Chomarat et son éditeur ont choisi de ne pas alourdir l'apparat critique, déjà très rempli par la présence de la version grecque ou latine des extraits choisis par Scaliger. On n'y trouve donc, outre les commentaires philologiques dont on a parlé, qu'un petit nombre de précisions éclairant un terme de rhétorique, un détail historique, géographique ou mythologique, ou encore dévoilant l'identité des adversaires que Scaliger désigne sous le nom de *grammatici*, c'est-à-dire presque toujours Macrobe.

Cette traduction du *Criticus* offre aux chercheurs qui s'intéressent à la littérature du seizième siècle, à la théorie littéraire, à l'histoire de la critique et à celle de la réception des oeuvres antiques, un outil de qualité dont on espère qu'il sera fait grand usage. Mais le *Criticus* lui-même semblera incomplet tant que les autres livres formant les *Poetices libri septem* n'auront pas été traduits et annotés avec le même soin: on sait à quel point cette somme, tout à la fois ordonnée et désordonnée, est pleine de résonances, d'échos, de dédoublements qui construisent son sens. À défaut d'une édition unique et unifiante, on attend les éditions partielles qui permettront au lecteur de composer sa propre vision globale de cette oeuvre. D'ici là, sans doute, on consultera encore trop souvent cet ouvrage magistral comme on le faisait déjà au seizième siècle: de manière toute ponctuelle, à l'aide de l'index détaillé, et sans le pratiquer véritablement.

CLAUDINE JOMPHE, *Université de Montréal*

Alvin Kernan. *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright. Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995. Pp. 230.

On 7 January 1605 the King's Men staged *Henry V* at court before James I. Modern critics assure us that Shakespeare's text portrays Harry of Agincourt ironically, even iconoclastically, resulting in a play that is deeply sceptical of hierarchical authority. One of the main questions asked by Alvin Kernan's *Shakespeare, The King's Playwright* is: if this and other plays by Shakespeare subvert established order so transparently, how did performances at court fail to offend? One answer suggested recently by Paul Yachnin is that the theatre's ability to represent, let alone galvanize, political opposition was severely limited ("The Powerless Theater," *ELR*, 21 (1991)). As a cultural practice the late Elizabethan and Jacobean stage was largely disengaged from wider social realities; in political terms it was functionally powerless. Yachnin argues that the players knew such a position was in their best interests and promoted it by various means. Alvin Kernan arrives at similar conclusions by examining Shakespeare's career as a member of the King's Men. He argues that Shakespeare's Jacobean plays encode approved Stuart ideology as well as topical subjects, and that

normal performance conditions at court did not encourage spectators to recognize, let alone ferret out, potential ambivalence or subversion in a way that close or thick readings may otherwise permit.

Kernan begins by emphasizing the importance of Shakespeare's professional activities as a royal servant to his overall success as a national playwright. While not ignoring the fact that the King's Men (prior to 1603 the Lord Chamberlain's Men) derived most of their income from the commercial theatres and continued to perform most of their plays there, Kernan observes that under James I their commissioned productions increased markedly. During Elizabeth's reign (45 years) 271 plays were acted at court, during James's (22 years) 421. The Lord Chamberlain's Men performed 32 times before Elizabeth, but as the King's Men 138 times before James. The favour shown to Shakespeare and his company leads Kernan to compare him with other great artists of Renaissance Europe who flourished under aristocratic patronage. Kernan also aims to correct what he sees as a rather wishful view of Shakespeare as primarily a popular artist writing with a high degree of creative autonomy. Such a repositioning of Shakespeare's career represents a change for Kernan himself, since his earlier *The Playwright as Magician* (1979) argued that the sonnets and plays such as *Timon of Athens* expressed Shakespeare's resentment of aristocratic patronage and its restrictions on artistic freedom. Here Kernan claims that Shakespeare prospered not only because he pleased his royal master but because their relationship was mutually beneficial.

Like many European monarchs with developed views of absolutism, James used his players as an instrument of statecraft. Their performances glorified newly-baptized British culture before visiting princes and envoys. They displayed royal power and mythologized Stuart dynasty in the festivities, court masques, and civic pageantry which they helped to mount. And of course the players were not Puritans but "social allies" whose enterprises the Stuarts were willing to sanction in exchange for legitimizing the state and its official policies through dramatic art. Shakespeare's collaboration in this process, Kernan asserts, was not abjectly propagandistic but circumspectly supportive.

The fashionable issues and intellectual debates that interested James and his courtiers are presented as the context of reconstructed Christmas performances of seven Shakespeare plays. In certain cases Kernan can rely on records that name performances, such as *King Lear* on 26 December 1606. But in others the play-titles remain unknown, so that imagining a performance, say, of *Coriolanus* sometime over Christmas 1608 is wholly speculative. In this play Kernan contends that the main fascination for court spectators would have been the veiled clash of attitudes between older Stuart aristocrats and new political and economic elites. Jacobean interest in *Hamlet* would have been aroused largely by its treatment of a succession crisis, *Measure for Measure* by the nature of state justice, *Macbeth* Stuart legitimacy, *King Lear* the limits of royal authority, *Anthony and Cleopatra* court immorality, and *The Tempest* a vision of benevolent empire, as well as the King's playwright's swan-song.

If this sounds reductive, that is because Kernan intends it to be. He readily admits to not offering new documentary evidence about court life, but draws instead on existing scholarship to highlight events and gossip between 1603 and 1613, with special attention to anecdotes about stage performances. Like his Christmas datings, links between a reconstituted court *zeitgeist* and certain plots and characters sometimes seem little better than romantic speculation — which is ironic given that one of Kernan's (laudable) aims is to de-romanticize Shakespeare as a professional playwright. His interpretations of the plays are conventional. Certain modern critical perspectives such as feminism are completely absent, while others such as New Historicism are invoked oppositionally. Again this is a deliberate strategy of reading on a surface level, narrowing our attention to the impressions he believes spectators would have received in the unsuspecting atmosphere of court performances. In the case of Shakespeare's royal patron, Kernan notes that the king habitually attended plays late in the evening in stifling rooms, after dining heavily and attending to a full schedule of public activities. Contemporary reports of James's behaviour on such occasions suggest that his interest was only randomly piqued by topics of personal interest — of a kind Shakespeare tried to represent obliquely through his plays. Otherwise, with his capon-lined belly and regular unease among crowds, James was bored, inattentive, and unlikely to discern political subtlety.

Kernan sees Shakespeare as representing the same circumstances of audience reception in his on-stage performances. In plays such as *The Taming of a Shrew* (and *A Shrew*), *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, spectators are often disruptive, perverse, simple-minded, or uncomprehending in their response to the actors. Those watching *The Murder of Gonzago* in *Hamlet*, for example, cannot imagine that the players could be commenting authoritatively on their own situations. While Claudius is affected by the dumb show, the main play fails to induce reformatory self-reflection in him or anybody else, Hamlet included. As Kernan observed earlier in *The Playwright as Magician*, *The Murder of Gonzago's* theme of human will subordinated to fate is neither fully understood nor acted upon. Each member of the court responds idiosyncratically to what he or she watches, and remains unchanged by the experience. Although the theatre occupies an important place at Elsinore, just as it did for the Jacobean court, it has no unsettling effect upon the workings of state.

This leaves us with a paradox. On the one hand "Shakespeare's Stuart plays are not fixed mirrors but active participants in the shaping of perceived reality." On the other their ideological intent was monologic, and political consequences were collusive. Unlike Paul Yachnin, who claims the players neither supported nor disrupted the dominant political order, Kernan believes that the socially conservative underpinnings of Shakespeare's plays mythologize a deep need for hierarchical order as part of the "natural and human bedrock," and that official approval of these premisses explain their benign reception. And yet we have the evidence of writers such as Francis Bacon to show that some spectators at Whitehall or the Banqueting House were rather more sceptical about such totalizing perspectives or the supposedly normative workings of human desires.

Kernan's book usefully leads us back to the public theatres and a re-animated dialectic with those forms of social discourse that questioned official ideologies. Such interventions fed the Stuart court's continual need to employ artists to construct approved and approving images of itself. And when viewed in the light of later historical developments, the same interventions would prove that those holy cords imagined by absolute monarchs to bind themselves and their subjects were neither so intrinsic nor natural as to resist being loosed.

RANDALL MARTIN, *University of New Brunswick*