

TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE

In this engaging new book, writer and critic Graham Holderness shows how a classic Shakespeare play can be the source for a modern story, providing a creative ‘collision’ between the Shakespeare text and contemporary concerns. Using an analogy from particle physics, Holderness tests his methodology through specific examples, structured in four parts: a recreation of performances of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* aboard the East India Company ship the *Red Dragon* in 1607; an imagined encounter between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson writing the King James Bible; the creation of a contemporary folk hero based on *Coriolanus* and drawing on films such as *Skyfall* and *The Hurt Locker*; and an account of the terrorist bombing at a performance of *Twelfth Night* in Qatar in 2005. These pieces of narrative and drama are interspersed with literary criticism, each using a feature of the original Shakespeare play or its performance to illuminate the extraordinary elasticity of Shakespeare. The ‘tales’ provoke questions about what we understand to be Shakespeare and not-Shakespeare, making the book of vital interest to students, scholars, and enthusiasts of Shakespeare, literary criticism, and creative writing.

GRAHAM HOLDERNESS is Research Professor in English at the University of Hertfordshire. He has published extensively in early modern and modern literature, and drama. His influential publications include *Shakespeare’s History* (1985), *The Shakespeare Myth* (1988), the trilogy *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (2001), *Visual Shakespeare: Essays in Film and Television* (2002), and *Textual Shakespeare: Writing and the Word* (2003), the innovative biography *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (2011), and the novel *The Prince of Denmark* (2001). He is also a dramatist and poet, and his poetry collection *Craeft* received a Poetry Book Society award in 2002.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-07129-2 — Tales from Shakespeare
Graham Holderness
Excerpt
[More Information](#)

TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE

Creative Collisions

GRAHAM HOLDERNESS



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107071292

© Graham Holderness, 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
 of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
 place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2014

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Holderness, Graham.

Tales from Shakespeare : Creative Collisions / Graham Holderness.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-07129-2 (hardback)

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Adaptations—History and criticism.
2. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Criticism and interpretation.
3. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Influence. I. Title.

PR2880.A1H65 2014

822.3'3—dc23

2014002312

ISBN 978-1-107-07129-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
 or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
 publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
 remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-07129-2 — Tales from Shakespeare
Graham Holderness
Excerpt
[More Information](#)

To my parents
Who bought me Tales from Shakespeare

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-07129-2 — Tales from Shakespeare
Graham Holderness
Excerpt
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
Introduction: from appropriation to collision	i
PART I	
1 The voyage of the <i>Red Dragon</i>	23
2 ‘Shooting an elephant’	37
PART II	
3 Shakespeare and the King James Bible	61
4 ‘ <i>Wholly Writ</i> ’: <i>A Play in Two Acts</i>	75
PART III	
5 The <i>Coriolanus</i> myth	89
6 ‘The Lonely Dragon’	126
PART IV	
7 Shakespeare and 9/11	179
8 ‘Rudely interrupted’	207
<i>Afterword: ‘Tales from Shakespeare’</i>	222
<i>Notes</i>	226
<i>Index</i>	239

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-07129-2 — Tales from Shakespeare
Graham Holderness
Excerpt
[More Information](#)

Preface

I CREATIVE COLLISIONS

Ideas rose in clouds: I felt them collide until pairs interlocked, so to speak, making a stable combination. (*Henri Poincaré*)

When I first read Shakespeare at school, the plays were firmly located within a set of contingent discourses clearly marking out what was Shakespeare from what was not.

These contexts formed the infrastructure of Shakespeare studies: Tudor history; the arts and manners of the Elizabethan court; the history of the theatre, mediaeval to early modern; the literary world, with its as yet un-dissociated Renaissance sensibility. The critical context was provided by T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, G. Wilson Knight.

Though deeply embedded in this culture, I was also aware that Shakespeare had an unnerving tendency to pop up everywhere around me. I heard his words in pop songs ('You know someone said, the world's a stage'); saw his plays travestied in comedy sketches by Tony Hancock, and Morecombe and Wise ('What d'ye think of it so far?'); found his image in advertisements, and his face on beer-mats. But there seemed to be no bridges linking the Shakespeare of the academy with the Shakespeare of that popular culture my critical mentors despised and ignored; no meaningful connection between Shakespeare and not-Shakespeare.

Thirty years later, it was possible to document these interactions, and to discuss Shakespeare in relation to popular culture, tourism, and advertising; to the general fields of theatre, education, and television; and to social contexts such as politics, media, and gender that had been made visible by critical theory. My edited collection

The Shakespeare Myth (1988) pioneered, in the teeth of no little resistance, many such approaches that have, in the meantime, become much more familiar. But the wounds of controversy quickly heal, and academic institutions adjust and rebalance themselves. Though the geography has changed, there are still clear-cut borders between what is acknowledged to be Shakespeare, and what is not. Or rather, it is accepted that Shakespeare permeates everything, but there is no corresponding recognition that everything permeates Shakespeare.

This book readdresses this problem via a methodology derived from an analogy with contemporary particle physics. The concept of ‘collision’, signifying the impact of a number of forces and objects upon one another, is a useful analogy for describing and accounting for what sometimes happens to produce the phenomenon we know as ‘Shakespeare’. A collision may be violent and destructive, as in a car crash, or it may be harmless and hardly noticeable, as when two people bump into one another. But in every case the collision makes a difference, alters the trajectory of the objects themselves, and creates new energy that did not exist before. The examples of Shakespearean ‘collision’ I have written on below vary, from the extreme violence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, to the more ‘normal’ interaction between a classical text and a contemporary process of adaptation or appropriation. But in every case the collision can be seen to release new ‘available energy’ and to modify both objects and the forces that move them.

My introduction explores various methodologies based on analogies from the natural sciences, which are widely (if unconsciously) deployed in Shakespeare studies, using *Hamlet* as a test-case. All these approaches concur in proving the extraordinary elasticity of the Shakespearean text, which can undergo protean changes without ever completely losing its identity. Once this position is accepted, it becomes easier to perceive that some encounters between Shakespeare and not-Shakespeare are not at all the random and accidental collisions they at first sight appear to be. Such encounters release new energies and create new particles, generating new meanings and modifying both parties to the collision.

Four chapters of the book test this methodology through specific examples: the performances of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* aboard the East India Company ship the *Red Dragon* off the coast of Africa in 1607; the brief encounter between Shakespeare and the King James Bible