

SHAKESPEARE & ME



38 GREAT WRITERS, ACTORS, AND
DIRECTORS ON WHAT THE BARD
MEANS TO THEM – AND US

Edited by Susannah Carson
Foreword by Harold Bloom



ONE WORLD

A Oneworld Book

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Harold Bloom

FOREWORD
Who Else Is There?

In my long career as a teacher, I have found that students, interviewers, and fellow readers keep asking me, “Why Shakespeare?” It seems a question as necessary to ask as it is impossible to answer, unless you respond, “Who else is there? Who but Shakespeare has influenced so many creative intellects?” The genealogy includes Milton, Austen, Dickens, Keats, and Emily Dickinson, and many of the strongest writers of our own generation. Who besides Shakespeare has perfected expressions of experience, and broadened and defined the horizons of human possibility? He has given us, through thirty-seven plays, 154 sonnets, and four longer poems, a secular religion.

His is the most capacious of consciousnesses. He comprehends and apprehends realities that are available to us but beyond our ken until he manifests them.

If you run any mode of criticism, whether historicism—old or new—or analytical, through Shakespeare, you find it is Shakespeare who illuminates your mode of thinking and not the other way around. His is an electrical field. Anything entering it will light up, but Shakespeare powers the illumination.

There is no God but God, and his name is William Shakespeare. Yahweh is not God. William Shakespeare is God. Heinrich Heine said, “There is a God, and his name is Aristophanes.”

On Heine's model, I again remark: there is a God, there is no God but God, and his name is William Shakespeare.

Shakespeare did not set out to create a religion, or to define us. We can never know his motives—presumably to fill seats, write good parts for his actors, stay out of the sight of Walsingham, Elizabeth's Chief of the Secret Service, and so avoid the fate of Thomas Kyd, who was tortured, and Christopher Marlowe, who was stabbed to death. In the plays, we find traces of Shakespeare's evolution as an artist. He swerves from the influence of Ovid, Chaucer, and Marlowe, and discovers that the only opponent worthy of agon is the writer of his own earlier plays. Not Shakespeare as man, but Shakespeare as playwright was the source of his own continued artistic struggle to break free of self-overdetermination.

Paul Valéry, great theoretician of influence, said we must learn to speak of the influence of a mind upon itself, a very rich insight which I have adapted to my own understanding of Shakespeare. After a large book on Shakespeare called *The Invention of the Human* and a shorter one devoted to *Hamlet* called *Poem Unlimited*, I explored the influence of Shakespeare's mind upon itself in *The Anatomy of Influence*, which provides some radically new readings of the elliptical qualities in *Hamlet*, in *The Tempest*, and of Edgar in *King Lear*. The only significant influence on Shakespeare, in the end, was Shakespeare himself. Increasingly in his work, what he leaves out becomes much more important than what he puts in, and so he takes literature beyond its limits. He transforms himself, a victory for art, and yet his own position as poet and as self-precursor resulted in an internalization of the conflict and an unresolvable ambivalence.

The result is a panoply of characters who possess inner lives

so very intricate that, although they are finite on the page, to us they nevertheless remain infinite in faculty and endless to meditation. The more elliptical the renderings, the more complex, illusory, and transformative the result. Shakespeare invented the depiction of inwardness in imaginative fiction, and with these characters he shows us how to overhear ourselves think and, by so doing, become richer, more complex, and more sensitive human beings. We learn about ourselves in these plays, and at the same time we enter their worlds to overcome our loneliness. These are our friends, our lovers, our enemies, our parents, our children, and the characters we encounter only briefly in the course of our daily lives.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that Shakespeare wrote the text of modern life, which means that we are all of us, each in turn, a kind of amalgam of various Shakespearean roles, though I would prefer to call them people. Shakespeare is people, and I write about them not only as roles to be performed, but as more real than you and I. If this is an eccentricity, at least it is a useful one for many actors, and for readers who look to literature for more than confirmation of their own critical agendas.

Old Bloom likes to identify with Sir John Falstaff, but another part of him secretly and inwardly identifies with the Black Prince of Denmark, and another part, rather yearningly, doesn't identify with, but wishes he were on warm terms with, Cleopatra of Egypt. Many years ago, in London, I saw a production of *Macbeth* with Michael Redgrave as the hero, and the marvelously fierce, sexually intense actress Ann Todd playing Lady Macbeth. When she cried out "Unsex me here!" Miss Todd grabbed herself in the crucial area and doubled over. Many men in the audience were highly activated.

My favorite fantasy is that Falstaff did not allow himself to

be done in by his murderous adopted son, the dreadful Prince Hal, and instead Shakespeare let him wander off to the Forest of Arden. There he sat on one end of a log, with the beautiful Rosalind on the other, and the two matched wits. Orson Welles had a fantasy in which he remarked that Hamlet did not go back to Elsinore but voyaged on to England, where he eliminated poor Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, stayed on, grew old and fat, and became Sir John Falstaff. Welles played a splendid Falstaff in the movie *Chimes at Midnight*, with Jeanne Moreau as Mistress Quickly.

We are used to characters breaking loose from Shakespeare. You cannot confine these figures to their own plays. They become instances of what was said of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* by Gabriel Harvey: that Hobgoblin had run off with the garland of Apollo. Shakespeare kills off Mercutio, since otherwise who would pay attention to Romeo? Juliet is marvelous enough, so people would keep admiring her. It became a choice between Mercutio and the play, and Mercutio had to go. In the same way, what can you do with Falstaff? He is larger than the play. He is life itself. Shakespeare may not have intended Sir John to turn into this comprehensive vision of immanence, but his is the outstanding instance of the real presence in all literature. He appears again in the beautiful Cockney prose elegy of Mistress Quickly in *Henry V*, but that isn't Sir John anymore. The impostor in the unforgivable play *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not Falstaff either. It is in *Henry IV*, Parts 1 and 2 that he triumphs.

My book *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* shows the Prince escaping from Shakespeare and writing his own play. He loathes the story that is unworthy of a majestic and marvelous mind. Shakespeare and Hamlet fight it out in the play. That sounds like Bloomian fantasy, but the more deeply you absorb *Ham-*

let, the more you realize that the Prince has cut loose from Shakespeare. I can understand anyone not much liking Hamlet. I remember a conversation with the learned scholar Alastair Fowler in which he said to me that it wasn't right to call Hamlet a hero-villain, for he is rather a villain outright. Hamlet is responsible for eight deaths, including his own. He destroys everyone in the play who has a speaking part, with the exceptions of Horatio, the fop Osric, and the dunderhead Fortinbras, who marches in with his army at the close—and so pragmatically Hamlet is very bad news indeed.

And yet he raises for Shakespeare, for me, and for you, a problem that we can't, I think, escape. One of the strangest ideas in Freud, expressed in his letters and by anecdotes concerning him, is the belief that great souls who are able to sustain a thorough psychoanalysis can emancipate their own thinking from its sexual past. When Freud is at his most reductive, he is sometimes strongest. It is the very small child's immense curiosity about gender difference that is the origin of thinking in every one of us, and almost all of us never transcend this. Thought never does get emancipated from its sexual past, and so we are caught in an endless moody brooding. Hamlet escapes, and I do not know whether that is his triumph or Shakespeare's. Hamlet has freed thinking from its sexual past. He does not know, we do not know, and perhaps Shakespeare does not know, when the actual sexual relationship began between Gertrude and Claudius. This leaves the unnerving possibility that Hamlet is the natural son of his uncle. If you protest how unlike he is from Claudius, reflect that he scarcely resembles that great basher of heads in battle, his putative father King Hamlet.

In *Hamlet*, and perhaps also throughout his canon, Shakespeare seems to have liberated his own thinking from its sexual past. He produces the uncanny detachment of the Sonnets.

They are a different mode than the plays, for they do not invent human beings. Lyric rather than dramatic, the narrative they offer is dangerous if employed to reveal the historical man. The poet of the Sonnets is Shakespeare, and yet he is also outside Shakespeare, revealing and concealing himself. Sonnets 1 through 126 possess a distanced erotic intensity, and the Sonnets from 127 on show an indisputable and heated erotic rancidity, although both the earlier poems concerning the fair young man and the later poems dealing with the dark lady are unified by their ironic stance. Shakespeare is so advanced in irony that we never will catch up. There is but one Sonnet in the sequence which is beyond irony, and that is 129, "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame," which affrights us but will not let us go. Here, perhaps nowhere else, the force of Shakespeare's sentiment becomes just as strong as his craft. He is one with the Sonnet's speaker, momentarily and deliberately giving in to madness as perhaps the last defense there ever can be against the lure of that perilous imbalance. There may be elements of Shakespeare himself in Hamlet and in Falstaff, and perhaps traces of the same rancidity in the later plays, most notably in *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, but in those dramatic instances the craft outlasts the sentiment.

Such rancidity is different from Shakespeare's negations, which culminate in the high tragedies. At their strongest, as in Iago, Shakespeare's grand negations are figures in a negative poetics which is a kind of dramatic negative theology. Iago is the incarnation of the spirit of modern war, which is his religion. Even Shakespeare surpasses himself, since, after he composes *Othello*, in the next fourteen consecutive months he goes on to write and revise *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Had one the privilege of having a drink with Shakespeare in a tavern, no doubt in salacious company, insofar as either of

us could disengage our attention from our associates and the spirits, I suppose I would have asked him: Am I right in believing that after the high tragedies that culminate in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, and then modulate magnificently into *Antony and Cleopatra*, it had all cost you too much?

Susannah Carson

INTRODUCTION

The Tyger's Hart

We live in Shakespeare's world, which is to say that we live in a literary, theatrical, cultural, and even psychological world fine-tuned for us by Shakespeare. Had he never lived, we would have bumbled along well enough, but he *did* live, and he did write, and those works were printed, and read, and performed, and passed on, and read some more, and performed some more, and emulated, and assimilated, and quoted, and so on. So that now, four hundred years later, we continue to read and perform and emulate his work so thoroughly and so passionately that it's difficult to conceive who we would be—as a culture, as ourselves—had Shakespeare never existed.

Shakespeare is the most widely read author in English; his *Complete Works* are second in popularity only to the Bible. In the United States, 90 percent of secondary school students read Shakespeare; 100 percent read him in Britain. But even before we come across the texts themselves, somehow we have already been infused with the themes of his thought and even snippets of his language. One is reminded of the young student who, upon seeing his first production of *Hamlet*, reported that he liked it well enough but that it was full of clichés: an apocryphal story, or does it happen all the time? Shakespeare is in many

ways so near to us that his words have already found their way into our hearts and heads.

In other ways, however, Shakespeare remains distant—a shadowy figure who wore ruffs and tights and wrote with a quill. The four hundred years separating us from him have taken their toll, and so it often seems that either we have to imagine our way back to him or we have to help him find his way forward to us. In addition to the time jump, Shakespeare keeps his distance through a variety of literary and biographical puzzles. His language is often impenetrable, for his vocabulary is abstruse or forgotten or invented; his syntax is sometimes contorted out of sense by verse; and his word games—such as the tongue twister and brain twister “Light seeking light doth light of light beguile”—can make our heads spin. Furthermore, Shakespeare couldn’t turn a plot for a bedtime story, and so he stole his plots, tinkered with them a bit, and then left them some mixture of lopsided, implausible, clichéd, unresolved, and (if historical) inaccurate. And then, to make matters even worse, we don’t even know how much of Shakespeare was indeed Shakespeare. Whether one thinks the great Authorship Question is nonsensical or worthy of serious consideration, it has contributed significantly to the aura of magic and mystery surrounding the poems and plays.

Despite all these complexities, when we finally relax into Shakespeare’s language we find those thoughts—rich and resonant, well-known and new—that help us make sense of our human condition. And when we slide into his stories we lose track of events and fall in with the motley crowd of impish heroines, rakish heroes, mischievous rogues, harrowing villains, ominous ghosts, star-crossed lovers, and brilliant fools. These are fresh acquaintances, but they double as those familiar figures we have met on this other side of fiction. More familiar

still, we can often recognize in Shakespeare's characters aspects of our own selves.

The goal of this collection of essays is to reacquaint readers with the Shakespeare they already love and to help them get to know that other, trickier Shakespeare too. The essays cover a broad range of experiences (reading, performing, adapting, interpreting), and the essayists offer a wide variety of professional backgrounds (actors, directors, scholars, poets, novelists, graphic novelists, and even one naturalist-explorer). I've attempted to bring together as many perspectives as possible, not in order to be exhaustive—indeed, with Shakespeare, one can never be exhaustive—but to celebrate the many different approaches to appreciating Shakespeare that are possible. There is no definitive response to Shakespeare, but rather a multitude of questions, anecdotes, observations, theories, attempts, and hopes. Together, they constitute a joyful and endless conversation. This book is part of the larger cultural exchange occurring right now, which extends to epistolary exchanges between old acquaintances, coffee-table talk, seminar discussions, conference panels, film production meetings, discussions between directors and actors on the staging of difficult scenes, and—perhaps my favorite instance—those warm debates friends engage in as they file out of theaters.

This book is also part of a broader historical conversation that goes back to the very beginning—starting with Shakespeare's first critic, Robert Greene, who referred to him in 1592 as having “a Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde”—and no doubt this conversation about Shakespeare will be with the human race all the way until an end we cannot now predict. I do not think that is overstating the matter: there is indeed something fearsome and formidable about that scope, and yet we should not feel overwhelmed, as we should not feel over-

whelmed by the idea of genius, since it all comes down to an immediate response, a joy, a sharing, a love, a sudden finding of ourselves—and all of that is tethered by what is, at heart, nothing more than words. That scope is as large as it is small. “O! For a muse of fire.” “Out, damned spot.” “Do we not bleed?” “His nose was as sharp as a pen.” “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I.” “Juliet is the sun.” “Put out the light, and then put out the light.” “A world-without-end bargain.” “What country, friends, is this?” “The island is full of noises.” “Let me not be mad.” “I am content.”

Together, the new Shakespeareans represented in this book will help readers close the four-hundred-year gap by finding the rhythms of a language that is both familiar and foreign, as well as by discovering the relevance of stories that are both legends and realities.

* * *

Most of us, for better or worse, first encounter Shakespeare in the classroom. We are assigned *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth*, for instance, and then perhaps we grumble and go home and put off the reading until the very last moment, and then read through the requisite scenes as quickly as we can to make the process of imbibing essential culture as painless as possible. That the initiation of an adolescent to Shakespeare should be conducted in such a rude and unpalatable manner is a great loss.

If Shakespeare must first be encountered read, then it is a shame that the reading should be so dry. Reading can be just as exciting as attending a stage play or a film when undertaken by a reader with an active imagination. With your own powers of invention you can imagine Shakespeare just how you want him, and so he can become, in that way, entirely yours and yours

alone. You can have your own *Hamlet*, your own *Twelfth Night*, your own *Henry IV*. You can be the director, and the lead actor, and the other actors too, as well as the scenery, and the costumes, and the lighting, and the audience. It is self-indulgent, never mind solipsistic, but it is entirely possible, and can be not only quite sufficient but hugely thrilling.

Reading Shakespeare affects how we live our lives in the broadest sense and, if we are writers too, then it can also affect how we write. In recent years, novels have helped us close the distance between ourselves and that distant Shakespeare. These contemporary works include Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (inspired by *King Lear*), Alan Gordon's *Fools' Guild* series (inspired by the fools in Shakespeare, especially Feste from *Twelfth Night*), Eleanor Brown's *The Weird Sisters* (inspired by all of Shakespeare), and Jess Winfield's *My Name Is Will: A Novel of Sex, Drugs, and Shakespeare* (inspired by Shakespeare's life). How can novelists such as these, writing directly in line with Shakespeare, find the space for their own voices and inventions? Does Shakespeare haunt writers like the ghost of the old King Hamlet, or does he work a strange magic which allows them to float into the deep imaginative realms of Bottom's dream?

The issue is not limited to those works that wear their Shakespearean influence on their sleeves. In addition to novels in which versions of Shakespearean characters walk the pages, there exist works in which Shakespeare's presence can be felt like a shadow in between the lines. Throughout the Western canon, and even on the borders, Shakespeare's influence is pervasive: to trace it in novels, plays, and poems would be to give the greater part of the history of literature. What is it like to be a modern nonwhite and/or non-Protestant-or-Catholic and/or female author writing in the tradition of the quintessential dead white

male? What's it like to try to find a place in the English language to create, for instance, a Chinese-American novel, as has Maxine Hong Kingston? How does growing up in Chile and pasting drawings of Shakespeare onto matchsticks to help envision his plays influence the writing life of a novelist such as Isabel Allende? Is the situation any different when one is working from within the same tradition to carve out space for one's own fictional worlds, as Dame Margaret Drabble and Joyce Carol Oates have done in their novels? In their essays, these novelists reveal, in various modes and through various themes, those elements of Shakespeare they have taken in, made their own, and accepted as influence, even as they have risen above the influences to find the sound of their own distinguished literary voices.

The novel seems like a traditional genre, and yet it was a new, still unproven literary form when Shakespeare was writing (Cervantes, often credited with the first "modern novel," *Don Quixote*, died close to the same day in the same month of April 1616). What, then, about those literary forms that are new today? Has Shakespeare suffered from the rise of comic books and graphic novels, or has he been able to reinvent himself as something like an illustrated superhero? This is a medium which, like the theater, unites language and imagery to create something greater than the sum of its parts. But aren't comics just kid stuff, written by grown-up kids? Hardly. In this collection, some of the most celebrated, award-winning, well-read, literary—and, yes, playful—creators in the comics industry reflect on the influence of Shakespeare in their own lives: Bill Willingham, author of the literary comic book series *Fables*; Matt Sturges, author of *Jack of Fables* and *House of Mystery*; Peter David, prolific novelist, screenwriter, and author of *Marvel 1602: The Fantastick Four*, which features Shakespeare as a character; and Conor McCreery, author of the series *Kill Shake-*

speare, which weaves many of Shakespeare's stories together into one riveting world.

Poetry, on the more traditional side, seems to be more elite than popular these days—and yet poetry was Shakespeare's own literary form, in the Sonnets and his longer poems, as well as in the plays themselves, which are extended dramatic poems. J. D. McClatchy, poet, professor, and editor of *The Yale Review*, writes on Shakespeare's poetic influence.

The best literary criticism is an art in its own right. The scholars and philosophers whose essays appear in this collection have chosen to address a wide variety of topics. Angus Fletcher writes on how Shakespeare brought subtleties and harmonies to his language, resulting in a new music of meaning. In an essay on *The Merchant of Venice*, the philosopher Stanley Cavell reflects on the nature of justice, drawing from his own personal encounters with prejudice. The Oxford professor Richard Scholar reflects on what free-thinking and democracy mean in *Julius Caesar* as a way to get at what they mean in the world of politics today. By means of a close reading of spring-time imagery throughout the plays, Germaine Greer comes to the conclusion that Shakespeare spent every Lent with his family in Warwickshire, where he accomplished so much of the writing which, it has been claimed by some, was too extensive for one man to produce.

Just as there is no single way to read Shakespeare, there is no single way to either write about him or write through his influence: as these essays show, the inspirational possibilities of Shakespeare as a written text are infinite.

* * *

Perhaps the most important circumstance to keep in mind when reading Shakespeare is that he wrote for the stage. Unlike

the works of authors such as Milton or Dickens, Shakespeare's works can be considered not only in the black and white of the printed page but also in what John Gielgud once called "the pasteboard glitter of the theatre." When we watch Shakespeare as spectators, we can enjoy the dual-level experience of a deeply personal, individual response, on the one hand, and on the other a communal audience alchemy. We are alone, and we are also part of something larger than ourselves. Watching a performance or film doesn't confuse the two experiences and lessen them, but rather heightens the enjoyment of both.

A different set of questions arises, therefore, as soon as we consider Shakespeare not just as flat on paper, but in that magical, moving pop-up book of the theater, for those printed words, stamped so distinctly in black and white, have inspired countless staged productions and films. We can imagine our own Shakespeare come to life, true, but the one thing we cannot do for ourselves is imagine all those other possible Shakespeares, all those other interpretations which are beyond our ken. Encountering these other visions expands the limits not only of our own imagination, but also of our ability to respond to and fully inhabit the human condition. Those involved in the staging and filming of Shakespeare—actors, directors, playwrights, screenwriters, voice instructors—have a particular relationship to Shakespeare, since they are actively involved in making his work a living experience. How do they tap into this vital force both personally and professionally? How do they draw from it different sounds and colors? And how do they communicate this, their privileged sense of Shakespeare's energy, to their audiences time and again, across an infinite combination of plays, characters, productions, and performances?

Some of these essays address single plays, of which *Othello*

has proven one of the most compelling. What's it like to be the first black man to play Othello at the Globe Theatre? That would be Eamonn Walker, a pioneer in the role in 2007. What is it like to be a part of a production that is both *Othello* itself and an Indian rewriting of *Othello*? The legendary actor, director, and instructor Barry John writes of his experiences as a white ex-pat in India, in *Othello: A Play in Black and White*. And how do one's experiences of *Othello* change, after revisiting the great work over the course of a career spanning no less than seven productions? The great James Earl Jones reflects on his past incarnations and conveys his current thoughts on how to reinvest Othello with the status of tragic hero.

Othello, it would seem, has a strong resonance with modern audiences. The same is true of *The Merchant of Venice*. I've mentioned Stanley Cavell's piece on justice in *The Merchant*. In his essay, F. Murray Abraham reflects on the manner in which he was able to portray Shylock as the sympathetic cornerstone of the play. *Hamlet*, the greatest work in Western literature, is correspondingly one of the most discussed plays in the collection.

Some of the essays reflect a lifetime of living with Shakespeare. Having performed in both romances, such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and tragedies, such as *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Coriolanus*, Brian Cox traces Shakespeare's pragmatic relationship with social order. Sir Antony Sher reflects on a life of performing Shakespeare's greatest heroes and villains, including Richard III, Leontes, Macbeth, and Iago—and that other masterpiece of a character who is neither hero nor villain, Lear's Fool. For us, Sir Antony is one of the quintessential Shakespearean actors, but in this essay he reflects on his unliterary upbringing—"To

paraphrase Hamlet, the Shers' motto could well have been, "What's Shakespeare to us, or we to Shakespeare?"—and the decades-long process of learning to feel comfortable in Shakespeare's language, having been born a South African of Jewish descent.

What is it like to be a female actor playing roles originally written for cross-dressing boys? What does Shakespeare tell us about how to be the heroines of our own lives in this modern world? Dame Harriet Walter reflects on her experiences embodying Shakespeare's greatest heroines, from Cleopatra to Viola to Juliet. "In all but a few cases," she writes, "I found myself as a character in competition with a man for the love of the hero." Eve Best reflects on her experiences playing Lady Macbeth and Beatrice at the Globe—two characters who seem polar opposites, but who share a similar strength.

Sir Ben Kingsley writes on the fundamental importance of encouraging younger generations to rise to the challenge of Shakespeare, insisting that "of course it's relevant. It's us. It's the birth of the greatness of our language." His colleague, the legendary Royal Shakespeare Company voice director Cicely Berry, reflects on her experience directing *King Lear* in a production which provoked a radical shift in the way the plays were then brought to life: through an awareness of how Shakespeare creates character not just with the meaning of words, but also with their very sounds. Camille Paglia, social critic and professor at the University of the Arts, writes about her years of teaching Shakespeare to young American actors, for whom, unlike for British actors, "he is an import, trailing arty clouds of glory." She encourages a deep engagement with the plays, encompassing the particularities of Shakespeare's language and the grandeur of his themes.

In addition to being a master craftsman, Shakespeare was a

popular writer whose primary goal was to delight his audiences. How can Shakespeare's sense of humor be updated to produce the same giggles and guffaws? In this tradition is the Reduced Shakespeare Company's *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*. In his essay, the company's cofounder Jess Winfield writes of adapting *The Complete Works* to suit the humor of different venues around the world during different times, using Shakespeare's sacred status as prime material for comedy. The members of the celebrated Fiasco Theater company reveal how they transformed *Cymbeline*, often considered a "problem play," into a riotously funny New York production. Karin Coonrod, Yale professor and director of a Public Theater production of *Love's Labor's Lost* (*sic.*) writes about helping modern audiences understand the light-hearted romantic banter of this linguistically complex play. The artistic director of the Globe Theatre, Dominic Dromgoole, writes of the specifically linguistic challenges—and opportunities—involved in staging *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Henry V*.

Having played Hamlet as well as Edgar in *King Lear*, Tobias Menzies writes about accessing these characters, both of whom adopt a form of madness, in a way that's modern and yet retains the original magic. David Farr, the playwright, screenwriter, and Royal Shakespeare Company director, explores Shakespeare's use of the sea as imagery for change. Interested specifically in the changes undergone by characters throughout and even before the beginnings of their plays, Rory Kinnear writes about his creation of Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, Hamlet, and Bolingbroke in *Richard II*.

After having been part of theatrical productions, some directors are moved to bring their favorite plays to film. Julie Taymor produced stage versions of *The Tempest* before filming her innovative production with Helen Mirren as Prospera;

in her essay, she writes of decisions inspired by the cinematic medium and of the different weight the story enjoys with a sorceress as the lead. Ralph Fiennes acted in *Coriolanus* on stage ten years before he decided to revisit the work as director and as Coriolanus himself in film. In his essay, he writes of the various ways in which he adapted the Roman setting to resonate with contemporary politics by using a modern setting and filming in Croatia.

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The fact that there are two primary ways of encountering the plays has led to two different interpretive approaches, which, more frequently than not between Shakespeare's time and now, have remained distinct. Should Shakespeare be read? Scholars, historians, and writers tend to prefer the pleasures of curling up with a good book. Or should Shakespeare be performed? Directors, actors, playwrights, and filmmakers describe the delights of the stage. It is almost as though there are two different traditions entirely.

But is it possible to have it both ways? The essays in this collection cover both sides of this spectrum and add new dimensions as well: although some performers write about performing and some novelists write about writing, most of the essays transcend the traditional division. Actors are scholars, critics are performers, directors are readers, and so on.

Two of the contributors defy categorization from the outset. James Franco is an actor, director, writer, poet, scholar, and artist. In his essay, he writes about his recent Gagosian Gallery cinematic installation based on Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, which was in turn based on *King Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*. James Prosek is an artist, writer, documentarian, and natural scientist. Drawing from his own experiences exploring South

America for new species of birds, he reflects on the nature of naming in Shakespeare's magical forests.

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Shakespeare continues to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for new creators, and just when one thinks nothing more can be done, a new work is born. There are great Shakespearean goings-on right now—but then, there always are. What accounts for his sacred eminence? His perennial celebrity? How is it that Shakespeare is always in theaters, in cinemas, in bookstores, and in our lives? And how is it that he appeals to all sorts of people? One thinks of the great literary figure Robertson Davies, who as a small child would look up admiringly at engravings of the great actors playing Antony and Portia, or of Isabel Allende with her makeshift matchstick theater, or of James Earl Jones listening to his uncle reciting *Antony and Cleopatra*. The essays in this book, it is hoped, will speak to those who have lived with Shakespeare for decades as well as to those who are just beginning their acquaintance with him. By painting portraits of their individual Shakespeares, those who have shared their favorite insights and anecdotes in the following essays are also inviting each of us to deepen, and perhaps even to discover, our own distinct and inevitably personal Shakespeares too.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The order of the essays loosely calls out certain themes, but other themes are interwoven throughout. Just as with any sustained conversation, while some ideas arise once, others recur and are modulated, supported, and refuted by their authors in varying contexts. Some of the authors wrote on single plays, some on multiple plays, and some on the entire corpus—thereby making any rubric impossible, and thankfully so, as one of the goals

of this collection is to dissolve apparent boundaries. Since there can be no true order to such a variegated collection, any reading sequence will do. Please see the back of the book for an index of plays and characters for specific navigation.

Except where otherwise noted, the text and the line references of the citations are taken from the RSC edition of 2009, which was modernized from the First Folio; for some of the shorter citations, mentioned in passing, the line references have not been included.

Although portions of some essays have been offered previously (see the permissions page), these essays have been updated by the authors specifically for this collection. This is the first time the essays have appeared in their current form.

I'd like to put thanks in print to each of the contributors, for they took time from their busy schedules to pause, reflect, recount, and write. This book owes its existence to Bonnie Nadell. Other support and counsel, in a variety of forms, was offered by: Harold Bloom, Jeanne Bloom, Karen Carson, Brian Cox, Jordan Culver, Dominic Dromgoole, Flynn Earl Jones, Janet Dulin Jones, Angel Jiménez de Luis, Tristram Kenton, Sharib Khan, Ken F. Levin, Albert Maggini, Ben Nathan, Dawn Revett, Joshua Bower Saul, Fiona Shaw, James Sime, Dame Harriet Walter, and Sarah Williams.