

Lukas Erne. *Shakespeare and the Book Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp 302.

Lukas Erne. *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp 323.

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As Erne's work on Shakespeare in print continues, it is becoming easier to see the advantages and limitations of a book history approach to Shakespeare. *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* is introduced as 'an extension of my earlier study, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*' (8) and, like that earlier book, it offers a productive challenge to many truisms of Shakespeare scholarship whilst also making many more local arguments that, though frequently important, often isolate Shakespeare and inadvertently elide the broader theatrical and print contexts of his work.

The book moves from an attempt to quantify Shakespeare's presence in print to three studies of the way 'Shakespeare' is manifested in print: authorial misattribution, the plays' and poems' bibliographic spaces, and the various publishers involved in their production. The final chapter considers Shakespeare's immediate print reception, identifying three kinds of readership or book-owner: those who collect books, those who write in them, and those who recycle print material in their commonplace books.

The central challenge to the notion that Shakespeare was an unimportant and uninvolved print author is very welcome. Erne is particularly interesting on the 'emphatically' authorial 1608 title page to *King Lear* (77), *The Passionate Pilgrim* as fan literature (87–8), title-page references to Shakespeare as corrector (98–9), the infrequency of playbook prefatory epistles (103–6), and the publication of Shakespeare's poetry (148–59). His insistence that we stop considering playbooks as mere print ephemera is especially important (192, 194–5). At these moments Erne rightly insists that we rethink our assumptions about the field.

Both the larger claims of Erne's work and the local attention to detail, however, rest on assumptions that themselves might be usefully challenged. Erne repeatedly asserts, at the heart of both this and his earlier study, that Shakespearean scholarship has over-emphasized or unduly isolated Shakespeare's

theatrical provenance (see, for example, 1). But performance and performance studies continue to seem peripheral to current scholarly concerns, and Erne's own brief descriptions of theatrical experience — calling it 'fleeting', for example (7) — tend towards the negative, suggesting that anti-theatricality still lingers at the heart of Shakespeare scholarship. Ironically, this emphasis on drama's ephemerality relies on the same assumptions that Erne is trying to challenge with respect to quarto publication.

The book has a troubled relationship with time, seeming to define time periods in order to suit its argument. On the first page, attempting to square Shakespeare's dual investment in performance and print, Erne insists that 'the public theatre and the printing press' 'simultaneously put [Shakespeare's] plays into circulation' (1), where 'simultaneously' seems to elide the different time scales that defined these two media. It also overlooks the different ways in which these media developed: a long comparison between Shakespeare and Greene, for example, never makes the point that the latter writer was working in an earlier and much less established market and had a far shorter career and a very different generic range (30–5). Erne is similarly uninterested in another of Shakespeare's early contemporaries, Lyly, resorting to the misleading truism that he was 'much in vogue for a limited time' to explain away his otherwise surprising prominence in Erne's list of authors reprinted within ten years of a play's original publication (52). Though the book frequently mentions contemporaries, it never engages with them extensively, so that the rich implications of Erne's findings are occasionally missed: Heywood's complaints about the miscegenation of his and Shakespeare's authorship in *Passionate Pilgrim* (84–5), for example, is especially interesting in light of Erne's earlier findings that Heywood came closest of all the contemporaries in challenging Shakespeare's prominence, at least in the terms defined by Erne himself (39).

The biggest problem with time, however, comes when Erne proposes to treat essentially contemporary events as if they occurred in different periods. Erne proposes one 'temporal focus', 'Shakespeare's own time', for his book, and hopes that 'flexibility' and 'a variety of time windows' will allow him to cut off this period at 1660. Erne proposes another period inaugurated by the first folio, 'a time which is distinctly posthumous to Shakespeare rather than contemporaneous with him' (6), and makes it clear that this period will not be pertinent to his study. This distinction gives us an earlier period running until 1660 and another period starting in 1623, which Erne largely ignores. This rather unorthodox periodization scheme legitimizes evidence

that favours its thesis and excludes that which is less expedient. On a purely practical level, and for all his concern with cut-off dates, Erne never declares a start date for his periodization: a passing reference to 'the beginning of the publication of professional plays' (37) simply begs the question.

The book's engagement with current scholarship is sometimes variable. It seems odd to discuss Shakespeare as textual reviser without reference to Grace Loppolo, for example. Though he cites Joseph Loewenstein's work on possessive authorship, Erne states categorically that a lack of authorial copyright meant that 'dramatists and poets had ultimately no control over the publication of their works' (20), despite Loewenstein's careful demonstration that writers often exerted some form of control over publication. With his reference to 'dramatists and poets', Erne overlooks prose literature, a form where such control is most obvious (for example, in Nashe's use of the title page as a space for literary composition), but Erne himself later refers to Jonson, Chapman, and Marston's playbook self-representations, which also belie Erne's blunt statement about control. As he did in *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, Erne leans heavily on Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser's work on the print market, but his description of their key term, 'professional', is inaccurate.¹ For Farmer and Lesser, it operates as a synonym for adult, outdoor theatre, which makes the unfortunate assumption that companies working in indoor playhouses were not doing so for money. In unconsciously redefining this term so that it now includes the plays of the boy companies, Erne ironically improves on Farmer and Lesser's use (37), though a later footnote referring to Peter Blayney 'includ[ing] in his count plays which were not performed at public playhouses' suggests inconsistency or confusion around his use of the term throughout the book (101). The statement that play publication was 'mostly unprofitable' (55) glosses over recent debate and seems to assume the incompetence of early modern publishers. Though Erne cites Gary Taylor's work on the first folio (106), the book never acknowledges the importance of Taylor's point that the first folio may not have been a commercial success, surely a central problem for a book whose central thesis is that 'a name to make money with was "Shakespeare"' (59). The first folio appears very briefly towards the end of the book as a 'bleak' indicator of Shakespeare's popularity (perhaps an oblique reference to Taylor's argument), but Erne moves immediately on to more uplifting evidence (195). This elision seems to explain the book's insistence on confining itself to the 'time' of Shakespeare's quarto publication, rather than that of the folio.

A range of methodological considerations might complicate the arguments Erne advances here. The question of collaboration never troubles the book's conceptualization of Shakespearean authorship, despite occasional acknowledgment of a collaborative Shakespeare (11, 40, 90). The issue of anonymous publication similarly haunts Erne's thesis, reoccurring without prompting the reflection that an anonymous playbook has cultural value for many of its producers, including the author(s) of its text. The decision to ignore the first folio — to say nothing of a lack of interest in the half of the corpus that was not printed in quarto form — allows Erne to tell his story of Shakespeare's 'astounding' and 'massive' bibliographic presence and contemporary reception (48, 42). Erne's interest in the misattribution of plays to Shakespeare might have benefited by comparison to other examples of literary representations of authorship, such as the use of fictional characters or authorial personas to sell prose writing, for example. Book historians seem automatically to assume that a lack of reprints indicates a text or book that is a commercial failure, as Erne repeatedly does here (75, for example), but this is in tension with Erne's own claims that certain publishers declined to print or reprint certain works for non-commercial reasons. Erne's book is symptomatic of a wider problem in book history: the need for caution in the face of the seeming security of numbers. When literary scholars turn to accountancy, they need to retain their proper scepticism for evidence.

The signs here indicate that Erne is writing for a rather narrow range of academic readers, both supportive and hostile, which seems a shame given the wider interest his work could have for other kinds of readers, and in this sense the book shares with Erne's new preface to the second edition of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* a self-conscious concern to preempt its own reception. The concerns raised here mean that, although this book makes a very welcome challenge to various misconceptions about Shakespeare, he is never truly placed in the book trade in the way the title suggests. Much work remains to be done on the position Shakespeare's work occupied in any given publisher's portfolio, which would benefit from an acknowledgement of the multiple ways Shakespearean authorship cannot be separated from his peers. Despite the controversy Erne's work has previously engendered, it is difficult to escape the impression that much of the fallout it has provoked is in part due to the fact that it tells Shakespeareans what they already wanted to hear: that he was a popular and reassuringly literary writer. Erne's book is, then, a work of canonical entrenchment that isolates Shakespeare even as his contemporaries appear briefly around him. In that sense, it shares with

Bart van Es's recent *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford, 2013) a determination to demonstrate Shakespeare's radical difference even as it establishes that difference by overlooking the boundaries between Shakespeare and the contemporaries with whom he collaborated.

Notes

- 1 Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The popularity of playbooks revisited', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56.1 (2005), 6.

Lynn S. Meskill. *Ben Jonson and Envy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp 229.

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Ben Jonson and Envy offers a sustained look at the emotion that has from the eighteenth century been perennially attributed to Jonson. Despite the ubiquitous critical belief in Jonson's personal invidiousness, Lynn Meskill rightly claims that there has been no thorough consideration of how envy functions within his writings. *Ben Jonson and Envy* is an important attempt to remedy this lacuna. Crucially, Meskill sees Jonson's personal envy and its presence in his works as inextricably related. Her central claim is that rather than a Bloomian 'anxiety of influence', Jonson was controlled by an "anxiety of reception" (borrowing Lucy Newlyn's phrase) that arose from his belief that an 'audience's *vision* is naturally *depraved*' and inevitably 'dominated by invidiousness' (5–7). This perceived envy became in turn 'a generative force': Jonson consistently wrote 'not just *against*, but in *response* to a judging spectator or reader', resulting in texts 'generated by and through a series of engagements with the spectator's and ... reader's imagined queries and objections' (8). Throughout, Meskill inflects her primarily cultural-materialist approach with a subtle Freudian paradigm, aligning herself with what she calls the '*sinister* approach' of Edmund Wilson's and William Kerrigan's Freudian readings of Jonson. With them, she aims to expose the 'darker aspect' of Jonson