

Eötvös Loránd Science University Doctoral School of Literary Studies

Renaissance-Baroque Doctoral programme

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**Szabó, Máté**

**margins of philology -**

**re-constructing Shakespeare's deconstructive "poetic" character**

**a doctoral dissertation**

This text approaches Shakespeare's work – the playtexts, all their staged phenomena, even the sequence of the playtexts or any material remnant of Shakespeare's work, as semiotised objects, phenomenal *appearances*. The text conjectures that they were *made to be like that*, the qualities and characteristics of their appearance is the result of a conscious activity. Everything Shakespeare had made wants to go onstage and show themselves, so that conclusions can be drawn from their likeness; they can be read. As if we were in a multiplex theatre from history sending its signs.

The main focus of this text is the investigation of the nature of Shakespeare's signs through interpreting a number of presences available to interpreters of this age. I am focusing on two questions: why is it wherever one approaches the likeness of Shakespeare's signs constituting units, like texts, playtexts, stage phenomena or the Shakespearean corpus itself, at the heart or origin there is a deconstructive non-centre? Another dilemma is the *how*, thus why on Earth shall one think of Shakespeare as a maker problematising Derridean non-tions while writing his playtexts? Since close readings of the texts *appear to be so, show themselves* to be like that.

The previous “reading”<sup>1</sup> and interpretive techniques presented by Serpieri and Elam almost decided upon a reading code of those overdetermined, culturally overloaded presences called the complexity of the things / appearances made by Shakespeare; this reading, again, is attempted over the tension of these components: In agreement with the above critics, I claim right that Shakespeare is operating with the collapsing of the symbolic model, the overthrow of central ideologies and destabilising rhetorical strategies.<sup>2</sup> The text “reading the signs” agrees upon a way of reading between the borders, at the margins, credible only in its marginality, going against not only the totalising attempts of their critical times but even more importantly, almost offering a key to approaching and maybe philologically reconstituting the general nature of the phenomena set on stage by Shakespeare.

My conjecture is that the semiotised / semiotisable levels Serpieri and Elam attempt to read – onstage materialities, narrative structures and graphic / physical materialities of the playtext-monuments - may be *typified* over these margins, by *a technique of deconstructing-deconstructed margins*; they *appear to have been* signified this way. Of course, it would be an exaggerated reductionism to adhere a hierarchical structure of Shakespeare's things reading their phenomenal appearances, structuring bottom-up from minimal constituents, but I must consider how well the alleged constituents (written signs, voiced signs, acted signs) and their constructions (playtexts,

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<sup>1</sup> “Reading the Signs: towards a Semiotics of Shakespearean Drama” in: *Alternative Shakespeares* pp. 119-143.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 126.

rhetorical structures and dramaturgical constructions) respond to the *general code of reading* over the *self-effaced sign*.

I will use *poetic* or *drama-poetic* “*character*” referring to i. an alleged complex use of a deconstructive origin, somewhat a groundwork being archetypally influential of signification, structuring the complex staged metaphors, the playtext-monuments or bodytexts from a destructure; ii. this deconstructive, self-effaced nature of the sign that makes and best characterises the plays in their complexities being individual signs themselves, appearing in their singularities as auto-effacing complexities.

Putting it simple: these *elements* make up constitutions, a completeness, a *whole* of something, that bravely may also be called *the code* for Shakespeare’s sign. A *hole*, a *de-code*. And these signs share an archetypally self-effaced-effacing feature. Carrying over the works of deconstructive critics, in this text I will attempt a philological *naming* of this phenomenological presence, simply by translating into a philological understanding Derrida’s and Heidegger’s philosophical words, that *named* the ways Shakespeare *appears to have shaped* his drama-poetic character.

Of course, this translation / shaping cannot set up a formalism; I have felt the need to stop with these extremities by the revisiting, almost naming of words Shakespeare may merely have dreamt, or unconsciously felt; if there is a formalism in my translation it is best read in the appropriations of this text, as it would appear woefully trivial presented as a chart or formalism (still, I almost reach that point). I hope though the reader shall find no difficulties continuing my translations, finding the deconstructive element in the background, not just in the *between* of Shakespearean acts.

This text also attempts to call attention to the temporal dimension of Shakespeare’s deconstructive poetic practices, again, in lack of the infrastructure of a broader historic study, highlighting the appearance of this sort of making in the English canon being in close collaboration with the expanding culture of graphic representation and printing, offering a diachronical reinterpretation of Shakespearean deconstructive grammatology, maybe the coming of de-grammatology into the English canon.

Most contradictorily, it became apparent that what is happening in Shakespeare (how problematic this term is!) is excellently problematised by deconstruction; that the deconstructive game is one of the chief makers in Shakespeare’s dramatic sign and he *was, must have been* somewhat conscious of that. At least should I write that had I exact proof in my hand, yet apart from new historicising reconstitutions and guesswork that would be overtly exaggerated. Still, the appearances of things made by Shakespeare *suggest* that, but even then the most I can do is to offer some readings at the

margins, moving the focus on the phenomenal appearance that Shakespeare takes readers to stay between the margins and refrain from centres. Again, Heidegger's claim that the *uniqueness* of the artwork always bears a happening of an undisputable *truth* at work, might offer a *hand* the critical theorisation of Shakespeare working with, in the frame of the deconstructionist problem:

In a work, by contrast, this fact, that it *is* a work, is just what is unusual. The event of its being created does not simply reverberate through the work; rather, the work casts before itself the eventful fact that the work is as this work, and it has constantly this about itself. The more essentially the work opens itself, the more luminous becomes the uniqueness of the fact that it is rather than is not. The more essentially this thrust comes into the open region, the more strange and solitary the work becomes. In the bringing forth of the work there lies this offering 'that it be.'<sup>3</sup>

Going even further, thematising this marginality as a *code*, the still lingering presence of the abandoned idea, the already not fulfilled unification, restoration, etc (paradox, paradox!) of the dissident *non-tion* and its antagonistic empirical academic discourse *appears to be* a possible and necessary critical adventure. Perhaps better without the term "critical": adventure.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, Heidegger, 'The Origin of the work of Art' in D. F. Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993) 99. 190-1. Also quoted in Joughen p. 139.