Introduction:
A Dance Routine Set in a Library

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"Shakespeare and popular culture", the title of this issue of *Textus*, is almost an overdue topic for the most important journal of English studies in Italy, given the crop of scholarly articles and publications that have appeared on the subject and the interest the topic awakens in and outside the academic community. Working in this area allows a number of intersecting disciplines to converge and synergise, from reception and translation studies to cinema and television studies. The tantalisingly vast possibilities offered by the internet and social networks in terms of reception and remediation have in turn opened up correspondingly innovative and varied fields of research. Media, graffiti, Shakespeare-in-prison studies, and countless other forms have emerged. Maurizio Calbi's felicitous phrase, *spectral Shakespeares* (which is also the title of a work repeatedly evoked here), well represents this proliferation of forms and texts. Like his own Richard II, Shakespeare is cracked in a hundred shivers; and each fragment tells us much about the reception of his works and their relevance for contemporary audiences. At the same time, in recent years the wider field of Shakespearean studies has been energised by the increasing attention paid to his relationship to popular culture, both in his own and our times. Shakespeare's various debts to medieval and early Tudor popular theatre have been explored, throwing new light on his plays; at the same time, historical and sociological investigations of Shakespeare's audience have prompted us to re-assess his work as a popular dramatist. Leaving behind us the romantic image of the solitary, self-sufficient artifex, we have rediscovered the playwright's works as composed within a community of writers, actors, spectators and patrons, creating an intricate and fertile cultural network which affects

production as well as reception, and which has transmuted and re-shaped itself over the centuries.

Our collection stems from the awareness that this new field is gaining considerable favour among Italian scholars of English literature, not least because very often it throws new light on another important field of research, that of Anglo-Italian cultural relations in the Renaissance. As editors of this volume, with different expertise and different approaches to the theme, Clara Calvo and I found it hugely rewarding to ask the Italian community of English scholars for their contributions. The result is a very wide range of essays, touching on different forms of art and experiences and consistently avoiding the obvious in order to focus on revelatory details, unexpected evocations, or practices touching, sometimes painfully, on contemporary issues. Our intention was both to find clues and details by retracing the presence of early modern popular culture in Shakespeare's works through settings, characters, or allusions, and to seek contributions that address the afterlives of the plays and poems; the role of Shakespeare as cultural catalyst; and the new and challenging ways in which artists express their own cultural perspectives through Shakespeare. This collection looks in many different directions, and often indicates new routes of exploration. One of the most exciting tasks for the editors was to arrange the various contributions in a cogent sequence. In the most unexpected ways, each contribution echoes or answers another, creating a multilingual and multiform dialogue that shows the variety of Shakespeare. More than ever, the playwright plays in one person many people. Accordingly, instead of following the more predictable chronological order in our Table of Contents, we have aimed to find connections between and across genres and forms.

The volume opens with a section dedicated to a topic particularly close to the heart of the scholar who is the only begetter of this volume, Mariangela Tempera. The topic is of course Shakespeare on screen. This particular field enables us to measure the distance these studies have travelled. If we look back at the classic works on the subject, such as Roger Manvell's *Shakespeare and the Film* (1971), Jack J. Jorgens's *Shakespeare on Film* (1977), or Anthony Davies' *Filming Shakespeare* (1988), we find that the initial interest of scholars was to explore how films re-presented Shakespeare's plays – whether they chose magic and music, as in Max Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or daring camera action and the contrast between

darkness and light, as in Orson Welles's *Othello*. In all these cases, fidelity to the author through a different medium was the issue. But, as scholarship on the subject grew and extended to a wider range of films, scholars progressively moved away from focusing so exclusively on the mere transposition of individual plays into the film medium. Film directors have found in Shakespeare's plays cultural antagonists that could be used to sharpen the perception of social issues or ideological debates that are often very far indeed from Shakespeare's own ideological stance or spiritual perspective. Lorne Buchman perhaps glimpses this trend when he writes, in the Introduction to his study *Still in Movement*:

> The idea of Shakespeare on film conjures, for me, that vivid image in Chaplin's *Modern Times* when the tramp, diligently working on the assembly line, becomes so flustered by the increasing speed of the conveyor belt that, in earnest pursuit, he ends up in the great modern machine itself, processed through its gears and wheels (Buchman 1991: 3).

The image is one of introjection and transmutation, of devouring and processing. The films examined in this volume (Pasolini's *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* by Serena Parisi, Davide Ferrario's *Tutta colpa di Giuda* by Maurizio Calbi, Alfredo Peyretti's *Moana*, and Connie Macatuno's *Rome and Juliet*) seem sometimes alien to all we know and love about the playwright. Yet we find that Shakespeare remains for them not so much an inescapable source of cultural capital, but rather the means through which we express the inexpressible. Both Parisi and Calbi suggest that the films under investigation are not intended as an explicit homage, since they tend to avoid even the mention of Shakespeare's name. Yet these films find in the floating fragments of the plays – scenes, characters, isolated phrases – material against which their own stories and characters may react. It is as if Shakespeare's texts created a constant cultural murmur that the films, at key points, could not ignore.

A multiplicity of cultural phenomena and critical approaches also appears in the second section, dedicated to music. Almost inevitably this section opens with opera. Opera, in its true meaning of *dramma per musica*, a dramatic piece that expresses itself through music, has long found in Shakespeare a major source of inspiration, and some of the outcomes, from Rossini's and Verdi's *Otellos* to

the latter's *Falstaff*, to Charles Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, are justly acclaimed as masterpieces in their own right. Once again, however, Fernando Cioni's work goes beyond the long and illustrious tradition of operas inspired by the great works and analyses a very recent piece that looks at a musical mode established long before Rossini and Verdi: the baroque pastiche. Jeremy Sams's *The Enchanted Island*, presented at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 2011, combines the plots of *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, adapting arias by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau and others to the English-language libretto. Whatever the merit (and the undoubted commercial allure) of the outcome, it points at a purpose drastically opposite to the best-known operatic adaptations of Shakespeare. Joseph Kerman strikingly writes of Verdi-Boito's *Otello* that its guiding principle is "that of crystallising emotional situations regularly into lyric sections or tableaux in which music can take its own time and contribute most strongly and unequivocally to the drama" (Kerman 1988: 111); the same could be said of a number of nineteenth-century stagings of Shakespeare on the "legitimate" stage, and, in this sense, opera truly reflects the appropriation of Shakespeare by nineteenth-century popular culture. Such a process has only a documentary value in contemporary opera houses: *The Enchanted Island* cashes in on the dazzling array of evocations, from Shakespeare to baroque music, turning opera (partly thanks to the amazing cast) into a game of citations for connoisseurs. While Cioni's essay calls our attention to the loss of meaning in a remediation of Shakespeare reduced to a cultural icon, Sara Soncini's contribution, also dedicated to music, goes in the opposite direction: T.S. Eliot's *Shakespeherian Rag* becomes here a *Shakespeherian Rap*, without losing its ragged and fragmented connotation. The interaction between Shakespeare and contemporary popular music results not in a collage of elegant allusions, but in a multiplicity of voices finding in the playwright a common point of reference. By focusing on *Othello*, Soncini shows how the play can become relevant for racial issues and, more extensively, for issues of identity. In the second part of her chapter, the scholar shatters the Shakespearean monolith further by focussing on differentiated uses of *Othello*, from theatre (with an allusion to the long-debated and painful issue of blackface) to cinema; in the conclusion she harks back to Parisi's contribution with a section dedicated to Pasolini's film. These are, after all, still fragments to be shored against our ruins.

Thus cinema and music, as exemplified in these studies, are no longer find their sufficiency in a simple re-proposal of individual plays. The choice on the part of our contributors to focus on this form of remediation may simply be a coincidence, but it may also reflect our own perception of Shakespeare, both as scholars and as readers/spectators. Douglas Lanier has analysed the paradox at the heart of the theme of Shakespeare and popular culture: once Shakespeare becomes a cultural icon, conceived *ab initio* as "aesthetically refined, timeless, complex and intellectually challenging, concerned with *lasting truths* of the human condition" (Lanier 2002: 3; italics mine), there seems to be little relation, if not of an inherently demeaning nature, to a form of culture that is by definition transient and topical. Yet the Shakespearean cultural capital becomes necessary for a definition of this very transience. If there is some inevitability in considering opera and cinema the popular interlocutors of Shakespeare's plays respectively in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the present century still seems in search of a form that might adequately (and fully?) represent him.

In the second part of the volume our contributors test a number of assumptions on popular culture against our perception of the past, looking as far back as the Elizabethan era. The popular culture of Shakespeare's own time is scrutinised by Gilberta Golinelli in her analysis of the food and cooking imagery in *Titus Andronicus*. Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, as England was precariously attempting to reach economic and political stability, it developed a culture of eating that is shown, for instance, in the *babees' books*, short educational texts mostly dedicated to table manners, or in several well-known passages of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* such as the description of the Prioress's exquisite delicacy with her food, or the Franklin's open generosity with his meals. Such peaceful and domestic images, which were taken up and developed in Tudor culture, seem especially jarring in the gory atmosphere of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy; Golinelli highlights the effect created by this contrast upon an audience who was bound to recognise contemporary eating practices and discourses on the body that would prompt disconcerting metaphors. The Senecan tragedy thus finds a natural ally in the popular culture of the household. Against this look at Elizabethan popular culture, we have set Beatrice Montorfano's study of the experience of prison theatre in Italy. Montorfano examines the Shakespearean productions of Teatro Metropopolare,

identifying a series of characteristics that distinguish this form from, for instance, American prison theatre. In this case the theatrical activity does not find in a possible therapeutic outcome its *raison d'être*; rather, director and actors make Shakespeare their own by proposing his work in different languages and dialects, interspersing in the text suggestions from contemporary popular music or other shared memes that become a form of communication.

The closing section of the volume, dedicated to less easily classifiable media, paradoxically constitutes a return to the past, exploring *Shakespeareana* in Victorian and Edwardian times, and carrying the idea of popular dissemination and radical remediation into previous centuries. Laura Tosi develops research she has undertaken extensively in recent years by offering an analysis of Victorian re-readings of Shakespeare, in the form of cautionary tales for young female readers. Here she underlines the, sometimes radical, remediation of female characters in Victorian and Edwardian readings of *As You Like It*, which use different angles on issues such as sibling rivalry to highlight their contemporary relevance. While in these tales for young females Shakespeare becomes a vehicle of moral refinement and an educational tool, in the Edwardian advertisings Clara Calvo analyses in the final contribution in the issue, Shakespeare's plays become a poaching ground. Lines or entire sentences are taken out of context, and sometimes altered beyond recognition (I particularly enjoyed the Pears' Soap advertisement that transformed Henry V's "For so appears this fleet majestical" into *For Soap Pears*, downscaling the play's military image and turning it into an evocation of domestic comfort) to suit a commercial need. The cultural capital by this point is in the name alone: bizarrely like the early modern Machiavelli, a name to conjure all evil quite irrespective of what he had written, the modern Shakespeare transcends his own works.

I have left the most important mention to the end of my introduction. The author of the opening essay and the presiding spirit of this volume is Mariangela Tempera, a scholar and a friend who sadly died at the end of 2015. At a time in which this field of academic studies had not yet received appropriate recognition in this country, Mariangela was giving to her own work and to the work of her colleagues an international dimension, tirelessly working to create networks of research and teaching in Italy and

elsewhere. Her legendary *videoteca* represented a collection of all films, in any language and from any country, that did not simply transpose Shakespeare's plays but also evoked them (and his iconic cultural presence) through citations, allusions, parodies and jokes: the list of references, now available online[1], is staggering. But her work went beyond Shakespeare and film, covering different forms and media, remediation and retelling, local and global: the title of the impressive conference she organised in 2013, "Shakespeare in Tatters", resonates with much that is presented in this volume, showing the long-lasting quality of her legacy. The conference itself attracted scholars from the five continents, and even today the titles of the contributions in the programmes speak of the new take on Shakespeare in the twenty-first century: in bits and bites, fragments, citations, and in pseudo-quotations. The short bio we have appended in the List of Contributors is woefully inadequate to express the range and scope of Mariangela's contribution to the field of studies explored in this volume. We have thus decided to undertake, with a number of friends, a labour of love: a reconstruction of Mariangela's immense bibliography, which ranges from studies on early modern witches to the Italian discovery of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century to the novellas that served as sources for Elizabethan plays. The enterprise has produced yet another pleasing echo: one of her last publications is an essay on "Shakespeare behind Italian bars" (Tempera 2017), a topic for which she was once again a pioneer, and which is also explored by the youngest of our contributors.

Like the dance routine set in a library Mariangela mentions in her contribution, this volume is a multifaceted and joyful rap, moving from the whirling nonsense of *Romeo and Juliet* for a TV audience to the stately pace of the *obiter dicta* incongruously employed to advertise soap and baked beans. I am sure Mariangela would have enjoyed it, as we know she appreciated and enjoyed the *sonetto caudato* that follows, a little homage from a friend and scholar, Manfred Pfister, as well as yet another twenty-first-century friendly Shakespearean shred.

[1] http://www.ilibridiemil.it/images/Image/Tempera_Catalogo.pdf.

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