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# Looking for Shakespeare: The Textuality of Performance

Pascale Aebischer

Shakespearean performance criticism has become very well-established in the last twenty-odd years – the beginning of this critical movement is conventionally identified with the publication of Stylian’s *The Shakespeare Revolution* in 1977, although it emerged a little earlier. Nevertheless, the branch of performance criticism which analyses modern theatrical productions of Shakespeare’s plays has until very recently remained rather under-theorised. As a result, the analyses by performance critics have often tended to be far more “impressionistic” and subjective than those written by their colleagues in literary criticism. Twenty years into performance criticism, Coursen’s programmatic claim in 1992 that “[a] Shakespearean script exists only in performance. Period.” (15) sounds oddly naïve and anachronistic in its militant tone. This tone, however, becomes more comprehensible in the context of Coursen’s introduction to his book on *Shakespearean Performance and Interpretation*, where he openly acknowledges what he sees as his (and his fellow-critics’) failure to elaborate an adequate theorisation of performance with the pessimistic statement: “I do not believe that any satisfactory ‘theoretics of performance’ will ever emerge” (10).

What are the key problems for such a theorisation? Coursen quotes Worthen’s view that “the central issue still eluding performance criticism [is] the problematic relation between the text’s origin, its initial production, and its reproduction through history” (12). The very terminology used here reveals further problems: which “text” is being referred to? Is the “text’s origin” its author or the first trace we have of the text? What is meant by production and reproduction: a material object, like a book or a manuscript, or a theatrical performance? To extend these questions raised by Coursen’s invocation of Worthen with questions of my own: can we speak of stage productions and films as “texts”? And if we do so, how do we reconcile the ephemeral nature of the theatre with the fixedness associated with the notion

of “text”? Is the textuality of stage performance the same as that of film? Is that of film the same as that of television and video? And when does a “performance text” detach itself from the authority of Shakespeare, discard its status as a version and become a new text in its own right? Is *Looking for Richard* a “text” by William Shakespeare or by Al Pacino?

These questions addressing the textuality and authorship of Shakespeare’s plays have become increasingly urgent with the recent explosion of film and television adaptations of literary works. Are they quite as unanswerable as Coursen seems to imply? I would like to suggest that an approach which is conscious of the historical dimension of the text, which takes account of the problems of authority, and which acknowledges the limits of textuality, can solve many of the difficulties perceived by Coursen. Ironically, I will begin my exploration of alternative terminologies where Coursen suggested one might begin: by “tak[ing] Shakespearean textual criticism as a paradigm” (12). This paradigm will allow me to address the problems of authority and the evolution of the plays through history. I will then proceed to a discussion of the differences between literary criticism and performance criticism, and will conclude with an enumeration and explanation of terms which I believe can help us to sustain differentiations in our discussion of different types of performances.

As textual critics of Shakespeare have long recognised, the problems pertaining to the textuality and authorship of Shakespeare’s plays have their origins at the time of their creation. The whole bardolatrous stable construct of Shakespeare as “*the quintessential text, the Ur-book, the model for English literary textuality, not a script but secular scripture*” (Lanier 188), is revealed by textual critics to be just that – a construct. Let me take the textual situation of *Romeo and Juliet* as a detailed example. The text most of us are familiar with from the major scholarly editions is the text which was printed in Quarto format in 1599 by Thomas Creede under the title of *The Most Excellent and lamentable Tragedie, of Romeo and Iuliet*. This text more or less directly served as a copy-text for all subsequent seventeenth-century editions of the play, including the 1623 First Folio. The 1599 Quarto edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, however, is not the earliest printed version we have of the play, as is acknowledged even on its title page, which boasts that the 1599 text is “*Newly corrected, augmented, and amended*.” The earliest extant printed text of *Romeo and Juliet* is the 1597 Quarto edition of *An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Iuliet*. Not only do we have two texts, but we even have two titles for the text. But who is the author? It is not until the fourth, undated, Quarto edition that some copies of the edition, though not

all of them, carry the mention “Written by W. Shake-speare” on the title page. Apparently it is only some time after the publication of the Third Quarto in 1609 and probably before the publication of the Folio in 1623 – and in the middle of a print run – that someone decided that the authorship of the play was at all relevant to its marketing. It is only in the Folio edition, itself based on the Third Quarto, which is a reprint of the Second Quarto, that author, play, and title are united in the form to which we have got used: according to the Folio editors, “Mr. William [Shakespeare]” is the author of *“Romeo and Juliet.”*

For centuries, editors were happy to rely roughly on either the Folio or the Second Quarto as copy-texts for their editions, here and there adopting some readings from the First Quarto, which was considered to be Shakespeare’s first draft of the play. Then, at the beginning of this century, Pollard re-examined the Quarto editions of Shakespeare’s plays and decided that the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* was to be categorised as one of Shakespeare’s “Bad Quartos.” Chambers in 1930 described those “Bad Quartos” in the following way:

They have in common a measure of textual corruption, far beyond anything which a combination of bad transcription and bad printing could explain. . . . The total effect is one of perversion and vulgarization. To emend is futile; it is incredible that Shakespeare should have written or the Chamberlain’s men presented such texts. It cannot be doubted that these are primarily the versions which Heminges and Condell stigmatized as “surreptitious.” (156)

Not surprisingly, the categorisation of the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* as a “Bad Quarto” entailed editorial policies which “sought to reduce their dependence on Q1” (Evans 211). The situation which ensued was one with which bardolaters could feel relatively happy and secure: there was a single text, by a single author, and even though obviously other hands had meddled with the text in the printing process – the Second Quarto is printed less carefully than its “corrupt” predecessor – there was still the feeling that somehow there was a direct line going from author to early modern printing house to modern edition to modern reader.

More recently, however, this happy situation has been upset by New Textualists who have taken a closer look at the First Quarto. This text is shorter than the “standard” version by one third – a shortness which is mainly due to obvious cuts. What New Textualists have found is that even if it should be proved beyond doubt that the First Quarto is indeed a memorial reconstruction written by one or more actors who at one time had performed

in the play, the First Quarto remains an excellent acting text. Some critics have gone so far as to claim that this text is “authorial,” thus postulating the existence of two separate authorial versions of the play. I myself am torn between those two interpretations. When I first worked on *Romeo and Juliet* I was convinced that the First Quarto was, indeed, “authorial” in the sense that I felt that it represented a cut version of a longer manuscript which, after some revision, became the copy-text for the Second Quarto. Since then, I have had the opportunity to direct probably the first production of the First Quarto, putting the claim that it is a good acting text to the test.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the First Quarto works very well on stage, and interestingly enough, it tends to confirm Erne’s speculations about the running time of early modern plays. With another 249 lines cut, but complicated scene changes and long silences and pieces of business added, the production ran to 2 hours 10 minutes.<sup>2</sup> That the First Quarto is close to an actual representation is evident not only from “the two hours’ traffic of its stage,” but also from its elaborate stage directions and theatrically canny cuts of lyrical passages which do not directly contribute to the action. However, working with actors whose memories were playing tricks on them, I realised during rehearsals that the First Quarto is probably a memorial reconstruction after all. It would be difficult to explain the anticipation and repetition of certain lines in any other way.<sup>3</sup> But this does not change anything about the surprisingly *good* quality of the text in all but one scene (Romeo and Juliet preparing to get married in the Friar’s cell).

So where does this leave us? Unlike *King Lear* and *Othello*, which are both arguably plays that exist in two distinct authorial versions, *Romeo and Juliet* has come down to us in an authorial version which is corrupted by the mechanisms of the printing house and a version prepared for the stage which is corrupted by the shortcomings of human memory and, to a lesser extent, those of the printing house. Neither text, then, can be said to be “authorial” in the sense that its printing is officially sanctioned by Shakespeare himself (none of his plays were). Of neither text will we ever know exactly how many persons besides Shakespeare meddled with it before it got into the

<sup>1</sup> Performed at Lincoln College, Oxford, April 30 – May 2 1998. A video recording of the production is available at the Shakespeare Centre Library in Stratford-upon-Avon.

<sup>2</sup> This goes against Gurr’s suspicion that “Possibly the two hours’ traffic of the stage that Shakespeare proclaimed in *Romeo and Juliet* was a bit of a fiction” (179).

<sup>3</sup> An example of this phenomenon is the Nurse’s anticipation of the line “Giue me some aqua vitae” in the Q1 equivalent of Act 2 Scene 5, which is a line that reappears in what is probably its correct setting when Juliet is discovered “dead” in the Q1 equivalent of Act 4 Scene 5: “some Aqua vitae hoe” (Q2: “Some Aqua-vitae ho”).

printing press. MacDonald P. Jackson, one of the most thorough Shakespearean textual critics, does well to remind us that “[p]lays are textually the least stable of all literary forms” (even though he concludes with the debatable statement that they “[achieve] their true realization in performance” – I do not believe there is such a thing as a “*true realization*” of a play). Jackson also concludes that Shakespeare himself “would not have thought of his own completed draft as in any sense a final text,” since his plays always needed to be approved by the players and would almost invariably be altered on stage (166). Authorship of early modern plays seems to be always collaborative to a certain extent, so that Jonson’s efforts at claiming authority over his own texts can be seen as a proof of their a(du)lteration elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The two texts of *Romeo and Juliet*, then, could be said to be two alternative versions of the play. Whereas the First Quarto derives its claim to authority not so much from the author as from the collaborative social institution of the theatre, the Second Quarto claims authority from a perceived closeness to what might be expected of the writer’s own manuscript. Both texts, I would like to argue, are worthy of critical attention, and both texts should, as far as possible, be kept apart from each other. Whereas a study of the First Quarto will reveal information about Elizabethan staging practices and let us get a feeling of which parts of the play were perceived to be essential to it, and hence not cuttable, the Second Quarto, I believe, tells us more about Shakespeare the writer of poetry who is less encumbered by pragmatic theatrical considerations than whoever was responsible for the First Quarto cuts. Most importantly, both texts have to be considered within their historical contexts, so that it is not enough simply to speak of the “multiplicity of the Shakespearean text” – we have to take account of the historically different but equally valid claims to authority of these texts, whether it is an authority derived from the theatre or from the writer.

From the point of view of a theorisation of performance, the textual situation of *Romeo and Juliet* is particularly interesting because one of the texts derives its “authority” precisely from its connection with the theatre. What emerges from this discussion of the textual situation of *Romeo and Juliet* is that in the case of Shakespeare’s plays in particular, Engler is right in urging us to “take seriously the collaborative nature of textuality – including not only authors and readers, but all those who have intervened between them (editors, printers, distributors, teachers, etc.), and its history” (181). It might be useful to signal our awareness of this multiple “author-

<sup>4</sup> See Orgel’s incisive discussion. The collaborative nature of early modern playwrighting has also recently been analysed at length by De Grazia and Stallybrass as well as by Masten.

ship" of Shakespeare's texts by borrowing and adapting a phrase from Foucault and attributing the "author-function" rather than the "authorship" of the plays to the historical person of William Shakespeare. This allows us to avoid the tedious putting of Shakespeare's name in inverted commas, which has the effect of not only questioning his sole authorship of the plays (which is legitimate), but which also implies a doubt about his historical responsibility for the plays if not about his very historical existence. "Author-function" can be seen as a space in the chain of communication of literary works which can be filled by a single person or several persons and institutions. The name which is designated as filling the author-function can thus be seen as a representative of the whole process of production, and we can even choose to fill the slot with more than one name. This has already been done for centuries with obvious collaborative writings, such as the plays by "Beaumont and Fletcher," or "Middleton and Rowley." Would it not make sense to attribute the author-function of the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* to "Shakespeare and players"?

The reason why I am insisting on this notion of "author-function" is, of course, that it is a term which could be used to designate the authorship of stage performance. In fact, the term itself came to my attention through an article by John Rouse, who suggests that "author-function" may be a good way of

describing the contradictory elaboration of discourse within the performance text: we all know, and usually murmur in passing, that this text is "written" through a collaboration between those who control its various signifying systems (actors, designers, composers, etc.), but we "legitimize" the text's authority by attributing it to the director . . . /Director/ has become the sign we use to inscribe that connotational consistency and interpretational purpose we propose to glimpse within and behind a "weaving together" of the strands of the dramatic with those of the performance text. (147)

As a consequence, Rouse explains, there are two "author-functions" involved in the production of a play: the function filled by the writer(s), and that filled by the producers of the play.<sup>5</sup> A modern production of a play by Shakespeare, as a consequence, can be seen as a site of negotiation between a modern group of producers, referred to synecdochically by the term "di-

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<sup>5</sup> For a sophisticated model of the communicative situation in the theatre, which takes account of the fact that a performance "involves an ensemble of co-producers of the text who have a double role as interpreters of the writer's dramatic text and as producers and/or presenters of the theatrical text," see Hess-Lüttich (236).

rector," and a text which has come down to them by tradition and which itself is, to a greater or lesser extent, the result of a collaboration. We could, then, even speak of modern productions of Shakespeare's plays as "diachronic collaborations," a mixing of two historically quite distinct author-functions which together produce the performance.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, things are a little more complicated than that, as my tell-tale phrase "a text which has come down to [the producers] by tradition" both conceals and reveals. In fact, as the preceding discussion of the textual transmission of *Romeo and Juliet* has shown, the texts which are currently in use in studies, classrooms, and rehearsal rooms carry the heavy weight of history and textual interventions.<sup>7</sup> A modern edition is normally if not a conflation of the different early modern versions – the worst possible scenario – then at least emended according to the editor's (or editors') grasp of "the author's intentions." That the concept of "authorial intention" can be, probably quite unconsciously, abused by the editor so that the resulting text reflects not so much the authorial intention as the editor's ideology, can be seen from a tiny example from the "Queen Mab" speech in *Romeo and Juliet*. In fact, although editors have for a long time agreed that the First Quarto is a corrupt text, it is quite consistently used for subtle little emendations whenever this is thought necessary. Such a moment occurs in Mercutio's speech, when, in the Second Quarto, he speaks of "the lazie finger of a man." Suddenly, in all the editions I am familiar with, and which all take the Second Quarto as their copy-text, the editors feel the urge to have a peek at the First Quarto. After all, Shakespeare cannot possibly have meant for men to be called lazy, can he? What a relief it must be at such times to have the First Quarto with its "lasie finger of a maide" as an alternative text! However subtle the change, we cannot consider it to be innocent. If we apply Zeller's strict rule, according to which a literary text is analogous to a speech act, and "any amount of variation creates a new version" (Rasmussen 458), then each edition of the plays since their first appearance in print constitutes a new version. Editions as well as productions, then, must be considered to be diachronic collaborations between two or more historically distinct author-functions. And just as productions engage in intertextual negotiations

<sup>6</sup> The term "diachronic collaboration" is borrowed from Masten, who uses it to designate "the writing of several playwrights on a playtext at different times (revision) and the manifold absorption and reconstitution of plays and bits of plays by playwrights writing later" (378).

<sup>7</sup> De Grazia and Stallybrass interestingly discuss modern editions, which they see as the result of a "collaborative process." They also draw a pertinent parallel between "the instability of the early playtexts" and the "very number and variety [of editions] through the centuries" (283, 261). See also Worthen for a differentiated comparison of productions and editions (17ff.).

with other productions, with critical analyses, different editions, and so on, so editions in their introductions, footnotes, and endnotes engage in frantic intertextual negotiations. A modern staging based on such an edition must, as a consequence, be seen as the product of a negotiation of a multiple author-function, usually referred to by the name of a director, with a version of the text which is itself created by a multiple author-function. Diachronic collaboration takes place both between the modern editor and the early modern text(s) and between the producers of the play and the early modern text(s) as represented by the editor's version.

A production can hence be differentiated from an edition because it involves an additional collaborative author-function. Although both can be seen as re-productions of the play in different material realms, and although in both types of re-production the prefix "re-" could be said to stand for the inherent and unavoidable change, editions can also be distinguished from productions in terms of their overt goal. Whereas the editor's task is supposed to be, in McLaverty's words, "to restore the score according to the author's intentions" (127), and therefore to be supposedly as uninterpretative as possible (an obviously unattainable goal), we normally expect of a production that it should have a more or less clearly identifiable attitude towards the text. Especially with the emergence of the director in the latter half of the twentieth century, a production of a Shakespearean play will, as Smallwood has observed, normally "offer something of an interpretative essay upon it, showing its awareness of other critical essays academic and theatrical" (177). This is particularly true of Shakespeare's plays, where the producers can normally presuppose that their audience will have a basic knowledge of the play and will be able to see the production as a critical dialogue between the play, its literary and theatrical heritage, and the producers. Productions, as Leggatt already suggested in 1977, because of the choices made by the actors and directors, "constitute interpretative criticism that deserves to be regarded as seriously as the criticism of a writer, and to be used as supporting evidence in any discussion of the play" (44). This position has since then been refined by Barbara Hodgdon, whose analysis of the affinities between critical readings and productions is worth quoting at length:

on the one hand, there is a self-individuated private project, resulting in a text (the critical reading) that replaces the play with another text; on the other hand, a collectively understood and collectively mediated performance, a public project that *re-places* the play within a theatrical and cultural space. Although the final *products* (the critical reading, the performance) do indeed differ, the *processes* that generate each text, each "performance," so to speak, share more similarities

than differences . . . alteration, interruption, and intervention are features endemic to imagining and creating both sorts of texts. (*End Crowns All* 17)

Critical readings and productions, however, differ in the *type* of interpretation they practise – and this is the reason why I believe both must be studied if we want to grasp as fully as possible the range of meanings of a Shakespearean play. Let us take Act 4 Scene 1 of *Othello* as an example. The moment I want to examine is Othello's striking of Desdemona in front of the Venetian ambassadors. A literary critic using the earliest printed "authorial" versions of the play, the First Quarto and the First Folio, will not find a stage direction for this act of violence in either version. The only way that a critic or editor can infer the blow is from a line towards the end of the scene, when Lodovico expresses his outrage at what he has witnessed with "What! Strike his wife!" Some act of striking, then, definitely takes place in this scene, and modern editors help the modern critic by inserting a stage direction at what they believe to be the most appropriate moment. Thus, in Honigmann's Arden edition, there is a stage direction in square brackets "[*Striking her*]" opposite Othello's "Devil!" (4.1.239) – which is, indeed, the most appropriate moment. A literary critic will be able to discuss this moment in terms of imagery, of acceleration of the action, of the deterioration of the marital relationship which is mirrored in the breaking up of the blank verse and which culminates in Othello's first act of physical violence towards Desdemona, and so on.

A performance critic, on the other hand, can have a look both at the different printed versions of the text *and* analyse one or more productions. The absent stage direction of the Quarto and Folio suddenly achieves unexpected prominence, for *how* is Othello to strike Desdemona? An analysis of choices made in productions from the nineteenth to the twentieth century for instance reveals that these choices were never quite independent of other choices made in the same production. The productions can always be seen to be engaged in a double dialogue with the play and the production's own historical context. In the nineteenth century, it was obviously felt that too great a breach of decorum was involved in a full blow, so that the scene was either cut altogether (Booth) or reduced to a slapping or tapping on the shoulder with the folded or rolled-up letter. One result of this very controlled, "soft" use of violence is that Desdemona is not represented as a battered wife. Furthermore, by comparing the interpretation of this scene in different productions, a performance critic can discover some sort of correlation between race and violence: the less brutal Othello is with his wife, the more "white," "civilised" he is. This correlation can then be seen in the context of a wide-

spread effort in the nineteenth century to prove that Othello is actually white and not black, a North African “tawny moor” (Carlisle 192), and not a “villainous Black-amoor” (Rymer 42). Nineteenth-century productions in which Othello actually struck his wife with “a backhanded blow . . . full upon those sweet lips . . . which makes your own lips grow white as death at the sight” (this is an audience member’s description of the scene as performed by Tommaso Salvini [Hankey 277]) correspondingly emphasised the savagery of Othello. In keeping with Darwinist theories of criminal atavism, brutal Othellos tended to have features which linked them to the earlier stages of evolution, such as a tiger-like walk, and very convincing roaring in the final scene.

In the twentieth century, “striking” Desdemona is usually performed as a hard slap in the face, which sometimes even sends Desdemona to the ground. Several productions in the past years have furthermore literalised Othello’s comments about Desdemona’s capacity for turning by making him spin her till she collapses on the ground. As in the nineteenth century, the ideological project behind each production quite literally colours the scene. By comparing Olivier’s Othello in 1964/65 with that of Anthony Hopkins in 1981, we can observe a change in sensibilities.<sup>8</sup> Olivier’s blacked-up and “primitive” Othello was brutal with his wife quite in the mode of Salvini in the previous century. By the time we come to Hopkins’s portrayal, what has changed is not the degree of violence but Othello’s skin colour: Hopkins’ Othello is a blue-eyed white man with a suntan. Put simplistically, this production portrays wife-battering not as a matter of race but as a matter of gender relations. It thus uncovers a layer of meanings in the play which could otherwise be literally obscured by the use of black make-up.

Once granted that productions are worthy of study and that they have a status which situates them in-between an edition (insofar as they re-produce the play) and a critical reading (insofar as they interpret it), we still have to find an adequate way of speaking about productions. Barbara Hodgdon seems to me to be the most differentiated and practical theorist of Shakespearean performance criticism, and it is her work which forms the basis of

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<sup>8</sup> The 1964 production at the National Theatre was directed by John Dexter and included Laurence Olivier, Maggie Smith, Frank Finlay, and Joyce Redman in the cast. A version of the production which was filmed under the direction of Stuart Burge in 1965 is available on video. The 1981 version of the play with Anthony Hopkins as Othello was filmed as part of the BBC/Time-Life series and directed by Jonathan Miller. Its cast included Penelope Wilton, Bob Hoskins, and Rosemary Leach.

my own terminology.<sup>9</sup> Hodgdon explains that “a Shakespearean play exists in multiple states – as the words constituting the playtexts, as the readings based on those texts, and as their concrete, historically particular theatrical representations, or performance texts” (*End Crowns All* 3). Her use of the term “playtext” to designate “the words that are traditionally construed as “Shakespeare’s play” is meant “both to convey some sense of their indeterminacy and to differentiate them from other, more determinate, textual categories.” The term “performance text,” on the other hand, refers to theatrical representations. The apparent oxymoron of the term is meant to acknowledge “the perceived incompatibility between the (infinitely) flexible sub-state(s) of a Shakespearean play and the (relative) fixity of the term ‘text.’” Hodgdon furthermore describes her own critical engagement with the “playtext” and the “performance text” as part of a “performance work,” which is a concept that includes all the textual traces we have of a play, be it in critical readings, performance texts, or theatrical documents such as posters, reviews, programmes, promptbooks, and so on (*End Crowns All* 20 and “Absent Bodies” 258-59).

While Hodgdon’s term “playtext” can be adopted without any problem to refer to the written texts as they have come down to us in more or less edited and mediated form and on different material supports (paper or CD-Rom, for instance), it needs to be clearly distinguished from another type of text which inhabits a space between the written and the oral, the playtext and the performance. I am referring to the *script*, which is the text that emerges out of the collaborative efforts of director and company in rehearsal.<sup>10</sup> The script includes all the cuts, alterations, and additions, and specifically all the decisions taken about movements, lighting effects, costumes, and sets. While the script is mainly an oral text shared between the members of the production team, it is materialised to a certain extent in the promptbook. The promptbook is a written record of the script. The script always exceeds the promptbook and is much more easily subject to change. It consists of what the production team has agreed is supposed to happen during a performance, even if

<sup>9</sup> Philip McGuire is another differentiated theorist, but I doubt that many performance critics will make practical use of the fascinating paradigm derived from quantum physics which he develops in the final chapter of his book.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Schechner for this differentiation. Schechner describes the script as “the interior map of a particular production” and as “developed during rehearsals to suit a specific text as in orthodox western theater” (85, 91). What I term “performance,” however, Schechner calls “theatre,” which creates an unwelcome confusion between the actual building and the event.

no performance ever corresponds exactly to what has been outlined in the script.

The performance of the script, according to Hodgdon, should be referred to as a “performance text.” This use of the term, however, has recently been criticised by Douglas Lanier. He rightly points out that the emergence of the VCR, with the possibility of recording a performance and thus potentially creating “a new monolithic and stable ‘text’ – the ideal performance, recorded on tape, edited and reshaped in post-production, available for reviewing” (203-04), represents a danger for performance criticism:

If the central insight of performance criticism is that performance is radically contingent, open to historical and material pressures that may not outlast a performance ..., the stability of the records from which we work may be false to the very historicity performance criticism seeks to address. The run of a play is marked by night-to-night differences that spring from chance, design, and serendipity, differences that certainly shape reception and potentially reveal much about the performance process; yet the typical records of performance – prompt-books, set models, photographs, videotapes – tend to elide those differences, encouraging us instead to think of a given production as a self-consistent “text.” (204)

To avoid the danger pointed out by Lanier, I would like to suggest that we could quite simply draw a distinction between “performance” and “performance text.” The deliberate equivocation of Hodgdon’s oxymoron needs to be disambiguated and fixed. *Performance* can then refer to the physical realisation of the script at a specific historical moment. It is characterised by its ephemerality, spontaneity, productive interaction between spectators and actors, and the subjectivity of its reception. Performance can be conferred “textuality” only insofar as it is a message in a communicative chain, and insofar as from the point of view of its production it fits with the etymology of the word “text” as a weaving, an “interlacing or entwining of any kind of material” (McKenzie 5). Whereas the different sign systems used in the theatre are certainly interwoven to create a meaningful product, this product is importantly an *event* and not a fixed material object. In performance, production and reception of meaning happen simultaneously, and critically the distinction between the meaningful or intentional and the accidental remains blurred. Actors’ charisma, the material conditions of the theatre building, audience moods, and so on, are all factors which, if taken as part of the “text,” stretch this term to the extent that it becomes too all-inclusive to be useful as a concept. Finally, performance is available for analysis only through memory, which is by definition selective and subjective.

What I would like to call the *performance text*, in return, is a performance which has been textualised by means of the mechanical devices of film and video. In a way, a video recording of a performance can be seen as another type of materialisation of the script, analogous to the promptbook. The performance text is both more and less than the performance: while its replayability and fixedness allow for much more objective and profound analysis (very much like literary criticism), the performance text is also subject to the rules pertaining to film. What we see is mediated through a selective camera eye (even if the camera is static), and what in performance is ephemeral, subjective, and shaped through an interaction with the audience, is, in the performance text, fixed and bereft of a context. Literally and metaphorically we can say that the performance text is a reduction of the three-dimensional to the flat two-dimensional. Performance texts can never replace performances: archival video recordings tend to be of appallingly poor quality and must only be seen as a tool for the reconstruction of a past production, which is best accompanied by (recorded) memories of an actual performance.

Film and television productions of Shakespearean plays, as opposed to recordings of stage performances, can be referred to quite simply as "film" or "TV-film." Films have developed a set of conventions which are quite distinct from those in use in the theatre, so that it is not unusual to speak of "film language" and of having to "translate" Shakespeare into this different medium. In fact, much criticism of film and television Shakespeare is concerned with an analysis of this act of translation which often implies a substitution of the terms used in the playtext (the words) with terms taken from the vocabulary of film (images, framing, cutting, focus, etc.). Films, then, become "versions" of the play or work in its broadest sense as "the 'global set' of the texts and plays arising in the history of producing Shakespeare's plays" (McGann as discussed in Osborne 170). Because the performances recorded by film can be selected from a range of takes of the same scenes, which can be cut and altered in post-production, film is indeed, as Lanier suggested, as close as we can get to an "ideal performance" or "ideal text." However, even here there is a certain multiplicity and instability of the text involved: Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* film exists in a long and a short version, and many films exist as both a studio cut and a director's cut. Furthermore, there are important differences between types of film: Branagh's large-scale feature film of *Hamlet* can make use of far more "filmic" devices than can the BBC television film of the play recorded in a television studio or, even more restrictedly, Richardson's recording of his stage production at

the Roundhouse using his theatrical set. The differences between a simple archival video recording and a full-blown feature film are of degree rather than of kind.

To return to the stage, another term which can be useful for performance criticism is that of *production*. A production is a collaborative process in the widest sense. Its author-function is at least double, since it involves both the playtext, normally as mediated by an editor, and the production team. The term *production* includes the script, the performance(s), the performance text(s), and all paratexts (programme, posters, etc.) – quite simply all the results of the collective and collaborative labour of the production team which have to do with a particular playtext. A production is historically specific and cannot be taken out of its context.<sup>11</sup> A production, I believe, must be seen as distinct from the “performance work” as defined by Hodgdon, although the two terms do, to a certain extent, overlap. For me, *performance work* refers to any kind of engagement with one or more productions of a play. This engagement can take the form of photographic documents, reviews, post-performance discussions, or performance criticism. All these engagements with productions are interpretative and subjective and are themselves shaped by the historical context (both artistic and socio-political) in which the productions take place.

Performance critics, while taking part in the performance work, also stand outside it insofar as their engagement with productions is normally complemented by an equally strong engagement with the playtexts and the body of literary criticism about those playtexts. Performance criticism based merely on a negotiation between the critic’s knowledge of a playtext and his/her memory of a performance will of necessity be of the highly impressionistic and subjective kind which I deplored at the beginning of this paper. However, I believe that performance criticism, with the theatres’ increasing use of the VCR to create performance texts that can be used to qualify the subjectiveness of individual memory, will continue to gain strength as a legitimate form of criticism. I hope that the terminology used here will contribute to establish the “theoretics of performance” of which Coursen seemed to despair. At any rate, when we are looking for Shakespeare in *Looking for Richard*, we can now say that Shakespeare is present as one of the two main

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<sup>11</sup> McConachie interestingly points out that the term “production” only came into use in relation to the theatre in 1894, where it was clearly meant to imply “the investment of capital and the hiring of labor to create and sell a product on the entertainment market in the expectation of generating a profit.” Before then, there was no single term for “the process of putting together a stage performance and the event resulting from this process” (169, 168). Speaking of “productions” of Shakespeare’s plays in early modern England hence implies a critical anachronism.

author-functions of the diachronic collaboration of which the material product is the film. But this film, in its oscillation between being a version of Shakespeare's play and being a new text in its own right, between its status as a film and its aspiration to be a kind of critical edition of selected scenes, also points to the limits of my own textual terminology.

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