

Magdalena Cieślak,* Agnieszka Rasmus*

Introduction

This volume of *Multicultural Shakespeare* focuses on the dynamics of the binary opposite of diversity and homogeneity. The democratic culture of the West, often seeing itself as the maker of global standards, is ideologically paradoxical. On the one hand, its fundamental premise is the freedom of each individual, which should seemingly embrace diversity and nourish difference as society's organising principle. On the other, however, its practice is to normalise people's behaviour and effectively marginalise individuals that do not conform to the legal norms set by the majority, in effect creating a homogeneously sanitised and orderly society.

The selection of articles in this volume analyses the above thematic areas, looking at how issues connected with the politics of nation, class, and gender are rendered in the output of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as well as in recent reworkings of Shakespeare's plays in theatre, television and film. The authors discuss Renaissance works and their adaptations from a number of methodological perspectives, such as philosophy, reception studies, adaptation and film studies, feminism, postcolonialism and pedagogy, giving the volume a diversity of approaches and an insight into contemporary critical trends.

In "Re-gendering of the Nietzschean Übermensch in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*—the Case of Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate" Katarzyna Burzyńska combines the reading of Renaissance views of femininity with Nietzsche's seemingly sexist, if not misogynistic, texts. She seeks ways to utilise Nietzsche's philosophy to discuss Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate as possible cases of an "overwoman" that expose the oppressive patriarchal system of the Renaissance. Christy Desmet's "Revenge, Rhetoric, and Recognition in *The Rape of Lucrece*" examines the mechanisms of rhetoric and recognition in the poem, allowing for cross-gendered identification with the victim and the violator. Focusing on the trope of *syneciosis*, she proposes to look beyond the nation-building history argument to embrace the poem's poetics as a way of capturing the emotional layer of the revenge story. Kay Stanton in "Intersections of Politics, Culture, Class, and Gender in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merchant of Venice*" draws from

* Department of Studies in Drama and pre-1800 English Literature, Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź, Poland.

the “rabbit-duck” metaphor to signal possible diversities in reading gender and class relations in the selected plays, to then move on to more multiple interpretations of the plays’ patterns and complexities applying the idea of a kaleidoscope. In “Holding a Mirror up to Nature? Adapting *The Taming of the Shrew* for Teenagers and Pedagogy” Agnieszka Rasmus analyses two approaches to updating the play’s gender wars for a specifically teenage audience—a production in the Stefan Jaracz Theatre, Łódź, Poland, and a Hollywood off-shoot *10 Things I Hate About You*—in order to illustrate how successful or misguided the production decisions may be and how Shakespeare criticism may not always reflect the more positive readings the updates afford its young audience. Inci Bilgin in the article “Rereading *Hamlet* in Contemporary Turkey: Towards Postcolonial Feminist Rewrites?” discusses the politics of nation and gender analysing the reception of Turkish theatrical productions of *Hamlet* since the 1960s until the present.

Jacek Fabiszak in “Kenneth Branagh’s Multicultural and Multi-ethnic Filmed Shakespeare(s)” presents the arguments for and looks at the consequences of casting and location choices in Kenneth Branagh’s adaptations. He analyses such problems as political correctness, colourblindness, and exotic and fairy-tale like sets in the context of Branagh’s theatrical roots and film conventions. David Livingstone in “Silenced Voices: A Reactionary Streamlined *Henry V* in *The Hollow Crown*” examines the play versus its film version to see how the minor characters’ role in exposing Henry’s disputable national politics is rendered, and how the complexities of the nation and class issues are downplayed on screen. In “Postcolonial Re-reading of the Marginalized Nation in William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*” Natalia Sabiniarz explores the play’s complexity in representing the nation, focusing on marginalisation strategies towards women, the elderly and outcasts in maintaining social hierarchies. Piotr Spyra’s “Chaucer and His Bastard Child: Social Disjunction and Metaliterariness in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*” offers a fresh look at the issue of class divisions in Jacobean drama. The analysis of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Fletcher and Shakespeare reveals that the concern with class and social divisions, apart from serving as a topical commentary on the social realities of life in early modern England, may also function as a vehicle for purely (meta-)literary reflection on the nature of poetic creation in the shadow of the great precursor poet.