

# Reading List: Being Critical With Shakespeare

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This reading list provides a thorough introduction to the various contemporary critical approaches to Shakespeare that make the field so urgent, thriving and relevant today. It equips students to put those approaches into practice in their own work, and seeks to demonstrate the range and diversity of methods that modern scholarship embraces. Since the emphasis is on method, the list is organised by critical approach (such as sensory studies) rather than by play (such as *Hamlet*), with students encouraged to think how they might go on to apply a method they encounter here to a play they are interested in. The list is therefore particularly suitable for students who already have some familiarity with Shakespeare, and are looking to develop more advanced critical engagements with his plays and poems. This might be at postgraduate level, at advanced undergraduate level, or whilst preparing an undergraduate dissertation on Shakespeare.

Each week introduces a different critical approach, using three essays and articles (and occasionally a specialised textual edition) from the Cambridge Shakespeare platform. The trio is selected to give students a secure basis for understanding each methodology, but also a sense of the variety that a given approach – such as sensory studies – might result in. Students are encouraged not just to evaluate the arguments being made in the readings, but to consider how they might apply the methods being used and questions being asked to their own critical work. To help with this, prompt questions are supplied each week. The readings are largely drawn from *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare Survey*, both available in their entirety through the Cambridge Shakespeare Platform, but also encompass the 'Early Quartos' and 'Shakespeare in Production' series for specialised work on textual studies and performance studies respectively. The Shakespeare plays and poems discussed in the critical readings are all available in modern critical editions through the Cambridge Shakespeare platform; students can thus consult the play-texts themselves in conjunction with the critical readings where helpful.

- Week 1 – Sensory Studies
- Week 2 – Shakespeare and Race
- Week 3 – (Re)sources, Influences and Inter-Texts
- Week 4 – Ecocritical Shakespeares
- Week 5 – Gender and Sexuality
- Week 6 – Textual Studies and Early Modern Publishing
- Week 7 – Early Modern Performance Culture
- Week 8 – Shakespeare in Production
- Week 9 – Adaptation and Reception Studies

## Week 1 – Sensory Studies

We begin with sensory studies, a methodology that has reinvigorated Shakespeare criticism in the wake of Bruce R. Smith's generative study *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (1999). Thinking about the embodied sensory experiences encoded in Shakespeare's plays and encountered by audiences of his plays, and considering the challenges of studying the senses at a historical distance of four centuries, methodology is at the core of this week's critical focus. The first reading, by Lars Engle, investigates sound in *Coriolanus*, using the concepts of 'signal' and 'noise' to think about language and sound in Shakespeare's play through comparison to Augustine's *Confessions*, a widely-read text in the period. Michael Neill's wide-ranging account of the hand takes in embodied experience, the hand as inscribed and inscriber, and even physical violence upon the hand. Finally, David McInnis foregrounds the challenges of studying something as ephemeral as early modern plays by focusing on what we have lost and how we might engage productively, rather than dismissively, with evidentiary gaps.

Key questions:

- 1) How is sensory experience represented in Shakespeare?
- 2) In what ways do Shakespeare's plays in performance require the audience's senses (beyond comprehending language)?
- 3) How do the critics go about studying Shakespearean sensations, particularly when there are gaps in the evidence?
- 4) Does a sensory approach to Shakespeare offer insights not possible with a narrower textual focus?

### Core Critical Reading

Engle, Lars, 'Hearing Voices: Signal Versus Urban Noise in *Coriolanus* and Augustine's *Confessions*', *Shakespeare Survey 73: Shakespeare and the City*, edited by Emma Smith (2020), 79–92: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108908023.006>

Neill, Michael, "'Amphitheaters in the Body": Playing with Hands on the Shakespearian Stage', *Shakespeare Survey 48: Shakespeare and Cultural Exchange*, edited by Stanley Wells (1996), 23–50: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521550300.003>

McInnis, David, 'All Early Modern Drama is Virtual to Us', *Shakespeare Survey 76: Digital and Virtual Shakespeare*, edited by Emma Smith (2023), 1–8: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009392761.001>

## Week 2 – Shakespeare and Race

This week maps some of the recent and transformative Shakespeare scholarship drawing on pre-modern race studies and other areas of critical race theory. Presenting race and racialising thought as a consideration for all Shakespeare scholarship, not a self-contained critical conversation, the three articles selected here model intersectional approaches (thinking about class and gender as well as race), emphasise whiteness as a crucial category in racialised thinking, and consider hitherto marginalised figures such as Barbary in *Othello*. For students unfamiliar with pre-modern race studies, the articles provide extensive contextual information, from the diversity of early modern London's population to the role of travel narratives and new cross-cultural encounters in shaping English perceptions of those living in different parts of the world. They also model a range of methods for building considerations of race into Shakespearean scholarship, from an emphasis on the construction of white English identity in opposition to Spanish identity as well as other labels (such as 'Moor') identifying race and nation, to a detailed engagement with archival traces of real lives lived in London as a frame for reconstructing possible playgoing experiences.

Key questions:

- 1) What are the benefits of an intersectional approach to Shakespeare (attending to identity categories such as gender and class as well as race)?
- 2) What do Shakespeare's plays suggest about the construction of whiteness as a racialised category in early modern England?
- 3) How important are early colonial encounters and the related genre of travel writing to Shakespeare's representations of racialised difference?
- 4) What questions relating to race and racialised thinking (including the construction of whiteness) can you productively ask when studying any Shakespeare play or poem?

### Core Critical Reading

Sheeha, Iman, "'[A] Maid Called Barbary": *Othello*, Moorish Maidservants and the Black Presence in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Survey 75: Othello*, edited by Emma Smith (2022), 89–102: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009245845.007>

Bui, Hanh, 'Sycorax's Hoop', *Shakespeare Survey 76: Digital and Virtual Shakespeare*, edited by Emma Smith (2023), 180–95: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009392761.017>

Cheema, Zainab S., 'Grafted To The Moor: Anglo-Spanish Dynastic Marriage And Miscegenated Whiteness In *The Winter's Tale*', *Shakespeare Survey 75: Othello*, edited by Emma Smith (2022), 240–55: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009245845.017>

## Week 3 – (Re)sources, Influences and Inter-Texts

Week 3 begins with the study of what John Drakakis has termed ‘Shakespeare’s Resources’: the materials that shaped his writing, and from which he shaped his writing. It introduces methodologies for thinking about where Shakespeare’s plays and poems came from, moving beyond traditional ‘source study’ approaches focused narrowly on plot parallels and verbal echoes. Three critical readings model approaches to this topic. First, Emma Smith and Laurie Maguire’s investigation of ‘What is a Source?’ tracks recent methodological debates about how to conceptualise Shakespeare’s engagement with other materials, before putting this into practice to argue that Marlowe and Nashe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* significantly influenced *The Tempest*. Megan Elizabeth Allen’s account of Shakespeare’s (and Peele’s) transformative engagement with Virgil’s portrayal of Aeneas to explore *pietas* in *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates another significant example of influence not reducible to a dramatic source. Finally, Lynn Enterline’s exploration of how Shakespeare’s schoolroom education and reading shaped not only his dramatic craft but his representation of education and pedagogy in his writing provides a wider educational context for Shakespeare’s sources and yet another way of thinking about sources and influences.

Key questions:

- 1) What are the strengths and limitations of the concept of a ‘source’?
- 2) What kinds of material does Shakespeare draw on, and what does he take from that material?
- 3) How do these critics substantiate their arguments that Shakespeare was influenced by Marlowe/Virgil/early modern classrooms?
- 4) Consider how many different kinds of material (classical poetry; contemporary pamphlets; other plays...) influenced Shakespeare, and how you might go about identifying and engaging with such material yourself

### Core Critical Reading

Maguire, Laurie, and Emma Smith, ‘What is a Source? Or, How Shakespeare Read his Marlowe’, *Shakespeare Survey 68: Shakespeare, Origins and Originality*, edited by Peter Holland (2015), 15–31: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316258736.002>

Enterline, Lynn, ‘Education and Reading in Shakespeare’s Work’, in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part XII – The Historical William Shakespeare*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 845–50:  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.109>

Allen, Megan Elizabeth, “‘Titus, unkind’: Shakespeare’s Revision of Virgil’s Aeneas in *Titus Andronicus*”, *Shakespeare Survey 70: Creating Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Holland (2017), 228–39: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108277648.025>

## Week 4 – Ecocritical Shakespeares

This week we explore some of the ways in which scholars have brought ecocritical approaches (engaged with ecology, environment and climate) to bear on Shakespeare. This includes scholarship concerned primarily with how Shakespeare engaged with and understood his environment, as well as scholarship focused principally on how Shakespeare (as text, performance or both) might contribute to ecological debates and discussions today. Gabriel Egan's essay on 'Country' thinks through Shakespeare's own relationship with urban and rural environments, growing up in the provincial locale of Stratford yet working in London. Charlotte Scott's account of forest settings in Shakespeare's plays establishes relevant classical frameworks such as pastoral, then goes on to situate Shakespeare's forests in relation to legal and cultural debates about forests as unruly social spaces. Randall Martin's article models another ecocritical approach, tracing the significance of Shakespeare to the development of Darwin's ethological writing and arguing for the value of Shakespeare performance as a means of engaging with contemporary ecological debates.

### Key Questions:

- 1) What are some of the similarities and differences between how Shakespeare may have experienced and understood environment and ecology and how we may today?
- 2) How does Shakespeare use rural settings in his plays?
- 3) How and why might Shakespeare contribute to contemporary debates about climate, environment and ecology?
- 4) Identify scenes in Shakespeare's works that you think would respond productively to ecocritical approaches of one kind or another

### Core Critical Reading

Egan, Gabriel, 'Country', in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part I – Mapping Shakespeare's World*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 40–45: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.006>

Scott, Charlotte, 'Dark Matter: Shakespeare's Foul Dens and Forests', *Shakespeare Survey 46: Shakespeare as Cultural Catalyst*, edited by Peter Holland (2015), 276–89: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9781107011229.025>

Allen, Megan Elizabeth, 'Evolutionary Naturalism and Embodied Ecology in Shakespearean Performance (with a Scene from *King John*)', *Shakespeare Survey 71: Re-Creating Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Holland (2018), 147–63: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108557177.017>

## Week 5 – Gender and Sexuality

This week turns to the wide array of scholarly approaches concerned with gender, sexuality or both – in Shakespeare’s time and today. Three contrasting critical readings give a sense of the range of work engaging such questions: one exploring early modern understandings of sex and gender (including binary and non-binary models); one taking contemporary creative responses to Shakespeare as an entry point to consider gender attitudes in his plays; and one drawing on concepts developed in queer studies, such as ‘camp’, to build close readings of Shakespearean texts. Recognising gender and sexuality as topics that scholarship should be habitually attentive to, rather than siloed fields of investigation, as well as recognising the conceptual and theoretical models and approaches developed in gender studies and queer theory that may be of use to Shakespeareans, this week’s work sketches the outlines of a vast area of study and invites students to engage with its range and diversity.

Key questions:

- 1) How do competing early modern understandings of sex and gender inform your view of Shakespeare’s writing?
- 2) Can practices of rewriting (or writing back to) Shakespeare help elucidate the gender dynamics (or queer potentialities) of his works?
- 3) Can Shakespeare contribute usefully to contemporary discussions about gender and sexuality?
- 4) How would you apply the approaches taken and the questions asked in these critical readings to Shakespeare plays you have studied?

### Core Critical Reading

Traister, Barbara, ‘How the Body Worked’, in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part XI – Medicine*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 777–83: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.100>

Macfie, Pamela Royston, ‘Shakespeare, #MeToo and his New Contemporaries’, *Shakespeare Survey 74: Shakespeare and Education*, edited by Emma Smith (2021), 342–54: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009036795.023>

Geddes, Louise, ‘Taylor Mac’s *Gary* and Queer Failure in *Titus Andronicus*’, *Shakespeare Survey 76: Digital and Virtual Shakespeare*, edited by Emma Smith (2023), 137–49: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009392761.014>

## Week 6 – Textual Studies and Early Modern Publishing

This week we turn to the texts that make up ‘Shakespeare’, investigating how they came into being, and how modern editions like those on the Cambridge Shakespeare platform relate to the early texts that have survived. Textual studies has in recent decades moved from a specialised sub-field dominated by editors of Shakespeare’s works, to a mainstream practice that scholars draw upon in work on all aspects of Shakespeare. This week’s work encourages students to take a similar approach, not simply taking for granted the modernised text in front of them as ‘Shakespeare’, but asking what choices have been made to produce that text, and what cultural forces might have shaped its form. The first reading, John Jowett’s essay on ‘Printing, Publishing, Textuality’, sets out the business and organisation of the early modern book-publishing industry, also supplying a concise overview of the different kinds of text in which Shakespeare’s writings survive. It argues for the influence of publishers and playing companies, as well as Shakespeare himself, in the selection and presentation of his plays in print, and thus the form that the surviving texts take. We then turn to a specific play-text discussed in Jowett’s essay, the first quarto of *Hamlet* in Cambridge’s ‘Early Quartos’ series, accompanied by Tiffany Stern’s essay arguing that this unfamiliar version of *Hamlet* (modern editions generally draw instead on the second quarto and the folio) may have been produced from shorthand notes taken in the theatre.

Key questions:

- 1) Who, apart from Shakespeare, might influence the form of a play-text as we encounter it in a modern edition such as Cambridge Shakespeare?
- 2) How helpful is a Cultural Bibliography approach (considering the lives and cultures that produced a text as well as technical features of the text itself) for understanding and editing Shakespeare’s work?
- 3) How might our understanding of Shakespeare benefit from attending to texts like Q1 *Hamlet* that aren’t generally the basis of modern editions?
- 4) Make a list of text-related questions that you can investigate when studying and writing about Shakespeare

### Core Critical Reading

Jowett, John, ‘Introduction’, in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part V – Printing, Publishing, Textuality*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 323–35: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.Q05>

*The First Quarto of Hamlet*, edited by Kathleen O. Irace, New Cambridge Shakespeare: The Early Quartos (1998): <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316563915>

Stern, Tiffany, ‘Sermons, Plays and Note-Takers: *Hamlet* Q1 as a “noted” Text’, *Shakespeare Survey 66: Working with Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Holland (2013), 1–23: <https://doi.org/10.1017/SSO9781107300699.001>

## Week 7 – Early Modern Performance Culture

The first of three weeks thinking about Shakespearean performance focuses on the early performance culture for which he wrote. A particular consideration is the variety of evidence available when studying the early modern theatre, and the range of methods and approaches that might be applied to that evidence – not limited to traditional theatre history. The three critical readings explore different aspects of early modern playhouse culture – production processes, the history of playing companies who performed Shakespearean texts, and actorly technique – and draw upon many different forms of evidence. Students are encouraged to approach early modern theatrical culture as open to interpretation from the available evidence, rather than a fixed and settled historical narrative, and to consider how the three readings this week open up space for future investigations, as well as proposing their own arguments.

Key questions:

- 1) How do early modern production processes affect your understanding of Shakespeare's plays?
- 2) What kinds of evidence are (and are not) available when studying early theatrical culture?
- 3) How do the readings this week engage with previous theatre-historical scholarship?
- 4) Identify moments in Shakespeare plays you are familiar with that would provide particular challenges (or opportunities) when performed in the early modern theatre.

### Core Critical Reading

Stern, Tiffany, 'Production Processes', in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part II – Theater*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 122–8: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.018>

Syme, Holger, 'Three's Company: Alternative Histories of London's Theatres in the 1590s', *Shakespeare Survey 65: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, edited by Peter Holland (2012), 269–89: <https://doi.org/10.1017/SSO9781139170000.021>

Smith, Simon, 'Acting Amiss: Towards a History of Actorly Craft and Playhouse Judgement', *Shakespeare Survey 70: Creating Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Holland (2017), 188–99: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108277648.020>



## Week 8 – Shakespeare in Production

We turn next to the history of Shakespeare performance, across time and place, and up to the present day. The first critical reading, Joseph Roach's 'Production History', introduces readers to the questions that performance scholars might ask of a production, the sources they might work from, and the features of a performance they might attend to. Students and other readers unfamiliar with performance studies will find this in invaluable basis to start from. The next reading is Elizabeth Schafer's extensive production history of *Twelfth Night*, from 1602 to the present day, that appears in her 'Shakespeare in Production' edition of the play, to be read alongside the play itself in the same edition. This case study of a single play – albeit with a particularly extensive performance history – will help illustrate how the approaches and questions modelled in Roach's chapter are put into practice, and help equip students with an understanding of how to write critically about performance for themselves.

Key questions:

- 1) What questions should performance criticism ask, and what aspects of a production should such criticism attend to?
- 2) Can performance criticism help us better understand Shakespeare's plays themselves?
- 3) What are some of the key choices that productions of *Twelfth Night* have to make, and how have these been handled by productions in the past?
- 4) Can you identify changing critical understandings of the play being reflected in production choices over time?

### Core Critical Reading

Roach, Joseph, 'Introduction', in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part XII – Production History*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 1545–57: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.Q22>

*Twelfth Night*, edited by Elizabeth Schafer, Shakespeare in Production (1998): <https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511840548>

Schafer, Elizabeth, 'Introduction', in *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare in Production (1998), pp. 1–78: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511840548.003>

## Week 9 – Adaptation and Reception Studies

Our final week explores Shakespeare's adaptation and reception through new acts of creativity across media. It thinks about the many forms beyond stage performance that 'Shakespeare' might take, and the boundaries (or indeed the fluidity) between performance and adaptation, between criticism and creativity, and between reception and remaking. Katherine Rowe's introduction to 'Shakespeare and Media History' sketches Shakespeare's significance to a wide range of new technologies as they have emerged in the past two century, before turning to crucial questions of how and why one can study Shakespeare's media transformations and adaptation. Peter Holland's question, 'When is *King Lear* not *King Lear*' models the practice of adaptation studies even whilst testing the limits of the concept, and raising important questions about what does and does not count as an adaptation of Shakespeare. Finally, Louise Geddes' essay makes a case for a closer integration between creative and critical responses to Shakespeare, exploring contemporary Shakespeare fan culture as one locus for significant Shakespearean reception and afterlife that academia is only beginning to recognise as worthy of attention and study.

Key questions:

- 1) How helpful are Katherine Rowe's 'four principles' for your engagements with Shakespeare adaptations?
- 2) Can adaptation be a matter of audience perception as well as the media producers' intentions?
- 3) How might creative and critical responses to Shakespeare interrelate?
- 4) What does the history of adaptation suggest about the cultural place of Shakespeare (in different times and places)?

### Core Critical Reading

Rowe, Katherine, 'Introduction', in *The Worlds of Shakespeare: Part XXVIII – Shakespeare and Media History*, edited by Bruce R. Smith and in association with Katherine Rowe (2016), pp. 1907–18: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137062.Q28>

Holland, Peter, 'When is *King Lear* not *King Lear*?', *Shakespeare Survey 76: Digital and Virtual Shakespeare*, edited by Emma Smith (2023), 64–75: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009392761.007>

Geddes, Louise, 'Unlearning Shakespeare Studies: Speculative Criticism and the Place of Fan Activism', *Shakespeare Survey 71: Re-Creating Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Holland (2018), 209–20: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108557177.022>