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Foreword

Yan Brailowsky, Anne-Valérie Dulac and Laetitia Sansonetti

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Foreword

Yan Brailowsky, Anne-Valérie Dulac and Laetitia Sansonetti

Shakespeare After Shakespeare

- 1 On the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the academic society which bears his name in France devoted its annual conference to the study of what remains of the "Bard"'s *œuvre* today, discussing some of the changes he inspired in poetry and drama, as well as film, dance and the visual arts. For this academic celebration, we found ourselves unable to select a narrower topic. As a consequence, we included a number of papers which, like Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, attempted to circle the Globe-world in a handful of days. The experience was doubly satisfying, as the conference took place at the Fondation Deutsch de la Meurthe of the Cité internationale universitaire de Paris, a venue which reminded us both of the stage of the Globe theater and of old university colleges in England.
- 2 What remains of Shakespeare today? What is "the" Shakespeare who remains "after Shakespeare"? What does "Shakespeare" stand for? These were some of the questions addressed by the contributions to this volume, each in its own way. Even biographical approaches were discussed, although mostly in passing. True, we still know little of "W. S.", the man who signed dedicatory epistles to narrative poems which we know with greater certainty were willingly and deliberately published in his own name. The relative paucity of biographical data has brought grist to the mill of a number of more or less hare-brained conspiracy theorists, some of which resurfaced recently riding the wave of the Shakespeare anniversary year and attendant media interest, eliciting varied responses from academics from either side of the Channel.¹ What we do know is that the artist has bequeathed poems (some of which dubiously attributed to "Shakespeare"), and over three dozen plays which inspired the aesthetics of drama around the world. Shakespeare's plays are not the preserve of the elite, but remain some of the most popular and vibrant works in Western drama.
- 3 In addition to detailed studies of the influence of Shakespeare in France, and contributions on the cultural role of key characters such as Hamlet who serve as a

turning point in Western — or world — culture, and studies on the adaptations of Shakespeare on stage or film, Shakespeare's daunting figure was at the heart of the questions raised by the contributions in this volume. "Shakespeare" is more than an *œuvre*.

- 4 In many respects, "Shakespeare" includes much more than the traditional corpus attributed to the swan from Avon, which is why the study of what came "after Shakespeare" elicited so many contrasted reactions from audiences and artists, young and old alike, which occasionally stray far from the source texts, suggesting Shakespeare is no longer a corpus, or even a coveted corpse, but truly a "world", a creative source the origins of which remain a mystery. As the lately departed Yves Bonnefoy argued, "There is something in Shakespeare's works that is not explicit, and which contains a part of the unconscious which requires further analysis."² One could argue that the following contributions are varied attempts at making this unconscious explicit.

Shakespeare, France, and Romanticism

- 5 Catherine Treilhou Balaudé's article focuses on a key moment in the French reception of Shakespeare: the tipping point at which he stops being predominantly criticised for not being classical enough, and starts becoming a beacon for playwrights eager to renew their art. The early years of the 19th century were indeed a period in which France opened to cosmopolitan influences from Europe, in particular ideas and trends coming from Germany. From Chateaubriand to Deschamps via Guizot, Stendhal, and Hugo, Treilhou Balaudé analyses how men of letters related to Shakespeare, whom some enthusiastically adopted as a role model capable of rejuvenating French drama thanks to his use of mixed genres and his choice of historical topics, while others presented him – a little less enthusiastically – as a source of inspiration not to imitate too closely.
- 6 Florence Naugrette's article can be read as a sequel to Catherine Treilhou Balaudé's: Naugrette analyses a type of literary metempsychosis that could be called a form of appropriation, namely how Victor Hugo took hold of the figure of Shakespeare in his essay entitled *William Shakespeare*. For Hugo, who was writing in exile, Shakespeare incarnates an antithesis and an antidote to the prevalent classical good taste that he finds so stifling for French literature and society. Shakespeare is praised for his excessiveness and his use of *coincidentia oppositorum* both for his character psychology, with his "Romantic" exemplars of universal passions, and for his rhetoric, with his antithetical images and styles all blending within a canon that is huge, protean, almost monstrous – well worthy of Hugo himself.
- 7 Valérie Courel focuses on yet another Romantic variation on Shakespeare as a character, that of Ambroise Thomas's *Songe d'une nuit d'été*. The libretto for this comic opera, written by Joseph Bernard Rosier and Adolphe de Leuven and very freely adapted from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, tells the story of how a character named Shakespeare is rescued from a life of debauchery by a character named Élisabeth, who helps him turn into a poet and a hero. In this operatic version, Shakespeare is presented as a Romantic hero thanks to a fanciful rewriting of his relationship with Elizabeth. The successful opera contributed to the rise of Bardolatry in France, where it was relatively late to emerge, compared to Germany or England. It

even helped its further development outside France, via the numerous adaptations and translations Thomas's work inspired.

Hamlet transformed

- 8 Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine explores the many adaptations of *Hamlet* on the French stage over the 19th century and shows how this tragedy progressively emerged as a major play in French theatres. The tragedy, once translated, transformed and adapted for French taste by Jean-François Ducis, first gave François-Joseph Talma the opportunity to perform as Hamlet, which he played no less than seventy-four times, thereby gaining increasing popularity as a tragedian. At the height of the Romantic period, Alexandre Dumas and Paul Meurice's adaptation of *Hamlet* became by far the most popular one. This version, which turned the tragedy into a "*drame*" and was further modified by Meurice after Dumas's death, was the one in which Jean-Sully Mounet famously starred as Hamlet at the Comédie-Française. The lasting success of this production, both in France and abroad, is one of the reasons why *Hamlet* became such an emblematic play in 19th-century France, which the many illustrations added to Schwartz-Gastine's fascinating historical outlook only serve to confirm.
- 9 Michelle Assay reviews the myth that Stalin banned any performance of *Hamlet* while he was at the head of the Soviet Union. While showing that there was no such total ban, she explains that Stalin seems to have resented not so much the play or its main protagonist as the notion of "Hamletism" attached to it, with the image of an indecisive prince or leader. She analyses the political, cultural, and administrative context of Soviet theatre performances and documents thoroughly the reception of the play to shed light on Stalin's hostility. His criticism of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, for instance, seems to stem from the similarities he perceived between the depiction of the Russian czar and the Danish prince.

Shakespeare, alive in memories

- 10 Karen Newman looks into memory in and of Shakespeare's plays. Remembering and forgetting are central in Shakespeare's works, perhaps most notably in *Hamlet*, with its spectral figures begging for remembrance. Yet Shakespeare's plays themselves have over time become exercises in memory proper, passages of which came to be memorised for pedagogical purposes. Newman first focuses on the many philosophical debates about memorizing from Plato or Cicero to Locke, among others. She then shows how over the 18th century Shakespeare became one of the authors most often learned by heart by schoolchildren, in order to understand why this became common pedagogical practice as well as a key form of mediation whereby Shakespeare has been transmitted over the centuries.
- 11 Sujata Iyengar's contribution shows the relevance of Shakespeare today by offering a fascinating foray into the field of law and literature. Reminding us that "adaptation" and "appropriation" mean something different in law and in literature, Iyengar takes as her starting point Shakespeare's un-copyrighted status to analyse what Shakespearean adaptations do to "Shakespeare", but also what they do to our contemporary cultural habits and mindsets, in a process she calls "transformative". She

thus sheds light both on questions of Shakespearean canonicity and on the vexed topic of fair use, by explaining how appropriation art works by re-contextualising.

Shakespeare illustrated

- 12 Louis-Antoine Prat's article, which introduces and analyses an array of French paintings from the 19th century, sheds light on the influence that Shakespeare's works had on French artists, in particular Delacroix and Chassériau. Prat highlights the aesthetic choices made by the painters in the context of the literary reception of Shakespeare at the time, and shows how those choices contributed to sketching a Romantic and post-Romantic version of the Shakespearean canon in France: what plays were most quoted and illustrated (mainly the tragedies, with *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet* among the plays most frequently referred to), and within those plays what scenes excited the imagination of painters and drawers, who in turn helped shape the visual imagination of Shakespeare's readers.
- 13 Manon Montier's contribution offers a lavishly illustrated history of Shakespeare's reception in France over the 19th century. Through the comparison of two illustrated editions of Shakespeare's works – *Œuvres de Jean-François Ducis* (1813) and *Souvenirs du théâtre anglais* (1827) – she probes into the sometimes conflicting interaction between Shakespeare's plays and the pictures created by painters and engravers to illustrate them. In addition to allowing an insight into performance history, this iconographic journey takes the reader into a reflection on both the notion of adaptation and the evolution of illustration techniques in 19th-century France, as well as on Romantic reinterpretations of Shakespeare's works.

Shakespeare on screen(s)

- 14 Christy Desmet uses Ian Bogost's concept of alien phenomenology, which centres on non-human types of relationships, to understand the networks of meaning that can emerge in digital representations or appropriations of Shakespeare. Filmed performances, shorter or longer amateur YouTube videos, Wordles, searchable digitised texts, or apps in which the words from a play can be read while images are played and the corresponding text is heard – through the variety of the ways in which a digital user can encounter "Shakespeare", one constant remains: access to meaning in Shakespeare is always mediated, and always problematic.

NOTES

1. On attribution theories, see some of the responses and academic resources on the website of the French Shakespeare Society: <http://shakespeare.revues.org/1681> (accessed 30 May 2017).

2. Yves Bonnefoy, Shakespeare et la poésie, in Yves Bonnefoy : L'amitié et la réflexion, Tours, Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2007 (translation mine), <http://books.openedition.org/pufr/771> (accessed 30 May 2017).

AUTHORS

YAN BRAILOWSKY

Université Paris Nanterre

ANNE-VALÉRIE DULAC

Université Paris 13

LAETITIA SANSONETTI

Université Paris Nanterre