

# FORCED ENTERTAINMENT

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## COMPLETE WORKS: TABLE TOP SHAKESPEARE

Information Pack  
For Schools





### Who we are:

We are based in Sheffield, UK and tour and present our ground breaking provocative performances across the UK and internationally.

For more than thirty years we have sustained a unique collaborative practice and been key players in the development of a truly contemporary theatre language. Our work explores and often explodes the conventions of genre, narrative and theatre itself drawing influence not just from drama but from dance, performance art, music culture and popular forms such as cabaret and stand-up.

### How we work:

As six people who have worked together more or less continually for over 30 years, we share a big history and a lot of skills, conversations and ideas. We also share input into and responsibility for the work we produce.

This particular project came about because of our longstanding interest in storytelling, breaking down drama to get the heart of narratives on stage. We liked the idea of taking something as culturally recognisable and epic as Shakespeare's Complete Works and reducing it down to just the plots of the plays. It seemed audacious, challenging and new for us. We are often drawn to finding ways in which we can have no actors 'playing parts' on the stage, so using household objects to represent the plays' characters, on a tabletop, instantly seemed like an interesting device - the characters and story become an act up of conjuring-up, casting life onto inanimate objects, which is jointly shared by the performer who's handling the items, and the audience.

In most of our other projects, we don't work with a ready-made text like Shakespeare's, so making a show will usually start with us in a rehearsal room - discussing ideas, raiding the dressing-up box, trying a line of dialogue, playing a soundtrack, improvising a scene until something starts to stick. Then we keep developing the material - we experiment with it, debate it, video it, watch it, adapt and edit it before trying it on an audience which can open up a whole new set of questions. Since we also like new approaches and ideas we often invite other creative people to work with us.

For more information about the company and how we work visit the 'About Us' section of the website at [www.forcedentertainment.com](http://www.forcedentertainment.com). You can also find a full index of all our projects from the last 34 years on the website in the 'Projects' section.

# COMPLETE WORKS

## Introduction



THIS PACK AIMS TO GIVE YOU AN INTRODUCTION TO **COMPLETE WORKS: TABLE TOP SHAKESPEARE** AND HOPEFULLY ADD TO YOUR ENJOYMENT OF WATCHING THE PERFORMANCES.

Firstly, here's a little bit about **Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare**:

Over nine days we recreate and retell all 36 of Shakespeare's famous plays, from *Hamlet* to *Macbeth* with everything in between. Replacing the actors for everyday objects we narrate each story on a two by one metre table top stage.

**A salt and pepper pot for the king and queen. A vase for the prince. A matchbox for the servant. Lighter fluid for the Innkeeper. A water bottle for the messenger.**

We have long had an obsession with virtual or described performance, exploring in different ways over the years the possibilities of conjuring extraordinary scenes, images and narratives using language alone.

**Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare** explores the dynamic force of narrative in a simple summary of Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies and histories, creating worlds as vivid as they are strange.

**BUT WHO IS SHAKESPEARE, AND WHY ARE HIS COMPLETE WORKS OF INTEREST?  
READ ON AND FIND OUT...**

# COMPLETE WORKS

## Who is Shakespeare



### Who is Shakespeare?

William Shakespeare is **one of the most influential writers in all English Literature**. His plays, in particular, have become significant works of art performed and adapted around the world. Born in 1564 he began his career as a successful playwright and poet in the late 1590s. He was greatly admired by his peers, including King James I, and his plays were heralded as timeless by the likes of Ben Jonson and other influential literary figures of the sixteenth century.

Shakespeare's works included plays and poems and were collected and printed in various editions in the centuries following his death, by the early eighteenth century, his reputation as the greatest poet and playwright ever to write in English was well established.

Our production focuses on the plays of his Complete Works. Having dropped Henry VIII (due to doubt over who wrote it) **we present all 36 of Shakespeare's plays**.

**WATCH THE MAKING OF 'COMPLETE WORKS: TABLE TOP SHAKESPEARE' BY CLICKING THE IMAGE BELOW:**



# COMPLETE WORKS

## More about Shakespeare



### Language in **Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare**

The English language has changed a great deal over the last few hundred years, which means Shakespeare's language can be challenging at times. In **Complete Works** we side-step the dense poetry and use the stories of the plays to make something simple, evocative and compelling.

The performers from Forced Entertainment retell the stories of the Shakespeare plays in their own words. They use everyday contemporary language, communicating the narratives in playful and direct ways.

### TRAGEDIES, COMEDIES AND HISTORIES

List of Shakespeare's plays by genre.

#### Histories:

- Henry IV, Part I
- Henry IV, Part II
- Henry V
- Henry VI, Part I
- Henry VI, Part II
- Henry VI, Part III
- King John
- Richard II
- Richard III

#### Tragedies:

- Antony and Cleopatra
- Coriolanus
- Cymbeline
- Hamlet
- Julius Caesar
- King Lear
- Macbeth
- Othello
- Romeo and Juliet
- Timon of Athens
- Titus Andronicus
- Troilus and Cressida

#### Comedies:

- All's Well That Ends Well
- As You Like It
- The Comedy of Errors
- Love's Labour's Lost
- Measure for Measure
- The Merchant of Venice
- The Merry Wives of Windsor
- A Midsummer Night's Dream
- Much Ado About Nothing
- Pericles
- The Taming of the Shrew
- The Tempest
- Twelfth Night
- The Two Gentlemen of Verona
- The Winter's Tale

# COMPLETE WORKS

## DRAFF Interview



### INTERVIEW WITH CATHY NADEN & RICHARD LOWDON, DRAFF MAGAZINE OCTOBER 2017\*

**CATHY:** The idea for doing Shakespeare plays with objects or even without objects was around for quite a long time.

*DRAFF: And how did you all work together to create 'Complete Works'?*

**CATHY:** On the whole we worked independently so the process for 'Complete Works' has been quite different from other shows, where we are all in the rehearsal room together, creating the material.

*DRAFF: Did you all work on the plays in the same way?*

**CATHY:** I think everyone approached it slightly differently, because I think the biggest job was getting the whole play down to 45 minutes worth of material. So some people just kind of read the plays over and over again and then worked out how to do the editing job and others sort of watched films.

And it was decided right from the beginning, wasn't it [*turning to RL*] that we wouldn't use the language, we wouldn't use the Shakespearean language, we would just kind of re tell the stories in our own words, in our own ways.

*DRAFF: How did you decide which objects to use?*

**RICHARD:** We each went away and we took a single play and then we messed about with objects and we showed each other what we had. And at that point we set certain ground rules about the kind of objects that were allowed, or weren't allowed.

So for instance bottles that have faces on them are not very good, in fact anything that is, like a toy doll would not be good. In a way it has to be an inanimate object because part of the pleasure of it, I suppose in a way, is to place an object in front of you and suggest it is actually thinking about something.

# COMPLETE WORKS

## DRAFF Interview



*DRAFF: So why Shakespeare?*

**RICHARD:** We are often drawn to making quite formal decisions. So having decided that the table is the stage and the objects are the characters, the idea that it was Shakespeare is almost secondary to that.

We make a decision that it is interesting to tell a story with objects that you ascribe feelings to, on a table, and then you around and think 'OK so what stories should you tell?', and you think actually the Shakespeare's are interesting.

I feel like I learnt a lot about Shakespeare doing this, and that was really strange. And then what you discover is that actually when you take away the language, the stories are kind of fascinating.

*DRAFF: Do you have any comments about your use of the audience's imagination? Or their willingness to imagine?*

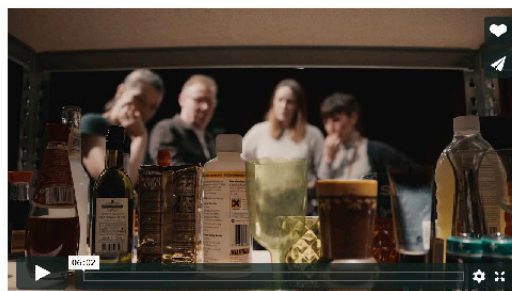
**CATHY:** I think there is something about the job of making it happen, a similar kind of job to other things that we do.

**RICHARD:** There is also a whole sort of strand to our work that's about talking and conjuring, the performance, in the mind of the audience.

It's like a magic trick almost. It's like I show you these ridiculous objects, say they're going to stand in for people, you laugh initially, but my objective is to make you care about this jam jar.

Somehow rendered like this [on the table top], they become interesting again. Though of course Shakespeare purists hate us for it, you know, because they say, 'Where is the language?'

**Watch the full interview with Richard and Cathy here:**



**FORCED ENTERTAINMENT / BERGEN, OCTOBER 2017**

# COMPLETE WORKS

## A cast of household names



### A CAST OF HOUSEHOLD NAMES: THE TAMING OF THE SHREW RETOLD WITH EVERYDAY ITEMS

Claire Marshall speaks to Chris Wiegand of The Guardian about her own tabletop version of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which the leading characters are played by an ornamental rose and a jar of mustard. Talking about casting her objects and getting to the heart of the story, Claire reveals the process of recreating all 36 of Shakespeare's plays:

When Forced Entertainment set out to stage tabletop versions of Shakespeare's plays, we ditched Henry VIII and split the remaining 36 plays between the six of us. Then we each drew titles out of a hat.

Our tabletop performances use household objects to represent the characters. The first time I did *The Taming of the Shrew*, my retelling was rather angry. Petruchio was played by a carton of jerk seasoning called Slap Ya Mama, the name written in big red letters. Poor Katherina was a half-empty bag of crisps, left crushed by the end. But the more I worked on the text, read around it and played with my people, the more I could recognise how complicated it actually is: it's a commentary, a question, a cautionary tale. It has a lot of fun with mistaken identities and disguises and pokes fun at pomposity, greed and vanity.





# COMPLETE WORKS

## A cast of household names



*[Continued]*

Katherina doesn't really have much space to speak until the end, when she gives an extraordinary speech in which she says: why argue? It's better to live in harmony. Men and women are different. Is it so hard to play a role? Her speech is sad and hopeful, and I wanted it to hang in the air – a question not an answer.

The idea of tabletop performances was one of those Forced Entertainment conversations that has gone on for years. We realised that we had more in common with Shakespeare than we might have originally thought: the plays within plays, talking to the audience, the insistence on being here and now. We don't tend to do interpretations of other people's work, but as we've got older we've become more interested in what it is to tell someone else's stories. And the discovery that Shakespeare himself borrowed so many plots, twisting them to suit his own means, really resonated with us.

The performances are very much solo pieces. It was an unusual way for us to work. We would work in pairs, sitting on opposite sides of the table and showing each other what we were doing.

Doing the pieces, you are director, narrator and performer, and you can't help but bring something of yourself to the telling of the story. You have to really care about the objects. It's a bit like puppetry. At the start we thought we could use any old objects, but then we all became quite obsessive about our casting and raided our bathrooms and kitchens.

**“There is something moving about watching an orange being frightened, a tin of mackerel falling in love, a can of hairspray being humiliated, a Pritt Stick dying”.**

These objects aren't pretending or acting; you, the viewer, have to do the work, allow it to happen.

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Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016  
[WWW.THEGUARDIAN.COM/STAGE](http://WWW.THEGUARDIAN.COM/STAGE)

# COMPLETE WORKS

## Think About



HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU COULD THINK ABOUT WHEN WATCHING **COMPLETE WORKS**:

- Do you find yourself developing a relationship with, or an opinion of, any of the characters? And in what moments?
- What difference does it make to you when the performer looks directly and closely at an object, as opposed to when they look out at the audience?
- What difference does it make to you when a performer is touching an object, as opposed to when it is 'standing' by itself?
- Is the performer acting?
- Are the objects acting?
- Who do you think is doing the biggest job of imagination in this work - the performer or the audience?

# COMPLETE WORKS

## Resources



HERE YOU WILL FIND SOME EXTRA RESOURCES TO TELL YOU SOME MORE ABOUT **COMPLETE WORKS**

BELOW: **MACBETH, HAMLET AND JULIUS CAESAR** SHORT TRAILERS:



YOU CAN ALSO FIND LOTS OF INTERESTING RESOURCES ONLINE:

Website - [www.forcedentertainment.com](http://www.forcedentertainment.com)

To find further resources about **Complete Works** and all our projects including:

- An archive of all of Forced Entertainment's projects, illustrated with stunning photographs and video by Hugo Glendinning, interviews, programme notes, essays and other fragments.
- Full details of all touring activity, including links to online booking where available.
- Subscription to our newsletter to keep you informed of all Forced Entertainment news.

Online Shop - [www.forcedentertainment.com/shop](http://www.forcedentertainment.com/shop)

To order additional contextualising content including:

- *Making Performance* (DVD)
- *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* – authored by Tim Echells
- A selection of performance texts and DVDs from previous projects.

Social Media

To find additional resources and stay up to date with the latest news, projects and performances:

You can find us on Facebook: **@forcedentertainment**

Follow us on Twitter and Instagram **@ForcedEnts**

And don't forget to tweet us about the performances using **#CompleteWorks**

# COMPLETE WORKS

## Credits



### COMPLETE WORKS: TABLE TOP SHAKESPEARE

Conceived and devised by Forced Entertainment

**Performers** Robin Arthur, Nicki Hobday, Jerry Killick, Richard Lowdon, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor

**Director** Tim Etchells

**Text** Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells, Jerry Killick, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor

**Design** Richard Lowdon

**Sound & Lighting Design** Jim Harrison

**Production** Jim Harrison

Complete Works is a Forced Entertainment production. Co-produced by Berliner Festspiele – Foreign Affairs Festival, Berlin and Theaterfestival– Basel.

Thanks also to the RSC My Shakespeare initiative, which commissioned Tim Etchells' Be Stone No More, an early, development version of this project, as well as to the people who participated in that phase of the work.

**Forced Entertainment Creative Team** Tim Etchells (Artistic Director), Robin Arthur, Richard Lowdon (Designer), Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor.

**Forced Entertainment Management Team** Eileen Evans (Executive Director), Hester Chillingworth (Creative Producer: Participation & Engagement), Jim Harrison (Production Manager), Natalie Simpson (Office Manager), Julia White (Marketing and Communications Manager).

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