

ACCENTS ON SHAKESPEARE

Making Shakespeare

FROM STAGE TO PAGE

TIFFANY STERN



ACCENTS ON SHAKESPEARE

General Editor: TERENCE HAWKES

Making Shakespeare

Making Shakespeare offers a lively introduction to the major issues of stage and printing history, whilst also raising questions about what a 'Shakespeare play' actually is.

Tiffany Stern reveals how London, the theatre, the actors and the way in which the plays were written and printed all affect the 'Shakespeare' that we now read. Concentrating on the instability and fluidity of Shakespeare's texts, her book discusses what happened to a manuscript between its first composition, its performance on stage and its printing, and identifies traces of the production system in the plays that we read. She argues that the versions of Shakespeare that have come down to us have inevitably been formed by the contexts from which they emerged, being shaped by, for example, the way actors received and responded to their lines, the props and music used in the theatre, or the continual revision of plays by the playhouses and printers.

Allowing a fuller understanding of the texts we read and perform, *Making Shakespeare* is the perfect introduction to issues of stage and page. A refreshingly clear, accessible read, this book will allow even those with no expert knowledge to begin to contextualise Shakespeare's plays for themselves, in ways both old and new.

Tiffany Stern is Senior Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University. Her previous publications include *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (2000) and, with Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare in Parts* (2005). She has edited *King Lear*, is editing Sheridan's *Rivals*, and is particularly interested in the way theatrical performance impacts on the writing and revision of plays.

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General Editor: **TERENCE HAWKES**

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Making Shakespeare

From stage to page

TIFFANY STERN

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To my brother Jonty

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General editor's preface

In our time, the field of literary studies has rarely been a settled, tranquil place. Indeed, for over two decades, the clash of opposed theories, prejudices and points of view has made it more of a battlefield. Echoing across its most beleaguered terrain, the student's weary complaint 'Why can't I just pick up Shakespeare's plays and read them?' seems to demand a sympathetic response.

Nevertheless, we know that modern spectacles will always impose their own particular characteristics on the vision of those who unthinkingly don them. This must mean, at the very least, that an apparently simple confrontation with, or pious contemplation of, the text of a four-hundred-year-old play can scarcely supply the grounding for an adequate response to its complex demands. For this reason, a transfer of emphasis from 'text' towards 'context' has increasingly been the concern of critics and scholars since the Second World War: a tendency that has perhaps reached its climax in more recent movements such as 'New Historicism' or 'Cultural Materialism'.

A consideration of the conditions – social, political, or economic – within which the play came to exist, from which it derives and to which it speaks will certainly make legitimate demands on the attention of any well-prepared student nowadays. Of course, the serious pursuit of those interests will also inevitably start to undermine ancient and inherited prejudices, such as the supposed distinction between 'foreground' and 'background' in literary studies. And even the slightest awareness of the pressures of gender or of race, or the most cursory glance at the role played by that strange creature 'Shakespeare' in our cultural politics, will reinforce a similar turn towards questions that sometimes appear scandalously 'non-literary'. It seems clear that very different and

unsettling notions of the ways in which literature might be addressed can hardly be avoided. The worrying truth is that nobody can just pick up Shakespeare's plays and read them. Perhaps – even more worrying – they never could.

The aim of *Accents on Shakespeare* is to encourage students and teachers to explore the implications of this situation by means of an engagement with the major developments in Shakespeare studies over recent years. It will offer a continuing and challenging reflection on those ideas through a series of multi- and single-author books which will also supply the basis for adapting or augmenting them in the light of changing concerns.

Accents on Shakespeare also intends to lead as well as follow. In pursuit of this goal, the series will operate on more than one level. In addition to titles aimed at modular undergraduate courses, it will include a number of books embodying polemical, strongly argued cases aimed at expanding the horizons of a specific aspect of the subject and at challenging the preconceptions on which it is based. These volumes will not be learned 'monographs' in any traditional sense. They will, it is hoped, offer a platform for the work of the liveliest younger scholars and teachers at their most outspoken and provocative. Committed and contentious, they will be reporting from the forefront of current critical activity and will have something new to say. The fact that each book in the series promises a Shakespeare inflected in terms of a specific urgency should ensure that, in the present as in the recent past, the accent will be on change.

Terence Hawkes

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and encouraged that interest – and me. My brother Jonty (Jonathon) Stern’s warmth, kindness and thoughtfulness deserve more than I can say or give. To him this book is affectionately dedicated.

Textual note

As this book focuses on texts, it is important to present Shakespeare passages in the form in which they were first printed. For that reason, quotations are given as they appear in quarto (Q) or folio (F). Quarto texts were consulted using *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto: A Facsimile Edition of Copies Primarily from the Henry E. Huntington Library* ed. Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981); they are referred to by page signature. Folio texts were consulted using the Norton Facsimile of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies (The First Folio)*, prepared by Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968); they are referred to using the through-line-numbers (TLN) of that edition. A modern act-scene-line reference is also supplied, taken from the *The Riverside Shakespeare* ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al.*, second edn (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). Speech-prefixes have, to avoid confusion, been regularised except in instances when they are themselves the subject of examination. Similarly, 'i' and 'j' and 'u' and 'v' have been regularised in quotations, except, again, when the use of either is under discussion.

Prologue

It is a truism to say that a play printed on the page is not the same as a play in performance. What is less often considered is that one version of a play in performance is different from others. Shakespeare's plays were written and rewritten throughout their production, taking markedly different forms on their first day, on subsequent days, for court and for revivals. Censorship, changes in playhouse personnel, audience reactions all took their toll, and their shadows can be seen through the texts that have come down to us, as this book will illustrate. But plays were also shaped by other circumstances: they were written primarily for London performance in certain buildings whose size and construction also informs the content of the texts. Subsequently printed in a variety of forms and marketed to different readers, plays were then moulded to and by the books in which they were published. *Making Shakespeare* is about the playtexts we have, and the way they relate to events in the theatre and printing houses of the past. It explores the distance between the texts that have survived, what the author wrote, what the reviser rewrote, what was initially performed, what was subsequently performed and what was first printed. The contents of Shakespeare's plays may have been in their nature 'fluid', as is often said; but this is also a book about the 'fluidity' of the material conditions of production.

Recent scholarship, which has stressed the importance of the multiple contexts that brought about Shakespeare's work, attempts to 'situate' plays inside the culture that helped generate them. This book concentrates on the contexts that directly impacted on the nature of the playtext in the playhouse and the printing house, examining the full process of production undergone by a text to bring it from what Shakespeare wrote to what was published in quarto and folio. *Making Shakespeare* is thus a 'stage-to-page' book with a difference. It shows everything that goes into making a play – but it also shows how the versions of plays we have are only written testaments to moments in the life of an unstable text. It introduces the major issues of stage history and printing history, whilst raising questions about what a 'Shakespeare play' actually is.

Concerned as it is with situation and circumstance, *Making Shakespeare* considers plays not one by one, but context by context. No prior knowledge is assumed; instead, the chapters describe how London, the theatre, the actors, the way plays were written and printed, affect the 'Shakespeare' that we now read. The book straddles performance and bibliographical issues; it shows what happened to a manuscript between its first composition, its performance on stage and its printing, and how leftovers of the production system have worked their way into the plays that we read. It argues that the way actors received and responded to their lines, the props and music anticipated and used in the theatre, and the continual revision and remodelling of plays by the playhouses and printing houses have formed the versions of Shakespeare that have come down to us. Included in the book is a discussion of the knotty question of revision (who did it? when did it happen? and what can be learned from notions of a revising author?) and a look at 'new' bibliographical issues, such as the way books were typeset and what effect this has on the text. Each chapter explores a different practical context for shape-shifting Shakespeare; each is illustrated verbally and, sometimes, with pictures. The book aims not to give a dictatorial series of 'readings'; rather, it builds up a familiarity with particular passages and references, while providing the background material and tools to allow readers to contextualise Shakespeare's plays – in old and new ways – for themselves.

The opening chapter, 'Text, Playhouse and London', is concerned with buildings – both the buildings of early modern London and, more locally, the buildings in which Shakespeare's

plays were enacted. The structure of the early modern theatres and the layout of early modern London itself became a feature of Shakespeare's writing, and this chapter illustrates how these and other contingent factors have formed Shakespeare's plays and are manifested in them. The history of the establishment of the Theatre, the Globe and Blackfriars is discussed in terms of the plays written for those buildings; London life, playhouses, bear-baiting pits, theatrical audiences, theatrical flags and theatrical candles are shown to have impacts on the writing as well as the performance of Shakespeare.

The next chapter, 'Additions, Emendations and Revisions', explains what happens to Shakespeare's plays over time and how that is manifested in quarto and folio. It looks at plays revised during the process of writing, and plays revised after performance in the light of censorship, or criticism – or simply in order to maintain their currency. It shows, too, how signs of revision can be found, even in plays that exist only in one form. The playhouse of the time demanded a flexible and fluid text; just how unfixed that text was, and how receptive to change, is examined in this chapter.

What does it mean to share a number of productions amongst the same small group of people? The fourth chapter, 'Rehearsal, Performance and Plays' puts Shakespeare's works in the context of the people who acted in them. It looks at members of the playing company – clowns, tragedians, 'boys' and a series of other typecast actors – and it examines the way the writing reflects these people or types. It also asks how theatrical companies dealt with the quantity of texts that had to be learned and relearned. The process of putting together a performance is discussed, with a look at actors' preparation from the moment when separate scripts ('parts') are received, through individual 'study', to brief collective rehearsal. How are the players and the way they perform reflected in the plays themselves?

Chapter 5, 'Props, Music and Stage Directions', investigates the practical stage. It compares verbal props and physical props, showing how actual props functioned symbolically rather than realistically. Colour, music, stage-hangings and words joined together to make statements to the audience – but how were those statements perceived? And how were the plays designed to accommodate the artefacts of the early modern theatre?

Shakespeare was an actor writing for actors: he wrote anticipating the way his texts would be disseminated and learned.

Chapter 6, 'Prologues, Songs and Actors' Parts', explores the life of different fragments of the play, arguing that the theatre was, in many ways, more interested in 'parts' of the work than in the whole. By paring Shakespeare's plays back down into the separate pieces of paper that made them up, this chapter shows how the printed versions relate to theatrical manuscripts, and examines the implications of this relationship.

Looking at the corrections, improvements and errors that arise from the way texts were readied for performance and for the printing house, Chapter 7, 'From Stage to Printing House', shows how, even by the time of publication, the plays of Shakespeare were distinctly different from what their 'author' had written.

The stage-to-page trajectory of this book, an approach currently without its own defining 'ism', is a particular example of a more general trend in recent modern criticism. As part of its aim to 'restore Shakespeare's artistry to the earliest conditions of its realization and intelligibility', that criticism initially aligned itself with two particularly strong movements from the 1980s.¹ It took its interest in the importance of context from new historicism, and its interest in textual indeterminacy and instability from the post-modern project to 'decentre' the text and query the nature of 'authorship'. The next step was to start considering the various factors involved in the construction of a Shakespeare text, and to question the authority residing in the plays themselves. Studies mostly concentrating on *King Lear* – the test-case for revision – had already begun to point out that Shakespeare's plays were regularly altered and adapted by a number of different agents. Principal amongst the 1980s work was Peter Blayney's *The Texts of King Lear and Their Origins: Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto*, which explained the printing house background to the two variant texts of *Lear*. That was swiftly followed by a fascinating collection of essays arguing that the quarto and folio versions of *Lear* constituted two slightly different plays: *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear* edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren. The later exciting and notorious *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, responded to issues arising out of the new interest in textual instability by printing *Lear* separately in two versions and – more controversially – renaming Falstaff 'Oldcastle' in *1 Henry IV*, Imogen 'Innogen' in *Cymbeline*, and retitling *Henry VIII* 'All Is True' in an attempt to present 'Shakespeare' not as written by the author but

as performed in the theatre.² Arising from this was a renewed interest in collaboration: had we been too certain not just in the stability of texts, but in the stability of authorship itself?³ Questions were asked not only about how ‘fixed’ any printed text was, but what constituted a text at all.⁴

‘Context’ and ‘indeterminacy’ were themselves inflected by various other concerns radically different in their nature. One was theatre history, a subject that has been of continual interest to Shakespeareans and that, unlike most other approaches to Shakespeare, has never been outdated or replaced – though it has also been slow to accept new interpretative methodologies. It came to greater prominence than ever during the 1990s with the growth of general concern in the material conditions that shaped the playhouse, traceable to a combination of practical events and technological advances. The discovery of the Rose theatre site, the building of the new Globe in London and the new Blackfriars in Virginia have returned attention to early modern playhouses as buildings: just how did the original places of performance impact on the texts performed in them?⁵ At the same time, new historical material was and is being made available in huge quantities allowing criticism with an empirical base to flourish. *REED* (*Records of Early English Drama*) has since 1979 been publishing manuscript county records illustrating habits of performance outside London; internet sites are beginning to make rare books – and so book-based scholarship – accessible to universities situated miles away from rare-book libraries.⁶

As a movement, however, the stage-to-page field, combining theatre history and book history, reaching towards a ‘Shakespeare’ defined by multiple contexts rather than authorial intention, has only lately been theoretically situated. A series of notable recent books have begun the process. Principal among them are two collections of essays: *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). Both attempt to recover specific historical contexts and actions in playhouse and printing house that produce meaning(s) in the light of questions about textual and authorial instability.⁷

Making Shakespeare is part of a critical movement that, in the same spirit, concentrates not on ‘Shakespeare’ the individual author but on the collaborative, multilayered, material, historical

6 Prologue

world that fashioned the Shakespeare canon. The book provides both a summary of stage and textual history and an alternative way of understanding the dissemination of theatrical manuscripts. It inherits a tradition that perhaps once saw the study of 'literature' and the study of 'history' as separable if not separate activities. By redefining ideas of textual and authorial instability in a rooted, historical context, it aims to create a newly vibrant meeting point between the two.

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