

Mudriczki, Judit. *Shakespeare's Art of Poesy in King Lear: An Emblematic Mirror of Governance on the Jacobean Stage*. Budapest and Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020. 126 pp. ISSN: 2063-3297.

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Judit Mudriczki's *Shakespeare's Art of Poesy in King Lear* is the result of years of research, as the author had already started to work on the topic during her MA studies, and later she pursued the subject further in her PhD dissertation. It was published in the Collection Károli series by L'Harmattan Publishing in 2020. The author poses a general, comprehensive research question, which uniquely aims at the art of poesy to be discovered in a particular edition of *King Lear*: "What makes the 1608 Quarto version of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* an outstanding and exceptional work of art?" (9). This perhaps somewhat broad research question is immediately narrowed down and the author offers a "preliminary answer": the 1608 Quarto is to be examined as a unique product determined by "Shakespeare's poetic craft" just as much as "the rhetorical tradition set by the public discourse of his age", and thus the play can be read as a "dramatized mirror of governance" (9) on several levels.

The book is divided into three chapters, which seemingly all tread quite divergent paths: the first one is entitled "The Dramaturgical and Theatrical Heritage: the Contrastive Reading of *Magnificence*, *King Lear* and *King Lear*"; this chapter is followed by a discourse on "Rhetorical and Poetical Conventions: Shakespeare's Arte [sic] of Poesy in the Love Contest and the Mock Trial Scenes"; the concluding chapter is about "The Influence of Early Modern Theories of Governance: Corporeal Images and the Representation of the Body Politic in the 1608 Quarto". The chapters can be seen as three distinctive approaches to *King Lear*; however, the author proposes three different layers of one particular playtext for analysis, and the governing factor pulling together the three directions/layers would be the Quarto text and Shakespeare's creative art producing it, as well as the various cultural-historical factors which contribute to the understanding of the text. The book thus, as Tibor Fabinyi aptly concluded in his introductory remarks at the book launch in October 2020, indeed resembles a triptych in its unique approach. Just as a triptych, it offers three quite different points of view to the same phenomenon, and although these approaches may seemingly divert and produce different conclusions, the object of contemplation – the art of poesy in the *Lear* Quarto – binds the book's argumentation into a unity. As a triptych is hinged together in a way that each panel can be seen and interpreted separately, and yet the view of *the whole* artwork in three panels opens up a radically new perspective of the topic in the centre of the composition (see, for example the masterpiece of Hieronymus Bosch: *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490-1510), this book also, quite similarly, offers three different approaches for contemplation, and at the same time the cultural historical background, the "poetic complexity of Shakespeare's craft" (17), and the 1608 Quarto itself allows the reader to witness the ideas evolve into a coherent argument.

The first chapter is a chapter on drama history, highlighting the dramaturgical features that make *King Lear* unique, and examining the macrostructure of the 1608 Quarto play. It gives a comparative analysis of three works: John Skelton's *Magnificence*, the anonymous *True Chronicle History of King Leir*, and Shakespeare's *Lear* Quarto. The chapter juxtaposes the Quarto with the two earlier plays and, as Mudriczki claims, this contrastive reading leads to a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's craft; thus, the analysis of the drama alongside two contemporary plays featuring similar motifs enables a better understanding of the uniqueness of the *Lear* Quarto. The chapter offers the contrastive reading of the plays comparing their positive and negative characters and the role of the jester in each play, but it also examines recurring dramaturgical elements in the plays (elements frequently found not only in these plays but early modern plays in general), as letters (lost, forged, received) and disguises (verbal and real). The table provided on page 48 concludes the findings of these recurring dramaturgical elements, and the conclusion is that *Magnificence* – a political morality about Henry VIII and the evils of ambition, hitherto not explicitly linked and examined in detail alongside *Lear* – seems to offer undeniable macrostructural links with the *Lear* Quarto perhaps more apparently than with the known and obvious source of Shakespeare's play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*.

The following chapter is – as the centrepiece of this interpretative triptych, and thus carrying the main title of the book in itself – places the Quarto *Lear* (and its two thematically central scenes, the love-test scene and the mock trial scene) within the framework of the rhetorical and poetical conventions of the age. More precisely, it highlights how Puttenham's handbook *The Arte of English Poesie* may serve as a guideline for the overview of Shakespeare's rhetorical and poetic solutions in the play. As the author suggests, this would lead us to the investigating of the microstructure of the drama, thus allowing readers to read the play along the idea of "mannerly public behaviour" (83): on decency in public speech and in courtly behaviour. A great merit of this chapter is that it offers readers not only a thorough analysis of these two frequently discussed scenes of the play, but that Mudriczki achieves this through the investigation of rarely discussed rhetorical works and emblems of the age, providing a vivid cultural and historical background as well as a solid argument of how Shakespeare's art of poesy is indeed inseparable from early modern conventions and the general practice of rhetoric manifested in Puttenham's work.

The concluding chapter – which is the most substantial and intriguing part of the book – takes a surprising turn from the play's structural analysis towards a rather different approach: it offers a reading of the play based on early modern theories of the body politic as represented in theories of governance. The chapter "focuses on the use of corporeal or body-related metaphors throughout the play" (87), and the author suggests that these images referring to body parts would develop into an image cluster, allowing "an anthropomorphic mapping" (87) of the characters of the play in relation to King Lear – and the monarch as the body politic in general. Along these lines, the chapter gives a vivid and exciting investigation into how Lear's body politic is dissected, and how the parts of this body would indeed be possible to attach to certain characters (Cordelia: heart; Kent: eyes; Gloucester: ear; Fool: tongue; evil sisters: guts, intestines; nails; Edgar and Edmund: legs) and thus be integrated into the "organic conception" of the

kingdom. Not only does the chapter offer a novel approach to the play, but it also sheds light on the workings of the early modern monarchy and the way in which the monarch's body would be both a physical reality *and* an overwhelming abstraction of the Monarchy itself – the division of which would consequently lead to the dissection and decomposition of the king's (and Lear's) own physical, corporeal integrity.

Mudriczki's book seems to utilize networks of knowledge available in early modern England: besides Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' literary works, she offers insights into relevant rhetorical handbooks, emblem books, theories (mirrors) of governance, and paintings, connecting them smoothly to the *Lear* Quarto. Consequently, almost as an "anatomy book" of *King Lear*, the author presents a work that excels a simple poetic interpretation of the play and moves on to a trifold analysis which is embedded into a literary historical, poetical/rhetorical, cultural/political framework, and thus provides a genuinely new historicist approach.

Mayer, Jean-Cristophe. *Shakespeare's Early Readers: A Cultural History from 1590-1800* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
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Jean-Christophe Mayer's *Shakespeare's Early Readers: A Cultural History from 1590-1800* detects how Shakespeare's texts were produced with its focus on the role of early readers. It also classifies and analyses the interaction between Shakespeare's printed works and their early modern readers with his touch on the empirical, social, material, and psychic reality of the period. In the introduction of the book, Mayer validates Shakespeare's early modern reader's role in literary "canon formation" (1). He gives a brief account of these readers who were generally male buyers and lenders, establishment buyers, collectors, travellers, text editors, annotators, transcribers from the middle class, aristocracy, clergy, reading groups of book clubs, libraries, theatre people, international owners, working class buyers, and some early modern women. The readers were silent or expressive because, as he puts forth, they contributed to Shakespeare's texts to draw an account of canon formation. The main argument of the book is that Shakespeare's texts of poems, or plays were prone to the extractions, cuts, adaptations, commonplacing, editing, censorship, cutting, revising, adding, gap-filling, simplifying, modernisation, adaptation, textual emendation of these readers in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. In this respect, Mayer offers an overview of the social strata of the readers and their interpretations of the texts. He, in other words, substantiates that the story of Shakespeare's texts is that of "a parenthesis in time" (5). The book's methodology originates evidence from the archive; that is to say, it is a "social text of Shakespeare." (5)

The book also transmits the circulation of Shakespeare's text, developing an interpretive method by drawing on Peter Stallybrass and Roger Cartier's article, "Reading and Authorship" (6). In this line of thinking, the act of reading is more than "a process [...] to pin down [two] oscillating structures of the text to some specific meaning." (Iser 197) Thus, Mayer prefers to specify the readers' activity as "appropriation", a term used by Douglas Lanier rather than the term "reception" (7) that culminates from Jauss and Iser's reader response theory to assert the "circulation of Shakespeare's works" (7). In his book, Mayer relates his focus on annotation and marginalia to imagined, implied, ideal readers of the time so the book is about "historicising the experiences of various readers" (9). Besides, he emphasizes that the readers transformed the main features of Shakespeare's text according to their individual aesthetic taste and their ideological needs. Distillation and fusion of various generic mixes and editions establish Shakespeare's work beyond a single authorship to a rewritable textual space. The book mainly focuses on the question "what did early modern readers really think of Shakespeare's works?" (Mayer 12)

The first chapter, "Literacy and the Circulation of Plays" is about 'the issue of early modern literacy' (Mayer 15), the readers, the early buyers, the collectors, the borrowers and the lenders of Shakespeare's works. Mayer puts forth that it was the price of the printed books and the "mass illiteracy" (19) that prevented the circulation of the works in the society. The owners later became "a vast community" (27) that consisted of the British establishment, the priests, middle classes, artists, theatre people, eighteenth century editors, early modern women, readers across the British Isles and working classes. Plurality in the strata of the social milieu of early modern literacy fills in "the gaps of indeterminacy" (Iser 196) although it leads to a mirror reflection of the social, empirical, material and psychic reality of that society.

The second chapter, 'Life in the Archives: Shaping Early Modern Selfhood' brings about how the early readers of Shakespeare used 'the edge of the page' of Shakespeare's books to rewrite "a boundary between verse and life" (Mayer 44) and to communicate what they meant by adding their perspective. The trace of the early readers 'decontextualises and dematerialises' the original text by constituting an "extended self" (45) of early modern readers. Mayer delineates the wide aspects of "the material world of the readers", pointing to the circulation of their worldly and "textual objects" (46) that include their activities. Mayer also acknowledges the connection between "selfhood, the Shakespearean text and the world" (46). The "paratextual material" (51) of the Shakespeare folios includes dates and readers' sense of time, personal feelings on the page through "the impact of reading" (65) prestige with their format. Thus, this chapter appraises the acceptance and the rejection of the text which regulates the participation of the reader to the text (Iser 198).

Mayer exemplifies the status of Shakespeare's texts by referring to the difference of the texts in relation to the responses of their readers. Confirming that texts trigger the identity formation of the readers through the dates and signatures on the pages of the manuscripts or the books, he analyses how the interaction between the texts and the readers manifests a means of time and space for each other's existence (Mayer 62). The marginalia or the annotations also reveal the individual feelings that scaffold various meanings to the text. For

instance, Samuel Pepys's diary entries associate both his personal feelings of fear in his time, and its resonance in Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be" (qtd. in Mayer, 66). Pepys finds both happiness, and fear in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as he finds in life. Mayer resembles his explication to Foucault's "stylistics of existence" (qtd. in Mayer 72) because reading Shakespeare is a vital experience (72) through language. This manifests multiple interpretations to convey meanings in Shakespeare's texts.

The third chapter, 'Reader and Editors: *Concordia Discors*' justifies that editing of texts becomes a 'collective enterprise' in the early modern period (74). The seventeenth century editions of Shakespeare's work were mainly based on character identification (Mayer 81). A reader of *Othello*, for instance, changes "Villaine" and writes 'standard bearer to ye moor'" instead in the First Folio in Georgetown University's Lauinger Library (80). This annotation demonstrates the difference in identification with the character and the reader's reaction. These specific instances in Mayer's book elucidate how Shakespeare's readers, and literary critics create Shakespeare's literary sphere. For instance, the reader of *King Lear* adds pages and cuts the original page so as to construct a "parallel text" (86) with the marginalia. The other readers reacted to this kind of destruction of original texts, so they criticised the editors for being "licentious" (qtd. in Mayer, 95). Mayer explicates Samuel Johnson's definition of the role of the editor as to "develop intellectual judgement" (100) for other readers. All of Mayer's specific explications mark one common point for Shakespeare's textual identity: it is a constructed verbal space of a period which includes two centuries of interaction. That is, time and space play a crucial role to recreate Shakespeare's work which is still so in our contemporary society. The book brings out another farfetched point: Shakespeare's text is much more than a reduction of one's own experiences to grasp specific meanings that project a single standard.

The fourth chapter, 'Early Modern Theatrical Annotators and Transcribers' elucidates the mutual dependence of Shakespeare's texts and his stage performances, referring to the close relationship between the readers and the theatre audience (Mayer 108). Mayer argues that cutting and editing the text for modernisation is also fruitful for the expectations of the audience from the play. Songs and dances were added to fill in the gaps of Shakespeare's verbal space as well. The texts, in other words, changed according to the political, social and individual circumstances of the time. Thus, the interaction between the theatre audience and Shakespeare's text unfolds the text as a literary object that constitutes "schematised views" (Iser 197) in Ingarden's terms. These views lead to a free play of interpretation of live performances so they never formulate a concrete truth as they are independent from the individual reader's thought.

The fifth chapter, 'Commonplacings: The Myth and the Empirical Impulse' delineates the interest in Shakespeare, that may also be interpreted as a result of commonplacings which is an embodiment of Renaissance humanist education (137) whose method was based on "the study of classical authors." (138) In this way, his texts are decontextualized, transformed also through a generic mix of his readers' time so Shakespeare's work can still infuse at the heart of the events. Mayer, in such a way, brings out how Man becomes a measure of textual circulation creating new discourses for cultural expansion.

The last chapter of the book, 'Passing Judgement on Shakespeare' reveals the cutting of plays as "the most violent act of expurgation" (188), that is mostly subjective as censorship depends on an individual's taste (190). Mayer also marks the misreading of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century as its interpreters drew on the nationalistic features of the texts, which were erased ironically earlier by the French influence. In the neoclassical age of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, there is a tendency for national interpretations, adaptations again with the influence of the French elite. These ideological or aesthetic transformations of the texts aim at founding a polite society within individual hierarchies (211) and "a cross-generational social interchange between the poet and the dramatist" (223). That is to say, the historical positioning of the eighteenth century goes hand in hand with the reality of Shakespeare's text within the reader's imagination and it also constitutes shifts in episteme unfolding a free play of thought in a nutshell.

The major strength of Mayer's book is its spatial aspect constituted by the illustrations of catalogues of books, transcriptions of poems, ink drawings of preliminaries, apocryphal pages of Folios, a manuscript list of plays and the letters of the readers (viii-ix). These are also signs of the continuum of the liveliness of Shakespearean studies. Consequently, Mayer appraises the critics and Shakespeare's readers, who created Shakespeare's literary sphere. The figures about the photographs of Folger Folio, compiled commonplace books, The First Folio Catalogue, a manuscript list of plays, calligraphy... in the book reveal the richness of Mayer's in-depth research as evidence for the analysis of the nature of reality and episteme. These also illustrate the ontic status of the early readers of Shakespeare.

Mayer concludes that printed Shakespeare is a verbal space for a community's text. However, this text has no literary ownership. Shakespeare's readers circulated the textual cycle not only by editing, but by reading them silently to refine their taste in terms of personal aestheticism and elitism until Shakespeare's work was institutionalised in the nineteenth century (228). Elites favoured Shakespeare once again with the rise of the popularity of mass media, which mainly attracted the attention of working and middle classes in the twentieth century (229). Ultimately, Mayer's book is rich and resourceful with its illustrations that add up to an epistemic and ontic formation of Shakespeare's texts that transmit the national interpretations and adaptations as a wilful interaction to contribute to literature in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.

Works Cited

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