Shakespeare in Performance
Prompt Books from the Folger Shakespeare Library

AN ONLINE RESOURCE
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Primary sources for teaching and research

Folger SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY
Overview

This digital resource features the world-famous prompt book collection at the Folger Shakespeare Library. These prompt books tell the story of Shakespeare's plays as they were performed in theatres throughout Great Britain, the United States and internationally, between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. This remarkable resource will transform understanding of how Shakespeare’s plays have been interpreted and performed since they were written.

A prompt book is the main copy of a production script, containing all the necessary detail about the performance. They include personal notes, sketches and cues for lighting and music, from set design and costume to music and acting. Through these insightful records, researchers can follow how each individual production unfolded; see what amendments were made to the text and stage management over the years as audiences and social culture changed; and explore the influences and connections between different productions of the same play.

Highlights

Shakespeare in Performance features prompt books for over 90% of Shakespeare's plays, including editions owned by notable actors and directors such as Charles and John Philip Kemble, Henry Irving, Ellen Terry and Laurence Olivier.

Seventeen performances of particular cultural importance have been selected as case studies, including additional archival material such as photographs, costume designs and music scores. These case studies include David Garrick's revised 1772 production of Hamlet, Henry Irving's famous 1879 production of The Merchant of Venice, and Laurence Olivier's Academy Award-winning cinema release of Hamlet in 1948.

Users will have the facility to view and navigate two prompt books side-by-side for easy comparison.

Documents are indexed by play, country of performance, theatre, associated names, and other key search terms.

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