

莎士比亚全集

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
COMPLETE WORKS

Jonathan Bate Eric Rasmussen 编

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS



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序

辜 正 坤

横亘于案的这一巨册《莎士比亚全集》可谓划时代的作品汇集。我所谓的“划时代”，非指莎士比亚作品本身的价值。在许多学者眼中，莎氏作品的价值不仅仅属于某个历史阶段，而是——用本·琼森的话来说——属于所有的时代。所以，我这里所谓的“划时代”是另有所指。我指的是这部由享誉世界的英国皇家莎士比亚剧团隆重推出的《莎士比亚全集》辉煌的辑注成就。毫无疑问，这部全集的编辑原则与撰注实绩，与前此所有林林总总的莎士比亚版本判然有别。它一举打破了延续 300 多年的传统莎士比亚著作辑注取向，开创了崭新的辑注、阐释原则与独特的审美趣味。它是莎士比亚著作在 21 世纪重树的一块丰碑，也同时昭示着躁动于国际莎学界的一场革命。要而言之，这部新版《莎士比亚全集》至少有如下几个特点，使之在众多的莎士比亚版本中独树一帜，领秀群芳。

一、1623 年版对开本重出江湖

皇家莎士比亚剧团(the Royal Shakespeare Company)推出的《莎士比亚全集》(*William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, 以下简称皇家版《莎士比亚全集》或《皇家版》)最大的特点，是重新确立了 1623 年第一对开本莎士比亚作品集的权威地位，使其成为新莎士比亚全集剧文的权威依据。在粗心的读者看来，彰扬这个特点似乎是在夸大其词，因为前此的一切莎士比亚作品集或作品全集也绝非不重视第一对开本。那么，皇家版《莎士比亚全集》在处理第一对开本的态度和方法上是否与前此的莎士比亚编撰家们迥然有别呢？答案是肯定的。为此，有必要简述数百年来莎士比亚专家在辑撰莎士比亚作品时处理第一对开本及其他四开本莎士比亚著作的方式。皇家版《莎士比亚全集》的主编乔纳森·贝特(Jonathan Bate)先生在全集导言里对此有绝妙的追溯，我这里只是用中文简单地转述一下他的观点，以使中国读者明白 1623 年版第一对开本与后来的所有其他版本在价值上的根本区别。

贝特先生批评的矛头首先指向 18 世纪初的诗人和剧作家尼古拉斯·罗伊(Nicholas Rowe)。罗伊注意到哈姆雷特最后的一大段独白只见于早期的一个四开本，却不见于第一对开本，便自作主张地将两个版本的文本拼合起来，产生了一个合成本《哈姆雷特》，并希望这个本子代表莎士比亚的原本。但现代莎士比亚版本目录学家的研究证明，早期不同的《哈姆雷特》文本，和戏剧演出的舞台历史相关，代表了该剧在不同演出时期的面目。所以罗伊的合并本绝非莎士比亚的原作。

贝特先生认为，罗伊的拼合法为后世的许多莎士比亚剧本辑撰者所仿效，例如蒲柏(Alexander Pope)即进而使用所谓“取精融汇法”(pick-and-mix)，把许多四开本和对

开本剧文混为一体，许多学者却以为这是处理莎士比亚版本问题的绝妙法门。此法于是为后世莎士比亚版本领域各家所宗，200余年，竟无人质疑。

贝特先生特别提到1986年牛津版《莎士比亚全集》开始对早期文本进行单独处理，即承认《哈姆雷特》和《李尔王》的不同文本都具有独立价值。但他同时指出，牛津版在处理不同文本时依然缺乏统一的准则，例如它使用了对开本的《亨利六世》剧文，但是其标题则又取自四开本。由此而来的必然结论是：此前的一切莎士比亚版本都是有缺陷的。其缺陷最主要的根源，即滥用所谓“取精融汇法”将多个版本进行随意拼凑，而始作俑者，则为罗伊。300多年来，谬种流传，殊令人慨叹！

贝特先生进一步指出，如果说莎士比亚早期各种不同版本的剧文都各具独立价值，那么第一对开本毫无疑问是其中最重要的版本。但是由于上述原因，这个版本居然300多年来从未被单独进行过辑注处理，例如对其进行系统的勘误、将其拼写和标点现代化等。当然，1632年、1663年和1685年这三个重印对开本中亦不乏纠误和现代化处理之处，但是其总体成就微不足道。许多莎士比亚著作的编辑们往往以四开本为据，同时吸收来自对开本的舞台提示语等。换句话说，对开本的独立价值并没有得到充分的重视，它只是被当作一个重要或较重要的参照物。相比之下，四开本，尤其是所谓“善本”四开本却受到更多的青睐。

贝特先生和拉斯马森(Eric Rasmussen)先生共同主编的这部皇家版《莎士比亚全集》采取了截然不同的做法：它坚定地维护对开本的固有完整性、真实性和权威性，竭尽全力恢复对开本的本来面目。当然，有一点必须指出，他们虽然始终把第一对开本作为基础辑撰对象，但是在具体甄别剧文时，也并不完全排斥其他四开本的参考作用。实际上，当发现对开本中明显的错误（尤其是印刷错误）时，他们也据四开本来进行纠正。换句话说，在某些特定的方面，他们也注意吸收四开本之长。此外，这个本子力求保持剧文真实性的同时也力求使之具有当代性，例如对拼写、标点等加以现代化，以便使莎士比亚总是活生生的莎士比亚。

简而言之，如果说前此的莎士比亚学者侧重以所谓“善本”四开本为权威，同时参考第一对开本等来进行所谓莎剧真本的甄别、校正、注释、评论的话，贝特先生和拉斯马森先生的做法则刚好相反。他们重新确立了1623年第一对开本莎士比亚作品集的权威地位，并以之作为新莎士比亚全集剧文的权威依据，而其他版本，例如善本或劣本四开本等，则主要作为参考本。这无疑颠覆了延续300多年的传统编辑原则，在莎士比亚著作辑撰工作或者说莎士比亚版本研究工作方面开拓出了一片新天地。

二、用于演出的脚本与用于出版的文学剧本其艺术价值各有所宗

文字剧本只是一维性表达，戏剧演出却是多维的立体性全方位表达。研究过电影艺术的学者就知道发表在刊物上的电影文学剧本与拍电影时导演手中的电影脚本有很大的区别。当然，莎士比亚时代正式发表的戏剧文本和供演出用的脚本之间没有这么大的差异，但是，二者之间存在着明显的区别却是毋庸置疑的。我们万万不能忘记，莎士比

亚在成为剧作家之前，首先是一个演员。演员眼中的剧本和普通读者眼中的剧本是很不一样的。普通读者阅读一个剧本的时候，比较留心剧中的情节和剧本本身的文学色彩。而演员看着剧文，却要能够立刻在大脑中将之呈现为舞台上活生生的行动、声音、表情等等。换句话说，演员（包括导演和有演出经验的剧作家）具有比普通读者强得多的**舞台呈象能力**。正如贝特先生所指出的，“莎士比亚最初写的剧本是用于排练演出的脚本，而不是用于出版的精雕细刻的文学作品”。不用说，用于“排练演出的脚本”比之“用于出版的文学作品”必定有更多附属于舞台条件的因素。而正是这些因素势所必然地构成了“排练演出的脚本”的独特性。这种独特性也是一种艺术性，只不过它的艺术性主要借助于舞台条件和舞台空间来完成。“用于出版的文学作品”则可以相对独立于舞台条件，它的艺术性主要借助于读者大脑的想象空间来完成。读者不必受制于舞台条件，他以自己想象的现实生活空间来对剧情加以呈象。从这个意义上来说，普通读者使用的不是舞台呈象能力，而是**现实生活呈象能力**。那么剧作家、演员、导演等有没有现实生活呈象能力呢？当然也有，而且由于创作的需要，他们还必须比一般读者拥有更强的现实生活呈象能力。因此，剧作家、演员、导演既有舞台呈象能力，也有现实生活呈象能力。他们创造出的艺术世界既要与**现实生活想象空间**吻合，也要与**舞台表现空间**契合。后者正是剧院所使用剧本的独特价值，而1623年版第一对开本中收集的剧本恰恰就是这样的剧本。这个特点300多年来却为莎学界的诸多学者有意或无意地忽略了。

三、莎士比亚剧本回归剧院老家

与无以数计的莎士比亚版本相比较，皇家版《莎士比亚全集》的价值还在于它是在权威的皇家莎士比亚剧团的支持下来进行编辑、注释的。它的主编之一贝特先生本人就是一位常常出现在剧团排演间的莎士比亚专家，因此，他很容易从戏剧演出这个视角来思考和辑注莎士比亚，从而发现传统莎士比亚辑撰者们的疏漏。贝特先生在《莎士比亚全集》导言中说：“在某种情形下，四开本可能比较接近莎士比亚的原作手稿，而第一对开本则可能比较接近于这些剧本在莎士比亚剧院演出的实际情形。”这个判断是很精到的。贝特先生认为，作为单行本的四开本开本较小，而对开本开本幅面大，所以有理由推论，对开本可能是用来保存原有演出剧本的形式，而不是原本书写下来的形式。也正是出于这种艺术考量，皇家莎士比亚剧团对经过仔细辑校的第一对开本情有独钟！在这样的情况下，闻名遐迩的1623年版莎士比亚可谓结束了300多年的文学性阅读剧本身份，终于在21世纪初实至名归地以戏剧演出本的身份走向诞生它的剧院老家。从一定的角度来看，这似乎标示着莎士比亚戏剧审美过程中的一个转折：经典剧本向剧院回归，而不是仅仅作为书斋学者进行繁琐考据与精妙阐释的对象。这种转折之意义的深远程度还需要进一步观察。但是，这至少是一个令人振奋的开端，因为它开创或者毋宁说恢复了一种赋予剧院以剧本仲裁者角色的传统。在这一传统中，演出目的、效果、条件等诸因素，成为剧本生发衍变的互动要素。当然，对剧院派剧本的重新定位不应该排除书斋式剧本存在的理由。文人墨客仍然可以利用已有的版本在想象的空间里使剧本在文

学性质的其他可发挥层面上得到更丰富的展现，满足人们别样的审美需求，从而使脱离舞台的文学剧本也能够完成自己独特的文学审美使命与功能。换句话说，剧院里的剧本和书斋里的剧本各有千秋，互动互补互彰。

四、释义贵精，详略适当

对于一般读者、尤其是中国读者而言，莎士比亚版本的注释是一个关键部分。没有理由要求普通中国读者对英国早期现代英语的了解达到英美读者那样的程度。恰恰相反，中国读者对那个时期的英语通常是陌生的。因此，适当的注解对中国读者而言变得至关重要。《新集注本》和《阿登版莎士比亚》的注释详尽，资料极丰富，确实是莎士比亚版本界的骄傲。但是大有大的难处，例如有的地方释义过分繁琐，文献过分累赘。作为学者型版本，这些也许不可或缺，但是庞大的规模不易普及，同时也缺乏市场效应。牛津版和剑桥版莎士比亚倒有普及版的功能，但是也如贝特先生所指出的，在编辑方针上，它们依然未完全跳出传统藩篱，把第一对开本和其他的四开本混在一起处理的地方时有所见。《河畔版莎士比亚》（以下简称《河畔版》）亦有同样的长处，同时亦未免同样的弊端。鉴于《河畔版》在中国英语界使用得比较广泛，现特就文本、注释等相关层面，将《皇家版》与之作简单比较，以见出二者各自的特点与优劣。

仅以《哈姆雷特》一剧第一幕第一场为例。两个剧本都有相关的剧情介绍、背景知识与评论。导论文字长度也相当，各占 16 开 6 页左右篇幅，差异不大。差异较大的是注释。两个版本均用脚注方式，黑体字注明要注释的词条。以黑体字为条目计算，《河畔版》共有注释 80 条，《皇家版》共有注释 98 条。《皇家版》比《河畔版》的注释多出 18 条。抽样看了其他幕、场的注释，情况与此相似。总的说来，《皇家版》注释要更仔细一点，注释条目也明显多于《河畔版》。对于普通读者、尤其是中国读者来说，《皇家版》的注释量比较适中，剧中凡是费解的地方，几乎都给了注解。相比之下，《河畔版》则略掉了一些可能有必要注释的地方。下试举数例以证此说。

如皇家版《哈姆雷特》第一幕第一场第 29 行（记为 L29，下同）有注释两处，即对 touching 和 by 加了注释（黑体字是词条原文，后面的白体字是注释内容，下同）：**Touching** concerning; **of** by。但是《河畔版》却对这两个词都没有注释。一般读者、至少中国普通英语读者，是不大知道 touching 可作 concerning 解的。of 可作 by 解，对许多英美读者虽然不是太陌生，但是对于中国英语读者来说，也是难处。所以省略这两处注释势必为中国英语读者理解原文造成障碍。又如紧跟着的 L30: I entreated him along 句中 along 的用法，《皇家版》注：**along** to come along。注中增补了不定式动词 to come，读者自然对这种用法一目了然。《河畔版》未加注，显然有碍理解。再如紧接着的 L31 中的 watch 一词，《河畔版》未加注解，《皇家版》则注为：**watch** remain awake during / keep guard through。这一注释指明 watch 非一般的“观看，观察”，还含有“细心守望”之意，故《皇家版》的注释是颇周到的，尤其对中国英语读者而言。下面紧接着还有许多类似情况，这里限于篇幅，只顺次列出《皇家版》第 36 至 43 行中的注释，

略加解说，以资比较：

L36: **assail** attack.《河畔版》对 **assail** 一词未加注，对英美读者而言，也许可以省掉，因这两个词同义。但是对中国读者而言却是适当的，因为 **assail** 比 **attack** 更生僻一些。

L41: **last night of all this very night past**. 其中 **of all** 这种搭配，现代读者一般相当陌生。《河畔版》对此未加注，显然不妥。

L42: **yond yonder, that**. 其中的 **yond** 用法颇旧。《河畔版》未加注，不妥。

L43: **t'illum** to illuminate. 特殊缀合用法和特殊动词用法。《河畔版》未加注，不妥。

L43: **his**. 此词《皇家版》未加注。《河畔版》注: **his** its (the commonest form of the neuter possessive singular in Shakespeare's day). 此是《河畔版》迄今为止略优于《皇家版》处。

有的注释，《皇家版》和《河畔版》都加了注释，但是注释的质量是有区别的。例如同一个地方的两条注释：

L33: **approve** corroborate the reliability of.《河畔版》注而未详: **approve** corroborate.《皇家版》加上 the reliability of 之后，置换进原文 He may approve our eyes, 则成: He may corroborate the reliability of our eyes, 在搭配上明显更贴切。此条注释《阿登版莎士比亚全集》注为: **approve our eyes** confirm or corroborate what we saw 也优于《河畔版》，但仍不及《皇家版》更贴切。

L42: **pole pole star** (i.e. North Star).《河畔版》注而未详: **pole pole star**.《皇家版》加上了 (i.e. North Star), 释义更到位，更完整。

注释问题牵涉许多方面，《河畔版》出版在前，经多方采用，其长处不可掩盖。但就上述随机所选注释条目情况而言，《皇家版》在注释方面确实下过很大的功夫，在总体上无疑超过了《河畔版》。对于目前中国英语界来说，《皇家版》对莎士比亚著作许多词义的注释释义精审，详略得当，中国读者通过这个版本的注释部分，完全能够较好地理解莎士比亚的原文，所以这是颇具实用性的莎士比亚注释本，很值得赞扬，也很值得向中国读书界和出版界推荐。

五、对中国广大英语读书界而言确为上选的莎士比亚版本

每一个伟大民族都有一些本真的、可代代相传的辉煌的文化积淀。对于英格兰民族而言，莎士比亚是这种文化积淀的代表。阅读莎士比亚就是在阅读一个伟大民族的灵魂。

伟大的文化积淀最终都会突破时空藩篱而融入世界文化遗产的宝库，成为世界各民族集体的精神财富。

莎士比亚作品即这样的财富。它历经 400 年而长盛不衰，且日益焕发出艺术魅力，这可说是突破了时间的藩篱；它被译成无数的语言，远播天涯海角，风靡世界各国，这可说是突破了空间的障碍。

中国人接受莎士比亚已经有百年历史，不胜枚举的莎士比亚译本总是在中国的图书市场上受到青睐，标志着华夏民族对远在西方的文化巨人的景仰与爱戴。近 30 年

来，随着当代中国波澜壮阔的外语学习、尤其是英语学习浪潮的掀起，相当多的中国读者已经可以不仅借助译本、而且经由英文原著来学习和欣赏莎士比亚。这一现象潜藏着深刻的文化含义。对此，我在不久前为推荐引入《阿登版莎士比亚》（*The Arden Shakespeare*）的一篇文章中曾加以阐述：“中国正在成为一个英语图书大市场。毋庸说，这一现象理所当然地应该引起中国英语界学者的警醒：大市场需要正确的引导，确保它不被随之而来的英语垃圾文化所淹没。而中国出版界的同仁尤其应该在引入外版书方面尽可能披沙检金、将西方的最有价值的原版书送到中国读者手上。”以莎士比亚各种版本而言，不胜枚举，目前已经达到 1300 余种！因此在引入我国时，应该尽可能择善而从，使少数真正优秀的版本得到优先考虑。经过仔细比较，我以为外语教学与研究出版社引进的皇家版《莎士比亚全集》（英国麦克米伦公司 2007 年出版）正是这类“最有价值的原版书”的代表。

总而言之，皇家版《莎士比亚全集》在莎士比亚著作的编辑原则方面能够跳出 300 多年来的窠臼，横空出世，别树大旗，在当今莎学界可谓异军突起，独步莎坛。其识见幽明，能烛照先贤疏漏，其注释精审，多兼采百家之长。倘莎氏地下有知，亦当颌首示谢。中国读者沾溉于当今世界繁荣兴旺的出版业，一俟皇家版《莎士比亚全集》长编付梓，即可来年诵读于中华，实为幸中之幸。今奉命为序，恭疏短引，实指望来哲方家，相与赏此佳编，共成莎学界一段佳话。

是为序。

2008 年 9 月 20 日草于北京大学世界文学研究所

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.

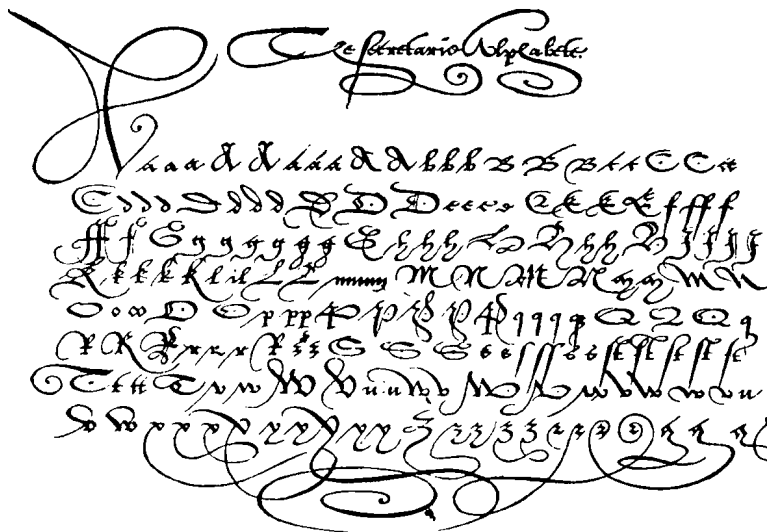
Héloïse Sénéchal was chief commentary editor, researching and writing the explanatory notes for about half the plays herself and revising the initial work on the other half, which was undertaken by Eleanor Lowe, Jan Sewell, Charlotte Scott, Esme Miskimmin, Penelope Freedman, Christopher Campbell, Takashi 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 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 conflations 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



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.

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 (see Plates), as part of a festival in which Shakespeare's complete works were staged in the course of a year. *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'.

