

BLACKWELL MANIFESTOS

Phenomenal Shakespeare

Bruce R. Smith



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A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2010
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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Smith, Bruce R., 1946–

Phenomenal Shakespeare / Bruce R. Smith.

p. cm. — (Blackwell manifestos)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-6312-3548-4 (hard cover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-6312-3549-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616 — Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PR2976.S49 2010

822.3'3—dc22

2009030169

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 11.5/13.5pt Bembo by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

1 2010

Acknowledgments

The original inspiration for this book was a seminar called “Knowing Bodies: Towards an Historical Phenomenology” that I convened at the 1999 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in San Francisco. That 28 people signed up for the seminar, many of them graduate students, made me realize there was a tactic here worth pursuing. For that confirmation and for getting the conversation started in interesting directions I want to thank the participants in the inaugural seminar: Catherine Belling, Gina Bloom, Anston Bosman, Peter Cummings, Will Fisher, William Flesch, Susan Frye, Wes Folkerth, Skiles Howard, Daniel Kulmala, Joan Pong Linton, Cynthia Marshall, Gail Kern Paster, Marie A. Plasse, Martha Ronk, Lauren Shohet, James R. Siemon, Geraldo U. de Sousa, Scott Manning Stevens, Adriane L. Stewart, Ellen Summers, Jesse G. Swan, Joseph M. Tate, James Wells, Suzanne Wofford, Julian Yates, James J. Yoch, and Susan Zimmerman.

The ten years that have intervened between “Knowing Bodies” and *Phenomenal Shakespeare* have allowed me to try out the approach in classes and seminars at Georgetown University, the University of Southern California, and Middlebury College’s Bread Loaf School of English. I am grateful to my students for their openness to ways of reading that initially seemed strange, and for their ingenuity, once they had made those ways their own, in prompting me to see, hear, and feel things I would have missed on my own. My ideas were given a hearing at a number of conferences, and I am grateful to the organizers in each case for inviting me: Peter Stallybrass (“Forms of Address,” the English Institute, 2006), Lyn Tribble (“Embodying Shakespeare,” the

Acknowledgments

Australia and New Zealand Shakespeare Association, 2008), Heidi Brayman Hackel and Heather James (“Literature Beyond Words,” USC-Huntington Early Modern Studies Institute, 2009), Doug Trevor (“Shakespeare’s Cruelty,” Shakespeare Association of America, 2009), Ross Brown and Andy Lavender (“Theatre Noise,” Central School for Speech and Drama, 2009), and Michael Witmore and Will West (“Phenomenal Performances: Getting a Feel for Shakespeare’s Theater,” Northwestern University, 2009). The generous encouragement, useful references, and difficult questions that I received from my auditors on these occasions are evident in almost every page of this book. A complete list of the people who made suggestions would be very long indeed. I am grateful to all of them.

Phenomenal Shakespeare is a more felicitous affair than it might have been thanks to readings of the penultimate draft by P.A. Skantze and Will West. As readers for the press, both of these individuals knew just where to put pressure (so to speak) on my arguments, and the book is the more robust for their efforts. I am indebted to both of these excitable but exacting readers.

Let me thank finally the people who literally lent me a hand—or two: Ana Karen Campos in the frontispiece, Crescenciano Garcia in Figures 2.1, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11, Rosalind Larry in Figure 3.1, and Joseph Roach in Figure 4.3. The hands in Figure 4.1 and the hand with the stylus in Figure 4.5 are my own.

It is the fashion in books like this one to end by thanking one’s family for support over the long haul and to apologize for dishes not washed, hikes not taken, movies not seen. In my case it’s not just slackness forgiven for which I am grateful but imagination nurtured. With deep thanks for the nurturing as well as the forgiveness I dedicate *Phenomenal Shakespeare* to my husband Gordon Davis.

B.R.S.

Santa Fe, New Mexico

Prologue: The Argument

That Shakespeare is *PHENOMENAL!* will hardly come as news. If you are reading this book, or only thinking about doing so, you already know that the infant baptized as “*Gulielmus filius Iohannes Shakspere*” in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, on April 26, 1564 (let’s call him THWS, The Historical William Shakespeare) went on to write a corpus of plays and poems (CWWS, the Collected Works of William Shakespeare) that all foster the illusion of an author thoroughly in control (WSA, William Shakespeare as Author) and that have become a cultural institution (WSCl, William Shakespeare as Cultural Icon) from New York to Beijing and from Reykjavik to Johannesburg.¹ Shakespeare, we can safely say, is a phenomenon as we understand that term today.

¹ The record of THWS’s baptism in the registers of Holy Trinity Church—“William, son of John Shakespeare”—is illustrated and discussed in Schoenbaum 1987: 24–6. I use “William Shakespeare as Author” (WSA) to refer to the supposed all-knowing all-controlling mind-in-charge that readers often assume is immanent in a text. WSA should not be confused with The Historical William Shakespeare, who may have entertained thoughts quite different from those registered in the Collected Works of William Shakespeare (CWWS), or with William Shakespeare as Cultural Icon (WSCl), whose identity has changed radically across four centuries. Nor should WSA be confused with the author in Roland Barthes’ “Death of the Author” (1968), the author as a fiction that holds together the meanings from diverse sources that make up a text, or the “author function” in Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?” (1969), which exists as a structural principle but not as a guarantor of meaning outside the text. WSA is not a real person but a phenomenon, a by-product of reading a poem or watching a play.

As it happens, “phenomenon” was a word just coming into use during THWS’s lifetime, but he was more likely to have read it in a book than to have heard anybody say it aloud. To judge from CWWS, the word did not figure in WSA’s active vocabulary. Nonetheless, “phenomenon” was becoming a useful term, and the next-to-earliest instance recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows why. To say that the sun revolves around the earth, Francis Bacon observes in *The Advancement of Learning*, “is not repugnant to any of the *phenomena*” (Bacon 2000a: 93).² It is just repugnant to the demonstrations of geometry. “So the ordinary face and view of experience is many times satisfied by *several* theories and philosophies,” Bacon concludes, “whereas to find *the real truth* requireth another manner of severity and attention” (Bacon 2000a: 94, emphases added). Ordinary experience, many theories, one truth: Bacon’s three-step program is an inductive process in which theories do not exist apart from ordinary experience any more than truth exists apart from theories. However high he casts his gaze, Bacon’s feet remain firmly on the ground. *The Advancement of Learning* was first published in 1605, about the same time WSA was looking towards the heavens in *King Lear*. Bacon, like other writers in English from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reserves the word *phenomena* (always in the plural) specifically for appearances in the sky or the air, which was in fact the original meaning of the phrase τὰ φαινόμενα in Greek (OED 1989: “phenomenon,” etymology and 1.b, with citations; Owen 1975: 113–26).³ A word for these celestial appearances was needed by THWS and his contemporaries for a very good reason: science was increasingly undermining the veracity of what could be experienced firsthand

² In all cases, quotations from early modern sources are given in modern spelling and capitalization, but with original punctuation. I do this because most readers of this book will have encountered CWWS in modern spelling. To insist on original spelling for other authors—authors like Bacon, for example—is likely to make them seem quaint and far away.

³ For elucidating this original usage of the word *phenomena* and for pointing me to Owen’s article I am grateful to Lorraine Daston. On the epistemological challenges of “the new philosophy” see Watson 2006: 3–35.

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(Watson 2006: 3–35). “The new philosophy,” John Donne famously said, “calls all in doubt” (Donne 1978: 27).

In our own age of science and technology, that doubt hangs in the air more heavily than ever. Education in the early twenty-first century involves learning a great many things that you can’t actually observe firsthand. From what I have read and been told, I can imagine electrons and neutrons, but I haven’t actually seen any. Presumably I could remedy that situation by looking through a strong enough microscope, but even then the scale would be so different—the electrons and neutrons so small and I so large—that my experience would feel secondhand. According to Bacon, the same alienation effect extends to philosophy and the arts. In *The New Organon*, published in Latin 15 years after *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon repeats his earlier remarks about how things appear in the sky, but he looks down and around to consider how things appear in the world of humankind. Bacon turns attention to the stories we tell ourselves about how things are—or rather about how they *seem* to be. Bacon calls these stories “idols of the theatre”:

For just as several accounts of the heavens can be fashioned from the *phenomena* of the air, so, and much more, various dogmas can be based and constructed upon the *phenomena* of philosophy. And the stories of this kind of *theatre* have something else in common with the dramatist’s theatre, that narratives made up for the stage are neater and more elegant than true stories from history, and are the sort of thing people prefer. (Aphorism 1.62 in Bacon 2000b: 50, emphases original)

A bit later Bacon rephrases the distinction between “phenomena of the air” and “phenomena of philosophy” as a distinction between “nature” and “arts” (Aphorism 1.112 in Bacon 2000b: 87). Phenomena of *philosophy*? Phenomena of *arts*? What can Bacon mean by those terms? Although Bacon is remembered today as an advocate of the scientific method, his insistence on beginning with particulars, with observations, with hands-on experience extends to all forms of thinking. The trouble with “philosophers of the rational type,” Bacon says, is that they leap too readily from how things *seem* to how things *are*—or

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rather to how they *presume* things are. Such hyper-rationalist thinkers “are diverted from experience by the variety of common phenomena, which have not been certainly understood or carefully examined and considered” (Aphorism 62 in Bacon 2000b: 51).

The trouble with theater, according to Bacon, is that the stories enacted there are too simple, too neat, too elegant. They are tidier than the “true stories” of history. (By “history” I take Bacon to mean not just the deeds of kings but human experience in general, human experience in all its teeming and tangled complexity.) Bacon’s remedy—in philosophy, as presumably it would be in the theater—is to insist on particulars, even when the temptation is to move on quickly—too quickly—to what THWS, Bacon, and their contemporaries knew as “the argument.” In early modern English “argument” could mean subject matter or theme (*OED* 1989: “argument,” *n.*, †6) as well as a series of statements in support of a proposition (4) or, more generally, proof or manifestation (1). Arguably, the reason why the CWWS have continued to attract audiences and readers across four centuries is precisely because they are so attentive to particulars at the expense of argument. Take, for example, the shocking submission of Kate at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Or the new Henry V’s brusque rejection of Falstaff. Or Shylock’s refusal to remain a comic stereotype. Or Isabella’s wordless silence at the end of *Measure for Measure*. Or Macbeth’s missing the point of his existential situation in his “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” soliloquy. Or the way Cleopatra gets out of hand in a play whose argument, in the source, is all about Antony. Or Bertram’s unbelievably lame last words in *All’s Well That Ends Well*. Or the death of Cordelia. Or the conspicuous absence of contrition on the part of Antonio and Sebastian, the only two characters in *The Tempest* whom the audience actually sees trying to commit murder. These are not the fictions of an imagination too quickly prone to argument in the sense of support for a proposition.

Shakespeare’s critics have not always read, watched, and listened in kind. Handed a subject or theme, many readers—perhaps most—want a proposition. If an obvious one doesn’t seem to be there already, they supply it. Watchers and listeners in the theater may be more open-minded, but usually the director has chosen the proposition in advance.

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Isabella doesn't have to stand there in silence when the Duke announces that he is going to marry her; she takes off her nun's habit and grasps his hand or she hesitates and gives her brother Claudio a significant look or she turns around and walks off the stage. Each of these directorial choices advances an argument: the details of the production have been lined up in support of a proposition, whether it be "*Pater* knows best" or "This play is really about incest" or "Shakespeare was a feminist." A production review or an academic article will be even more adamant in its demonstration of whatever proposition the author has decided to put forward. An argument, in its root sense of making something manifest, need not be so dogmatic. There are many possible reasons, plausible but contradictory, why Isabella should be scripted to say nothing. After so much talking on the part of the Duke, there may be something in the silence itself—or, more to the point, in the listeners' experience of that silence.

The argument in the pages to follow is "argument" in the most general sense of that word, argument as manifestation, evidence, token, proof. The first of these words begins the book; the fourth ends it. "Blackwell Manifestos": the series title and the description of the series as "timely interventions to address important concepts and subjects" may suggest a need for hammer, nails, and a cathedral door. One thinks of Wyndham Lewis's "Long Live the Vortex!" in issue one of *BLAST* (1914) or the Nicene Creed (CE 325) or Marx and Engels's *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (1848) or Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) or the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972) or Antonin Artaud's two "*Manifestes du Théâtre de la Cruauté*" (1931–2). To judge from all the titles listed at www.manifestos.net/, a need for manifestos has increased exponentially since the advent of the internet. So here is one more.

Just what is being manifested in these pages? Three things. First and most important are some particulars about CWWs that tend to get overlooked in the rush to propositions. I shall be paying attention, just as Bacon advises, to "the variety of common phenomena, which have not been certainly understood or carefully examined and considered." The emphasis will fall on common experiences: emotions, reading,

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watching and listening in the theater. Also to be made manifest are the goals, assumptions, and working methods of a new critical approach that has come to be known as “historical phenomenology.” Inner gestures that inspire speech, the kinesthetic knowledge that comes with reading, and the pleasurable twinge of watching and hearing characters suffer on stage are difficult to talk about, not only because bodily sensations do not have a transparent relationship to language but because our keen awareness of cultural differences makes the project of talking about them look presumptuous if not impossible. Just because you or I find the thought of sex with animals distasteful (you *do*, don’t you?) doesn’t mean that THWS and his original readers did. *Phenomenal Shakespeare* offers evidence that subjective experience of poems and plays written 400 years ago can be approached from the outside in culturally specific and politically aware terms. *Approached*. We may not be able, in Bacon’s terms, to understand such experience in the literal sense of standing under or within it, but we can at least carefully examine and consider it. In the process a third thing should be made manifest: why “Shakespeare”—THWS, CWWS, WSA, and WSCI, all four—remains phenomenal in our own time and place. By recovering the felt experience of “Shakespeare” in the past we may be able to recover the felt experience of “Shakespeare” that often goes missing in the here-and-now, at least in books like this one.

The plan of this book is simple: a how-to-do-it chapter is followed by three examples and a short conclusion. Chapter 1, “As It Likes You,” lays out the principles and procedures of historical phenomenology as a way of reading and thinking, with an emphasis on the “likes.” Three examples of such reading, thinking, and liking are put forward in the next three chapters, one on each of the genres in which THWS exercised his imagination. Chapter 2, “How Should One Read a Shakespeare Sonnet?” uses a single sonnet to explore two very different models of language and to argue (in sense number two) that the time has come to reconsider Saussure’s model in light of William James’s and Lev Vygotsky’s model. Chapter 3, “Carnal Knowledge,” returns *Venus and Adonis* to the ambient circumstances in which the narrative poem was originally read. In the process two kinds of sexual knowledge are contrasted: the law’s outside-looking-in

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and the reader's inside-looking-out. Chapter 4, "Touching Moments," trains attention to the nexus between language and gesture in theatrical performance, with particular attention to scenes of cruelty in *King Lear*. A brief summation considers "What Shakespeare Proves."

In several senses, the book you are holding in your hands is a handbook. It provides a manual for how to do historical phenomenology. But it is also a book about hands. The human hand—with its carpus (wrist), metacarpus (palm), and digits (fingers)—figures in each of the book's chapters. The notion that there is such a thing as "the Renaissance hand" will come as no surprise to readers of Katherine Rowe's essay "God's handy worke" in *The Body in Parts* (Mazzio and Hillman 1997: 285–312) and of the essays in *Sensible Touch*, where the hand functions again and again as synecdoche not only for the sense of touch that pervades the entire human body but for human agency in doing things and saying things (Harvey 2003: 10–11, 242, 247–8). But the hand fits the task here in a more fundamental way. Aristotle's treatise "On the Soul" laid out for THWS and his contemporaries the ground plan of the psychology they used to explain what was happening when they sensed things outside their bodies, felt those things in their hearts, thought about those sensed and felt things with their minds, and acted upon those sensed, felt, and thought-about things with arms and hands. According to Aristotle, it is not just language that distinguishes humankind from other animals but an exquisite sense of touch. (Daniel Heller-Roazen's book *The Inner Touch: Archeology of a Sensation* narrates the afterlife of Aristotle's contention.) "While in respect of all the other senses we fall below many species of animals," Aristotle observes, "in respect of touch we far excel all other species in exactness of discrimination. That is why man is the most intelligent of all animals" (421a23–6 in Aristotle 1984: 1:670). A chapter on touch, in fact, concludes Aristotle's entire treatise, just as it concludes this handbook.

The argument of *Phenomenal Shakespeare* might better be posed as a question instead of a statement: what's so touching about "Shakespeare"? To get us started, take a second look at the frontispiece to this book. It illustrates a paradox that fascinated one of the twentieth century's great phenomenologists, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his last

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years. When you touch yourself, you trouble the usual distinction between subject (the toucher) and object (the touched). In Merleau-Ponty's words, "the touching is never exactly the touched" (quoted in Heller-Roazen 2007: 295). What comes in between the toucher and the touched remains a mystery to the rational mind—indeed, it defies the rational mind. Merleau-Ponty calls that something-in-between "the untouchable." Neither the rational mind nor the feeling body can get at it; neither the rational mind nor the feeling body can account for the whole, for the phenomenon. The situation is something like the familiar visual puzzle presented by the vase that can also be read as the profiles of two faces. Is that a vase I'm seeing there? Or is it two faces? The rational mind wants it to be one or the other, but "it" refuses to stay stable, now presenting itself to my mind as a vase, now as two faces. Such is the relationship between readers, audiences, and thinkers-about-things on the one hand and the poems and plays they read, watch, listen to, and think about on the other. What is the toucher and what is the touched? You. What is touching about "Shakespeare"? The in-between.

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1

As It Likes You

If you're under the age of 40 (maybe even if you're older) you already *do* phenomenology when you tell a friend what a third party said. Consider how you might report what you heard Jaques say to the deer your friends had wounded in comparison with how the First and the Second Lord tell the story to Duke Senior in Act Two, scene one of *As You Like It*:

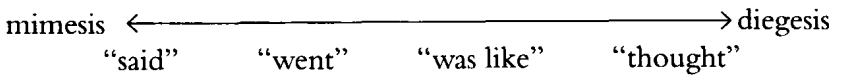
DUKE SENIOR But what said Jaques?
Did he not moralize this spectacle?
FIRST LORD O yes, into a thousand similes.
First, for his weeping into the needless stream;
"Poor deer," quoth he, "thou mak'st a testament
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
To that which had too much." Then being there alone,
Left and abandoned of his velvet friend,
"Tis right," quoth he, "thus misery doth part
The flux of company."¹

If the same scene were being performed in today's idiom, the First Lord's report might go more like this: "He was ... like, deer, you write

¹ *As You Like It*, 2.1.44–52. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Shakespeare's plays and poems are taken from the Oxford Shakespeare, 2nd edn. (Shakespeare 2005), and are cited in the text by act, scene, and line numbers in the case of the plays, by sonnet number and line numbers in the case of the sonnets, and by line numbers in the case of the narrative poems.

your will just like people do” and “He was ... like, right, misery takes care of too much company.” “Like”: apparently Jaques’ thousand similes aren’t enough. But “like” in these updated speeches is not a preposition like those you find in a simile. Instead, it functions as a “quotative” (Buchstaller 2003 and 2001), like the First Lord’s “quoth.”

The standard distinction between direct and indirect quotation fails to do justice to the range of situations in which people tell stories and quote other people. Instead of a binary (direct versus indirect quotation) we should imagine a continuum of performance possibilities, with mimesis (impersonation) at one end and diegesis (narration) at the other. Along this continuum Isabelle Buchstaller has ranged currently used quotatives according to how much scope they give for involvement on the part of the teller:



“Said” at one end of the continuum implies direct quotation, reportage of a speaker’s actual words, while “thought” at the other end turns the reportage inward, to what the reporter felt when the other person was speaking. Somewhere in the middle are “went” and “was like.” They bring the past event into visceral presence, inspiring sound effects and gestures that perform the reporter’s feelings. In Buchstaller’s summation,

Using the new quotatives, speakers quote as if they were reproducing a real speech act but package it in a more expressive form, in sound and voice effects. This suggests that speakers take advantage of the full creative possibilities the language offers them in the new quotatives: a stream of consciousness-like display of inner states and attitudes realized in vivid, immediate speech. (Buchstaller 2001: 14)

“Like” affords these possibilities to today’s speakers for the same reason it recommended itself to The Historical William Shakespeare (THWS) and the denizens of the Forest of Arden. “Like” does not purport to be or not to be: it compares and approximates, it blurs the boundary

between inner and outer, it puts objects into subjects and subjects into objects.

In that respect, “like” is phenomenal. “Like” implicates *you* in *it*.

:

Take the epilogue to *As You Like It*. The actor who has been playing Rosalind (in the original 1599 production the actor was a boy and sometimes these days is a man) moves freely back and forth, left and right along Buchstaller’s continuum between mimesis and diegesis. Gender critics and queer critics in the late twentieth century have made this speech as famous as Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” was in the nineteenth century. The blurring of distinctions with respect to gender, surely familiar already to readers of this book, also involves a blurring of distinctions with respect to pronouns, to what it pleases us to call “subject positions.” “It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue,” begins he/she/he (Ep. 1–2). So whom do we see speaking here—Rosalind as “the lady” or the actor who has played the role (which has included taking on the guise of Jupiter’s sex toy Ganymede) or both? “What a case am I in then,” exclaims the speaker, making some very nice puns on “case” as happenstance, state of affairs, body, suit of clothes, and (for the Latin-wise among the hearers) syntactical position as subject or object (OED 1989: “case,” *n.*¹, I.†1.a, I.4.b; “case,” *n.*², 3.a, †4.b; “case,” *n.*¹, I.9.a).

“What a case am *I* in then”: the confusion here is not just between *she* and *he*, between “Rosalind” and boy actor, but between *he/she/he* on the one hand and *I* on the other, between the character in the fiction being stashed away over there, in the space behind the speaker, and the person standing and speaking here toward the front of the stage. He/she/he solves this dilemma of first-person identity by turning to *you*, the people out there who are looking at *him/her/him* in third person, singular in *his/her/his* case and plural in *theirs*. “My way is to conjure you” (Ep. 10–11)—like, say, a judge administering an oath or a magician calling up the devil—and he/she/he begins with the women. “I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you” (Ep. 11–13)—a timely