Introduction

This book concludes a larger project on authority and representation in early modern discourse and theatre. Having previously discussed the conjuncture of playing and writing on Elizabethan stages, and in prologues delivered on them, we now shift focus to Shakespeare's plays themselves. Here we approach them through the confederation and dissension of the two media, dramatic language and performing bodies. Just as language in Shakespeare's theatre was used in myriad ways, so also did performing assume and extend multiple modes, styles, and functions – especially in the apparently impromptu range of its interaction with language. Still, there remained a gap even in the interdependence of the two media. Drawing on two different forms of cultural production, the plays in performance sought to overcome and yet allude to and use the rift between them. Shakespeare's achievement cannot be separated from his astonishing readiness not only to acknowledge but also to play with the difference between the meaning of words and the practice of their delivery. The gap between language and the body afforded the playwright a new reach, cogency, and mobility in the uses of embodied signs.

This gap and the ways to accommodate and exploit it were marked by highly particular circumstances. The latter arose as the late Renaissance culture of literacy and the new technology of print began to affect and to intermingle with traditional ways of delivering oral or nonverbal feats and skills. As far as they had entered the marketplace and were entrenched in commercially run theatres, these practices showed considerable resilience. They continued to assert their own rights of display even after theatrical shows began to be indebted to new uses of dramatic language. At this juncture, the theatre – against all kinds of learned precept and pious prejudice – could lay claim to a certain "sovereign grace" (*The Comedy of Errors*, 3.2.160).[1] The stage flourished at the very point where two socially and culturally different practices came to be conjoined in a workable alliance. It was precisely the joint transaction, the joint appeal of the two

different media, that allowed for a situation in which the authority of the
text could be either affirmed or intercepted by the rights of performance.
Either way, the alliance between the two cultural practices derived from and
sanctioned a purely pragmatic, unwritten contract of mutual entertainment
(in both senses of the word) between the institution and its audience. In the
sixteenth century this bifold mode of cultural production, even when
formally hedged by courtly interest, patronage, or censorship, was unpre-
cedented, its workings largely untried. Yet this theatre was powerful enough
in its own right to speak to thousands. It was free to show unknown locations
and unexplored circumstances without the slightest reluctance to display,
rather than conceal, the work of its performing tools and agents.

The combined potency of diverging arts and media was not, and cannot be
grasped as, a purely technical or formal matter. The hybrid mode of commu-
nication, now drawing on both expanding literacy and print, proved of the
highest consequence, especially in its accessibility for a considerable mass of
people. The Chorus to *Henry V* went out of his way to offer his service to
both those who knew and "those who have not read the story" (*Henry V*, 5.0.1).
The conditions under which "the story" and the "unworthy scaffold" (Pro. 10)
came together were largely self-fashioned by those who played there and
in turn fashioned "the scene" (Pro. 4; 20–34, 42; 3.0.1; 4.0.48) by presenting
their roles on it. Comprising "our performance" (3.0.35), "our stage" (Epi. 13)
and the "brightest heaven of invention" (Pro. 2) and representation, the
conjunctural work of the theatre was very much a matter of time and place.
Historically, this conjuncture was shaped by: (1) the economic needs and
opportunities of a commercially based cultural institution; (2) the social and
historical momentum of a situation marked by rapid change, transition,
and "mingle-mangle"; (3) and, following the Reformation and the growing
impact of the printing press, an increasingly practiced literacy. Finally, these
new forces of economic, social, cultural, and religious change met with, and
were affected by, (4) still strong premodern culture. Even while this tradi-
tional component was being widely exposed to an expanding market for
cultural goods, some of its habitual forms and functions continued to be
taken for granted on London's public stages.

In these circumstances, the "swelling," double-coded "scene" was spacious
enough for a quickening moment of interactive give-and-take not only
between material bodies and imaginary uses of language but also, in the
audience, among sensory faculties – in particular "th' attest of eyes and ears"
(*Troilus and Cressida*, 5.2.122). The "heaven of invention" could project a
"story" of the past over its enactment in the present, right there. Between the
representation of something past or absent and its delivery in the present,

Shakespeare's theatre offered astonishing links and yet revealed incalculable
gaps in time and space. In the Prologue cited, the distance between who and
what was representing the play and who and what was represented in it was
foregrounded rather than concealed. While the former was a matter of "our
performance" here and now, the latter, as outlined in "story" and history, was
altogether different in its lofty and purely imaginary shape.

   In our context, it is crucial to understand how the theatre used the gap
between "So great an object" (Pro. 11) of representation and such mode of its
presentation "as may unworthiness define" (4.0.46). The spatial extension
of this "distance" clearly had important social and temporal dimensions.
Pulsating at the heart of relations between page and stage, the mediation
between then and now, there and here, high and low required a dramaturgy
largely unknown to the all-encompassing sense of presence in the mystery
cycles and even in some of the older morality plays. For Shakespeare, who
both performed and wrote, it must have been a supreme challenge to scan
and interrelate these different, newly disposable spaces. As his Prologue
phrased it, the playwright was prepared to work with the use as well as with
"Th' abuse of distance" when it came to "force a play" (2.0.32).

THE ARGUMENT

The articulation of three general goals may help signpost the direction of this
project. These include, first, a redefining of early modern performances as a
miscellaneous assemblage of contingent, formally and culturally variegated
practices. If on Elizabethan stages relations between the practice of perform-
ance and the authority of writing were as yet rather unsettled, the most
consequential reason was this extraordinary diversification among perform-
ance practices. The latter were divided at the very point at which they were
and were not consonant with the demands of verbally prescribed utterances.
While this difference is potentially given in any performed instance of
language use, it was especially pronounced on early modern stages.

   As this first aspect suggests, we propose to address stage/page relations
through the issue of difference – that is, from how in the theatre the specific
form and force of each medium defines, and is defined by, the other. The
same principle informs our second goal: redefining an approach to the
symbolic order of representation. The act of performance is primarily, though
not exclusively, anchored in bodily practice. Representation, in particular its
world-picturing function, is primarily, though again not exclusively, indebted
to scriptural uses of language. It is in and through written discourses that a
remote, absent, complex world can be represented. Apparently disconnected

circumstances, hidden motivations, anachronistic sequences, rugged spaces, abstruse happenings – all these can be captured in images of dramatic speech and action.

The achieved relationship of performance and text in Shakespeare's theatre has usually been approached from ontological premises. While indebted to more recent anthropological and performance studies, we seek to shift emphasis to sociological bearings and a focus on socio-cultural history. Far from wishing to foreground large or overriding narratives, then, our third aim is to contextualize the relationship of performance and text *in concreto*, that is, as a changeful ensemble, in Shakespeare's theatre, of socially and formally different cultural productions. Along these lines, our approach will provide us with important clues to the history and genealogy of Shakespeare's own works in the theatre, unlocking hidden connections, rarely perceived trends and formations in the dramatist's oeuvre. As several significant configurations emerge from his plays, these shed new light on what is distinctly his own peculiar position in the history of the Elizabethan stage. As goes without saying, neither the historical dimension in the stage/page relationship nor the uses of performing and writing can be exhaustively traced here throughout the dramatist's entire oeuvre.

As the arrangement of our material suggests, we have focused on the most prominent lines of interaction between the powers of performance and the shaping faculties of dramatic composition. The encounter between the two has a genealogy that attests to a premodern impulse in the "contrariety" that Philip Sidney had associated with "our comedians." Their contrarious impulse is documented in our first chapter, a reading of *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*. This mid-Elizabethan moral play is teeming with performing energies, with the scheming, cunning, diversionary élan of showmanship. As an unbound force of indifference and self-willed inversion, Courage the Vice practices mischief, moving within the allegorical order of transcendent morality the better to defy this very order.

The project of his evil fortitude is followed up in the next two chapters by Shakespeare's highly varied adaptations of a Vice protagonist in, respectively, Richard Gloucester (chapter 2) and Philip Faulconbridge (chapter 3) – both, incidentally, as intrepid as the undaunted Iago and Edmund. We have chosen *Richard III* and *King John* because the royal villain in the former play can, even while publicly exhibiting the nasty arts of his counterfeiting, profit from the semi-tragic compensation of his disability. Alternatively, the witty, quipping, conniving Bastard in the early scenes of *King John* is himself "amaz'd," and fears "I . . . lose my way" when the "vast confusion" (*King John*, 4.3.140, 152) happens to be already there, in the surrounding world of the play itself.

Because further inversion of this perverted state of affairs is self-forbidding, contrariety itself is inflected by a given, circumstantial politics of commodity in the tugging and the scrambling for "The unowed interest of proud swelling state" (147). In both plays, then, a thick performative is jostling side by side with representations of personal and sometimes national plight.

On an entirely different plane, these engagements between textual direction and performative prowess also inspired a doubly encoded clowning. As we suggest in chapters 4 and 5, this bifold structure in the agency of clowning tends to preclude clear and fixed lines between the live actor and his imaginary role. The line between them is liable to swerve in directions marked by either author's pen or actor's voice. There results an extremely volatile dramaturgy by which the representational can be slanted toward presentation, and the presentational toward some kind of meaningful representation.

This dramaturgy provides a largely unacknowledged clue to the fashioning of imaginary personhood on Shakespeare's stage. Even while the culture of print and literacy helped produce configurations marked by a more complex sense of identity, Shakespeare twirled agency itself around for scrutiny in the mirror of character. As we show in chapter 6, the strongest and most consequential attestation of the actor's presence comes in the image of Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines. The alluring presentation of gendered disguise was one way of accrediting the skills of playing itself. The boy actor gracefully representing a young woman presenting herself as page or trusted servant steered the figuration back to what in life embodied a double-gendered representation.

But Shakespeare the actor also accredited the zest and gusto, the sheer energy in the presentational *gestus* of his fellow players elsewhere, especially in the twinkling eye of counterfeiting role delivery (chapter 7). We call this practice personation, the "secretly open" exposure of the actor behind the dramatic role and its persona. Personation privileges the *making of* the mask, the *skill* and the *show* of playing the role of another. As a presentational practice, it falls back on the dramaturgy of "A juggling trick – to be secretly open." Thersites's phrase here (*Troilus and Cressida*, 5.2.24), in its use of a "juggling trick," betrays predramatic origins, even physical skills in a marketplace type of entertainment. In the drama of this personation, the personator is not entirely lost in the personated. Rather, the dramatist is prepared to foreground and thereby to honour the actor's presence in the delivery of the text. So the text makes allowance for a representational practice that suggests vital links with, and inspirations from, a wider world of performance action and behavior. Here, as elsewhere, this practice

reveals what bifold authority could also be about: an acknowledgment of mutually concerted action.

The double-encoded force of personation in Shakespeare's theatre coexisted with (rather than being replaced by) the "deep" characterization typically associated with his middle and later plays. As chapter 8 seeks to demonstrate, the agency in personation often appears at precisely those moments when selfhood and subjectivity are most meaningfully at issue. As presented upon the boards of the Elizabethan stage no less than in the pages of contemporary playbooks, the grammar of personal identity found itself advanced in the first person singular of "secretly open" speakers. Laboring at their craft with the assistance of a strong performative, these actor/characters project, in the form of a presentation, an apparently self-sustained image of dramatic selfhood. For Viola to declare, "I am not what I am" (*Twelfth Night*, 3.1.141) is to deliver an open, playful inflection, with change in pitch and tone, of the actor's body, gender, and identity.

Such inflection, we observe in chapter 9, frequently comes at dramatic moments in which characters' relationships to issues of agency and identity are considered through, and with the assistance of, written materials. As far as any dramatic subjectivity echoed within the assertive "I," it was often indebted to images of dramatic composition that surface regularly in Shakespeare's plays. These representations speak not only to the economy of part and role in the professional acting repertoire of the day, but also to the imaginary, wide-ranging shapes of print outside the playhouse. In the publishing of dramatic playbooks especially after the watershed year of 1594, the "imaginary puissance" (*Henry V*, Pro. 25) in the dramatist's composition itself must have affected the dynamic, pivotal role of character. These representations of dramatic character were inflamed not simply by his literary leanings; they must also have been fuelled by prospects of a wider circulation and, potentially even more important, in response to the resources of a structural transformation of print during the late Elizabethan era.

As this summary suggests, we have chosen performance to serve as our gate of entry in this study, on the grounds that it is the more recently discerned, controversial component in the alliance of writing and staging. With those multiple modes and styles of delivery in mind, we will pursue an approach that seeks critically to integrate, rather than uncritically subscribe to, recent performance studies. From these we will borrow what, transcending J. L. Austin's primarily linguistic terms, may be called the "performative" in early modern cultural practices. With this broader extradramatic field before us, it seems difficult to deny that, in William Worthen's phrase, performance should not critically be reduced to a

"merely interpretive mode of production." The purpose of performing is
not exhausted by a histrionic practice which "recaptures or restates the
authority of the text."[2] Here, obviously, important issues are at stake. In
particular, this new, broadly anthropological understanding of perform-
ance constitutes a far-reaching challenge to what, in Michael Bristol's
formulation, is the centuries-old "ministerial" approach to the actor's
practice as subservient to the playwright's text.[3]

However, at this point questions arise which so far have not received
satisfying answers. What kind of practice, what type of staged action and
delivery do we actually mean when talking about performance in its own
right – that is, as an independent, even sovereign force in Shakespeare's
theatre? True, in certain ancient ritual ceremonies, just as in the latest displays
of today's performance artists, performance can do very well without verbal
language. But if, as Worthen goes on to note, "performance has no intrinsic
relation to texts," the question is: what sustains the relationship when, in the
early modern theatre, the two media have come close to interactive conjunc-
tion? Here Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern have drawn attention to the
mediating force of the individual "part" as "at once a physical artefact, and an
actor's vocation" bearing "both text and context in its own right." If the part
"never ceases to be a creative catalyst" for Shakespeare and, simultaneously, is
identified by the actor "as the vital thing to be opened-up and expanded," a
more complex mode of give-and-take would inform the relationship over and
beyond any purely ministerial pattern.[4]

To acknowledge the importance of the text on the actor's scroll is not,
therefore, to minimize the nonministerial dimensions of performance in
Shakespeare's theatre. On the contrary, it sharpens the contours of the
problem. For performers on Elizabethan stages to "open and expand" their
parts may or may not exhaust the frontiers of interpretation. But if it is one
thing to postulate an "opened-up and expanded" mediation of the text, it
is an entirely different matter to demonstrate the ways by which and the
degrees to which the uses of performance transcend the mediating purpose
of interpretation. For an answer, the actor's own voice and em*bodi*ment,
the circumstantial space and purpose of his/her action must be a crucial
point of departure.

As against a purely and exclusively interpretive practice, we shall look for
and locate in Shakespeare's plays conditions of a surplus type of perform-
ance action. Are there any specific sites and situations demanding or
witnessing to what Michael Goldman called the "terrific" energy of the
actor? Or, in Bernard Beckerman's phrase, where and when can the per-
former be traced "as his own inventor," as a "*self-generative*" agency whose

presence in presentation is marked by "spontaneity and uncertainty"?[5] Even
to raise those questions in reference to Goldman and Beckerman is to
submit an important qualification. The present inquiry into the "power"
of nonministerial performance practices confines itself to those particularly
enabling conditions, situations, and figurations in Shakespeare's plays that
can best circumscribe the springs, forms, and functions of self-sustained
acting.

Our response to Worthen's and other critics' challenging propositions, in
fact, is to show how the performed interpretation goes hand in hand with
something larger than itself. So we need to ask: how, when, and in which
context can the staged mediation of Shakespeare's text be informed by some
more independent, self-sustained activity on the part of the performer? In
other words, from where and by what means does the actor's practice reach
beyond the ministerial delivery of the text? These questions point to the
exceptional difficulties in fixing what is, in fact, a radically fleeting border-
line between textually sanctioned interpretation and what is more than such
interpretation. Rather than offering a phenomenal, but ultimately unwork-
able definition, then, this study seeks to historicize the issue in its socio-
cultural context. This, of course, takes into account the *terra incognita* of
mid-Elizabethan theatre history, where as early as 1567, with the opening
of the Red Lion playhouse near Stepney, we are confronted with a startling
disparity between the existence of large-scale theatre and the absence of
dramatic texts. The story of discontinuity between (early) theatre history
and a history of extant dramatic texts beginning only two decades later is
by now well known.[6] This discontinuity can serve as important, though
not fully accountable, grounds on which to posit, in the London area, a
tradition of performance for which the uses of language were either secon-
dary or merely incidental.

In reference to frequent Elizabethan allusions to a multitude of unli-
censed entertainers and practices, not to mention recent studies by Philip
Butterworth and of course the rich mines excavated in the REED series, we
propose to distinguish two major trends in contemporary performance
practices.[7] Each of these is marked by a different social background and a
different cultural genealogy. Relations between them, and the diversity in
the aims and poetics of their performance practices, can best be grasped in
those differential terms by which the respective force and form of each trend
help define, and are defined by, the other.

In its roughest outline, one of these modes of performance was in touch
with the work of the schools, their supreme concern with the teaching of
language and the neoclassical memory of humanists comprising certain

echoes of ancient Greek and plenty of Roman and contemporary Italian stageplays produced for "the better sort." Performance deriving from these premises had no difficulties with role-playing. On the contrary, what mattered was the mimetic endeavor to counterfeit an other, to assume a persona so as to wear the mask of an imaginary identity.

While this mimetic side of the actor's task was in itself representational, the second trend and direction in performance practices sought to bypass the mirror of representation. As against neo-Aristotelian precepts, these performing entertainers more than anything displayed the strength and appeal of their presence on stage; that is, the show of their performative zest, their poignant, pungent delivery, the anonymous wit and repartee in their jesting, their adroit bodies, and nimble movement.[8] Such "self-resembled show" had its roots in predramatic ritual, rural ceremonial, or a marketplace experience ripe with the physicality of jugglers, dancers, tumblers, fencers, or even those who exhibited animal tricks and baitings next door. In our context, this nonrepresentational dimension of playing will be of special import when it comes to tracing a performance practice that was self-sustained (though not of course unmediated) and beyond the politics of any textual regime.

Shakespeare's stage was spacious enough to comprehend, but also to qualify both these traditions. The altogether unequal degree of qualification in either of these modes of performance meant that, intriguingly, boundaries between the verbal signs of language and the visible signs of the body became as porous as they were contingent. For Shakespeare, therefore, the familiar opposition of "performance versus text" (or vice versa) would be entirely unhelpful. The pressure of such opposition would have been punctured in the heat of the battle over the following question: how can a performer exert authority, let alone sovereignty in his own right, when the dramatist's language itself has already assimilated the player's *gestus*, speech rhythm, and kinetic thrust prior to any subsequent embodiment? Verbal and visible signs come together in the literary as well as the material production, but also in the audiovisual response of auditors-spectators. All three are conjoined in a dramatic discourse that is an object of, as well as an agency in, the staging of the play. The performative dimension of Shakespeare's language has generally been recognized since the days of Rudolf Stamm and has continued to receive distinguished attention by David Bevington and others.[9] We must content ourselves here with one exemplification of how language in the composition of a stage play proceeds by itself to assist in rendering, even directing the "swelling scene."

Returning to *Henry V*, we are struck by how the kinetic energies required in the material process of its production are either intercepted by, or in their turn unleashed in, the speeches of the Prologue/Chorus. As he sets forth "our swift scene" (*Henry V*, 3.0.1–3), events proceed "With winged heels" (2.0.7); the audience, summoned to "Play with [their] fancies" (3.0.7), must follow suit. Urged "upon your winged thoughts" with "So swift a pace" (5.0.8, 15) to follow the play, onlookers are implored from moment to moment, "Work, work your thoughts" and in their "minds" to "Grapple" (3.0.25, 18) with the difference between "royal face" or "majesty" (4.0.35, 40) and what on so imperfect a scaffold "may unworthiness define" (4.0.46). The task of the audience, then, is for themselves to be swift in their own border-crossing activity between what presents and what is represented on the platform stage. The challenge is to bridge or simply make the most of the "distance" we have noted. In this operation there is a point at which the language, the staging, and the watching coincide with the grand design, of import to both players and spectators: "And make imaginary puissance" (Pro. 25).

Here the power of performance and the puissance of imagined meanings become finally indivisible. In the language of *Hamlet*, "scene" and "poem" are conjoined, as linked by a mere "or" in the phrase, "scene individable, or poem unlimited" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.399–400). Paradoxically, the symbolic order of represented meaning is most wanted when the performed play's demands upon cooperating audiences become quite irresistible. This happens because many circumstantial forces in Shakespeare's theatre do not derive from literary, rhetorical, or compositional sources. These forces operate between the written text and its reception in the playhouse. Their broadest common denominator can perhaps best be defined as "presentational practice" – the process of transaction that in its own turn is accompanied by responsive action in the yard and from the galleries. As these are aroused, the Chorus adopts the grammar of an imperative form: there is something compelling for and in "your imaginary forces." What is called for is sheer meaning-making, as suggested by "Suppose . . ."; "Think . . ."; "For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings" (Pro. 18–28). The clarion call is for the signifier and, with it, the signified, and for those "imaginary forces" that make them both work and interact.

This brings us to our second area of concern: the symbolic order of representation. The more immediate point of departure is that the culture of literacy and print contributed to the rendering of purely imaginary replications of things and passions. However, the rise, in this context, of world-picturing and self-picturing modes of postallegorical dramatic