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Realism and the Ethics of Risk at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival

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The Duchess and her woman die

There's a story about the death of the Duchess of Malfi and her woman, Cariola, at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

In 2006, Peter Hinton, the current Artistic Director of the English company at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and someone known for creating unique, challenging work at the Festival, directed *The Duchess of Malfi* on Stratford's Tom Patterson stage; the production that emerged redefined "risk" for a classical company many scholars and popular critics have long characterized as notoriously risk-averse. Its aesthetic was Renaissance Goth, complete with eerie soundscape, low lighting, and heavily stylized costumes (including couture-like exaggerated farthingales); the show began dark (much to the chagrin of reviewers) and grew only darker. As actress Laura Condlin (Cariola) noted to me in an interview in July 2010, this was a world of utter savagery, a world in which nobody – not even audiences – could be safe. While the only previous *Duchess* at Stratford (in 1971, directed by Jean Gascon and starring Pat Galloway) had been characterized by a "pretty" aesthetic (Peacock, Personal interview), this one was, above all else, deeply unsettling.

And yet Act 4, scene 2 – the scene in which the Duchess and Cariola die – felt, looked, and sounded completely different from the rest of the show. As I've argued elsewhere (Solga 98-140), overall this production was tangibly metatheatrical in its performative play with body doubles and in Peter Hannan's soundtrack, which sampled chunks of text in order to push and pull the play's words into electrified song. By stark contrast, the Duchess' and Cariola's death scene took place in pared-down costumes and featured no soundtrack of any kind; save Bosola's skull mask there was nothing on stage in this moment to indicate the self-consciousness that

shaped the show's broader ethos. Lucy Peacock, as the Duchess, kneeled on a bench placed lengthwise down the middle of the stage in a shaft of bright light. Her executioners pulled the cord around her neck; her hands flew up in deformed supplication as she fought hard against her attackers, pounding and gripping the bench. The scene went on for what seemed like a very, very long time; the only sound on stage was that of intense physical struggle. Some audience members laughed, finding the moment perhaps too real, perhaps curiously, inappropriately, *unreal*. We seemed, together, to be on a dangerous edge: the border between theatre and terror, the expected and the absolutely unimaginable. We all knew Lucy was ok – wasn't she? We all knew this was just for "play" – wasn't it? Giggles of minor discomfort gave way to uncertainty, anxiety, and then, for some audience members, disgust.ⁱⁱ Finally Cariola (Condlln) was strangled and fell into seizure. The audience gasped.

I saw Hinton's *Duchess* live twice in the summer of 2006, and again on archive video in 2008. Every time the Duchess and Cariola died I got the distinct impression that I was seeing something I was not really supposed to see, seeing what is not supposed to happen on a stage – and certainly not on a stage at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, a large, not-for-profit organization that bills itself as North America's leading classical repertory company and the largest festival of its kind in the world. The moment veered far away from what I call "Festival realism": the acting style most associated with mainstream Shakespeare production in the contemporary Anglophone West, in which early modern characters are created by actors and presented to audiences as "real" people with late modern motivations and psychological frameworks.ⁱⁱⁱ Eschewing this kind of carefully styled realism – which often on stage looks elegant, tidy, and controlled despite the messy labour of actors behind the façade – the Duchess' and Cariola's executions pushed into uncanny territory that I prefer to describe as radical

naturalism.^{iv} The scene produced a realer-than-real effect that challenged the line between what is and is not possible in early modern performance (or, for that matter, in any performance) and at the same time pressed patrons to consider what, exactly, they expect from “good” Shakespeare, “real” Shakespeare. As the Duchess and Cariola were murdered the audiences at the live performances I attended seemed to go through an awkward form of catharsis: first there was silence; then there was nervous laughter; then there were isolated but audible sounds of shock. What there was *not* was any form of sentimental release – the kind Bosola conjures in his eulogy for the Duchess in the final moments of Act 4, scene 2 – for either actors or audience members.^v Was this “good”? Was it “real” (or “truthful” or “authentic”)? What had happened in this moment? What were we supposed to take away from it?

I finally learned the story behind the creation of this scene in 2010, during separate interviews with actors Sara Topham, Laura Condln (Cariola) and Lucy Peacock (the Duchess).^{vi} As Topham and Condln explained it, Hinton wanted to explore what it would mean actually to be strangled – he wanted to investigate, in rehearsal, the entire process such a death would entail in real life.^{vii} Working with Condln and fight choreographer John Stead, Hinton tried to get past the moment when the representation of death-by-strangulation becomes uncomfortable to watch, or, as Topham put it to me, past “the moment [when] you do something long enough that it becomes not OK.” Hinton wanted to reach the place where performance implies something much greater than itself, the place of profound discomfort when we realize that the thing on stage is not, in fact, “just” a play – that it has real implications for everyone in the room, actors and audience members alike. The result of this work, for me, was the least “safe” thing I have ever seen on a Stratford stage (perhaps on any stage, in fact): a truly “visceral” (Peacock, Personal

interview) event that called spectators to new, uncomfortable, embodied acts of witness (and in the face of which a number of spectators simply left the theatre [Condlln]).

Of course, the extraordinary disruption – what I wish to call the “unsafety” – this scene produced for audiences was possible only because the rehearsal process had brought the performers involved to a place of carefully managed risk, controlled physical safety, within which they could take an incredible leap of craft. Much of the work on this scene in rehearsal was necessarily technical: in order for Peacock and Condlln to be able to push past the barriers with which “Festival realism” marks death on stage, their complicated physical struggles needed to be choreographed to the second and run for technical clarity over and over again – this *on top of* the emotionally and physically draining work each actor needed to do individually in order to “be” strangled for minutes on end, over and over again. In rehearsal, the deaths of the Duchess and Cariola took many hours and extraordinary labour to create and perform; on stage we saw only a few raw minutes of this work, but we also encountered the traces of the long, exhausting, and deeply disquieting journey *beyond* the standard version of theatrical death that lay behind it. This is what I and other spectators were unknowingly called upon to witness when we sat down to watch the play: the remnants of profoundly radical theatrical labour, pushing hard past what scholars might call “safe”, and what many of Stratford’s more conservative audience members might call “good”; the serious work of the bodies behind the masks we too easily consume, and often condemn, when we come to a mainstream cultural tourism venue like this one.

In this paper I am interested in what it means that such a moment as the Duchess’ death can appear on a stage as notoriously conservative as Stratford’s, and why a director as well known for challenging, boundary-breaking, “intellectual” theatre (Condlln) as Peter Hinton should work at the Festival and be so very welcomed by both its actors and its artistic leadership

when he does. More specifically, I am interested in why scholars, critics, and some audience members (myself included) have often claimed that this place is unwilling and unable to take risks – to risk political productions; to risk more non-traditional casting; to risk performing Shakespeare and his contemporaries in non-traditional modes – and what these claims in turn imply about the rather complex valences of the term “risk” at Stratford. My aim in the discussion that follows is twofold. First, I want to parse what “risk” means in the Stratford context, and the different *ways* in which “risk” means for the various stakeholders involved here: artistic leadership; actors; audiences; scholars; and popular media critics. What kind of work defines “risky” for each of these groups? How should we evaluate risk? What forms of risk have been validated at Stratford? What forms have *failed* to be validated – and why?

My second, related aim is to complicate the way we, as theatre and performance scholars, understand “risk” in relation to Stratford, and to help us recognize the intellectual, social, and political labour it is already accomplishing there. Reading “risk” not simply as Stratford’s failing, but as a moving target weighed down by a substantial amount of cultural baggage and plenty of varied stakeholder expectations, we might, I argue, be able to nuance our relationship both to the term and to classical companies like this one where, in the past, we have disdained any real possibility of daring theatrical work. Here, in particular, I want to align the challenges of risk with the politics of realism, which Stratford’s academic critics tend to cite as the main reason the Festival is unable to create politically productive or aesthetically provocative theatre.

There’s a broadly accepted academic story about Stratford, one that’s been in circulation since the 1990s and that gained particular currency with the important work of Ric Knowles in *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004); it argues that risk-taking, politically minded directors find no love at Stratford and see their productions ultimately fail. These failures occur, the story

continues, because both the larger Festival (non-profit but revenue-driven; focused around big-budget productions and satisfying cultural-tourism experiences) and its acting core (steeped in the psychological realist traditions of character unity, linear through-lines, and a generalized Bardolatry) are unable to accommodate work that questions ideological presuppositions or challenges social or political status quos (Knowles, *Reading* 31-2, 36-7, 123; “Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology” 107-8; “From Nationalist to Multinational” 45; Groome, “Stratford” 125; “Affirmative Shakespeare” 150-55). I do not deny that Stratford performers work in a very traditional way, and that the tenacity with which both actors and coaches at the Festival cling to a particular lineage of psychological realist performance practice can easily stifle dissent, and with it certain kinds of creativity.^{viii} That said, I am also increasingly dissatisfied with the “failed risk” argument, in large part because the recent work of Hinton at Stratford – on *The Duchess of Malfi* (2006) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (2008) – troubles several of its core claims.

Hinton began mounting bold, provocative shows at Stratford with his *Swanne Trilogy* in 2002-4, and he has been broadly, if not exclusively, successful with each of them.^{ix} Further, multiple accounts suggest it is his exceptional rapport with the Stratford company – the extraordinary trust he establishes with performers as well as his encouragement of them to take risks of their own, be curious, and explore the unknown (Peacock, Personal interview; Hinton, Interview with Janet Irwin) – that allows his artistic teams to create challenging, dissonant, often very complex theatre. Actors have called him “galvanizing” (Condlin) and “inspiring” (Peacock, Personal interview); while he fits the profile of a quite traditional director in that he is always in the “driver’s seat” (Condlin), a “big” brain who arrives at rehearsals with a complete and clear vision into which actors can insert themselves, it is the historical completeness, the intellectual richness, and the aesthetic suppleness of the worlds he frames that actors view as safe spaces in

which they are willing to be pushed to try truly unsafe things. As Topham said to me of her work in the second part of Hinton's *Swanne* trilogy: "Peter held us safe [...] we would have done anything he asked."^x Speaking about her work on *Duchess*, Peacock characterized the labour of that show as a genuine artistic collaboration:

I loved it. I mean, it was hugely demanding on every level, but it was... there was no doubt everybody wanted to be in that world, that we were doing it together. You can't help but feel that [Hinton] takes care of the actors that way. He makes sure that you're clear. He digs deep. He forces you to dig deep. He digs deep. We're all in it together.

(Personal interview)

Hinton's productions – which have appeared on all four of the Festival's stages – are embedded at Stratford's core, not languishing on its margins, and they clearly represent deeply respectful collective labour rather than a battle between the "avant-garde" director and the "conservative" acting company. His theatre is by no means overtly political (although it is always overtly intellectual), but I want to suggest – and this claim will lie at the centre of my argument about his *Shrew*, below – that Hinton's shows may be *all the more* politically charged because they are dense, multivalent, and often contradictory as they admit a variety of viewpoints, including those brought to the stage by actors working in conventional realist modes. Existing arguments about Stratford imply that if a daring director's work resonates at the Festival that resonance is likely to be the result of a clash of styles between directing and acting teams, a chafing of the company's "Festival realism" against the director's more purposely political vision (Knowles, *Reading* 127). Hinton's case, however, suggests the opposite argument may also hold. Could it be that his work's density and, ultimately, its political potential are *enabled* by his negotiation with Stratford's culture – and not produced in spite of it? Could it be that bringing "avant-garde",

“risk-taking” directors like Hinton into dialogue with Stratford’s more inherently conservative conditions of production might in fact improve so-called daring or risk-taking work by rendering it more multilayered, less obvious, and thus less easy to consume, to explain, to dismiss or to forget?

I realize that this is a contrarian claim, and risks itself romanticizing work that may not be received by many Festival patrons as anything out of the ordinary (or even anything particularly good). As Knowles rightly notes in *Reading the Material Theatre*, the Festival’s own promotional discourses are market-driven and tend not to create the expectation of challenge or difficulty among audiences (106-109). But I also believe – in the spirit of Roberta Barker’s recent work (2009) on the political potential of reading the encounter between early modern texts and actors’ subtexts in performance – that scholars critical of Stratford do the Festival, and ourselves, a disservice by disregarding its power to enable political dialogue even among the glittering surfaces of mainstage, marquee shows. In order to make my case for a more politically agile, risk-forward Stratford, I will first consider what “risk” has meant within official Stratford discourses in the past, what it means to scholars and critics of the Festival now, what it means to actors, and what it *could* mean in the future. I will then read Hinton’s 2008 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* – a rather conventional love story set within an utterly unconventional, even Brechtian framework – arguing that when it complicates our expectations, disquiets our relationships to character and storyline in this most well-known of plays, it reveals a forcefully historical (and at times openly political) directorial vision working *in collaboration* – and not at cross-purposes – with traditionally trained actors playing fairly predictable through-lines. Far from generating happy (and not so happy) accidents, I suggest that this collaboration may in fact

purposefully unsettle the “Festival realism” status quo by revealing something of that status quo’s own political force.

Taking a risk at Stratford

I use the terms “risk”, “risky” and “risk-taking” above and below primarily to describe work that breaks with, or pushes back against, existing performance norms, possibly but not necessarily in the service of advancing a specific political argument. Insofar as risk-taking work challenges performance status quos and thus invites audiences to rethink their viewing positions, even if only temporarily, I consider all such work to be inherently political. Work that challenges the norms of standard psychological (“Festival”) realism, however, is daring in another, perhaps more urgent way: it necessarily breaks realism’s mimetic contract with its audience, its promise that the world spectators meet on stage will not simply appear “as in real life,” but will *be* real life – albeit “real life” filtered through an idealized, sanitized lens.^{xi} Everyone in the theatre knows that realism’s stage world is *not* real, of course, and yet the genre requires us to suspend this knowledge, at least to some extent, in order to get comfortable in our seats and prepare to pass judgment on the veracity, the believability, and thus the quality of that world. This is the paradox on which classical stage realism was founded in the latter part of the nineteenth century^{xii}: as a form of theatre unwilling to admit its debt to the mimetic, and indeed its debt to the backstage labour mimesis requires, realism is fundamentally anti-theatrical (Williams) *even as* it insists, in settings like Stratford’s, that “good” realism is the best, the only proper, form of classical dramatic representation. This is also the paradox which Hinton, Condlin, Peacock and the other artists involved in the Duchess’ death scene stripped bare when they worked to push

death's mimesis beyond the borders of the idealized, sanitized "real" – and this, I suspect, above all is why spectators routinely walked out.

Such are the stakes of risk for a director like Hinton, and for the scholars and critics who want less realism, and more generic and technical innovation and experimentation, from the Festival. But this is only one side of the "risk" story at Stratford: the side academics prefer to tell, the one that has been over-represented in scholarship about the Festival in recent years. What (and how) the term "risk" means in the broader Stratford context is, in fact, quite a bit trickier to pin down; even a brief stocktaking reveals that the term has had multiple, often contradictory valences within the Festival's nearly 60-year history. I'd like to explore some of these valences now, in order to consider the ways in which risk and its analogs function at Stratford as the Festival's own founding paradox. Given the twists and turns of the term's Festival history, I believe scholars need to take seriously the possibility that risk (along with its vexing partner, realism) is still up for grabs at Stratford – and thus that the term can, and should, be re-imagined to reflect a Festival that doesn't (indeed cannot) always meet its critics', or its patrons', primary expectations.

Stratford was established in 1952-53 as an informal "national" theatre for Canada, with the goal of creating a homegrown Shakespeare tradition that would permit Canadians to observe, participate in, and learn from the high-culture forms equated with the power and knowledge of international elites. Stratford was part of Canada's cultural coming-out party, and from the beginning it played both a teaching role (within the nation) and a marketing role (selling Canada to the world outside). It would school Canadians in the arts of true civilization; it would reveal, via Shakespeare, the "universal" values to which Canadians should subscribe; it would confer legitimacy upon Canada in the eyes of cultural centres elsewhere; and, most importantly, it

would contribute to the development of late-twentieth-century Canada as a “mature” nation (Groome, “Stratford” 122). In the early years Stratford was the only house of its kind in the country, a social and intellectual powerhouse in a place still shackled to provincialism, and was perceived as inherently bold, smart and risk-taking as a result; meanwhile, to secure the legitimacy and maturity it sought the Festival mounted productions that were utterly spectacular and “unashamedly luxurious” (124). As Margaret Groome notes, “an aesthetic of spectacle and effect” (124; “Affirmative” 140) became Stratford’s norm as it laboured to equate Canadian stagecraft with money, power, and cultural authority. Taken together, these different aims, perceptions and outcomes meant that the bold new house was at once daring and a place of old Broadway-style glamour; they also meant the marginalization of realism, a genre at the time associated as much with the social-realist experiments of Bertolt Brecht as with the Method-style psychological realism of mid-century Hollywood, and thus also with a difficult class politics on which the early Festival did not want to risk its social climbing. Directors who attempted social realist productions assumed the weight that came with bucking the Festival’s trend toward glamour and glory – and were typically repaid for their labours with charges of inauthenticity and betrayal (“Affirmative” 150-55). Their work might have had a realist pedigree but, at Stratford, it was not considered “real” Shakespeare (149-50). In the beginning, then, realism *was* risk at Stratford; the days of standard-issue, “safe” Festival realism were yet to come.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s those days had arrived, and discursive shifts in critical circles – both academic and popular – shifted in turn the meanings of risk at Stratford. The Festival was now being most seriously criticized by academics for its covert racism (few non-White actors worked at Stratford until 2000) and its problematic emphasis on cultural tourism as it focused on the needs of its commercial apparatus (hotel, restaurant, and retail tie-ins) alongside

cautious productions that would not rock the commercial boat (see DiCenzo et al; Knowles, “From Nationalist to Multinational,” and *Reading the Material Theatre* 105-28). Academic critics argued that Stratford was not just unwilling, but because of its corporatized structure unable, to take a risk on work that might be less commercially viable – including work by non-White actors in serious roles, and work that eschewed the late twentieth century trend for politically “neutral” realist portrayals.^{xiii} On the other side of the critical coin, mainstream press reviewers such as *The Globe and Mail*’s prominent and outspoken theatre correspondent Kate Taylor consistently denounced the popularization of the Festival under the artistic leadership of Richard Monette (1994-2007), who provoked ire with a deficit-busting focus on crowd-pleasing productions (including a record number of musicals) that avoided “adventurous interpretations” (Brady 269) and used Shakespeare to promote old-school Humanist values (Parolin 200-1).^{xiv} While both academic and popular critics agreed that the Festival’s commercial focus was dumbing down its fare, the former sought the avant-garde as remedy, while the latter sought classical (read realist) interpretations with fewer bells and whistles and more focus on text. For writers like Taylor and the Tarragon Theatre’s late artistic director Urjo Kareda, taking a risk at Stratford now meant doing the classics *properly*, returning to traditional, elite interpretations. Kareda noted with dismay that Stratford had become “a tourist attraction, no longer a temple” (qtd in Parolin 204) while Taylor, as Parolin puts it, argued that “Stratford’s mass audience was the threat from which the classical canon needed saving” (204).^{xv}

The “elitism” versus “populism” argument that circulated in mainstream press circles and among returning actors and audiences^{xvi} throughout Monette’s tenure consistently deployed the vocabulary of risk, but it was not really about what most scholars would recognize as (artistic) risk at all: the idea that Stratford might produce anything outside the comfort zone of classical

Shakespeare was never on the table for reviewers such as Taylor, who mostly just wanted fewer add-ons, and clearer (that is, more psychologically consistent) acting and direction.^{xvii} By the 1980s what I am calling Festival realism had come to be representative of elite, text-focused Shakespeare, both “authentic” (in its commitment to emotional through-lines for each character) and “intellectual” (in its commitment to Shakespeare’s language, well spoken), and this – done simply, elegantly, done right – is what Monette’s loudest critics called for. The fight for the Festival waged between Stratford’s administration (with Monette at the helm) and critics like Taylor (whose berth atop the Arts section of *The Globe and Mail*, Canada’s leading national newspaper and a centrist political vehicle, guaranteed her an elite and influential readership) was ultimately about what kinds of audiences the Festival hoped to cultivate – or, to put the dispute in the terms of my argument, on what kinds of audiences the Festival was willing to take monetary risks. For Taylor et al, taking a risk on the commercial (one that might pay big dividends for the Festival’s future economic security) meant risking in turn the marginalization of Stratford’s core audience of well-off middle class patrons, many at or near retirement age, for whom the work of the Stratford company is an affirmation of cultural power and economic privilege. Monette’s critics argued that his artistic direction risked destroying the elite cultural tourism brand for which Stratford was originally known; they were ultimately pining for a new version of what is now regarded as the “pioneer[ing]” “golden age” of the 50s and 60s (Bemrose), when the Festival produced “the most exciting theatre in North America” (Christopher Plummer, qtd in Bemrose).^{xviii} (The “mass” audience Taylor and her colleagues dismiss is, of course, no more or less a tourist audience than the one they favour; the difference lies in the “culture” of each group’s particular sort of tourism.) For Monette, on the other hand, not branching out to new and more culturally diverse audiences (urban tourists; families; Broadway pilgrims) meant risking

the future financial failure of Stratford, full stop, and with it the possibility of producing commercial *or* more alternative work on any of its stages, large or small. Meanwhile, insulated to some degree from the financial realities that frame all Stratford discussions, scholars took the vocabulary of cultural tourism – central to everything for which Stratford has ever stood – as the base line of their blasts against what they perceived to be the contemporary Festival’s failure to risk anything at all.

Then, in 2007, the Festival’s internal discourse began to shift again, as Monette handed the directorship to the team of Marti Maraden, Don Shipley and Des McAnuff. By 2008 this team had fallen apart, with McAnuff now running the Festival in concert with General Director Antoni Cimolino. From 2007 to 2008, however, the language of risk at the Festival began once again to take on fresh, exciting valences.

Maraden, Shipley and McAnuff demonstrated real anxiety over the commonly accepted notion that Stratford had become in recent years too commercial, too insular, and too afraid to take artistic chances. In response they “articulated a narrative in which the Festival would be increasingly committed to Shakespeare and the classics, artistically adventurous, and relevant in the world of international theater” (Parolin 199). This is a vague, even contradictory mission statement designed for broad appeal – although, as I’ve tried to demonstrate above, contradiction and paradox are the bread and butter of an organization that must, in order to survive, be several Festivals to a variety of stakeholders at any one time. By 2008, however – the year Peter Hinton offered *The Taming of the Shrew* – a renewed commitment to classical theatre meant *Romeo and Juliet* alongside a production of the little-seen Spanish Golden Age work *Fuente Ovejuna* as well as a rare mounting of Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*; meanwhile, both artistic adventure and international relevance arrived via *Emilia Galotti*, performed by the Deutsches Theater Berlin in

a highly esoteric, rapid-fire production that represented the best of contemporary European festival fare. The 2008 season featured some of the most stylistically and generically diverse work ever assembled at Stratford; it suggested that under the Maraden/Shipley/McAnuff collaboration the Festival could indeed have taken an internationalist, even at times genuinely avant-garde, turn, turning Stratford's tumultuous relationship to risk once more on its head.

Before I explore this moment of possibility more closely via Hinton's 2008 production of *Shrew*, however, one other side to Stratford's story of risk demands attention. It is embodied by the academic critique of Stratford's acting company, and is particularly central to my claim that "risk" at the Festival may be more flexible, more nuanced, and more difficult to account for than critics (both academic and popular) at first tend to assume. Ric Knowles, following the influential work of Alan Sinfield, argues that the psychological or emotional realist tradition in which most Stratford actors are trained is designed to emphasize the "universal [over] historical and individual [over] social" dimensions of each text and performance (Sinfield, qtd in Knowles, "Shakespeare" 96). Actors learn to take Shakespeare into themselves as a comrade or confidante (Topham), to "free" their minds, bodies and voices in order to access a "psychological depth" that will bring them closer to the Bard and his words (Knowles, "Shakespeare" 96-7). The training frames this work as ideologically neutral, elitist and exclusive,^{xix} but also as a very serious form of personal risk: Martha Henry, the current director of Stratford's Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre, notes that acting in this way "is about the revelation of the human spirit. In order to be its conduit, we must be clean, meticulous and open in life, so we can be risky and dangerous on the stage" (Henry, "Training").

Henry's language may just have made your eyes roll; it is typical of the discourse favoured by performing artists trained in the psychological or emotional realist style, a discourse

many academics find at best naïve and at worst deliberately anti-intellectual. And yet it also, quite simply, expresses how many actors define risk for themselves, and understand the dangers of the jobs they do. Sara Topham notes how much risk she assumes in every role she plays: because she must “lend my body and my heart” to her characters she must allow herself to become emotionally very vulnerable in rehearsal and in performance – that is, for her, acting’s most crucial, and most challenging, labour. Condlin characterizes her experience of Cariola as “my biggest, riskiest thing to date,” a role that challenged her physically, psychologically, and intellectually at every turn even though, from an audience’s vantage point, Cariola is a genuinely small part, one that, save her spectacular death, scarcely bears notice. Similarly, Lucy Peacock explains her sense of risk in terms of the challenge of self-care, something required of every actor taking on multiple roles in a repertory company:

[O]f course risk is about pushing or challenging one's self and the text to reach beyond the assumed parameters and that's a must. What I was thinking about was protecting one's self enough that one can always get “back” or “home” safely. That is very exciting and I certainly have felt that danger and the wish to “go to the other side” many, many times but at the end of the day (especially in repertory as there may be another world to enter within hours) one should be able to retreat back to a place of stillness or evenness to launch again. (Personal email)

What is going on here? How can individualist Shakespeare, the kind that emphasizes the private and personal over the social and political, be both so conservative and yet so risk-laden at the same time? What weight should we give to Henry’s claim that her actors are indeed “risky and dangerous” on the stage? To Topham’s claim that she risks baring her soul every time she steps into a rehearsal room? To Peacock’s claim that she risks her “heart”, her sense of

equilibrium, in climbing into a role and climbing back out again (Personal interview)? What should this articulation of risk mean to scholars of theatre and performance? Do we dismiss it as irrelevant to the product we read on stage? As a retrograde deployment of a term we tend to claim as our own? Or do we recognize it as an essential part of the material labour that suffuses the stage, determines its conditions of production? Does it matter whether or not spectators can “see” an actor’s risk for what it is? If not, then what happens to the valence of that risk when the vulnerability assumed invisibly by an actor like Topham permits or even invites audiences to sit comfortably back in their seats, in no way challenged or disrupted themselves?

Topham has told me that she feels betrayed when her work is called safe, knowing as she does that so much of what may appear safe from the vantage of the auditorium is in no way safe for her. In light of these and similar claims, I wonder: how might the personal risks actors like Topham assume in performance – even if those risks emerge from acting traditions that routinely ignore the social and political in Shakespeare – contribute nevertheless to a politically nuanced, socially complex interpretation of early modern work at a venue like Stratford, where “risk” itself is a moving ideological target? What would it mean to call the labour of Stratford actors genuinely risky, genuinely unsafe – to take their deployment of “our” term, and the paradoxes that deployment necessarily generates, seriously in our own work? And, perhaps most important for actors, audiences, and critics alike: what would it mean to translate the risks of Stratford’s stages more consistently into its auditoriums – honoring both the work of its actors, and the demands difficult theatre should make on audiences – as Hinton did in *Duchess of Malfi* 4.2?

The Case of *The Taming of the Shrew* (2008)

Hinton's work offers tentative responses to all of these questions. The physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual risks his actors were willing to assume during the preparation of *The Duchess of Malfi* made possible for spectators an incredibly visceral experience of two deaths, moments in performance that drove home the extraordinary violence required to render silent the voice of a powerful, transgressing woman in early modern England. Two years later, Hinton's *Taming of the Shrew* built on but also complicated this earlier production's messaging, using a popular comedy to frame a continued exploration of the ways in which violence against women appears, and disappears, in early modern culture (as well as in our own).

Hinton took a rigorously historicist approach to *Shrew* – something, according to Topham, Condlin and Peacock as well as other official and unofficial accounts, that characterizes every one of his production's preparations – creating his Elizabethan world in careful detail and paying close attention to the complexities of both individual female experience and the interactions between and among women within this world. For Hinton, *Shrew* is, among other things, about Queen Elizabeth I, and specifically about the irony generated by the bald fact of a woman on the throne of a nation that offered women virtually no legal or political power (“Herstory” 8); what he calls the “paradox of the Virgin Queen” (8) – the story of an apparently powerful woman in all her instability, vulnerability, and strength – motored his imagining of Kate the Shrew and of all the other women on his stage. In deploying this paradox as his scaffolding, Hinton purposefully made room for a wide variety of perspectives on early modern women's experiences; he also opened up a space in which the sometimes quite conservative character readings proffered by his lead actors could commingle productively with the jarring commentary on violence against women built into his overall design. This layering provoked rich and difficult questions: When is *Shrew* a play about misogynist violence and torture? When is it

not? How do women treat each other in the play's world, and in early modern culture more broadly? When and how do women witness each other's pain and suffering, and when are women one another's worst witnesses? Can this play be about love? If so, under what circumstances, and with what caveats?

Hinton made several significant changes to the text in order to create the world in which these questions became playable. First, he gave the production both metatheatrical and metahistorical frame stories. His set was a working Elizabethan playhouse, complete with widgets, pulleys, flywheels, a large central scaffold with balcony, and painted backdrops. He not only kept the induction but also added a prelude: Lucy Peacock (later Grumio) and Irene Poole (later Kate) opened the show on a bare stage singing "My Husband Has No Courage In Him"; moments later, Adrienne Gould (later Bianca) was wheeled on, chained to a working cucking stool, and dunked as a scold. Christopher Sly (Wayson Choi) eagerly orchestrated the dunking, Peacock alongside him, urging him on; Gould was white and shrieking during what came off, in performance, as genuine public torture. The dunking over, Poole, as tavern hostess, began the play proper by chasing Sly out of her house for abusing women. The full resonance of her role in this scene – as she scolded Sly and cared for the traumatized Gould – would only become apparent much later, when as Kate she would herself torture Gould's Bianca.

The Lord of the induction scene represented one of Hinton's most significant changes: played by singer Barbara Fulton, the Lord was no less than Queen Elizabeth I herself. Despite the charming staginess of the play's set and the metatheatrical antics of the induction, the violent realism of the prelude followed by the appearance of Fulton's Queen Elizabeth shifted the production's global focus from playful theatricality into serious social history – women's social history. Fulton's Elizabeth played the regal "audience" for *Shrew*'s play-within, but she was

always much more than just a spectator: weaving in and out of the action, from Petruchio's first entrance until her debutante turn as the Widow in the final scene she was a constant witness to the larger histories behind the play's "love story". She offered an exceptional opportunity to stage Hinton's founding paradox of the Virgin Queen, opening a window for audience members onto the distance between what we might imagine the Queen's interests to be and where she placed her focus ultimately. Contrary to my feminist expectations, for example, she shadowed Bianca persistently but often ignored Kate; indeed, she seemed eager to turn a blind eye to the latter especially in some of her most difficult moments. Scenes 2.1, 3.1 and 3.2 are instructive in this regard. Fulton left the stage (taking with her the most obvious markers of the metatheatrical frame) for the first time just before Petruchio's first entrance and did not return until 3.1, when Bianca entered with her suitors-as-tutors. While Fulton not only observed but also passively intervened in Bianca's scene, she took (perhaps wanted?) no part in Kate's "wooing". (She also observed none of the scenes at Petruchio's house; Poole's Kate was thus entirely isolated there.) And yet Fulton offered her tacit approval of the wooing in 3.2, leading a solemn processional dance to open the wedding scene. Given her apparent refusal to watch or take any part in Petruchio's antics and Kate's failed resistance during 2.1, I found myself asking: as she dances, is Elizabeth silently blessing Petruchio's strategy, or is she commiserating with Kate?

In *Duchess of Malfi*, Hinton employed Jane Campion, an elderly member of the Stratford company, as the Duchess' midwife and her constant, silent witness; here, Fulton assumed that role, and watching exactly who – and what – she was willing to see, and who and what she worked to avoid, became for me one of the most subtle but important components of the production's commentary on early modern women's worlds. Fulton's Elizabeth was at once sure of herself and vulnerable, regal yet marginal, the ghost of a great woman standing sentinel

against her own forgetting. Perhaps nervous about getting too close to controversy, perhaps uncertain about the public fallout of intervention, or perhaps genuinely uninterested in, even opposed to, Kate's resistance, she chose never to give the latter her support. Finally, as Hortensio's Widow in 5.2, she bucked back as Kate had once done – and then it was Kate's turn to turn on her. Fulton was a persistent, even puzzling reminder of the question the induction poses about history: if the play is not mere "household stuff" (Induction 2.131), then exactly whose "history" (line 132) is it? What awkward, even contradictory contours might a thorough stage exploration of early modern women's history reveal? The tableau that matched the induction's question in performance told much of what Hinton's audience was up against: Gould, as the player-woman, stood at centre stage, facing away from the audience; she was pulled by the hair, neck craned, by a man about to drop-kick her. The other players, all men, surrounded her, lusting for blood. Elizabeth offered her approval, and the show began in earnest.

Despite what looked and sounded like an overtly feminist pre-show, Hinton's production did not impose an ideology: actors' interpretations of their characters did not signify a unifying political vision, and Hinton appeared quite happy to allow differing perspectives to push and pull one against another as the production's social history unfolded. I argued above that Hinton's strength as a risk-taking director derives from his support of actors, his trust in their instincts, and their trust in him in turn; this mutual trust, combined with the safe space provided by Hinton's rigorous historical visions for his productions, allows him and his actors to be "at risk" together in complex, often contradictory ways throughout the rehearsal and performance process.^{xx} I want to test this theory now by examining the work of two *Shrew* actors, Lucy Peacock and Irene Poole. Poole and Peacock played Kate and Grumio respectively, and they have each spoken quite extensively about the creation of their characters in webcast interviews. What happened in

performance when these characters came to life via the through-lines imagined by Peacock and Poole, but within the world of gendered violence and political paradox created by Hinton?

Making Grumio – Petruchio’s manservant – a woman had substantial implications for two of the play’s central relationships. First, it made the comic violence between Petruchio and Grumio much more fraught, locating it within the production’s larger focus on violence against women in early modern culture (something Hinton appears to have intended in making the switch [“Herstory” 8]). Grumio was not just part of the clown contingent (Hortensio, Gremio, Biondello et al); instead, her experience of servitude, obedience, and subjection to Petruchio’s outbursts of violence echoed Kate’s – especially when the two found themselves together at Petruchio’s house. Second, Grumio’s femininity meant that Kate was regarded as both an ally and a threat: Kate might usurp Grumio’s place as second-in-command, but she might also be another woman with whom Grumio could share the difficult experience of living with Petruchio. Both Peacock and Poole have commented on these and similar effects (“Webcast 18, part 3”), but Peacock also imagined Grumio’s relationship with Petruchio to be primarily sexual. She conceived Grumio as a young woman “in for the ride” who believed she and Petruchio were playing a trick in catching Kate; when Grumio finally realized Petruchio was in love with his conquest she was thunderstruck, forced to grow up and move on (Peacock, “Lucy”). This is a familiar-sounding narrative common to Festival realism: it emphasizes the “love story” over the play’s social conditions and takes little account of Grumio’s precarious position as a low-class woman in a young gentleman’s household. In performance, however, as Peacock’s Grumio pressed up against Hinton’s history, a character far more complex emerged than either side alone may have been able to conceive.

Arriving on stage near the top of the show, Petruchio and Grumio engaged in bawdy play that quickly turned violent: Grumio yelled “help! my master is mad!” with real urgency before she gained the upper hand and the violence became playful again. Clearly Grumio was ok, it was just a bit of fun; clearly as well, though, it might easily have gone another way. The performance embedded both possibilities – violence as jest, and violence as “real” – and gave, momentarily, both possibilities equal weight, asking audiences to note the thin line between them. Later, when Grumio and Kate were alone at Petruchio’s house, this early moment of (play?) violence returned in another key as Kate begged meat and Grumio taunted and withheld. The difference, now, lay in the gender dynamic: Grumio played both master and man, understanding that real power obtains only when you subdue a(nother) woman.^{xxi} When Petruchio finally entered, Grumio – now stripped of her brief power – moved upstage right to stand, somewhat shrunken, off to the side; then, as Kate ran at Petruchio, Grumio, behind him, cowered and turned as though to protect her face. From what did Grumio shrink? Did she fear Kate’s wrath? Or had she been run at, slapped, beaten too many times before? This scene produced a wealth of resonances for me, raising yet more questions about Grumio’s seemingly innocuous, playful relationship with Petruchio while also revealing her inability, for the very real uncertainty of her own position, to bear witness to Kate’s experience with anything like genuine care.

Like Peacock, Poole approached Kate romantically (and well within the boundaries of normative Festival realism), but as in Peacock’s case the results were far from predictable. Poole has spoken about Kate as “angry”, “mad”, “out of control” and in need of help, and has argued that Petruchio (far from being an abuser^{xxii}) is on a journey of personal discovery in which he is “learning a lot, he’s accepting a lot of responsibility for what he’s doing and he’s trying to find the heart in what’s happening” (Poole and Buliung, “Webcast #20, P1”; Peacock and Poole).

Poole and Evan Buliung (Petruccio) imagined their relationship to be one of true love and loyalty in which Kate and Petruccio become, over the course of the play, equal partners rather than battling spouses – something that Hinton appears to have encouraged and may have even suggested (Poole and Buliung, “Webcast #20, P2”). But why would a director whose production frame promises a feminist history imagine Kate and Petruccio in love? What might he be trying to achieve?

Poole’s Kate fought Buliung’s Petruccio every step of the way, and with her pronounced limp and awkward gait she embodied this struggle as far more violent, and far less romantic, than her description of her role suggests. She was at turns visibly stunned by Petruccio’s forwardness and clearly, bodily exhausted by her own physical and discursive helplessness. Further, several of her key interactions with Petruccio were marked by long, deliberate silences that I, personally, found quite difficult to read; they seemed to carry the weight of the impossible choices that shape Kate’s experiences (and perhaps Poole’s experience of Kate). Whether at her first entrance to Petruccio, or at his demand that she kiss him at the end of the “wooing” scene, or as she stood alone atop the set’s high scaffold, trapped in her “room” at Petruccio’s house while her husband delivered his infamous soliloquy on the “way to kill a wife with kindness” (4.2.177), these silences signaled an admixture of fear, determination, rage, loss, and budding desire that offered no easy characterization but did produce a glimpse of the complexity, the paradoxicality, marking Kate’s situation. She is a strong woman left with an apparently hard man; she is a woman who wants love and marriage because she understands the power as well as the comfort both may bring; she is a woman who is slowly starting to recognize the fine, often blurry lines in the world of this play between violence and home, love and pain; she is a woman (maybe?) allowing herself to fall in love as a result. Poole’s silences captured the tension, the ambiguity,

and indeed the violence that lay between her own “love story” and Hinton’s much more brutal “history”: they made it impossible for audiences to see a single Kate without the spectre of the other, like Fulton’s Elizabeth, rising to challenge, to unsettle, to haunt.

Who was Kate, in the end? What really happened to her? We have no way to know; Poole and Hinton held *Shrew*’s final moments close. Kate, Bianca and the Widow exited (at 5.2.48) to the raised platform at the front of the Festival Theatre’s thrust stage, a platform marked by previous scenes as a site for performance, for playing and watching. There they sat, like china dolls^{xxiii}, wearing expressions that told absolutely nothing of what they might be thinking, feeling, or planning, while their husbands waded upstage. Sent for via Grumio, Kate silently moved to stand; Bianca fell toward her, called out her name, and then the women held a brief tableau: Bianca semi-prostrate at Kate’s feet, Kate clutching her hand, Grumio’s hand gripping Kate’s other, perhaps in aid, perhaps in command. The moment was pregnant with the possibilities of women’s community and its just as likely failure; in honour of the paradox of the Virgin Queen, this was a world of *both* violence *and* care.

Sent moments later to retrieve her companions, Poole’s Kate held out her hands to the women once again; a long, silent look among them marked the failure of words in the face of what was about to transpire. Then, as if in response to this look, to the enigma they had all become in this final scene, Poole played Kate’s final speech straight, allowing it to shatter like Cariola’s death – to reverberate as uncanny, as a moment just a little too real to take. Poole didn’t wink and didn’t supplicate but spoke every word with determined, deliberate conviction. Her tone was measured; at turns she seemed on the verge of mocking, on the verge of rage, but she gave over to neither. She appeared fully to believe in her argument, and yet she also moved around the stage as though trying to come to terms with it, to get hold of it, to own it even as she

spoke it, to play her consent into being. Working both Hinton's historical frame and her own romantic back-story simultaneously, Poole produced only more questions; she offered an *uneasy* solution to the play's central "problem" at the moment when we all expect, as in comedy, *resolution*. As she ended, the immediate effect was literally stunning: her onstage audience fell into its own long, uncertain silence while the rest of us waited to react. When she and Petruchio finally embraced, clearly every inch in love, nobody clapped, and nobody laughed – at either performance I attended live. In the end, this "love story" could not escape Hinton's history of violence against women, now fully internalized, and that history could not be told without invoking the absolutely disquieting spectre of a broken woman truly in love. Hinton needed both narratives in the frame in order to create his "women's history"; it was their blending that proved his greatest risk in this production, and its most productive outcome. We walked out into the night arguing, uncomfortable with what we had seen – and with what it might mean.

Stratford at Risk: Redux

What does a production like Hinton's *Shrew* reveal about the future of risk at Stratford? Nothing certain. For every critic who found Hinton's historical framework compelling (Reid; Nestruck), another could not see its value (Ouzounian; Coulbourn). For every audience member arrested by Kate's final speech, another laughed just a little too hard as Petruchio bent her to his will. Meanwhile, outside the auditorium, rumblings have again begun about too much Broadway-style programming at the Festival, while Hinton (now full time at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa) hasn't worked at Stratford since *Shrew* closed. As my own argument draws to an end I can in no way claim that the singular example of Peter Hinton represents a larger trend at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, nor can I claim that I've seen anything there to rival his

work since *Shrew*. Nevertheless, what Hinton's example does offer Stratford's scholars, reviewers, patrons and leaders is crucial indeed: a representation of the *promise* of risk's turbulent valences, of the new and enriching ways that risk *could also* mean – has in fact already meant – at the Festival now and in the future. Hinton's work reminds us how tricky a signifier “risk” must necessarily be within a theatre ecology as large and increasingly diverse as Stratford's; it reminds us that Stratford is not inhospitable to intellectual and artistic risks of the kind scholars seek, nor is that risk incompatible with mainstream appeal. His work reminds us that political provocations can and do mesh with Festival realism's performative vicissitudes – and that this meshing, in fact, makes the political stronger, more agile, and more powerful – while the very actors who devote their working lives to apparently a-political Shakespeare clamour loudly for more opportunities to work with Hinton and directors just like him, directors who challenge their muscles and push them to think, feel, and move in new ways. Most importantly, Hinton reminds us that the story we have told of Stratford in-and-out-of risk is incomplete, and that the story Stratford tells about itself in this regard is incomplete, too. With a little more attention paid to paradox and seeming incongruity, all of us who invest something of ourselves in this place could better capitalize on its most unexpected nuances – and thereby offer spectators, consumers, readers and each other a far richer experience of contemporary classical theatre than the one we always expect to find at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

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ⁱ My warmest thanks to Laura Condlln, Lucy Peacock and Sara Topham for the generosity with which they shared their experiences during the preparation of this article. My thanks also to Ric Knowles, mentor and friend, without whose groundbreaking research my own labour here would have been impossible.

ⁱⁱ Condlln told me that spectators routinely walked out of the performance during this scene. She articulated its significance for audiences perfectly: "there's like an unspoken agreement [...] that the audience will be safe inside the theatre. And we have this agreement that we're all play-acting. And so I think this is one of the moments [where] we've trapped you [spectators], and [said] you must witness this, and we are taking you beyond [...] your comfort zone, but into a very stark kind of reality [...] maybe [one] that is more dangerous and more ugly than you were willing to [encounter]."

ⁱⁱⁱ I understand "realism" to be, in the specific context of Stratford Shakespeare performance, a set of techniques that derive historically from the work of Constantin Stanislavsky and seek to create a socially familiar (even if culturally or historically very *unfamiliar*) world on stage. Actors who work in this style do not generally understand what they do to be "realism"; for them, it is simply the work of acting, and it is not ideologically coded (Topham; see also Knowles, *Reading* 24, 33-4, 47, and "Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology"). I recognize this set of techniques can be dangerously myopic as a result of such elisions, but I also argue below that, when brought into dialogue with other, more socially realist performance frameworks, it may allow actors to complicate politically productive work in even more valuable ways.

^{iv} I am indebted to Roberta Barker for much of my thinking on "radical naturalism". Both in her writings (see for example the performance analyses in *Early Modern Tragedy*) and in frequent conversations she has inspired me to think differently about the cultural and political labour realism and naturalism can achieve on our contemporary stages.

^v In personal interviews, Condlln remembered this production – and specifically though not exclusively Cariola's death scene – as her "biggest, riskiest [performance] to date," one that left her emotionally drained from the sheer difficulty of the challenge. Peacock recalled composing limericks in her head in order to manage the anxiety of lying dead on stage for many long minutes.

^{vi} Of these three performers, only Topham was not in *Duchess*; I spoke with her as a result of her experience working with Peter Hinton on other productions.

^{vii} Peacock describes Hinton's rehearsal periods as a kind of lengthy performance-as-research process, buoyed by the extensive historical material he brings to the table on the first day. She notes that Hinton is in rehearsal above all exploratory; he encourages his entire team, including actors, to be inquisitive at every stage of the process: "anytime you're working with Peter, he inspire[s] you to push the envelope but also ask questions instead of assuming [...] what's going to happen in that moment. You don't. You explore it, properly." As a result, Peacock notes, the work is "never finished" (Personal interview).

^{viii} Both Topham and Condlln noted to me that Stratford is the sort of workplace where certain artists find it hard to fit into prevailing norms and conventions. For those artists, Stratford can be “tricky” terrain to negotiate (Condlln).

^{ix} Hinton’s reviews are typically mixed; as Peacock noted to me, he’s a director audiences (and critics) either love or hate. *Duchess*, perhaps Hinton’s most aesthetically difficult show for the Festival, garnered primarily negative reviews; two years later, however, he was back to direct *The Taming of the Shrew* in a marquee production on the Festival stage. *The Swanne Trilogy* (2002-4), which he wrote and directed, was his Stratford break-out hit; his 2005 *Into the Woods* demonstrated that the Festival was not afraid to hand him big-budget money-makers.

^x See also Hinton’s interview with Laurie Brown, in which Brown notes how much actors like working with him because they feel both “supported” and “push[ed]” to new places.

^{xi} I am indebted for this insight to my many colleagues in the seminar “Shakespeare and Emotional Realism on the Modern Stage,” convened by Roberta Barker and Cary Mazer at SAA 2010.

^{xii} For a superb account of realism’s foundational paradoxes – and their activist, ethical potential – see Williams.

^{xiii} As Rob Ormsby notes in a recent interview with Guillermo Verdecchia, who directed *Rice Boy* by Indo-Canadian playwright Sunil Kuruvilla at the Festival’s Studio in 2009, Des McNuff, the Festival’s current Artistic Director, has made a firm commitment to so-called “colour blind casting in which ethnic identity is not really an issue” (Ormsby and Verdecchia 27). Verdecchia cautions, however, that because Stratford is “tied up in explicit and not so explicit ways with a variety of colonial and racist attitudes” that mark Canada’s colonial past and present (30), it is not enough for the Festival simply to let non-White actors into classical roles we assume to be “White”. Rather, he argues, Stratford needs to consider “a plurality of approaches” (31) in its push to make its stages, its workspaces, and its audiences more representative of an increasingly diverse Canada and North America, “including producing plays that allow for fuller and complex explorations of a variety of subjectivities and relations” (32).

Verdecchia’s excellent points aside, for me Stratford’s commitment to actors of colour in classical roles remains an issue in need of vigilant critical attention. For all its recent breakthroughs toward taking these artists seriously – Yanna McIntosh as Lady MacBeth (2009) or Hermione (2010); Graham Greene as Shylock (2007) – the Festival continues to make what I consider to be racist mistakes, including the utterly orientaling representation of the talented Dion Johnstone as Caliban in its blockbuster *Tempest* (2010) starring Christopher Plummer.

^{xiv} Monette inherited a deficit of over \$1M (Canadian) in 1994, and managed to turn a surplus of \$800,000 over the course of the season. He generated a surplus in each year of his tenure, and also increased the Festival’s endowment substantially (Parolin 200).

^{xv} In Taylor’s own words (1998): “The [Festival’s] board must recognize that a public arts organization is not a profit-making business in which annual growth is an end in itself. [...] [T]he artistic director must recognize that a laudable quest to make the classics accessible should not be achieved at the expense of the plays themselves or of the festival’s mandate, even if that means giving up a mass audience.”

^{xvi} Despite Monette’s fiscal achievement at Stratford – one that enabled, among other innovations, the rise of the Studio theatre as an experimental space, and the establishment of the Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre training – he was an ambivalent figure for actors, other artists, and regular audience members as much as he was for critics. His course

toward the commercial drew record crowds, but at the same time it had many Festival artists and subscription patrons anxious about the future of Stratford under his leadership. A number of artists, including actors and designers, have spoken to me privately about Monette; they never fail to note their respect for him, and many claim to owe careers to him, but most also express serious reservations about the trends he began.

^{xvii} This is, of course, nothing new for those familiar with the discourse of mainstream Shakespeare review, and in fact reviews of both Hinton productions I discuss here followed this normative trend. *Duchess* was roundly criticized for being too gimmicky, its aesthetics add-ons to tickle only the director's fancy. *Shrew* was much better reviewed, but those who disliked it laid the blame at the feet of Hinton's historical frame, which, they argued, made "no sense" in the context of the play's central love story (Ouzounian; see also Coulbourn). By contrast, Kelly Nestruck appreciated the show because he found its historicization to stem directly from the text and, crucially, to support rather than undermine the love story. In testament to the force of Hinton's sociopolitical vision, however, not all positive reviews felt this way; for a welcome alternative, one that recognized Hinton's historical additions as essential vehicles for helping audiences to get past the notion that *Shrew* is a love story, see Reid.

^{xviii} Ironically, the opulent productions on which Stratford was built were, by the late 1950s, increasingly critiqued as empty spectacles (Groome, "Affirmative" 144), utterly bereft of risk.

^{xix} You have to have a special quality to excel at classical Shakespeare, according to Stratford's Martha Henry. You have to have "a smell of text" and "a feeling" for words. And more: "you want something that makes you say 'huh! Oh – that's an interesting young man, or, what a *fascinating* young woman that is" (Henry, "Martha Henry", my emphasis).

^{xx} This argument deserves a caveat, which I sadly do not have space to fully explore here. Condlln, the most junior of the actors I interviewed, clearly respects Hinton as a galvanizing, supportive director, but her own experience on *Duchess* also revealed another side to his relationship with performers. As an actor still finding her feet in a big, difficult text, Condlln was overwhelmed by Hinton's vision for *Duchess*, the mountain of historical research behind it, and the expectations that came along with it – in other words, by that same edifice Topham and Peacock have called essential to Hinton's empowerment of actors like them. Condlln's experience of *Duchess*, by contrast, "wasn't remotely empowering" (Condlln).

^{xxi} In conversation with me, Peacock characterized this scene as the "payoff" of her playing Grumio as female: a chance to hear two early modern women's voices in concert and in clash, and a chance to understand, if only for a moment, what might be at stake for them both.

^{xxii} In the same conversation Peacock concurs, suggesting that it is Petruchio who "truly suffers" and is "vulnerab[le]" in this production (Peacock and Poole).

^{xxiii} My thanks to my research assistant, Hilary Fair, for this astute observation.