Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies

Corcoran, Neil, *Reading Shakespeare's Soliloquies: Text, Theatre, Film*, **London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018, 230 pp.**

Nordlund, Marcus, *The Shakespearean Inside: A Study of the Complete Soliloquies and Solo Asides*, **Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 256 pp.**

What's a soliloquy? What's in a Shakespeare soliloquy? Why is a character given this type of speech? Do Shakespeare soliloquies vary in time? Marcus Nordlund's and Neil Corcoran's volumes try to address these and more problems, investigating the same corpus, i.e. Shakespearean soliloquies, with a difference though, given that Nordlund also takes solo asides into consideration, calling the former and the latter simply 'insides', while Corcoran is interested mainly in the 'classical' monologues. But the methods of analysis, the declared purpose, the range of evidence and the readership itself of these two books are definitely different. And the results as well, as a consequence of the just mentioned aspects.

Nordlund's work, which – as the volume's subtitle reads – claims to be "a study of the complete soliloquies and solo asides", is based on a quantitative search through Shakespeare's whole dramatic corpus by means of the NVivo software that allows to carry out a certain number of queries in complex corpora. As the author explains in the first of four appendices to his book, after preparing the texts (i.e. the file containing all insides) and coding them, he proceeded to explore them by means of the software and, finally, to interpret the results (p. 205). It is clear, from this brief description, that Nordlund's

digital-humanities approach does not confine the 'human' to a mere clerklike task, but that he resorts to machine-aided exploration to accelerate his own research and to avoid biased hypotheses as much as possible. This position, which is made clear as early as the very beginning of the "Introduction" (p. 1) where the author also declares that "the resulting *Shakespearean Inside Database* […] will be made freely available online" to NVivo users (p. 2), is exemplified along the whole volume, but in particular in chapters 3 ("Dialogue", pp. 107-53) and 4 ("Distribution", pp. 154-201), enriched as they are with illustrative tables. Tables are useful to visualise data in a comparative way (for example Table 3.3, p. 118, that shows the relevance of the function of 'reporting' in the five plays ranking highest in the results independently of their subgenre). Nevertheless, Nordlund works by calculating the word count of the various insides, whereas one never encounters a table with 'simply' the numbers of soliloquies and/or solo asides taken into account in individual plays. Certainly it is interesting to see how many words are spoken in insides, but it would also be relevant to establish how many times a character resorts to these conventions of dramatic speech, and how many of these times they use soliloquies proper or solo asides. And this, not only for the sake of accumulating numbers, but, on the contrary, to offer further elements for the characterization of the *dramatis personæ*.

One of the points stressed by the author is that his type of computational analysis is also useful in defining authorship problems, since numbers can reveal Shakespeare's and/or his co-authors' tendency when using a certain rhetorical structure (the apostrophe, for example). It must be said that Nordlund does not advance any hypothesis of his own concerning this issue, while always relying on textual scholars' suggestions which he tries to verify.

The starting point of Nordlund's analysis (especially visible in the first two chapters), though, is James Hirsh's *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies* (2003). In his book Hirsh clearly takes side in favour of soliloquies as self-addresses and expression of a character's individuality. Nordlund, on the other hand, often highlights the fact that some monologues are not self-addressed, since they show marks of direct address to the audience, in this way bridging the gap between the internal and the external axis (or 'level', as Nordlund

calls it) of theatrical communication (esp. in chapter 1, "Direction", pp. 15-60). In doing so, Nordlund affirms to side with "the modern tendency of scholars, actors, and directors to return Shakespeare to his medieval, audience-addressed roots" (p. 8). It remains to be checked, however, how far medieval and early Tudor drama and theatre really tended to always include the audience in solo speeches. For example, Everyman's monologues in the homonymous play (ca. 1485) are cases of hybrid forms of 'inside', given that the protagonist now prays, then recapitulates his sorrows, then reveals his future actions: the soliloquy starting with "O, to whom shall I make my moan" (ll. 463-84) is an interesting illustration of pre-Shakespearean monological speech where no audience is addressed[1]. And so is judge Apius' after he has been taken by the foul desire to have Virginia, a soliloquy very similar indeed to Angelo's analysis of his sudden yearning for Isabella in *Measure for Measure*: "now my force is done: / I rule no more, but ruled am" (*Apius and Virginia*, 1575, ll. 348-49)[2]. Obviously these Tudor plays were composed for performance, but both speakers do not address the spectators. On the contrary they dig deeply into their feelings and speak to themselves. So, Nordlund's attribution of medieval roots to Shakespeare's monologues should have been better researched and, as a consequence, his self-confidence as to this point should have been more limited.

Nordlund's study reveals to be quite useful when it shows Shakespeare's "habitual practices" (p. 3) along the playwright's career, i.e. when it reads the tables showing how certain stylistic facets characterise the plays of a given period, even if the author is well aware of the always uncertain dating of single texts. For example, when writing about Shakespeare's use of "illeism" and "tuism" in the insides as a way speakers adopt to "*detatch* themselves from their own person", Nordlund says that "they [illeism and tuism] were used more frequently in the first phase (3 per cent in 1590-4) and then trailed off before disappearing almost completely in the last phase (0 per cent in 1610-14)" (p. 130; the corresponding

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[1] *Everyman*, in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, ed. A.C. Cawley, London, Dent, 1977.

[2] R.B., *Apius and Virginia*, in *Tudor Interludes*, ed. Peter Happé, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972.

tables, 3.6-3.8, are on pp. 131-32). Gender, as well, is one of the categories employed to analyse the distribution of insides among Shakespeare characters: to this issue Nordlund devotes great part of chapter 4, in which he zeroes in on *The Two Noble Kinsmen, The Taming of the Shrew*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*, that is, on plays whose heroines are given a certain number of insides. The study of these plays, which goes together with that of *Hamlet* and *Othello* in other parts of the volume, is carried out with the usual tools of close reading and text analysis.

By stressing that his book does not want to investigate "Shakespeare's literary *intentions*", Nordlund succeeds in clarifying the playwright's "literary *habits*" (p. 180), and sometimes also in opening new perspectives on the Bard's writing strategies. One might object (as I've done myself) to some of Nordlund's opinions, but the results of this study appear insightful and may be of help in understanding not only Shakespeare's "usual practices", but also – as a consequence – his deviations from the former so as to attribute meaning to them and shed light on ambiguous passages. The readership of this volume appears to be mainly scholarly, although Nordlund here and there touches on performance problems (therefore imagining actors and directors as possible readers) and often speaks about the texts' skill in maneuvering audience's responses. An evidence of this is detectable in the total absence of actors' or directors' names in his analysis of Shakespearean insides and the complete avoidance of any mention to modern and contemporary performances and/or films. After reading this volume one might perhaps lament that its author has not exploited his data more extensively and that, on the other hand, he has allowed himself to rely too much on 'traditional' approaches to the plays, even if he shows successfully how digital humanities can be of help to literary and dramatic scholarship.

Neil Corcoran, too, mentions Hirsh's book on Shakespeare soliloquies (a study unavoidable for everybody interested in this Elizabethan drama convention), but his main aim is not to show that many Shakespeare monologues are not self-addressed, even though he also criticises Hirsh's "inflexibility" (p. 86) about the nature of soliloquies, some of which – he writes – "distinguish themselves from others by the extent of their apparent inwardness, interiority,

intensity and so on, and must have seemed then, as they do now, much less like talking to oneself and much more like internal reflection" (p. 86). Corcoran 'reads' the soliloquies with his personal craft of close analysis, but at the same time he encompasses a wide range of information and his own readers' presumable knowledge and direct experience of Shakespeare drama. Actors, directors, performances and films play a great role in this volume and not only because they are mentioned, analysed and compared, but also because of the structure itself of Corcoran's research.

The volume is divided into four parts. In the first ("Soliloquies in practice", pp. 1-54) and in the second ("Soliloquies in theory", pp. 55-120) Shakespearean monologues undergo the author's refined close reading that always goes hand in hand with a vast knowledge of past performances and successful cinematic adaptations, so as to bring the reader to a multi-faceted understanding of the specific soliloquy Corcoran is working on at that moment. In "Soliloquies in practice" readers are also guided – sometimes even too didactically – by statements conspicuous on the page since they are printed in light-grey squares. For example, we get to know (but aren't we supposed to be already in the know?) that "Soliloquies employ many elements of what the Renaissance understood by 'rhetoric'" (p. 31), and that "Some soliloquies take the form of prayers, although not necessarily in any straightforward way" (p. 32). In these 'boxes' the author intends to identify "some persistent attributes of soliloquies" which help him in his analytical process. Another 'box' tells us that "Cinema finds soliloquies difficult to cope with but can be inventively responsive to the difficulty in ways that may influence our sense of them more generally" (p. 18); it is then followed by a perceptive discussion of Laurence Olivier's film version of *Hamlet*, of *Richard III* by the same actor and by Ian McKellen, and of Orson Welles's *Othello* (pp. 19-22). That is, the investigation is subtle, but the introductory remarks in the grey boxes sound sometimes inopportune.

The second part – "Soliloquies in theory" – actually deals rather with history than with theory. In it this speech convention is seen and investigated along its historical development. The principal working tool is close reading once again, enriched with the author's rhetorical and textual erudition and scholarship. However, here, too, there are points which – although perhaps relevant to a less knowledgeable

readership – become obtrusive to others. When Corcoran explains that the Good and Evil Angels in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* are a "direct inheritance from allegorical characterizations" (p. 68), he does not even consider that many of his readers already possess this information and, therefore, does not hedge his statement in an appropriate rhetorical way. Some imprecision can also be detected on the following page when the author paints the historical background of such characters as Richard III and Iago, connecting them to the Vice of early Tudor drama "sometimes called Haphazard, Iniquity or Ambidexter". The legacy of the Vice on these Shakespearean *dramatis personæ* has long been established, while Corcoran writes about this not as a *given*, but as something *new*, forgetting, by the way, to say that the names he mentions are not general names for Vices, but each of them the name of a specific Vice in three different plays (Haphazard in *Apius and Virginia*, Iniquity in *King Darius*, and Ambidexter in *Cambises*).

The third part ("Soliloquies in performance", pp. 121-66) stands alone because it consists of the answers given by eight actors to a list of questions prepared by Corcoran. This allows readers to understand some performers' views about Shakespeare's plays and about soliloquies, although – as the author notes – what actors say is not "enough to establish any significant contemporary performance criteria" (p. 125). One might at this point reconsider the controversial issue whether a soliloquy is self-addressed or addressed to the audience, in the light of actors' perspective. What actors declare about their performances as soliloquists is quite interesting because it contributes to adding internal, so to say, points of view. For example Noma Dumezweni says that she "loves looking at the audience when I'm talking" (p. 129); Mariah Gale observes that, performing Isabella's monologue in *Measure for Measure* (II.iv.170-86), she felt instinctively "that it was the audience I was speaking to" (p. 134). Pippa Nixon even states: "That's what a soliloquy and an aside should be. It's a flirt [with the spectators]" (p. 144), and Alex Waldmann adds that "my way in to any soliloquy is always a conversation, so the audience is absolutely another character in the play" (p. 157). Corcoran summarises that "for all these actors, soliloquy is a matter of engagement with an audience […] the audience may, for the actor-soliloquist, variously and at different

times, be figured as any of the following: mirror, shadow, energy, point of focus, recruit, subject, judge, conscience, another character in the play, the location of the next thought to be discovered" (p. 125). For a differentiated readership willing to 'read' into actors' understanding and practice of soliloquies this part certainly adds, and sometimes confutes, any theoretical and scholarly interpretation, or – better – it helps us test how theory merges with (or contrasts) the 'real thing', i.e. theatre.

The fourth part of the book ("Soliloquies in play", pp. 167-214) hosts the close reading of Richard's monologues in *Richard III* and in *Henry VI, Part 3*, of Juliet's in *Romeo and Juliet*, and of the main characters' soliloquies in *Othello*. It is presented by Corcoran as the conclusion of a "kind of dialogue between performer and critic and between performance and text" (p. 169), which might also explain aspects connected to the development of Shakespeare soliloquy. In this section, even more than in Part 1 and 2, Corcoran shows his awareness of modern and contemporary critical stances such as cultural, post-colonial, and textual studies, even though his main approach to the plays remains firmly grounded on close reading (no attempt is made at employing digital-humanities approaches, though), so that the title of the book "*Reading* Shakespeare's Soliloquies" finds its explanation and justification not only in the investigating process, but also in the main analytical tool chosen by the author.

The volume has an "Index" and a "Select Bibliography", but no notes. This is also a relevant signal that the readership it envisages is a general one made of people interested in Shakespeare, but not necessarily in specifically academic approaches to the plays, somebody also interested in the way theatre operates and how actors react to the challenge of performing a Shakespeare soliloquy (performers and directors included), somebody, furthermore, who attends theatres, cinemas and watches TV (or DVDs), so as to be reminded of various past visual experiences. To this gaze towards non-Shakespeareans Corcoran's at times unseemly 'guides' are also attributable. Some endnotes, though, might have helped.

Nordlund's and Corcoran's volumes could somehow be read as two sides of the same coin, Shakespeare soliloquies being the interface between them. Each of them contributes – for different

readers – to the understanding of the always defying and enriching complexity of Shakespeare's plays.

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Dustagheer, Sarah and Woods, Gillian, eds, *Stage Directions and Shakespearean Theatre*, **London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018, 350 pp.**

This is an important book, both for the level of contributors, mostly editors of Shakespearean and early modern texts, and for the relative virginity of the theme (only two book-length studies have been dedicated to its exploration in 1999: Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama: 1580-1642*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, and Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, both amply quoted in this work).

Stage directions are in themselves a sort of genre, a code that has "a particular grammar and rhetoric" (p. 7), and which provides the structure of the play. Its treatment involves central themes, such as early modern and contemporary readings of the Shakespearean texts, authorship, editors' interpretation (starting from Rowe in 1709 and arriving at the present) and their effects on production. The relationship between editors, producers and readers is also discussed throughout.

As the "Introduction" by the two editors underlines, most essays in this book stress the "mutable", "enigmatic" quality of stage directions as texts (p. 2), their "liminality" as "boundary crosser[s]" having a mediating function (Laurie Maguire, "The Boundaries of Stage Directions", p. 46 and *passim*, and Sarah Lewis, specifically about *The Duchess of Malfi*). Their complex historical origin and status are underlined, as texts which might have been inserted by copyists, often in different ink and in a marginal position. It is pointed out that even the first editors might have written some of them (harking back, therefore, to Heminges and Condell themselves). Stage directions (henceforth SD) are defined in opposite terms: from the "crabbed"

hints of Bradbrook (*Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1932, quoted by Andrew Hiscock, p. 244) or, on the contrary, narrations highlighting aspects that even the audiences are not aware of (of this later).

Most contributors underline their character of paratext or *Nebentext*, but even this seemingly objective quality is fruitfully denied by others, who claim for SD a more intense relationship of the playwrights with their addressees (actors, directors, readers).

Most scholars, differently from what happened in the past, notice their *narrative* quality: the fact that they are inserted *for the reader* (even those first readers who were the actors, being read aloud the text to be performed, before receiving their partial 'lists' containing their parts). Emma Smith underlines how SD are an attempt – an almost moving one, I would add – on the playwright's part to remain in contact with the audience, trying to shape the text for it beyond the interpretation of the director. This idea, in Smith's essay and in others, provokes a reference to Shaw and Beckett: the first, probably the most relevant instance of how SD take a life of their own, unravelling for pages, and connected to the narrative habits of nineteenth-century novels; the second trying to indicate *one* solution for performance, with the symphonic quality of a musical score with prescribed *tempo*, music and silence.

The book takes as its starting point the two important scholarly works about stage directions I have mentioned, Dessen-Thomson's and McJannet's. It is divided into six parts: "Introduction", "Taxonomy", "Text", "Editing", "Space" and "Plays". Each contains essays by widely known Shakespearean scholars, from Tiffany Stern to Emma Smith or Douglas Bruster, who often refer back to their own experience in editing Shakespearean and early modern texts, or in their production. In Emma Smith's case, it is her years-long study of the Folio (*Shakespeare's First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, ppb. 2018) which shines through her study.

As Dustagheer and Woods announce in their "Introduction", the part about taxonomy somehow closes with an anti-taxonomy, with Paul Menzer and Jess Hamlet's essay: here they discuss the previous attempt at systemization of SD in Dessen and Thomson's *Dictionary*, challenging the foundations underlying it: the hypothesis that a kind

of industry of theatre existed at the time, and that it shared a common vocabulary and common conventions. They find the hypothesis unconvincing, as the "nonce stage directions" (*hapax legomena* only employed once, and often highly idiosyncratic, as in Heywood) seem to indicate that individual choices used to prevail over systematized usage. The two contributors state that a more likely case, in their opinion (based on careful examination of SD that are *hapax legomena*), is that each company "had its own shorthand" (p. 74), and that idiosyncratic use by some playwrights was the most normal case, instead of the opposite. I cannot resist the temptation to underline, without in the least trying to undermine the huge research carried out by the two critics, that the typical "nonce stage direction" which is quoted in the title, "*Peter falls into the hole*", might be unique, but that it is echoed quite strongly in Middleton and Dekker's *The Bloody Banquet*, where the reformed villain Lapyrus "*falls into the pit*" (II.i.13).

Coming to more general and relevant aspects, the book describes SD from many points of view, mostly accepting the old definition (by Dover Wilson and his contemporaries) and the one by Hosley (Richard Hosley, "The Discovery-Space in Shakespeare's Globe", *Shakespeare Survey*, 12) between technical or "theatrical" and "fictional" or "narrative" ones. The technical ones limit themselves to illustrating action ("enter X") and instructions on how to interpret the words accompanying them (exit Y, "as by night": that is stumbling and feeling his way, Maguire, p. 53), while the more complex ones are meant to fill for readers the gaps which are not present in performance. Most contributors tend to agree on a fundamental point: SD are "snippets of narrative" (Smith, p. 97), they "describe and direct" (Bruster, p. 116), and they are indispensable for *the reader* to be aware of what is clear to the audience when the individual play is performed. Smith (p. 102) even points at instances where the reader is made to share with the playwright a knowledge hidden both to characters on stage and to the audience: the perfect example is *The Winter's Tale* SD "Hermione (like a statue)", where the fact that the statue *is* Hermione imparts privileged knowledge to the reader, a knowledge which little later will be a turning point in the play, for characters and audience alike.

Authorship is no doubt one of the key questions concerning stage directions; see, as my example of this, Roger Holdsworth's analysis of SD in all extant plays from the Elizabethan to the Caroline canon (in his unpublished PhD dissertation of 1982, University of Manchester, which has been instrumental to reestablishing an interest for Middleton's work in the last century; as well as in his essay in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 *On Authorship*, eds Rosy Colombo and Daniela Guardamagna, 2012), to find evidence of forms which are specific to Middleton and no other author, like 'Enter X with Y', and the like. But the authorship of SD themselves is doubtful, and the contributors have different opinions on the subject.

Some consensus was reached in the past in attributing some SD to scribes (also because of quality in ink and marginal position), in particular to the famous and widely employed scribe Ralph Crane, who took part in the preparation of the First Folio. Douglas Bruster, though, in his essay "Shakespeare's Literary Stage Directions", convincingly shows how many SD attributed to Crane, for example in *The Tempest*, show instead precise Shakespearean features. Bruster underlines that the language in SD is not shared in the little existing Crane canon (p. 128), while it is widely present in the plays' texts, in Shakespeare's undoubtedly authored words: "thunder and lightning" in *Macbeth* (both, of course, in various SD and in the *incipit*, in the Witches' exchange), "banquet", "quaint", "vanish" in *The Tempest*, especially in the mage-playwright-director Prospero's words. Another interesting idea which is expressed by contributors along the same line, therefore attributing SD to the authorial hand, is how the language of the character speaking, or of the protagonist of the play, often 'colours' – as it were – the vocabulary of SD: both Maguire and Smith notice (p. 51, quoting Peter Holland in his Arden edition of the play, and p. 105, respectively), how in *Coriolanus* SD describe the crowds with the derogatory terms Coriolanus himself would employ ("*plebeians*", "*rabble of plebeians*", "*the rabble againe*", and never the "more respectful term citizens", except at the beginning but in the form "*a Company of Mutinous Citizens*", Smith, p. 105); or the dumb show in *Hamlet*, which employs words ("loath", "crown", "years", "decline", "seeming virtuous", "sleeping"), which had been uttered by its original protagonist, that is the royal Ghost of old Hamlet during the narration of his killing in I.iv (Smith, p. 107).

SD are often linked to the other non-verbal important feature of some plays, that is the dumb show. Tiffany Stern's essay ("Inventing Stage Directions: Demoting Dumb Shows") identifies the birth of the term in its derogatory use by eighteenth-century playwright and critic Lewis Theobald, who coins it to attribute it to dumb shows. This genre ("mini-genre", in Stern's apt words, p. 21), is recognizably a difficult one to interpret; Menzer and Hamlet remind us that characters themselves often appear perplexed by it ("What means this, my lord?", asks Ophelia to Hamlet in III.ii.136, and he obligingly answers). Stern underlines that dumb shows were transmitted separately from the text because they needed special treatment in their action (pp. 22-23), not being text to be recited as the rest of the play, but action where actors had to be choreographed towards a precise meaning. The attention to dumb shows as a peculiar form of SD is continued in the last essay in the book, "Understanding Dumb Shows and Interpreting *The White Devil*", where Gillian Woods dwells on the dumb show in Webster, particularly *The White Devil*, clarifying its statute and its importance in the play at the same time.

Suzanne Gossett, in her essay "When Is a Missing Stage Direction Missing?", refers back to her own work both as general editor and as editor (of Middleton's *The Fair Quarrel* in Taylor and Lavagnino's *Collected Wor*ks of 2007, of Chapman, Marston and Ben Jonson's *Eastward Ho* for the Cambridge complete edition of Jonson's works – Bevington, Butler and Donaldson, 2012 – and of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* for Arden, in 2009). She specifies how some SD need to be inserted in modern editions, and this is to be done without qualms when the instance is that of "clarifying the 'logic of the action'" (p. 150), for example in the specific case when there is the 'exit' of a character who is then to speak, and therefore he obviously needs to be made go back to the stage before doing so. On the other hand, Gossett wisely cautions against inserting SD, though we might feel the need for them, especially where the playwright purposely avoided to do so. The clearest instance is that of Isabella's silence in *Measure for Measure*'s last scene (the *lack* of a SD is here more meaningful than its presence), where the protagonist does not answer the Duke's proposal of marriage, and obviously it is up to the reader, and to that privileged reader who is the director, to decide whether she happily flies into his arms gleefully accepting his

proposal (as she surprisingly did in a few performances), or remains aghast at the prospect of abandoning her cherished plan of retiring to a convent, but of course cannot dare to say so, thus enhancing the bleakness of the play and undermining its so called happy ending. To this sound example, I would add the lack of a SD, and therefore the uncommented ambiguous silence which ensues when Antonio receives Prospero's forgiving words in *The Tempest* V.i.130-34. Here wishful thinking would be satisfied by a clarifying SD, while it is of course wise to leave silence as the most meaningful reception. This highlights Prospero's sadness at his failure, the impossibility for "pains, / Humanely taken" (IV.i.189-90) to alter the human propensity to evil when it is deeply entrenched in the character's soul, be it Caliban's or Antonio's: one of the reasons why Prospero's mind is "vexed" in IV.i.158.

Gossett also specifically clarifies, as hinted by other contributors throughout the book, how any editorial intervention is akin to an act of "critical interpretation" (p. 155), as practically no editorial intervention can be neutral as it would, and is very likely coloured by the editors' reading of the text.

Terri Bourus and Martin White also start from their professional experience to make statements about different aspects of SD. Bourus relies on the one hand on her life-long experience as director and actress, on the other on her work as one of the general editors of the New Oxford Shakespeare (2016-17, 4 vols), with Gary Taylor, John Jowett and Gabriel Egan. Martin White, besides referring back to his study of less widely known early modern texts (such as *The Magnetic Lady* by Ben Jonson, *Believe as You List* or *The Guardian* by Massinger, and others), also brings in his experience as a director at Bristol Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.

In the *NOS*, as she informs the reader in her essay ("Editing and Directing: *Mise en scène, mise en page*"), Bourus has written about her uncommon though interesting practice, that is supplying what she calls "*anachronistic*" SD, where she works on the Shakespearean text providing both reflections about performed actions and elements of history of performance. She quotes her notes about *Antony and Cleopatra*: "Judy Dench [as Cleopatra] conveyed a thoughtful, sad acknowledgement of passing years"; "Vanessa Redgrave, after a pause, and comic turn of the head, expressed embarrassed disdain at

the memory of her own immaturity" (p. 174); "the exit of Octavia overlaps with the entrance of Cleopatra, usually with a strong sense of contrast between the two women" (p. 183). Moreover, she dwells with the fact that act breaks date to performances in private theatres, therefore to 1608 onwards for the King's Men. The theory is well-known, but if an application to practice were to ensue (as in the 2007 *Collected Works* of Middleton and the NOS), this would entail a transformation of the known Shakespearean texts which would amount to a revolution.

Martin White concentrates on act breaks as well, but the main focus of his essay is the quality of lighting in indoor theatres, where his theory is that some actions took place in actual semi-darkness, modifying, therefore, their interpretation for audiences.

Dustagheer's long essay, signed with director Philip Bird, with whom she discussed many critical points and whose interventions are reported in a different font, identifies SD describing 'discovery' of bodies on stage with a deeply entrenched preoccupation about death in Jacobean times. Discussing this solution in various revenge tragedies, from Kyd to Chettle, Marston, Middleton and Webster, she shows how the theatrical and metatheatrical mechanisms are instrumental to expressing the deepest anxieties in the culture of the time.

Hiscock's study ("'*Enter Macduffe, with Macbeths head*': Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the Staging of Trauma") also deals with the revelation of deep obsessions in the Jacobean period, in particular with the manifest "unslakable desire for the violation of body and community", of violence as a "strategic and constitutive marker of identity" (pp. 249-50), responded to and expressed in *Macbeth*'s SD. The last two essays, dealing with Webster's works, again underline the liminality of SD. Sarah Lewis ("'From the Dutchesse Grave': Echoic Liminalities in *The Duchess of Malfi*") exemplifies this by the embedded liminality of the character of Echo. The circle closes in Wood's analysis of Websterian dumb shows, where the tension between action and words is described again, as the main characteristic of the genre discussed throughout the book.

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Equestri, Alice, *"Armine... thou art a foole and knaue". The Fools of Shakespeare's Romances*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, 200 pp.

Thanks to Alice Equestri's recent book, *"Armine… thou art a foole and a knave". The Fools of Shakespeare's Romances*, published by Carocci Editore (Rome 2016), the 'last plays' of Shakespeare (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*), composed between the end of the first and the beginning of the second decade of the seventeenth century, reach us with renewed vigour. Far from suggesting a retreat into fantasy and magic, they engage instead in a search for a new form for modernity, implicitly inserted in a debate on the revision of the canonical dramatic forms that had already been going on in sixteenth-century Italy. It may be worthwhile observing that problems of form are already hinted at in *Hamlet*, with Polonius's often quoted remarks about the "pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited" (II.ii). Ridiculous as they may be, pedantic in relishing scholastic combinations of words, the four basic categories named by Polonius, that is "tragedy", "comedy", "history", "pastoral", in going beyond the traditional distinction between comedies and tragedies, led Heminge and Condell to use "histories" as well for their partition of the Folio, but "pastorals" – a promising opening, in our perspective – was left out, not read into.

However, it is through Shakespeare, mainly, that such formal issues become relevant to contemporaneity, when the breakthrough play of the modern theatre, *Waiting for Godot,* takes up an equivalent dramaturgical category as its subtitle: *A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. In fact, if on the one hand there is a fair degree of certainty over the chronological contiguity of the *romances*, critics cannot quite agree on a label that could denote them. In a way, this is already apparent in the Folio, where Shakespeare's theatrical works are arranged in subgenres, and where – whilst *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* is missing, for reasons of doubtful *authorship* – *Cymbeline* and *Timon of Athens* are placed in the group of the "Tragedies", whereas *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* are placed in the group of the "Comedies" (respectively at its beginning and end). Such a formal elusiveness points out to their experimental quality and openness: the label of 'tragicomedies'

is one of the most used; 'romances' suggests complementary ways of interpretation; 'last comedies' is less appropriate because it narrows the focus; 'last play'" is anything but a simple neutral definition, non-committal with respect to the preceding ones: 'last' conveys the 'sense of and ending', and gathers all Shakespeare's previous works in an *oeuvre*.

In Shakespeare's *oeuvre* the *fool*, given its shifting embodiments, is certainly a *leitmotiv*. A typical character of the theatrical repertory, at the hands of other playwrights the *fool* had previously owed much to the historical figure of the *jester* linked to medieval and sixteenth-century courts, whose duties – theatrical by reflection – consisted in musical and poetic performances, in witty remarks, in parodic imitations, in the displaying all the abilities of a juggler: all features within the boundaries of the comic *relief*. But Shakespeare endows it with a new density of language; makes it a source of concealed, ambiguous, painful truths, and a scourge to stiffened social pretensions; finally, a means of and to knowledge. Hamlet, the unique and totalizing *fool* of his own tragedy, has a clear outline for the previous *fool:* "a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times". He goes on, addressing the skull of poor Yorick, both to evoke a private memory and to signal a historical change: "Where be your jibes now? your gambols? your songs? Your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?" (*Hamlet*, V.i).

Equestri's book joins productively two crucial areas of the critical discourse on the work of the great playwright (the *romances*, the *fool*), inserting organically the figure of the *fool* in the tissue and in the semiotic system of the text. It joins in a well-established trend of Shakespearean studies, aimed at the world of the *performance*, and at unravelling the connections between the text and the material structures of the theatre and its life in the Elizabethan-Jacobean society. The actors, and their companies, are an essential aspect of this picture, and Equestri reasserts it in the first of the three main chapters of her book, dedicated to the actor Armin (significantly, the title of the volume is referred to the actor, while the subtitle to the play itself). After William Kempe left the Chamberlain's Men, at the turn of the century, it was Robert Armin, of a small frame and physically ungraceful, who took over as the new implicit receiver and

assignee of the parts that Shakespeare wrote with Armin's actorial qualities in mind, bound to achieve greater poetic effect. It is justifiable, on this basis, to follow the several features that connect transversally the characters taken over by Armin, that go from Boult, to Cloten, to Autolycus, to Caliban. In the 'servant' Boult – whose name refers to the door hinges, the doors of the brothel of which he's the keeper (the connection is accurately demonstrated, since the pimp had also the task of entertaining the clients with music, and exerting his *wit* to increase the value of the women of the 'bawdy house') – it will then be the case of considering not only the coexistence of the 'knave' and the *fool*, but also of identifying the transition from one to the other guise. Thus, from being the sarcastic lash of his master, Boult ends up a *pimp*. Something similar is argued for a character like Caliban, whose historical culture (Vaughan) is by now extremely rich, starting from the renowned designation in *dramatis personae* of the Folio ("A savage and deformed Slave"). Yet at a certain point, in his association with Trinculo and with Stephano, Caliban as well takes up the typical features of the *fool*.

With philological and historical accuracy Equestri outlines a wide range of forms, meanings and associations of which the word *fool* is bearer (of characters conveying the role: "country rustics", "servants", "knights", "soldiers", "foolish officers", "professional court jesters", or "nobler figures endowed with the wise-fool logic"). Consequently, new perspectives open up in terms of the matching of the four plays taken into consideration. Whereas, starting from the above-mentioned division of the Folio, and according both to chronology and to criteria of critical and theatrical success, one associates *Cymbeline* and *Timon* on the one side, and *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* on the other, the criteria that focus on the specific character of the *fool* – underlining points of contact among equivalent characters – lead here to associate instead *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. As a result, the 'underworld fool' marks the first group, whereas the 'natural fool' characterizes the second, so that these types feature in the titles of the second and the third chapter of the book, respectively.

Equestri draws on valuable and accurate historical documents, providing a list of the critical literature on the social transformation that, in Shakespeare's time, resulted in the marginalization of great

numbers of people who were pushed beyond the limits of poverty and crime. Moreover, her work brings to bear on the literary characters under scrutiny the physiological and medical knowledge of the time in ways that are particularly helpful for other interested scholars and researchers. For example, the 'natural fool' might be attributed jutting eyes, prominent lips in the eversion of the lower lip or in the indent of the upper one, a mouth open and flabby, and a particular cranial conformation, marked by the presence or not of the sutures. Thus a closer bond is unearthed between Cloten and Caliban, who are associated further by their 'devilish mothers'.

The numerous references to its class placement enshrine the *fool* in a realistic aura, as is also testified by the almost synonymous term 'clown'. It is therefore understandable that he is assigned so much of the balancing weight with respect to the equally marked disposition towards the marvellous that is present in the last plays; a marvellous that is both in the alexandrine freedom of the plot (the sea voyage, an improbable geography, pirates…), and in the happy resolution of the fantastic events, in the restoration of order and of life itself: as if by grace – and it has been observed that the term 'grace' has an unusual strength in these plays. The 'masterless' Autolycus proves an example of realistic strain. He is a character that mirrors the upheaval caused by the "enclosures" (p. 72), the proximity between the condition of vagrancy and criminality, and even a documented and historical migration of similarly destitute people from Scotland towards Bohemia (p. 81). On the other hand, he hints at the sometimes very difficult plight of actors and artists, not sufficiently talented to succeed in providing themselves with aristocratic protection. Because he is masterless, a vagrant, and an outcast, Autolycus comes to the foreground as a powerful travesty for the artist, with felicity and ease of linguistic invention, extraordinary rhetorical *wit*, and a peculiar poetic turn ("his use of song ad poetry", p. 75), even though instrumental to 'coney-catching'.

In this respect one could also underline, in conclusion, how the text magnifies the difference of this type of *fool* from the one we come across in *Lear*. While in that tragedy the satiric function applies itself against the old and dethroned king, Autolycus targets the varied social specimens of a country fair. For a noteworthy historical transition, one could argue that Lear – a king whose catastrophic

stubbornness and blindness warns both audience and readers against the flaws of monarchic absolutism – corresponds exactly to the type of *fool*; instead, the tragicomic dimension of the last plays, to match a more uncertain and protean political and social climate, demands the transformism of Autolycus (p. 73), and a wider field of action, such as the one provided by the fair. Equestri appropriately stresses that Autolycus comes from the court, from which in fact he has been banished (p. 70). It is one of the many critically perceptive remarks that further enhance the value of her book.

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Vaughan, Virginia Mason, Antony and Cleopatra*: Language and Writing,* **London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015, xvii+160 pp.**

This volume is part of the "Arden Student Skills: Language and Writing" series edited by Dympna Callaghan, with a view to providing analytical guidance to college students in their reading of – and writing about – Shakespeare's works. The book is beautifully orchestrated: starting with a general historical, cultural and philological introduction and overview of *Antony and Cleopatra*, it then proceeds to a close-reading of the text. The focus on language – a follow up of the author's editorial work on the original Folio text of *Antony and Cleopatra* for the *Norton Shakespeare* – addresses in particular composition techniques matching the rhythm of the poetic line with the emotions being expressed, thus highlighting "Shakespeare's masterful fusion of sound and sense" (p. xiii). The volume is divided into three main sections: 1. "Language in print: Reading and performance", 2. "Forms and uses", 3. "Language through time: Changing interpretations after Shakespeare", each aiming to encourage students to develop their own interpretations and engage in critical writing of their own – openly demonstrated in the crucial "Writing matters" conclusion to each section – providing them with tools to convey ideas "in a clearly written and well researched essay" (p. xii).

The core of Virginia Mason Vaughan's interpretation – blending the plot of a great love tragedy with that of a world-wide political conflict at the outset of Roman Empire – lies in a careful analysis of

anamorphosis as a strategy of Shakespeare's perspective art. Vaughan argues that anamorphosis, typical of Cleopatra's mobility, as well as of Antony's being and not being a Roman hero, is also consistent with the binary structure of Rome and Egypt; therefore it extends to the very form of this play, whose differences are created through language. Not only is such a strategy vital for Shakespeare's figurative language, but it also testifies to the involvement of this major play in the early modern crisis of Renaissance linear perspective; in fact a challenge to the authority of the classical heritage. The lack of a centre, including the formal shift from tragedy to romance as a foreboding of Shakespeare's last plays, is presented as the reason for multiple discordant interpretations of *Antony and Cleopatra* after Shakespeare. Chapter 3 looks at a range of interpretations which affected the play along the history of literary criticism – character criticism, new criticism, deconstruction, new historicism, gender, ethnicity, intertextuality: in fact Vaughan's richly documented investigation into *Antony and Cleopatra* is also a spectrum of research methods and an overview of the history of literary criticism. Moreover, the identity issue as far as characters and genres are concerned hints to a broader philosophical discourse on the concept of time as the founding category of modernity (p. 144).

In addressing this volume to college and university students, of both English and Theatre departments, Virgina Mason Vaughan perfects a change that in the 1980s superseded a long tradition of departmental distance between fields of study, concentrated on restricted and often conflicting specialisms. Like her previous valuable studies on *Othello*: *A Contextual History* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and on *The Tempest* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2011) – a kind of literary criticism responsible both to the domain of literature and to its changing relationship in the culture surrounding it – this volume is also politically committed to building bridges between an élite of sophisticated readers and a class of younger consumers of Shakespeare, still in their formative years.

The rigorous critical method connected to passionate teaching in which this book is grounded provides an outstanding example of continuity of the "Language and Writing series" with the best British and American tradition in the field of education, conceived as a

strong formative practice, meant to have an impact on the *Bildung* of the new generations engaging in public and cultural life.

<div align="right">Rosy Colombo, Sapienza University of Rome</div>