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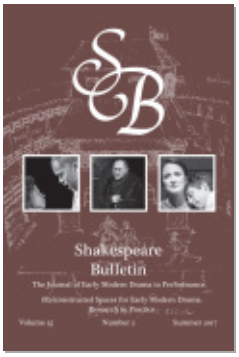

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"Original Practices," Lost Plays, and Historical Imagination: Staging "The Tragedy of Merry"

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In 1594, Thomas Merry murdered his neighbor, Master Beech, by hitting him repeatedly over the head with a hammer. Merry was condemned and hanged, along with his sister, Rachel, who was found to be complicit in the crime. The murder was reported in a news pamphlet—"a booke entytuled *A True Discourse of a Most Cruell and Barbarous Murther Comitted by one Thomas Merrey*" (August 29, 1594)—and in five broadside ballads published in August and September that year (Knutson and McInnis, "Thomas Merry (Beech's Tragedy)"). In 1600, William Haughton and John Day's "The Tragedy of Merry" (also called "Beech's Tragedy") was performed at the Rose, as documented in Philip Henslowe's *Diary* (Greg 1: 114). The fictionalized version of the crime played in the same Southwark neighborhood where the murder originally took place.

Despite the evident hold of the murder upon the popular imagination, demonstrated both by the proliferation of ballads and pamphlets capitalizing on "news" of the murder and by the staging of Beech's death six years after the murder itself took place, the contemporary narratives of the murder are lost. None of the texts is extant: we find only their traces in records in the Stationers' Register, and in a series of entries in Henslowe's *Diary*.

Yet one portrayal of the crime survives. In 1601, the play *Two Lamentable Tragedies* was published in quarto, attributed to Robert Yarrington (who appears to have been a scribe) (Hanabusa xv–xvi; Greg 2: 208–209).

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The title page describes these two tragedies:

> The one, of the murther of Maister Beech a Chaundler in Thames-streete, and his boye, done by Thomas Merry. The other of a young childe murthered in a Wood by two Ruffins, with the consent of his Uncle (Yarrington).

Two Lamentable Tragedies is unusual in representing two interlocking narratives: one set in Padua in the non-specific past, concerning the murder of a ward by his uncle, and the other, a "true crime," set in contemporary London—the tragedy of Thomas Merry. The two narratives are framed and interlinked by narrator-figures: Homicide, Avarice, and Truth.

The relationship between the play performed at the Rose and the surviving playtext has been much debated (Hanabusa xxv–xxviii; Wiggins 305), but whether Yarrington's "Merry" narrative is some form of memorial reconstruction of Henslowe's play, or a separate play altogether, it would seem that both are based on Merry's crime. Indeed, it may be useful to borrow Barbara Hodgdon's term for the relationship between Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and the anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew*, as "representing different stages of an ongoing theatrical 'commodity,'" of which the exact relationship, chronology, and authorship is impossible to determine (Hodgdon 36). As a later stage of the ongoing theatrical "commodity" of Merry's crime, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* seems to contain extensive traces of an earlier lost play, yet has itself neither a stage history, nor a recorded relationship with a known author, company, or space. Indeed, it has been suggested that it was never staged, or is even unstageable (Hanabusa xii–xiii).

Two Lamentable Tragedies therefore presents unique opportunities for scholars interested in marginal genres, the possibilities for engaging with "lost" plays, and the role of performance practice as—and as a complement to—research, in the study of early modern drama, culture, and society. This article charts our explorations of these possibilities, a process that shared many of the concerns of Oliver Jones's work in Stratford discussed elsewhere in this special issue, but from a different perspective: Jones seeks to explore and reimagine a space, we, a text. We excerpted "The Tragedy of Merry" from the surviving text of *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, and, working with a company of professional actors and academics, staged our historical imagining of the play at University College London in March 2014.[1] A second production, using a new cast of amateur actors with almost no prior experience of early modern drama, was staged at The Walronds in Cullompton, Devon, in June 2015.[2] Building on the research

of Tiffany Stern, who shared her research with the London audience in an introductory talk prior to the performance, we used an "Original Practices" model of rehearsal and performance—including actors' parts, a limited rehearsal period, shared lighting, costume contemporary to the performance, and a "book-keeper" (see Stern, *Rehearsal* 52–122)—to interrogate how these methods illuminate genre, spatial dynamics and character development for both actors and audience. Using our historical imagining of this "lost" play as a case study, this article asks what staging a neglected play can teach us about the relationships between history and literature, tragedy and comedy, the domestic and the communal; charts how early modern rehearsal practices can assist and challenge actors in performing early modern texts; and explores the role of theatrical practice-as-research within, and beyond, the academy.

In engaging with each of these questions, we use the experiences of the actors, as expressed in interviews during the rehearsal process as well as after the performance, alongside audience responses gathered through post-performance questionnaires.[3] In the analysis of these responses, we do not attempt to map contemporary audience responses onto an imagined early modern audience—as Sarah Werner puts it, "if it can be difficult to know what today's audiences are doing, it is even harder to ascribe responses to past audiences" (166). Rather, we use contemporary audience responses, alongside actors' experiences, to explore how the play itself functions in performance.

Interdisciplinarity is key to our approach: in bringing together literary scholars, textual historians, theater historians, and theater practitioners, we aimed to explore how the intersections of disciplinary expertise and approaches could enable a richer understanding of the possibilities of staging neglected early modern plays. Richard Allen Cave argues that "research through such modes of practice engages with the art of theatre as a living process where theatre is experienced as having a vibrant existence beyond texts, documents, sketches, long views, building contracts and the like" (11). We use documentary evidence and literary analysis coupled with theatrical practice to explore how the "living process" of staging "Merry" illuminates both our process and the play itself.

"Original Practices" and Performance-as-Research

In excerpting and staging "The Tragedy of Merry," we aimed to produce an imaginative reconstruction in performance, using what are sometimes referred to as "Original Practices" (Dessen 45; Karim-Cooper

90–92).[4] Our primary concern was with the staging of the play, and what this might illuminate about its generic characteristics, spatial dynamics, and character relationships. We focused on the "original" rehearsal and performance practices that, as a non-professional company without the pressures and limitations of a working commercial theater, we were well-placed to recreate: a limited rehearsal period, cue-scripts (also known as actors' parts), a "book-keeper," an audience on three sides of the playing space, and shared natural light. As "The Tragedy of Merry" was set in the homes, shops, and taverns of contemporary London, our actors wore quotidian costumes that recognizably belonged to our own historical moment so that audience members, like their early modern counterparts, watched "actors dressed like themselves" (Escolme 132).

Some Original Practices were beyond the scope of our project; lacking a reconstructed playhouse, we were unable to recreate the upper stage required by the stage directions, as we explore further below. Yet there were advantages to the limitations of our university and semi-domestic venues. Cave observes that such situations can "reproduce to some measure the conditions obtaining with the unlocalised playing space that was the Renaissance stage," the lack of set enabling an exploration of "the power of spatial relations to extend the meanings present in the written text" (Cave 3). We likewise found that our simple venues in fact highlighted the spatial dynamics of the play.

There are further advantages to this model of selected Original Practices outside a playhouse venue. Criticism of reconstructed playhouses alleges that the focus upon the space diminishes the emphasis upon the body of the actor (Menzer 104–05). In our focus on how embodied action can illuminate the generic characteristics and spatial relationships of the play in the absence of a reconstructed playhouse, we aimed to offer neither a critique of nor an alternative to the performance-as-research at the Globe, but rather an adjunct to it, which focuses upon particular conditions of rehearsal and performance, while retaining the shared lighting conditions that are central to early modern dramaturgy. We were alert to the significance of "thinking spatially" in our theatrical close reading, something Eleanor Rycroft addresses elsewhere in this special issue, exploring space as just one of many performance conditions comprising the "theatrical matrix" that can be used to illuminate the playtext (Rycroft 256).

In using actors with some experience of cue-scripts, very limited rehearsal periods, and an absence of Stanislavskian approaches to character, we aimed to put into practice recent research into the key role of ac-

tors' parts (or "cue-scripts") in shaping individual performances (Palfrey and Stern; Stern, *Making* 46–123). In advance of the London rehearsal process, theater practitioner Philip Bird ran a two-hour workshop on cue-scripts, building on his work with Patrick Tucker and the Original Shakespeare Company (see Weingust 137–91). We then ran a second, "ensemble" workshop, where the actors experimented with cue-scripts and began to coalesce as a company. They received their parts—comprising only their own lines and short cues—thirteen days before the production, at the initial read-through; they then met individually with the "book-keeper" (rather than director) to discuss their character choices and work on their lines. A week later, we held a single "stage business" rehearsal, where we plotted the use of props, fights, and the closing jig, and a single dress rehearsal. Otherwise, the actors were left alone with their parts, developing their sense of "ownership" (Palfrey and Stern 32).

Some scholars have claimed that the limited rehearsal period and use of cue-scripts suggested by archival evidence is unlikely; discussions with actors have led to the argument that professional actors would find it necessary, for their own success and reputation, to rehearse extensively (if unofficially) and access the full script.[5] Our production challenged this claim, testing the success of the limited rehearsal period and cue-scripts in performance. Of course, it is impossible to recreate the experience of an early modern playing company, but we sought to mitigate this by using a play with a comparatively short running time (about an hour), by rehearsing and performing a single work (rather than a series of old and new plays in a repertory system), and, in the London production, using a mixture of academics and professional actors who had worked together previously, some of whom were already familiar with cue-scripts.

Actors commented variously that working with cue-scripts was "tricky," "tough," "great fun," "fascinating," and "absolutely terrifying." One of the most challenging aspects of working in this way was the "complete lack of context": one actor commented that "you often don't understand the lines until the dress rehearsal."[6] Several audience members commented on the sense of immediacy and realism produced as a result of the cue-script process, describing how they perceived "real reactions to the action," because the actors "don't know any more about it than we do." This "genuine reaction" was also something commented upon by all the Cullompton actors, for whom the experience of working with cue-scripts was entirely new. Our aim was to explore the consequences of both this lack of foreknowledge and context, and the isolated nature of the rehearsal process, on the actors' performances of intimate household relationships,

and on staging domestic space with minimal props and without any kind of "blocking."

The Cullompton actors in particular struggled with the Original Practices. Without exception, they described the preparation process as being completely different from their usual intensive and fully-directed rehearsal periods, which often last for many months. A palpable sense of insecurity surrounded the performance at The Walronds, as pre- and post-performance comments by the actors attest, deriving almost entirely from their lack of familiarity with the text and the intricacies of plot. The actors identified the lack of a collective sense of ownership of the production. Each took responsibility for her/his own character, but they did not feel confident in their own abilities to remember their lines or act upon their cues (some, indeed, carried their "parts" about their person and consulted them as necessary during the performance), and they devolved responsibility for the success of the production as a whole to the "book-keeper," whose prompts were frequently required. The actors also felt anxiety about the need to give the correct cue in order that the play could proceed, as none knew one another's parts. This situation they described as "completely the opposite" of their usual familiarity with the whole of a play and its staging, making it "pretty much impossible to step in when anything goes wrong, like I usually would."

Indeed, the difficulties caused by the unfamiliar rehearsal process resulted at Cullompton in a production that was, in the words of one participant, "a bit shambolic." While the audience and actors' responses show they enjoyed the Cullompton "Merry" enormously, the experience suggests the necessity for professional expertise in a company attempting this rehearsal method: although only some of the London cast had prior experience with cue-scripts, their professional training or familiarity with early modern dramatic texts proved essential in experimenting with unfamiliar rehearsal methods.

We also wanted to test the extent to which the play, in the form in which it has survived, is performable. One benefit of practice-as-research is the extent to which, as Rycroft puts it, "the need to find concrete performance solutions" can increase researchers' attention to aspects of the text that are "easily overlooked during reading" (Rycroft 257). Our own imaginative reconstruction suggests the extent to which the need to find practicable solutions for difficult aspects of staging can transform our readings of a play's theatrical and literary potential: in the case of "Merry," our staging illuminated both the "performability" of features previously considered unperformable, and the significance of the prescribed staging

to the tragic vision of the play. Chiaki Hanabusa argues that *Two Lamentable Tragedies* was never intended for performance, judging several staging requirements as "difficult to carry out," particularly "long, descriptive stage directions" which are elaborative and challenging enough to induce "doubts whether they could actually be performed as instructed" (Hanabusa xii–xiii). The unusual length of the stage directions might suggest either a memorial, or tablebook, reconstruction of "The Tragedy of Merry"'s staging, by a scribe with little theatrical experience himself, or an amateur or inexperienced dramatist.

Our performance of "Merry," however, demonstrates that the staging implied by the playtext is dramaturgically and theatrically effective. Indeed, the author's staging requirements exemplify, in spatial terms, many of the themes and anxieties of the play. Moreover, the audience response to our performance indicates that "Merry" was a successful piece of theater: 100% of over 100 respondents at the London performance indicated that they enjoyed the play, their reasons including: "well-acted," "compelling story," "sensational and entertaining," "strong plotting without digression," "brilliant acting," "succinct and elegant language," "well-paced," "witty," "quickly unfolding plot," "great range of characters," "entertaining mix of tragedy and comedy," "cracking plot," "great story," "acted with great verve," "liked the gore," "simple but effective plot," "clearly works as a satire while still making citizens heroic." The variety of the responses, selecting elements as diverse as the quality of acting, the language of the play, and the plot, suggests that "Merry" can be performed to good effect when detached from the other narrative in *Two Lamentable Tragedies*.

"Why shed you teares, this deed is but a playe": Laughter, Tears, and the Question of Genre

In using early modern rehearsal methods, we were anxious to avoid "directing" the play anachronistically; instead, we allowed the actors to make individual choices, without imposing any artificial coherence on the production. The specificity of the stage directions helped to make it relatively easy to stage, even with very little rehearsal, as the actors were always able to situate themselves in terms of the imagined spaces of the home and neighborhood. During the rehearsal period, the actor playing Master Beech and Constable commented that a potential pitfall of the cue-script model is that it can lead to "bell jar" acting: each actor feels "I've got to get my thing right, and I've got to get my moment in the limelight … at the expense of the storytelling." To some extent, this

came across in performance, as each actor, keen to remember lines and to present a performance that had been privately prepared rather than communally rehearsed, responded differently to the tone of the play, particularly in relation to genre, some fully exploiting what they perceived as their part's comic potential. Although "Merry" is a tragedy, it is a highly comic one: one of the most significant moments of the narrative, the discovery of the parts of the dismembered body, is given to two Watermen, the "clowns" of the play, who trip over the bag containing "a mans legges, and a head with manie wounds" (F4^{v}). In performance, the audience responded strongly to the comedy, laughing at the goriest and darkest of moments, which led the majority of the actors to exaggerate the comic elements further.

It is hard to assess the extent to which this response illuminates something about the hybrid genre of domestic tragedy, or is simply a thoroughly human response to an excessively macabre, unfamiliar piece of theater. This is further complicated by the fact that any contemporary performance, if one took place, would have been in close proximity, both spatially and temporally, to the original murder, which may have affected actor choices and audience responses in ways we were unable to address. Indeed, in staging a series of events that had recently occurred in the London of the 1590s, "Merry" represents an opportunity to consider the complex relationship between the "real" and "play" worlds Clare Wright analyses elsewhere in this special issue. The recent and local murder, spatially and temporally proximate, relegated by the narrator-figure Truth to the realm of the reported "truth" of news reproduced in pamphlets and ballads, is brought into the "here-and-now" of the performance event, as the re-enactment converts the audience into witnesses (Wright 196). Our audience responses cannot recover the specificity of a performance event that at once engaged audiences with, and estranged them from, their own local history, but in our practice-as-research experiment, we sought to explore the extent to which our imaginative reconstruction made us more alert to the dramaturgical potential of moments where the "play" and "real" worlds were brought into dialogue.

Some of our audience laughter might simply have been an anachronistic reaction to onstage violence which seems comical in its extremity today, but which was rooted in the local experiences of the original audience, and was a common feature of many Elizabethan tragedies (such as *Titus Andronicus* or *The Massacre at Paris*). Yet these features may also have elicited laughter in their original audiences. As Sarah Lewis observed in her review of the production,

> audience members found amusement in violent murder, laborious dismemberment, and ultimately, grisly execution. But that came as no surprise: as is so often the case in tragedy of the period, darkly comic moments worked to elicit laughter and horror in equal measure throughout this production. (162)

The laughter of contemporary audiences in response to tragedy is an issue that frequently resurfaces in academic reviews of contemporary productions of early modern drama, many of which combine tragedy and comedy in an "unsettling unity" (Price). Audience laughter comes in many different forms: for example, it can signify that something is funny, or that the audience finds something unsettling. In a historically reconstructed performance, it can suggest commonality with the past, or an awareness of historical difference (Caldwell 397–99). It demands ethical assessments, particularly when the laughter is prompted by violence or corruption, so that it becomes tempting to listen for whether laughter questions or reinforces a play's assumptions, with an inappropriate belly laugh or more thoughtful "hollow laughter" (Price). In our production, some audience members were startled by the seemingly indecorous laughter of others, suggesting in their questionnaires that it demonstrated a mistake either on the part of the production or on the part of the audience, as the tragic became inappropriately comic. Perhaps, then, this play invites such laughter, and such judgement; in their cue-script performances, many of the actors were picking up on this in their sensitivity to audience reactions. In the uneasy juxtaposition of the gory onstage action and the moralizing commentary of the narrator-figure, Truth, an ambivalent audience response seems to be written into the play itself.

Many plays feature onstage weeping, but, as Matthew Steggle observes, "remarkably few early modern plays set out an intention to make the audience weep"; the narrator in *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is one of only three surviving examples (93). Truth frequently predicts, dictates, and comments on imagined audience responses. When she first enters, she squabbles with the onstage personifications of Homicide and Avarice, and then addresses the audience directly: "Gentles, prepare your teare bedecked eyes" ($A3^{r}$); audience members are instructed as to an appropriate reaction to the ensuing tragedy. Later, as Merry dismembers Beech's corpse, Truth addresses "the sad spectators of this Acte" ($E2^{v}$). This is comparable to the much-discussed soliloquy of Marcus in the aftermath of Lavinia's rape in *Titus Andronicus*, as gruesome spectacle is juxtaposed with a lengthy soliloquy; yet here, this disjunction is developed still further through Truth's direct address to the audience:

> I see your sorrowes flowe up to the brim
> And overflowe your cheekes with brinish teares,
> But though this sight bring surfet to the eye,
> Delight your eares with pleasing harmonie,
> That eares may counterchecke your eyes, and say,
> Why shed you teares, this deede is but a playe (E2^{v}).

Truth's admission creates an aesthetic distance that upsets the straightforward relationship that has been established between the staged action and the tragic "true crime" the play dramatizes. Indeed, several of our respondents observed that this was a moment when the disjunction between Truth's commentary and the audience reaction was particularly strong; as audience members laughed at the dismemberment of the body, Truth suggested that they were weeping, and attempted to comfort them. Truth's commentary at once estranges the crime performed from its theatrical performance, and separates the theatrical response of the audience from the response projected onto it by the play itself, in the manner identified in Wright's essay; this interaction challenges a straightforward relationship between theatrical "illusion" and "devices" that disrupt this illusion, as both onstage fiction and theatrical reality, imagined audience and present audience, are foregrounded simultaneously (Wright 189–90).

Hanabusa suggests that in the onstage dismemberment "the author's magnitude of imagination slipped beyond theatricality" (Hanabusa xiii). Yet the text implies that the butchery takes place behind the "faggots," where the body is hidden (E2^{r}); with a concealed bowl of blood, prepared body parts, and an actor's sleight of hand, the body can be "dismembered" onstage without any complex stage business. Furthermore, Truth's accompanying soliloquy here creates a sophisticated stage effect, where audience members are invited to embrace the disjunction between onstage (pretended) action, Truth's commentary, and their own physical responses. In the uneasy juxtaposition of the gory onstage action and the moralising commentary of the narrator-figure, an ambivalent audience response seems to be invited by the play itself, and the hybrid genre of the play is highlighted.

In our production, all Truth's utterances were played as genuine and sincere, yet the audience responses complicated how this delivery was received, creating a sense of ironic distance. This was further challenged by the fact that in both our performances, the final scene, in which both Rachel and Merry are hanged, produced no laughter, only silence. Truth's epilogue, again suggesting weeping by remarking on the "scarce drie eyes" of the audience (K2^{v}), seemed to chime with their experience in a way

that framed earlier laughter as inappropriate or perverse. Many of the questionnaire responses suggested that the final tableau was one of the most genuinely tragic moments of the play.

Indeed, our audience responses highlight the complex interplay of generic features in a play that situates a traditionally "comic," non-elite character in a tragic dramatic structure, aiming to regulate the behavior of subjects rather than of rulers through his gory example: a striking hybridity of early modern generic theory. "Merry" also combines an emphasis on "truth" with aesthetic distancing devices, and couples a self-conscious desire to provoke tears through tragedy with comic stage business, features that were recognizable as generically "mixed" to a modern audience. One respondent commented that the "excellent" acting "played on the borderline between comic/ghoulish." Others noted their "inappropriate" reactions to the tragedy, and how the comedy "heightened the shock of the gruesome" elements of the play. The re-assembling of Beech's dismembered corpse by his neighbors was described by as one of the most amusing moments of the play, but it was also cited (in one case by the same audience member) as the most moving: laughter and tragedy were able to co-exist for the audience. The laughter may have been due in part to malfunctions with the stage properties—our cloth dummy's stuffing began to protrude from its clothing, drawing accidental attention to the material reality of the corpse as stage property—yet that audience members were able to engage simultaneously with this moment as tragic suggests that the dynamic between heightened staged action, remembered local "true crime," and moralizing commentary may continue to resonate for a contemporary audience.

"*Then being in the upper Ro[o]me* Merry *strickes him in the head*": Staging Domestic Space

In staging the murder, its concealment, and the apprehension of the criminal in a recognizable early modern house, "The Tragedy of Merry" offers the audience unprecedented access to the staged private spaces of a non-elite household. Like other domestic tragedies, such as *Arden of Faversham* or *A Warning for Fair Women*, the play is set in the threshold spaces and reception rooms of an early modern home (which in this case is also an ale-house)—hospitable spaces that are represented as open to neighbors and guests. However, "Merry" is unique in also staging a more private "upper room," where the murder, and the dismemberment of the body, takes place. The spaces and boundaries of the home form a pattern for the narratives of murder, concealment and detection, and thus construct the play's trajectory.

Like *Arden* or *A Warning*, "Merry" stages a violent and disruptive crime, while compelling the audience's sympathy for the criminals, but it is unusual in also staging, in great detail, the efforts of the neighbors to solve the crime. We wanted to gauge the audience's response to this, so the questionnaire asked, among other questions: "Did you empathise more with Merry and Rachel's plight, or with the neighbourhood detectives who tried to discover them?" Responses varied: one audience member empathised more with Rachel and Merry, as "convincing" characters, than with the "faceless" law; another responded with: "Merry and Rachel—but why??!" Other audience members responded "neither," or empathized more with the neighbors, particularly Beech's landlord, Loney, who led the detective process.

In exploring the spatial dynamics of the play, utilizing the long and descriptive stage directions, we arrived at some insights that might explain these split audience sympathies. The murder scene is staged on two levels. Our venue lacked this feature, so we created a horizontal (rather than vertical) split stage effect. Modern audiences are familiar with "split screen" techniques from film and television, and thus this convention can be used productively in staging early modern drama in spaces that lack the necessary stage.[7] It was also used, to good effect, in Katie Mitchell's 2011 production of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* at the National Theatre, where the simultaneous staging of the two homes reinforced the extent to which disrupted household hierarchies and perverted household bonds are central to the play's domestic tragedy.

We aimed to use this method to replicate the effectiveness of the upper/lower stage split, and in so doing, demonstrated that this is an integral element of "Merry"'s tragedy. Jones's Guildhall experiment explored "how hierarchy might be displayed spatially, how actors moved through the space, and how they interacted amongst themselves and with the audience" (Jones 278); in our own staging, we were likewise interested in how the spatial hierarchy and spatial dynamics of the actors could reflect the social hierarchy and dynamics of the characters, but this was further complicated by the extent to which this mapped onto the spatial hierarchy of the domestic world of the play, where master-servant relationships, host-guest relationships, and gender dynamics patterned the use of "upstairs" and "downstairs" spaces. In some ways, the lack of a reconstructed playhouse or existing early modern space with some form of "upper stage" was a drawback, as we were unable to test the specifics of this configuration, yet, in other ways, it was an advantage: without the audience automatically "reading" this hierarchy through the onstage ar-

chitecture, our actors had to pay particular attention both to establishing the imagined spaces of the play, and to developing the spatial relationships between characters, and between the actors and the audience. This, in turn, forced us to engage still further with these dynamics and hierarchies in our readings of the play.

The two levels of staging heighten the dramatic tension, and are instrumental in splitting audience sympathy. Merry invites Beech upstairs with the words "Goe up those staires, your friends do stay above"; in the empty "upper room," he then approaches Beech from behind, and kills him: "*Then being in the upper Ro[o]me* Merry *strickes him in the head fifteene times*" (B4^{r}). After committing the murder, Merry, now stained with blood, plots the death of Beech's manservant, who knows his master's whereabouts, before attempting to clean himself. He then looks through Beech's purse, as his sister Rachel and manservant Harry Williams enter below. Both saw an unknown man go up the stairs with Merry, and Williams suggests that Rachel carry up a candle for her brother and his guest. Rachel's stage direction reads "*Exit up*" (B4^{r}); as she joins her brother on the upper stage, she sees the bloodstains, and understands that a murder has taken place. Williams, waiting below, hears Rachel cry out; when she joins him below, he questions her:

> *Williams*: What was the matter that you cried so lowde?
> *Rachell*: I must not tell you, but we are undone:
> *Williams*: You must not tell me, but we are undone,
> Ile know the cause wherefore we are undone. *Exit up.*
> *Rachel*: Oh would the thing were but to do againe,
> The thought therefore doth rent my hart in twaine.
> *She goes up. Williams to Merry above.*
> *Williams*: Oh maister, maister, what have you done? (B4^{v})

The audience can see the murder; the members of Merry's household cannot, yet by watching the movements of their master and his guests, and hearing one another's cries, they become aware of, and are implicated in, the crime. The split staging thus exemplifies the ways in which the closeknit household has been divided by Merry's crime, and demonstrates both Rachel's torn loyalties, and the division between Williams and his master that will result in Williams's betrayal.

The way the split staging informs the plot also highlights the problematic nature of "privacy" in early modern England, demonstrating the extent to which Merry believes the "upper room" of his home to be a space where he will escape detection. He underestimates the extent to which

the other members in his household are at once spatially proximate, and bound up in his actions. The attentive behavior of his sister and manservant render them unwitting detectives. Merry fails to anticipate that his manservant's attentive loyalty will become loyalty to the state, and he is unprepared for the extent to which his home will become vulnerable to the curiosity and suspicion of his neighbors, curiosity that was, as Lena Cowen Orlin observes, "authorized—indeed, mandated—as a condition of order' in the period (10). Merry, like Alice Arden in the aftermath of her husband's murder, mistakenly believes that the walls of his home will protect him from the curiosity—and thus from the detection—of the outside world. As Catherine Richardson argues,

> The façade of the house mediates between the domestic and the communal ... Merry considers physical distance from the street to be synonymous with social invisibility and productive of an inviolable space which can remain unseen. The play's moral project is quite explicitly a refutation of this interpretation. (Richardson 137)

Indeed, the play renders this refutation literal. In the immediate aftermath of the murder, there is a knocking at the door, which reminds Merry and Rachel of the proximity of neighbors who might discover the crime. In *Arden*, knocking at the door signals that the neighbors have arrived, with the mayor, to report that they have discovered Arden's body, and to apprehend Alice for her husband's murder. In "Merry," this trope is used to comic effect; Rachel goes down to answer the door, but discovers that it is only a maid, who has come to buy a penny loaf, in complete ignorance of the crime.

"Merry"'s playwright is apparently experimenting with the features of this newly-popular genre of domestic tragedy. As one of a spate of "true crime" plays at the Rose in the early 1600s, we can imagine that "Merry" was knowingly manipulating audience expectations, and that audiences would have recognized the play's comic departure from the conventions of an earlier (and recently reprinted) domestic tragedy. Later in the play, in a direct reversal, the stage space becomes the street outside Merry's house, and the stage door where Rachel, we may assume, greeted the maid, becomes the door that leads to Merry's house—it is the same door, but we are on the other side:

> *Third Neighbour*: Whose house is this?
> *Loney*: An honest civill mans, cald Master Merry,
> Who I dare be sworne, would never do so great a murther. (G3^{r-v})

The effect of this reversal upon the audience's relationship with the world of the play and the characters that inhabit it is comparable with Wright's observations about ontologies of play (200–02). A similar tactic is employed in *Arden*, when Arden's servant, Michael, betrays him to his murderers: Arden is staying in his friend Franklin's London residence, and Michael offers to leave the doors of the house unlocked at night, but he later becomes afraid, and his master locks the door. In the following scene, the audience then finds itself on the other side of that door, with the frustrated murderers (Whipday, "'Marrow-prying neighbours'" 104–05). This spatial shift is in the same direction as in *Merry*, but with the opposite implication. In *Arden*, we leave the law-abiding home (which hides a traitor) to join the murderers that attempt to penetrate it. Conversely, in *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, we leave the home that hides the murderer to join the neighbors that seek him.

On this occasion, the neighbors are unsuccessful. However, Merry has not escaped justice. His manservant, Williams, is uneasy in his conscience, and is shortly to betray him to a friend. When this takes place, Merry and Rachel are apprehended by a constable, in company with the two watermen who discovered the body. Yet unlike in *Arden of Faversham*, the audience does not join the criminals as they await the knock that signals their apprehension. Rather, the audience waits on the other side of the door, as the stage door becomes the front door to Merry's home, and we observe the constable who knocks upon it:

> *Constable*: This is the house, come let us knocke at dore,
> I see a light they are not all in bed:
> *Knockes, Rachell comes down.*
> How now faire maide, is your brother up.
> *Rachel*: He's not within sir, would you speake with him?
> *Constable*: You doe but jest, I know he is within,
> And I must needes go uppe and speake with him. (I1^{v}).

"Merry" is unusual in situating the audience with the apprehending constable on the outside of the home, as well as staging the murder scenes that take place within it. A similar technique was used a decade later, to comic effect, by Jonson in act five of *The Alchemist*, when after four acts sequestered within the house with the criminals and their gulls, the audience suddenly find themselves outside it, as Face's master Jeremy returns home, and learns from his neighbors (and from the knocking of frequent visitors) some of what has gone on in his absence.

Conclusion

Two Lamentable Tragedies stages a nightmare of Elizabethan society, as one neighbor secretly murders another in the private spaces of his home, and his household becomes complicit in concealing the crime. Yet it also represents the inverse of this: a fantasy of a society in which the neighborhood wittingly and unwittingly works as one unit to solve the crime. Cowley, a friend of Harry Williams, becomes aware of the local concerns, thanks to the efforts of the neighborhood detectives, and thus is able to probe Harry, discover his secret, and prompt his confession. The curiosity of the local residents ensures that the crime is discovered, but does not discover the criminal. It is only when the strength of neighborhood ties, coupled with Harry's uneasy conscience, is able to overcome private household loyalty, that the murderer can be apprehended and brought to justice. The play stages the ways in which the criminal act of murder renders the home permeable and undoes the privacy of its inhabitants. Our productions, in making possible a theatrical close reading of the play, enabled us to explore how the embodied action of the play within and without the domestic sphere encapsulates the play's concerns. The representation of violent crime in *Merry* justifies opening up the private spaces of the home and the illicit acts that take within those spaces to the gaze of the watching audience.

Our theatrical imagining of "The Tragedy of Merry," as an excerpt from a surviving text which shares a plot with a lost play, a pamphlet, and a number of ballads, also enabled us to experiment with the possibilities of engaging with practice-as-research in the study of lost plays, and the significance of those "lost plays" in our readings of the early modern "theatrical marketplace" (Knutson and McInnis, "*The Lost Plays Database*: A Wiki" 46). As a genre of which relatively few examples survive, which is intimately related to, and in some ways shares the fate of, its cheap and ephemeral sources, domestic tragedy has suffered relative neglect, particularly in terms of practice-as-research experiments which, understandably, tend to focus on surviving playtexts (often with named, canonical authors). Our imaginative reconstruction has suggested that a play belonging to a neglected genre, with few "literary" features, lost source materials, a lack of performance contexts, and a ghostly "twin" with performance contexts but no text, can be an effective case study for a practice-as-research experiment. Our productions engaged explicitly with these contexts: actors performed surviving ballads narrating domestic murder as audience members entered the playing space, alerting the audi-

ence to the extent to which attending early modern plays intersected with the consumption of other kinds of cheap print and public performance. In demonstrating the extent to which a theatrical close reading of "Merry" can illuminate the spatial and generic features of the play, our production suggests the necessity for further exploration of the possibilities for using selective early modern rehearsal and performance conditions outside the reconstructed playhouses in the analysis of rarely-staged plays; and the potential for engaging with "lostness" in using practice-as-research as an approach to early modern drama.

Notes

[1]This production was only possible thanks to the support of the Malone Society, UCL Centre for Early Modern Exchanges, UCL Joint Faculty Institute of Graduate Studies, the University of Exeter, the AHRC International Placement Scheme, and the Huntington Library. An archival recording of the production is available online (see "Performance"). See also *Staging Two Lamentable Tragedies.*

[2]The Walronds, Cullompton, Devon, is a recently-restored domestic residence, built in 1605; our performance was staged in the oak-panelled hall (see *The Walronds, Cullompton*). We are very grateful to the Trustees for allowing us to use the space.

[3]This methodology involves a number of problems (see Purcell 17). We followed Stephen Purcell's model, structuring questions that allowed for unexpected responses and collecting feedback immediately after the performance.

[4]For counter-arguments, see Lopez and Mazer.

[5]These discussions took place at the "Practice-as-Research" workshop (organized by Andy Kesson and Stephen Purcell) at the Shakespeare Association of America Annual Meeting in St Louis, 2014. See also Meagher, esp. 21–23; and Tribble.

[6]For actor interviews, see Whipday, "The Malone Society Blog"; and also "*Two Lamentable Tragedies*: Actor Discussion."

[7]This was observed by Martin Wiggins during a "Performance Workshop" at the "Out of the Shadow of Shakespeare" conference, held at the University of Loughborough, 2012.

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