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978-0-521-18283-6 - Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre

Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster

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SHAKESPEARE AND THE POWER OF PERFORMANCE

This study opens new horizons upon Shakespeare's achievement by redefining the relationship between language and performance in the early modern playhouse. In Shakespeare's theatre the growing authority of the text was not superimposed upon performance; rather, the Renaissance impulse of "mighty" eloquence accommodated – even collaborated with – a performance practice marked by self-sustained energies and appeals. Shakespeare foregrounds this power of performance in its boldest bodily delivery through his use of Vice descendants, clowns and fools, gendered disguise, and "secretly open" modes of role-playing. Throughout his career, Shakespeare's plays were therefore driven by a dynamic relationship between language and show. Meeting the challenge of Performance Studies, the authors effectively bridge the gulf between stage-centered and text-centered approaches. This book rewrites the history of a formative phase in Shakespeare's contribution to world theatre.

ROBERT WEIMANN is Professor Emeritus, Department of Drama, at the University of California, Irvine. His publications in English include *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (1978), *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse* (1996), and *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge, 2000).

DOUGLAS BRUSTER is Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin. His books include *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1992), *Quoting Shakespeare* (2000), and *Prologues to Shakespeare's Theatre* (with Robert Weimann, 2004).

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521182836

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First published 2008
First paperback edition 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-89532-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-18283-6 Paperback

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*This book is dedicated to two younger colleagues
David Hillman and William West
who gave their best at earlier stages, and to our good friend
Friederike Riese
whose very special support helped complete the project.*

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Acknowledgments

Robert Weimann would like to acknowledge his first and largest debt to his co-author, without whose contribution this study would not have been possible. My gratitude to him is scarcely lessened by an overlapping indebtedness to two younger colleagues and friends whose names – given in the dedication – are connected with those chapters that were conceived, drafted, and mostly published in versions reaching back to the 1990s. Altogether and throughout that decade, my thinking and writing much benefited from stimulating discussions with my students in the English and Drama departments of the University of California, Irvine. In fact, this study has been in the making for so long because it concludes a larger project, with several preparatory book-length studies such as those on authority and representation in Reformation discourse and Renaissance fiction (1996), on the sociology and dramaturgy of the Elizabethan theatre (2000), and, with Douglas Bruster, about prologues on early modern stages (2004). Since these studies in their turn were preceded by even earlier work in German reaching back as far as 1983, it is impossible for me in retrospect to do more than thank all those who directly or indirectly helped and contributed to the evolution (which is also a devolution) of the project at large. If the present volume may be granted an exception, I would gratefully acknowledge that several of its chapters were read and most helpfully commented on by colleagues and friends, among them Catherine Belsey (Cambridge), William Dodd (Siena), Nora Johnson (Swarthmore College), Ludwig Pfeiffer (Siegen), William West (Northwestern) and Wolfgang Wicht (Potsdam). In no way responsible for what flaws remain, they graciously gave their acumen and perspicacity to improve my contribution to the present study and thereby foster a better book. Last but not least I owe a very special, personal gratitude to family members of the younger generation, particularly Jochen and Robbi, and to the unfailing support and forbearance of Maja, my wife. Finally, I was blessed to be able to rely on the

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invaluable, ever generous help of a good friend and former colleague, whose name is gratefully inscribed in the dedication.

At the same time, I wish to thank editors and journals for permission to incorporate and/or adapt previously published texts and materials. Our opening on the moral play was in its original version published under “Moralize Two Meanings’ in One Play: Divided Authority on the Morality Stage,” *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995), 427–50. Considerable parts of the present study of *Richard III* were first published as “Performance-Game and Representation in *Richard III*,” in Edward Pechter, ed., *Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence* (University of Iowa Press, 1996), 66–85. The essay on *King John* was (in a somewhat different form) first printed under the title “Mingling Vice and ‘Worthiness’ in *King John*,” in *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999), 109–33. The argument and some important material in the present study of cross-dressing and disguise (chapter 6) first appeared as “Textual Authority and Performative Agency: The Uses of Disguise in Shakespeare’s Theater,” *New Literary History* 25 (1994), 789–808. While the “secretly open” mode of personation (chapter 7) was (in radically different form) first presented at the SAA Convention in Miami (2001), it benefited considerably from the more focused treatment contained in a recent contribution to the collection *Shakespeare and Character*, edited by Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights (Palgrave, 2008). This contribution was as much adapted as was, in chapter 9, the much earlier essay on “Society and the Individual in Shakespeare’s Conception of Character,” published in *Shakespeare Survey* 34 (1981), 23–31. Finally, the socio-semiotic reading of the conflict in *King Lear*, though here crucially integrated in the much-augmented context of chapter 10, goes back to a German-language contribution to the Festschrift for B.A. Sørensen, “Autorität der Zeichen versus Zeichen der Autorität: Status und Repräsentationsproblematik in *King Lear*,” in *Orbis Litterarum* 42 (1987), 221–35.

Douglas Bruster would like to express sincere gratitude to his wife, Elizabeth Scala, and their two daughters, Madeleine and Claire, for patiently supporting his scholarly endeavors. Thanks go as well to two extremely encouraging Department Chairs, James D. Garrison and Elizabeth Cullingford, for helping make this research and writing possible, and to Phoebe Francis, for her help with the Index. A final acknowledgment must go to this volume’s brilliant and generous co-author, without whom this book – and so much of our knowledge concerning the agency of early modern performance – would not exist.

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Acknowledgments

In conclusion, both authors cannot do better than join words and sentiments in appreciation of their medium, Cambridge University Press, and all those whose performance made this book possible. In particular, there is good reason to be grateful to both our distinguished general editor, Sarah Stanton, sensitive and supportive throughout, and Rebecca Jones, our gracious editor who had so much insight, understanding, and more.