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## Preface

Volume 15 of *Animus* is dedicated to studies of Shakespeare.

William Shakespeare is the central figure of the Western literary canon and a ubiquitous cultural icon in school, theatre, and popular culture. This eminence has produced both ‘bardolatry’ – the uncritical worship of Shakespeare – and its equally irresponsible antithesis: a corrosive resentment, even hatred, anchored in the denial of his intellectual authority. Consider, for example, George Bernard Shaw who famously claimed that “Shakespeare’s weakness lies in his complete deficiency in that highest sphere of thought, in which poetry embraces religion, philosophy, morality, and the bearing of these on communities, which is sociology. That his characters have no religion, no politics, no conscience, no hope, no conviction of any sort.”<sup>1</sup> Postmodern versions of this assertion of Shakespearean vacuity are articulated by Terence Hawkes, who claims that “Shakespeare doesn’t mean: *we* mean *by* Shakespeare,” and Gary Taylor, who says that “We find in Shakespeare only what we bring to him or what others have left behind; he gives us back our own values.”<sup>2</sup> Such statements sometimes win critics notoriety for their insouciance, but no doubt seem to most readers and audiences an astonishing denial of the obvious: the richness and fecundity of Shakespeare’s thought. Moreover, they have done little to erode Shakespeare’s popularity and reputation, even over the last half-century of ‘high theory’ during which Shakespeare has continued to provoke and answer many of our most searching and urgent questions.

But if there is general agreement that Shakespeare is a significant thinker, there is far less consensus about precisely what kind of thinker he is. What is his relation, for example, to major figures that precede and follow him: Plato, Aristotle, St. Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Descartes, Hobbes, Hume, etc.? Is he an apologist for tradition, order, and “degree” (like Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*) or an avante-garde skeptic and materialist (like Iago or Edmund)? Is he best understood as a religious thinker or a political one? Do his plays reflect nostalgically on the classical and medieval past, or are they prophetic anticipations of modernity? And to what extent can a contemporary reader look to Shakespeare’s intellectual authority on matters like human nature, the human condition, and the formation of the self? A major difficulty lies in the dramatic form itself which, combined with the plenitude of Shakespeare’s language and characterization, prohibits any simplistic account of “what Shakespeare thought.” As Marjorie Garber notes, “Shakespeare’s voice is many voices” and “one voice will always answer another.”<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Bate, in *The Genius of Shakespeare*, argues that this ability to

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<sup>1</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw on Shakespeare*, Ed. Edwin Wilson, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1961), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Terence Hawkes, *Meaning By Shakespeare*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 3. Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, from the Restoration to the Present*, (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 411.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 6.

make different voices persuasive is the key to Shakespeare's renewability and unequalled cultural influence. For Bate, the two "laws of the Shakespearean universe" are "aspectuality" – the recognition that truth is not singular – and "performativity" – the recognition that identity is performed through action; the combination of these two "laws" gives Shakespeare's plays "the capacity to be played successfully in an almost infinite number of different cultural circumstances."<sup>4</sup>

The essays in this volume of *Animus* cohere around two main issues: Shakespeare's representation of human nature and the relevance of other major thinkers, especially Aristotle, to the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. We believe that these essays both exemplify the openness of Shakespeare's text and evince an openness to the text.

John Baxter, in "George Whalley and a Way of Thinking About Shakespeare," demonstrates the contribution that non-Shakespearean scholars, such as Whalley, can make to the field of Shakespeare studies. He argues that Whalley's critical commentaries on Aristotle, Coleridge, and Jane Austen illuminate the Aristotelian unity of action within Shakespearean drama. In particular, he focuses on Whalley's notion of *pathos-as-praxis*: *pathos* as an inherent part of tragic form: a combination of suffering and action, passivity and agency. He illustrates the far-reaching implications of this insight in a reading of *The Winter's Tale*, in which characters like Hermione and the Shepherd's wife are accorded poetic "presence" through the combination of dynamic, finely-detailed language and "pure action."

Jonathan Goossen, in "'The Disposition of Natures': Aristotle, Comedy, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," investigates the nature of comedic catharsis in Shakespeare by drawing on the work of two Aristotelian scholars – Leon Golden and Richard Janko. In his reading of *Measure for Measure*, he makes the case for *nemeson* or "righteous indignation" as the dominant emotion of comedy and the crucial role of comic hoaxes in exposing comic error, curing the characters' extreme divergences from the virtuous mean, and altering "the disposition of natures" of structure and character. In the resulting reading, *Measure for Measure* emerges not as a psychological portrait, but as a comedy about comedy.

Ken Jacobsen, in "'What a piece of work is man': Theatrical Anthropology in *Hamlet*" argues that *Hamlet* contains three distinct strands in its exploration of the theme of human nature: Piconian optimism, coalescing around the figure of *homo rationalis*; a skeptical Montaignean critique of *homo rationalis*; and *homo histrio*<sup>5</sup> – man the actor -- who

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Rev. Ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 327, 329, 332.

<sup>5</sup> I am not using the term as a synonym for *homo ludens* – man the player – Johan Huizinga's term which covers a wide range of cultural phenomena and does not pertain to theatricality *per se*. Nor is the term as narrow as Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical self" developed in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1959) or Colin McGinn's "theatrical construction of a self," an adaptation of Goffman's concept used in *Shakespeare's Philosophy: Discovering the Meaning Behind the Plays*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 10-12. *Homo histrio* is meant to stand as a comprehensive metaphor for human nature parallel to *homo rationalis*.

mediates between the two. He argues that *Hamlet* demonstrates the various ways that theatricality, a human invention, has entered into the human world and become a powerful conditioning force within it and that the play's treatment of a theatricalized human condition addresses key issues around which the critique of traditional anthropology coheres: rationality, epistemology, temporality, language, identity, and agency.

Andrew Moore, in "'Goats and monkeys!': Shakespeare, Hobbes, and the State of Nature," argues that Shakespeare's plays, notably *King Lear* and *Othello*, lay the ideological groundwork for social contract theory, particularly as formulated in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. He contends that Shakespeare's view of human nature, like that of Hobbes, is revolutionary in that it insists on the primacy of human autonomy and the need for a political order which accounts for it. In their interrogation early modern political community, Shakespeare's mature plays mark the transition from the notion of politics as a divinely ordered realm to an understanding of human community as constructed. Like Hobbes, Shakespeare portrays the capacity of humans to be something other than what they are by nature.

We hope you find these essays challenging and stimulating. Enjoy.