

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 “formactions” – 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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In many ways my most important interlocutors have been my students at Brasenose College, Oxford. It was in tutorials and classes with them (and lectures to the wider student body) that I had the chance to test my ideas and find compelling examples; and of course they contributed many of their own. And so I want to thank them all, particularly those of the last three years: Harry Ford, Rob Williams, Alice Gimblett, Georgia Mallin, Richard O'Brien, Katie Carpenter, Jessica Edwards, Celia Berton, Emily Hawes, Brogan Kear, Lucy Fyffe, Saranna Blair, Duncan Morrison, Dani Pearson, Savannah Whaley, Chloe Wicks, Chloe Cornish, Emily Hislop, Amy Lewin, Amy Rollason, Trisha Sircar, Pari Thomson, Christopher Webb, James Fennemore, Maria Fleischer, Josie Mitchell, Joshua Phillips, Namratha Rao, Rachel Rowan-Olive, and Alexandra Sutton.

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This book is dedicated to Jo. She avoids reading anything I write, a forbearance which I happily construe as faith, sanity, and permission. And which daily reminds me there are worlds elsewhere.

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).