

RECONSIDERING 'DOUBLING': THE CASE OF GLOBE ON TOUR'S *COMEDY OF ERRORS* (2009-2011)

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ABSTRACT

Doubling, originally devised out of necessity in scaled-down productions with limited resources, had not yet been fully cultivated on modern stage, though its theatrical potential had been the subject of some papers. Here comes Globe on Tour's production of *The Comedy of Errors* (director: Rebecca Gatward), first performed in 2009 and revived subsequently in 2010 and 2011. This paper examines how doubling is employed in this production, focusing in particular on two crucial scenes, the 'lock-out scene' and the 'reunion scene'. Although both scenes are difficult to perform with doublings, the subject of mixed up identities dovetails with the intricate doubling strategy of this production. In addition, multiple doublings in this production provide more physical comedy and therefore enhance the comic essence in the text. Finally, Globe's touring production demonstrates how the embodied characters co-create the situation of ultimate confusions with the spectators. Doubling can help to establish ultimate intimacy between the audience and the performer with all the tricks and the errors they share and therefore functions as an alternative method of breaking the fourth wall.

1. Introduction

Doubling was originally devised out of necessity in scaled-down productions with limited resources: i.e., the number of the actors available is smaller than that of the roles. Possible effects of theatrical doubling have been discussed in some inspiring essays. It is argued that this 'technique' can shed a new light on the text in Shakespeare's comedy or thematically enrich it when performed in theatre: 'In a time when the "Shakespeare revolution" still provides us with a host of fresh interpretations, doubling is a comic practice that richly deserves to be explored' (Oz, 1980). However, the relative scarcity of doubling in modern Shakespeare productions in practice is striking, considering Peter Brook's 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the only major example in modern theatre as it is speculated that in Shakespeare's time the doubling of parts were used 'adjectively – to inform, comment on, and, perhaps, augment the events enacted' (Booth, 1979). How could anyone then 'encourage modern directors to follow Brook in exploiting the theatrical energy inherent in the doubling of parts by companies that revel in the practice and, like their audiences, revel in the theatricality of theater' (Booth, 1979).

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Finally, a production worth noted for its doubling strategies has appeared. Doubling, a theatrical device full of potential but yet to be cultivated in performance, is a focus of Globe on Tour's production of *The Comedy of Errors*, performed at Shakespeare's Globe first in 2009 before touring in the UK, and then revived in 2010 and 2011 with a partially new cast, taking on a new dimension in a theatrical space where the distance between actor and audience is close and intimate. This paper examines multiple doublings in Rebecca Gatward's Globe production to explore what doubling can do in live theatre.

2. Doubling Controversies

The Comedy of Errors has two sets of twin brothers. At first glance the doubling of the twins seems like the best theatrical strategy to represent twins on stage. Surprisingly, the British stage has seen only a few. While on the other side of the Atlantic double casting dates back to the Colorado Shakespeare Festival at Boulder in 1962, the first major stage production in Britain appeared in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1990 when Ian Judge directed the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Neither theatre critics nor academic reviewers warmed to this drastic attempt, claiming that the doubling of estranged brothers killed the magic of the reunion scene: The central problem is the casting of Desmond Barrit and Graham Turner as both sets of twins: the Antipholi and Dromios of Syracuse and Ephesus. This strikes me as a monumentally daft idea and one that undercuts the whole basis of comedy since we become almost as confused as the characters on stage as to which twin is which (Billington, 1991).

Negative responses might have warned other directors against the idea of following Judge's path: doubling was not resurrected until 1999 when multi-talented Kathryn Hunter directed the play at Shakespeare's Globe. This time the strategy was received in general much more favourably by London critics (Clapp, 1999/Curtis, 1999/Logan, 1999/Spencer, 1999), whether it was due to the informal and intimate nature of the venue or some significant change in the climate of the British theatre, though not so favourably by academics (Lusardi, 2000/Smallwood, 2000/Smith, 1999). The issue seems to be a balance between the narrative and the theatrical pleasure the production offers through doubling: Hunter's boldest decision is to cast just two actors as both sets of twins: In theory, I am against it – the audience, I feel, should be ahead of the game rather than sharing the confusion of the characters on stage. In practice, it works perfectly well.... (Billington, 1999)

Or the Globe's theatrical space can be a key to understand less negative attitudes: The doubling, moreover, gave the audience almost the same sense of bewilderment as the characters themselves, and Hunter may have felt that, at the Globe, this was a more desirable response than a sense of superiority. (Potter, 1999)

Nevertheless, it took ten years to see another doubling attempt after Hunter's daring production. The material condition of Globe's touring production is limited by the small number of actors, a small stage and a 'booth stage' or a cloth covered booth which serves as a 'tiring house' (Johnson, 2009/Spencer, 2009/Quarmby, 2009). Each set of twins is played by a single actor, who uses a pair of spectacles to distinguish the twins from each other. Here is a casting list for the 2009 production:

Ronan Raftery	Antipholus of Syracuse/Antipholus of Ephesus
Sarah Ridgeway	Adriana
Dana Gartland	Luciana
Miltos Yerolemou	Dromio of Syracuse/Dromio of Ephesus
Cornelius Booth	Dr Pinch/Egeon/Second Merchant
Philip Battley	Angelo/Duke
Johanne Murdock	Abbess/Courtesan/Balthaser
Sophie Scott	Merchants/Gaoler/Officer/Servant to Adriana

Thus, doubling extends to some other characters in the production. This paper focuses on the use of doublings in two scenes, which are difficult to stage with doublings and therefore are crucial to my analysis. There is a dramatic tension developing in these scenes where doubled roles have lines, and also there are many more characters present onstage at the same time than the number of the company. The first scene is allocated in modern editions to Act 3 Scene 1 and called the 'lock-out' scene.

3. The Lock-Out Scene

The most important prop in this scene is a panel, blue on one side and beige on the other, which is placed in front of the blue curtain, the entrance to the tiring house. The panel, called a 'swivel door', is installed with wheels and therefore is mobile. Miltos Yerolemou as Dromio of Ephesus pulls the panel out to stage centre while calling his fellow servants and places it sideways to divide the stage space into two, one inside the Phoenix, a property belonging to Antipholus of Ephesus (stage left) and the other outside the Phoenix (stage right). Yerolemou's action has an effect like 'panning' in film moving a camera into the house. The panel also establishes transparency onstage, showing both inside and outside simultaneously, and most fascinatingly keeps the fact of doubling visible to the audience. The production has neither pretence to be naturalistic by hiding the material reality of doubling nor expectation for the audience to ignore doubling as part of the stage convention. The audience is invited to imagine the body absent rather than the two identical bodies of

the twins represented on stage by lookalikes. The end result is that the audience can see how an actor makes use of doubling to play totally identical twins.

Yerolemou moves across the downstage of the panel towards stage left to play Dromio of Syracuse lying on the floor behind the panel or the beige side of the door panel to guard the gate following his master's command. The next few exchanges involve Antipholus of Ephesus on stage right and both Dromios, which forces Yerolemou to move back and forth behind the panel between the two spaces. Pointing at the other side of the door, Dromio of Ephesus speaks extempore: 'I wonder who he is'. This 'extemporization' elicits conspiratorial laughter from the audience, serving as an invitation to a 'game', the very act of fantasy making with a sense of joint effort that connects the spectators with the stage and gets them truly 'involved' in the stage business.

Laughter reaches another height when Yerolemou has to display a dialogue between the two roles he is doubling, Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus:

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE (*within the Phoenix*)

The porter for this time, sir, and my name is Dromio.

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

O villain, thou hast stol'n both mine office and my name!

The one ne'er got me credit, the other mickle blame.

If thou hadst been Dromio today in my place,

Thou wouldst have changed thy place for a name, or thy name for an ass.

(3.1.43-47)

The audience witnesses how a single actor performs a dialogue with himself, acknowledging the fact of one body and observing this one body signifying the two bodies in the narrative. Hearing the 'imposter' identify himself as Dromio, EphesianDromio is expected to deliver his lines instantaneously, without any lapse of time, to sound like a proper angry response. It is strenuous for an actor to act out both roles, the two textually defined bodies. As soon as he finishes the SyracusianDromio's line, Yerolemou rushes to stage right and speaks 'O villain' in the midst of the very act of putting on his glasses to be the EphesianDromio, trying to control his breathing, an inevitable physical sign of playing two roles in a physically demanding manner. From the audience's perspective, Yerolemou's one-man act is funny. The confused state of Dromio, the comic essence of the scene, thus comes to the fore with the help of doubling.

Yerolemou moves between the two spaces more frequently than the lines suggest as he not only delivers lines but acts out a physical response to the other Dromios' remarks. Thus the actor continuously reminds the audience of the twin situation or of the two bodies while there is only one. However hard he tries to play the two characters, the audience sees only one body of an actor. From the audience's perspective, Yerolemou's continuous, persistent attempt to create two bodies has a straightforward comic effect, just like a desperate clown trying to achieve an impossible task. The Dromio brothers also are key to creating the inside and outside of the Phoenix, while only one Antipholus has lines in this scene, thereby conjuring, dividing and negotiating the space.

By the time the audience becomes uncertain of the identity of the twins, Yerolemou decides to exploit this natural development of the scene, in which confusions go into overdrive, and ends up playing the part of an actor who gets too confused to know which Dromio to play. The actor is about to put on the glasses to be Dromio of Syracuse and hesitates for a moment, not confident enough to know which twin comes next, giving a desperate glance at his master, or rather his fellow actor Rowan Raftery, for advice. In another show, Yerolemou demonstrates an error in doubling, taking off the glasses immediately after putting them on by mistake. By sharing the chaotic moment with the audience, doubling helps to break the fourth wall, an imaginary wall separating the audience from the performer and this gives presence to the audience as a co-creator of the theatrical illusion, this time a devastating confusion of identities.

The first part of this scene is outside-focused and in the latter part materializes the inside of the Phoenix. Yerolemou turns the door panel about 90 degrees for the beige side to face the audience, thus extending the space inside. Holding the beige side of the door on his back, the porter Dromio of Syracuse protects it from possible intruders trying to break in any moment. The entrance of Adriana and Luciana also enlarges the inner space and works as a cue for the Antipholus actor, Raftery, to run from stage right to slide down next to Luciana, quickly putting on the spectacles to be Antipholus of Syracuse having a drink with the two women inside the Phoenix. The outside of the Phoenix remains: although Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus are invisible behind the door, the audience hears the banging noise and sees the response of the people inside. The audience is aware of the body absent but, after being exposed to the mechanism of doubling earlier, has no problem to follow the onstage creation of another body.

Raftery has a physique totally different from his co-actor, Yerolemou: the former is more than average tall and slim with long thin legs and blond hair; the latter, short but broad with a well-developed upper body with dark Mediterranean complexion and dark bushy hair. The dynamics of doubling is taken further once Raftery starts playing double as he is forced to run a longer distance than Yerolemou from upstage to

downstage, right to left, which puts him in the audience's full view. His long thin legs make a mad dash look more awkward than small, quick-moving Yerolemou. Besides, his roles are more contrasting: as Antipholus of Ephesus he bangs his head against the door furious and devastated while as Antipholus of Syracuse he enjoys a quiet drink with Luciana (no lines), totally indifferent to the outside chaos. Raftery follows Yerolemou's cue to switch between inside and outside but is visibly more struggling than the smooth, subtle, even well-choreographed movement of Yerolemou's, which elicits even more laughter.

Doubling develops into another phase. Yerolemou, eventually too exhausted to move between the two spaces, decides to cheat: with a wink at Raftery, a gesture to clarify his intention to everyone including the spectators, Yerolemou turns the panel around to change the two spaces instead of hurrying between them. Now the colour of the door panel becomes significant. Yerolemou no longer rushes back and forth but stays on the same spot to play both Dromios comfortably, taking advantage of this trick while the rest of the actors, depending on which side of the door they are supposed to be on, ought to dash right or left. This panicked exodus is repeated three times, until Raftery directs the fellow actors to the correct side of the door and onstage chaos reaches a climax.

4. The Reunion Scene

In the other key scene, Act 5 Scene 1 and the final scene of the play, both pairs of the twin brothers are at last reunited and all the confusions in earlier scenes are duly resolved. The consensus among the negative reviews on Judge's doubling is that this daring attempt undermines the otherwise touching moment of a family reunion: the production 'compromised the very structure of the play by doubling the Antipholus and Dromio twins, necessitating transparent substitutions (meaning doppelgangers) at the end, the romance denouement when the pairs of brothers are reunited, thus cheating the audience of one of the major thrills of recognition toward which the play builds from the beginning' (Whitworth, 2002). The estranged twin brothers are reunited, which is followed by reconciliation of all other characters who have fallen into the abysmal state of confusions, including the estranged father of the Antipoli brothers, the Syracusean merchant who is facing the execution.

The final scene requires at least 13 characters onstage at one time while the touring company has only eight actors available and hence is in need of multiple doublings. This also results in an actor playing two roles without exiting once to re-enter as another character, conjuring up two bodies out of one. The final scene of the play involves a variety of different types of doublings flourishing such as onstage transformation from

one character to another. The actors cannot afford any pretence of multiple bodies. The first instance happens when Angelo the Goldsmith becomes the Duke of Ephesus and the Second Merchant becomes Egeon the Syracusan merchant while they are discussing those very characters.

ANGELO

By this, I think, the dial point's at five.
Anon, I'm sure, the Duke himself in person
Comes this way to the melancholy vale,
The place of death and sorry execution,
Behind the ditches of the abbey here. (5.1.118-22)

Half way through these lines, as if the word 'Duke' is a cue, Angelo begins his transformation into the character. The actor Philip Battley puts the Duke's hat on his head and slips on the Duke's jacket slowly and deliberately while still in mid-sentence about the Duke's appearance. His fellow actor, Cornelius Booth slowly commences his transformation into the Syracusan merchant whose imminent execution Angelo has just mentioned. Those two actors change not only the costumes but manner of speech and their postures to communicate the switching between two characters: while Angelo tends to lean forwards slightly as a humble goldsmith, the Duke stands perfectly upright. Thus the audience actually sees how actors distinguish those parts, witnessing their dexterity.

Then Battley, doubled as both the Duke and Angelo, handles a one-person dialogue, what Yelorigo does earlier as the Dromio twins:

ANGELO

My lord, in truth, thus far I witness with him:
That he dined not at home, but was locked out.

DUKE

But had he such a chain of thee, or no?

ANGELO

He had, my lord, and when he ran in here
These people saw the chain about his neck. (5.1.254-58)

Whenever Battley has to become Angelo the Goldsmith, he takes off his 'Duke' hat, holding it in front of his body, moves slightly to his right and kneels down. Then he looks up to his left, where the Duke is supposed

to be standing, and speaks Angelo's lines. Thus he 'creates' the Duke in an empty space and with the same trick acts out the Duke talking to the invisible Goldsmith who is kneeling to his right. The actor performs onstage transformations when the character has lines to deliver or even when the character is in topic, nodding to the speaker as if to consolidate his 'absent' presence. This continuous reminder re-creates a missing body and thus keeps textually required bodies alive onstage. The strategy, which might have resulted in a farce, actually helps to raise the tension by co-creating the narrative with the audience.

Once doubling is established as the main feature of the production, the actors commence their daring exploits of the device. Johanne Murdock happily standing onstage as the scantily-dressed Courtesan, as Yerolemou earlier acts out an error, misses her cue ('Go call the Abbess hither', 5.1.280) with full intent to exit to the tiring house and re-enter as the black-clad Abbess. The servant exits first without Murdock but then pokes her head out of an opening of the tiring house to gesture to her, to which Murdock replies with a feigned surprise and then rushes in. Thus instead of hiding doublings, the production emphasizes them to the extent of clarifying who is doubling which role. Therefore, the audience can follow very easily when Murdock is on stage as the Abbess opens the front of her black gown to expose her Courtesan costume and deliver the line ('Sir, I must have that diamond from you', 5.1.393).

By the final reunion scene the audience is fully prepared for a surprise, another strategy to overcome the shortage of the bodies: the focus is not much on the reunion itself but how the reunion of the twin brothers can be performed with a single body. With the Abbess's cue ('Most mighty Duke, behold a man much wronged', 5.1.331), enter Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse, one line later than indicated in 1623 folio and also in modern editions, in the form of two life-sized photographs. The audience accustomed to the tricks of doublings by now welcomes with laughter and a shower of applause those photographs, which mark the end of the doubling of the twins. The applause is for the stagecraft and the art of acting exposed to and shared by the audience without any hesitation. In the live theatre, reality could become a fantasy. The audience does not have to imagine what is not there but enjoys the constant 'negotiation' between the fictional body and the material body. What the audience sees is how the fictional body is represented by the material body and how the material body is interfered with the fictional body. This production with theatrical illusion and anti-illusion in fact presupposes the audience's participation. The magic of reunion is replaced by the magic of live theatre: the audience positioned as a collaborator has to complete the event happening in front of his/her own eyes. This is possibly what some critics are aware of but not able to elaborate about the doubling of the twin brothers: what matters is not the doubling of the brothers itself but how doubling functions in the production.

5. Conclusion

Globe's touring production demonstrates how doubling, a device with enormous theatrical potential, can be employed onstage and how the embodied characters co-create the situation of ultimate confusions with the spectators. The subject of mixed up identities dovetails nicely with the intricate doubling strategy of this production: The fact that the play is about mistaken identity actually really lends itself to the fact that you have a truncated group of actors. So there are lots of doubling. There are lots of people who are playing different characters. We have Antipholus and Dromio who are central characters. They are twins. They've been played by the same actors. But that's not the only area we are doubling. Everyone has to double, which means by the time we get to act five, there's all sorts of little mistaken identities that occurred because suddenly people end up talking to themselves as different characters or they have to do a very quick, minute, little change in order to become somebody else you met earlier in the play (Gatward).

Furthermore, doublings in this production provide more physical comedy and therefore enhance the comic essence in the text. Generally claimed to be one of the most farcical plays of Shakespeare's, the production of *The Comedy of Errors* on modern stage does not always succeed in eliciting the desired comic effects. And finally, doublings can help to establish ultimate intimacy between the audience and the performer with all the tricks and the errors they share, which is an alternative to the usual method of breaking the forth wall by talking to the audience directly. If live theatre is a place of exchanges between performers and spectators, this is the moment of interaction between them, the moment the actor touches the audience and the audience touches back in response. The audience does not have to conceive of non-existent bodies but simply welcomes the reality of theatre, one actor working hard doubly to play a character and its double. Thus more visible is the actor's physical and verbal dexterity than the role he/she plays, which goes beyond the usual mimetic representation. The act of exposing a performing person to the audience connects the latter with the former as its conspirator. The actors are narrating the story using their physical presence onstage and embodying different persons with the audience as their fellow conspirator or the co-creator of a scene. Doubling thus reveals a contradictory and therefore fascinating nature of live theatre: illusion-breaking could be illusion-making.

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**The particular production the author watched took place in the Bodleian Library Quadrangle, University of Oxford on 2 August 2009, and the author also consulted the video recording of the same production performed at Shakespeare's Globe.

***Line references are to the Oxford Shakespeare.

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