Beyond Books and Plays:
A Nomenclature for the Cultures
and Practices of Writing in Early Modern Theatre

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Abstract

This introductory essay constitutes a survey of the contributions gathered in this issue of *JEMS*. It begins with an overview of the volume's area of study and moves on to build a glossary for an academic field whose perimeters are perhaps not all that clear. The survey next dwells – in a little more depth – on the various perspectives offered and issues raised in the volume, concluding with an afterthought on where this collection of papers leaves us as a scholarly community wishing to continue to engage with a difficult interstitial field beyond books and plays and between cultures and practices of writing in early modern theatre.

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You are about to read a collection of essays that address the major cultural phenomenon of the production of early modern spectacle, including the multiple practices, cultures, and uses of writing that underpin and surround that which was performed. This situates volume 8 of *JEMS* at the crossroads between textual studies, performance or theatre studies, cultural studies, authorship studies, and studies of orality vs. literacy. Venturing beyond any direct relationships between book and stage, as explored in studies of recent years, the topics covered here address textual practices both as sources and offshoots of contextual theatrical enterprises; the relationships between texts and performers' cultural environments in time and place, and the relationship between the popular professional theatre and a literary environment. If the production of text in theatrical practice from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century (from printed canons to manuscript plays and fragments of plays onwards to variants of mummers' plays and the use of dramatic woodcut illustrations in printed performative genres) has your interest, then read on. This volume not only focuses on the contexts of major national

traditions (i.e. Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, French theatre, Italian professional and popular theatre and their theatrical environments) but also on peripheral and lesser known domains.

The following papers accordingly explore the connections between printed texts and performances and, importantly, the (vernacular) afterlives of printed texts and performances, including popular, civic and religious representations and traditions of representation. It is our hope that this collection of articles will open up new horizons and allow you to ponder the syntheses and synergies between literary traditions and performance cultures in early modern Europe. These connections and synergies are first and foremost detectable through the critical vocabulary used across the volume, and as a co-editor I am indeed pleased to see a new vocabulary forming for the study of this field. Any academic realm arguably benefits from having its own glossary, both as inspiration for future studies and as a means for classification. Allow me therefore now, first of all, to highlight (cf. bold print below) some of the cross-cutting, analytical terminology used in the articles.

The very first paper, by Darwin Smith, speaks of 'the original book'/'full text' as the **crossroads** of all processes; the source of all other reading practices. 'The original text' remains a much-contested theoretical concept, and rightly so, but defining this document type as a **crossroads** makes a difference because of the very uncertainty and the multiplicity of choice embedded in the cross-roads both as notion and *topos*. In this way, Smith successfully resituates the concept of originality, turning it from something static into something highly dynamic.

The first paper importantly and in several ways also highlights the centrality of **textual variance** (due to performance processes and the extemporising practices of players), and introduces the notion that playtexts may be seen as **sediments in written circulation**.

Sediments, in Smith's interpretation, are **text tradition variations** that by definition are difficult to locate in the process between writing, performing and conserving. This gives rise to the first article's all-important introduction of the concept of the ***textus***. Here, specifically, the *textus* denotes a format or mediation tool of couplets designed for reproduction, but the concept can be more broadly applied, throughout the entire field of early modern studies, as a reminder that the dramatic canons that we study – if popular enough – are likely to have involved some type of memorized *textus* for each performance of a play which, when voiced 'live', remains **plastic in performance**.

The article moves on to introduce other very useful concepts and terminology, like the notion of a **dual writing-orality channel**, enabling the evolution of the performed material towards monumentality, facilitated by the ever-growing place of the written word. Smith's paper offers up terminology such as **formatted texts** and **formulas in texts**, reminding us that the **author is corporate as much as an individual**.

The second article, by Paola Ventrone, continues in the vein of cross-cutting practices, identifying a **transformation** of the spectacular from **performance action** to **container of memory**, through images fixed in woodcut book illustrations. We also hear of a **repeatable format fixed in print**, and of **literary forms with spectacular dimensions**, as Ventrone continually highlights the two-way channel that exists between the 'live' and static formats of theatre. Equally apt is the terminological nexus of the **representation in body/performative action** vs. **representation as object/container of mental images** (i.e. illustrations in book form). Last but not least, the second paper also emphasizes the important link between performance and **community**. That is to say, that (early modern) theatre almost always incorporates the tastes of a public/an audience, and as such by definition functions on an adaptive and multi-original basis.

The third paper, by Thomas Pettitt, introduces a nomenclature for the general and generically wide-ranging **vernacular afterlives** of early modern plays. After a play's stage history, Pettitt explains, follows a vernacular afterlife, borne out not only through regular actors, but also by the people involved in non-institutional, **extra-theatrical performance** traditions. Pettitt thus makes a case for the cross-media dissemination of verbal material over time, across both professional and folk trajectories, involving what Pettitt refers to as **textual degradation** during **re-contextualization** and **recollection from memory in performance**.

To our glossary Pettitt's essay adds further key terms like the *Endform* and *Zielform*; terminology derived from the work of the Swiss folklorist Max Lüthi, but in Pettitt's scholarly *oeuvre* used more broadly than by Lüthi to denote an identifiable morphology that all kinds of transmitted performance material will tend towards.

Another significant term introduced in Pettitt's paper is the *theatergram* or **dramatic formula** (a notion first elaborated by Louise George Clubb), which enables 'new permutations of established common material in a broad and extended swathe of western drama from Greco-Roman theatre, through liturgical Easter Plays, German carnival interludes (*Fastnachtspiele*), French farces, and the *commedia dell'arte*, to the Elizabethan stage and beyond' (p. 136 in this volume). Thus defined, the **theatergram** is a familiar typology common to many forms of early theatre; and, to my mind, thus related to Darwin Smith's notion of the *textus*. Pettitt also speaks of **artisanal re-versifying** strictly within the metrical system and rhyme scheme of an original text, making use of typecast 'masks' and the like - notions that match the related concepts of the *textus/theatergram*.

In the fourth paper, Roberto Ciancarelli writes of the public or city theatre, where a whole city is performing in groups and associations, introducing the term **theatre as community** (unwittingly echoing Ventrone). In Ciancarelli's paper, we are reminded of the collaborative dramatic mechanics of '**commune**

masks', and of the **stock figures** or **masked types** from the *commedia dell'arte*; and it is highlighted how an audience is always already an integral co-producer of meaning/significance in public and popular theatre. To our critical glossary, we can thus add Ciancarelli's concept of city theatre's assembly of **recognizable gags**, where the whole **city serves as *spectaculum*** and the masks as **vessels for spectacle**; concepts that incidentally also echo Ventrone's point about the important ability of early modern theatre to **act out topicality** – in this case a *comical* commentary on life as lived in early modern Rome.

The fifth essay, by Christopher Haile, investigates a single play that seems to have been dependent on a particular **public *locale***, London, to function. More specifically, Haile explores how the seventeenth century play *A Game at Chess* operates as a vessel for a specific message or as a 'learning' contract reliant on a specific type of culture that was widespread in (and likely spatially limited to) Jacobean London. Haile goes on to expand this notion and suggests that the very nature of early modern theatre is a **spatially limited cultural form** that every single audience member needs must have been familiar with in order for the enterprise to function. The terms or notions we gain from Haile's contribution are important in the sense that they highlight the implicit contract between stage and public that enables the reception of the performed material. Haile further adds to our glossary the concepts of the **public theatre as allegory**, **theatre as topical code to be decoded**; **theatre as a paraphrase** of life as lived, **spectacle as coded message** about actual real events (here involving specific political events) – all notions that are reminiscent of the arguments also presented elsewhere in this volume by e.g. Smith, Ciancarelli and Dongu. Finally, the **systematic use of clichés** for specific communicative purposes, and the **use of parallelisms** in plays in cahoots with the audience to 'discuss' something topical/political are equally relevant concepts to add to our glossary.

The sixth article, by Maria Grazia Dongu, introduces the pertinent concept of **the text/performance complex**, providing us with new terminology for the live/living text and its (re)generative energy. We are reminded of the **distinctly unstable** Elizabethan playtext, born from the **cooperative act of a playwright and his company coming up with a text**, which is then **corrected during rehearsals and adjusted for new audiences and historical contingencies over time**. It is highlighted how the text shares **the transience** of its theatrical performances – and here Dongu ventures the extremely apt term **a text *in situ***, with all that this entails of impermanent linguistic and stylistic constituents. The **text *in situ*** at the same time functions as a warning against the consolidating trends manifested by many 'canon-makers' of recent years, and can as such be seen as a methodological antidote to overly author-centric attribution studies and editorial practises alike. Dongu's paper likewise reinvokes concepts like the '**Urtext**' and **metatext fragments**, concepts that remain relevant if scholars are to come to terms with the **paradox** of the early modern theatrical text's **re-emerging fluidity**.

Dongu finally mentions the **interdependence** of **eye** and **ear** in the making of theatre, in the sense that **spectators perceive polysensorically**. These dimensions remain essential to theatre studies, but the principle risks being neglected when scholars try to fit stagecraft into singularly literary rubrics. Granted that the written formats of early modern theatre were intended for polysensoric reception, these formats will from their very inception have been **co-dependent on the bodies of actors** who would enact the words (in Dongu's words, the actor's body is transformed into a readable book composed of iconic signs) and use their voices to transform recognizable visual signs into recognizable oral/aural output to transmit what Dongu calls the **energy of the text**.

The seventh and final article, by Darren Freebury-Jones, is a study of canonicity and authorship, which naturally avails itself of the hallmark terminology of attribution studies. But Freebury-Jones' paper fuses the methodological terminology of statistics, metrics and linguistics with a deeper glossary of cross-cutting, interstitial terms like **parallels of thought**, **verbal matches**; **parallel phraseology**, **shared repetitions**, and **corresponding plot features** – all of which are essential to authorship studies as well as to the extra-authorial aspects covered in this volume, and as such germane to the glossary we are compiling. The notion that one play '**echoes** another' or that a given play may **echo all parts of an author's work** is central to Freebury-Jones' argument, although it remains to be determined whether it is the authors who are influenced by other authors or the words that influence other words, as it were. Thus, a collaborative nexus remains central also in Freebury-Jones' paper because collaboration and co-authorship, in the broadest sense of those words, constitute the very foundation of authorship studies.

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Highlighted in bold above we have heartening evidence of a critical vocabulary for the study of the many intermediate aspects between playtexts and performances, cultures, and practices of the early modern stages.

The glossary ties the contributions of the volume together and offers inspiration to scholars working or wanting to carry out work in this same field. However, the essays also contain specificities worth dwelling on because of the original research they offer and as a pointer to the exciting new perspectives made available through this volume. The final part of the Introduction therefore offers a taste of what is fully unfolded in the essays, which means that the eager reader may now choose to simply move on to the essays themselves or dwell a little longer on the aspects of the articles that I as a co-editor find particularly pertinent or enlightening.

With his study of the writing processes surrounding theatrical performances in medieval France, Darwin Smith positions the *original full text* ('the Book', 'le Livre', 'les originaux') as the conceptual and material

basis from which all ensuing forms, modes and copies were produced for *different* reading practices – entertainment, meditation, devotion, teaching, learning – identified by specific content, layout and material features. We may rank Smith's case studies of *Maistre Pierre Pathelin*, a late fifteenth century comedy, and the *Mystère des Trois Doms*, an early sixteenth century urban play, as excellent new studies of textual variation, dependent on the extemporizing practices of professional players and resulting in co-occurring so-called sediments in written circulation. Moreover, Smith importantly positions his work within the scholarly practice of *codicology:* the study of manuscripts as cultural artefacts for historical purposes. By doing so, he reminds us that theatre manuscripts are not so *in and of themselves*, but rather textual incarnations of practices of copying and making books, which belonged to widespread cultural activities and not theatre in particular. Smith also brings to our attention that the texts in the French medieval theatre do not distinguish themselves from other literary genres, but are basically composed as a *textus* of octosyllabic couplets – a practical tool highly efficient for transmedial circulation (i.e. memorising, performing, writing) of all manner of early genres. Later on, the theatre texts gain formal and functional generic qualities of their own, but the root principle or mechanism is a *textus*. Smith's main contribution is thus his timely reminder that the author of early modern theatre, *qua* the *textus*, is as much corporate as individual. Finally, the documented extemporizing practices of professional players, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, may well be key to understanding the origins not only of early French theatre or the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, but also more generally the beginning of modern professional theatre practices in Europe.

Paola Ventrone's research into acting and reading drama in the Florentine *sacre representazioni* highlights and offers evidence for the transformation of a performative action into a container of memory images, fixed through printed book illustrations in the form of woodcuts. As Ventrone reminds us, the woodcuts function like staged drama to portray real-life situations in recognizable contexts that are either realistic or meta-real in the sense of stock dramatic references or *theatergrams* (to use a glossary term). These woodcut images might also be topical (recognizable Florence settings) as they become re-readable in print and as such merge coeval popular communication with the dissemination of received religious teaching.

Woodcuts, in short, are also readings/representations/media and communicative forms. They 'travel' in tradition like other spectacular material and, as Ventrone points out, gain afterlives of their own in other works far from where they originally appeared, bridging genres and, potentially, communicative purposes. This is somewhat akin to what Pettitt notices when phraseology or character names or stock types reoccur across time and place in unrelated plays/Mummers' plays. Incidentally, but related to Ventrone's

commentary on dramatic illustration, woodcuts also form part of the parallel traditions of stage plays in early English popular culture, particularly in printed ballad texts. Although not all early modern English ballads contain images, a majority are designed to include woodcut illustrations and many sixteenth and seventeenth century broadside ballads do. The woodcut illustration published with the 1663 broadside ballad of *[The] complaint and lamentation of Mistresse Arden of [Fev]ersham in Kent* is a case in point. The ballad text and its woodcut illustration clearly lie beyond what Freebury-Jones seeks to cover in his paper on the canon of Thomas Kyd, who Freebury-Jones cautiously defends as the author of the 1592 stage play *Arden of Faversham*. It would nevertheless be interesting to hear how an attribution scholar would relate the ballad-*cum*-woodcut dramatization of the 'real' story of the murder of Arden of Faversham to the interplay between authorial canons, given Freebury-Jones' observation that the oral/aural memorial repository of theatrical phrases in one canon is more than capable of crossing over into another.

With his new case studies for this volume of *JEMS*, Thomas Pettitt has provided an extraordinarily well-founded and textually oriented study of the relationship between folk drama and early English theatre. Pettit's five case studies all juxtapose an original text of an early English stage play (or other dramatic genre) with documentation of a 'vernacular' performance decades or centuries later of that same item or dramatic material extracted from it. In each case, it is known which is the original version, and which is the derivative. In some cases, Pettitt acknowledges, the vernacular or folk text may also have functioned as a script for up-coming performances, while in all cases the vernacular text qualifies as a transcript documenting anterior performances. In this way, Pettitt's analyses of textual discrepancies show in phraseological detail *what* has happened to that original text, 'deliberately or unconsciously, before performance, between performances, during performance' (p. 167 in this volume), through a particular strand of a given play's vernacular afterlife. This means that we, through Pettit's new work, gain access to a 'recording of the most recent production of a given Elizabethan stage play in the latter's theatrical afterlife' (p. 151 in this volume) – an entirely exhilarating notion and a fresh insight into exactly which dramatic elements appear to survive extensive transmission.

Roberto Ciancarelli's paper on 'self-referential theatre' (involving citizens, amateur actors and authors, and depicting clear images of milieus, conventions and habits of a city, in this case Rome) describes how students, teachers, artisans, traders, soldiers and also writers and academics, painters, musicians, courtesans, notaries, judges, lawyers, doctors, surgeons and even priests join efforts to become a 'whole performing city'. Ciancarelli crucially provides a valuable new example of a fragment of such a city comedy, outlining a web of recognisable masks and an assembly of comic gags whose

interpretation relies on the collaboration of a city, or *locale*, and not so much on collaboration between the separate categories of performers and audiences. Ciancarelli's research thus confirms the use of communicative vessels like the *textus/theatergram* and adds important further documentary evidence to the volume's formative case studies.

Christopher Haile's essay on Thomas Middleton's allegorical play *A Game at Chess* provides a necessary and relevant re-visitation of a special play. A play that the London audiences had the upper hand in interpreting through their intense familiarity with the several theatres in operation within and without the city. Haile uses *A Game* to exemplify how an early modern play may tell its story through a *systematic use* of parodies of famous scenes of other plays, adding further weight to the self-referential aspects explored by Ciancarelli and others in this volume. Haile's examples of distinct parallelisms between *A Game* and *Measure for Measure* shows how the play and its performers are in cahoots with the audience to 'discuss' something topical/political. The hypothesis that interlinked plots of various plays/performative products could be used to convey a new message sits rather well with this volume's overall focus on moving beyond *the* text or any *one* text. What happens in the complex between play/performance/text/audience/time, Haile thus reminds us, is that *parallel thematics* and their use is as interesting as parallel phraseology (as discussed by the majority of the authors in this volume) when trying to grasp the interconnectedness of the products and productions of the early modern stages. Allegory is by necessity 'more than meets the eye' - more than one text or meaning - which is another reason why Haile's paper fits well in his volume, which focuses on what lies beyond and between.

Maria Grazia Dongu's excellent discussion of eighteenth-century *mise en scène* as collective and negotiable creations of meaning shows how actors, critics, and theatregoers knowingly negotiated texts into collective, distinctively provisional rewritings. With *Macbeth* as a case study, Dongu illustrates how the *mise en scène* function as a dynamic process triggered by multiple and diverse readings of Shakespeare's plays, provisionally ended by the performers, the spectators and the eighteenth-century reviewers. As the material resurfaced in eighteenth-century essays on acting and acting techniques, a parallel or metatextual analysis of anterior performances came into being. This 'debate', enacted by actors and audiences, shows that the co-dependent stakeholders were 'fully aware of their role as active participants in producing the performance, as testified in their letters' (p. 244 in this volume). With Dongu's evidence of the *conscious* cooperation of writers, actors, and audiences in the intermedial and cross-medial field of theatre-making, we have a valuable foundation for further work on the collaborative nature of early modern playwrighting, including the intermediate afterlives of such plays.

While most of the other papers of the volume occupy the realm of the text-performance nexus, Darren Freebury-Jones, in the final paper, focuses on the professional theatre as a literary environment, where authors write plays and in so doing amass what critics were later to call canons and have proceeded to study as works of authorial origin. What makes Freebury-Jones' paper relevant to this volume is first of all its insistence that canonicity is also something that lies beyond books and plays; an aspect of the afterlives of the texts produced for the early modern stage.

Freebury-Jones not only reminds us that the Elizabethan stage was supplied with material by a choir of playwrights who laboured to earn money and presumably fame in competition and collaboration with each other. He also incorporates the notion that actor-playwrights' (aural) memories might result in the migration of phraseology or patterns of phraseology across canons. Freebury-Jones' paper makes a case for a more expansive Kyd canon, based on recent scholarly practices of computational authorship attribution, but in so doing he also highlights how one playwright (Shakespeare) might have been influenced by the phraseology of a series of popular stage plays: *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Soliman and Perseda*, *King Leir*, and *Arden of Faversham*, with more verbal borrowings from *The Spanish Tragedy* and *King Leir* and less from *Arden of Faversham*. This, Freebury-Jones proposes, might be related to Shakespeare himself having seen, heard, or performed in these plays and not in *Arden*, thus accepting an element of oral/aural/memorial transmission that is not usually incorporated into attribution studies. Freebury-Jones likewise emphasizes that Kyd was a scrivener's son, acknowledging that any given playwright might also be influenced by extra-authorial, artisanal practices. It is always revitalising when one scholarly field enters into dialogue with another, and thus Freebury-Jones' paper is refreshing in more ways than one as it concludes this volume by adding further (no less quantifiable or documentable) dimensions of early modern English dramatic production to those usually explored in literary/linguistic/stylometric attribution studies.

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This survey has been an invitation to expand notions of theatrical production, introducing a series of studies that engage with a difficult realm beyond and between early modern text and performance. By offering these fresh perspectives on the visual, oral/aural, multi-generic, corporate, communal and cross-medial capacities of early modern plays and playtexts, along with a critical nomenclature to go with it, we hope to at least assist in inspiring further research that reflects the practices beyond the playtexts themselves.

Part Two

Case Studies

Text and Stage
(Vernacular) Traditions and Afterlife