

# Review: Here Lies Shakespeare at Jacksons Lane

JACKSONS LANE ◊ 11 - 15 JANUARY 2017

*The Bard meets Mr Potatohead: Sally Hales reviews Les Antliacastes' dissection of the Shakespeare industry.*

[SALLY HALES](#)



Here Lies Shakespeare at Jacksons Lane. Photo: JP Estournet.

It's an image I don't think I'll ever unsee: a puppet cow shits prolifically onto a merry-go-round of tiny shopping trollies a while a grotesque puppet hybrid of Elizabeth I and some kind of goat-monkey thing dances a jig on its back. It's part of a scene that takes place around halfway through Les Antliacastes's *Here Lies Shakespeare*, performed at Jackson's Lane as part of the London International Mime Festival. And, by this point, it's pretty clear that the makers of this show, led by director, puppeteer and performer Patrick Sims, don't think much of the Shakespeare industry.

Based on Mark Twain's *Is Shakespeare Dead?*, in which the American satirist seems to espouse the argument that Shakespeare was not the author of the plays attributed to him, the show takes some of Twain's arguments (the absence of biography of Will-the-man and the surfeit of legal knowledge found in the work are among them) and, as with the original, uses them to interrogate the present. Our desire to 'know' and

‘solve’ Shakespeare-the-man, even if that means uprooting him and replanting someone else there altogether, is an act of attempted possession redolent of the project of capitalism. And, before you know it, you’ve got the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, instead of a direct relationship with the plays. Can’t really argue with that.

#### ADVERTISEMENT

The prologue takes place in a half-circle in front of the tiny stage, where an alien puppet skeleton collects potatoes as a makeshift satellite beams Shakespeare’s words out into the ether. This seemingly random beginning is fleshed out through the next three ‘short stories’ and the epilogue: potatoes become an extended metaphor for the flawed Shakespeare project, as the bard’s image (but not his work) is found polluting the oceans, buried in the earth and filling the airways. But is he there? We dig for answers, but there are only potatoes: the man himself is forever elusive. At various points, his excavated skeleton is exposed only to be revealed as made of the humble root vegetable. There’s a toy Mr Potatohead, followed by an enormous man with an actual potatohead, and another tiny potatohead sings *Are you Lonesome Tonight* complete with Jacques’s famous soliloquy from *As You Like It*: ‘All the world’s a stage, and all men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts.’ Shakespeare’s parts, it seems, are all made from potatoes. Surreal doesn’t really start to cover it. And that’s just a small part of the onslaught of images that probe our Shakespearean misadventures: Frankenstein takes tea from a Union Jack china service in Stratford with a doll that changes face to reveal a monkey, while a skeletal turkey (?) with Shakespeare’s head sits atop a Globe Theatre itself topped with a till, happily ringing up money as a parade of tiny trollies pass by. You get the message.

The stunning staging plays with perspective and merges performance, puppetry and humour – at times, it’s laugh-out-loud funny – with effortless ease. The technical virtuosity on display often defies comprehension. But, structurally, it feels a little like a one-trick pony: the same message being driven home through several, albeit entertaining scenarios, with little sense of narrative drive. The strongest scenes pass early on. An underwater section featuring an erstwhile Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*, a fish-mermaid and lots of marine rubbish flounders, and the concentration wanders. Mind you, if you’re still tamping about Emma Rice (and aren’t we all?), this will fill your anger tank to overflowing, and is well worth it for that reason alone.

*Here Lies Shakespeare is on until 15th January 2017 at Jacksons Lane. [Click here for more details.](#)*