

EDITORIAL PREFACE

The essays on Shakespeare's poetics collected here, written by distinguished scholars on the occasion of his 450th anniversary, are dedicated to an exceptional scholar from the English Department, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, Professor Veselin Kostić. All of the essayists in this volume tell stories of the ways in which Shakespeare is understood by them today. They are joined by Professor Kostić, whose distinguished voice can be heard in the interview he graciously bestowed to this very special edition of BELLS.

The contributors do not tell a unified story but outline intellectual trajectories. They demonstrate a reverence for the achievements of this great writer and a desire to study the boundaries in Shakespearean studies, while telling their stories in the form of criticism. And they have brought much insight to these boundaries! As a result, each has told a unique story, if not always directly connected to Shakespeare's poetry. Thus the papers address historical or ideological aspects of Shakespeare's plays; the translation of Shakespeare's poetry; Shakespeare and emotions; Shakespeare in the theatre; Shakespeare in scholarship.

Irrespective of their focus, each of these essays complies with Stephen J. Greenblatt's suggestion that literature is effective insofar as it is pleasurable. The essays collected here are effective in their ability to delight! For we, "certainly cannot hope to write convincingly about Shakespeare without coming to terms with what Prospero at the end of *The Tempest* claims was his whole 'project': 'to please'".¹ Ever mindful of the divergent sensibilities of early 17th century London and contemporary audiences, the authors of

¹ Stephan J. Greenblatt. *Learning to Curse*, New York: Routledge, p. 9.

these essays have performed their tasks on various levels: they historicize pleasure, explore its shifts and changes, and try to understand its project.

Shakespearean Literary and Cultural Studies

Svetozar Rapajić in “Shakespeare in Music Theatre: *West Side Story*” considers the similarity between dramatic poetry and music, an approach forwarded by T.S. Eliot and supported by music dramatists such as Verdi who drew inspiration from Shakespeare’s plays. American music theatre has also acknowledged this relationship, Rapajić argues, considering in particular Bernstein’s *West Side Story*. This musical, the epitome of American music theatre, sets the story of *Romeo and Juliet* in mid-20th century New York, where ethnic rivalry culminates in tragedy. Rapajić argues that, “the different adaptations of Shakespeare’s works, involving changes to the time period and setting of the narrative and the social class of the characters as well as the various interpretations of staging are proof that his writing affords possibilities for new discoveries, and is at once versatile and universal”.

Jelisaveta Milojević’s essay, “Untying the Knot: Shakespeare’s Sonnets 27 and 144 in Serbian Translations” discusses just that. These two sonnets were chosen for analysis because of their astonishing polysemy and consequent translation issues. Professor Milojević’s own translations are also presented. General questions are considered, such as: Why translate that which has already been translated; Can a person with no knowledge of the source language translate poetry with the assistance of a prose translation done by someone who does know the language; Where are the limits of poetic license in versification; Are the critic and translator to be the same person; Why is translation criticism necessary? The importance of such criticism is defended in the essay.

Dubravka Đurić’s paper, “Svetislav Stefanović’s Interpretation of William Shakespeare and World Literature” addresses Svetislav Stefanović’s reading of Shakespeare’s works as literary classics. In his analysis, Stefanović compares Shakespeare’s writing with the *Bible* and Greek and Roman classics, as well as work by Goethe and Dostoyevsky. Đurić argues that Stefanović’s interpretation of Shakespeare is performative because in demonstrating the classic qualities of Shakespeare’s works and their place in the canon of world literature, he symbolically included modern Serbian literature, too.

Zorica Bečanović Nikolić's paper entitled, "Shakespeare Studies, Philosophy and World Literature" considers two new books of Shakespearean criticism: *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* by Ewan Fernie and *Free Will: Art and Power on Shakespeare's Stage* by Richard Wilson, both published in 2013, and both remarkable for encompassing Shakespeare studies, philosophy, and world literature within their respective critical scopes. In *The Demonic* Shakespeare is, along with Milton, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Kierkegaard, and other authors, considered in the context of demonic transgression, paradoxically close to the mystical knowledge of what is beyond self-experience. The author considers this book to be an audacious retreat from current literary criticism insofar as it insists on responding to crucial ontological and ethical questions through a passionate spiritual engagement with art, literature, and philosophy. In Wilson's *Free Will*, the focus is on Shakespeare's demystification of the ruse of power, based on both truthful experience and the careful performance of nonentity, which produced a specific form of early modern creative autonomy.

In her essay, "Nothing of Woman: The Feminine Void of Matter in Shakespeare," Danica Igrutinović looks at how the metaphysics of Renaissance Neoplatonism could be taken to explain some of Shakespeare's characters. Drawing on the Neoplatonic concept of matter, her paper attempts to elaborate the figure that Philippa Berry has termed, "Shakespeare's tragic O's" by showing its connection to multiple images of matter as the maternal/ infernal void. Igrutinović suggests that in Shakespeare's darker plays, "the 'O' as feminine prime matter can figure as a locus for the encounter with primordial matter, the womb/tomb that (en)matters and thus kills, the 'hell' and 'nothing' that can indicate both unformed matter and the vaginal orifice, and the nothing—the 0—out of which everything is made.

Goran Stanivuković's article "Earliest Shakespeare: Bombast and Authenticity" explores bombast as one of the defining features of Shakespeare's style of writing in the earliest, pre-1594, phase of his career as a dramatist. Bombast is considered as both a logical and rhetorical instrument of knowing. At the cognitive level of text, improbability, which is the key feature of bombast, plays an important role in 'earliest' Shakespeare because it captures competing currents of thought that structure dramatic plots as they were outlined by Elizabethan practices of playwriting, and moves the action forward. This article suggests that, "'earliest' Shakespeare is under the spell of Christopher Marlowe's bombastic blankverse, but [that] he also looks beyond Marlowe, turning bombast into a tool of opening up new possibilities for drama

performed within the specific context of London's burgeoning theatre scene in the 1590s".

In her article, "The Stage as Purgatory: Shakespearean Moral Dilemmas," Vesna Lopičić discusses Trevor Nunn's 2011 production of Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, with the aim to answer the question of why Hamlet's friends are kept in Purgatory and repeatedly exposed to decisive events from their earthly lives. Based on Stephen Greenblatt's study *Hamlet in Purgatory* and Gareth Leyshon's B.Th. Dissertation *The Purpose of Purgatory: Expiation or Maturation*, the author proposes that, "the purpose of their detention is maturation, meaning the ability to make morally right choices when faced with Shakespearean moral dilemmas".

In "Vision in Shakespeare's Tragic Plays: Perception, Deception, Delusion," Nataša Šofranac underscores the importance of visual effects in theatrical performances but also in the reading of Shakespeare's works. She claims that the visual element is important in understanding Shakespeare's characters as well as the way they see and experience other characters, the world, and themselves. Šofranac argues that, "[S]ometimes because of distorted vision, sometimes because of malevolent input that works on their minds, or just because of inherent subjectivity of perception, the appearance of persons and things was substantially different from reality and that causes a tragic course of events and ultimate catastrophe". Flawed vision, the author concludes, was very much the tragic flaw of Shakespeare's heroes.

In "To do a great right, do a little wrong': *The Merchant of Venice* and its Ethical Challenges," Danijela Kambasković discusses the discrepancy between Portia's words and her actions when Bassanio urges her to break the law in order to thwart Shylock. She initially refuses on the grounds that to do wrong is always immoral, but despite her words, her actions show her ready and willing to do the opposite. The author effectively illustrates the connection between Portia's situation and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as how it relates to the principle of equity, "an open-handed, individualised approach to justice when hard legal questions exceed the scope of the law". However, the incongruity between Portia's words and her actions, Kambasković argues, is of a more complicated nature, and suggests, "the presence in the play of a different, non-Aristotelian ethical framework: that of Nicolò Machiavelli's post-Epicurean teleological utilitarianism". Shakespeare's moral considerations in *The Merchant of Venice* explore the crucial question of whether expediency is more appropriate in real life than principles not defined by expediency, and observes that to apply

this question to the main themes of *The Merchant of Venice*, i.e., to the themes of cultural and religious difference, stereotyping, discrimination, scapegoating, gender equality, and bias, holds particular didactic value in the 21st century classroom.

In her article entitled, “‘A fortnight hold we this solemnity’: The Elizabethan Annual Cycle in Shakespeare’s Major Comedies,” Milica Spremić Končar takes as a starting point François Laroque’s book-length study, *Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, which analyzes festivity and its literary and imaginary representation in Shakespeare’s England. He argues that the Elizabethan year is essentially simple and logical as it is divided into two halves. The first half starts on the winter solstice of 24 December and ends on the summer solstice of 24 June, including the twelve days of Christmas celebrations and a group of moveable feasts such as Easter and Whitsun, which Laroque calls the ritualistic half of the year. The second half, which begins on 25 June and ends on 24 December, is marked by a lack of important religious festivals, the presence of a few fixed festivals, and more working days than holidays, which is thus known as the secular half of the year. Drawing on Laroque’s insights, Milica Spremić Končar argues that Shakespeare’s major comedies—*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*—bring to life the secular half of the Elizabethan year in such a way that each play seems to evoke a particular period and its associated activities.

Milena Kostić’s essay, “‘I am for other than for dancing measures’: Shakespeare’s Spiritual Quest in *As You Like It*” analyzes the spiritual quest Shakespeare undertook in *As You Like It*. Her analysis, grounded in the critical insights of Ted Hughes, Northrop Frye, and Riane Eisler, focuses in particular on Melancholy Jaques. Milena Kostić argues that his, “decision to devote himself to a solitary life in search of the causes for the existence of the hostility and rivalry between brothers reflects Shakespeare’s professional decision to dedicate himself to the resolution of this issue throughout his writing career”.

New Voices: Literary and Cultural Studies

We have included three “new” critical voices to open a venue in support of Ph.D. candidates. Future developments belong to the generations to come!

We have classified, for the purposes of this volume, most of the papers submitted by these authors as Non-Shakespearean. Their texts reflect current trends and ask us to see the causes and effects of the actions of the characters of the works they selected; all of them are committed to contemporary critical perspectives on literature, culture, and society.

Vladimir Bogićević deals with the American novel in his essay, “In search of the Unpresentable: ‘Detectives of Sublime’ in (Post)modern American Novel.” He considers some of the representative American novels of the 20th century—Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, Barth’s *Lost in The Funhouse*, DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and Morrison’s *Beloved*, using Nabokov’s *Lolita* as a reference text, to arrive at a cross-section of sorts of the narrative strategies employed. Bogićević applies the theory of Lyotard, Baudrillard, Ricoeur, and Hutcheon, together with some of Derrida’s philosophical postulates in order to demonstrate that all of these texts are unified by the quest for the modern expression of the *unpresentable*, in which different types of *marginal perspectives* play a specific role.

Irina Kovačević departs from a similar literary domain with her contribution to Nabokov scholarship and Postmodernism in her text, “Popular Culture in its Postmodern Context: Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*.” She explores the relationship of elements of popular culture to postmodern literature and where they intersect in this novel. She also addresses and elaborates the concept of postmodern identity, together with aspects of the consumerism and consumptionism that characterize it.

Stefan Pajović’s work, “Instructing the Individual in Democracy in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*,” concludes our Non-Shakespearean section with its magic word, “democracy.” Pajović carefully studies this motif in Whitman’s magnificent collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*, concluding that Whitman’s poems focus on the individual. As democracy is the safeguard of the individual, the art it produces is of critical importance. Whitman frequently represents democracy in his verse through the metaphor of the maritime journey.

Let us believe that the art of Shakespeare will remain, alongside new voices, a fixture on the scholarly stages of the future. At present, may we express in conclusion our hope that readers of this celebratory edition of BELLS will agree that each of the essays included merits being read through to the end. And perhaps more than that: being read with relish, in the same way that they were read by the members of the Editorial Board, reviewers,

proofreaders from the English and other departments, and many others who collaborated in its production. On this pleasurable note, our letter to Shakespeare and Professor Kostić comes to a close!

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The Editors