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**Renaissance et Réforme**



**de Grazia, Margreta and Stanley Wells (eds.). The New  
Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare**

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frequency by the editors and several other contributors, so its provision in translation by Smarr is especially useful.)

Campbell and Stampino are both major figures working at the intersection of comparatist early modern studies and feminist literary studies; they and their contributors are to be congratulated for opening up to view the variety and complexity of discursive contexts to which sixteenth-century Italian women's writings both responded and contributed. This volume, available for a mere \$32 in print or as an e-book, will prove not only a useful resource for early modern scholars but also a valuable text for classroom use.

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**de Grazia, Margreta and Stanley Wells (eds.).**

*The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare.*

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xvi, 360 + 19 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-521-71393-1 (paperback) \$28.99.

Readers can be assured that the contents and contributors of this title measure up in every way to those of the previous companion edited by de Grazia and Wells in 2001. But do the two volumes differ enough to warrant yet another Shakespeare reference book? This is the fifth Cambridge Companion dedicated to Shakespeare or Shakespeare Studies and the second to announce itself as “new.” It contains 21 “newly commissioned” chapters that “cover the traditional categories of Shakespeare study — his life, times and work — often with an innovative twist,” according to the editors (xi). Clearly, there is some tension here between the old and new — some chapters implicitly not being as innovative as others — but it is fitting for a subject who lived at a time when novelty was suspect and imitation the preferred mode of composition. Books in Shakespeare's lifetime were often advertised as newly altered or improved, sometimes despite considerable evidence to the contrary.

Some things don't change. The obligatory opening chapter on Shakespeare's biography, for example, predictably contains no new information; it changes only in the author's approach to the subject. Whereas Ernst Honigmann had in the previous companion engaged in the commonplace

speculations and assumptions of Shakespeare's more positivist biographers, Stephen Greenblatt takes a step back from his subject to reflect upon the constructivist importance of the biographer's imagination. Greenblatt's own *Will in the World* is afterwards listed as recommended reading.

In other chapters, the authors have been free to expand upon their themes owing to the improved organization of the new volume — which, although slimmer than its predecessor, is in fact longer (with more illustrations) and, on account of the glossy paper stock, heavier. There is a more logical progression to the chapters; a reader who tends to consult an individual chapter of interest might be tempted here to read through the whole volume, from beginning to end. There is also a more user-friendly layout to many of the essays, which would enable the same reader to consult sections within individual chapters on further points of interest. In Jeff Dolven and Sean Keilen's chapter on Shakespeare's reading, for example, the authors derive most of their evidence for Shakespeare's reading from the plays themselves, as Leonard Barkan had before them. Unlike Barkan, however, they organize their discussion around individual characters in such a way that readers can easily turn to their chapter to better understand Hamlet's reading, in particular, as much as Shakespeare's reading, in general.

Many of the traditional categories covered in the previous volume have been broken up with similar success. In the last volume, only one chapter dealt with the reproduction of Shakespeare's texts. In the new volume, the same subject spans two chapters, one still dealing generally with the transmission of Shakespeare's texts, and another dealing specially with the move from manuscript to print. The most striking difference in this regard is the separate treatments of Shakespeare's genres. In the last volume, Susan Snyder had fewer than twenty pages in which to survey Shakespeare's versatility across the full spectrum of dramatic genres. In the new volume, these genres each receive their own chapter: comedies, tragedies, histories, classical plays, and tragicomedies. David Scott Kastan had dealt separately with Shakespeare and English history in the previous volume, but readers will know better what to expect from Ton Hoenselaars's "history plays" in the current one.

The same is true of the volume's treatment of Shakespearean criticism. The editors retain a chapter on further resources, though rather than including one that surveys relevant criticism, they assign individual chapters to different critical issues: religion and politics, race, sexuality and gender (previously

“gender and sexuality”), globalization, etc. The advantage is that each author is able to make her or his case for the importance of the issue at hand for understanding Shakespeare’s life, time, and work. The themes are also broad enough to accommodate whatever New Boredom might be on the critical horizon. Digital Shakespeare, for example, falls safely under “media history,” which as the penultimate chapter might be understood as the most current trend. Still, a separate chapter on Shakespeare and collaborative authorship would have been both useful and instructive.

For the remaining chapters, the editors have merely swapped one expert for another whose work seems more innovative if only for being more recent. The quality of scholarship is not strained. One might as well consult John Kerrigan on Shakespeare’s poetry in the last volume as Colin Burrow in the present one, just as one will learn as much from John Ashington on Shakespeare’s theatre as from Tiffany Stern. Arguably, though, the tables and examples in the newly commissioned essay on Shakespeare’s language will be less threatening to non-experts than the more discursive approach of the previous one. In some instances, the authors even generously list their predecessor’s chapter as recommended reading, which suggests that their approaches are meant to be complementary.

The new companion is in many ways a supplement to the old, and it should for that reason alone earn a space on the shelf even of those readers with little to spare. I, for one, am happier having both to consult and compare — along with the Oxford handbook or Bedford and Blackwell companions — although as things are going, I doubt I will have room, in another ten year’s time, for the next Cambridge companion to Shakespeare.

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