In 1995, Mark Rylance was appointed as Artistic Director of Shakespeare’s Globe, the London reconstruction of the Shakespeare’s public playhouse. He differs from many of the directors in this volume in that he performed in, rather than directed, much of the work there; he has been called, by himself and others, an actor-manager. He has spoken out against awards for individuals in the theatre and has repeatedly drawn attention to the achievements of the ensemble at the Globe. During his tenure, his starting points for producing Shakespeare were not only the plays but also a range of external influences and pressures, both material and spiritual: the demands that the architecture of the reconstructed theatre make of text and performance, his sense of the English Renaissance’s spiritual relationship with the classical world, the meanings potentially created in the live encounter between performer and audience. He was the director of a building and a set of experimental artistic practices rather than, very often, the director of plays. However, his work at the Globe makes an important intervention in a volume about ‘Directors’ Shakespeare’, as it challenges the very notion of a Shakespeare waiting to be released by one man or woman’s creative vision.

Rylance wanted the reconstructed theatre building, and the audiences that came to it, to play a primary role in ‘directing’ the meanings that were produced there. The Shakespeare productions that he led and performed at Shakespeare’s Globe ranged from the *Henry V* in the theatre’s opening season, produced according to founder Sam Wanamaker’s desire for one production per season to follow historically researched early modern theatre practices, to Rylance’s last appearance there, a three-man *Tempest* haunted by three female ‘fates’ in contemporary dress. The original practices remit was criticised by some for producing too broad and populist a ‘heritage’ Shakespeare. Rylance’s approach to the reconstruction of Shakespeare’s theatre has seemed to some pragmatic and materialist, to others archaic and esoteric. However, his vision for the theatre was primarily that it should be an experiment in historically
researched theatre practice, and I am going to argue that the Globe under Rylance staked out new ground for British Shakespeare production in terms of the audience’s role in the production of meaning.

Mark Rylance was born in Ashford, Kent in 1960; his family moved to Connecticut when he was two, then to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when he was nine. In 1978, he returned to England to take up a place at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA). Though he first played Shakespeare at his American high school, his early professional experiences tread a very British line between theatrical tradition and experimentation. His pre-Globe professional acting credits offer an impressive narrative of artistic growth through all that was respected in the British subsidised theatre during the late twentieth century. He worked with Mike Alfreds of Shared Experience, whose early presentational narrative techniques and metatheatrical aesthetic must have proved something of a perfect training for eventual work in a theatre so dependent on the performer–audience relationship. Alfreds was eventually brought to the Globe by Rylance in 2001, to direct Cymbeline. Rylance played Romeo in the inaugural production at the Swan in Stratford, whose stage thrusts its actors into the presence of the audience. His work with Max Stafford-Clark at the Royal Court, with his task-based approach to Stanislavskian objectives, chimes well with Rylance’s sense of the Globe as a meeting place for presentation and interiority, for inner and outer worlds: ‘The Globe stage thrusts in to the centre of the theatre, no part of it is without the circle as in the proscenium theatres […] And Shakespeare plays on our inner selves with his outer show’ (Rylance 1996). Rylance embraces opposition and contradiction with enthusiasm. He has an acute sense of the materiality of the meanings produced when the architecture and texts of history come into contact with the actors and audiences of the present, but his descriptions of the Globe project also demonstrate a spiritual investment in the project. He has described it as a space to play, between ‘heaven and earth’, ‘imagination and matter’, ‘spirit and body’: ‘and when we play with these, we are sustaining our souls, for the soul thrives when it acknowledges a divine factor in human endeavour. Or for that matter, a human factor in divine endeavours’ (RSA lecture 1996).

Once appointed Artistic Director, Rylance wanted to realise Sam Wanamaker’s vision for the reconstruction: a theatre as near as possible to the original site, one that recreated the architecture of the first Globe and the active, participatory, face-to-face relationship between performer and audience that might have existed in Shakespeare’s theatre. Critics leapt to point out that this was an inherently problematic project. Late-twentieth-century audiences were not late-sixteenth-century ones: their understanding of what it was to visit a theatre, their journey to that theatre, their behaviour, their smell,
their Shakespeare, were all radically different from the cultural references and material conditions of Shakespeare’s first audiences. Undoubtedly there was a sense, from the project’s outset, in which Shakespeare was to be discovered or revealed in this space; the theatre was built on a faith in the historical research into the original’s architecture and a belief that certain historical performance energies might be recreated within it. Rylance’s commitment to the exploration of ‘original practices’ was always part of what he regarded as an essentially experimental brief, however. The work with all-male companies, the use of early modern music and instruments, research into the accurate reconstruction of Elizabethan and Jacobean costume using ‘original’ materials, research into early design elements, a direct relationship between performer and audience, the finale ‘jig’, were as much indicative of an openness to the materiality of meaning and its production, as of a museum-piece reverence for ‘authenticity’. Indeed, Rylance never claims to have found an authentic Shakespeare, and Wanamaker’s ‘authentic brief’ was soon replaced in Globe parlance by ‘original practices’ to describe the productions based on historical research. What Rylance set up here was a series of historically researched restrictions on artistic practice. What might Shakespeare mean if electric light did not focus audience attention, if the audience stood, or sat on benches, sometimes in potentially uncomfortable proximity to one another, if changing from one costume to another was cumbersome or impossible, if men played women? His determination to put historical research into theatrical practice has often cut through the bardolatry that suggests Shakespeare is always our contemporary. His passionate support, for example, as a continuing member of the Architectural Advisory Group at the Globe, for the decoration of the auditorium in similar painted style to the pillars and frons, flew determinedly in the face of modern conceptions of the ‘historic’ as tastefully plain and rough-hewn. Rylance often spoke of Globe productions as site-specific; he worked with the restrictions and impositions, as well as the obvious opportunities, offered by the architectural reconstruction, to produce Shakespeare at the Globe.

The commitment to original practices that Rylance shared with the Globe’s Musical Director, Clare Van Kampen and its costume designer Jenny Tirrimani, was a logical extension of the Globe’s experiment with historic theatre architecture. This commitment also gave rise to quite different kinds of experimentation, inspired by the original practices remit. The all-male shows, and others during Rylance’s tenure, used costume produced as far as was possible according to period design and methods of construction. The opening production, Henry V, used historically accurate underwear and dyes. Julius Caesar, on the other hand, used period costume for most of the characters but had plebeians emerge from the audience in contemporary street clothing.
Original-practices clothing at the Globe was sometimes startling. It did not conform to the taste for the subtle and the muted, characteristic of much late-twentieth-century theatre design – the post-Brechtian beiges we might expect with our historical realism. These clothes refused to signify the pre-consumerist functionality or faded grandeur offered by many heritage sites. They were newly made clothes, produced according to historical research into dying and construction. The clothing of aristocratic characters displayed the riches of early capitalism in an overtly presentational way, as their originals might have on the backs of the Chamberlain’s Men’s aristocratic sponsors. When the clothing gave rise to objections by actors for its impracticability (ties and loops caused problems during quick changes that Velcro has since been invented to solve), and by audiences for its bright cleanness, Rylance’s commitment to the experiment was undiminished. ‘The clothing that made up the costumes was so expensive’, argued Rylance; ‘you wouldn’t have broken it down. So some people felt that wasn’t very realistic, but the realism is being carried by the words, not by the matter’ (Rylance, Globe Exhibition interviews). What was carried by the ‘matter’ was a double gesture of display – the social display of hierarchical colour systems, of doffing hats and of wearing weapons (all supported by the historical research of the Tudor Group, whom Rylance invited to work with a number of Globe companies) and the theatrical display of huge, bright figures against an intricately painted frons.

I will not re-rehearse here the debate as to whether men, as opposed to pubescent boys, might have played women at the first Globe. What was significant about the all-male – and indeed about the all-female – productions at the Globe under Rylance were the ways in which gender was intermittently denaturalised and placed in quotation marks on this stage. Intermittently, because, as some scholars have speculated might have been the case at the first Globe, it was often possible to forget that men were playing women on the reconstructed stage (see Dawson and Yachnin 2001: 31–7 for a summary of arguments regarding the visibility of the boy player’s gender on the early modern stage). In John Dove’s touring production of Measure for Measure, for example, Edmund Hogg wheeled around the stage in his vast black and white farthingale, held his Isabella straight, stiff and contained, and spoke with an uncanny, soft precision – the epitome of virtuous modesty, onto which Angelo could project his fantasies. Angelo then destroyed the woman of his imagination in a disturbing short-circuiting of stage convention: he gave his ‘sensual race the rein’, and grappled the gendered epitome of virtuous modesty to him. Hogg’s audiences reacted in shocked silence or with nervous laughter. The wreck of theatrical illusion mapped uncomfortably but productively onto the wrecked and trembling Isabella. In Giles Block’s Antony and Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen’s acts of anger and vulnerability, and Rylance’s
constructions of them, were both part of the entertainment and produced a figure both highly theatrical and highly empathetic. The effect was of an actor standing up for as well as standing in for his character, very different from that produced by the naturalistic actor in a space intensely focused by stage lighting. This effect was successfully capitalised on in Phyllida Lloyd’s all-female *Taming of the Shrew*, in which Janet McTeer’s strutting *gestus* of maleness is finally out-performed by Katherine Hunter’s Kate, who enacts her final submission with such wild enthusiasm as to embarrass the men into awkward silence.

The most powerful legacy of Rylance’s actor-management of the Globe, however, is an ‘original practice’ that every production there is forced to experiment with: a direct relationship between performer and audience. An awareness of the production of meaning in the moment of contact between actor and spectator underpins many of Rylance’s statements about the theatre, his talks to actors as rehearsals begin and his own performances. It is this, above all, that makes him a significant figure amongst the directors of Shakespeare analysed in this volume: he directed the modern British actor’s preoccupation with the invented inner lives of characters outward, to the audience.

Mark Rylance’s production of *Julius Caesar*, the one production for which he took the role of ‘master of play’ during his tenure as Artistic Director, attracted a remarkable range of contradictory notices. The ‘masters’ system had been developed during the play’s first season: the titles of Masters of Play, Verse, Voice, Music, Costume, Movement were coined to suggest an assemblage of experts, bringing their crafts and abilities together to make theatre. Two years after the theatre’s opening and preview seasons, the Globe had established itself amongst its large audiences as a space for open, presentational, participatory performances. Alongside the theatre’s own productions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, created by a range of ‘Masters’, the preview season had included *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* performed by Northern Broadshe, a company who focus on popular Shakespeare spoken by Northern English actors, and the use of direct performer–audience contact. The Johannesburg Civic Theatre’s *Umabatha: The Zulu Macbeth* played the opening season and further demonstrated the appropriateness of the space for powerful traditions of storytelling. As Paul Prescott’s analysis suggests, a number of critics felt uncomfortable about the notion of a popular, participatory Shakespeare (see Prescott 2005), and when reading newspaper reviews, it is sometimes difficult to separate critiques of the artistic quality of the productions from snobbish assumptions regarding the proper make-up and behaviour of audiences. At any rate, those who disliked *Julius Caesar* found it broad, unsubtle and lacking in the naturalistic character development they
expected of modern Shakespeare. More favourable reviews suggested that there was something here to replace the fully, psychologically drawn characters supposedly to be found in the best of the early modern drama. Comment in the *Independent* points to the novelty, in 1999, of Rylance’s attention to the performer–audience relationship at the Globe: ‘The artifice is blatant and unapologetic: the main event has to take place within an imaginative world that – if this doesn’t sound too pretentious – relieves as much on the participation of the audience as it does on the actors’ (Robert Butler, *Independent on Sunday*, 30 May 1999). At the time of Rylance’s resignation in 2005, it would have seemed odd for a critic to express the need to apologise for pretentiousness when commenting on that relationship.

During rehearsal for *Caesar*, Rylance was very conscious of the dimensions and intimacies of the spaces used for rehearsal and how they differed from the theatre itself. Alongside the familiar, post-Stanislavskian exercises – building ‘character’ through discussion of the play’s imagined past, asking actors to speak out everything their character says about another – Rylance incorporated site-specific process into rehearsal. He invited audiences to watch work in progress, so that the performer–audience relationship could be discovered and continually remade; once rehearsal transferred to the Globe, he had groups touring the theatres stand in for the groundlings in the crowd scenes, so that the plebeians’ rousing of the theatre audience could be tried (see also Bessell 1999). The admixture of character-development techniques and meta-theatrical approaches did not work for every actor, and the transfer onto a stage surrounded by greater numbers of visible witnesses appears to have been a difficult one for some. Toby Cockerell, particularly, who doubled as Portia and Octavius, resorted to a forced shouting in the latter role, which suggested he felt more comfortable with the female presence he had established in the space than the young, patrician, male one. Despite some awkwardness, however, and a problem with some performances ‘flattening out’ in the transfer from indoor rehearsal to outdoor performance, *Julius Caesar* is a key production in terms of the discoveries Rylance made about performer, architecture and Shakespeare at the Globe.

Rylance and Tirimani’s scenography for the production was typically simple. A curtain depicting the Roman goddess Fortuna was drawn across the opening to the tiring house; Roman statues were set in the gallery; a little avenue of orange trees in pots created Brutus and Portia’s domestic space. Ancient Rome was evoked through explicit visual reference to the feast of Lupercal (Antony wears a wolf mask and skin in Act I, Scene 1) and through the kinds of costuming detail that the Peacham drawing suggests would have been worn by Shakespeare’s actors – there were togas over doublet and hose for the assassination of Caesar. The plebeians emerged from the audience in
T-shirts and baseball caps, signifying that, just as Shakespeare’s Rome resonated for Shakespeare’s England, so Shakespeare’s England could be used to reference ours. Through these figures in street clothes, the audience was asked to witness and, to some degree, take part in decisions, power-brokering and acts of violence that unfolded in the theatrical present.

Rylance wanted the Globe companies to achieve eloquence during the 1999 season – eloquence according to the Oxford English Dictionary definition: ‘to speak with force, fluency and appropriateness’. Maintaining a theatrical ‘appropriateness’ in the presence of an audience who are ‘there with a chance to voice their own thoughts’ (Rylance, in Bessell 1999) requires a degree of flexibility, however. A stage manager’s account of drunken groundlings taking a dislike to Cassius from his entrance, and pre-empting lines from their own copies of the play, demonstrates that the work of pulling the visible, contemporary audience into a narrative burdened with cultural baggage can be challenging, and a number of significant changes were made during previews that shifted the performer–audience relationship radically.

One area of speculation at the Globe was the use of the yard for acting. Towards the end of Rylance’s tenure, little action took place there, and Rylance had decided it was unlikely that Shakespeare’s company had used it. Indeed, there is no evidence for an early use of the yard by actors, and conclusions about whether Julius Caesar’s experiment with plebeians performing there ‘proved’ anything must remain speculative. However, the presence of Rylance’s t-shirted, baseball-capped plebeians, shouting from the crowd and climbing onto the stage, foregrounded the political control of crowds in the play and drew attention to the class tensions explicit in the first scene. The first performance was introduced by a London ‘town crier’, who announced the opening of the ‘four hundredth season at the Globe’ and concluded with a shout of ‘God bless you all! God bless Sam Wanamaker and God bless the Queen!’. A cheery shout of monarchist acquiescence arose from the playgoers, which died awkwardly when one of their number, or so it seemed, disrupted the celebratory proceedings by calling out ‘Hurry up, we’re getting wet!’.

There were nervous titters; the wit in the baseball cap was carrying a can of beer, and those around him were clearly unsure as to whether he was going to prove a disruption throughout; this was a crowd that was going to need controlling. Caesar, it seemed, knew exactly how to do so, swiftly casting the audience as enthusiastic Caesar-worshippers in a raucous and populist Lupercal procession, headed by Antony in a wolf-skin and little else; there were clamorous cheers and catcalls from audiences throughout the run. The entrance of the train, directed in the early previews so as to maintain a fluidity of action from scene to scene, had to be delayed so that the last lines of Act I, Scene 1 could actually be heard above the mob of Caesar-worshippers.
The casting of audience as pro-Caesar mob had implications for Cassius, who, in Act I, Scene 2, had to break down the Globe’s cheery holiday mood and reconstruct the audience as thinking, freedom-loving classical patricians. The audience’s own foregrounded presence in this theatre drew attention to the contempt with which Cassius speaks of the crowd to Casca: we must hush up and listen, we are exposed as the hooting ‘rabblement’, the ‘rag-tag people’ who would have accepted Caesar had he ‘stabbed their mothers’ (Act I, Scene 2, lines 244, 258, 274). The audience, conscious of having been a rabblement, listened to rabblements denigrated. This made for a wryly self-conscious crowd of playgoers, aware of the parts they were being asked to play in the fiction.

By the end of the run of Julius Caesar, though, this construction of a cynical, knowing audience had been complicated, via decisions made about the use of the yard, and by Mark Lewis-Jones, who began the run as something of an ironic Mark Antony (see also Koch-Schulte 1999). He caused gales of laughter, and one shout of ‘Liar!’ when he assured the audience, before the Caesar’s coffin, that he ‘only speak[s] right on’ (Act III, Scene 2, line 218). Each of Mark Antony’s actions – including his clambering down from the stage into the yard to show us Caesar’s bloody robe – was clearly a rhetorical device, and the audience were in on the game. By the end of the run, Lewis-Jones was working to persuade on a much more emotionally engaging level, and though the audience were just as willing gleefully to demand ‘The will!’ as in early performances, ‘Friends, Romans, countrymen’ was far more of a sincere tribute to a dead friend. By the end of the run, Antony was moving from gallery to stage to show the crowd Caesar’s robe, rather than climbing into the yard, and the calls of the plebeians came from the audience instead of from on stage. The small group of plebeians had made something of a feeble crowd early in the run, and though Brutus and Antony speaking to the audience across the empty stage space had its own awkwardness, the later staging was the more effective, as Antony filled the empty space not with mere rhetoric but with the material body of Caesar. In early performances, Antony’s line ‘now let it work’ (Act III, Scene 2, line 253), as the plebeians ran off to wreak havoc, was all part of the manipulative plan; later in the run, the line rather served to complicate and interrogate a performance of sincerity. Julius Caesar at the Globe was an experiment in the political meanings produced by the occupation of theatrical space.

An intuitive understanding of where Globe audiences might productively laugh, or raucously participate, developed throughout the production’s run, particularly in the case of Benedict Wong’s Calphurnia. Wong was beset with nervous giggles from the audience when first called centre stage by Caesar early in the run. In later performances, she was accosted by a raunchy Antony
in his Lupercal costume, so that laughter at a man in a dress was released in a comic moment more in keeping with the world of the play. By 2002, when Rylance played Olivia in the Globe’s *Twelfth Night*, much had been learned at the Globe about permitting the audience their incredulity and finding valves whereby laughter could be productively released.

**Performer, audience, women and men**

Rylance’s intuitive understanding of how to move, speak and make his presence felt in the Globe reconstruction offered some of the most powerful direction to actors working with him, the invaluable contributions of a rich range of Masters of Play notwithstanding. Rylance’s presence has sometimes dominated the Globe stage, because he understands that the stage demands a kind of honourable showing off, a theatricality centred not only on the generous giving of focus but also on the shameless taking of it. This has been clearest in his performances of female roles. The shameless taking of focus is perhaps familiar in the case of Cleopatra, whose theatricality is clearly central to the fiction. It is more unusual to witness a production of *Twelfth Night* in which Olivia is such a dominant figure.

The Globe’s 2002 *Twelfth Night*, produced for a short season of performances at the Middle Temple Hall, was redirected by the production’s Master of Play Tim Carrol for the outdoor playhouse, with a partly different cast. It was powerfully centred on Rylance’s Olivia: on her shifts from close retirement to social participation, from control to vulnerability, from death to life. Though Rylance is a RADA-trained actor with as much concern about Stanislavskian superobjectives and psychological intentions as the next, his interest as Artistic Director of the Globe in the performer–audience relationship lead him to foreground the theatrical powers and vulnerabilities of the fictional figure in Shakespeare’s theatre, and a particular kind of theatrical femaleness was produced as a result.

When Michael Brown’s Viola emerged through the trap door in the middle of the Globe stage into Illyria, the audience were strange creatures to her; she looked about the galleries in wonder and appeared instantly vulnerable, both on the shores of this new country and to the gaze of the paying audience. Rylance’s Olivia, on the other hand, made little direct contact with the audience at first. She entered in ceremonious procession with her household, as if to restore order after two scenes in which the central characters have appeared somewhat out of control, stranded or in love. Dressed in black and wheeling effortlessly around her domain, she began Act I, Scene 3 at the head of a long table, signing papers to signify the competent ordering of her household. Her mourning dress and absorption in her papers, her reluctance to
engage with Feste’s foolery, then her good-humoured refusal to be unnerved by his mockery, all signalled a determination to create an impenetrable space of ordered calm. This mourner appeared determined to let nobody – neither Orsino nor the spectator – into the privacy of her mourning. Once Olivia had met Cesario, all semblance of self-control dissolved, and Olivia ricocheted about the space, fanning herself and stumbling over words much to the audience’s delight. Her self-revelation from behind the mourning veil – ‘But we will draw the curtain and show you the picture’ (Act I, Scene 5, line 223) – catapulted her into self-revelation, and her soliloquy after Cesario’s departure had her cringing with embarrassment at her own imperious questioning of Cesario’s ‘parentage’ (Act I, Scene 5, line 279).

As a portrayal of someone plunged into emotional confusion and vulnerability, this Olivia was both a comic and a sympathetic one. Interestingly, the presentational nature of the Globe had a very different effect on Sir Toby’s relationship with the audience. Bill Stewart’s Toby Belch was a cynical, knowing old lush. When he cried for Aguecheek to caper ‘Higher! Higher!’ (Act I, Scene 3, line 137) it was clear that he is happy to humiliate the foolish knight for our enjoyment, and his final rejection of Sir Andrew came as no surprise. In fact, Stewart might have productively made more contact with the audience; after all, as a lively production of Richard III will demonstrate, the most iniquitous vice figures on the Shakespearian stage can draw us into complicity. However, the tendency of the actor trained in the principles of psychological character study may be to regard anything but the most fleeting moments of direct address, outside of soliloquy, as unforgivable mugging. Liam Brennan (Orsino) uses a telling phrase where he explains that he ‘spoke very directly to the audience in my first scene, but I felt thereafter the object of Orsino’s attention is Viola [. . .] The same was true last year with Macduff [. . .] he was so driven and focused that it wouldn’t be right to be “courting” the audience’ (Brennan in Ryan 2002, my italics). What Rylance’s tenure at the Globe demonstrated was that the variety of potential modes of direct address in this theatre are huge: ‘courting’ the audience is only one of them. Rylance’s Olivia moved from complete indifference to the opinions of audience and other characters alike, to a highly sympathetic self-consciousness in their presence. He glanced nervously or joyously out at his audience according to the progress Olivia was making with Cesario, indicating a figure highly self-conscious about the suddenness of her love and her lack of control over the behaviour it seems to be inducing. As Brennan himself showed in his Angelo soliloquies in the Globe’s Measure for Measure, direct address is not merely what Hamlet accuses the clown of doing. The actor/character on the Globe stage can confront the audience, appeal to them, conspire with them, acknowledge his vulnerability in their presence. Having questioned Brennan’s
dismissal of direct address as ‘courting’, I should say that his Orsino, particularly at Act II, Scene 4’s moment of awkward intimacy with Viola, demonstrated a supreme sensitivity to the extent to which Globe audiences can be drawn into the fictions presented to them, and the production gave the lie to the figuration of Globe crowds as tourist dilettantes. The actor’s work at the theatre is a testimony to his own flexibility and to the success of Rylance’s policy of inviting actors back to the Globe for future seasons.

Rylance’s commitment to all-male production at the Globe allowed him to develop techniques for playing female that illuminate an aspect of a number of Shakespeare’s women that rarely emerges in modern production. Rylance’s permits the female figures he plays to be ludicrous as well as vulnerable, comic figures as well as funny women. In playing, rather than being, a woman, Rylance has explored the comic vulnerability of the female figures he has played, where actresses have perhaps been more inclined to discover their strengths. This is not the soft vulnerability of sexist stereotype; indeed, it is not necessarily a gendered vulnerability at all as is most clearly demonstrated by Rylance’s hapless Duke Vincentio in Measure for Measure. It is, rather, the vulnerability of the modern clown, who is always conscious of the judging gaze of the audience, whether he bends before it, courts it or defies it. Rylance was clearly able to make comic sense of Olivia having played Cleopatra three years previously.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Escolme 2006: 128–34), the key to the critical success of the Globe’s 1999 Antony and Cleopatra was the way in which Rylance’s theatrical persona and Cleopatra’s theatrical manipulations within the fiction map onto one another in Rylance’s performance. This was a key season for the Globe’s original-practices remit. After the run of this production, Rylance became convinced that Shakespeare’s company would have cut the plays rather than spoken with a rapidity that the acoustic of the theatre would have made impossible; he determined that the inside of the theatre needed a unified, painted design rather than a stage area anachronistically separated from the auditorium by a décor the auditorium did not share; he found that an extended balcony was a practically and theatrically successful solution to the design of the frons scenae (see Bessell 1999). In the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to cut playing time down to two hours with few cuts in the text, speed became of the essence for the season’s Red Company and the best use to date was made of the potential fluidity of the bare platform stage. The rapid shifts from the tragic to the comic became particularly evident through rehearsals and performances of this play, and Rylance’s Cleopatra was memorably funny:

I learned more about the dynamics of the plays this year. The audience
teaches me each year to be more confident, to let the play swing into comedy, in order for a bigger swing back into tragedy to occur [. . .] [T]he audiences here [. . .] seem to respond strongly to that antithetical relationship between comedy and tragedy in both plays [The audience have taught me that] it’s all right to laugh at Cleopatra’s line ‘How heavy weighs my lord!’ (IV. xv. 32), because the relief in laughing opens them up and catches them unaware; fifteen seconds later they see her howling in despair as Antony dies suddenly in her arms.

(Rylance in Bessel 1999)

Cleopatra’s relationship with the audience in this production swung from defiant obliviousness, to blatantly manipulative performance, to raw vulnerability in Antony’s death scene. She skipped exuberantly about the stage, followed by the tolerant but weary Charmian and Iras, who dropped cushions wherever she deigned to sit down. Paul Shelley’s Antony endeavoured to rediscover the authority of the centre-stage space but had his theatrical status repeatedly undermined by her lively possession of the space and her court. The production repeatedly demonstrated the ways in which actor and space produce meaning in this theatre. Centre stage can be an ‘authority space’ (see Kiernan 1999: 63–4) but is also a risky, exposing place, where one’s authority can be undermined. Moving back and forth or standing for too long at the front of the stage reads as weakness: Paul Shelley told us that he ‘must from this enchanting queen break off’ in this position (Act I, Scene 2, line 121) – and his declaration seemed like a desperate bid for the audience’s help and support in achieving the impossible. Charmian’s parody of Cleopatra’s constant, flitting movement as she teases the Queen over ‘brave Caesar’ (Act I, Scene 5, line 67) is amusing – but Charmian gives her parodic performance across the front of the stage and demonstrates nothing like her mistress’s mastery of the space. It is Cleopatra who understands the power of acting on this stage and in this Egypt.

Rylance’s expansive gestures, often a feature of Globe performances, read as spontaneous exuberance in one moment, highly performed in the next. A speech that often reveals whether a Cleopatra is of the more manipulative or the more sincerely in-love variety, was significantly hard to read here: ‘all the gods go with you. Upon your sword / Sit laurel victory, and smooth success / Be strew’d before your feet!’ (Act I, Scene 3, line 100–2) says Rylance, with the deepest of historically researched curtsies, and because bowing, curtseying, shaking hands and doffing hats are all so carefully socially encoded, we cannot know how sincerely Cleopatra means this performance of loving lady bidding adieu to her lord.
Rylance’s Cleopatra took her costume for Acts IV and V from Plutarch, who, after Antony’s death, had ‘rent her garments’ and ‘scratch[ed] her face and stomach’ (Plutarch 1964: 310); he wore a filthy shift and had removed Cleopatra’s wig of auburn curls to reveal a shaved head with tufts of torn hair. Cleopatra’s performances of royalty and femininity were stripped away. However, this vision of broken humanity did not indicate a privileging of sincerity over performance, a revelation of the ‘real’ Cleopatra behind her ‘becomings’. Her pathetic, self-abused figure re-dressed itself for her last performance in death, and she constructed her own monument to time from her own body and costume. Immediately before taking the asp, she knelt and kissed the feet of the ultimate performer, the clown, who had cheekily got up onto the throne in which she would take the snake’s bite. What Rylance revealed here were the ways in which ‘woman’ and ‘queen’ and ‘human’ might be constructed theatrically, and in opposition to Roman masculinity and war machine.

‘That within which passeth show’: *Hamlet*

Given the attention this account has paid thus far to the metatheatricality of Rylance’s work at the Globe, the theatre’s 2000 *Hamlet* is of particular and paradoxical significance because of its interest in interiority – both in terms of psychology and imagined architecture. This production offered an alternative to the presentation/personation binary that underpins much speculation about early modern acting style. Rylance’s Hamlet presented ‘interiority’ to the audience, and the emotional impact of his performance was produced in moments when Rylance’s work at playing Hamlet was foregrounded most clearly.

As records of design meetings suggest, the creation of interior spaces on the Globe stage was an early focus for *Hamlet*. Tiramani and Rylance’s idea of suspending a false ceiling under the heavens was finally abandoned, but a low rail was built around the edges of the stage for *Hamlet* which ‘contained the world of the play’ and ‘was an attempt to define the “interior” feel of the play’ (see Bessel 2000). Four benches were used throughout and created further enclosed spaces for action. The yard was not used by actors at any point in the production: ‘The world of the Danish court needed to feel [...] enclosed and claustrophobic’ (Bessel 2005: 5). Though Giles Block was appointed ‘masters’ of both ‘play’ and ‘verse’, Richard Olivier, who had directed Rylance in the Globe’s opening production of *Henry V*, worked with the company on a period of rehearsal at Otley Hall, an Elizabethan mansion in Suffolk. Here, the company played through the text in ‘real’ time, with the Ghost appearing on their first night and the graveyard scene occurring on the second (Bessel
The play’s scenes of spying and surveillance took place in rooms in the house, and all this was intended to give the company a sense of how the action might ‘really’ have felt in the dark, in a gallery, in a mother’s ‘closet’. An experience was being created here that actors could recall in the moment of performance – a technique that rather recalls Stanislavskian techniques of emotion memory than site-specific metatheatre. Attention to another, more spiritual sense of interiority was, moreover, taken to something of an extreme when, on Olivier’s suggestion, Rylance underwent a meditative burial ritual in a hole dug for him by the production’s gravediggers, ‘in order to get in touch with the earth’ (Bessel 2005: 11). These narrative, psychological and spiritual exercises manifested themselves on stage in a performance of emotional intensity on display. Rehearsing Hamlet as if it were a naturalistic drama of families in domestic (albeit royal) settings, combined with attention to the demands of audience and architecture at the Globe, produced a compelling emotional theatricality that renewed old questions of Hamlet’s madness, his relationship with Ophelia, his procrastinations.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Escolme 2005: 63–4), Rylance’s Hamlet was intensely emotional. He wept where other recent Hamlets had sneered and ranted, begging Ophelia to leave for the nunnery as if he genuinely felt this was the only safe retreat for her from the ghastliness of the court and the world; he was horrified at his accidental killing of Polonius and wept once more as he hauled the guts into the neighbour room. From the moment in his first soliloquy when he turned to the yard and galleries (he begun, as he did at the RSC in 1989, with his back to the majority of the audience), he was a painfully vulnerable figure, aghast, it seemed, at having to reveal everything he was keeping from the court to over 1,000 paying spectators. From these spectators, however, he took courage, energy and a need to communicate all this horror. The performance reinvigorated voice-training truisms about Shakespeare and the ‘need for words’. Hamlet compulsively talked to us, performed the clown for us, rehearsed the revenge hero for us and offered us both his inadequacy and his contempt for that hackneyed role. This Hamlet knew he had no fixed role to play at court or within the conventions of stock revenge tragedy, and the ‘character’ of this emotionally intense Hamlet was produced by his relationship with the audience. Where Polonius was assured that the audience would find his comments on Hamlet’s madness sublimely sensible, Hamlet never seemed sure of what our judgements would be. He was a small, dark blot on the bright red velvet world of the court – or a small, dark blot outside of it, as he would not move up towards the happy tableau of family and good government Claudius was endeavouring to create at the beginning of the play. Even when others were on stage, Hamlet often appeared to be alone with the audience.
Then, at the point where many a school pupil is taught that Hamlet learns to act, Hamlet told us that the readiness is all and withdrew his presence from us, slipping into another plot, a stock revenge one written by Claudius, in which a show is set up to disguise a murder, and avenger, innocent bystander and villain alike end up strewn dead across the stage. It is as if this complex, questioning being, whose presence before the audience produces his ‘character’, is finally too complex for a revenge drama and has to withdraw from us so that the play can end. One reading, then, of this production is that the metatheatrical self-consciousness of its performance throws Hamlet, who continually and painfully interrogates theatrical and cultural convention, into dark relief against the simple ethic of revenge tragedy and finally establishes tragedy as a withdrawal of theatrical presence. For Rylance himself, the physicality of the play’s final dual is a theatrical distillation of a new sense of ethical and political responsibility on Hamlet’s part, a demonstration of the character’s willingness to enter the drama appropriately and actively, if not mercifully. Though Rylance’s own reading partakes of the meta-narrative of spiritual journey that underpins many humanist and actorly readings of tragedy, unlike many such readings, it is theatrically informed. ‘Sword-fighting is, after all’, Rylance remarks, ‘one of the most dangerous, immediate and demanding pieces of acting you can do and requires incredible presence and willingness to “be”’ (Rylance, personal correspondence to Escolme). In this description, and in acting Hamlet, Rylance has mapped the actorly notion of the character’s inner journey onto the formal theatricality of the virtuoso end-piece of tragedy, so that theatrical acting and fictional action appear simultaneously to dissolve into and stand apart from one another.

**Director’s Shakespeare**

In his assessment of the question ‘Who will succeed Rylance at the Globe?’ theatre critic Michael Billington argued that ‘the choice is crucial, since it will determine whether the Globe continues to be an old-fashioned, actor-driven company or whether it opts for intellectually challenging, director-led reinterpretations of Shakespeare’ (Billington 2004). Billington thus suggests that to challenge the intellect, Shakespeare must be ‘directed’ in ways that the first productions were not. What these analyses of moments from Shakespeare production at the Globe have endeavoured to show is that the singular vision of the director, as constructed by contemporary convention, is not the only way to produce intellectually challenging and emotionally engaging Shakespeare. At the time of writing, the Royal Shakespeare Company has recently completed a reconfiguring of the performer–audience dynamic in their own work through a refurbishment of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford; at the
company’s Swan Theatre, recent productions of *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale* have been performed to standing audiences in a stalls stripped of seating. Mark Rylance’s work at the Globe has done much to foster what Billington called a new ‘hyper-theatricality’ at Stratford (Billington 2003). Rylance’s reappearance, after Hamlet’s death, in the signature end-piece ‘jig’ of his tenure at Shakespeare’s Globe (for this production a *dance macabre* complete with leaping skeleton), was a distillation of the nature of the live theatre event in this space. Rylance ceased to be Hamlet and became a dancing actor, signifying anew that Hamlet was really dead: there was no escape from mortality here via Horatio’s legacy or some universal sense of the Shakespearian tragic. In Rylance/Shakespeare’s Globe, meaning has been produced in the gap between actor’s work and character’s action and in the awkward, exciting, shifting space between performer and audience.

**Chronology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982–3</td>
<td>First season as an actor with the Royal Shakespeare Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>With actor David Moylan, forms the London Theatre of Imagination, an actors’ cooperative without a director</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Marries Claire Van Kampen, later Musical Director at Shakespeare’s Globe</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Founds Phoebus’ Cart theatre company, with Claire Van Kampen, to perform Shakespeare in sites of ancient spiritual significance and to marry the disciplines of music, dance and acting</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Joins Board of Directors of Shakespeare’s Globe project under Project Director Sam Wanamaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>First production, <em>The Tempest</em>, on the site of the reconstructed Globe</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995–2000</td>
<td>Artistic Director of Shakespeare’s Globe</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Bassanio, <em>The Merchant of Venice</em>, dir. Richard Olivier</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Cleopatra, <em>Antony and Cleopatra</em>, dir. Giles Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Director (Master of Play) <em>Julius Caesar</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Collaborated with Peter Oswald in the writing of <em>Augustine’s Oak</em>, the first new play produced at the Globe reconstruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Hamlet, <em>Hamlet</em>, dir. Giles Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Posthumus and Cloten, <em>Cymbeline</em> (Shakespeare’s Globe, then Harvey Theatre, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, 2002), dir. Mike Alfreds</td>
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</table>

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2002 Olivia, *Twelfth Night* at Middle Temple Hall, then Shakespeare’s Globe and US tour, dir. Tim Carroll
2005 Rylance resigns as Artistic Director of Shakespeare’s Globe

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About the author

Bridget Escolme is Senior Lecturer in Drama at Queen Mary, University of London, where she teaches theatre and performance studies and researches early modern drama in current and historical practice. Her monograph *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (2005) and her contribution to the Shakespeare Handbooks series, *Antony and Cleopatra* (2006) are concerned with the ways in which meaning is produced in the moment of live performance and with the relationship between performer and audience. She is currently researching for a book project, *Madness and Theatricality*, exploring recent production of historical plays featuring madness. She is a member of the Architectural Advisory committee for Shakespeare’s Globe, and the case studies contained in this essay are based on extensive experience of live performance at that theatre.