langue et altérité dans la culture de la renaissance

Language and Otherness in Renaissance Culture

textes réunis par
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Language and Otherness in Renaissance Culture

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Ann Lecercle & Yan Brailowsky

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Contents / *Table des matières*

List of illustrations / *Table des illustrations* IV

Preface / *Préface* 1

1 Cartographies of Otherness : Placing Parameters 5
Ann Lecercle

2 « Castalian King Urinal Hector of Greece » :
la « langue latrine » dans *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 15
Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin

3 "A Kind of Music" : The Representation of Cant
in Early Modern Rogue Literature 31
Viviana Comensoli

4 Le jargon des colporteurs :
de la langue secrète à la représentation pittoresque 45
Pascale Drouet

5 "Lest My Brain Turn": Lying about Dover Cliff,
and Locating the Other in *King Lear* 59
Simon Ryle

6 At the "frank heart" of *King Lear*:
Shakespeare's French As a Second Language 77
Marie-Dominique Garnier

7 *Curiositas* et dynamique du désir dans le Londres élisabéthain 87
François Mallet

8 Arboreal language and otherness in Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1651) 101
Victoria Bladen

9 Prophetic Utterance in Elizabethan Culture 131
Yan Brailowsky

10 Signes scéniques et trouble identitaire :
l'altérité de l'ombre tragique 147
François Lecercle

11 "And if that Envie barke at thee":
Slanderous Reading and the Case of Ben Jonson 165
Lynn Sermin Meskill

Appendix / *Appendice* 179

Contributors / *Note sur les auteurs* 185

Index 189

List of illustrations / *Table des illustrations*

5.1 "The Death of Cordelia" by Hawes Craven, 1892 64

8.1 Wrought iron vine scroll, York Minster (13th c.) 104
8.2 Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504), Florence 109
8.3 Foliate spire, Holy Trinity church, Hull 118
8.4 Green Man, York Minster (13th c.) 121
8.5 Green Man, Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire (1483) 123

Preface

Iago: Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.
Othello (5.2)

THE PAPERS SELECTED for this volume explore some of the diverse, devious, deviant, or downright dangerous ways in which language is either sensed or seen, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, strikingly to depart from the paradigm of "civil conversation" in early modern art and society. The aim is to chart singularites and strategies which may be common or relevant to very different domains.

To chart language and otherness in Renaissance culture, the authors have adopted several angles of approach:

1. language as other in utterance (slander, insult, prophecy, blasphemy, underworld cant...);

2. language confronted or associated with egregious figures of the other (the bastard, the ghost, the cadaver, the boy actor as Elizabethan stage girl...);

3. language whose destiny makes it other: via translation into foreign tongues, gesture or music.

In this effort to stake out differences between angles of approach, several of these papers deal with kindred topics using diverse conceptual frameworks. Essays by Marie-Dominique Garnier and Simon Ryle, are solely devoted to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. While Garnier returns to the role of another language, be it French or Lear's "*lingua franca*", following Philippa Berry's seminal work on *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings*, Ryle dwells on the meaning—or what he calls the "spatial implications"—of the Dover Cliff episode, basing his analysis on documented stage and film versions of the scene and on Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the Other.

Two other essays, by Viviana Comensoli and Pascale Drouet, discuss cony-catching pamphlets by Thomas Dekker, Robert Greene or Thomas Harman. While these popular works claim to embody the language of the underworld, providing the readers with (partial) translations of a highly inventive language, their authors also stake out a lucrative editorial territory. François Mallet uses works by Dekker, Greene, and a passing reference to *King Lear*, in an attempt at charting the concept of *curiositas* in Renaissance culture, using lexicography, geography and philosophy, to demonstrate how inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness were linked in Elizabethan London.

Several papers included in this volume dwell on other important literary figures, stressing the role of an imaginary or figurative Other, or interpreting figurative language. Victoria Bladen speaks of Andrew Marvell's "arboreal language", exploring links between poetry, architecture and Scripture with the Green Men motif. Sermin Lynn Meskill analyses Ben Jonson's complex relationship, or obsession, with an imaginary Other: the "envious reader" particularly prone, the poet fears, slanderously to misinterpret his *œuvre*. Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin examines the second stage of the process, when slander leads to insult, and proposes a convincing explication of an intriguing Shakespearean insult in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Lastly, François Lecercle and Yan Brailowsky discuss the language of past, present and future by analysing utterances of ghosts, cadavers and prophets on the stage. Lecercle describes the language of ghosts ("*ombres*") in French and English seventeenth-century plays, explaining their enduring popularity on the stage. Brailowsky wonders whether prophecy in Shakespeare's plays has specific linguistic attributes: is it as

different from ordinary language as Shakespeare's prophetic characters claim it to be?

These diverse angles of approach to the question of language and otherness in Renaissance culture are taken up by Ann Lecercle in the opening essay. Lecercle argues that the Other—as in "strange", but also "alien"—serves to underline the topological, as well as dramatic, linguistic and psychoanalytic issues at stake in early modern plays such as *Hamlet.* She recalls Lacan's contention that language is an "experience of alienation"—hence this volume's topic: language *and* otherness, but also language *as* otherness.

1
Cartographies of Otherness : Placing Parameters

1 The site of the other

GIVEN THE VASTNESS of the terrain proposed for exploration, it is hardly conceivable to proceed without a preliminary charting of the domain proposed for study. This introduction therefore undertakes to survey the general outlines of its topology. (In proceeding thus, I follow in the footsteps of the latest instalment of Lacan's Seminar, entitled *D'un Autre à l'autre*,[1] "From the Other to the other", where the opening chapter is devoted to "The topology of the other".)

After his visit to an Elizabethan theatre, the Renaissance traveller Thomas Platter merely remarked that the "pleasure" he had derived resided in the learning of *strange things*.[2] In Shakespeare's contribution to the art sampled by Platter on the London stage, the playwright elevates the strategy of *immersion in the alien* to the status of a required initiation into the knowledge of self.

For the *tragic*, ontological side of this immersion, one has but to recall

[1] LACAN Jacques, *D'un Autre à l'autre*, "Le Séminaire XVI", MILLER Jacques-Alain (ed.), Paris, Seuil, 2006.

[2] Quoted in MULLANEY Steven, *The Place of the Stage*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1981, p. 76.

2

« Castalian King Urinal Hector of Greece » : la « langue latrine » dans *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Thou art a castalian king urinal – Hector of Greece, my boy !

(2.3.30–31)[1]

A VOULOIR PRONONCER ce chapelet que l'Hôte de la Jarretière adresse au Docteur Caius dans *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, on se sent des accointances avec le pauvre Peter Quince de *A Midsummer Night's Dream* qui, déclamant avec application le Prologue de *Pyramus and Thisbe*, ne parvient qu'à débiter des sons, sans jamais réussir à prendre le contrôle de son texte. « A sound but not in government » (*MND*, 5.1.123) : voilà qui pourrait bien décrire la façon dont on est forcé d'articuler ce chapelet éminemment Bakhtinien, mi-élogieux, mi-injurieux[2], qui est censé mettre en confiance un Caius qui s'apprête, rappelons-

[1] Nous utilisons ici le texte *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, MELCHIORI Giorgio (dir.), Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, 2000 (appelé ensuite Arden 3).

[2] Voir BAKHTINE Mikhaïl, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Âge et sous la Renaissance*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, où Bakhtine parle du « double ton du mot », p. 428 et sq.

3

"A Kind of Music" : The Representation of Cant in Early Modern Rogue Literature

THE ROGUE LITERATURE of early modern England originated in the mid-sixteenth century and was popular with a variety of audiences. Early examples of the genre are Robert Copland's *The Highway to the Spital-house* (c. 1535–1536), ?Gilbert Walker's *A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play* (1552, 1555), ?John Awdeley's *Fraternity of Vagabonds* (?1561, 1565, 1575), and Thomas Harman's *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds* (1561–1573). Later contributions are the cony-catching pamphlets of Robert Greene, Thomas Dekker, and numerous other writers, which were popular from the late sixteenth century until the 1620s. The genre shares early modern culture's fascination with discovery and decipherment, as manifested in the trope of bringing hidden things to light. A staple of all rogue literature is the "discovery" of London's underworld of vagrants, which the author, in the service of society, renders by means of catalogues illustrating the classes of rogues and descriptions of their habits and secret language, namely cant. The pamphleteers' claims to originality and historical veracity in the later rogue books especially, and their persistent claims to be presenting subject matter that is strictly for

4

Le jargon des colporteurs : de la langue secrète à la représentation pittoresque

QUE SAIT-ON de l'argot des gueux, du parler des mauvais pauvres ? Que sait-on de cette langue secrète désignée dans l'Angleterre de la Renaissance par « cant », « canting » ou « pedlar's French », et sur laquelle les dictionnaires sont peu diserts ? Dans *l'Oxford English Dictionary*, « pedlar's French » est sommairement défini par : « the language used by vagabonds and thieves among themselves ; rogues' or thieves' cant ; hence, unintelligible jargon, gibberish[1] ». Dans cette expression, « pedlar's French », que Marie-Thérèse Jones-Davies traduit par « le français des mercelots[2] », s'entend une connotation négative double due à la mauvaise presse des colporteurs d'une part, au français d'autre part qui suggère l'équation « autres mots, autres mœurs » comme le soulignent les différents composés de « French » désignant les maladies

[1] « Pedlar », *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols., London, Book Club Associates, 1971, 1979, 2 : 2112. Première occurrence datée de 1530.

[2] JONES-DAVIS Marie-Thérèse, *Un Peintre de la vie londonienne. Thomas Dekker (circa 1572–1632)*, 2 vols., Paris, Didier, coll. « Etudes Anglaises », 1958, 1 : 149.

5

"Lest My Brain Turn": Lying about Dover Cliff, and Locating the Other in *King Lear*

1 Introduction: Lying and Nothingness

In this essay I will explore spatial implications of the famous Dover Cliff scene of *King Lear*. Edgar's imaginary cliff functions within the narrative as an improvisation of an internally generated space made to protect suicidal Gloucester. I will argue, in deriving its existence in conventions of stage poetry, the cliff calls on early modern stage patterns of space representation, and thus fixes Gloucester's blindness as an avatar of the audience's suspension of disbelief. I will investigate how non-dramatic visual representations of the play return repeatedly to Edgar's non-existent cliff, and how the conversion of the cliff to the genre codes of film affects the scene's location of the other in non-space. I will suggest Edgar's technique of protecting his father by falsehood seems to anticipate the manner in which responsibility for the other precedes, in Levinas, the question of ontology.

Shakespeare assembles an incredible concentration of signifiers for the scene. A madman leads a blind man to the edge of a great precipice, the iconographic end to the kingdom of England, where he hopes to throw

6

At the "frank heart" of *King Lear*: Shakespeare's French As a Second Language

Am I in France?
King Lear (4.7.76)

Affecting Language

"WELCOME to Paris!" (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 1.2.22): the King of France's welcome to Young Bertram, Count Rossilion, is quickly fleshed out with a series of compliments addressed to a man whom "frank nature, rather curious than in haste, hath well composed" (20–21). Both terms, "frank" and "curious" are identifiable for French students as *faux-amis*, deceptive cognates, which can neither be translated as *franc* nor as *curieux*, but rather as equivalents of "generous" and "caring". The same curious term "curiosity" recurs in the opening lines of *King Lear,* in the first exchange between Kent and Gloucester:

> KENT. I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

7

Curiositas et dynamique du désir dans le Londres élisabéthain

S'INTERROGER sur la *curiositas* à l'époque élisabéthaine, c'est se pencher sur une époque de seuil et de transition. Seuil, parce que l'usage du terme ne devient systématique que dans la seconde moitié du dix-septième et au dix-huitième siècles, accompagnant le plus souvent les titres de catalogues, de traités (comme le traité d'architecture de Palladio, publié à Londres en 1668 seulement) ou d'enquêtes — ce qu'à la même époque on nomme en France « recherches curieuses ». Transition, parce que bien sûr le terme lui-même de *curiosity* (et ses dérivés), bien qu'assez rare, remonte déjà loin, étant attesté chez Chaucer, et, sous sa forme latine, chez Plaute, et qu'il a eu le temps de se charger de connotations multiples voire contradictoires.

Indice de la rareté du mot dans la langue quotidienne orale, on peut noter d'emblée que dans tout Shakespeare, lorsque les mots *curious*, *curiosity* ou *curiously* sont employés, ils le sont toujours par un aristocrate ou un membre de la *gentry*, jamais par un personnage de classe inférieure ; c'est déjà un indice, d'une part, de la rareté et étrangeté du mot dans la langue élisabéthaine ; mais cela révèle aussi que les types de comportement ou les réalités recouverts par le terme sont encore

8

Arboreal language and otherness in Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1651)

Introduction

Across Renaissance culture was a language of trees that fused the botanical with the metaphysical, planted the symbolic in the terrain of the observed, and articulated a green resurrection. The language originated primarily from a series of significant arboreal metaphors in biblical text, articulated in visual art and literary texts from the early Christian period, throughout the medieval and into the early modern. These metaphors, which used arboreal analogies to express spiritual concepts, provided the matrix of a green language that from the fifteenth century was also drawn on in secular contexts to articulate political or general moral concepts.

In 1651, the English poet Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) was resident at the country estate of Nun Appleton in Yorkshire, having returned from several years of traveling on the Continent.[1] He was employed as

[1] Biographical summaries and lists of biographical studies from the critical literature are provided in the editions of Marvell's poetry by Nigel Smith and Ormerod and Wortham. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, Smith Nigel (ed.), London, Pearson

9

Prophetic Utterance in Elizabethan Culture

John R. Searle tries to justify his attempt at describing "speech acts" in the opening lines of his book on this linguistic phenomenon:

> What is the difference between a meaningful string of words and a meaningless one? What is it for something to be true? or false? ... in some form or other some such questions must make sense; for we do know that people communicate, that they do say things and sometimes mean what they say, that they are, on occasion at least, understood, that they ask questions, issue orders, make promises, and give apologies, that people's utterances do relate to the world in ways we can describe by characterizing the utterances as being true or false or meaningless, stupid, exaggerated or whatnot. And if these things do happen it follows that it is possible for them to happen, and if it is possible for them to happen it ought to be possible to pose and answer the questions which examine that possibility.[1]

Searle's way of talking of the possibility for "things" to "happen" is an early suggestion of what he will go on to analyze with the notion of the

[1] Searle John R., *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963, p. 3.

10

Signes scéniques et trouble identitaire : l'altérité de l'ombre tragique

Si l'on veut faire la cartographie de l'altérité, aux seizième et dix-septième siècles, on peut difficilement éviter de s'intéresser à la figure du revenant. Elle suppose en effet ce rapport d'intimité perturbée sans lequel il ne saurait y avoir d'altérité véritable, car n'est vraiment « autre » que ce qui est potentiellement identique. L'autre, c'est le même en tant que non reconnaissable, défiguré au point qu'on hésite à se reconnaître en lui. Sans ce mélange d'intimité et d'altération radicale, il n'y a pas d'« autres », il n'y a que des étrangers. Quand ils se manifestent aux vivants, les morts sont précisément dans ce rapport de familiarité interdite : ils ont été ce que nous sommes, ils sont ce que nous deviendrons inévitablement et c'est pourquoi leur rencontre est si perturbante.

On sait qu'à la Renaissance, il y a un lieu que les morts ont envahi : le théâtre, et en particulier la tragédie, sur laquelle s'est abattue une véritable épidémie de fantômes ou plutôt, comme on les nomme alors, d'« ombres ». Il peut pourtant sembler incongru de considérer ce tropisme nécrophile de la tragédie dans le cadre d'une enquête sur l'altérité car la tragédie est, à première vue, un assez mauvais exemple, puisque les ombres y sont moins les manifestations d'une altérité troublante que

11

"And if that Envie barke at thee": Slanderous Reading and the Case of Ben Jonson

In both *Richard II* and *Hamlet*, Shakespeare addresses the consequences of slander on a person's name and fame. In the very first scene of *Richard II*, Mowbray accuses Bolingbroke of being a "slanderous coward and a villain" since Bolingbroke has publicly denounced Mowbray as "a traitor and a miscreant".[1] The play underlines the pernicious effects of slander upon reputation, both in the present and in posterity. Mowbray refuses to "forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed" (156), citing the necessity to revenge himself on the injury slander has already wreaked upon his "fair name" (167): "I am disgraced, impeached and baffled here, / Pierced to the soul with Slander's venomed spear" (170–171).[2] In Act 5, when Bolingbroke, now King Henry, is presented with the proofs of King Richard's murder he tells his henchman: "Exton, I thank thee not, for thou has wrought / A deed of slander with thy fatal hand / Upon my head and all this famous land" (5.6.34–36). The

[1] *King Richard II*, Forker Charles R. (ed.), London, Arden Shakespeare, 2002, 1.1.61, p. 39. Subsequent line references to the play will be included in the text.

[2] Mowbray later tells his king that: "The purest treasure mortal times afford / Is spotless reputation, that away, / Men are but gilded loam or painted clay" (1.1.177–8).

Index

Abraham, Lyndy, 109n., 112n., 125
An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds, 34
Adonis, 117n., 126n.
Affergan, Francis, 49
Africa, 173–174
Allen, Don Cameron, 111n., 126n.
Ambrosius Merlin, 137n.
Ameisenowa, Zofja, 103n.
Anderson, William, 117n., 122n., 124n., 127n.
Antonella da Messina, 108
Apelles, 170
Apuleius, 88
Asclepius, 22–23
Ashrea, 115
Attis, 117n., 124
Augustine, 95, 104n., 152
Austin, J. L., 132
Awdeley, John, 31, 35, 46, 47, 49
Axtel, Daniel, 111
Aydelotte, Frank, 32

Bacon, Francis, 61, 99, 132, 134
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 15, 17n., 35
Baldwin, William, *see* Mirror for Magistrates
Barbour, Reid, 39n.
Barker, Lawrence, 90–93, 95, 96
Barry, James, 63
Barthes, Roland, 149n.
Basford, Katherine, 122n.
Baudelaire, Charles, 57n.
Bazin, André, 71–72, 74
Beier, A. L., 37n.
Du Bellay, Joachim, 20n.
Bellini, Giovanni, 108
Bene, Carmelo, 11
Berry, Edward, 28n.
Berry, Philippa, 80–81
Bess of Hardwick, 110n.
Birkett, Michael, 73n.
Blanchot, Maurice, 145–146
Boose, Lynda E., 25n.
Bouts, Dirck, 68
Bowers, R., 18n.
Braudel, Fernand, 8
Brook, Peter, 73–76
Brown, Ford Madox, 64
Browne, Thomas, 126n.
Burke, Peter, 37n.
Byblos, 127n.

Céard, Jean, 138–139, 145n.
Cast, David, 171n.
Castiglione, Baldassare, 17, 21–22
Castile, *see* Spain
Cavell, Stanley, 144n.
Cecil, Robert, 97, 99
Cenni di Francesco, 106n.

Cernunnos, 124
Chabrol, Claude, 149n.
Charles I, 76, 111
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 87
Cicero, 94, 137
Clair, Jean, 171n.
Clark, Sandra, 36n.
Coleby, Robert, 73
Collet, John, 23
Combe, Thomas, 19
Comodi, Andrea, 171n.
Constantine I, 106n.
Cook, Roger, 103n., 107n., 117n., 127n.
Copernicus, Nicolas, 61
Copland, Robert, 27, 31, 37, 40
Coras, Jean de, 163n.
Cornwallis, Sir William, 20n.
Cospi, Francesco, 99
Cotgrave, Randle, 12
Cotton, Nancy, 27n.
Cotton, William, 27
Craik, T. W., 16, 16n.
Crane, David, 16, 16n.
Craven, Hawes, 64
Cromwell, Oliver, 111, 113, 115
Cummings, Robert, 114, 119
Curie, Pierre, 9

Daniel, 107, 112
Daniel, Samuel, 175n.
Davenall, Tony, 72, 73
Davis, Nathalie Zemon, 163n.
Dee, John, 142
Dekker, Thomas, 31, 46–47, 50–58
  The Belman of London, 33, 51–53
  Lantern and Candlelight, 33, 36, 39–40, 43–44, 48–49, 53–54
  The Roaring Girl, 46, 50, 55, 56
  The Wonderful Year, 94
Derrida, Jacques, 67
Descartes, René, 99
Diana, 119
Dionne, Craig, 34n.
Dionysos, 124–125, 126n., 127n.
Dobin, Howard, 138n., 140n.
Doglio, Maria-Luisa, 153n.
Doidge Willcock, Gladys, 42n.
Donno, Elizabeth Story, 18–21
Drayton, Michael, 176
Drouet, Pascale, 34n., 53n.
Dubrow, Heather, 34n.
Dusinberre, Juliet, 18n.

Edwards, Graham, 111n.
Eliade, Mircea, 52n.
Elizabeth I, 18, 24, 29, 94, 110
Ellinghausen, Laurie, 55
Empson, William, 114n.
Erasmus, 20n.
Esculape, *see* Asclepius
Eyck, Jan van, 112n.

Fabbri, Paolo, 153n.
Fairfax, Mary, 102
Fairfax, Thomas, 102, 111, 116, 126, 128
Ferber, Michael, 103n.
Ferguson, F. S., 105n.
de Feynes, Henri, 96
Fineman, Joel, 9
Flavius Josephus, 160
Fleming, Abraham, 95n.
Fludd, Robert, 120n.
Fly, Richard, 66
Foix de Candale, 126
Forsyth, Elliott, 155n.
France, 75–77, 83, 86
Frankis, P. J., 28n.
Freeman, Rosemary, 110n.
Freud, Sigmund, 83, 144
Fumerton, Patricia, 32n.

Gaddi, Agnolo, 106n.
Galen, 22–23
Garrick, David, 73
Gemma, Cornelius, 139
Genette, Gérard, 52
Geoffrey of Monmouth, 136
Geremek, Bronislaw, 49
Gilbert, Allan H., 170
Girard, Didier, 28
Goltzius, Hendrik, 105n.
Grafton, Anthony, 98
Greece, 17, 18, 24
Green, Jonathon, 51, 56

Greene, Robert, 31, 43, 46, 57
Ciceronis Amor, 100
The Defence of Cony-catching, 57
A Notable Discovery of Cozenage, 38–39
Guerre, Martin, 163n.
Guiana, 92

Habsburg, 8
Hale, John, 41
Hall, John, 109n.
Hall, Jonathan, 20n., 24
Hall, Joseph, 92
Hansen, Adam, 38
Harding, Mike, 127n.
Harington, John, 18–29, 175n.
Harman, Thomas, 31, 32, 34, 36–37, 46–50, 53, 56–57
Harris, Stephen L., 117n.
Harrison, William, 33
Harsnett, Samuel, 61, 84
Hawkins, Henry, 109n.
Hegel, G. W. F., 96
Henriette-Marie de Bourbon, 76
Here beginneth the seinge of Urynes, 22n.
Hermes Trismegistus, 125
Hewson, John, 111
Hirst, Derek, 102n.
Holderness, Graham, 73n.
Hollande, *see* Netherlands
Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches, 41
Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 65
Horace, 174
Horowitz, Maryanne Cline, 103n.
Horus, 127n.
Howarth, David, 112n.
Howatson, M. C., 119n., 126n., 127n.
Hugo, Herman, 105n.
Hunter, G. K., 61n., 78n., 81, 86

Indies, the, 93
Ingegneri, A., 153n.
Ireland, 8
Irving, Henry, 64
Iselin, Pierre, 29n.
Isis, 127n.
Iversen, Erik, 126n.

James I, 94, 97
James, O., 117n.
James VI of Scotland, 169
Jenkins, Harold, 151n.
Jerome, 104n.
John the Baptist, 107
Jones, Inigo, 62
Jones, Richard Foster, 42n.
Jones-Davies, Marie-Thérèse, 45, 48n., 58n.
Jonson, Ben, 165–178
Bartholomew Fair, 175–176
Entertainment at Britain's Burse, 97–99
Love's Triumph Through Callipolis, 112n.
The Masque of Blacknesse, 173–174
Poetaster, 171, 174
Timber, Or Discoveries, 175–176
Jorgens, Jack, 73, 74
Judges, A. V., 32n., 36n., 40n., 47n., 56n.
Jung, C. G., 105

Kaplan, M. Lindsay, 166, 167n.
Kean, Edmund, 73
Keats, John, 66
Kelley, Edward, 142
Kemble, Charles, 73
Kenny, Neil, 88
Kinney, Arthur F., 32n., 33n., 38n., 39n.
Knight Miller, Henry, 20n.
Knowles, James, 97, 97n.
Koch, Marc, 36n.
Kors, Alan Charles, 140n.
Kozintsev, Grigori, 73

La Taille, Jean de
Saül le furieux, 155, 158–162
Labhardt, André, 88
Lacan, Jacques, 5, 13
Ladner, Gerhart B., 107–109n.
Laporte, Dominique, 26
Laroque, François, 17n., 27
Larson, Charles, 111n., 114
Lavocat, Françoise, 152n.

Lecercle, François, 152n., 153n.
Leland, John, 20n.
Leonard, E. M., 35
Leonardo da Vinci, 108
Levinas, Emmanuel, 59, 62, 66–68, 74–76
Lilly, William, 23
Lipsius, Justus, 88
Littré, Émile, 85
Livy, 108
London, 7–9, 90, 95, 99
    Thames, 25–26
Lucian of Samosata, 170–171

Malinowski, Bronislaw, 49
Manley, Lawrence, 34n.
Marlowe, Christopher, 100
Marotti, Francesco, 153n.
Mars, 111
Marshall, William, 112
Marvell, Andrew
    Upon Appleton House, 101–102, 110–129
    Upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector, 113–115
Mary Stuart, 110, 169
Maslen, R. W., 41n.
Masolino da Panicale, 106n.
Massing, Jean-Michel, 171n.
Matthew, Thomas, 105n.
Matthews, John, 122n., 124n.
McCaffery, Steve, 142n.
McEachern, Claire, 40, 41n.
McKerrow, R. B., 105n.
McLuhan, Marshall, 68–70
Medici, 8
Medvedev, P. N., 35
Melchiori, Giorgio, 15n., 16, 26, 27
Mentz, Steve, 34n.
Michelangelo, 108, 109
Middleton, Thomas, 13, 57
    The Triumphs of Health and Prosperity, 95
Mikalachki, Jodi, 56
Miller, Jonathan, 72
Millet, Olivier, 152n.
The Mirror for Magistrates, 138
Montaigne, Michel de, 7
Montmouth, Geoffrey of, 80
Moskos, Leo, 105n.
Mullaney, Steven, 5n., 8n.

Nashe, Thomas, 27
Netherlands, the, 92
Neumann, Erich, 105n., 125n.

Oliver, Harold James, 16, 16n.
Ormerod, David, 102n., 111n., 114n., 125–127n.
Osiris, 117n., 124, 126n., 127
Ottoman Empire, 8
Ovid, 174
    Fasti, 119n.
    Fasti, 111
    Metamorphoses, 124n.
    Metamorphoses, 13

Palladio, Andrea, 87
Panofsky, Erwin, 68, 70–71, 74, 108n.
Paris, *see* France
Parker, Patricia, 23n.
Partridge, J. B., 64n.
Paster, Gail Kern, 26
Pays-Bas, *see* Netherlands
Peacham, Henry, 109n.
Peter, 90
Peters, Edward, 88, 140n.
Petrarch, 119n.
Philip II of Spain, 17
Piero della Francesca, 106n.
Platter, Thomas, 5
Platzner, Gloria, 117n.
Plautus, 87
Pliny, 112n.
Plutarch, 91–92, 137, 174n.
Poe, Edgar Allan, 148–151, 156
Pollock, Jonathan, 28
Pompilio, Arnaldo, 153n.
Porter, Roy, 37n.
Prescott, Anne Lake, 167n.
Pritchard, Allan, 102
Prosser, Eleanor, 157n., 159
Pseudo-Cyprian, 104n.
Pseudo-Tertullian, 104n.

Pugliatti, Paola, 39n.
Puttenham, George, 42–43, 136, 166, 174

Quarles, Francis, 105n.

Rabelais, François, 13, 20n., 27, 143
Radd, Ronald, 73
Ralegh, Walter, 61
Rasula, Jed, 142n.
Reno, Stephen, 104n.
Reynolds, Bryan, 34n.
Richard I (Richard the Lionheart), 17
Richmond, H. M., 114n., 122n.
Rid, Samuel, 35–37n., 40n., 56, 57
Ripa, Cesare, 109, 171
Roberts, J. A., 28n.
Rodway, Norman, 72
Romanyshyn, Robert, 69, 70
Rostvig, Maren-Sofie, 114n.
Runciman, John, 63

Sabbattini, Nicolo, 153n.
Salgādo, Gāmini, 32n.
Salino, B., 11n.
Samuel, 155, 161, 162
    Saül le furieux, *see* La Taille
Saul, 155, 161
    Saül le furieux, *see* La Taille
Schama, Simon, 103n., 117n.
Schiller, Gertrud, 103n., 125n.
Schmitt, Jean-Claude, 152n.
Schongauer, Martin, 105n.
Schrade, Leo, 151n.
Scot, Reginald, 138, 143
Scott-Warren, Jason, 19n.
Searle, John R., 131
Seneca, 93, 151, 156, 162
Set, 127n.
Shakespeare, William, 7–10, 13, 87, 110
    2 Henry IV, 6
    Pericles, 110n.
    All's Well That Ends Well, 77
    As You like It, 18
    Coriolanus, 28
    Cymbeline, 110n.
    Cymbeline, 100
    Falstaff, 13, 18–29, 52, 54
    Hamlet, 10–13, 66, 82, 150, 153, 155–159, 165–166, 168
    2 Henry IV, 54
    Henry V, 82
    Henry IV, 29
    Henry V, 18, 29
    2 Henry VI, 136
    Henry VI (series), 133
    Julius Caesar, 133–135, 139
    King John, 84
    King Lear, 6, 10, 59–86, 88
    Macbeth, 13, 134, 135
    The Merry Wives of Windsor, 15–29
    A Midsummer Night's Dream, 6, 13, 15, 28
    Much Ado About Nothing, 8
    Richard II, 110n.
    Richard II, 8, 9, 133, 143, 165–166, 168
    Sonnets, 172
    Troilus and Cressida, 18
    Twelfth Night, 18n.
    Twelfth Night, 11
    The Winter's Tale, 146
Shaughnessy, R., 73n.
Shepherd, Geoffrey, 41n.
Sidney, Philip, 41, 140–142, 169
Slack, Paul, 33
Smelik, K. A. D, 152n.
Smith, Nigel, 101n., 102n., 114n., 126n., 127n.
Smith, P. S., 18n.
Smith, Peter J., 18n., 22n., 25n., 27n.
Sommi, Leone de', 153n.
Spacks, Patricia Meyer, 167
Spain, 17
Spenser, Edmund, 167
    The Fairie Queene, 168–172
    The Shepherd's Calendar, 169
Spinoza, Baruch, 143
Steadman, J. M., 28n.
Stewart, Stanley, 104n., 106n.
Sutton, Shaun, 72n.
Swain, Margaret, 110n.
Swanton, Michael, 104n.

Taylor, Barry, 34, 47
Thames, *see* London, *see* London
Thanhouser, Edward, 72
Thomas, D. B., 36n.
Thomas, Keith, 140n., 144
Thoth, 125
Tite-Live, *see* Livy
Troy, 17, 18
Tudeau-Clayton, Margaret, 8n., 16n.
Turkey, *see* Ottoman Empire

Ulysses Upon Ajax, 21, 27

Villon, François, 55n.
Virbius, 119
Virgil, 95, 174
Virginia (United States), 93
Vitruvius, 117n.
Voragine, Jacobus de, 106n., 125n.

Waage, Frederick O., 39n.
Walker, Alice, 42n.
Walker, Gilbert, 31, 32, 46
Wallace, John, 114n.
Walsham, Alexandra, 117n.
Ward, Frederick B., 72
Webb, Alan, 73
West, William N., 35–37, 51, 57, 58n.
Williams, Deanne, 86
Wilson, Edward, 28n.
Wilson, Richard, 82–83
Wither, George, 167n.
Wolfe, John, 22n.
Woodbridge, Linda, 34, 36, 37n.
Wortham, Christopher, 102n., 111n., 114n., 125–127n.
Wright, Craig, 119n.

Yorkshire, 101, 122

Zwicker, Steven, 102n.