

Anthony R. Guneratne, ed. *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies*.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. xv + 314 pp. \$90. ISBN: 978-0-230-10898-1.

Shakespeare and Genre is something of a grab bag, and a mixed bag at that. I use the metaphor of a bag because of the essays' conceptual organization. (More about that in a minute.) I say it is a mixed bag both because some essays don't seem to belong in a collection ostensibly devoted to genre and because those that do belong range from excellent to mediocre. Guneratne begins his brief introduction by explaining that the "book began as a challenge" to its contributors: "could they work together towards a single, cohesive compendium that redefined the pertinent subject areas in such a way as to appeal to a broad range of readers?" (1). Sadly, the answer is no. The book's failure to cohere is due, however, to the editor, not to the contributors. The title and subtitle of *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies* are telling in this respect. What, one may reasonably ask, does genre have to do with inheritances and legacies? Furthermore, are inheritances and legacies to be understood as synonyms or are they meant to have different meanings that mark the opposition between early modern and postmodern? To comment on the subtitle as I have would be mere caviling were it not for the fact that the titles organizing the contents are equally opaque.

The book is divided into two sections in an effort to match the opposition in the subtitle. Section 1 is entitled "Shakespeare and Renaissance Genres" and section

2 is entitled “Shakespeare and Contemporary Genres.” Each section is divided further into three parts and more or less random titles, the last one being “Shakespeare as Genre.” There is no unifying theory of genre or debate between theories of genre or literary and media histories of genres that explains to the reader why the essays have been ordered in the way Guneratne has ordered them. Of course, a book about Shakespeare and genre that turns out to be a disorganized grab bag is not necessarily a bad thing. The genre of the essay collection may best be served by a mix-up of genres, a scrambling of the codes by which readers make sense of an anthology. In any case, the contents of this mixed-up, grab bag of a book, are something of a mystery. The opening essay of the collection “Shakespeare the Metalinguist” is largely a series of lists, and the author only gets to genre in the last two pages. The second essay, Stephen Greenblatt’s “Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and The Representation of Rebellion,” first published in 1983 and republished many times since, will be familiar to most readers: so familiar one wonders why Guneratne felt it necessary to include it. (Guneratne does not give the essay date in his introduction and does not cite its in the endnotes; there is no permission to republish it or to republish any other essay in the volume on the copyright page, so I cannot tell if all of the other essays are published here for the first time or have been republished.)

The rest of the essays in the collection may be read at random, as essays in collections commonly are. Among the best, in my view, are essays by Laurence Danson’s on genre as remix, Pete Donaldson’s on Shakespeare and media allegories, Alex Huang on “polygeneric Shakespeares” in China and the Chinese diaspora, Douglas Lanier on genre literacy, and Tony Howard on television. I suggest the reader grab the book and read them now.

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