

Emma Smith



The Cambridge **Introduction** to
Shakespeare

CAMBRIDGE

www.cambridge.org/9780521855990

This page intentionally left blank

*The Cambridge Introduction to
Shakespeare*

This lively and innovative introduction to Shakespeare promotes active engagement with the plays, rather than recycling factual information. Covering a range of texts, it is divided into seven subject-based chapters: Character, Performance, Texts, Language, Structure, Sources and History, and it does not assume any prior knowledge. Instead, it develops ways of thinking and provides the reader with resources for independent research through the ‘Where next?’ sections at the end of each chapter. The book draws on up-to-date scholarship without being overwhelmed by it and, unlike other introductory guides to Shakespeare, it emphasises that there is space for new and fresh thinking by students and readers, even on the most-studied and familiar plays.

EMMA SMITH is Fellow and Tutor in English at Hertford College, University of Oxford.

Cambridge Introductions to Literature

This series is designed to introduce students to key topics and authors. Accessible and lively, these introductions will also appeal to readers who want to broaden their understanding of the books and authors they enjoy.

- Ideal for students, teachers, and lecturers
- Concise, yet packed with essential information
- Key suggestions for further reading

Titles in this series:

Eric Bulson *The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce*

John Xiros Cooper *The Cambridge Introduction to T. S. Eliot*

Kirk Curnutt *The Cambridge Introduction to F. Scott Fitzgerald*

Janette Dillon *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*

Janette Dillon *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies*

Jane Goldman *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*

Kevin J. Hayes *The Cambridge Introduction to Herman Melville*

David Holdeman *The Cambridge Introduction to W. B. Yeats*

M. Jimmie Killingsworth *The Cambridge Introduction to Walt Whitman*

Ronan McDonald *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*

Wendy Martin *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson*

Peter Messent *The Cambridge Introduction to Mark Twain*

John Peters *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*

Sarah Robbins *The Cambridge Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe*

Martin Scofield *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*

Emma Smith *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare*

Peter Thomson *The Cambridge Introduction to English Theatre, 1660–1900*

Janet Todd *The Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen*

Jennifer Wallace *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy*

The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare

EMMA SMITH



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521855990

© Emma Smith 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provision of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published in print format 2007

ISBN-13 978-0-511-27149-6 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-27149-2 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85599-0 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85599-3 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-67188-0 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-67188-4 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of urls for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	page viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
Chapter 1 Character	1
Juliet's balcony, Verona	1
Shakespeare's realism?	3
Shakespeare's 'unreal' characters	4
Reading Shakespeare's characters on the page	6
Embodying Shakespeare's characters on stage	7
Doubling on the early modern stage	8
Writing for particular actors	11
Falstaff: character as individual or type?	12
Naming and individuality	12
Characters as individuals or as inter-relationships	14
Character: interior or exterior?	17
Character: where next?	19
Chapter 2 Performance	23
<i>Measure for Measure</i> : staging silence	23
'Going back to the text': the challenge of performance	26
Performance interpretations: <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	27
Topical performance: the plays in different theatrical contexts	30
Citing performances	32
Using film	33
Using film comparatively: <i>Macbeth</i>	35

<i>Hamlet</i> : ‘To be or not to be’	39
Adaptations: Shakespearean enough?	41
Performance: where next?	42
Chapter 3 Texts	46
Shakespeare’s hand	46
So what did Shakespeare write?	47
Stage to page	48
Quartos and Folio	49
Editing as interpretation	50
The job of the editor: the example of <i>Richard II</i>	53
Stage directions	57
Speech prefixes	60
The job of the editor: the example of <i>King Lear</i>	61
Texts: where next?	65
Chapter 4 Language	71
‘In a double sense’ (<i>Macbeth</i> 5.7.50)	71
Did anyone really talk like that?	72
Playing with language	77
Language of the play / language of the person	79
Prose and verse	81
Linguistic shifts: <i>1 Henry IV</i>	82
Shakespeare’s verse	84
Linguistic variation: <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>	85
Language: where next?	87
Chapter 5 Structure	90
Finding the heart of the play	90
Shakespeare’s genres: dynamic, not static	93
Tragedy and comedy	94
Tragedy – expanding the genre	95
Comedy – expanding the genre	98
History: is this a fixed genre?	101
Structuring scenes: <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	103
Juxtaposing scenes, activating ironies: <i>Henry V</i>	104

Showing v. telling	106
Structure: where next?	107
Chapter 6 Sources	113
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> and Plutarch	113
Originality: was Shakespeare a plagiarist?	116
Shakespeare at work: the intentional fallacy?	118
The source bites back: <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> and <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	120
The strong poet? <i>King Lear</i>	127
Sources: where next?	131
Chapter 7 History	134
Politic picklocks: interpreting topically	134
History plays: political Shakespeare?	136
History plays: Shakespeare as propagandist?	138
<i>Hamlet</i> as history play?	140
Jacobean patronage: <i>King Lear</i> and <i>Macbeth</i>	142
Historical specificity: gender roles	144
Race and <i>Othello</i>	148
History: where next?	153
<i>Bibliography</i>	157
<i>Index</i>	162

Figures and tables

Figures

- 3.1 Ending of *King Lear* Q (1608) Trinity College Library,
Cambridge page 62
- 3.2 Ending of *King Lear* F (1623) 63

Tables

- 3.1 Comparing *Richard II* in its first edition (1597) and the
Cambridge text edited by Andrew Gurr. 1597 edition reproduced
by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California 56
- 5.1 Aspects of comedy and tragedy 94
- 6.1 Prologues to Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* and Shakespeare's
Romeo and Juliet 121

Preface

This book is intended as an introduction in two senses. Firstly it is an introduction in a sense available to Shakespeare's contemporaries: that of a first guide to a topic. Readers in sixteenth-century London could purchase 'introductions' to fields from astrology to Welsh, and from swimming to dying well. Like these, I have tried not to assume existing expertise or familiarity: I have wanted the book to be self-standing, acting as an encouragement and guide to further reading and investigation via 'Where next?' sections after each chapter. Each chapter covers a range of examples with a focus on those plays most frequently studied. The emphasis of this volume, unlike the many other great introductory guides that are currently available, is that it engages less with facts than with critical approaches to Shakespeare's plays – with the question of what we 'do' when we read or study Shakespeare. And I have also thought of it as an introduction in a more recent sense: 'the action of introducing or making known personally' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Meet Shakespeare ('s plays): I think you'll find you have some things in common. I hope you hit it off.

Lots of students – particularly at Hertford College, Oxford, at the Department for Continuing Education in the University of Oxford, and at the Bread Loaf School of English – will find this material familiar, either because they've heard me rehearse parts of it in different forms or on different occasions, or because they recognise their own ideas here too. I'm grateful for the serial privilege of those conversations. Emily Bartels has cast a generous eagle eye over it all; Charlotte Brewer has, among other things, saved me from my most egregious forms of mateyness. And since this is a book which comes out of, and I hope may give something back to, teaching, it's made me think with affection about what I owe to those who have taught me: Rita Chamberlain, John Gregory, Katherine Duncan-Jones, and, differently but especially, Viv Smith.

All suggested websites were accessed in April 2006. Except where I've indicated otherwise, the edition of the plays I have used is the New Cambridge: for *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Winter's Tale* where there is no New Cambridge edition yet, I've used *The Complete Works* ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (2nd edn, Oxford, 2005).

Chapter 1

Character

Juliet's balcony, Verona	1
Shakespeare's realism?	3
Shakespeare's 'unreal' characters	4
Reading Shakespeare's characters on the page	6
Embodying Shakespeare's characters on stage	7
Doubling on the early modern stage	8
Writing for particular actors	11
Falstaff: character as individual or type?	12
Naming and individuality	12
Characters as individuals or as inter-relationships	14
Character: interior or exterior?	17
Character: where next?	19

Juliet's balcony, Verona

In the Italian town of Verona, the tourist authorities have taken Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and in particular the character of Juliet, to their hearts. Despite the historical tenuousness of the association of Juliet with Verona, a suitable medieval townhouse has been designated Juliet's house, and a balcony was added in the 1930s to make the setting photogenically consonant with the play's most iconic moment, when Juliet calls down from her balcony to her new lover. Streams of visitors add lovestruck graffiti to the walls, gain luck from stroking the right breast of a modern bronze statue of Juliet, and apparently address numerous letters requesting help in matters of the heart (rather oddly, since Juliet's wasn't an entirely successful love affair to aspire to) to 'Juliet, Verona', which are duly answered by a multilingual team of agony aunt volunteers known as the 'Juliet club'.

While the curious afterlife of Juliet in Verona is an extreme case, it nicely illustrates two aspects of our abiding interest in, and attitude to, Shakespeare's characterisation. Firstly, projecting a real person from the words of

Shakespeare's plays involves an extreme effort of will. We desperately want to believe that Juliet is a real person – a desire bound up here with narratives of travel, of holiday snapshots as consumption, of a sentimental version of romantic love, of the modern vestiges of pilgrimage – and thus the tourist offices provide what we want, complete with medieval-effect balcony and a substitute Juliet in the form of a statue. We might compare this effort to the effort we habitually make in reading or watching plays, by which we supply missing details or smooth over inconsistencies in the name of realism or of helpfully suspending our disbelief in order to help the play along. And secondly, this desire and our exertions to satisfy it postdate the plays, by a long way. Inventing Juliet in this form – as a real person in a real house in a real city, rather than a collection of words written on a page – is a twentieth-century tail on a sixteenth-century play. It's the interpretative equivalent of that Mussolini-era balcony tacked onto the medieval house.

We could therefore argue that Shakespearean characters are *writing* first, *people* second – just as the meanings of the very word 'character' have shifted from its earliest meaning as 'impression' or 'graphic sign or symbol' to the now dominant meaning, first registered after Shakespeare's death, of distinctive individual personality. When they were first printed, Shakespeare's plays had no character lists or *dramatis personae* as we are now used to in modern editions. There was therefore no obvious sense in which the persons of the play pre-existed the words they speak in it. We can see dramatic characters in this way as a product of the language which, strangely, they seem themselves also to produce. Rather than articulating their own words, they are articulated by them. One of the beguilingly circular argumentative movements of character study has been to derive from the characters' speeches an idea of their personality which is then used to interpret and underwrite those same speeches.

Character study – how characters are depicted in the drama, why they behave as they do, and the modes of reading or viewing which encourage empathic identification with them – has been a dominant mode of Shakespearean criticism since its earliest days. In fact, the first appreciations of Shakespeare tended to praise his characterisation above all other aspects of his work, particularly as an antidote to the datedness of his language or to the perceived irregularity of his plotting by classical standards. In recent academic writing, however, the whole notion of 'character' has been placed under question. Critics have argued that personality as a distinctive inner quality would have been less recognisable to Shakespeare's first audiences than it has become for us, and that therefore character study is based on an anachronistic premise. We tend to think that how people perceive themselves and others has been a historical constant across all time; historicist criticism has challenged this assumption

and drawn usefully on changing ideas of privacy and the personal, as well as on dramatic technique, in the early modern period. (See ‘Where next’ for further reading on this topic.) But readers, viewers and performers of Shakespeare have been resistant to this apparent undermining of one of their primary sources of pleasure in the plays. So this opening chapter traces the critical debates about character, aiming to develop and interrogate, rather than entirely to reject, what often seems most appealing about those apparently lifelike personalities such as Hamlet or Falstaff or Beatrice in Shakespeare’s plays.

Shakespeare’s realism?

Alexander Pope’s assertion that ‘every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual, as those in life itself’ expresses the claims for psychological verisimilitude often made for Shakespeare’s powers of characterisation. When we say that we relate to, or recognise, aspects of Shakespeare’s characters, we are willingly entering into a relationship with them in which we endow them with human form, and compare their actions with our own and those of people around us. Thus the characterisation of Beatrice and Benedick – the unwilling lovers of *Much Ado About Nothing* who spend much of the play denying what is plain to all their friends, that they are a passionately compatible and unorthodox romantic couple – is bolstered by our recognition of these kinds of behaviour in the real world; perhaps we think we have all known people whose protestations that they cannot stand each other are a thin cover for deep feelings hidden through habit or fear of hurt, and those people combine in our mind with Shakespeare’s characters to give an illusion of verisimilitude. Often Shakespeare presents us with individuals undergoing particular life events which are likely to chime in with readers’ own experience: the death of a parent in *Hamlet*, for example; the adolescent search for an adult identity in unfamiliar surroundings in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; the suffocating burden of parental expectations in *1 Henry IV*; the heady experience of first love in *Romeo and Juliet*; the clash between private conscience and public duty in *Julius Caesar*. In measuring the plays against our own experiences – and, in some cases, vice versa – we do some of the work to animate Shakespeare’s words into the shapes of sentient, moral agents like ourselves. Using the language of emotional empathy – identification, sympathy, recognition – literary criticism has often seemed to teach that fully to engage with the plays we have to reach out a hand to their characters.

There are lots of ways in which Shakespeare’s works encourage this kind of psychic rapport. We might, for example, adduce those wonderful moments when a single remark gestures towards a whole back-story for a character – as

when the foolish gull Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night* sighs ‘I was adored once’ (2.3.153), or when Lady Macbeth says that she would have killed King Duncan herself, ‘had he not resembled / My father as he slept’ (2.2.12–3). Such information does not really help the plot along; rather, it serves to create the illusion of a broader psychological history of which the current play can only be a segment. There’s more to me than I get the chance to say here, these lines seem to signal; they’re like a marker flag saying ‘look at me again’. Shakespeare gestures to a world surrounding, but not articulated in, the play, rather as he does in his habitual device of opening his plays in the middle of a conversation we are to suppose was going on before we came in on it: with ‘Nay, but this dotage of our general’s / O’erflows the measure’ (1.1.1–2), Philo begins *Antony and Cleopatra* with a response to an unheard and unrecorded remark by his Roman interlocutor Demetrius (the term for this is *in medias res*, literally, ‘into the middle of things’).

If gesturing to a more complete back history is one of Shakespeare’s approaches to realistic character presentation, another is to endow characters with recognisable emotions. Thus when Capulet and his cousin discuss the passing of time in *Romeo and Juliet*, they suddenly emerge as recognisable older people at a family reunion: ‘His son is thirty.’ ‘Will you tell me that? / His son was but a ward two years ago’ (1.5.38–9). Of course this has a thematic relevance to a play about speed, and particularly the speed with which young people grow into adulthood, often unnoticed by their elders, but significantly it is a brief moment in which the play sees that process not from the point of view of the children but sympathetically from that of the parents. This part of the scene isn’t directed at anyone who’s been treated as the child they no longer are by relations at a family party; instead, it’s for the people who, seeing strapping young adults in place of the chubby infants preserved in their memory, have to realise that they too have aged.

Shakespeare’s ‘unreal’ characters

These examples, and numerous more like them, could be cited in support of Pope’s assessment of Shakespeare’s verisimilitude. But there are ways in which seeing Shakespeare’s characters as people blinds us to other possibilities and limits our understanding of the way the plays work. It is important to register, for example, that elsewhere characters in Shakespeare do not approach this recognisability: they do not gesture towards a knowable past. Sometimes these are ‘minor’ characters; sometimes it’s necessary to the plot that they lack the apparent verisimilitude lavished on some of their peers. Take Mariana, for

example, in *Measure for Measure*. This play works by juxtaposing two interrupted marital unions. The first is that of Claudio and the pregnant Juliet, who maintain that they are married ‘save that we do the denunciation lack / Of outward order’ (1.2.9–10) – meaning, apparently, that they have undergone a kind of private, rather than church, wedding – and are to be punished by the new governor of Vienna, Angelo, for unlawful fornication. The other, parallel couple are Angelo himself and Mariana the ‘affianced’ bride he abandoned when her dowry was lost at sea. *Measure for Measure’s* presiding organiser, the Duke of Vienna who is disguised as a friar, plots to deliver both couples, and devises a so-called ‘bed trick’ by which Angelo can be brought to have sex with Mariana, thinking it is with Isabella the sister of Claudio, and thus by consummating his relationship with Mariana he be brought to recognise his marital obligations. With me so far? The point is that Mariana completes a situation of parallels which is crucial to the design of a play titled after a parallel, ‘measure for measure’ (editions of the play often have a cover illustration of a set of scales), in which the notion of equivalence – ethical, legal, moral, dramatic – is insistently interrogated.

Because this is her role – structural, rather than personal – Mariana is hardly characterised at all. She isn’t even mentioned until Act 3 of the play and first appears in Act 4. She substitutes for Isabella in Angelo’s bed – an action seemingly requiring the complete abdication of individual personality – and goes on to play out the role the puppet-master Duke has scripted for her as the means by which Angelo’s hypocrisy and harshness will be punished. It is thus inappropriate to ask of her, as we might of a ‘real’ person: why does she want to marry the awful Angelo after the way he’s treated her? why does she go along with the Duke-Friar’s seedy plan? why is she still mooning around her ‘moated grange’ thinking about her worthless fiancé? The answer to these questions is not primarily psychological but dramatic: because the play requires it.

There are lots of other examples of characters whose purpose in their play is functional, structural or thematic, rather than to be uniquely themselves: we might think of Hotspur as the foil to Prince Henry – the king expresses the wish that the two boys had been swapped in the cradle, just in case we don’t understand that they are meant to be conceptualised as two sides of the coin – in *1 Henry IV*, or Sebastian, the twin of Viola in *Twelfth Night*. Rather akin to Mariana, Sebastian’s own role is also a sort of pre-sexual ‘bed-trick’: having fallen for Viola who has been dressed as a male page Cesario, Olivia vows to marry him. No one in the playworld knows of Sebastian’s existence, so his arrival at Olivia’s coincides with her rush to the altar and, bewilderedly, he substitutes for his sister and marries a woman he has only just met. As a figure whose

purpose in the play is to substitute for someone he looks just like – his own twin – it is appropriate that Sebastian has relatively little personality of his own. He's a plot device, although we could argue that a couple of scenes with his devoted companion and rescuer Antonio are unnecessary by this estimation, and serve to establish Sebastian as a character who can himself inspire affection, rather than just mop it up by appearing in the right place at the right time.

Reading Shakespeare's characters on the page

So looking at Shakespeare's characters as if they were, and with the expectation that they can be explained as, real people, may be more appropriate to some characters than others. It may also confine us unhelpfully or lead to questions the text is not supported to answer. A good example might be the issue satirised in the title of L. C. Knights' article 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' (1933). The title refers to the scholarly controversy prompted by the fact that while Macbeth and his wife apparently have no offspring, there *are* references to a child, particularly in Lady Macbeth's startling image designed to strengthen her husband's resolve to kill King Duncan:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this. (1.7.54–9)

So Lady Macbeth has 'given suck' and yet Macbeth sees he has achieved a 'barren sceptre' since he has no heir. One of the most influential character critics of Shakespeare, A. C. Bradley, devoted a section at the end of his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (first published in 1904) to this problem, along with other questions including 'Does Lady Macbeth really faint?' and 'When was the murder of Duncan first plotted?' The form of the questions suggests that there are absolute and knowable answers if only we can interrogate the play skilfully enough to make it confess them. The play is withholding information which we need to uncover. (The terminology is appropriate: the connotations of the interrogation cell are disturbingly present in this interpretative model.) This again puts the onus on us as readers, performers, or viewers to do that work the play does not do for us – mentally to supply the unwritten scenes in which the answers to our questions are provided – but it may be that it is the questions themselves which are unnecessary.