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Introduction

Sarah Werner

Nearly everyone studying Renaissance drama today would agree that the examination of Shakespeare and performance is a central field in the discipline, one that has been growing steadily over the past 30 years. Beyond that basic assertion, however, is a wide range of opinions about and valuations of that study. What does it mean to study Shakespeare and performance? What sort of performance – theatrical? film? early modern? twenty-first century? What are the terms of such study – how it compares to other productions of Shakespeare's plays? its relationship to the text? whether the performance was "good"? What is the focus of such study – Shakespeare? theatrical practice? Renaissance drama? the meaning of the text? And where do we best study such performance – in rehearsal rooms? theater audiences? libraries and archives?

A brief consideration of the history of studying Shakespeare and performance suggests why there is such a wide range of questions that might be asked about its basic premises.[1] Most overviews begin with the publication of J. L. Styan's *The Shakespeare Revolution* in 1977. But we might push the origins of the field back further, to William Poel's production of the First Quarto of *Hamlet* in 1881, a production that strove to present Shakespeare's play as it would have been done on the Elizabethan stage and that is often seen as the precursor to Styan and to today's Original Practices movement. Poel's theatrical impulses can be linked, as Robert Shaughnessy has shown, to the scholarly and technological impulses of the period that led to photographic facsimiles and increased attention to an "authentic" Shakespeare (Shaughnessy 2002, 17–54). In that light, Poel's desire for academic validity in addition to theatrical success marks him as a precursor not only to a stripped-down theatrical aesthetic, but to the need to legitimate the interplay between scholarship and theater through academic trappings.

This tension between scholarship and theater and the struggle for legitimacy can be found even as the study of Shakespeare and performance found its most vocal early proponents in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. That generation of scholars argued that the primary value of studying performance was to gain a deeper understanding of what the plays meant: because Renaissance play texts were written to be performed, it is primarily through their enactment on stage that we can understand how and what they mean (for examples see, in addition to Styan, Brown, Goldman, McGuire, and Thompson). Reacting to New Criticism and other literary schools that studied the plays as poems to be read, this first generation argued vociferously that theatrical meaning was not only as valid as literary meaning, but was in fact more faithful to Shakespeare's intent. Scholars began to mine productions of (primarily) Shakespeare's plays in order to gain insight into what the text meant. At the same time, they celebrated what they saw as common ground between Shakespeare's early modern theatrical language and that of their own contemporary theater. Modern theater was held out as a laboratory for exploring and experiencing Shakespeare's own meaning.

The assumptions that ground this early scholarship are easy to see from our perspective. Such scholarship assumes that performance is a single, stable entity, the practices of and response to which remain consistent over time, geography, and cultural values. (It is this assumption that allows one to believe that performances in the late 1970s could replicate the effects and meanings of performances in the 1590s.) There is also the assumption that the text itself is stable (the playscript that actors and scholars read today is the same as the one that players would have been performing) as is its meaning (we respond to issues of gender or theology, for instance, in the same way as the plays' first audiences). There is, finally, and crucially, the belief that it is the purpose of performance to realize the script – to interpret the meaning that is created by the playwright, rather than to use to the script to create a new meaning through the acts of performance.

A second generation of scholarship starting in the mid-1990s reacted against this view of the relationship between performance and text, arguing that it diminished the power and effect of performance by understanding its purpose as limited to textual interpretation. This next wave of scholars insisted that performances create meaning and that productions are shaped equally by the dramatic script and by the processes of performance (for key examples, see Bulman, Hodgdon, and Worthen). Rather than examining productions in terms of how they realize Shakespeare's intent, or in terms of how they allow us to discover his meaning, these scholars focused on the interactions between spectator, performer, and text. New concerns were introduced to the field, such as actor training, how directors claim authority for their decisions, the effect of theater architecture, and the nature of theater finances. If we could no longer learn about a script by watching a performance of it, we could instead understand performances better by meeting them on their own terms.

This second wave of scholarship counteracted some of the earlier criticism of the field, which distrusted the prioritization of stage over page (in the standard trope of those debates) and which saw such study as hopelessly naïve and lacking in rigor. If the first wave of scholarship sought to invert the dominance of text over performance, it still reinforced the value of literary interpretation by accepting its terms of engagement. The second wave of performance scholarship sought, instead, to bypass the hierarchy by proposing a new set of terms, drawing its inspiration less from literary studies and more from theater and performance studies. In so doing, however, a new host of questions and concerns cropped up. If the goal is no longer to gain a better understanding of Shakespeare's text, what is the purpose of studying performances of the plays? Without the common ground of Shakespeare's meaning, how can performance study speak to literary scholarship or theater history?

It would be wrong to assume a teleological progress from the first generation of performance scholarship to the second: the latter is not necessarily better, nor did it overwrite the practices of the first. Scholarship is still being produced that assumes as its foundation the possibility of better understanding Shakespeare through the performance of the plays; theater practitioners are still held up as models of textual engagement. Influential series with their origins in the first wave of scholarship – Manchester University Press's *Shakespeare in Performance*, which debuted in 1984, focuses on production histories of each of the plays, and Cambridge's *Players of Shakespeare*, begun in 1985, is devoted to actor's accounts of performing the plays – continue to produce new volumes today, evidence of their ongoing popularity. At the same time, examinations of the cultural and material contexts for the production of Shakespeare performances (the "Shakespeare effect" as Shaughnessy calls it) continue to grow, and questions about "the force of performance" (to quote the title of W. B. Worthen's 2003 book) create new impulses for studying the plays.

This multiplicity of approaches to studying Shakespeare and performance provides the impetus for this collection. In the concurrent and often contradictory methodologies for thinking about performance and Renaissance drama, what lessons can be drawn? And, more importantly, what has been omitted? These questions and concerns are at the heart of this collection. But rather than simply responding to what has already been done, the chapters in this volume seek out new directions that the field of Renaissance drama and performance studies needs to explore in order to continue as a vital inquiry. The volume is divided into three sections that group the chapters into some of the primary concerns they share, concerns that come out of the present field of performance studies: Part I, "Working with the Ephemeral"; Part II, "Reconnecting Literary Criticism and Performance Analysis"; and Part III, "Resituating Shakespeare." A final chapter serves as a postscript, building on the issues raised throughout the volume in order to point toward further questions. In all instances, the chapters speak to each other and turn the conversation outward toward the reader, moving from what has been done to what needs to be done.

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Part of the second generation's response to the first wave of performance scholarship was to insist that performance is not one stable thing: the material conditions of each production effect its final shape, the final shape itself varies from performance to performance, and any recording of, or response to, a single performance cannot replicate the experience of the performance itself. For scholars working from the perspective of literary analysis, such ephemerality can seem to vitiate the value of studying performance. Even for those scholars who accept this premise of continually shifting performance, there can be a feeling of unease, a wondering of what it is that we are studying. The chapters in Part I of *New Directions*, "Working with the Ephemeral," reconsider what it means to think of performance as ephemeral and how scholarship can respond to this perceived dilemma.

Robert Shaughnessy's "One Piece at a Time" serves as an introduction to the concerns about the passage of performance and the reliability of memory that have emerged as central tropes in recent years. In this piece, Shaughnessy explores how we write about theater that we have seen – "live performance," as it is typically described – given that writing about performance, of course, always happens *after* the event. Because of this gap, what and how we remember crucially informs what we are able to write. Looking back on his own memories of theatergoing, Shaughnessy is struck by the lack of differentiation between what seems memorable and important and what does not, describing a series of flashbulb moments that capture not only what happens onstage but who he is with, a network of memories that brings the context of performance into the performance itself. Attending to theatergoing, however, means valuing not only what we remember, but what we forget and misunderstand. The notes that Shaughnessy uses to help remember a performance also record his misimpressions, a palimpsest of rerecordings and unfulfilled expectations. For Shaughnessy, the process of watching a performance ultimately becomes a process of watching himself watching and of watching others watching. Shaughnessy's perspective is strongly shaped by the sense of a performance as an event, and this chapter itself records a specific moment in time and a network of watching and being watched. Written originally for a 2006 conference on "Watching Shakespeare, Watching Ourselves," and published subsequently in *Shakespeare Bulletin,* "One Piece at a Time" voices key concerns about current approaches to studying performances of Shakespeare. Shaughnessy's articulation of and response to those concerns has been an influential part of the conversations that shape this collection.

For William N. West, the process of remembering performance depends not on inscribing our roles as spectators, and our distance from or proximity to the live performance, but on performance's self-reflexive representation of itself. Chapter 2, "Replaying Early Modern Performances," argues that the field's preoccupation with the loss of performance cripplingly misunderstands the work of performance and our relationship to it. Although late twentieth-century theoreticians have insistently focused on the absence of performance – referring to it in terms of mourning, death, ghosting, and other metaphors of loss – that rhetoric of melancholy can be traced to an insistence on seeing theater as an event, as something that has happened and that is always already in the past. West, however, traces that rhetoric back to the earliest days of the English theater and, in so doing, reinvents that sense of absence as an historically contingent understanding of performance, rather than an ontological one. In the place of loss, West substitutes "replaying" – a recognition that performance is built around a series of absences and recognitions, not losses alone. Through an analysis of the Wooster Group's 2007 *Hamlet*, a production that consciously replays Richard Burton's film of his stage performance of the play, West examines how performance continually quotes and refers back to earlier incarnations, both to earlier moments in the same production as well as to earlier productions. In this way, West argues, performance is never lost, but is always replayed. Worries about how traces of performance are mediated – through promptbooks, video or sound recordings, props – forget that not only does memory mediate a performance, subsequent performances mediate earlier ones, and the current performance bears in itself the mediated traces of replaying. Ultimately, reconfiguring "loss" as "replaying" allows West to understand how performance works without either ignoring or getting trapped by a sense of performance's movement through time.

Christopher Cobb's "Acts of Seizure: A Theatrical Poetics of Metonymy and Metaphor" also argues that we need to move away from thinking of theater as a discrete event, not because it falsely sets up performance as irrecoverable, but because the impulse to record all aspects of the event and its surrounding context turns our attention away from the moment of performance itself. Cobb in Chapter 3 looks back at the history so far of studying performance and identifies two trends that distract scholars from the task at hand. The first was the argument over the prioritization of stage over page that was noted earlier in this introduction; the second is the melancholic sense that the more we capture about the context of a performance, the less we can say about the significance of that performance. In response, Cobb proposes a new way of thinking about performances, a methodology drawn from semiotics that will allow scholars to focus on analyzing the work of performance itself. By thinking about how performances construct meanings either metonymically or metaphorically, scholars can analyze the tools that performances use to create meanings and the ways in which the signifying practices of both text and performance shape each other and impact the spectators' reactions. Such an approach enables a focus on how performance seizes our attention and shapes meaning from that interaction, as well as brings literary attention to text back into the picture by considering the interplay between text and performance rather than subsuming one into the other.

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The chapters in the first part are all concerned with how scholars make sense of the act of performance, whether that be through attention to how we behave as spectators, to how performance replays itself, or to the process by which a performance assigns meanings. The second group of chapters in *New Directions* reconsiders what we might learn from the interplay between literary criticism and performance analysis. The first wave of performance scholarship insisted that we could better understand Shakespeare's plays by studying modern performances of them; the second wave countered that studying modern performances reveals modern theatrical practices rather than ahistorical textual meanings, effectively severing the relationship between modern performances and historically informed literary analysis of the plays. But must we then assume that there can be nothing to learn about Renaissance plays by watching modern theater? What is the relationship between modern performances and literary criticism of the plays?

Andrew James Hartley takes as his starting point a belief that performance is a materially grounded and culturally distinct process, neither timeless nor transparent. But in Chapter 4, "Page and Stage Again: Rethinking Renaissance Character Phenomenologically," he argues that modern performances can enhance our understanding of temporally distant playtexts in ways that are both theoretically sophisticated and historically sensitive. Drawing on a production he directed of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Hartley explores how character is generated from impulses which are bound to textual elements but not defined exclusively by them. Vindice's relationship to the audience is created through the actor's present body and the contradictory impulses found in the playscript's dialogue, a tension that might differ in specific details between Renaissance players and modern actors, but one that exists for both. In focusing on both textual and performance aspects of Vindice's character formation, Hartley argues against privileging text as the sole source for understanding character both on the Renaissance and modern stages, and against the assumption of absolute difference between past and present.

The one area of performance studies where the belief that contemporary theater could inform scholarship has remained strong is the Original Practices movement. Under that rubric scholars, in cooperation with actors, have insisted that performances created in conditions that replicate those of early modern playhouses can help us better understand the plays. The Original Practices movement is often dismissed as a mistaken attempt to recreate an irretrievable past and an overly simplistic approach to the plays and to theater history. Paul Menzer, in Chapter 5, "The Spirit of '76: Original Practices and Revolutionary Nostalgia," takes the impulses behind this movement seriously and rather than dismissing its project, critiques it through its preoccupation with real estate – its desire to recreate early modern theater spaces and its insistence that those animating spaces will direct actors' work to recreate Renaissance practices and meanings. Tracing the fetishizing of theater buildings back to the founding stories of English theater, Menzer sees in the current Original Practices movement an American nostalgia that began with revolutionary zeal, but that turned into an entrepreneurial reification of business practice over creative labor. As suggested by this preoccupation with real estate and architecture, current Shakespeare performance studies too readily identifies the past through the traces it has left behind, leading theater history to the dangerous supposition that it is those material traces that generate performances rather than the creative work of theater practitioners. Menzer advocates moving away from such traces to think instead about the blanks in history, the theater events that might be imaginatively recreated today and that might be more invested in people than architecture.

Hartley and Menzer revisit the impetus for watching modern performances to argue for its connection to our understanding of early modern theater and plays. Jeremy Lopez turns his attention in Chapter 6 to the impetus for watching itself, wondering what connection academic theater reviews have to literary or performance analysis. Reviews have long been source material for scholars studying productions, and while our understanding of the context and conventions of newspaper reviewing informs our use of that material, less attention has been paid to the reviews that we write ourselves. “Spreading the Shakespeare Gospel: A Rhetorical History of the Academic Theater Review” argues that those reviews are deeply informed by what Lopez calls the proselytizing gesture – the urge to promote and celebrate the ever-wider, ever-more accessible dissemination of the works of Shakespeare to less fortunate people everywhere. This gesture is inscribed within the review’s form, a structural imperative to describe and record and to justify this task of describing and recording. Studying the last 50 years of reviews published in *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *Shakespeare Survey*, Lopez contextualizes the language and form of the academic theater review in the shifting goals of academic journals and their relationship to the Shakespeare industry. Ultimately, Lopez argues that the form of the theater review has become so stultified that even scholars who are skeptical and astute in their performance and literary criticism blindly cheer on the performance of Shakespeare in their theater reviews.

One of the key dynamics driving the reviews that Lopez considers as well as the larger field of performance studies is a relentless focus on Shakespeare. Such a focus is of course understandable. Very few other Renaissance plays have the long stage tradition that Shakespeare’s have, and modern performances of Shakespeare’s contemporaries continue to be few and far between. The focus on Shakespeare also reflects the dominance that he has over the rest of early modern studies, and, indeed, the entire study of English literature. In both its search for material to study and its desire for legitimization, performance studies’ focus on Shakespeare seems obvious. But the near-exclusive attention paid to Shakespeare’s plays has shaped the field’s concerns in ways we do not yet fully understand. Our assumptions about the

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dramaturgy of Renaissance theater, about the power of performance, about theatrical languages – all these assumptions are rooted in Shakespeare's canon. What would happen if we were to move our attention away from this singular focus? These questions are the driving concern of the volume's third part, "Resituating Shakespeare."

In Chapter 7, "Performance Criticism Without Performance: The Study of Non-Shakespearean Drama," Genevieve Love turns her attention towards plays without a modern performance history and finds that there is much to be learned about the nature of theater in the absence of specific performances. Starting with a review of past studies of Shakespeare in performance, Love notes that performance centered scholarship has insistently focused on the dynamics of excess and loss, characterizing the possibilities of performance as being both full of potential but bounded by finite choices, and as simultaneously rich in theatrical history and haunted by the absence of the earliest performances. While the dynamics of excess and loss are tied to the specifics of Shakespeare's plays and their publication and production history, Love argues that we can find the root of these tugs of plenitude and scarcity in the production of theatrical power itself. Through an examination of Thomas Heywood's *A Mayden-head Well Lost*, a play with no known performance history after the seventeenth century, Love studies the nature of theatrical desire and the use of fantasizing about performances that never were. Love's contention is that not only can we study performance via plays that remain unperformed, we need to examine such plays in order to more fully understand how theater works. As such, "Performance Criticism Without Performance" offers both a methodology for studying plays lacking a performance tradition and a rallying cry for the necessity of such study.

Emma Smith in Chapter 8 also takes as her starting point the question of how to study non-Shakespearean drama through the lens of performance. Smith observes that non-performance criticism of Shakespeare's plays has in recent years examined how his plays are relevant to present-day concerns, a presentist focus that has long been part of the rhetoric of understanding how his plays make sense in performance; non-Shakespearean drama, however, has insisted on an historicist approach, disconnecting the plays from even the scarce performances of them today. In "Performing Relevance/Relevant Performances: Shakespeare, Jonson, Hitchcock," Smith argues for the importance of bringing the study of performance into the realm of non-Shakespearean drama so that the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries might not descend further into obscurity. Rather than doing as Shakespeare scholars do, and prioritizing a presentist approach to the plays and performance alike, Smith articulates a new approach of thinking analogically. By seeing performance as a series of formal, dramaturgical possibilities, and not as something that is "of" a text, Smith is able to explore how Jonson's plays work as performance pieces by reading them alongside Alfred Hitchcock's films, performances that are not of Jonson's plays but are analogous to them in the use of narrative voice, authorial interplay, and audience response. By focusing on connections grounded in the mode of performance, rather than in the text at hand, Smith decenters the prioritization of the literary text and demarginalizes non-Shakespearean drama in the study of performance.

Both Smith and Love are interested primarily in what it means to reorient the field of performance study so that Shakespeare's early modern contemporaries are central objects of concern. But what about his contemporaries on today's stages? Actors routinely perform not only Shakespeare, but the works of many other playwrights. Bridget Escolme, in Chapter 9, "Shakespeare and Our Contemporaries," insists that thinking of Shakespearean performance only in terms of other performances of Shakespeare overlooks the wider range of theatrical practices that shape how those performances work. Spectators who have noted a shift in recent Royal Shakespeare Company productions have often attributed their new hypertheatricality to the pressures that Shakespeare's Globe Theatre put on popular performances of Shakespeare's plays: in this line of argument, the RSC has shifted toward an Original Practices style that follows the Globe's emphasis on audience interactivity. But Escolme resituates that line of argument, seeing both the RSC and the Globe styles as having their roots in Lecoq's physical theater, a type of performativity that emphasizes clowning and the actor's vulnerability. Rather than understanding Shakespeare in terms of Original Practices – a view that reinforces prioritizing Shakespeare's meaning over contemporary connections – Escolme reveals the ways in which current methods of performing Shakespeare draw on cultural concerns of the post-2001 world and our feelings of anxious vulnerability.

Ayanna Thompson is also fundamentally concerned with how productions reveal and rework contemporary anxieties that are not only voiced in Shakespeare's texts but put into practice through theatrical performances. In Chapter 10, "'Ay, there's the rub': Race and Performance Studies," Thompson explores two contemporary American plays – Neil LaBute's *This Is How It Goes* and Suzan-Lori Park's *Venus* – in order to illuminate how Shakespeare's *Othello* haunts modern conversations about race and performances of race. By placing Shakespeare's play alongside today's theatrical debates about our racial history and the practice of cross-racial casting not only are the ways in which race is performed revealed to be integral to the history of Shakespeare and performance, the history of Shakespeare performance is interwoven with ongoing practices of race in and as performance. Like the other chapters in this section, Thompson's argues for the necessity of new contexts for Shakespeare – placing his plays not only alongside those of his historical and stage contemporaries, but within the continuing explorations of racial identity and performance.

The chapters that form the main portion of this volume, with one exception, focus on theatrical performances of Renaissance drama rather than filmic ones. Even the one exception to this rule proves the general belief driving this choice, a belief that cinema and theater are separate media with different impacts and different theoretical needs – Smith's use of Hitchcock to explore an analogic criticism of Jonsonian performance stems in part from the difference between the two media and the possibility of finding ways to discuss similarity in spite of that difference. But the relationship between theater and film and between the study of each medium is in many ways at the heart of some of the questions facing what it means to study Renaissance drama in performance. Anxieties about ephemerality, for instance, have been slaked both by turning towards film as a (misleadingly) stable and repeatable performance and by turning away from the repeatability of films and videos to focus on the uniqueness of the live theatrical event. And the desire to produce "readings" of a performance akin to literary criticism comes in part out of a sense that film can be read in a manner similar to reading a written text: by examining the object of study repeatedly and closely.

The relationship between theater and film and the impact that it has had on the shape of performance studies is the focus of this volume's postscript by Courtney Lehmann. Many of the concerns raised by the chapters in this volume return in "Performing the 'Live': Cinema, Simulation, and the Death of the Real in Alex Cox's *Revengers Tragedy,*" including the illusion of "live" performance and the long shadow cast by Shakespeare. Lehmann situates theater's valuation of live performance over recorded performance in terms of the century-old struggle between theater and cinema for legitimization and popularity. But Lehmann goes on to show, through a compelling analysis of Cox's film informed by the theories of Baudrillard, Auslander, and Žižek, that in today's hypermediatized world, "live" is always already mediated and the "real" is already problematized. What happens to the study of performance if the very things that separate theater and film are called into question? Lehmann's chapter does not provide an answer to the questions that drive this collection, but it does suggest some ways that those questions can be put to provocative use.

The chapters in this volume have been grouped together in purposeful ways, as this introduction makes clear, but their concerns can be mapped in other ways as well. The idea of loss haunts the chapters of West, Menzer, and Love, for instance, in ways that produce different effects and drive the conversation in different directions. The struggle to understand how we respond to performances can be seen in Shaughnessy, Cobb, Hartley, and Thompson; Lopez focuses explicitly on reviewers, but a consideration of the shaping influence of reviews can be found in Cobb, Escolme, and Thompson as well. What role history plays in our study of performance is a question considered by West, Hartley, Menzer, Love, and Lehmann. While the chapters in this volume speak to each other and to shared concerns, they do not necessarily agree with each other. Lehmann's and Smith's use of the relationships between film and theater, for instance, are not completely reconcilable;

nor does Lehmann's theorizing erase the concerns of Shaughnessy and West about the tensions between live and recorded performances. Both Lehmann and Hartley find in *Revenger's Tragedy* a way to rethink the limitations of Shakespeare for creating performances, but their use of non-Shakespearean performance does not ask the same questions that Love wants us to ask. West and Menzer share an interest in early modern theater history and how it might connect to modern performances, but they diverge on the question of whether the idea of the theater event is a productive way to make that connection.

The study of Renaissance drama and performance is a field that continues to grow and to offer new insights. The aim of this volume is not to provide a univocal manifesto for how the field ought to develop. It is rather to start a debate that its readers will continue, a debate from which we will all benefit.

Note

1. Longer accounts of the history of Shakespeare and performance studies can be found in Shaughnessy 2002, 1–14; Love 2009; Hodgdon 2005. Many of the chapters in this volume also examine this history, situating their own interrogations in the context of what has come before; see particularly Shaughnessy, West, Cobb, and Love.

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