

Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland, eds. *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. xiv + 264 pp. \$99. ISBN: 978-1-107-01627-9.

The publication of an authoritative collection of essays by esteemed scholars often marks the end of debate, and for some, perhaps, the great doom's image. Happily, and to its own credit, such is not the case with *Medieval Shakespeare*, though its contributions are comprehensive, diligent, and largely persuasive. Far from shuttering critical conversation, it discovers, rather, undeveloped and far-reaching implications of Shakespeare's contact with the Middle Ages. More important, the achievement of the book is that it invites readers to consider not simply what makes Shakespeare medieval but how and why it is that we have been slow to recognize and appreciate the pervasive premodern influences deeply embedded in his works, his language, and in his broader culture. For example, our myopic attention to chronicle history ignores, as Ruth Morse perceives, Shakespeare's interest in the rhetorical historiography of the romance tradition. Tom Bishop contends that in our humanist deference for literary notions of art we have lost the trick of seeing how deeply the medieval practice of play informs the dramaturgy of the professional London stage. From Elizabeth Montagu to Jan Kott, Shakespeare's genius for dramatic characterization has been cited to justify his renovation into our contemporary, but Helen Cooper's study of personification establishes the medieval habits of thinking by which Shakespeare crafted his dramatic characters at the intersection of psychological and ethical analyses.

Insisting that the polyphony in Shakespeare's scripts be kept in play, Bruce Smith explores whole-body models of perception available in the Middle Ages and to Shakespeare but underplayed after Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. Margreta de Grazia's contribution argues that it is precisely the historical remoteness of *King Lear's* BCE setting, and not contemporaneity with its postincarnational audience, that underwrites the play's singularly tragic ending. The collection's formidable array of historical, linguistic, material, generic, phenomenological, and performative approaches thus encourages readers to rethink our fundamental inclination to modernize Shakespeare.

Of course, several essays more overtly problematize or overcome the medieval-Renaissance divide. Anne Coldiron argues that early printed texts in England, including the works of ancient pagan authors, came to readers bearing unmistakable marks of mediation from francophone techniques and technologies developed in the Middle Ages. Janette Dillon and Michael O'Connell find direct connections between late medieval and early modern English drama. Along with Bishop's piece, these essays in particular invite future scholars to uncover further material and dramaturgical links, even as they connect themselves to the pioneering work of Robert Weimann and David Bevington. Readers will, in fact, be treated to Bevington's stimulating insights in the book's afterword.

If the contributors note continuities between medieval and Renaissance literature, language, and culture, they likewise draw careful attention to disjunctions, change, and historical difference. Bart van Es, for example, traces the invention of the literary category of the medieval in the early seventeenth century, and argues that the historiographical distance that attended it may help to explain the archaisms in *Pericles* as well as a broader ersatz medievalism in later Stuart drama.

Scholars interested in rethinking periodization will find much here to converse and contend with. True to its subtitle, however, this transhistorical collection will also appeal to researchers with interests beyond this topical issue and this single author. Jonathan Hope queries the ideology of standardization, for example, and challenges the assumption that linguistic variation is pathological; the implications of his essay ought to give future editors pause. And Peter Holland's contribution examines not merely nineteenth-century antiquarianism, but more importantly our ongoing need to perform the Middle Ages in productions of the history plays — and the resulting succession of fake-authentic perceptions of medieval culture that say more about our present concerns than they do about Shakespeare's imagination of the past. Most of the volume's illustrations appear in de Grazia's essay. The book's index is serviceable, yet its bibliography is comprehensive and current. I would certainly recommend *Medieval Shakespeare* as secondary reading for graduate-level courses, and several essays would also benefit undergraduate study.

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