

GOSSETT, Suzanne. 2022. *Shakespeare and Textual Theory*. London: Bloomsbury. Pp. 272. ISBN 9781350121249, Hardback \$90.00. ISBN 978135 0121232, Paperback \$29.95. ISBN 9781350 121256, eBook \$26.95.

Suzanne Gossett's *Shakespeare and Textual Theory* is the latest addition to the *Arden Shakespeare and Theory* series, edited by Evelyn Gajowski. Gossett was the ideal choice to write the volume, a task she has executed with consideration and care. The breadth of her scholarly knowledge, the depth of her editorial experience, and the quality of her pedagogical aptitude are all strongly evident in the book and, combined, produce a text that serves as a useful reference for the seasoned Shakespearean as well as an invaluable tool for the neophyte textual scholar.

After a brief introduction, the book is divided into four fittingly uneven sections. The first two, at approximately thirty pages each, provide foundational information on Shakespeare's texts and twentieth-century textual theory, respectively. The bulk of the book is devoted to the substantial third section, "Current Debates", six chapters of which focus on various topics of academic dispute. The section's final chapter offers two case studies that together provide a comprehensive illustration of how those disputes bear out in scholarship. The book's final section is a brief twelve-page coda that looks forward to the impact of digital technologies on textual studies. In sum, the book covers the past, present, and future of the field.

Gossett begins by reminding her reader, "There is no Shakespeare without text" (1). If not for the literary artifacts that identify Shakespeare as author, his name would have no significance in Western culture. Such reasoning underpins the entire volume, clearly affirming the value of textual theory to the study of Western literature's overwhelmingly predominant figure. Gossett attends to the full range of approaches that contribute to understanding surviving play texts, including examination of "physical, historical, theatrical and literary" evidence (22). In describing the origins of New Bibliography and poststructuralism and the role of such critical movements in the rise of textual theory, Gossett points out the insights generated by those theories as well as their weaknesses and blind spots, such as New Bibliography's "binary thinking (e.g., a text was based either on a promptbook or on foul papers)" and its "assumption that the author was an identifiable person of a particular historical period" with determinable intentions (46, 49). Similarly, in exploring current textual debates, Gossett champions "the persuasiveness of empirical evidence" in research on attribution (103) and the "material evidence" that forms the

basis of book history studies (167), but she also cautions against a “nostalgic desire for certainty” (194) and warns that, depending on the state of any given text, “even the most elaborate methodology may never be able to provide a final determination” on scholars’ questions (201). In this manner the book maintains fair and balanced insight on its subject.

Some of that balance, though, comes from the many tensions inherent to Shakespeare studies. The desire to have as much Shakespeare as possible is countered by a demand for the purest Shakespeare possible, an urge to construct a firm barrier “around whatever is definitely Shakespeare’s” (84). The rigor and persistence of textual scholars working in multiple disciplines means that even partial agreement can result in fresh insights, but it also leads to seemingly endless academic arguments, such as whether collaborations belong as part of the Shakespeare canon. These tensions run throughout the book, sometimes to the extent that they risk generating anxiety or a sense of futility in the reader who craves resolution to irreconcilable debates; but that fault lies with the subject, not the author, and Gossett does a wonderful job of framing the field’s manifold tensions as opportunities and even pleasures. She points out that “part of the fun of textual studies is that some of it is detective work, and readers are invited to become detectives themselves” (5), and she celebrates “lively [. . .] debate” (55). Gossett’s genuine enthusiasm and playful metaphors help make the book accessible to a broad audience, inviting a new generation of scholars to join the field.

In fact, Gossett judiciously but repeatedly highlights access points to the textual study of Shakespeare for beginners. Speaking directly to her reader in the introduction, she asserts, “There is always more to discover and a newer view. With what you will learn in this volume, you may be the one who solves some of the remaining riddles” (5). And again, at the book’s end, she reminds us that “discoveries continue to be made” (227). Indeed, despite its range and erudition, the book is eminently readable. Gossett neither avoids the specialized terminology of the field nor does she lapse into pedantry or sheer didacticism. Instead, through exceedingly well-organized explanations illustrated by specific examples and careful cross referencing, she draws the reader into the mysteries and delights of the Shakespearean text. Gossett not only clearly and thoroughly elucidates key concepts but also has a knack for distilling them into apt and concise descriptions, as when she asserts simply, “There can never be proof that any individual correction restores Shakespeare’s intention” (81). Her lucid sentences crystalize the core tenets of textual theory regarding essential but surprisingly complex terms like “text, work and author” (56) so that the sometimes nebulous and opaque field becomes vivid and concrete for those trying to accurately survey it.

The book also holds space for diverse theories of textual analysis, including some that have been historically marginalized. In describing the foundations of the field, Gossett details important early work by feminist scholars such as Ann Thompson, Jeanne Addison Roberts, Valerie Wayne, and others who provided new perspectives on and possibilities for Shakespeare's texts in their "undeterred" and "unabashed" attention to women's characterization, performances, and bodies (62). The book's chapter on "Book History and the Text" includes a section titled "Women and Shakespeare books" that devotes three pages to early women owners and readers of Shakespeare texts and usefully asserts, "Book history is one place where textual scholarship has been notably impacted by the rise of feminist criticism" (158). Queer textual work (57–59) and postcolonial textual and critical analysis (64–67) also receive due attention. While the examples provided by Gossett may appear somewhat limited, it is worth noting that the *Arden Shakespeare and Theory* series also includes Marianne Novy's *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (2019), Jyotsna Singh's *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2020), and Melissa Sanchez's *Shakespeare and Queer Theory* (2020). Gossett's incorporation of these other theories, then, demonstrates their valuable intersection with the field of textual studies while understandably leaving their broader impact on Shakespeare writ large for the companion volumes wholly dedicated to each.

Gossett seems to know just what to include and how much to leave out, prudent choices that reveal her extensive experience as a textual editor of Shakespeare. While she admits up front the particular perspective of her writing, which she describes as "coloured by my values and my experience as a scholar and editor" (5), it is also true that her values and experience are indispensable to the success of the book as a whole. She offers canny insights into the nature of the editorial process in relationship to textual theory, describing both its challenges and its privileges. For Gossett, textual editors are responsible for everything from "what is meant by 'Shakespeare'" (67) to authorship itself (75). The book's chapter on "Editing and Unediting" exemplifies the extent of Gossett's capabilities, as her analysis of the editor's role in regard to Shakespeare and textual theory shows not only her own prowess as an editor but also her ability to unpack the implications and functions of that role for others. Her roster of "problems that keep editors up at night" includes reconciling textual variants, identifying the limits of editorial authority, applying cultural awareness, and deciphering textual cruxes (137). In one useful example, Gossett describes the challenge of editing *All's Well That Ends Well* 2.4 in which two successive lines feature the identical speech prefix *Clo.*, for Clown; a scribe or compositor may

have dropped a line between, or the author himself may have made the omission, possibly amended by a marginal note that was later missed by a copyist (144–45). Gossett explains the approach taken by three different editors and the ramifications of their various choices, concluding, “Editors cannot escape choosing, over and over, between sometimes conflicting goals with different theoretical implications” (145). Her illustration of the editorial process illuminates the vital and dynamic nature of the work, encouraging others to contribute new perspectives.

After so richly demonstrating the wealth of knowledge to be gained through scholarly editorial practice, perhaps it is no surprise that Gossett seems a bit cautious regarding what she calls the “digital turn” in textual studies (215). As in other portions of the book, she is careful to present a balanced view of both sides but also remains ambivalent about some of the possibilities, describing, for example, the student annotation features of one recent electronic Shakespeare edition as “either ideal freedom or an instructor’s nightmare” (219). Sharing an admittedly “pessimistic” viewpoint, Gossett warns that “the availability of free texts, as well as a lack of interest in high culture leading to low sales, means that publishers, not earning a return on their investment, will cease to fund editions” and therefore, presumably, cease to employ editors (222). She also shares a foreboding cautionary tale about Amazon exerting undue regulation in the textual marketplace, resulting in “material control by a gigantic modern stationer” (226). Ultimately, Gossett insists on the unknowability of the future. While she admits that lack of knowledge leaves room for innovation, the book’s final paragraph is disappointingly grim in its catalog of lost beliefs, enduring disagreements, and uncertain desires: “We no long[er] believe that bibliographic analysis can convincingly reveal all the details of the manuscript that lies behind the printed text we read. [ . . . ] We cannot agree whether Shakespeare wrote short plays that he later expanded, or long ones that were cut for performance. [ . . . ] We are uncertain whether we want our text in postmodern flux or ‘staticized’” (226). Perhaps, though, persistent ambiguity leaves the reader a fittingly potent reminder of the power of an undecided future; after all, as Hamlet says, “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” With a guidebook such as Gossett’s to inform expanded thinking about Shakespeare and textual theory, the future of the field looks very promising indeed.

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