



«Ask the author»:
*notes on authorial philology and
contemporary playwriting*

by Vera Cantoni

ABSTRACT: Correspondence between the company and the playwright, different versions of the script, rehearsal notes, prompt books: a theatre's archive can preserve the traces of a creative workshop ideally characterized by an ongoing dialogue, of which the recurring reminder "ask the author" can be a telltale sign. Additions, changes and cuts, in the case of a text intended for performance, are generally negotiated by the writer and other members of the creative team according to their respective style choices, knowledge and needs, so the analysis of the resulting palimpsest can help not only to unveil the story of a single play and to assess the role of variants and variations (when present), but also to reconstruct such complex artistic practices as those of contemporary theatre.

In the present paper I mean to illustrate and discuss opportunities and problems of authorial philology applied to contemporary playwriting with particular reference to the new texts produced by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and the documents held by its archive.

KEY WORDS: contemporary playwriting; authorial philology; drama; variants; theatre archives; Shakespeare's Globe Theatre

INTRODUCTION

Saggi/Ensayos/Essais/Essays
Sc[Arti] – 01/2020



Joining philology and theatre has never been easy: the fact-based scientifically minded analysis of texts has often been seen as contrasting with the artistic openness of dramatic performance. This sort of prejudice has recently been overcome, at least in part, by emphasising the descriptive, not prescriptive nature of philological studies and the freedom every production's creative team maintains to overturn their results, while gaining new knowledge from them. Yet the relationship between the two disciplines is still somewhat tense, if such observations need to be repeated by way of explanation at the beginning of essays based on their interaction (see for instance De Blasi 11) and works on this subject remain sparse.

In the present article I mean to uphold the usefulness of philological enquires into dramatic texts and in particular to explore the opportunities afforded by authorial philology to research in the field of contemporary playwriting. Both by investigating the specificity of this case on a theoretical plane and by illustrating some examples, I wish to show the mutual help theatre studies and textual scholarship can offer. The critical edition of a script can benefit from as accurate a reconstruction as possible of its author's creative context. Conversely, an accurate investigation into a play's versions and variants can shed some light on the complex artistic practices and collaborations that underlie most theatre productions.

'DRAMATIC PHILOLOGY': AN ASSESSMENT

In recent years, several conferences and publications have dedicated unprecedented attention to the philological investigation of theatre and drama, by means of theoretical contributions as well as by collecting and connecting analyses that focus on different specific creative contexts. Some meaningful examples are the thematic issue 26 *Théâtre*, edited by Nathalie Léger and Almuth Grésillon, of the specialised journal *Genesis (Manuscrits-Recherche-Invention)* (2005), or the conferences *Philology and Performing Arts: A Challenge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, 1-3 September 2011) and *Filologia Teatro Spettacolo* (Napoli, 7-10 Giugno 2012) with their respective proceedings (Cavagna and Maeder; Cotticelli and Puggioni). Nevertheless, critical reflections on the specificity of authorial philology applied to dramatic texts are still comparatively few and some areas of this field are nearly unrepresented in theoretical writing, their possibilities probably underrated as a consequence. Therefore it may be useful, first of all, to try and map this little-explored territory.

When dealing with plays, textual scholarship has to account for the specificity of their transmission, of course. Besides the explanations and arguments that necessarily accompany critical editions of drama, its unique relationship with orality and the questions surrounding playscript ownership have originated theoretical works on the subject. Most of these deal with a single context or author (a considerable example being the old but still lively debate concerning the witnesses of Shakespeare's output and particularly the so-called bad quartos, for which see e.g. Egan), but there are also articles that aim at describing the general philological challenges posed by drama (Riccò; Scannapieco; Vescovo).



Both Scannapieco (26) and Vescovo (186) actually consider the possibility of 'dramatic philology' as a distinct discipline, although neither affirms it absolutely. Vescovo explicitly traces its identity not to formal considerations, but to the unique connection that links plays and their transmission to stage practices; Scannapieco points out that the creative work of the playwright itself is generally set within and often dependent upon the modes of production of a theatrical context (33). As a consequence, textual scholarship in this field must constantly bear in mind the relationship as well as the distinction between the script and its staging. Grésillon and Thomasseau significantly begin their exploration of dramatic authorial philology by illustrating and even representing in a graph the mutual influence of play text and theatrical production (19-21) and stress their interdependence, even though they then proceed to analyse the way their creation and evolution can be studied separately, for the sake of clarity and ease.

Plays' 'amphibious' nature, their thriving on page and stage, tends to generate a double line of philological investigation. On the former plane, traditional studies, aiming at the critical edition of texts, employ the knowledge of theatrical practices in order to assess the reliability and representativeness of extant witnesses.¹ On the latter, productions appear to be inaccessible to philological enquiry, because performance is necessarily ephemeral and there can be no "philology of the fleeting moment," as Scannapieco aptly put it (30, my trans.). The impermanence of the artwork is not a problem for authorial philology, though, and the analysis of a staging's genetic dossier is certainly challenging, due to the variety of formats the relevant documents may have (Grésillon and Thomasseau 28), but it constitutes a viable and fruitful way of studying a piece of theatre, as Budor's valuable experiment on Dario Fo's *Le Médecin Volant* shows.

Thus two research paths neatly divide, conscious of their proximity and ready to learn from each other's findings, but leaving a deceptively empty space in the middle. They seem to mirror the dual life of the script described by Vescovo as typical through centuries of Western tradition (187): the finished text was copied and from that moment on there were two distinct manuscripts with different destinies, one for the company and one that remained in the playwright's possession. One for the stage and one for the (printed) page, we might say, if we follow the traditional view that makes the author's copy the most authoritative (as words would have it) and thus the most legitimate choice for publication. The former's philological lot, to become part of a production's genetic dossier, the latter's, to be the basis for critical editions.

All scholars agree that the two lives of the scripts are actually intertwined and sometimes there is no material bifurcation to separate them, but researchers usually deal with this complexity as a condition to be reckoned with rather than the emergence of a third, promising perspective for research. Yet, as Laura Riccò remarks even in an article specifically dedicated to the difficulties of dramatic critical editions, the few surviving actors' roles "give us an unusual chance to deepen our knowledge of how drama was composed and distributed" (219, my trans.). Generally speaking, the

¹ See the articles by Riccò and by Scannapieco (44-55) for particularly thorough discussions on the subject that scrutinize both general principles and meaningful instances of such editorial work.



textual investigation of the playtext's variants and variations, precisely in their peculiar links with the processes of theatrical production, can yield a treasure of insights concerning the complex creative practices of the (back)stage and not only a minefield of dilemmas in the establishment of an authoritative version.

It is perhaps significant that among traditional works of textual criticism those embracing a similar perspective are generally the ones on playwrights that also direct and/or enact their pieces, such as De Blasi's on Eduardo De Filippo, that is aptly identified in its title as "a case of authorial (and *actorial-authorial*) philology" (my emphasis). This choice is favoured by the interest such versatile artists arouse, but it entails a simplification. Theatre is marked by a semiotic conundrum, because the message(s) it carries involves not only a variety of codes and means but also different senders (actor, director, theatre manager...). Their interaction bears on specific aspects of the play as well, and creative interference does not leave the script untouched. All the articles quoted above address the difficulties with which authorial philology is necessarily faced when confronting texts conceived for performance, the different versions of which may well be due primarily to the influence, requests or intrusions of artists and professionals that are not considered authors but certainly had a say in the play's creation and existence. So when one or more of these figures coincide with the playwright, philological analyses can be less complicated and possibly more conclusive, because the origin of any change is clearer. But the web of interventions that contribute to a script's evolution, as witnessed in the sequence of drafts, prompt books and published versions, can be itself the subject of research, the outcome of which would be of obvious interest for theatre and drama historians and useful to the texts' critical editors as well.

It may be worth pointing out that such work, focused on the reconstruction by means of textual criticism of the collaborative processes peculiar to playwriting, is fruitful also in the comparatively well-known context of contemporary theatre practices. A valuable example is Anne-Françoise Benhamou's exploration of how director Patrice Chéreau contributed to the development of Bernard-Marie Koltès's *Combat de Nègre et de Chiens* and possibly influenced the playwright's following output. Starting from a close examination of Chéreau's *brochures* (annotated scripts) of the play and the comparison between its two published versions, she achieves a new, well-grounded insight into the artists' creative processes by delving deeper into the available traces of their work and interpreting rather than describing or selecting them. Benhamou's essay thus shows how the wealth of documents recent archives provide can be put to productive use, effectively eschewing the information surfeit the proliferation of texts and editions might generate (Scannapieco 43).

ON CONTEMPORARY PLAYWRITING

Since the context in which this kind of research takes place obviously bears on its possibilities by determining both the creative processes under scrutiny and the kind of documents available, the examples in the following section require a brief outline of the theatrical and archival practices they refer to. All the more so because they pertain



to contemporary British playwriting and genetic criticism—a philological approach that is characteristic of the French and Italian traditions, while unusual in English-speaking countries—has rather neglected this field.

Although artistic practices vary, of course, in the UK playwrights do not usually take on other roles in a show's production, especially in the bigger theatres and companies—those that are more likely to keep substantial material records of past productions. Even when they have a career as directors or actors, for instance, they are not likely to participate in the staging of their own plays as anything else but writers. A relevant example may be that of Jessica Swale, who had already been in charge of Nell Leyshon's *Bedlam* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (2010) when her *Blue Stockings* (2013) and *Nell Gwynn* (2015) premiered there, directed by John Dove and Christopher Luscombe respectively. Playwrights can have specific forms of involvement, though, based on their attending rehearsals (occasionally or consistently; for Shakespeare's Globe, for instance, see Cantoni 22, 196) or on company members keeping in touch with them. Sometimes, individual talks with the author are planned in performers' schedules. More frequently, playwrights may receive requests for rewrites, permissions to change or explanations.

"Ask the author" or similar phrases actually recur in the rehearsal notes of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, a sign of the respectfully close collaboration the company usually enjoys with writers that are not, as the playhouse's dedicatee, 400 years dead. Possibly supported by the undisputed prestige of the Bard, playwrights maintain a certain authority and their approval is required even for minor alterations to the text; at the same time, their work is seen as a part, however paramount, of a shared effort, and therefore open to change for the sake of the production's overall success. As a result, scripts hardly ever reach their final form before the beginning of rehearsals and this collaborative phase of their development is generally recorded in the company's papers.

Theatres that encompass education or research in their mission are likely to keep archive files of their productions. In the case of recent stagings, these rarely include such private documents as correspondence between the artists or personal notes, but may frequently comprise the minutes of meetings and accounts of rehearsals, one or more versions of the script, advertising leaflets and press cuttings, video recordings of performances. A peculiarity of Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives are the End of Season Interviews (EOSI) members of the research department conduct with as many artists as possible.

The main staple of nearly all production dossiers is the 'Bible' prompt book. As the name suggests, this cumbersome binder contains what may be considered the final word about all production choices, set designs and scene changes, costumes and props plot, lighting and sound cues, blocking and, of course, words. It represents the traditional prompter's unifying role of book-keeper, only apparently contrasting with the complementary occupation of copying and handing out the actors' parts (Vescovo 195). Nowadays the prompt book is usually under the care of a stage manager, who is in charge of updating it throughout the rehearsals; as a result of this continuous development, the 'Bible' script is paradoxically rich in amendments and often documents the process as well as the product of the artists' work. From this point of



view, it is not an entirely reliable witness, though, for two main reasons. Firstly, its record of previous versions is only accidental and therefore possibly unclear or even absent, because its proper goal is only to provide a faithful account of what is ultimately expected to happen on stage (and in the wings), so that a clean description of the latest blocking or wording may well replace or be pasted upon an older one, for instance. Secondly, it does not say anything about how changes were brought about or by whom, but invariably coats everything with the uniformity of a single handwriting. All in all, contemporary Bible prompt books may well offer information and require decoding as much as far more ancient documents do.

What is more, they generally contain the latest version of the play approved by the author. The published one must not be taken for the *ne varietur* text; on the contrary, it usually carries an explicit disclaimer: "This text went to press before rehearsals had ended, so may differ slightly from the play as performed." As observed before, any changes to the script would have the playwright's permission, so each variation must be assessed in its specificity. It may be interesting to compare this situation to the one traditional for opera librettos, the philological treatment of which Anna Scannapieco has suggested as a possible model for drama in general (250-51), because they share the custom to print texts in time to be sold to theatregoers (see also Vescovo 187). While for librettos this quick publication was part of the stage-copy's life, as opposed to that of the authorial manuscript, which might eventually reach the press at a later moment and under better controlled conditions, twenty-first-century British plays do not have such two separate traditions. The published version of contemporary drama is closely related to the one(s) witnessed by the prompt book, together with which it must be scrutinized in order to reconstruct the play's development.

For many productions, Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives also hold a 'research' file composed of sundry materials – images, texts, bibliographic references – on one or more aspects of the play, such as a theme, the setting, a historical figure, a documented episode or period music, for instance. It is an obviously interesting document for genetic criticism, but also one that requires great caution, because it does not state when and especially by whom it was perused, so its contents cannot be confidently attributed to any member of the creative team without further information.

SOME EXAMPLES FROM SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE THEATRE

The following examples are meant to illustrate how relevant the methods of authorial philology can be in the case of contemporary playwriting by showing that critical interpretations of the scripts' different versions can offer insights concerning theatrical creative processes. Their subjects belong to a particularly promising corpus, namely that of the new plays produced by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre since 1999. These texts are especially suited to the present research because they were commissioned or at least reworked specifically for the reconstructed Elizabethan theatre (Cantoni 18-24; on Shakespeare's Globe in general, see Mulryne and Shewring), so their development



was consistently characterised by a consciously close collaboration between writer and company.² Moreover, the commitment of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to research (Carson and Karim-Cooper 1-12) means that its archives are marvellously rich and welcoming.

The first Globe play set in the twenty-first century, Ché Walker's *The Frontline* (2008)³ portrays the diversity of London by focusing on a night's events in the surroundings of a tube station and it is characterized by overlapping speeches. In the original production, they were voiced simultaneously from different parts of the stage and of its cruciform addition protruding into the yard, so as to mimic the impression of conversations overheard in a crowded, lively public space. The development of this peculiar feature is at least partly discernible in the three different versions of the script held by the archive, dated 2008, "2008 final show" and 2009 (when the very successful production was revived; Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives, Ref. No. GB 3316 SGT/THTR/MUS/GT/2009/Front and GB 3316 SGT/THTR/SM/1/2009/Front). In the earliest text, several overlapping dialogues are marked as such, but printed continuously or divided only in long chunks, as if they followed each other, while the details of how they interlace are written in pencil; these notes take the form of printed interspliced conversations both in the second manuscript and in the published edition of the play. This is the case, for example, of the simultaneous monologues of Elliot and Ragdale (Walker 33-34), or part of Seamus and Benny's confrontation, the argument between Miruts and Salim and Beth's preaching (Walker 17-19); here is an extract of the latter passage in its published form:

² Twenty years and more than thirty plays into this innovative experience, it would be interesting to start tracing its development in time. Yet, the variety of shapes the collaboration between Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and its playwrights has taken even at the same time cannot be appropriately discussed here. A useful example may be that of the 2013 *Season of Plenty*, that included three new plays: the playwriting debut of director Jessica Swale (*Blue Stockings*), the first draft of which was not intended for a specific theatre; the return of Ché Walker (*The Lightning Child*) after his earlier Globe success *The Frontline* (2008); and Samuel Adamson's *Gabriel*, a project originating in trumpet virtuoso Alison Balsom's desire to make the most of the playhouse's extraordinary acoustics. These different situations naturally brought about diversified interactions between the writers, the rest of the creative teams (which were themselves dissimilar) and the artistic director. A diachronic assessment of such diversity, which was by no means exceptional for the Globe's new drama productions, would require an extensive discussion that cannot be satisfactorily accommodated here.

³ The numerous and diverse characters of *The Frontline* generally interact in small groups and although the themes of love, history and identity recur in all strands of the plot, these tend to intersect only occasionally. The main action is possibly that centred on Miruts, who seems to find love with Donna but is killed shortly afterwards by the drug dealer he has stolen from. Two plot-lines concern developments in the family lives of two strippers from the "fantasy bar": Violet confronts her teenage daughter Babydoll and starts dating bouncer Marcus, while Casey tells the boxer Jayson, her partner, that they are going to have a baby. Other stories include Ragdale looking for his long-lost daughter, a young actor trying to pitch his one-man show, the momentary crisis of lovers Seamus and Benny, reborn Christian Beth's falling back into her old drug addiction and extremely strung-up Val's attempts to rescue her son Elliot from dangerous companies and role models. All these inhabitants of the pavement in front of a large underground station briefly come together to confront Cockburn, the drug dealer, while a sense of unity is provided throughout the play by street vendors Mahmoud and especially Erkenwald, who introduce the action around them and comment on it.



Benny	Belong to you?
Salim	Rrrrr! A gun! I'm get me a gun!
Benny	Belong to you?
Beth	Purge me of the drugs!
Benny	Thass your whole problem!
Miruts	Ga ahead! I'll lend you a bullet!
Benny	I ain't some trinket!
Salim	I'm telling you, you little prick!
Beth	Purge me of the alcohol!
Salim	Your life is ebbing away! Tonight, you gonna die. (Walker 17)

The playwright sketched the effect on paper, but its precise timing was set down only during rehearsals, when the actors actually spoke those lines and other members of the company listened, and the results of this procedure were finally established for performance as well as for publication.

Yet a further comparison between the two 2008 versions, the published one and the one marked "March 2009" partly challenges this interpretation. A section of the dialogue between Donna and Miruts that overlaps with the one between Val and Jayson (Walker 58-60) is present only in the Faber and Faber edition, and in its first page small blocks (2-4 lines each) of the two conversations alternate: it seems Walker orchestrated it autonomously, without the performers' contribution. Furthermore, another section of these simultaneous conversations (Walker 56-57), the overlapping of which had already been specified in pencil on the earliest script and then printed both in the second and in the published text, is once again printed as a series of monologues and dialogues that follow each other in the 2009 version.

These apparent anomalies suggest that while Walker chose to fine-tune the overlapping effects in rehearsal, he did not need to, and that the different arrangement of lines may also have another explanation. As a matter of fact, the 'continuous' layout does not correspond to a separate delivery but only to less detailed indications of the same synchronicity represented by the interspliced speeches: stage directions explicitly state that the characters speak at the same time. So the two graphical renderings may well fulfil different functions. The texts in which they appear belong to distinct stages in the production's development, after all, and – what is more – their addressees are not the same. The first script is the one used by actors to study their parts, and from their point of view the continuity of a monologue or dialogue necessarily takes precedence over the way it will combine with others; the prompt book's purpose is to coordinate all aspects of the performance, so it must draw as precise a picture as possible of what happens on stage at a given moment; the same level of detail is appreciated by readers, who need to imagine the synchronicity they cannot hear; while the playwright and the rest of the creative team, when revising the text for a revival, may choose to dwell on one or more characters' arc in a scene rather than on its overall effect. These different perspectives are perfectly mirrored by the changes in the scripts' form described above, i.e. in the continuous / interspliced / interspliced / continuous rendering of simultaneous speeches.

This interpretation sheds some light on the possibility that a stage manager contributed to *The Frontline* as we read it. It was not the playwright's pen that first marked the sequence of lines as they could be heard when the actors performed their



parts at the same time, but the book keeper's pencil, the same that took note of when and where the main pieces of stage business took place. So the analysis of the overlapping speeches' representation across the four available versions of the script suggests that this effect was fine-tuned by means of an articulated collaborative process comprising at least four passages: Ché Walker first devised it; the actors, guided by the director, rehearsed it; a stage manager wrote down how their performance sounded; the playwright, perhaps after some further suggestions and changes, approved the lines' interspliced rendering for publication.

A peculiar discrepancy between prompt book and published version characterises two of the plays written by Howard Brenton for Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, *In Extremis* (2006)⁴ and *Anne Boleyn* (2010)⁵: a change in the final stage direction. The similarity is even stronger, because on both occasions the book describes a minimal interaction with the audience that is not in the archived script. In the earlier play, Heloise "holds the Penguin book out to Bernard, who stares at it, *then out to the audience*" (Brenton, *In Extremis* 90, my emphasis stressing the words that are not in the prompt books); in the second, instead of just leaving with a smile, Anne "blows the audience a kiss" (Brenton, *Anne Boleyn* 115, my emphasis).

In what may be a surprising exception, and in spite of the usual disclaimer about the text going to press before the end of rehearsals (Brenton, *Anne Boleyn* 10), the published edition of both plays is the more accurate in describing what happened in performance, as witnessed by the video recordings of Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives (Ref. No. GB 3316 SGT/ED/LIB/REC/2006/IE, GB 3316 SGT/ED/LIB/REC/2007/IE, GB 3316 SGT/ED/LIB/REC/2010/AB and GB 3316 SGT/ED/LIB/REC/2011/AB). As in the case of *The Frontline*, an explanation for this puzzling anomaly can be found in the prompt book's purpose: since a final small gesture or look do not trigger any further action or technical cue,⁶ they do not need to be recorded by stage management. Anyway, their absence from the printed text of the script suggests that this little but crucial pieces of stage business were created in rehearsal, their presence in the plays as they were published attests Brenton's choice to include them. So the comparison between different versions of both *In Extremis* and *Anne Boleyn* shows that they end on an image generated by the actors' and director's collaboration with the playwright and in all probability influenced by the theatre itself, since such tributes to the audience chime with the spectators' visibility and centrality in the Elizabethan-structured playhouse.

Brenton is repeatedly mentioned in the rehearsal notes for his plays, in accordance with the fact that he collaborated closely with the company but did not

⁴ *In Extremis* tells the well-known story of Abelard and Heloise's ill-fated love with a specific emphasis on the proto-humanistic philosophy that unites them in contrast with the nearly mindless faith of Bernard de Clairvaux.

⁵ *Anne Boleyn* is a peculiar history play focused on two plot lines that are set some seventy years apart but curiously interlinked, as the title character's role in bringing the Protestant faith to England intrigues James I and inspires his commitment to the creation of the Authorised Version of the Bible.

⁶ It may be interesting to note, by the way, that this observation would not be likely to hold in traditional proscenium-arch theatres, where the very last word or gesture of the play must be followed by a light change or a curtain or both. Shakespeare's Globe Theatre has spectators all around the stage and homogeneous lighting, so no such technical intervention accompanies the end of the action.



attend all rehearsals (as Peter Oswald did; see Cantoni 21-24). Such remarks are essentially reminders for members of the crew and the creative team, so they hardly ever give a complete account of the question they refer to. As a consequence, they may raise doubts just as well as they may clear uncertain points. A note concerning a thatcher's observation that newly-cut thatch is already golden in colour, for example, may explain why the script of *In Extremis* (Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives Ref. No. GB 3316 SGT/THTR/SM/1/2007/IE) carries a correction from the published version's "I'm worried it[the thatching]'s green" (Brenton, *In Extremis* 74) to "I'm worried it's damp." But it is puzzling to read about the need to change the lines that mention Henry VIII's red hair (Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives Ref. No. GB 3316 SGT/THTR/SM/1/2010/AB), probably because Anthony Howell, who played the king, is brown-haired, when there is no such reference in any available text of *Anne Boleyn*. The issue was obviously solved at a previous stage of the script's development, but one can only hypothesize how, where and when. The character's repeated assertion that baby Elizabeth has eyes like his (Brenton, *Anne Boleyn* 84 and 86) may have replaced the observation that she has the same red hair, but such educated guessing cannot satisfy the researcher's curiosity.

Unresolved questions such as this one suggest that when dealing with contemporary works the scholar too can ask the author. Its importance notwithstanding, this possibility does not provide all the answers: as time goes by, playwrights tend to forget the details of their work, especially if they did not entail any particular conflict. I can quote at least one instance, though, in which the writer's words were decisive in assessing a substantial variation. Act 2 Scene 4 of *Blue Stockings*⁷ sees Carolyne try to leave the college unnoticed in order to attend a suffrage rally; in the published edition of the text, she hides in Mr Peck's cart (Swale *Blue Stockings* 81), while according to the prompt book she is cross-dressed in Mr Peck's clothes (Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archives Ref. No. GB 3316 SGT/THTR/SM/1/2013/BS). The structure of the scene is affected by this change, because the latter version begins almost directly with the plan's failure, while in the former Mr Peck is virtually alone on stage and performs an imaginary dialogue with the headmistress, who is bound to discover them:

Mr Peck No one but me would be this daft... This is a bad idea. A bad idea! She'll find us out, I tell you. "Mr Peck, what are you doing?" "Nothing, ma'am." "Why are you taking the cart out?" "I'm not taking the cart out." "Well, what's that then?"

Mrs Welsh enters unseen and watches.

"I was going to the bakery." "Oh really, Mr Peck?" "Oh yes, Mrs Welsh." "Why are you getting the cart out to go two hundred yards to the bakery? How many buns were you intending to buy?" "But Miss Addison said—" (Swale 81).

Rehearsal notes state the need to cut the cart and put forward the hypothesis that Carolyne may be cross-dressed. The direct testimony of Swale herself (Cantoni

⁷ *Blue Stockings* follows a group of young women studying at Girton College, Cambridge, in the 1890s, and the campaign for their right to graduate. Carolyn is one of the students, while Mr Peck is the College's maintenance man.



196) explained the reason for this variation (the actor playing Mr Peck did not have the time to enter with the cart because he came from a quick costume change) and sanctioned both versions of the scene, one as her initial idea and the other as an acceptable alternative for companies that experienced difficulties with the cart. By doing so, she displayed on the one hand the writer's ultimate authority on textual problems and on the other the inherent openness of the dramatic text.

CONCLUSIONS

All these examples illustrate the mutual support genetic criticism and theatre studies can offer in the investigation of contemporary playwriting practices. While the knowledge of the context in which plays are produced is of capital importance for the interpretation of their development, the careful scrutiny of all available witnesses of a script can shed some light on the artistic collaboration that originated it.

Drama is both a literary genre and an element in the multifaceted art of the theatre; as such, it necessarily raises questions regarding the object of a hypothetical "dramatic philology" (the script or the "stage text" that includes the non-verbal aspects of performance) as well as the subject(s) of a "dramatic authorial philology" (the playwrights alone or the whole ensemble of people who contribute to their work). I do not presume to give a definitive answer to these debates within the brief scope of an article; the present observations go to show that, whether regarded as an autonomous discipline or as a peculiar branch of textual criticism, the philological study of play texts is worth both extensive application and further theoretical reflections on its specificity. Moreover, the case study of the new writing produced by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre testifies to the fruitfulness of authorial philology applied to contemporary playwriting. In conclusion, without intending to diminish the importance of research into stage texts and their genesis, I advocate the concurrent philological analysis of the scripts as literary works firmly and creatively set within the context of theatrical production: both theoretical considerations and existing examples show that the complexity of their authorship is not only an obstacle in the critical editors' path but also a core aspect of their essence.

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