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Afterword

‘What’s Past Is Prologue’

Peter Holland

‘No people live longer than the documents of their culture’. ‘Kein Volk lebt länger als die Dokumente seiner Kultur.’ It is an unnerving quotation to begin with but Hitler’s statement, in his speech on 11 September 1935 to the Conference on the Cultural Politics of the Nazi Party in Nuremberg, is intriguing. His solution, with its own finality, was to exterminate both people and their documents, be they Jews, Roma or gays. But his comment became a slogan that was worked into Third Reich art objects, like the tapestry that was placed in the SS-Ahnenerbe Haus in Berlin,¹ or on the catalogue for the Allach porcelain factory that opened in 1939,² or as the inscription on the Haus der deutschen Kunst in Munich that Samuel Beckett (of whom more later) saw in March 1937, noting in his diary that it offered ‘[p]leasant possibilities of application’, a comment that Mark Nixon describes as made ‘wryly’.³

As this collection has investigated documents of a past culture it has tried to bring something back to life, by rethinking the

documents that constitute the material evidence of a particular moment in theatrical culture, the historical moment that we call, though no-one then did, ‘Shakespeare’s England’.⁴ And what we call a document might not have been given the same label then either. As Tiffany Stern mentioned in the Introduction, referring to Claire Bourne’s chapter, the word *document* meant “‘teaching” or “instruction” rather than, as now, the inscribed paper that contains them’ so that ‘performance was itself a “document”, and that theatrical events, for which there may never have been paper witnesses . . . are “documents” too’ (p. 5). *OED* orders its definitions so that ‘Teaching, instruction, warning’ (document, *n*.1) precedes ‘An instruction, . . . a lesson’ (2) and ‘That which serves to show, point out, or prove something; evidence, proof’ (3), all marked as obsolete. Its earliest date for ‘Something written, inscribed, etc., which furnishes evidence or information upon any subject’ is 1728. *OED* is, as often, far from reliable about earliest usages – for instance, this 1695 statement about a work of historiography seems to be using ‘document’ in the sense familiar to us:

It will be a Task, requiring great time, skill and pains, and the help of more knowing persons, by particular Treatises, going in order from the greater Antiquity downward, out of the most antient and approved Histories, most exact Collections and authentick Records and Documents, to describe the considerable and eminent Families . . .⁵

Nonetheless, the dominance of our current sense of the word can lead even *OED* into occasional error. When it offers a passage from Nashe’s *Lenten Stuffle* (1599) as its earliest example for *documentize* (one of only 10 uses of the verb that even Anupam Basu’s text-mining website, *Early Modern Print*, can currently offer) in the sense of ‘To furnish with evidence’ (2), it seems to me to mistake that for the usual early modern meaning, ‘to teach, instruct, give a lesson to’ (1): ‘Those that be scrutinus . . . let them reuolue the *Digests* of our English discoueries . . . and be documentized most locupletly [richly]’.

Shakespeare is sure what a document is, at least in the single use he makes of the word, itself a somewhat surprising infrequency. Laertes describes his mad sister's linking of rosemary and remembrance, pansies and thoughts as 'A document in madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted' (4.5.176–7). Her actions are acts of teaching, fitting flower to meaning and fitting the combination of flower and meaning to recipient. Even the mad can instruct, can create moments that teach, so that her madness has method in it. By verbalizing the connections Ophelia creates a lesson, that act of teaching that *document's* source in *docere* (Latin, 'to teach') still made its primary semantic space in early modern English.

Worrying at the word, even in Shakespeare, is not the point. Worrying at what the early modern senses might offer us as we rethink the (written) documents is more valuable. Much of this collection is concerned with what they might teach us and how they might instruct us. Later I shall be concerned with what the limits might or should be in what constitutes a document but I want first to emphasize how much this collection exemplifies a new and exciting interaction between book history and theatre history, for it has been far too rarely the case that scholars in each have connected in their consideration of their materials and the results are a major sign of the extent to which this collection marks an exhilarating step forward in our work.

In one of the most impressive of his long, long list of publications, W. W. Greg analysed (in one thick but normal-sized volume) and reproduced (in a second, gloriously huge volume) 'actual playhouse documents used in the original productions of Elizabethan plays'.⁶ The purpose of the sustained analysis of these materials that Greg went on to offer was that they 'tell us something about the conditions of performance, and something about the nature of the texts in use' and the reason that might be worth doing is that their origins 'supply . . . as it were a material scheme within the limits of which both the bibliographical critic and the textual editor must work'. The bibliographical critic and textual editor might be the same person, for they aptly describe the roles

Greg himself performed across his career and for which, twenty years after these two volumes were published, he would be knighted. Book history and editing early modern drama intertwine. Writing of those documents that he labelled 'prompt books', Greg argues that

[t]hese thirty or so manuscripts afford a wealth of evidence that is of first-rate value, is indeed indispensable, to the textual critic and bibliographer, and there can be no question that its thorough investigation is among the most pressing tasks that await students of Elizabethan drama.⁷

Greg's own areas of study thus influence his own work here. The two volumes are an addition to the resources that he laboured to make available and to think about. But he defines the potential of this particular outcome only in terms of those same fields of work. There is no space here for the influence such study might have on literary criticism, something he rarely practised.⁸ Nor can he imagine – for why would he have done? – that there would in the 1950s be a new academic discipline in the UK directly concerned with the study of theatre, with the University of Bristol's founding of the first UK Department of Drama in which Glynne Wickham would, in 1960, be the country's first Professor of Drama.

While many of the contributors to this volume might self-describe as theatre historians, interested in the cultural history of theatre and using textual bibliography and the editions of the dramatists prepared by Greg, his predecessors and successors as a way of understanding the material conditions for early modern theatrical activity, almost all of them work in departments of English. To the best of my knowledge, the McMeel Family Chair in Shakespeare Studies at the University of Notre Dame is the only permanent endowed chair in Shakespeare studies in the world not located in a department of English or Literature, being in the Department of Film, Television and Theatre.

There is a consequence for the nature of our work in the fact that we were all (or nearly all) trained through the discipline of English studies and that our approach to theatre history is driven by an interest in early modern performance, not measured against the longer tracks of theatre history or the broader geographies of global theatre cultures. The sharp and provocative new perceptions, large and small, that fill the pages of this volume are, nonetheless, to some extent constrained by our disciplinary training and practice. As we look forward to the work that may follow ours, we might consider the consequences of our disciplinary biases. When we examine the traces of early modern performance, are we alert enough to the documents that constitute the knowledge of, say, classical Greek tragedy and comedy, documents that include vase-paintings as well as papyri and inscriptions? Might a fuller knowledge of, say, the 'Texts, Documents and Art from Athenian Comic Competitions', as the subtitle of a magnificent collection of such materials describes itself, help us rethink how we interpret the texts and documents, not to mention the art and archaeology, of Shakespeare's theatres?⁹ Even more significantly, the ways in which classical scholars have interpreted and rethought their corpus of documents might make us wonder whether we have been as sophisticated as we should be in the methodologies and theoretical frameworks we have been using. Not that I wish here to be especially privileging classical theatre. The more general problem is that the intense and fine explorations of how theatre historiography could and perhaps even should function have largely passed us by. To take just one leading figure in the development of the proper quizzing of historiographic evidence for theatrical practices with whose work we might engage – and whose writing we have shown comparatively little sign currently of engaging with – we could consider one introductory text and two collections by Thomas Postlewait and decide whether we have yet been sufficiently alert to the healthy scepticism that characterizes his thinking.¹⁰ I am not, of course, proposing that this would necessarily and unequivocally transform our work – but it might.

To take the next step, we might also look at the work of those Shakespeare scholars whose focus of attention has been on later performances to see whether their ways of working with the material traces and documentary evidence available for their research might indicate approaches that could prove both relevant and fruitful for the early modern materials with which we grapple. I think here, for instance, of the brilliant last book by the late Barbara Hodgdon, *Shakespeare, Performance and the Archive*,¹¹ whose extraordinary grasp of theory and redefinitions of what constitutes our archive (photography, costumes, props, actors' scripts, stage managers' reports, fire safety concerns over candles and cigarettes onstage and the like) have been profoundly definitional of how performance might be researched and how it might be written about.

It seems to me that, perhaps because the discipline is so differently structured, book – and manuscript – historians are more aware of the potentials elsewhere in their field than theatre historians (and I count myself firmly among the latter, not the former). Paul Werstine's rethinking of the nature of theatre manuscripts is crucial here, in his *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare*,¹² itself building on Greg's achievements and always seeing those moments where Greg had not followed his own method.¹³

But Greg was always trying to be alert to what the documentary historical evidence can and, even more importantly, cannot tell us. As he said near the start of *Dramatic Documents*,

Every item of historical evidence performs a two-fold function: positively it enlarges the basis we have to build on, and enables us to extend the structure of valid inference; negatively it is often of even greater service in limiting the field of admissible conjecture. That is why to a certain type of mind all fresh evidence is so extremely distasteful.¹⁴

I wish I knew whether that devastating last sentence was aimed at a particular fellow-scholar. *Rethinking Theatrical*

Documents is full of new items of historical evidence brought newly into view, from the smallest details of type-setting in early modern playbooks to the extraordinary amount that can be recovered about plays long lost and objects never preserved. It may be that we also need to rethink whether the archaeology of the theatres themselves constitute documents or at least documentary evidence, especially in the light of the fascinating report of excavations at the Globe and the Rose presented by Julian Bowsher and Pat Miller.¹⁵

But, of all the material newly available, the most exciting for our understanding of theatre practice seems to me to be Martin Wiggins's multi-volume project with Catherine Richardson, currently print only but urgently needing to be available as a website that can be easily searched, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*.¹⁶ There are many moments in our collection where authors use or negotiate with Wiggins's presentation of materials, especially over titles and details of lost plays – and reading his entries alongside the rich resources of the *Lost Plays Database* (<https://lostplays.folger.edu>) is always a fascinating and enriching experience. But I am especially intrigued by the way in which Wiggins's choice of what to record offers new ways of thinking about playtexts that are very well known indeed.

Take, for instance, the entry for *King Lear*.¹⁷ Inevitably, as Wiggins records information according to the template he devised for each and every entry, there is much that is entirely familiar. It did not need the *Catalogue* entry to tell us that the Stationers' Register entry calls the play a 'history', Q1 a 'true chronicle history' and F1 a 'tragedy' but it is worth noting that Sir John Harington listed his copy of it under 'Names of Comedyes'.¹⁸ Much more intriguingly for thinking about the play in performance is the list of props,¹⁹ ranging from lights and a torch, the swords carried by Edmund, Oswald, Cornwall, Edgar and two servants, plus the 'bloody knife' of the last scene, money and letters, to furniture like a bench, a joint-stool and a chair. And the costume list also offers potential for our rethinking.²⁰

Wiggins's entry records places that are represented but also ones that are spoken of. So we find in *King Lear* a list that covers Britain (Kent, Gloucester, Albany, Cornwall, Lipsbury, Salisbury Plain, Camelot, Dover and its cliff), Greece (Thebes and Athens), France, Burgundy, Germany and, in Asia, Scythia, Turkey and Persia.²¹ If we are to understand the fictional geographies of early modern drama – and it is an area of study that seems to be much needed – then such speaking of place as well as speaking in places, places apparent only because they are spoken of, has promise for our work.

We are used to thinking about the characters who make up our editions' lists of characters. Wiggins finds 32–36 speaking parts in Q and 25–31 in F. We are also used to the resource that Thomas L. Berger and others compiled from another of Greg's astonishing research creations, his *Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, as their *Index to Characters in Early Modern English Drama: Printed Plays 1500–1660* (1998). Their work enables us to find all the plays with doctors, French doctors, English doctors and any other varieties of medical professionals. But Wiggins also lists other characters in *King Lear*, ones only spoken of and never seen, such as Edmund's mother and Regan's mother, Gloucester's father, Goneril's and Regan's servants, the French spies in the households of Albany and Cornwall (present only in F) and Monsieur le Far, the French Marshal. Our future studies of early modern performance could, in the light of Wiggins's *Catalogue*, encourage different ways of pursuing early modern theatre costume – what *does* a French doctor look like and in what ways is that unlike an English one? – or peopling the play with the unseen characters each drama speaks of or researching the geographies of its imaginary.

In spite of the labours of so many scholars, I am still left with the enduring mystery of how exactly Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists constructed their plays, started planning, managed writing. Some early modern documentary evidence could usefully be reconsidered here, such as the materials Sisson presented long ago in *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (1936).²² But it is a

mystery for me only magnified by a fragment of a twentieth-century playwright drafting the beginnings of a play, a scrap that has intrigued me for years and that might help us rethink the abstract forms of some early modern drama, such as the chiasmic shapes of *The Tempest*, a drama whose scenic design was brilliantly laid out by Mark Rose: 'Surrounding the centrepiece, accounting for almost the entire play, is thus an extraordinary triple frame comprised of distinct character groups'.²³

At some point between February 1967 and April 1968 Samuel Beckett began outlining a play. He abandoned his first attempt. The second try changed the cast-list from two women to one man and one woman. Beckett sketched out a series of movements on and off the stage, creating four numbered sections:

- 1 Arrivée femme . . . Arrivé homme Reduction espace.
- 2 Femme seule.
- 3 Elle le ramène. Il l'expédie. Homme seule.
- 4 Il la ramène, ils s'expédient.

Then he wrote timing for each section: 10 minutes, 20, 5 and 10. Then he put a series of questions: '1. quel dialogue? 3. Que fait l'homme seul? 4. Quel dialogue? Et pourquoi decision l'en finir?' Finally, across the rest of the sheet there are some sketches of answers.²⁴ First, movement, then rhythm, then action. Or is the movement itself the action, as the parallel rhythms of the two acts of *Waiting for Godot* are or the form of *Play* with its astonishing stage direction near the end 'Repeat play'?²⁵ This sketch, something Dryden might have called a 'scenary', and we call a 'scenario', suggests a mode of forming a drama far from our usual models.

Beckett's fragment makes me rethink not only how he wrote but also how others, even Shakespeare, might have written – and the answer lies a long way from our most popular images of it, even when it appears most embedded in the material conditions of theatre as in the imaginings of the romcom screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love*. As we accustom ourselves to the brave new world that the innovative rethinkings of the

contributors here have so thoughtfully and provocatively sketched, we can build on those insights in ways that they themselves have encouraged me to develop briefly here. The rethinking of theatrical documents is far from over.

Notes

- 1 See the image in the Library of Congress, available at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013650088/> [accessed 14 January 2019].
- 2 See the image at <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/german-porcelain-factory-catalogue-1843324774> [accessed 14 January 2019]; see also Edmund de Waal, *The White Road* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015), 354.
- 3 Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries, 1936–1937* (London: Continuum, 2011), 87.
- 4 If the use of ‘Shakespeare’ in the title of this volume is in part a marketing ploy, it is also more accurately appropriate than in, say, the title of the two-volume collection of articles as *An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age* that finally appeared as a tercentenary marker in 1916, edited by C. T. Onions and others (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916).
- 5 William Camden, *A Second Edition of Camden's Description of Scotland* (London, 1695), sig. ¶2v, located through a rapid search of examples for ‘document*’ in ‘EEBO-TCP Key Words in Context’ at *Early Modern Print*, https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html?corpus=plaintext_reg&searchPattern=document*&startYear=1692&endYear=1700&authors=&titles=&page=1 [accessed 14 January 2019].
- 6 Sir W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 1: ix.
- 7 Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, 1: 190.
- 8 Though see W.W. Greg, ‘The Function of Bibliography on Literary Criticism Illustrated in a Study of the Text of *King Lear*’, *Neophilologus* 18 (1933), 241–262.
- 9 See Jeffrey Rusten et al., eds, *The Birth of Comedy: Texts, Documents, and Art from Athenian Comic Competitions, 486–280* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

- 10 I am thinking here, simply as examples, of his *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); the very influential collection he co-edited with Bruce A. McConachie, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989); and the more recent volume co-edited with Charlotte Canning, *Representing the Past* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010).
- 11 Barbara Hodgdon, *Shakespeare, Performance and the Archive* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
- 12 Paul Werstine, *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 13 See, especially, his article, 'The Continuing Importance of New Bibliographical Method' in *Shakespeare Survey* 62 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30–45.
- 14 Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, 1: x.
- 15 Julian Bowsher and Pat Miller, *The Rose and the Globe: Playhouses of Shakespeare's Bankside, Southwark* (London: MOLA, 2009).
- 16 Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012–), 9 of the projected 10 volumes published to date.
- 17 Item 1486, in Wiggins and Richardson, vol. 5 (1603–1608), 252–259.
- 18 Greg included Harington's lists in his *Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1939–1957), 3:1306–1313. 'K. Leir of Shakspear' appears in the first list, the playwright's name included to distinguish it from 'King Leire.: old:' in the second list, one of only three playwrights' names in the first list (3:1310–1311). Harington heads the list 'Names of Comedyes' and marks some as tragedies within it, e.g., 'Mustaffa tragedy' and 'Byroun tragedy'. But he also leaves some self-evident tragedies without such a marking, e.g. 'Bussy D'Amboys' and 'Ferrex & Porrex'. It seems best to assume that 'Comedyes' here means no more than 'plays' and is not a genre marker.

- 19 Wiggins and Richardson, vol. 5, 257
- 20 Wiggins and Richardson, vol. 5, 257.
- 21 Wiggins and Richardson, vol. 5, 256.
- 22 Charles Jasper Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936).
- 23 Mark Rose, *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1972), 173. I explored this further in 'The Shapeliness of The Tempest', *Essays in Criticism*, 45 (1995), 208–229.
- 24 The sheet is described and reproduced in James Knowlson, ed., *Samuel Beckett: An Exhibition held at Reading University Library, May to July 1971* (London: Turret Books, 1971), #376, p. 118, and plate 6 following p. 30. '1. Woman arrives. Man arrives. Space narrows. 2. Woman alone. 3. She calls him in. He sends her off. Man alone. 4. He calls her in. They leave. . . . 1. What dialogue? 3. What does the man do on his own? 4. What dialogue? And why the decision to end it?' (my translation).
- 25 Samuel Beckett, *Play* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 22.