

Paul Edmondson and Ewan Fernie, eds. 2018
New Places: Shakespeare and Civic Creativity
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2014 and 2016 are the key years around which this stimulating collection is based. As the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and the 400th anniversary of his death respectively, the various celebrations and commemorations discussed in the volume provided ample opportunities for the type of Civic Shakespeare in which the collection is interested. These anniversary celebrations moved outside professional Shakespeares in the theatre and the academy to occupy new spaces in towns and cities in the UK, Europe and North-America and, in the process, invited new audiences for their work. There are also other commemorations and celebrations dealt with in the book, including the 150th anniversary of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft in 2014 and the 500th anniversary of the establishment of the Venice ghetto in 2016, both of which combine with these Shakespearean anniversaries in interesting and multifaceted ways.

Several of the contributions in this volume deal with the traffic between civic Shakespeares in the past and present. The first section of the volume, for instance, looks back to the 1769 Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon and David Garrick's performance of *An Ode upon dedicating a building, and erecting a statue, to Shakespeare, at Stratford upon Avon*, a performance which has become a central moment in the history of English Bardolatry. Michael Dobson's chapter looks back from the present to ask whether Garrick's *Ode* was actually any good and finds himself paradoxically "impressed and delighted" with Sam West's 2016 performance of the work in Holy Trinity Church, whilst "struck by how comparatively useless and inaccessible and merely quaint it seemed to be for everyone else there" (13). He adds laconically that "2016 was a big year for being outvoted" a comment on the Brexit referendum, which is very much the sub-conscious of the volume because of its consequences for Europe and Europeans as

well as for the failure of the attempt to make Shakespeare a European Poet Laureate. Other chapters look at the new work commissioned alongside the *Ode* in 2016, particularly *A Shakespeare Masque* with music by Sally Beamish and poetry by Carol Ann Duffy. Duffy's autobiographical approach to Shakespeare and the participation of both amateur and professional as well as young and old performers in this work indicate some of the more contemporary features of Civic Shakespeare. Tobias Döring's illuminating chapter on the 1864 and 2014 Jubilees of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft in Weimar also contrasts the way in which the former's close connection with the desire for a German nation and first performance of Shakespeare history plays as a cycle became the very different 2014 Bremen Shakespeare Company' performance, which was not only "less textually centred than performatively inspired" but portrayed history as "fragmentary, purposefully incoherent, without higher destiny or meaning" (141). In the North-American section, Katherine Scheil points out how the aims of "personal fulfilment, community building, and civic enrichment" in women's Shakespeare clubs in the nineteenth century have given way to online meetings in the twenty-first century and their concerns with "social isolation, lack of personal contact and community coherence" (221).

Yet the traffic in the volume is not only between past and present but also between competing versions of the present. This is most apparent in the necessary task of defining what is meant by Civic Shakespeare, a task that is enthusiastically taken up by most of the contributors. A term coined by Tobias Döring, Paul Edmondson and Ewan Fernie at a 2011 meeting in Stratford, Edmondson's contagious enthusiasm for Civic Shakespeares is balanced by Fernie's more cautious approach. In the Preface, Edmondson argues that Civic Shakespeare "refers specifically to forms of engaging with Shakespeare that might take place on the streets or in other civic spaces, spilling beyond the boundaries of schools, universities, theatres, concert halls, galleries, libraries and museums" (x). Such forms, he continues, "dare to risk embarrassment, to be sentimental and enthusiastic, to be passionate" (xiii) and that "some might even wave flags" (xiii). His chapter on his own 2016 libretto set to the final fourteen minutes of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is just such a work of passion, although it is equally passionate about

Shakespeare as a central figure of European culture. Fernie plays Jaques to Edmondson's Duke Senior, eschewing flag waving and pointing to the danger in Civic Shakespeare that it might simply reinforce the status quo and be instrumentalized by a disappearing State to solve essentially social and economic problems. Aware of the fact that a term like Civic Shakespeare might fail to resonate in non-Anglophone contexts, Döring examines the tortured history of a German word like "volk" as a translation of "civic" in order to reveal its "rebellious, unruly, anti-establishment "potential" (138). Graham Holderness' Afterword historicizes the notion of the civic and its transformations over time. He notes the volume's concern "to find and occupy a 'civic sphere' of consensus and agreement and accord [...] beyond institutional and personal divisions" (253) but cautions that

We need to be confident that our civic domain of inclusion and integration, beyond political and religious controversy, is not simply an echo chamber in which we hear only the sound of our own voices: homogenous because exclusive, harmonious because purged. (253)

Conscious also of the ways in which the advocacy of Civic Shakespeare is also an attempt by academics to move beyond the strictures of the neo-liberal university, he encourages academics nevertheless to remain open to losing control of cherished understandings of Shakespeare when engaging with wider audiences. Katherine Craik and Ewan Fernie's chapter on *The Marina Project*, which seeks to find a radical contemporary meaning for Marina's chastity and Silvia Bigliuzzi's chapter on creating alternatives to the constant reproduction of *Romeo and Juliet* in Verona are both valuable attempts to rethink the work of the academy within a wider society. However, it could be argued that their presuppositions of what constitutes the radical and the alternative also mean that the basis of the projects is already determined before the projects begin, leaving less room for more open processes of creation.

Other attempts to define Civic Shakespeare make use of existing theoretical formulations which are then applied to the field. David Ruiter's intersectionally-inspired exploration of "the civic intersection" or "a place teeming with the traffic of history and present day life, of identities and narratives built, shared and owned

in a lively, if sometimes challenging process of self-authoring and inclusion" (235) brings a necessary focus on diversity and temporal shifts to notions of the civic while Döring cites Almond and Verba's 1963 definition of civic culture as a third culture "neither traditional nor modern but partaking of both; a pluralistic culture based on communication and persuasion, a culture of consensus and diversity" (xxii) and thus goes beyond attempts to cast the civic as simply progressive or regressive. All these formulations illustrate the real strength of the book – its ability to open up new questions prompted by working outside the conventions of the academy or the theatre. The other great strength of the book is the observer-participant or insider perspective which brings a strong sense of creative process and insider knowledge to the discussions along with the welcome reproduction within the book of much of the new material created, from the liturgy *Seeing More Clearly with the Eyes of Love* to the performance script of *Shakespeare Unbard* by the performer/researchers Hester Bradley and Richard O'Brien, which accompanies an exemplary analysis of the pitfalls of celebrating Shakespeare, to Garrick's *Ode* itself.

There are questions that might have been dealt with in more detail. The reference to "New Places" in the title, obviously plays on the association with New Place in Stratford, but apart from Shaul Bassi's chapter on *The Merchant of Venice* in the Ghetto, which extensively documents the various meanings, both historical and contemporary, that accrue to this highly symbolic performance space and Silvia Bigliuzzi's notion of Verona as a space saturated by *Romeo and Juliet*, there is little discussion of how the locations themselves create meanings for the artistic endeavours that take place there. There is also little indication of how Civic Shakespeare feeds back into the institutional sites of the academy and the theatre. Silvia Bigliuzzi talks movingly of her memories of working with theatre practitioners and hearing words she has written come to life. David Ruitter charts the re-authoring of *Macbeth* by the civic performance project: Will Power to Youth in 2016 which reimagined the play as "the tragedy of lost agency, of lost authorship, the tragedy of following someone else's story rather than writing one's own" (248) yet these are no more than tantalising details of what was learned from such experiments.

New Places: Shakespeare and Civic Creativity, to its credit, opens up many such questions without prematurely answering them. Fernie's rather understated conclusion to his Introduction "Civic Shakespeare, we propose, could make a real contribution" (xxiii) may not inspire people to take to the streets, yet it is a judicious assessment of a productive area of work that offers many rewards but also demands experimentation with new ways of thinking about and working with Shakespeare.

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