

men' (4). I also questioned the author's characterization of her own methodological strategies as performance criticism, rhetorical analysis, and postcolonial critique. Of these the last, because most limited in its application, is most clear, though one might question the political implications of extending postcolonial critique to the situation of women generally. However, the dramatic texts discussed are far from 'the realization of [scripts] in performance' (22), which she says performance criticism takes as its object of study. Reservations aside, however, this is a brave book. It moves the phenomenon of an aspect of female suffering from the margins to centre not only of the stage, but of the social and political arena as well. It is also immensely readable in its easy movement between narrative and analysis and between past and present and impressive in its firm grasp on the limits of interpretation.

Leanore Lieblein

James Hirsh. *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003. Pp 470.

This vigorously argued account of the history of soliloquies moves from the classical past to the present day. The writer adopts a literalist formalistic approach based on a rigorous inspection of textual detail. There are, he suggests, three categories of soliloquy: classical and renaissance self-addressed soliloquies, Shakespearean and other 'feigned' soliloquies (designed to be overheard), and modern interior monologues. These categories are demonstrated by abundant illustration from a wide range of dramatic texts. The pivotal text is Hamlet's celebrated speech, 'To be or not to be', which the author claims to be a feigned soliloquy. The book originates in an article written back in 1981, which he believes has not received the attention it deserves. By enlarging the context of his argument about this speech, he hopes he will convince a wider audience of the relevance of that particular analysis.

Unfortunately, there seem to be certain fundamental confusions in Hirsh's approach. Certainly, on a literal reading, traditional texts show that soliloquies were regarded as self-addressed speech, and in many cases they are feigned soliloquies, designed to be overheard for the advantage of the speaker. But the advantage is always very explicit, and immediately obvious to the audience. There has to be a clear purpose to deceive in a feigned soliloquy. And a

fundamental problem arises right from the start. Does not language *construct* thought? Is it not an archaic confusion to suppose that thought can be distinguished from language? Even when we say we are unable to express our thoughts in the emotion of the moment, does that not state by implication our knowledge that thought cannot exist without language? The literary convention that self-addressed speeches are in fact the expression of thoughts, feelings, and confusions in the moment is surely recognised implicitly by classical and renaissance writers. The distinction between soliloquies as self-addressed speech, and soliloquies as an expression of thought in modern interior monologues, seems to be a distinction without a difference. Thought may be expressed in highly rhetorical terms, or in the more fluid language of the interior monologue, but it cannot exist at all without language.

This perception of language, then, brings your reviewer on to the question of the celebrated soliloquy. Is it really designed to be overheard by eavesdroppers? The evidence offered here from plot and text seems rather slight. The main textual evidence, in the author's view, is that the remark 'The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns' is a deliberate contradiction of what we know, because the Ghost *has* returned and spoken to Hamlet. The remark may, however, be understood to mean simply that countries remain undiscovered, unless a traveller returns to *tell* us about his experience of them. There would, on this reading, be no contradiction of the plot, and so no feigned soliloquy here, if this were so. It is the Ghost of old Hamlet who tells his son that he is 'forbid / To *tell* the secrets of my prison-house'. Hamlet gains no knowledge of the afterlife (albeit purgatory) from his father. Does Hamlet then deliberately conceal his knowledge of the Ghost from suspected eavesdroppers? Or is he simply recalling what he has been told in private, but in an oblique, reformulated way? He has earlier insisted that his comrades swear an oath not to reveal what they have seen when the Ghost appeared.

The stronger argument in the author's discussion of this speech is that Hamlet is curiously general and impersonal in his remarks, whereas all his other soliloquies are marked by an explicit preoccupation with himself. (I avoid saying thoughts, for fear of being taxed with 'anachronistic' terminology!) Yet here again, this may be because the notion of mortality is general, and so fit for this level of commentary. We may remember Claudius' speech on the generality of mortality in the opening court scene. The immediate context and motive for the soliloquy is also somewhat vague, and so allows some suggestion of feigning. Hamlet has been called privately to a conference with the King and perhaps Polonius, who actually turns up too. They hope to waylay him

with Ophelia, and so get to the bottom of his melancholy. They themselves remain concealed. But Hamlet is unaware of this ploy. Perhaps he suspects an ambush from the King; perhaps he is armed (he certainly is when he visits Gertrude in her closet; and 'Now I might do it pat' implies he is armed and dangerous). Perhaps princes of the blood were allowed to bear arms around the court (they at least could not be suspected of dishonourable intentions towards the King, and would perhaps constitute part of a 'guard of honour' around him?) The actual stage directions are sparse, and there is of course no explicit commentary on what the speech is meant to mean in the immediate context.

So here we may find some support for the author's view, but without the explicit deception he suggests from the earlier comment above. Maybe the generality of the speech implies a cautious 'guarded' reflection on Hamlet's situation at this very moment. Perhaps, and I speculate here, Hamlet is thinking more specifically of making a sudden attack, and attempting an assassination of his deadly enemy; perhaps he suspects eavesdroppers, and so speaks in these rather general terms. (This is an unexpected request from Claudius for an interview, which occurs before the play scene.) Hamlet must be fairly certain he would not survive such an assault on the King. Bodyguards would be near at hand and getting away with the killing would be difficult. At the same time, Hamlet's remark, 'Soft you, now, / The fair Ophelia' suggests that his soliloquy has been 'unguarded' up to that moment, and that he does *not* suspect eavesdroppers. Whether he could have failed to see Ophelia, if she was visible onstage, or whether Ophelia only appears in his line of sight after he has almost finished his remarks, is not something we can be certain of. The author seems to be more informed of stage arrangements than appears possible on the sparse textual evidence. Perhaps it was a convention that soliloquies could not be overheard in some circumstances, except by the audience. Othello does not hear what Iago says as Cassio leaves the stage, and asks him to repeat himself. This isn't a whole soliloquy, simply an aside, but seems quite natural in context. Ophelia may be backstage or upstage, or on a different level of some kind. We know rather little about the physical details of stage and stagecraft at this time.

The various assumptions in post-renaissance productions of the scene seem rather implausible, because the central intention of Hamlet is not explicit here, and the author is right to show how forced are the many variations of this scene in performance. I prefer to believe that this private meeting represents an unexpected opportunity, which Hamlet considers taking advantage of. He is always an opportunist, both in conversational practice, and in more lethal

circumstances, as in his dealings with Polonius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Did he not think he was killing the King when he killed Polonius? That too was a chance opportunity.

Perhaps Hirsh becomes rather too confined by a rigorous logical analysis, and a literal reading of the texts he deals with. He tends to brush aside all alternatives with an appeal to a logical certainty that does not really exist. A dramatist like Shakespeare is always interested in the dramatic potential of the *moment*, and may not always be thinking in terms of plot. (But as I suggest above, the textual evidence from plot is ambiguous in the scene.) Perhaps the sentimentalisation of Hamlet's character (which the author rightly dwells on) is the cause for so many unlikely post-renaissance interpretations of this celebrated soliloquy. But logical rigour can only take us so far, and Hamlet, unlike Brutus, for example, does not think in logical, but emotional terms. 'How *all occasions* do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge' he remarks.

Anthony J. Gilbert

Claire Jowitt. *Voyage Drama and Gender Politics 1589–1642: Real and Imagined Worlds*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003. Pp 256.

For Claire Jowitt, Lecturer in Renaissance literature at University of Wales Aberystwyth, travel drama depicts the exotic and the foreign, but also reveals anxieties about the local and the domestic. In this her first book, Jowitt, using largely new historicist methodology, approaches early modern travel plays as allegories engaged with a discourse of colonialism, and looks in particular for ways in which they depict English concerns about gender, leadership, and national identity. Allegory is used here in a specific way, drawing on the work of Jonathan Dollimore and Paul Yachnin. Rather than possessing a clear fixed meaning, the form of allegory known as *aenigma* is opaque, presenting ambivalent conclusions that may be read as politically orthodox or politically oppositional.

Using the functional ambiguity implicit in *aenigma*, the book proceeds to examine Elizabethan and Jacobean travel plays looking at the relationships between gender and the monarchy. Drawing on Louis Montrose's work