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Introduction

Tiffany Stern

Theatre and book history, which are rooted in the same set of facts, the same interests, and often the same material texts, have traditionally attracted scholars with different priorities and approaches. Each cognate field, theatre and book, has, as a result, developed its own ethos; the two are often treated as though they are separate, and sometimes as though they are in conflict. Even the attempt to join the two, the ‘stage to page’ or ‘page to stage’ discipline (the order of the words reveals the priorities of the user) joins its topics by desperate rhyme, as though fearing there is no more real connection between the two.

This edited collection finds ways in which the two fields can learn from and give to one another and, on occasion, solder their separations. It is the result of a Folger Shakespeare Library Symposium that brought theorists, book historians and theatre historians together in what turned out to be a feverish and passionate dialogue. Over a week of collaboration and sharing, ‘documents’ and their attendant ‘playbooks’ were found to be more entangled, and often in odder ways, than either theatre or book history separately had suggested.

The book thus relates to, but differs from, the field of ‘performance studies’. That field places performance – now

and historically – at the core of its discipline, importantly redressing a ‘Shakespeare studies’ long obsessed with text without considering the occasion for which it was written. The focus of ‘performance studies’ on ‘performance’ in its own right has made it receptive to new theoretical and intellectual frameworks: important recent performance studies work considers staging in the light of cognitive science, for instance. Yet in replacing a print-focus with a production-focus, ‘performance studies’ reverses rather than resolves a two-part hierarchy. This book, by contrast, aims to keep both early modern text and performance in view as it presents the rich complexities of their conjoined relationship. Its intention is to explore the way plays negotiate with both page and stage, providing information and approaches that relate to, arise from, complicate, and complement ‘Shakespeare studies’ and ‘performance studies’ too.

Rethinking Theatrical Documents expands the available documentary evidence (looking at ‘different’ documents on the stage/page divide like staged title-boards, staged books and ‘play ballads’); considers the meaning of lost documents (including lists of plays with their performance dates, repertory accounts, and performance venues); explores never existing ‘documents’ (clowns’ improvisations); and reconceives the way that we analyse the documents we have, such as the printed play, prologues and epilogues, actors’ parts, and commonplace play extracts. But its aim is to think anew about what even constitutes ‘documents’ in the first place, and, as a consequence, what constitutes ‘plays’, what constitutes ‘playbooks’, and what the nature is of the relationship between events seen and heard in performance and words read on the page.

The book confronts a fact that modern scholarship tends to avoid: that the stage/page tension it inherits is itself early modern in origin. For the very word ‘playbook’ combines ‘play’, which has its roots in the Middle Dutch ‘pleyen’, to dance or leap, with ‘book’, which has its roots in the Old Dutch ‘buok’, a written document; the ‘playbook’ was, in its very name, a paradox in which performance was confounded in text and text in

performance. No surprise, then, that early modern playwrights did not have one fixed model for the way the playbook negotiated with production. So James Shirley can regret the way a printed play ‘wanteth . . . that Ornament, which the *Stage* and *Action* lent it’;¹ Nicholas Downey can be comforted by the fact that S.H.’s play is printed ‘Before some *Players* braine new drencht in sacke / Do’s clap each terme new fancies on it’s backe’;² and Cleveland can be delighted because the ‘majestick splendour’ of Ben Jonson’s printed works survives to triumph over ‘a gawdy show / Of boords and canvass, wrought by Inigo’ (Inigo Jones had designed the scenes and costumes for many of Jonson’s masques).³ As this shows, printed plays might ‘mean’ differently – in these instances, less than performance, free of performance, and better than performance respectively – according to author and/or text. Our modern assumption that printed playbooks represent one thing, often hides the difference not just between printed play and performance, but also between printed play and printed play.

The fact, moreover, that all plays, whether printed or not, intertwined performance with the text behind them – as manifested by early modern terminology – shows how complex the relationship between the two was from inception. Performance was often, in the period, described as a literalized book, for instance. The person in charge of overseeing a production, the ‘prompter’, was also called the ‘book holder’ (and, occasionally ‘book keeper’), because he held the manuscript ‘book’ of the play in his hands throughout the production and guided and corrected actors against it. Indeed, so linked was prompting actors with the fact of the ‘book’ that the verb ‘to hold the book’ was an alternative for the verb ‘to prompt’: Will Summers in Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will* [perf. Whitgift’s household? 1592] asks the prompter to ‘holde the booke well’, in order that ‘we be not *nonplus* [at a loss about what to say] in the latter end of the play’.⁴ Thus behind all performances was a book that was both a physical presence and a notional ideal. Acting was judged by its ability to be faithful to that ‘book’. Henry Wotton relates how some apprentices had, in 1613,

‘secretly learnt a new Play without book, intituled, *The Hog hath lost his Pearl*’.⁵ His vocabulary reveals that actors who had perfectly learned their lines – ‘off-book’ is our modern, still book-focused, term – were said to be ‘without’ the book, even though they will only have been given ‘parts’ (bits, rather than the whole of the book) to memorize. Collectively conveying to the audience the book from which their parts descended, however, was what actors’ perfection was. Thus whenever books are staged, as Wall-Randell argues (Chapter 7), performance and text meld into one another in particularly complex ways.

Similarly, the vocabulary for reading printed books was often performative. When Middleton and Rowley published the masque *The World Tost at Tennis* (1620), their printer or publisher – or perhaps they themselves in the guise of the printer/publisher – gave it a dedication ‘To the . . . well reading *Vnderstander, well-vnderstanding Reader*’, jokily conflating the playgoer who stands under the stage with the playreader who understands fully the printed text. As masques were sometimes printed in advance of performance, and were often intended to be read during it, this text may even have been conceived as an aspect of performance.⁶ Yet a similar point is made by the stationer who writes an epigraph to Beaumont and Fletcher’s *King and No King*, a text only ever available to be read after performance. It has the lure, ‘*A Play and no Play, who this Booke shall read, I Will judge, and weepe, as if ’twere done indeed*’.⁷ Here a pun on the title of the play is also a pun on the relationship between play and book – this book, it is claimed, has an urgency that will make its events seem so ‘real’ that ‘weeping’ and ‘judging’ – what a good performance provokes – will be the result. The suggestion is that reading *King and No King* will seem ‘real’ in that the reader will feel as though the play is really being staged. That may connect to the fact that publication itself was sometimes seen as an extension of performance (or performance a prediction of publication), so that Beaumont calls the printing of Fletcher’s *Faithful Shepherdess* ‘This second publication’ – the first ‘publication’

being the making-public of the text on stage.⁸ So just as performance was instinct with text, so text was instinct with performance, the one always gesturing towards, because always somewhat being, the other.

That introduces an issue at the heart of this collection: that playbooks, in manuscript or print, tended to hover between text and performance, containing aspects of both. We know, for instance, that whatever the origin and meaning of published playbooks, they were sometimes later used as prompter's books – printed texts being easier to read than manuscript texts; hence printed plays that are marked up with manuscript production notes.⁹ We know too that documents designed for staging sometimes made it into print – as when the 'scrolls' containing stage letters, songs, or prologues, often from different sources and dates from the dialogue, are printed in playbooks.¹⁰ But plays, as this book shows, continued to resolve, during and after performance, into further documents, being taken away by audiences as snippets for commonplace books, or printed and then commonplaced (Kiséry, in Chapter 8, teases out why play snippets were thought useful for conversation), or rethought as ballads (Stern in Chapter 11 explores marketing plays as or in other texts).

Here it is important to realize, as Claire Bourne reminds us (Chapter 10), that even the term 'document' is loaded. It stood, in the early modern period, for 'teaching' or 'instruction' rather than, as now, for the inscribed paper that contains them. So 'he that goes to see a Play' was described as having 'a Morall presented to his eye, that should convey some profitable document to his heart', the document here being not a paper but a lesson.¹¹ That means that performance was itself a 'document', and that theatrical events, for which there may never have been paper witnesses (explored in Preiss's Chapter 4 on the lost essence of clowning, improvisation) are 'documents' too. This book, in considering what constitutes documents at their broadest, extends its understanding not only of how 'documents' relate to 'plays', but also of what 'documents' and 'plays' actually are.

It also seeks to expand the approach and methodologies we have for discussing such documents. Theatre and book historians have traditionally been averse to speculation and often list or catalogue the tremendous discoveries they have made, leaving other scholars to make the information work. Authors for *Rethinking Theatrical Documents* were encouraged to interpret, think imaginatively, even speculate. They opened up new areas and approaches for known documents including playbooks (Bourne, Chapter 10); Daborne's letters (Munro, Chapter 1); actors' parts (Marino, Chapter 3); prologues and epilogues (Massai and Craig, Chapter 5); and cataloguing (Estill, Chapter 9). Equally, the book allowed for fresh thought, speculation, and analysis of what might be learned from documents that, like Syme's performance lists (Chapter 2), Steggle's title- and scene-boards (Chapter 6), and most of the plays discussed by Knutson and McInnis (Chapter 12), no longer exist.

Rethinking Theatrical Documents consists of four sections: 'Documents Before Performance', 'Documents of Performance', 'Documents After Performance' and 'Lost Documents'. It starts with documents out of which a play was constructed and learned (including sources, plots, drafts, casting lists, repertory lists, actors' parts); moves on to documents from which a play was performed (including prologues and epilogues, staged title-boards and staged books); considers the documents into which a play resolved after performance (including passages in miscellanies and commonplace books, and ballads); and finally explores the documents that survive when a play itself does not. An Afterword points at the future for the critical field defined by the book. Made up, throughout, of 'provocations' in the form of mini-chapters, the book hopes to replicate the collaborative conversations out of which it was formed, and to harness their vigour and excitement.

The first section, 'Documents Before Performance', is on papers that shaped what performance was. It starts with Lucy Munro's 'Writing a Play with Robert Daborne', which revisits the letters of Robert Daborne to Philip Henslowe in 1613–14,

a rich documentary resource that has been much underused, to describe the lived experience of playwriting: reading source materials, plotting, drafting, reading to the company and revising. Written during a period in which Daborne was scripting plays for the Lady Elizabeth's Men, the letters show how the messy circumstances of Daborne's own life impaired his ability to meet his commitments. Tracing working practices that were both idiosyncratic to Daborne and crucial to the collaborative structures of the early modern theatre industry, the chapter explores the relationships between playwrights, financiers and actors, the dynamics of authorial collaboration, and the financial processes and institutions with which aesthetic production was entwined.

Holger Syme's 'A Sharers' Repertory' considers a pre-play document that must have existed though no examples of it survive: the list of plays and performance dates that companies would have drawn up in order to help organize their daily offerings. It undertakes a fresh analysis of Henslowe's *Diary* in the light of surviving casting information from the 1620s and 1630s in order to explore which roles a 'lead' player was really expected to take on. Added to this information is what can be learned from a newly developed database that includes word-counts for all roles in all early modern plays – it suggests that the assumption that lead roles were always played by the company's lead actor is anachronistic. Thus its 'lost' repertory document, considering how repertories will really have been assembled, and how companies will have spread their major roles among the sharers, becomes a new means of rethinking the early modern star system itself.

The third chapter, James J. Marino's 'Parts and the Playscript: Seven Questions', reconsiders actors' parts. It argues that many standard hypotheses implicitly depend on the notion that actors could make changes to their parts in the playhouse, without examining the possibility or feasibility of such changes. Its seven questions are about the way parts will have affected the early modern repertory. How, for instance, did actors relearn parts when they changed; what revisions were most

difficult or most potentially disruptive of performance; and what limits does a part-based repertory set upon revision? By thinking through some of the greater questions to which parts give rise, it refocuses attention onto plays in pre-performance or pre-revised-performance as well as performance form.

Richard Preiss' 'Undocumented: Improvisation, Rehearsal, and the Clown' is on passages that were never inscribed. It compares what we know about the way companies distributed parts for study, rehearsal, revision, and line-learning with what we know about the clown, who forgot, altered, or added to parts programmatically. How do we reconcile a production system that prioritized efficiency with a clowning technique seemingly designed to provoke error and miscue? Identifying improvisation not as a contingency but as an expedient, the chapter uses extemporization to interrogate the distinctions we draw between the phases of a play's life, such as composition and performance, or rehearsal and premiere. Why, if improvisation was so routine, did playwrights insist so obsessively and paradoxically on staging its failure? When is a play a 'rehearsal' and when is it a 'performance'?

The second section, 'Documents of Performance' looks at documents that tread a careful line between performance and book. It starts with Sonia Massai and Heidi Craig's 'Rethinking Prologues and Epilogues on Page and Stage', which explores the oddity of prologues and epilogues: seemingly theatrical documents that found their way into printed playbooks. Providing the first systematic overview of the different role that prologues and epilogues played once rendered into reading texts, and considering their rate of inclusion in early modern printed playbooks, it asks whether some types of printed playbooks were more likely than others to include prologues and epilogues. Touching upon the way prologues and epilogues changed over time and the extent to which they may, and may not, relate to the prologues and epilogues that were spoken on stage, it reveals the fraught and ambiguous nature of this peculiar form of paratext.

A different kind of performative paratext, the ‘Title- and scene-board’, is the topic of the next chapter by Matthew Steggle. It investigates the early modern theatre’s use of painted signs bearing, respectively, the title of the play being acted and the location of the action. Drawing on examples from the stage directions of the amateur dramatist William Percy, who seems to envisage a hierarchy of different information contained within written signs around the playing area, it shows how the information contained in signs affected the watching experience of early modern theatre. It places these little texts as new members of the family of ‘documents of performance’, arguing that title- and scene-boards set out an interpretive frame for the play’s theatre audiences, and hence are part of the way we need to understand the performed play as textual object.

Sarah Wall-Randell’s chapter asks ‘What is a staged book?’ It questions the ontological status of a book on stage asking whether books are merely physical objects like any other prop, or something more active or interactive. Exploring lines spoken by actors as though read from books, and asking which actual books were staged – can books ‘play’ themselves? – the chapter speculates about a ‘company library’ that was both a resource for playwrights and a supplier of stage props. If sources or references might also become props, then we must think in a new way about the interpenetration of play and the real in early modern theatrical mimesis.

The third section, on ‘Documents After Performance’ looks at the documents that a play is rendered into after performance has taken place. One obvious one is extracts in commonplace books: what András Kiséry calls ‘Flowers for English Speaking’. His chapter is on the notes taken from plays which, in terms of scholarship hitherto, have generally been treated as ‘literary’ extracts. But, as the chapter explores, dramatic dialogue in the period was closely associated with spoken discourse, and among oral modes, with the conversational rather than with formal oratory. Arguing that most early seventeenth-century notes from plays – whether from printed playbooks or from the stage – are documents not of theatrical performance, or

‘literature’, but, of colloquialisms and colloquial style, it posits a culture of oral, conversational performance, complicating what plays were used for, and why.

Laura Estill’s ‘Shakespearean Extracts and the Misrepresentation of the Archive’ is also on play extracts, and explores a different way in which they have been misunderstood. It considers how scholarship itself, privileging the Shakespearean over the non-Shakespearean, has misrepresented surviving documents. Dramatic extracts from Shakespeare seemingly outnumber those from other dramatists in pre-1600 manuscripts – but only because centuries of Shakespeare-centric cataloguing and scholarship have alerted scholars to ‘Shakespearean extracts’ more than to other extracts. Likewise dramatic extracts are more fully catalogued than the other materials found with them in commonplace books. Making a case for under-researched non-Shakespearean/dramatic commonplace examples, the chapter argues that we cannot properly comprehend early modern dramatic texts and their reception until we are more thoughtfully alert to their contexts.

Claire M. L. Bourne’s ‘Typography *After* Performance’ analyses what type itself can reveal about staging. It starts from the fact that playbooks themselves are the major documents after performance. Many playbooks were also after performance in that they were designed to accord with (as in, to take after) the effects of performance. The chapter explores playbook typography and the arrangement and appearance of dramatic material on the page to show how readers were taught to encounter, navigate, and experience the print instantiations of this genre. Using Q1 *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1598) as a case study, it explores a varied range of typographic strategies that help ‘vitalize’ for readers the play’s non-verbal theatricality, especially in set-pieces that involve onstage reading and/or performance. Just as the play’s plot turns on the (un)successful reading and performance of textual matter, so Q1 positions readers in the conceptual space between the idea of the play as a book and the idea of the play as a theatrical event, providing one of the best examples of an early

modern playbook that functions as a 'theatrical document for readers'.

Another beyond play document was the ballad, which seems sometimes to have been written for, sometimes exploited by and sometimes sold at, the playhouse. In 'Shakespeare the Balladmonger?' Tiffany Stern looks at Shakespeare's use of ballads in his plays; and also his or his theatre's use of 'play ballads' – printed ballads that tell the entire narrative of his dramas. Asking whether Shakespeare promoted links between ballads and plays, or simply used them when they were there, the chapter raises questions about the form and nature of theatrical marketing around, before and after performance. Did ballads promote plays in performance or print – or did performance or print promote ballads? Were ballads specifically sold at playhouses, and if so, with the tacit acceptance, or at the insistence of the company? Complicating notions of the relationship between high and low literature, audience and actor, orality and text, performance and print, the chapter asks whether Shakespeare's company, and/or its playwrights, ever specifically marketed ballads to market plays, and whether a ballad should ever be considered part of a playtext.

The final section is on 'Lost Documents'. Knutson and McInnis consider 'Lost Documents, Absent Documents, Forged Documents', pointing out that countless documents from the early modern playhouse are no longer extant; routine events occurred in playhouses and among parties interested in theatrical business that did not provide a record at all; and forgers, motivated by professional self-importance and the allure of discovering evidence, filled gaps in received knowledge with documents of their own making. This chapter, on the continuum of lost-to-extant documents, moves beyond the paperwork generated by plays during the processes of composition and performance to consider evidence related to the culture of the early modern playhouse world in the categories of repertory, playwrights, provincial and court venues, and governmental action. Throughout, it considers the theoretical underpinnings of working with lost documents and the resources scholars have

developed to raise the visibility of data from documents no longer extant. Although frustrated by incalculable losses from and about the early modern playhouse world, the chapter argues nonetheless that an awareness of what existed at one time is itself knowledge that keeps us both wary of assumptions and disciplined in the construction of narratives unsupported by the surviving documentary record.

An Afterword by Peter Holland adds to the rich range of what might constitute a 'document', and points the way for further productive investigation in the page/stage field.

Through these twelve brief chapters and Afterword, *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England* reflects upon and hopes to shift the way that page and stage, stage and page are addressed and separated. Documents should not, it suggests, be analysed and put in their place as ephemeral papers that give way to a play: rather, the playhouse should be understood to be frantically generating paratexts before, during and after performance, and redistributing them in wider society in ways that question what was text and what performance. This collection, which brings together, explores, analyses and theorizes a rich variety of entangled documents, some known and some relatively unknown, intends to shake up the critical, editorial, historical and material fields that depend upon 'page and stage' (or 'stage and page'). By using collective intervention to rethink both theatre history and book history, it provides new ways of understanding plays critically, interpretatively, editorially, practically and textually.

Notes

- 1 James Shirley, *The bird in a cage* (1633), A2r.
- 2 S. H., *Sicily and Naples, or, The fatall union A tragedy* (1640), A1r.
- 3 John Cleveland, *J. Cleaveland revived poems, orations, epistles* (1659), 43.
- 4 Thomas Nashe, *A pleasant comedie, called Summers last will and testament* (1600), H4v.

- 5 Henry Wotton, *Letters of Sir Henry Wotton to Sir Edmund Bacon* (1661), 155.
- 6 Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *A courtly masque: the deuice called, the vworld tost at tennis* (1620), A3r.
- 7 Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *A King and No King* (1639), titlepage.
- 8 John Fletcher, *The faithfull shepheardesse* (1610?), π3v.
- 9 Leslie Thomson, 'A Quarto "Marked for performance": Evidence of What?', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 8 (1996), 176–210.
- 10 The subject of Tiffany Stern's *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 11 John Spencer, *Kaina kai palaia Things new and old, or, A store-house of similies, sentences, allegories, apophthegms, adagies, apologues, divine, morall, politicall, &c.* (1658), 274.