

***William Shakespeare e il senso del tragico*, a cura di Simonetta de Filippis, Napoli, Loffredo Editore 2013, pp. 317, €14.50 [ISBN 978-88-7564-645-5]**

This volume collects contributions to a Shakespearian conference organized by the University of Naples “L’Orientale” in 2012. The main theme, Shakespeare’s sense of the tragic, is approached from various perspectives which range from a more comprehensive view on the philosophy of the tragic during the Renaissance, to more specific sections concentrating on the tragic gaze, adaptations and rewritings of Shakespeare’s works and two final parts which deal more directly with stage performances and Shakespearian directors, actors and actresses.

The opening paper written by the editor Simonetta de Filippis lucidly emphasises the innovative nature of Shakespearian tragedy, a tragedy of men with flaws and frailties, no longer victims of God’s wrath but rather tragically responsible for their own fate. The sense of uncertainty and precariousness which characterizes aspects of the Renaissance is observed through the other papers which make up this first section, through examinations of *Richard II* and the metaphor of the mirror as a tool for attaining outer knowledge and reflecting on identity, of the role of passions both in the tragedies and the comedies and of Marlowe’s *Faustus* whose thirst for knowledge is compared to Hamlet’s desire for self-knowledge. The section closes with a detailed analysis of *King Lear* as a father more than a king, and a more general reflection on the Aristotelian idea of the tragic intended as a particular narrative form and a specific series of events.

*King Lear* is also at the centre of the opening two contributions in the section concerning the tragic gaze. The first minutely analyses the father/daughter relationship, which Shakespeare was to develop further in his Romances, and the search for motherly care – together with the acknowledgement of its lack – in association with the storm scenes. The theme of filial *pietas* is interestingly explored also through examination of significant artworks. The tragedy of *Lear* is seen, in the second paper, as deriving from a breakdown in communication: Cordelia’s silence and her “nothing” are shown to give rise to the ensuing confusion and manifestations of cruelty, a cruelty which finds expression through the abundant animal imagery present in the play. Imagery, this time of an erotic nature, is next explored in a study on *Othello* which deals with the concept of obscenity both in its sense of indecency and in that of taking place off-stage – outside and beyond the scene. The audience is invited to gaze at what happens on stage and, at the same time, to turn away from the occurring monstrosities. Gaze is again central in the concluding paper, this time with a captivating analysis of the Sleeping Beauty myth; some Shakespearian females are seen as the object of a desiring male gaze whilst in a position of submission because they are asleep, or lying down or in a state which appears to be between life and death.

A form of Shakespearian transcodification is presented in an appealing analysis on “Digital Shakespeare” in which the author comments on the implications of the interactive mode provided by the web. This is investigated with respect to the Shakespearian text and particularly to the sense of the tragic which traditionally requires an extended period and instead needs to be strongly reduced when expressed through the internet. From transcodification to transposition we might say in the next contribution on Shakespeare in Bollywood. *Othello* and *Macbeth* are investigated through their Indian versions *Omkaara* and *Maqbool* by Vishal Bhardwaj demonstrating how the tragic sense of Shakespeare’s plays can be transposed onto a contemporary

Indian setting where modern politics and corruption echo their original counterparts. Auden's famous *The Sea and the Mirror* is the object of a paper exploring issues of Shakespearian rewritings. The tragic sense in *The Tempest* is expressed in this poem with reference to the tragic events of the forties, and the individual Shakespearian characters are acutely described with Caliban significantly obtaining the final monologue as the one embodying – according to the poet – man's true nature. The closing contribution to this section is devoted to the monologues of Tim Crouch where particular emphasis is given to minor characters with a view to demonstrating that history does not belong to heroes. Apart from the meticulous approach to Crouch's narration, the paper interestingly contextualizes its main focus through the so-called "Mobility studies" introduced by Stephen Greenblatt and other scholars in 2010 which advocate that in dealing with cultural processes what should be taken into account is the mobility and fluidity of cultural traditions and identities.

Three contributions concentrating on Italian stage performances, stirred by Shakespeare, compose the penultimate section of this volume. The first introduces us to the production by the Neapolitan actor and playwright Giovanni Piscitelli, *Rosalina: ovvero l'incubo di una notte di fine autunno*, which gives body and substance to the very slight figure of Rosaline in *Romeo and Juliet*. The novelty of this play and of its protagonist is that it gains inspiration from both the Shakespearian text and John Ford's *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore*; in fact, the analysis of Piscitelli's play is preceded by a rich investigation into the sense of the tragic in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries precisely through a comparison of the two works which both make use of the eye metaphor as a means for perception of reality. *Hamlet*, as mirror of Modernity, is identified, in the second paper, also as a reflection of what Lyotard has defined the "postmodern condition". The rewritings of *Hamlet* by Carmelo Bene and Federico Tiezzi – which are exhaustively commented upon – function as a kind of deconstruction of the traditional tragic element. Both playwrights find in Shakespeare's most famous play the ideal, and possibly only true subject for their own research into the nature of the tragic and the possibility of its staging. Finally, *Totò, principe di Danimarca* by Leo de Berardinis invites us to reflect upon the possibilities of mixing the comic with the tragic. De Berardinis' production seems to show us that this is not only possible but can produce most effective results. The Italian playwright exhibits highbrow and lowbrow cultures alongside each other in all aspects of his work, from language to setting and music. Different acting styles mingle and the play closes on the notes of Verdi's *Falstaff* as if to remind us of the burlesque nature of our universe.

The closing section of this book provides us with brief personal viewpoints of directors and actors/actresses. Laura Angiulli discusses the manifestations of different types of power and forms of evilness in her direction of *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III*, initially produced as a trilogy and later as individual plays. The actor Giovanni Battaglia recounts his experiences in interpreting Iago and Michelangelo Dalisi – who is a director as well as an actor – comments on the comic and tragic elements which are frequently combined in Shakespeare and which he accentuates in his own version of *Hamlet*, *Per Amleto*, a play which he centres around the concepts of memory and oblivion. Alessandra D'Elia, an actress who considers Shakespeare the richest source for any performer, recalls her own personal reaction to the female characters she has impersonated whereas Stefano Jotti, recalling Peter Brook, stresses the extreme power of words in Shakespeare's works which, according to him, function as epiphanies. Finally we hear the voice of Piscicelli, whose adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* had been

previously dealt with, explaining himself the reasons which pushed him to place at the centre of his production the neglected Rosaline who existed only through the words of others and his choice to translate the iambic pentameter with an archaic Neapolitan dialect.

The volume, as we have seen, ranges from theoretical issues concerning the tragic mode to the practical implications of putting it on stage as witnessed by those directly involved. The various aspects approached in the different sections provide an extraordinary rich and vivid picture of the distinct ways a complex theme such as Shakespeare's tragic sense can be confronted and the individual contributions are noteworthy for their capacity to introduce us to less popular performances and directors, to new studies and schools of criticism, to original interpretations and reflections. This collection of essays confirms the vitality and innovative nature of research which has always been associated with scholars working at the "Orientale" in Naples, a University which is traditionally an academic cutting-edge institution.

*Maria Valentini*