

## *Reading Metatheatre*

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Is it possible to *read* metatheatre? If so, to what extent was metatheatre part of the playreading experience in early modern England? Focusing on “paratexts” to a range of plays printed in England in the early seventeenth century, from printed character lists to manuscript marginalia, this article investigates implied and actual readers’ responses to the self-reflexive qualities of playbooks, whether or not those qualities are intentional. In doing so, it argues that early modern printed playbooks prompted “performative” reading practices through which readers actively reflected on the relationship between the real- and play-worlds, and enacted their own roles in the production of metatheatre. While Stephen Purcell proposes in this special issue that metatheatre is a “game ... that can be played only in [theatrical] performance” (XXX), I contend that certain forms of metatheatre are accessible through—and sometimes even dependent on—the inter-play between different agents of meaning-making (dramatists, stationers and readers) on the “paper stage” of the printed book. Such an approach offers a new methodological framework and uncovers a neglected body of evidence for the analysis of metatheatre in early modern drama, including character and errata lists, printing errors in Shakespeare’s First Folio, and readers’ marks. Metatheatre, I suggest, needs to be re-assessed from the perspective of book history as well as theater history, and especially intersections between the two. Early modern metatheatre was largely experienced through the conspicuous mixing of media, manifestations of the theatricality of the book and the bookishness of theater.

### **Playreading as performance: Metatheatre, paratexts and paper stages**

For some scholars, self-reflexive playreading might fall into the domain of “metadrama” rather than “metatheatre”. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait define metadrama as “a play which comments on the conventions of its genre”, and metatheatre as “a performance calling attention to the presentational aspects of theatre and its conventions in the moment of its transpiring” (14-15).<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to use the word “metatheatre”, however, because I want to challenge the tendency to characterize playreading in opposition to performance and theatricality.<sup>2</sup> Although playgoing and playreading were different activities in many respects, recent scholarship has started to explore intersections between reading and performance, considering “how and to what effect reading the ‘book’ of the play intersected with theatrical culture” (Straznicky 8). While Tiffany Stern has shown that “a play at a playhouse was continually thought of as having bookish qualities” (“Watching as Reading,” 154), other scholars have explored ways in which printed playbooks were designed to simulate or facilitate theatrical experiences for readers. Holger Syme, for example, suggests print could “construct an alternative mode of theatricality” (144). He argues that Ben Jonson and John Marston, collaborating with printers and publishers, “used the page’s specific signifying systems to recreate a set of effects characteristic of the stage; or, to put it more simply, ... they found a way of making the book a theater” (144).<sup>3</sup> Printed forms of drama, it is increasingly being recognized, should not be seen as non-theatrical and non-performative, but rather as offering readers new ways of engaging with performance and theatrical culture.

Early modern paratextual reflections on, and instructions for, playreading often encouraged this way of thinking about printed drama. The prefatory materials to a range of printed books, including playbooks, suggested that reading was akin to

watching—or even participating in—a theatrical performance. The printed page was often framed as an alternative performance space, what Thomas Nashe called a “paper stage” in his preface to Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1591; A3r). In a prefatory poem to Shakespeare’s posthumous First Folio, James Mabbe dramatizes the author’s grand entrance into the book trade, exploiting the fact that a number of readers would have been former spectators, and even seen Shakespeare perform in his own plays: “Wee thought thee dead, but this thy printed worth, / Tels thy Spectators, that thou went’st but forth / To enter with applause” ([<sup>r</sup>B]1r). “Hee may become an Actor that but Reades”, writes John Ford in his contribution to the commendatory verses that preface the quarto of Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (1629; A4r), showing readers could be compared to performers as well as audience members.<sup>4</sup> If early modern drama used strategies such as the *theatrum mundi* metaphor to make audience members recognize their own identities and activities as performative, then printed playbooks had the capacity to do the same to readers of drama, engendering self-consciousness about their roles in virtual worlds that were constructed by their material and imaginative interactions with the text. The “paper stage”, as such, was a performance space constituted by not only the materiality of the text,<sup>5</sup> but also readers’ engagement with the text.

What does this mean for our understanding of “metatheatre” and “metatheatricality”? For the purposes of this article, I define metatheatricality as a quality of drama which—when activated by performance—blurs or disrupts the perceptual boundary between the play-world and the real-world.<sup>6</sup> I am arguing that the performance required for the activation of metatheatre can be located in readers’ self-reflexive interactions with not just the language and content of printed playbooks but also their visual, material and typographical aspects, whether designed by

playwrights, stationers or scribes, or the product of chance or error.<sup>7</sup> Early modern readers could engage with or trigger metatheatrical elements of playbooks through performative acts of interpretation and annotation. In doing so, readers—like audiences—had the opportunity to contemplate the nature of the conceptual boundary or threshold between the play-world and the real-world. But for readers, that threshold depended on the relationship between the world-of-the-text and the world-beyond-the-text. That is to say, the threshold blurred or disrupted by “reading metatheatre” was that between the fictive world imagined in response to the playtext, and the actual world in which the playtext was produced and existed as a stubbornly material object. This idea is central to my understanding of metatheatricality in terms of paratextual features of printed playbooks.

In early modern drama studies, the term “paratexts” is now generally applied to any text, image or mark that frames or supplements the main text. These include preliminary and terminal materials such as title-pages, dedications, addresses to readers, character lists and errata notices, “theatrical paratexts” such as inductions, choruses, prologues and epilogues, and marginal devices such as running titles, act and scene divisions, speech prefixes and stage directions.<sup>8</sup> Readers also produced “paratexts” themselves in the form of manuscript marginalia. Early modern paratext studies have been influenced by French theorist Gérard Genette’s coinage and definition of paratext as a kind of “threshold ... that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back”, and a “transitional zone between text and beyond-text” (1-2, 407). While scholars have illustrated the appropriateness of Genette’s threshold metaphor to ways in which early modern paratexts constructed notions of textual liminality (e.g. Sherman, “On the Threshold”; Bruster and Weimann), there has been understandable resistance to the suggestion that paratexts

are somehow marginal to and detachable from the texts of which they are part.<sup>9</sup>

Contesting the applicability of “paratext” to early modern printed drama, Sonia Massai suggests a kinship between “metadrama” and the “metatextual” qualities of dramatic paratexts:

As much as early modern drama is intrinsically metadramatic, early modern printed playbooks are self-consciously meta- rather than para-textual, meta- meaning both “next to, by the side of, beside” *and* “denoting change and transformation” (*OED*), as in “metamorphosis”. The presence of what we improperly call paratext in early modern playbooks is genuinely and thoroughly transformative. Detaching metatextual features from early modern playbooks is as foolish as attempting to draw a distinction between Hamlet’s soliloquies and his lesson to the actors, between drama and metadrama. (“Shakespeare,” 3-4)

Massai’s striking idea that we should think of paratext and text as we do metadrama and drama urges further investigation into what dramatic paratexts can tell us about self-consciousness in drama. While I will continue—as Massai does—to use the term “paratext” to refer to the features of printed playbooks listed above, I want to pursue the “meta-” quality of dramatic paratexts and especially their relevance to metatheatre, which—like paratexts themselves—can be said to “frame” or “present” a play at the same time that it inhabits and transforms it.<sup>10</sup>

Paratexts are crucial to the study of early modern metatheatricality and metatextuality because they have a framing function that is often self-reflexive in nature: theatrical paratexts such as prologues address the audience directly, referencing the methods and materials of theatrical representation, and preliminaries

like prefaces to readers—normally printed independently and added last—were often “highly self-reflexive, commenting on the quality of printing contained in the book they accompany, or on the processes and accidents of production” (Smith and Wilson, 3). If metatheatre frames the play, gesturing to its agents and modes of production, dramatic paratexts do the same for the playtext. Yet, we can push this further. In addition to self-reflexive framing, metatheatricality and paratextuality are bound by the concepts of the threshold, space and transformation. Metatheatrical and paratextual features both forge liminal or dual spaces, situating audiences and readers between worlds, or forcing them to inhabit two worlds at the same time. While metatheatricality explores the relationship between the play-world and the real-world, paratextuality is concerned with the world-of-the-text and the world-beyond-the-text.

In their edition of *Paratexts in English Printed Drama to 1642*, Thomas L. Berger and Sonia Massai usefully caution that Genette’s concept of the paratext as a threshold is “only helpful so far as it is understood as a fluid textual space that often merges with the fictive world of the play” (1:xv). If so, the capacity of dramatic paratexts to merge or confuse actual and fictive worlds is comparable to a function of metatheatre, which disrupts the play-world/real-world perceptual boundary, or even—as Jenn Stephenson has argued—triggers awareness of the ontological “duality” of theatrical speech, objects, bodies and space as both actual and fictional (119). And like dramatic paratexts, which, as Massai suggests (“Shakespeare,” 4), transform the texts and fictive worlds of which they are part, metatheatre can be conceptualized in relation to transformation: it both transforms audiences’ and readers’ perception of the play, and highlights the processes by which theater transforms actual spaces, bodies and props into fictional worlds, persons and objects.

With the close relationship between metatheatricality and paratextuality in mind, I now turn to examples of metatheatrical paratexts in early modern printed playbooks. These demonstrate ways in which metatheatricality could be read in the period, suggesting points of contact between theatricality and bookishness that had the potential to prompt self-reflexive contemplation of the relationship between the play-world and the real-world.

### **Bookish metatheatricality: Character lists and theatrical errata**

While book historians and bibliographers rarely discuss metatheatricality, playbooks offered early readers opportunities for theatrical self-reflexivity that were exclusive to the medium of print. Prefatory materials or “printed paratexts” to playbooks such as dedications, prefaces and errata lists—despite their common distinction from “theatrical paratexts”—were often concerned with the performative nature of presenting and reading plays in print, and promoted self-conscious engagement with the playtext.<sup>11</sup>

Printed character lists, Jitka Štollová has recently observed, could “help readers orientate themselves within the new fictional space” and even “breach the boundaries between play-text and paratext” (140, 141). They had the potential to thrust readers into the world of the play before they arrived at the “main text”, and to provoke contemplation about the artificial construction of theatrical persons, who in playbooks drew life not from actors but rather the imaginative performances of readers. Indeed, some early readers added their own manuscript character lists, naming, ordering and describing *dramatis personae* based on their experience of the play.<sup>12</sup> Tamara Atkin and Emma Smith’s work on the form and function of character lists printed from 1515-1642 has opened a range of possibilities for further research.

In particular, the idea that character lists illustrate “the cultural interplay between reading and playgoing as registered by early modern play-books” (670) suggests that these lists contributed to the theatricality or even metatheatricality of printed paratexts. Philip Massinger’s tragedy *The Roman Actor* (1629; first performed 1626) is one of a several playbooks in the 1620s and 1630s that includes a list of professional actors alongside a list of characters.<sup>13</sup> “The persons presented” are listed next to “The principall Actors”, together forming two columns divided by a vertical line (A1v; Figure 1).

<PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

**Figure 1:** Corresponding character and actor lists on the verso of the title-page to Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (London, 1629), A1v. © The British Library Board 644.e.74. Image produced by ProQuest as part of *Early English Books Online*. [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com). Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.



Atkin and Smith note that “the play’s own insistent metatheatricality” challenges the columns’ “distinction” between characters and actors (659). On closer inspection, what divides the columns is not a continuous line but a series of unconnected vertical dashes varying in thickness. The broken line visualizes the metatheatrical operations of a play that relentlessly ruptures the perceptual boundary between drama and reality, between “actors” that perform (players) and “actors” that participate in the play’s action (characters).<sup>14</sup> *The Roman Actor* features three plays-within-a-play and opens with a discussion between Paris and other Roman actors about the plight of theater in an oppressive political climate. Performed by famous King’s Men actors, this first scene “must to many in the audience at Blackfriars have thrillingly blurred the boundaries between life and art” (White, 102).

For readers, however, entry into this self-reflexive play-world would have been curiously delayed, or staggered, by the paratextual architecture of the playbook’s opening leaves. Interposed between the character and actor lists and the play’s first scene is a dedication by Massinger (A2r-v) and a series of commendatory verses (A3r-A4v). Unsurprisingly, the prefatory poems are concerned with acting and theater, but they also address the performativity of play-writing and reading: before Massinger’s tragedy the stories of Domitian, his wife and Paris “meerly were related / Without a Soule,” the dramatist John Ford concludes,

Vntill thy abler Pen

Spoke them, and made them speake, nay Act agen

In such a height, that Heere to know their Deeds

Hee may become an Actor that but Reades (A4r).

The final prefatory poem, which faces the first page of the play, is by Joseph Taylor, successor to Richard Burbage as lead actor of the King's Men, and the man identified by the actor list as having "presented" Paris, the titular "Roman Actor". On one page (A4v), Taylor performs his paratextual role of "Vshering this Worke" as he commends Massinger's tragedy to a world suspicious of new plays; on the opposite page (B1r), the character Taylor played ("*Paris the Tragaedian*") speaks of an "vnpeopl'd" and "forsaken" theater. Looking across the gutter of the book, the reader enters the play-world of *The Roman Tragedy*, but—like the broken line dividing the character and actor lists—the boundaries between text and paratext, and play-world and real-world, are far from secure.

Another paratextual list sometimes included in printed playbooks was the errata list, which similarly had the potential to inspire self-consciousness in readers about the relationship between the play-world, the playtext and what Julie Stone Peters calls the "theatre of the book". Far less common than character lists, errata lists would seem to be the most bookish, non-theatrical of dramatic paratexts. Yet by encouraging the reader to recognize the materiality of the playtext, and even to participate in its construction through correction, errata lists and textual errors more generally could prompt reflection on the bookish matter behind a fictional play-world, and the way in which that play-world was staged by a real-world object produced by fallible humans. Placed before or after the play, errata lists were sometimes deployed to frame and even nuance the play-world generated by the text, and solicited self-reflexive approaches. Readers of the tiny duodecimo playbook *Pedantius* (1631; first performed 1581), a Latin satirical comedy by Edward Forsett, were themselves given the opportunity to play the pedant at the end of the play, as the verso of the final leaf

features “Erratula corrigenda” (errors for correction), and instructions that play upon the names and characteristics of several of the comedy’s *dramatis personae* (H12v).

A short address to the reader just before the first page of Thomas Dekker’s satirical comedy *Satiromastix* (1602; first performed 1601) presents textual errata as dramatic characters that will feature in the theatrical experience offered by the playtext:

IN steed of the Trumpets sounding thrice, before the Play begin: it shall not be amisse (for him that will read) first to beholde this short Comedy of Errors, and where the greatest enter, to giue them in stead of a hisse, a gentle correction. (“*Ad Lectorem*,” A4v)

This introduction to a list of errors, probably by Dekker or the publisher Edward White, sets up a parallel between the play’s theatrical characters (performed by St Paul’s Boys and the Chamberlain’s Men) and the typographical characters that bring them to life on the paper stage of the printed playbook.<sup>15</sup> The listed errata offer an amusing induction to the satirical comedy, but their bathetic entry during the play is also anticipated, when they will have the potential to exert theatrical agency. If the errata list substitutes for the sounding of “Trumpets” that signaled the beginning of a play in theaters, then the errors’ appearances in the playtext are metatheatrical notes of discord that gesture back to the text’s framing as a performance.<sup>16</sup> In correcting these theatricalized errata, the reader endorses the paratextual metaphor, setting his or her hand to the book’s performance like the applauding audience at the end of the play, who are asked by Captain Tucca in the epilogue to “set your hands and Seales to this” (M2v-M3r). Tucca, of course, is in part a fictional spokesperson for Dekker in the War of the Theatres, and principal scourge of errors set forth by Horace/Jonson in *Poetaster* (1602; first performed 1601). The readers’ “gentle correction” of the

playtext assists Dekker's not-so-gentle correction of Jonson; appropriately, during Horace's "untrussing" in the final scene the reader is asked to correct Crispinus's condemnation of Horace's "stinging insolence" to "stinking insolence" (L3r). The errata list is a metatheatrical paratext which solicits the reader's self-conscious participation in a theatrical event, merging the play-world of *Satiromastix* with the physical playtext.

### **"BOte-swaine": Beginning the First Folio's *Tempest*, copy Folger 24**

Of course, playbooks lacking errata lists still contained errors. And by their very nature, textual faults always had metatheatrical potential. Like an error in performance—a broken prop, a "dried up" actor—errata could breach the dramatic illusion, drawing attention to the play-world's artificial nature as a material and linguistic construct dependent on the imaginative agency of those experiencing the play. I want to focus on a single error in a copy of Shakespeare's First Folio of 1623, a typographical slip which invites readers to play upon the thresholds between text and paratext, between drama and reality, and between theatrical illusion and the materiality of the text.

The First Folio does not have an errata list, but its errors have been extensively catalogued and analyzed.<sup>17</sup> We need look no further than the first letter of the first word of dialogue in the Folio's first play for an example of a printing error. Textual variants indicate that the first page of the "text proper", presenting the storm scene that starts *The Tempest*, received special treatment and was corrected several times (Hinman, xxiv, 910). In copy Folger 24, the page is in a wholly uncorrected state and contains multiple errors. Most notably, the opening word of dialogue, "BOte-swaine",

begins with an upside-down “B”, apparently caused by the accidental inversion of an ornament by the man now known, funnily enough, as “Compositor B” (Figure 2).

<PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

**Figure 2:** Shakespeare, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London, 1623), A1r. Folger Shakespeare Library Call #: STC 22273 Fo.1 no.24. First Folio, Folger 24, A1r. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The error’s prominence calls attention to the text’s imperfection, but it also offers a powerful aesthetic effect. Following a stage direction signaling “*A tempestuous noise of Thunder and Lightning*”, this capsized “B” represents the chaos and disorientation of a shipwreck on the printed page. It is often discussed how the “direfull spectacle” (A1v) of the shipwreck, as Prospero later calls it, might have been staged at the Blackfriars and the Globe through a series of impressive theatrical effects (Gurr), but

here we have an example of a destabilizing typographical effect which forces the reader to share—if only for a moment—the characters’ sense of confusion.

What makes this mis-set “B”, which seems to swirl on the threshold of the First Folio’s first play-world, a “metatheatrical” error? How might it have contributed to a reader’s self-consciousness at the beginning of a play that insistently connects bookishness and theatrical illusion? The metatheatricality of the opening storm in *The Tempest* has been widely discussed,<sup>18</sup> and in particular the revelation at the beginning of the second scene that it has been staged by Prospero’s bookish “Art” is often interpreted as a metatheatrical strategy which identifies Prospero’s magic with “illusion created through special effects” (Crane, 265). In the First Folio, this revelation begins on the same page: “If by your Art (my dearest father)”, pleads Miranda, “you haue / Put the wild waters in this Rore; alay them” (A1r). For readers of Folger 24, the error that begins the play’s dialogue offers a parallel moment of revelation: even in its inception, the play-world is exposed as an illusion staged by the materiality of the text. The upturned ornament conspicuously announces the volume to be the mediated product of fallible human agents practicing the collaborative art of playbook-making. So too are the play-worlds staged in the theater of the mind of the Folio’s reader.

That the inverted part-ornament, part-dialogue “B” can be seen as either paratext or text contributes to its metatheatricality. It is difficult to say when the “text proper” of the Folio begins (with the play’s title? its first act and scene heading? its first stage direction, speech prefix or word of dialogue?), but the upside-down “B” is positioned close to—if not on—the edge of the Folio’s first fictive world, where paratext becomes text.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not *The Tempest*’s preoccupation with the fetishization of books and their facilitation of theatrical effects explains its position as

the first play in the Folio (Hooks, 187-89), the textual error occurs during the transition between the worlds of “Shakespeare’s book” and of “Prospero’s book”, between the paratextual space in which the Folio’s “printed worth” is theatricalized, and the fictional space that models the powers of what Francis X. Connor calls a “theatrical book” (228).<sup>20</sup> The error can be read as metatheatrical not only because it prompts contemplation of the relationship between the play-world, theatrical illusion and the materiality of the text, but also because it does so on what Genette might call “the threshold of the threshold” (15), the meeting point between text and paratext. Disoriented by error at the moment of induction to the Folio’s first play, the reader is urged to consider the inseparability of *The Tempest*’s play-world, controlled by Prospero’s bookish theatricality, and the Folio as a real-world book, a paper stage shaped by the material drama of the printing house.

Reading a single error in a single copy of the First Folio as metatheatrical may be seen as over-interpretation. The correction of the initial ornament in the Folio’s *Tempest* is generally viewed as “cosmetic” (Higgins, 40). While scholars have started to recognize that “error has been insufficiently treated discursively as a theoretical and practical aspect of textual transmission” (Jowett, “Shakespeare,” xlix), I think we also need to investigate the literary and theatrical value of error as something with the capacity to shape meanings and experiences for playgoers and readers.<sup>21</sup> Here I share Jonathan Walker’s concern that, “as literary critics, we frequently continue to depend upon or invest in at least a fiction of intentionality” (232). Metatheatre in particular has been haunted by the specter of authorial intention because questions of theatrical self-reflexivity so often lead to discussions of dramatists’ self-consciousness about their own artistry (see Introduction to this special issue), and the critical history of *The Tempest* is a case in point. However, by analyzing metatheatrical elements of drama

created by non-authorial agents, whether in performance (actors, prompters, audiences) or in print (stationers, scribes, readers), and even by accidents of production, it is possible to recognize metatheatre as the revelation of a play-world to be a fictive space shaped by multiple human and non-human forces in the real-world.

In print, metatheatre often depended on readers' performative ability to shape that fictive space, not only in the theater of the mind, but also with their hands as they manipulated and marked the printed page. In what remains of this article, I turn to these performing hands, focusing on examples of "metatheatrical marks" in the First Folio. Thus while in this article I have been primarily concerned with *implied* readers, I want to finish with examples of interventions by *actual* readers.

### **Metatheatrical marks: Manuscript paratexts and readers' performing hands**

Scholars have started to catalogue and analyze early modern readers' markings (or "manuscript paratexts") in early modern printed playbooks.<sup>22</sup> These included ownership inscriptions; corrections and emendations; notations of alternative words and phrases; additions and annotations of speech prefixes and stage directions; and signs marking out passages to be copied into commonplace books. Tracing general patterns of reading practices is notoriously difficult in marginalia studies, but arguments for trends have emerged. Writing about annotations in Shakespeare's quarto playbooks, Massai contends they were "increasingly read as literary works" rather than theatrical scripts ("Early Readers," 151). By contrast, there are also markings in playbooks which indicate "some readers were more active in constituting the play as imaginary theatre than the text immediately allowed" (Jowett, "For Many," 310). While I cannot hope to determine whether early readers were more literary- or theatrical-minded, here I want to analyze examples of annotations which



suggest that early modern readers participated in the production of metatheatre through self-conscious, performative and transformative marking of their playbooks.

Certain marks in playbooks suggest early readers were alert to the metatheatrical qualities of drama, especially moments when characters speak directly to the audience and/or themselves. Investigating the typographical representation of asides in printed playbooks, Claire Bourne has shown that early readers sometimes noted in the margin that certain lines of dialogue are spoken “aside”.<sup>23</sup> Such marks contribute to the playbooks’ textual differentiation between plains of communication within and beyond the world of the play. The extensive annotations in a copy of Shakespeare’s First Folio now held at Meisei University in Tokyo, made by a reader based in Scotland in the 1620s or 1630s, indicate interest in moments in the plays that present and invite reflection on acting and theater, the audience’s imaginative capacities as co-creators, and the theatricality of life.<sup>24</sup>

Responding enthusiastically to Jacques’s “All the world’s a stage” speech (R1v), the reader writes at the top of the page that “The world is the stage of mens changeable fortunes”, and notes in the margin the seven ages or “parts” of man (separated by horizontal lines), finishing with the “Miserie of / the last of / our age & / life” (Yamada, 61-63). The use of “our” suggests recognition that the reader too has a part to play in “this strange euentfull history”, and the notes contribute to a paratextual framework that endorses Jacques’s analogy: the Folio is designed to resurrect Shakespeare from what Hugh Holland calls “Deaths publique tyring-house” (πA5r). Elsewhere the same reader takes particular interest in Hamlet’s reflections on acting, noting above the soliloquy in which he wonders at the First Player’s uncanny ability to “force his soule ... to his whole conceit” (Oo4v) an observation of the “strange promptitude in plaiers to act euerie thing to the life” (Yamada, 237). The

noun “promptitude”, meaning “readiness of action” (*OED* n. 1), may bear the influence of Hamlet’s lament below that he *cannot act* despite being “Prompted to my Reuenge by Heauen, and Hell”, helping to forge a parallel between actors’ and revengers’ responsiveness to prompts or cues. Perhaps most significantly, this reader tries to capture what the Prologue to *Henry V* (h1r) is asking of the audience: “The auditours Imagination must supplie the strangenesse of Incredible / representations of the stage” (Yamada 125; see Figure 3).

<PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

**Figure 3:** Annotations on the first page of *Henry V* in Shakespeare’s First Folio, copy Mesei 1 (shelf mark MR 774), h1r. Reproduced by permission of Meisei University.

This note is positioned unusually around the paratext's separate heading, "Enter Prologue", instead of at the top of the page with other annotations on the first scene of the play. Thus the reader, alienated from the theatrical space of "*this Woodden O*", uses the typographically distinct space of the italicized and boxed Prologue to think about the creation of the play-world. Although a reader rather than an "auditour", the extensive annotations that reframe and reshape this copy of the Folio suggest the imaginative presence of someone highly aware of their own capacity to "supplie the strangenesse of Incredible / representations".

In her recent work on the First Folio, Emma Smith has surveyed early readers' annotations, tracing patterns but also demonstrating important variations, even between marks made by the same individuals. A significant variation is that "attention to the fictive world of the plays is accompanied by marks that attest to the more pressing concerns of the world of the readers" (138-39). One such concern was the selection of passages for commonplacing, the recording of poetic passages, pithy phrases and *sententiae* for re-use in social contexts to demonstrate wit and wisdom. Nevertheless, sometimes the readerly act of marking out language for extraction seems to cause the world of the play and the world of the reader to bleed into one another. Smith, for example, notes the use of "manicules"—drawn pointing hands—in the Royal Shakespeare Company's copy of the Folio (Rasmussen and West, no. 39) to show enthusiasm for Marcus' highly rhetorical speech in *Titus Andronicus* upon discovering the raped and mutilated Lavinia, who has had her hands cut off and her tongue cut out: "The reader's preferred mark here echoes, perhaps unconsciously, the play's own linguistic preoccupation with hands, both figurative and physical" (143). The irony of drawing disembodied hands in the margin to mark out a speech to a character whose hands have just been cut off may indeed be unintentional, as

manicules appear elsewhere in the same copy. Yet this is a play in which hands cannot be disassociated from the image of the dismembered body: “O handle not the theame, to talke of hands,” Titus scolds Marcus after an unwitting turn of phrase, “Least we remember still that we haue none” (dd4r). Intentionally or not, the commonplacing reader of this copy has handled the theme of hands, bodying forth on the page what is represented as missing on the stage. Indeed, if “[i]n Lavinia’s rape and mutilation is figured the deflowering of the chaste poetic word” (Calderwood 32), then the drawn hand that signals the handling and extraction of a poetic “flower” from the Folio’s text participates in the play’s metatheatricity.

In his history of the “manicule” (a term coined with reference to the Latin *manus*, “hand”), William H. Sherman characterizes reading in the early modern period as a “*manipulation*” or—more literally—“handling” of information consisting of “selecting, ordering, and applying resources gleaned from a wide variety of texts”. Sherman shows that the drawing of manicules, designed for “taking the text *in hand* and fitting it to the purposes *at hand*”, demonstrates the extent to which “reading was a self-consciously embodied process”, and that readers had “an acute awareness of the symbolic and instrumental power of the hand” (*Used Books*, 47-48). With this in mind, the hand of the reader that self-reflexively drew itself in the margins of printed playbooks was not unlike the hand of the actor, which—as Farah Karim-Cooper has recently shown—was “an expressive and versatile agent of performance in early modern playhouses”(6). In *Titus Andronicus*, where the performativity of hands (attached and detached) is central, it is significant that the theatrical spectacle of Lavinia’s body is supplemented by bookish intertextuality: not only does Marcus’ long speech on finding his handless and tongueless niece gesture towards the tale of Philomel in Shakespeare’s source-text, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but that book is also

later staged so that Lavinia, as she “quotes the leaues” (dd4r), can gesture to the story that parallels her plight. For Karim-Cooper, the performative act of *gesture* is what connects the actor’s hand and the manicule; by using *Metamorphoses* to make herself understood, Lavinia becomes “the manicule, pointing towards the text that can reveal the truth of her tragedy” (232). This interpretation is even more compelling in light of the manicules that populate the margins of the RSC’s copy of the Folio, and those found in early modern playbooks more generally, which encourage us to recognize playreading as self-conscious, embodied and performative. On the paper stage, readers’ hands could function metatheatrically as well as metatextually.

## **Conclusion**

Metatheatre in early modern drama is often understood as a quality or effect experienced by audiences in theatrical performance. However, early readers could also engage with and even contribute to metatheatricity on the paper stage of printed playbooks. By focusing on metatheatrical paratexts, this article has analyzed examples of “reading metatheatre” which indicate that readers’ perception of the relationship between the play-world and the real-world would have been strongly influenced by elements of playbooks that inspired self-consciousness about the relationship between the world of the playtext and the world in which that playtext was created. I have offered just one way of thinking about metatheatre’s readerly accessibility or production, and the field of metatheatre and early modern drama has much more to gain from book history and textual studies. The forms and functions of metatheatre in the period can be further illuminated by addressing bookish concerns such as paratext, metatext, intertext and the book-within-the-book. While Callan Davies’s exploration of “matter-theatre” in this special issue demonstrates the

advantages of investigating metatheatre in relation to rhetorical “matter” and the materiality of the stage, we should also start thinking about metatheatre as something conditioned or even produced by the materiality of the text.

There is an emerging recognition that early modern readers of printed playbooks were “co-creators of the literary dramatic text” (Clegg 35), but beyond this we need to accept that readers were capable of the kind of self-reflexive, embodied and performative interactions with drama which have been attributed to early modern audiences.<sup>25</sup> If, as I have argued, readers were in fact self-conscious “co-performers” on the paper stage of the printed playbook, then metatheatre was integral to their interpretive and material practices as agents of meaning-making. For early modern readers, drama may have been at its most metatheatrical when it was at its most bookish. By recognizing that metatheatre was something that could be read in early modern England, it is possible to challenge the arbitrary opposition between seeing a play and reading a play in the period, which continues to divide theater history and book history in early modern drama studies.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Rochester uses “‘metatheatre’ for self-consciously *theatrical* or performance references, and ‘metadrama’ for self-conscious references to other playtexts” (11). Also see Pellegrini, who defines metadrama as “reflexivity embedded in a script’s structure by the playwright” rather than “superimposed in production by the director or designer” (388).

<sup>2</sup> Kastan, for example, identifies the printed play as “a *non-theatrical* text”, claiming its conventions “defer or, even better, deny performance altogether” (8). Also see Orgel, who argues that “[i]f the play is a book, it’s not a play” (23).

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<sup>3</sup> In *Theatre of the Book, 1480-1880*, Julie Stone Peters shows that the relationship between theater and print in the early modern period was strongly inflected by the rhetorical and visual framing of printed texts as theatrical, as well as by metaphors of “the performing book” and “the textuality of performance” (109). Also see Claire Bourne, *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England* (forthcoming), which investigates how “printers, publishers and playwrights seized on the capacity of print to enable readerly access to the extra-lexical features and effects of theatrical performance”. Thank you to Claire Bourne for allowing me to read and cite her work in advance of publication.

<sup>4</sup> Peters discusses further examples that show “the dramatic book could be figured as theatrically performing” (111).

<sup>5</sup> See de Grazia and Stallybrass on the “materiality of the text”.

<sup>6</sup> This definition does not subscribe to “the traditional boundary model where a unidirectionally-transparent ‘fourth wall’ separates the world of the characters from that of the audience” (Stephenson, 118). The highly permeable boundary or threshold between the play-world and the real-world, as I see it, was perceptual rather than physical or architectural, and was constructed through notions of difference between fiction and reality that were necessary to the semiotics of early modern theater.

<sup>7</sup> In considering unintentional as well as intentional aspects of printed playbooks, I differ from Syme, who is concerned with conscious design and focuses on Jonson, Marston and Webster, playwrights “highly exceptional in their efforts ... to influence the appearance of their plays in print” (149n.25). Like Jonathan Walker, who similarly challenges preoccupations with intentionality, I am concerned with how playbooks’ “physical properties often activate dramatic meanings” (202). On the

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semiotic properties of typography and their importance to the reading experience, see McKenzie.

<sup>8</sup> For work on paratexts to early modern printed playbooks, see Berger and Massai; Stern, *Documents*; and Erne, 90-129. The term “theatrical paratexts” is used by Massai (“Shakespeare,” 6).

<sup>9</sup> On the applicability of Genette’s paratextual theory and terminology in early modern studies more generally, see Smith and Wilson.

<sup>10</sup> Genette purposefully uses the term “present” when stating that paratexts “surround and extend [the text], precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of the verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world” (1). Smith and Wilson identify the early modern paratext as “a space which both frames and inhabits the text”, invoking Jacques Derrida’s theoretical work on the parergon (7). The use of the language of “framing” in relation to metatheatre is strongly promoted by Hornby, especially when discussing the play-within-the-play (33-35).

<sup>11</sup> The remediation in print of “theatrical” paratexts traditionally associated with metatheatre, such as inductions, prologues and choruses, has already been discussed at length (e.g. Stern, *Documents*, 81-119). In focusing on what tend to be seen as “bookish” or “literary” paratexts, I am challenging the idea that they are—as Lukas Erne has described them—“extraneous to the theatrical experience” (123).

<sup>12</sup> See Atkin and Smith, 670-72; Massai, “Early Readers,” 150; Erne, 226-27; and Mayer, 110-11.

<sup>13</sup> Others include Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) and Lodowick Carlell’s *The Deserving Favorite* (1629). See Atkin and Smith, 659-60.



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<sup>14</sup> Beckerman discusses the use of the word “actor” to refer to both character and player in his review of printed character lists.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the errata list has the appearance of many character lists between the opening and closing of the commercial theatres, in that it is positioned opposite the first page of the play (following other paratexts), occupies its own page, and is framed above and below by decorative woodcut borders (see Atkin and Smith, 650, 652, 653). Earlier in the prefatory materials, a numbered list of “*Dramatis personae*” (A2r) follows the title-page, and sits above lines taken from a Latin epigram by Martial, “*Ad Detractorem*” (A2r).

<sup>16</sup> On the use of trumpets to mark the beginning of a performance, see Stern, “Before the Beginning”. Stern observes that trumpets were “quintessentially metatheatrical” because they connected “the play’s ‘factual’ opening, and its subsequent ‘fictional’ music” (367).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Higgins, 37-38, 39-40; Rasmussen and West; Hinman, xxx-xxxii; and Blayney, 14-16.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jones, 142-44.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, Folger 24 now lacks all of its preliminaries (Rasmussen and West, no. 82), so the first page of *The Tempest* is the first page of the whole volume.

<sup>20</sup> Connor argues that the preliminaries to the First Folio present “a capitalist extension of an argument Shakespeare seems to make in *The Tempest*, a play that defines a book’s value by its relationship to theatrical performance” (228).

<sup>21</sup> On the “interpretative potential” of printing errors, errata lists and corrections in early modern literature more generally, and their role in “the literary, aesthetic, or thematic effects of a book”, see chapter 3 of Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (forthcoming with Cambridge UP, 2018). Smyth compellingly reads

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errors as “moments when a book admits its own clumsy materiality, confesses its contingency, and hints at the labour that brought it into the world”. In the case of printed playbooks, I would suggest errors had the potential to function theatrically, exposing the materiality and labor of printing in the same way metatheatre could expose the materiality and labor of performance. I am grateful to Adam Smyth for allowing me to read and cite his chapter in advance of publication. On the related concept of the “accident” in early modern England, and its centrality to “Shakespeare’s highly reflexive theatrical practice” (4), see Witmore.

<sup>22</sup> See Massai, “Early Readers”; Jowett, “For Many”; Erne, 224-31; Smith, 121-82; and Mayer. Rasmussen and West’s *Descriptive Catalogue* records manuscript annotations in a wide range of copies of Shakespeare’s First Folio. In *Used Books*, Sherman explores how early modern English readers marked printed books of various genres.

<sup>23</sup> Claire Bourne, “Asides: Performance & Print,” paper presented at the Shakespeare Association of America, Atlanta, 8 April 2017. For details of Bourne’s forthcoming book, which shares concerns with her paper, see *op. cit.* 3.

<sup>24</sup> The annotations have been transcribed by Yamada, and are discussed at Smith, 129-38 and Mayer, 114-15.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Hobgood, who argues that “early modern spectators significantly shaped and altered theater through their emotional participation” (27).

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