



Janja Ciglar-Žanić, *Neka veća stalnost. Shakespeare u tekstu i kontekstu* [*Something of great constancy: Shakespeare in text and context*], Zagreb: Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog fakulteta, 2001.

Serious books on English literature published in a language not readily intelligible to the international community of scholars are bound to suffer neglect. When they happen to be concerned in part with a specifically local situation of the foreign body of literature, the choice of language becomes even more troublesome. This is true of those who write about Shakespeare, still the prickly centre of the body, as much as those who write, for instance, about contemporary Australian literature. Such work, then, is forced to lead a strangely double life in which English and Croatian rehearsals, different versions of similar ideas, common arguments significantly divided by differences of language, are finally captured in the covers of one linguistic code and presented to the public expected to judge their merit by reference to the criteria constituted within a tradition supposedly one's own. This rift between languages, providing the author sometimes with distinctive insights, often invites a specific type of inquiry which, if conducted honestly, is very likely to prove contentious.

This is definitely the case with Janja Ciglar-Žanić's book on different Shakespearean topics that, in its very title, undertakes yet another translation typical of most recent studies: that of the literary text, i.e. Shakespeare, into a critical assertion. "Something of great constancy" is not just a carefully chosen quote; it is a comment on what happened to both Shakespeare and to those powerful voices running the academic Bardbiz in the last decades of the twentieth century. Addressing, in the introduction, the question of repeated instances of re/canonising Shakespeare by those who set out with rather different proclamations, the author duly notices the uncanny but also deeply ironic quality which Hippolyta's statement has acquired. The first chapter pursues this idea further: it deals with the ways in which Shakespeare still conditions our own sense of what counts, writing our own plays for us. Tracing along the silent chain of ruptures or critical faultlines the intricate discursive network both connected and divided by a common Shakespeare, Ciglar-Žanić here considers the intellectual Shakespeare culture from a noticeably Caliban-sympathetic perspective, disclosing, once again, the strategies by means of which Prospero



manages to spin his tale of nurture couching it in the reassuring terms of an educated coloniser in possession of his books. This chapter also offers a reliable survey of the encounter between feminism and Shakespeare studies, which is, characteristically, exemplified on *Troilus and Cressida*. An important part of the discussion is devoted to the work of Jan Kott and his (lack of) popularity among Anglo-American Shakespearians. This controversial “Eastern-European” figure is here defended from those who failed to acknowledge the pathbreaking value of his work and who still seem not to recognise the fascinating force which, in Ciglar-Žanić’s opinion, Kott’s writings on Shakespeare are capable of exerting. Appropriately therefore, the next chapter is devoted to multifaceted possibilities of using the canon and to the apparently unresolved conflict between what is termed “traditional Shakespeare criticism”, persistent in claiming to be aesthetically disinterested, and Jan Kott, an embarrassing “contemporary” but also “foreign” presence.

A different note is struck by the chapter dealing with Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. Although recent debates about the sexual politics of the sequence are mentioned, the focus is instead on the Petrarchan tradition of the sonnet genre (though the term “genre” may be a misnomer here) and the transformations it undergoes when handled by Shakespeare. Drawing on the continental European tradition of Baroque and Mannerist scholarship, Ciglar-Žanić hopes to find satisfactory answers to a large number of interpretive difficulties besetting Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* if not from the date of their publication, then certainly from the moment they were admitted into the canon in the late 18th century. A final comparison is made between certain uses of Petrarchan conventions in *Romeo and Juliet* and their deployment or sudden reversal in the 1609 collection.

Shakespeare’s so-called “romances” figure prominently in the book. A whole chapter is devoted to *The Tempest* and the wealth of its post/modernist reinscriptions, whereas another chapter concentrates on *Cymbeline*, a play less frequently encountered in recent studies of Shakespeare. The discussion of *Cymbeline*, a play whose political content has always been found confusing, is visibly inspired by the theoretical assumptions of new historicism, a mode of analysis that in Ciglar-Žanić’s writings emerges as a result of her growing fascination with its critical, though perhaps not political, possibilities. Placing herself within the theoretical framework of the romance genre developed by Northrop Frye, the author goes on to consider ways in which this genre can be appropriated and used in pragmatic, often politically motivated projects. What follows is a plausible suggestion that the romance mode of *Cymbeline* enabled Shakespeare to present the characteristic chasm between illusion and reality, which here means a discrepancy between the self-image that the Stuart monarchy propagated and its own image as actually fashioned by the social and political circumstances of the time. The discussion of *The Tempest* is not historicist in this sense. Its tone is, predictably, anticolonial and the theoretical hero of these pages is undoubtedly Edward Said. Moving from a very interesting discussion of “revisionist adaptations” (p. 130) of *The Tempest* by Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway to the differences between three important contributors to the criticism on the play (Kermode, Orgel, Greenblatt), Ciglar-Žanić still writes in the terms of postcolonialist



theories; now, however, the struggle is about the rights over interpretation. This “political” struggle in the field of criticism continues into the concluding two chapters, the most valuable part of the book, in my opinion. Here we finally meet a more personal side of the author, engaged in a battle against those who feel that foreign Shakespeare is often a creature born of ignorance, of misunderstanding the wayward language of the English past, or, which is even worse, that some so-called “Shakespearean” appropriations have little to do with Shakespeare and are rather to be seen as personal and idiosyncratic recruitments of the Bard with a nationalist agenda lurking behind. The final chapter of the book is a reply to the reception which certain Croatian “recruitments” of the Bard enjoyed in some Shakespearean circles. Urged by the reactions whose ultimate goal is always to “own” and “control” Shakespeare, Ciglar-Žanić examines the problem of “the legitimate/d (as against the supposedly illegitimate) uses of the discursive formation we call ‘Shakespeare’” (p. 182) and reviews “the rates of exchange” involved in contemporary Shakespearean transactions. The discourse thus, though formally finished, is far from being closed. Instead, the author is hopeful about the future of foreign Shakespeare and envisions a truly interactive study of different Shakespearean cultures in all their complexity.

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