

## *Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies*

**Claudia Olk, *Shakespeare and Beckett. Restless Echoes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2023, 251 pp.**

Even if Shakespeare and Beckett have come to signify theatre itself in current culture, very few comparative monographs have been devoted to these two towering figures in the history of drama. Claudia Olk's study is the first volume consecrated to the Shakespeare-Beckett connection after Ann Marie Drew's *Past Crimson Past Woe*, published in 1993. The Twentieth Century, from T.W. Adorno to Peter Brook, has taught us to read Shakespeare through Beckett and Beckett through Shakespeare. Olk's analysis, however, is more than a mere remapping of Shakespearean and Beckettian intertextualities; it is a productive, challenging study which offers new insights and interpretations of a vital relationship. Her main assumption is that "Shakespeare's and Beckett's texts exhibit their aesthetic strategies and reflect on them at the same time" (p. 4). If, as a young Beckett signalled, "the danger is in the neatness of identifications", the two playwrights position their works on shifting foundations, on a territory where "self-reflection often becomes its own form of creation" (p. 4). This 'natural perspective' defies the confident, cataloguing gaze of the critic. Writing from the margins of two ages of transition, Shakespeare and Beckett retell for modernity the myth of Echo, which becomes the main subject of Olk's meditation and at the same time a problematic aesthetic principle.

This "restless" nature of echo is particularly evident in Chapter Three ("Some remains': *Beckettian and Shakespearean Echoes*), but it informs Olk's study as whole:

An echo creates a divided presence. It is not an exact repetition, a recurrence of the same, but rather a critique of the idea of mere repetition or sameness. In an echo the sound waves that are reflected back to the listener from some distant surface suggest familiarity and closeness, yet they harbour the notion of difference and deferral. (p. 74)

In this context *Happy Days* – analyzed in chapter three – is a tragicomic version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Denying any possibility of tragedy, Beckett, when confronted with Shakespeare, operates by means of a tragicomic mode. Even if one is farcical and the other tragic, Winnie and Juliet are both figures of entombment, characters interred from the very beginning, who literally become their own echo: “just as Romeo and Juliet, who cannot live their love, are constrained by custom and appear as a proto-Beckettian couple, so Winnie and Willie, who can no longer reach each other, present themselves as a post-Shakespearean couple” (p. 86).

But the notion of echo reverberates in many other chapters. It operates as pause or deferral in Chapter Four (‘Purgatory and Pause – *Dante, Shakespeare and the Lobster*’) where Olk reinterprets Beckett’s view of Purgatory through Joyce’s treatment of *Hamlet* in Book Six of *Ulysses*. The tragedy of the father becomes a way to reread Beckett’s Joycean heritage, his inescapable bond with the Penman. Pause, “the wavering and hesitancy before the completion of a task” that “is central to the structure of *Hamlet*” (p. 103), animates Belacqua’s stance in *Dante and the Lobster*, a short story that resonates with *Hamlet* and with Stephen Dedalus’ ‘Hamlet theory’. A character which focuses all his actions on the rhetoric of pause, Belacqua inaugurates, through Shakespeare and Joyce, Beckett’s “programmatically deferral of syntactic closure” (p. 117). A deferral investing the patrilineal notion of literature and tradition too.

Echo shapes the “still lives” of Shakespeare’s and Beckett’s late plays in Chapter 5 (‘[It is] winter/Without journey’ – *Still Lives in Beckett and Shakespeare*). As Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, many of Beckett’s late plays begin and end in brief theatrical *tableaux vivants*. The creatures inhabiting these late stages enact “a notion of a being that is simultaneously lifeless and alive”, recalling Walter Benjamin’s idea of dialectics as a standstill, a condition “driven towards finality” (p. 123) and yet resisting the idea of an end. As Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*, the character of Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue* experiences a “purgatorial non-death” (p. 128).

In some instances echo is the tool of a radical metatheatrical process, as in *The Tempest* and *Endgame* (see Chapter Six, *Endgames*). Contrasting the traditional, Adornian reading of *Endgame* as a re-writing of *King Lear*, Olk finds many Beckettian echoes in *The Tempest*. Both plays are dominated by sea imagery and are located in close, insular spaces. But, more importantly, they offer a profound meditation on “artistic autogenesis” (p. 159), with characters creating their stories and at the same time being created by the same narratives. While they appear as masters of the dramatic action, Hamm and Prospero are inextricably bound to a role which originates from the mimesis dictated by their lines from the very beginning, an act of self-creation which replies to the suffocating self-sufficiency of the worlds they inhabit.

There are many other engaging suggestions in Olk’s volume; for example the stunning continuity between the protagonist of Beckett’s short prose *Lessness* and Shakespeare’s Timon. These characters embody “trajectories of dispossession, of shrinking, reduction and contraction” (p. 136) which replicate the decomposition of the dramatic arc. Or Beckett’s extraordinary miniaturization of Shakespeare’s Globe in *A Piece of Monologue*, where the spherical lamp – a glimpse of light in a pitch-dark stage – “casts the theatre, the globe, into a place where a faint form of life, the actor, coming from nowhere and going nowhere, can be observed” (p. 129), as in *Macbeth*’s final soliloquy. A shadowy presence (or perhaps a Dantean ‘shade’) which foreruns the analysis of the rhythms of sleeping and waking imbued in plays such as *Waiting for Godot*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Cascando*, *Nacht und Träume*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* in chapter seven (“Theatres of Sleep”). Here ghostliness becomes a key exegetic element, a formal category which rekindles the notion of echo as an oscillation between being and non-being; a liminal state that generates a meta-dramatic stance, in which Shakespeare’s and Beckett’s theatre experiment with the creation of stage presences that also affect the experience of the audience, forced to wait on “the rip word” (Beckett 1984, 269).

I would like to conclude this short review focusing on a further – and somehow dizzying – cogitation suggested by Olk’s comparative study. It concerns the status of imagination. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the poet is described as giving life to an “airy nothing”,

while in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra recreates Antony in mythical terms, a figure which brings imagination “past the size of dreaming” (“Nature wants stuff / To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t’ imagine / An Antony were nature’s piece ’gainst fancy, / Condemning shadows quite.” [*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.120-24]). Olk aptly notices how Shakespeare’s tragedy entails another Shakespeare-Beckett-Joyce triangulation. Joyce highlighted the “Cleopatra-like” (p. 49) quality of Shakespearean metamorphosis in *Ulysses*, where Shakespeare is described – through Coleridge – as “a myriadminded man”. It is hard to tell if the imagination is a limit or an excess, something missing or exceeding (as Joyce seems to suggest) the figure it evokes. In both cases Shakespeare and Beckett are entangled in the paradigm dictated by *Imagination Dead Imagine*: like Echo’s voice, the imaginative flight dies the very moment the text is born. Or perhaps, in an equally unsolvable conundrum, the death of the imagination is the permanent, inherent condition of a work of art.

DAVIDE CROSARA, Sapienza University of Rome

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W. 1988. “Trying to Understand Endgame.” In *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett’s Endgame*, edited by Harlod Bloom, 9.40. New York: Chelsea House.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, transl. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Drew, Anne Marie, ed. 1993. *Past Crimson, Past Woe: The Shakespeare-Beckett Connection*. New York, London: Garland.
- Gontarski, S.E. 1985. *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett’s Dramatic Texts*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Grady, Hugh. 2000. *Shakespeare and Modernity*. London: Routledge.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. 2001. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton, NJ, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

**Garber, Marjorie, *Shakespeare in Bloomsbury*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2023, 392 pp.**

Yes, I strongly recommend reading *Shakespeare in Bloomsbury* by Marjorie Garber. It is a profoundly intelligent and very well written book, an extremely entertaining work of investigation and a superb exercise in literary criticism. Garber explores with great ease and verve the different relationships that the members of the Bloomsbury Group, each and every one of them, held with Shakespeare. Of course, they all loved Shakespeare – that should not come as a surprise – because Shakespeare was the inventor of modern literary English, as any educated person in England, even in Europe, would understand. And all of them were, of course, educated people, so they all loved Shakespeare. In England *then* – I underline *then*, that is, at the beginning of the century they inaugurated, the twentieth century, the Modernist epoch – learned people would read Shakespeare and feel Shakespearean... (nowadays, I don't know, I am not so sure.)

But then, it was so. Then, in those times, the 'Bloomsbury people' knew and felt that Shakespeare had "invented" not only English but humanity, in the Bloomian sense that through his plays he taught readers and theatregoers how to feel and how to be human. In other words, Shakespeare offered them a spectrum of passions – from love to hate to fear, anguish, envy and jealousy – and a range of modes to interpret those emotions. One could recognize oneself in love like Juliet, one could hate like Iago, feel jealousy like Othello...

Especially deep and to the point is the chapter Garber dedicates to Virginia Woolf's enchantment with Shakespeare. Of course, we who read and love Virginia Woolf, the great modernist writer, know how much in love with Shakespeare she was. We know that because her love of Shakespeare is in everything she writes. Yes, Shakespeare influences her: Shakespeare is there, is everywhere inscribed in her novels, Shakespeare inspires her writing, even when she writes a letter Shakespeare guides her pen to find the right metaphor. Put simply, Shakespeare feeds her imagination. Shakespeare feeds her language.

Garber guides us with great clarity and sureness of touch through the many quotations Woolf scatters throughout her writings. So much so that we realize just how extensive her knowledge of Shakespeare was and how that knowledge reflected her love for him. Could she

have written *The Waves*, one wonders, and *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*, had she not read Shakespeare?

But not only that: through Garber's book we get to know more precisely how all the artists and writers of the Bloomsbury Group adored Shakespeare, and frequently discussed Shakespeare in person and by letter. For all of them, in their various fields of work and expression, in their own writings and creative works, in their conversations, Garber shows, Shakespeare proved to be deeply influential, deeply nourishing.

From the outset, Garber insists on informing us readers that her book is "a book about Shakespeare in Bloomsbury – about the role Shakespeare played in the lives of a remarkable set of writers, artists, and thinkers whose influence is still strongly felt today." And she delivers, in the sense that Garber teaches us how many roles the Bard "would come to play: as a cultural inheritance and social code; as an inspiration for work in genres as apparently different as fiction and biography, art history and economics; as a vehicle for expressing – and also for masking – personal opinions; as a structure of feeling and a structure of thinking."

Here, precisely, is what I found most interesting in her analysis: I share with Garber the notion that reading Shakespeare for the Bloomsbury figures is not simply paying a debt to Tradition, it is learning a language to express emotions, feelings, thoughts. In this sense, the experience of reading Shakespeare is unforgettable for them, it is the forging of a language.

Garber's research starts with Shakespeare in the Victorian Era; when, emerging from his recognition as one amongst many of England's famous poets and dramatists, he became the 'greatest' in the minds of many. The latter half of the nineteenth century witnesses, precisely, Shakespeare's elevation to greatness, a greatness unrivalled by any English writer past and present, as Garber shows. And it is from this perspective that we come to the Shakespeare of Virginia Woolf, and of the men and women of the Bloomsbury Group. How much the men and women of Bloomsbury, with their complicated and refined minds, delighted in Shakespeare, is explored in their literary corpus and letters.

One by one, we recognize how important Shakespeare was for them all: for Lytton Strachey, how he was another great unqualified lover of Shakespeare, very much like Virginia Woolf; and for the

famed economist John Maynard Keynes, whose love for Shakespeare was such that it led him to become a member of the Shakespeare Society as he wrestled with the crisis of the Great Depression and helped transform modern economics. Keynes's love for Shakespeare grew ever more when he fell in love with Lydia Lopokova, whom he eventually married. Lydia was an accomplished dancer and theatre performer who graced the stage of several adaptations of Shakespeare. An artist like Roger Fry, an art critic like Clive Bell, the publisher Leonard Woolf, Virginia's husband; all of them proved instrumental in ensuring Shakespeare's literary legacy.

Finally, we are treated to Shakespeare the poet with the Bloomsbury poets: John Lehmann, Rupert Brooke, and T. S. Eliot (though he was never a proper member of the Bloomsbury Group). Of particular interest is Rupert Brooke's Shakespeare, since Brooke had such high praise for Shakespeare while also demeaning him at the same time. "Brooke's comments about Shakespeare," Garber writes, "varied in tone depending upon his audience." Among women and lay audiences, Brooke was "instructive and tutorial." Writing in private, though, he mixed reverence with irreverence, such as when he wrote in his Grantchester notebooks, "This glutton, drunkard, poacher, agnostic, adulterer, and sodomite was England's greatest poet." Brooke wouldn't let facts dissuade him from telling a grand story for rhetorical and performative shock – but in that sense he really did follow in the footsteps of Shakespeare, who took artistic license with historicity for the same purpose.

"In discussing the writing of the Bloomsbury Group and their followers, I have alluded in passing to something I called Bloomsbury Shakespeare," writes Garber. "But what might be meant by such a phrase?" Garber insists that their passionate amateurism is something we need to recover in our day and age, and I concur. There is nothing wrong with 'amateurism' and we should be willing and courageous to follow in those same footsteps. "The Shakespeare they admired, read, and quoted, and sometimes performed was a poet, a stylist, a wordsmith, and a thinker. What they valued above all was his language." All fine and good.

But just how did their interest in Shakespeare enrich their lives, one might ask? The answer is in the book Garber presents to us like gift. With meticulous patience, she narrates the previously untold story of Shakespeare's profound influence on Virginia Woolf and the

rest of the Bloomsbury Group. She tells us how they went to the theatre, discussed performances, and speculated about Shakespeare's mind. As poet, as dramatist, as model and icon, as an elusive 'life', Shakespeare haunted their imaginations and made his way, through phrase, allusion, and oblique reference, into their own lives and their art. For the men and women of the Bloomsbury Group, Shakespeare was a constant presence and a creative benchmark. Not only in the works they intended for publication – the novels, biographies, economic and political writings, stage designs and reviews – but also in their diaries and correspondence, their gossip and small talk, they turned regularly to Shakespeare. They read his plays for pleasure in the evenings, year after year.

I repeat: Shakespeare provided them with a common language, a set of reference points, and a model for what they did not hesitate to call 'genius'. Among these brilliant friends, Garber shows, Shakespeare was in effect another, if less fully acknowledged, member of the Bloomsbury Group. What she, what all of them find in Shakespeare is the regenerative power of his language. And a sense of recognition and surprise, of release and identification. They think through him. Exactly as Virginia Woolf says: "Shakespeare is speaking our own thoughts."

It is precisely when we get to Woolf, that we lovers of her works and mind and imagination, feel so grateful to Garber's book. Because she offers us wonderful insight into Woolf's writings through the role and influence of Shakespeare over her. So much so that it becomes more and more clear reading Garber's book – although we knew it in essence from the beginning – that to read Virginia Woolf without perceiving and realizing Shakespeare's luminous influence over her is to not know Virginia Woolf at all. To know Virginia Woolf, as Garber shows, "is to know her relationship with Shakespeare." Not by chance, all her life, Virginia Woolf made entries about Shakespeare in her journals and diaries and kept up a lively correspondence about the plays with her friends.

Quite rightly, then, the chapter dealing with Virginia Woolf's Shakespeare is at the heart of the book.

In this light, the considerations Garber shares with us in the coda to her scrupulous and remarkable book on how Shakespeare's language nourished the mind, life and work of Bloomsbury, are extreme-

ly interesting. What they did with Shakespeare is unrepeatable, she writes. Such an experience, we come to understand, is and will remain unique. Why? First, because they were unique themselves. And their relation to Shakespeare, to his language, absolutely inimitable. Second, because that experience took place in an epoch before cinema, radio, and television became dominant sources of entertainment; an epoch when reading Shakespeare aloud in the evenings was still a popular recreation in upper and upper-middle-class households. Lytton Strachey read Shakespeare to Carrington and their friends at Tidmarsh and Ham Spray. Lady Ottoline Morrell and her husband exchanged lines from *Richard II*.

Even I remember in the late Eighties of the last century evenings in Cambridge with my late husband Tony Tanner reading *Antony and Cleopatra* aloud. After all, he was named Antony after that play. But all that is over, I believe... How sad!

Coming back again to Garber, yes, her book is an outstanding critical performance, and its very special achievement lies precisely in the way she teaches us to recognize how the knowledge of Shakespeare, of his dramatic and poetic language, forges and nourishes the language of Woolf the writer.

NADIA FUSINI, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa

**Amanda Bailey, *Shakespeare on Consent*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2023, 248 pp.**

*Shakespeare on Consent* is a six-chapter volume, framed by an introduction and a coda, in which Amanda Bailey displays an alternative perspective on the concept of consent. She grounds her theory in controversial legal cases concerning crimes where the abuse was perpetrated against unconscious victims or when consent was not clearly expressed or vitiated by the circumstances of an unbalanced relationship. Bailey believes that Shakespeare's work shows the crisis of consent norms, thus can be seen as "a rich, untapped archive of our current consent norms" (p. 7). The springboard of Bailey's theory is a provocative statement: consent is an illusion that projects the idea that all subjects possess equal agency. Instead, consent functions as a privilege reserved

for those empowered by race, gender, and class. Departing from such a premise, the author wishes *Shakespeare on Consent* to serve as a guide for scholars, teachers, and students to think beyond the binary of consent and coercion, proposing an alternative framework of thought.

In the introduction, titled "Equity without Justice," Bailey departs from the observation that, despite the #MeToo movement, which made people aware of the idea of consent, the very notion of consent "has been a casualty of the movement" (p. 5). Instead, the notion of consent is "intersectional" and requires deeper exploration of its multiple implications. The author focuses her critique on the university setting, as it appears to be emblematic of how equity is frequently reduced to bureaucratic procedures that on the one hand offer protection to some students, while, on the other hand, exacerbate inequities for others. At this intersection stand two Shakespearean scenes: Shylock, who was forced to declare "I am content" in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Isabella's silenced response to the Duke's marriage proposal in *Measure for Measure*. For Bailey, these moments dramatize the paradox embedded in consent given under coercion, showing the entanglement of the human body and political subjection. Both scenes, she argues, "understand consent to be grounded in the broader social and cultural valorisation of bodily sovereignty, and the supposition that control over and ownership of one's body is an inherent right" (p. 20).

In Chapter One, entitled "Rape of a Nation", Bailey discusses consent as an institutionalised abstract concept. The discussion starts by exposing the protests that broke out after the Jerry Sandusky abuse revelations at Penn State University. Bailey views this as a case where the focus shifted from the bodies of the victims to the university institution, which became the violated entity. Bailey links this case to *The Rape of Lucrece*, where the female body symbolises Rome's moral integrity. Then her analysis moves back to the United States, showing how rape becomes a cultural topos. She examines D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* film as racist propaganda where white female vulnerability is exploited as an excuse for racial terror. Bailey links this narrative to Shakespeare's Tarquin and, provocatively, to Donald Trump's rhetoric of "bad hombres" (p. 39). Bailey argues that Shakespeare's plays often use the image of the white female victim to justify acts of racialized violence, such as Prospero's treatment of Caliban in *The Tempest* and the vengeance pursued by Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. According to

Bailey, these portrayals reflect deep anxieties about race, gender, and power, which later shaped cultural narratives like *The Birth of a Nation*, where the supposed threat of a Black man violating a white woman becomes a tool to legitimize racist violence (p. 42). The chapter then comes back to a close reading of *The Rape of Lucrece* to show how the female body is exploited as a fetish both by Tarquin and Brutus for political purposes; thus, consent, initially posited as an expression of free will, turns into a means of triggering people's emotions to defeat tyranny (p. 47). Bailey discusses the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal of the 1990s, drawing also on Toni Morrison's essay (1998, 32) that famously dubbed Clinton "the first Black president" and links the politics of impeachment to America's enduring fear of racial and sexual contamination. Bailey suggests that Clinton was symbolically racialized as "the nation's first black president," cast as a "threat to the 'ancient and persistent configuration of American power and ideology'" (p. 52)

Chapter two, titled "Stamped by shame", explores how shame and racialization intersect in views of sexual consent. Using early modern concepts of purity and inheritance, Bailey connects Shakespeare's imagery to current ideas about the "blackened" sexual body. She shows that purity fiction sustains racial hierarchies and that consent is a legal fiction that relies on excluding those seen as incapable of self-ownership. The chapter spans contemporary #MeToo culture, classical Shakespearean tragedy, and feminist theories to ask: What does it mean to bear the mark of sexual shame, and can such a mark be reclaimed? Bailey brings up Monica Lewinsky's case and its connections with the #MeToo movement as the main example to discuss sexual shame in public. Bailey presents shame as "embodied alienation," (p. 62), a term coined by cultural critic Darieck Scott (2010, 13). Shame, she argues, reveals a "body-psyche nexus" (p. 62) in the injured subject. For Bailey, #MeToo reverses the logic of shame, making it a force for solidarity instead of silence. Bailey underpins her theory with Shakespeare's plays, where the language of shame appears in several plays. In *Richard III*, Richard's term "rudely stamped" becomes an example of embodied disgrace and shows how self-perception and social judgment depend on each other. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, sexual stigma functions as both a metaphor and a physical mark: "To be shamed by sexual assault is to be stained or un-whitened" (p. 66). In Shakespeare, the binary of black and white is a key paradigm:

whiteness means sexual innocence, while blackness means corruption, as appears in *Much Ado About Nothing*, where Hero is accused of infidelity and described as having “fall’n / Into a pit of ink” or being “foul-tainted” (p. 67). Bailey then discusses silence and its interrelations with shame in the cases of women who have suffered from sexual violence. Like Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, whose tongueless body signifies unspeakable violation, victims are often denied speech and agency. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Cressida is passed among the Greek generals like a prize. Bailey situates this last episode within its performance history, looking at Howard Davies’s 1985 production (p. 69) and Gregory Doran’s 2018 version (70), where Cressida, “marked as dark”, demonstrates how staging choices reveal the enduring racial and sexual hierarchies embedded in the text: “As a prisoner of war Cressida’s volition has no meaning. Like a slave, she has no right of property in her own person, and she serves as a possession to be traded among the men who racialize her” (p. 71).

Chapter Three, entitled “While you were sleeping”, discusses how consent is treated when the victim is physically incapable of expressing it. Bailey opens with the 2012 Steubenville rape case, when social media made the shocking image of an unconscious teenage girl’s body being carried by her rapists circulate. Bailey highlights how, in this case, incapacity was viewed as a proxy for consent, referring to Larissa Brian’s definition of incapacity as a “twisted surrogate for consent” (2020, 154). Through legal case studies, among which is that concerning Bill Cosby’s trial for the crime of abuse against several women, Bailey discusses the phenomenon of somnophilia (p. 89) and how women’s passive submission due to unconsciousness is idealised and aestheticized by Western culture, and how women’s silence is intended as a form of consent that justifies the exploitation of their bodies. Bailey reinterprets Shakespeare’s sleeping female characters, citing several works as examples of her perspective, including *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Cymbeline*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, making the reader aware that all these plays evoke this theme (p. 93). In particular, Bailey discusses the final scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, comparing it to Ovid’s *Pyramus and Thisbe* and to *Frayre de Joye Sor de Plaster*, which are the basis for the Sleeping Beauty tale. By linking these narratives, Bailey argues that romantic idealization and sexual coercion are structurally intertwined within the Western literary canon

since the male characters, even if declaring their love, actually rape the sleeping beloved (p. 93). She deepens this issue by interpreting *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through the lens of the crime of date-rape, which is a crime of abuse perpetrated by a person known by the victim. Indeed, the author shows how the play's enchantment depends upon incapacitation through drugs that make characters incapable of free consent and self-determination.

In Chapter Four, entitled "I May Destroy You", Bailey looks at the consequences of sexual violence both in the physical and political spheres. Departing from Michaela Coel's TV series, she moves again to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The bed is interpreted as both a symbolic and a material site where consent, agency, and memory converge. Bailey discusses the case of Emma Sulkowicz, whose performance, *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*, reclaims the bed as public testimony, transforming private shame into a collective witness. Bailey also revisits the Lorena Bobbitt case, examining how the bed serves as a symbol of memory. The analysis then turns back to Shakespeare's "beds", tracing how, on the stage, this piece of furniture is the space of domination and psychological strife. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio adopts a "timing strategy" that consists of depriving Katherine of sleep, so the bed turns into an "unsafe space" of intimidation and "physical harm" (p. 112). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bailey identifies another manipulative logic: Theseus's boast that he "wooded Hippolyta with his sword" is a reminder for Hippolyta about "the blurred line between marital and martial conquest" (p. 113).

In Chapter five, titled "Make sex great again", Bailey examines the tension between consent and desire, asking whether "great sex", as an experience culturally imagined and idealised, can coexist with expressed consent and ethical approach. Bailey takes into consideration California's 2014 "Yes Means Yes" bill, which codified the notion of "affirmative consent as 'affirmative, conscious, and voluntary agreement'" (p. 130), and she reflects upon the notion of desire and expressed consent. Drawing on contemporary popular culture, feminist theory, and early modern drama, Bailey examines how the fantasy of spontaneous, uncontrollable passion continues to undermine the principles of affirmative consent that modern feminism promotes. The chapter opens with the comic absurdity of a *Curb Your Enthusi-*

*asm* episode in which Larry David's attempt to practice "affirmative consent", which turns to parody. Then Bailey turns to *Romeo and Juliet* and suggests that Shakespeare's tragedy, which is celebrated as the pinnacle of romantic love and passion, is a play where such feelings are intertwined with violence, lack of consent, coercion, and rape. The lovers' "star-crossed" passion embodies the myth of irresistible desire as a force that absolves moral responsibility (p. 135).

Chapter Six, entitled "Why We Love (to Hate) Weinstein," extends this investigation into institutions of power, commenting on the Harvey Weinstein case in the context of the history of patronage that links the Renaissance stage to contemporary media and film industries. Bailey demonstrates the continuity between early modern patronage and the contemporary film production system, using Weinstein's *Shakespeare in Love* as an example. Bailey coined the term "Shaxwood" to describe the intersections between Shakespeare and the Hollywood system since "the film lays bare the foundational conditions of a patronage system sustained by power asymmetries and reliant on the cultural work of romance to buttress and obscure inequities" (p. 157). In the section "The Brand is Shakespeare", Bailey examines how Weinstein exploited Shakespearean prestige as means of concealing his abuses through the aura of high art (p. 168).

The Coda, titled "Refusal is the first right," concludes *Shakespeare on Consent* with a meditation about Johnny Depp and Amber Heard's defamation trial. The author analyses how credibility and madness are intertwined, wondering if Heard's mental instability, which was certified during the trial by a forensic psychologist, was but a strategy of "rejection" of the condition created in her marriage (p. 179). Turning to Hamlet and Ophelia, Bailey rereads both as allegories of refusal, as "non-performance," (p. 180). In the subsection "Consent Not To Be", Bailey calls for a shift from contractual to relational ethics, grounded in care and interdependence rather than autonomy. Institutions, she insists, must move "away from correction and toward repair" (p. 186). In the final pages, Bailey delivers a reflective conclusion that situates readers within what she calls "diseased time" (p. 184), characterized by overlapping crises: the pandemic, systemic racism, political unrest, violence, and injustice. She proposes a shift toward a "poetics of relation," which, according to Anjali Prabhu (2005, 76), is inspired by the idea that "the entire totality within which specific concepts and interactions

become coherent" (p. 185). Bailey's hope is that through a communicative and care-based approach, it will be possible to apply a politics that aims to repair rather than correct. Indeed, Bailey calls readers and institutions to action and to rethink Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Consent Culture not as discrete, bureaucratic initiatives, but as collective, transformative practices, even though the same author asks whether her vision is utopian, "crazy," and "mad" (p. 186).

In conclusion, Bailey's book is dense with intriguing intuitions and compelling theories, which are supported by detailed descriptions of striking legal cases of abuse that have occurred between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, thereby enflaming the public debate. Her aim of overturning the perspective on consent to propose a "care-based" approach is fascinating. As the threshold between consent and coercion is blurred, she asks for a change of approach in treating these cases of abuse, since it is precisely in this grey area that legal cases are discussed and the law appears to lack a remedy to achieve equitable justice. To strengthen her theory, the author, in each chapter of the book, takes a controversial legal case concerning crimes as her starting point and then, on this basis, reinterprets Shakespeare's plays and characters. However, this reviewer wonders whether the title of the book, *Shakespeare on Consent*, may lead readers to expect a more focused exploration of how the complexities of consent are represented in Shakespeare's theatre. The detailed examination of contemporary legal cases may overshadow literary analysis, and the constant shifting between real-world examples and close readings of Shakespeare's plays may produce historical or contextual displacements.

SIMONA LAGHI, Sapienza University of Rome

## References

- Brian, Larissa. 2020. "After Steubenville: Incapacitated Bodies, Rape, and a Theory of Sexual Subjectivity Beyond Consent." *Feminist Media Studies* 20 (2): 153-167.
- Hutson, Lorna. 2016. "The Shakespearean Unscene: Sexual Phantasies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Journal of the British Academy* 4: 169-195.

- Morrison, Toni. 1998. "Talk of the Town." *New Yorker*, October 5: 32.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 2012. *Citadels of Pride: Sexual Assault, Accountability, and Reconciliation*. New York: Norton.
- Prabhu, Anjali. 2005. "Interrogating Hybridity Subaltern Agency and Totality in Post-Colonial Theory." *Diacritics* 35 (2): 76-92.
- Scott, Darieck. 2010. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*. New York: New York University Press.

**Minier, Márta, Montironi, Maria Elisa and Cristina Paravano (eds), *Local/Global Shakespeare and Advertising*, New York, Routledge, 2024, 267 pp.**

"It pays to advertise", the old saying goes. But what does this catchy phrase mean when applied to Shakespeare? Does it suggest that "Shakespeare" (forgive the shorthand of the inverted commas to mean his oeuvre as well as his mythical persona) has been so successfully advertised in his own country over time to be transformed into the 'national poet'? Or rather that "Shakespeare"'s renown, or celebrity status, has been growingly used in non-British cultures as an effective advertising tool? Since the late 1980s, critics in the field of cultural materialism – from Graham Holderness (1988) and Michael Dobson (1992) to Barbara Hodgdon (1998), but especially Douglas Lanier (2002, 2014), and more recently Dominic Shellard and Siobhan Keenan (2016) and others – have investigated on Shakespeare as both a British and a global icon, pointing out how its immensely grown cultural capital has turned all things Shakespearean into status symbol and desirable commodity. This timely volume focuses on a specific aspect of commodification: advertising. Stemming from the innovative work of a research group based at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo' – the Shakespeare Advertising and Propaganda Network – the book solidly builds on the relevant but still comparatively small critical literature on the matter – which is usually limited to English speaking countries – to bring the debate on Shakespeare and advertising to a new level of awareness and sophistication.

Considering the evidence of the extensive and transnational use of Shakespeare's name and quotes in advertising, the three editors,

Márta Minier, Maria Elisa Montironi and Cristina Paravano, start their argumentation by highlighting that “Shakespeare is a byword for both language and emotion” (p. 1), a combination that sells. As the market well knows, advertising talks us into believing that we need a certain product because it will gift us with a positive emotional reward. And what can be more emotionally persuasive and compelling than Shakespearean language? The very word advertising, as the editors remind us, derives from the Latin “*ad-vertere*” – “to turn toward” – implying the ability “to direct people’s attention to something or someone” (p. 2). Shakespeare’s language draws people’s attention, and when used in advertising it nudges it toward what is convenient or desirable they turn to. Since the Eighteenth century “Shakespeare” has become synonymous not only with sophisticated language, but also with symbolic capital: from David Garrick to date, his silhouette and words have been used not only to sell books and performances, which would be fair enough, but also gadgets, beverages, cars, clothes, jewels, and what you want, including political ideals. Approaching Shakespeare not as a static, cultural monument but as a living agent in contemporary consumer culture, the editors pose a number of thought-provoking questions: what has the practice of advertising to do with a playwright who lived in England over four centuries ago, when capitalism was still in its infancy? When did “Shakespeare” become a successful “advertising formula,” and why? How has the attractive power of his brand evolved over time? What, precisely, constitutes the somewhat blurry concept of “Shakespeare brand”? Which industries have been most eager to rely on it to attract customers? But, above all, is it possible to map the phenomenon, thus adding a spatial dimension to it?

Tracing the paths of Shakespeare’s marketability on the geo-historical map is perhaps the most innovative aspect of the volume, in thorough coherence with the inclusion of the local/global categories within its title. Perfectly aware that a productive transnational reception has transformed “Shakespeare” from *the* English national poet into a global icon for all seasons, the editors insist on the need to leave behind the understanding of globalization as a process of “Westernization”, in order to fully embrace the cultural complexity of today’s spatiality and consider instead “the large spectrum between the micro-‘local’ or hyperlocal and the sweepingly ‘global’” (p.

3). Thus, Minier, Montironi and Paravano felicitously complicate the concept of “glocalization” introduced by Victor Roudometof (2016) combining it with Pierre Bordieu’s idea of cultural field in order to contend that as far as the word “global” is concerned “regional dimensions may hold relevance” and when “local” is evoked “there is more to this issue than the centre-periphery or the urban-rural debates”. To further stress the problematization of the phenomenon of glocalization, they acutely make us aware that:

the majority of the word “g/local” is “local”. From “global” only the “g” is borrowed, so when used for our purposes, “glocal” stresses the fact that Shakespeare’s texts and image/biography are “used” to apply to, speak to a variety of contexts. It helps us avoid the uncomfortable connotation of the spread of monoculturalism and international capitalism carried by the “globalization” (p. 4)

Importantly, the book also advocates the inclusion of “Shakespearian ads” within the current academic interest in “transitory text types, genres and microgenres” (p. 10): fragments of “Shakespeare” are taken by the advertising practice either from his works or his biographical myth, and creatively put in new cultural contexts and media environment, to which they adapt, thus producing still more meaning. As transient texts, “Shakespearean ads” are therefore surprising intermedial objects.

Within this theoretically rich framework, the volume displays three interconnected sections, each addressing a different dimension of the research: “Historical Perspectives”, “Culture Specific Perspectives” and “Vistas From Industries”.

The first part reconstructs the genealogy of the Shakespeare brand from the early modern period to present. Roberta Mullini’s opening essay revisits the advertising environment of early modern England when forms of “promotion” were already practiced through theatrical bills, pamphlets, and public spectacle. Her analysis of persuasion within Shakespeare’s language puts together the rhetorics of a character like Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale*, with that of the editors of the First Folio, Heming and Condell, brilliantly demonstrating the active and passive meaning of “advertising” Shakespeare in his own time. Anna Anselmo and Marco Canani continue this historical trajectory by revisiting Garrick’s 1769 Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon, convincingly framing the

event as the moment when the Bard became a marketable icon. Jan Marten Ivo Klaver's essay on Cassell's *Illustrated Shakespeare* (1864) extends this line into the Victorian age, examining how print culture and publishing industries contributed in transforming his work into both a pedagogical and commercial commodity, an intangible and durable counterpart to the tangible monument that was to be erected for his three hundredth anniversary. Fabio Ciambella concludes the section by tracing the fate of "To be or not to be" across international advertising, demonstrating how Shakespeare's "adspeak" (p. 71) functions as a globalised idiom of persuasion.

"Culture-Specific Perspectives," the second part, shifts from time to space, exploring how the Shakespeare brand has been specifically appropriated and repurposed across national cultures and different ideologies. The critical discourse here acquires what the editors, captivantly, call "an academic accent" (p. 5). Roberta Zanoni analyses Italian campaigns (from Alfa Romeo to Levi's), highlighting how Shakespeare is translated into a language of style and irony that proves "the presence of a culture-specific interpretation existing along the universally shared connotations usually attached to Shakespearean references in advertising" (p. 104). Christa Jansohn's study on Weimar situates Shakespeare within the German classical canon and its transformation into a locus of heritage tourism. Tomasz Kowalski focuses on post-1989 Poland, where market liberalisation fostered playful and subversive uses of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Selusi Ambrogio turns to China, reading Shakespeare as a tool of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Finally, Niyanta Sangal explores the use of Shakespeare in social and environmental activism, where his authority is mobilised not to sell but to critique.

Finally, "Vistas from Industries," that hosts the contributions of the three editors, expands the discussion to Shakespeare's presence within the creative industries – from broadcasting and automotive marketing to fashion, music, and theatre promotion. Paolo Caponi investigates Shakespeare's afterlife on Italian radio, situating broadcast adaptations within the dialectic of local and global culture. Maria Elisa Montironi analyses how Shakespeare is used in car advertising to negotiate gender roles and patriarchal constructs, functioning simultaneously as a marker of timeless cultural authority and as a fluid, market-driven sign open to reinvention, "a potential for imagining a

challenge to patriarchy which is, nevertheless, never fully realized" (p. 206). Cristina Paravano's contribution focuses on fashion advertising, a field of enquiry she convincingly shows to be worthy of further exploration, where Shakespearean quotations and iconography lend cultural prestige and emotional depth to luxury branding, enabling us to see "many new and unexpected faces of Shakespeare in the twenty-first century" (p. 224). Stephen M. Buhler turns to music, tracing how artists from Duke Ellington to Rufus Wainwright have invoked Shakespeare as a strategy of self-legitimacy. Finally, Márta Minier analyses the role of Shakespeare in promoting theatre-going, choosing to present the case of theatre marketing for *Romeo and Julie*, a Welsh rewriting of the play performed at the National Theatre and at the Sherman Theatre; Minier argues that advertising materials, and in particular printed programmes for the performance, act as paratexts that extend performance through memory, creatively capitalizing, in this case, on Welshness and social class. Across these five essays, the section articulates a nuanced panorama of how the Shakespeare brand operates within contemporary creative economies, where the boundaries between art, commerce, and identity are continuously renegotiated.

*Local/Global Shakespeare and Advertising* contributes to the growing body of scholarship investigating Shakespeare as a "rhizomatic system" (p. 6), following in the wake of critics like Douglas Lanier (2014, 29), who is also the most referenced in the book. By focusing on advertising as both a commercial and identity building practice, the editors and contributors present a number of original case studies with a wide diachronic scope and a refreshing geo-cultural diversity. Together, they reveal the intermedial quality and the resilience of Shakespeare's afterlife, inviting future research to further map the intersections between academic criticism, creativity and industrial practice. Adapting and appropriating "Shakespeare" in the advertising industry is yet another social activity that keeps his word alive: it validates its endless creative power by relying on cultural memory and on the pleasure of "repetition without replication", as Hutcheon notoriously put it (2013, 7).

And yet a question stands there, hovering over the book and disquieting the brave contributors: is this a thoroughly riskless activity? The authors are very cautious and, though demonstrating once

more that the passing of time and the change of space cannot deplete Shakespeare's "infinite variety", their case studies also leave us pensive about the effects of extracting precious linguistic fragments from their context employing their power to blaze and arrest the attention to serve a precise economic purpose. Perhaps, Shakespeare's language when experimented with in the context for which it was born, theatre – which, let us not forget, also was a commercial enterprise – does not stop human attention for a few seconds to re-direct it towards objects to be possessed to promote one's own identity. It makes it stay with it and explore the deep. In the naked essentiality of one's own embodied self.

MADDALENA PENNACCHIA, Roma Tre University

## References

- Dobson, Michael. 1992. *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hodgdon, Barbara. 1998. *The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Holderness, Graham. 1988. *The Shakespeare Myth*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hutcheon, L. with O'Flynn, S. [2006] 2013, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Lanier, Douglas. 2002. *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014. "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value." In *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, edited by Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, 21-40. New York: Palgrave.
- Roudometof, Victor. 2016. *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Shellard, Dominic, and Siobhan Keenan, eds. 2016. *Shakespeare's Cultural Capital: His Economic Impact from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Joel B. Altman, *Shakespeare the Bodger. Ingenuity, Imitation and the Arts of "The Winter's Tale"*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2023, pp. 232.**

Since its first documented performance at the Globe Theatre on Wednesday, 15 May 1611, *The Winter's Tale*, seemingly "grounded on impossibilities" (Dryden 1672, 163) or, in Ben Jonson's words, "drolleries" (Jonson 1641, "Induction"), has captivated audiences, actors, readers, and academics, not least because it resists any attempt at categorization. Reflections among English dramatists regarding the possibility to create a mixed genre, one that could successfully merge tragedy and comedy, were stimulated by the renewed interest of sixteenth-century Italian humanists in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Halliwell 1987, 1; Shakespeare 2010, 15).

That this play demands the audience's, and obliquely the readers', active participation in its wondrous stage machinery becomes strikingly clear in the final act, when the midwife-priestess Paulina, before revealing the statue of the presumably deceased Queen Hermione, requires the bystanders to "awake" their faith: "It is required / You do awake your faith. Then all stand still" (V.iii.94-95). King Leontes himself, at the very end of the performance, invites the audience members as well as the other characters (on and offstage) to engage with the play's uncertainties:

LEONTES  
 [...] Good Paulina,  
 Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely  
 Each one demand and answer to his part  
 Performed in this wide gap of time since first  
 We were dissevered.  
 (*The Winter's Tale*, V.iii.151-55)

Emma Smith has observed how epilogues in a number of Shakespeare's plays "direct audiences to make up their own minds" and how the dramas' "gappiness and their ambiguities produce creative readings" (Smith 2019, 322).

It can certainly be argued that Joel B. Altman's brilliant monograph, reviewed here, effectively contributes to filling this epistemological "gap" by providing insightful views on what is still regarded

as “a sprawling, unwieldy, improbable and tonally discordant play” (Ko 2025, 48).

The subject of *Shakespeare the Bodger. Ingenuity, Imitation and the Arts of “The Winter’s Tale”*, as its intriguing title suggests, is the playwright’s “ingenuity, particularly as it is exercised in the composition of his late play *The Winter’s Tale*” (p. 5). However, it emerges early on that the volume aims at a broader purpose: it sheds fresh light on Shakespeare’s playmaking whilst also illuminating practices of imitation, translation, and “bodging”, or “botching” (pp. 5-6), in the early modern English Renaissance. The two latter terms, related to the clothing trade, “signified taking up and stitching together disparate patches of second-hand text to form a fabric of one’s own” (p. 6). In this sense, Shakespeare himself is a “bodger”, or tailor, a craftsman of dramatic art ingeniously basting the materials of others.

Among the most compelling features of this book is the fact that Altman brings the sixteenth-century Italian architect and painter Giulio Romano, Raphael’s favourite pupil, back into the centre of the discussion on *The Winter’s Tale*. The author investigates in a thorough and fascinating way how Giulio Romano’s work is “patched through verbal allusion” (p. 7) into Shakespeare’s text since Act I, that is well before a Gentleman announces that a statue of the late Queen Hermione “is in the keeping of Paulina, a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master Giulio Romano” (V.ii.93-5). In fact, the anachronistic mention of the Italian artist, better known as a painter, architect, and designer, rather than a sculptor, has long been regarded as evidence of Shakespeare’s ignorance. In the words of Stephen Orgel, the Elizabethan dramatist “knew so little about him that he made him a sculptor” (Orgel 2011, 239). Besides, Simon Forman’s failure to record the reappearance of Hermione in his *Booke of Plaies and Notes therof per forman for Common Pollicie* (1611), which documents his observations on some performances he attended at the Globe Theatre between April and May of that year, has sparked scholarly debate regarding the possibility that the scene is a later authorial addition, presumably devised on the occasion of the Palatine Wedding (Ioppolo 2013, 152).

The book is structured as follows: the Prologue, which offers a detailed overview of the topics that will be explored throughout, is followed by five main chapters. The discussion is completed by an

Epilogue. The twenty-two figures that accompany the volume (from Classical and Renaissance sculpture, but also engraving and painting) enable the reader to fully appreciate the way Shakespeare employs the rhetorical device of ekphrasis (*descriptio*, in Latin) in order to “place before the eyes” various works of visual art.

To discuss Shakespeare’s practices of imitation and bodging by resorting to the document containing the earliest known allusion to the Stratfordian dramatist is particularly apposite. Chapter 1 begins by considering the pamphlet *Groats-worth of witte, bought with a million of Repentance* (1592), allegedly written by Robert Greene on his deathbed, but later attributed to the printer Henry Chettle and to the dramatist Thomas Nashe. Here, the author addresses three fellow poets, notably a “famous gracer of Tragedians”, a “byting Satyryst”, and a writer “driven [...] to extreme shifts” (possibly Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele), warning them against “an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, [...] in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country” (*Greene’s Groatsworth*). As Altman highlights, pseudo-Greene’s criticism, just like Thomas Nashe’s attack on “grammarians-turned-poets” (p. 4), tackles matters of plagiarism and artistic usurpation, while also reflecting coeval material changes, specifically the rise of popular and commercial theatre in contrast to the elitist production of university-trained dramatists. The chapter also explores Shakespeare’s multifaceted relationship with Robert Greene’s works, namely *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588), *Mamillia* (1583-1593), *Groats-Worth of Wit* (1592), and *The Second Part of Conny-Catching* (1592).

By dismantling the traditional view of ekphrasis as a mere verbal description of visual art, Chapter 2 reveals instead how this rhetorical device “can be an important instrument for the representation of subjectivity” (p. 7). After retracing its literary-critical tradition in Greek and Roman oratory through a wide array of sources, Altman shows how ekphrasis – described by Erasmus in *De copia verborum ac rerum* as something that “draws the hearer or reader outside himself as in the theater” (p. 53) – has a considerable role even when the hearer is already a spectator.

Building upon the distinction between the two dramaturgical entities of *dramatis persona* and *character* (Altman 2010), the author discusses how “[a character’s] subjectivity is often expressed in concrete language that assumes a distinctive *colore*” (p. 7). Such vivid, detailed,

coloured theatrical speech produces “ekphrases” (p. 7). Central to this chapter is the psychology of phantasia, which the author explores through classical and early modern texts in order to understand how the dramatist’s imagination transformed different elements into a unified theatrical experience.

That Shakespeare was aware of the power of ekphrastic description to reveal the subjectivity of his characters is eloquently demonstrated by numerous examples drawn from his plays, namely *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *King Lear*. Such instances lay bare the Aristotelian tenet that “images in the mind are there because experience put them there” (p. 47) and therefore create a powerful “subjectivity effect” (p. 57) even when the subject is describing something else.

This chapter also offers incisive insights into a more revealing means of depicting the subject of ekphrasis, that is, when a speaker “glosses” an object which the public also sees. This recalls a passage from Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* (8.3.64-65), where the rhetorician considers the imaginative potential of details left unspoken by the orator. Such a dynamic, Altman argues, is exemplified in the figure of King Leontes. Thus, the concluding sections of Chapter 2 narrow the field of investigation down to *The Winter’s Tale* by focusing on two of the drama’s most debated moments: Leontes’s unaccountable jealousy in Act I, Scene ii, which precipitates the play’s tragic consequences, and the striking reference to Giulio Romano.

The originality of Altman’s contribution to the ongoing debate lies in the fact that the author highlights how, among other reasons, Shakespeare invokes Giulio Romano’s reputation for producing life-like, mimetic art in Act V (“had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom”, V.ii.95-97) in order to counterpoint Leontes’s imaginary works of art. These shall be understood as the ekphrastic constructions produced by the Sicilian king while observing what the text presents as the decorous behaviour of his wife Hermione and his friend Polixenes in Act I, Scene ii. As Altman puts it, “[t]he two figures [Leontes and Giulio Romano] are linked by the remarkably lifelike representations each can create, which deceive the eye and confound the mind” (p. 63). Significantly, by adding his own “glosses” to what he sees – such as the imagined “paddling palms and pinching fingers” (I.ii.115) – the King of Sicily fabricates images that exist solely in his imagination.

These function as “subjective ekphrases”, which, as Altman notes, “persuade no one but the speaker” (p. 63).

In Chapter 3, the author seeks to respond to two questions which scholars have pondered for centuries: “what did Shakespeare know about Giulio Romano and what did he expect his audience to know?” (p. 82). That Giulio di Piero Pippi de’ Giannuzzi, better known as ‘Romano’, was renowned in early modern England as one in a network of artists and writers such as Parmigianino, Baldassarre Castiglione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Pietro Aretino, has long been established (Gombrich 1986; Magri 2004; Sokol 1994). As Altman rightly reminds us, Shakespeare might also have been familiar with the anonymous epitaph in Latin allegedly written on the occasion of Giulio’s death and quoted by Giorgio Vasari in the first edition of *Le Vite de’ piú eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue, insino a’ tempi nostri* (1550). Here the Italian architect and painter is praised as a sculptor whose works create the illusion of life to such an extent as to cause Jupiter’s anger:

Jupiter saw *sculpted and painted* bodies breathe, and the dwellings of mortals made equal to those in heaven, through the skill of Giulio Romano. Angered, [...] he called a council of all the gods, and swept him from the earth. (Vasari 1991, 2: 837, trans. Altman, p. 63; emphasis added)

As we know from the words of the Third Gentleman in *The Winter’s Tale*, Giulio Romano has indeed “put breath into his work” and “would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape” (V.ii.96-97). Even though Vasari did not quote the same encomium in the second edition of *Le Vite* (1568), it is nonetheless true that Shakespeare might have read it and inferred that Giulio was also a sculptor whose statues “deceptively resembled life” (Gombrich 1986, 160; see also Magri 2004, 58). Through the close reading of excerpts from the 1550 and 1568 editions of *Le Vite*, Altman eloquently proves that the playwright might well have consulted both versions of Vasari’s masterpiece to elaborate his portrait of Giulio Romano, a practice which lies “at the heart of the art of bodging” (p. 84).

As Altman himself makes clear, however, the above considerations do not satisfactorily illuminate the reasons why Shakespeare would choose precisely Giulio Romano, when other artists (Raphael and Titian, among others) were praised for their ability to create mi-

metic works of art. The author once again offers a compelling (and, to my knowledge, yet unexplored) hypothesis by arguing that the “rare Italian master” (V.ii.94-95) actually “makes a silent entrance” (p. 8) quite early in the play, that is in Act I, Scene ii when Leontes comments upon the courtly exchanges between Hermione and Polixenes. In the author’s view, the king’s ekphrastic description of the scene is informed by Giulio Romano’s erotic drawings which were engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi and published, accompanied by Aretino’s *Sonetti lussuriosi*, in a volume entitled *I Modi (Postures, in English)*. The scandalous publication, issued in the 1520s, circulated among Shakespeare’s contemporaries (p. 8).

Even more significantly, another work of art makes its ekphrastic appearance in the play – prior to the unveiling of Hermione’s statue – and is once again connected with Giulio Romano. This is *The Transfiguration of Christ*, the last commission of Raphael of Urbino, brought to completion by Giulio Romano and Giovan Francesco Penni, and of which several early copies are now visible in different venues: the Sistine Chapel, the Prado, and the Dulwich College Chapel, outside London. The painting resonates most clearly in Act V, Scene ii, during the courtiers’ awed description of the off-stage reunion between the two royal families at the court of Sicily, a scene described in iconographic terms as a *painting*, a *dumb show*, and a *staged play* (p. 102) and suffused with a language of religious miracle (“a world ransomed, or one destroyed”, V.ii.15). Here Shakespeare appropriates the painting’s thematic richness and gestures to “bodge up” a scene that would otherwise remain invisible to the audience (p. 8). By meticulously tracing the provenance of the copy of the painting now hanging in the chapel of Dulwich College, attributed to Giulio Romano, Altman documents that it appears to have been in possession of English collectors as far back as the early seventeenth century, possibly even belonging to King Charles I.

Having established Shakespeare’s ingenuity at bodging two art forms, engraving (*I modi*) and painting (*The Transfiguration of Christ*), into the text of *The Winter’s Tale*, in Chapter 4 the author moves on to consider how the playwright incorporates another visual medium, that is sculpture, into his drama. Striking evidence is offered supporting the fact that Giulio Romano was indeed a designer of sculpture (p. 131). A particularly noteworthy feature

of this chapter lies in Altman's ability to guide the reader towards a visualization of Hermione's statue, despite the absence of a concrete visual description in the play itself. As is discussed, Shakespeare does provide indirect cues regarding the statue's appearance. More particularly, Altman demonstrates how allusions to the four marble women of the Strozzi funeral monument in Mantua, designed for Pietro Strozzi, inform the play's most enigmatic moment. Although the identity of the work's designer and sculptor remains uncertain, well-documented connections with Giulio Romano exist (pp. 136-37). Drawing on modern art historical research, Altman elucidates in meticulous detail the artist's known "interest in painted and carved figural sculpture" (p. 140). To cite just one instance, the reader's attention is drawn to the oil on canvas picturing Ceres/Abundance (*Dovizia*), now at the Louvre and attributed to both Giulio Romano and Raphael (c. 1515). The goddess's posture, as Altman foregrounds, is strikingly reminiscent of the sibyls painted by Giulio Romano in the fresco *The Baptism of Constantine* (Sala di Costantino, the Vatican) and of the Hellenistic figure carved on the Strozzi monument (p. 139). This visual correspondence is particularly noteworthy since it reinforces the well-established symbolic significance of Ceres to the thematic structure of *The Winter's Tale* (Romero Allué 2016; Zamparo 2022).

Further testifying to the playwright's ability to adapt Italian materials, including Vasari's *Le Vite*, Chapter 5 illustrates how the dramatist draws extensively upon Italian dramatic writings and theory, notably Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio's *Ecatommiti*, *Epizia* and *Discorso intorno al comporre delle commedie e delle tragedie*, as well as Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido* and *Compendio della poesia tragicomica*. Through detailed and nuanced analyses of the so-called "problem plays" (*Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*), the author ultimately contends that *The Winter's Tale* emerges as Shakespeare's innovative version of Giraldi Cinzio's *tragedia di fin lieto*. Most interestingly, in the light of the latter's assertion that one of the defining characteristics of this kind of drama is that the "spectator should be held in suspense but not always in the dark" (p. 187), the Epilogue lays emphasis upon Paulina's paramount role. As Altman posits, the Sicilian lady is a "behind-the-scenes dramatist", who offers the public "the unique pleasure of participating in a *tragedia di fin lieto*"

(p. 198). In other words, through Paulina's agency, "the audience is getting a behind-the-scenes look at what they have been enjoying all along: theatrical craft" (p. 206).

This volume stands out as an exceptional, and at times demanding, contribution, owing to the author's erudition, which skilfully combines the tools of literary criticism and art history with a scrupulous attention to primary sources, both Classical and from the early modern period. It is therefore an invaluable homage to Shakespeare's artistry and to one of his most experimental plays.

MARTINA ZAMPARO, University of Udine

## References

- Altman, Joel B. 2010. *The Improbability of "Othello": Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Dryden, John. 1672. "Defence of the Epilogue. Or, An Essay on the Dramatique Poetry of the Last Age." In *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards. In Two Parts*. London: Printed by T. N. for Henry Herringman.
- Gombrich, Ernst H. 1986. *New Light on Old Masters*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Halliwell, Stephen, ed. 1987. *The "Poetics" of Aristotle*. Duckworth: London.
- Ioppolo, Grace. 2013. "Shakespeare: From Author to Audience to Print, 1608-1613." In *Late Shakespeare, 1608-1613*, edited by Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane, 139-157. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jonson, Ben. 1641. *Bartholomew Fayre*. In *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*. Vol. 2. London: Printed for Richard Meighen.
- Ko, Yu Jin. 2025. "The Performance History: *The Winter's Tale* in Performance from the Ends of Opposed Winds." In *The Winter's Tale: A Critical Reader*, edited by Peter Kirwan and Todd Andrew Borlik, 47-76. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Magri, Noemi. 2004. "Italian Renaissance Art in Shakespeare: Giulio Romano and *The Winter's Tale*." In *Great Oxford: Essays on the Life*

- and Work of Edward De Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford 1550-1604*, edited by Richard Malim, 50-65. Tunbridge Wells: Parapress.
- Orgel, Stephen. 2011. *Spectacular Performances: Essays on Theatre, Imagery, Books, and Selves in Early Modern England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Romero Allué, Milena. 2016. "What you do still betters what is done. Arte, mito e natura in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Immagini della mente. Scrittura e percezione visiva nella letteratura inglese del Rinascimento*, 46-95. Venezia: Università Ca' Foscari.
- Shakespeare, William. 2010. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by John Pitcher. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen.
- Smith, Emma. 2019. *This is Shakespeare. How to Read the World's Greatest Playwright*. London: Pelican.
- Sokol, B. J. 1994. *Art and Illusion in The Winter's Tale*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Vasari, Giorgio. 1991. *Le Vite de' piú eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue, insino a' tempi nostri (1550)*. Edited by Luciano Bellosi and Aldo Rossi. 2 vols. Torino: Einaudi.
- Zamparo, Martina. 2022. *Alchemy, Paracelsianism, and Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale"*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.