

Question 21

In what ways are the plays revealing about Shakespeare's knowledge of theatrical practice?

Tina Packer

As a theatrical poet, Shakespeare knew all about stage-craft. There are implied stage-directions within the speeches which help the actor to move. Volumnia speaks to her companions about her son, Coriolanus, 'He turns away. / Down ladies. Let us shame him with our knees.'

Music cues are integrated into the main action; music and its effects become part of Shakespeare's stories.

Nearly all of the plays can be performed with a company of around 14 people, and were adaptable for touring.

The plays allow for meaningful doubling of roles: the two brothers in *Hamlet* – Claudius and the Ghost of the brother he has murdered.

There is time for stage descents and for costume changes from the upper playing space.

And in the later plays, his writing draws on the resources of the new, smaller, indoor theatres like the one at Blackfriars which opened in 1608.

Shakespeare knew what it is to direct and to act, as well as to write.