

most important kind that in this new book, in poems such as "A Testimony" and "Souvenir," for example, we have before our eyes the view of a poet of great sensitivity *working through* the personal and artistic problems of living his philosophy — problems that were less obvious when most of his moments still lay ahead. If hopelessness sometimes seems to pass too easily ("as a shift of light among leaves"), elsewhere "all that's dark" is accepted and even welcomed. In the end, I think, it has taken courage and strict self-discipline for Gray to achieve the conclusion (in both senses) of "Afternoon Walk":

There is nothing I want back
I have ever known, or that I lack.

Certain Things is a rare "stimulus to life." If Robert Gray sees with eyes (in Eliot's phrase) "assured of certain certainties," the excitement for the reader is that through his poetry Gray lends us those eyes. In so doing, he gives us the "things" of the world, the things of which he is fundamentally "certain," as few other poets can. In contemporary Australian poetry Gray's bountifulness in this respect is surpassed, perhaps, only by that of Les Murray — the latter, interestingly enough, a poet assured of an "other-world."

20

Alexander Leggatt

SHAKESPEARE AND THE EMPIRE: BREAKING, SHIFTING, PROVOKING

Philip Mead and Marion Campbell, eds, *Shakespeare's Books: Contemporary Cultural Politics and the Persistence of Empire*, Melbourne University Literary and Cultural Studies Series No. 1., Department of English, University of Melbourne, 1993.

This collection of essays originated in a conference held at the University of Melbourne in July 1992. As its subtitle indicates, its concern is with the uses to which Shakespeare has been put, particularly in empire-building and its aftermath. The primary focus is on Australia, but there are also essays on New Zealand, India and the United States. The core idea is that Shakespeare has been made an instrument of empire, but in the collection as a whole there are many variations on that idea, and it breaks and shifts in useful and provocative ways. It appears in its most straightforward form in Leigh Dale's "Red Plague Rampant?: Shakespeare's *Tempest* in Australia," which surveys three critical readings and one production in which the play is used to "mask or authorize colonialist authority" (99), either presenting the imperialist view directly (as in the case of Mungo MacCallum) or endorsing it covertly by aestheticising the play. It is an easy case to make — perhaps too easy — and given the readiness with which the text can be

turned against colonialism, we might protest that Shakespeare can't be blamed. Stephen Knight ("In the Golden World: Shakespeare and the Pedagogy of Power") insists that Shakespeare can and should be blamed. Recalling his own education, Knight not only describes the way Shakespeare was used to turn English schoolboys into "officials of an empire" (116) but deplores the authoritarianism in the texts themselves, which made them suitable instruments for colonialist indoctrination. He takes as his test case *As You Like It*, in whose forest there is no Robin Hood. He admits that when he saw Vanessa Redgrave play Rosalind he glimpsed the possibility of an Amazonian disruptiveness in the character — but only because a few weeks earlier he had seen her addressing a CND rally. The panache and verbal mischief of Knight's essay are part of its anti-authoritarian stance; the fun is part of the argument.

Glenn D'cruz, in "A 'Dark' Ariel?: Shakespeare and Australian Theatre Criticism," finds in the enthusiastic reception of Michael Gow's 1986 play *Away*, with its heavy use of Shakespearian allusion, depressing evidence of the continuing Anglocentrism of Australian culture. Paul Washington puts us in touch with an earlier point in that story, describing a controversy over the acting of *Hamlet* in Melbourne in 1867 as a stage in the formation of the local cultural establishment. It does not seem from this account that the details of the debate had a partic-

ularly Australian resonance; it was rather that these people had to discuss *Hamlet* in order to prove to themselves that they were serious. In the opening essay Michael Bristol sees in Hamlet's relations with his father a paradigm of America's cultural relations with Europe, unable either to fulfil or to reject the imperatives of the old world. His key evidence comes from *Huckleberry Finn*, which he reads pessimistically as a tale of entrapment, finding in the King's mangled version of Hamlet's soliloquy "a complex stasis and historical paralysis, ... a kind of carnivalised allegory of a deracinated American consciousness trapped by a European past it can never forget nor ever hope to renew" (22). If that seems a solemn reading of one of the funniest Shakespeare burlesques ever written, we may recall the advice of one of Bernard Shaw's characters: when a thing seems funny, search it for a hidden truth.

Leela Gandhi surveys in sharp, compelling detail the continuing deference to Britain that informs — cripples, even — the education system in modern India. (Her view is supported by Glenn D'cruz, who reports that when he visited India — the country of his birth — he kept getting into conversations on railway trains in which Indian deference to British culture was the keynote.) Gandhi's essay, unlike some others in the collection, does not stay at the level of lament or complaint but points a way forward; the answer, she proposes, is not to stop teaching Shakespeare but

to stop being intimidated by the British way of reading him. I can confirm from my own experience teaching in a cosmopolitan city that students from non-British backgrounds can have a capacity for direct imaginative entry into many aspects of Shakespeare that I, as a middle-class third-generation Canadian of Scottish descent, have to get at by research. After a lecture on Elizabethan marriage attitudes, one of my students commented, "You were describing the world I grew up in." She was from India.

Another disruption of the pessimistic model is suggested by Philip Mead, in "Reversible Empires: Melville/Shakespeare/Furphy." Starting with the position that nationalism is constructed by male bonding and the suppression of difference, he proposes to show that in their reception of Shakespeare Melville and Furphy reformulate this masculinist ideal "towards a homosocially and homoerotically secret (even forbidden) space of writing" (28). Unfortunately he spends so much time questioning what traditionalist critics have done with this material that by the time he gets to his own case he can give it only a tentative development. Simon During ("Transporting Literature: Relations Between Metropolitan and Colonial Literary Cultures During the Settlement Period") not only reports how early visitors to New Zealand used Shakespeare and other English writers to help them understand (and misunderstand) what they were seeing, but — drawing his evidence

from Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee — makes the important and frequently overlooked point that the English culture they were importing was itself fragmented and conflicted.

John Rickard ("The Bloke and the Bard: Shakespeare, Empire and Cultural Hierarchy") surveys Shakespeare production in Australia, concentrating on the work of Allan Wilkie, who in the 1920s tried to make Shakespeare accessible to Australian audiences, but at the cost of making him a vehicle for middle-class respectability. Wilkie can at least be credited with raising a few eyebrows by having Audrey played with a strong Australian accent, and Rickard notes there have been more recent attempts to localise Shakespeare, but not enough to form a tradition. The Bloke is entitled to respond to the Bard in his own way, but it seems they have not been given the access to each other they both deserve. What sounds like an attempt in that direction is described by Mark Davis in his account of a local amateur production of *Hamlet* in 1964 in Hamilton, Victoria, which his father produced, which involved a large cross-section of the community (including a clothing drive to provide the costumes), and which packed the town hall for its two-night run, being seen by most of the community and drawing a letter to the local press hailing "a play 'for the people by the people'" (155). As I read about it, it sounded like a wonderful way to do Shakespeare, throwing in the resources of the community in the old miracle-play tradi-

tion, restoring Shakespeare's status as a popular artist. But Davis casts an academic chill over the whole occasion (his title is the distinctly non-populist "That Reliable Signifier: Shakespeare, Difference and (Post) Colonial Memory"), seeing it not as a labour of love but as a labour of anxiety, in which the town registered its self-consciousness and instead of telling its own story (much less the story of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the site) allowed itself to be taken over by a colonialist text. He was there (albeit at the age of five) and I wasn't; he writes with an authority I can't pretend to claim. But as I read his dissection of the discreditable side of the enterprise from the modern academic perspective, something in me kept saying, "Dammit, if these people want to do *Hamlet* let them do *Hamlet*. Stop lecturing." (I hope it's clear that I was irritated and engaged by this essay in roughly equal measure.)

Two other pieces on the theatrical dimension of the subject embody a curious irony. Ian Carruthers protests against the logocentric prejudices of so much Shakespeare criticism and production, and offers as an antidote the body-centred work of the Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi, as exemplified in *The Chronicle of Macbeth*, produced in Melbourne at the Playbox Theatre in 1992. Carruthers deeply admires the Japanese theatre tradition from which Suzuki comes, equating its success with that of modern Japanese business (as exemplified by the seed-producing firm Takii). He laments the fact that the

Australian actors weren't quite up to the task, having had the benefit of only a few months work with Suzuki. In his brief notes on actor training (from a workshop a version of which he conducted at the conference) Norman Price similarly defers to Brecht and his concept of the *gestus*. In both cases there is an assumption that there is an older tradition (let's not forget how long Brecht has been dead) from another country that knows better than we do. I only ask: does this sound familiar? Price at least expresses the hope that by using Brecht (his other authorities include Barthes, Eco and Pavis; his exercises include "Spanish stamping" and "Suzuki duelling" [190]) he can break down British training methods and release "home-based or local cultural energies" (188). But his brief notes can give no indication of whether anything like this actually happened, merely that it was discussed, and there is something depressing in his concluding questions — "How has the theory assisted in the development of the performance text?" "How has the theory assisted in the workshop process?" — whose formulation seems to leave no scope for the answer, "It hasn't; let's try something else."

I found more encouragement in Denise Varney's account of a workshop re-thinking from a feminist perspective the staging of *Measure for Measure* 2.4 (the scene in which Angelo demands Isabella's body as the price for Claudio's life). For one thing, Varney in a rough and gritty way is working things out on her own.

Resisting what she sees as the male-dominated focus of the BBC version, and resisting also the primacy of the written text, she tried the scene two different ways: one with Angelo and Isabella historically costumed but watched by a young woman in modern clothes who kept the focus on Isabella (or Isabelle, as Varney prefers to call her); the other with Isabella's body bound tightly in a large black cloth, signifying her oppressed position. Cold on the page, both images may sound over-explicit to the point of banality. But if I may speculate about a performance I never saw, I suspect the second image in particular could have a theatrical power resonating beyond its immediate moral.

In the final essay, "Regimes of Value," John Frow breaks the whole subject open, challenging paradigms on which some of the other pieces are based (such as the separation of high and low culture) and arguing that Shakespeare is now not the possession of the dominant class, but of the middle-class intelligentsia, who can use him, and the power of culture generally, for good. Speaking as a member of that class, I wish I could be happier about our track record; *la trahison des clercs* is one of the recurring facts of history. But at least this informative, provocative collection of essays tells us a lot about one of our chief problems, and alerts us to our responsibility.

20

Delys Bird

FRAME CELEBRATED

Gina Mercer, *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994. 293 pp. ISBN 0 7022 2459 6

Gina Mercer begins her exhaustive study of Janet Frame's fictions with two quotations from the writer, each of which establishes the direction of Mercer's work as well as the mysterious and indeed the subversive power of Frame's writing. The first is from a 1983 interview with Frame, in which she describes what for her is "one of the fascinations of writing ...", which lies "in the coding of what is written to describe what is not written." She goes on, "I like to think of the contents of a book as a signpost to a world that is not even mentioned." The other is from one of the novels, *Intensive Care* (1970). It represents a writing of woman's body, one that conveys not an esoteric essentialism but a gendered politics that exists in the threat of those bodies, produced in their hidden, multiple meanings. "Even after the doses of tranquillisers there were parts of Gloria that couldn't be reached: women have so many secret pockets and undiscovered ravines, the government never dreamed. If protests arise ... they will come from the women ..."

Frame is a writer whose interest lies in the what is not said, and the writing struggles always to express that