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On entering *Shakespeare in Ten Acts*, the British Library's contribution to the world-wide celebrations commemorating the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, visitors are greeted by perhaps the most recognizable Shakespearean artefact: a copy of the 1623 First Folio. The Folio serves as a powerful starting point of commonality – no matter what drew you to the exhibition, odds are this book, or at least its iconic portrait of the playwright, features somewhere in your personal Shakespearean history. Folios are often the highlight of Shakespeare exhibits (there is even one touring America this year), so by beginning where many exhibitions end the British Library proposes to literally pick up where most leave off. Happily, this promise is immediately kept. Feet away from the Folio are some of the most significant artifacts of Shakespeare's textual history: a rare copy of Shakespeare's first success in print, the long poem *Venus and Adonis* (1594), and steps from that quarto, a manuscript page from the never-performed play *Sir Thomas More* that is believed to show the only extended example of Shakespeare's handwriting. Standing just a thin pane of glass away from the spurred 'a' of the playwright's own hand in the *More* manuscript, a text that for preservation reasons even most scholars do not get to see in person, it becomes clear that this is not just an exhibition of Shakespeare artefacts – this is *the* exhibition.

From the scrawly lines of Shakespeare's own hand, the exhibition moves on to his work via its main theme of 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts'. Acts in this instance are ten significant 'performances' that are both landmarks of Shakespeare history and also denote profound cultural changes: the first *Hamlet* performed at the Globe, the King's Men's move to the Blackfriars indoor theatre, the first documented performance of *Hamlet* outside of Europe, the first woman to act in a Shakespeare play, the birth of the cultural icon, the first black actor to play Othello, the restoration of Shakespeare's text of *King Lear* after more than a century of adaptation, Peter Brook's rejection of Victorian opulence in his 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the return to original practice with the building of the reconstructed Globe Theatre, and the future of Shakespeare performance in a media-driven, digital world.

As with acts in any performance, these sections tell of triumphs and struggles. The story of the actress who first played Desdemona, for example, is tempered not only by the fact that her name was not recorded, but also because her gender is only confirmed by a prologue in which the speaker assures the audience that he 'saw the lady drest'. If Shakespeare was not immediately a platform for female artistic autonomy, the act's display of images such as George Henry Harlow's portrait of Sarah Siddons's saintly looking Lady Macbeth, a photograph of Sarah-Bernhardt dressed as Hamlet in 1899, and a clip of Maxine Peake performing *Hamlet*, shows that Shakespeare's plays have come to reflect the changing and expanding position of women in the theatre. Similarly dynamic is act six, which features the career of Ira Aldridge who in 1825 was the first black actor to play the role of Othello. The exhibition shows reviews and playbills from Aldridge's performances around England, ranging in response from 'considerable merit' to 'inappropriate' for the traditional performances of the West End, they reveal that being cast in the role was only the beginning of the struggle for racial diversity in the theatre. Further images from performances across the 20th and 21st century including Paul Robeson's Othello, Josette Simon's Rosalind in the RSC's 1989 *As You Like It*, David Oyelowo's Henry VI in the RSC's 2006 History Cycle, and Parminder Nagra's Viola in Channel 4's 2003 *Twelfth Night* suggest Aldridge's initial efforts are still being realized in the art of actors from diverse cultures and backgrounds who are now playing roles across the canon. In these acts, Shakespeare's continued presence as a global icon becomes a touchstone by which to record and examine the evolution of society.

For all its somber lessons, the exhibition is above all a celebration of the way Shakespeare, the man and his work, remains a subject of 'constant reinvention'. It is the exhibition's range of adaptations, translations and re-imaginings on the page and stage that is one of its real treasures. In addition to the relevant historical texts, which seem to cover every woodcut, portrait and manuscript page you have seen in all of your Shakespeare textbooks combined,

visitors are treated to a variety of items from Shakespeare's time to the present: costumes, props, playbills, and reviews. The understated personal mementos are perhaps the most striking. For example, the small copy of *Hamlet* belonging to Kenneth Branagh, its title page autographed by former Hamlets Michael Redgrave, Peter O'Toole, and Derek Jacobi who each signed the copy before handing it on to their successor.

Act five focuses on the creation of Shakespeare the cultural icon, and features the 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee, a three-day celebration of Shakespeare produced by the actor and impresario David Garrick. A favorite historical event for many Shakespearean scholars it is less well-known to the public and so it was lovely to see it represented here. The jubilee is famous (or infamous) for having all the recognizable trappings of modern fan culture – souvenirs, statue unveilings, parades, fireworks, horse races, and even a Disney-style character parade. Reading the extensive program of activities the visitor discovers that Garrick thought of just about everything: everything that is except to include the performance of a Shakespeare play in the proceedings. Seeing the 'official' jubilee medal, the commemorative handkerchief, and the small wooden casket made from a mulberry tree like the one in the yard at New Place, Shakespeare's Stratford home, we witness the birth of Shakespeare the cultural icon and the industry of Shakespeare 'bardolotry' that continues to this day.

Act three devoted to Shakespeare in the 'wide world' is also a highpoint for its amazing range of Shakespeare adaptations and translations. We know that Shakespeare's plays have travelled across the globe, but seeing the documentation of a performance of *Hamlet* held on an East India Company voyage in 1607, translations with dynamic illustrations of Shakespeare in Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Swedish and a slap-stick puppet version of *Hamlet* in German (*Der Bestrafte Brudermord* or 'Fratricide Punished') from 1710 drive the point home.

Performance is the central interest of this exhibition. Considerable space is given to Peter Brook's 1970 production of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* showing original props, concept art and costuming of this landmark production whose white stage and abstract color blocking deconstructed the opulence of conventional Victorian-style inspired productions. The exhibition finishes with recent innovations in performance with Shakespeare's Globe's work on original practices and the more avant-garde staging presented in The Wooster Group's multi-media *Hamlet* from 2007. With the emphasis on Shakespeare's reinvention on the stage it was surprising that, apart from a clip of the Metropolitan Opera's 2011 production of *The Enchanted Island*, an operatic pastiche of *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there were few references to Shakespeare's contributions to classical performing art forms, particularly to opera and ballet. No doubt the line had to be drawn somewhere, and I can imagine the curators had many heart-breaking discussions when deciding what to use and what to exclude – perhaps there were enough cuts for an exhibition part two?

The biggest problem with the exhibition is really that there is so much to see; it takes at least a couple of hours to work your way through if you are looking at a good amount of the material in any detail. On the plus side, the variety of artefacts allows for any number of narratives depending on whether the visitor prefers texts, theatrical memorabilia, translation, modern performance or a combination of any of the above – the breadth of the exhibition creates the potential for any number of satisfactory threads of exploration. Old favorites are seen and new ones discovered – I left with a list of performances I want to hunt down including the Sphinx company's production of *The Roaring Girl's Hamlet* (1992). Also, do make a point of watching the clip of Peter Sellars appearing on the 1965 TV special 'The Music of Lennon and McCartney'. Sellars recites the Beatles' song 'Hard Day's Night' in the style of Laurence Olivier's Richard III – you will smile for the rest of the day.

Naturally, the exhibition draws heavily on the British Library's unparalleled collection of manuscripts and rare books. Scholars will not be disappointed as they encounter rare texts of the Shakespeare canon such as the first quartos of *King Lear* (1608) and the first and second

quartos of *Hamlet* (1603 and 1604–5). Readers can also read Robert Greene (or rather Henry Chettle's) insulting of Shakespeare as an 'upstart crow' from the *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) and Frances Meres's approbations of Shakespeare as 'mellifluous and hony-tongued' in *Wits Treasury* (1598). A bit more could have been made of the significance of this collection of rare books in terms of its importance to scholarship and public understanding of Shakespeare. There is a corner of the exhibition where the story of the multiple versions of the *Hamlet* 'To be or not to be' soliloquy (two quartos and folio) are used to explain that variant editions of the play are often conflated in performance and in print editions. It is visually of the highest quality, but narratively a bit understated, in terms of the fact that without these editions we would not even have *Hamlet*. Also, located in a corner amidst all the 'live' books and artifacts that are absolutely everywhere, the story is easily skipped over. In an effort to tell other stories about Shakespeare (which are certainly no less important) it felt like the story of the value of the collection itself, as the only contemporary witnesses to Shakespeare's work, was sadly muted.

The physical layout of the exhibition's different acts could also have used some clarification in places. When working my way along the cases of non-English adaptations and translations of act three, 'The wide world', I suddenly encountered a typescript copy of an early synopsis for *West Side Story*. I was thrilled to see it, but I was not sure why I was seeing it at this moment until I retraced my steps and found the sign introducing the Act; it was located counter-intuitively on the opposite side of the door from the line of displays. Information on a number of panels seemed insufficient at times. A clip identified simply as 'Maxine Peake as Hamlet' in reality also included very interesting clips of Peake and Harriet Walter discussing their approaches to playing traditionally male roles. However, these minor moments of confusion do not take away from the overall bliss of the exhibition – if anything they add to the glee that there are so many wonderful and surprising things to look at.

It is not only the depth of the British Library's collection that gives this exhibition its power – glance at the provenances of the individual items and you will see these artefacts have come from many major libraries, museums, trusts, private houses, and personal collections from the United Kingdom and beyond. We should be truly grateful for the generosity of these contributors who, rather than keep their individual items to display themselves in this banner year, decided to loan them to the British Library so that they could be seen as part of what is surely the most amazing collection of Shakespearean history that has ever been assembled. The world came together to make this amazing collection, a further testament to how Shakespeare, and art more generally, unites across borders and cultures.

If you are eager for more Shakespeare after your visit, or are not able to make it to the British Library to see *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* in person, the Library's companion website, *Discovering Literature: Shakespeare*, offers another opportunity to explore the ideas of the exhibition alongside many of its treasures. The major features of the site are a virtual catalogue of 291 items drawn from both the Library's collection and the *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* exhibition, a collection of 83 articles on an exhaustive range of Shakespeare-related topics, and a teaching resources section aimed at key stages four and five (ages 14 to 16 and 16 to 18). The site is aimed at general readers and non-specialists aged 14 and up, but the many interesting images of collection items (particularly performance images) mean that Shakespearians of all backgrounds will enjoy exploring the site.

The virtual collection may never replace the excitement of seeing the exhibition in person, but the site certainly makes an effort. One of the real strengths of the site is the high quality images of rare books, maps, props, and performance photographs available throughout. In many cases, opportunities for engagement with these resources goes beyond the expected visuals. For example, a typical essay in a book or on a website will offer the single image of a title page. *Discovering Literature*, however, invites the visitor to flip through the first few pages of the 1600 quarto edition of *Much Ado About Nothing* – offering a valuable new experience particularly for non-specialists who may have never seen an early modern edition

of Shakespeare. The quality of the scanned texts is remarkable, enabling close scrutiny of type and handwriting in manuscripts. How useful such a tool is in this context is unclear, but it is refreshing to see a website that tries to offer an experience beyond simply a digital version of a paper essay. Collection items are also supported with extended information about the item itself and its contextual relationship to Shakespeare. The page featuring a letter dated 1776 from Abigail Adams to her husband John Adams (future second president of the United States) includes helpful biographies and also highlights Abigail Adams's use of quotations from *Julius Caesar*. The page offers not only transcriptions of the quotes used by Adams in the letter, but the fuller text of the original speeches, allowing readers to interpret the use of Shakespeare in this context for themselves. For those interested exploring further the themes of government and Republicanism suggested in the analysis, the bottom of the page offers links (laid out one below the other in a rather awkward long scroll) to related articles, other items in the collection, and a synopsis of the play.

The other major contribution of the site is the extensive collection of articles composed specifically for the site by a range of experts including academics and theatre professionals from a variety of disciplines. Considering the number of articles, their arrangement under only four, rather limited, 'themes' of comedy, history, tragedy, and context impedes access to the full range of topics, particularly for non-specialists who may not already be aware of what subjects would typically fall under which genre. Such broad categories also result in large lists of search results that are again presented in long, cumbersome scrolls down the page. More effective cross-referencing appears in the pages of individual articles which offer suggestions of related pages, but it is not the most efficient way to initiate searches for a particular subject and even less amenable to browsing. This layout makes one wish that the question and answer approach that made the pages for the collection items so accessible was also employed in some way in the searching function and home page for this section.

The content of the articles is an effective blend of scholarly rigor and accessible writing that supports the site as a gateway for general visitors and non-specialists to discover more about Shakespeare's works. Articles make frequent use of quotes from the play texts so readers are quickly immersed in the play's subject matter and the topic under discussion – a valuable quality for web readers who like to dip in and out of pages. Lines from plays are identified with act/scene/line attributions in the text, quotes from secondary sources are efficiently linked to footnotes at the bottom of the page, and play titles are conveniently set as hyperlinks to detailed play synopses – all of which makes the information easy to track down elsewhere. The range of topics covered is extensive and compelling. Like the exhibition, the site pays particular attention to performance, but there is considerable space given to historical context including an article on 'Shakespeare's London' which connects the cultural history of the city to Shakespeare's work as well as articles exploring early modern gender, religion, clothing, multiculturalism and the countryside to name just a few. Many of these topics are reimagined as lessons and classroom activities in the 'Learning resource' section, which offers downloadable lesson plans that include extracts from relevant secondary sources, links to additional websites and a variety of discussion questions and close reading group activities for key stages four and five. These sources would successfully supplement larger units on the major plays. Overall, if one is willing to scroll and wander, the site covers most major areas of enquiry, and, as with the exhibition, it is also a great opportunity to expand your knowledge of Shakespeare regardless of your background.

Author's Response

Zoe Wilcox

Our main intention for *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* was to use the 400th anniversary of his death as a milestone from which we would look back at Shakespeare's evolving reputation and the ways in which each generation has responded to his plays. It was incredibly difficult to aim at any degree of comprehensiveness given that we were considering the work of the world's most performed playwright, a man who has been written about so extensively for such a long period of time.

We found it helpful, therefore, to narrow things down by arranging our story around ten narrative hooks, ten performances which each hold a mirror up to the era in which they were performed and provide a window into themes that we wanted to explore further. Of course we had more than ten contenders for key performances and we had to whittle these down to what we thought were the most important stories and, crucially, the ones which we could best illustrate with items from the British Library's collections. We also took advice from our sterling team of academics and writers who advised us on the subjects that they thought most pertinent to a historical examination of Shakespeare in performance. While it would have been lovely to showcase more opera, ballet and contemporary dance in the exhibition, we did have to draw the line somewhere and we decided that it was not possible to go too far into Shakespeare's influence on other art forms; that could be a whole exhibition in itself.

The importance of the survival of rare books and manuscripts from the early modern period is something that is conveyed to visitors in our interpretive text. We highlight the significance of Shakespeare's First Folio in preserving 18 previously unpublished plays which might otherwise have been lost to posterity, we emphasise that the first quarto of *Hamlet* is one of only two surviving copies in the world and that 'The Book of Sir Thomas More' has been identified as the only surviving literary manuscript to contain Shakespeare's hand. To further emphasise the significance of the Library's collection and its influence on the public understanding of Shakespeare would have risked overloading the visitor with information in an exhibition where there is already much to see and much to read. It may also have led us to stray into didactic territory when our primary ambition was to reveal the human stories behind the performances.

We aim to strike a balance with our interpretive text so as to tell a story as succinctly and compellingly as possible without exhausting the visitor. Where the reviewer found the captioning of the Maxine Peake and Harriet Walter interview to be minimal I think this has arisen because a credit line has been taken for the title of the film itself. The full title of the film appears on screen at the beginning of the interview but naturally those who start watching mid-way through the piece (as is usually the case in an exhibition) will miss this, so we may reconsider this approach for future exhibitions.

With regard to the positioning of elements within the gallery, we spend a lot of time working out the ideal place for objects and text panels and we carefully consider the route visitors will take through the exhibition. We do occasionally have to make slight adjustments for practical reasons – such as moving the introductory text for the global Shakespeare section to allow for a widening of the thoroughfare – but the main text panels remain prominent and easy to spot. We have been very gratified by the response to *Shakespeare in Ten Acts*. For it to be regarded as 'the exhibition' of the anniversary year and 'the most amazing collection of Shakespearean history that has ever been assembled' is high praise in deed and, for us, justifies our maximalist approach to the subject.