Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Straznicky, Marta, ed. Shakespeare's Stationers: Studies in Cultural Bibliography

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Shakespeare's Stationers speaks to recent and growing interest in the careers and
professional concerns of the publishers and printers who made Shakespeare's
plays and poems available in print. Marta Straznicky contributes a helpful
introduction in which she outlines the conversations taking place in early
modern stationer studies and identifies this book's particular engagements with
that field. This collection has a strong and coherent research focus: it provides
detailed investigations into the workings of the trade in the fifty to sixty years
around the turn of the seventeenth century and the networks of professional
and personal relations within which decisions were made.

Alexandra Halasz opens with "The Stationers' Shakespeare," in which
she argues that stationers cultivated the literary market over the long term to
make of the texts to which they had publishing rights "steady rent-producing
properties" (17). These marketing strategies extended to Shakespeare's plays
and poems. Pavier's aborted 1619 venture, in this context, comes to seem an
economically smart effort to create a "synergy" among related texts, both to
develop existing properties and to expand the readership for them at "a middling
price point" (25). When this effort failed—according to Halasz, because the
playing companies realized how publishers' development of "property" might
impair their own economic interests—a compromise founded on an authorial
canon was reached, in the form of the First Folio. The year 1619 thus marks a
turning-point in the ways drama would in future be marketed to readers.

The precarious market for playtexts is even more explicitly the subject of
Holger Schott Syme's investigation of "Thomas Creede, William Barley, and the
Venture of Printing Plays." Syme makes the case in favour of Peter Blayney's
view (so disagreeing with Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser) that playtexts
were not particularly financially lucrative. Playbooks could turn a small profit
and so warrant a reprint, but the profits were unable to compare with longer,
riskier books. Syme concludes that Creede was successful, where Barley (with
whom Creede had professional relations) was not, because unlike Barley,
Creede "ground his commercial fortunes […] in a string of projects exceeding
50 sheets in length" (41). A different kind of recovery project is pursued by

William Proctor Williams, who maps in detail the career of Zachariah Pasfield, one of fourteen licensers of drama before the office of the Master of the Revels took over this responsibility in 1607. As Proctor notes, these licensers and their practices have hitherto been neglected by both bibliographers and theatre historians.

Four essays in this collection argue that stationers shaped their list according to literary or political inclinations. Shakespeare and the preacher Thomas Playfere, for example, were both praised by contemporaries for their "sweet" and "mellifluous" style, and Adam G. Hooks argues that Andrew Wise's decision to publish both of these authors was a canny business choice, Wise thus "reinforcing [the two authors'] respective authorial brands" (56). It makes sense then that Wise is one of the first stationers to add Shakespeare's name to the title pages of his plays. Zachary Lesser likewise finds literary interests guiding John Waterson's re-invention of the Crown bookshop after his father's death, away from university books with potential appeal to a non-university London audience towards a different kind of elite publication, namely playtexts associated with indoor theatres and the court. Lesser argues that Waterson's marketing strategies were timely, but foundered due to the enduring force of his father's success, creating of *The Two Noble Kinsman*, published by Waterson, "Shakespeare's Flop" (195).

In "Nicholas Ling's Republican Hamlet (1603)," Kirk Melnikoff argues that Ling committed himself from 1596 to texts "with republican themes having to do with governance, counsel, and political virtue" (96). Melnikoff persuasively engages with the interpretive differences between Q1 *Hamlet* and the later texts to indicate how this edition, in particular, might have appealed to Ling, and so found a coherent place in his list. Alan B. Farmer examines political trends in the financially-troubled career of John Norton—"the most active publisher of Shakespeare during the 1630s" (148)—to make a couple of points that bear on an understanding of how Shakespeare's history plays might have been interpreted in Caroline England. First, the relevant political distinction was not pro- or anti-Catholic, but between those who feared either domestic rebellion or (Catholic) attack from without. Second, when Norton publishes independently of a partner, his books lean towards an "anti-Puritan" agenda (read: fear of domestic rebellion). His decision to reprint *Richard II, Richard III*, and *1 Henry IV* in the 1630s might then indicate that these domestic-rebellion dramas, perhaps unexpectedly, were regarded as pro-monarchist in Caroline England.

Sonia Massai turns to patronage to argue for the authorizing "clout" given to the First Folio by William and Philip Herbert (146). The dedication of the Folio to the Herbert brothers is not a missed opportunity—a failure to gain royal patronage—but a coherent publishing strategy that is consistent with Blount's other efforts to position himself as an "upmarket literary stationer" (133). This move links the Folio to the Sidney circle, "the most important literary coterie in the period" (138), and Massai thus reinterprets the reference to "surreptitious" and "deformed" copies as making a claim for *authorized* as opposed to authoritative texts: "'authorization' was a process that was understood as projecting forward from the author, to the patron, to the reader, as well as backward, from the printed text to the author" (145). Douglas Bruster takes a slightly different approach from the other contributors with his provocatively-entitled "Shakespeare the Stationer." His argument is that the plays from Shakespeare's "prose period" (*Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado about Nothing, 2 Henry IV, As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*) either sold poorly in a temporarily glutted market or were not offered for print sale at all because Shakespeare by 1600 was best known for his verse (both poems and plays). Shakespeare's shift away from plays written predominantly in prose, for Bruster, was a response to poor print sales. Bruster's account is engaging, but details such as the lack of authorial prefaces and dedications in the drama and the fall in new plays reaching print after 1603 niggle.

Nearly half of this collection is devoted to two handy appendices. The first consists of a chronological table of Shakespearean publications to 1640, including the apocryphal plays from the second issue of the Third Folio (1664) and works attributed to Shakespeare on the title page of at least one edition printed by 1640. The second appendix offers thumbnail sketches of Shakespeare's stationers; entries include a list of the plays and poems by Shakespeare each published. *Shakespeare's Stationers* is a superb collection, filled with historical detail mapping the networks of relations and considerations within which stationers operated. It powerfully shapes our understanding of how and why, and with what success, Shakespeare's works were made available to readers.

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