

which a detailed examination of the practice of particular writers continually frustrates" (182).

Griffiths' clear perspective on the complexity of the literary developments he depicts is particularly highlighted in the conception of the volume's final part presenting three different groups of minority or alternative voices which do not fit the major traits of African writing as described in the previous chapters. The first group is a small but occasionally highly conspicuous number of authors from non-anglophone countries in East and West Africa with such illustrious figures as the Somalian novelist Nuruddin Farah or the Sudanese poet Taban Lo Liyong among them. Another kind of alterity is then discussed in a chapter on African female writers who very frequently offer perspectives which fundamentally differ from the "mainstream" male traditions, irrespective of generation gaps and changes. Flora Nwapa and Grace Ogot, prominent names in the 1960s, here stand side by side with more recent writers such as the Ghanaians Ama Ata Aidoo and Efiya Sutherland, and, most famously, Buchi Emecheta. The last chapter finally looks at writers who have adopted a more global and international approach, such as the London-born Jamal Mahjoub, whose father is Sudanese, or the Tanzanian Abdulrazak Gurnah, Sierra Leonian Lemuel Johnson and, most famously of course, Nigerian Ben Okri. Especially with writers of such multicultural backgrounds as M.G. Vassanji, Griffiths argues (319ff), it becomes difficult to find convincing criteria on the basis of which to assign them wholeheartedly to the African domain, while they themselves may live elsewhere or write about subjects and use settings of a global variety. This is, in fact, one of the few guesses which Griffiths ultimately ventures to make about the future for English in Africa that, next to an increasing importance of indigenous African languages, there will be "an increasing separation between those writers whose work is either aimed at or promoted by the international publishing networks, and those who seek to address a local audience and to promote a viable local publishing industry" (334).

Clearly, here is a multi-purpose volume where in-depth discussions to the highest critical standards of major literary works are found besides and intimately integrated into an overall agenda of great historical sophistication and cultural sensitivity. The book is eminently readable throughout; only very occasionally does Griffiths' prose become somewhat ponderous and his argumentation can show some redundancies, but these rhetorical features are clearly functionalized within his overall emphasis on balanced judgments, his great circumspection to give a hearing to all sides of a question, and his fine sensibility where cultural and political controversies are concerned. Griffiths' rendering of this area of African writing in English has undoubtedly set a standard for a long time to come.

**PARADIGMS FOUND: FEMINIST, GAY, AND NEW HISTORICIST READINGS OF SHAKESPEARE**

Pilar Hidalgo

Amsterdam, Atlanta, GA.: Rodopi, 2001.

(by Celestino Deleyto. University of Zaragoza)

One of the practical ironies confronting the student of Shakespeare in the last two decades or so is that, while her original reason to undertake the analysis of Shakespeare's works may have probably been the powerful attraction of plays and poems, she will find herself spending most of her time trying to keep abreast with theoretical and critical developments in the huge and ever growing scholarship on the subject and with little time left to pursue what she initially thought was going to be the object of her study, namely the texts themselves. This proliferation of published research on the English playwright, which, by the way, is paralleled outside the academy by the recent boom of the "Shakespeare industry", has made the subject often forbidding and has persuaded many young scholars to turn their attention to other, less attractive fields. Pilar Hidalgo's book is a brave attempt to confront this problem and, if only for this reason, it will be welcomed by students and experts alike.

Aware from the outset of the difficulty of the project of systematising and giving some sort of coherence to the whole of contemporary Shakespeare criticism, the author restricts her field to Anglo-American criticism and to what in her view have been its two most important and influential tendencies: feminism and new historicism. Not only is it difficult to disagree with her choice but this selection proves on inspection to be an astute one since the reader soon realises that these two paradigms allow the author to cover a lot more ground than had originally

seemed possible and, what is more important, it situates her right at the centre of the most important debates in literary, cultural and film studies in recent years: the decline of psychoanalysis and essentialist models, the evolution of feminism, the rise of history and its confrontation with theory, the fragmentation and the occasional re-essentialisation of the postcolonial subject. While the book always remains firmly within the bounds of Shakespeare criticism, the debates often resonate with wider implications. This is, of course, partly due to the fact that, in the last twenty-five years at least, Shakespearean scholarship has always been at the cutting edge of literary theory but it is also related to Hidalgo's ability to make her choice of critical works and her discussion of them always seem relevant.

The book's eight chapters are roughly divided in two parts: the first three chapters are devoted to feminism and the last three before the conclusion to new historicism. In between them, chapter four deals with what the author denominates "gay interventions". The final chapter, which is not exactly a conclusion, deals with more recent works, concentrating especially on the 1995 Autumn issue of *English Literary Renaissance* and on the recent *Norton Shakespeare* with Stephen Greenblatt as general editor. The objective of this chapter is two-fold: on the one hand, to acknowledge the closing of the gap between the two paradigms, after a great degree of hostility between them, especially in the nineteen-eighties, and, on the other, to record a certain sense of exhaustion illustrated, according to the author, by a certain sense of return to more traditional positions in Greenblatt's general introduction to the *Norton Shakespeare*. The organisation of the book is, therefore, not only roughly historical but also teleological: at the end, we realise that Hidalgo has been telling us a story, with a beginning, a couple of turning points, a climax and an ending. However manipulative and untrue to the wealth and, to a certain extent, inchoate nature of recent Shakespearean criticism this may seem, the huge advantage for the reader is that she gains from this "authorial intervention" a sense of clarity and deep understanding of the context in which the individual works exist. It is perhaps surprising, then, in view of the careful structure of the book that, while the closing pages of the last chapter may be taken as a conclusion, there is no introduction of any sort, with only the title to guide the reader as to what the author's intentions and objectives are. While these become clear as the book develops, it seems to me that an initial statement of objectives, explicit demarcation of the field of study and justification of its exclusions would have helped.

Like any other story, the one offered to the reader in this book has several protagonists and secondary characters but its undisputed star is Stephen Greenblatt. Apart from a sizeable part of the final chapter, two other chapters in their entirety and the initial justification for a third are devoted to this critic, a decision quite justified in my view. While feminist criticism as a whole has

definitively changed the way we nowadays teach and write about Shakespeare, no single recent scholar has had as much influence on the way we think about the English writer as Greenblatt. To say that he is the star of this book, however, is not to say that the author sees eye-to-eye with him; it refers, rather, to the obviously privileged position he occupies in the book and also to the depth of Hidalgo's knowledge and understanding of his writings. The first chapter devoted to him, chapter 5, is a generally respectful and extremely clear and well structured account of Greenblatt's first book, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* and of its critical importance. In referring to the limitations of his approach, Hidalgo relies mostly on Jean Howard's critique of new historicism. This provides the starting point for the next chapter, which then, perhaps unexpectedly, moves on to consider work on Shakespeare's pastoral by Louis Montrose and others. Here the author devotes a considerable amount of space to Hugh Grady's *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf*, although only one of the four plays analysed in this book is a pastoral (*As You Like It*). When she returns to Greenblatt, in chapter 7, careful delineation and analysis of his subsequent work and criticism of it are more closely intertwined. Again, the author delegates the critique of what is probably Greenblatt's most famous essay, "Invisible Bullets", to other critics. In general, given the author's acumen and depth of analysis, the reader would occasionally like to know more about her own opinions on the issues she raises.

One such example occurs in her analysis of a different chapter of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, "Fiction and Friction". Here Hidalgo accuses Greenblatt of being far-fetched in linking early modern European medical knowledge about sexual excitement and reproduction with the linguistic friction between the lovers of the comedies, but does not provide any further explanation. The link may seem far-fetched (like most links made by Greenblatt between literary and non-literary works) but, given that Greenblatt, as Hidalgo remarks, never claims that Shakespeare was familiar with medical theories, its critical usefulness would surely lie in its explanatory power. Before this article, the canonical account of romantic comedy explained its structure as a move from sexual or social incompatibility between the lovers to final compatibility but I find Greenblatt's insight of locating the sexual compatibility in the apparent initial incompatibility far more convincing. This is an insight that also makes explicit the sexual content of the romantic structure and, more importantly, helps carry out a much needed change of emphasis in the genre from the ending of the narrative to its middle. For these reasons, the far-fetchedness of the argument loses some weight. Another insight in Greenblatt's article, the description of comedy as "the wildly unconventional drive towards conventionality", also highlighted here by Hidalgo, while again being an interesting fresh insight into the structure of romantic comedy, encapsulates Greenblatt's deterministic view of subversion and containment and this is where I

find his ideological approach most debatable. His general view that all subversion, otherness and transgression ends up serving the purposes of established power seems at times more like a structural sleight-of-hand of the author than a plausible explanation of the ideological workings of the plays. To say, for example, that Falstaff's anarchic energy in *Henry IV* or the sexual multiplicity of the middle section of *Twelfth Night* are cancelled out or assimilated by the endings seems, confronted by the "hard" evidence provided by the plays themselves, either a very old-fashioned critical privileging of endings or, more tendentially, a rhetorical attempt to make the plays fit the theory. It is also here, in my view, that Greenblatt departs most from Foucault's work on power and comes closest to Althusser's deterministic views on ideology.

In any case, an extremely sophisticated and detailed account is given here of Greenblatt's *oeuvre*, including his own drive towards conventionality (of criticism) in the *Norton Shakespeare*, as Hidalgo amusingly notes. Apart from Greenblatt and the new historicism, the selection and organisation of feminist approaches to Shakespeare in the first half of the book are excellent, as is the author's account of bibliography related to the boy actor in chapter four. Here, as in the rest of the book, the links established by the author between the various critical works facilitate the reader's task of making sense of them individually and contextually and should be of great help to those interested in Shakespeare, both as students and researchers. Given the great complexity of the endeavour, the result is highly successful and the book should become essential reading for those who, like Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, "catch the plague" and join the ranks of the apparently never-dwindling Shakespearean community.

#### TORPID SMOKE: THE STORIES OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Steven G. Kellman and Irving Malin (eds.)

(Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics, 35). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000.

(by José Ángel García Landa. University of Zaragoza)

This is the fourth published book of criticism on Nabokov's stories, three of them being fairly recent (1993, 1999, 2000). I confess that I do not see the title of this work as especially apposite to its subject matter: although it is the title of one of Nabokov's stories, I would have opted for "Terra Incognita" or "Ultima Thule". As academic books go, there are some initial limitations in this one: there is no name index, and a different reference system is used in each paper. That is, this volume, like the earlier *A Small Alpine Form*, is a collection of individual papers rather than a unified volume. The unity comes from the remarkable coherence in the corpus of Nabokov's short stories. Marina Turkevich Naumann had written a book on the short stories of the 20s (*Blue Evenings in Berlin*, 1978); Maxim D. Shroyer's *The World of Nabokov's Stories* 1999 is a more sophisticated monograph on the short stories, although it addresses a relatively small number of them and on occasion from a rather narrow perspective. It usefully complements *A Small Alpine Form*, which remains the best volume written yet on Nabokov's short fiction. *Torpid Smoke* ranks third.

A book on Nabokov's stories might have taken the trouble to refer the reader to a bibliography on certain matters (e.g. the Zembla page). But the contributors to this volume are not overly given to referring to previous studies, to differentiating their readings from previous ones, or to showing much awareness of what is going on in the Web (though there are a couple of references to electronic materials).