

Early Interest in Shakespearean Original Pronunciation

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Recent interest in Shakespearean phonology in the 2000s, under the heading of 'original pronunciation' (OP), has a history which can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. A memorandum by Richard Grant White in 1865 was followed by a detailed analysis by Alexander Ellis, particular attention being paid to Shakespeare's rhymes. Later studies, transcriptions, or presentations include those of Wilhelm Viëtor, Daniel Jones (whose influence was particularly important), Harold Palmer, F. G. Blandford, and A. C. Gimson. BBC broadcasts of extracts from Shakespeare in OP took place during the 1930s and 1940s, and proved popular, but full productions in London and Cambridge during the 1950s received mixed reviews. Dramaturgical and scholarly criticisms are briefly discussed, and the value of the reconstruction exercise strongly affirmed.

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Shakespearean phonology — the sound system of Elizabethan English, as evidenced in the plays and poems — has been remarkably neglected. It is a point noted by Vivian Salmon in her introduction to the *Reader in the Language of Shakespearean Drama* (Salmon and Burness, 1987), in which she regrets the absence from the volume of essays on this topic, 'due to the rarity, in article form, of such studies in recent years'. The only exception she cites is Fausto Cercignani, who had incorporated the content of two articles on the subject into a meticulous book-length analysis a few years before (Cercignani, 1981). Since then, the situation has hardly changed — perhaps because Cercignani's book was so thorough in its collation of examples, and so clinical in its rejection of claims about phonological difference unless they were based on clear evidence.

Cercignani's rigorous perspective should not be forgotten in a new era of interest in Shakespearean pronunciation. This era began in 2004, when Shakespeare's Globe in London mounted a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in what was being called

'original pronunciation' (following the Globe's use of the adjective in other contexts, such as 'original practices'), and the acronym OP caught on. The experiment (recounted in Crystal, 2005) was sufficiently successful to motivate the Globe to mount a second OP production the following year, of *Troilus and Cressida*. These were the first staged reconstructions of Elizabethan period speech for fifty years. In 1952, John Barton had produced *Julius Caesar* in OP for the Marlowe Society in Cambridge, England; a few months later, Joan Swinstead produced *Macbeth* in OP for the new Mermaid Theatre, starring Bernard Miles; and in 1954 Helge Kökeritz advised on a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the Yale School of Drama. Since 2005, other OP events and some full-length productions have taken place, notably of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*, details of which can be found at a dedicated website (Crystal, 2011). Nor is it only Shakespeare who has been the focus of interest. OP has been used to read texts of other writers (such as John Donne's sermons), and people interested in early composers (such as Byrd and Dowland) have experimented with the medium, as have those involved in tourism to Jacobethan-period locations.

Thanks to over a century of research by philologists and historical linguists, we now know a great deal about the pronunciation of Shakespeare's time — or rather 'pronunciations', for the period in which he lived was characterized by huge social and linguistic variation and change. Shakespeare himself was well aware of it. Tybalt is contemptuously described as one of the 'new tuners of accent'; Holofernes is appalled that someone can do something so absurd as not pronounce the 'b' in 'debt'; disguised Rosalind is nearly caught out by Orlando noticing her refined accent. There are several such examples, showing that we must be careful when talking about Early Modern English pronunciation. It is not a question of reconstructing a single accent. There were as many accents of English in 1600 as there are today, all derived from the same underlying sound system, or phonology.

Early approaches

The contemporary movement to hear works in OP is recent, but interest in reconstruction can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. Before that, there was of course regular exploration into the prosody of Shakespeare's verse, and within the perspective of nineteenth-century philology attention was routinely drawn to individual puns, rhymes, and metrical idiosyncrasies. A typical example is Craik (1857). But I have found nobody trying to construct a system of early pronunciation in real detail until an essay by the American literary critic and lawyer, Richard Grant White, whose many works on Shakespeare included two editions of the plays. He was also a music critic, and it was perhaps this joint interest which led him to pay special attention to OP. In an appendix, 'Memorandum on English Pronunciation in the Elizabethan Era', he analyses rhymes, puns, and spellings as evidence of early pronunciation, and is the first to anticipate the reaction of readers (White, 1865). After giving a transcription of a *Hamlet* speech with respellings (rather than phonetic transcription, which was not available in his day), he comments (438):

Some readers may shrink from the conclusions to which the foregoing memorandums lead, because of the strangeness, and, as they will think, the uncouthness, of the pronunciation which they will involve. They will imagine *Hamlet* exclaiming:—

'A *baste* that wants *discoorse* of *rayson*
Would *haive moorn'd* longer!' [...]

and, overcome by the astonishing effect of the passages thus spoken, they will refuse to believe that they were ever thus pronounced out of Ireland.

People always hear echoes of other accents in OP — unsurprisingly, given that so many of these accents would later evolve out of the sound system of Shakespeare's time. Irish is one of the commonest impressions, though only a few of the features of OP have a direct correspondence with modern Irish accents. However, reactions of this kind have been heard every time OP has since been presented, right down to the present day. And White's riposte has often been made, too:

But let them suppose that such was the pronunciation of Shakespeare's day, and they must see that our orthoepy would have sounded as strange and laughable to our forefathers, as theirs does to us.

White's interest is paralleled by a number of other publications that appeared in the early 1860s. George P. Marsh, for example, delivered a series of lectures at Columbia College in New York in 1858–59. Lecture 22 was called 'Orthoepical change in English'. It was a general discussion, from Old English onwards, but it contained several references to Shakespeare, and some discussion of general principles, such as the use of metrics and rhyme as evidence. He warns against the uncritical use of rhymes, and he identifies the biggest difficulty facing his contemporaries: 'All the old English writers on orthography and pronunciation fail alike, in the want of clear descriptive analysis of sounds' (1861: 475). Thirty years later, the publication of the International Phonetic Alphabet would help to solve that problem.

The topic of OP was evidently being widely discussed at the time. In 1864, the work of Craik, Marsh, and White was analysed in a long review article by Charles S. Peirce and J. B. Noyes in the *North American Review*. And, in Britain, a similar interest was emerging in the embryonic phonetics community. The major work was by Alexander Ellis, *On Early English Pronunciation*, in which Chaucer and Shakespeare receive special attention. This was a massive study, over a thousand pages in its four parts. Ellis had in 1867 given a paper to the Philological Society on 'Pronunciation in the Sixteenth Century'. He was excited to be able to explore the subject using the new system of palaeotype symbols devised by Melville Bell in *Visible Speech*, replacing earlier metaphorical expressions for sound description ('thick, thin, fat, full, flat, hard, rough', etc.). In his book (1871: 26–27) we find the first statement of the method that has been used ever since. To begin with, we need an awareness of the principles underlying sound change:

In tracing the alteration of vowel sounds from the XVIth through the XVIIth to the XVIIIth century a certain definite line of change came to light, which was more or less confirmed by a comparison of the changes, as far as they can be traced, in other languages.

Second, we must acknowledge the importance of auditory rhyme, in a period when few people knew how to spell:

the rhymes to be appreciated at all must have been rhymes to the ear, and not the modern monstrosity of rhymes to the eye.

Ignoring the value-judgement, Ellis's emphasis is correct. Eye-rhymes presuppose a standardized spelling system, which did not exist in Shakespeare's day; and it is always the auditory requirement of rhyming that dominates when this topic is dealt with in the books on poetics that were around at the time, such as George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*.

Third, we need to know the views of contemporary authors, of whom Ellis lists and paraphrases several. This is where we get the first collation of evidence of such pronunciations as a short vowel in *prove* and *remove* (ibid.: 100-01), a detailed discussion of the phonetic quality of postvocalic *r* (ibid.: 200-01), and other period effects. His account is unprecedented in its detail, and not to be surpassed until Dobson (1957) almost a century later. Ellis also comments on the effect of OP on an audience, and — despite his scholarly caution expressed on almost every page — reaches a very firm conclusion (ibid.: 224):

There can be no reasonable doubt, after the preceding discussions, of its very closely representing the pronunciation actually in use by the actors who performed Shakspeare's plays in his lifetime.

Ellis's transcription was a major step forward, but his palaeotypy was limited to 'the ordinary printing types', as the title page put it, he completely ignores the evidence provided by spelling, and the representations are not always easy to interpret. A reader schooled in modern phonetics has to rethink several parameters in order to get a sense of the postulated sounds.

It is in section 8 of his book (ibid.: 917ff.) that Ellis goes into the matter in real detail, evaluating the authority of the various orthoepists, and stating the internal evidence: 'puns, metre, and rhyme'. He sees straight away that the pun 'is not really of so much use as might have been expected', but he nonetheless identifies a large number of punning word pairs that do provide good evidence of pronunciation (such as *goats/Goths*, *dollar/dolour*, *Rome/room*, *civil/Seville*). He gives a long list of metrical variants, reproduces the orthoepist Alexander Gil's Latin account as evidence, and quotes many of the examples contained in Abbott's *Grammar*, which was being published at the time. For instance, he lists copious instances justifying the use of an extra syllable in such words as *patience* and *substantial*. He also abstracts the main conclusions of White (ibid.: 966ff.), and makes a detailed comparison of his approach and the conclusions of Peirce and Noyes, before concluding (ibid.: 917): 'we do not

much differ' — an interesting remark, given that the two studies were referring their phonetic values to different regional base accents, American and British.

In relation to rhymes, Ellis cautions about trusting rhymes too much, but nonetheless makes some illuminating observations. He notes that Shakespeare is not as liberal [i.e. respecting phonetic accuracy] as Spenser, and that the most liberal rhymes are to be found in the songs, where 'he seems to have been quite contented at times with a rude approximation' (ibid.: 953). But, despite Ellis's caution, he concludes that, 'viewed as a whole, the system of rhymes is confirmatory of the conclusions drawn from a consideration of external authorities'. He ends with a series of specimens in palacotype from several plays.

Like White, Ellis takes pains to anticipate the view of readers (ibid.: 982–84):

The pronunciation founded on these conclusions, and realized in the following examples, may at first hearing appear rude and provincial. But I have tried the effect of reading some of these passages to many persons, including well-known elocutionists, and the general result has been an expression of satisfaction, shewing that the poetry was not burlesqued or in any way impaired by this change, but, on the contrary, seemed to gain in power and impressiveness.

The reference to elocutionists is the Victorian temperament showing through, as is his fear of actually using any of this approach on the stage:

it is, of course, not to be thought of that Shakspeare's plays should now be publicly read or performed in this pronunciation. [...] As essentially our household poet, Shakspeare will, and must, in each age of the English language, be read and spoken in the current pronunciation of the time, and any marked departure from it (except occasional and familiar 'resolutions', sounding the final *-ed*, and shifting the position of the accent, which are accepted archaisms consecrated by usage,) would withdraw the attention of a mixed audience or of the habitual reader from the thought to the word, would cross old associations, would jar upon cherished memories, and would be therefore generally unacceptable.

This was a time when Received Pronunciation ruled the English stage, as it did the British Empire.

The interest in OP continued over subsequent decades, especially in Germany, where the study of the history of English was an important theme in German comparative philology (e.g. Sweet, 1874; Franz, 1905). Shakespeare and Chaucer attracted especial attention. The French phonetician Paul Passy, the founder of the International Phonetic Association, reports (1905) on a vacation visit to Britain where he sat in on lectures by Henry Sweet, and he comments on Sweet's readings from Chaucer and Shakespeare in OP. The following year, the professor of English philology at Marburg, Wilhelm Viëtor, produced two books on the subject, using the new International Phonetic Alphabet (1906a; 1906b). He comments that, although there has been a great deal of German work on English historical phonetics, 'the pronunciation of Shakspeare has only incidentally been treated since 1871' (1906a: 3). He has read

Ellis, but finds his transcription to be 'rather archaic' (ibid.: 2). His aim is 'to show that there is a far greater majority of perfect rimes in Shakespeare's poems and plays than might appear from modern usage, and also from the conclusions of Ellis' (ibid.: 5). The book is predominantly about the evidence provided by the rhymes, with two-thirds of it (pp. 116–266) devoted to a comprehensive rhyme-index. Variant pronunciations receive special mention. However, in the Reader that accompanied his theoretical book, he adopts a simplified transcription which does not distinguish between strong and weak vowels. He also notes few variants — mainly uncertainties over length, by putting the length mark in parentheses, as in *hæ(:)st* for *haste*. But this was the fullest attempt at the time to present texts in OP, and his work influenced several others over the next few decades (e.g. Ayres, 1916; Blandford, 1927) — though it would later be strongly attacked by Kökeritz (1953: 48–49) for its 'archaic and artificial' style of utterance — including Daniel Jones, who first encountered phonetics while studying German at Marburg.

The Daniel Jones era

Jones was beginning his own explorations in OP at this time. In 1909 he made a public presentation at University College London (UCL) of 'Scenes from Shakespeare in the original pronunciation', himself playing Prospero and Andrew Aguecheek (*The Tempest* Act 1, end of Scene 2; *Twelfth Night*, Act 1, Scene 3). It was reviewed by Noël-Armfield, who later became Jones's assistant, in *Le Maître phonétique* (1910):

Saturday, 3 July, 1909, marks an epoch in the history of Elizabethan representations of Shakespeare. On that date people living in the twentieth century heard some of Shakespeare's work in the pronunciation which may be safely accepted as that used by the poet himself and his fellow actors.

Jones, says Noël-Armfield, 'was, of course, responsible for the phonetic transcription, as well as for the actual pronunciation of the performers, and it is a testimony to the care and thoroughness with which he rehearsed his little company that we noticed very few deviations from the printed transcriptions'. The event also received a favourable mention in an *Observer* review the next day (4 July 1909), which reported some of the sound effects. The *Observer* reviewer echoes the comments of listeners before and since, all of whom attempt to relate OP to accents they already know:

The effect of the old pronunciation on the ear was very pleasing. It strongly resembles the broad, rich dialect of the West of England, with a strong admixture of the Lancashire speech.

No mention of Irish, this time.

Jones was unimpressed with the attempts of newspaper reporters to write OP down. In a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* (30 June 1909), he castigated the writer of an article announcing the forthcoming event at UCL for his use of a system of respelling which gives only 'the very roughest idea of what the actual pronunciation was'. He insists: 'a scientific system of phonetic transcription is essential'. And

the following year he published a supplement (2010a) to *Le Maître phonétique* containing the transcription, and followed it up with some notes on his method (1910b), based on those he wrote for the programme, in which he acknowledges the prior work of Ellis, Sweet, and Viëtor. The event was such a success that he repeated it in Wimbledon, London (where he lived) in December 1909, with music, himself singing some madrigals. He also would give occasional recitals at social occasions, such as dinners and weddings, usually 'without book'. As part of the plans for a proposed Institute of Phonetics (which never materialized), Jones suggested (in a letter, 21 November 1919) that he could put on a shortened version of *Twelfth Night* in OP, to be staged by pupils from his brother Arnold's prep school, but this never went ahead.¹

Jones's interest in OP evidently influenced his junior colleagues. Harold Palmer joined him in UCL in 1915 and stayed there for five years, eventually being given charge of what Jones called the 'Spoken English department'. Palmer then went to Japan, where he stayed for many years, becoming a major influence on the early development of English language teaching. But he was often in England, and at the official dinner of the Second International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, held in London in 1935, he is on record as being part of the entertainment: Jones recited some Chaucer, and Palmer presented (in song) 'The Modern Phonetician' — a fluency exercise reworking Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Modern Major-General'.² Although we have no example of Palmer himself using OP, he evidently was well aware of it, judging by the opening lines of the third stanza:

I've read the works of Daniel Jones, of Ripman and of Viëtor
(Who tells us how the Germans speak in every German theatre) [...]

It was Palmer's collaborator, F(rancis) G(eorge) Blandford, who was more involved with OP. Blandford had been an undergraduate at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, later becoming a lecturer and then director of studies in the Secondary Department of the Cambridge University Training College for Schoolmasters (later, the Department of Education). As early as 1927, he had published a booklet transcribing Act 1, Scene 5 of *Twelfth Night* into OP for the Festival Theatre Company in Cambridge, and this was used on a number of occasions. A production by Terence Gray at the Cambridge Festival Theatre in 1933 included this scene in OP (everything else was in modern English). The experiment did not impress the *Manchester Guardian* correspondent (18 May 1933), who described the OP as an experiment that was 'interesting if not entirely justified' — 'an impossible mixture of Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and a Lancashire dialect'. No mention of the West Country, this time.

Although not a Jonesian in his approach to phonetic theory, Blandford would certainly have encountered Jones on the academic circuit, as well as through the BBC.

¹ For the details of Jones's early career, see, Collins and Mees (1998: 58–62, 266, 368–70, 444–48), where examples can also be found of the programme and transcriptions.

² The list says it is in two parts, but only Part 1 is relevant, as the other side is a modern English conversation at the tobacconist's!

Jones had begun an association with the BBC in 1926, when he became one of the founder members of the Advisory Committee on Spoken English. A decade later (15 April 1936), the BBC put out a one-hour programme called 'London Calling — 1600'. The *Manchester Guardian* radio critic loved it:

The result was a speech that sounded as if it were made up of some of the more pleasant English country accents and something almost foreign, while the whole effect was much more soft and musical than spoken Shakespeare is to-day.

The programme was repeated on 25 February 1937. Clearly, OP was attracting a great deal of interest — and the interest now extended across the Atlantic. There was a publicity piece in the *New York Times* (21 February 1937) which refers to a Cambridge professor (i.e. Blandford) schooling the cast in 'the correct Elizabethan pronunciation, which to us today seems very strange — something like a mixture of Yorkshire dialect and Irish brogue'. And the BBC kept up its involvement. At the end of 1937 (6 December) there was a fresh broadcast of the *Twelfth Night* scene in both modern pronunciation and OP for its Experimental Drama Hour, with Blandford as the consultant. Jones almost certainly was involved behind the scenes in maintaining the BBC's interest, as he was still himself actively promoting OP. The same year he made an OP recording for Linguaphone (1937a; 1937b), along with an accompanying pamphlet. The speakers are Daniel Jones and a phonetician colleague, Eileen Evans.³

During the 1940s, the BBC developed its interest in Shakespeare production. A famous series of broadcasts in 1943–46 on individual Shakespeare characters, written by Herbert Farjeon, was again produced by Mary Hope Allen, and culminated in a full production of *The Tempest* in 1953 (with John Gielgud). None of these was in OP, but the memory of the 1936–37 broadcasts evidently remained, for in 1949 Jones was asked to train a group of actors to present a programme of OP Shakespearean extracts. The result was broadcast on BBC Radio's Third Programme on 28 December 1949 as 'The Elizabethan Tongue: passages from the plays of Shakespeare in their original pronunciation', introduced by Jones himself. He also wrote a 1000-word piece for *Radio Times* the same week called 'The tongue that Shakespeare spake . . .' (Jones, 1949). He is in no doubt that 'we now have a pretty accurate picture of the way in which English pronunciation has developed from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day'. There must have been some worries in the BBC about possible listener reaction. The *Radio Times* announcement ends with the advice: 'Listeners may find the text useful in occasional passages'.

In the third edition of *The Pronunciation of English* (1950: 198) Jones builds on his confidence to present his own transcription of the 'Friends, Romans and Countrymen' speech from *Julius Caesar* (whereas in the first edition (1909: 103), he had simply referred readers to Viëtor). Evidently he now found Viëtor's version too conservative and stylized. However, the trend to see OP as nearer to present-day

³ Eileen Evans became Eileen Whitley — the lady who gave me my phonetics oral examination in my BA finals exam (Crystal, 2010: 88–89). A later external examiner, for my PhD, was Vivian Salmon.

English did not satisfy Kökeritz, who strongly criticized both Viëtor and Jones (1953: 49–50) for not going far enough. Jones, as a consequence, revised his transcription, influenced also by the fresh ideas about OP coming from a new member of Jones's department, A. C. Gimson, and also from Randolph Quirk, who would later become Professor of English at UCL. Jones's fourth edition (1956) shows several further changes, especially in the use of weak forms. However, Kökeritz's view that 'Shakespeare's pronunciation strongly resembled modern English' (ibid.: 6) was in turn strongly and convincingly attacked by Cercignani (1981), whose detailed study is the latest and fullest attempt to review all the evidence of rhymes, puns, spellings, and metrics in the Shakespeare corpus. The outcome is that the Jones transcription is actually now seen to be more reliable than it was a few decades ago.⁴

Gimson had joined the UCL Phonetics Department after World War II, and took up the OP baton when Jones retired in 1949, later becoming head of department. His interest in the history of English phonology is exemplified in the extracts from Old English to Modern English in his *Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (1962), one of which has the 'dagger' speech from *Macbeth* transcribed in OP. This book also illustrates the changes Gimson had made in the system of phonetic transcription introduced by Jones. The choice of *Macbeth* was a consequence of Gimson having advised in the OP production at the Mermaid Theatre a decade before, along with Bertram L. Joseph.⁵ Gimson was responsible for the transcription, together with his colleagues J. D. O'Connor and Gordon Arnold; Joseph (a specialist in Elizabethan stage performance) advised on gesture and movement. The unique feature of this event was that the phoneticians provided the company with a recording of the play in OP, and most of this is available in the UCL Phonetics Collection at the British Library.

The OP aspect of the production received mixed reviews. A *Guardian* journalist, writing before the production, and evidently having heard the UCL recording (or perhaps one of the rehearsals), was quite positive (Our London Correspondent, 1952a):

'Macbeth' is being done in contemporary accents, and the phonetics department of London University has recorded the play, as a mode, for the actors, in Elizabethan speech which is smooth, less exaggerated than has sometimes been heard, and with pleasant Midland, West of England, and Irish undertones. Australians may be surprised to hear the words 'too true' coming out with the familiar sound of 'tue trew'.

The review of the year in the 1953 *Shakespeare Quarterly* (Current Theater Notes, 1953) found it an 'interesting experiment'. On the other hand, the correspondent who attended the opening night was less enthusiastic (Our London Correspondent, 1952b):

⁴ My own transcriptions have been influenced by Gimson, who taught me OP when I studied under him at UCL.

⁵ I am indebted to David Barrett for tracking down the details of this production and of the associated reviews, as part of research for a forthcoming doctoral thesis, 'Performing Shakespeare in the Original Pronunciation'.

The other interest is that here, as in a recent 'Julius Caesar' at Cambridge, an attempt is made to recapture the supposed broad vowels of the Elizabethans, whereby 'war' becomes 'wahrr' and so on. This may give purists pleasure and it suits Mr Miles perfectly, for he can run the gamut of his dialect diction. But the danger is that it not only slows the pace but makes the speaking of verse perhaps even more difficult for the lesser fry.

This indicates under-rehearsal in the OP, which inevitably leads to inconsistency, as well as suggesting different levels of acting ability in the use of the accent — problems that have always beset productions. It also suggests a lack of confidence in the OP — understandable in a production which had such a short run. It was performed twice nightly for only six days, with a large gap in the middle, which is never the best of conditions for developing a fluent OP. Perfect OP production (i.e. an error-free realization of the phonetic transcription) takes a great deal of rehearsal time. It is not like the learning of a modern regional accent, where the actors have contemporary intuitions and everyday models to refer to. It requires a special kind of dialect coaching, which is not always available. The present-day OP movement has encountered the same problems (Crystal, 2005).

John Trim, who had joined the UCL Phonetics Department in 1949, confirms the impression that the OP was shaky:⁶

Bernard Miles himself was very enthusiastic and followed the reconstruction quite accurately, but I gained the impression (confirmed by the performance I attended) that others did not wish to spend time on detailed phonetic accuracy as opposed to giving a general impression, and that his wife, who played Lady Macbeth, was rather impatient of the undertaking.

Miles would have taken further inspiration for his production from a 75-minute BBC radio play, 'The Conscience of the King', transmitted on the Third Programme in May 1952, in which a group of actors are heard rehearsing a performance of King Lear, and discussing the role of the Fool, to be interrupted by the ghost of Shakespeare, who takes part in the discussion speaking in OP. The role of Shakespeare was played by Ian Catford, who in the late 1940s was carrying on a combined career as a phonetics lecturer and actor, and who later went on to set up the School of Applied Linguistics in Edinburgh (Catford, 1998: 20). He was greatly influenced by Henry Sweet and trained partly by Daniel Jones, and in the 1940s taught actors at RADA, finding them to have very little awareness of phonetics. He was in frequent demand at the BBC whenever they wanted an actor who was able to produce regional speech at will, and this was one of his many radio broadcasts. Catford's OP interests extended well beyond the late sixteenth century — he read extracts from Langland and Chaucer, for example — but it seems to have been the Shakespearean OP that had the greatest impact on listeners.

⁶ Personal communication, July 2012.

Later reactions

The negative reactions of the 1950s were hardly surprising, given the general style of speech production which dominated the British theatre scene. This was a time when Received Pronunciation (RP) was the dominant voice of British theatre, given resonant articulation by such famous voices as Olivier and Gielgud. It was also the voice of the BBC, and Shakespeare broadcasts there were uniformly in RP. In the USA, actors struggled to acquire an RP accent for their Shakespeare performances. Putting on the plays in a regional accent was unimaginable; so a production which was perceived to be a mixture of accents was never likely to be well received.

Things might have been different if the academic community had been publicly more positive. Despite the confident conclusions of Ellis and Jones, referred to above, the general impression given by the OP philologists and phoneticians was less stimulating. They were all careful to stress the tentative nature of many of their findings, and to draw attention to the speech variation that existed at the time. They repeatedly pointed out that the evidence of rhymes and especially puns is limited, and that agreement is often lacking among the orthoepists, who wrote in different periods, were from different parts of the country, were of different ages, held different attitudes about correctness, and presented transcriptions which are not always easy to interpret phonetically. There were also scholarly clashes between leading proponents. This was hardly the way to rebut the criticisms voiced by reviewers, or to answer the question present in the minds of everyone who attends an OP production: 'How do we know?'. A negative climate thus built up about OP, which is probably why, after the 1950s, no further productions took place for fifty years.

The scholarly caution expressed by the OP researchers has led some observers to conclude that the OP exercise is pointless. Some have dismissed the whole approach out of hand, and this attitude can still be encountered today. Gurr (2001), for example, summarizes the work of Kökeritz, Dobson, Barber, and Cercignani, notes their uncertainties and disagreements, and reaches a remarkable conclusion:

In the light of such learned negativism, it seems presumptuous to try establishing any possibly Shakespearean pronunciation of any word, let alone any speech from the plays. [...] a retrieval process yearning all the way back to Shakespeare invites only despair.

Phonologists, however, are made of sterner stuff. What Gurr has ignored is the depth of detail of the major early studies, the confident findings about language variation and change that have emerged from almost a century of work in historical phonology and dialectology, and the fact that, even in 2001, there were already several phonetic transcriptions and accompanying recordings. He is simply wrong when he says in his paper that audio recordings were 'non-existent'. And this comment is even more irrelevant today, with at least six plays fully performed in OP, with four available in audio or video format, as well as extracts on CD (British Library, 2012).

The philologists and phoneticians have, it must be admitted, been poor at boasting. They have focused on the difficulties (as good scholars should), and underemphasized

the areas where the evidence is compelling. Casual readers, who look at the general observations but do not go through the thousands of listed examples, inevitably end up with a limited impression. But there is also a great deal of agreement, as any comparison of different transcriptions shows.

What Gurr also ignores is the fundamental distinction between phonetics and phonology. This perspective was missing in the early studies, as the theoretical distinction was not introduced into linguistics until the 1920s, and it is not strongly present in the work of Kökeritz and Dobson either. Their background in traditional philology motivates them to use spellings in traditional orthography along with occasional phonetic symbols, and it is often unclear, when reading their transcriptions, whether they are thinking in terms of phonemes or phones. But this distinction is crucial to the modern study of OP. It allows for the fact that there were variant forms in Elizabethan English, that the actors came from different accent backgrounds, and that recitation would have involved different styles. At the same time, it recognizes that, unlike today, the Early Modern English sound system was different: for example, it allowed such pronunciations as 'in-ven-see-on' for *invention*, whereas this is not possible in any accent of Modern English. A comparison of related examples usually allows a decision to be made about the direction of a rhyme. And in cases where it does not, we are simply left with alternative pronunciations, neither of which reflect a modern English phonology, and which thus are worth exploring to see the effects they convey in dramatic or poetic production.

The fallacy is to think of reconstruction of OP as aiming to be 'authentic'. But authenticity is not the aim, just as it is not when describing the experience of sitting in the reconstructed Globe theatre. Rather, the operative word is 'plausible'. OP does not lead to the postulation of a single accent; it results in the reconstruction of a set of plausible accents, all distinct from what is heard today. The excitement comes from exploring these possibilities to see what insights into meaning, aesthetic, or performance can be obtained. It is time to reject the philosophy of despair advocated by Gurr, and still being echoed in 2012 in a *Times Literary Supplement* column (JC, 2012), where the British Library CD was dismissed with an airy 'we had best admit that we don't know how his plays sounded', and a conclusion that there is not even a point in trying to find out. It is a conclusion that Vivian Salmon would have vigorously rejected.

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