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Gary Watt

Notes on *A Strange Eventful History*

“Shakespeare didn’t write this stuff to be read. It’s like sheet music. You don’t just look at it; it’s just a bunch of notes on a page. This was meant to be played.”

The actor Kevin Kline speaking on John Barton’s *The Shakespeare Sessions* (Storyville Films, Dir: Jacoby, 2003)¹

This paper retells the story of a strange event. In the summer of 2016, I joined The Song Company of Australia (described on its website as “the continent’s leading vocal ensemble”)² in rehearsing and performing a Shakespeare-themed show that I had co-written with their Artistic Director, the composer Antony Pitts.³ The idea behind *A Strange Eventful History* (*‘ASEH’*) was to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s death with a symphony of famous Shakespearean speeches and musical pieces connected by a playful narrative. The narrative, which was loosely structured according to the “seven ages of man” as presented by Jaques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (2.7.140–67),⁴ was threaded throughout by the conceit that The Song Company had assisted scientists in recovering snippets from the original soundscape of Shakespeare’s London. Thus the narrator introduces the show as “a journey back to Shakespeare’s London and the journey of a lifetime from birth to the last scene of all” (*ASEH*, prologue). Another idea, at least for my part, was to experiment with some of the performance theories and practical techniques that I had written about in a book – *Shakespeare’s Acts of Will: Law Testament and Properties of Performance* – that was published around the time of the show.⁵

1 Kevin Kline might have been recalling Harley Granville-Barker’s words in the Introduction to his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*: “The text of a play is a score waiting performance” (London: Batsford, 1930), 5.

2 See <http://song.company> (last access September 6, 2017).

3 I am grateful to Antony Pitts, Marc Stauch and Sean Mulcahy for their helpful comments on a draft of this paper. I am to blame for duff notes that remain. My thanks also to Daniela Carpi, Chiara Battisti and Sidia Fiorato for the invitation to present these reflections at the conference *As You Law It: Negotiating Shakespeare* (Verona, 2016). I also want to take this opportunity to record my thanks to all members of The Song Company, those on stage and off, who did so much to entertain me and organise me and make me welcome.

4 William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series, ed. Juliet Dusinberre (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). All references to Shakespeare are to the most recent editions in The Arden Shakespeare unless otherwise stated.

5 Gary Watt, *Shakespeare’s Acts of Will: Law, Testament and Properties of Performance* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016). See, further, Sidia Fiorato, “Gary Watt’s *Acts of Will*: A

One of those techniques is a poetic method that is subtly at work in much of Shakespeare's dramatic writing. I call it "fractional inference." In essence, it is a method of scattering fragments of sound throughout a passage of a text and then combining the fragments to produce a recognizable word. The fragments provoke the subconscious to seek a resolution that at first eludes the ear (and eye, if the text is being read) until it finally finds completion in some word or phrase that combines an audible sense with the intended literal (dictionary) sense of the target word. I call this target word the "tenor" word. The term "tenor," with its obvious musical overtones, is actually borrowed from the vernacular of literary critique in which it describes the meaning or sense carried by the "vehicle" of a metaphor (in the phrase "love is like a red, red rose," love is the tenor and rose is the vehicle). In a case of "fractional inference," the tenor word combines the scattered sound fragments into a pleasing whole. The satisfaction of the resolution can be heightened by postponing the express presentation of the tenor word by using homonymic or homophonic forms of the word. Homophones tease the subconscious to within tantalizing proximity of the tenor word so that the final presentation of the true tenor becomes all the more pleasing. Occasionally the tenor word never appears, but is left to the imagination to create.

By way of illustration, I will repeat, in brief, an example of the phenomenon that I discuss in *Shakespeare's Acts of Will*. (A further, new, example is presented later on in this paper). Set out next are four lines from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which feature in Antony's rhetorical effort in the funeral scene to stir the mob against Brutus. I have curtailed the passage for present purposes at the word "stir." "Stir" is the tenor word, and the reader will note how sound fragments of the word are scattered through the four lines and on two occasions the sound sense (but not the dictionary sense) of the word appears homophonically in "ye-ster-day" and "ma-ster-s," thus the culminating appearance of the word "stir" is the rhetorically satisfying third iteration in the tricolon "ster" – "ster" – "stir." I have underlined and bracketed the relevant sound fragments to show how Shakespeare sometimes encloses one fractional version of the word within another to produce a layering or amplification of sound effect:

But yesterday the word of Caesar might
 Have [stood again[st the wor]ld. Now lies he there],
 And none [so poor to do him rever]ence.
 O masters! If I were disposed to stir (*Julius Caesar* 3.2.119–123)

Consummate Performance," *Cardozo Electronic Law Bulletin* (2016): 1–19; and Daniela Carpi, "Review of *Shakespeare's Acts of Will: Law Testament and Properties of Performance*," *Pólemos* 10.2 (2016): 453–457.

The reader will note that within the tricolon “ster” – “ster” – “stir” three fractional versions of the “stir” sound are sandwiched between the homophonic pair “ster” and “ster.” The fact that one of these homophonic versions is enclosed within another means that there is a three-fold layering: a fractional “stir” sound inside a fractional “stir” sound inside the pair “ster” and “ster.” We have then a tricolon of tricolons – the first is “ster” – “ster” – “stir,” the second is the three fractional versions of the “stir” sound, the third is the three layers in which the sound is enclosed within the sound. As with the musical tricolon of melody, harmony and rhythm, the overall effect is rhetorically stirring stuff indeed.

The technique of “fractional inference” – by which the audience is prompted to infer a whole from fractional parts – is a sound effect which has equivalents or close comparators in musical theory. One such is so-called “thematic transformation” or “thematic metamorphosis.” It is a common technique of musical composition whereby the composer produces a pleasing resolution or reiteration of a theme by scattering its component motifs and other elements throughout the work. The musical theme may be stated in complete form early in the piece so that it becomes the subject of subsequent fragmentation and variation; or the fragments may come first, to be combined later in a climactic statement of the theme; or the two sequences (“whole followed by fractions” and “fractions followed by whole”) may be employed together in the same work. It may seem strange to commence these notes with reference to a single technical point of comparison between music and literary text, but the broader point is that the techniques in both arts are united by their pleasing effect upon the ear. It is my argument that such pleasing sound effects are the most direct point of connection between the arts of music and dramatic text and the arts of law, for they share a rhetorical concern to persuade through pleasing sensual, including auditory, effects. As the classical rhetorician Quintilian wrote:

Composition, therefore, as it seems to me, plays the part of a sort of...bowstring in giving direction and force to our thoughts. This is why the best scholars are all convinced of its great value, not only for pleasure but also for its emotional impact, first because nothing can penetrate to the emotions if it stumbles at the ear – at the threshold, as you might say; and, secondly, because we are naturally attracted by harmony.

The best judge of Composition is the ear, which senses completeness, feels the lack when something is incomplete, is offended by unevenness, soothed by smoothness. (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 4.9–10, 116)⁶

⁶ Donald A Russell (trans.), *The Orator's Education*, Volume IV, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Rhetoric is the most substantial justification for the inclusion of these performance notes in the present set of essays, concerned as they are with Shakespeare and the law. A less substantial, more circumstantial, link between *A Strange Eventful History* and the law is the fact that the fifth age in Jaques' seven ages of man is the age of "the justice." I want to suggest that Jaques' seven ages of man can be appreciated in a new acoustic sense as a series of seven notes on sound and silence. In *ASEH*, each of the six singers was allocated one of the first six ages. We have the "mewling" infant;⁷ the "whining schoolboy";⁸ the "sighing" lover;⁹ the swearing soldier ("full of strange oaths") whose fiery instinct is to "quarrel" even in the cannon's mouth;¹⁰ the justice "full of wise saws and common instances"¹¹ ("common instances" alludes to rhetorical commonplace sayings, such as Justice Shallow's "death is certain to all, all shall die" (2 *Hen IV*, 3.2.27)); and, the pantaloon whose "big manly voice" has turned again "to childish treble, pipes / And whistles in his sound" (2.7.163–4).¹² The seventh age is the age of oblivion, with its deathly decline into silent nothingness. His is the scene "[t]hat ends this strange eventful history" (2.7.165). The seventh age was allocated to the musical director Antony Pitts who throughout the entire show accompanied the singers on a Fender Rhodes electric piano on which he also intermittently played dances including the charming *Mal Sims* by Giles Farnaby (c. 1560–1640). The Fender Rhodes wonderfully evoked the tripping, daintiness of a Shakespearean virginal whilst simultaneously playing up to the conceit that the performers were sharing a soundscape revealed by space-age scientific instrumentation. The seventh age of man is a dance of death. His voice is silent.

Jaques' justice represents the life of man at its zenith before things start to go downhill. He is in all respects a full figure. Physically he has his "fair round belly with good capon lin'd"; intellectually he is "[f]ull of wise saws and modern instances" (2.7.157). After the age of the justice, Jaques informs us that the "sixth age shifts." The man wanes thin. The trousers have to be tightened at the waist ("His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide / For his shrunk shank" (2.7.161–2)); and eventually he wastes away to nothing. Jaques' depiction of the justice is a de-piction indeed; it is highly visual – we have his "eyes severe and beard of formal cut" in addition to the sight of his "fair round belly." The mouth is framed by the beard, and although both mind and mouth are full of

7 Played by Anna Fraser (soprano).

8 Played by Andrew O'Connor (bass baritone).

9 Played by Hannah Fraser (mezzo soprano).

10 Played by Mark Donnelly (baritone).

11 Played by Richard Black (tenor).

12 Played by Susannah Lawergren (soprano).

sayings, our imagined sense of sound is arguably drowned out by the overpowering sense of sight. I hear a warning here about the overpowering influence of the visual in law – a theme on which many law and humanities scholars have reflected.¹³ It is said that justice must be seen to be done. Is it not equally true that justice must be heard?

The sense of sound – even the lack of sound and the strain to achieve a fair hearing – takes us back to rhetoric. Shakespeare’s playhouse dramas and the performance of law are deeply connected to each other by their shared origins in the classical arts of rhetoric. The word “rhetoric” ultimately derives from Proto-Indo-European for the spoken word (**wretor*), and related to it is the Greek *rhetra*, which came to denote a ceremonial or authoritative utterance. Today we think of the “writ” – the written word – as an epitome of stated legal power, but a different and deeper authority emanates from the word spoken. Audible speech adds an appealing sense of sound to the silent rhetorical qualities of script, notwithstanding that silent script may acquire an imagined auditory quality by means of the mind’s inner voice. Rhetoric of the spoken sort may be called the art of persuading through the music of sweet sound. For Shakespeare, music is the food of love, but lover’s words also have a “silver-sweet sound” that is “like softest music to attending ears” (2.2.165–6). An appreciation of the audible quality of Shakespeare and law in performance will bring us closer to a sense of sound justice than can be achieved by a silent appreciation of the logic – the *logos* – of the written word alone. As David Levin put it, the “development of our capacity for listening exercises and develops our (bodily felt) sense of justice. The primary sense of justice is not seeing, but hearing.”¹⁴

There is a difference between the word on the page and the word spoken. When I teach my student advocates how to speak well, I never focus exclusively upon the logical sense of the words used or even upon formal stylistic features of the script. I emphasize the musicality of pleasing speech and the moderation –

¹³ See Leif Dahlberg, ed., *Visualizing Law and Authority: Essays on Legal Aesthetics* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012); Peter Goodrich, *Legal Emblems and the Art of Law: Obiter Depicta as the Vision of Governance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Ruth Herz, *The Art of Justice: The Judge’s Perspective* (Oxford: Hart, 2012); Paul Raffield, *Images and Cultures of Law in Early Modern England: Justice and Political Power, 1558–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard K. Sherwin, *Visualizing Law in the Age of the Digital Baroque: Arabesques & Entanglements* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Anne Wagner and Richard K. Sherwin, eds., *Law, Culture and Visual Studies* (Heidelberg; New York; London: Springer, 2014).

¹⁴ David Levin, *The Listening Self: Personal Growth, Social Change and the Closure of Metaphysics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), 184; cited in Richard Dawson, “Listening,” in *Justice as Attunement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 163–169.

indeed, the musical modulation – of the voice, which should be tuned to produce ease of speech and hearing so as to bring out with fidelity the sound quality of the script. Equally important is to learn to listen well and not merely to rely upon what is written down. There are, as has been said, “difficulties [...] in the tendency to reduce [...] sensory knowledge to visual terms[...] A word is more than a sign of something [...] It is a cry, a voice.”¹⁵ The appeal to human well-being and the human psyche in pleasing sound is so deep that justice silenced must surely amount to justice lost. We might have our day in court, but unless we are free to speak and to voice our concerns audibly we will not have had our hearing. Might it be that the sounding out of arguments and the hearing of voice are together absolutely essential to our sense that justice has been done? Richard Dawson and James Parker, legal scholars from New Zealand and Australia respectively, have recently and separately called for greater attention to the acoustic quality of justice.¹⁶ It may be that the aural sense figures more prominently as a concern in common law jurisdictions due to the adversarial mode of trial procedure, but even in countries with a more documentary or inquisitorial system the call should not fall on deaf ears. One of the pillars of due process and of a fair trial – the hearing of both sides to an argument – has been telling us, since it was first rendered in the Latin *audi alteram partem*, that audition is the key sense in a judicial hearing. To an Anglophone ear the auditory connection between forensic rhetoric and other species of performative rhetoric is pronounced in the French word “audience,” which the French lawyer hears as a legal hearing and an English speaker hears as the body of theatrical playgoers. In Anglophone jurisdictions we sometimes talk of judicial “hearings,” but even the more usual word “trial” has a strained, perhaps strange, connection to audition. The verb “to try” seems to have its origins in ideas of sieving or separating, which ideas equally underlie such judicial words as “discern” and “discriminate.” (Shakespeare uses “sift” in a judicial sense in *All’s Well That Ends Well* where the king, having put material, written and oral evidence to the proof, states “We’ll sift this matter further” (5.3.124)). Thus trial and audition can, at a strain, be understood to be connected by a sense of straining – the sense that a judge is called upon to discern the sweet voice of justice from the general noise of the debate or, to put it another way (and to make another etymological connection), to sift the true note from the general “clamour” of the claims. The

¹⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 109–110; cited in Richard Dawson, “Rhetoric,” in *Justice as Attunement*, 220–226.

¹⁶ Dawson, *Justice as Attunement*; see especially the chapters on “Listening” and “Rhetoric”; James Parker, *Acoustic Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

judge's task of hearing or attunement becomes, therefore, the task of being able to tell which account rings true, and, in response to what is heard, to sound a new note in their judicial speech. Jurisdiction is, after all, the necessary start and conclusion to any fair hearing that claims to give sound judgment.

These linguistic correspondences between sound and law are something more than puns. The metaphor of the legal hearing may be a dead metaphor but when it is disinterred a sound can be heard in it. Let me pause on that pairing “dis-in-tered” and “heard-in-it.” As is the case with so many rhetorical and poetical devices, that pairing seduces our ear and our sense of sound before it seeks to reason with our sense of logic. In the pairing “dis-in-tered” and “heard-in-it” assonance is amplified by a structural palindromic technique that may be considered a species of chiasmus. Paired sounds move one way and then the other, as if echoing off a wall. “Dis-in-tered” bounces back as “heard-in-it” so that, through the assonance of paired sounds, the paired words become in the most literal sense resonant of each other. This echo-effect captures our attention and makes us attend to other reverberations created in the mind through sound. For example, we become aware, albeit subconsciously, that the echoing pair has produced a pleasing structural sense of balance. This sound sense of balance has numerous musical equivalents – for example juxtaposed crescendo and diminuendo or the use of ascending and descending scales. The idea of scales and balance can be playfully productive in our appreciation of the musical sweetness of sound justice. In *A Strange Eventful History*, each of the seven ages of man is introduced by a stanza written as a variation on Shakespeare's (Jaques') version and delivered by the narrator. For the age of the justice, we have the following iambic pentameter lines:

See the justice keep score with scales and notes
 Ignoring weighty planks while sawing notes
 When sharp indentures the innocent bite
 The judge's jaw should set all things aright
 With evident eyes and fair-hearing ears
 Speaking sound judgment and drowning down tears (*ASEH*, the justice)

When the forms of law bite, the jaw of the law should speak substantial justice. Indenture is an old form of legal document that was typically cut down the middle to produce corresponding part and counterpart containing identical script, so that the two parties each had a portion of the original whole and a complete copy of the document's terms. The line of the cut was deliberately jagged like the intersecting teeth of a jaw, so that the original part was a true and perfect fit for none other than its original counterpart. It was an early technological method of fraud-prevention.

Let us dwell a little longer and more deeply upon the musical metaphor. Music is made up of melody, harmony and rhythm. It is most pleasing and persuasive to human sense when it is rhetorically constituted by the trinity of these elements, but each of the three can be played with; indeed the highest art – the discretionary and equitable aspect – consists in the judicious bending of the formal rules. Regular scales played in metronomic strict time are no more pleasing or humane than formal rules strictly and unwaveringly applied in law. A series of scale exercises is hardly more musical than a strict law is just. Justice, in music as in law, requires art as well as technical skill. The rhythmic metre of Shakespeare’s verse, especially his iambic pentameter, is no doubt a large part of what makes it pleasing. The pairing of unstressed and stressed beats in the iambic foot (“dee-DUM”) is said to be resonant of the “lub-DUB” of a human heart-beat. Commenting on iambic pentameter, Peter Groves observes that “Shakespeare’s meter informs the actor’s production of emotional meaning through rhythm... the rhythm can seem an echo to the sense.”¹⁷

In addition to melody, harmony and rhythm, there is a fourth or master element – one that constitutes and combines and transcends all other elements. In a sense it is an anti-element. In both music and law it goes by the name of “silence.” It is telling that justice systems based on juris-diction nearly always enshrine a right to silence. In English law, a criminal accused’s right to silence is now exercised with this official caution: “You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.”¹⁸ Silence is very often more eloquent than words.¹⁹ To take a musical example, each section of Pärt’s setting of the Latin translation of the St John Passion in the Vulgate is “allocated a certain constant set of notes and durations throughout” and “Even the silences between sections have a precise duration specified by the number of syllables in the final word of the preceding sen-

¹⁷ Peter L. Groves, “‘My heart dances’: Performing Emotion through Shakespeare’s Rhythms,” in *Shakespeare and Emotions: Inheritances, Enactments, Legacies*, eds. R. S. White, Mark Houllahan and Katrina O’Loughlin (Palgrave Shakespeare Studies: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 84.

¹⁸ The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 ss.34–37 deals with “Inferences from accused’s silence” including the effect of the accused’s “failure to mention facts when questioned or charged” (s.34); “silence at trial” (s.35); “failure or refusal to account for objects, substances or marks” (s.36); failure or refusal to account for presence at a particular place (s.37). The right to silence is discussed in Annabelle Mooney, *Language and Law* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 68–73.

¹⁹ See, generally, Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike, eds., *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985); Michal Ephratt, “The functions of silence,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 40 (2008): 1909–1938. Ephratt adopts the term “Eloquent Silence.”

tence.”²⁰ Pärt’s formula provides that “if the final word in a section (with a full stop) has one or two syllables, then the following silent bar should be of the same duration (as in the printed score); if the final word has three or four syllables, then the silent bar should be exactly half as long.”²¹ Actors know that silence fills the theatre in a way that can hardly be attained even by shouting. When one shouts, the sound immediately dies away, whereas silence gets louder and louder and louder the longer it lingers.²² It is not emptiness, but a solid thing that demands our attention. It is not for nothing that we speak of a pregnant pause. The silent pause may be an anti-element to sound and it may be considered an absence, but it is by no means an emptiness or a vacancy. It is a full thing that seems to strike the ear physically almost as sound does.

To attend and to be attentive one must first be called to attention. In Shakespeare’s London, church bells summoned congregations to hear sermons and trumpet and drum summoned playgoers to the theatre. The ear must be excited, incited, invited to hear. A clamour awakens the ear as a prelude to attentive hearing. Rhetoricians have long appreciated this need to excite auditory engagement, thus the rhetorician Thomas Wilson lauded the “plaine beginning” wherein “the hearer is made apt to giue good eare out of hande.”²³ Shakespeare was highly likely to have been familiar with Wilson’s work and it might even have inspired Mark Antony’s famous plain beginning to his speech in Caesar’s funeral where he expressly invites the “Friends, Romans, countrymen” to lend their ears (3.2.74). That said, the call to give or lend the ear had long been a staple of theatrical practice just as it had long been a staple of the rhetorical tradition. In fact, the earliest surviving play script in the canon of English theatrical drama – *The Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1420) – begins with a similar call to friends to lend their hearing: “Farewel, fayre frendys, / That lofly wyl lystyn and lendys.”²⁴ In another example of the tradition, Shakespeare has the Vice figure, Rumour,

20 Arvo Pärt *Passio (Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Secundum Joannem)*, The Song Company; St Mary’s Cathedral Choir; Omega Ensemble St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, Friday 10 March 2017 (Programme Notes).

21 Antony Pitts, “A Brief Introduction to Pärt-writing: Arvo Pärt and his unique musical formula,” *Church Music Quarterly* (March 2004): 1–7, 7.

22 See, further, Sean Mulcahy, “Acting Law | Law Acting: A Conversation with Dr Felix Nobis and Professor Gary Watt,” *Exchanges: The Warwick Research Journal* 4.2 (2017): 189–200. Available at <http://exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/article/view/146/276> (last access September 6, 2017).

23 Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique* [1560], ed. George H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 99.

24 Frederick J. Furnivall and Alfred W. Pollard, eds., *The Macro Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 75–188, lines 153–1544.

call upon the audience to engage their acoustic sense at the start of *Henry IV, Part II*: “Open your ears; for which of you will stop / The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?” (*The Induction*). Similarly, *Coriolanus* opens with these words of a citizen speaking in the streets of Rome “Before we proceed any further, hear me speak” (1.1.1).²⁵

The impressive quality of such lines, by which I mean that aspect of these lines that makes the fullest impression on the mind, is the fact that spoken words strike the ear and make an initial demand to be heard. Thus the call to hear operates in a curiously oxymoronic way by calling a listener to listen. The effect of this, I would suggest, is to make the audience reflexively self-aware of its own auditory engagement with the words of the script. It therefore invites a more acute and critical engagement with the sense of the words – hearing becomes *a* hearing. Shakespeare indicates elsewhere that the same effect can be achieved in combination with music. At the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, for example, the opening line (“If music be the food of love, play on...”) makes express reference to music that we can presume was being played by musicians on stage or in one of the adjoining spaces. (*ASEH* included Antony Pitts’ own setting of “If music be the food of love.”) In Shakespeare’s play the on-stage music, combined with the express textual overture to “music,” would have excited the ear of the audience, and perhaps, by focusing their attention on stage sounds, would have prompted playgoers to hush their own chatter at the outset of the play. *Henry V* through its prologue invitation to the audience “gently to hear, kindly to judge our play” (1.prologue.34) more expressly and directly than any other of Shakespeare’s plays invites the audience to engage in a critical hearing of the ensuing drama, but it also contains within it a more subtle and primordially effective appeal to the audience’s sense of hearing. The opening line of that prologue – “O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend” – contains at least two significant auditory notes. The reference to “muse” is one, for it might awake a musical sense of hearing in readiness for the ensuing verse, but more potent is the very first word of the play – the exclamation “O.” This is the shape of an open mouth and the sound that an open mouth makes, and it is also the shape of the open ear against which the sound strikes. It is in every sense a portal through which the play is presented, and this is quite apart from its resonance with the “wooden O” of the theatre structure.²⁶ That

²⁵ I am grateful to Sean Mulcahy for directing me to the intensity of sound references in the opening and closing scenes of *Coriolanus*.

²⁶ In *A Strange Eventful History*, I liken Shakespeare’s Globe theatre to the instrument of the human voice: “But how did the scientists find the thread of a single voice strung out somewhere between the earth and the moon? Here Shakespeare helped us in ways he could not have fore-

opening “O” is not so much a word as an attention-grabbing alarm. *Beowulf*, the earliest surviving poem in the Anglo-Saxon language, begins with another example of an ear-seizing monosyllable, which Dr Felix Nobis describes as “the classic Anglo Saxon call” – “Hwæt.”²⁷ It is frequently translated “listen!” or “lo!,” although recent scholarship suggests that it should perhaps be read (in the context of the line) as “what we have learned.”²⁸ The first line in full is “*Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,*” which Seamus Heaney translates “So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by.” In a note on his own translation he makes an interesting observation connecting Anglo-Saxon speech to legal speech: “when the men of the family spoke, the words they uttered came across with a weighty distinctness, phonetic units as separate and defined as delph platters displayed on a dresser shelf [...]. They had a kind of Native American solemnity of utterance, as if they were announcing verdicts rather than making small talk.”²⁹

Techniques for acquiring an attentive ear, whether in express or more subtle forms, create a sense of acoustic anticipation whose combined effect is something similar to that produced by the biblical injunction – “those who have ears, let them hear.”³⁰ In the context of a musical concert a similar effect is achieved by the tuning of the instruments. It is not just that the musical instruments are being tuned, but also that the auditory instruments of the audience – their ears – are being attuned to the acoustic context of the musicians’ instruments in this place. It was with such techniques and considerations in mind that the advance publicity for *A Strange Eventful History* sought to strike a playful note calculated to invoke a critically engaged mode of hearing. The hope was the standard one of enticing through intrigue, but at the same time it sought to encourage acoustic appreciation of the resonance between the musicality of Shakespeare’s words and the musical compositions that inspired him and which his works in turn inspired. The paragraph of advance publicity – the teaser – read as follows:

seen. His Globe theatre was a huge wooden model of the human vocal tract – a vast wooden cylinder for a throat and the sounding board of a hollow wooden stage thrust like a voice box into its very centre [...] and Shakespeare kindly left the lid off for us, so the great mouth of the playhouse could shout out into thin air [...] into the thin air of space, and of time” (*ASEH*, narrative).

²⁷ See <https://vimeo.com/108538344>, at 8.38–46. See, further, <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/performance/beowulf-dr-felix-nobis> (last access September 6, 2017)

²⁸ See <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/listen-beowulf-opening-line-misinterpreted-for-200-years-8921027.html> (last access September 6, 2017).

²⁹ See <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/beowulf/introbeowulf.htm> (last access September 6, 2017).

³⁰ Matthew 13:9.

For decades, scientists have been straining to hear alien voices in outer space. Now traces of speech have been found. Are they extra-terrestrial, or could they be human voices trapped in time? The rumour is that scientists have found the sounds of Elizabethan London and have recovered the voices of actors in the original Globe theatre. Twenty-score years since the death of William Shakespeare (1564–1616), *A Strange Eventful History* marks time with a journey through a sweet soundscape of Shakespeare’s words and the music he has inspired... Lend us your ears, and hear that strain again...

Bridging this preamble to each evening’s performance, I opened the show by welcoming the audience whilst wearing a lab coat. This gave time for the six singers to warm up back stage and at the same time gave the playful illusion of scientific veracity and thereby continued the framing conceit – introduced by the advance publicity – that scientists had discovered or recovered actual sounds from Shakespeare’s original Globe Theatre (from 1599 when it opened to 1613 when it was destroyed by fire).

The performance proper began with a prologue that in the printed paper programme was subtitled “roll-call.” This was a playful reference to the fact that the paper programme was itself in the form of a large single-sheet designed to be rolled and therefore to evoke the paper scrolls on which the early modern player received his section of the playscript – his roll, it will be recalled, was the practical (and etymological) origin of the actor’s “role.” The word “call” was also intended to evoke the auditory cues, discussed earlier in this paper, by which audiences have historically been summoned to congregate as witnesses to a performance. Even such homonyms as roll and role were placed in the script not just for punning, but with a desire to engage and excite the ear. The prologue or roll-call of *A Strange Eventful History* comprises four elements – a song, a section of narration, a Shakespearean speech and another song. The first song, which served as an overture to the entire work, was “The isle is full of noises” (Paul Ayres b.1970) which was sung by the six singers as they gradually entered the scene from various points off-stage. The express reference to “noises” in the title of this song alerts the listener to the overall theme of the show, which is to connect speech and music and sounds of all sorts at the primal level of noise. The fact that the phrase “isle is full” is full of the lulling sound of the letter “l” fits with the lulling quality of the tune, which, like a lullaby, lulls the listener into a dreamlike state. Shakespeare’s text promises that noises will be audible in the isle, but the busy, buzzing “s” and “z” sounds in the word “noises” are in fact inaudible when the word “isle” is pronounced – the same was probably true of pronunciation in Shakespeare’s day, so his “isle” turns out to be curiously *empty* of noises. We are left, instead, with an isle (pronounced “I’ll”) that enhances the lulling, dream-like quality of the soundscape and in which the feeling that the isle is alien and unreal may be heightened because the “s” of the written

word is not present. Shakespeare's line "the isle is full of noises" is taken from Shakespeare's play about a colonized island *The Tempest* (3.2.135), and this serves to open up a suggestive and intriguing set of acoustic allusions to the continental island of Australia in which the performances of *A Strange Eventful History* were taking place. Even in the suburbs of modern Sydney one is wonderfully assailed by a clamour of cockatoos, mynahs, parakeets and occasionally the lyricism of the elusive Lyre bird. One can easily imagine how raucous must have been the African and American islands on which early modern explorers first set foot in Shakespeare's day. The beautiful music of the opening song, coupled with Shakespeare's beautiful words, awakens the ears of the audience and stirs their attention even as it induces a somewhat soporific, dreamlike state. It is into this that the narrator's opening speech intrudes:

The isle is full of noises and tonight we will be full of play. Welcome to *A Strange Eventful History* – a journey back to Shakespeare's London and the journey of a lifetime from birth to the last scene of all.

At this point the pseudo-scientific framing narrative is picked up, as it is throughout all of the narrator's speeches:

Scientists have found strange sounds in space: historical remnants of human voices. They call them "Light Amplified Radio Cords" – L.A.R.C.s for short; and they have asked the Song Company to help turn these LARCs into human voices. Tonight we share our findings. You've heard the speculation....

Shh...shh...Shakespeare's voice has been found!

It's just a rumour, but who can "stop the vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?"

The narrative sections serve to articulate the songs and the speeches by connecting them whilst keeping them distinct from one another. The first of Shakespeare's speeches to be introduced is the famous prologue to the first Act of *Henry V*, spoken (as befits a strange form of choral concert) by the character called "Chorus." It begins with a couplet that brings in the musical and extra-terrestrial themes of the show: "O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention" (1.prologue.1–2). One highly pertinent couplet later in the prologue directly urges the audience to visualise horses: "Think when we talk of horses, that you see them / Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth" (1.prologue.1.26–7). These lines expressly urge the audience to see horses, but they also encourage the horses to be heard in the imagination's ear. The percussive "pr" sound that is rapidly repeated in the phrase "printing their proud" has an onomatopoeic quality that is calculated to make an impression on the ear of the mind even as the mind's eye is called upon to witness horses snorting and

hooves impressing the soil. The narrator interrupts the speech immediately after the phrase “receiving earth” to amplify the playful conceit that scientists have detected signals of Shakespearean sounds that centuries ago had emanated into space. The interruption – which required me as narrator to interrupt myself in the middle of my own delivery of the prologue to Act One of *Henry V* – was deliberately designed to alienate and to create a sense of the alien. An instance, perhaps, of what Brecht called the *Verfremdungseffekt* (“alienation effect”).³¹ The interruption took the form of a question addressed to the singers and, obliquely, addressed to the audience: “Are you receiving earth?” The hope was that the audience might enter more fully as participants in the play and that their ears, alerted and alienated, would be more acutely attuned to the sound play connecting the songs and the script.

The prologue to the first Act of *Henry V* acquires the ear of the audience by means of another poetic technique that Shakespeare was profoundly adept in. The technique I am referring to is a playfulness with related vowel sounds. In particular, the vowel sound of “or.” It should be noted that in the following passage the “hour” in hour-glass would also have been pronounced with an “or” sound in the Elizabethan pronunciation and the possessive pronoun “our” would have been closer to “or” than to our modern bisyllabic pronunciation.³² I have underlined in bold the “or” sound and underlined related sounds to show how loudly the passage is loaded with this audible refrain:

For ‘tis **your** **thoughts** that now must deck **our** kings
 Carry them **here** and **there**; jumping **o’er** times,
 Turning the accomplishment of many **years**
 Into an **hour**-glass: for the which supply,
 Admit me **Chorus** to this **history**;
 Who prologue-like **your** humble patience pray,
 Gently to **hear**, kindly to judge, **our** play (1.prologue.28–34).

³¹ John Willett, trans., *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1964), 144.

³² See David Crystal, *The Oxford Dictionary of Original Shakespearean Pronunciation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The ‘or’ sound ɔ: would have generally sounded ɔ̃: In his *English Grammar*, Ben Jonson likens it to the growl of a dog: “R is the dog’s letter, and hurreth in the sound.” Compare *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.190. In the original Elizabethan pronunciation, Hamlet’s “words, words, words” (2.2.189) would have been filled with the sound of “or”, as in modern Received Pronunciation of “swords, swords, swords.” I have engaged elsewhere in an extended appreciation of the sound of “or” in *Hamlet* (Watt, *Shakespeare’s Acts of Will*, Chapter 5, “His will is not his own’: Hamlet downcast and the problem of performance,” 191–198).

Shakespeare is not the only great rhetorician to employ the sound of “ore” poetically to acquire the ear of his audience. The most famous example from politics is surely the opening clause of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth.” There are four “ores” in that one clause, and the rich “r” sound resonates further as it echoes around full vowel sounds in such words as “years,” “our” and “Father.” The “ore” sound fills the mouth and fills the ear. Repeated and amplified with further vowel and “r” sounds it has a roaring quality. In *A Strange Eventful History*, the prologue speech from *Henry V* is followed by *The Cries of London* by Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625) that was written around the time of the original Globe playhouse. The choral quality of the “or” sound features in the opening line of the song (as indeed it features in the composer’s Christian name): “God give you good morrow, my masters, past three o’clock and a fair morning.” In the original early modern pronunciation the repeated “r” sounds would have awakened the ear like a drum roll. (“God give you good morrrrrrow, my ma[r]sters, past thrree o’clock and a fairrr morrrrning”). The song celebrates the musicality of the streets especially in the cries of street vendors who would have crowded the lanes outside the playhouse and mingled with the crowd inside.

For *ASEH*, it was hoped that the down-to-earth music of street voices would join with the hooves printing the earth to produce a concrete sense so that, despite the intangible quality of time and imagined time-travel, the listener would be located in a present felt experience. These are, of course, precisely the same effects that Shakespeare aimed at and so successfully achieved in the time-traveller prologues to the Acts of *Henry V* delivered by the Chorus. For example, in the prologue to the third Act we have the tangible call to ‘Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy’ (3.prologue.18) and in the prologue to the fifth Act the audience is invited (in reference to the king) to ‘Heave him away upon your winged thoughts’ and ‘fetch’ him in (5.prologue.8, 28), and, most tangibly of all, to ‘behold / In the quick forge and working-house of thought’ (5.prologue.22–3).

After the prologue part of *ASEH*, the show proceeds to the seven ages of man as Jaques describes them, starting with the age of the infant. To begin with, Jaques’ entire speech was spoken to allow each singer to introduce themselves to the audience. All parts having been introduced in the overture, the show then proceeded to journey through the seven ages one-by-one. The format for each age contained, with occasional slight variation, the same structural elements. First, the narrator introduced the age with a poetic stanza newly written for this production. In writing these stanzas, I took Jacques’ words as a starting point for a playful riff designed to emulate some of the techniques of sound play discovered in Shakespeare’s writing. The new stanza for each age therefore operated as an amplification, and maybe an exaggeration, of Shakespeare’s own

poetic methods. For example, the stanza written to introduce the first age, began with the couplet “In expectation here begin fantastic / scenes and phantom sounds of ages past.” This couplet makes straightforward sense as an introduction of the show’s pseudo-scientific conceit concerning the recovery of an Elizabethan soundscape. Less obvious is the fractional arrangement of the word “infant” within the couplet; not just once, but twice. Here I copied Shakespeare’s technique of bracketing or echoing a sound within a repetition of the same sound, as follows: “[**In** expectation here beg**in fant**]astic / scenes and **phant**om sounds of ages past.” The effect of the closely concentrated **{in fant}** at the centre of the more sparsely spaced [**In ... phant**] seems to produce concentric waves of sound sense, akin to the waves produced by dropping a pebble in a pond. There is a large ripple in the middle that fades out to a more gentle ripple as the ring widens. Perhaps the concentric sense causes sound waves to ripple through the mind. The stanza for the age of the lover was a playful take on the “sigh” sound which Shakespeare’s Jaques associates with this age. Thus the first couplet of the lover’s stanza contains four homophonic repetitions of the “sigh” sound: “The lover’s eyes for signs shoot swift to sight / As high in hope as cupid’s darts in flight.” The word “sigh” itself is never in its dictionary sense expressly stated in the couplet or the stanza as whole, but its absence might foster a lovesick sense of longing, and the quick repetition hopefully engenders a bodily sense of lovesick lament – as sighing does. Each stanza was merely the first feature in the performance of each age. Second, as I spoke the words of the stanza for each age, I handed a prop to the singer playing that particular age. In return each singer handed me the labcoat that they had been wearing up until that point, and which, removed, revealed clothes in some colour on the rainbow spectrum – one for each of the seven ages, starting with red for the infant and ending with violet. Third, having introduced the individual performer, he or she sang a solo piece (usually with other performers accompanying in the role of chorus). The prop was in each case appropriate to the age being represented and was in each case capable of being played as an instrument – a rattle for the infant, a hoop and stick for the schoolboy, a (violin) bow for the lover, a drum for the soldier, a pair of brass scales (miniature cymbals) for the justice, and a spectacles case for the pantaloon. Antony Pitts, representing the seventh age, the age of oblivion, had his instrument and prop throughout in the form of the Fender Rhodes electric piano. With its cover removed the audience saw a skeletal array of metal ribs and electric sinews which simultaneously evoked musical instrument, scientific instrument and something like an emaciated corpse in a lid-less coffin or sarcophagus. It was present throughout the entire performance, like a memento mori.

On that note, this might be the appropriate point to elucidate a further instance of “fractional inference” in Shakespeare’s dramatic works. This example, like the earlier one, is taken from *Julius Caesar*. The following lines appear in a longer passage of speech that was spoken to exemplify the age of the soldier in *A Strange Eventful History*:

O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
 That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!
 Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
 That ever lived in the tide of times (3.1.254–57)

As before, I have highlighted the relevant sound fractions to bring out the tenor more clearly, even though there might be some slight variation between Elizabethan pronunciation and modern. The subject of the passage – he who is the “bleeding piece of earth” – is none other than Julius Caesar himself, and the tenor word that may be inferred from the constituent sound fragments is “Caesar,” perhaps (more tenuously) “Julius” also. Caesar’s name appears towards the end of the full speech, but in this case the word “Caesar” is sufficiently inferred without needing to state it expressly. It is, after all, the title of the play and everyone knows to whom Antony is referring as he addresses the corpse. In fact, the inference is arguably all the more powerful through the absence of any express reference to the name, for this has the effect of confirming Caesar’s absence in the listener’s mind. Without the resolving satisfaction of an express reference to “Caesar,” the audience will also be encouraged to hold in mind Caesar in his broken form. The fractional representation of “Caesar” in scattered sounds fits perfectly with an idea that is expressly stated in these lines, namely that the statuesque colossus that was Caesar is now a “ruin,” fragmented into a rubble of parts (a few lines later Antony even muses in connected vein that Caesar’s blood shall “cumber all the parts of Italy”). Note that the salient lines start with the declaratory “O,” one effect of which is, as we have already observed, to engage the playgoers’ auditory attention. The sound of Caesar is palpable, echoed especially in the endings of the first two lines “piece of earth” and “these butchers.” These lines present the bleeding ruins of Caesar. Caesar chopped up.

This might seem to be pushing the point. Surely Shakespeare did not intend the audience to hear or sense Caesar’s name in these lines. Perhaps not. Who can know what Shakespeare intended, and how much of his craft was instinctive. What is clear is that earlier in the play, Shakespeare makes great play of Caesar’s name and expressly engages the audience’s ear to hear the sound quality of “Caesar.” Cassius asks:

“Brutus” and “Caesar”: what should be in that “Caesar”?
 Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
 Write them together: yours is as fair a name;
 Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well. (1.2.141–144)

Caesar himself speaks of his own name at the start and end of a seventeen-line passage that mentions hearing, music, the ear and deafness and in which we find in two adjacent lines two instances of fractional inference of the name “Caesar” (highlighted in the following abridgement):

Yet if my name were liable to fear,
 I do not know the man I should avoid
 So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much,
 [...]
 [...] he hears no music;
 [...]
 Such men as he be never at heart's ease
 Whiles they behold a **greater** than themselves,
 [...]
 [...] for always I am Caesar.
 Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf. (1.2.198–200, 203, 207–208, 211–212)

Shakespeare was fond of the set-piece eulogy spoken over the body of a Great One fallen. Julius Caesar is not the only one of his titular characters to receive the honour. Coriolanus is another, whose “eulogist” Aufidius cues the play’s closing music with his words: “Take him up. / Help, three o’ the chiefest soldiers; I’ll be one. / Beat thou the drum, that it speak mournfully: / Trail your steel pikes” (5.5.147–50). This, of course, is an echo of *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet*’s case the general Fortinbras, like the martial Antony, speaks formal honours for the fallen prince while Horatio takes Antony’s part in speaking of his friend. The intervention of Fortinbras brings the play to a close with a crescendo of sound and auditory elements. When Horatio promises an oration on the sad events, Fortinbras commands “Let us haste to hear it, / And call the noblest to the audience” (5.2.370–71). His next passage of speech, the very last lines of the play, contains a cue, surely, for gunpowder effects (of the sort that would later cause the fire that destroyed the Globe playhouse) and a concluding fanfare of martial trumpet:³³

33 See <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/sound-the-trumpet-1249715.html> (last access September 6, 2017).

Let four captains
 Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
 For he was likely, had he been put on,
 To have proved most royally: and, for his passage,
 The soldiers' music and the rites of war
 Speak loudly for him.
 Take up the bodies: such a sight as this
 Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
 Go, bid the soldiers shoot. (5.2.395–403)

The cacophonous climax brought in by Fortinbras is in marked contrast to the hush of Hamlet's passing. In his dying words, Hamlet had alluded to the audience (on-stage or playhouse, perhaps both). However noisy and distracted the playgoers might have been upon entering the playhouse they were surely silent for his last words; with which he resigned himself to the inevitable law of death. Hamlet did not live long enough to play the justice, for the sergeant Death has come:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,
 Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
 Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—
 But let it be. (5.2.339–43)

Hamlet's final speech is a study in the sound of "o" that echoes until it dies away into a silence that fills the wooden "o" of the playhouse:

O, I die, Horatio.
 The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
 I cannot live to hear the news from England.
 But I do prophesy the election lights
 On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
 So tell him, with th'occurents, more and less,
 Which have solicited. The rest is silence.
 O, O, O, O. (*dies*) (5.2.306–313)

Hamlet's silence inspired the closing words of *A Strange Eventful History*. Perhaps those closing words provide a just and fitting note to finish on:

The rest is silence? No. The rest is sound.
 The rest is peace? Yes. But not quiet.
 True rest is the song of birds, the company of sweet words, the soothing chorus of friends.
 And when we think that the light is fading and the colours are dying away...we are mistook.
 The light is merely sleeping beneath the layers of a life laid down: it lies within a blanket of

enfolding dreams. The colours of life do not die, but dye...and deeply too. Ever deeper.
For mixed with the shades of me are the memories of you.

All hue. No cry...but a tone.

The end is not darkness, but beautiful black. Not silence, but a full forever sound.

Life ends in perfect pitch. (*ASEH*, epilogue)³⁴

34 The words “a tone” were the cue for Antony Pitts to play 52 keys descending the length of the keyboard – one key for each completed year of Shakespeare’s probable lifespan (he is known to have died on 23rd April 1616 and is romantically reputed to have been born on the same day in 1564, based on his baptismal date of 26th April that year). 23rd April was, even then, the Saint’s Day of England’s patron St George. The standard modern grand piano has 52 white keys and a total of 88 keys, as do some models of Fender Rhodes, although in this case the Fender Rhodes was of the smaller 73 key variety.