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Looking for Sex in Shakespeare

Stanley Wells is one of the best-known and most versatile of Shakespeare scholars. His new book, written with characteristic verve and accessibility, considers how far sexual meaning in Shakespeare's writing is a matter of interpretation by actors, directors and critics. Tracing interpretations of Shakespearian bawdy and innuendo from eighteenth-century editors to modern scholars and critics, Wells pays special attention to recent sexually oriented studies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, once regarded as the most innocent of its author's plays. He considers the sonnets, some of which are addressed to a man, and asks whether they imply same-sex desire in the author, or are quasi-dramatic projections of the writer's imagination. Finally, he looks at how male-to-male relationships in the plays have been interpreted as sexual in both criticism and performance. Stanley Wells's lively, provocative and open-minded new book will appeal to a broad readership of students, theatregoers and Shakespeare lovers.

STANLEY WELLS has devoted most of his life to teaching, editing and writing about Shakespeare and his contemporaries. He was Director of the Shakespeare Institute from 1987 to 1997. He is General Editor of the Oxford editions of Shakespeare, edited *King Lear* for the multi-volume Oxford Shakespeare, and has been associated with the New Penguin edition, for which he edited several plays, since its inception. His publications include *Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life*, *Shakespeare: For All Time* (2002) and (with Paul Edmondson) *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (forthcoming in 2004). He is editor of *Shakespeare on the Stage: An Anthology of Criticism*, with E. A. Davies of *Shakespeare and the Moving Image*, with Michael Dobson of *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, with Margreta de Grazia of *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, with Sarah Stanton of *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, and with Lena Orlin of *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide*.

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To my friends the actors

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Fournier 12/15 pt *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

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

ISBN 0 521 83284 5 hardback
ISBN 0 521 54039 9 paperback

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Foreword

A glaring omission from an otherwise compendious *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* is an entry that should appear between Orson Welles and Arnold Wesker. If any scholar deserves inclusion in a reference work about Shakespeare on the page and on the stage it is Stanley Wells.

In autumn 2002, Professor Wells accepted the International Shakespeare Globe Fellowship, one of two annual fellowships that have been offered to scholars by Globe Education since 1997. As Fellow, Professor Wells gave lectures to undergraduates studying at the Globe and to MA students on the Globe/King's College MA. In addition he gave three public lectures as part of Globe Education's *Sonnets and Desire* season of staged readings, lectures and events.

In introducing his three lectures, *Lewd Interpreters*, *The Originality of Shakespeare's Sonnets* and *Men Loving Men in Shakespeare's Plays*, Lord Alexander of Weedon QC, Michael Dobson and I paid tribute to Professor Wells's work in Stratford-upon-Avon with the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Shakespeare Institute, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the International Shakespeare Association, to his contribution to textual, literary and performance studies and to his support, as a trustee, of Southwark's Rose Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe.

Professor Wells has the remarkable gift of effortlessly engaging groundlings and university wits alike with his scholarship,

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Foreword

without being patronizing or rarified. His delivery is akin to a performance and the lectures were written and presented with a live audience in mind.

Those who attended the lectures and asked afterwards for transcripts (and the many who were unable to secure a ticket) will be grateful to Sarah Stanton for promoting the idea of a publication to Cambridge University Press. However, while the three talks were written for the one-hour traffic of a lecture theatre, Professor Wells has been able to reinstate cuts made for the evening and add post-production thoughts for this published edition. Those in the original audience will miss the pleasure that the lectures afforded us when they were presented with the soul of lively action, but as readers they and others will benefit from this newly imprinted and enlarged record.

As Thomas Heywood wrote in his preface to *Greene's Tu Quoque*, 'since it hath passed the test of the stage with so general an applause, pity it were but it should likewise have the honour of the press'.

Patrick Spottiswoode
Director, Globe Education

Preface

This little book has its origins in three lectures given at Shakespeare's Globe, London, in October and November 2002. I am immensely grateful to the Globe's Director of Education, Patrick Spottiswoode, for the invitation to speak and for his genial hosting of these occasions. He kindly took the chair for the first, Professor Michael Dobson for the second, and Lord Alexander of Weedon for the third. Dr Paul Edmondson read quotations for the lecture printed as Chapter Two. I am indebted to the librarians of the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon, for help with the illustrations. Dr Jan Sewell assisted in preparing the book for publication, and Sarah Stanton, of Cambridge University Press, has been unfailingly helpful at all stages of its publication.

Quotations from Shakespeare's works refer to the Oxford edition of the *Complete Works*, General Editors Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (1986). Quotations from Shakespeare's contemporaries are modernized unless there is special reason to preserve the conventions of presentation in the original text.