Shakespeare on page and stage

This exhibition marks the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare on 23 April 1616. Drawing on Eton College Library's rich holdings in English literature and theatre history, it brings together books, prints, drawings, photographs, and other materials to illustrate approaches to presenting Shakespeare's plays in print and on the stage.

Shakespeare's status as a cultural icon did not immediately follow his death, but was only consolidated with the 18th-century phenomenon of 'worship' of Shakespeare as the national poet. Very few concrete facts are known about Shakespeare's life, and a whole industry has sprung up around this lack of information, attempting to discover the man behind the works, reconstruct his reading and recover relics of his life. His plays are only known to us in printed form, and College Library is fortunate to possess copies of all four 17th-century folio editions of the collected plays, as well as a collection of early quarto editions.

Relatively little evidence survives of productions of Shakespeare's plays in his own time. Theatrical activity was suppressed during the Civil War, but after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the plays were revived in performance, and altered and 'improved' versions of the plays were themselves printed and reprinted. Later, editors and actors sought to recover Shakespeare's original words. Textual and graphic records allow us to trace changing practices in staging, costume and set design, and in the interpretation and portrayal of Shakespearean characters over the centuries.

Bardolatry

When the First Folio was published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, its editors could not have imagined it would become one of the most important books ever printed in English. Shakespeare's reputation as the pre-eminent English writer was slow to build in the century or so after his death, but by the 1720s his growing status as a cultural icon was being formalised with the inclusion of a bust at the Temple of British Worthies at Stowe in 1735, and the erection of the Shakespeare monument at Westminster Abbey in 1740.

The key figure in Shakespeare's cultural apotheosis, a phenomenon for which George Bernard Shaw later coined the term 'bardolatry', was the actor David Garrick, who burst upon the London stage with his sensational debut as Richard III in 1741. In addition to his superb performances, Garrick's assiduous memorialisation of Shakespeare culminated with his staging of the Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, a major event that established Shakespeare as the English national poet and set Stratford-upon-Avon on course for becoming the major Shakespeare tourist destination that it is today.

Shakespeare's creations also became favourite subjects for artists for notable artists such as William Hogarth in the late 1720s and later for the many contributors to John Boydell's immensely popular Shakespeare Gallery, which opened in Pall Mall in 1789 with the ostensible aim of founding a British school of history painting, supported by the commercial goal of selling engravings. The gallery closed due to financial difficulties in 1803, but by the 19th century Shakespeare was firmly established as an emblem of national pride and the epitome of English culture. He had become a 'rallying-sign', as

Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1841, for the entire British Empire, and accordingly a statue of the poet dominated the entrance to the British section of the Great Exhibition of 1851—a demonstration of Great Britain's colonial, industrial and cultural might. Today Shakespeare has near universal name recognition in the English-speaking world and beyond. Bardolatry carries on in a variety of forms, not least in the 'Shakespeare 400' celebrations this year.

David Garrick, *An ode upon dedicating a building and erecting a statue, to Shakespeare, at Stratford upon Avon*, London: T. Becket, and P.A. de Hondt, 1769

The performance of this ode, accompanied by an entire orchestra and chorus, in which Garrick famously refers to the playwright as 'the god of our idolatry', was the pinnacle of the Shakespeare Jubilee. An entire orchestra and chorus accompanied Garrick, and the crowd responded enthusiastically despite torrential rain.

John Bell, Minton porcelain figure of Shakespeare, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, c.1866

This idealised figure is a copy of the life-sized statue that was displayed in the Great Exhibition of 1851, along with a number of other representations of the national poet. Bell's statue drew on both the 17th-century bust on the author's tomb at Stratford and the 18th-century monument in Westminster Abbey.

Filling the gaps

Despite Shakespeare's position at the pinnacle of the literary pantheon, very few concrete facts are known about the man behind the plays. In literary biography, there is no subject more intriguing than Shakespeare of whom we know so little. This absence of knowledge exposes Shakespeare to all manner of theories, assumptions and doubts about who he really was, and even whether he really wrote the works ascribed to him.

With one possible exception, all of Shakespeare's manuscripts are lost, leaving a considerable gap in the study of his composition and creative processes. There is perhaps one fragment that survives: it is thought that Shakespeare contributed to *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*, a play written collaboratively by a number of hands but never printed, and surviving only in a unique manuscript now in the British Library. His handwriting is only otherwise known from six surviving signatures on legal documents. In 1794, at the height of bardolatry, this lack of tangible relics prompted a young legal clerk, William Henry Ireland, to fill the gap by forging a series of legal and personal documents purportedly in Shakespeare's hand. Over the next two years Ireland composed at least 170 Shakespearean forgeries, including a lost manuscript of *King Lear*, books from the playwright's library complete with marginal annotations, and even a hitherto unknown play, before being exposed as a fraud in 1796.

In an attempt to reach the man through his reading, much effort has gone into tracing Shakespeare's literary and historical sources. Shakespeare borrowed language, characters and often entire plots from an extensive range of English and foreign works. While no source had more impact

on his writing than the Bible, Shakespeare was also inspired by classical authors such as Ovid, Plutarch and Seneca, English poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser, and chroniclers such as Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed. His reading can be narrowed down to specific editions of some of these works, but it is difficult to go further; Shakespeare made no mention of books or manuscripts in his will and no copies of books owned or read by him are proven to have survived.

Reproduction of a leaf of *The booke of Sir Thomas More*, British Library, Harley MS. 7368, f. 9r

It has been thought since the 19th century that the so-called Hand D in this manuscript is that of Shakespeare, who was invited to revise part of this play between 1592 and 1604. © *British Library*

W. H. Ireland, Autograph copy of a letter purporting to be from Shakespeare to Anne Hathaway, 1790s

This is one of several contemporary autograph copies of Ireland's forged love letter from Shakespeare to Anne Hathaway, all of which have a number of textual variants.

W. H. Ireland, *Miscellaneous papers and legal instruments under the hand and seal of William Shakespeare*, London: Egerton et al., 1796

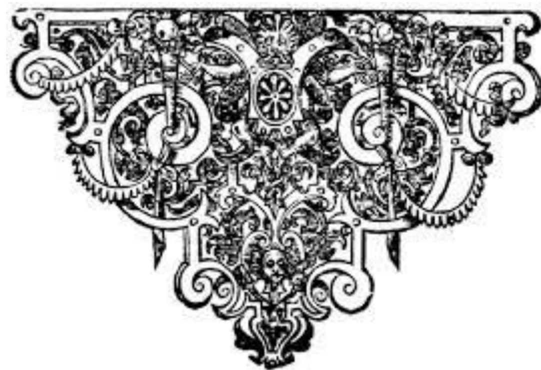
Ireland's audacity peaked in 1794 when he revealed the manuscript of *Vortigern and Rowena*, a hitherto unknown play purportedly by Shakespeare. His forgeries were accepted as genuine by some, but he was exposed shortly after he published many of them in this book.

Edward Hall, *The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke,* [London: R. Grafton], 1550

This copy of one of Shakespeare's most used historical sources has manuscript annotations in the chapters describing Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI. Some believe these are in the playwright's hand on the basis of an association documented in the 1580s between an ancestor of the present owners and a 'Wilim Shakeshaft'. *On loan from a private collection.*

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed,* [London: T. Petit, 1550]

Shakespeare may well have read this edition by William Thynne. It is open at a woodcut illustrating 'The Knight's Tale' from *The Canterbury Tales*, which inspired *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* Chaucer's poetry was also the primary source for Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and is echoed in other plays.



Printing the plays

Shakespeare wrote his plays not to be printed and read, but for performance by his theatrical company, the Chamberlain's (later King's) Men, whose intellectual property they became. The manuscripts of his plays took different forms. The 'foul papers' were the playwright's working papers, which can be inferred by what appear to be consistent forms of misreadings by those who set the type from the manuscripts. Others were typeset from 'fair copies' by a professional scribe, possibly with authorial revisions. The most finished form of manuscript was the prompt-book, which was most valuable to the company and least likely to be sold. Apart from the so-called Hand D in the *Sir Thomas More* fragment, no original manuscripts by Shakespeare survive. If they had not been printed by others, they would have been lost in the same way as hundreds of other plays of the period.

Quartos

The first editions of Shakespeare's plays, printed from 1594 onwards, were the quartos. The name derives from their format: small, cheap books formed by folding printed sheets in half twice to make quires of four leaves (eight pages). Twenty of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto in his lifetime. Between 12 and 14 'good quartos' were based on manuscripts of reasonable quality, possibly sold to printers when the theatres were closed due to plague to raise income. The remaining 'bad quartos' contain very corrupt texts, most being apparently pirated 'memorial reconstructions' by actors, able to recall their own parts accurately but less so those of others. The first attempt to bring out a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays appears to be a collection of 10

unauthorised quarto reprints by William Jaggard for Thomas Pavier in 1619.

Folios

The term folio refers to large books formed by folding printed sheets in half, creating two leaves (four pages). These were expensive to produce, and usually reserved for prestigious or serious works, not for ephemeral plays. The first English author to publish plays in folio format was Shakespeare's friend and rival Ben Jonson in 1616.

The First Folio was edited by Shakespeare's fellow actors and friends John Heminges and Henry Condell. It is not known whether the idea was first conceived by the King's Men or by the publishers, but their work was to have far-reaching consequences. The Folio contains 36 plays, of which 18 were previously unprinted and probably would not otherwise have survived. No extant play excluded from the Folio has been convincingly attributed in its entirety to Shakespeare, nor any play included in it entirely to someone else. However, the editors' decision to arrange the plays by genre has had far-reaching consequences for the appreciation of Shakespeare's generic fluidity and for our ability to establish the order of composition.

It is not known how many copies of the First Folio were printed. Estimates range between 750 and 1200 copies, probably sold for 15 shillings unbound; some 230 survive today. The Folio was reprinted in 1632, 1663 and 1685.

William Shakespeare, *The famous historie of Troylus and Cresseid,* London: G. Eld for R. Bonian and H. Walley, 1609

The second issue of the first edition of *Troilus and Cressida*, and the only example in College Library of a quarto printed during

Shakespeare’s lifetime, is thought to have been printed from his foul papers. The version in the First Folio may have been set from a copy of this quarto, with reference to a manuscript prompt-book.

William Shakespeare, *The excellent history of the merchant of Venice,* [London]: J. Roberts [i.e. W. Jaggard for T. Pavier], 1600 [i.e. 1619]

The second quarto edition of *The Merchant of Venice*, although dated 1600 on the title-page is now known to be one the falsely dated unauthorised quartos printed for Thomas Pavier in 1619.

***M. William Shake-speare, his true chronicle history of the life and death of King Lear, and his three daughters*, [London]: N. Butter [i.e. W. Jaggard for T. Pavier], 1608 [i.e. 1619]**

King Lear exists in two substantially different editions. The quarto contains 285 lines including an entire scene not in the Folio, which contains 115 new lines and over 1,000 variants. The Folio text is thought to have been set from a copy of this edition with reference to an independent manuscript possibly in Shakespeare’s hand.

William Shakespeare, *The late, and much admired play, called, Pericles, Prince of Tyre,* London: T. P. [i.e. W. Jaggard for T. Pavier], 1619

First published in 1609, *Pericles* was not included in the collected plays until 1664. Possibly based on an actor’s memorial reconstruction, the first nine scenes were written by George Wilkins, who had been hired by the King’s Men to work on the new play, which was then completed by Shakespeare.

William Shakespeare, *The most excellent lamentable tragedie of Romeo and Juliet,* London: R. Young for J. Smethwicke, 1637

Romeo and Juliet was clearly a hit from the start, being first printed as an unlicensed 'bad quarto' text pirated in 1597. The second quarto edition in 1599 was based on Shakespeare's foul papers, and this is the form of the text found in the First Folio.

Ben Jonson, *The works of Beniamin Jonson*, London: W. Stansby, 1616

John Dryden records an anecdotal debate in which John Hales of Eton defended Shakespeare against Jonson and others as a 'poet of nature'. Despite this, over a century elapsed between the arrival of this book in College Library in the 17th century and the first recorded works by Shakespeare in the 18th. Shakespeare's name appears in the list of performers appended to two of the plays.

***Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares comedies, histories & tragedies. Published from the true originall copies*, London: I. Jaggard, and E. Blount, 1623 (The First Folio)**

The verses facing the iconic title portrait are by Ben Jonson. Eton's copy, part of the bequest of the bibliophile Old Etonian Anthony Morris Storer in 1799, is an unusual survival of an extra-illustrated copy with dozens of engravings of individuals and places associated with the plays bound in at the end.

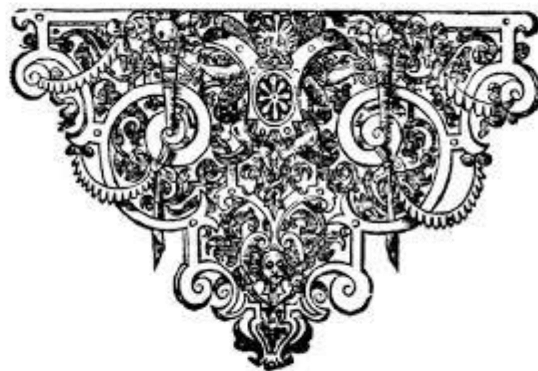
***Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, and tragedies. ... The second impression*, London: T. Cotes for R. Allot, 1632**

Sales of the First Folio were brisk enough for it to be reprinted less than 10 years later. The Second Folio was prepared from a copy of the First Folio, revised by an unknown editor. The Folio

text of *The Tempest* (displayed) is thought to have been set from a fair copy by the scribe Ralph Crane.

***Mr. William Shakespear's comedies, histories, and tragedies. … The third impression*, London: [R. Daniel, A. Warren, and another] for P.C. [i.e. P. Chetwind], 1664**
The Third Folio was first published in 1663, and re-issued the following year with the addition of *Pericles* and six apocryphal plays, necessitating the removal of the iconic portait from the title-page to make room to advertise the new titles. Many unsold copies perished in the Great Fire of London.

***Mr William Shakespear's comedies, histories, and tragedies. … The fourth edition*, London: H. Herringman, E. Brewster, and R. Bentley, 1685**
Like its predecessors, the Fourth Folio was prepared from a copy of the previous edition, continuing the process of regularising spellings and usage. Shakespeare's plays were written as scripts to be worked upon in the theatre as needed, and the folio text of *King Lear* (displayed) is thought to represent his own revision of one of his greatest plays.



Adapting and restoring the plays

Adapting

The performance of stage plays was forbidden at the start of the English Civil Wars in 1642. When the theatres were reopened after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, tastes had changed, and the repertoire and performance style were adapted accordingly. Under the influence of contemporary French drama, Shakespeare's plays were reassessed according to the Aristotle's unities of time, place, and action, all of which were routinely flouted by Shakespeare. These factors and others led to the reshaping of many of Shakespeare's plays. William Davenant's popular version of *Macbeth* (?1664) featured a chorus of singing, dancing and flying witches, and Nahum Tate's reworking of *King Lear* (1681) made Shakespeare conform to the Aristotelian unities, for example by removing the genre-bending Fool. Plays were also written 'in imitation of Shakespeare's style'.

The publication of single plays in quarto dwindled after 1639, and the transmission of Shakespeare's dramatic works depended on the Folio reprints. As his cultural pre-eminence was established, growing demand in the 18th century led to numerous editions of the collected works in smaller formats, beginning with Nicholas Rowe's illustrated edition in 1709, which was influential for introducing scene divisions, locations, and character lists. Each new edition, however, continued to be printed from a marked-up copy of the previous edition, accumulating errors alongside improvements in presentation and layout.

Restoring

Scholarly editing of Shakespeare began in the 18th century, when editors steeped in bardolatry began to appreciate the importance of returning to the earliest reliable editions of each play, namely the First Folio and the quartos published in Shakespeare's lifetime. In *Shakespeare restored* (1726), the first critical book devoted to Shakespeare, the editor and writer Lewis Theobald pointed out that basing new editions on the text of their immediate predecessor compounded and multiplied errors, and Edward Capell's edition published in 1768 after 20 years' gestation was the first to be based on a study of the earliest printed texts of all the plays. The crowning achievement of 18th-century textual scholarship was Edmond Malone's edition of 1790, supplemented in 1821 with additional material left unpublished at his death.

The 18th and 19th centuries also saw the return of Shakespeare's original texts to the stage. David Garrick's stage versions retained popular additions like Davenant's chorus of witches, but discarded many of the more egregious alterations of the Restoration. The actor-manager W. C. Macready, basing every element of his productions on attention to historical detail and a close study of Shakespeare's texts, was the first to reinstate the Fool in his 1838 staging of *King Lear*. However, the 19th-century trend towards spectacular productions—necessitating long scene changes and large casts—also required drastic cutting and rearrangement of the texts. In reaction, the late 19th century evinced a growing desire to produce Shakespeare's plays as they might have been known by him. Today, Shakespeare's plays are available in editions that foreground the stage tradition and practice, as well as the bibliographical tradition founded in the early quartos and folios.

David Garrick, *Catharine and Petruchio,* London: J. and R. Tonson, and S. Draper, 1756

Garrick's productions restored passages of original dialogue, but he was also a practical theatre man seeking maximum effectiveness on stage by adding passages of his own composition and making wholly new versions. This adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* supplanted Shakespeare's original until 1886.

***Bell's edition of Shakespeares plays*, vol. 2, London: J. Bell, and C. Etherington at York, 1774**

John Bell published all 24 plays in the Covent Garden and Drury Lane repertoire 'regulated from the prompt books', with the remaining plays in standard texts marked with suggested cuts. *King Lear* largely follows Nahum Tate's adaptation, and the Fool is accordingly absent.

Lewis Theobald, *Double falsehood; or The distrest lovers*, London: J. Watts, 1728

Theobald claimed that this tragicomedy was adapted from manuscripts of an unpublished play by Shakespeare in his possession. Possibly the 'Cardenno' or 'Cardenna' performed at court by the King's Men in 1613, the manuscript is now lost, and scholarly debate about its authenticity continues.

***The plays of William Shakspeare*, vol. 1, London: T. Longman, B. Law and Son, et al., 1793**

This 15-volume edition compiled by George Steevens begins with two volumes of introductory material. The pages displayed demonstrate the proliferation of 'modern' editions, the prefaces of which are also reproduced in full. The footnote comments dyspeptically on food stains deposited in copies of

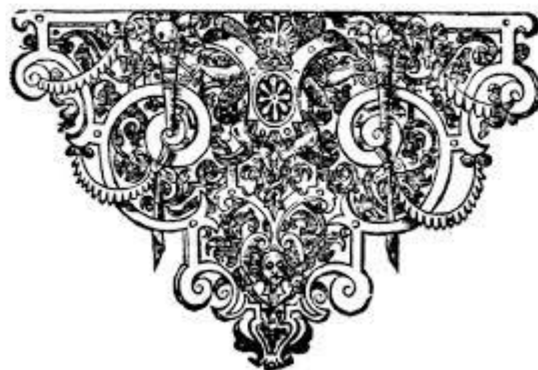
the First Folio before it became ‘the most expensive single book in our language’.

Reproduction of George Scharf, ‘Shakspere’s King Lear, Act I Scene I’, from *Recollections of the scenic effects of Covent Garden Theatre during the season 1838-9*. London: J. Pattie, [1839]

This image is part of a series illustrating productions by W. C. Macready, whose painstaking revival of *King Lear* in 1838 was the first production since the 17th century to restore the Fool, played in this instance by a woman.

Programme for *Hamlet in its entirety*, produced by Harcourt Williams at the Old Vic, 1930

Hamlet is Shakespeare's longest play, with over 4,000 lines taking over four hours or longer to deliver. It is therefore usually staged in abridged acting editions, but full-text productions of the play, pioneered by F. R. Benson at Stratford in 1900, resolve many of the difficulties this causes in the story.



Staging the plays

Shakespeare’s stages

Shakespeare’s plays were first staged in purpose-built outdoor playhouses such as the Globe Theatre and the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. Performances were also held at palaces and noblemen’s houses, in the halls of law schools and the courtyards of inns. Many theatres were elaborately painted, but the open platform stages were bare of scenery except for objects required by the plot. Plays were accompanied by music and dancing, and spectacle was provided by the sumptuous contemporary clothing of the male actors who played all characters on the Renaissance stage.

Patent theatres

These stage traditions were discontinued when, at the start of the English Civil War in 1642, all stage plays were banned and theatres officially closed in 1642. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, theatre returned, and Shakespeare’s plays were now performed by both men and women in indoor royal patent theatres in the elegant West End. In an innovation that would reshape productions for three centuries, the new royal theatres introduced the proscenium arch, which framed painted scenery flats conveying settings through stock scenes.

Stars

In the 18th century, as theatres and audiences expanded, the forestage shrank almost entirely, and stage and audience were further separated by an orchestra pit. The auditorium was, as in the indoor theatres of Shakespeare’s day, lighted by candle chandeliers, but candle footlights and sidelights were introduced to illuminate the painted scenery—as well as the performers—more brightly than the audience. Shakespeare’s

plays were increasingly treated as star vehicles for celebrity actors.

Actor-Managers

From the turn of the 19th century until the First World War, a long line of actor-managers took leading roles, ruled acting companies and exercised artistic control to interpret Shakespeare to a truly popular audience. Productions generally followed a pictorial aesthetic, and never more so than in staging Shakespeare. Elaborate scenery, lavish costumes and props, grand pageants with many supernumerary actors and *tableaux vivants* all stemmed from an antiquarian, educational impulse to recreate the periods and locations in which the plays were set.

Directors

Reaction against 19th-century pictorialism was led by the Elizabethan Stage Society, which sought to return to original performance conditions; and also by Edward Gordon Craig, who called for abstract and emblematic staging. Later directors experimented with the form of the stage, modern dress, locating plays in new periods, timeless costumes and unlocalised settings. The importance of the director's vision, as well as the continuing influence of all of these 20th-century approaches, can be seen in today's various styles of Shakespearean production.

'"Macbeth" played in the costumes of 1763: Garrick and Mrs Pritchard as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth', from *The Illustrated London News,* 16 April 1910

This print, based on an 18th-century painting by Johann Zoffany, reconstructs the experience of seeing David Garrick onstage, with candle lighting and painted scenery appropriate

to his period. Garrick, the first actor to be called a star, famously played opposite Hannah Pritchard, the favourite actress of the day.

Jean-Louis Fesch, Miniature portrait of David Garrick as Macbeth, watercolour on vellum, c.1770
Garrick inherited a tradition of playing Shakespearean characters dressed in contemporary finery, and was remembered to have played Macbeth 'in a suit of scarlet and gold, a tail wig, etc., in every respect like a modern military officer'.

M. Jackson after James Gwinn, Mezzotint of Spranger Barry as Macbeth, c.1753
Barry was David Garrick's main rival on the London stage, and his only serious competitor in tragic roles. He and his wife later joined the acting company managed by Garrick, in which they alternated with Garrick and Hannah Pritchard in playing favourite roles.

Edmund Kean as Richard III at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, hand-coloured etching, c.1821
This satirical print offers a detailed picture of contemporary stage conditions. The proscenium arch, minimal forestage, orchestra pit and candle footlights depicted here were all late 17th- and 18th-century innovations. *On loan from a private collection.*

Playbill for a performance of *Macbeth* at the Royal Princess's Theatre, 20 July 1853
Victorian productions presented Shakespeare's plays as a series of elaborate stage-pictures. This playbill accordingly places special emphasis on the visual delights awaiting the audience. Of all of the 19th-century actor-managers, Charles

Kean was most passionate about historical accuracy, as the prefatory note advertises.

'Shakspear's Historical Play of *Henry VIII*, Scene I, Act III', hand-coloured engraving, 1855

Charles Kean was elected as a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1857, in recognition of the unprecedented historical precision of the sets, costumes and props for his Shakespearean revivals. His *Henry VIII*, a recreation of Tudor England, was the first Shakespearean production to run for 100 consecutive nights.

Martin Laroche, Photograph of Drinkwater Meadows as Old Gobbo, 1858

In this early theatrical photograph, Meadows appears in the elaborate set of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket. The production was under the management of Charles Kean.

Percy Macquoid, Costume design for *Hamlet* at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, 1930-1931

Macquoid was one of the favourite designers of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, the last of the great Victorian actor-managers. This is part of a collection of lavish costume designs for a later revival of *Hamlet*, which won special praise from one reviewer for resisting the influence of 'experimentalists'.

George Scharf, 'Shakspere's King Lear, Act I Scene I', from *Recollections of the scenic effects of Covent Garden Theatre during the season 1838-9*, London: J. Pattie, [1839]

This series of etchings records the elaborate scenery, costumes and props used in plays produced under the actor-manager W. C. Macready, who was the first consistently to use spectacle for the purposes of historical illustration in Shakespeare's plays.

J. R. Planché, *Costume of Shakespeare's tragedy of Othello, and comedy of the Merchant of Venice; selected and arranged from the best authorities* […], London: J. Miller et al., 1825

Following early dabbling in period dress by Garrick and others, Planché was the first to introduce carefully researched, historically correct costumes to Shakespearean performance. This set the standard for subsequent 19th-century staging.

Playbill for *Macbeth* at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, 14 January 1836

As theatres and audiences grew larger, 19th-century actor-managers deployed every available technology to stage more and more spectacular effects. The popular appeal of spectacle is to the fore in this advertisement.

Souvenir of *Macbeth* produced at the Lyceum Theatre by Henry Irving, 29 December 1888

The Restoration addition to *Macbeth* of a chorus of singing, dancing witches lasted into the 20th century. In this production, Irving (often praised for the relative restraint of his spectacle) concluded the cauldron scene with 60 witches apparently flying across the landscape, singing to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan.

Souvenir of *King Lear* produced at the Lyceum Theatre by Henry Irving, 10 November 1892

The pictorial aesthetic that governed Victorian productions did so perhaps most literally here. In the 1840s, the artist Ford Madox Brown made sketches of scenes from *Lear,* some of which he worked up into oil paintings. Irving drew heavily on these for sets, costumes and attitudes of the actors in this production.

Set for the throne room for *Hamlet* at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, pencil drawing, 1892

Herbert Beerbohm Tree continued to define Shakespeare for most audiences into the 20th century with sumptuous, heavily cut productions. The realist, pictorial elements of his work are evident here.

Edward Gordon Craig, Set design for the *Hamlet* at the Moscow Arts Theatre, c.1909

Craig, who had started as a performer in the company of Henry Irving, rejected the Victorian pictorial aesthetic. In 1908 he was invited by Konstantin Stanislavski to design and direct *Hamlet* at the Moscow Arts Theatre. This is an early sketch for the design of the set.

Photograph of set design for *Hamlet* in Edward Gordon Craig's model theatre, 1910

The most famous aspect of the Moscow *Hamlet* was Craig's plain set, made up of movable, large abstract screens. He tested his ideas in a model theatre, with carved wooden figures to represent the characters.

Photograph of set design for *Hamlet* in Edward Gordon Craig's model theatre, 1910

Using his model theatre, Craig designed variants for many scenes in *Hamlet*, only some of which were realised on stage when the production finally opened in 1912.

Edward Gordon Craig, Characters from *Hamlet*, wood-carvings, c.1909

The many flat figures Craig carved for use in his model theatre in preparation for the Moscow *Hamlet* included Claudius and Gertrude, as well as Hamlet (with his Daemon, a symbolic figure representing Death, ultimately abandoned for the stage production).

Edward Gordon Craig, *For King Lear,* woodcut, 1920

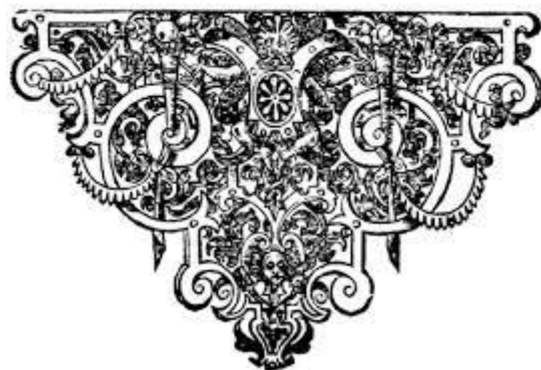
Applying modernist sensibilities to the stage, Craig influentially used light and abstract scenery to create symbolic worlds. This vision of the storm scene, never realised on stage, places characteristic emphasis on light and form.

Poster enclosure from the programme for *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* directed by Peter Brook at Stratford, 1970

Twentieth-century experimentation found particularly radical expression here. The poster emphasises the importance of the minimalist set. Brook embraced the potential of an empty space and called upon the imagination to evoke the places, atmosphere and invisibility conjured by Shakespeare's words.

Photograph of Act 3, Scene 1 of Peter Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* 1970

Set in a white box adorned with trapezes and inhabited by characters dressed like circus performers, this landmark production rejected traditional ideas of staging and ushered in a new era of Shakespearean interpretation. An early reviewer declared the director himself to be the star of the show. *Photograph by Reg Wilson, © RSC*



Playing the parts

Changing fashions in editing, staging and interpreting Shakespeare's plays and the desire to present fresh perspectives have led to different ways of conceiving and portraying his characters, on and off the stage. In this exhibition, six parts have been selected to highlight the range of approaches.

Interpretations of Richard III, Shakespeare's first great villain, range from characterisations centred on Richard's charismatic malevolence and visible deformity to more nuanced readings seeking an understanding of the human reasons behind his crimes.

The title character of *The Merchant of Venice* is Antonio, but most memorable one is the Jewish moneylender Shylock. He has mostly been depicted as a cruel man bent on revenge, often with racist overtones, but there is also a tradition of more sympathetic and humanising portrayals, particularly since the early 19th century.

Hamlet is Shakespeare's longest play and arguably his greatest, acclaimed for its complexity and depth of characterisation, and its title role is one of the most compelling and fascinating in English literature. Despite his introspection, Hamlet is ultimately unknowable, and has become the part against which every actor measures himself, leading to a wide variety of interpretations.

Lady Macbeth is deeply embedded in cultural consciousness as a by-word for ruthless female ambition. Both lead characters of *Macbeth* are notable for their ambiguity, however, and Lady Macbeth, in many ways more fearsome than her husband, ends up a victim, her sanity shattered. Many portrayals of Lady

Macbeth address the question of whether her actions 'unsex' her, setting up an opposition between womanhood and murder.

The lead part in *The Winter's Tale*, King Leontes, is a classic depiction of sexual jealousy that feeds on itself: arising without explanation, completely unfounded, and only increased by any attempt to assuage it. Interpretations of Leontes have consequently focused on the psychology of the character and the challenge of making him sympathetic.

Perhaps surprisingly to the modern eye, Falstaff was until relatively recent times also unquestionably his most popular character. The 'fat knight' appears in three of Shakespeare's plays and is one of his finest comic creations. Traditionally played for laughs, Falstaff has also inspired some celebrated interpretations which have brought out noble qualities and tragic undertones.

Richard III

William Hogarth and Charles Grignion, after William Hogarth, 'Mr Garrick, in the character of Richard III', c.1746

David Garrick played Richard at the Drury Lane Theatre from 1741 onwards. He adopted what was then a novel approach by emphasising Richard's humanity as opposed to his potential as a stage villain. This Richard was notably without a hump.

Staffordshire figure of David Garrick as Richard III, c.1860

Earthenware figures were first produced in Staffordshire in the late 1830s. Designed for mantelpiece decoration, figures of actors and actresses were popular. This figure is modelled on Hogarth's painting.

Hand-coloured etching of Edmund Kean as Richard III at the Drury Lane Theatre, 1814

Kean outshone traditionalist contemporaries by giving a tragic performance notable for its passion, wit and sheer range of response. This was a feat considering that he performed an adaptation in which the scope of the play is narrowed and focused upon Richard's evil ambitions.

Photograph of Laurence Olivier as Richard III at the Old Vic Theatre, 1944

Olivier's Richard delighted in his own evil, elevating him above typical stage villains. The maniacal ring of Richard's voice was reminiscent of Hitler, especially to a wartime audience. Yet, Richard's monologues confided in a complicit audience like a pantomime villain and he pranced with an energy that belied his disabilities.

Photograph of Antony Sher as Richard III in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of 1985

Late 20th-century actors struggled to escape Olivier's shadow. Sher played Richard with an emphasis on disability. His Richard was literally a 'bottled spider', scuttling on crutches and consumed by self-loathing at his own deformities. It is this that motivated Sher's Richard to commit his crimes.

Programme for Richard Eyre's production of *Richard III* at the National Theatre, 1990

This highlighted the parallels between Shakespeare's play and totalitarianism, as hinted by Olivier in the 1940s. Eyre's anachronistic production is set in a fictionalised, fascist, 1930s England, and features a cigarette-smoking, suave yet menacingly deformed McKellen as the tyrannical Richard.

Shylock

China figure of an early 18th-century Shylock, c.1950
In early performances Shylock had a red wig and often an exaggeratedly hooked nose, following the medieval tradition of presenting Jewish characters as grotesque, ridiculous villains. *On loan from a private collection.*

Joseph Wenman, 'Mr. Macklin as Shylock', reproduction of a 1777 engraving, c.1880
Charles Macklin first played Shylock at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1741. Abandoning the version of the play in common use, a 1701 adaptation *The Jew of Venice*, Macklin depicted him as a serious character rather than the figure of low comedy he had been. In Macklin's portrayal, Shylock was still a villain but he had gravitas and sobriety.

Coloured lithograph of Edmund Kean as Shylock, 1827
In his sensational debut at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1814, Kean brought further complexity and depth to the role. Whilst his Shylock was still a villain, Kean gave him more dignity and humanity than ever before. The red wig was notably abandoned in favour of a black wig.

Staffordshire figure of W. C. Macready as Shylock, c.1852
Macready chose *The Merchant of Venice* for the opening production of his management of Drury Lane Theatre in 1841. His insistence that all parts be equally well cast made Shylock a less dominant character. Nevertheless, he gave him dignity, stateliness and pride in his Jewish heritage*. On loan from a private collection.*

Photograph of Henry Irving as Shylock, 1879
Irving's Shylock was cruel, focused and yet, at the same time, noble. He emphasised Shylock's lowest moments for maximum pathos. In Irving's own words, 'the worst passions of human

nature are nurtured by undeserved persecution and obloquy'.
On loan from a private collection.

Programme for Jonathan Miller's production of *The Merchant of Venice* at the National Theatre, 1970
Laurence Olivier starred in this production, set in the late Victorian period. According to Miller, 'allowing Shylock to appear as one among many businessmen, scarcely distinguishable from them […] made sense of his claim that, apart from his customs, a Jew is like anyone else'.

Hamlet

'Mr Garrick in Four of his Principal Tragic Characters', engraving, c.1750-1779
David Garrick pioneered a more naturalistic, emotional acting style. Hamlet was the most famous role of the most famous actor of the age. The iconic pose shown here expresses shock on first seeing the ghost. The impression was enhanced by a hydraulic wig which made Garrick's hair stand on end.

John Philip Kemble as Hamlet, Staffordshire figure after an 1810 print, c.1860
Kemble's style of acting was stately and polished, drawing on a long tradition of formality in posture, gesture and elocution. His portrayal of Hamlet, which focused on the melancholy and princely aspects of the character, dominated the stage for over 30 years.

C. F. Reichert, 'Charles Kean in the Character of Hamlet', hand-coloured lithograph, 1838
This print depicts Kean's first appearance as Hamlet. His interpretation of the role was considered striking and energetic, but was also criticised for being too tearful and melodramatic.

‘Irving as Hamlet’, engraving after Edwin Long, 1911
Henry Irving introduced a psychological Hamlet—poetic, volatile, possibly actually mad. His Hamlet was one of intellect and introspection rather than tragic passion. Widely praised, his interpretation defined the role for his generation.

Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet, *La vie illustrée* no. 63, 29 December 1899
Part of a tradition of female Hamlets, Bernhardt played the role in Paris and London in 1899. Her Hamlet was vigorous, determined and logical—unlike the noble, sensitive and melancholy figure that had come to be expected on the British stage.

Photograph of Samuel West as Hamlet at Stratford, 2001
In this production, set in the modern corporate world, Sam West appeared as the first ‘hoodie Hamlet’. He played the Danish prince as an intelligent, disaffected young student. In his interpretation, Hamlet’s madness was barely perceptible. *Photograph by Manuel Harlan, © RSC*

Photograph of David Tennant as Hamlet at Stratford, 2008
After months of speculation about what kind of Hamlet Dr Who would make, Tennant presented him as wildly humorous, witty and a compulsive mimic. Mad capriciousness, suggested here by the angle of the crown, overlaid outrage and recklessness in a Hamlet more active and athletic than philosophical.

Lady Macbeth

Hubert Gravelot after Francis Hayman, ‘Macbeth. Act 5. Sc[ene]. 1’, from *The works of Mr William Shakespear,* vol. 5, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1770
Sir Thomas Hanmer’s lavishly illustrated edition was first published in 1743-44. The artist was advised by David Garrick

on gesture and expression. The sleepwalking scene is derived from the artist's imagination rather than a stage production, but is characteristic in using contemporary mid-18th century costume and scenery.

James Parker after Richard Westall, 'Shakspeare. Macbeth Act I Scene V.', from *A collection of prints ... illustrating the dramatic works of Shakspeare*, vol. 1, plate XXXVIII, London: J. and J. Boydell, 1803

In contrast to previous interpretations of Lady Macbeth as merely ambitious, 'unsexed' and evil, Sarah Siddons envisaged her as passionate and vicious. Westall's sternly neoclassical depiction for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery captures the mesmerising power of her performance, arguably the definitive portrayal of the role.

***Macbeth, a tragedy by William Shakespeare as arranged for the stage by Henry Irving ... 29th December, 1888*, London: Nassau Steam Press, 1889 (Ellen Terry's copy with autograph notes on the character of Lady Macbeth)**

Known for her grace, warmth and charm, Ellen Terry excelled in Shakespearean comedy. Her Lady Macbeth was an unexpectedly fragile and feminine figure, a loving wife who falls victim to her husband's ambition, played for pathos rather than tragic power.

Photograph of 'Miss Ellen Terry as "Lady Macbeth"', [London?:] Window & Grove, 1888

Terry's spectacular gown, designed to look 'like soft chain armour ... and yet have something that would give the appearance of the scales of a serpent'. Embroidered with gold decorated with a thousand iridescent green beetle wings, it was immortalised by a John Singer Sargent portrait now on display at the Tate Gallery.

Angus McBean, Photograph of Margaret Rawlings as Lady Macbeth to Alec Clunes's Macbeth, Arts Theatre, London, 1950
Margaret Rawlings's careful and acute portrayal of Lady Macbeth received mixed reviews, suggesting that the legacy of larger-than-life performances such as those of Sarah Siddons still cast a long shadow over 20th-century interpretations of the role.

Leontes

Antony Sher, '"Winter's Tale" rehearsals. Leontes' dreams', drawing, 17 November 1998
In preparing for the role of Leontes for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Anthony Sher consulted experts in mental disorders and made sketches during rehearsals visualising Leontes' morbid fantasies. The resulting 'strange, aggressive couplings' illustrate a psychological approach to staging Shakespeare's plays.

Falstaff

Derby figure of James Quin as Falstaff, c.1765
Quin was known for his larger-than-life stage presence and powerful declamation (his nickname was 'Bellower' Quin). The most famous Falstaff of his time, he was praised for appearing not as an actor, but as 'Falstaff himself'. *On loan from a private collection.*

Maurice Morgann, *An essay on the dramatic character of Sir John Falstaff*, London: T. Davies, 1777
In this early piece of psychological criticism, the first dedicated study of any Shakespearean character, Morgann contends that Falstaff is not a coward. He praises Shakespeare for creating a character true to nature—foibles and all, and tries to explain

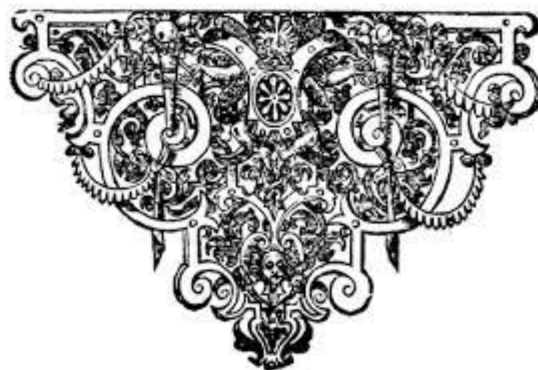
the fundamental sympathy of readers and audiences for the fat knight.

'Mr. Phelps as Sir John Falstaff', hand-coloured engraving, London: J. Redington, 1846

This twopence coloured portrait records the first portrayal of Falstaff by Samuel Phelps, one of the great actor-managers in one of his finest roles. Here knighthood was more important than fatness: Phelps downplayed Falstaff's sensuality and emphasised instead his intelligence and a gentlemanly suaveness.

Roger Furse, Costume design for Ralph Richardson's Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, 1945

Ralph Richardson's celebrated performance of Falstaff stole the show in a production at the Old Vic also starring Laurence Olivier and Michael Warre. Going against tradition, his portrayal was not a comic one; he presented Falstaff's exuberance and wit, but he also brought out the knight's nobler qualities.



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Cover: Edmund Kean as Richard III at Drury Lane Theatre, hand-coloured etching, c. 1821. **Inside front cover:** 'Names of the principall actors in all these plays', from *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares comedies, histories & tragedies,* London: I. Jaggard, and E. Blount, 1623. **Inside rear cover:** Roger Furse, Costume design for Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2* at the Old Vic Theatre, 1945.