

Adrian Blamires

The Inconvenience of Stage Posts: Green World Locales at the Rose Theatre

A long-running debate surrounds the staging of ‘green worlds’ in early modern drama, with some commentators envisioning a bare stage while others believe that performances utilized multiple properties. One area of contention concerns the extent to which theatres used stage posts to represent trees. This article considers four plays (by Shakespeare, Munday, and Porter) performed at the Rose Theatre in the period 1594–8 and makes a case for the employment of various properties in forest scenes. Reference to the playhouse’s architecture after it was renovated in 1592, in particular the location of its stage posts, underpins the argument.

Forest or pastoral scenes in Renaissance drama have a singular hold on theatrical and scholarly imaginations. The stage historian Alan Dessen observes that ‘the most discussed locale in Shakespeare’s plays is the forest or country that often serves as a “green world” contrast to a court or city’.¹ Northrop Frye coined the ‘green world’ epithet for plays that enact a ritual theme: ‘the triumph of life and love over the waste land’ or ‘the victory of summer over winter’.² Bids for romantic or political freedom are made in the face of tyranny; lovers and renegades escape into woodland, pasture, or heath, though not all such scenarios end in ‘triumph’ or ‘victory’ for the protagonists. In *The Shakespearean Forest*, Anne Barton notes that the issue of what the original spectators saw remains ‘fiercely debated’.³ The main contention, as outlined in Barton’s second chapter ‘Staging the Forest’, is whether the public stage materially embodied the trees and other green properties mentioned in early modern playscripts. No one doubts that the theatre companies of the era had large tree properties, but did they employ these props for brief and isolated special effects — in symbolic dumb shows, for instance — on an otherwise bare stage, or utilize them for extended sequences, perhaps alongside other props, in a decorative or even naturalistic greening of the stage? The debate,

Adrian Blamires (abla@henleycol.ac.uk) completed his PhD in early modern drama at the University of Reading and currently works at Henley College.

which reflects both age-old arguments over the relative importance of spectacle in theatre and more recent semiotic enquiries into 'iconic identity',⁴ has significant bearing on how we produce and interpret early modern drama.

Dessen and Barton stand in opposite camps. Dessen favours a minimalist approach: staging the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, say, 'requires not a single tree, bush, or blade of grass'.⁵ Not for him the pictorial tradition exemplified by a 1907 production with its 'collection of moss-grown logs, two thousand pots of fern, large clumps of bamboo, and leaves by the cartload from the previous autumn'.⁶ While Dessen accepts that early modern theatre companies created property trees for fleeting spectacles such as dumb-shows, he maintains that this would not have been the case for 'normal forest or wood scenes that are part of the flow of the play'.⁷ He argues rather that woodland garb is the only tangible requirement for conjuring a forest on an open stage; that decking the stage with superfluous greenery would interrupt the dramatic flow; and that stage posts — a specific focus of this essay — can serve as trees to climb or hide behind.⁸ In Dessen's view, deictic references to 'this tree' or 'this bank' usually require only the 'actor's gesture [working] in concert with the spectator's imagination'.⁹ In other words, the forest materializes solely within the mind, in much the same way that audiences imagine rivers or seascapes without recourse to onstage water features.¹⁰ This argument gives primacy in scene setting to the spoken word, to poetic evocation; indeed, some critics feel scenic productions of Shakespeare in particular are 'continuously at odds with themselves',¹¹ with the props and backdrops working against the playwright's scrupulous and detailed verbal scene painting. For Dessen, overly literal or naturalistic staging is 'divorced from the metaphoric or imaginative potential of the Elizabethan open stage'.¹² Similar thinking lay behind the open stage movement, spearheaded by director Tyrone Guthrie and designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch, whose swift, uncluttered productions of Shakespeare in Stratford, Ontario, in the 1950s 'were staged on an undecorated, purely functional platform',¹³ and whose 'aesthetic of austere sets surging with activity' proved highly influential in 'opening up plays to the audience's imagination'.¹⁴

Barton, however, challenges the assumptions of 'modern, minimalist theatre';¹⁵ she and other proponents of scenic staging point to evidence that early modern productions used multiple props for forest scenes. A wide variety of elaborately crafted trees were made for one-off court entertainments and street pageants throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries;¹⁶ the accounts of the revels at court record payments for the supply of various tree properties, both real and artificial, including timber and holly 'for the forest', paper for leaves, and canvas

for hollow tree trunks;¹⁷ the forest based plays of the aristocratic amateur dramatist William Percy required ‘the stage well deckt with greene boughs’,¹⁸ and such properties as a ‘Hollowe Oake’, a ‘Fourme of Turves’, and a ‘Greene Bank’;¹⁹ and, of greatest significance to the professional stage, Philip Henslowe’s inventory informs us that the Admiral’s Men in the 1590s utilized moss banks and various property trees — he specifically lists a bay tree, a tree of golden apples, and Tantalus’s tree.²⁰ The tree of golden apples may have appeared as a tempting tree of Vice — ‘a fair tree of Gold with apples on it’ (1.3.0 sd)²¹ — in Thomas Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus* (1599);²² if so, it must have been a substantial property since Fortunatus’s son Andelocia climbs it and stands ‘fishing with his girdle’ for the ‘Apple that growes highest’ (4.1.75–85). The apple, sweet but with a bitter aftertaste, turns Andelocia into a miserable beast with horns, a state from which he is redeemed by eating from a more humble tree of Virtue ‘with green and withered leaves mingled together, and little fruit on it’ (1.3.0 sd), the bitter fruit of which soon turns ambrosial. Such evidence accords with the idea of Renaissance drama being, as Barton puts it, ‘wedded ... to visual spectacle, and the emblematic embodiment of ideas’.²³

In semiotic terms Barton’s vision of green world locales has a higher degree of iconicity than Dessen’s, property trees being more analogous than stage posts to real trees.²⁴ The use of posts for trees, a solution commonly proposed by open stage advocates,²⁵ is a particular area of scepticism for Barton. According to Ernest Rhodes, in his work on stage practices at the Rose Theatre, ‘the suggestion is strong that posts and columns of the stage may have represented trees’.²⁶ Dessen asserts that in most cases where plays direct someone to climb a tree, the action would have been ‘readily accomplished by means of a scaling of a stage post’; introducing a property tree for ‘minimal gain’ would be counterproductive, disrupting the flow of the play.²⁷ Vin Nardizzi even presents a stage post as an actor of sorts, standing in for Herne’s Oak in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: ‘The stage post performs here a ghostly version of its past status as a living tree’ — a tricky role, perhaps, if the pillars were painted to look like marble as at the Swan Playhouse.²⁸ Discussing *Merry Wives*, Barton expresses dissatisfaction with the idea that a stage post would have sufficed for Herne’s Oak, and with minimalist productions that have the Windsor citizens tripping around an imaginary tree; she argues instead for a ‘substantial property tree ... probably carried on specially for Act 5’.²⁹ Her case rests on practical as well as aesthetic grounds: ‘Nor does an inconveniently off-centre stage post make sense as focus for the play’s long and crowded final section.’³⁰

I agree with Barton on the likely materiality of Herne's Oak, despite finding many arguments put forward by Dessen and others in favour of an open stage compelling. Writing in 1664, the Restoration dramatist Richard Flecknoe (ca 1600–78) drew a distinction 'betwixt our Theatres and those of former times', the latter being 'but plain and simple, with no other Scenes, nor Decorations of the Stage, but onely old Tapestry, and the Stage strew'd with Rushes ... whereas ours now for cost and ornament are arriv'd to the heighth of Magnificence'.³¹ Flecknoe's first play had been performed nearly thirty years previously, so he wrote with experience of stagecraft in both the Caroline and Restoration eras. A glance at Henslowe's property list, which includes a rock, a hell mouth, and three tombs as well as trees and moss banks, reveals that Flecknoe somewhat exaggerated the scenographic minimalism of 'former times', but I see no reason to doubt his general point. Public theatre companies of the Elizabethan era had a 'drastic rate of turnover ... [staging] a different play for regular playgoers every afternoon',³² and we encounter neutral, non-localized scenes everywhere. With frequent changes of location in most plays, costumes and portable properties were often sufficient for scene-setting.³³ Pockets of greater iconic detail exist, but these tend to appear as part of upstage 'discoveries' of, for example, tombs, studies, and bedchambers rather than in the largely undifferentiated main acting space.³⁴ As M.C. Bradbrook remarks, 'The chief characteristic of the Elizabethan stage was its neutrality and its corresponding virtue, flexibility'.³⁵ But for all that I broadly agree with many open stage theories, I incline towards Barton's view when it comes to rural locales — and indeed towards Bradbrook's view when she observes of orchard scenes that they 'must have been more realistic than most', involving the use of 'solid and practicable trees'.³⁶ In what follows, I pick up on Barton's notion of 'inconveniently off-centre' stage posts while focusing on four plays performed by the Admiral's Men at the Rose Theatre in the mid-1590s in the hope of gaining further purchase on the matter of green world scenography.

Rhodes's work on the Rose, mentioned above, was published before an excavation in 1989 brought various key architectural features to light. We learned that the original Rose Theatre of 1587 lacked a permanent cover for the stage and that it had a raked yard. A drop of nearly half a metre to the stage might suggest a concern over sightlines for those standing at the back of the yard.³⁷ Alterations to the playhouse in 1592 raised the yard and made it more hard-wearing; it was also given a less pronounced rake, perhaps due to drainage problems; significant erosion had occurred close to the stage. The height of the Rose stage is unknown, but the Red Lion contract of 1567 specifies 5 feet (1.52 metres), which may have been standard given average heights of 5 feet, 7 inches (1.71 metres) for men and

5 feet, 2 inches (1.59 metres) for women in the era.³⁸ Taller than average people at the front would clearly obscure the view of those behind them for any action that required actors to sit or lie down at stage level. A shallower rake would also compromise the view of such action. Perhaps the moss banks of Henslowe's inventory were created not just for rural verisimilitude but also to raise the action and thus improve sightlines. I mention this possibility as I address the use of moss banks later when considering how a scene may have used a range of green world properties in conjunction; the primary feature I am concerned with, however, is the stage posts. A cover (or heavens) was added to the Phase II Rose in 1592, and one of the surprise archaeological discoveries was that the supporting pillars were placed at the front of stage, unlike the midstage columns at the Swan Theatre in the famous de Witt-van Buchell sketch.³⁹ Andrew Gurr describes them as 'so close to the "front" line of the stage platform that they would have left little if any room for the players to walk round them or hide behind them'.⁴⁰ The Rose's stage had tapered sides, with the posts located in the angles. This decidedly off-centre positioning becomes significant when we probe the dramaturgical requirements of certain green world scenes performed at the Rose in the period 1594–8.

George Peele and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, staged at the modified Rose Theatre in early 1594,⁴¹ contains an extended forest sequence in act 2. This Shakespeare-penned episode offers a green world that is far from escapist,⁴² as it contains the rape and mutilation of Lavinia and the murder of her husband, Bassianus, whose body is flung into a 'loathsome pit' (2.3.193).⁴³ Two of Lavinia's brothers, Martius and Quintus, are subsequently ensnared in the pit in uncanny fashion and framed for murder. Most commentators agree that a trap would have functioned as the pit,⁴⁴ but we find less of a consensus over other scenographic elements. The script refers to 'rude-growing briars' around the mouth of the pit, and further clues are provided when, as part of the plot against the Andronici, Aaron the Moor places a bag of gold 'Among the nettles at the elder tree / Which overshades the mouth of that same pit' (2.3.199, 272–3). Eugene Waith suggests in his Oxford edition that an elder tree would have been set near the pit with nettles at its base, that loose branches would have covered the trap, and that the bay tree and moss banks of Henslowe's inventory may have furnished the scene more generally.⁴⁵ Opposing this, Dessen makes a case for an unadorned, neutral stage, arguing that Tamora's antithetical descriptions of the locale — at once a paradisaical trysting-place and a 'barren detested vale' (2.3.93) — mean that the audience's imagination should not be restricted with one specific design.⁴⁶ Some editors of the play take a similar line, with Jonathan Bate and Alan Hughes emphasizing, in their Arden and Cambridge editions respectively, the power of the word

in summoning the forest.⁴⁷ Both suggest that a property tree is unnecessary as Aaron could hide the bag of gold beside a stage pillar instead.

But would utilizing a pillar have been an option here, given the front-of-stage location at the Rose? It strikes me as unlikely that a bag of gold, however fictional its contents, would have been left within easy reach of curious or attention-seeking playgoers. Conscious of a need to hide the bag somewhere, Martin Wiggins speculates about 'a small aperture in the stage' for burying the gold, but this seems a less satisfactory solution than simply placing some foliage around the trap, and indeed Wiggins includes 'briars or other foliage' in his list of properties for *Titus Andronicus*.⁴⁸ He does not include a tree, however.⁴⁹ But if the briars and nettles have a tangible presence, we might expect the same of the elder tree since spectators may have found a combination of visible and invisible points of reference in such proximity jarring. While playgoers would frequently have seen some things but not others on the early modern stage — Shakespeare famously asks them to employ their 'imaginary forces' (Prologue.18) to flesh out the battle scenes in *Henry V* — demonstrative moments that draw the audience's attention to specific objects tend to have high levels of iconicity and symbolic resonance. Scenes involving the trap have an affinity in this respect to the discovery scenes mentioned above: consider, for example, *Hamlet's* gravedigger scene (5.1) with its skulls, coffin, and strewn flowers, or the concentrated use of props in the cauldron scene in *Macbeth* (4.1). The bag of gold, the blood-stained foliage, and the elder tree of *Titus Andronicus* seem to me equally vital as tangible elements of the *mise en scène*. The location of the trap itself is also of consequence for the staging here. If (as seems probable) the trap had a central position, and the elder tree was supposed to overhang it, a pillar could hardly have concealed the bag of gold: even on the playhouse's relatively small acting space an actor would have had to walk away from the designated hiding-place to plant or retrieve the bag.⁵⁰ The moment of retrieval is crucial as Aaron must find the gold 'among the nettles' in an almost immediate response to Saturninus's line 'This is the pit and this the elder tree' (2.3.277). The double use of this as a demonstrative pronoun suggests an equivalent proximality: both the pit and the tree are directly at hand. As Saturninus appears to stand by the pit throughout this exchange — he uses the proximal adverb 'here' at four points to refer to the pit or the murdered corpse it contains (2.3.246, 263, 279, 282) — then employing a front-of-stage pillar as the elder tree would presumably have required a distal deictic expression such as that or there.

I am inclined, then, to agree with Waith that the audience would have seen a material embodiment of what is described, with a property tree placed behind a centre-stage trap to avoid compromising sightlines, its branches overshadowing

the fatal pit. None of this is to deny the importance of Shakespeare's verse: the descriptions of the pit as an 'unhallowed and blood-stained hole', a 'fell devouring receptacle', and a 'swallowing womb' generate much of the scene's chthonic sexual horror (2.3.210, 235, 239). But the emblematic properties — plants that scratch and sting, a tree with diabolical associations (since, according to legend, Judas hung himself in an elder)⁵¹ — would, I suggest, have worked in conjunction with Shakespeare's imagery to create the sinister glade while offering the dramaturgical advantages noted above. For reasons both pragmatic and symbolic, the use of forest stage-properties in act 2 of *Titus Andronicus* seems likely — far more so, in my view, than a bare stage production with one of the Rose Theatre's inconveniently positioned stage posts serving as a tree.

A couple of Anthony Munday's plays also raise issues of where to conceal props on an open stage and of how front-of-stage pillars might have been employed. His enormously popular *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon*,⁵² produced at the Rose in 1598, seems at first to bear out Dessen's point that costumes alone could suggest a green world locale. The first appearance of the outlaws in Sherwood Forest sees them dressed in green, carrying bows and arrows, and blowing on hunting horns. When Robin Hood offers a new home to Maid Marian, his description of the forest as a palatial abode might also support Dessen's idea of a locale conjured solely in the mind's eye:

For Arras hangings, and rich Tapestry
 We have sweete natures best imbrothery [embroidery] ...
 For what in wealthe we want, we have in flowers,
 And what wee loose in halles, we finde in bowers.⁵³

No scenic props are required here. Yet we next see Robin and Marian together in their 'bower' (F4v): 'Curtaines open: *Robin Hoode* sleepes on a greene banke, and *Marian* strewing flowers on him' (F3v). This near magical discovery (Marian's father has just expressed a wish to find her before he goes into exile) was probably situated upstage centre in what Tim Fitzpatrick terms the 'concealment space', an enclosure created by hanging curtains slightly forward from the tiring-house wall.⁵⁴ Having green curtains might have enhanced this effect as green was a signal and phenomenologically resonant colour in the hangings and tapestries of the Renaissance stage, according to Bruce R. Smith.⁵⁵ The scene must have employed one of Henslowe's moss banks for the discovery not only to help with sightlines but also to suggest the romantic intimacy of the green world idyll.⁵⁶ The setting seems at first to imply a post-coital discovery, though dialogue soon informs us that the chaste lovers have declined to consummate their marriage

until King Richard's return (thus keeping Marian as both maid and wife in the classic liminal state of the romance heroine). Further green world props seem required for the final forest-based stretch of the play. One suicidal character finds a tree with a suitably 'winter-bitten' and 'withered' bough (I4r-v) on which to fasten a halter. Wiggins proposes that a stage post with a projection over which to sling the rope could stand for the tree here.⁵⁷ A front-of-stage post might suffice in this instance, but since the pillars at the Rose were probably slender things, painted at no little expense, the company would not be likely to blithely nail appendages to them.⁵⁸ Munday's script also mentions a bush beneath which Friar Tuck conceals a sword and buckler: 'For in this bush here lyeth mine' (K3r). As with the bag of gold in *Titus*, the props need to be hidden somewhere, and using an actual bush culled from the natural green world that surrounded the Bankside theatres would be the simplest solution.⁵⁹ But once we posit this, how likely is it that one isolated bush would signify Sherwood Forest on an otherwise bare stage? The action remains near the lovers' bower, presumably represented by the continued presence of a moss bank. With these green world props in place, including a property tree as a gallows — again perhaps an elder since the suicidal character compares himself to Judas (I4v) — seems a strong possibility. A pillar with an awkwardly attached 'withered bough' is, for me, out of the picture.

Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* offers more evidence of a willingness to employ arboreal properties at the Rose — if, that is, we accept the identification of this play with *The Wise Man of West Chester*, the title given in Henslowe's diary to a hugely popular Admiral's Men play first staged in 1594.⁶⁰ According to Dessen, no tree property 'is signalled in the playhouse book of *John a Kent*',⁶¹ but in fact a stage direction in act 3, set on a green before a castle, calls for a concealed character to enter 'out of a tree, if possible it may be'.⁶² The qualifying phrase must give us pause. Does it reflect the playwright's uncertainty over how much he can reasonably ask for or ignorance over what was and was not possible — relating perhaps to the sturdiness of the tree property — or awareness that the play might require adaptations when taken on tour? Whatever it signifies, the phrase raises a doubt about whether the play when performed at the Rose would have utilized a tree property. This, however, is not the play's only reference to a tree. In act 4, as a party makes its way to Chester, a chestnut tree serves first as a meeting-place, then as a site of magic: Shrimp, a Puck-like figure, leads a pair of spellbound characters on a merry dance 'circkling it and never getting thence' until they collapse and are seemingly ensnared by the 'accursed tree' itself (1395, 1420). Dessen argues that introducing a property tree here would interrupt the flow of the play and implies that the scene would instead have used a stage post.⁶³ But when we consider the

front-of-stage location of the pillars at the Rose, clearly the characters could not have danced around one of them. Act 4 required a property tree unless the whole action is to be played as a mime; I suggest that the castle-green tree of act 3 would also have had a material presence at the Phase II Rose, and that, for the sake of efficiency, the property would have remained onstage for act 4, doubling as the enchanted forest tree.⁶⁴

My final example of green world stagecraft at the Rose comes from Henry Porter's superb farce *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, which scholars usually consider to have been a popular success for the Admiral's Men ca 1598, despite incomplete and ambiguous records in Henslowe's diary.⁶⁵ An eloping pair of lovers plans to meet at the 'Cunny borough' — the coney or rabbit burrow — at night. Their elopement prompts a rural escapade, full of mistakes and confusions, described by Marianne Brish Evelt as, excepting the middle acts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'the longest, fullest and funniest' of the era's nocturnal sequences.⁶⁶ Wiggins suggests that stage posts were 'probably used to represent trees' in the play,⁶⁷ and Porter certainly includes a metatheatrical joke when a clown bumps into a post in the dark: 'A plague on this poast, I would the Carpenter had bin hangd that set it up so'.⁶⁸ But I am not convinced that the posts would have served elsewhere in the sequence. The stretch of high farce begins with a soliloquy delivered by the comic heroine Mall Barnes at the 'Cunny borough':

Heere is the place where *Phillip* bad me stay
Till *Francis* came, but wherefore did my brother
Appoint it heere? why in the Cunny borough?
He had some meaning in't I warrant yee,
Well heere Ile set me downe under this tree,
And think upon the matter all alone. (1923–9)

Taking a seat beneath a tree, Mall goes on to muse upon 'what a sweete meate a Cunny is' and 'what pritty things these Cunnys are / How finely they do feed till they be fat' — with 'fat' here meaning pregnant (1930–2).⁶⁹ The sexual metaphors pile up as she considers, mock-fearful, the trapping of rabbits:

For harmfull men many a haye do set:
And laugh to see them tumble in the net,
And they put ferrets in the holes, fie, fie,
And they go up and downe where conneies lie. (1937–40)

She finally recalls her trothplight husband, Frank: 'what will he say? Looke boy, there lies a conney in my way' (1947–8). Any apprehension about being an

unprotected young woman out in the open at night gives way to carnal anticipation. The actor's gestures working in tandem with eroticized scenic properties — a moss bank and a property tree — may have accentuated the suggestive comedy here.

I will try to explain how this might have worked. With Mall delivering her soliloquy from a seated position, a bank would serve both to represent the rabbit warren and raise the speaker's position. Later in the play Mall's mother, Mistress Barnes, declares 'Ile set my torch upon this hill' (2681), which further suggests the presence of a bank. The scene could have employed both moss banks owned by the Admiral's Men simultaneously to create, with the addition of some bushes perhaps, a rural landscape of sorts; one reason for possessing two banks may have been to furnish 'green world' locales in a broadly illusionistic fashion. The banks and other props could have aided the comedic stumbling and fumbling of characters through hedges and ditches, 'darkling up and down' and 'led a darke daunce in the night' (1894, 1897). And what of the tree Mall mentions? Having sat beneath it, she ducks behind it at the end of her soliloquy on the arrival of her angry mother: 'Ile play bo peepe with her behind this tree' (1951). Again, if we consider the front-of-stage position of the posts in the Rose playhouse, Mall could not sit in front of one. The actor could have sat to the side of a post, still giving the impression that Mall was 'under' the tree, but this may not be a warrantable solution since, even with slender posts, sightlines would be affected for spectators on the opposite side;⁷⁰ also, as noted above, the posts at the Rose afforded little space to hide behind. I posit, then, a moss bank positioned more centrally, away from the posts, which would entail the use of a property tree — placed, I suggest, either directly behind or on top of the bank — to give Mall somewhere to hide. I also posit that the boy actor playing Mall would sit down before the tree and direct the soliloquy 'forwards' over the yard. Perhaps these are unsafe surmises regarding a nearly in-the-round theatre space, with many playgoers watching the action from oblique angles: 'Where is the "front" of a circle ...?', ask Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, before observing that 'three-dimensional acting makes it wrong to think of any "normal" direction to look in'.⁷¹ But the relatively shallow stage at the Phase II Rose — depth 18 feet, 4 inches (5.6 metres); maximum width 27 feet, 7 inches (8.4 metres)⁷² — tapered to something that can legitimately be considered a 'front',⁷³ and a largely forward-facing delivery from a midstage location would, I suggest, maximize the comedic 'playing to the crowd' potential of Mall's soliloquy. The actor could have rotated in a seated position to address spectators on both sides as well, unimpeded by an adjacent pillar.

A combination of tree and moss bank properties makes performative sense here, in my view. And if the company indeed employed a moss bank as the ‘Cunny borough’, might it not, to continue in naturalistic vein, include a ‘hole’ to represent the entrance to the warren? A hole in a mound, topped with foliage: does Porter mischievously create an earthy mound-of-Venus, a bawdy antithesis to the fatal womb-like pit of *Titus Andronicus*? If so, the ribald, forthright Mall Barnes speaks in her soliloquy from the metonymic seat of her own desire. Erotic semiotics are more commonly associated with Jacobean rather than Elizabethan drama, but Porter was unquestionably an innovative dramatist — consider, for example, his symbolically charged use of the game of tables in scene 1 to establish the rivalry between the titular ‘angry women’⁷⁴ — and I see him as anticipating playwrights such as Marston and Middleton in the suggestive nature of his stagecraft.

While we can easily get carried away with conjecture, I hope that the textual and stage-historical evidence I have supplied makes the scenographic ideas outlined above worthy of consideration. To assume that Porter’s ‘Cunny borough’ scene included at least one moss bank and a tree — the bay tree from Henslowe’s inventory, perhaps — is not unreasonable, given the resources available to the theatre company and the limitations imposed by the location of the stage posts.⁷⁵ In a review of Barton’s *The Shakespearean Forest*, Michael Neill observes that while ‘It remains very hard to know how these forests were represented onstage ... in a few cases at least property trees and bushes seem to have been used to satisfy the audience’s sense of a forested landscape’.⁷⁶ Although acknowledging this possibility may be as far as we can proceed with confidence, my analysis of forest scenes at the Rose might tempt us to edge a little further. As I hope to have demonstrated, properties such as trees, bushes and banks were very probably used at the playhouse for a variety of reasons — practical, emblematic, and localizing.⁷⁷ I suggest that this type of staging may have been the norm for extended green world sequences, with the props remaining onstage for significant stretches of time, thus minimizing the need for intrusive scene shifting. Does this mean other companies in other playhouses utilized such properties in a similar fashion? Is Barton correct in favouring a substantive, centrally positioned tree property over an off-centre stage post as Herne’s Oak in *Merry Wives*? These are moot questions. If the Admiral’s Men employed tree properties and moss banks in their green world plays of the 1590s, it would be surprising, in my view, if the Chamberlain’s Men, the main competition, did not at least experiment with something similar,⁷⁸ but we cannot prove this hypothesis on current evidence. Nor can we extrapolate with any certainty from the example of the post-1592 Rose Theatre since the frontal position of its stage posts may have been unique. We can more safely limit any

conclusions to the Rose itself, where, as I have argued, various tree scenes would have required substantial material embodiment given the inconveniently located stage posts. This particular playhouse likely realized its green world locales visually as well verbally.

Notes

This article has been developed from a paper given at the Kingston Shakespeare Conference: Marlowe and Shakespeare held at the Rose Theatre, Kingston upon Thames, in November 2017. I would like to thank Gerald Baker and Richard Wilson of Kingston University for their early interest and encouragement. I am also extremely grateful for the detailed and highly perceptive feedback given by the readers of my initial submission to *Early Theatre*.

- 1 Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge, 1995), 152, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511627460>.
- 2 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), 182–3.
- 3 Anne Barton, *The Shakespearean Forest* (Cambridge, 2017), 20, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139015257>.
- 4 Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, 1980), 20, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426074>; Elam coins the phrase 'iconic identity' to address the degree of 'similarity between sign and object' on the stage. For discussion of the importance of spectacle in the period, see Jenny Sager, *The Aesthetics of Spectacle in Early Modern Drama and Modern Cinema: Robert Greene's Theatre of Attractions* (Basingstoke and New York, 2013), 1–52, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137332400>.
- 5 Dessen, *Recovering*, 154.
- 6 Quoted in A. Stuart Daley, 'Where are the Woods in *As You Like It*?', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34.2 (1983), 172–80, 172n1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2869832>.
- 7 Dessen, *Recovering*, 61.
- 8 The points listed here summarize Dessen's arguments in *Recovering*, 61–3 and Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge, 1984), 58–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554179>.
- 9 Dessen, *Elizabethan*, 61n8.
- 10 *Ibid*, 58–9.
- 11 Margaret Webster, *Shakespeare Without Tears: A Modern Guide for Directors, Actors and Playgoers* (Cleveland, 1955), 74.
- 12 *Ibid*, 68.

- 13 Joe Falocco, *Reimagining Shakespeare's Playhouse: Early Modern Staging Conventions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2010), 100. See also Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2001), 152–64.
- 14 David Jays, 'Tanya Moiseiwitsch', *The Guardian*, 20 February 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/feb/20/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>.
- 15 Barton, *Shakespearean*, 36.
- 16 Barton provides extensive evidence in *Shakespearean*, 21–47; see also the variety of trees mentioned in Glynne Wickham, 'The Emblematic Tradition' in *Early English Stages: 1300–1660*, vol. 2, part 1 (London, 1963), 206–44, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315008639>.
- 17 See G.F. Reynolds, "'Trees" on the Stage of Shakespeare', *Modern Philology* 5.2 (1907), 159–60, <https://doi.org/10.1086/386737>.
- 18 From the property list to *A Forest Tragedy* (1602), reproduced in Madeline Hope Dodds, 'A Forrest Tragaedye in Vacunium', *The Modern Language Review*, 40.4 (1945), 246–58, 248, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3716865>.
- 19 From the property list to *The Fairy Pastoral, or Forest of Elves* (1603), reproduced in Robert Denzell Fenn, 'William Percy's *Faery Pastorell: An Old Spelling Edition*' PhD thesis (University of British Columbia, 1997), 83, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0088710>. While some have seen Percy as irrelevant when it comes to professional drama, Fenn argues persuasively that he 'knew the theatrical conventions of his day ... as an observer, although not an insider, of the theatre' (45–6).
- 20 See *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2002), 319–21. The inventory is dated 10 March 1598.
- 21 Parenthetical citations reference Thomas Dekker, *Old Fortunatus* in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 1, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1953).
- 22 The extant quarto of Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (London, 1600; STC: 6517) records a court performance of December 1599, but see also the discussions of earlier Fortunatus plays in the company repertory in the *Lost Plays Database*, <https://lostplays.folger.edu/Fortunatus>, Part 1, last modified 10 December 2021, and Martin Wiggins, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 2014), entries 843, 851, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199265732.book.1>. Neil Carson associates the tree of golden apples with the Fortunatus story and speculates that Henslowe retained 'large properties ... closely identified with a single production, probably because the play in question could not be produced without them'; *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge, 1988), 52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511554162>. Wiggins (entry 843) feels the property is more likely to have been created for a

- lost Hercules play of 1595. See also David McInnis, 'Fortunatus and the 'Tree of Gowlden Apelles' in Henslowe's Inventory', *Notes & Queries* 58.2 (2011), 270–2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjr055> and Werner Habicht, 'Tree Properties and Tree Scenes on the Elizabethan Stage', *Renaissance Drama* 4 (1971), 69–92, esp. 88–90, <https://doi.org/10.1086/rd.4.41917076>.
- 23 Barton, *Shakespearean*, 36.
- 24 Though Tim Fitzpatrick, in a reader report commenting on an earlier version of this essay, observes that 'a stage-post, as a vertical piece of timber with things (roof trusses) sprouting from its top, can justifiably be considered a reasonably concrete (iconic) rather than abstract representation of "tree"'.
- 25 Robert Cohen, for example, states that 'Trees were probably represented most of the time by stage posts', *Shakespeare on Theatre: A Critical Look at His Theories and Practices* (Abingdon, 2016), 64, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315691190>.
- 26 Ernest L. Rhodes, *Henslowe's Rose: The Stage and Staging* (Lexington, 1976), 126.
- 27 Dessen, *Recovering*, 62–3. See also Tim Fitzpatrick, *Playwright, Space and Place in Early Modern Performance* (Farnham, 2011), 31–3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315600857>, on how *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet* might have used stage posts as trees.
- 28 Vin Nardizzi, *Wooden Os: Shakespeare's Theatres and England's Trees* (Toronto, 2013), 78, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442664173>. Visiting the Swan in 1596, Johannes De Witt observed that the columns were 'painted in such excellent imitation of marble that it is able to deceive even the most cunning'; qtd in Martin White, *Renaissance Drama in Action: An Introduction to Aspects of Theatre Practice and Performance* (Abingdon, 1998), 129. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203298749>.
- 29 Barton, *Shakespearean*, 37.
- 30 Ibid, 36–7. Whether stage posts would have been available for the earliest public performances of *Merry Wives* (somewhere between 1597 and 1601) is not clear. The Lord Chamberlain's Men played at the Theatre and the Curtain 1597–9, playhouses which almost certainly had no permanent pillars or stage covers when first built, though such features could have been added later: see Glynne Wickham, "'Heavens", Machinery, and Pillars in the Theatre and Other Early Playhouses', in *The First Public Playhouse: The Theatre in Shoreditch 1576–1598*, ed. Herbert Berry (Montreal, 1979), 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1w6t9z6> and Mariko Ichikawa, *The Shakespearean Stage Space* (Cambridge, 2013), 4, 104, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139097192>. The Lord Chamberlain's Men performed at the Globe from mid-1599, a playhouse for which strong evidence of stage pillars exists; Paul Nelsen, 'Positing Pillars at the Globe', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.3 (1997), 324–335, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871020>.

- 31 Richard Flecknoe, *A Short Discourse of the English Stage*, appended to *Love's Kingdom* (London, 1664; Wing: F1229), G4r–8r, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A39719.0001.001/1:13?rgn=div1;view=toc>.
- 32 Andrew Gurr, 'Tudor and Stuart Scenography', in *The Routledge Companion to Scenography*, ed. Arnold Aronson (Abingdon, 2018), 207–14, 208, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781317422266-17>.
- 33 See, for example, ideas on the probable use of flowers for indicating garden locales in Ichikawa, *The Shakespearean*, 120–2, and a discussion of the metonymic function of portable properties in Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance* (London, 1982), 34–40, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203709542>.
- 34 See Leslie Thomson, *Discoveries on the Early Modern Stage: Contexts and Conventions* (Cambridge, 2018), 151–82, 219–41, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590488>.
- 35 M.C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1980), 8, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620362>.
- 36 Ibid, 12.
- 37 For a comprehensive discussion, see Roger Clegg, *Reconstructing the Rose: Computer Modelling Phillip Henslowe's Playhouse* (2019) <https://reconstructingtherose.tome.press/>. On the roof or cover over the stage, see sections 4.9.1 and 5.8.5; on the yard, see 4.5 and 5.4.
- 38 Ibid, 4.5.1.
- 39 Ibid, 5.8.4.
- 40 Andrew Gurr, 'The Bare Island', *Shakespeare in the Theater*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen (New York, 1999), 29–44, 35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521470846.003>. Gurr continues: 'It is possible that just enough of the stage's floor timbers protruded forward of the foundation wall to allow the posts to be used for concealment, but the evidence is against it'. See also Clegg, *Reconstructing*, 4.9, 5.8.
- 41 Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's*, 21.
- 42 Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan, eds, *The New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion* (Oxford, 2017), 491, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199591169.001.0001>, gives an overview of attribution issues. Act 1 and perhaps the opening scene of act 2 are ascribed to Peele, but most of the rest, including the forest sequence, is ascribed to Shakespeare.
- 43 Citations reference George Peele and William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, in *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke, 2007). Parenthetical citations of Shakespeare's plays (*Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*) reference act, scene, and line numbers in this complete works edition.

- 44 See Clegg, *Reconstructing*, 4.5.1 and Mark Hutchings, 'Titus Andronicus and Trapdoors at the Rose and Newington Butts', *Shakespeare Survey* 71 (2018), 221–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108557177.023>.
- 45 Eugene Waith, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, (Oxford, 1984), 2.3n and 2.3.8n, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198129028.book.1>.
- 46 Alan C. Dessen, *Shakespeare in Performance: Titus Andronicus* (Manchester, 1989), 82. Habicht, 'Tree Properties', 79, argues conversely that, despite the 'paradoxical associations', a tree property here 'visually guarantees a general unity of the place'.
- 47 Jonathan Bate, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, (London, 1995), 2.2.2n, 2.9.1n, 2.2.197.1n, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781408160121.00000031>, and Alan Hughes, ed., *Titus Andronicus* (Cambridge, 1994), 2.3.8n, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511840333>. Note that Bate's scene division is distinctive; his 2.2 is most editors' 2.3.
- 48 Wiggins, *British Drama*, entry 928.
- 49 Wiggins seems to favour bare-stage solutions for trees; he does not include Herne's Oak, for example, in his list of properties for *Merry Wives* or for *As You Like It*; *British Drama*, entry 1079 and 4:1237.
- 50 More than one trap was possibly available; see Rhodes, *Henslowe's Rose*, 17; however, most commentators assume a central position for the trap in early modern stages. For discussion of evidence of a trapdoor 'just downstage of center' at the Globe, see James J. Mainard O'Connell, 'Hell is Discovered', in *Renaissance Papers*, ed. Christopher Cobb (Rochester, 2009), 65–88, 76–7. The posts at the Rose were 6.24 metres apart; see Clegg, *Reconstructing*. If the trap were front-centre, the posts would be 3 metres away, enough to make questionable a claim that the post/tree 'overshades' the pit. The distance to a centre-stage pit would be greater still.
- 51 As Peter M. Daly suggests in *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, 2nd edn (Toronto, 1998), 175, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442676732>, the elder could also be utilized in act 5 when Aaron is forced to climb a ladder into a treetop with a halter about his neck. Henslowe's 1598 inventory does not mention an elder tree, but perhaps, only specialized large properties necessary for certain plays were retained for future revivals; see Carson, *A Companion*, n22. Medieval and early modern English legend held that 'Judas was hang'd on an elder', as Shakespeare puts it in *Love's Labour's Lost* (5.2.606), a play usually dated 1594–5; see Naseeb Shaheen, ed., *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays* (Newark, 1999), 141–2.
- 52 Possibly written in collaboration with Henry Chettle.
- 53 Antony Munday, *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon*, ed. John S. Farmer (London, 1913), F2r.
- 54 Fitzpatrick, *Playwright*, 34–8. Fitzpatrick considers how the Rose's angled tiring house wall could have facilitated the creation of such a space.

- 55 Bruce R. Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture* (Chicago, 2009), 208–47, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226763811.001.0001>.
- 56 According to Rhodes, *Henslowe's Rose*, 115, the clearest instance of such usage in the Rose repertory.
- 57 Wiggins, *British Drama*, vol. 4, entry 1106.
- 58 See Clegg, *Reconstructing*, 5.1 for the relatively large sums paid by Henslowe to have the Rose repainted.
- 59 See Rhodes, *Henslowe's Rose*, 124–7 on references to bushes.
- 60 The evidence for the identification is persuasive, in my view. For a summary of the debate, see Douglas H. Arrell, 'John a Kent, the Wise Man of West Chester', *Early Theatre* 17.1 (2014), 75–92, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.17.1.4> and Tom Rutter, *Shakespeare and the Admiral's Men: Reading Across Repertories on the London Stage, 1594–1600* (Cambridge, 2017), 77–9, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139924870>. See also 'The Wise Man of West Chester', *Lost Plays Database*, last modified 16 January 2021, https://lostplays.folger.edu/Wise_Man_of_West_Chester_The.
- 61 Dessen, *Recovering*, 62.
- 62 Anthony Munday, *John a Kent and John a Cumber*, ed. Muriel St Clare Byrne for The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford, 1923), 836.
- 63 Dessen, *Recovering*, 62.
- 64 Barton, *Shakespearean*, 34–5, argues similarly, though in her view *John a Kent* was 'performed probably by Strange's Men at the Curtain theatre shortly before 1590'. If Barton is correct, stage pillars would not likely have been available to stand in as trees; see n30.
- 65 See Jean E. Howard, 'Sharp-tongued Women and Small-town Social Relations in Porter's *Two Angry Women of Abington* and Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', in *The Merry Wives of Windsor: New Critical Essays*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski and Phyllis Rackin (Abingdon, 2015), 73–83, 73n1, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779065> and Charles Cathcart, 'Romeo at the Rose in 1598', *Early Theatre* 13.2 (2010), 149–62, esp. 150 and 158, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.13.2.845>.
- 66 Marianne Brish Evett, ed., *Henry Porter's The Two Angry Women of Abington: A Critical Edition* (New York, 1980), 50.
- 67 Wiggins, *British Drama*, vol. 4, entry 1151.
- 68 Henry Porter, *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, ed. W.W. Greg (Oxford, 1912), 2250–1. This edition is based on the first quarto, *The Pleasant Historie of the Two Angrie Women of Abington* (London, 1599; STC: 20121.5); original spelling gives a better sense of the coney/cunny homophone than Brish Evett's modern-spelling critical edition.

- 69 See Mary Bly, 'Bawdy Puns and Lustful Virgins: The Legacy of Juliet's Desire in Comedies of the Early 1600s', *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (Cambridge, 1996), 97–109, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521570476.008>.
- 70 Tiffany Stern, "'You that walk i'th' Galleries": Standing and Walking in the Galleries of the Globe Theatre', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.2 (2000), 211–16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2902134>, points to evidence that audiences had freedom of movement in the galleries and were thus able to resolve sightline issues 'irrespective of the size or dimensions of the pillars' (216), but a significant section would need to shift en masse for a good view of a soliloquy delivered by a pillar.
- 71 Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford, 2000), 8, 10.
- 72 Clegg, *Reconstructing*, 5.8.
- 73 Julian M.C. Bowsher, the archaeologist who supervised the excavation of the playhouse, refers to the 'front wall' of the stage and to its possible influence on other 'tapered stage-fronts'; Bowsher, 'The Rose and its Stages', *Shakespeare Survey* 60, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge, 2007), 36–48, 40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol052187839x.003>.
- 74 See Caroline Baird, *Games and Gaming in Early Modern Drama: Stakes and Hazards* (Cham, 2020), 161–202, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50857-9>.
- 75 The choice of a tree emblem to close the quarto edition of Porter's play might be a visual reminder of its green world scenography; see Porter, *The Pleasant Historie*, M1v.
- 76 Michael Neill, 'In the Shady Wood', review of *The Shakespearean Forest*, by Anne Barton, *London Review of Books* 40.6 (2018), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n06/michael-neill/in-the-shady-wood>.
- 77 Habicht, 'Tree Properties', 76, argues that the way trees function on the Elizabethan stage is 'symbolical and evocative rather than localizing or decorative', but in the scenes I consider here, all of these functions might be said to apply.
- 78 The Lord Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men had distinctive house styles, but they influenced each other's choice of repertory. On the cross-fertilization between the green world plays of Shakespeare and the plays by Munday and Porter discussed here, see Howard, 'Sharp-tongued', and Rutter, *Shakespeare and the Admiral's Men*.