

Jeffrey Todd Knight. *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature*.

Material Texts. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. viii + 280 pp. \$59.95. ISBN: 978-0-8122-4507-3.

Every so often a paradigm-altering monograph in literary studies appears. This kind of book tends to reveal the ways in which modern biases occlude our capacity to understand the very nature and function of creative texts from the standpoint of the writers and authors who produced those texts. Jeffrey Knight's *Bound to Read* is just such a book. It ranks without a doubt among the very best work in Renaissance studies to have appeared over the course of two or three decades or more. It deserves such high praise and a place on every shelf and reading list not just because it describes so lucidly why and how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers and owners bound works together into *Sammelbände* compilations, either for ease of preservation or because sets of books appeared to share thematic content. Knight's work also reveals how badly we have misunderstood the writing practices of Shakespeare, Spenser, Montaigne, and other central figures. After all, they approached the act of composition in terms of a culture of print that did not isolate solitary authors producing uniform books in the way we conceptualize great literature today. Things were much messier. Compilations advertised as collected works frequently included writings by other authors. Writers exploited the fluid relationship between text and paratext as they made meaning by mixing portions of text that modern scholarly editions tend to keep separate.

What is more, Knight argues compellingly, these writers drew attention to this fluidity in important ways that we're always in danger of misconstruing because English Renaissance studies is predicated on the assumption that the most significant sixteenth-century authors wrote like nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists and poets. In other words, Spenser and Shakespeare must have been great authors who wrote self-contained classics that would stand alone as books in the same way that an influential later writer may have done. In actual fact, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collectors and rare-book curators separated the Shakespeares and Spensers from the *Sammelbände* in which they tended to be found. These curators then rebound these works separately, destroying evidence of reading practices and, more fundamentally, manufacturing an artificial literary-historical pedigree for themselves by reinventing sixteenth- and seventeenth-century

authors and their books in their own images. These pedigrees imagine the writers of the earlier period in terms defined by anachronistic understandings of books, writers, and authors that are based upon the tastes and preferences of a subsequent era. As a result of this displacement, which scholars have inherited and have yet to jettison fully, central concepts to the field of English Renaissance literary study, such as literary imitation and the emergence of the authorial self, take on new meanings when understood as part of earlier traditions of reading and compiling. As Knight argues by way of conclusion, “those who organize and assemble literary texts determine the material conditions of reading and shape the parameters of interpretation to an extent not fully realized or utilized in literary studies” (185).

The implications of this thesis are profound. One immense benefit to emerge from the book is Knight’s meticulous and painstaking reconstruction of the contents of numerous *Sammelbände* whose contents were separated and broken up under the influence of modern standards of classification in rare-book libraries. Knight turns particular attention toward a series of antique catalogues at Cambridge University Library that make possible the tracking of separate works from the compilations in which they originally entered the library to their place as neat-and-clean separately bound books on the shelves today. Knight’s second chapter shows how Shakespeare’s plays and poems acquire unexpected new meanings when understood as having been bound and read in compilations that have long since been broken up.

In the second section of this book, Knight explains exactly how the tendency to read books in compilations shaped the writing of some of the most important books of the period, including Spenser’s *Shepherdess Calendar*, Montaigne’s *Essays*, and the First Folio of Shakespeare. The third chapter affords a fascinating case study of sonnet compilation based on a book, now at the Bodleian Library, in which the poet composed his sonnet sequence in, around, and through the text of his copy of Thomas Watson’s *Hecatompithia*, to which it is bound. The fourth chapter turns to notions of authorial singularity in Spenser and Montaigne, and the concluding chapter examines the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century works of Spenser, Samuel Daniel, and other writers in order to differentiate the Shakespeare and Jonson folios from what was more customary, messier practice within the broader contemporary genre of vernacular collected writings. Of course, this practice only appears messy from the vantage point of a literary studies that requires clean-cut works volumes of influential authors in order to legitimate itself in modern terms.

Space does not permit full discussion of all the merits of *Bound to Read*. They are many indeed. This is a book that teaches so much, but in such a way that the reader sees clearly what should have been visible all along.

MARK RANKIN

James Madison University