Hailey Bachrach reveals how Shakespeare used female characters in deliberate and consistent ways across his history plays. Illuminating these patterns, she helps us understand these characters not as incidental or marginal presences but as a key lens through which to understand Shakespeare’s process for transforming history into drama. Shakespeare uses female characters to draw deliberate attention to the blurry line between history and fiction onstage, bringing to life the constrained but complex position of women not only in the past itself but as characters in depictions of said past. In Shakespeare’s historical landscape, female characters represent the impossibility of fully recovering voices the record has excluded and the empowering potential of standing outside history that Shakespeare can only envision by drawing upon the theatre’s material conditions. This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

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STAGING FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE’S ENGLISH HISTORY PLAYS

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Note on the Text

Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the plays under discussion are taken from the following editions, with further citations included in-text. Titles of Shakespeare’s plays are occasionally abbreviated.


Spelling has been modernised except when unavoidable, as in a quotation from a scholar who has not modernised spelling. Web citations throughout were checked and accurate as of 30 September 2022.