“Distortion” is nearly always understood as negative. It can be defined as perversion, impairment, caricature, corruption, misrepresentation, or deviation. Unlike its close neighbour, “disruption”, it remains resolutely associated with the undesirable, the lost, or the deceptive. Yet it is also part of a larger knowledge system, filling the gap between the authentic event and its experience; it has its own ethics and practice, and it is necessarily incorporated in all meaningful communication. Need it always be a negative phenomenon? How does distortion affect producers, transmitters and receivers of texts? Are we always obliged to acknowledge distortion? What effect does a distortive process have on the intentionality, materiality and functionality, not to say the cultural, intellectual and market value, of all textual objects?

The essays in this volume seek to address these questions. They range from the medieval through the early modern to contemporary periods and, throughout, deliberately challenge periodisation and the canonical. Topics treated include Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, Reformation documents and poems, Global Shakespeare, the Oxford English Dictionary, Native American spiritual objects, and digital tools for re-envisioning textual relationships. From the written to the spoken, the inhabited object to the remediated, distortion is demonstrated to demand a rich and provocative mode of analysis.

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Essays and Studies 2017

Textual Distortion

Edited by
Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker
for the English Association

D. S. BREWER
This book is dedicated to Helen Lucas, Chief Executive of the English Association, who has tirelessly worked for the organisation and its members, and unstintingly supported Essays and Studies, as well as all other initiatives of the Association.

Thank you, Helen.
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Preface and Acknowledgements

The contributions in this volume of Essays and Studies were inspired by the Stanford Text Technologies Collegium on 'Distortion', held in May 2015 at Stanford University. Funded by the Denning Gift, this three-day intensive collegium examined one of the key themes in the history of textual communication: how texts are distorted even as they are disseminated, sometimes as a result of accidental manipulation, or careful mediation; sometimes through wilful perversion or falsification. At the Stanford Collegium, we were delighted to host Benjamin Albritton, Mark Algee-Hewitt, Emma Cayley, Paul Fyfe, Tom O’Donnell, Sarah Ogilvie, Timothy Powell, Colin Reeves-Fortney, Giovanni Scorcioni, Elizabeth Tyler and Greg Walker, and each gave powerful and intellectually stimulating papers on very different topics, centred on the concept and practice of distortion.

We are grateful to be able to include the work of some of these original participants in this book, and other essays we have specifically commissioned for inclusion here. We are pleased to thank the attentive and engaged audience at the Collegium, whose informed questions and focused responses allowed invigorated discussion. We also wish to thank the Dean of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford; the Denning Fund for Humanities and Technology, which supports Text Technologies; the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA), which hosted the Collegium; and Daeyeong Kim, who, as Text Technologies Graduate Administrator, organised the proceedings with great skill and professionalism.

Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker
Feast Day of St Baldus, 2016
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Matthew Aiello is a Ph.D student in English at the University of Pennsylvania, having completed his Master’s degree in Medieval Literature at Worcester College, University of Oxford. His research interests are primarily focused on book history in early medieval England, addressing questions about the relationship of the literature to its physical context. He is particularly interested in smaller, non-elaborate, feasibly portable manuscripts from the two centuries following the Norman Conquest.

Emma Cayley is Associate Professor of Medieval French at the University of Exeter. She teaches and publishes in the area of late medieval French poetry and culture, and her research interests extend across the digital humanities; manuscript studies and the history of the book; text editing; and gender studies. Her publications include Debate and Dialogue: Alain Chartier in his Cultural Context (Oxford University Press, 2006); and A Companion to Alain Chartier c.1385–1430: The Father of French Eloquence (Brill, 2015) with Daisy Delogu and Joan E. McRae. She is currently working on two critical editions; Debate Culture in Medieval Europe for the University of Florida Press; and the Exeter Book app in partnership with Stanford and Glasgow Universities. She has been a Leverhulme Trust Fellow and a Text-Technologies Fellow at Stanford.

Aaron Kelly is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. His research interests include modern and contemporary Irish, Scottish and English literature; working-class writing; and the interfaces between literature, ideology and politics. Among his recent publications are Irvine Welsh (Manchester University Press, 2005), The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969: Utterly Resigned Terror (Ashgate, 2005) and James Kelman: Politics and Aesthetics (Peter Laing Publishing, 2012). He is currently working on a major project to recover and republish neglected working-class writing from the 1920s and 1930s.

Daeyeong (Dan) Kim is a senior doctoral candidate in English at Stanford University. His dissertation, ‘Migrant Identities: Converts, Immigrants and Cosmopolitans in Early Modern English Drama’, investigates the ways in which culturally hybrid figures performed and renovated their identities in relation to their changing worlds, both as self-fashioners and world-makers. He is Graduate Associate Director of Stanford Text Technologies.

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Giovanni Scorcioni, founder of FacsimileFinder.com, is a professional bookseller specialising in facsimile editions of medieval manuscripts. His comprehensive knowledge of facsimiles – from production, to distribution, to academic use – has earned his company the trust of libraries across the globe. Additionally, he is regularly invited by major universities to illustrate the making process of manuscript facsimiles to students involved in medieval studies courses.

Elaine Treharne is Roberta Bowman Denning Professor of Humanities, Professor of English, Director of the Centre for Spatial and Textual Analysis, and Director of Stanford Technologies at Stanford University. She is the author or editor of almost thirty books and sixty articles, nearly all focused on Old and Middle English literature, and manuscript technologies. Her most recent work is A Very Short Introduction to Medieval Literature (Oxford University Press, 2015) and Text Technologies: A History, with Claude Willan (Stanford University Press, 2017); and she is currently completing The Phenomenal Book.

Greg Walker is Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. He has published widely on the literature and politics of the later medieval period and the sixteenth century, on early drama, and the political and religious history of the reign of Henry
VIII. Among his recent publications are Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation (Oxford University Press, 2005); The Oxford Anthology of Tudor Drama (Oxford University Press, 2013); and Imagining Spectatorship from the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage (Oxford University Press, 2016), co-written with John J. McGavin. He is currently working on a study of the work of the playwright John Heywood.

**Claude Willan** received his Ph.D in English from Stanford University and is Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Center for the Digital Humanities at Princeton University. His research interests include historical poetics, digital humanities, disciplinarity, media theory, and verbal and visual satire. He is working on his first book, The Seizure of Literary History in the Eighteenth Century.
Introduction
ELAINE TREHARNE

"The most dangerous untruths are truths slightly distorted"¹

‘Distortion’ is nearly always understood as negative: it can be defined as perversion, unnoticed alteration, impairment, caricature, twisting, corruption, misrepresentation, deviation. Unlike its close neighbour, ‘disruption’, currently enjoying a makeover in British government-speak as a newly positive term (in such collocations as ‘disruptive technologies’ and ‘disruptive industries’), it remains resolutely associated with the undesirable, the lost or the deceptive. The process of distortion is generally seen to create a form of the original (factual, true, authentic, real) that is not transubstantive as such, but deformed: warped, misshapen, skewed, shrunken, amplified or simulated. Even in acoustics or music, the notion of distortion, however aesthetically pleasing in itself, most often connotes loss of purity or clarity of signal. And yet, it might equally be said that only through distortion can one find the presence of the original. Indeed, in literary and historical studies, one might argue that all textual transmission is inevitably distorted – either through mediation, translation, appropriation, colonisation, canonisation and authorisation of an elite corpus or authentic version, digitisation, remediation or, more obviously negatively, through misunderstanding, lack of contextualisation, deliberate falsification or pretence.

In the Collegium held at Stanford University in 2015, at which some earlier forms of these essays were presented (Cayley, Ogilvie, Powell, Scorcioni, Walker), the three-day discussion ranged from core issues of space, place, time and context in the production of literary and artefactual meaning, to the archive and its necessary interpretation – whether through sorting and cataloguing or editing, retrieval and display. In tussling with the term and its implications, we returned frequently to the concept of the undistorted and what it might imply, whether in theory or practice. An antonym of ‘distortion’ seems always to be the search for the authentic, the original, the true, as if that might exist textually. Yet, alongside this

inbuilt distrust of the text or artefact as a bearer of undistorted meaning, there is an equally evident suspicion of the oral, and of sound or speech – with their evanescence and ephemerality, even when recorded (as is shown brilliantly in Powell’s essay). Distortion is part of the larger knowledge system, filling the gap between the authentic event and its experience; it has its own ethics and practice, as a number of writers here point out, and it is necessarily incorporated in all meaningful communication.

What results from distortion? Need it always be a negative phenomenon? How does distortion affect producers, transmitters and receivers of texts? Are we always obliged to acknowledge distortion? What effect does a distortive process have on the intentionality, materiality and functionality, not to say the cultural, intellectual and market value, of all textual objects? The essays in this volume seek to address these questions, focusing on a broad range of literature, language and textual objects.

The essays in this book are, then, all carefully themed around ‘distortion’. Within the compass of this term, though, the contributors range from the medieval to early modern to contemporary periods and, throughout, deliberately challenge periodisation and the canonical. Subjects treated range from early English manuscripts to Native American animated matters; from lexicographical compilation to the performance of texts in new contexts. From the written to the spoken, the inhabited object to the remediated, distortion is demonstrated to demand a rich and provocative mode of analysis.

Matthew Aiello offers a compelling essay, arguing through the case studies of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85 and Junius 86, against the distortion that inevitably follows from the investigation of manuscripts via individual texts, or incoherent evaluations of script, scribal practices and codicology. He shows that a scrupulous holistic investigation of a pair of manuscripts previously dismissed as ‘scruffy’ provides new and important evidence for the ways in which scribes worked with inherited materials in the earlier medieval period. In this case, books that were thought to be ill-constructed and produced, but split up at a much later date, are proven to be the result, rather, of a careful pair of scribes working in the eleventh century. The distortion of models of manufacture in traditionally received scholarship is thus replaced with verifiable evidence in this fastidious study.

Emma Cayley’s essay looks at distortion more positively, focusing on ways in which texts might be amplified, continued, debated and adapted through time and across media and cultures. She describes how some of the Old English riddles in the tenth-century Exeter Book have been strikingly reimagined as a sculpture illustrating a key tourist feature of Exeter;
a multi-purpose app aimed at a range of audiences; and as furnishings in a modern Exeter hotel. Then, demonstrating further the afterlife of texts, Cayley moves into the later medieval period, switching attention to the little-known French medieval debate poem of the mid to late fifteenth century, the Songe de la Pucelle (Dream of the Virgin). In this case study, Cayley shows how successive printed editions of this ambivalent text in French and English offer in their prefatory materials – and still more in their woodcut illustrations – often quite sharply distinct interpretations of the text and its implications, designed to refashion the text’s functionality for new readers.

Aaron Kelly’s contribution looks at notions of distortion in the work of Lionel Britton, a neglected working-class English writer of the 1920s and 1930s. He shows not only how contemporary understandings of time, history and causality are explored, contorted and reframed in Britton’s work, most obviously in his visionary plays, Spacetime Inn (1932) and Animal Ideas: A Dramatic Symphony of the Human in the Universe (1935), but also how attending to Britton’s eccentric genius and particular brand of ‘proletarian aesthetics’ allows, indeed forces, us to rethink conventional models of class consciousness and the relation of ‘those who work’ to ideology and the imperatives of history.

Dan Kim’s essay is also both broadly and pointedly political. It focuses on the issue of nationhood in the global landscape of Shakespeare studies. Inspired by MacMorris in Henry V, who asks ‘What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?’, Kim reflects upon this vexed question in relation to the many versions of Shakespeare around the world today – a world of permeable borders and transnational networks of media and movement. Kim attends to the remapping of Shakespeare in Korea, and Korea in Shakespeare, asking how that country is represented on the international stage, through its performances of Hamlet and The Tempest, plays that, as Kim sensitively shows, have particular resonance for Korea’s past and present.

Sarah Ogilvie’s engaging account of the distortion inherent in dictionary history examines the origins and twentieth-century evolution of The Oxford English Dictionary (OED). From her own experiences writing for and about the OED, Ogilvie provides a detailed account of the ways in which words and their meanings are distorted by lexicographers, by published narratives of words’ histories, and by public desire either to maintain stasis or to bring about unrealistic change in language. Ogilvie’s discoveries about the motivation for particular instantiations of lexicographical compilation and suppression surprise, and she exhorts researchers and the engaged public to pay particular attention to evidence not
only within the *OED* and other dictionaries, but also evidence accrued over decades of that publication’s history. She shows how all endeavours to describe and record are, in the end, subjective and potentially distorting efforts.

Timothy Powell’s powerful narration of his experiences with Indigenous storytelling highlights the inadequate (and always already colonising) framework of western scholars’ canonical accounts of early American literature, and of temporal considerations. ‘Indigenous stories like this’, he argues, ‘possess the power to teach us to see anew the distorted origins of American literary history in ways that may yet prove to be transformative’: storytelling as ‘social activity’ that deepens scholarly understanding of history, existence and its own literary explorations within the academic community. Ojibwe drums enact code-switching, as the drum becomes animated ‘vibrant matter’ at the hands of those medicine men who know how to engage with the inhabited object. Powell insists upon the need for scholars to work with Indigenous literature and matter on its own terms, with a more sensitive apprehension of space, time and the existential.

Giovanni Scorcioni’s technical and agenda-setting essay reveals his experiences as the manufacturer of deluxe ‘exact’ replicas of medieval manuscripts. He takes the reader through the processes of facsimile production, highlighting the photographic and artisanal effort undertaken by the publishers to ensure the proximity of the replica to the original. While never diminishing the value and testimony of the original artefact, Scorcioni effectively highlights the complexity and professionalism of the facsimile maker, raising the issues of light, colour and materiality in the first essay of its kind. In this piece, distortion is seen to be both troublesome and essential; to be avoided and, simultaneously, a core component of the process of facture, or, to quote Scorcioni: ‘distortion is itself an essential means to get rid of distortion’.

Greg Walker focuses on the period of the Reformation Parliament (1529–36) to assess the curious acts of haunting manifested by ‘revenant’ Lollard texts resuscitated in print as part of the English church’s internal struggles over its own history, destiny and relationship to revealed ‘truth’. Even as the Reformation appeared to be an historical and theological novelty, Walker suggests, it also clearly resonated with multiple moments of forestalled revolution from the past – especially during the later fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries, seeking evidence for its own eventual victory in the evidence of ongoing failure they provided. As Walker demonstrates with close analysis of key texts, including the pseudo-Chaucerian *Plowman’s Tale*, at this critical juncture in Henry VIII’s reign, ‘history folded in upon itself and declared its own indecisiveness, even as those