

Einzelrezensionen

Eric Langley, *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xiv, 322 pp. – ISBN 978-0-19-882184-7– \$ 90.00 (hb.).

Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies is a sensitive and engaging study of the effects of contagious infection on early modern subjectivity and society and of Shakespeare's response to concerns once voiced by Montaigne: "how do we show compassion in a world of contagion? Should we risk communication, when communication is a risk?" (p. 13). Eric Langley shows that the fear that "kind interaction can facilitate cruel infection" (p. 8) was widespread in early modern thought, whether in poetic, natural-scientific, religious, philosophical, and medical writings, and he focuses in particular on the effects of this fear on language and communication.

Langley argues convincingly that an understanding of this paradoxical caution towards "compassionate contact" (p. 8) helps to illuminate Shakespeare's "interim spaces" and characters who act as "carriers or go-betweens" (p. 47). Particular attention is given to the instability of identity and the work of polluting comparison in *Troilus and Cressida* (chapter 2), to dissembling, flattery, and sycophancy as the "primary mechanisms for contaminative dispersal" (p. 167) and Iago as a particular invidious infectious agent in *Othello* (chapter 4), and to Miranda's excessive compassion in *The Tempest* (chapter 5). Other chapters range across several plays or consider Shakespeare's poetry together with the plays. Chapters 1 and 2 examine sympathy and its potential for contagion; chapters 3 and 4 focus on its oppositional force, antipathy, particularly the notion of language as *pharmakon*, whereby communication is understood to have both healing and harmful effects. Chapters 5 and 6 turn to tenderness and focus on the Shakespearean "extended-subject" (p. 17, and *passim*), or the consequences for subjectivity of this early modern paradox of sympathetic communication.

This book accords with other recent work on contagion, disease and the body, such as that of Margrit Shildrick, Priscilla Ward, and Margaret Healy; however, Langley's chief interlocutors are scholars of affect and the 'affective life', particularly Teresa Brennan and Michel Serres, and scholars of early modern subjectivity. Langley's work on the problematically permeable contours of the early modern subject enters into debate with two other key works of the past decade, Nancy Selleck's *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (2008) and James Kuzner's *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods, and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (2011). All three

argue for the early modern understanding of selfhood as interrelational, open, and vulnerable. Langley, however, assesses the influence of contagious disease on early modern subjectivity and society less optimistically than Selleck and, in particular, Kuzner. While Kuzner sees continuities between the Renaissance and early modern ‘open’ and vulnerable subject and the contemporary radical reconceptualizations of selfhood in the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, and others, Langley sees the influence of infectious disease on both early modern subjectivity and society as largely destructive. For Langley, disease “destabilized the elementary structures of society and societal interaction, snuck into and contaminated that in-between” (p. 19) and “London’s plague [...] effectively undermined early modern affective life, and closed down the inter-animate open subject” (p. 9). For Langley, therefore, the pervasive fear of infection “prepares the way for the reactionary formulation of a nascent Cartesian subject or *cogito*” (p. 33). Nonetheless, Langley contends that Shakespeare – like his own study – ultimately offers “qualified support” (p. 48) for those subjects who resist the drive to autonomy and independent individuality and instead risk the infection of sympathetic communication.

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Peter W. Marx, *Hamlets Reise nach Deutschland: Eine Kulturgeschichte*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2018. 435 S. – ISBN 978-3-89581-490-7 – € 35,00 (hb.).

“Deutschland ist Hamlet! Ernst und stumm / In seinen Thoren jede Nacht / geht die begrabne Freiheit um” (S. 105). Ferdinand Freiligraths Gedicht von 1844 ist der erste Höhepunkt im Identifizierungsprozess, den Deutschland durchläuft. Diesen Prozess zeichnet der Verfasser in neun Kapiteln, die von einem Prolog und einem Epilog umrahmt werden, nach. Dabei betont er immer wieder, wie sehr Hamlet eine “Sehnsuchtsfigur” (*passim*) gewesen sei. Zumindest für weite Teile des 19. Jahrhunderts war er aber eher eine Identifikationsfigur – in negativem Sinn. Mit dem Verweis auf Hamlets Schwächen wird den Deutschen der Spiegel vorgehalten: Der deutsche Nationalcharakter weise die gleichen oder ähnliche Charakterzüge auf und sei deshalb zum Handeln unfähig (bezogen auf Freiheitskampf und Einheitsbestrebungen um 1848). Erst gegen Ende des 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts tritt im Kontext der nationalen Vereinnahmung Shakespeares (als ‘dritter deutscher Klassiker’) eine Wende ein, und durch die Bühnendarstellung eines Josef Kainz wird *Hamlet* vollends ins Positive gewendet. Marx weist in diesem Zusammenhang auf die Ablehnung jüdischer Schauspieler hin, da diese nicht dem (germanischen) Männlichkeitsideal entsprochen hät-