

Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies (2014-2016)

Exploring Liminality: In the Grain of the Cardenio Story Review Essay by Rosy Colombo

Fletcher, John, and Shakespeare, William, *Fragments of The History of Cardenio*, ed. Gary Taylor, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Modern Critical Edition, General Editors Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, Gabriel Egan, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 3135-3177, £ 32.00.

McGee, Lenny, *Dietro l'arazzo. Romanzo*, It. transl. by Riccardo Duranti, Mompeo (RI), Coazinzola Press, 2016, 483 pp., € 22,00.

During the 2016 Shakespeare centenary, the academic and imaginative “quest for Cardenio”, in the words of the leading scholar in the field, Gary Taylor, took on new, interesting shapes. While a new adaptation of *The History of Cardenio* in the shadow form of fragments edited by Taylor was issued in the *New Oxford Shakespeare* – a giant among the publishers devoted to the Shakespearean canon – a fictional life of Thomas Shelton, blending creative associations with historical accuracy, was surprisingly brought forth in Italy by Coazinzola Press, a small, fledgling publisher with a low budget but plenty of courage and experimental vision. Suffice it to say that *Dietro l'arazzo* (*Behind the Tapestry*) is presented as the Italian translation of an English original which has yet to be published, and that the Irish name of the author, apparently not a professional writer but a photographer dabbling in literature, stirs no feelings of recognition, which on the contrary happens to be the case with the name of Riccardo Duranti, internationally acknowledged as a literary transla-

tor and poet: one admired, among others, by Raymond Carver, Tess Gallagher, and John Berger, to whom Shelton's biography is actually dedicated.

The purpose of *Dietro l'arazzo* is to restore the full identity of the first translator of *Don Quixote* (1612), thereby rescuing from oblivion the missing link between Cervantes and the two Elizabethan playwrights, and, more in general, between the rival countries of England and Spain in the early modern period. Indirectly it also calls for an acknowledgment of translation as a constitutive practice in the shaping of cultures.

Translation matters today. From its former instrumental function, "a strange way of copying, not only from one hand to another, but also from one tongue to another" (*Dietro l'arazzo*, p. 391), it now claims a status of its own as a practice and a theory. On the back cover of *Dietro l'arazzo*, the author declares that he was inspired by Cervantes' idea that a text in translation is like the reverse side of the original, a web showing threads, stitches and knots behind the fabric; in other words, a mirror of the finished texture. Being *Don Quixote* the tapestry in this case, Shelton's translation is to be considered as an integral part of Cervantes' text, itself the foundation of a lengthy process of adaptation and recreation in English that had begun with Fletcher and Shakespeare's lost play and which was re-enacted in the eighteenth century by Davenant and especially in Theobald's *Double Falsehood*. It is significant that the large volume *William Shakespeare & Others, Collaborative Plays*, edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2013, rather than printing the successful 2011 Stratford version directed by Gregory Doran with the assistance of the Spanish writer and dramaturg Antonio Álamo (which was inspired by an exotic view of Spain imbued with sexual fantasies and Catholic "superstition"), chose to publish extracts from Shelton's translation of *Don Quixote* as a complement to Theobald's 1727 stage version.

As a consequence, the Fletcher-Shakespeare association is enhanced, according to the postmodern view of writing as difference, *per se* an act of displacement from an origin which by statute is irrevocably lost; it is an association which, paradoxically, Shelton's translation works to conjoin as well as disjoin. The missing link between Fletcher-Shakespeare and Cervantes is indeed also evidence of an insurmountable distance. It is on this assumption that *Double Falsehood* could

be edited by Brean Hammond in the 2000 Arden Shakespeare with no authorial name on the cover page (although with clear reference to Shelton's translation in the excellent introduction). Hammond's ground-breaking undertaking started off a "Cardenio fever" of endless endorsements and refutations (the latter most notably by Tiffany Stern); the contest ran through the following decade, with Gary Taylor as a dedicated champion of the cause of Theobald's honesty, supported by a number of eminent authorship and attribution scholars (McDonald P. Jackson, amongst others). In the 1986 *Oxford Shakespeare* (eds Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor) *Cardenio* had not appeared as a text, but merely as an open question mentioned on a single page; twenty years later not only did Taylor launch two important critical anthologies (and a big international conference) on the topic, but he also committed himself to the adventure of creating and recreating *Cardenio* as a text, in the form of two adaptations, in 2012 and 2016, both of which reinvented the material provided by Shelton, although with different formal intentions and authorial stances.

First came *The History of Cardenio, 1612-2012*, as authored by John Fletcher, William Shakespeare, and Gary Taylor. It was included in *The Creation & Recreation of Cardenio. Performing Shakespeare, Transforming Cervantes* (eds Terri Bourus and Gary Taylor, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2013, pp. 241-317), after a successful performance the year before in Indianapolis, directed by Terri Bourus. Here the names of the *dramatis personae* are restored from the changes Theobald had made and the sexist innuendoes about Violante develop a racist turn in the case of Violenta, now explicitly "a half black" character. Several songs by Robert Jonson are inserted (some with words attributed to Shakespeare) which had disappeared in *Double Falsehood*, but had recently emerged in the debate about Michael Wood's conviction that *Woods, Rocks and Mountains* is an original song from the 1613 London production of *Cardenno*, or *Cardenna*, at the court of James I.

Most challenging, however, was the form of the text, recreating a probable Jacobean pastoral tragicomedy which was typical of Fletcher's production and not alien to Shakespeare in his late phase. In this version, Taylor inserted a comic plot, drawing the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho from the Shelton material: one in the habit of a schoolmaster who catches the infection of insanity from the mad Cardenio in the bitter Arcadian setting of pastoral romance; the other as "his boy". In this scenario the predominance of meta-

theatrical issues provided a splendid opportunity for Terri Bourus, who directed the performance in a way that she later reported on in a long essay included in the volume ("Poner en escena *The History of Cardenio*", pp. 197-218).

The second version, in the *New Oxford Shakespeare*, is quite different, showing that the tide has now turned in favour of a fragmentary form. Rather than adding to the Theobald prototype, the key of Taylor's method is now subtraction: displaying blanks whenever the editor – like a modern art restorer – has thought it appropriate to remove passages, words and phrases incompatible with the Jacobean vision and style, be it Shakespeare's or Fletcher's. In the last decade research carried out with digital tools has become more sophisticated, so that in an original essay included in the *Authorship Companion to The New Oxford Shakespeare* (*The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*, eds Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 407-416) Giuliano Pascucci could extend the scope of his attribution enquiry beyond the obvious discrimination of Shakespeare from Fletcher's hand (see *Memoria di Shakespeare*, n. 8, 2012) by using compression algorithms to measure *Double Falsehood* against a control set comprised of a number of Elizabethan and Jacobean works by several authors. The research question first posed by Jonathan Hope and Brean Hammond has thus found a possible answer in a more detailed description of the way in which different authorial interventions were superimposed in the play in the course of time. And the thesis that Theobald had a manuscript of the lost play *Cardenio* is confirmed.

In the 2016 version by Taylor an emphasis on meta-theatre prevails, and full credit is given in the accompanying paratext to Terri Bourus, on account of her stage experience and competence, particularly as director of the 2012 adaptation, about which she writes: "*The History of Cardenio* is partly the history of Cardenio's costume changes. He goes from the casually dressed student of his first scenes to courtier-disguised-as-mere-citizen, to mountain madman, gradually deteriorating to rags and near-nakedness, while his body grows progressively darker, dirtier, more unkempt" ("Poner en escena *The History of Cardenio*", p. 204).

In this light, the recent retrieval of Shelton's translation from behind the Quixote tapestry becomes more than a conventional missing link between source and author. Being itself an adaptation, it is in line with the vision of literature upheld by radical postmod-

ern thinkers such as Borges and Derrida in terms of a genealogy of adaptations, appropriations and recreations, fostered by a desire to make up for the original loss. And it is from such a scenario that a scholar like Roger Chartier could emerge to communicate his excellent research in an almost narrative vein (*Cardenio between Cervantes and Shakespeare. The Story of a Lost Play*, English transl. by Janet Lloyd, Malden, Polity Press, 2013).

Behind the story of *The History of Cardenio* runs the story of the probable life of Thomas (“Tom”) Shelton as a man of letters as well as action, recounted in McGee’s novel. A life spent in exile – with an emphasis, however, on his never disowned Irish background. An eventful life, created in and out of documentary material: spanning between Ireland, Shelton’s native country, and Spain, his adopted country, and the rest of Europe – a Europe which also included England at a time when ‘Will’ Shakespeare was in London and John Florio very popular, and where he certainly had his translation printed by the distinguished literary publisher Edward T., thanks to the mediation of Thomas Lodge, himself a Catholic exile whom Tom had met in the Flanders in his escape from religious persecution. In his wanderings Tom is not alone; with him is always the woman of his life, Eva, the daughter of Cervantes and mother of their son Cardenio.

The two plots interact within the frame of the lost and found papers, a classical convention adopted by the author of *Don Quixote* – who introduces himself in the prologue as stepfather, rather than father, of *Don Quixote* – and refashioned in McGee’s fiction as the accidental discovery in the corner of an American bookshop of a number of Cardenio papers sealed in a box (labelled “Irish exiles – 17th Century: Misc.”, p. 10), which for centuries had been buried in obscure places and had then been providentially acquired by the library of an unspecified Boston University. Hence the doubts about the best way to recycle the papers: and here the novel delves into an argument between an academic professor, obviously in favour of a philological method, and his young female research assistant (the one of course who has actually made the discovery), who is convinced that an imaginary treatment of the papers would provide a better guess at Shelton’s life, a choice which in fact prevails¹.

¹ Very interesting, in this sense, is the 2008 *Cardenio* that was staged in Boston and New York by Stephen Greenblatt and Charles Mee as an experiment in textual and

Dietro l'arazzo weaves its episodes in a linear, chronologically ordered thread. Yet the ultimate meaning of the life of Shelton that is recreated is the result of cumulative, choral writing, engrafted in a pattern of multiple styles, each different on the graphical plane as well: a type reproducing e-mail communication sets the scene for the narrative frame of the contemporary university setting, while normal type is used for dialogues; standard italic defines stream of consciousness, and yet another font imitates handwriting as a mark of epistolary communication. The different styles interact by means of a montage technique that is particularly suited to the treatment of the Cardenio issue, effectively sharing the postmodern scepticism about traditional, static notions of authorship.

The sense of a loss is at the core of the text just published in the *New Oxford Shakespeare*, as well as in the account of Shelton's experience as a translator of *Don Quixote*. In both cases the search for an authorial identity that will justify the ways of literary creation is bound to fail: it stops at the edge of Shakespeare's and Fletcher's language in Gary Taylor's newly edited, fragmentary text; it haunts Shelton's phantasmatic project of making the English language (in fact not Shelton's mother tongue) match the Spanish original.

This is however not surprising if one accepts Derrida's assumption that rather than the origin of meaning, authorship is an effect of the textual chain in which it is inscribed, and that difference, the condition of being itself *and* another, offers the criterion for an approach to meaning based on critical scrutiny *and* open to the pleasures of the imagination. Rather than a celebration of authorship *per se*, the coincidence of *Fragments of The History of Cardenio* with the fictional story of *Quixote's* first translator into English

cultural mobility, allowing for further exploration of the transit between art and life. The play is set in modern-day Umbria, and it is announced as a lost play recently rediscovered and offered as a wedding gift. The text, to be performed by the betrothed and their close friends, is that of *Double Falsehood*, but the plot is drawn from a Boccaccio novella, known as *The Curious Impertinent*. In the course of the rehearsal the two texts interlace according to the category of mimetic desire, and the performance intrudes upon reality. Greenblatt explores the liminality of the Cardenio story: in being acted, *Cardenio* embodies the mental life of the performers at the deepest level, thereby becoming a mediator between art and the unconscious through its performative energy. In making '*Cardenio* in performance' – rather than its textual identity – the theme of their play, clearly Greenblatt's and Mee's aim was not to restore an original, but to create a recycling process, following Shakespeare's own dramatic practice.

brings to the fore *Cardenio's* constitutive intertextual difference, historical as well as structural, thereby defying the thesis of a supposed original purity – of sense, of being, of the sign, i.e. the traditional hallmark of a text's identity – founded on the authority of its first author, according to a metaphysics of presence. The secret of the *Cardenio* authorship does not consist in a full coincidence of writing and consciousness, nor is it locked in a monument consecrated to an ideal. The issue with *Cardenio* is a kind of literature at the edge: being 'other' is its specific mode and quality, its constitutive feature; hence the elusive identity of the topic in the canon, and the notorious doom on Theobald's adaptation. Today, however, the converging prospects of the *New Oxford Shakespeare* and of Shelton's imaginary biographer appear to reveal more in the grain of the *Cardenio* story.

Bassi, Shaul, *Shakespeare's Italy and Italy's Shakespeare. Place, "Race", Politics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, xi+231 pp., hardcover € 88,39.

Shaul Bassi addresses what he terms "the cultural difference of Italy *in* and *through* Shakespeare" as a social and political encounter of conflicting "country dispositions", investigating the playwright's Italian plays and Italian afterlife through the categories of place, race, and politics. This dual perspective, offered in the attempt to illuminate each other's field, responds to the author's chiasmic objective "to ask how Italy explains Shakespeare and how Shakespeare explains Italy" (p. 3).

In its tripartite structure, the book includes three chapters for each section, debating the issues of race and ethnicity, political philosophy, and the notion of place through a variety of such distinctive topics as Italian nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century rewritings and adaptations (part I), the relationship between Shakespeare and Italian political theories from Machiavelli and Bruno to postmodern philosophers (part II), and a reconsideration of the nexus between Shakespeare and place from the perspective of Italian locales and settings, and how these last generate further ideological meaning, contributing to the plays' axiology (part III). By claiming with Thomas Cartelli that the Bard's significance is

most effectively grasped outside the national boundaries of the Anglosphere in a new globalized culture, Bassi aims to highlight “singular potentialities of the plays activated by these specific Italian circumstances”, motivated by social, historical, and political factors, and set against the plays under scrutiny, thereby transforming “Shakespeare into a special guide to a nation’s changing ethos and political unconscious” (p. 4).

The confrontation of cultures as a bilateral process of appropriation, exploitation, and divergence, exemplified in Iago’s “country dispositions”, helps us to discern not simply the positive, traditional, and reassuring principles portrayed in the Shakespeare canon but also the elements of dislocation, opposition, and subversion detectable both in his culture and through ours. This dualistic method allows Bassi to delve into significant examples of ideological appropriations, ranging from such topics as the politics of Italian adaptations under the Fascist regime to the new implications of Machiavelli and Giordano Bruno; from a philosophical approach to *Hamlet* by the neo-Marxist intellectual Massimo Cacciari, to a reconsideration of Venice as a unique place of opposing ideological values, up to a rewarding discussion of the drama film by the Tavani brothers’ *Caesar Must Die*, regarding the Rebibbia Prison performance of *Julius Caesar* by Italian convicts.

Bassi’s propositions in *Shakespeare’s Italy and Italy’s Shakespeare*, distancing from both the new historicist’s and the presentist’s approaches, provide us with the opportunity to examine the Bard’s dramatic concerns through the ways Italians read, interpreted, and rewrote Shakespeare, appropriating and juxtaposing the playwright’s themes with the changing culture and ideology of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century Italy, and disclosing through them a number of hitherto not fully debated points. Despite the author’s stimulating thesis and the insightful observations of the individual chapters, the danger of this ideologically-minded, post-colonialist criticism is that while we learn much about the second term of the chiasmic subject – the Italian use and exploitation of Shakespeare’s output – probably much less is our understanding of what the playwright made of Italy and the structurally-meant, metatheatrical constructions of his Italian-based dramas.

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Cefalu, Paul, *Tragic Cognition in Shakespeare's Othello. Beyond the Neural Sublime*, London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015, viii+124 pp., £ 16.99.

Paul Cefalu integrates cognitive and psychoanalytic approaches to literature in this reading of *Othello*, which makes him a welcome guest in the second wave of *Shakespeare Now*, the Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare series that follows Jan Kott's seminal example of actualization and revitalization of Shakespearean drama. The awareness that cognitive literary criticism works fairly well in reconstructing how characters think, but scores very poorly in explaining why they think and act the way they do, spurs Cefalu's use of psychoanalytic tools to accomplish the goal. In particular, Iago is diagnosed with hypermindedness, Cefalu's sobriquet for Iago's unique ability "to read and act so effectively on the perceived beliefs and desires of his peers" (p. 3). Hypermindedness causes discontentment, which Iago manages by developing the sado-masochistic plot that results in the destruction of the play's principals, himself included. Iago's hypertrophic cognitive condition, clinically similar to a form of autism, parallels the neural sublime (a category Cefalu borrows from Alan Richardson's recent study on Romanticism) in that both describe mental states in which "we intuit not the idealized, transcendent supersensible self, but the physiological neural mechanisms working beneath our perceptual illusions" (p. 5). Hence Iago's philosophers cannot be Burke or Kant, but Hegel and, above all, Schopenhauer, whose explanation of Iago's heroic escape from the neural sublime reveals that Iago's catharsis lies in his tragic resignation to embrace death, "to turn away the will from life", in Schopenhauer's words. In Iago's final line "Demand me nothing, what you know, you know", Cefalu detects the tragic dimension of a path that remains inaccessible to ordinary humans, because the gap between cognition and consciousness that hyperminded Iago comes very near to closing will for ever remain open, or, one should say, needs to remain large enough to allow for people's mental sanity and moral soundness. In other words, that very aperture guarantees the healthy conditions and functioning of human brains.

Evidently, Cefalu's argument is Iagocentric, as his interpretation of the character of Othello as Iago's opposite shows very clearly. Whereas Iago is affected by a surplus of mind, Othello has a mind-

reading deficit or mindblindness. Consequently, the former's discontentment is reciprocated by the inverse condition that the latter enjoys at the beginning of the play, contentment resembling the state of semi-bliss that New Age gurus call psychic flow and which the author describes as "peace of mind to the degree that we are not bothered too much to mind the business of others" (p. 12).

All things considered, Cefalu masters his subject and the vast bibliography of literary and non-literary cognitive theory. Nevertheless, however balanced and sound his argument may appear, the cognitive-cum-psychoanalytic approach to literature he attempts here does very little to suppress concerns that literary studies stay focused on textual and rhetorical issues. In an influential essay that Cefalu himself quotes, Peter Brooks gives voice to the sentiment that literature and psychoanalysis are mismatched bedfellows. Cognitive theory entering the picture seems to reinforce rather than dispel that impression.

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Del Sapio Garbero, Maria, ed., *Shakespeare and the New Science in Early Modern Culture / Shakespeare e la nuova scienza nella cultura moderna*, Pisa, Pacini, 2016, 384 pp., € 35.00.

Moving from recent debates on the complexities of the production and epistemology of early modern knowledge(s) and in dialogue with methodologies such as neo-historicism, cultural materialism and women's and gender studies, *Shakespeare and the New Science in Early Modern Culture* explores the Shakespearean text as a site where different paradigms of knowledge overlap and interweave one with the other. As the etymology of the word 'text' suggests (lat. *textus*, a tissue, and *texere*, to weave), Shakespearean texts are weaves shaped and assimilated by different languages, cultural discourses and meanings whose continuous overlapping is a sign of Shakespeare's modernity and of his attempt to interrogate new ways of thinking and understanding of how man could (re)create or (re)shape knowledge. In a period when an organic and holistic knowledge of the human, centred on an analogical system of connections between the microcosm and the macrocosm, is "about to break up into separate categories of knowledge under the impact

of the new science" (Del Sapio Garbero, pp. 10-11), Shakespeare's works become highly emblematic. They in fact participate in a reconceptualization of the human being, combining ancient and new knowledge, old and new cognitive paradigms, which might be able to (re)posit and/or (re)define the human being, his/her mind, and his/her interior and exterior body within a decentred and infinite universe, inhabited by innumerable peoples and species. They are thus emblematic – as Maria del Sapio Garbero and the Shakespearean scholars who have contributed to this volume have already shown in previous studies on this topic (*Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare's Rome. Interfacing Science, Literature, and the Humanities*, Göttingen, V&R Unipress, 2010) – of the Renaissance episteme characterized by the interface, cooperation and permeability among different fields of knowledge and, more specifically, amongst science and the humanities.

Shakespeare, as the essays collected in this new, rich volume further show, shared with scientists, artists, anatomists and other important early modern writers not only the same language produced by a similar set of tropes, but also the quest for a theoretical and organic model of knowledge able to integrate a practical one. A new knowledge based on direct experience, observation and empirical enquiry. It is for this reason that Shakespeare's works need to be read, or re-read, according to an integrated form of knowledge, since, as Del Sapio Garbero argues in quoting John Dee's *Mathematicall Preface to Elements of Geometrie of Euclid of Megare* (1570), the word 'arte' was used to refer "in like manner to both the empirical art of the astronomer or the geographer and the more abstract and creative art of the philosopher or the artist" (p. 19). It is mainly through a trans-disciplinary approach that the Shakespearean text can not only be re-located in its historical, literary and cultural context, but also illuminate the complexities of our present time.

The essays focus on specific topics – the power of the eye and the importance of optics in *Henry VI* (Patricia Harris Stäblein Gillies), the use of "mapping imagery" to interrogate the unreadability of the self and to display its being both in the world and withdrawn from the world (John Gillies), the role of astronomy and the rise of anatomy, in order to both 'anatomize' the Shakespearean text, and to include it in the early modern integrated system of knowledge.

It is through an analysis of Hamlet's enquiries and doubts that Alessandra Marzola identifies, for example, an early modern English theory of knowledge that mainly aims at giving shape to the subject of knowledge itself. Gilberto Sacerdoti's essay focuses on the influences of Bruno's *De l'infinito, universi e mundi* on Thomas Harriot, Walter Raleigh and, in particular, Shakespeare. As he shows, Bruno's new image of the infinite universe, an image that raised doubts on the finished, ordered and hierarchical Aristotelian and Christian cosmos, pervades the geography and language of *Antony and Cleopatra*, built on hyperboles and tropes that underlie the overall boundlessness depicted in the play. The same idea of variety and dispersion is depicted in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, where, as Paola Colaicomo reminds us, the Mediterranean Sea becomes the emblematic site where ancient cultures – and their theoretical knowledge – overlap with the new ones. Drawing from a gender perspective that also interrogates issues such as empowerment and agency in the *The Rape of Lucrece*, Del Sapio Garbero shows how Lucrece's long-drawn *ekphrasis* of the Troy "piece" betrays "an authorial concern for the ways in which bodies and feelings were being re-discovered and re-invented by both science and the humanities" (p. 190). The importance of reconsidering the body and in particular the power of vision is also at the core of Maddalena Pennacchia's essay, which re-reads *The Tempest*, where Shakespeare deals with the interconnection among vision, knowledge and power, through Julie Taymor's re-mediation of the play. But Shakespeare, as Claudia Corti points out in her essay, is also able to give dramatic voice to the radical positions of the puritans and reformers of his time, such as John Dee, Thomas Digges and Robert Recorde. And, in doing so, as both Laura di Michele and Viola Papetti show in their essays, Shakespearean plays (Di Michele) and Shakespearean sonnets (Papetti) unveil Shakespeare's interest for astronomy, the political theories of his time and numerology. In an age in which new fields of knowledge were opening up to the human mind, as Iolanda Plescia reminds us in her study on the impact of the new science on the linguistic world of Shakespeare, it was necessary to develop a vocabulary that would be able to describe a rapidly changing world both in literary and non-literary fields, since "English was felt to be especially wanting in specialized terminology" (p. 349).

The volume also includes two illuminating essays by Silvia Bigliuzzi and Antonella Piazza that enhance contemporary debates on the interfacing of old and new paradigms of knowledge in Shakespeare's texts and time. Bigliuzzi's analysis of John Donne's appropriation of scientific knowledge "either to disclaim its validity or to use it as an image of transcendence" (p. 319), and Piazza's investigation of John Milton and his depiction of Satan's multidirectional and revolutionary journey, shed new light on these two early modern writers who contributed, like Shakespeare, to develop, interrogate and revolutionize (new) early modern epistemology.

Shakespeare and the New Science in Early Modern Culture is an original volume that not only enriches Shakespearean criticism but also confirms the need to use a novel, integrated approach able to explore and understand the overlapping languages, discourses and meanings that Shakespeare (re)shaped through his works.

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Döring, Tobias, and Fernie, Ewan, eds, *Thomas Mann and Shakespeare. Something Rich and Strange*, New York-London, Bloomsbury, 2015, 280 pp., £ 28.99.

The editors and contributors to this very fine collection of essays in the Bloomsbury series of *New Directions in German Studies* would certainly subscribe to the famous, paradoxical statement of Terry Eagleton's: "Though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida" (T. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, pp. 9-10). They simply stand up for Thomas Mann to be one more of those post-Shakespearean companion readings of Shakespeare's, albeit a still neglected connection among literary critics. Yet, the aim of these authors, of markedly diverse nationalities and academic affiliations, is not simply to fill in the gap of specific research in this relationship, nor to insist on emphasizing the incredible presence of Shakespeare in German culture, starting from Lessing onward all through the Romantic age ("Er ist unser", wrote Schlegel in 1796) and the nineteenth century ("Deutschland ist Hamlet", wrote Ferdinand von Freiligrath in 1844) down to Mann's

contemporaries, authors Mann knew and appreciated and learnt a lot from about Shakespeare (like Georg Brandes, Frank Harris and Friederich Gundolf). The group of scholars gathered around Tobias Döring and Ewan Fernie do not particularly linger on an 'anxiety of influence' approach; they rather practice what Elizabeth Bronfen in her profound "Afterword" names "crossmapping", a way of exploring more "adventurous conjunctions", "so as to understand the double move at work in the conversation between Mann and Shakespeare" (p. 246) or, as Ewan Fernie puts it in his "Introduction", "to show how Shakespeare's influence on Mann can help us to understand Shakespeare" (p. 12) in turn.

This attempt follows the track of a seminal volume, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), written by Norman Rabkin, who, in a kind of contrapuntal response to Greenblatt's new historicist approach of the former year (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* had appeared in 1980), already promoted a "bold transhistorical connection" (p. 2), which admitted the possibility that Mann's vision of life – and art – could unlock 'the problem' of Shakespearean meaning. Since everyone would agree with R. W. Emerson that "Shakespeare wrote the text of modern life", our authors convincingly encode Mann's oeuvre into Shakespeare's, and have the two resonate together, in order to obtain a 'richer' definition of what modernity is in Germany, Europe and America.

The Mannian interpretation of the *Krisis* denoting modernity is notoriously embodied in *The Magic Mountain*, in Settembrini and Naphta, the two mentor figures who contend for Hans Castorp's soul. Renaissance humanism has provoked religious crisis but at the same time it engenders religious revival in the forms of fanaticism and terrorism (a note on contemporary terrorism and anti-terrorism does not go wasted!). "Liberation and development of the individual are not the key to our age", Naphta says, "they are not what our age demands. What it needs, what it wrestles after, what it will create – is Terror". It is not that the sleep of reason produces monsters: it is reason itself that is responsible, as Freud had already clearly indicated in his analysis of civilization. A feeble alternative for Castorp, the modern Everyman, could be represented by the Falstaffian Peeperkorn, so much so that a question is raised worthy of further attention: "can Falstaff stand against Macbeth?" (p. 10). But Peeperkorn remains just a sketch, soon to be overwhelmed by the majestic rewriting of the

Renaissance myth *par excellence*, that is *Doktor Faustus*. Mann's last novel, written in the aftermath of the German catastrophe and set in the decades preceding and preparing World War II, modulates the demonic elements intrinsic to civilization and humanism by focusing on the troubled enmeshment of the political and the aesthetic. It is in this novel celebrating the final crisis of the modern artist – and possibly of any poetry after Auschwitz – that, according to the authors of this collection, Shakespeare's work unleashes all its demonic potential and simultaneously gets fully entangled in the predicament of Adrian Leverkühn's fall coinciding with the criminal, but organized, Nazi project of modernity.

The 'strange' thing is that inspiration for Leverkühn's demonic music is not taken from Shakespeare's more arguably demonic plays and characters but, with an authentic Freudian move, from his juvenile Baroque comedy *Love's Labour's Lost*. Not such a transhistorical interpretation after all, since – as Richard Wilson reminds us – Mann's use of this play opens it to quite an unorthodox historical reinterpretation which fully restores it to the atrocities of the religious wars. These are openly referred to through the assassination of the King of France and the succession of the King of Navarre announced at the end (the play having been composed in the wake of the holocaust of St. Bartholomew's Day) and obscurely and obliquely alluded to by evoking Christopher Marlowe, the author of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Massacre at Paris*, himself assassinated during those wars, in the figure of the messenger Mercade. The "crossmapping" practised by our authors in Mann's and Shakespeare's territories actually starts from *Love's Labour's Lost* as the privileged observatory from which to understand how, if "Shakespeare invented us", as affirmed by Harold Bloom, Mann actually helps us understand what the 'human' he invented is, and how it relates to the 'humane' his epoch was also inventing.

The first play from the whole of the Shakespeare corpus to score a quotation in the novel ("Mirth cannot move a soul in agony"), *Love's Labour's Lost*, particularly its fifth act, becomes Leverkühn's opera project: when he is actually working on it, there the Devil walks in. Adrian is greatly impressed by the couplet: "The blood of youth burns not with such excess / As gravity's revolt to wantonness" (my emphasis), which he understands as an unmasking of the aberrations of humanism (civilization/Enlightenment/progress etc.). But

in his author's subtler view, it is as if wit, laughter, irony – all the staggering empty delirious nonsense displayed by the Euphuistic wits in the play – indicated symptoms of excessive seriousness in search of irresponsible freedom and totally unconventional creativity, which in distancing itself from life becomes liable to turn desire into an even more disciplined and organized abyss of violence and inhumanity. Leverkühn's dodecaphony is Satanic in that it ideally leaves "no more free notes" – just like the Nazis' *Endlösung*. That is why Rosaline, the character who speaks the couplet, by administering a shocking treatment to her witty lover at the end of the play (to go and try to amuse sick suffering peevish people for a year with his distempered language), somehow plays on that final 'e' which distinguishes humane from human and shows the arts a possible way out: "If the human is that which brings back into the conversation what the humane seeks to disavow, the absent 'e' opens up an artistic practice in which barbarism is harnessed not in the name of human values, but in opposing aesthetic compositions of strict series in which nothing is contingent, incalculable, or out of place" (p. 255), i.e. in 'revolting' to Shakespeare's "infinite variety".

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Fusini, Nadia, *Vivere nella tempesta*, Torino, Einaudi, 2016, 216 pp., € 18.50.

Vivere nella tempesta is a fascinating and revelatory journey through the multiple possible readings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and of the many tempests we encounter in life. Living in the tempest and in *The Tempest* (as the author candidly admits to doing by daily reading and rereading her beloved 1611 romance) is to explore the wreck and the story of the wreck, the thing itself and the myth (with all due respect to Adrienne Rich). Like Miranda portrayed in John William Waterhouse's homonymous 1916 painting chosen for the cover of the book, Nadia Fusini sits on a rock and watches a ship sinking in a tempest. She consults *The Tempest* as Prospero consults his "books". Having embraced the lesson of one of her masters, Agostino Lombardo – who used to compare Shakespeare's play to a huge shell containing every sound of the theatre and especially the sound of the sea – Fusini has finally come to learn how to hear the multi-layered sounds of the tempests. It is a sound that echoes from Shakespeare

to Anna Maria Ortese, passing through Keats, Melville, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, W. H. Auden and the creative writing of Nadia Fusini herself. Indeed, Fusini steps in and out of her role as scholar to eventually become part of the narrative, as her childhood memories merge with an incisive understanding of the play. An accurate and somewhat unusual historical contextualization (with no shortage of allusions to the New World or the British contemporary situation, to the shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* in 1609 and Pocahontas's infamous journey to England, among others) interacts with meaningful autobiographical stories. It is to these epiphanic fragments, both historical and personal ones, that Nadia Fusini clings to find the right route. Moreover, by doing so she allows her readers to find their own personal route in the sea of possible performances and readings of the play. Everything in Fusini's reading of the *The Tempest* acquires a double or multiple meaning and it is through the awe and wonder of theatre that History (his story: Shakespeare's and/or Prospero's story) can also become *her-story* (Nadia Fusini's and/or Miranda's story).

Vivere nella tempesta is both an analysis of the text and an analysis of the self. Structured into several smaller chapters, which echo the frantic succession of theatrical scenes or the flow of psychoanalytic sessions, the essay is delimited by a prologue and an epilogue. Everything is marked by a precise temporal succession: as a matter of fact time plays an essential role both in Shakespeare's play and in Fusini's essay, since time and tempest share the same Latin root: *Tempestatas* derives from *tempus* and means a short period of time. The time of the tempest and the time of the performance are under the strict surveillance of the poet-magician, but both castaways and spectators feel the weight of the consequences. Because living in a tempest, or through the tempest, means accepting that life is made up precisely of many tempests and, paradoxically, to live necessarily means to be shipwrecked. On an island that is both a physical and a metaphorical location, in the Mediterranean Sea or somewhere between Bermuda and Patagonia (but of course also in London), a stage where every passion is played out, a setting where all hurts are healed. Who really owns the island? To whom does it belong? This island offers itself also as space for ambition and power; even Prospero – who neglected state matters when he was Duke of Milan – takes his task seriously, “and controls and disciplines and punishes” (p. 97) all the other inhabitants or unfortunate patrons.

Nevertheless, the island is also a sanatorium and a place for a second chance, and the sea a purgatorial experience. Nobody actually dies in this shipwreck, everyone emerges changed but not immune to repetition compulsion, for the only imagination of which we are actually capable is that of going back to where we really belong. In the end, living in the tempest helps us recognize that we have made mistakes like any other native or acquired islander. The experience helps us to forgive others for their treachery and deceit, but above all to forgive ourselves and let go of what has gone wrong in our life and what we cannot redeem ourselves: theatre as a radical act of conversion.

Gian Pietro Leonardi

Marzola, Alessandra, *Otello. Passioni, Prismi – Classici nel tempo*, Milano, Mimesis, 2015, € 16,00.

Like Shakespearean drama, this book by Alessandra Marzola on *Othello* addresses different audiences simultaneously: amateurs and specialists, theatregoers and scholars, students and teachers. It is, not coincidentally, the first volume in a new series, *Prismi – Classici nel tempo*, published by Mimesis, which aims at bringing together teaching and research: two domains – as the editors, Marzola herself and Caroline Patey, remark in their presentation of the series – which do not always live on friendly terms in the academic world. Seeking to avoid both the oversimplification that can occur in the classroom and the excessive complexities and jargon of the specialist essay, each ‘prism’ is meant to deal with a classic in English-language literatures conveying the plurality and polyphony that form their identity. In this light, the choice of *Othello* as the study-object of the first book in the series could not have been more fitting (while the second volume brought forth to date, Caroline Patey’s *Gita al faro. Circumnavigazioni*, 2016, is devoted to another highly prismatic text: Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*).

Otello. Passioni offers a comprehensive and articulate introduction to Shakespeare’s tragedy, including plot summaries, informative references to the history of its critical reception and cultural legacy, as well as very useful reading guides. What Marzola presents us with is a “tale” which, as she herself states, endeavours to show rather

than explain, a tale addressed to those who still don't know but are willing to know: exactly as happens in a classroom (p. 13). At the same time, the book is much more than a didactic tool. It displays an overall fascinating design, a heuristic movement which is decidedly stimulating and inspiring not only for the lay reader, but also for the specialist: "a spiralling motion that tries to hold [the play's] words in an increasingly intimate embrace" (p. 13). The three chapters that make up the book – "Mappe" ("Maps"), "Maledizioni" ("Curses") and "Segreti" ("Secrets") – are indeed three increasingly close echoes of, or perspectives on, the text of *Othello* that investigate and shed light on the infinite generative power of Shakespeare's language.

A tragedy of extreme passions, the only Shakespearean tragedy that does not show facts but the fantasies they engender and whose real protagonists are the ghosts of imagination (p. 17), *Othello* has always stirred visceral response and given rise to (often corrective) re-writings, antithetical interpretations, diverging ideological and political appropriations (p. 16). A thread that runs through the whole of Marzola's book is indeed the investigation of *Othello* as a text undergoing constant metamorphosis, a text that not only tolerates but seems to require endless betrayals, thus becoming a "matrix" of different genres, models and styles across the media (p. 37) – so much so that it can be viewed as a "hypertext" (p. 16). Thanks to the protean power of its language, *Othello* incorporates previous history and literary models and, at the same time, projects itself into the future by activating the "creative memory" (p. 37) of its viewers and readers, revealing each time one of its myriad "prismatic faces" (pp. 47, 48, 81). It gathers, for example, the rich mediaeval and early modern tradition of tales about 'the Orient' and faraway lands and is, in its turn, a matrix of 'orientalist' tales – a process in which the character of the Moor plays an especially pivotal role as he not only suffers but interiorises and uses against himself an orientalist gaze, radicalizing it to the point of self-destruction (p. 39). Owing to its nuanced scrutiny of marriage – a foundational early modern institution aiming to regulate passions but, because of the unprecedented freedom of choice it entails, always liable to become the site of their uncontrollable explosion (pp. 81-84, 112) –, *Othello* is also the matrix of numberless developments in the romance and novel forms. Its exploration of monstrosity – a monstrosity originating in the mind rather than discovered in the world outside the self – prefigures the gothic and

horror traditions. And, although the debt is often unacknowledged, many iconic monsters of our culture – from Dr Frankenstein’s creature to Mr Hyde, from Dracula to the twentieth-century monsters of the unconscious – draw on aspects of *Othello* (p. 45).

Engaging with Stanley Cavell’s seminal work (*Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* [1987], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, updated edition 2003), another thread that runs throughout *Othello. Passioni*, and is scrutinised from different angles in each chapter, is the issue of *Othello*’s scepticism: the way in which this text depicts the epistemological shift that led to the affirmation of scepticism as the episteme of modernity and, in so doing, obliges the audience to become aware of its catastrophic consequences, violence and discrimination (p. 103). Marzola emphasises, particularly in the second chapter, how the whole parable of *Othello*’s scepticism is fostered by the “curses” contained in the Book of Genesis which the text clearly evokes (the “curse of service”, I.i.34, and the “curse of marriage”, III.iii.271, referring respectively to the curse of subjection imposed by Noah upon Canaan, son of Ham, in Genesis 9.20-27, and to the curse of eternal enmity between man and woman pronounced by God on Adam in Genesis 3.14-15). In chapter three scepticism is connected to the rise of a culture of secrecy and of a new scientific paradigm, promoting a prying anatomical gaze, in early modern England. Reprising and further developing some considerations she already put forward in previous studies (cf. “Shaping Scepticism, Arousing Belief: The Case of *Othello*”, *English Literature*, 1:1, 2014, and “*Hamlet* and the Passion of Knowledge”, *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 1, 2014, an Italian version of which is included in Maria Del Sapio Garbero, ed., *Shakespeare and the New Science in Early Modern Culture / Shakespeare e la nuova scienza nella cultura moderna*, Pisa, Pacini, 2016), Marzola delves into the question of scepticism by comparing its different outcome in *Hamlet* and in *Othello*. Both tragedies stage bodies that have become closed (*corpi clausi*), an interiority that has been severed from the exteriority, a split between appearance and reality, words and meanings; both are haunted by the urge to rend the barriers that make the inner ‘truth’ unreachable. But while *Hamlet* interrogates this new, fissured world and the new perception of the human being as a separate entity, a distinct ‘subject’ endowed – but also cursed – with an invisible, secret self (“that within which passes show”, *Hamlet*, I.ii.85), Iago uses the sceptical doubt for his own

ends. Iago is not troubled by the “crisis in transparency” (p. 102) that plagues the modern world; rather, he exploits it to kindle the other’s predatory pursuit of knowledge and, simultaneously, to annihilate otherness. Moreover, by constantly involving us in his nefarious scheming through his soliloquies and asides, he compels us to an unwanted and disturbing complicity.

One last recurring theme in *Otello. Passioni* that I would like to highlight as especially fertile and thought-provoking is its reflection on Desdemona and her “posture”. This theme also runs like a thread throughout the study, particularly featuring in the final section, “Epiloghi e Inclinzioni” (“Epilogues and Inclinations”). Although in *Othello* Desdemona is a multifaceted, ever-changing figure – “a maiden never bold” (I.iii.94), a passionate lover, a “fair warrior” (II.i.176) –, what has remained in the cultural memory is the “monumental alabaster” (V.ii.5) of her body frozen in the stillness of death. However, Marzola contends, what truly characterises Desdemona, what sets her apart making her an eccentric and subverting presence, the real “extravagant and wheeling stranger” (I.i.137) in the play, is her “inclination”. Othello’s description of Desdemona’s inclination to listen to his tale in the first act (“This to hear / Would Desdemona seriously incline”, I.iii.144-45) is later echoed and transformed into a permanent attribute of the character in Iago’s phrase “the inclining Desdemona” (II.iii.325). Her leaning out of her own centre towards the other, in an incessant gesture of generosity and desire, threatens the Cartesian frame that governs *Othello*’s world. In this world, which is our own sceptical world, no position is allowed except for the vertical, ‘right’ one (cf. Adriana Cavarero’s insightful study, *Inclinzioni. Critica della rettitudine*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2013) and the horizontal flatness of death. Desdemona’s outstretched ‘obliqueness’ arouses the annihilating fury of a world infected by scepticism. But, at the same time, it reveals the outline of another possible play and of another possible episteme. In a tragedy that closes on a particularly sombre note, that seems to deny any future and does not even promise future (perhaps explanatory) tales, Desdemona’s inclination presents us with an alternative outlook, a different epistemological stance that refuses any search for the ‘absolute’ truth and accepts uncertainty. In this light, Marzola intriguingly suggests, even Iago’s baffling last statement, “Demand me nothing; what you know, you know” (V.ii.300), could be seen as a secret celebration of enigmas,

an invitation to abandon the anatomical gaze which endeavours to pierce the surface of reality like a scalpel, and can prove as lethal. Owing to Desdemona's pliant posture we can thus imagine different epilogues for the tragedy and for ourselves: a world which does not revolve around the vertical line of the 'I' but around a line bent towards the other (p. 154).

These remarks on 'other' epilogues coincide with the epilogue of Marzola's book, an epilogue which does not intend to close the discussion on the prismatic text of *Othello* but, on the contrary, to open up new perspectives and trigger new questions. In keeping with its emphasis on inclination as a value and with the spirit of the whole *Prismi* series, thanks to the clarity of its orchestration and the wealth of critical suggestions and tools it generously offers its readers, *Otello. Passioni* is a study outstretched towards its diverse audience: an 'inclining' study.

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Meagher, John C., *Shakespeare's Shakespeare: How the Plays Were Made*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015 (1997), 240 pp., £ 95.00.

Shakespeare's concern as a dramatist was to turn stories into successful plays. He understood the subtle procedures of stagecraft, needed to help create effective performances. But what exactly were his principles in matters of dramaturgy? The term 'dramaturgy' covers both the literary and directorial aspects of staging a play. It involves the ability to devise a text for performance, and consequently to adapt it for the company staging it. Therefore, it also consists in advising actors on possible readings of the play and how to better translate thoughts into actions, working with them till the opening night to see that intonation, gestures and movements follow the writer's design accordingly. This is common knowledge in every theatre and for every company, and Shakespeare presents us with a vivid example of this practice when he parodies it in the rehearsals of Peter Quince and his fellow mechanicals.

Would exploring Shakespeare's dramatic composition strategies therefore help us to better understand his plays? That is the question John C. Meagher attempts to answer in *Shakespeare's Shakespeare: How the Plays Were Made*. First published in 1997 by

Continuum, it was reissued in 2015 in the Shakespeare Bloomsbury Academic Collections, a distinguished selection of titles which, in this particular case, made newly available a classic work of scholarship to enrich “our understanding of him [Shakespeare] as an author and director”. It must be said that this new edition could have provided the volume with an index/bibliography to facilitate searching for individual plays and various issues, or for further reference – its absence remains extremely inconvenient.

In ten chapters and through a study of seven of his plays (*As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part 1*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*) Meagher surveys several instances to illustrate Shakespeare's dramatic principles and uncover his skills as dramatist as well as his practical knowledge as actor and director. Bringing to the fore such issues as historical performance conventions, stagecraft practices and playwriting techniques, strategies and schemes of dramatic plot structure, Meagher's aim is to discover and reconstruct “some of the important principles by which Shakespeare's plays were written and performed” and to promote “a way of rereading the plays that will incorporate an awareness of these principles, [...] and eventually convince readers that his approach, although not the only legitimate one, is finally more satisfying [...] than any other” (p. 15). As the title suggests, the book was written with the ultimate purpose of putting Shakespeare directly in charge of the interpretation of his plays. In Meagher's view, no-one better than the playwright himself can provide an intimate and accurate, dramaturgically informed level of reading and understanding of his plays, and to know how he did this we should look at him as a “designer of drama”. As Meagher puts it, “this is about getting in touch with *Shakespeare's Shakespeare*, which I believe to be immeasurably better than that of anyone else” (p. 26).

Even if what Meagher calls “interpretive creativity” has produced some “brilliant performances in the art of critical interpretation”, he cautions us against readings which are not grounded, not on intimate terms with the text. Only if we are “constrained by the discipline that is built into the plays” will we be seriously “challenged to discover and understand” instead of being free to be pleasantly inventive (p. 34). Given the richness of Shakespeare's plays it would be easy to find in them confirmation that would

seem to verify nearly every postulated theory. Meagher mediates between textual criticism and performance history to show us a long-lost technique of understanding, arguing that the heaped-up commentaries of editors, directors and critics over the centuries have prevented us from seeing some of Shakespeare's basic concerns as a dramatist. He posits that for us it is often easier to understand what Shakespeare read than what he wrote.

Many of the cases that Meagher takes into consideration convincingly illustrate his remarks. Particularly interesting is the chapter in which he examines Shakespeare's dramaturgical deviations from 'normal' time. He introduces several categories to distinguish different narrative strategies and to illustrate that Shakespeare's treatment of time and continuity in the advancement of the story could be artificial but never arbitrary: "For Shakespearean dramaturgy, time, like space, is an independent variable that the playwright may control. It may be sped up, slowed down, over-stuffed, split into incommensurable but commutable alternatives, artificially linked – whatever will make the play work more smoothly, or coherently, or effectively" (p. 93). Meagher doesn't intend to show the effects of Shakespeare's work in shortening, multiplying, expanding, displacing or intervening with time, but the differing means he makes recourse to and the consequent meanings that follow.

In the appreciation of what makes a good play, Shakespeare and his contemporaries focused on what seems functionally appropriate to their audiences and to them: "Appropriateness is the key category" (p. 191), Meagher states, even if he recognizes it is a "slippery category". Nonetheless, with critical finesse and through balanced explanations, when considering the question of the Aristotelian principle of unity of action, Meagher demonstrates that what governed Shakespeare's aesthetics had nothing to do with the modern notion of unitary principles, which is a neo-classical artefact. Shakespeare finds unity not by constructing his dramaturgy according to a unifying principle, but he rather links things together creating a sense of "connected multiplicity" (p. 194), and changing the very notion of what consistency is. Inconsistency, far from being a flaw, is for Meagher a dramaturgical strategy: what we need, then, is precisely the different understanding the author has showed us in his book.

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Ryan, Kiernan, *Shakespeare's Universality: Here's Fine Revolution*, London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015, xvi+142 pp., £ 12.99.

This is a provocative and fascinating “brief polemic” (p. xvi) whose lean and agile argument addresses the difficult topic of why and in what ways Shakespeare has maintained such a wide and universal appeal through a period of some four hundred years. At the very heart of his argument Ryan sets up a dialogue with a Marxist reading of Shakespeare published by Robert Weimann in 1978 and well into the book Ryan announces the fact that his inspiration lies in *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*. The failure of this brilliant but neglected text, says Ryan, lay in the fact that Weimann’s argument was too abstract to be readily assimilated and provided no close textual proof of his hypothesis.

But Ryan begins his own argument some way from this point by giving a vivid account of the way in which historicist approaches to Shakespeare have so powerfully superseded the traditional idea of the ‘myriad-minded’ Bard. For thirty years, he says, the “universality” of Shakespeare, his huge world-wide appeal and his central place in the canon of world literature has been displaced by research into the local, the historical, the legal, and the theological conditions of the production of Shakespeare’s plays. In their sharp (if fruitful) focus on the particular, recent scholars have not merely ignored the more general issues, but they have almost demonized Shakespeare’s wider appeal as sentimental, politically suspect, and even taboo. The idea of Shakespeare’s universality has become, says Ryan, “an intellectually indefensible and politically pernicious myth” (p. x). According to Ryan the universalizing view of Shakespeare came hand in hand with conservative repressive political tendencies, the creation, he suggests, of a self-perpetuating cultural elitist orthodoxy. Notwithstanding the excoriation of the academy, however, Shakespeare’s appeal goes from strength to strength, growing and widening. Amongst audiences who have no interest in Elizabethan theological controversies, land titles, agricultural practices or geographical awareness his dramas continue to cross boundaries of class and geography. Ryan sets out this paradoxical moment in the history of Shakespeare’s reputation very clearly. He sees it as a kind of schizophrenia with scholars huddled in one corner busily exploring the minutiae of the bardic text and its embedding in cultural

and societal issues while elsewhere the world celebrates the warmth of Shakespeare's characters and the wide and generous appeal of his plots. Ryan's project is not so much to bridge this gap as to re-examine, reassess and possibly rehabilitate the traditional view of Shakespeare's appeal by reference to a quite different model of assessment. This he finds in Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*. Wiemann's book is an examination of Shakespeare's dramaturgy dealing with the "interplay of actor, role and audience" (p. 17). Seen from this point of view Shakespeare's plots and characterization remain firmly embedded in their own space and time, yet because of Shakespeare's unusual perspectives they are able to transcend the local and the particular. Where the conservative version of Shakespeare's greatness sees his work as transcending the conditions of his time, in Weimann's version the universalizing pattern in Shakespeare is "never outside history" but lives "beyond the historical conditions" that made it possible (p. 18). This pattern is connected, not with the contingent narratives of the plays, but the ways in which "the plays are fashioned and phrased by the dramatist and apprehended by the audience" (p. 19). Unlike Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists whose names are little known to modern audiences, Shakespeare himself offers character and plot in generic terms which cut across distinctions and divisions forged by history, nationality, race, class etc. Even though the characters are powerfully idiosyncratic, the dramas in which they appear are shaped in such a way as "to activate our awareness of the *potential* we share with the protagonists" (p. 14). Ryan points out the profoundly democratic nature of Shakespeare's dramas; how Hamlet and the gravediggers, rooted though they are in contemporary society, transcend their class limitations and categorizations. Shakespeare presents them as people who have more in common than they have differences, and who are also linked to each member of the audience past and present. It is in this that Shakespeare's universality lies. Not in his specific plots or in his representation of the Elizabethan world, but rather in his dramatic poetics and in the way in which he represents characters and their common humanity.

It was this idea that Robert Weimann began to suggest in *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* but which he never worked out in detail. But Ryan does begin to work these ideas out in practice by developing a series of close readings that comprise

the remainder of the book. In the second chapter he deals with issues of time in the sonnets, the Roman plays and *Hamlet*. Chapter 3 is a skilful and impressive account of Shakespeare's "utopian realism" (p. 67) where characters are seen as rooted in their historical moment, but we as observers have a view which "points far beyond that moment" (p. 62). The last chapter on *Timon of Athens* asks more questions than it can successfully answer, though it does nothing to detract from the totality of this impressive "brief polemic". It would be very good to see Ryan's approach taken up in further Shakespeare criticism in such a way that the passion of the older view of his "universality" could be aligned with the dogged historicism of more recent scholarship.

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Saval, Peter Kishore, *Reading Shakespeare through Philosophy*, New York-London, Routledge, 2014, 182 pp., hardcover £ 110.00.

Peter Kishore Saval's book does not mean to study the influence of philosophy or philosophers on Shakespeare, but rather to read Shakespeare as philosophy and philosophy as Shakespeare considering his drama as a way of "doing philosophy" (p. 1). Drawing upon a number of thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz and Kant, the particular focus of this work is to view individual characters and their fates not simply as subjects or individuals, but rather as "notions"; in other words the proposed philosophical approach is to abandon the idea of characters simply as personalities with their own inner tensions because, in the author's view, this univocal perspective often does not fully explain enigmas raised by the text. The author's project therefore is to depart from most Shakespearean criticism which takes its starting point from subjectivity or personality, and to adopt a non-subjective philosophy of individuality in order to observe characters' relations with the cosmos from this standpoint.

In fact, the first play which is closely examined, *Julius Caesar*, is viewed from a framework from which to understand the relationship of the "individual with the cosmos" (p. 16) and Saval concludes that, in this case, the individual is co-essential with it. Through the use of Leibniz' logic, the character of Caesar is seen then not simply as a single personality but rather as a "notion" which includes all the

events which can happen to him, thus providing, for instance, a further point of view from which to understand why the fate of Caesar is reflected in the disruption of the cosmic order the night before his assassination.

A brief study of *Love's Labor's Lost* seeks to find in the play a "philosophy of history" which once again goes beyond a subjective relationship to time and displays enigmas concerning the contacts between comedy and history. The delay of courtship in the play, according to Saval, turns out to be a way of imagining an alternative history.

Possibly the most interesting chapter is the analysis of *The Merchant of Venice* which raises questions concerning the nature of debt and gift. The drama of money presents a vision of human life which stretches from the individual to the cosmos, challenging ideas on the connection between subjective autonomy and human freedom. Drawing on the theories of David Graeber, Saval illustrates the different types of debt and their implications and applies them to Shakespeare's play in order to revitalize its interpretation. The survey of theories concerning the possible connotations of debt and gift is in itself informative and stimulating and does indeed suggest various different angles from which to interpret the central issue of the play.

It is the philosophy of the Stoics to which the author turns for his study of *Timon of Athens* in order to develop his non-subjective approach and to redistribute the individual into the cosmos. Whereas in the cases of *Julius Caesar* and *Love's Labor's Lost* the individual was co-essential with the cosmos and in the *Merchant of Venice* the connection was "mythical", in *Timon*, Saval notes, the individual is "mixed with the cosmos" (p. 109). The Stoic term *Krasis* (the mixture of individual and cosmic elements) opens up a reading of the play which concentrates on the language which is saturated with the rhetoric of liquidity.

The final chapter deals with *Twelfth Night* and "the being of the future". It is a play that provokes many questions on what it means for something "to be", imagining all future events through what the author sees as baffling language. In this light it reveals a solution to the enigmatic problem about the relationship between being and future and, hence, character and fate.

This approach to Shakespeare's plays has the merit of introducing philosophical concepts which are amply expanded and which cer-

tainly may serve to add yet another perspective to the multifarious landscape of Shakespearian criticism. Applying these theories enables the reader to solve what, in the author's opinion, are otherwise unexplainable enigmas raised by the plays in general and by certain puzzling linguistic expressions. The limit to this approach is best expressed in the words of the author, who frequently observes that Shakespeare's charismatic personalities are in many ways his greatest gifts and in abandoning the notion of characters as personalities or subjects we lose part of the greatness of his art which comes, according to many, precisely from "his gorgeous and idiosyncratic human characters, and the way in which they compel us to reflect upon ourselves as human subjects" (p. 5).

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Shapiro, James, 1606. *Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*, London, Faber & Faber, 2015, 423 pp., £ 9.99.

As in his 1599. *A Year in Shakespeare's Life*, published in 2005, what is impressive about this book is the ease with which James Shapiro manages to dilute and dissolve his huge scholarship in a narration which, as some blurbs go, "reads like a novel". A novel about history, it should be added, but with an incredible quantity of details and knowledge of facts; so much so that it reads as if very informed contemporary witnesses, present to the scene, had come alive to give us detailed information about the mood of James I on a particular morning or about the private letter a gentleman from the court concocted to have it safely read among close friends. Facts about James I's court and the city affairs are recounted from the last few months of 1605, which deeply influenced the year under study; the profound relevance of political affairs to Shakespeare's work is shown, interweaving historical data with the three Shakespearean plays that were composed and staged that year, both at Court and at the Globe or the Blackfriars: *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Shapiro manages to achieve this true-to-life atmosphere through his immense amount of reading and his long permanence ("much of the past decade", p. 408) in the archives of the Folger, the Bodleian, the British Library, the Public Record Office, where he also consulted Calendars of State papers, registers of the Privy Council, contempo-

rary correspondences, journals and sermons. He unites deep study of the seminal twentieth-century books on Shakespeare (the forty-page bibliography, as well as concepts digested and scattered in the text, are evidence of this) to an up-to-date knowledge of new philological discoveries (suffice it to quote the fairly new controversial dating of *All's Well*, Middleton's work on *Timon*, *Macbeth* and his *Revenge's Tragedy*) – in addition to a strong determination to avoid critical jargon and terminology which could be puzzling for lay readers. A small example is his refusal to use the rather simple, but technical word 'tetralogy' for the Richard and the Henry plays, which he simply calls "his earliest four history plays" and "the four-part drama" (p. 261). After that, he presents us with the original definition that many of the plays composed in the 1590s, including Shakespeare's, "were sequels". Then he proceeds to tell us that Shakespeare, "while at work on one play, was already thinking about the next one" (p. 267), proving this in fascinating detail with a few examples I will later quote.

Scholars working on the early modern period know about the relevance of the "division of the kingdom" in *King Lear* that echoes James' long-cherished and eventually abandoned project of uniting his two crowns (England and Scotland) in one realm, and of the importance of equivocation in the Powder Plot trials for *Macbeth*. What one wouldn't expect are the extremely detailed and richly informed fifty pages (and more throughout the book) devoted to the rising and the discovery of the plot, from the secret and probably forged letter which Lord Monteagle, "in the evening of 26 October at Whitewall, [coming] at this late hour from his house a mile or so away in Shoreditch" (p. 104), brings to the Privy Council to inform them about the plan to blow the Parliament to pieces. This leads to the discovery of thirty-six barrels of gunpowder in the entrails of the Parliament house (p. 108), to the interrogation and torture of the confederates (with gory details of their executions) and to the aftermath of the rebellion, which lives for years in the memory of Londoners. Equivocation is dealt with in detail, quoting treatises on or against it (pp. 178ff). Shapiro dwells on the mission of two English Jesuits, the notorious Father Garnet and Robert Southwell, who were sent back to London from Italy in 1586; he expands on the facts that induce them to hide in a house in Hindlip in 1606 and on how, "at dawn on 20 January" (p. 198), they are put under siege; a week later, unable to bear the strictures of their self-willed imprisonment, they finally surrender.

The Powder Plot episode starting from Monteagle's letter is not only linked to *Macbeth*, but also to *Lear*: this "forged, opaque letter" is equated to the one Edmund pretends to conceal from his father, which of course concerns an equally heinous – if more limited – plot against the life of a nobleman, namely Gloucester. Here, as elsewhere in the text, Shapiro proves convincingly how Shakespeare's imagination linked phenomena from his surroundings to epochal changes in contemporary history, and (also harking back to his own past work) how much, while at work on one play, he was plotting and elaborating the next one.

This is fascinatingly explored in the chapter devoted to *Antony and Cleopatra*. The presence of Plutarch in Shakespeare (since *Julius Caesar*) is proved for *Macbeth* as well: the passage where the future tyrant expresses his fears of Banquo, and says that "under him his genius is rebuked" as Marc Antony's was under Caesar (III.i.55-58), is shown to be taken probably from memory from Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, which is indeed very similar and which will be used extensively in *Antony and Cleopatra* (pp. 266ff). The chapter on *Antony and Cleopatra* is richer in critical hypotheses than the ones devoted to *Lear* and *Macbeth*: the use of (and also the departure from) Plutarch is demonstrated in detail; the dramaturgy which shows the adulterous couple being described by their detractors for most of the play, and then suddenly achieving regal status in the last scenes, is depicted so convincingly as to make the reader wish the author had given more space to critical analysis.

It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the wealth of information and findings in the whole book, from data on the recurrent plagues (with the number of weekly deaths, relevant also to the closure of the theatres and, therefore, the dating of plays), to the rich description of Jonson's masque *Hymenaei* and its influence on Shakespeare, to the misgivings of the new monarch after the Powder Plot, his relationships with his subjects, his ambition to be remembered as an Augustus Caesar-like peacemaker, his project to establish a new sort of lineage from Henry VII to his mother to himself (which induced him to move the body of Elizabeth to a new tomb, though with great honours, keeping the place near Henry VII for himself). This book is a mine of information, equally valuable for the lay reader and the specialist of the early modern period.

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Watt, Gary, *Shakespeare's Acts of Will: Law, Testament and Properties of Performance*, London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016, hardback £ 63.00.

Last summer (2016) in Stratford, during the World Shakespeare Congress celebrating the fourth centenary of Shakespeare's death, New Place, his house, hosted an exhibition of different material objects belonging to the playwright and to the cult which flourished around him. One of these objects was the original document of his will, the detailed, much discussed testament where the name of his wife was never mentioned, not even when she was bequeathed only his "second best bed".

Quite appropriately, three days before the beginning of the congress, Bloomsbury had issued Gary Watt's *Shakespeare's Acts of Will: Law, Testament and Properties of Performance*, a volume that from the very title offers the opportunity for frequent word play on such expressions as testament, testimony, property (state and personal), performance (as representation and enactment) and, in a more customary way, on Will as a name, will as the expression of voluntary acts, and will as a document whereby legacies of an absent author are left.

As Watt points out, the fact that Shakespeare was born not so long after the Statute of Wills was proclaimed and enacted in 1540 means that the problems connected with it were still to be completely absorbed by the general public. Indeed, one of the strong points of Watt's book is the fact that, though extremely precise in terms of technical-juridical concepts and legal language, as one would expect from a brilliant Professor of Law, it helps to appreciate the complex network operating between the different cultural practices of the period. In particular the cultural practices which connected individual lifestyles that the law had started to regulate with the institutional problems deeply affecting contemporary political life – and which were widely debated even among lay people, if we are to trust Shakespeare's history plays. The framework is, of course, the acts of representation developed by the theatre as institution – at the time trying to legitimize its own existence by advocating public educational aims – as a response to the accusations of puritan critics. Rhetoric though, with its aims of persuasion, with its use of different channels of perception on the part of the audiences, activated by the embodiment of voice and movement, plays a huge part in the perfor-

mative success of manifestations of will both in the field of law and in the theatre as a cultural practice.

Shakespeare's representation of this complex cultural phenomenon is detailed, pervasive, and illuminating both in his tragedies and in his comedies; Watt's analyses of will and performance in a great number of plays are competent, imaginative and perceptive. *Richard II* among the tragedies and *As You Like It* among the comedies occupy a special role in Watt's book.

Watt argues that in *Richard II* the dramatic conflict has to do with the traditional concept of order coming from heaven and with the lawful transmission of power, while the crown that is being exchanged on stage is just a token of the trade unlawfully exercised on state properties. It is however doubtful whether power over the country's lands and people could be handed down otherwise than by lawful succession, as happened, instead, with other hereditary properties among the common people that could be disposed of by contract or will. In the play Richard seems to be aware of the difference, and of the implicit meaning of his own agency in the process. Defeated on the battlefield, he could only make trade of the crown he was not able to relinquish according to Divine Right. Instead of a vertical movement of transmission, from high to low, Richard traded his crown laterally within his horizon of opportunity, according to a prevailing merchant ethics and practice he did not believe in, but was unable to fight.

Watt's hypothesis is that Shakespeare did not intend to discuss the merit of the question even if, or perhaps precisely because, the question had just been revived by Henry VIII's testamentary dispositions directly concerning the queen in power. What Shakespeare does in the tragedy is to explore the dramatic tension caused by the possible conflicting courses of action, while enabling the audience to experience what it feels like to handle evidence and to take part in politically relevant discourse. In this key Gary Watt carries out a perceptive and convincing analysis of the text.

In the first chapters of *Acts of Will*, Watt discusses a pair of texts each from a common, integrated perspective: in the second chapter it is *Richard II* and *King John*, two plays where the issue of succession to the throne is carried out as a trading transaction by means of will and testament. In the third, *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* are analyzed in their turn towards comedy, their dramatic actions

prompted by actual testaments and/or the manipulation of wills. Watt comments competently and convincingly on Shakespeare's movement from legalism to feeling, via the specificity of theatre communication.

In *As You Like It* the story offers food for thought on the unreliability of ostensible forms, starting from the fact that a formal testament is left by a father, who eventually dies, to his eldest son, Oliver, who inherits his lands but is asked, in exchange, to provide a gentleman's education for his younger brother. He is required to perform his father's testamentary will, but it is within the comedic world to allow for an escape from subjection to the will of another. This is what Oliver does, advocating the letter of the document but failing its spirit. Here Gary Watt wittily comments on Shakespeare's own exploitation of the rights of the male heir he deeply missed, as shown in his own testamentary will, where so much is left to his daughter Susannah provided his grandsons will be later bequeathed his own properties and estates. We can perhaps say that if a testamentary will generally certifies the present absence of the deceased, in Shakespeare's will what is also certified is the presence of the long absent Hamnet, the male heir he had lost twenty years before.

Individual chapters are dedicated to *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, and we can only agree with Daniela Carpi's perceptive review of Watt's book in *Polemos* (10:2, 2016, pp. 453-57), the international journal of Law and Literature, when she emphasizes that "in Brutus' and Antony's skillful orations Watt points out an unexpected perspective. What if honour could be characterized as haughtiness?" (p. 455). The enactment on stage of Brutus' haughtiness, which is in the text, is convincingly analyzed by Watt through competent linguistic and theatrical scrutiny and through the apt consideration of Antony's conflicting strategy aimed at avoiding the risk of a revolution.

As for *Hamlet*, the relevance of material objects, forms and gestures to make up one's mind in order to take decisions is focused on both the plot in relation to Hamlet as a character, and the involvement of the members of the audience in the process of passing judgements, since their position is that of a jury. The issue of performance is central both to Watt's speculation on the practical effects of will, in all its nuances of meaning, and to *Hamlet*, a play which pivots around the

scene of the advice given to the actors, around the dumbshow and the play-within-the-play. If the law is the expression of matters of justice and order in practical forms, and performances are open to communal participation (p. 181), then this concept is connatural also to the creation of a work of art. Apart from the occasional allusions to questions of law, in *Hamlet* the testamentary quality of the play consists in the presence and action of a third party as witness. Horatio is openly asked to tell Hamlet's story so that he can be judged fairly. This narrative is Hamlet's testamentary will and it is up to Horatio to execute it.

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