

*Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton.* By LEAH S. MARCUS. London and New York: Routledge. 1996. xii + 268 pp. £45 (paperbound £14.99).

Textual bibliography is no longer considered an objective discipline divorced from interpretation, and it is being embraced by politically engaged critics. Showing that New Bibliographers were never the cool-headed scientists they might have believed themselves to be, Leah Marcus charts the critical assumptions underlying their editing in five essays that examine the early editions of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Taming of A/The Shrew*, and *Hamlet*, and Milton's *Poems*. For the plays, Marcus lends support to the increasingly accepted view that the differences between the early editions might reflect not varying degrees of fidelity to a lost authorial original but different versions that were in production at different times.

The 'A' and 'B' texts of *Doctor Faustus* must be kept apart because the former is set in Württemberg, a centre of militant Protestantism, and the latter is set in the more theologically conservative Wittenberg. The change in the religious norms violated by Faustus reflects changing English theological politics between the 1590s and the 1610s. Marcus is thinking along the same lines as the editors of the new Revels edition of the play in maintaining that far from getting the best of both worlds, conflation of the two versions loses the theological specificity and produces a collection of contradictory ideas. Likewise, the location of the 1602 quarto of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is more urban than that of the 1623 Folio version because a consistent set of revisions was made; the quarto is not inferior but merely different. T. W. Craik described the 1602 quarto's dependence upon the Folio version as the kind of 'loose paraphrase which is a characteristic of reported texts'. Marcus finds that this 'at least fleetingly suggests sexual transgression' (p. 78), and that the language of New Bibliography figures bad quartos as femininely errant.

Many of Marcus's examples of editorial prejudice are too weak to support the weight placed upon them. The introduction uses an example from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Prospero's description of Sycorax as a 'blew ey'd hag' (1.2.270) is often glossed as indicating the colour not of her irises but of the skin around the eye (as in a modern 'black eye' bruise). Bluish rings, editors have suggested, indicated pregnancy and/or physical decay. Victorian editors were especially keen to deny that Sycorax's irises were blue because an Algerian witch should not have any alluring Aryan attributes. Marcus cites several Shakespearean references to blue eyes, but misses the most important: in *The Winter's Tale* one of the ladies-in-waiting teasingly describes herself as having blue eyebrows. Gesturing to Mamillius's visibly pregnant mother Hermione, the lady-in-waiting predicts that his sexual development will be accelerated by the arrival of his new sibling, and that he will want to put her and her colleagues in the same condition (11.1.1-20). Hermione and Sycorax are both prisoners for whom pregnancy provides a possible dispensation, and if one parallel is allowed to validate another (an interpretative strategy favoured by Marcus) then the balance of probabilities tips in favour of the traditional reading of 'blew ey'd hag'.

Marcus's introduction ends with a commitment to 'unedit the Renaissance', to restore unsettling original meanings in place of accreted editorial interpretation, using the model of Sycorax's blue eyes even though 'that example was not particularly enlightening' (p. 27). Just as the disruptive potential beauty of Sycorax has been editorially suppressed, so the relatively free Katherine of *The Taming of A Shrew* and the bourgeois women of the first edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* have been suppressed in favour of their less disruptive half-sisters in the later editions. The new explanation offered for the differences between the Q1, Q2, and Folio versions of *Hamlet* and the distinctiveness of the first edition of Milton's *Poems* (1645) is that the transition from a vestigial oral culture to modern literary culture left its mark on the extant print versions. Modern editions of Milton's poetry that dispense with the 1645 edition's engraved portrait and its Greek verse disclaimer lose just those elements Milton included to force the reader to construct an authorial subjectivity from the biographical hints within, and so provide a replacement for the written word's absent 'voice'.

Few of the arguments in this book are new. Early editions are now frequently treated as distinct entities rather than conflated. Unmediated access to 'originals', whether of text or performance, is not sought and the ineluctable 'materiality' emphasized by Marcus is already orthodoxy. Marcus's most cogent objections are directed towards particular glosses rather than modern editorial practice, and a more accurate title would have been 'Re-Interpreting the Renaissance'. Even this is too grand a title for a project for which the author claims only 'my goal throughout will be to undo rigidities inherited from the past' (p. 37). Who could argue with that?

SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

GABRIEL EGAN