G. B. Shand (ed). *Teaching Shakespeare: Passing It On*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Pp 241.

The focus of this often inspiring book is the teaching of Shakespeare at university level. It had never occurred to me that anything as sophisticated as a pedagogy might actually underpin university teaching. In mitigation I can only plead my own experience as an undergraduate at Oxford in the early 1970s, when teaching seemed to consist of setting an essay for the following week, listening to its nervous author read it aloud, and offering one or two cursory remarks together with a glass of sherry. Richard Dutton's account here of his Cambridge days (198–9) is hauntingly familiar.

What a surprise, then, to find evidence in this diverse collection of essays of a plethora of pedagogies striving for attention. If this were a live debate, the clash of competing ideologies would cause sparks to fly. The university teachers represented here range in philosophy and tone from the fuzzily liberal to the stridently politically-correct (and how I prefer the 1970s version of that phrase: ideologically sound). Engagingly, however, all these contributors, usually known for their scholarly analyses of early modern drama, switch here to a chattily anecdotal style, at least in their placing of themselves in the institutions in which they have taught. The notable exception is Kate McLuskie, who not only never gives us a sense of herself as a Shakespeare teacher, but dismisses other practitioners' accounts for offering teaching tips 'building on anecdotes about pedagogic strategies that "work" in their classrooms' (134). Thankfully, the personal anecdotes in the essays that surround hers prove to be some of the most enjoyable and revealing parts of the book, and Frances E. Dolan explicitly defends them in admitting, 'When I speak or write about teaching I usually resort to anecdotes because they are the only way I can convey the ad hoc, seat-of-the-pants nature of teaching as I experience it' (181). It is a pity she resorts to the verb 'resort', which suggests uncertainty about the intellectual rigour of the anecdotal approach. Alexander Leggatt, however, unblushingly confesses that his essay is 'built on stories of … students over the years' (62), while Richard Dutton boldly turns his entire contribution into an extended anecdote, moulding his experiences as both educator and educatee into an absorbing mini-autobiography.

In the opening essay, 'Teaching Shakespeare, Mentoring Shakespeareans', Jean E. Howard reflects on the conceptions and misconceptions of undergraduates. '[M]any students', she says, 'wrongly think that being professional means being hard to understand' (19). It doesn't, of course, and it is a pity

this message didn't get through to all her fellow-contributors. Kate McLuskie is aware of the problem, framing her essay, 'Dancing and Thinking: Teaching "Shakespeare" in the Twenty-First Century', in a consideration of Lucky's speech from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* which is partly a parody of incomprehensible academic discourse. Aware of the danger, McLuskie manages to keep her reflections on the understandable side of what she calls 'the pretentious meaning-making that is mocked in this episode' (124). She has a number of axes to grind, emphasized by the loosely integrated five-part structure of her essay. Most notably, she takes issue with current performance-based pedagogies largely derived from Rex Gibson's 'Shakespeare in Schools' project. Though she tries to be fair in her assessment, her tone often slips into one of lofty condescension — 'It would be churlish to gainsay the achievement of projects such as Rex Gibson's' (131) — which does not help her case. Yet many of her reservations are valid and need to be addressed. As she wryly observes, among all the devotees of teaching Shakespeare through performance '[n]o one ever describes a bad class' (131). Let me remedy that. As a school-teaching advocate of an active approach, I confess that my attempts to engage large classes of unmotivated adolescents in the joys of Shakespeare have sometimes been disastrous, leading me to revert grudgingly with Russ McDonald to the adage 'keep them in their seats' rather than 'get them on their feet' (31). Visiting RSC education practitioners, parachuted in to inspire students, are in a very different position from the regular class-teacher who must pick up the daily baggage of dismissive disrespect and habitual antagonism.

McLuskie is one of the few writers in this collection to consider 'Teaching Shakespeare' as a continuum that stretches from primary school to postgraduate level with frequently unfortunate results. Shakespeare's plays, 'released from their texts to become … the sources of imaginative empathy' (131) for young children, mutate in the context of increasingly target-driven university courses into a 'generalized humanist interpretation of "Shakespeare"' (137). With scarcely disguised disdain emphasized by her careful employment of linguistic bathos, McLuskie describes a typical Shakespeare program 'that builds on expectations of an intuitive engagement with easily assimilated and universally available humanist narratives, together with the added attractions of a theatre trip' (137). A debate between McLuskie and McDonald, who bemoans 'a powerful antihumanist strain in Anglo-American cultural life' (29) which he partly identifies with late twentieth-century 'politically inflected' (30) literary analysis, would be instructive.

McDonald's essay, 'Planned Obsolescence or Working at the Words', has all the virtues of traditional liberal humanism as well as being witty and attractively self-deprecating. He advocates a pedagogy in which students are able to 'absorb and develop the ability to read, interpret, and take pleasure in the plays and poems on their own' (28). For some, 'pleasure' is surely far too bourgeois an outcome of undergraduate studies, yet its deep currents swirl through many of these essays. Anthony B. Dawson indulges in blatant fan-worship, praising 'the most wonderful … of all writers', 'that consummate man of the theatre' (75). Ramona Wray unfashionably confesses that 'when teaching, I am passionate about' — well, it doesn't much matter what she's passionate about, since few teachers these days would be prepared to admit to such commendable emotional engagement with their work.

The initial pleasure engendered by Wray's admission soon dissipates. Her title makes her passions explicit: 'Communicating Differences: Gender, Feminism, and Queer Studies in the Changing Shakespeare Curriculum'. So far, so ideologically sound. What grates, however, is that throughout her account of the English degree program she runs at Queen's University, Belfast, Wray's tone somehow suggests that this is the way Shakespeare *should* be taught in the interests of achieving a 'politicized classroom' (156). Here, students 'are enabled to arrive not only at a fresh sense of their agency but also at a consciousness about their own positions in a society [i.e. Northern Ireland] that has historically traded upon fixed roles and that has often elected to judge on the basis of predetermined affiliations' (157). Wray pursues these aims through the study of Shakespeare films, and anecdotal evidence of her students' surprisingly sophisticated responses attests to her success. Yet Shakespeare seems principally an absence here: at best an excuse, a hook on which to hang arguments about such issues as 'gendered modalities of linguistic resistance' (155), whatever that means. No wonder students, to paraphrase Jean Howard, frequently equate academic discourse with incomprehensibility. I have no quarrel with Wray's wholly admirable socio-political agenda, but the restrictive use to which she puts Shakespeare sometimes smacks of a spirit of indoctrination that contrasts hugely with the ideals of elucidation and openness evident elsewhere in this volume. Thank goodness for Ania Loomba, whose observations on 'Teaching Shakespeare and Race in the New Empire' are rooted in the perceptions and experiences of her students, for whom 'race is a subject [they] are often uncomfortable dealing with or talking about in the classroom' (170). Loomba's vetoing of her students' use of the word 'culture' at the start of her course, forcing them to find more precise

terms of discourse — 'Do they mean society? Do they mean religion or language? Do they mean custom?' (173) — is particularly interesting.

Though one may take issue with much throughout the book, more often enormous pleasure results from the insights of so many experienced practitioners: Alexander Leggatt celebrating the invaluable 'strangeness' of many key moments in Shakespeare and worrying about killing it with explanations (66), or Carol Chillington Rutter defying the performance sceptics by declaring that 'After the summer of 1977 [the year she sat in on Terry Hands's rehearsals for the RSC *Henry VI* trilogy] it never occurred to me to think of Shakespeare without thinking of performance' (221). There is also a paradoxical reassurance to be found in recognizing attitudes and assumptions familiar from school pupils carried through to undergraduate level. Russ McDonald is particularly good on students' suspicions of 'hidden meanings' (40), as if texts are puzzling conspiracies whose solutions are only available to a specially trained intellectual elite. Miriam Gilbert confronts head-on the fact that 'for many students, questions begin with characters [because] characters seem easier to grasp than anything else in the play', arguing that 'this seemingly outdated approach may still be relevant' (92). Frances Dolan celebrates the 'pedagogical victory' achieved if students have actually 'read a play and want to raise their hands and say something about it' (182). In a familiar teachers' nightmare, Barbara Hodgdon agonizes over the student 'whose writing came straight from Wikipedia and who … finally came to my office in the last week of classes and informed me that she hadn't understood anything all term' (116). Such are the everyday dilemmas facing teachers, which the contributors to this volume almost without exception address with either a calculated pedagogy or a spontaneous readjustment of method that places them where their students actually are.

In the face of such experiences, the sense of uncertainty and inadequacy that emerges from these pages is hardly surprising. McDonald observes that 'many of us are loath to employ the authority with which our training has furnished us' (32); Rutter admits that 'I constantly face up to the ludicrous futility of my teacherly words' (223). Frances Dolan commendably cuts through all the pedagogical theorizing essayed elsewhere with the refreshing admission that she possesses no 'coherent "philosophy of teaching"', adding that she 'could produce one if required to do so for institutional reasons, but [her] heart would not be in it' (181). Good for her; it is not surprising that her excellent essay, 'Learning to Listen: Shakespeare and Contexts', is one of the best in the book.

For many of these writers, a coherent teaching philosophy is unfortunately demanded by the antihumanist contexts in which they work, fighting a rear-guard action against what McDonald calls 'a disdain for the uselessness of the liberal arts, for the irrelevance of the literary' (29). It is partly the need for such self-defensive postures that motivates the intense politicization of Shakespeare Studies evident throughout the volume. If a utilitarian function for studying Shakespeare is difficult to argue, then at least one can claim to be nurturing students' political awareness. One can only sympathize with Barbara Hodgdon's anxieties about being a Shakespeare teacher in the context of the modern world's troubling politics and applaud her conviction that, through her students' creation of alternative dramas arising from Shakespeare's plays, she has enabled them to use his words 'to do political work'. She concludes, touchingly, that the 'barricades' are 'right here' in the Shakespeare classroom, and that that is where she should stay: 'on the front lines' (118). This is a far cry from McDonald's promotion of 'pleasure', but both are entirely valid outcomes. Indeed, one could argue that without the pleasure that students might derive from studying the plays there can be little chance of their achieving any level of political engagement.

This book creates the impression that the range of approaches it encompasses — political, textual, practical, theatrical, performance-based, film-centred, context-orientated — are somehow mutually exclusive. Given the need for a study-program to be reasonably coherent, it would surely still be possible to employ a plurality of methods, perhaps demonstrating how each approach can illuminate a chosen play from a different angle and reflect that illumination back on the world in which we are studying it. If this seems to require something of a pedagogical juggling act, perhaps the teaching of such a course could be shared between different faculty members, ensuring at least that students would leave university having realized that, as Kate McLuskie's inverted commas suggest, there is more than one construction of 'Shakespeare'.

Peter Malin