

**THE FESTIVE REMEMBRANCE OF SHAKESPEARE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
THE MISSION, IDENTITY, AND RHETORIC OF THREE AMERICAN
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVALS**

by

Melissa Rynn Porterfield

BFA, Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus, 1996

MA, Miami University, 2003

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This dissertation was presented

by

Melissa Rynn Porterfield

It was defended on

January 14, 2013

and approved by

Dr. Bruce McConachie, Academic Rank, Theatre Arts Department

Dr. Kathleen George, Academic Rank, Theatre Arts Department

Dr. Marianne Novy, Academic Rank, English Department

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Attilio Favorini, Academic Rank, Theatre Arts Department

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written over the years on the collective memory of Shakespeare and how it continues to be perpetuated centuries after his death, even in places such as America, to which he had no direct connection. Most recently, the intersection of performance studies and memory studies has afforded theatre historians the opportunity to reevaluate the impact of performance on the collective memory of Shakespeare by acknowledging that the embodied performance of a text is no less important than its written words. This dissertation's examination of three American Shakespeare companies -- Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia -- explores the shifting sands of this intersection.

Relying on contemporary theories regarding the inherently social process of memory, this examination posits that the performances of these companies both partake of and constitute commemorations of Shakespeare. The institutional identity of each company is so integral to the performances they produce that the rhetoric and graphics used by these companies in their marketing and promotional materials, are, like the performances themselves, capable of affecting and sustaining the collective memory of Shakespeare. In case studies of each institution, I

examine the particular bond these companies had to the community in which they performed and the ways that each became intimately entwined in the cultural life of that community, pointing to the ways in which their promotional rhetoric and general production aesthetic is directly related to their ideas about how Shakespeare should be remembered and the distinct target audience they hope to attract.

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PREFACE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AMERICAN COMPANY: AN HISTORICAL PROTOTYPE

One of the earliest and most successful theatre companies in the United States was The American Company, which performed throughout the original thirteen colonies (as well as Jamaica and Barbados) from the early 1750s into the 1800s. Originally founded by English actors William and Lewis Hallam as the Hallam Company, over its more than fifty year institutional history the Company performed under no fewer than five different names, owned and operated eight different theatres in eight different cities, was headed by more than four different managers, and ensconced itself and its members into the fabric of communities up and down the East Coast regardless of the cities' political leanings, anti-theatrical sentiments or cultural tastes. The Company's pervasive success among the disparate audiences of colonial and post-Revolution America was largely the result of its ability to appeal to its audiences through its selection of plays, (the majority of which were Shakespearean titles), and the rhetoric employed by the Company in its advertising, performance interludes, and other public interactions. These early American performances of Shakespeare's plays, coupled with the marketing rhetoric and institutional identity of the Company that performed them constituted a powerful force in the shaping of the American collective memory of the cultural icon that is Shakespeare.

The Company chose Shakespeare titles for its earliest productions because they represented a connection to the cultural history and authority of England. In his book, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the American New Republic*, historian Jeffrey H. Richards notes that colonial American audiences were “used to a steady diet of British plays, from Shakespeare to Sheridan to forgettable drivel, often at the expense of local playwrights, and thus making London the city that determined acceptable American stage fare.”¹ Richards asserts that the incorporation of Shakespeare titles among the partisan farces and political satires popular among audiences in these early seasons served as a sign of civility to those audience members who feared the raucous reputation of theatres.² Further, The American Company capitalized on their professional connection to the English theatre, leveraging the cultural capital of both Shakespeare and the British Shakespeare Establishment to legitimize themselves as actors and entrepreneurs.

By the time the Company arrived in 1752, every colony except Virginia and Maryland had laws on the books forbidding the staging of plays,³ but luckily Lewis was able to obtain written permission from the Governor of Williamsburg for the Company (known at the time as the Hallam Company of Comedians) to refurbish the Williamsburg playhouse, built for their company’s use (and quickly abandoned) by Walter Murray and Thomas Kean the year before. It was there that the Company performed its first show, *The Merchant of Venice*, on September 15, 1752, and the Company remained in Williamsburg for over a year before deciding to try their luck in New York. But despite several reconnaissance missions on the part of the brothers to gauge the theatrical waters there, and a letter of introduction and recommendation by the

¹ Jeffrey H. Richards, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the American New Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 125-126.

² Richards 264.

³ Wilson 13.

Virginia governor, the Company was not able to secure permission to perform in New York. The next year the Company headed south for Charleston, SC where the puritan, anti-theatrical sentiment that characterized the American Northeast was nearly non-existent. Despite a successful season there, in 1755 the Company relocated to Jamaica, where Lewis Hallam died. In a move to assure the Company's survival, the recently widowed Mrs. Lewis Hallam married David Douglass, head of the Douglass Company. Douglass, another England native, had established his fledgling theatre company in Jamaica because it was considered by many at the time to be one of the few locations in the New World that truly welcomed theatre companies.⁴ When the two companies merged, eighteen year-old Lewis Hallam Jr. became the Company's leading man and Douglass became the manager, promoter, and builder. Eager to try their hand again in the wider audience base of America, in 1758, the recently merged companies returned to New York, this time under the name The London Company. The new name allowed Douglass to assert the respectability and gentility of his Company in contrast to the poor reputations of other lesser companies with no real connections to the legitimate London stage. But only a few years later, in 1763, the Company was obliged to change its name once again, this time to The American Company, to avoid the growing political hostility against the tyrannical rule of Britain. In his book, *Performing Patriotism*, Jason Schaffer characterizes the 1763 name change as an attempt on the part of the Company to shift "the emphasis of the troupe's advertising from the cosmopolitanism of London to a more homespun appeal."⁵ While the Company was obliged to weather out the majority of the Revolutionary War in Jamaica, when it returned to the Philadelphia in 1784, it began billing itself as The Old American Company, and, as the numerous

⁴ Wilson 14.

⁵ Jason Schaffer, *Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) 88.

partisan satires that had been popular in the antebellum years had fallen out of favor among new American audiences, its seasons featured an overwhelming number of Shakespeare titles, which helped to establish the Company as one of the most successful theatrical companies of its time.

As is the case for modern Shakespeare companies whose case studies form the basis of this dissertation, the popular success enjoyed by The American Company was not simply the result of audience preference, but rather a combination of its performances paired with the carefully constructed marketing and promotional rhetoric employed by Company members. The semantic battles waged on behalf of the survival of the Company by the Hallam, Douglass, and other subsequent managers can be traced back to Hallam's work at the New Wells theatre in London. Hallam had gained notoriety in England by flouting the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737. According to Charles Shattuck,

In order to keep upwind of the law he made it appear in his advertisements that what he was selling to the public was only musical entertainment: the play being offered was incidental to the concert, and it was free of charge. But with this dodge (which later proprietors of non-patent houses would often resort to) he managed during three seasons to stage over fifty-five main plays for a total of nearly three hundred nights.⁶

Hallam's theatre was eventually closed in December of 1747 when authorities began enforcing the licensing act in earnest.⁷ Likewise, the theatrical bans in place in most colonies at the time of the Company's arrival in the America required numerous efforts on the part of Hallam and Douglass to frame the Company and its offerings in terms that would ensure its

⁶ Charles H. Shattuck, "Setting Shakespeare Free?" *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 17.4 (Winter 1982): 110.

⁷ Shattuck 110.

institutional survival. In the antebellum years, when the Company found itself in cities espousing primarily Loyalist sentiments ads for its performances focused on the English heritage of the players and ended with the declaration, “Vivant Rex and Regina.”⁸ In the South, Douglass enlisted upper class English magistrates and gentlemen, offering them not only a chance to be a part of his attempts at “placating, cajoling, educating” local audiences but in his efforts at “circumventing their enemies in the North.”⁹ In the Northern colonies, in a series of attempts to circumvent the anti-theatrical laws, Douglass characterized the Company as a “histrionic academy,” a semantic choice that enabled him to present the works of Shakespeare as a series of lectures, moral dialogues, or pantomimes.¹⁰ In one such move in Newport in the summer of 1761, Hallam advertised the Company’s production of *Othello* as a “Series of Moral Dialogues in five parts depicting the evil effects of Jealousy and other Bad Passions and Proving that Happiness can only Spring from the Pursuit of Virtue.”¹¹ In the face of similar anti-theatrical opposition among New York audiences, in 1758, Douglass attempted to disassociate his Company from theatre altogether, claiming that his interests lay solely in “Dissertations on Subjects, Moral, Instructive, and Entertaining.”¹² As a result of his public, anti-theatrical espousal, the Company was given permission to perform Nicholas Rowe’s *Jane Shore* (1713) on December 28, 1758.¹³

⁸ Quinn 17.

⁹ Wilson 16.

¹⁰ Wilson 16.

¹¹ Walter J. Meserve, *An Emerging Entertainment: The Drama of the American People to 1928* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977) 7.

¹² Douglass qtd. in Meserve 9.

¹³ Meserve 9.

In addition to the public avowals of its managers and the rhetoric of its print ads, the Company often made attempts to align its institutional identity with the preferences of its audiences during performances themselves. In the interval between the first and second acts of its 1761 *Othello*, Hallam inserted a patriotic song presented by one of the actresses of the Company in order to assure Loyalist audiences of Newport of their support of English rule (Wilson 24). Hallam also took advantage of a theatrical tradition of the day in which companies added poetic prologues and epilogues to plays. These catchy verses served not only to direct audiences to the particular moral, ethical, or political aspects of the script in question, but as general advertisements or mission statements for the company performing them. Lewis Hallam Sr. wrote a prologue for the Company's 1753 performances that argued against the theatrical bans in place in most colonies:

Much has been said at this unlucky time,
To prove the treading of the stage a crime.
Mistaken zeal, in terms oft not so civil,
Consigns both play and player to the devil.
Yet wise men own, a play well chose may teach
Such useful moral truths as churchmen preach.¹⁴

In the Company's first production of *Merchant* in 1752, Hallam adds a prologue that Schaffer argues is an optimistic attempt at championing the morality of theatre by creating a rapport with Williamsburg audiences, appealing to them as the cultural descendants of not only England, but the Classical worlds of Rome and Greece:

Haste, to Virginia's Plains, my sons, repair,

¹⁴ Qtd. in Meserve 31.

The goddess said, Go confident to find
An audience sensible, polite and kind.

...

On Athen's [*sic*] infant stage
The Tragic Muse did Honour to the State,
And in a mirror taught them to be great;
The Comick too, by gentle Means reprov'd;
Lash'd every Vice, and every Vice remov'd:

...

Thus was the Grecian Stage, the Romans too;
When e'er they wrote, had Virtue in their View;
In this politer are, on British ground,
The sprightly Scenes, with Wit and Sense abound.¹⁵ (qtd. In Shaffer 66)

In contrast, in May 28, 1773 at a New York performance of *Hamlet* attended by both George Washington and General Gage, Douglass added this pro-American prologue:

When stern Opposition rear'd her baleful head,
To this blest clime our free-born fathers fled:
Secure from lawless sway, they cheerful toil'd.
And soon the grateful glebe with plenty smil'd;
Cities arose, while Commerce pour'd her store,
And Wealth flow'd in from every distant shore.
Now polish'd ease, and manners shine confest,

¹⁵ Qtd. in Schaffer 66.

While ardent Freedom warms each generous breast.¹⁶

The relatively widespread popularity of The American Company has been directly attributed to its uncanny ability to construct itself as an integral part of their audiences' communities, a rare accomplishment according to historian Odai Johnson, given the fact that the "markets of colonial America were still too small to support a resident company, and touring was thus inevitable."¹⁷ To accomplish this, Douglass was careful to position his Company not as itinerants feeding off of the frugal resources of the young colonies in a one-time raid, but as seasonal residents engaged in a sustainable relationship with the community, residing and returning to towns sometimes bi-annually. Johnson identifies the ownership of playhouses as being central to this new social positioning.¹⁸ Over the course of his career, Douglass built (or re-modeled) an impressive number playhouses in cities such as Williamsburg, Kingston (Jamaica), Charleston, Annapolis, Philadelphia, Newport and New York, in effect building his own touring circuit.¹⁹ In contrast, companies that did not secure permanent spaces were forced to search for adequate and available venues in every location, were often obliged to borrow money in numerous towns along the way in order to secure performance venues, and, as a result, made few lasting or positive community connections on which to base future tours. In particular, Johnson contrasts the reputation of Douglass and the American Company with William Verling's Virginia Company, a contemporary troupe who rented Douglass's theatre in Williamsburg in the late spring of 1768, and who left in their wake "a trail of bad faith, at least two incarcerated

¹⁶ Qtd. in Schaffer 97-98.

¹⁷ Odai Johnson, *Absence and Memory in Colonial American Theatre: Fiorelli's Plaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 31.

¹⁸ Johnson 31.

¹⁹ Wilson 14.

actors, an absconded slave, and possibly an eloped wife -- and no playhouse for collateral.”²⁰ To further aid in the Company’s community relations campaigns, Douglass and Lewis Hallam Jr., along with Company actors William Quelch and Stephen Woolls, became members of the Masons. The fraternal organization provided the company with a document known as a Traveling Masonic Certificate listing them as members in good standing, certifying their general social acceptability, and guaranteeing the Company’s safety. At the time, Masonic meetings “represented the most densely concentrated occurrence/gathering of the powerful men in town, whose good will Douglass needed to secure their reputation/place in any community. It was a kind of one-stop-shop for social standing, political protection and economic success for a theatre manager.”²¹ As an added bonus, because the Masons frequently sponsored concerts and other performances to benefit civic charities, their events were considered to be “polite” gatherings where women could safely attend,²² a fact which lent an air of respectability to the theatre of its members.

The tumultuous and uncertain political landscape of Early America certainly constituted a particularly hostile environment for theatre companies, which accounts, in part, for the Company’s highly constructed institutional identity, carefully crafted promotional rhetoric, and the motives behind its performance and recall of Shakespeare. However, my examination of several contemporary American Shakespeare companies will demonstrate that many of the institutional strategies familiar to The American Company serve to a surprising degree as a precursor for the marketing and promotional tactics of modern Shakespeare theatre companies.

²⁰ Johnson 29.

²¹ Johnson 104.

²² Johnson 116.

1.2 PERFORMANCE, COMMEMORATION, AND NOSTALGIA: THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF SHAKESPEARE

Much has been written over the years on the collective memory of Shakespeare and how it continues to be perpetuated, centuries after his death, in places – such as America – to which he had no direct connection. Most recently, the intersection of performance studies and memory studies has afforded us as theatre historians the opportunity to reevaluate the impact of performance on the collective memory of Shakespeare by acknowledging that the embodied performance of a text is no less important than its written words. This dissertation's examination of three American Shakespeare companies explores the shifting sands of this intersection, noting the ways in which a company's particular institutional identity and performance aesthetic combine to affect the collective memory of Shakespeare. Central to this effort are two fundamental notions regarding the functioning of memory. First, is the decidedly social aspect of memory. According to journalist and memory theorist Michael Schudson, even the personal memories of an individual are subject to the influence of society and culture at large. Further, he suggests that:

In its most systematized form, memory is conveyed through institutions such as law and public offices of record or in collectively created monuments and markers: books, holidays, statues, souvenirs. . . . So even where memory seems to be exercised as individual cognition, it relies, always, on a connectedness to the social: the act of remembering is . . . occasioned by social situations, prompted by

cultural artifacts and social cues that remind, employed for social purposes, even enacted by cooperative activity.²³

The other fundamental characteristic of memory that this examination relies upon is sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' assertion that the collective memory of a person or event can only be kept alive through commemorations, festive enactments, or other embodied rituals, a fact reiterated by memory theorist Edward S. Casey who suggests that the mnemonic power of commemorations lies in their ability

to overcome the effects of anonymity and spatio-temporal distance and pay homage to the people and events I have never known and will never know face-to-face. The mystery of the matter -- but also an insight into its inner working -- resides in the way I remember the commemorated past through various commemoratively effective media in the present. It is as if the past were presenting itself in them, albeit darkly: as somehow set within their materiality.²⁴

Sociologist Paul Connerton elaborates on this idea in his seminal book, *How Societies Remember*, in which he argues that whatever societies care to remember most, they entrust to commemoration – an embodied ritual practice. In his discussion of the ways in which our collective memory is constructed and maintained, Connerton makes two important observations as to the nature of commemorations. First, he maintains that, like the recall of personal memories, commemoration is an inherently selective process in which particular memorial aspects are recalled or emphasized in order to explain or legitimize the present situation of the

²³ Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* New York: BasicBooks, 1992, 51-52.

²⁴ Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1987) 219.

rememberer or the collective.²⁵ Second, he suggests that one reason that commemorative acts hold such sway over our collective memory is that the habitual body memory required for embodied practices is less susceptible to the ravages of time than other mnemonic modes. This notion that performance can serve a powerful means of constructing and maintaining collective memory is expanded upon by Joseph Roach in *Cities of the Dead*, who theorizes that because performances are expressive moments of larger cultural mnemonic reserves they are able to “participate in the transfer and continuity of knowledge” of a specific group or people.²⁶ More recently, in her book *The Archive and The Repertoire*, Diana Taylor, suggests that, as embodied cultural practices, performances “offer a way of knowing”²⁷ and function as “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated” behavior.²⁸

Following this line of reasoning, our contemporary collective memory of Shakespeare is shaped and sustained both by the biographical and historical information we learn about him in classrooms and by performances of his works. However, our recall of these performances is also intimately entwined with the institutional identities of the producing companies whose theatrical and social offerings constitute contemporary commemorations of the Bard -- institutional identities which are shaped by the rhetoric and images employed by those companies in their marketing and promotional materials. Thus, the ways in which these companies construct their own identities influence the collective recall of Shakespeare among their audiences. In the case

²⁵ Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 52.

²⁶ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996.) 26.

²⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertory: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003) 3.

²⁸ Taylor 2.

of Shakespeare companies in particular, the performance of Shakespeare's plays constitutes a commemorative act, allowing us to "preserve versions of the past by representing it to ourselves in words and images. . . [that] keep the past in mind by a depictive representation of [the] past."²⁹ In my examination of three case study Shakespeare companies, I suggest that, because the institutional identity of each company is so integral to the performances they produce, the rhetoric and graphics used by these companies in their marketing and promotional materials, like the performances themselves, constitute a form of commemoration.

That these commemorations may bear no resemblance to the accurate, historical circumstances of Shakespeare, his works, or his theatre is, to a large degree, unimportant, as it is their material presence and intent to recall that matters most. In fact, according to David Lowenthal, one of the fundamental elements of monuments, memorials, and commemorative rites is that "their form and features may in no way resemble what they are expressly built to recall. Although commemorative emblems often derive from or symbolize antiquity, many memorials simply reflect the iconographic fashions of their own days."³⁰ More important to collective memory than accuracy, he suggests, is its ability to quench the nostalgic desires of its spectators and participants. Lowenthal asserts that commemorations reveal among their participants "a popular demand for the past. . . . the possession of which through cultural property in the form of commodity fetishism is used to shore up and maintain the status quo. And this duty to the past is, necessarily, not to any authentic representation of earlier events or values, but is instead situated through a nostalgia for that authenticity which is not achievable."³¹

²⁹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) 72.

³⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1985) 321.

³¹ Lowenthal 21.

In addition to serving as a commemorative act, performances of Shakespeare's works (complete with their accompanying array of marketing and merchandising materials) can also fulfill the nostalgic desires of audience members by allowing "consumers [to] vie for a diverse but eclectic range of commodities with which to anchor their experience and desires. In its most restrictive forms, nostalgia performs as the representation of the past's 'imagined and mythical qualities' so as to effect some corrective to the present."³² According to Susan Stewart, because commemorations are capable of satisfying nostalgic desires, modern societies are often tempted to engage in a frenetic drive to preserve all markers of tradition,³³ but this process is fraught with issues of truth/authenticity because, as she reminds us that, '[t]he nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the referent itself. Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss.'³⁴ She maintains that, "If it were really possible to experience the original conditions of those theatres in which Shakespeare's plays were performed, it would effectively eradicate 'the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence'."³⁵

³² Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, eds. *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (New York: Manchester UP, 1989) qtd. in Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996) 5.

³³ Bennett 10.

³⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) 145.

³⁵ Stewart qtd. in Bennett 35.

1.3 MEMORY AND NARRATIVE: AMERICANS REMEMBER SHAKESPEARE

Given the myriad evocations of the Bard and his works in contemporary culture, it is unsurprising that many of them bear little to no resemblance to the historical figure of Shakespeare, a fact that continues to be a source of irritation to many of his devoted fans and scholars alike. While frustrations regarding over mythical stories of Shakespeare are understandable, the majority of what most individuals know of Shakespeare, or any other historical figure for that matter, comes from stories told to us by people who also have no direct knowledge of him. Philosophers Ricoeur and Barthes championed the idea that humans impose narrative form on their experience in an attempt to bring order and meaning to the whirlwind of often unrelated sensations and events that comprise our daily existence. Narrative is also the primary means by which memory is transmitted, and because the process of memory itself is a selective one in which certain events are heightened in our recall in order to account for our current experiences or to serve our present needs, the “true” story of Shakespeare that we seek in memory “has never existed except as a narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.”³⁶ While it may be tempting to assail certain narratives of Shakespeare with charges of inaccuracy, our own nostalgic desires, coupled by our present circumstances, guarantees that any narrative attempting a totalizing depiction of Shakespeare will inherently be less-than-accurate. As sociologists Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase remind us, “it is wrong to imagine that there exists some non-nostalgic reading of the past that is by contrast ‘honest’ or authentically ‘true’.”³⁷

³⁶ Stewart 23.

³⁷ Shaw and Chase 30.

Regardless of our discontinuity with much of the past, Lowenthal insists that, “Remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity,”³⁸ both personal and communal, helping us to understand who we are and what we might become. In my analysis of the American Shakespeare companies examined here, I suggest that the collective memory of Shakespeare offers Americans both the ability to claim traditional cultural legitimacy and the opportunity to rebel against the established cultural authority, a memorial project that requires both commemoration and purposeful forgetting, an idea suggested by Michael Bristol in his book, *Shakespeare’s America, America’s Shakespeare*. Bristol maintains that “Shakespeare’s centrality in American culture might be construed as a kind of anomaly in that it entails respect and admiration for an archaic world-consciousness deep inside the American project of renovation.” But Bristol also questions how a society whose founding actions entailed “a radical separation from all institutions of hereditary privilege” could be so devoted to a writer whose name evokes notions of cultural elitism and whose plays focus on the ethos and pathos of kingship.³⁹ In her examination of Early American theatrical history, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People*, Heather Nathans observes that this same curious conflict of rhetoric between tradition and innovation characterized the development of the American theatrical scene in general:

The rhetoric that surrounded the creation of the Boston and Philadelphia theaters points to an intriguing problem that faced the theaters’ founders. On the one hand, they wanted to build theaters that would be uniquely “American,” that would serve as “schools of Republican virtue.” . . . The theaters’ founders claimed

³⁸ Lowenthal 197.

³⁹ Bristol, Michael D., *Shakespeare’s America, America’s Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 2.

their theaters would inculcate truly democratic principles in their audience, and that their theaters would remain untainted by European vice. Yet, even while they expressed their disdain for the ‘corrupt’ British theater, they hastened to ape British styles of architecture and design in their playhouses Even as they struggled to define their playhouses as ‘American,’ they wanted to ensure that they would match or surpass the best that London had to offer.⁴⁰

Nathans reminds readers that, despite his English identity, from the first recorded American performance of a Shakespearean play, to the closing of the theatres in 1778 due to the Revolution, Shakespeare was the most produced playwright in America. But his popularity extended beyond the stage; his popularity as great thinker among prominent early Americans has also been well documented. Several signers of the Declaration of Independence owned copies of Shakespeare’s works in their libraries, including Jefferson and Adams.⁴¹ In his article, “Shakespeare in America,” James McManaway suggests that Shakespeare’s popularity in America can be attributed to the fact that, for a majority of Americans before the Civil War, English history and culture was American culture and history because of the relative youth of America as a nation. According to him, Shakespeare’s place in American culture was cemented as early as 1787, when the publication of his works began in major cities such as Philadelphia, Boston and New York.⁴² While he acknowledges that the initial pricing and availability of these texts limited their circulation to primarily elite audiences, he traces Shakespeare’s persistence in

⁴⁰ Heather Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 8.

⁴¹ James G. McManaway, “Shakespeare in America,” *PMLA* 79.5 (Dec. 1964) 513.

⁴² McManaway 514.

popular culture to the fact that throughout the 1800s inexpensive copies of Shakespeare readers were printed for use by school children.⁴³

Throughout this examination of Shakespeare and the construction and persistence of his collective memory in America, I will rely on the narrative trope of “freeing Shakespeare,” as suggested by Charles Shattuck in his article, “Setting Shakespeare Free?” in which he maintains that the over-arching story of Shakespeare in performance in this country involves repeated instances of innovative practitioners seeking to save the Bard and his works from the wrong-headed interpretations of actors, directors, and scholars of previous eras. Shattuck theorizes that in the attempt “to bring Shakespeare up-to-date, to freshen interest in him by pretending he is one of us, to make him ‘our contemporary.’ Far too often we alienate him.”⁴⁴ While Shattuck’s article focuses on the attempts of both English and American writers and scholars, in particular the “historically accurate” performance techniques of William Poel and his disciples, in this dissertation I am interested in the ways that modern Shakespeare theatre companies with extremely strong performance aesthetics or institutional missions seek to construct their own ideas about Shakespeare, his intended audience, and the theatrical conditions of his era as moments in which they are “freeing” him and his works from the academic connotations, elitist tendencies and over-blown, anachronistic, or concept-laden production histories of the past half a millennium.

The notion that Shakespeare required saving by Americans may well have begun with John Adams. A devoted fan of Shakespeare’s works, he arranged a trip with Thomas Jefferson to visit the Birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1786. According to his journal entries, Adams was

⁴³ McManaway 517.

⁴⁴ Shattuck 107.

extremely disappointed by the trip and the failure of the English citizenry to properly honor or venerate the great playwright. He admonishes the English for their failure to recognize the importance of the site -- “Tell your neighbors and your children that this is holy ground; much holier than that on which your churches stand”⁴⁵ -- and suggests that because they seem to have “little real appreciation for Shakespeare’s cultural and historical significance” it would be up to Americans, like himself, who truly appreciate his championing of the individual human spirit to save him from fading into historical memory.⁴⁶ In his book, *Representative Men*, Ralph Waldo Emerson named Shakespeare among his collection of great thinkers throughout history, and suggested that because his works deal with the idea that individual autonomy can be viewed as social agency, Shakespeare was better-suited to America’s ideals than those of England.⁴⁷

On the American stage, the impulse to free Shakespeare from the hands of the English actors came to a deadly head during the Astor Place Riots of 1849. The wide-spread animosity stirred up against English actor Charles Macready by supporters of the American actor Edwin Forrest was based on the notion that Macready’s focus on poetry and lavish, “historically accurate” sets and costumes wrongly allied Shakespeare with elitist British culture. Forrest’s stripped down performances at the working-class Bowery theatre were perceived as having freed Shakespeare from Macready’s lush, civilized productions at the polite venue of the Astor Place opera house. Forrest’s ruggedly masculine, forceful performances were preferred by American audiences over Macready’s more restrained, polished style, a style that many felt wrongly aligned Shakespeare with the elitism of European culture.

⁴⁵ Adams qtd. in Bristol 53.

⁴⁶ Bristol 53.

⁴⁷ Bristol 129.

Much like Forrest's performance is seen as freeing Shakespeare from the elitism of English theatre, Edwin Booth is seen by Shattuck as freeing Shakespeare through his focus on historical accuracy, calling him "The first American to commit himself whole heartedly to historical reconstruction," and citing his meticulous research on his *Hamlet* (set in tenth-century Denmark, complete with historically accurate costumes and architecture), and the detail-oriented, painted scenes of Italy which he re-created as backdrops for his productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice* as examples of his dedication to accurately producing Shakespeare's works.⁴⁸ In terms of his acting, Booth's style was unlike the forceful and bombastic work of his father, Junius Brutus Booth Sr. and his father's contemporary Edmund Kean, making his reputation on his introspective, naturalistic productions, freeing Shakespeare again, this time from the declamatory style of the previous generation of performers.

While the Englishman William Poel is perhaps the most prominent figure in the field of historically accurate stagings of Shakespeare's works, several of his American contemporaries were exploring similar ideas to those favored by Poel's Elizabethan Stage Society. In 1895, just a year after Poel initiated his company in England, George Pierce Baker created his own Elizabethan stage in the Sanders Theatre at Harvard University.⁴⁹ Poel's former collaborator Ben Greet toured the US during the early 1930s in a production without scenery, staging performances "in the Elizabethan manner" in a variety of non-stage venues.⁵⁰ B. Iden Payne, who had worked with Poel in England, came to America and established a connection with Thomas Wood Stevens, a Shakespeare scholar at Carnegie Tech who began to stage outdoor

⁴⁸ Shattuck 113.

⁴⁹ Shattuck 114.

⁵⁰ Shattuck 115.

performances of Shakespeare productions in Pittsburgh, in what he called a “modified Elizabethan manner.”⁵¹ In 1933-34, for the Chicago Century of Progress, Stevens built a reconstruction of the Globe, where Payne continued to direct his “Elizabethan” stagings of Shakespeare’s plays. The work of each of these Shakespeareans was aimed at freeing Shakespeare from the stage directions, the elaborate stagings, and the edited texts of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The work of these early 20th century practitioners paved the way for the rise of American Shakespeare Companies during the 1950s and 1960s. Companies such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, founded in 1935 by Angus Bowmer, as part of the Chautauqua assemblies’ mission bringing the best of culture -- in the form of speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and other trade specialists -- to the audiences of rural America. Shakespearean Tyrone Guthrie, who, though an Englishman, also sought to free Shakespeare from the confines of the proscenium, by bringing his idea of the proper stage for Shakespeare’s plays (an open platform backed by a neutral façade with entrances at the sides and center as well as an elevated acting space above the main playing space), to North America, first to Stratford, a town that had fallen into dire economic straights after the decline of the railways, and later to Minneapolis, Minnesota where he founded the Guthrie Theater.

As early as 1906, the editorialist of the *Nation* magazine had suggested that “if the objective [of performing Shakespeare] is to relate us more intimately with the plays, the most effective technique would be to put the actors into modern dress,”⁵² in order to free Shakespeare from the embellished production conventions and elitist dress codes of the nineteenth century.

⁵¹ Shattuck 115.

⁵² *The Nation* editorial qtd. in Shattuck 120.

Though the earliest experiments with concept-laden Shakespeare production can be traced to the work of Barry Jackson, (founder of the Birmingham Rep in England, whose experimental and modern-dress Shakespeare productions began in 1924 and often made their way to the stages of New York and other large American cities), a new generation of Shakespeare directors in the late 1950s through the 1980s attempted to bring Shakespeare out of the past and set him free in the present. The result, according to Shattuck, was that in the last half of the 20th century, American audiences “were treated to a *Hamlet* in space suits, *Shrew* as a shoot-‘em-up western, a voodoo *Macbeth*, a fascist *Julius Caesar* . . . and an Eskimo *King Lear*.”⁵³

It is within this narrative framework of Americans freeing Shakespeare that I will attempt to analyze the performance aesthetics and institutional identity of the Shakespeare Companies featured here, noting along the way how they have constructed themselves and their particular aesthetic commemorations of Shakespeare as more deeply rooted in the historical Shakespeare and his theatre than other theatres or practitioners before them. Each of the companies explored here is also variously interested in setting Shakespeare free, recalling him in different guises and stressing different aspects of our historical knowledge of him and his time and his theatre. Their rhetorical “spin” regarding his works, coupled with performance aesthetics and marketing strategies that make their audiences feel a part of and entitled to the cultural heritage of Shakespeare serves their mission to perpetuate, and continually reconstruct, the collective memory of Shakespeare.

This dissertation will examine the work of three companies – Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, The American Shakespeare Center (previously known as Shenandoah Shakespeare and the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express) in Staunton, Virginia, and the (now

⁵³ Shattuck 120.

defunct) Three River Shakespeare Festival in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In my selection of these companies as case studies, I have not sought to create a representative sample of all American Shakespeare Festivals; rather, I have chosen these specific companies because their similarities provide multiple points of comparison. All three theatres I have chosen were founded within a decade of one another, in the late 1970s and 1980s, by a single impresario with a strong vision as to how, and for whom, Shakespeare should be performed and produced. Each company had a specific and vivid bond to the community in which they performed and became intimately entwined in the cultural life of that community.

All three companies make claims about how Shakespeare is for everyone, but the rhetoric they use to convey this message, as well as the general production aesthetic of each is directly related to both the distinct target audience they hoped to attract and their belief that their audience was not currently being served by other existing, professional Shakespeare production companies. And finally, all three companies, at some point, see themselves as having to combat the archaic, academic and elitist associations associated with the cultural icon of Shakespeare. They see themselves and their signature style of Shakespeare as being able to provide an affective counterpoint to those perceived obstacles, and they rhetorically express those convictions to their audiences while trying to survive the financial realities of the field of the professional performing arts.

Shakespeare & Company tackles the problem of Shakespeare's lack of modern appeal by advocating for a new, distinctly American performance aesthetic, less declamatory and presentational, more physically and vocally engaged, and more passionately expressed than was the tradition of the existing British Shakespeare Establishment. The American Shakespeare Center believes that the solution to Shakespeare's publicity problem lies primarily in re-creating

an actor-audience relationship that more accurately replicates the one originally experienced between players and spectators in the theatres of Shakespeare's own era. The Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival attempted to humanize the imposing cultural icon of Shakespeare through a focus on his identity as a working-class man of the people whose plays were designed to create vivid and universally compelling worlds which, when combined with a festive, communal atmosphere, are capable of providing an escape from the work-a-day existence of modern life.

Regardless of their differences, each company hopes that its memory of Shakespeare is capable of making such a lasting impression among audiences that the company itself and their particular brand of Shakespeare is, as Bert States puts it, "preserved in the communal memory as part of the history of the play, leaving its imprint (for a time) on the text,"⁵⁴ and perhaps on the collective memory of the Bard as well.

⁵⁴ Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (Berkeley, California: U of California P, 1987) 200.

2.0 CHAPTER ONE: TINA PACKER'S SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

"Suit the action to the word and the word to the action."

Hamlet's Advice to the Players (*Hamlet* III.ii)

In this chapter, I will examine the origins and early decades of Shakespeare & Company (S&C), exploring the reasons why Packer, a RADA graduate and former member of the RSC, chose to turn against the British Shakespeare establishment and spawn her new breed of a Shakespeare company in America. By assessing the language of Packer's early grant proposals and press from the Company's first few years, I will identify the potential benefits of rhetorically connecting Shakespeare to America, pointing to the ways in which Packer sought to brand her Company as the new and improved American counterpart to the RSC. Along the way, I will locate moments of tension between S&C's mission and identity and the rhetorical strategies it employed in promotional materials in order to legitimize itself as an institution. Centrally, the Company sought to capitalize on the aspects of Packer's personal life, professional history and memories as a kind of synecdoche upon which the identity of the Company, and its memorial construction of Shakespeare, could be based. I maintain that by focusing on specific elements of Packer's own identity -- as a woman, an actor, a defector from the British Shakespeare Establishment, and a free spirit -- S&C was able to promote a heritage of Shakespeare and his works which was hybrid in nature, one that combined the British dedication and skill in presenting Shakespeare's language with a distinctly American focus on emotional and physical

freedom, all the while claiming to be more or less faithful to the historically-based circumstances of Elizabethan theatre. This was a difficult, if not paradoxical, premise to sustain, as the banner of recollecting the Elizabethan Shakespeare flew in the stiff wind of what Packer identified as American-inspired innovation.

Central to this chapter is my assertion that Shakespeare & Company has been able fundamentally to affect the American collective memory of Shakespeare, by constructing themselves as a new generation of Shakespeareans dedicated to exploring the words of the playwright through a more physically expressive and emotionally passionate performance aesthetic. In his classic, *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton expands Maurice Halbwachs's seminal assertion that our collective memory of the past is routinely re-constructed throughout the ages in order to address the situations and needs of our present,⁵⁵ positing that generational shifts in the collective memory are accomplished when a group establishes a new set of cultural practices to meet their specific needs, beliefs and values.⁵⁶ Connerton argues that new bodily practices become persistent mnemonic forces when habitualized in the body through an inscribing process, and are incorporated into rituals of commemoration.⁵⁷ By constructing its own identity as a production company dedicated to commemorating Shakespeare's works through more visceral and lively performance choices, in sharp contrast to the work of the RSC and other prestigious British theatres, Shakespeare & Company is able to position (and

⁵⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 49.

⁵⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 10.

⁵⁷ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 40 and 72-73.

subsequently promote) itself as restoring the memory of Shakespeare to its original glory by presenting his texts as Shakespeare would have wanted them to be played.

The Company's ability to construct itself as the font for a new generation of performers is enhanced by the fact that its primary thrust is not production, but rather actor training. By focusing its efforts on creating a performance aesthetic whose style is at once easily recognizable and simultaneously the result of a highly-specified knowledge system in which transmission is limited to those who have been trained within its own ranks, Shakespeare & Company has been able to have a significant effect on the way Shakespeare is memorialized in America.

From a phenomenological perspective, S&C's claims on the collective memory of Shakespeare are enhanced because its performance system operates simultaneously on two mnemonic levels. First, as a highly physical performance system, it functions for the actor, in part, on the level of habitual body memory. As Edward Casey writes in *Remembering*, habitual body memory involves "an active immanence of the past in the body,"⁵⁸ resulting in "a subtle structuring of behavior along the lines of a personal or collective tradition that becomes readily reinstated in certain circumstances."⁵⁹ As actors within the system are rigorously and repeatedly trained in the Company's new performance aesthetic, they become predisposed to employ the same physical interpretations to Shakespeare's works, even after they have ceased to be active company members. By carrying the particulars of the Company's process in their own work at subsequent Shakespeare theatres and performances, actors trained at Shakespeare & Company become, in effect, evangelists for Packer's more physically vibrant recollection of how

⁵⁸ Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1987) 149.

⁵⁹ Casey 150.

Shakespeare should be performed. In this way, as Casey puts it, habitual body memory “no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts* it; and if it still deserves the name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment.”⁶⁰ It might be tempting to dismiss the effect of body memory on the construction of collective memory because as Casey suggests, body memory is often resistant to the kind of narrativity employed in historicization. For the audience watching a performance, the habitual body memory of the actors is read as a kind of physical text that, because of the primacy of the visual in terms of remembering, becomes a fundamental, even familiar and orienting, aspect of their own subsequent cognitive constructions of Shakespeare in performance.

The work of Shakespeare & Company also functions as a second mnemonic category – commemoration -- a participatory and intensified form of communal remembrance often imbued with celebratory connotations. As Casey puts it, “in acts of commemoration remembering is intensified by taking place *through* the interposed agency of a text . . . and *in* the setting of a social ritual. . . [and] become[s] efficacious only in the presence of others, *with* whom we commemorate together in public ceremony”.⁶¹ In commemorations, participants are able “to overcome the effects of personal anonymity and spatio-temporal distance in order to pay homage to people and events [they] have never known and will never know face-to-face,”⁶² through memorially effective media in the present. According to this definition, theatre, by its very nature, can provide one of the most congenial venues for commemoration. While audience

⁶⁰ Casey 168.

⁶¹ Casey 217-218.

⁶² Casey 218.

members cannot recall direct, personal memories of Shakespeare, or the Elizabethan era, nonetheless by taking part, even as a spectator, in such a viscerally embodied performance, it is as if this past is presented before them, “albeit darkly: as somehow set within their materiality.”⁶³ The strength of this mnemonic phenomenon is that, in the future, when individuals call up memories of Shakespeare, it is these theatrical moments of commemoration which seem to represent themselves to the rememberer. In this way the particular performance aesthetic of Shakespeare & Company, proliferated through its production history, becomes elided with the historical memory of Shakespeare himself. In cultural terms, one might say that S&C have played an important role in the construction of Shakespeare as an American meme.⁶⁴

This chapter will also take into account how the specific locale of the Company directly influenced its identity and, by extension, its ability to serve as bearers of Shakespeare in American culture. Specifically, I will suggest that the Company’s connection to the Edith Wharton estate and the historical Berkshire arts community was employed in a way that both re-enforced its identity and legitimized its position as a classical theatre company through a kind of transitive property of historical authenticity. I will assert that through their efforts to restore The Mount, and their continued dedication to staging Wharton’s works, S&C presented itself as a capable custodian of cultural heritage and worthy of the challenge of becoming the caretakers of Shakespeare’s legacy in America. I will also suggest that The Mount functions as a *lieu de mémoire*, according to Pierre Nora’s definition, serving the company’s commemorative efforts in

⁶³ Casey 219.

⁶⁴ The term “meme,” was originated by Richard Dawkins’ *The Selfish Gene* (1976), and is defined by the *Miriam-Webster Dictionary* as, “an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture.” Of particular interest to this project is Dawkins’ assertion that while memes essentially self-replicate, that process is a selective one, based not on inherent, stable characteristics, but rather mutate in response to external pressures.

a way that is at once material, functional and symbolic. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a look ahead at the Company's future, and how significant changes in location, performance venues, season selection and artistic leadership have, and will continue, to alter the mission, identity and aesthetic of its congenially constructed remembrance of Shakespeare.

2.1 A NEW ANGLO-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

From the beginning, Tina Packer's relation to Shakespeare has been a passionate one. In 1962, Packer, then twenty years old, returned to England from Paris heartbroken after a particularly disturbing breakup and set about distracting herself by auditioning for and accepting a slot at the RADA. But her relationship with the most prestigious actor training program in England ultimately proved to be as tumultuous as the one that had prompted her return to England. Packer quickly ran into problems fitting into what she saw as the narrowly prescribed roles available for women of her age in the established English stage system. According to her instructors there, she was too "visibly spirited" and "round" to fit into the classical ingénue type.⁶⁵ However, most problematic was the fact that her strong will was "a quality that her drama school directors found more appropriate for character actresses than for leads. Also at issue for the first time in her life was the way she spoke English."⁶⁶ According to Packer, RADA placed significant pressure on their actors, specifically women, to "speak well," a euphemism for an

⁶⁵ Helen Epstein. *The Company She Keeps: Tina Packer Builds a Theatre*. (Cambridge, MA: Plunkett Lake P, 1985) 19.

⁶⁶ Epstein 19.

accent commonly referred to as “Standard” or “BBC English,” that, according to Packer, is employed only to demonstrate that “you’re part of the upper classes.”⁶⁷ For Packer, this focus on proper English speech patterns was not only a distraction from the power of Shakespeare’s words, but, as she would later complain in interviews, an elitist perpetuation of a falsehood. The particular patterns that characterized this accent were, according to Packer, neither Elizabethan nor truly English at all. She was particularly disturbed by what she saw as a significant disparity between genders in this vocal training, noting that, during her training, the men of the RADA were no longer being pressed to adapt the standard accent due to a rash of new plays, popular during the 1960s which focused on the working class Englishman, making speech patterns like the Manchester accent of Albert Finney not only acceptable, but popular. “But women were still expected to push their voices to the front of their mouths and make plummy sounds... [and] pear-shaped vowels.”⁶⁸ Further, Packer found the training she received there to be both physically and emotionally inhibiting and restraining, noting that other actors who were not as “naturally vibrant”⁶⁹ as she, often had a hard time expressing the inner life of characters. But displaying her vibrant personality was never the problem for Packer, who was so openly expressive that she was accused by one of her teachers of throwing herself around the stage like a “spastic duck.”⁷⁰ According to Packer, her instructors discouraged her from performing

⁶⁷ Epstein 19.

⁶⁸ Epstein 20.

⁶⁹ Epstein 20.

⁷⁰ Epstein 20.

Shakespeare, suggesting that her “energy and exuberance”⁷¹ made her better suited for Restoration comedy. But Packer’s biographer Helen Epstein insists that her resistance to the training at RADA was not based on her disappointment at being steered away from playing Shakespeare, but rather that she was convinced that her own “ideas about doing it were better than those of her teachers.”⁷²

Despite Packer’s own very public and repeated accounts of her difficulties with the faculty at RADA, and her sharp criticism of the performance aesthetic they employed, (which would later become a reoccurring trope in Shakespeare & Company’s press material), there seems to be no formal evidence of trouble between Packer and the English institution. At the time of her graduation in 1964, she was awarded the Ronson Award for the Most Promising Actress, and, in a year when half of the members of British Actor’s Equity were unemployed, Packer was working steadily as an actress. That year she also auditioned for Peter Hall, then Artistic Director of the RSC, and was offered a three-year contract there as an Associate Artist, affording her the opportunity to work with such prestigious directors as Hall, Trevor Nunn, and John Barton. Her split from the RSC was also relatively amicable and not the result of personal or professional disagreements; according to Epstein, in deference to her then husband, Laurie Asprey (a less successful actor who was unhappy with his own position in the company), Packer persuaded the RSC to release her from her contract. Though she went on to star in popular BBC serials and direct Shakespeare productions at LAMDA, when her application for a faculty position at RADA was denied, Packer began to realize that there was little hope in attempting to

⁷¹ Epstein 20.

⁷² Epstein 20-21.

change the British Shakespeare establishment's performance aesthetic from inside the system. While the British Shakespeare establishment was on the verge of a new era of experimental Shakespearean productions, led by Brook's seminal production of *Midsummer* in 1970, Packer felt that the artistic turning point heralded by these directorially-adventurous productions may have marked a new era of experimentation in the arena of traditional Shakespearean production, but offered her, as a mere actress, little agency in terms of shaking loose the strict performance practices in which she had been trained.

It was clear to Tina Packer that if she were to have any chance of creating a new kind of Shakespeare company her best move would be one across the pond to America. After years of toiling, within the ranks of the well-established British Shakespearean system, first as an actress and later as a director, Packer had finally reached a point where she felt that she could no longer reconcile herself and her art to the narrow confines of what the English considered to be "good" Shakespeare. According to Packer, "good" Shakespeare in Britain had become a stagnant art form, a kind of lifeless memorial cemented into culture by centuries of production history, serving as a reminder to the world of Britain's once-held cultural superiority. But Shakespeare, she maintained, was a passionate playwright whose relegation to the stodgy confines of classical British performance traditions was tantamount to abuse. Yet this staid and stately remembrance of Shakespeare constructed and reified by esteemed British theatrical institutions was too deeply entrenched in the popular mindset in England, and productions that opposed such a construction were not well received. If Packer hoped to champion a more vibrant and emotionally engaged recognition of Shakespeare, it seemed she was going to have to find not only a new way of performing Shakespeare, but a new audience as well.

For Packer, the freedom and radical experimentation that characterized the American theatre scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s seemed the ideal environment for her radical project of reimagining a cultural icon. The cultural memory of American audiences, she maintained, was less entrenched in decades of milestone productions by the RSC and other elite, nationally supported theatrical institutions. According to Packer, “Unlike the British, Americans don’t have that backing of notions of what Shakespeare ought to be. They ask fresher questions.”⁷³ The English, she insisted, having been weaned on the staid, traditional performance aesthetics of the British training system, had come to expect their Shakespeare to be delivered in a particular fashion: formal, declamatory, somewhat presentational and reserved, and with an emphasis on the beauty of the verse work. In her mind, American audiences, who were more accustomed to the emotionally-amped displays of Method actors, would be more open to seeing classical works, like Shakespeare’s, performed in a more contemporary and emotionally-vivid style; a style on which Packer hoped to base and train her own company.

Packer’s attraction to America was also based on the fact that, unlike England, (where a highly regimented, nationalized classical actor training system closely attached to a state-supported Shakespeare repertory defined and controlled the cultural currency of Shakespeare), the US had no national theatre and very few classical actor training programs in existence. America, she reasoned, would be more receptive to her revolutionary ideas about the performance of Shakespeare, and Packer began to cultivate her professional reputation as a rebel and innovator in order to attract supporters. In *The Company She Keeps*, a biography of Packer and a history of the early years of Shakespeare & Company, author Helen Epstein paints a

⁷³ Packer qtd. in Cash Lockheart Clay, “Shakespeare and company: Berkshires troupe is faithful to bard’s word,” *The Sunday Eagle* [Berkshires, MA] 12 Aug. 1979: F2.

portrait of Packer in 1978 as a scrappy underdog, determined to create the unachievable -- a company that would serve as an American version of the British Shakespeare establishment:

For years people had been calling for the establishment of an American national repertory theatre, and for years, American theater executives had said it could not be done: it was too expensive, the country was too large, there was no tradition of government subsidy, and not incentive for American actors to stick with one group. . . . Tina Packer would not be deterred. What she wanted was a year-round, classically-trained repertory group based on the English model but with an energy and emotional truth that she saw as distinctly American. She wanted to build what would be regarded as an American peer of the Royal Shakespeare Company in England.⁷⁴

Presenting herself as a determined underdog fighting for the creation of an American institution equivalent to the RSC proved to be an effective initial means of attracting the attention of American granting foundations. Cloaking her own agenda in the most American of metaphors -- sports -- Packer likens the importance of great theatre companies to that of a great sports team, noting that, in both cases, only through a significant commitment of time, energy and training can excellence truly be achieved. In the following passage from an S&C program from 1982, Packer places the importance of her own Company on par with that of other, more prestigious, classical European theatre companies:

Despite many abortive attempts, there has been no success in this country in creating a national company with a character of permanence such as the Royal

⁷⁴ Epstein 10-11.

Shakespeare Company or the Berliner Ensemble. There is no way that such a theatre company can happen fast; can be packaged or bought; the team must be carefully built (any football coach will agree) and held together over time. Shakespeare & Company, through a careful commitment to training and a rigorous production standard, is almost there, [and] has almost created a stable institution where the highest standard of art can be generated.⁷⁵

But while it was true that America lacked a nationalized Shakespeare industry, Packer seemed to underestimate the number of Shakespeare companies operating in the 1970s, and as result, was under the promising, though somewhat mistaken, belief that many Americans simply had no access to professional Shakespeare performances.⁷⁶ In a 1972 grant proposal, she claimed to have had knowledge of only two professional North American Shakespeare companies -- Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival and British-born Michael Langham's Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario -- and suggested that neither institution was interested in the kind of actor training necessary to explore the true genius of Shakespeare's works. She wrote:

I am aware that there are other companies doing Shakespeare, but none of them are doing what we are doing. . . . [W]hile I admire the [New York Shakespeare Festival's] actors' vigor enormously and feel that they often capture Shakespeare in spirit, they are hard put to catch his soul because that is contained in the verse

⁷⁵ Program for *Macbeth*. Shakespeare & Company, 1982: 5.

⁷⁶ Though at the time there were more than 20 active American Shakespeare companies, (including Oregon, San Diego's Old Globe, California, Colorado, and the Folger), Packer claims she had no knowledge of them in her 1972 grant proposal to the CBS Foundation (Epstein 34).

which Mr. Papp's men seem to fear; . . . [And Mr. Langham's company,] while admirable in many respects, perpetuates the English Shakespearean acting tradition which even over here (in England) is obsolete and in the States can only be a false grafting without reference to the strong indigenous roots of American theatre. And neither company has the intention, or the time, to explore new approaches to the text that require re-training in actual acting methods.⁷⁷

The language of Packer's grant highlights several key issues that would have undoubtedly proved attractive to potential philanthropists. First, it rightly points to the relative lack of professional classical actor training programs in America as compared to England. Second, it introduces the possibility of a uniquely American way of performing Shakespeare, one which she suggests wasn't even on the radar of the most established American Shakespeare theatre companies. Further, Packer's proposed system of Shakespeare performance promised to be the perfect amalgam of the past and the future. Rhetorically, the language used to describe this potential performance style locates its past in the strong verse work and presentational style of the British Shakespeare establishment, while its future is located in the "energy and emotional truth"⁷⁸ of American acting traditions.

In 1971, one of Packer's earliest grant proposals caught the attention of Dick Kapp, then program manager of the Ford Foundation's theatre division, who was drawn in by Packer's description of a proposed method of playing Shakespeare "through the emotion contained within

⁷⁷ Packer qtd. in Epstein 35.

⁷⁸ Epstein 34.

the sound of the word itself.”⁷⁹ Knapp helped Packer write her first successful grant for the Ford Foundation, which awarded her \$132,000 in February of 1973, in order “to explore the roots of Elizabethan theater with an Anglo-American company of actors and teachers.”⁸⁰ This short-lived, early incarnation of the Company trained for several months in Alcester, England, outside of Stratford-on-Avon, before taking their production of *The Taming of the Shrew* on tour to select metropolitan locations in England and to a number of locations in New England. According to Packer, the Company’s production was a success in terms of its actor-training process, allowing her and a core group of master teachers the opportunity to, “find a way of doing Shakespeare that was both true to him and true to us,”⁸¹ but, failing to attract the kind of critical and box office success that Packer had hoped for. Critics were unimpressed by the company’s un-traditional, broadly physical approach. A reviewer from *The Mamaroneck Times* went so far as to warn audiences, “The more you love Shakespeare, the more you’ll loathe what this company is doing to him,” complaining that the tumbling skills of the performers far outweighed their acting abilities. Even the *Village Voice* critic, who praised the actors’ physical abilities, was forced to conclude, “How much is enough?”⁸² Faced with the abysmal public reception of her work, Packer dissolved the company after only one season. Smarting from the

⁷⁹ Epstein 11.

⁸⁰ Packer’s 1973 Ford Foundation Grant Application Narrative qtd. in Epstein 10.

⁸¹ Epstein 38.

⁸² *The Mamaroneck Times* and *Village Voice* reviews qtd. in Epstein 48.

unsuccessful venture, Packer returned to England and spent four years concentrating on raising her son before returning to America and the world of theatre.⁸³

By 1978, Packer had refined her ability to rhetorically define the performance aims of her intended Company and once again set out to secure funding. This time around she spent less time insisting on the merits of her own system in comparison to what she characterized as the stodgy British performance tradition, and more time extoling the potential benefits of founding a uniquely American Shakespeare company with actors trained with the same level of rigor as exemplified by the British Shakespeare establishment. Rather than distancing herself from her prestigious career in England, she capitalized on it; even calling upon Peter Hall, with whom she had worked during her time at the RSC, to write a letter of recommendation to accompany her proposals praising Packer's "originality" and "drive," and maintaining that the "cross-fertilisation [sic] of American talent with the craft and expertise of English tradition is something that can do nothing but good."⁸⁴ Hall's recommendation places Packer within the ranks of the most prominent English Shakespeare practitioners of the age, and that standing, coupled with her own history within the British Shakespeare establishment, painted her as a good financial risk. To potential corporate sponsors, the promise of a performance aesthetic capable of honoring both the spirit of Shakespeare and the spirit of America was undoubtedly an attractive one. It allowed for the notion that the America's preoccupation with innovation, which had propelled the US to the head of the pack of industrialized nations, could prove to be the key to recovering the true

⁸³ Despite this 1973-4 incarnation of the company under the same name, the company considers 1978 to be its founding date, and marks all of its subsequent anniversaries and jubilees from that year.

⁸⁴ Packer qtd. in Epstein 37.

spirit of Shakespeare. By this logic, America's forward-looking endeavors could prove to be the savior of a historical British cultural icon.

While it may seem an overstatement to say that Shakespeare needed saving from the British, Packer's conviction that Shakespeare had suffered at the hands of unenlightened practitioners was not without precedent. In his book, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare*, Michael Bristol points out that traditionally, "the goal of research and criticism in relation to Shakespeare has typically been to rescue his authority from institutional distortions accumulated through its history."⁸⁵ Packer's, desire to break with the English tradition, despite her English identity, marked her as a kind of cultural rebel and afforded her an acceptance among Americans who saw her as an artistic innovator who, according to early local press on S&C, was becoming known for "making a career of fighting traditional concepts of Shakespeare."⁸⁶

But fighting traditional concepts of Shakespeare performance was not simply a matter of reminding audiences of the passion and vibrancy of the Bard's works, it required a campaign of purposefully forgetting another older set of cultural practices. Early interviews and press releases were filled with references to what became known as Packer's controversial "anti-classical" style. In 1981, Kevin Kelly of the *Boston Globe* noted that while Packer's "supposed anti-classicism really amounted to a contemporary approximation of the Elizabethan style,"⁸⁷ he also pointed to several of the more American aspects of Packer's decidedly anti-British system,

⁸⁵ Michael D. Bristol. *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 5.

⁸⁶ Clay 1.

⁸⁷ Kevin Kelly, "Bard in the Berkshires, a midsummer's dream," *Boston Sunday Globe* 9 Aug. 1981: A24.

which would eventually become signature aspects of the Company's performance aesthetic. First, he notes the absolute clarity in the actors' delivery of their text and suggests that the resulting egalitarian feel of the production is the direct result of Packer's belief in what she calls, "a common culture Shakespeare," spoken clearly, cleanly and 'certainly not exclusively in Oxsonian accent.'⁸⁸ Second, he points to the Company's dedication to using non-traditional casting practices, noting that Packer believed that Shakespeare should be played by "multi-racial actors, not just pristine, pale, polished Britishers."⁸⁹ Finally, he reveals that "heresy of heresies, [Packer] also came to feel that American actors were not only as competent but in many ways emotionally and physically freer to play Shakespeare than their British colleagues."⁹⁰

Packer's vocal distaste for the trappings of "classical" performance styles is featured repeatedly in the Company's first decade of press exposures and help to paint her as a rebel with a real cause. Charles Smith, a reporter from the *New England Monthly* recounted Packer admonishing her cast at the end of a 1984 rehearsal-run of *Romeo and Juliet*: "Those of you that have worked with me before know that there is one thing that is absolutely anathema to me, and that is any sort of Shakespearean acting."⁹¹ Both Packer and the author go on to use the term "Shakespearean acting" as the "highest insult" imaginable. Smith depicts Packer as an artistic

⁸⁸ Packer qtd. in Kelly, "Bard in the Berkshires..." A24.

⁸⁹ Packer qtd. in Kelly, "Bard in the Berkshires..." A24.

⁹⁰ Kelly, "Bard in the Berkshires..." A24.

⁹¹ Packer qtd. in Charles C. Smith, "Shakespeare Gets Rolfed: Tina Packer's vibrant production can scorch a codpiece at fifty paces," *New England Monthly* Aug. 1984: 22.

savior, having rescued the genius of Shakespeare's words from his hoity-toity alter ego. In the article, Packer reductively characterizes the British Shakespeare establishment as,

an assortment of time-honored stage clichés that many young actors adopt simply because they've seen experienced performers fall back on them time and time again. . . . Women putting their hands on their hips, men slapping their thighs and putting one foot higher than the other -- those things to me are signs of bad Shakespearean acting.⁹²

Smith goes on to note that . . .

those hackneyed poses are only the outward flourishes of the acting style she hates, a style that represents to her everything that is awful about the British stage tradition in which she was trained. Displaying a fine postimperial scorn for England's venerable theater establishment, she dismisses most of the BBC's silly productions of Shakespeare as "prissy, silly, and boring – the worst sin of all," and mourns the emotional emptiness that she finds epidemic in English acting. "English actors are great balls of suppressed emotion," she says. "It's just not considered done to expose your emotion."⁹³

In numerous interviews, like this one for *The Guardian*, Packer praises the emotional availability which she identifies as the primary characteristic of what she defines as the American aesthetic: "My actors are retrained to be emotionally available and to express their emotions. I call the American way of acting Method and the British way of acting the school of

⁹² Packer qtd. in Smith 24.

⁹³ Packer qtd. in Smith 24.

repression. . . . The British actors say their lines very, very swiftly and usually not very clearly but they do not touch the greater depth. They will turn their back on the audience and emote rather than actually allow the tears to flow.”⁹⁴ In several articles Packer and other Company members invoke Marlon Brando as the ideal performer, possessed of the emotional freedom that, for Shakespeare & Company, defines the allure of the American theatrical tradition.

While the rhetorical strategy of Packer’s early attempts to promote the uniqueness of her Company hinged almost entirely on the notion of its quintessentially “American” identity, Packer played fast and loose with her definition of the label. While grant proposals for both the 1973-1974 and the 1978 incarnations of S&C focused on the enormous potential for what Hall referred to as a productive cross-fertilization that would inevitably result from the mixing of British and American actors, for practical reasons the Company was never able to achieve the kind of even mix among the acting company that Packer had initially hoped for. Contract issues with the actor’s unions in both America and the U.K. made having an even number of American and British actors an impossibility. In response to this hurdle, by 1980, Packer shifted her promotional verbiage to focus on the goal of creating an “international” company of players.

Numerous press releases and local newspaper articles from the first five years boast of Company’s wide national and racial make-up, reporting that its casts included both white and black Americans “as well as Canadians, Japanese, Lithuanians, Italians -- all of whom are strictly American, individualistic [and] responsive.”⁹⁵ Despite this, the overwhelming majority of Company members were white Americans. The reasons for this were primarily financial. In early

⁹⁴ Packer qtd. in Barbara Jeffrey, “Star Spangled Shakespeare,” *Guardian* 2 Jun. 1981: n.pag.

⁹⁵ Packer qtd. in Bethia Caffrey, “Tina Packer: A Passionate Woman with Definite Ideas,” *Evening Independent’s* [Berkshires, MA] *You Magazine* 29 Nov. 1980: n.pag. S&C Company Archives.

years, the Company could not afford to pay any of its members a living wage, and as a result the majority of its members were actors who had both the free time and a financial situation that would allow them to work for several months at a stretch, in dilapidated communal housing, making what amounted to a meager stipend. Secondly, in order to fulfill the goal stated in early grants of being a “professional” Shakespeare company, the Company was obliged to adhere to the contractual regulations set forth by the Actors Equity Association. But the job of the American union was to insure that paying jobs went to American actors, and as a result, early contracts with AEA stipulated that S&C could only use three foreign actors for every nine American actors in the Company. But even this ratio is somewhat misleading. The total number of the Company members reported to the AEA was based in part on its stated status as a training school, and not a professional theatre. So, while according to AEA the “professional” company members in 1979 numbered thirty-three, the full number of company members, including those classified as students, in the summer of 1979 was seventy-five, making the actual percentage of non-white American Company members during S&C’s early years much lower than its boast.⁹⁶ Union regulations also put the kibosh on the Company’s early plans to begin fulfilling its goal of becoming an internationally renowned performance troupe. One of the original plans laid out in Packer’s 1972 Ford Foundation grant application was for Shakespeare & Company’s players to move freely from between America and England, performing in both countries. But neither British nor American Actor’s Equity was willing to agree on the same troupe make-up, and, as a

⁹⁶ For an account on the company’s early contractual arrangements with AEA see Helen Epstein’s account of the early years of the company’s history. For the actual figures used here, see Milton R. Bass, “‘Dropping in’ on *The Winter’s Tale*,” *Berkshire Eagle* 7 Jun. 1979: n. pag..

result, the “international” focus of the Company fell by the wayside before the 1982 season began.⁹⁷

When it was no longer practical or beneficial to define the Company’s dedication to the “American” notion of diversity in terms of an “international” troupe of actors, Packer once again redefined her concept of “American,” by focusing on the racial diversity among its American actors. Echoing the same claims made by Shakespeare & Company in its 1982 Season Press Release, *The New York Times* claimed that,

Perhaps the single most American aspect of Shakespeare & Company is its racial mix. In a recent *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo was black, Juliet was Japanese and Lady Capulet was white. In *Twelfth Night*, one of the romantic leads is played by a black, Gregory Uel Cole. “I’ve been given the opportunity to play roles I wouldn’t normally be able to play elsewhere,” Mr. Cole said. “Socially, it’s wonderful to see a black actor perform Shakespeare because audiences think blacks can’t speak English.”⁹⁸

Though, at the time, the colorblind casting practices employed by Shakespeare & Company were considered to be daring, appropriate, and quintessentially American, the Company’s use of racially diverse actors could also be read as yet another given circumstance rhetorically transformed into a production choice rhetorical strategy and employed by Packer and Company to brand themselves as a distinctly American Shakespeare company. In the press, Packer often asserted her belief in the importance of colorblind casting in her mission to rescue Shakespeare’s

⁹⁷ Markland Taylor, “A theatrical fest in the Berkshires,” *New Haven Register*, 25 Jul. 1982: 3+.

⁹⁸ Cole qtd. in Susan Heller Anderson, “Shakespeare in the Park, this Time in Brooklyn,” *New York Times* 2 Jun. 1982: n. pag.

works from the elitist, white, Western canon, without changing his texts. Further, she frequently suggested that, due to racial, linguistic and cultural diversity, “America and American actors are closer to the England of Shakespeare’s day, and to the actors of the era, than modern-day British actors are.”⁹⁹

In an interview for *The New Haven Register*, accompanied by founding master teacher Kristin Linklater, Packer contrasted her own particular definition and practice of American racial diversity against those of other American Shakespeare companies, complaining that,

Playing Shakespeare has settled into pockets of nationalism and class This seems to us to simply skim the surface, and, contrary to Joe Papp who feels the need for a black Shakespearean company and a Puerto Rican Shakespearean company, and so on, we feel that the very multiplicity of backgrounds in our company brings out the excitement. We also look to the unification of the roots of poetry that go far beyond multiplicity of nationality or race.¹⁰⁰

According to Packer the advantage “for us being a British, American and multi-racial company . . . is that all sides have so much to offer.”¹⁰¹ Packer’s implication is that the race-specific production practices of her contemporaries amounted to little better than institutional ghettoizing; while in contrast, her own Company existed as a true melting pot of American identities.

⁹⁹ Packer qtd. in Enid Nemy, “A Company That Gets the Stiff Upper Lip Out of Shakespeare,” *New York Times* 2 Sept. 1984: n. pag.

¹⁰⁰ Packer qtd. in “Shakespeare and Wharton in Lenox,” *New Haven Register* 3 Jul. 1978: n. pag.

¹⁰¹ Packer qtd. in “Shakespeare and Wharton in Lenox,” *New Haven Register* 3 Jul. 1978: n. pag.

Yet of all the verbiage used during their first decade, the self-descriptor most commonly used by the Company in its own press and marketing materials was “Anglo-American.” By describing its system as a hybrid, the Company was able to assert that its performance aesthetic was uniquely American while simultaneously taking advantage of their prestigious connections to the established cultural authority of the British Shakespeare System. The label afforded S&C the opportunity to play both sides of the field, placing emphasis on its British heritage when it wished to solidify its artistic qualifications, while focusing on its American identity when it wanted to emphasize the newness, the emotional freedom, or rebellious nature of Packer’s approach. The label was particularly well-suited to the Company’s ideas about Shakespeare’s language, as developed by founding master teacher Kristen Linklater. In opposition to the British Shakespeare establishment, who stressed the poetic beauty of the Bard’s works, Linklater located the appeal of Shakespeare’s words in their potential for emotional power. For her, this distinction, bolstered Packer’s own insistence that her emotionally-connected performance approach, was better able to illuminate the universal themes inherent in the Bard’s works than her British predecessors. It followed, for Packer, that she was making Shakespeare more approachable to a wider American audience that might otherwise be scared off by the elitist reputation that she believed the English had cultivated around his works. In early interviews, Packer is often depicted as trying to debunk the notion that, “Shakespeare is best performed by the British,”¹⁰² an idea that Packer says is “nonsense.”¹⁰³ As she told one regional newspaper in a 1983 profile piece on the company, “Shakespeare is a universal playwright, and he wouldn’t

¹⁰² Joe Meyers, “‘No frills’ Shakespeare is company director’s aim,” *Telegram* [Bridgeport, CT] 23 Jun. 1983: 17.

¹⁰³ Packer qtd. in Meyers 17.

have endured this long if his work was only suited to the British. One of the reasons that a lot of American actors can't do Shakespeare is because they keep accepting the idea that there's only one way to do it -- the British way."¹⁰⁴

Yet, despite her professed distaste for the British Shakespeare system at large and her vehement assertions that she was not merely importing their existing British traditions to America, all of the master teachers that Packer assembled to form the base of her actor training program were well-respected members of the British Shakespeare establishment. Kristin Linklater, a Scots-born vocal coach who had trained and held teaching positions at LAMDA, met Packer in America in 1972. Biographer Helen Epstein notes that both Linklater and Packer, "like many Britons in the 1960s, had decided that America was the place to be,"¹⁰⁵ and had left England in search of better artistic funding, greater artistic freedom, and better job opportunities for women. Linklater would later recall that her plan was a popular one among her artistic peers. "To come from London and think you could just tap into American riches was a pretty British idea at the time."¹⁰⁶ In 1972, when Linklater first met Packer, she had recently received her own \$10,000 grant from the Ford Foundation and was on her way to Italy where she would write *Freeing the Natural Voice*. Linklater was impressed by Packer's "pluck," and knowing first-hand how difficult the grant process was, "she gave her several significant contacts in the grant realm."¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Packer sensed a kindred spirit in Linklater, who was one of the first

¹⁰⁴ Packer qtd. in Meyers 17.

¹⁰⁵ Epstein 8.

¹⁰⁶ Linklater qtd. in Epstein 10.

¹⁰⁷ Epstein 10.

instructors that Packer secured for her new company. She then assembled the remainder of Shakespeare & Company's master teachers by poaching them from the British institutions where she had previously worked. John Barton had been Packer's mentor during her stint at the RSC. The Company's movement coach, John Broome was an instructor from her alma mater RADA, and both Linklater and S&C tumbling and combat coach, B. H. Barry, were instructors at LAMDA, where Packer had recently taught.¹⁰⁸

Early versions of S&C's mission statement identify the Company's focus on actor training by these renowned British masters as being the central to the its identity. S&C's first attempt at a mission statement in a July 1979 press release reads: "Shakespeare & Company is a 2-year-old British and American multi-racial, international equity acting troupe dedicated to the words of the classics, and equally to the techniques and inspirations of four master teachers of world-wide reputation and experience." To balance the distinctly British pedigree of the master teachers, Packer frequently insisted to the press that her system was not merely an importing of British technique to the United States, but rather, as she explained it in the Company's first significant article in the *New York Times*, an "ambitious attempt" to "come up with something different from both, marrying the British technical and cultural emphasis to the strong American psychological and emotional base that the 'method' actors use" in order to create "a permanent Classical theater."¹⁰⁹ Yet despite her insistence on the hybrid nature of her approach, the Company's early interviews and press profiles relied heavily on the reputations of its master teachers within the British Shakespeare establishment. In early national press, the company

¹⁰⁸ Epstein 37.

¹⁰⁹ Packer qtd. in Harold Farber, "Shakespeareans Thrive At Old Berkshire Estate," *New York Times* 18 Feb. 1979: n. pag.

presented the American professional accomplishments of Packer, Barry, and Linklater, all of whom had recently held positions at prestigious American institutions such as the Lincoln Center Repertory, Yale, NYU, Julliard, and Smith College, as mere footnotes to careers defined by having held positions in the same British Shakespeare Establishment that Packer had so frequently and publicly decried. Meanwhile, in local press, much was made of the fact that these renowned British Shakespeareans agreed to stay on “slumming it,” as it were, in the modest accommodations of the Berkshires, in a selfless effort to train a new generation of American actors.

But, more than any other Company member, it was Packer whose professional reputation and personal history was at the heart of S&C’s promotional press. Despite her own misgivings about the British system in which she was trained, Packer recognized that in the eyes of Americans, the performance of Shakespeare, as practiced by prestigious training institutions like RADA and the RSC, constituted, in the words of Connerton, a “privileged form for the transmission of social memories,” as those who are “allowed to perform in the process are limited to those who have received special training”¹¹⁰ -- training that Packer herself had and was willing to leverage in her attempt to create her own training and production-focused Company. In the press, S&C’s particular construction of Packer’s coming-to-America story positions her, and by extension her company, as the direct American inheritors of the cultural icon that is Shakespeare, highlighting her prestigious history within the English Shakespeare System:

¹¹⁰ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 102.

Shakespeare & Company's founder and artistic director, Tina Packer, a 37-year-old British Equity actress and director. Her training was at the Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, and she acted extensively with the Royal Shakespeare Company. It was at the Royal Shakespeare that Packer's advocacy of certain Elizabethan precepts attracted the attention of the Ford Foundation, which in turn offered her a grant to amplify and codify these practices. After studying in this light all over the world, Packer found herself at Smith College, Northampton, Mass., directing a production in her manner of *The Learned Ladies*. It was a great success and attracted attention in a number of American theatrical circles.¹¹¹

Here, as in other promotional materials, the specifics of Packer's narrative are elided so as to reinforce her own identity as an artist trained in the selective ranks of a prestigious institution and possessed of the specialized knowledge required to qualify her as a worthy custodian of the memory of Shakespeare. Avoided in this truncated narrative are the facts that she felt her talents went unappreciated at RADA, that she had fundamental disagreements with the RSC's way of doing Shakespeare, that her first attempt at creating Shakespeare & Company less than five years before on the Ford Foundation's dime was a failed experiment, and that the "American theatrical circles" that she had been running with were little more than a few local former blue-collar workers who had turned arts patrons when their businesses ran flush. Rather, readers are encouraged to easily trace Packer's journey as she sprang from the original fount of reputable

¹¹¹ Fred LeBrun, "Shakespeare & Company: As you like it, as he wrote it," *Times-Union*, [Albany, NY] 5 Aug. 1979: F1 and F6.

(i.e. “good”) Shakespeare at the RSC, travelled the world to become a seasoned artist (funded via strong American corporate sponsorship), arrived at an ivy-league American college, and was adopted into the cultural and theatrical elite of the Northeast.

Over the more than thirty years of the Company’s existence, as its standing among American Shakespeare companies has grown more secure, and as the original British master teachers moved on to other opportunities, S&C has backed away from this kind of extreme emphasis on their ‘Anglo-American’ identity. However, Packer continues to this day to assert that Americans are uniquely qualified to perform Shakespeare the way it was intended to be performed because our society is, in so many ways, similar to that of the Elizabethan era. In my own interview with Packer, I asked if she intentionally set up her own acting system to be the new and improved, American version of its stodgy English counterpart at the RSC, and she replied,

In the beginning, that was definitely the case. Though in the past thirty years the systems have gotten much closer together. The English Shakespeare has gotten much more visceral. . . . [Now] there’s a lot more physicality. . . . So in the beginning, I think, what attracted me to Americans was that they were so physical, and I felt that was very Elizabethan, and not Victorian, which is what I would call the English, you know? We’re all upper-middle class people speaking terribly well. But they [Americans] had a whole range of accents which was very Elizabethan. They come from all walks of life: very Elizabethan! We’re really going to fight if we’re going to fight: very Elizabethan! So there was a kind of alignment between the American psyche and physicality that I think allied very closely to the Elizabethan. They’re both young societies. They’re both brash, you

know? There's a lot of alignment with them and the Elizabethans. All of us, [the Company's original master teachers], we never went back to England. We found a mode of expression here. And that has to do with the flexibility of American society that allowed us to do . . . but also because there wasn't something for us to have to knock down here.¹¹²

Packer's constructed narrative of Elizabethan society constitutes what Michael Schudson calls "instrumentalization," a particular form of memory distortion, in which the past is put to work in the service of a present (frequently political) end, often at the expense of issues of truth.¹¹³ Of particular note in the case of S&C is that, according to Schudson, instrumentalization is not necessarily a calculated process; it is subject to rationalization, repression, and other forms of cognitive (ego) bias, and may be countered by living memory in a pluralistic world. Further, Schudson suggests that commercial or other forms of intervention may stimulate a second-order instrumentalization -- distortion without embracing a particular, alternative vision of the past, in which "the past is employed not to promote a particular view of it but to attract a ticket-buying crowd."¹¹⁴ Packer's assertion of the similarities between the Elizabethan world and contemporary American society distorts the past in service of the present-day situation of her Company, and her ego bias is particularly evident in her framing of Shakespearean core values. Yet Packer's rhetorical intention in moments such as these is clearly focused on the promotion of

¹¹² Tina Packer, Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2009.

¹¹³ Michael Schudson, "Distortion in Cultural Memory," *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*. Ed. Daniel L. Schacter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 351.

¹¹⁴ Schudson, "Distortion in Collective Memory" 354.

her Company and its productions rather than on the accuracy of her narrative, a fact that, in part, mitigates its inaccuracies.

While the Company maintained a focus on the prestigious reputations of Packer and the other British master teachers in order to insure their initial acceptance into the American theatrical circles, its bid for a more permanent piece of the American Shakespeare pie was based firmly in their identity as an actor-centered training institution. Establishing training as its primary focus allowed the Company to define itself and its members as a new generation of custodians of the collective memory of Shakespeare, trained in a new set of specialized knowledge created by the artists within their ranks, and disseminated by a new generation of actors trained in a more emotionally, physically, and vocally free method of performing the work of the Bard.¹¹⁵ The choice further served to further set her Company apart from the British tradition, which did not incorporate such an intimate blend between actor training and professional performance. To this day, Packer sees her actors as the rightful bearers of Shakespeare's cultural legacy. As she professed in my own interview with her, "the actors are really the carriers of the knowledge. They are out there on the frontline."¹¹⁶

Packer has been clear from the beginning that the primary focus of the Company is on training and the transmission of its acting system:

It really is about the passing on of knowledge, and you can't do that without there being collective knowledge -- if I can say that. It can't just be Tina doing that. It

¹¹⁵ For a more complete exploration of how generational changes in values and circumstances necessarily transform the collective memory of a given person, place, thing or event, within a given group, see Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 102.

¹¹⁶ Packer Interview 2009.

can start off being just Tina doing that. But then Tina needed Kristen, and John Broome and B.H. Barry and Dennis Krausnick and Kevin Coleman and all those other people, too. So it's always the idea of passing on of knowledge. It's always at the center of what we do. . . . The aesthetic of the company is really held in the training.¹¹⁷

The “collective knowledge” that Packer relies upon in the transmission of her performance system is, in effect, a new set of historically and culturally situated and physically embodied cultural practices cemented into the collective memory of a new generation of Shakespearean actors, whose performances, in turn, make inroads on the collective memory of Shakespeare in the culture at large. This new memorialization of him is an exercise of what Connerton calls “habit-memory” with the repetition of the skills acquired in the actor training system constituting as an “accumulative practice of the same,”¹¹⁸ while solidifying the authority of its own system as the preferred means of commemoration. In effect, the Company’s memorial strategy as training system provides tactics to control both the past memory of Shakespeare and the future memory of Shakespeare.

In its early decades, the actor training at Shakespeare & Company functioned much like a master-apprentice system, in which specific elements of the system, such as stage combat, tumbling, Linklater’s vocal system, and Packer’s “dropping-in” techniques, become, in effect, trade secrets, which can only be passed down through teachers that are in a direct educational line from the “authentic” (British?) source of the method. As actors left and moved on to other

¹¹⁷ Packer Personal Interview, 2009.

¹¹⁸ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 35.

companies throughout the country, Shakespeare & Company's physically and aurally-based method of commemorating Shakespeare was disseminated throughout the American Shakespeare scene. The communal/family feel of the Company paired with its relatively remote locale lent a further an air of secrecy to its system, effectively privatizing it and thereby increasing its appeal among actors seeking a different kind of training experience. By 1981, press had begun to note the strong connection between the success of that training program and the strong, positive response to their work from critics and audiences alike. In a glowing review of the Company's 1981 production of *Twelfth Night*, *New York Times* theatre critic Frank Rich, summed up their mission statement by focusing on its dedication to training: "Shakespeare & Company is dedicated to the renewal of classical theater in America and the training of young actors who can bring about that rebirth."¹¹⁹ Another appeal of the training program, according to Linklater, is that, unlike other programs, at Shakespeare & Company both directors and students think of it as a more democratic, actor-centered process, rather than a rote perfection of a prescribed set of postures passed down to quiet, obedient students by task-master-teachers.¹²⁰ Because S&C derived much of its identity and financial success from its focus on actor training, a large portion of its marketing and promotional materials were geared towards attracting potential artists and educators to study with the Company at Lenox or book them for training and educational workshops. As a result, many of S&C's early promotional photos featured actors and master teachers in physically-charged, hands on teaching moments.

¹¹⁹ Frank Rich, "A Short Day's Journey," *New York Times* 6 Aug. 1981: n.pag.

¹²⁰ Bonnie Fuller, "Actor-centered training," *the [sic] Paper* [n.p.], Aug. 3 – Sept. 6 1989: 23.



Figure 1: Tony Simotes Teaches (Travelling Conservatory Brochure, photo by Judy Salsbury, Shakespeare & Company, 1979.)

Figure 2: John Broome Teaches (Sixth Season Program, photo by Judy Salsbury, Shakespeare & Company, 1983, 9.)

Figure 3: Kristen Linklater Teaches (Fourth Season Program, photo by Jane Edmunds, Shakespeare & Company, 1981, 13.)

As the Company progressed, many of the original master teachers assembled by Packer moved on to more lucrative and prestigious work. S&C was able to maintain its connections to the British Shakespeare Establishment by hiring their replacements from among the its own students, a move that reinforced the ability of its training program to produce disciples capable of accurately and effectively passing on the knowledge of their respective masters. In a letter from the Artistic Director in the program from S&C's fifth season, Packer clearly articulates the direct connections between her newly hired teachers and their prestigious predecessors, boasting:

Many regional repertory companies maintain a core group of artistic staff, but Shakespeare & Company's uniqueness lies in its devotion to an aesthetic which demands a commitment to life long [*sic*] training for its professional actors comparable only to that of the professional boxer or Olympics contender. In order

to sustain our training we are developing teachers from within the acting company (the best teachers are very often the most talented actors as well), and we are building teaching teams thoroughly trained to teach voice, movement, stage combat, and Shakespeare text. . . . Paying careful attention to the training of teachers we acknowledge our debt to the traditions by which we have been trained and try to be responsible to the next generation of theatre explorers inevitably, as a result, our own work continues to expand and deepen.”¹²¹

The letter goes on to proudly announce that actors Natsuko Ohama, Gregory Uel Cole and Zoe Alexander, having been trained by Linklater, were now “experienced teachers” capable of spreading the Gospel of Shakespeare according to Packer. Likewise, combat master Barry’s talents were in such demand that the Company had grown to rely on Barry’s pupil and founding Company member Tony Simotes to serve as their fight captain and to teach workshops. Master movement teacher Broome had begun to pass many of his duties on to his apprentices, Susan Dibble, who focused on dance and movement, and to Merry Conway, whose movement skills focused primarily on clowning. And while the Company’s programs did address a very real void in professional, classical actor-training programs in the US, (which made its programs highly desirable to actors seeking significant classical training outside of the academic theatre setting), S&C’s rhetorical focus on lineage and the perpetuation of its own ideas about Shakespeare and how his works should be performed, effectively constructs the Company as a new version of the kind of totalizing cultural authority that Packer originally sought to rebel against.

¹²¹ Fifth Season Program. Shakespeare & Company, 1982: 3.

In addition to training a new generation of actors to perpetuate their own commemoration of Shakespeare, the Company was also invested in the creation of a new generation of audience members, one that would demand more emotionally-connected and vivid presentations of the Bard's works. To that end, the Company focused the "off-season" efforts of its early years on developing a strong educational arm of the company, with class offerings for students from elementary to high school and a series of workshops geared to help secondary school teachers find new, more engaging means of introducing Shakespeare to a new generation. Peggy O'Brien, director of education at Washington, D.C.'s Folger Shakespeare Library, praised S&C's work for its ability to prove to students that Shakespeare was not "only for the very bright and the very white. All that did was to get us further and further away from the broad, popular audience at the Globe Theatre."¹²² During the late 1980s, O'Brien noted an increased interest among the teachers she encountered for "less deadly" educational strategies for teaching the Bard,¹²³ citing the rise of classroom teaching techniques and guide books like, *No Fear Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare for Dummies* as a sign of this educational turn that sought to restore Shakespeare's popular appeal among students by insisting on the approachability and emotional honesty of his works. Shakespeare & Company's passionate performance aesthetic placed its educational approach to his work in line with this larger, renewed movement among American academics to purge Shakespeare's works of their elitist tendencies and focus on their more universally approachable explorations of the emotional and psychological journeys of his characters. And even among Shakespeare academics, the Company's lively and embodied

¹²² O'Brien qtd. in Lawrence Malkin, "In Lenox they are 'dropping-in' on the Bard of Avon," *Smithsonian* November 1991: 136.

¹²³ O'Brien qtd. in Malkin 136.

approach to Shakespeare's heightened language has been praised for its ability to resuscitate the language of the English-speaking world's most eloquent poet. Marjorie Garber, a leading Shakespearean scholar and a professor of English at Harvard has credited Packer and her colleagues for developing an educational approach to Shakespeare that "put[s] students back in touch with the language."¹²⁴

According to Shakespeare & Company, it is the passion inherent in Shakespeare's works that makes them naturally attractive to adolescents, who are frequently consumed by exploring their own passionate means of self-expression. "When you put Shakespeare in the hands of adolescents, you are giving them a loaded gun," says Kevin Coleman, Director of Education for Shakespeare & Company. "It will demand the most of them intellectually, spiritually, emotionally. You are giving them material that was written during the Renaissance, so it's about being outrageous, expansive, going out into the world and into yourself on every level, and that's what the teenage years are about."¹²⁵ Coleman believes that one of the reasons that students are turned off by Shakespeare in school is that the explicit passions that are at the core of every Shakespeare play have been censored.¹²⁶ In a profile of the Company in a local Massachusetts newspaper in 1987, then school tour manager and instructor Peter Wittrock maintained that the fact that:

Shakespeare can be as entertaining as a sizzling soap opera or sequined rock star comes as a surprise to most students But when they see the real life of the

¹²⁴ Garber qtd. in Malkin 137.

¹²⁵ Coleman qtd. in Malkin 134.

¹²⁶ Malkin 134.

plays emerge, it makes all the difference in the world in their attitude toward Shakespeare. When we're done with the kids and they go out into the hallways, you hear Shakespeare coming out of them all over the place. It's our goal.¹²⁷

And while it may have been rewarding to hear Shakespeare on the lips of a new generation of students, it was perhaps equally gratifying to create a new, local audience base of students around the region clamoring to be taken to see the true genius of Shakespeare, presented as it was meant to be performed -- by Shakespeare & Company. Since its inception, the educational arm of S&C has consistently been the most lucrative of its endeavors, (due in great part to its ability to secure grant monies for student programs). By 1989, ten years into its Shakespeare-in-the-Schools programs, the educational touring arm of the Company employed eight to fifteen actors who taught workshops to more than 45,000 students during the nine-month school year.¹²⁸

But if S&C was to be truly successful in making its approach to Shakespeare performance an integral part of the way his works are introduced to the next generation, the Company would need to convince teachers, as well as students, of the merits of its system. Once again, the Company began by identifying passion, specifically Packer's, as the underlying motive for embarking on this endeavor. In an interview with the *Boston Globe* about the future goals of the Company, Packer aligns herself with her intended audience of educators by reminding readers of the importance of the teaching profession.

I might have continued just as an actress. But, well, there was an equivalent of an epiphany for me. And, yes, I was on stage when it happened. It's a little difficult

¹²⁷ Linda Mjeuit Daniels, "Shakespeare done with soul," *News* [n.p.] 6 April 1987: n. pag.

¹²⁸ Emily DiVoti, "Summer School For Shakespeare," *Berkshire Record* [MA] 4 Aug. 1989: n.pag.

to explain, but, somehow, I was overcome with the notion that *there had to be something more*. My passion was for Shakespeare, but there just had to be something more for me than just acting in his plays. There just had to be. There was. There was teaching. Through my own personal dissatisfaction with just being an actress, and I don't mean to sound the least bit demeaning or pejorative in the least to others who act, I turned to teaching.¹²⁹

Here, Packer's insistence on a passionate approach to Shakespeare performance is extended to insist upon it in Shakespearean pedagogy as well. Additionally the quote identifies her as an educator first and a practitioner second, lending credence to the Company's focus on both training and education, and serving as a means of attracting passionate educators to enroll in its newly created series of weekend long teacher workshops.

In 1990, Shakespeare & Company,¹³⁰ in collaboration with scholars from the University of Massachusetts at Boston, received a \$450,000 three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a month-long Summer Institute on Teaching Shakespeare, designed to improve the teaching of Shakespeare in secondary schools. These workshops for teachers, (which continue to be offered throughout the year), capitalized on Shakespeare's iconic status within the American education system, and allowed the Company to create and market a product (i.e. teacher training) that had significant commercial potential. Their hands-on, production-based methods appealed to educators frustrated by dusty, academic, literary approaches to the

¹²⁹ Kelly, "Bard in the Berkshire..." A24.

¹³⁰ In 1984, Shakespeare & Company formed a tentative partnership with the now defunct Boston Shakespeare Company (BSC), which had appointed Packer to replace Peter Sellers as their Artistic Director. The grant in question was officially awarded to the BSC, but by 1990 both companies operated out of a more-or-less joint budget.

Bard, and eager to find new ways to engage students in a more impassioned recognition of Shakespeare.

Packer's actor-centered approach to Shakespeare's works recalls him as more than just a playwright; at Shakespeare & Company the most-famous poet of the English language is also remembered as only one member of an extremely successful artistic team of collaborators. According to Packer, S&C "has always been built in the Shakespeare principle of actor-managers, so just like all Shakespeare's company actors did something other than just acting, so do ours. By and large the leaders of our company have always been actor managers, and they still are."¹³¹ In the press and their own promotional materials, the Company maintains that its actor-manager model functions as a reminder of how theatre companies operated during Shakespeare's own time and of the relative importance of the actor before the rise of the director, honoring the "long theatrical tradition of actor-managers that includes William Congreve and Shakespeare himself." Going one rhetorical step further to support her own vision of the Company as an Anglo-American hybrid, Packer frequently described S&C's administrative model as being a "democratic" company of actors. The descriptor recalls Shakespeare & Company's idealistic roots, when the British Packer set out in 1978 to establish a democratic American company where "actors run the company," because, according to Packer, "It felt to me that the actors had given up the creation of the theatrical event, and if they were going to own their art form again, they needed to own their theater."¹³² Like many other of the Company's signature aesthetics, Packer's attempt to recall the business model of the King's Men as a

¹³¹ Packer Interview 2009.

¹³² Packer qtd. in. Patti Hartigan, "They're not merely players," *Boston Globe* 21 Aug. 1994: 53.

democracy simultaneously served to define Shakespeare & Company in opposition to what she perceived as the hegemonic British Shakespeare system in which she was trained.

In reality, S&C's administrative model was born "partly out of necessity and partly out of philosophy. In order to assure that members of the acting company were able to make a living wage, and that they would be available for the Company's rigorous rehearsal, training and production schedules, actors were offered additional employment in other staff positions. According to Packer and other Company members, the new structure re-invigorated the communal nature of S&C, improving morale and strengthening the company's ensemble, and in the press, Company members spoke "zealously about owning their work" and having a say in what was produced and how things were managed.¹³³ But despite the actors' support of the double-duty system, it did present its own set of problems, the most significant of which was the fact that Company members continually ran the risk of being exhausted and overworked. To allay the concerns of Actor's Equity representatives, the administrative duties of actors were contractually considered to be assigned on a volunteer basis -- meaning that actors were not contractually obligated to fulfill administrative duties in order to hold positions as actors within the Company.¹³⁴

In practice, this new, more democratic system proved to be an ineffective model for operating a theatre company. During the earliest incarnation of the company,

meetings, originally designed to afford every member a democratic chance to be heard, were soon hi-jacked by any, and every, passing distraction, becoming more

¹³³ Hartigan, "They're not merely players" 53.

¹³⁴ Hartigan, "They're not merely players" 53.

like group gripe sessions than productive business meetings. One memorable meeting lasted more than 24 hours. Company morale began to erode as egos, (never in short supply among theatre artists), began to clash. . . . Packer was devastated that the failings of the company seemed to stem from the same management system she had been so dedicated to establishing. “I felt so disillusioned with human behavior that I couldn’t function properly. Here were the people I was working so closely with to do the thing dearest to me – destroying one another.”¹³⁵

The lack of centralized authority in the Company’s administrative model would prove to be problematic again in its fifth season, when Packer, prompted by a wave of dissatisfaction among Company members who felt they deserved more prominent roles, dissolved the company for the period of a weekend. Prior to this moment, the perception on the part of the actors was that if they trained diligently with the Company and “paid their dues” by playing smaller roles and taking on administrative duties, that they would eventually be rewarded with a principle role in the mainstage season. Packer recalls that eventually,

there was so much owed and everybody felt so much of “You-owe-me,” that it was untenable. And we were broke. Again. So, I just dissolved the company. I said, “This is it. I have had it. We’re going to start the company new again on Monday. If you sign up, nothing is owed anybody, because we can no longer function around what we owe everybody. So you got to think about whether or

¹³⁵ Epstein 46-47.

not you want to come on Monday.” And most people came. And a few people didn’t.¹³⁶

In my own interview with her, Packer called this momentary dissolution one of the most formative events in the history of the company.

Still, despite these early difficulties, in terms of marketing choices, Shakespeare & Company’s longest lasting visual graphic -- the enlarged ampersand in the Company’s name -- is a testament to Packer’s fundamental belief in the importance of the actors and other artists who formed the basis of her Company. As a moniker, Shakespeare & Company, both recalls the name of a bookstore Packer saw while travelling abroad and was intended to reinforce both the Company’s identity as an actor-centered institution and the collaborative model on which it would be structured and run. In the Company’s first few seasons, its logo featured a black and white, almost cartoonish sketch of Shakespeare’s head, whose irreverent depiction seemed to mesh well with the Company’s less staid acting aesthetic.



Figure 4: S&C Bumpersticker (“S&C At The Mount” Bumpersticker, Shakespeare & Company, 1979.)

¹³⁶ Packer Interview 2009.

In a few instances, promotional material for S&C included a graphic in which its depiction of Shakespeare is placed behind an illustrated mountain range in such a way as to evoke the idea that Shakespeare is ‘hiding out’ in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts.



Figure 5: S&C Shakespeare in the Berkshires Logo (Travelling Conservatory Brochure, Shakespeare & Company, 1979.)

However, around 1985, Shakespeare’s image disappeared from promotional materials for over a decade, and was replaced by a bold graphic of the company’s name featuring its trademarked, over-sized ampersand.



Figure 6: S&C Giant Ampersand Logo (Touring Brochure, Shakespeare & Company, 1987.)

In the mid-1990s when Shakespeare & Company chose to expand its season by including new works by modern playwrights, the rhetorical focus of “& Company” as used in its marketing shifted to reflect the S&C’s intention to present both the work of Shakespeare “&” other authors, noting that the decision to present non-Shakespeare productions was, in fact, a recall of a Shakespearean practice.

The tight-rope act of balancing the Company’s insistence that its practices both accurately recollected Shakespeare’s original intents and reclaimed Shakespeare from the staid

pretentiousness of the British Shakespeare establishment with its equally insistent focus on the edginess of its own performance aesthetic is mirrored by the paradoxes demonstrated in the configuration of Packer herself as Company leader. Over its long history, and especially in its formative years, a significant portion of the S&C's marketing and promotional tactics focused on Packer's own personal identity, as both a woman dedicated to running her Company on "a different, more egalitarian, more feminist model" than the one employed by the RSC, and as an artist uniquely interested in the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of theatre.¹³⁷ Press material from S&C's earliest days, and throughout the 1990s, make much of Packer's gender, her professed feminism and her personal tastes, allowing them, in many ways, to stand in for its institutional ideals.

During the Company's first decade the relative rarity of women as Shakespearean directors provided Packer with a noteworthy means of distinguishing her own work from that of other contemporary Shakespeare companies, and numerous press profiles focused on Packer's dual identity as woman and director of Shakespeare. *The New York Times* once notably attributed both the Company's egalitarian spirit and its focus on ensemble as being a direct result of Packer's gender.¹³⁸ According to Packer, in contrast to the British system, which functioned to reinforce the patriarchal authority of directors, her production process allowed actors the opportunity for true agency over their own performances. Interviews with actors from the Company frequently referenced the difference it made to work in a company run by women.

¹³⁷ Epstein 46.

¹³⁸ Anderson n.pag.

“They care about the work here. It’s not just a business,”¹³⁹ said Charles Halden, a graduate of New York University’s School of the Arts in his first year with the company. Halden, like many other company members, appreciated working with a company that valued the rehearsal process as highly as it did the finished product. The word he used to describe the group was “nurturing.”¹⁴⁰ This desire to recall Shakespeare’s own company under the larger umbrella of feminist sensibilities within the field of arts administration had already proved to be a timely one for Packer, because, as biographer Helen Epstein suggests, part of Dick Kapp’s initial enthusiasm for Packer’s project was based on the fact that MacNeil Lowry, then head of the Ford Foundation’s theatre division, had recently underwritten the work of several American women theatre directors, “based on the widespread perception that women, (based on their natural proclivities towards caretaking), were better suited than men to nurture the growth of new companies.”¹⁴¹

Rhetorically, the Company capitalized on metaphors of family and feminine caregiving, in order to construct themselves as a new generation of custodians of the collective memory of Shakespeare. The choice to function on a distinctly feminine administrative model allowed S&C to promote itself as a kind of family unit whose members shared Packer’s artistic desires, working and living together in a strongly communal environment. As the Company grew, promotional materials and press focused on the personal lives of company members in order to

¹³⁹Halden qtd. in Ron Jenkins, “As They Like It,” *Boston Globe Magazine* 31 Jul. 1981: n. pag. S&C Company Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Halden qtd. in Jenkins.

¹⁴¹ Epstein 33.

further this familial representation of the company. Early press made much of the family-like quality of the commune, with profiles focusing on their communal lifestyle:

Work for the company begins daily at 7 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m., with 2 ½ hours of lunch and dinner time (vegetarian meals are cooked by Mr. Broome's wife and company members). Everyone participates in voice, movement and text classes. And everyone - master and student alike – helps with such tasks as cleaning the kitchen or scrubbing the halls of The Mount, and parking cars during productions. It is a communal life whose members feel like they are running 'a Shakespeare marathon.' At most hours of the day and night, fragments of the Bard's speeches are being rehearsed, discussed, and argued over in the rooms, gardens, and woods of the estate.¹⁴²

While depictions like the one above evoke idyllic visions of an actor's utopia, it seems more likely that Packer's insistence on the notion of a communally-based company of actors were the result of her own desire to keep her core group of acting teachers together rather than maintaining company based on the economic structure of shareholding, as was arguably the case in Shakespeare's own company. Still, by playing up the familial nature of the organization, Shakespeare & Company was able to strengthen its particular commemoration of Shakespeare and its own authority as caretakers of his artistic heritage, by imagining S&C as a new generation of the Bard's own theatrical family of players.

In the 1990s, Packer once again evoked her reputation as the mother-figure of American Shakespeare by her choice to present the *Women of Will* series. In 1989, she had finally decided

¹⁴² Clay F2.

to give in to the acting itch to return to the stage but was divided as to which Shakespeare role to choose for her triumphant return to the Bard. Determined that no single role would do, she helped to create an original compilation piece in which she would perform a number of Shakespeare's heroines. The resulting adaptation, *Women of Will I: From Violence to Negotiation*, was billed by the company as "an exploration of the development of the female psyche in Shakespeare's plays."¹⁴³ Though the play was produced at The Mount in collaboration with Shakespeare & Company, as a project, *Women of Will* was actually conceived of by a loosely organized group of performers known as the Company of Women, headed by Packer, Linklater and Harvard psychologist and Summer Training Institute Scholar, Carol Gilligan, who were looking for ways to produce Shakespeare's works "as told by a woman's voice."¹⁴⁴ Gilligan was perhaps best known for her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, which argues that girls are naturally as assertive as boys, but are "socialized into silence" around the age of eleven. Her plea for adolescent girls to rediscover the value of outspokenness was very much in line with Linklater's desire for actors to shed their inhibitions, as she lays out in *Freeing the Natural Voice*. The idea behind the off-shoot company was "to combine their work to unveil new resonances in Shakespeare and to help women rediscover their natural voices,"¹⁴⁵ and enable them to take a different approach to Shakespeare from their male counterparts. The decision on the part of S&C to engage in this side project was no doubt influenced by the popular theatrical trend of the early 1990s to present female-driven interpretations of classics. In 1992, the same

¹⁴³ Jeffery Borak, "Lots of Shakespeare, plenty of Wharton coming at The Mount," *Berkshire Eagle* [MA] 25 May 1990:18.

¹⁴⁴ Patti Hartigan, "Women Rediscover Their Voices," *Boston Globe* 2 Aug. 1992: B1.

¹⁴⁵ Hartigan, "Women Rediscover..." B1.

month that Packer premiered *Women of Will* in Boston, the Boston Publick Theater produced a performance called *The Women of Shakespeare* and the Democratic convention proclaimed that its convention theme would be the Year of the Woman.¹⁴⁶

The Company also derived much of its early identity in the press, not only from Packer's gender but from her general personality; her vivacious nature made her a gold mine for the media looking for a more human entry into the Company's artistic endeavors. Packer's ability to charm allowed her to turn development-minded feature stories into human interest pieces starring her as the prestigiously-trained Shakespeare professional who simply had too much personality and drive to remain in the stodgy British Shakespeare Establishment. The press depicted her as a sympathetic rebel against the larger-than-life British Shakespeare machine, and American readers were encouraged to see her as a kindred spirit who had stolen fire from the British Gods of Culture and had come to share it with mere American mortals. Her passion was marketed as one of her greatest qualities and used rhetorically to make her more appealing to audience members.

Over the years, as the Company has developed, it has continued to redefine the American element of its identity. In the past few years, as Packer stepped down from her position as Artistic Director of the Company, Shakespeare & Company has once again been forced to re-evaluate its notion of how they constitute a uniquely American theatrical institution. For Tony Simotes, founding Company member, master of fight training, and now Producing Artistic Director of Shakespeare & Company, the Company's identity can no longer be defined either by its uniquely emotional and physical approach to the plays, nor by the once-legitimizing

¹⁴⁶ Hartigan, "Women Rediscover..." B26.

connection of Packer and the Company's other master teachers to the British Shakespeare Establishment, but must now find its identity in the newest generation of American performers who now constitute the core of S&C:

The Company was founded by four artists that came from the U.K. . . . [but] I am actually "homegrown" [*he says, using air quotes*]. I don't come from a privileged background, by any means. For me I felt that it's important that Shakespeare & Company be able to reflect the stories of the next generation that actually holds the company in its heart and hand. And so, what I'm interested in is how Shakespeare will tell its story in the 21st century -- but through American eyes, not through the sense of history that Shakespeare & Company has through the U.K. Tina left the U.K. for very specific reasons. Because she found in the States a particular energy and a *lack* of tradition which gave her the opportunity to create a vision for how she thought that Shakespeare should be played and studied. And all these other wonderful artists felt the same way. . . . But those four were like renegades from their own country . . . and they were here in the States, just stirring the pot. And they were unique. Very unique. That's changed. The people who are all running this Company are all from here. And I think that [because] the dominant spirit of Tina that has been at the helm for so long, there's been a certain kind of focus that the Company has had because, well she's *English* and you just defer to her because she knows a hell of a lot more than I do about Richard and Elizabeth than I'll ever know, because it's *her history*. . . . To me that will be the difference ongoing. What makes and keeps these pieces alive is that we're not doing museum pieces. Shakespeare & Company has never been tied to

that. We've never been re-creationists. We're not trying to create an anachronism or to do it how the Elizabethans would do it. But with Tina and Kristen and everybody else, they brought so much of their history with them that it was around us all the time. But so the *American* story -- the story of who we are as a people in this new century -- and what we are going to bring to this classical language is what is interesting to me.¹⁴⁷

2.2 A NEW, VIVID PERFORMANCE AESTHETIC

In many ways, Packer's performance aesthetic, developed by her pack of Shakespearean "renegades," was intended to be a revolutionary strike against the previous, institutionally restrained collective memory of Shakespeare -- functioning as a new set of commemorative practices ascribed to by a new generation of Bardolaters and intended to, as Connerton puts it, "mark out the boundaries of a new, radical beginning."¹⁴⁸ In its own way, Packer's method constructs what Connerton calls, "a barrier between the new beginning and the old tyranny" that both establishes "a new set of bodily practices,"¹⁴⁹ through which the true genius of Shakespeare should be commemorated and marks a kind of liberation from the previous practices of commemoration employed by the British Shakespeare Establishment. And while Packer's

¹⁴⁷ Tony Simotes, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 13.

¹⁴⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 10.

passionate performance aesthetic was a distinct break from the aesthetic championed by the institutions in which she was trained, Packer insists that her continued focus on the passion inherent in Shakespeare's works is not her own idea, but rather represents a return to a more historically accurate, Elizabethan performance aesthetic. She maintains that every aspect of the Company's performance aesthetic, as well as its philosophy concerning the theatre's administrative and managerial structure, is based on an attempt to remember how Shakespeare's own company functioned. But these kinds of assertions regarding Elizabethan performance practices, organizational structures, and original artistic intentions are problematic, as Packer's claims of historical accuracy can be difficult to reconcile with her insistence on hybridity and Americanism. In this section I will examine the elements of Shakespeare & Company's performance aesthetic and the rhetorical assertions made by the Company in justifying these claims, exploring the ways in which the Company has marketed itself based on the particular elements of its physically and vocally freed, visually economic signature style.

In terms of physicality, Packer and other Company members maintain that, as performers, Shakespeare's own actors were expected to be proficient at a wide variety of skills, from swordplay to dancing, making them truly "Renaissance Men." For Packer, only an actor's physical prowess can "create a kind of visual spectacle which can compete with the verbal spectacle of the verse drama. The whole point of being an actor is being able to do many more things than an ordinary mortal can do."¹⁵⁰ According to fight master Dennis Krausnick, "Tumbling, swordplay, physical contact and feats were part of the actor's standard repertory in an age with [*sic*] actors who were half acrobats. . . . [and] spent several hours a day perfecting

¹⁵⁰ Packer qtd. in Epstein 45.

tumbling and hair-raising or hair-removing fight scenes.”¹⁵¹ He suggests that, “Good stage fighting takes three or four years to learn,” and in order to compete with that level of training Krausnick estimated that S&C actors spend approximately three hours a day developing technique.¹⁵²

In support of the Company’s focus on physicality, Packer has consistently maintained that the best way to connect with the Elizabethan roots of Shakespeare’s texts was to find a means of physically and vocally expressing the emotional passions of the characters. Likewise, the performance aesthetic of Shakespeare & Company is predicated on an acknowledgment of the strong connection between human emotions and physicality. According to Packer, the aim of the Company’s physically vivid style is “to get the words out of the head and into the body where they are experienced emotionally and viscerally. The usual approach to the text is to worry out the sense in your head first. It’s not how language was experienced in Elizabethan times; language was an infinitely more physical experience. . . . The principle rule of Shakespeare is that emotion goes through the language, not around it.”¹⁵³ And while it may be impossible to prove conclusively how Elizabethans experienced language, Packer’s assertion provides a kind of quasi-historical justification for her preference for physical exaggeration and passionate excess. Packer constructs her new commemorative practices as revival of old ideas, intending her new system to recall a glorious, if not mythical, past in which Shakespeare held widespread popular appeal.

¹⁵¹ LeBrun F6.

¹⁵² Krausnick qtd. in LeBrun F6.

¹⁵³ Packer qtd. in Helen Dudar, “A Troupe Tries to Plumb the Heart of The Bard’s Words,” *New York Times* 28 Aug. 1983: 5 and 11.

While the Company's highly physical style of performance remains a strong part of its appeal to modern American audiences, its focus on the physical has been met with mixed critical reviews over the years. In a review of the S&C's 1982 production of *Twelfth Night*, *New York Times* critic Jennifer Dunning suggested that the physical excess of the production was in tune with the spirit of an Elizabethan production, and imbued with "the kind of rowdy comedy and direct appeal that the Globe's productions were said to have had in Shakespeare's day."¹⁵⁴ But while its swordplay comes across as appropriate, even necessary, to producing its version of authentic Shakespeare, its more slapstick, physical comedy work has drawn criticism for being too over-the-top. For example, A *New York Post* review of the Company's 1983 production of *A Comedy of Errors* calls its cast, "As silly, dirty and hyperactive as a clubhouse of 12-year-old boys," and complains of their overreliance on, "such standard Packer trademarks as fistfights and pratfalls, shouting matches and mugging."¹⁵⁵

In response to these accusations, Packer insists that physical comedy and role of the clown are crucial components to the universal appeal of the Shakespeare's work, and, in support of her hybrid ideal, she suggests that Americans are in a better position than their English counterparts to reclaim those comedic performance traditions within the arena of Shakespeare production:

There is not a play of Shakespeare's that does not have a strong comedy element (and some are a riot from beginning to end), but because of our [English] inability to clown in the same manner, and because of the inordinate amount of

¹⁵⁴ Jennifer Dunning, "Theater: 'Twelfth Night' Staged in Prospect Park," *New York Times* 11 Jul. 1982: n. pag.

¹⁵⁵ Marilyn Stasio, "Nice 'Comedy,' but too many errors," *New York Post* 28 May 1983: n. pag.

‘seriousness’ that has been attached to ‘the Bard,’ much of the sheer joy and fun of Shakespeare has been lost for modern audiences. I have never met a school child who learned to love Shakespeare through lessons, a writer who is the most humane, funny and enlightened in English literature. The Americans I have been working with have already learned to relax in their attitude towards Him [*sic*] and are well into learning basic slapstick and tumbling techniques. . . . I have found that when Americans first come to me they are very mistrustful of words. However, once they are over this fear they have a vigor and a directness that English students do not seem to possess, and, in fact, are better able to express the depth and breadth of emotion felt by Shakespeare’s characters. (I don’t know whether this is because America is at this moment more closely in tune with Elizabethan England -- in any case, that is a discussion we must leave for another time).¹⁵⁶

Here again, Packer asserts that her own reclamation of the Bard, characterized by its juxtaposition of riotous physicality with profound humanity, is closer to the true memorial construction of Shakespeare.

But just as often as the Company claims that its methods recall those of Shakespeare’s own day, it maintains that it owes its unique style to Packer’s personally-professed enthusiasm for all things spiritual and experimental. An admitted “guru groupie,” Packer has counted any number of spiritual masters and self-awareness entrepreneurs among her influences. In one profile piece she was quoted as saying, “For a long time I was heavily into Krishnamurti. I was

¹⁵⁶ Packer qtd. in Epstein 36.

one of the early people to do the *est* training. I've been rebirthed. I've been in analysis up the wahoozie. I went to India; I've been with Swami Muktananda. I like hanging out with all those people. And, of course, I always put it right back into the work."¹⁵⁷ In this and other articles from the company's first decade, Packer comes off as one-third *est* guru, one-third den-mother, and one-third revolutionary artist, with a following no less devoted than the most rabid of Shakespeare acolytes. Intern Normi Noel described her feelings towards the Company's teachers in language that recalls the kind of hero worship that many Shakespearean devotees have for the Bard himself: "Tina, Kristin and the others are sort of epic heroes. But we are not here to imitate them, for if we work hard enough, some of us can be as good as they are. They are not telling us to worship them – they are giving us ourselves."¹⁵⁸

Biographer Helen Epstein suggests that Packer's attraction to the *est* movement and other psychoanalytical practices arose from the fact that they served as a "lure back to the world of theatre" after her disastrous first attempt at founding the company in 1973.¹⁵⁹ While therapy was still stigmatized in England, it was becoming a sign of liberal progressiveness in America. Like Linklater, who had been inspired to create her system of freeing the voice after studying with a Freudian psychoanalyst, Packer became deeply involved with the *est* training movement.¹⁶⁰ The therapeutic techniques of the *est* movement were all the rage in America at the time, and professionals had found ways to apply its tenets to their own endeavors in a variety of fields

¹⁵⁷ Packer qtd. in Smith 24.

¹⁵⁸ Clay F2.

¹⁵⁹ Epstein 49.

¹⁶⁰ Epstein 43 and 54.

from business to education. Packer was particularly inspired by its physical and vocal exercises that required that its practitioners shed their socially acceptable inhibitions and embrace the full potential of their natural abilities. The training not only helped her develop exercises for her actors, but it bolstered her own self-confidence in her creative abilities and taught her to embrace the positive potentials of her own leadership position within the company. “Packer refers to the various American psycho-therapies as ‘enlightenment,’ and some of the evangelical flavor of *est* and its brusque way of developing intimate group dynamics can be felt in Packer’s training methods today.”¹⁶¹

In practice, this focus can be seen in some of the Company’s training techniques, like “dropping-in,” which have a distinct encounter-group flavor. One of S&C’s most well-known acting exercises, the technique of “dropping-in,” is best described as a directorially-guided, emotional exploration of the individual words in a piece of text. Developed by Packer as a means of forcing her actors to acknowledge the inherent power that each individual word in a text can carry, this stream-of-consciousness technique, which received a good deal of workshopping in the early years of the Company, was practiced in small, intense rehearsal sessions and involved Packer (and other guides, most notably founding company member, Dennis Krausnick), asking repeated questions of an actor about a specific word in a piece of text. In this process, the guide encourages the actor to recall as many of their own personal associations to the word in question as possible in order to discover what emotions that word triggers. “Dropping-in” is itself a technique of memory recall, closely bound to the Company’s focus on the “word,” as it encourages actors to experience anew all of the memorial baggage they have attached to a given

¹⁶¹ Epstein 54.

word of text. The technique for creating vivid subtext is practiced exclusively by those who have been trained at Shakespeare & Company, and has become another example of the kind of specialized, restricted knowledge that constitutes Packer's system as a revolutionary attempt to revise the collective memory of what Shakespeare in production should be. Further, the implicit assertion of this exercise -- that language is capable of having deep physiological effects on an actor's performance -- capitalizes on the mind/body connection inherent in the Company's signature style. As an acting exercise, "dropping-in" has become perhaps the most widely-recognized of the techniques to have come out of Shakespeare & Company, and was referenced in press coverage of the Company throughout the 1990s, even in articles where the exercise itself was not specifically examined. The exercise continues to be a key training technique for its actors though the Company's reliance on it as part of its fundamental identity has lessened as S&C has matured.

Another hallmark of Shakespeare & Company productions has been the strength and clarity of the vocal work of its actors, which relies fundamentally on the techniques developed by founding member and original master teacher Kristin Linklater. In line with Packer's insistence upon emotional connection and physical investment, Linklater's vocal training was one of the primary foundations upon which the Company's performance aesthetic was based. At LAMDA, Linklater, who had received her training there and eventually became one of the school's instructors, began to experiment with developing a new method of vocal training that was more in line with the school's "from-the-inside-out" approach to acting.¹⁶² For Linklater, the voice,

¹⁶² Epstein 31.

the word, emotion, and the body are inexorably tied together, and without proper integration of the body and the voice the appropriate emotional state cannot be achieved.

For both Linklater and Packer, the mind-body connection was part of the key to creating a training system that more accurately remembered Shakespeare and the material conditions of performances given by Elizabethan actors -- a group, they remind us, of which Shakespeare himself was a member. In a profile piece on the company in the *Smithsonian*, Linklater rationalizes her belief in the fundamental importance of vocal training for the actor by pointing to the fact that Shakespeare himself “was an actor and, like most English schoolboys, might have begun training his voice by declaiming the Latin authors in school.”¹⁶³ The Company strongly believes that, in addition to the normal rehearsal process of modern theatrical productions, Shakespearean actors require significant training, to insure that, to quote Linklater, words and actions are able to “fly from the inside of the body,” reflecting the “primitive, subverbal connections inside the body, not from the mind alone,” allowing actors to “express their feelings and thoughts more naturally and with better results from the audience.”¹⁶⁴

Both Packer and Linklater maintain that acknowledging and honing an actor’s ability to control and manipulate the mind/body connection is the only way to access the kind of intense and prolonged emotional passion called for in Shakespeare’s texts, many of which exceed the limits of our everyday emotional engagement. Shakespeare & Company firmly insists that it is essential for the Shakespearean actor to rise above mundane expressions of emotion and refuse to ascribe the vivid passions expressed by his characters into a socially-acceptable vocabulary of

¹⁶³ Linklater qtd. in Malkin 143.

¹⁶⁴ Linklater qtd. in Farber.

feelings. According to Linklater, in order to deal with Shakespeare's heightened language -- which often requires an actor to "wax poetic on such sociopathic impulses as murdering one's family members for more than 20 lines at a stretch" -- actors must learn how to "tap into passions that go way beyond neuroses."¹⁶⁵ Linklater, who was working on her second book at the time, (which was published in 1992, under the title, *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*), described the rigorous voice and movement training at Shakespeare & Company as not only a way to remember Shakespeare, but was structured as a kind of campaign of organized forgetting, in which the actor must shed the coded behavior imposed on the body and voice by society in order to remember how the voice and body can function without socially prescribed inhibitions. For Linklater, it is not only Shakespeare that needs remembering, but the way in which the voice and body are naturally intended to function. She maintains that her approach to the voice work is "largely an undoing process," involving exercises that teach students to forget the bad habits of the body, inscribed largely through the process of socialization, and to remember how to free and control the natural voice.¹⁶⁶ In terms of contemporary memory studies, Linklater is striving to make implicit memory explicit.

But perhaps the greatest achievement of the Company's vocal training system lay not in the ability of its actors to accurately express the passion of Shakespeare's works, but their ability to be heard and understood by their audience, despite the density of the text and the enormous size of the outdoor mainstage venue at The Mount. Linklater identifies two primary elements as being essential in the training of Shakespeare & Company actors: "exercises to reduce tensions"

¹⁶⁵ Linklater qtd. in Fuller 23.

¹⁶⁶ Linklater qtd. in Avic Meehan, "Shaking all over," *Berkshire Eagle* [MA] 18 Jan. 1979: n.pag.

and “nitty-gritty, grammatical understanding of text.” She maintains that in most modern-day performances of Shakespeare, “actors only understand about 25% of the script. So that’s why you can’t understand them. They don’t understand themselves.”¹⁶⁷ Linklater’s insistence upon detailed text work combined with powerfully honed vocal techniques has remained one of the most fundamental elements of the Company’s aesthetic identity. Promotional materials sent out by S&C make much use of repeated quotes by reviewers lauding the superior vocal abilities of its actors and the textual clarity of their productions. A marketing packet, assembled for distribution by S&C in 1983, contained more than twenty-five quotes from reviews in regional newspapers concerning the Company’s relative prowess for Shakespeare’s language, including this quote from the *Boston Globe* comparing their vocal work, favorably, against that of the RSC, used by the company in their promotional literature:

It isn’t often that one can take a voluptuous pleasure in simply hearing the sound of the English language, as is the case here. The actors, all young and attractive, read Shakespeare’s lines as if no one had ever read them before, without subjecting them to the over-intellectualization that bogs down, say, a Royal Shakespeare Company production. The result is that the words sound freshly minted, even though they are being classically inflected.¹⁶⁸

Its focus on the vocal aspects of performance effectively allows S&C to re-order the hierarchy of the senses, disturbing the visual’s traditional position of primacy within the

¹⁶⁷ Linklater qtd. in Tom Littlefield, “Shakespeare & Company: Teaching and delighting -- Behind the Scenes.” *KITE* 5 Sept. 1979: n. pag.

¹⁶⁸ Promotional quote from *The Boston Globe*, used in the Sixth Season Marketing Packet. Shakespeare & Company, 1983.

theatrical medium. This re-prioritizing is at the base of the Company’s identity and is closely bound to its belief in the primacy of the “word” and the poetry of Shakespeare’s language, and its attempt to reduce the supremacy of the visual in its theatrical productions can be seen in one of the Company’s earliest marketing tropes: at Shakespeare & Company, the “word” of the Bard is the most important thing.

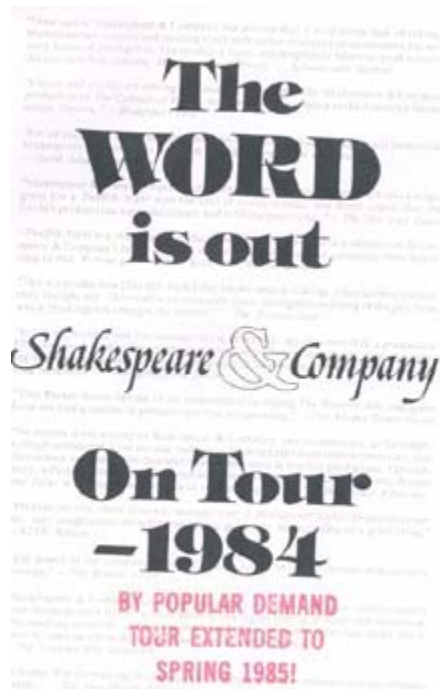


Figure 7: The Word Is Out (Seventh Season Touring Pamphlet, Shakespeare & Company, 1984.)

While the original use of the slogan referred to the words of Shakespeare, it is interesting to note that in the pamphlet featured in Figure 7, the particular use of the “word” has a double meaning as it not only refers to the Bard’s “word,” but also to the words of the critics who had praised the Company’s work, which are used as the pamphlet’s background graphic. The focus on the “word” as one of its most fundamental identifiers can be seen in the Company’s invitation to its 10th anniversary gala. The fold-out invitation, printed on all black paper, features the simple quote, “It began with the Words,” in small, white print on the lower left-hand corner. As the

reader unfolds the invitation, each successive black page reveals a new, small phrase concerning the founding elements of the company: “and the perfect Woods,” and finally, “and the dream of a theatre....”

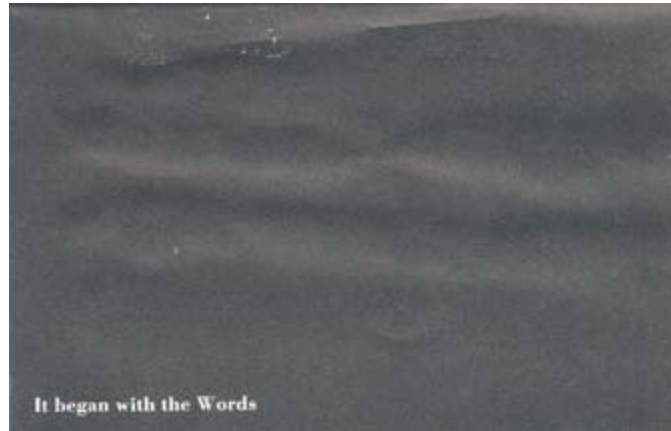


Figure 8: The Word Gala Invite (Tenth Anniversary Gala Invite, Shakespeare & Company, 1989.)

When fully unfurled, the back side of the accordion-folded card invited patrons to celebrate Shakespeare & Company’s tenth season with an evening of “Dinner, Dancing, and Special Entertainment,” hosted by Honorary Chairman of the Board, Miss Helen Hayes, who Shakespeare & Company repeatedly referred to in the press as “the First Lady of the American theatre.”¹⁶⁹

The Shakespeare & Company renewed its dedication to the “word” in 1983, by joining forces with Neil Freeman, a drama scholar from York University in Toronto. His project was to bring innovations in the world of word processing to the study of Shakespearean verse. Freeman began by creating a computerized concordance of all of Shakespeare’s texts. But as his early work progressed, he began to analyze the small, but significant, editorial changes that had been made to the texts since their original quarto and folio printings. Like many of his contemporaries,

¹⁶⁹ Tenth Anniversary Gala Invite. Shakespeare & Company, 1987.

Freeman was convinced that many of the grammatical errors, changes in spelling, capitalization, and meter of verse, and other anomalies found in the Folio texts were not mistakes, but rather savvily embedded clues left by the playwright to serve as interpretive instructions to his actors. Packer and Company agreed with his assessment, and secured an NEA grant to fund 38 weeks of his employment with S&C, and an additional \$10,000 private grant for him to type the entire First Folio of Shakespeare's works into the computer and co-ordinate it with his existing concordance. Packer was quick to incorporate the First Folio based-work in to the training at Shakespeare & Company. "It is exceptionally useful to know what William thought about the ways the text should be played. The First Folio is a far better acting edition than the other editions [in print today]."¹⁷⁰ It is also worth noting that this added bit of insight into authorial intent allows Packer to express her opinions with the kind of close familiarity reflected in her calling the playwright by his first name. Freeman's First Folio methods meshed well with Packer's beliefs in the primacy of the text, the necessity of intense methods of emotional expression, and the importance of making Shakespeare's words accessible to a modern audience. Further, Freeman's use of new technology could serve as another means of keeping S&C's methods on the cutting edge of performance innovations.

By 1990, the Company began to more formally articulate its belief in the fundamental power of Shakespeare's "word," citing it as being both the Company's founding principle and the overall touchstone for its performance style. Promotional press packets distributed by S&C that year included a new feature: a brief description of the history of the Company and the aesthetic principles upon which it was based. In 1992, the press release for S&C's summer

¹⁷⁰ Packer qtd. in Patti Barrett, "Finding Shakespeare's Heartbeat," *Berkshire Courier* [MA] 11 Aug. 1983: 1 and 18.

season included a paragraph reasserting that it was the Company's focus on Shakespeare's language that allowed for the physically vivid, passionate, spiritual, and emotionally free performances of his work for which they had become famous:

The ability to have language affect our world is the driving force of Shakespeare & Company. It is always Shakespeare's sense of rhythm, sense of creating each word anew in the moment, of being unafraid of looking for the most truthful (and therefore poetic) way of expressing pain, joy, ecstasy, horror, the almost nameless terrors, that is integral to our work.¹⁷¹

At the time that the Company was founded, Packer's insistence on the primacy of Shakespeare's language in production stood in direct contrast to many of her contemporaries who were heavily invested in employing strong directorial concepts in their productions of his canonical works. "I've never liked the idea of 'concept' productions of Shakespeare with elaborate costumes and settings," said Packer in a 1983 interview at American Shakespeare Theater. "I hate working in them as an actress because they turn actors into puppets."¹⁷² Packer's distaste for high-concept approaches to Shakespeare, a practice widely employed in the 1960s and 1970s by many prominent directors, including many artists that she had worked and studied under at the RSC,¹⁷³ prompted her to adopt a performance aesthetic which attempted to honor the words of the playwright and the practical, physical ramifications of the Elizabethan open-

¹⁷¹ Fifteenth Summer Season Press Release, Shakespeare & Company, 1992. S&C Company Archives.

¹⁷² Packer qtd. in Meyers 17.

¹⁷³ Though Packer had many fundamental artistic differences with many of the directors at the RSC, she has frequently (in the press as well as in my own 11-19-2009 interview with Packer) credited her mentor, John Barton, former director at the RSC, for sparking her interest in Shakespearean verse work.

stage. For Shakespeare & Company, the focus on the “word” is, at heart, a kind of antiquarian initiative. One of its founding beliefs was “that the power of Shakespeare and other Classical playwrights can be regenerated on the stage only by returning to their actual words, not by imposing a preconceived concept of a director.”¹⁷⁴

However, over the past two decades, Shakespeare & Company has begun to experiment with productions that have a stronger, more distinct directorial interpretation,¹⁷⁵ while continuing to insist that, despite the individual aesthetics of any given director, its productions are textually faithful -- though exactly what that means is not explicitly spelled out. In practice, texts are often cut, primarily in the interest of running time, various strategies of double and triple casting have been employed, and occasionally, especially in recent years as the Company has employed more well-known directors, portions of the texts have been rearranged. In my own interview with Packer, I asked if potential directors are instructed to stay away from heavy directorial concepts. In response, Packer hemmed and hawed a bit before replying:

What we ask our directors to do is to really stay focused on the text. I mean Helena Aldritch¹⁷⁶ was relatively high concept . . . But what we ask the directors to do, and why they generally come from our ranks, is to have the storyline follow

¹⁷⁴ Farber n.pag.

¹⁷⁵ The Company’s first real experiments in directorial concept were made possible in the early 1990’s when additional performance venues were added at The Mount. These added venues allowed the S&C to present more experimental work without the potential negative effects to the Company’s artistic reputation or its fiscal situation. These second tier shows, often geared to attract a younger crowd, were frequently mounted in the Stables venue. The additional performance venues were also used by certain company members as a space to work on personal or side projects, (such as Packer and Linklater’s Women’s Company and their *Women of Will* productions).

¹⁷⁶ Helena Aldritch directed S&C’s 2006 production of *Hamlet* starring Packer as Gertrude, Krausnick as Claudius and Packer’s son Jason Asprey as Hamlet. The production, billed as a kind of Shakespeare & Company family affair, was one of the most heavily conceptual Shakespeare pieces in the Company’s production history.

the text. . . . [B]y and large we are directing as they would have in Shakespeare's time. Now they didn't have directors, but what you are doing is following the text itself. You're following Shakespeare's own dramatic impulses. Now what happens when you get conceptual directors -- first of all, they know nothing about Shakespeare. Second, if they do know anything it is on a superficial level, not on a deep level. Thirdly, we've got so many directors of Shakespeare now that don't even speak English [*Packer laughs a little under her breath at the absurdity of the idea*] so they're not interested in exactly what the language says. Whereas the mystery of it is in the language, the syntax and the poetry of it -- that's where the mystery is. Otherwise it's just a story like anything else, and you're just using it for a story. And that's fine. But you're not actually mining what's there. So if we have to make a stand, this is where we're making a stand.¹⁷⁷

As the Company continues to grow, so too has its definition of what it means to present Shakespeare's work free from directorial concept. In my interview with new Producing Artistic Director, Tony Simotes, he expressed his determination to reveal the universal appeal of Shakespeare's works by telling his stories in a new, more American way. I asked if he believed that would necessarily require the company to impose upon Shakespeare's works -- particularly the history plays -- a greater level of directorial concept, an idea that S&C has spent much of its existence trying to avoid. After a great pause and deep breath in, he tentatively replied, "Possibly. But that's never really been what we've done here." He tries to explain by citing the Company's 2002 *Macbeth*, a production which Simotes, deeply affected by the events of 9/11,

¹⁷⁷ Packer Personal Interview, 2009.

chose to set in what he called a kind of nebulous, “no-time” setting. Women in burkas could peacefully co-exist on the stage with renaissance weapons and modern-day technology, the kind of production that could explore a powerful array visuals without ascribing to one over-arching concept. In a conflation of the ideas of directorial concept and historical setting, Simotes says of the Company’s productions of the history play: “We’ve never done a history play that was just rooted in the period that it is set. So we’ve never been afraid of forgetting what Shakespeare was getting at.”¹⁷⁸

The Company’s focus on the primacy of the word and the physically and vocally vivid performance techniques of its actors is matched by its memory of his stage and the theatrical practices employed there, forming the basis for the Company’s strong belief in maintaining a resident company of actors, along with a minimalist visual and design aesthetic. Packer has long maintained that, “There’s no substitute for getting people with commitment working together for a long time -- it’s the only way you build a real ensemble, and a real ensemble is the best approach to Shakespeare -- or any other kind of theater, in my opinion.”¹⁷⁹ Less than five years after the Company’s inception, ensemble had become one of the trademarks of a Tina Packer production, as identified in this review from *The Boston Globe* which held that, “A distinctive ‘company style’ is hard to find, but this group has found it. *The Comedy of Errors* is unmistakably a Shakespeare & Company product.”¹⁸⁰ This dedication to ensemble finds its roots in the Company’s collective remembrance of how Shakespeare’s own company functioned. For

¹⁷⁸ Simotes.

¹⁷⁹ Packer qtd. in Jeff McLaughlin, “Packer has long-term plans for Shakespeare & Company,” *Boston Globe* 26 Aug. 1984: n.pag.

¹⁸⁰ John Engstrom, “Shakespeare & Co.’s dazzling ‘Comedy of Errors’,” *Boston Globe* 22 Aug. 1983: 23.

Packer, the relationship between Shakespeare, the playwright, and his company was a symbiotic one; Shakespeare would not have been able to achieve the level of fame and success he has without the talents of the company of actors who performed his works, and, conversely, the players of the King's Men would not hold such a significant place in theatrical history had they not performed the works of Shakespeare.

While maintaining a strong ensemble of actors has always been one of the primary goals of the Company, there have been times during its history when the successful functioning of the ensemble has been challenged. During the Company's second decade, the decision was made, prompted by financial pressures, to increase the number of productions per season, which resulted in what many actors saw as a lapse in the Company's focus on process-oriented productions. In 1990, as a means of re-dressing this issue, the Company decided to change the format of its season to feature two Shakespeare remounts and only one new title each season, in order to devote more rehearsal time to the new production. Packer was called to the carpet for her decision by a number of local news outlets who complained that the Company would, in effect, be showing "re-runs" for more than half of its summer season. But for Packer, the added rehearsal time and other benefits that the decision afforded her far outweighed the potential for boring local audiences:

You can't create a great Shakespeare company by asking your actors to play a role for only eight weeks. You cannot do texts that are as dense or profound in truths while you're still setting the lines. True creativity for an actor begins when

the lines are in the back of his mind. The ideal¹⁸¹ of course is to have actors play these roles for two years. I can't have them play a role for one or two years, but I can have them do it for three summers.¹⁸²

While the decision had undeniable appeal for actors, it also had a more practical motive - money. Previously, rehearsal constraints on the season schedule meant that the Company was only able to offer one Shakespeare production at a time. Under the new model, the Company was able to run two to three Shakespeare shows at a time, in rotating rep. Internal marketing and development memos from 1990, reveal that the general consensus among Company members was that even frequent tourists to the area -- whose ticket purchases accounted for approximately half of its summer season revenue at the time -- would not have been able to see all of the Company's previous productions, and, as a result, would be inclined to purchase tickets to see all three shows offered by the theatre while they were in town, regardless of when the show originally opened. In the end, the 1990 season featured only one new Shakespeare production, *Much Ado About Nothing*, (which was performed on the smaller Oxford Court stage), and one Mainstage remount, *As You Like It*. Originally mounted in 1988, *As You Like It* had been the top grossing show in the Company's history, and despite the fact that actress Karen Allen, who starred in the original, was pregnant and therefore unavailable for the 1990 revival, S&C chose to re-produce it. The gamble paid off; the remount was the best-selling production of its 1990 season.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ The "ideal" that Packer refers to describes the contract practices used by the RSC which often allowed an actor to perform the same role for the full tenure of their contract with the company.

¹⁸² Packer qtd. in Borak, "Lots of Shakespeare..." 18.

¹⁸³ Borak, "Lots of Shakespeare..." 18.

If the Company's memory of the material circumstances of Shakespeare's own company provided the basis for Packer's focus on ensemble, then the material circumstances of Shakespeare's theatre provided the basis for Shakespeare & Company's pared-down design production aesthetic. In comparison to the lush costuming and sets that had become *de rigueur* for other Shakespeare companies, productions at Lenox featured relatively Spartan sets and costumes, and, as all of their Shakespeare productions before 1990 were performed in outdoor venues, lighting contributed little to the overall look and feel of the theatre at Shakespeare & Company. For Shakespeare & Company, this economy of design is an active remembrance of the open stage practices employed by Shakespeare's company. By keeping its use of set pieces to a bare minimum, as was the tradition in Elizabethan theatres, productions at Shakespeare & Company are able to move quickly and seamlessly between scenes, regardless of the number of locales represented, allowing the audience to stay focused on the language of the text. Like their Elizabethan predecessors, Shakespeare & Company relies on the use of the language by its actors to conjure the physical world of the play in the mind of the audience. According to Packer, as a Renaissance playwright, Shakespeare was acutely aware of that material reality, and as such, his plays "were written with that in mind."¹⁸⁴ Packer insists that her Company's bare visual aesthetic is not so much the result of an impulse towards innovation, but rather a restoration of the circumstances of Shakespeare's original theatrical practices. In one early interview Packer referred to her system as "a new approach that's a very old approach. Shakespeare as it was

¹⁸⁴ Packer qtd. in LeBrun F1.

presented in the Bard's own lifetime. Art in a natural setting,"¹⁸⁵ where actors are required to "create the 'sets' through their own abilities and conjuring."¹⁸⁶

While the Company may have relied on the talents of its actors to conjure the memory of Shakespeare and the traditions of the Elizabethan stage, as it matured into a larger, multi-million dollar institution, it became clear that the Company needed a more cohesive, easily recognizable marketing identity in order to maintain their visibility among the growing ranks of American Shakespeare companies. The most significant move towards an official branding of the Company came in the mid-1990s at the urging of Nathan Winstanley, one of the Company's board members, who suggested that Shakespeare & Company needed to have a more recognizable visual touchstone for its performance aesthetic to be used in marketing. After interviewing all of the Company members at the time to determine what they felt were the Company's most prominent features, Winstanley developed six different logo options and submitted them to the company for a vote. The winner, by a unanimous vote, was an illustration of a fencing sword.



Figure 9: Shakespeare & Company Sword Logo

¹⁸⁵ Packer qtd. in LeBrun F1.

¹⁸⁶ LeBrun F6.

Packer, who refers to Winstanley as “a marketing genius,” was thrilled by the power of the image and its connotation that the Company’s work was on the “cutting edge” of Shakespeare.

Packer recalls:

Everybody agreed on the sword, because it was the “cutting edge,” but also because it was the most vibrant -- it had the most energy in it. The others were nice, but they didn’t have the same energy. Now, you know, the down side is that, it’s a sword, you know, and here we are this great feminist company -- But...uhm...we *overcame* that. And aesthetically we just liked it. And we thought it was distinctive, and we thought it best spoke to the physicality. And we hadn’t figured out how to do the voice in a [visual logo].¹⁸⁷

Shakespeare & Company’s sword logo was introduced in earnest in 1997 on the copious promotional material generated by the Company for their 20th Anniversary Season. And, while it has been paired with a variety of different taglines and visual accompaniments, the sword has remained the Company’s most successful attempt at a branding that encompasses its production aesthetic.

Another of the Company’s noteworthy visual marketing strategy that originated in the promotional materials from the 20th anniversary season was the choice to feature photographs of Company actors in the vigor of performance. The choice emphasizes both the physical exuberance of the Company’s productions and the importance of actors and their choices in terms of the Company’s overall aesthetic.

¹⁸⁷ Packer Personal Interview, 2009.



Figure 10: What Revels Are In Hand! (Tenth Festival Season Subscriber Mailer, Shakespeare & Company, 1987.)

As a marketing tool, depictions of actors acting passionately were particularly well-suited to Shakespeare & Company because it could be applied equally well to the endeavors of all three of the company's prongs of praxis -- training, education and performance. The strategy has proved to be so successful that S&C continues to use these hyper-active, impassioned actor shots as the basis for its marketing nearly thirty-five years later.



Figure 11: Promotional Ad for Jason Asprey and Tina Packer in S&C's 2008 *Hamlet* (Thirtieth Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 2007: 27.)

As the Company has evolved, it has periodically reassessed its use of the sword logo, and its presence in marketing and promotional materials has become more and more inconsistent. After his recent appointment, Simotes, was asked to reevaluate the logo's ability to define Shakespeare & Company in its new 21st century existence, and has since decided that the vast symbolism contained within the image continues to make it the perfect fit for the Company's aesthetic and its current rhetorical philosophy:

Since I have come here in June there has been some question as to whether or not the sword should shift. Because on some items the sword is there and on other marketing items it isn't. And sometimes there is a box around it and sometimes it exists on its own. I personally still like this [*he says pointing to a business card on his desk featuring the sword logo featured in Figure 9*]. It is strong and recognizable, and it stands out more. And is it cutting edge? Yes. . . . [F]or me it represents a sense of the language. It's a symbol of strength. But this symbol also has the feeling of both male and female feel to it. . . . [W]ithin the weapon there is a craftsmanship that is really unique, there's a sense of history in terms of where it's come from, and then there's also a great responsibility because of what this weapon can do. So to me, when you think about it, all of that. . . works consciously and subconsciously on people when they see it. So I think the branding of the sword was a brilliant stroke at the time. And I still think that. I think that in some ways we need to re-invigorate what our brand is, instead of just shifting our brand. And how we invigorate our branding is by our product

onstage, not just a symbol. I am willing to take a look at the graphic of our name -
- you know, 'Shakespeare & Company'. . . But realistically, it's a good thing that
still serves us and I think that we should still use it.¹⁸⁸

2.3 EXTRAORDINARY, SPECTACULAR, UNIVERSAL SHAKESPEARE

Though the majority of the identity of Shakespeare & Company rests in its performance aesthetic and its mission to transmit its particular memorialization of Shakespeare to a new generation, for many years a fundamental part of the Company's identity lay in its relationship with another literary figure: Edith Wharton. In the late 1970s, Packer, who had taken a position directing at Smith College (in Amherst, Massachusetts), began to search the greater New England area for a potential home base for her new Shakespeare company. It was Mitch Berenson, a former dock worker turned successful real estate developer, who would become a supportive and resourceful local patron for the company, who convinced Packer to turn her search towards the Berkshires,¹⁸⁹ an area in the mountainous region in Western Massachusetts that had long been a popular vacation destination for wealthy New Englanders. After looking at a number of different properties available in the area, Packer eventually settled on The Mount, the former home of American author Edith Wharton.

¹⁸⁸ Simotes Personal Interview, 2009.

¹⁸⁹ Epstein 61.

The estate, which included a large mansion, sprawling grounds and several additional out- buildings, including a greenhouse and stables, had been abandoned by Wharton in 1911. In 1942, after decades of disuse, the estate became the home for the Foxhollow School for Girls, but its tenure there ended in the 1976, and the estate had remained vacant since. When Packer and Berenson first scouted the property they discovered that the furnace was inoperable and as a result the pipes had frozen and the house had flooded, but despite its dilapidated condition, Packer was drawn to the estate. And so, in the summer of 1978, a company of twenty-five actors and S&C's core master teachers moved into The Mount, which had been rented to the Company that first year for relatively low price of \$8000, plus the promise of an additional \$4000 worth of labor and repairs that were to be done on the mansion by Berenson.¹⁹⁰ The founding Company members "had agreed to clean-up and repair the house, live communally in the unfinished rooms and sleep on mattresses on the floor . . . and work on some Shakespeare, if there was any time left over. . . all for the wage of \$50 per week."¹⁹¹ During the first few years that the Company was in residence, the mansion was basically uninhabitable; in fact, during the first season, the house was condemned for a brief period and Company members was forced to split up and reside in local motels and in the houses of area patrons until the matter was resolved. For nearly the first decade of its history, every Company member was required to take on additional tasks involving the maintenance and renovation of The Mount and much of the early press coverage of the Company included vivid descriptions of life on the derelict property.

¹⁹⁰ Epstein 61.

¹⁹¹ Epstein 71.

Given the dire conditions and relative remoteness of their venue, the Company might well have had no luck at all in attracting an audience had it not been for three important factors. First, the Berkshires had long been considered to be an artistic mecca, and as a vacation location it had drawing power beyond the theatre. The Berkshires were already a thriving summer arts scene and home to two summer repertory theatres (Williamstown and Stockbridge), Jacob's Ladder (the summer dance festival produced by The Boston Ballet), and the international Tanglewood festival (and the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra). Further, the area was famous for having been home to a number of prominent American writers and artists, including Norman Rockwell, Daniel Chester French, Herman Melville, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, many of whom had estates in the area that had been transformed into home museums. Fortunately for Packer, the area had a long and proven track record for its ability to attract both the audiences and the funding that she needed for her new company. Berenson also pointed out that, "the area had already proven itself to be open to a large arts organization being run by a woman; Tanglewood was founded by Gertrude Robinson Smith, an indomitable women's rights advocate and socialite who, along with her life-long partner, Miriam Oliver, managed to stir up national funding and critical attention for a series of concerts, in a rural mountain town in the middle of the Great Depression."¹⁹² Secondly, Shakespeare enthusiasts have, over time, been trained to accept the notion of Shakespeare theatres in terms of their identity as a destination location.

Author Dennis Kennedy has written about the significant connection between Shakespeare and tourism and asserts that the appeal of the destination festival lies in its ability to

¹⁹² Epstein 61.

reinforce contemporary Bardolatry by “requiring audiences to travel to their venues and thereby (re)establishing the sense of pilgrimage to a sacred locale.”¹⁹³ Douglas Lanier too agrees that requiring audiences to travel long distances elevates audience expectations, creating “the arts -- and eventually Shakespeare performance -- [as] a high-cultural tourist destination.”¹⁹⁴ Finally, the pastoral setting of the Berkshires created for the audience a kind of nostalgia for the originary cultural wholeness that the Elizabethan era represents for Americans. Marjorie Garber calls this nostalgia a kind of fetish, in which modern society deprived of direct connections to its cultural origins, longs for a return to a state of wholeness that it can never achieve. According to her Freudian interpretation, our modern-day attempts to connect with Shakespeare’s England are not an attempt to accurately remember the events or circumstances of that culture, but rather an attempt to construct the era as, a “fantasy space of ‘early modern’ England, the England of Elizabeth and James, in which we are busily discovering all kinds of behaviors and social practices, from colonialism to imperialism to transvestism to sodomy, that make it the mirror of today.”¹⁹⁵ Likewise, Lanier characterizes this nostalgia in the Shakespeare establishment as a longing for a return to a more “natural” state of human existence. “The pastoral settings of Shakespeare festivals tend not only to evoke obliquely the bucolic image of Elizabethan pre-modernity and to link that image with audience communalism, but also to reinforce the impression that we are seeing Shakespearian performance in its ‘natural’ state, Shakespeare ‘set

¹⁹³ Dennis Kennedy, “Shakespeare and Cultural Tourism,” *Theatre Journal* 50 (1998): 176.

¹⁹⁴ Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

¹⁹⁵ Marjorie Garber, “Shakespeare as Fetish,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990): 246.

free’.”¹⁹⁶ This sense of audience communalism created by the experience of Shakespeare festivals provides the sense of participation as well as the unifying sentiment necessary for these theatrical performances to fall under Casey’s definition of commemoration.

For more than two decades, Shakespeare & Company made its home on Wharton’s Berkshire estate, and as a result, much of its identity was (and to some extent remains to this day) intricately entwined with the restoration of The Mount, its use of the estate’s vast grounds as its outdoor performance space, and its ability to maintain Wharton’s legacy as a classic American author. In many ways, becoming the custodian of Wharton’s works and her house allowed the Company to define itself as an artistic organization both capable and worthy of preserving, restoring and maintaining the artistic legacy of a classical author, which, by extension, legitimized its role as the cultural custodians of Shakespeare’s legacy in America. In an article entitled “Shakespeare and Edith are a compatible couple,” *The New Haven Register* suggests that, “While S&C is saving the Classics, it has also saved The Mount from demolition.”¹⁹⁷ Though the Shakespeare & Company was deeply committed to preserving Wharton’s individual legacy and literary oeuvre, I suggest that it was also interested in conflating its direct connection to Wharton with its indirect connection to Shakespeare. Through a kind of transitive property of memory, S&C is able to lend an air of authenticity to its claims regarding its particular memorial construction of Shakespeare even as it evokes Wharton. In interviews, Company members frequently drew comparisons between the two authors, as in this quote by Packer: “We feel it is right for us to be here in Edith Wharton’s house, because she devoted her life to words, she loved

¹⁹⁶ Lanier 154.

¹⁹⁷ Markland Taylor, “A theatrical fest in the Berkshires,” *New Haven Register* 25 Jul. 1982: 3 and 5.

words, and we are in the business of words.”¹⁹⁸ Likewise, Dennis Krausnick, who adapted many of Wharton’s novels and short stories into plays, suggests that even the physical space of The Mount was capable of serving as a connection between the two literary talents. “The Mount is a special place for actors. The classical proportions and harmony were as important to Mrs. Wharton as they were to Shakespeare. Each room has a sense of safety and security that an actor can feel.”¹⁹⁹

By aligning itself with The Mount, Shakespeare & Company had also discovered a way to diversify its potential appeal as a cultural tourist attraction by adding architectural enthusiasts and the literati to its existing audiences of theatregoers. The unique association effectively doubled the Company’s regional and national press attention by broadening the particular social spheres in which the Company could market itself. In fact, one of the first significant profiles of Shakespeare & Company in the *New York Times* was not for its Shakespeare productions, but rather for its efforts to preserve Edith Wharton’s house.

¹⁹⁸ Packer qtd. in Judy Salsbury, “Shakespeare and Co., - What now?,” *Berkshire Courier* [MA] 31 Aug. 1978: n. pag.

¹⁹⁹ Krausnick qtd. in Rollene Saal, “Edith Wharton’s Mountain Home,” *New York Times*, n.d. Aug. 1987: n. pag.



Figure 12: S&C Promotional Photo of The Mount (Warren Fowler, photographer). Promotional Stock Photo of The Mount, Fourth Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 1981: 16.)

An article on the front page of the Thursday, August 7, 1980 *New York Times* detailed the 78-year-old home's "unusual rescue" by a theatre company, who planned to use it not as "yet another house-museum," but rather intended it to become, "a lively theater center instead, an appropriate addition to the wealth of cultural activities already present in these special hills."²⁰⁰

The article then quickly reassured potential preservation purists that, "despite the drastic change of use . . . the house will not be significantly changed. It is the theater company's plan to restore the house fairly closely to its original appearance, and to use it primarily for offices and professional conferences."²⁰¹ The article explains that the estate had officially been bought from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for \$300,000 by a newly formed corporation called Edith Wharton Restoration Inc., which shared several board members with Shakespeare & Company, and reports that "the groups intend to work in tandem over the course of the

²⁰⁰ Paul Goldberger, "Edith Wharton Home: An Unusual Rescue," *New York Times* 7 Jul. 1980: C1.

²⁰¹ Goldberger C1.

project.”²⁰² The article goes on to note that, in order to raise funds for the restoration, “the company began their summer by producing a small piece of theatre within the house, a kind of chamber theater as it were, in which members of the troupe impersonate Mrs. Wharton, frequent Mount guests such as Henry James, and characters from her novel *The House of Mirth*, written during her period at The Mount.”²⁰³ True to promise, during its association with The Mount, Shakespeare & Company produced more than fifty adaptations of Wharton’s and James’ work, maintaining their literary legacy and exposing new generations to their classical stories.

Metaphorically, the intention to restore the dilapidated estate provides an example of the ability of the Company to restore the works of classical writers to their former glory. In this analogy, Shakespeare & Company’s vivid performance aesthetic should not be seen as an *innovation* of Shakespeare, but rather as a *renovation* that restores classical works of art to their intended beauty. Further, presenting Wharton’s works in the kind of chamber theatre setting afforded by the mansion allowed the Company to show its more genteel classical abilities in an authentic indoor venue. This more traditional venue required a more restrained physical take on the text, which served as a significant contrast to their bold, new-yet-authentic style of Shakespeare performance. Finally, the estate’s rural/pastoral locale became key to the company’s attempts to evoke nostalgia for the Elizabethan past through its connection to Shakespeare. Despite the fact that the estate has no direct claim to Shakespeare, I suggest that the specificity and history of the location and its connection to the authentic remembrance of Wharton added an air of the veridical to the Company’s assertions about how it remembers Shakespeare.

²⁰² Goldberger C9.

²⁰³ Goldberger C10.

For Shakespeare & Company, The Mount functioned mnemonically as what historian Pierre Nora refers to as a *lieu de mémoire*: a site “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” because “a sense of historical continuity persists” in the location.²⁰⁴ Categorizing Wharton’s estate as one such a site of memory is particularly appropriate because, for Shakespeare & Company, The Mount fulfilled Nora’s requirement of serving material, functional, and symbolic needs.²⁰⁵ Materially, the estate served as the physical home and base of operations for the company. Functionally, The Mount was also used as a performance venue for plays based on the classical literary works of Wharton and her contemporaries. Symbolically the estate functioned on a number of different levels: as a superior example of artistic design, as the legacy of a great American literary figure, as a reminder of the long history of artistic and cultural achievement in the Berkshire region, as a sign of the Company’s dedication to serving as cultural caretakers. That the site has no direct historical connection to Shakespeare is, in many ways, immaterial to the estate’s ability to serve as a site for his commemoration as, according to Nora, “[t]he *lieux* we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant[s],” whose fundamental purpose is to remember,

to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial-just as if gold were the only memory of money-all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their

²⁰⁴ Pierre Nora, “Memory and history: *Les Lieux Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989): 7.

²⁰⁵ Nora 18-19.

capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.²⁰⁶

The Company's ability to evoke a nebulous sense of cultural history around the estate that is equally applicable to Wharton and Shakespeare, despite their historically disparate time periods is proof of the site's lieu-like ability to elide the temporal constraints of history and serve as a consolidator of heritage.²⁰⁷

While its performance aesthetic was designed in order to provide a more accurate and lively remembrance of Shakespeare, it was S&C's choice to utilize The Mount's grounds as its primary venue which became one of the Company's most recognizable elements of its signature style. Critical reactions to the Company's productions there frequently cited the outdoor venue as one of its strongest and most innovative aesthetics. According to one local reviewer: "[t]o see this brand of Shakespeare outdoors is to wean you away from ever seeing the great playwright's works in what, by comparison, are the staid confines of a conventional theater."²⁰⁸ For the first two decades of its history, Shakespeare & Company's identity was integrally tied to the idea of performing Shakespeare outdoors. When the Company took its 1982 production of *Twelfth Night* to Brooklyn's Prospect Park, the group chose not to perform in the park's usual venues, opting instead to perform "in a woodland clearing" opposite the pagoda as the stage, arranging sets of audience bleachers on and around the pagoda in extremely close proximity to the intended stage. The close relationship between the actors and the audience was commented on in a number of

²⁰⁶ Nora 19.

²⁰⁷ Nora 20.

²⁰⁸ Dan DiNicola, "Macbeth Masterpiece at The Mount," *Schenectady Gazette*, 12 Aug. 1982: 33.

local New York reviews. Most notably, a *New York Times* article promoting the production quotes well-known actress Colleen Dewhurst, (who had memorably visited in Lenox on the occasion of Helen Hayes's 1981 visit), on the "spontaneous feeling between player and audience," which allowed the audience to experience Shakespeare anew, with "real American vitality and passion."²⁰⁹

The notion that performing Shakespeare outdoors somehow evokes a connection to America, is perhaps best articulated by Lanier who points to what he calls the "democratic nature" of outdoor Shakespeare venues, in which, "Even a sudden downpour, a little mark of historical authenticity, works as a leveler of social hierarchy: actors, noblemen, and commoners alike soldier on through the rain."²¹⁰ The "leveling" choice to present Shakespeare outside, as (most of) his plays were originally performed, further encourages nostalgia in its audience members by encouraging them to recall other great Shakespearean performances from their past. Such was the case on one of actress Helen Hayes' visits to Lenox. Hayes, who was in town to attend a performance of Company's 1980 production of *The Tempest*, was delighted by the outdoor venue because it reminded her of the first Shakespeare play she had seen as a child of six or seven years old in Lake George, NY. "That was heaven," she recalled of that formative event, "to see Shakespeare against the trees!"²¹¹

During its tenure at The Mount, Shakespeare & Company developed a reputation for the imaginative use of nearly every part of The Mount's outdoor estate as a place for performance,

²⁰⁹ Dewhurst qtd. in Anderson.

²¹⁰ Lanier 144.

²¹¹ Hayes qtd. in Jennifer T. Davies, "Fans flock to meet the other 'first lady'," *Berkshire Eagle* [MA], 10 Jul. 1981: 7.

its storytelling abilities enhanced by its absolute mastery of and one-ness with its natural environment. S&C's first outdoor space was located near the rear of the property and used the natural hillsides surrounding it as a kind of raked bank of audience seats, but over the years, the Company began to explore more ways to use the estate's outdoor spaces for its own highly-physical stagings of Shakespeare's works. Reviewers routinely noted S&C's strong and imaginative use of the spectacle of the outdoors, where one might discover Shakespeare's "Art in a natural setting. Actors spewing out their lines bound down a gravel path, out of the bushes or from behind a line of old pines, or along a parapet, to the center of the action."²¹² For many critics, the Company's ability to harness the magic of nature in its performances was a testament to S&C's desire to present Shakespeare in its intended venue. According to one reviewer: as "actors make their entrances over stone walls and from behind trees, one is reminded that at the Globe Theatre Shakespeare's audiences first heard his plays in a setting that was open to the sky."²¹³ The natural setting of The Mount was at the heart of so many critics' descriptions of S&C's "magical" abilities that the tendency to describe the Company's productions in supernatural language persisted, even when the performance was not in Wharton's wooded wonderland, as in the *New York Post's* review of the Company's 1982, production of *Twelfth Night* in Prospect Park, Brooklyn that called the performance, "An enchanted evening," and declared it to be "among the best Shakespeare seen in New York in recent memory."²¹⁴

²¹² LeBrun F6.

²¹³ Jenkins.

²¹⁴ *NY Post* 1982 Review qtd. in Program for *Macbeth*. Shakespeare & Company, 1982:4.

The outdoor mainstage at The Mount was well-paired with the passionate physical and vocal choices of the Company, and in many ways its vastness justified many elements of the Company's aesthetic. Much of S&C's often-praised ability to handle Shakespeare's poetic language arose as a necessity for its actors who had to learn to adequately project and articulate in order to make their vocal and physical choices comprehensible across great distances of open space. But the challenging size of the mainstage was a double-edged sword for actors on the rare occasions that the Company performed indoors; the extreme vocal and physical choices of the actors caused their performances to fall victim to critical accusations that their performances were "over-the-top."²¹⁵ This criticism was commonplace in reviews of the Company's adaptations of classic works by turn-of-the-century writers such as Wharton and James which were performed in the indoor spaces of The Mount. The performances in these pieces were accused of everything from "monotonous delivery," to being "grossly overdone," "screeching," and "one-note," and were consistently criticized as being significantly less skilled than the performances in the mainstage productions, despite the fact that many of the same actors performed in both the indoor and outdoor pieces.

The Company's marketing identity too became inexorably tied to its outdoor venue, beginning with the program for the 1981 season which features an idyllic black and white picture of one of the decked stage regions of the playing space behind the house with lush trees soaring above meandering stone walls, with the title "Shakespeare & Company at The Mount 1981," written in a simple calligraphy font.

²¹⁵ Marilyn Stasio, "Nice 'Comedy,' but too many errors," *New York Post* 28 May 1983: n. pag.



Figure 13: Third Season Program (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 1981.

The language of the program identifies the company, the historical estate, and the pastoral setting as inexorable parts of the same whole. The program also introduces a new tag line for the Company -- “SHAKESPEARE UNDER THE STARS” -- which would subsequently find its way onto much of S&C’s promotional literature. Likewise, a teaser mailing for the 10th anniversary season, (which established the style of graphic illustration which would be used for the majority of the programs and promotional materials over the next five years), features a series of half-tone images of Victorian botanical prints in lavender and sage green ink, arranged on a dusty pink parchment background in a sparse collage pattern, as the background for the olive green text. The cover of the mailer features vintage woodblock prints of a horse’s head and the face of a flowing-haired woman with a coronet of flowers as a hint to those in the know that the bill for the yet un-announced season included a revival of the audience’s favorite production: *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*.



Figure 14: Tenth Anniversary Season Mailer, Shakespeare & Company, 1987.

Perhaps as a reflection of the Company's desire to recollect the memories of its own roots, many of the visual images used in the marketing campaign for their 10th Anniversary Season evoked the S&C's connection to nature and their reputation for presenting theatrical "magic" in a "natural" setting, and was reinforced by the choice to produce *Midsummer* as the Mainstage production for that year. It is clear that the pastoral setting of The Mount meant that some of Shakespeare's works were more suited to their trademark Mainstage space than others. As a result, certain plays (most often comedies and romances), were revived every few years, while other plays in his canon (most notably the history plays and the tragedies) were relatively under represented. So, despite the fact that S&C had already produced *Midsummer* three times in its ten-year history, it was decided that the play's integral combination of magic and nature far out-weighed its potential dismissal as an easy re-mount. The decision proved to be a successful one, with numerous critics commenting on the fact that the play was a perfect match for the Mount mainstage venue.

It is not often that action set in a forest is actually performed among the trees. It lends a spirit of authenticity that is immediately captivating. The world of magic and fairies never seemed so real as they do in this, their natural setting. . . . The

Mount opened their first season 10 years ago with *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. It was a wise choice to bring it back for their anniversary. It is hard to imagine a setting more appropriate for this wonderful rendition than under the stars and trees, a slight breeze cooling your face and the mysterious music surrounding you. It's enough to make one truly believe in fairies.²¹⁶

Six years later in 1993, when the Company chose to remount *A Midsummer's Night Dream* for the fourth time, Packer was asked why she had chosen to present so many versions of that single play. Her reply was, "Because it is absolutely the best play to do in this wonderful outdoor space. Audiences love it, and we love doing it."²¹⁷ While one might expect that frequent Lenox patrons might be disappointed to see yet another step-by-step remount of the company's previous productions, in fact the concern was quite the opposite. Numerous Berkshire summer residents had come to view picnicking on the grounds of The Mount during a Shakespeare & Company show as one of the most eagerly anticipated rituals of the summer season.²¹⁸ A testament to the Berkshires social event that S&C productions had quickly become can be seen in the humorous illustration that serves as the cover for the Company's 1983 production of *A Comedy of Errors*, which devotes as much space to showing the picnicking patrons as it does the actors on stage.

²¹⁶ Sandra Ducey, "A *Night's* Fun," *Advocate* [Williamstown, MA] August 1987: n. pag.

²¹⁷ Packer qtd. in Bob Goepfert, "Shakespeare & Co. goes once more into the breach," *Hartford Record* [CT] n.d. 1992: n. pag.

²¹⁸ Goepfert.

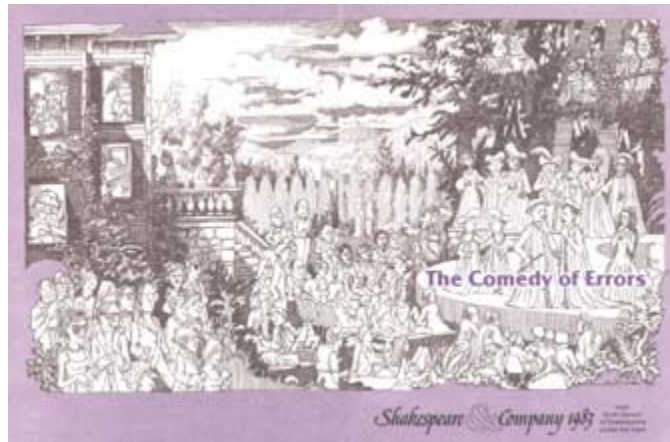


Figure 15: Sixth Season Program (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 1983.

The Company's institutional connection to nature persisted as a marketing trope for the Company for decades, as is evidenced by this brochure for the Company's 1998-1999 Training Program.



Figure 16: Twentieth Anniversary Training Programs Brochure (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 1998.

In another marketing trope, Shakespeare & Company put the significant amount of positive press they received to work for them, emphasizing quotes about its “magical,” “spectacular,” and “extraordinary” productions in its promotional and marketing materials. By

the mid-1990s S&C had begun to work with a new graphic art company, Studio Two, in order to develop a new marketing campaign born of its passionate approach to Shakespeare and of the public's memory of its finest moments and most defining characteristics.



Figure 17: Studio Two Thank-You Ad (Thirtieth Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 2007: 115.)

As early as 1995, the Company had been making strategic use of a quote from film actress Karen Allen, who had trained with S&C and starred in a particularly successful production of *As You Like It*, in conjunction with active shots of actors in its workshops in the ads for its actor training program. But for the Company's 20th anniversary season in 1997, Allen's well-used testament that the program was "An extraordinary, revitalizing and inspiring experience!" became the inspiration for the one of S&C's newest slogans, "Shakespeare Outside the

Ordinary,” which was most frequently accompanied by one of two new graphics. The first is an illustration of a woman in classical dress, kneeling with her head down and her arms extended and resting on the hilt of a sword.



Figure 18: Twentieth Anniversary Gala Program (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 1997.

Out of the spot where the sword’s point touches the ground, a vine has grown, curling up around the sword, over the woman’s outstretched arms and down and around her body. The vine itself is populated with a cornucopia of blossoms and studded with butterflies, birds and fairies. The drawing references the Company’s performance aesthetic in the central figure: a classical actor engaged in a fully-embodied action that carries with it a significant emotional weight and, by incorporating the sword, includes a nod to the Company’s logo. The vine recalls the Company’s connection to its outdoor venue, while the fairies evoke memories of S&C’s numerous, and popular, productions of *Midsummer*. The second illustration to appear with the “Shakespeare

Outside the Ordinary” slogan was a graphically enhanced photograph of a woman in profile with long, flowing blond tresses, resting her chin on her hands, which are clasped together.



Figure 19: Twentieth Anniversary Company Brochure (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 1997.

On her head sits an ivy coronet, the tendrils of which, at first glance, seems to trail down past her shoulders and tumble into the foreground of the shot. Upon closer examination, the trailing vines are filled with the ghostly shapes of witches, women, children, warriors and fairies. Like the first graphic, this version too, recalls S&C’s performance history and style, while remaining literally tied to their connection to both the natural and the supernatural. The images function much like the particular Shakespearean texts given preference in the Company’s production history, providing the viewer with an endless array of magical and extraordinary possibilities. Beginning in 1998, after its 20th Anniversary season, marketing materials continued much in the same vein for several years, featuring retouched photos of vibrant women nestled among floral trappings.



Figure 20: Twenty-seventh Season Program (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 2004.

One example of how the Company has married its performance identity to its connection with the spectacle of the outdoors can be seen in the promotional material developed for the Twentieth Anniversary celebration. A full-page, panoramic photograph of performance by the Company on The Mount’s Mainstage on a hazy night at dusk, features this quote by Ben Brantley from *The New York Times* superimposed over the shot: “There’s no denying the exhilaration of seeing the woods surrounding the Mainstage again turned into a spectral forest of illusions, with actors scampering out of the darkness as giddy apparitions.”²¹⁹ Though the production still is from a 1983 production of *A Comedy of Errors* and the quote from Brantley is from a review of a totally unrelated 1996 performance, the two combine to evoke in audiences a sense of rare magic. The grainy quality of the photo combined with the blurred actors caught in a moment of action makes this image stand out among the wide array of crisp, clean focused action-shots of actors at work that make up the majority of the images used in the programs and brochures for the 20th anniversary season, and lends the photo a hazy feel that encourages viewers to nostalgically recall their own memories of productions at The Mount.

²¹⁹ Brantley qtd. in Jonathan Levine, “Fiscal woes hit Oak and ‘Bard’,” *South Advocate* [MA] 3 Jul. 1990: 1 and 4.

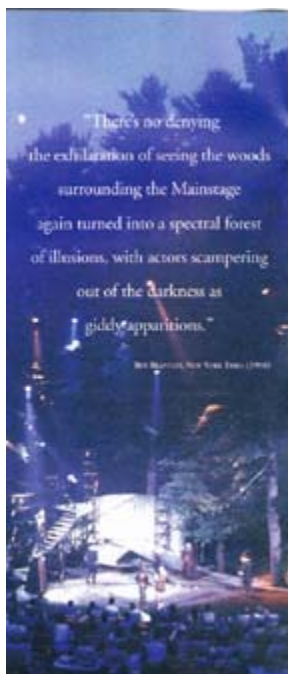


Figure 21: Twentieth Anniversary Season Program (inside cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 1997.

The Company members own memories of the early years at The Mount also provided the basis for an origin story for S&C, which it began refining in the press during its 10th anniversary season. Press coverage that year encouraged Company members to recall the long and arduous journey that had brought them thus far, and an entire section in the season program that year was dedicated to a series of quotes from founding Company members detailing the harsh conditions of Shakespeare & Company's early years. The tales of the trials and tribulations of the actors living at, and working on, The Mount read like a kind of Horatio Alger story of a theatre company that had earned its way into a community through blood, sweat equity, and tears. In this narrative, the obstacles faced by the Company were depicted as being larger than life: the property was condemned, because "the local authority said it was not fit for human habitation. The roof leaked. There was no electricity. The septic tank had overflowed raw sewage into the

water supply.”²²⁰ The epic quality of the narrative of the Company’s journey from humble beginnings to being one of the most recognizable Shakespeare institutions in America, highlighted its tenacity in rising beyond its underdog beginnings. The Company, which at the time could boast an operating budget of more than a million dollars, recalled its own humble beginnings and its past struggles as merit badges which entitled it to its current level of success. Less than a decade in, Company members nostalgically characterized the hardships of their toil-filled early years as “the good old days,” recalling proudly, even fondly, the back-breaking work required of them at the Company’s inception. Kevin Coleman, who had become the head of the Shakespeare Schools Program recalled, “My memory of being here that first winter is of it being cold. I can remember getting up in the morning and cracking the ice in the toilet bowl. For two months of work, we were paid \$200, I think. It was brutal. But there was a kind of gung-ho young kind of energy...created out of idealism.”²²¹ “It was an adventure,” said actor John Hadden, who had been with Company since the beginning, recalled. “It wasn’t just theater. It was putting this house together. There were piles of plaster in the middle of the room. It was like pioneering.”²²² Rhetorically, Hadden’s analogy is a powerful one for the company’s identity. First it casts the entire Company in a warm glow of good citizenship -- an image well-befitting a company seeking to become the American equivalent of the RSC. Second, it depicts the Company members as hard-working, spirited adventurers, whose strong work ethic aligning them philosophically with the hard-working, no-nonsense New Englanders who were,

²²⁰ Jeffrey.

²²¹ Coleman qtd. in Jeffrey Borak, “Dreams and Reality meet at Shakespeare & Company,” *Berkshire Eagle* [MA] 7 Mar. 1987, n. pag.

²²² Hadden qtd. in Hammann.

geographically-speaking, their primary audience. Finally, the language of the narrative likens the grand ambitions of the Company to the notion of Manifest Destiny, making the possibility of achieving them a glorious and foregone conclusion.

In 2000, after a five-year legal battle, Shakespeare & Company split with the estate that had been both its home and one of its guiding forces for more than twenty years. In the beginning, the fact that The Mount was not owned by the acting company, but rather by a separate non-profit corporation, was an arrangement that, according to Krausnick, was intended to protect the theatre; so that, in the event of a lawsuit, the theatre could not be taken away from them.²²³ However, it was ultimately this ownership structure that allowed for the eviction of the Company from its long-time home. The Mount's board of directors, led by then executive director Stephanie Copeland, sought to disassociate the estate from the Company on the grounds that having the historic landmark serve as an active theatre was causing fundamental damage and irreparable changes to the home. But having lost its representative power on the Mount's board of directors, Shakespeare & Company was unable to assert its right to use the property as its performance venue. Copeland repeatedly insisted in the press that the motivations behind her efforts were rooted entirely in her desire to maintain the property as it would have been at the height of Wharton's tenure there. Packer, meanwhile, hoped that the public would be swayed by her attempts to keep the estate functioning as an integral part of an active, artistic community. As Packer told Kate Muir of *The London Times*, "The choice is between a living house, or a dead, picture-perfect one."²²⁴ Still, without any legal proof that the original intent of creating the

²²³ Avice Meehan, "Tentative contract is signed for the purchase of The Mount," *Berkshire Eagle* [MA] 30 Oct. 1978: n.pag.

²²⁴ Muir n.pag.

historic trust was, in part, to serve the needs of the theatre, Shakespeare & Company was forced to rely on sentiment in order to try to maintain its right to use the property. The Company recalled the diligent and back-breaking labor put in by decades of the theatre's employees. And in one particularly reaching attempt to support her case Packer reminded a reporter of Wharton's "fascination with the theatre: She loved actors. I have no doubt what side she'd be on."²²⁵ To this day the subject of the dramatic split brings up great emotion in Packer, which she summed up in the following way:

We created a separate not-for-profit, because we didn't want to be dealing with it all of the time. But it [the board of directors at The Mount] was all us. The six members of its board were all us [the founding members of the theatre company]. And, it was our naiveté. We didn't make it legally -- proof that their purpose was to support Shakespeare & Company. We built their board. Then they started taking off. Then they had some consultants in that said that, "You've got to disassociate from Shakespeare & Company because everybody thinks it's all Shakespeare & Company and you'll never be able to raise any money." Then as the board evolved, we were supposed to have six cross-over members according to the original agreement. They broke that. We didn't take any recourse So they then started to find their place in the restoration world. They found this Executive Director, Stephanie Copeland, who had been with us -- the second year she was our Director of Development. We thought this would be a good thing for us and we could all work together, when, in fact, it turned out to be a real minus.

²²⁵ Packer qtd. in Kate Muir, "Shakespeare and Company versus America's literary do-gooders," *London Times* n.d. 1995: n. pag.

Stephanie said, “I’m going to get rid of you.” And her next five years were spent getting rid of us. And she succeeded. I mean we had three years in the courts. They accused us of owing them money. And then the courts said they owed *us* money. Living with Edith. Losing her. It was very difficult for all of us. Dennis²²⁶ especially.²²⁷

The split with the Mount has been one of the most defining moments in the Company’s history. In order to prevent the same legal problems in the future, and to further cement its position in its host community, S&C chose to purchase its next home outright, and after significant consideration, they settled on its current home on Kemble Street in Lenox, approximately a mile away from The Mount. The Company acquired the 63-acre property and all of its existing buildings -- many of which had been used by The Lenox Boy’s School which occupied the property in the 1960s -- in April of 2000, for \$4.1 million dollars. The first performance venue on the new campus was the Founder’s Theatre, an indoor 450-seat theatre with two levels of audience seating in a horseshoe formation and a lower level of adjustable audience banks that allow the space to be configured either as a deep thrust or a proscenium with a deep apron. The adjustable stage was intended to house both the Company’s Shakespeare productions and its New Works Season, featuring new plays by modern playwrights.

²²⁶Here Packer refers to Dennis Krasunick, a founding S&C member and Packer’s long-time romantic partner, who was the primary adapter and director of the Wharton and James productions, and, as such, was perhaps most personally affected by the Company’s split with The Mount.

²²⁷ Packer Personal Interview, 2009.

When the indoor Founder's Theatre became its primary performance venue,²²⁸ Shakespeare & Company was obliged to adjust some of the details of its original production aesthetic. During the first few seasons in the new space, Company actors drew repeated criticism for their over-exaggerated performance style, which many felt was not well suited for the indoor venue. Further, producing its Shakespeare season in the same venue as its modern works was a decision that seemed to many patrons seemed to unduly elevate the new works, placing them on par with those of the Bard. Shakespeare & Company's fundamental identity seemed to be in flux. Packer was forced to address accusations that the Company had abandoned Shakespeare for greener pastures. She responded by reassuring patrons that the Globe didn't just present the works of the Bard; Shakespeare's own company presented the best plays from all of the best authors of the day. In yet another example of how S&C's collective memory of Shakespeare is selectively constructed in order to support its particular present circumstances, Packer responded that Shakespeare & Company was now interested in presenting the Bard's work alongside the best new works of contemporary theatre. As the Company has settled into its new surroundings it has continued to adjust and improve the connection between its space and its performance style, shifting focus slightly away from the over-exuberant physicality that had so defined the productions of its early years. In terms of marketing too, the Company has shifted away from graphics that feature actors submerged in nature, and have begun to rely nearly entirely on photographs of actors in physically active or highly emotional poses.

²²⁸ Though the Company would not become an indoor company until its split with the Mount, during the 1990 season with the construction of The Stables, a 100 seat indoor, black box theatre constructed in the former stables of the estate.

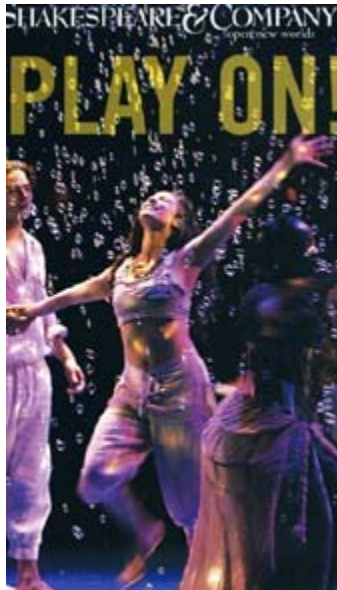


Figure 22: Actors Jason Van Over and Lucia Brawley (Thirty-third Season Brochure (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 2010.)

Inspired by the seemingly limitless possibilities afforded them by the new campus, the Company began to envision a vast institutional expansion in terms of scope, repertory, and the number of performance venues and other facilities at its disposal. In 2007, the 30th anniversary season, Shakespeare & Company announced that it would “evolve into the American Center for Shakespeare Performance and Studies.”²²⁹ But Packer’s intention to form a new kind of campus dedicated to both the academic and the performance-based explorations of the bard was not as original an idea as she might have imagined. In Staunton, Virginia another Shakespearean impresario, Ralph Alan Cohen, one of the founding directors of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, had already begun to transform his own company in a similar direction and had already settled on calling his newly re-branded company the American Shakespeare Center. Though the news was probably initially crushing to Packer, several years later she is able to recall the

²²⁹ Thirtieth Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 2007.

disheartening news with a solid sense of humor about the event. When, in my own interview with Packer, I revealed that ASC was one of the other Shakespeare companies I was working on for this project, Packer asserted,

You'll find that between us and the American Shakespeare -- in fact they stole the name. I was shifting over to that, and he -- they had done a whole marketing campaign and he needed to tell me that they had [decided] that was the perfect name. And we hadn't copyrighted it or anything, so... [*Her voice trails off as she shrugs her shoulders*]. It's alright. He came and told me personally, you know. But what you'll find between these two companies, there are a lot of similarities. And a lot of the talk is the same, but the difference, I would say, is that Ralph is an academic and I am a theatre [person]. And, and all of his impulses tend to be academic. Although *he* would probably deny that! And he's *terrific* at it. He knows far more about Elizabethan theatre than I do -- *not Shakespeare*, but Elizabethan theatre. And ours -- it's not that we don't understand the academics, because we do, but [our performance aesthetic] it's deeply buried in the *theatrical* impulse.²³⁰

With the option of the Company's name change and subsequent rebranding put on the back burner, and the national financial crisis steadily eroding funding for the arts, Shakespeare & Company was once again forced to reimagine the future of its vast new physical campus. The decision was made to consolidate building plans to focus on two venues: renovating an existing 72,500 sq. foot field house into a multi-million dollar theatre and production space called the

²³⁰Packer Personal Interview, 2009. All italics are mine, based on Packer's own emphasis while speaking.

Production Arts Center (PAC), and breaking ground on a 720-seat, historically-accurate reconstruction of the Rose Playhouse surrounded by what S&C's website calls the "Rose Village,"²³¹ which, in the original plans for the campus, included a wooded Greek amphitheater, a Lake theatre, an Island theatre, a Stables II Theatre, a kitchen garden, a swimming pool, a combination cloister and library, cabins, residence halls, cottages, and a miniature version of a mid-eighteenth century farming village. The PAC was intended to house an intimate, 155 seat black box theatre, costume and scenic shops, and several spacious rehearsal spaces specially designed to accommodate the swordplay, dancing and tumbling of the Company's signature performance style.

Shakespeare & Company's plan to create a historic reconstruction of The Rose was also very much a product of its own present moment in time. Partly as a result of Sam Wanamaker's efforts to save the foundations of the original Rose in London, the 1990s saw an increased American popular interest in Shakespeare in America, as was evidenced by an increase of Hollywood film adaptations of his texts, culminating in Tom Stoppard's *Shakespeare in Love*, (winner of seven Academy Awards in 1999, including Best Picture), which offered a glimpse into what it might have been like for a theatre company performing at the Rose in Shakespeare's time. Eager to capitalize on the public's revived interest in Shakespeare, and anxious to reassure their audiences of their commitment to producing his works, in 2000, shortly after purchasing the Kemble Street property, the Company held its first Lenox Conference on The Rose. By 2004, S&C had embarked on the largest capital campaign of its history known as "The Rose Playhouse Project USA," and had succeeded in obtaining a million dollars in federal funding alone for its

²³¹ "About Shakespeare & Company." *shakespeare.org*. Shakespeare & Company, n.d. Web. 7 Sept. 2012.

educational programs and the furtherance of The Rose project. Initial fundraising efforts were relatively successful, but the current economic crisis has significantly slowed efforts. Though the Company has not made any physical progress on its construction of the replica theatre, it continues to remind audiences of the venue's imminent arrival by including half-page ads in its own programs of the proposed plans for the playhouse. In the meantime, the Company has continued to use the space intended for its historically reconstructed theatre as an active performance space, staging lesser-known classical texts there and allowing the Company to once again expand its season and evoke the large-scale, festival feel that the Company had its height at The Mount. The large outdoor space, appropriately called The Rose Footprint, has, in recent years, helped S&C return, in part, to its identity as a company that produces vibrant, outdoor productions of Shakespeare's works.²³²

In August of 2008, the Company opened the PAC black box as the Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre, but the majority of the complex, and the larger campus, remains unrealized, as the Company's current financial concerns have put further development of the space on hold for the moment. Despite this, S&C continues to dedicate an entire page of its website to promoting the "Rose Playhouse U.S.A. Project." Further, the copy on another page of the website entitled, "Our Home: Architecture," rhetorically attempts to connect the Company's plans for the campus to its long-standing connections with nature and America. According to the site, plans for the campus were designed to preserve much of the meadows, woods, and wetlands, in an effort to

²³² For a more exhaustive discussion of S&C's plans for the new campus and The Rose theatre, see the Company's website at www.shakespeare.org, which currently features a number of videos and press features covering the development and funding of the spaces, the timeline of the project (which begins curiously in ancient Greece, and creates a straight through-line to its present fundraising campaign) on page 62 of Shakespeare and Company's 2004 Season program, and the development packet -- *Shakespeare & Company's 30th Anniversary Campaign: Open New Worlds* -- prepared by the Company in 2007.

demonstrate Shakespeare & Company's dedication honoring and preserving its host environment – an idea that had been part of its institutional ethos since its association with The Mount. According to the website, the campus was designed to be “an American Masterpiece,” “A place apart” with “every aspect of it calling for a deeper understanding of the world.”²³³ Despite its stated goal of becoming “an American Masterpiece,” the Company's website provides this quote from Packer in which she grandly suggests that the campus will also, somehow, recreate the active cultural life of Shakespeare's London:

Just as William Shakespeare, so full of life and unfettered imagination, had a driving desire for the Renaissance idea of wholeness and balance, so Shakespeare & Company's twenty-first century home will provide the avid Shakespeare lover as well as the casual visitor with the same experience: a world in harmony with itself, with nature and the highest aspirations of humanity; a world vibrant with poetry, passionate philosophical discourse, groundbreaking educational exploration, cutting-edge classical theatre training, a sense of heaven and hell and the journey of life -- all held in an American garden.²³⁴

However at present, the Company's financial situation has proved prohibitive in seeing these grand designs come to fruition.

This recent decade of transition has prompted the Company to re-articulate its mission statement and its approach to marketing its programs and productions. No longer revolutionary for its highly physical performance approach, separated from the historic Mount, and estranged

²³³ “*About Shakespeare & Company.*” shakespeare.org. Shakespeare & Company, n.d. Web. 7 Sept. 2012.

²³⁴ Packer qtd. in “*About Shakespeare & Company.*” shakespeare.org. Shakespeare & Company, n.d. Web. 7 Sept. 2012.

from its identity as a purely classical, primarily outdoor company, Shakespeare & Company has returned once again to Packer's belief in the primacy and power of the "word" as the basis for its institutional re-tooling. In 2004, S&C developed a new mission statement, one that both accounted for its more diverse endeavors while simultaneously reaffirming its original assertion that the Company's guiding principles were the same as those embraced in Shakespeare's own theatre. The new mission statement relies decidedly on the rhetoric of universalism in an attempt to strengthen the connection between the Company's work and the Elizabethan world of Shakespeare and maintain its identity as a "classical" company. In the opening paragraph of the new, nearly page-long statement, each of its three institutional prongs are identified and defined:

Shakespeare & Company provides original, in-depth, classical training and performance methods. Shakespeare & Company also develops and produces new plays of social and political significance. Shakespeare & Company's education programs inspire a new generation of students and scholars to discover the resonance of Shakespeare's truths in the everyday world, demonstrating the influence that classical theatre can have within a community. . . . By classical we mean: the highest truths told in a universally accessible form which have an impact that is healing for the individual and society.²³⁵

While this passage re-affirms the Company's desire to create a new generation of theatre-goers, it is worth noting that S&C has pulled back from rhetorically focusing on its once trademarked physically vivid performance aesthetic, preferring instead to focus the broader assertion that "Shakespeare's truths" are universal, applying just as readily to our own modern society as they

²³⁵ Twenty-seventh Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 2004: 9.

did in his own time. Further it suggests that the universal qualities of both Shakespeare's texts and the Company's classical approach to them afford them the ability to heal the widest breaches of society and time itself. As Garber has asserted, this rhetoric of universalism is profoundly nostalgic:

That Shakespeare is the dream-space of nostalgia for the aging undergraduate (that is to say, for just about everyone) seems self-evidently true and, to tell the truth, not all bad. He is -- whoever he is, or was -- the fantasy of originary cultural wholeness, the last vestige of universalism: *unser Shake-speare*. From the vantage point of a hard-won cultural relativism, a self-centered de-centering that directs attention, as it should and must, to subject positions, object relations, objects, race-class-and-gender, there is still this tug of nostalgia, the determinedly secularized but not yet fully agnosticized desire to believe. To believe in something, in someone, all-knowing and immutable. If not God, then Shakespeare, who amounts to a version of the same thing.²³⁶

According to Connerton, because of the inherently social nature of memory as a form of cognition, a person need not possess any information about a given event, person, or context in order to be able to recall, retain, and use the collective memory of it; rather, all that is required is that "the person who remembers that thing must have experienced or learned of it in the past."²³⁷ In this light, Shakespeare & Company's invocation of the universality of Shakespeare functions as a powerful cognitive claim on the collective memory of him. By removing the physical

²³⁶ Garber 243.

²³⁷ Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 22 and 28.

gestures and postures that have traditionally characterized Shakespeare performance and replacing them with a more emotionally available, contemporarily legible, physical vocabulary, Shakespeare & Company stakes the claim of uniquely reminding their audience of the universality of the characters and plots of Shakespeare, engaging in an instrumentalization of the past for its own institutional aims.

Regardless of the memorial intentions implicit in the Company's invoking of the trope of universality in its mission statements and marketing, it is worth noting that the broad nature of Packer's "universalist" approach to Shakespeare allows ample room to continually redefine the particulars in order to avoid the critical pitfalls implicit in employing its totalizing, often reductive rhetorical strategies. Just as the precise nature of her definition of her "American" company was constantly being adjusted in order to attract the kind of critical, artistic or financial attention that the Company needed or desired, Packer's focus on the universal qualities of Shakespeare's works has potentially allowed her to side-step the sticky wickets of cultural materialism, politics, post-colonial theory and other problematizing approaches to Shakespeare.

Over the years, the company has leveraged the universal appeal of Shakespeare in a number of different ways. In the 1970s and early 1980s S&C substituted the one-size-fits-all "multiculturalizing" of the Company for the ethnically-specific approaches to Shakespeare that were popular at the time. In the 1990s, the Company avoided fully assuming the label of a feminist Shakespeare company by focusing on its attempt to restore a harmonious, humanist balance to a Shakespearean tradition drawn into gender wars. Most recently the Company has used the trope of universalism to justify everything from its educational outreach programs, to its programming on leadership and management in the field of business, and even to its non-Shakespeare season choices.

The 2004 re-write of the Company's mission statement also marked the first time that Shakespeare & Company began to employ the three rhetorical questions that currently act as the company's guiding philosophic principles, and the basis of their present marketing campaign. Originally appearing under the heading: "A Statement of Values that Unite Us," the Company identified three questions it believes reside at the heart of "all of Shakespeare's plays," namely: "What does it mean to be alive? How should we act? What must I do?"²³⁸ In the past five years of season programs, these existential questions have been used as un-official subject headings, each addressing a different company endeavor: the first question as an introduction to the Company's choice of plays for the season, the second detailing the events of the actor training program, and the third describing the Company's educational offerings.



Figure 23: Actor Kristin Villanueva in "What Does It Mean To Be Alive?" (cover art), Development Brochure, Shakespeare & Company, 2009.

²³⁸ Twenty-seventh Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 2004: 9.

However, recently a quote from *King Lear* -- “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” -- has replaced the third question as the unofficial slogan of the educational arm of the Company, though the original question continues to be featured with the first two in the mission statement and as one of the tag lines used by the Company on all of their marketing and promotional materials.



Figure 24: Education Program Brochure (cover art), Shakespeare & Company, 2009.

The use of these taglines not only fit the Company’s attempt to evoke notions of universality along with the recall of Shakespeare, but the existential nature of the questions implies that somehow Shakespeare, and by extension Shakespeare & Company, is capable of addressing, and perhaps solving some of life’s greatest and most fundamental questions. In my own interview, Packer defended S&C’s most recent, ethical, turn in its rhetoric by reminding me of the relative importance of the art of rhetoric in the educational system of Shakespeare’s day, (noting that both Shakespeare and his actors would have studied rhetoric in school), and pointing to the ways in which the plays themselves engage in active rhetorical debate.

By its 30th Anniversary Season in 2007, the Company had further distilled its universalist mission statement. The new statement, firmly re-organized around the three “vital questions at the heart of each of Shakespeare’s plays,” begins in the first sentence by re-asserting the authenticity of the company’s performance aesthetic:

Shakespeare & Company was founded in 1978 to create theatre of unprecedented excellence rooted in classical ideals of inquiry, balance, and harmony; a company that performs as Elizabethans did -- in love with poetry, physical prowess and the mysteries of the universe. . . . We Believe: That the creative impulse is the source of life and it must be at the center of our education system, our interaction with each other and our community, as well as the center of our performance, training and education. That creativity attracts people of all races, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, age and gender differences, to work, and play together to the enrichment of the human race.”²³⁹

Here, the potentially academically troubling choice of the word “universal” has been removed, but the notion that Shakespeare’s works and words can be used to unite and improve upon all facets of human existence remains. In this version, the universally binding concept constructed by the Company’s rhetoric is creativity. Further, making direct, and thereby potentially refutable, statements about the authenticity of their performance aesthetic have been avoided in favor of the claim that it is the company’s “love” of “poetry, physical prowess and the mysteries of the universe” that aligned the S&C’s performances with those of Shakespeare’s own company, rather than any specific theatrical convention, space or practice.

²³⁹ Thirtieth Season Program, Shakespeare & Company, 2007: 4.

The Company will, no doubt, face countless other challenges in the future that will continue to modify its goals and redefine its identity and mission. But for now, Packer continues to see Shakespeare & Company as using all aspects of its three pronged (Training, Education, and Production) as means of actively creating a new generation of performers and theatre-goers who remember Shakespeare as a passionate playwright and collaborative theatre artist whose skillful use of language and rhetoric explores the emotional depths and the universal philosophic questions of human existence. At the conclusion of my own interview with Packer, I asked “What is it about Shakespeare that you are hoping that Shakespeare & Company remembers in a way that no other company can or does?” She replied:

[T]o ask those three questions and really try and be leaders in the field of language, and the people who love language and delight in looking at what it means to be a human being through language. You know, ‘In the beginning there was the Word.’ Because that is how we define who we are, but also [how] we expand who we are. So it seems to me that those are our missions. And to have a lot of fun while we’re doing it.’²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Packer Personal Interview, 2009.

3.0 CHAPTER TWO – SHAKESPEARE & THE CITY: THE THREE RIVERS SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

What is the city but the people? - William Shakespeare – Coriolanus

3.1 SHAKESPEARE & PITTSBURGH?!?!: AN IMPROBABLE PAIRING

“*Shakespeare?!? In Pittsburgh?!?*” That was the incredulous response that Attilio “Buck” Favorini received at nearly every turn in 1979, when he first began to seek funding to start a Shakespeare Festival in the once-thriving steel city in the rust belt of Western Pennsylvania. Favorini, a New York native with a PhD from Yale, had been eager to find a local outlet for his passion for the Bard since he relocated to Pittsburgh in 1969, in order to take a theatre faculty position in the University of Pittsburgh’s Department of Speech. But his passion was tested by the significant initial resistance he received from the City’s philanthropic community; Pittsburgh, they insisted, was a decidedly blue-collar town with little to no interest in trappings of elitist culture. In Pittsburgh, the ‘Steel City,’ labor, not art, was the prevailing ethos, uniting a racially and ethnically diverse population under one hard hat. It was a working man’s town where professional sports was the preferred form of entertainment, where beer was the preferred

beverage, and where the works of a four-hundred year-old English poet were preferred only by elderly high school English teachers -- or so it was thought. Pittsburgh, it seemed, was no place for Shakespeare. But, by 1983, despite the overwhelming odds stacked against him, Favorini would prove them all wrong when his fledgling company, The Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, became the sixth largest Shakespeare Festival in the United States.²⁴¹

This chapter will investigate the attempts of the Festival to insure its own institutional survival by reviving, and subsequently re-constructing the popular cultural memory of Shakespeare among the predominately blue-collar citizens of Pittsburgh. By establishing itself as a cultural tradition within Pittsburgh, the Festival belongs to all three of the overlapping types of “invented traditions” as laid out by sociologist Eric Hobsbawm: “a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, social status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior.”²⁴² I will point to the ways in which the Festival, through its marketing materials and rhetoric, functioned in all three of these ways as a uniquely Pittsburgh tradition. By examining the Festival’s press coverage, marketing and promotional materials, and its multiple depictions of Shakespeare, I assert that the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival (TRSF) sought to re-situate the collective memory of the classical English literary figure within the active cultural milieu of the city of Pittsburgh. Further, I will suggest that its efforts amounted effectively to a kind of re-

²⁴¹ Figure based on attendance, budget and number of performances of Shakespeare Companies in the Shakespeare Theatre Association of America (STAA). Figure cited in Yvonne Steele, “Booking the Bard,” *Pittsburgh Arts* 2.4 (1984): 2+. Figure also cited in the Fourth Season Souvenir Program, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983.

²⁴² Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester UP ND, 1989) 11.

branding of the Bard, memorially re-constructing Shakespeare to reflect the down-to earth tastes and prevailing values of work, commerce and physical prowess of the self-proclaimed “City of Champions.” Throughout this examination I will note the ways in which the Festival leveraged Shakespeare’s inherent cultural cachet in an attempt to simultaneously assert its own legitimacy as a company and to assist in the City’s larger effort to improve Pittsburgh’s identity on a national level. Finally, I will interrogate the TRSF’s attempt to use the inherently communal aspects of its “festival” format in order to strengthen the cultural community and reputation of Pittsburgh and to engage in a series of commemorative acts aimed largely at supporting its congenially constructed remembrance of Shakespeare.

3.2 UNPRETENTIOUS SHAKESPEARE: THE WORKING MAN’S PLAYWRIGHT

The resistance Favorini first encountered from Pittsburgh power brokers can, in part, be traced to the City’s long history of supposed anti-theatrical sentiment, which has often been attributed to the puritanical ideals of Pennsylvania’s Quaker and Scots-Irish founding fathers. William Penn himself set the standard in 1682 when he declared playgoing to be “an offense against God [which incited] people to Rudeness, Cruelty, Looseness and Irreligion.”²⁴³ This early theatrical prohibition, compounded by the traditional Scots-Irish, Presbyterian distaste for idleness, impelled early inhabitants to develop a strong work ethic as its most defining civil characteristic. As early as the first decade of the 1800s, its citizens had begun to articulate the

²⁴³ Lynne Conner, *Pittsburgh in Stages: Two Hundred Years of Theatre* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007) 16.

deeply-felt connection between the City and the ethos of work. Pittsburgh's first bookseller, Zadok Cramer wrote, "The character of the people [here] is that of enterprising and persevering industry; everyman to his business is the prevailing maxim, there is therefore little time devoted to amusements or to the cultivation of refined social pleasures."²⁴⁴

Despite its supposed reputation as an anti-theatre town, Pittsburgh had a surprisingly rich, if distant, history of serving as host for welcoming Shakespeare's works. Yet even in the earliest appearance of the Bard on the boards of the 'Burgh, Shakespeare and his works were recalled through representations of a more populist flavor, as exemplified by an advertisement on the front page of the April 17, 1790 issue of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* announcing an evening of entertainments at the Theatre in the Garrison featuring the tragedy *Cato* and an unknown Shakespearean parody entitled *All the World's a Stage*. While the majority of early American theatrical histories have devoted little attention to Pittsburgh, the City's geographical location, paired with its socio-economically and ethnically diverse population, and its relatively non-restrictive legislation on theatrical entertainments made the burgeoning metropolis a popular stop for some of the most notable performers and touring theatre companies of the era.²⁴⁵ One of the City's first Shakespeare festivals was produced in the 1833-1834 season when a touring company mounted six Shakespeare productions which played for more than 40 performances.

²⁴⁴ Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator: Containing Directions for Navigating the Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers; With an Ample Account of These Much Admired Waters . . . And a Concise Description of Their Towns, Villages, Harbors, Settlements, etc. With Maps of the Ohio and Mississippi to Which is Added An Appendix, Containing an Account of Louisiana, and of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers As Discovered by the Voyage Under Captains Lewis and Clark*, 8th ed. (Pittsburgh: Cramer and Spear, Franklin Head Bookstore, 1814, [orig. publ. 1801]) 12.

²⁴⁵ See Conner's, *Pittsburgh in Stages*, (specifically Chapters One and Two), for a historic account of notable Shakespeare productions the city, including those by acting troupes lead by James Douglas, Noah Ludlow, Samuel Drake, featuring stars such as Elenora Duse, Junius Brutus, Edwin Booth, Edwin Forrest, and Ellen Tree.

The Company's season also included a series of short, original plays featuring a performing monkey who was, arguably, the company's largest draw. And, as one local theatre critic wrote, "No one knows whether the monkey attempted Shakespeare, but it could scarcely have lowered the rock-bottom reputation of theatre in the hard-working Presbyterian town of Pittsburgh."²⁴⁶ Despite the relatively significant number of Shakespeare productions that graced the boards of Pittsburgh stages in the 18th and early 19th century, it was not until the rise of variety theatre, vaudeville and the minstrel show that the city began to see lasting expansion of the professional theatres. The popularity of these traditions in Pittsburgh may, in part, be attributed to the fact that the wide-swinging mix of highbrow and lowbrow entertainments that characterized these genres seemed uniquely capable of appealing to the city's extremely diverse populace. As a result of the popularity of these traditions, Pittsburgh's downtown theatre district experienced a 500 percent increase in the City's theatrical capacity during the period between 1840 and 1865.²⁴⁷

Still, despite the City's embrace of the popular theatre traditions of the mid-19th century, Pittsburgh could not shake its anti-theatrical reputation, and by the end of World War II, its theatrical offerings began to wane. In her local theatre history, *Pittsburgh in Stages*, Lynne Conner asserts that the most significant decline in commercial stage activity in Pittsburgh occurred during the 1950s. She attributes the rapid decline to a number of factors: economic changes in the theatrical touring industry that eliminated Pittsburgh from the list of all-important try-out booking cities, significant drops in commercial airfares which allowed wealthy patrons the option of travelling to New York for a weekend of theatre-going, and the working class's

²⁴⁶ Jim Davidson, "Pittsburgh's a Stage for 3 from the Bard," *Pittsburgh Press* 16 Jun. 1983: D1+.

²⁴⁷ Conner 34.

attraction to a new crop of movie houses, local social halls and little theatres that had begun to pop up in their own neighborhoods. Significantly, the two glorious buildings, Heinz Hall and the Benedum, that now house live theatre, dance and music were originally movie palaces. In many ways it was the overwhelming success of community theatres in Pittsburgh, most notably The Pittsburgh Playhouse, which had a long history of producing popular local productions of Shakespeare's works that contributed to the City's slow embrace of the rising regional theatre movement in the US during the 1960s. Yet, despite its thriving community theatre scene in 20th century, Pittsburgh's perceived (though perhaps undeserved) reputation as a "working class city with working class tastes," persisted. Audience members were often described as having a tendency to display their predisposition towards emotional restraint by their tendency to "sit on their hands" during performances.²⁴⁸

The decline of the steel industry during the 1970s and early 1980s posed further challenges for a city that was often a punch-line on late-night television. The oil crisis of 1973, paired with increasing competition from manufacturers in Germany and Japan, resulted in a decline in the demand for American steel, a situation exacerbated by the Reagan administration's focus on stimulating the free market through the deregulation of industry and other anti-union policies. Problems persisted at the local level as well: local deposits of coke and iron ore, necessary for steel production, had become depleted, driving up the cost of production. During the economic recession of 1981-1982, more than 153,000 workers were laid off from Pittsburgh

²⁴⁸ Beatrice Lewis, "Pittsburgh's a Poor Road Town, but Just Needs Encouragement," *New York Times Herald Tribune* 6 Jul.1941: n.pag.

mills, the ripple effect of which prompted the closing of railroads, mines and other local manufacturing factories.²⁴⁹

Through thick and thin, Pittsburgh citizens warmed towards the accomplishments of their professional sports teams. By 1979, the City had cultivated the nickname “The City of Champions,” prompted by the Pittsburgh Steelers’ unprecedented four NFL championships in six seasons, bookended by two MLB World Series wins by the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1971 and 1979.²⁵⁰ The dual victories in 1979 were particularly noteworthy because, in addition to the championship wins, all four MLB hitting awards and the NFL MVP that year went to Pittsburgh players. Billboards, bumper stickers, and all-manner of sports paraphernalia were designed to boast of the City’s new source of civic pride.²⁵¹ It helped that the University of Pittsburgh Panthers won national football championships in 1976 and 1980. The nickname gained national recognition when *Sports Illustrated* featured Steeler Terry Bradshaw and Pirate Willie Stargell on the cover of its December 24, 1979 issue with an accompanying article entitled, “Two Champs from the City of Champions.” The name solidified Pittsburgh’s emerging identity as a sports town and gave residents a new source of Pittsburgh pride.

Meanwhile, in 1969, Attilio Favorini, a New York City native, the son of a federal agent and a homemaker, arrived in town to take a position in the University of Pittsburgh’s Department

²⁴⁹ The figure on the layoff of the early 1980s can be found in the definitive book on the decline of the Steel Industry in Pittsburgh -- John Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline and Fall of the American Steel Industry* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1988): 689.

²⁵⁰ Also of note during this era was Steeler fullback, Franco Harris’ role in the now famous “Immaculate Reception” play (a term coined by local Pittsburgh Sportscaster Myron Cope) which resulted in a controversial win for the Steelers in the final minutes of the 1972 AFC Division Playoff game against the Oakland Raiders.

²⁵¹ The City of Champions nickname experienced a more recent revival in 2009 when the Pittsburgh Penguins won the NHL’s Stanley Cup and the Steelers captured their sixth NFL championship (tying them for the team with the most championships), and resulting in the *Sporting News* declaring them the “Best Sports City” of the year.

of Speech and Theatre. Favorini had developed his own love of Shakespeare while playing Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night* at Fordham University and has credited his largely Jesuit education for his somewhat pragmatic approach to making theatre, describing his artistic style as “a combination of worldliness and immediacy with an ideological base.”²⁵² But having lived in two cities with such relatively rich theatrical environments Favorini was unprepared for what he referred to as Pittsburgh’s cultural “inferiority complex,” and his pragmatism was tested when he began to think of expanding the University’s brief forays into summer theatre productions into a Pittsburgh-based Shakespeare Festival.

In 1979, when Favorini began to lay plans for his new Shakespeare Festival, the professional theatre scene in Pittsburgh was nearly non-existent; though the professional BFA training program out of the Carnegie Mellon University’s (CMU) School of Drama was still regularly producing, there was a time in the mid-seventies, between the closing of the Public Playhouse in 1973 and the opening of the Pittsburgh Public in 1975, that there was no professional theatre operating in Pittsburgh, much less during the summer months. Even more disheartening to Favorini, the City’s inferiority complex extended to some in his own institution, who worried that potential audience members would be suspicious of the artistic quality of theatrical productions associated with the University of Pittsburgh in comparison with those out of Carnegie Mellon University’s prestigious theatre training program. Still, Favorini was able to remain optimistic about the possibility of bringing the Bard to the ‘Burgh for several reasons. First, Favorini and his colleagues had made a few, limited forays into mounting productions

²⁵² Favorini qtd. in Jim Davidson, “The Bard’s promoter: Shakespeare Festival producer ‘Buck’ Favorini is part entrepreneur, part arts world idealist,” *Pittsburgh Press* 21 March 1984: J1+.

during the summer months -- Neil Simon's *The Good Doctor*, a documentary drama written by Favorini and colleague Gil Elvgren about the rise of steel unions in Pittsburgh called *Steel/City*; an extremely popular Gershwin revue; and a production of Pinter's *Old Times* which had drawn unprecedented critical praise for a university production. The relative success of these precursor productions and the audiences they were able to draw encouraged Favorini and others in his department, and as Favorini recalls, "gave us a sense of pride and made us think that Carnegie Mellon didn't have to be the only game in town."²⁵³ Second, Favorini had already begun "to harbor a vision" for an expanded and separate theatre department at the University of Pittsburgh, "one that offered a BA, an MFA, and a PhD."²⁵⁴ But in order to make that vision a reality, Favorini knew that he would need to define that program in a way which would contrast significantly with the renowned theatre program offered just down the street at CMU. By placing Shakespeare as the cornerstone of the potential department's offerings Favorini believed Pitt theatre would be able to assert its own classical leanings as a department, placing itself in direct contrast to the large-scale musicals and technically ambitious productions of CMU's theatre program. Additionally, Favorini saw Shakespeare as an easy fit for the talents of his fellow faculty members, as many of them had significant experience acting, directing and designing his works. And finally, Favorini believed that Shakespeare had something to offer Pittsburgh, namely, "status -- that's what Shakespeare had to offer the city."²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Attilio Favorini, Personal Interview, 28 Jun. 2011.

²⁵⁴ Favorini, Personal Interview 2011.

²⁵⁵ Favorini, Personal Interview 2011.

For Favorini, reviving the City's collective memory of the Bard could prove to be the key to combating Pittsburgh's cultural "inferiority complex," which could, in turn, help pave the way for improving Pittsburgh's civic and cultural reputation on a national level. However, the first step in that process would require convincing the city's populist audience that Shakespeare was worth remembering at all. If, as sociologist Maurice Halbwachs writes, "[e]very collective memory requires the support of a group delineated in space and time,"²⁵⁶ then Favorini's challenge would be identifying the particular aspects of Shakespeare's personal and professional history that would encourage Pittsburghers to recall the distant historical figure as one of their own. Quoting Stephen Balint, Artistic Director of Squat Theatre, Favorini was convinced that theatre should be "something from a given place,"²⁵⁷ Favorini set out to construct a new recollection of Shakespeare in line with the ethos of Pittsburgh, one that emphasized a strong work ethic, physical prowess, and a down-to-earth, proletarian sense of practicality. To insure its own material viability, TRSF attempted to promote Shakespeare as an active part of the cultural heritage of the city of Pittsburgh in order to create among its potential audience members a kind of familiarity with, and even a sense of ownership of, the historically and geographically distant theatrical icon of Shakespeare. As Favorini asserted when interviewed in the second year of the Festival, "if a community gets a feeling it has created its own culture, rather than having it bust [*sic* for "bussed"] in from somewhere else . . . it gives people a sense of pride."²⁵⁸ By recalling Shakespeare within the more familiar and particular cultural context of the city, the Festival was

²⁵⁶ Halbwachs 84.

²⁵⁷ Balint qtd in Favorini, Attilio Favorini, *Voicings: Ten Plays from the Documentary Theater* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1995) xxxiv, footnote 80.

²⁵⁸ Favorini qtd. in Jim Davidson, "Shakespeare Fest Just As You Like It," *Pittsburgh Press* 14 June 1981: G2.

able to reconstruct him as one of Pittsburgh's own greats, a sort of honorary citizen of the City of Champions.

Nearly every marketing decision made by TRSF attempted to settle Shakespeare into Pittsburgh culture, an idea graphically manifest in its official logo.



Figure 25: TRSF Logo (Gala Invite, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1980.)

The image recalls the production upon which Favorini had made his reputation as a Pittsburgh theatre artist: *Steel/City*, a documentary play, written by Favorini and University of Pittsburgh faculty member and TRSF founding member Gil Elvgren, which chronicled the development of the steel industry from its earliest days in the 1790s, until 1976 -- the year the play premiered. Favorini and Elvgren structured the play around the character of Andrew Carnegie, but balanced his presence in the play by including the stories of “many ordinary workers who articulated -- in words taken verbatim from our interviews with scores of steel workers -- a workingman’s perspective on this great and ‘basic’ industry. Quite surprisingly, the play found its audience not only from the white collars who normally attend theatre, but among steelworkers who had certainly never set foot in our theatre before.”²⁵⁹ The production was an overwhelming popular

²⁵⁹ Attilio Favorini, Letter to John Drummond, 27 Sept. 1982.

and critical success and not only solidified Favorini's identity as a true Pittsburgher but focused a level of national attention back on the Smoky City that it had not experienced since the rapid decline of the steel industry. A twelve minute segment of the play was broadcast nationally on NBC's *The Today Show* and played a week's engagement at the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife. So when Favorini's next project, the Festival, began to develop logos, he mined potential material from his last local success. Working with local designer Jim Holman, Favorini borrowed the graphic of the Pittsburgh skyline, backed by a half circle of rays of light, which was used on the *Steel/City* poster, and paired it with a familiar illustration of Shakespeare's face. The resulting marketing graphic, which numerous Festival employees referred to in promotional interviews as "Shakespeare rising," evokes the idea of a brilliant light emanating from the Bard, bathing the entire City below in his radiant glow. The image of the skyline is topped by a regal crown and below it sits a triangular representation that, according to Favorini, can be read "either as representing the outline of Fort Duquesne and the fountain at the Point, or as the ruff collar of an Elizabethan."²⁶⁰ Favorini recalls that the citation of the *Steel/City* graphic was absolutely intentional: "We did that because *Steel/City* was -- and the newspapers at the time said so -- a defining moment in the City's cultural history . . . it meant a lot to the people So when we were thinking about Pittsburgh's identity we had a visual key that we knew already resonated strongly with the people of the City, so we re-used it."²⁶¹

Rhetorically, Favorini began his efforts to convert Pittsburghers to his particular brand of Shakespeare by stressing that, in contrast to other drier, more academic productions, the

²⁶⁰ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

²⁶¹ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

offerings of the TRSF would be lively and unpretentious. In a letter generated to attract local professionals to serve as potential board members for the Festival, Favorini articulated his proletariat-minded assertion, which was also used as the primary component of the Festival's mission statement: "I am convinced that if Shakespeare is produced in a down-to-earth, unintimidating manner, people from all walks of life will come to enjoy and be enriched by him. After all, Shakespeare's original audience consisted of as many laborers as lords; there's no real reason that that can't be the case again."²⁶² Early press coverage on the TRSF focused rhetorically on how its plain-spoken, vigorous productions were intended to serve as a kind of curative to the disenchantment instilled in those whose initial exposure to Shakespeare was at the hands of dry academics and Bardolaters. The Festival's rhetorical indictment of academic approaches to Shakespeare can be seen in this early profile piece, in which local theatre critic George Anderson notes, "Favorini seems to take more satisfaction in introducing new audiences to Shakespeare than in winning the praise of experienced theatregoers. 'Nothing makes me happier,' [Favorini] admitted. 'That's exactly why I'm in this business. In school, the first reaction to Shakespeare is all too often negative and unpleasant'."²⁶³ While the Festival was certainly interested in competing with more traditionally elite arts organizations in town, such as the opera and the symphony, for funding, exposure and, to some degree, audience members, Favorini made certain to maintain his assertion that the Festival was dedicated to bringing Shakespeare to all of Pittsburgh's varied citizens, not just the cultural elite. His insistence on the

²⁶² Attilio Favorini, Letter to Robert Kavanaugh, 16 Dec. 1982.

²⁶³ George Anderson, "The Bard is Back," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Weekend Magazine* 17 Jun. 1983: 1+.

validity of the connection between the Festival's mission and their particular recollection of Shakespeare can be seen here in this early grant application for the company:

While we hardly bar the theatre's doors to the patrons of the Symphony and the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, the Festival is determined to make Shakespeare accessible to an audience that does not yet regularly come to the theatre. We keep this in mind as we debate concept, playing style, ticket scale, [and] marketing strategy. This may seem like management policy dictating artistic policy, but in reality it is the opposite. . . . I know first as an artist and scholar that [Shakespeare's] plays seethe with a liveliness appealing to all people, no matter whether they wear letters after their names or numbers underneath their pictures. Therefore, as a producer I seek ways to deliver to the people that vigorous, active, often violent and richly humorous life.²⁶⁴

In order to encourage a collective memory of Shakespeare that reflected the particular tastes and values of Pittsburgh, the Festival's recollections of him frequently emphasized the more proletarian aspects of his biography and the universal appeal of his texts. In an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, the Festival's first national press profile, Favorini was quoted as saying, "Shakespeare played to the guy down the block, and that's what we're doing."²⁶⁵ Favorini's assertion that Shakespeare played to the Pit was echoed by Festival actor Paul Rosa, who grew up in Pittsburgh. Rosa told reporter Carol Hymowitz he was not at all surprised by Shakespeare's popularity in the steel town, noting that, "Shakespeare is meat and potatoes, and Pittsburgh is a

²⁶⁴ Attilio Favorini, Supplemental Material for NEA Grant Application, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983.

²⁶⁵ Favorini qtd. in Carol Hymowitz, "Another Willie Makes It Big In Steel City," *Wall Street Journal* 7 Aug. 1980: n.p.

meat-and-potatoes town.”²⁶⁶ In another early interview, when asked to compare the Festival’s unpretentious style to that of the Bard himself, Favorini quoted Festival director Marc Masterson’s motto for approaching the Shakespeare’s comedies: “[T]here’s no such thing as a cheap joke because everything is stolen already.” Favorini went on to explain that what Masterson was alluding to was that, “Shakespeare stooped, if you will, to a low comic style,” and then, reminding the interviewer of Shakespeare’s financial share in the success of his own public theatre company, he further insisted that Shakespeare “had a high investment” in keeping the working class audience members who patronized his own productions entertained.²⁶⁷ The rhetoric of the Festival’s promotional materials also stressed the wide accessibility of both Shakespeare’s texts and TRSF’s particular aesthetic, as is evidenced in this letter soliciting development donations:

The guiding idea behind TRSF is that William Shakespeare’s plays are far more available and accessible to the average person than most of us would imagine. Shakespeare’s own audience was composed of people from all walks of life, with workingmen and small businessmen predominating. There is no law that says that you need a Ph.D. to enjoy Shakespeare. . . . Our conviction that Shakespeare can speak to all has influenced the entire operation of the Shakespeare Festival. We have chosen the most accessible of the comedies and the most directly appealing of the tragedies.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Rosa qtd. in Hymowitz.

²⁶⁷ Favorini qtd. in Jim Davidson, “They Offer Sprightly Shakespeare,” *Pittsburgh Press* n.d. 1981: F1+.

²⁶⁸ Attilio Favorini, Letter to Sandra S. Collier, Executive Director of the Willie Stargell Foundation, 21 May 1980.

In a personal letter to local media contacts, Favorini implored potential supporters of the Festival to “help us get the word out that Shakespeare is not just for the elite and the over-educated. Shakespeare’s own audience was largely composed of non-readers. Our productions emphasize action that anyone can enjoy and understand.”²⁶⁹

In order to appeal to its Pittsburgh audience, one of TRSF’s signature aesthetic choices was a focus on the physical vigor and violence found in Shakespeare’s plays and which was intended to act as a reflection of the tough, competitive spirit of the City of Champions. The Festival received extensive critical praise for its combat choreography, much of which was devised by University faculty member W. Stephen Coleman, who served as both a director and fight choreographer, as well as acting in several productions for the Festival.²⁷⁰ However, despite the Festival’s success in staging of fights, responses to TRSF’s first season production of *Taming of the Shrew*, in 1980, was varied. While some Shakespeare purists were initially upset by what they perceived as an unnecessarily vigorous staging of the production, complaining that the actors, “roll and leap across the stage . . . with such fury . . . that the audience becomes exhausted,”²⁷¹ others, like retired steelworker Fred Gertenschlager “loved the production precisely because it was ‘so lively’,” and vowed to return to see the Festival’s other productions based on the production’s rough and tumble feel.²⁷² Likewise, *Pittsburgh-Post Gazette* theatre critic George Anderson wrote of Coleman’s particularly physical 1983 production of *Henry IV*,

²⁶⁹ Attilio Favorini, Letter to Media Friends of TRSF, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 26 May 1982.

²⁷⁰ Coleman used the name “W. Stephen Coleman” for his academic and directing work, but used the stage name “Alex Coleman,” a reference to his grandmother’s maiden name, for his professional acting credits. Coleman also served as Interim Executive Director of TRSF during 1986, when Favorini was on sabbatical from the University.

²⁷¹ George Anderson qtd. in Hymowitz.

²⁷² Hymowitz.

Pt. I, “Coleman has marshaled his force as skillfully as a victorious field general. He makes every aspect of the play -- the drama, the raucous comedy, the pageantry and the clamorous battle -- equally vivid.”²⁷³

And, while the Festival remained dedicated to producing what it called “Shakespeare for Everybody!,”²⁷⁴ it retained a certain fondness for the bawdier side of the Bard, counting on it to provide an added appeal for its blue-collar audience. Both Favorini and Coleman remember younger audiences being especially thrilled by the Festival’s willingness to acknowledge the earthier, often titillating aspects of the texts which they believed reflected their own passionate existences.²⁷⁵ Predictably, others were startled by such frank interpretations, like Willie Mae Graham, 72, vehemently complaining about the Festival’s “bold displays of sex.” Graham left the Festival’s inaugural production of *The Taming of the Shrew* at intermission, mistakenly believing that the codpieces worn by the male actors had been invented for the production, and complaining that, “Shakespeare would have been hurt,” by the vulgar costume choice.²⁷⁶

The Festival’s emphasis on the earthier, more violent and physically-vigorous aspects of the plays was part of its broader desire to create what Favorini has referred to as a “visually-lush production aesthetic”²⁷⁷ that would encourage audience members to fully immerse themselves in the world of the play, and thereby combating the tendency for uninitiated audience members to experience anxiety over the more unfamiliar aspects of Shakespeare’s works. One fundamental

²⁷³ George Anderson, Rev. of *Henry IV, Pt. I*, TRSF production, dir. W. Stephen Coleman, N.d. Jun 1983: n.p.

²⁷⁴ Slogan used in the Fifth Season Brochure Mailer. Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1984.

²⁷⁵ Favorini Personal Interview, 28 June 2011 and W. Stephen Coleman, Personal Interview, 5 October 2011.

²⁷⁶ Graham qtd. in Hymowitz.

²⁷⁷ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

example of this assertion can be seen in Favorini's insistence that TRSF actors should speak in an American dialect and eschew attempts to replicate what he referred to as the "'hoity toity' or 'British' style" often adopted by American actors in the performance of classical works such as Shakespeare. Local theatre critics often praised the Festival actors for their ability to be understood by those who normally experienced anxiety when confronted with the Shakespeare's language: "They speak naturally in a rich, clear and understandable voice. The actors sound so comfortable with the language and this helps put the audience at ease."²⁷⁸ However, for Favorini, the choice stemmed from more pragmatic than idealistic concerns:

For our audiences, (and this is true for all people who have little contact with Shakespeare), their main complaint [about Shakespeare's works] is that they are hard to understand, and that figured heavily into our decision to create visually-lush productions which could convey the meaning of the play. It takes people about fifteen minutes to get into the rhythm and the feel of the play. So we paid very close attention to the diction and the pace of the first fifteen minutes of productions -- speeding it up later in the play when people got used to what they were hearing.²⁷⁹

The Festival's continued desire to attract the uninitiated to their Shakespeare productions placed special emphasis on making production choices that would appeal to the average Pittsburgh audience. University of Pittsburgh faculty member and frequent Festival director, Gillette A. Elvgren, Jr., spoke in several interviews about the importance of incorporating the specific tastes

²⁷⁸David Petechuk, "The man behind the Shakespeare Festival," *Night Times* [Pittsburgh, PA] July/Aug. 1984: n.d.

²⁷⁹Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

and situations of a theatre's target audience into modern productions of Shakespeare's works rather than striving for a performance style and aesthetic that was historically accurate. He dismissed the more staid and traditional performance style embraced by many classical theatre companies of the time as "dull," preferring to find "ways to make a production meet a contemporary audience, not [just] to "do it as it was done in Shakespeare's time."²⁸⁰ Elvgren acknowledged that classical theatres faced growing challenges in competing for a share of the popular entertainment dollar from the rapid increase of entertainment technology employed by the television and film. According to Elvgren, as modern audiences "we are geared to watching much more than listening, because of TV, movies, etc., so a sensitive and sensible production of Shakespeare should be oriented to the visual."²⁸¹ Coleman, too remembers continually striving to find ways to compete with some of the more readily accessible takes on Shakespeare's works, most notably the publication of the *No Fear Shakespeare* series, graphic novel adaptations like those from Workman Publishing,²⁸² and the overwhelming popularity of Kenneth Branagh's film versions of *Hamlet*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*.²⁸³ And while Festival employees have acknowledged the impact that pop culture representations of Shakespeare's works, like Branagh's, had on the Festival's aesthetic choices, for the majority of its existence nothing out-ranked the festival's mission to present Shakespeare in an manner congenial to the

²⁸⁰ Elvgren qtd. in Deborah Nicholas, "Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival," [Pittsburgh, PA] *Night Times*, May/June 1983: 5.

²⁸¹ Elvgren qtd. in Nicholas 5.

²⁸² In fact, the TRSF used the Workman Publishing version of *Macbeth* as part of its pre-show educational packets for groups of grade school children attending matinee performances its 1984 production of *Macbeth*. See "Macbeth as comic book villain," *Oakland News* [Pittsburgh, PA] 24 May 1984: 3.

²⁸³ Coleman Personal Interview

character of the city of Pittsburgh, because, as Elvgren insisted at the time, “even more important than differences in physical space, lighting, and technology, are the differences in society.”²⁸⁴ However, this notion of competing against television and film persisted, growing in fact, as the company did. By the time Laura Ann Worthen was chosen to serve as Artistic Director for the company’s final two seasons, 1994 and 1995, the Festival’s mission statement had been dramatically retooled to include a final paragraph that characterizes the prevalence of television and film in American society as a significant threat to the role of theatre in culture and calls for Festival supporters to save the art of theatre:

Presenting entertaining and exciting theatre in America today is a challenging proposition; an uncertain economy, the seemingly exponential growth of TV and Cable offerings, the technology of film-making -- all conspire to bring into question the validity of live theatre. The Festival believes passionately that the culture of a society is what endures. . . . We know a culture by its art. Help us to conserve and nurture the art of classical theatre and thereby preserve a vital aspect of our culture.²⁸⁵

Another of the most original aspects of TRSF’s production aesthetic was its frequent use of original songs and musical scores, composed by Festival member Christine Frezza. Favorini recalls that her compositions were “invaluable” to the Festival’s attempts to create the its signature, lush production aesthetic that encouraged audiences to fully immerse themselves in

²⁸⁴ Elvgren qtd. in Nicholas 5.

²⁸⁵ Mission Statement, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1994.

the worlds of the plays.²⁸⁶ In promotional interviews, Frezza focused her recollections of Shakespeare on the rich pageantry found in his plays. “Shakespeare knew what he was doing. . . . He knew people in the audience didn’t want to limit themselves to words. They wanted music, they wanted pageantry, they wanted everything they didn’t have in their everyday life.”²⁸⁷ Frezza’s work eschewed the familiar Romantic era tunes associated with Shakespeare in production, preferring instead to “design” music to fit in with specific production concepts. Her score for TRSF’s 1981 *As You Like It* contained what one reviewer called “a crash course in music history,” progressing from medieval music in the early court scenes to high Renaissance music in the forest scenes and finishing with Baroque flourishes to accompany the exuberance of the final scenes.²⁸⁸ But the popularity of her work among audience members came not from her ability to orchestrate and arrange historically accurate compositions, but her ability to craft simple tunes that appealed to its Pittsburgh audience and stuck with them as they left the theatre. Company actor Martin Merritt, who played Orlando in the production, noted that the popularity of “Who Killed the Deer,” one of the show’s original tunes, was due to the fact that it “sounds like a beer song” adding that “it’s the kind of song you’re humming a few scenes later.”²⁸⁹ Coleman recalls that he and other directors frequently relied on Frezza’s talents to help guide their own work. In my own interview with him, he took great pains to emphasize the tremendous

²⁸⁶ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

²⁸⁷ Frezza qtd. in Jim Davidson, “Bard Liked It With Pageantry,” *Pittsburgh Press* 30 July 1981: n.p.

²⁸⁸ Frezza qtd. in Davidson, “Bard Liked It...”.

²⁸⁹ Merritt qtd. in Davidson, “Bard Liked It...”.

influence she had on the other artists of the Festival, stressing just “how important Christine Frezza’s contributions were to defining production concepts.”²⁹⁰

Indeed, rarely was a production mounted at TRSF that did not bear Frezza’s stamp. For the Festival’s 1982 production of *Richard III*, which emphasized the title character’s likeness to the anti-Christ, Frezza composed a score that drew heavily on the music of Latin masses. When Elvgren decided to re-set his 1983 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* in post-WWI Italy, Frezza wrote five original songs that evoked the roaring 1920s. In 1984, she designed a soundscape of “electronically enhanced instruments and voices” in order to create the “supernatural aura for the hellish realm of madness”²⁹¹ explored in Coleman’s black-magic centered production of *Macbeth*. Frezza is perhaps best remembered for her work on the Festival’s 1987 production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Coleman, who had been chosen to direct the production, recalls that during his directorial prep work on the text he was struck by the play’s improbable lack of consequences and its general sense of frivolity. He anecdotally recalls that after reading the play for the third time, he got to the second scene and furiously scribbled in his notes, “This damn thing reads like a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta! And fifteen minutes later, I was on the phone to Christine asking, ‘Can you write this as a Gilbert and Sullivan piece?’ and she said, ‘Sure!’”²⁹² The musical adaptation, which eventually contained eighteen original songs by Frezza, was one of the most popular and highest grossing productions in the Festival’s history, and was re-mounted by the company in 1992. Frezza was one of the

²⁹⁰ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

²⁹¹ Christine Frezza, “Music for *Macbeth*,” Instructional Packet for the Three River Shakespeare Festival’s Fifth Season Production of *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, TRSF, May 1984: 10-11.

²⁹² Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

Festival's longest and most frequently employed company members, and remained a strong force in the Festival's production work until leaving TRSF in the early 1990s for a position at the Utah Shakespeare Festival.

Despite the Festival's continued attempts to align itself (and by extension, Shakespeare), with the City's working-class population, its intimate connection to the University of Pittsburgh left it vulnerable to the very same elitist and academic connotations it was seeking to avoid. Rhetorically, Favorini was insistent that the true damage to the collective memory of Shakespeare had been done, not by theatre academics, but rather by the usurpation of his works by English departments, who focused on his texts as examples of great literary works, rather than plays intended to be performed. His argument is best exemplified by his published response to a column by *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* writer Sydney Harris. In his column, Harris expounded at length on his own "stubborn conviction" that Shakespeare "is better appreciated when he is read than when he is performed," asserting that, "No one should attend a Shakespearean play who has not first immersed himself in the text." Harris held that once a reader has wrung all of the beauty and meaning from Shakespeare's written texts "there is little need to see a realistic interpretation of the drama. For the reverence we pay to his name is like the reverence we exhibit in church . . . while we nod off during the sermon." Harris ended his column by insisting that Shakespeare's failure to publish his own plays during his lifetime was a clear indication that he was more interested in being remembered for his poetry than for his playwriting, an occupation with which Harris suggests he was "ashamed and disgusted . . . considering it merely as a way to make a living by popular appeal."²⁹³ Favorini countered with a letter to the editor that stressed the

²⁹³ Sydney Harris, Op-Ed column, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 30 Apr. 1984: n.pag.

inherent importance of actions and acting in dramas, and fervently insisted that, “Shakespeare was quintessentially a man of his medium. Not only did he write plays, but he acted in them and was a prime shareholder in his own production company.”²⁹⁴ He goes on to categorically refute the notion that Shakespeare was “ashamed and embarrassed” of his identity as a playwright, insisting “rather that he gloried in the power of the theatre to move hearts and minds.”²⁹⁵ In stark contrast to Harris’s suggestion that no one should see a Shakespeare play without first reading it, Favorini suggests “that no one should go near a Shakespearean text who has not first savored the excitement of Shakespeare live.”²⁹⁶ Favorini concludes his argument with a plug for the Festival and their fledgling Shakespeare in the Schools (SITS) outreach program: “For the first time in the history of Pittsburgh schools, live professional Shakespeare will be available to students on a regular basis. We hope to fire their imagination before fuddy-duddies like Mr. Harris get them and turn Shakespeare into a chore.”²⁹⁷ The language of the piece clearly attempts to emphasize characteristics of Shakespeare’s own history that align himself and his works with Pittsburgh’s blue-collar sentiments: as a craftsman capable of working at all levels of production who believes in the important contribution his work can make to society at large.

The Festival’s assertion that Shakespeare’s reception among average Americans had suffered at the hands of academics can be seen in one of its most controversial ad campaigns. The ad, designed by Werner Chepelsky & Partners as part of the Festival’s 1991 marketing

²⁹⁴ Favorini, Attilio. Letter to the Editor: “Play Action,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* n.d. May 1984: n.p.

²⁹⁵ Favorini, Letter to the Editor, 1984.

²⁹⁶ Favorini, Letter to the Editor, 1984.

²⁹⁷ Favorini, Letter to the Editor, 1984.

campaign, featured a photo of a formidable-looking woman with large glasses, pursed lips, and a cardigan, over the words, “Did this woman kill Hamlet?” with copy below that reads, “With all due respect to the teachers that made us read it, we think one should experience Shakespeare the way he intended.”



Figure 26: "Did this woman kill Hamlet?" Ad for Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 19 April 1991: C9. Microfilm.

The ad provoked an immediate response from high school English teachers throughout Western Pennsylvania, angry over the ad’s allegations. Criticisms of the ad ran the gamut; some protested that the ad was “negative advertising” for the already beleaguered educational system, while others accused the Festival of engaging in blatant sexism.²⁹⁸ But by far, the greatest response came from well-meaning educators with a sincere love of Shakespeare. The ad, they claimed, unfairly “offends both bad and good teachers,” in effect, driving “a wedge between those who

²⁹⁸ Werner Chepelsky & Partners countered the accusation of sexism by noting that the larger campaign contained ads featuring both male and female “teachers,” but Festival organizers cancelled many of these scheduled ad runs in response to the negative feedback they received. See “Alas, Poor Teacher,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 27 Apr. 1991: n.p.

are doing their best to promote the Bard and their students.”²⁹⁹ In retrospect, Favorini concedes that the ad may have been “a mistake,” but notes that, as the saying goes, “there’s no such thing as bad press.”³⁰⁰ His 1991 response to the controversy was similarly pragmatic: “In terms of box-office response, no other ad created as much as that one. . . . We started to get calls the Monday after the ad ran.”³⁰¹ Favorini’s bottom-line-driven response may not have been as mercenary a position as it may seem; though responses from irate teachers filled the op-ed pages of local newspapers for nearly a month, many of them contained considerable praise for the Festival and their particular style of Shakespeare, as in this response from local English teacher Virginia Long-Karlsson that appeared only days after the original ad appeared: “Do I think the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival people went a bit too far? Yes. Do I think they owe a bit of an apology to the ‘lady’ in their ad? Yes. But by all means, go and see what the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival folks have done to the Bard.”³⁰² Both Favorini and W. Stephen Coleman, recall that at the time the Festival staff and the faculty of the University’s Theatre Arts Department carefully monitored the fall-out of the controversy by examining general ticket sales for the Festival season as well as the bookings for school matinees and found that not only was there not a drop off in sales, there was, in fact, a slight increase in bookings for student matinees after the ad ran compared with previous seasons.³⁰³

²⁹⁹ “Alas, Poor Teacher,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 27 Apr. 1991: n.p.

³⁰⁰ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

³⁰¹ “Alas, Poor Teacher.”

³⁰² Virginia Long-Karlsson, “See what they’ve done to the Bard,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 4 May 1991: 8.

³⁰³ Coleman and Favorini Personal Interviews 2011 and 1991 Budget Report, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 6.

While “Did this woman kill Hamlet?” was arguably the Festival’s most controversial marketing campaign, it reflects another of the Festival’s frequently employed marketing tropes, namely an intent to elicit pleasure from its audiences by casting the city of Pittsburgh in the role of cultural underdog and advertising its productions through irreverent promotional takes on the Bard and his works. The rhetorical depiction of Pittsburgh as cultural underdog is best exemplified in the Letter from the Executive Director in the first season’s Souvenir Program, in which Favorini acknowledges the improbable pairing of Shakespeare and the former steel city noting the ways that the Festival could both improve the cultural life of the city and reflect the characteristics of its people:

Pittsburgh has a Shakespeare Festival.

We can say that now with quiet pride. Elsewhere, though, among those who don’t yet know our city, the same words might be spoken with different emphasis:

‘**Pittsburgh** has a Shakespeare Festival?’

I suppose we have come to tolerate that, if not enjoy it. The world knows us for our laboring strength, industrial might, ethnic richness, and invincible athletes -- and well it should. But much of our burgeoning culture remains obscured, as if the darkness at noon which used to blight our city still hung over the streets. Our logo of “Shakespeare rising” is partially an image of light shed on that part of the city still overshadowed.

Successful Shakespeare Festivals both contribute to and harmonize with their environment, and so shall we. You can expect us to be a vital, vigorous, plain-spoken, down-to-earth, accessible -- like Pittsburgh. We expect you’ll take us as

we are, without looking for a pedigree. We're seeking an audience not unlike Shakespeare's own: lively, eager to be entertained, and drawn from all walks of life. As academics we shall honor the plays; as citizens we shall serve the people.³⁰⁴

The 1983 Season Brochure features another example of the Festival's strategy to simultaneously leverage the cultural cachet of the more traditional/elitist, established Shakespeare production industry, while insisting on its own unpretentious brand of his works. The cover of the brochure, when folded for mailing, resembles a handwritten message from the season's featured guest performer Claire Bloom³⁰⁵ "cordially" inviting audiences to the Fourth Annual Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, complete with the image of wax seal embossed with the letters "TRSF." But upon opening the brochure the reader is faced with a comic photo of three rather intoxicated and simple-minded looking men in Elizabethan costumes toasting with three flagons of ale featuring the heading, "And She's Invited a Few of Her Most Entertaining Friends."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ First Season Souvenir Program, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1980, 3.

³⁰⁵ Bloom, a London born, classically-trained actress of stage and screen, who performed her one-woman show, "These Are Women: A Portrait of Shakespeare's Heroines," which included monologues from several of her acclaimed stage performances as a special event for the TRSF 1983 season.

³⁰⁶ Fourth Season Brochure, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983, 1-2.



Figure 27: Fourth Season Brochure, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival (cover and inside cover art), 1983.

The brochure's juxtaposition of Bloom's reputation as elite Shakespeare performer with the raucous depiction of some of Shakespeare's most lowbrow, comic characters exemplifies the Festival's desire to intentionally tarnish Shakespeare's highbrow reputation in an attempt to endear him to the city's predominantly blue-collar populace. In sum, the marketing and promotional strategies employed by the Festival took a kind of mischievous pride in their ability to knock the stuffiness out of the traditional recollections of Shakespeare. A letter from Favorini to producers at NBC's *The Today Show* pitching a possible focus piece on the TRSF relied on the City's anti-culture reputation to serve as a hook to the segment which focused on the underdog Festival's unexpected success. Favorini suggests the following copy in an attempt to highlight the Festival's unlikely rise to prominence:

Pittsburgh -- City of Champions, home of the Pirates and the Steelers, where enthusiastic fans paint their heads Black and Gold at Super Bowl time.

Pittsburgh -- cradle of the steel industry in a year of slumping profits.

Pittsburgh -- which all the world knows, is a smoky, hunky-town with no culture to speak of.

Pittsburgh -- has a Shakespeare Festival!³⁰⁷

The mischievous sense of civic pride that allowed this kind of self-deprecating ad to resonate with Pittsburgh audiences also paved the way for a later marketing campaign which mocked the unsophisticated nature of Pittsburghers themselves. The Festival capitalized on its audiences' tendency to relish in their less sophisticated reputation in the 1990 season's subscriber mailer. In a nod to *The Tempest* as one of the season's mainstage productions, the season subscription mailer, designed to target existing audience members, featured a particularly unintelligent-looking photo of actor Sheridan Crist as Caliban with his mouth agape and scratching his head in a perplexed manner. The copy on the mailer reads: "Still making summer plans? It's not too late to subscribe."³⁰⁸



³⁰⁷ Attilio Favorini, Letter to Carol Wendt of *The Today Show*. Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival 22 July 1980.

³⁰⁸ Eleventh Season Subscriber Mailer, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1990, 2.

Figure 28: Eleventh Season Subscription Mailer (cover art), Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1990.

Though the Festival was interested in touting its working-class identity rhetorically, the organization preserved at least some of the highbrow connotations associated with traditional Shakespeare festivals. For Favorini, it was clear from the beginning that the Festival would have to walk a fine line in order “[t]o create a Shakespeare festival with a very, very hometown feel, on the one hand, and on the other hand, invest the festival with its own quasi royalty.”³⁰⁹ Early on, Festival marketing tactics even tried to make a joke paralleling Pittsburgh’s two “royal” Richards -- Mayor Richard Caliguiri and Governor Richard Thornburgh, both early and vocal supporters of the Festival -- with Shakespeare’s Richard II and Richard III. “So it worked both ways,” Favorini recalls; the comparison took advantage of “this level of ‘royalty’ associated with the festival, and yet, because they were Pittsburgh people, it reinforced the Pittsburgh identity of the company.”³¹⁰ While audience surveys reveal that the Festival’s paying customers generally fit the expected demographic— well-educated and upper-middle class – even from the beginning TRSF was able to boast a larger portion of blue collar audience members than would have been expected, given the typical experience of Shakespeare, and this core audience responded to a public persona for the Festival that was both unpretentious and distinctly American (being free from the traditional institutional ties to the British Shakespeare Establishment). However,

³⁰⁹ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

³¹⁰ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

through its free performances in the park and student matinees the Festival was able to draw a blue collar audience whose views on Shakespeare helped to shape its marketing campaigns.³¹¹

But despite Favorini's insistence that, "[a]t the Festival, we are not interested in preaching to the converted. Though our productions have won local and national renown, we are not an elitist organization. Rather, we partake of the vigorous and unpretentious spirit which characterizes the city whose hospitality we enjoy,"³¹² TRSF's success in this arena is somewhat difficult to assess. Despite Favorini's own personal recollections of the numerous occasions when local Pittsburghers (from roofers, to shoe salesmen, to butchers) approached him with their own fond memories of how TRSF productions had been their first introduction to Shakespeare, and had inspired a life-long love of the Bard in both them and their children, he too acknowledges that time and time again audience surveys revealed that the Festival's average audience member "was well-off and with graduate degrees."³¹³ With this in mind, the Festival focused on its educational outreach programs, the Shakespeare in the Schools (SITS) program and their High School Matinee Series where, arguably, the greatest potential for reaching audiences of first-time Shakespeare viewers lay: that was where "we were really proselytizing," Favorini recalls.³¹⁴ At its height in 1987, Festival reports indicate that SITS programs served fifty-three schools from the Western Pennsylvania area, and of these, eleven schools indicated

³¹¹ Third Season Report, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, Oct. 1982, 3. See also, "A Case for Financial Support," Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1988.

³¹² Attilio Favorini, Letter to Reggie Young, 23 Oct. 1984, 2.

³¹³ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

³¹⁴ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

that the majority of their students had not seen a professional production of Shakespeare.³¹⁵ But similar reports in the years that follow indicate a predictable decline in the number of new schools attracted to the Festival's offerings. Despite the decline in attracting first-timers, the SITS program outlived the Festival and continues to produce in the schools.³¹⁶ Likewise, the Festival's attempts at increasing accessibility of the Bard's works for the hearing and visually impaired of Pittsburgh, which began in 1983 -- and at its height included pre-show workshops, tours of the set, action scores of the production in Braille, audio cassette introductions to the actor's voices and the characters they played, and ASL interpreted performances -- were not expanded upon, as was stipulated in the company's 1986 Five-Year Plan. Rather, by 1993 the Festival, now under new management, had stopped producing the Braille action-scores, discontinued tours of the set and audio introductions, and reduced the number of ASL interpreted performances to one per production run.

One of the Festival's most significant means of attracting new-to-Shakespeare audiences were the free performances of its mainstage productions, remounted in local City parks to thousands of Pittsburghers every year. The free Shakespeare-in-the-Park performances, funded largely by grants from the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, were essential to establishing the company's festive identity, an integral part of the company's mission to bring Shakespeare to the diverse population of the City, and a significant means of audience development in the early years of the Festival. During the Festival's first season, a free production of *Romeo and Juliet* drew 800 people, 200 more than could be seated, many of whom

³¹⁵ SITS Final Report, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1987, 1.

³¹⁶ Even after the demise of the Festival, the SITS program remained and was eventually incorporated into the production efforts of the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Theatre Arts.

had never seen a Shakespeare play performed.³¹⁷ But in 1987, the free performances that had become such an anticipated feature of the City's summertime cultural events came to an end when deep cuts in the City's operating budgets resulted in the decision to end funding for the Shakespeare-in-the Park series, a decision that Favorini recalls was made after he had secured a "handshake agreement" with Citiparks director Louise Brown to renew the Festival's funding.

The funding cut was a particularly devastating blow to the Festival for two reasons. First, according to Favorini, "[t]he outdoor performances really defined who we were and what we were doing" and "we always felt like we were missionaries in a crowd that otherwise might never be exposed to Shakespeare."³¹⁸ The free shows were all the more important to the Festival's goal to attract new audiences to Shakespeare because the audience targeted by the Festival's Shakespeare-in-the-Park offerings were those hit hardest by the City's financial decline. "And even if they had the money to pay to see [Shakespeare], it wouldn't be their first choice in how to spend their entertainment dollar."³¹⁹ Second, the decision was particularly devastating because, according to Favorini, the Festival was not informed of the budget cut until after its performances had already been carried out. Favorini recalls, "They acted like we had never spoken. When we went to submit the invoice, they said, 'No, we can't pay it'."³²⁰ Hoping to raise public outcry over the funding loss, Favorini took his grievance to the press: "Tossing the gauntlet and girding his eloquence, Favorini issue[d] the plea, 'Give us back our

³¹⁷ Hymowitz.

³¹⁸ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

³¹⁹ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

³²⁰ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

Shakespeare!”³²¹ But despite his best efforts, the City never renewed the funding for the project, a fact that Favorini attributes significantly to the declining health of long-time Festival supporter Mayor Richard Caliguiri who was dying of amyloidosis at the time,³²² and whose absence from office greatly affected the Festival’s relations with City government.³²³

While the Festival frequently championed the traditionally-held opinion that Shakespeare was an important part of the cultural and theatrical life of Pittsburgh, it did so, as Jen Harvie suggests in her book *Theatre & the City*, in ways that “simultaneously indicate[d] the importance of other principles of social organization”³²⁴ around which the city was organized: specifically Pittsburgh’s prevailing ethos of work and its dedication to industry and the capitalist market that spawned it. In an effort to maintain its place in Pittsburgh’s labor-centered culture, TRSF frequently highlighted its identity as a “professional” theatre company, and early press and marketing materials from the Festival stressed that even though the Festival was associated with and housed at the University of Pittsburgh, it was “not college theatre” but a “union-affiliated” organization which hired “more local professionals than any theatre in town.”³²⁵ A development mailer aimed at raising funds from local corporations clearly illustrates the Festival’s rhetorical attempts to characterize their service of and importance to the City in the language of work. The brochure opens to reveal a shot of Pittsburgh’s downtown skyline accompanied by text

³²¹ Favorini qtd. in Wendy Nardi, “Shaking Up The Bard.” *In Pittsburgh* 3:42 (3-9 Jun. 1987): 1 and 13.

³²² A condition which he would finally succumb to the following year, 1988.

³²³ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

³²⁴ Jen Harvie, *Theatre & The City*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

³²⁵ The underlining in this passage is Favorini’s in his Letter to Media Friends 26 May 1982.

emphasizing the Festival’s service to the City’s workers, providing “generous discounts” to the public.

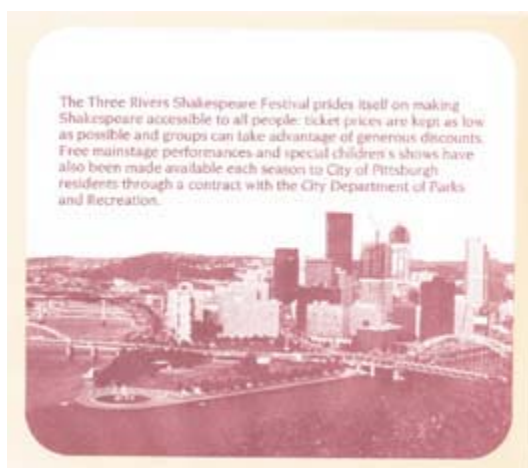


Figure 29: Fourth Season Development Mailer (inside cover art), Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983.

The copy inside includes a brief description of the Festival, its history and its guiding principles. Tellingly, this information is divided into sections with headings couched in verbiage intended to engage with the City’s predilection for labor and commerce: “Dollars & Cents,” “Jobs,” “Help,” and “Intern.” The information included under each topic heading focused heavily on the work and the workers of the Festival, reminding potential donors of the its “fully professional” status, its commitment to hiring “both union and non-union workers,” the wide number of performers, technicians, artists and other administrative staff that TRSF employed from the region, and its dedication to providing opportunities to area students interested in interning in the professional “training grounds” offered by the Festival.³²⁶ Likewise, a copy of the Festival’s 1983 Company Profile stresses that, “[t]he festival is staffed by professionals whose careers are based in

³²⁶ 1983 Development Mailer, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival.

Pittsburgh, by the finest graduates and faculty members from local theatre training schools, and by guest artists. TRSF operates under a letter of agreement from the Actor's Equity Association."³²⁷ This description of the variety of local workers associated with the Festival appears as the second paragraph of the Company Profile, a brief document generated by the company that was routinely included in promotional and development mailing packages. Similarly, in a press release for a new series of community classes and internships offered by the Festival, Favorini couched the impetus for these classes in terms of their ability to stimulate and support an entire field of employment for the economically struggling city. "We responded to the demand for more courses this year because we're convinced that a career in theatre is a viable option for young people." Finally, the brochure capitalized on the City's anxiety over its inability to retain recent college graduates in the face of dwindling job-opportunities, by boasting, "[o]ur instructors are theatre professionals whose skills in acting, stage combat, design administration and theatre history have landed them full-time employment in the Pittsburgh area."³²⁸

The Festival's attempts to ensconce itself in Pittsburgh's work-centered culture were buoyed by the marketing rhetoric of its local corporate sponsors. Advertisers in the Festival's Souvenir Season Program were all too eager to capitalize on TRSF's dedication to presenting the Bard with a distinctly Pittsburgh flare. A full-page ad for Pittsburgh National Bank, which ran for years in the Festival's programs, featured one simple line in an embellished font that read, "Shakespeare As *We* Like It," followed by the tagline, "We're a bank that believes in

³²⁷ 1983 Company Profile, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 3.

³²⁸ "Shakespeare Fest Professionals Offer Acting Classes and Shakespeare Studies," Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival Press Release 3 Jun. 1983.

performance.”³²⁹ Here the play on the word ‘performance’ works to assert both the Festival’s and the bank’s successful operations as well as a general proclivity among Pittsburghers towards quality work and excellence in job performance, and effectively evoking the City’s popular moniker of “The City of Champions.” Another full page ad for the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company featured a copy of a painting entitled, “Heritage,” by local artist Nat Youngblood. The ad, which bore the heading “The Idea of Pittsburgh,” contains copy glorifying the ethos of work in the city:

Pittsburgh’s past is full of all the resources that made America a place of opportunity -- through work. More than 150 years ago Pittsburgh already had built its reputation as the bustling Gateway to the West. Here men built boats to carry thousands westward, and wagons, and iron furnaces to forge rails and plows and sometimes rifles. Pittsburgh has had a dynamic past complete with floods, fires and fights -- and always long hard days of work. In the Workshop of the World, even our legends are of workers, and of industrial titans. And it happens every day in Pittsburgh, where ideas become events.”³³⁰

³²⁹ Fourth Season Souvenir Program, 34.

³³⁰ Fourth Season Souvenir Program, 38.

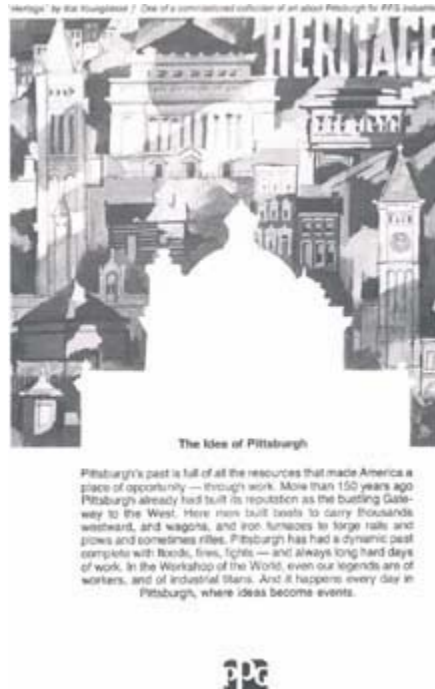


Figure 30: PPG Advertisement, Fourth Season Souvenir Program, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983:

38.

The ad’s epic description of the Pittsburgh’s history and defining characteristics encouraged the reader to see the Festival as part of the City’s proud, hard-working heritage, allowing their artistic, and therefore potentially alienating, efforts to be reframed as moments of production in which the intangible becomes tangible. By re-defining itself as yet another star on Pittsburgh’s industrial horizon, the Festival was able to begin to combat the City’s cultural inferiority complex, to rekindle the collective memory of Shakespeare among the City’s inhabitants, and to offer a backstory for presenting his works in an unpretentious manner that reflected the most fundamental values of its citizens. And while the Festival may not have converted every audience member to a life-long love of the Bard, it is certain that the Festival’s acceptance by average Pittsburghers helped to pave the way for the significant increase in professional theatre activity in the city in the late 1990s and beyond. “While Pittsburgh might not be known in other parts of

the country as an artistically sophisticated town, Favorini has succeeded in creating a real theatrical presence. And he has proven that Pittsburghers appreciate artistic quality.”³³¹

3.3 PITTSBURGH’S SHAKESPEARE FRANCHISE AND THE STEEL CITY RENAISSANCE

Much of the Festival’s early support was the result of Favorini’s ability to convince local politicians, corporations, and grantors that the presence of a Shakespeare Festival could serve as a powerful indication of Pittsburgh’s cultural legitimacy. In a 1979 letter to Pennsylvania Governor Richard Thornburgh officially proposing his idea for the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, Favorini stressed his belief that a “Shakespeare festival will enhance the image of the Three Rivers area as an exciting and hospitable locale for business and tourism.”³³² Favorini openly conceded that his plan to leverage the cultural cache of Shakespeare in order to support a particular company’s mission was not an original one, but rather a tactic employed with relatively frequent success by Shakespeare festivals across America. His pitch to the Governor recalls many of these other institutions, noting their ability to create commemorations of Shakespeare that both served as a powerful tourist draw and a simultaneous reinforcement of the specific values and characteristics of their locations and the people that inhabit them.

³³¹ Petechuk J3.

³³² Attilio Favorini, Letter to Gov. Richard L. Thornburgh, 13 March 1979, 2.

I have attended Shakespeare festivals in various parts of this country and Canada and . . . I know firsthand the thrill of being together with thousands of people of diverse backgrounds to celebrate the triumph of spirit, the joy of being human which Shakespeare's plays radiate. Festival playgoers are different from those who only attend professional theatre at high prices in New York – or in Pittsburgh. Festival playgoers in Ashland, Oregon imbibe their Shakespeare with an almost religious fervor; those in Utah and Colorado absorb the Bard as they do the glorious natural settings in which the plays are presented. Pittsburgh playgoers would find their own milieu, their own way of contacting humanity that awaits them in the plays.³³³

Yet even this early imagining of the Festival there are some examples of contradictory impulses. While Favorini clearly stresses that the Festival would reflect the City's anti-elitist sentiments, one of the potential benefits to the City that he suggests, namely the construction of a theatre to house the Festival and potentially serve as an arts center,³³⁴ reveals an understanding that their financial fruition would ultimately rely on achieving more traditional, bourgeois signs of success. His suggestion to build a new space echoes Marvin Carlson's assertion in his book, *Places of Performance*, that city authorities often support the building of monumental theatres "as highly visible signs of dedication to the arts, especially the arts as defined by the high

³³³ Favorini, Letter to Gov. Richard L. Thornburgh, 1.

³³⁴ This letter represents one of the very few mentions of a potential new performance venue for the theatre in the Festival's archival records. Although the company entertained the idea of relocating on a few occasions, funding proved problematic and as a result, the Festival remained on the University of Pittsburgh's campus.

bourgeois culture of the nineteenth century.”³³⁵ The suggestion, however, was tailored to support the desire of Pittsburgh civic authorities at the time to help the City shake its reputation as a fading, rust-belt city and re-establish it as a thriving metropolis. Favorini’s suggestion to build an arts center seems aimed at convincing the Governor of its ability “to attract thousands of visitors annually to an economically depressed region.”³³⁶ In summing up his proposal, he makes certain to stress that the Festival would serve as a means of luring in potential tourists who he suggests would come for the Shakespeare and stay for Pittsburgh’s already existing attractions, noting, “[i]t doesn’t take too much vision to see the possibilities of adding a major cultural asset to a region that is ecologically interesting, and historically important.”³³⁷

Despite Favorini’s assurance that the Festival could serve as a sign of the City’s cultural legitimacy, there remained tension between maintaining the Festival’s unpretentious identity while attending to its more material need to appeal to traditional arts organizations for funding. At an early board meeting in 1981, board members Larry Werner and Dick Barnhart, fearing that the city’s lackluster cultural reputation would hurt the Festival’s chances at securing grants, stressed the need for large, local corporate support “towards changing Pittsburgh’s image around the country,” in order to compete for arts funding on the national level.³³⁸ Werner maintained that the Festival’s ability to “develop and maintain a special prestige image” would be essential

³³⁵ Carlson, Marvin. *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993, 88.

³³⁶ Favorini, Letter to Gov. Richard L. Thornburgh, 2.

³³⁷ Favorini, Letter to Gov. Richard L. Thornburgh, 2.

³³⁸ Ned Read, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival Board of Advisors Meeting Minutes, 4 Nov. 1981, 3.

in securing grants from larger arts funding organizations.³³⁹ While the board generally agreed on the need to participate in the larger effort to improve the image of Pittsburgh on a national level, board member Carol Brown voiced a concern echoed by several others in the room that an institutional branding based on “prestige” would read as elitist to locals and, as a result, would “dilute other fund raising efforts” from local sources who had already proven to be financially supportive of the Festival’s unpretentious brand of Shakespeare.³⁴⁰ Still, despite these brief moments of slippage, Favorini’s interactions with the media display a continued insistence that it was possible for Pittsburgh to modify Shakespeare’s iconic status to fit into its own blue-collar cultural milieu. In an interview for an alternative local paper, Favorini again references the efforts of other established Shakespeare festivals to create their own local brand of the Bard:

You find, if you go around the country that every festival, if it’s successful, it reflects the area in which it’s involved. For example, San Diego’s is very Southern California. You get a lot of off-the-wall interpretations -- you know Shakespeare in *Star Trek* costumes or whatever. In Ashland, Oregon, you get Shakespeare uncut without intermissions in strict Elizabethan garb. I asked the guy who runs the festival why that was. He said that the people who . . . [settled] there came with two books -- the Bible and Shakespeare -- and it was a toss-up which one they relied on more. People there like their Shakespeare like they like their Bible -- straight and uncut. Now Pittsburgh is an accessible, realistic city

³³⁹ Werner qtd. in Read 3.

³⁴⁰ Brown qtd. in Read 4.

that's impatient with pretension. Our productions will be . . . vigorous, vital, unpretentious Shakespeare because that's what this city is like.³⁴¹

One thing clear to both the Festival and civic authorities was that reinvigorating the national identity of Pittsburgh was the key to insuring its economic recovery. To accomplish this, the City, led by Mayor Calliguri, began an urban renewal campaign called Pittsburgh's Renaissance II. In 1944, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, a non-profit group, led by Henry John Heinz II, was formed in an effort to fulfill Robert Moses's 1939 plan for redeveloping the city's "golden triangle." The Conference spearheaded Pittsburgh's Renaissance I campaign -- a twenty-year effort to improve living conditions in the City that "entailed the demolition of hundreds of acres of buildings, new construction, reengineering the city's food control efforts, and implementing smoke control and emissions regulations that began to clean the air for the first time since industrialization."³⁴² By 1947, the Allegheny Conference had announced plans to demolish large portions of the city's lower Hill District and construct in its place a mammoth arts and sports complex. Conner points to the fact that this Renaissance reflected the prevailing belief among the Conference members at the time that in order for the city to return to its former glory the city would need to have "major league ball teams, major league symphonies and major league government; and to have that we have to have major league stadiums and major league symphony halls."³⁴³ It was eventually decided that the project would be split into two distinct efforts, a stand-alone sports arena, which in 1961 would be completed

³⁴¹ Bruce Steele, "Pittsburgh's Other Willie," *Pittsburgh New Sun* 26 June 1980: 3+.

³⁴² Conner, 139.

³⁴³ Conner 139.

as the Civic Arena, and a Center for the Arts, to be built on the city's Lower Hill. But despite a million dollar gift from the A.W. Mellon Foundation for the purchase of the land, and the offer of an additional \$8 million for a newly proposed symphony hall within the complex, by the end of the Renaissance I campaign in 1973, The Center for the Arts was never built.³⁴⁴

The Renaissance II campaign maintained a similar conviction: that in order to regain its status among major metropolitan areas, Pittsburgh would need to prove that it possessed cultural life significant enough to sustain its population, and as a result sought to fund local construction efforts, artistic organizations, and other community building efforts. Much of the Festival's early funding came under the larger auspices of Pittsburgh's Renaissance II campaign. For the 1983 season, the City was successful in securing corporate funding from the Gulf Oil Corporation for the company's "Shakespeare Festival Weekend" in Schenley Park by emphasizing TRSFs contribution to the overall cultural milieu of Pittsburgh. In a letter from Louise R. Brown, then Director of the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Parks and Recreation, to the Executive Director of the Gulf Corporation, Brown supports the Festival's claim about its "extremely important role" in accomplishing the City's primary goal of providing "diverse, quality, accessible, and affordable cultural programs to Pittsburgh area residents."³⁴⁵ The letter cites the Shakespeare Festival's park performances as a cultural opportunity that has "not only enhanced the quality of life for Pittsburghers, but . . . helped to make our City one of the most 'livable' cities in the country."³⁴⁶ In her appeal for corporate funding for the Shakespeare Festival

³⁴⁴ Conner 140.

³⁴⁵ Louise R. Brown, Dir. of the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Parks and Recreation, Letter to E. E. Sheldon, Exec. Dir. of the Gulf Corporation, 20 Dec. 1982, 1.

³⁴⁶ Brown 2.

Weekend, Brown asserts her department's belief that "increasing artistic and cultural experiences for Pittsburgh residents," especially those who could "not ordinarily afford such cultural events," was key to "building the positive economic and social" identity of the city on a national level.³⁴⁷ In return for their support of the Festival, Brown and other civic authorities were able to use the Festival's success in their own press interactions as proof of the City's dedication to its burgeoning cultural rebirth: "In addition to bringing a free culturally-rich and very entertaining production to the public, we are proud to make Pittsburgh one of the 8 cities in the country that offer Shakespearean plays in the true historical tradition -- out-of-doors."³⁴⁸ Pittsburgh's embrace of TRSF demonstrates the social connections between theatres and the cities they inhabit made by Harvie in *Theatre & the City* in which she asserts that theatre is "symptomatic of urban process, demonstrating the structures, social power dynamics, politics and economies also at work more broadly throughout the city."³⁴⁹

Under the umbrella of the Renaissance II campaign, a symbiotic relationship was created between the Festival and the City that served to further strengthen the Festival's identity as an integral part of the city's cultural life. Several letters from TRSF's Director of Development and Public Relations Marilyn McWilliams pitching stories on the Festival to regional and national publications make a strong effort to situate the Festival's efforts as part of the larger Pittsburgh Renaissance II program, asserting that the Festival, along with the new building initiative in the City's Golden Triangle area and developments such as the Station Square complex (renovated

³⁴⁷ Brown 2.

³⁴⁸ "Shakespeare in the Park!," [*Pittsburgh*] *Area Advertiser* 17 Aug. 1983: N.pag.

³⁴⁹ Harvie 7.

from the old P&LE Railway station), “have brought back shoppers and those seeking nightlife attractions back to the city.”³⁵⁰ Favorini, McWilliams, Business Manager Ned Read and other Festival employees were frequent participants in local cultural events, board members for local business and arts organizations and supporters of other area arts events in a concerted effort to cross-promote the Festival with other organizations efforts towards Pittsburgh’s Renaissance. The Festival’s effort to become actively intertwined with the civic life of Pittsburgh can also be seen in its promotional materials. In a coordinated move with the City’s Renaissance II campaign, TRSF decided to use “Shakespeare II” as its marketing slogan for its second season. In August of 1983, during local radio station WQED-FM’s week-long tenth anniversary celebration, the Festival was featured in two interviews and a series of taped ads as being one of the most significant cultural draws in the area. Festival staff members also regularly attended meetings and events planned by the Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Pittsburgh Council on Tourism. Recognizing the benefits afforded by an increase of tourism to the area, Festival employees manned booths at tourism conventions and worked with local tourism organizations in developing travel packages which included tickets to TRSF productions and events.³⁵¹ In return these local agencies proved invaluable in aiding with regional and national distribution of Festival promotional materials. By 1983, only three years after its uncertain first season, Mayor Richard Caliguiri referred to TRSF as “a Pittsburgh Institution,” declaring that the Festival’s productions, “[t]ogether with festive food services, an Elizabethan song and dance group, and a ‘road show’ travelling to City parks and recreation centers, and the great dramas of

³⁵⁰ Marilyn McWilliams, Letter to Fred Smith, 8 Feb. 1983.

³⁵¹ Michelle E. Mancini, Letter to Ned Read, 18 May 1983.

Shakespeare add measurably to the quality of life in the City. I hope that you and your family will enjoy these and other delights of the Renaissance City during our fourth ‘Shakespearean Summer’.”³⁵²

That the City’s civic rebirth campaign was named after Shakespeare’s own historical period was not lost on Festival employees who frequently made rhetorical use of the semantic coincidence. In a letter soliciting Robert Kavanaugh, then managing partner of the local branch of Arthur Anderson & Co., to become a member of the Festival’s board of advisors, Favorini asserts his desire to assist the efforts of Pittsburgh’s Renaissance campaign through the Festival’s own commemorative efforts. “Certainly Pittsburgh, in the midst of its civic Renaissance, deserves a festival celebrating the greatest playwright of the historical Renaissance!”³⁵³ Similarly, in a letter to the Mayor’s office he writes, “With TRSF, a great playwright will join the galaxy of stars making an annual appearance in our City of Champions. It’s appropriate, as well, that Pittsburgh’s Renaissance II should have a Festival devoted to the drama of the original Renaissance.”³⁵⁴ In the summer of 1984, TRSF joined forces with The Pittsburgh Center for the Arts in presenting “Art Camp,” a series of classes and workshops aimed at children ranging in ages from 6-17 with a distinctly Renaissance flavor, including classes in acting, period dance, puppet making, juggling and clowning, stage combat, and Renaissance crafts.³⁵⁵ The promotional brochure for the camp features a group of medieval travelers on horseback riding

³⁵²Caliguiri qtd. in Fourth Season Souvenir Program 3.

³⁵³ Favorini, Letter to Robert Kavanaugh.

³⁵⁴ Attilio Favorini, Letter to Ben Hayllar, City of Pittsburgh Mayor’s Office, 15 May 1980.

³⁵⁵ Classes called “Crafts around the Castle” explored domestic handcrafts and the decorative arts of the Renaissance.

out from a castle pictured in the background, with the heading, “Art Camp ’84: Creates and Celebrates Its Own Renaissance.”³⁵⁶



Figure 31: Art Camp ’84 Brochure (cover art), Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, 1984.

Rhetorically, the strategy to establish TRSF as, in the words of Favorini, one of “the most prestigious arts organizations in the city,” and the “jewel” in the “crowning triumph of Renaissance II,”³⁵⁷ relied on the Festival’s ability to create in its audience a sense of nostalgic desire for a time, place and person geographically and historically distant from the second-classed city of Pittsburgh. Shaw and Chase define nostalgia as a “[y]earning for former times and circumstances” which is “expanded to embrace a generalized and often unspecified past.”³⁵⁸ The ability of the City and TRSF to create nostalgia among Pittsburghers for such a remote time period was made easier by the fact that, due to its reputation as an anti-theatrical city, Pittsburgh lacked an easily identifiable period of cultural superiority and therefore was forced to rely on less direct connections to more well-known European cultural icons in order to demonstrate its own cultural legitimacy. Thus, the Festival and the City’s Renaissance II were able to create a

³⁵⁶ Art Camp ’84 Brochure. Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, 1984.

³⁵⁷ Favorini, Letter to Media Friends.

³⁵⁸ Shaw and Chase 19.

generalized yearning for themselves as entities based on their ability to evoke a romanticized yet ambivalent “feeling of ancientness,”³⁵⁹ among Pittsburghers.

One of the more concrete goals of the Renaissance II campaign was to convince recent graduates of its numerous colleges and universities to remain in the City. The Festival capitalized on this by marketing themselves as being “entirely a Pittsburgh project,” boasting that, unlike other Shakespeare festivals in the US which staffed their theatres with itinerant artists who were only in residence for the few months of the year that the theatre was in operation, TRSF had not, as Favorini boasted in his fundraising efforts, “hired high-priced actors from New York to come here for a week and then go home. Rather we have sought and found the finest talent Pittsburgh has to offer.”³⁶⁰ In promotional materials, the Festival emphasized its down-home identity, employing a sports metaphor to highlight its continued dedication to reflect the “true colors of the Three Rivers Area” by hiring. . .

as many personnel as possible from Pittsburgh and [its] environs. The policy represents neither parochialism nor regional chauvinism, but is rooted in practicality and cultural philosophy. Practically, the Pittsburgh area is rich in students and graduates of first-rate theatre-training schools. There are more and more local professionals performing full- or part-time. Finally, there is a growing number of performers originating from Pittsburgh who have relocated elsewhere for professional reasons. These groups constitute the Festival’s ‘first-round picks’ for its staff. We trust this policy makes sense to you, as well, in a more profound

³⁵⁹ Shaw and Chase 19.

³⁶⁰ Favorini, Letter to Sandra S. Collier.

way, conveying to the public that Pittsburgh can produce and encourage its own artists and culture, rather than being merely the recipient of cultural ‘packages’ put together elsewhere.³⁶¹

Rhetorically, the strategy was a sound one, given the aims of the city’s goal to retain recent graduates in the local workforce. As the Festival grew and was able to hold auditions it pulled back somewhat on this angle, however Favorini insists that “we always used a Pittsburgh actor in a role, if we could find the right one.”³⁶² It is also worth noting that, in practice, the Festival spent significant time and effort in bringing in solo performances by world-renowned classical actors, including Claire Bloom, Nicholas Pennell, Tammy Grimes, Donal Donnelly, Brian Bedford and F. Murray Abraham. While these special, limited run engagements were often designed to serve as fundraisers, the decision represents a tacit understanding on the part of the Festival that while its mission and the rhetoric of its marketing dictated that it remain an institution staffed by Pittsburghers for Pittsburghers, it was still invested in appealing to the large portion of its audience comprised of more affluent citizens with fairly traditional performance tastes.

While many of the Festival’s artistic, aesthetic and marketing choices were made in an attempt to reconstruct the collective memory of Shakespeare by focusing on those aspects of his identity which allow him to be remembered as a populist entertainer, other decisions represent a desire to remain connected to the existing Shakespeare industry in order to bolster its chances of material success. One such example of this can be seen in the decision to coordinate the

³⁶¹ Fourth Season Souvenir Program, 22.

³⁶² Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

Festival's inaugural season to coincide with the Folger Shakespeare Museum Exhibit Tour of 1980. The exhibit, which travelled across the United States to various metropolitan cities, contained rare manuscripts, diaries, and copies of the 1623 First Folio. By coordinating the Festival's opening with the arrival of the Folger tour, it was able to capitalize on the marketing efforts of the more established Shakespeare institution in order to stimulate public and media interest in its own fledgling organization. Still, exhibit planners were keenly aware that even the reputation and the financial backing power of the Folger would not be enough to draw the predominantly blue-collar workers of Pittsburgh to a museum to see rare documents of historical literature. Donald Adam, the coordinator of the touring exhibit, admitted at the time that the situation in Pittsburgh was more challenging than in other cities on the tour because, "Pittsburgh is a town of steelworkers who labor hard by day and spend their midsummer nights rooting for the Pirates, not at the theater. We can't exactly walk into steelworker bars and say, 'Hey guys, let's hear it for Middle England!'"³⁶³ Adam also worried that Shakespeare "intimidated" a lot of people, making them "feel guilty because they think they're supposed to like him."³⁶⁴ In response, Adam revealed that in Pittsburgh local tour sponsors had "augmented those [historic] documents with some homemade entertainment -- puppet shows, Elizabethan musicals and dances, even fencing matches,"³⁶⁵ in an attempt to attract a broader spectrum of the City's population to the Carnegie Museum. The plan to expand the exhibit to include more popular entertainments paid off for both parties: the exhibit drew "about 3,000 visitors a week, including

³⁶³ Adam qtd. in Hymowitz.

³⁶⁴ Adam qtd. in Hymowitz.

³⁶⁵ Adam qtd. in Hymowitz.

a broader mix of viewers than on previous stops in Kansas City and San Francisco. A recent poll of 100 visitors here [in Pittsburgh] showed that almost 40% of them hadn't been to the museum in a year."³⁶⁶ By maximizing the potential for cross-marketing strategies with the Folger and the Carnegie and offering deep discounts to their performances, TRSF was able to draw much of the audience from the museum exhibit to their theatre right across the street. Endorsements from the Governor's and the Mayor's offices, re-printed in the Festival's brochure, supported the coordinated cultural effort; "I know you will enjoy not only this summer's plays, but the strolling players and musicians, the picnic meals and the Shakespeare exhibit across the street at the Carnegie Museum of Art -- all of which will give us our first 'Shakespearean Summer.' Let us entertain you!"³⁶⁷ Audience response from the exhibit was surprisingly positive and the press recounted the praise of several locals as proof of its populist appeal. "'I was crazy about it,' says William Turner, who works for the Pirates. Mr. Turner isn't a Shakespeare reader, but he 'loved the atmosphere' of the exhibit. 'Even if you don't go for the scholarly books, you can come and feel that the atmosphere is part of you,' he says."³⁶⁸

Favorini's position as a member of the Shakespeare Association of America and a contributor to the *Shakespeare Newsletter*, required him to travel extensively across the U.S. and his contact with these "sister companies" helped to shape the Festival's production aesthetics, and marketing and operations strategies. The rising success of Shakespeare festivals during the late 1970s and early 1980s in cities less-populated than Pittsburgh strengthened Favorini's

³⁶⁶ Hymowitz.

³⁶⁷ Favorini, Letter to Ben Mayllar.

³⁶⁸ Steele, "Pittsburgh's Other Willie" 4.

resolve to reinvigorate the collective memory of Shakespeare in his own City. For Favorini, these numerous festivals functioned as a loose Shakespearean corporation with franchises operating in major cities across the country, serving as beacons of culture and signs of civic legitimacy for the communities they served; and he believed that Pittsburgh deserved its own version, as he wrote in an early fundraising letter: “I am unashamedly idealistic in my vision for the Festival. I want every Pittsburgh summer to be illuminated with the plays, the strolling musicians, authentic foods and other delights which characterize the most entertaining of the forty-some-odd Shakespeare Festivals around the country.”³⁶⁹ TRSF benefitted from its association with these other, more established festivals, by establishing themselves as a kind of Shakespeare franchise, and, as a result, Pittsburgh’s civic reputation was enhanced by its ability to serve as a viable competitor for cultural tourist dollars. “It used to be that you had to go to one of the Stratfords -- England, Ontario, or Connecticut -- to see Shakespeare at his best. No Longer. Shakespeare is alive and well in Pittsburgh.”³⁷⁰ A graphic representation of this institutional construct of the franchise can be seen in the centerfold of the 1983 TRSF Souvenir Program, which contains a two-page map of the United States titled “Shakespeare in America.”

³⁶⁹ Favorini, Letter to Robert Kauffman.

³⁷⁰ “Stratford-upon-Three Rivers,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 16 Jul. 1982, n.p.



Figure 32: Fourth Season Souvenir Program, (centerfold art) Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983: 24-25.

Featuring a portrait of the Bard that encompasses the majority of the plains states, the map is devoid of place names, providing only rough approximations of mountain ranges and rivers and an illustration of the Stephen Foster Memorial Theatre that covers the Western half of Pennsylvania as landmarks. The map is designed to provide a visual overview of the popular presence of Shakespeare Festivals in the U.S. and locates seventeen such companies with dots on the map and features an accompanying page of brief descriptions and a season line-up for each. In many ways, the map resembles the kind of promotional material that might be employed by a fast-food chain, indicating the numerous locations where travelers could stop in for a burger -- or in this case, a bit o' the Bard.

3.4 BARD O' THE 'BURGH

The Festival's commemoration of Shakespeare employs another category of the memory distorting processes laid out by Schudson: "cognitivation and conventionalization." In this process, the memories of adults are modified over their lives, so that what they eventually

remember is “not what they experienced but what they learn they are conventionally supposed to have experienced.”³⁷¹ In light of Schudson’s assertion that because of the changes to the past that it entails, memorialization constitutes a special case of conventionalization as its commemorative events are “invested with an extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past,”³⁷² TRSF’s memorialization of Shakespeare can be seen as being underscored by cognitivization and conventionalization as its choice to depict Shakespeare in ways appealed to the tastes and values of Pittsburghers, was, in part, an attempt to convince its audiences that they not only had the right to enjoy the works of the Bard, but that they *could*, and in fact, *did* understand his words, even though they may not have had any direct knowledge of the time period in which he lived or the plots he wrote. Further, in its role as what Hobsbawm calls an ‘invented tradition,’ the Festival, and by extension its marketing and promotional materials, served not only as a means of legitimizing the social and cultural communities of Pittsburgh, but established TRSF as an institution whose mission involved the reification of the beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behavior of the City as a whole.

One such marketing campaign, which played heavily on the City’s reputation as the City of Champions, sought to leverage the City’s reputation as the home of world-class athletes in an effort to construct Shakespeare as one of Pittsburgh’s own greats. The campaign’s slogan, “Pittsburgh’s Other Willie,” encouraged citizens to recall Shakespeare, not within the dusty, academic context commonly associated with the playwright, but rather as cultural icon with the

³⁷¹ Schudson, “Distortion in Collective Memory” 358.

³⁷² Schudson, “Distortion in Collective Memory” 359.

same power and prowess as local sports hero Willie Stargell. In the Festival's first national press profile, *Wall St. Journal* reporter Carol Hymowitz wrote:

Everybody around here knows who Willie is. Willie Stargell is captain and first baseman of the World Series champion Pittsburgh Pirates. The problem of the moment is how to whip up interest in "Pittsburgh's Other Willie": William Shakespeare. . . . So the local Shakespeare promoters are playing to local tastes. To reach the fans of Willie Stargell, they have put a sign in the Pirates ballpark urging the bleacher denizens to "celebrate summer with Pittsburgh's other Willie."³⁷³

The campaign also featured a television commercial in which Favorini, dressed as Shakespeare in full Elizabethan garb, is seen bowing graciously to two younger men as he jogs past them in Schenley Park. The first man asks "Who's that?" To which the second man gushingly replies, "Don't you know? That's Will Shakespeare. He's running all summer at the Stephen Foster Memorial Theatre!" In a TV spot for a subsequent season, Favorini/Shakespeare is seen again, this time leading a pack of runners in the Pittsburgh local marathon, The Great Race, with the slogan, "Shakespeare is off and running again this summer (*bird's eye visual of the Great Race*) and he has a great following." The ad, which graphically reinforced the notion that Shakespeare commanded a large and devoted following, also marks Shakespeare as one of the City's champions and a source of civic pride. The campaign's overwhelming success was due in no small part to the fact that Pittsburgh locals were amused to be in on a cultural joke which might otherwise have been lost on a more traditionally cultured audience. Local reporter Bruce Steele's

³⁷³ Hymowitz.

take on the marketing slogan not only praised the originality of the campaign but noted that its unpretentious tone was in-line with the Festival's recollection of the literary figure of Shakespeare himself:

Actually, the Willie slogan epitomizes the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival's unworshipful approach to history's most gifted hack writer. No one preaches that approach more fervently than Dr. Attilio 'Buck' Favorini, head of the University of Pittsburgh's Theater Arts Department. "Shakespeare never worried about posterity. . . . He worried about getting the guy down on the street to come into his theater, and he wrote about things that the guy down the street cared about."³⁷⁴

This campaign also served as the source of one of the Festival's simplest, yet most fundamental rhetorical attempts to reconstruct Shakespeare as an unpretentious Pittsburgher; as often as possible, Festival marketing materials referred to him simply as "Will." This seemingly small decision to embrace the popular diminutive of his given first name encouraged a more approachable, casual recall of the imposing literary giant. The tactic allowed the audience's recall of the distant historical figure to be made under familiar, rather than alienating, terms, alleviating the anxiety that might typically have been associated with their own memories of drier, more academic encounters with the Bard. Many of the Festival's promotional materials feature quotes from his works attributed to "Will Shakespeare," and "Will Power" buttons were sold at its souvenir stand.

In promotional materials and in interviews with the press, the Festival frequently employed sports metaphors in an attempt to make the world of theatre as familiar to

³⁷⁴ Steele, "Pittsburgh's Other Willie" 3.

Pittsburghers as the world of sports. In a letter to local media friends, Favorini pleads his case for financial support by comparing the public draw of his own organization to that of the then World Champion Pittsburgh Pirates:

If the Festival is to reach its full potential -- and add a jewel to the city's crown -- we shall need your help. As I'm sure you realize, the Festival has to be "re-sold" to the public each year, refreshing public interest in its annual, but new and varied offerings. In this respect, of course, we are like the Three Rivers Arts Festival or the Symphony -- or the Pirates for that matter. Indeed, to put things into perspective, each of the Festival's three productions this season will draw more attendance than some of the Pirates games have drawn this year. If we received as much coverage in a three week period -- the length of our run -- as the Pirates receive daily, we would be well on our way to selling out. Unlike the Pirates however, we are non-profit and presume to provide the people with a service that goes beyond unquestioned entertainment value.³⁷⁵

Likewise, a press release announcing the upcoming 1983 season was filled with metaphors comparing the Festival's operations to baseball. The release begins, "It isn't just baseball that begins in the Spring and extends through the months of summer. This week marks the beginning of rehearsals for the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival: Pittsburgh's other long season." The press release compares Favorini's role in the company to that of a team manager who is responsible for scouting talent and assembling a team to produce a full season of

³⁷⁵ Favorini, Letter to Media Friends.

entertainment for the people of Pittsburgh.³⁷⁶ The Festival's efforts to associate Shakespeare with sports can also be seen in several of its graphics, which either depict Shakespeare as an athlete or in the company of athletes.



Figure 33: TRSF Logo with Ball Players (Ninth Season Souvenir Program, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1988: 14.)

Figure 34: Shakespeare as Pittsburgh Pirate ("Shakespeare Comes to Town" (illustration), *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* 29 May 1987, 2.)

This marketing strategy is a clear demonstration of the Festival's belief in Halbwachs' assertion that collective memories do not exist independently, but rather are intimately entwined with "a totality of thoughts common to a group," and that, to recall them, we must "place ourselves in the perspective of this group, that we adopt its interests and follow the slant of its reflections."³⁷⁷

And, as proof of the strategy's popular success, the idea of graphically juxtaposing Shakespeare with sports figures as a means of depicting TRSF's unpretentious brand of Bardolatry was picked

³⁷⁶ "'Spring Practice' Starts from Pittsburgh's Other Long Season," Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival Press Release, 10 May 1983.

³⁷⁷ Halbwachs 51.

up by newspapers and magazines which frequently provided their own illustrations of Shakespeare as a sports enthusiast in articles on the Festival.



Figure 35: Bard with Beer at Ballpark: (Hymowitz, Carol. “Another Willie Makes It Big In Steel City.” *Wall Street Journal* 7 Aug. 1980: n.pag.)

Another of the Festival’s depictions of the Bard which was embraced and reproduced by media outlets was the depiction of Favorini as Shakespeare himself, as first seen in the “Shakespeare running here” television ad of the Festival’s first season. As Coleman recalls, with some degree of delight, “Somewhere he got the idea that he looked like Shakespeare and it just stuck!”³⁷⁸



³⁷⁸ Coleman Personal Interview.

Figure 36: Favorini by Statue of Shakespeare (Steele, Bruce. "Boosting the Bard," photo by Roy Englebrecht, *Pittsburgh Magazine* Jun 1981, 38.)

The likeness of the two was perpetuated by his appearance as the Bard in an annual commemoration of his birthday organized by a local high school English teacher and held at a large statue of Shakespeare across the street from the theatre at the Carnegie Public Library. After the Festival's successful initial season of ads featuring Favorini/Shakespeare,³⁷⁹ he was approached to revive his appearance at the annual event -- and did so for several years before the pressures of his own hectic spring schedule forced him to abdicate the role, handing it down to a series of Festival actors. The depiction of Favorini/Shakespeare was successful because it simultaneously humanized the literary giant and provided Pittsburghers with a chance to make a more direct, personal, and contemporary memory of "Shakespeare." The similarity between the two men was significant enough that it was noted by several media outlets that also chose to feature illustrations of Favorini in Elizabethan garb.



³⁷⁹ My use of the label, "Favorini/Shakespeare," was inspired by an article by Carole Patton in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* detailing the events of the Festival's 1985 *No Holds Bard II* gala. The article uses the term in reference to a moment during the gala in which "Shakespeare/Favorini turned over in this casket after Cardile asked him what he thought of the theatrics," See Carole Patton, "Notables satirize the Bard of Avon." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 27 Aug. 1983: n.p.

Figure 37: Favorini as the Bard: (Steel, Bruce. "Pittsburgh's Other Willie." *Pittsburgh New Sun* 26 Jun. 1980, 3.)

Figure 38: Shapiro and Favorini as Bards (Schultz, Martin. "Dramatis Persona," illustration by George Shill. *Pittsburgh Magazine* Jun 1984, 33.)

The Festival's delight in presenting unpretentious depictions of the playwright was contagious, inspiring others in the community to take part in commemorating Shakespeare through more irreverent means. Perhaps the best examples of the City's embrace of the Festival's particular brand of Shakespeare commemorations were the *No Holds Bard* galas held by the Festival in 1983 and 1985.³⁸⁰ Designed as fundraisers, these revues were comprised of parodic poems, skits and musical numbers loosely strung together in the format of a local television newscast. The Festival drew on its board members, patrons, and a significant number of local media, business and political figures to serve as the entertainers for the evening, and, while it is clear that the all-star cast of Pittsburghers served the more material function for the Festival of insuring that the events received significant local media coverage, the galas served not only as fundraisers, but as some of the most overt examples of how the Festival engaged in what Halbwachs calls "commemorative, festive enactments" intended both to preserve and construct the collective memory of Shakespeare.³⁸¹ The evening's festivities were filled with images and references that blurred the lines between present day reality, historical fact and fiction, and allowed the audience members a more familiar and direct connection to the historically distant

³⁸⁰ The details of the *No Holds Bard* gala productions were taken from the prompt scripts of the productions contained in the TRSF archives, currently housed in the Curtis Collection at the University of Pittsburgh's Hillman Library. The archives also contain several different versions of the script/s with editorial marks by Favorini, as well as gala invitations and programs, event planning notes and financial records, and the correspondence between Festival staff members and the various local business figures, politicians, media personalities, and performers who were part of the events.

³⁸¹ Halbwachs 23.

cultural icon. By conflating the world of Elizabethan London with that of their own contemporary Pittsburgh setting, these performances encouraged audiences to recall Shakespeare as one of their own great citizens.

Numbers from the shows included performances by Mayor Caliguiri and Governor Thornburgh, a satiric song written by local theatre critic and scholar Susan Smith and her husband Phil listing the names of nearly a hundred of Shakespeare's characters to the tune of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Major General Song," a performance by the Allegheny Country Bar Association's Players of "There is Nothing Like a Dane" (a parodic version of the classic number from *South Pacific*), and a performance of "The Most Lamentable Comedy and Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby" from *A Midsummer's Night Dream* starring local newspaper writers and television personalities. Local media coverage of the event were particularly thrilled by Caliguiri who danced a soft shoe number and recited a poetic ode to his own "Renaissance City," written by local poet and University of Pittsburgh faculty member, Ed Ochester.³⁸² Local theatre critic Chris Rawson and his wife Mary, a well-known local actress, served as emcees for the revues and led the audiences in singing several musical numbers from Broadway adaptations of Shakespeare's works. Both galas features a segment called "WILL-TV News" which reported plot points from several of Shakespeare's most well-known plays as local new stories. The faux newscasts, which featured the on-air talents from several news and radio programs around town,

³⁸² Ochester's poem, "Renaissance City," written as the poet left the Stephen Foster Memorial after one of the Festival's performances, was intended to commemorate the Festival's fifth anniversary. The ode recalls Pittsburgh's former days of economic prosperity and likens his own "industrial paradise" to Shakespeare's London. The poem expresses the author's longing to return to the City's glory days: "I want to be part again of the bright coming and going/ in the dark, as Shakespeare was in his great city,/ which was ours, and held in the same hearts, the same fear,/ the same characters walking the long streets./ the same miracle of some humans dreaming/ "not the smallest orb which thou behold'st/ but in his motion like an angel sings."

were led by Mary Robb Jackson (*No Holds Bard I*), a local actor and anchor for KDKA-TV news, and William “Chilly Billy” Cardile of WPXI-TV (*No Holds Bard II*). While the majority of the “WILL-TV News” was concerned with the welfare of the fictional residents of locations such as Verona, Denmark and Ancient Rome, the weather and traffic reports reflected the real-life issues facing modern Pittsburghers, capitalizing on the pleasure elicited from the audience who delighted at being in on the jokes. Like the “events” they reported on, the language of these texts was a comic hybrid of Elizabethan and more modern-day English, (often with a distinctly Yinz-er³⁸³ accent). As commemorations, these performances simultaneously allowed audience members and performers alike to become participants in a communal, commemorative ritual that both extolled the virtues of the Festival and Shakespeare and reflected the City’s own predilection for the irreverent, the feisty, and the unfussy. In this communal ritual, the recollected Shakespeare is both an approachable fellow urbanite with tastes not unlike those sitting in the audience that evening *and* the greatest poet and playwright of all time, whose words and image are so famously ingrained in modern pop culture that they require no introduction.

Tellingly, the graphics used in the promotional materials for the galas support both this assertion of Shakespeare’s pervasive and iconic power and the overall parodic tone of the gala. The envelope for the invitation features no return address; in its place is an image of Shakespeare whose features have been entirely obscured by the pie that has been thrown in his face.

³⁸³ The term Yinz-er refers to the residents (and the dialect) of Pittsburgh, Southwest Pennsylvania and other nearby areas of the Appalachians. It is derived from the colloquial use of the Scots-Irish phrase “you ones” (shortened to “you’uns” and eventually to “yinz”) as the second person plural, (similar to the use of “y’all” in the American South).



Figure 39: Clown-face Shakespeare, Pied in the Face (*No Holds Bard* Program, front and back cover illustrations, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1984.)

The front cover of the program is a comic depiction of the Festival's logo featuring a Shakespeare in clown makeup and a red ball nose.³⁸⁴ Another example of how the *No Holds Bard* galas attempted to place Shakespeare into a more pop culture context can be seen in the series of fake commercials interspersed throughout the newscasts that "advertised" Shakespeare as a tangible, marketable product. The most interesting of which, entitled "Sonnets," roughly parodies the format of the blind-taste-test commercials used by Jif brand peanut butter in the early 1980s. In it, a local shopper is encouraged to try Shakespeare's sonnets as a superior alternative to the generic book of poetry she just purchased. Upon reading the Bard's verse the woman exclaims, "Omigod -- this is great -- I can't believe it! . . . These are smooth! Provocative, yet not lewd! Packed with all the richness of life! Wow! What is that anyhow?" The shopper is surprised when it is revealed that the sonnets she loves are Shakespeare's. The announcer replies, "You see, we think Shakespeare's better. Better written and better for you." The amazed shopper replies, "I just never imagined there was such a difference. I'm definitely buying Shakespeare from now on." The commercial concludes with the two actors reciting the

³⁸⁴ Both images of the Bard were re-used by the Festival in subsequent years in promotional materials for the Fool's Company.

commercial slogan in unison: “Choosy mothers choose Shakespeare. He may cost a little more, but he’s definitely worth it.” While the faux-mercantile’s tagline, indicating that Shakespeare costs more than other entertainment, may have been in conflict with the Festival’s goal of increasing Shakespeare’s accessibility by offering productions at free or reduced prices, the effects of this slippage were ameliorated by the fact that the target audience of the commercial was not Pittsburgh’s citizenry at large, but rather, the more culturally-elite patrons of the theatre who could afford to purchase tickets to the fundraising gala. The bit was so popular it was recycled by the Festival in a subsequent TV ad filmed in a local supermarket featuring local comedienne Barbara Russell, Favorini, and an actor portraying Shakespeare. Within this context, the commercial’s message not only reinforces the cultural value and authority of Shakespeare but casts the theatre’s wealthiest patrons in the role of cultural-parents to the City’s predominantly blue-collar populace, encouraging them to see their own financial support of the Festival in the altruistic light of providing superior cultural guidance to their culturally-under-exposed community.

Shakespeare’s inclusion in these galas was not limited to references of his cultural persistence or comedic graphic illustrations; as promised repeatedly by the Festival in pre-gala press interviews, both evenings included appearances by Favorini/ Shakespeare. Taken together, these two performances of Shakespeare represent the extreme ends of the spectrum of representations of the playwright produced by the Festival; *No Holds Bard I* featured a more traditional representation of Shakespeare in an Elizabethan context, while *No Holds Bard II* presented a much more irreverent depiction of the playwright. In *No Holds Bard I*, the evening

began with a traditional madrigal number performed by the Festival's Good Companions.³⁸⁵ Then, as the lights dimmed on the audience, a somewhat formal procession of the evening's performers, led by Favorini/Shakespeare, made their way through the audience and onto the stage, while a slide of the Festival's logo, featuring its own image of Shakespeare, was projected onto the stage. This reverent representation of the Bard served as a transporting event, signaling the evening's audience of Pittsburghers that this Festival performance would allow them the opportunity to indulge their nostalgic fetish for immersion in a kind of historical fiction: a constructed Golden Era of high culture. In contrast, according to local news accounts, Favorini/Shakespeare's brief, irreverent appearance in *No Holds Bard II* was the most talked about moment of the evening. During the performance's invocation, which parodied the first witch scene in *Macbeth*, William "Chilly Billy" Cardile of WPXI-TV Cardile attempted to conjure Shakespeare to rise from his coffin with the following passage, rife with references to Pittsburgh and its athletic prowess:

"Eye of newt, and toe of frog, think Monongahela³⁸⁶ fog.

Pirate's bat and Steeler's Thumb,³⁸⁷

Panther's curse of Number One.³⁸⁸

O City of Champions,

³⁸⁵ The Good Companions were a small madrigal group comprised of Festival performers that regularly performed before mainstage shows and toured to other civic engagements across the city.

³⁸⁶ One of the three rivers that boarder the city of Pittsburgh.

³⁸⁷ The term "Steeler's thumb" refers to the football team's fifth NFL Championship ring which would have to be worn on the thumb.

³⁸⁸ A reference to the University of Pittsburgh's football team, the Panthers, and their 1976 win of the NCAA championship win, the team's first since 1937.

Among thy ghosts of Pie and Honus³⁸⁹

Now another (*indicates the coffin*) bears the onus

Of having greatness thrust upon us.

Let us call him forth!”³⁹⁰

But Cardile’s words alone are not enough to raise Shakespeare, and so he and the emcees are forced to pry open his coffin. As in the ghost scene in *Hamlet*, the group then commanded Shakespeare, (in faux-Elizabethan dialect), to rise and speak. Two separate attempts at this failed; but on the third attempt Chilly Billy asked in more colloquial tone, “Hey Bill, d’ya like the show?” In response, Favorini/Shakespeare bolted upright in his coffin and then turned over in his grave. The *Post-Gazette’s* coverage of the event began gleefully with the line, “William Shakespeare turned over in this grave last night -- literally. . . . after a collection of Pittsburgh notables performed a jocular tribute to the 17th century playwright.”³⁹¹ The moment’s appeal for the audience of Pittsburghers lay not simply in the Festival’s willingness to engage in self-deprecation, (a tendency Pittsburghers had adopted themselves in response to the City’s declining metropolitan status), but in its presentation of Shakespeare as an audience member who, like Pittsburghers, was impatient with the pretenses of elitist culture.

³⁸⁹ A reference to Honus Wagner and Pie Traynor, two Pirates from the record-breaking Pittsburgh Pirates team of the turn of the century. The two opened a local sporting goods store in downtown Pittsburgh in 1919 which remained open until 2011.

³⁹⁰ *No Holds Bard II* Script, (revised version), Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1985.

³⁹¹ Patton.

TRSF's bending of the Bard to suit the tastes of Pittsburghers ran the gamut from those imbued with pomp and pageantry to the parodic with an ease that encouraged audiences to accept all of the festival's many versions of the playwright as proof of his universal appeal.



Figure 40: TRSF Shakespeare on the Radio Logo: (*The Big Bardcast Program*, cover art, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1984.)



Figure 41: Shakespeare in Straw Hat (Fifth Season Brochure Mailer, back cover art, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1984.)



Figure 42: Shakespeare Santa (Holiday Development Mailer, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1985.)

Figure 43: Black and Blue Shakespeare (Fifteenth Season Program, cover art, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1994.)

Marketing mailers send out during November of 1983 and 1984 featured a red and white image of Shakespeare in in Santa Claus garb set against the city skyline. The mailers, which targeted season subscribers, suggested subscribers “do something different” and “Think July in December,” by giving their loved ones “something to look forward to” -- the “gift of live

theatre.”³⁹² They also featured a letter from Favorini reminding audiences of the numerous delights of Shakespeare’s plays: “Think of kings and conquests. Bawdy songs. Madcap jesters and players. Madrigals. Magic. Jestings Maidens. Dupes and villains. Lovers. Love in the afternoon, evening, and late morning. Battles. Wars. . . . Think Shakespeare. Yes, he’ll be back all next summer. You can be part of it.”³⁹³ While the language used does in fact describe the plots of many of the Bard’s works, the verbiage also serves as a reminder of the pleasures offered by the Festival’s productions and their outdoor, pre-show entertainments. The text’s appeal lies in its promise to provide audiences an opportunity to directly participate in the community-building, commemorative rite with a distinctly Pittsburgh flavor, where all ranks of society have an equally important role to play in a distinctly human drama. Favorini ends his appeal with one final attempt to blur the lines between popular and high culture, as he signs his letter with the tag line, “May the Bard be with you,”³⁹⁴ a reference which recalled the recent success of the second installment of the widely popular *Star Wars* trilogy that opened the year before in 1982.

But, by far, TRSF’s most popular marketing depiction of the Shakespeare was the comic book character Super Bard. The character, drawn and scripted by Festival actor Tim Hartman was introduced to the Pittsburgh public in 1989, when the Festival mailed over 80,000 copies of a comic book entitled, “The Amazing Adventures of Super Bard” to every name on its mailing list.

³⁹² “‘Tis the season” Holiday Mailer, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1983.

³⁹³ “‘Tis the season” Holiday Mailer.

³⁹⁴ “‘Tis the season” Holiday Mailer.

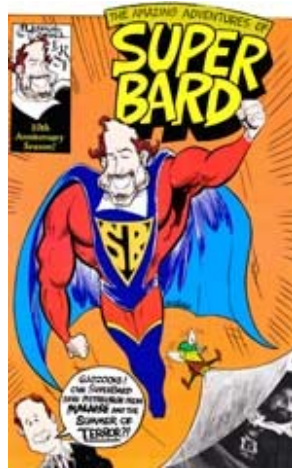


Figure 44: Hartmann, Tim. *The Amazing Adventures of Super Bard*, cover art, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1989.

The comic book tells the story of mild-mannered Pitt Professor Stern Rosencrantz who accidentally frees the fairy Puck from a moldy volume of Shakespeare’s plays. As a reward for freeing the fairy, Rosencrantz is transformed into Super Bard, a literary caped-crusader bent on restoring the public’s belief in the accessibility of Shakespeare’s classical works. The story follows Super Bard in his attempts to try and free Pittsburgh from the evil villain, Malaise, and his attempts to bring a “Summer of Terror” to Pittsburgh. Along the way, the cultural hero encounters such Pittsburgh notables as Mayor Masloff, Steeler Franco Harris, sportscaster Myron Cope, and local television personalities Paul Long and Joe DiNardo. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* praised the comic as being, “quite well drawn and clever, full of jabs at stuffy academics and puns on popular culture. We especially liked the part where Malaise cripples Super Bard by releasing Neil Simonite from a lead box. Will the Bard recover? Only the box office will tell.”³⁹⁵ The Spring 1989 edition of TRSF’s newsletter, *Folio*, featured a photograph of Favorini

³⁹⁵ “Shakespeare Brochure Turns Into Superhero Comic Book,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 1 April 1989: n.p.

and Harris at the Festival's unveiling ceremony for the Super Bard marketing campaign which, due in no small part to Harris's involvement, was subsequently re-printed by several local newspapers.



Figure 45: Harris and Favorini at Super Bard Press Conference (“Superhero Makes Rare Appearance At Press Conference.” *Folio* (Spring 1989): 1.)

In the *Folio* article, Favorini explained that the Super Bard character served as a reflection of the Festival's ongoing mission “to give people a new way of looking at Shakespeare . . . to assail the idea that he's some dried up old relic from the past.”³⁹⁶ The campaign was extremely successful, and TRSF ads featuring the character were printed in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The London Daily News*. The character, who was the cornerstone for the Festival's Tenth Anniversary Marketing campaign, was also featured in a series of local radio ads and served as the illustrated “spokesperson” for the Festival's ticketing promotional strategy, “The Bard Card.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ “Superhero Makes Rare Appearance At Press Conference.” *Folio* (Spring 1989), 1.

³⁹⁷ The Bard Card, a marketing invention of Favorini's, was a flexible ticket package that offered patrons the ability to use their block of passes to see one performance of each of the Festival's production offerings in a season, or, alternatively, to use all of their passes to bring guests to any show of their choosing. The idea and the name, “Bard Card” proved to be a popular strategy among other Shakespeare companies across the country, who replicated the strategy in subsequent years.



Figure 46: Super Bard Card Ad (*Folio*, back cover ad, Spring 1989, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival.)

Super Bard was, in many ways, a personification of the enduring traits that characterize the spirit of Pittsburgh. An original, artistic product of the city, Super Bard physically evoked notions of athleticism, invincibility, superior physicality which corresponded to the kind of physical ideals valued by Pittsburghers. His physically powerful persona was intended to counteract the potentially off-putting, heady, and overly academic connotations often associated with the study of Shakespeare.

3.5 FESTIVAL, COMMEMORATION, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

The idea that festival entertainments are capable of creating and supporting communities is articulated by social anthropologist Alessandro Falassi, who defines the word *festival* as, a “periodically recurrent social occasion,” participated in either “directly or indirectly and to various degrees” by members of a community,

united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a world view.

Both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognizes as essential to its

ideology and world view, to its social identity, its historical continuity, and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what festival celebrates.”³⁹⁸

Like rituals, festivals confirm and reinforce the identity of its membership through their emphasis on shared, lived experience.³⁹⁹ TRSF’s festive offerings allowed Pittsburghers the ability to see their own integral place in the communal recollection of Shakespeare and in building and celebrating their own local community. In addition to taking advantage of its identity as a festival in order to promote community building, TRSF’s decision to remain focused on their ancillary festival offerings had two additional benefits: financial viability and the ability to imbue the City’s collective memory of Shakespeare, often disassociated from more stuffy, academic recollections of the Renaissance dramatist, with a spirit of fun and playfulness.

Favorini’s initial decision to mold his “company” into a “festival” came from a meeting he had with John Hirsh, then associate artistic director at the Stratford Festival. As part of his research into the operations at other Shakespeare companies, Favorini travelled to Stratford in 1979 and secured a meeting with Hirsh to solicit advice about starting his own Shakespeare company. Favorini recalls, “He [Hirsh] said, it was like the movies, where the profit margin was in the popcorn not the ticket price of the movie. And he said that creating the festival atmosphere was the most important thing. So from the beginning we had a green show.”⁴⁰⁰ In the first few years of operations, these offerings were sparse; “festive” entertainments were limited to pre-show performances by the Good Companions, a group of Festival actors who performed a series

³⁹⁸ Alessandro Falassi, *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque [NM]: UNMP, 1987) 2.

³⁹⁹ Falassi 176.

⁴⁰⁰ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

of musical numbers and period dances outside of the theatre culminating in a fanfare of trumpets announcing the opening of the house. But in 1983, TRSF expanded its green show offerings under the label of a “Renaissance Fair” in honor of the City’s Renaissance II campaign. The Festival’s season brochure invited patrons to a wide range of “Elizabethan” entertainments that would serve as a transporting event that would enhance the audiences’ Shakespearean experience:

Beginning at 5pm before every evening performance, and at noon before matinees costumed Elizabethan Vendors will offer a variety of English and other festive foods to be served *al fresco* . . . no reservations necessary. Seated on comfortable hay bales strewn among the trees and colorful pennants, you will be entertained by the Festival’s own Good Companions with their Elizabethan madrigals, as well as a fun-loving troupe of acrobatic jesters and visiting musicians and artists.⁴⁰¹

TRSF also produced a special invitation mailed to its patrons announcing the new pre-show events. The card featured an etching of the Stephen Foster Memorial and grounds situated at the base of the University’s Cathedral of Learning on one side and a brief invitation to the “Lords and Ladies” who had made donations to “Join the festivities at the Festival,” dine on gourmet picnic fare provided by “Elizabethan Vendors,” and enjoy strolling performances by the Good Companions and other “Elizabethan entertainments.”⁴⁰² The rhetorical emphasis on the authentic Elizabethan origins of the festival entertainments was continued in the 1983 season’s

⁴⁰¹ Fourth Season Brochure.

⁴⁰² Fourth Season Festival Invite Postcard. Three Rivers Shakespeare, 1983.

souvenir program, which stressed the connection between the added programming and its identity as a festival:

Two further principles, both reflected in the Festival's name, have served the Festival from its inception and will continue to guide its future direction. From the outset, its directors have aspired to create a true Festival, not just a producing-organization for plays. Elizabethan vendors offer festive foods served *al fresco*. Fool's Company, a band of Shakespearean zanies, will entertain children and adults. Shakespeare's Good Companions stroll amidst diners, singing songs of English court and country life. In sum, Festival activities are designed to invest the plays with the verve and festivity which would have accompanied their presentation in Elizabethan London.⁴⁰³

This passage reveals intent on the part of the Festival to elevate the civic prominence and culture of Pittsburgh via their ability to evoke the vibrancy of Shakespeare's London and to use these events to create a festive experience for audience members beyond the stage proper. This accumulation of attractions should not be deemed to be purely nostalgic by design. As Shaw and Chase have observed of other such nostalgic attractions, these festive attractions do not necessarily imply a desperate rejection of the present:

Few admirers of the past would actually choose to return to it . . . we want to relive those thrilling days of yesteryear, but only because we are absolutely assured that those days are out of reach. People tend to believe that life in the past was 'happier' -- that families were closer, that pollution was absent, that peace

⁴⁰³ Fourth Season Souvenir Program 22.

and order prevailed. But as desirable as they may have been, few would now embrace them as the cost of modern comforts.”⁴⁰⁴

Evidence of this somewhat anachronistic aspect of nostalgia can be seen in the Festival’s choice to frequently advertise its more “historic” events (such as madrigal songs, armed combat displays, jousting, and even falconry) in marketing materials alongside reminders of the modern creature comforts offered by the Festival, such as the “convenient and ample parking” and “air-conditioned” theatre spaces it boasted of in its promotional materials.

Over the years, as the burden of planning and staffing these expanded offerings grew, the Festival invited other local groups and artists to take part in pre-show entertainments which included sword combat demonstrations, performances by the Pittsburgh branch of the Society for Creative Anachronism, a team of magicians, mimes, storytellers and a group of “Renaissance jugglers” (who eventually re-formed as the Festival’s own touring “Fool’s Company”). The Festival also maintained a thriving concessions and souvenir trade, and, as Hirsh had suggested, merchandise at the “Shakespeare Shoppe” became one of the Festival’s most consistently lucrative revenue streams. The Festival also spent significant time and energies arranging for catered meals to be made available before performances as an attempt to increase the communal feel of the Festival for audiences. Even when the logistics of feeding audiences became a nightmare for Festival organizers,⁴⁰⁵ Favorini insisted the Festival continue its efforts because of the ability these shared meals had to create a sense of community among audience members.

⁴⁰⁴ Shaw and Chase 28.

⁴⁰⁵ Company meeting minutes from 1985 on reveal that the planning and staffing of these meals were the source of endless drama and conflict between Festival representatives and local food purveyors. Records also indicate that staffing and planning these meals caused significant friction among the Festival employees who were tasked with handling them.

Interestingly enough, the issue of food became a telling litmus test of sorts for Pittsburgh audiences who were quick to voice their opinions of the food offerings. Initially, the Festival placed significant effort into providing authentic “Elizabethan” food, but it quickly changed course when audience feedback indicated that the meals were not to their liking. Festival organizers then switched gears and arranged to have a series of gourmet catering companies provide meals and snacks; but these offerings too proved to be too unfamiliar for Pittsburgh tastes. Favorini remembers the situation as being ridiculously difficult. “I mean we tried all kinds of things. Numerous vendors offering everything from traditional buffet offerings, to more gourmet snacks and meals, but the things that really worked best were the most ordinary, down-home, Pittsburgh meals... rigatoni, pierogies, green salads....”⁴⁰⁶

These audience demands for Festival offerings more in line with local tastes uphold Falassi’s assertion that “festivals are ultimately community affairs. Indeed, they provide the occasion whereby a community may call attention to itself and, perhaps more important in our time, its willingness to display itself openly. It is the ultimate public activity, given its need for preparation and coordination of effort . . . in which many of the basic notions of community are put to the test.”⁴⁰⁷ In further support of this, despite the language used in early marketing campaigns, Favorini insists that the idea was not to try and create an authentically Elizabethan cultural experience, but rather to present a variety of approachable entertainments that would allow audience members, who would later spend two to three hours sitting more or less passively in the dark listening to others, an opportunity to become more active participants, simultaneously

⁴⁰⁶ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

⁴⁰⁷ Falassi 181.

providing them direct and personal memories of their experience of “Shakespeare.” For Favorini, the festive atmosphere of TRSF’s green show offerings supported his often quoted belief “in the humanizing magic of the theatre, [and] of its powers to bring people together in an awareness of what it means to live fully.”⁴⁰⁸ When asked if he felt it was contradictory for a festival that emphasized its mission to make Shakespeare more accessible to its Pittsburgh audiences to evoke an Elizabethan setting, Favorini replied that the green shows frequently employed songs, dances, contemporary references and local performers whose works were in no way attempts to replicate historically accurate entertainments, but rather attempted to play directly to the popular and contemporary tastes of its audiences while maintaining its dedication to invigorating Pittsburgh’s collective memory of Shakespeare:

I wouldn’t say that we performed them [the green show offerings] tongue-in-check, but they were very contemporary in their humor as well. We did a rap version of *King Lear* that was very popular. We always had a bit of a wink to what was going on. And even when it was just the straight group of madrigal singers, they had low-cut blouses and were lively in a more bawdy way. It was not a fancy scene; it was very Pittsburgh.⁴⁰⁹

For the citizens of Pittsburgh, the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival encouraged a break from their traditional preoccupation with work and labor and an embrace of its opposite: play. In interviews with the press, Festival employees attempted to battle against the academic connotations that accompanied the mention of Shakespeare by emphasizing the “fun” that

⁴⁰⁸ Favorini, Letter to Gov. Richard L. Thornburgh.

⁴⁰⁹ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

audiences would experience with its brand of Shakespeare. In an interview for the University of Pittsburgh's student newspaper, *The Pitt News*, Associate Producer Ned Read tried to allay student concerns that seeing Shakespeare might be "difficult," by reassuring them that the Festival believed that going to see "Shakespeare isn't really different from [seeing] any other kind of play," in that Shakespeare audiences, like other theatre audiences "just want to have fun. They like to laugh and have an easy, fun time."⁴¹⁰ Likewise, Favorini told in the [Pittsburgh] *Tribune-Review*,

The most important things to know about the Shakespeare Festival is that it's great fun. . . . Even before you walk into the theatre, it's fun. . . . We have entertainment outside, jugglers, musicians to get you started, the theatre itself is interesting architecturally; it's a national historical landmark. . . . We try to bring our audience into Shakespeare's world. It's like opening up a small door to a very big world that most people probably didn't even know existed. People today are imprisoned in the present, in that they see only a small part of human history. The play opens up a new world and creates a sense of discovery. That's what makes the festival so much fun.⁴¹¹

While the popular appeal of the TRSF lay in its ability to provide audiences with an opportunity for play, part of its identity was grounded very materially in its connection to another historic Pittsburgh artist who provided audiences with popular unpretentious entertainment. The Festival's primary performance venue was the Stephen Foster Memorial Theatre which

⁴¹⁰ Read qtd. in "The Bard is Alive and Well," *Pitt News* [Pittsburgh, PA] 12 July 1983: n.pag.

⁴¹¹ Zuchowski, David. "Pittsburgh . . . Stratford on the Mon," *Tribune-Review* [Pittsburgh, PA] 28 May 1988: B2.

functioned in many ways for the Festival as what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire*, serving a variety of material and symbolic functions for the company, and revealing the company's intent to remember Shakespeare. The theatre, a limestone, gothic-styled monument situated prominently on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh, was built in the late 1930s, and funded by Josiah K. Lilly, a pharmaceutical manufacturer based in Indiana who was an avid Foster collector.⁴¹² The impressive and highly visible structure was dedicated to one of the most widely recognized artists to come out of Pittsburgh and housed an archival library dedicated to Foster's music and minstrelsy, a nearly 600 seat proscenium stage, and a social hall. In marketing and promotional materials, the Festival frequently referenced the memorial's status as "a landmark building listed in the National Registry of Historic Places."⁴¹³ Because of the Festival's connection to the University, the Festival was allowed to use the space without rental fees, thus fulfilling the memorial's material function as a *lieu de mémoire* for TRSF. But more importantly, utilizing the widely recognized Foster Memorial as its performance venue, TRSF was able to recall the historically and geographically distant theatrical icon of Shakespeare within a context more familiar to the blue-collar audience Favorini was interested in attracting to the Festival. Symbolically, the memorial allowed the TRSF to lessen the elitist overtones so often associated with Shakespeare through its association with the more populist Foster, a true Pittsburgher whose work exemplified the vaudeville and minstrel traditions of the City's most successful period of theatrical activity. Further, the symbolic excess of the memorial created a kind of nebulous sense of historical accuracy, lending legitimacy to the Festival's assertions

⁴¹² Conner 243.

⁴¹³ 1983 Company Profile.

about Shakespeare's appeal to the working classes. Through a kind of transitive form of memory made possible by its connection to the Foster Memorial qua *lieu de mémoire*, TRSF sought to promote, and subsequently profit from, the collective memory of Shakespeare by reconstructing him as a man of the people and an artist connected to the cultural heritage of the city of Pittsburgh. Like Shakespeare & Company's use of Wharton's estate, The Mount, TRSF's was able to use the Foster Memorial as the site for its particular commemoration of Shakespeare, despite its lack of direct connection to the Elizabethan playwright, to conjure a general sense of ancientness, which elided the temporal constraints of history to serve as what Nora calls "a consolidator of heritage."⁴¹⁴

3.6 FADING BACK INTO THE RUST BELT: THE DEMISE OF TRSF

By the early 1990s, the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival had garnered significant recognition among American Shakespeare companies. The second edition of *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, published in 1992, named it among the fifteen "principal" Shakespeare Theatres in America.⁴¹⁵ In 1991, Shakespeare scholars Felicia Londré and Daniel Watermeier visited the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival as part of their research for their book, *Shakespeare Companies: An International Guide*, but by the time their generally positive profile of the Festival was published in 1995, Favorini had resigned and the Festival had folded after

⁴¹⁴ Nora 20.

⁴¹⁵ Martin Banham, editor, *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 982.

only sixteen seasons in existence. Though numerous factors contributed to the Festival's closing, it was the Festival's association with the University of Pittsburgh, the same institution that had been its cradle in its early years, which ultimately led to its demise. As early as 1985, minutes from board meetings and every Long-Term Planning Report produced by the Festival contain repeated requests from Festival administrators and board members to clarify, and or modify, the financial and organizational relationship between the Festival, the University and the Department of Theatre Arts. Tensions over what the Festival owed the University, the Department, or its MFA students, and how much control, if any, the University and the Department should have over the financial, employment and artistic concerns of the Festival began to appear only a few years into its operations.

Favorini and the board believed that, because the Festival attracted more people to the campus than any other non-sporting event,⁴¹⁶ it should have been entitled to more "in-kind" support from the University. In 1986, Favorini became convinced that the University's financial support of the Festival did not reflect its growing success, and so, feeling what he described as being "really unappreciated,"⁴¹⁷ he went on the job market. He used one of the job offers he received to play hard ball with Peter Koehler, then Dean of the University's College of Arts and Sciences. Persuaded in part, according to Favorini, by the fact that there had never been a salary line for Favorini himself in the Festival budget,⁴¹⁸ Koehler decided to increase the office space

⁴¹⁶ Figure based on the annual (paid) attendance in estimated at 25,000 in the Festival's profile in *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An International Guide*, eds. Engle, Londré, and Watermeier.

⁴¹⁷ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

⁴¹⁸ In my personal interview with Favorini, he recalled that during his 1986 meeting, "the dean said, 'But you get extra money for doing the festival.' And I said, 'No I don't. There's no salary line for me in the Festival budget.' I mean I didn't take any money for the working on the Festival for six years. And his assistant, Dick Howe said later,

for the Department, (which enabled many of the faculty and administrative office to move out of the cramped basement they shared with the costume and scene shops), and authorized a new faculty line to support the Department's growing MFA acting program.⁴¹⁹

But even before the Festival became successful, many graduate students and faculty expressed frustration over the Festival's hiring and casting practices, which they believe did not offer significant and consistent employment for them, despite the connection between the Department and the Festival. Many graduate students were disillusioned to discover that their presence in the Department's MFA program did not guarantee their participation in the Festival. To combat this objection, the Festival established its own "Young Company,"⁴²⁰ staffed with MFA actors and directors, but despite this effort, feelings of disenchantment continued to fester among students. Faculty members too, were frequently disappointed to discover that the summer employment they had one year was not guaranteed in the coming years. Further, many felt that Favorini's position as both the Chair of the Department and the Executive Producer of the Festival was a consolidation of power that amounted to a dictatorship. Local theatre writer Jim Davidson noted the anxiety over Favorini's far-reaching authority in his 1984 profile on Favorini as the Executive Producer of the Festival:

The combination gives him year-round control over the fates of the faculty and staff of the theatre department. Most are loyal. Some are angry and openly

'The dean was really impressed that you didn't ask for anything for yourself.'" Following the meeting, the Dean subsequently awarded Favorini a salary for his work on the Festival equivalent to what a professor of his ranking would receive to teach one summer course.

⁴¹⁹ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

⁴²⁰ The Young Company productions were more aesthetically daring and less traditional than those of TRSF's mainstages, but despite this it primarily positive reviews over the course of its history.

resentful of his methods. Yet both camps respect Favorini as a skilled businessman who crafted something from nothing. He says he did it not by studying management texts, but by looking to literature for wisdom about how to run a business. “You either like him or dislike him, but you can’t deny that he gets the job done,” says Christopher Applegate, a PhD candidate who dropped out of the program last year and went home to Philadelphia last summer, unhappy with his lack of opportunity to direct and act.⁴²¹

Later in the same article, another Festival employee, who preferred to remain anonymous, praised Favorini’s skills as a “shrewd” businessman and an incredible “wheeler-dealer” but complained that with Favorini,

It all came down to, if you do what he wants, you’re fine. If you don’t do it, he is quite vindictive. If you don’t do what he says, he’ll screw you to the wall. If you buck him, you’ll get nailed. He can dangle a job over your head in a way that’s sinful and offer salaries that are an embarrassment. . . . I think the problem I’ve always felt in relating to Buck is there was good and bad in everything he did. He rescued City Theatre, but it was also an imperialistic move. He started the Shakespeare Festival, but he did it with blood, sweat and tears from everyone involved.⁴²²

On the other hand, fellow faculty member Gil Elvgren defended Favorini’s decisions as being the kind of hard decisions involving money and the bottom-line that make many producers

⁴²¹ Davidson, “The Bard’s promoter . . . “ J1.

⁴²² Anonymous qtd. in Davidson, “The Bard’s promoter . . . “ J1.

unpopular. “He is a real entrepreneur and has, I think, had a real impact on the theatrical scene in Pittsburgh. If he left to go somewhere, I would be very tempted to go with him.”⁴²³ Favorini locates another faction of dissatisfaction among some the other faculty members in the department at the time:

I held the reins for the whole operation -- the department and the Festival -- and I think the faculty got to a point where they wanted more of the decision making power. I mean, I didn't guarantee *anybody* a spot in the festival, and I think that ruffled feathers. I think maybe in the last year or two, I named both Steve [Coleman] and Gil [Elvgren] as associate artistic directors, or something like that, and I think the faculty was disgruntled by that. And there were some disgruntled students as I mentioned earlier. And to be truthful, I think there were some mischief-makers on the faculty. Dennis Kennedy was on the faculty and he wanted to direct, but he wasn't really a director, and I think he stirred things up a bit.⁴²⁴

Tensions came to a head during the 1992, when a perfect storm of events both in and around the theatre brought the Festival to its knees. In the department, by-laws concerning the position of Chair were changed to insure that the appointee could not also serve as the Festival's Executive Producer. Favorini had taken the position of head of the Theatre Arts Division of the Department of Speech and Theatre in 1972, only a few years after moving to Pittsburgh. In 1982, when the Theatre Arts became its own department, Favorini was nominated by the department

⁴²³ Elvgren qtd. in Davidson, “The Bard's promoter . . . “ J1.

⁴²⁴ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

faculty, and subsequently appointed by the Dean, to the position of Chair, a position he held until 1992, when he stepped down in order to retain his position at the Festival. According to Coleman, in the resulting scramble to replace him as chair, “Dennis Kennedy was the heir apparent.”⁴²⁵ But despite this perception department politics took a surprising turn, and the faculty, upon whose recommendation the Dean traditionally appointed the position of Chair, decided overwhelmingly against Kennedy, who they felt had poor “personal communication skills,”⁴²⁶ recommending instead a somewhat reluctant Coleman⁴²⁷ as their choice for the position. Coleman recalls that upon being appointed to the position dean Koehler told him that his first job would be “to find the perforation between the Festival and the department,” and that he learned very quickly “that the line was very fuzzy.”⁴²⁸

Factors outside the University also began to conspire against the Festival. The summer of 1992 also saw a city-wide newspaper strike, and the resulting lack of press and reviews for season shows proved to be a crippling blow to Festival ticket sales, especially for the re-mount of *Steel/City*, whose solid tour bookings nevertheless failed to translate into mainstage ticket sales. Further, the City’s lingering recession caused several prominent corporate and foundational granting agencies to cut back significantly on its support to local arts organizations. By June, the

⁴²⁵ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

⁴²⁶ In a draft of a letter from the Theatre Arts Faculty to the Dean, shared with Kennedy, identifying their choice for chair, they write, “We realize that while Dr. Kennedy is an outstanding scholar, but his personal communications skills are not as favorable as Dr. Coleman’s. . . . At times he is brusque and his manner can be misconstrued as rude,” (See Betty Tarantino, Letter to Dennis Kennedy, Re: Chairmanship of our Department – Draft, 22 Jan. 1992.)

⁴²⁷ In my interview with him, Coleman remembered his nomination to the chair in the following way: “One of my colleagues, Sarah Barker, came and asked if I would stand [for the nomination for Department Chair]. And I said, ‘Hell, no!’ No fucking way, you know?” (Coleman Personal Interview 2011).

⁴²⁸ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

Festival announced that it was anticipating a deficit, and that though it would petition the University to off-set some of this debt, it would be cutting the budget of *Pericles*, the final show of the season, and that it anticipated some full-time and seasonal lay-offs.⁴²⁹ Favorini has maintained that, had the University's higher administration truly appreciated the value of the Festival, they would have recognized that the deficit "was chicken feed,"⁴³⁰ but the University itself was also in financial straits and refused the Festival any financial support. So, despite earlier reassurances to Festival employees that the Festival would go on as planned that season, *Pericles* was cancelled. The refusal by the University administration was the last straw for Favorini, who subsequently resigned as Executive Producer of the Festival in the Fall of 1992.

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Department faculty members reeled as they tried to find a way to replace Favorini within the Festival and contend with the significant blow to the budget -- the 1993 season budget was shrunk to \$200,000, compared to the \$650,000 budget of the previous year -- which required several significant structural changes to the Festival's operations.⁴³² Ultimately the faculty decided to appoint to the position of Artistic Director faculty member Laura Ann Worthen, who was more than eager to take on the challenge. Born in Minneapolis, Worthen became an actor at the age of six when her parents relocated to Dallas. She earned her bachelor's degree in theatre from Brown University and studied with William Ball during her Master's program at ACT in

⁴²⁹ Attilio Favorini, Memo to the Staff, Casts and Crews of TRSF, Re: The Current Crisis. 5 June 1992: 1.

⁴³⁰ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

⁴³¹ Beginning with the 1993 season, the TRSF archives grow increasingly sparse, and by the final 1995 season, little evidence beyond the season program. After Favorini's tenure at the Festival, internal documents were no longer kept and only incomplete and often conflicting budget reports exist.

⁴³² Adrian McCoy, "The Bard is Back." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Weekend Magazine* 28 May 1993: 2.

San Francisco before accepting a position as an acting and voice teacher at the University of Pittsburgh in 1991. Worthen was eager to make a clean break from the previous reputation of the Festival and to move the aesthetic of the Festival in a more modern and innovative direction -- one focused on creating ensemble casts featured in updated versions of Shakespeare's plays. In one of her first interviews as head of the Festival, she voiced her belief that the mistake of many Shakespeare productions make is that they "ritualize play going" telling audience members that "it's a *special* thing to sit in the audience and watch the people up there, it's a *special* thing that I sit quietly and hold my purse on my lap while it happens. There's all this ritual and it is all a bit distant" from modern audiences."⁴³³ Coleman characterized her style as being,

a real push towards modernization, big concepts, po-mo and deconstruction. I mean there was a whole movement away from the relatively traditional take on the classics that rest of us had generally taken. . . . And she got in and that's all she did. There were no more classical, traditional productions. And her artistic vision was like nothing we had experienced in the past. Laura was very much her own person and didn't want the old guard around at all.⁴³⁴

But his recollection also reveals some of the tensions that would quickly lead to the Festival's demise: "She was bringing in actors and directors that she knew, and many of them quite wonderful and brilliant. I mean I would have felt comfortable and flattered if she had asked me

⁴³³ Ted Hoover, "The Taming of the Bard," *In Pittsburgh Newsweekly* 16-22 June 1994: 24.

⁴³⁴ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

to direct, even once, while she was in charge, but she didn't."⁴³⁵ Further, despite being warned by Christine Frezza, the newly appointed Planning Administrator for the Festival, that according to years of audience surveys, the Festival's audience preferred more traditional stagings of Shakespeare's works, Worthen pushed ahead with her new vision for the Festival,⁴³⁶ calling in a series of local advertising firms to pitch new marketing strategies to promote her new agenda of presenting new, more modernized productions of his plays.

Her first step was composing a new two-page long mission statement for the Festival that reflected her new, modern vision for its future. While the Festival's original mission focused on the mutually beneficial relationship between the Shakespeare Festival and the City, in the new version, the word "Pittsburgh" appears only once, in reference to its geographical location. Rather than focusing on the Festival's product as a reflection of the City and its people, the new statement opted to try for a broader, more American-based appeal: "through the prism of Shakespearean text and story-telling we American's [*sic*] have seen parallels to our own society, and to our own political struggles. This immediacy and relevance to our own times most enthralls the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival."⁴³⁷ Much of the Festival's new mission revolved around three primary ideas: attracting new, younger audiences to classical theatre, "[e]xploring Shakespeare's less familiar plays," and "[r]evitalizing the profound relevance for Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' writing to our own times."⁴³⁸ Further, due to the

⁴³⁵ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

⁴³⁶ Christine Frezza, Memo to Laura Ann Worthen, Re: TRSF Long Range Planning, 27 October 1992.

⁴³⁷ Mission Statement, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1994.

⁴³⁸ Mission Statement, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1994.

Festival's dire financial straits, most of the pre- and post-show festivities, so popular with local audiences, were curtailed.

While Festival archives of the last three seasons are sparse at best, it is interesting to compare the Festival's new mission statement and the only marketing campaign initiated under Worthen to previous strategies. Heralding TRSF's institutional transition was a new logo for the Festival which bore no signs of Shakespeare or of Pittsburgh, featuring instead a rather classically-inspired illustration of the comedy and tragedy masks.



Figure 47: TRSF New Logo, 1993.

In contrast, the traditional graphics previously used by the Festival, the new season brochures and mailers were very contemporary and reflected numerous pop-culture pre-occupations, including grunge, rap, deconstructed texts and references to the perceived apathy of Generation-X.



Figure 48: Sixteenth Season Brochure, (cover art), Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1995.

Promotional materials from the last two years of the Festival are devoid of attempts to establish its institutional identity in terms of its association to Pittsburgh, the urban character of the City, or the ethos of its citizenry. While the rhetoric of the material still sought to present “Old Billy Boy” as a man of the people, it made little to no attempt to connect to the immediate Pittsburgh community. Instead promotional materials from its final years contain copy that reveals an almost desperate desire to attract a young, modern audience:

Word Up. Our Shakespeare is at Large. He’s out there in the streets. He’s not sentenced to life in some class. He’s not shackled to the rules. We have unchained his words from conventional periods, places and personalities. We have liberated his voice. He speaks to you, here and now, with the glorious language of the Globe and the wisdom of every age. Free yourself.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Sixteenth Season Brochure, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1995.

One mailer continues with a blurb for the pre-show lecture series, now called, “Rap Sessions” which stressed the Festival’s goal to present modern productions for contemporary times and audiences:

Old Billy Boy was never one to back away from a fight, why should you? Steel yourself and join us in a full-tilt debate with scholars and community leaders at any of the Three Rivers Shakespeare Summer Symposia. There’s one session for each play and they’re all free. You can come and get stoked before you see the play. Or see the play first and go toe-to-toe with the people who are supposed to know.⁴⁴⁰

Another example of the Festival’s new rhetorical focus on popular culture designed to court a younger audience base can be seen in the rap session for the Festival’s 1995 production of *Romeo and Juliet*’s, entitled “Pop Culture Burnout: Eating Our Young,” the marketing blurb for which reads, “Are Romeo and Juliet just a couple of been-there-done-that Generation X-ers who just couldn’t deal with it? Or are they the road kill on society’s super highway of institutional decay?”⁴⁴¹

As a sign of its “commitment to exploring what is most proactive, most prevalent, most entertaining to us now,” Worthen pushed the Festival to take on three of Shakespeare’s works best known for the difficulties they pose to modern directors -- *Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* -- for the fifteenth anniversary season in 1994.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Sixteenth Season Brochure, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1995.

⁴⁴¹ Sixteenth Season Brochure, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1995.

⁴⁴² Fifteenth Season Program, Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival, 1994: 5.

Though the Festival had mounted relatively well-received productions of each of these plays in the past, (including an avant-garde production of *Measure for Measure* by Israeli director Yossi Yzraeli in 1985), each of the plays in the 1994 season were both critical and box office failures. Local theatre critic Ted Hoover wrote,

At the risk of destroying my finely-honed reputation I have to admit that I am in love with the Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival's Artistic Director Laura Ann Worthen. Her makeover of the Festival has been nothing short of astonishing; the work has style, intelligence and a very definite point of view. But at the risk of alienating my new girlfriend, I have to admit that the Festival's latest production, *The Taming of the Shrew*, is unforgiveable.⁴⁴³

Hoover goes on to bemoan the fact that while the modern take on the play is stylish and fun, it "makes no attempt to add anything to the work."⁴⁴⁴ Reviews for the second show of the season, *Merchant of Venice*, were much worse, complaining that the production's high concept unraveled early in the evening, leaving audiences confused. Only *Measure for Measure* received passable reviews, and the success of that production too was tainted by a tiff with local reviewer Chris Rawson. Worthen believed Rawson had unfairly depicted her casting practices by pointing to the fact that in recent years the Festival had both decreased the number of local actors and directors and increased the number of actors with degrees from CMU (as opposed to using MFA grads from the University of Pittsburgh's Theatre Arts Department). Worthen wrote two letters of complaint, one to Rawson and another to his editor, complaining that Rawson's article on the

⁴⁴³ Ted Hoover, Rev. of "*The Taming of the Shrew*." In *Pittsburgh Newsweekly* 7-13 July 1994: n.p.

⁴⁴⁴ Hoover, Rev. of *Shrew* 1994.

change of guard at the Festival had mischaracterized her casting choices. She maintained that her decision to use CMU actors was not, as she believed Rawson had insinuated, proof that the University of Pittsburgh was not producing actors in their MFA program that were worthy of being cast in Festival productions. Worthen declared Rawson's insinuations untrue and stressed her "avid support of the growth and development" of Pitt MFA students.⁴⁴⁵

But Rawson was not the only one to notice that Worthen's desire to produce new and innovative Shakespeare was coming at the expense of many of the same artists who had launched the Festival to success. As a significant faction of the faculty became disillusioned with Worthen's decisions, including the hiring of directors from CMU's School of Drama, Favorini began to call for the end of the Festival. Coleman recalls having "miserable, endless confrontations with Buck," who had begun "speaking continually to the fact that the Festival had run its course and should be put to bed. That's not to say that Buck was the only one saying the Festival had run its course. There were a number of people [in the department] that felt that way."⁴⁴⁶ Making matters worse was the fact that Pittsburgh audiences remained unsold on the Festival's new identity, as evidenced by the fact that ticket sales for the 1994 season dropped by nearly 35% from the previous season.⁴⁴⁷

Still worse for the Department was the fact that Worthen failed to rectify the Festival's dismal financial situation. In 1993, during its first year under Worthen's leadership, the Festival

⁴⁴⁵ Worthen, Laura Ann. Letter to the Editor. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 28 May 1994: n.p.

⁴⁴⁶ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

⁴⁴⁷ 1994 Ten Month Annual Budget Comparison, Three River Shakespeare Festival, 6 September 1994: 4.

went more than \$94,000 in the red,⁴⁴⁸ and in 1994, that figure was still nearly \$29,000.⁴⁴⁹ In hind sight, Coleman points to Worthen's financial management of the Festival as its real death knell:

She was willful and driven to a fault, and very powerful and very persuasive. And I think she was the wrong person for that job at that time. Very energetic, very bright, very talented, but a terrible producer it turned out, because, though she was doing these very interesting things, she just kept running in the red ink out the wazoo, five to seven to ten times as much as Buck ever did in a given season, and, much to my surprise, the upper administration seemed forgiving.⁴⁵⁰

Coleman remembers being amazed that the University administration that had once taken Favorini to task for a \$3,000 deficit, continued to support Worthen in her efforts to re-make the Festival, while Favorini recalls that the real change in the University's toleration of the Festival's financial situation came with the hire of a new Associate Provost who had worked in Rutgers' Mason Gross School of the Arts and was an appreciator of the Festival.⁴⁵¹ In the end, the faculty agreed with Favorini, that "the lingering death of the Festival was draining energy" from an already crippled department⁴⁵² and voted to bring the Festival to an end.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁸ Christine Frezza, Memo to W. Richard Howe, Re: Festival FY93 Budget Report, 30 September 1993.

⁴⁴⁹ 1994 Ten Month Annual Budget Comparison, Three River Shakespeare Festival.

⁴⁵⁰ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

⁴⁵¹ Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

⁴⁵² Favorini Personal Interview 2011.

⁴⁵³ Coleman Personal Interview 2011.

**4.0 CHAPTER THREE – WWSO?: THE SHENANDOAH SHAKESPEARE
EXPRESS/ SHENANDOAH SHAKESPEARE. THE AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE
CENTER**

Oh call back yesterday . . . bid time return. – Richard II

Your children's children will see this and bless heaven. – Henry VIII

**4.1 SHENANDOAH SHAKESPEARE: RENAISSANCE RULES, ROCK 'N' ROLL
AESTHETIC**

Ralph Alan Cohen, professor of English literature and head of the Studies Abroad program at James Madison University (JMU), was frustrated. Though he was an avid fan of the Bard, Cohen recalls that no matter how he discussed Shakespeare's works in the classroom his students remained unmoved by their content. For them, the recollection of Shakespeare's works at the well-meaning, though perhaps uninspired, hands of high school English teachers came with too much dry, academic baggage. Cohen's students recalled "Shakespeare's plays as boring books, too difficult for anyone but bookworms to understand and enjoy."⁴⁵⁴ But Cohen, persisted: "I wanted them to know why his works are still great."⁴⁵⁵ Convinced that the key to getting his

⁴⁵⁴ Program for *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1989.

⁴⁵⁵ David B. Bowes, "Hamlet to Go," *Mid-Atlantic Country* June 1995: n.pag.

students to appreciate Shakespeare lay in seeing them performed, Cohen set out to expose his students to the best productions. As the head of JMU's Studies Abroad program he spent the mid-1980s taking scores of students to some of the most respected Shakespeare productions in London, but they remained unconvinced. Cohen claimed "even the Royal Shakespeare Company was pretentious and overproduced at the time,"⁴⁵⁶ and had none of the lively interaction between audience and actors that he maintained was one of the defining characteristics of the experience of theatre-going in the playhouses of Shakespeare's day. "Shakespeare used to be about having a good time, a raucous time and getting involved with the show. The Shakespeare we have today is like church."⁴⁵⁷ To combat the over-production and over-reverence that he believed had "sapped the energy and excitement out of" his works, Cohen set out to "bring rock 'n' roll back to Shakespeare" by recreating the staging conditions of Shakespeare's own historical time and venues and grounding their interpretations in contemporary, late 20th-century contexts.⁴⁵⁸

To put his ideas to the test, Cohen organized and taught a seminar for JMU undergrads aimed at exploring Shakespeare's plays by employing the theatrical and performance conventions used by Elizabethan theatre companies, while simultaneously encouraging his students to liberally incorporate contemporary pop culture references. The intention was to clarify some of the denser, historically-oriented aspects of the text in order to make the productions more accessible to young modern audiences. The seminar, which culminated in a production of *Henry V*, based on Cohen's unique combination of Elizabethan staging practices

⁴⁵⁶ Bowes.

⁴⁵⁷ Cohen qtd. in Bryan Smith, "Shakin' Up Shakespeare: Local Troupe Gives Bard's Works A New Look," *News-Record* [Richmond, VA] n.d. 1991: 13+.

⁴⁵⁸ Cohen qtd. in Smith, Bryan 13.

and contemporary cultural contexts, was a hit among his own students and the JMU student body at large. One of Cohen's students, JMU Senior Jim Warren, was particularly drawn to Cohen's insistence that Shakespeare's plays were not only classic works of literature, but contemporary works of entertainment. Warren, who starred as King Henry in Cohen's 1988 production, had directed a student production of *Romeo and Juliet* at JMU the previous year (1987), which reimagined the play as a battle between rival fraternities on a modern-day college campus, and featured a modern rock soundtrack played by a DJ character that served as a narrator of sorts for the production. In an interview for the JMU newspaper, *The Breeze*, Warren, championing Cohen's own beliefs to the paper's (and the production's) audience of primarily college students, insisted that, "William Shakespeare wrote for people, not professors. His plays were meant to live on the stage, not the page. For it to be as meaningful to the audience today as it was then" productions should feature "all the elements people look for in contemporary entertainment." In an attempt to lure his fellow college students to his Shakespeare production, Warren capitalized on the parts of the production he felt would be most appealing, boasting, "We've got sex. We've got drugs. We've got violence. We've got rock 'n' roll."⁴⁵⁹ The popular success of both Warren's production of *Romeo and Juliet* and Cohen's *Henry V* among JMU student audiences, was a revelation to Warren, who, upon graduating, approached his former professor with a proposal to co-found a new kind of Shakespeare company with him, one dedicated their shared vision. Cohen agreed, and together, the two co-founded the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express (SSE), a regional touring company aimed at combining Cohen's principles of Elizabethan staging practices with Warren's flair for updating classical texts for young, contemporary

⁴⁵⁹ Warren qtd. in Jim Richardson, "Shakespeare classic goes contemporary," *Breeze* [James Madison University, VA] 7 Dec. 1987: 17.

audiences. So, in the summer of 1988, armed with little more than a budget of \$500, a blue jean clad troupe of largely student actors, and Warren's dilapidated, powder blue station wagon, the Company mounted its first production, *Richard III*, which played to critical and popular success at high schools, colleges, and civic centers throughout Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

This chapter will examine the rhetoric of SSE's mission, marketing, and promotional materials, asserting that the Company's particular recollections of Shakespeare are made in an attempt to legitimize its own signature production aesthetic. Tracing the Company's history through its roots as a touring company, to its choice to settle down and create a historic replica of the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, (pronounced stän'-tŏn), Virginia, to its eventual re-branding as the American Shakespeare Center for production, education and research in 2005, I will point to the ways in which its various institutional identities played out in terms of its marketing and promotional tactics and its claims of authenticity. Along the way, I will identify moments of slippage in the connections between the Company's institutional mission and its practices, and note instances of tension between its constructed remembrance of Shakespeare and generally accepted theatre history.

Initially Cohen's impetus in co-founding the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express was to actively combat the anti-Shakespeare sentiment in his students -- a crippling condition that Cohen affectionately refers to as "ShakesFear."⁴⁶⁰ He gradually came to believe that the key to insuring a Shakespeare production's successful reception lay in its ability to recover that lost

⁴⁶⁰ In 2007, Cohen completed his book *Shakesfear and How to Cure It!*, a how-to book of sorts designed to provide educators with a step-by-step guide to teaching twenty-two of Shakespeare's most popular plays, augmenting in-depth textual discussions with practical, on-your-feet exercises designed to make the students' introduction to the classic texts more lively, embodied, and engaged. The book was well-received by critics and won the 2007 Association of Educational Publishers Award for the Best Professional Development Book.

sense of direct connection between actors and audiences, a bond that Cohen insists was stronger and more direct in Shakespeare's time than in our own. As a result, early press and promotional material sought to construct SSE in direct opposition to both the dry, literary explorations of high school and college academics and to the production work of the more traditional, established, Shakespeare establishment, as exemplified by the RSC, whose productions had failed to engage his own students. Programs for the Company often employed a rhetorical strategy which first evokes popularly held negative connotations to Shakespeare and then encourages audiences to replace those memories with memories of SSE's own productions, as in this copy from a SSE production at the Folger Library:

Say 'Shakespeare' and most Americans think of tights and posturing, of British accents and three-and-a-half-hour productions, of memorizing speeches in school. The goal of this theatre company is to make 'Shakespeare' synonymous with vital, contemporary entertainment -- entertainment that both expresses and creates community.⁴⁶¹

Ultimately, by recreating the physical configuration and conditions of the playhouses of Shakespeare's own time, the SSE hoped to reinvigorate the actor-audience relationship, placing the audience in a more active role in order to generate a more positive, pleasurable recollection of Shakespeare particularly among its young, contemporary audience members.

Fundamental to its attempts to strengthen the relationship between performer and spectator, is the Company's belief in a tactic it refers to as "universal lighting," a convention that calls for the audience and the actors be lit by the same, non-theatrical light. Company literature

⁴⁶¹ Cohen qtd. in Program for "Shenandoah Shakespeare Express at the Folger Library," Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1993.

asserts that its use of universal lighting is, like many of its signature performance rules, due in equal parts to the convention's historical accuracy and its ability to fulfill the Company's mission to produce "dynamic, living Shakespeare" capable of "plugging the gap between audience and performer."⁴⁶² According to the Company, placing the audience in the dark, a convention its promotional literature traces back to the rise of the "fourth wall" and the proscenium arch, is directly responsible for the passive nature of current theatrical spectatorship, which, by extension, robs Shakespeare's texts of their original power and appeal. However the Company's truncated history of staging conventions fails to acknowledge several historical nuances, including the fact that performing in natural lighting was hardly a convention exclusive to Shakespeare, as it was not until the mid-to-late 19th century that houselights were darkened for performances. Still, in promotional interviews, Cohen is often quoted railing against the alienation that he feels characterizes the current actor-audience relationship at many theatres, where, "You go in and the lights go out and you can't see each other. You don't know who's asleep and who's not, the actors can't see you, they can't respond to you -- it's just crazy."⁴⁶³ This philosophy is hammered home by one of the Company's first marketing slogans: "We Do It with the Lights On." In terms of merchandising, the slogan's double entendre proved particularly popular among the Company's younger audience members, who delighted in its titillating irreverence, and were eager to sport the slogan on a wide variety of tee-shirts, tote bags, and bumper stickers. The slogan's "cool" factor was increased by linking its brand with a secret body of knowledge available only to the initiated. In terms of word-of-mouth marketing, the tactic

⁴⁶² Jim Warren, SSE *Richard III* Post Mortem Evaluation, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1998.

⁴⁶³ Cohen qtd in Smith, Bryan 14.

effectively deputized audience members to serve as enthusiastic, if informal, ambassadors of its brand of Shakespeare, to those curious about the meaning behind the titillating slogan.



Figure 49: We do it with the lights on. SSE Bumpersticker

In addition to affording actors the opportunity to gage audience reactions, universal lighting affords SSE actors with more opportunities for direct address of the audience, one of the Company's most fundamental performance aesthetics. In its first mission statement, the SSE asserted its essential belief, "that delivering dialogue directly to the audience is key to unleashing the power found in Shakespeare's work."⁴⁶⁴ According to Jim Warren, "When an actor can see an audience . . . an audience can play the roles Shakespeare wrote for them -- Scottish soldiers, citizens of Venice or simply the butt of innumerable jokes."⁴⁶⁵ Here, Warren reminds potential audience members that Shakespeare had them in mind when he wrote his plays, an idea that both legitimizes the Company's insistence upon a heightened actor-audience connection and increases the personal pleasure of and connection between audience members and the playwright. Rhetorically, this assertion too, implies that direct address, (like universal lighting), is a uniquely Elizabethan convention, largely ignoring the fact that the concept of talking directly to the audience is as old as the Greek Chorus, and was, in fact, the prevailing dramatic trend of the

⁴⁶⁴ Program for *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1989.

⁴⁶⁵ "Story of a Shakespeare Troupe," *Odessa American* 31 March 2000: C3.

Middle Ages. In fact, one could argue that the innovative thing about the Elizabethan drama was not direct address, but rather its creation of private scenes between characters, scenes that occur without an acknowledgement of the theatrical audience or the ever-present eyes of a chorus, and which (frequently) banished direct address in the attempt to stage a new kind of intimacy between characters.

The Company's actor handbooks contain an entire section dedicated to SSE's insistence on "Talking to the Audience."⁴⁶⁶ These handbooks offer instructions and strategies on how actors might increase their attempts to actively incorporate the audience into the action of the play. They characterize soliloquies as moments on stage which "require you to struggle out loud and share that struggle with the audience," and suggest that, as often as possible, actors should let the audience serve as extras in the play, imagining them to be "an army of soldiers or fairies or courtiers or confidants."⁴⁶⁷ Further, the handbooks even go so far as to quantify what constitutes an appropriate level of direct eye-contact with audience members:

[Y]ou will be asked to make direct eye contact with one audience member at a time for at least one whole phrase before breaking that contact.

- connecting with an audience is different than talking at an audience
- you must hold eyeball-to-eyeball contact for at least one complete phrase before moving on

⁴⁶⁶ Actor Handbook, American Shakespeare Center, 2007: 41.

⁴⁶⁷ Actor Handbook 2007, 41.

- if your eyeballs are darting from person to person or scanning generally, you will not be making specific enough contact.⁴⁶⁸

As ambassadors for the SSE, its mission and its techniques, actors are encouraged to discuss the use of direct address, like the convention of universal lighting, as yet another illustration of its dedication to present Shakespeare's works as the Bard himself would have.

In a local profile piece for the company, author Tamela Graham also notes that the Company's frequent choice to have actors not featured in scenes "sit on stage among the action of the play and watch," is a unifying concept that she claims "adds personality and wit to the performance because the audience sees the actors laughing together, enjoying the humor in Shakespeare's plays."⁴⁶⁹ Cohen, too points to the fact that universal lighting encourages "a more vocal response to the comedies," insisting, "Plays are funnier in the light."⁴⁷⁰ SSE frequently takes the rhetorical opportunity to characterize its work as being "part of a global movement to bring Shakespeare back to the general public by performing in the spirit of the original productions. Hopefully, we will help destroy the historically inaccurate, boring, 'traditional' approach and replace it with the energy, magic, and fun for all that comes with using Shakespeare's own approach."⁴⁷¹ The language of this, and other examples of Company literature likens, the SSE and its relationship to the larger Shakespeare establishment to that of the rag-tag forces of the Rebel Alliance of the popular *Star Wars* film franchise, whose leaders

⁴⁶⁸ Actor Handbook 2007, 41.

⁴⁶⁹ Tamela Graham, "All the World's Their Stage." *Curio* [Shenandoah Valley, VA] Summer 1992: 20.

⁴⁷⁰ Hap Erstein, "The Shenandoah troupe: Brevity is the soul of Will," *Washington Times* 8 July 1992: E1+.

⁴⁷¹ Program for *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1989.

are able to defeat the evil Empire by recovering the powerful secrets of the Jedi knights of long ago. (The metaphor becomes a frequent marketing trope for the Company, which I will return to later in this chapter.)

Tactics such as these, designed to reinvigorate the actor-audience relationship, proved to be remarkably successful at eliminating the crippling effects of ShakesFear among the primarily student audiences that were the bread and butter of the first decade of the Company's existence, and its archives contain countless letters from local high school teachers and college professors, impressed by the SSE's unique ability to engage young audience members. "You almost feel like you're at a football stadium," Professor Robbie McNallie recalls. "The students cheer and get really excited. They forget the experience they thought they were supposed to have for Shakespeare and respond on a basic level."⁴⁷² Much of the success of this technique among student audiences is undoubtedly due in part to the highly-improvisational environment fostered by universal lighting coupled with this degree of audience interaction. While this improvisational component of the SSE's performance style may prove exhilarating to audiences, it often proves to be as challenging for actors as it is rewarding. The Company's actor handbook acknowledges that while the,

"front rows of our audiences are often filled with people who want to be part of the action, the butt of the joke, or a fellow conspirator, . . . the scary part (and the part that takes some getting used to) is that every audience member you talk to will have a particular response and energy you need to use -- as if you were doing

⁴⁷² McNallie qtd. in Graham, Tamela 21.

an improv show. Without changing Shakespeare's lines, your job is to feed off the responses of audiences and turn their energy back into your scene.⁴⁷³

Actor Uzey Turner was quoted as saying that while the Company's style of incorporating the audience directly into the action of the play can be unpredictable for actors, it is "the funnest [*sic*] thing we do as part of our style." He added that the increased improvisation raises the stakes of every performance for actors because, "we never know how they're going to react. Some people you'll have come up on stage and steal the scene, and sometimes you'll have people who try to avoid eye contact and shrivel into their seats."⁴⁷⁴ Actress Miriam Donald says that while she found the idea "scary at first," she has learned to find comfort in the "different kind of community" that the technique creates. "It's no longer the audience and the actors -- we're one community sharing the same story."⁴⁷⁵ By requiring the actors to respond with specificity to each of these moments of direct contact, the Company provides its audience members with recollected images of the Bard that are more positive, immediate and personal than the memories of Shakespeare they recall from English classes. The relationship among audience members too is encouraged by the ability to see one another and their reception of the performance. This dynamic is furthered by another of the Company's signature Shakespearean staging practices -- the use of a deep $\frac{3}{4}$ thrust stage, which, it asserts, strengthens the sense of community among audience members. In promotional interviews, Cohen frequently reminds readers that, in

⁴⁷³ Actor Handbook 2007, 38.

⁴⁷⁴ Doug Gillett, "Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad, Bard?" *Burg* [Lynchburg, VA] 28 June 2000: 9-10.

⁴⁷⁵ Donald qtd. in Gillett 10.

Shakespeare's era, patrons came to the theatre "to be seen as well as to see," noting that "If you can't see the [other members of the] audience, you're missing part of the show."⁴⁷⁶

The physical proximity of the actors and the audience, paired with the Company's insistence that the performers both acknowledge and incorporate instances of audience interaction, often result in some of the most memorable and entertaining moments at SSE shows, and are frequently recounted by reviewers in order to provide readers with an idea of what it is like to be in the audience at one of the Company's productions. A review of its 1994 production of *Othello* in the *Chicago-Sun Times*, raves about a moment when one of the actors "borrowed a cigarette lighter from a woman on the aisle and used it to roast a marshmallow during a party scene."⁴⁷⁷ Another article recounts an anecdote from SSE's 1994 visit to Duke University in which, in the middle of an outdoor performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, when Petruchio dispatches his servant to fetch his spaniel Troilus, "the actor returned with a pet ferret borrowed from an audience member" and presented it to his master as "Troilus."⁴⁷⁸ While the Company brazenly takes advantage of anecdotes like this for publicity, in person, the novel and immediate appeal of the actor-audience connection is difficult to deny. The night I saw ASC's 2011 production of *A Comedy of Errors*, the most memorable moment of the performance occurred when a teenage audience member sitting in the "Juliet Balcony," located upstage of the thrust and about six feet above the actors on the stage, spilled his entire soda over the railing and onto

⁴⁷⁶ Edwards, Chris. "Blackfriars: Staunton goes Shakespeare." *C-Ville Weekly* [Charlottesville, VA] 18-24 Sept. 2001: 11.

⁴⁷⁷ Lon Grahne, "Othello Takes Express Lane: Troupe 'Unplugs' Shakespeare," *Chicago Sun-Times* 12 Aug. 1994: n.pag.

⁴⁷⁸ Paul Bonner, "Shakespeare Unplugged," *Herald Sun* [Durham, NC] 22 March 1996: 13.

the head of one of actors below. After comically pausing to wipe his face, the actor turned to the mortified offender and delivered his next line of dialogue (without changing the text) as a hilarious and charming reprimand. The incident became a running joke over the course of the evening; each time the actor in question came through one of the upstage entrances he engaged with the teen, shooting him fearful glances, pointing accusingly at him, and, whenever possible aiming his most insulting lines at the boy. By the end of the evening, the boy was no longer embarrassed by his mistake, but rather was thrilled at his ability to be a part of the action and with the continued willingness of the entire cast to incorporate him into their performance. At the end of the show, as the cast re-appeared to thank audience members as they left the theatre, I caught sight of the teen and his parents, still laughing, thanking the actors for “the best show ever!”

Still, while the Company’s desire to incorporate the audience in its performances has proved to be a popular tactic among its student audiences, more traditional theatregoers often complain that the increased connection between performers and audience members during SSE performances can be both alienating and distracting. At a 1999 touring production of *Macbeth* in Arkansas, one reviewer characterized the loud and rowdy behavior exhibited by high school students in the audience, (and encouraged by the actors’ continued acknowledgment of their reactions), as that of “Modern ‘groundlings’,” suggesting that, though the audience that night was separated by nearly 400 years from Shakespeare’s own audiences, “they evidently share a common trait -- no home training.”⁴⁷⁹ Ironically, the reviewer’s chief complaint, that “Shakespeare’s dialogue [was] drowned out by the unselfconsciously witless comments of

⁴⁷⁹Jones, Bill. “Modern ‘groundlings’ mar nice take on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* at UALR.” *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* 16 Mar. 1999: n.pag.

students who should have been given extra credit for not attending” the performance,⁴⁸⁰ seems to be exactly what the Company is interested in achieving -- an immediate and engaged actor-audience relationship, which it asserts characterized the theatre of Shakespeare’s own era.

For over a decade, the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express created a name for itself based on its rough and tumble Shakespeare, priding itself on its ability to perform in nearly any venue, with no technical support, the barest minimum of costumes and props, under a strict two-hour time limit. In promotional materials and in press interviews, Cohen referred to SSE’s particular aesthetic of economy as “Theatre of the Imagination,” referring to the fact that, due to the lack of elaborate sets and technical effects, Renaissance audiences were obliged to augment performances with their own creative imaginings in order to create the specific conditions and circumstances laid out by Shakespeare in his texts. According to Warren, the elements of the Company’s insistence on replicating the original conditions of performance in Shakespeare’s time, had uncovered the “secrets to successful Shakespeare which had been imprisoned and forgotten for centuries,” which “include a company of less than 15 actors, $\frac{3}{4}$ thrust staging, audience contact, universal lighting which illuminates the stage as well as the audience, and a constant acknowledgement of theatrical make-believe.”⁴⁸¹ Marketing pamphlets and press packets took aim at the technology-driven productions of Shakespeare, which had become popular in many more established Shakespeare theatres, suggesting,

If you were bored by the last Shakespeare production you saw, you probably should have been. Most Shakespeare productions try to win their audiences

⁴⁸⁰ Jones.

⁴⁸¹ Warren 1.

through spectacle, and Shakespeare companies get into a fatal spiral of costs -- more lights, more elaborate sets That's not Shakespeare, and -- worse -- it's not entertaining. . . . We want to bring Shakespeare's plays home from ponderous 3-hour culturethons and home to modern audiences by making the plays speak clearly and feel as immediate as rock and roll. . . . Our company, like Shakespeare's, doesn't rely on the machinery of technology: our act -- a living and involved audience -- is the same as his, and our special effects, like his, come from great words and ingenious acting.⁴⁸²

In passages such as these, which lay out the specifics of the Company's signature style, Cohen's rush to encourage audiences to view his Company's performance aesthetic as a radical re-discovery of the long-lost "secrets" to Shakespeare production, perhaps unintentionally, erases the contributions of other theatrical figures who experimented with Renaissance staging conditions, including William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society, which experimented with many of these stylistic choices in the 1880s and 1890s, as well as the work of Tyrone Guthrie and that of the Old Globe in the 1930s.

According to both Warren and Cohen, the Company's bare stage aesthetic was as much as reflection of the financial realities of the Company in its early years as it was an artistic decision. Yet despite this acknowledgement, in interviews, Cohen, somewhat arbitrarily, justifies the Company's sparse visual aesthetic by his suggestion that the choice further aligns SSE's concerns with those of Shakespeare himself: "Remember, Shakespeare was concerned with the economic situation too. He was generating text, in a way that he could get the most out of the

⁴⁸² Press Packet, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992, 6.

people he's got and keep it cheap."⁴⁸³ Likewise, in promotional materials, the Company frequently recalls Shakespeare as a shrewd businessman: "We are also going back to basics as a business. To survive Shakespeare had to sell tickets and keep his costs down. That's what we do, and we are seeking support from sponsors who believe that the arts are important to the life of this country, but who are leery of donating to organizations whose expenses outstrip their mission."⁴⁸⁴ Passages such as this, in defense of SSE's financial solvency simultaneously accuse more established Shakespeare companies of perpetrating unwarranted abuses against Shakespeare and his works.

Another example of the Company's dedication to producing plays with Shakespeare's own economic aesthetics can be seen in its use of doubling and gender-blind casting techniques. Doubling is just another of Shakespeare's trade secrets re-discovered by the Company -- one that is both historically accurate and supports SSE's institutional mission to produce Shakespeare's plays as he intended. Fundamentally, the Company suggests that doubling heightens the actor-audience relationship by allowing the audience "the joy of watching the same person play different parts, assume different postures, different voices," rewarding imagination on the part of the actor and the audience alike.⁴⁸⁵ However, as with many of the Company's signature performance choices, the practice of doubling has a very real material benefit for the company. Not only does doubling decrease the number of actors that the Company must hire, it emphasizes

⁴⁸³ Cohen qtd. in Erstein E1+.

⁴⁸⁴ Press Packet, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992.

⁴⁸⁵ Erstein E1+.

the portability of its troupes, a characteristic it capitalized upon in order to market their educational tours “portable Shakespeare Festivals.”⁴⁸⁶

“Most Shakespeare companies have 20-30 actors, but we have just 12, the same number as Shakespeare, and that means we’re portable. We’ll go anywhere in the Valley from Roanoke to Winchester. And since we perform Shakespeare’s works as they were first performed, without cumbersome sets, all we have to pack is our costumes and our props.”⁴⁸⁷

While the benefits, (both financial and aesthetic), of the Company’s decision to embrace doubling as a convention are clear, it seems an overstatement to refer to doubling as one of Shakespeare’s trade “secrets,” as it had been the standard in the Western performance tradition from the time of the ancient Greeks. Here, as elsewhere in its public pronouncements, SSE seems caught up in a history/memory confrontation, in which arguably inaccurate “memories” are in tension with documentable history. Still, Company actors and audience members alike have noted that the SSE’s strong reliance on this convention has a significant effect on audience reception.

Perhaps the best description of the effects of the Company’s use of doubling comes from Stephen Booth’s review of the company’s 1992 season in *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Booth begins his review of the Company’s 1991 season by telling us that, as a tenured professor, he had decided never to write a theatre review again, but announces that he has made an exception in the case of SSE, because after seeing them perform in Washington D.C., “I haven’t thought the same

⁴⁸⁶ The use of the term “festival” here is interesting, in that, after the 2005 ASC re-branding, Cohen takes great pains to abjure, as discussed in the third section of this chapter.

⁴⁸⁷ Press Release for *Richard III*, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1988.

since of Shakespeare or the theater.”⁴⁸⁸ Booth begins by asserting that the Company’s peculiar blend of historical stage conventions, employed to provide modern audiences with what he calls “the *kinds* of experiences” playgoers in Elizabethan London might have had, paired with continued, “unabashedly twentieth-century” cultural references, results in a style that he maintains results in, “one less barrier than is usual on the modern stage between action and audience.”⁴⁸⁹ Of the Company’s many historically-inspired staging conditions that Booth examines, he spends the most time extolling the virtues of SSE’s dedication to using double and triple casting, a phenomenon which he notes is compounded, in terms of audience reception, by the Company’s early implementation of a true rotating repertory schedule.⁴⁹⁰ Booth explains that the effect of seeing the same company of fifteen or fewer actors playing all of the roles in two or more Shakespearean plays “is that the productions insist that we notice the acting of the actors we would otherwise take for granted.”⁴⁹¹ He suggests that while the audience’s repeated, forced recognition of the doubling, (i.e. the recognition that the same actor who played Iago last night plays both Andrew Aguecheek in the following matinee and Tybalt the next evening), does somewhat increase the aesthetic distance between the audience and actor, (as the recognition results in the audience being momentarily taken out of the action of the play), it simultaneously increases the intimacy between the two, a pleasurable effect which he sees, in practice, as upholding the Company’s insistence on intensifying the actor-audience bond.

⁴⁸⁸ Stephen Booth, “The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43.4 (Winter 1992): 479.

⁴⁸⁹ Booth 479.

⁴⁹⁰ The Company’s first rotating repertory season was its second summer season, 1990. Since that time, the company has offered significant price reductions (up to half off the price of the first booking) to venues interested in hiring the troupe for more than one play.

⁴⁹¹ Booth 482.

But while the Company's practice of doubling upholds the kinship of its casting practices to those of Shakespeare's own troupe, SSE's use of women in its casts is an obvious historical discrepancy between the two. Not only does the Company use women, it frequently casts them in traditionally male roles, which its actresses perform as men. The Company's 1992 Season Program contains a rationale justifying its ahistorical use of women in its casts in almost entirely pragmatic terms:

- 1) The company wants to hire from a vast number of talented women actors;
- 2) As an equal opportunity employer, the SSE will not ignore over 50% of the population;
- 3) The SSE is committed to theatre in which our audience sees itself reflected.

We therefore attempt to hire actors from across the gender, ethnic, and racial spectrum.⁴⁹²

Ultimately, the Company suggests that its ahistorical casting choices are not a rejection of the conventions of Shakespeare's time, but rather one of the numerous modernizations employed by the Company in its attempt to amplify the approachability and relevance of Shakespeare among contemporary audience members. However, in its implementation, the practice has produced uneven, one might even argue troubling, results in terms of the equitable performance of gender. While cross-gendered casting is, in and of itself, neither particularly revolutionary nor egregious choice, the disparity with which it casts men in women's roles has the unintended effect of further othering the performance of the feminine. While the Company acknowledges that its choices may possibly reaffirm gender-normative ideals, it, rather pragmatically maintains that, in

⁴⁹² Program for 1992 Season, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992.

terms of audience response, many of its experimental attempts to use men in the roles of women have resulted in the audience's inability to see the choice as anything other than a parody of the feminine. In contrast, it suggests that its audiences are more receptive of the company's numerous uses of women playing men.⁴⁹³ Still, one might wish, as Paul Menzer laments in his review of the 2006 season, the Company would "challenge themselves," and the preconceptions of its audiences by casting men in dramatic female roles.⁴⁹⁴

The Company's aesthetic of economy can also be seen in its insistence on producing all of its plays in the "two hours' traffic of our stage" as set out by Shakespeare in the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*. The Company accomplishes this in three fundamental ways; it insists on continued action within and between the scenes, it demands that actors remove all pauses within and between lines, and it regularly makes cuts to Shakespeare's scripts. In fact, speed became one of the most defining characteristics of the Company's style and a focus of much of its marketing. Even its name was chosen, in part, as a reflection of its institutional dedication to speed:

Shenandoah is where we're from: *Shakespeare* is what we do . . . and *Express* [emphasizes] our shows are brisk -- freed from the massive sets and elaborate costumes that can turn 'two hours traffic on our stage' [*Romeo & Juliet*] into three hours of gridlock. We also think of *Express* as a verb: our concentration is on the

⁴⁹³ Warren discusses this "unfortunate" casting reality in his Personal Interview, 2010.

⁴⁹⁴ Menzer 101-102.

words, on Shakespeare ‘expressed’ in the auditory sense. It’s Shakespeare’s words, but it’s our language.⁴⁹⁵

Here, the Company asserts its ownership over the Bard’s language in order to justify its choice to make significant cuts to his scripts, suggesting that Shakespeare’s own company used edited versions of scripts. “[J]ust as Shakespeare’s company itself did, we edit the text to a working script, faithful to the original language for Shakespeare buffs but exciting and quick enough for the newest play-goer.”⁴⁹⁶ While there exists a long history of Shakespeare companies that have chosen to focus on speed and brevity, in its internal literature, both Warren and Cohen choose to justify SSE’s emphasis on speed by citing the material conditions of Elizabethan theatres:

I believe Shakespeare (and every Renaissance playwright) wrote continuous dialogue to keep the audience’s attention when there were no sets or lighting effects on a basically bare stage. I believe Shakespeare was writing material to be performed for an often rowdy, mobile audience that would get tired if actors weren’t talking. The invention and use of lighting allowed actors to become self-indulgent, altering styles to include gaping pauses in delivering Shakespeare’s dialogue. . . . Before directed lighting, when daylight lit both the audience and the stage, the only thing to direct the crowd’s attention to the stage was a speaking actor. All this stuff means you will be encouraged to find objectives, intentions, actions, and motivations which keep your characters talking. . . . Once the

⁴⁹⁵ “Shenandoah Shakespeare Express Returns!” Shenandoah Shakespeare Express Press Release, 3 August 1995.

⁴⁹⁶ Press Release for *Richard III*, 1998.

thoughts are coming out cleanly, clearly and completely, we will explore speeding up the shifts to keep the pace cracking.”⁴⁹⁷

Not only does the passage above support the Company’s assertions about the importance of universal lighting in producing Shakespeare’s plays, it also reinforces the Company’s assertions that the “self-indulgent” theatrical productions of other companies are responsible for disseminating negative recollections of the Bard.

As a rule, Company productions without an intermission run under two hours while those with intermissions come in under two and a half hours, however, that time limit includes the action of choreographed fight scenes and musical interludes, both of which are featured prominently in the Company’s productions. In most cases directors are tasked with making their own cuts to scripts, keeping in mind that the Company “opposes amputation and supports liposuction. We ask that directors edit by a careful thinning process – word by word – rather than by lopping off speeches, scenes, and characters.”⁴⁹⁸ In the early years of the SSE, the decision to keep run times short supported its identity as an educational touring company; short shows not only appealed to young, restless audiences, but were a necessity in order to fit into highly-regimented schedule of most public schools. Cohen has also demonstrated a fondness for using the Company’s trademark for brevity as an excuse to cheekily suggest that, “We care about our audiences’ butts.”⁴⁹⁹ The majority of critics have found the Company’s brisk pace a welcome change to the “many theatrical ‘runs’ [that] actually trudge, shuffle or stagger across the

⁴⁹⁷ Warren qtd. in Valley Season Company Packet, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1996, 2.

⁴⁹⁸ Actor Handbook 2007, 16.

⁴⁹⁹ Cohen qtd. in Bowes.

stage,”⁵⁰⁰ and have praised its ability to “pare the Bard’s work without turning into Shakespeare Lite.”⁵⁰¹ Several, like Stephen Booth, have even declared that its productions “spoiled me for less rigorous Shakespeare productions,” noting that after having seen the SSE’s 1991 season:

Later in the summer of 1991, productions at Ashland that would not, I think, have felt slow to me a year before seemed to drag. And even the generally splendid stripped-down, high-energy Nagle Jackson *Antony and Cleopatra* at the California (formerly Berkeley) Shakespeare Festival had my mind periodically muttering “Get on with it.”⁵⁰²

However others have found the sheer speed of speech disorienting. According to one critic, “Their very pace can be a problem for cognition; the burst of each scene on top of the ending of the scene before it can leave the spectators no time to reflect and grasp a deeper sense of what is happening.”⁵⁰³

Still, aside from the occasional negative review, critical response to SSE’s innovative, economic performance aesthetic has been extremely positive, providing the Company with numerous catchy, descriptions of its signature style, many of which have been appropriated for use in its own promotional literature: including “no-frills,” “back-to-the-basics,” “Shakespeare Straight,”⁵⁰⁴ “Barebones Shakespeare with attitude,” (*Christian Science Monitor*) “a lean, mean

⁵⁰⁰ Grahnke.

⁵⁰¹ Bowes.

⁵⁰² Booth 479.

⁵⁰³ Mary Jane Freeman and Paul Gallagher, “A National Shakespeare Touring Company,” *EIR* 29 (Sept. 2000): 66.

⁵⁰⁴ Ron Rosenbaum, *The Shakespeare Wars: Clashing Scholars, Public Fiascoes, Palace Coups*, (New York: Random House, 2006) 328.

Shakespeare machine,” (*Daily News Record*) and “unadorned bardolatry,” (*Washington Post*). When the *Chicago Sun Times* wrote that, “Like MTV’s ‘Unplugged’ rock concerts, which stress vocals and lyrics over high-tech sonic effects, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express emphasizes the playwright’s language and the actors’ expressiveness and versatility,”⁵⁰⁵ the Company transformed the comparison into a new marketing slogan with pop culture appeal for the 1990s: “Shakespeare Unplugged.”⁵⁰⁶

Still, what primarily distinguishes SSE’s work from the work of other companies that experiment with historical staging conventions is its insistence on the paradoxical, often gratuitous, employment of modern pop culture references and citational humor. Just as it does with its economic approach to productions, the Company defends its signature use of contemporary cultural references through its assertion that the choice recalls the staging conditions of Shakespeare’s own theatres. The most visible example of SSE’s dedication to presenting Shakespeare that is immediate and relevant to contemporary audiences is its use of modern clothing as costumes. In its first few seasons, Company actors were costumed in matching modern dress -- originally blue jeans, black sneakers and white tee-shirts – and employed a variety of costume props designed to distinguish character, rank, and role,” and to clarify moments of actor doubling.⁵⁰⁷ Company literature attributes this choice, not to its institutional desire to make its actors and productions more accessible to its original, student audience base, but rather to its desire to recall the staging conditions of Shakespeare’s own era.

⁵⁰⁵ Grahmke.

⁵⁰⁶ Cohen qtd. in Program for 1994 Touring Season, Folger Library Performances, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1994.

⁵⁰⁷ Program for 1995 Season, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992, 3.

Internal Company literature instructs actors to characterize its costuming choices in the following way: “[W]e are not bound to Elizabethan dress in our productions, since Renaissance companies performed in the clothes of their day. The tights and pumpkin pants they wore were the equivalent of our modern Levis.”⁵⁰⁸ This assertion, like so many of the Company’s other truth claims, elides or omits significant historical details in order to legitimize its choices. While it is true that Elizabethan actors wore contemporary clothes, SSE’s assertion that pumpkin pants were the Levis of their day fails to acknowledge that Renaissance costumes were, most frequently, the donated but lavish cast-offs of wealthy company patrons and were, most likely, intended to serve as signifiers of the nobility and power of the regal characters that wore them. In contrast, the SSE’s early insistence on matching, utilitarian, contemporary clothes, not only aided the its goals of speed and doubling -- “The Express players, dressed for speed in black high-top sneakers, sprint through their version of William Shakespeare’s tragedy. . . with no intermission, no laborious set changes and no pauses between scenes. They completed Wednesday’s opening performance [of *Othello*] in 135 minutes,”⁵⁰⁹ -- it allowed its young audiences to perceive Company actors as approachable, contemporary peers. Financially, the Company was all too happy to take advantage of the pop culture appeal and marketing power of certain contemporary clothing brands. For several seasons in the beginning of the 1990s, SSE was able to secure corporate support from the Bugle Boy jeans company, which also supplied its actors with matching jeans to be used on tour. The relationship also allowed SSE to benefit from the popular success of a series of Bugle Boy television commercials which began airing in 1988, featuring

⁵⁰⁸ Blackfriars Tour Script, American Shakespeare Center, 2006, 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Grahnke.

beautiful women in a sports cars pulling over to ask rugged-looking men, “Excuse me, are those Bugle Boy Jeans you’re wearing?”

The Company’s first logo also reflected its contemporary costume choices. The graphic, (referred to here as the “Crown and Converse Logo”), features a drawing of a pair of black high-top sneakers, sporting a picture of Shakespeare’s face on the shoes in the circle that normally bears the “Converse” brand logo, with a crown resting on them.⁵¹⁰



Figure 50: Converse and Crown Logo (1995 Season Program, back cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1995.

While the logo represents a fundamental element of its production aesthetic, the idea for the graphic came from the material reality that in early seasons several Company members realized that they already owned matching Converse high-tops that they could use as part of a trademark, matching performance attire.

Modern costumes allowed the Company to alleviate ShakesFear among its student audiences by presenting its actors, not as elitist, classically-trained Shakespeareans, but rather as

⁵¹⁰ Program for 1995 Season, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992, back cover art.

approachable contemporaries of its largely student audiences. By presenting the Bard's iconic characters as more recognizable modern character types, the SSE found a way to make the potentially alienating period texts instantly accessible to a new generation. Through the use of contemporary costume pieces, *As You Like It's* philosophizing Jacques was reimagined as a meditating hippie and *The Taming of the Shrew's* Kate become a metal head under the high school bleachers.



Figure 51: Jacques as Hippie in 1996 *As You Like It* at Duke University. (Sweet Smoke of Rhetoric Tour Program, photo by Khrissy Shields, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1997, 7.)

Figure 52: Actress Joyce Peifer as *Shrew's* Kate in *Judas Priest Tee*. (Tenth Anniversary Season Program, photo by Jim Warren, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1998, 3.)

In terms of marketing graphics, the Company regularly depicts its actors as entertaining, young people having fun, a strategy which, by extension, lends its particular brand of Shakespeare an air of levity and accessibility not ordinarily associated with the Bard. The tactic is evident both in production stills and in general promotional shots of the actors, and has served as a defining characteristic of the Company's promotional photography for more than a decade.



Figure 53: Production Still (1993 Valley Season Brochure, cover photo, Christina Chamberst and Jeff Pierce (performers), Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, July 1993.)

Figure 54: Scoff and Grin Tour Promotional Photo (Promotional Photo for *Dr. Faustus*. Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2001.)

Figure 55: Tongues Like Knives Company Photo (Promotional Photo of SSE Touring Company, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1994.)

Another way that the SSE found to incorporate contemporary references into Shakespeare's classic texts was through its use of music. Frequently, performances begin with the audience being serenaded by Company actors performing both faithful and parodic versions of popular, rock music. In her 1992 profile piece, Tamlea Graham recounts how two Converse-clad young actors prepared the audience for the entertainment to come by warming up the audience with songs by the Rolling Stones and Paul Simon. She notes that, "Right from the start, they let the audience know that this isn't going to be an average Shakespeare production. The contemporary music, casual dress, and unconventional stage create an atmosphere that insists

upon audience participation. The SSE's approach to Shakespeare makes the plays synonymous with contemporary entertainment."⁵¹¹

In addition to pre-preshow music, the Company regularly uses contemporary music as musical interludes and intermission entertainment, as well as incorporating it within the plays where Shakespeare calls for songs. According to Cohen, "Although Shakespeare gave us lyrics . . . we cannot be sure of their melodies. We can assume, however they were familiar tunes -- as are ours."⁵¹² Based on its insistence that Shakespeare's own productions would have been filled with music of his era, the Company has used the lack of original scores as, "an opportunity to combine contemporary musical styles with Elizabethan lyrics. The result is emblematic of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express' general approach: a rigorous commitment to the text and the mission of connecting it to our audiences."⁵¹³ The results are often the most remarked upon moments of the Company's performance, providing spectators with indelible memories of their evenings with the SSE's brand of Shakespeare. More often than not, pre-show song choices either foreshadow or editorialize on the actions of the play: the modern-rock classic "Tainted Love" as an intro the 2001 touring production of *Midsummer*, or Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man" and The Police's obsession-based "Every Breath You Take" before a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Using modern rock music not only provided the Company with the "street cred" necessary to attract its young audiences, it effectively labeled SSE as the "cool" Shakespeare Company. The choice to capitalize on its rebellious rock identity can be seen in

⁵¹¹ Graham, Tamela 18.

⁵¹² Program for 1995 Season, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 14.

⁵¹³ Program for 1995 Season, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 14.

promotional photos, (like this Company photo featuring a rag-tag group of rebels in leather biker jackets),



Figure 56: Promotional Photo of Scoff and Grin Touring Company. ASC Staunton Archives.

and extends to its recollections of Shakespeare himself, as in this merchandise booth flier featuring a caricature of Shakespeare encouraging patrons to purchase promotional tee shirts that contains the copy, “Willy says: ‘These guys rock!’”



Figure 57: "Willy Says. . ." Merchandise Table Flier, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1995.

The final element of the Company’s production aesthetic is arguably its least historically accurate, most institutionally pervasive, and most regularly criticized, namely its embrace of humor. Unlike other elements of its performance aesthetic, the Company wisely makes very few, if any, direct claims concerning the historical accuracy of its assertion that Shakespeare’s plays were intended to be played in a much more comedic fashion than ordinarily associated with the

Bard's staid, academic reputation. Still, the inability to directly connect this focus on humor to the theatrical conventions of Renaissance playhouses has not stopped the Company from rhetorically conflating it with other, more verifiable historical claims as to how "Shakespeare himself" practiced theatre as in this excerpt from a 1989 press release:

It is our contention that the works of the world's greatest playwright have been burdened with and sterilized by the traditions and trappings associated with modern theatre. Based on Shakespeare's original theatrical principles, our shows stress speed, audience contact, humor and clarity on a thrust stage with minimal props and universal lighting."⁵¹⁴

Further, in promotional interviews, many Company members have insisted that even Shakespeare's tragedies were intended to be far funnier than modern audiences believe them capable of being.

But far from simply mining texts for the comedy intended by Shakespeare, the Company acknowledges and even encourages the comedy that inevitably arises from the juxtaposition of Shakespeare's classical texts with the Company's more contemporary character portrayals and modern soundtrack, counting on these anachronisms to function in performance like an "in" joke, allowing actors additional opportunities to bond with its modern-day audience. And, while the Company is known for its minimal use of props and costumes, it is rarely above a sight gag, especially if it encourages an audience to engage in the action of the play. Yet despite its willingness to go for the easy laugh, the Company has repeatedly and clearly drawn a line in the sands of comedy at engaging in bawdy humor. Despite Shakespeare's own frequent embrace of

⁵¹⁴ Press Release for *The Taming of the Shrew* Tour, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express 24 Jan. 1989, 1.

the blue, the Company is firmly opposed to adding bawdy humor that is not explicitly called for in the text. While the Company's actor handbook provides the following rationale for this particular restriction, there seems no doubt that the choice is closely tied to the Company's original identity as a touring company focused on presenting to young audiences. While the Company

encourages finding and using every bawdy reference and double entendre in Shakespeare's plays. . . . Creating a bawdy joke not supported by the text is a lose/lose/lose situation. We *lose* the real meaning of the line. When audiences suspect that we have added in a bawdy joke, we *lose* the impact of the bawdy joke Shakespeare actually wrote. By opening ourselves up for accusations that we are making Shakespeare 'dirty,' we *lose* audience and funding.⁵¹⁵

Often the only criticism included in reviews of SSE productions revolves around the Company's choice to defy traditional audience expectations by adding humor to traditionally "straight" characters or dramatic moments. A critic from the Eastern Mennonite University's newspaper, *The Weathervane*, complained that the appearances of the ghosts to *Richard III* in Act Five, scene three, were inappropriately comedic, suggesting that, "The little song-and-dance routine by the ghosts, whose appearance ultimately makes Richard realize the evil of his actions, should create a surreal and bizarre, dream-like setting, appropriate for such visitations. Unfortunately, the scene is played for laughs -- not as the solemn occasion that it should be."⁵¹⁶ Likewise, a reviewer for *EIR* accused SSE's comic skills of leading its actors "overboard" in the

⁵¹⁵ Actor Handbook 2007, 17.

⁵¹⁶ Kain 13.

Company's 1997 production of *Twelfth Night*, spawning "a series of mischaracterizations, exemplified by the portrayal of the melancholy Lady Olivia -- acted brilliantly, but wrongly -- as another comic character along with her clown and her retainers."⁵¹⁷ While several reviewers have noted that the degree of latitude given to the actors to indulge in humor as a means of connecting with the audience audiences can result in "moments when the entire cast, egged on by belly laughs from the audience, started to mug and slide into burlesque," most conclude that while audiences should "be prepared to groan at some of the sight gags," "chances are you'll still be laughing throughout this subtly well-conceived fun house of a show."⁵¹⁸ Still others have remarked that by allowing for less-conventional, potentially humorous character interpretations of Shakespeare's most iconic characters the Company is able to shed new light on his classic texts. One such example came from Terry Teachout of *The Wall Street Journal*, who wrote that the Company's 2006 production of *Othello* was "illuminating" in its choice to portray the title character as crisp and soft-spoken, and pair him with an "unabashedly sexy Desdemona" and a "balding, middle-aged clown" of an Iago.⁵¹⁹ Teachout characterizes the result as being somewhat unsettling, but delights in describing the way that the laughter-filled production "made the play's climactic explosion of madness and violence all the more shocking" to unsuspecting audience members.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Freeman 67.

⁵¹⁸ William Triplett, "Shenandoah's Sassy 'Midsummer': 'Midsummer' Madness Bottom's Up!," *Washington Post* 28 May 1997: n.p.

⁵¹⁹ Terry Teachout, "Shakespeare, Straight Up," *Wall Street Journal* 15 September 2006, n.p.

⁵²⁰ Teachout.

The SSE's embrace of the comedic possibilities of Shakespeare is exceeded only by the comic tone that has defined the copy in its marketing and promotional materials since the Company's inception. This trademark, institutional sense of humor seems to be an extension of Warren's own informal, irreverent, geek-oriented, citational comedy stylings, paired with a public persona of Cohen, designed, according to minutes from a meeting with a local PR advisor, to market the professor as a "persuasive con man" in order to focus on their goal of "selling hip Shakespeare."⁵²¹

Early uses of humor in the Company's marketing and promotional materials seem to be designed to define its work in direct opposition to the more serious productions of the traditional Shakespeare establishment, as in this early marketing pamphlet, which hammers home the Company's anti-establishment identity by replacing its name in a version of the Converse and Crown Logo with the label "the UnRoyal Shakespeare Company."



Figure 58: UnRoyal Shakespeare Company (1992 Season Program, back cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992.)

The copy for the pamphlet promises to put the fun back in Shakespeare:

“An Evening Of Shakespeare With The SSE Will Surprise You. . . [I]f you think of a Shakespeare evening as a bunch of folks in coats and ties trying to

⁵²¹ PR Meeting Minutes, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 3 Sept. 1991.

understand a bunch of actors in tights, then you'd better get ready for something different. We don't recommend you wear a coat and tie (even if you're a guy.) We do require shirts (even if you're a guy.) **And if you think the stuff's too serious, you may be confusing the real thing (that's us) with the stuff you had to learn in school.** We put the fun, the blood, and the guts back into the plots. **And if you think Shakespeare's plays are too hard to understand then you're in for the biggest surprise of all** because we use Shakespeare's words, but we speak your language.⁵²²

The informal and irreverent comedy of the company's promotional materials is best exemplified by the writing in the Company's seasonal newsletter, the *Shakespeare Carrier*, (which bore the apropos subtitle of the "official propaganda sheet of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express"). In this publication Cohen, Warren, and other Company members were allowed near-full reign to be as charmingly humorous as possible, a tactic intended to endear the Company to its loyal followers: an odd group of neo-Shakespeareans who relished the SSE's commemoration of a more modern, more humanized, more hilarious Shakespeare... one who would make as good a drinking buddy as a poetry teacher.

⁵²² Valley Season Pamphlet 1992, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1992, 2. (The use of bold type is from the original document.)



Figure 59: Shakespeare Winking (*Shakespeare Carrier*, cover art, Summer 1994, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express.)

The first issues of the *Carrier* were designed to keep patrons in Virginia apprised of the (mis)adventures of the Company's touring troupes, and used SSE's signature informal and irreverent sense of humor to extend and maintain the close actor-audience relationship that had converted so many in its audiences into enthusiastic Shakespeareans and diehard SSE fans. Issues of the *Carrier* included accounts of the Company's most recently completed tour in the form of a brief and hilarious travel journal, kept by each tour's appointed "Historian." These journal entries include successes, failures, road side mishaps, all of which combine to further the Company's casual and approachable feel, allowing patrons to feel a strong, personal connection to the players, even as they trekked across the country.

The Company's proclivity towards pop culture references is also exemplified by its frequent citation of George Lucas' *Star Wars* franchise, a choice due in no small part to Warren's obsession with the films since childhood. While marketing materials, press releases, and the *Carrier* are filled with references to the films, the best example of the Company's embrace of its metaphorical connection to Lucas's fictional epic can best be seen in the introduction to the Company's 1997 Rough Music Tour. This SSE parody writes the Company's

early institutional history in the language of the film's epic battle between the Evil Empire and the courageous Rebel Alliance. In it, two "Modern Jedi Shakespeare Knights" from "The Chicken Planet of Harrisonburg," "Obi-Ralph-One Cohenobi" and "Jim Warren Walker," begin a "rebellion against the dark side of the Shakespeare Force." Having searched the galaxy in order to "assemble a mighty fighting force of eleven trainees," the two heroes "tirelessly trained teams" of Jedi Knights, capable of "slashing Imperial pauses from Shakespeare with their Light Folios" and bringing the good side Shakespeare Force back to audiences everywhere.⁵²³

But by far, in marketing and promotional material, the Company's strongest comic suit has proven to be self-deprecating humor, with the sharpest barbs being reserved for discussions of its often dire financial straits. Even when begging for money, the Company's rhetoric seems less desperate than too-cool-for-school. The Autumn 1993 issue of the *Carrier* specially re-titled its regularly featured "We Ain't Too Proud to Beg" column, the "'We Ain't too Proud to Write Grants' Department," in order to boast that that the Company had secured a grant from the NEA, ("The Holy Grail of all non-profit groups"), which would allow them: "to take our brand of Shakespeare (which is of course Shakespeare's brand of Shakespeare) across America and into the classrooms," and "turn twenty-four academics into folio-thumping Shakespeare zealots who will spread the word to their students that Shakespeare can be as fresh, modern, and topical as modern entertainments."⁵²⁴ First, the comic tone of the piece belies the Company's more significant assertion that the historical circumstances of Elizabethan theatre practice, not only somehow constitutes a "brand," but that both the SSE and Shakespeare share that same brand.

⁵²³ Star Wars/SSE Parody -- Proofing Draft. Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1997.

⁵²⁴ *Shakespeare Carrier* Autumn 1993. Shenandoah Shakespeare, 3.

Second, the passage's use of religious language clearly sets up a metaphor in which the holy word of Shakespeare is disseminated by his faithful prophets at the SSE who are dedicated to converting followers everywhere to the one true means of worship. The evocation is particularly ironic given the lengths that Cohen goes to in other interviews to assert that his brand of Shakespeare is dedicated to banishing over-worshipful recollections of the Bard. Further, while the image of an army of Folio-thumping, Converse-clad Shakespearians is certainly not without humor, the Company's dedication to growing its supporters by the process of conversion would become a rhetorical sticking point later in its history.

The Company extended its well-known penchant for mocking its financial situation into a full-blown comic trope in the section on the Company's history in its tenth anniversary season program. The program includes a chronicle of the Company's history and features blocked off sections of text titled, "And how poor were we?" which recounts some of the more dire circumstances faced by the company in its early years. Hardships detailed in the Company's narrative include having actors provide their own costumes and props, not having enough money for the film for a group photo, having to use Warren's apartment as the mailing address for the company, and using his powder-blue station wagon as their only means of transporting the fourteen-member touring acting company (none of whom were paid for their participation for the first few seasons) to performances. As the Company matured, promotional press articles made much of comparing its original \$500 budget in 1998, which it wistfully recalled meant that Company members had "to sleep in sleeping bags on people's floors as we travelled around Virginia," to its 2000 budget of nearly \$500,000.⁵²⁵ SSE's continued reference to its financial

⁵²⁵ Gillett 9.

hardships is not only humorous, it served to continually re-construct the Company as the underdogs of the Shakespeare world, heretics of the church of Shakespeare, dedicated to liberating the genius of his works from 400 years of overblown production history, and restoring Shakespeare to the modern everyman. Despite the tenuousness of its claims on historical accuracy, by the time the SSE reached its fifth anniversary in 1992, the little-Shakespeare-company-that-could was able to boast that it had performed “in more places throughout America than any other touring company.”⁵²⁶

4.2 SHENANDOAH SHAKESPEARE: GROWING UP AND SETTLING DOWN

Though the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express originally staked its reputation on its identity as a touring company of Shakespeare rebels, by the early 1990s the Company had already begun to show signs that it was interested in becoming a more established force within the Shakespeare community. In 1990, encouraged by the critical success of its first few seasons, the rag-tag company took a turn towards the traditional by adding several notable Shakespeare scholars to their Board of Advisors, including David Bevington, Barbara Mowat, George Walton Williams, as well as director Jerry Zales, actress Judi Dench, and actor/producer/founder of the International Globe Centre in London Sam Wanamaker. The Company rounded out its new board of well-established Shakespeareans with a few of its own veteran actors and some of its more well-connected first guest directors, including Mary Hartman and Kevin Coleman from

⁵²⁶ Valley Season Touring Pamphlet 1992, 2.

Shakespeare & Company, Murray Ross of TheatreWorks in Colorado Springs, Tom Berger of The Malone Society and Saint Lawrence University, and Peggy O'Brien, who served as educational director of the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Appointing these well-respected members of the theatrical academy alongside notable successes in the field of Shakespeare production exhibits intent on the part of the Company both to legitimize its status within the existing Shakespeare establishment and to assert the veracity of its assertions about Shakespeare and the way his works were intended to be staged. The move helped pave the way for the Company's ambitious plans for expansion during the 1990s, even as it aligned the Company with some of the same institutions against which it had previously defined its aesthetic (i.e. the RSC and Shakespeare academics). It was also during this early transitional period that the Company began to use a new graphic on its promotional and marketing materials: a lower case "sse."



Figure 60: sse logo (1997 Valley Season Brochure, back cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express.)

The simplicity of the logo not only mirrored SSE's economic production aesthetic, it demonstrated the Company's desire to mature as an institution and its continued delight at its junior status within the larger establishment.

Another early sign of the Company's desire to be seen as more than a rag-tag band of young Shakespeare enthusiasts was its 1992 decision to "settle down," and dedicate a portion of its season to producing what it called the Valley Season, a month-long run of its three play

season at the Dayton Learning Center. As part of the Company's institutional goal to strengthen ties between the Company and the Shenandoah community that served as its base of operations, the Valley Season was marketed as a social event for locals who were also invited to cap off the run with a Fourth of July celebration -- "complete with hot dogs, baked beans and the occasional runaway Frisbee."⁵²⁷ An article in the *Carrier* covering the Company's first experiment with settling down noted that the month-long run "was made all the more enjoyable and challenging" by coordinating the Valley Season with the SSE's new workshop entitled 'Bringing Shakespeare Home.'⁵²⁸ Funded by the Company's first successful grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the ten-day workshop offered twenty high-school teachers from across the state the opportunity to learn new, more active classroom strategies for working with Shakespeare's texts. The article ends by noting that the Company had successfully converted these teachers who could now be counted "among our greatest advocates in the battle against 'Shakesfear' and the Rarefied British Accent School of Shakespearean Thought,"⁵²⁹ a somewhat contradictory notion given the recent notable additions to its Board of Advisors.

Still, the Valley Season presented a number of challenges for the SSE. Initially the Company worried that its rock 'n' roll take on Shakespeare would not play well among local audiences where the average age of the spectators would be significantly older than the audiences it had become accustomed to while on tour. On a financial level, the Valley Season stretched the Company's resources. Until 1992, the SSE had been able to operate entirely on

⁵²⁷ *Shakespeare Carrier* Spring 1993, 2.

⁵²⁸ *Shakespeare Carrier* Spring 1993, 2.

⁵²⁹ *Shakespeare Carrier* Spring 1993, 2.

earned income, owing to its identity as a touring company. It had never had much overhead to speak of, and certainly nothing, such as the rent on a venue, that needed to be paid before the Company performed. Ultimately, the gamble to settle down paid off. In the second Valley Season, the SSE was not only able find local businesses and arts organizations to underwrite all of its performances, it doubled its attendance from the previous Valley Season.⁵³⁰ Yet even as SSE focused on growing its resident season, it continued to expand its touring efforts, and in 1995, found it necessary to form a secondary touring company in order to meet increased demands for its tour bookings. In another moment of historical recall, the Company chose to differentiate between the two by calling the its original troupe the “Elizabeth” company and the new troupe the “James” company, in reference to the ruling monarchs of Shakespeare’s lifetime.

Ultimately, the Valley Season served as an experimental prelude to the Company’s first institutional re-branding in 1999, when it announced its intention to establish a permanent home base of operations in the Shenandoah Valley and produce a year-long resident season while continuing to maintain its touring troupes. To mark this significant change in its identity, the Company dropped the “Express” from its name and became known simply as Shenandoah Shakespeare (S2).⁵³¹ But Cohen’s goal was not simply to create a sit-down theatre company, his aim was to establish Shenandoah Shakespeare in Staunton as “one of America’s top Destination-Shakespeare cities.”⁵³² In an article in the *Carrier* announcing the new brand name, Cohen also revealed that the wide variety of long-term projects planned for the Company would be kicked

⁵³⁰ *Shakespeare Carrier* Autumn 1993, 1.

⁵³¹ The decision to use “S2” as the abbreviation for Shenandoah Shakespeare is explained by Cohen as having arisen from the desire not to be associated with the more dubious acronym “SS.”

⁵³² *Shakespeare Carrier* Fall 1999, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1.

off by a \$2.7 million capital campaign for the construction of a 300-seat replica of the Blackfriars Playhouse, (slated to open in the Spring of 2001), and the subsequent plan to construct a 1,500-seat replica of London's second Globe Theatre, (scheduled to open in 2005). In the article, Cohen notes that the new name was intended to "serve as an umbrella title over the multi-faceted entity we are becoming."⁵³³ Other changes planned for the newly christened Shenandoah Shakespeare included the creation of a "comprehensive, cutting-edge research center and scores of new educational programs for Shakespeareans of all ages,"⁵³⁴ and a new Master's Degree program in Shakespeare and Performance to be administered by a consortium of Virginia colleges and universities and taught by instructors from the theatre company. Still, the Company reassured its current ranks of teacher and student supporters that its transformation into a destination Shakespeare theatre would neither change its signature performance conventions or aesthetics nor diminish its dedication to touring. As proof of the Company's intention to remain faithful to the style and format that had made it so successful it announced an expansion of its touring efforts, which would continue to use the name Shenandoah Shakespeare Express.

In interviews, Cohen has often recalled that his experience leading student trips to British Shakespeare heritage sites in the early 1990s provided the inspiration for creating the company's own reconstructed theatre space. Cohen's quest to build "an Elizabethan indoor theatre in Staunton which would be a major attraction for students, tourists, and the theatre-going public" began as early as 1995, when he began contacting influential community and business leaders in

⁵³³ *Shakespeare Carrier* Fall 1999, 1.

⁵³⁴ *Shakespeare Carrier* Fall 1999, 1.

order to float his plan for a replica theatre.⁵³⁵ In the summer of 1995, Joe and Evy Hartman, the operators of the Fredrick House Bed and Breakfast, inspired by one of the SSE's workshops on Shakespearean staging, called Cohen and asked him to find a way to bring Shakespeare to Staunton. After contacting a number of notable citizens in order to feel out the potential for local support, the Company made plans to relocate to Staunton. While the small town of Staunton (with its population of nearly 24,000 people) was remarkably similar to many others in the Shenandoah Valley, it did have a few advantages over its neighbors. Only thirty miles from the larger city of Harrisonburg, Staunton, founded in 1747, was known for its historic architecture (boasting over 1000 buildings listed on the National Historic Register) and was home to several other cultural attractions, including the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace, the Theatre at the Lime Kiln and the Museum of American Frontier Culture, and was in close proximity to established tourist locations such as the Natural Bridge and the Blue Ridge Mountain Skyline Drive, Shenandoah National Park, Jefferson's Monticello, Madison's Montpelier, and Monroe's Ash Lawn-Highland.⁵³⁶ Staunton was also home to Mary Baldwin College, which had hosted SSE since its first production in 1988. But just because the Company was sold on Staunton as its choice for the home of its new theatre didn't mean that Staunton was sold on the idea of becoming a destination Shakespeare town; and so began the Company's prolonged efforts to sell Staunton on its own value as a company and on the value of Shakespeare an "attraction."

The Company formally initiated its plans for the Blackfriars in 1999 by forming a "vision committee," comprised of corporate and community leaders from Staunton and Augusta County,

⁵³⁵ Cohen, Ralph Alan. Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Porter. 1 Feb. 1996.

⁵³⁶ Jane Wooldridge, "Shakespeare is Staunton," *Free Lance-Star* [Fredrickburg, VA] 27 April 2002: E1-E2.

who selected a site for the construction of the Blackfriars Playhouse in downtown Staunton on Market Street, near the proposed site for a city parking garage. That early committee then assembled a Strategic Planning Task Force, including local business, government and community leaders, whose primary responsibility was to devise an achievable five-year strategy for the project. It was decided that the Shenandoah Shakespeare Center Capital Plan would be divided into two phases: the first phase would require five years and \$2.7 million to complete and would include S2's relocation to Staunton, the construction and opening of an "Elizabethan Playhouse" and the establishment of a Center for Education, while the second phase, estimated at \$7 million and would focus on the "Creation of the New Globe Theatre." The Company used the findings of this task force as the basis for a development packet that was distributed to local businesses and cultural organizations, and arts patrons in an attempt to sell the residents of Staunton on Shenandoah Shakespeare's proposed replica theatre.⁵³⁷

Fundamental to the Company's ability to appeal to Staunton citizens was its potential ability to serve as a tourist draw. In a slick, new development packet entitled, "Brave New Stage: A Five-Year program of Cultural, Educational, and Economic Development," S2 laid out its plan to "attract tourists students, and lovers of Shakespeare from Virginia and across the eastern United States" to the new "Shakespeare State," causing people to recall that "Virginia is for Shakespeare Lovers,"⁵³⁸ a claim that inspired a series of ads used by the Company during its

⁵³⁷ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet. Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1999.

⁵³⁸ The slogan is also a play on the Virginia state tourism slogan at the time -- "Virginia is for Lovers."

2000 and 2001 seasons,⁵³⁹ which featured a graphic of Shakespeare's profile turned on his ear in such a way that he becomes a depiction of the mountainous Shenandoah region.

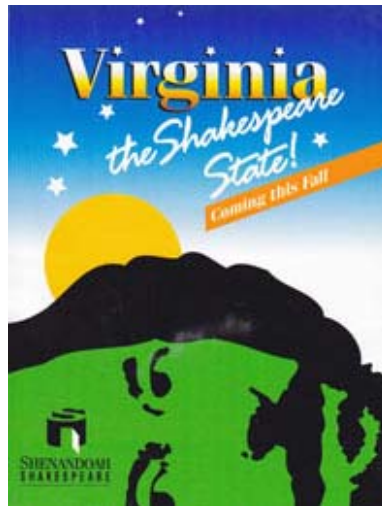


Figure 61: Shakespeare as Mountain Range ("Virginia: the Shakespeare State!" Ad, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2001.)

The development packet begins with numerous endorsements of the Company from local notables including Cynthia H. Tyson, then President of Mary Baldwin College, who reminds readers that the “quality of life” and “future well-being of our community depends on a vibrant economy which can attract and serve new business and industry and promote a wholesome lifestyle for our citizens,”⁵⁴⁰ and local businessman Preston C. Manning, who promises readers that an investment in Shenandoah Shakespeare Blackfriars Playhouse is both “good citizenship and good business.”⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹ “Brave New Stage: A Five-Year Program of Cultural, Educational, and Economic Development.” Shenandoah Shakespeare 2000, 2.

⁵⁴⁰ Brave New Stage 2000, i.

⁵⁴¹ Brave New Stage 2000, 1.

The packet also contains an entire page dedicated to comparing Staunton to two established Shakespeare destination theatre towns: Ashland and Cedar City, Utah. The literature sets up a chart which shows Staunton to be relatively equal to, or in many cases better than, the two more established destination Shakespeare cities in terms of base population, proximity to major population centers, colleges, universities, and high-schools. The chart ends with perhaps its most compelling figure, comparing the “Annual Economic Impact on Community” of the festivals in Ashland (“\$90,000,000”), Cedar City (“\$19,000,000”), and Staunton (“\$???”).⁵⁴² The comparison also notes several other facts which the Company asserts would ensure the success of Staunton’s festival; no other American Shakespeare festival has an “authentic” theatre while they planned to have two; other existing, significant destination Shakespeare theatres are based in west-coast or in Canada; no other festival “started with an established and highly acclaimed theatre company with longstanding ties to the national and international Shakespeare networks.”⁵⁴³ A shorter, brochure version of the development packet was generated to distribute to audience members and focused on the Company’s promise that, unlike the local, existing natural and cultural attractions that drew tourists to the Valley, or the summer-only seasons of other American Shakespeare festivals, its theatre would offer tourists a “year-round attraction.” Literature for the capital campaign asserts that the area’s “amazing architecture, great crafts and antiques stores, and established museums is the epitome of the ‘get-away-town’ tourists cherish.”⁵⁴⁴ In terms of its ability to draw tourists, the Company points to the fact that there are

⁵⁴² Brave New Stage 2000, 13.

⁵⁴³ Brave New Stage 2000, 11.

⁵⁴⁴ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet, 1999, 2.

ten “major population centers,” within a four-hour drive of Staunton, 250 colleges and universities, thousands of high schools and 21 million people from which to draw potential audience members.⁵⁴⁵

In addition to its promises of increasing area tourism, S2 literature also reassures potential investors that having an authentic replica theatre that also served as an educational center would enhance the Company’s reputation within the arena of Shakespearean scholarship, thereby insuring its institutional success. As a part of its five year plan, the Company announced its intentions to “draw students of all ages deeply into the world of each of Shakespeare’s plays and expand their experience of Shakespeare’s language and genius” by offering, “a comprehensive Shakespeare ‘package’ of educational and cultural activities to people of all ages,” through daily backstage tours, theatre camps, teacher workshops, research seminars for Shakespeare scholars, actor training programs, and “even a Master’s Degree program offered in conjunction with a regional college and university consortium.”⁵⁴⁶ The document also promises that the Company would fund an “educational endowment to provide cultural learning experiences for disadvantaged children,” and “house a permanent exhibit on the history and development of Shakespearean theatre as well as a library and seminar/instructional space for education and research.”⁵⁴⁷ According to its development material, these educational offerings, combined with the Company’s historically accurate venues, would, without a doubt, “establish the city of Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley as a premier destination regionally and

⁵⁴⁵ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet, 1999, 3.

⁵⁴⁶ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet, 1999, 3.

⁵⁴⁷ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet, 1999, 3.

nationally.”⁵⁴⁸ Finally, the Company offered its own success as a touring troupe as a kind of insurance policy for the success of the Company’s new destination identity, suggesting that maintaining active touring would allow road companies to “serve as ambassador for the city of Staunton” and “establish, through its loyal patrons, instant credibility for the Shenandoah Shakespeare Elizabethan Playhouse.”⁵⁴⁹

While the Company’s promises of economic development and were enough to secure the support of area business owners anxious to reap the benefits that Shakespeare, and S2, had to offer, one of the biggest boons in the Company’s effort to sell Staunton on the value of becoming a destination Shakespeare location had nothing at all to do with theatre. Before the Company had even begun its plans to relocate, the city of Staunton had begun its own revitalization project, referred to by locals as “the Big Dig,” aimed at demolishing and or renovating entire blocks of buildings along the major streets of the downtown area. Crucially, these plans included the construction of a new parking garage, designed to hold 277 cars and slated for completion in the fall of 2000, in the congested downtown area.⁵⁵⁰ Anticipating the increased strain on the city’s meager parking facilities, the Company’s Strategic Planning Task Force planned construction of the Blackfrairs theatre to roughly correspond with the completion of the proposed parking garage. However, when “glitches” in the Big Dig project postponed groundbreaking on the garage by nearly a year, in order to insure its own construction goals, S2 was forced to aggressively advocate for the completion of the structure, and, by championing a project which

⁵⁴⁸ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet, 1999, 2.

⁵⁴⁹ Shenandoah Shakespeare Capital Plan Development Packet, 1999, 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Mary Erskine, “‘We’re beginning to see the payoffs,’ director says,” *News Virginian* [Waynesboro, VA] 22 February 2000: n.pag.

was so popular among Staunton residents, the Company was able to assert its dedication to the needs of its host community. Further proof of S2's assertions regarding its ability to stimulate the region's economic growth could be seen as early as 2000, when Staunton was featured in an article on the front page of the *News Virginian's* Business section yearly update. The article noted that, according to Staunton's Downtown Development Association, eighteen new businesses had opened in 1999, an increase that Executive director Kimberly Watters attributed, in part, to the first stage of S2's new building project.⁵⁵¹

In one local newspaper article, Cohen wrote a piece in honor of breaking ground on the Blackfriars which outlined the potential economic and cultural benefits of the theatre's five-year plan for Staunton's citizens. The article begins with a lofty quote from the Bard himself, from *Henry VIII*, which Cohen employs to reinforce the significance and magnitude of the project: "Our children's children shall see this, and bless heaven." The article boasts that the replica will serve as a venue where "theatregoers will see Shakespeare's plays produced in their 'natural habitat' by professional actors -- Shenandoah Shakespeare actors who know how to make Shakespeare's language accessible and bring his work to life."⁵⁵² Cohen prudently attributes its potential success as being "the result of the partnership between the company and the community's public servants, businesses and private citizens. . . [who] welcomed us here, and have steadily and wisely moved us toward our goal of making Staunton into Shakespeare's most

⁵⁵¹ Mary Erskine, "Committee saw 18 new businesses open in 1999," *News Virginian* [Waynesboro, VA] n.d. 2000: E1.

⁵⁵² Ralph Alan Cohen, "Exciting times ahead from Staunton," *Sunday News Leader* [Staunton, VA] 28 November 1999: n.pag.

famous American home.”⁵⁵³ The article concluded by promising the public the opportunity to “be a part of Shenandoah Shakespeare” by giving “a gift that figuratively and literally enriches this community for generations,” and ends, in typical S2 tradition, with the quasi-joking, audience-incorporating suggestion that readers pose for pictures in front of 11 East Beverly Street, the future location of the Playhouse, “just to prove that you were part of history.”⁵⁵⁴

One of the many local institutions that the Company relied on in order to help entrench the organization within the community was Staunton’s town newspaper, *The Sunday News Leader*. In November of 1999, the paper dedicated an entire “Special Report” section of the paper to Shenandoah Shakespeare’s relocation to Staunton, and the building of the Blackfriars Playhouse. The section, entitled “Summoning Shakespeare,” is essentially a propaganda piece aimed at inculcating Staunton’s collective memory of Shakespeare by convincing local residents that Shakespeare already occupied a firmly held position of their own cultural memories and that his iconic status was capable of providing a significant enough draw to transform their own little hamlet into a Shakespearean mecca with the potential to pull in millions of tourist dollars. Geared to appeal to the general population of Staunton, the section includes a compelling origin story for the Company that relies heavily on a narrative depicting Warren and Cohen as two underdog scholars engaged in a battle against both the existing Shakespeare establishment and the disinterest of modern American audiences for the continued study and preservation of Shakespearean staging conditions.

⁵⁵³ Cohen, “Exciting times. . .”.

⁵⁵⁴ Cohen, “Exciting times. . .”.

The section also includes a description, geared to the uninitiated, of how the Company intended to use its proposed replica theatres to create a “laboratory environment” that would allow visiting scholars the ability to explore “the way plays actually went on” during Shakespeare’s own era. Cohen offers as an example the scenario of a visiting director, curious about how Shakespeare’s crowd scenes may have originally been staged, being offered the opportunity to work on an accurate replica of Shakespeare’s own stage, with a troupe of actors trained to work within the confines of Elizabethan theatrical conditions, in order to discover firsthand what the staging option might have been for Shakespeare himself. “Out of that will come articles, and out of that will come all sorts of great experiences where scholars and actors will be working together.”⁵⁵⁵ While Cohen’s practical, easily-comprehended example does in fact accurately describe many of the practice-based moments of scholarly exploration engaged in by the Company’s educational offerings, the language is gauged to downplay the elitist and academic connotations which many feared would alienate locals.⁵⁵⁶ It also glosses over the inconvenient fact that the “Blackfriars” playhouse in planning would be compelled to make countless compromises with historical accuracy.

The Company was eventually able to convince locals that its new identity was simply the natural progression of an organization with a compelling and successful method of recalling the true genius of Shakespeare and his works. In terms of its previous promotional rhetoric, however, the decision to construct historic replica theatres presented a potentially precarious situation for the Company. For the first decade of its history, Shenandoah Shakespeare had made

⁵⁵⁵ Kristi DiSalvo, “Why Staunton?” *Sunday News Leader* Special Edition Section [Staunton, VA] 28 November 1999: E2.

⁵⁵⁶ DiSalvo, “Why Staunton?” E2.

its reputation on its purported re-discovery of the historical staging practices employed by Shakespeare's own company combined with its own rebellious inclusion of contemporary pop culture references. So when the time came for the Company to contemplate constructing a theatre of its own, suggestions from within the Company ran the gamut in terms of historical accuracy. Ultimately, the decision to construct a replica theatre was a strategic financial decision. In terms of securing funding from granting corporations and foundations, applying for funding to construct a "historic replica" of a theatre was a far more appealing proposal than the construction of a modern performance venue. While the majority of the funds contributed to S2's capital campaign came from private sources, some of the original seed money for construction came when a local failed real estate developer was forced to return \$200,000 in federal funds to the city of Staunton. Upon learning of the available funds, Joe Harman, a founding patron of S2, suggested that Cohen apply for the monies, which were to be used to stimulate local tourism.⁵⁵⁷ Cohen's application was successful.

In further support of its decision to construct a replica theatre, in 2000 the Company retooled its mission statement in order to highlight its commitment to employing Shakespeare's staging conditions. This new statement, as it appears in the Actor Handbook for the 2000 Elizabeth Troupe, retains a focus on the Company's dedication to recreating the sense of community that it claims its style of Shakespeare was uniquely designed to facilitate. Company literature from this period reminds audiences that, from its inception, its "mission has been to recapture the palpable sense of community that Shakespeare's audience enjoyed," a task the Company claimed to accomplish by employing "the basic staging conditions for which

⁵⁵⁷ Edwards 15.

Shakespeare wrote” and ensuring “that the audience and the actors can *see* and, more importantly, *engage* each other.”⁵⁵⁸ S2 refined its mission statement again in 2002, the year after the opening of the Blackfriars Playhouse. This version of the statement goes even further in asserting the cultural and communal power of the historically accurate venue:

Shenandoah Shakespeare -- through its performances, its theatres, its exhibitions, and its educational programs -- seeks to make Shakespeare, the joys of theatre and language and the communal experience of the Renaissance stage accessible to all. By re-creating Renaissance conditions of performance, Shenandoah Shakespeare explores its repertory of plays for a better understanding of these great works and of the human theatrical enterprise past, present, and future.⁵⁵⁹

Alongside such grandiose (and difficult to substantiate) claims regarding audience reception, many of the Company’s justifications of its choice to construct a historic replica possess the same kind of specious have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too reasoning found in its previous claims regarding Elizabethan theatrical traditions, implying that S2’s quasi-historical space, like its quasi-historical staging practices, could be suitable both as a museum-like venue for the theatrical fare of a bygone era and for the theatrical innovations of the present and the future.

While concept of a historically accurate replica was very much in line with the Company’s original performance aesthetic and institutional goals, Cohen was well aware that the decision to construct a true replica would leave the Company open to the same war over the exacting minutiae of historical construction faced by Sam Wanamaker in his project to re-

⁵⁵⁸ Scoff and Grin Tour Actor Handbook, Shenandoah Shakespeare, ASC 2000, 3.

⁵⁵⁹ Blackfriars Playhouse 2002-2003 Season Program, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2002.

construct the Globe theatre in London. Determined to by-pass much of the academic controversy faced by the Globe project, Cohen approached Andrew Gurr, one of the leading historians of Elizabethan theatre design, who had served as the chief advisor on architectural issues for the Globe for the better part of the 1990s, to serve as a consultant on the construction of S2's replica. In a 2001 interview, Gurr admitted that he was initially wary of agreeing to work on Wanamaker's Globe Project because, at the time, the academic sphere dedicated to researching the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres was so over-saturated and contentious that it seemed impossible to navigate. Gurr's trepidation was well-founded and, in a final move to avoid charges of historical inaccuracy, the Company backed-off of its focus on the importance of the exact replication of the playhouses of the Elizabethan era and towards a focus on the ability of the particular spatial conditions of the these venues to encourage an intensified actor-audience relationship. In an interview explaining his eventual support of S2's replica, Gurr noted of his work on the Globe that:

It did seem to me there was an essential value in working on what the actual theatre was like because not only was Shakespeare a part-owner of the building, but it was his workplace. The plays are like the software he wrote to go on the hardware of the Globe. . . . Indeed, you can test the accuracy of our reproduction of the hardware by how well the software works on it.⁵⁶⁰

After much consideration, the Company selected award-winning architect Tom McLaughlin, from Richmond, Virginia, to head up the project's building committee. McLaughlin engaged in detailed research in London, at the Globe, and at the Folger Library in

⁵⁶⁰ Sarah O'Connor, "Doenges Scholar Andrew Gurr Center Stage at MBC." *Columns* (Fall 2001): 13.

D.C., consulting with notable Shakespeare scholars such as C. Walter Hodges, Irwin Smith, Frank Hildy, Peter McCurdy (master carpenter and builder of the re-created Globe Theatre in London), and David Weiss before beginning his own plans for the Blackfriars replica. Because no plans for the original theatre existed, McLaughlin used a variety of sources on which to base his design, including a 1616 design of Inigo Jones for the un-built Cockpit in Drury Lane, John Webb's 1629 drawings for the renovation of the royal Cockpit-in-Court, Simon Basil's 1605 plans for a temporary theatre in Oxford's Christ Church, along with the research of Andrew Gurr, and Frank Hildy, and Peter McCurdy.⁵⁶¹ Luckily for Cohen, Gurr, in his preparations for the Globe project, had already hosted five separate conferences with the foremost Shakespeareans and historic construction scholars, during which many of the academic disagreements as to the particulars of Renaissance construction and design were settled, paving the way for a less contentious road to acceptance among Shakespeare scholars for many of the details of S2's Blackfriars replica.

Throughout the planning and construction of the Playhouse, Company literature vacillated between emphasizing and downplaying the importance of historical accuracy of the space in order to insure its overall institutional goals. For example, while one example of the Company's mission statement justified its signature style through the assertion that it replicates the production circumstances of Elizabethan playhouses, the opening paragraph of the season program for the same season contains an acknowledgement of just how little solid information scholars have on which to base their claims of architectural, historical or theatrical practice claims:

⁵⁶¹ Blackfriars Playhouse Program 2001, 15.

The amphitheaters in which Shakespeare and his company performed barely left their footprints on the banks of London's Thames River. The vast, open-air arenas where up to 3,000 spectators surrounded a large wooden stage have vanished, leaving only remnants of their foundations. Reconstructing the precise shape and dimension of these theatres from the scant archeological evidence is a little like rebuilding a car with only its axles to go on. Yet we know many of the basic principles of theatrical production in Shakespeare's time, and by following those principles, the SSE attempts to give our audiences some of the pleasures that an Elizabethan playgoer would have enjoyed.⁵⁶²

In contrast, other promotional materials for the Blackfriars focus on how replicating the exact seating configurations of Renaissance playhouses allows audiences to,

experience Shakespeare's plays as his audiences experienced them four hundred years ago. They came to see and be seen, to attend a play, and to be at a social event. Some sat on benches in the stalls or in the upper or lower gallery, some sat in Lord's chairs beside and above the stage, some sat on Gallants' stools directly on the stage. Our theatre offers the same variety. Every seat gives you a different way to hear and see the play and your fellow playgoers.⁵⁶³

Here as elsewhere, Company literature sought to avoid issues of historical authenticity by focusing on the kinds of audience *experiences* that its proposed replica could provide.

⁵⁶² Program for 1998 (Tenth Anniversary) Season, 3.

⁵⁶³ Blackfriars Playhouse 2002-2003 Season Program, 7.

The Company's ambivalence on issues of authenticity reflected the growing thread of discourse within the Shakespeare academy that critiqued Shakespeare Festivals along the same lines as heritage sites. In his article, "Shakespeare and Cultural Tourism," Dennis Kennedy identifies the Globe reconstruction as a case in which the theatrical audiences are also, effectively, cultural tourists. Echoing Dean MacCannell's assertion in his 1976 book, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* that "tourism is the search for the 'absolute other',"⁵⁶⁴ Kennedy posits that while replicas and other re-constructed heritage sites are, as MacCannell suggests, "most likely a perversion of the real" which rely on "staged authenticity" as their primary appeal, the rampant popularity of inauthentic sites is proof of the fact that authenticity "become[s] much less significant when we focus on the spectators rather than the builders."⁵⁶⁵ Kennedy argues that because the experience of the tourist involves a complex semiotic process in which, even at authentic sites, the spectator sees "not the authenticity, but the site as signifier," authenticity cannot be seen as a fixed concept, and may in fact "gradually appear in situations that are eminently counterfeit."⁵⁶⁶ Kennedy suggests that, in this way, the "movement to recreate the Elizabethan stage" can be seen as "an exercise in nostalgia operating as an 'invented tradition',"⁵⁶⁷ in which the pleasure of direct experience on the part of the participants compensates for the inclusion of inauthentic elements. Likewise, David Lowenthal, in his book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, acknowledges that the inherent disparity between the

⁵⁶⁴ Kennedy 182.

⁵⁶⁵ Kennedy 182.

⁵⁶⁶ Kennedy 183.

⁵⁶⁷ Here Kennedy employs a term of Eric Hobsbawm's. See Hobsbawm 183.

authenticity of the original and the replica leaves open the possibility of misrepresenting the “truth” of a relic, but suggests that risk pales in comparison to the alternative risk of future generations having no awareness of cultural relics from other times. By way of an example, he notes that most people know the Bible and *The Iliad* only through translations and copies, and suggests that, despite their lack of access to the original documents, “they are just as pleased” by the copy, which “reflects ‘the past’ no less than the original.”⁵⁶⁸

Whatever the reason, the design of the Blackfriars was generally well-accepted by Shakespeareans. In its newsletter, *Quarto*, the Shakespeare Theatre Association of America (STAA), praised McLaughlin’s designs for the structure, declaring that the space would “replicate in every way possible the dimensions and Elizabethan materials on the Blackfriars; the stage itself will draw its details from Inigo Jones[’] drawings for a Stuart stage” and “provide the ideal staging area for the work of the SSE, which has been dedicated to performing the plays of Shakespeare in ways appropriate to the staging conditions for which he originally wrote them.”⁵⁶⁹ While it is worth noting that the STAA is a promotional organization for the Shakespeare festival industry rather than a scholarly organization, its support of S2’s choices regarding the replica largely overlooks issues of historical accuracy. In general, most of the negative attention surrounding the Playhouse was aimed at the design of its façade and lobby, which is anything but Elizabethan. McLaughlin was consistent from the beginning in his assertion that his design for the façade did not attempt historic accuracy, but rather was a an

⁵⁶⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1985) 295.

⁵⁶⁹ “New Globe for the New World.” *Quarto* [STAA Newsletter] Spring/Summer 1999: n.pag.

attempt to make the building “a ‘good neighbor’ in its basically Victorian neighborhood,”⁵⁷⁰ combining “the best of existing downtown Staunton’s 19th century historical architecture with the profile and mass of buildings in Stow’s London.”⁵⁷¹ And, while McLaughlin has characterized the style of the Playhouse’s exterior as “contemporary astylistic,” others have described the realization of Cohen’s “bizarre quixotic project”⁵⁷² as a “Zen-teahouse-like theater,”⁵⁷³ (while locals concluded that “it’s more of a cross between a Swiss chalet and a small-town railway station”).⁵⁷⁴ Whatever its style, McLaughlin has made no apology for the decidedly modern space, justifying his decision with the Cohen-esque defense that even the Blackfriars of the King’s Men was a hodgepodge of historical styles. In one interview he is quoted as saying that, “The original Blackfriars [theater] was a renovation. It was a 16th-century building that had been a Dominican monastery.”⁵⁷⁵ In a further attempt to connect his quasi-historical design choices to the Company’s desire to create a unique and memorable audience experience, McLaughlin has suggested that the lobby was designed to make the audience’s entrance into the impressive playing space inside seem like a “theatrical” experience.⁵⁷⁶

In terms of media attention, the Blackfriars Playhouse and its identity as a replica was a double edged sword; while it encouraged a new level of attention from the press that the

⁵⁷⁰ Roy Proctor, “All the works a stage.” *Richmond [VA] Times Dispatch* 23 September 2001: G1.

⁵⁷¹ “New Globe for the New World.”

⁵⁷² Ron Rosenbaum, *The Shakespeare Wars* (New York: Random House, 2006) 445.

⁵⁷³ Rosenbaum 446.

⁵⁷⁴ Proctor G1.

⁵⁷⁵ Proctor G1

⁵⁷⁶ Proctor G1.

Company was desperate for, it also invited continued evaluations of its authenticity. The frenzy of coverage generated for the opening of the Playhouse afforded the Company its first mention in the *New York Times*, including a picture of a beaming Cohen in the balcony of the replica. The short article focused on the accuracy of the space, noting that, while it could boast “historically accurate bench seating,” its “9 chandeliers” were lit “with 24 electric candles,” and that, due to “fire codes, the 500-square-foot timber-frame theater seats 320, rather than the original 500.”⁵⁷⁷ The *Wall Street Journal’s* theatre reviewer, Terry Teachout, was less exacting in terms of accuracy, focusing instead, as the Company had hoped, on the ability of the space to create a unique audience experience. Teachout notes that while “most of the American replicas. . . are variously modernized structures that incorporate such anachronistic devices as theatrical lighting,” tourists who want “to see the real thing -- and see it in a convincing way” should go to Staunton where “performances are given in a dazzlingly exact re-creation of the Blackfriars Playhouse.”⁵⁷⁸ That Teachout forgives the anachronistic elements of the Playhouse is a reflection of the assertion made by both Kennedy and Lowenthal that replicas are, in some ways, preferable over the original to tourists. They are more accessible to visitors than their decaying original counterparts, which for reasons of conservation are removed from immediate access of tourists. In addition to the predictable modernizations of indoor plumbing, electric lighting, and accessibility accommodations for handicapped patrons, the Company has slowly made other historically inaccurate changes to insure its audience’s viewing pleasure. While the interior of the theatre boasts historically accurate benches as its seating, patrons have the opportunity to pay for

⁵⁷⁷ Eric P. Nash, “Virginia Theater True to Shakespeare,” *New York Times* 21 October 2001: TR3.

⁵⁷⁸ Teachout.

optional seat backs (which are designed to attach to the underside of the period benches without visible hardware) and seat cushions (originally at the price of \$2 a piece or \$4 for both) to provide traditional theatregoers some of the modern comforts to which they are accustomed. Several years in, based on significant and repeated feedback from patrons, the Company decided to keep the seatbacks in place on the audience section on the ground floor (called ‘the Stalls’) and offer those seats, which feature better sight lines than some other seats in the theatre, at a higher price tier. Feedback on audience experience also prompted the Company to add long (removable) cushions on the wooden benches of the theatres upper galleries for the comfort of patrons.⁵⁷⁹

Though the replica made numerous anachronistic concessions on behalf of its audiences’ experience, the most heated moments of tension between local preference and historic accuracy occurred over the seemingly small issue of paint. Upon opening the Blackfriars Playhouse, the Company announced its intentions to paint much of the interior of the theatre which was, at the time of the opening, dominated by the highly-polished, unpainted wood that covered nearly every surface of the space, in an attempt to emulate Elizabethan architectural practices. The decision sent shockwaves through local residents and numerous theatre patrons who made no secret of their preference for the Virginian White-oak surfaces, which were unadorned in the first season or so of the Playhouse’s existence.

⁵⁷⁹ Proctor G1.



Figure 62: Interior of Shenandoah Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse, interior stage view

(Promotional photo of Blackfriars Playhouse, photo by Lee Brauer, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2000.)

But according to Cohen, that particular audience preference was at odds with a significant amount of research on Elizabethan architecture which clearly supported his insistence that “The Elizabethans never saw a surface they didn’t paint.”⁵⁸⁰ For whatever reason, the Company, who had on numerous other occasions sacrificed historical accuracy for audience experience, seemed adamant at painting a line in the sand. So, after discussing the issue at great length with some of the foremost authorities in the field at academic conferences, the Company made the decision to hire Jeff Stockberger, a JMU graduate and local artist, to paint only the backdrop (*façade*) of the performance area (*frons scenae*) black with marbled touches. In anticipation of the unveiling of the painted façade on February 4, 2005, the local Staunton paper featured an article on the painting controversy, which began with the declaration: “They painted it. After years of bickering back and forth, the scholars won over the local theater-goers.”⁵⁸¹ The article makes extensive use of an interview with Shakespeare scholar Frank Hildy, who professes his

⁵⁸⁰ Edwards 15.

⁵⁸¹ Alice Mannette, “Stage dons makeup.” *News Leader* [Staunton, VA] 29 January 2005: 1+.

unwavering support of the Company's decision, saying, "It was very important for the Blackfriars to paint the stage. In the past, people have always painted wood."⁵⁸² According to Hildy, historical research indicates that the most prominent colors of paint for Elizabethans were black, red, white and yellow, and while he maintained his support of the choice to use marbelization technique, he characterized the base color choice of black to be an inappropriate one: "I have a theory that black is not a color that you should ever use in a theatre," Hildy was quoted as saying, adding that Elizabethans "liked things to be pretty wild. They liked things to be ornate."⁵⁸³ Hildy's implied alternative was a sobering one for locals who were reportedly, "Afraid that it would be McDonald's colors."⁵⁸⁴ Despite his quibbling over the color, Hildy's interview ends with the assertion, that "people are going to feel that the performances are better and they won't know why" -- a conclusion that effectively re-affirms the Company's decision to paint.⁵⁸⁵ For its part, S2 added a section to the script used by the actors who lead tours of the replica theatre which maintained that, "though no definitive guidelines exist" for the painting of Elizabethan playhouses, the "decoration for the Renaissance Drama relied heavily on paint."⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸² Hildy qtd. in Mannette 2.

⁵⁸³ Hildy qtd. in Mannette 2.

⁵⁸⁴ Hildy qtd. in Mannette 2.

⁵⁸⁵ Hildy qtd. in Mannette 2.

⁵⁸⁶ Blackfriars Tour Script, 2006, 4.



Figure 63: Painted interior of S2's Blackfriars Playhouse (Promotional Photo of the Painted Interior of the Blackfriars Playhouse, photo by Lauren D. Rogers, ASC, n.d. *americanshakespearecenter.com*. Web. 5 Oct. 2012.)

While national news outlets were interested in issues of authenticity, S2 had much more control over the regional and local media coverage and attempted to focus attention on the Playhouse as an example of local craftsmanship. In an attempt to encourage a sense of local pride and ownership over the new theatre, Cohen, in an article for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, boasted that while the Playhouse was on one hand “an English creation,” it was, on the other hand, “pure Virginian,” owing to its Richmond architect Tom McLaughlin and its local crafts people and suppliers. As one might expect, regional press coverage on the opening of the Playhouse was magnified by a number of off-shoot articles on the Virginian craftspeople involved in the construction.⁵⁸⁷ In addition to defining the Playhouse as a paragon of local

⁵⁸⁷ Ralph Alan Cohen. “A Shakespeare Original, A New Virginia Treasure.” *Richmond [VA] Times-Dispatch* 20 September 2001: 1.

artistic skill, the tactic effectively re-constructs the collective memory of Shakespeare as just another one of the talented local artists whose work is featured at the Blackfriars. The Company leveraged the resulting sense of local pride in order to impress the Playhouse on local memories, uniting Shakespeare with Staunton's most significant cultural claim to fame before the Company's relocation, namely its reputation as being home to a rich array of historic buildings and architecturally significant homes, most dating from the city's late 19th Century boom-town growth. But the idea that Staunton was particularly renowned for its craftsmen is as constructed a memory as the Company's recall of Shakespeare himself. The primary reason that Staunton is renowned for its architecture over other towns in the region is that it managed to survive the burnings and battles of the Civil War unscathed. As a result, the town is able to boast surviving examples of many of the significant architectural movements from its founding in 1732 until the present, including the prolific work of architect T.J. Collins⁵⁸⁸ and his four sons, whose firm has been a fixture in Staunton since 1890. Still, the lasting impact of the Company's commemoration of the Bard persists in the memories of locals and is evinced by the words of its crafts people, who refer to the grand Playhouse as "a living thing. It's a piece of history that will become part of the fabric of this community."⁵⁸⁹

To cement its new, emerging identity, the Company commissioned a local graphic design firm from Charlottesville, Virginia, Gotham Graphix, to design a new logo that signified S2's new, broader identity. But in the interim, while Gotham Graphix was still at work on a new logo, the company was forced to employ a hodge-podge of graphics; setting an unfortunate precedent

⁵⁸⁸ Collins is best known for having come in second to James Hoban in the contest to design the White House.

⁵⁸⁹ Clayton, Sarah. "Love's Labour's Found." *Baltimore Sun* 14 October 2001: 1R+.

for inconsistency in the Company’s branding that would persist for nearly a decade. During the Playhouse’s construction, the Company continued to use the lowercase “sse” logo on touring brochures while experimenting with a variety of new graphics for its resident season. In addition to continuing to use the graphic of Shakespeare as the Appalachian Mountains, the Company, bolstered by several successful international touring dates, had begun using a new logo featuring an abstract rendering of the globe with the new slogan, “Act Globally.”



Figure 64: “Act Globally” Bumper Sticker, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1994.

Late in the fall of 1999, Shenandoah Shakespeare introduced its new “Giant ‘S’ Logo,” developed by Gotham Graphix as a replacement for the lower-case “sse” logo that had been in use since 1995. According to Cohen, “The new logo reflects the entity we’re becoming. The giant ‘S,’ of course, represents Shenandoah Shakespeare. The open door represents the doors to the new theatres we’re building in Staunton, and it also underscores our mission to reach as wide an audience as possible.”⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁹⁰ Cohen qtd. in *Shakespeare Carrier* Spring 2000, 2.



Figure 65: Giant "S" Logo ("Brave New Stage: A Five-Year Program of Cultural, Educational, and Economic Development," cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare 2000.)

Gotham Graphix also created four additional logos, one for each of the proposed arms of Shenandoah Shakespeare: the SSE (the touring arm), the Blackfriars Playhouse, the Globe, and the Education Center.

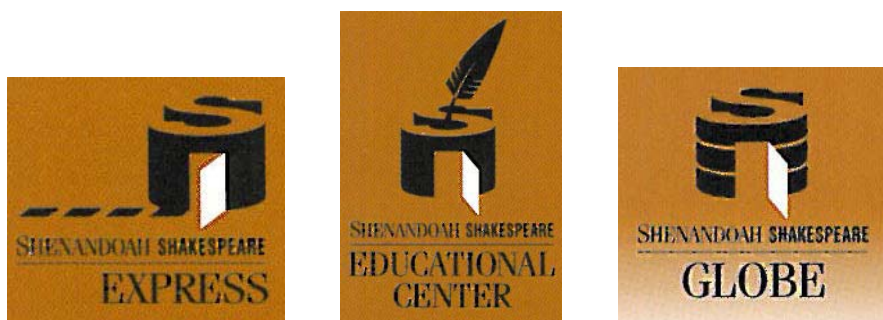


Figure 66: Giant "S" Alternative Logos (Shenandoah Shakespeare at the Blackfriars Playhouse Brochure, back cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2001.)

On the importance of the sub-brand logos, Cohen wrote that, “Each of the new logos incorporates the giant “S,” so that “People will see that “S” and know it’s part of Shenandoah Shakespeare. They’ll know it means quality.”⁵⁹¹ Adding with an impish sense of humor, “I just

⁵⁹¹ *Shakespeare Carrier* Fall 1999, 1.

hope we don't get sued by Superman.”⁵⁹² Interestingly, version of the logo used on most of the Company's marketing materials absented Shakespeare's image from the graphic entirely.



Figure 67: Empty Giant "S" Logo (2001 Touring Brochure, back cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2001.)

As S2 settled into its new role as a more serious Shakespeare company, it went to great lengths to try and maintain its identity as a “hip” Shakespeare company. In order to shore up support among its existing fans, the Company employed a new graphic on the promotional material for its resident season which involved a capitalization of the “H” and “A” in the word “Shakespeare” of the Company's name. The resulting, pun-y “HA” graphic was accompanied by a new slogan -- “Serious Fun” -- reminding audiences of the joy and hilarity that characterized S2's particular brand of Shakespeare.



Figure 68: Program for Shenandoah Shakespeare Express at the Folger, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1999.

⁵⁹² *Shakespeare Carrier* Fall 1999, 1.

The oxymoron of the slogan allowed the Company the freedom to use its signature photos depicting its actors in moments of hilarious action, as well as a new range of more dramatic shots, intended to capture the more serious, dramatic side of its production work.



Figure 69: Promotional Photo Card for the Charm Your Tongue Tour, all photos by Mike Bailey, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2000.

The resulting marketing materials were so in line with the company’s signature use of humor that S2 continued to use the “HA” logo and the “Serious Fun” slogan on marketing materials for years, even after the reveal of the Shenandoah Shakespeare’s new, official “Giant ‘S’” logo. This refusal of the Company to standardize its branding was a situation which would persist until 2005.

The Company also made certain to maintain much of its signature sense of humor in promotional and marketing materials, as is evident in this humorous except from the Fall 1999 issue of the *Shakespeare Carrier*, (itself re-vamped during the S2 rebranding), that announced its plans to construct a replica of the Blackfriars:

**Top Ten Rejected Names for Shenandoah Shakespeare's New Blackfriars
Playhouse.**

10. Shakespeare's Shrimp Shack (rejected by Tiny Artistic Director Jim Warren)
9. Stratford-Upon-Staunton
8. Club Cohen
7. Blackfriars II: The Adventure Continues
6. The Ralph Cohen Memorial Playhouse (rejected by less-than-amused
Executive Director Ralph Cohen)
5. The Other Other Place
4. Bardassic Park
3. The "The Brits Don't Have One of *These*' Playhouse
2. Ralph's Renaissance Rendezvous and Gentleman's Club
1. Warren's World⁵⁹³

The choice to keep this pop-culture-referencing feature in its re-vamped newsletter is, in and of itself a kind of reassurance to its loyal following that, despite S2's ambition to transform into a destination Shakespeare theatre, the Company was still as dedicated as ever to its signature style of citational humor.

While the original plan stipulated a July 1, 2001 opening for the Blackfriars Playhouse, the actual opening was postponed until September of 2001, a decision that would prove to be not only memorable but unfortunate. Perhaps the best thing about the delayed opening of the theatre was that it avoided adding to the growing parking problem in downtown Staunton. Construction

⁵⁹³ *Shakespeare Carrier* Fall 1999, 3.

on the all-important proposed parking garage, which had been slated for completion by the fall of 2000, had stalled and its opening postponed until the fall of 2001. Had the theatre opened on its originally intended date in 2001, before the scheduled completion of the downtown parking garage and before the operation of the two city-operated trollies (designed to shuttle people from two large parking lots on the edge of town around the historic downtown area) had begun, the resulting traffic and parking situation might have made enemies of many of the locals already frustrated by the situation on the streets of Staunton.⁵⁹⁴

The official opening of the Blackfriars was scheduled for September 14, 2001, days after the traumatic events of 9/11,⁵⁹⁵ and as a result, much of the Company's hard advance work in terms of publicity and marketing was a wash -- either replaced or overshadowed by media coverage of the terrorist attacks. Despite this terrible timing, ticket sales for the first season were eighty percent above the original projections,⁵⁹⁶ with some weeks sold out entirely even before the Playhouse had officially opened.⁵⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the final price tag for the Blackfriars was also over initial predictions. Though initial cost for the Playhouse was estimated at \$2.7 million, by the end of 2001 numerous press sources report that the final cost for the theatre was \$3.7.⁵⁹⁸ By the end of 2004, the Playhouse was still operating at a deficit, despite posting record-breaking ticket sales each year since 2002. Cohen maintained that S2's "problems have nothing to do with

⁵⁹⁴ Jeremiah Stoddard, "So Many Attractions, So Little Parking." *Daily News-Record* [Harrisonburg, VA] 6 October 2000: 9-10.

⁵⁹⁵ Due to the events of 9/11, the decision was made to postpone the opening celebration until September 21, 2001.

⁵⁹⁶ Edwards 16.

⁵⁹⁷ Michelle Lincoln, "Much Ado About Shakespeare in Staunton." *News Virginian* [Waynesboro, VA] n.d. September 2001: C1.

⁵⁹⁸ Edwards 9.

ticket sales and everything to do with giving;”⁵⁹⁹ a problem that he noted was being experienced by numerous theatres nationwide as “charitable giving to theatres nationwide was down forty-two percent from the previous year.”⁶⁰⁰ Yet despite its developmental woes, Cohen predicted that the Playhouse would be operating in the black by the end of 2005.⁶⁰¹

Still, the slowed progress of the capital campaign had significantly impinged upon the Company’s future plans to construct a replica of the Globe. In 2006, the Company revised its timetable on the construction of its Globe announcing that it hoped to see the theatre completed by 2016. ASC Managing Director Tony Smith was quoted as saying, “Clearly we’re in no position financially to move forward with the Globe. It’s in our 10-year vision. We have a strategic plan that the board approved in September to build toward that.”⁶⁰² *The News Leader* reported that, “Staunton’s Globe II theater will differ from other Globe theaters around the world because it will be the only historically accurate replica of the structure.” The de-valuing of the work of other Shakespeareans who have come before in an attempt to assert the validity of its own constructed recollections of Shakespeare seems endemic to the Company’s entire project.

Though the Company’s business plan anticipated some initial start-up deficits, it had not been able to anticipate the effects of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the national economy and tourism. Cohen’s insistence that S2’s financial problems were the result of larger, more systemic economic issues and not simply institutional in nature was not without truth, and it was

⁵⁹⁹ Cohen qtd. in Maria Longley, “Blackfriars far from full, but attendance rising.” *News Leader* [Staunton, VA], n.d. 2004: 1.

⁶⁰⁰ Longley 1.

⁶⁰¹ Longley 1.

⁶⁰² Smith qtd. in David Royer, “Globe theater moves ahead, but slowly.” *News Leader* [Staunton, VA] 16 November, 2006, 1+.

supported by the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Association Director Meriwether German, who characterized 2004 as “probably the worst tourism year in 20 years.”⁶⁰³ In the same article, Cohen proudly reminds Staunton readers with beaming pride that despite an eleven percent drop in overall tourism to the Valley and a nation-wide decrease in attendance at not-for-profit theatres, (according to a report by the Theatre Communications Group), S2 ticket sales had continued to increase.⁶⁰⁴ With the opening of the Blackfriars, the Company not only added a third acting troupe with a year-round season, it more than doubled its operational budgets. In 1998, the year before breaking ground on the Playhouse, the operating budget for the Company was \$380,000, but by 2001 that figure was projected to be over a million dollars.⁶⁰⁵

Fliers advertising the grand opening of the theatre began with the teaser, “1642 London ...2001 Staunton. Dark for over 350 years. The Grand Re-Opening of the Blackfriars Playhouse,” and announced an inaugural season comprised of seven Shakespearean favorites (*Midsummer*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *A Winter’s Tale*, *A Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry V*) and four other titles (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, *The Alchemist*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Saint Joan*). Pictured in the ad are the chandelier (the Company’s new signature Playhouse graphic which they continue to use to date), the Giant “S” logo, a swatch of one of the architectural drawings for the Playhouse, and the shadowy image of Shakespeare himself. The text, advertising the September 21, 2001 opening of the new home of Shenandoah Shakespeare,

⁶⁰³ Longley 1.

⁶⁰⁴ Longley 1.

⁶⁰⁵ Proctor G1.

invites audiences to join the Company “under the chandelier lights of the world’s only re-creation of Shakespeare’s indoor theatre.”⁶⁰⁶

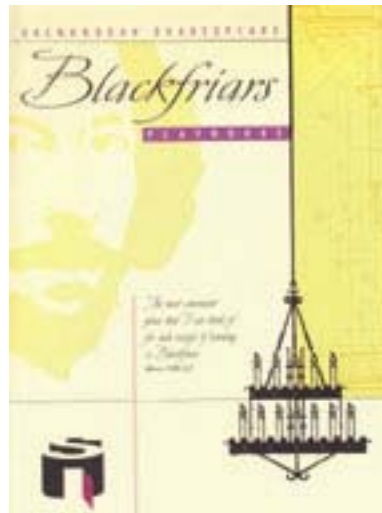


Figure 70: Blackfriars Playhouse Program, cover art, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2001.

With the opening of the Playhouse in 2001, the Company applied for an NEA grant to fund a newly proposed educational program offered by S2 in conjunction with the Globe Theatre in London called “Shakespeare’s Playhouses: Inside and Out.” The program was designed to provide scholars and teachers of Early Modern Drama the opportunity to study performance practices at three one-of-a-kind Shakespeare theatres: the Blackfriars, the Folger Library’s theatre and the re-created London Globe. In terms of marketing, the program was not only another feather in the cap of S2’s expanding educational programs; it increased awareness for the Playhouse by placing it on par with two of the well-known Shakespeare replica theatres. However, due to issues with planning, coordination and a failure to secure the needed funds, the program was downscaled to a one-time event. The conference, eventually became a solo

⁶⁰⁶ Blackfriars Playhouse Grand Re-Opening Flier, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2001.

endeavor for S2, (now known as the Blackfriars Conference), which continues to be held on a bi-annual basis.

The relative success of the conference's mission can be seen in William Proctor Williams' review of it for the fall 2001 *Shakespeare Bulletin*. In the review, Williams praises the inaugural event for maintaining a rare "blend of the academic and the theatrical that is so well represented in the person of the executive director of Shenandoah Shakespeare and ringmaster of this conference, Ralph Alan Cohen."⁶⁰⁷ And while Williams writes that the event "was the best academic conference I have attended in more than thirty years," he also notes that "questions still remain" as to "whether or not economic/theatrical considerations will get the upper hand over history and scholarship."⁶⁰⁸ 2008 conference participant and Shakespeare scholar Tiffany Stern, from the University of Oxford, agreed and was quoted as saying that that the conference is unique because, "it's a place where scholars and actors have some sort of dialogue," and because "You don't usually laugh this much at an academic conference."⁶⁰⁹ Sarah Enloe, then a student in the MLitt/MFA program at Mary Baldwin College and the coordinator of the conference, (who would go on to become the company's Director of Education), agrees, adding that part of the "fun" of the conference comes from the fact that it is also a bit of a "family affair," drawing former students, actors, directors, and scholars who have been involved with the Company to commemorate Shakespeare together.⁶¹⁰ Over the years, the conference has featured numerous,

⁶⁰⁷ Williams, William Proctor. "Blackfriars Playhouse Inaugural Conference, October 11-14, 2001 Staunton, Virginia." *Shakespeare Bulletin* (Fall 2001): 45.

⁶⁰⁸ Williams 45.

⁶⁰⁹ Stern qtd. in Nicole Barbano, "Scholars of the Stage," *News Leader* [Staunton, VA] 26 October 2007: 2.

⁶¹⁰ Enloe qtd. in Barbano 2.

renowned Shakespeare scholars and practitioners as its speakers, (including Andrew Gurr, Alan Dessen, Tina Packer, Stanley Wells, David Bevington, and Stephen Greenblatt), and by 2008, the conference had expanded to span five days, and include over 200 participants from around the world. In terms of marketing, the Company began to employ a quote from *Henry VIII* -- “The most convenient place that I can think of for such receipt of learning is Blackfriars” -- on much of the its promotional materials for the conference as well as in the advertisement of other educational programming at the Playhouse.

While the mission of the conference is certainly in keeping with the Company’s overall mission, in some ways the insistence on bridging the gap between the scholars and practitioners reveals a persistent insecurity of Cohen’s, namely his reputation as being a scholar of Shakespeare as opposed to a theatre professional. Cohen’s trepidation stems from the fact that he comes to Shakespeare from the point of view of an English professor, rather than a theatre practitioner, a fact he used as bookends for his first interview with me, and one he has repeated publicly, and always with a twinge of an inferiority complex. In a profile piece on the Company for *The Chronicle of Higher Learning*, the interviewer notes that, “Mr. Cohen describes himself as a dilettante and worries that theater professionals will never take him seriously.”⁶¹¹ In my own interview with Cohen, upon discovering that I have a performance background, he reiterates his Company’s aim to break down the walls between theory and practice in theatre, insisting,

I will tell you, and I don’t care who hears it -- the wall is much, much higher on the theatre side than on the literature side. Literature people are always excited to hear what actors have to say. On the other hand, actors, or people who come out

⁶¹¹ Lawrence Biermiller, “Virginia Is for Shakespeare Lovers,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 16 November 2001: A56.

of theatre programs are much more skeptical to hear from the literature side of things, because they know that they have been in the fire, like real generals, while these other people are just like politicians telling them what to do.⁶¹²

While Cohen's own experience and reputation in the academic world often allowed him to navigate the dicey waters of issues of authenticity, in dealing with matters of production, his anxiety over the acceptance of his Company's signature style is revealed. In a letter to one of S2's 2001 touring companies, scheduled to perform at the 2001 Ohio Shakespeare Conference, Cohen gives several acting notes to the cast of *Twelfth Night*, but ends with a specific caveat to make certain that the cast does not attempt to "push" the Company's signature moments of contact with the audience. He notes that, while, "all shows matter equally, some are more equal than others and I would ask that you make sure that the shows for the Ohio Shakespeare conference are (1) contained in terms of audience contact and (2) tight."⁶¹³ He points out that, unlike the Company's usual audience, those attending the productions at the conference "will be my peers, and they will know cheap schtick immediately. They will also understand when an audience contact moment doesn't really work. I want to persuade them that we're right about Shakespeare; too many moments of license will persuade them we are wrong."⁶¹⁴ The statement is rhetorically packed. First, it implies that the Company may be willing to draw in less-experienced Shakespeare theatre-goers by relying on the novelty of their "schtick." Second, by exposing Cohen's own anxiety over the acceptance of his ideas about Shakespeare, it reminds

⁶¹² Cohen, Ralph Alan. Personal Interview. 13 Aug. 2010.

⁶¹³ Ralph Alan Cohen, Email to "Fred." 25 February 2001, 1.

⁶¹⁴ Cohen, Email to "Fred" 1.

the reader both of the tenuousness of those claims, and his own stake, academically, in making certain that audiences buy into his assertions regarding the relative importance of staging conditions in the veneration and preservation of Shakespeare's works. Finally, his use of the term "we" in the final sentence implies that he and the cast are equally responsible for promoting his ideas about Shakespeare and therefore equally required to persuade members of the academic community that their particular commemoration of him and his staging practices are in fact, "right."⁶¹⁵

Whether audiences are drawn to the Blackfriars because of its replica status and its academic offerings, because of its signature production aesthetic, (or, more likely, some combination of these two,) the Company and its Playhouse have become a significant tourist draw to the Shenandoah area, as projected in the planning stages of the project. In June of 2003, a survey by Travelocity.com members rated the Blackfriars as one of the top ten tourist attractions of Virginia. Of the rating, Cohen proudly responded, "Shakespeare would be proud to know that he's alive and well in Virginia, where his patrons founded the Jamestown Colony."⁶¹⁶ Only five years later, tourism in Staunton would be dominated by visitors to the Blackfriars, and by 2006, brochures produced by the Staunton Department of Tourism proudly featured the slogan, "The Stage is set..." an indicator that they had embraced the central role of the Playhouse in the attraction of tourists.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ Cohen, Email to "Fred" 1.

⁶¹⁶ "Blackfriars Playhouse Named One of Top 10 Most Popular Sites in Virginia." Shenandoah Shakespeare Press Release, 25 June 2003.

⁶¹⁷ "Historic Downtown Staunton: The Stage is set. . ." Brochure, Staunton [VA] Department of Tourism, 2006.



Figure 71: "Historic Downtown Staunton: The Stage is Set..." Brochure, cover art, Staunton [VA]

Department of Tourism, 2006.

4.3 CONVERSION WITHOUT WORSHIP: ASC'S ANTI-MEMORIAL CONUNDRUM

By 2004, Shenandoah Shakespeare was finally gaining widespread name recognition and had become a well-known player in the world of Shakespearean scholarship and widely popular among its constituency of tour venues, a fact perhaps best exemplified by a letter of praise written to the company by Angel Hoskins, the chair of the English department at rural Appalachian high school. In the letter, Hoskins writes that, over the past several years, the Company's touring productions had left quite an impression on her students who asked "countless times,"

When are the Shenandoah Shakespeare people coming back?' When I respond that I don't know, they are disappointed. I think this speaks more about your

company than anything else I could possibly say. If you can get high school students to remember the name of the company and not just say “those Shakespeare people,” then I know you have made a real impression on their lives.⁶¹⁸

Ironically, the very next year the Company would announce that it was changing its name yet again, this time to the American Shakespeare Center (ASC).

Cohen recalls that after the Blackfriars was constructed, it was clear that a major re-branding, perhaps even a name change for the Company was inevitable. He notes that the primary impetus for the 2005 name change was the desire to be known as “more than just a regional theatre,” but rather as a true center for the research and production of the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.⁶¹⁹ In order to insure the development of the Company’s educational offerings as part of its newly expanded identity, a new plan outlining ASC’s academic and educational goals was developed. Some of the newly articulated goals for the Company included becoming “one of the three major educational centers in the world for the study of Shakespeare and performance.” Aspirations included establishing “a major international network for students of Shakespeare,” which would be tied to the Shakespeare’s Globe in London and the Folger Shakespeare Library; creating and staffing the only two-year curriculum for a Master of Literature in Performance program; expanding its programs to train teachers of Shakespeare through performance; and developing “the country’s most interactive on-line Shakespeare site, one that will give students the opportunity to watch and actually redirect live

⁶¹⁸ Angel Hoskins, Letter to Bill Gordon, 4 Feb. 2004, 2.

⁶¹⁹ Ralph Alan Cohen, Personal Interview, 12 Jan 2012.

performers in scenes from Shakespeare.”⁶²⁰ As a result of this ambitious new set of educational goals, the Company was obliged to retool its own bylaws. Throughout the revision process, Cohen remained insistent that the new entity keep its educational efforts on equal footing with its production efforts. In a letter critiquing a draft of one revision of the bylaws, Cohen complains that, in its current state, the document “downplays the educational aspect of our organization,” which he insists is an “economic mistake as well as a philosophical mistake. An organization like ours cannot survive without having an education component that is as strong as its artistic component.”⁶²¹ In it, he stipulates that “that equality must be written into the by-laws” and supported by having a position for a Director of Education built into the company’s new organizational structure. Cohen’s letter also seems to imply that he and Warren had already begun to find themselves at odds with the local committee and “board members who do not understand our mission.”⁶²²

Though it did not develop entirely as the Company had originally planned, in partnership with Mary Baldwin College, the ASC did help to establish the Master of Literature program in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature and Performance that it had hoped for, the only one of its kind in America. In the first few years of its existence, the majority of the program’s classes were to be taught by Cohen and/or a visiting scholar, (the first such visiting scholars being Gurr and Tom Berger, Russ Macdonald and fight master Drew Fracher). By 2002, more course options materialized, allowing the school to offer select second year students in its M.Litt.

⁶²⁰ “Virginia: the Shakespeare Education State.” Proposal to the Virginia Foundation for the Shenandoah Shakespeare Center in Virginia, Shenandoah Shakespeare, Feb. 2000, 1.

⁶²¹ Ralph Alan Cohen, Letter to “Lydia,” N.d. 2000.

⁶²² Cohen, Letter to “Lydia.”

program the possibility of earning (the terminal degree of) an MFA. Eventually, Paul Menzer, who at various points in his career served as a member of the SSE staff, and an ASC board member was appointed the director of the MLitt/MFA program. However, the exact nature of partnership between the Company and the Master's program continues to evolve, and the program's overall importance to the Company varies depending upon whom you ask. In my interview with Warren, when asked to describe the relationship between the two entities he responded hesitantly, "That program -- it exists in partnership with us because Ralph was dedicated to a degree-granting program that explores Shakespeare's stage and his contemporaries." And then he quickly moved on to discussing the number of other theatres around the country that are staffed by former Company actors.

While the Company's rebranding allowed for an increased focus on creating and maintaining connection in the educational and academic spheres of the Shakespeare industry, numerous members of ASC's marketing staff identify the most significant benefit of the 2005 name change as the accompanying move to standardize the Company's brand in terms of marketing and promotional materials. From 1999 to 2004, the Company advertised productions under no fewer than three names -- the SSE, Shenandoah Shakespeare, and the Blackfriars Playhouse -- each of which maintained its own logo, graphics and overall visual aesthetic, making it difficult to gain any lasting recognition of the Company's overall brand. One of the first decisions made on this front was to once again call upon the services of Gotham Graphix, tasking them with the job of standardizing the Company's brand and the overall aesthetic of its promotional materials. The firm designed a new logo, with several sub-brand logos to be used in by the various arms of the Company (i.e. educational and research, touring, and the Blackfriars Playhouse). These new logos were rigidly standardized in terms of graphics in order to make

certain that the larger umbrella brand was easily recognizable even in the graphics for the “sub-brands.”



Figure 72: ASC Logos Graphic Standards

Ironically, while ASC’s re-branding was intended to more closely align the Company with the larger Shakespeare community, the graphic of the logo actually drastically diminishes the image of Shakespeare in its marketing materials. The new graphic is a section of the larger two-tone graphic of Shakespeare’s face used during the S2 years, cropped so that only the eyes and eyebrows remain, making the recognition of the image as the Bard nearly impossible to the uninitiated observer.

As to the name, The American Shakespeare Center, while several other choices were discussed, including the Shenandoah Shakespeare Center

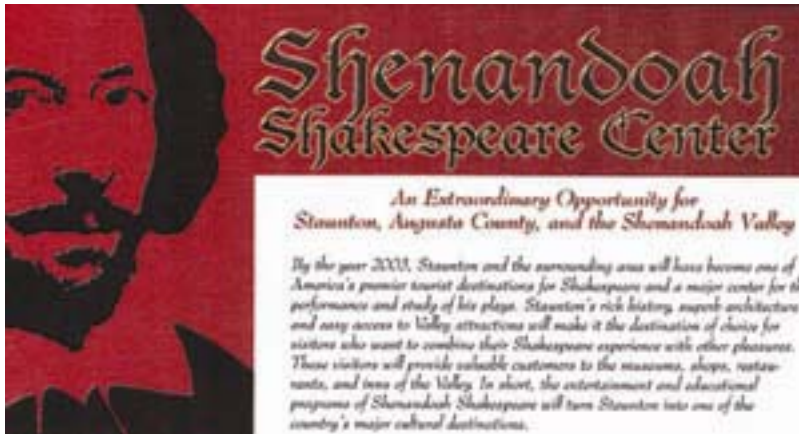


Figure 73: Shenandoah Shakespeare Center Capital Plan Development Flier, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 1999.

-- a name that was even used by the Company on a significant amount of promotional material for the fundraising campaign associated with the re-branding -- the American Shakespeare Center quickly emerged as the winner for the semantic significance and connection of each word to the Company's overall institutional goals. In both its newsletter and the scripts for the actor-led tours of the Blackfriars, the Company asserts, "We officially changed our name to 'The American Shakespeare Center' in April, 2005 to reflect our growth and our desire to be a national resource for all who love Shakespeare."⁶²³ According to Cohen, the use of the word "American" was not only an attempt to expand beyond the Company's previous regional identity, it was also his hope that by giving Americans their own Shakespeare Center they would be able "to claim Shakespeare" and his texts, about which he insists there is something "quintessentially American," in a way they previously had not been able. "We have to convince people that this is *our* Shakespeare Center!"⁶²⁴ In an article in *EIR* on the Company's re-

⁶²³ Blackfriars Tour Script 2006, 4.

⁶²⁴ Cohen Personal Interview 2012.

branding, Cohen maintained that “the plays of Shakespeare were a major part of our national culture, entertainment, and thinking, from the Irish neighborhoods of Manhattan, to cowboy and railroad camps in Utah and California.”⁶²⁵ Further, he suggests that, in previous eras, “Shakespeare was America’s bard. The major collections on Shakespeare’s life and works are in America, not England; there are in America 18 theatres built on the model of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, but in England only one, and that was reconstructed by an American actor.”⁶²⁶ The word “Center” was also chosen for its connotation as a place for research, discussion and discourse. In my own interviews with him, Cohen displayed a keen interest in the connection between the mission and theatrical and educational offerings of American Shakespeare companies, having recently written and presented his own paper on the comparative study of over twenty-five such companies. As a result, Cohen proudly insists that the key to organizational success is “knowing what your mission is and who you are. And you *will not find another* company more concerned about those issues -- sticking to them, fighting over them, talking about them, people storming out over them. But always at the heart of it is that real interest” in the production of Shakespeare’s plays:

That’s why we chose the word ‘Center’ for the name. Our graduate program [at Mary Baldwin College] offers the only degree in the country, in the world really, for the acting, directing, dramaturgy, and performance of Shakespeare, the only one. We’re not just a company. We’re not just a building. We want to be a place where people come to explore the stagecraft and the language of Shakespeare and

⁶²⁵ Freeman 65.

⁶²⁶ Freeman 65.

the way audiences work -- which you can do in this room, because the lights will stay exactly as you see them now. And we want to build a [replica of the] Globe. So we see ourselves as a *Center* for the study and enjoyment of Shakespeare. Which is much different than a theatre or a festival. And ‘festival.’ That is a word we have always run from because we think the word is being misused. The festival is supposed to be centered on a feast and is usually at only one point in the year. And ‘theatre,’ well, we don’t want people to only think of this space and not remember our touring efforts around the country. And ‘company,’ well, that excludes the audience and scholars like you. And that’s why you have come here, to ask questions about Shakespeare. Now granted, you could ask just about anyone that question, but when you ask it *here* we really have a lot to say about it.⁶²⁷

As proof of the newly renamed Company’s right to be known as the American Shakespeare Center, it generated a chart comparing its own production and educational offerings with that of nine other American Shakespeare companies, as part of the program for the Grand Opening Ceremony for “Shenandoah Shakespeare’s American Shakespeare Center.” The inclusion of this kind of comparative chart in the relatively short (one 8x11 page folded in half) program seems emblematic of the ASC’s anxiety concerning its reputation within the community of Shakespeare practitioners. The program also features a quote from *Coriolanus* referring to the Company as having been, “By deed-achieving honour newly named.”

⁶²⁷ Cohen Personal Interview 2010.

AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANIES (alphabetically)	New long season	Resident company	Traveling company	Long running in history	High school programs	Teacher Training Programs	For or near Shakespeare festival	For or near Shakespeare festival	Master Programs	Original Play Lists	Authentic Sites
Albany Shakespeare Festival Albany, New York	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		
Atlanta Shakespeare Festival Atlanta, Georgia	✓			✓			✓	✓		✓	
Baltimore Shakespeare Festival Baltimore, Maryland					✓						
Old Globe San Diego, California	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓		
Chicago Shakespeare Festival Chicago, Illinois	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				
Chicago Shakespeare Festival Arlington Heights, Illinois	✓	✓	✓				✓				
Shakespeare and Company Amherst, Massachusetts		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	
Shakespeare Theatre Washington, D.C.	✓			✓					✓		
Old Shakespeare Festival Columbia, South Carolina	✓	✓	✓								
Shakespeare Theatre Knoxville, Tennessee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 74: Comparison Chart of American Shakespeare Companies' Offerings, (ASC Grand Reopening Program, back cover graphic, American Shakespeare Center, 2005.)

The 2005 re-branding also prompted yet another step forward in terms of the maturation of ASC's marketing tactics: saving some of its more irreverent marketing tricks for use on materials for the touring arm of the Company in order to adjust its marketing strategies to account for the changing demographics of its audience. In contrast to the youth-oriented audiences of its first fifteen years, a 2002 audience survey indicated that 58% of Playhouse patrons were over the age of 35.⁶²⁸ The strategy is best exemplified through the comparison of the promotional materials for the Company's various 2009 seasons. While at the Playhouse, the decision was made to both extend the Company's fledgling Actor's Renaissance Season (ARS)

⁶²⁸ Audience Survey 2002, Compiled Results, ASC, 2002.

⁶²⁹ and add another non-Shakespeare Early Modern title into its resident season repertory, the company's touring season was given the title "Rough, Rude and Boisterous." Promotional materials from that touring season relied strongly on the previous Company marketing strategy of using irreverent photos of actors to reinforce its identity as a 'hip' Shakespeare company. Meanwhile, the cover of the program for the Company's 2009 Blackfriars season is staid by comparison, despite picturing Falstaff, arguably one of Shakespeare's most 'boisterous' characters.

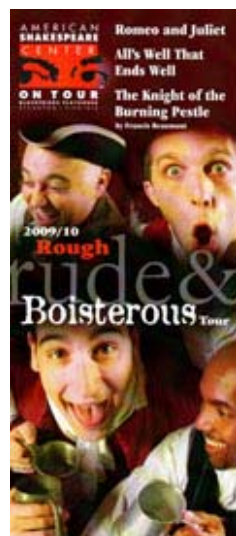


Figure 75: Rough, Rude, and Boisterous Tour Brochure, cover art, American Shakespeare Center, 2009. Featuring performers Chris Suter, Greg Phelps, Paul Fidelgo and Frank Errington.

Figure 76: Blackfriars Playhouse 2009 Summer and Fall Seasons Program, cover art, American Shakespeare Center, 2009.

The acronym for the ASC's new brand also bears a fortuitous resemblance to that of another more legendary Shakespeare: the RSC. However, despite the similarity, both Warren and Cohen categorically deny that the new name was chosen intentionally to draw comparisons

⁶²⁹ A more thorough discussion of this program is featured later in this chapter.

between the two companies. When asked if he believed that the name encourages people to recognize his company as the American version of the British theatrical giant, regardless of his supposed intent, Warren replies,

ASC is not intended to have anything to do with RSC. It's just the letters put together. . . . We're trying to carry the torch of Shakespeare, and I'll just say it, we have this goal, not just for America, but for the whole world. Because I think even the Globe, which is a great organization and great thing, they are not interested in the same things we are. They're not interested in having their directors think about, "How did Shakespeare use the doors? How did he use the above? How did he use the below?" They're thinking, 'What can we do that's really cool?' And that's great. That's valid. But it's not what we do. We're trying to explore things from the point of view that, if we think Shakespeare might have done it, we wanna try it. ⁶³⁰

By the time of the 2005 rebranding, some significant changes had begun to be seen in the Company's signature performance style. And as one might imagine in a Company that claims to employ Shakespeare's staging practices as its own, issues of authenticity continue to be intricately intertwined with the reception of its work. In his review of the resident company's 2005 season, Paul Menzer explores ASC's have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too rationalizations, noting that while many of its claims "about how early English players conducted their business," would "certainly surprise his [Shakespeare's] shareholders," many of its anachronistic choices are

⁶³⁰ Jim Warren, Personal Interview, 13 Aug. 2010.

consistent with the Company's own "elastic characterizations of its approach: "a commitment to Shakespeare's text and to the mission of connecting that text to a modern audience."⁶³¹

Costumes are, perhaps, the area where ASC's consistency to its original aesthetic has most wavered. The Company which began with a troupe of identically costumed actors who used simple, modern day costume props in an attempt to connect with its young student audiences, by 2002 boasted productions with designs ranging in time period from the ancient Greeks to the 1950s, and had even experimented with historically accurate costume construction methods. In 2002, the Company that had once prided itself on rescuing theatre from the pretentious clutches of stuffy actors in pumpkin pants and tights changed its tune for a production of *Twelfth Night*. Led by costume designer Terry Southerington, who researched period patterns by studying pictures of clothing from museums, the Company made the decision to construct authentic Elizabethan fashions for the production, employing construction techniques and materials that mimicked those available in Shakespeare's own era, including eleven pairs of hand-cobbled period shoes.⁶³² This production aside, the Company's costume choices currently run the gamut from nebulous to encyclopedic, a choice it justifies by its assertion that because Shakespeare's own company "performed *Julius Caesar*, for example, in primarily Elizabethan garb" it too has the license to ignore historical accuracy: "Sometimes we'll use contemporary garb. . . Sometimes Elizabethan, and sometimes a mix of everything in between."⁶³³

⁶³¹ Paul Menzer, American Shakespeare Center 2006-2007 Theater Review, *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25.2(22 Jun. 2007): 100.

⁶³² While Southerington did sew Olivia's costume by hand, the production schedule required that she use sewing machines to construct the costumes for the rest of the cast. See Kristie Di Salvo, "Costumes add authenticity," *News Leader* [Staunton, VA] n.d. 2002: n.pag.

⁶³³ Program for *As you Like It*, Blush and Swoon Tour, ASC 2000, 4.

A review of the Company's 2001 *Twelfth Night*, performed at the Folger Library, reveals that not all audiences appreciated the production's modern references. In his review in *The Washington Times*, Eric M. Johnson wrote, "My only quibble is with the chronological choices. . . this production takes place sometime in the first half of the 20th century. . . [but] that decision adds nothing discernible to the play. The costumes apparently are from the 1930s or '40s, but the songs sound like a cross between Pink Floyd and Cat Stevens -- except for 'There's no Business Like Show Business,' a 1946 song used during scene changes."⁶³⁴ Still, the confusion does little to change Johnson's overall enjoyment of the evening, as he ends by declaring, "But who cares about the jumble -- we're all postmodernists now, right?"⁶³⁵

Many reviewers have praised the Company for its innovative use of the Blackfriars playing spaces, often noting that ASC does a better job than the London Globe at staging productions for a deep thrust, playing to the audiences on the sides and not simply relying on putting actors in the aisles. Still others insist that the Company's explorations do not go far enough. Paul Menzer suggests that for a company that claims one of its goals is to explore the staging technologies available on the Early Modern stage, the ASC has not used its self-proclaimed "laboratory playhouse" in a way that truly explores the historical staging technologies that emerged in Elizabethan theatres, technologies which, he notes, were commonplace by the rule of James I and which are clearly called for in many of Shakespeare's later, romance plays. By way of example, Menzer gives the example of ASC's 2006 production of *The Tempest* that made spectacular use of actors climbing nautical ropes during a daring

⁶³⁴ Eric M. Johnson, "Bard's bright 'Night' alight with seasonal merriment," *Washington Times* n.d. Dec. 2001: n. pag.

⁶³⁵ Johnson.

staging of the opening shipwreck, but made no attempt to explore the same space when the goddesses arrive from the heavens in the masque later in the play. He suggests that the Company's commitment to Shakespeare's text, a focus which, as he puts it, results in a "privileging of the ear to the eye" may be at the root of its unwillingness to embrace the spectacle inherent in so many of Shakespeare's plays.⁶³⁶

Another change to the Company's staging conditions can be seen in the creeping growth of the run times of the Company's productions. Numerous reviewers have commented on the fact that its "two hour" benchmark for running time has increased over the years, and today it is the rare ASC show that comes in much under two hours. While the Company's trademark element of speed is still admirably visible in the pace of the action of the play and the Company's insistence on seamless transitions between scenes, the move into the Blackfriars introduced the idea of intermissions and intervals to the Company's productions, bringing with them the financially appealing notion of concessions, all of which are famous for inadvertently causing delays during performances. As early as 2002 the Company has sold wine to be consumed by audience members during shows, inside the Blackfriars -- "in fact, they encourage it"⁶³⁷ -- as according to Cohen, it is one of the numerous ways that the ASC "strives for authenticity."⁶³⁸ By 2005, the Company regularly inserted intermissions in its productions, filling them with the same delightfully modern musical interludes, the sale of more wine and candy, and more shameless begging-for-dollars by the actors. Still, some have complained that

⁶³⁶ Menzer 103.

⁶³⁷ Diane Daniel, "An authentic Bard experience at Blackfriars Playhouse," *Boston Globe* 31 July 2002: n.pag.

⁶³⁸ Cohen qtd. in Daniel.

these intermissions go too far beyond the authentic Elizabethan theatre conventions, (especially in the case of the 2006 production of *Macbeth*, the shortest of Shakespeare's tragedy, which featured not one, but two, fifteen-minute breaks). At present, all ASC productions have pre-shows that include, curtain speech material, announcements of other ASC shows or events, music, and the "Shameless hocking [*sic* for "hawking"] and selling of merchandise and refreshments' by actors.⁶³⁹

Another significant way the production aesthetic of the Company has evolved over its history involves the kinds of actors it has hired and the responsibilities assigned to them. For financial reasons, in its earliest years the Company hired only student actors, (and in its earliest seasons, these student actors were not even paid). As the Company's reputation and budgets increased, it was finally able to justify the hiring of professional non-Equity actors for its touring troupes. Still, as Warren points out, the rigorous schedule and physical demands of touring troupes "always attracts younger actors without families, mortgages and other obligations."⁶⁴⁰ As a result, through the better part of the 1990s the Company endured reviews that criticized its use of actors that many felt were too young to do justice to some of Shakespeare's more mature characters. In a profile piece on the Company and the opening of the Blackfriars, one regional theatre critic was particularly pleased to point out that one of the many benefits of the Company's decision to settle down was that "the average age of the cast -- a critical sticking point over the years -- should increase in the new space."⁶⁴¹ While adding a number of more

⁶³⁹ Actor Handbook, ASC 2007, 17.

⁶⁴⁰ Warren qtd. in Proctor G1.

⁶⁴¹ Proctor G1.

established, Equity actors to the resident seasons at the Blackfriars allowed the Company to tackle certain plays which seemed out of reach of the young actors of its touring troupes, the change also resulted in some complications that the Company had not entirely anticipated. While some of the newer, Equity actors were game to “drop away all the jadedness” found in more established theatres, many felt they had “earned the right not to move furniture,” nor were they interested in constructing their own props, as previous S2 troupes had.⁶⁴² The relatively short three-week rehearsal period also proved frustrating to those used to having a more polished product by opening night. “They just put ‘em up and hope they get better,” complained Washington-based actor Joe Wallace, who acted in the 2002-3 season.⁶⁴³

Over the course of an evening of entertainment at the Blackfriars actors can be seen setting their own stage, props and costumes, inviting audiences into the theatre, serving as their own warm-up comics, serenading the audience with tone-setting musical selections, selling concessions (and even alcoholic libations) from the stage, and explaining the Company’s signature staging practices. Equity rules forbid such practices, except in highly regulated circumstances, resulting in several years of unfortunate stratification amidst resident Company actors, as non-Equity actors were compelled to pick up the slack that had arisen from the use of guest contract Equity actors. Actors in the touring troupes had yet another set of responsibilities: selling audiences outside of the Valley on the Company’s particular brand of Shakespeare and planting within them the desire to see these productions in their originally intended venue, in the hopes of luring audiences to ASC’s new destination Shakespeare theatre. Though these

⁶⁴² Trey Graham, “Stage Flight,” *CPArts* n.d 2003: 2.

⁶⁴³ Graham, Trey 2.

additional duties were, in some ways, merely an extension of the kind of duties touring actors already performed as ambassadors for the Company and for Shakespeare, the workload for the Company's actors has always been taxing and not every actor was interested in taking on responsibilities beyond the performance of the text. The divide between the resident and touring troupe resulted in a kind of second-classing of the latter, as they were compelled to work for the benefit of another group of actors who were not always required to assume an equal share of the duties.

By way of example, Tony Tassa, a touring actor, submitted his resignation shortly before the fall tours began. Among his numerous grievances was the assertion that the schedule and workload for the touring company was "unreasonable." Tassa maintained that the proposed schedule for the upcoming fall tour, which significantly increased the number of performances from the previous touring season, and would frequently require the actors to do six shows in a seventy-two-hour period, constituted an unacceptable pace and resulted in actors whose performances would be "limited by exhaustion." Tassa ended his list of grievances by concluding that, "I am also not interested in promoting your opinions about doing these plays. I have no confidence in the shows or in the style. I think they are gimmicks, pure and simple."⁶⁴⁴

In the Company's early years, actor contracts included claims about the production circumstances under which Shakespeare's company operated, suggesting that actors at Shenandoah may be called upon to fulfill those same obligations, as indicated in this somewhat vague passage of an actor contract from 1993: "Shakespeare's actors made their own costumes, built their own sets, did their own publicity, lugged around their own equipment, and did all the

⁶⁴⁴ Tony Tassa, Letter to Dr. Ralph Cohen, 15 August 1996.

backstage work in addition to acting. The SSE is trying hard to carry the torch of that Shakespearean tradition by giving each company member production responsibilities and a voice in company decisions.”⁶⁴⁵ However, as a result of continued internal disputes among troupes as to the specific responsibilities of both Equity and non-Equity actors, and faced with increasing pressure to insure the financial viability of the newly re-branded ASC, the decision was made to spell out explicitly the duties expected of each category of performer, including the duty to ‘sell’ the Company and its ideals, which is now stipulated as part of the contractual obligations of both Equity and Non-Equity Company actors.⁶⁴⁶

Where the Company finds its actors is another circumstance that has changed as it has matured and grown in national recognition. In the first decade of the Company, actors were most frequently regional college theatre students eager for acting experience. By the time of the S2 re-branding, when Company finances had reached the point where it could pay professional actors a somewhat competitive wage, Warren recalls that he spent a good deal of his year travelling to regional auditions (such as NETC, SETC, URTAs, the StrawHats, etc.) in order to secure the best quality actors that the Company’s meager budgets could afford. According to him, after the 2005 re-branding, ASC had enough clout within the field of American Shakespeare companies that actors around the country submit video auditions to him. Warren also acknowledges that the process of casting and the training of actors in the Company’s signature performance style have gotten easier each year as the number of alums within troupes continues to grow

⁶⁴⁵ Season Contract, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 1993, Item 30, 5.

⁶⁴⁶ Scoff and Grin Tour Actor Handbook, Shenandoah Shakespeare, ASC 2000.

exponentially.⁶⁴⁷ According to Warren, at present, there may be as few as three new actors in any given troupe -- a fact that he attributes to the ASC's unique performance style which is often so addictive to actors.⁶⁴⁸ In fact, several Company alums have gone on to start their own Shakespeare theatres around the country, implementing (and perpetuating) much of ASC's performance style. Warren also notes that, for some time now, the Company has toyed with the idea of creating a summer program dedicated to training new actors to work in its signature style, but has made no real plans to institute anything of that nature. When asked how ASC currently handles training actors new to its very specific style, Warren mentions the detailed Company handbook it distributes to actors shortly after they are cast, while maintaining that the most effective means of training actors comes in the rehearsal room setting, seeing other actors and the director working within the style. Warren says that he always makes certain that he is scheduled to direct the first show of every troupe's season in order to "get them into it."⁶⁴⁹ In terms of training, it should be noted that, despite the ASC's connection to the graduate program in Early Modern Theatre offered at Mary Baldwin College, it has not made a practice of culling a company from the ranks of that department. In 2010 Warren estimated that he had only ever hired two actors from the program:

We are just now starting to integrate more [with that program] so that we are using their students as interns on our stage. . . .We're starting to have our actors teaching in the program, but they are still developing as a program. And they

⁶⁴⁷ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

⁶⁴⁸ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

⁶⁴⁹ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

don't have auditions to get into that program, so in my view, as the artistic director of this company, they're not ready yet. But they're growing and they are getting better.⁶⁵⁰

Though the Company has undergone many changes, its rhetorical use of Bardolatrous language has remained largely the same over the years, as is demonstrated in this passage found in promotional material for the 2007 season which makes the assertion that the performance style is not only the salvation of Shakespeare, but of our very society.

When the American Shakespeare Center set out to recover Shakespeare's original staging practices, we thought -- rather grandly -- that we were saving them from over-production and too-reverent treatment. What we discovered was that we were saving the audiences, too. Our interactive productions recapture for modern audiences of all ages and backgrounds the palpable sense of community that Shakespeare's audiences enjoyed."⁶⁵¹

The primarily student audiences of the Company's early years meant that a significant number of SSE's audiences had little to no awareness of Shakespeare or even a negative opinion of his plays a situation that both Warren and Cohen recognize as a benefit: "Sometimes we have an easier time winning people over who don't have any experience of Shakespeare, other than it's boring."⁶⁵² But the Company currently prides itself on its self-proclaimed ability to appeal to Shakespeare traditionalists as well. "It is a great joy to see people turn around. . . . The greatest

⁶⁵⁰ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

⁶⁵¹ Actor Handbook, American Shakespeare Center, 2007, 3.

⁶⁵² Warren qtd. in Bonner 12.

satisfaction for me is that both ranges -- Shakespearean scholars and people who do not like Shakespeare -- we win over.”⁶⁵³

The first page of the 2007 Actor Handbook, lays out a newly articulated goal for the Company in a section titled, “OUR CHARGE: Theatre as Civic Engagement.” The argument begins by restating sociologist Robert Putnam’s assertion the social fabric of America is fraying as the rise of the internet and technology had lessened direct human interaction and encouraged a more fractured society of individuals. ASC then rhetorically positions itself as the cure to that social ill through the assertion that “theatre *is* the act of coming together as a temporary community,” and that its style of theatre, which encourages more active audience engagement, is uniquely designed to create a true sense of community among participants.⁶⁵⁴ This claim however, like so many made by ASC, seems an overstatement of what its style is truly capable of accomplishing. The idea that a performance, (especially one given by a group of touring actors often in town for only a day or two), is able to create any lasting sense of community seems to be an overestimation of the unifying power of the liveness of performance. Further, it could be argued that while the ASC has claimed to be doing theatre the way Shakespeare would have, other contemporary productions of Shakespeare texts, (like *Sleep No More*, where the audience has to chase down actors in a labyrinthine space and each audience member necessarily experiences his/her own version of *Macbeth*), have been able, often through the use of the same modern technologies disparaged by ASC, to, arguably, surpass and deepen the level of audience engagement offered by performances at the Blackfriars.

⁶⁵³ Cohen qtd. in Erstein E1.

⁶⁵⁴ Actor Handbook, American Shakespeare Center, 2007, 3.

But the Company's grandiose, quasi-religious evocations of the Bard, however inspired or well-meaning are in direct contradiction to Cohen's original institutional mission to take the worshipful nature out of the typical American's rarified perceptions of Shakespeare and his works. This contradiction has persisted, in varying levels of severity, throughout the Company's history, but the construction of the Blackfriars, coupled with the assertion that its performance style replicates Shakespeare's staging conditions, opened it up to numerous evaluations of its authenticity, particularly from a growing faction within the academy concerned with the exploration of what most scholars refer to as 'Original Practices' (OP), a set of theories on the theatrical conditions and conventions of the Early Modern stage in England. While the Company occasionally used the term "original practice" from the late 1990s until 2005, soon after its re-branding as the ASC, it began once again experimenting with new, less fractious verbiage to describe the particular connection to history its signature rules of performance had. Warren and Cohen defended their reluctance to use the term OP on the grounds that the Company's focus on connecting with contemporary audiences meant it had little interest in complying with rigid theories of historical accuracy, but were instead trying to recreate "the *spirit* of those conditions in our unique way,"⁶⁵⁵ a distinction that they began articulating soon after the ASC re-branding. In a 2006 interview for *American Theatre*, Cohen and Warren cheerfully admitted that some of their practices were "utterly inconsistent with the 'original practices' mode they otherwise promote."⁶⁵⁶ Cohen is quoted as amiably admitting, "You're quite right it's a contradiction," but both he and Warren "point out that contemporary all-male Shakespeare companies don't really

⁶⁵⁵ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

⁶⁵⁶ Celia Wren, "They Do It Like the King's Men Did – Almost." *American Theatre* Feb 2006: 46.

hew to Renaissance praxis either, since they cast adult men, rather than boys, in the women's roles. 'I'm obviously dancing on the head of a pin here,' Cohen confesses during this line of reasoning, 'You can hear me. Ouch!''⁶⁵⁷

Meanwhile, within the academy, the war over the authenticity, and even the use-value, of OP became so pervasive that it seemed that no scholarly examination of Shakespeare was complete without engaging in its growing discourse. The battle over OP is, in some ways, a microcosm of the battle between scholars and practitioners of Shakespeare and exemplifies the institutional struggle faced by the ASC; the very history of the field straddles the theory/practice divide, much as Cohen claims ASC's practices do. While OP itself may well be traced back to William Poel's production-based explorations of the effects of the theatrical conventions and physical realities of the Elizabethan stage on the performance of Shakespeare's plays, its first true proponents were literary scholars seeking to un-do the editorial changes made to his works in the centuries since their first publication. Frictions among scholars erupted into a full blown war in the 1990s when proponents of the rising field of New Bibliographers clashed with practitioners, notably Neil Freeman and Patrick Tucker, advocates for First Folio-based acting methods. By the turn of the millennium, the field of Original Practices had become so contentious among scholars that Cohen began to fear that even the mention of it promotional literature would prove to be polarizing or off-putting, and so the Company decided to distance themselves from the term by whatever means necessary. In my own time in ASC's offices in Staunton, I was frequently reminded of the Company's desire to avoid the term "original practices"; on one memorable occasion during my 2012 trip to Staunton, I made the mistake of

⁶⁵⁷ Wren 47.

using the term “OP” while interviewing a staff member, which prompted two of her fellow staffers to lean in from their adjacent cubicles to issue the very seriously toned reminder, “We don’t use that term here.”

By 2008, ASC had begun using the terms “original staging conditions” and “early modern staging conditions” interchangeably in its promotional material, especially in the literature for the Master’s program at MBC. In my 2012 interview with Cohen I asked him to discuss his reluctance to use the term OP. His somewhat overly polite response was, that while he doesn’t want to disparage the term -- “I was in the meeting at the Globe when we decided to call it ‘original practices,’ and it definitely seemed the least pretentious [of the suggestions made]!”⁶⁵⁸ -- he noted that its rigid notions of authenticity meant that some scholars would have them perform before an “audience who smell bad and are English.” Rather, he prefers the idea that ASC produces “bedrock Shakespeare,” (a term that he used several times during our 2012 interview), which he describes as being definitely “invested in the idea of origins” or “Shakespeare Staging Practices,” and therefore better able to describe the experience of going to an ASC performance to the uninitiated.⁶⁵⁹ In the past two years, the Company has finally standardized the descriptor of its style, ultimately settling on Warren’s suggestion, “Shakespeare’s Staging Conditions.” Paradoxically, the replica-status of its performance venue often attracts the very same Bardophiles whose reverence the Company’s production style and marketing tactics have always sought to avoid. The success of its paradoxical institutional identity lies, according to Hope Hynes of *Spectator Magazine*, in the Company’s ability to “help

⁶⁵⁸ Cohen Personal Interview 2012.

⁶⁵⁹ Cohen Personal Interview 2012.

an audience forget they are watching Shakespeare,” a skill she ironically identifies as one of the tools “which will allow the Bard to live on into the next century.”⁶⁶⁰

At present, the most significant challenge faced by the Company, according to every employee I interviewed, is to find a way to differentiate ASC’s means of commemorating Shakespeare from the memorializing tendencies so often ascribed to efforts of historical re-creationists. Cohen acknowledges this as “a continuing battle, and we’re not always winning.”⁶⁶¹ He is also well aware of the irony in the fact that, while in many ways the building of the Blackfriars insured the economic survival and expansion of the Company, it has also been the thing that has most jeopardized its assertion of the enduring relevance of Shakespeare and his works in our contemporary culture. He recalls that, “when we opened [the SSE in 1988] we had a serious problem. I spent my whole career, all that teaching at James Madison, fighting to convince people that seeing Shakespeare shouldn’t be like going to church. And then we went and built a space that’s so beautiful that when you walk into it you feel reverent, and that’s a trap.”⁶⁶²

Several employees contend the lack of specifically-labeled seats in the house disabuses potential audience members of the idea that their experience at the Blackfriars will be the polite fare experienced at most traditional, contemporary theatrical events. While patrons can reserve a ticket in a certain area or section, there aren’t specific seat numbers. Director of Education, Sarah Enloe asserts that, because spectators are deprived of a stable and specific seat, they quickly

⁶⁶⁰ Hope Hynes, “To Play Is The Thing When The Play Is The Thing,” *Spectator Magazine* [Raleigh, NC] n.d. 2001: n.pag.

⁶⁶¹ Cohen Personal Interview 2012.

⁶⁶² Cohen Personal Interview 2010.

realize that they are free to move about the space in order to try to get a better view of a production moment from elsewhere in the house. Other than its claim for the community-building benefits of its historically accurate venue, both Warren and Cohen point to the Company's prevalent use of modern music during the pre-show and intervals as well as the decision to allow concessions and alcohol beverages in the house during the show as the most obvious methods it has employed to combat its antiquarian perception.

Over the years, the Company has also experimented with its choice of play selection as a means of attracting and maintaining audience members and asserting its desire to do more than produce museum theatre. Warren recalls that the opening of the Blackfriars brought with it increased anxieties over the Company's ability to maintain a vital, year-long repertory season featuring only the thirty-seven extant plays by Shakespeare, and as a result, the decision was made to begin to look beyond the Bard for season selections. Warren says that, over the years, he has developed a set of criteria for determining which plays would best lend themselves to the Company's performance style, allowing for the incorporation of the audience into the world of the play and for the action of the play to be staged without technical effects or special lighting. Still he acknowledges that, "...and this is where some people will wanna smack me -- I'm taking plays that weren't written for these kinds of conditions, so in some way I'm doing the same thing I'm accusing other people of doing to Shakespeare's plays."⁶⁶³ Over the years, the Company has taken on both contemporary plays, (including *A Christmas Carol*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The Santaland Diaries*, and *Greater Tuna*, and *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*

⁶⁶³ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

(*Abridged*)), and classics, (such as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Saint Joan*, and *Tartuffe*), and produced them in its own signature style.

Many of the biggest risks taken by the Company in terms of non-Shakespearean season selections occurred prior to the 2005 re-branding. Desiring to use the laboratory atmosphere of the Blackfriars to explore the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries, they first chose *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a 17th century comedy by Francis Beaumont. Appropriately, Beaumont was possible collaborator with Shakespeare, and as such his plays were written to be performed under the performance conditions provided by the Blackfriars Playhouse. But perhaps even more fortuitously, the text carries the Renaissance play-within-a-play conceit to an extreme,⁶⁶⁴ affording the Company a unique opportunity to explore the immediacy of its more active actor-audience relationship. The production was well-received locally, (so much so that they remounted it in 2003 and again in 2010), and while the *Washington Post* took issue with the production's repetitive comedy and plodding pace, it praised numerous individual performances and ultimately decreed the production to be "sublimely silly."⁶⁶⁵ In its promotional material, the Company characterized Beaumont's comedy in familiar pop culture terms while emphasizing the text's historical authenticity: "Part Marx Brothers, Part Monty Python and the Holy Grail. . . . Imagine Homer and Marge Simpson buying tickets to a Chekhov play and then climbing onstage to redirect the show to meet their tastes. . . . [T]his play is a celebration of the way Elizabethan

⁶⁶⁴ The plot of the play centers on the performance of a conventional romance by a group of players. The performance is then interrupted by a pair of disgruntled audience members, a grocer and his wife, who insist that the players spice up their boring plot by adding more action and adventure. When the players attempt to refuse the couple on the basis that they have no additional actors to help them with the proposed additions, the couple nominate their wily servant, Rafe, who plays to his masters' whims with a mischievous glee that eventually runs the production hilariously aground, despite the best efforts of the professional players.

⁶⁶⁵ Lloyd Rose, "'Knight': A Swash Chuckler," *Washington Post* 22 May 1999: n.pag.

audiences expected to be part of the ‘action.’⁶⁶⁶ The play, and the playfully charismatic lead character Rafe, were so popular among audience members that the marketing department continued to use promotional photos from the show, which became a staple on general marketing and promotional materials for several seasons to come. Under the auspices of S2, the Company produced the Early Modern works *The Roaring Girl*, *The Alchemist*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *The Most Lamentable Comedy of Sir John Falstaff*⁶⁶⁷ as part of its resident seasons. It also began a fledgling program called “Bring ‘Em Back Alive,” a pay-what-you-will series of staged readings done in the Blackfriars by regional actors who performed lesser-known Renaissance works with scripts in hand, offering audiences the opportunity to “enjoy coffee and a light refreshment with the actors” at the interval.⁶⁶⁸ The first season of the series included performances of Middleton’s *The Witch*, Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Cupid’s Revenge*, Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revenge*, and Chapman, Jonson, and Marston’s *Eastward, Ho!*

Following the 2005 ASC re-branding, one might have expected the Company to have adopted an all-Shakespeare bill of fare, but instead the 2006 season featured the sci-fi- rock

⁶⁶⁶ Blackfriars Playhouse 2002-2003 Season Program, 12.

⁶⁶⁷ One of the company’s less successful attempts outside the Shakespeare canon was an original compilation piece called *The Most Lamentable Comedy of Sir John Falstaff*. Cohen served as “text conflator” for the play which attempts to make one cohesive plots of the various narrative surrounding the character of Falstaff. Cohen defended his choice of project at the time by noting that his conflation was just the latest in a long line of similar attempts, including Edward Derrig in the 1620’s, Orson Welles’ film, *Chimes at Midnight*, and a 2003 production at Lincoln center starring Kevin Kline. The production, directed by Warren, was poorly received, even by critics who had traditionally been very complimentary to the company’s productions. Local reviewer Charles Culbertson suggests that while the character may have been “good comic relief” in his original position as a secondary character, he cannot sustain the process of being “snatched from the plays in which he appears and reassembled in a work of his own. Further, he complains that the play, at two hours and forty-five minutes, is far too long, and that the performance of Falstaff by actor Eric Quander lacked the presence needed for the iconic role (Culbertson, Charles. “Lamentably, ‘Falstaff’ fails to engage.” *Go! Magazine* 1-7 July 2004, 2. ASC Special Collections, Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University.)

⁶⁶⁸ Blackfriars Playhouse 2002-2003 Season Program, 6.

musical *Return to the Forbidden Planet*. Warren, a self-acknowledged sci-fi geek, explained the choice as being based partly on his own interests and partly on the desire to “expand the Bard’s reach and . . . promote the company’s new branding” and “go with something kind of outlandish, wonderful and unexpected. This show mixes a sci-fi spoof, a Shakespeare review and a rock concert all into one.”⁶⁶⁹ The Bob Carlton musical, based on a 1956 sci-fi film, (itself inspired by Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*), and winner of the Olivier Award in 1990, had developed an international cult following and as such provided the Company with the opportunity to re-assert itself as the rock ‘n’ rollers of the world of Shakespeare as had been its reputation in the past. By placing it in the Company’s touring season, rather than as a part of the season at the Blackfriars, ASC was able to reap the benefits of a season of nation-wide press reviews, which depicted it as a company with a hip, modern take on Shakespeare’s dry and dusty canon. Still Warren insisted that the choice was very much in line with the Company’s desire to introduce its signature style to the “uninitiated” and “those who might be shy about seeing Shakespeare.”⁶⁷⁰ Bill Gordon, then Director of ASC’s Touring Operations, agreed, calling the show “perfectly designed for what we already do. It’s a big, modern musical with a high percentage of Shakespeare’s text in it and a rocking soundtrack. It truly is education disguised as entertainment.”⁶⁷¹

One of the most popular and exciting new programs offered by the re-branded ASC was its Actor’s Renaissance Season (ARS), developed in 2005 in an attempt to explore issues of historical accuracy in terms of the rehearsal and production process. Unlike other ASC

⁶⁶⁹ Warren qtd. in Deryl Davis, “Shakespeare Rocks,” *Stage Directions* Oct. 2005: 110.

⁶⁷⁰ Davis 111.

⁶⁷¹ Gordon qtd. in Davis 113.

production seasons, an ARS begins when company “Sharers,” (a.k.a. the ASC artistic staff), assemble a cast of ten to twelve actors and distribute among them the roles for the season. The Sharers also assign various members of the actors company to serve as Musical Director, Fight Choreographer, and ‘tyre-man’ or ‘costume coordinator’ who is responsible from pulling costumes for the show from the Company’s existing stock of costumes. No directors or designers are assigned to the production; the acting company must work among themselves to stage the production, much as the company contends that theatre productions may have been organized during the Elizabethan era. Troupes are, however, provided with a “book-keeper” or “prompter,” who serves much the same role as their historical counterparts with some of the added responsibilities of a modern stage manager, and a student from the MLitt/MFA program to serve as dramaturge. Like their Elizabethan counterparts, actors are not provided with full scripts, but rather sides of their own lines.

The ARS has received significant praise among academics for its ability to truly address the ASC’s claims about the laboratory-nature of its playhouse. Company literature boasts that

the ARS is not some academic experiment in antiquated theatre -- it’s about making theatre exciting, making it fresh. By daring to throw away a few more of our twenty-first century theatrical norms, we hope to create an even stronger bond between performer and audience and an even greater level of fun and excitement for an audience experiencing the raw energy of the Renaissance theatre.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷²Program for Second Actors Renaissance Season, American Shakespeare Center, 2006, 5.

The passage re-enforces ASC's reputation as the Company that asks "WWSD?,"⁶⁷³ while reasserting its own rebellious identity, expressed, as is its style, with a pop culture sense of humor. On a practical level, the ARS was also one of the numerous attempts on the part of ASC to expand its offerings to a year-long season. Warren understands that audiences come to the Blackfriars for a variety of reasons, not simply season selection. "Sometimes they're coming because they know the actors just barely know their lines (because they'll call for lines on stage, and that's part of the show). Some people come because they know about the process, and some of them come because they want to see it here [in the Blackfriars]."⁶⁷⁴

Over the years, the Company's formula regarding the incorporation of non-Shakespearean plays into its resident season has undergone a significant evolution. In an interview to promote the opening of the Blackfriars in 2001, Cohen claimed that his formula called for "seventy-five percent Shakespearean works with the remaining twenty-five percent coming from the work of Shakespeare's contemporaries (like Jonson and Beaumont) and plays based on the themes Shakespeare addressed (such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* and *Forbidden Planet*)."⁶⁷⁵ But even as his own seasons evolved away from an all-Shakespeare format, Cohen chastised other Shakespeare companies that had begun to drastically reduce the number of Shakespeare's works that they produced, and (in the case of the Stratford Festival in Ontario) for removing Shakespeare from its name and its mission statement.⁶⁷⁶ However, most

⁶⁷³ A take-off on the Christ-centered mantra, "What Would Jesus Do?" popularly abbreviated as "WWJD?" on bracelets, tee-shirts and other merchandising around the turn of the millennial century.

⁶⁷⁴ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

⁶⁷⁵ Edwards 15.

⁶⁷⁶ Edwards 15.

recently ASC has pulled back significantly from modern works, choosing to focus, with a few notable exceptions, on the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, because, according to Warren,

I am no longer looking for other modern plays to fit into our staging conditions. I am looking at more Renaissance plays that nobody knows about that are real gems and will really come alive in this environment. . . . Performing them using SSC is what our mission is. So when we can do something that's not Renaissance and be true to mission we might. But we can be more true to mission by staying inside of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. . . . We never changed our mission statement but we thought we had to kind of operate a bit outside of it. Turns out, we don't. . . . We've jettisoned them one-by-one to the place where we are now, where we try to stay true to the mission all the time.⁶⁷⁷

Rather than evoking the double-edged sword of historical accuracy in its promotional materials, the Company has most recently turned its marketing focus towards the kinds of experiences that the Blackfriars and ASC are capable of offering audience members. The strategy recalls Dennis Kennedy's article on Shakespeare tourism in which he asserts, "Tourists are modernity's paradoxical consumers who seek not merchandise but experience; the attractions of the world draw them with promises of sensation or renewal, inspiration or plain diversion. Experience is hard to commodify."⁶⁷⁸ Still that is exactly what the Company's marketing and

⁶⁷⁷ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

⁶⁷⁸ Kennedy 176.

development departments are actively engaged in trying to do: boast about the Company's ability to provide a unique "Shakespeareance" in its equally unique venue.⁶⁷⁹

Ironically, as ASC's dedication to producing Renaissance texts in a historically-inspired setting has grown, the Company's use of Shakespeare's image on its promotional materials has been almost completely abolished in favor of a marketing focus on audience experience. This change can be seen as early as 2003, when the Company began to use the term "Our House" to refer to the Blackfriars in an attempt to make the combat the memorial connotations so often associated with historic replicas (and, arguably, Shakespeare himself).



Figure 77: "Come Over to Our House" Ad Proof, Shenandoah Shakespeare, 2004.



Figure 78: "From Our House to Yours," Touring Brochure, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, 2004.

⁶⁷⁹ "Shenandoah Shakespeare Express: From Our House to Yours" Tour Brochure.

By the 20th Anniversary season, the image of Shakespeare was entirely absented from the Company’s marketing materials, with the exception of his eyes in its logo, featuring, instead, the photos of Company actors in performance, coupling them with taglines that emphasize audience experience,⁶⁸⁰ such as “Where audience matters,” (used in in ads for the Company’s 20th anniversary season, and “All YOU Can Imagine,” used in ads from 2004-2006.



Figure 79: Promotional Photo of ASC's 2007 production of *Love's Labors Lost* (Twentieth Anniversary Season Program, cover photo by Michael Bailey, American Shakespeare Center, 2008.)

Figure 80: Blackfriars Playhouse 2007-2008 Season Brochure, photo by Michael Bailey, American Shakespeare Center, 2007: 2.

Ultimately, ASC still struggles to find its equilibrium between pleasing scholars and practitioners, between reviving the cultural memory of Shakespeare and memorializing him; it is, according to Cohen, a tricky balance: “I don’t think we’ve mastered that yet.”⁶⁸¹ When asked what his Company is uniquely capable of contributing to the enduring cultural memory of the Bard, he replies, that Shakespeare’s genius is “more than just the universal appeal of the texts,”

⁶⁸⁰ Cathy Bagwell Marsh, Personal Interview, 12 January 2012.

⁶⁸¹ Marsh Personal Interview 2012.

noting that what is most remarkable about his writing is his ability to “get the nanoseconds of humanity so real” that the audience cannot help but identify with the very personal and human moments provided by Shakespeare for the characters in his plays.⁶⁸² As to what comes next for the Company, both Warren and Cohen are optimistic that ASC finances will once again be secure enough to return to its plans to construct a replica of the Globe in Staunton, noting that it would be great to,

beat London to the punch -- you know, in having Shakespeare’s indoor and outdoor theatres, because that presents the same challenges but with much more stuff to deal with. And we could move back and forth between the spaces, like he did. . . . And that’s an exciting thing for actors and directors to think about doing. The scale of everything gets bigger with the Globe. But it’s still the same stuff, so I feel like continued success at showing what our mission is: an exciting thing for people to get to experience. . . . I think that what Shakespeare is so good at, and what all good art tries to do, is connect with that and try to expand our humanity expands, we get better, we become better people. And if we become better people our worlds, our small spheres of influence, become better. And I think the world becomes a better place. I think that night after night of doing our shows, especially creating the kind of community we create every night, we make the world a better place. So I think that continuing to get to do that for more people, or deeper for certain more with the people we have, is where the goal is.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸² Cohen Personal Interview 2012.

⁶⁸³ Warren Personal Interview 2010.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Each of the case-study companies examined here had a sense that the production of Shakespeare should not stand outside of their local and very American culture(s), but had to both partake of and add to it. In combating the elitist, memorializing tendencies associated with highbrow Shakespeare productions they have attempted to keep his memory alive, in a manner compatible with their aesthetics and with local consumer taste. Situating Shakespeare within the active cultural life of their specific audiences, nonetheless allowed them to present Shakespeare as a unifying and universal cultural touchstone. Creating a sense of community among their audience members is, likewise, a goal shared in differing degrees by the companies.

The particular institutional identity of each company necessitates a different recall of Shakespeare. S&C's overtly physicalized, emotional performance aesthetic recalls the authentic Shakespeare as passionate Renaissance Man, as an actor and a playwright capable of crafting universally compelling stories populated with vivid, dynamic characters, whose work was imprisoned in the staid production aesthetics favored by the British Shakespeare Establishment. This view allowed the Company to see itself as restoring Shakespeare to his former glory by harnessing the emotionally-freed predisposition of American actors and honing their talents through highly-disciplined actor training. TRSF recalled Shakespeare as a man of the people, a savvy theatre writer with the ability to please a wide range of audience members in all social

classes. Through this recollection of the Bard, the Festival saw itself as liberating Shakespeare from his reputation as entertainment for the elite. ASC recalls Shakespeare as a popular entertainer whose work, when performed in the specific, historic, theatrical contexts of its original time, is capable of re-creating the more intimate, heightened actor-audience relationship which they believed characterized the theatre of his day. Its dedication to its own versions of the stagecraft conventions of the Elizabethan stage affords the Company the opportunity to characterize their work as recovering the true genius of Shakespeare and his plays.

In each case, the work of the company is inherently bound up with the values and tastes of its audiences. The necessary bond between theatres and their constituencies can result in choices that could be accused of creating what Susan Bennett has called a “(dis)articulation of the past” in an attempt to explore contemporary issues within the medium of performance.” As a result, she asserts, there exists a “deliberately antagonistic relationship” between contemporary performances, which many characterize as being examples of a kind of “creative vandalism” perpetrated upon classical texts.⁶⁸⁴ While very few of the productions of the companies explored here would be considered to be the kind of radical, concept-laden productions to which Bennett is referring, some of their particular recalls of Shakespeare could well be described by detractors as doing “creative vandalism” on the collective memory of the Bard. Whether led by practitioners or by scholars, the work of all theatres is bound up with the desires of its audiences; “vandalism” only occurs when the compromises made in terms of assumed significance or authenticity are too great. According to Lanier, “The question -- and it is a contentious one -- becomes how far we are willing to extend the name ‘Shakespeare,’ and the answers often hinge

⁶⁸⁴ Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996) 1.

on the assumptions about what constitutes the essential or authentic Shakespeare.”⁶⁸⁵ Lanier sees this tension between the authentic and the popular as characterizing much of the twentieth century’s cultural anxiety over Shakespeare and the ways in which we recall and commemorate him.⁶⁸⁶ In his examination of *Shakespeare in Modern Popular Culture* he asserts that “both classic and parodic sustain Shakespeare’s vitality in the culture” and that manifestations of the Bard in pop culture are “important means by which notions about Shakespeare’s cultural significance” can be “created, extended, debated, revised, and renewed, not only parodied or critiqued.”⁶⁸⁷ He concludes that if, in fact, the authentic or “real” Shakespeare is always under construction, then pop culture manifestations deserve to be considered as “real” as any other and the very existence of Shakespeare as “a source or analogue for popular culture . . . asserts the fundamental continuity between high and popular culture.”⁶⁸⁸

5.1 NOBROW SHAKESPEARE?

Lanier’s insistence on this continuity is an attempt to erase the highbrow/lowbrow cultural divide, a distinction popularized within the discipline of Shakespeare Studies by Lawrence Levine in his book, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. In it, Levine chronicles the attempt by the 19th century American bourgeoisie to create

⁶⁸⁵ Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 9.

⁶⁸⁶ Lanier 164.

⁶⁸⁷ Lanier 89.

⁶⁸⁸ Lanier 95.

or widen the divide between elite and popular entertainment and privatize the aesthetics of audience response. Levine asserts that before the Civil War there was less distinction between performances of Shakespeare and other theatrical presentations, noting that his texts were often presented on the same bill with jugglers and other variety acts. Levine's contention is that, after the war, museums, libraries and theatres dedicated themselves to serving an educated elite as opposed to honoring their original missions of rendering their services to the public at large as part of a conscious effort of the new American elite to legitimize their cultural authority. Though numerous critics of Levine's work have been quick to point out that his examination fails to thoroughly acknowledge, much less explore, the use of culture as a means of social control, the result of this binary was the relegation of Shakespeare to the ranks of highbrow culture and this perception of his elitism dominated the American collective memory of the Bard for the better part of the 20th century, which, in many ways, served as the impetus for the Shakespeare impresarios examined here to found their own Shakespeare theatres.

However, more recently, cultural and literary theorists have suggested that in the digital information age the high/lowbrow binary distinction has eroded to the point that it is no longer useful, and suggest that the culture of the postmodern age would best be described as "Nobrow." In his book, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing/The Marketing of Culture*, journalist John Seabrook suggests that the high/lowbrow culture divide persisted for over a century precisely because social status and cultural tastes were imagined to progress hand-in-hand. Seabrook notes that the binary persisted for so much of the 20th century because, while on the surface, the high/lowbrow divide appears to be a quality distinction, it was, in fact, the only acceptable way to discuss class in the supposedly class-less America. Echoing scholar Van Wyck Brooks, who, in his book *America's Coming of Age*, characterized the highbrow as being associated with "the

plane of stark intellectuality,” and the lowbrow as a part of “the plane of stark business.” Seabrook maintains that: “As long as commercial culture was assumed to be inferior to the elite culture -- TV was a dumbed-down form of theater; Elvis-on-velvet paintings a bastardized form of art; mass produced furniture of lower quality than handmade furniture; off-the-rack clothes less stylish than handmade suits, and so forth -- so the people who patronized commercial culture . . . could be conveniently placed lower on the social hierarchy than the people who patronized elite culture.” Seabrook suggests that in our digital society, where the value of people, items, or events is judged by the number or “likes” it receives, this dynamic may be changing.

Seabrook says that in the 1990s, technology paired with commercialism allowed the middle class to have -- or at least appear to have -- all the trappings of elite culture, suggesting that the rise of affordable franchise brands like Banana Republic, Old Navy, Pottery Barn, IKEA, et. al. allowed for a kind of standardization of American Commercial culture. But, he notes:

As the middle class got better and better at appropriating the distinctive styles of the rich . . . the rich were forced to distinguish themselves, making high fashion out of clothes and furniture so imperfect and ugly, in such poor taste (in the old High-Low sense) that no self-respecting middle-class person would want to knock them off, like the \$3,800 ripped and beaded Gucci jeans that were all the rage last fall.⁶⁸⁹

According to him, in our post-modern society, where politics are run by the “market research” of voter polls, “old gut-based value judgments,” have been replaced with a new kind of judgment based on only on sheer numbers and the ability of a phenomenon to be replicated and proliferated, resulting in the rise of “nobrow” culture, in which the values that defined the old

⁶⁸⁹ Seabrook 168.

high/low binary have been virtually erased and have been replaced with a cultural system in which mass popularity trumps notions of quality or authenticity.

While *Nobrow* is not, by virtue of its genre, a book hoping to make grand theoretical claims, Seabrook's conclusion, given his own suggestion that the high/lowbrow binary divide arose as a way to openly discuss issues of class in our supposedly classless American context, (arrived at by engaging in just enough citation of scholarly arguments along the way), is as potentially troubling as it is liberating. His pleasure at the proposed dissolution of the binary into the vast waters of consumer culture seems to be an insensitive denial of the growing chasm between the classes in America. In a subsequent printing of the book, Seabrook added a new afterword, in which he acknowledges that, in retrospect, his book on the rise of the nobrow, (even with its intentional, repeated, often shameless pop culture references), somehow retains a relatively highbrow feel, a perception that prompts him to ask if the high/lowbrow binary can ever truly be erased? Based on the continued evocation of Shakespeare in both theatrical and pop culture contexts as a means of establishing cultural legitimacy, I suggest that, over time, his name will continue to be a cultural signifier for quality, but that the continued pop culture recycling of his works will ultimately result in a kind of freeing of Shakespeare's characters and plots from the confines of his literary and historical personage to a kind of mythological state, in which they become universal archetypes and tropes.

5.2 REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

As Diana Taylor reminds us in her book, *The Archive and the Repertory*, performing “is as much about forgetting as remembering.”⁶⁹⁰ While the larger embedded memory project of each theatre is focused on remembering and commemorating Shakespeare through production, the rhetoric used by these companies reveals a distinct and equal focus on forgetting. All three companies were deeply engaged in forgetting some crucial aspect of the collective memory of Shakespeare that they believed existed at the time of their founding, whether it be forgetting the eloquent but declamatory acting style of previous decades, forgetting the academic or elitist connotation usually associated with the Bard, or forgetting the baggage accumulated around Shakespeare and his texts after more than 400 years of production history. In his book, *How Modernity Forgets*, Paul Connerton asserts that “the desire to memorialize is precipitated by a fear, a threat of cultural amnesia.”⁶⁹¹ While some may suggest that the sheer number of popular representations of Shakespeare available to audiences of the digital information age might allay the anxiety to memorialize him, Connerton points out that the building of memorials does as much to sustain the anxiety of forgetting as it does to alleviate it, suggesting that while the construction of a physical memorial may be sufficient to prevent the memory of an event or a person from slipping into the irretrievable past, the result is that societies may no longer feel the pressure to actively commemorate them.⁶⁹² In this light, the contemporary hope that popular,

⁶⁹⁰ Taylor 11.

⁶⁹¹ Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 27.

⁶⁹² Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* 27.

parodic, and digital strategies will help sustain Shakespeare's memory may, in fact, ultimately result in surrendering our collective memory of Shakespeare to "creative vandalism."

As increased cultural memes become a sign of our times, how will they continue to stimulate anxiety among future Bardolators? With the rise of digital media culture and the decline of the print market, the myriad strategies currently involved in maintaining Shakespeare's collective memory will, doubtless, experience a significant change, and I suggest that the position of performance within the memorial matrix that constitutes "Shakespeare" will continue to rise. The prevalence of online video sharing sites such as Vimeo and YouTube offers every student with internet access the ability to see video from both historical and contemporary theatrical productions, allowing the commemorative power of performances to expand beyond the confines of their original time, space, and actor-audience relationship. Seabrook's assertion that the high/low binary has effectively been erased now that issues of quality have become less important than the ability of a phenomenon to be endlessly reproduced and disseminated seems to be a less than satisfying synthesis of the matter. I suggest that there may yet be a productive way of viewing the binary. A more fruitful characterization of the divide might be to reconceive it, not as distinction of quality, but rather as opposing poles in a generation-based cycle where the work of the older artists comes to be perceived by subsequent generations as an elitist cultural authority that must be rebelled against and replaced by newer, more popular commemorations of the Bard.⁶⁹³ While the current high/lowbrow binary is fraught with complex, theoretical conflicts, when conceived as a cycle, it may retain a usefulness in the fact that society's inevitable swings between its two available viewpoints are capable of producing the

⁶⁹³ I acknowledge that Harold Bloom has proposed a similar thesis about poets in *The Anxiety of Influence*.

healthy memorial anxiety necessary to keep Shakespeare's memory alive. In which case, it may be interesting to imagine what future cultural contexts might arise that will prompt a new generation of Bardolaters to free Shakespeare from the tastes and values of the companies and their impresarios examined here.

APPENDIX A

SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY PRODUCTION HISTORY

First Season – 1978

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Mainstage)
Three Voices of Edith Wharton (Salon)

Second Season – 1979

An Afternoon with Edith Wharton (Salon)
The Winter's Tale (Mainstage)
Romeo and Juliet (Mainstage)

Third Season – 1980

The Tempest (Mainstage)
A Very Special Afternoon (Salon)

Fourth Season – 1981

As You Like It (Mainstage)
DibbleDance81 (Mainstage)
Duet with Variations (Salon)
Twelfth Night (Mainstage; Toronto Theatre Festival)
A Very Special Evening (Salon)

Fifth Season – 1982

Edith: An Intimate Portrait (Salon)
Macbeth (Mainstage)
Twelfth Night (Mainstage; Brooklyn's Prospect Park)

Sixth Season – 1983

The Comedy of Errors (Mainstage)

The Mount: A Turning Point (Salon)

Seventh Season – 1984

The Custom of the Country (Salon)
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Mainstage/Tour)
Romeo and Juliet (Mainstage/Tour)
Songs from the Heart (Salon)
Mother Courage (Boston Shakespeare Company)
Judgment (Boston Shakespeare Company)

Eighth Season – 1985

The Comedy of Errors (Mainstage)
In One Door and Out the Other (Salon)
Much Ado About Nothing (Terrace)
Songs from the Heart (Salon)

Ninth Season – 1986

Anthony and Cleopatra (Mainstage, co-produced with Cleveland Playhouse)
Anthony and Cleopatra (Boston Shakespeare Company)
Master Harold and the Boys (Boston Shakespeare Company)
Pantomime (Boston Shakespeare Company)
Roman Fever (Terrace)
The Taming of the Shrew (Oxford Court /STI)

Tenth Season – 1987

All's Well that Ends Well (Mainstage STI)
 Autres Temps (Terrace)
 DibbleDance87 (Mainstage)
 Measure for Measure (Oxford Court/STI)
 Midsummer Night's Dream (Mainstage)
 Othello (Tour)
 The Other Two (Terrace)
 A Rat in the Skull (Boston Shakespeare Company)

Eleventh Season – 1988

Afterward (Salon)
 As You Like It (Mainstage)
 Confession (Salon)
 DibbleDance88 (Mainstage)
 Hamlet (Tour)
 Love's Labor's Lost (Oxford Court/STI)
 Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching
 Towards the Somme (Boston Shakespeare Company)

Twelfth Season – 1989

Duet with Variations (Salon)
 Expiation (Salon)
 DibbleDance89 (Mainstage)
 Julius Caesar (Tour)
 Richard III (Oxford Court/STI)
 Roman Fever (Salon)
 The Temperate Zone (Salon)
 The Tempest (Mainstage)

Thirteenth Season – 1990

The Aspern Papers (Salon)
 As You Like It (Mainstage)
 Daisy Miller (Salon)
 The Descent of Man (Salon)
 DibbleDance90 – (Mainstage)
 Duet with Variations (Salon)
 Edith: An Intimate Portrait (Salon)
 The Legend (Salon)
 Much Ado About Nothing (Oxford Court/STI)
 The Old Maid (Salon)

Roman Fever (Salon)
 Romeo and Juliet (Tour)
 Songs from the Heart (Salon)
 Women of Will1: From Violence to
 Negotiation (Stables)

Fourteenth Season - 1991

The Aspern Papers (Salon)
 The Descent of Man (Salon)
 DibbleDabble91(Mainstage)
 Hamlet (Salon)
 The Last Asset (Salon)
 The Legend (Salon)
 Macbeth (Tour/Mainstage)
 Shirley Valentine (Stables)
 Tearsheets (Stables)
 Twelfth Night (Mainstage)
 Women of Will 1: The Warrior Women
 (Stables)
 Xingu (Salon)

Fifteenth Season – 1992

Berkley Square (Salon)
 Custer Rides (Stables)
 DibbleDance92 (Mainstage; Stables)
 Duet for One (Stables)
 The Inner House (Salon)
 Julius Caesar (Stables)
 A Life in the Theatre (Stables)
 A Love Story (Salon)
 Maisie (Salon)
 The Mission of Jane (Salon)
 Much Ado About Nothing (Stables)
 Romeo and Juliet (Tour/Mainstage)
 Shakespeare & Young Company:
 Tragedarius (Mainstage)
 Shirley Valentine (Stables)
 The Tale of the Tiger/Eve's Diary (Stables)
 The Taming of the Shrew (Mainstage)
 Troilus and Cressida (Oxford Court/STI)
 The Two Gentleman of Verona (Oxford Court/STI)
 Women of Will 1: The Warrior Women
 (Stables)

Sixteenth Season – 1993

Autres Temps (Salon)
 Berkely Square (Salon)
 DibbleDance 93 (Mainstage)
 Duet for One (Stables)
 The Henry VI Chronicles (Oxford Court/STI)
 Julius Caesar (Stables)
 Kerfol: A Ghost Story (Salon)
 The Landscape Painter (Salon)
 A Midsummer Night's Dream (Mainstage)
 A Memory of Splendor (Salon)
 On the Open Road (Stables)
 Roman Fever (Salon)
 Shakespeare & Young Company (Mainstage)
 The Spirit Warrior's Dream (Mainstage)
 The Studio Festival of Plays (Mainstage)
 Troilus and Cressida (Stables)
 Twelfth Night (Tour/Stables)
 Unparallel Lives: A DibbleDance (Stables)
 Virginia (Stables)

Seventeenth Season – 1994

The Comedy of Errors (Mainstage)
 The Custom of the Country (Salon)
 Cymbeline (Oxford Court/STI)
 DibbleDance94 (Mainstage)
 The Fiery Rain (Salon)
 Hamlet (Tour/Stables)
 The House of Mirth (Salon)
 Kerfol: A Ghost Story (Salon)
 Laughing Wild (Stables)
 Macbeth (Stables)
 The Merchant of Venice (Oxford Court/STI)
 Mrs. Klein (Stables)
 New Land'scapes (Stables)
 Richard II: Deposed (Stables)
 Shakespeare & Young Company (Mainstage)
 The Studio Festival of Plays (Stables)
 Souls Belated (Salon)
 The Winter's Tale (salon)
 Xingu (Salon)

Eighteenth Season – 1995

Afterward (Salon)
 Expiation (Salon)
 DibbleDance95 (Mainstage)
 The Fiery Rain (Salon)
 Fortune and Misfortune (Salon)
 Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) (Salon)
 Laughing Wild (Stables)
 A Memory of Splendor (Salon)
 Much Ado About Nothing (Salon)
 New Land'scapes (Stables)
 Othello (Stables)
 Pericles (Oxford Court/STI)
 Romeo and Juliet (Oxford Court/STI)
 Shakespeare & Young Company (Oxford Court/STI)
 Shirley Valentine (Stables)
 The Studio Festival of Plays (Salon/Stables)
 The Turn of The Screw (Salon)
 Women of Will 2: Going Underground (Stables)
 Women of Will 3: The Maiden Phoenix (Stables)

Nineteenth Season – 1996

The Death of the Father of Psychoanalysis (& Anna) (Stables)
 DibbleDance96 (Mainstage)
 Ethan Frome (Stables)
 Faith and Hope: Edith at War (Salon)
 Love's Labor's Lost (Oxford Court/STI)
 A Love Story (Salon)
 Madame de Treymes (Salon)
 The Merry Wives of Windsor (Mainstage)
 Measure for Measure (Stables)
 Mercy (Stables)
 The Monkey's Paw (Salon)
 New Land'scapes (Stables)
 Shakespeare & Yung Company (Oxford Court/STI)
 Songs from the Heart (Salon)
 The Studio Festival of Plays (Stables)
 The Two Gentlemen of Verona (Stables/SPI)

Women of Will -- Pts. I, II, and III (Stables)

Twentieth Season – 1997

Betrayal (Salon)
Brief Lives (Salon)
The Death of the Father of Psychoanalysis
(& Anna) (Stables)
DibbleDance97 (Mainstage)
Ethan Frome (Stables)
Henry IV, Part I (Mainstage)
The Lady's Maid's Bell (Salon)
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Stables/SPI)
New Land'scapes (Stables)
Off the Map (Stables)
The Pretext (Salon)
Shakespeare & Young Company (Oxford
Court)
The Studio Festival of Plays (Stables)
Twelfth Night (Oxford Court/STI)
The Verdict (Salon)
The Winter's Tale (Stables)

Twenty-first Season – 1998

All's Well That Ends Well (Stables)
The Comedy of Errors (Oxford Court/STI)
DibbleDance98: Beauty (Stables)
The Dilettante (Salon)
Glimpses of the Moon (Stables)
The Lear Project (Stables)
The Merchant of Venice (Stables)
The Millionairess (Stables)
The Mistress (Salon)
Private Eyes (Salon)
A Room of One's Own (Salon)
Shakespeare & Young Company (Oxford
Court)
The Studio Festival of Plays (Stables)
The Taming of the Shrew (Stables/SPI)
Tina Packer's Afternoon Discussion Series
(salon)
The Triumph of Darkness (Salon)
Wit (Stables)

Twenty-second Season – 1999

A Room of One's Own (Salon)
As You Like It (Stables/SPI)
Glimpses of the Moon (Salon)
Richard III (Duffin)
Love's Labor's Lost (Mainstage)
Private Eyes (Salon)
Summer (Stables)
Tina Talks (Salon)
The Tempest (Oxford Court/STI)
Shakespeare & Young Company (Oxford
Court)
Studio Festival of Plays (Salon/Stables)
DibbleDance99: Rooms, Boxes and the
Secret of the Individual
The Woman in Black (Salon)

Twenty-third Season – 2000

The Wharton One-Acts: Oh! Mr. Chekhov!
and The View Beyond (Salon)
Much Ado About Nothing (Stables/SPI)
Twelfth Night (Duffin)
Jack & Jill (Stables)
The Compleat Works of Wilm Shkspr
(abridged) (Duffin)
Romeo and Juliet (Stables)
Coriolanus (Stables)
The Winter's Tale (Oxford Court)
DibbleDance 2000 (Mainstage)
Tina Talks (Salon)
Shakespeare & Young Company (Oxford
Court)
Studio Festival of Plays
(Stables/Salon/Oxford Court)
Halloween Benefit: nevermore? Nevermore
(Stables/Salon)

Twenty-fourth Season – 2001

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Mainstage)
Coriolanus (Founders')
Collected Stories (Founders')
The Tempest (Founders')
Shakespeare & Young Company
(Founders')
Studio Festival of Plays (Founders' and
Spring Lawn)

The Turn of the Screw (Founders')
The Wharton One-Acts: The Rembrandt, An
International Episode (Spring Lawn)
Tina Talks (Spring Lawn)
A Tanglewood Tale (Spring Lawn)
The Compleat Works of Wilm Shkspr
(abridged) (Stables)
The Comedy of Errors (Stables)
King John (Stables)

Twenty-fifth Season – 2002

Macbeth (Founders')
Collected Stories (Founders')
Henry V (Founders')
Wharton Centennial Celebration: Summer,
Ethan Frome, The Fiery Rain
(Founders')
Rain (Founders')
Shakespeare & Young Company
(Founders')
Studio Festival of Plays (Rose Footprint and
Spring Lawn)
The Scarlett Letter (Founders')
DibbleDance: Dance of Death and Signs of
Life (Founders')
The Wharton One-Acts: Roman Fever, The
Other Two (Spring Lawn)
Golda's Balcony (Spring Lawn)
The Valley of Decision (Spring Lawn)
The Henry VI Chronicles: in two parts
(Rose Footprint)
The Vienna Project: Wittgenstein vs. Popper
– The Main Event, Among
Murderers and Madmen, Undine
Goes

Twenty-sixth Season – 2003

The Fly Bottle (Spring Lawn)
Much Ado About Nothing (Founders')
The Chekhov One Acts: The Celebration,
Swan Song, The Harmfulness of
Tobacco, The Brute (Spring Lawn)
The Compleat Works of Wilm Shkspr
(abridged) (Founders')

Shakespeare & Young Company
(Founders')
Studio Festival of Plays (Spring Lawn)
Vita and Virginia (Spring Lawn)
DibbleDance: The Fools' and Lovers'
Dream Dances (Founders')
King Lear (Founders')
The Two Gentlemen of Verona (Rose
Footprint)
Ethan Frome (Founders')
Lettice and Lovage (Spring Lawn)
Free Outdoor Bankside Festival: Preludes, A
Midsummer Night's Dream,
Shakespeare & the Language that
Shaped a World (Rose Footprint)

Twenty-seventh Season – 2004

As You Like It (Founders')
The Comedy of Errors (Founders')
Full Gallop (Spring Lawn)
Lettice and Lovage (Spring Lawn)
Vita and Virginia (Spring Lawn)
Othello (Founders')
Romeo and Juliet (Rose Footprint)
Shakespeare and the Language that Shaped a
World (Rose Footprint)

Twenty-eighth Season – 2005

Ice Glen (Spring Lawn)
Taming of the Shrew (Founders')
Wharton One-Acts: Mission of Jane and The
Promise (Spring Lawn)
King John (Founders')
The Tricky Part (Spring Lawn)
DibbleDance: Tea and Flowers/Purity and
Grace (Spring Lawn)
The Tamer Tamed (Rose Footprint)
Wild and Whirling Words (Rose Footprint)
Jack the Juggler (Rose Footprint)
Studio Festival of Plays (Founders')
The Tell-Tale Poe (Founders')

Twenty-ninth Season – 2006

Enchanted April (Founders')
Martha Mitchell Calling (Founders')

Hamlet (Founders')
Merry Wives of Windsor (Founders')
To Pay the Price (Staged Reading)
(Founders')
The Servant of Two Masters (Rose
Footprint)
Wild and Whirling Worlds (Rose Footprint)
Studio Festival of Plays (Founders')
Kerfol & Poe Readings (Founders')

Thirtieth Season – 2007

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Founders')
Antony and Cleopatra (Founders')
Rough Crossing (Founders')
Blue/Orange (Founders')
The Secret of Sherlock Holmes (Founders')
Scapin (Rose Footprint)
Studio Festival of Plays (Founders')
Shakespeare and the Language That Shaped
a World (Rose Footprint)

Thirty-first Season – 2008-09

The Ladies Man (Founders' Theatre)
All's Well that Ends Well (Founders'
Theatre)
Othello (Founders' Theatre)
The Goatwoman of Corvis County (Elayne
P. Bernstein Theatre)
The Canterville Ghost (Bernstein Theatre)
Bad Dates (Bernstein Theatre)
The Mad Pirate and the Mermaid (Rose
Footprint)
Studio Festival of Plays (Bernstein Theatre)
Wild and Whirling Worlds (Rose Footprint)
The Lear Project (Bernstein Theatre)
The Actors Rehearse the Story of Charlotte
Salomon (Bernstein Theatre)
Twelfth Night – Conservatory (Bernstein
Theatre)
Hamlet (National Tour)

Thirty-second Season - 2009-10

Hamlet (Founders' Theatre)
Othello (Founders' Theatre)
Twelfth Night (Founders' Theatre)

Romeo and Juliet (Bernstein Theatre)
Pinter's Mirror (Bernstein Theatre)
Measure for Measure – Lunchbox
Shakespeare (Bernstein Theatre)
Devil's Advocate – American Premiere
(Bernstein Theatre)
The Dreamer Examines His Pillow
(Bernstein Theatre)
White People (Bernstein Theatre)
The Hound of The Baskervilles – American
Premiere (Bernstein Theatre)
Shirley Valentine (Bernstein Theatre)
The Actors Rehearse the Story of Charlotte
Salomon – World Premiere
(Bernstein Theatre)
Golda's Balcony (Bernstein Theatre)
Toad of Toad Hall (Rose Footprint)
Wordplay – World Premiere (Rose
Footprint)
Cindy Bella (or the Glass Slipper) – World
Premiere (Bernstein Theatre)
Les Liaisons Dangereuses (Bernstein
Theatre)

Thirty-third Season – 2010-11

Women of Will (Overview) (Founders'
Theatre)
Mengelberg and Mahler (Bernstein Theatre)
Richard III (Founders' Theatre)
Sea Marks (Bernstein Theatre)
The Winter's Tale (Founders' Theatre)
The Taster (Founders' Theatre)
Bad Dates (Bernstein Theatre)
The Comedy of Errors – Lunchbox
Shakespeare (Bernstein Theatre)
The Amorous Quarrel (Bernstein Theatre)
Julius Caesar (Bernstein Theatre)
The Real Inspector Hound (Bernstein
Theatre)
The Santaland Diaries (Bernstein Theatre)
The Mystery of Irma Vep (Bernstein
Theatre)

Shakespeare and the Language that Shaped a
World (Bernstein Theatre)
Wordplay II (Rose Footprint Theatre)

APPENDIX B

THREE RIVERS SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL PRODUCTION HISTORY

First Season - 1980

Much Ado About Nothing (Pitt Rep and Tour)

The Taming of the Shrew

Romeo and Juliet

Second Season - 1981

The Comedy of Errors

The Winter's Tale

As You Like It

Third Season - 1982

The Tempest

Hamlet

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Fourth Season - 1983

Henry IV, Part I

Much Ado About Nothing

Othello

Claire Bloom's tour of "These are Women: A Portrait of Shakespeare's Heroines"

Fifth Season - 1984

Macbeth

The Merchant of Venice

Love's Labour's Lost

Tammy Grimes in Concert

Nicholas Pennell's tour of "A Variable Passion"

Sixth Season - 1985

Romeo and Juliet

Twelfth Night

Measure for Measure

Donal Donnelly's tour of "My Astonishing Self"

Seventh Season - 1986

A Midsummer's Night Dream

All's Well That Ends Well

King Lear

Eighth Season - 1987

Two Gentlemen of Verona

Cyrano de Bergerac

Richard III

Ninth Season - 1988

The Taming of the Shrew

Volpone

Julius Caesar

Brian Bedford's tour of "The Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet"

Tenth Season - 1989

Antony and Cleopatra
Hamlet
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the
Forum
The Tempest (SITS)
Maids and Blades – (SITS)

Eleventh Season – 1990

Shakespeare on Broadway (SITS)
Everykid (SITS)
Tartuffe (YC)
As You Like It
Merry Wives of Windsor (YC)
Richard II
The Tempest

Twelfth Season - 1991

Othello
A Horse of a Different Color
The Comedy of Errors
Goodnight Desdemona, (Good Morning
Juliet) (YC)
Cymbeline (YC)
Macbeth (SITS)
Dan Kamin in “The Pantomime Man” and
“Confessions of an Illusionist”

Thirteenth Season - 1992

Two Gentlemen of Verona
Steel/City
Ophelia (YC)
Twelfth Night (YC)
A Midsummer’s Night Dream (SITS)
Pericles (Unproduced)

The Fourteenth Season - 1993

Much Ado About Nothing
A Midsummer Night’s Dream

The Fifteenth Season - 1994

Measure for Measure (at The Pit)
The Taming of the Shrew
Romeo and Juliet (SITS)
The Merchant of Venice

The Sixteenth Season - 1995

Macbeth
The Winter’s Tale
Romeo and Juliet

APPENDIX C

AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE CENTER PRODUCTION HISTORY

First Season – 1988

Richard III

Second Season – 1989

The Taming of the Shrew

Third Season – 1990

Julius Caesar

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Fourth Season – 1991

Measure for Measure

Twelfth Night

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Fifth Season – 1992

Macbeth

The Merchant of Venice

The Comedy of Errors

Sixth Season – 1993

Antony and Cleopatra

Romeo and Juliet

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Seventh Season – 1994

Othello

Much Ado About Nothing

The Taming of the Shrew

Eighth Season – 1995

The Tempest

Twelfth Night

Hamlet

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead

Ninth Season – 1996

Henry V

As You Like It

The Comedy of Errors

Julius Caesar

Tenth Season – 1997

Love's Labour's Lost

Henry IV, pt. I

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Macbeth

Eleventh Season – 1998

Measure for Measure

Richard III

The Taming of the Shrew

Romeo and Juliet

Twelfth Season – 1999

The Merchant of Venice

The Knight of the Burning Pestle

Macbeth

Much Ado About Nothing

Hamlet

Thirteenth Season – 2000

Richard II
 Much Ado About Nothing
 Doctor Faustus
 Othello
 Twelfth Night
 The Roaring Girl

Fourteenth Season – 2001

A Midsummer Night's Dream
 Hamlet
 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead
 The Alchemist
 The Winter's Tale
 As You Like It
 Romeo and Juliet
 An American Christmas Carol: 1852

Fifteenth Season – 2002

Henry V
 The Comedy of Errors
 Saint John
 The Merry Wives of Windsor
 Love's Labour's Lost
 Macbeth
 Julius Caesar
 Richard III
 Twelfth night
 A Christmas Carol

Sixteenth Season – 2003

The Tempest
 Coriolanus
 The Taming of the Shrew
 The Knight of the Burning Pestle
 Much Ado About Nothing
 King Lear
 Tartuffe
 A Christmas Carol

Seventeenth Season – 2004

A Midsummer Night's Dream
 Henry IV, pt. I

The Two Gentlemen of Verona
 The Importance of Being Ernest
 Merchant of Venice
 Falstaff
 Les Liaisons Dangereuses
 The Santaland Diaries
 A Christmas Carol

Eighteenth Season – 2005

The Compleat Works of Wilm Shkspr
 (abridged)
 The Taming of the Shrew
 The Tamer Tamed
 A King and No King
 Measure for Measure
 She Stoops to Conquer
 Twelfth Night
 The Three Musketeers
 The Comedy of Errors
 Hamlet
 All's Well that Ends Well
 The Santaland Diaries
 A Christmas Carol

Nineteenth Season – 2006

Greater Tuna
 'Tis Pity She's a Whore
 Romeo and Juliet
 Eastward Ho!
 The Brats of Clarence
 Richard III
 Return to the Forbidden Planet
 Much Ado About Nothing
 Macbeth
 As You Like It
 The Tempest
 Othello
 The Santaland Diaries
 A Christmas Carol

Twentieth Season – 2007

The Duchess Of Malfi
 Hamlet (First Quarto)
 Pericles
 The Brats of Clarence

The Devil is an Ass
Cyrano de Bergerac
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Julius Caesar
The Winter's Tale
Romeo and Juliet
Love Labour's Lost
Antony and Cleopatra
The Santaland Diaries
A Christmas Carol

Twenty-first Season – 2008

Volpone
Macbeth
The Jew of Malta
Cymbeline
The Witch
The Taming of the Shrew
The Merchant of Venice
Henry V
King Lear
Twelfth Night
Measure for Measure
Richard II
The Santaland Diaries
A Christmas Carol

Twenty-second Season – 2009

The Revenger's Tragedy
A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Changeling
Henry VI, pt. I
The BLibd Beggar of Alexandria
Hamlet
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead
The Comedy of Errors
Much Ado About Nothing
The Merry Wives of Windsor
Titus Andronicus
Henry IV, pt. I
The Rehearsal
The Santaland Diaries
A Christmas Carol

Twenty-third Season – 2010

Doctor Faustus
Twelfth Night
The Alchemist
Henry VI, Pt. II
The Roman Actor
The Knight of the Burning Pestle
All's Well that Ends Well
Romeo and Juliet
The Taming of the Shrew
Wild Oats
Henry IV, pt. II
The Fair Maid of the West
The Twelve Dates of Christmas
The Santaland Diaries
A Christmas Carol

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