

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘What was it Shakespeare said?’: Peter Holland and Adrian Poole, eds, *Great Shakespeareans*, set III, vols X–XIII (London: Continuum, 2012). ISBN 978 1 4411 6011 9.

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The editors of *Great Shakespeareans* have described this major series as an ‘explor[ation of] those figures who have had the greatest influence on the interpretation, understanding and reception of [William] Shakespeare’ (vol. 10, p. vi). Peter Holland and Adrian Poole acknowledge that this task is without conclusion, and, implicitly, immensely challenging: ‘[c]harting the effect of Shakespeare on cultures local, national and international is a never-ending task, as we continually modulate and understand differently the ways in which each culture is formed’ (vol. 10, p. vi).

An indication of the extent of Holland and Poole’s undertaking may be grasped by comparing the following quotations:

O mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert — but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!¹

¹ Thomas De Quincey, ‘On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*’, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th edn, ed. by M. H. Abrams and others, 2 vols (London: Norton, 2000), II, p. 546.

I remember the astonishment I felt when I first read Shakespeare: [...] not only did I feel no delight, but I felt an irresistible repulsion and tedium, and doubted as to whether I was senseless in feeling works regarded as the summit of perfection by the whole of the civilized world to be trivial and positively bad, or whether the significance which this civilized world attributes to the works of Shakespeare was itself senseless.²

Placed contiguously, the observations of Thomas De Quincey and Leo Tolstoy present a stark divergence. For the former, Shakespeare is a dazzling cornucopia of the ‘phenomena of nature’ and all that is experienced by humanity. In his celebration of the ‘Mighty Poet’ De Quincey coincides with noted readers such as John Keats, who ascribed to Shakespeare ‘negative capability’ (‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’),³ and Jorge Luis Borges, whose short story ‘Shakespeare’s Memory’ delineates a Shakespearean mind capable of ‘states of happiness and darkness that transcend common human experience’.⁴ For Tolstoy, however, Shakespeare represents tedium, and his cultural exaltation nothing more than a poor reflection on the ‘civilized’ world’s discernment.

Such contrasting views consider the playwright and poet within roughly similar parameters. Analysing what Shakespeare had to say and how he said it, De Quincey and Tolstoy reach different conclusions as to the aesthetic success of the Shakespearean canon. Another more recent comment proffers its own insight into the complexities of engaging with Shakespeare. In a recent episode of the popular Channel 4 comedy programme *Peep Show*, the bard becomes a somewhat surprising topic of conversation:

JEZ: Who knows how these things happen? There are powers at work beyond our understanding.

MARK: No there aren’t.

JEZ: What was it Shakespeare said?

MARK: He said a lot of things, Jeremy.

² Leo Tolstoy, *A Critical Essay on Shakespeare*, trans. by V. Tchertkoff and I. F. M. (New York and London: Funk Wagnalls and Company 1906), pp. 4-5.

³ John Keats, *Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats* (Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin and Company 1899), p. 277.

⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Shakespeare’s Memory’, in *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare’s Memory*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 128.

JEZ: He basically said something about how there are more... things there than there are actual... things you can see with your eyes.
[Pause] That's not the exact quote...⁵

The line to which Jez alludes is Hamlet's assertion, and, in Jez's understanding, Shakespeare's by proxy, that there are more things in heaven and earth 'than are dreamt of in our philosophy'.

However, that line isn't exactly Shakespeare's. Nor is it Hamlet's. Or at least, it isn't incontrovertibly. Shakespeare, as has been remarked, said quite a lot of things. Jez's comments are almost certainly a hazy recollection of the lines 'There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio' as featured in the Bard's posthumously-published folio edition of 1623. However, the early quarto editions of *Hamlet* reveal that 'our philosophy' is not as communal as the folio might suggest. In the earlier publication, we find a Hamlet critical of his ensign, speaking not of 'our' philosophy but rather 'your [Horatio's]' philosophy. So to which Hamlet, and by implication which Shakespeare is Jez alluding? The inclusive one of the folio? Or the accusatory one of the quarto? Or perhaps there exists yet another Shakespeare — a half-remembered one, read or heard fleetingly, repeated in the hope that one might (as quoting Shakespeare tends, unfortunately, to do) give the appearance of profundity?

The indeterminacy in Jez's statement regarding 'what Shakespeare said' is important because it shows that readers of Shakespeare have encountered, and continue to encounter, a constantly shifting textual terrain where even slight changes of typography — the omission of a single letter in this instance — can impact upon interpretation. And changes in typography in early seventeenth-century printed literature have a slippery though substantive significance. Shakespeare's writing career was embedded in a literary culture where the authorial narrative of composition to publication to readership was not quite so clear-cut. Shakespeare's primary impulse was towards theatrical production, a medium in which constant collaboration, alteration and interpretation is commonplace. Tiffany Stern rightly points to the inherently problematic nature of faithful translation from 'stage to page' with regard to Shakespeare's writing, observing that '[i]t is a truism to say that the play printed on the page is not the same as a play in performance'.⁶ The printing press was almost certainly a secondary consideration for a majority of the Shakespeare's output. Thus, in reading Shakespeare's plays in particular we are engaging with a writer in a literary genre entirely discrete from its primary incarnation. As Jonathan Hope reminds us in a recent essay on Shakespeare's near-

⁵ 'Jeremy in Love', *Peep Show*, series six, episode three, dir. by Becky Martin. 2009. [On DVD].

⁶ Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

contemporary and occasional (I use the word advisedly) collaborator Thomas Middleton: '[w]hile [Ben] Jonson certainly prepared his plays for the press, and Shakespeare may have thought about publication, this was not a primary mode of disseminating their work'.⁷ Stephen Orgel's famous observation that '[w]e know nothing about Shakespeare's original text'⁸ may be an exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis, but it nonetheless reminds us of the multiplicity of Shakespeares we as a twenty-first century audience and readership encounter. As well as the quarto Shakespeare and the folio Shakespeare, a shelf of the playwright's published work includes more modern incarnations such as the Norton Shakespeare, the Arden Shakespeare, the New Cambridge Shakespeare, the Oxford Shakespeare and the Signet Shakespeare, each replete with their own editorial apparatus, editorial mediations and thematic focal points. And this in print alone.

The awareness of Shakespeare's multiplicities is the most admirable feature of volumes ten to thirteen of the on-going series *Great Shakespeareans*, a wide-ranging survey of different readers, interpreters, critics, scholars and re-producers of the early modern English poet and playwright over the course of two centuries. Volume ten concerns itself with two of the most influential figures in Shakespearean criticism: Marx and Freud. Crystal Bartolovich and Jean E. Howard, in an indication of the many ways we can approach 'what Shakespeare said', tackle Marx's reading of Shakespeare and also Marxist-influenced interpretations of Shakespeare. Bartolovich is tasked with analysing the German economist's 'citation practices' with regard to the usage of Shakespeare in his work (vol. 10, p. 9). She scrutinizes how Marx uses intertextual allusion and reference to answer crucial questions such 'what are the roles of art in society?', '[h]ow is it related to social change?' and '[h]ow do art and criticism participate in education, and what sort of education best leads to reflective, vigorous and mutually enhancing social life?' (vol. 10, p. 9). Howard, in an apposite companion discussion, looks more broadly at 'Marxism and Shakespeare', and how the ideas derived from Marx's reading of Shakespeare (as detailed by Bartolovich) percolated through later twentieth-century schools of thought such as new historicism, cultural materialism, post-structuralism and feminism. Bartolovich and Howard are wisely paired, and both display a perspicacity regarding the nuances of Marx's encounter with Shakespeare, and also more widely the intricacies and debates surrounding Marxist literary theory itself.

⁷ Jonathan Hope, 'Middletonian Stylistics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 248.

⁸ Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare: And Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.

The issue of how Freud illuminates Shakespeare is similarly addressed in a two-part essay, in this instance by a single author, David Hillman. Again, the titles of all three Hillman chapters — ‘Freud and Shakespeare’, ‘Freud’s Shakespeare’ and ‘Shakespeare and Freud’ — accord with the overall project of *Great Shakespeareans* in its attempt to investigate the multitude of intricate and multifaceted discourses involved in reading Shakespeare, Great Shakespeareans reading Shakespeare and reading Great Shakespeareans. Hillman’s opening gambit acknowledges the prominence of his subject in Shakespeare studies, asking if it is at all possible to read Shakespeare after Freud *without* Freud? Hillman cites the story of ‘the proverbial American who, upon first going to see *Hamlet*, exclaimed that the play was so darn full of quotations’ (vol. 10, p. 99) to illustrate the pitfalls of looking back at Shakespeare through the inescapable lens of popular culture which is often attracted to aphorisms and easily-repeatable sayings. In a similar fashion, Freud remains an almost unavoidable influence on post-Freudian interpretations of Shakespeare. ‘Even were one to leave out of the account the many major non-psychoanalytic literary critics strongly influenced by Freud,’ Hillman declares, ‘a summary of the existing psychoanalytic criticism of Shakespeare would fill several volumes’ (vol. 10, pp. 99–100). In the face of this capaciousness, Hillman seeks to ‘meditate upon the radically different reactions evoked by Shakespeare and Freud, a division between what might be best thought of as the positive and negative transferences — the love and hate — instigated by these two writers’ (vol. 10, p. 102). What follows is a perceptive analysis of both Freud’s reaction to Shakespeare’s writing, and also the reaction of critics to Freud’s writing on Shakespeare. From the outset of ‘Freud’s Shakespeare’, Hillman is careful to emphasise the fragmentary nature of Freud’s own Shakespearian criticism: ‘Freud never actually takes on Shakespeare; he generally takes hold of an element — a few words or lines, a character, a scene — and uses these to bolster his psychoanalytic understanding of a wider structure’ (vol. 10, p. 104). This ‘scavenger’s attitude’ (vol. 10, p. 104) is further magnified when, as Hillman points out, Freud’s most substantial engagement with Shakespeare was through a single genre from the playwright’s extensive work, namely the tragedies. In light of such sparse primary material, a narrow critical gaze and Freud’s own dubiety over the authorship question — this section of the series commences with a quotation from a letter from Freud to Arnold Zweig in which he questions Shakespeare’s capability to create ‘Hamlet’s neurosis, Lear’s madness, Macbeth’s defiance and the character of Lady Macbeth, Othello’s jealousy etc.’ (vol. 10, p. 104) — Hillman skilfully teases out the nuances of ‘Freud’s Shakespeare’, laying out methodically evidence to support the claim that Freud’s relationship with his predecessor was marked by ambivalence.

Volume eleven considers four major figures in the history of European opera: Hector Berlioz, Giuseppe Verdi, Richard Wagner and Benjamin Britten. With each producing a

number of adaptations of Shakespearean plays, the composers are ripe for analysis in the context of an investigative history of how readers have approached Shakespeare. As Daniel Albright states in his introduction, ‘Berlioz, Verdi and Wagner all wrote about their intimacy with Shakespeare. Verdi grew angry at those who suggested that he had a poor understanding of Shakespeare; Wagner recorded a dream in which he had met Shakespeare and talked with him in the flesh; Berlioz thought that Shakespeare would have loved Berlioz if Shakespeare had had the luck to meet him’ (vol. 11, p. 5). In Berlioz, Peter Bloom identifies a reader who ‘found in Shakespeare an immense wealth of invention, an immeasurable fount of wisdom, and [...] a privy councillor, a poetic confidant, a kindred spirit, a *dieu personal*’ (vol. 11, p. 7). Considering Berlioz’s extensive use of the Shakespeare’s writing as a source for inspiration — which manifested a symphony (*Roméo et Juliette*) and an overture (*Le roi de Lear*), as well as considerable allusion to other Shakespearean works — Bloom’s introductory assessment of Berlioz is apt: ‘Of all the great composers — rank them as you wish — none was more smitten by Shakespeare than Berlioz’ (vol. 11, p. 7). What emerges in Bloom’s insightful examination is a composer whose passion for Shakespeare was substantial and lifelong. Investigating Berlioz’s familiarity with the tragedies, histories and comedies (vol. 11, pp. 15–48) Bloom proceeds to provide an insightful assessment of the presence of Shakespeare in Berlioz’s work, both explicit and allegorical. While *Roméo et Juliette* is purposely Shakespearean, works such as *Les Troyens* (1856) are linked through a documentarian examination of Berlioz’s correspondence and also a perceptive comparison of the opera itself to *The Merchant of Venice* and *Troilus and Cressida* (vol. 11, pp. 63–68). In his analysis of *Les Troyens*, for example, Bloom shows how ‘in Berlioz’s imagination [...] the Bard was [...] never far away’ (vol. 11, pp. 63–64).

Daniel Albright’s chapter on Verdi and David Trippett’s chapter on Wagner highlight a degree of Shakespearean adaptation as engaged, if not quite as extensive, as Berlioz’s. The first explores Verdi’s *Macbeth* (1847, revised 1865), *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1894), and traces the development of the composer’s Shakespeare-influenced operas from the ‘univocal forward thrust’ (vol. 11, p. 80) of his earliest work to the more elaborate, multi-vocal and multi-narrative approach of maturity. Albright, to elucidate this development, employs Victor Hugo’s famous celebration of the multifarious grotesque in Shakespeare:

[I]n [Christian] poetry, while the sublime will represent the soul just as it is, [the grotesque] will play the role of the human beast. The first type, disengaged from impure bond, will carry with it every charm, every grace, every beauty: it must create Juliet, Desdemona,

Ophelia. The second will take every ridiculous thing, every infirmity, every ugliness. To this division of humanity and creation will come passions, vices, crimes; there will be the lecher, the groveler, the glutton, the miser, the traitor, the bungler, the hypocrite; there will be by turns Iago, Tartufe, Basile; Polonius, Harpagon, Bartholo; Falstaff, Scapin, Figaro. There is only one type of the beautiful, but the ugly has a thousand types. (vol. 11, pp. 79–80)

‘In due time,’ Albright argues, ‘Verdi would become a Shakespearean in Hugo’s sense’ (vol. 11, p. 80). Providing a concise argument to support his developmental thesis, and displaying an intimate knowledge of the techniques and effects of musical composition, Albright’s chapter brings to the work of Verdi a deep erudition regarding the subject of (to borrow from the title of his 2007 study) ‘musicking Shakespeare’.

David Trippett’s essay follows Bloom and Albright by analysing the German composer’s musical renditions of Shakespearean works. Trippett acknowledges the rich tradition of comparative writing on Shakespearean Wagner (vol. 11, p. 153), while pointing to the composer’s love of Shakespeare, but in German translation. This distaste for English — ‘Wagner,’ Trippett writes, ‘valued Shakespeare in German principally because he could not easily manage the English text, once noting his “repugnance for the English language”’ (vol. 11, p. 148) — and simultaneous appreciation of an English writer appears contradictory. However, it contains within it an implicit belief of a Shakespeare outside of a particular language, and marked by universalist themes, plots and characterisations — a recurrent theme of the German Romantic and later English Romantic cultural movements, as De Quincey’s aforementioned panegyric testifies. Wagner’s ostensibly oxymoronic love of the writer but distaste for his language indicates the diversity of Great Shakespeareans and situates the German composer within the ‘marvellous cosmicomedy’ (vol. 11, p. 168) of Shakespearean study. This paradigm, set out in Seth Brodsky’s study of Benjamin Britten, holds that in the engaging with the Shakespearean oeuvre ‘each character [reader] believes he or she is acting independently’ but is in reality part of a great inter-connected theatre of interpretation where conventions, counter-trends, creeds, heresies and contradictions abound. Interspersed with complex and often complicated tables and diagrams, Brodsky’s extensive and in-depth chapter is perhaps the most challenging in the book for readers unfamiliar with the minutiae of musical terminology and scholarship. Nonetheless, it represents a fulsome investigation of Britten the Great Shakespearean.

Taken together, the essays of volume eleven offer a stimulating perspective. ‘What Shakespeare said’ is analysed in a form that is removed from its native medium, and in some cases even its native language. By focusing to a large extent on adaptations, Bloom, Albright, Trippett and Brodsky show the ardent admiration their subjects held for Shakespeare as a writer. Furthermore, they also gesture towards the persistent strain of certain Shakespearean types of interpretation that has manifested in some readings an body of work that is groundless, and as a consequence ceaselessly fractile. As Brodsky notes ‘It may be in the hands of certain Great Shakespeareans, Shakespeare becomes an unfathomably elaborate — if not ruse, then at least conceit, something which structures a fantasy with aims quite distinct from the faithful setting of this play or that sonnet’ (vol. 11, p. 165).

Volume twelve constitutes, to borrow Adrian Poole’s humorous introduction, the ‘one about the two Irishmen, an Englishman and an American’ (vol. 12, p. 1), presenting an interrogation of the ‘Great Shakespearean’ credentials of four towering figures of twentieth-century English literature — James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden and Samuel Beckett. Anne Stillman’s study of T. S. Eliot begins with the satirical anti-Hamlet of ‘The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock’, and brings a fresh perspective to Eliot’s ‘well-known pronouncements’ on Shakespeare (vol. 12, p. 61). Stillman’s essay emphasises the seminal importance of Eliot’s observations on Shakespeare in the history of Shakespearean scholarship, especially with regard to his thoughts on authorship and its visibility to the reader, a key concern of the Eliot-influenced school of New Criticism. ‘[Eliot’s] fascination with collaboration, interpolation and audiences,’ Stillman writes, ‘suggests that one appeal of Shakespearean plays is that they are forums in which the author does not appear’ (vol. 12, p. 83). In addition to focusing on Eliot’s critical work on Shakespeare, Stillman also explores Shakespeare in Eliot’s poetry, identifying a presence that is a cipher for ‘collapses, meltings, disintegrations [and] destructions’ (vol. 12, pp. 102–103). The reader, appropriately, gets an impression of Eliot as a Modernist Great Shakespearean, attracted to the playwright’s diffuseness but retaining an acute sensitivity of the poetic intricacies of Shakespearean language.

As Jeremy Noel-Tod’s chapter shows, Eliot serves as an interesting contrast with W. H. Auden, who often contradicted and refuted Eliot’s theories regarding the Shakespearean canon. Accordingly, Auden ‘oppos[es] Eliot’s theory that [*Hamlet*] fails due to personal problems that Shakespeare was unable to “drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art”’ (vol. 12, p. 107), and also ‘rewrites’ Eliot’s seminal essay ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921) (vol. 12, p. 109). Auden is shown as a figure who encountered Shakespeare with occasional irreverence, but also a redoubtable appreciation of the playwright’s negativity capability, especially in the exquisitely rendered amatory voices

of the sonnets: '[i]t was for his ability to inhabit the condition of difference between people equally that Auden valued Shakespeare so highly,' asserts Noel-Tod, 'and that led him to defend the treatment of the universal "mystery" of love in the *Sonnets* from simplification by "ideology", whether heterosexual or homosexual' (vol. 12, p. 148).

This volume allows for a consideration not just of how certain readers read Shakespeare as a writer, but also how certain readers read Shakespeare as an embodiment of the English language, and the implication of such interpretations for considerations of language as a political medium, particularly in the context of colonialism and Anglo-Irish relations. Oscar Wilde, chronicler of Victorian England's drawing rooms and son of an Irish nationalist poet, encapsulated such a fraught engagement with the confession that 'I am Irish by race, but the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare'.⁹ For Joyce in particular, Poole writes, the lionization of Shakespeare provoked an attempt to turn the exalted author into a comic character in the great comedy of European literature, 'Shopkeeper' to Dante and Goethe's 'Daunt', and 'Gouty'. Such a rhetorical transformation was underpinned by a reaction to the established discourse which saw Shakespeare as 'stand[ing] for the comfortable commercial prosperity that underpinned the regal and imperial values' of Victorian and Edwardian Britain (vol. 12, p. 3).

In a similar regard, Maud Ellmann's chapter explores Joyce's excoriation of the effect of English colonialism on the literary discourse of his native country in 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages' (1907). Ellmann highlights the way in which Shakespeare has been utilised as a tool within the self-legitimizing discourse of British colonialism, with his foregrounding as an epitome of human wisdom and genius in itself containing an inference of English intellectual and cultural superiority: 'the academic discipline of English literature, which was established in the same era as the scramble for Africa, helped to ensure British cultural domination by providing "wisdom while you wait" from Shakespeare' (vol. 12, p. 19). The debate regarding 'Shakespeare as a colonial battlefield' has been a particular feature of intellectual considerations of Shakespeare in the last thirty years, most notably in *Postcolonial Shakespeares* (1998) and *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985, 1996, 2008), studies which have drawn together a multitude of distinguished scholars to consider in particular themes of race, colonialism and ethnicity in the Shakespearean canon and Shakespearean literature. More specifically, much has been written regarding Shakespeare's representation of Ireland, and the country's frequent role in the Shakespearean canon as a seat of sedition has proven a rich area for studies interested in early modern Anglo-Irish relations, for example Andrew Hadfield's

⁹ Oscar Wilde, *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 197.

Shakespeare, Spenser and the Matter of Britain (2004) and Stephen O'Neill's *Staging Ireland: Representations in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (2007). However, in Ellmann's discussion of the Shakespearean Joyce — and indeed Dan Gunn's chapter on Beckett — we find fresh and exciting perspectives on the Irish modernist movement's nuanced relationship to the pre-eminent writer in the English language. For example, Ellmann juxtaposes Joyce's critique of the baleful effect of English dominance on Ireland's literary culture with the frequent citation of Shakespeare as a literary benchmark as yet unsurpassed by the re-emergent Irish literary culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. 'The looming obstacle that Stephen has to tackle,' observes Ellmann, quoting *Ulysses*, 'is the Irish sense of cultural inferiority to England. "Our young Irish bards, John Eglinton censured, have yet to create a figure which the world will set beside Saxon Shakespeare's Hamlet"' (vol. 12, p. 19). There is also an attention to stylistic as well as political themes: Ellmann shows how Joyce, as possessed by puns as his literary predecessor, revels in ludic linguistics that recalls Shakespeare at his most playful.

Following Ellmann's chapter, Dan Gunn sets his sights on Samuel Beckett. While noting the relative scarcity of references to Shakespeare in Beckett's literary criticism or correspondence in comparison to other Great Shakespeareans examined in the series, he also argues that 'Beckett was thoroughly familiar with Shakespeare's plays and verse' (vol. 12, p. 149). Tracing Beckett's background from a 'solidly middle-class Anglo-Irish famil[y]' to his attendance at Trinity College Dublin in October 1923 and later his emergence as a professional playwright (vol. 12, pp. 150–155), Gunn reappraises established comparisons between *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* to *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. At the same time, the contrasts between the two playwrights are considered, most particularly in a thought-provoking comparative analysis of Shakespeare's (minimal) and Beckett's (maximal) use of stage directions (vol. 12, pp. 160–167). Gunn wisely qualifies the notion of minimalist Shakespearean stage directions with the equivocation 'in so far as we can judge' (vol. 12, p. 160), but the comparison once again highlights the variation we encounter on reading Shakespeare. There is a Shakespeare on the stage, and a Shakespeare on the printed page.

The focus of volume thirteen shifts to more recognisably academic figures, or rather writers whose primary vocation was professional scholarship. Consequently, the criticism of Prof. Sir William Empson (Cantab.), Prof. G. Wilson Knight (Oxon.), Prof. C. L. Barber (Cantab.) and Prof. Jan Kott (Harvard and Yale) is collectively examined as part of a 'crucial segment' of the series' wider project to explore, in the words of the volume's editor Hugh Grady, 'the centuries-long and international set of reactions to the extraordinary works of William Shakespeare' (vol. 13, p. 1). In the case of Empson and

Knight this encompasses an analysis of the ‘two revolutionary developments in the history of Shakespearean criticism that began in the twentieth century and have continued to influence Shakespeare studies ever since: the Modernist revolution in the arts and the rise of English literature as a newly instituted subject for professionalism in the re-constituted universities in the Western world of the Progressive era’ (vol. 13, p. 1). Lars Engle’s chapter on William Empson represents a thoughtful and nuanced study worthy of its subject. Surveying such issues as Empson’s appropriation by queer critics because of his ‘candour about the complexities of sexual self-position’ (vol. 13, p. 35); and ‘Is Empson a Great Shakespearean?’ (vol. 13, p. 47), Engle also focuses on the relationship between critical analysis and acknowledgement of authorial biography. Consequently, Engle relates Empson’s Shakespearean writings to his broader critical manifesto. Accordingly, the twentieth century scholar ‘may have been drawn to the sonnets not merely because they are a luminous beacon for any interpreter drawn to complex utterance’. Instead, they served as exempla of Empson’s wider ideas about literary composition, with his interest in the sequence emerging from a desire to integrate ‘extremely close textual analysis with speculative authorial biography’ (vol. 13, p. 36).

Michael Taylor’s consideration of G. Wilson Knight, meanwhile, commences with an examination of the critic’s legacy. Taylor proclaims his subject as ‘the most important pioneer of a method that revolutionized how to read a Shakespeare play’ (vol. 13, p. 61). This method centres on the technique of ‘spatial interpretation’, whereby the reader is sensitive to the spatial and structural dynamics of the drama and approaches the play in an holistic fashion. As such, for Knight ‘reading one of Shakespeare’s plays was a particularly efflorescent experience — across its five acts pulse networks of interactive elements, nodes of verbal activity, uncircumscribed by the plot and character, though obviously not divorced from them’ (vol. 13, p. 65). Taylor elucidates the network of impulses at work in Knight’s criticism — humanism, libertarianism, royalism — while also being careful to note the critic’s very real concern for the practicalities of staging and acting Shakespeare.

The politics and practicalities of reading Shakespeare in Soviet Russia is explored in Madalina Nicolaescu’s first part of a double essay playfully titled ‘Kott in the East’. Examining how Kott’s major series of articles on the playwright, translated into English in 1964 as *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, was received behind the iron arras, Nicolaescu analyses how Kott interacted with prevailing critical discourses underpinned by Marxist and quasi-Marxist politics. Nicolaescu emphasises ‘Kott’s way of universalizing and at the same time topicalizing Shakespeare’ (vol. 13, p. 148) and how his forthright interpretations of plays such as *Troilus and Cressida* — ‘the war is fought

over a cuckold and a hussy' (vol. 13, p. 148) — played on the ideological political terrain of Soviet states. For example, the reception of Peter Brook's 1964 Kott-influenced performance of *Lear* in Romania is surveyed to map out the conflicting reactions (and the political motivations behind such reactions) to Kott's ideas. What is delineated is a Great Shakespearean working in an environment where Shakespeare and the theatrical medium was as immediately politicized as almost never before. Furthermore, Kott's role in shaping the reception of Shakespeare is emphasised, underlining once again the influence of readers of the playwright on those who come after: 'Kott's book not only articulated an intellectually powerful way of opposing the regime while evading censorship, but was also instrumental in radically innovating theatrical vocabulary and techniques. Kott's "contemporary Shakespeare" became part of a larger political and artistic project that turned the theatre into a major forum for debate, innovation and oppositional action' (vol. 13, p. 153).

Zoltán Markus offers a different perspective on Kott the Great Shakespearean. Taking advantage of Kott's bifurcated career between East and West — Hugh Grady informs us in a brief biographical introduction that Kott emigrated to the United States in 1969 following increasing tension in his native Poland — Markus looks at 'Kott in the West'. Instigated by a series of questions such as 'Whose Contemporary in the Academy?' (vol. 13, p. 161) and 'Is He Still Our Contemporary?' (vol. 13, p. 165), Markus's chapter provides a contrast with Nicolaescu's in that it explores how *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* was read by Western audiences, both academic and theatrical. A particular theme is Kott's enthusiasm for absurdist readings of *Lear*. Such ostensible anachronisms, and their consequences — explored in an examination of Kott's occasionally fractious engagements with contemporary theatrical directors such as the Kabuki-influenced Ariane Mnouchkine (vol. 13, pp. 160–1) — gesture towards yet another aspect of reading Shakespeare.

Unperturbed, the Bard remains resilient and resourceful in the midst of it all: as this series demonstrates, whether in totalitarian states, the concert hall or academic disputation, the Shakespearean canon retains its ability to provoke discussion and debate.

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