

SHAKESPEARE AND THE  
FORCE OF MODERN  
PERFORMANCE

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CHAPTER I

*Performing history*

This theatre reminds many people of Shakespeare's Globe; my only question is, can we use it for playing Shakespeare?

Freddie Rokem, Discussion session

When Stephen Greenblatt confessed “a desire to speak with the dead” in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1), he expressed a common longing, a hunger that has also shaped the most notorious theatre built in recent memory: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on London's Bankside. The texture of the structure promises to satisfy an appetite for such discourse with the dead, or at least with the creations of the dead – Hamlet, Ophelia, Shylock, and so on. An early modern structure frames the return of early modern subjects and the force of their actions onstage. In its meticulous reconstruction of building practices and ongoing research into the use of period costumes and staging, the Globe reflects a desire to see performance releasing original Shakespearean meanings; the Globe is a monument to an understanding of dramatic performance as the embodiment of a textualized past, expectantly awaiting the chance to speak. At the same time the Globe also enacts the ineluctable presentness of performance, the ways performance speaks with a difference. Despite the oak and plaster, the Globe is everywhere traced by the passage of history: it is down the street from the original foundations; it holds fewer, bigger, and quite different people; the hair-and-lime plaster uses goat hair (cow hair today is too short); the thatch is chemically treated; the lath and plaster conceals a modern firewall; sprinkler heads dot the ridgepole; the exterior timbering is whitewashed, a concession to modern “Tudor” sensibilities; there are actresses, intermissions, numbered seats, toilets, ushers, ice cream, a restaurant, a cafe, a gift shop. The Globe

epitomizes a host of attitudes toward history, not least the commodification of “pastness” within the economy of international tourism. It “works” as a theatre because it epitomizes one sense of contemporary dramatic performativity.

The common understanding of dramatic performance is thoroughly informed by a sense of the “performative”: words on the page appear to cite a range of appropriate behaviors, behaviors that evoke an agent, a fictive subject, often a “character.” They also appear to summon an ensemble of theatrical behaviors, the vocal, physical, and gestural regimes of acting that enable performers and audiences to regard the text *as* susceptible to the force of the stage. The Globe expresses one dimension of the historically volatile ensemble of values and behaviors that I am calling “Shakespearean performativity”: the sense that a Shakespeare play can, or sometimes should, evoke the pastness of the text and what the text represents – early modern values, behaviors, subjects – in the present action of performance. Reconstructing both the material frame and the spatial and proxemic relations of Shakespeare’s playhouse, Globe performance claims a performative and historical privilege, as though the framing structure will release the behaviors that originally made the plays “work” from their captivity in the text and their inaccessibility to the trends of modern theatre. The Globe is only one index of a widely held belief about dramatic performance: that the stage can – through a variety of means, of which reconstruction is only one – reclaim the original theatrical force of a playwright’s writing.

“Performance means: never for the first time”: Richard Schechner’s definition of performance as “restored behavior” underlines the understanding of drama sustained by the Globe (“Collective Reflexivity” 40). The Globe expresses a familiar attitude toward the proper relationship between stage and page in dramatic performance in the West, the sense that the stage echoes, repeats, or restores meanings that originate in the text. In part because of Shakespeare’s dual canonicity as theatre and as literature, Shakespearean performance is especially liable to this misunderstanding, that a performance “of *Hamlet*” is a reproduction of textual meanings in some relatively straightforward way. The force attributed to the text in a performance is not a stable or essential aspect of dramatic performativity; the genre of a performance determines how (or whether) a sense of “the text” emerges

onstage, and what kind of force it has as stage behavior. Even in the relatively restricted stylistic repertoire of contemporary Anglo-North American theatre, different texts appear to exert different kinds of force: Shakespeare productions tend to interpret the text in distinctive ways, different from the approaches typically taken to Greek drama, or to Chekhov, or to Beckett.

The force of texts is constituted differently again in nontheatrical arenas of dramatic performance, such as film television. Television scripts are dispensable material *for* the performance, as, arguably, the scripts of early modern plays were in their day. Devised by writers, not “authors,” these scripts have little value outside performance; the performance cannot be *of* them in the way we see a performance *of Hamlet* (Patrick Stewart cannot really give a faithful or an unfaithful performance of “Jean-Luc Picard”), in part because television does not operate as a repertory medium (the cast of *Friends* will not be reviving *Seinfeld*), and also because the scripts are not often reconceptualized in another sanctioned institution – literature – that would incorporate them as “works” and lend them an independent identity outside performance.

Although dramatic performativity in the West may arise at the interface between writing and enactment, the function of the text in the force of performance is extremely variable, even within a relatively discrete historical and cultural moment.<sup>1</sup> And while the ways of attributing force to the dramatic text in stage performance change, so, too, do the ways of using performance to illuminate the text’s historicity (if that historicity is figured as part of the play’s theatrical vitality at all). In many ways this historicizing capacity is the mark of *modern* Shakespearean performativity, emerging fitfully in the eighteenth century and extending through the dominant theatrical innovations of the nineteenth-century theatre. The two forms of this historicizing – dramatic pictorialism, reproducing the dramatic setting in stage sets and costumes (Romans in togas, Macbeth in kilts), and theatrical antiquarianism, reproducing the physical environment of Shakespeare’s theatre, staging, and costumes (thrust stage, doublet-and-hose) – express a modern understanding of the proper force of classic drama onstage. Henry Irving’s Anglo-Saxon *King Lear* or the Republican Rome of the Saxe-Meiningen *Julius Caesar* enabled their audiences to view an authentic Shakespeare through the lens of costumes and

sets appropriate to the dramatic setting, much as William Poel's Elizabethan reconstructions enabled audiences to view the plays through the theatrical apparatus appropriate to Shakespeare's historical period. When Betterton's or Garrick's Hamlet cast wore contemporary clothing, they were not anticipating modern-dress or eclectic staging today; their dress spoke to a sense of Shakespeare's plays as properties of the contemporary theatre, susceptible to the usual practices of playacting. The modern-dress and eclectic design typical of twentieth-century performance also assert the historicizing force of contemporary behavior, its ability to redeem Shakespeare's meanings from their historical moment, and preserve a historicizing tension between past styles of language and characterization and the theatrical elements of the present (design, props, acting style). Modern Shakespeare merely reciprocates the sense that the Shakespearean text is freighted with its past, a history that can be confronted onstage.<sup>2</sup>

The notion that dramatic texts might bear their historical origins into performance not only sustains projects like the Globe, but also characterizes Shakespearean performativity in the modern era. Charles Kean's *Richard II*, William Poel's picture-framed Fortune stage, the authentic underwear of the Globe's 1997 *Henry V*, the armored Armani Romans of Julie Taymor's *Titus* all evoke a modern confidence in the restorative power of performance, and a modern anxiety as well: the fear that much as performance operates in the here and now, it risks losing a validating connection to the past, a past located in the text that the performance is said to enact, to be *of*. However we understand the subjects of Shakespearean dramatic writing, can performance really make them speak to us?

Shakespeare's plays have been successfully and forcefully staged in languages, in social and performance traditions, and with technologies unimaginable to Shakespeare: we can readily sidestep the sense that Shakespearean drama, any drama, is so essentially theatrical – that there *is* an essential theatricality – as to determine the conditions of its stage production. The historicizing capacity of performance is better described in a more dialogic fashion. Michael Bristol's *Big-Time Shakespeare* provides an unusually cogent argument for the importance of regarding performance as a means of preserving the historical character of dramatic writing. At the same time that he illustrates the attraction of this continuity with a Shakespearean past, though,

Bristol also demonstrates the difficulty of framing that continuity onstage, of seeing the text's past in the present of performance.

*Big-Time Shakespeare* develops a shrewd case for the ongoing work of Shakespearean writing, a case that depends at once on the continuing renegotiation of Shakespeare's texts by successive readers, critics, and performers, *and* on properties of the texts themselves, their openness as "discursive formations" that are not "limited to expressing the concerns and interests of a narrowly circumscribed historical period" (11). To frame this ongoing historical dialogue, Bristol must at once resist a "universal" or dehistoricized Shakespeare and a hermetically "localized" Shakespeare as well: Shakespeare can neither transcend the past nor be entombed within it. Instead Bristol captures the text's potential to stage a dialogue across history – to say something determinate, while at the same time remaining open to later interrogation – in his vivid translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's *bolshoe vremja* as "big time" (10). Taking the uncritical celebration of textual indeterminacy and the "abolition of the author" (54) to represent a willful evacuation of the materiality of writing, its character as labor, Bristol frames literary artifacts as "the deliberate and purposeful work" of human agents (18), evoking the ethical dimension of writing-in-history. Literature provides equipment for living by enabling a continuous, dialectical understanding of the history of the subject, one that enables "the inheritors of Western modernity to understand their complex situatedness as fully as possible" (140) by enabling them – *us* – to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the past through the reading and performance of Shakespearean drama.

While discursive openness may be a feature of Shakespeare's texts, this historicizing dialogue is crucially enabled by the implication of Shakespearean writing in the material conditions of its production, particularly by the persistence of the two institutions that gave that writing its social presence: the professional theatre and the profession of publishing.<sup>3</sup> Stage production and playwriting were reciprocal elements in the wholesale invention of a new mode of cultural production, which persists to the present day: the commercial entertainment industry, the big time. Theatrical entrepreneurs of the 1570s and 1580s were able to transform the "familiar performance practices" of traditional communities (both popular fairground performance and the similarly occasional performances commanded as an aristocratic



privilege) into “cultural merchandise” (36). More to the point, theatrical enterprise transformed both “the commodities of spectacle, narrative, and conviviality” and the audience who purchased them, an audience now cast as “self-reliant consumers,” able “to enjoy cultural goods at their pleasure . . . without the time-consuming burden of direct participation” (37) implied by more traditional forms of performance. Selling performance as alienated commodity, the theatre both depended on and helped to create a new kind of subject: the “socially undifferentiated consumer of cultural services” (37). As “founding documents in the history of modern show business,” Shakespeare’s plays contribute to this “pattern of long-term continuity” (30) in the institutional formation of theatre, a business dependent both on a monetary economy and on the increasing diversification and alienation of urban life. Shakespeare’s colleagues invented a business whose product (performance) and audience (consumers) are recognizably those of the theatre industry today.<sup>4</sup>

In this view contemporary performance can use Shakespearean drama to open a historicizing dialogue with the past because stage production today participates in the institutional continuity of theatre, an industry in which Shakespeare’s plays were “founding documents.” For performance today to take up a dialogue with Shakespearean drama in this way, however, also requires a continuity between the performative function of writing in the early modern theatre and in contemporary Shakespearean performance. Bristol argues that Shakespeare’s plays were also “founding documents” of another emerging industry, dramatic publishing. He works to “analyze the complex relationship between these emerging media [theatre, print] without assigning a privilege either to a theatrical or to a bookish Shakespeare” (30). Nonetheless, in order for later theatres to perform the meaningful recovery of a past lodged in the text, the “residual” (43) printing of plays must be taken to register the integrity and identity of Shakespearean writing, writing everywhere compromised by other, disintegrating factors. This integrity is provisional at best, particularly since Shakespeare’s plays “were created not as autonomous works of literary or even dramatic art as we now understand such notions, but rather as a set of practical solutions to the exigencies of a heterogeneous cultural market” (49). The “participation of collaborators, revisers and other secondary creative agents” so inflects any understanding

of Shakespearean writing that it is impossible to disentangle Shakespeare's "singular creative agency" from such "derivative forms of participation in artistic production" (52). Nonetheless, by defining such participation as "secondary" or "derivative," Bristol regularizes the relationship between dramatic writing and theatrical performance along modern lines, and so preserves the idea that Shakespearean writing – *any* writing – can have been a "founding document" of this theatre, a theatre whose principal commodity – *performance* – was not yet exchangeable with a competing "literary" valuation of *drama*.<sup>5</sup>

To situate the text at the origin of early modern theatre, that is, we must take early modern dramatic writing to participate in an institutionalized practice of theatrical performativity recognizably continuous with the practices of conventional modern theatre. We must also take the relatively marginal printing of plays to reflect, even to guarantee, an emerging, pervasive, and modern sense of the literary integrity of the dramatic text and of its independent value in the marketplace of literature.<sup>6</sup> While many playwrights of the period were involved in the printing of their plays, that investment was widely variable, affected by local theatrical practices, legal and contractual obligations, and the personal predilections of individual writers: Heywood's investment in print was very different from Lope de Vega's, Shakespeare's was very different from Jonson's or Middleton's.

The identity of the dramatic work – as print literature or theatrical performance – remained contested for some time, not least in the commercial value ascribed to plays. In the early modern era, plays generated considerably greater monetary value, value as property, when they could be sold to a company that knew how to perform them than they gained when sold to a bookseller, and a great many plays never made it into print – their only value was in performance. As David Scott Kastan points out, "[i]nductions and epilogues speak regularly of the play not as the author's but as 'ours,' property and product of the players," a proprietary notion reflected both in the often garbled attribution of authorship on title pages, and the constant revision to which plays were subjected; we might also recall that Henslowe frequently paid more for individual costumes than for new plays (*Shakespeare after Theory* 34). Lavish folio volumes like those of Jonson's and Shakespeare's plays, or later folios of Beaumont and Fletcher, testify to a growing reading public for plays, as does

the proliferation of quarto and octavo single-play volumes, the demand for manuscript fair copies of plays, and even – despite Thomas Bodley’s distaste for it – the accumulation of plays in private libraries. Nonetheless, during the first two centuries of print, the publication of plays seems less to register the literary identity of dramatic texts than to represent the “derivative” by-product of a much more valuable commodity: dramatic performance.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding performance as capable of recovering a history located in the dramatic text requires a recognizable correlation between early modern and contemporary practices of dramatic performativity, as though the early modern theatre enunciated the force of its texts, its “founding documents,” rather than merely consuming them as television and film do today. In Bristol’s view performance engages the ethical dimension of dramatic writing only if we understand it to preserve this relationship; throughout history “the *longue durée* of Shakespeare’s cultural authority is the product of interactions between a body of incompletely determined works and a resourceful theatrical ingenuity. Shakespeare’s works are themselves an important instance of derivative creativity highly responsive to its own moment of contemporaneity” (*Big-Time Shakespeare* 61). Much as Shakespeare’s “company routinely engaged in the various forms of derivative creativity” (65), so, too, “Garrick’s productions, like those of his predecessors [and successors], were a sophisticated pastiche of Shakespeare’s poetry fused with contemporary performance techniques” (69). Performance is, for Bristol, the application of an institutionally derivative ingenuity to the theatre’s founding documents, and this relationship sustains the historical development of the stage in the West (incidentally explaining the theatre’s increasingly subordinate relation to literary production), and opens the opportunity for truly Bakhtinian historical dialectic. If the performative relationship between texts and performance in the early modern theatre is continuous with our own, then every “staging of a Shakespeare play results from a dialogue between the historical moment of its creation and the contemporaneity of the *mise-en-scène*” (13).

*Big-Time Shakespeare* makes a strong case for the ongoing historicity of Shakespeare’s work, one that elaborates a conventional sense of the priority of text-to-performance in the signification of the stage. Bristol accounts for the historical *feel* we usually expect from classical

performance, the tension between a *then* attributed to the play's language and action, and the *now* of performance. Despite this vivid account of the commodification of traditional performance as the instigating moment of theatrical capitalism, Bristol's effort to redeem theatrical performance from triviality depends on taking performance as institutionally "derivative," relying for its force on something other than the stage behavior of professional actors: the text.

Although texts may have this kind of force in some kinds of dramatic performance today, often in Shakespearean performance, this use of the text is not intrinsic to the performance of drama, nor is it uniform through the institutional history of Western theatre since the sixteenth century; even the variety of forms, formats, and practices of printed drama testifies to a fluid relationship between page and stage. Nor is it entirely clear that the text had this kind of force in Shakespeare's theatre, given the commodity status of dramatic scripts – sold as manufactured goods (like cloth or lumber) used in making a more finished product (clothing, houses, theatrical performances) – and the tenuous purchase of printed drama on "literary" identity in the period. To account for the historicity of performance as an effect of the dialectical tension between the determining force of the text and the derivative ingenuity of the theatre would require us to understand the history of Shakespearean performativity not as a record of dynamic change, but as fundamentally continuous with its dominant practice today. The unsettled identity of dramatic texts in Shakespeare's theatre and the variety of ways in which written texts have been used in the theatre since then point instead to the necessity for a different understanding of the relation between texts and performances.

"To suggest that a verbal artifact as complex as, for example, *Hamlet*, contributes nothing of its own to the practices of exegesis, interpretation and stage performance is to trivialize those very practices" (27): Bristol raises the stakes for our understanding of Shakespearean performativity, and of the theatrical vitality of classic drama in general. To see performance evoking a force intrinsic to its text (presuming that in the welter of early modern and modern texts we know what we mean by "its text") defines performance as "derivative." Yet a "derivative" conception of theatre bears with it the possibility of enacting a historical dialogue between the present of performance and the historical alterity of the text, its representation of early modern characters

and their behavior, the significant force of their actions onstage. To see performance as an independent (though related) mode of production, fashioning texts into something else (behavior), releases the stage from a “derivative” dependence on literature, from the obligation (even from the ability) to reproduce the text, or the ways we may understand it as mere readers. Yet this understanding of performance appears to sacrifice the belief that performance can reproduce a history inscribed in the text; however much its productions smack of history, they evoke only a suspiciously modern, commodified “pastness.”

While it may seem that this second alternative replicates the Disneyfication of history and identity characteristic of contemporary commodity culture, an understanding of performance as “derivative creativity” should give us pause as well. “Derivative creativity” implies that the dramatic text can supply the “lawful or pre-ordained structure” – of meaning, character, history – to the “spontaneous expressive individuality” of the stage, and that performance is capable of seizing and representing this structure (23). This is, I think, what Stephen Greenblatt has in mind when he claims that theatrical “refigurations” of the original circumstances of a play such as *King Lear* “do not cancel history, locking us into a perpetual present” because “they are signs of the inescapability of a historical process, a structured negotiation and exchange, already evident in the initial moments of empowerment,” of the text’s creation (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 6). For all its attention to the material histories encoded in the text, this understanding of historical mediation oddly dematerializes the force of theatrical performance. The “textual traces” of the social energy animating the play “were made by moving certain things – principally ordinary language but also metaphors, ceremonies, dances, emblems, items of clothing, well-worn stories, and so forth – from one culturally demarcated zone to another” (7), from Shakespeare’s social world into the texts of his plays. Yet for Greenblatt these traces are finally not moved into the theatre: “Except in the most material instances – items of clothing, stage properties, the bodies of actors – nothing is literally moved onto the stage. Rather, the theater achieves its representations by gesture and language, that is, by signifiers that seem to leave the signifieds completely untouched” (7). Greenblatt understands the force of theatre to derive directly from the written text. Rather than inserting Shakespeare’s language into the signifying force

of the present performance, a performance that reconstitutes the signifiers of the text in its own materialized discourse and so incarnates its own unanticipated signifieds, the force of Greenblatt's theatre is fundamentally etiolated: the behaviors of the stage merely haunt the tracings in the text, leaving its significations materially untouched.

Just because "there is no direct, unmediated link between ourselves and Shakespeare's plays does not mean that there is no link at all" (6): Greenblatt evokes our sense that classic drama – Ibsen and Chekhov as much as Shakespeare or Sophocles – encodes modes of being and acting that are at once familiar and alien, and that somehow remain accessible to performance. At the same time the notion of "derivative creativity" – more extreme in Greenblatt than in Bristol – seems to require an understanding of theatrical performance that is fundamentally literary, in which theatre is a mode of textual transmission and blind to the nature of theatrical performativity itself: how the practices of the theatre determine the forms, moods, and shapes of meaning onstage, the force of dramatic action as embodied performance.

In this chapter I have narrowed the question of the impact of writing on dramatic performativity to a single dimension: can performance enable the text's past meanings to speak? The historicizing potentiality of theatre is, in the West at least, itself a function of the increasingly literary character of drama and theatre, the ascription of a governing authority to dramatic texts that participates in print's characteristic transformation of writing into an objectified, authorized "literature." To assess the historicizing capacity of dramatic performance, then, I open with a consideration of the drama's troubling position in a conventional narrative: the story of print and the oral and manuscript cultures it supposedly displaced. Dramatic writing – in Shakespeare's era as well as our own – evokes many of the familiar problems associated with an insistently dualistic view of orality and literacy. Describing a more complex history of the uses of texts and the practices of literacy, the history of printed drama enables a more diversified understanding of the relationship between writing and "the performative," even in the apparently text-centered theatricality of Western theatre.

I then turn to a contemporary critical controversy – the nature of "the subject" in early modern drama – and its bearing on performance. Can we understand performance to restore some mode

of early modern identity to the stage? The desire to engage with Shakespearean performativity in historical terms is visible across a wide range of contemporary performance: in films and stage productions that set the plays in their historical era (Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*) or in Shakespeare's (Mark Rylance's *Hamlet*); that attempt to find a more familiar historical analogue to the distant past of the sixteenth century (Branagh's *Hamlet*, Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* and the Royal National Theatre stage production on which the film was based); that argue for the contemporary force of the play by setting it in the present (Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*); or that use an eclectic design principle to implicate the play in "history" without specifying a specific moment in time (Julie Taymor's *Titus*, Jonathan Kent's *Coriolanus*). How does contemporary performance construct the force of the past? Does it ascribe that force to a governing text? Or is that "pastness" inevitably an effect of the performative force of present modes of acting, an elaborate effect of contemporary Shakespearean performativity?

PRINT, PERFORMANCE, AND THE FORCE OF PLAY

I can see no good reason to alter my opinion, for excluding suche bookes, as almanackes, plaies, & an infinit number, that are daily printed, of very vnworthy maters & handling, suche as, me thinkes, both the keeper & vnderkeeper should disdaine to seeke out, to deliuer vnto any man. Happely some plaies may be worthy the keeping: but hardly one in fortie.

Sir Thomas Bodley, *Letters* (221–22)

Dramatic performativity in the West – the consensus regarding the construction of meaning between inscribed texts and theatrical performance – has been decisively shaped by print and the cognate institutions of modern literacy and literate culture. Now, in the era of digitized writing, print has come increasingly to be seen as a central, perhaps *the* central, technology in the formation of Western culture in the past six centuries: critically enabling social and political history (the Reformation, the wars of independence, even the idea of "nation" itself); installing a characteristic conception of language and its workings; inflecting the practices of writing and reading, and decisively shaping literacy and literature; becoming the vehicle of a

distinctive sense of privacy, identity, and experience; and so providing the crucial vehicle of subject formation in this extended historical period.

The most familiar version of this narrative – popularized by Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Elizabeth Eisenstein, among others – tends to see print and literacy exerting a crucial technological agency over the formation of language, public life, and subjectivity. In this view Gutenberg’s introduction of changeable type, a logical but by no means inevitable development from the conception of an alphabetic language, both introduced the range of formal elements associated with print culture (regularity, repeatability, standardization, synchronization, dissemination) and implied the extension of those features to practices of cultural production writ large. Elizabeth Eisenstein’s magisterial and controversial study *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* outlines the consequences of print in these terms: on scientific inquiry, on commerce (standardized weights and measures, double-entry bookkeeping and accounting, advertising); on the rise of nationalism (standardized languages, newspapers, translation); on notions of privacy and private property; on education; on the development of a systematic body of law.<sup>8</sup> Taking the “esprit de système” as the most powerful legacy of print, Eisenstein sees the format of the book as a means of ordering, controlling, and making accessible print’s information explosion, even while it enabled a host of modern institutions, and perhaps even modernity itself.

In this perspective the “esprit de système” of print altered the understanding of language, its private function relative to the individual subject, and its public performance as well. More completely than scribal writing, print enabled the objectification of language as an object for sale, property, in ways that altered its social uses – the ways in which writing was performed as a social act – and so the ways in which it related to genres of oral culture, not only silent reading as opposed to reading aloud, but also the entire phenomenology of public performance. Walter Ong schematizes the differences between “orality and literacy” along similar lines: unlike writing, oral communication is “*Additive rather than subordinative,*” “*Aggregative rather than analytical,*” “*Redundant or ‘copious,’*” “*Agonistically toned,*” “*Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced,*” distinctions that (among many others) are amplified by the advent of alphabetic writing



and its dispersion in print (*Orality and Literacy* 37–57). Moreover, since words “are made out of units (types) which pre-exist as units before the words which they will constitute,” then “[p]rint suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did” (118). Ong notes that the Chinese had movable type without an alphabetic language, and the Turks used their movable type, even with an alphabetic language, to cast whole words, yet these alternative uses of technology do not appear to imply an alternative narrative, a different teleology, or a less determined account of the technological imperatives of print: “Alphabet letterpress printing, in which each letter was cast on a separate piece of metal, or type, marked a psychological breakthrough of the first order. It embedded the word itself deeply in the manufacturing process and made it into a kind of commodity” (118), and fittingly enough the printing industry emerges as the first instance of modern standardized “assembly-line” commodity production.<sup>9</sup>

Print altered for ever the social functioning of writing; it also altered our understanding of the relationship between writing and performance, particularly to the degree that print came to embody features taken to be paradigmatic of language, and of the abilities needed to use language properly.<sup>10</sup> Print also came to govern the rhetoric of theatrical performance, the sense that performance derives from the order of print. The iterative nature of print changed the understanding of theatre and its relationship to dramatic writing, giving rise to a sense of theatre as a form of printlike reiteration, and so to a distinctive sense of theatrical (in)fidelity, the notion that theatrical performance is a replaying of an artistic identity held elsewhere, within the printed text of the play.

And yet, while print has changed the landscape of performance for ever, installing plays as fixed printed objects to be reiterated in another medium (performance), the first impact of print in the theatre was on a culture that used writing in a specific process of oral transmission, and printed drama remains embedded in a range of oral practices today. “Scribal culture” (Eisenstein’s term) was heavily reliant on “oral transmission” in ways that make a simple opposition between oral and literate cultures suspect. Not only were manuscripts often “copied” from dictation (a reader reads the manuscript aloud, the scribe copies what s/he hears), but “literary compositions were ‘published’ by being read aloud,” so that “even ‘book’ learning was governed by reliance on

the spoken word – producing a hybrid half-oral, half-literate culture that has no precise counterpart today” (Eisenstein, *Printing Press* 11). Although he takes the oral-aural element of manuscript culture to embody only a “marginal” orality, Ong also suggests that “[m]anuscript cultures remained largely oral-aural even in retrieval of material preserved in texts” (*Orality and Literacy* 119).

Much as manuscripts were transmitted through oral-scribal means, so, too, reading was not a silent activity, and many practices we now think of as being performed accurately only from an inspection of written documents, such as “auditing” financial records, were thought to be performed more accurately orally-aurally. Using manuscripts more often than printed texts, copying them out in parts or “sides,” and subjecting them to the differential literacies of its actors, the early modern theatre is perhaps exemplary of this “scribal” culture, and this sense of alternative relationship between writing and performance persists in the theatre today. One of the reasons why theatrical literacy is often impugned by literary scholarship has to do with the persistence of “oral” values – reading aloud, memorization – and of interpretive practices that stand outside the iterative “logic” of print.<sup>11</sup>

The notion that oral transmission is inferior to written transmission is common only in highly developed print cultures; cultures in which literacy and the means of literate transmission do not predominate tend not to regard oral transmission as a necessarily inferior or inaccurate mode of communication. As Leah S. Marcus suggests, “sixteenth-century speakers often viewed the production of written versions of their oral discourse as a fall into uncertainty,” lamenting that “manuscript and printed versions of a speech offered only a pale, obscure reflection, an imperfect copy, of the utterance as communicated by its author-speaker” (“From Oral Delivery to Print” 34). Our understanding that a text transmitted in part from memory is deficient, less fully authorized than a text transmitted solely through writing, may not conform to early modern ideas of authority, particularly in a form – theatre – so dependent on orality.<sup>12</sup> In a theatre in which literacy must have been variable (it is not certain, for example, that all of the actors could read their parts, or that they needed to read to learn them), the notion that “memorial reconstruction” is a corrupting influence, rather than the dominant, appropriate, intrinsic means of transmission, may be something of an anachronism,

our problem not theirs. After all, “memory” played a large part in all forms of Shakespearean transmission in the early modern theatre: notetaking in the theatre, copying of manuscripts, typesetting, as well as acting. To get a sense of the role of memory in legitimate, print-authorized, modern performance, Laurie Maguire watched the *BBC-TV Shakespeare Plays* with a copy of their published production texts in hand: *all* of the standard “mistakes” attributed to the corrupting pirates of Shakespeare’s day – dropped lines, substitutions, gabbled words – are committed by the stars of the RSC as part of this authoritative series (*Shakespearean Suspect Texts* 135–46).

The “celebratory model of the printing press” – and of print itself – as “a device whose effects could be charted independently of the people who used it and the communities that promulgated its dissemination” has been searchingly challenged by a “more fragmented, materialist, and skeptical dismantling of the *grand récit*” (Seth Lerer, “Histories of Reading” 109). Stepping outside the technologically determined understanding of the rise of print is important, precisely because it enables us to revalue the *uses* of print, including the public, oral, and collaborative uses that form the practices of social literacy and social life, and of the theatre as well. Taking issue with Ong’s essentialized opposition between orality and literacy, Brian V. Street argues that “[f]rom a theoretical standpoint, it is also incorrect to conceive of ‘literacy’ in isolation from other media of communication. Literacy practices are always embedded in oral uses, and the variations between cultures are generally variations in the *mix* of oral/literate channels” (*Social Literacies* 157). The “introduction of a new technology of writing does not automatically render older ones obsolete” (Ilana Snyder, “Page to Screen” xx–xxi); nor does it extinguish other uses of written language. Far from extinguishing orality, the history of print is better characterized as a constant negotiation with enduring and emerging forms of communication, a negotiation that embodies the lived history of literacy, not its abstract reduction to the “logic” of print.

The changing relationship between printed texts and their oral uses is sometimes recorded in printed texts, quite often in printed drama. One place in which to grasp the dynamic diversity of the use of writing, its susceptibility to recording and evoking different modes of behavior, is the print-inflected field of punctuation. As M. B. Parkes

outlines the history of punctuation, students were first taught to mark separations between words, long vowels, and pauses as a way to learn written languages, and as a way to read (aloud, as was the practice) more easily. Punctuation could also help to teach effective public speaking, by marking longer semantic units, breathing rhythms, and rhetorical emphases. Parkes suggests that by the twelfth century punctuation, along with word separation and handwriting conventions, had become an intrinsic element of writing.<sup>13</sup> As it did with spelling, grammar, and syntax, print tended to regularize and conventionalize punctuation, and the “dissemination of particular founts of type stabilized the shapes of the marks, and subsequently led to the adoption of a single graphic symbol for each sign” (*Pause and Effect* 87). From its inception, though, punctuation reflected a dual attitude toward the uses of writing. It visually marked conceptual and syntactic units for readers (a factor that would become increasingly critical with the rise of print and with the rise of silent reading as well); but punctuation also performed a rhetorical as well as a syntactical function, providing a potential *record of* and *instigation for* the performance of writing, what Ong dismisses as “secondary orality (an orality not antecedent to writing and print, as primary orality is, but consequent upon and dependent upon writing and print)” (*Orality and Literacy* 171).

Although standardized punctuation contributed to the sense of the printed text as a visual field organized for silent consumption, the notion of punctuation as a prompt for oral discourse persisted as a controversial and troubling element of print, persisted for centuries after the inauguration of the press, and persists today, especially in printed drama. Writers at least as late as Thackeray used punctuation both rhetorically and syntactically, to guide readers toward the oral force of written language.<sup>14</sup> As Bruce Smith suggests, while we now take commas and semicolons to operate as visual markers of syntactic units, earlier readers “were disposed to ‘hear’ commas and semicolons as well as read them. One could distinguish [,], [;], [:], and [.] according to how long a pause each signalled and how deep a breath it implied” (“Prickly Characters” 28–29). While this tension between syntactical/visual and rhetorical/oral punctuation has long been seen as a feature of early modern printed drama, writers often practiced both forms of punctuation at the same time. Far from seeing print as the domain of the visual, Francis Bacon “seems to have regarded

logic as determining the method of transmitting knowledge, rhetoric as the means of illuminating it for the reader,” and used punctuation for both purposes, creating “an overlap between the pointing of the rhetorical structure and the pointing of logical relationships” (Parkes, *Pause and Effect* 89).

It is not surprising that Thomas Sheridan’s *A discourse . . . Being the Introductory to his Course of Lectures on Elocution and the English Language* (London, 1769) employs “punctuation to indicate ‘declamatory’ or ‘elocutionary’ units where the speaker or reader is expected to pause for effect” (91). Benjamin Franklin – a printer by trade – also advocated a typographical system that would make “the oralization of texts easier thanks to an ‘expressive typography’ which plays with italics, capital letters added to certain words, or new punctuation marks (for example, with the introduction into English of the inverted exclamation or question marks typical of Spanish and which, placed at the beginning of a sentence, indicate from the outset how one is to pitch one’s voice)” (Chartier, *Publishing Drama* 21). Franklin evokes the oral use of print as critical to the democratic practice of the new American republic: print enables public orators to disseminate an important speech throughout the republic with all the force of the original performance, and of the original speaker’s speech act. Rhetorical pointing permits “the discourse of the ‘publick Orator’” to be “‘reproduced’ as if he were ‘present’ in his very absence” (21).

Alphabetic print may reinforce the values of repeatability, systematicity, and linearity, but rhetorical punctuation implies that print is susceptible to alternate uses, in ways that imply an alternative, “performative” history of print. Early modern writers “wrote in a palimpsest of two different ideas about how writing is related to speech” (Smith, *Acoustic World* 239), and the publishing of plays – still in tension today between the expectation of formal regularity and a range of print conventions unique to drama – is one place where we might expect the persistence of rhetorical pointing and of idiosyncratic print features devised to prompt, even to direct, performance. This ambivalence is expressed in several ways in early modern printed plays. Peter Holland remarks that the pointing of “Hand D’s section of *Sir Thomas More*, for those who accept this section as Shakespeare’s” is “exceptionally light” (“Modernizing Shakespeare” 29), and he traces the ways that successive print editions of Shakespeare’s plays assimilated this

rhetorically inflected logic to an increasingly print-determined understanding of the grammatical sentence, pointing the text in complex ways (commas, semicolons, colons, dashes) in order to resolve a palpable “tension between print and speech” (30). Bruce Smith has made a somewhat different argument regarding the increasingly heavy use of punctuation in printed Shakespearean drama.

The twenty years that separate the First Folio from Quarto 2 [of *Hamlet*], as brief as they may seem in the hindsight of four centuries, in fact add up to an entire generation. The compositors who set the first folio in type might not even have been born when the speeches they were setting had first been written. It was just in these twenty years that semicolons were introduced into English printing and that syntax-based punctuation was being advocated. This shift in the ontology of print may be as much a factor as a difference in copy-texts or the idiosyncracies of Compositor B in explaining why the First Folio text of Hamlet’s first soliloquy is more heavily punctuated than Quarto 2. (“Prickly Characters” 34–35)

Although the First Folio may well retain some elements of rhetorical pointing, whatever their source, Smith suggests that the increasingly heavy pointing of Shakespeare’s plays regularizes punctuation toward grammatical norms. As might be expected, though, the relation between rhetorical and syntactical pointing is fluid, expressed in different ways in different texts. In his edition of the first quarto of *Othello*, Scott McMillin argues that a different – nonetheless distinctive – punctuation pattern also implies a kind of rhetorical pointing. In the “withheld period – the period reserved for the end of the speech” (Introduction 17) and the rather heavy punctuation of intermediate pauses and line endings, McMillin finds evidence for the copytext having been taken down while listening to the play, or from recitation by actors (20–25).

In the later case of Molière, Roger Chartier notes that the early editions of several Molière plays are heavily pointed – “*Gros, et gras, le teint frais, et la bouche vermeille*” in the case of *Tartuffe* (1.4.233) – in ways that imply a rhetorical use of punctuation as a guide to reading aloud, even enabling readers to reconstruct aspects of stage performance. Later editions, however, tend to drop punctuation that is not grammatically correct: subsequent editions of *Tartuffe* read “*Gros et gras...*” (Chartier, *Publishing Drama* 18–19). Chartier’s brilliant short study demonstrates that across early modern Europe printed

drama provides a record not of the instant displacement of orality by print, but of an ongoing contestation of how print might be put at the service of cultural practices experienced as oral – both theatrical performance *and* reading. As Smith argues, for “notating dramatic speech, syntactical punctuation is frustratingly rigid and astonishingly inefficient” (*Acoustic World* 242), and the desire to use print both to record and to prompt a rhetorical use of writing has not disappeared: think of Shaw’s various means of indicating emphasis, of the famous ellipses and pauses that once bemused readers and actors of Harold Pinter’s early plays, of Caryl Churchill’s use of the slash-mark [/] to indicate overlapping speeches, or of Suzan-Lori Parks’s insertion of “rests” and “spells” into the action, breaks “[d]enoted by repetition of figures’ names with no dialogue. Has sort of an architectural look” (“from ‘Elements of Style’” 16).

Today electronic, print-emulating script makes a range of fonts and points immediately available for expressive purposes. In the social space of e-mail and online chatrooms, the manners of polite sociability are figured typographically, both in the proscription of SHOUTING (typing in uppercase letters) and in the use of punctuation – emoticons – to point up the force of writing: :) . Emoticons, like language, are culturally specific, in ways that point to their rhetorical character. In Japan a different convention is used for the “smiley face” emoticon – ^\_^ or simply ^ ^ – and several emoticons correspond to a specifically Japanese sense of social propriety, such as the “smile with cold sweat,” used when one is concerned about expressing oneself too strongly: -.-; .<sup>15</sup>

Print has not extinguished orally coded, rhetorical ways of writing, nor has it entirely extinguished the distinctively dialogic practices characteristic of manuscript transmission. In the conventional narrative of authorship, Margaret Ezell suggests, “print publication takes on the heroic role of the revolutionary force, usually represented by male writers eager to seize new opportunities, while manuscript culture has the role of the villain – the elitist, snobby aristocrat, very often a woman, clinging to long-outmoded forms in a futile attempt to retain control and power” (*Social Authorship* 11). Ezell’s searching effort to document the persistence of a residual mode of authorship – manuscript circulation – in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brilliantly shows how class, geographical and political location,