

Collecting Shakespeare: The Story of Henry and Emily Folger. Stephen H. Grant. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. xvi + 244 pp. \$29.95.

In this entertaining biography, we see Henry Folger as an earnest student, savvy businessman, unostentatious member of the Gilded Age megarich, devoted husband who appreciated Emily's intellectual and economic acuity, and prescient collector. One thing we don't see him doing very much is reading Shakespeare. The Folgers packed their books away in secure warehouses — much to the frustration of scholars — until their library finally opened in 1932. They did read Shakespeare, and again and again, but their main interest was collecting him. Anything taking time

away from that enterprise — whether social events or actually reading the rare volumes — had to be largely given up.

Grant's biography too is focused on the collection, and we get only brief discussions of how the Folgers understood Shakespeare. Emily was the scholar of the couple, with a master's from Vassar; it was she who consistently made the first pass through booksellers' catalogues. As Vassar had no resident Shakespearean, her thesis was directed by Horace Howard Furness, the greatest American Shakespearean of the age and editor of the *Variorum Shakespeare*. Grant gives its intriguing title, "The True Text of Shakespeare," but unfortunately no discussion of its substance. By contrast, Henry seems not quite to have understood what textual criticism entailed: once the library was completed, he planned to collate all variations among his copies of the First Folio. He was seventy-two when he made this plan, a project that would require Charlton Hinman more than a decade of work and the invention of a mechanical collator, without which he estimated it would have taken forty years.

In another, more enduring sense, however, Folger brilliantly perceived the foundation of bibliographic analysis. As Grant details, unlike Henry Huntington, who wanted pristine copies and frequently sold duplicates, Folger was satisfied with imperfect and annotated copies, and he actively sought out duplicates. Folger was the first collector to grasp fully the importance to the study of Shakespeare of bringing together numerous copies of the same book in one place. This is not to say he was ahead of his time. Rather, in Grant's depiction he seems equally a Victorian gentleman-antiquarian and a proponent of twentieth-century scientific bibliography. Like earlier collectors, Folger purchased a lot of Shakespeare kitsch: tea caddies and goblets supposedly carved from Shakespeare's mulberry tree; Queen Elizabeth's corset (actually eighteenth century). Folger's belief in these realia was shared by many nineteenth-century collectors, even though one might say of the mulberry tree what Calvin said of the true cross, that it would take a large ship to transport all the pieces scattered in churches (or libraries) around the world. From our perspective, this credence is hard to reconcile with Folger's investment in the *New Bibliography*: in 1919, he purchased the Edward Gwynn copy of the Pavier quartos for \$50,000, inspired by the bibliographic findings of Pollard and Greg. The price is staggering, more than Folger paid for any other book except two First Folios, and it shows the influence of the *New Bibliography* that revealed the volume as the first attempt to collect Shakespeare's plays.

Grant's biography is adulatory, but not hagiographic. He demonstrates clearly that the fortune enabling the collection derived mainly from Folger's participation as a front for Standard Oil in an illegal evasion of antitrust laws. Folger was nearly prosecuted in 1913, but his investment in this Texas oil company yielded him about \$400 million in today's money. He also benefited massively from the 1922 reduction of the capital gains tax to 12.5 percent. Similarly, American collectors like Folger and Huntington took advantage of the introduction of death taxes in England, which forced aristocrats like the Duke of Devonshire to sell their libraries. This is a tale of the one percent.

Collecting Shakespeare is an engrossing read, despite some odd repetition and the occasional lapse into an accumulation of details without much narrative principle other

than chronology. The book is pitched at a general audience, not at scholars, but all readers will find much of interest. There are some fairly serious errors, though: the Gwynn volume was not part of the Halliwell-Phillipps rarities (84–85, 87), which Folger had already acquired a decade earlier; the 1655 quarto of *Othello* was the third edition (or the fifth, if one includes the two folios), not the fourth (121); Milton's poem on Shakespeare appears in the Second Folio not the First (152), having been written in 1630. Errors like these made me a little nervous about factual statements on topics with which I was less familiar. Nonetheless, Grant has written an illuminating book that artfully places Henry and Emily Folger in their own time while showing how they helped to shape the scholarship of ours.

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