

## THE PLAYERS' ADVICE TO HAMLET

Hamlet is a characteristic intellectual more inclined to lecture actors about their craft than listen to them, a precursor of Enlightenment figures like Diderot and Lessing. This book is a quest for the voice of early professional actors, drawing on English, French and other European sources to distinguish the methods of professionals from the theories of intellectual amateurs. David Wiles challenges the orthodoxy that all serious discussion of acting began with Stanislavski, and outlines the comprehensive but fluid classical system of acting that was for some 300 years its predecessor. He reveals pre-modern acting as a branch of rhetoric, which took from antiquity a vocabulary for conversations about the relationship of mind and body, inside and outside, voice and movement. Wiles demonstrates that Roman rhetoric provided the bones of both a resilient theatrical system and a physical art that retains its relevance for the post-Stanislavskian performer.

DAVID WILES is Emeritus Professor of Drama at the University of Exeter. A British theatre historian, he specializes in classical and early modern theatre and has spent his career in departments of drama, where his teaching has always engaged with practice. His research interests include performance space and time, mask, acting and citizenship. This is his eighth book for Cambridge University Press.

THE PLAYERS' ADVICE  
TO HAMLET

*The Rhetorical Acting Method from the Renaissance  
to the Enlightenment*

DAVID WILES

*University of Exeter*



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The seed for this book was an invitation by Willmar Sauter in 2008 to participate in a conference at the Theatre of Drottningholm in Stockholm. Modern acting styles on a perfectly preserved mid-eighteenth-century stage felt discordant, and he had a vision of the theatre as a laboratory where historically informed actors might bring the space to life. A co-authored book, an IFTR keynote, and many interactions with the Stockholm 'Performing premodernity' research group followed. Dialogue with Jed Wentz proved particularly valuable. Other important collaborations have been with Anna Sica, a specialist in declamation at the University of Palermo; the Centre for Oratory and Rhetoric at RHUL; the Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l'Age Classique et les Lumières at Montpellier; the TaPRA Actor Training Working Group; and the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama in Oxford. An APGRD conference on epic performance in 2013 drew me to *Hamlet*. Conversations within the Theatre Historiography Working Group of the IFTR, and with Tom Postlewait in particular, have kept me thinking about the relationship between sources and story-building. A conversation with Ralph Cohen at the Blackfriars Playhouse in Virginia first opened my eyes to the significance of rhetoric as a key to understanding Shakespearean acting.

The focus of this book on process rather than product, on how actors work rather than on performance events, derives from a career spent working in departments of drama/theatre where the pedagogy is framed around teaching students to be theatre-makers. Conversations with colleagues at Royal Holloway University of London and at the University of Exeter were a constant stimulus, forcing me to reflect on how theatre practitioners today require us to ask different questions of the past, and in turn how the past speaks to the present. Testing ideas in the studio, and engaging with the creative responses of students, has been an integral part of my research process. Seminars in university locations that include

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