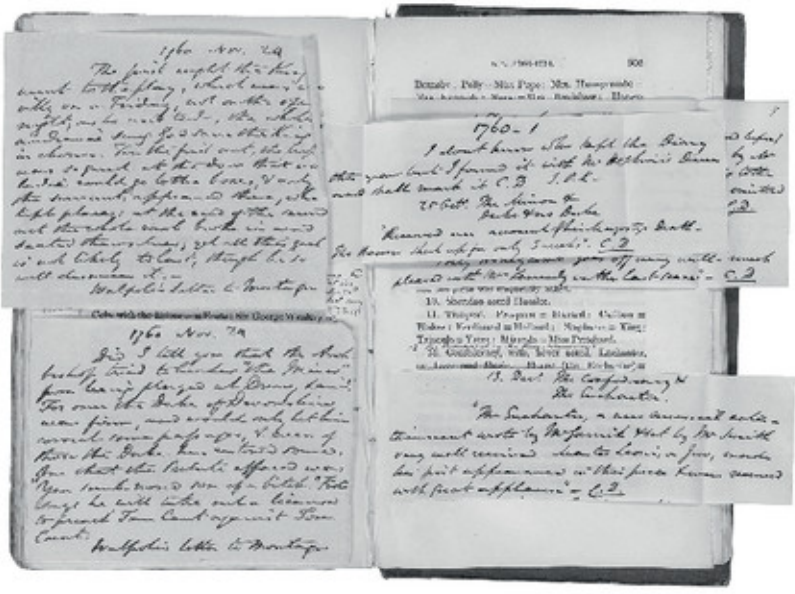
Writing the History of the British Stage, 1660–1900

Richard Schoch



WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH STAGE, 1660–1900

This is the first book on British theatre historiography. It traces the practice of theatre history from its origins in the Restoration to its emergence as an academic discipline in the early twentieth century. In this compelling revisionist study, Richard Schoch reclaims the deep history of British theatre history, valorizing the usually overlooked scholarship undertaken by antiquarians, booksellers, bibliographers, journalists, and theatrical insiders, none of whom considered themselves to be professional historians. Drawing together deep archival research, close readings of historical texts from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and an awareness of contemporary debates about disciplinary practice, Schoch overturns received interpretations of British theatre historiography and shows that the practice – and the diverse practitioners – of theatre history was far more complicated and far more sophisticated than we had realized. His book is a landmark contribution to how theatre historians today can understand their own history.

RICHARD SCHOCH is Professor of Drama at Queen's University Belfast. He is the author of *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* (Cambridge University Press), *Not Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press), and *Queen Victoria and the Theatre of Her Age*. He has also edited *Great Shakespeareans: Macready, Booth, Terry, Irving* and *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques*. For a popular audience, he wrote *The Secrets of Happiness*, which has been translated into six languages. His books have been shortlisted for the Barnard Hewitt Award and the Theatre Book Prize. Schoch has received fellowships from the Leverhulme Trust, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Stanford Humanities Center.

WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH STAGE, 1660–1900

RICHARD SCHOCH

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107166929

First published 2016

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-107-16692-9 Hardback

For Stephen Orgel, optimus maximus

Contents

Figures

Acknowledgments

My chief debt of gratitude is to the Leverhulme Trust, which awarded me a Major Research Fellowship to write a book on British theatre historiography. The fellowship provided the extraordinary luxury of three years devoted entirely to research. Without the Trust's generous award, this book would not have been finished and perhaps never attempted. At a time when support for monographs is declining, the Leverhulme Trust must be commended for its loyal dedication to individual scholars.

I spent my fellowship period mainly at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. In addition to housing the world's greatest collection of materials related to Shakespeare, the Folger is also a world-class archive for theatre history. My sincere thanks go to Michael Witmore, the Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, for his inspiring and visionary leadership. In the Folger's reading rooms, I depended daily on the knowledge and professionalism of LuEllen DeHaven, Alan Katz, Camille Seerattan, Betsy Walsh, and Georgianna Ziegler. Janet Alexander Griffin, the Folger's Senior Director for Public Programs, and Garland Scott, Head of External Relations, were committed to sharing research in theatre history with the wider public. I thank them for enlisting me in that worthy initiative. Erik Castillo and Jodie Pitman were instrumental in handling the logistics of my long residency at the Folger. For participation in other aspects of life at the Folger, I am grateful to Caroline Bedinger, Carol Brobeck, Daniel DeSimone, Kathleen Lynch, Barbara Mowat, Gail Kern Paster, Winnie Harrington Robinson, and Owen Williams. Ricky Mitchell, Quintin Peterson – a fellow author – and their colleagues kept a watchful eye over everything at the Folger and provided a friendly welcome to all visitors. I must also warmly thank Stephen Enniss, now Director of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, but who served as the Folger's Librarian when I began this project. With its winning combination of archival treasures and curatorial expertise, the Folger is an extraordinarily rich place for scholars and scholarship.

At Queen Mary, University of London, where I taught until 2012, I benefited from the support and advice of Trevor Dadson, former Vice-Principal for the Humanities and Social Sciences; Colin Jones in the School of History; and my Drama colleagues Maria Delgado and Bridget Escolme. During my tenure as Director of the Graduate School for Humanities and Social Sciences, it was a joy to work with Joshua Bronson, James Dunkerley, Linda Grant, and Quentin Skinner. My new colleagues at Queen's University Belfast have been equally helpful, especially Michael Alcorn, Mark Phelan, Kirk Shilliday, Kurt Taroff, and Pearl Young. I also thank Shane O'Neill, former Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, for his warm and encouraging support during the years when I was on the university payroll but not yet on the university campus.

Parts of this book originated as papers delivered to the American Society for Theatre Research, the Shakespeare Association of America, and the International Federation for Theatre Research. On those and other occasions, I have benefited from the questions, advice, and challenges of Gina Bloom, Clara Calvo, Marvin Carlson, Edward Chaney, Bradin Cormack, Derek Dunne, Amanda Eubanks-Winkler, Barbara Hodgdon, Coppélia Kahn, Seth Lerer, Ellen MacKay, Cary Mazer, Judith Milhous, Andrew Murphy, Thomas Postlewait, Fiona Ritchie, Alan Stewart, Henry Turner, Denise Walen, Don Weingust, and Will West. At Cambridge University Press, this book has benefited from the patience, foresight, and vigilant care of Sarah Stanton, my longtime editor. She has my deepest thanks. Chloé Harries carefully and efficiently oversaw the production process while the ever-scrupulous Heather Dubnick prepared the Index. Thanks are also due to anonymous readers who offered helpful responses to a draft of the full manuscript. Fellow scholars were marvelously generous with their time in reading and commenting upon a rather long manuscript. This book would be much the poorer were it not for the timely and expert interventions of Peter Holland, Erika Lin, Kate Newey, Stephen Orgel, Joseph Roach, and W.B. Worthen. No scholar could ask for a better group of sharp but sympathetic readers.

My time in Washington, DC, was much enriched by the friendship of Cynthia Coogan, Jean Gilson, Steve Holman, Paul McCarren, S.J., Michael Peterson, Liz Robelen, and Mark Thornburg. Richard Cellini deserves thanks for giving an outsider's perspective on the whole project. During my return trips to London, Reggie Blennerhassett and Ray Aller were gracious and obliging hosts. The company of Rebecca Beasley and Markman Ellis was and remains a delight. Last year I lost a treasured

friend – Rick Curry, S.J. – who had been a source of strength for me and for many others, even as his own strength ebbed away. To each and to all, my heartfelt gratitude and affection.

This book is for Stephen Orgel, my first and best reader. All that I owe to him can scarcely be recounted, let alone repaid. After you, who?

Introduction

The times, the times are chang'd.
– John Fletcher, *The Tragedy of Rollo* (1640)

This book – a history of British theatre history – would not have been written in 1952 when Alois M. Nagler published *Sources of Theatrical History*, a weighty and widely influential compendium of extracts from primary sources documenting Western stage history from Sophocles to Strindberg. Nagler, the Austrian émigré who for thirty years taught theatre history at Yale University, was North America's most redoubtable champion of *Theaterwissenschaft*: the polemically "scientific" approach to the theatrical past, rigorously conducted through the collection, ordering, and authentication of source materials. As Nagler made clear on the first page of his book, the only goal of the theatre historian was "to reconstruct, both vividly and accurately, the conditions under which" plays were first performed. He placed little confidence in earlier works of theatre history, judging them to be unhelpfully inspired by "personal enthusiasm" or "local patriotism." Following the dictum pronounced by Max Herrmann at the University of Berlin half a century earlier, nothing valuable could be found in the unscientific writings on the stage produced by "the general dilettantism of the nineteenth century."[1] To venture further back in time was futility itself.

It was no coincidence that historiography did not strongly interest modernists, whose goal was to faithfully reconstruct the past from archival sources. Beyond the discovery and authentication of those sources, there was, so it seemed, no methodological problem to solve. For much of the twentieth century, as Michael Bentley has argued, scholars believed in an

[1] Alois Nagler, *Sources of Theatrical History* (New York: Theatre Annual, 1952), ix, xx, xxi. Nagler was indebted most immediately to Herrmann for the principle that a good theatre historian aims to reconstruct the lost performance event.

"emerging historical truth which, once demonstrated, no rational person could gainsay."[2] Indeed, the total dispensability of historiography – we don't need to know what earlier historians thought because we are better than they – was the very triumph of the modernist method.

Not yet have we fully renounced the modernist paradigm. Consider, for example, Ellen MacKay's broad assertion that "theater history perpetually re-begins itself" with a "purge" of past scholarship.[3] That was true for Nagler and his twentieth-century contemporaries but it was absolutely not true for their predecessors. In 1780, when Isaac Reed prepared the second edition of Robert Dodsley's *Select Collection of Old Plays*, he included the history of the English stage that Dodsley had written for the original edition published thirty-six years earlier and brought it up to date with his own "Supplement." John Payne Collier, in the 1825 third edition, included what both Dodsley and Reed had written. This example alone makes clear that theatre historiography once proceeded not by purging earlier scholarship but by preserving and valuing it.

Yet because we read chronologically remote histories more as sources of facts than as interpretive interventions in their own right, we remain largely unaware of the diverse historiographical principles and perspectives they enact. Despite the vigor of recent critical historiography, there remains a curious reluctance to engage seriously with the aims and methods of theatre scholarship produced before the early twentieth century, even though the first works of British theatre history date from the 1660s.[4] Indeed, the opening essay in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past* (1989) – the landmark edited volume that spurred a new interest in performance historiography – dismisses theatre histories written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as "too often inaccurate, fragmented, and pointless."[5]

[2] Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870–1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

[3] Ellen MacKay, "Against Plausibility," in *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*, eds. Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 22–31; citation at 23.

[4] As the learned Robert D. Hume has observed, "[f]undamental differences in the practice of theatre history between the late seventeenth century and the later eighteenth century have been little understood and have received almost no comment from practising theatre historians or theoreticians of historiography." Hume, "Theatre History, 1660–1800: Aims, Materials, Methodology," in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800*, eds. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 9–44; citation at 9.

[5] Ronald W. Vince, "Theatre History as an Academic Discipline," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past,* eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 1–18; citation at 4. In more balanced reflections on disciplinary origins, Shannon Jackson and Marvin Carlson also locate the pioneers of theatre history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge

My intention here is not to fault other scholars but rather to point out the continuing, yet often unacknowledged, force of modernist historiography that discounts the interpretive value of scholarship predating what it regards as empirical rigor in the humanities.

I want to turn that assumption on its head. I want to take seriously a body of historical writing more trivialized than scrutinized. I want to find *histories* in texts usually regarded only as *sources*. Many of the works considered in this book – for example, Gerard Langbaine's *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), John Downes's *Roscius Anglicanus* (1708), and John Genest's *Some Account of the English Stage* (1832) – are still known to historians of theatre and drama and sometimes used by them. My point is not that these works have been forsaken but that they have been principally used as repositories of facts and not as expressions of historiographical intent and vision. By taking these works seriously I mean treating them less as neutral sourcebooks and more as valid interpretations of the theatrical past. Thus, I understand historiography as embracing the study of the changing methods of writing history *and* the accumulated body of historical writing on a particular subject.

In conceiving this book I drew inspiration from two scholars who have expanded our collective historiographical consciousness. Peter Holland's essay "A History of Histories: From Flecknoe to Nicoll," which appeared in *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History* (2003), and Jacky Bratton's *New Readings in Theatre History* (2003) mark important steps in reclaiming the deep history of theatre history.[6] They have challenged the discipline to reappraise the material, methodological, and ideological bases on which it was founded and practiced for several hundred years. They have shown that matters are more complex than we had assumed. That I do not agree with Holland and Bratton on every last point is entirely to be expected because difference keeps scholarship alive. Yet that scarcely detracts from the lasting value of their research. If my study of past theatre

University Press, 2004). Carlson, "Reflections on a Global Theatre History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History,* eds. David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski (Cambridge University Press, 2012). When Carlson states that "theatre history was established as a field of study in the late nineteenth century" (149), surely he means that it was then established as an academic discipline. Theatre history as an organized "field of study" existed long before then.

[6] Peter Holland, "A History of Histories: From Flecknoe to Nicoll," in *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History,* eds. W.B. Worthen and Peter Holland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8–29; and Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially pp. 17–35. Thomas Postlewait also acknowledges the roots of theatre historical scholarship in *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). Postlewait's monograph comprises extended versions of some of his most influential essays that were originally published between 1988 and 2004.

historians has taught me anything, it is that our indebtedness to other scholars is far more substantial than we customarily express. So I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that in many respects this book is a long response to the challenge that fellow scholars have set down.

Research in the humanities has inclined in recent years toward ever-greater fragmentation, partly to focus on previously marginalized subject groups and partly to avoid the ideologically suspect totalities that sometimes characterized earlier scholarship. "Microhistory" is the most prominent example of the anthropological disaggregation of historical research, in which minute or local investigations are deployed to arrive at far-reaching conclusions. Ever-smaller units of analysis have also characterized much work in theatre historiography, which continues to organize itself tightly around case studies.[7] Countering that trend, I investigate in this book the explanatory potential of long-range historical study by examining the usually overlooked theatre histories and historians from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. I do so without wishing to reinstate the historiographical absolutes that microhistory has validly called into question.

Nor is my purpose merely revisionist: that is, to include otherwise secondary or peripheral figures within an undisturbed larger narrative. As Susan Bennett has astutely remarked, too often the result of historiographical inclusion – a necessary but inevitably partial undertaking – is an expanded reiteration of "what has always already been known" rather than a reimagining of what can be known.[8] Thus, my goal in this book is less to widen the community of past British theatre historians than to use that enlarged community to redefine what theatre historiography has been. Ultimately, then, I want this book not just to change the evidentiary basis for theatre historiography but also, and more importantly, to change the terms of scholarly investigation. By studying accounts of the British stage written from the Restoration to the end of the Victorian era as credible historiographical mediations, I hope to expand the scope of the discipline;

[7] See, for example, Rosemarie Bank and Michal Kobialka, eds., *Theatre/Performance Historiography: Time, Space, Matter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait, eds., *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010) and Magelssen and Bial, eds., *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*.

[8] Susan Bennett, "Theatre History, Historiography, and Women's Dramatic Writing," in *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies*, eds. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (Manchester University Press, 2000), 46–59; citation at 53. She has similarly argued in a more recent essay that revisionist "historiographical labor" can fail to alter the contours of "theatre histories." "The Making of Theatre History," in *Representing the Past*, 63–83; citation at 72.

to integrate and comment upon existing scholarship, yet raise the stakes of inquiry; and to interpret the writing of theatre history in light of larger historiographical trends. My project begins with the story of our current historiographical moment, and how we got here.

Historicisms, Narrow and Wide

The epistemological rupture that broke through in the 1970s, and which is commonly labeled "postmodernism," caused much anger within a historical profession proud of its many archive-based accomplishments. After the linguistic turn in the humanities and social sciences foregrounded the power of language to construct reality, and not merely to reflect it, realism was effectively banished from academic historical thought. Scholars for whom relativism is itself an absolute principle can find it difficult to appreciate just how much of a loss to scholarship the debasement of empirical specificity was felt to be. A sardonic Walter Benjamin did not exaggerate when he described Rankean historical realism – "how things actually were" – as the strongest narcotic of the nineteenth century.[9] So strong that it survived well into the twentieth century, including through the principles and methods of *Theaterwissenschaft*.

Central to the postmodern critique of Enlightenment values is the proposition that there is no impartial vantage point for historians to occupy. Eighteenth-century scholars like Edward Gibbon and David Hume, among the few historians of their age still read, understood the fundamental precept of historicism that all human events are circumscribed by time and place and therefore can be understood only by reference to their particular time and place. Yet the Enlightenment awareness of diversity within history did not negate its belief in a human nature that, as Hume proposed, "remains still the same" in "all Nations and Ages."[10] What changed in history was not human nature but only its localized sequences of development. The historian stood outside the varied temporal unfolding of human nature, its singularity, like that of the natural world, being more discernable when appraised impartially and from a distance.[11]

[9] Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 463.
[10] David Hume, *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (London: A. Millar, 1748), 133.
[11] See George Nadel, "The Philosophy of History before Historicism," in *Studies in Philosophy and History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 49–73.

Postmodernity has embraced a wider historical consciousness: the recognition that historians themselves are part of the processes of history. A historian looking at the past is not a *subject* who looks at an *object*, like a tourist stopping in front of the Great Pyramid of Giza. Whenever historians say something about the past they are also, and inevitably, saying something about themselves. So orthodox has this view become that we are no longer startled by Hayden White's once controversial claim that historians confront an essentially neutral data field that they selectively employ according to their political and esthetic values.[12] The interest in theatre historiography that has arisen over the past few decades is nothing other than the disciplinary manifestation of our consciousness that historiography is itself constructed.[13] And so for us, historiography bears a double meaning, as Michal Kobialka has articulated: It "generates different questions that are being asked of research material" *and* "destabilizes, rather than relativizes, the notions of an event and a fact."[14]

How Do Historians See?

As Erika Fischer-Lichte explains, we construct histories by asking subjectively chosen questions of subjectively chosen objects.[15] Evidence is the object that enables you to answer your subjectively formed question and a good question is the one that you can answer by appealing to your subjectively chosen evidence. Yet "subjective" does not mean "personal";

[12] The classic text on this point is White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

[13] In addition to the works cited above, see also Ronald W. Vince, "Comparative Theatre Historiography," *Essays in Theatre* 1.2 (1983), 64–72; Vince, *Renaissance Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984); Vince, *Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984); Bruce A. McConachie, "Towards a Postpositivist Theatre History," *Theatre Journal* 37.4 (December 1985), 465–86; Vince, *Neoclassical Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988); Joseph Roach, "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Theatre Journal* 41.2 (May 1989), 155–68; Michael L. Quinn, "*Theaterwissenschaft* in the History of Theatre Study," *Theatre Survey* 32 (November 1991), 123–36; McConachie, "Theatre History and the Nation-State," *Theatre Research International* 20.2 (1995), 141–8; Roach, "Reconstructing Theatre/History," *Theatre Topics* 9 (1999), 3–10; Robert D. Hume, *Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); William Ingram, "Early Modern Theater History: Where We Are Now, How We Got Here, Where We Go Next," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–15; S.P. Cerasano, "The Dream of a Perfect History," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 40 (2012), 47–56; and Rebecca Schneider, *Theatre & History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[14] Michal Kobialka, "Historical Archives, Events and Facts: History Writing as Fragmentary Performance," *Performance Research* 7.4 (December 2002), 3–11; citation at 7.

[15] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 342.

rather, it means the structuring forces of cognition that, while neither natural nor essential, cannot be reduced to individual taste or preference. In many stage histories the structuring mechanisms are periodization and plays. These mechanisms are not *what* we think about; they are *how* we think. It is how performances as historical events organize themselves in our consciousness. Thus, we are accustomed to reading – and writing – books with titles like *Hamlet through the Ages* or *Medea in Performance*. But we are less accustomed to thinking about how these ideational givens create their own object of study, in as much as historiographical form creates its own content. It is possible to imagine performance histories that do not cling to periodization and that do not regard theatrical performances as performances *of plays*. But it is difficult to write such histories, primarily because of the continuing force of institutional practices and conceptual biases.[16]

The banishment of realism from historical thought has not banished the necessity of archival labor. But that labor appears in a new light: because we now accept that the findings of research are not transparent to their own meaning. Most significantly, we are aware that the archive has never been a neutral or disinterested site for the production and organization of knowledge. Indeed, it has been the locus of an acutely felt desire to return nostalgically to the site of unequivocal origin – as Jacques Derrida put it, "to the most archaic place of absolute commencement."[17] Moreover, to organize disparate materials into a "collection" is already to interpret the past, because whatever is organized must be organized in a particular way. As Michel de Certeau has explained, the collection presumes the totality of the past events that it documents even though it is the collection itself that produces a conception of pastness through its initial "gesture of *setting aside*."[18] Archival inscription "foregrounds and reiterates favored representations," Joseph Roach reminds us, while the absence of archival detail "occludes the undesirable ones."[19] As in a Möbius strip, the tasks of recording and creating history cannot be distinguished. And so the archive is both a physical place – a warehouse of

[16] Performance studies has given us alternative models for understanding the phenomenon of performance, most notably Richard Schechner's articulation of "restored behavior" and Joseph Roach's concept of "surrogation." Both paradigms can accommodate a performance event that utilizes a dramatic text but neither defines performance in terms of any affiliated text.

[17] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91.

[18] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 72.

[19] Joseph Roach, "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," 159.

historical information – and a symbolic event – the enunciation of what is historically thinkable.[20] Yet instead of reducing the archive to an over-indulged metaphor, I focus throughout this book on the concrete archival practices of specific historians. In so doing I share Rosemarie Bank and Michal Kobialka's materialist emphasis on historiography as "the arrangement of the historical record."[21]

Nor do the raw materials of history exist in a pre-archival state of nature. Far from being neutral, the materials out of which archives are constituted are inevitably slanted, because they result from prior determinations of relevance that privilege some data and sideline others. As Paul Veyne has observed, the significance that we ascribe to certain facts derives only from the criteria of importance that historians later impose upon them.[22] Nor can we insist that some facts are more important than others by virtue of their consequences, because the criteria of significance for consequences are likewise predetermined by the historian. There are no irreducibly elemental facts out of which a total history might be compiled. There are only facts chosen for their signifying potential within a certain plot or itinerary.[23]

In the 1830s, John Payne Collier complained that Philip Henslowe had not organized his "Diary" efficiently, thus attributing to that varied memorandum book an evidentiary stature that its compiler never intended. In so doing, Collier attributed a corresponding agency to Henslowe, making the theatre entrepreneur a theatre historian *avant la lettre*. Such presumptions of historiographical intent arise not from the artifact and its creator but from the demands subsequently placed upon them by investigators. Indeed, the Diary survived not because anyone thought it would be an excellent documentary source for theatre history – no such discipline existed when Henslowe died in 1616 – but because his papers were later deposited at Dulwich College.[24] There the Diary remained, a largely unknown quantity until Edmond Malone in 1790 realized just how much unique information it contained about the Elizabethan stage.

[20] For a helpful discussion of the archive as it relates to early modern drama and theatre, see Alan Galey, *The Shakespearean Archive: Experiments in New Media from the Renaissance to Postmodernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[21] Bank and Kobialka, eds., *Theatre/Performance Historiography*, 2.

[22] Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 20.

[23] See James Wilkinson, "A Choice of Fictions: Historians, Memory and Evidence," *PMLA* 111.1 (January 1996), 80–92.

[24] Henslowe's stepdaughter was married to the actor Edward Alleyn, who founded Dulwich College in 1619.

A Methodological Prolegomenon

In responding to the challenge of redefining British theatre historiography I have had to organize a vast amount of material.[25] The historical record itself provided the starting date – the Restoration – because that was when the first histories of the British stage were written. The end point was more difficult to determine, because there was no precise moment when theatre history became a modern discipline, which I knew would be the outer limit of my study. Initially, I believed that this book would conclude with E.K. Chambers – in particular, the 1923 publication of *The Elizabethan Stage* – because he occupies a liminal position between "amateur" and "professional" theatre historians. Yet during the course of my research it became clear that the methodological apparatus regarded as the inaugural feature of academic theatre history – that is, performance reconstruction based on authoritative primary sources – emerged much earlier, in the mid and late nineteenth century. The shift that took place in the early twentieth century was not about how to practice theatre history but about how to brand it professionally. And so the main chapters of this book conclude in the nineteenth century, when the scholarly basis for professional theatre history was first established. The scholarship came first and was followed by a narrow professional identity characterized ever-more emphatically as "scientific."[26] In the Postlude I carry the story forward to the advent of modernism in the twentieth century, arguing that the methodological line from Collier to Hazlitt to Chambers to Nagler is more or less unbroken.[27] This continuity has been obscured for reasons of academic narcissism – professional theatre historians could not allow themselves to be indebted to amateurs – but its existence cannot be gainsaid.[28]

[25] Most British theatre histories written during the period in question focused on London, such focus necessarily reflected – but not endorsed – in my historiographical account. Legitimately challenged by theatre historians today, a London-centered approach was nonetheless dominant for centuries. Works such as Richard Wright Procter's *Manchester in Holiday Dress* (1866) and James C. Dibdin's *The Annals of the Edinburgh Stage* (1888) were exceptions to the metropolitan rule.

[26] Whether scholars today believe that an impersonally scientific engagement with facts is possible is a different question.

[27] In his chapter on Tudor and Stuart theatre, Nagler is guided principally by Chambers in identifying primary sources, which he quotes not directly but from Chamber's transcriptions in *The Elizabethan Stage*. See Nagler's endnotes (*Sources of Theatrical History*, 594–5).

[28] In a study of this length, sacrifices in coverage are inevitable. No doubt some readers will wish that I had continued my study well into the twentieth century, with longer examinations of Chambers and Allardyce Nicoll. While acknowledging the validity of that preference, I am mindful that there is no stopping point that would please all readers. Nor do I claim to have written the last word on the subject.

During this long period – 250 years – many different people wrote many theatre histories of many different kinds. How should these works and their authors be presented? As Herbert Butterfield observed in the 1950s, anyone writing the history of historiography "must avoid the disjointed chronicle, the temptation to give a straggling meaningless string of names."[29] His cautionary advice is still relevant. It is pointless to undertake a study of historiography that amounts to nothing more than a compendium of thinkers and their thoughts. Lines of authorial influence are important only if they shed light on how historians reshaped and adapted the work of their predecessors to respond creatively to the demands of their own time. So instead of writing a book about history *books* I have tried to write a book about historical *practice*.

Thus, I provide biographical information on various historians to contextualize their practice. Retracing, as best I could, their own intellectual journey, I studied the materials they studied and I read the books they read.[30] More importantly, I examined the letters, drafts, and notes that some of them left behind in the course of their work, because such informal documents often express more clearly a particular historian's assumptions, desires, and working methods. That these underlying materials are rarely consulted only confirms the fact that we still have much to learn about theatre historians from the past. Moving beyond the writings of individual historians, I have explored the social environment in which they worked, looking at the availability of patronage and primary sources, the marketplace demand for theatre history, and the gradual shift in attitude toward intellectual labor from a communal undertaking with no fixed terminus to a solo enterprise that culminated in the magisterial monograph.

Few readers will be familiar with every historian and every historical work under discussion. Indeed, our collective amnesia about British theatre historiography in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries is a main justification for this book. At the risk of coming across as an antiquarian myself, I have tried to give a sense of how these works were put together and what it is like to read them. The diversity of how theatre history could be written struck me most: catalogue, calendar, chronicle, list, dictionary, dialogue, documentary transcription, marginalia, biography, and narrative. We now take for granted that historical writing is

[29] Herbert Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (Cambridge University Press, 1955), 8.

[30] In a few instances this was not possible: e.g., John Downes wrote *Roscius Anglicanus* in 1708 partly from memory and partly from documents that no longer survive. In many cases, however, sources and documentation are extant.

narratively structured – it tells a story – but that was not always the case.[31] In fact, narrative was long regarded as the most unreliable historical genre because it depended mostly upon the rhetorical eloquence of the author. Moreover, I pay attention to different experiences of reading theatre history, such as the tradition of annotating copies of Langbaine's *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), the utility of David Erskine Baker's pocket-sized *Companion to the Play-House* (1764), and the agony of reading Collier's *History of English Dramatic Poetry* (1831). These appraisals do not fetishize any single book or historian but rather seek to comprehend more fully the aims of theatre historians in different periods, the formal and generic conventions that shaped their writings, and how both the aims and the conventions changed over time.

Because I regard historiography as a practice embedded in the institutions, outlooks, and ideologies of a particular moment – and not as a sequence of autonomous acts of intellection – I do not account for every theatre historian in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Instead, I concentrate upon those scholars whose writings best illustrate, in my estimation, the major historiographical developments of their time. From the Restoration to the early eighteenth century, when theatre history was a new discipline, the number of authors was small; and so it has been possible for me to discuss virtually all of them – for example, Flecknoe, Langbaine, Wright, and Downes – although comprehensiveness for its own sake is not my goal. Because the number of works on British theatre history increased markedly from the middle of the eighteenth century onward, I had to choose which historians to investigate. Among the determining factors for inclusion or exclusion were: the dialogue between a given work of theatre history and historiographical trends more broadly; the significance of the work to its original readers, and subsequently to the discipline as a whole; the work's historiographical ambitions; and its distinctiveness, whether factual, formal, or methodological.[32]

In short, I focus on works that shaped the discipline rather than those that only reiterated it. I am drawn to the works of scholars who unsettled

[31] David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski present as categorically self-evident their value judgment that "[s]uccessful historians are good story tellers." "When?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, 9.

[32] For example, I give scant attention to Charles Dibdin's *A Complete History of the English Stage*, 5 vols. (London, 1797–1800). Dibdin's work promises a comprehensive theatrical history and the author repeatedly ranks himself alongside "other historians" – but the result is a weak compilation of extracts from "authorities" (1:9, 2:222). Valuable for its factual plenitude, this work claims a historiographical dynamism that it does not possess.

the received orthodoxies of historical practice. Thus, I am interested in such questions as: Why are the catalogues of Restoration booksellers among the earliest discursive sites for theatre historiography? Why did James Wright in 1699 compose a history of the English stage when he knew that many readers would dismiss his topic as trivial? Why did John Downes in 1708 create genealogies of acting that linked his theatre with that of Shakespeare? Why did Colley Cibber in 1740 borrow the tropes of political autobiography when writing his *Apology*? Why did Robert Dodsley in 1744 turn for inspiration to the Italian theatre historian Luigi Riccoboni when writing one of the first narrative histories of the English stage? Why did Malone in 1790 find little to esteem in medieval theatre, while John Payne Collier in 1831 explained in detail the use of pageant wagons? And why do Collier's numerous forgeries and fabrications of manuscripts in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s exemplify, rather than negate, his commitment to primary sources?

Some of these questions can be answered only speculatively, although that is hardly unusual for historical research. What they have in common, along with other questions that I will ask, is a focus on cruxes in theatre historiography. I am looking, then, at moments of contradiction, tension, and change – moments when the gears shifted in how and why theatre history was written. Particularly because this book contains so much unfamiliar material, I invite readers to focus less on the precise sequence of scholars and scholarship ("where are we now in the story?") and more on the different issues that have recursively animated British theatre historiography.

Put differently, this book is conceptual in approach even though its content is arranged broadly chronologically. Indeed, I wish to avoid the common pitfall of constructing the history of theatre history as a linear evolution from the naïve and simplistic outlook of earlier scholars to the more intellectually and theoretically sophisticated perspective of modern ones.[33] There is little to be gained from invigilating the writings of earlier scholars only to pronounce them deficient, for that would tell us only what we already know: they were not like us. My starting point is different. I understand historiography not as condensed "literature review" but as open-ended exploration of why historical writing took the shape that it did at a certain time and in a certain place. By rejecting a progressive view of

[33] In the chapters ahead, when I point out contradictions and tensions within a particular historical approach (e.g., Malone's compromised commitment to the objective authority of documents) I am not criticizing scholars personally so much as I am rebalancing interpretation of them. That is the least one can expect from a book on historiography.

historiography, I am able to ask questions that are sidelined if we look upon past historians simply as inferior versions of historians today:

- What did past historians find interesting in *their* past?
- Which "pasts" did previous historians emphasize?
- How did the availability of sources change perceptions of the past?
- Why did new genres of historical writing emerge when they did?
- What sort of readers did past historians have in mind?

To answer such questions I must encounter past theatre historians on their own terms, allowing the contours of their distinctive thought-worlds to come into focus. I have no totalizing story to tell about the advance of antiquarian research in the seventeenth century, the rise of historical consciousness in the eighteenth century, and the triumph of whig progressivism in the nineteenth century. Rather, I investigate how and why theatre history was practiced in the diverse ways that it was, without imposing any trajectory upon that diversity. Another scholar might adopt a different approach, and that is a good thing. My responsibility here is to explain what decisions I have made and why, in the hope that you will regard them not as categorically normative but as useful and productive interventions in a scholarly conversation that preceded me and that will succeed me, and that right now includes you.[34]

My decisions about what material to cover might puzzle – or disappoint – some readers. On the one hand, I examine texts and authors that are not usually considered in theatre historiography, such as catalogues of Restoration booksellers, annotated "Langbaines," and the surviving notebooks and marginalia of theatre historians, including their annotations to the writings of *other* theatre historians. Such sources are routinely ignored either because they were not intended to be theatre history (e.g., book catalogues) or because they were not formally published (e.g., annotations).[35] Yet for the purposes of this book, neither intention nor

[34] For example, a scholar following the principles of "archaeo-historicism," a neologism coined by Robert D. Hume, would be less interested in why the practice of theatre history changed over time (for me, a high priority) and more interested in detailing the factual "added value" of every work of theatre history produced in a given period (for me, a lower priority). Both approaches have advantages and limitations.

[35] The Folger Shakespeare Library owns John Payne Collier's annotated copy of John Genest's *Some Account of the English Stage* (1832). For me this was a valuable source because the annotations – effectively, a dialogue between Collier and Genest – reveal much about the developing principles and methods of theatre historiography in the first half of the nineteenth century (see pp. 323–25). Yet according to the Folger's circulation records, when I called up this item in February 2015 it had been more than a decade since another reader had done the same.

publication is a criterion for inclusion. Indeed, I have examined these neglected materials precisely because they exist in a perpendicular relationship with the official record of theatre history, and so by their very nature they incite a debate about the methods, aims, and principles of the discipline. I have tried to bring that debate into the open.

When considering published works, I look at them dynamically, in different temporal strata, such that each text simultaneously possesses a past (the sources out of which it was written), a present (its form, content, and argument), and a future (how later readers used and understood it).[36] Thus, in the chapter on *Historia Histrionica* I look back to the medieval manuscripts that James Wright consulted, I look into Wright's history as an ingenious rebuttal of Jeremy Collier's denunciation of the stage, and I look ahead to how and when *Historia Histrionica* influenced later scholarship. When a work of theatre history is used by later scholars it becomes itself a "source" for other works, in the way that Wright was a source for Malone, and then Malone was a source for Collier, and then Collier was a source for Chambers, and then Chambers was a source for everybody. In these ways, the past, the present, and the future of scholarship blur beyond the point of distinction. This book's recursive structure, in which individual chapters move backward and forward in time, deliberately mirrors the recursive patterns of theatre historiography itself.

On the other hand, I devote little attention to persons that some scholars might deem significant. William Rufus Chetwood, a prompter in the age of Cibber and Macklin, has occasionally been hailed as an exemplary "tribal scribe," someone who wrote theatre history from within the theatrical profession.[37] Yet for me Chetwood registers hardly at all, partly because I find little merit in the "tribal scribe" paradigm and partly because his contemporaries regarded him as a bad historian: he made things up.[38]

[36] Peter Holland's essay "A History of Histories" is one of the few works to date that acknowledges the importance of understanding the afterlife of theatre histories written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not least because those afterlives – the accumulated understandings and uses of a text – are rarely straightforward.

[37] See, for example, Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History*, 26–8. Bratton cites Stephen Jones's criticism of Chetwood in the 1812 second *Biographia Dramatica* as evidence of a "split between the bibliographical and the theatrical branches of the scribal tradition" (28) in the early nineteenth century. That assertion is based upon error. Bratton seems unaware that the remarks disparaging Chetwood were written in 1782 by Isaac Reed for his earlier edition of *Biographia Dramatica*, and then reprinted by Jones thirty years later.

[38] The former actor David Erskine Baker looked kindly upon Chetwood's service as Drury Lane's prompter – "in that very laborious and useful Office [he] was esteem'd to have great Excellence" – but found nothing positive to say about his *General History of the Stage*, dismissing it as possessing "very little, or rather indeed no Merit." Baker, *The Companion to the Play-House: or, an Historical*

Chetwood was a colorful but never a consequential figure. Nor is productivity a reliable index to the significance of any particular historian. In the early nineteenth century, James Winston, another theatrical insider, collected an extraordinary amount of material for a history of the stage that he never wrote.[39] Even so, Winston makes only a few appearances in this book. Not because he failed to publish – the same was true of other scholars at the time – but because his scholarship was derivative, borrowed wholesale from antiquarian habits of the time. He was a dogged but never a dynamic figure.

Perhaps the greatest surprise for my readers is that biography and autobiography are not central to my inquiry, even though many of them were written from the middle of the eighteenth century onward. Thus, Thomas Davies's *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* (1780) and Anna Larpent's Diaries (1790–1830) do not figure prominently in this book. Such works have become the focus of renewed scholarly interest because the "anecdote," a mainstay of popular biography, has been redeemed as a valid form of historical discourse, and also because biographies allow the voices of marginalized figures to claim their place in the annals of performance history. Indeed, whatever renewed appreciation for theatre histories written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has developed in recent years can be attributed precisely to a present-day interest in biography and anecdote. While affirming the value of that revisionist scholarship, I find that my concerns lie elsewhere. I am interested in understanding how theatre history developed and why. For that line of inquiry, theatrical biographies are not strongly relevant because they are primarily expressions of the social construction of subjectivity and the commodification of public personalities; only secondarily are they instances of historiographical debate. The principal exception is Cibber's *Apology*, a work that is actually more theatre history than memoir. Samuel Pepys is discussed in the pages ahead, but mainly in terms of how the publication of his Diary

Account of all the Dramatic Writers (and their Works) that have appeared in Great Britain and Ireland, from the Commencement of our Theatrical Exhibitions, down to the Present Year 1764 . . ., 2 vols. (London: T. Becket and P.A. Dehondt, C. Henderson, and T. Davies, 1764), II:F2v. Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage, from its Origins in Greece down to the present Time* . . . (London: W. Owen, 1749).

[39] *The Theatric Tourist* (1805), Winston's sole published work, is a highly interesting illustrated account of provincial theatres. There is, however, some uncertainty over how much of the text he wrote himself. See Alfred L. Nelson, "James Winston's *Theatric Tourist*, A Critical Edition with a Biography and a Census of Winston Material," unpublished PhD dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, DC, 2 vols. 1968. Six years after Winston's death in 1843, his notebooks were sold at auction. Many of them can now be found at the British Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Huntington Library, and the Harvard Theatre Collection.

made him – in the estimation of nineteenth-century historians – a more compelling witness of the Restoration stage than the prompter John Downes. Above all, I have concentrated on works that have taken the long view: those that look through a telescope, as it were, and not through a microscope.[40]

Thematic Recurrences

A justification for any sort of historical research is that it throws light on surprises and paradoxes that favored interpretations have either left in shadow or not detected. As I worked on this book, a cluster of ideas that I believe do shed new light kept emerging in the different periods that I studied. They are the concerns that run throughout this book, and so define – or rather, redefine – the long history of British theatre historiography. In the remainder of this Introduction I want to summarize the key arguments that are elaborated in the chapters ahead.

1. *Theatre History Has Never Been Narrowly Teleological but Always Dispersed and Multi-Directional*

It is often assumed that theatre historians in the past were in thrall to an intellectually bankrupt notion of teleology, whereby the stage "developed" toward a state of perfection – Shakespearean drama – that was implicit in theatrical practice from the outset and required only its fulfillment in time. There might be occasional declines from the summit of excellence – Restoration and Victorian drama are the typical suspects – but the overall linear paradigm remained intact. This narrative is a cherished disciplinary formation, not least because it casts us, today, in the flattering role of those who know better. No longer hostages to the master narrative of progress, we do not operate under the illusions that distorted the work of our distant predecessors. The irony is that scholars whose starting point is radical contingency can easily adopt a "whig" interpretation of disciplinary history, in which today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better still.

[40] Nor does my inquiry much extend to visual evidence of performance. I have concentrated almost entirely on written texts partly because that was the form taken by most theatre histories, partly because the visual record is chronologically erratic, and partly because iconographic evidence is often governed by aesthetic conventions that limit its strict accuracy. Moreover, playhouse illustrations, as valuable as they are, do not generally share the wider historiographical ambition of the texts under consideration.

Yet when we look at what theatre historians in the past actually wrote, a far from uniform understanding of historical change emerges. The earliest accounts of British theatre history demonstrate awareness that change has always been multi-directional. This awareness of discontinuity comes through most strongly in the problem of medieval theatre – a "problem" because this historical phenomenon could be understood in multiple ways. Medieval theatre was either the valued locus of moral instruction and civic pride (Wright's *Historia Histrionica*) or a forgettable barbarism (Malone's "Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage") or a rudimentary precursor of Elizabethan drama (Collier's *History of English Dramatic Poetry*). It could be any of those things, but it could not be all of them. Historians had to choose – and they chose according to their standards of relevance. In the 1690s, James Wright was able to valorize medieval theatre and drama because his age did not subscribe to the historiography of progress, which would have characterized the medieval past as rude or barbaric. That was an Enlightenment belief, which in the 1790s prevented Edmond Malone from recognizing anything worthwhile in medieval theatre. From the Restoration onward, when theatre historians looked back at the past, they usually did not see the same thing in the same way.[41]

The plurality of historiography reminds us that there can never be a *total history*, because what is gained through one approach is lost through another. No historian – indeed, no generation of historians – can ask or answer all the questions that might be asked or answered of the historical record as they find it. That is what it means to be yourself part of the process of history. Yet all too often we interpret historically remote scholarship according to the normalized frameworks in which our own scholarship is produced, thereby dividing our disciplinary forebears into "heroes" and "villains." I try to escape that self-referential tendency by seeking to understand the intrinsic plurality of theatre historiography on its own terms and not from any evaluative perspective. I reject the premise that theatre historians in the past acquire their significance according to whether they anticipated the concerns and conclusions of theatre historians today. Malone, who in his time knew more about Shakespeare than anyone in the world – that is no exaggeration – went to his grave without knowing that the Globe was built in 1599, something that today any twelve-year-old

[41] Thus, I must depart from William Ingram's claim that "[o]ur predecessors," simply because they had access to fewer sources, did not confront the "contradictions," "inconsistencies," and "awareness of what kinds of data are still missing" that contemporary theatre historians do ("Early Modern Theater History," 13).

can find out in a matter of seconds on Wikipedia.[42] We know more today than did scholars in the past because historical knowledge is cumulative. But that does not make us better or them worse. Accordingly, my project implies no superiority on my part, as if it were possible for me to survey the discipline from a position of detached privilege. Like all historiographers I am embedded in the very subject that I study.

Instead of judging past historians I want to understand them. I want to comprehend why certain methods and certain interpretations were valued – or rejected – at certain times. When I draw attention to similarities between past and present historical practices, such as the creation of disciplinary networks, I do so not to configure the present as the logical fulfillment of the past. Rather, I do so to shed light on some recurring historiographical issues, without implying that their recurrence tends toward a fixed or final point of resolution. The heterogeneous nature of the theatre historical imagination and the historical works that resulted from it will be on prominent display throughout this book.

2. *The Binary Divide between Theatre History and Literary History Is a Twentieth-Century Invention of the Academic Profession that Has No Firm Basis in Prior Scholarly Practice*

It is well understood that the establishment of theatre studies as an academic discipline within British and North American universities in the opening decades of the twentieth century necessitated that theatre history define itself *against* dramatic criticism and literary history in order to demonstrate its own quasi-scientific rigor and solidly empirical credentials.[43] In consequence, the purported opposition, or at least tension, between "page" and "stage" became the controlling framework for artistic and scholarly practice alike, in that the validity of a performance has sometimes been thought to derive from its precursory text and sometimes from the processes of its own enactment, or some combination of them.

[42] "I am unable to ascertain at what time the Globe theatre was built . . . I believe it was not built long before the year 1596." Neither did Malone know that James Burbage built The Theatre in Shoreditch or that some of Shakespeare's earliest plays were staged at the Rose. Malone, "Historical Account of the English Stage," in *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, 10 vols. (London: J. Rivington and Sons *et al.*, 1790), 1.2, 41–2, 50; citation at 50.

[43] "For much of the present [i.e., twentieth] century, theater researchers have struggled to distance themselves from literary critics and literary historians, to establish their discipline on the fact of theatrical performance rather than on that of dramatic text." Vince, "Theatre History as an Academic Discipline," 1.

Yet when we subject the binary divide between print and performance to historical scrutiny we can see just how contingent it actually is. Prior to the twentieth century, theatre historians did not presume that "theatre" and "drama" denoted adversarial camps and that they had to choose between them or subsume one into the other. Although theatrical performance was not regarded as an autonomous art form until the modernist age, it does not follow, as Erika Fischer-Lichte has overstated, that performances were previously studied only "in terms of how they were able to convey or mediate literary works of art."[44]

In this book's opening chapter I argue that an enriching synergy between literary and theatrical history occurred in the Restoration, when booksellers' catalogues provided some of the first opportunities for thinking about the history of the stage. The theme recurs in subsequent chapters, which examine the methods and animating principles of scholars like Dodsley, Reed, Malone, and Collier, who found it entirely unproblematic to focus on the history of performance and the history of printed drama at the same time, without any loss in the integrity of their research. Although this book is not specifically about recuperating early modern stage history, it is undeniable that much theatre historiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed alongside the editing of Shakespeare's plays, a concurrence that underlines all the more the complementarity between literary and theatrical history.

When some theatre historiographers today denounce the apparently sempiternal subjugation of performance to literature, they are indulging an anachronism. They impose upon past disciplinary practice a specific ideological struggle in which they are invested, but their predecessors were not. As Shannon Jackson has shown, debates in the early twentieth century about how to define theatre as a research object were shaped primarily by the institutional context in which research was conducted: that is, what must theatre be and how must it be studied in order to merit a place in the modern university?[45] Yet the larger truth is that theatre had been a research object since the Restoration, and until the twentieth century, the university was the last place anyone chose to study it. By looking at the long history of British theatre history we can, if not dislodge, at least contextualize disciplinary narratives of antagonism and vulnerability.

[44] Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*, 338.
[45] Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 40–78.

3. *Theatre History Did Not Begin Within the Theatrical Profession; nor Is There Anything Categorically Distinctive About Theatre History Written by "insiders"; nor Has There Always Been a Firm Boundary between "insiders" and "outsiders"*

A corollary of the presumed conflict between page and stage is the insistence that theatre history emerged from within the theatrical profession in the first half of the eighteenth century only to be colonized in the nineteenth century by "elite" literary and dramatic historians who were hostile to the realities of "popular" performance. The heroes in this account are "tribal scribes" like John Downes, the long-serving prompter at Drury Lane who wrote *Roscius Anglicanus*, and the villains are supposedly logocentric bourgeois scholars like John Payne Collier, author of *The History of English Dramatic Poetry*, a work berated in some recent scholarship for being deeply anti-theatrical.[46]

This account is flawed on both sides. Theatre history did not begin with the prompter's memories, at least not exclusively. John Downes did compose an early work of theatre history, but he was not alone. As the opening chapters of this book demonstrate, the history of the British stage began in the Restoration with a variety of extra-theatrical figures: booksellers like Francis Kirkman, literary biographers like Gerard Langbaine, and antiquarians like James Wright. Nor is it fair to claim that nineteenth-century scholars like Collier were antagonistic toward the material and social aspects of performance when so much of their scholarship was devoted to actors, theatre architecture, scenery, licensing, inventories of properties and costumes, and other aspects of what was then called the "internal economy" of the stage.

Moreover, it is misleading to insist upon firm distinctions between theatrical insiders and outsiders, as if they were separate and inevitably rival constituencies. The boundaries between theatre production, book publishing, journalism, and scholarship were much more permeable in past centuries than they are today. David Erskine Baker, compiler of *The Companion to the Play-House* (1764), began his career as an actor. The *Dramatic Miscellanies* (1785) of Thomas Davies, a failed actor-turned-bookseller, are a mixture of character criticism and theatrical anecdote. Edmond Malone, editor of the 1790 Shakespeare variorum, and the first scholar to transcribe parts of Henslowe's Diary, wrote prologues for Covent Garden and counted among his friends the actor-manager John

[46] This hermeneutic of conspiracy is active in Bratton's *New Readings in Theatre History*.

Philip Kemble, who dedicated to Malone his essay *Macbeth Reconsidered* (1786).[47] It was even thought that Garrick had amassed a collection of early modern drama (as Kemble did after him) because he planned to write a history of the English stage.[48] Collier, who made his living as a journalist, wrote drama reviews, was an early member of the Garrick Club and lobbied (unsuccessfully) to be appointed Examiner of Plays. The long period when the people who wrote theatre history did not regard themselves as professional historians – that is, the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries – is characterized more by fluid identities than by fixed ones.

4. *The Principal Fault-Line in British Theatre Historiography from the Earliest Times Has been the Distinction between Antiquarian Scholarship and Critical Narrative*

The main dividing line in theatre historiography has not been the vocational placement of the historian (i.e., insider or outsider) but rather the form or genre in which a historian chose to write. Essentially, there were two options: antiquarian scholarship and critical narrative. Only with difficulty could these formats be merged, because each implied a distinctive practice for studying the past and a distinctive purpose for representing it. Antiquarian history required rigorous scholarship while critical narrative demanded eloquence and synthesis.

The purpose of antiquarian history was to reconstruct the past from its material remains. It was a retrospective undertaking: to trace the origins of a country, a people, or a language. Works like *Biographia Dramatica*, along with similar catalogues and dictionaries, were essentially annotated lists of a great variety of playhouse information, usually organized around the names of playwrights or actors. Chronicle histories like Downes's *Roscius Anglicanus* were not so brutally formatted, but they, too, were basically chronological bundles of data. As I will argue, such works are not void of intellectual worth but possess an interpretive strength of their own.

[47] Kemble's essay was a response to Thomas Whately's *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare* (1785), thus confirming that eighteenth-century actors and critics were in dialogue with each other.

[48] The Shakespeare editor William Warburton, writing to Garrick, described the actor as having "entertained so proper and curious a design as the writing the history of our stage; which I wish you would pursue in good earnest." Warburton to Garrick, 4 May 1756; quoted in *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick* . . ., ed. James Boaden, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1835), 1:64.

Narrative history, rooted in the classical tradition, looked upon the past as a storehouse of lessons to be profitably applied in the present day. Both ways of writing history emerged in Tudor England, but it was antiquarianism, as practiced by individuals inside and outside the theatrical profession, that dominated theatre history for centuries. Narrative theatre historiography did not begin in force until the eighteenth century, when the neoclassical paradigm of history as the public actions of public men finally weakened. Only then could theatre be regarded as a historical phenomenon susceptible to narration. Perhaps the earliest such instance is Robert Dodsley's "A Brief View of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage," written as the preface to his *Select Collection of Old Plays* (1744). As the title of Dodsley's essay confirms, narrative theatre historiography committed itself to detecting developmental patterns whereby the stage progressed from medieval rusticity to Shakespearean genius. The structuring principle of "development" enabled the writing of narrative theatre history, in that the story to be told was the gradual movement of theatre toward ever-greater perfection. This developmental structure is the teleology often presumed to have governed theatre historiography prior to the rise of postmodernism.

Yet it was never a question of developmental narratives replacing antiquarianism, in the way that a new car replaces a faulty old one. There was no teleology of *method* at work. Narrative historiography prospered not because it was objectively superior – a historical narrative is a fiction that takes place on a historian's desk – but because it was more appealing. As Hayden White has explained, narratives create the attractive illusion of "a centered consciousness capable of looking out on the world, apprehending its structure and processes."[49] Nor was antiquarianism an immature form of historiography that obediently expired once methodological rigor was championed in the humanities. Indeed, the antiquarian model has boasted considerable staying power. In the final two volumes of Chambers's *The Elizabethan Stage* you will find not holistic narrative but disaggregated lists and appendices that would be instantly recognizable to Langbaine and Downes.

Some scholars believe that antiquarianism never died. Typically that is meant as a condescending critique of "old-fashioned" theatre historians judged to be insufficiently theoretical and fussily devoted to the minutiae of performance reconstruction. Putting aside the false dichotomy between

[49] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 36.

"history" and "theory", such views contain a nugget of truth: the discovery, authentication, and presentation of evidence remain central to the work of historians today. If anything, the utility of antiquarian research has been reinforced in the digital age when many primary sources have become available to scholars who might otherwise struggle to gain access to them. We can all be antiquarians now in the anti-hierarchical virtual archive. And so, one of the recurring themes in this book is that if we want to understand historiographical debates in centuries past, then we need first to recognize them as debates about the competing claims of scholarship and rhetoric. As Michel de Certeau aptly remarked, the "struggle between history and story-telling is very old."[50]

5. *Theatre History Has Always Been in Dialogue with Broader Developments in Historiography Generally*

An unfortunate blind spot in British theatre historiography is its failure to recognize that theatre history did not develop in isolation from other forms of historical writing. Perhaps this oversight is attributable to the misleading presumption that theatre history began within the theatrical profession exclusively and thus conducted itself in a correspondingly insular manner. Or perhaps it arises from the equally mistaken belief that no serious theatre history was written prior to the late nineteenth century and thus the discipline missed out on developments in the wider historical culture. Whatever the cause, the result has been an artificial separation between theatre historiography and broader historiographical trends. Beyond vague – and usually pejorative – references to antiquarianism and positivism, little attempt has been made to connect theatre history with larger historical concepts and approaches, despite the inarguable truth of Stephen Orgel's claim that "[t]heatre history is no different from any other kind of history."[51]

The claim is true because historical "fields" – political history, feminist history, or theatre history – are genres of our own devising and not objective demarcations of prior actualities. Accordingly, one of this book's principal ambitions is to understand that theatre historiography, far from existing in a state of intellectual quarantine, has been in

[50] Michel De Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. B. Marsumi and W. Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 199.

[51] Stephen Orgel, "Introduction: A View from the Stage," in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England,* eds. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1–10; citation at 1.

continuous dialogue with the prevailing historical culture of its moment. Embedded in that dialogue has been a recurring anxiety about theatre historiography – an anxiety felt by its own practitioners – in terms of both the worthiness of the topic and the credibility of its distinctive research materials.

Evidence for that mutual dialogue is plentiful and varied. James Wright, author of *Historia Histrionica*, was better known for having written *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (1684) and counted among his patrons the great local historian Sir William Dugdale. Wright also benefited from the generosity of Sir John Cotton, in whose magnificent library he worked alongside the leading historians of his day. In this instance, a historian skilled in other areas turned his attention to the stage, such that one of the earliest works of British theatre history was as methodologically up to date as other forms of historical writing. The dialogue also worked in the opposite way, with theatre historians learning from scholars in other fields. In 1740, when Colley Cibber was preparing his *Apology*, he found in the political historian Gilbert Burnet's *History of My Own Times* (1724, 1734) a model for making himself the prism through which to view the past. By drawing inspiration from the stylistic norms of political history Cibber bolstered his view that the stage was as equally worthy of historical investigation as statecraft, military campaigns, and religious schism. For all its idiosyncratic charm, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian* is but one instance of a general historiographical shift toward authorial subjectivity. We cannot fully understand what Cibber wrote about himself and about the stage without first understanding the historical culture of which he was part.

The matter goes well beyond individual areas of scholarly expertise or stylistic choice. It goes to the very structuring principles of theatre historiography, which cannot be explained as purely intrinsic developments. The process by which theatre emerged in the Restoration as a topic for historical research in its own right certainly depended on the changing cultural status of theatrical activity – that is, the establishment of theatre as an identifiable commercial activity in early modern England. But it also depended, and essentially so, on the weakening of the humanist paradigm that restricted history to public affairs. Theatre history was not "thinkable" until this larger paradigm shift occurred. Similarly, the "rise and progress" narratives of theatre history that first appeared in the eighteenth century must be understood not as unique to the theatre but as targeted manifestations of the general Enlightenment principle that societies move forward in

time through "stages" of development, from barbarism to refinement. This principle was as true for economics as it was for literature and the arts.

Nor must we think of theatre history as parasitically reflecting historiographical trends that originated elsewhere. Romantic historical writing, for example, relied heavily on theatricality to resurrect the past as a living bodily presence rather than as a dead archival document. And yet one of the contradictions of nineteenth-century theatre historiography is that it never had a Romantic movement. British theatre history never had its own Thomas Babington Macaulay – that is, someone who combined a strong narrative of national progress with a winning prose style. What it had, instead, were forensic document sleuths like John Payne Collier and James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps. Sometimes theatre history swims with the historiographical tide and sometimes against it. But the one cannot be understood apart from the other.

To accommodate this wider perspective I have composed three historical excurses that function as prelude, interlude, and postlude to the main chapters. These excurses, which are arranged chronologically, focus on three pivotal historiographical moments: the early modern period, the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century. Their purpose is to situate the practice of theatre history within the broader historical climate of different times. If this book is to amount to something more than an account of the working habits of past theatre historians, then it must enter into a dialogue with historical culture itself.

6. *The Transition from History as Popular Belletristic Art to History as Incipiently Professional Science Accounts for the Most Significant Changes in Theatre Scholarship between the Late Eighteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries*

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, "discipline" and "profession" are not synonyms. Discipline refers to a body of knowledge and to the methods for acquiring, sharing, and evaluating it. Someone gains a place in a discipline by mastering its subject matter, its methods, and its protocols of presentation, which are always dynamic, not static. In the Restoration, Richard Flecknoe erased medieval theatre from the historical record while James Wright regarded the Middle Ages as the touchstone for theatre's civic and moral value. Downes wrote theatre history as almanac, Dodsley wrote it as narrative, and Baker wrote it as dictionary, all within the first half of the eighteenth century. Collier, whose career encompassed most of the nineteenth century, refused to admit theatrical anecdotes into

the published historical record but happily collected and shared them in his letters and private notebooks. Despite the variety of their topics and modes of inquiry, these authors all understood themselves to be writing theatre history. Though they would not have phrased it as such, they were all practicing the discipline.

By contrast, a profession is not a body of knowledge but rather the institutional or careerist structures through which that knowledge is controlled. A profession is a sign less of quality than of exclusivity: anyone can practice a discipline but you have to be admitted into a profession. The modern professoriate is one such gated community, whose jealously guarded mechanisms of control include doctoral programs, systems of tenure and promotion, funding bodies, scholarly organizations, peer-review journals, and university presses. I am a member of this profession and most likely you are, too – because over the past one hundred years the center of gravity for original research in theatre history has shifted to universities, where scholars train for and build their careers. Theatre history now lives mainly inside the academy and belongs mostly to academics that write for each other, often in specialist idiom, and with only occasional regard for the public presence or benefit of their research.[52]

Leopold von Ranke's endlessly repeated insistence that no true history could be written without recourse to archival materials has led some scholars to mistakenly believe that no historian before Ranke had ever visited an archive. Yet the fact remains that the *discipline* of theatre history predates the *profession* of it by more than 250 years. Wright practiced theatre history in the 1690s by learning how many theatres in London operated during Shakespeare's lifetime; Malone did it in the 1790s by studying the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels under Charles I and Charles II; and Chambers did it in the 1890s by scrutinizing the account-books of medieval guilds that staged the Corpus Christi plays. None of these scholars was a professional in our sense of that term and yet each of them pushed back the frontiers of knowledge.

It is insufficiently appreciated that Chambers's *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923), whose four volumes are still in print, nearly a century later, was the lifework of a civil servant who carved out spare time for his research. What made Chambers distinctive was not how he practiced

[52] This situation is changing, particularly in the United Kingdom, where academics in all disciplines are increasingly required – as a condition of funding – to engage with audiences outside universities and to demonstrate the public value of their scholarship. Highly controversial, this shift marks in some ways a return to earlier times, when the natural home of scholarship was not the university but the public sphere.

scholarship – methodologically, he followed in Collier's footsteps – but that he lived at the moment when theatre scholarship began to find a home within universities. In other words, Chambers was among the first British theatre historians to experience a disjunction between *discipline* and *profession*. It was not, for him, a comfortable experience. The opening pages of *The Medieval Stage* (1903), written just twenty years after Collier's death, betray the author's embarrassed anxiety over his lack of professional credentials and university position, an anxiety unknown to previous theatre historians:

> The remorseless ideal of the historian's duties . . . floats before me like an accusing spirit. I know how very far I am from having reached that standard of scientific completeness. To begin with, I had not had the necessary training . . . But the greater difficulty has been the want of leisure and the spacious life. Shades of Duke Humphrey's library, how often, as I jostled for my turn at the crowded catalogue-shelves of the British Museum, have I not envied those whose lot it is to tread your ample corridors and to bend over your yellowing folios! Amongst such happy scholars, the canons of Clio may claim implicit obedience.[53]

Posterity has granted to Chambers his wish to join the ranks of "happy scholars" because we have surreptitiously absorbed him into an academic profession to which he never belonged. We have attributed to his work – now much argued against, because of its supposed Darwinian values – a comprehensive originality that it never possessed.[54] In so doing, we have purified the messy history of our discipline, in which knowledge of the theatrical past was generated by sundry antiquarians, bibliophiles, essayists, journalists, publishers, playwrights, actors, and audience members. Chambers did not inaugurate modern academic scholarship in theatre history so much as he summarized a long tradition of disciplinary practice undertaken by a heterogeneous group of stage enthusiasts.[55] The collapsing of the terms "discipline" and "profession" marks the moment when it is

[53] E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 1:vii. Before retiring in 1926 Chambers conducted most of his research not at the British Museum but at the London Library, a private subscription-based institution. See F.P. Wilson, "Sir Edmund Kerchever Chambers 1866–1954," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 42 (1956), 267–85.

[54] "The scholarly foundation for modern studies of the Elizabethan theatre is the magisterial work of E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*." Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 20 n. 3.

[55] This fact was apparent to some of Chambers's first readers. "His book puts a period to the study of Elizabethan drama because it sums up the best knowledge of the subject." [Harold Hannyngton Child], "The Elizabethan Playhouse," *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 March 1924.