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978-1-107-09878-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's First Folio

Edited by Emma Smith

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST FOLIO

Shakespeare's First Folio, published in 1623, is one of the world's most studied books, prompting speculation about everything from proof-reading practices in the early modern publishing industry to the 'true' authorship of Shakespeare's plays. Arguments about the nature of the First Folio are crucial to every modern edition of Shakespeare and thus to every reader or student of the plays. This *Companion* surveys the critical methods brought to bear on the Folio and equips readers with the tools to understand it and to develop their skills in early modern book culture more generally. A team of international scholars surveys the range of bibliographic, historical and textual material relating to the Folio, its editors, collectors and critical reception. This revealing volume will be of wide interest to scholars of Shakespeare, the history of the book and early modern drama.

Emma Smith is Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the University of Oxford. She has lectured widely in the UK and beyond on the First Folio and on Shakespeare and early modern drama. Her research interests include the methodology of writing about theatre, and developing analogies between cinema, film theory and early modern performance. Her recent publications include *Macbeth: Language and Writing* (2013), *The Cambridge Shakespeare Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *Shakespeare's First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book* (2016).

*A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book*

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*FOR PETER W.M. BLAYNEY*

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## CONTRIBUTORS

Gabriel Egan, De Montfort University

Steven K. Galbraith, Rochester Institute of Technology

B.D.R. Higgins, University of Oxford

Adam G. Hooks, University of Iowa

Edmund G.C. King, The Open University

Peter Kirwan, University of Nottingham

Chris Laoutaris, Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham

Tara L. Lyons, Illinois State University

Jean-Christophe Mayer, CNRS and University of Montpellier

Eric Rasmussen, University of Nevada

Emma Smith, Hertford College, Oxford

Sarah Werner, Independent Scholar

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## PREFACE

The book now known as Shakespeare's First Folio was published as *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* in late 1623, some seven years after its author's death. This large-format publication includes, in 900 pages of double-column text, 36 plays, half of which had not previously been printed and for which, therefore, the First Folio is our only authority (see chapters 1 and 5). The plays in the Folio are, in order (titles modernised), firstly the 'Comedies': *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, and *The Winter's Tale*; then the 'Histories': *King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3*, *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*. In between the 'Histories' and 'Tragedies' sections, almost all copies of the book also include *Troilus and Cressida*, which, for reasons discussed in Chapter 2, was not included on the catalogue page. The 'Tragedies' appear in the following order: *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*.

Those plays which had already been published in the small, single-play quarto format, appear in the First Folio with some textual variants: sometimes small or apparently inconsequential, but at other times substantial (see chapters 5 and 8). Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry is not included, and nor are two plays we now believe to be collaborative: *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Debate continues to rage about whether we should add other plays to this list of omissions (see Chapter 6).

The First Folio sold at retail for around 15 shillings unbound in 1623. It was a large investment for its backers. The book was produced by a syndicate of publishers led by William Jaggard and his son Isaac, who also printed the volume, and the stationer Edward Blount. Its 900

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double-columned pages were printed, with many interruptions, at the Jaggards' printshop in the Barbican during 1622 and 1623 (chapters 2 and 3). A title-page illustration of the dramatist – the only extant portrait authorised as a likeness by those who knew Shakespeare – was commissioned from Martin Droeshout. A number of contemporary writers added dedicatory and commendatory verses that were crucial in shaping Shakespeare's literary reputation (see Chapter 4). There is a list of the actors in the Chamberlain's, later the King's, Men, headed by Shakespeare's own name, and two prose epistles signed by Shakespeare's colleagues John Heminge and Henry Condell. The first dedicates the book to the noblemen associated with the company, that 'incomparable pair of brethren' William and Philip Herbert; the second 'to the Great Variety of Readers' who are urged, 'what ever you do, Buy'.

The First Folio is perhaps the most studied book ever, prompting speculation – sometimes deeply scholarly, sometimes excitably partisan – about everything from proof-reading practices in the early modern publishing industry to the 'true' authorship of Shakespeare's plays. For Shakespeareans it has generated endless questions about its author, about the provenance and authority of its texts and about the circumstances of its production. Arguments about the nature of the First Folio are crucial to every modern edition of Shakespeare and thus to every reader or student of the plays. Further, this book has had an ongoing life over four centuries in the hands of readers, editors and collectors (see chapters 7, 8 and 9) that has a lot to tell us about the reception of Shakespeare, and of rare books more generally, across time and culture. And its unique cultural prominence is unchallenged: despite the fact that it is not a rare book by early modern standards, the 'discovery' of a tattered and uncatalogued copy in a French library made international headlines in 2014 (Chapter 12).

This *Companion* surveys this range of material, and the bibliographic, historical, textual and critical methods brought to bear on this most-studied of books, with the aim of equipping students and general readers with the tools to understand the First Folio and to develop their skills in early modern book culture more generally. It reflects current interests in the history of the book and in the implacable materiality of literary forms, as well as developing perennial themes about Shakespeare's text and critical reception. First Folios have never been so accessible, as museum treasures on display in major libraries and for special anniversaries, and as digital objects available for perusal on-screen. This book is intended as a user's guide to these many online and print avatars, to help readers understand the book's history. It is also an exhortation to turn its pages, as Ben Jonson, in the poem addressed 'To the Reader' which opens the First Folio, encouraged: 'looke / Not on his

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Picture, but his Booke'. In the same spirit, we hope our *Companion* will send you anew to the First Folio (see Chapter 10). Thus, to echo Heminge and Condell in their prefatory epistle 'To the great Variety of Readers', 'we leave you to other of his Friends, whome if you need, can bee your guides'.

A note on references: when quoting modernised texts of the plays we use the appropriate volume in the New Cambridge Shakespeare series unless otherwise cited. References to the First Folio use the standard alphanumeric signature system found at the foot of the first three leaves of Folio gatherings. Reasons for some of the more complicated collational formulas in the book are discussed in chapters 3 and 4, but most of the Folio leaves are printed in gatherings of six, making twelve printed pages. The first three pages are typically numbered in the form A1, A2, A3, and the next three are taken to be A4, A5 and A6, before the new gathering starts at B. At the end of the alphabet, the sequence starts again as aa1, aa2, aa3 etc. A superscript 'r' at the end of the signature refers to the 'recto' or face of a leaf; a 'v' indicates the 'verso', or reverse. The Bodleian online First Folio ([firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk](http://firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk); see Chapter 11) marks each image with one of these signatures.