The Spectacular In and Around Shakespeare

The Spectacular In and Around Shakespeare

Edited by

Pascale Drouet

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

The Spectacular In and Around Shakespeare, Edited by Pascale Drouet

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1105-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1105-7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part Three: Appropriating the Spectacular

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Three scholars initially encouraged me to edit this volume: Professor Richard Hillman, of the Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, University of Tours (France); Professor Gordon McMullan, of King's College London; and Professor Jean-Marie Maguin, of the Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l'Âge Classique et les Lumières, University of Montpellier III (France). I would like to express my thanks to them for their benevolence and encouragements.

I am particularly indebted to Richard Hillman for his unfailing support and impeccable editorial help. Without him, this volume might never have seen the light.

I am grateful to Edouard Lekston, who kindly provided the illustration for the cover.

Most of the chapters in this volume were previously published online, in French versions, in *Les Cahiers Shakespeare en devenir/The Journal of Shakespearean Afterlives*, Cahiers no. 2, "Shakespeare et le spectaculaire" (2008) (http://edel.univ-poitiers.fr/licorne/sommaire.php?id=3943). I am pleased that they are now available in English, accessible to a wider readership.

INTRODUCTION

PASCALE DROUET

> Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier had spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hands, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it. (3.2.1-13)[1]

Hamlet's recommendations to the strolling players stopping at Elsinore read as a warning against performances that would be striking and imposing—that is, spectacular—for the wrong reasons: not for admirably subtle counterfeiting able to arouse emotions, but for forced, excessive acting, more or less conditioned by "the groundlings" wanting to get their money's worth, and hence to be suspected of demagogic intent. To be true to the purpose of playing, the players are required to "hold . . . the mirror up to nature" (3.2.20-21). Does the same go for playwrights, or are they free to depart from nature? In the Induction of *Bartholmew Fair*, the Scrivener presents the characters of the play and then informs "spectators or hearers" (62-63)[2] that, although most of the play has the fair as setting, they should not expect to see freaks or any other vulgar exhibitions. The Scrivener reports the author's position:

> If there be never a servant-monster i' the Fair, who can help it? he says; nor a nest of antics? He is loth [*sic*] to make Nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such like drolleries, to mix his head with other men's heels, let the concupiscence of jigs and dances reign as strong as it will amongst you. (122-127)

What is pointed to here probably includes, from *The Tempest*, Caliban's hybrid nature, Ariel's fantastic metamorphoses, Prospero's magical

display rich in spectacular effects, the burlesque threesome composed of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban; from *The Winter's Tale*, Antigonus' grotesque exit "pursued by a bear" (3.3.58),[3] Autolycus' dubious tricks and fantastic, bawdy ballads, the dance of satyrs, and Paulina's ultimate staging of the statue-like queen. These examples help us understand that the spectacular is closely associated with either implausibility arousing amazement or excess for the sake of entertainment. The spectacular clearly departs from "temperance," "smoothness" and "Nature"—that is to say "the modesty of nature," as Hamlet puts it (3.2.18). It nearly magnetically solicits the eyes and—in early modern times—ears with an intensity propitious to imaginary extensions, but also to critical reactions. In different ways, Shakespeare's Hamlet and Ben Jonson's Scrivener draw attention to the polarised reactions to the spectacular: marvel or contempt, depending on the quality of both the exhibition and the gaze. Marvel is the appropriate response to the spectacular pyrotechnics displayed for the opening of the Globe theatre in 1599 (Chapter One), to the lavish 1575 festivities at Kenilworth designed by George Gascoigne (Chapter Three), to the public scientific exploit of Cornelis Drebbel's prototype submarine in 1620 (Chapter Two). By contrast, Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* evince, respectively, contempt for political staging, ostentation and demagogy, as well as hatred for the superficiality of prodigal private entertainments (Chapters Five and Six).

This raises the question of intentionality. What is behind the spectacular? What are its stakes? The spectacular is first and foremost supposed to be entertaining and, as such, must meet its audience's expectations—whether those are popular or aristocratic. In an aristocratic context, the spectacular has to do, more often than not, with political stakes and hegemonic apparatus; the economy of the spectacular can hardly be dissociated from the dominant ideology. When the orientation is popular, the spectacular may verge on excess, not to say questionable taste, and be void of meaning: the spectacular for the sake of the spectacular—except for its economic benefits. In January 2009, I saw a production of *Hamlet* in French at the TAP-Scène Nationale of Poitiers. It seemed that the director was more interested in providing her audience with spectacular surprise than with the spirit of Shakespeare's demanding tragedy: flying falcons and vultures assisted the actors; the gravedigger had turned into a drag artist; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were parodic figures of the Marx Brothers; mad Ophelia appeared naked on stage, but so too did Hamlet later, exhibiting his muscles and genitals while doing a series of press-ups on the upper stage footbridge, which offered a perfect low-angle shot for voyeuristic spectators. The fidgety teenagers in the

room gave a standing ovation at the end of the three-hour-and-forty-minute production, enthusiastically stamping and whistling—the obvious sign that the director and her company had met the challenge of brushing the cobwebs from the Shakespearean text. In fact, this was the spectacular for the sake of the spectacular, or rather innovation and originality as a mere cover for facility and demagogy—commercially successful, perhaps, but artistically self-devaluing. It was tempting, all in all, to see the production as the perfect counter-illustration of Hamlet's recommendations to the players. Clearly, *that* spectacular was not intended to reveal or promote any sort of knowledge, competence or achievement—another of its potential goals.

The spectacular can be a means of making public scientific discoveries, artistic talents or any unusual capacities, a means of getting oneself acknowledged at one's true worth. In the wings of any show, there lurks something about the need for recognition—something different, however, from sheer narcissism, a type of the spectacular that would merely hold a mirror up to "some vanity of [my] art" (4.1.41)[4] or, to take up Yves Bonnefoy's phrasing, that would correspond to "[the] slight thing that [my] talent has the weakness to take pleasure in."[5] In some cases, this recognition paves the way for valuable transmission to come—or old scores to be settled once and for all. Shakespeare's first use of extended storm effects in *Julius Caesar* was a way to highlight the propensity of the Globe theatre for the spectacular and show it to be a cut above its rivals, splitting the ears not only of its groundlings but also of those standing in nearby theatres (Chapter One). The Mannerist context of emulation between artists encouraged the emergence of Hendrick Goltzius' exuberant engravings, which fascinated Henry Peacham (Chapter Four). Cornelis Drebbel and John Dee did not hesitate to resort to spectacular effects to promote their inventions—for Drebbel, recognition meant that he was recruited by the English navy (Chapter Two). So, to what extent can the spectacular be said to have a manipulative purpose and work as a *trompe-l'œil*, a sort of deceptive device more or less serving personal projects (micro-level) or meeting political and ideological objectives (macro-level)? The spectacular can be used as a decoy and have a sort of Gorgon-like effect, virtually mesmerizing the gazer to the point of near anaesthesia and thus creating a "time of lethargy" (4.4.615)—as Autolycus has it—propitious to manipulation. The entertaining, reflecting surface cunningly suggests innocuous superficiality, whereas manipulative forces are at work. Exhibiting his goods as if they came directly from some divine cornucopia, the roguish pedlar of *The Winter's Tale* lures the rustics, who had gathered for the sheep-shearing feast, and ensures that

mimetic desire will have them, in turn, sing ballads and create their own spectacle. The result, he tells us, was that

> [It] so drew the rest of the herd to me, that all their other senses stuck in ears: you might have pinched a placket, it was senseless; 't was nothing to geld a codpiece of a purse; I would have filed keys off that hung in chains: no hearing, no feeling, but my sir's song, and admiring the nothing of it. So that in this time of lethargy I picked and cut most of their festival purses. (4.4.609-616)

When the Earl of Leicester commissioned George Gascoigne to create the Kenilworth festivities, in which Elizabeth I would participate as one of the major mythological figures, he intended not to cut royal purses, of course, but to be put in the Queen's good books; he aimed at impressing her and publicly celebrating her cult. Personal interests and political propaganda, then, were behind the magnificence of the entertainment (Chapter Three). This suggests why, whether as a tool of deceit, an instrument of flattery, or a vehicle for the dominant ideology, a means for private or political ends—or both—the spectacular always bears the hallmark of suspicion. The limits of that attitude are explored in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*. Coriolanus exposes the political rite of passage imposed by Roman tradition—wearing the gown of humility and exhibiting his spectacular scars in order to get the people's voices—as a hypocritical performance, a mere demagogical masquerade (Chapter Five). This close association between political power—or abuse of power—and ostentatious, duplicitous show—that is, what is nowadays known as "theatrocracy"[6]—is also at stake in Edouard Lekston's pictorial interpretation of *King Richard III* (Chapter Nine). As for Timon, he experiences the limits of the spectacular within his own domestic scenography, and bitterly reflects on its superficiality. Like Prospero's "insubstantial pageant," Timon's lavish entertainments "[l]eave not a rack behind" (4.1.155, 156); they do not entail an economy of exchange or a dialectics of gift and gratitude (Chapter Six). In other words, the spectacular can prove counter-productive, to the point of backfiring. This is why, lately, the director Julia Pascal, when adapting *The Merchant of Venice*, departed from the stage tradition that sheds a harsh light on the famous trial scene with the knife-wielding Jew (Chapter Seven). But it is less certain that Marcus Thompson, Mike Figgis and Alex Cox, when they appropriated Jacobean tragedies and turned away from the aesthetic norms of Shakespeare films to offer cinematic versions with "plenty of blood," avoided having their productions backfire (Chapter Eight).

The first part of this book brings us back to Elizabethan and Jacobean England and takes us from the Globe theatre to outside life-size stages, such as the Thames River and its banks, and the gardens and woods of Kenilworth Castle, but also to one-dimensional, pictorial scenes teeming with spectacular details, like those recreated by Mannerist painters. In the wake of Steve Sohmer's work, Gwilym Jones focuses on the play chosen for the opening of the Globe theatre in the early summer of 1599, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and shows how appropriate the Roman play, with its spectacular storms and battle noises, was for the long-awaited inaugural event, especially as the Globe provided new opportunities for special effects and nuances of sounds. To appreciate fully the spectacular effect that such a production would create, Jones also considers the way storms and tempests were described in narratives, that is, how they were experienced and interpreted by Shakespeare's contemporaries (Chapter One). Arguing that scientific discoveries are linked with the spectacular in Renaissance culture, Mickael Popelard points out the dialectic movement between the discoveries that appropriate spectacular devices for promotion's sake and the drama that feeds on new inventions and machines to increase the spectacular dimension of productions. Popelard's contrastive approach brings together Drebbel's ostentatious display of his submarine, Prospero's spectacular art in *The Tempest*, Doctor Faustus' entertaining science in Marlowe's play, and Bacon's notion of useful science, as developed in *The New Atlantis* (Chapter Two). Taking into account both George Gascoigne's own script, *The Princely Pleasures of Kenilworth*, and a spectator's report known as *Robert Laneham's Letter*, Cécile Mauré recaptures the spectacular lavishness of the Kenilworth festivities commissioned by the Earl of Leicester to honour the Queen. Mauré brings out the private strategies and political stakes lying behind the sheer magnificence of the pageant: Gascoigne's double attempt, via a blend of mythological figures, pagan and Arthurian, to regain the Queen's favour—hence his praising her as the Virgin Queen—and to please the Earl of Leicester—hence his trying to persuade the Queen of the benefits of marriage (Chapter Three). Going back over the expansion of Mannerism in Europe and particularly focusing on the theatrical, exuberant virtuosity of the Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius—known in early modern England thanks to Henry Peacham's writings—Josée Nuyts-Giornal suggests that the mention of "that rare Italian master, Julio Romano" (5.2.96), who supposedly carved the Queen's statue in *The Winter's Tale*, is significant in this context, and casts a new light on the scene of the statue, the play as a whole and Shakespeare's artistic choices (Chapter Four).

The second part of the book is devoted to two Shakespearean tragedies in which the spectacular is given a rough ride, as it is either fiercely resisted (*Coriolanus*) or bitterly exposed as superficial (*Timon of Athens*). Pascale Drouet focuses on Coriolanus' reluctance to put on a demagogic, political show in the market-place and, more significantly, on his refusal to display his wounds—a "spectacle" much expected by the plebeians—to gain the citizens' voices. Drouet argues that the Roman hero's resistance to bodily exhibition is due to his deep distrust of the other's gaze, his idea that counterfeiting cannot be dissociated from imposture, and the ambivalent semiotics fostered, in the Renaissance context, by "sturdy beggars" exhibiting fake sores (Chapter Five). Richard Hillman analyses how the initial exploitation of the (self-referential) spectacular by Timon generates an anti-spectacular counter-current, a vain struggle against deceiving appearances and the hegemony of the spectacular, to the point of total self-effacement: the Athenian "hero" not only organizes his famous revenge banquet of un-substantiation, but also dies out of sight, buried in a barely noticeable grave, hardly paid attention to, and absent—even as a mere corpse—from the final scene (Chapter Six).

The third part of this collection is concerned with contemporary stage and screen adaptations, and innovatory graphic interpretations, that is, with turn-of-the-twentieth-century appropriations in varied artistic forms—namely, stage, screen and page. Sonia Massai shows how Julia Pascal's 2007 adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, at the Arcola Theatre in London, subtly departs from traditionally polarised interpretations of Shylock in the trial scene and debunks the spectacular stereotype of the knife-wielding Jew. Pascal reclaims the Jewish heritage, Massai argues, by introducing a distancing play-within-the-play device: the play is watched by a new character (Sarah) who is a Holocaust survivor, played by a real-life survivor of the Warsaw ghetto (Ruth Posner); the effect is to blur the limits between history and fiction, favouring multiple levels of interpretation and turning Shylock into a complex sign (Chapter Seven). With *Shakespeare in Love* in mind to serve as a foil—at least at first sight—Gordon McMullan provides a detailed analysis of three radical screen adaptations of non-Shakespearean plays: Marcus Thompson's 1998 *Middleton's Changeling*, Mike Figgis' 2001 *Hotel*, and Alex Cox's 2002 *Revengers Tragedy*, which weirdly appropriate *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Thomas Middleton and John Rowley's *The Changeling*, and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. McMullan convincingly suggests that although these films, teeming with gory, perverse, excessive, tasteless, apocalyptic, postmodern scenes, definitely provide a radical alternative to the governing aesthetics of Shakespeare films—those of Kenneth Branagh,

for instance—they paradoxically reinstate a conservative misunderstanding of Jacobean tragedies as being "decadent" (Chapter Eight). Finally, commenting on the genesis and structure of his reasoning and drawing, Edouard Lekston presents his 2008 graphic interpretation of *King Richard III*, a thoroughly original threefold work entitled *Family Gathering, or RIII's Dance of Death*. This is composed of a collection of drawings of each scene in sequence, a paper frieze on which *King Richard III* is strikingly reinterpreted as a *danse macabre*—associating the spectacular and the morbid—led by Richard himself, and a large, horse-shaped map of England, which is to be read as a jigsaw of the War of the Roses (Chapter Nine).

Works Cited

Balandier, Georges. *Le détour. Pouvoir et modernité*. Paris: Fayard, 1985.

—. *Le pouvoir sur scènes*. Paris: Balland, 1980.

Bonnefoy, Yves. *Shakespeare and the French Poet*. Translated, edited and with an Introduction by John Naughton. Including an Interview with Yves Bonnefoy. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Jonson, Ben. *Bartholmew Fair*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. The New Mermaids. 1977. London: A & C Black, 1991.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan. The Arden Shakespeare (Third Series). 1999. London: Thomson Learning, 2003.

—. *The Tragedy of Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. The Oxford Shakespeare. 1987. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

—. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by J. H. P. Pafford. The Arden Shakespeare (Second Series). 1963. London: Routledge, 1994.

Notes

[1] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, The Oxford Shakespeare (1987; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[2] Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, The New Mermaids (1977; London: A & C Black, 1991).

[3] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J. H. P. Pafford, The Arden Shakespeare (Second Series) (1963; London: Routledge, 1994).

[4] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, The Arden Shakespeare (Third Series) (1999; London: Thomson Learning, 2003).

[5] Yves Bonnefoy, *Shakespeare and the French Poet*, trans. John Naughton (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 68.

[6] The term was originally coined by the Russian essayist Nicolas Evreinov. It was then taken up by Georges Balandier in *Le pouvoir sur scènes* (Paris: Balland, 1980) and *Le détour. Pouvoir et modernité* (Paris: Fayard, 1985).

PART ONE

THE SPECTACULAR IN CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

"THUS MUCH SHOW OF FIRE": STORM AND SPECTACLE IN THE OPENING OF THE GLOBE

GWILYM JONES

In a study of the spectacular in Shakespeare's plays, *Julius Caesar* is a crucial text, containing as it does the playwright's first staged storm.[1] It marks, in many ways, a vital milestone in the dramatist's career. In the time between the indelicate lightnings of the *Henry VI* plays, the narrated sea-storm of *A Comedy of Errors* and this tragedy, Shakespeare has clearly developed a far more deft approach to the nuances of the device of the storm. It is in *Julius Caesar* that we find the foundations of the storms of *Macbeth* and *The Winter's Tale*, not to mention *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. The Roman play, however, goes far beyond simple groundwork and, as with each of Shakespeare's great storm plays, *Julius Caesar* emerges with a singular oragious identity.

In considering the storm and the spectacular in *Julius Caesar*, it is crucial to bear in mind that *Julius Caesar* was almost certainly the first play to be performed at the original Globe Theatre, when it opened in the early summer of 1599.[2] We have, of course, the record of Thomas Platter, the Swiss tourist, who saw the play in September of that year, but the arguments that it was the Globe's opening showpiece are reinforced by criticism concerning the text's poetry. Steve Sohmer, for example, in *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*, painstakingly aligns images and phrases from *Julius Caesar* with appropriate sections of the liturgy—the latter, of course, being ascribed a specific date for public consumption by the liturgical calendar. Sohmer's argument also includes numerous other details—the propitious astrology of certain dates, for example. I want to add to these lines of enquiry with a consideration of *Julius Caesar* as a prime example of theatrical bravado: it is the work of a playwright with the keys to a new playhouse; the work of a playwright with a fresh and

eager audience; the work of playwright, as we shall see, who is invested in and reliant upon, spectacle.

The need for an impressive opening show at the Globe is obvious enough. This was to be the third theatre on Bankside alone, an area which also accommodated other public "entertainments," such as bear-baiting. Although the Swan had been forbidden a permanent company since 1597, it still produced plays, and very likely hosted touring productions. Closer to the Globe was the residence of the Admiral's Men, the Rose; the two theatres, in fact, were less than fifty yards apart. In addition, there were numerous emergent theatres around, and within, the city, some inns and some full-sized playhouses. Furthermore, as James Shapiro notes, "troubling still was word that, after a decade's hiatus, the boys of St. Paul's would shortly resume playing for public audiences at the Cathedral."[3] The indoor venue, Blackfriars, was soon to be opened to another company of boy players. This was a time of great theatrical competition, especially for a budding venue, and there was no time for faltering starts.

Before we explore the ways in which *Julius Caesar* utilises its particular stage, we might consider the manner in which it showcases the company who were to play it, the Chamberlain's Men. Not only does the play require four very strong lead actors, in the parts of Brutus, Cassius, Antony and Caesar—which is enough to give an impression of the depth of the company—but these roles span the breadth of personality, according to humours psychology. Thus, each of the main male characters of the play is particularly dominated by one humour: Caesar, phlegm; Brutus, melancholy; Antony, blood; Cassius, choler. In a simple stroke of metaphor, the Chamberlain's Men are constructed as capable of playing any personality type. This presentation of the company does not stop there—there are two strong female roles in Calphurnia and Portia, displaying undeniable faith in the boy actors and effectively pronouncing them every bit the equal of the re-emerging boy companies within the city. Such faith is hardly misplaced, given that these are presumably the same actors who were required to converse and joke in French in *Henry V* (and of course, they would soon repay this faith, in being awarded leading roles in Shakespeare's next play, *As You Like It*). So, four strong male characters, two strong female characters and one further display of the company's virtuosity: Brutus' servant, Lucius. The instrument which Lucius plays and sings himself to sleep with in Act 4, scene 3 is, apparently a lute. Whether or not Lucius was doubled by one of the boy actors of Portia or Calphurnia, the point is the same: the lute requires a great degree of skill and nuance to play effectively—in the hierarchy of

Renaissance musical instruments, it's the monarch—and so to have a young boy talented enough to perform with one is reason indeed to write such a performance into the play, and impress the Globe's first audience.

I hope that such a brief summary gives an impression of the way in which the abilities of the cast are displayed in *Julius Caesar*. It is, however, in the staging of the play that we can truly start to speak of the spectacular. In modern editions of *Julius Caesar*, little is made of the theatrical effect of the storm. Martin Spevack's gloss of the first incidence of thunder is typical: "Thunder was produced by rolling a cannon-ball down a wooden trough, the 'thunder-run,' by drums or cannon-fire; lightning, by some kind of fireworks."[4] David Daniell, it seems, is alone amongst modern editors in stating that the thunder is imitated "by metal thunder sheets."[5] Often, as in the Oxford edition, mention is made of Ben Jonson's prologue in *Every Man in His Humour*, in which the playwright dismisses the "rolled bullet heard, / To say, it thunders, or tempestuous drum / Rumbles to tell you that the storm doth come."[6] It seems to me that none of the current editions capture the potential force of a display of a theatrical storm. The quotation from Jonson, which is found in at least one edition of every play glossing Shakespeare's thunder, does little to help this cause, as its tone is purposefully deprecatory and scornful of, it seems, anything which detracts from his words. The same applies to the Induction of *A Warning for Fair Women*, which the Oxford *Julius Caesar* also quotes: "a little rosin flasheth forth, / Like . . . / . . . a boy's squib" (Humphrey 1984, 119). This play was published anonymously in 1599, but we know from its title-page that it was acted by the Chamberlain's Men. The same is true of Jonson's play, first published in quarto form in 1601, but likely first performed by the same company at the Curtain in 1598. Jonson's prologue, with its dismissive lines, was added only in the 1616 Folio text; it is inviting to speculate that both Jonson and the anonymous playwright of *A Warning for Fair Women* were mocking their fellow Chamberlain's writer and his fondness for fire and noise.[7] Regardless, I think that it should be made clear that thunder and lightning in an Elizabethan theatre would have been a hugely impressive and noisy affair, with rockets, fireworks and squibs providing noise and spectacle. It is probable that a cannon, or some other piece of heavy ordinance would also have been fired to simulate the sound of thunder along with the thunder-run. In order to offer a context for the Jonson lines, then, here is an earlier description, from the architect Serlio:

> You must draw a piece of wyre over the Scene, which must hang downewards, whereon you must put a squib covered over with pure gold or shining lattin which you will: and while the Bullet is rouling, you must

> shoote of some piece of Ordinance, and with the same giving fire to the squibs, it will worke the effect which is desired. [8]

Although Serlio, who died in 1554, was Italian, and this work not translated into English until 1611, these techniques or similar ones would likely have found their way onto the English stage in the intervening half-century. They certainly were evident in France, as "during the performance of . . . *Antichrist* in 1580, it is recorded that 'they shall project fireworks in the air and along the cord'" (Butterworth 1998, 44). As Phillip Butterworth notes with respect to Serlio, "the co-ordinated shooting of 'some piece of Ordinance' is yet another example of how more than one effect is often required to create an accumulative effect" (Butterworth 1998, 44). An example of firework use which is more closely related to Shakespeare—and one that he would certainly have witnessed in action—is in the stage directions of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*: "Enter Mephostophilis, who sets squibs at their backs. They run about" (4.1.66)[9]; "Faustus and Mephostophilis beat the Friars, fling fire-works among them and exeunt" (3.3.108). It is hardly a leap of imagination to suppose that the thunder and lightning towards the climax of *Faustus* (5.1.sd) would have included some dramatic fireworks, or that Shakespeare, heavily influenced by Marlowe, would have noted such use. The use of fireworks, I think, is made clear by some of the diction in the text of *Julius Caesar*. It is possible, of course, that phrases such as "tempest dropping fire" (1.3.10)[10] or "the aim and very flash of it" (52) are included to evoke the image of lightning rather than to complement the effect of it. However, in addition to the stage direction calling for lightning—a specifically visual effect—we have Brutus' lines in the following scene in the orchard. Here, Brutus has received the letters compelling him towards the conspiracy and, before reading them, remarks, "The exhalations, whizzing in the air / Give so much light that I may read by them" (2.1.44). The preceding soliloquy of Brutus is calm, thoughtful and quiet: there is no reference to the weather, nor any need for one. The word "whizzing," however, is particularly evocative of fireworks rather than lightning; whether or not the fireworks continue in the orchard scene, it seems certain that they have been on display.

I feel, therefore, that in the glosses of modern editions the impressions of the physicality of these displays are grossly diminished. The quotability of Jonson is no excuse for lessening the vibrancy of early modern theatrical effect: there is an inherent double standard in the inevitable noting of Jonson's deprecatory tone and the reliance on his descriptions as fair and accurate evidence. That all the fire effects appear to have been carried out with scant regard for health and safety, as evidenced by the

directions in *Doctor Faustus* and by the fire, ignited by stage cannon, which destroyed the Globe in 1613, indicates just how seriously the playing companies took the impact of their fire and sound. There must have been a tangible vein of fear in those present, especially if the documented early modern fear of fire is taken into account.[11] By turns electrifying and terrifying, the noise and the sight of banging and fizzing effects would have been accompanied by a strong smell of gunpowder—truly an assault on the senses. This was certainly a feat which could not be matched by the boys in St. Paul's Cathedral and, very likely, was not to be found, at least on the scale of *Julius Caesar*, anywhere else in or around the city. Of the plays being staged in June 1599, most are lost, but none of those extant match Shakespeare's enthusiasm for thunder and lightning.[12] It can be concluded, then, that part of Shakespeare's purpose in writing a storm might well have been to maximise the full sensory impact of the venue and create the impression, and the hype to go with it, of the Globe as a vibrant and exciting new theatre with an effects department to outmatch its rivals.

Further evidence that Shakespeare was utilizing the capability of this new theatre is in his description of flourishes and alarums. The battle scenes of Act 5 of *Julius Caesar* as read in the stage directions show a sensitivity for distance which had not been evident in the playwright's earlier work. In *Titus Andronicus*, a play probably performed at the Rose, there are eleven battle calls and flourishes, none distinguished by volume level. A Renaissance trumpet could be sounded only at one loud volume; in order to create the illusion of distant battles, there needs to be some kind of backstage structure to dilute the sound.[13] Only in *Julius Caesar* does Shakespeare begin to write directions such as "Low alarums" (e.g., 5.5.23). A helpful way to think about this kind of effect is to remember the final moments of the first act of Verdi's *La Traviata*, when Alfredo sings "under the balcony" as Violetta is onstage.[14] The scene is usually staged so that Alfredo sings offstage, and the tenor's voice crescendos to forte—apposite, given that he is singing of his love—but the sense of distance is maintained by the artist's position. In the Elizabethan amphitheatre, without an opera singer's range of volume, or the backstage space of an opera house, the trumpets might play through some kind of backstage muting area in order to gradate their tone. If this was the case, then such a system was only available at the Globe, for no other playhouse at the time uses such distinctions of musical directions. If the conjecture is false, it is hard to imagine either the reasons or the techniques behind Shakespeare's suddenly careful sound directions. Later in Shakespeare's Globe career, the nuance of battle sounds becomes even more developed, and we find

very specific sound directions, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*: "Alarum afar off, as at a sea fight" (4.13). This might seem distinctly un-spectacular to us. Indeed, there is something of a contradiction in the concept of an auditory spectacle. Yet if we are to hold to the oft-repeated dictum that an early-modern audience went to hear a play, as we go to see a play, we must also hold that variations in sound-effects, especially ones as novel as this seems to be, would have been remarkable, even spectacular. *Julius Caesar* marks the beginning of Shakespeare's variations of sound distance—the audience, perhaps for the first time, experienced their battles in a multi-dimensional soundscape—and it is likely that the structure of the Globe playhouse is crucial in this development.

Furthermore, a vital factor to take into account, at least in terms of the storm, is that the Globe and the Rose, as I've mentioned, were less than fifty yards apart. A loud noise from one playhouse would have been easily audible in its rival. All plays began at two o'clock in the afternoon. It is therefore quite possible that the audience and the players at the Rose would have been distracted, and intrigued, by the violent sounds coming from nearby. This point extends to audience cheering and applause: it would have been very easy for an audience member, especially one in the yard, to decide that the other playhouse sounded more entertaining and to make the short journey across the road. If, on the Globe's opening performance date, an audience member left the Rose halfway through the first storm scene, they would be in the new theatre in time for Brutus' orchard soliloquy, which precedes the introduction of every conspirator (2.1.86-97), and then be treated to more thunder and lightning when Caesar reappears. They would, in short, have missed little in terms of plot and would get more special effects to reward their curiosity. Of course, there cannot be evidence that such behaviour took place, but the sound of the Globe's cannon and rockets yards away would at least arouse the curiosity of those at the Rose.

Fireworks and squibs may make a grand dramatic impression, but there is much more to the storm than a show. Those audience members at the opening of the Globe who were familiar with Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch (there would have been some) or even the basic story of Julius Caesar (most would have been) would know that a great many unusual portents were said to have preceded the assassination. Plutarch, in that translation, writes:

> Certainly destiny may easier be foreseen than avoided, considering the strange and wonderful signs that were said to be seen before Caesar's death. For, touching the fires in the element and spirits running up and down in the night, and also the solitary birds to be seen at noondays sitting

> in the market-place—are not all these signs perhaps worth the noting, in such a wonderful chance as happened?[15]

"Touching the fires in the element" is as close as Plutarch, Shakespeare's principal source for the play, comes to reporting a storm.[16] Indeed, the description is as close to a theatrical storm—heavy on gunpowder and flames—as it is to an actual tempest; the playhouses might have had rockets for lightning, but relied on poetry for rain. It is from this passage that Shakespeare takes material for Casca's speech in the storm. The playwright was also, in all probability, drawing on other descriptions here. Ovid and Lucan both describe the scene, as does Virgil:

> Such peals of thunder never poured from high,
> Nor lightnings flashed from so serene a sky.
> Red meteors ran across the ethereal space;
> Stars disappeared, and comets took their place.[17]

It is clear, then, that Shakespeare was not the first writer to make use of thunder and lightning when listing his ominous signs. Literate members of the audience would have expected storms as a result of this, but what kind of theatrical legacy were the stage effects drawing upon? In addition to examples such as *Dr. Faustus*, it is likely that similar effects were used in medieval mystery cycles and other religious drama. In *The Conversion of St. Paul*, for example, there is a stage direction reading, "Here comyth a feruent, with gret tempest" (Butterworth 1998, 6). "Fervent" is not listed as a noun in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but the modern adjective meaning "zealous" and "ardent" did not become widespread until the seventeenth century. It is most likely here that "fervent" refers to an effect both glowing and hot, suggesting a flame effect. In the same play, there is also a direction for the entrance of "a dyvel with thunder and fyre." As Butterworth notes, elsewhere, it is angels who are portrayed as fiery: "The *Mystery of the Acts of the Apostles* at Bourges in 1536 required angels to 'throw' lightning at the Jews in an attempt to stop them removing the body of the Virgin Mary" (Butterworth 1998, 45). Just as the roots of theatre are entwined with religious display, so it seems that the effects of stage fire and thunder have an ecumenical branch in their ancestry. It is important, too, that both good and evil forces are associated with these effects: good by the Mystery's angels and later, for example, to accompany Talbot's oath in *1 Henry VI*; evil by *The Conversion*'s devil and later by Faustus and Mephistophilis.[18] Needless to say, the boundaries are seldom so easily defined, especially in Shakespeare, where *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, as well, of course as *Julius Caesar*, all make a mockery of such

simplicity. Moral ambiguities in interpretation may be avoided with the portrayal of angels and devils, but are otherwise likely to arise when either may employ the same effect. The audience, therefore, even if expecting to see lightning and hear thunder, would not have been readily disposed to make assumptions about the ethical signification of these spectacles.

So, if moral judgements were elusive, how might a contemporary audience have reacted to a storm? How would their reaction to a staged storm be different from that to a real storm? In March of 1599, whilst the Globe was being built and *Julius Caesar* was very likely being written, there was a storm in London which would find a place in the writings of several contemporary chroniclers. Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, was departing from the city with his officers and cavalcade. This was the first stage in the Earl's journey to Ireland, where he aimed to crush the rebellion of Tyrone. The fluctuating relationship between Devereux and Queen Elizabeth had resulted in the Earl's appointment in this challenging and dangerous role. There had been some delay in his departure and the rebellion was gathering strength; to put it bluntly, this was an eagerly anticipated moment of great significance. There would have been many who wished Devereux success, and many who hoped that his ambition, if not his life, would be curtailed by the enterprise. The historian John Stow (1525-1605) provides the most complete contemporary description of the day's events:

> The 27th of March, about two of the clock in the afternoon, the right honourable Robert earl of Essex, lieutenant general, lord high marshall, etc. departed from Seething Lane, through Fenchurch Street, Grace Street, Cornhill, Cheap, etc. towards Sheldon, Highgate, and rode that night to St. Albans, towards Ireland, he had a great train of noble men, and gentlemen, on horseback before him, to accompany him on his journey, his coaches followed him. He had also (by the pleasure of God) a great shower, or twain, of rain and hail, with some claps of thunder as he rode through the city.[19]

Stow's language evokes a great spectacle. There is a certain reverence in his listing of Devereux's titles, of his companions and of the streets through which they passed. The description of the weather employs a similar syntax and thereby hints at a similar reverence. It is made explicit in the parenthetical "by the pleasure of God" that the display is a divinely staged backdrop to the hero's departure. Note also the possessive "He had," which, being echoed in the description of the weather from that of the company, goes further to consolidate the notion that the environment (and, therefore, God) is on the Earl's side. If there is a portent to be found

in this weather, it seems, Stow would have it be positive. For the sake of contextualising Stow's comments, we may contrast this description with his account of a "tempest of wind" in November 1574:

> The eighteenth day at night, were very stormy and tempestuous winds out of the south. . . . These are to be received as tokens of God's wrath ready bent against the world for sin now abounding, and also of his great mercy, who doth but only show the rod wherewith we daily deserve to be beaten. (Stow 1601, 1149)

Here, we may see that Stow's accounts of storms are, at least occasionally, dependent on his interpretation of God's intentions as manifest in the weather. Although both storms are unexpected, they are both harmless, and Stow records no damage caused by them.[20] Nonetheless, the two storms are presented very differently. There is certainly no mention of God showing the rod in the Devereux account, nor indeed, any of "grace" in the earlier narrative. It does not seem sustainable, in light of this, that Stow wished Devereux anything but support and admiration. It is, I feel, significant that one writer should appraise two harmless storms so differently. The fickle character of weather interpretation seldom depends solely upon that weather but is bound up with other issues: from the political to the religious, the literal climate is invariably aligned with a metaphorical climate. Stow's description of the sudden storm of Devereux's departure tells us about the weather, but his inclination to view it as bountiful tells us about his veneration of, or at least his hope for, the Earl of Essex. As Shakespeare has Cicero note when Casca is harbouring the doom of the storm: "men may construe things after their fashion / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves" (1.3.34-35). Cicero's comment reinforces what the Stow's reports confirm: meteorology is subject to highly idiosyncratic malleable interpretations and empiricism has only a minor role to play.

Stow, with his religious language, was hardly being unusual in his descriptions. It is the significance attributed to these storms which is important. Even if there is no significance characterised by religious belief, then there is invariably still a superstitious perspective involved. An example of such superstition is provided by Leonard Digges, writing in his *Prognostication everlasting of right good effect:*

> Thunders in the morning, signify wind: about noon, rain: in the evening great tempest. Some write (their ground I see not) that Sunday's thunder, should bring the death of learned men, judges and others.
> Monday's thunder, the death of women.

> Tuesday's thunder, plenty of grain.
> Wednesday's thunder, the death of harlots, & other bloodshed.
> Thursday's thunder, plenty of sheep and corn.
> Friday's thunder, the slaughter of a great man, and other horrible murders.
> Saturday's thunder, a general pestilent plague & great death.[21]

Digges's suspicion about such beliefs ("their ground I see not") is clear, but the fact that he records them nevertheless is significant.

Another writer who notes superstitions based on thunder is Thomas Hill, whose *Contemplation of Mysteries* was published in 1574. The work is a compilation of the meteorological observations of many thinkers, edited by Hill, who notes:

> The learned *Beda* wryteth, that if thunder be first heard, comming out of the East quarter, the same foresheweth before the yere go about or be ended, the great effusion of bloud.
> That if thunder first heard out of the West quarter, then mortalitie, and a grieuous plague to insue.
> That if thunder be first heard out of the South quarter, threatneth the death of many by shipwrack.
> That if thunder be first heard out of the North quarter, doth then portend the death of wicked persons, and the ouerthrowe of many.[22]

Again, death is the main emphasis here; thunder portends bloodshed or disease, whichever direction it comes from. Hill, in a later work on dream interpretation, writes as though to confirm the above passage: "besides wheresoeuer the fyre [in the skye] shalbe or where it is carried vp, as from y^{e} North, South, West, or East, & from thense enemyes come, or els neare those regions or countryes, dearth shall be."[23] Those who feared the omens of storms and dreams of storms cannot have been reassured by the progress of Devereux, whose crossing to Ireland was beleaguered by tempest.

The superstitions outlined by Digges and Hill, and others like them, were surely in place for many as parameters of the thunder which accompanied the Earl of Essex. Some of the observers that Devereux's company attracted would have, like Stow, taken the day's weather to be a good omen—many others, an evil one. In several biographies of Elizabeth I and Devereux, a paragraph can be found which paraphrases Stow's description before noting that the storm "seemed to the more suspicious a bad omen."[24] Although the majority of these are not forthcoming with evidence to support this claim, Alison Weir notes that Francis Bacon, writing many years afterwards, said that the storm "held an

ominous prodigy" and that he "did plainly see [Essex's] overthrow chained by destiny to that journey."[25]

The combination of strange weather and significant event ensures that both are more likely to be remembered. As Shapiro notes, the afternoon's weather

> made so powerful an impression on the translator John Florio that, over a decade later, he included it in a dictionary as the definition of the word "Ecnéphia": a kind of prodigious storm coming in summer, with furious flashings, the firmament seeming to open and burn as happened when the Earl of Essex parted from London to go for Ireland. (Shapiro 2005, 117-118)

It does not appear to concern Florio that the storm by which he defines the word does not come in summer—a condition of the definition—but in March. I would argue that this is testimony both to the impression that the storm made on Florio and to that which he implicitly acknowledges it has made on his reading public. It makes much more sense to use an example which is ingrained in living memory, whether or not it fits in snugly with the definition. Such is the power of dramatic weather, especially when it occurs at dramatic moments which can be easily recollected by witnesses. However the storm is interpreted, and with whatever omens it is said to bring, there is always the possibility that it will be remembered long after those interpretations and omens have faded from memory.

As Antony pulls the mantle from the body of Caesar before the crowd of citizens, the first plebeian responds, "O, piteous spectacle." With a slight change in tone, this has the deprecatory whiff of something Ben Jonson might say. I have tried to show that *Julius Caesar* contains no piteous spectacle. No piteous spectacle, the strength in depth of the Chamberlain's Men. No piteous spectacle, the sounds of distant battles and of battles fast approaching. And no piteous spectacle, Shakespeare's first staged storm, as closely aligned with contemporary events as it is with those of ancient Rome.

Works Cited

Butterworth, Philip. *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in Early English and Scottish Theatre*. London: Society for Theatre Research, 1998.

Digges, Leonard. *A prognostication everlasting of right good effect.* London: Felix Kyngston, 1605. [STC1/Reel 1629:4].

Harrisson, George Bagshawe. *The Life and Death of Robert Devereux Earl of Essex*. London: Cassell and Co., 1937.

Hill, Thomas. *A contemplation of mysteries.* London: Henry Denham, 1574. [STC1/Reel 839:15].

—. *The moste pleasuante arte of the interpretacion of dreames.* London: Thomas Marsh, 1576. [STC1/Reel 639:11].

Lacey, Robert. *Robert Earl of Essex: An Elizabethan Icarus*. London: The History Book Club, 1970.

Marlowe, Christopher. *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*. Edited by Fredson Bowers, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Plutarch. *Shakespeare's Plutarch: The Lives of Julius Caesar, Brutus, Marcus Antonius, and Coriolanus in the Translation of Sir Thomas North . . . with Parallel Passages from Shakespeare's Plays*. Edited by T. J. B. Spencer. London: Penguin, 1964.

Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar.* Edited by David Daniell. The Arden Shakespeare (Third Series). London: Arden Shakespeare, 1998.

—. *Julius Caesar*. Edited by A. Humphreys. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

—. *Julius Caesar*. Edited by Martin Spevack. New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

—. *Julius Caesar*. Edited by Norman Sanders. London: Penguin, 2005.

—. *The Norton Shakespeare.* Edited by Stephen Greenblatt et. al. New York: Norton, 1997.

Shapiro, James. *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare.* London: Faber, 2004.

Smith, Bruce. *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Sohmer, Steve. *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: The Opening of the Globe Theatre 1599*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Stow, John. *The Annales of England*. London: Ralfe Newbery, 1601. [STC1/Reel 1586:14].

Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971.

Verdi, Guisseppi. *La traviata: Opera in Three Acts*. Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave. English version by Natalie Macfarren. Edited and the pianoforte acc. rev. by Berthold Tours. New York: G. Schirmer, 1926.

Virgil. *Georgics*. Translated by John Dryden. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:po:Z300343122:3. (Accessed March 31, 2008.)

Weir, Alison. *Elizabeth the Queen*. London: Pimlico, 1998.