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Shakespeare & the Eighteenth Century

MICHAEL CAINES

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GENERAL EDITORS: PETER HOLLAND AND STANLEY WELLS

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Garrick. Ye ministers of Drury Lane defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health, or poet damned,
Bring with thee laurel-wreath, or catcalls shrill,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in so theatrical a shape,
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee SHAKESPEARE,
Warwickshire lad, sweet *Willy-o!* – O answer me:
Let me not burst in ignorance!

...

Ghost. I am Shakespeare's ghost,
For my foul sins, done in my days of nature,
Doomed for a certain term to leave my works
Obscure and uncorrected; to endure
The ignorance of players; the barbarous hand
Of Gothic editors; the ponderous weight
Of leaden commentator; fast confined
In critic fires, till errors, not my own,
Are done away, and sorely I the while
Wished I had blotted for myself before:
But that I am forbid to tell the pangs,
Which genius feels from ev'ry blockhead's pen,
I could a tale unfold....

Arthur Murphy, 'Hamlet, with Alterations; a Tragedy in Three Acts', from *The Life of Arthur Murphy, Esq.* by Jesse Foot (London: J. Faulder, 1811), 268, 270.

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If it has any merit in it at all, it is thanks to them. Its shortcomings are certainly all mine.

A Note on Texts and Abbreviations

Most references to the text of Shakespeare's plays in this book are to eighteenth-century editions. All other references to Shakespeare are to *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, second edition 2005). Quotations have been modernized unless the argument requires the old spelling.

The following abbreviations are used in the endnotes:

Bate	Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730–1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)
BD	Philip H. Highfill, Jr., et al., eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973–93)
De Grazia	Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)
Dobson	Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)
ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue
Garrick, Letters	David M. Little and George M. Kahrl, eds., *The Letters of David Garrick*, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963)
Garrick, Plays	Harry William Pedicord and Fredrick Louis Bergmann, eds., *The Plays of David Garrick*, 7 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980–2)

Hume, 'Bard'	Robert D. Hume, *'Before the Bard: "Shakespeare" in Early Eighteenth-Century London', English Literary History*, vol. 64 no. 1 (Spring 1997)
Jarvis	Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearian Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725–1765* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)
Johnson	Samuel Johnson, ed., *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: J. and R. Tonson et al., 1765)
LS	William van Lennep et al., eds., *The London Stage, 1660–1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period*, 11 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960–8)
Malone	Edmond Malone, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, 10 vols. (London: J. Rivington et al., 1790)
ODNB	*The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
Pope	Alexander Pope, ed., *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, 6 vols. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1725)
Rowe	Nicholas Rowe, ed., *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, 6 vols. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709)
Seary	Peter Seary, *Lewis Theobald and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)
Taylor	Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: Grove Press, 1989)
Theobald	Lewis Theobald, ed., *The Works of Shakespeare*, 7 vols. (London: J. Tonson et al., 1733)
Vickers	Brian Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974–81)

Introduction

The eighteenth century, at least as far as two female friends were concerned, began with Caliban on the throne. The evidence for this curious situation may be found in the coded correspondence of a certain 'Mrs Morley' and 'Mrs Freeman', dating from the 1690s, and in the subsequently published histories of the real women behind these aliases—namely, Princess Anne, Caliban's heir, and Sarah Churchill, Lady Marlborough.

At the time, Lady Marlborough was Anne's closest friend and political confidante. She was also her social inferior; and adopting the plain *noms de plume* 'Morley' and 'Freeman' provided the two women with a means for corresponding as equals. But theirs was not an intimacy of which William III, Anne's Dutch brother-in-law, and Mary II, his wife and her sister, could approve.

During the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which had brought William and Mary to the throne of England, Scotland, and Ireland, Lady Marlborough's soldier husband John Churchill, Lord Marlborough, had defected from the side of Anne and Mary's father, James II, to join with William. But England's new rulers had since come to suspect Marlborough of plotting with their enemies on the Continent—the overthrown James and his great ally, Louis XIV of France—and working to turn the Army against the newly crowned co-regents. The Marlboroughs found themselves banned from Court, while further steps were taken to limit their political influence.

Anne obstinately refused to give up her association with Lady Marlborough. Under intense pressure to break with her friend, Mrs Morley told Mrs Freeman that she was determined to 'keep her in spite of their teeth and . . . by the Grace of God I will go to the utmost verge of the earth rather than live with such Calibans'.[1]

'Calibans'? Was the Court an isle full of noises?

As old resentments, partly caused by William's difficult manner and coolness towards all but a small inner circle of trusted advisors, stirred to the surface, relationships between William and Anne deteriorated further: 'can you believe', Mrs Morley wrote, 'we will ever truckle to that monster who from the first moment of his

coming has used us at that rate as we are sensible he had done and that all the world can witness... Suppose I did submit and that the King could change his nature so much as to use me with humanity, how would all reasonable people despise me, how would that Dutch abortive laugh at me and please himself with having got the better [of me]'? 'Mr Caliban has some inclinations towards a reconcilement', she reported to Mrs Freeman, early in 1693, 'but if I ever make the least step, may I be as great a slave as he would make me, if it were in his power'.

Mary died in 1694, and, while gestures towards reconciliation would follow, William could still be described as 'Mr Caliban', a creature capable of 'ill-natured, cruel proceedings' as late as 1701, when he refused to allow Anne to put her household at St James's Palace in London into full mourning on the death of her father, James II.[2] The following year, William himself died, and Anne, the last of England's Stuart monarchs, succeeded him. The year was 1702, and, as this summary of dynastic manoeuvring and name-calling might suggest, Caliban's creator, the poet and playwright William Shakespeare, played a very different role in English culture to the central, canonical role which the coming century would decisively assign him.

Caliban gets into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, too. 'We'll visit *Caliban*, my slave, who never yields us kind answer.' The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers Prospero's line from *The Tempest* as the first quotation in its entry for 'Caliban'; the second is dated to 1678, and Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*: 'I found th'infernal cunning-man, | And th'under-witch his Caliban, | With scourges... armed.' But then the *OED* skips forward to 1876, when George Eliot used the name in *Daniel Deronda*.[3] The further quotations given reflect the increasingly common use of the name over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, usefully showing how 'Caliban' grew into a familiar monster once Shakespeare had become a household name—or into a man, not a monster at all. The much-vaunted universality of his creator might have something to do with that.

Between Samuel Butler and George Eliot, however, the *OED* fails to mention that at least one other person attached significance to the name, and her name was Anne. Perhaps it was really Lady Marlborough's idea. Perhaps for both correspondents, the name recalled the King's unprepossessing personal appearance as well as

the absence of 'humanity' in his behaviour. But assuming for now that the nickname was Anne's: I begin this book with *her* Caliban, the one who once ruled England, precisely because it is an allusion that has been overlooked by literary critics, yet has been hiding, in plain sight, for many years now. Anybody who cared to open a biography of Anne might have seen the name in print; but no historical study that I know of draws a connection with, say, the performance history of *The Tempest*. Students of the Restoration theatre, on the other hand, will know all about the adaptation of Shakespeare's play by John Dryden and Sir William Davenant, first staged at the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1667. This *Tempest* would remain a popular part of the repertoire, seeing off several rival versions, for the next 170 years, and until John Gay produced *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728, it would remain the most popular work of all on the London stage.[4] There was also the adaptation of the adaptation, in 1674, seemingly reworked by Thomas Shadwell, that turned what was already a highly musical and spectacular show into an even more operatic affair.[5] It is possible to imagine the music-loving Anne enjoying such *Tempests*, in contrast to William. He 'does not care for plays', she had heard.[6]

From the point of view of considering the relationship between a writer (in this instance, Shakespeare, when the name stands for his works, too) and a particular time period (in this instance, the eighteenth century, not the writer's own period but a later one), it seems to me to be crucial to consider this kind of connection, to assess how the past shapes the present—and how the present reshapes the past. If the Restoration stage conception of Caliban hardly accords with Shakespeare's own, for example, it also sounds as if Anne might not have had in mind any deep correspondence between William, as she saw him, and the Restoration Caliban, but simply the character's theatrical appearance. He is, after all, 'not honoured with | A human shape',[7] the Dryden-Davenant Prospero says, much as Shakespeare's Prospero does, while Trincalo asks, on first seeing him:

> What have we here, a man, or a fish?
> This is some monster of the isle; were I in England,
> As once I was, and had him painted,
> Not a Holy-day fool there but would give me
> Six-pence for the sight of him....[8]

As Christine Dymkowski has observed, *The Tempest*'s rewriters succeeded in reducing the character to 'essentially a comic creature, a good-natured being who does not plot against Prospero, is happy to serve his new master Trincalo and does not become embroiled in the ducal faction-fighting'. Caliban and his newly invented sister, Sycorax, are 'natural innocents' rather than 'sophisticated degenerates'; the various omissions and additions to the part take him 'firmly out of the human realm, making him a literal monster whose good nature is all the more appealing'.[9] It might be a mistake, then, given that 'good nature' is probably not what Anne has in mind when she describes William as 'that Dutch abortive', to assume too close a connection between the Restoration adaptations of the play and her own, private use of the name.

Dryden and Davenant do not give Caliban especial prominence in their reworking of the play, and it is telling that in Thomas Duffett's parody of the Shadwell version, called *The Mock-Tempest: Or The Enchanted Castle* (performed in 1674; published the following year), Caliban barely figures at all. The association in Anne's mind between William and the supposed monster remains intriguing, all the same, when considered as an implied comment on both the source of the allusion and its subject. As the source (which version of *The Tempest*) cannot be certainly identified, exactly what Anne is saying about the subject (William as Caliban) remains unclear; but it might help to know that he was 'cold and taciturn' when sober but apparently became quite a different character when drunk (just as Caliban's mental condition is transformed by first contact with alcohol):

> William detested all frivolity. He did not suffer fools at all. He accepted contradiction of his opinion only with bad grace, and kept a small group of intimates to which outsiders could not gain easy access. . . . The only cracks in the austere façade came on the occasions when William got drunk. Then, unfortunately, he was as likely to disgrace himself with wild behaviour as impress with alcohol-induced conviviality.[10]

In the same way, it *may* be some use to learn that Anne's hereditary claim to the throne was stronger than William's—as he knew and resented—since *The Tempest* is, apart from anything else, a play about the problem of succession. If Anne could not rule England yet, she looked forward to the day—the 'sunshine day'—when she would, and

when the monster was gone. 'She hopes England will flourish again.'[11] Only it is curious to think that at the outset of this decisive period in the forging of a new polite vernacular culture in England, the highest ranking members of society were to be found unwittingly enacting, and even casting themselves, in a Shakespearian drama...

Princess Anne's choice of one particular character name from what was, for her, possibly a modern opera rather than an old play seems to me to be representative of the sort of contemporary connections between literature and history that the passing of time and the orthodox division of scholarly labour have rendered obscure or ambivalent. To historians of the late seventeenth century and biographers of Anne and Sarah, the future Duchess of Marlborough (as Anne later made her), this clutch of private, passing allusions to *The Tempest* has perhaps appeared to be both self-explanatory and unworthy of any deeper investigation. For literary scholars, it seems likewise to have had little appeal—so it remains unclear not only what exactly the name would have meant to Anne (or whether she even associated it with *The Tempest* in any form, or thought it just sounded exotic and a bit like that other fine scare-word, 'cannibal'), but it is also unclear why she thought it so appropriate a name to apply to her enemy, the King.

The apparently neglected case of Princess Anne's Caliban seems to me to be an example, from the beginning of the period, of a phenomenon that recurs, persistently, throughout the ensuing century. On the one hand, here is something familiar to somebody with a little knowledge about Shakespeare in the twenty-first century: that a play called *The Tempest* featured a character called Caliban, and here he is, naturally enough, some years after that play's composition, performance, and publication, his name a byword for monstrosity. But this is also, on the other hand, quite possibly the Caliban of Shakespeare's Restoration dramatist-successors, or simply a name that seems vaguely fit for the purpose of writing insultingly about a drunken Dutchman, without reference to any play. As an allusion, this 'Mr Caliban' is about as trustworthy as those common words that crop up in eighteenth-century English as they do in its modern equivalent ('generous', 'main', 'virtuoso'), but to varying degrees mean different things. (To quote from Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755, the words just given may mean, respectively: 'Not of mean birth'; 'The

ocean'; 'A man skilled in antique or natural curiosities.')[12] Shakespeare's cultural afterlife is full of such 'false friends'—celebrated incidents, such as theatrical performances, or publications—and they form a central concern in the chapters that follow.

Remains of Shakespeare

On the death of William Shakespeare in 1616, a process of division ensued. His 'remains' took several forms: there were the play scripts that belonged to his company, the King's Men, and the living tradition of performance that they represented; there were the published versions of those plays that could circulate widely, as books often do; and there were the physical remains of the man Shakespeare, buried at Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. A fourth form of survival lay in the memory of Shakespeare carried by those who knew him and survived him: family, friends, fellow actors and writers. Ben Jonson, to take one important example, paid homage to his old friend as late as 1640, when his *Timber: or, Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter* appeared. Here Jonson testified that Shakespeare had 'an excellent *Phantsie*; brave notions, and gentle expressions'; he was 'honest, and of an open, and free nature'. Indeed, Jonson could say that he 'loved the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any'.[13] Through such recollections, Shakespeare 'remained' a presence, albeit a dwindling one, until the middle of the seventeenth century, and even after the Restoration in 1660. The eighteenth century, tantalizingly, caught the last whispers of this tradition.

John Aubrey had his information about Shakespeare from William Beeston, the son of Christopher Beeston, Shakespeare's contemporary, including details about Shakespeare being a schoolmaster at some point, and that 'the humour of the constable in *Midsummer Night's Dream*'—probably meaning Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*—had been drawn from life.[14] Aubrey's account did not circulate widely until the early nineteenth century, but his fellow antiquaries did read his notes in manuscript; and, in the meantime, readers and playgoers had learned to become fascinated by such colourful testimony, only to find that it was unreliable (was Shakespeare really a deer-poacher in his youth, as the actor Thomas Betterton was told?) or suspect in

some way (jealousy became the usual reason given for Jonson's criticisms of Shakespeare's prolixity and lack of learning). Betterton was not only the leading actor of the Restoration theatre, but an active researcher into the life of Shakespeare—a writer, *pace* Jonson, whom he idolized. As a founder member of the Duke's Company, Betterton had worked under Sir William Davenant, Shakespeare's supposed godson, from 1660 until Davenant's death in 1668; it was Betterton who supplied Nicholas Rowe with biographical information for his edition of Shakespeare's *Works* published in 1709.

While this oversimplifies matters a little, as will be seen in the following chapters, the performance and republication of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, as well as his transformation into a cultural icon that Jonson would have found quite perplexing, depended on similar transformations in the course of the preceding hundred years. The Restoration had decisively reshaped the theatrical environment: now there were actresses, who soon came to replace boy actors in female roles; there was moveable scenery and an increasing emphasis on stage spectacle and machinery (although a trap-door continued to be a useful and simple device in any theatre); and there was a new repertoire to reflect changed times, new fashions, shifts in the language itself. Under these circumstances, Davenant chose to cut and clarify *Hamlet*, failed to persuade the audience to like *King Lear* (that would have to wait until Nahum Tate gave it a happy ending in 1681), and—as we have seen—turned *The Tempest* into an opera. Such stage adaptations also made it into print, providing a foil to the heavy tale of *Mr William Shakspear's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* as they appeared in new editions, in 1623, 1632, 1663 (with a second impression the following year that incorporated a further seven plays, the so-called Shakespeare Apocrypha, to add to the preceding folios' thirty-six), and 1685. It was this final collection of forty-three plays that Rowe edited in 1709, another form of renewal, in print, for the new century. But there was a long way to go yet.

The specifics. . . .

'It is impossible to imagine the study of Shakespeare without authentic texts for his works, historical accounts defining his period, facts about his life, chartings of his artistic and psychological development,

and determinations of his meanings.' This, the opening sentence of Margreta de Grazia's *Shakespeare Verbatim*, draws attention to what, she argues, would only be adopted as the essential attributes of Shakespeare studies towards the end of the eighteenth century, under the influence of a broad intellectual movement: the Enlightenment. 'Authentic' texts, facts about Shakespeare's life and the rest should not be taken for granted—these are not 'timeless necessities' but the 'determinate needs of a specific historical situation'; that de Grazia finds it possible to question them, two centuries later, indicates that their 'transparency' can no longer be taken for granted, 'after the recent challenges, founded primarily on the work of Foucault and Barthes, to the modern notions of author and work, after the Oxford Shakespeare's re-characterization of the Shakespearian text as malleable, permeable, and even multiple, and after the new-historicist and cultural-materialist emphasis on the production and reproduction of Shakespeare as performance and as text within institutional, ideological, and political contexts'.[15] De Grazia concentrates on the late eighteenth-century edition of Shakespeare that she sees as seminal in this regard: *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare* of 1790, edited by Edmond Malone. But there is no shortage of potential subjects for this kind of sceptical re-examination of the cultural products of the past, both before and after Malone, that, despite appearances, must be assigned to their 'specific historical situation'. And although the eighteenth-century Shakespeare has long been an object of study for Shakespearian scholars, it is in the past thirty years that some of the most fruitful work has been done to expose that specificity.

Writing a few years after de Grazia, for example, Robert D. Hume took her initial observation about the impossibility of imagining textual scholarship under radically different circumstances and applied it to the age of Queen Anne's Caliban. It might be impossible for us now to imagine Shakespeare studies without 'authentic texts for his works, historical accounts defining his period, facts about his life, chartings of his artistic and psychological development, and determinations of his meanings', Hume argues, but:

> This is precisely the situation in which literate and interested Londoners found themselves at the beginning of the eighteenth century—and what we now need to try to imagine.... Until well into the eighteenth century 'Shakespeare' was a much more inaccessible writer and (from our point of