THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

SHAKESPEARE ON STAGE

Edited by Stanley Wells
and Sarah Stanton

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STANLEY WELLS

Chairman, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

and

SARAH STANTON

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PREFACE

This *Companion* is designed for readers interested in past and present productions of the plays and to accompany the increasing number of courses devoted to the history of Shakespeare in performance. It joins other volumes in the series, developing one key aspect of the *Companion to Shakespeare* (edited by Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells) and complementing the *Companion to Shakespeare on Film* (edited by Russell Jackson).

The book addresses both British and international performance. While coverage cannot hope to be exhaustive, the first six chapters describe aspects of the British performing tradition in chronological sequence, from the early stagings of Shakespeare's own time, through the Restoration and eighteenth century, the Romantic and Victorian periods, bringing the reader up to the present via developments in the twentieth century. But this is by no means a uniform narrative: authors have been chosen for their expertise in a particular period; each has related Shakespearean developments to broader cultural concerns and, where relevant, to developments outside the UK; each has adopted an individual approach and focus, be it on textual adaptation, acting, stages, scenery or theatre management.

Following the chronological chapters is a sequence of three which explore aspects of tragic and comic acting and the subject of women performers of Shakespearean roles. The latter part of the book considers international performance, beginning with a chapter on the issue of interculturalism, appropriation and the translation of Shakespeare's plays into other languages. This is followed by an account of the phenomenon of national and international touring companies from Elizabethan times to the present. Geographical coverage of performance outside Britain is necessarily selective, but focuses on those countries or regions that have a continuous and/or highly distinctive history of performing Shakespeare, sometimes developing styles which have themselves fed back into the English idiom. Productions of Shakespeare in Germany, Eastern Europe and South Africa offer examples of the adaptation of Shakespeare plays to political ends; chapters on North American, Asian

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and African stagings provide distinct accounts of how Shakespeare has been assimilated into vastly different cultural and national traditions.

Throughout the book we have interpreted 'Shakespeare on stage' to mean spoken performances of the plays rather than operas or musicals, though the distinction becomes blurred at times, especially in the sections on Asian and African performance.

At the end of the book is an amalgamated list of items for further reading. This begins with references to books in the general area of Shakespearean stage history and proceeds to a set of miniature bibliographies arranged according to the chapter titles.

Quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from volumes in the New Cambridge Shakespeare, where published, and from the Oxford *Complete Works* in other cases.

The selection of pictures is intended truly to illustrate and not merely to decorate the points being made in the text. In this respect, our thanks go to the sources listed for their permission to reproduce items from their collections, and especially to Michael Morrison, whose generous provision of prints from his own collection has enabled us to double the quantity we would otherwise have afforded.

Publishing a book, like staging a play, is a team effort and we have been fortunate in our collaborators. The contributors to this volume have been an inspiration. We have also had invaluable help from Hilary Hammond (copyeditor), Juliet Stanton (proofreader) and Kate Welch (indexer). Our Press editor, Vicki Cooper, has supported us throughout with enthusiasm, tact and tolerance. Both of us, in different ways, have been involved with CUP over many years and colleagues there have, as always, been a pleasure to work with.

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1

GARY TAYLOR

Shakespeare plays on Renaissance stages

The business of playing

Shakespeare's plays were born on stage. They might have been conceived 'In the quick forge and working-house of thought', but for Shakespeare that house where you should 'Work, work, your thoughts' was itself a playhouse (*Henry V* 5.0.23, 3.0.25). Shakespeare did his thinking in theatres. 'My muse labours', Shakespeare wrote, 'and thus she is delivered', Iago says, enacting thought, the actor delivering his line as the character delivers his rhyme (*Othello* 2.1.126–7). What the muse conceives is not properly born until it cries out, giving voice to what had before been only 'bare imagination' (*Richard II* 1.3.296). So it should not surprise us that Shakespeare imagined being 'born' as an entrance onto 'this great stage' (*Tragedy of King Lear* 4.5.175). That metaphor depended, in part, upon the Latin motto of the Globe Theatre, '*Totus mundus agit histrionem*' (translated in *As You Like It* as 'All the world's a stage'). But it also reflected Shakespeare's own frequent association of the womb that delivers newborn babes with the theatre that delivers newborn plays. He compares the walls of a circular amphitheatre to a 'girdle', encompassing a 'pit' that is also an 'O' (*Henry V* Pro. 19, 11, 13); he imagines a 'concave womb' echoing with words (*Lover's Complaint* 1), and asserts that a 'hollow womb resounds' (*Venus* 268), as though a uterus were a resonating auditorium. Such associations subordinate female anatomy to the emotional and professional experience of a male actor and playwright. That is why, when the Princess of France anticipates the projected show of Nine Worthies, she says that 'great things labouring perish in their birth' (*Love's Labour's Lost* 5.2.517): she equates performance with parturition. So does Shakespeare.

Consequently, we mislead ourselves if we imagine a play moving *from* text *to* stage, as though textuality and theatricality were separate entities, or as though one evolved into the other. For Shakespeare, a play began life in the theatre. Often enough, the stage itself inspired composition of the text.

A character like Pistol, sampling from old plays, literally embodies memories of treasured theatrical performances; at the same time, he probably parodies the vocal and physical style of the first great English actor, Edward Alleyn. *The Merchant of Venice* – which also went by the now less familiar title '*The Jew of Venice*' – remembers and rewrites *The Jew of Malta*, for years one of the most popular plays in the repertory of a rival company, led by Alleyn; Shakespeare's familiarity with Christopher Marlowe's play can only have come from performances, because it was not printed until 1633. Likewise, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* responds to Henry Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, a recent hit play performed by the same rival company, and not available in print at the time. Many of Shakespeare's histories, not to mention *Hamlet*, rewrite successful plays of the 1580s. His final comedies, from *All's Well That Ends Well* to *The Tempest*, self-consciously reject the innovative genres of city comedy perfected by Thomas Middleton and John Marston in plays for the Jacobean children's companies; Shakespeare and his aging fellow-actors instead mined nostalgia, resurrecting and reshaping Elizabethan dramatic romances.

Shakespeare, as these examples suggest, was writing not only for himself but for a particular acting company, and against their chief commercial rivals. The Chamberlain's Men – in 1603 rechristened the King's Men – was a joint-stock company, co-owned by its chief actors who, like modern stockholders, received proportionate shares of its profits. From 1594 until his retirement in 1613, Shakespeare worked, as actor and playwright, with the company that he part-owned; in 1599 he also became a shareholder in that company's open-air suburban amphitheatre, the Globe; in 1608, he became a shareholder in their indoor theatre at Blackfriars. In writing plays Shakespeare was deeply invested, emotionally and financially, in the success of that company.

Unfortunately, we have no record of that company's day-to-day procedures, no financial accounts or personal memoirs. Nevertheless, a lot of circumstantial evidence suggests that its operations resembled those of other companies. For instance, Philip Henslowe, the entrepreneur personally and financially associated with Edward Alleyn and the Admiral's Men, regularly recorded advance payments to playwrights. The playwright presented to the acting company a 'plot', or scene-by-scene scenario of a prospective play; if the company approved, they would offer the playwright a down payment, and might make subsequent part payments as he completed parts of the play. Such a routine gave the acting company a voice in the evolution of each script, almost from its outset. Every play was conceived and executed as a corporate capital venture. That was as true of Shakespeare's plays for the Chamberlain's Men, as of Thomas Dekker's plays for the Admiral's Men. But every play also depended upon, and reinforced, a network of personal relationships; in Shakespeare's case some of those relationships were mutually rewarding enough to last decades. In choosing which plays to write, or when to write them, or what kinds of roles to put into them, he must have taken some account of the attitudes and aptitudes of his fellow-sharers.

Playwrighting in these circumstances was an intrinsically social process. Considerably more than half of the known plays of the period were written by more than one playwright. The business of playwrighting often resembled the apprentice–master relationship that structured London trades (and the training of boy actors by an adult veteran). Thus, early in his career Shakespeare apparently collaborated with Thomas Nashe and others in writing *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*, and with George Peele in writing *Titus Andronicus*; *Edward the Third* may also be an early collaboration. For a decade after the formation of the Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare – perhaps stung by Robert Greene's bitter attack on him, in 1592, as a thief of better men's talent – chose not to team up with other playwrights. But in 1605 he began collaborating again, first with Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, then with George Wilkins on *Pericles*, finally with John Fletcher on *Henry VIII* (or *All is True*), *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the lost *Cardenio*. In each case the middle-aged Shakespeare teamed up with a young man who had already successfully captured the new public mood. Such partnerships not only paired individuals; they created a dialogue across generations and theatrical fashions.

To say that early modern plays were masterpieces written by committees would be an exaggeration, but the exaggeration came close enough to the truth that Ben Jonson felt the need to insist rebelliously upon individuality and independence. Shakespeare, by contrast, was a company man. The earliest editions of his plays specified the company that performed them, but no author; not until 1598, with the quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost*, did his name reach the title page. After 1598, plays continued to appear with the company's name, but not his (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1599; *Henry V*, 1600), and the 1623 collection of his *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* was prefaced and dedicated and probably edited by two of his old colleagues, fellow-shareholders in the Chamberlain's/King's Men. Even when he was not teamed with another author, Shakespeare was always writing for and with a specific company of actors, and what we call 'his' plays were at the time often considered 'theirs', or both 'his' and 'theirs'. After all, Shakespeare was, in the technical terminology of the period, a 'sharer', the part-owner of a collaborative enterprise; 'Property was thus appalled' by a creative corporation of 'Two distincts, division none' (*Phoenix and Turtle* 37, 27).

The earliest texts of his plays are, accordingly, frustrating documents; reading them is like overhearing someone carrying on an argument with himself, half-vocalised, or listening to one half of a telephone conversation, or trying to follow the elliptical dialogue of twins. Unlike Jonson's plays, or some of Middleton's, Shakespeare's were not printed from manuscripts prepared for the convenience of that consortium of readers called 'the general public'; instead, they were written to be read by a particular group of actors, his professional colleagues and personal friends. He could rely on those readers to bring to their reading much specialist knowledge about theatrical conditions and working practices, and the circumstances of the specific company to which they and he belonged. The written text of any such manuscript thus depended upon an unwritten paratext, which always accompanied it; an in*visible life-support system of stage directions, which* Shakespeare *could* either expect his first readers to supply, or which those first readers would expect Shakespeare himself to supply orally. For instance, not a single sixteenth- or seventeenth-century printed text of a Shakespeare play indicates every necessary exit; indeed, even the surviving manuscript promptbooks for the King's Men do not indicate every necessary exit, or the costumes worn by most of the characters. Sometimes the texts do not specify who sings a song, or which song they sing.

Actors who enter must exit, every actor must wear (or not wear) something, every word sung on stage must be sung by someone, and every singer must have words to sing. Exits and costumes and speech attributions and song texts are necessary elements of even the most minimal performance script. Shakespeare's texts, nevertheless, uniformly fail to supply such minimal information. Why? Because Shakespeare expected his fellow-actors to fill in those obvious blanks. That is, he expected parts of the minimal performance script to be 'written' by the actors with whom he was collaborating.

Casting and doubling

Because Shakespeare expected his words to be spoken by actors and heard by audiences, each text is a score for lost voices. He composed roles for the tone and range of the particular human instruments who would perform them. Richard Burbage (like Edward Alleyn) had an exceptionally capacious memory, which meant that playwrights could write for him some taxingly long parts, longer than any parts written for any European actor before 1590: Burbage certainly played Richard III, Hamlet, and Othello (as well as Marston's Malevole and Jonson's Mosca), and probably also first embodied Henry V, Duke Vincentio, and Antony (as well as Middleton's Vindice). These parts not only give a single character thousands of words to speak; they also demand, and enable, an exceptional variety of emotional and vocal display. Burbage was the company's leading actor, and stayed with it even after Shakespeare retired; by contrast, the company's first clown, Will Kemp, left in 1598, to be replaced by Robert Armin. Shakespeare's clowning changed to suit the more intellectual and musical gifts of the new resident comedian. Likewise, as Burbage aged, Shakespeare's leading characters got older: much is made of the age gap between the young Desdemona and the aging Othello, grey-haired Antony is contrasted with the young Octavius, Lear is 'fourscore and upward' (*King Lear* 4.6.58). The only long role for a conspicuously young protagonist in Shakespeare's late plays is Coriolanus, but that might have been played by the rising star John Lowin, who is known on other occasions to have played soldiers. Certainly, when Lowin joined the company, the King's Men began to perform plays which contained not one but two long and complex parts, of a kind hitherto limited to Burbage. The combination of Burbage and Lowin made possible a sustained binary opposition of two strong characters, which in turn shaped the structure of Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), Jonson's *Volpone* (1606), and Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610).

More generally, Shakespeare and every other professional playwright designed their scripts to suit a certain size and shape of acting company. In the 1580s and early 1590s, when the Queen's Men set a standard their competitors felt they had to match, Shakespeare was not alone in writing plays that – even allowing for doubling – require exceptionally large casts (all three plays on Henry the Sixth, *Titus Andronicus*). But after the break-up and reorganisation of companies caused by the severe outbreak of plague and subsequent long closure of the London theatres in 1592–3, playwrights began composing for leaner troupes: Shakespeare's later history plays consistently require fewer actors than the early ones.

In plotting and writing all his plays, early and late, Shakespeare would have assumed that some actors would play more than one role. As Costard announces in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the traditional 'Nine Worthies' will become, in their performance, 'three Worthies', because 'everyone pursents three' (5.2.486–8): each actor plays three parts. Likewise, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom, having already been given the role of Pyramus, suggests 'let me play Thisbe *too*', and 'Let me play the lion *too*' (1.2.42, 57; my italics): of course this histrionic self-aggrandisement amusingly characterises Bottom, but it also draws upon a widespread sixteenth-century tradition of character-doubling. From the evidence of surviving cast lists and theatrical documents from the 1580s to the 1630s, in the professional London companies actors playing the lead parts in a play did not (normally) double, and those playing young female characters did not (normally) play adult male characters too; most of the doubling (normally) involved adult male or female secondary characters, with relatively few lines. These casting practices probably

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