SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Since this pioneering Series was first launched in 1984, the study of Shakespeare's plays as scripts for performance has grown to rival the reading of Shakespeare's plays as literature among university, college, and secondary school teachers and students. The aim of the Series remains today what it was then: to assist this study by exploring how Shakespeare's texts have been realised in performance, in a multitude of different ways by actors, directors, and designers, and in the various media for which the plays have been adapted.

The idea of what constitutes performance has itself changed considerably in the past few decades, promoted by cultural anthropologists who have defined performance as a more inclusive set of social practices than theatre historians ever envisioned, a continuum of human actions ranging from ritual, sports, popular entertainments and the performing arts to the enactment of social, gender, race, and class roles in everyday life. Advances in digital technology, too, have led to an expansion of what forms Shakespearean performance can take in various media – in theatres and less conventional playing spaces, in the cinema, and on the computer screen. They have also led to a fundamental questioning of what 'live' performance means – liveness being a basic tenet of performance studies – and to a better understanding of how viewers can become players in interactive performances. The rapid growth of media and digital technology, furthermore, has created a global market for Shakespeare that has not only encouraged intercultural exchanges by theatre companies, but also created new audiences for "local" adaptations of the plays in parts of the world that once would have had scant familiarity with Shakespeare.

Each contributor to the Series has selected a number of productions of a given play and analysed them comparatively. Drawn from different periods, countries, and media, these productions were chosen not only because they are culturally significant in their own right but because they illustrate how the convergence of material conditions can shape a performance and its reception: the medium for which the text is adapted; the language in which Shakespeare's text is spoken; the performance style and aesthetic

decisions made by directors and whether they embrace or flout tradition; the production's set, lighting, music and costume design; the bodies – raced, gendered, aged, sized and shaped – and the abilities of the actors working individually but also in an ensemble; and the historical, political, and social contexts which condition audience responses to the performance.

We hope that audiences, by reading these accounts of Shakespeare in performance, may enlarge their understanding of what a playtext is and begin, too, to appreciate the complex ways in which a performance is a deeply collaborative effort. Any study of a Shakespeare text will, of course, reveal only a small proportion of the play's potential meanings; but by engaging issues of how a performance essentially translates a text into a work with cultural resonances and meanings beyond anything Shakespeare as author could have anticipated, our Series encourages a kind of reading that is receptive to the contingencies that make performances of Shakespeare an art unto themselves.

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General Editors