

help us step less naively as we negotiate the complexity of one-size-fits-all multiculturalism, where one language is considered an adequate encoder for the values of a diversity of cultures.

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Jonathan Hart. *Theater and World: The Problematics of Shakespeare's History*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1992. pp. xii, 404. \$37.50.

At her adultery trial, the always-surprising Hermione, Queen of Sicilia, produces as part of her defence a stunning retrospective gloss on some of the problematics of Shakespeare's chronicle history plays. The chaste life of this "fellow of the royal bed" who owns "A moi'ty of the throne" is, she insists, "more / Than history can pattern, though devis'd / And play'd to take spectators" (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.32-39). The consistency of her royal history exceeds the most cunning patterns—whether providential, didactic, or scientifically historiographical—that her playwright had ever devised "to take [in?] spectators" at his English history plays. Those patterns, we may recall, were sometimes tragic (*Richard II*), sometimes comic (*I Henry IV*), and sometimes, according to Jonathan Hart, as problematic (*Henry V*) as any problem play, the form towards which he argues the Lancastrian histories of the Second Tetralogy gravitate. The argument that Hart presents is well worth following and deserves a far more eloquent, Hermionean defence than a short review permits.

The delicate negotiations between the "world" of the title—by which Hart seems to mean the locus of actual events unfolding in time—and the representation of those events in a theatrical space under the aspect of dramatic time are, he maintains, extraordinarily unsettled and unsettling. These relations are endlessly bedeviled by what Hart, following Northrop Frye, calls the Fall (of everyone—historian, playwright, character, reader) into Language and its peculiarly temporal discontents. "The relation between the Fall," Hart writes, "the temporality into which we are fallen, and the human problems of genre and representations that have artistic implications especially for Shakespeare's representation of history should be uppermost in our minds throughout the book" (20). It is iterative imagery study, rather than semiotic analysis, that Hart performs on the texts in order to establish the "fallenness" or inadequacy of language in Shakespeare's histories, oft-worked terrain like the gardener's plot in *Richard II* (3.4). In the three long central chapters of the book he doesn't often step back to question the adequacy of the Clemens-Spurgeon model of textual analysis or the mystifying and universalising effects of Frye's version of human history *sub specie aeternitatis*. But, then, Shakespeare critics were not actively challenging imagery study, structural analysis, or myth criticism when Hart began his project as a doctoral thesis at Toronto a dozen years ago, and he does, in fairness, survey alternate

approaches to the plays in a substantial "Afterword" to which I'll turn in a minute.

Hart makes irony a central feature of reading the problematics of Shakespeare's histories. "Irony," he says,

reinforces the godlike authority of the author by facilitating an overview, but it also qualifies that authority by destabilizing literal meaning and creating a tension between the author's intention and the reader's interpretation. . . . Irony's self-conscious discovery of the rhetoric of temporality and the temporality of rhetoric—our fallenness in time and our wish to transcend it—does not allow for dissolution or totality, for it reveals sequence and consequence in their oppositions and interpenetration. (10)

Here and in a subsequent, fuller history of irony from Aristotle through the German romantics to the present ("Afterword" 223-31), Hart refuses to let irony be the textually stabilising strategy that it was for many New Critics, preferring instead to let irony work in a variety of ways, ranging from fully problematised authorial overviews to local rhetorical quibbles.

The positive effect of Hart's eclecticism and refusal to settle for the single or simple interpretation of tricky topics, such as irony or the ways that time's power gets represented on stage, is that his book has a good deal broader scope and a more deliberative feel about it than some recent and more ideologically restricted books on the histories. Still, some of those intensely political books, such as Graham Holderness's materialist study, *Shakespeare's History*, have shown themselves to be capable of addressing effectively the large topics of Hart's book—theories of historiography, the generic history of the English chronicle play, the reception of Shakespeare's histories—without Hart's habit of visiting and revisiting problems from numerous critical perspectives, and, in the case of Holderness's book, to do it in about half the space. If Hart's book is a cornucopia, sometimes his *copia* become excessive. While a characteristically full footnote such as the one on Shakespeare's stages (290-92) would provide most graduate students with an ample bibliography for a term essay, I can't quite see why Hart imbedded in its midst three works on acting. Sentences such as the following, which incorporates three separate lists of several items each into a compound list, tend to lose distinction within distinctions: "By inverting, reversing, contrasting, and blending tragic, comic, and satiric conventions and tones, Shakespeare also raises questions about the multiple, ambiguous, and therefore, ironic nature of history itself" (172). Finally, his habit of visiting and revisiting, turning and returning to a subject emerges as the stylistic tic of chiasmus. (At one point I counted a half-dozen in twenty-five pages: fiction in his history as well as history in his fiction, the truths of fictions and the fictions of truth, their theatre of the world as well as their world of the theatre, and so on.)

But this is to cavil with a book that makes a large and solid contribution to Shakespeare studies, a book against which I would level only

one major criticism. The device of the "Afterword" simply doesn't work for me. It is a 55-page addendum to the study that attempts to deal with the critical "paradigm shift away from a textual criticism . . . toward a contextual criticism" (219) that happened during the period of its composition. Incidentally, I'm not at all sure that feminists and new historicists would accept the textual/contextual dichotomy that Hart uses to separate them from earlier critical orientations, but the real point at issue is whether the author of the present monograph can adequately deal with the current revolution in literary studies without raising damaging second thoughts about what he has said earlier about particular plays. Despite his demur in the "Afterword" section on gender that "I do not mean to ignore my interpretation of [*Henry V*] in the body of my study" (269), a sustained feminist approach to that play's final scene might well call into question Hart's earlier view of Henry as a figure who can contain all contraries (143). (In passing I'd like to note that Hart appears to accept at face value, as most people have, Kenneth Branagh's space-clearing assertion that *his* film of the play is not epic and patriotic like that of his notable predecessor [129]. It seems to me that no matter how hard directors try to twist this particular rabbit around into a sardonic duck, it seems to right itself into that fuzzy creature, the patriotic war story.) And Hart's assault on Stephen Greenblatt's work via the section on analogy in a standard logic textbook (259) is less telling than other critiques published within the last few years. These weak spots in Hart's otherwise admirable book might have been avoided had he left more recent developments in literary theory (such as his own excellent work on narrative) to other publications. The ideas at the core of the present book are sufficiently well articulated to require no apology or after-words. And, as an extra, the press at Northeastern has done a stunning job of producing the book.

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