

Recent Studies in Theatre History: Evidence, Interpretation, and Bibliographers Behaving Badly

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Salzman, Paul, *Facsimiles and the History of Shakespeare Editing* (Cambridge Elements in Shakespeare and Text), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023; paperback; pp. 104; 43 illustrations; RRP £17; ISBN 9781009228268

Stern, Tiffany, *Shakespeare, Malone and the Problems of Chronology* (Cambridge Elements in Shakespeare and Text), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023; paperback; pp. 100; RRP £17; ISBN 9781009224710

Syme, Holger Schott, *Theatre History, Attribution Studies and the Question of Evidence* (Cambridge Elements in Shakespeare and Text), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023; paperback; pp. 90; RRP £17; ISBN 9781009227391

When I started my PhD in the late 1990s, I worked in the North Library at the British Museum—this was a year or so before the British Library opened on its current Euston Road site in 1998. There was a sense of the last days of an institution: of an imminent shift in how reading, thinking, and writing would be done. Only one desk had a power supply: a small number of mostly young readers with laptops rushed to get the precious twelve seats every day. I was mostly reading seventeenth-century printed miscellanies of verse, and while I often ordered up the original publications, filling out the handwritten order slips that the British Library returned to in 2024, I also came to rely on the versions of these texts that arrived at my desk in the form of hardback, green, or red, or blue Scholar Press Facsimiles. These were photo-facsimiles of seventeenth-century texts, usually in the original size, with a very brief, typically one-page introduction. The text itself, but mediated. Scholar Press was the brainchild of the tireless bibliographer and man-of-big-plans R. C. Alston (1933–2011), an academic committed to the idea of research students accessing ‘original’ (note my scare quotes) early modern books. Established publishers perhaps unsurprisingly didn’t take too enthusiastically to the commercial prospects of what were essentially bound photocopies of often very obscure premodern books, so Alston did it himself, setting up Scholar Press in 1966, inventing the wonderfully titled ‘Prismascope’ for photographing fragile

books, and publishing some two thousand facsimiles of pre-1801 books over the next seven years. In those early days of my PhD, the seventeenth century came at me through these strange, beguiling, mediated objects: it was the century, it seemed to me, of low-quality photocopying and stiff bindings.

Like me, Paul Salzman relied on facsimiles for his research. As an early modern scholar working in Australia, Salzman's scholarship 'would never have happened were it not for the university microfilm series that was the precursor of Early English Books Online', and for all the complexities and problems with the ideas of 'copy' and 'reproduction' and 'original' that Salzman deftly draws out in *Facsimiles and the History of Shakespeare Editing*, there is at the heart of this book a sense of appreciation for access and dissemination. Salzman's book is a survey of the ways early modern texts (often but not always Shakespearean; printed but not manuscript) reached readers in facsimile form, taking in traced, type, photographic, and digital reproductions, from the eighteenth century to the print-on-demand of 2023. Despite the Malone Society motto ('the permanent utility of original texts'), facsimiles are, in Salzman's account, not the same as the originals but 'highly mediated photographs generally of one specific original copy'. That etymological slippage in 'facsimile' between making something that is the same as something else, and making something that is similar, is the conceptual space that Salzman explores. Salzman is not interested in any moralised binary of good original versus bad reproduction, but draws out the affordances and drawbacks of facsimiles, and, crucially, shows the attitudes to literature that they have enabled. Most centrally, perhaps, this means a rich discussion of the relationship between facsimile reproductions and Shakespearean editing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Editions by Rowe, Pope, Theobald, and Malone presented pages that became visually distanced from the original *mise en page*, with footnotes and commentaries: an 'aesthetic and conceptual distance starts to open up between the original text', which is the basis of the modern edition, and Salzman shows how that gap created a counter-urge for facsimiles.

This isn't a simple Whiggish story of technologies getting better over time—W. W. Greg liked to rattle out the bon mot 'photographic reproductions are reliable but illegible, reprints are legible but unreliable'—and Salzman is an excellent guide to the paradoxes inherent in these 'documentary' works. Eugene Power's University Microfilms, founded in 1938, produced in effect 'the largest ever compilation of facsimiles', but these flashing-by page images turned codices into scrolls and converted all formats into the same size. Charlton Hinman's 1968 facsimile of Shakespeare's First Folio is a reproduction not of any single copy but a combination of photographs of pages from multiple copies of Shakespeare's book at the Folger Shakespeare Library: it is a kind of bibliographic ideal or fiction or act of perfecting, a sort of wish for something right, conveyed in a medium that looks, at first, like a neutral record.

Sometimes these fakes (certainly the wrong word) might be astonishingly effective. Joseph Smeeton's type facsimile of *Solimon and Perseda* used 1722

Caslon type and ornaments traced from the originals, but it's hard to think you're not reading the 1599 text printed by Edward Allde when you have it on your desk, turning the pages. (The clues are small: on the verso of the title-page, tucked in the corner so that it might be easily cut away, the printed words 'J. Smeeton Printer'). Certainly, Greg was fooled by Smeeton's skills, and so was Frederick Boas—although when Greg realized his mistake, he went on to review Boas's edition and criticised him for making the same error. Salzman has an eye for the eccentricities of character, and the learned-journal bust-ups, that often seem to characterise bibliography in its early twentieth-century manifestations, and these sudden, brief vignettes humanise this history of technology. ('Unfortunately, Furnivall was an exceptionally irascible society member and became involved in many feuds'.)

Bibliographers behaving badly is a refrain in the other two books reviewed here. Holger Schott Syme notes, and one suspects rather delights in, the 'many acrimonious exchanges in the *TLS* letters pages' between Gary Taylor and Brian Vickers, and, more seriously, Tiffany Stern draws a connecting line between the hostilities that Edmond Malone endured ('the rancour and incessant malignity [...] with which Steevens [...] endeavoured to carp at [...] *all* my notes') and the 'bullying, and *ad hominem* attacks', usually or perhaps always by senior men, that characterise some online and printed responses to new editorial work. There is an article to be written about why certain kinds of textual scholarship produce particular levels of toxic acrimony—the aforementioned *Times Literary Supplement* letters pages would be an important starting source.

Stern's *Shakespeare, Malone and the Problems of Chronology* is a riveting study of Malone's three attempts—published in 1778, 1790, and 1821—to establish the order of Shakespeare's plays. It explores and critiques the conceptual and archival methods Malone deployed, and also the consequences, for good and for bad, of Malone's profound influence on ideas of Shakespearean chronology today (orthodox modern dating follows Malone in thirty-one of thirty-six plays). Stern's book is both a homage to Malone, and an unravelling of the problems of his methods and legacy: 'questioning his correctness,' as Stern puts it, 'while paying homage to his brilliance'.

Malone established chronology through either internal or external evidence. Internal evidence means the language within the play; external evidence means documents of performance or references in other books like the 'diary' of Philip Henslowe, or the *Office Book* of Sir Henry Herbert, or Francis Meres's 1598 *Palladis Tamia*. Stern shows how these two kinds of evidence suggest different dates (internal evidence gives an earliest date, external evidence a latest; textual scholars seem duty-bound to use the phrases *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*), but Malone problematically combines them to produce a single chronology of plays appearing in sequence. More fundamentally still, Stern argues that the seemingly simple question 'when was a play written?' is often or perhaps always unanswerable: a play might be started, delayed, revised over time; multiple plays might be written in overlapping periods; one play might be revised while a later

one is being written; and so the very idea of a punctual chronology of single dates in a linear sequence of composition starts to unravel. We can often know the date of print publication, of course (although eighteen of Shakespeare's plays were not published until they appeared together in 1623); and we have documents that sometimes tell us about performance dates (but there are gaps for plays with no such records). But different categories of evidence suggest different moments in time: as Stern writes, '[m]ost plays are chronological palimpsests'. This temporal complexity is, for Stern and, by the end of the book, her readers too, a source of joy, not despair: there is a wonder in the stratigraphic layers of a play like *Twelfth Night*, written (John Manningham's gossipy Middle Temple diary proves) before February 1602, but surviving in a First Folio text that is likely a record of a later, post-Globe, musically rich production, perhaps associated with the Banqueting House in 1618. To pin this play down to a single date is to miss the ways in which theatrical composition is a kind of fluttering through time.

Stern's response to all this is not to abandon chronology—'we require chronologies to organise our thoughts about Shakespeare'—but to separate out these categories of 'internal' and 'external' evidence, and to celebrate chronological instability. In place of Malone's table of single dates—the product, as Stern shows, of conflicting conceptions of chronology—Stern offers a 'rangy' map of 'chronological possibilities': dates for work, text, alongside evidence of 'earliness' and 'lateness'. Malone, with his lawyerly pursuit of evidence and documentation (Coleridge called him 'that eternal Bricker-up of Shakspeare'), might not have liked this, but Stern's 'liberating' (her apt word) embrace of multiple possibilities opens the plays up for new kinds of thinking. The best way to read Stern's short book is alongside Margreta de Grazia's *Four Shakespearean Period Pieces* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), on anachronism, chronology, and periodisation, and de Grazia's earlier book on Edmond Malone, *Shakespeare Verbatim* (Clarendon Press, 1991): these three texts form a brilliant cluster.

'Cluster' is a key word in Syme's *Theatre History, Attribution Studies, and the Question of Evidence*. Syme's book gets very granular very fast—in that sense it's a contrast to Salzman's and Stern's—and the compacted argument at times deserves the greater space of a longer, more formally conventional monograph. But there are major implications here in terms of the assumptions we bring to the study of early modern theatre.

At the heart is a close study of Henslowe's diary and Henslowe's methods of note-taking, focusing, in the early stages of Syme's book, on the significance of the term 'ne'; from this extreme detail emerges a wider thesis about how Henslowe used the same title for different plays, and, more broadly, and fascinatingly, about the co-existence of 'clusters' of plays with different texts but the same or very similar subjects, characters, sources, and plots, existing in repertories at the same time, performed under the same or very similar titles. Syme suggests that by the late 1590s, records of 'Jeronimo', for example, referred not to a single play by Thomas Kyd, but to a 'complex of texts performed variously by Strange's Men,

the Chamberlain's Men, Pembroke's Men, the Admiral's Men, the Children of the Chapel, and the King's Men, in at least six separate venues'. This cluster-culture is immediately helpful and appealing as a way to re-approach plays we thought we know, like *The Taming of the Shrew*. Rather than, as traditionally, framing the Shakespearean play as central and *A Shrew* as a surpassed pre-text—ignoring the clear popularity of *A Shrew*, and approaching it only in terms of its subordinate relationship to *The Shrew* (as reported text, or source, or early draft)—Syme wants to think seriously about the culture of clusters of closely related plays, including Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed*. As so often in early modern theatrical studies, good and interesting things happen when scholars stop making Shakespeare the necessary centre—and Syme is committed to this move. This work has consequences for how we talk about titles ('[e]ven the Master of the Revels, it seems, was not especially concerned about what the plays he read were called'), and also, more broadly still, in terms of our (over-)investment in ideas of originality, newness, and authorship.

Syme's thesis also has implications to the relations we imagine between print culture and theatrical culture. Syme shows very elegantly how our focus on the Stationers' Company, as a way in to thinking about performance, has led to some distorted assumptions. As Peter Blayney made clear long ago, and as Syme discusses, the owner of a title registered in the Stationers' Register could seek the Stationers' Company's protection 'if *any* book—not necessarily a reprint or plagiarism of his own copy—threatened his ability to dispose of unsold copies of an existing edition'. This print culture which sought to limit texts on similar topics, including those with similar titles, has obscured a contemporary but very different theatrical culture of clusters of similar plays: book culture has established certain norms for early modern scholars that might not always be helpful for understanding theatre. Syme puts it like this: 'Rather than taking [...] the regulations of the Stationers' Company as normative, we need to understand the writing of plays as primarily a theatrical practice. As such, plays had venues and performers. They might have had recognizable plots and characters, but only rarely did they, in the theatre, have authors.' Syme, previously, and Amy Lidster, more recently, have explored these issues in relation to the English history play: while theatre audiences might see multiple plays about the same historical figures by different companies, only a small number of these plays reached print due to Stationers' Company restrictions, giving the false impression of a fading or dormant genre.

These three excellent books are part of the new Cambridge Elements in Shakespeare and Text series, edited by Claire M. L. Bourne and Rory Loughnane. This trio of titles shows a deep interest in evidence, but not in a positivistic sense: evidence needs interpretation, and interpretations change, and all three authors take readers through the multiple ways we might approach the 'fragments and minutiae' (Syme's words) of archival research. The books are short, at around one hundred small pages each, and index-free (regrettably—perhaps searchable online

reading is the imagined norm). Salzman's has adequate but not terrific images. All three books are light: tuck them in your pocket as you head to the theatre. You will feel energised to return afresh to what you thought you knew.

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