

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Lesser, Zachary. Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619; Bibliography in the Longue Durée

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Volume 44, Number 2, Spring 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082720ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37549>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hart, J. (2021). Review of [Lesser, Zachary. Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619; Bibliography in the Longue Durée]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(2), 256–258.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37549>

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Lesser, Zachary.

Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619; Bibliography in the Longue Durée.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. Pp. 232 + 70 ill., 1 table. ISBN 978-0-8122-5294-1 (hardcover) US\$49.95.

Zachary Lesser makes a significant contribution to various fields such as Shakespeare, bibliography, and the history of the book. His distinctive study has collective origins in scholarly debate and conversation: “From its beginnings in dialogue between A. W. Pollard and W. W. Greg, bibliography of the Pavier Quartos has been a collective endeavor. This book is the outcome of discussions with numerous colleagues” (ix). Lesser’s volume is focused, a book about a book, “an extended case study, with I hope broad implications, of one of the most important books in the history of Shakespeare studies” (2). For Lesser, the history of the Pavier Quartos can tell us a great deal and in ways that are not always readily apparent:

In this book, I use many of the techniques of New Bibliography to take a new look at the Pavier Quartos, but I try to do so without assuming the conclusions to which the New Bibliographers have led us. In fact, those conclusions have obscured the evidence I will discuss, since the New Bibliographic narrative has been powerful enough to prevent us from properly seeing these books (18).

The uncovering also covers up. Lesser’s counter-narrative qualifies the narrative potency of the story that the New Bibliographers tell. Lesser and others identify a problem with the genre of bibliography, with its driving narrative akin to the detective novel.

Lesser sums up this problematic well: “Like Conan Doyle’s criminology, bibliography is a method that seeks in the physical attributes of books the clues that can explain how things came to be as they are. This narrative structure impels us toward a solution, an unmasking; our bibliographic evidence pushes us toward a literary conclusion” (19). Quite aptly, Lesser proposes a move away from criticizing or building on the New Bibliographers through their work to a return to “close looking” or a re-examination of these materials, but with new theoretical perspectives, understanding the limits of the New Bibliography,

and with new technologies, such as multispectral imaging and the commercial airplane that permit an examination of the matter of book (for instance, paper) unavailable to the New Bibliographers (19). Lesser also notes that the New Bibliographers thought about editions and not individual copies, so that not until Charlton Hinman's work on the First Folio in the Folger Shakespeare Library and his *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963) did this kind of analysis demonstrate its benefits: that close attention to different copies of an edition can show the division of work among compositors in the printing house, the order in which the sheets of the book were printed, and the changes to the text that stop-press corrections made (19).

Here is a key assumption that Lesser makes: "Each copy of an edition is a unique object, with its own bibliographic evidence to offer about its particular history" (21). This is a sensible place to start and I also agree with his view that books do not ensure "literary historicism" but, with close attention, "embody multiple temporalities" (22–23). It is also sensible, as Lesser maintains, to remember that a "book is a palimpsest" and that we can employ "tools to read what is written underneath" yet we also need to engage with "how what has been overlaid can rewrite the substrate" or otherwise "we may misread both texts" (23). Lesser's use of Hilary Jenkinson's *Manual of Archive Administration* (1922) is productive, especially Jenkinson's tenet that an archivist must not consider future historians and their needs (24). Moreover, Lesser calls on Jacques Derrida to qualify this view, stressing Derrida's turn to the Ghost in *Hamlet* for his symbol or embodiment of this fever for the archive, for the sense that the objects we seek to ensure authentic origins violate temporal order by their very haunting or ghosting (25).

The difficulty of the task is something of which Lesser is keenly aware. He also calls attention to the degree to which bibliographers and librarians are conscious of the challenges of the reconstruction of the past, including the violation of archival principles by allowing an imagined posterity to affect the preservation of the past with fine bindings, the washing and trimming of marginalia, and the separation of sammelbands (25). Lesser turns to Henry Bradshaw, a Cambridge librarian and founder of modern analytic bibliography, saying that palaeotypography should be treated "as a branch of natural history" (25). According to Lesser, the Pavier Quartos need a bibliography returning to the origin and questioning it, "by dwelling in the *longue durée*, in the book's forever *unfinished* character" (26). Although criticizing elements of major

revisionist theories, Lesser notes that their views have prompted his work (32). Still, they do not consider the evidence of the quartos, which is what Lesser does in this book. He wishes once more to examine these books to find what we did not know (32).

In the first chapter, "Ghosts," among other things, Lesser says that "A bibliographic ghost returns to the world that has forgotten it to reveal lost collections, lost sammelbands, lost histories" (33). Lesser notes much of interest, including the "strangeness" of finding Heywood's play often bound up with the Pavier Quartos, something that challenges recent revisionist theories of the quartos (68). The second chapter, "Holes," also expands on this discovery and confirms that printers often included *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in the collection (69–70). Lesser uses as bibliographical evidence tiny holes buried deep in the gutters of nineteenth-century bindings to add to the story (70). He examines various factors that suggest that Isaac Jaggard was trying to deceive someone by manipulating the set to imply that it was not a usual collection that a publisher would issue (86). The third chapter, "Rips and Scrapes," argues that this deception extended to include "post-printing manipulations of copies" (86). The tears and repairs, when observed with transmitted light, show the difference in paper stock and help confirm that the ripping is about 1619 (87). In the Conclusion, "Questions," Lesser mentions that Jeffrey Todd Knight's discovery of the ghost of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, discovered on the last verso of the Huntington *Henry V* (SC 334), prompted his own interest in the quartos of 1619 (125). Lesser shows that a deep study of a book can tell a story that has important bibliographical, literary, and cultural implications. He helps us to see the Jaggard Quartos in terms of how the King's Men constructed them as fraudulent in 1619, which led to "their material transformation in the printing house," and the New Bibliographic effort to reconstruct them "as the fraudulent forerunner of the First Folio" (146). Lesser asks us to look closely again at the evidence embedded in "centuries of accreted history" and does so with great success (146).

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<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37549>