

THE EPILOGUE AS DISCLOSURE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *AS YOU LIKE IT* AND *THE TEMPEST*

Geraldo Magela Cáffaro (gmcaffaro@yahoo.com)
Universidade Estadual de Montes Claros (UNIMONTES),
Minas Gerais, Brasil

Abstract: This paper follows recent revaluations of Shakespeare's *oeuvre* and purports to examine it from the marginal standpoint of the epilogue. The epilogues selected are the ones to *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*; I argue that these texts perform different kinds of *disclosure*, which do not merely reveal the plays' fictionality but maintain the audience under the spell of fiction while urging them to act according to the theatrical protocol. To support such argument, I draw from areas such as genre theory, Greenblattian new historicism, and literary anthropology. The readings and discussions proposed offer the opportunity to see Shakespeare's theatre as intimately connected to its audience and context, and not as the product of a disembodied genius.

Keywords: Shakespeare. Epilogue. Disclosure.

O EPÍLOGO COMO (DES)VELAMENTO DO FICTÍCIO EM *AS YOU LIKE IT* E *THE TEMPEST*, DE WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Resumo: Este trabalho se orienta pelas recentes reavaliações da obra de Shakespeare e busca examiná-la sob a perspectiva marginal dos epílogos. Os epílogos selecionados são os de *As You Like It* e *The Tempest*; o argumento principal é o de que esses textos realizam diferentes formas de (des)velamento que não apenas evidenciam a ficcionalidade das peças, mas mantêm o público sob o efeito da ilusão ao mesmo tempo em que o incita a agir conforme o protocolo teatral. A teoria dos gêneros literários, o novo historicismo Greenblattiano e a antropologia literária amparam tal argumento. As leituras e discussões propostas permitem ver o teatro shakespeariano em íntima relação com o público e o contexto, e não como produto de um gênio desincorporado.

Palavras-chave: Shakespeare. Epílogo. (Des)velamento

Artigo recebido em 31 ago. 2015 e aceito em 29 set. 2015.

Scripta Uniandrade, Curitiba, PR, v. 13, n. 2 (2015), p. 78-89.

Data de edição: 11 dez. 2015.

Critical appreciations of Shakespeare's oeuvre have recently moved away from a tendency to celebrate the Bard's transcendental genius to readings concerned with the social and historical forces surrounding his works. In *Alternative Shakespeares* (1996), Terence Hawkes addresses this shift in Shakespeare studies and observes, drawing from Steven Mullaney, that "Its expansion to embrace 'the ideological analysis of discursive cultural practices, including but not restricted to the literary, and non-discursive practices as well' stands as one of the first requirements of an alternative approach" (HAWKES, 1996, p. 10-11). By extension, new historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt sees Shakespeare's theatre not as the creation of a gifted individual, but as "the product of collective intentions" which "manifestly addresses its audience as a collectivity" (1989, p. 4-5). Granted that this characteristic of Shakespeare's theatre is particularly evident in the epilogues of some of his plays, these texts emerge as privileged sites of enquiry into the relationships between text and performance, reader and audience.

In light of this, in this paper I purport to examine the epilogues of two of Shakespeare's plays: *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*. As I argue, these epilogues constitute a different kind of *disclosure*, which does not merely reveal the plays' fictionality (thus offering an exit for the "real" world outside the play); instead, it seems to maintain the audience under the spell of fiction, while urging them to respond to the plays according to the theatrical protocol. In order to support such argument, I will begin with a genre-based discussion on the **paratext** and the epilogue; then I shall justify the use of the term *disclosure* by contrasting it with the concept of **self-disclosure** by Wolfgang Iser. Situations of self-disclosure shall be identified in the "main" texts and then compared with the type of *disclosure* seen in the epilogues. Thus, this paper will offer an opportunity to read Shakespeare's plays from the marginal standpoint of the epilogues; in turn, the belief in the idea of textual closure and 'organic unity' will be called into question.

Both James Walter (1983) and Robert Weimann (1996, 2004) have underlined the liminal character of epilogues in Shakespeare's plays and their views will be given due consideration here. In any case, these critics follow the tradition of speaking of prologues and epilogues in terms of the spatial metaphor of the threshold. This tradition can be traced back to Gérard Genette's book *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation* (1997),¹ in which

the French theorist defines paratexts as those texts situated at a “zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*, a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public [...]” (p. 2). As such, paratexts often employ direct performatives in order to inform, exhort, persuade, or advise the audience.

Antoine Compagnon also acknowledges the liminality of the paratext, even though he uses the term **perigraphy** to refer to it (1996, p. 104)². According to him, the perigraphy would correspond to the periphery of the fortified city of the main text, and this periphery would be like a frame closing a painting (p. 104). The problem is that Compagnon views the author as the center of this city, while (s)he was arguably relegated to the textual margins with the specialization of literature from the sixteenth century on. When it comes to Shakespeare’s plays, the idea of authorship as property, or as attribution to a clearly identifiable empirical individual, is not yet present in the epilogues as it is in later paratexts. Therefore, theorizations of generic nature should not fail to take historical specificity into account.

Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann’s more historically specific study *Prologues to Shakespeare’s Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama* (2004) brings important elements to discuss the phenomenon theorized by both Génette and Compagnon. According to Bruster and Weimann, “the prologue”, in particular, “is a multifaceted phenomenon and term” as it can operate as “text, actor and performance” (p. 1). The authors also acknowledge that these liminal texts shape audience expectations “by appealing to potentially common interests and experiences. They thereby seek to temporarily control a socially significant space” (p. vii). Bruster and Weimann additionally note that the choice of actors for delivering prologues was based on their particular liminal status among the other actors of the company.

Richard Alleyn was apparently a hired man; Dick Juby was a young actor who on at least one occasion took both male and female roles; Richard Sharp had taken the very challenging role of the Duchess of Malfi as a boy actor before assuming adult male roles; the same trajectory marked the careers of Theophilus Bird (or Bourne) and Ezekiel Fenn. (2004, p. 36)

Bruster and Weimann go on to articulate the liminal status of these actors with the liminal situation of the prologue as a performance which enabled the audience to experience the transition from their everyday lives into imaginary worlds (2004, p. 37). After acknowledging the contribution of Genette's *Paratexts* to reflections on textual thresholds, Bruster and Weimann resort to the theory of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep for a less strictly textual take on liminality. The authors give special attention to Gennep's theory of the **rites of passage**, which cover a range of transitional processes in society. While the rites of passage may be understood as individual experiences – especially in coming-of-age situations or in the delivery of prologues for some of those liminal actors – the authors emphasize the force of the collectivity in codifying and recognizing these rites.

If we are to maintain the idea of liminality in perspective, however, we need to look at the texts which precede the epilogues and which constitute demarcated areas divided by them. Both *As you like it* and *The tempest* feature legitimate rulers who are overthrown from power, and have to live in exile until order is reestablished. In *As You Like It*, Duke Senior goes to live in the forest of Ardenne after his brother, Duke Frederick, banishes him from the court. In *The Tempest*, Prospero, the Duke of Milan, is also the victim of his brother Antonio, who counts on the help of the King of Naples to take over the dukedom and banish Prospero. But the plot coincidences seem to end there: the forest of Ardenne is a pastoral setting, whereas Prospero lives in a bare island peopled by the native Caliban and a host of spirits. In addition, while Prospero is an omnipotent magician who manipulates all events until he can take revenge on his brother, Duke Senior lives like a shepherd and does not do anything to recover his position or avenge himself. Lastly, whereas disguise and cross-dressing are key elements in *As You Like It*, in *The Tempest* it is magic and the supernatural that occupy centre stage. This is what makes Rosalind's role in the former play so vital: as the banished Duke's daughter, she needs to dress as a man (as does her cousin Celia) in order to flee the tyranny of Duke Frederick.

From then on, *As You Like It* will present situations that foreground the artifice of (theatrical) representation, or that double the very acts of performing and reception. In *The Tempest*, something similar happens when Prospero disrupts one of the masques and digresses about the insubstantiality

of his creations. These situations fit within the concept of self-disclosure discussed by Wolfgang Iser in *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (1993). According to Iser, “Literary texts contain a range of signals to denote that they are fictive” (1993, p. 11) and this is the very characteristic that distinguishes literature from more instrumental discourses that try to hide their own fictionality. However, these signals “are not to be equated exclusively with linguistic signs in the text ... for these signals can become significant only through particular, historically varying conventions shared by author and public” (1993, p. 11).

The insertion of the public (reader, listener, or audience) into the discourse of fiction undermines the idea that fiction is an inherent aspect of the text alone. Rather, in the case of self-disclosure, the recognition of fictional traces in the text is closely dependent on a change of attitude on the part of the reader. Interestingly, one of the examples provided by Iser comes from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, when the “artisans acting their play remind their audience that they need not be afraid of the lion, which is not a real lion but one played by Snug the joiner” (ISER, 1993, p.12). In that case, what is expected of the reader/audience is that they see the representation “as-if” it were reality and not take it for reality.

By contrast, in the epilogues delivered by Rosalind and Prospero, it is expected that the audience **feel** “as-if” they were part of the play. Instead of a suspension of belief – as would happen momentarily as a result of self-disclosure – we are back to a suspension of disbelief. The speakers address the audience as characters still in their roles, and not as actors out of their characters – despite Rosalind’s allusion to the gender trick behind her costume. This moment of closure, therefore, works as a *disclosure*, a failure to provide a harmonious ending to the play; but it is also an attempt to create an illusion of audience participation, thus delaying the collapse of representation and the return to the “real” world. In a sense, then, the *disclosure* seen in the epilogue goes counter to the movement of self-disclosure evidenced in the main text.

An example of self-disclosure in *As You Like It* appears in the second act, when Amiens excuses himself after singing to Jacques: “My voice is ragged, I know I cannot please you;” to which Jacques replies: “I do not desire you to please me, I do desire you to sing” (II.5.13-14). The

word “please” will appear again in the epilogue, and in both cases it could be seen as part of a metacommentary, pointing both to the performed and the performing realms of the play. It follows that the concern with entertaining and pleasing the audience runs parallel with the need to perform a duty, to offer the service that is expected of the theatre company. This shows the playwright’s awareness of the social function of the theatre and the anxieties concerning the reception of a performance.

A more blatant example of metacommentary can be seen in the seventh scene from act five. Orlando has just begged Duke Senior for food and says he has to go and find Adam, his father’s old servant, who is weak and starving. On hearing of the strangers’ plight, Duke Senior utters some of the play’s most famous lines: “Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy/ This wide and universal theatre/ Presents more woeful pageants than the scene/ Wherein we play in” (II.7.135-8). Jacques’s reply picks up the metaphor and extends it: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players./ They have their exists and their entrances,/ And one man in his time plays many parts [...]” (II.7.139-42). The audience would have no trouble identifying the first speech as a metacommentary (or as an instance of self-disclosure), even though the words that signal such disclosure are also working on the metaphorical level. “The scene wherein we play in” can be read as a reference to the scene of the play *As You Like It* – as watched/read by the audience – or to the particular situation of the characters in that moment of their lives. Jacques’s speech, however, shows another effect of self-disclosure: that of a reversal of perspective. If the theatre is as worldly as the stage, the actors, or the audience that make it possible, the world is seen as a stage in which people living their regular lives perform different roles according to their ages.

Although the theatrical jargon is also present in the most significant example of self-disclosure coming from *The Tempest*, that reversal is not as explicit as in Jacques’s speech. And the voice in Prospero’s self-disclosure speech seems to be that of the playwright, as more than one critic has pointed out. It is worth attending to some of the lines from that speech:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and

Are melted into air, into thin air;
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
as dreams are made on, and our little life
is rounded with a sleep. [...] (IV.1.146-156)

Again, self-disclosure is not devoid of ambiguity; Prospero is speaking to Ferdinand on the diegetic level of the play, but we cannot help suspecting that the “you’ in line 147 is also targeted at us. This suspicion may be related to Marjorie Garber’s view according to which there is, by the end of the play,

a transferential desire, this wish to hear Shakespeare’s voice in Prospero’s, to believe – as Coleridge, Edward Dowden, and other Romantic critics long ago believed – that through his dramatic figure of the father-playwright, Shakespeare was sending us a message, the message of his departure. (2008, p. 13)

Whether we see this speech as Shakespeare’s “farewell to the stage”, we may agree with Paul A. Cantor when he states that Prospero’s “revels” speech evidences that “the aim of *The Tempest* is to make us aware that those who act in the play are merely actors” and that “[b]y momentarily opening up a perspective on the world beyond the borders of human life, *The Tempest* seems to take us beyond the borders of drama itself. (1981, p. 258).

If the experience of going beyond borders is already present in the main text of the plays, and if the reader/audience is already inscribed in the situations of self-disclosure, why would an epilogue be necessary? In “Thresholds to memory and commodity in Shakespeare’s endings”, Robert Weimann claims that in both *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*, “the language of the epilogue gracefully helps to displace or at least tone down a sense of abruptness in the perception of an abiding gap between represented roles and performing actors” (1996, p. 2). In doing so, it would guarantee an afterlife for the play, and work as a marketing strategy devised to keep

audiences coming to see other productions (1996, p. 1-2). The critic James Walter also focuses on the afterlife of the play in the audience's minds. However, in his specific study of Prospero's epilogue, he interprets the magician's final words as moral lessons to be followed by the audience: "Prospero ... is petitioning his audience not merely for applause that will help rupture the illusion but also for better deeds and gentler speech as they make their transition from spectators to citizens" (1983, p. 73).

Although I subscribe to the idea of the epilogue as a marketing device, I tend to disagree with Weimann's claim concerning the gap between represented roles and performing actors. Instead of reducing that gap, the epilogue foregrounds it; the gap that seems to be bridged there is the one between the speaker and the audience. Let us begin by reading Prospero's speech this time:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell,
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
And my ending is despair
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardoned be,
Let your indulgence set me free. (V. Epilogue. 5-20)

Prospero is, in his last lines, assigning the audience the role that he performed throughout the play. The theatrical protocol of the applause is the magical gesture that can set him free, even though this freedom is not the fall of the mask, but the return to Naples. Furthermore, the “gentle breath” that will fill his sails echoes the gesture that caused the tempest at the beginning of the play. Likewise, the exercise of granting mercy and indulgence is a repetition of what Prospero did at the end on the diegetic level of the play. Seeing this exercise as a moral lesson should not blind us to the fact that we are still in the fictional universe of the play. The experience enacted there is that of entrapment and suspension, and not of freedom and disclosure in the sense of unveiling. The characters are still all on the island and the harmonious closure to take place in Naples is only a promise.

If the role Prospero assigns to the audience is mirrored in his own previously held attributions as a magician, Rosalind’s address to the audience seems to engage the audience in the same game of gender ambiguity seen in the main text. Whereas the feeling conveyed in Prospero’s epilogue is that of entrapment, as I have remarked, in *As You Like It* there is a sense of inadequacy between the gender of the speaker and the role she has to perform: “It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue... “ (V.4.1). However, as she goes on to suggest, such inadequacy is the mere product of the convention her costume imposes on her: “I am not furnished like a beggar, therefore, to beg will not become me” (8-9). After that, she explains that her purpose is to “conjure” the audience, a word that may mean either “charge,” or “bewitch,” as the *Norton Shakespeare* informs us (GREENBLATT, 1997, p. 13). What follows is a rather truncated appeal for appreciation, but the audience is asked to assume fixed gendered roles, which seems ironic if we consider that her main point is that gender is also performance. Although she makes it clear that she is not really a woman, and that she is just playing one (“If I were a woman...”), she ends by making a “curtsy” – a gesture which carries feminine associations – and bidding (the men?)³ farewell.

The *disclosure* in *As You Like It* is a result of gender ambiguity, inadequacy, and failure to permanently leave the fictional space and step outwards into the “real” world. Conversely, the audience is invited to step inwards into the threshold of the theatrical universe as they respond to

Rosalind's "conjuring" to fit within the roles established by her. Here the idea of the threshold gains renewed relevance. Transaction, intersection, and pragmatic strategy all come together in the cases discussed. However, these epilogues do not work as "frames" closing the picture because closure and resolution do not seem to take place. What Weimann states about the ending of the Elizabethan play coincides with my views in this respect: "[...] the ending of the Elizabethan play, including the epilogue as a stylized mode of bringing its transaction to a close, inhabited a remarkably open; in many ways vulnerable; and, despite its genial tone and language, divisive site" (1996, p. 2).

This divisive site, however, puts the two sides of the border – the text of the play and the audience – in perspective. There may even be a continuum between these two sides, which can be seen in the fact that the personas of the play are carried over into the epilogue. Furthermore, in both the main text and the epilogue, virtual spaces are built so as to "accommodate" readers/spectators. Whereas in the main texts of the plays analyzed, these virtual spaces (identified with the concept of self-disclosure) reveal the artifice of representation and allow the receiver to see the actual world as play space, in the epilogues *disclosure* tries to capture the spectator in its fictional web, assigning roles to them and delaying the so-called collapse of representation. This proposition is, after all, in close affinity with Stephen Greenblatt's thought about Shakespeare's theatre in *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*: "The triumphant cunning of the theater is to make its spectators forget that they are participating in a practical activity, to invent a sphere that seems far removed from the manipulations of the everyday" (1989, p. 18).

Reading from the margins, as I proposed in this paper, does not mean adopting a polarized conception of literature which would superimpose one extreme over the other. Instead, it represents an alternative way of approaching literary texts to the ones that sought to construct well-wrought monuments or gifted creators. Reading these tiny bits of texts almost engulfed by their antecedents helps us understand how the audience determines the choices made by artists in forging their productions. But such reading can be more rewarding if it does not ignore the several movements that lead these tiny bits back to their antecedents or that produce discontinuities and *disclosures*.

Notes

¹ Originally published in French as *Seuils* in 1987.

² My translation from the version in Portuguese, entitled: “A Perigrafia”. In: *O trabalho da citação*. The French version is from 1979: *La seconde main: ou le travail de la citation*.

³ As to judge from the beginning of the line, she seems to be talking exclusively to the men: “If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me...” (V.4.14-15).

WORKS CITED

BRUSTER, Douglas; WEIMANN, Robert. *Prologues to Shakespeare's Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama*. London: Routledge, 2004.

CANTOR, Paul A. Prospero's Republic: the Politics of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In: *Shakespeare as a Political Thinker*. Eds. John Alvis and Thomas G. West. Durham: Carolina American Press, 1981.

COMPAGNON, Antoine. “A Perigrafia.” *O trabalho da citação*. Trad. Cleonice P.B. Mourão. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1996, p. 104-105.

_____. *La seconde main: ou le travail de la citation*. Paris: Seuils, 1979.

GARBER, Marjorie. *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*. New York: Pantheon, 2008.

GENETTE, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Literature, Culture, Theory). Trad. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

_____. *Seuils*. Paris: Editions du Seuils, 1987.

GREENBLATT, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.

GREENBLATT, Stephen *et al.* (Eds). *The Norton Shakespeare*. New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1997.

HAWKES, Terence. Introduction. In: *Alternative Shakespeares*, Vol. 2. Ed. Terence Hawkes. London; New York: Methuen, 1996, p. 1-16.

ISER, Wolfgang. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Edited by EVANS, G.B.; TOBIN, J.J.M. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

WALTER, James. From Tempest to Epilogue: Augustine's Allegory in Shakespeare's Drama. *PMLA*, n. 98, vol. 1, 60-76, 1983.

WEIMANN, Robert. Thresholds to Memory and Commodity in Shakespeare's Endings. *Representations*, n. 53, 1-20, 1996.