
The “game of the pure self-activity of the word”: on Ernst Cassirer’s pithy characterization of the verbal action of Shakespeare’s comedies, Keir Elam builds his important challenge to a commonplace procedure of Shakespearean criticism. The critical tradition, from Coleridge to Blaze Bonazza, derogates the verbal achievement of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and other comedies as “merely a verbal display,” as “self-indulgent” showing off, as failure to subordinate means to themes. Such suspicion of verbal virtuosity, Elam argues, is encouraged by a ‘layer-cake’ conception of drama, deriving from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which ranks distinct components—plot, character, theme, diction—subordinating diction as “one of the lesser elements.” A strategic division of Shakespeare’s comedies into “early/late” then serves as a convenience, permitting a critic to relegate the verbal ostentation of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* to the marginal category of apprentice work, and, Elam suggests, to downplay the conspicuous linguistic vitality and insubordination of *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and other “mature” comedies. While Elam refers most often to *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, he argues that the “active and self-advertising presence of language in use” (p. 1) is in the foreground of all the comedies.

In search of a theoretical model for this central idea—dramatic language as activity—Elam initially proposes speech-act theory. Whereas the Aristotelian conception of drama opposes *praxis* to *lexis*, privileging action over verbal expression, J.L. Austin’s concept of the “speech act” invites one to view language as itself action, prompting—as as an extreme position—Ross Chambers’ intriguing suggestion that “in the great majority of cases, the dramatic action appears, in its unfolding, as a story composed of a series of speech acts, and the basic unit of all narrative analysis of drama can thus only be the speech act” (p. 7). But Elam rejects the analytic framework of Austin’s locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions as too limited to embrace the full range of Shakespeare’s verbal performance, and proposes instead a model of “language in action” derived from Wittgenstein’s concept of the “language-game,” that is, “any distinct form of language-use subject to its own rules and defined within a given behavioural context” (pp. 10-11). He categorizes what he takes to be the most recurrent language-games in Shakespearean comedy as “theatrical games” — those which establish “the fictional
context of the dramatic world” (p. 13); “sematic games” – those which concern “the nature and make-up of the linguistic sign” (p. 14); “pragmatic games” – the conversational and interactional functions of language; and “figural games” – uses of rhetorical schemes and tropes. Furthermore, Elam’s notion of a “game/frame” dialectic expands his taxonomic apparatus to encompass his conception of discourse as both activity and object in the comedies. “Frames,” or framing devices, ranging from obtrusive repetition to direct commentary by the comic characters on the verbal game in progress, bring into the foreground or call conspicuous attention to the verbal doings, so tranforming activity into a direct object of interest.

Elam’s encyclopedic treatment of his topic resists summary, but an account of the title chapter, “Universes,” can give something of the book’s flavour. The discussion of “world-creating games” dwells on the built-in reflexivity of fictional worlds, on how the dramatist’s language itself constitutes the world to which it ostensibly refers. Elam makes some fine observations on Shakespeare’s “world-initiating” skills, for example, on how information requisite to the audience emerges from the seemingly casual and directionless chat of Celia and Rosalind at the outset of As You Like It. Elam, however, presses his insistence on the language-created world of Shakespearean comedy too far in his observations on such simple verbal moves as Benedick’s references to himself as “I” and to Beatrice as “thee” or as “fair lady”:

the ‘existence’ at either end of the [referring] act is a fairly precarious quantity, residing in two points of textual return held together and apart by the same discursive thread. Or to put it another way, that point of textual reference (the speaker) which constitutes the sole authority testifying to the existence of the other point (the object), is in reality held in position by the very act of which he is the supposed source, until taken up in turn as object of some other existence-confirming reference . . . in what can be described as a ‘you verify me and I’ll verify you’ reciprocation. (pp. 92-93)

Against such ingenuity one must insist on the obvious: that the dramatic world is not an entirely verbal world, that two actors standing on a stage suffice to convince an audience – without words – of the ‘existence’ of two fictional characters. But Elam’s misleading exaggeration of the metaphysical perils of reference and of predication is strategic. It facilitates his characteristic critical manoeuvre: the demonstration of Shakespeare’s self-conscious reflection on his own verbal strategies. In this instance, Elam argues that the verbal activity of pseudo-reference (the world-creating game) is estranged (the game is given a frame) to become itself the object of attention – as in the referential mix-ups of The Comedy of Errors, or as in the characters’ scene-painting in Love’s Labour’s Lost where the park turns out to be “more rhetorical than physical topos” (p. 94), or as where the “anti-chronological games in the Arden scenes of As You Like It” reduce “temporality to the semantic space of the dialogue” to “open up the prospect of the limitless play of discourse” (p. 109).

In his introduction, enumerating the main risks of studying Shakespeare’s language, Elam cites “the risk of tautology,” the danger of taking on
The chapter on "world-creating games" is itself a virtuoso performance in risk-taking. In his attempt to rebut views of drama that subordinate language to the role of decoration for some "extra-linguistic substance" (p. 6), he denies the drama any content other than words. One might expect the chapter on "Performance" to redress the imbalance of Elam's text-centred reading of Shakespeare, but the emphasis on "the place of language in the comedies' metatheatrical-metadramatic reflexions and reflections" (p. 33) reiterates the familiar themes of James Calderwood's metadramatic criticism, without offering much insight into how Shakespeare's language is responsive to the stage moment.

The most formidable quality of Elam's study is the terminological eclecticism that accompanies his efforts at descriptive synthesis:

the use here of contemporary modes of linguistic analysis with its particular technical metalanguage - borrowed eclectically from linguistics, semiotics, literary theory, sociology of language and the philosophy of language - is married with or, better, filtered through Renaissance models and Renaissance terminology. (pp. 22-23)

Elam justifies this practice - which produces as mixed a feast of languages as Love's Labour's Lost - by asserting the centrality of linguistic awareness both to Shakespeare's age and to our own. Underlying Elam's practice of "marrying" terminologies (as in "Modern speech-act jargon translates pathos into 'perlocutionary effect'" [p. 231]) seems to be an assumption that our linguistic interests are their linguistic interests, only - to use Elam's favourite word - freshly "baptized." Elam's failure to question this unstated premise, beyond characterizing contemporary views as descriptive and Renaissance views as prescriptive, is one shortcoming of this ambitious study. Still Elam's comparison between contemporary discussions of conversational pragmatics and Renaissance versions of decorum does provoke some stimulating insights into the conversational make-up of Shakespearean drama in his chapter on "pragmatic games." Here he is careful to distinguish between the disordered progress of familiar talk and the necessarily more patterned conversational situations of Shakespeare's drama. The interactive models of both sociological linguistics and speech-act theory do provide a potentially useful corrective to those methods of analyzing dramatic language that derive from New Critical strategies for the close analysis of poetry. Our talk is a microcosm of our social behaviour, and drama is all talk. Yet one cannot but feel that the science of talk is still at a crude stage when Elam requires the authority of three experts to put forward such axioms of "turn-taking" as "speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs" or "overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time" (p. 187). Nonetheless, Elam's observations on the substantial amount of "talk about talk" in Shakespeare's comedies and his suggestions about interrelations between conversational and narrative configurations point valuable new directions for the study of dramatic language.

Keir Elam is at his best where he is identifying and challenging those hidden
evaluative manoeuvres of criticism that are based on unexamined bipolar oppositions. One of his targets in the discussion of "rhetorical games" is the opposition between schemes and tropes, "figures of sound" and "figures of thought," which facilitates the dismissal of rhetorical experiment in the "early" plays as superficial appliqué, and privileges metaphor and related figures identified with mature Shakespearean practice as serious and semantically charged. "Another scheme, another theme" (p. 253) is Elam's rallying cry in his effort to rehabilitate the schemes by demonstrating correlations between formal patterns of the words and structural patterns of the narrative - between, for example, chiasmus and the crossed couplings of lovers in the dance scene of Love's Labour's Lost. But at the heart of Elam's final chapter is his deconstruction of the plain speech/painted rhetoric opposition which he places at the centre of debate not only in Love's Labour's Lost but in Renaissance linguistic controversy, whether in theology, the new science, philosophy, or education. Elam's ironic reading of the recantation of "taffeta phrases" in Love's Labour's Lost is not new except in some of its details. But what becomes apparent here is that Elam's defence of what some have found objectionable in the verbal dalliance of Shakespeare's comedy is also self-defence. For every rhetorical gesture and "abuse" of language that Elam illustrates and rehabilitates in Shakespearean comic practice is reproduced in the showmanship of Elam's own critical performance, from the dizzying "phonetic metaplasm" of "Petruchio (that pure Perlocutio)" (p. 231) and "genuine (rather than phoney) phoné" (p. 264) to such "ynkehorne termes...sought out of strange langages" (p. 265) as "nuda veritas issues," "actantial scheme," "flatus vocis," "énoncé," "infelicity," "anti-tropicality," "introjection of the referent," "illocutionary uptake," "vis verborum," "interlinguistic games," "size marker." The interminable play of the signifiers in Elam's own writing suggests that he subscribes to that position, currently fashionable, which levels the distinction between critic and literary artist, the position announced in Roland Barthes' imperative: "Let the commentary be a text." It seems likely that the opacity of this "text" brought more pleasure to its author than to its reader. Nonetheless, it would be unfortunate if the extreme difficulty of Elam's self-reflexive rhetoric discouraged readers from responding to his radical challenges of critical orthodoxies.

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L'essor de la traduction à l'époque de la Renaissance a déjà fait l'objet de nombreux travaux. Mais il reste beaucoup à faire avant qu'un ne soit en mesure d'écrire l'ouvrage de synthèse qui rendrait compte, dans toute sa complexité, de l'activité traductrice de ce temps pour l'ensemble des littératures européennes. L'ouvrage de G.P. Norton a d'abord le mérite de définir strictement, par son titre même, le champ d'opération que l'auteur s'est fixé. Il ne s'occuperà pas de la pratique de la traduction; il cherchera seulement quelle idéologie sous-tend alors en