

Marta Straznicky, ed. *Shakespeare's Stationers: Studies in Cultural Bibliography*.

Material Texts. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. viii + 378 pp. \$75. ISBN: 978-0-8122-4454-0.

This book presents nine subtle and significant essays written by a notable group of book historians. The contributors examine the ways in which pre-1640 stationers defined and refashioned Shakespeare within the field of print. As its subtitle suggests, this collection is not designed as a comprehensive survey; a number of important figures and vexing problems receive scant attention. Compensation is provided in extensive appendixes tracing the publication of Shakespeare by date and providing biographical and bibliographical profiles of key stationers. These, together with a list of books licensed by William Pasfield appended to William Proctor Williams's essay and endnotes, make up over half of the volume.

Broadly speaking, the essays are arranged chronologically as if to constitute a history of the field. A thematic structure might have sharpened the overall impression of debate and controversy. Most of the essays address individual stationers. For some, the emphasis is economic. Alexandra Halasz identifies three symptomatic moments in the history of Shakespeare in print. The interventions of Richard Field (first publisher of *Venus and Adonis*), Cuthbert Burby (publisher of Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* and of Shakespeare quartos), and Thomas Pavier (publisher of the aborted 1619 collection of Shakespeare plays) can all be related to typical trade strategies, in particular the payment of rent in return for permission for

a second publisher to issue a book for whom the first publisher held the rights. Holger Schott Syme makes the case that Thomas Creede was a key player in creating the market for playbooks. He was, however, acting as proxy for William Barley, who belonged to the Company of Drapers rather than the Stationers. Barley's advantage lay in the location of his shop, which was handy for the theater trade, but he failed nevertheless through a combination of overspecialization and bad luck.

Several essays find their explanations instead in the various cultural self-positionings of publishers. These generate some unexpected Shakespeares. Adam G. Hooks portrays Andrew Wise as a specialist in publishing texts whose style was accounted "sweet" or "mellifluous." This drew him to two particular writers whose tempers were otherwise quite different, Shakespeare and the sermon-writer Thomas Playfere. Kirk Melnikoff argues that the first quarto of *Hamlet* can be aligned with other books that Nicholas Ling published as a pro-republican text. His evidence lies in Q1's presentation of Corambis as a more dignified figure than his equivalent Polonius in the more familiar versions, a speaker of serious political maxims that are often critical of royal power. Alan B. Farmer explores John Norton's specialization in playbooks in terms of their prospect of both low investment and good return, or, alternatively, as an expression of his anti-Laudian religious politics. Crucially pushing the issue of motivation, whether economic or political, Farmer inclines to the political. Zachary Lesser argues that John Waterson constructed *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as a classic, but in so doing he disastrously dissociated it from courtly bearings, and lost custom as a result. Sonia Massai investigates Blount as publisher of the First Folio and the Herberts as its patrons. She argues that its claim to authority is not just about authors (or stationers): it also crucially flows from patrons.

Two essays further foreground figures other than the stationers. Douglas Bruster takes up the case influentially argued by Lukas Erne for regarding Shakespeare himself as a writer interested in the publication of his plays. His success in print enhanced the financial and cultural value of his future work. Unfortunately, an overload of the market for playbooks in 1600 caused this policy to backfire. This, Bruster suggests, explains Shakespeare's reversal of strategy after 1600. Bruster also argues, contentiously, that Shakespeare abandoned his development toward a prose-heavy style because readers (not actors or theatergoers) preferred verse. Williams offers an unprecedentedly detailed account of the press licenser Pasfield. These essays are useful correctives to the idea that the stationers reinvented Shakespeare without constraint.

The book as a whole therefore raises important questions as to both agency and motivation. Most of the contributors are deeply immersed in the delectations of the archive, and their researches bear rich fruit. Despite the scholarly nuance, there are, nevertheless, some distinct elements of anecdote, conjecture, and speculation. These are sometimes found at the key points, moments where an otherwise safely empirical and richly documented account of a stationer is transmuted into a narrative about Shakespeare's presence and representation in print.

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