

Book Reviews

Latest Western Shakespeare Criticisms Introduced and Studied in China. A review of 许勤超, 《文本政治学: 文化唯物主义莎评研究》 [Xu, Qinchao. *The Politics of Text: A Study of Cultural Materialist Shakespeare Criticism*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2014. Pp. 199] and 杨林贵、乔雪瑛, 《世界莎士比亚研究选编》 [Yang, Lingui and Qiao Xueying, eds. *Selected Papers of World Shakespeare Studies*. Beijing: Commercial Press, 2020. Pp. 407].

Reviewed by *Zeyuan Hu**

One thousand readers make one thousand Hamlets. Shakespeare has been read and interpreted through different schools of criticism and theories since his own time. There had been Neo-Classicism, Romanticism, and Victorian criticism of Shakespeare before the 20th century. Prior to the 1970s, the intrinsic criticisms of literature had been dominating the western literary criticism. Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism, etc., emphasized the autonomy of literary texts and viewed the texts as the focus of their literary analysis. In the 1980s, some critics began to realize the defects of intrinsic criticisms. A literary work is deeply rooted in its political, social and cultural contexts. The so-called “self-sufficient literary work” doesn’t exist at all. Since 1979, the intrinsic rhetorical studies of literature have been replaced by the extrinsic studies of literature. Around the 1980s, Western Marxism, Feminism and New Historicism became the most influential theories in literary criticisms. As one of the most influential schools of literary criticisms, Cultural Materialism emerged in England in close association with Marxism and New Historicism. Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticism, Marxist Shakespeare criticism and New-Historical Shakespeare criticism are classified as Materialist Shakespeare criticisms as a whole.

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In China, the first exclusive study of western Cultural Materialist criticism of Shakespeare in the west was made by Xu Qinchao in his monograph *Politics of Text: A Study of Cultural Materialist Shakespeare Criticism* published in 2014. It makes a close reading of the writings of leading cultural materialists, such as Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, and John Drakakis, on William Shakespeare, with an interaction with other critical theories. What's worth mentioning is that the author combines theoretical discussions with the play texts of Shakespeare from historical, political, social, feministic, cultural and educational perspectives. Theoretical analysis is convincingly interwoven with textual reading and textual reading often illuminates theoretical reasoning.

Chapter 1 introduces the political turn in Shakespeare criticism in the academia of the English-speaking world. The emergence of Cultural Materialist Shakespeare Criticism is accounted for in political, social and literary contexts. The representatives of this school, like Dollimore, Sinfield, Drakakis, etc., are adequately introduced. What is especially worth noticing for western scholars is the Cultural Materialist Criticism of Shakespeare in China. Yang Zhengrun, the author's supervisor for his Ph.D. dissertation and a noted Shakespeare scholar, is the first scholar who studied Shakespeare from the perspective of Cultural Materialism. He published an essay titled "The Politicization of Literary and Shakespeare Studies: A Survey of Cultural Materialism" in the magazine *Literature and Arts* (wen yi bao) on December 22, 1990. According to Yang, the rise of Cultural Materialism was due to the ideological change since the conservative government of Madame Thatcher took power in England in the 1970s. In Shakespeare criticism, there appeared a political tendency. Cultural Materialism integrated the political context with intrinsic formalist studies of literature. He categorized politics into four fields: race, class, gender, and sex. According to Yang, politics is mainly about power. These fields are battlefields of power. Critics should analyze the political intention, political content and political function of the literary works from the relations among the four fields. Yang thinks that each of Shakespeare's plays is a social critique from morality rather than from politics. Shakespeare hoped to reform rather than subvert the political power structure of his time. The author makes a survey of foreign and domestic studies of cultural materialist Shakespeare studies and finds that most of the studies were merely introductory without profound interpretations of Shakespeare's works. Cultural Materialism was regarded as a school of New Historicism and discussed with its theoretical framework, cultural background and other critical theories. There were few exclusive studies of this school combined with a profound textual reading at home or abroad. The book makes a close reading of Cultural Materialist criticism of Shakespeare interacting with critical theories, Shakespeare's works, historical and political backgrounds, as well as an analysis on race, class, gender and sex.

Chapter 2 discusses the history, ideology and subjectivity of the interpretation of Shakespeare. History, subjectivity, anti-essentialist humanistic criticism and historical ideological criticism are discussed in three sections separately. The author highlights the critical strategy in cultural materialism: Dollimore revealed the historical and social truth of decentralized subjects in Shakespearean plays, committed to subvert the various ideologies which limited the freedom of subjects, and resumed the identities of those suppressed subjects. The author points out that it was from the perspective of anti-essentialism that Dollimore analyzes *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and reveals the pivotal function of wealth, politics and power in the construction of human nature. Through Xu's Dollimore analysis, we know that human nature becomes more sophisticated with social interventions.

Chapter 3 is about the identity politics in Shakespearean plays. Race, class, gender and sex politics in Shakespeare plays are discussed in comparison with post-colonialism, Marxism, and feminism. The author acknowledges the significance of Cultural Materialists' discussion of race problems in Shakespeare criticisms. The conflicts of classes are not only determined by economic factors, but also by various other factors, like race and gender. Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticism emphasizes the impact of history and culture and avoids unary determinism. The author concludes that with the development of cultural studies, Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticism tends to be more closely integrated with feminist Shakespeare criticism. In later Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticism, gender and sex studies became the major objects of the political interpretation of Shakespearean plays. However, the strategies in deconstructing male chauvinism were mainly on the levels of language and culture, which was far from reality and failed to be conducive to the liberation of women in reality.

Chapter 4 is an ideological investigation of the Shakespeare industry. It discusses the teaching, performance, and film and TV productions of Shakespearean plays from the perspective of ideology. With a close reading of Alan Sinfield's "Give an Account of Shakespeare and Education, Showing Why You Think They are Effective and What You have Appreciated about Them. Support Your Comments with Precise References," this chapter discovers that Shakespeare was applied in the education of British citizens as a tool to spread conservative political ideology while its humanism was neglected. With an analysis of Alan Sinfield's "Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and the Making of Ideology," the chapter holds that the Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of Shakespearean plays consolidated the ruling ideology in England. With reference to Graham Holderness's "Radical Potentiality and Institutional Closure: Shakespeare in Film and Television," the author points out that the adapted films and TV series of Shakespearean plays were simply a means for various groups and parties to win the cultural leadership or obtain their economic profits.

Chapter 5 is a conclusion summarizing the achievements and limitations of Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticisms in the west. First it acknowledges the inheritance of tradition in Cultural Marxist Shakespearean Studies. Then it holds that the most striking and outstanding contribution of Cultural Materialist Shakespearean Studies was its political criticism and ethical pursuit. Shakespeare criticisms are going out of the ivory tower and directly intervene in the reality. Shakespeare embodies the qualities of a Marxist and writes as a Marxist here. In reading Shakespeare, with the illumination of cultural materialist critics, we discover the political, historical, racial, class, gender and sexual struggles in and between the lines. At last the author criticizes Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticism in China is far from enough despite the dominant Marxist ideology in China. There is still much room for Chinese scholars to do Cultural Materialist studies of Shakespeare.

In comparison with other critical theories, like New Historicism, Feminism, Post-colonialism, and Marxism, the book clarifies the characteristics of Cultural Materialist Shakespeare criticisms. What's illuminating is that the author wisely combines ancient Chinese stories in analyzing Western Shakespeare criticisms, such as comparing the tragic love story of Xiang Yu, King Ba in the late Qin Dynasty, and his beloved concubine Yu Ji with that of Antony and Cleopatra. The book also makes some objective comments on the achievements and limitations of Cultural Materialist studies of Shakespeare.

Xu's book makes a profound analysis of Cultural Materialist Criticism of Shakespeare in England. It helps Chinese scholars to understand Cultural Materialists' interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. By combining a close reading of Shakespeare's play texts, the book makes some creative interpretations of Shakespeare in light of Cultural Materialism. Furthermore, the book deepens and clarifies the meaning of those texts and conversely enriches Cultural Materialist criticism. The author insightfully points out the limitations of cultural criticism: Cultural Materialism deconstructs the internal criticism but fails to construct a systematic criticism instead; it is problematic for Cultural Materialism to neglect totally the religious factors in Shakespearean plays.

Despite its contributions, nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the book would have been a better monograph if it traces the academic origin of Cultural Materialism and analyses the social and political background of the Marxist Shakespeare scholars, which are very important for Chinese readers to understand the critical paradigm of Cultural Materialism. If there are more comparative efforts between western Cultural Materialist criticisms and their Chinese counterpart, it would be more easily understood by those scholars in China who are not able to read English works directly. In addition, an equal dialogue between western and Chinese scholars on the same topic will not only make the discussion more interesting, but also more comprehensive and convincing.

Despite the widespread pandemic of covid-19 all over the world in early 2020, the latest western Shakespeare criticisms have been introduced to China in an even more comprehensive way. Perhaps this is because Shakespeare offers us fun, knowledge and hope especially in times of hardship. Shakespeare has been more widely read during this challenging period of time. Readers can obtain more pleasure in reading Shakespeare with the interpretation of specialized critics. Luckily, to our expectation, a more comprehensive selection of the latest western Shakespeare criticisms, *Selected Papers of World Shakespeare Studies* edited by Yang Lingui and Qiao Xueying was published in 2020 timely. Inspired by Russ McDonald's *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1945–2000* and Yang Zhouhan's *Selected Works of Shakespeare Criticism*, Professor Yang Lingui, a leading Shakespeare scholar in China who published much internationally, organized quality Shakespeare scholars to translate the representative papers of the latest leading Shakespeare scholars in the English-speaking world in New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Post-Colonialism, Feminism, etc, since the 1980s.

Professor Yang Lingui wrote a long and comprehensive preface titled "Shakespeare Studies and the Turn of Literary Criticism" introducing the developments in Shakespeare studies since the 1950s. He holds that the creation and spread of literary works should never be isolated from three core elements: writers, works, and readers (viewers of dramas and movies) and hence literary criticism should not only be concerned with the deliberation of the meaning of literary texts but also investigate the mechanism of the production and reception of them. In his opinion, there is a fourth dimension of meaning, context, in which the above-mentioned three elements are profoundly and complicatedly involved. According to Yang, the different interpretations of the sophisticated relations of the four elements lead to the various schools of literary criticisms. In Shakespeare studies, the different turns in different periods were the consequences of the changing understanding of history. Since the late 1970s, critics not only put Shakespeare and his works in the historical context but also attempt to demystify the secret meaning of his works and find the possibility of textual participation in the construction of historical meaning. In the 1980s, with the development of theory and criticism, some schools like New Historicism began to replace New Criticism and became the main player in literary studies and cultural education. Then the preface introduces concisely various representative scholars' Shakespeare studies from the perspectives of Reader's Response, Psychoanalysis, New Historicism, Materialism, Feminism, Gender Studies, Postcolonial Studies, etc. Through Yang's introduction, we can gain a complete and profound understanding of the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays by various critical theories.

The selection covers the schools of New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Feminist Criticism and Postcolonial Studies. The selection is made

elaborately on the basis of an extensive reading of western Shakespeare studies. It borrows some representative papers of the leading critics from Russ McDonald's *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000*. For Historicism and New Historicism, readers gain access to the Chinese translation of Stephen Greenblatt's "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*," Jean E. Howard's "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies" and Jonathan Dollimore's "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and New Historicism." For gender studies, Catherine Belsey's "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies," Gayle Greene's "'This that you call love': Sexual and Social Tragedy in *Othello*," Stephen Orgel's "The Performance of Desire," Ania Loomba's "Sexuality and Racial Difference." For Post-colonial studies, Meredith Anne Skura's "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*." For social studies, Lynda E. Boose's "The Family in Shakespeare Studies; or Studies in the Family of Shakespeareans; or The Politics of Politics." It also includes the relatively more recent studies of the leading scholars in various fields, like Alan Sinfield's "*Macbeth*: History, Ideology and Intellectuals" and Valerie Wayne's "Historic Difference: Misogyny and *Othello*." However, different from Russ McDonald, the editors didn't simply categorize the papers into several groups of isms. This arrangement is more appropriate since with the integration of various critical theories, it is quite hard to simplify the critical methods into one single school of criticisms. Rather, most papers integrate various theoretical approaches in their criticisms. The selection covers most of the leading and latest Shakespeare studies in English academia, which will surely broaden the academic horizon of Shakespeare scholars in China. The publication of the book is a signal literary event in Shakespeare studies in China.

To guarantee the quality and authority, editors invite specialized Shakespeare scholars to do the translation. The translated version is under continuous polishing. For example, the term "containment" in "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and New Historicism" was previously translated as "bao rong 包容" meaning "tolerance" in an earlier version by Huang Bikang, a famous professor of Shakespeare at Peking University. But in this selection, it is revised as "yi zhi 抑制" meaning "restraint," with an explanatory note. This rendition is more academically precise and adds to our understanding of western Shakespeare criticisms. With the development of Shakespeare studies in China, we can see Chinese scholars gaining a more profound and more accurate understanding of their western colleagues. Yang also mentions the latest theoretical perspectives in Shakespeare studies, like eco-criticism, cognitive poetics, new reading theory and ethics for interested scholars in China to further their studies. At the end of his preface, Yang admits that Shakespeare studies in the English world are not the whole picture of world Shakespeare studies and plans to continue to edit selections of papers on Shakespeare from non-English

academia. He hopes more and more Chinese scholars will publish internationally and make contributions to world Shakespeare studies. Actually, generations of Shakespeare scholars in China, from the pioneers like Yang Zhouhan, Bian Zhilin, Li Funing, Lu Gusun, and Fang Ping, to younger scholars like Gu Zhengkun, Zhang Chong, Yang Lingui, Luo Yimin, Hao Tianhu, and Liu Hao, have not only introduced western Shakespeare studies to Chinese academia, but also published internationally and contributed considerably to world Shakespeare studies. The introduction and study of western Shakespeare criticisms have long inspired Shakespeare studies in China and will definitely contribute to the shaping of China's academic discourse in Shakespeare criticisms. Shakespeare criticisms by Chinese scholars diversify the picture of world Shakespeare studies and inspire western scholars more extensively. This has set a typical example of cultural cross-fertilization between the West and China.

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Mo Zhi, *Mo Zhi's Notes on Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2019. Pp. 355.

Reviewed by *Jie Tang**

Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, like an everlasting spring, continuously water and nourish every generation. Zhang Qiong is a writer and professor from Fudan University and her inquiries center around Shakespeare's productions and adaptations. Underpinning the 2005-version Arden Shakespeare's 154 sonnets and Tu An's (one of the distinguished Chinese Shakespearean critics and translators) Chinese translation, Zhang Qiong, with the pseudonym of Mo Zhi, presents her sharp and subtle insights on Shakespeare's sonnets with her own Chinese translation scattered throughout *Mo Zhi's Notes on Shakespeare's Sonnets* published in 2019 by Fudan University Press.

Mo Zhi's book engages in a discussion of Shakespeare's aesthetics, poetics, artistry and creativity, and bursts forth her own ruminations on aesthetics and poetics, her own meditation on life, friendship, love, truth, beauty, kindness, and justice. Within her engagement, the author tries to transcend her reading and life experience over time and space for refreshing entertainment and blessedness of soul and mind. She professes in the prologue that free from traditional divisions and established comments, her reading tends to gloss every single piece of sonnet as a self-sufficient and independent item, which is her so-called "intentional misreading" (15). However, she candidly confesses that she unintentionally links up each sonnet like a cluster of pearls since these sonnets are an organic whole after reading Sonnet 17 (37). Therefore, between the so-called self-sufficiency and whole lies a tension entrusting Mo Zhi to trace Shakespeare's subtle and intangible nuances in the sonnets that seemingly repeat again and again the same theme, namely advising the author's friend to get married and give birth to offspring to bequeath his beauty before Sonnet 126, and the love triangle among the author's friend, the dark lady and the author after Sonnet 126.

Following the ebb and flow of Shakespeare's acute emotion, Mo Zhi starts her personal journey of closely reading and elaborating Shakespeare's sonnets from various aspects including wording, touches, rhythm, rhyme and rhetoric, and of deeply probing into Shakespeare's dynamic sensibility and thought in each sonnet (76).

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Mo Zhi unearths new elements and novelty as each sonnet proceeds from Sonnet 1 to Sonnet 126, in which the theme of marriage is cast into these sonnets. She focuses her attention on the theme of marriage from Sonnet 1 to Sonnet 9, in which in order to persuade his friend to get married, Shakespeare employs different similes, such as “rose” (Sonnet 1), “glass” (Sonnet 3), “beauty’s legacy” (Sonnet 4), time and its double effect (Sonnet 5), son and sun (Sonnet 6), music (Sonnets 8 and 9). Shakespeare’s resourceful similes in these sonnets enthrall Mo Zhi who agrees that artful wording with exquisite refinement refreshes the mind and undoes vulgar greed (19). Yet, she does not stick with the theme of marriage from Sonnet 5 on and ponders on the extensions and implications behind these sonnets (13). Mo Zhi recognizes that the poet firstly declares the intimacy between his friend and him in Sonnet 10, and from this point on, the poet often expresses his love, lovesickness, unstable affection, optimism, pessimism, hate and relief as their relationship changes, either in physical distance or in spiritual distance. Apart from communication of these emotions, Shakespeare begins a turn from Sonnet 19 on from the theme of advising his friend to get married and give birth to a discussion of artistry. Mo Zhi focuses on the poet’s disturbance and entanglement in Sonnets 20 to 51 because the poet is trapped by love; thus, “the dull substance of my flesh” is “so much of earth and water wrought” (Sonnet 44). Therefore, from Sonnet 52 on, Mo Zhi is aware of the fact that the poet shrinks from the love relationship, and conceives that the poet’s active and vigorous choice of retreat represents initiative in art creation which dramatically motivates luxuriant poetic diversity and transcends the poem itself (119). And Mo Zhi starts paying her attention to Shakespeare’s aesthetics. Mo Zhi explains that the friend, “thou,” is not the real man, but an ideal beauty within for whom the poet strives from Sonnet 53 on, and the beauty expands from human beings to nature (121). From Sonnets 53 to 70, Mo Zhi also analyses the effect of time on beauty in Sonnets 59, 60 and 65. Mo Zhi concludes that a true and natural beauty without pretension in these sonnets appeals to the poet (154). Mo Zhi indicates that changes in theme and content take place from Sonnet 71 on. Sonnet 78 shows the relationship of patron and writer between the friend and the poet, so the poet seems to flatter his friend and defends his own poems. Mo Zhi assumes that Shakespeare’s creation surpasses other poets because the beauty he creates is rather artificial than self-sufficient without modification (189), and that until Sonnet 105, it is the first time that Shakespeare conveys the trinity of beauty—a whole unity of “Fair, kind, and true” (Sonnet 105). From Mo Zhi’s perspective, the poet, due to the inequality, expresses his leave from his friend in Sonnets 109 and 110, so the friend becomes a metaphor and a certain belief for the poet in Sonnet 112 (252). Following Sonnet 112, Shakespeare, Mo Zhi explains, concentrates on the artistry whose quintessence is true feelings, and concludes in Sonnet 126 that his language is futile and “the rest is silence” (*Hamlet*, 5.2.358).

From Sonnet 127 on, Mo Zhi discusses the theme of love triangle among the dark lady, the poet's friend and the poet. Mo Zhi argues that Sonnets 1 to 126 describe the spiritual love, while Sonnets 127 to 154 the erotic love (347) that features the desire of body and soul. Sonnet 136 repeatedly borrows the loaded word "will" to highlight eros and desire, but this technique, Mo Zhi explains, directly deconstructs them, so Sonnet 137 discloses there is an insurmountable gulf between sense and sensibility. Besides, the dark lady in the sonnets draws Mo Zhi's attention. Shakespeare rebukes the monolithic taste that white is supremely beautiful, and glorifies the beauty of blackness. From Mo Zhi's perspective, the dark lady is a singular woman who challenges common customs and has her own life style and wisdom; therefore, she is carefree and discovers her own fascination and demeanor (298). In Sonnet 144, the poet writes, "The better angel is a man right fair, /The worser spirit a woman coloured ill." Unlike some readers holding that this sonnet divides evil and good by gender, and that Sonnets 1 to 126 depict an ideal and perfect world while Sonnets 127 to 154 a dark and evil world, Mo Zhi avers there is no telling distinction from each other in these sonnets, and Shakespeare deconstructs the binary opposition (332-333). Besides, Mo Zhi also interprets Shakespeare's "mad" (Sonnet 140) love and "My love is as a fever" (Sonnet 147), and ends with the sentence "Love's fire heats water, water cools not love" (Sonnet 154), which Mo Zhi thinks is a hail and salute for the love whose "fire" dies hard.

Indeed, Mo Zhi overwhelmingly falls her eyes on the motif—*Ars longa, vita brevis* when reading the sonnets. For example, Sonnet 15 conveys the poet's works can sustain the friend's beauty, and Sonnet 18 boasts art makes life last. Shakespeare's sonnets are dotted with the capriciousness of love, which uncovers the poet's personal and peculiar love philosophy. It is this kind of personalization and singularity that overwhelmingly impinge upon Mo Zhi who outputs her differently provoking insights and enlightenment for herself and readers. It is safe to say Mo Zhi's individual understandings aroused by the sonnets are the quintessence of the book.

Apart from assessments on Shakespeare's texts, Mo Zhi always aims to express her timely inspirations stirred by the sonnets on life, love, truth, beauty, kindness, etc. Concerning life, what is eternity? What is the essence of making life last and keeping life on? How do we maintain and optimize our life? Mo Zhi is always pondering on those questions. She believes life is endowed with natural rules that always refresh life, and we should follow those rules (4). Life's ultimate end is death, but we have different ways to transcend death (13). As every type of life shares the same end, we do not have to get depressed. Hardly has life ended when there is a new life blossoming and flourishing (27), in which the universal circle of life is the driving force. For love, Mo Zhi explains uncertainty may be the normal condition of love (246), so love brings about sweetness and sorrowness (68). Falling in love is one's own business, regardless

of the beloved (76). Love is selfless that leads a person to lose oneself (83), which results in loneliness when loving someone too deeply (53). However, Mo Zhi encourages people to love, because one who loves another one gains real happiness. We can transcend ourselves in love which broods hurts, healing, failures, gains, etc. To love, and to love bravely and ardently (70), is of paramount importance, no matter happy or heart-broken. At the same time, lovers should give each other space for imagination and freedom (87). As for truth, beauty and kindness, Mo Zhi concedes it is difficult to universalize a consensus standard to judge them (292). However, truth penetrates everything and pretension is doomed to failure (46-48). Truth and beauty are the hearts of art (31) and pretentious techniques must give way to them (72). At the very end of the book, Mo Zhi has to admit unexpectedness is the true condition of individual life. No one can obtain reasonable transcendence because one's mind always sways between good and evil, which is human beings' confusion and reality (333).

Mo Zhi also shows her meditations on aesthetics and poetics in the book. Poems should be repeatedly read, which contributes to newness and novelty (2). Poetry's allurements lies in different understandings according to our different moods (4). Indeed, meaning is continuously constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed (9). Poetry is so flexible and dynamic that reading it over and over again provides readers with another experience to re-taste and reassess (9), and another chance to reenter the wonderland of poesy. As a result, readers are lost in the wonderland filled with the beautiful, and then transient nourishment brings about eternity (7). Poetry's beauty lies in compact and brief expression uncovering tremendous and enormous imagination and inspiration (7). Poetry's ambiguous wording contributes to its self-deconstruction, which is the reason why poetry attracts readers. Poetry reveals not what truth is, but only sorrowfulness, contradictions and entanglements suffered by people, yet poetry traverses through time, and it no less conveys true emotion and helplessness upsetting people as time goes by (305). Poetry motivates individual understandings of life experience.

Poetry and love are holy but also heart-broken (66). Shakespeare presents his undefeated and great love in his sonnets (99), which produces eternity and transcendence (126). In the afterword, Mo Zhi remarks that the arrangement and development of Shakespeare's sonnets have a certain system and structure, but randomly reading one by one can strengthen our reading experiment and enjoyment of the English language. What we do is just to embrace curiosity for and interest in language and literature, regardless of systematic and theoretic analyses. We shall abandon stereotypes, feeling free to read them loudly. The 154 sonnets, including wording, sentences, structures, rhyme, rhythm, etc., produce a variety of ambiguities, so there is no agreed reading methodology. Individual reading experience spanning across decades

and generations is a precious reward, which entertains soul and mind, and absorbs the pleasure of appreciating and contemplating beauty (355).

What's most impressive about this book is Mo Zhi's personal ruminations on the thoughts and aesthetics behind these sonnets, not restricted with established comments. Based on her close reading of the Bard's sonnets, Mo Zhi closely following the flow and subtlety of Shakespeare's emotion gradually displays her singular explorations with her personal life experience. It seems that Mo Zhi transcends herself within Shakespeare's wonderland. Equally impressive is the fact that Mo Zhi has performed an in-depth analysis of Shakespeare's creative faculties.

It would have been more helpful if Mo Zhi could more scrutinize the wordings in these sonnets, rather than just offer her own prose translation. Moreover, it may be better to undertake an in-depth textual analysis. Finally, certain improvement in editing work would surely rectify some minor errors in this otherwise brilliant book.

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Nigel Wood, *Shakespeare and Reception Theory*. London and New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2020. Pp. 195.

Reviewed by *Guixia Xie**

Nigel Wood's *Shakespeare and Reception Theory* is part of the Arden Shakespeare and Theory series edited by Evelyn Gajowski. This series aims to introduce a wide variety of contemporary theoretical developments that have established a role in the field of Shakespeare studies in the past few decades. Nigel Wood the author is a Professor of literature with specialist research areas of 18th-century literature and the staging of Shakespearean texts in the contemporary age. In this book, he co-opts reception theories to the enhancement of understanding of Shakespearean texts and aims to exemplify several theoretical templates for the study of how dramatic meaning is achieved and how artistic significance might be projected.

The book begins with the four main reception-engaged issues, viz. where the artistic elements exist, what their nature is, the significance of understanding past reaction to literary artifacts, and the possibility of a manufactured reaction during the viewing and reading of an artifact. To seek answers to these issues, Wood presents the two reception-related formative ideas that have contributed to the more recent assumptions about theatrical effects, i.e. hermeneutics, which concerns how people interpret external data, and aesthetics, about how people register the experiences derived principally from art. Three theorists are referred to at this point. Edmund Husserl's philosophical concept of "transcendental phenomenology" is used to ascertain the ways how we make sense of art. Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of "horizon of understanding" is used to demonstrate that our interpretation of artworks cannot be transhistory. And Roman Ingarden's concretization of literary works of art shows how people approach and interpret artifacts is distinct from other forms of communication. According to Wood, Gadamer's and Ingarden's theories share an interest in aesthetic effects, yet they diverge widely from each other in their perceptions of the subjectivity, viz. whether the aesthetic effects are constructed by the subjectivity based on the received text or it is the text that directs the subjectivity to certain types of aesthetic understanding (21). To explore the topic of subjectivity, Wood then skillfully introduces Jean-Paul Sartre's distinction

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between a passive “having-to-be” self and an active “not-knowing” one, with the former easily surrendering to the received opinions and the latter more active to search for some perception beyond the given. This cognitive sense of response leads to a more explicit discussion of Carolyn Brown and Bruce McConachie, who use a psychoanalytic approach to literature and to audience analysis and who emphasize that the preconscious allegiances or the “epistemic competence” determine any aesthetic qualities in response. These discussions in the first chapter provide a knowledge basis for the coming chapters and raise the aspects to be developed into theoretical templates in the following chapters.

Chapter Two picks up the concept of “preconscious” response in Chapter One and analyzes it from a sociological perspective with a focus on the discussion of how spectators and readers interact with performance. A great section of this chapter is dedicated to the theories of Hans Robert Jauss. His sense of “horizon of expectation” is used to argue that history and aesthetics are entwined and that the individual’s aesthetic judgments are not born out of free choice but historically conditioned. Thus, Wood argues, with examples of different adaptations of *Antony and Cleopatra*, that the reconstruction of the past horizon of expectation could enable us to discover how a work is received by contemporary readers and also allow us to register what is involved in that move of adaptation. While emphasizing the importance of “history” in the understanding of Shakespeare, Wood also identifies other aspects that are important in this process of understanding, including Wolfgang Iser’s ideas about the involvement of readers, which highlights the indeterminacy readers would encounter in the process of sense-making of the profound dramatic action, and Umberto Eco’s idea of implied authorial intention, which emphasizes the role played by the author.

Chapter Three approaches the problem of literary response in a more behavioral way, shifting from the discussion of response caused by external forces, i.e. the text-in-history or the text itself, to more internal ones, meaning that the process of meaning-making is more determined by our deepest impulse brought to the fore by an encounter with fictive expression (68). The first theorist referred to is Norman Holland. His psychoanalytic inquiry of literary response emphasizes that we the reader, with a personal “identity theme,” would encounter a text through our own predilections, working out through the text with our patterns of desire and interacting with the work to make it part of our psychic economy or vice versa. David Bleich’s notion of “negotiation” is introduced at this point to complement Holland’s more personal and psychological ones. According to Bleich, through negotiating with the patterns of a literary work, we might “resymbolize” the experience to make it comprehensible both to ourselves and others. Following this more social vein of discussion, Wood then discusses Stanley Fish’s “interpretive communities,” which is the source of meaning that we confer on texts, and Jonathan Culler’s “literary

competence,” which refers to an understanding of the common rules or laws of traditional good taste encouraged by institutional pressures that structure our reading and spectating habit. The plot and performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are used in this chapter to connect these theories with the text and practice.

Following the psychological and social perspectives, Chapter Four moves on to a more extreme scenario when the co-option of performance becomes a matter of identifying and evokes a resistant response from the audience. Wood shifts our attention to some more authentic responses when we find aspects of Shakespeare questionable or are offended by the plot or characterization about our identity. In this chapter, Judith Butler and Judith Fetterley's viewpoints on gender relationship, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon's discussion of colonialism, as well as other writers and theorists such as Bertolt Brecht, Jacques Rancière, Harold Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, and David Bleich's ideas about performance and interpretation are discussed, so as to raise the readers' pensiveness on the more tutored responses on the one hand and the more instinctual reactions on the other. During the discussion, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest* and their different adaptations are referred to bring up the identity problems such as gender, racism, and post-colonialism respectively.

Chapter Five explores how a divide between the private and public spheres might bear upon an approach to Shakespeare's works. He raises the point that “[t]he need to approach audience response via a consideration of how it is placed within the expectations and impulses of specific senses of a ‘public’ is central to locating communal reactions to drama” (129). He then goes over a brief history of how “public sphere” has been formed together with the then rising practice of playgoing and how the opinions towards theater vary among different scholars in the 18th century. In this section, Jürgen Habermas's identification of the changing range of the public sphere is introduced to assist in the analysis of early modern theatrical culture, Henri Lefebvre's views to the discussion about the boundaries of public and private spaces, and Stephen Greenblatt's to the “sustained collective improvisation” created by the theatrical space. Besides arguing about what effects different spaces might have on the audience's response to these theories, this chapter also discusses the differences between the composition of Shakespeare's first audience and the modern one. These modern audiences, who are more privatized and scattered because of the thriving mass media and recorded performance, and whose sense, according to Wood, is “much more conditioned by physical boundaries than most of Shakespeare's spectators” (148), make the tracking of response much more difficult nowadays. The examples used are the different presentations of *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. Such a distinction of the Shakespearean audience into the public

and private groups by Wood provides a new perspective to the discussion of Shakespeare reception.

In the concluding part, Wood briefly discusses how the Covid-19 pandemic and advancement of technology would affect the performance and the audience, making the problem of response even more different from the traditional ones. He also analogizes the way an audience expresses and argues his or her opinions about a play with others to that of the operating mechanism of response theories, justifying his use of reception theories in the analysis of Shakespearean plays. At the end of this section, Wood wraps up the book by concluding four areas where reception theories are key to the theatrical understanding of how drama effects might be registered.

Throughout the book, Wood demonstrates his outstanding ability in adopting specific reception theoretical approaches in the application. As Holub once criticizes reception theories as providing the paths that are not “proved to be as open and productive as originally envisioned”(148), Wood, however, demonstrates to us how a range of response theories bear on the criticism of Shakespearean dramatic texts and on the understanding of how audiences and readers in history or at present have reacted to Shakespeare’s works. His combination of different aspects such as psychology, identity, and public sphere, also has some interdisciplinary significance to the reception theories, a point touched by Jauss when he regards reception theory as “partial” discipline to the communication theory and mentioned by Henry Schmidt when he discusses the application of reception theory with real readers (160). Such an interdisciplinary approach not only enables Wood to discuss the reception problems with new perspectives but also to shift among different reception theories with ease, though a further comparison of different concepts might be needed for a better understanding of the theories for the readers such as the subtle difference of the “horizon” concept of Gadamer and Jauss.

Besides theoretical contributions, this book also has some practical significance. It can serve as a valuable reference for scholars who are keen on reception studies or Shakespeare performance studies, and the theoretical templates developed in the book are wealthy resources for students who seek a systematic introduction of response theories and fields for any further investigation.

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- Holub, Robert. *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1984.
- Schmidt, Henry J. “Review: ‘Text-Adequate Concretizations’ and Real Readers: Reception Theory and Its Application.” *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 157-169.