

PART XIV

SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY RECEPTION (TO 1660)

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This chapter concerns audience response to Renaissance poetry and drama, especially Shakespeare's plays, up to the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. Among the most intriguing aspects of early modern reception is that it anticipates some of today's emerging critical interests in reception: interests in literature as a social medium, as an instrument for playing, and as knowledge for living. The corpus of evidence for the reception of Renaissance literature and drama is notoriously skimpy but also long underrated. A substantial body of recent research into reception now challenges that state of affairs.

Shakespeare's presence in extant manuscript collections is smaller than that of many of his contemporaries. But publishing history demonstrates Shakespeare the dramatist's singular popularity. No one else came close to matching his sixty-six editions of separate plays published by 1660, plus two collected editions of his plays and one collection of his poems. Nine unauthorized editions of separate plays broke the rules to capitalize on the sales power of Shakespeare's name, and many plays were falsely attributed to Shakespeare for the same reason. Records do not allow a count of their stage productions, but his plays, with their deep performance traditions in the King's Men, remained crucial to that company's success until the closing of the theaters in 1642.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Conditions of early modern reception
- The crisis of authority
- The new authority of author and audience
- The theater and the play of receptions
- Poetry and drama as equipment for living
- The purpose of playing
- Manuscript circles and imitation
- Rhetoric and the commonplace book
- Firsthand accounts of plays and masques
- The indispensable allusion
- How to do things with *Tamburlaine*
- A collection of Falstaff allusions
- Workers and women in public and private life
- Reception of drama and the public sphere
- A day at the Globe in 1624
- *Richard III* and Milton's defense of regicide
- Shakespeare's early reputation
- Shakespeare the love poet
- The major verse eulogies

131. MANUSCRIPTS CONTAINING TEXTS BY SHAKESPEARE

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Two sorts of manuscripts are investigated in this chapter: those associated with playhouses and those copied out by Shakespeare's admirers. The only portion of a manuscript play text that survives apparently in Shakespeare's own handwriting is a three-page addition in the collaborative manuscript play called on its title page *The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore*. That manuscript, and Shakespeare's hand in it, receives detailed attention in this chapter. From the early seventeenth century on, admirers began to copy out in their own manuscripts whole or partial portions of Shakespeare's works as soon as they

had some form of access to them. That form of access seems in every case to have been printed books or other manuscripts copied from printed books, not from manuscripts derived directly or indirectly from Shakespeare, his acting company, or his printers.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Manuscripts related to playhouses
- *The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore*
- Shakespeare's manuscripts for the playhouse
- Shakespeare's work in other people's manuscripts
- Commonplace books, miscellanies, and songbooks

132. ALLUSIONS

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From Shakespeare's lifetime until 1660, his lines were borrowed, sometimes directly quoted, occasionally praised or mocked, but rarely alluded to knowingly. The available evidence indicates that the seventeenth century did not have the modern sense of many particular phrases from Shakespeare as a pervasive cultural presence. Few lines seem to have become memes reproduced in English culture independently of their sources, and those that became favorites among other writers for borrowing or reference were, with a few exceptions, different from modern favorites. We might do better to drop the word "allusion" as a term for Shakespearean quotations and borrowings, as such a term assumes a cultural position Shakespeare did not attain until the eighteenth century.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Contemporary anthologies and opinions of Shakespeare
- Shakespearean love: reputation and appropriations
- Allusions, quotations, and borrowings from the histories
- Appropriations from the mid-career tragedies
- Shakespearean aphorisms and ornaments in anthologies
- Hotspur, Falstaff, and company in quotations and allusions
- Shakespearean absences

133. SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY IN COURT RECORDS

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Beginning in 1595, the Lord Chamberlain's Men appear regularly in court financial records as recipients of payments for performances at court. In the first entry, William Shakespeare is mentioned by name along with Richard Burbage and William Kemp. As the King's Men after 1603, Shakespeare's company dominated the court performance scene – a position they maintained after the accession of Charles I in 1625. By this time, the office book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, provides evidence of Herbert's view of the company, with some indication of Shakespeare's continuing place in court entertainments a decade or more after his death.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- "Our play is preferred": the 1590s
- Keeping courtly patronage as the Chamberlain's Men
- But which plays?
- Dominating the royal scene
- More details in the Master of the Revels' accounts
- The hectic season of 1612–1613
- Continuing prominence after Shakespeare's death
- Shakespeare's lasting reputation

134. EXPERIENCES OF PERFORMANCE: FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS OF THEATER

Andrew Fleck, San Jose State University, United States

At every performance of a play by Shakespeare, the same words were spoken, but the actor speaking them stood before an audience that could vary considerably. The places of Shakespearean performances and the eyewitness accounts of early theatergoers give us a sense of the variety of theatrical experiences in the early modern period. Quite a bit of evidence remains available to those who wish to piece together an understanding of the experience of attending a performance in the theater in Shakespeare's day, but we must recall that Shakespeare's audiences often focused on parts of his plays that we would not expect them to care about, or that they cared about different things in his plays than we sometimes do.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Brief eyewitness accounts
- Longer first-person accounts
- Playhouse illustrations
- Tudor and Jacobean illustrations of performance

135. SCANDALS: ESSEX, COBHAM, AND OTHERS

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Part of the theater's appeal to its paying customers was that it relayed to them the talk of the town, sometimes even the latest news, and indeed promised to be a newsworthy event in its own right. All the more interesting and significant, then, is the relative reticence of the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men – and of Shakespeare in particular – to use drama as a medium for certain kinds of intriguing, politically and socially risqué publicity. Nonetheless, *1 Henry IV*, *Richard II*, and *Henry VIII* did strike some observers as subjecting particular individuals to public scrutiny. *Measure for Measure* analyzes scandal and the public sphere in a more general way.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- What do we talk about when we talk about scandal?
- Private vices and public judgment
- Scandalous acting companies
- Puritans and transvestites: the power of the theater
- Shakespeare's scandalous plays
- *Measure for Measure*: Shakespeare's analysis of scandal and the public sphere

136. SHAKESPEARE AND RENAISSANCE AESTHETICS

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In the development of "aesthetics" as a philosophical category in the eighteenth century, the plays of William Shakespeare played a major role, especially in Germany, where he was championed by figures such as Goethe and Herder as a major instance of many of the qualities of aesthetics. In his own time, however, Shakespeare was undoubtedly read and understood through different interpretive lenses based on different assumptions. Although Shakespeare's age did not reproduce all the tenets of a later aesthetic discourse, it did create concepts about the aesthetic in poetic and dramatic forms that cast grave doubt on the idea that it lacked aesthetic theory completely.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- "Aesthetics" vis-à-vis "art"
- Some intellectual sources
- Sir Philip Sidney's poetics
- Madman, poet, and lover in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- Art and aesthetics in *Timon of Athens*

137. SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY RECEPTION IN EUROPE

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It is a paradox of the early reception of Shakespeare on the European continent that many of his plays were brought across the English Channel even during his lifetime but that their author remained fairly unknown and was not rediscovered until the eighteenth century. Before then, Shakespeare's plays belonged to popular culture. Beginning in the 1580s, traveling English actors are recorded as performing in Denmark, the Low Countries, and Germany. Their repertoire included versions of more than a dozen Shakespeare plays, including *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*. The invasion of English artists on the Continent led to the introduction of much Shakespearean material but did not establish "the Bard's" reputation. Instead, the English troupes seem to have contributed to the creation of a network in which cultural and Shakespearean material could circulate.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- English actors on the Continent: the facts
- Some testimonies
- The repertoire
- Impact on German and Dutch theater