Matthias Bauer, Angelika Zirker (Eds.)

# Drama and Cultural Change

## Turning Around Shakespeare

Matthias Bauer, Angelika Zirker (Eds.)

# Drama and Cultural Change

## Turning Around Shakespeare

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

**Drama and Cultural Change:**
**Turning Around Shakespeare** /
Matthias Bauer, Angelika Zirker (Eds.). -
Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009
ISBN 978-3-86821-194-8

Umschlaggestaltung: Brigitta Disseldorf


ISBN 978-3-86821-194-8



WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier
Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier
Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Tel. (0651) 41503, Fax 41504
Internet: http://www.wvttrier.de
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

# Contents

# Preface

This collection of essays is concerned with the way in which drama both responds and contributes to cultural change. Not all of the contributions are focused on Shakespeare but most of them address the fact that, as regards the English-speaking world, Shakespeare has formed the pivot of the relationship between drama and culture for several centuries. This will perhaps appear most clearly when we consider the ways in which Shakespeare's plays have been adapted and transformed. It seems possible to read these adaptations as documentary evidence of cultural change, no matter whether the adaptation is meant to be a way of 'saving' Shakespeare for a different cultural climate, whether it is an iconoclastic attempt at showing the need for a thoroughgoing revision of the cultural assumptions on which his plays appear to be based, or whether Shakespeare's words, themes, characters and elements of action are mainly used as a kind of language helping later authors to make their own individual statements known and understood at particular cultural moments. This very process of marking similarity and difference by 'using' Shakespeare, however, shows that drama indicates, considers, enhances or slows down cultural change in complex ways.

Eckhard Auberlen's contribution to this volume, together with Ellen Dengel-Janic's and Johanna Roering's essay, is most immediately concerned with the use of Shakespeare in later dramatic works. In his article on George Granville's adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, Auberlen points out that to Granville, Shakespeare's play becomes a means of pursuing an aesthetic and political agenda which responds to the social and economic situation of Granville's own time. One way of doing so is to present *The Merchant of Venice* as the defense of a world in which trade forms a harmonious league with aristocratic ideals of generosity in the face of a more ruthless, profit-oriented form of capitalism. In their discussion of the British-Asian film *Second Generation*, Dengel-Janic and Roering come to a conclusion which evinces parallels to Auberlen's: in this TV production, Shakespeare (in this case *King Lear*) is used to eventually advocate a notion of stability in a multi-ethnic, postmodern, economically instable context. The fact that, in this process, the quintessentially tragic action of Shakespeare's play is turned into a not entirely unsentimental story with a happy ending is perhaps no coincidence when we consider the history of post-Renaissance Shakespeare adaptations. Lars Eckstein's paper on representations of Shakespeare's Caliban in 18th and 19th-century British painting implicitly takes the notion of adaptation onto a different plane, not only because he is concerned with painting rather than the stage or the cinema but also because, by focusing on the exotic imaginary to which the Shakespearean character gave rise, Eckstein reflects on the imaginative potential of a figure that could, in a particular economic and ideological context, become a manifestation of exoticist desire.

Shakespeare, however, can be regarded as the catalyst of cultural change not only when it comes to adaptations and reconfigurations of his plays or certain characters.

The plays themselves may be seen to present notions and concepts which are, as it were, most sensitive (and prone) to cultural change. The papers by Lothar Fietz, Anne-Julia Zwierlein, Norbert Lennartz, Matthias Bauer and Angelika Zirker belong to this group. In his survey of antithetical world-views in the sixteenth century, Fietz outlines competing models of reality, characterized by theocentric concepts on the one hand, and an increasing emphasis on human autonomy on the other. He goes on to situate Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies in this force-field, pointing out, for example, that the comedies not only reflected but also reinforced processes of modernization. Zwierlein takes up a specific element of change: the redefinition of inheritance in the early modern period, when the principle of primogeniture was increasingly circumvented by personal wills. She focuses on pairs or triplets of siblings in *Henry IV, Part 2*, *As You Like It*, and *King Lear* and traces the complex ways in which primogeniture is contested as well as reaffirmed in these plays. An adaptation comes into the picture as well: Nahum Tate's Restoration version of *King Lear*, in which a harmonious union of primogeniture and moral legitimacy is conjured up by Tate having Cordelia marry Edgar in the end. Where Zwierlein considers the dramatic exploration of a changing social practice, Lennartz focuses on the uses of a metaphor which can be read as a commentary on changing cultural attitudes: the representation of love as a hunt, which he pursues from *Venus and Adonis* via several of Shakespeare's plays to Cavalier poetry and beyond. Lennartz shows that the metaphor serves to point out the replacement of well-ordered love with uncontrolled predation, finally leading to the aporia of the love-hunt becoming utterly futile; the image thus used gives evidence to a deeply sceptical view of sexual relationships and humankind in general. Bauer and Zirker, in their article on *The Taming of the Shrew*, are also concerned with changing gender relationships but approach them by reflecting on obedience and its loss of status as a virtue. This is identified as one of the reasons why modern criticism frequently finds it hard to appreciate the play. They show that Shakespeare, far from advocating brainless submission, takes obedience literally as a process of learning to hear; it may thus become the prerequisite for mutual understanding.

Neither Shakespeare's works nor adaptations of his plays but the ways in which 'Shakespeare' has become a cultural authority give rise to Christoph Reinfandt reflecting on the fact that, in spite of the futility of the effort, again and again some factual and biographical 'truth' is sought in and behind his works. Reinfandt illustrates this by discussing a scene from *Shakespeare in Love* in which the problems of such an enterprise are staged, as the author all but completely vanishes behind the presence of the actors and, when retrieved as the source of the "legend," turns out to be as fictional as the plays themselves.

Four articles in this volume are not, or only tangentially, concerned with Shakespeare but we are quite convinced that they form an integral part of the collection. Joerg Fichte discusses the concept of the commonwealth or public weal which not only was frequently debated in non-dramatic Tudor literature but in various guises also turned up among the *dramatis personae* of plays by Roo, Bale, Udall and others. The fact that

drama itself becomes the site of such a debate indicates cultural change and a new engagement of playwrights with the question of how good governance could be established. Near the other end of the historical spectrum represented in this collection, John Arden, as Christopher Harvie points out in his essay, can be seen to be inspired by a concern for the public weal, the belief that the theatre may help creating a society. Harvie links this to a discussion of Arden's eclipse as a result of cultural change while reminding us that he may well have transcended such change by creations like Charlie Butterthwaite in *The Workhouse Donkey*. The articles by Ralf Schneider and Gabriele Rippl are, in different ways, concerned with the representation of desire in a changing cultural context. Schneider focuses on the ways in which comedy, between 1660 and 1800, served to integrate amorous desire with an increasing emphasis on buyer-seller relationships. This could lead, as Schneider points out in his discussion of Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, not only to discovering ways of moderation as ultimately most rewarding but also, quite paradoxically, open up spaces for disinterested behaviour among friends. Rippl analyzes the transformations of the story of Phaedra and Hyppolytus in H. D.'s *Hippolytus Temporizes*, O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* and Jeffers's *The Cretan Woman* as responses to the discontents of contemporary society. Where O'Neill's New England universe with its suppression of desire menaces the integrity of his protagonists, H. D. uses the ancient myth to make deep layers of the human psyche visible and Jeffers strives to reintroduce the vitality and violence of Greek tragedy as an antidote to the restrictions imposed on affects in modernity.

About two decades ago, Patrick Collinson reminded us of the fact that "cultural change" is an elusive notion. As regards the question, for example, whether a change of virtues and values in Reformation England led to "a new *ideal* of family relationships,"[1] no definite answer seems possible. While there are good reasons to believe in an increased emphasis on marriage for love, a widened scope of sources and a more detailed study of those sources may very well make the notion of such a change appear problematic. At any rate, it will prevent undue generalizations and simplifications concerning specific periods, as well as schematic ideas of a clearly definable "culture" undergoing equally definable "changes." This very approach, however, may be characteristic of our own time, in which, as Mike Featherstone puts it, "the sensitivity to particularity […] accompanies a greater appreciation of cultural complexity," leading to a "shift in emphasis from conceptualizing universalism and unities to particularization and diversity."[2] As a consequence, the relationship between the observation of detail and diversity on the one hand and broader characterizations on the other will have to be considered, and it is to be hoped that the twelve case studies of this volume, even though (or because) they do not present a unified picture of "drama and cultural change" will contribute to such an enterprise.

1 Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) 90.

2 Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Cultural Change* (London: SAGE Publications, 1992) vii-viii.

Most of the articles collected in this volume are based on the papers given at a symposium held in honour of Professor Eckhard Auberlen upon his retirement. For more than three decades, Eckhard Auberlen has taught at the University of Tübingen, where he has been a member of the English Department. In teaching and research, his scope of authors, themes and periods has been amazingly wide. The Early Modern period, however, has for a long time been his special field, beginning with his dissertation on the Incredible in Shakespeare's late plays and continued by his study on *The Commonwealth of Wit: The Writer's Image and his Strategies of Self-Representation in Elizabethan Literature* (Tübingen: Narr, 1984). More recently, as is shown by his contribution to this volume and several other publications, he has been concerned with adaptations and transformations of Shakespeare from the Restoration period to the present. The topic of this volume furthermore reflects Auberlen's own continuous interest in the relationship between literature and the social and cultural world, of which it is an integral part. The readiness with which a great number of his present and former Tübingen colleagues have taken up the topic and contributed to this volume is a sign of their appreciation of Eckhard Auberlen as a scholar, colleague, adviser and friend.

The editors are grateful to those who made both the symposium and this volume possible, both by their critical advice and by their practical support. In particular, we would like to thank the friends of Tübingen University (Vereinigung der Freunde der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen e.V.) and the English Department for their financial support of the symposium and all those who attended it. Our thanks also include Ruth Bausenhart, who supplied the cover design for this book, our team at the chair of English Philology in Tübingen, Erwin Otto and his team at WVT for their help and patience while editing this volume, and, last but not least, Uli Fries, who formatted the book and helped us editing it.

Matthias Bauer & Angelika Zirker