Introduction

"Longing on a large scale is what makes history."
Don DeLillo, *Underworld*

In his 1589 treatise *The Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham diagnosed the limited ability of humans to perceive history. The past, according to Puttenham, is that which "we are not able [...] to attaine to the knowledge of, by any of our sences."[1] History is defined by its inalienable absence. It exists only in forms of textual or pictorial representation, such as prose works, poetry, and illustrations, or in embodied acts such as storytelling and theatrical playing. In sixteenth-century England, these forms flourished as varying responses to a heightened awareness of the absence of history, an awareness that the intellectual ambitions of the Renaissance precipitated. Of all the forms of history, performance alone supplies a pretense of sensual contact with the vanished past through the bodies that move and speak on stage. The history plays that I consider in this book, from the repertory of the Queen's Men and by Shakespeare, grew out of a vibrant Elizabethan historical culture, and they in turn helped to shape a new historical outlook. These works suggest a distinctive consciousness of history, one that understands the generation and production of historical narratives as driven by a sense of longing for contact with the past, a desire that is doomed from the start to remain unfulfilled. The historical consciousness I see at work on the late-sixteenth-century stage thus comprehends the pleasures of history as rooted in a dialectic of presence and absence, for the performance of history provides an experience of "pastness" that is necessarily ephemeral. Theatrical performance in this era *formally* enacts history as a communally created phenomenon that exists only insofar as it is continually produced.

Early modern dramatic historiography has elicited a steady outpouring of criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the insights of this criticism have varied greatly, the set of questions asked has been fairly consistent. Even as the New Historicists became ascendant in the 1980s and

1990s and challenged many assumptions and conclusions about the genre that were put forth by mid-twentieth-century scholars, the center of gravity for work on the history play has remained the political arena.[2] With few exceptions, scholars have tended to focus on the genre's topical relevance for Elizabethan and Jacobean questions of national identity, kingly authority, and the interpellation of subjects.[3] This focus has yielded a number of persuasive links between theatrical representation, the domestic and international expansion of state power, and the everyday operation of Elizabeth's and James's governments. But while such scholarship – the old and the new – has done much to illuminate the ideological connotations of dramatic historiography, we have not fully accounted for the pleasure such plays offer and the range of the intellectual power they exert, especially in regards to the concept of history itself. It is, then, the dramatic exploration of the *idea* of history in this period, rather than of the topicality of history, that occupies me here. By and large, this book is not the place to look for analyses of how plays negotiate the "politics of history" in the Renaissance, a topic that has been well served by countless books and articles. While I do address such concerns in places here, such as my consideration in Chapter 4 of genealogies of authority in *1 Henry VI*, and while I am aware that is impossible ever to separate the political from the historical, this study is ultimately attuned more to early modern approaches to history as a cultural *phenomenon* than as an ideological battleground.

By examining a repertory of pre-Shakespearean history plays by the Queen's Men and by drawing on a body of work I bring together here under the omnibus term "performance theory," I hope to open up the critical conversation about the Shakespearean history play and thus to expand our sense of what made these plays popular and desirable dramatic commodities as well as vital expressions of Elizabethan historical consciousness. My main claim in this book is twofold: first, I argue that each of the plays I examine here, through language and staging cues, demystifies historical representation by connecting it conceptually to the artifice of theatrical performance; and, second, I argue that this demystification is not the undermining of historical culture but its positive condition. By highlighting how these plays about the English past implicate historical knowledge in aesthetics and representation, I claim that the plays I discuss evince a historical consciousness in which the conceptual status of the past is defined by its embeddedness in the present tense of cultural production. Performance is a transient form. As a theater critic recently remarked, "one cannot step twice into the same show."[4] This homage to Heraclitus' insight about change and time – you can't step into the same river twice – is an apt

way to initiate this study, for it is, I will suggest throughout, precisely the existence of a play *in time* that makes it such an intellectually provocative and aesthetically compelling medium for exploring the notion of history. Much of the performance theory that informs this book, then, is concerned with the fact that performances disappear. This insistence on the evaporation of stage-playing will dominate the first few chapters. However, there is another strand of thinking about performance as a phenomenon of perpetual "becoming" that I see Shakespeare begin to explore in *Richard III* and, later, in *Henry V*. Audiences to Elizabethan history plays could experience performance, and the ways of thinking that performance can inspire, in both these ways: not only as that which vanishes but also as that which might, like old Hamlet's Ghost, vanish and reappear.[5]

The majority of this book deals with Shakespeare. In addition to being the most prolific dramatic historiographer of his age, Shakespeare is the player-playwright who is most interested in exploring the relationship between drama and historical sensibilities in this era. My initial route into analyzing his historical plays runs through the earlier work of the Queen's Men playing company. I choose to attend to the Queen's Men for two reasons. First is the simple fact of priority. They were the first players to stage the English past in the popular theaters, and so a serious consideration of the Shakespearean history play must take their foundational contributions into account. Second, this company influenced the historical and theatrical imagination of Shakespeare in ways that have yet to be appreciated. They developed a set of dramaturgical strategies to highlight the compelling theater that emerges when plays examine the status of history and historical knowledge, and thus blazed a trail that Shakespeare followed and augmented as he honed his craft and earned his early fame by trafficking in the past. I have chosen in this study to concentrate on two anonymously authored works from the repertory of the Queen's Men, *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and *The True Tragedy of Richard III*; and from there to move on to readings of Shakespeare's *1 Henry*, *VI Richard III*, and *Henry V*. It is deliberate that all of these works are from the Elizabethan era. The commercial theaters developed in London in the 1570s, and it was still a relatively novel form of cultural production throughout the two decades that followed. I am most interested in thinking about the history play in relation to this novelty. The theatrical self-consciousness that is a *topos* of early modern plays derives in part from awareness of their "newness." The late sixteenth century is a particularly exciting moment in which to assess the impact of performing history on early modern English historical consciousness. Plays from this time reverberate with the sense that they are emerging from an innovative

technology for depicting and in some sense creating the past. The total number of history plays I have selected from this time period is small, and this is also deliberate. Such focus allows me room for detailed close readings. I have aimed to provide a depth of analysis of particular works in each chapter that I hope will yield more insight into early modern theatrical and historical culture than an attempt at "coverage" of the Shakespeare canon or of the entire field of the Elizabethan history play would be able to provide.

In Chapter 1, I contextualize the notions of history and theatrical performance in the early modern period. Here I deliver an outline of Elizabethan "historical culture" in relation to the key term "historical consciousness." I turn next to an exposition of my methodology in this book. My work brings techniques of formal criticism that assume the vitality of dramatic poetry together with insights gleaned from investigating theoretical and practical aspects of performance. I will discuss in this chapter how I adapt postmodern theories of performance in ways that are sensitive to the specificity of the early modern period. I then provide an overview of the Queen's Men and their approach to performing history and begin to suggest how they shaped Shakespeare's own historical imaginings.

I begin my examination of the repertory of the Queen's Men in Chapter 2 by looking at their important play *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. I am particularly interested in the presence in it of the company's most famous player, the great clown Richard Tarlton. I argue that in mounting this and other plays on history that draw much of their power from the present-tense centered presence of clowns such as Tarlton, the Queen's Men make awareness of history as an absence, as precisely what's not present in the presence of theater, a central aspect of the experience of their plays and the consciousness of history they promote. In the following chapter, I offer one of the first full-length, substantive analyses of *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, a play that has elicited surprisingly little critical attention. I examine the appearance of three unusual speech-prefixes in this play: "Truth," "Poetry," and "Report." These are quasi-allegorical characters in *The True Tragedy of Richard III* whose very presence unsettles the play's other attempts at historical mimesis. I connect Truth, Poetry, and Report as they appear in this play to Elizabethan discourses of history and literary production seen in Philip Sidney's *The Defense of Poetry* and Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*. The specific dialogue in which these figures engage in *The True Tragedy of Richard III* implicates the telling of history in aesthetic strategies and stylized forms of repetition.

I move from here to a consideration of Shakespeare. He expanded on the Queen's Men's use of theatrical technology in his own explorations of the

aesthetic and intellectual pleasures the history play can offer. Heminges and Condell list ten titles under the rubric "Histories" in the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. From that field I have chosen three – *1 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Henry V* – that each represent a novel meditation on the relationship between performance and historical consciousness: in the case of *1 Henry VI* about continuity; in the case of *Richard III* about visual memory; and in the case of *Henry V* about the sense of the historicity of the world outside the theater that a stage play can create. A study of these particular works also showcases a spectrum of Shakespeare's engagements with the genre in the 1590s, a spectrum that both highlights the development of his compositional strategies and underlines his increasingly radical anatomization of questions of dramatic and historical presence. Chapter 4 looks at *1 Henry VI*, one of his earliest ventures in the genre. In *1 Henry VI*, history emerges as akin to performance: shadowy, transient, and existing only through the collective will of those who produce and receive it. I focus on how genealogy is examined in this play. Shakespeare explores the implications of theatrical presence for historical representation by juxtaposing broken political succession with broken continuity in historical narratives. Here we see Shakespeare develop poetic and dramaturgical strategies geared to exposing the failures of both theater and history to produce continuity, a failure that in fact opens space for the imaginative faculties of audiences and thus contributes to the pleasure of the play.

I turn in Chapter 5 to the pivotal work *Richard III*. Here Shakespeare aligns historical and dramatic representation to the point of creating a new form of historical consciousness in which the historical imagination becomes populated with theatrical bodies. This play is often read in terms of its "theatricality." I argue that the term "theatricality" is too loosely applied to this play to mean, in the broadest possible sense, that the play participates in the ancient theater–world analogy. I consider theatricality, or theatrical self-consciousness, as something *specific* to theatrical practice rather than as a vague term that can make legible every aspect of social and political life. I argue that in *Richard III* this stage-specific theatricality works to disrupt the traditional binary between written and oral historiography by explicitly introducing theatrical performance as a form of historical representation that is distinct from both of those modes. Through a detailed analysis of the "ghost" scene, I argue that in this play Shakespeare refines the age-old *theatrum mundi* trope by developing a more particular analogy between his aesthetic form – theater – and the historical imagination, a notion I call *theatrum historiae*. The *theatrum historiae* trope, I argue, is when history

is understood according to the structures and dynamics of theater. An examination of the "afterlife" of the figure of Richard III as mediated by Shakespeare's depiction of him helps me further develop this concept and begin assessing the long-term impact of the Elizabethan history play on Anglo-American historical consciousness.

I then move to a reading of *Henry V*, perhaps the Elizabethan history play that has been most extensively examined in the past thirty years or so. Here I hope to cultivate some fresh insights from the well-trod ground of the Chorus's pervasive meta-theatricality. I first consider the possibility that Shakespeare drew his inspiration for the prologue and other speeches by the Chorus from Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, a wild and fantastic mess of a play. If this is so, it shows us the extent to which Shakespeare considered the representation of history to be as challenging for audiences to comprehend as it is for writers and performers to produce. (This line of thinking also helps to resolve the controversy over the dating of the Chorus's speeches, for it establishes 1600, the publication date of *Old Fortunatus*, as the most likely date by which the part of the Chorus was established in performances of *Henry V*, despite the fact that it does not appear in print until 1623.) The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an explication of the ways that the Chorus, which initially seems to fix audience historical understanding within the walls of the playhouse, in fact makes progressive gestures toward the ways that original audiences of the play could use knowledge gained within the "wooden O" to understand the environment outside it – early modern London – as itself a space that was full of triggers to the historical imagination. In a brief conclusion, I reflect on how elements of the historical consciousness that is inaugurated on the Elizabethan stage can be seen in contemporary phenomena that combine discourses of performance and history like the "new" Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

Finally, it is worth noting now that, throughout this book, by "audience" I refer to original live audiences of Elizabethan productions. Obviously, I am aware that it is impossible for a twenty-first-century critic to speak on behalf of early modern playgoers and that the play texts I examine are never the same thing as the performances they seek to record. We will always do well to remember Lukas Erne's sound admonishment that "the plays that have come down do not give us access to the plays as they were performed, only to how they were printed."[6] We might also do well, though, to consider a sentiment from Umberto Eco: "When originals no longer exist, the last copy is the original."[7] While the texts that have come down to us may be dim reflections of fugitive performances, for the overwhelming majority of early

modern plays, the surviving texts *are all we have to go on* for information about their staging. As Jeremy Lopez has recently observed about early modern theater studies, "given the state of the documentary evidence in the field, there is a point at which imagination must take over where evidence leaves off," a comment that could describe the act of performing history as well as it describes acts of Shakespeare criticism.[8] Elizabethan playwrights, performers, and playgoers recognized the past as absent but, for intellectual stimulation and aesthetic satisfaction, they sought imaginative contact with it anyway. Perhaps my motives and procedures are akin to theirs. Despite our manifest inability to access original performances, I am not ready to abandon the consideration of live performance and its implications in this period altogether. Keeping both Erne's skepticism and Eco's playful logic in mind, my goal is to hypothesize about, with as much rigor as possible, a range of potential audience responses to the traces of performance that lurk within those texts, the "last copies" of the performances that took place on the early modern stage.[9]

NOTES

1. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 39. For a modern historian's reflection on this concept, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Make the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 3), where Gaddis writes that the "past […] is something we can never have. For by the time we've become aware of what has happened it's already inaccessible to us."
2. The works that fall under this description date back over sixty years and are too numerous to cite here adequately. Even the very selective list that follows makes for a cumbersome note. Not every book cited here is solely concerned with the history play but each contains at least a significant section or chapter devoted to examples of the genre: E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's English History Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1946); Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1947); M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962); Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*," in John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares 1* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), pp. 210–231; Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Metheun, 1986); Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press,

1988); Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); Christopher Pye, *The Regal Phantasm: Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Louis Adrian Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Ivo Kamps, *Historiography and Ideology in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); and Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). The most significant book-length discussion of the Elizabethan history play in the past twenty years, in my opinion, is Rackin's *Stages of History*, which, among other contributions, brings into focus the overlooked issues of class and gender that are central to the Shakespearean history play. In an important precedent for my aims, Rackin also cites concepts of anachronism and temporality as driving forces of the history play's affect. But while her book alerts us to such issues, the study remains within the prevailing tradition of considering these plays in mainly "political" terms.

3. The essay collection *Shakespeare's English Histories: A Quest for Form and Genre*, ed. John W. Velz (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1996) is one example of an attempt to come at the genre from different angles, as are the chapters on the history play in Kastan's *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1982). One recent precedent for my book is Benjamin Griffin's *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama 1385–1600* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001). Griffin, too, expresses a desire to move beyond strictly political readings of the genre to see history plays as "experiences in theatre and time" (2001: xiii), a useful way to describe my own approach here.
4. Aleksandra Wolska, "Rabbits, Machines, and the Ontology of Performance," *Theatre Journal*, 57, 84 (2005): 83–95.
5. The comparison between the reappearance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* and theatrical performance in general is one of theater theorist Herbert Blau's favorite and, indeed, most ingenious, insights. See, for one iteration of it in his work, "Set Me Where You Stand: Revising the Abyss," *New Literary History*, 29, 254 (1998): 247–272.
6. Lukas Erne, "Shakespeare for Readers," in Diana Henderson (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares 3* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 93. On this point, see also Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 19–20.
7. The Umberto Eco quotation is taken from *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, 1989), p. 127. The context of this line in Eco's novel is infused with fakery and irony to be sure, but it expresses

a profound, perhaps often suppressed, necessity in historical and literary studies.

8. Jeremy Lopez, "Imagining the Actor's Body on the Early Modern Stage," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 20, 188–89 (2007), 187–203.
9. On the notion of "performance as a kind of prehistory of scripted drama," see Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks' fascinating work *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 13.

CHAPTER 1

Dialogues with the dead: history, performance, and Elizabethan theater

In the A-text of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the Emperor Charles V asks Faust to "raise" for him "Alexander the Great" and his "beauteous paramour." The Emperor explains his request as a deep longing for the past: "It grieves my soul I never saw the man."[1] Marlowe's play gives voice to feelings of loss that permeate the historical culture of sixteenth-century England, where a heightened sensitivity emerged to the break between the past and the present or to what Andrew Escobedo has called the temporal "caesura" of historical distance. As Escobedo argues, sixteenth-century English culture evinces a "hankering after a knowledge of its origins [...] yet nonetheless [is] predicated on its isolation from these origins."[2] I wish in this study to examine how *theatrical performance* contributed to and expanded on that historical outlook. The pages that follow provide a historical framework and a theoretical model for understanding how staging the past inflected historical consciousness in late-sixteenth-century England.

I will start with a three-part overview of the historical culture of the Elizabethan era, looking at its conceptual roots in the Italian Renaissance, its variety and increasingly self-reflexive nature, and its implication in notions of rupture, in particular the rupture of the Reformation. The historical consciousness of this culture, I will contend, is shaped by a need for history and an awareness that the past only exists when it is produced through potentially ephemeral human efforts. I then consider how, within the period's theatrical culture, there emerges a related outlook on performance: it is something which is desired and which is ultimately subject to disappearance. Recent performance theorists have written extensively on some of the very issues that I claim are central to Elizabethan theorizations of performance, such as the temporality of drama and the status of the body in performance. I discuss these critics who have helped to shape my method of reading plays and show how their work can be adapted to illuminate aspects of early modern theater. I close with two final sections devoted to an overview of the creative minds and bodies behind the particular plays I study in this