

***SHAKESPEARE AND GENRE. From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies*, ed. by Anthony R. Guneratne, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp. 314**

Theoretical problems of genrology are not the most popular in the modern Shakespearean criticism. Lawrence Danson's work *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres* (Oxford 2000) was almost the only appreciable monographical study of this field of questions at the turn of the millennium¹. That's why the book under the title *Shakespeare and Genre* is anyway of keen interest for Shakespearean scholars and students.

The essays, which make up this collection, are written by various authors and differ from each other in the investigated material as well as in the methodological trends. In his introductory article Anthony R. Guneratne writes, that the book offers "interdisciplinary approaches" to Shakespeare's dramaturgy and its long life on page, stage, and screen. Obviously it is the main reason of quite a non-typical structure of the book, which consists of two sections: *Shakespeare and Renaissance Genres* and *Shakespeare and Contemporary Genres*. Each section in its turn is divided into some chapters. Such the structure helps to readers to orientate themselves in the diverse content of the book.

The prominent linguist David Crystal called his laconic, but interesting essay *Shakespeare the Metalinguist*. The key word *metalanguage* is used here in the extended meaning. The author examines Shakespeare's metalanguage as a *Plot device*, as a *Character Note*, *Effect*, *Linguistic Novelty*, *Humor*, *Trope*, and *Genre*. Of primary interest for us is the last point. David Crystal shows how the legal terms help to create genre peculiarity of several Shakespeare's plays, in particular, *Love's Labours Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Besides, he emphasizes, that it is not the number of words the playwright used is of most importance, "but how he used them" (p. 36).

An essay *Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion*, contributed by Stephen Greenblatt, is strongly marked by some methodological novelties of the "new historicism". Starting from the *Painter's Manual* by Albrecht Dürer, the scholar passes to the discussion about some types of historical monuments and the correspondence between them and tragedy as a literary genre. An essay offers an amount of information about the Peasants' War in Germany (1524–1525) and its likeness to the historical situation in England of the 16th century, and so on. However, the parallel between the Peasants' War in Germany

¹ See my review of L. Danson's book — *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, t. 44, z. 1–2 (87–88), 2001, s. 152–154.

and Cade's rebellion in *Henry VI*, is hardly convincing, and discussion about the history of the *class struggle* in Europe, methinks, is weakly correlated with the problem of literary genre.

Andrew Gurr's article *The Stage is hung with black': Genre and the Trappings of Stagecraft in Shakespearean Tragedy* contains a critical overview of an anonymous play *A Warning for Fair Women* and its genre. The drama was published and played by Lord Chamberlain's Servants in 1599. Comparing generic nature of this play with some works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries (Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Marston), Andrew Gurr tries to explain how that non-Shakespearean drama could survive in Chamberlain's repertory of the first years up to 1599. The author's conclusion, that "the key distinction in genre for the literate followed the rise of tragicomedy" (p. 74), deserves scholarly interest, but obviously needs more concrete arguments and strict logical foundation, too.

Two articles are focused on Shakespeare's *Deployment of Genre*. David Bevington explores "genre as adaptation" in the comedies and histories of the playwright. He points out the traces of Plautus, Chaucer, Spenser in the plot of *The Comedy of Errors* and several other comedies, as well as traces of G. Peele, R. Greene and G. Gascoigne in *Taming of the Shrew*. As far as the history plays are concerned, Bevington considers them "a composite and informal kind of dramatic entertainment made up from disparate historical and theatrical materials" (p. 93). Shakespeare is represented in the essay as "an inspired borrower" (p. 97). That is absolutely just when the origin of the plots is meant, but says almost nothing about Shakespeare's artistic transformation of the "borrowed" plots.

Lawrence Danson in his essay *The Shakespeare Remix: Romance, Tragicomedy, and Shakespeare's 'distinct kind'* writes mostly about the genre of *The Winter's Tale*. To his mind, "romance is one of the more slippery of critical terms" (p. 104). It is really so, and the reason of this quality may be found first of all in the polysemy of the word even in the limits of literary criticism. Danson appropriately mentions, that the term "romance" was not applied to Shakespeare's plays until the 19th century, when Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that "*The Tempest* is a specimen of the romantic drama" (p. 103). Especially valuable are the scholar's judgments about examples of genre "remix" in *King Lear* (p. 105–109).

The third part of the first section is entitled: *Shakespeare and the Reconfiguration of Genre in Performance*. Stephen J. Lynch tries to explain, how the playwright "turned genre on its head" in three plays, belonging to quite the different generic forms: *Richard III*, *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*. Comparing these plays with their historical or literary sources, Lynch comes to the conclusion that Shakespeare "refashioned his source texts with increasing complexity, creating alternate, oppositional, and often multilayered generic constructions" (p. 121). Diana E. Henderson in her essay *Shakespearean Comedy, Tempest-Toss'd: Genre, Social Transformation, and Contemporary Performance* writes about "topsy-turviness and dynamism" in all Shakespearean subgenres — genre modifications of comedy. Of special interest for the scholar are the genre features of several newest films and theatrical musicals, which are based on Shakespearean comedies.

The section under the title *Shakespeare and Contemporary Genres* begins with two essays about appropriation of Shakespearean dramatic genres by Chinese and East-European cultures. Alexander C. Y. Huang retraces the reception of "polygeneric" Shakespeare's plays in China and Chinese Diaspora in other countries of the world. The essay contains a remarkably wide range of facts which are obviously exotic and little known to many European and American colleagues, and it is the guarantee of the specialists' interest in this article.

The second essay of this section is written by Alexander Shurbanov and Boika Sokolova. They describe the history of stage interpretation of *King Lear* by theatres of the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria and DDR. In spite of the limited size of the article, it contains a vivid and deeply serious survey of the most significant performances of the *British tragedy* in the countries of the so-called “socialist camp”. Discussing the widely-known productions of Soviet stage, the scholars do not limit themselves by the experience of Russian theatre but pay also their attention to the most successful performances of Ukrainian, Georgian, Jewish (Yiddish) and Byelorussian theatres, and it is a real merit of their essay.

To my regret, the both articles lack the accuracy of information about Soviet theatrical history. For instance, Alexander Huang states, that “Stalin effectively banned *Hamlet*, for a play about a police state was too close to home...” (p. 158). It is not entirely accurate. *Hamlet* was not “banned” officially in Stalin’s times, and was staged from time to time by various Soviet theatres in the 1930-40s, but was not the most popular Shakespearean play in the repertoire of Soviet dramatic companies during that historical period, indeed. The reason of such a phenomenon is indicated by Huang almost exactly.

Shurbanov and Sokolova mention “civil war of 1920s” in Russia (p. 175), and it is chronological inexactitude: the Civil War began in 1918 and ended in 1922. On the page 188 (n. 35) we can read: “The State Jewish Theatre in Moscow is now Teatr na Maloy Bronnoy”. In fact, “Teatr na Maloy Bronnoy” (Theatre in Malaya Bronnaya Street) is located since 1962 in the building where GOSET (State Jewish Theatre) was playing until the closing of this theatre by the Soviet powers in 1949², but there are no genetic connection between two companies. The authors write that the well-known Ukrainian director Les’ Kurbas “left Kiev for Moscow in 1933. On the way, he was arrested and thrown into prison where he was shot four years later...” (p. 176). In reality Kurbas was not arrested “on the way”, but arrived in Moscow, where he was living for several months, directing the famous production of *King Lear* in GOSET in collaboration with Solomon Mikhoels, and was arrested in December 1933, not long before the first night. Russian scholar Mikhail Morozov is represented as “a contemporary critic” (p. 177), though he died in 1952, and his old-fashioned brochure, which is quoted in the essay, appeared about seventy years ago.

Three essays are devoted to exploration of *Shakespeare-based Genres in Other Media*. Samuel Crowl writes about Shakespearean films “in the Branagh generation”, representing Kenneth Branagh as a pioneer in new cinematographic approach to Shakespeare’s plays. Discussing briefly the films of Branagh’s predecessors, Crowl distincts “the Olivier — Welles — Kurosawa generation”, adding to this list also Zeffirelli. It is strange that he ignores Kozintsev — Brook “generation”, whose achievements in Shakespearean filmography are generally known. The analysis of Branagh’s *Hamlet* in the essay is too laconic (p. 158–159) to be discussed here. The thesis about Branagh’s “generic choices” and his inclination to Hollywood’s set of genres is, in my opinion, unsufficiently proved. The final conclusion of the essay sounds as a kind of uncertain verdict: “Film genres, from the western to those associated with the noir, have played a powerful role in Shakespeare’s translation from stage to screen. Directors have seized upon film genres as a way of appropriating Shakespeare for a mass audience...” (p. 202). It seems that such the situation is positively accepted by Samuel Crowl and regarded as an important trend. In this respect one question may be put to the author of the essay: must film directors to bring Shakespeare nearer to mass audience’s

² In the interim period of time Moscow Theatre of Satire was playing in this building.

tastes, or their task is to try to raise mass audience to the understanding of Shakespeare's thought and art?

Tony Howard writes about TV-interpretations of Shakespearean plays and about specific functions of "televised Shakespeare". To my mind, this essay may be of great interest for TV-journalists, first of all. Especially interesting are Howard's remarks about different approaches to Shakespeare on television in Great Britain and USA. Peter S. Donaldson called his article quite unusually — *Shakespeare and Media Allegory*. In the corpus of adaptations, biographical dramas and "other cinematic reworkings of Shakespeare" he distincts "a number of films that are also concerned with media history, transitions from one medium to another, or media systems and regimes" (p. 223) and defines these films as *Shakespeare media allegory*. Having analysed such works as Jean-Luc Godard's *King Lear*, Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* or Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Donaldson concludes that such postmodernist films "create a much-needed space for critical reflection on new media and its relation to the literature and theater of the past" (p. 235). As far as the question about vulgarization of Shakespeare in such the *allegories* is concerned, every reader of the essay can obviously answer it himself.

The last part of the collection has rather original and a bit misleading title — *Shakespeare as Genre*. Charles Martindale in his essay *Shakespeare among the Philosophers* addresses to the problem of ancient philosophy's importance for generic nature of Shakespeare's works. It is quite clear that the subject is enormously great to be examined in a laconic article and that's why Martindale's text may be regarded as a promising project for the upcoming monograph. Douglas M. Lanier turns to the problems of Shakespeare pedagogy. Proceeding from the assumption that "the Genre is message", he states that "screen Shakespeare" is of great importance for the "cross-medial pedagogy". Examining the message of *Hamlet* in the light of John McTiernan's film *Last Action Hero*, Lanier comes to such the conclusion: "...in adaptation of Shakespeare to popular culture the protocols of contemporary genre exert considerable pressure..." (p. 267). Such the situation in modern American cinema can suggest not very optimistic thoughts, but that is a special theme, of course.

As a whole, the book *Shakespeare and Genre*, despite some controversial points, represents a number of interesting trends in exploration of Shakespearean dramatic genres. It suggests certain areas for further work, and contemporary scholars will find much in this collection of essays to interest them.

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