

INTRODUCTION

Margarida Gandara Rauen

Emphasis on William Shakespeare (1564-1616) as an outstanding poet and playwright has often led to oversimplified notions of English literature and drama during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when many other remarkable writers existed. This period is generally called the Renaissance, despite the limitations of this term. Hollander and Kermode, for example, note that "By the English Renaissance, historians of literature and culture mean the period from about 1509 to 1660, the reign of the Tudor Henry VIII and his children and the first two Stuarts, and the revolutionary government of the Commonwealth..." (5)

The articles in this issue of *Ilha do Desterro* cover the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. They address the work of six major writers: the playwrights Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), John Fletcher (1579-1625), Francis Beaumont (1584?-1616) and Ben Jonson (1572-1637); the poets John Donne (1572-1631) and George Herbert (1593-1633).

The need to be selective has forced me to exclude many additional important names. Given the usual division of the literary production of the English Renaissance into song and lyric modes, drama and prose, I

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 34	p.009-012	jan./jun. 1998
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regret not having been able to include, for instance, articles about Thomas Wyatt, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Richard Lovelace, Andrew Marvell, John Heywood, Thomas Middleton, Thomas More, Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes.

I have in effect narrowed the scope of this anthology in order to attain the single objective of examining representative cases of historical and cultural conditioning. The various essays offer insight on the extent to which texts can be approached as ideological objects, provided their contexts of production and reception.

The three essays about poetry are concerned with the subjects of critical reductionism and transgression in the process of transmission. Janis Lull's piece on George Herbert aptly considers the limitations of traditional literary biography and provides examples of the bias it generated in interpretation, which still relies on speculations regarding the influence of Magdalene Herbert, the poet's mother, upon his writing.

José Ghirardi's and John Milton's appraisal of critical scholarship about John Donne in Brazil shows that in spite of the greater recognition of his importance in the national literary debate since the 1960s, transmission remains limited by generalizations which have been received from foreign authors rather than emerging as a result of careful readings of the poetic corpus itself.

Responsive to postmodern theory, Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira argues wonderfully for the phenomenon of dialectic appropriation of the metaphysical and love poetry of John Donne in Brazil. She draws, for example, on intercultural features of the production of translator Augusto de Campos and popular composer Caetano Veloso. As a result of Vieira's comprehensive appraisal of Brazilian translations of Donne from 1978 to 1991, many political and religious relationships are established, so that his poetry rises way above the simple status of source and emerges as a complex intertext in Brazilian cultural production.

The three essays about drama reflect upon aspects of subject matter appropriation and development. Linda Anderson's in-depth

analysis of power relations in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* not only focuses the themes of oppression and violence against children, but also presents evidence that these were traditional cultural practices in sixteenth-century England. Anderson examines the tension which underlies the play in light of Stephen J. Greenblatt's remarks on the period's "deep gerontological bias." She ultimately suggests that, although a comedy, *The Knight* is a tragic case of what we would now call "child abuse."

Carmen Gago Alvarez's "Ambiguity in *Edward II*" illuminates the issue of historical appropriation and distortion. She suggests that Marlowe's dramaturgy blurs history by featuring main characters whose behavior thrives on instability and contradiction. Peres, drawing on recent queer theory, offers a thought-provoking piece about the problem of homophobia in Marlowe's *Edward II*.

Craig Bernthal's two reviews of seminal books about Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, published in the early 1990s have been a generous addition to this volume and offer an effective and brief perspective of controversies involving these authors. My own review of recent materials that re-examine traditionally held assumptions about Renaissance English poetry and drama is meant provide additional examples of the reformist nature of current scholarship. Hopefully, the selected bibliography will help the interested readers to investigate the current debates in the critical scene further.

For the sake of brevity, the selected bibliography accentuates publications of the 1990s, with just a few earlier and notable pieces. Although a detailed discussion of background scholarship would not be practicable in this introduction, I'd like to acknowledge several important critical lines. First, despite its polemic status nowadays, is Marxist philosophy, without which the re-shaping of orthodox views of literature and drama would hardly have been possible. Second, historians such as Carlson seem to agree that one of the first crucial contributions of the second part of the twentieth century was Rainer

Warning's book *Rezeptionsaesthetik* (1975) which "traced modern reception analysis back to the Prague school, recalling that Mukarovsk had insisted on "the indeterminacy" of works of art. As the end of the milenium approaches, it is plausible to say that theories by Roland Barthes, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Umberto Eco, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson and Stephen Greenblatt have radically transformed criticism and in different ways inform the current developments in literary and theatre research, as well as the articles in this edition of *Ilha do Desterro*.

Given the growing importance of manuscript and rare book research, I have provided a list of the major sources with information about microfilm distribution and databases, which allow for scholars anywhere in the world to have access to and obtain information regarding these fabulous materials. The books and periodicals are, for the most part, unavailable in Brazil. I have, nevertheless, provided all the e-mail contacts that I could obtain.

Overall, the articles and the bibliography in this volume are meant to indicate how historically and culturally complex the state-of-the-art is, accommodating a range of poststructuralist interests in production, reception, politics, gender, queer aesthetics, religion, race, to name a few.

Indeed, since E.M.W. Tillyard published *The Elizabethan World Picture* in 1943, we have come a long way!