

The RSC Shakespeare

William Shakespeare
COMPLETE WORKS

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edited by

Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen

Chief Associate Editor: H elo ise S en echal

Macmillan

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PREFACE

As Shakespeare wrote for a company of actors and as the First Folio was the product of the work of many hands, so this edition is a product of the Royal Shakespeare Company's principle of ensemble. Jonathan Bate's role has been akin to that of a theatre company's artistic director: he devised the guiding principles, wrote almost all the introductory materials and was final arbiter for every editorial decision. He gladly takes responsibility for all the edition's failings. Eric Rasmussen has been like a stage director overseeing the performance of the complete works: line by line, through nearly a million words of Shakespeare, he has made choices about modernization, punctuation, emendations and stage directions. He has edited thirty of the thirty-eight plays in this edition and checked the remaining eight, for which primary credit belongs to Eleanor Lowe (*King John*, *1 and 2 Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *Coriolanus*), Dee Anna Phares (*Macbeth* and *Othello*) and Lucy Munro (*Pericles*). Jonathan Bate edited the poems and sonnets, with assistance from Jan Sewell, Penelope Freedman and James Gibson.

Héloïse Sénéchal was chief commentary editor, researching and writing the explanatory notes for about half the plays herself and revising the initial work on the other half, which was undertaken by Eleanor Lowe, Jan Sewell, Charlotte Scott, Esme Miskimmin, Penelope Freedman, Christopher Campbell, Takashi Kozuka and Erin Sullivan. 'First pass' edits, establishing the core of the play texts, were undertaken by Sophie Holroyd, Trey Jansen, Dee Anna Phares and Will Sharpe. Ayako Kawanami and Paul Prescott assisted with text preparation early in the project, and Oliver Phillips with tabular material. Jan Sewell and Trey Jansen played the hugely important role of checking, improving and proof-reading every work. Equally indispensable was our eagle-eyed copy-editor, Tracey Day. Over fifteen person-years of editorial labour have gone into the project and every word of Shakespeare has been scrutinized by five or six pairs of editorial eyes – but still, as in every previous edition, there are bound to be errors, and we would like to express our gratitude in advance to any readers who may draw our attention to them via the message board on the edition website, www.rscshakespeare.co.uk. Every effort will be made to incorporate corrections in later reprints and our forthcoming editions of individual works. Also to be found at the website are an array of supporting materials, including hints on Shakespearean verse-speaking with audio examples, a bibliography (readily updatable online as it could not be in print), a more detailed account of our editorial procedures than that provided in the general introduction, and RSC production histories of all the plays.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of our many predecessors in bringing Shakespeare from script to print. We have been especially influenced by the following: John Hemings, Henry Condell, Ralph Crane, Isaac Jaggard, Edward Blount and their collaborators for the production of the First Folio; Nicholas Rowe and his successors for establishing the modern editorial tradition; Samuel Johnson for principles that helped to shape this edition; the select company of editors – Charles Knight, Charlotte Porter and Helen Clarke, Herbert Farjeon – who stayed loyal to the Folio in the centuries dominated by confluations and Quartos; successive generations of editors for Oxford, Cambridge and the Arden series; the example of David Bevington; Stanley Wells and his collaborators on the 1986 Oxford edition for a new paradigm against which to measure ourselves.

The theoretical and practical work of many scholars has helped to shape our editorial principles, but special notice should be given to the work of Peter Blayney, Lukas Erne, John Jowett and Paul Werstine. Our explanatory notes owe an immense debt not only to the commentaries of previous editions, but also to the creators of the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, *Early English Books Online* and *Literature Online*, the editors of *Athlone Shakespeare Dictionaries*, and the work of David and Ben Crystal (*Shakespeare's Words*), Ian Lancashire (*Early Modern English Dictionary Database* and *Lexicons of Early Modern English*) and Gordon Williams (*Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* and *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language*).

We have always been conscious of standing on the shoulders of giants, while being aware that our predecessors will disagree with several of our key principles and hundreds of our local decisions. Such is the process of Shakespearean editing, which will continue so long as the plays are read and performed.

Jonathan Bate, University of Warwick
Eric Rasmussen, University of Nevada, Reno

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Bate

‘After God, Shakespeare has created most’

(Alexandre Dumas, French novelist whose works have been translated into nearly a hundred languages and adapted into over two hundred films, figures surpassed by Shakespeare alone)

‘Shakespeare was conscious of a double or treble reality fused together into one line or a single word’

(Cesare Pavese, Italian poet and novelist)

‘Somehow Shakespeare always had something to say to us’

(Ahmed Kathrada, imprisoned on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela)

Shakespeare our Perennial Contemporary

Hamlet is delighted when he hears the news that the players have returned to Elsinore. He greets them as personal friends. Some of the theatre enthusiasts among the courtiers of Queen Elizabeth and then King James, such as the Earl of Southampton, the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Montgomery, would have greeted Shakespeare and his fellow-actors in the same way. The circumstances of the fictional acting company at Elsinore reflect those of the real company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, that first put on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Their highest priority is to be available on demand for court performances, if necessary reshaping their repertoire in response to a particular demand, as when Hamlet asks for a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines to be inserted into their tragedy. While waiting to be summoned to the palace, they perform regularly in the city, trying out each new play in the court of public opinion. They are an all-male company, whose teenage apprentices play the female parts. Their business at the box office faces a range of challenges, from state censorship to closure because of plague to rival attractions and in particular a fashionable new company consisting entirely of highly trained schoolboys.

Given that the players in *Hamlet* are in part a witty self-representation of Shakespeare’s own acting company, it is fair to assume that Shakespeare himself believed as Hamlet does that actors are ‘the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time’. According to contemporaneous dictionaries, an ‘abstract’ was ‘a little book or volume gathered out of a greater’, ‘an abridgement, epitome, summary, compendium, short course, or discourse’. In an age of long sermons, interminable homilies and closely-printed treatises on ethics and politics, plays provided a crash course in the way of the world, an instantaneous mirror of manners and of life. The weighty folio volumes of *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* gathered by Raphael Holinshed and others were anything but ‘brief’. In a fraction of the time it would have taken to read them – and at a fraction of the cost of buying the book – Shakespeare’s players, as they moved from the Rose to the Theatre to the Curtain to the Globe, offered the London public an abridgement and compendium of the nation’s history.

Their dramatized ‘chronicles’ of times past – whether British, European, ancient Greek or Roman – were also mirrors of the present. All productions were ‘modern dress’, with just the occasional period

detail such as emblematic togas to represent classical Rome. More money was spent on the purchase of costumes than the commissioning of scripts. The kings, dukes and ladies in the plays would have looked impressively courtly not least because their wardrobe consisted in part of the second-hand clothes of courtiers: often when aristocrats died, they would bequeath items of clothing to their servants, who would sell them to the players. From his reading and his first-hand experience of submitting his work for the approval of the Master of the Revels, then of performing at court, Shakespeare learned the language and manners of courtiership. So his characters came to speak and to gesture, as well as to be dressed, in the manner of monarchs and their entourage. A Duke of Buckingham or Earl of Pembroke in the audience might have seen himself mirrored in one of his ancestors in the chronicle plays. King James, who claimed descent from Banquo, would have watched 'the Scottish play' with close attention. And the followers of the Earl of Essex, who liked to consider him the modern Achilles, would have found rich food for thought in Shakespeare's deconstruction of the Achillean code of chivalry in his *Troilus and Cressida*, written soon after Essex's dramatic fall from Queen Elizabeth's favour.

Whether set or written in the past, all great plays speak to present times. In Shakespeare, topical allusion is rare – the odd flattering glance at Queen Elizabeth, one conspicuous nod to Essex in *Henry V* – but the sense of the fictional world on stage as a mirror of the real world beyond the auditorium is pervasive.

Theatre is unique among the arts of the word in the degree to which it is public, collaborative, multidimensional and unpredictable. The greatest playwrights combine many different skills: they share the gift of narrative with the novelist and the epic storyteller, the arts of persuasive oratory with the lawyer and the public speaker, the trick of minting language anew with the poet, the ability to bring the past back to life with the historian, and the capacity to imagine – indeed to shape – the future with the prophet. While doing all this, they have always to think in three dimensions, to write for a body as well as a voice, to animate a stage as well as a page. At the same time, they rely on trust. Whereas the poet or novelist writes in the expectation of a direct relationship between their words, their imagined world and the minds of their readers, the playwright's work is always incomplete. It is only brought to fruition through the work of intermediaries: the actors and all the other professionals involved in the process of putting on a play.

Theatre writing accordingly offers a unique combination of presence and absence. The audience is present in the same room as the performers. This is what makes the ancient and primal art of theatre different from such modern media as radio, film, television, DVD and webcast. Indeed, the audience's response helps to shape the performance, which will be subtly different on every occasion. There is always a sense of risk. An actor might forget his lines: Shakespeare plays with the possibility in *Coriolanus*, when his mouthy protagonist is reduced to silence by the arrival of his pleading family ('Like a dull actor now, / I have forgot my part, and I am out, / Even to a full disgrace'). A stage effect may misfire, as when a faulty cannon burned down Shakespeare's Globe near the end of his career. A slip in a sword fight may shed real blood (this happened to me when I was playing Macbeth as a schoolboy, probably as punishment for our failure to observe the theatrical superstition of never uttering the title *Macbeth* but referring instead to 'the Scottish play'). An unruly audience may overwhelm the stage (again, Shakespeare plays with the idea when Caliban and his drunken companions interrupt the play-within-the-play in *The Tempest*, provoking Prospero into an elegy on the evanescence of the theatre of human life itself). The authorities may close a show for political reasons, as in *Hamlet* the usurping King of Denmark closes 'The Mousetrap' before it is finished and as the deposition scene in *Richard II* was too sensitive to be printed or perhaps even to be played.

Shakespeare recognized that human affairs always embody a combination of permanent truths and historical contingencies, of – to use the terms of his age – ‘nature’ and ‘custom’. At one level, he is ‘not of an age, but for all time’. He works with archetypal characters, core plots and perennial conflicts, as he dramatizes the competing demands of the living and the dead, the old and the young, men and women, self and society, integrity and role-play, insiders and outsiders. He grasps the structural conflicts shared by all societies: religious against secular vision, country against city, birth against education, strong leadership against the people’s voice, the code of honour against the energies of erotic desire. But he also addressed the conflicts of his own historical moment: the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism and feudalism to modernity, the formation of national identity, trade and immigration, the encounter with new worlds overseas, the shadow of foreign powers. He was restricted by the customs of his age, notably when it came to the subordination of women, but at the same time he was prophetic of future ages. Despite the inferior position of most women in his society and the fact that the convention of his theatre meant that female parts were played by young men, he gives a remarkable degree of freedom and mental agility to his women.

Shakespeare’s black characters were originally played by white actors with faces blackened by charred cork, but ever since the black singer, actor and political activist Paul Robeson played Othello to Peggy Ashcroft’s Desdemona in the 1930s, this drama of inter-racial marriage has been made to address pressing contemporary concerns of ethnic, cultural and religious difference. In the early twenty-first century, the Islamic connotations of ‘the Moor’ became as significant as his colour.



Shakespeare endures because with each new turn of history, a new dimension of his work opens up before us. When George III went mad, *King Lear* was kept off the stage – it was just too close to the truth. During the Cold War, *Lear* again became Shakespeare’s hottest play, its combination of starkness and absurdity answering to the mood of the age, inspiring the Polish critic Jan Kott to compare it to Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* in his influential book *Shakespeare our Contemporary* (1961), and both the Russian Grigori Kozintsev (1969) and the English Peter Brook (1971) to make darkly brilliant film versions.

Early in 1934, when the French Socialist government was close to collapse, a new translation of *Coriolanus* was staged at the Comédie Française in Paris. The production was perceived as an attack on democratic institutions. Rioting pro- and anti-government factions clashed in the auditorium. The Swiss translator was branded a foreign Fascist. The prime minister fired the theatre director and replaced him with the head of the security police, whose artistic credentials were somewhat questionable. What are we to conclude from this real-life drama? That *Coriolanus*' contempt for the rabble makes Shakespeare himself into a proto-Fascist? How could it then have been that the following year the Maly Theatre company in Stalin's Moscow staged a production of the same play which sought to demonstrate that *Coriolanus* was an 'enemy of the people' and that Shakespeare was therefore a true Socialist? Shakespeare was neither an absolutist nor a democrat, but the fact that both productions were possible is one of the major reasons why he continues to live through his work four centuries after his death.

On 20 June 2006 a production of *Titus Andronicus* directed by Yukio Ninagawa opened at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, as part of a festival in which Shakespeare's complete works were staged in the course of a year (see plates). *Titus* is a dramatization of the bloody and inexorable logic of revenge in a militarized world where the highest value is placed upon the code of honour. For Shakespeare and his original audiences, imperial Rome was synonymous with such a culture; the Ninagawa production powerfully aligned the play with Samurai codes of behaviour (twenty years earlier, the same director had achieved a similar cultural translation in an internationally acclaimed staging of *Macbeth*). This *Titus* was an abstract and brief chronicle of several times at once: Ninagawa followed Shakespeare in skilfully collapsing several phases of ancient Roman history into one (primitive, republican, imperial, decadent), while at the same time spectators were conscious of both Shakespeare's sixteenth-century England and the enduring influence of Samurai Japan. But the play still spoke to the present: that same day in Iraq two American soldiers had their throats slit in revenge for the death in an air strike two weeks earlier of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. According to the Mujahedeen Shura Council, this ritualized act of vengeance was carried out personally by al-Zarqawi's successor – just as Titus exacts revenge with his own remaining hand. So long as we have wars, rape, codes of honour and violent acts of revenge, Shakespeare's tragic vision will go on being contemporary. So long as we continue to be fascinated by human relationships – children rebelling against parents, mothers struggling to let their sons grow up and break free, best friends falling for the same girl, servants and counsellors who are wiser than their masters, ordinary people using jokes as a way of deflating those in authority – his comic vision will also remain alive.

People are not really killed on the Shakespearean stage (whereas people do sometimes really kiss each other, which is one of the important differences between tragedy and comedy). People do not speak highly rhetorical five-beat iambic pentameter verse lines in real life (whereas many lines in Shakespeare, sometimes tragic but more usually comic, are spoken in prose, which is one of the important differences between his work and that of more austere dramatists such as Sophocles and Racine). Shakespearean deaths and Shakespearean speeches are stylized. There can be no such thing as an entirely naturalistic staging of Shakespeare. Stylistically, the kind of drama from which he is furthest is soap opera – though, gloriously, for all the fine language and exotic settings, many of his plots and themes inhabit the same realm as those of soap (boy meets girl, marriage goes wrong, people grow old). Every production has to maintain a delicate balance between creating the illusion of reality and self-consciously acknowledging the theatrical process. Shakespeare loved that duality, which is why one of his favourite devices is what critics call 'metadrama': plays-within-the-play, impersonation

and dressing-up, allusions to the world as theatre and life as acting, direct addresses to the audience, choric figures who are both inside and outside the action.

In his world, character is not predetermined. People become themselves through action, dialogue, the process of thinking. Drama is a basic tool for discovery of the self, achieved through exile, disguise, soliloquy and scenic counterpoint. For Shakespeare, value is not absolute. It depends upon reflection, as when a person's 'virtues shining upon others / Heat them and they retort that heat again / To the first giver' (*Troilus and Cressida*). Shakespeare's theory of human relativity is made possible by his dramatic medium, by double plots, contradictions between word and action, and the constant presence of a questioning audience.

In our journey through life or a character's journey through a play, do we find a core of 'self' or do we make ourselves up as we go along? In Shakespeare, those with pre-written scripts find their plotted stories disrupted: Prospero, Angelo, the men in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shylock, Bertram, Leontes, Henry IV, Coriolanus, Lear. The powerful exception is Prince Hal/Henry V, who always remains ruthlessly in control of his master-plan even as he gives the impression of being just one of the boys. Those who improvise are the characters who most excite Shakespeare (and us): Hamlet, Falstaff, Lady Macbeth, Beatrice, Rosalind, Viola, the Bastard in *King John*, Mercutio, Cleopatra, and in their darker way Richard III, Edmund in *Lear* and Iago. Those who cannot adapt to change inspire our pity (Richard II, Othello). At the deepest level, Shakespeare's most successful characters are the best actors.

'Shakespeare's plays', wrote Dr Samuel Johnson in the preface to his edition of 1765, 'are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind: exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.' Tragedy and comedy are terms which go back to the drama of the ancient Greeks. In ancient Athens the two kinds were strictly separated. Tragedy concerned the downfall of great men and women, larger-than-life figures, kings and queens, mythical heroes and anti-heroes – Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Oedipus, Hercules, Medea. Comedy was filled with ordinary people: petulant fathers, unruly wives, clever servants, young lovers on the make. Arbiters of taste have a tendency to shelter themselves under the wings of tradition. For this reason, literary theorists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century regarded the practices of the ancients as rules to be obeyed rather than examples to be admired. In Shakespeare's lifetime, Sir Philip Sidney wrote with lofty disdain of the 'mongrel tragi-comedy' which was the staple fare of the London stage. In Dr Johnson's century, critical sophistication was frequently regarded as synonymous with French taste – and that meant the rigorous classicism of Racine and Voltaire.

Johnson's preface to Shakespeare was written in a spirit of English empiricism which did not worry itself about neo-classical rules. 'There is always an appeal open from criticism to nature', he says: Shakespeare's plays are great for the very reason that they mingle joy with sorrow and high with low. They may not conform to the model of the ancients, but they are true to life. The fall of the mighty is only ever part of the picture. Even Shakespeare's severest tragedies have their comedians: the Porter in *Macbeth*, Lear's Fool. Even his happiest comedies have their malcontents: Jaques in *As You Like It*, Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing*. We might go so far as to say that all Shakespeare's plays are tragicomedies and that is one of the principal reasons why his drama is, as Dr Johnson also recognized, 'the mirror of life'.

Shakespeare's Debut: The 'Upstart Crow'

William Shakespeare was an extraordinarily intelligent man who was born and died in an ordinary market town in the English Midlands. He lived an uneventful life in an eventful age. Like many clever country boys, he moved to the city in order to make his way in the world. Like many creative people, he found a career in the entertainment business.

Public playhouses and professional full-time acting companies reliant on the market for their income were born in Shakespeare's childhood. When he arrived in London as a man, a new phenomenon was in the making: the actor who is so successful that he becomes a 'star'. The word did not exist in its modern sense, but the pattern is recognizable: audiences went to the theatre not so much to see a particular show as to witness the comedian Richard Tarlton or the dramatic actor Edward Alleyn.

Allegedly the son of a pig farmer, Tarlton came from the provinces. His trademark costume was a russet suit and buttoned cap. He graduated from the role of tavern jester to that of professional clown. His persona was the country innocent who is apparently baffled by the ways of the city, but whose outsider's eye gave him the ability to prick the bubble of pretension and anatomize the follies of the age. He died in 1588, but his name lived on for years; it has been claimed with some justice that he was the first Englishman of humble origins to become a national 'celebrity'. His role as company clown for the Queen's Men made possible the roles that Shakespeare wrote for his clowns, Will Kempe and Robert Armin: Lance and Lancelot, Costard, Dogberry and Bottom, Touchstone, Feste, the gravedigger in *Hamlet* and Lear's unnamed Fool. More than this, his status as outsider looking in, countryman in



A panorama of Shakespeare's London, showing the theatres on the south bank of the River Thames, a location on the margins of the city in an area associated with brothels and violent entertainment for the masses: by a pleasing irony, the engraver has captioned the bear-baiting arena 'The Globe' and the theatre 'beere bayting h[ouse]'.

the city, was a kind of model for Shakespeare's own art, which is at once a quip and a shrug, planned and improvised, involved and detached.

Whereas Tarlton the comedian died young, Alleyn the tragedian lived long. He established his fame with mighty roles such as Marlowe's striding Tamburlaine, but then, like many a modern star, he recognized that there was more money and artistic control to be gained in becoming his own producer than in remaining a hired gun. A skilled entrepreneur, he built a succession of theatres that doubled as bear-baiting houses, and became a very rich man. After dabbling in local politics, he decided to immortalize himself through philanthropy by endowing a college at Dulwich. Two years younger than Shakespeare, he was always a step ahead of him. Alleyn was the man who revealed for the first time that the entertainment business could make you rich, famous and respectable.

At the royal court, meanwhile, there was a new demand for sophisticated entertainment. A few years before Shakespeare's birth, Queen Elizabeth I had inherited an England that had oscillated between extremes of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The nation was weak and marginal in comparison with the might of Spain on the European mainland, let alone the Ottoman Empire beyond the Mediterranean Sea. Through a delicate balancing act, the young queen kept in play opposing religious faiths, rival courtiers and multiple diplomatic liaisons. By refusing to submit to any potential husband, she claimed to be married to her people. Through the cultural patronage offered by her courtiers and the myth-making symbolism afforded by poetry, spectacle and painting, she shaped an image of herself as a virgin goddess and her nation as a new imperium, a worthy successor to the ancient Roman Empire that had mastered more than half the known world. During the 1580s, John Lyly – who had become the most fashionable writer in the land, thanks to his *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit: Very Pleasant for All Gentlemen to Read* (1578) – wrote a series of plays for court performance, composed in finely-spun prose and played by talented boy-actors from the London choir schools. Lyly flattered the queen while at the same time appealing to the classical learning of the social elite and exploiting the aura of flirtation and femininity that was inevitable in a court where ambitious males vied for Her Majesty's attention. In Lyly's hands, courtship was inseparable from courtiership, the vicissitudes of love on stage serving as metaphor for the fickleness of favour in the royal presence-chamber.

Shakespeare was an actor before he was a writer. It appears not to have been long before he realized that he was never going to grow into a great comedian like Tarlton or a great tragedian like Alleyn. Instead, he found a role within his company as the man who patched up old plays, breathing new life, new dramatic twists, into tired repertory pieces. He paid close attention to the work of the university-educated dramatists who were writing history plays and tragedies for the public stage in a style more ambitious, sweeping and poetically grand than anything which had been seen before. But he may also have noted that what his friend and rival Ben Jonson would call 'Marlowe's mighty line' sometimes faltered in the mode of comedy. Going to university was all well and good for honing the arts of rhetorical elaboration and classical allusion, but it could lead to a loss of the common touch. To stay close to a large segment of the potential audience for public theatre, it was necessary to maintain the spirit of Tarlton, to write for clowns as well as kings and to intersperse the flights of poetry with the humour of the tavern, the privy and the brothel.

In the 1580s and early 1590s, several of Lyly's plays appeared in print. They offered Shakespeare a model for what might appeal at court: a tumble of clever words, witty banter between lovers, substantial female roles to be played by cross-dressed boys who sometimes slip back into male attire. The women are always one step ahead of the men, more sensitive of spirit, quicker of mind and tongue. A quick study and a brilliant mimic, Shakespeare realized that it was possible to do it all. To

write both heroic and villainous roles for serious actors in the vein of Alleyn, as Marlowe had done. To churn out jokes and comic misunderstandings for Tarlton's successors. And to create linguistically and emotionally challenging female parts to be played by youthful males. To appeal to the queen and the ladies and gentlemen of the court as well as the gallants of the town and the denizens of the Bankside taverns. To find a voice that spoke to both the queen and her commoners.

The chronology and the pattern of authorship of Shakespeare's early works are impossible to pin down.* It seems, though, that by the summer of 1592 he had made his first steps in comedy, history and tragedy. Many of those first steps – and not a few of his later ones – depended on an art of rewriting existing repertoire rather than creating new plays from scratch. In the late eighteenth century, wrestling with the thorny problem of the authorship of the *Henry VI* plays, the great scholar Edmond Malone predicted that 'A time may arrive, in which it will become evident, from books and manuscripts yet undiscovered and unexamined, that Shakespeare did not attempt a single play on any subject, till the effect of the same story, or at least the ruling incidents in it, had been tried on the stage and familiarized to his audience.' He has almost been proved right.

With *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare created two very different courtship comedies. *The Two Gentlemen*, with its language of courtly love and its juxtaposition of the conflicting demands of desire and friendship, was close to the style and preoccupations of Lyly, whereas *The Shrew* was written in a harsher vein and more robust language, pushing at the borderline between violence and play. It is possible that both comedies were reworkings of existing repertory: the primary source for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* may have been a lost pastoral called *Felix and Philismena*, played at court by the Queen's Men, while a surviving script published in 1594 as *The Taming of a Shrew* may reflect a pre-Shakespearean version of the story of the formidable Kate.

Though the evidence is not absolutely decisive, it is probable that Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, was also a new version of an old play. When it was published early in 1594, the title page indicated that it had been acted by several different companies. Stylistic analysis has revealed the hand of George Peele in the first act especially, but we do not know whether Shakespeare wrote in active collaboration with Peele or took over an older play by Peele, left the first act more or less intact and reworked the remainder more inventively. Whatever its origins, once in Shakespeare's hands *Titus* became a tour de force. As his *Shrew* put violence into courtship comedy, so his *Andronicus* put black comedy into bloodstained tragedy. Over twenty years later, Ben Jonson was complaining that audiences were still swearing that '*Jeronimo* or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet' (*Jeronimo* was Thomas Kyd's hugely popular *Spanish Tragedy*, foundation text of the revenge tradition and another play from which Shakespeare learnt a potent rhetoric).

Comedy and tragedy, but also history: Shakespeare was one of the first to realize that theatre could be the medium to make the national past available to a wider audience than the elite who could afford to read large history books. He accordingly domesticated the model of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, an epic two-part drama full of elevated rhetoric, reversals of fortune and energetic battles. England's disintegration took the place of exotic *Tamburlaine's* military career as the central action of his first foray into historical drama. A two-part dramatization of the Wars of the Roses, entitled *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, established Shakespeare as a force to be reckoned with in the London theatre world. A few years later, sophisticated Ben Jonson would mock both the language and the staging of these plays – 'with three rusty swords, / And help of some few foot and half-foot words, / Fight over

* For a conjectural chronology of all the works, see p. XXX.

York and Lancaster's long jars' – but in the early 1590s, the high-flown passion of York's excoriation of Queen Margaret, the 'she-wolf of France', thrilled the ears of play-goers:

O, tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide!
 How couldst thou drain the life-blood of the child,
 To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,
 And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?
 Women are soft, mild, pitiful and flexible;
 Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.
 Bid'st thou me rage? Why, now thou hast thy wish.
 Wouldst have me weep? Why, now thou hast thy will.
 For raging wind blows up incessant showers,
 And when the rage allays, the rain begins.

The rhetorical formality, the accumulation of epithets and symmetries of phrasing, would have assisted the actor in memorizing such a speech and then delivering it memorably in the testing environment of an open-air stage. The contrasting play of 'tiger's heart' and 'woman's hide', the stimulus to the archetypal tragic actions of raging and weeping (which would have been expressed by gesture as well as word), the clash of opposites ('soft' against 'stern', 'flexible' against 'flinty'), the sense that the face can both reveal and deceive: every aspect of the writing provides rich potential for the actor. At the same time, there is a startling reversal of customary roles. York is a senior actor, a master, but his role is to be humiliated by a boy, the apprentice in the female role. For force of passion and sheer range of expression, the part of Queen Margaret was unprecedented on the English stage. Shakespeare's audacity in giving such prominence to a mere apprentice, in stretching female representation so far beyond the conventional romantic roles of Lyly's comedies, was a severe challenge to theatrical custom.

The First Part of the Contention and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* appeared in print in 1594–95. The published scripts in pocket 'Quarto' or 'Octavo' format were shorter versions of the plays than those printed in 1623 in the posthumous First Folio of Shakespeare's complete works as the second and third parts of *Henry VI*.^{*} The play that the Folio calls *The First Part of Henry the Sixth* was not published in the 1590s, but it was an undoubted hit on stage. Performed as new or newly revised at the Rose theatre in March 1592, it juxtaposed the origins of the Wars of the Roses with the battles in France between plain-speaking English Talbot and tricky French Joan of Arc. In a pamphlet published later that year Thomas Nashe praised the power of the performance: 'How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage and have his bones new-embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least, at several times, who in the tragedian that represents his person imagine they behold him fresh bleeding?' Nashe may, however, have had a vested interest in exaggerating the triumph of the Talbot play: stylistic analysis suggests that he had a hand in its writing himself. There are also strong resemblances to the work of two other university-educated dramatists, Robert Greene and George Peele. Perhaps, then, as a result of the success of Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses plays, Philip Henslowe, proprietor of the Rose, commissioned a new treatment of the earlier part of King Henry VI's reign from some combination of Nashe, Greene and Peele – only for Shakespeare to stamp his own mark on it once it was in the hands of the actors.

^{*} For further discussion of the early texts of Shakespeare, see 'The First Folio Restored', pp. 50–7.

There is not enough evidence to rule out the possibility that all three *Henry VI* plays may include elements of collaborative writing or reworking of older plays. In the early years of his career, Shakespeare seems to have been a hired man, a jack of all trades: the bit-part actor who had found a niche for himself as a reformer of old plays was now contributing distinctive scenes to new ones. His stylistic fingerprints have been tentatively identified in a range of plays that apparently belong to the early 1590s: he may have written a powerful scene of domestic quarrelling in the admirable detective tragedy *Arden of Feversham*; since the eighteenth century there have been strong arguments in favour of his authorship of some witty scenes in *The Reign of Edward III*, where the king attempts to seduce the Countess of Salisbury with some assistance from his court poet Lodowick; there are some notable verbal parallels between his early works and *Edmund Ironside*, a chronicle-based drama concerning a native English rebellion against the rule of King Canute. In 1595, the old play of *Lochrine* (set in the primitive Britain where Shakespeare would locate *King Lear*) was printed with a title page describing it as 'Newly set forth, overseen and corrected by W. S.' Though there is no evidence to link this 'W. S.' to Shakespeare, it does seem that he cut his teeth as a writer in the role of overseer, improver and new setter forth of old scripts.

It was galling for established writers to see their work being 'corrected' by a mere actor. Late in 1592, a pamphlet was published under the title *Greene's Groatworth of Wit, bought with a Million of Repentance*. Prepared for the press by the playwright and printer Henry Chettle, it purportedly contained the dying wishes of the prolific writer Robert Greene, whose life had ended in squalor and poverty a few months before. One section took the form of a letter addressed 'To those Gentlemen his *quondam* acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plays'. The gentlemen in question are recognizable as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe and George Peele. The first two had, like Greene, graduated from Cambridge University, while Peele was an Oxford man. Collectively known by scholars as the 'university wits', they had written the best plays of the late 1580s and early 1590s, often working in collaboration with each other. The *Groatworth* complains that the players – 'those puppets, I mean, that spake from our mouths, those antics garnished in our colours' – were getting rich on the back of the university men's labour, yet offering them minimal reward. Stop writing for the theatre, warns the voice of the dying Greene, or you will end up in my sorry condition. What is more, there is a new threat to the professional writers, coming from within the acting trade:

Trust them not, for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers that, with his 'Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide', supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. O that I might intreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses: and let those apes imitate your past excellence and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions . . . whiles you may, seek you better masters, for it is a pity men of such rare wits should be subject to the pleasure of such rude grooms.

The parody of York's line in 3 *Henry VI*, with 'woman's hide' wittily changed to 'player's hide', together with the pun 'Shake-scene', leaves no room for doubt that the person under attack here is Shakespeare, the actor turned redresser of plays. The implication is that the actors, who are not gentlemen but lowly 'grooms' in the service of their patrons, are taking the 'inventions' of the freelance playwrights and altering them at their 'pleasure', mainly through the agency of the 'upstart crow'. 'Upstart' suggests Shakespeare's inferior social origin. *Johannes Factotum* means 'jack of all trades', an allusion to the perceived breach of decorum whereby he has dabbled in both the vulgar trade of acting and the genteel profession of writing.

The image of the 'upstart crow' and the conceit of 'Shake-scene in a country', the latter word perhaps calculated to suggest the opposite of 'city' sophistication, suggest that the author of the *Groatsworth* has in his sights not only Shakespeare's lack of a university degree but also his rural simplicity. Regional dialects were strongly divergent at this time: when Shakespeare came to London, both his accent and his speech idioms would have seemed provincial. The academic curriculum and social customs of Cambridge would have gone a long way towards homogenizing the Kentish Marlowe and the East Anglian Greene and Nashe in their patterns of thought, speech and behaviour. Shakespeare, by contrast, came straight to London from the Forest of Arden. If there is a self-portrait in his plays, it is probably to be found in a parodic representation of his own much-mocked origins: the figure of William, the country bumpkin in the Arden of *As You Like It*. It would be no surprise if we were to learn that Shakespeare played this cameo role himself. There had been pastoral interludes in Greene's comedies, but one of Shakespeare's hallmarks was the pervasive dramatic pattern of a movement between court and country, city and forest, sophistication and the simple life, a movement that reflected his own double life as London theatrical entrepreneur and provincial Warwickshire property speculator with pretensions to gentility.

The Back Story: Shakespeare of Stratford

Pomewater, Crab, Bitter Sweeting, Pippin, Leathercoat: Shakespeare knew his English apples better than any other dramatist. His language is scattered with flowers that are described with both botanical exactitude and folk knowledge. Damask, musk and dog rose; the 'pale' primrose that is 'first-born child of spring'; crocuses with their 'saffron wings'; daffodils 'that come before the swallow dares'; the blue-veined harebell; 'freckled' cowslips; 'streaked gillyvors' (bi-coloured carnations artificially grafted so that some call them 'nature's bastards'); 'larks-heels' or larkspurs; 'sweet' marjoram; 'hot' lavender; the 'luscious woodbine' and its 'sweet honeysuckle' flower; the eglantine or sweet-briar; 'long purples', an orchid with testicle-shaped roots that Gertrude in *Hamlet* says maids call 'dead men's fingers' but 'liberal shepherds give a grosser name' (the plant was variously known as 'priest's pintel', 'bollock grass' and 'dog's cullions', but also as 'the rampant widow', which is ironic coming from Gertrude). The list could extend for pages, as could an account of Shakespeare's technical knowledge of country pursuits such as falconry – which was one of his distinctive metaphors for relations between the sexes, as when Juliet longs for a falconer's voice to call back her 'tassel-gentle' Romeo or, more darkly, when Othello makes an extended comparison of Desdemona to a 'haggard', the term for a wild or unbroken hawk.

One of the ways in which Shakespeare made the imaginary worlds of his plays seem real was through an art of exactitude. This required greater truth to nature than to history. Historically, King Henry IV died in the spring of the year, but dramatically Shakespeare requires a late-summer mood at the climax of his two-part drama about the relationship between Prince Hal and Sir John Falstaff. He accordingly drops in a casual allusion to Hinckley Fair (a famous cattle market held annually on 26 August) and refers to the sowing of the 'headland' (the strip at the end of the furrow where the plough turns, which was planted later than the main field), with 'red' (spring) as opposed to white (winter) wheat. Two centuries after the play was written, agricultural writers noted with amazement that red wheat was indeed sown on the Cotswold Hills as late as August.

Like Tarlton before him, Shakespeare enjoyed feigning rustic simplicity. He fooled his more urbane rivals by hiding his sophistication behind the pose of the 'natural'. The 'rude mechanicals' who rehearse their play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are described as 'hempen home-spuns', suggesting the countryman's garment of coarse hemp, as opposed to the fine silks and furs of court dress, and yet

it is the most seemingly simple-minded of the group, Nick Bottom the weaver, who is granted an intimate encounter with the fairy queen and who achieves a special grace even as he is mocked as an ass. When Shakespeare witnessed his words being played before Queen Elizabeth, he must have felt a little like Bottom himself.

We will never know what drove his ambition, but his father's ill-fortune may have been part of the story. The human lifecycle in early modern England was such that a man often fathered children around the time his own father died. So it was for John Shakespeare. His father Richard, a tenant farmer who lived in the village of Snitterfield, just north of Stratford-upon-Avon, died in 1560 or 1561. John Shakespeare, born in about 1530, had married Mary Arden – daughter of his father's landlord, socially a cut above him – when he was in his late twenties, by which time he was established as a glove-maker and leather-dresser in Stratford. William, their first surviving son, was born in April 1564. He grew up to write plays in which a 'great round beard' is compared to 'a glover's paring knife', and the soft kidskin leather known as 'cheverel', used to make gloves, turns into a metaphor for his own most valuable commodity, namely his gift with words. Thus Mercutio jokes about Romeo's wit of cheverel that 'stretches from an inch narrow to an ell broad'. Since 'wit' was also a playful term for a man's sexual organ, the line contains sustained bawdy wordplay that exemplifies the wit it describes. Again, Feste in *Twelfth Night* says that 'a good wit' can handle fragments of proverbial wisdom like a cheverel glove: 'How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!' The capacity to turn things inside out in an instant – whether through verbal pyrotechnics, twists of plot, turns of character or intellectual reversals – is Shakespeare's hallmark. It is satisfying that cheverel is one of the signs he hangs above his metaphorical shop: he made his living from his wit where his father had made his from gloves.

John and Mary Shakespeare had five subsequent children, of whom the most intriguing is the youngest, Edmund, who was born in 1580 and later followed William to London, where he became an actor, presumably as an apprentice in his brother's company. The other survivors, sister Joan and brothers Gilbert and Richard, lived impeccably dull and respectable local lives. The black sheep of the family was John Shakespeare's brother, William's Uncle Henry, who frequently found himself on the wrong side of the law, at various times being fined, imprisoned or excommunicated for affray, debt, trespass, refusing to pay his tithes and going to church in a hat instead of a cap.

By the time William was seven, his father had bought more property and achieved respectability in the town, holding the posts of bailiff and chief alderman of the borough council. This entitled him to send his children, free of charge, to the local grammar school. The King's New School provided a thorough grounding in Latin. A scene in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* featuring a clever schoolboy called William being drilled in his grammar has the smack of a personal memory being turned to comic account. The curriculum does not survive, but there was considerable uniformity in what was taught across the Elizabethan grammar school system, so Shakespeare's classroom experience may be readily inferred from others that do. Boys would remain in the first form until they could read Latin aloud with correct pronunciation and clear expression. They would then proceed to the second form, where they would be introduced to grammar: first the eight parts of speech, then the 'concordances of grammar and Latin speech to know the agreement of parts amongst themselves'. After this initial grounding, work could begin on set texts, such as 'the precepts of Cato with such other little books wherein is contained not only the eloquence of the tongue, but also good plain lessons of honesty and godliness'. More demanding and literary texts were introduced in the third form, typically Aesop's fables, the poetry of Virgil, Cicero's letters and the comedies of Terence. Boys who succeeded in mastering these would eventually be promoted to the fourth form, where there was a demanding

regime of daily translation from Latin to English and back again, of readings in more advanced set texts, lessons in the rules of Latin versification and composition of 'epistles'.

This pattern of work offers a glimpse of Shakespeare's beginnings as an author. Literary creation begins in translation and is inseparable from a programme of reading: so it was that nearly all Shakespeare's plays were reworkings of pre-existent texts. The 'epistles' that the boys had to write to each other were his first exercise in the art of dramatic empathy: the requirement was to write a letter (in Latin) as if you were a famous figure from a classical story. Thus the boy Shakespeare might have been asked to imagine that he was wise old Nestor 'exhorting Achilles by letter, that he bear bravely the snatching away of Briseida by Agamemnon, showing that one must bear even with an evil ruler, and public good must be preferred to private grief' or – being asked to inhabit the opposing side in the Trojan war – to write in the voice of Antenor persuading King Priam 'that he should not be unwilling to return the stolen Helen to her Menelaus, either because it was just in itself, or because it would be the part of a very foolish ruler on account of the most shameful love of an effeminate youth and hardly a man Paris to cause that so many very brave men should enter battle'. Another exercise would be to use an incident in the life of, say, Julius Caesar or Mark Antony in order to exemplify some moral or political 'theme'. The work of playwrighting was an extension of the grammar school repertoire, cunningly adapted so as to be less obviously didactic.

The teaching of style and eloquence was as important as the moral content. From Erasmus' *De Copia* Shakespeare learnt the art of linguistic amplitude, saying the same thing several times over in a display of rhetorical ingenuity. From Cicero's letters to his friends and his *Offices*, a handbook on ethical citizenship, he learnt to polish and balance his sentences. He was regularly taught lessons in the art of persuasion. One of the specimen letters in Erasmus' textbook was on the theme of persuading a young man to marry: Shakespeare's sonnet sequence would begin with a set of variations on just such a theme, while a dialogue such as that between Helen and Parolles in *All's Well that Ends Well* as they debate the pros and cons of virginity wittily imitates and elaborates upon several points made by Erasmus. The schoolroom technique of learning to argue both sides of a question – *in utramque partem* – was invaluable training not only for lawyers and politicians, but also for dramatists. Shakespeare imbibed his dialogic way of thinking unconsciously through the daily grind of his exercises in the Stratford-upon-Avon classroom. One suspects that his conscious mind would have been more engaged by the stories he encountered: in Ovid he read of erotic obsessions and magical transformations from man to beast, in Caesar he found the technical vocabulary of warfare, and in Sallust the machinations of conspiracy and power politics.

Ben Jonson, writing with the pride and insecurity of the learned auto-didact, claimed in his commendatory poem in the First Folio that Shakespeare had 'small Latin and less Greek'. Small by Jonson's prodigious standards is large by ours: Shakespeare seems to have had enough Latin to base his *Comedy of Errors* and *Rape of Lucrece* on classical sources that had not been published in English translation. This is less surprising when one discovers that the boys in the upper forms of an Elizabethan grammar school were expected to speak Latin at all times, save when they were assisting in the instruction of the lower forms.

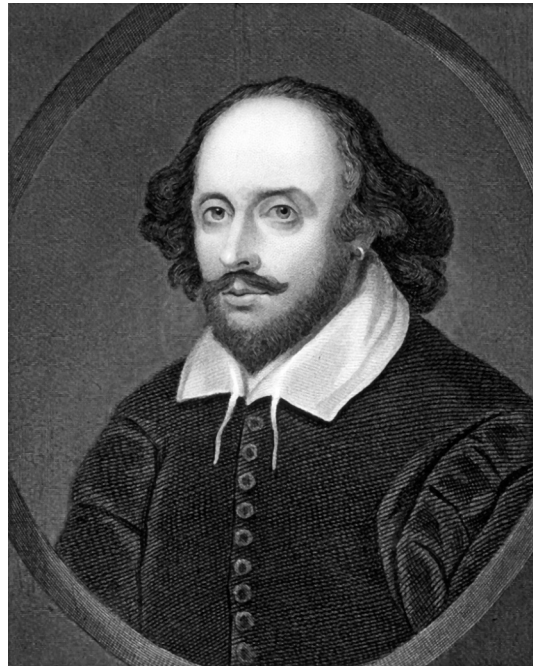
The expectation that the senior boys would teach the junior is in accordance with the time-honoured system of learning by means of apprenticeship. On completing their grammar school education, many of the Stratford boys would have been apprenticed into a trade. Richard Field, Shakespeare's near-contemporary, went to London, found a position with a master printer and went on to become a master himself, with special skill in the printing of classical texts. Provided their parents could afford it, the most intellectually gifted pupils went on to Oxford or Cambridge University

and thence to a career in the Church or the law. This was the road that Shakespeare did not take and the reason he was regarded by the university-educated writers as an ‘upstart crow’.

Why didn’t Shakespeare go to university? His father was clearly ambitious and determined. As well as establishing his glove and leather business, he dealt in wool, managed farmland for sheep-grazing and apparently also practised a little moneylending. Many of his business deals ended in litigation in the local courts, but that was common in the period. Young Will must have seemed like prime university material: bright as a button and son of the chief alderman of the town council. But in Will’s thirteenth year, his father stopped attending local council meetings. He should have been fined for this (others in Stratford were), but he was not. The local tax assessments show that he was asked to pay less than he should have been, given his status. The clear signs are that he was in financial difficulties, but that his colleagues were initially willing to cut him some slack and give him the chance to set his affairs in order. Business was conducted largely on a credit basis, so a few bad debtors and a lack of cash reserves could cause big trouble. John Shakespeare’s problems seem to have begun when one particular creditor pursued him hard. Over the next few years, he started selling land and trying to raise cash. He mortgaged a house in Wilmcote, the village where his wife had been brought up, to her brother-in-law from Barton on the Heath (a village mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew*). Fearful of arrest for debt and consequent social humiliation, he stopped attending church. So at exactly the period when Shakespeare might have gone to university – boys typically went up in their mid-teens – he was needed at home.

John Shakespeare had over-extended himself. He was struggling to maintain his young family. The likelihood is that Will spent his late teens as his father’s apprentice in the leather business. According to John Aubrey, one of the earliest, albeit not the most reliable, witnesses to Shakespeare’s life, ‘he exercised his father’s trade, but when he killed a calf, he would do it in a high style and make a speech’. Shakespeare probably cut up the hides rather than killed the calves, but the anecdote gives a sense of the intellectual frustration of this occupation for a man of his intelligence.

Many portraits have been claimed as images of Shakespeare. The only representation that is unquestionably authentic is the dome-headed engraving on the title page of the First Folio (see p. 61). The painting with the best provenance, going back to Shakespeare’s godson William Davenant, is the so-called ‘Chandos’ portrait in London’s National Portrait Gallery, with its swarthy look, casually untied collar and stylish single gold earring. Engravings based on the portrait, such as this one, circulated widely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shaping the popular perception of Shakespeare.



At the age of eighteen, Shakespeare impregnated Anne (otherwise known as Agnes) Hathaway, a woman eight or nine years his elder. A special licence was issued, allowing them to be married without the usual three prior readings of the banns. A bond had to be provided as surety against any legal irregularity: since William was a minor, the money was put up by some friends of the Hathaways. The marriage took place at the end of November 1582, in a village outside Stratford. These circumstances suggest a degree of haste and concealment: John Shakespeare's financial problems may have been a factor (one only has to imagine a twist upon *Much Ado about Nothing* to visualize the potential embarrassment of the groom's father being arrested for debt during the wedding ceremony).

Susanna Shakespeare was born six months after the wedding, a few weeks after the third birthday of Will's brother Edmund. About a year and a half later, Anne gave birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith, named after Hamnet (a variant spelling of Hamlet) and Judith Sadler, family friends who would have served as godparents. During the years 1585–87 there were several actions for debt against John Shakespeare in the local courts. He racked up fines for failing to appear in court in answer to them. Three times he was bound over to keep the peace, in circumstances related to the debts. So it was that in the first years of his legal majority, William Shakespeare had to be the breadwinner for a household of four children under the age of seven.

At exactly this point he disappears from the historical record, only re-emerging at the moment when the *Groatsworth* describes him as an 'upstart crow'. Did he go to seek his fortune as a soldier in the Dutch wars? A memorable scene in *2 Henry IV*, located in his native Cotswolds, reveals his knowledge of the process of recruitment, while play after play is steeped in the technical language of warfare and military life. Did he exploit his 'small Latin' and become a lawyer's clerk, a 'noverint' (this was the route towards the theatre world taken by another talented, modestly-born writer, Thomas Kyd)? Play after play is also steeped in the technical language of the law. In the late twentieth century, there was a popular theory that Shakespeare spent time as a servant in a recusant Catholic household in Lancashire, but the purported evidence was highly circumstantial and is largely discredited.* The best hint as to how he spent these so-called 'lost years' comes via Aubury from the son of Christopher Beeston, one of Shakespeare's acting colleagues, who recalled that he had been 'in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country'. It has not, however, been established where or for how long this might have been the case. New evidence may yet be found. Why, for instance, did the distinguished poet and courtier Fulke Greville, whose family home was at Alcester near Stratford, take pride in being known as 'Shakespeare's master'? Was it simply because he was the local lord of the manor or could he have found young Will a teaching position, perhaps on the Welsh border where he had extensive powers of patronage? In several of the plays Shakespeare is unusually interested in Wales and the Welsh language. His most memorable schoolmaster is a Welshman, Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, whose accent and foibles are mimicked with a degree of detail that conceivably hints at affectionate parody of a sometime colleague.

But this is all guesswork. All that is known for sure is that sooner or later Shakespeare tried to restore his family's fortunes by going to London and becoming an actor. Several of his plays rework originals in the repertoire of the Queen's Men, the leading company of the late 1580s, who toured widely (they made several visits to Stratford-upon-Avon) and were known for their anti-Catholic propaganda. Perhaps he initially had some association with them. Most of the actors who would go on

* In particular, it has been persuasively shown that the 'William Shakeshafte' named in the will of Alexander Hoghton of Lea Hall near Preston in Lancashire could not have been the young Shakespeare.

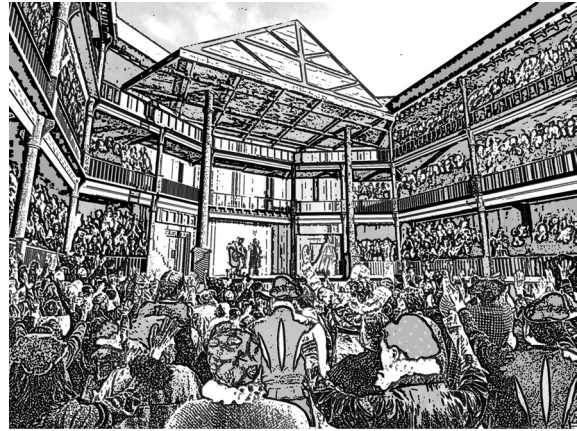
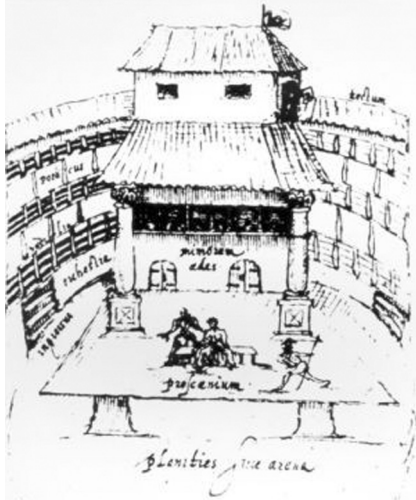
to be his closest colleagues cut their teeth in the company known as Lord Strange's Men, so he is highly likely to have been a member of that troupe. In 1592, some of his plays were in the hands of a short-lived, mainly touring, company under the patronage of the Earl of Pembroke. It is not known whether he travelled with them.

The Playhouses

While Shakespeare was still at school in Stratford, James Burbage, leader of the players who toured the land under the patronage of the Earl of Leicester, realized the potential offered by the massive expansion in the population of London that had occurred over the previous two generations: build a permanent playhouse and you have full control of your box office and your programming. You also have the potential to establish an audience base of repeat attendees in a way that was not possible when you were perpetually on the road. In 1576 he took a twenty-one-year lease on a site in Shoreditch to the north-east of the city and set about building a theatre, working in partnership with his brother-in-law, John Brayne. Burbage's playhouse – simply called The Theatre – soon became a landmark. A preacher at St Paul's Cross spoke of the 'gorgeous Playing-place erected in the fields', dutifully adding that it resembled 'the old heathenish Theatre at Rome' in being 'a showplace of all beastly and filthy matters'. The City of London was dominated by puritan-leaning figures who for generations would habitually associate plays with 'unchastity', 'sedition' and 'uncomely matter'. That is why the actors relied on the court for patronage and why the public playhouses were always built in the 'liberties' on the margins of London, outside the jurisdiction of the City fathers. It is also why Shakespeare took pleasure in teasing or exposing such puritanical figures as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Angelo in *Measure for Measure*.

Southwark was an area on the south bank of the river, reached either by ferry or by walking across London Bridge, where the severed heads of executed traitors were displayed on poles as a reminder of the consequence of treason. Once on the south side, you could look back over the river to see St Paul's Cathedral towering over the city, but many of the buildings around you were brothels and gambling dens. This was the place for bear-baiting and cockfights. It was here that a new theatre, the Rose, opened in 1587. Under the management of Philip Henslowe, it was used by several of the acting companies who over the next few years broke the monopoly of the Queen's Men. Among those who played there were Lord Strange's Men. Their patron, Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange (later Earl of Derby), had taken over some of Leicester's Men, just as he followed in Leicester's footsteps in supporting the publication of translations and other literary works. Richard Burbage, son of James, was a leading figure in the troupe. Several others were to join him in forming the core of a new company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, in 1594, after the mysterious sudden death of their patron. Since Shakespeare's plays first emerge in the repertoire of Strange's at the Rose, it may be inferred that Burbage, who became his closest colleague, was someone he met very soon after making his way into the theatre world.

Elizabethan playhouses were 'thrust' or 'one-room' theatres. To understand Shakespeare's original theatrical life, we have to forget about the indoor theatre of later times, with its proscenium arch and curtain that would be opened at the beginning and closed at the end of each act. The proscenium arch theatre, which held sway from the 1660s to the 1960s, divided the audience from the actors. Stage and auditorium were effectively two separate rooms: the audience looked from one world into another as if through the imaginary 'fourth wall' framed by the proscenium arch. The picture-frame stage, together with the elaborate scenic effects and backdrops beyond it, created the illusion of a self-contained world – especially once nineteenth-century developments in the control of artificial lighting



Reconstructions of Elizabethan playhouses have relied heavily on this drawing by Arendt van Buchell (left), purportedly showing the Swan theatre, which was built in 1596, but recent scholarship has shown that van Buchell was a poor draughtsman and unreliable copyist, so its details, such as the deep thrust stage and thick canopy-supporting pillars, should not be relied upon. The archaeology of the Rose theatre suggests that Elizabethan stages were usually wider, shallower and tapered. Since there is no authentic image of the interior of a Shakespearean theatre, we reproduce a hypothetical one (right), based on various kinds of evidence and designed by Charcoalblue: it is intended to suggest the vibrant atmosphere of the outdoor courtyard playhouses.

meant that the auditorium could be darkened and the spectators made to focus on the lighted stage. Shakespeare, by contrast, wrote for a bare platform stage with a standing audience gathered around it in a courtyard in full daylight. The audience were always conscious of themselves and their fellow-spectators, and they shared the same 'room' as the actors. A sense of immediate presence and the creation of rapport with the audience were all-important. The actor could not afford to imagine he was in a closed world, with silent witnesses dutifully observing him from the darkness.

Since Shakespeare's theatrical career began at the Rose, there was enormous interest when the theatre's foundations were excavated in 1989. The stage was revealed to be wide and shallow, trapezoid in shape, like a lozenge. This design had a great deal of potential for the theatrical equivalent of cinematic split-screen effects, whereby one group of characters would enter at the door at one end of the tiring-house wall at the back of the stage and another group through the door at the other end, thus creating two rival tableaux. Many of the battle-heavy and faction-filled plays that premiered at the Rose have scenes of just this sort.

At the rear of the Rose stage, there were three capacious exits, each over ten feet wide. Unfortunately, the very limited excavation of a fragmentary portion of the original Globe site, also in 1989, revealed nothing about the stage. The first Globe was built in 1599 with similar proportions to those of another theatre, the Fortune, albeit that the former was polygonal and looked circular, whereas the latter was rectangular. The building contract for the Fortune survives and allows us to infer that the stage of the Globe was probably substantially wider than it was deep (perhaps forty-three feet wide and twenty-seven feet deep). It may well have been tapered at the front, like that of the Rose.

The capacity of the Globe was said to be enormous, perhaps in excess of three thousand. It has been conjectured that about eight hundred people may have stood in the yard, with two thousand or more in the three layers of covered galleries. The other 'public' playhouses were also of large capacity,

whereas the indoor Blackfriars theatre that Shakespeare's company began using in 1608 – the former refectory of a monastery – had overall internal dimensions of a mere forty-six by sixty feet. It would have made for a much more intimate theatrical experience and held a much smaller capacity, probably of about six hundred people. Since they paid at least sixpence a head, the Blackfriars attracted a more select or 'private' audience. The atmosphere would have been closer to that of an indoor performance before the court in the Whitehall Palace or at Richmond. That Shakespeare always wrote for indoor production at court as well as outdoor performance in the public theatre should make us cautious about inferring, as some scholars have, that the opportunity provided by the intimacy of the Blackfriars led to a significant change towards a 'chamber' style in his last plays – which, besides, were performed at both the Globe and the Blackfriars. After the occupation of the Blackfriars a five-act structure seems to have become more important to Shakespeare. That was because of artificial lighting: there were musical interludes between the acts, while the candles were trimmed and replaced. Again, though, something similar must have been necessary for indoor court performances throughout his career.

Plague and Poetry

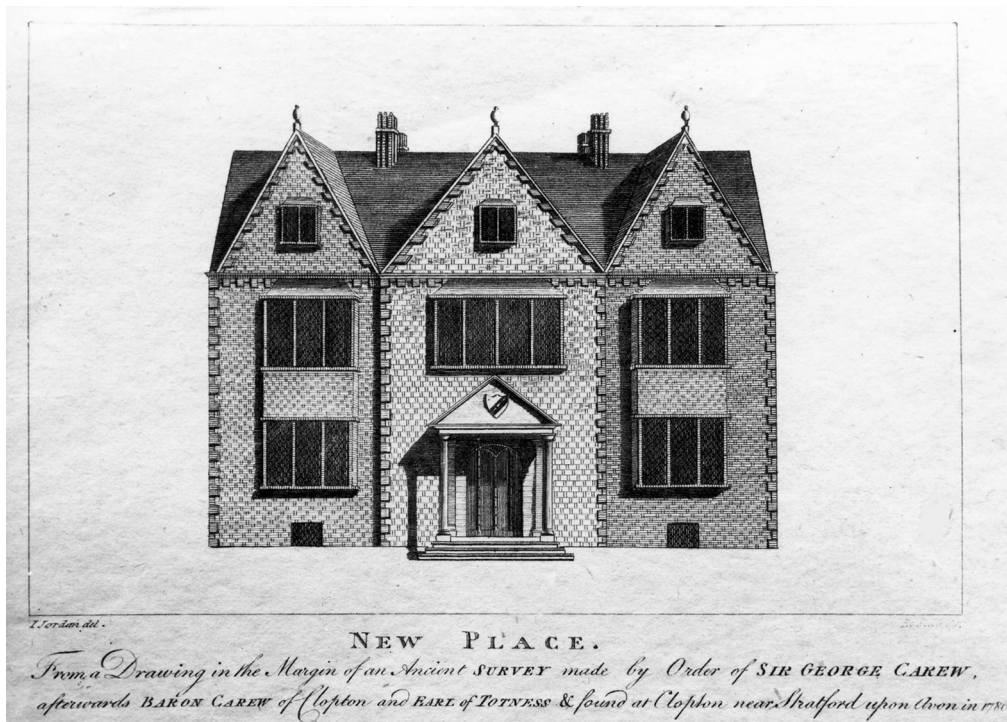
Times were hard for the players in the years 1592–94. In June 1592, the theatres were closed by government order, following a public disturbance. They reopened briefly in the depths of the following winter, but were then closed again for almost a full year, this time due to an increase in plague. The best way of stopping the spread of infection was to prevent public gatherings such as plays, bear-baitings and bowling matches. So just as Shakespeare was establishing himself as a theatre writer, his means of livelihood was cut off. Back home, his father had recently been blacklisted for non-attendance at church – not in the category of Jesuits, fugitives, recusants or people 'vehemently suspected to be such', but among those who stayed away for fear of process for debt (Henry Field, father of the apprentice printer Richard, was on the same list). A case against John Shakespeare was also being heard in the Court of Common Pleas.

With the need to earn money for the family more pressing than ever and his writing gifts established, Shakespeare responded to the closure of the theatres by writing non-dramatic verse in the hope of gaining patronage. This was a common strategy at the time, since the publication of a poem with a flattering dedication to a wealthy aristocrat could potentially yield three forms of income – a small cash payment from the publisher, a gift from the patron as thanks for the dedication and, if one was very lucky, some form of secretarial or other employment in his lordship's household. Shakespeare (and several other writers, including the same Tom Nashe who seems to have had a hand in *1 Henry VI*) targeted Henry Wriothesley, the third Earl of Southampton, ward to Lord Burghley, the most powerful man in England. Southampton was shortly to come into his majority and – it was hoped – a considerable fortune. In the weeks after the closure of the theatres, Shakespeare polished off his witty and erotic *Venus and Adonis*, a brilliantly inventive imitation of Ovid, and persuaded his Stratford friend Richard Field to print it, complete with a fulsome dedication to Southampton in which Shakespeare promised that he would dedicate his 'idle hours' (of which he had many because of the continuing plague) to the composition of 'some graver labour'.

The latter came to fruition as the longer, more rhetorically elaborate and more sombre *Rape of Lucrece*, published a year later in May 1594, with a shorter but more intimate-sounding dedication, suggesting that Southampton had offered Shakespeare some sort of reward. It may have been in Southampton's household, either in London or at Titchfield in Hampshire, that Shakespeare met the Anglo-Italian John Florio, whose works he would read with profit and who perhaps provoked in him

an interest in Italian culture. Like many of his contemporaries, Shakespeare was fascinated by the way that Italy was the home of courtly and artistic sophistication, but also the fount of political and sexual intrigue. The former was exemplified by Petrarch's love sonnets and Baldassare Castiglione's handbook on the art of being a courtier, the latter by Machiavelli's maxim that 'might is right' and Pietro Aretino's heady literary concoctions of satire and eroticism.

Clever, sexy, intuitively responsive to the classics without being academically stifled by them, *Venus and Adonis* struck an instant chord with educated, fashion-conscious young male readers in London and the two universities. They constituted the principal market for artful poetry, so Field was duly rewarded: *Venus and Adonis* became the best-selling long poem of the age. It established Shakespeare's reputation as the absolute master of witty words. This must have felt like a satisfying riposte to the *Groatsworth*. Furthermore, from this point onwards, the financial fortunes of the Shakespeare family greatly improved: there were no more lawsuits against John Shakespeare and a concerted attempt was made to recover Mary Arden's property in Wilmcote. Within a few years, there were two clear signs that the Shakespeares had been restored to respectability in Stratford-upon-Avon: in 1596, John Shakespeare, almost certainly through his son's agency, was petitioning for a coat of arms and thus the status of a proper gentleman, and in May the following year William struck an excellent bargain in purchasing New Place, the second-largest house in town.



Shakespeare was probably the first writer in England to become wealthy on the proceeds of his work: by the end of the 1590s, he had bought New Place, the second-largest property in Stratford-upon-Avon. He had also obtained the status of a 'gentleman' and a family coat of arms: in this eighteenth-century engraving, it is displayed above the door of his house. The spear on the bend of the coat of arms plays on the bearer's name: Shakespeare could never resist a pun.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men

The accumulation of wealth had not, however, come from the poetry. Field and the publisher to whom he subsequently transferred the right to print *Venus and Adonis* would have taken the profit on sales, and when the Earl of Southampton came of age in 1595 he was found to have far less wealth than expected, so did not prove a munificent patron (a later source speaks of him giving Shakespeare 'a thousand pounds' for a purchase, but this is likely to be a gross exaggeration). But in the theatre world the cards fell right for Shakespeare. Plague abated and the playhouses reopened in the summer of 1594. The authorities took the opportunity to establish two companies in an effective duopoly, one troupe under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain (Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon) and the other under his son-in-law, the Lord Admiral (Charles, Lord Howard). To have two strong companies on hand with repertoires of proven quality and suitability, rather than having to deal with half a dozen companies, who could be difficult to track down when on tour, was the best way of ensuring that royal commands for court performances could always be met at short notice and with the prospect of results that satisfied Queen Elizabeth. The Lord Admiral's Men, with Edward Alleyn as star and his son-in-law Philip Henslowe as theatre manager, were based at the Rose on the south bank of the River Thames, with the plays of the recently-murdered Christopher Marlowe (and others influenced by them) at the core of their repertoire. The Lord Chamberlain's Men, with Richard Burbage as star, Augustine Phillips and later John Hemings as company manager, were based at the Theatre in Shoreditch, with the plays written or revised by Shakespeare at the core of their repertoire. The premature demise of Marlowe and Greene meant that Shakespeare had suddenly become the pre-eminent writer for the public stage.

He also invented a new role for himself, that of in-house company dramatist. Where his peers and predecessors had to sell their plays to Henslowe or another manager on a poorly-paid piecework basis, Shakespeare took a percentage of the box-office income. The Lord Chamberlain's Men was constituted as a joint stock company, with the profits being distributed among the core actors who had invested as sharers. Shakespeare acted himself – he appears in the cast lists of some of Ben Jonson's plays as well as the list of actors' names at the beginning of his own collected works – but his principal duty was to write two or three plays a year for the company. By holding shares, he was effectively earning himself a royalty on his work, something almost without precedent in English literary history. At the beginning of Shakespeare's career, theatre had been dominated by Alleyn the tragedian and Tarlton the clown. When the Lord Chamberlain's Men collected their fee for performance at court in the Christmas season of 1594, three of them went along to the Treasurer of the Chamber: Burbage the tragedian, Kempe the clown and Shakespeare the playwright. That was something new.

We do not know which two plays they performed before the queen that Christmas. The most likely is *The Comedy of Errors*, a dazzlingly contrived farce of twins and mistaken identity, fashioned from the ancient Roman comedy of Plautus: this was the show they played to a riotous audience of young lawyers at Gray's Inn on 28 December, so it would have made sense also to have given it at court a day or two before. If, as was often the case, the queen had requested mixed fare, the other play might have been *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, the historical drama that rounds off the Wars of the Roses begun in the *Henry VI* plays. Written as a showcase for Richard Burbage, the title role was more demanding in both range and length than anything written hitherto in English drama. Here the arts of self-consciously villainous play-acting and self-examination in the form of soliloquy were developed as never before. To judge from subsequent allusions, both admiring and parodic, Crookback Richard was the first of Burbage's signature roles.

The next four years were the golden period in Shakespeare's career. In his early thirties and in full command of both his poetic and his theatrical medium, he perfected his art of comedy, while also

developing his tragic and historical writing in new ways. In 1598, Francis Meres, a Cambridge University graduate with his finger on the pulse of the London literary world, praised Shakespeare for his excellence across the genres:

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labours Lost*, his *Love Labours Won*, his *Midsummer Night Dream* and his *Merchant of Venice*: for tragedy his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Juliet*. As Epicius Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue if they would speak Latin, so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase if they would speak English.

For Meres, as for the many writers who praised the 'honey-flowing vein' of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, Shakespeare was marked above all by his linguistic skill, by the gift of turning elegant poetic phrases. Half the plays mentioned by Meres had not been published by 1598, so he must have known them from the theatre or by reputation – which is striking, since plays were advertised in terms of their title, content and the identity of the acting company, not with a credit to the playwright. It is not inconceivable that Meres read some of the plays in manuscript: there are surviving examples of plays from the period being copied for the purpose of private reading (one of them, the so-called Dering manuscript, is a skilfully edited conflation of the two parts of *Henry IV*). Meres certainly knew that what he called Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets' were circulating 'among his private friends'.

The surprise in the list is the comedy called *Love Labours Won*. Was this a lost sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost*, a play that ends with an offstage death resulting in the delay of a year before the ladies will allow themselves to be won? Or was it an early version of a comedy subsequently revised under another title – *As You Like It*, perhaps, or *Much Ado about Nothing* or *All's Well that Ends Well*? In 1953, a bookseller's inventory dating from 1603 was discovered: among the plays listed were not only *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of a Shrew* and *Love's Labour Lost*, but also *Love's Labour Won*. This seems to prove that the play was actually printed, with no copies surviving (by no means a unique occurrence – all copies of the first printed edition of *Love's Labour's Lost* are also lost, while only single copies survive of the first editions of two of Shakespeare's most popular works, *Venus and Adonis* and *Titus Andronicus*). The absence of *Love's Labour Won* from the Folio may lend weight to the theory that it was an alternative title for a known play, but a lost play could be accounted for by a copyright dispute of the kind which meant that *Troilus and Cressida* very nearly failed to make it into the Folio. A copy of the Quarto edition of *Love's Labour Won* might still turn up, in what would be the most sensational literary discovery of modern times.

By the year 1598 it was clear that Shakespeare's name was a highly marketable commodity. Several of his plays, as well as the two narrative poems, had been in print for a few years, but it was only now that his name began appearing on the title page, something that was very much the exception rather than the rule when theatre scripts were published. A publisher named William Jaggard cashed in on his name by producing a tiny volume of poetry called *The Passionate Pilgrim by W. Shakespeare*. It included three sets of verses lifted from *Love's Labour's Lost*, together with two Shakespeare sonnets that had been circulating in manuscript and that would eventually form part of the full collection of 1609, but also a selection of songs and sonnets by other authors. When the volume was reprinted in 1612, Jaggard added some work by Thomas Heywood, who immediately objected and in doing so mentioned that he had heard that Shakespeare was also displeased at Jaggard's sharp practice.

During the years around the turn of the century, Shakespeare perfected his comic art in *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Twelfth Night*. He brought his sequence of English history plays to a climax with *Henry V*. And, after the more domestic subject matter of *Romeo and Juliet*, he turned his tragic muse back to affairs of state with *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. *Caesar* is one of the handful of Shakespearean plays for which we have an eyewitness account of an early performance. It took place in September 1599 at the newly-built Globe on Bankside, where the Lord Chamberlain's Men had rebuilt their theatre, following the expiry of the lease on their site in Shoreditch. The spectator was a Swiss student, Thomas Platter. In his journal of his visit to England, he especially noted two aspects of the production: the size of the cast ('nearly fifteen characters') and the jig at the end of the show (performed by four dancers, two dressed in men clothes and two in women's). He was probably used to reading ancient tragedy, Seneca especially, where the casts were much smaller. The sheer scale and variety of the action of a Shakespeare play was what impressed him. The fact that Platter singled out the closing jig – and that his journal moved directly from play-going to the two other popular 'theatrical' entertainments available in Southwark, cockfighting and bear-baiting – may suggest that he did not take the drama all that seriously. He did, however, observe that it had a vital educative role for the native London audience: 'With these and many more amusements the English pass their time, learning at the play what is happening abroad; indeed men and womenfolk visit such places without scruple, since the English for the most part do not travel much, but prefer to learn foreign matters and take their pleasures at home.' The suggestion is that for Elizabethan Londoners the theatre was not only a medium of mass entertainment, but also a prime source of news, opinion and political knowledge.

Shakespeare's personal story during these years was mixed. He made enough money to restore his father's fortunes and buy a big house, together with the status conferred by a family coat of arms, but success and prosperity were overshadowed by the death in August 1596 of his only son Hamnet, aged eleven. The influence of such a loss on his work is incalculable. It adds peculiar poignancy to Constance's lament on the death of her similarly aged child Arthur in *King John*, which may have been written shortly afterwards ('Grief fills the room up of my absent child'), but then again *King John* may have been written earlier. Some five years later, Viola's moving response to the loss of her twin brother in *Twelfth Night*, and her joy in the reunion with him, give a very echo to what we may imagine were the feelings of the similarly aged Judith Shakespeare, while *Hamlet* (the variant spelling of Hamnet) has much to say about fathers and son in the context of death and grief – but *Hamlet* was an old play from the late 1580s which Shakespeare did not rework into its extant form until around 1600.

The nearest we may come to an immediate reaction to Hamnet's death is a curious incident that autumn when Shakespeare became involved in a dispute between Francis Langley, the moneybroker who had financed the building of the Swan theatre, and an agent acting on behalf of a quarrelsome, litigious Surrey Justice of the Peace who was not averse to sharp practice in his personal affairs. Shakespeare's part in the affair is mysterious, though it is not impossible that he was engaged in negotiations with Langley at this time with a view to the Lord Chamberlain's Men playing at the Swan, which would have given them exposure on the south bank of the river, in the backyard of their rival Henslowe, who was still operating out of the Rose. What is intriguing about this brush with the law is its proximity to Hamnet's death. Hot-tempered dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson seemed to be forever getting into street fights (sometimes to the death) and ending up in court, whereas Shakespeare habitually kept his nose out of other people's quarrels. This time, though, a threat was made and he was bound over to keep the peace: perhaps it was the one occasion where his grief was such that he let his temper fray.

On the financial side of things, he was a less than perfect citizen: in 1597 and 1598, lodging in Bishopsgate, he defaulted on his local taxes, while back in Stratford he was accused of having illegally hoarded a large quantity of malt or grain during a shortage. Letters and legal documents reveal him making loans, calling in debts and accumulating considerable acreage of land as well as additional properties in and around Stratford all through these years and into the new century. Shakespeare's father died in 1601 and his mother seven years later, when the family property in Henley Street passed to him, further enhancing his status as one of the town's wealthiest men.

The Ensemble at Work

Like many crafts, the making of theatre is a conservative profession. There is a way of doing things that actors and support staff learn early in their training, then stick by throughout their careers. Customs and techniques are broadly the same in different companies; conventional practices endure for generations. So although the archive of Shakespeare's company is almost entirely lost, their practices may be inferred from such sources as the papers of Philip Henslowe, manager of the rival Admiral's Men, and from an array of other fragmentary materials – including the practices of the players in *Hamlet* and Peter Quince's amateur troupe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the absence of typewriters and photocopying machines, reading aloud would have been the means by which the company got to know a new play. The tradition of the playwright reading his complete script to the assembled company endured for generations. A copy would then have been taken to the Master of the Revels for licensing. The theatre book-holder or prompter would then have copied the parts for distribution to the actors. A partbook consisted of the character's lines, with each speech preceded by the last three or four words of the speech before, the so-called 'cue'. These would have been taken away and studied or 'conned'. During this period of learning the parts, an actor might have had some one-to-one instruction, perhaps from the dramatist, perhaps from a senior actor who had played the same part before, and, in the case of an apprentice, from his master. A high percentage of Desdemona's lines occur in dialogue with Othello, of Lady Macbeth's with Macbeth, Cleopatra's with Antony and Volumnia's with Coriolanus. The roles would almost certainly have been taken by the apprentice of the lead actor, usually Burbage, who delivers the majority of the cues. Given that apprentices lodged with their masters, there would have been ample opportunity for personal instruction, which may be what made it possible for young men to play such demanding parts.

After the parts were learned, there would usually then be a single rehearsal before the first performance. With six different plays to be put on every week, there was no time for more. Actors, then, would go into a show with a very limited sense of the whole. The notion of a collective rehearsal process that is itself a process of discovery for the actors is wholly modern and would have been incomprehensible to Shakespeare and his original ensemble. Given the number of parts an actor had to hold in his memory, the forgetting of lines was probably more frequent than in the modern theatre. The book-holder was on hand to prompt.

When new plays were first performed, a prologue would be delivered. At the end of the show, audience reaction was gauged and alterations might be made before the next performance. Some shows were dropped after one performance, others after three. Thereafter, a successful a play would enter the repertoire and probably not be altered any further, though it might be reworked when revived in later seasons.

Backstage personnel included the property man, the tire-man ('tire' being short for 'attire') who oversaw the costumes, call-boys, attendants and the musicians, who might play at various times from

the main stage, the rooms above and within the tiring-house. To judge from a comic exchange in the induction to Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, dramatists were prone to make a nuisance of themselves backstage: 'we are not so officiously befriended by him as to have his presence in the tiring-house, to prompt us aloud, stamp at the book-holder, swear for our properties, curse the poor tire-man, rail the music out of tune and sweat for every venial trespass we commit, as some author would, if he had such fine eagles as we' (this play was performed by the boy-actors – 'eagles' is the same metaphor as Hamlet's 'little eyases'). There was often tension between the acting companies and the freelance playwrights from whom they purchased scripts: it was a smart move on the part of Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men to bring the writing process in-house.

Front of house there were the 'gatherers' who collected the money from audience members: a penny to stand in the open-air yard, another penny for a place in the covered galleries, sixpence for the prominent 'lord's rooms' to the side of the stage. In the indoor 'private' theatres, gallants from the audience who fancied making themselves part of the spectacle sat on stools on the edge of the stage itself. Scholars debate as to how widespread this practice was in the public theatres such as the Globe. Once the audience were in place and the money counted, the gatherers were available to be extras on stage. That is one reason why battles and crowd scenes often come later rather than early in Shakespeare's plays. There was no formal prohibition upon performance by women, and there certainly were women among the gatherers, so it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that female crowd members were played by females.

The play began at two o'clock in the afternoon and the theatre had to be cleared by five. After the main show, there would be a jig – which consisted not only of dancing, but also of knockabout comedy (it is the origin of the farcical 'afterpiece' in the eighteenth-century theatre). So the time available for a Shakespeare play was about two and a half hours, somewhere between the 'two hours' traffic' mentioned in the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* and the 'three hours' spectacle' referred to in the preface to the 1647 Folio of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays. The prologue to a play by Thomas Middleton refers to a thousand lines as 'one hour's words', so the likelihood is that about two and a half thousand, or a maximum of three thousand lines made up the performed text. This is indeed the length of most of Shakespeare's comedies, whereas many of his tragedies and histories are much longer, raising the possibility that he wrote full scripts, possibly with eventual publication in mind, in the full knowledge that the stage version would be heavily cut. The short Quarto texts published in his lifetime – they used to be called 'bad' Quartos – provide fascinating evidence as to the kind of cutting that probably took place. So, for instance, the First Quarto of *Hamlet* neatly merges two occasions when Hamlet is overheard, the 'fishmonger' and the 'nunnery' scenes.

The social composition of the audience was mixed. The poet Sir John Davies wrote of 'A thousand townsmen, gentlemen and whores, / Porters and servingmen' who would 'together throng' at the public playhouses. Though moralists associated female play-going with adultery and the sex trade, many perfectly respectable citizens' wives were regular attendees. Some, no doubt, resembled the modern groupie: a story attested in two different sources has one citizen's wife making a post-show assignation with Richard Burbage and ending up in bed with Shakespeare – supposedly eliciting from the latter the quip that William the Conqueror was before Richard III. Defenders of theatre liked to say that by witnessing the comeuppance of villains on the stage, audience members would repent of their own wrongdoings, but the reality is that most people went to theatre then, as they do now, for entertainment more than moral edification. Besides, it would be foolish to suppose that audiences behaved in a homogeneous way: a pamphlet of the 1630s tells of how two men went to see *Pericles* and one of them laughed while the other wept. Bishop John Hall complained that people went to

church for the same reasons that they went to the theatre: 'for company, for custom, for recreation . . . to feed his eyes or his ears . . . or perhaps for sleep'.

Men-about-town and clever young lawyers went to be seen as much as to see. In the modern popular imagination, shaped not least by the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and the opening sequence of Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* film (1944), the penny-paying groundlings stand in the yard hurling abuse or encouragement and hazelnuts or orange peel at the actors, while the sophisticates in the covered galleries appreciate Shakespeare's soaring poetry. The reality was probably the other way round. A 'groundling' was a kind of fish, so the nickname suggests the penny audience standing below the level of the stage and gazing in silent open-mouthed wonder at the spectacle unfolding above them. The more difficult audience members, who kept up a running commentary of clever remarks on the performance and who occasionally got into quarrels with players, were the gallants. Like Hollywood movies in modern times, Elizabethan and Jacobean plays exercised a powerful influence on the fashion and behaviour of the young. John Marston mocks the lawyers who would open their lips, perhaps to court a girl, and out would 'flow / Naught but pure Juliet and Romeo'.

Scenery was limited, though sometimes set-pieces were brought on (a bank of flowers, a bed, the mouth of hell). The trapdoor from below, the gallery stage above and the curtained discovery-space at the back allowed for an array of special effects: the rising of ghosts and apparitions, the descent of gods, dialogue between a character at a window and another at ground level, the revelation of a statue or a pair of lovers playing at chess. Ingenious use could be made of props, as with the ass's head in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a theatre that does not clutter the stage with the material paraphernalia of everyday life, those objects that are deployed may take on powerful symbolic weight, as when Shylock bears his weighing scales in one hand and knife in the other, thus becoming a parody of the figure of Justice who traditionally bears a sword and a balance. Among the more significant items in the property cupboard of Shakespeare's company, there would have been a throne (the 'chair of state'), joint stools, books, bottles, coins, purses, letters (which are brought on stage, read or referred to on about eighty occasions in the complete works), maps, gloves, a set of stocks (in which Kent is put in *King Lear*), rings, rapiers, daggers, broadswords, staves, pistols, masks and vizards, heads and skulls, torches and tapers and lanterns which served to signal night scenes on the daylight stage, a buck's head,



This image from the title page of an academic play, William Alabaster's Roxana, may be inspired by an indoor playhouse. It gives a sense of the audience's closeness to the action, of the tapered stage and its rail, and of the curtain or 'arras' across the back. Scholars debate whether some of Shakespeare's audience members would have occupied the galleries above the stage, as here – in his plays, the space 'aloft' is often used for action or music-making.

an ass's head, animal costumes. Live animals also put in appearances, most notably the dog Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and possibly a young polar bear in *The Winter's Tale*.

The costumes were the most important visual dimension of the play. Playwrights were paid between £2 and £6 per script, whereas Alleyn was not averse to paying £20 for 'a black velvet cloak with sleeves embroidered all with silver and gold'. No matter the period of the play, actors wore mainly contemporary costume. The excitement for the audience came not from any impression of historical accuracy, but from the richness of the attire and perhaps the transgressive thrill of the knowledge that here were commoners like themselves strutting in the costumes of courtiers in effective defiance of the strict sumptuary laws whereby in real life people had to wear the clothes that befitted their social station.

To an even greater degree than props, costumes could carry symbolic importance. Racial characteristics could be suggested: a breastplate and helmet for a Roman soldier, a turban for a Turk, long robes for exotic characters such as Moors, a gabardine for a Jew. The figure of Time, as in *The Winter's Tale*, would be equipped with hourglass, scythe and wings; Rumour, who speaks the prologue of *2 Henry IV*, wore a costume representing a thousand tongues. The wardrobe in the tiring-house of the Globe would have contained much of the same stock as that of Philip Henslowe at the Rose: green gowns for outlaws and foresters, black for melancholy men such as Jaques and people in mourning such as the Countess in *All's Well that Ends Well* (at the beginning of *Hamlet*, the prince is still in mourning black when everyone else is in festive garb for the wedding of the new king), a gown and hood for a friar (or a feigned friar like the duke in *Measure for Measure*), blue coats and tawny to distinguish the followers of rival factions, a leather apron and ruler for a carpenter (as in the opening scene of *Julius Caesar* – and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where this is the only sign that Peter Quince is a carpenter), a cockle hat with staff and a pair of sandals for a pilgrim or palmer (the disguise assumed by Helen in *All's Well*), bodices and kirtles with farthingales beneath for the boys who are to be dressed as girls. A gender switch such as that of Rosalind or Jessica seems to have taken between fifty and eighty lines of dialogue – Viola does not resume her 'maiden weeds', but remains in her boy's costume to the end of *Twelfth Night* because a change would have slowed down the action at just the moment it was speeding to a climax. Henslowe's inventory also included 'a robe for to go invisible': Oberon, Puck and Ariel must have had something similar.

As the costumes appealed to the eyes, so there was music for the ears. Comedies included many songs. Desdemona's willow song, perhaps a late addition to the text, is a rare and thus exceptionally poignant example from tragedy. Trumpets and tuckets sounded for ceremonial entrances, drums denoted an army on the march. Background music could create atmosphere, as at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, during the lovers' dialogue near the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, when the statue seemingly comes to life in *The Winter's Tale*, and for the revival of Pericles and of Lear (in the Quarto text, but not the Folio). The haunting sound of the hautboy suggested a realm beyond the human, as when the god Hercules is imagined deserting Mark Antony. Dances symbolized the harmony of the end of a comedy – though in Shakespeare's world of mingled joy and sorrow, someone is usually left out of the circle.

The most important resource was, of course, the actors themselves. They needed many skills: in the words of one contemporary commentator, 'dancing, activity, music, song, elocution, ability of body, memory, skill of weapon, pregnancy of wit'. Their bodies were as significant as their voices. Hamlet tells the player to 'suit the action to the word, the word to the action': moments of strong emotion, known as 'passions', relied on a repertoire of dramatic gestures as well as a modulation of the voice. When Titus Andronicus has had his hand chopped off, he asks 'How can I grace my talk, / Wanting a hand to give it action?' A pen portrait of 'The Character of an Excellent Actor' by the

dramatist John Webster is almost certainly based on his impression of Shakespeare's leading man, Richard Burbage (who was also a skilled painter):

Whatsoever is commendable in the grave Orator, is most exquisitely perfect in him; for by a full and significant action of body, he charms our attention: sit in a full theatre, and you will think you see so many lines drawn from the circumference of so many ears, whiles the actor is the centre . . . and for his voice 'tis not lower then the prompter, nor louder then the foil and target. By his action he fortifies moral precepts with example; for what we see him personate, we think truly done before us: a man of a deep thought might apprehend the ghosts of our ancient heroes walked again, and take him (at several times) for many of them. He is much affected to painting and 'tis a question whether that make him an excellent player, or, playing an exquisite painter. He adds grace to the poet's labours: for what in the poet is but ditty, in him is both ditty and music . . . All men have been of his occupation: and indeed, what he doth feignedly that do others essentially: this day one plays a monarch, the next a private person. Here one acts a tyrant, on the morrow an exile: a parasite this man tonight, tomorrow a precisian, and so of divers others.

Though Burbage was admired above all others, praise was also heaped upon the apprentice players whose alto voices fitted them for the parts of women. A spectator at Oxford in 1610 records how the audience were reduced to tears by the pathos of Desdemona's death. The puritans who fumed about the biblical prohibition upon cross-dressing and the encouragement to sodomy constituted by the sigh of an adult male kissing a teenage boy on stage were a small minority. Little is known, however, about the characteristics of the leading apprentices in Shakespeare's company. It may perhaps be inferred that one was a lot taller than the other, since Shakespeare often wrote for a pair of



No image survives of a Shakespearean apprentice, but this is Ned Kynaston, last of the 'boy-actors', a famous Desdemona and the subject of Stage Beauty (2004), an excellent movie that reimagines the time when actresses first took on Shakespeare's female parts in the 1660s.

female friends, one tall and fair, the other short and dark (Helena and Hermia, Rosalind and Celia, Beatrice and Hero).

'He that plays the king shall be welcome; his majesty shall have tribute of me: the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target: the lover shall not sigh *gratis*: the humorous man shall end his part in peace: the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled o'th'sear: and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't': Hamlet's welcome of the players to Elsinore suggests that a degree of typecasting – the king, the adventurer, the lover, the humorous man and so forth – was customary in Shakespeare's theatre, a practice borne out by the tendency of his scripts to use generic speech headings such as 'King', 'Clown', 'Bastard' and 'Braggart'. But putting the names of the Chamberlain's Men to particular parts is almost impossible. Burbage was undoubtedly Richard III, Romeo, Hamlet, Othello and Lear, but was his apprentice, young Nick Tooley, the original Viola, Beatrice, Portia and Rosalind? Did 'stuttering' Hemings, as he was known, play Polonius and Lafew? When Henry Condell graduated to the status of full company sharer, did he become Edgar in *Lear* and Malcolm in *Macbeth*? We know little about Shakespeare's own acting roles – an early allusion indicates that he often took royal parts and a venerable tradition gives him old Adam in *As You Like It* and the ghost of old King Hamlet. Save for Burbage's lead roles and the generic part of the clown, all such castings are mere speculation. We do not even know for sure whether the original Falstaff was Will Kempe or another actor who specialized in comic roles, Thomas Pope.

Kempe left the company in early 1599. Tradition has it that he fell out with Shakespeare over the matter of excessive improvisation. He was replaced by Robert Armin, who was less of a clown and more of a cerebral wit: this explains the difference between such parts as Lancelet, Gobbo and Dogberry, which were written for Kempe, and the more verbally sophisticated Feste and Lear's Fool, which were written for Armin.

One thing that is clear from surviving 'plots' or story-boards of plays from the period is that a degree of doubling was necessary. *2 Henry VI* has over sixty speaking parts, but more than half of the characters only appear in a single scene and most scenes have only six to eight speakers. At a stretch, the play could be performed by thirteen actors. When Thomas Platter saw *Julius Caesar* at the Globe in 1599, he noted that there were about fifteen. Recent research suggests that a typical Lord Chamberlain's Men production had a cast of twenty-three (nine sharers, eight older apprentices or hired men, six boys), suggesting that there was less doubling of substantial roles than has sometimes been supposed, but it nevertheless remains suggestive when a major character is absent for a large part of the play. Why doesn't Paris go to the Capulet ball in *Romeo and Juliet*? Perhaps because he was doubled with Mercutio, who does. In *The Winter's Tale*, Mamillius might have come back as Perdita and Antigonus been doubled by Camillo, making the partnership with Paulina at the end a very neat touch. Titania and Oberon are often played by the same pair as Hippolyta and Theseus, suggesting a symbolic matching of the rulers of the worlds of night and day, but it is questionable whether there would have been time for the necessary costume changes. As so often, one is left in the realm of tantalizing speculation.

'Dangerous Matter': Politics and Religion

From the summer of 1594 to March 1603 the Lord Chamberlain's Men played in London with few interruptions. They undertook a limited amount of touring: they are found at Cambridge and Ipswich in the eastern counties in 1594–95, at Faversham in Kent in the summer of 1596, at a private house in Rutland in the Midlands just after Christmas that year (a hurried trip for a one-off performance of *Titus Andronicus*, before returning to court duties) and on a longer tour to the south-east and

south-west in 1597, venues including Dover, Rye, Marlborough and Bristol. The reason for this longer tour was that the London theatres were closed for a period as punishment for the production at the newly-built Swan theatre of a politically ill-advised play called *The Isle of Dogs*. It is not known whether Shakespeare travelled with his fellows. In *King Lear* he reveals his knowledge of the thriving economy of samphire-gathering on Dover cliff, so he is likely to have gone there.

Ironically, the only literary composition to survive in Shakespeare's handwriting is a scene for a play which was never performed and with which he had very limited involvement. It seems to have been sometime around the turn of the century that the Lord Chamberlain's Men obtained the script of a play about Sir Thomas More that had not been staged, due to political objections from the Master of the Revels who licensed all performances. Shakespeare contributed a skilful scene in which More quelled a rioting crowd through the force of his rhetoric. In a characteristic balancing act, he managed both to animate the ordinary people in the crowd with colourful detail (thus Doll says that More's care for the people is witnessed by his having 'made my brother, Arthur Watchins, Sergeant Safe's yeoman') and to argue in More's voice on behalf of both empathy with the dispossessed (in this case immigrants) and respect for the order of the state ('For to the king God hath his office lent / Of dread, of justice, power and command, / Hath bid him rule, and willed you to obey'). This was not enough to make the play acceptable: 'Leave out the insurrection wholly, with the cause thereof', demanded the Master of the Revels, with the result that it languished in manuscript until the nineteenth century, when a scholar realized for the first time that here were a few precious pages in Shakespeare's fluent, barely punctuated hand. Contrary to the expectation established by Hemings and Condell's observation in the preface to the First Folio that when Shakespeare handed his manuscripts over to his acting company there was barely a crossing-out, the scene from *Sir Thomas More* reveals him in the process of having second thoughts even as he composes.

Since the 1700s, the cult of Shakespeare has been closely bound up with the idealization of Queen Elizabeth I. The plays of Shakespeare have often been set beside the poetry of John Donne, the gentleman-like virtues of Sir Philip Sidney, the global circumnavigation of Francis Drake, the colonial enterprise of Sir Walter Raleigh and the defeat of the Spanish Armada: these, it has been said, were the fruits of England's golden age. The reality is that Queen Elizabeth inherited, and Shakespeare grew up in, a divided and vulnerable nation. The Spanish threat and the Irish problem would not go away. The queen's tactic of not marrying was a highly effective way of keeping open a range of possible alliances, but by the 1590s it had created severe anxiety about the succession to the throne. In the period when Shakespeare was writing his plays, the queen and her ministers had come to rely more and more on coercion, threat and surveillance in order to maintain authority.

At the end of his career, writing in collaboration with John Fletcher, Shakespeare turned his direct attention to the moment that shaped the historical context of his own life: Henry VIII's decision to divorce Katherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn (or Bullen) in the hope of siring a son to succeed him on the throne of England, an act of high political risk that eventually had consequences for the spiritual life of the entire nation. When Shakespeare's father John was born, there was no Church other than that of Rome. When Shakespeare was born, there was a new state religion, the Church of England. When Shakespeare's father was born, he owed a subject's obedience to the king but a soul's obedience to God via the Pope. During Shakespeare's youth, successive Popes excommunicated the Queen of England and licensed her assassination. Drastic measures were taken to protect her safety. Shakespeare lived in a world of government spies, Catholic conspiracies, supposed Catholic conspiracies that were really secret service frame-ups, and public executions of traitors. In 1584, the queen's Privy Council, their eyes cast anxiously on the claim to the throne of Elizabeth's Catholic

cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, instigated a 'Bond of Association for the Preservation of Her Majesty's Royal Person', whereby they vowed 'to pursue to utter extermination all that shall attempt by any act, counsel, or consent to anything that shall tend to the harm of Her Majesty's Royal Person, or claim succession to the Crown by the untimely death of Her Majesty; vowing and protesting in the presence of the Eternal and Everliving God to prosecute such persons to the death'. The Bond, to which hundreds of Englishmen signed up, specifically called for vengeance in the event of the queen's assassination. The world of oaths and factions, plot and counter-plot, murder and seizure of the throne, vengeance and blood, in Shakespeare's tragedies and histories should be understood in this historical context.

The public drama had enormous propaganda potential. A play such as Christopher Marlowe's dramatization of *The Massacre at Paris* that had occurred on Saint Bartholomew's Day in 1572 was the perfect way of inflaming the people against murderous Popish tyranny and also creating sympathy for London's population of exiled Huguenot Protestants. But the drama had equal and opposite subversive potential. In 1597, an order went out for all the playhouses to be demolished as a result of Nashe and Jonson's 'lewd and mutinous' *The Isle of Dogs*, which had been staged at the Swan. Had the order been carried through, Shakespeare's career would have been cut short well before he wrote many of his greatest plays. As it was, the Privy Council relented, though for a time performances were restricted to the two trusty troupes, the Lord Chamberlain's and Lord Admiral's Men. But plays touching on politics, religion and international relations always retained the element of risk. The archives of the Revels office are punctuated by entries that reveal the censorship process at work: 'this is too insolent and to be changed' scribbled against a speech, or the note 'I did refuse to allow a play of Massinger's because it did contain dangerous matter, as the deposing of Sebastian King of Portugal by Philip the Second and there being a peace sworn twixt the Kings of England and Spain'. A passage about York usurping the crown through popular incitement appears in the original published version of the play that became *2 Henry VI*, but not the Folio text. References to Irish rebellion are toned down in the same play and Macmorris' plea on behalf of the Irish nation is absent from the 1600 Quarto of *Henry V*. The deposition scene is absent from the first three editions of *Richard II*. Passages concerning rebellion seem to have been removed from *2 Henry IV*. Shakespeare had to change the name of Oldcastle to Falstaff so as not to tarnish the memory of a famous proto-Protestant martyr.

In 1599, severely dangerous matter was published in the form of a history of the reign of Henry IV by Sir John Hayward, a follower of the queen's restless favourite, the Earl of Essex, in which it was argued that Richard II's weakness as a ruler was sufficient justification for Henry Bullingbrook's seizure of the throne. The book was suppressed, but its aura of subversion clung to Shakespeare's dramatization of the same material: the day before Essex and his followers attempted to seize the court in February 1601, they commissioned a performance of *Richard II* at the Globe, as if to prepare Londoners for the removal of an anointed but ineffective monarch.

Shakespeare's political beliefs are as elusive as his religion, his sexuality and just about everything else about him that matters. Precisely because he was not an apologist for any single position, it has been possible for the plays to be effectively reinterpreted in the light of each successive age. In the four centuries since his death, he has been made the apologist for all sorts of diametrically opposed ideologies, many of them anachronistic – we should not forget that he was writing before the time when toleration and liberal democracy became totemic values. But the political appropriation of him is true to his own practice: he too was a great trader in anachronism. He took the political structures of ancient Rome and mapped them onto his own time and state with fascinating effect. *The Rape of Lucrece* is set at the moment of transition from monarchy to republic, *Coriolanus* during the republican

era, *Julius Caesar* at the pivotal moment when a crown is offered and refused but the republic collapses anyway, *Antony and Cleopatra* ends with the beginning of empire, and *Titus Andronicus* fictionalizes the Roman Empire in decay, approaching the time when the great city will be sacked by 'barbarian' hordes from the north. *King Lear* and *Cymbeline* find echoes of the modern in the matter of ancient Britain. The history plays speak at once to the generations before Shakespeare and to his live audience. Several other plays use contemporary Italy as a mirror. Humanist learning and mercantile travel meant that the eyes of the Elizabethans were open to alternative forms of government other than the hereditary monarchy they experienced at home. They had great admiration for Venice, regarding that island city-state as a model of anti-papal modernity and trading prowess. Venice had no monarch but a sophisticated oligarchic system, which was observed by English travellers and absorbed by readers such as Shakespeare by way of Lewis Lewkenor's translation of Contarini's *The Commonwealth and Republic of Venice* (an important source for *Othello*).

Not so long ago, it was commonplace for historians to assert that republican thought had no following in England until well into the seventeenth century – that the intellectual conditions which made the Cromwellian republic possible only emerged a few years before the extraordinary moment when the English chopped off their king's head. Recent scholarship has shown that this was not the case: republican discourse, if not overt republican polemic, was widespread in Shakespeare's time. So, for instance, the anti-imperial Roman historian Tacitus was read and discussed and admired as the most dispassionate of historians, whose work combined moral insight into the behaviour of political actors with an assessment of their value as governors. Several of Shakespeare's plays may by this light be described as 'Tacitean'. The flavour of Tacitus is wonderfully captured in Justus Lipsius' dedicatory epistle to his translation of the *Annals*: 'Behold a theatre of our modern life: I see a ruler rising up against the laws in one passage, subjects rising up against a ruler elsewhere. I find the devices which make the destruction of liberty possible and the unsuccessful effort to regain it. I read of tyrants overthrown in their turn, and of power, ever unfaithful to those who abuse it.' This could equally well serve as a conspectus of Shakespeare's history plays and political tragedies.

The association of Shakespeare with Tacitism is especially interesting because it aligns him with the Earl of Essex. Henry Savile, the first English translator of Tacitus, became provost of Eton school through Essex's patronage and there were a number of other Tacitean scholars and apologists in his circle. Shakespeare's patron, Southampton, was a follower of Essex, so it must have been a political gesture on Shakespeare's part to dedicate to him *The Rape of Lucrece*, a highly Tacitean account of the tyranny of Tarquin and the establishment of the Roman republic. Shakespeare's most explicit contemporary political allusion is a flattering allusion in one of the *Henry V* choruses to Essex's military expedition against the Irish. The commissioning of the performance of *Richard II* on the eve of the Essex rebellion suggests that the Tacitean faction still considered Shakespeare to be effectively their house dramatist in the last years of the old queen's reign. But with his usual cunning, Shakespeare somehow managed to throw off the association: Essex was executed for treason and Southampton was sent to the Tower, but the players got away with a reprimand. They claimed that they had only put on the show because they had been well paid to do so.

The King's Man

Shakespeare sometimes wrote in direct flattery of Queen Elizabeth, as in the epilogue to a court performance on Shrove Tuesday 1599, which our edition is the first to include in the main body of his work (see p. XXX). And the *Virgin Queen* is almost certainly the immortal phoenix of the mysteriously beautiful poem that has become known as 'The Phoenix and Turtle', written the same year as the

Essex rebellion. But when the old queen finally died in 1603, Henry Chettle expressed surprise that Shakespeare's 'honied muse . . . dropped no sable tear' in her memory. Though there seems not to have been a published elegy, Shakespeare did perhaps reflect on the end of the era and the uncertain times to come in Sonnet 107, with its reference to the 'eclipse' of the 'mortal moon' (in classical mythology, the moon was associated with Diana the virgin huntress – and Elizabeth in turn was associated with her).

The new king, James I, who had held the Scottish throne as James VI since he had been an infant, immediately took the Lord Chamberlain's Men under his direct patronage. Henceforth they would be the King's Men, and for the rest of Shakespeare's career they were favoured with far more court performances than any of their rivals. There even seem to have been rumours early in the reign that Shakespeare and Burbage were being considered for knighthoods, an unprecedented honour for mere actors – and one that in the event was not accorded to a member of the profession for nearly three hundred years, when the title was bestowed upon Henry Irving, the leading Shakespearean actor of Queen Victoria's reign.

The King's Men were given the status of Grooms of the Chamber. Each sharer in the company was given four and a half yards of red cloth from the Master of the Great Wardrobe for the occasion of the new king's ceremonial procession through the City of London in March 1604. Henslowe's rival company, now under the patronage of the new queen, enacted a spectacle along the way. It is not known whether the King's Men performed or marched, perhaps assisting in the bearing of the royal canopy (implied by Sonnet 125?).



King James and his family: Shakespeare began writing in the time of the unmarried Queen Elizabeth, but after 1603, when his company became the King's Men, he knew that his plays would be performed in front of a royal family – royal weddings and dynastic liaisons become a preoccupation in his later plays.

In August that year, they had to close the theatre and spend eighteen days literally 'waiting' in attendance at Somerset House during the visit of a special envoy from the King of Spain, while a peace treaty was being thrashed out. This moment of suspension was an important turning point in Shakespeare's career. Elizabethan Shakespeare was a war poet: the Armada and the campaigns against the Spanish in the Netherlands had overshadowed his whole career. Jacobean Shakespeare was a peace poet: of course he still wrote battle scenes, which were always good box office, but a play such as *Coriolanus* is equally interested in the question of what happens to a man of action in time of peace. A Scottish king working in harmony with the English court brings peace at the climax of *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline* ends with a peace treaty, and *Antony and Cleopatra* concludes with Octavius becoming Augustus and promising to fulfil his prediction that 'The time of universal peace is near.' James liked to see himself as a modern Augustus, at once the bringer of peace across Europe and the founder of a new empire ('Britain', in contrast to Elizabeth's 'England'). Shakespeare's Jacobean plays resonate with the new king's preoccupations: in *Macbeth*, the Gunpowder Plot, witchcraft, the lineage of Banquo, the practice of 'touching' subjects to cure them of scrofula, known as 'the king's evil'; in *Lear*, the need to unite Britain and the dire consequences of its division; in *Cymbeline*, Britain as a new Rome and the talismanic Welsh port of Milford Haven, where Henry Richmond landed at the dawn of the Tudor dynasty; in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, royal children and dynastic liaisons.

During the early years of the new reign, Shakespeare lodged in Cripplegate at the home of Christopher Mountjoy, a 'tire-maker' of French Huguenot origin who may have been involved with the costuming of the King's Men. A very rare fragment of Shakespeare's own voice is to be heard in a deposition that he lodged with the Court of Requests in 1612 in a case of matrimonial dispute involving the Mountjoys' daughter and their apprentice. Shakespeare had helped to facilitate the match, but could not remember the financial details of the marriage settlement. His deposition seemed calculate to offend neither side, to be generous without making any commitments. When pressed, he said that 'more to this interrogatory he cannot depose' or that he could 'say nothing touching any part or point of the same interrogatory'. To say nothing or to refuse to depose more than a little: he was as guarded before the court as he was in his writing.

An anecdote handed down from an actor in Shakespeare's company said that he was 'the more to be admired' because 'he was not a company-keeper', adding that he lived in Shoreditch, 'would not be debauched' and, if invited to go out on the town in pursuit of women, would say that he was not feeling well. And yet the 'dark lady' sonnets give the impression of being written in the voice of a man who knows sexual passion, guilt and even apparently the mercury-bath cure for syphilis. There is no firm evidence concerning the question of his sexuality, and in particular the degree of homoerotic charge in his idealization of the 'fair youth' of his other sonnets – whoever that may have been, if indeed he was a real person at all.

Shakespeare's productivity rate slowed in the Jacobean years, not because of age or some personal trauma, but because there were frequent outbreaks of plague, causing the theatres to be closed for long periods. The King's Men were forced to spend many months on the road. Between November 1603 and 1608, they are to be found at Leicester, Coventry, Oxford and Bridgnorth in the Midlands, Bath and Barnstaple in the West Country, Faversham, Fordham, Maidstone and Dover in Kent, Saffron Walden and Dunwich in East Anglia. Attractive as it might be to imagine Shakespeare in Barnstaple shortly before the writing of *King Lear*, listening to a Devon accent that he then gives to the disguised Edgar, it is possible that he stopped touring with his colleagues in these later years. He may

indeed have stopped acting; he is in the cast lists of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) and *Sejanus* (1603), but, unlike Burbage, Hemings, Condell and the rest, not those of *Volpone* (1605), *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Catiline* (1611). An early owner of a copy of the First Folio scribbled against the names of the King's Men actors details about his knowledge of them. Against Shakespeare he wrote 'least', or perhaps 'ceast', 'for making' – this enigmatic comment might suggest that as 'maker' of plays Shakespeare reduced his commitment to acting in them.

With the London theatres closed so much of the time and a large repertoire on the stocks, Shakespeare seems to have focused his energies on writing a few long and complex tragedies that could have been played on demand at court: *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Cymbeline* are among his longest and poetically grandest plays. *Macbeth* only survives in a shorter text, which shows signs of adaptation after Shakespeare's death. The bitterly satirical *Timon of Athens*, apparently a collaboration with Thomas Middleton that may have failed on the stage, also belongs to this period. In comedy, too, he wrote longer and morally darker works than in the Elizabethan period, pushing at the very bounds of the form in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well*. It might even be argued that he was turning into a more literary and less theatrical author. The 1608 Quarto edition of *King Lear* emphasized its status as a 'true chronicle history' as much as the fact that it had been played before His Majesty the King at Whitehall on Saint Stephen's night. One of the two printed issues of *Troilus and Cressida* in 1609 has a title page again emphasizing history as opposed to theatre, together with an epistle conspicuously addressed to the *reader* as opposed to the play-goer. It was also in 1609 that the sonnets were published, with their many references to the achievement of immortality through the work of the pen. It is not, however, certain whether or not this volume was authorized by Shakespeare himself.

From 1608 onwards, when the King's Men began occupying the indoor Blackfriars playhouse (as a winter house), Shakespeare turned to a more romantic style. His company had a great success with a revived and altered version of an old pastoral play called *Mucedorus*. It even featured a bear. The younger dramatist John Fletcher, meanwhile, sometimes working in collaboration with Francis Beaumont, was pioneering a new style of tragicomedy, a mix of romance and royalism laced with intrigue and pastoral excursions. A play called *Philaster, or Love lies a-bleeding* was the prime example. Shakespeare experimented with this idiom in *Cymbeline* and it was presumably with his blessing that Fletcher eventually took over as the King's Men's company dramatist. The two writers apparently collaborated on three plays in the years 1612–14: a lost romance called *Cardenio* (based on the love-madness of a character in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*), *Henry VIII* (originally staged with the title 'All is True'), and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a dramatization of Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'. These were written after Shakespeare's two final solo-authored plays, *The Winter's Tale*, a self-consciously old-fashioned work dramatizing the pastoral romance of his old enemy Robert Greene, and *The Tempest*, which at one and the same time drew together multiple theatrical traditions, diverse reading and contemporary interest in the fate of a ship that had been wrecked on the way to the New World.

The collaborations with Fletcher suggest that Shakespeare's career ended with a slow fade rather than the sudden retirement supposed by the nineteenth-century Romantic critics who read Prospero's epilogue to *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's personal farewell to his art. In the last few years of his life Shakespeare certainly spent more of his time in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he became involved in further property dealings and litigation. His voice is heard in an acrimonious dispute over the enclosure of the fields on the Welcombe Hills on the edge of town. As in the Mountjoy case, he was careful to balance his position between the parties. But his London life also continued.

In 1613 he composed an *impresa*, or emblem, to be painted by Richard Burbage and carried during the Accession Day tilt by the Earl of Rutland, one of the old circle of Southampton and Essex. In the same year, Shakespeare made his first major London property purchase: a freehold house in the Blackfriars district, close to his company's indoor theatre. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may have been as written as late as 1614, and Shakespeare was in London on business a little over a year before he died.

He made his will in March 1616, but soon altered it in order to protect the interests of his daughter Judith, when he discovered that her new husband, Thomas Quiney, had impregnated another woman. The bulk of his estate went to his elder daughter Susanna and her very respectable husband, Dr John Hall. Shakespeare's widow would have been entitled to a life interest in a third of the estate. The famous late insertion in the will whereby she is bequeathed the 'second-best bed' has been the subject of endless speculation. John and Susanna doubtless got the best bed, but we are unlikely ever to know whether the mention of the second-best one was an affectionate gesture, a slight, a joke or of some other unexplained significance. The most touching aspect of Shakespeare's will is the bequest of money to buy memorial rings for his three closest colleagues among the actors, John Hemings, Richard Burbage and Henry Condell.

He died on 23 April 1616, which may have been his fifty-second birthday. An old but unsubstantiated local tradition claimed that he expired after a drinking bout during a visit from fellow-authors Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson. Two days later he was buried. As a tithe-owner, he was entitled to a place in the chancel of the parish church. Some doggerel upon the stone that covers the grave has been assigned, also by local tradition, to his own pen: 'Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear / To dig the dust enclosed here. / Blessed be the man that spares these stones, / And cursed be he that moves my bones.' The sentiments are strictly conventional and the lines could have been written by anybody.

His immediate family died out within two generations, when his library and other possessions would have been dispersed. If he had a library, that is: just as he had the quality of a magpie in his literary borrowings, so the books he read in preparing to write his plays may well have been borrowed rather than owned. At one time or another about 130 surviving books have been put forward as bearing his signature or initials. Among them are copies of Florio's translation of Montaigne in the British Museum, the Aldine edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Most Noble Grecians and Romanes* in the Greenock Library in Scotland. Most, if not all, of the signatures are forgeries. Not long after his death, a stone monument was erected in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. But, as readers and other writers quickly recognized, his living monument was his work.

The Great Feast of Languages

When Shakespeare's daughter Susanna died in July 1649, just a few weeks after England was proclaimed a commonwealth instead of a kingdom, she was described in her epitaph as 'witty above her sex'. 'Something of Shakespeare was in that', continued the verses cut on her gravestone. From the initial reception of *Venus and Adonis* through the dedicatory material prefaced to the First Folio to this nod towards his daughter's lineage, Shakespeare was renowned above all for his wit, his mastery of language. He lived in an age when the English language was undergoing a huge expansion, sucking in new words from all over Europe and beyond, and he worked in a profession wholly reliant upon the memorable use of language.

The eloquent and persuasive arrangement of words was the essence of the drama, as John Marston made explicit when he brought the figure of ‘Rhetoric’ onstage near the beginning of his play about playing, *Histrionastix*:

Rhetoric will put her richest habit on
Of gestures, voice and exornation:
Her tropes and schemes shall dignify her sense
And honour peace with clearest eloquence.

Like all his poetic contemporaries, Shakespeare had a profoundly figurative imagination. Composition was conceived in terms of figures of words, divided into tropes (a word shifted away from its usual context or signification) and schemes (words arranged in expressive patterns), and figures of thought (such as frankness of speech, understatement, vivid description, the structural division of argument, accumulation, refining, dwelling on the point, comparison, exemplification, simile, personification, emphasis, conciseness, ocular demonstration). Tropes and schemes were both a device to assist actors in memorizing their lines and a method of organization to make the words spoken on stage vivid and memorable for the audience.

Even today Shakespeare is admired for certain kinds of rhetorical effect, such as simile (Cleopatra’s ‘The stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch / Which hurts and is desired’), metaphor (Cleopatra’s ‘Dost thou not see the baby at my breast / That sucks the nurse asleep?’) and an array of devices of repetition and variation – as when Macbeth imagines how the blood on his hands will ‘The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red’, which essentially says the same thing twice, first in orotund Latinate phrasing, then in plain monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon. But Shakespeare’s original audience would have taken pleasure in recognizing dozens of elaborate verbal figurations, ranging from *catachresis* (words wrenched from common usage, as in Hamlet’s ‘I will speak daggers to her, but use none’) to *asyndeton* (the omission of conjunctions – as occurs throughout Sonnet 129) to *anacoluthon* (changing the grammatical construction in the middle of the sentence, in imitation of the way we often speak) to *synonymy* (repeating the same idea in different terms: ‘This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden, demi-paradise’) to *anadiplosis* (repetition of a word from the end of one line or clause to begin the next line or clause, as in Hotspur’s dying speech, ‘But thought’s the slave of life, and life, time’s fool; / And time that takes survey of all the world / Must have a stop’) to *antimetabole* or *chiasmus* (the mirrored pairing of two clauses – Polonius’ ‘foolish figure’ exemplified by ‘’tis true ‘tis pity, / And pity it is true’) to *epanalepsis* (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning and end of the same clause or sentence – Lear’s ‘Nothing will come of nothing’) to *isocolon* (phrases or clauses of parallel structure and approximately equal length) to *climax* (a series of phrases or clauses in order of increasing importance, often with key terms repeated using *anadiplosis* and often arranged in the form of *tricolon* or three-fold *amplificatio*). The rhetorical handbooks listed dozens more such effects.

Shakespeare is sometimes said to have coined more new English words than anyone else, with the possible exception of James Joyce. This is not true. The illusion of his unique inventiveness in this regard was created by the tendency of the *Oxford English Dictionary* to cite examples from him as the first usage of a word. That was because of his ready availability when the dictionary was created at the end of the Victorian era. Now that there are large digitized databases of sixteenth-century books, it is easy to find prior occurrences for many supposed Shakespearean coinages. Despite this, the list of neologisms remains impressive. To give a random selection of words, Shakespeare is responsible for such verbs as ‘puke’, ‘torture’, ‘misquote’, ‘gossip’, ‘swagger’, ‘blanket’ (Poor Tom’s ‘blanket my loins’ in *Lear*) and

'champion' (Macbeth's 'champion me to the utterance'). He seems to have invented the nouns 'critic', 'mountaineer', 'pageantry' and 'eyeball', the adjectives 'fashionable', 'unreal', 'bloodstained', 'deafening', 'majestic' and 'domineering', and the adverbs 'instinctively' and 'obsequiously' in the sense of 'behaving in the appropriate way to render obsequies for the dead' (only in the eighteenth century did the word come to connote 'excessive deference' – perhaps as the very result of Richard III's feigning performance of the word). Many of his coinages are not new words, but old words in new contexts (such as the application of 'manager' to the entertainment business, with *Midsummer Night's Dream's* 'manager of mirth') or new compounds or old words wrested to new grammatical usage. 'Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence' is a good example of the latter in *Measure for Measure*, and in *Macbeth* 'I'll devil-porter it no further' offers compounding and grammatical conversion in the same instance.

Though twenty-first-century electronic databases diminish the extent of Shakespeare's actual coinages, they immeasurably enrich our sense of the astonishingly multivalent, polysemous quality of his language. As will be seen from our on-page explanatory notes, even an apparently simple word may have two or three very different meanings. Early modern dictionaries suggest that Shakespeare and his contemporaries thought of words not as referring to one thing, but as signifiers of a range of subtly related meanings. So, for instance, 'conscience', a key word in *Hamlet*, is defined in John Baret's triple English, French and Latin dictionary of 1574 as 'witness of one's own mind, knowledge, remorse', thus simultaneously suggesting modern 'consciousness' as well as the associations of a guilty conscience. 'Honest', a key word in *Othello*, is revealed by John Florio's 1598 *World of Words* to be within a spectrum of words including 'loyal', 'true', 'trusty', 'upright', 'faithful', 'righteous', 'natural', 'good', 'godly' and 'civil', all of which are wonderfully inapposite for 'honest Iago'.

One particular area where multiple signification operates extensively in Shakespeare is that of sexual reference. Puns on body parts, such as 'thing' and 'will' for the penis, 'nothing' and 'case' for the vagina, have long been recognized in both the comedies and the sonnets, but a long tradition of editorial reticence has meant that it is still not fully appreciated how pervasive sexual innuendo is across the full range of Shakespeare's works. Our explanatory notes do not shy away from the bawdy energies of 'back-trick', 'banquet', 'bauble', 'beard', 'bog', 'Brentford', 'buried face upwards', 'chink', 'clack-dish', 'her very c's, her u's, and [n] her t's, and thus makes she her great P's', 'focative is caret / And that's a good root', 'Neapolitan bone-ache', 'out', 'part', 'purse', 'ring', 'stones' and scores of cognate terms. Words such as 'out' do not, of course, always have a sexual connotation, but an exchange such as the following in *As You Like It* depends on the bawdy pun, whereby Orlando uses the actor's sense of forgetting one's lines ('lost for words') and Rosalind responds as if he intended the bawdy one ('denied entry'). Her reply also depends on 'honesty' meaning 'chastity', and 'rank' meaning 'lustful' and/or 'in heat':

ORLANDO Who could be out, being before his beloved mistress?

ROSALIND Marry, that should you, if I were your mistress, or I should think my honesty ranker than my wit.

ORLANDO What, of my suit?

ROSALIND Not out of your apparel, and yet out of your suit. Am not I your Rosalind?

Sexual punning is not only a symptom of the unprecedented extent and exuberance of Shakespeare's verbal wit, it is also a source of his boundless commitment to life. We will only fully understand his vision when we unashamedly acknowledge how he can move in an instant from such uplifting similes and metaphors as 'It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear' and 'But, soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun' to the

sentiment expressed by Mercutio just seconds before, 'O Romeo, that she were, O, that she were / An open arse and thou a pop'rin pear', where the innuendo comes from not only the resemblance of the medlar fruit to a woman's genitals but also the naughty play on 'pop it in'.

Cult and Heresy

In 1612, around the time that Shakespeare was beginning to work in collaboration with John Fletcher, perhaps as a prelude to his retirement, the young dramatist John Webster wrote a preface to his tragedy *The White Devil* in which he expressed his 'good opinion' of the 'worthy labours' of his peers in the art of playmaking: the grandiose style of George Chapman, the learning of Ben Jonson, the collaborative enterprise of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, and 'the right happy and copious industry of Mr Shakespeare, Mr Decker [sic], and Mr Heywood'. Shakespeare's plays are thus praised for being plentiful in number and well judged in execution. He is placed in the company of Thomas Dekker and Thomas Heywood, two other prolific and highly professional writers who made their living from the stage. But he is mentioned after four writers who, while equally professional and industrious, were better connected to the court and the gentry – Chapman, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher. Four years later, in the spring of 1616, Beaumont and Shakespeare died within a few weeks of each other. Beaumont became the first dramatist to be honoured with burial in the national shrine of Westminster Abbey, beside the tombs of Geoffrey Chaucer (the father of English verse) and Edmund Spenser (the greatest poet of the Elizabethan era). Shakespeare was laid to rest in the provincial obscurity of his native Stratford-upon-Avon. That same year, Ben Jonson became the first English dramatist to publish a collected edition of his own plays written for the public stage. He was much mocked for his presumption in doing so, especially under the title of *Works*, suggestive of an edition of a classical author such as Virgil or Horace. Webster learned many of the tricks of his trade from Shakespeare, but if he had been asked which of his contemporaries would achieve immortality and come to be regarded as the greatest playmaker since the ancient Greek tragedians, he could as well have plumped for either Jonson or the team of Beaumont and Fletcher. Or possibly even Chapman. We now think of Shakespeare as a unique genius, the embodiment indeed of the very idea of artistic genius, but in his own time, though widely admired, he was but one of a constellation of theatrical stars.

How is it, then, that when we reach the eighteenth and nineteenth century Shakespeare's fame has outstripped that of all his peers? Why was he the sole dramatist of the age who would eventually have a genuinely international, ultimately a worldwide, impact?

One of the ways in which writers endure is through their influence on later writers. Jonson intuited this in his dedicatory poem to the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare's collected plays, where he described Shakespeare as a 'star' whose 'influence' would 'chide or cheer' the future course of British drama. Once the Folio was available to, in the words of its editors, 'the great Variety of Readers', the plays began to influence not just the theatre but poetry more generally. The works of Milton, notably his masque *Comus*, were steeped in Shakespearean language. Indeed, the young Milton's first published poem was a sonnet prefixed to the second edition of the Folio, in which Shakespeare was said to have built himself 'a live-long Monument' in the form of his plays. Shakespeare was Milton's key precedent for the writing of his epic *Paradise Lost* (1667) in blank verse rather than rhyme. Even later seventeenth-century poets who were committed to rhyme, such as King Charles II's Poet Laureate John Dryden, acknowledged the power of his dramatic blank verse. As an act of homage to 'the Divine Shakespeare' Dryden abandoned rhyme in *All for Love* (1678), his reworking of the Cleopatra story.

The London theatres were closed during the years of civil war and republican government in the middle of the seventeenth century. The years after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 were

characterized by a somewhat schizophrenic attitude to Shakespeare. On the positive side, he was invoked for his inspirational native genius, used to support claims for English naturalness as opposed to French artifice and for the moderns against the ancients. In a sweeping *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Dryden described Shakespeare as 'the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul'. He brushed off charges of Shakespeare's lack of learning with the memorable judgement that 'he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature'.

Contemporaneously with Dryden, the learned Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, praised Shakespeare for his extraordinary ability to enter into his vast array of characters, to 'express the divers and different humours, or natures, or several passions in mankind'. Yet at the same time, the courtly elite had spent their years of exile in France and come under the influence of a highly refined neo-classical theory of artistic decorum, according to which tragedy should be kept apart from comedy and high style from low, with dramatic 'unity' demanding obedience to strict laws. For this reason, Dryden and his contemporaries took considerable liberties in polishing and 'improving' Shakespeare's plays for performance. According to the law of poetic justice, wholly innocent characters should not be allowed to die: Nahum Tate therefore rewrote *King Lear* (1681) with a happy ending in which Cordelia marries Edgar. Tate also omitted the character of the Fool, on the grounds that such a figure was beneath the dignity of high tragedy.

The more formal classicism of Jonson and the courtly romances of Beaumont and Fletcher answered more readily to the Frenchified standards of the Restoration theatre. Actors, though, were demonstrating that the most rewarding roles in the repertoire were the Shakespearean ones. Thomas Betterton (1635–1710), the greatest player of the age, had enormous success as Hamlet, Sir Toby Belch, Henry VIII, Macbeth, Timon of Athens, Lear, Falstaff, Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, and Othello (some of these in versions close to the original texts, others in heavily adapted reworkings). Playhouse scripts of individual plays found their way into print, while the Folio went through its third and fourth printings. By the end of the century, Shakespeare was well entrenched in English cultural life. But he was not yet the unique genius.

Thomas Betterton's veneration for the memory of Shakespeare was such that late in his life he travelled to Warwickshire in order to find out what he could about the dramatist's origins. He passed a store of anecdotes to the poet, playwright and eventual Poet Laureate Nicholas Rowe, who wrote 'Some Account of the Life of Mr William Shakespeare', a biographical sketch published in 1709 in the first of the six volumes of his *Works of Shakespeare*, the collection that is usually regarded as the first modern edition of the plays. Rowe's biography offered a mixture of truth and myth, calculated to represent Shakespeare as a man of the people. It tells of how young Will was withdrawn from school when his father fell on hard times, how he then got into bad company and stole deer from the park of local grandee Sir Thomas Lucy. The resultant prosecution forced him to leave for London, where he became an actor and then a dramatist. There is no documentary warrant for the deer-stealing story. Rowe's account is a symptom of how every age reinvents Shakespeare in its own image. The road from the provinces to London was a familiar one in the eighteenth century – Samuel Johnson and David Garrick walked it in real life, Henry Fielding's Tom Jones in fiction. Shakespeare served as exemplar of the writer who achieved success, and an unprecedented degree of financial reward, from his pen alone. The Earl of Southampton may have helped him on his way in his early years, but he was essentially a self-made man rather than a beneficiary of court and aristocratic patronage. For writers such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, struggling in the transition from the age of patronage to that of Grub Street professionalism, Shakespeare offered not only a body of poetic invention and a gallery of living characters but also an inspirational career trajectory.



An engraving from William Hogarth's famous painting of Garrick as Richard III, confronting the ghosts on the night before the battle of Bosworth Field. Painted in the artist's studio, but influenced by the cluttered and 'realistic' stage-sets of the eighteenth century – a world away from the bare boards of the Globe.

If we had to identify a single decade in which the 'cult of Shakespeare' took root, in which his celebrity and influence came to outstrip that of his contemporaries once and for all, it would probably be the 1730s. There was a proliferation of cheap mass-market editions, while in the theatre the plays came to constitute about a quarter of the entire repertoire of the London stage, twice what they had been hitherto. The promotion of Shakespeare was driven by a number of forces, ranging from state censorship of new plays to a taste for the shapely legs of actresses in the cross-dressed 'breeches parts' of the comedies. The plays were becoming synonymous with decency and Englishness, even as the institution of the theatre was still poised between respectability and disrepute.

David Garrick (1717–1779), the actor who may justly be claimed as the father of what George Bernard Shaw later christened 'bardolatry', arrived in London at a propitious moment. Shakespeare was growing into big business and the time was ripe for a new star to cash in on his name. As in many a good theatre story, Garrick's first break came when he stepped in as an understudy and outshone the actor who normally took the part. This was followed by a more formal debut, again of a kind that established a pattern for later generations: the revolutionary new reading of a major Shakespearean part. For Garrick, it was Richard III (for Edmund Kean in the next century, it was Shylock). After this, there was no looking back. Garrick did all the things we have come to expect of a major star: he took on the full gamut of Shakespeare, he had an affair with his leading lady (the gorgeous and talented Peg Woffington), and he managed his own acting company, supervising the scripts and directing plays while also starring in them. It was because of Garrick's extraordinary energy in all these departments that he not only gave unprecedented respectability to the profession of actor, but also effectively invented the modern theatre. The 'actor-manager' tradition that he inaugurated stretched down to Laurence Olivier and beyond.

It was in the art of self-promotion that Garrick was unique. His public image was secured by William Hogarth's vibrant painting of him in the role of Richard III (see illustration opposite), confronted with his nightmares on the eve of the battle of Bosworth Field. The most frequently engraved and widely disseminated theatrical portrait of the eighteenth century, this iconic image simultaneously established Garrick as the quintessential tragedian and inaugurated the whole tradition of large-scale Shakespearean painting. Hitherto, the elevated genre of 'history painting' had concentrated on biblical and classical subjects. With Hogarth's image – created in the studio, though influenced by Garrick's stage performance – Shakespearean drama joined this august company.

The climax of Garrick's career in bardolatry was the Jubilee that he organized in commemoration of the bicentenary of Shakespeare's birth. The event took place in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, on the occasion of the opening of a new town hall, a mere five years later than the anniversary it was supposed to mark. It lasted for three days, during which scores of fashionable Londoners descended on the hitherto obscure provincial town where Shakespeare had been born. The literary tourist industry began here: local entrepreneurs did good business in the sale of Shakespearean relics, such as souvenirs supposedly cut from the wood of the great Bard's mulberry tree. Not since the marketing in medieval times of fragments of the True Cross had a single tree yielded so much wood. The Jubilee programme included a grand procession of Shakespearean characters, a masked ball, a horse race and a firework display. In true English fashion, the outdoor events were washed out by torrential rain. At the climax of the festivities Garrick performed his own poem, 'An Ode upon dedicating a building and erecting a statue to Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon', set to music by the leading composer Thomas Arne. In the manner of a staged theatrical 'happening', Garrick had arranged for a member of the audience (a fellow-actor), dressed as a French fop, to complain – as French connoisseurs of literary taste had complained for generations – that Shakespeare was vulgar, provincial and overrated. This gave Garrick the opportunity to voice his grand defence of Shakespeare. Though the whole business was much mocked in newspaper reports, caricatures and stage farces, it generated enormous publicity for both Garrick and Shakespeare across Britain and continental Europe. The Jubilee did more than make Stratford-upon-Avon into a tourist attraction: it inaugurated the very idea of a summer arts festival.

In an age when orthodox religion was facing severe challenges, the cult of Shakespeare was becoming a secular faith. Thanks to the enthusiasm of poets, critics and translators such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt and John Keats in England, J. W. von Goethe and the Schlegel brothers in Germany, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas in France, during the nineteenth-century era of Romanticism, the grammar school boy from the edge of the Forest of Arden became the supreme deity not just of poetry and drama, but of high culture itself.

There was, however, a downside to the apotheosis. Gods have an unfortunate propensity to attract wild-eyed extremists and earnest cranks. A few years after Garrick's Jubilee, a retired Oxford don named the Reverend James Wilmot went poking around Stratford-upon-Avon in pursuit of relics and reminiscences of the divine William. Disappointed by the paucity of what he found, he became the first person to consider the possibility that the plays might really have been written by someone else. He did not, however, publish his theory.

Fast-forward to the mid-nineteenth century. Bardolatry and the British Empire are in their heyday. It is 1852. An unsigned article in an Edinburgh magazine asks for the first time the question over which so much ink would be needlessly spilt in the next century and a half: 'Who wrote Shakespeare?' The author found it hard to reconcile the glories of the plays with our knowledge of Shakespeare's life – his mealy-mouthed business dealings, his churlish will (that 'second-best bed'). Maybe Shakespeare hired someone else to do his writing for him? Within a few years, a favoured candidate emerged: Lord Bacon, one of the most learned authors of the age. It did not seem to matter that Bacon's 'new philosophy' of scientific empiricism represented an altogether different species of learning from that of the plays, with their habitual scepticism and casual resort to folk-wisdom. Nor that Bacon's own efforts at drama were distinctly wooden. The theory that 'Shakespeare was Bacon' remained popular for half a century, despite numerous reasoned refutations. After the First World War, dozens of other candidates began to be brought forward. Those who found most vociferous support in the twentieth century were aristocrats such as William Stanley, the sixth Earl of Derby, and Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.

The love of conspiracy theories that pervaded western popular culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries gave continuing prominence to the 'authorship dispute'. One response to the phenomenon is dismissive: what does it matter so long as we have the plays? But there is a repellent snobbery in the idea that a man from an ordinary background could not have written the plays, that the true author must have been an aristocrat in disguise. Shakespeare's family and fellow-townspersons knew his gift: they represented him as a writer on his Stratford monument and compared him to Socrates and Virgil in the inscription upon it. His fellow-actors and intimate associates in the running of his theatre company, whom he remembered in his will, knew that he wrote the plays: they edited the First Folio and never doubted his authorship. Ben Jonson knew Shakespeare extremely well: Shakespeare acted in his plays, they quoted and parodied each other's works, he contributed verses to the First Folio (a short poem affirming that the frontispiece was a true likeness of the author and a long epistle praising him as 'swan of Avon' and saying that the plays were very good despite their poor attainment in the classical languages). In both his conversations with fellow-poet Drummond of Hawthornden and his commonplace book, Jonson discussed Shakespeare's compositional method and his relationship with the actors. Others who described Shakespeare as both an actor and a writer included Sir George Buc, William Camden, Leonard Digges (stepson of an overseer of Shakespeare's will), John Davies of Hereford (on at least two occasions), and the author of the academic *Parnassus* plays. Among those who knew Shakespeare and described him as a writer were Francis Beaumont (who praised the plays specifically on the grounds of their lack of book learning) and Francis Meres, who knew some of the sonnets in manuscript (perhaps including the one with the phrase 'my name is Will', which has always proved mildly embarrassing to proponents of the view that the real author was called Francis or Edward or Christopher or Elizabeth).

The poor quality of the French, the hazy knowledge of European geography and the howlers in the representation of court etiquette in the plays rule out the authorship of any highly educated courtier or gentleman. Specific allusions, for instance to the names of villages around Stratford-upon-Avon and to individuals such as Shakespeare's schoolmate and publisher Richard Field and the local Somerville family, prove that the author was from Warwickshire. Though Shakespeare lets slip his identity in casual passing allusions of this kind, early modern plays were not autobiographical documents. Nearly all Shakespeare's plots were taken over from old plays, novels, history books and other sources. They were not encodings of a secret life at court, as conspiracy theorists like to propose. Indeed, the principal failure of all 'disguised aristocrat' fantasies about the authorship of the plays is their failure to account for the deeply collaborative nature of early modern theatre: stray speech headings and other details reveal how Shakespeare wrote particular parts for particular actors; allusions to other plays, especially during the period of fierce inter-company rivalry around 1600, reveal that he was in constant dialogue with rival playwrights; the plays have many technical innovations intimately linked to practicalities of the theatre, such as the opening of the Globe in 1599 and the introduction of act divisions in response to the move to Blackfriars in 1608: all these are signs of a professional theatrical insider, not an accomplished gentleman amateur. Above all, there is the fact of actual collaboration: the revision of other men's plays in the early works, the involvement with Thomas Middleton and George Wilkins (author of the first half of *Pericles*) in the early 1600s, and the co-writing of the last three plays with Fletcher. We know an immense amount about how plays were put together collaboratively and a whole battery of stylometric tests has enabled us to work out which playwright wrote which scenes. The 'disguised aristocrat' theory cannot account for this. Besides, all verifiable stylometric tests conclusively rule out every alternative candidate who has been proposed as the true author of Shakespeare.

Other anti-Stratfordian claims reveal astonishing ignorance of the age. How could Shakespeare have been a literary man, it is asked, when he left no books in his will? Francis Bacon (one of the most advanced thinkers of the age), Richard Hooker (the leading theologian of the Anglican faith) and Samuel Daniel (the first English author to publish a collected edition of his literary works) left no books in their wills either. People did not habitually include inventories of their possessions in their wills. How could he have written such brilliant plays when there is so little evidence of his having received a formal education? The roll of the Stratford-upon-Avon grammar school is lost, but Shakespeare was entitled to attend it free of charge, by virtue of his father's civic office, and the range of knowledge and allusion in the plays matches closely with what he would have learnt in grammar school. The comic Latin lesson in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and the pedantic schoolmaster in *Love's Labour's Lost* are manifestly the creations of a grammar school boy, not a privately educated aristocrat.

Shakespeare is no different from his fellow-dramatists: George Chapman and Ben Jonson were the two most famously learned theatre writers of the age, yet there is no contemporary record of either of them having attended school of any kind, let alone university. Jonson probably went to Westminster School, leaving to become a bricklayer's apprentice before reaching the upper forms – but his attendance is an inference on the basis of circumstantial evidence, exactly as is Shakespeare's attendance at King Edward's grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon. Nor do we know anything about the schooling of Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Michael Drayton, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton, John Webster and a host of others.

Where are Shakespeare's play manuscripts and letters? The same place as nearly all the play manuscripts and letters of the other Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists: lost because nobody at the time thought that the work of these popular entertainers, let alone the details of their lives, were sufficiently important to merit preservation for posterity. Immensely talented dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Heywood did not even have the benefit of close friends in the theatre world to put together collected editions of their plays, as Hemings and Condell did for Shakespeare. It would in fact be more plausible to mount a case that Jonson did not write Jonson (a learned bricklayer?) or that Chapman did not write Chapman (translating Homer without a university degree!) than that Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare. Jonson's and Chapman's plays show far more classical learning than those of Shakespeare and as acute an understanding of court intrigue and politics, and yet they too were 'uneducated' writers, so why has no one questioned their authorship? The logical conclusion of the fact that no one has done so is that the 'Shakespeare authorship debate' is not a proper historical question with its roots in the early modern period, but an epiphenomenon, an aberrant offshoot of the nineteenth-century Romantic cult of Shakespeare. It stems from a desire to give Shakespeare a strong personality, and in so doing denies his greatest gift: the ability to suppress his own personality and absorb himself in his characters, to empathize not only with kings and lords, but also with daughters who disobey their fathers and outsiders who challenge the social order.

The First Folio Restored*

Shakespeare initially wrote his plays as scripts for performance, not finished literary works for publication. In order to understand the status of his texts and the editorial problems they present, we must begin by abandoning the modern model of literary authorship, with its movement from the

* A longer and more technical discussion of the textual question and our editorial procedures is available on the edition website (www.rscshakespeare.co.uk).

A printing house: in the background, the compositors are picking the individual letters out from the case, while in the foreground the leaves are being inked before being put through the press.



solitary figure of the writer and a piece of paper (or a typewriter or computer screen) to the submission of a manuscript, typescript or computer file to a publisher, followed by the process of copy-editing and proof-reading. The traditional mark of a writer's authorization of his or her final text is the return of corrected proofs to a publisher, who then submits them to a printer for mass reproduction, binding and distribution via the book trade. It is probable that Shakespeare only ever personally corrected the proofs of two of his forty or so works: the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. In every other case, a process of conjecture is required in order to establish some kind of authoritative text.

Nearly all the necessary raw manuscript materials are lost. Aside from the scene for *Sir Thomas More*, we have no working manuscripts in Shakespeare's hand, no scribal transcripts of the originals, no 'playbooks' or 'promptbooks' from his theatre, no printer's copy, no authorially marked-up proof sheets. This is not unusual for the period. The editors of Christopher Marlowe and John Webster face exactly the same problems. We do know that Shakespeare's friend and rival Ben Jonson carefully oversaw the progress of his plays into print, so his texts present fewer problems, but again the manuscripts behind them are lost. Printers did not archive the copy from which they worked; theatre companies did keep master copies of their scripts, but these would mutate over time as theatrical innovations led to a process of rewriting. One of Shakespeare's late collaborative works, *Cardenio*, survives only in the indirect form of an eighteenth-century rewrite of a playbook that was reworked some time in the late seventeenth century.

Plays are not like novels, poems or biographies. They are not 'owned' by an individual author. The best modern analogy for the status of an Elizabethan theatre script is the film screenplay. Screenwriters traditionally occupy a lowly position in the Hollywood food chain. More often than not, teams of writers are employed. Sometimes one team will be sacked and another brought in to fix up a script. Producers will then demand changes on the basis of their perception of what will be commercially successful. Directors will demand changes on the basis of their own artistic vision. Stars

will demand changes that enhance their own parts. Writers end up well down the credit list. Only after the industry matured did the notion of a published screenplay take hold; publication remains the exception rather than the rule, reserved for 'classics' and films that are either exceptionally successful or unusually 'artistic'. And when a screenplay is published, it is far more likely to be the studio's finished version or the 'director's cut' than the writer's or writers' original script.

In every one of these particulars, there is an analogy with the theatre in Shakespeare's time (which is why Hollywood loved, and heaped Oscars upon, the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*). The theatre manager Philip Henslowe was like a Hollywood producer: he would employ teams of writers to create new works and fix up old ones; it was star actors such as Edward Alleyn, not writers such as Robert Greene, who dominated the scene at the Rose (which is why Greene, or his colleague Henry Chettle, seems to have become bitter when a minor actor called William Shakespeare began fixing up other people's plays and even writing his own). Publication of plays was the exception rather than the rule. Most of the scripts that did find their way into print in the 1580s and 1590s lacked an author's name on the title page. The name of the acting company who had played the work ('with great applause') was what mattered. The identity of the playwright was not considered a selling point. It is a mark that Shakespeare was beginning to be considered someone special, perhaps an unusually literary dramatist, that after some half-dozen of his plays were published anonymously from 1594 onwards, in 1598 his name appeared on the title pages of texts of *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Richard II* and *Richard III*.

During Shakespeare's lifetime about half his surviving plays were published in the format known as Quarto (so called because the sheets of paper that came off the printing press were folded in four). In terms of size, relatively low price and function (books to be read through rather than lovingly preserved in a library), the modern paperback provides a good analogy. The print run for play Quartos was unlikely to be more than a thousand copies at most. A few of Shakespeare's Quartos were sufficiently good sellers to go through several editions. By the time of his death there were six Quarto printings of *1 Henry IV*, *Richard II* and *Richard III*, and three of *Hamlet*, *Pericles*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Titus Andronicus*. Since we know nothing about box-office returns from the Theatre and the Globe, demand for printed copies is the best measure we have of the relative success of the plays. These seven – three histories, three tragedies and a collaboratively-written romance – qualify as the best answer to the question 'Which were Shakespeare's most successful plays in his own lifetime?' Frequency of allusion and imitation in the work of other dramatists provides confirmatory evidence. Ben Jonson was distinctly dismayed that *Titus* and *Pericles*, which he regarded as ramshackle affairs in contrast to his own more polished scripts, were such crowd-pleasers. But none of the plays was so successful in print as *Venus and Adonis*, which went through nine editions in Shakespeare's lifetime and a further six in the next twenty years. By a considerable margin the most widely read long poem of the age, it ensured that Shakespeare's name was synonymous with poetic eloquence and erotic delight.

In the year of Shakespeare's death, Ben Jonson became the first dramatist for the public stage to gather his plays in the more durable form of a 'collected works'. Three years later a publisher called Thomas Pavier put out editions of ten purported Shakespearean plays (among them the apocryphal *Sir John Oldcastle Part 1* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*). This looked like an unauthorized attempt at a 'collected Shakespeare'. It certainly seemed so to the King's Men. With the assistance of the Earl of Pembroke, who was Lord Chamberlain and a good friend to the actors, the three leading players, Burbage, Hemings and Condell, obtained a blocking order against further productions of a similar kind. Burbage died soon after, leaving Hemings and Condell to begin the work of gathering materials for an authorized edition. The process involved collecting old Quartos and comparing them with the scripts held by the company. For

previously unpublished plays, transcripts were made of the prompter's 'book', some of them by a professional scribe called Ralph Crane. After long delays in the printing house, the great book was finally published in 1623 under the title *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies Published according to the True Originall Copies*. Printed in large double-columned 'Folio' format, it was adorned with Martin Droeshout's engraving of Shakespeare and an array of preliminary matter, including Ben Jonson's commendatory poems praising his fellow playwright as 'Soul of the Age', as a rival even to Sophocles, and as a dramatic artist whose works were 'for all time', surpassing 'all that was ever writ'. Without the Folio, half of Shakespeare's output would have been lost for ever, and several other plays would have only survived in error-strewn texts. Among the eighteen Folio-only plays are *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The Folio was reprinted three times before the end of the seventeenth century, but by early in the eighteenth it was beginning to have an antiquated feel. Shakespeare's reputation was on the rise and a new middle-class reading public was emerging. The time was ripe for a 'modernized' edition and the task was entrusted to the poet and dramatist Nicholas Rowe. In preparing his text, Rowe made a mistake that has never been fully rectified. He noticed that Hamlet's last major soliloquy – 'How all occasions do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge' – was missing from the Folio text of the play but present in the early Quarto. He accordingly stitched together the two texts, creating a composite version of *Hamlet* in the hope that it represented Shakespeare's true original. But it did not. Modern bibliographic investigation has decisively shown that the early printed texts of *Hamlet* represent different moments in the play's evolving stage-history. A 'conflated' *Hamlet* is not a Shakespearean original: it is a version of the play created by Rowe nearly a hundred years after Shakespeare's death.

The eighteenth-century editors who followed Rowe, beginning with Alexander Pope, went even further with the 'pick-and-mix' approach, mingling the variant Quarto and Folio texts of many more plays, most notably *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Richard II*, *Richard III* and *Troilus and Cressida*. This approach continued in the mainstream editorial tradition through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Oxford edition of 1986 began the work of separating out the early texts, recognizing the discrete versions of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. But it still moved inconsistently between versions, even printing the *Henry VI* plays in their Folio texts but with their Quarto titles. In short, then, all existing Shakespeare editions are deeply flawed: Rowe set editors off down the wrong path and they have not returned.

So it is that, astonishingly, the Shakespeare First Folio – unquestionably the most important single book in the history of world drama – has not been edited in its own right for about three hundred years. By 'edited' we mean reproduced with the correction of presumed printer's errors and the modernization of spelling and punctuation. There have been *facsimile reproductions* and *diplomatic transcriptions* of the Folio: these, however, are not corrected and modernized *editions*. Editing of a kind took place in the Second Folio of 1632, the Third Folio of 1663 (and its second issue of 1664), and the Fourth Folio of 1685. Some corrections were made and there was an element of modernization, but the interventions were fairly minimal: conventions of spelling, punctuation and typography changed between 1623 and 1685, but far less than they have done in the three and a bit centuries since.

For the eighteen Folio-only plays, there is only one version to print, but where there are both Quartos and Folios, the story is complicated. The Quartos can be divided into two categories. Seven of them are short in length and contain frequent misprints and lines that don't make sense: *The First Part of the Contention* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* (which became the second and third parts of *Henry VI* in the Folio), the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, the First Quarto of *Hamlet*, *Henry V*,

The Merry Wives of Windsor and the one Quarto play of which there is no Folio text, *Pericles*.^{*} Thirteen others are long and well printed: *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, *Richard III*, the Second Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Second Quarto of *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*. Uniquely, the Quarto of *King Lear* is long, but with many misprints and lines that do not make sense. It is a special case, its errors stemming from the particular circumstances of its first publication: a printer unused to working with plays and a manuscript probably based on Shakespeare's working draft, known in the period as 'foul papers'.

In the twentieth century, the short Quartos were described as 'bad' texts because of their high degree of error, because the Second Quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* advertised themselves as, respectively, 'Newly corrected, augmented and amended' and 'Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect copy', and because Hemings and Condell's preface to the First Folio spoke of how their authoritative text was replacing 'diverse stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious imposters that exposed them'. In all probability, though, this remark refers to Pavier's illicit Quartos of 1619, not those published in Shakespeare's lifetime.

The short Quartos have variously been supposed to be first drafts, abridgements for performance or perhaps touring, stenographers' reports or – the most popular theory in the twentieth century – actors' memorial reconstructions. There is an inherent implausibility about the theory that some of the minor actors pieced together the texts from memory, employed a scribe to copy as they recited, then went slyly to a 'pirate' publisher, so the latter hypothesis has been much criticized, though the First Quarto of *Hamlet* and the Quarto of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* do bear some marks of reconstruction from memory. Whatever the origins of the various short Quartos, they represent the plays in very different form from that authorized by Hemings and Condell. In preparing the text of such plays as *Henry V* and *Merry Wives*, the Folio editors consciously rejected the 'short' Quarto and used different manuscript sources, probably the 'book' held by the acting company (sometimes known as the 'promptbook', though that is not a term from the period).

With five of the long Quartos, there are very few differences from the Folio. These are *Love's Labour's Lost*, *1 Henry IV*, Second Quarto *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*. The norm here is that the Folio text was printed from a Quarto, with errors introduced and corrections made, but stage directions were added, presumably following consultation of the 'book' held at the theatre. Most editors work from the Quartos, but insert the Folio's stage directions. We use the reverse procedure, respecting the integrity of the Folio but using the Quartos to correct its printing errors.

In four cases – *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *2 Henry IV* – there are significant local differences, such as added scenes, the change of a character's identity in a single scene, an element of rewriting or the marks of censorship. So, for instance, the darkly comic 'fly-killing' scene is in Folio *Titus* but not Quarto. The same goes for the deposition scene at the centre of *Richard II*. In Folio *Dream*, Egeus instead of Philostrate introduces the revels in the final scene. In these plays, the Folio was printed from a Quarto, but in the preparation of copy for the printers there was more thoroughgoing attention to a manuscript source. Most modern editors back-project the Folio additions such as the fly-killing scene into their Quarto-based texts, thus creating a hybrid. We prefer, again, to respect the integrity of the Folio, though make use of the Quartos in correcting printers' errors.

^{*} *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by John Fletcher and William Shakespeare first appeared in Quarto in 1634, from the printer of the Second Folio.

The five remaining plays present the greatest textual challenge. They also happen to be five of Shakespeare's longest plays: *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida*. In each case there are major differences between the Quarto and Folio texts – substantial additions or omissions, hundreds of variant lines and words. In each play, some of the differences can be attributed to printing errors in one text, but many cannot. Here Quartos and Folios were printed from different principal sources (for example, Quarto from the authorial manuscript or a transcript of it, and Folio from the theatrical promptbook or a transcript of it). To complicate matters, the Folio editor sometimes consulted a Quarto when his manuscript copy was unclear. The best explanation for the major differences is that the two versions represent two moments in the life of the play, with intervening revisions having been undertaken by Shakespeare or the acting company or another dramatist on behalf of the acting company or a scribe preparing a written text or some combination thereof. It is with these plays that the editorial tradition of conflation has been most damaging.

In Shakespeare's time, when the creation of a book involved the extraordinarily laborious process of picking out each individual letter from a case of type, printers preferred if at all possible to work from a book that was already printed rather than a manuscript, since the latter was much more difficult to read. The most significant fact about the printing of the First Folio is that Hemings and Condell had the opportunity to provide the printing house with Quarto texts of a large number of plays that could simply have been reprinted in the new large-page double-column format of the Folio. Pavier had produced his 1619 collection at speed because he was working from existing Quartos, not manuscripts. But Hemings and Condell did not do this. Even where Folio did use Quartos as copy-texts, there was consultation of playhouse manuscripts. And in the case of the four big plays where there was an adequately-printed Quarto, they chose to work from a different, playhouse-derived source that would have been much slower to print. Their choice not to take the easy option is a major reason why we should respect the integrity of their enterprise, why we should not conflate and why we print the Folio texts of *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida*. In some cases, the Quartos are probably closer to Shakespeare's original manuscript draft, but the Folio is undoubtedly closer to his playhouse. For an edition such as this one, which is commissioned by a Shakespearean acting company, the copy-text has to be the one authorized by Shakespeare's own acting company.

This is not to say that we have edited the Folio as if the Quartos did not exist. Quarto readings are invaluable in the process of identifying and correcting printing errors in the Folio. And, indeed, it is a matter of peculiar good fortune that they exist for several of the tragedies. The overall standard of printing in the First Folio is remarkably high, though there are degrees of variation according to the nature of the printer's copy for each play and the habits of the various members of the team of compositors who worked on the project. However, after the comedies and histories were completed, a new and less competent printer joined the team. Probably an apprentice, he is known by scholars as 'Compositor E'. He was responsible for typesetting large chunks of *Troilus and Cressida*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*: consultation of the Quartos allows us to undo much of his bad work in these plays. He also set parts of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*, together with a page of *Timon of Athens*: since there are no Quartos of these plays, correction of his errors in them requires a higher degree of editorial conjecture.

None of the Folio plays is without error. 'Compositor E' is a special case, but even 'A' and 'B', the principal setters, had their vagaries and their careless moments. It probably did not help that ale was abundantly available in the printing shop, in order that there would be a ready supply of 'chamberly'

abundantly which was customarily used to moisten the leather of the inking balls. A modern editor would be foolish to reproduce a manifest compositorial error out of an obsessive desire to stay true to Folio. On many occasions, the Quarto text is manifestly accurate and the Folio compositor has made a clear error: on these occasions the Quarto reading must be restored. Because of compositorial errors, the Folio as printed did not exactly correspond to the Folio as Hemings and Condell wanted it printed. Our text is the first to seek to recover (in modernized form) the closest thing we have to an 'authorized' Shakespeare: the text that Hemings and Condell prepared for Isaac Jaggard's printers in the early 1620s. Facsimiles reproduce what came out of Jaggard's shop. Most editions go back two steps to an irrecoverable supposed 'original' – Shakespeare's working manuscript or the purported text of the first performance. No edition until ours has begun from an attempt to reconstruct and then modernize what Hemings and Condell authorized: the texts that *went into* Jaggard's shop in the form of transcripts of promptbooks for some plays and Quartos marked up with reference to the theatre for others.

Like all editors since those of the 1632 Second Folio, we have attempted to be more accurate than the First Folio compositors were. Our golden rule has been to follow the Folio whenever it makes sense, but correct it from the Quartos when a Quarto is manifestly correct and the Folio manifestly erroneous. So too with the larger question of emendation: we follow the Folio whenever it makes sense, but correct it from the editorial tradition when the editorial tradition makes sense of what is manifestly erroneous in the Folio. In cases where differences between Folio and Quarto are, in the editors' judgement, due not to a compositor's error but to a divergence in copy (because of authorial or playhouse revision, or intelligent alteration or annotation or sophistication on the part of the book-keeper or editor or scribe who prepared the Folio text), the Folio is followed, but if the revision is of substance and interest it is flagged in the textual notes. For the sake of completion, substantial Quarto-only passages – which are especially numerous in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* – are edited separately at the end of each play where they occur.

Our text, then, aims to be simultaneously authentic and modern. Spelling and punctuation must be modernized to ensure that Shakespeare remains a living dramatist. Speech headings need to be rendered consistent and other tidying up is necessary for the sake of the modern reader and actor. We aim to return to the origins of Shakespearean editing in homage to Hemings, Condell and their team, but at the same time we have learned the lesson of late twentieth-century scholarship and editorial theory: that there is no single definitive authorial text, because many different agents at different moments influence the creation and dissemination of a play. To stress again: our claim to originality is that we have edited a real book (the First Folio), not an imaginary construct ('the plays as they came from Shakespeare's hand', as in the dominant editorial tradition, or 'the plays as first performed' as in the revisionist school of editing). We grant that this results in the alteration of some things that Shakespeare originally wrote, as in the case of oaths, which were modified ('heaven' for 'God', removal of the blasphemous 'zounds' and 'sblood') following a parliamentary act of 1606. We accept that there are almost certainly passages in the Folio that are the result of playhouse additions after Shakespeare's death or scribal regularization and emendation in the process of preparing copy. But such features are worth retaining for the sake of editorial consistency, of fidelity to the ambition of recovering the plays at one particular key moment in their evolutionary history, and of recognition that Shakespeare's achievement was at the profoundest level collaborative.

We have also respected the Folio in editing its preliminary matter. And we have demarcated the non-Folio works (poems, sonnets, Quarto-only passages of *Hamlet* and *Lear*, together with the two collaborative plays, *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*) by setting them in double-column

format – a deliberate inversion of the original distinction whereby Quartos were single column and Folio double. Unlike some modern editors, we are not fully persuaded that Shakespeare wrote the Countess of Salisbury scenes in the anonymous play *Edward III* – stylometric analysis increases our scepticism – so that play is not included.*

To illustrate the results of our method, here are two simple examples, one of Quarto/Folio variation and the other of our presumption against emendation unless it is absolutely necessary. Each involves a kiss. Othello tells the assembled senators of Desdemona's reaction to his narrative of his exotic military adventures. Quarto has 'She gaue me for my paines a world of sighes'. Folio has 'She gaue me for my paines a world of kisses'. Nearly all editions follow Quarto, even when Folio is their base-text. The assumption seems to be that Desdemona would not be so forward as to kiss Othello when he is still a comparative stranger. But 'kisses' for 'sighes' is an unlikely scribal or printer's error. It is more probable that each reading is true to the play at the particular moment in its life represented by the respective texts. We edit Folio, so we retain Folio's 'kisses'. We note in our commentary that, in the usage of the period, 'kisses' could mean 'gentle touches', but it is also the case that Venetian customs of courtesy in the play are by any standard forward – Cassio greets Iago's wife Emilia with a kiss on arrival in Cyprus and Iago's manipulation of Othello plays intensely on the Moor's lack of ease with Venetian body language. A Desdemona who kisses Othello in the imagined pre-action of the play is a stronger, more active and interesting character than one who merely sighs in admiration for his charisma.

At the climax of *Much Ado about Nothing*, all modern editions give Benedick the line 'Peace, I will stop your mouth', at which point in all modern productions he kisses Beatrice. But the Folio reads '*Leon*. Peace I will stop your mouth'. It is hard to imagine that the printer misread the speech heading '*Bene*' as '*Leon*' and, besides, by this point in the play Benedick is addressing Beatrice with the intimate 'thou' and 'thy', not the more formal 'you' and 'your'. There is therefore every reason to suppose that Shakespeare intended the line to be spoken by Leonato – who perhaps *forces* Benedick and Beatrice into a kiss. By restoring the Folio line to its original speaker we create the possibility for a staging that is at once more challenging and, in all probability, more authentic.

Editing the Folio has involved us in hundreds of decisions of this sort.

We hope that our edition may come to be regarded as a modern equivalent to the eighteenth-century example of Dr Samuel Johnson. As Johnson drew on the revolutionary textual innovations of his predecessors such as Lewis Theobald, but had a presumption in favour of the authority of the Folio and of *explaining rather than emending* Shakespeare's text, so we draw on late twentieth-century scholarly innovations but inaugurate the twenty-first-century editorial tradition by falling back on Johnsonian common sense and gratitude to John Hemings and Henry Condell for their extraordinary work in making Shakespeare available 'to the great variety of readers' in a text that keeps his plays anchored in the place from which they came and where they continue to be most alive: the theatre. Here, then, is the actors' Shakespeare: the text authorized by the King's Men and edited for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

* A link to an electronic text is provided on the edition's website, www.rscshakespeare.co.uk. We accept that Theobald's *Double Falsehood* (1728) is indirectly derived from Shakespeare and Fletcher's lost *Cardenio*, but the relationship is too distant to merit inclusion. We would also welcome further investigation of Shakespeare's possible hand in the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* and the possibility that he intervened somewhere in the theatrical life of other Chamberlain's/King's Men plays such as *Satiromastix* (1601), *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1602), *The London Prodigal* (1605), *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1608), *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608) and *Mucedorus* with 'new additions' (1610).

USER'S GUIDE

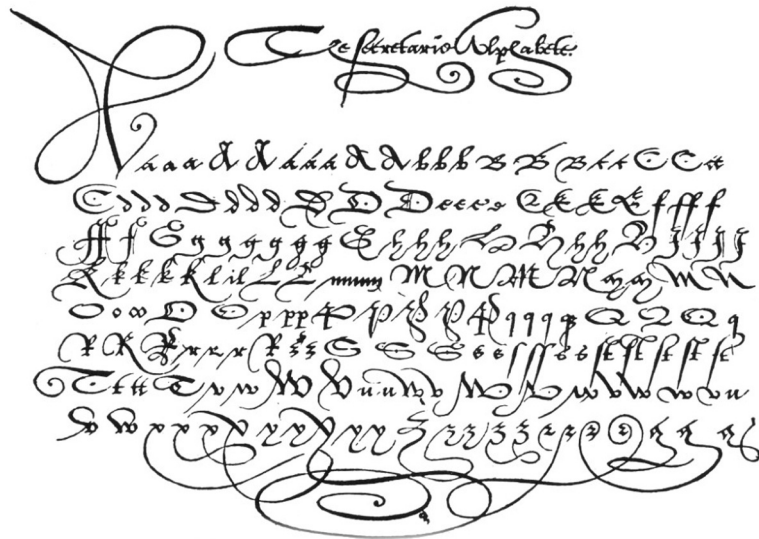
Titles follow the First Folio, where there are sometimes minor variations of nomenclature between contents list, title at head of play and running header – our default preference is the title at the head of the play (thus, for example, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Tragedy of Cymbeline* as opposed to the contents list's *Love's Labour Lost* and *Cymbeline King of Britain*). Some of the plays were originally staged with different titles (e.g. *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth* began its life as *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, and *Henry the Eighth* seems to have been called *All is True*).

Lists of Parts are supplied in the First Folio for only six plays, so these are predominantly editorial, arranged by groups of character (thus for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the court, the gentle lovers, the artisans, the fairies). Capitals indicate that part of the name which is used for speech headings in the script (thus 'PROSPERO, the right Duke of Milan' and 'Sir John FALSTAFF').

Locations are provided by the Folio for only two plays (*The Tempest* is set on 'an uninhabited island' and *Measure for Measure* in Vienna). Eighteenth-century editors, working in an age of elaborately realistic stage sets, were the first to provide detailed locations. Given that Shakespeare wrote for a bare stage and often an imprecise sense of place, we have relegated locations to the explanatory notes at the foot of the page, where they are given at the beginning of each scene where the imaginary location is different from the one before. We have emphasized broad geographical settings rather than specifics of the kind that suggest anachronistically

realistic staging. Thus Sicilia and Bohemia or court and country in *The Winter's Tale*, Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*, not usually such locations as 'another room in the palace'. Indications of movement from outdoors to indoors are given where appropriate.

Act and Scene Divisions were provided in the Folio (they were absent from the Quartos published in Shakespeare's lifetime). Sometimes, however, they were erroneous or omitted; corrections and additions supplied by editorial tradition are indicated by square brackets. Five-act division is based on a classical model, and act breaks provided the opportunity to replace the candles in the indoor Blackfriars playhouse which the King's Men used after 1608, but Shakespeare did not necessarily think in terms of a five-part structure of dramatic composition. The Folio convention is that a scene ends when the stage is empty. Nowadays, partly under the influence of film, we tend to consider a scene to be a dramatic unit that ends with either a change of imaginary location or a significant passage of time within the narrative. Shakespeare's fluidity of composition accords well with this convention, so in addition to act and scene numbers we provide a *running scene* count in the right margin at the beginning of each new scene, in the typeface used for editorial directions. Where there is a scene break caused by a momentary bare stage, but the location does not change and extra time does not pass, we use the convention *running scene continues*. There is inevitably a degree of editorial judgement in making such calls, but the system is very valuable in suggesting the pace of the plays (it reveals, for instance, the great compression of *Othello*).



The forms of Elizabethan secretary hand: the variant strokes suggest how difficult it would have been to read the original manuscripts, which is one reason why the early printed texts are prone to error and the modern editorial process remains so laborious and speculative.

Speaker's Names are often inconsistent in Folio. We have regularized speech headings, but retained an element of deliberate inconsistency in entry directions, in order to give the flavour of Folio.

Verse is indicated by lines that do not run to the right margin and by capitalization of the first letter of each line. The Folio printers sometimes set verse as prose, and vice versa (either out of misunderstanding or for reasons of space). We have silently corrected in such cases, although in some instances there is ambiguity, in which case we have leaned towards the preservation of Folio layout. Folio sometimes uses contraction ('turnd' rather than 'turned') to indicate whether or not the final '-ed' of a past participle is sounded, an area where there is variation for the sake of the five-beat iambic pentameter rhythm. We use the convention of a grave accent to indicate sounding (thus 'turnèd' would be two syllables), but would urge actors not to overstress. In cases where one speaker ends with a verse half-line and the next begins with the other half of the pentameter, editors since the late eighteenth century have indented the second line. We have abandoned this convention, since the Folio does not use it, and nor did actors' cues in the Shakespearean theatre. An exception is made when the second speaker actively interrupts or completes the first speaker's sentence.

Spelling is modernized, but older forms are occasionally maintained where necessary for rhythm or aural effect. For instance, 'y'are' is generally modernized to 'you're', but the old form is retained in Regan's 'I know you are of her bosom ... Y'are. I know't.'

Punctuation in Shakespeare's time was as much rhetorical as grammatical. 'Colon' was originally a term for a unit of thought in an argument. The semi-colon was a new unit of punctuation (some of the Quartos lack them altogether). We have modernized punctuation throughout, but have given more weight to Folio punctuation than many editors, since, though not Shakespearean, it reflects the usage of his period. In particular, we have used the colon far more than many editors: it is exceptionally useful as a way of indicating the way in which many Shakespearean speeches unfold clause by clause in a developing argument that gives the illusion of enacting the process of thinking in the moment. We have also kept in mind the origin of punctuation in classical times as a means of assisting the actor and orator: the comma suggests the briefest of pauses for breath, the colon a middling one and a full stop or period a longer pause. Semi-colons, by contrast, belong to an era of punctuation that was only just coming in during Shakespeare's time and that is coming to an end now: we have accordingly only used them where they occur in our copy-texts (and not always then). Dashes are sometimes used for parenthetical interjections where the Folio has brackets. They are also used for interruptions and changes in train of thought. Where a change of addressee occurs within a speech, we have used a dash preceded by a full stop (or occasionally another form of punctuation). Often the identity of the respective addressees is obvious from the context. When it is not, this has been indicated in a marginal stage direction.

Entrances and Exits are fairly thorough in Folio, which has accordingly been followed as faithfully as possible. Where characters are omitted or corrections are necessary, this is indicated by square brackets (e.g. '[and Attendants]'). *Exit* is sometimes silently normalized to *Exeunt* and *Manet* anglicized to 'remains'. We trust Folio positioning of entrances and exits to a greater degree than most editors: thus, for instance, we follow Folio in having the other characters enter in the middle of Petruccio's speech

to Kate at *Taming of the Shrew*, 2.1.268–81, making the latter part of the speech into a kind of game for the benefit of the onstage audience (an interpretation that strongly shaped Greg Doran's RSC production).

Other Stage Directions such as stage business, asides and indications of addressee are rare in Folio. Modern editions usually mingle editorial directions with original Folio and Quarto ones, sometimes marking interventions by means of square brackets. We have sought to distinguish what could be described as *directorial* interventions of this kind from Folio-style directions (either original or supplied) by placing the former in the right margin in a different typeface. There is a degree of subjectivity about which directions are of which kind, but the procedure is intended as a reminder to the reader and the actor that Shakespearean stage directions are often dependent upon editorial inference alone and are not set in stone. We also depart from editorial tradition in sometimes admitting uncertainty and thus printing permissive stage directions, such as an *Aside?* (often a line may be equally effective as an aside or a direct address – it is for each production or reading to make its own decision) or a *may exit* or a piece of business placed between arrows to indicate that it may occur at various different moments within a scene.

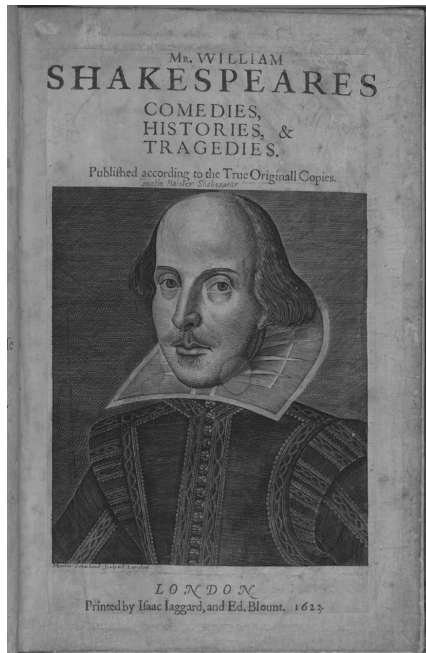
Line Numbers in the left margin are editorial, for reference and to key the explanatory and textual notes.

Explanatory Notes at the foot of each page explain allusions and gloss obsolete and difficult words, confusing phraseology, occasional major textual cruces, and so on. Particular attention is given to non-standard usage, bawdy innuendo and technical terms (e.g. legal and military language). Where more than one sense is given, commas indicate shades of related meaning, slashes alternative or double meanings.

Textual Notes at the end of each play indicate major departures from the Folio. They take the following form: the reading of our text is given in bold and its source given after an equals sign, with 'Q' indicating that it derives from the principal Quarto and 'Ed' that it derives from the editorial tradition. The rejected Folio ('F') reading is then given. A selection of Quarto variants and plausible unadopted editorial readings are also included. Thus, for example, at *Hamlet*, 3.4.180, '**blot** = Ed. F = blunt. Q = blowt', indicates that we have adopted the editorial reading 'blot' where Folio has 'blunt' and Quarto has 'blowt'.

'**Key Facts**' boxes at the beginning of each work give information on plot, sources, proportion of verse and prose, textual issues, authorial attribution when doubtful or collaborative, date of composition and first performance. They also include lists of substantial parts (characters who speak more than about forty lines) in descending order of size. Since the definition of a line spoken is variable (because of prose and half-lines), figures are given in terms of a percentage of the whole, the number of speeches delivered and the number of scenes the character is onstage. These lists make it possible to distinguish between works that are more ensemble-based (e.g. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *2 Henry IV*) and those that are dominated by a small number of characters (e.g. *Othello* and *1 Henry IV*). Though there is a degree of imprecision about these lists as a result of editorial interventions, they offer much valuable information – for instance that Sir Toby Belch has the largest part in *Twelfth Night* and that only six lead characters so dominate their world that their part is over three times the length of anyone else's in the play (*Hamlet*, Richard III, *Timon*, *Macbeth*, *Prospero*, *Henry V*).

PRELIMINARY PAGES OF THE FIRST FOLIO



To the Reader
 This figure that thou here see'st put,
 It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
 Wherein the graver had a strife
 With Nature to outdo the life:
 O, could he but have drawn his wit
 As well in brass as he hath hit
 His face, the print would then surpass
 All that was ever writ in brass.
 But since he cannot, reader, look
 Not on his picture, but his book.
 Ben Jonson

TO THE MOST NOBLE AND INCOMPARABLE PAIR
 OF BRETHREN, WILLIAM Earl of Pembroke etc., Lord
 Chamberlain to the King's most excellent majesty,
 AND PHILIP Earl of Montgomery etc., gentleman of his
 majesty's bedchamber, both Knights of the most noble
 Order of the Garter and our singular good LORDS

Right Honourable,

Whilst we study to be thankful in our particular for the
 many favours we have received from your lordships, we
 are fallen upon the ill fortune to mingle two the most
 5 diverse things that can be: fear and rashness, rashness
 in the enterprise and fear of the success. For when we
 value the places your highnesses sustain, we cannot but
 know their dignity greater than to descend to the
 reading of these trifles, and, while we name them trifles,
 10 we have deprived ourselves of the defence of our
 dedication. But since your lordships have been pleased
 to think these trifles something heretofore, and have
 prosecuted both them and their author, living, with so
 much favour, we hope that, they outliving him and he

15 not having the fate, common with some, to be executor
 to his own writings, you will use the like indulgence
 toward them you have done unto their parent. There is
 a great difference whether any book choose his patrons
 or find them: this hath done both. For so much were
 20 your lordships' likings of the several parts when they
 were acted as, before they were published, the volume
 asked to be yours. We have but collected them and done
 an office to the dead to procure his orphans guardians,
 without ambition either of self-profit or fame, only to
 25 keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive
 as was our SHAKESPEARE, by humble offer of his plays
 to your most noble patronage. Wherein, as we have
 justly observed no man to come near your lordships but
 with a kind of religious address, it hath been the height
 30 of our care, who are the presenters, to make the present
 worthy of your highnesses by the perfection. But there
 we must also crave our abilities to be considered, my
 lords. We cannot go beyond our own powers. Country
 hands reach forth milk, cream, fruits, or what they
 35 have: and many nations, we have heard, that had not

To the Reader poem printed opposite the title page **graver** engraver, who was Martin Droeshout (1601–1650?), a Flemish immigrant from a family of
 painters **Ben Jonson** dramatist and friend of Shakespeare; original poem is signed 'B. I.' ('I' and 'J' were interchangeable in seventeenth-century typography)
Dedication WILLIAM . . . Pembroke William Herbert (1580–1630), a notable patron of books and the arts, who as Lord Chamberlain took special responsibility for
 the acting company to which Shakespeare had belonged, the King's Men; it has been suggested that he might have been the dedicatee of Shakespeare's sonnets
King's . . . majesty James I of England (he was also King James VI of Scotland) **PHILIP . . . Montgomery** Philip Herbert (1584–1650), William's brother, a
 favourite at the court of King James I **gentleman . . . bedchamber** an official court post **Order . . . Garter** the highest order of English
 knighthood **13 prosecuted** treated

44 gums and incense, obtained their requests with a
 45 leavened cake. It was no fault to approach their gods
 by what means they could, and the most, though
 meanest, of things are made more precious when they
 are dedicated to temples. In that name therefore, we
 most humbly consecrate to your highnesses these
 50 remains of your servant Shakespeare, that what delight
 is in them may be ever your lordships', the reputation
 his, and the faults ours, if any be committed by a pair
 so careful to show their gratitude both to the living and
 the dead as is
 55 Your lordships' most bounden,
 JOHN HEMINGE, HENRY CONDELL.

To the great variety of readers

From the most able to him that can but spell: there you
 are numbered. We had rather you were weighed,
 60 especially when the fate of all books depends upon your
 capacities, and not of your heads alone, but of your
 purses. Well, it is now public, and you will stand for
 your privileges, we know: to read and censure. Do so,
 but buy it first. That doth best commend a book, the
 65 stationer says. Then, how odd soever your brains be, or
 your wisdoms, make your licence the same, and spare
 not. Judge your six-penn'orth, your shilling's worth,
 your five shillings' worth at a time, or higher, so you
 rise to the just rates, and welcome. But whatever you
 70 do, buy. Censure will not drive a trade or make the jack
 go. And though you be a magistrate of wit, and sit on
 the stage at Blackfriars or the Cockpit to arraign plays
 daily, know, these plays have had their trial already,
 and stood out all appeals, and do now come forth
 75 quitted rather by a decree of court than any purchased
 letters of commendation.

It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have
 been wished that the author himself had lived to have
 set forth and overseen his own writings. But since it
 80 hath been ordained otherwise, and he by death
 departed from that right, we pray you do not envy his
 friends the office of their care and pain to have collected
 and published them, and so to have published them as
 where, before, you were abused with divers stolen and
 85 surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the
 frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed
 them, even those are now offered to your view cured
 and perfect of their limbs, and all the rest absolute in
 their numbers, as he conceived them. Who, as he was a
 90 happy imitator of nature, was a most gentle expresser of
 it. His mind and hand went together, and what he
 thought he uttered with that easiness that we have
 scarce received from him a blot in his papers. But it is

not our province, who only gather his works and give
 95 them you, to praise him. It is yours, that read him. And
 there we hope, to your diverse capacities, you will find
 enough both to draw and hold you, for his wit can no
 more lie hid than it could be lost. Read him, therefore,
 and again, and again, and if then you do not like him,
 100 surely you are in some manifest danger not to
 understand him. And so we leave you to other of his
 friends whom if you need can be your guides: if you
 need them not, you can lead yourselves and others. And
 such readers we wish him.
 105 JOHN HEMINGE, HENRY CONDELL.

*To the memory of my beloved, the AUTHOR Master
 William Shakespeare and what he hath left us*

To draw no envy, Shakespeare, on thy name
 Am I thus ample to thy book and fame:
 110 While I confess thy writings to be such
 As neither man nor muse can praise too much:
 'Tis true, and all men's suffrage. But these ways
 Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise,
 For silliest ignorance on these may light,
 115 Which, when it sounds at best, but echoes right;
 Or blind affection, which doth ne'er advance
 The truth, but gropes, and urgeth all by chance;
 Or crafty malice might pretend this praise,
 And think to ruin where it seemed to raise.
 120 These are as some infamous bawd or whore
 Should praise a matron: what could hurt her more?
 But thou art proof against them, and indeed
 Above th'ill fortune of them, or the need.
 I therefore will begin. Soul of the age!
 125 The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!
 My Shakespeare, rise. I will not lodge thee by
 Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
 A little further to make thee a room.
 Thou art a monument without a tomb,
 130 And art alive still while thy book doth live
 And we have wits to read and praise to give.
 That I not mix thee so, my brain excuses:
 I mean with great but disproportioned muses.
 For if I thought my judgement were of years
 135 I should commit thee surely with thy peers,
 And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,
 Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.
 And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek,
 From thence to honour thee I would not seek
 140 For names, but call forth thund'ring Aeschylus,
 Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
 Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
 To life again, to hear thy buskin tread

55 bounden obliged 56 JOHN HEMINGE, HENRY CONDELL Shakespeare's fellow-actors in the King's Men: Heminge (1566–1630, so spelled here, but 'Hemings', 'Hemmings' or 'Heminges' elsewhere) appears to have acted as the company's business manager. Both he and CondeLL (1576–1627) were among the original sharers in the Lord Chamberlain's Men 58 but only just 67 six-penn'orth six old pence was the price of a small Quarto volume; the First Folio cost 16–20 shillings (20 shillings was one old pound), depending on the binding 70 jack mechanism 72 Blackfriars...Cockpit both indoor theatres; Shakespeare's company used the Blackfriars from 1608 onwards during the winter months; wealthy gallants could pay two shillings to sit on a stool at the side of the stage arraign interrogate/find fault with 74 quitted absolved, acquitted (i.e. popular acclaim on the stage has already judged the plays' success) 84 divers...conceived them perhaps an allusion to an unauthorized attempt to publish a collected Shakespeare in 1619, which seems to have inspired the King's Men to begin preparing their own edition 109 ample liberal, unsparing 111 muse poet, i.e. one inspired by a Muse (a classical goddess presiding over the arts) 112 suffrage common consent 114 silliest simplest, most artless light land or chance upon 120 bawd pander, go-between 126 My...room an allusion to William Basse or John Donne's elegy 'On Mr. Wm. Shakespeare', which circulated widely in manuscript before it was first published in 1633: 'Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh / To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lie / A little nearer Spenser, to make room / For Shakespeare in your threefold-fourfold tomb.' 127 Chaucer Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400), regarded as the father of English poetry Spenser Edmund Spenser (1552?–1599), author of the epic romance *The Faerie Queene*, regarded as the greatest Elizabethan poet Beaumont Francis Beaumont (1584–1616), playwright known for his collaborations with John Fletcher 133 disproportioned muses i.e. lesser poets 135 commit connect/consign 136 Lyly John Lyly (1554–1606), regarded as the best pre-Shakespearean writer of comedy 137 Kyd Thomas Kyd (1558–1594), renowned for his influential play *The Spanish Tragedy* Marlowe's mighty line Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), renowned for the brilliance and lofty rhetorical flourish of his pentameter lines in plays such as *Tamburlaine the Great*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Doctor Faustus* 138 small...Greek Shakespeare's grammar school education would have given him a good grounding in Latin, but little if any Greek; Jonson, by contrast, paraded his formidable learning (despite not having been to university) 140 Aeschylus...Sophocles the three great writers of ancient Greek tragedy 142 Pacuvius...dead Roman tragedians him of Cordova Seneca 143 buskin high, thick-soled boot worn by the actors in ancient Athenian tragedy

And shake a stage: or, when thy socks were on,
 145 Leave thee alone for the comparison
 Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome
 Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.
 Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show
 To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
 150 He was not of an age, but for all time!
 And all the muses still were in their prime
 When like Apollo he came forth to warm
 Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm!
 Nature herself was proud of his designs,
 155 And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines,
 Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
 As since she will vouchsafe no other wit.
 The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
 Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please,
 160 But antiquated and deserted lie
 As they were not of nature's family.
 Yet must I not give nature all: thy art,
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
 For though the poet's matter nature be,
 165 His art doth give the fashion, and that he
 Who casts to write a living line must sweat,
 Such as thine are, and strike the second heat
 Upon the muses' anvil, turn the same,
 And himself with it that he thinks to frame;
 170 Or for the laurel he may gain a scorn,
 For a good poet's made as well as born.
 And such wert thou. Look how the father's face
 Lives in his issue, even so the race
 Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines
 175 In his well-turned and true-filed lines,
 In each of which he seems to shake a lance,
 As brandished at the eyes of ignorance.
 Sweet swan of Avon! What a sight it were
 To see thee in our waters yet appear,
 180 And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
 That so did take Eliza and our James!
 But stay, I see thee in the hemisphere
 Advanced, and made a constellation there!
 Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage
 185 Or influence chide or cheer the drooping stage,
 Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourned like
 night
 And despairs day, but for thy volume's light.
 BEN JONSON

Upon the lines and life of the famous scenic poet,
 190 *Master William Shakespeare*

Those hands which you so clapped go now and wring,
 You Britons brave, for done are Shakespeare's days.

His days are done that made the dainty plays
 Which made the globe of heav'n and earth to ring.
 195 Dried is that vein, dried is the Thespian spring,
 Turned all to tears, and Phoebus clouds his rays.
 That corpse, that coffin now bestick those bays
 Which crowned him poet first, then poets' king.
 If tragedies might any prologue have,
 200 All those he made would scarce make one to this,
 Where fame, now that he gone is to the grave
 Death's public tiring-house the *nuntius* is.
 For though his line of life went soon about,
 The life yet of his lines shall never out.
 205 HUGH HOLLAND

To the memory of the deceased author Master W. Shakespeare

Shakespeare, at length thy pious fellows give
 The world thy works, thy works by which outlive
 210 Thy tomb thy name must; when that stone is rent,
 And time dissolves thy Stratford monument,
 Here we alive shall view thee still. This book,
 When brass and marble fade, shall make thee look
 Fresh to all ages. When posterity
 215 Shall loathe what's new, think all is prodigy
 That is not Shakespeare's; ev'ry line, each verse
 Here shall revive, redeem thee from thy hearse.
 Nor fire nor cank'ring age, as Naso said
 Of his, thy wit-fraught book shall once invade.
 220 Nor shall I e'er believe or think thee dead,
 Though missed, until our bankrupt stage be sped,
 Impossible, with some new strain t'outdo
 Passions of Juliet and her Romeo,
 Or till I hear a scene more nobly take
 225 Than when thy half-sword parleying Romans spake.
 Till these, till any of thy volume's rest
 Shall with more fire, more feeling be expressed,
 Be sure, our Shakespeare, thou canst never die,
 But crowned with laurel, live eternally.
 230 LEONARD DIGGES

To the memory of Master W. Shakespeare

We wondered, Shakespeare, that thou went'st so soon
 From the world's stage to the grave's tiring-room.
 235 We thought thee dead, but this thy printed worth
 Tells thy spectators that thou went'st but forth
 To enter with applause. An actor's art
 Can die, and live to act a second part.
 That's but an exit of mortality;
 240 This, a re-entrance to a plaudite.
 JAMES MABBE

144 *socks* the *soccus* or low shoe worn by comedians 149 *scenes* stages, theatres 152 *Apollo* Greek and Roman sun god, patron of music and poetry
 153 *Mercury* messenger of the gods 157 *vouchsafe* grant 158 *merry Greek* rascal, jester; applied here to the Greek writer of old comedy, *Aristophanes*
 (c.444–c.380 BC), considered *tart* since his satire was sharp and personal 159 *Terence, witty Plautus* (second century BC) stylish exponents of sophisticated and
 influential Roman new comedy 161 *As* as if 170 *laurel* its foliage signifies victory or distinction in poetry 176 *shake a lance* puns on Shakespeare's name
 178 *swan of Avon* the River Avon flows through Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon; swans were sacred to Apollo and there are many on the
 Avon 181 *Eliza* . . . *James* Queen Elizabeth I and her successor King James I 194 *globe* plays on the name of the Globe theatre 195 *Thespian* of Thespis, the
 traditional father of Greek tragedy (sixth century BC) 196 *Phoebus* Apollo as god of poetry, music and the sun 197 *bestick* adorn, bedeck 205 *HUGH HOLLAND*
 poet, fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge 215 *prodigy* abnormal, monstrous 218 *Nor* neither *Naso* the Roman poet Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC–AD
 18) 219 *wit-fraught* stored or supplied with wit, intelligence 221 *sped* provided, furnished 225 *half-sword parleying* debating at close quarters
 230 *LEONARD DIGGES* poet, member of University College, Oxford; his stepfather, Thomas Russell, was an overseer of Shakespeare's will 234 *tiring-room*
 dressing room (stage metaphor) 240 *plaudite* round of applause 241 *JAMES MABBE* ('I. M.' in First Folio), fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford

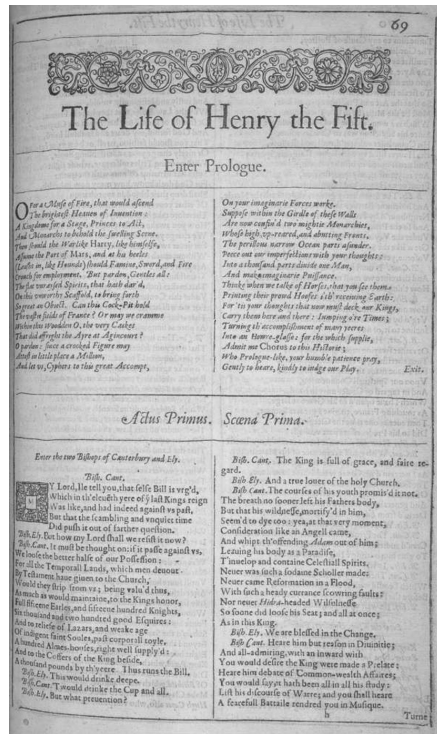
The Works of William Shakespeare, containing all his Comedies, Histories and Tragedies: truly set forth, according to their first ORIGINAL. The names of the principal actors in all these plays:

William Shakespeare
 Richard Burbage
 John Hemmings
 Augustine Phillips
 William Kempe
 Thomas Pope
 George Bryan
 Henry Condell
 William Sly
 Richard Cowley
 John Lowin
 Samuel Cross
 Alexander Cook

Samuel Gilburne
 Robert Armin
 William Ostler
 Nathan Field
 John Underwood
 Nicholas Tooley
 William Ecclestone
 Joseph Taylor
 Robert Benfield
 Robert Gough
 Richard Robinson
 John Shank
 John Rice

A CATALOGVE
 of the severall Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume.

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Catalogue of plays in the First Folio (Troilus and Cressida is missing; copy was only obtained at the last minute, after the preliminary pages were printed).

A page from the First Folio.

Burbage (1568–1619) leading tragedian and close friend of Shakespeare; an original sharer in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men Phillips (d.1605), original sharer and business manager, also jig writer Kempe (d.1603) leading comedian and dancer of the 1590s; left Shakespeare’s company in 1599; spelled ‘Kempt’ in Folio Pope (d.1603), sharer, with company by 1597 Bryan (d.1612), sharer, with company by 1596–97 Sly (1573–1608), sharer, with company by 1597 Cowley (1568–1619), sharer, with company by 1598 Lowin (1576–1653), sharer, joined company in 1603, later took over some of Burbage’s leading roles and Hemings’ managerial responsibility Cross (1568?–?) Cook (1583–1614), apprenticed to Hemings by 1597, later a sharer, played major female roles Gilburne (fl.1605) apprenticed to Phillips by 1597, played major female roles Armin (1568–1615) took over from Kempe; a more cerebral, less physical comedian, he sang and also wrote plays Ostler (d.1614), originally with a boy-company, joined King’s Men by 1610, married Hemings’ daughter Field (1587–c.1620), originally a boy-actor; also wrote plays; only joined the King’s Men after Shakespeare’s death Underwood (c.1588–1624) originally with a boy-company, joined King’s Men by 1608, became sharer Tooley (1583–1623) Burbage’s apprentice, played major female roles in 1590s, remained with King’s Men until his death Ecclestone (1591–1623), with company by 1610, possibly having been an apprentice in 1590s Taylor (1586–1652), sharer, took over some of Burbage’s leading roles and Hemings’ managerial responsibility Benfield (1583–1649) only joined King’s Men in 1615 Gough (d.1624) apprentice to Phillips or Pope, later a sharer, played female roles in 1590s Robinson (c.1595?–1648) Burbage’s apprentice, then adult with King’s Men (married his master’s widow) Shank (d.1636) joined King’s Men after 1616 Rice (fl.1607–30) with King’s Men by 1607

FOREWORD

Michael Boyd

Artistic Director, Royal Shakespeare Company

The endurance of Shakespeare depends not only on the felt experience of good, vivid theatre, but also on dynamic scholarship that reveals his living text. So we have pursued a long-held ambition: the creation of the first RSC Complete Works edition. Editing Shakespeare, like staging his plays, is a constantly evolving process. We're delighted to be working with Macmillan and Random House on this new edition with a team led by Jonathan Bate – one of the foremost Shakespeare scholars of his generation and a valued presence in the RSC rehearsal room. By way of a foreword I'd like simply to make a few recommendations on how to read this book:

Firstly, remember that you are reading scripts, blueprints for performance to a live audience and parts for actors to learn and embody. There's an extent to which you shouldn't 'read' this book at all, but rather speak the parts out loud. You need to imagine the use of space, time, pitch and rhythm, as well as the (sometimes) unspoken voice of the audience, that are all essential to the realization of what the scripts imply. They were not written as literature and should not be 'read' as such.

If you are relatively new to Shakespeare's work, don't be put off by any sense that his work might be difficult to appreciate. A surprisingly small part of that difficulty is due to the distance between Shakespeare's English and today's. The detailed glossary notes and your own best guesses can deal with that. Most of Shakespeare's 'difficulty' is the product of intelligence at play or the linguistic compression of passionate thought, be it erotic love or political rage. Sometimes difficulty is an important part of the narrative, with characters being deliberately misleading or obscure. They might be talking to each other or to the audience in code, but the clues are always there, and the puzzles are enjoyable and significant.

Trust the Folio-based text as being as close as we can get to the favoured draft of Shakespeare's original acting company. And trust the author. The best way to celebrate Shakespeare's extraordinary status as the world's favourite artist four hundred years after his death is to trust him to take you to places you had previously not imagined or understood. Many of these texts would probably have been heavily cut for public performance, but to cut or ignore those scenes or speeches which don't immediately make sense, without the author at your side, is perilous.

It's particularly tempting with a Complete Works edition to look for Shakespeare's 'essential' voice, to seek for consistency of tone and concept. It's also probably a big mistake. Indeed, one of the most essential secrets of Shakespeare's survival and brilliance as an artist is his utterly successful sublimation of himself into the constantly conflicting voices of his characters. Thus he avoided the stringent political censorship better than any of his contemporary rivals and thus he avoided stifling his living dramas with the authorial voice of an essayist. Don't try to decide what the plays are about. Let them be rowdy, lyrical, dirty and inconsistent in your head. Read Jack Cade's manifesto in *2 Henry VI* and Gonzalo's manifesto in *The Tempest* in another part of the book and enjoy the ride on Shakespeare's dangerous contradictions.

Lastly and most importantly – be inspired and not intimidated by the achievement of this great human artist.