

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 932nd meeting of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon took place on Tuesday 10 March 2020, when Shakespeare scholar Viv Thomas spoke on "*Shakespeare's Soliloquies and Narrations*". The meeting was chaired by Susan Brock.

Mr Thomas considered the range of speeches that can be thought of as soliloquies, in which one character speaks directly to the audience. Soliloquies have an ancient pedigree, appearing in both Classical Greek and medieval morality plays. Shakespeare used them in a huge variety of ways, their length varying from three words to seventy-one lines. The longest comes in *Henry VI Part 3*, spoken by the Duke of Gloucester, and the same character addresses the audience in one of the most famous of soliloquies, "Now is the winter of our discontent" a kind of prologue to *Richard III*. The soliloquy allows him to insinuate himself with the audience who immediately form an uneasy alliance with him as he sets out his murderous intentions.

Another character who builds up a relationship with the audience through his soliloquies is Falstaff, who has eleven. Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* uses soliloquies to comment on the play's action, giving the audience a different perspective from those of the main characters. Other characters explain their changing state of mind as in King Lear's "Poor naked wretches" or discuss ideas with themselves and the audience as Brutus does when he speaks "It must be by his death" in *Julius Caesar*. These great speeches allow the characters to contrast their inner world with external reality.

Narrations, in which one character tells a story or fills in background for the audience, are different but equally powerful. Examples include Othello's speech to the Venetian senate and Gertrude's emotional account of the drowning of Ophelia in *Hamlet*.

Mr Thomas interspersed his talk with recitals of many of the soliloquies from a wide variety of Shakespeare's plays and the meeting closed at 9.08 pm.