

Renaissance faith in the power of figures to *move* in the sense of stirring the emotions. Try Hieronimo's outpouring of grief in *The Spanish Tragedy*, 'O eyes, no eyes . . .', for example (another example of a pretty epanorthosis), which was still cited as the model of a tear-jerking speech in the 1620s (see Thomas May, *The Heire*).

What is much easier for us to understand is the persuasive power of figures to move us to a particular point of view, since this is still very much in evidence in political speech-making (though it is of course also true that people may be persuaded by being emotionally moved). Quentin Skinner's brilliant discussion of paradiastole, which many readers will already know, is a good example. This figure works through redescribing a vice as a virtue, so craftiness may be relabelled prudence, and even murder may be presented as a manly deed. Skinner cites Peacham here, though it is Chapman's version ('Manly slaughter/ Should never bear the account of wilful murder') that perhaps takes this figure to the limit of its credibility. In a different vein, Ian Donaldson's essay on syncrisis outlines a figure that offers a side-by-side comparison, as in Plutarch's *Lives*, in order to convince us of the superiority of one subject over another. One of the implications of the essay is to show that the modern idea of criticism, which emerged in the eighteenth century, does indeed have a specifically rhetorical source.

To distinguish between two versions of *movere* does not mean that rhetoric makes no contribution to the vitality of literature, as the essays by Gavin Alexander on prosopopeia, which brings things to life through the spoken voice, and by Claire Preston on ekphrasis, the figure of vivid description, demonstrate. Alexander makes the important point that *prosopon* (Greek) and *persona* (Latin) are both words for mask and that 'personhood in Renaissance fictions is built on the rhetorical idea that a self is the word it speaks'. If this works at the expense of the modern concept of interiority, Preston's essay shows how the complementary figure of ekphrasis can use pictorial effects to convey psychological insights.

There are further subtle and engaging contributions from Janel Mueller on the period, Sophie Read on puns, R. W. Serjeantson on testimonia, Katrin Ettenhuber on hyperbole and Brian Cummings on metalepsis; Patricia Parker's well-known discussion of hysteron proteron also reappears. Since this is the first modern study specifically devoted to Renaissance figures of speech, as the editors justifiably claim, it is a pity that there is no mention of George T. Wright's classic essay on hendiadys or of David Colclough's more recent work on parrhesia. But this is an outstanding contribution to the subject—the most rewarding book about rhetoric I have ever read and a very fine tribute to the late Jeremy Maule, in whose memory it was conceived.

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doi:10.1093/res/hgn060

*Advance Access published on 18 April 2008*

MATTHEW STEGGLE. **Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres**. Pp. xiv + 158 (Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama). Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. Cloth, £45.

Why do TV shows and sitcoms use laugh tracks to signpost the funniest gags? The answer is that they draw on audience research that reveals that laughter is contagious. According to the findings of Matthew Steggle's performance-based study, this was no news to early modern playwrights. He argues that the early modern theatre had as

sophisticated a set of theories about how to evoke audience response as the entertainment industry that caters to the emotional needs of a mass audience today.

Nonetheless, Steggle is careful to point out that emotions have cultural histories. The ideas about laughter and weeping that circulated in the Renaissance were not the same as those that prevail today. While Aristotle's dictum that laughter was the mark of humanity was endlessly recycled, excessive laughter and weeping were deplored as potentially dehumanising and a sign of a loss of rational control. Steggle admits one needs to distinguish between early modern attitudes towards laughing and views of weeping. Weeping was regarded in far more positive terms, reflecting as it did the belief that life was a vale of tears, while laughter was linked to the sin of pride and expressed inordinate enjoyment of the pleasures of this world.

At the heart of Steggle's book is a quantitative analysis of a corpus of around eight hundred early modern stage plays, utilising the most sophisticated databases at the disposal of literary scholars today: *Early English Books Online (EEBO)* and *Literature Online (LION)*. With their help Steggle ascertains, for instance, the fact that the standard verbal form for representing the sound of laughter on stage is 'ha ha ha'; 'he he he' is frequently associated with the laughter of a fool, while 'ho ho ho' is the guffaw characteristically attributed to the Devil. Onstage laughter is also signalled through implied stage directions such as holding one's sides or clapping one's hands. Analogously, weeping was represented gesturally by wringing the hands, wiping the eyes, or with the help of props such as handkerchiefs.

Steggle's main interest lies in the question whether early modern plays aimed to move laughter or tears and whether this was seen as a yardstick of success. He asserts that numerous plays pointedly staked their claim to a share of audience laughter, that early modern mirth was loud and boisterous, and that the clowns deployed both comic devices such as face-pulling and verbal humour such as puns and obscenity to elicit laughter. Similarly, he draws on a range of contemporary texts, including eyewitness accounts, commendatory verse and internal evidence from the plays themselves, that corroborate the notion that early modern actors inspired their audiences to weep and that their ability to do so was regarded as an index of theatrical skill.

Next, Steggle tackles those playwrights who explicitly distance themselves from audience laughter—Lyly and Jonson. Lyly's programmatic emphasis on 'soft smiling, not loud laughing' was shaped by a Sidneyan aesthetics that posited laughter as vulgar. In the neo-classical precepts outlined in Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, decorum was the keyword. These ideas were enthusiastically endorsed by Jonson, who repeatedly draws attention to the classical notion of laughter as a social corrective. However, as Steggle points out, despite the theoretical views both playwrights aired, their theatrical practice clearly aimed at inducing audience amusement and providing first-rate stage entertainment.

Steggle uses the play *Lust's Dominion*, probably a collaborative effort by Dekker, Day, Houghton, and Marston, to test the vexed issue of a breach of decorum, as in the case of laughter stimulated by tragedy. He uses the notion of contagious laughter to assert that the gleeful chuckles of the Machiavellian protagonist in the play would have provoked a similar mirthful reaction from the audience. Indeed, he declares that as a general principle, laughter and tears onstage trigger the same response with the audience—only to admit that Shakespeare tends to complicate issues by pointing to the close proximity between laughter and tears.

It is when Steggle turns to entire plays that both the strengths and the weakness of his approach become visible. The study offers a wealth of evidence about early modern

performance practices that has never been amassed before. But Steggle's avowed aim to focus purely on the physical phenomenon of laughter and weeping and to avoid all discussion of the comic and the tragic leads to a narrowing of focus that tends to overlook the complexity of the theatrical experience itself. Laughter is not only cued by the japes of clowns, but also by the satirical representation of follies, by topical allusions or by scapegoat figures—to name only a few varieties of humour that do not necessarily involve onstage laughter. Indeed, as the comedian Jerry Lewis would point out, comedy thrives on malicious pleasure: 'the premiss of all comedy is a man in trouble'. Furthermore, the early modern theatre was far too sophisticated to simply offer an early variety of canned laughter. Numerous plays explore the idea of laughter and its limits in onstage discussions and plays within plays. Audience laughter at the gulling of Malvolio or the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*, for instance, becomes increasingly difficult to sustain and is called into question. It is to Steggle's credit that he draws attention to an endlessly fascinating topic, one fraught with contradictions and ambiguities that reward further investigation.

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doi:10.1093/res/hgn066

*Advance Access published on 29 April 2008*

GORDON MCMULLAN. **Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death.** Pp. xii + 402. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Cloth, £55.

Gordon McMullan's *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* is a major contribution to criticism. Shakespeareans, but also readers interested in lateness as a critical trope or as a manifestation of creative genius, will find much to challenge and interest them in this book.

The idea that Shakespeare had a 'late phase' is most often associated with the Victorian critic Edward Dowden, who divided Shakespeare's life into four periods: 'In the workshop', 'In the world', 'Out of the depths' and 'On the heights'. Shakespeare's late plays belong to this final period, when, according to Dowden's model, Shakespeare emerged from his tragic phase, recognising the power of redemption and reconciliation and discovering a hard-won, late-blooming serenity allegedly evident in his romances. Dowden's objective was to understand Shakespeare as an individual, extrapolating a psychobiography from the evidence found in his plays. As is often the case with Shakespeare criticism, Dowden's *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (1875) and *Shakspeare* (1877) expose at least as much about Victorian preoccupations and about Dowden himself as they do about their putative subject. McMullan's book is in some ways no exception to this general rule. Like Dowden, McMullan reveals much about the current state of criticism and about himself, particularly in his idiosyncratic, highly personal introduction. It is especially fortunate, then, that McMullan is both a knowledgeable interpreter of critical approaches and an extremely engaging personality in his own right. Guided by his roving curiosity and stylish prose, the reader is carried along through an analysis that ventures into art and music as well as literary and cultural theory. The result is a rich and deep sense of lateness as a critical concept that applies not only to Shakespeare but also to Picasso, Rembrandt and Beethoven among the many other creative minds discussed in this wide-ranging study.

McMullan explores the extent to which the idea of late style is a critical construct rather than, as has often been argued, a characteristic feature in the career of a certain kind of genius. In this sense, the book is a work of Shakespeare reception, tracing the myth of