Introduction

Shakespeare's Early Readers covers the period from the publication of the first Shakespearean playbooks to the gradual disappearance of the monopoly on the publication of Shakespeare's works, held by a handful of publishers, and the opening of the market to a wider readership in the course of the eighteenth century. In sum, the monograph addresses that crucial formative early modern[1] 'moment' when Shakespeare's works began to permeate the public sphere both in London and elsewhere. His plays and poems were handed down, transformed, disseminated and appraised by his readers. All of this took place prior to the institutionalisation of Shakespeare in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and well before the global dissemination of his works in the twenty-first century. By breaking the mould of the usual opposition between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century appropriation of Shakespeare, my aim is of course not only to highlight the discontinuities between earlier and later reading practices, but also to reveal their cross-generational palimpsestic nature, as readers across time entered into dialogue on the printed or manuscript page.

The book reconsiders the role of readers in the history of Shakespeare's rise to fame and in the history of canon formation – as they often attributed value to Shakespeare's works. This rise was a complex and discontinuous process involving a wide variety of institutions and of course the world of theatre itself. Readers are only part of the story – even if they remain to this day a crucial and often unseen part of it. Indeed, the central claim of this book is that the role of readers has been much understated and that the study of *actual* appropriation practices provides another important means of measuring how fame and literary value were constructed, sometimes

[1] In this book I shall be using the word 'early modern' to refer essentially to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The reason for this is that I have not found enough fundamental divergences – at least in the field of the history of reading – to differentiate these two centuries.

against a variety of odds, by the will and curiosity of individuals, during Shakespeare's lifetime and across two decisive centuries.

Above all, this enquiry is a hymn to the archive and to what can be found there. Throughout the ten years or so during which I worked on this project, I was often asked what traces readers had left (if any) in those early books and manuscripts. While not as popular with early collectors of verse as John Donne,[2] Shakespeare (whether he was named or not) quickly became part of the manuscript picture. As for books, it is in fact rare to find one that does not bear traces of a reader – often someone from the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Ten years later, after surveying thousands of pages, my conviction is that the nature of the early readerly engagement and response was considerable. That so much had lain dormant for so long came as a surprise and encouraged me to write on the subject. To date, no book has looked at the work produced by Shakespeare's early modern readers in a comprehensive manner – that is, not only by including drama and poetry, but also by taking into account print *and* manuscript.[3] This will enable us to offer a more integrated vision of production and reception practices in the early modern period and provide us with a *much bigger* picture of the circulation of Shakespeare's works throughout the period.[4]

In writing this study I have not consulted every single extant early edition of Shakespeare, or every manuscript that contained extracts of his works. The task would have been near impossible, or indeed futile, for reasons that will appear shortly. This book is built around what I would call a 'critical mass' of both early printed editions and manuscripts. Having collected a substantial and very varied number of examples, this 'critical

[2] Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 147; 159.

[3] Eric Rasmussen and Anthony West's indispensable *The Shakespeare First Folios: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012) gives very valuable descriptions of annotations, but no analysis of them is provided and it is of course limited to First Folios. David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) is a mine of useful information and insights, but is primarily concerned with book theory and 'implicit' readers, rather than actual ones. Charlotte Scott's *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) is a valuable work of scholarship, but it looks at books as metaphors in Shakespeare's works and as objects on stage, which is not what the current project will be doing.

[4] Such a vision is now possible thanks to the in-depth work of old and new bibliographers, on the one hand, and, on the other, to decades of dedicated research in the field of manuscript studies, now combined with new technology making all this material far more accessible and searchable. See, as examples of new technology serving older research two indispensable websites: http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/index.html (for early modern playbooks) and www.celm-ms.org.uk (for literary manuscripts). Also the work of E. Leedham-Green and Alan H. Nelson for the 'Private Libraries in Renaissance England' project, a database which has recently gone online too.

mass' helped me form an idea of the major reasons for readers to get involved with Shakespeare. This was how the chapters of this book were designed – to reflect and analyse the type of material I had found in the archive.

As we know, reading is such an idiosyncratic activity that no claim is made here to have addressed every manner of reading Shakespeare in the period concerned.[5] Nor does analysing even a considerable number of documents exclude errors of interpretation – reading readers, so to speak, can not only be baffling, especially from our perspective, but also represents a daunting challenge. As Roger Chartier argued, such acts of interpretation reflect 'the paradox underlying any history of reading, which is that it must postulate the liberty of a practice that it can only grasp, massively, in its determinations'.[6] Meaning itself is always constructed and the interpretations offered in this study are informed by what we know of the past and are never devoid of the methodological concerns and biases of the present.[7] Finally, there were of course those thousands of readers who read 'silently' and never left traces of their thoughts and opinions. They were probably numerous, and the dream that the whole of human experience is recoverable has to be abandoned. Yet it is my belief that those who did mark, extract and express themselves, were, in some ways at least, not too dissimilar to their 'silent' counterparts. All the elements we mentioned in this paragraph are inherent risks for a study of this nature, but, in the end, they have to be accepted and borne in mind to enable a book like this to develop its argument.

The early modern period may have created 'bardolatry',[8] but it was certainly not a time when Shakespeare's fame as a dramatist or poet was assured. We are far from the institutionalised Shakespeare that we first encountered through the school system, or indeed through his 'fragments', which have circulated and transformed themselves from the sixteenth

[5] All the more so as 'all readers probably do not use the same reading strategy in any period, nor does any one reader always read the same way' (Stephen B. Dobranski, *Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 34).

[6] Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992), trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 23.

[7] Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book, A Study of Spaces and Traces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 14 and Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts Readers and Reading Communities, 1695–1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p. 13. See also Claire M. L. Bourne, 'Marking Shakespeare', *Shakespeare* 13.4 (2017), pp. 367–86; 381.

[8] Although we know that the process was truly complex and even contradictory: Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet; Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 6–7 et passim.

century. These fragments we now accept as being part of culture as a whole, either consciously or unconsciously. Neither the twentieth nor the twenty-first centuries invented extractions, cuts, spin-offs, adaptations, the transcoding of works or the unacknowledged pilfering of literary texts.[9] Shakespeare would no longer be part of our picture were it not for the work of thousands of individuals who read and extracted his plays and poems, circulated them, transformed them and gave them a new lease of life. Ironically, this happened at a time when scholars, especially towards the end of the eighteenth century, were attempting to 'reassemble' Shakespeare and when what is now known as professional textual editing attempted an impossible task – to produce the best possible Shakespearean text and then, some years later, to understand the relations between Shakespeare's source texts. Needless to say, that task is still under way.

Inevitably, the editorial endeavour and the political need to turn Shakespeare into Britain's national poet in order to counter French influence on the diplomatic and cultural terrain, specifically during the latter half of the Georgian period, may have impeded the *personal* appropriation of his works. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's readers had lost much of their freedom of unmediated interpretation. Perhaps they never really regained it, as Shakespeare slowly became synonymous with formal education and high culture in the centuries to follow.[10] His current global status can be seen as a tribute to his works' ability to speak not only through time, but across cultures and social classes. Less favourable interpreters point out that his popularity, particularly among emerging nations, is a sign of countries needing to prove their worthiness on the cultural stage by appealing to recognisable western cultural figures.[11] As for the underprivileged, at home or abroad, there may be a lingering feeling that access to Shakespeare is the necessary condition to be part of a society that does not deem their existing personal culture sufficiently worthy.[12]

Shakespeare was an establishment playwright (a member of the prestigious Chamberlain's Men and then of the King's Men) who wrote to entertain popular audiences, mainly in the public theatre. Yet another vindication of this book's main argument is that the cultural ground was

[9] See, for instance, Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare Cut: Rethinking Cutwork in an Age of Distraction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[10] See the conclusion of this book.
[11] See, as an example, Alexander C. Y. Huang, 'Global Shakespeare as Methodology', *Shakespeare* 9.3. (2013), pp. 373–90 and Marcus Tan, 'Spectres of Shakespeare: Ong Keng Sen's *Search Hamlet* and the Intercultural Myth', *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 90.1 (2016), pp. 129–40, esp. 137–8.
[12] For more on this subject, see conclusion.

shifting. After vernacular literature, it was English drama's turn to enter the realm of literature, a terrain which was still dominated by poetry at least in the minds of the elite. Shakespeare's plays, whether as collected works or as single-play editions were partly marketed as saleable and collectable literature and as objects connected to the theatre (reminiscent of a performance, or, later in the period, as pre-publicity for a show or adaptation). Early Shakespearean editions contain little paratext, as opposed to their eighteenth-century counterparts. Nevertheless, in either case, paratexts were ways of 'pitching' an edition for a particular occasion, or, more generally, of carving an imaginary relation between the reader and the book. This explains why I have chosen not to focus at great length on them, the ground being also very well covered by other studies.[13]

The story told by this book is that of a parenthesis in time. The period it covers was one during which both the response to Shakespeare and the engagement with his works were far less encumbered, as who 'owned' Shakespeare and his texts was much less clear at that time than it is for us at present.[14] Early responses tended to be not only eager, enthusiastic and personal, but also haphazard, seemingly unconnected to the text and not necessarily neatly packaged. We need to forget the awe frequently attached to the early modern period and simply look at it empirically, that is, with eyes that simply accept and embrace the traces the past has left. It is surprising how seldom these fragments correspond to what printed books of the time tell us about reading methods and practices. In truth, the gap between reading theory and practice was real, despite what contemporary theorists and educators claimed. As a consequence, this study prefers to focus on practice and remains wary of wishful statements.

The methodology for *Shakespeare's Early Readers* was built on the evidence gleaned from the archive. Nonetheless, it was also helped immensely by the work of many scholars in the field. As an extension to the more personal 'acknowledgements' section, I need to say a few words about the people who suggested where I should look and who ultimately brought this book to life. Lukas Erne's book on *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (2003) was probably what got me excited about the idea that there could exist not only a 'social text' of Shakespeare, but also one that may have been aimed at

[13] Jean-Christophe Mayer, 'Shakespeare and the Order of Books', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, special issue no. 21, https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-21/05-Mayer_Shak&theOrderOfBooks.htm; Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Thomas L. Berger and Sonia Massai, eds., *Paratexts in English Printed Drama to 1642*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[14] See conclusion in particular.

readers.[15] I then delved into the work of the late Sasha Roberts, who spoke so thoughtfully of the specificities of the early modern archive, of the manifold roles Shakespeare's lyrics played in the early modern period, and of the importance of women readers – an aspect I have tried to address as a man writing about a considerable number of male readers (female literacy figures remained low until the eighteenth century).[16] Roberts's work also explains why the current study concentrates more on plays than on Shakespeare's poems.

Still in the field of Shakespeare studies, Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier's seminal article 'Reading and Authorship: The Circulation of Shakespeare 1590–1619' helped me develop an interpretative method for readers' textual transformations through the two scholars' concrete examination of how Shakespeare's works were turned into commonplaces.[17] Chartier and Stallybrass's cooperation over the years pursued the rich trans-Atlantic tradition of interest in books as material and cultural artefacts that led to what has become the 'history of books', a relatively new field of study, now represented by its association aptly named SHARP.[18]

[15] Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as a Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 63; 175. In his recent book, Akihiro Yamada attempts to demonstrate that the market for playbooks was on the rise because of the concurrent increase of playgoers interested in purchasing plays *Experiencing Drama in the English Renaissance: Readers and Audiences* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2017). The argument is interesting and adds fuel to Erne's theory, although Yamada's figures do not seem to take into account the findings of the New Bibliographical movement, such as, for instance, those of Zachary Lesser in *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[16] Sasha Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), p. 130 and passim. Roberts was very active in the field, see also 'Engendering the Female Reader: Women's Recreational Reading of Shakespeare in Early Modern England', in *Reading Women Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 36–54; 'Reading Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* in Early Modern England', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 108–33; 'Shakespeare "creepes into the women's closets about": Women Reading in a Room of Their Own', in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580–1690* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 30–63, or *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660–1900: An Anthology of Criticism*, edited with Ann Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[17] See Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier, 'Reading and Authorship: The Circulation of Shakespeare 1590–1619', in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 35–56; esp. 43–55. Murphy's own *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) is a unique tool for anyone, like myself, having to find his way through a maze of printed editions of Shakespeare, particularly during the Georgian era.

[18] The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, see: www.sharpweb.org/main/. Pioneers in the field were mainly French and American scholars. To cite but a few: Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1480–1800*, trans. David Gerard

The fact that I have not yet mentioned the word 'reception' – a word that the theories of Iser and Jauss made familiar[19] – is due to the influence of another Shakespearean. Douglas Lanier underlined the usefulness of the term 'appropriation' to describe the circulation of Shakespeare's works both in the early modern era and in contemporary culture. 'Reception' appeared too passive a term to describe such phenomena. Lanier's personal understanding of the term 'appropriation' is clear-sighted. Indeed, borrowing from Shakespeare may not always be a question of contention, or of marking one's cultural territory (as its Latin root appears to indicate, *appropriatus*, 'made one's own'), but can imply negotiation, collaboration and exchange.[20] I found much in Lanier's open definition of appropriation to be particularly applicable to the processes at work in the primary sources I was studying. Lanier himself was no doubt inspired by the writings of Roger Chartier's mentor, Michel de Certeau, a pioneer French social historian who attempted to rid readers of the fetters of poststructuralist theory by giving them more freedom of movement: 'Far from being writers . . . readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it for themselves'.[21] Both Lanier's and De Certeau's definitions were particularly helpful when interpreting the findings of this book.

This brings me to speak of key influences outside the field of Shakespeare studies proper. For instance, H. J. Jackson's *Marginalia, Readers Writing in Books* (2001), with her explicit and scholarly focus on annotations was a useful way to begin thinking about how marginalia functioned in detail. Yet, in my view, Jackson sometimes collapses readers and authors unhelpfully, and her laudable enterprise is unavoidably

(London: Verso, 1990 [first pub. in French in 1958]); Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999 [first pub. 1992]); Robert Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', *Daedalus* 111.3 (1982), pp. 65–83; his 'First Steps towards a History of Reading', *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 (1986), pp. 5–30; and his *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990); Anthony Grafton, 'Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise? Guillaume Budé and His Books', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 91.2 (1997), pp. 139–57 and his more recent *The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

[19] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[20] See Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. p. 5.

[21] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol.* 1, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 174.

hampered by the historical ground she endeavours to cover (over three centuries). It is certainly difficult to speak of marginalia that ought to be commendable, or that must meet specific standards, as far as the notes we have encountered are concerned. Nevertheless, this appears to be her argument near the end of her book (as far as I am concerned, such strict distinctions are more likely to be valid for much later periods and in the case of well-known marginalists).[22]

William H. Sherman's *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (2008) was paradigm shifting for this study. Sherman considerably enlarged the concept of marginalia (including intellectual comments as well as everyday markings).[23] For him, as for me, what mattered was that these books (especially printed books) had been 'used', that they had been read for a purpose (scholarly or mundane), or a set of purposes – and, more often than not, with fervour. Importantly, Sherman tried to look for what he described as the 'imagined actual reader' – a more historical reader – steering clear of poststructuralist, disincarnated and certainly over-theorised 'imagined', 'implied' or 'ideal' readers, concepts that were ill-adapted to the evidence at hand.[24]

The idea of a 'used' book is one which bears traces of life and activity and this is fundamentally what this project is interested in.[25] It should be clear by now that we shall not busy ourselves with the pristine, 'washed',

[22] See for instance H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia, Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 205–6; 209–10.

[23] See William B. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 16–17 and his chapter entitled 'The Social Life of Books', in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture, Volume 1: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, ed. Joad Raymond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 164–171, esp. pp. 165–7. Directly related to Sherman's project, is Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio's, *Book Use, Book Theory 1500–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005). The book is insightful in the same way as Sherman's and contains a wealth of illuminating illustrations. Similarly, see also Roger E. Stoddard's *Marks in Books, Illustrated and Explained* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1985).

[24] Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*, pp. 96; 100. For a long list of these abstract readers, see his *John Dee and the Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 55 and Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 7.

[25] Orgel writes cogently that books 'always needed something more that could be supplied by the reader – commentary, explanation, something to help us remember it, or even simply something to make it ours, something to make it not absolutely dead' (Orgel, *The Reader in the Book*, p. 8). As Robert Davenport put it less sophisticatedly in his address 'To the knowing Reader', '*A Good Reader, Helps to Make a Book*' (*King John and Matilda* [pub. 1655], cited in Dale B. J. Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama 1642–1660* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), p. 238). See also Steven N. Zwicker, '"What every literate man once knew": tracing readers in early modern England', in *Owners, Annotators and the Signs of Reading*, ed. Robin Myers, Michel Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 2005), pp. 75–90; esp. 85.

'cropped', or sometimes made-up[26] book retailed by a number of booksellers in the nineteenth century for a *clientele* of collectors seeking to buy the 'perfect' Shakespeare (unaware that early modern printing processes never produced such books anyway) and no doubt persuaded that a perfect book would get them closer to that almighty figure, the 'Author'.[27]

Shakespeare's Early Readers is concerned with 'historicizing the experiences of various readers', as Heidi Brayman Hackel contends in the first chapter (entitled 'Towards a Material History of Reading') of a monograph that was to become a manifesto for 'Material Studies', now a burgeoning discipline.[28] Like Hackel, I 'reject the category of "the reader" as an essentialized, ahistorical subject' and certainly regret that the demise of affect deprived the history of reading of precious ways of understanding the reading process until recent years, as Karin Littau contended.[29] This book goes some way towards reintroducing affect and more broadly emotional response (in parallel with cognitive response) into the reading experience. More generally, I completely endorse Chartier's statement that 'a text exists only because there is a reader to give it meaning'.[30]

My fundamental contention and central argument will be that Shakespeare was – to gloss Crites in Dryden's essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668) – 'pushed by many hands', including those who wrote in the margins of his books, or took great pains to extract, transform and pass on his works in writing.[31] To address my subject, I have chosen to divide my argument into six chapters.

To give the study a firm basis, Chapter 1 ('Literacy and the Circulation of Plays') answers a number of essential questions. For instance, it offers

[26] Many extant early Shakespearean editions lack, or lacked pages. In the past, books could thus be 'made up' again through a variety of processes: a scribe could be hired to copy (and sometimes imitate) the missing script, a modern printed page could be substituted, or an original page could be bought and inserted. As remarkable as it may seem, there was a market for original Shakespearean pages. For details, see Peter Blayney, *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (Washington, DC: Folger Library Publications, 1991), pp. 36–40.

[27] Orgel also sees the desire for pristine books and the cult of Shakespeare as intimately related (*The Reader in the Book*, p. 25).

[28] In her *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1–16; at 7.

[29] Hackel, *Reading Material*, p. 18; Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 9.

[30] Chartier, *The Order of Books*, p. 2.

[31] 'It has been observed of Arts and Sciences, that in one and the same Century they have arriv'd to a great perfection; and no wonder, since every Age has a kind of Universal Genius, which inclines those that live in it to some particular Studies: the Work then being push'd on by many hands, must of necessity go forward' (John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay* (London: printed for Henry Herringman, 1668), p. 9. Wing D2327).

up-to-date information about the ownership and the reading of plays in the early modern period. It reveals who Shakespeare's readers were and sheds light on the social and monetary value of his works. Owning did not necessarily mean reading and, conversely, reading did not always necessitate the ownership of books. This will lead us to focus on some of the many shades of literacy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. Naturally, the social spectrum of his readers widened considerably over the decades.

Literature, including Shakespeare's texts, informed the lives of many early modern individuals. Indeed, as will become clear in Chapter 2 ('Life in the Archives: Shaping Early Modern Selfhood'), early material incarnations of Shakespeare's text interacted with and were transformed through their contact with their readers' universe of mundane objects and social relations, since they also bore the imprints of these individuals' desires, fears and frustrations. Traditionally looked upon as a desecration of books, 'graffiti' in Shakespearean editions celebrate both the work and the author of the inscriptions. Some of the graffiti in these editions could be considered to be forms of life-writing. As this chapter argues, associations between the self, the book and the world can help individuals feel more grounded – they enable readers to establish their sense of place and their awareness of belonging to a community.

The question of the 'true' text and of who should be allowed to tamper with it was a crucial concern during the whole of the early modern period, as will be apparent in the course of the following chapter (Chapter 3: 'Readers and Editors: A *Concordia Discors*'). The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century communal culture of correcting the text is often opposed to that of the eighteenth century when editing gradually became the domain of a handful of editors in charge of deciding the 'true' meaning of Shakespeare's words. While many eighteenth-century editors found it difficult to depart from the 'received text' of Shakespeare (established by previous editors), a large body of readers who owned early editions of the playwright were busy examining these copy texts. Some, predictably, were intent on adapting Shakespeare's quartos and folios to the received text (that is, they wished to edit the text by modernising it in the light of eighteenth-century editions). Others, however, emended early editions either according to their own rules and uses, or by contesting the modern editions, noting differences and challenging modern editors. If the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the rise of the editor as an alleged supreme authority over Shakespeare's text, they also witnessed in parallel

the development of genuine personal interest in the text of Shakespeare on the part of readers who claimed their autonomy through textual editing.

The links between the circulation of Shakespeare's early editions and the performance or revival of his works on stage have received relatively little attention. Thus, the traces left by those who annotated, cut, interleaved, transcribed, or sometimes pulled apart these editions for dramatic purposes remain understudied. Chapter 4 ('Early Modern Theatrical Annotators and Transcribers') reconsiders the all-too-often assumed divide between the world of print production and that of theatrical production. It also looks at the long publishing tradition which continued to foster exchanges between the world of readers and that of theatre people between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. The common features and diversity of annotating practices among performance-oriented readers is the focus of the latter part of the chapter, which relies on examples of professional and amateur 'theatricalised' printed texts, as well as manuscript playbooks. Even when they worked within the bounds of the so-called 'authentic' book, seventeenth-century theatrical annotators shifted the borders of the text by opening it up to new aesthetic possibilities and reinventing its performability. Eighteenth-century revisers worked in the same way. If sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printed plays annotated for the theatre are uncommon, early Shakespearean manuscript play texts are extremely rare. The chapter closes with a number of case studies of this nature. Ultimately, I claim that if Shakespeare is still performed today worldwide, it is because, throughout the early modern period, there were people who changed the parameters of the printed text by rescripting his works, making them as flexible as was necessary to serve their aesthetic, personal or ideological needs, as well as those of their audiences.

Etymologically, reading (*legere*) is fundamentally about plucking, gathering and assembling. The reading of Shakespeare is no exception and Chapter 5 ('Commonplacing: The Myth and the Empirical Impulse') will provide ample proof that commonplacing, that is, the collecting and classifying of excerpts used to garnish one's own speech or writings with other people's thoughts and words was a practice ingrained in early modern culture. If Shakespeare's works were plundered by commonplacing readers, it may have been because the style adopted by Shakespeare (and a few others among his contemporaries) was consciously inspired by the commonplace tradition. The aim is to understand what drew readers to commonplacing, despite the method's long-recognised deficiencies. We shall examine what I call the 'empirical impulse' to compile, collect

and sometimes classify Shakespearean extracts. The drive was no doubt fuelled by a growing Shakespearean nationalist myth. However, there could be side effects: the interest in collecting and using a fragmented Shakespeare led to a sense of overkill. Compilation could make Shakespeare too common in the eyes of some. Yet the empirical impulse to build collections had positive consequences as well: since Shakespeare's works could be disarticulated, distilled, fused, misread and reinjected, they survived through engagement and process.

Our final chapter entitled 'Passing Judgement on Shakespeare' is divided into two parts. Part 1 (which is focused on the seventeenth century) deals with: 'Shakespeare and the Early Formation of Aesthetic Taste' and Part 2 (which concentrates essentially on the Georgian era) is devoted to 'Shakespeare and Communal Cultural Dialogue'. Both parts address the book's central question, which could be formulated candidly in the following way: what did early modern readers really think of Shakespeare's works?

While there will never be a hard and fast answer to such a question (for reasons already mentioned), I argue that as early as the first part of the seventeenth century, readers were sensitive to well-constructed plots, that they were interested in characters and in the expression of emotions, and that they formulated critical and aesthetic comments on Shakespeare's works. Well before the classification and appreciation of plays according to neo-classical standards at the Restoration and during part of the Augustan age, and prior to the elevation of good literary taste as one of the foremost public virtues in Georgian Britain, readers were making vital critical statements during Shakespeare's lifetime or in the decades immediately following his death. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the time factor began to affect the reception of Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the Restoration brought new interest in Shakespeare – but mostly as dramatic material to pilfer or reinterpret. It is at this moment that readers can be seen transitioning between the Old and the New.

Part 2 nuances the scenario of Shakespeare's rise to fame, at least as far as his reading public was concerned. In fact, I demonstrate that a number of readers fought against, or tried to distinguish themselves from, the then increasingly available critical printed 'mantra'. For some, the playwright and poet was aesthetically appealing because they saw that parts of his texts could serve specific political agendas, those of English nationalism in particular, but not exclusively. Others used Shakespeare obsessively to showcase their literary tastes. Some remained resolutely independent,

partly cut off from the influence of mainstream criticism, and produced remarkably idiosyncratic aesthetic responses. Then, there were those who had a true passion for Shakespeare's textual universe and strove – often against considerable difficulties (especially when they were women) – to become shapers of literary taste through his works. Before the school system turned him into a set author in the course of the nineteenth century, early Shakespeare remained a genuine site of excitement, but also of self-interest, of shrewd criticism and of intensely personal expression.