

Editor's Foreword

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This issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies*, the fifth in its new online, open access life, proposes an assortment of contributions which are not linked by a single theme, but rather offer miscellaneous approaches to Shakespeare ranging from close readings and philological analyses, to source studies and comparative investigations. The choice of opening the issue with an article concerning Shakespeare's influence on Keats – which also led us to choose the protean chameleon as an apt image for our front cover – was aimed at highlighting the idea of Shakespeare as a “Presider”, presiding over Keats, as the latter says himself, as a rousing and benevolent presence, but also presiding, in a sense, over this entire volume. Keats is primarily a ‘reader’ of Shakespeare, a poet who is powerfully affected and inspired by his works rather than a scholar who interprets. Traces and echoes – as well as direct references – appear throughout his poetry and inspire some of his most famous formulations. The article seeks to establish the modes of this poetic influence through Keats's creative responses.

Silvia Bigliuzzi's paper, “Romeo before Romeo”, takes into consideration the many possible sources of the Romeo and Juliet story which can themselves be examined as products of intertextuality, as multilayered fields of interpretation refashioned by Shakespeare. Central to this study is the assessment of the

process of transformation of Romeo's masculinity in the novella tradition, a masculinity which is often questioned in Shakespeare's play. The close textual analysis of passages in the various novellas exhibits pictures of Romeo composed of strength and aggressiveness but also of emotional weaknesses, thus putting Romeo's masculinity into perspective. The emerging gender structure may have provided the premises for Shakespeare's creation of his own Romeo.

The article which follows revisits the play-within-the-play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Here Marisa Sestito explores the contrast and blending of comic and tragic modes which also reflect those present in the play as a whole. A careful analysis of the rehearsals and the actual staging of *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe* put on by the workers brings out its Ovidian influence on many levels. Interestingly the Pyramus and Thisbe story shares elements present in *Romeo and Juliet* – such as the hostility of the parents, the secret encounters of the lovers and similarities in the death scenes – thus functioning as a kind of comic redefinition of its tragic ending.

The first of the two articles devoted to *Timon of Athens*, by Tommaso Continisio, tackles its polymorphic nature, and considers its complexity as mirroring the emerging cultural forms which were displacing the dominant ideology. The continuous game of refractions occurring in the play is seen as exemplifying the opposition between being and seeming, displayed mainly through social relationships, and notably based on hypocrisy, which governs interpersonal relationships. Davide Del Bello, in the second article, though acknowledging the primary role of money, gold and debt in *Timon*, shifts attention to the use of invective and vituperation and its political and rhetorical resonance. Invective is illustrated as a rhetorical mode in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and is exhaustively analysed within the play, especially through the language of abuse adopted by Apemantus, Alcibiades and Timon himself. The rhetorical patterns which emerge, interestingly, serve also to reflect on the "relentless exercise of Protestant scatological invective against Roman rites" (p. 99).

The two following contributions involve the figure of Fletcher. Roger Holdsworth's article, "Anti-Comedy in *The Two Noble*

Kinsmen", highlights the shift in critical attention towards this play which has occurred in recent years. In the author's view the claim that Shakespeare and Fletcher's play may be read as a political allegory, given also its clear historical parallels and their current relevance, does not contribute much to a satisfactory interpretation. Similarly, the idea of the play as a comedy which ought to foster the notion of a "transcendental power of good" (p. 105) has now been superseded by a view which rather evaluates the work as darker and more skeptical; more inclined, in fact, to pointing to the futility of action. Further, the paper convincingly demonstrates that gender relations too are problematical and go against the standard practice of comedy; though there is no cross-dressing, the constant shifts in the protagonists' self-presentations point towards a fluidity of sexual identities and desires. The play, then, escapes traditional reassurances commonly granted by comedy.

Gary Taylor's article, delving further into Fletcher's work, reconsiders the evidence for the dating of *The Tamer Tamed: or, The Woman's Prize*, a subject which had not been dealt with since the late 1930s. The play is commonly linked to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, as a reply or a counterpart to it, and is therefore of particular interest to Shakespearean scholars, but is also related to Jonson's *The Silent Women*, representing, as the article proves, a response to both of these, considered by the author as two of the most misogynistic plays in the English canon. An unprecedented, meticulous analysis of references to historical and political events, plague outbreaks, and, particularly, to sea voyages and oceanic explorations, allows the inclusion or exclusion of certain dates for its composition and at the same time gives convincing evidence as to where it was first performed and by which company.

The paper which closes this issue gives a current picture of the global popularity of Shakespeare through an analysis of Shakespeare entries in the worldwide online encyclopedia Wikipedia, the fifth most visited website in the world. Statistics derived from the number of viewings of certain authors and their works contribute to the assessment of canonicity of world authors, and the article examines both the number of consultations of biographical entries on Shakespeare and the viewings of the articles concerning single plays in the year 2017.

We are shown, for instance, which play is the most accessed, and in what countries; whether non-English speaking countries have different preferences, which plays have travelled best across the languages. The author does not aim at establishing reasons behind the popularity of certain plays as opposed to others, or specific motives for success in different cultures, but provides important empirical evidence upon which to reflect and which can serve as a basis for further research.

From Keats as a 'reader' of Shakespeare, examined in the first article, to the anonymous and inevitably amorphous world of online 'readers' tackled in the last one, this issue continues to consider, and to discuss, Shakespeare as our President.