REVIEWS

Enrico Fink,

Patrilineare. Una storia di fantasmi. Torino: Lindau, 2025.

"Vorrei imparare a vivere".[1] Così ha inizio *Spettri di Marx*, il saggio che il filosofo Jacques Derrida scrisse nel 1993, dopo la caduta del muro di Berlino. Il libro prosegue con queste parole: "Vivere, per definizione, non si impara. Non da soli, dalla vita attraverso la vita. Solo dall'altro e attraverso la morte."[2] Il paradigma derridiano della spettralità si presta ad analisi politiche e psicologiche, in sintonia con quell'interesse postmoderno per trauma, amnesia, memoria e postmemoria che al volgere del millennio si è tradotto in una pluralità di narrazioni.

Una cultura della memoria cui abbiamo affidato il compito di costruire un mondo migliore. Anche se ancora non ci siamo. Anche se il ricordo sembra in ultimo non bastare. Ma la necessità di mantenere viva la memoria continua a imporsi: la necessità d'interrogarci sulla vita a contatto con l'altro in ogni sua forma. E in ogni morte.

Il desiderio di imparare a vivere torna urgente in un libro fortemente abitato da spettri, fin dal titolo: *Patrilineare. Una storia di fantasmi* – un oggetto narrativo non identificato che Enrico Fink ha regalato al pubblico all'inizio del 2025. Un memoir personale e famigliare. Un romanzo. Tutto questo e di più.

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx. L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, p. 13. Traduzione mia.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 14. Traduzione mia.

Patrilineare non si lascia definire con facilità, non si lascia circoscrivere. È il racconto di un'esperienza tanto sincera e toccante nella sua nudità quanto è ricco e complesso il suo tessuto stilistico. Per tracciare il suo percorso personale Fink veste gli abiti del vero romanziere, raccontandoci per pagine intere la storia di un sasso, adottando a tratti il punto di vista di una telecamera, e perfino proiettando i lettori sulla Luna, a contatto con uno dei rover lì abbandonati dopo le missioni spaziali delle varie sonde Apollo.

Eppure il libro è la storia di Elias, che si avvicina all'ebraismo in età adulta per un'esigenza maturata a contatto con l'ombra, che si tratti dell'ombra di un *dybbuk* – "lo spirito di una persona morta anzi tempo che resta nel mondo e possiede il corpo di un vivente" (347) – o di un più famigliare fantasma freudiano, col suo corredo di conflitti edipici e sensi di colpa.

L'essere figlio di *padre* ebreo si traduce per Elias in una condizione liminale, visto che l'appartenenza ebraica è matrilineare, e per di più Elias è stato allevato in un ambiente laico, anche se la nonna paterna fin da bambino gli ha trasmesso frammenti di memorie introdotti da un semplice modo di dire. Solo un richiamo all'attenzione, che cela un più profondo imperativo narrativo: quel *Devi sapere* con cui iniziano per il piccolo Elias le storie di vita di chi lo ha preceduto.

Non arriviamo subito al cuore di queste storie. Il libro ripetutamente spiazza, e lo fa con mestiere, con colta e scaltra indifferenza a ogni economia narrativa. Prima che quel *Devi sapere* abbracci appieno anche noi lettori, ci troviamo a fare cose che mai avremmo immaginato. Condividere il cubo di una discoteca con Elias – sensibile flautista che nel vagheggiare futuri concerti si presta, per pagare l'affitto, a eventi disco dance – e l'eroticissima Lovejoy, nata su Venere (a quanto lei stessa racconta) il giorno di San Valentino. Oppure correre contromano a gran velocità sulla Porsche nera guidata da John (tutto abbigliato in pelle e con un gran cappello texano, ma il cui vero nome è Giovanni Paolo, in omaggio al defunto Papa) mentre una fila interminabile di auto punta al parcheggio del Cyborg, la discoteca di punta del nord est padano.

Facendo del suo protagonista uno *schlemiel*, un picaro postmoderno in cerca di fortuna musicale, il libro ci cattura a nostra insaputa finché il gioco è fatto. La narrazione è ormai prepotente nella sua presa. Non tollera abbandoni né dilazioni.

Sa scrivere questo Enrico Fink! Non solo un romanzo, ma al suo interno cento brevi racconti, che non ti danno il tempo di stancarti. La vicenda di Gianfranco e dei suoi gatti. La scoperta della casa di Via Mazzini. I viaggi in elicottero dell'Ingegner Prampolini… Perfino le traversie pornosplatter del protagonista! La narrazione è digressiva eppure memorabile. In questo sta il segreto della scrittura di Fink, la sua maestria. In un metodo che è oltre ogni metodo.

Attraverso una panoplia di registri, il libro diverte e commuove, mostrandoci il mondo come non lo abbiamo ancora visto, alternando momenti di fantateatro comico a episodi di affettiva intimità, finché arriviamo al nucleo della narrazione: quel luogo e quel tempo da cui in ultimo l'ombra trae la sua oscurità e la sua urgenza.

Siamo a Ferrara, all'epoca della strage fascista meglio nota come la lunga notte del '43. Nel cuore della comunità ebraica, che nella Scuola tedesca di via Mazzini (così si chiama la sinagoga più frequentata) trova il punto d'incontro, il fulcro della propria identità.

Siamo in un mondo in cui il piccolo Guido, cresciuto all'ombra di leggi razziali di cui non comprende la portata, si reca ogni mattina nella scuola ebraica di Via Vignatagliata, talvolta inseguito da male intenzionati coetanei.

È la Ferrara dei *Finzi Contini* e di Giorgio Bassani, di cui è lontana parente – nella realtà quanto nel romanzo – Laura Bassani, la mamma di Guido, il cui papà è Isidoro Fink, nato da ebrei di origine russa trasferitisi a Gorizia per sfuggire ai pogrom. E a Ferrara vivono nel '43 anche i genitori di Isidoro, immigrati dall'accento ancora straniero il cui tragitto dall'impero russo a quello austro ungarico all'Italia è sotto il segno di una perpetua diaspora, mentre le radici ebraiche della famiglia di Laura affondano solide nella Ferrara rinascimentale.

Contribuiscono i dettagli a proiettarci in un mondo la cui spoglia umanità è spesso resa con un sorriso, come quando Guido, in un quaderno, racconta del regalo che gli ha portato il nonno paterno: "'Il pacchetto era così bello e colorato, l'ho scartato facendo una festa felice. Ma dentro c'era solo una mela cotta"' (230).

Leggiamo di tutto questo tutto d'un fiato. Dei rastrellamenti, delle follie del regime, delle fughe in campagna, dei tradimenti, delle deportazioni e del destino di chi resta.

Il libro attraversa la fitta oscurità di un tempo in cui le bombe americane vengono salutate come il vento di morte che allontana il fascismo, in cui la speranza è sempre in bilico, in cui la fame dà il braccio alla paura.

Non temano le future lettrici e i futuri lettori. In queste pagine la memoria non è monocorde, non è penitenziale, non è retorica. Il libro è bellissimo e pieno di luce, da cui l'ombra – questo è vero – esce ancora più buia.

Frutto di una consapevolezza maturata nel corso degli anni attraverso un itinerario (a tratti doloroso, forse ascetico?) di scoperta degli altri e di sé, *Patrilineare* è raccontato con autoironia e comicità, senza compiacimento, con semplicità di cuore e dovizia di strumenti narrativi. Questa storia di fantasmi attinge a un ampio scaffale di letture, compresa la grande tradizione del romanzo ebraico-americano, e per di più – con un 'patrilineare' omaggio alle passioni gemelle di Guido Fink, critico letterario e cinematografico che tanti ricordano per il suo genio e le sue doti di docente – ibrida felicemente il linguaggio del romanzo con quello del cinema.

Più di ogni altra cosa, il libro è scritto con una grande, vera attenzione all'umano. Meritatissima, dunque, la menzione speciale che ha ottenuto nella trentasettesima edizione del Premio Calvino. E altrettanto meritato il tempo che il pubblico dei lettori vorrà dedicargli.

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Camilla Caporicci (edited by),

The Song of Songs in European Poetry (Twelfth to Seventeenth Centuries): Translations, Appropriations, Rewritings. Turnhout: Brepols, The Medieval Translator 21, 2024.

"The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's" (Song 1:1): this opening formula, reminiscent of the ascriptions to David in the Psalms, constitutes the only conventional statement in a biblical text that otherwise defies precedent. The verse is immediately followed by an outburst of erotic longing, which sets the tenor for a work that foregrounds corporeal desire with an intensity unmatched in Scripture: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine" (Song 1:2). Does this fervent love relate to God? This has remained the central question for generations of readers and exegetes. For the two lovers never explicitly name God. Yet, perhaps precisely due to its unabashed sensuality, the Song of Songs has been one of the most enticing readings among the biblical books, playing an essential role in shaping medieval and Renaissance European spirituality. Over time, Jewish and Christian interpreters have preserved this exceptionally ambivalent book in their respective canons by allegorising it as a meditation on the relationship between divine and human love. From early rabbinic exegetes reading Israel (or the individual soul) as God's covenantal Spouse to medieval Christian conceptualisations of the Church's or the soul's marriage with Christ, and further through Marian devotion to ecstatic mysticism, the Song has been reframed as "a triumph of allegory, the eroticism of the text not erased, but re-semanticized as a sign of something else" (p. 13). Emerging early on, these diverse allegorical interpretations transformed the biblical book into a model for devotional expression. The Song of Songs thus stands as one of the most fascinating paradoxes in the history of biblical reception: a lyrical and passionate celebration of love that, across centuries, has served as a vehicle for articulating the profound mystery of spiritual union and sacred eros.

Scholarly fascination with the many allegorical interpretations and appropriations of the Song of Solomon in the medieval and early modern period long diverted attention away from the influence of the biblical book in the rise and development of European poetic culture. Recent scholarship by Ann W. Astell (1990), E. Ann Matter (1992), Rosanna Guglielmetti (2008), Monica Barsi and Alessandra Preda (2016), Noam Flinker (2000) has begun to redress this,

bringing to light the dynamics through which the Song has permeated the literary and cultural fabric of Europe. While these studies have unveiled much about the medieval and early modern reception of the Song, they have only briefly addressed its poetic resonances or have privileged its exegetical and homiletic traditions. In this context, Camilla Caporicci's study emerges as both timely and pioneering. Her edited collection fills an important scholarly lacuna, offering the first comprehensive investigation of the biblical book as a vital intertext in vernacular and Latin poetry between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries.

This volume, developed from a 2020 conference at the University of Padua, forms part of Caporicci's broader research project for the reappraisal of the Song's role in the European tradition of love lyric – a project whose major findings have been recently published in her monograph with Oxford University Press (2025). Arranged into three main sections, the collection contains essays by fourteen contributors from a variety of academic fields and backgrounds. The reader is thus invited to reflect on the intricate process of the Song's appropriations and rewritings from the perspectives of biblical reception, comparative literature, literary criticism, musicology, translation studies, philology, and linguistics. Moreover, the collection spans a diverse geographical scope, favouring the appreciation of the phenomenon across confessional and linguistic disciplinary boundaries. Its commendable coherence is grounded in its thematic focus and the well-thought-through structure, which facilitates the reader's grasp of the material's historical evolution.

The methodological diversity is one of the book's greatest strengths as it also allows for addressing the longstanding but problematic distinction between sacred and secular poetry. While this dichotomy is increasingly seen as misleading, it cannot be utterly dismissed, especially in medieval contexts, where spiritual and secular discourses often intersect in complex ways. Few biblical texts have inspired such sustained poetic engagement in major devotional and religious medieval works. It is not surprising, then, that the four essays of the first section, 'A Many-faced Influence: Medieval Voices', examine the multifaceted contexts in which the lyric appropriations of the Song of Songs fostered this exceptional convergence of sacred and secular codes. Leor Jacobi outlines the Song's lore in Hebrew liturgical poetry, pointing out its peculiar interpretation in the fifth-century Ashkenazi poem, *Shir HaShirim Amareha Sefe*. The author of the *piyyut*

transforms the profane love text into an interpretative space, where the feminised Song (despite the masculinity of the term) turns into a nourishing mother and the Sages are the breasts, mediating the "scholarly act of 'expressing milk' from the Song of Songs" (p. 42). The text's remarkable fluidity and tension between devotional and secular love are further developed in the following chapters. Greti Dinkova-Bruun examines three particular verse engagements with the *Cantica canticorum* – namely, Riga's own versification, Aegidius of Paris's revision of it, and an anonymous poem called *Cantica canticorum Beate Virginis* – to prove the uniqueness of Peter Riga's *Aurora* on two levels. On the one hand, the generative power of Riga's composition transforms the biblical text into a highly poetic reality "both profound theologically and intricate stylistically" (p. 51); on the other hand, the *Aurora*'s great capacity to inspire imitations and adaptations is seen precisely in the Song of Songs's intersection between erotic passion and spiritual love. Moving beyond traditional allegory, Brindusa Grigoriu's chapter analyses the Song's textual reminiscences in early Tristan and Ysolt romances, including Béroul's version of the legend, Thomas of Britain's poem, *The Folie of Berne*, Marie de France's *Chevrefoil*, and Eilhart of Oberg's adaptation. Grigoriu examines the episode of Tristan's amorous death, where the hero becomes a tree amid the arboreal landscape of the world-garden, assuming the role of the mystical Bridegroom from the Song of Songs. United with his feminine, flower-like counterpart, he comes to embody the triumph of a love-death "viriditas" (p. 60) through which the two lovers are eternally joined. This first section concludes with Christiania Whitehead and Denis Renevey's chapter focusing on the fourteenth-century Middle English mystic Richard Rolle, whose writing was deeply influenced by the Song of Songs. As Reveney argues, the impact of the biblical poem "is not only literary, accounting for the intense lyricism and musicality of *Melos* [*amoris*], its imagery, and its metaphors; in addition it also contributes the building blocks of Rolle's contemplative system" (p. 90). In particular, Reveney maintains that Rolle's contemplative sensorium, consisting of the fusion of bodily and inner sense perceptions, evolved directly from his engagement with the Song of Songs. Christiania Whitehead, in turn, explores the reproduction of Rolle's lyrics in the fifteenth century and his mediation on angelic song. Whitehead's analysis of the anonymous religious lyrics is finely

informed by their accompanying illustrations, which changed the resonances of these lyrics.

The transmission of the Song of Songs and its intertextual relationship with other works appears highly problematic since the book circulated in multiple genres and forms. This dynamic is particularly evident in the essays constituting the second section, where the dialogue between poetry and music in Italian medieval and early modern contexts comes to light ('Poetry and Music: the Italian Tradition'). Lino Pertile's finely argued essay shows how the Song's imagery of the wound of love and the marriage of the Cross is reinterpreted as an interdiscursive phenomenon in the popular piety tradition of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. Pertile turns to Dante's *Purgatorio* to reveal how the concept of 'buon dolor' (good sorrow) – a thirst for suffering which perfects the penitents' souls and brings them closer to God – "would not be possible without the Song of Songs and the immense riches of its commentary" (p. 108). This textual entanglement persists into the Renaissance as it appears in the following chapters. Matteo Navone's contribution offers a reassessment of Petrarchism's complex relationship to biblical language, and especially how both minor and famous sixteenth-century Italian poets, such as Pollastrino, Girolamo Malipiero, Bernardo and Torquato Tasso – though not overtly invoking the Song – nevertheless revived their spiritual lyricism with a language close to that of the Song's love poetry. The conflation of corporeal and mystical languages also features in the last two chapters of the section, which focus on the significant influence of the biblical book on Italian early modern musical production. Marina Toffetti's broad survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century musical settings of the Song reveals the extent to which composers drew upon its lyrical intensity not merely for textual content but as "a privileged catalyst for certain traits of the spiritual and aesthetic sensibility" (p. 161). Gabriele Taschetti's analysis centres on a collection of motets, *Symbolae diversorum musicorum*, compiled by Lorenzo Calvi (Venice, 1621). The collection deserves attention since a quarter of it is dedicated to the Song of Songs. Taschetti unpacks the different textual approaches and the editorial strategies behind this rich repertoire of Song-based motets. Both essays eloquently attest to the power of music as a parallel – and often privileged – hermeneutic mode for the Song.

The English translations and appropriations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the subject of the third and final section, 'Rewriting and Appropriating the Song of Songs in the British Isles'. Echoing earlier patterns, the Song of the Songs here again serves as a bridge between sacred and secular discourses. Its fusion of sensual and devotional imagery allowed it to influence a wide spectrum of poetry, making it common for texts to be both religious and amorous or, at least, to exhibit a polysemic richness rooted in its language. Of course, the Reformation added complexity by prompting vernacular translations of the Bible, including the Song, and further multiplying the variety of possible source texts – verse paraphrases, exegetical and liturgical texts, sermons, hymns, and prayer books. In this light, the first three chapters might be read through the lens of cultural acquisition and the different strategies of lexical and conceptual amplification, domestication and defamiliarisation behind poetic and prose borrowings. Fabio Ciambella's study of early English Bible translations, from Coverdale to the King James version, combines a corpus-based lexical analysis with theological sensitivity to reveal how each translator adopted different styles and priorities at a time "when multiple source texts were available and considered equally important" (p. 203). Rachel Stenner's compelling reading of William Baldwin's *Canticles* (1549) positions it as a liminal text between scriptural paraphrase and a precursor of Petrarchian lyric, inviting the reader to reconsider the development of Petrarchism in England. By voicing female desire, Baldwin unsettles the assumptions about gender and voice that defined the English tradition of love lyric. The result, concludes Stenner, "is a biblical paraphrase fashioned as English love poetry", manifesting "an experimental conjunction of secular and devotional writing" (p. 222). Tibor Fabiny's attentive close reading of Joseph Hall's 1609 verse paraphrase of the Song of Songs presents it as a highly poetic commentary (compared to some of the greatest poems of the period) and a very complicated text, enlarging on the biblical source text to express the author's artistic, political and theological intentions. Rediscovering Hall's forgotten commentary "can help us broaden our knowledge of the poetic and religious imagination of the seventeenth century" (p. 235).

The concluding chapters of this section reveal the role of the Song of Solomon in the intricate religious and political situation of seventeenth-century England, to bear witness to either one's faith or one's religious dissent. Carmen

Gallo's chapter is devoted to George Herbert, one of the major representatives of metaphysical poetry. Gallo discusses Herbert's reshaping of the Song of Songs, particularly the image of the banquet, in *The Temple* (1633) "as a way of representing a sacramental experience that mingles spiritual and sensual dimensions to respond to the theological controversies of his time on Christ's Real Presence" (p. 238). As for the influence of the Song on religious dissent, Simone Turco addresses the ambivalent attitude toward the biblical source of some Ranter thinkers during the Puritan Revolution. While recognising the Song as a possible vehicle of sensuality, they fail to unify the erotic language and imagery of the source with their religious principles to affirm their libertarian views. In the context of significant repression, Adrian Streete closes this section with the poetic engagement of a number of English women prophets in the seventeenth century, drawing upon the Song of Songs as a powerful means of asserting their spiritual and social authority. Streete focuses on the writings of Anna Trapnel, Katherine Sutton, Anne Wentworth, and Dorothy White, offering an interpretive lens that situates their use of the Song within a triadic framework: theological, political, and domestic. Streete concludes with a few reflections on the broader use of the Song by other religious sects and considers the fate of its prophetic resonances in the later decades of the seventeenth century.

Caporicci's volume not only reaffirms the enduring vibrancy of the Song of Songs *as* and *in* literature, but also makes a vital contribution to a long-overlooked area in the study of biblical reception across medieval and early modern Europe. Impressively ambitious in scope yet lucid in structure, this essay collection navigates the Song's multifarious poetic afterlives with clarity, originality, and scholarly finesse. Through an approach that combines precise close readings with exceptional methodological vivacity, Caporicci's book offers a much-needed reappraisal of the importance of the Song of Songs for European culture. What emerges is a conceptually layered portrait of this scriptural work as a text that continually renews itself through dialogue with theology, philosophy, aesthetics, and music across an array of literary forms and genres. At the same time, the volume's multidisciplinary acumen guides the reader to a major awareness that the reception history of the Song of Songs is an elusive and hidden phenomenon. The volume also gestures (albeit briefly) towards the material transmission of the Song, hinting at the fertile potential of further enquiry into its manuscript

and print histories. Above all, the study succeeds in demonstrating how the biblical poem served as a complex and veiled paradigm within European literary imagination. It will undoubtedly remain a touchstone for scholars working at the intersection of biblical reception, poetics, and cultural history. More broadly, it promises to reshape future conversations about the history of the Song of Songs and its role in defining religious and literary culture.

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Camilla Caporicci, Fabio Ciambella, and Cristiano Ragni (edited by),

Richard Barnfield's Poetics: Early Modern English Poetry Beyond Shakespeare. London: Bloomsbury/The Arden Shakespeare, 2025.

Richard Barnfield (1574-1620) occupies a curious space in the literary history of early modern England. At once marginal and seminal, boldly innovative yet long neglected, Barnfield is a writer whose poems have been overshadowed by the very authors with whom he was once confidently ranked. This conditioned fame is all the more striking given his meteoric career, for he appears to have written and published poetry only between 1594 and 1598, with a second edition of *Lady Pecunia* issued in 1605. Until quite recently, he was remembered simply because two of his poems were long attributed to Shakespeare (the sonnet "If music and sweet poetry agree" and the beautiful ode "As it fell upon a day" occasionally set to music) and were included in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599). Yet, this poet who admired Spenser but who strongly engaged with Marlowe and especially Shakespeare, who has Apollo behaving like a besotted teenager, calling Cassandra "my Cass" (1595, D5*v*), and who deliberately mixes thrilling eroticism with bathetic expressions, is extremely interesting. *Richard Barnfield's Poetics: Early Modern English Poetry Beyond Shakespeare*, edited by Camilla Caporicci, Fabio Ciambella, and Cristiano Ragni, is the first scholarly volume to take Barnfield's entire poetic corpus seriously as a site of aesthetic, historical, and cultural enquiry. It is also the only edited collection designed expressly for the occasion of Barnfield's 450th anniversary, and it positions itself as a major reappraisal set to influence future understandings of Barnfield's poetics, also considering that the most recent critical edition, by George Klawitter, dates back to 1990.

The editors' Introduction alongside Robert Stagg's Prelude lay out the case for Barnfield's renewed critical attention and provides a biographical and bibliographical overview that serves as a foundation for the volume's aims. They remind readers that Barnfield's career, though brief — his printed works appearing between 1594 and 1598 — was marked by experimentation across genres including pastoral, Petrarchan lyric, epyllion, and mock-encomium. They also acknowledge the long history of discomfort with Barnfield's bold homoeroticism, which until recently often resulted in either moralising condemnation (consider Thomas Warton's choice of terms when discussing

"allusions of an equivocal tendency" in the poems; 1871, 440) or sanitising mischaracterisation (including, for instance, insistence that his love poetry was homoerotic only in a juvenile and chastely Neoplatonic way). This "*Brigadoon* of early modern writers", as Will Tosh playfully calls him in the Afterword (281), has begun to be hailed – at times rather naively – as the first English poet to openly celebrate gay love, and he has also been invoked in earlier criticism as evidence in debates about artistic degeneracy. For instance, drawing on Havelock Ellis, Mario Masini claimed that Barnfield was publicly accused of sodomy and consequently imprisoned during his lifetime (an event that, in fact, never occurred; 1915, 272). The editors frame the volume as an attempt both to consolidate and to expand the rapidly developing scholarship on Barnfield, whose works have gained significant attention as key documents in queer literary history and as complex participants in wider Elizabethan poetic practices. This triadic focus, that is, queer studies, intertextual/genre studies, and stylistics, structures the collection's four sections.

The first section, "Barnfield's (Re)sources", addresses Barnfield's relationship to his classical and contemporary sources, emphasising Barnfield's learned conversation with classical antiquity, with Petrarchism, and with broader cultural resources (see Drakakis 2021) in early modern literary memory. The section opens with Massimiliano Rivera's "Barnfield at Grammar School: Orpheus's 'sad teares' and the Rhetoric of *Pathos*". It is an essay on one of the least known of Barnfield's compositions, *Orpheus, His Journey to Hell* and it offers one of the most original arguments in the volume. Noting Barnfield's exceptional faithfulness to the Orpheus and Eurydice passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Riviera contends that Barnfield's adaptation does not merely function as humanist rewriting but as a critique of sixteenth-century rhetorical pedagogy. Riviera reads the poem as an epyllion, belonging, like most specimens of the genre, to that group of "poems that behave badly" (32). By tracing Barnfield's parodic manipulation of Quintilian, Riviera shows how *Orpheus* becomes a wry commentary on the overvaluation of *actio* and pathos in Elizabethan grammar school training. This claim helps reframe Barnfield not as derivative but as subtly oppositional to humanist normativity. Cristiano Ragni's chapter addresses *The Legend of Cassandra*, perhaps the most consistently neglected work in Barnfield's corpus. Ragni outlines the difficulty of identifying direct sources for the poem

but persuasively argues for Barnfield's engagement with compendia such as Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (rather than directly drawing on Aeschylus). More importantly, he situates Barnfield's treatment of Cassandra — at turns petty, passionate, prophetic, and politically charged — within the 'minor epic' tradition and the generic conventions of complaint and panegyric. Ragni's strongest claim is that Barnfield deliberately renders Cassandra's character in ways that avoid politically dangerous associations with Queen Elizabeth I. The first section ends with Shawn Smith's essay on Barnfield's Petrarchan inheritance. He argues that Barnfield engages not only with the surface conventions of Petrarchan but also with Petrarch's deeper philosophical tensions regarding the legitimacy of erotic desire. With sensitivity to both the *Canzoniere* and its English tradition, Smith claims Barnfield ultimately rejects Petrarchan narcissism, opting instead for a homoerotic Petrarchism that acknowledges its own marginality and challenges the laureate paradigm. This argument resonates strongly with queer theory by suggesting that Barnfield's Petrarchism is simultaneously imitative and resistant, a hybrid mode that reorients erotic authority away from heteronormative structures. Smith highlights the poet's "ability not only to validate homoerotic sexual desire […] to celebrate the tensions and ambiguities inherent in the human experience not only of sex but of love" (87).

The second section, "Barnfield and His Contemporaries", examines Barnfield's embeddedness in the networks – social, poetic, and ideological – of the 1590s. Andrew Hadfield's chapter ("Richard Barnfield: Patronage, Intimacy, and Money") is a necessary corrective to Barnfield's reception as primarily a queer poet, reminding readers that financial need and patronage politics were central pressures for all Elizabethan writers and even goes so far as to state that "Few poets have been more open than Richard Barnfield about their frustrations with the need to secure support from the rich and powerful" (96). He was not an entirely steadfast member of any literary circle and *Lady Pecunia* and *The Complaint of Poetry* emerge as sharp critiques of the emerging monetisation of literary culture. And yet, Hadfield sensibly acknowledges that Barnfield's critique of money is ambiguous since "it is hard to know how far-reaching some his ideas/criticism really were" (109).

Evgeniia Ganberg's chapter ("The Female Gaze? Seeing, Seeming, and Being Seen in Barnfield, Powell, and Shakespeare") nicely complements Ragni's essay and offers a comparative study of visuality in Barnfield, Shakespeare, and Thomas Powell (the author of the rather obscure poem *Love's Leprosy*). Ganberg argues that Barnfield subverts conventional gendered dynamics of seeing by giving Cassandra a visual agency that overpowers Apollo's divine gaze, an agent rather than a passive object of desire. Tania Demetriou's masterful essay, "The Poetics of Unpersuasion: Barnfield, Virgil, Shakespeare", very helpfully situates Barnfield's *The Affectionate Shepheard* within Virgilian pastoral and Ovidian epyllion traditions and argues that Barnfield deploys prosopopoeia to create a poetics of "unpersuasion": Barnfield and the Shakespeare of *Venus and Adonis* are revealed as participants in a shared literary aesthetic of frustrated desire and rhetorical breakdown. The chapter closes with a very interesting palaeographic note on the copy owned by William Burton (who moved in the circle around the Earl of Southampton) of Virgil's works now at Cambridge University Library which deserves further attention.

The third section is titled "In and Out of Conventions in Barnfield's Love Poetry", offering nuanced readings of his treatment of desire, beauty, and pastoral space. Danila Sokolov's chapter is a theoretically rich exploration of aesthetics and jurisprudence in Barnfield's *Cynthia* using a Kantian aesthetic perspective. Mattia Italiano is very frank in his view of Barnfield instituting a homoerotic "revolution", noting how Barnfield reshapes Petrarchan conventions to centre male beauty, male vulnerability, and homoerotic agency. On his part, Harry Matthews ("Ecology of Desire: Queer Pastoral and Unrequited Love in Richard Barnfield's *The Affectionalte Shepheard*") stimulatingly brings an ecocritical lens to appreciate Barnfield's work, connecting queer theory with the environmental humanities.

The final section exemplifies a turn towards the digital humanities and stylistics, offering methodological breadth to the collection. It is titled "Linguistic and Stylistic Approaches to Barnfield's Poetics" and is made up of two contributions. Aoife Beville's fine chapter "A Stylistic Approach to Irony in *The Encomion of Lady Pecunia*" provides a stylistic account of irony, wordplay, and communicative structure in Barnfield's mock encomium. She argues that Barnfield creates ironic distance through parallelism, punning, and the presence

of a 'double audience' in H. W. Fowler's terms, i.e. "an audience in-the-know, who arrive at the correct implicature, and a (sometimes hypothetical) naïve audience which arrives only at the surface meaning" (248). Fabio Ciambella's essay is perhaps the most methodologically innovative. Using programmes such as #LancsBox and Voyant Tools, he analyses lexical frequency, collocations, and morphosyntactic variation across Barnfield's works using corpus stylistic analysis. Ciambella's essay paves the way to future research while empirically grounding assertions such as the one according to which Barnfield's sonnets reveal a more explicitly homoerotic vocabulary than Shakespeare's (Sonnets 1-126).

The volume closes with Will Tosh's brief but important "Afterword": Richard Barnfield's reception has finally, hopefully "come of age" (284). Indeed, this volume is a landmark in Barnfield studies. It expands the field in three crucial directions: firstly, for the first time, Barnfield's entire corpus is addressed — from *The Affectionate Shepheard* to *Cynthia*, from *Cassandra* to *Lady Pecunia*. Secondly, it relies on an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing classical reception studies, queer theory, feminist theory (see especially Ganberg's chapter on the female gaze), ecocriticism, aesthetics and law, stylistics, and the digital humanities. The editors deserve recognition for bringing together scholars whose approaches intersect but do not converge into a single theoretical orthodoxy. Thirdly, the volume's insistence that Barnfield belongs *within* – not outside – the mainstream of Elizabethan poetic innovation should be applauded. If the volume has one limitation, it lies in the relative scarcity of sustained attention to Barnfield's readership and his books as material objects. But readers of this volume will be motivated to address Barnfield's place in early modern anthologies and examine hitherto hidden early responses to his poetry. *Richard Barnfield's Poetics* is an indispensable contribution to early modern literary studies and a milestone in the re-evaluation of a poet whose work has long merited greater scholarly attention.

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Silvia Bigliazzi, Rocco Coronato, Bianca Del Villano (a cura di),

Shakespeare, il teatro dell'io. Individuo, soggetto, testo. Roma: Carocci, 2024.

In the ever-expanding and increasingly interdisciplinary landscape of Shakespeare studies, the collective volume *Shakespeare, il teatro dell'io. Individuo, soggetto, testi* (Shakespeare, the Theatre of the Self. Individual, Subject, Texts), published by Carocci in 2024, stands out as a work of particular significance. Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi, Rocco Coronato, and Bianca Del Villano, the book investigates one of the most complex and fascinating questions posed by the playwright from Stratford-upon-Avon: the representation and construction of identity during a pivotal transition from a pre-modern era to the dawn of modernity. Through a series of essays spanning philology, literary criticism, the history of ideas, and performance analysis, the volume offers a multifaceted and profound exploration of how Shakespeare placed the notion of the self at the heart of his theatre in all its facets, revealing an internal drama that often complements and even surpasses the external drama of the plot.

The introduction by the editors, both lucid and programmatic, establishes the theoretical coordinates of the inquiry. The concept of 'theatre of the self' is not limited to a simple analysis of the individual Shakespearean character – or *in-dividual*, "in-diviso delle capacità di individuare categorie, valori, identità secondo un discorso logico" (un-divided in the capacity to identify categories, values, and identities according to a logical discourse, p. 15) as the three editors state – but extends to an understanding of how language, narration, and the very structure of the play contribute to shaping a complex and often fragmented identity. The volume is divided into four sections, each dedicated to the "tema specifico dei modi e delle articolazioni drammatiche e liriche della soggettività in Shakespeare" (the specific theme of the dramatic and lyrical modes and articulations of subjectivity in Shakespeare, p. 17).

Part 1, "Contesti e discorsi" (Contexts and discourses), examines the philosophical and political frameworks surrounding Shakespeare's depiction of the self. Rocco Coronato's opening chapter probes the very existence of a Shakespearean self, distinguishing between a relational ("che si percepisce come soggetto [e suddito] rispetto a qualche classe di appartenenza", which perceives itself as a subject [and subordinate] with respect to some class of belonging, p.

35), a profound, and a multiple 'I', this latter synthesised by Hamlet, who is "l'io più molteplice di tutti" (the most multifaceted self of all, p. 49). Angela Locatelli follows with a rich discussion of subjectivity as a form of "interpellazioni e controinterpellazioni decisamente eterogenee" (highly heterogeneous interpellations and counter-interpellations, p. 74), showing how characters' identities are shaped by and against political, religious, and patriarchal ideologies. The section concludes with Maria Del Sapio Garbero's illuminating analysis of "lo specchio come complesso strumento identitario" (the mirror as a complex identity tool, p. 105), demonstrating how Shakespeare's political subjects contend with and (sometimes) reconcile the fraught space between public and private selves.

Stylistic and performative features used to articulate the self are explored in the second section of the volume, "Testi, forme e stili" (Texts, forms and styles). Roberta Mullini offers a compelling account of the monologue, a form that became "espressione metonimica di alcuni testi drammatici" (metonymic expression of some plays, p. 113), which transcends simple exposition to reveal the innermost thoughts of a character's mind. Fernando Cioni explores the dynamic relationship between the dramatic 'I' through the lens of metatheatre, with examples ranging from the tragic irony of *Antony and Cleopatra* (pp. 138-46) to the comic awareness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (pp. 146-53). Completing this part, Bianca Del Villano presents a pragmastylistic reading of character, analysing the nuanced and often shifting 'faces' (in a Goffmanian sense) of the self within Shakespeare's plays, notably in *Hamlet*, adopting the lens of the theory of (im)politeness.

Part 3, "Temi e problemi" (Themes and problems) explores specific textual and thematic aspects of identity across Shakespeare's genres. Donatella Montini examines the concept of the divided self in what she defines as the "Shakespeare storico" (Shakespeare as historian, p. 188), concentrating on the political body and the dynamic between the king's 'I', his physical body, and his voice, with a specific focus on *Henry V*. Focusing on the comedies from *Love's Labour's Lost* onwards, Rocco Coronato explores the transparency and divine nature of language, while Silvia Bigliazzi tackles the impossible catharsis in the tragedies, arguing that the Shakespearean self grapples with guilt, understood as "desiderio consapevole di un rovesciamento dei tradizionali valori etici" (a deliberate wish

to overturn traditional ethical values, p. 237) and a tragic mirror that reflects a lack of easy resolution. Emanuel Stelzer's illuminating contribution on the romances explores fragmentation and completion, highlighting a newfound sympathy and subjectivity in these later works, where "l'io chiede di essere ricomposto", since "il fugace senso di comunione tra i personaggi e quello tra attori e spettatori […] sono il trionfo del teatro" (the self asks to be recomposed; the fleeting sense of communion among the characters and that between actors and spectators are the triumph of theatre, p. 267). Finally, David Schalkwyk provides a meticulous close reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets, analysing the pronominal forms (*I*, *thou*, *you*) as reflections of difference and identity, with a particular focus on those sonnets which present a "struttura pronominale chiastica" (chiastic pronominal structure, p. 275).

Finally, the fourth section of *Shakespeare, il teatro dell'io*, titled "Approcci" (approaches), showcases innovative methodological frameworks for studying the Shakespearean self. Silvia Bigliazzi offers a fascinating textual comparison between the Q1 and Q2 versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, revealing the textual variations of Juliet's 'I' that the digital approach of the SENS project's archive (*Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and Their European Dissemination*, https://sens.skene.univr.it) can highlight. This segues into Alessandra Squeo's chapter on the digital turn, which demonstrates how Digital Humanities can be used to construct "pratiche discorsive e identità social[i]" (discursive practices and social identities, p. 348), especially in *The Merchant of Venice*. The volume concludes with a captivating and imaginative contribution from Shaul Bassi, who engages in a fictitious dialogue between Ophelia, "la bellezza verginale" (the virginal beauty) and Caliban, "la creatura mostruosa" (the monstrous creature, p. 367), to explore the posthuman and our relationship with nature, a truly modern epilogue.

The volume is a well-conceived and meticulously curated work. The interconnections between the various contributions are evident and constitute the true strength of the book. The variety of methodological approaches and the depth of analysis in each essay make for a rich and stimulating read. Every contribution stands out for its originality and scientific rigour, offering food for thought for both the specialist and the general reader interested in a deeper

understanding of Shakespeare. The extensive and up-to-date bibliography is a further valuable resource.

The main virtue of *Shakespeare, il teatro dell'io* lies in its ability to capture the essence of Shakespearean modernity not in a single concept but in its plural and dynamic nature: the self that emerges from his theatre is a fragmented, conflicted self, constantly renegotiated through language, the body, history, and performance. The book represents a significant contribution to Shakespearean studies and to literary theory in general, confirming the timeless relevance of the English playwright. Although an English translation would be desirable, as it would give the volume greater visibility – but I am sure the co-editors will carefully think about it very soon – with this volume, Bigliazzi, Coronato, and Del Villano have created a very much needed work for anyone who wants to understand how Shakespeare not only tells the stories of men but also "porta l'io sulla scena […] nel modo più pieno" (brings the self onto the stage in the fullest possible way, p. 17).

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