1 Introduction

It's not unusual for those who read, watch, or stage Shakespeare's plays to assume that they exist in only two historical moments: 'then' and 'now'. 'Then' is Shakespeare's lifetime – 1564 to 1616 – when his plays were written and originally performed and when Richard Burbage first spoke 'To be or not to be' from the stage of the Globe Theatre on London's Bankside. 'Now' is the ever-advancing present, whether for an undergraduate student taking a Shakespeare class, tourists visiting Stratford-upon-Avon to see the latest production by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), or the artistic team planning next year's season at the Australian Shakespeare Company in Melbourne.

The idea that Shakespeare exists simultaneously in 'then' and 'now' was first expressed by Ben Jonson in his commendatory verse prefacing the 1623 First Folio, the first published collection of Shakespeare's plays, in which he declared that the playwright was both 'soule of the age' *and* 'not of an age, but for all time'. A brief seven years after Shakespeare's death, Jonson imagined both a past and a future for his late friend and rival poet. Time has proved Jonson right. The belief that Shakespeare belongs both to *his* time and to *our* time has been the most enduringly powerful belief in the history of his theatrical and literary afterlife. Without that belief, 'Shakespeare' the cultural icon recognized the world over would not exist; and in all probability, neither would the text you are now reading.

Yet Jonson's words also reveal something else: the confident assertion that Shakespeare will be continuously relevant – for *all* time – and not just relevant to the immediate here and now. A perpetually relevant Shakespeare – a fixed longitudinal presence – immediately creates a *history*, because every experience turns into a memory and every today becomes a yesterday. These stockpiled memories and accumulated yesterdays – not of any single person but of peoples and cultures collectively – make up the history of how Shakespeare has been understood, valued, adapted, argued over, rejected, and even denounced down the centuries and around the world. Occupying the middle zone between the distant 'then' of early modern England and the always fugitive 'now' of our own direct experience, this history is nothing other than the complex and multivoiced record of what

Shakespeare has meant in various times and in various places to various sorts of people.

Nowhere has this history unfolded more vigorously than upon the living stage, the 'unworthy scaffold' (as Shakespeare described his own outdoor theatre in the famous prologue to *Henry V*) whose business is the creation of brave new worlds. This history is richly diverse, embracing Sarah Siddons' unnerving performance of Lady Macbeth in the late eighteenth century when she performed the sleepwalking scene with her eyes open and so expressing the magnified power of the actor's slightest movement or gesture; the Hindu Theatre of Calcutta, whose inaugural production in December 1841 included scenes from *Julius Caesar*; and the birth of 'modern dress' Shakespeare in Barry Jackson's production of *Cymbeline* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in England in 1923, in which characters dressed like the audience to make a very old play, as Jackson put it, relevant to 'the man [*sic*] in the street'.

This Element will attempt to encompass that strange eventful history, trying to make it intelligible and meaningful to a variety of readers, from working scholars wanting to situate themselves in a dynamic research field to students who might never have had occasion to think about how previous generations staged Shakespeare or how other cultures do so now.

Yet I hope that all readers might agree that the history of Shakespeare in performance is fascinating because it is both familiar and foreign. It's familiar because the plays and the characters feel close to us. We know what happens: Romeo and Juliet die, Richard II loses his crown, and a disguised Portia wins in the courtroom. Thus, we inevitably bring a good deal of pertinent knowledge to any investigation of Shakespeare performance history. In one performance of his 1838 production of *The Winter's Tale*, William Charles Macready (1793–1873), playing Leontes, suddenly kissed and caressed the hair of Helena Faucit (1817–1898), playing Hermione, in the famous scene in Act 5 when Hermione's statue comes to life. So startled was the young actress that Macready whispered to her, 'Don't be frightened my child! don't be frightened!' From a distance of nearly two centuries that precise moment in performance still seems fresh and vivid. We easily picture it in our minds.

And yet we can struggle to understand or appreciate other aspects of this same history, because people in the past didn't always think and act like us. Despite our knowledge of the plays, Shakespeare performance history can resist or confound us. In 1662, Sir William Davenant (1606–1668) combined parts of *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Measure for Measure* into one play, which he titled *The Law Against Lovers*. His conflation of two strongly different works now seems odd or even wrongheaded: How does the merry banter between Benedick and Beatrice align with Angelo's brute sexual manipulation of Isabella? Davenant, who helped to restore the English stage after its long closure during Puritan rule, was the most pivotal figure in Restoration theatre. Founder of the Duke's Company, he produced plays that he believed would succeed at the box office. So, he must have had good reason to write his first Shakespeare adaptation, however bizarre it seems to us. *The Law Against Lovers* certainly pleased the famous diarist Samuel Pepys, who, after seeing a performance, called it 'a good play and well performed'. In pondering such strange episodes in Shakespeare performance history – strange, that is, from *our* perspective – we must always remember that people in the past created performances that made sense to them, just as today we create performances that make sense to us.

Familiar or foreign, does this history matter? Does it matter to the twenty-first century that, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-French actor Charles Fechter (1824–1879) (shown in Figure 1) took London by storm when he played Hamlet as a friendly blond-haired Danish prince? It mattered to audiences at the time. The 1861 production ran for an astonishing 115 consecutive nights when other theatres performed two or three different plays each week to attract audiences. Spectators who arrived night after night at the Princess's Theatre on Oxford Street wanted to see a new sort of Shakespearean tragic hero, neither the brooding aristocratic Hamlet embodied by the haughty tragedian John Philip Kemble (1757–1823) at the beginning of the century nor the sedate bourgeois Hamlet conveyed by Macready and Charles Kean (1811–1868) in the 1840s and 1850s. Suddenly, here was a 'thoroughly human Hamlet', as a leading London newspaper put it. When Fechter's Hamlet put his arm around his childhood friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, perched on a gravestone, sat on the

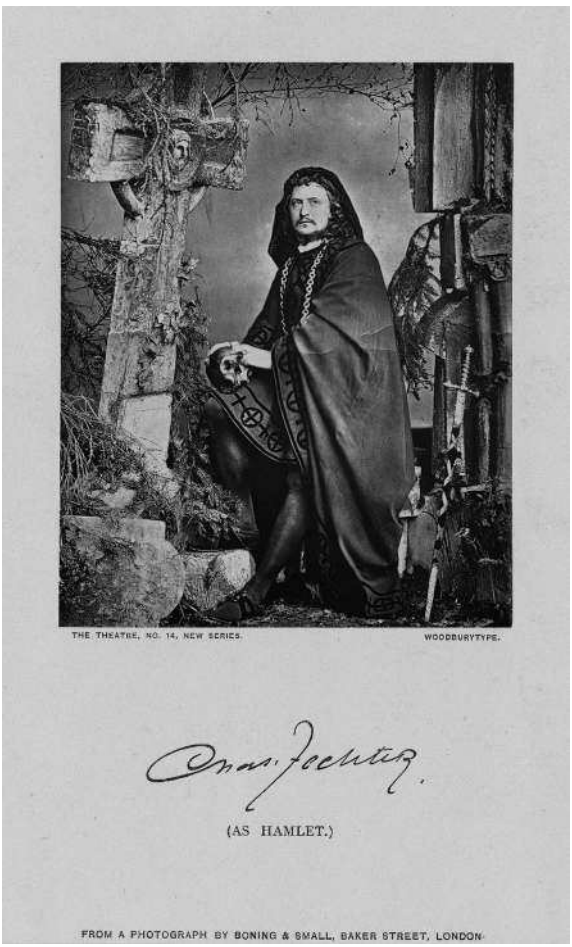

Figure 1 Charles Fechter as Hamlet, Princess's Theatre, London, photograph, *c.* 1861. The actor's pose and garb may seem artificial to us today but, in its time, Fechter's performance was praised for revealing Hamlet's humanity. Reproduced courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

ground with the lowly comical gravediggers, and almost kissed Yorick's freshly unearthed skull – startling behavior, never before seen by an English audience – many felt that the greatest role in the Shakespearean repertoire had new life breathed into it at the very moment when it was in danger of expiring.

Today we might assume that *every* Hamlet will be similarly colloquial, familiar, and down to earth – a prince, yes, but with the common touch. No one, however, assumed any such thing when Fechter dared to play the role that way, two and a half centuries after Shakespeare created the part. Indeed, it was Fechter's fresh performance – and that of his American contemporary Edwin Booth (1839–1893) – that cemented the popular image of an approachable Hamlet.

Consciously or not, that image has influenced performances ever since, including Ben Kingsley's (1943–) emotionally vulnerable Hamlet for the RSC in 1975, Ben Wishaw's (1980–) lovable waif-like Prince of Denmark at London's Old Vic Theatre in 2004, and the RSC's 2008 production in which David Tennant (1971–) casually wrapped himself up in a wooly cap, scruffy parka, and burly orange sweater. Think also of Ethan Hawke's (1970–) techno-geek tragic hero in Michael Almereyda's low-budget film *Hamlet* (2000). It is indisputable that many modern interpretations of Hamlet owe something – not everything, but something – to the legacy first bequeathed by the little-remembered actor Charles Fechter during the reign of Queen Victoria. But do theatre artists and audiences today recognize that legacy's existence and its power over them?

The example of Fechter's Hamlet illustrates the most fundamental truth about Shakespeare on the stage: No performance is created in isolation and no performance can be understood in isolation. Rather, every performance of Shakespeare responds (affirmatively or critically, explicitly or implicitly) to past performances; expresses the values and sensibilities of its own time; and declares the arrival of new ways of doing Shakespeare. In other words, every performance occupies simultaneously the past, the present, and the future.

It can, however, be difficult to see beyond the present. Yet that is precisely the reason for knowing about the past. Only by studying history can we understand how things change; can we identify the causes

of change; and can we realize what has not changed. Without a grasp of history, we cannot understand how the present *became* the present. And if we do not understand the present, then we will not understand the future that it creates, the future we ourselves are creating right now. The need to understand the future is a very good reason to study the past.

If the history of Shakespeare on the stage teaches anything, it teaches that no single production can ever be definitive because every such production possesses meaning only within its own context. When it comes to Shakespeare performance history, there are always dual contexts: synchronic and diachronic. Synchronically, we can study any performance of Shakespeare in terms of the other kinds of plays or performances that an audience could have seen – and many times did see – around the same time. Thus, Henry Irving's first attempt at playing Macbeth in 1875 was criticized for being too much like his performances in Victorian melodrama, an entirely different theatrical genre. Today, we might interpret Judi Dench's (1934–) performance as Paulina in Kenneth Branagh's (1960–) production of *The Winter's Tale* (2015) in light of her screen roles in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) or *Shakespeare in Love* (1998).

Diachronically, we can study any performance of Shakespeare in terms of the stage history of a particular play or character: how it has been performed over decades or even centuries. This long temporal frame of reference was second nature for earlier generations of theatregoers, who instinctively compared every new production of, say, *Othello* or *Antony and Cleopatra* to the standard set by earlier productions. Actors in previous centuries willingly exemplified different genealogies of performance conventions – the Garrick 'religion', the Kemble 'school' – that invited normative comparisons with legendary predecessors. For many performers, to act well was to act like the great stars of yesterday. Of course, conventions could be overturned, as when Edmund Kean reinvented the roles of Shylock, Richard III, and Coriolanus for the Romantic age. Indeed, without such iconoclastic performances the living theatre risks becoming a petrified version of itself. Either way, the key point of reference was always historical: How did earlier generations of actors play the same part? Were they similar to us or were they different from us?

These two lenses through which we can look at Shakespeare in performance – synchronic and diachronic – give us a powerful dynamic that opens up multiple avenues for interpreting and understanding those performances. Within the terms of that critical perspective, it's not so helpful to judge whether a past performance was 'good' or 'bad'. What's helpful – indeed, what's essential – is to comprehend the forces and values that created a past performance. Accordingly, this text will not recite a time-honored roll call of famous actors and directors who have interpreted Shakespeare over the past 350 years. It will, rather, convey various themes and conceptual frames for better understanding the manifold history of Shakespeare in performance. In articulating themes and critical frameworks, chronology sometimes helps and sometimes hinders. The first half of this text is arranged chronologically, because the material being discussed is largely confined to key events and key figures in British and North American theatre history between 1660 and 1900. The second half, which considers Shakespeare in performance from a global perspective in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, forsakes chronology for an explicitly thematic and topical approach, given the vast amount of material that could be discussed. As you read this text, I encourage you to focus less on the specific performances being discussed and more on the issues of wider and lasting relevance (e.g., textual fidelity, acting style, Bardolatry, interculturalism) that those performances put into play. These discussions should be regarded less as retrospective than as prospective invitations for readers to continue their own analyses and investigations of Shakespeare in performance. Ultimately, this Element seeks not to end discussion but to stimulate it.

For students and scholars alike, this work aims to encourage certain habits of mind for encountering 'Shakespeare after Shakespeare', whether by reading and studying the plays, watching them in performance, or bringing them to life on the stage. The foremost habit of mind that this Element encourages is the historicist imperative: to make sense of past performances *on their own terms* and not on our terms; to understand past performances in light of the values and desires of the artists who created them and the audiences who witnessed them. The most vital work that a performance historian can undertake – particularly a historian of Shakespeare on the stage, where the documentary record is so long and

so varied – is to analyze why a given performance was created in a particular way, at a particular time, in a particular place, and for a particular audience: What cultural need did that performance respond to? What difference did it make in the wider world? What influence did it have on theatre artists?

Consider this example. Theatre historians in recent years have argued that the insistence on archaeologically correct scenery, costumes, and properties in Victorian revivals of Shakespeare – whether the fancies of *The Tempest* or the facts of *King John* – was not spectacle run wild but rather an opportunity for popular theatre to become a vehicle for historical consciousness, itself a broader movement within Victorian visual and material culture. Sets and costumes derived from original sources – the portrait of Richard II in Westminster Abbey, an eyewitness account of Henry V's victory at Agincourt, the tomb effigy of King John in Worcester Cathedral – turned the stage into a living history book. This new argument overturned a long-standing scholarly consensus that the Victorian era was an embarrassing chapter in Shakespeare performance history, partly by exposing that such consensus was itself based on presentist values ('today is superior to yesterday') and partly by taking seriously what Victorian theatre artists themselves took seriously: the power of the stage to educate a mass metropolitan audience. To make this sort of argument – and not instinctively to dismiss a previous era's theatrical choices as quaint, absurd, or unenlightened – is to focus on the dynamic efficacy of past performances.

2 Shakespeare in the Restoration

On September 2, 1642, at the beginning of the English Civil War, Parliament issued a temporary edict declaring that 'publike Sports doe not well agree with publike Calamities'. 'Sports', as the word was then used, meant pastimes or leisure pursuits generally. Without question, theatres were then a popular destination for Londoners in search of entertainment. But, for the ruling Puritans, playhouses were an open invitation to crime, intrigue, and immorality. And so, beginning in 1642, all public theatres were shut down by force of law. Acting companies like the King's Men – Shakespeare's own company – effectively disbanded or went underground (or sometimes to continental Europe) because it was now illegal to stage

a play. From time to time, actors tried to stage clandestine performances in the surviving disused London theatres, such as the Red Bull on St. John Street. These furtive performances never lasted long because the military promptly raided the premises. The closure of the theatres lasted for eighteen years, during the period of Puritan rule known as the Interregnum: the interval between kings.

With the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660 came the official restoration of the theatre, which first returned to life in 1659 when the royalist victory was inevitable. After nearly a generation of suppression – though not total extinction – the London theatre became once more an important part of the city's cultural life. Taking a deeply personal interest in the newly reconstituted theatrical profession, the newly crowned king quickly issued exclusive licenses ('patents') for two new theatre companies: the Duke's Company, led by Sir William Davenant, and the King's Company, led by Thomas Killigrew (1612–1683). These two companies remained rivals until 1682, when the financial difficulties of the King's Company forced them to merge for a period. Davenant and Killigrew were both courtiers – they joined the king when he had been forced into exile in Europe – which tells us that the Restoration stage was much more closely identified with the court and with a socially elite audience than the commercial theatre had been in Shakespeare's time.

Because theatrical activity had been prohibited for nearly twenty years, few new plays were immediately available. By necessity, the patent companies turned to the pre-1642 classics of John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare. Reprising the convention that each acting company owned an exclusive repertoire – the Admiral's Men performed Christopher Marlowe's plays but not Shakespeare's – Davenant and Killigrew divided the 'Old Stock Plays' between them. Killigrew, because his company included older actors who had performed before the Civil War, declared the King's Company to be the lawful heir to the pre-1642 King's Men, the company in which Shakespeare was sharer, actor, and playwright. Having the upper hand in negotiations, Killigrew acquired for his troupe most of the plays belonging to the old King's Men, leaving Davenant and his company of younger actors with just nine of Shakespeare's plays – although their share of the repertoire

included *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*. Interestingly, in the tussle between the companies for the right to perform the pre-Restoration repertoire, the tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher were regarded as more desirable on the whole than Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, and histories.

Initially, the two theatres staged Shakespeare's plays mostly unaltered; and, while *Othello*, *Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Hamlet* were successful, other plays fared less well. In 1662, Samuel Pepys was deeply disappointed by a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* as written by Shakespeare: 'the play of itself the worst that ever I heard in my life'. His distaste for an unrevised *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was even more pronounced: 'the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life'. He much preferred strong adaptations of Shakespeare's original plays, particularly Davenant's adaptation of *Macbeth* (1664) and Davenant and John Dryden's (1631–1700) inventive reworking of *The Tempest* (1667), both first performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Pepys was, of course, just a single spectator. But his negative verdict on 'pure' Shakespearean drama tells us something important about the changed environment of Restoration theatrical culture: In order to succeed in the commercial theatre, Shakespeare's plays often needed to be vigorously rewritten, sometimes to emphasize political topicalities, sometimes to satisfy a neoclassical preference for less ornate language and more symmetrical plotlines, and sometimes to delight the audience with songs, instrumental music, and dance. Davenant and his company members believed that Shakespeare's plays belonged more to the theatre of their own time – here and now – than they belonged to Shakespeare's own theatre – there and then. Thus, the title page of Davenant's version of *Macbeth* (shown in Figure 2) boasted that the text included 'the Alterations, Amendments, Additions, and New Songs' that made the play so popular with Restoration audiences. Indeed, in the long history of Shakespeare on the stage, the belief that his plays should be performed as originally written is the exception not the rule.

For Restoration audiences, *Richard III* was repackaged as a politically pointed tragicomedy: the rise and fall of a failed (Commonwealth) tyrant. Macduff and Lady Macduff watch the witches sing and dance in a scene that