

A Bibliographical Primer, Editorial Guide, and Textual Introduction might be a more accurate (not to say verbose) title in hindsight, the reality is that 'bibliography' is simply not as sexy a term as 'reading'. The book's extensive discussion of other dramatists, with half of its illustrations gleaned from outside the Shakespeare corpus, clearly indicates that Giddens' subject-matter is far more than just 'Shakespearean' in the limited sense that a reader might intimate from the title alone. In much the same way, Lukas Erne's *Shakespeare's Modern Collaborators* (London and New York, 2008) functions as a superb primer on editorial theory and practice in general as much as it offers a persuasively argued mission statement for the continued importance of editing Shakespeare in particular. Indeed, one could easily teach a graduate seminar on editing early modern drama, and not just Shakespeare, with Giddens and Erne as set texts. Neither book should be judged by its title.

In conclusion, *How to Read a Shakespearean Play Text* is a solid but gentle introduction to the bibliographical and textual principles, methods, and issues most relevant to the study of early modern drama in print. It is not a substitute for the lengthier bibliographical tomes of Bowers, Greg, Gaskell, McKerrow and the like, nor does it claim to offer an exhaustive treatment of its subject. Giddens writes in an engaging, straightforward style that will not alienate a student readership (as many of the earlier handbooks may do). At the same time, the content is in no way diluted or reduced to appeal to a lay audience. Indeed, scholars new to textual studies will find this book immensely useful as an introduction, while trained bibliographers may benefit from it as a primer or be stirred by the occasional pointers for future directions scattered throughout the text.

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Max Harris. *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011. Pp xi, 322.

According to E.K. Chambers (summarizing a contemporary report), one of the last accounts of a clerical Feast of Fools in France involved Franciscan lay brothers who 'put on the vestments inside out, held the books upside down, and wore spectacles with rounds of orange peel instead of glasses. They blew

the ashes from the censers upon each other's faces and heads, and instead of the proper liturgy chanted confused gibberish'.¹ In *Sacred Folly*, Max Harris quotes this and other descriptions of the feast by modern scholars and contemporary observers only to skewer them for distortion and inaccuracy.

As amusing as the picture of the lay brothers wearing orange-peel lenses may be, it must be said that Harris carries the day. *Sacred Folly* is a succinct, well-argued, and meticulously documented history both of the Feast of Fools itself and of the ways in which it has been presented and described in scholarly and popular accounts of the medieval period. The results of Harris's investigations suggest that part of the difficulty for past scholars may have been the ambiguous nature of the Feast of Fools' usual date, 1 January. In the western Christian calendar this is the Feast of the Circumcision (or the Naming of Jesus, as it is more usually called in modern times), one of a number of theologically and liturgically rich festivals celebrated in the Christmas season. But in the western civil calendar it is New Year's Day: the successor, in the late ancient and medieval periods, to at least some Roman customary observances of the Kalends of January. Antiquarians' and scholars' shared desire to discern some remnant of Kalends masquerades in the more organized and ritual misrule of the Feast of Fools seems to have strongly influenced what they saw when they looked at that feast.

In fact *Sacred Folly* works to overturn the once prevalent consensus view of the feast as a disreputable and even blasphemous parody of liturgy and worship, tolerated by at least some ecclesiastical authorities as a form of 'blowing off steam' through an annual practice of misrule. Instead it seeks to locate the feast within traditions of 'sacred subversion' that owe much to the themes of the Magnificat canticle (Luke 1:46–55). In this endeavour, its author shows a sympathy for and understanding of liturgy often lacking in early twentieth-century studies by men such as Chambers. Divided into five sections (with a prologue and epilogue), the text itself comprises only 288 pages, with the remainder taken up by a bibliography and index.

In part one, Harris's discussion begins by considering possible precursors to the Feast of Fools, such as Romano-Byzantine New Year's observances and western Kalends masquerades. Part two deals with the early emergence of the Feast of Fools as an organized liturgical observance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and also with early critiques of the practice, including the well-known letter of Innocent III. Here a reader might wish for a greater understanding of and sympathy with the ecclesiastical reform movements of the period and the Lateran IV Council and its aftermath, but this is a comparatively minor lapse

in the book's generally strong treatment of ecclesiology and liturgy. This section considers the liturgical ordo for the Feast of the Circumcision in Sens as well as associated liturgical drama in Beauvais and Laon. Part three covers the growth and spread (mostly in France but occasionally elsewhere) of the feast and its ritualized and organized misrule; it also covers the growth of support, especially local support, against its detractors. In this section Harris brings in the unfortunately patchy evidence for the Feast of Fools in England at such cathedrals as St Paul's in London and those in Exeter, Lincoln, and Wells. He must also deal with laic activities at the same season of the year, whose disorders and excesses have been confused by both contemporaries and later scholars with the clerical activities at the Feast of Fools.

In part four Harris moves into the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the feast's critics prevailed in most dioceses. A range of influential opponents from Jean Gerson to the council fathers of Basel and the Paris theology faculty arrayed themselves against the Feast of Fools or the excesses that they associated with it. While opposing their arguments and judgments, Harris is forced to document their successes in many areas. Part five, entitled 'Beyond the Feast of Fools', deals primarily with laic festive societies and their New Year's activities after the suppression of the Feast of Fools in most French dioceses, and considers the argument that these activities were somehow a legacy of that feast.

An old adage in the world of entertainment is supposed to be, 'Always leave them wanting more'. If that is true, *Sacred Folly* certainly succeeds. Its success in dealing with the intricacies of the Feast of Fools and with the arguments of scholars who have written on it in the past only serves to underscore the need for a comparable study of the intricacies of boy bishop observances. One of the possible times for the boy bishop's liturgical activities was also during the Christmas season: on 28 December, the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Harris has shown in *Sacred Folly* how in some French dioceses the boy bishop appeared as part of the Feast of Fools observances; perhaps he could be persuaded to pursue that figure with the same skill and enthusiasm he has brought to bear on the Feast of Fools itself.

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- 1 E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1903), 1.317–18.