Despite their diverse range of subjects, this collection does a better than average job of bringing together diverse essays into a coherent whole. The authors consider and even comment on the work of other contributors. The essays presuppose too much background knowledge for the average undergraduate, particularly when one considers the chronological and geographical spread of the material, but the documentary appendices would provide useful fodder for an undergraduate paper and colorful illustration of important themes for anyone teaching undergraduates. Overall, this collection will be valuable both to seasoned scholars and to graduate students and others just beginning study in this field.


Reviewed by: Gabriel Egan, Loughborough University

The first eighteen of the twenty-six essays in this collection are about editing Shakespeare, the volume's theme. John Jowett (1–19) gives a brief history of twentieth-century editing of the plays with due weight to Lukas Erne's radical thesis that Shakespeare might have been writing for readers as well as actors. Edward Pechter (20–38) attacks the intellectual bases of the New Textualism (or Newer Bibliography, as he calls it) and defends traditional New Bibliography. For Pechter, the Foucauldian rejection of authorial authority was right to turn attention toward textual reception rather than creation, but the New Textualists read Foucault as if he discouraged the pursuit of meaning altogether. Randall McLeod and Paul Werstine would prefer readers to approach Shakespeare's plays via facsimiles and diplomatic reprints, but since critical editions embody not only objective knowledge but the subjectively critical too—that being the very reason McLeod and Werstine dislike them—this amounts to a ban on interpretation.

Stanley Wells (39–48) offers histories of the series of editions for which he has been general editor, making valuable distinctions that an outsider would not otherwise notice between the markets and publishers in the United Kingdom and the United States. Patricia Parker (49–62) points out that the 1623 Folio Twelfth Night has inconsistencies and lacunae that editors since the eighteenth century have emended away and that are overdue for reexamination. When the faked letter is first read aloud its famous line is not "Some are born great" but "Some are become great," and successive seventeenth-century reprints that changed other lines left this alone. Tom Rooney's essay (63–68) describes how Orson Welles and his former prep-school teacher made a collaborative edition of three plays called Everybody's Shakespeare, aimed at children and ahead of its time in being performance-centered. MacDonald P. Jackson's contribution (69–78) is yet further proof that Hand D in the manuscript of the play Sir Thomas More is Shakespeare. Regarding the infamous wife/wise crux in The Tempest, Ronald A. Tumelson II (79–90) decides that both are right, which will help only the most postmodern of editors. On the same play, Andrew Gurr (91–107) thinks that Shakespeare's subtle prosody is hard to recover from the Folio because other agents in transmission—scribe Ralph Crane and printshop compositors—could scarcely tell which bits were verse and which prose.

Tom Lockwood (108–23) revisits the "Ireland" forgeries to give a "materialist" account of them: essentially, descriptions of their physical forms as manuscripts, transcripts, and printings. Julia Paraizs (124–35) thinks Alexander Chalmers an unjustly neglected nineteenth-century editor of Shakespeare, with Romantic leanings. Also biographical is Jeanne Addison Roberts's (136–46) account of Charlotte Endymion Porter and Helen Armstrong
Clarke, who between 1903 and 1913 published three editions of Shakespeare. Cary DiPietro’s essay (147–56) is not as broad as its title promises (“The Shakespeare Edition in Industrial Capitalism”) but his account of the Cambridge New Shakespeare series illuminates the damage done to scholarship by E. K. Chambers’s thundering against “disintegration” of the canon. The essays on electronic editing by Bernice W. Kliman (156–67) and Christie Carson (168–81) are vitiated by their authors’ having too much to say about their own relatively limited projects. Still, these essays naturally fall within the volume’s topic, while Alan Desse’s (182–92) and Elizabeth Schafer’s (198–212) arguments that directing is editing and Balz Engler’s (193–97) that translating is editing might have been better not stretched upon the Procrustean bed of the volume’s theme.

The best essay directly on the topic comes last: Suzanne Gossett’s (213–24) remarks on the differences between editing sole-authored and multi-authored plays span literary and dramatic theory (especially as it relates to authorial intention), theatre history, and editorial pragmatism. Among the many difficult matters she addresses is that editing each author’s share (as far as one can tell it) in a coauthored work with an eye to the habits of its particular author tends to foreground the very discontinuities that editing in general tries to overcome, yet not doing this effaces discontinuities that stand out in the text. She does not pretend to have solved this.

The last eight essays are not on editing. Ronald Gray (225–38) reads the Sonnets as workings out of Neoplatonic ideas about love, self-negation, and two-in-oneness. Lynn Forest-Hill (239–53) sees The Tempest as a religio-historical allegory informed by the myths of the founding of Britain—usually requiring the incoming settlers to kill indigenous monsters—especially the ones about Albina, Gogmagog, and Brutus. Ruth Morse (254–66) makes a study of how Shakespeare divided his own period’s historical past into epochs, but lacking, of course, the Middle Ages, which had not yet been invented. Brandon S. Centerwall’s title reveals his research question and the answer: “Who wrote William Basse’s ‘Elegy on Shakespeare? Rediscovering a Poem Lost from the Donne Canon’ (267–84). The elegy was written to get Shakespeare’s body removed from Stratford to Westminster Abbey and hence in ignorance of the curse written on Shakespeare’s tomb. Centerwall also points out that the Stratford monument is inscribed simply “Shakespeare,” which would pick him out in Westminster Abbey but not in a Warwickshire church where the name was common; clearly the monument was intended for London. Jonathan Holmes’s (285–97) contribution is about ancient Greek and Enlightenment (French and English) philosophy and how these illuminate the peculiar mimesis that is an actor at work.

An untheorized approach to mimesis ends the volume with Michael Dobson’s (298–337) reviews of British Shakespeare performances in 2005, worth the book’s price alone. His critical vocabulary is conventional (lines are “thrown away,” productions are “pitched” in a “key”) but Dobson’s insights are as keen as his wit: “As Dromio of Syracuse, Jonathan Slinger resembled an older and thinner Fat Boy from The Pickwick Papers, and as Dromio of Ephesus Forbes Masson resembled Dromio of Syracuse.” Unable to complete his run in a bad production of Pericles, Corin Redgrave was “rescued by a heart attack.” Dobson’s allusions to popular culture are super-subtle, if not unconscious. A Puck in A Midsummer Night’s Dream is likened to John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten), and the forest called a place for “the castaway, the residual, the disowned” (in other words, everything “punk”) and also called a “flowers-in-the-dustbin” zone, which actually is a line from the Sex Pistols’ song “God Save the Queen.”