Producible Interpretation: Literary Criticism and the Performance Possibilities of Playscripts

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Writing in 1954, Raymond Williams explained both the title and the program of his book on *Drama in Performance* by pointing out that while there was an abundance of studies treating plays as literature, and a growing body of work treating plays as theater,

> we have very few examples of the necessary next stage: a consideration of the play in performance, literary text and theatrical representation, not as separate entities, but as the unity which they are intended to become.[1]

Many critics since Williams have formulated this problem in similar terms, and have proceeded to develop a number of effective, if quite diverse, methods to analyze the constitutive features of what Thomas Van Laan calls "the idiom of drama." Behind the diversity of their methods, however, we can discern a shared perception that to consider drama in performance is to consider the play as a communicative act; and a common recognition that we can best answer the question "What does this play mean?"--the traditional question of literary criticism--by first asking the question "What does this play do?"[2]

The proposal for a new, more fully dramaturgic criticism is thus over 30 years old, yet as Alan Dessen recently wrote, "even though the trumpet calls heralding the treatment of plays as scripts rather than literary texts have now become commonplace, the full implications of such an approach have not been explored."[3] Indeed we are now developing one of those valuable rhetorical ploys by which critics can introduce their essays by noting what a cliche the call for such performance-oriented study has become. But if the call for an integrated dramatic criticism has become a cliche, and noting what a cliche it

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has become is becoming the next cliche, then it seems a fair inference that the desired integration has yet to occur.

Nonetheless, we are obviously moving in that direction, and I want to use one recent attempt at synthesis as a springboard for exploring both some aspects of the emerging new model of a unified drama criticism, and some of the possible directions in which we can continue or expand this transformation. My starting point is *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays 1675-1707* by Judith Milhous and Robert Hume, which I believe is one of the most important books in recent dramatic criticism. The book's significance resides both in its attempt to frame a new starting point for the study of playscripts in the opening chapter on "The Concept of Producible Interpretation" and in its varied development of this starting point in the eight chapters exploring specific plays. Like all pioneering efforts, the work will provoke as much dissent as agreement, but the reward for the authors, surely, will be in the thinking they help stimulate. For my purposes, Milhous and Hume serve a double function: in suggesting a specific form of criticism, they help us discern some of the major conceptual shifts we must undertake in creating an integrated study of drama; and if we step back to look at their book as an example of the process by which such an integrated study of drama is emerging, we can also discern some factors that unite critics who are developing new approaches to drama.

In this essay, then, I will examine four main areas. First, I will sketch Milhous and Hume's concept of production analysis, looking especially at how we must transform the concept of ambiguity when dealing with the playtext and performances. Second, I will look at what Milhous and Hume propose as performance analysis, and at how a number of recent critics, without necessarily using this term, have begun to develop models of performance analysis that provide precisely the sort of rich and full responses to the playtext's potentials that Milhous and Hume call for. Third, I will look at the complex problem of how text and performance relate to each other, and examine some proposals as to how we can deal with the conflict between claims of validity and producibility. Finally, since all proposals for new forms of dramatic criticism are also, at least implicitly proposals for revision in the training of those who work with playtexts and performances, I will indicate some of the possible directions to take in transforming our work as teachers of drama.

I

In *Producible Interpretation*, Milhous and Hume clearly join those who, as I noted above, have shifted from asking "What does the play

mean?" to asking "What does the play do?" They have, moreover, applied the question to the activities of those who study plays, noting that "This book--like the critical method it embodies--has grown out of our attempt to answer a disturbingly basic question: What should an interpreter of drama undertake to accomplish?"[4] As critics attempting to integrate literary and theatrical approaches know, the answer to that question depends upon not identifying the words of the play with the play."

> A playscript should be interpreted as what it is--a vehicle to be completed in performance--not an aesthetic object complete in itself. Where a poem or novel stands on its own, a play does not--an obvious fact, but one all too often ignored by recent critics. (ix)[5]

Milhous and Hume suggested that "Widespread lip service to the principle has, however, produced little change in practical criticism" (5). They overstate the matter, since the work of Raymond Williams, J. L. Styan, Bernard Beckerman, John Russell Brown, Richard Hornby, Roger Gross, Alan Dessen and John Barton, to list some obvious examples, is more than lip service, but their overstatement leads them to an interesting survey of what it is most critics have traditionally done--and this overview is itself a service to us, since it provides us with some concepts and categories useful both for intelligible dialogue and for further theoretical innovation.

They enumerate nine kinds of critical activity, the first seven already commonly practiced and the last two their own suggestions of what needs to be developed and practiced much more extensively.

[1] Prescriptive directions to authors, which seek to discover or enumerate the principles of playwrighting.

[2] Literary analysis, which aims at providing readers with a grasp of the literary features of a play treated as a text.

[3] Drama history, which looks at plays in a period, examining genre, subject, and ideology.

[4] Theatre history, which studies buildings, management and finances, and acting style.

[5] Instructions for performers, which help them grasp a play's logic and interpret their roles.

[6] Reviews: "Properly executed, such a review should ask what the production tried to do; whether the aim was reasonable; how it tried to achieve those aims; and how well the aim was fulfilled." (8)

[7] Records of performances, which, ideally, "encompass... text, theatre history, and actual performance."

[8] Performance analysis, which "is analysis attentive equally to the script and its realizations."

[9] Production analysis, which draws on all the possible kinds of criticism to produce "a sense of the multiple possibilities in actual performance." (10)

Their first concern is to remind us of how most literary analysis of drama in the past two hundred years has distorted the theatrical reality of playtexts precisely because it has treated the words of the play as the play. Literary approaches, they argue, make the task of examining drama at once too hard and too easy. First, literary critics make investigation too hard, Milhous and Hume assert (in a claim that seems more polemically useful than strictly true of recent critical practice), because they ask for a single correct reading, and thus, commit themselves to a concept of unity inappropriate to texts that are in fact scripts: "the 'inconsistencies' or multiple interpretive possibilities that bedevil the literary critic are meat and drink for the production analyst" (xx). Second, they make life too easy because, like those who write criticism of novels, they can be selective in a way that is impossible when a play is being performed: "the literary critic is at least de facto much freer to deal selectively with his text . . . Such selectivity merely renders a production analysis ridiculous: the contriver has to take a position on choices necessary to any production" (31).[6]

New critical approaches, then, must start from a correct understanding of playtexts, and must move towards objectives that follow from this grasp of what a playtext is and how it functions. One possible objective for such activity will be to formulate a "producible interpretation," which as Milhous and Hume define it, is "a critical reading that a director could communicate to an audience in performance" (3). And the method for arriving at a producible interpretation is to conduct a production analysis.

> By this term we mean interpretation of the text specifically aimed at understanding it as a performance vehicle--"reading with a directorial eye"; if you like. While heavily grounded in textual analysis, such criticism will be undertaken on the principle that what should emerge is a sense of multiple possibilities in actual performance. Production analysis should draw freely on theatre history and drama history. Particular productions will be studied for what they can tell us about the potentialities of a script, but the critic is in

> no way limited to what has been staged. . . . The object is to clarify possible meanings and effects, primarily for readers, critics, and theatregoers, secondarily for the interested director. The result should be improved understanding of the performance potentialities of the play at issue. (10)

In shifting from asking "What does this play mean?" to asking "What range of meanings might this play be able to communicate?" Milhous and Hume are moving from what Bernard Beckerman has called the scholar's protective approach to the director's explorative attitude.[7] Or as they put it, critics of drama need to start by asking "not what the play" is (or "is about") but rather what it can be *made* in performance!" (80; italics mine.) And as soon as we begin to ask about what a play can be made in performance, we must also begin to examine how the concept of ambiguity developed by literary critics must be revised for the study of drama.

The transformation of the concept of ambiguity emerges as Milhous and Hume compare the sort of monist interpretation that they claim has been generally favored by literary critics with the sort of pluralist interpretation inherent in production analysis:

> Where the literary critic attempts to present the 'correct' reading, or the 'best' reading, the author of a production analysis claims merely to identify performable production concepts and to indicate the sort of response to be sought from the audience in each case. Unlike literary criticism, production analysis is essentially undogmatic, making no exclusive claim to truth for any one production concept. (23)

That is, someone doing a production analysis will look for ambiguities but treat them in a radically different fashion from the old New Critics, assuming that ambiguities usually represent production choices, not critical problems. The aim of such an analyst will not be to show the subtle convergences and unities of the ambiguities, but rather to discover if these ambiguities can be analyzed so as to produce one or more coherent production concepts. Thus even if a literary analyst might argue that the ambiguities represent incompatible or directly contradictory interpretations, these contradictions may, from the point of view of a production analyst, merely mean that the script is indeed open to two or more coherent productions, some of which are contradictory.

> To a literary critic a play with multiple potentialities is at best suspect, at worst irretrievably flawed. The fallacy is easily seen: the script offers incompatible possibilities, but a competent director will make a choice and present *one* of them. (25)

The shift is from seeing ambiguities and incompatible interpretations to seeing the playtext as inviting multiple producible interpretations whose realization will involve the director making choices between the incompatible readings. The director that is, spends part of her time disambiguating the playtext, while the literary critic often spends her time discovering ambiguities which she then praises as the source of the text's power and richness. Ambiguity will exist in performance, on their argument, only when the director fails to choose or the actor fails to project one of the conflicting potentials, and this type of ambiguity will confound interpretation, hence probably wreck the production. This contrast in literary and dramatic approaches is well exemplified in Ralph Berry's response to Kenneth Muir's analysis of the central ambiguity which dominates the end of *Measure for Measure*:

> "Any good production of *Measure for Measure*" [says Muir] "would necessarily present us with the possibility that Duke Vincentio was a symbol of divine providence, or an earthly ruler who was God's steward, or a puppet-master, or a busybody. It is not the business of the director to choose one of these and exclude other." . . . What looks like ambiguity to the priesthood might [replies Berry], to a lay audience, seem plain confusion. I find it hard to conceive of an Isabella simultaneously exercising her options of prostrating herself before divine Providence, accepting joyfully the hand of an earthly ruler, registering womanly indignation at the unmasking of a puppet-master, and sending a busybody about his business.[8]

Let us look for a few minutes at what happens if we shift to "reading with a directorial eye," and begin to discriminate between ambiguities that represent critical problems and those that represent challenges to the director to make production choices.

Milhous and Hume's examination of Wycherly's *The Country-Wife* is an excellent example of how their model works. They examine both the playtext and the critical debate about it, and argue persuasively for three basic production concepts, each based on different "assumptions about what the play is and does."

> [1] The play is a farce without significant point or moral value.
> [2] The play is a libertine comedy that allows the audience to empathize with the rake.
> [3] The play is a satire that excoriates Horner, his society, or both of them. (79-80)

Each of these interpretations issues in what seems to be a playable production concept which, it is plausible to assume, can be conveyed in performance.

This examination of *The Country-Wife* also demonstrates another aspect of how we might redefine the concept of ambiguity. If we adopt this approach, we will begin to employ the concept of a text as relatively open or closed in the range of potential productions:

> Some play texts are much more restrictive than others . . . Wycherly does not establish a definite attitude toward the principal characters in *The Country-Wife*: whether we regard this as profound complexity or bad dramaturgy is another question. The crucial point for the critic is to recognize the essential *openness* of the script Wycherly has given us. [What we have is] a text that clearly permits a wide range of quite contradictory performance possibilities. We do not believe in unrestricted critical pluralism . . . But given the wide-open nature of the script, and the broad range of production concepts appropriate to it, to imagine that there is a single 'valid' interpretation is madness. (104)

If we adopt this concept of ambiguity as, in part, a symptom of the relative openness of playscripts, we will also be able to reframe the way in which we examine readings which contradict each other.

Another cue that, given the focus of their inquiry on the play as a whole, Milhous and Hume do not follow up, concerns the ambiguity that will occur in the production itself. They seem to assume that once a team of director and actors chooses between alternate production concepts, the performance they create for the audience will be unambiguous. What they mean, I presume, is that the production will project, or try to project, its interpretation as unequivocally as possible, and that it will seem to be unambiguous in communicating the meanings embodied in the relevant production choices. But their work suggests that we need to distinguish between two diachronically different senses of ambiguity, and that we need to pursue the ways in which ambiguity will remain in the performed play.

What becomes evident is that when we deal with drama we encounter two fundamentally different forms of ambiguity: the form which confronts the director and actors preparing to create a performance, and which manifests itself as production choices; and the form which confronts the audience as an interpretive challenge, and which might be called performance ambiguity. These two forms of ambiguity are different from, for example, the seven types of ambiguity delineated by William Empson, because they are encountered by two different groups of interpreters, who must respond to them differently.

The first form of ambiguity is the ambiguity that faces director and actor, who must choose between different and perhaps incompatible production options--the choices which are the focus of Milhous and Hume's study. This is a type of ambiguity that may well be a wonderful richness for a playtext's *reader* (as in Kenneth Muir's list of possible interpretations of the Duke in *Measure for Measure* quoted earlier), but that must, usually, be eliminated in performance. The director-actor team confronts such ambiguities and makes choices between the different possibilities, and if the performance is executed adequately, the spectator, unlike the reader, will experience none of this type of ambiguity.

The second form of ambiguity is that which confronts the audience during the performance itself, and which is inherent in all drama: for example, even when production choices are made and unequivocally communicated, the audience still must deal with the ambiguity of how they are to integrate any given choice or element into the performance as a whole. Thus the performers' production choices, in the very act of eliminating ambiguities available to directors, actors, and readers, also open the door for the sort of interpretive challenge that makes the performed play something other and more than (as well as less than) the play's text.[9]

When we turn our attention to this second type of performance ambiguity, we can begin to discern how much room there is for further critical delineation. Some basic sources of ambiguity in a performed play will be analogous to or identical with the basic sources of ambiguity in our lives. These will include the sort of ambiguity that arises when we do not have access to people's motives. We may not have access to our own motives because, for example, we deceive ourselves or choose not to analyze the mixture of motives that impel us to act in one way rather than another. And we often do not have access to the motives of others because they choose not to share their motives, because they actively deceive us, because they are self-deceived, because events happen too fast for any questions . . . and because even when we pay close attention to the non-verbal cues we cannot be sure we have interpreted them correctly. In the theater, of

course, the people to whom we might address questions about motivation are inaccessible, either because as characters they are virtual rather than actual creatures, or because as actors what they intend to communicate about the character through the character's words and actions, is, precisely, what cannot be directly communicated.

More specifically, while some beats demand that the director and actors choose between particular interpretations, and that these choices be conveyed unequivocally to the spectators, in other beats the actor's creation of a concrete subtext will still lead to a performance which is ambiguous for the audience--although not ambiguous in the negative sense of flat, uninteresting, unspecific, or unexciting.

As an example of this type of ambiguity we can look at the first appearance of Harriet in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*. When she appears--and Etherege has held off the entrance of his heroine until Act III, thus insuring that we, like the rake-hero (if hero he is) Dorimant, are intensely curious about what she is like, and insuring also that we will pay close attention to what she says and does--Harriet has just learned she is betrothed to Young Bellair, whom she is positive she will not marry. As the scene progresses, the teasing of her maid suggests, despite (or because of) Harriet's protests, that she is interested in Dorimant. When Young Bellair, the man she is supposed to marry, enters, he indicates, as courteously as he can, that because he is in love with another woman, he will not wed Harriet:

> Young Bellair. I must confess, madam, you came a day after the fair.
> Harriet. You own then you are in love?
> Young Bellair. I do.
> Harriet. The confidence is generous, and in return I could almost find it in my heart to let you know my inclinations.
> Young Bellair. Are you in love?
> Harriet. Yes--with this dear town, to that degree I can scarce endure the country in landscapes and hangings.[10]

The actress playing Harriet can decide to hold a lengthy pause after "Yes", creating suspense in Young Bellair and speculation on our part as to the mixture of motives in conflict over this decision. By this point in the play, we are well aware that this is a world where knowledge is power, where a secret is a capital piece of information vital to success, and we will therefore take her pause as indicating that Harriet is also aware of these realities. At the same time, such a pause will lead us to suspect that she is seriously tempted by the frankness of Young Bellair's confidence, thereby implying her own generosity of spirit. Such a moment, small as it is, will be a crucial

element in delineating the balance of spontaneity and calculation that this particular Harriet shall have. The ambiguity we experience here, in fact, is one means by which Etherege makes us experience the world of his play as if we were participants: we will never know the process of Harriet's decision, and yet we will have, I think, an unambiguous sense of the forces at play in making that decision.

A second basic source of performance ambiguity, which is more specifically a product of the medium itself, comes from the fact that a play is a designed whole, as life is not. The design of the play may make a single moment which is clear in itself ambiguous, even when the director-actor team has made concrete and specific choices about why the moment occurs, and even if the actor clearly projects the character's motives for his choices. Here the ambiguity is in effect created by the audience's perception of the moment, and it is not, of course, the result of a failure to choose between production options but rather inherent in the act of making such choices and performing the play.

An example of this sort of design-created (rather than character-created) ambiguity occurs in Act V of Marlowe's *1 Tamburlaine*. Besieging Damascus, Tamburlaine announces that if the Governor does not surrender by the third day he will exterminate the entire population of the city. On the third day the Governor sends out the Virgins of Damascus to plead with the conqueror. Confronting the Virgins, a melancholy (as a stage direction indicates--and that melancholy will itself function as an ambiguity) Tamburlaine responds that their pleas are in vain. Here is the interpretation of the moment suggested by Bruce Brandt:

> Despite their pleas, and despite his own feelings, Tamburlaine prepares to fulfill his word:
>
> Virgins, in vaine ye labour to prevent
> That which mine honor sweares shal be perform'd:
> Behold my sword, what see you at the point?
>
> *1 Virgin.* Nothing but feare and fatall steel my Lord.
>
> *Tamburlaine.* Your fearfull minds are thick and mistie then,
> For there sits Death, there sits imperious Death,
> Keeping his circuit by the slicing edge.
>
> (V.i.106-112)
>
> But at the last moment, with his sword raised for the fatal stroke, Tamburlaine finds that he cannot kill them himself.
>
> But I am pleasde you shall not see him there:
>
> He now is seated on my horsmen's speares,

> And on their points his fleshlesse bodie feedes.
> *Techelles*, straight goe and charge a few of them
> To chardge these Dames, and shew my servant death,
> Sitting in scarlet on their armed speares.
> (V.i.113-118)

> Tamburlaine's word is preserved, but he has had to delegate to others the action necessary to preserve it.[11]

Brandt's interpretation is, as far as I know, a novel one. But it is certainly also a possible performance for the actor, who can clearly pull his sword as if intending to use it and then falter. The faltering will be clear, and an effective actor, I believe, can communicate at least the sense that he is acting from a specific motive even if the motive itself (say an inability to kill a woman) is not communicated.

But the meaning or rather meanings of the moment will come from our perception of how what Tamburlaine does and says makes sense in the context of the production as a whole. Thus even if the actor playing Tamburlaine assumes, for example, the motivation suggested in Brandt's interpretation, and even if he conveys that motive unequivocally to the audience, and even if the motive seems, in the abstract, a positive one which reveals some nobility in Tamburlaine's soul, there will still be a range of possible interpretations of the moment's significance within the design of the action. Whether we see it as a sign of humane pity and mercy in a man distressed by the need to adhere to his conquering project, or as a revelation of a weakness in the very nature of the conqueror's project, or as the hypocritical chivalry of a bloodthirsty killer, our interpretation will be controlled, in part, by the choices made before and after the moment in the production as a whole. To take only an immediate point: our sense of this moment will be shaped by whether the Virgins are slaughtered on or off-stage, and, if slaughtered off-stage, whether their bodies re-appear onstage.[12]

This type of ambiguity is frequently a play's strength, not a weakness, providing a creative tension that, as is certainly true of *Tamburlaine*, forces us to explore and articulate some controversial problem or issue that it is the play's intention to raise but not resolve. An ambiguity such as this one is powerful because as the play unfolds we find ourselves having to repeatedly re-interpret an action whose meaning we thought we clearly understood when it first occurred.

This example is surely representative of a class of ambiguities that are inherent in performance precisely because drama is, to borrow

one critic's wonderful phrase, "an incarnational art." As we continue to study the wide variety of ways that ambiguity functions in drama, and discover more fully the differences between dramatic and literary ambiguity, we will also discover a new anatomy of types of ambiguity appropriate to the play in performance.

II

Production analysis, then, contains the seeds for much rewarding future criticism, and for the refinement of critical concepts such as ambiguity and openness in playtexts. Performance analysis, that is "analysis attentive equally to the script and its realization" (9) seems to promise even richer future developments. At the same time, Milhous and Hume see major obstacles confronting the development of such criticism:

> . . . the principal obstacle to performance analysis remains our lack of more than the barest rudiments of a method and vocabulary for analyzing theatrical performance. Even more daunting is the formidable practical problem of collecting the evidence necessary to a serious analysis of performance. Videotape is preferable to scattered comments in eighteenth century newspapers, but even when available is not a panacea. For the present, performance-oriented criticism remains a utopian ideal. (10)

However, despite these obstacles, a number of critics have already begun to develop the practice of performance analysis, and in order to formulate some of the issues, questions, and directions raised by their work, I would like to focus on recent developments in the study of Shakespeare's plays. I am using Shakespeare studies not only because it is an area I am familiar with but also because the sheer number of performances of Shakespeare's plays combined with the density of critical study they have provoked can help us think about how we might apply these new practices to analyze the playtexts of other dramatists.

One crucial development shared by both production and performance analysis is to reconceive what might be called the collective critical function of a play's production history. Here, for example, is theater historian Cary Mazur:

> The historian of Shakespeare in performance acts on the conviction that these interpretations are valuable only if they can be preserved and made available in more durable

> form to the scholarly community at large . . . The shift in the presentational format in the books of that most encyclopedic of Shakespeare performance historians, Marvin Rosenberg, is indicative of this goal. *The Masks of Othello* presents, in a chronological narrative, the fortunes of the play's interpretation in performance throughout history. But first in *The Masks of King Lear* and then in *The Masks of Macbeth* the chronological narrative is scrapped. Details of the individual performances are divided into little bits and, like so many file cards, reshuffled. The interpretations of performances in the act become data for an aggregate interpretation in the present. . . . The entrance of each character, the physical business, the emotional flow of the speeches, the ebb and flow of character interaction, are discussed in order, as the audience would experience them. Rosenberg describes the drama of each interpretive moment by describing how that moment was interpreted in any and every documentable performance from the past. By showing the full range of theatrical readings arrived at to date, Rosenberg builds a prototype for all possible theatrical performances. The blueprint for the play's human vitality in performance, according to this school of scholarship, lies in the aggregate of all its human embodiments in the theatre through history. . . . by presenting the history of the play in performance, [theatre historians] can test, measure, and delimit the range of possibilities for performance today. If "meaning" lies only in performance, then by assembling the data of performance the Shakespeare performance history creates, in effect, a variorum of the play's theatrical meanings.[13]

The concept of creating a *performance variorum* as one aspect of performance analysis opens the curtain to a wonderful variety of possible studies in which we can begin to explore and discern just *how* we can make the text and the performance enter into a reciprocal dialogue, and thus how we can begin to integrate literary and theatrical practices, enriching both.

As Mazur notes, Marvin Rosenberg's books are extraordinary, of course, because each one attempts to cover an entire Shakespearean tragedy. But there are a number of other possible ways of conceiving of such performance variorums, so that we might choose to study a play by a type of scene, by a type of character, or, with even more theatrical focus, by types of activity, both verbal and nonverbal, textual and extratextual.

A recent example of a category, rather than whole-play, deployment of the performance variorum approach is Philip McGuire's wonderful *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences*. McGuire examines the range of performance options provided by some of the key silences in Shakespeare playtexts, particularly silences at the beginning and end of a text, and shows how choosing each option, in turn, changes the meaning of the play, sometimes quite radically:

> What is an "open" silence? . . . An open silence is one whose precise meanings and effects, because they cannot be determined by analysis of the words of the playtext, must be established by nonverbal, extratextual features of the play that emerge only in performance. Such silences are usually required by Shakespeare's words, and they occur most often during the final scene of the play. (xv)[14]

McGuire's readings of open silences in *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, The Tempest, Measure for Measure,* and *King Lear*, clearly demonstrate one type of production choice inherent in transforming a playtext into a performance, and hence also help demonstrate the inherent openness not only of such silences but of the larger entity, the play, in which they occur--as well as the need to go beyond a purely verbal or textual approach to the study of drama:

> A mode of analysis that takes as its exclusive point of reference the words of *Measure for Measure* cannot enable us to understand the precise meaning(s) and effect(s) of Barnadine's failure or refusal or inability to speak when he is granted life. Barnadine's silence is textually indeterminate; it is open. A silence like his takes on distinct coherence--a set of specific meanings and effects--only within the particular contexts established during actual performances of the play. Those contexts are primarily nonverbal and extratextual, and they can vary in remarkable, even contradictory ways, endowing Barnadine's silence with a broad span of potential meanings and effects. Without contradicting Shakespeare's playtext, Barnadine's silence can be played as a sign of gratitude or of repentance that justifies the Duke's mercy. However, that same silence can, on another occasion and, again, without contradicting what Shakespeare wrote, be played as an act of indifference or even incorrigibility that elicits from the audience a far more qualified, ambivalent response to the Duke's mercifulness.

> Thus, granting life to Barnadine may be fully appropriate within the context established during one performance of *Measure for Measure* and entirely inappropriate within the context of a different performance of the play. The presence of open silences such as Barnadine's--silences whose meaning and effects are central yet can vary legitimately from production to production--requires a process of inquiry that unites close analysis of the words of Shakespeare's playtexts with equally rigorous analysis of performance. (xix)

Performance variorum study such as McGuire's, then, will allow us also to explore not only crucial production choices in a playtext (and hence contribute to our thinking more fully about how the process of production is a process of re-composition of the play, drawing on the player's own creativity) but also enable us to begin to develop a much fuller, more explicit sense of the consistent patterns in the operation of the non-verbal elements of performance. An anatomy of silences is a project that future performance analysts can follow McGuire's lead in pursuing.

Studies adopting a performance variorum approach uniting "close analysis of the words . . . with equally rigorous analysis of performances," furthermore, may also provide opportunities for influencing future productions by demonstrating that a particular playtext is more open than previous interpreters have recognized. The ending of *King Lear* is notorious among literary critics, for example, precisely because it is open to widely divergent and directly opposite readings, ranging from nihilist despair to Christian affirmation. Yet the range of recorded performances actually may not have taken advantage of just how open the silences at the end are:

> Stage traditions, editorial practices, and habits of interpretation have combined in ways that drastically narrow, if they do not obliterate, awareness of the presence and the ramification of open silences during the final moments of *King Lear.* (97)

In order to prove this claim, McGuire looks at Lear's final request, so moving and so mysterious, "Pray you, undo this button," as it occurs in the first Quarto and Folio versions, and proceeds to unpack an array of possible stagings.

McGuire's analysis can be formulated by saying that, from a director's point of view, there are three major choices that must be made to shape the playing of this request. First, what button is Lear

referring to: one on his own gown, or one on Cordelia's? And, who does Lear make his request to: is it a request to a specific person, or a general request for assistance? Second, how do those around Lear respond to the request? And, whoever responds, how does he (or indeed she, if any female attendants to Goneril or Regan appear here) perform that action? Third, what if no one responds? What meaning is created by the lack of response to Lear's request? Theatrical tradition, as McGuire points out, has been that it is Lear who is referring to the top button of his own gown and that it is Kent who does the unbuttoning. But this is not mandated by either of the texts of the play (texts whose interesting and suggestive divergences have been, because of the mainstream editorial tradition of seeking a unitary best text, themselves largely ignored by both performers and literary critics). McGuire explores six possible stagings and suggests others, and this examination is, as he notes, by no means exhaustive. More importantly, he shows how each of these stagings will at once complete and modify the meaning created by the pattern of the play's previous action, providing in each case a different balance of hope and despair, helplessness and renewal in the playing of this powerful ending. Similarly, his exploration of whether Albany or Edgar either accept or refuse the kingship illuminates another aspect of the ending that is frequently downplayed or ignored by performers and critics alike.

Although Beckerman's distinction, noted earlier, between the scholar's protective and the director's explorative paradigm suggests, correctly I believe, that the scholar is usually more conservative than the director, McGuire's work shows that this is by no means an inevitable difference, and through his work we can see "how stage traditions and the desire to settle upon a fixed, standard text for *King Lear*--to agree upon words that all can scrutinize--have had the effect of minimizing the freedom of the play's final moments" (xxii). The study of the text and performance together may allow the critic to discern openings in a script and make suggestions to directors and actors about as yet unrealized potentials in a play's design. McGuire's work shows just how rich the first form of ambiguity in a playtext can be, and how rewarding it is to anatomize the script's openness to multiple production choices. If nothing else, such modes of performance analysis will impel us to discover in much greater detail the multiple potential patterns of the play, and to answer more fully the question: What might a performance of this play do?

III

Once we openly acknowledge the multiple production options inherent in a playtext, and acknowledge that different productions can legitimately communicate quite different meanings, we come face to face with the issue of the relation between the producibility and the validity of an interpretation. Within literary criticism as a whole, the question of what constitutes a valid interpretation, or indeed whether there is such a thing as validity of interpretation, is obviously a violently contested issue, on which no consensus has emerged--and where even those who agree that there are grounds for deciding the validity of an interpretation often do not agree on what those grounds might be. But when we move to the study of drama, where a performance is at once the result of interpretive activity and itself an event to be interpreted, then the situation seems to be even less resolvable. As we develop the critical practices for performance analysis, we will be forced to rethink the relation, or better yet the interaction, of literary interpretation of published criticism with the theatrical interpretation of performance.

What might be called an outside limit to valid interpretation in performance has been suggested by McGuire: "A Shakespearean playtext is not a series of statements that specify in all respects--or even in all important respects--what must happen during performance. Its statements do specify what *cannot* happen, and in doing so they permit whatever possibilities are not prohibited" (139). But even if we accept this assertion, it does not solve the question of how we might determine if a permitted possibility is also a valid interpretation.

On the one hand, it is obviously the premise of the whole play-in-performance movement, as it is the premise of those who work in the theater, that there is more than one valid interpretation of a playtext, and that there will also be more than one production that legitimately embodies even a single valid reading. On the other hand, very few critics are willing to accept the idea that *any* successful production automatically validates the interpretation embodied in that performance. Milhous and Hume, for example, write:

> Let us try to summarize our position on some thorny issues. A producible interpretation may not be historically valid, though any stageable interpretation possesses a certain de facto legitimacy. . . . We are dealing with three distinct concepts here. A *producible interpretation* is not necessarily *historically valid*; a *valid interpretation*, however, should be producible, unless the critic has specifically disavowed the applicability of his reading to actual performance. For

> the theatrical critic, a valid interpretation is a producible one. (19; italics in original)

We can better examine the most important issue here, I believe, if we eliminate the historical dimension in order to concentrate on the relations between valid and producible interpretations. When the two concepts are interlocked, they create four categories, so that a reading might be seen as: (1) producible and valid, with a perceived literary design that is communicated in a performance; (2) producible and invalid, with a design that seems not inherent in or to contradict the playtext, and yet turns out to communicate its vision successfully to an audience; (3) unproducible and valid, with a design that literary critics find convincing that yet turns out to be theatrically incommunicable; (4) unproducible and invalid, with a design that no one except its proposer endorses, and that proves to be unplayable (or is never attempted). Given the complexity of these issues, I simply want to sketch in what these categories might mean. If these categories are accepted, the real issue will be how to use them?

The first and last categories seem relatively clear. A producible and valid interpretation is one which seems both congruent with the text and is successfully communicated in performance. And an invalid and unproducible interpretation seems one which only the proposer endorses, and which fails to be communicated in performance. (There may be another distinction to be made here, between an interpretation that can be enacted yet fails to be read by an audience, and an interpretation that cannot be enacted.) In both cases we presume that literary and theatrical judgement will coincide.[15]

But what about the second and third categories? One clear solution would be to use producibility as a test of validity:

> Michael Booth has gone so far as to argue that "no interpretation of Shakespeare or any other dramatist is valid unless it is proved workable in performance, that is unless it can be clearly communicated to the audience by the actors and the staging." We are in considerable sympathy with this position, though it ultimately seems too extreme. Plays are printed and read, and in that form they can legitimately be interpreted as printed literature. (12)

The appeal of this maneuver is that it seems to simplify the interpretive challenge: unproducible would equal invalid and the third category would disappear; and if one was willing to go further, and agree that producibility would equal validity, then the second category would disappear. But I do not think this equation will be accepted. The

legitimacy of the experience of reading a playtext and hence the validity of "purely literary" interpretations, is something that I, for one, value much too highly to relinquish. The point has been forcefully argued by Bert States and Gary Taylor, two critics who are themselves students of drama in performance, but who, like Milhous and Hume, value the fact that "Plays . . . can legitimately be interpreted as printed literature." States observes:

> Shakespeare, theater people are pleased to note, was an actor; he wrote for the stage and went to his peace caring little about the survival of his texts, even for future actors' use. His plays--and by extension all plays--are essentially scripts or scores, that exist only in a literary limbo until actors, the musicians of the tribe, arrive and give them sound and sensible motion. This is an innocent enough fiction, notwithstanding the fact that there are as many things about *Hamlet* one cannot possibly appreciate in a performance as there are things in a performance that elude the most sensitive reading. But this has less to do with the art than with biopsychology--that is, with the range of responses awakened by different senses and stimuli.[16]

And Taylor argues:

> Shakespeare's reputation has since the Restoration always rested, and continues to rest, largely on the power of his plays as reading-texts. Critics may argue--justifiably, in my opinion--that the plays can only be fully appreciated in and through performance, but the fact remains that many people who have never seen them performed satisfactorily, or at all, have derived immense pleasure merely from reading them. If we imagine individual works of literature as experiments conducted on the reading and playgoing public, then the assassination scene of *Julius Caesar* is an experiment which has succeeded with both groups, whereas *Henry V* (say) has had more success with the playgoing than the reading public, and *Troilus and Cressida* or *Antony and Cleopatra* (say) more success with the latter than the former. Criticism, it seems to me, should take some interest in explaining the disparity of these results.[17]

Like States and Taylor, I would argue that one major direction our endeavors should follow is to explore precisely *how* the spectator-performance and reader-playtext interactions differ. Taylor, for

example, suggests a plausible hypothesis about how lists function quite differently for a reader and for a spectator:

> When a reader reads a list, he tends to pay only minimal attention to its items; he quickly abstracts the principle of the list ('names of French nobles'), he glances down the page to see how far it extends, he reckons he has received the author's message and need be detained no longer. . . . But a listener cannot make the actor hurry over, or skip, the list; a listener has no choice but to attend to each item, to give each weight, and from the weight thus given to its items the list accumulates its growing force. Because each item might well be the last, any such list is in performance structured toward a climax based upon an ascending energy of expectation. But for the reader no such structure will be evident, because he can see no ascending or innate significance in the items themselves, and indeed there is none. The emptiness of the speech for a reader is a measure of its fullness for a listener. (141)[18]

The question "What does the play do?" will thus be translated into a series of much more specific questions about what each element of a playtext does, and does to two different audiences.

The comments of McGuire, States, and Taylor, as well as the title of this journal, all remind us that the attempt to frame a new poetics of drama has been shaped largely as a debate between two sides who, whatever their differences, have shared the essentialist premise that either the words or the performance were the "real" play, so that the other manifestation was dismissed as either a "mere blueprint" or a "mere spectacle." Recent work, however, has begun to replace this either/or attitude with a both/and starting point. Another vision of what might happen if we called a halt to this polarized debate has been provided by Barbara Hodgdon's introduction of the term *performance text*:

> Quite obviously, my label seeks textual authority for theatrical representation. Here, what is first of all essential is to encounter the conceptual illusion behind the term "text." The very word appears inviolate, enclosed--an "x" or "nexus" fenced in by two powerful "t"s: appropriating the term and coupling it with "performance" intentionally threatens both the notion of an established, authoritative written text of a Shakespearean play and the notion that those written words represent the only form in which a play

> can possess or participate in textuality. An apparent oxymoron, "performance text" freely acknowledges the perceived incompatibility between the (infinitely) flexible substate(s) of a Shakespearean play and the (relative) fixity of the term "text." Certainly our contemporary critical climate recognizes and gives value to the multiple, "imperfect" states of many Renaissance texts, challenges the notion of an inviolate canon, and generates renewed attention for the collaborative atmosphere which gave rise to theatrical representations. Why, then, not give equally privileged attention to radically imperfect and radically variable performance texts? Currently, our forms of discourse acknowledge such variability in so-called stage-centered reading, which attempts to create the equivalent of a performance text in rehearsal by generating multiple options for representation. Yet the result is often just as empty and static as the original "ideal" architecture, uninhabited by live bodies. If, however, we permit specific theatrical representations to participate in and own the privileges accruing to textuality, to read what we see and hear as a *text*, such a project would generate a more precise, more historically--and culturally--engaged model of performance criticism.[19]

The purpose of this shift seems at least two-fold. First of all, Hodgdon wants us to pay much greater attention to performances in their own right:

> Can we approach [a performance] as we do Shakespeare's playtext, with textual skills similar to those of a highly informed, theoretically alert reader? What questions can we ask of it? How does this new text invite us to reformulate the questions we could ask of Shakespeare's text? (4-5)

Like those developing models of performance analysis, Hodgdon asks us to read the performance descriptively, for what it is trying to communicate before doing what the literary part of the profession does, which is, mainly, judge the performance against the ideal performance that literary critics in general, and readers of Shakespeare in particular, carry in the mind's eye.

But Hodgdon obviously also suggests that if we do not privilege the text against the performance, then the performance can open our eyes to its own incarnate vision. Seeing the performance as a text will mean, especially, that we take it as a unity rather than disintegrating it to compare piece by piece against the written text, noting

how *this* element of the performance seems valid and *that* does not. The point will be to start by seeing the performance as a whole and to accord it the same sort of passionate and detailed attention that literary critics accord to the written word. We will thus, as Hodgdon argues, gain doubly, getting more from the performance itself and gaining new insight into the potentials of the text. We will discover how the older playtexts reshape our understanding of our present world even as our present productions reshape our understanding of the text.

If indeed we are developing a new paradigm for the study of drama as a whole, then this is also a time when it may be useful to step back, and to think in long-range terms about where we want to go and how we want to get there. If we accept Philip McGuire's new paradigm for example, what consequences follow for the logic or poetics of the study of drama? If we accept Milhous and Hume's suggestion that performance analysis will be our most rewarding procedure, what practices do we need to develop? If we follow States and Taylor in exploring the different phenomenologies of seeing and reading plays, what might be the best means for a concrete examination of the parallels and divergences in reader and spectator response? And if we follow Hodgdon, what will be the best means for recording not only the performance text but all the activities from which that performance text emerged? These seem to me questions that we can and should begin to discuss in detail, discovering what enterprises seem most possible and productive as we create a realm of performance analysis.

IV

I want to conclude by starting to look at the implications of these efforts to integrate theatrical and literary approaches to drama, both as visions and as concrete programs of action.

If I take the work of the critics I have been examining as presenting us with implicit visions of a possible future, then what I find most compelling is an image of a new unity that would encourage productive diversity. What they help me see is the connections and overlappings between the various activities performed by actors, directors, reviewers, and teachers. What appeals especially are the suggestions as to how we might begin forming new connections on a common ground of text and performance. And what becomes clearer are the possibilities for community among members of different disciplines that, in my view, could be one of the major rewards, as it will be one of the major challenges inherent in reshaping what we do and how we do it.

More concretely, at the level of practice, there are at least four

implications for us as theatrical and literary people in our own performances and in our work with students.

First, there are the implications for how we teach drama, which show us what will have to happen for the creation of a truly integrated drama criticism--namely that people in both literary and theatrical studies will have to have a fuller range of training. For people in literary studies, this would mean more training in acting and directing, particularly, I would think, in the sort of disciplined discovery processes that actors are taught to use in studying a playtext, developing a character, and exploring the potentials of a script with their fellow actors in the rehearsal process. We will also find ourselves taking on new roles--as Ken Davis and William Hutchings report in an article on "Playing a New Role: The English Professor as Dramaturg."[20] This role will demand both a new use of our knowledge and great tact if English professors are to be accepted in the rehearsal process, and it seems clear that building this sort of relationship will turn out to have complexities worth elucidating. And as Richard Hornby suggests, if we can play this role we will eventually build up a new body of criticism which will guide directors and actors, students, and readers generally as to what potentials exist in a script, how these potentials have and have not been realized in various productions, and what new productions might attempt.[21]

I am much more hesitant to suggest what changes might be useful for people in the theater, and in fact one function of this essay is to invite those working in the theater to propose changes they think would improve their ability to create effective productions. I would hope that as literary professors become better trained to read playtexts as scripts, they will be able to make their ability to discern patterns in a text more immediately accessible to theater teachers and practitioners. Perhaps the series on "Playing Shakespeare" conducted by John Barton and members of the Royal Shakespeare Company also shows us how much is to be done through having actors and directors explain their own forms of practical criticism in studying playtexts, and thus foreshadows some of the more integrated training that people in both areas may develop.

Second, these models obviously suggest changes in our own critical practice. Specifically, work such as that of Milhous and Hume invites us to conduct production analyses, and suggests that we develop the methods necessary to conduct performance analyses--especially as use of video-tape may help us develop means for speaking more precisely about the full range of action taking place on stage. The development of new and non-trivial ways of talking about performance will obviously be a collective effort, and I imagine it will be one of the richest and most rewarding areas to work in.

Third, there are implications for how we train students. English majors, to put it briefly, need to learn to read subtext as well as text, which means more work in performance, even if performance itself becomes a tool for further literary analysis. They should also be led through a more systematic practice of the wide variety of critical writing defined by Milhous and Hume. They will thus be better trained as students of drama, better trained for example, to act as dramaturgs. And theater students, in turn, should be able to find literature courses that are more directly useful to give them broader training in drama as well as theater--so that they can read the text more fully even as they develop their skill in articulating subtext.

Fourth, as Milhous and Hume suggest, a reconception of our critical practice should also lead to changes in scholarly publishing, such that more articles appear in a variety of journals that integrate the different kinds of criticism, putting more emphasis on the study of production concepts and actual productions, and what specific productions tell us about the potentials of a playscript as a theatrical score. And of course the next obvious suggestion is the creation of still another journal . . . but although when I read this passage I thought "Who would dare carry out such a suggestion?" it is evident that this journal was already preparing to address precisely these issues.

Alan Dessen ends his book by arguing that the problem is one of trust: "Despite the universal lip service, how many of us in the universities or the theatre *really* trust Shakespeare's knowhow and skills to the extent that we feel a responsibility to *dis*cover and *re*cover his techniques and meanings?"[22]

As we become better trained, we will develop a greater trust in drawing on both literary and theatrical approaches to playtexts, and in working with those trained in the area that is not our home base. If we are to move from a protective to an explorative paradigm--and I would argue that we can see how liberating this shift can be by looking at what has happened, for example, with the adoption of process approaches to teaching composition--then we will be moving towards seeing the teaching of drama as an act of discovery, undertaken with our students in the exploration of both the literary patterns and performance possibilities of the text. The explorative paradigm helps me as reader and spectator, as critic and teacher, as someone who does indeed want to see what can be learned from playing with the text as a script to guide my work in class, where my students engage in a collaborative effort to produce new interpretations of the plays we study, even as it guides those who transform drama into performance.

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Notes

1. Raymond Williams, *Drama in Performance* (London: Frederick Muller, Ltd., 1954) 11-12.

2. To take two examples that are near to hand, both Stephen Booth and Alan Dessen have argued for this shift. See Booth's "On the Value of *Hamlet*," which appeared in *Reinterpretations of Renaissance Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia UP, 1969) 138; and Dessen's introduction to *Renaissance Drama*, NS 12 (1981), Editorial Note, n.p.

3. Alan Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambrige: Cambridge UP, 1984) 161.

4. Judith Milhous and Rober Hume, *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays 1675-1707* (Carbondale, Il.: Southern Illinois UP, 1985) 3. All further citations from this text will be given parenthetically in my essay.

5. For purposes of argument, Milhous and Hume have overstated the contrast between literary and dramatic texts. The literary text does "stand on its own" but it is only "complete" when a reader reads it. Or to put it another way, Milhous and Hume are ignoring the whole dimension of the reader-text interaction, which parallels but is not identical with the spectator-performance interaction. (If no other difference existed, it would still be true that a spectator is immediately influenced by her fellow spectators in a way that readers do not influence each other.)

6. The selectivity of a critic dealing with a novel has been emphasized, for example, by Frank Kermode, in *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983) 68.

7. Bernard Beckerman, "The Flowers of Fancy, the Jerks of Invention, or, Directorial Approaches to Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare 1971: Proceedings of the World Shakespeare Congress, Vancouver, August 1971*, ed. Clifford Leech and J. M. R. Margeson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1972) 201-203.

8. Ralph Berry, *Changing Styles in Shakespeare* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981) 11.

9. For a concise statement of this point, see Harold Clurman's "In a Different Language," *Theatre Arts*, XXXIV (January) 1950, 18-20.

10. George Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, ed. W. B. Carnochan (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1966) 53.

11. Bruce Edwin Brandt, *Christopher Marlowe and the Metaphysical Problem Play*. Salzburg Studies in English Literature. (Salzburg, Austria: Institut fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1985) 75-76.

12. Stage directions do not indicate anything more than "take them away"; and a strong inferential argument is that, given the emphasis on spectacle in this play, any further spectacular effect such as their on-stage execution or the re-appearance of corpses would surely have been noted. Nonetheless, a director might well feel free to add such a spectacle here.

13. Cary Mazur, "Shakespeare, the Reviewer, and the Theatre Historian," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36, No. 5 (Special Issue) 650-651.

14. Philip C. Mcquire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) xv. Further citations are given in parentheses in my text.

15. The seeming clarity of this assertion is not meant to hide a number of interesting questions about how we know it is communicated, and to whom it is communicated, or how we might decide, if we could do such research, whose "answers" might or might not count, and so. Gary Taylor, in the book cited in note 17 below, presents some interesting arguments about these issues.

16. Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 130.

17. Gary Taylor, *To Analyze Delight: A Hedonist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1985) 27-28.

18. See also Taylor's excellent analysis of how most of the effects of Catherine's language lesson in Henry V will occur only in the theater, and be largely unavailable for a reader (125).

19. Barbara Hodgdon, "Body Play / Head Play / Performance Work," unpublished paper delivered at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference, Seattle, Washington, Saturday, April 11, 1987. I am quoting from a copy of the talk sent to me by Professor Hodgdon. I would also like to acknowledge how much conversations with Professor Hodgdon (Drake University) and with Professor Miriam Gilbert (University of Iowa) have shaped my thinking in this paper.

20. Ken Davis and William Hutchings, "Playing a New Role: The English Professor as Dramaturg," in *College English*, 46 (October, 1984) 560-69.

21. Richard Hornby, *Script into Performance: A Structuralist View of Play Production* (Austin: University of Texas, 1977) 199. Hornby also calls for new kinds of criticism, with suggestions parallel to those of Milhous and Hume:

> But there is still a need for two other kinds of critical essays: first, those employing the method, suggested in passing by Richard Schechner, by which the critic learns about a script from directing it himself, or from being closely involved with a production as *Dramaturg*, and reports his findings for the use of future producers of the script; and, a second, the kind of essay, more hypothetical, that deals with a script in terms of its performance potential, not spelling out *how* it must be performed, but rather channeling the imagination of theatre practitioners, by pointing out patterns that they "might otherwise have missed."

22. Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters 163.*