CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

*Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems*

The theoretical question of how we read or receive the works of the past has been at the core of critical concerns in the last decades. One approach to the problem may be summed up by Antoine Vitez's comparison of the plays of the past ages with 'sunken galleons which we bring back to light in pieces, without ever putting them together, since, in any case, we no longer know how to use them'.[1] In this attempted salvage operation, it is increasingly recognized that one of the missing pieces is the set of cultural assumptions underlying the plays. The difficulty of recapturing the ideological frame of reference of the original audience is perhaps one reason why so many directors now practise substitution devices like the transposition of historical periods.

As its title indicates, the present collection of essays shares in the current curiosity about the interconnections between text and context. It is thus doubly apposite to begin our introduction with a quotation from a French director constantly interested in historicity, since *Travel and drama in Shakespeare's time* is largely the offspring of a fruitful international encounter held in 1992 at Rouen, during which critics reflected upon 'Idea and Form in Renaissance Theatre: European Crosscurrents and New World Perspectives'.[2] The crossing of boundaries, the attempt to reconstruct the past from historical, geographical, sociological as well as political angles, were thus part of the initial project, as was the concern with form as well as with content, with the text as an artistic artefact as well as document. The concepts of *travel and drama*, it became apparent in discussion, are essentially productive through their confrontation; a whole range of interconnections emerges from the exploration of the rarely visited domain of voyage accounts and



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



foreign relations in Shakespeare's England, on the one hand, and the more familiar ground of drama in Shakespeare's age, on the other.

Within this network of interacting texts, some of the essays (like Andrew Hadfield's) concentrate more on travel than on drama, while others (like Kenneth Muir's) are more concerned with drama than with travel, but they all cohere to explore, from adjacent and finally converging perspectives, the various negotiations between these two phenomena.

Anthony Parr's account of the exploits of the Sherley brothers in the late 1590s analyses how the mostly abortive endeavours of the three brothers paradoxically developed into a myth shaped by a series of publications and then dramatized by Day, Rowley and Wilkins. *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607) provides an interesting example of drama inspired by actual travel and of interaction between myth and fiction as well as between narrative and drama, since the playwrights used Anthony Nixon's commissioned pamphlet, *The Three English Brothers* (written in the same year) as their immediate source.

In his documented study of 'Elizabethan perceptions of Ireland', Andrew Hadfield surveys the English representations of Ireland and Irishness provided by travel writing such as Campion's *History of Ireland* (*c.* 1571), Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (*c.* 1596) or Fynes Moryson's *Itinerary* (1617). By analysing the discourse of English observers rather than that of official documents, he shows that Ireland was perceived in two fundamentally different ways: as a kingdom ruled by the English monarch and as a colony akin to those of the New World; so that rather than suggesting that 'Ireland was no more than a stepping-stone *en route* to the colonization of the Americas', he stresses 'the problematic and transgressional nature of the evidence'.

Jonathan Bate also focuses mainly on travel writing, some real, some fictional, starting from the actual experiences of Henry Wotton (through an examination of his *Letters* and of Walton's *Life* of the diplomat, first published in 1651), moving on to the record of Thomas Coryate's walk to Venice in his *Crudities* (1611) to finish with the Italian half of Nashe's fiction, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). One type of interaction between travel and drama is here uncovered, as Bate analyses Coryate's sense of the theatricality of

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



Venice, and then proceeds to discuss Jonson's *Volpone* and the role of its English traveller, Sir Pol.

Philip Edwards' essay on 'Tragic form and the voyagers' suggests a further form of interpenetration of voyage accounts and drama. Approaching travel as drama, Edwards investigates the links between Elizabethan tragedy and the chronicles of Elizabethan voyages, grounding his argument on the tragic pattern of the final voyage of Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1583, as it is narrated by Edward Hayes, as well as on other documents of disaster on the high seas, including those of Cavendish (1591–93) and Ralegh (1596), and John Nicholl's *Houre Glasse of Indian Newes*, published in 1607. He thus discovers in the narratives of real-life drama the same intertwined patterns of responsibility and causality as in tragedy.

In his re-evaluation of *The Spanish Tragedy* (1582–92) in the light of contemporary Spanish and Portuguese events, Ronnie Mulryne does not actually refer to travel but rather to foreign relations. Moving beyond the Hispanophobic prejudice established by Eugene Hill and Ronald Broude in their analyses of the play, Mulryne reveals undercurrents of allusion such as the English anxiety about Spanish annexation of Portugal and the interest in potential Portuguese opposition to Spain. He also shows that the concluding masque of *Soliman and Perseda* celebrates the triumph of Turkish anti-Christianity, in line with alleged Spanish perversion of Christian values, and he finally sets the play within a wider consideration of 'Elect nation' propagandist theatre.

Both Yves Peyré and Lois Potter, exploring the workings of Renaissance multilayered intertextuality, reconstruct the debts and cultural connections of the dramatists they study. In 'Marlowe's Argonauts', Peyré shows how Marlowe, appropriating the culture of Antiquity to explore the potentialities of his own present, uses the travels of the Argonauts as an image of desire. The quest of the Golden Fleece, often used at the time 'to lend mythic aura to the discoverers of America', provided the dramatist with an image of travel which encapsulates 'suggestions of conflicting quests for love, material riches, noble adventure and spiritual discovery', and Peyré analyses it to uncover some of the tensions that structure Marlowe's drama and poetry.

In 'Pirates and "turning Turk" in Renaissance drama', Lois

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



Potter examines some rarely studied sea plays as well as some better-known ones, in the light of the history of piracy under James I. Some semi-biographical plays such as Heywood and Rowley's *Fortune by Land and Sea* (1607–9), which stages the historical Purser and Clinton, or Daborne's *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1612), defined by its subtitle, *The Tragical Lives and Deaths of the Two Famous Pirates, Ward and Dansiker*, pose the problem of how close fiction can remain to facts. They are also used as foils to Shakespeare's treatment of similar material in *Hamlet* or *Othello*.

In Brian Gibbons' essay 'The wrong end of the telescope', *Henry V* (1599) is shown to have spawned an interestingly odd assortment of plays (*The Shoemaker's Holiday*, written in the same year, *Eastward Ho!* (1605), *The Tempest* (1610) and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614)) which are all bound up by a sense of mutual parody and a common interest in the social and political notion of a commonwealth. Civil disruption, whether in the form of a military expedition abroad, a voyage-cum-shipwreck off the Bermuda coast or on the less exotic shores of the Isle of Dogs, or a fair, such as the one held annually in Smithfield, turns out to produce, as through a lens, a critical, defamiliarized image of the home-country.

In 'Travelling hopefully: the dramatic form of journeys in English Renaissance drama', Peter Holland concentrates more specifically on the dramaturgical difficulties of representing journeys on stage. Drawing upon a large corpus of plays (ranging from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (*c.* 1588) to Brome's *The Antipodes* (1637)), Holland reviews various techniques used to shape travel material into dramatic form. Beside such staple devices as choruses, dumb shows, chance encounters and scenes of failed or delayed recognition, Holland discovers a more imaginative venture in *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, its series of confrontations between different ethnic groups allowing a systematic exploration of cultural gaps between East and West.

The next essays are more specifically concerned with plays drawing upon the discovery of the New World, the prime example of which is *The Tempest*. The link between the two is provided by *The Sea-Voyage* which serves as the focal point of Michael Hattaway's essay, 'Seeing things: Amazons and cannibals'. Whereas *The Tempest* (which obviously inspired Fletcher and Massinger's play)

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



confronts the fact of colonialism and its dour implications, *The Sea-Voyage*, like most of the minor travel plays elsewhere examined, is found to occlude cultural differences through its ethnocentric manipulation of conventional tropes pertaining to the New World (romantic space, fertile and infertile lands and savage peoples). Ideologically, the play's romantic plot with its constant demonization of women and its Amazons finally discovered to be Portuguese ladies in disguise, offers an interesting case of 'gendered racism'.

In his discussion of *The Tempest*, Andrew Gurr returns to London in order to recontextualize the play in terms of the Elizabethan and literary traditions of 'service'. Shakespeare's romance, Gurr argues, may be seen to derive as much from forms of domestic organization as from a vision of colonial power in action. Starting from the premise that much of the play's formal patterning develops out of the differentiated relations of Ariel and Caliban to their master, Gurr shows that Prospero's slave-servants, though subjected to the island's conditions of unpaid slavery, occupy different positions within the spectrum of service – Ariel being closer to the status of the bound apprentice and Caliban to that of the household servant.

Looking at the play from an aesthetic rather than a social viewpoint, Leo Salingar argues that what *The Tempest* owes to reports of voyages to the New World, and more particularly to the colonization of Virginia, is essentially an infusion of realism into the world of romance, an alchemy which, Salingar suggests, may account for the play's uniqueness. Like the travel accounts it draws upon, Shakespeare's *Tempest* evinces a 'critical sense of reality' entangling with a 'desire for wonders'. Citing Tasso's concern that what is true to life should coalesce with the marvellous in epic poetry, Salingar sees the play as Shakespeare's theatrical response to what seems to have been a major imaginative demand of his contemporaries.

In the last of the three essays concentrating on *The Tempest*, Günter Walch calls attention to several discourses embedded in the play and generated by its island location. Though the discourse of colonialism reflected notably in Prospero and Miranda's vision of a languageless Other, looms large in Walch's analysis, greater emphasis is laid on the discourse of memory and on the more frequently explored discourse of metatheatricality. In the island-

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



shaped wooden O in which new meanings are produced, these two discourses are shown to be powerful agents of the play's deconstruction of its own text.

'Lope de Vega and Shakespeare', the concluding essay by Kenneth Muir, may be described as a journey in itself, which takes the reader from England to Spain and back and is made possible by its author's knowledge of Spanish and his critical expertise in both these dramatists. But the paper's relevance to the subject matter of this volume rests on more solid foundations than a mere metaphor. Basing his argument on four plays by Lope (*Peribañez* (1613), *The Dog in the Manger* (1618), *Fuenteovejuna* (1619) and *El Castigo sin Venganza* (1631)) dramatizing questions of honour in which 'social *mores* and Christian teaching were bound to conflict', Muir shows that both in Lope and Shakespeare a structurally built-in ambivalence or polysemy exists, despite cultural differences; hence the theoretical validity of multiple interpretations, a theme amply demonstrated throughout the volume but most noticeable, of course, regarding *The Tempest*.

One specific feature of this collection of essays is precisely the fact that its dramatic corpus receives fresh contextualization because it constantly interacts with a corpus of travel accounts. These texts which, as Philip Edwards complains, remain 'so little read by students of literature', are here mostly referred to and analysed through the voyage narratives gathered by Hakluyt and Purchas.[3] The object of many essays is to identify the various discourses which inform these contemporary documents. Whether they move to Italy, Ireland or follow the adventures of the Sherley brothers, Bate, Hadfield or Parr aim at clarifying the rhetorical and cultural codes which travel narratives place between the reader and the supposed eyewitness. Within their largely common frame of references to voyage narratives and travel-inspired drama, all the contributors combine historical enquiry and textual analysis to provide readings of drama and travel literature which ground them firmly in the period for which they were written and take into account the preconceptions and perceptions of their original public. Ronnie Mulryne uncovers a rich range of meanings in *The Spanish Tragedy* by reconstructing the political and religious prejudices of the audience of the 1580s and 1590s. Conversely, Parr explores

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



the cultural significance of prose narratives and plays connected with the Sherley brothers and shows how they shaped the Jacobean public's attitude to the foreign. Textual analysis is strengthened by ideological interpretation and vice versa.

The basic concern for historical perspective as well as for contextual and intertextual investigation is further enhanced by forays into modern literature as a means to illuminate – through similitudes and contrasts – certain preoccupations and values of the Renaissance. Discussing the theme of disorientation in Utopian fiction, Gibbons sets up a powerful confrontation between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and More's seminal *Utopia* (1516). Hattaway also cuts across the centuries, calling up Seamus Heaney's recent collection of verse *Seeing Things* (1991), to suggest that Donne's perception of 'new Nature', acquired through trade, may be extended to other forms of social behaviour such as travelling and play-watching.

'It is our task to consider not just what was seen but how it was seen', Hattaway adds. All the essays in this collection constitute precisely this stimulating reflection on the intriguing concept of cultural otherness, on the problems of visualizing and defining the Other which are discovered to be, most of the time, another means of defining the Self. Indeed, whether voyagers or dramatists look towards Europe and the East (Turkey and Persia) for cultural differences (as in Bate, Holland, Mulryne, Potter and Parr) or towards the New World to substantiate Utopian or dystopian visions or to feed their expectations of marvels (as in Hattaway, Gurr and Salingar), whether they find strangeness at home (as in the Elizabethan social system described by Gurr) or just away from home (across the Irish Sea as in Hadfield's study, in Italy, as in Bate's essay or in Roman Catholic Spain and Portugal, as in Mulryne's analysis of *The Spanish Tragedy*), they all tend to view the Other as an inversion of the same, that is through the glass of an England-based culture. Carried to extremes, the Europeans' mutilated and mutilating vision obliterates cultural alterity, reducing it almost to invisibility. At the dawn of European colonial enterprise, it is not surprising to find the Other constructed into a culturally non-existent entity, in need, therefore, of European domination (Walch).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



The New and the Old Worlds which we read about or discover on the stage look more like 'allegories of the forms and pressures of the time' (Hattaway), than like actual perceptions of 'remote otherness' (Gibbons); they give the image of an Other which provides at the same time a 'means of self-examination' (Bate). 'Persia was not so much Europe's Other as its opposite or foil', Parr writes; or again Hattaway: 'Geographic plays, like history plays, are not reflections of other cultures, but reflections upon the culture inhabited by their audience.'

Though pursuing their quest for the wonders promised by Mandeville and others, Renaissance explorers *and* writers must needs graft the old upon the new, mingle the strange and the familiar, thus relocating the myth of the Golden Age in America (Salingar), transferring to the New World the myth of the Amazons from its native Scythia or Libya (Hattaway), appropriating Antiquity to encapsulate in its legends some of the most disturbing contradictions of their own time (Peyré) or, in a more homely fashion, acclimatizing the native traditions of 'the idle or industrious apprentice' to Prospero's symbolic island (Gurr).

Another merit of the constantly interactive approach of travel and drama is the interest it nurtures for a wide range of travel plays which had so far received little attention but are here illuminated in their own right or by the connections established between them. It is not so common after all to find such plays as *A Christian Turn'd Turk*, *The English Traveller* (printed in 1633) or *The Sea-Voyage* looked at from more than one angle and drawn into meaningful, if sometimes unexpected, analyses. Several contributors note that plays concerned with the New World are rare and that most travel plays move east, dealing rather with Moorish and Turkish worlds. Thus the confrontation between East and West, between Persian and Christian practices is discovered to be an articulating force in *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*. Even a better-known play like *Eastward Ho!* benefits from being freshly contextualized. It is here successively approached as a dramatic parody of the ideal commonwealth, as an instance of comic non-travel, and as a specimen of an idle/industrious servant play to support by way of contrast Gurr's analysis of the Prospero/Ariel/Caliban triangular structure of *The Tempest*. This is a case where the various essays

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



clearly augment each other's findings, providing glancing sidelights which both enrich the understanding of so-called 'minor' plays and converge to contextualize the new readings proposed for *The Tempest.*

When set against these lesser plays, Shakespeare's play unsurprisingly appears, like the rest of his drama, as much more sophisticated and ambivalent; one of the virtues of a confrontation between different plays is precisely that suggestions can be made to explain this hierarchy, as when Lois Potter concludes her study of various dramatic examples of 'turning Turk', including Shakespeare's, with this remark: 'Shakespeare [evoked], as Daborne and others could not do, not only what the renegade loses but the real attractions of what he gains.' One plausible explanation concerning *The Tempest* is that, like its simultaneously Mediterranean and Bermudan magic island, it is in itself a 'palimpsest in which a number of discrepant codes are laid across one another' (Gibbons). Among these, two are of special interest, as they seem to account for much of the play's elusive discourse and intriguing artistic form: the codes of 'romance and actuality, fantasy and tried experience', whose interplay, Salingar observes, gives *The Tempest* its peculiar 'shimmering' quality. But the play's ingrained polysemy, what Günter Walch aptly describes as its 'resistance to interpretative closure', calls for a broader reflection on Shakespearean art. It emblematizes the dramatist's gift or cultivation of 'negative capability', which Kenneth Muir also sees embodied in Lope de Vega, another 'poet for the defence', an expression coined by Muir to define Shakespeare's capacity for dramatizing both sides of a debate.

Most of the essays lay bare internal tensions of meaning in the texts they analyse: Hadfield's study reveals a discourse of inclusion/exclusion towards the Irish which he connects with the dichotomy savage/civilized and the perception of Ireland as both an exotic culture and part of domestic society. Both fascination *and* repulsion appear, from Bate's essay, to define the Elizabethans' perceptions of Italy. Lois Potter also insists on the equivocal reactions to piracy which contained both attraction and repulsion. This common and repeated interest in ambiguities and plurality of meaning often serves as a means of analysing the specificity of the literary text,[4] as when Peyré grounds his analysis of Marlowe's

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03514-9 - Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time
Edited by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems
Excerpt
More information



plays on the ironies and ambiguities derived by the dramatist from the myth of the Argonauts exploited both as extolling the spirit of adventure and enterprise and as containing powerful undercurrents of negative readings; or when Philip Edwards finds in the tension between human responsibility and supernatural intervention a structure which informs both travel narrative and tragedy as opposed to real life; or when Günter Walch turns to poiesis rather than mimesis to interpret the making of fictional worlds in *The Tempest* and compares the play to 'a theatrical laboratory in which to conduct a crucial test under isolated island conditions'.

The plays discussed here are never approached as mere cultural documents. Strongly historical as it is, Parr's essay analyses the playwrights' various manipulations of factual or reported detail, and several more theatre-oriented papers confront some of the questions raised by the difficulty of staging voyages, discussing some of the means through which travel writing is made to adjust (sometimes with mitigated success) to the demands of comedy and tragedy. A particularly innovative treatment of the voyage motif can be found, Holland argues, in those plays where anticipation, incompletion or mere imagination of travel constitute the principal structuring device of drama and, possibly, the surest therapy for would-be voyagers. Conversely, Philip Edwards' paper demonstrates how tragedy as a genre (with its stories of heroic disaster) has shaped the voyage narratives of Hayes, Cavendish and Ralegh. Theatre consciousness is again seen to emerge in *A True Declaration of the Estate of the Colonie of Virginia*, a pamphlet issued in 1610 by the London Virginia Company, in which the shipwreck of the expedition flagship on the coast of Shakespeare's 'still vex'd Bermoothes' is significantly described as a 'tragicall Comoedie' (quoted by Salingar). In their individual ways, most of the essays cohere to set off the ways in which playwriting more than other writing and Shakespearean drama more than other drama, expose and exploit the ambiguities and paradoxes present in the perceptions of other worlds and of Others.

The authors of *Travel and drama in Shakespeare's time* set their work in the context of current critical trends. The studies of *The Tempest* refer to a wide range of critical reactions and particularly of post-colonialist readings of the play,[5] though often to qualify them.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org