fuss; subsequent Arden editors take note. *Timon of Athens* is the better of these two editions partly because of the consideration for its readers that the editors demonstrate both here and throughout the volume.

Peter Malin

Notes

1 Michael Cordner, '"Are We Being Theatrical Yet?": Actors, Editors, and the Possibilities of Dialogue', *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, Barbara Hodgdon and W.B. Worthen (eds), (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 399–414, 399.

Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster. *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp x, 266.

Consider the following quotations: 'Once disguise playfully dissociates any unitary cast of character, the closure of representation in the characterization of given standards of worthiness itself is ruptured' and 'Shakespeare would explore the actor's grappling with cross-dressed disguise in several comedies'. The latter quotation is comprehensible but tells us nothing we don't already know. The former quotation, by contrast, may tell us something original or important but masks its meaning beneath a style so opaque as to render it beyond assimilation. The fact that these two quotations come from the same page (126) of *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance* only goes to show what a curate's egg the book is. Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster have produced a volume that is by turns suggestive, exciting, bland, and infuriatingly nonsensical.

Unfortunately for readers of the volume, the latter quality is the most extensively represented and conspicuous characteristic of a prose style that relishes formulations which demand to be read three or four times — even then without always making sense: 'A thick performative [a thick performative *what*?] is jostling side by side with representations of personal and sometimes national plight' (5); 'When the fat knight puts a cushion on his head,

we no longer have the sign of the sign of royalty but something which, strictly speaking, amounts to less than the sign of the sign of the sign of royalty' (137); 'A stage-centred approach is scarcely qualified for probing more deeply into the *énoncé/énonciation* relations in question, even when ultimately bifold authority wants to have a verbal correlative in the theatre itself' (21). Elsewhere the pronouncements are so patent as to be virtually pointless: 'Shakespeare was immersed … within a dense network of theatricality' (188); 'Live actors' (as opposed to dead ones?) are 'involved in a communication situation' (190); the word 'ha!' as printed cannot capture 'the performer's explosive breath, the airstream's vibrations in his vocal cords, or the membranes in his glottis' (40).

The book comprises several theses but never successfully sustains or clinches any of them. First, as its subtitle indicates, it is concerned to heal or at least address 'a renewed or … growing rift between page and stage in Shakespeare studies' (13). While the Oxford edition of *The Complete Works* sought to prioritize the plays' theatricality more recent work by Lukas Erne and others has stressed the literariness of Shakespeare's composition, suggesting that the playwright had page as much as stage in mind when writing. For Weimann and Bruster the plays are not consumed in different places by different audiences/readerships but rather manifest and sustain a parity between stage and page. Their significance in their time lay in the ways 'in which the script and the show mutually engaged and intensified one another' (25) and the authors are intent on exploring 'how *in the theatre* the specific form and force of each medium defines, and is defined by the other' (3, italics mine). Notice the force of that 'in the theatre': while Weimann and Bruster argue for a reciprocity that suggests a relationship among equals, stage is finally more equal than page.

Since the authors are primarily interested in the practicalities of performing rather than reading, this asymmetry should not shock us. In fact, reading takes a back seat as they explore such theatrical phenomena as personation, character, clowning, and cross-dressing. They argue that basic personation gives way to a more complicated staging of character as 'a more comprehending image of subjectivity' (160). This is said to occur 'at about the turn of the century' (161), though no specific evidence is offered for this timing. Indeed, the authors cite Anthony Dawson on the ineluctable quality of the actor under the character in 'a mingling of representational or mimetic acting and 'presentational' acting whereby the actor … calls attention to his own skill and invites the audience to admire it' (qtd. 162). This description rather

gives the lie to the argument that acting graduated from the latter style to the former, let alone 'at about the turn of the century'. Rather, as Dawson insists, both styles were maintained on the early modern stage. In spite of their earlier claim, Weimann and Bruster are forced to acknowledge this thesis, concluding that 'the person who is actually speaking is neither the actor nor the character but the actor-character' (176).

Given the authors' greater interest in stage than in page, we should not be surprised that the latter term doesn't really get a look-in until page 180 of a 223-page discussion. When it does appear, it means a bewildering number of things: early modern printing (the book trade), the relationship of prose and verse (prosody), and the appearance of printed and written matter within the plays in the form of letters, tavern bills and other documents (hand properties). The authors attempt to account for the term's multiplicity: 'pages' [their quotation marks] is 'a term under which we could loosely gather all the materials in question here' (184). This quotation precisely identifies the problem with their approach: the term "page" is used so broadly that it ceases to be useful.

The volume ends not with a bang but with a whimper. One of the most textually intriguing and problematic of Shakespeare's dramas, *King Lear* — a work which exists, as the Oxford editors and others have argued, as two distinct plays — is here given short shrift. There is hardly any discussion of different texts but a series of weird suggestions: 'The middle scenes of *King Lear* offer … a display of what we could anachronistically think of as the early modern playhouse's green room' (200); 'As long as something would stand for something else, the register of what is representative makes representation tick' (200). Both Weimann and Bruster are undisputed heavyweights of the Shakespeare world and one is loath to sound so waspish about their volume. The trouble is that in its eccentricity, its magpie-mindedness, and its obfuscatory critical discourse it clouds rather than illuminates the complex relationship between stage and page in early modern England.

Peter J. Smith