Introduction
A Material History

Amy Lidster and Sonia Massai

War is an abiding concern in many of Shakespeare's plays, and memorable lines from them are routinely used in international-relations parlance or by political leaders either to caution against military action or to garner public support for conflict. Rousing reminders that 'the valiant never taste of death but once' (*Julius Caesar*, 2.2.33) are balanced by sobering admonitions that 'few die well that die in a battle' (*Henry V*, 4.1.129). But war is never simply eulogized or critiqued in Shakespeare, as these lines seem to suggest when extracted from the context within which they were originally written and performed. Shortly after speaking the first line, Julius Caesar gets himself assassinated out of vanity rather than valour; and few would guess that the second line comes from a play often associated with national pride and military prowess. Views about war, like much else in Shakespeare, are not only multiple and varied across the canon, they are also nuanced through complexity of characterization or dramatic irony within a fictive world.

While sustained attention has been devoted to the rich and multiple perspectives on war in Shakespeare, our emphasis is on the use and reception of Shakespeare during wartime, a topic that is attracting increasing critical interest.[1] Indeed, the way in which we use Shakespeare and his plays reveals their meaning for us. Conditions of war are sometimes assumed to prompt clear-cut, didactic, or propagandistic engagement with the arts, including Shakespeare; but this collection shows how even ostensible propaganda involving the mobilization of Shakespeare's works – or his cultural capital – has in fact proven invariably complex or complicated by the variety of uses and interpretations that they have produced. This collection featuring essays and interviews from a wide range of contributors, including Shakespeare scholars, theatre practitioners, military figures, and political and wartime historians, explores how Shakespeare – in performance, text, and quotation – has been used over the past two-and-a-half centuries. We strive to offer an expansive historical perspective, while concentrating

on conflicts that directly involved Britain, including the Seven Years' War and the American Revolutionary War in the eighteenth century, the Napoleonic Wars and the Russian War (otherwise known as the 'Crimean War') in the nineteenth century, the First and the Second World Wars in the twentieth century, and the Iraq War in the early twenty-first century. This *longue durée* approach has made it possible for us to identify three factors that have emerged as qualifiers in the mobilization of Shakespeare at times of war: the nature and extent of the conflict (such as 'total war' versus 'proxy war'), Shakespeare's shifting cultural capital, and the individual aims of the agents and networks involved. Because of the varying interplay of these three factors, the history of Shakespeare at war does not progress linearly.

One of the features that makes this collection distinctive is its 'material history' – its focus on archival objects, such as theatrical props, playbills, and production photographs, along with newspaper articles, broadsheets, prints, posters, and pamphlets. This material approach is a vital and illuminating one: each essay in the collection concentrates on a specific, local history of Shakespeare at war and shows that, by slowing down and offering rich descriptions of a material object and its significance, we can recover untold and forgotten histories from the archives that shed light on Shakespeare's wartime appeal and the role of the arts during conflict. Objects and their history of use and valuation – the position of, for example, a cabinet card of Shakespeare within the papers of Irish nationalist Michael Davitt (as Andrew Murphy considers in Chapter 6) – witness an intersection of different agents, aims, and interpretations, which often challenge established critical priorities. This material history offers fresh insights into the ideologies, affiliations, and agendas of those who 'recruited' Shakespeare at times of war and shows that even the most belligerent or oppositional acts of appropriation were qualified by the intersectional identities of those who produced them or by the divided responses that they elicited.[2] There are also parallel histories of Shakespeare's use during conflict to critique war, to contest his relevance, and to reflect on the experiences of non-elite or marginalized voices (see Monika Smialkowska's discussion in Chapter 9 of the gender hierarchies on display in a 1916 Shakespeare gala at Calais). Indeed, Shakespeare's appeal for a specific community – for an audience, readership, government, armed force, or nation – is variable, non-uniform, and often changes during a conflict. In place of a single, linear history of Shakespeare's reception during wartime, our aim – through the structure, content, and material focus of the collection – is to embrace and recover a plurality of voices and histories.

The most recent conflict to erupt in Europe since this project got underway – Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – shows that Shakespeare is still routinely invoked at times of war. On 8 March 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the British Parliament and cited *Hamlet* to sum up the existential threat faced by his people: 'The question for us now', he said, 'is to be or not to be'. Then he added, emphatically, that the answer to that question was 'definitely yes, to be'.[3] *Hamlet* was also the play that the resident company of the Ivan Franko Academic Drama Theater in Kiev decided to revive on 15 March 2022 to underline the need to take a stand against invading Russian forces. Making a transhistorical link with an earlier period of conflict, the production was dedicated to 'the people of the UK for ongoing support of Ukraine & in recognition of the Blitz of WW2 in which the UK's civilian population was also bombed'.[4] These uses tap into a history of oppositional readings of this play in Ukraine, as well as resistance to imposed Russian translations of Shakespeare in the years following the First World War, which strove to 'confirm the right to stage Shakespeare in Ukrainian', as Irena R. Makaryk has explored.[5]

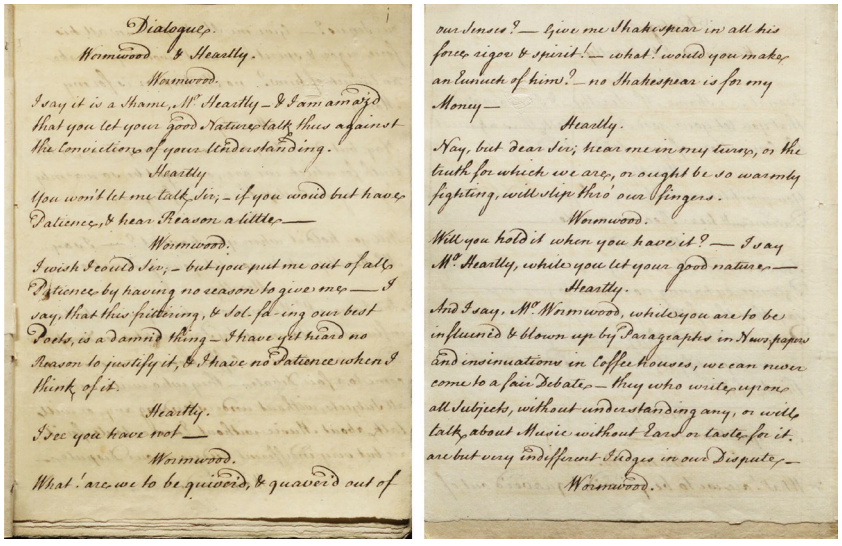
In at least one respect, however, the way in which Shakespeare has been mobilized in Ukraine so far confirms that it amplifies, and never simplifies, fundamental questions that deepen our understanding of complex situations, even as they unfold. When Zelensky made his appeal to the British Parliament, both parties knew that British military support was at the time unfeasible, because it would automatically trigger the involvement of all other NATO countries and therefore lead to the escalation of this conflict at a global level. However, his reference to *Hamlet* helped him to challenge what kind of support – humanitarian, diplomatic, financial, and so forth – heads of state, military leaders, and international organizations believe to constitute 'involvement' in a military conflict. Similarly, the dedication of the *Hamlet* production staged by actors of the Ivan Franko Theater to the 'people of the UK' as fellow victims of brutal regimes foregrounded the tension between an ethical imperative and civic duty, since Britain was about to issue a veto that made direct involvement of its citizens as a voluntary militia illegal.[6] In short, the use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* right at the outset of this conflict aligned the international community with its main character in a renewed effort to establish what course of action constitutes an ethical versus a purely strategic or even pragmatically necessary response to a violent crime, or even what constitutes a (war) crime.

By prioritizing how Shakespeare is used at times of war, rather than how war is represented in Shakespeare, we are able to see how embedded

Shakespeare has become over the centuries, not just in Britain but, as this most recent example suggests, globally, and that this relevance is not exclusively linked to his most warlike plays. Admittedly, *Henry V* has been a firm staple during wartime – sometimes through high-profile productions, such as Laurence Olivier's 1944 film version (see Edward Corse's discussion in Chapter 17) – although it has not been performed as frequently as one might assume. *Hamlet* has, for example, proven to have quite wide appeal during wartime. The play, of course, involves a political usurpation, but many wartime readings have pursued a different emphasis: on Hamlet as a questioning individual painfully dislocated from his society, on the cultural fame that this play has acquired globally, and on the rhetorical template offered by its most famous soliloquy.[7] As discussed, this speech has been invoked most recently in Ukraine, but it has a long history of wartime mobilization: as this collection shows, it was used by Wilhelm II during the First World War when describing the conflict as an existential question for Germany (see Marius S. Ostrowski's discussion in Chapter 11) and in a range of print parodies during the Napoleonic Wars (see Lidster's discussion in Chapter 4). While plays such as *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing* do not depict active combat per se, the former is set within a military community and the latter within a surrounding wartime context, and these plays have been adapted to reflect on how the costs, consequences, and conduct of war permeate and implicate all aspects of a society (see discussions by Maria Aberg, Jonathan Shaw, and Iqbal Khan in Chapters 24–26). Plays that are even more removed from the immediacy of conflict, such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, and uses of Shakespeare that focus on the dramatist himself as a cultural combatant (see, for example, Irena R. Makaryk's and Reiko Oya's discussions in Chapters 5 and 20, respectively) have also played important roles during conflict, sometimes presenting the arts as aspects of society, allied with notions of freedom of expression and democracy, that are being defended through the war effort.

Casting a wide net over the past two-and-a-half centuries, this material history of Shakespeare at war uses its distinctive focus to shed light on some of the core political issues dominating a conflict, the wartime role played by the arts, and the shifting cultural capital of Shakespeare for different communities. In this reception history, Shakespeare is both of an age *and* for all time: he is often used to respond directly to the immediacy of a specific conflict and carry topical currency, but he is also part of a long cultural history that is always under negotiation and reveals a shifting set of priorities, values, and even prejudices. This collection of essays, which doubles as a critical companion for the *Shakespeare at War* exhibition

(held at the National Army Museum in London, 2023–24), shows what can be gained from a material focus on this history. By exploring the lives of significant objects – their provenance, uses, and resonances – we can work to recover the polyvocality of wartime Shakespeare. But the work of 'Shakespeare at War' is never over, and the archives are full of many more exciting and overlooked histories. We hope that our focus in this collection prompts us all to slow down, look again, and pay attention to the layered responses found within this important critical tradition and the trail of fascinating archival objects that it has left behind.



Dialogue.

Wormwood & Heartly.

Wormwood.

I say it is a Shame, Mr. Heartly – & I am afraid that you let your good Nature talk thus against the conviction of your Understanding.

Heartly

You won't let me talk Sir, – if you would but have Patience, & hear Reason a little –

Wormwood.

I wish I could Sir, – but you put me out of all Patience by having no reason to give me – I say, that this pittering, & Sol-fa-ing our best Poets, is a damn'd thing – I have yet heard no Reason to justify it, & I have no Patience when I think of it.

Heartly.

I see you have not –

Wormwood.

What! are we to be quiver'd, & quaver'd out of our Senses? – Give me Shakespear in all his force, vigor & spirit! – what! would you make an Eunuch of him? – no Shakespear is for my Money –

Heartly.

Nay, but dear Sir, hear me in my turn, or the truth for which we are, or ought be so warmly fighting, will slip thro' our Fingers.

Wormwood.

Will you hold it when you have it? – I say Mr. Heartly, while you let your good nature –

Heartly.

And I say, Mr. Wormwood, while you are to be influenced & blown up by Paragraphs in Newspapers and insinuations in Coffee Houses, we can never come to a fair Debate – they who write upon all Subjects, without understanding any, or will talk about Music without Ear or taste for it, are but very indifferent Judges in our Dispute –

Wormwood.

Figure 1 David Garrick, opening pages of the 'Dialogue', performed as prologue to Garrick's *The Tempest* (1756) (LA 123 Larpent Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009042383.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press