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*Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of
Shakespeare's Drama* (review)

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Book Reviews

Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie, eds. *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare's Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
xv + 229 pp. £48.00, \$70.

This collection of thirteen essays represents a milestone for textual criticism. Commissioned from a group of distinguished young and more established editors, who have themselves helped shape the history of editing and textual scholarship, the volume re-examines this history and maps out the paths scholars might want to follow in the future. The result is a sense of remarkable range and historical situatedness. These are combined with moments of visionary thinking about ways of conceptualizing the transmission of early modern texts that emerge from experience and an excitement about the possibilities afforded by both old and new technologies.

Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie's Introduction is lucid, thoughtful, and witty (the uncritical use of modern editions of Shakespeare by literary scholars is, at one point, compared to the dangers associated with driving an untested second-hand car). As the editors put it, the aim of the volume is "to gather together the points of key debate and controversy of the present moment to begin to understand the range of pragmatic edito-

rial methodologies that are emerging from the fray, how they respond to the surviving documentary evidence, and how they might speak (or fail to speak) one to another" (4). This dialogue and occasional open disagreement between the contributors energizes the volume and saves it from the dogmaticism of its acknowledged ancestor, Gary Taylor and Michael Warren's *The Division of the Kingdoms* (1983). At the same time, while Erne and Kidnie are correct in their assertion that the collection "does not advocate a party line" (5), their selection of viewpoints inevitably favours some approaches at the expense of others. In their inclusion of three articles, by H. R. Woudhuysen, Paul Werstine, and Ernst Honigmann, that are (somewhat repetitively) concerned with the evolution of textual and editorial thinking in the twentieth century, combined with the absence, for instance, of any contribution primarily focusing on the impact of feminist or queer thought on editorial practice, the editors reveal their bias in favour of historical approaches and textual scholarship that steers relatively clear of the debates that have animated literary criticism and theory in the past twenty-five years.

That said, the volume contains several essays that are informed by, for example, contemporary postcolonial criticism and performance studies, giving the reader insights into ways in which other contemporary critical approaches might shape editorial work. Leah Marcus's opening essay examines the racial vocabulary used in Quarto and Folio *Othello* with astonishingly clear-cut results: she finds that if indeed the Folio text shows evidence of authorial revision then Shakespeare "revised in the direction of racial virulence," giving, in the Folio version, "an almost pornographic specificity and negativity to the image of interracial love" (30, 25). This makes Marcus's observation that current editorial practice obscures the Quarto-Folio differences, conflating the texts in such a way as to create a version of *Othello* that is more racist than either the Quarto or Folio texts are in isolation, particularly disturbing. A similarly unsettling conclusion about "the conservative cultural bias" shown by traditional editorial practice is reached by Michael Warren, who examines how editors almost consistently emend a perceived error in the speech headings of the opening crowd scene in *Coriolanus* to show the citizens as an "angry, imminently lethal crowd ... menacing a figure of authority" (140). Starting from an entirely different standpoint in her concluding essay, Barbara Hodgdon's thought-provoking remarks on the editorial challenges posed by the desire to make both past and future performance choices an integral part of the critical commentary in standard editions also highlight examples of editorial scurrilousness and prejudice.

Like several other contributors, Hodgdon writes from the standpoint of someone currently (or recently) working on an edition of a Shakespeare play. One theme that re-emerges in several of these essays—including the fascinating piece on doubling charts in the Arden 3 *Hamlet* co-authored with Neil Taylor by Ann Thompson, the general editor of Arden 3—is the frustrating nature of editing Shakespeare for established series, whose guidelines almost necessarily stand in the way of individual thinking and innovation in the type and layout of commentary. What makes John Jowett's and Kidnie's contributions in particular so refreshing is that they combine pragmatic awareness of such constraints with an optimistic attitude that allows them to think beyond these restrictions and imagine different ways of presenting texts in print. Unlike John D. Cox, who records the almost systematic frustration of his attempts, in his and Eric Rasmussen's Arden 3 edition of *Henry VI*, to relegate "stage directions" and performance options to the footnotes, leaving the text itself as open and flexible as the Globe stage itself, Kidnie frees herself from the shackles of established print layouts. She proposes a new way of presenting text and stage directions which "begins to transfer the interpretative activity from the editor to the reader" (165). John Jowett, on his part, designs innovative layouts for the print presentation of the adapted texts of *Sir Thomas More* and *Measure for Measure* that allow him to highlight effectively the processes and implications of adaptation in his editions of these texts for the Arden 3 series and Thomas Middleton's *Collected Works* (Oxford) respectively. Although, as Kidnie herself acknowledges, her layout "is in some respects as rigid as the more conventional format" (173), it is her and Jowett's way of radically re-imagining the printed page which will, I hope, contribute to re-invigorating the medium of print, making it suitable for the twenty-first century user.

As John Lavagnino remarks in "Two Varieties of Digital Commentary," "the casual futurological wisdom" of the 1990s, which saw the print medium as doomed to make way for electronic texts, has been proved wrong by events: "[I]t is not the case that we read everything online while our books collect dust" (194). Initial optimism about the possibilities afforded by the new media has now been replaced by more careful consideration of the ways in which e-texts and online editions may complement print or, if they are to replace print, how they may do so in a genuinely user-friendly manner that affords the user clear advantages over the print medium. Lavagnino's thoughtful comments on the limited use of online commentary and his reflections about the distinction that should be made between "commentary intended as a companion to reading and commentary

intended as a scholarly reference” (195) are best read side by side with Sonia Massai’s contribution detailing her work on an internet edition of *Edward III*. Massai is clearly excited by the electronic medium and the way it allows an editor to draw “attention to textual instability,” foregrounding various aspects of the unstable text. Where David Bevington, who expounds a whole series of examples in which modernization and standardization of spelling lead to dramatic losses in meaning, nevertheless concludes that “the benefits [of modernization] outweigh the costs by making early modern texts more available to readers” (157), Massai’s edition, which belongs to Lavagnino’s category of commentary intended for scholarly reference, goes in the opposite direction. Her diplomatic transcript of the text includes animated type that alerts the reader to press variants. Furthermore, she includes the full texts of all available editions of *Edward III* up to 1905, as well as extracts from all more recent editions. Her essay and edition, thus, become the most extreme and materialized example of the direction in which the more daring contributors to this stimulating and important collection are heading: that of an editorial practice which, while providing critical guidance, ultimately shifts the responsibility for interpretation onto the reader, who is now conceptualized as a “user, or what can be described as a ‘Barthesian’ reader” (103).

This volume constitutes essential reading for anyone engaged in textual criticism or the editing of early modern drama. It should also appeal more widely to all “users” of modern Shakespeare editions who would like to avoid the here so vividly outlined pitfalls associated with the uncritical use of such texts.

Works Cited

Taylor, Gary, and Michael Warren, eds. *The Division of the Kingdoms*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

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