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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

FRAMING LAUGHTER IN THE THEATRE SPACE: REPRESENTATIONS OF LAUGHTER AT THE SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation focuses on laughter elicited in early modern drama via text and dramatic performance at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. It examines how and why the audience laughed, how laughter was expressed in comedy and tragedy, and points out what each form of laughter indicated about the audience's values and beliefs, highlighting laughter's essential position in the theatre. The dissertation considers how moments of laughter were constructed in the theatre space and how laughter reflected, reinforced, and alternately challenged social frames of gender, ethnicity, social status, but it also considers the pertinence or relevance of laughter. The dissertation draws on frame theory, audience response theory, geocriticism and theories of performance to show that constructions of laughter in early modern English drama depend on colliding structures that involve cultural and historical background, gender and class constructions, as well as theatre space. The dissertation examines how Shakespeare conveys humour in a particular theatrical moment (through a joke or the theatrical "ha ha") and how the director creates the conditions to frame laughter, which develop in a specific performance space at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. I also focus on the function of moments of the audience's laughter—how they fit contextually within the play's larger themes and character development—and, more exactly, what they reflect about the audience's cultural views, but also about laughter from the perspective of gender, class, and race.

How does a particular audience recognise a moment of hilarity, which triggers laughter? What does an audience's reaction to that comicality—through laughter, silence, dismissal—reveal about the elements inscribed within that kind of joke? To answer these questions, I engage a corpus of Shakespearean plays composed in the early modern period, but produced in the twenty-first century. I focus on productions of plays by Shakespeare as represented at the Shakespeare's Globe in London (*Love's Labour's Lost*, *As You Like It*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice*), analysing the instances of laughter in each production. As both frame theory and theories of laughter, as well as audience response theory, emphasize influences of the community and social aspects of drama, the plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries cannot be understood in isolation. Representations of laughter in early modern English drama, therefore, like human laughter itself, is a communal and diversified activity depending on the actants involved in the performance process and the actual space of performance. For this

reason, I have selected plays performed at the modern Shakespeare's Globe in London in my analysis—which performed plays in an environment similar to the original productions—in order to demonstrate that the theatrical space is just as important as the audience response when analysing the emergence of laughter in the early modern theatre. Moreover, instances of audience's laughter in the specific productions analysed in this dissertation are recorded in the filmed version of the production, available on *Shakespeare's Globe on Screen*, a project of *Drama Online*.[1]

The three interlinked methodologies (frame theory, audience response theory, geocriticism and theories of performance) offer ample scope for this dissertation to develop its main points. Frame theory distinguishes the comic from comedy and acknowledges the universality of laughter as a cultural phenomenon. Audience response theory indicates the therapeutic value of laughter for the audience in the theatre, as well as discussions of the reception of laughter in Shakespeare's time, as opposed to the twenty-first century audiences. As laughter is an emotional response to events developing on stage, I argue that the framing of laughter comes in response to certain keys that mark the hilarious moments in the development of the production of the play. For this reason, my argument includes the theory of carnival, as expressed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Timothy Hyman. My addition to the argument is the spatial perspective, according to which, as I argue, the theatre space is both conservative and transgressive simultaneously, when laughter is involved. While the audience expects to react through laughter during a production at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, moments of transgression are revealed, when laughter is vituperative or critical.

Laughter in the theatre is not only related to laughter in real life—in the sense that it is the emotional expression of individual members of the audience attending the play at a particular moment—but it is also elicited by the cultural-specific elements and the actors' gestures and body language during performance, as well as the audience's cultural expectations. Apart from the rhetorical theory of framing, discussions of audience-response theory (Dennis Kennedy, Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill, and Paul Menzer) and theories of performance (Robert Weimann) inform my dissertation. The framing of laughter, therefore, depends on many factors, and only some of them are related to the jokes in Shakespeare's text, while others depend on the actor's agency. Most of the spontaneous instances of laughter occur as a result of the directorial choice of play, the actor's interpretation of the role, or the immediate reactions of the audience during an interactive theatrical moment.

[1] Drama Online - Shakespeares Globe on Screen (dramaonlinelibrary.com).

Chapter 1, entitled "Framing Laughter in the Theatre" (1) is based on frame theory, production history and spatial studies and explores the key moments used by playwrights, directors, and players to access pre-existent cultural frames. The chapter explores productions of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *As You Like It* at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to show that the framing of laughter occurs at multiple levels of the performance, when the audience reacts to jokes, pantomime or even silences. These key moments are metaphors that trigger laughter in the audience. I argue that laughter is elicited through incongruous frames—intended to be funny—but also through individual jokes performed by actors during the dramatic interaction. The space of theatrical performance is very important from the perspective of my analysis because the location of the Shakespeare's Globe in London's Southwark is, in itself, a factor that triggers the assumption that the conditions of performance are exactly as they were in Shakespeare's time. However, this is not so,[2] and much of the audience's laughter is derived from the incongruities related to these specific conditions of performance.

The first subchapter of chapter 1, entitled "Early Modern Theories about Laughter" (1.1), surveys early modern theories and narratives about laughter, as presented in a corpus of three non-fictional texts of the period: *The contemplation of mankinde* (1571) by Thomas Hill; *The tranquillitie of the minde* (1570) by John Bernard; and *The foreste or Collection of histories* (1571) by Pedro Mexía. In the early modern period, laughter was outlined through various classical and early modern stories to show the psychological origin of laughter and to justify human character. In addition, these early modern texts show that laughter and satire can be used efficiently to amend detrimental habits in society. Apart from being considered a sign of human physiognomy, a smiling face is pleasant and attractive, as opposed to a serious philosopher's visage, which is unappealing. As it was believed that the features of a person's body and face contained signs by which their character could be read, everybody was interested in defining various ways through which these signs might be decoded. Laughter, therefore was a form of assessing a person's intellectual capacity, whereas clownish behaviour was often received with laughter and, consequently, derided. I argue that early modern representations of laughter in non-fictional texts of the period reveal the authors' preoccupation with this subject. Whether these authors are philosophers, physicians or Catholic humanists, laughter is viewed from various perspectives in these texts. There is no single answer to the question of why

[2] During productions of Shakespeare's plays at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre nowadays, audiences can frequently hear airplanes flying to and from the relatively close Heathrow Airport. This is a condition that was not met during Shakespeare's time. Audience's laughter may frequently become inaudible because of such intrusions.

people laugh, but all authors highlight the positive and negative aspects of laughter. Laughter often amends moral behaviour and is a sign of good health and good will.

The second subchapter of chapter 1, entitled "Lost Laughter: *Love's Labour's Lost*" (1.2), discusses instances of laughter existing in Shakespeare's playscript of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Then my argument moves to the moments of laughter elicited from the audience during the production of *Love's Labour's Lost* directed by Dominic Dromgoole (2009), as recorded in the *Drama Online* database. Shakespeare represents both conflicting opinions about laughter extant during his time, namely that laughter is beneficial to the mind, but also that laughter in excess may be harmful. The main argument in this subchapter is that audience's laughter in this production highlights other human emotions—such as love, insecurity, and comic response to intellectual sophistication—while the characters fall into two groups: those being laughed at, and those who are laughing at others. As the Princess and her ladies (Rosaline, Katharine and Maria) show intelligence and erudition, they seldom laugh at others. This is because the ladies demonstrate a higher grade of human sympathy, as befits a truly erudite person. Alternatively, the audience frequently laughs at the hypocrisy displayed by the four young men (the King of Navarre, Berowne, Longaville and Dumain), demonstrating that the men's pretended intellectual sophistication stems from their immaturity and emotional insecurity. The ridiculous Don Armado is often laughed at, while he believes that smiling and avoiding laughter are signs of wit and intelligence. Even laughter as a concept was the target of ridicule in this Shakespearean comedy, and so were the subtle allusions to the Muscovites, related to political hazard emerging from the direction of the Russian state nowadays.

The third subchapter of chapter 1, entitled "Mocking and Laughter: *As You Like It*," examines the instances of the audience's laughter in the production of *As You Like It*, directed by Thea Sharrock (2009), as recorded in the *Drama Online* database. I argue that, in this production, the audience laughed heartily at the jokes and innuendo generated by the clownish characters (Touchstone, Audrey, Jacques, shepherds and shepherdesses), rather than laughing at the noble couples in disguise. Even if the scenes involving Rosalind/Ganymede and Celia/Aliena were the source of much laughter from the audience, their reaction was not satirical towards the two young women. Instead, Orlando's emotional immaturity was sanctioned with laughter, as well as the amusing scenes when melancholy Jacques satirized the world's fools, or when he played the actor-director interacting with the audience. I argue that the spectator's emotional experience of the fictional stage world in *As You Like It*—expressed through laughter—depends on the production strategies used by the director, the ideological coding of each scene, and the material conditions of performance.

Chapter 2 of this doctoral dissertation, entitled "Laughter and Tears: A Physiological Association" (2), examines early modern ideas about the physiological connections between the production of laughter and the causes of weeping, respectively comedy and tragedy. The chapter discusses early modern treatises about laughter and tears written by the French physician Laurent Joubert, in his *Treatise on Laughter* (1579) and the English physiologist Timothy Bright, in his work *Treatise on Melancholy* (1586). In addition, contemporary views on laughter and tears are adduced, in works of philosophical anthropology by Helmuth Plessner and Thomas Lutz, to show that laughter and tears are expressions of human emotion related to structures of social significance. The chapter then looks at moments of laughter among the members of the audience during contemporary productions of Shakespeare's tragedies at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Productions of tragedies such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* are mined for moments of laughter—from the perspective of performance criticism and studies of spatiality—in order to show that nothing is stable in Shakespeare's tragedies, and the audience laughed even more during these Shakespearean tragedies than they did during the productions of comedies.

The first subchapter of chapter 2, entitled "Physiological Connection between Laughter and Tears" (2.1), discusses Laurent Joubert's *Treatise on Laughter* (1579) and Timothy Bright's *Treatise on Melancholy* (1586) to describe the physiological and psychological processes of the formation of laughter and tears, as well as the laughter through tears, which is described in many early modern treatises. While contemporary anthropologists and cultural historians define laughter and tears as forms of expression of essentially human emotions, all critics admit that it is extremely difficult to describe the actual situations in which somebody laughs or weeps, or the causes of their laughter or crying. Instead, it is easier to define the physiological and psychological processes—including the chemistry—of laughter and tears. When it comes to answering the question "What is the combination of laughter and tears as manifested in the theatre?" things are even more difficult. Even if laughter was often associated with comedy and weeping with tragedy, there is no clear demarcation between the expression of these emotions among the members of the audience while watching a Shakespearean tragedy at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. I argue that laughter in the theatre is an ineffable emotion that occurs spontaneously among the members of the audience when they seek relief from the tensions of tragedy.

The second subchapter of chapter 2, entitled "Laughter and Tragedy: *Antony and Cleopatra*" (2.2), examines the audience's laughter during the production of *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Jonathan Munby at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (2014), recorded

in the *Drama Online* database, from the perspective of performance theory, audience response theory, and theories of spatiality. In the first part of this production, laughter occurred frequently, which showed not only the audience's tendency to anticipate some sort of relief from the tragic story, but also that Cleopatra's histrionics and theatricality were suitable to eliciting laughter among the members of the audience. The audience sanctioned Antony's overconfidence and political inability through laughter. I argue that the festive atmosphere in Egypt—which is associated with carnival and laughter—influenced the audience's responses to most of the tragedy. While Cleopatra and Mark Antony behaved like clowns and elicited the audience's laughter, Octavius Caesar's rigid behaviour generated peals of laughter. It was as if the two opposing worlds of Rome and Alexandria—geographically and mentally distant—influenced the perceptions of psychological space and cultural parameters in the tragedy. As the audience sensed the conflictual opposition, they reacted with laughter to the scenes that evoked Cleopatra's unsuitability as a queen of Egypt; Mark Antony's clownish behaviour, despite the fact that he was one of the three most powerful rulers of Rome; and Roman rigidity and intransigence, represented by Octavius Caesar.

The third subchapter of chapter 2, entitled "Roman Politics and Laughter: *Julius Caesar*" (2.3), examines the moments of laughter elicited from the audience in the production of *Julius Caesar* directed by Dominic Dromgoole at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (2014), recorded in the *Drama Online* database. I argue that Julius Caesar and Mark Antony were turned into political clowns through the audience's laughter, which occurred at significant moments during the dramatic interaction involving these characters. Even the outstanding Brutus and the other conspirators—whose political machinations had serious consequences ending in Caesar's assassination—were satirized through the audience's laughter at certain moments in the tragedy. The women in this tragedy—Portia and Calpurnia—were not laughed at, but there was a scene in which the servant Lucius mocked Portia's anxiety. The production sanctioned political power as a big joke, involving clownish politicians, who tried to manipulate the people, but they had no moral rectitude. Laughter in this tragedy was not a signal of light amusement, but rather a form of uneasiness related to the fact that such political situations may be replicated throughout the ages, when rulers of countries that are influential in global politics are nothing else but clowns themselves, without even being aware of this fact.

The fourth subchapter of chapter 2, entitled "Physiology and Relief: *Hamlet*" (2.4) discusses laughter as a sign of irony in tragedy, which signals moments of truth, when truth cannot be told directly. The analysis refers to the production of *Hamlet* directed by Federay Holmes and Ellie While at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (2018), recorded in the *Drama*

Online database. I show that laughter occurred at unexpected moments during the tragedy, when psychological tension was too high and the audience burst into laughter for release from psychological pressure. While the audience did not laugh at the incongruities related to cross-gender casting—such as Ophelia being interpreted by a tall male actor (Shubham Saraf) or Hamlet being interpreted by a female actor (Michelle Terry)—laughter occurred frequently during the production in relation to sexual jokes or political innuendo. I argue that laughter in this production of *Hamlet* was not so much a reaction to discrepancies in age, height, gender or race of actors in the cast, or a response to sexual puns, but a response to the tension of tragedy—a form of laughter through tears. Polonius' foolishness elicited laughter from the audience, as did Hamlet's clownish behaviour, when he indirectly mocked himself. Claudius' and Gertrude's selfishness and self-absorbed thoughts were often the target of the audience's laughter. The play's unexpected comic scenes occurred in response to the audience's need to see the tragedy from a different (comic) perspective and to challenge the philosophical questions and incongruities that pervade the play.

Chapter 3 of this doctoral dissertation, entitled "Pertinence of Laughter" (3), examines the suitability or expectation of laughter among the members of the audience when they attend a comedy at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Pertinence shows the function of a particular moment of laughter during the play, which depends on technique, tone and intentionality, or the agency of the comic actor in interpreting his/her role. The analysis applies audience-response theory and theories of spectatorship to describe the responses through laughter, taking into account the audience as a cultural phenomenon. The plays analysed are the productions of *Twelfth Night* directed by Tim Carrol (2012); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Dominic Dromgoole (2013); and *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Jonathan Munby (2015). I argue that there is no specific indication regarding the pertinence or suitability of laughter during a performance of any Shakespearean comedy. Different types of audiences attend productions of Shakespearean comedies and it is difficult to draw a general conclusion about how and why they laugh. However, clowns and other comic characters elicited roars of laughter from the audience, even if this laughter was not always the same or occurring at the same moments during the production.

The first subchapter of chapter 3, entitled "Feste and Comic Laughter: *Twelfth Night*" (3.1) discusses the production of *Twelfth Night* directed by Tim Carrol at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (2012), as recorded in the *Drama Online* database. I argue that Feste had a subversive comic role in *Twelfth Night*, as the character subtly elicited laughter through costume, language and gesture. Moreover, the serious character of Malvolio elicited roars of

laughter from the audience, as did Maria, Sir Toby or Sir Andrew Aguecheek, but these characters cannot be classified as clowns. Olivia, interpreted by a male actor (Mark Rylance), Viola/ Cesario, also interpreted by a male actor (Johnny Flynn), and Maria, interpreted by Paul Chahidi elicited laughter among the members of the audience through their acting and interpretation of their comic roles, rather than the clownish pranks they produced.

The second subchapter of chapter 3, entitled "Bottom's Weaving of Laughter: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (3.2) examines the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Dominic Dromgoole at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (2013), recorded in the *Drama Online* Database. Laughter elicited by Bottom's transformation, or the *Pyramus and Thisbe* interlude, as well as the jokes in the play, are related to the tension between theatrical illusion and reality. The couples of lovers—through their self-centredness and emotional immaturity—elicited laughter from the audience because they turned into clowns. Even the couples Theseus–Hippolyta and Oberon–Titania were the target of the audience's laughter, despite their grand social position or ultimate supernatural power. I argue that the audience's laughter elicited in this production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is of three kinds: (1) laughter in reaction to the comic action and puns shown on stage; (2) laughter at the comic characters as clowns; (3) and laughter at themselves, namely the members of the audience, present to see the play on that particular night. Laughter occurred when witnessing the scenes involving cross-dressing and disguise; pantomime; irony and sexually-pointed verbal puns; paradox; the lovers' self-absorbed mindset; the men's insensitivity and lack of sympathy; and the mechanicals' clumsiness and ridiculousness. Laughter was catching, and laughter on stage was matched by the audience's laughter.

The third subchapter of chapter 3, entitled "Launcelot Gobbo and the Jester's Laughter: *The Merchant of Venice*" (3.3), examines the audience's laughter during the production of *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Jonathan Munby (2015) at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, as recorded in the *Drama Online* database. This serious comedy elicited the audience's laughter through representations of spaces as modelling characters' identities (Venice and the imaginary Belmont); pantomime and directorial insertions; as well as the presence of clowns in the play. I argue that Launcelot Gobbo was a go-between traversing the play's metaphoric spaces, revealing his shape-shifting identity. Yet he was not the only character who prompted the audience's laughter. Bassanio and the four young men in his circle (Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salerio and Solanio), as well as Portia, Nerissa and Jessica, and even the serious Antonio, were the target of the audience's laughter. While the production suggested a grave atmosphere—dominated by the pound-of-flesh plot—even Shylock's presence triggered the audience's

laughter at times. The play was dominated by theoretical discussions about laughter and merriment, accompanied by the real effect of laughter on the audience, which occurred outside the stage but was an integral part of the play's comic resolution.

The interactive component of laughter produced by the audience when attending a Shakespearean comedy or tragedy is a defining factor of humour. As the audience experiences the fictional stage world as a place in which the actors interact among themselves and with the audience, there is no particular rule that regulates the manifestation of the moments of laughter in comedy or tragedy. Laughter occurs spontaneously, not necessarily and not only in response to a cue, a joke in the text, or pantomime and body language. The framing of laughter is not compulsory, but it depends on many factors related to types of audience, directorial choices, and actors' interpretation. As twenty-first-century audiences have different triggers of reacting through laughter than the spectators in Shakespeare's time, there is always a gap between what the audiences think they should laugh at and their immediate and spontaneous reactions through laughter triggered by a joke or a humorous note during the dramatic exchange. Laughter in the theatre, therefore, is both a matter of personal choice and spontaneous reaction.

There are three reasons that can help explain why contemporary audiences express their emotions through laughter while attending a play at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre: (1) comedy and tragedy measure their success according to whether or not they are able to move the audiences to laughter; (2) audiences do not laugh with lesser intensity in tragedies than in comedies, and laughter in tragedy is not accompanied by a sense of guilt and inappropriateness; (3) it is important to explain clearly the details about what the audiences laugh at; otherwise, accounts of the audience's laughter in tragedy or comedy tend to influence negatively on the total effect of the production. For these reasons, laughter in both comedies and tragedies at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre is the response to a spontaneous and indefinable emotion—and laugher is often forgotten when another moment of laughter occurs. Like life, laughter is essentially transitory, but infinitely likeable.

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