

Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 917th meeting of the Shakespeare Club, took place on Tuesday 10 April 2018. The speaker was Professor Nigel Wood, his subject 'Shakespeare and the Digital Revolution: Text and Performance Possibilities'. The meeting was chaired by Mrs Sylvia Morris.

The ideas came from Professor Wood's personal experience, having worked on electronic texts of Shakespeare for actors and performance and from using what he termed 'digital humanistic techniques' in research. But he began in the theatre, posing director Peter Brook's question 'when do plays end?' At the curtain-call, when the house lights go up, or when the last line is spoken? Professor Wood argued that a play existed as long as we remember it, when it offered a provocation to an audience's memory and, on the page, this was a function of radial rather than linear reading. At any point in a play there can be a radiation out to the world beyond the play. He spoke about watching *Twelfth Night* at the time of Mad Cow disease in the 1990s. Now digital big data can take us beyond human memory connecting anything to anything, though Professor Wood warned of the danger that human interpretation could take a back seat to algorithmic processes producing 'post-human' results.

As an example of how the digital could be a positive factor in understanding Shakespeare's plays, he looked at Shakespeare's use of 'fancy's queen' in *Twelfth Night* and 'kind/gentle' in *The Merchant of Venice*, showing how words gained resonance by meaningful repetition both within the text and from contemporary works. He quoted several digital philosophers especially the work on symbolic modelling by Lawley and Tompkins in *Metaphors in Mind*, which provided a key to how we look at the early modern mind. But no matter how interesting these results were in themselves, digital enquiry must always come back to the judgement of the reader/critic to ask 'is it worth it?'

After a wide-ranging discussion of the pros and cons of living in a digital world and a vote of thanks from the chair, the meeting ended at 9pm and the audience retired for refreshments.