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Whitfield, Peter. Illustrating Shakespeare

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elsewhere in the house. While the Penshurst catalogue still leaves us with many questions, this superb edition clearly establishes the significance of the books gathered by the first and second earls of Leicester for our understanding of the Sidneys' reading and collecting practices and the place of the library within Penshurst and within early modern literary culture.

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Whitfield, Peter.
Illustrating Shakespeare.

London: British Library / Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. 160 + ill. ISBN 978-0-7123-5889-7 (hardcover) \$35.

Illustrating Shakespeare is Peter Whitfield's latest in a series of similarly expansive titles that he has published in the past few decades through the British Library. Despite its rather illustrious provenance, Whitfield's collection is not a scholarly monograph in the sense that it makes no attempt to break new ground by challenging or advancing received ideas, or even to engage in any transparent way with past scholarship. Rather than focus at length on any particular aspect of his chosen topic, Whitfield offers in just 160 pages a sweeping survey of three and a half centuries of Shakespeare illustration that considers about a hundred images, four countries, and numerous aesthetic periods and styles in 35 chapters that average just four or five pages each. The discussion that accompanies the attractive colour plates engages not in critical analysis but rather in summarizing the scholarship on the topic without ever acknowledging its sources. In its comportment, then, Whitfield's project apparently partakes in two of the modern movements that its chapters address: "...the Book Beautiful" (chapter 29) and Bardolatry (chapter 35).

Whitfield's point of entry for his roughly chronological treatment of Shakespeare illustration (chapter 2: "Before 1700") may be taken as exemplary of both the book's shortcomings and its successes: Henry Peacham's sketch, from the Longeat manuscript, purportedly illustrating Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Whitfield addresses in just two brief paragraphs (16–17). Cobbling together only some of the scholarly analysis, debate, and controversy that the

sketch has garnered, Whitfield's broad strokes gloss over what he apparently regards as irrelevant details, such as Peacham's being the first Englishman to author a book of practical instruction in drawing; the uncertainties regarding the dating of the sketch; the full complexities of its visual iconography; and the murky relations between the diagram, Shakespeare's tragedy, and the various inscriptions that attend the drawing. Whitfield's handsome half-page reproduction crops out much of the original folio sheet to focus almost exclusively on the sketch. Equally telling is Whitfield's failure in his exposition to cite a single source for the assertions he makes. Clearly, this collection seems aimed at the coffee table rather than the research institution. That said, the volume is not without its merits: the famous works of William Hogarth (chapter 5), Henry Fuseli (chapter 9), William Blake (chapter 10), John Murdoch (chapter 22), John Everett Millais (chapter 26), and Edward Austin Abbey (chapter 30) are given special attention; as are Shakespeare editions by Rowe-Tonson (chapter 3), John Murdoch (chapter 22), Charles Knight (chapter 23), and Henry Irving (chapter 24); while sections devoted to John Thurston's comic-strip style approach to his 1825 *Illustrations of Shakespeare* (chapter 13), Sir John Gilbert's forays into chromolithography for his treatment of the songs punctuating the plays (chapter 21), and the advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century (chapter 25) all offer fascinating albeit brief glimpses into comparatively unconventional branches of Shakespeare illustration. cursory sections like those purporting to cover Shakespeare illustration in France (chapter 15), Germany (chapter 16), and America (chapter 17) demonstrate the perils of opting for breadth over depth.

One of the book's strongest appeals is its offering in a single volume and for a modest price an eclectic array of intriguing, beautifully reproduced images. However, despite the collection's large format and useful index, readers may find other aspects of the production vexing: images that are given pride of place sometimes receive relatively minor textual treatment, while others that earn prolonged explanation fail to appear at all; the order in which the images are presented is not consistent with the order in which they are described; the plates receive no systematic numbering; and the text rarely provides parenthetical references that would simplify the reader's efforts to locate the images under discussion. Moreover, image captions frequently omit vital details, such as the name of the artist, the year of composition, or the edition in which the illustration first appeared. One curious feature to which the collection points, but

that Whitfield neither ponders nor explains, is the apparent paucity of women's contributions to the field. Whitfield mentions the works of just three female illustrators in the entire book, and only two of their illustrations appear, both dating from the mid-twentieth century. Whitfield fails to point out in his section on John Boydell (chapter 11) that in 1789, Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery showcased works by three women artists: the sculptress Anne Seymour Damer; Caroline Watson, engraver to Queen Charlotte; and Angelica Kauffman, who was one of the first members of the Royal Academy (see Georgianna Ziegler, "Suppliant Women and Monumental Maidens: Shakespeare's Heroines in the Boydell Gallery"). Contributing to rather than clarifying this oversight, Whitfield's introduction consistently alludes to the theoretical illustrator—collectively "the artist"—by deploying the masculine pronoun. Why illustrating Shakespeare remained so predominantly a male enterprise for so long, and what the work of women contributed to the project, the author never considers, but Whitfield's collection certainly raises, if only tacitly, the spectre of gender bias.

In his introductory chapter, Whitfield wonders how we might best judge the relative success of a Shakespearean pictorial endeavour: should the illustrator's aim be graphically to capture the essence of the play, whether imagined inside or outside the confines of the theatre (if such transcendent coherence even exists); to strive instead to offer the viewer an artifact of the play's significance in relation to the historical and cultural *zeitgeist*; or to liberate entirely the depiction from the drama by creating a loosely related but independent work of art? Although Whitfield never provides the basis for his own verdicts by answering this query, he readily declares some Shakespeare illustrations triumphs of genius and others utter catastrophes. To judge this volume solely by its merits, *Illustrating Shakespeare* succeeds as an attractive tome that a mass-market audience can admire and afford.

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