

*Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England.* Tiffany Stern, ed.  
London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2020. xvi + 288 pp. £81.

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“The rethinking of theatrical documents is far from over,” Peter Holland’s afterword to this volume proclaims, a fitting end to a book that seeks, as its editor Tiffany Stern, asserts, “to keep both early modern text and performance in view as it presents the rich complexities of their conjoined relationship” (2). The book consists of twelve essays split into four sections, an introduction by the editor, and the afterword by Holland. Three of the sections divide the essays chronologically relative to their relationship to performance (“Before,” “Of,” and “After”), while the fourth section, on lost documents, consists of a single chapter by Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnis, creators of the invaluable Lost Plays Database, who rightly assert that this kind of “awareness of gaps in the historical record enables us to assess extant evidence more shrewdly” (243). The collection thus has much to offer both book and theater historians (or should that be theater and book historians?) as they negotiate the evidence upon which they base scholarly research and critical interpretations of the theatrical works of early modern England.

My query in the previous sentence is deliberate: Stern notes, sternly, that the order in which an author issues the words *stage* and *page* “reveals the priorities of the user” (1), and the chapters throughout the collection demonstrate their authors’ re-prioritization of nuance, detail, and method as they offer new ways of thinking through (and around, and sometimes beyond) old artifacts. Just as often-lost holographic forms gave way to the always-lost performances of dramatic works, the texts of these live performances came to mean differently as they were later recorded by audiences, booksellers, and company revisers. For example, Richard Preiss’s essay, “Undocumented: Improvisation, Rehearsal and the Clown,” illustrates how comic characters’ impromptu schtick was part of a play’s “living connective tissue, fitting texts to the exigencies of performance” (80). In reconsidering the meaning of *document* as both a noun and a verb, the essays of *Rethinking Theatrical Documents* offer a trenchant reminder that book-based metaphors percolate throughout theatrical discourse as readily as books themselves appeared onstage. Lucy Munro’s vivid “Writing a Play with Robert Daborne” (like Preiss’s chapter, from the “Before” section of the collection) highlights the way that Daborne, as harried a playwright as any modern early career researcher, was supplied with source material from Philip Henslowe’s own library; later, in the section of the volume titled “Documents of Performance,” Sarah Wall-Randall’s essay on “Books as ‘Actors’ in the Early Modern English Theatre” shows how book artifacts could shift their semiotic and ontological significance as actors handled them, sometimes by “playing themselves” (133), and sometimes masked as other books. Chapters on prologues/epilogues and title and scene-boards flesh out this section with an attention to the forms and functions of theatrical paratext in the interpretation of performance.

Stern's collection also reminds us that, despite literary historians' many attempts to offer comprehensive accounts of printed playbooks, the meanings that plays could evoke for audiences and readers shifted throughout the early modern period. András Kiséry's chapter on the use of play extracts in conversation thoughtfully extends the current discussion of humanist commonplacing of play dialogue beyond the carefully punctuated products of the bookseller's stall and finds that aphorisms and sententious lines regularly circulated in recursive and surprising ways. In a metaphor that has gained an unfortunate new context during COVID-19, Kiséry's demonstration of the way dramatic *sententiae* worked as viral forms show that readers' commonplacing notes aren't just "preparatory work for written composition, but supporting material for oral performance" (160). Likewise, in her essay on "Typography *After* Performance," Claire M. L. Bourne shows how the multiple agents responsible for the creation of printed playbooks used typographic mechanisms for displaying "non-lexical business," offering an ingenious appraisal of the first quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* (1598) that paradoxically reveals how Q1 is "at its most theatrical when it is at its most bookish" (199). The collection is derived from a symposium of the Folger Shakespeare Library, and its chapters so deftly refer to each other, that, like the theatrical documents they discuss, the whole may easily be seen as much more than the sum of its parts.

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*The Italian Novella and Shakespeare's Comic Heroines*. Melissa Emerson Walter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. xiv + 280 pp. \$65.

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Walter's book is a welcome addition to a growing body of critical works addressing the complex influence of the early modern novella on some of the more canonical theatrical works of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. While specific plot points are analyzed, the book is more broadly focused on the influence of Shakespeare's significant knowledge of Italianate novella conventions on his overall plot and character development. Using a feminist lens and novellesque plot devices, Walter argues in great detail for the overarching influence of these novellas and novella collections on several of Shakespeare's comedies, concentrating primarily on their influence on his female characters.

Looking closely at the common novellesque motif of containment, Walter details how characters in the novellas are confined, either literally or figuratively, by otherwise benign household items such as trunks or baskets, or less benign concepts of jealousy and chastity. She notes particularly how these items or concepts appear in the novellas as metaphors, not only of the female characters' limited freedoms as women, but also as fluid concepts that can be used and manipulated as forms of protest of, or escape from,