

The ruler came once to this earth,
 Christ almighty. And even so he met you clean and precious,
 Butressed by might.
 So did the prince of angels lock you behind him, all unblemished,
 With a limbeck, the author of life.
 Show us now that grace that the angel
 Gabriel, God's messenger, brought to you.
 Truly we city dwellers pray for this,
 That you show men joy,
 Your own son. After we may
 Unanimously all have hope,
 Now that we see that child upon your breast.
 Plead for us now with true words
 That he not let us any longer
 Heed error in this den of death.
 Let him lead us to the Father's kingdom,
 Where free from sorrow we might after
 Abide in glory with the Lord of hosts.
 (Muir 58-61).

Rereading Shakespeare

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As proof of excellence, there is no doubt about Shakespeare. Or, to put it another way, there is every doubt about Shakespeare, the glover's son, working man of the theatre, pre-capitalist Renaissance business man, universalist and genius whose place of literary pre-eminence will survive the latest, and the next, round of indifference from those "economic rationalists" (captains of industry, political power-brokers, influencers of curricula, university administrators) who measure cultural capital in the most grossly capital of ways. As English departments tighten their belts, deconstruct "the canon," deplore canonicity, diversify, seek new allegiances and wonder about what they have to sell, and to which niche of a troubled market place, as "English" remakes itself as "Cultural Studies" and acknowledges, again, the multicultural base, ideology, discourse, history, politics, power and popular communication, Shakespeare anticipates the moves. Thirty-eight plays and the poems, what a diminution it would be if these were to become the exclusive preserve of small groups of scholars reading and rereading the texts ever more closely, inventively, finding other things to say or new ways to say again what has already been said, their sharings limited to specialist journals and their clutch of specialist readers. As Hamlet says more broadly, the play's the thing; and as the Shakespeare critical industry continues energetically, and as readers pore over the texts, theatre companies continue to produce the plays in different languages around the world and film-makers find that they can market this high cultural material in the market places of popular culture. As Zeffirelli, Branagh and Luhrmann demonstrate, there are many ways of doing Shakespeare.

Whatever measures of worth we might employ, there is little doubt about Shakespeare's rating. In the matter of measuring, Harold Bloom's grand claim calls loudly for attention. Deliberately audacious, idiosyncratic and provocative, Bloom presents the western canon as his readings of richness and value, of literary cultural resources measured in terms of sublimity and representativeness, with Shakespeare "the largest writer we will ever know."

(1994, 3) at the centre as the figure of unparalleled excellence, as the one about whom the rest may be arranged. I have no quarrel with the rating. But it is Bloom's focus on Freud that is especially intriguing, his application of the anxiety of influence thesis in terms of Freud's Shakespeare complex, with Shakespeare as "Freud's hidden authority, the father he would not acknowledge" (1994, 372):

Freud, as prose-poet of the post-Shakespearean, sails in Shakespeare's wake; and the anxiety of influence has no more distinguished sufferer in our time than the founder of psychoanalysis, who always discovered that Shakespeare had been there before him, and all too frequently could not bear to confront this humiliating truth. (1994, 390)

Claiming that he taught Freud for years as prosified Shakespeare, this is Bloom revisiting that tetralogy of texts from the 70s: *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), and *Poetry and Repression* (1976). If the niggardly reading fixes on a battle of egos, on Freud's alleged humiliation, the positive reading emphasizes influence as creative misreading of the precursor text, as an influence that is intertextual and whose effects may be seen most interestingly not in pop psychology but in the work, in the texts. In the low postmodernist variation on this intellectual claim a young fellow responds to the question about whether or not he enjoyed his introduction to Shakespeare, a production of Hamlet, with "Yes, I'll say, I didn't know it was so full of quotes." So, Bloom's Freud is a leading example of the processes of literary influence and its anxieties with Shakespeare as best architect of emotion and ambivalence, the pre-Freudian inventor of psychoanalysis because of the revelatory depth and understanding manifest in his explorations of human character.

The last two decades of Shakespearean studies have been dominated by various forms of materialist criticism with new historicism and feminist materialism at the forefront. Although there is nothing new about political and historical criticism of Shakespeare, more recent developments acknowledge the interplay of ideologies by recognizing, against the truth claims of capital "H" History, the divided processes and the politics of acts of reception and interpretation. Working with poststructuralism's investigations of language, textuality and meaning, and with new political interests in cultural materialism, these returns to history typically read texts, ideology and culture as intricate networks of complex relationships. The range is considerable as may be seen in such anthologies as John Drakakis's *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985) and Ivo Kamps's *Materialist Shakespeare* (1995), together with the "new historicist" work of Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and Catherine Gallagher, the "cultural materialism" associated with Graham Holderness, Kathleen McLuskie, Jonathan Dollimore, John Drakakis and

Alan Sinfield, and developments in feminist analysis evident in Valerie Wayne's collection *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1993) and Ivo Kamps's and Deborah E. Barker's *Shakespeare and Gender: A History* (1995). The field is appropriately divided and energetic.

One of the challenges always facing critical theory and practice is to find appropriate accommodations for the oppositional categories and qualities at play not only in texts and contexts but also in the processes of reading and analysis. What possibilities might arise, therefore, from a concentration upon the "festive" in Shakespearean tragedy, upon the celebratory as a component of the tragic? Naomi Conn Liebler situates her study, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, with reference to C.L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959), acknowledging his influential attention to communal festivity, to celebration and mirth, and to patterns in the comedies of the restoration of order after disruption. As she suggests, studies in social and cultural anthropology (Bakhtin, Girard, Turner, Douglas, Geertz) have influenced rereadings of the plays by emphasizing their effects not as enclosed systems of meanings but, rather, as open-ended sites of contestation and exchange. It is clear too that poststructuralist studies of language and text, particularly in their deconstructive concentration upon fundamental binary relations, have unsettled old certainties to direct attention back to the complications of exchange and negotiation. Thus patterns coexist with the forces of their displacement in a state of continuing tension. As she suggests, the licensed misrule of comedy shifts in tragedy to more fundamental eruptions of chaos but the extent to which those eruptions may be reconciled with notions of survival and redemption, with social forms and the restitution of order, remains contentious. There are old interpretative battlelines drawn between Christian/humanist emphases upon salutary lessons, upon learning wisdom through suffering, and those readings of the tragedies that stress pain, loss and a philosophy of incertitude and meaninglessness. In this reading of the festive, Liebler reaffirms redemptive qualities in the tragedies by emphasizing the communal significance of their presentation of individual aberrations and crises in authority. Thus the common good takes precedence over those emblematic disturbances that interrupt it, even allowing for their performance in symbolic forms as a process of recognition and containment. Put as a question, as an issue for continuing exploration, the matter invites revaluations of the actual political effects of carnivalesque energies as well as the powerplays in Renaissance culture. Here, for example, is Greenblatt: "Renaissance discourses contain subversion, in the double sense that they simultaneously elicit and control it, grant it a space for its enactment but finally encompass and disarm it" (1986, 93). What constitutes evidence? If Liebler finds support in Aristotle's notion of catharsis and Girard's of ritual sacrifice as purgation, this is more ambiguous not only in Derrida's reading of the pharmakon as both toxin and cure, which she cites, but also in those

deconstructive unsettling that assert the processes of change, alteration and disturbance against the real and potential settings (social structures, perspectives, orders) to which they are linked and in association with which they have their meanings and their cultural provenance. From one reading of the tragedies to the next, in the shift of sensibility and significance between individual and community, between suffering protagonists and the patterns and systems and meanings that exceed them, we may indeed remain uncertain about "who's in, who's out":

The absence, misconstruction, or perversion of a necessary ritual is a hallmark of Shakespearean tragedy. It is neither the cause nor the consequence of the tragic patterns of these plays; rather it is an accompaniment, part of the tragedy's representation of what happens when crisis threatens to disintegrate a social or political organism. What these tragedies celebrate, what makes them "festive," is the heroic effort of the protagonist, involving some recognition of ritualistic action at some point in the play, to hold the edges of the world together, to keep Nature's molds from cracking and all germins from spilling at once, to set right disjointed time. (Liebler, 25)

But it is a matter of fundamental contention whether the emphasis is upon those happy communal patterns and ideals from which there is such a falling off, from the once held or the yet to be obtained, or upon the slips, treacheries and violence that also mock all ideas of benevolence and the communal good and suggest existential absurdity and incertitude, not reasonable opportunities of happiness and prosperity, as the normal human condition. It is a tough reading that holds such sacrificial rituals as the death of the tragic protagonist, let alone destruction of the Cordelias, Ophelias and Desdemonas, as acts of purification in a grand scheme of evolutionary development or ritual recycling. As Liebler notes elsewhere in her study, "Tragic closure is thus immanently unstable. It resists itself; like Brutus, it is 'with [itself] at war'. Implying conclusion, it also implies opening; suggesting resolution, it hints at renewed conflict" (130). Surely this is so, even at the simple level of plots that leave such characters as Fortinbras, Malcolm, Edgar and Albany to set things right, let alone such fundamental speculations as Hamlet's, Macbeth's and Lear's upon incertitude, mishap and injustice.

Furthermore, it can be argued, as Liebler indicates, that ritual itself, whatever its functions of mediation and containment, cannot erase conflict. Ideological questions remain. If ritual observances, through their acts of repetition and remembering, point to the communal, its structures and ideals and practices are fraught with ideological divisions and pressures. In the operations of societies and of discourses, there are always questions to be asked about the distributions of power, about whose interests are being served, and sensitivities to race, class and gender only begin to acknowledge

the complications. While it has long been held that ritual observances and ceremonial actions are fundamentally conservative, that they are social control mechanisms, there is ambiguity about their effects in the tragedies. Following Victor Turner, and van Gennep, Liebler's attention to liminality is productive because of her emphasis on the processes of paradox, inversion and ambiguity. It is not so much that the normative is re-affirmed by negation but that, at least in Shakespeare's explorations, the categories themselves are suspect.

This study provides particular and detailed attention to *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Based upon the assumption that Shakespeare had read about the Feast of the Lupercal in the "Romulus" section of Plutarch's *Lives*, Liebler's reading of *Julius Caesar* focuses on ritual sacrifice, scapegoating and rejuvenation, a reading that links Lupercalian elements with English rites to claim a deeply felt appreciation of the ritual foundations. Tracking sources for *Titus Andronicus*, she makes an interesting case for Herodian's *History*, representation of a Rome dominated by feminine influence and the play as a site for examination of the complex interplay of the political and ritual in culture. Various lines converge in her view that Coriolanus serves Rome as both scourge and cure, the emblematic tragic hero who is compared with St. George, by turns admired, demonised and destroyed, and situated thereby in the practice of popular ritual performances. In discussing Hamlet, she uses the figure of the hobby-horse ("For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot") to focus upon such urgencies as mourning, remembering/forgetting and the possibilities of renewal. The argument is clear, sustained and closely documented, emphasizing pollution and so many ritual confusions and violations where time is indeed "out of joint" and there is such attention to treachery, uncertainty and the need for demystification. With their presentations of societies in transition, with such radical threats to forms of hierarchy and communitas, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* offer compelling examinations of social structures and practices, relationships, bonds, rituals and the question of identity. As Liebler points out, if Shakespeare addresses larger socio-economic movements he does so in terms of family closeness and the disintegration of old codes of trust, loyalty and responsibility. But if traditional relationships and ritual observances are subjected to a deconstructive unsettling, such that questions outrun answers, the paradoxes, inversions and uncertainties may themselves denote values in negativity, in the "message" that, against institutionalised rituals, forms, repetitions and the orders they denote, there are always other questions to address, possibilities to investigate, in terms of process rather than resolution.

How might Harold Bloom read Ned Lukacher's *Daemonic Figures: Shakespeare and the Question of Conscience*? Bloom postulates Shakespeare as Freud's father figure, claiming that he taught Freud, for years, as Shakespeare

in prose. Lukacher's study addresses Shakespeare's place in the history of conscience, with particular attention to Shakespeare's influence upon Freud and Heidegger. This study is deliberately selective, emphasizing, in addition to Freud and Heidegger and a range of Shakespeare's texts, particularities in Plato's *Republic*, the Pauline *Epistles*, Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In Lukacher's view, Shakespeare questions both the Christian and the classical interpretations of conscience, the idea of conscience as divine spark in humanity and the idea of daimon as a natural inner presence.

With introductory attention to Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and Lacan, Lukacher explores the centrality of the secret other as conscience, claiming that the "transformation of classical daimon into Christian conscience is one of the most important events in the history of Western thought" (10). He situates Paul as Freud's precursor, showing how the daemon becomes demonized, and suggests that Shakespeare anticipates Heidegger, Nietzsche and Foucault in his concentration on the susceptibility of conscience to manipulation. To trace developments in moral law necessitates attention to language as well as to changing historical contexts for, as Lukacher argues, such key concepts as guilt involve linguistic and temporal problems. His analysis of Moses and Monotheism locates it as Freud's main attempt to historicize conscience and, with further attention to the relationship in Freud's work between conscience and the theory of drives or instincts, he suggests that "[l]ike Shakespeare, Freud understands not only that conscience makes cowards of us all but that we enjoy being so abused" (55). His attention to Freud and Heidegger is persuasive. Heidegger, who never cites Shakespeare, argues for the poet as saviour figure, as the one "who dwells nearest the lack in Being and who brings into the clearing the words of Being's self-refusal" (97).

So what about Shakespeare? Lukacher presents a case for reconsidering, as important amongst sources for *The Merchant of Venice*, 1596 court records relating to a charge against Shakespeare and others for threatening to kill one William Wayte, situating this amidst money-lending and threats towards the theatre. With consideration of Shakespeare's relationship with the Earl of Southampton, he proposes reasons for Shakespeare's making the usurer a Jew, claiming that the real target of anti-Puritanism is masked "beneath the glib humour and theatrical effect afforded by a facile anti-Semitism" (117). Just as he interprets Shakespeare's break with Southampton as informing *The Merchant of Venice* and the sonnets, Lukacher reads *Hamlet* in terms of the misfortunes of Essex and Southampton, with Shakespeare's resultant concentration on issues of conscience and changes in power relationships. In this version of biographical/new historicist criticism with its focus on the daemonic presence of conscience, he negotiates a path between readings, sources and influences to argue that Shakespeare presents a defence of

conscience as poetry against Puritan appropriations of it. Thus he comes to *Macbeth* as "Shakespeare's poem of the cleaving and clinging of conscience" (163), drawing attention to Freud's emphasis upon childlessness as a primary frustration and reading *Macbeth* as "the tragic poem of the silent call of language" (190) or the site of the daemonic function and limitation of language. The study is inventive in its readings in philosophy and, as Lukacher appreciates, his interests and arguments may find much more territory in Shakespeare than he explores in this instance.

One of the most interesting and provocative of recent books on Shakespeare is Rawdon Wilson's *Shakespearean Narrative*, a particularly well-researched and wide-ranging study that addresses the nature and functions of narrative in the plays and the long poems. With a strong interest in Renaissance writing and in contemporary literary theory, Wilson approaches Shakespeare as a Renaissance rather than Elizabethan figure, one whose intellectual range and writing strategies invite consideration in the larger context of Spanish and Italian, as well as English, traditions and practice. Thus, Cervantes, Ovid and Spenser, in addition to recent developments in narrative theory, are important components of this frame of reference and the study demonstrates in its critical practice the possibilities that it claims in argument for an eclectic and pluralistic mode of analysis, for "seeing with a fly's eye" (47). The result is a strong meditation upon narratology as well as an exploration of narrative processes in the works of Shakespeare.

With so much attention devoted to Shakespeare's sources, coupled with the common view that he was an uncommonly inventive borrower, one who didn't so much create as borrow plots, what might it mean to analyse narrative in his work? In his "Preface to Shakespeare" (1768), Dr Johnson set one pattern in commentary by holding narration as wearisome in drama, seeing it as an impediment to the energy of dramatic action; in *The Western Canon* (1994), Bloom asserts that "Shakespeare's greatest originality is in representation of character" (47) and, unavoidably, Shakespeare criticism has always taken a focus on character. But given the subtle interrelatedness of things in literature, character, ideas, place and structure are indeed components of one another, all created in words and, therefore, functions of the operations of language. If narrative is story and narration is story-telling, they are predominant not only in literature but in historical-cultural thought and discourse. As Wilson argues, narrative is a basic rhetorical strategy in the Renaissance and a fundamental mode of human understanding and representation. Involving sequencing, relationships, order and attempts at explanation, it invites attention to history, memory and the processes of construction, exchange and reception. In an appropriately eclectic manner, he provides an initial survey of narrative modes and effects by concentrating on Othello, Titania, Horatio and Iago as story-tellers, consolidating the illustration with precise reference to *Don Quixote* and *The Faerie Queene*. If

there is indeed something special about Renaissance culture that produced its particular love of language and delight in narrative forms, it is also the case, even as the moods of play change from one text and one culture to another, that the opportunities for narrative invention and exploration, are manifold, irresistible and endemic in human culture.

This study focuses mainly on conceptual issues, with chapters on narrative, conventions, voice, world, character and boundaries. Its mode is exploratory and comparative. Shown to operate through such processes as summary, exposition, parallelism, allusion and characterisation, narrative is held to enrich and complicate language in the texts, their invocation of contexts and the processes of exchange in which they have their meanings. Paying close attention to *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Venus and Adonis* and selected sonnets, Wilson also refers to a broad range of the plays but with particular emphasis upon *Hamlet*, *I Henry IV*, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Winter's Tale*. Whereas many of Shakespeare's characters tell stories within the larger narratives of the plays that contain them, the plays themselves are complex intersections not only of different voices and characters but also of different stories and worlds (court/forest, court/tavern, Rome/Egypt, present/past, and the like). Of particular interest in this study is Wilson's focus upon possible world theory (following Maitre, Pavel et al.) and theories of game and play (he is the author of a leading study in this field *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations of Play, Game and Narrative Theory*). His examination of narrative conventions and practice is attentive to the play of language and, acknowledging the inevitability of misreading, he subjects theories and interpretations to persistent questioning thereby holding the texts open always to new constructions. With an emphasis upon slips, tricks, riddles, disguise, deceit, duplicity and paradox in the texts, he explores the entrancing possibilities of ambiguity, uncertainty and different meanings within the narrative pathways that construct fictional worlds.

Some of the study's most interesting work concerns the concepts of fictional worlds and boundaries. The worlds are conceived as simultaneously distinct and connected; imaginative textual constructions, distinctive in their particularities and separateness, they are also linked in various ways (through ideas of character, action and settings) with "this" world (the Renaissance itself and all subsequent contexts of reception):

Any one of Shakespeare's plays would provide an example of fictional worldhood: textual markers that create an initial boundary, a semiotic system that proclaims its distinctness, the strong solicitation (to viewers or readers) to imagine it from within. The plays are obvious worlds, but they also contain multiple worlds. The interior worlds occur in narratives. Whenever a character interrupts the dramatic action to tell a story, Titania remembering India, Othello before the

Venetian Senate, Horatio on the battlements at Elsinore, or Hotspur exculpating himself before King Henry, a fictional world emerges within the play's encompassing world. The paradox of fictional worldhood is unmistakable in the partial, recessive narrative worlds of the plays, often called into existence by only a few indexical words. Fictional worlds depend upon textual indices as necessary conditions, but exist only as constructs within imagination; they require little textual support for their existence, but once called into being they become strangely boundless. (123)

So, Wilson suggests, narrative theory must take account of imagination, allowing for those multiple pathways by which, across boundaries, readers can participate in the act of world-building. He provides the example of *As You Like It* with a world in two parts, the court and the forest, each with its own set of signifiers and different senses of time, hierarchy and behaviour. Emphasizing the "dichotomies of the empirical world in the Renaissance" (145), he acknowledges pathways of presentation and understanding between this variously divided "real" and the "fictional" constructions of Montaigne's, Cervantes', and Shakespeare's expression of worlds in writing. In this context, the concept of boundaries is important if they mark out a territory, emphasizing definition and providing for inclusion and exclusion, they also invite attention to boundary-crossing, to opportunities for connection, negotiation and understanding. So *Hamlet*, the play so riddled with questions ("Questions are tools for finding answers. They seek out paths across boundaries," 193), indicates not only a jumble of fictional worlds and the boundaries that sustain them but also the search for these narrative pathways of connection. So many characters tell stories (Horatio, the Ghost, the Player King, Hamlet, Ophelia) and their narrative modes involve linguistic play as well as the ambiguous rewards of variable communication and partial revelation.

Noting two prevalent perspectives on literary characters, their degree of "lifelikeness" and the conventions involved in their creation, Wilson determines three forms of conceptual framework: a psychological model, an intellectual model and what he describes as "an underperforming narrative structure that, though conventional, is transhistorical" (168). With particular interest in this third form, he defines it with respect to characterization of Tarquin in *The Rape of Lucrece* where antithetical values and split consciousness are represented by interior monologue. As he indicates, the convention is common in medieval and Renaissance literature; it is also common in Shakespeare's plays with such obvious examples as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Lear*. It is typical of the range and scholarly procedure in this study, that the convention is discussed in terms of Greek tragedy, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Prudentius's fourth-century epic poem *Psychomachia*, Chaucer and Cervantes. Following Chatman, Wilson favours reading characters as

"open constructs" allowing for these "narrative agents" to be seen as not only participants in but compositions of narrative procedures. As the notes to this chapter indicate, the discussion is based upon consideration of a very extensive range of theories of character. Notes, indeed, are a feature of *Shakespearean Narrative* and, indicating an impressive breadth of research, they reinforce this study's persistent attention to theory, conceptual models and an open-ended critical practice.

Intellectual currency, like any other, is subject to variations in the marketplace, to changes of fashion, shifts in the exchange rates and fluctuations in the authority of major power-brokers. And literary history, including the history of literary criticism, provides fascinating evidence of change and variation not only in terms of "who's in, who's out" amongst poets, dramatists, novelists and critics but also with respect to theory, interpretative moves, definitions of text and context and reading practice, and interdisciplinary influence. Although Shakespeare's work remains decidedly "in," it continues to provoke shifts in critical engagement with so much of this diversity enabled by developments in poststructuralist theory that hold the texts open to new affiliations and further interpretations. Liebler's, Lukacher's and Wilson's studies are very different from each other in terms of orientation, interests and critical procedures. They demonstrate again the richness of the site and its openness to cross-disciplinary rereadings.

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