Kenneth Gross. ***Shakespeare's Noise***. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 282p.

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In *Shakespeare's Noise* Gross gives us an interesting but unsettling look at Shakespeare's use of rumor, gossip, "slander, defamation, insult, vituperation, malediction, and curse" (1). Gross shows how Shakespeare explores language's power to damage, expose, and violently disorder our social world. Gross chooses the word "noise" for its older connotations of disturbance, quarrel, and scandal, as well as to evoke the human voice in theatrical productions. He argues that this staged "noise" invigorates and enlivens drama for an audience trapped in a social world of propriety and blandishments, and that slander and the fear of calumny are important negative components of the early modern, humanistic notions of fame and honor.

If Gross' argument seems a bit self-evident in this brief synopsis, his treatment of individual plays quickly shows how innovative and fresh his approach is. *Hamlet* becomes a world of deadly words, words, words, where the poison poured in the King's ear leaches out of the mouth of his dangerous son. Slanderous rumor permeates the play, ghostlike, infecting listeners and turning young Hamlet into a vulnerable, yet cutting, libeler and satirist. Invoking Castiglione's *The Courtier*, Gross shows how "Hamlet brings within the world of the Danish court a truly corrosive network of puns and jests, a labyrinth of fragmentary stories and allegories, mutterings, marred resonances and allusions, haunting and infectious innuendoes—if we have the ears to hear them" (11). The noise in *Hamlet* builds until the ghosts are exorcised, then the rest is silence.

In his second chapter ("The Book of the Slanderer") Gross gives a broader, new historical "thick description" of slander and libel in early modern culture, which adds depth to his subsequent readings of *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, and *King Lear*. As with *Hamlet*, the focus of each subsequent chapter is on the dangerous and damaging power of language, and like his treatment of the melancholy Dane, each sets its respective play in a new light. Gross convincingly shows the early modern preoccupation with slander and demonstrates how that cultural anxiety adds tension and vitality to Shakespeare's works.

Gross adds a coda ("An Imaginary Theater") concerning the current theater and the continuing role of libel and slander in drama. In fact, he goes beyond linking the early modern and postmodern in claiming that "noise" has always been an integral part of theater and always will be. Jumping across literary historical peri-

ods from the ancient Greeks to postmodern productions of *Hamlet*, this portion of the study is the least contiguous. The coda has the musing quality of an outline for a future study, to which I look forward, but touches on far too broad a topic to cover in its 14 pages.

Shakespeare's Noise provides an entry point into familiar plays that leads us to new terrain and better appreciation. The study has made me reevaluate some of what I "know" about Shakespeare—as the best scholarship should—and has enlivened my reading (and I hope my teaching) of Shakespeare's plays. The groundwork Gross sets down readily applies to works he does not discuss, and has given me new inroads into plays such as *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, and *Julius Caesar*. This book belongs on your Shakespeare shelf. ❋