

When Peter Greenaway ends his film, *Prospero's Books*, with an image of the First Folio, he shows blank pages magically turning towards their consummation. As these pages are filled by the text of *The Tempest* Greenaway pays homage to a dearly-loved critical tradition in which the magus is both the actor and the author of the text.¹ This tradition ultimately draws on Edward Dowden's allegorical reading of the play, which claims that 'Prospero's departure from the island is the abandoning by Shakespeare of the theatre' and 'the Dukedom he had lost, in Stratford Upon Avon'.² Understanding Prospero's valediction as the author's relinquishing of his pen and his past positions the play as a meta-text, consciously aware of its status as a script as well as a performance. Although a strictly biographical reading of *The Tempest* can be reductive, it serves in part to focus our attention on the dynamic between text and performance, which is so pertinent to the play. Whilst perhaps not the most spectacular of the late plays, *The Tempest* is certainly the most theatrical, concerned as it is with the power of art and the capacities of illusion.³ As Prospero bids farewell to the conjurations of his masque, he tells a startled Ferdinand:

These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air,
And like the baseless fabric of this vision
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life

¹ David Bergeron elegantly echoes this tradition when he writes: 'Easily one can view Prospero, like a dramatist, creating the text of the lives gathered on the island: such power to control and create recalls the power of writing itself', 'Traacherous Reading and Writing', in *Reading and Writing in Shakespeare*, ed. David Bergeron (Newark: University of Delaware Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1996), p. 175

² Edward Dowden, *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*, p. 328

³ The question of style, form and classification of the 'late plays' is comprehensively dealt with by Russ McDonald in the introduction to his *Shakespeare's Late Style* (CUP, 2006), pp. 9-15.

Is rounded with a sleep (4.1.148-158).

Here Prospero's musing on the quality of magic is also his metaphysical song on the frailties of life: for the magus, acting and art is finite; dependent as they are on the temporality of action. The play's interest in presence, in seeing, witnessing, and experiencing is apparently in conflict with the imaginary fabric on which it is built. This illusory quality is part of the construction of Prospero's island and, most potently, his books.

Towards the end of *Cymbeline*, after Jupiter's descent on the back of an eagle, Posthumus awakes to discover a 'tablet' next to him. 'What fairies haunt this ground? A book? O rare one!', he exclaims looking at the text that will help to unravel the complexities of the play's action. The words 'rare' and 'strange' proliferate throughout the last plays (culminating in over half their overall usage), and Posthumus's description of the book is symptomatic of the way in which writings emerge in Shakespeare's 'Romances'.⁴ The multiple meanings of these words (*rare*: uncommon, exceptional, scattered, loose structure, pale, unusually good, splendid or to 'express astonishment'; *strange*: alien, belonging to others, unknown, external, unfamiliar, abnormal, extreme (*OED*)) denote the poetic landscapes of the last plays as they also come to reflect the idea of the written word. From the material article to the metaphoric image, the graphic text appears throughout these plays dividing, explaining, deceiving, revealing and destroying the characters as well as the worlds they inhabit. The multiplicity of the text, its forms as well as its effects, points to Shakespeare's wider interest in questions of division as well as resolution and it is through these opposing conditions that we find the image of the written word at its most theatrical, and which will form the subject of this essay.

Writing as he does in a period in which the printed book begins to flourish in the vernacular, playbooks were being published for the first time and the commercial theatre was rapidly developing as a site of entertainment, exploration and expression,

⁴ This volume is dedicated to a view of the last plays as those written between 1608-1613, what constitutes a 'last' or 'late play' is notoriously slippery (see above) and here I will use a number of those terms to refer to the four plays I am concerned with. McDonald makes the salient point that a number of terms, 'romances,' 'tragicomedies,' 'late plays,' 'last plays,' and 'final plays', 'survive alongside one other ... each pointing to essential features that the other does not comprise', p. 25.

Shakespeare becomes increasingly sophisticated in his dramatic use of the written text.⁵ Moving through the various questions of representation that the book poses – form, image, metaphor, materiality, similitude – the late plays turn with a more satiric eye to the value of writing, in both its qualitative and moral sense.⁶ Alongside Shakespeare’s earlier interest in the materiality of form as an image for the development of multiple sites of expression – Hamlet’s brain, Lavinia’s body, Richard II’s divinity – there develops an increasing fascination with the theatrical role of the figurative word. As printed material the book becomes a representation of graphic thoughts, narrative fictions, histories, homilies or solitude and as a figurative image the book evolves into increasingly complex indices to the body, the mind, the heart and the eye. Ever conscious of the dynamic between the body and the mind, Shakespeare evokes such a tension through the book and the stage in Sonnet 23, claiming finally: ‘O, let my books be then the eloquence / And dumb presagers of my speaking breast’. The text here will say more than the tongue can and bridge the gap between the heart and the voice. Shakespeare is, of course, writing to a burgeoning world of books, as well as words, and through his conscious development of the relationship between image and form, language and silence, text and performance he develops a bookish art that seeks to explore the limits of theatre as well as explode them.⁷

A great deal of the conflict that vernacular printing created came to the theatre as satire, and perhaps at its most articulate in what became known as the ‘war of the theatres’. A brief period at the turn of the seventeenth century, the war of the theatres referred to the ways in which the stage spoke directly to the role of print as it became an outlet for the expression of anxieties suppressed by the ‘Bishops Ban’ of 1599. A flurry of plays centralised the literary in a far more self-conscious way than it had done before as dominant figures of the period, including Jonson, Marston and Dekker,

⁵ See for example the essays in this volume by Grace Ioppolo and Andrew Powers as well as the work of Zachary Lesser, Peter Stallybrass, William C. Carroll, David Scott Kastan. For a longer view of the text in Shakespeare’s plays see my *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Book* (OUP, 2007).

⁶ Frederick Kiefer traces the relationship between writing and conscience as it emerges through a shifting perception of moral law, and the evolution of a private self as distinct from an ineffable faith. *Writing on the Renaissance Stage: Written Words, Printed Pages, Metaphoric Books* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1996), pp.111-162.

⁷ See Robert S. Knapp, *Shakespeare – The Theatre and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) for a brilliant and post-structuralist exploration of this topic, and for a more controversial re-examination of the relationship between the page and the stage see Lukas Erne’s *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003)

dramatised each other in a bid for artistic supremacy.⁸ As the writer became a satirical image for entertainment in a way that perhaps the actor had done in the previous decade, questions of authorship, literary status, authenticity and the image of the text developed through a changing value system. The critical commonplace that observes a fundamental dichotomy between publishing and performance begins to shift in the period characterised by this volume as we will also witness a change in the ways in which printed material was understood. The publication of Shakespeare's sonnets in 1609, for example, recognises the value of the form outside of an imagined coterie.⁹ During the twenty years in which Shakespeare actively wrote for the theatre, the image of the text, as well as its dissemination, significantly changed. The most profound shift had, however, been in motion for some years before this as a consequence of the Reformation but as vernacular literature became more available the idea of the book began its extraordinary journey from religious icon to everyday expression.¹⁰ The very history of the book and writing enabled this long metamorphosis as it moved through a series of figures: the writing hand, the faithful heart, the material object, the secret self, the public body and the inquiring mind. This vast semantic landscape made the book a potent form of expression. Shakespeare's interest in representation is, of course, a constant in his works but as we turn into the last section of his theatrical career we become aware of a changing attitude to the book.

Pericles is fraught with questions and problems of reading, and, like *Cymbeline*, the hero must learn to read rightly, as he also learns to interpret. Both these plays position the text closely – both literally and figurative – to the female body.¹¹ The erotic

⁸ Jeffrey Knapp covers this topic as well as much else central to the evolution of the theatre in *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (University of Chicago Press). See also Zachary Lesser's *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication* (CUP, 2004).

⁹ Recently scholarship has worked hard to undo the long-held assumption that Shakespeare was disinterested in publication, or himself as an 'author' within that context. Among the central works on this debate are Lukas Erne's *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* and Patrick Cheney's *Shakespeare National Poet-Playwright* (CUP, 2003) and *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (CUP, 2008).

¹⁰ See Michael O'Connell's *Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) for the role of iconoclasm in the development of a literary consciousness.

¹¹ There is a long and complex history between the text and the body that begins long before the printed book and ends well after, I imagine, the tattoo. Eric Jager writes compellingly on the early evolution of the text and the body in *The Book of the Heart*. See also Wendy Wall's seminal book *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), for a more specific exploration of the relationships between the female body

relations between the book and the body go way beyond the fetishization of the private space: as you may open a book so you may uncurl a lover; to read is to touch, to interpret is to possess and to discern is to desire. Whilst many dramatists of the period explore and exploit the proximity between the book and the body (notably Middleton and Dekker), Shakespeare's late plays focus their anxieties of authority onto questions of authenticity. Obsessed with truth, the graphic text often accompanies characters in search of identity and perhaps never more so than in *The Winter's Tale*. Towards the end of the play when the runaway lovers have reached Sicilia in search of refuge with Leontes, the king observes Florizel with the comment: 'Your mother was most true to wedlock, prince, / For she did print your royal father off, / Conceiving you (5.1.123-5).¹² The dramatic resonance of Leontes's image is profound, fraught as it is with his fears of infidelity, bastardy and loyalty. Alongside the sexual pun the idea of the text remains central to both the anxieties and the revelations of the play, conflating as it does both fear and desire. As the reunions and revelations unfold the 'gentlemen' who report them call repeatedly on images of articulation and writing: beginning with 'speech in their dumbness, language in their gesture' (5.2.13-4), to questions of form: 'such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it' (ll. 23-5) and 'the news, which is called true, is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion' (ll. 27-9) to 'that which you hear you'll swear you see, there is such unity in the proofs' (ll. 31-2).¹³ The language of the writing – ballads, tales and proofs – is haunted by the language of truth urging us to believe where we would tend to doubt.

The Romances foreground the multiplicity of the text, its form and status, and seek its aid in the exploration of both the mystery and the humour that make up so much of these plays.¹⁴ On a practical level, both *Cymbeline* and *Pericles* are sustained by letters; their narratives, 'characters', events and histories emerge through the writing,

and the conventions of print and Gordon Williams's *Shakespeare, Sex and the Print Revolution* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1996).

¹² See also Jonathan Goldberg, 'Fatherly Authority: the Politics of Stuart Family Images' in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. Margaret Fergusson *et al.*

¹³ See also Joad Raymond, 'Seventeenth Century Print Culture', Blackwell's *History Compass*, November 2004.

¹⁴ Aware of the chronology of this anthology, we might look to *Coriolanus* for Shakespeare's most visceral book in the complex matter of Volumnia (volume). Coppelia Khan writes brilliantly on this in her chapter on the play in *Roman Shakespeares*.

reading and delivering of the written word.¹⁵ Equally central to these plays is the drama of reading, whether it be graphic text, image or body, the ability to discern, interpret or understand is crucial to the deployment of the narrative.¹⁶ Yet where the written word often may define the theatrical space as it takes the form of a letter, the story or the idea of a graphic narrative frequently complicates that space with deceit, forgery or fantasy. Much of the theatrical potency of these devices and images lies in their relationships (or lack of them) to the writers, readers and speakers who hold that image. Most famous of these speakers is Prospero who holds the book to ransom, in the wings of his theatre to delude and rescue his fellow islanders. Central to the power of this image is the text as a prosthetic, occupying the dramatic space as the body of the mind. Letters, however, are perhaps the most obvious in this way, facilitating as they do the absent body of the writer and the imagined responses of the reader. When Imogen declares ‘To write, and read /Be henceforth treacherous’ (4.2.316-7) she is speaking directly to a body of letters which she rightly believes to be ‘feigned’.¹⁷ Although Imogen is mistaken in thinking Pisanio is to blame she is right in realising the destructive power of the letter: letters that have led her into exile with fatal intentions. Yet, particularly in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare frequently juxtaposes the reading of a document with the (mis)reading of a body or circumstance. Whilst Imogen is right to identify the anxiety of letters she is comically wrong in the identifying the headless body beside her. ‘Reading’ Cloten’s body in her husband’s clothes she confidently exclaims: ‘I know the shape of ‘s leg: this is the hand: /His foot mercurial: his Martial thigh: / The brawns of Hercules’ (4.2.309-11); that this is not Posthumus is one thing, that she could describe Cloten in these terms is quite another. ‘Reading’, whether the letter or the body, becomes a meta-theatrical experience in which both the questions of representation and the expectations of truth can be investigated. Central to Shakespeare’s theatre is the creation and exploitation of irony, and perhaps none so rewarding as dramatic irony. As he explores his

¹⁵ See Alan Stewart’s *Shakespeare’s Letters* for the performance of letters in the Shakespearean imagination. For a deconstruction of the performance of graphic type see Jonathan Goldberg’s *Writing Matter, From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). For a more general look at writing in the late plays see David Bergeron’s ‘Treacherous Reading and Writing in Shakespeare’s Romances’, in *Reading and Writing in Shakespeare*, ed. David Bergeron, pp. 132-159.

¹⁶ Shakespeare’s plays are replete with the language of interpretation as well as representation and the semantics of printing and reading particularly inform the relationship between the sexes, from ‘glossing’ to ‘parling’, reading one’s lover was a crucial step in learning to possess them.

¹⁷ I follow the Folio’s spelling of Imogen.

characters' ability to read we discover the multiple ways in which images of text function. As Imogen fails to read the body of her husband, so Pericles fails to read the body of his hoped-for wife. When the Prince of Tyre stands before Antiochus's daughter he declares:

See where she comes, apparelled like the spring,
Graces her subjects, and her thoughts the king
Of ev'ry virtue gives renown to men;
Her face the book of praises, where is read
Noting but curious pleasures, as from thence
Sorrow were ever razed and testy wrath
Could never be her mild companion (1.1.55-61).

Pericles, it soon transpires, is entirely misguided in 'read[ing] / Nothing but curious pleasures' in her face and his use of the bookish image heightens our awareness of how practices of 'reading' emerge. The 'book of praises' that Pericles observes becomes a grotesque joke when, turning to another text, he discovers incest and aberrance; reading again, Pericles rightly interprets the riddle and says to the King:

Few love to hear the sins they love to act.
'Twould braid yourself too near for me to tell it.
Who has a book of all that monarchs doe,
He's more secure to keep it shut than shown,
For vice repeated, like the wand'ring wind,
Blows dust in others' eyes to spread itself (1.1.135-40).

The book moves from the (mistaken) virtues of the princess, to the revelations of the riddle and then the conscience of the King, so that at each stage the image acquires a deeper level of truth from the outward, the actual to the inward natures of the characters. But the centrality of the image to this exchange is fundamental to the ways in which the play introduces us to its attitudes towards revelation and disclosure. We witness Pericles as he stands between his own textual metaphors, holding a paper that will betray as much as disgust him. The dramatic achievement of the image alongside its materialisation is marked as Shakespeare instantly draws our attention to the

frailties of representation and our dependence on outward form. Shakespeare's dramatic art is replete with the conflict, anxiety even, between truth and representation, and the book, or the text, becomes a sophisticated way of developing that concern.

Questions of authenticity and truth, as well as matter and form have shadowed the book and its production. The early modern convention of dedication, epistles, prologues and preambles not only replicate in part a system of manuscript circulation but reflect an in-built anxiety in the reproduction of knowledge. The form of print, its reproducibility, materiality and indelibility supported a fear of exposure which almost equalled its pleasure. How far one may believe in a text goes way beyond the author's control and into the body of the text as a material form. Shakespeare's dedicatory epistle to *Venus and Adonis*, probably published over ten times by the early seventeenth century, elaborately engages with this anxiety through a metaphor of husbandry:

But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear so barren a land for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest. I leave to it your honourable survey, and your honour to your heart's content, which I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation.

Instantly we notice that the text is a separate entity, suspended in contention by both its author and its recipient. The 'heir' is a child in its creation and an adult in its reception. The value of the text emerges on its reading and not on its writing. The powerful ambiguity that attends written matter makes it dramatically very effective since it relies on a discernable process of (mis)interpretation. As print became a more familiar medium into the seventeenth century, writers began to satirise the very conventions they had established. Thomas Dekker exposes the ridiculousness of 'Custome' (given the liability of the reader) when he identifies the perils of print:

To mainteine the scurvy fashion, and to keepe Custome in reparations, [the writer] must be honyed, and come-over with Gentle Reader, Courteous Reader, and Learned Reader, though he have no more Gentilitie in him than Adam, had (that was but a gardener) and no more Civility than a Tartar.... For he that dares hazard a pressing to

death (that's to say, To be a man in Print) must make account that he shall stand ... to be beaten with all stormes.¹⁸

Playing on the language of the print-shop, the language of punishment, and the language of sex ('pressing'), Dekker urges the vulnerability of the writer as one who is at the mercy of those who publish as well as interpret. But it is printers, rather than authors, according to Zachary Lesser, who consciously shape and affect this process, directing as they do both market and reception:

Publishers ... developed techniques of presentation and marketing to ensure that their imagined customers became real ones. But because they specialized, publishers also constructed their customers' readings by the act of publication itself, leading customers to consider a play within its publisher's speciality.¹⁹

But in the absence of prefatory direction, reading must occur at the moment of a text's reception, materially, imaginatively or intuitively, and as Shakespeare's late plays become increasingly preoccupied with revelation so too does the idea of the text.

This heightened theatricality in relation to the book is equally pronounced in *Cymbeline* – here a book does materialise and in a very spectacular way, descending with Jupiter on an eagle. The imagery that surrounds this text is both mythological and Anglican, celebrating the king of the Roman gods as well as imaging an eagle-shaped lectern, which symbolises John the Apostle. This extraordinary scene makes much of the image as well as Jupiter's glorious entrance all of which focuses ours and Posthumus's attention on the 'rare' text. Its cryptic script and positioning between the natural and supernatural worlds (occupying a hinterland that *Pericles's* Gower will describe as a 'gap') gives the book a central role in the move towards the play's resolution and restitution. Above all, perhaps, it re-focuses our attention on Posthumus as a reader and the importance of interpretation in the unfolding of our lives. His reading, like his writing, fails him since he manages to neither discern nor configure the truth. Much of our hero's journey is learning to read: his wife, his

¹⁸ As quoted by Wendy Wall in *The Imprint of Gender, Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Lesser, *Renaissance Drama*, p. 21. See also Wall, p. 172.

letters, his friends, Jupiter's book. Imogen, on the other hand, must learn circumspection in her reading: her husband's letters, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the headless body beside her. The various forms of text – from the informative letter, the mendacious letter, the book, the body, the spectacular script and the riddle – all pose invitations to read and it is through the character's (mis)reading that the play unfolds. Jupiter's exhilarating descent on the eagle with the book celebrates the majesty as well as the wonder of text in performance (and yet, we may wonder ourselves as to what extent we should take this image seriously, since Jupiter's distinctly umbrageous tone makes the scene as amusing as it is peculiar).

As Imogen declares writing and reading to be treacherous, so her father will exclaim 'Who is't can read a woman?' (5.5.48) before Posthumus turns to a soothsayer to decode Jupiter's 'book'. Where Imogen will reject reading as insalubrious, neither Cymbeline nor Posthumus will be able to read; the former his wife, the latter his future. Where both may be obvious to the playgoer, the characters must endure a process of denial and exposure in order to establish the boundaries of interpretation. What we witness is a series of enforced demolitions of the text as such forms are shown to be powerfully unstable and radically subjective; the gap between truth and interpretation widens to let fantasy and delusion in. At its most self-conscious, this gap is represented as theatre itself. When Prospero relinquishes his magic, he does so through the ceremony of theatre, renouncing the book that gave him the art:

But this rough magic
I here abjure; and when I have required
Some heavenly music – which even now I do –
To work mine end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book (5.1.50-57).

Part of Prospero's illusion is his book; neither visible nor identifiable, the idea of the book belongs to the fantasy of verisimilitude that he creates, so effectively, in fact, that Caliban is bent on 'seizing' and then 'burn[ing]' the books he has probably never

seen. Moving between the elusive text and the illusory magic, Prospero affects actual experience to trammel up the distinctions between imagination and drama.

Writing to a long history of the anxiety of form, Lodovico Castelvetro, in his *Poetics* (1570), explains the importance of distinctions:

For if a writer intends to compose drama that will afford the pleasure peculiar to drama, he will surely defeat his own purpose if he treats some of his matter in the narrative mode, which will destroy every trace of verisimilitude.... How, indeed, can dramatized matter present the appearance of truth if the dramatist confesses in his own person or in another's that it is a fiction?²⁰

For Castelvetro to conflate genres is to compromise their value and yet, for Shakespeare, the combination of apparently competing forms initiates the dialogue between art and artifice so central to his theatre. Letting questions of fiction collide with questions of truth facilitates our confrontation with interpretation and how we 'read' the text within a dramatic context. Towards the end of *Pericles*, when Gower moves us in the direction of resolution, he exclaims:

I do beseech you
To learn of me, who stands i'th'gaps to teach you
The stages of our story (4.4.7-9).

Conflating his role as the historic poet, the present authority and the translator of word into action, Gower self-consciously plays upon the 'gap' between the written and the performed. The 'gap' which occurs as a 'breach in an otherwise continuous object' (*OED*) focuses our attention on the relationship between text and action, story and play, as a rupture rather than a division. The voice of the poet literalised in an embodied narrative tries to bridge that gap to bring the 'stage' and the 'story' into life. What follows elaborates on Gower's image as we observe a dumb show and hear a text. Whilst the performance is representative of Pericles's predicament, the text is the spurious epitaph for Marina who is neither dead nor beloved of the person who

²⁰ As cited by Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book 1480-1880, Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 166.

wrote it. Again we return to the fascinating conflict of truth between text and performance, heightened, not diminished, by these competing forms. As Gower stands, literally, in the 'gap' between history and the future, between the spoken and the written and between performance and text he self-consciously literalises the multiplicity of representation in the quest for 'truth'. The decorum of form that Castelvetro speaks of becomes harder and harder to achieve as those forms begin to take on the roles of each other through the development of print. The slippage between narrative and performance is notoriously provocative as the evolution of the public theatre creates a world full of stories.

Perhaps part of the appeal of Dowden's category of 'Romance' is his attention to the story; his wilful celebration of 'a beautiful romantic background of sea or mountain'.²¹ The notion of story that can support the collapsing of real time or place is central to the ways in which these last plays navigate the slippery question of verisimilitude. Whilst they are relentlessly in search of truth, resolution or revelation the worlds of these plays are fraught with the issue of what form such truth should take. The story that will haunt *The Winter's Tale* like the man in Mamillius's churchyard is both Greene's *Pandosto* and the fulfilment of the Oracle. The text and the intertext shadow the play as alternative sites of authority, tragedy or comedy, one must be fulfilled. Yet the written word is always in contention; from Leontes's dismissal of the Oracle to Mopsa's ballads the playworld turns a sceptical eye on the text even as it drives its performance.²² When, at Hermione's trial, Leontes demands of the Officer reading the scroll 'Hast thou read truth', the Officer replies 'Ay, my lord, even so / As it is here set down' (3.2.136-7). In calling for the Oracle to determine the truth of his wife's relationship to Polixenes Leontes refers to a revered tradition in which the word is sacred. In the event of the Oracle's revelations, however, that truth is denied and events are returned to the whim of a crazed king. The truth resides in the materiality of the text, its 'holy seal', and graphic form, yet Leontes's rejection of this tradition of truth makes a nonsense of the convention as well as the form.²³ Whatever import the written word may carry it is only as effective as its reader. Questions of reading return us to the way in which the play holds off its

²¹ *Shakespeare* (New York, 1877) p.55. See also Stephen Orgel's introduction to *The Winter's Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially pp. 2-6.)

²² See the humorous exchange between Mopsa and Autolycus (4.4.225-285) on the 'truth' of ballads.

²³ See Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters*, pp. 17-20.

resolution. The scroll left with Peridta, her ‘character’ and her history, is neither read nor rehearsed on stage, but rests in the hands of the old shepherd until he reveals its presence. Unlike the Oracle, this script serves Leontes his truth but we are never party to its performance. The text becomes central to revelation – like Camillo’s ‘script’ for the runaway lovers – but we do not witness its narration. Both absent and present, mendacious and revelatory, written documents accrue an intense theatrical power as they direct or suppress emotion, as well as events.

The dramatic ambivalence that Shakespeare adopts towards the theatrical text is at its most profound in *The Tempest*. Fraught with the question of Prospero’s books, Shakespeare’s last single-authored play attempts to engage with written matter beyond the confines of the stage. The command of the book is established from the outset as we listen to Prospero’s history and the part in it which his library played: ‘Me, poor man, my library / Was dukedom large enough’ (1.2.109-10). Telling Miranda of his exile, he remembers the great service Gonzalo did to him:

Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me
From mine own library with volumes
That I prized above my dukedom (1.2.166-8).

These volumes remain central to the rest of the play, directing Prospero’s actions and reactions as he drives his enemies to madness, puts his future son-in-law on trial and variously rewards and punishes his erstwhile companions now slaves. The power that Prospero lays claim to through his books is an arcane one and exposes a deep ambivalence at the heart of the status of the book. As the printing press made the reproduction of vernacular literature possible so it necessarily widened the scope of the literate and potentially created access to a vast array of information. This information, however, as initially explored by Christopher Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus*, gave an autonomy and autodidacticism to the thinking public that could be as dangerous as it was liberating. Faustus’s celebration of his personal rise to world renown is tempered by his restlessness, boredom and frustration all of which lead him back to the original sin: the quest for knowledge beyond one’s godly allowance:

Divinity, adieu!

These necromantic books are heavenly
Lines, circles, scenes, letters and characters:
Ay, these are those that Faustus so desires.
Oh what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,
Is promised to the studious artisan! (1.1.48-54)

Faustus's focus on necromancy (which here we might gloss as magic), its symbols, constructions, codes and encryption makes way for his self-aggrandisement and solipsism. Punning on a basic tenet of humanism Faustus celebrates his radical revision of the boundaries of learning, translating Horace's dictum of education (*Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae*) into material acquisition and temporal power. The importance of 'profit or delight', stated by Horace around 18 BC, in the value of education and the arts was heartily adopted by Renaissance poets and most famously reconstructed by Philip Sidney in his own *Defence of Poesy* (1583). For Sidney it was both profit *and* delight that came to define the usefulness of fiction and yet in the mouth of Marlowe's hero we hear a laconic shift from the 'golden' world of the poets to the glittering world of financial reward. This shift is vibrantly explored in Marlowe's fallen hero but in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* it becomes a more subtle examination of the facets of power. To acquire knowledge is to have power and to have power is to exercise control. This is a rehearsal of the power of the text that is at once humorous – satirical, even – and tragic, performing, as it does loss, loneliness, humiliation, fear and isolation. The late play's interest in reconciliation and recuperation finds a particular bookish language in *The Tempest*: a language that cannot fully celebrate or condemn the book, but turn away from it.

The image of the book was central to the representation of power; from lawyers, priests, town clerks, justices, courtiers to the queen learning was a seminal part of the performance of that authority.²⁴ Whether devotional or lay the image of the book tended to suggest influence. Perhaps one of Elizabeth I's most iconic appearances with the book took place during her pre-Coronation ceremony in January 1558.

²⁴ The role of the book in the creation and division of societies is infinitely interesting in this period. Famously discussed by Thomas More in *Utopia* and redeployed by Shakespeare in the mouth of Cade in *HIV part 2*, as well as Gonzalo's re-invention of Montaigne's 'On Cannibals' in *The Tempest*.

Written by the humanist and schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster, the progress directs Elizabeth to the possession of a Bible in a conduit in Cheapside:

But as soon as she had received the book, kissed it, and with both her hands held the same, and so laid it upon her breast, with great thanks to the city therefore.²⁵

This moment marks Elizabeth's public authority and her role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Elizabeth's performance with the book celebrates her faith as much as her power but this act reflects the theatrical nature that such objects acquire once they are taken into the public domain. This moment is dramatically redeployed in Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* in 1605 when Elizabeth responds to the Mayor of London's gift after Mary Tudor's death and her subsequent succession:

We thanke you all: but first this booke I kisse
Thou art the way to honor; thou to blisse,
An English Bible, thankes my good Lord Maior,
You of our bodie and our soule have care,
This is the Jewell that we still love best,
This was our solace when we were distrest,
This booke that hath so long concealed it selfe,
So long shut up, so long hid; now Lords see,
We here unclaspe, for ever it is free (ll. 1578-86).²⁶

Heywood's Elizabeth performs her liberty through the image of the book, conflating her personal freedom with that of the reading public. As the book is opened so the world can turn towards its better future, waiting, as it has been, for this apotheosis. Between Mulcaster's pre-coronation progress, Marlowe's *Faustus*, Heywood's *If You*

²⁵ *The Queenes Maisties passage through the Citie of London to Westminster the day before her coronacion* (facsimile of the publication on January 23rd, 1559), James M. Osborn (ed.), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 48. I have modernized orthography and typography.

²⁶ See both Frederick Kiefer's *Writing on the Renaissance Stage, Written Words, Printed Pages, Metaphoric Books* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), p. 77 and Alexander Leggat's *Jacobean Public Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 169-70.

Know Not Me, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* the idea of the book had made its most significant journey. The iconic text has metamorphosed from a symbolic prop to a discursive image, dramatising the perpetual motion of both history and knowledge. The theatre was central to this shift from the static to the mobile since it allowed the book to perform beyond its prescribed limits: the solitary reader, the act of misinterpretation, the afterlife of information and the handling of printed material were all visible to the paying public. The book in performance could simulate the mind in motion. Francis Bacon writes most eloquently of this when he exclaims:

But the images of men's wits and knowledges remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time, and capable of perpetual renovation. Neither are they fitly to be called Images, because they generate still and cast their seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions, in succeeding ages. So that if the invention of the Shippe was thought so noble, which carryeth riches, and commodities from place to place, and consociateth the most remote regions in participation of their fruits: how much more are letters to bee magnified, which, as Shippes, pass through the vast seas of time?²⁷

Conflating the movement of knowledge with the trafficking of trade, Bacon shows that the written word is always in motion and that it will always have a point of departure as well as a destination. As we move ever faster towards the commodification of knowledge, Bacon conjures the fabric of Prospero's island sustained as it is by 'the minds of others', the 'invention of the Shippe' and the 'vast seas of time'. There is both a majesty and a magic here that sits easily with the Duke of Milan: Prospero's attention to his books, his carefully drawn portrait of a man sequestered by his library and the neglect of his state, his tutoring of Miranda, and she of Caliban, and the control he exercises over all three returns us again and again to the image of the book in the figure of the magus. Yet in the play's refusal to show these books, to identify them or perform them we become aware of Prospero's art, like Shakespeare's theatre, as something of an illusion. There is a certain humour in Shakespeare's metatheatrical valediction which comes from the mouth of a figure that has spent the last two hours deluding his islanders and colluding with an object he

²⁷ Brian Vickers (ed.), *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition of the Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 168.

cannot represent. When Prospero tells Ferdinand that 'these our actors ... were all spirits, and / Are melted into air' he dispenses with an image in the same way that he will drown his books 'deeper than did ever plummet sound'. Finally, the text gives way to theatre, its authority too complex an illusion to sustain in performance.