

Abstract: "On an Ethics of Enactment and the Specter of Coercive Texts."

The first part of my subject is framed as a question: whether there is an ethical dimension to performing a text in the sense of a duty to the text. To that end, it juxtaposes the notion of making canonical plays "relevant" and accessible, through displacement and creative reinvention, with that of "original practices" as embodied in recent productions from Shakespeare's Globe (London). The second part of my subject addresses the related matter of a capacity inhering in or attaching to texts to resist deformation, sometimes asserting a character even in defiance of authorial intervention. The focus here is on a study by Felix Budelmann, Laurie Maguire, and Ben Teasdale ("The Play's the Thing," *TLS*, 19 July 2013) of audience reactions to strongly divergent productions of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, measuring identification, moral approval, and "attribution" – essentially, wherein lies the blame? If, in appearance, "text seemed to trump performance," as the authors declare, and "the texts seemed director proof," how does that affect the question of an ethics of enactment?

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