

Review

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CHARLES MARTINDALE AND A. B. TAYLOR, eds. *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xiv + 319 pp. Cloth, \$75.

A collection of over a dozen critical essays by European and U.S. scholars, *Shakespeare and the Classics* participates in a recent “back to books” movement in literary criticism as it confirms the centrality of classical works to Shakespeare’s literary universe. Having been dominated, for instance, by a genre of historicism that looks primarily to the operations of political agency outside texts, and by a materialism that focuses largely on the social life of objects, the field of Shakespeare studies is discovering that authors’ histories of reading and their engagement with compositional resources are in every way historical and material. Aided by such studies as Robert Miola’s *Shakespeare’s Reading* (2000) and Stuart Gillespie’s *Shakespeare’s Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare’s Sources* (2001), scholars are returning to the texts Shakespeare used in an attempt better to understand his works’ relation to the diversity of resources available to him.

This collection’s primary organizing device is Ben Jonson’s notorious reference to his fellow writer’s “small Latine & lesse Greek.” Beginning with an essay on sixteenth-century humanism and concluding with a select bibliography, it divides its contents among “small Latine” (with sections on Ovid, Virgil, Plautus and Terence, and Seneca), “lesse Greek” (Plutarch, Greek romances, Greek Tragedy, and a “general” essay), and “The Reception of Shakespeare’s Classicism.” The editors rightly acknowledge that, apart from a conviction that Shakespeare’s works are more deeply implicated in their classical sources than is widely believed, the essays in the volume share no single theoretical or methodological orientation. Such is not to say, of course, that they make no joint contribution to our knowledge of Shakespeare—for they do, and it is an important one. To do justice to their diversity of topics and approaches, however, this review will begin by providing individualized summaries of their arguments.

Colin Burrow’s introductory essay on “Shakespeare and humanistic culture” is one of the most stimulating in the collection. Eschewing the false choice between seeing Shakespeare’s education as “liberatingly dialectical” or “crushingly grounded in the authority of the classics” (15), Burrow offers a provocative version of humanism in which the classics are important by being misremembered and strongly reconceived. Shakespeare’s works deploy “a language of humanism, in which classical allusions can become part of the texture of conversation, and in which particular texts can be evoked and interpreted differently by different people with different pragmatic and social needs from those texts” (24). It perhaps goes without saying that every student will appreciate Burrow’s portrait of a structurally forgetful Shakespeare.

The Latin section of the collection opens with Vanda Zajko’s essay on Ovid and *The Taming of the Shrew*. For Zajko, the *Metamorphoses* is as interested in internal change as in external transformations. Her analysis of *Shrew* therefore takes up the episodes of Daphne and Salmacis, as well as the *Ars Amatoria*, to foreground what she argues is Shakespeare’s similar fascination with the dynamics

of psychological change within romantic relationships. Some trace of this psychological Ovid carries over into A. B. Taylor's essay, which, charting the influence of the *Metamorphoses* upon the numerous transformations in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, maintains that this is Shakespeare's most Ovidian drama. Taylor suggests a source for Hermia's nightmare (2.2.144–49) in Tisiphone's snake-handling sequence in Book 4 of Ovid's poem (4.611–15 in the sixteenth-century text he cites, 4.495–99 in the standard texts of today) before concluding with a surprising, five-sentence postscript that should really be a separate essay. Heather James's enjoyable chapter on "Shakespeare's learned heroines in Ovid's schoolroom" argues that such characters as Hermia, Bianca, Portia, and Rosalind "come into their own as romantic heroines at the moment they conceive and act on a passion for the expressive liberties and audacious wit of Ovid" (79). As a footnote, I will say that it strikes me as odd that, like Zajko, James sees Bianca in a positive light—never my response to this character in the study or playhouse.

Charles Martindale's exploration of Virgil's influence on Shakespeare's literary production begins with a welcome *mea culpa*. In an earlier study, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity* (1990), Martindale and Michelle Martindale had downplayed the significance of Virgil to Shakespeare, but here he traces the contours of the Dido story and the presence of Virgil generally in Shakespeare's works, with special emphasis on *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tempest*. The "Plautus and Terence" section is misnamed, as Terence—not very important to Shakespeare—is justifiably dispensed with in a single sentence by Wolfgang Riehle. Riehle's essay builds on T. J. Moore's thoughtful study (*The Theatre of Plautus* [1998]) to extend some of the insights of his own, *Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Humanist Tradition* (1990). Raphael Lyne advances a more pointed argument in seeing Plautus as the source of the "New Comic space," which functions as a kind of second world in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*. His essay usefully accounts for the bridging of comedy and romance that has, since at least Bernard Knox's 1955 essay, "*The Tempest* and the Ancient Comic Tradition," been recognized as crucially subtending Shakespeare's dramatic practice. Yves Peyré addresses a much less certain relation: that between Shakespeare and Seneca. Preferring to remain agnostic about whether Shakespeare read Seneca, Peyré demonstrates a host of parallels between the Latin tragedies and *Macbeth*, particularly "themes of destructive confusion" and "the collapse of most of the distinctions that help to define human identity" (153).

The "Lesse Greek" part of this collection opens with two essays on Plutarch. John Roe focuses primarily on Plutarch's importance to *Julius Caesar* and argues that the source text's "pagan treatment of homicide" gave Shakespeare a "freedom to experiment" before the Christian morality of his own day limited his options in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (182). (Most writers, I believe, would gladly accept any such limitations if they could write works like these.) Gordon Braden's "Plutarch, Shakespeare, and the alpha males" provides a more wide-ranging examination of the influence of the *Lives* on Shakespeare's tragedies, pointing out that what the playwright found in Plutarch was "a wealth of skilfully shaped

stories about the occasional successes and characteristic missteps of" what Robert Lamberton has called Plutarch's "alpha males" (200). In "Shakespeare and the Greeks," A. D. Nuttall meditates on what it could mean to see Shakespeare as more Greek than Roman in his mental and cultural orientation, a move seconded by Michael Silk's chapter on Shakespeare and Greek tragedy, which discovers that, although there is no link whatever between the two, Shakespeare's tragedies are good in the way that many Greek tragedies are good.

In what proves to be one of the two or three finest essays in the collection, Stuart Gillespie explores the still underappreciated role of Greek romance upon Shakespeare's drama. Gillespie rightly observes that "the very considerable importance of the romances in the Elizabethan ocean of stories, that mackerel-crowded sea of translated, retold, recycled, summarised, excerpted tales that formed a pan-European storehouse for poets and dramatists, is little recognised" (229). Noting the "distanciation" of narrative events in the Greek romances, their self-consciousness and occasional self-referentiality, Gillespie asks if "Shakespeare was able to see his way through" to this self-referentiality and to "make use of it as his contemporaries did not?" (233). Readers could profit from comparing these insights with Raphael Lyne's argument about "New Comic space" in Shakespeare; clearly, as both critics realize, there is a need for more research into these related genres' deployment of implied space and relation to self-conscious representation.

The final part of this collection is represented as detailing the reception of Shakespeare's classicism, but to be precise, David Hopkins's excellent essay concerns not the classics in Shakespeare but rather the later association of Shakespeare's works with those of his classical forbears. Showing that we have accepted a simplistic and faulty picture of neo-classicism in England, Hopkins argues that "late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers' preoccupation with the classics was a positively *enabling* force in their developing appreciation of Shakespeare's distinctive artistic stature." This was especially the case in the wake of Boileau's 1674 translation of Longinus' *On the Sublime*, which helped shape "a conception of Shakespeare as an inspired, original and 'fiery' poet of the Sublime, an 'English Homer'" (262). Sarah Annes Brown's chapter surveys various quotations of Shakespeare in subsequent literature, noting that "Shakespearean texts and cognate classical works tend to grow closer together quite independently, for both are likely to be appropriated and reinvented in similar ways in accordance with the spirit of each age" (289).

The select bibliography, compiled by Joanna Paul, is quite useful, though it could have included recent work on Shakespeare and intertextuality. Readers interested in literary composition could benefit, for instance, from knowledge of Linda Woodbridge's seminal essay, "Patchwork: Piecing the Early Modern Mind in England's First Century of Print Culture" (*English Literary Renaissance* 23 [1993]: 5–45), among other works. Woodbridge has some remarkable material on Plautus and *The Comedy of Errors*. In addition to a reluctance to engage with recent theories of quotation and intertextuality, the decision to devote nearly

half this collection to Greek authors and works seems something of a misstep. Although the Gillespie essay is one of the strongest in the collection, having two chapters on Plutarch—and a fairly superfluous essay on Greek tragedy—struck me as in every way less desirable than an arrangement that might accord room for further treatment of the Latin tradition. I would mention here only Horace (whose *Odes*, I think, are the model for the Sonnets' polysemy) and Apuleius (whose *Golden Ass* has been dubbed "Shakespeare's favorite novel" by J. J. M. Tobin in a 1984 monograph of that title), though of course there are many authors and works that could have been treated.

All the same, this remains a valuable work, for Shakespeare could not have been Shakespeare without classical texts. Of course, even before Jonson's notorious remark about his small Latin and less Greek, Shakespeare had been understood in relation to his classical forbears. Less than a decade into the Stratfordian's career, that is, Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598) saw fit to compare his dramatic works to those of "*Plautus* and *Seneca*"; the narrative and lyric poems, for their part, showed the "sweete wittie soule of *Ovid*." The conversation that Meres can be said to have inaugurated with these juxtapositions—by no means confined, in his "comparative discourse of . . . English poets, with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets" to Shakespeare—is continued in stimulating fashion by this collection.

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