itself a working sense in which the actions played are not serious. One does not need a fully worked-out theory of the nature and place of play in human life to perceive or discuss the ludic in drama. But Kolvé's point is an important one notwithstanding: that the medieval theatre sustained and invested in a notion of dramatic performance as suspended or withheld from actual deeds more than later drama in an increasingly naturalistic mode was inclined to do.

More recently, Glending Olson has pursued the theory of medieval "plays as play" from a different angle, grounding his argument not in a general theory of play whose links are modern and anthropological, but in medieval religious and philosophical discussions of play as an ethical activity. In an important article tracing medieval scholastic and other discussions of play as recreation, Olson shows that dramatic representation was not clearly distinct from other forms of entertainment that were collectively analysed under a rubric derived ultimately from commentary on a passage in Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics on the mean and extreme varieties of "giving amusement."<sup>xv</sup> Dramatic playing as a species of the general category of play was understood as "a kind of social *activity* rather than as a kind of artistic creation or object," and in this way could be judged ethically according to whether it served the proper ends of human being, was decorous, was appropriate to the circumstances of participants and occasion, and so forth.<sup>xvi</sup> Olson reconstructs and elaborates from the texts he examines the detailed intellectual context of "a basic Christian distinction between wicked, human, and spiritual play" within which "as well as within strictly Aristotelian discussions, many people articulated their thinking about performance as some type of play activity."<sup>xvii</sup>

By providing a context within which the generic distinction between dramatic play and other forms of play as human social behaviour is to a large extent elided, Olson's work shows that Kolvé's basic point remains a sound one, even in the face of reservations about the extent that positive references to "games" and "plays" in surviving records denote dramatic performance.<sup>xviii</sup> Olson goes on to show how this framework of "play as play" informs both the structure and logic of the only extended medieval English discussion of the popular theatre, the "Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge," a single discourse likely compiled from two separate discussions written probably around 1400 in the vicinity of west Huntingdonshire.<sup>xix</sup>

The authors of the pieces comprising the "Tretise" engage in strong and sustained polemic against what they see as the perversion of human effort in the "pleyinge" of "miraclis," a disputed term by which they seem to denote a variable range of dramatic activity.<sup>xx</sup> A central plank in the argument, indeed, is that drama is by its very nature not a serious, or "ernest" activity, and that it is, as recreation, essentially low and occupied with bodily pleasures, having nothing of the spirit about it. Hence it is incompatible with a properly devotional mind or conduct, both of which call for higher and more strenuous energies, that must be husbanded by honest recreation and not squandered in unworthy play:

And herby we answeren ... that verry recreation is leevful, occupyinge in  
lasse werkis, to more ardently worschen grettere werkis. And therefore siche  
miraclis pleyinge ne the sighte of hem is no verrey recreasion but fals and  
worldly, as provyn the dedis of the fautors of siche pleyis that yit nevere  
tastiden verily swetnesse in God, traveilinge so mucche therinne that their  
body wolde not sofisen to beren siche a traveile of the spirite...<sup>xxi</sup>

The overall goal of the Treatise is one that we might characterise from recent literary criticism as the ideological demystification of drama. What foolish defenders have argued to be harmless and recreative mirth and even devotionally motivated and motivating, the Treatise undertakes to reveal as, at best, a waste of human energies that ought to be better deployed, and, at worst, a diabolical trivialization of sacred precept and exemplum, a form of "lese-majesté" against divine seriousness.

What is significant here is the basic ground, shared between defenders and detractors of drama, on which the Tretise chooses to do battle: that drama is a form of play, debased or approved according to one's lights. While there are other strands to the discussion – the comparison of plays to visual images as occasions of devotion for instance – the focus on playing, as the title suggests, is central. The Tretise works hard to assimilate the neutral vocabulary of “play” to a more negative one of “jape” and “bourde,” warning bluntly that “no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye the miracles and werkis that Crist so ernystfully wroughte to oure helthe.”<sup>xxii</sup> Sternly prosecutorial, the Tretise concedes what seems the defense's strongest point, only to turn it back on the defenders.

## II

These theoretical and philosophical explorations are useful in establishing a general intellectual framework for drama as a form of play in the later medieval period, a framework that supports the continuing use of “plays” and “players” as the standard vocabulary for dramatic events and those who engage in them. These modes of thought may also, as Kolvé argued and as Olson shows in the latter part of his article, be taken up into the vernacular religious drama itself in its recurrent concern with varieties and values of play staged within individual pageants – Christ as the object of a torturing game, dicing for Christ's clothes, Mak's joke of “switch the baby”, and so on.<sup>xxiii</sup> Olson intriguingly suggests that at least some of these instances may reflect the drama's self-conscious attentiveness to the ambivalent character of play within the very analysis he has uncovered, raising for the audience in concrete form “the problem of play itself...as an inducement to reflection on what proper playing is.”<sup>xxiv</sup> If this is so, it provides a striking anticipation of the kind of meta-theatrical reflection on its own procedures en courant for which Shakespearean dramaturgy is so often noted.

This is not the place to undertake an extended discussion of opportunities for actor and audience registration of playing as “play” in the cycle plays or in plays from other theatrical

traditions, such as Mankind. Nor can we here trace filiations between these traditions and the commercial repertory theater of later Elizabethan London -- a large and well-inhabited, if also disputed, subject. However, for present purposes, it is worth drawing attention to some pieces of evidence that suggest a continued association between the traces of medieval drama and ideas of play. Though concrete instances of Shakespeare's borrowing or alluding to the cycle-plays are difficult to demonstrate, two for which cases have been made are notable for their specifically ludic character and for the tone of play -- if grim play -- that they introduce into the plays that host them.

The first of these, and the more generally admitted, is the short interlude of the Porter in Macbeth, who comes onstage to answer the heavy knocking at the gate and proceeds to "devil porter" an imagined scenario of admitting damned souls to hell:

Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer, that hanged himself on th' expectation of plenty. Come in time! Have napkins enow about you, here you'll sweat for't. (*Knocking within*)  
(2.3.3-6)

Howard Felperin has explored the resonances created by Shakespeare's embedding of such traces of an older dramaturgy and scenario within his "modern" tragedy.<sup>xxv</sup> Here it seems important that this takes the specific form of a little piece of inset play, a grimly comic vignette both like and unlike the moment in which it stands, and which it glosses by analogy even while explicitly refusing the comparison: "But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further." It is as though the older drama, as Shakespeare recollects it, must import its large apocalyptic theme into Macbeth accompanied by a characteristic modal playfulness.

Something similar occurs in another passage whose analogy to a cycle-play sequence has been argued, this time by Emrys Jones in a chapter of his The Origins of Shakespeare. Jones surveys a number of possible recollections of the cycles, and makes a case in particular for a similarity of structure between the crowning of York on his molehill in Henry VI Part Three and medieval scenes of the tormenting of Christ, commenting that "in view of the prominence given in the mysteries to the malice of Christ's accusers ... it seems likely that something of their ritual of torment was carried over into Margaret's role in this scene."<sup>xxvi</sup> It is true, as Jones also concedes, that the historical episode is compared to the Passion in Holinshed, where Shakespeare surely

read it, and that that source, along with the account in the Gospels, might have been a sufficient trigger for what happens to York at the hands of his enemies.<sup>xxvii</sup> But the combination of the Biblical subtext, not explicit in Shakespeare's version, with the staging of a savage sport suggests again, as with Macbeth, that the matter of the old Biblical plays appeared to Shakespeare's imagination bound up with a ludic dramaturgy in which "Ecce homo" was as much the name of a game as of a Passion scene:

Why art thou patient, man? Thou shouldst be mad;  
And I, to make thee mad, do mock thee thus.  
Stamp, rave, and fret, that I may sing and dance.  
Thou wouldst be fee'd, I see, to make me sport:  
York cannot speak unless he wear a crown.  
A crown for York! and, lords, bow low to him;  
Hold you his hands whilst I do set it on.  
*(Putting a paper crown on his head)*  
Ay, marry, sir, now looks he like a king!  
Ay, this is he that took King Henry's chair,  
And this is he was his adopted heir.

(1.4.89-98)

These two examples are merely suggestive, and the traces of earlier dramaturgy in Shakespeare are wider than this. They extend to a whole array of elements inherited from a popular drama which, by 1600, had been confronted or overlaid or combined with more recent, humanist ideas in several waves, at least since the work of Rastell in the 1530s. What is striking about much of what is continuous with earlier drama is, as with these cycle-play examples, how prominent elements of the ludic remain in what is retained. Robert Weimann's discussion of the continuing authority of "the popular tradition in the theatre", for instance, locates a particular agency and force of that tradition in a mode of relation with the audience that he argues is descended from actor's positioning on the medieval "platea."<sup>xxviii</sup> For the present purpose, Weimann's "platea" mode is particularly notable for its persistent and self-conscious tendency to experimental playfulness, sharing the purposes of game with the audience in a wide variety of modes. Indeed, Weimann's work could be used to supplement Olson's, providing a part of what he gestures towards in admitting that his excavation in intellectual history takes in only one aspect of the relevance of play to medieval drama and can "by no means...be said to constitute *the* late-medieval theory of drama or performance."<sup>xxix</sup>

What I am concerned with here, however, is not so much the continuity of particular figures or strategies in staging between earlier and later drama as their common idea of drama as comprising a form and an occasion of play or game.<sup>xxx</sup> This is not an idea that theoretical or critical treatments of drama contemporary with Shakespeare are very comfortable with or interested in. Arguments such as Sidney's, which attach drama to the prestigious and high-flown realm of poetry rather than to the ethical sphere of recreative play, find these ludic aspects of drama, insofar as they countenance it at all, difficult to assimilate to their notions of decorum. The very elements that Weimann discusses and that Olson illuminates are among the likeliest to earn the scorn of commentators worried about the "mongrel" character of an art whose preference is notoriously for "mingling kings and clowns." Indeed, it may be that the urgent need for reform of the drama seen by humanists and other exponents of the new learning is in part the product of their removal of it from the category of play and its reinscription under the rubric of art. The verbal tussle between Hamlet and Polonius would then be one staging-place not only for two different social locations of drama but for two quite different ideas of what drama was for and what concerns should govern it.

A picture of the playhouse and the players as engaged in deliberate play – including such aspects of playing as competition, collective pretense, and arguments about the rules – can illuminate Shakespeare's dramatic designs, the kinds of tasks he gives his actors to do, and the kind of engagement his plays call for from audiences. Rather than offering an intellectual context or official vocabulary for the idea of "plays as play", as Olson so capably does for the earlier period, I want in the rest of this essay to look at the way some of Shakespeare's plays respond to the idea of play, and include instances of playing both at the level of explicit theme and incident and, deeper in their structure, in dramatic actions imagined as sorts of games. The discussion here will be less an investigation of theoretical histories of play, and more an exploration of the working texture of plays themselves as play. I will begin with some theatrical instances of a motive and goal visible everywhere in human play, and not least among actors: competition.

We know a great deal less than we would like about the conditions and habits of association of theatre professionals in Shakespeare's day. Matters of rehearsal, backstage organization, company hierarchy, relations among actors, and so forth, are for the most part undocumented and likely to remain so. There are no theatrical memoirists or performance diarists of the period, no rehearsal chapbooks or logs, barely even a clear record of scripts reshaped by actors at work.<sup>xxxix</sup> If we want to think about the creative and professional environment of the playhouse and the stage, we are forced to work as much backwards from what we observe now, running the risk of anachronism, as forwards from the few meager scraps of contemporary information that survive.<sup>xxxix</sup>

One such scrap is provided by a famous anecdote from John Manningham's "diary" for March 1602.<sup>xxxix</sup> The anecdote runs as follows:

"Upon a time when Burbage played Richard the 3rd there was a Citizen grew so far in liking with him, that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Richard the 3rd. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before, was entertained, and at his game ere Burbage came. Then message being brought that Richard the 3d. was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard the 3rd. Shakespeare's name William."

Despite the racy attractiveness of this joke, it would be wrong, I think, to take it as an accurate account of specific relations between either the poet or the actor and any woman, or women in general.<sup>xxxix</sup> It smacks too much of a piece of convenient urban folklore, a fabliau passed around among the professional lads and based on the ready hook of the actors' first names -- which Manningham has to explain to himself, as though he might forget.<sup>xxxix</sup> But some things, can, I think, fairly be proposed from the fact that the anecdote circulated and was found both funny and plausible enough to be so.

First: rather than a story about Shakespeare's or Burbage's relations with women, this seems to me a story about their relations with one another, mediated through a conveniently titillating foil. The "Citizen" has really no other function than the generic one of setting up a bawdy tale. But the use of her does telegraph certain conventions of the gag which reveal interesting commonplaces about "theatrical persons": that sexual and theatrical energies might feed off one

another, that star actors might be charismatic objects of desire, that a competitive tension might exist between an actor shining in a role and the writer of that role (it is not William Sly or Will Kemp, both in the company, who pips Burbage at the post).<sup>xxxvi</sup> The theatre emerges in the anecdote as an enterprise charged with emotional risk and the illicit pleasures of impersonation, of wit, of sexual triumph. And it is significant that the story appears in 1602, in the midst of the creative partnership between Shakespeare and Burbage, whose talent, though we have scant record of it, must have been even then catalyzing the great roles being written for him.

Manningham, that is, is recording a version of a contemporary sense that in Shakespeare and Burbage's partnership something extraordinary was happening which was part cooperative and part competitive, charged with mutual admiration and resentment, opportunism, domination, and dependence. The tale asserts that the two are rivals and, in a sense, twins, supplanter and supplanted, with hints of the brother-friend-foe paradigm filling the plays they were creating together. Shakespeare's triumph in the gag is a preposterous coup that also claims a priority in the creative process: script is to actor, crows the upstart (his head out the window in the 1759 version of the joke), as conquering William is to crooked Richard. On stage, William may play second banana, but in backstairs work, he comes before.

As it happens, a fascinating gloss on Manningham's gag along these lines is built into the very play that provides its pretext. The middle acts of Richard 3 are taken up with a partnership between Richard and Buckingham, and though it appears unlikely that Shakespeare played Buckingham (what little knowledge we have of his acting suggests he took smaller roles),<sup>xxxvii</sup> an awareness of rivalry as an element in the partnership of the actors forms an important part of these scenes in performance.

From its very outset, a strategic twinning of the two politicians is the ground-note of their alliance. As Richard notes when they first join forces, Buckingham is "My other self, my counsel's consistory,/ My oracle, my prophet, my dear cousin" (2.2.151-2).<sup>xxxviii</sup> And when, after the summary execution of Hastings, they venture on the heart of their design, the pair provide a prologue to their show with the very rhythm of an old double-act musical hall routine, complete with funny costumes:

*Enter RICHARD [OF GLOUCESTER] and BUCKINGHAM, in rotten armor, marvellous ill-favored.*

*Glou.* Come, cousin, canst thou quake and change thy color,  
Murder thy breath in middle of a word,  
And then again begin, and stop again,  
As if thou wert distraught and mad with terror?

*Buck.* Tut, I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,  
Speak and look back, and pry on every side....

(3.5.1-6)

It is significant the audience is given no hint until well into the scene as to why this pair of comic tragedians are kitted out in such bizarre togs. That is, their costumes are obviously there as costumes for a theatrical purpose that, virtuosi as they are, they will invoke at the appropriate point in the business. The effect is rather like watching a famous comedian appear with a prop that immediately takes on an expectation of significance – Benny Hill holding balloons, Laurel and Hardy with ladders. Competitive co-operation is the subject here, and, insofar as the double-act is an ancient and typical genre of comedic business, we recognize that a familiar “schtick” is in play.

Grafting that schtick onto “the mighty dukes” in conspiracy to gull the citizens into electing Richard as king is an inspired piece of theatrical wit – and its logic continues to shape what follows. Buckingham provides a list of objects to frame Richard’s performance of himself as one of the meek (“And look you get a prayer-book in your hand,/ And stand between two churchmen, good my lord” 3.7.47-8), and gives him directorial tips (“Be not you spoke with but by mighty suit;/... And be not easily won to our requests:” 3.7.46, 50), as though he were an author instructing an actor, or a senior man his apprentice.<sup>xxxix</sup> Their collaborative rivalry is even imagined, almost anticipating Manningham’s joke, as a scene of seduction. Buckingham advises Richard with vulgar brio to “play the maid’s part, still answer nay, and take it.” (3.7.51), diverting aggression against Richard towards a conventional comic scapegoat. Matey misogyny absorbs collaborative contest, just as Richard’s happy pretense at resistance conceals a tough-minded ambition that will eventually do down his preceptor in much the same way that William the conqueror would come before Richard Burbage.

The consequences of deploying playful actorly rivalry as an undercurrent in the development of Richard and Buckingham pays off handsomely in the rest of the sequence. How this works becomes visible if one imagines the pair not only as politicians conspiring to steal the

crown, but as star actors competing for top honors in outrageous stage posturing, in sheer gall. Through a series of alternating speeches, Richard and Buckingham sing a kind of lovers' duet of virtuoso play-acting for audiences both on and off-stage, climaxing in a delicious exchange later cut from the Folio for an over-the-top oath, an act of censorship already capped in advance by Richard's mockery of the whole performance. Richard, like, Claude Rains is "Shocked, shocked!":

[*Buck.*] ... And in this resolution here we leave you.  
Come citizens. 'Zounds, I'll entreat no more.  
*Glou.* O, do not swear, my lord of Buckingham.

(3.7.218-20)

The scene's triumph is the actors' emulous delight in sustaining the contest as long and as high as possible, each driving the other to yet more extravagant displays.<sup>xi</sup> The play of virtuoso emulation is thus built into the very acting texture of this central scene of Richard 3 just as, from the outset, evocation of the perilous high-wire act of performance – part of a thematics of "height" in general in the play – is a prominent part of the play's emotional texture.<sup>xii</sup>

#### IV

A quite different, but no less productive, awareness of the actor as performer playing his role as a stage-game helps to shape the rhythm of some scenes in Twelfth Night. Here one is conscious not so much of the actor's virtuosity, as of actors working script against stage moment in fruitful improvisational interplay – interplay which has implications for other sorts of improvisation, such as that of gender role, that the play attends to.

Consider how the scene of Viola's first address to Olivia unfolds. A doubly-disguised actor/messenger confronts a veiled figure who may or may not be the addressee of the message. The message, carefully scripted and memorized, fails from the refusal of its target to co-operate: the sacred "text" is belated ("I have heard it already"), is even proclaimed "heresy". Yet from the forced improvisation of speeches and business that Olivia's refusal precipitates, comes an effective - if unintended, even diabolical - counter-message. Script and improvisation upon script layer themselves through the scene: actors have texts and build upon or depart from them, at their peril or to their glory; bodies have sexes that are offered the routines and scriptings of gender to accept, refuse, or otherwise put in play; messengers have messages "excellently

penned” to deliver verbatim or, as Feste insists, with “vox” allowed. The self-consciousness of the actor’s set towards his character -- his “placement” of himself as actor in the scene -- is itself assimilated to the thematic concerns of the script’s design.

Another useful instance of a kind of game being played among actors on stage takes place in the letter-reading scene in Act Two of the same play. The plot sets this up as an exercise in the power of Toby and company to mock Malvolio in secret as they watch him gulled by Maria’s letter and his own self-conceit. Almost his every remark in the scene is punctuated, or punctured, by some threat, joke, insult or flout. There could hardly be a clearer instance of the actor’s vulnerability to ridicule and humiliation by an audience. The scene even presents Malvolio contemplating himself in the posture of an actor – rehearsing his own fantasy of himself as “Count Malvolio”, uncovering what seems a heaven-sent script for the realization of that fantasy by taking direction (“I will be point devise, the very man”) – even while both his audiences marvel at his credulity to “impossible passages of grossness.” One could hardly ask for a clearer stage rendition of what Meredith Skura calls “the confrontation between the player’s grandiose ambitions and the threat of humiliation.”<sup>xiii</sup>

And yet, at the same time, as anyone will have learned who has tried to rehearse this scene of exultant degradation, the one most in control is the actor playing Malvolio. For the task of his spies – not to be seen – gives him an almost absolute authority to destroy their theatrical effectiveness precisely by the threat of his seeing them: they must submit to the necessity of remaining invisible, an imperative which reduces them to automata desperately improvising ways to stay hidden even while the script and the comic bent of the scene require them to risk breaking cover. A good lively realization of the scene demands this perilous balance between exposure and concealment, repeating in a different key that of Malvolio himself, while, as it were, inverting it. And over this aspect of the scene the eye of the actor Malvolio can exercise an almost Olympian “austere regard of control,” as he puts it. All he has to do is threaten to look and his tormentors must scramble, panic-stricken, for whatever cover they can make or feign. The scene played to its maximum potential dares the exquisite knife-edge of this contest of powers to

humiliate and expose. It works best when it risks most, and convinces the audience to accept and enjoy the game of that risk.

Hence perhaps, out of the struggle for mastery -- a struggle that may include the usual casting of a lead actor in the role of Malvolio, with all the backstage tensions such things can generate -- arises the penchant for practical jokes that seems to haunt this scene.<sup>xliii</sup> Letters, being places of concealment, have a habit of attracting such stage skullduggery anyway, but Malvolio's very line seems to invite exploitation: "What employment have we here?" He does not know what may be in the letter he is about to open: the scene, for him, is horribly full of hiding places, so that improvisation, his own or someone else's, may exalt or undo him at any moment. Any such practical joke is, as it were, merely the displacement of a basic element of the scene's and the play's design, which displays a pervasive interest in how individual authority, luck or chutzpah may wrest a given or inhabited structure (gender, social class, grief) to its own devices, may rescue from the wreck, "like Arion on the dolphin's back", some unlooked-for blessedness.

## V

Scenes of spying and exposure such as Malvolio's are generic to comedy, and, of course, the basic situation of the theatre audience as unseen seers is always at hand for invocation as a spying-game of an analogous kind. Shakespeare seems to have had a special taste for such scenes, and to have taken delight in manipulating their conditions, in particular by playing with the question of who controls them as a deliberate game for the audience's enjoyment. Such scenes, or variants on them occur in, among other plays, The Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labors Lost (in a bravura "nested" design), A Midsummer Night's Dream, Hamlet, Othello and The Tempest. But perhaps the most startling spying game is played in Much Ado About Nothing 2.3 where the usual form of the game is staged at once "straight" and inverted, and there is a possibility that the inversion is then itself complicated to further compound the comic effect. In the scene, Benedick spies "the Prince and Monsieur Love" coming, and resolves to "hide me in the arbour", beginning a standard spying-scene pattern of the kind seen in Twelfth Night. However, in this case, the polarity of the action is no sooner set than it is deliberately

reversed: where Benedick thinks he is concealed, he is in fact the one being spied upon in plain view by the trio he hides from ("See you where Benedick hath hid himself"). The scene thus stages in exposed form the rhythm of control and evasion that we have already seen covert in the Malvolio scene, but this time the inner dynamic is externalized: for greater comic effect, those in the center must telegraph to us the willfulness of their "failure" to see the watcher. We are on the other side of the joke this time, and correspondingly, the greater power to shape the scene is in fact the actor Benedick's, who has the ability to challenge the others not to see him by "ineptly" breaking cover at comic moments. One could imagine how a rehearsal might experiment with various ways of forcing this tussle to the surface.

But there is also a further turn to this mechanism. There is a strong possibility, though definitive evidence is lacking, that Shakespeare adds to the situation another layer of pursuit and mutual unsight that points up the element of collaboration in the actors' assignments not to see and be seen. The scene as a whole begins with the following brief exchange:

*Enter Benedick alone.*

*Bene:* Boy!

*[Enter Boy.]*

*Boy:* Signior?

*Bene:* In my chamber-window lies a book, bring it hither to me in the orchard.

*Boy:* I am here already, sir. *Exit.*

*Bene:* I know that, but I would have thee hence, and here again.  
(2.3.1-7)<sup>xiv</sup>

As it stands in the text, this snippet has no sequel and seems utterly otiose. Why introduce a boy who serves no purpose except for a feeble pageboy quip? In a parallel scene in Love's Labours Lost, (3.1), Moth enters with Armado in order to sing and engage in lengthy banter. But here the boy appears only to be ordered off on a pointless errand.

But suppose the point of the order is precisely that it is executed. A particularly effective way of staging this scene brings the boy back on, armed with the requested book, at some carefully chosen point.<sup>xiv</sup> His puzzlement at Benedick's furious attempts to wave him off and the other trio's equally opaque refusal to see him while not being seen not to see him, both produces maximum comic dismay and compounds the overlapping awarenesses of the scene. This is a strategy quite in line with the play's ongoing thematic concern with the complexities of hearing,

over-hearing, mistaken identity and the engineering of information, where people routinely pretend to know what they do not, and not to know what they do, and even not to know what they do not know.<sup>xlvi</sup> And such a ploy would be quite characteristic of Shakespeare's interest at around this time in "exponential" compounding, as it were, of the standard theatrical machineries of his own medium, as he does with gender disguise in As You Like It, or with the cross-identifications of role-playing in the tavern scene of 1 Henry IV.

## VI

My last two examples take up the role of theatre games and game-playing in the world of King Lear.<sup>xlvii</sup> It is notable how often games and gaming seem to be referred to or invoked at crucial moments in this play, although other plays also contain references to games. Both "hide and seek" and "sacks to the mill" appear in Love's Labour's Lost ("All hid, all hid, an old infant play...More sacks to the mill" 4.3.76,79), and both "hoodman blind" (3.4.77) and the chasing/hiding game of "Hide fox and all after" are in Hamlet (4.2.30, Folio only). But King Lear seems unusually rich with them. Explicit references occur when Lear offers to switch the justice and the thief "handy-dandy",<sup>xlviii</sup> or when he bluffs the soldiers "An you get it, you shall get it by running", or greets Cordelia going to prison with the heart-rending "Have I caught thee?", or even when, in wonder at his apparent metamorphosis, he asks of a self-staged mock-Lear "Where are his eyes?" (perhaps covering his eyes as he does so).<sup>xlix</sup> And there are other moments that have the feel of game to them, if not the explicit vocabulary. The image of Gloucester bound to his chair, "tied to the stake" like a bear, as he says, may also recall the grim buffeting games of medieval Passion plays.<sup>i</sup> Most of all, the initial gambit of Lear's question to his three daughters, which certainly plays well as a grim piece of half-humour in the old man, rather resembles an ancient con-trick, the "shell game", a version of which is recorded as early as a fifteenth-century painting by Hieronymus Bosch.<sup>ii</sup> Detecting some such game latent in the opening scene brings with it the double irony of a Lear willfully conned by the game he himself has proposed: instead of the artist, he turns out to be the mark.

In addition to such local allusive play, a variety of forms of “hide and seek” appear to be explored in the action of the play, and to provide a running gloss not only on the thematic interest of the action in seeing, not seeing, failing to see, refusing to see, hiding from view, etc., but also on the uses of theatricality itself as a complex figure of hiding/seeking.<sup>ii</sup> A simple word-count confirms the prominence of hiding/seeking in the play. Forms of “hide” or related terms occur 19 times, and forms of seek 24 times, high numbers in both cases.<sup>iii</sup> Many of these are related to the importance of disguises for both Kent and Edgar and the ongoing pursuits of Lear and Gloucester in the middle acts of the play. But combined with the air of improvisatory play, even if such play is also direly serious, about much of the action (“Pull off my boots, harder! harder!”), it is worth asking whether an awareness of actors at play in their various disguises is not an important part of the emotional texture of any performance of the play. What seems most striking here, even given Shakespeare’s penchant for these kinds of effects, is the depth of scrutiny of disguise, self-disguise, and self-seeking (in both senses) that the play undertakes.

Several critics have written persuasively of this theme of the play in terms of the “covering” action that shame involves: hiding and seeking, from this point of view, can be associated with the play’s relentless impulse to strip its victims bare and expose them to a pitilessly shaming gaze.<sup>iv</sup> But it is striking how the language of hiding and seeking also responds to the actor’s situation as a skilled professional, one who hides himself in the role in order the more effectively to reveal it – and perhaps also himself. Unlike in the study, where the play has often been found unbearable by readers, most famously by Samuel Johnson, witnesses to the stage action can never be unaware that these actions are being played, though their response to that awareness can take many forms. The searing pain of events as imagined and represented is complexly tempered by awareness of the actors’ triumphant assertions of themselves presenting that pain through their play. This is a paradox that lies close to the heart of what the theatre as an art form is made of, and made for.

Here, for instance, is the fugitive Edgar’s version of a plan to hide himself inside a deliberate piece of play-acting:

Whiles I may scape  
I will preserve myself, and am bethought

To take the basest shape and most poorest shape  
That ever penury, in contempt of man,  
Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,  
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots,  
And with presented nakedness outface  
The winds and persecutions of the sky.  
The country gives me proof and president  
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,  
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms  
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;  
And with this horrible object from low farms,  
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,  
Sometimes with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,  
Enforce their charity. Poor Turleygod! poor Tom!  
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.

(2.3.5-21)

Edgar's speech depicts, and may provide the actor a chance to mime, the process of his self-concealment. But this hiding is also a kind of displaced revealing. He will hide, as later scenes make clear, in a version of himself -- Edgar-as-bject, the self-as-elf --, a hiding that will also become an act or process of seeking. The speech draws an unusual degree of attention for Shakespeare to the presence and use of the actor's body as he offers it to be transformed into a new persona, the mask of his non-presence, his nothingness. And at the same time, it will be aggressively offered up to us, the actor's regular sacrifice to our hungry eyes. "Presented nakedness" is deployed to "enforce" charity, to "outface" -- not merely endure -- the "persecutions" -- not merely inconveniences -- of the weather. The phrasing suggests how Edgar will be hiding his father's pursuing presence in the landscape of his assumed madness, shaping within concealment a version of his own predicament. Like Poe's famous "purloined letter" Edgar will become invisible in his very visibility, through which will trace fragmented versions of his situation and desires: punishment and self-punishment, capitulation and resistance.<sup>iv</sup> The self-consciousness in the donning of this role makes of it a kind of parable of the actor's craft in general -- the experimental embrace of a possible self figured through any performance at all, from Lady Bracknell to Stanley Kowalski.

Under such a description, Shakespeare's games of hide-and-seek in King Lear appear as an investigation of how and where human beings hide what they cannot or will not acknowledge, and how those knowledges may be released and confronted through play: "Who is it that can tell

me who I am?" "Lear's shadow." "I would learn that." One can extend such an inquiry quite widely in Shakespeare's work, to ask in what terms any given play construes the business of acting as a game with a particular local scheme to it, whether in Hamlet's call to "Hide fox and all after", or Perdita's sense in The Winter's Tale that "Sure this robe of mine doth change my disposition."

## VII.

My final example, also from King Lear, is the famous "clifftop" scene in Act Four, in which two players are given variant performing tasks whose implications are set at odds. In the contest between them, the rules that govern the game of theatre itself come to attention in a way that bears implications for the availability of playing as a means to inquire into human suffering.

The action begins with the image of two men who appear to be playing different scenes: one man pretends (or pretends to pretend, which looks much the same) to climb a hill; the other pretends not to climb a hill.<sup>lvi</sup> It is possible, if we do not know the play, that we may be confused. And even if we do know the riddle, we still register the competing pretenses of the actors as very different descriptions of their space. In the same way, their conversation as they walk concerns what can or cannot be heard, and we may be unsure which fiction – the hearing or the failure of hearing – is to be taken for "real". When Edgar asks "Hark, do you hear the sea?" the pause while Gloucester listens draws our attention to whatever soundscape we can hear in the theatre, where our senses always follow an actor's lead. When he reports he cannot hear the sea, we are again faced with competing descriptions of our shared space (even if we are at a seaside performance).

When the men stand still, Edgar conjures for his blind father (and, in a different way, for us) the famous image of a vertiginous cliff. He then, as it were, donates this performed description to his father, and to the actor playing him ("Set me where you stand"). The more compelling it is, the more startling and vivid what follows. And again, he does this whether or not we recognize that we are "not" atop a cliff. For we are atop one, at some level, in the layering of illusion of the scene. The energies of the action so far are of an insistent "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't" character.

As Gloucester kneels and then falls over his cliff-which-is-not-a-cliff, we find another instance of the “hide-and-seek” of the play, as Gloucester invokes the gods at last to emerge from hiding and see him:

**Gloucester:** O you mighty gods!           *[He kneels.]*  
This world I do renounce, and in your sights  
Shake patiently my great affliction off.  
If I could bear it longer, and not fall  
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,  
My snuff and loathed part of nature should  
Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O bless him!  
Now, fellow, fare thee well!                   *[He falls.]*

**Edgar:**   Gone sir, farewell.  
And yet I know not how conceit may rob  
The treasury of life when life itself  
Yields to the theft. Had he been where he thought  
By this had thought been past --- Alive or dead?

(4.6.34-41)

It is the audience become surrogate gods here, and who are invited to observe “in our sights” how Gloucester will now embrace the performance of his “great affliction”. The key term is “fall”, hanging at the cliff-edge of the line’s end. Gloucester embraces “falling” and the heavy weight of his body in space as an analogue, more precisely a dramatization, of his great social and personal “fall” from high place to low misery. He calls us to witness this gesture as his surrender to the gravity of events, but also as his triumph, his way of playing with and taking possession of what has happened to him. Since he cannot “not fall” to quarrel with the gods, which would rob him even further of dignity and decorum, he will, in falling, at least obey the exact rules of the genre that has captured him. Gloucester will enact, even embody, tragedy, will empty himself into it and transform his personal miseries in so doing. The space for his doing this, with its rhetoric of intolerable height, its vastness of spatial articulation, its perspectival depth, its vocation, has been partly created by Edgar, but it is Gloucester who possesses it and for whom it is fitted. We are invited to see him in his mind’s eye falling down the long cliff-face, past the startled sapphire-gatherer, onto the beach where the fishermen, low in several senses, walk like mice.

But of course, the scene does not play out this way. The cliff is an illusion, and against Gloucester’s vision -- and the actor’s demonstration -- of his heavy body pushed down by tragic

gravity there stands Edgar with his strange levity. Throughout the scene, Edgar's performance dances around Gloucester's, undercutting and reframing its loftiness, emptying his baleful would-be sublime into simple bathos. Edgar is a con-man. The cliff is made of cards. Handy-dandy, the rules of the theatre game are shifted about.

If Gloucester asserts through his performance that the actors' body has a certain solidity and tragic weight, Edgar's version of the actor's body offers by contrast the picture of theatricality as all mobility and transformation. There is his imaginary evocation of Gloucester's miraculous fall: "Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,/ So many fathom down precipitating,/ Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg." Gloucester-as-fairy, stripped of his heavy suffering, is a mobile piece of matter, without moral inertia, adaptable. Such a body can put on shapes at will, absorb and throw off versions of itself to meet the moment, just as Edgar contrives now to leave a grotesque version of himself behind on the imaginary cliff-top: "As I stood here below, methought his eyes/ Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,/ Horns whelk'd and waved like the enridged sea:/ It was some fiend." This is the actor as Proteus, metamorph, the man of a thousand noses, in whom one can lose oneself "like the enridged sea".

Two versions of the game of being an actor are thus set alongside and against one another in the scene, and an argument about how best to accommodate intense suffering is played out not only in words, but in the contest of styles of theatrical embodiment. The heart of the scene lies in the contest not only of the players as characters, but of their invocations of their own performances as exemplary of styles of being and suffering.

Two workshop anecdotes will, I hope, illustrate these different stakes for the actors playing Gloucester and Edgar. The first suggests how King Lear often casts its extreme demands on actors in terms of the bodily risks and nakednesses they endure. This was brought home to me some years ago in a version of the scene where the actor playing Gloucester, a tall dignified older man, fell over the cliff like a factory chimney and hit the floor with a palpable thud. Undaunted in his blindfold, he arose, but a few moments later, one of his nostrils began, very slightly, to bleed. When, after minor repairs, he continued, his further progress in the scene was haunted for the audience by the thought of his leaving small traces of his blood wherever he

grasped: "O let me kiss that hand!" "O let me wipe it first: it smells of mortality". What was striking here was the way in which the real presence, as it were, of the actor's damaged body wove itself directly and easily into the scene, as though the scene itself called for, or at least welcomed, such a pledge.

But another exemplary accident in another workshop displayed the opposite effect. This time, the actor playing Edgar, withdrawing from Gloucester as requested, inadvertently stepped right over the edge of the "cliff" he had just brought so vividly into imaginative being. The result was an audible gasp from the audience, followed by a laugh of reflexive correction, as Edgar stubbornly, like the cartoon coyote, refused to "fall". The "miracle" of this failure caught the audience off-guard, revealing to them their own investment in the weighty "thereness" of tragedy, and anticipating, in a mode of metatheatrical freedom, what would happen to Gloucester only lines later. Edgar's miraculous buoyancy reminded us of the actor's resilience and, in a way, invulnerability to the scene he was in, a reminder wonderfully like Edgar's own attempt to buoy Gloucester up out of his misery by giving him a new medium or style for the tale of himself.

This extended example of the contests in the "cliff" scene does not provide the matter for a thorough reading of King Lear. One might fairly remain skeptical of both Edgar's motives and his achievement in the attempted cure of his father. But what he is trying to reach is worth attending to, even if it is finally not possible in this play. At the bottom of the cliff, having left behind both tragic heaviness and inhuman lightness, Edgar and Gloucester try to affirm the ordinariness of their bodies and explore what it might be like simply to stand up with one's sorrows: "Give me your arm:/ Up: so. How is 't? Feel you your legs? You stand." This is the nearest Edgar comes to demonstrating what he will later call "ripeness." And this is also the moment where he first tries to return to the language of his ordinary being as Gloucester's son, calling him "father". He signs the purported achievement with a prayer: "Bear free and patient thoughts". But the play still its darker purpose: "Enter Lear, fantastically garlanded with flowers." A new, more savage game pushes Edgar to the rank of appalled spectator.

The above sequence from King Lear, justly famous for coupling emotional intensity and theatrical bravura, also brings together two inter-related aspects of Shakespeare's theatre games

that have been the subject of this essay. On the one hand, the scene frames its central action in terms of some game-like schemes and make-believe scenarios that we easily recognize. We could imagine it, I suppose, as a version of "Blind Man's Buff", in which a blindfolded character tries to catch and name his opponent, who avoids him by dodging about. At the same time, Shakespeare uses the contest of his actors, with their different tasks within the scene, to try – a trial by combat as it were -- two differing approaches to the theatricality of suffering, to test what resources humans might have for bearing, and staging, the unbearable. More largely, Shakespeare's theatre games in King Lear offer an investigation of how and where human beings hide what they cannot or will not acknowledge, and how those knowledges may be released and even confronted before an audience through play: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" "Lear's shadow." "I would learn that." One can extend such an inquiry quite widely in Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, to ask in what terms a given play construes the business of acting as a game with a particular local scheme to it, whether in Hamlet's call to "Hide fox and all after", or Perdita's sense that "Sure this robe of mine doth change my disposition."

#### VIII.

I have tried to suggest how Shakespeare's sense of the actor's task and calling – its exhilarations, challenges, temptations and dangers – led him in certain scenes, often crucial ones for the temper of their plays, to include that calling as part of the texture of what goes on on stage, and in particular to deploy the authority and experience of the actor as a player, that is, as one who is engaged in a serious game. By foregrounding the ludic character of the player's task and including the audience in evoking the deliberate consciousness of the playedness of the action, Shakespeare is developing an idea of playing that derives from the situation and experience of the player from long in the past. One could speculate as to why this particular approach to the crafting of plays, which gives the player's live experience before his audience a large measure of authority as the agent and fulcrum of the event, became less important in

dramatic writing over the course of the seventeenth century. Several elements may have contributed to the shift: a growing dominance of the writer over the actor (shadowed in Manningham's anecdote), changes in acting technique towards "personation," the technologies of an illusionistic stage, the progressive social stratification of genres and audiences. For whatever reason, the drama that succeeded Shakespeare, whether or not one chooses to call it a "modern theatre," was less and less interested in this sort of theatrical design. Only recently, perhaps towards the end of "the modern," and paradoxically in the post-war environment of a later modern-ism, has the performance of Shakespeare, embracing both a salutary poverty of means and a historical commitment to the recreation of his works, once more uncovered this investment in playing as the substance of the play, and in the importance of Shakespeare's theatre games.

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<sup>i</sup> The only such title I have been able to find invites papers that discuss "Shakespeare's medievalism" -- his use of or response to medieval stories -- rather than making the more daring claim for the absorption of Shakespeare wholesale into "the medieval."

<sup>ii</sup> See E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and other essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978). XX

<sup>iii</sup> See Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955).

<sup>iv</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from G. Blakemore Evans, et al. eds., The Riverside Shakespeare 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

<sup>v</sup> This small exchange over terms repeats a similar shift from the last time Hamlet and Polonius met, in the previous act. There, Hamlet talks only of "players" to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but switches to bait Polonius with "When Roscius was an actor at Rome...Then came each actor on his ass." Polonius in turn calls them "the best actors in the world" (2.2.392-398). Later in soliloquy and at the beginning of 3.2, Hamlet is back to speaking of "this player here" and "your players" (2.2.551; 3.2.3).

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<sup>vi</sup> OED records some more recent uses of “player”, but they are generally in contexts where an older practice is being deliberately cited or evoked.

<sup>vii</sup> The earliest occurrence of “actor” for a theatre professional cited in OED is, tellingly, from Sidney’s Defense of Poesie: “There is no Arte delivered to mankinde, that hath not the workes of Nature for his principall object,...on which they [the artists] so depend, as they become Actors and Players as it were, of what nature will have set foorth.” Note that the two terms occur together, straddling the gulf, and that even here, it is not the stage which is being discussed.

<sup>viii</sup> There are exceptions, however: “an unperfect actor” (Sonnets 23:1), “a dull actor” (Coriolanus).

<sup>ix</sup> The exception to this, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, seems to be playing its own deliberate game with status overtones: Bottom refers to the troupe as “actors”, but Egeus/Philostrate and Theseus refer to them as “players”. Perhaps Love’s Labours Lost is making a similar joke when Costard’s “Pompion the Great” refers to “the actors” of the pageant.

<sup>x</sup> Thus in Lucrece, Tarquin is called an “actor” in the sense of a “perpetrator” (Argument, 608), and in Measure for Measure Angelo speaks of “the actor” of a fault. The legal and oratorical senses of “action” and “actor” seem especially relevant to the up-marketing of theatrical terms, at just the time and in much the same way as players like Shakespeare were aspiring to become scholars and gentlemen.

<sup>xi</sup> It is a familiar paradox that the calls for reform of the stage that I here associate with Sidney and Jonson and denote an aspect of “modernity” are framed in terms of a revival of ancient decorum. I would emphasize that the play element I look for in Shakespeare’s designs is only one strand of the workings of his plays, which also include and respond to many other modes, including aspects of the reformist agenda.

<sup>xii</sup> V.A Kolvé, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 32.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Kolvé, p. 19. For criticism of Kolvé on this score, see the review of O.B Hardison Jr in MLQ 29:1 (1968): 94-98.

<sup>xiv</sup> Hardison in MLQ 29:1 (1968): 95.

<sup>xv</sup> See Glending Olson, “Plays as Play: a Medieval Ethical Theory of Performance and the Intellectual Context of the Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge,” Viator 26 (1995): 195-221. The passage in Aristotle, which Olson does not cite, is on “pleasantness in social amusement” from Nicomachean Ethics 2.7.1108a24: “peri de to hêdu to men en paidiai ho men mesos eutrapelos kai hê diathesis eutrapelia” (“with respect to enjoyment and social interaction the intermediate man is witty and the disposition wittiness”). Olson’s article extends to drama in detail an argument he first advanced in his earlier Literature as Recreation in the later Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

<sup>xvi</sup> Olson, “Plays as Play,” p. 197, emphasis in original.

<sup>xvii</sup> Olson, “Plays as play,” p. 205.

<sup>xviii</sup> For a careful sorting of some instances of “play” in surviving records that point to “games” rather than drama, see John C. Coldewey, “Plays and ‘Play’ in Early English Drama,” Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama 28 (1985): 181-88.

<sup>xix</sup> See the revised edition of this text by Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993). A linguistic discussion of the text by Paul A. Johnston Jr gives evidence for both the dual authorship and the location of writing.

<sup>xx</sup> Indeed, as Olson argues, the point seems to be precisely to assimilate more devoutly inclined drama to lewder and cruder kinds of spectacle in order to treat them as spiritually equivalent. Here the general category of play into which all forms of drama fall provides a useful catch-all for polemic denigration. The specific object at which the tretise directs its ire has been closely questioned by Lawrence M. Clopper, first in “Miracula and The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge,” Speculum 65 (1990): 878-905, and in extended form, also responding to Olson’s work, in his important Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Ch. 2. The detailed discussion cannot be resumed here, but turns in the end, as Clopper points out, on how narrowly one is entitled to read medieval generic terms for dramatic performances, a very difficult question to answer. Though Clopper’s points are well taken, Olson seems to me to make the better overall case. Even if the authors of the Tretise were not mainly referring to the vernacular cycle-plays, it is hard to imagine

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any writer with the views expressed in the Tretise countenancing the sort of thing that goes on in, say, the plays of the Wakefield Master.

<sup>xxi</sup> Tretise, ed. Davidson, p. 103.

<sup>xxii</sup> Tretise, p. 93.

<sup>xxiii</sup> See Kolvé, Play Called Corpus Christi, pp. XX-XX. Olson's remarks, all too brief given their richness, appear in "Plays as play", pp. 214-16.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Olson, p. 215.

<sup>xxv</sup> Howard Felperin, Shakespearean Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), Ch. 4, pp. 118-144. Felperin's work is especially helpful interested in what literary "modernity" in Shakespearean drama might mean. See also the comments on this scene of Glynne Wickham in Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 222 and John B. Harcourt, "I Pray You, Remember the Porter," Shakespeare Quarterly 12 (1961): 393-402.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Emrys Jones, The Origins of Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), Ch. 2, pp. 31-84, esp. 54-60. Other passages where Jones argues for analogies include the conspiracy against Gloucester in 2 Henry 6, the baiting of Lear by his daughters and the tribunes' attack on Coriolanus. The sequence in 3 Henry 6 seems to me the strongest of these instances, but Jones' argument is also wider than this.

<sup>xxvii</sup> See esp. Luke 22.63-64. Holinshed also gives the details of the molehill and the paper crown. For the relevant passages from Holinshed, see W.G. Boswell-Stone, Shakespeare's Holinshed 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907), pp. 299-300. Shakespeare fused two variant accounts from Holinshed into the scene given in the play.

<sup>xxviii</sup> See Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre transl. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>xxix</sup> Olson, p. 206.

<sup>xxx</sup> It is significant for my argument that the vocabulary of "plays" and of "games" was not as distinct in 1600 as it is today. The word "plays" was also used to denote recreations that we would now distinguish as "games." For instance, in his "Book of Games" of about 1665, Francis Willughby catalogues his subject matter as "Plaies," discussing "Plaies more simple and easie," "Plaies where only two can plaie," "Plaies for exercise," etc. This suggests that the sense of stage "plays" might also have been closer to games through this period, however it has since diverged. See Francis Willughby's Book of Games ed. David Cram, Jeffrey L. Forgeng and Dorothy Johnson (Aldershot Hants and Burlington VT: Ashgate Press, 2003), esp. pp. 93-4.

<sup>xxxi</sup> On the latter point there has been a great deal of discussion among editors and textual critics, yet little consensus has emerged about what might have been standard procedures, and the evidence, while instructive, is largely inferential. For recent overviews, see e.g. John Jowett, Shakespeare and Text (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Ch. 2; Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, Shakespeare in Parts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>xxxii</sup> Attempts to reconstruct habits and trends in Elizabethan acting include work by B.L Joseph, Elizabethan Acting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1964); Robert Cohen, Acting in Shakespeare (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1991); Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Russell Brown, Shakespeare's Plays in Performance rev. edn. (New York: Applause Books, 1993); and Peter Thomson, "Rogues and Rhetoricians: Acting Styles in Early English Drama" in John Cox and David Scott Kastan eds., A New History of Early English Drama (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 144-56, and Tiffany Stern, Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> The story was retailed independently in 1759, confirming that, whatever its accuracy, it at least had a long currency. See "Thomas Wilkes" (i.e. Samuel Derrick), A General View of the Stage, (London: J. Coote, 1759), pp. 220-221. Derrick could not have seen Manningham's diary, so must have had the story from elsewhere. Derrick is quoted in Samuel Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare: a compact documentary life rev. edn. (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p. 205. Manningham's entry is resumed in Schoenbaum, but not quoted in full.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Katherine Duncan-Jones, in her recent biography Ungentle Shakespeare, takes the anecdote this way, but so generic a story seems to me very unreliable evidence for biography, except

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insofar as the genre itself tells us something. See Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), pp. 131-3.

<sup>xxxv</sup> This suggests that Manningham did not himself know much of Shakespeare, but had heard the story through other channels. "Mr. Touse", named as the source of the tale, was William Towse, a fellow lawyer and a bencher at the Inner Temple, not someone with otherwise-known links to the theater. He also provided Manningham with Spenser's purported verses in response to his lack of advancement by Elizabeth, and other anecdotes and epitomes of contemporary figures. (Schoenbaum, p. 205, misreports the source as Edward Curle, another of Manningham's informants.)

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Actors' matinée-idol attractions in the period are discussed by Meredith Skura in her Shakespeare the actor and the purposes of playing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 34-5. Richard Flecknoe's poem on Burbage (quoted in Skura, p. 52) also points to a tension of agency between writer and actor. I am indebted to Skura's book for much provocative thought.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Don Foster's SHAXICON database, the most systematic – though not therefore reliable -- recent attempt I know of to trace Shakespeare's role assignments, concluded that Shakespeare played "Clarence (in I.i, I.iv, and V.iii) and Scrivener (III.vi). Possibly also Third Citizen (II.iii) in a late revival." Buckingham seems too big a role for this sort of acting repertory. See Foster's post to SHAKSPER on the subject: SHK 8.0422 Re: SHAXICON (Tuesday, 4 July, 1995) now at <http://www.shaksper.net/archives/1995/0531.html>

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Richard's next line, "I as a child will go by thy direction" alerts us brightly to the undersong of ironies: Richard is never more dangerous than when performing his own humility.

<sup>xxxix</sup> It has always seemed to me sublimely apt that Buckingham should later call these churchmen "Two props of virtue for a Christian prince" (3.7.96), and a good laugh can be extracted from a modern audience by using cardboard cutouts for them. Unhappily, the term "prop" for a stage property is not recorded until the nineteenth century. This does not mean, however, that it was not a playhouse term earlier (Henslowe's diary does refer to the "properties" of the Admiral's Men), so the joke is possible but not proved. See Carol Chillington Rutter ed., Documents of the Rose Playhouse (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 135-7.

<sup>xl</sup> Watching Olivier and Richardson in the 1955 film of the play conveys vividly, even in the comparative cool of film, the sense of two old stagers ranging one another at the top of their game. And at the scene's climax, Olivier, recognizing and perhaps relishing this competitive rhythm, flourished his staging with a triumph of actor as well as character: in a final gesture his Richard forces Buckingham to kneel and kiss his hand, to the latter's surprise and discomfiture.

<sup>xli</sup> Clouds that lour from on high (1.1.3), Hastings' "drunken sailor on a mast" (3.4.99), Queen Elizabeth's "careful height" (1.3.82), Richard's comparison of himself and his kin to "eagles" (1.3.70) and, most important of all, his image of his actions as a "descant on [his] own deformity" (1.1.27) are instances.

<sup>xlii</sup> Skura, Shakespeare the actor, p. 87.

<sup>xliii</sup> Directors can be quite fierce about attempting to suppress this sort of thing, but their fierceness only suggests how much actors are prone to it. Such discipline is merely, from another point of view, a modern reprise of Hamlet's lament that clowns misbehave for their own profit, against the designs of the play.

<sup>xliiv</sup> Capell first added the entrance for the boy. It seems just as plausible and less awkward that he should enter with Benedick. Likewise his exit seems better deferred until after Benedick's last remark to him, though the early texts have it after line 5, as here.

<sup>xliv</sup> This was the staging adopted, for example, in the RSC production of the play in 1983, directed by Terry Hands and with Derek Jacobi and Sinead Cusack as Benedick and Beatrice. No edited text that I have consulted makes mention of this possibility, however. XX [Check]

<sup>xlvi</sup> Though there is no proof that the scene is designed to be played in this manner, the absence of a re-entry stage-direction for the Boy would not be surprising, given that it is not necessary for him to speak any lines in order for his comic mission to be perfectly accomplished. The early stage directions in Much Ado are rather confused in any case: the null character of Hero's mother enters twice (1.1 and 2.1), and Don John once where the plot requires absolutely that he not appear (1.1.203). Of course, such textual looseness is also an argument for the removal of the Boy altogether.

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<sup>xlvii</sup> I am not the first to discuss this aspect of the play, of course. It is both implicit and explicit in much important criticism, for instance by Jan Kott, Wilson Knight, Stanley Cavell, Michael Goldman, and Harry Berger.

<sup>xlviii</sup> "Handy-dandy" is recorded by OED as a children's game as early as Langland.

<sup>xlix</sup> The following line, "Waking, it is not so", along with Goneril's strong rejection of "this admiration" as one of Lear "new pranks", suggests some kind of mime with hands and eyes through the passage. The question of whether or not any such game is being alluded to is not an easy one to decide, allusion being, as it were, yet another version of a game of hide and seek. What I seek to trace here, regardless of whether an allusion is actually present, might be best described as the way certain sequences in the play light up or present themselves in the interpretive field of "games" as a figure for stage action.

<sup>i</sup> See e.g. Coliphizacio in the Towneley Plays, and Barry Sanders, "Who's Afraid of Jesus Christ: Games in the Coliphizacio" Comparative Drama 2:2 (1968): 94-9 and Emrys Jones cited above. Torture scenes are also found in old saints' plays, such as the Cornish play of Meriasek, though the Cornish drama had no impact on Elizabethan drama. See The life of Meriasek: a medieval Cornish miracle play transl. Markham Harris (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1977).

<sup>ii</sup> "The Magician" c. 1475-80. The original is lost but a closely-accurate copy survives in the Musée Municipal, Saint-Germain-en-Laye. (See <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>). In this painting, the magician's table has two cups and a ball.

<sup>iii</sup> On the distribution, variety and history of "hide-and-seek" and other similar games, see Iona and Peter Opie, Children's Games in Street and Playground (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), Ch. 4, also Alice Gomme, The traditional games of England, Scotland and Ireland...[etc.] (London: D. Nutt, 1894-8). A useful article on "Games" by A. Forbes Sieveking, including an older bibliography, is in Shakespeare's England 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), vol. 2, pp. 451-83.

<sup>iiii</sup> Where "hide" includes "hid", "hidden" and "hiding" (total 7), plus "conceal" (3), "cover" (7) and "secret" (2), and "seek" includes "sought" (total 21), plus "discover" (2) and "reveal" (1). Compare Hamlet, which also has a thematic interest in what is hidden/revealed: "hide, etc." total 12 and "seek etc." total 13. The figures are even lower for Othello.

<sup>lv</sup> See for instance both Cavell, above, and also Michael Neill, "The Little Dogs and All: Ceremony, Nakedness, Shame and the Deconsecration of Kingship in King Lear" in Shakespeare's World: World Shakespeares ed. Richard Fotheringham, Christa Jansohn and Robert White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).

<sup>lv</sup> Harry Berger Jr. treats these transformations with consummate attentiveness in his chapters on the play in his Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), Chs. 3 and 4. I am greatly indebted to his reading.

<sup>lvi</sup> The opening of the scene may already resemble the game of "leading the blind", illustrated, like so many others, in Brueghel's great painting "Children's Games," now in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum. The game appears in the upper right distance in a line of six children. For commentary on the painting, see Paul Portmann, Children's Games by Pieter Breughel the elder (Berne: Hallwag, 1964); Edward A. Snow, Inside Breughel: the play of images in Children's Games (New York: North Point Press, 1997); Jean-Louis Claret, "Breugel and King Lear," Cahiers elisabéthains 56:8 (Oct, 1999): 13-24.