

Shakespeare's Possible Worlds

New methods are needed to do justice to Shakespeare. His work exceeds conventional models, past and present, for understanding playworlds. In this book, Simon Palfrey goes right to the heart of early modern popular drama, revealing both how it works and why it matters. Unlike his contemporaries, Shakespeare gives independent life to all his instruments, and to every fraction and fragment of the plays. Palfrey terms these particles “formations” – theatre-specific forms that move with their own action and passion. Palfrey’s book is critically daring in both substance and format. Its unique mix of imaginative gusto, thought-experiments, and virtuosic technique generates piercing close readings of the plays. There is far more to playlife than meets the eye. Influenced by Leibniz’s visionary original model of possible worlds, Palfrey opens up the multiple worlds of Shakespeare’s language, scenes, and characters as never before.

SIMON PALFREY is Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford. He is the joint founding editor of *Shakespeare Now!* His books include *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words* (1997), *Doing Shakespeare* (2004, 2011 – named a TLS International Book of the Year), *Shakespeare in Parts* (with Tiffany Stern, 2007 – winner of an AHRC Innovations Award and the MRDS David Bevington Award for best new book on Medieval and Renaissance drama), and *Poor Tom: Living “King Lear”* (2014).

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For Jo

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This is a book about Shakespearean possibility. Inevitably, I barely scratch the surface of my subject. But there is another smaller reason why I see my book as incomplete. Throughout much of its making, as it was dreamt and researched and drafted and redrafted, I was working towards one particular culminating example: Edgar-Tom in *King Lear*. But the material on Tom and Edgar started to build and build, and eventually threatened to overwhelm the enterprise, and so I decided to omit it completely and make it the subject of a separate work. This has become *Poor Tom: Living "King Lear"*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2014, an intensification and extension of my approach in *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds*. I hope that anyone stimulated by either one of these books may also find things to enjoy in its partner.

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A note on texts

Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*, prepared by Charlton Hinman, second edition (W. W. Norton & Company, 1996). Line references are to the through-line-number (TLN) of the Folio edition. In the case of *Pericles* I use the Malone copy of the 1609 Quarto in the Bodleian, edited by W. W. Greg (London, 1940). Likewise, unless otherwise noted all Middleton quotations and references are from *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, edited by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Clarendon Press, 2007).