

INTRODUCTION

Writing performative Shakespeares

When the project that has become *Writing Performative Shakespeares* was just beginning, some time before it knew or had named itself, the (writing) practice definitely preceded its theorisation. Therefore, this introduction – which will attempt to explicate what is here meant by that slippery and ubiquitous term *performative*, what is here practised as performative writing, and what is here defined and theorised as writing performative Shakespeares – will be, to some extent at least, retrospective and revisionist.¹ What turned out to be this first instance of writing performative Shakespeares, a revision of which features as Chapter 2 of this book, came about because of my incapacity to provide a linear account of (Shakespearean) theatrical meaning-making as contingent upon each of its various materialities, discourses and practices. Thus, in attempting to analyse a production of *Othello* that I had directed, and being unable to represent (in linear form) its discursive effects as a productive coalescence of, for example, the text used, the rehearsal processes, its various contexts, theoretical, cultural, historical and pedagogical, the finished production itself and its reception, I eventually opted to allocate equal and post-structured space to each of those elements via the form of a Sudoku puzzle. In order to publish that article I was required to frame it with an introduction – which began with an exhortation to skip straight to the puzzle – which was also a retrospective theorisation of writing practice subsequently labelled performative.

Why then, apart from attending to explanations of this book's specific understandings and deployments of performative writing, continue reading this introduction, and not go straight to the collection of puzzles, creative and innovative forms – the writing of performative Shakespeares – that follows? It is certainly possible, of course, to consider any of the following case study chapters without having read this overall introduction, each of which is framed by its own contextual and, to some extent, discrete (and, in some cases, retrospective) introduction. On the other hand, the chapters are ordered in such a way as to offer a developing argument – which is outlined below – about types of written performative engagement with Shakespearean production, each designed to intervene in methodological debates about Shakespeare in performance criticism. And, irrespective, or perhaps because, of my claim above that the practice of this book preceded its theorisation, especially given the authoritative insertion of 'definitely', such a claim begs (of me, self-reflexively) a deconstructive scrutiny that usefully, on at least three counts, illuminates this project. First, *Writing Performative Shakespeares* is consistently motivated by disentangling and reintegrating binaries such as practice and theory, process and product,

1. In 'Performative Writing as Scholarship: An Apology, an Argument, an Anecdote', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 5:4 (2005), 421, Ronald J. Pelias writes, performatively: 'With his proverbial hand slapped against his face, he slowly moved towards this form, a form that did not for him at that time have a name but a form that held promise for the central question he was struggling with: How can we write about performance in our reviews and essays that evokes the spirit of performance? He knew that to call for an exact representation was a fool's folly, but he wanted more than a record of what happened when. He wanted to be reminded of why we go see performances in the first place, that is, he wanted to encounter genuine renderings of human experience. What he is now most comfortable calling "performative writing" offered such a potential.'

A note on notes. The notes for this introduction, and for the separate introductions for each chapter of this book, are deliberately placed on the same page in order to foreground the citational nature of the project. There isn't space, though, for notes to the performative sections of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07299-2 - Writing Performative Shakespeares: New Forms for Performance Criticism

Rob Conkie

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Writing Performative Shakespeares*

each chapter – the columns, boxes, puzzles, etc. – on their actual pages. These notes, what I am calling Performative Notes, will feature at the end of each chapter alongside Appendices providing details of the performatively written productions.

2. “I have not chosen performance autoethnography as a method,” writes Claudio Moreira in ‘Tales of Conde: Autoethnography and the Body Politics of Performative Writing,’ *Cultural Studies* ⇔ *Critical Methodologies* 11:6 (2011), 590, “it has chosen me.”

3. Della Pollock, ‘Performing Writing,’ in Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, eds., *The Ends of Performance* (New York: University Press, 1998), p. 75.

4. Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. xiii.

5. Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Actors, Audiences, Selves* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 11.

6. H. R. Coursen, *Reading Shakespeare on Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), p. 27. Coursen’s ‘countervailing [to new historicism] force of scholars [comprises] J. R. Brown, John Styan, Bernard Beckerman, Marvin Rosenberg, Philip McGuire, Alan Dessen, Cary Mazer, Michael Goldman, Stanley Wells, Jay Halio, Peter Reynolds, William Worthen, Anthony Dawson, Thomas Clayton, [and] James Bulman.’

critical and creative: I may not have (realised that I had) read any performative writing until almost all of the chapters of this book were conceived, but subsequent engagement with such writing has enriched my understanding of the things I was attempting to achieve. Second, a deconstructive querying of my assertion that this practice preceded its theory focuses the important performative notion that discourses and practices mobilise almost imperceptibly: in other words, that I may have appropriated various strategies of performative writing without being entirely cognisant of the process; indeed, that performative writing might have appropriated or interpellated me.² Third, and following on from this, a deconstructive reversal prioritising theory above and before practice emphasises the important genealogical dimension of this project: what processes and practices underpin the production of performances, of identities, even of books – indeed, the act of reading itself?

Performative writing has often been labelled needlessly obscure – indeed, it has been characterised from within as a ‘difficult intervention’³ – but it is the intention of *Writing Performative Shakespeares* to address the kinds of questions posed above in an accessible style; thus, here follows an attempt to articulate the two major ways by which this book deploys the practice and theory of performative writing. First, the writing contained in this book is performative in the sense that it endeavours – to cite Carol Chillington Rutter (to whom I will often return) – to ‘re-perform’ Shakespearean (mostly theatrical) performance for the reader.⁴ It addresses questions such as: What happened in the theatre? What happened on the stage? What were the features of the design? How did the audience respond? What was the atmosphere of the theatrical event? This is fairly standard Shakespeare in performance critical practice, which, this book will argue, requires further specifically performative augmentation. Second, the writing contained in this book is performative in the sense, already alluded to in the previous paragraph, that it endeavours – to cite Bridget Escolme (to whom I will also often return) – to make ‘evident the work behind the illusion,’⁵ to trace, reveal and demystify the genealogies underpinning, informing and shaping Shakespearean performance. It addresses questions such as: How does Shakespearean theatre make meaning/s? How is Shakespearean production and the meanings it generates shaped by alternative types of actor training, by rehearsal practices, or by various contexts, historical and contemporary, local and global, social and political? What kinds of (theoretical) histories and geographies underwrite this practice? What kinds of (rehearsal) histories undergird this performance? What kinds of (production) histories underlie this canon? What kinds of (subjectivity) histories undermine this identity?

In the next section of this introduction I will establish a framework for performatively addressing these kinds of questions via Della Pollock’s seminal essay ‘Performing Writing’ (1998) and with reference to other articulations of performative writing, and to the several Shakespeare in performance criticism heroines who inspire this book. H. R. Coursen’s 1995 list of venerable Shakespeare in performance critics are all male,⁶ but the authors who impel the critical energy of this project are, for the most part, female, feminist and predominantly, at least when these books were published, near the beginnings of their

Introduction

respective careers. The Shakespeare in performance critics to whom this book owes its most significant debt, and who will repeatedly illuminate the following discussion, are (in chronological order of publication): Carol Chillington Rutter;⁷ Pascale Aebischer;⁸ Bridget Escolme;⁹ Roberta Barker;¹⁰ Kim Solga;¹¹ and Kate Flaherty¹² (several of these critics owe their most significant critical debt to Barbara Hodgdon's fabulous ground-breaking work; Hodgdon is not cited here but features throughout the book). These critics, along with others such as Stephen Purcell, W. B. Worthen, Robert Shaughnessy and John Russell Brown,¹³ have led the recent reinvigoration of Shakespeare in performance and production studies, a vigour (and rigour) *Writing Performative Shakespeares* seeks to emulate and extend.

Writing evocative Shakespeares

The first of Della Pollock's 'Six Excursions into Performative Writing', articulations which, predictably, resist definitiveness, is that 'Performative writing is *evocative*'. Pollock writes of such writing that

It operates metaphorically to render absence present – to bring the reader into contact with 'other-worlds', to those aspects and dimensions of our world that are other to the text as such by re-marking them. Performative writing evokes worlds that are otherwise intangible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight.¹⁴

This description is exemplary of the project attempted here in its attempt to evoke the absent other-world of Shakespearean theatrical performance, to re-presence it, and resonates with recent examples of Shakespeare in performance criticism. In the preface to *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage*, Rutter asks, 'how does the body play on Shakespeare's stage ... and how can I account for it, bring it on stage within this text?'¹⁵ One of the answers she provides is to write about Shakespearean performance with 'a body-conscious language attentive to feeling, to the itch and pleasures of desire, and to pain,'¹⁶ an echo of Pollock's formulation above. Rutter's evocation of the final moments of the 1990 RSC *King Lear* is demonstrative of this method. She writes the scene almost as a novelist, describing the dead Cordelia 'like a broken doll, her head flopped on the twisted neck, her arms akimbo, legs and feet at bizarre angles, her history written on her body.'¹⁷ The questions asked of the action described – such as 'out of the air (or out of his mind?)' or 'Kent howled, but was he addressing Lear's heart or his own?'¹⁸ – lend weight to the author's prefatory claim that her writing 'is provisional, contingent, never definitive,'¹⁹ although I will have more to say about this below. Rutter's final chapter remembers Emilia – her specific phrase – from the 1989 RSC *Othello* and similarly begins with powerfully evocative prose, its clipped rhythms suggesting the tragically inevitable momentum that the play will enact.²⁰ Later in this analysis, Rutter's prose becomes even more poetic, figuring Desdemona's dropped handkerchief as 'tantalizing, innocent, a piece of litter, a time bomb' and describing Emilia's surrendering of it to her abusive husband thus: 'She turned her gaze up towards

7. *Enter the Body*.

8. *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

9. *Talking to the Audience*.

10. *Early Modern Tragedy, Gender and Performance, 1984–2000: The Destined Livery* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

11. *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance: Invisible Acts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

12. *Ours As We Play It: Australia Plays Shakespeare* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2011).

13. These texts, respectively, are: *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); *The Shakespeare Effect: A History of Twentieth-Century Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and *Shakespeare and the Theatrical Event* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

14. 'Performing Writing', p. 80.

15. *Enter the Body*, p. xii.

16. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

19. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

*Writing Performative Shakespeares*21. *Ibid.*, p. 162.22. *Ibid.*, p. 163.23. *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, p. 17.24. In 'Confessions of apprehensive performer', *Text and Performance Quarterly* 17:1 (1997), 25–32, Ronald J. Pelias uses a play-script structure to explore multiple perspectives on stage fright; in 'Performative Writing as Scholarship' (see note 1), he homages Marianne Moore's poem 'Poetry' as self-reflexive analysis.25. *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, p. 18.

26. 'Performing Writing', pp. 85, 90, 94.

27. *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, p. 18.

Iago, standing ramrod straight, staring like a basilisk, like Milton's Satan gazing on Paradise. The kiss lingered. Iago glanced sideways, found Emilia's eyes. The emptiness between them was a wasteland.²¹ On the next page, Rutter evokes the intangibility of 'illicit' and 'unbearable' spectatorship, or, more accurately, auditor-ship, as she hears and reports that (Zoë Wanamaker's) Emilia's 'voice suddenly cracked':²² here is the 'body-conscious language attentive to feeling' and 'to pain' the preface promises, and the metaphorical rendering of absence that performative writing seeks to make present.

Pascale Aebischer's *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance*, which develops Rutter's preoccupation with embodiment, also considers the evocation of absent performance and the difficulties that lie therein. Thus, having noted that theatrical performance is 'characterised by its ephemerality, spontaneity, productive interaction between spectators and actors, and the subjectivity of its reception', Aebischer further argues that in 'writing about performance, a physical, three-dimensional medium is flattened into two dimensions, leading inevitably to distortions and misrepresentations.'²³ Aebischer's attempts to address these problems include, to take examples from her opening chapter on *Titus Andronicus*: scrutiny of other texts, such as memoirs (34, 46), biographies (41) and even novels (32), which contextualise the chosen productions; consideration of rehearsal process (34); critical sampling of theatre reviews (39); the application of critical theory (40); the recording of personal response (43); textual analysis (44); stage manager's show reports (46); private conversations with practitioners (50); descriptions of audience members' physical or vocal responses to on-stage moments (51); discussion with audience members (52); and, of course, detailed descriptions of on-stage action (36–37, 45–46, 50–51). Further considered within various social and political contexts (57), the combination of these various strategies offers a compelling methodology for the articulation and representation of (Shakespearean) theatrical performance.

Performative writing regularly deploys innovative form²⁴ as an investigation, interrogation or evocation of intangible content, something *Writing Performative Shakespeares* seeks to do in each of its case study chapters. Rutter's deployment of novelistic and poetic form within academic analysis might thus be described as performative, especially given her stated desire to re-perform performance. Likewise, Aebischer's evocation of absence, a three-dimensional grappling with the ephemeral, spontaneous, interactive and subjective nature of performance, depends upon a form 'Reconstructed self-consciously from a variety of sources.'²⁵ This writing might be described as performative, especially given its stated ambition to ameliorate the flattening effects of two-dimensional print, according to several of Pollock's descriptors: it is 'subjective' and reflexive; it 'crosses various stories, theories, texts, intertexts, and spheres of practice'; and it is 'citational' in its 'accumulation of quotations.'²⁶ Moreover, Aebischer maintains, echoing Rutter, that her methodology must acknowledge 'the fragmentary and contingent nature of the [assembled] evidence' and that the 'subjectiveness of the approach preclude[s] determinacy';²⁷ I will have more to say about this last claim below, too.

Kate Flaherty's 'accumulation of quotations' in *Ours As We Play It: Australia*

Introduction

Plays Shakespeare is perhaps even more extensive than Aebischer's. This range of evidence, in support of her main argument that Shakespearean theatrical meaning-making 'is negotiated as part of the creative, contractual work of culture',²⁸ includes: 'experiential awareness' (10); 'attending rehearsals' (11); 'interviewing actors' (11); 'archival research' (12); reviews (13); literary criticism (13); audience response (37); delivery of text (39); close description of staged action (43); stage lighting (58); vocal quality (61); stage mechanics (110); and stage design (119). Moreover, in an echo of Aebischer (who is not cited in this book), Flaherty concludes (where Aebischer introduced) that 'I have wrestled with the minutiae, the un-theorised and ephemeral, felt moments of performance and rehearsal' and that, further, the 'fractious life of such fleeting and subjective impressions – their simultaneous indelibility and resistance to theorising – has been, throughout, a spur to continue.'²⁹ *Writing Performative Shakespeares* is spurred to deploy such a theorising, chiefly via the conceptual complexity of performative writing, irrespective of initial, yet somewhat uncertain claims, that this project has been practice rather than theory-led. It also has something to say – the below is almost here, but will be deferred a little longer – about Flaherty's introductory claim, echoing Aebischer, echoing Rutter, that her book is 'conceived as a performance and as a collection of lived moments rather than a totalising and definitive critical edifice.'³⁰

Before returning to the respective and shared claims by Rutter, Aebischer and Flaherty for provisionality, contingency, indefiniteness and indeterminacy in their representations of Shakespearean performance, the next section will summarise how each of their texts could be said to share characteristics with performative writing. These three, and the other Shakespeare in performance scholars mentioned above who underpin this study, arguably exemplify as many as five of Pollock's 'Six Excursions into Performative Writing'. The six excursions, in the order that Pollock discusses them, and each preceded by the phrase 'Performative writing is', are: evocative; metonymic; subjective; nervous; citational; and consequential. I have already considered how the authors above evoke Shakespearean theatrical performance, as well as occasional references to some of the other elements; I will now discuss in more detail the degree to which they fulfil each of these other elements as articulated by Pollock and further illustrate the various categories via methodological examples from the case study chapters of this book.³¹ Then I will return to the issue of indeterminacy as a means of considering the ways their texts differ from performative writing, differences which are crucial to the articulation and definition of this project.

Performative writing: Shakespeares

When John Russell Brown argues in the introduction to *Shakespeare and the Theatrical Event* that 'Feelings, sensations, and physical presence will be taken into account'³² in the effective writing of Shakespeare in performance criticism, he expresses a sympathy with strategies here discussed as exemplary of performative writing (which is not to say that this particular methodology has any sort of absolute claim on such strategies). The desire Brown expresses in the book's concluding chapter, however, that such criticism should 'consider a play's total

28. *Ours As We Play It*, p. 20.29. *Ibid.*, p. 236.30. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

31. The case studies chapters are intended as examples of what Liz Shafer called, in her plenary lecture for the 2012 Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association Conference, 'micro-histories with attitude'. Unlike a conventional introduction, I have referred to the chapters not in chronological order, but as they illuminate the following discussion.

32. Page 4; see also pp. 151–152.

Writing Performative Shakespeares

33. *Theatrical Event*, p. 217.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 217–220.

35. 'Performing Writing', p. 82. On p. 12 of *Performative Writing: An Alphabet of Performative Writing* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2014), Ronald J. Pelias writes that 'performative writing is a highly selective camera, aimed carefully to capture the most arresting angles.'

36. *Enter the Body*, p. 145.

37. *Theatrical Event*, p. 215.

38. *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, pp. 31–46, 49–52.

39. *Ours As We Play It*, pp. 23–70.

40. *Enter the Body*, p. xiii.

41. Jonathan W. Thacker, 'Foreword', in Susan L. Fischer, *Reading Performance: Spanish Golden-Age Theatre and Shakespeare on the Modern Stage* (Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2009), p. xiii.

42. Pollock, 'Performing Writing', p. 83.

theatrical effect',³³ and his consequent glass-half-empty summary of a range of Shakespeare in performance studies,³⁴ is antipathetic to Pollock's second categorisation that 'Performative writing is *metonymic*'. Pollock explains that such writing offers 'a self-consciously partial or incomplete rendering',³⁵ seemingly an obvious inevitability with Shakespeare in performance criticism, although the degree of self-consciousness in the rendering of incompleteness probably represents the extent to which the writing is performative. Rutter deploys just this strategy in declaring that 'I want to re-read *Othello* through Wanamaker's performance, a performance that opened up Emilia's story to detailed scrutiny, putting in view what it invited spectators to read as the suppressed narrative of Shakespeare's play, a narrative whose subject is suppression.'³⁶ Though I am not entirely comfortable with the notion of reading performance – more of this below, too – Rutter here is demonstrably metonymic, opening up consideration not only of this particular production, but of the whole play, via a vital but not extensive role. Thus the chapter examines but one production, albeit crucially contextualised by discussion of various early modern discourses of misogyny, and of that production, only those moments when Emilia is on stage, parts of five scenes (2.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4.3, 5.2) throughout the play.

Such partial readings – though the degree of partiality or, its utopian opposite, comprehensiveness, differs – are unavoidable. Brown, for example, observes of Marvin Rosenberg, perhaps the most comprehensive of Shakespeare in performance critics, that 'he never had enough words for all the moments he wished to record'.³⁷ Aebischer and Flaherty, to offer two more respective examples of partiality, focus, in certain parts of their books, on Lavinia (across four theatrical productions) within, and as a metonymic revelation of, *Titus Andronicus*,³⁸ and on masculinity as represented by four Australian Hamlets.³⁹ The partiality of performative writing, though, refers not just to the inevitability of selection and deselection, the choices made in the evocation of the other-worldly, but also of the partial capacity of language to represent itself, experience, absence at all. Thus, it does not recognise Rutter's labelling of the 'provisional, contingent, never definitive' nature of her writing as 'limitations'.⁴⁰ Similarly, exponents of performative writing – perhaps, indeed, anyone theatrically minded – recoil at suggestions such as those proffered below by Jonathan W. Thacker. In the foreword to Susan L. Fischer's *Reading Performance: Spanish Golden-Age Theatre and Shakespeare on the Modern Stage*, having acknowledged that 'performance is viewed subjectively, and is unique, fundamentally unrepeatable, and subject to evolution over the course of a run', Thacker argues, as a commendation of Fischer's method, that 'the critic can reduce the effect of these inevitable handicaps by a number of steps'.⁴¹

Rather than view the representation of theatrical ephemerality as a handicap to be overcome, metonymic performative writing 'dramatizes the limits of language, sometimes as an endgame, sometimes as the pleasures of playing (*jouissance*) in an endlessly open field of representation'.⁴² This description neatly encapsulates the intents of the Sudoku Shakespeare chapter of this book. The main body of the chapter, laid out in Sudoku form, consists of nine (plus three bonus) pages with nine boxes on each page. Each of the boxes contains

Introduction

not more than 150 words so that the particular evocation of a box – for example, on a page whose theme is sexuality and sub-theme is rehearsal narratives – is subject to a strict economy and is sometimes maddeningly partial. Moreover, many of the boxes make sense only via cross-reference with other boxes, but even an exhaustive cross-referencing of each of the boxes would still amount to only a partial account of the actual staging choices, especially by contrast with, for example, Manchester University Press's Shakespeare in Performance series, which requires considerable (and predominantly chronological) description of the productions its authors choose to document. Though 'endlessly open field of representation' might initially seem hyperbolic, the Sudoku Shakespeare chapter, which can be entered or exited at any of the 81 (+27) boxes, and in which any reading path between those boxes is possible, potentially represents such a field, especially given the expansion of meanings which each reader will bring via their own (perhaps endlessly) open fields of response.

Under Pollock's third heading, 'Performative writing is *subjective*', she further explains, distancing such practice from autobiographical writing which presents 'a coherent self across time', that 'Writing that embodies this kind of subjectivity tends to *subject* the reader to the writer's reflexivity, drawing their respective subject-selves reciprocally and simultaneously into "critical intimacy"⁴³. Such a critical position might elicit discomfited groans from more established and conventional position holders, but here is Aebischer conducting (with considerable, established and not altogether unconventional sophistication) just such an engagement: 'When I weep at the end of a performance of *King Lear*,' she writes, 'I am never quite certain whether it is in empathy for the infinite sorrow of the dying king or in rage at letting myself be manipulated into sharing his sorrow.'⁴⁴ Here, the reader of Aebischer's text is invited to consider the author's uncertain subject position, an uncertainty prompted by response to a performance moment; moreover, the reader will probably have seen a performance of this play and of its last scene, perhaps even the productions which Aebischer discusses, and may reflect on an identification with Aebischer's confusion. Just prior to Rutter's various reflections on this very scene (already mentioned above), she writes, more compactly, and probably with more certainty than Aebischer, that 'in writing performance I'm writing myself.'⁴⁵ Lastly on this theme, though examples are legion,⁴⁶ Roberta Barker's situating of her critical practice, that the 'politically engaged critic cannot indicate what whole audiences thought about a production', and that 'she can only trace her own interventions with those components of a performance and its reception that her temporal and ideological positions allow her to see'⁴⁷ invites an implicit engagement with that practice. Barker's description of herself in the third person here opens up potential alliances – or critical intimacies – with like-minded interventionists.

Chapter 5 of this book, 'Engaging Shakespeare', could not have been written if I had not been centrally present within the research that eventually generated it. Indeed, it is a defining feature of this book that I have been physically present and often critically intimate with each of the selected case studies. The specific form of that presentness for three of the chapters (2, 5 and 6) has been

43. *Ibid.*, p. 86. The most recent and compelling examples of this type of (Shakespearean) criticism can be found in the Shakespeare Now! series. See, for example, Philippa Kelly's *The King and I* (London: Continuum, 2011) and, if with a more literary than theatrical focus, William McKenzie and Theodora Papadopoulou's collection, *Shakespeare and I* (London: Continuum, 2011), where the editors argue, on the very first page, for 'the value and importance of self-investment in any consideration of literary art' and 'the necessity of articulating personal investment in literature'.

44. *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, p. 155.

45. *Enter the Body*, p. xvii.

46. See, for example: Robert Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare: England, History and the RSC* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 33; Escolme, *Talking to the Audience*, p. 95; Coursen, *Reading Shakespeare on Stage*, p. 18; Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 137, 233.

47. *Early Modern Tragedy*, p. 24.

Writing Performative Shakespeares

practice-led, practice-based or practice as research (the terminology is predictably multiple). This is not a book about practice as research (PaR), but given that *Writing Performative Shakespeares* attempts to re-entangle practice and theory, and creative and critical approaches, the emerging methodologies of PaR shape not just the three chapters in the brackets above, but the book as a whole. Estelle Barrett summarises the subject-driven analyses of my project, for example, through her description of the ‘innovative and critical potential of practice-based research [which] lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge.’⁴⁸ Along the same lines, Robin Nelson’s explication of practice as research looks for ‘a resonance between complementary writing and ... praxis itself.’⁴⁹ In ‘Engaging Shakespeare,’ I overlay initial experiential memories of a performance (praxis) I took part in as an actor with subsequent (complementary) rewritings by several members of the production’s audience. The juxtaposed narratives create what Pollock identifies as ‘double and multiple voices’⁵⁰ and draw the respondents into a critical encounter with the highly self-conscious and reflexive tenor of my performative account. This, I suggest, typifies Pollock’s rendering of performative writing as subjective.

Pollock’s fifth category – I am skipping the fourth, ‘nervous,’ for now – is that ‘Performative writing is *citational*.’⁵¹ This conceptual arrangement, with its major debt to Judith Butler’s queering of gender via J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory, has become almost a commonplace of recent Shakespeare in performance criticism.⁵² The most influential of such critics, the one who has helped to create that theoretical commonplace, has been W. B. Worthen, who, in *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*, before a lengthy discussion of Austin and Butler (and Derrida and others), defines dramatic performativity as ‘the relationship between the verbal text and the conventions (or, to use Butler’s term, “regimes”) of behaviour that give it meaningful force as performed action.’⁵³ Worthen’s text forms the basis of Flaherty’s methodology, which likewise locates ‘performative meaning’ at ‘intersections between the imaginative plenitude of the play-text and the conscious exigencies of the cultural moment in which it is performed.’⁵⁴ Other studies already mentioned above choose to be more attentive to the historical moment in which the play-text was first performed. Though each study, including this one, is interested in the present and in a present/past dialogue – how, for example, does a production represent its pastness in its engagement with the present? – some, like Flaherty, focus more on present citations, and others, like Rutter, Aebischer and Barker, demonstrate their investment in the present via rigorously historicist analyses.⁵⁵ Perhaps this represents a reflection of the respective contexts of the productions discussed: Flaherty’s examination of Australian Shakespearean production is less interested in the text’s originary contexts, whereas Rutter, Aebischer and Barker, all writing about transatlantic, mostly English productions, delve into, for example, the sermons, tracts, medical and legal documents constitutive of that discursive past; the continuity of place seemingly requires a more focused exploration of the dis/continuity of time. *Writing Performative Shakespeares*, which examines productions from Australia and the UK, expends citational energy in the service of its present/

48. ‘Introduction,’ in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, eds., *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), p. 2.

49. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 11, italics original. On p. 20, Nelson defines praxis as ‘the imbrications of theory within practice.’

50. ‘Performing Writing,’ p. 88.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

52. See, for example, Escolme, *Talking to the Audience*, pp. 109–111 and Barker, *Early Modern Tragedy*, pp. 17–20.

53. Page 3.

54. *Ours As We Play It*, p. 4.

55. Kim Solga introduces *Violence Against Women* with the following statements on this theme: ‘I shape my argument around the deliberate collision of the historical and the contemporary as I try to imagine what it might mean to represent early modern experiences of violence against women on the stage in an ethical way, a feminist way, today ... [her book] invests in both the “then” of the early moderns and the “now” of contemporary Western performance, but

Introduction

past dialogue, perhaps in closest methodological alignment with Escolme, who more self-consciously focuses on the dialogue between then and now which contemporary Shakespearean performance conducts, especially as the explicit concentration of her book concerns conversation.⁵⁶

Pollock's observation, via Butler, that 'Identity cannot escape its discursive construction in/as iteration but through performance, it may exert a counter-pressure'⁵⁷ is exemplary of Barker's project to offer dissident and de-naturalising interpretations of realist performances. Thus, opposing the critics who judged Paul Rhys' Hamlet naturalistically and psychologically consistent, and therefore, as part of a wider argument, a critical endorsement of essentialist and immutable views of identity, Barker supposes that 'Rhys' acting produced a vision of subjectivity as an unpredictable appropriation of multiple, sometimes contradictory social possibilities.'⁵⁸ Barker has to work hard, I think, to find here what Escolme, summarising cultural materialism, calls the 'cracks and fissures in dominant ideologies.'⁵⁹ In the last chapter of this book, 'Ghosting Shakespeare', I posit an Indigenised *Hamlet*, a socially contradictory possibility that cites histories radically other than those of Shakespeare's play. The ghost, which is raised by the citation of a contemporary Indigenous artwork, a mural with 'Remember Me' stencilled at the centre of the Australian Aboriginal flag, is ethereally able move through those ideological cracks and fissures and perhaps to invite closer scrutiny of them. The first chapter of the book, 'Materialising Shakespeare', 'stages its own citationality',⁶⁰ more of present, than past contexts, via the form of a pinboard. This is designed as a complementary writing to the praxis of theatre-making in a pedagogical context whereby the archive genealogies of those productions are juxtaposed with descriptions and analyses of that practice. All the chapters in this book are self-consciously citational – rare, of course, is the academic work without notes and/or bibliography – but they fulfil Pollock's last excursion into performative writing to varying degrees.

Sixth, and lastly, 'Performative writing is' – but has no special claims to being – 'consequential'.⁶¹ It is motivated, Pollock continues, by 'its capacity for political, ethical agency' and 'enters into the arena of contest to which it appeals with the affective investment of one who has been there and will be there at the end' and 'who has a stake in the outcome of the exchange'.⁶² Each of the authors who inspire this book – feminist, materialist, interventionist – present a variation of Rutter's, via Joseph Roach, concluding commitment:

Performing the ending, Wanamaker's Emilia invents that which requires me never to forget. Performing Wanamaker performing Emilia, I want her performance remembered, for as her Emilia, at the end, accounted 'for how we got here', so she likewise embodied 'alternatives to our present condition'. Remembering performance for me is not just history but prophecy. Accurately recalling the past, we can make shrewd guesses about what's to come.⁶³

If with not quite the same conviction for accuracy, I similarly commit, throughout this book, to consequence. Ghosting Shakespeare offers the most deliberately consequential chapter, attempting, as it does, to intervene in oft-repeated

not in order to draw simplistic transhistorical links between the two. Rather, I challenge the urge towards transhistoricity reproduced in so much contemporary early modern performance, and I explore the ramifications – especially for women – of taking early modern wonders for late modern signs', pp. 1–2.

56. *Talking to the Audience*, pp. 5–6. In her latest book, *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), Escolme's performance analyses are supported by interrogation of a range of early modern (not just play-) texts.

57. 'Performing Writing', p. 92.

58. *Early Modern Tragedy*, p. 195.

59. *Talking to the Audience*, p. 8.

60. 'Performing Writing', p. 94.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

63. *Enter the Body*, p. 177. Solga, also via Roach, writes, 'Performance for me is a cultural doing, a historical doing, but it is also a means of cultural and historical intervention' and thus, 'I

Writing Performative Shakespeares

am writing towards hope, towards the potential performance embeds to stage an encounter with the past that opens up a new view of the present and the future. *Violence Against Women*, pp. 3, 28.

discourses of remembering and then forgetting Australian Aborigines. Sudoku Shakespeare also nervously – more of these nerves anon – addresses representations of blackness via productions of *Othello*, and other chapters consider issues such as the broader politics of performance-making (Chapter 1), the frequent cultural overlap of sexuality and violence (Chapter 3), and the agency and efficacy of Shakespearean audiences (Chapters 4 and 5).

To sum up this section, studies of contemporary Shakespeare in performance from the last decade or so might be defined, according to Pollock's criteria, as types of, or as typifying certain aspects of, performative writing. The works discussed above by Rutter, Aebischer, Escolme, Barker, Solga and Flaherty, and, to perhaps a lesser extent, those by Worthen, Brown, Shaughnessy and Purcell, all bear the hallmarks of performative writing in that they, to varying degrees: one, offer evocative representations of the other-world of Shakespearean performance; two, offer partial and metonymic representations of that world; three, situate themselves in subjective relationship to the other-world they partially evoke; four, depend for this evocation upon a range of discursive citations, present and past, popular and elite, local and global; and, five, commit themselves to consequential, transformative ends. But, my structure now anxiously demands, in what ways are such texts not representative of performative writing (remembering that they have made no such claims), and, by extension, in what ways will *Writing Performative Shakespeares* depart from these, its inspiration?

Writing nervous S/Zhakespeares

A few thousand words ago I promised to return to Rutter, Aebischer and Flaherty's claims that their respective representations of Shakespearean theatre, as a metonymic reflection of the ephemeral nature of the theatrical event itself, are marked by indeterminacy: Rutter concedes that her writing is 'provisional, contingent, never definitive'; Aebischer offers representations and analyses which will 'preclude determinacy'; and Flaherty promises that her work will not become 'a totalising and definitive critical edifice'. My problem with these claims is that, as Roderigo complains to Iago of promises unfulfilled, 'It hath not appeared' (4.2.214). A Shakespeare in performance critic whose discussion is prefaced by the acknowledgement of the fundamental indeterminacy of theatrical representation and the writing thereupon is a bit like the Shakespearean character who promises brevity before speaking; they do not follow through. Another way for me to put this is to say that the studies I have discussed thus far, while they bear many of the hallmarks of performative writing, do not, despite protestations of indeterminacy, exhibit Pollock's fourth formulation – which, admittedly, is not straightforwardly synonymous – that 'Performative writing is *nervous*'.⁶⁴ Indeed, I was somewhat disingenuous earlier in describing Aebischer's writing as performative given my partial quotation of Pollock's first sentence from this section on nervousness. Earlier, I noted and quoted, accurately enough, that Aebischer's method 'crosses various stories, theories, texts, intertexts, and spheres of practice'; the full quotation, framed by a beginning and end which more accurately depicts the nervousness of performative writing, states:

64. 'Performing Writing', p. 90.