Performing the Renaissance – The Art of Forms

Performance is the keyword characterising the Renaissance period. Its etymological interpretation oscillates between the derivation from the Old French parfournir, meaning "to accomplish entirely;" "to bring to completion" (Oxford English Dictionary 1987, 2131) and the Latin performare, meaning "to give shape" (Treccani Dizionario, s.v. 'performance,' my translation). The latter meaning, interpreted in the sense of "bringing to expression through forms" (cf. Watt 2016, 165) will be privileged in the present focus section, which aims at underlining how performance informs situations which foster a circulation of ideas, of cultural and political issues.

The concept of performance has also gained wide attention in the contemporary critical field, where it has been defined as the "primary episteme of the twenty first century" (Auslander 2003, 2). The concept applies to many areas of human endeavour, ranging from the legal sphere to the linguistic one, and to the aesthetic realm of the performing arts, at the same time crossing, as well as blurring, the boundaries between such fields, and generating "thick descriptions" (cf. Geertz 1973) of the period under consideration. Based on a conception of culture not only as a signifying and symbolic system but also, and mainly, as a site for collective action and invention, we can assert that early modern performance culture mirrors the process of the individual and collective making of meaning. The stage becomes the site for the representation and the articulation of the collective unconscious, the embodied play of the mind, which at the same time bridges the gap between the theatrical and the early modern social world, itself characterized by an intrinsic theatricality (Yachnin and Badir 2017, 1-10).

Within a given cultural context and its representations, 'form' indicates both the limits of what can be expressed, and a potential to overcome those limits. By representing particular cultural forms and human actions within fictional frames, Shakespeare's theatre invited its audience to reflect upon those forms and on culture's potentiality to reshape what can be expressed: "no form can ever be said to be simply given, but must always be understood as the historical product of its instantiations in time" (Barkan, Cormack, and Keilen 2009, 2; cf. also Williams 1977, 187). In this humanistic and sociological exploration of cultural phenomena, the stage is "an important site of cultural transformation – a place where cultural change [is] not simply reflected but also rehearsed and enacted" (Rackin 1987, 29). Therefore, from a performative perspective, it originates new relationships between individuals, thereby questioning norms of embodiment and social conventions (cf. Schechner 1988). Collective forms within a given representational mode "link that mode to the complex network of institutions, practices, and beliefs that constitute the culture as a whole" (Greenblatt 1982, 2); at the same time they question the repetitiveness of the embodied practices, and the way individuals inhabit forms. Performativity's dynamism precisely relies on repetition and interruption within the relation to an audience, and brings to its fullest potentiality the reference of the word "performance" both to the action taking place and to the result of that action.

Starting from these reflections, the present focus section positions itself in the trend of recent publications which engage with the relationship between Shakespeare studies, theatre studies, and performance studies (see Raffield 2010 and 2017; Worthen 2014;
Watt 2016; Bickley and Stevens 2016; Fiorato and Drakakis 2016) and posits the Renaissance stage as the ideal place for an interdisciplinary dialogue which proves particularly receptive to the conditions of theatrical representation, in which the audience actively engages with the processual forms and shapes of the performance. With regard to this, Worthen advocates for the modern period the concept of a postdramatic theatre, which goes beyond the mimetic representation of a text on stage in favour of the perception of the performance as an event (cf. Worthen 2014, 7): “performance’s […] aestheticity is not due to a ‘work’, an artifact which it creates, but to its particular eventness” (Fischer-Lichte 2005, 25). In this way, the ephemeral quality of the performance as an event becomes an important element of the representation; the work's aura affects the audience's experience and determines the circulation of social energy. In line with the contemporary critical interest in an active audience, not a passive one as a mere receiver of the staged spectacle, the dynamic qualities of early modern spectatorship are highlighted; the latter were further enhanced in particular by the actors' space which was variably continuous with, and distinct from, the space of the audience. This element spatially underlines how the audience is the representative of the society that generates the performance and, at the same time, also the recipient of the ideas presented through the performance itself.

The articles that follow illustrate how the thriving early modern theatrical context creates space for an interdisciplinary approach through critical perspectives such as law and literature, gender studies, adaptations in the performing arts. Through the analysis of the embodied meaningfulness of specific human activities they present a dynamic way of investigating the social world in which the theatre is situated and of recognizing its connections with the contemporary world, thus testifying to the power of Shakespeare's invention of the human (cf. Bloom 1999). The law and literature/law as culture approach, which relies on the well-established analogy between the stage and law courts (cf. a.o. Mukherjii 2006; Carpi 2007 and 2008), represents a particularly apt perspective that underlines the nature of performance as spectacle, and the period's pervasive symbolic imagination which permeates the enactment of cultural practices. Following Goodrich's contention that "forensic rhetoric encodes and formalizes the affective and performative dimensions of legal practice" (Goodrich qtd. in Mukherjii 2006, 5), it can be asserted that drama relies on the same rhetorical forms to enargeically represent cultural issues and to appeal to the audience (cf. Greenblatt 2000, 29). In our perspective, therefore, instead of an interpretive rhetoric in which performance actualizes a work on stage (merely repeating it), a productive rhetoric is privileged, in which performance enacts the selected issues for representation including the spectator's agency, and embodied presence, in the performance (cf. Worthen 2014, 7). The law and literature/law as culture perspective also includes a specific focus on related social and identity issues which are articulated by integrating theatre studies with the concept of performance in its widest sense. Performance thus becomes a privileged framework for an analysis of Renaissance society and its modes/forms of expressiveness, ranging from the linguistic to the performance of the social and political self.

The word "performance" started to be used in its theatrical sense in Shakespeare's time, whereas before it indicated a promise and was connected to the legal sphere (see Watt 2016, 8).¹ Shakespeare managed to stage the relationship between drama and the law in the same way in which he grasped the power, the potentiality and the participatory nature of the theatre, which established itself in that period as a commercial venture

¹ Gary Watt also points out that the word ‘action’ was similarly connected to the legal sphere before being used to refer to the theatre (the plaintive was called “the actor,” see Watt [2016, 8]).
and became the hallmark of the culture of a whole epoch. The theatre creates a communal activity in the representation of the play and its meanings, conscious and unconscious, aural and literary, personal and social (cf. Braunmüller 2003, 55). It activates the audience and requires its imaginative engagement, which, at the same time, constitutes its share of the spectacle. Early modern men went to the theatre to see and to be seen, thus being at the same time an integral part as well as a critical observer of the social framework. Renaissance plays called upon the imaginative powers of the audience in order to create a theatrical illusion, a willing suspension of disbelief which, however, impinged upon their present reality, in a double effect of their deciphering of the semiotic code. This contract between playwright and audience is openly stated in the prologue of Henry V (cf. Martin and Pesta 2016, 6). A second kind of contract sees drama as a testamentary performance which the audience is called to probate (see Watt, 2016): thus, the latter is called on to actively judge the staged issues regarding the main concerns of the time. This originated, or rather formed, a secular public opinion, in what can be considered the nearest equivalent to the modern mass media (cf. Heinemann 2003, 167). This mechanism can also be observed in the legal field where it contributed to the opening up of secular political discussion, just as the medium of the theatre portrayed competing paradigms of governance as well as political and constitutional relationships between governor and governed (cf. Raffield 2017, 238). However, Renaissance theatre did not only refer to the political dimension in all its articulations, but to all the "unusually eclectic range of subject matter" which characterized this "unprecedented form of performance art" (Raffield 2010, 2-3). The theatre thus becomes the embodiment of the active imagination of the audience and ultimately of the depths of the human mind. In this self-engendered court of public opinion, created through a synthesis of aural and visual imagery, drama represents "the outward limit of human achievement: aesthetically, cognitively, in certain ways morally, even spiritually. [The characters] abide beyond the mind's reach" (Bloom 1999, xvii) and represent "extraordinary instances not only of how meaning gets started, rather than repeated, but also of how new modes of consciousness come into being" (Bloom 1999, xviii). Shakespeare therefore enacts dramatic dialogues of human ideas (cf. Raffield 2017). Thought is enacted on stage and becomes a communal and artistic artefact to be mentally handled by the playgoers. In this "performative urge," the energy of drama creates a harmonious functioning of all the elements of the performance, intended as a process of acting through forms (cf. Watt 2016) and fosters the circulation of imaginative energy through its synaesthetic multimodality. Referring to the axial dynamics of theatre, we can assert that the energeia of the theatre's rhetorical and aesthetic empowerment develops both along the vertical line of hierarchy and the horizontal line of human relationships.

In its presentation of performative speech acts (Austin [1962] 2011) the theatre gave shape to reality and by putting that same reality under scrutiny it changed it, transforming lives and society, thus engendering what can be defined as 'performative theatrical acts.' Drama focussed on "the ongoing human struggle to perform individual will against the backdrop of status-entrenching social frames" (Watt 2016, 23); therefore, theatrical artistic expression emerges as a privileged means to coherently articulate human experience and proves capable of dealing with apparent contradictions in a culture's consensual view of reality (Watson 2003, 301-302), as well as – and most im-

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2 "Can this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram / Within this wooden O the very casques / That did affright the air at Agincourt? / O, pardon! Since a crooked figure may / Attest in little play a million, / And let us, ciphers to this great accompt, / on your imaginary forces work" (Henry V, Prologue, 11-18)
portantly – of delving into its fissures, thus disrupting the theatrical and social frame. The political transfigures itself into the theatrical and actively contemplates its own representation.

Theatrical images which aim at strengthening the status quo are subtly counteracted by "other" images which disrupt such an imposed order and put its tenets under discussion. Major examples in the political field are the on-stage representations of a regicide in Hamlet and of the deposition scene in Richard II, which lead to a demystification of the mystery of state and put the royal body at the centre of public interest. As Orgel observed, by the last two decades of Queen Elizabeth's reign "a strong sense of impatience and disillusion in the royal mythology was being felt" (Orgel 1982, 41), which on the one hand brought to the forefront the constructedness of royal spectacles, and, on the other, led to a humanization of kings and public figures, in particular staging the contradiction between the sacred royal office and the fallible human individual who holds it (cf. Heinemann 2003, 179). The symbolic aura of the body politic dissolves to reveal the human individual underneath. The recognition of the tension between private and public selves comes thus to the forefront, as well as the consequent need to adopt personae and to perform roles in the social theatre (theatrum mundi). The creation of the self interiorizes the instability and incoherence of society and state (cf. Sharpe and Zwicker 1998, 4); moreover, awareness of the possibility of fashioning identity, of forming and moulding individual subjectivity, raises the question of how to define it. The language of the body – expressive of sex, gender, marriage, the body politic – and of conscience, leaves the private dimension and enters a scripted public dimension. In this way, the heart of performance is reached, where "the solid stuff of the stage world connects to the intangible stuff of the will" (Watt 2016, 167). The audience is exhorted to think about the ideas underlying the staged events, and "[i]t is not the answer but the question that subverts" (Heinemann 2003, 177). Shakespeare does not aim at providing answers, but presents fascinatingly flawed human beings, capable of reaching the deepest chords of humanity. This effect is attained also through the powerful rhetoric of Shakespearean verse, which is visceral, passionate, physically and intellectually demanding; theatre thus also is a listening place, a site for a sensorial experience which creates a conspiracy (in its etymological sense of "breathing together") between audience and actors and leads to a sharing of the staged topics, in a theatrical experience that transcends the stage (see Watt 2016, 190, and Pensalfini 2016, 212).

The Renaissance is constantly being reimagined and recreated in our time and all its appropriations "invariably tell us so much more about the present than they do about the past" (Burnett and Streete 2011, 6). Like the Bloomian tesserae, specific aspects or issues of the past recombine to form (and per-form) new images and reflect aspects of our own humanity, in a process of rereading and actualization: "we return to Shakespeare, periodically regenerating the bard in our own images" (Croteau 2009, 19). Actually, Shakespeare's scripts, written to be performed (cf. Orgel 2003, 1), therefore texts "in progress," "were not repositories of unitary meaning but were open sites of negotiation among text, performers, and audiences where textual obligation met performative option" (Hodgdon 2005, 4). This aspect is in line with the disseminative qualities associated with the postmodern conception of meaning, which "remains open to refashioning by the agents of its performance" (Galey 2014, 54). In the reiteration of the performance, the characters continually develop themselves, bringing to light new perspectives, as they reconceive themselves anew in response to the changing Zeitgeist and Weltanschauung. These characteristics of the early modern period find a particular
resonance in our own epoch, with its focus on the performance of identity in a visual and mediatized society.

Early modern theatre particularly appeals to our contemporary sensibility as a space for the articulation and potential subversion of gender representation, which is grounded on the performer's body. On stage the body acquires multiple modalities of expression, it opens itself to play and display: it re-presents both normative identity and, at the same time, its alterity, or constitutive other and it thus gives form to a site of negotiation. This applies in particular to the staging of women, who in a patriarchal society were considered as bearers (not creators) of meaning for the strengthening of the status quo. The expressive force of powerful women stages the "other" of Renaissance culture and at the same time "others it," highlighting different forms of expression, contrary to the codified and normative ones. Shakespeare, as well as Middleton and Webster, put on stage powerful female characters who challenge early modern gender norms in their social and political context (see Kemp 2010, 173 ff.) and who may be said to mirror the social and political impact of Queen Elizabeth I. Dramatic performance becomes thus a "performance of the threshold" (Mullaney 1988, 31) which reveals the foundations of the community, and the ways, as well as the extent, of containment and control: far from simply ventriloquizing cultural and political practices, it allows "other, potentially subversive voices [to] be heard" through specific forms of representation (Drakakis 1995, 282). This effect is rendered more complex by the impersonation of female roles by boy actors, which led to further nuances of re-presentation.

The Renaissance belief that sexual differentiation takes place after birth and is then reinforced by social practices (cf. Laquer 1990) can be seen to anticipate Butler's theorization of gender performativity in the 20th century. This enables a politicized understanding of the categories of "gender" and "woman," which leads to a questioning of the heteronormative matrix underlying the categories of identity politics (see Johnston 2005, 133). Gender performativity is actually staged and en-acted in its multiple aspects in the protean context of the theatre: in the case of female-to-male cross-dressed characters, the destabilizing of social roles leads to a disruption of the interiorization of gender difference but also to a willing acceptance of a differential access to power, and to cultural as well as economic assets (Howard 1993, 21). On the one hand, the disruptive force of female characters renders the social and gender borders fluid, on the other, the assertion of their will and their action in society is subordinated to an interiorization of gender difference that requires cross-dressing. The case of male-to-female cross-dressing in the dramatic plot likewise posits the relationality of gender, as it allows the characters to enter social and economic relations. However, it also intersects with the common practice of cross-dressing on the part of boy actors, in whose case gender is linked to the construction of character and denotes the performer's condition of liminality, or duality: "Character, identity and gender are all destabilized as [...] characters become the very gender-bending actors who portray them" (Perkins Wilder 2016, 192).

The articles in this focus section engage in a fruitful dialogue with the Renaissance period and the Shakespearean texts and address multiple social, political and human aspects. They present a variety of voices which recreate the theatrical dynamic context and the resilience over time of the staged issues as well as the characters that embodied

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3 Cf. Bell: "Simultaneously subject to and powerful enough to transgress cultural constraints on women, provoking and dashing antifeminist stereotypes, Elisabeth gave the traditional male discourses of politics and love a female body and a female voice, turning her "liking" into a female counter-text that was radically difficult to read because it could not be interpreted or overmastered with the culture's assumptions about monarchs or women" (2010, 27-28).
them. Richard II is one of the main links between the articles, as he embodies the early modern contention that "meaning and power were created and propagated through public performance [i.e.] the actual, physical, visual and audible manifestations of bodies and voices which communicated to their publics through symbolic systems and codes" (Postlewate 2007, 7). As Raffield observes, Richard II was the first English monarch to establish a "theatre of divine kingship," relying upon specific words and gestures "intended to represent and enhance the mystical presence of the king" (Raffield 2017, 141); in his manipulation of spiritual iconography for his temporal aims he proved himself aware of the rhetorical power of the theatrical gesture, and created apt instances of the display and performance of royalty which resonated through the centuries. The articles of this focus section analyse Richard II (Cutolo), as well as its influence in the contemporary period with regard to the perception of Elizabeth II (Cutolo, Ward). The counterposition he came to embody between the performance of the law of the state and the demands of kingship resonates in other Shakespearean works and legal contexts (Watt, Costantini, Fiorato), and his piercing attitude toward forms that powerfully emerges in the Shakespearean character is implicitly evoked in a subsequent one, i.e. Hamlet (Fiorato). Another issue is that of the body, which comes to the forefront in the articulation of the English legal system itself (Costantini) and in connection with its performative action on the lives of the individuals subjected to it (Watt, Carpi, Guneratne, Neumeier and Youssef), in the portrayal of and resistance to the period's patriarchal tenets and the body's new function of performing the identity of the individual, in the articulation of gender issues (Mulhany, Battisti, Bladen), and likewise in the process of the dissolution of the body itself, which maintains its powerful resonance and symbolic value (Rees). A final aspect is represented by the power that Shakespeare's theatrical world exerts on our contemporary imagination in filmic (Bladen, Battisti, Fiorato) as well as theatrical adaptations (Carpi, Ward, Watt, Mulhany, Neumeier and Youssef, Guneratne). More in detail:

Cristina Costantini focusses on the performative aspect of the common law tradition, which grounded a legal as well as a social paradigm. The absence of a written legal corpus rendered necessary the construction of a legal tradition through a specific iconology, which was literally embodied by its practitioners, in a new conception of the corpus iuris. The Inns of Court, considered as the third university of the times characterized themselves as a distinctively English institution, symbolical of English identity, and they repeatedly asserted their exclusiveness through public rituals which blended geopolitical conceptions (the autonomy of the inns which configured them as a state of exception) and metaphorical visual images (the official investiture of the serjeants at law, which sanctioned their belonging to the restricted community that embodied and performed juridical knowledge). Costantini underlines how the process of the secularization of the administration of justice proceeded in conjunction with a process of sacralization of the figure of the jurist and of its ritual dimension.

Gary Watt underlines the reciprocal process of aesthetic empowerment between the law and the theatre. He observes that although the performance of the legal ritual is mostly associated with the colours of black and white (with reference both to the black letter of the law and the lawyers' gowns), the colour red of the wax seal is the actual signifier of the operative power of the law's social performance, of the performative valence of the written legal word. The seal's association with the colour of blood on a white animal skin parchment signals the violent nature of such performance in what we may term an anticipation of the Derridean theorisation of the force of the law; this aspect finds a powerful articulation in the drama of the early modern period which con-
nects murderous deeds to the legal execution of documentary deeds. The performative speech acts of the legal sphere are symbolized by performative properties on stage which articulate the framing action of legal regulations on human action, in its turn symbolized by the dramatic framing of human life in a specific script. Watt analyzes the wide implications of this concept as well as its subtly nuanced staging in works such as *Julius Caesar*, *A Warning to Fair Women* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*.

**Raffaele Cutolo** focuses on Richard II's deposition scene as a dramatic site for the performance and disruption of the king’s two bodies through subtle iconological and linguistic means. Richard’s agency in his self-deposition intrudes upon the traditional dynamics between the body natural and the body politic which he both transcends, seemingly attaining another metaphysical dimension. The shattering of the glass deprives him of the monarch’s "representational" function, while his (historically reported) act of renouncing the crown by putting it on the ground inverts the axial dynamics of the divine conception of sovereignty, at the same time disrupting the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm. At his death, his corpse, a metaphorically wounded body natural, forced to expel his body politic, maintains a sacred aura that resounds in the theatrical context. Cutolo also refers to Macbeth as a further example of the metaphysical implication of human action on the body politic and analyses recent negotiations of the issue with a specific focus on the TV series *The Crown*, devoted to Elizabeth II's ascent to the throne i.e. her acquisition and acceptance of the body politic.

**Sidia Fiorato** addresses performance issues in *Hamlet* and in Kenneth Branagh's 1992 film version of the play. Hamlet's quest concerning the relationship between being and appearance investigates the quintessence of humanity; in the context of Renaissance self-fashioning, the metatheatrical dimension of role-playing affects the authentic expression of the self in the context of social framing. This acquires a particular relevance in the context of an attack on the body politic and the ensuing disaggregation of the body natural represented by the court, and, by extension, of the state of Denmark in its political role. Branagh's Hamlet utters his soliloquy "To be or not to be" aptly facing his own reflection in a mirror, which epitomizes and disrupts Elsinore's macrocosm. It has been observed that, had he lived to become king, Hamlet would have become like Richard II, characterized by self-dramatizing gestures and verbal flamboyance but ineffective as a ruler (Sadowski 2003, 101). The analogy can be seen more in the sense of two characters aware of forms, who powerfully put themselves in relation with such forms (which they epitomize as crown prince and king) and subject them to a philosophical investigation. Instead of shattering the glass of royalty and trying to go beyond the body politic, Hamlet tries to enter its representative form and delves deep into a dimension located between the human and the metaphysical in search of his own identity.

**Ian Ward** focusses on Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III* (2014), a contemporary history play set in the future, but "Shakespearean" in its tone and reception. The play stages Charles III's engagement with the performative role of a monarch as well as with the limits of prerogative and convention, which he both misplays. Charles recalls Prospero, appearing as a thoughtful prince, but the whole play creates a Shakespearean palimpsest with multiple allusions. *Macbeth* is evoked by William's usurpation of the throne, assisted by Kate, a new Lady Macbeth, who traces her way to power by first complying with the gendered codification of her role and then conquering the crown for herself, in full awareness of her performative responsibilities. *Richard II* is echoed in Charles' deposition scene, which likewise plays on the fiction of the king's two bodies; the play actually distinguishes the human and the performative, the public role and the private dimension, as well as the institutional dimension of kingship. Hal, the supreme "self-
fashioning" Shakespearean prince, resonates in William's usurpation of his father which aptly takes place in a television studio, the privileged contemporary site for the royal function of representation and the new theatre of public opinion. The ghost of Elizabeth dominates the play, and her performative contention resonates in the future: "nor rash, and never changing, a great Crown/ is made by dint of always being there." The link (either respected or rejected) between the sovereigns is Bagehot's 1867 On Constitution, often referenced in Bartlett's script.4

EMMA REES reflects on early modern dramatists' fascination with the skull, which is revealed to fulfil multiple functions both in the dramatic texts and on stage. This stage prop signals the alteration of the self in connection with mortality and, at the same time, points towards the philosophical quest for the quintessence of humanity (in particular in Hamlet). However, the skull can also perform an active role and undermine the selfhood the protagonist seeks to establish. This emerges in particular in Middleton's The Revenger's Tragedy, with the dynamic staging of the counterposition between Gloriana-as-woman and Gloriana-as-skull. The liminal status of the skull disrupts binary ontologies, such as the one between subject and object, as well as those related to gender performance. The skull is the receptacle of the discursive relations that posit Gloriana's gendered conception as the stereotyped silent, chaste and obedient Renaissance woman. At the same time, Rees points out how the skull can be considered as gender-free and how it implicitly rejects an imposed semiosis of being, that is, a cultural inscription of identity, thus opening up possibilities for (female) active performance, albeit liminal, as they are grounded in death.

SEAN MULCAHY focuses on the implications of cross-gender casting on the Renaissance stage and the impact of the convention of boy actors on Renaissance audiences. In particular, in the light of contemporary Renaissance, queer, and gender studies, the article investigates whether the boy actor was considered as a subliminal or subversive figure, a symbol to feminism, an embodiment of the performativity of gender, or an object of male/female desire. The boy actors' portrayal of the artificiality of femininity as social construction (through costume, voice and text) prevailed upon the contemporary female actresses, active for example in the Italian theatrical context of the time, who were judged as too naturally passionate. The space of the theatre allowed for a disruption of the contemporary gender boundaries (in what has been seen as an emergence of women's masculine and empowering spirit) and, at the same time, intersects with the essence of performance. The female character was an embodied state of the boy actor, an indissoluble entity constantly in flux. The erotic allure these impersonations might have engendered is the object of much contemporary critical interest. From the available early modern sources, it seems that playgoers remained conscious both of the actor and of the illusion he created and this highlighted the artifice of acting as well as the actor's sexual ambiguity in an articulated play-within-the-play: for this reason, boy actors can be interpreted as liminal characters, embodying the sense of a mutable self, escaping the hierarchical categories of order that shaped and informed the period.

CHIARA BATTISTI focuses on the figure of Anne Boleyn (both in the historical sources and the TV series The Tudors) to trace her evolution from being the mere adornment of male kingly power, to the conscious performance of her beauty aimed at the achievement of power. Since her first arrival at court, Anne embodied a different model of femininity which clashed with the stereotypical passive one embodied at its utmost by Queen Catherine of Aragon; first enclosed and reified by patriarchal gender

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4 The reference to Bagehot's text has recently come to prominence in the TV series The Crown, where it theoretically grounds young Elizabeth's acceptance and acquisition of the body politic.
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codes, Anne counterposed herself to the queen in the patriarchal terms of the fertile vs. the sterile body, which was also instrumental to the performance of male political power (symbolizing royal succession). Anne, however, tried to reverse such terms, that is, her codified sexual identity, whose powers were limited in time due to the effects of old age, and to render her beauty a new alternative female language to impose her own fiction upon the world and gain social power. Anne's unconventional idea of beauty, aimed at exploiting male desire, relied on performative manipulation strategies that aimed at reverting the control of the male gaze and at asserting a new feminine vision of reality. Such self-fashioning was used against her in her fall; her image of a sexually free and independent woman posited her as a witch, relegating her once again to the margins of society and condemning her for her conscious performance of her body.

VICTORIA BLADEN underlines the concept of performance as a dialogue with the playtext as both historical object and living story. John Kurzel's Macbeth (2015) elaborates on the Shakespearean evocation scene of Lady Macbeth in which she ambiguously refers to maternity and to a dead child. The latter remains in a liminal position between a past existence and an evocative presence, and in Kurzel's cinematic rendering is transformed into an uncanny presence which both humanizes the protagonists and impacts the key scenes of their character development. In this new interpretative perspective, the child links, and becomes the symbol of, Macbeth's sterility and his political failing, his unfitness to rule and to keep political power, as he has no heir. In this context, the witches are significantly accompanied by a child, who acts as an intermediary figure and haunts Macbeth in its symbolic projection in all the child/son figures he encounters. The witches therefore become the symbol of a distorted parental image that lies at the basis of the tragic parable of Kurzel's Macbeth.

DANIELA CARPI demonstrates how Shakespeare remains our contemporary through the analysis of the 2013-performance of Julius Caesar by the inmates of the Rebibbia high security jail in Rome. The filmic rendering of the text by the Taviani brothers represents a patchwork of performance issues, starting with the counterposition between black and white scenes and colour ones which correspond to the rehearsal phase and to the completed scenes, and passing through the cathartic process triggered by the performative efforts of the inmates to enter in character. In this process, the prisoners discover the links between issues of power, betrayal and sin in the Renaissance and in their contemporary society. The film can be considered as an actualization of Hamlet's instructions to the actors, as the spectators witness the process of construction of character (through the director's cues, but mostly through the inmates' dialogues with each other and with their own inner selves) and its intersections with the inmates' real life; the cells become microcosms in the limited macrocosm represented by the jail as theatre and as the stage for the redemptive power of performance.

ANTHONY GUNERATNE focusses on those Shakespearean works which contain a dramatic use of dreams, and shows how the texts anticipate the later psychoanalytic interest in dreamwork, the operations of the unconscious and the nature of the self. Discourses on dreams, their connection with the supernatural and their truth value were widespread in the early modern period and contribute to our tracing of a fault line between medieval and modern, as "they suggest a development toward the individual and interiority, which helps move us closer to a modern sensibility" (Levin 2008, 8). Guneratne's approach intersects a historical perspective (the analysis of the James-Haydocke about the rationality and interpretability of dreams), a theatrical one (Shakespeare's receptiveness to philosophical, medical and popular cultural issues of the time), and a social-political one (the continuity between social performance and Renaissance politi-
cal stagecraft, including emerging practices of theatrical entertainment). The article aims at showing how Shakespearean dreaming intersects with Freud's dreaming in an inter-medial and interdisciplinary relationship.

BEATE NEUMEIER and SARAH YOUSSEF focus on immersive theatre, with particular attention to the adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in Rift's homonymous work (2014) and in Punchdrunk's *Sleep no More* (2003, 2009, and 2014). Immersive theatre dispenses with narrative plot and issues of representation in favour of an exploration of the process of performing and being performed in an embodied participatory and experiential event. The audience fragments into singular and personal approaches to the "text" and is confronted with disjointed scenic images and separate objects with which they actively engage drawing upon their previous knowledge of *Macbeth*. The visitors to these site-specific performances (usually former hotels or vast buildings) wander and trace their path through the spatial and narrative maze, experiencing the gaps between language, visual image and object world. In particular, they are taken into the nightmarish dimension of Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's minds in a process that impacts the guests' own interiority and fosters an inner journey within the self, exploring notions of control and loss of identity. The audience's communal character is partly restored after the performance, when the network of the social media connected to the event seems to perform an updated version of Greenblatt's *energeia*, propagating the work's effect related to the guests' individual experiences.

The articles of the present focus section show how Shakespeare invites us into a complex world, and how he is able to perform that world's complexity. This fosters "a mindset that admits of multiple possibilities, of complicated reasoning and feeling, of complex relationships and uncertain allies, of many different truths" (Pensalfini 2016, 213), of multiple per-formances.

**Works Cited**


