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978-0-521-88486-0 - Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage

Tom Rutter

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## WORK AND PLAY ON THE SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE

Time and again, early modern plays show people at work: shoe-making, basket-weaving, grave-digging and professional acting are just some of the forms of labour that theatregoers could have seen depicted on stage in 1599 and 1600. Tom Rutter demonstrates how such representations were shaped by the theatre's own problematic relationship with work: actors earned their living through playing, a practice that many considered idle and illegitimate, while plays were criticised for enticing servants and apprentices from their labour. As a result, the drama of Shakespeare's time became the focal point of wider debates over what counted as work, who should have to do it, and how it should be valued. This book describes changing beliefs about work in the sixteenth century and shows how new ways of conceptualising the work of the governing class inform Shakespeare's histories. It identifies important contrasts between the way the work of actors was treated in plays written for the adult and child repertoires. Finally, it examines whether different playing companies depicted work and workers in different ways in the decade between the reopening of the playhouse at St Paul's in 1599 and the move of the King's Men to the Blackfriars.

TOM RUTTER is Senior Lecturer in Renaissance Literature at Sheffield Hallam University. He has published articles in journals, including *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* and *Studies in English Literature*, and is a regular reviewer for *Modern Language Review* and *Early Modern Literary Studies*. This is his first book.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi  
 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/9780521884860

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First published 2008

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

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

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*  
 Rutter, Tom.

Work and play on the Shakespearean stage/Tom Rutter.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88486-0

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616—Characters. 2. English drama—Early modern  
 and Elizabethan, 1500-1600—History and criticism. 3. Work in literature.  
 4. Play in literature. 5. Professions in literature. 6. Literature and  
 society—England—History—16th century. 7. Acting in literature. I. Title.

PR 2989.R88 2008

822.3'3—dc22

2008011345

ISBN 978-0-521-88486-0 hardback

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*To Sophie, Cædmon, and Aphra*

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## *Acknowledgements*

This book developed out of my Ph.D. thesis, 'Playing Work: The Uses of Labour on the Shakespearean Stage', which was completed with the help of a postgraduate award from the Arts and Humanities Research Board and a Fourth Year Fellowship from the English Department of University College London (UCL). The same two bodies, along with the UCL Graduate School, also helped me to attend the seminar, 'Working Women/Women's Work: The Role of the Working Woman in Shakespeare's England' at the Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in 2001. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences at London South Bank University in enabling me to give a paper at the British Shakespeare Association's biennial conference in 2005. The Humanities Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University gave me the resources to consult manuscripts at the National Archives and the British Library; I would also like to thank the librarians at both of those institutions and at the libraries of Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield University, UCL, the University of London and the Warburg Institute.

Material from Chapter 2 appeared as 'The Actors in *Sir Thomas More*' in *Shakespeare Yearbook*, n.s., 16, 227–44. I want to thank the Editor, Douglas A. Brooks, and the Editorial Board for granting me permission to reprint that material here. Material from Chapter 4 appeared as 'Fit Hamlet, Fat Hamlet, and the Problems of Aristocratic Labour' in *Cahiers Elisabethains* 68 (Autumn 2005), 27–32. Again, I would like to thank the Editorial Board for granting me permission to reprint it.

It is a pleasure to record numerous debts to individuals. Foremost among those is René Weis, who supervised my Ph.D. with exemplary care and generosity and from whom I continue to learn. Henry Woudhuysen provided much guidance in the early stages, and, as secondary supervisor, Helen Hackett read successive drafts of my thesis and made numerous invaluable suggestions. Ann Thompson and Richard Dutton were benevolent but scrupulous examiners, and their comments were a great

*Acknowledgements*

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help when I came to redevelop the material as a book. My colleagues at Sheffield Hallam University, Annaliese Connolly, Lisa Hopkins and Matt Steggle, graciously agreed to read parts of the final draft, and I have benefited from discussions with Eva Griffith, Andrew Gurr, Farah Karim-Cooper, Roslyn Knutson and Lucy Munro. Writing books is not exactly hauling coal, but it's arduous in its own way, and I have been sustained by the companionship of Alice Bell, Robin Deacon, Kevin De Ornellas, Ricardo Domizio, Michelle Dowd, Caroline Gordon, Rowland Hughes, Margaret Kinsman, Sonia Massai, Gordon McMullan, Dinah Roe, Suzanne Scafe and Sarah Wood. Andrew Dewdney, Steve Earnshaw, Chris Hopkins, Danny Karlin, Anna Reading and Hillegonda Rietveld deserve thanks for helping to make their institutions congenial places to do research in. I would like to thank Sarah Stanton at Cambridge University Press (CUP) for believing in this project, Rebecca Jones and Jodie Barnes, for helping it to press, and CUP's anonymous readers for their input, which has made this a better book. I also want to thank Marianthi Makra and Liz O'Donnell for their work on its production. My approach to early modern drama owes a great deal to John Pitcher, in whose undergraduate seminars and tutorials this project's origins lie.

To three people, incalculable thanks are due. They are my parents, Bill and Rowena, who have provided continual encouragement to me in my academic career, and my wife Sophie, who has been an unfailing source of love and support in the face of extreme provocation. To her, and to our children Aphra and Cædmon, this book is dedicated.

## *Note on texts and dates*

Speech prefixes in quotations from plays have been standardised throughout. Except where indicated, in-text references to the works of Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, John Marston and William Shakespeare use the following editions:

- THOMAS DEKKER, *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953–61).  
 BEN JONSON, *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and E. M. Simpson, II vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52).  
 JOHN MARSTON, *The Plays of John Marston*, ed. H. Harvey Wood, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1934–39). As Wood does not supply lineation, volume and page number are given.  
 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

Except where indicated, dates of performance throughout this book are from Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975–1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, &c.*, rev. S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964).