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The Living Text: The Play, the Players, and Folk Tradition

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It would be reasonable to assert that on balance the influence of folklore studies on theatre historians has as yet been more confusing than beneficial. Above all, as it emerged earlier this century theatre history inherited from folkloristics both a fascination with origins and a belief that the traditions and customs studied by folklorists – i.e. 'folk drama' – derived from a primitive fertility ritual that contributed significantly to the emergence of drama-proper, be it in Greek Antiquity or in medieval Europe. Although some theatre historians have yet to notice, such 'survivalist' notions were abandoned by folklorists some time ago, and the 'evolutionary' notions on which they were based were abandoned by anthropologists even earlier.¹ This is all the more regrettable in that folklore studies have other assumptions, other insights, other approaches, which have proved more resilient, and which might well be deployed beneficially in the study of early theatre. The present essay will glance at one of them, the phenomenon of textual instability (and its concomitant textual multiplicity) which folklorists have been struggling with pretty well since the time (in the 1840's) when Motherwell persuaded Grundtvig (who persuaded Child) that 'reconstituting' the original of a folk ballad from the surviving, disparate variations was a hopeless or senseless task, and that we might as well publish, study and appreciate each variant individually.²

Medieval plays rarely, alas, survive in sufficient versions for their variety to be an issue: but the phenomenon is, notoriously, acute for the early popular stage.³ The reproduction of texts on the Elizabethan stage was, in relation to the script, very likely to have been inexact, mainly as a result of the sheer pressure on the memories of the actors,⁴ The Elizabethan companies, to judge from Henslowe's records, operated with a rolling repertoire in which in a given season a particular play was performed a limited number of times (say three to fifteen) at irregular intervals, and a considerable number of plays, in which a given player might have several parts, were performed

over any period. With Henslowe's help, we can assess the pressure on the memory of a player in the Admiral's men on 7 November, 1594.⁵ That day he would be performing in *The Knack* (presumably *The Knack to Know an Honest Man*), but would also need to have in his memory his parts in many other plays. Just how many is difficult to say, but as a minimum, certainly, those plays performed in the 1594-95 season both before and after 7 November; of which there are twelve. Presumably there were others from earlier in the season which he might not know would not be coming back, and yet others which would figure later, and for which he was in the process of learning his parts. This would certainly apply to *Cæsar and Pompey* which (taking the conventional interpretation of Henslowe's 'ne') had its first performance the next day, 8 November, and probably also to *Diocletian*, which entered the repertoire just over a week later, on 16 November.

We are accustomed to seek reassurance in the strength and capacity of the memory in oral cultures, which the Elizabethan still partly was, but it is by no means certain that the oral memory is inevitably geared to the verbatim reproduction of texts. Nor is it certain, given the ambiguous status of the playwright in this particular phase of theatre history, that the verbatim reproduction of his text, as opposed to keeping going and keeping the audience satisfied, was a decisive consideration with the players. As late as the mid-eighteenth century, David Garrick was still struggling to inculcate 'a proper respect to the audience and the author' in players 'who had fallen into an unlucky habit of imperfection in their parts, and being obliged to supply that defect by assuming a bold front, and forging matter of their own'.⁶

Such lack of respect for the author, from whom the Elizabethan players bought the text outright, and for less than they spent on costumes, will also have enabled the more deliberate changes – subtractions, additions, substitutions – to which the poet's text would have been submitted before it became the prompt copy for the first performance. Rather than artistically motivated, these changes are likely to have been utilitarian – reflecting a collective sense of what was feasible in the context (the given resources of people and machinery; the known expectations and tolerances of the audience). The latter factors are also likely to have applied in later (deliberate) changes between performances responding to stage experience (not to mention those anticipating a new context, for example taking the play on tour).

Given the virtual certainty therefore that as a result of both of these processes the text performed on stage will have differed from what the author wrote, it is reasonable (I think I mean vital) to ask: how much? in what way? and does it matter? In view of the recent controversies on the nature of tradition and the processes of oral transmission it is not enough to offer sensible suggestions on the implications of

interpolations, anticipations and recollections. Nor can we rely on the experience and opinions of actors in the modern theatre: training is different, attitudes to the author (especially to the immortal bard) are different, and anyway field studies in folk tradition suggest that while performers may claim they are reproducing a text verbatim, they are in fact changing it.⁷ My thesis is that on the Elizabethan stage (as in folk traditions) these changes will have shown distinct tendencies and that their impact is both detectable and amounts to a process of recreation which produces authentic new versions in a distinct, 'vernacular' aesthetic,⁸ but which nonetheless also tells us something significant about the 'artistic' original.

* * *

In a still respected study, originally published in German in 1909, the Danish folklorist Axel Olrik identified and discussed what are known in English as the 'epic laws' of folk narrative.⁹ 'Epic' translates Olrik's *epische*, which means narrative in general as opposed to lyric and dramatic forms, and the 'laws' concerned indeed applied to most forms of traditional narrative: folktale, myth, legend, and folksong. As presented the thirteen or so laws are somewhat complex and overlap, but they can be resolved into the two basic rules of *concentration* and *patterning*. Traditional narratives are concentrated in focusing on a single-stranded plot, with one hero and one major antagonist (as diametrically opposed to the hero as can be), and in being composed of incidents each of which confronts only two characters (the law of 'two to a scene'). Patterning manifests itself in a narrative progression and content deploying symmetries according to an inner logic which is stronger than everyday plausibility and realism. Thus the narrative progresses between major peaks of striking 'tableaux-scenes', and does so in a manner highly characterized by symmetry and repetitions. The narrative is rendered according to a distinct, traditional aesthetic, which involves restricting content to the absolutely necessary: 'Everything superfluous is suppressed and only the essential stands out salient and striking.' The familiar repetition of sequences of action in groups of three is merely a specific manifestation of this stylizing, the urge to simplify, it seems, matched by a craving for repetition: 'Every time that a striking scene occurs in a narrative, and continuity permits, the scene is repeated'.

By 'laws' Olrik meant 'common rules for the composition' of such narratives, but they are more likely to have been common tendencies in their transmission. In another influential study the later (Swiss) folklorist, Max Lüthi, suggested that the focus and symmetry characterizing much folk narrative (he was particularly interested

in folktales and legends) were not there from the start in the *Urform*, but achieved in the course of transmission. The 'finished' form of a given narrative (in the craft sense) is also the final (in terms of transmission): it is the *Zielform*, the goal or target form to which the text is shaped in the hands – in the memories and voices – of the narrators who tell it and pass it on. A story is, in Lüthi's term, *zurechterzählt*, 'told into shape': a shape evincing, I would claim, precisely the kind of concentration and patterning Axel Olrik identified as characteristic of traditional narrative.¹⁰

Lüthi offered no empirical documentation for this intriguing theory, but it is to hand, however, in the case of the narrative folksongs that I have studied in the course of my research into the oral transmission of the popular ballad. We are fortunate in that some news ballads, issued on broadsides in the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, have been recorded by folksong collectors in what have to be derivative oral versions decades or even centuries later. Comparing the oral versions with the printed original, especially when the same symptoms are shown by several oral derivatives, and when the same results occur in the study of several ballads, demonstrates exactly what tradition, the pressure of reproducing textual material from memory before an audience, does to a narrative.¹¹

The results are not surprising, except to those who see all oral tradition as inevitably destructive, but the laws of narrative transmission can now be formulated with greatly enhanced confidence. The impact of oral tradition on narrative involves:

subtraction:

the loss of material not essential for the progress of the narrative, typically introductory and concluding business, description of people and places, analysis and commentary, and even narrative transition between points of maximum crisis;

external contamination:

the intrusion of material from:

other narratives in the same genre

formulaic material common to the tradition as a whole

internal contamination

the replacement of original material at one point in the text by material from a similar point elsewhere, resulting in patterns of conceptual and/or verbal repetition whose exact configuration depends on the relative positions of the two segments concerned.

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Together these processes account for most of the concentration and patterning encompassed by Olrik's narrative 'laws', and whose emergence in the text cumulatively moves it towards Lüthi's *Zielform*.

I offer by way of brief illustration extracts from parallel texts of the ballad, 'Maria Marten': the original broadside, published in connection with the hanging, in 1828, of William Corder, for the murder of his sweetheart, and the derivative oral version, recorded by Cecil Sharp almost three quarters of a century later:¹²

Original Broadside, 1828

Oral Tradition, 1911

- | | |
|---|--|
| 5. If you will meet me at the Red-barn,
as sure as I have life,
I will take you to Ipswich town,
and there make you my wife; | 4. If you'll meet me at <u>the Red Barn Floor</u>
as sure as you're alive
I'll take you down to Ipswich Town
and make you my dear bride. |
| 6. I then went home and fetched my gun,
my pickaxe and my spade,
I went into the Red-barn,
and there I dug her grave. | 5. He straight went home and fetched his gun
His pickaxe and his spade,
<u>He went unto the Red Barn floor</u>
and he dug poor Maria's grave. |
| 7. With heart so light, she thought no harm,
to meet him she did go
He murdered her all in the barn,
and laid her body low;
... | 6. This poor girl she thought no harm
but to meet him she did go,
<u>She went unto the Red Barn Floor</u>
and he laid her body low, |
| 11. Her mother's mind being so disturbed,
she dreamt three nights o'er,
Her daughter she lay murdered
beneath the Red-barn floor. | 7. Her mother dreamed three dreams one night
she ne'er could get no rest,
She dreamed <u>she saw her daughter dear</u>
<u>lay</u> bleeding at the breast. |
| 12. She sent the father to the barn,
when he the ground did thrust,
And there he found his daughter
mingling with the dust. | 8. <u>Her father went into</u> the barn
and up the boards he took.
There <u>he saw his daughter dear</u>
<u>lay</u> mingled in the dust. |

As I cite for reasons of space only part of the text it is necessary to note that the inessential material subtracted in transmission includes the opening address to the

audience, the gory aftermath of the murder and the restlessness of the victim's mother prior to her dream. We also lose the entire (highly circumstantial) trial-scene: It is evidently enough to know, for the tragedy's closure, that the speaker is to die. It is possible to see the centre of the song moving towards a rather schematic *Zielform* comprising essentially a triad of significant visits to the red barn: by the lover; by the girl, and by the father, the last two forming a balance (the burial and finding of the body) framing the mother's dream of where it is. There is some contamination by external material, largely in the shape of commonplace formulations from general English folksong idiom, within the text cited for example the 'dreamed . . . dreams' phrase which emerges in the oral version's stanza 7. Particularly striking are the patterns of verbal repetition (of words and phrases) emerging through the process of internal contamination, both in adjacent and separated segments of the narrative. The mother's dream of the body's location, and the father's discovery of it which immediately follows, and which have quite distinct formulations in the original (st. 11 & 12), are in the oral version expressed with the identical phrase, 'saw her/his daughter dear lay . . .' (sts. 7 & 8). In two instances, similar events occurring at some distance in the narrative similarly achieve, through internal contamination, identical or near-identical formulations, producing patterns of verbal repetition. The entries of the murderer, the victim and her father into the fatal barn, expressed differently in the original (sts. 6, 7 & 12), in the oral version share the formulation '. . . went into/unto the . . . barn' (sts. 5, 6 & 8). Additional contaminations make a particularly close and ominous repetition of the juxtaposed entries of villain and victim (sts. 5 & 6): 'He went unto the Red Barn floor/ and he . . .'; 'She went unto the Red Barn Floor/ and he . . .'). Most strikingly, as these last quotations indicate, the law of symmetry is so powerful on this particular memory that the Red Barn is referred to consistently (and illogically but powerfully) as 'the Red Barn Floor' (sts. 4, 5, 6): the phrase actually deriving from a stanza of the original (st. 8) itself lost in the course of transmission.

That similar patternings can emerge in drama is suggested by the instance of a mummers' play performance recorded in the West Indies in 1968, compared to its printed original, published in 1895. We should not expect much by way of massive subtraction or substitution of material, for the original is itself based ultimately on traditional mummers' plays, which (from wherever they started) have already gone through the process of concentration and patterning towards their *Zielform*. It is consequently revealing that nonetheless a sequence of references to a sword in the original have been regularized in tradition to conform with one of them, verbal repetition being the result:¹³

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Printed Original, 1895

Oral Derivative, 1968

Slasher:

So with my trusty broadsword,
I soon will thee disable.

For with my trusty broad sword,
soon will I disable

St Andrew:

Disable, disable? It lies not in thy power,
For with a broader sword than thine
I soon will thee devour.
Stand off, Slasher, let no more be said,
For if I draw my broadsword,
I'm sure to break thy head.

Disable, disable, it's not in your power,
For with my trusty broadsword
nations soon I will devour.
So stand off Slasher and let nothing more be said,
For if I draw my trusty broadsword
I'll surely break thy head.

* * *

From this folkloristic vantage point it is possible to predict that some changes to which the texts of Elizabethan stage plays were subject to under the conditions obtaining in the Elizabethan theatre followed distinct trends which, as in the case of oral folk tradition, likewise moved a text towards its *Zielform*. This would involve concentration, through the subtraction of non-essential material – be it words, action, or characters – and with a corresponding greater focus on the remaining critical scenes and major antagonists. As already noted, some of the larger-scale subtractions will be the result of deliberate decisions before and between performances, which nonetheless to my mind remain 'traditional' if determined by a vernacular (making it work) aesthetic rather than a purely artistic one. What remained, of action and words, would be increasingly marked by external standardization in conformity with tradition, and internal standardization, patterns of repetition, within the play itself. At the level of action-sequences with accompanying dialogue, external standardization could involve the addition, or more likely the substitution of existing material, with routines, what I have called 'dramatic formulas', similar to the *lazzi* of the *commedia dell'arte*, common to the theatrical tradition as a whole.¹⁴ On the verbal level commonplaces or formulas like 'I warrant you . . .', 'How now . . .', 'Leave me alone for that . . .', 'Come, let us . . .', would become increasingly prominent, while repetition patterns would emerge as similar sequences of action and dialogue came to resemble each other more and more.

If this is what did happen there is one person who (as both an author and a

player) was well-placed to notice, who would have thought about it, and who would have commented on it, and that of course is Shakespeare. Unlike Ben Jonson, Shakespeare was not given to expressing his views on the theatrical art in Prologues and Prefaces, but he did sustain an intense debate on that art in the metadramatic perspective of his plays, and as we might have guessed, the question of the unstable text is closely examined and illuminated in his plays-within-plays, notably in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With the mechanicals' interlude we are privileged to follow a play from the moment the players are given their parts, through the difficulties of rehearsal, to the first (and doubtless last) performance, or from what the play itself calls 'The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe' (I.ii) to 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus And his love Thisbe' (V.i.56-57).¹⁵

The change in title from 'comedy' to 'brief scene' accurately reflects what must have been a massive subtraction of material in the course of preparing the author's text for performance. The original play contains parts (written and handed out for memorization) for Thisbe's Father (Quince), Pyramus's Father (Snout), and Thisbe's Mother (Starveling). They are sacrificed to solve problems encountered in rehearsal (Shakespeare also pursuing a discussion on stage illusion) and the players assigned the new (and very brief) roles of Prologue, Wall and Moonshine. Since we gather (from the play and from Ovid) that the parents of the lovers opposed their match, we have evidently lost a couple of scenes in which this opposition is expressed, and perhaps another lamenting the outcome. And in consequence of the subtractions the play is reduced to what must be close to a *Zielform* of the two essential scenes: the meeting in the garden between the lovers to express their love and plan their escape; the foiled meeting in the woods by Ninus' tomb which leads to tragedy. There is even a balance between them in that in each case their coming together is thwarted by the intervention of a third character: in the first instance, comically, by Wall (replacing and effectively symbolizing the excised parental opposition); in the second, tragically, by Lion.

The balance between the scenes is reinforced, ballad-like, by some verbal echos:

Thanks courteous wall

...

I thank thee, Moon

My cherry lips

...

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These lily lips, this cherry nose.

And there are more local repetitions within Bottom's parallel addresses in the first scene to night and Wall:

O grim-look'd night! O night . . .

O night . . .

O night, O night, alack, alack, alack

. . .

O wall, O sweet O lovely wall . . .

Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall.

Often acclaimed as parodying earlier dramatic poetry, the dialogue of *Pyramus and Thisbe* may equally be a poet's wry tribute to what 'fribbling' players did to his text, and that some improvisation did occur may be suggested by the discrepancy between the lines spoken by Pyramus and Thisbe in rehearsal (III.i.78ff.) and in the performance (V.i.192ff.): the latter is briefer and also contains some repetition (196-7):

Not Shafalus to Procrus was so true

As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you.

(One would have expected a new pair of lovers, or a least a reversal of their order, in the second line.) Shakespeare's reconstruction of a text under pressure also includes instances where the player's incompetence or fright leads to garbling (e.g. the mis-punctuating of the Prologue) and where audience pressure prompts total textual collapse (Moonshine's reduction of his part to a prose paraphrase). And one wonders what embarrassment Shakespeare is recalling by having Ninus's Tomb become 'Ninny's'.

* * *

Against this background one turns, with the utmost caution, to the question of whether such symptoms of change-in-transmission and steps towards a *Zielform* may actually be discernible in surviving Elizabethan play texts. Early printings based on an author's 'foul papers' or the 'book of the play' sold to the players would be of no relevance in this respect, while one based on a prompt copy would reflect only the

deliberate changes involved in readying the script for the stage. But there remains the hope that some at least of those notorious 'bad' quartos of plays by Shakespeare and other dramatists may reflect the state of the text at a stage further along its theatrical career by virtue of some way constituting recordings of performances: either by being taken down during performance by some form of shorthand, or by being 'memorial reconstructions' written or dictated by players to replace a lost prompt copy or to facilitate a 'pirate' edition by a printer without legitimate access to the play.¹⁶ I would assert that the studies and examples of folk tradition invoked above provide as reliable a tool as we are ever likely to achieve in detecting the symptoms of a play's passage through oral transmission. And the most reliable of those symptoms is the presence of repetition-patterns generated through internal contamination.

The classic Shakespearean case is of course *Hamlet*, whose notoriously 'bad' first quarto of 1603 is generally reckoned to be a reported text, i.e. a memorial reconstruction,¹⁷ and that this text has been through a phase of oral transmission at some point is strongly suggested by the way it generates verbal repetitions by internal contamination of the original (more closely represented in the Folio and second quarto texts). For example in the 'Nunnery Scene':¹⁸

Q2

Ham. Get thee a Nunry.

...

crawling betweene earth and heauen,

wee are arrant knaues, beleeeue none of vs,
goe thy waies to a Nunry.

Where's your father?

Oph. At home my Lord.

Ham. Let the doores be
shvt vpon him,
That he may play the foole no where
but in's owne house. Farewell.

Oph. O helpe him you sweet heauens.

Ham. If thou doost marry,

...

Get thee to a Nunry, farewell.

Q1

Ham. Go to a Nunnery goe.

...

crawling between heauen and earth?

To a Nunnery goe,
we are arrant knaues all, Beleeue none of vs,
to a Nunnery goe.

Oph. O heauens secure him!

Ham. Wher's thy father?

Oph. At home my lord.

Ham. For Gods sake let the doores be
shut on him,
He may play the foole no where
but in his Owne house:
to a Nunnery goe.

Oph. Help him good God.

Ham. If thou dost marry,

...

to a Nunnery goe.

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<p>Or if thou wilt needes marry, ... <u>To a Nunry goe</u>, and quickly too, farewell. <i>Oph.</i> <u>Heauenly powers restore him.</u> <i>Ham.</i> I haue heard of your paintings shall keep as they are: <u>to a Nunry go.</u> <i>Oph.</i> O what a noble mind is heere orethrowne!</p>	<p><i>Oph.</i> Alas, what change is this? <i>Ham.</i> But if thou wilt needes marry <u>to a Nunnery goe.</u> <i>Oph.</i> <u>Pray God restore him.</u> <i>Ham.</i> Nay, I haue heard of your paintings shall keepe as they are, <u>to a Nunnery goe.</u> <u>To a Nunnery goe.</u> <i>Oph.</i> <u>Great God of heauen,</u> what a quicke change is this?</p>
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The original's five expostulations about the nunnery become eight in the first Quarto, and through internal contamination all acquire the same formulation, based on one (twice-occurring) variation of the original's three distinct formulations. And five times (as against twice in Q2) the phrase functions as the signal for an exclamation by Ophelia, the dialogue acquiring a highly patterned, almost liturgical quality. Ophelia's exclamations punctuate Hamlet's tirade like the 'Good Lord, deliver us' responses of the Litany (and indeed Ophelia now has four appeals to heaven as opposed to the two of Q2).¹⁹

But while this merely confirms a generally agreed status for the bad quarto of *Hamlet* there is a less consensual scholarly context for the case of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, whose two printed texts (the A-Text of 1604; the B-Text of 1616) have long vied for editorial favour as closer to Marlowe's original (at least in the days when this was a significant editorial question). As the following instance indicates, the A-text is characterized by a striking concentration of verbal patternings, most of which can be seen to have been generated by the repetition (through internal contamination) of phrases used only once in the B-text:²⁰

B-Text (1616), III.ii.1073ff.

Pope. Lord Archbishop of Reames,
 sit down with vs.
Bish. I thanke your Holinesse.
Faust. Fall to, the Diuelle
 choke you an you spare.

A-Text (1604), vii.880ff.

Pope. My Lord of Lorraine, wilt
 please you draw neare.

Fau. Fall too, and the diuel
 choake you and you spare.

Pope. Who's that spoke?

Friers looke about,

Lord Raymond pray fall too,

I am beholding

To the Bishop of Millaine,

for this so rare a present.

Fau. I thanke you sir.

Pope. How now?

who snatch't

the meat from me!

Villaines why speake you not?

My good Lord Archbishop,

heres a most daintie dish,

Was sent me from

a Cardinall in France.

Pope. How now,

whose that which spake?

Friers looke about.

Fri. Heere's no body, if it like your Holynesse.

Pope. My Lord

here is a daintie dishe

was sent me from

the Bishop of Millaine.

Fau. I thanke you sir.

Pope. How now,

whose that which snatch

the meat from me?

will no man looke?

My Lord,

this dish

was sent me from

the Cardinall of Flo-rence.

We are at the Pope's banquet, where his holiness offers greetings and dishes to his guests, only to be interrupted by the invisible Faustus. In the B-text he addresses 'Lord Archbishop of Reames', 'Lord Raymond', and 'My good Lord Archbishop'; in the A-text they have all become 'My Lord'. Twice interrupted, in the B-text he exclaims in different formulations ('Who's that spoke?'; 'How now? who . . .'), while in the A-text he uses identical phrases, conglomerating words of the two original formulations (How now, whose that which . . .?). And the instructions to 'look' and 'speak' in the B-text are regularized to 'look' in the A-Text. Offering two dishes, he presents them with quite different formulations in the B-Text (I am beholding to . . .'; 'here's a most daintie dish'), in the A-text with an identical formulation ('. . . dish was sent me from the . . . of . . .'). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the A-text derives, via oral transmission, from the B-text, although since conventional wisdom (on the basis of orthodox philology) currently makes the B-text less authoritative/authorial than A,²¹ the conclusion would need to be formulated carefully, say along the lines of: The A-version derives, via oral transmission, from an original whose text, *in those parts common to both versions*, is better represented by the B-version.

But while it can – to this degree – be demonstrated that some texts have been through a phase of oral transmission, in the case of 'bad' quartos displaying these symptoms (e.g. *Hamlet*; another clear instance is Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*) there

remains the question of where exactly to place this oral phase. Do the verbal repetitions just illustrated, along with other focussing and patterning that moves a text towards its *Zielform*, occur during the process of memorial reconstruction itself,²² or were they already in progress during those earlier acts of recall undertaken by the players on the stage; i.e. were they an aspect of the text as performed? The folklore parallel suggests the latter,²³ but against this is the frequent assertion that some roles in a reconstructed play are preserved better than others, suggesting that the imperfections (the reshapings) occur in those parts with which the reporter is least familiar, and therefore in the act of reporting, rather than on stage. In the case of 'bad' texts for which we do not have the original the accuracy or otherwise of this or that part is inevitably a matter of subjective assessment; where it can be documented by comparison with the original it may be that the reporters had had more recent access to the written texts of some roles than others.²⁴ But whatever the case with individual plays or instances it could be asserted that the process of recalling the text for a memorial reconstruction differs in degree rather than kind from recalling it on stage: the effort of reporting merely speeds up the process, and given sufficient time and pressure, the sort of focussing and patterning evinced by the bad quartos would sooner or later manifest itself in performance.

* * *

Watching the Elizabethan play-text change shape under stress has a more than philological significance. The inexact reproduction of Shakespeare's text on stage is corruption only from a bardolatrous, literary perspective which privileges one variant of a text (the author's) over others (the collective achievement of author and performers). Folklore research suggests that it is to such collective achievement that we owe the glittering steely surface and unyielding narrative logic of the classic folktales, and the much acclaimed stark simplicity of the traditional ballads. As Axel Olrik noted, the 'rigid stylizing of life' characterizing traditional narrative 'has its own peculiar aesthetic value',²⁵ like the liturgical patterns emerging in the Nunnery scene in *Hamlet* or the series of stylized slayings to which *The Massacre of Paris* is in the process of being reduced. There is in other words a vernacular aesthetic operative in this process whose products, even at the expense of Marlowe's mighty lines and Shakespeare's rhymes and images, may warrant appreciation.

Bardolatrous skeptics may take refuge in the notion that the changes in a text under pressure, whatever their own aesthetic value, also reveal something about the original. Retention and subtraction reveal inner strengths and weaknesses, ruthlessly

separating what is essential from what is not; repetitions emerging at the verbal and dramaturgical levels emphasize, or reveal, similarities and rhythms already present at deeper levels. As Max Lüthi says of the *Zielform* of a legend: it is not constructed from the original, but emerges out of it, tradition being effectively a form of interpretation of a story, 'so that the narrative concept inherent in it emerges more purely, more clearly, more logically than in the original'.²⁶ Much of this may have been true of Elizabethan theatrical performance as well, where a company's 'interpretation' of a play was not so much something they achieved, deliberately and as a reflection of their command of the material, getting it right, in the way they wanted to, but equally or rather a constructive failure, reflecting their loss of control of the material, which as in folk tradition is living, and so changing, and so free to interpret itself.

NOTES

¹ For major statements in this process see E.R. Leach, 'Golden Bough or Gilded Twig?', *Daedalus* 90 (1961), 371-87; Georgina Boyes, 'Cultural Survivals Theory and Traditional Customs. An Examination of the effects of privileging on the Form and Perception of Some English Calendar Customs', *Folk Life* 26 (1987-88), 5-11; Thomas Pettitt, 'Early English Traditional Drama: Approaches and Perspectives', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 25 (1983, for 1982), 1-30.

² Mary Ellen Brown, 'Mr. Child's Scottish Mentor: William Motherwell', in *Ballads into Books: The Legacies of Francis James Child*, ed. by Tom Cheesman and Sigrid Rieuwerts (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 29-39; Flemming Andersen, "'All there is . . . as it is": On the Development of Textual Criticism in Ballad Studies', *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 39 (1994), 28-40.

³ I am grateful for the encouraging reception given by both actors and scholars to an early formulation of the ensuing notions at the conference, 'Within this Wooden O', at the International Shakespeare Globe Centre, London, in April 1995.

⁴ Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 54-55.

⁵ *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. by R.A. Foakes & R.T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961), p. 25.

⁶ Stephen Joseph, *The Story of the Theatre in England* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1963), p. 93, citing Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* (1780).

⁷ A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 26-29. For the controversy on oral transmission see Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts. A Guide to Research Practices* (London: Routledge, 1992); John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1985).

⁸ On the thinking behind this term see my 'The Ballad of Tradition: In Pursuit of a Vernacular Aesthetic', in *Ballads into Books: The Legacies of Francis James Child*, ed. by Tom Cheesman & Sigrid Rieuwerts (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 111-23.

⁹ Axel Olrik, 'Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 51 (1909), 1-12, trans. as 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 131-41.

¹⁰ Max Lüthi, 'Urform und Zielform in Sage und Märchen', *Fabula* 9 (1967), 41-54, particularly pp. 48-49; for a summary of the thesis in English see Max Lüthi, 'Aspects of the Märchen and the Legend', in *Folklore Genres*, ed. by Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), pp. 17-33, at pp. 26-28.

¹¹ For these findings, so far based on four ballads, each with numerous oral derivatives, see Flemming G. Andersen & Thomas Pettitt, "'The Murder of Maria Marten': The Birth of a Ballad?", in *Narrative Folksong. New Directions*, ed. by Carol L. Edwards & Kathleen E.B. Manley (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 132-78; Thomas Pettitt, "'Worn by the Friction of Time": Oral Tradition and the Generation of the Balladic Narrative Mode' [on 'The Berkshire Tragedy'], in *Contexts of Pre-Novel Narrative. The European Tradition*, ed. by Roy Eriksen (Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 341-72; 'Ballad Singers and Ballad Style: The Case of the Murdered Sweethearts' [on 'The Downfall of William Grismond'], in *The Entertainer in Medieval and Traditional Culture: A Symposium*, ed. by Flemming G. Andersen et al., (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), pp. 101-31; 'The Ballad of Tradition: In Pursuit of a Vernacular Aesthetic', in *Ballads into Books: The Legacies of Francis James Child*, ed. by Tom Cheesman & Sigrid Rieuwerds (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 111-23.

¹² Charles Hindley, *The Life and Times of James Catnach* (1878; repr. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968), p. 187 (Original Broadside); *Cecil Sharp's Collection of English Folk Songs*, ed. by Maud Karpeles (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), no. 69A (as sung by William aka Robert Feast at Ely Union).

¹³ Material kindly supplied by Peter Millington in connection with his paper, 'Textual Origin of the St. Kitts Mummies' Plays. A Study in Textual Variation', Traditional Drama Conference, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, July 1994; the latter now published as 'Mrs. Ewing and the Textual origin of the St Kitts Mummies' Play', *Folklore* 107 (1996), 77-89.

¹⁴ Thomas Pettitt, 'Formulaic Dramaturgy in Doctor Faustus', in *A Poet and a Filthy Play-Maker. New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill & Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 167-91.

¹⁵ Quotations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Harold F. Brooks, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1979).

¹⁶ The most authoritative recent examination of these questions is Laurie E. Maguire's *Shakespearean suspect texts: The 'bad' quartos and their contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), which deploys criteria derived in part from the ballad studies invoked above.

¹⁷ *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkins, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 19-20; 39.

¹⁸ *The Three-Text HAMLET*, ed. by Paul Bertram & Bernice W. Kliman (New York: AMS Press, 1991), pp. 126-29.

¹⁹ In insisting (*Shakespearean suspect texts*, p. 170) on a certain length for repetition to qualify as significant in this question, Maguire is able to conclude (255) that there are no internal repetitions in Q1 *Hamlet*: I would assert that these are very much on a

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par with the ballad examples given above, especially as the repetitions can be seen emerging from internal contamination in the original.

²⁰ *Doctor Faustus. 1604 - 1616. Parallel Texts*, ed. by W.W. Greg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950). Maguire (p. 241), again applying criteria which demand more substantial repetitions than the ballad model warrants, concludes that there is no internal repetition in the A-text of *Doctor Faustus*.

²¹ See Eric Rasmussen's *A Textual Companion to Doctor Faustus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

²² Maguire's *Shakespearean suspect texts* deploys textual features as criteria for detecting memorial reconstruction rather than the impact of oral transmission on stage performance.

²³ See also R.A. Cave's review of three editions in the Oxford Shakespeare in *Theatre Research International* 9 (1984), 141-45.

²⁴ David Bradley, *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 9, points to a badly reported scene in the bad quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* in which both of the supposed reporters (in the roles of Paris and Romeo) were on stage, but this in the context of a general argument questioning the whole business of memorial reconstruction.

²⁵ Olrik, 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative', p. 138.

²⁶ Lüthi, 'Urform und Zielform', 48 (my translation).