

The Bard Bounded: Containing Miniature Shakespearean Books

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Shakespeare never used the word 'miniature', but, in *The Winter's Tale*, he describes children as if they were miniature books. 'Although the print be little, they contain 'the whole matter / And copy' of their parents (2.3.98–9).¹ This is supposed to be reassuring, yet Leontes's attempts to read evidence of paternity in the 'lines' (1.2.235) of his son's face fail woefully. Whether as a scaling down, a fragmentation, or a place of possibility, miniature books reconfigure the relationship between form and content by foregrounding their own materiality. Like children, they can never be true copies of a larger original and, as *The Winter's Tale* suggests, the real question is not about what they have to say, but who they belong to. This, I argue, is made as manifest by the containers of miniature Shakespearean books as by the books themselves. By examining how miniature book boxes and cases both foster and obstruct access to the miniature books they hold, this article explores the effect that containing miniatures has on (not) reading Shakespeare.

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the description and cataloguing of miniature books, rather than critical or theoretical analysis.² Their neglect is also the result of their all too frequent (and often inaccurate) relegation from the library to the nursery. While work on the book trade's role in consolidating genre and constructing Shakespeare's literariness models how material texts make meaning, Shakespearean miniature books have never been the subject of serious study.³ Other kinds of miniatures, however, have: Susan Stewart emphasises the capacity of miniatures to turn observers' thoughts inwards; Melinda Rabb explores the eighteenth-century turn to miniaturising the mundane; Laura Forsberg examines the reciprocal relationship between empirical science and Victorian enchantment; and Abigail Williams argues that the basis of the miniature's appeal lies in its paradoxes.⁴ My focus on containers recognises the awkward position of miniature Shakespearean books between 'things' and texts, and puts pressure on the claims made by and for them of readability.⁵ What kind of containers are miniature Shakespearean books? Do their boxes and bookcases render them totemic or toyish? And what might it mean to own but not read Shakespeare's work?

Miniaturising Shakespeare

The history of miniature books reflects their engagement with outsized aspects of cultural history. The earliest printed miniature books appear in the late fifteenth century: a time when, in England, a religiously reformed culture placed

its faith in the Word and was distrustful of material forms (although the paradoxes of Protestantism's simultaneous avowal and disavowal of the material was more complex than claims of *sola scriptura* might suggest).⁶ For the next two hundred years, a variety of thumb Bibles and miniature works of devotion used their compact form to frame a tension between human and divine scales.⁷ John Taylor's popular miniature, *The Book of Martyrs*, for example, reduced John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, the largest book from the hand press period, into a volume measuring 1.625 × 1.25 inches, which contained 238 rhyming couplets. Where the imposing physique of the original was part of its polemical strategy, housed in churches beside the Bible, in miniature it became a different kind of icon, playfully reinforcing Christianity's promise of exaltation for the humble.⁸ Miniature books, like many books in the Reformation, were intensely physical objects, 'not merely a conveyor or container of ideas'.⁹

The eighteenth century then saw an explosion in the miniaturisation of popular almanacks, histories, and works of reference. These books provided the illusion of control through compression in an age anxious about the proliferation of information. In the same period, miniatures also began to be targeted at children. While there is an obvious logic to making small books for small people, children pose particular challenges in terms of the (in)accessibility and (il)legibility of the miniature. They often lack the dexterity demanded by the miniature book, which transforms all readers into ham-fisted giants. It is no coincidence that one of the first literary texts miniaturised in print was *The Adventure of Captain Gulliver in a voyage to the Islands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag* in c. 1793. While histories of Shakespearean adaptation for children typically begin in 1807, the year that saw the publication of Charles and Mary Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* and Henrietta Bowdler's expurgated *Family Shakespeare*, their origins lie earlier: in excerpts taken from Shakespeare's plays for moral training and elocution, in texts such as *The Young Ladies Miscellany* (London, 1726), John Newberry's *The Twelfth-Day-Gift; or the Grand Exhibition* (1767), Mary Wollstonecraft's *Female Reader... for the Improvement of Young Women* (1789) and John Newberry's *Mother Goose's Melody* (1797); in fantastical and melodramatic prose versions of Shakespeare's plots that appeared in chapbooks, such as *The History of Shylock the Jew, and Anthonio The Merchant, with that of Portia and the Three Caskets... Adapted to The Minds of Young Children* (1794) and *The History of King Lear, and his Three Daughters* (1794); in books that came with paper dolls, like *Young Albert the Roscius* (1811); and in Toy Theatres, pioneered by William West, Hodgson & Co., and popularised by the Skelts, which cultivated the re-enactment of favourite Shakespearean lines and scenes at home. While, against the background of conflicting eighteenth-century views on John Locke's theories of education, children were introduced to Shakespeare in various reduced forms, miniature Shakespearean books were not one of them. It was in the nineteenth century

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that miniature printed books came to contain the work of Shakespeare and the earliest miniature Shakespearean books were not aimed specifically at children.¹⁰

Despite Shakespeare's ongoing popularity as a playwright, both in theatres and music halls, for the Victorians he was primarily a poet.¹¹ Building on Romantic hyperbole, his poetry (dramatic, lyric, and narrative) was treated as secular scripture. Quotations from Shakespeare were printed beside extracts from the Bible and examined in the pulpit.¹² He became associated with a gold standard of literacy and, in 1882, he was named in the national standards for British schools.¹³ By the end of the century, when the publisher David Bryce began making miniature Shakespearean books, Shakespeare was being read (by Queen Victoria's chaplain, amongst others) as a source of divine inspiration.¹⁴ All the while, expanding literacy, the shift from fee to free libraries, and the ascendancy of the affordable paperback made Shakespeare's work more widely available than it had ever been before.¹⁵ As a household god, Shakespeare became part of the furniture, and miniature Shakespeare books began to acquire their own.¹⁶

The form taken by early examples of miniature Shakespearean books were influenced by the arrival of the literary annual in England. William Pickering's Shakespearean miniature books, for example, appeared shortly after Rudolph Ackerman produced the *Forget-Me-Not* (1822) annual, a collection of twelve engravings with accompanying essays, short fiction, and poetry, as well as the British monarchy's family tree and a list of sovereign families and ambassadors for other kingdoms – followed by a junior version in 1828.¹⁷ An idea imported from Germany, these annuals provided a token of remembrance and affection during the festive season. In the decades following the rise of the gift book – and, with it, the exchanging of Christmas presents in England – miniature Shakespearean anthologies, such as *Gems from Shakespeare* (1838), were printed. By 1886, they had even adopted Ackerman's title, *Forget-Me-Nots: A Text Book of Shakespearean Quotations*. While these individual (and unboxed) volumes did not invite, and rarely appear to have been subject to, sustained reading, they were designed along gift-book lines, for keeping close and for occasional consultation. Readers looked up, dipped in, and skimmed through them.

This kind of non-linear, non-narrative reading of imaginative texts was amplified as printing technologies took the miniature book from craft to mass-produced commodity. The supposedly sublime was repackaged as a souvenir. (Related phenomena include, on the one hand, the surge of full-sized anthologies as shortcuts to culture and the rise of the gentleman's home library, complete with uncut books, and, on the other, the appearance of limited-edition prints, such as those made by William Morris's Kelmscott Press.)¹⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, this enabled

the publication of a number of 'Complete' sets of miniature Shakespeare books. The most successful was the forty-volume set produced by Bryce in 1904.

The career of David Bryce (1845–1923), one of the world's most prolific and successful makers of miniature books, encapsulates various aspects of the miniature book's history. He describes the production of his little dictionary, 'the smallest in the world', as his initial descent 'into the miniature, mite and midget size'.¹⁹ This was just the first of numerous miniaturisations he initiated after adopting new advances in photolithography, so full-sized pages could be radically reduced on to Oxford University Press's ultrathin but strong India paper. These included several further dictionaries, a complete miniature *Bible*, *Book of Common Prayer*, *Thumb Gazeteer of the World* ('comprising the most recent statistical information and notices of the most important historical events associated with the places named, also the last census'), and *Gems of Thought from Classical Authors*. Despite the magnifier that accompanied Bryce's first miniature venture, it is the quality of his mechanically reproduced texts that make them distinctive for the period. A key claim of Bryce's miniature books is that they can be read with the naked eye, thanks to the clear six-point type. In 1886, Bryce produced his first diminutive Shakespearean publication: *The Illustrated Pocket Shakespeare*. These eight volumes came in a leather box cabinet. Instead of a lid, a brass hook-and-eye latch allows the box to be cracked in half and folded back on itself to form a cabinet of two conjoined shelves, which proudly display the spines of the books.

Each of the eight volumes of Bryce's first small Shakespeare, printed by Robert Maclehose using texts edited by Talford Blair, measure 6.7 × 9.3 cm. Technically then, they are not miniature books, which are traditionally defined as books that measure no more than the 'magical figure' of three inches (7.5 cm), in any direction.²⁰ But Bryce did go on to create a truly miniature set in *The Ellen Terry Complete Works of Shakespeare*, described by the miniature book historian, Louis W. Bondy, as his 'greatest achievement as a leading promoter of miniature books'.²¹ Also using Blair's texts, this set includes the plays, narrative poems, sonnets, a biographical sketch, and glossary. Each book measures roughly 3.8 × 5.5 cm and they were dedicated, 'by special permission', to England's great Shakespearean actress, 'Miss Ellen Terry', who had made her debut – as one of the miniature-book-children in *The Winter's Tale*, Mamillius – in 1856. Despite the novelty of his methods, Bryce's dedication of his *Complete Works* to Terry aligned it with a 'genial Britannia' who, by the turn of the twentieth century, had come to represent the traditional values of the previous century.²² Bryce's twentieth-century technology, and with it a distinctly modernist division of cultural from symbolic or economic capital, appears as Victorian nostalgia.

Most editions of the *Complete Works* bear the imprint 'Glasgow: David Bryce and Son, London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press Warehouse, Amen Corner' on the recto of the title pages. Bryce had been collaborating with Oxford University Press since his first (miniature) joint venture with them on *The Book of Common Prayer*. Another edition

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of the Ellen Terry set from 1904 replaces the Oxford University Press imprint with that of Frederick A. Stokes of New York. A third version bears the imprint of 'Andersons, Edinburgh, Limited', and is undated. By this time, Bryce had got into financial difficulty and been taken over by Gowan & Gray Limited (with whom he had shared his premises since at least 1911). Andersons, meanwhile, which printed books, calendars, and cards, and were known as 'specialists in fancy goods and tartans', had acquired many of his publishing assets.²³ They would go on to reprint the set with Allied Newspapers to commemorate the opening of The Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1932.²⁴ Each of these iterations of the *Complete Works* promise access to all of Shakespeare's plays and poems in a format that makes them practically, though not technically, unreadable. This tension, between what we value in Shakespeare and how we value him, is amplified by Bryce's bespoke boxes and cases, which further elides the material and imaginative content of the books they hold, reshaping the idea of the Shakespearean text.

Book Boxes

Boxes provoke curiosity and temptation. In Shakespeare's plays, they contain luxuries, like pepper and perfume, and essentials, like tinder; they can be occupied by living bodies or dead ones. Regardless of what a box might, or might not, contain (on the shelves of a poor apothecary or under the cloak of a spendthrift's steward, they prove to be empty), boxes are inherently dramatic. We want to open them.

From classical and Biblical versions of the troubling box to the term 'jack in the box', coined in the mid-sixteenth century to describe a thief who cheats tradesmen by substituting an empty box for one full of money, boxes are frequently associated with dishonesty.²⁵ In *Cymbeline*, it is a box that enables Iachimo to emerge into Imogen's bedroom after his attempt to seduce her has failed. As a humanist commonplace, boxes represented the interpretative challenges of superficiality, hypocrisy, and the act of reading itself.²⁶ But the potential danger of 'that within which passes show' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.88) is also the source of their potentially epiphanic delight. Before bookshelves and cases came into wider use in the seventeenth century, that delight often took book form. It is no coincidence that Iachimo jumps out of his box to find Imogen asleep after reading, or that it is after looking at her book, 'The tale of Tereus; here the leaf's turned down / Where Philomel gave up', that he suddenly returns 'to th'trunk again, and shut the spring of it' (2.2.49-50). The box itself is figured as an echo of Imogen's book, from which Iachimo rises, like a figure of Ovidian nightmare, with the potential to re-enact its plot. The box, like the book, is a potent imaginary space.

In 1886, Bryce's *The Pocket Portrait Shakespeare* was sold in what would now be called a 'blook', a box designed to look like a large book. (The term 'blook', short for 'book-look', has been introduced recently by Mindell Dubanksy in relation to a 2016 exhibition on fake books.)²⁷ Arranged in four compartments, the volumes sit inside a clamshell,



The Pocket Portrait Shakespeare in blook box.

Both the blook and the tiny wooden replica of 'Shakespeare's desk' that is, in fact, a miniature book box, conceal the size of the books they hold while advertising Shakespeare's literariness. The desk is modelled on the standing, single-plank slope-top schoolmaster's desk found in King Edward VI Grammar School and given to the Shakespeare Birthplace in 1863.³⁰ The oak of the miniature desk was allegedly taken from Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, where Shakespeare was baptised and buried.

Shakespeare's Miniature Desk, RB.s.2757.

By assuming guises that require interest and interaction for their contents to be discovered, only those willing to read or to learn gain access. As Daniel Miller suggests, the problematic 'depth ontology' of Western thought presumes that what is on the surface is superficial, and that the truth is hidden.³¹ To access the books within a box, we must first either know they are inside or be curious enough – or clever enough – to find out. The musician Johnny Cash playfully inverted this trope by housing his miniature *Complete Works of Shakespeare* in a two-shelfed wooden 'Regalia Especial' cigar box, reframing them as a contraband luxury.³²

Johnny Cash's set of *The Ellen Terry Complete Works of Shakespeare* in a Regalia Especial cigar box.

A box designed specifically for the *Complete Works*, an 'old-fashioned genuine oak dower chest', measuring 23 × 14.5 × 10 cm, was described by an advertisement in *The Bookseller* as a 'huge success for the latest outcome of Mr. David Bryce's active ingenuity'.³³ As poets have long recognised, the noun 'chest' refers both to boxes, like this one, and to the human torso. Kept in a chest, miniature Shakespearean books are positioned as essential organs. The same pun is made possible by the word 'trunk', another box-cognate fully exploited by Shakespeare in *Cymbeline*. But the associations

of the dower chest – a piece of furniture traditionally used by unmarried women to collect items, such as clothing and household linen, in anticipation of married life – are explicitly domestic. Caskets hold the key to Portia's marriage in *The Merchant of Venice*, and, in *Pericles*, Thaisa is thrown overboard in a box lined with treasure before being saved by the contents of Cerimon's more benevolent boxes. Each example exploits the associations of the box with female sexuality, birth, and death. Moreover, each is used to interrogate and ultimately affirm the heroine's identity as a faithful wife.

Boxes are designed to facilitate travel in their full-sized iterations. Both the examples from *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* exploit the box's promise of portability: Iachimo's – supposedly *en route* to the Roman Emperor – travels from Italy to England before entering Imogen's bedroom, while another box in the same play passes from the Doctor to the Queen to Pisanio before getting to Imogen; Thaisa, meanwhile, once she is enclosed, is washed from a ship bound for Tyre to the shore of Ephesus. Like boxes, books are portable almost by definition (few more so than the miniature), yet the forty-volumes of the *Complete Works* are not easily put in a pocket.³⁴ In keeping them together, the miniature dower chest designed to hold them actually makes the miniature books less likely to move. Display, rather than portability, is its primary purpose.



Bryce's chest is made (and advertised as being made) of oak to evoke age and strength. Across Shakespeare's plays, the riven oak – 'a bolt / That should but rive an oak' (*Coriolanus*, 5.3.175), 'rived the knotty oaks' (*Julius Caesar*, 1.3.6), 'oak-cleaving thunderbolts' (*King Lear*, 3.2.6), 'I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails' (*The Tempest*, 1.2.350) – is used as an image of something so impossible it necessitates divine intervention.³⁵ To the well-versed, then, opening the dower chest becomes an extraordinary act. Moreover, the patriotic resonance of the oak makes



it a fitting material within which to contain the works of England's national poet.³⁶ Despite the wide range of uses to which England's national tree is put, many of them mundane, oak is typically associated with large projects, such as naval ships or Westminster Hall (since 1936 the oak leaf has been the National Trust's logo). Jeffrey Theis has traced how early modern England 'continually sustained and defined itself in terms of the woods' within which the oak functioned 'as a symbol of the monarch'.³⁷ Oaks are traditionally associated with distinguished individuals. In Shakespeare work, examples include the Duke's oak in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Herne the Hunter's in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Jove's in *The Tempest*. The drop front of the dower chest (which, when opened, reveals the second shelf of books), is ornamented with a metal bust of Shakespeare, described in the advertisement as 'a brass medallion of the poet'.³⁸ The chest thus serves as a carpented metaphor for the scale, plenitude, as well as the particularly English genius of 'King Shakespeare' (as he had been crowned by Thomas Carlyle in 1840).³⁹

Yet owners of boxed *Complete Works* seem to have behaved more like Iachimo than Imogen. They opened, admired, and touched the books, as well, presumably, as talking about them, but they do not appear to have read them. Lifting the lid on one of the Bodleian Library's boxes reveals two shelves of red-cloth-bound volumes, 'rubies unparagoned' (*Cymbeline*, 2.2.20), with a gilt triple rose motif on their spines, echoed in the box's floral paper lining. Some of the books never appear to have been opened. Most have been repeatedly opened to their title page, but no further. This continues to be common practice today, with a variety of privately owned Shakespearean miniature books kept in makeshift boxes. These include *Complete Works* kept in baskets bequeathed by great aunts, plant pots forged in charity shops, and one set stowed in the belly of a manically cheerful piggybank of dubious provenance.⁴⁰ My favourite example is the tower of 1910 Knickerbocker miniatures (an American rival of the *Ellen Terry Complete Works*) – poised and precarious as an enchanted rose – inside a bell jar. The attention of any aspiring reader is partially deflected from the Jenga tower of books by fragments of their own reflection.

Select volumes of the *Knickerbocker Shakespeare* in a bell jar.



In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is willed by her father to the suitor who chooses a lead box over gold and silver ones; the base metal of the correct casket promises the modesty and inner beauty that will characterise Portia's marriage. The lesson is clear: we must learn to see beyond exteriors to the truth concealed within. Miniature book boxes appear to operate in a similar way. They hint at the character of what they contain – gesturing to the eloquence, erudition, or patriotism associated with Shakespeare (and conferring some of it onto their owners) – while testing the engagement of the viewer. Unlike Portia's caskets, however, they do not contain easily accessible texts or images. Instead, they exaggerate the box-like quality of the miniature books they hold, which are, in turn, admired and opened, but not read.

Bookcases

Shakespeare never had a bookcase. In the sixteenth century, books were still sufficiently rare and expensive that they were typically kept in chests, beneath desks, or in presses (medieval book cupboards). The diarist Samuel Pepys is often credited with the earliest domestic example of a bookcase, having commissioned several free-standing glazed cabinets for his books from 'Sympson my Joyner' in the 1660s.⁴¹ As the private ownership of books increased exponentially in the nineteenth century, so too did the popularity of bookcases. Accordingly, Bryce made his *Complete Works* available for purchase not only in select boxes but on various shelving units. These miniature bookcases drew attention, not only to the miniature books they held, but to themselves. Where boxes add to the secret, precious quality of the miniature books they contain, bookcases pull in the opposite direction, exaggerating the claims of miniature books to convenience and accessibility.

The most popular of all the containers of the *Complete Works* is described by Bondy as an 'attractive swivelling bookcase'.⁴² Each has eight compartments with shelves approximately 46 mm wide and 56 mm high. There is an upper and lower shelf on each of the case's four sides, each of which houses five volumes. This structure resists the various conventional ways in which Shakespearean works are ordered, such as the three genres of the First Folio or the chronological order of their composition or performance. There are numerous ways in which any set of works might be arranged on these shelves and many reasons for rearranging them. No two that I have seen have been set out in the same way. This allows for the personalisation that is essential to miniatures, personalisation that was at risk with the advancement in printing technology that allowed the large-scale commercial enterprise of Bryce's *Complete Works*. As Susan Stewart suggests, the souvenir 'contracts the world in order to expand the personal' but 'the collection furthers the process of commodification by which this narrative of the personal operates within contemporary consumer society'.⁴³ These containers encourage their owners to personalise their collection of miniature Shakespearean books by setting them out according to their own tastes.

Personalisation is also facilitated by their bindings. The *Complete Works* can be found in bindings that range from cloth with or without decorative celluloid plaques, to chamois leathers of various colours, and finely gilt-stamped calf or Morocco covers of different hues. Colours are sometimes deliberately mixed within a single set for effect. Bondy describes seeing volumes 'with embossed hall-marked silver plaques affixed to the front covers'.⁴⁴ Some volumes have untreated, others red or gilt edges, some are lettered in gilt on upper covers and spines, while others have gilt paper lettering pieces.⁴⁵ The set sent to furnish the library in Princess Marie Louise's (later Queen Mary's) Dollhouse was rebound by Riviere & Son and monogrammed with the intertwined letters MR for Maria Regina in gold tool beneath a crown. Whatever the personalised bindings of a set, the swivelling bookcase allow them to be on display. This

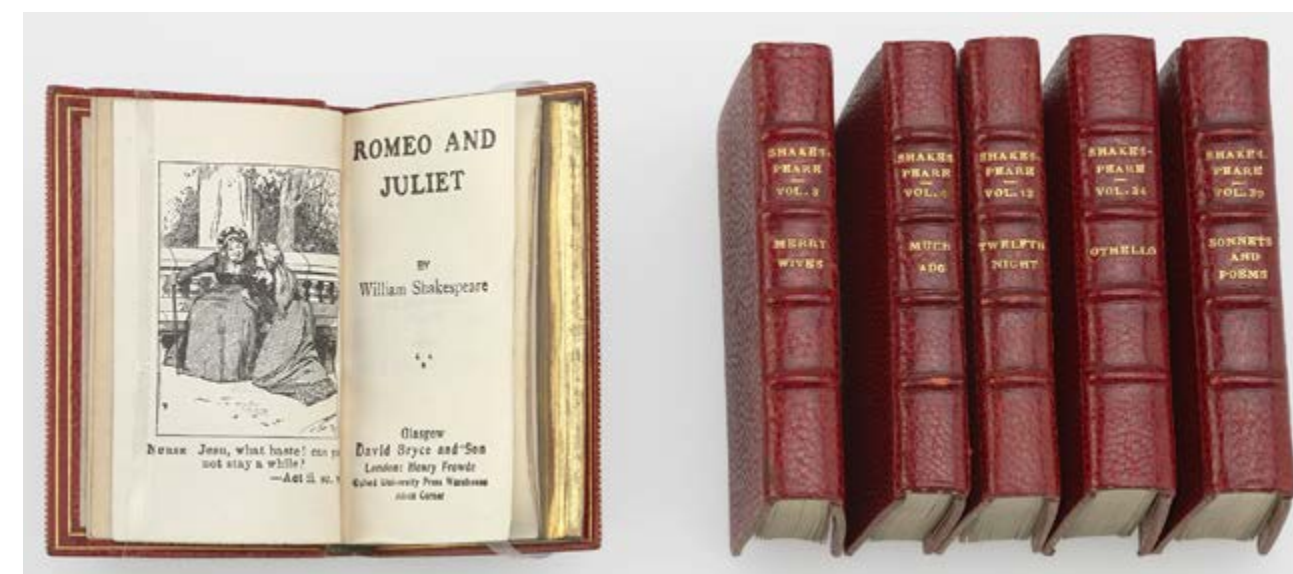
is also true of a wall-hanging bookcase in which the set can occasionally be found. In this three-shelved carved and gated hanging oak bookcase, with hinged doors, the panels of the doors are carved with an acanthus design in such a way that, even when the gate is closed, the books remain visible.

The Ellen Terry Complete Works of Shakespeare rebound by Riviere & Son for Queen Mary's Dollhouse Library.

While these miniature bookcases were available in both oak and mahogany, most were made of the more familiar and reassuring sycamore. This was (and still is) the wood 'of the kitchen, not the grand dining room, the chopping board rather than the board room'.⁴⁶ It is also culturally associated with the revelation of truth. In the Gospel of Luke, Zacchaeus, the tax collector, is discovered hiding in a sycamore's branches by Jesus and Saint Frideswide's legend has her hiding amongst sycamores to elude the king of Mercia who is struck blind on his pursuit.⁴⁷ Hiding in plain sight is something literalised in Shakespeare's use of the word sycamore. All early prints of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* make the homophonic pun of 'sick amour' visible, as in Romeo's grove wanderings and the tree-side sighs of the abandoned lover in Desdemona's ballad. It does not matter that the etymology is false, the fact that it looks like the meaning is enough.⁴⁸ The slatted design of the bookcase works in a similar way, creating the illusion of clarity. As well as a visible spine, the front cover of the two volumes at the right end of each compartment form a visible border for the adjacent side. In the Bodleian Library's red cloth-bound set, exposure to sunlight has bleached these row-end volumes pale pink, while the strip of book covered by the case remains red. As their Salmon shade suggests, these volumes have not so much revealed their truth as remained closed, fixed in the same position on their miniature shelf.

The exaggeration of miniaturisation always takes place in relation to the scale of proportion offered by the body.⁴⁹ Miniature books have to be held and manipulated for their scale to be appreciated. While extensive reorganisation of a single set of *Complete Works* does not appear to have happened frequently, many sets contain particular volumes that have been repeatedly extracted and replaced. Familiar favourites, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet*, can be found worn in ways that suggest they have been handled substantially more than others. Most copies of *Henry VI* (parts I, II and III), however, are immaculate. It is not, perhaps, surprising that a combination of five volumes (*Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*) were sold separately, in a small rack. These single layer, Art-Nouveau shelves either had silver ends or were made entirely of silver, to reflect the value placed on Shakespeare's greatest hits.⁵⁰

Like the books themselves, the sycamore bookcase solicits interaction to reinforce its miniature status. In so doing, it models the kind of interactions owners had with the books inside it. The bookcase comes with a matching circular sycamore pedestal around which it can rotate 360 degrees, in imitation of the revolving, full-



from its shelves. Chipping on the top corners of many suggests that this feature was regularly, and sometimes carelessly, used. The revolving bookcase makes handling the set a reflection of the way in which the books themselves are opened, at random rather than to particular pages.

The Ellen Terry Complete Works of Shakespeare in revolving sycamore bookcase.



The swivelling bookshelf reinforces the way in which miniature Shakespearean books frame a paradox of accessibility. It is easy to get to the book you want – the bookcase brings it to you like a bibliographical lazy Susan. But it is then not easy to extract the book as the shelf is too small and, with the exertion of pressure, it pulls away. Similarly, miniature books make Shakespeare's works literally but not actually graspable, as, in miniature, any substantial form of engagement with the text is challenging. While their contents are legible to the naked eye, any aspiring reader must grapple with the fiddly business of turning tiny pages, struggling to keep the tightly bound volume open, and not blocking out too many of the words with their giant fingers. In practice, these haptic challenges do not foreground the value of the text but the presence of the reader.

Book Ruff

The boxes and bookcases sold with Bryce's *Complete Works* frame miniature books as products of a consumer rather than literary culture, magnifying the owner's claim on the author. A container created for the later, Allied Newspaper memorial edition of the *Complete Works*, places these concerns at its (empty) centre. The artist and bookbinder, Jenni Grey, describes having her set of Ellen Terry miniature Shakespearean books 'in the cupboard for a while', unsure how to proceed, before recalling an earlier idea, for 'a circular binding [...] hous[ed] in a vintage collar box'.⁵¹ It was her idea for the box in 2012 that determined what she did with her *Complete Works*.⁵²

Similar in size to a large cake tin or a box of Quality Street chocolates, the only thing that announces Grey's production as a box for books is the engraved title in a ring on the glossy wooden lid: *The Works of William Shakespeare* (a brass pin divides each word from the next). The container might otherwise be mistaken for a sewing box – something about the lid's circular handle gives it the appearance of a large spool, from which one might unravel a length of thread. The circular box also recalls the shape of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. The audio guide for the Weston Library exhibition *Sensational Books*, in which this box was featured, compared the curved sides of the container to 'sleek perfectly manicured lollipop sticks'.⁵³ The initial inspiration for these panels came from the remnants of a roll-back-topped writing desk that Grey found in a reclamation yard, a bundle of mahogany strips 'about 900 × 30 mm glued to some canvas'.⁵⁴ Panelled in a lighter, maple wood glued on vellum, each strip is fixed at the bottom with a small metal stud, recalling the Tudor timbers of the theatre. Grey furthered the parallel by contrasting the light wood of the box's side with the darker walnut coloured wood of its lid and base. The original plan, to have a large hole, like the Globe's, in the lid instead of a handle was scuppered by concerns about the integrity of the structure.⁵⁵ A hole is revealed, however, when the lid is lifted, increasing the box's resemblance to the iconic early modern theatre. Whether it is most reminiscent of a box for baked goods, a bobbin, or a building, it announces its own craft, its made-ness, as all miniature books do.

Attached to the centre of the bottom of the box, which is the same walnut shade as the lid, is a circle of lighter wood on which the titles of Shakespeare's works are engraved in rings. There are six rings of titles in total and then the smallest circle at the centre gives the artists name and the date. The books themselves form another circle, spines facing inward and pages facing the edge of the box. The spines of these books have been sewn onto a leather band (the upper half a rust red and the lower half black) with a red cord strung with miniature golden beads, a gilded echo of the box's evocation of needlework. The black covers of each volume are cropped closely to the text and their edges are mottled gold or red, alternately arranged. If you look closely, there is a point in the circle where a thin fold of black leather marks a breaking point between *The Glossary* and *The Tempest*. The books have been ordered following the sequence of the First Folio catalogue (with the addition of *Pericles*, the narrative poems, the sonnets, and a glossary, in that order), but the impression is clearly meant to be one of continuity. Because the spines have been covered over and the bindings are not distinguished, where you start is something of a lottery. It does not matter where you begin, or which book is which. The book circle, like the revolving case, becomes its own wheel of fortune.

Jenni Grey's entry for the International Binding Competition. Bodleian, Rec. g. 26.

Bound this way, the books recall an Elizabethan ruff, one of the most prevalent signifiers of Shakespeare today.⁵⁶ Twenty-first-century depictions of Shakespeare wearing a standing



(starched) ruff collar are ubiquitous, even though no contemporary depiction of Shakespeare shows the playwright in one. Droeshout's First Folio engraving features a large flat, rebato collar, as does the Cobber portrait. Meanwhile, the Chandos portrait shows a figure in bands: a simple turned-down collar, usually part of a linen shirt. Bands are also on Shakespeare's funerary monument in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.⁵⁷ Early modern writers were often depicted with their bands untied to suggest the sitter's creative character.⁵⁸ Ruffs were, in fact, frequently ridiculed in early modernity, as in Phillip Stubbes' *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) where ruff-wearers get caught in the rain 'before they can get harbour, then their great ruffes strike sayle, and downe they fall, as dish-cloutes fluttering in the winde, like Windmill sayles' (51).⁵⁹ In Shakespeare's plays, ruffs are rarely seen on stage, though one does help to characterise Doll Tearsheet in *Henry IV Part 2* as a sex-worker. They are also mocked in *The Taming of the Shrew*, (4.3.56), and used in *Pericles* to mark the doomed suit of a lusty Spaniard (4.2.81–3). In Shakespeare's work, then, the ruff is foolish, foreign, or both. It is only at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when a personal connection between Shakespeare and Elizabeth I was suggested by John Dennis (who claimed that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written at her command) that Shakespeare enters his ruff era in earnest. It is in the wake of this fictional pairing that he is re clothed as a member of the aristocracy, and depicted in a ruff, as in George Vertue's 1721 engraving which was then used as the frontispiece to Alexander Pope's 1725 edition of *The Works of Shakespear* and in Stockdale's *Edition of Shakespeare* in 1784. As well as generally evoking early modernity, the ruff has come to bear the particularly Shakespearean associations of tradition, literary quality, and high cultural prestige.

Despite being made of books, Grey's ruff makes Bryce's *Complete Works*, to all intents and purposes, unreadable. The additional burden of the other thirty-nine volumes exaggerates the difficulties already associated with opening the bindings of miniatures. When you try to read one book, the rest coil and writhe like a slinky, fanning out and pressing in at various other points in the circle. The relation of each book to the rest is thus made material. To open *Titus Andronicus* is to physically engage with every other work, from *The Tempest* to *The Sonnets*, but it makes the effort of reading more pronounced as sustained pressure must be exerted not just by the mind, but by the thumbs. Realistically, the most one can do is move through it like a rosary – or worry beads – ticking off titles. The book ruff plays with the idea of Shakespeare as a tradition that borders on the stuffy and archaic, something we have made unwieldy, like a ruff. It makes Shakespeare's superlative status, and the difficulty of access many associate with reading or watching his work, part of that work's materiality.

The ruff-form of these books clearly invites another, atypical form of interaction: putting them on.⁶⁰ Miniature books do of course have a long history as accessories.⁶¹ As Brian Cummings has shown, during the Reformation books were worn as a punishment for heresy and as 'a badge of pride, incorporated with the body of the believer'.⁶² Three centuries later, one of Bryce's most successful

enterprises, *The Smallest English Dictionary in the World*, was sold in lockets in the 1890s. The hinged locket case, which also contained a circular magnifying glass set into its top cover, has a ring from which the book-locket is designed to be suspended from a watch chain or necklace. Like the revolving bookshelves, wearing a book allows it not just to be kept close but to be seen. Like a box, the miniature book necklace keeps the contents private. To wear a miniature book is both to treat a text as a treasure and to reduce it to an accessory. Both are implicit in one of the earliest miniature Shakespearean books printed as part of William Pickering's 'Diamond Classics' series in 1823, as well as in the title of Bryce's *Diamond English Dictionary* in 1896.

Grey's book ruff comprises the entire *Complete Works*, so there is plenty of room in the centre of the books for a head. Lifting the books from their box, hands at the ten and two o'clock position, there is the fleeting impression of a coronation, albeit a reflexive Napoleonic one (Napoleon did campaign with a travelling set of small Shakespeare's in tow, but they were duodecimos and so not technically 'miniatures'). Putting on the book-ruff makes Shakespeare culture's crowning achievement, although, in my case, this was witnessed not by awed crowds but by several suspicious librarians. Shakespeare's canon becomes its own 'hollow crown' (*Richard II*, 3.2.165), allowing the wearer to 'breath, a little scene' (169):

Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which wall about our life,
Were brass impregnable, and humr'd thus
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!
(171–175)

As well as lending the brass pins that punctuate the ruff's box a keener resonance, these lines chart the site of interaction between the institution and the individual. Unlike a crown, however, the book-ruff does not sit round the 'temples', stirring or delimiting the imagination – it is too large. Once on, it sits on the shoulders, less like a crown, or even a ruff, than a mayoral chain. This is the work of Shakespeare as synecdoche for all culture, worn with a civic pride teetering on the edge of absurdity. The miniature 'as metaphor for the interior [...] of the bourgeois subject' is, for a moment, literalised.⁶³ The miniature Shakespearean books have become the container and the would-be (or, rather, would-not-be) reader, the contained.

But the book ruff is not really designed for sustained wearing. Like all miniature books, it is a provocateur of proprioception. By foregrounding its own materiality, it heightens our awareness of our own. Its strangeness requires us to feel the books more acutely and to attend to them more closely. The book ruff sits uncomfortably between the metamorphic promise of reading or watching a Shakespearean play and Richard's lament for the shattering of illusion. The possibility that Shakespeare's works, like an actor's costume or the walls of the Globe theatre, remain useful because of their ability to be remade by the different individuals who inhabit them, is tempered by the possibility that, instead of infusing Shakespeare with meaning, we have hollowed him out.

Most containers only exist because of other things: they testify to the presence, or absence, of something else. The containers of Bryce's *Ellen Terry Complete Works of Shakespeare* examined in this article use various woods, metals, inks, and beads to make claims about what Shakespeare means. They frame his work as erudite, playful, patriotic, and personal. They enclose Shakespeare to celebrate his value, but they make accessing his work difficult. Where there is always an impracticality to the miniature book – it is inevitably fiddlier to find a word in a miniature dictionary than in a full-size one – this awkwardness is heightened with a work of imaginative literature, almost to the point of redundancy. The materiality of Shakespearean miniature books, and that of their containers, prioritises suspicion and wonder (are they real? are they complete?) over readability. This is at once the paradox of miniature Shakespeare books and the basis of their appeal.

1. I am grateful to Izzy Ferguson for bringing this to my attention.

2. Abigail Williams draws attention to this issue in "'The sum of All in All': the miniature book and the nature of legibility", in *Small Things in the Eighteenth Century: The Political and Personal Value of the Miniature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2022), pp. 15–30 (16); see also Louis W. Bondy, *Miniature Books: Their History from the Beginning to the Present Day* (London: Sheppard Press, 1981).

3. They have been the subject of an exhibition: see Elisabeth R. Fairman and James Reid-Cunningham, 'The Poet of them All: William Shakespeare and Miniature Designer Bindings from the Collection of Neale and Margaret Albert' (YC British Art, 2106). Recent examples of how material texts make Shakespearean meaning include Ben Higgins, *Shakespeare's Syndicate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) and Amy Lidster, *Publishing the History Play in the Time of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

4. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Melinda Alliker Rabb, *Miniature and the English Imagination: Literature, Cognition, and Small-Scale Culture, 1650–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Laura Forsberg, *Worlds Beyond: Miniatures and Victorian Fiction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021).

5. See Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001), 1–22.

6. James Kearney characterises this as a 'crisis of the book' in *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); see also Razzall, *Boxes and Books in Early Modern England*, pp. 103–148.

7. On this tension see Williams, 'The sum of All in All', 15.

8. See David Scott Kastan, 'Little Foxes', in *John Foxe and his World*, ed. Christopher Highley and John King (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 117–129.

9. Brian Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformations, 1521–1558', in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image*, ed. Jeremy Dimick, James Simpson, and Nicolette Zeeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 185–206 (202).

10. John Milton, *Paradise Lost: A Poem in Twelve Books* (London: Jones and Company, 1823) is miniaturised in the same year as Shakespeare.

11. Even in the theatre, Shakespeare was increasingly positioned in the higher reaches of nineteenth-century theatres, despite the long tradition of Shakespearean burlesques and the scheduling of performances of the heavily cut plays in double bills with pantomimes and other entertainments. See Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), pp. 13–15.

12. Charles La Porte, *The Victorian Cult of Shakespeare: Bardology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 24–30.

13. These evolved from the national standards that had been the product of the Revised Code of 1862. See Sarah Olive, '165 – Shakespeare in British Pedagogy', in *The Cambridge Guide to the Works of William Shakespeare, Part XVII*, ed. Bruce R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1228–1235.

14. *Ibid.*, 42.

15. See Kevin J.H. Dettmar, 'Bookcases, Slipcases, Uncut Leaves: The Anxiety of the Gentleman's Library', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39 (2005), 5–24.

16. See Sophie Duncan, *Searching for Juliet: The Lives and Deaths of Shakespeare's First Tragic Heroine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2023), pp. 77–78.

17. *Shakespeare: from the text of Johnson, Stevens, & Reed* (London: W. Pickering, 1823); see Katherine D. Harris, *Forge Me Not: The Rise of the British Literary Annual 1823–1835* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2015) and Emma Smith, *Portable Magic: A History of Books and their Readers* (Milton Keynes: Allen Lane, 2022), pp. 55–56.

18. See Dettmar, 'Bookcases, Slipcases, Uncut Leaves', 7–9.

19. David Bryce, 'David Bryce & Sons.', *The News-Letter of the LXIVmos* 12 (1928), 1–2 (2).

20. This measurement includes the size the of the binding, but Bondy allows for 'exceptional cases', see *Miniature Books*, pp. 1–2.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

22. Quoted in Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), p. 177; see also Sophie Duncan, *Shakespeare's Women and the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 131–167.

23. 'Men and Affairs'. *The Scotsman*. The British Newspaper Archive. Web (1944), 4; the company provided work for young women, employing them as sewers who stitched the books together. 'Representative', *The Scotsman* (1919). See also <vestpocketshakespeare.wordpress.com/book-production/> [accessed 1 May 2024].

24. The theatre had opened on 23 April 1932 on the site adjacent to the original Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which had been destroyed by a fire in 1926.

25. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Jack-in-the-box (n.)', June 2024, <doi.org/10.1093/OED/9250033133>.

26. Lucy Razzall discusses this with reference to Plato's Silenus statue, resurrected by Erasmus and transformed by Rabelais into a box, and the proverbial apothecary's painted box: see *Boxes and Books in Early Modern England: Materiality, Metaphor, Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 61–102.

27. Mindell Dubanksy, *Books: The Art of Books that Aren't, Grolier Club Exhibition Catalogue* (New York: Dubanksy, 2016).

28. SBT 81409920: maroon straight-grained Morocco, gilt title and decoration to both the front board and spine, marbled side panels (impersonating the paged edges of a book).

29. Razzall, *Boxes and Books in Early Modern England*, p. 115.

30. While the desk may be contemporaneous to Shakespeare, the initials WS have been engraved subsequently, see SBT L449, <collections.shakespeare.org.uk/exhibition/exhibition/shakespeare-connected-shakespeare-and-literary-pilgrimage/object/shakespeare-connected-shakespeare-and-literary-pilgrimage-8-shakespearees-desk-and-fragments-cut-from-it> [accessed 17 February 2025].

31. Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

32. See <www.folger.edu/blogs/shakespeare-and-beyond/miniature-books-johnny-cash/> [accessed 1 May 2024].

33. See <camdenlockbooks.com/products/shakespeare-william-ellen-terry-shakespeare-complete-set-of-40-in-old-fashioned-antique-oak-dower-chest?_pos=1&_sid=25d5978ff&_ss=r> [accessed 17 February 2025].

34. On the difficulties of actually defining a book see Smith, *Portable Magic*, pp. 276–293.

35. In *Coriolanus*, numerous characters also refer to the Augustan civic crown, the oak leaf wreath that signified Rome's highest honour.

36. The oak is also the national tree of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia and the United States of America, see Fiona Stafford, *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 94.

37. Jeffrey Theis, *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: a Sylvan Pastoral Nation* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009), p. 10.

38. <camdenlockbooks.com/products/shakespeare-william-ellen-terry-shakespeare-complete-set-of-40-in-old-fashioned-antique-oak-dower-chest?_pos=1&_sid=25d5978ff&_ss=r> [accessed 17 February 2025].

39. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (New York: Wiley & Halstead, 1859), pp. 70–71.

40. I am grateful to everyone who has shared details of their containers and those of their friends and relatives with me.

41. Samuel Pepys, 'October 1662', in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 3: 1662, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, 2016), p. 235.

42. Bondy, *Miniature Books*, p. 115.

43. Stewart, *On Longing*, xxi.

44. *Ibid.*, 114.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Stafford, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, pp. 157–8.

47. Sycamore derives from the Greek σϋκόμερος (fig-mulberry) and is used to refer to both the Acer pseudoplatanus and the Ficus sycamorus.

48. From the many possible early modern spellings, *Romeo and Juliet* Q1 has 'sicamoure', Q2 'Syramour' (a straightforward printer's error), F1 'Sycamour', while Othello Q1 has 'sicamour' and F1 'Sicamour'. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, both Q1 and F1 use the spelling 'siccamore' to describe Boyet's shady snooze (Q1's 'siccamone' an easily explicable printer's error). See Klaus Bartenschlager, 'The love-sick tree; A note on *Romeo and Juliet* I, 1, 119 and *Othello* IV, 3, 39', *English Studies* 59 (1978), 116–118.

49. Stewart, *On Longing*, xiii.

50. Full English hallmarks for 1904 made by George Betjemann & Sons, see Bondy, *Miniature Books*, p. 115.

51. Jenni Grey, 'Pondering Ways and Means (or thinking out loud with a brain that's full)', *The New Bookbinder: Journal of Designer Bookbinders* 33 (2013), 28–30 (28).

52. Grey, 'Pondering Ways and Means', 28.

53. <visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/sb-audio> [accessed 17 February 2025].

54. Grey, 'Pondering Ways and Means', 28.

55. *Ibid.*, 30.

56. <visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/sb-audio> [accessed 17 February 2025].

57. See Ella Hawkins, 'Displaced/repurposed Elizabethan icons', in *Shakespeare in Elizabethan Costume: 'Period Dress' in Twenty-First-Century Performance* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), pp. 93–125.

58. This is also true of depictions of John Donne and Ben Jonson, see Tarnya Cooper, *Citizen Portrait: Portrait Painting and the Urban Elite of Tudor and Jacobean England and Wales* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 177.

59. No ruffs are listed in the accounts of the Rose Theatre's impresario, Philip Henslowe, or in the costume inventory of his start actor, Edward Alleyn.

60. On the role of book wearing in the Reformation, see Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformations, 1521–1558', pp. 202–203.

61. See Bondy, *Miniature Books*, p. 47.

62. Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformations, 1521–1558', p. 203.

63. Stewart, *On Longing*, xii.