



7-1-2009

Review of Bradshaw, Graham et al. "The Shakespearean International Yearbook," Vol. 6. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006

Andrew Vorder Bruegge

Winthrop University, vorderbruegg@winthrop.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/cvpa_facpub

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Publisher Citation

Vorder Bruegge, Andrew. Review of *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*, Vol. 6, eds. Graham Bradshaw et al. *Sixteenth Century Journal*. XL(No. 2, Summer 2009): 472-473. Print. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/andrew_vorder_bruegge/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Visual and Performing Arts Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. For more information, please contact bramed@winthrop.edu.

claim that Hooker successfully insulated himself against Roman Catholic arguments using the same logic—sounded a bit like special pleading. Nonetheless, these are fairly minor criticisms of what are overall very successful and penetrating arguments that will be of great interest both to historians and to divinity scholars.

The problematic part of this book, then, is not Eppley's analysis but the framework of "order" in the church that is his premise. Implicitly throughout the book, and explicitly in the conclusion, Eppley approves of and endorses the idea of his protagonists that hermeneutical freedom for Christians is a fundamental problem and that absolutist or authoritarian solutions to that problem are necessary to maintain order. In other words, Eppley seems to regard individualism and subjectivity as threats to Christianity and he sees in St. German and Hooker sixteenth-century models for how the church might subjugate individual consciences to the greater good of order and uniformity. He notes in his conclusion that one anonymous reader of his manuscript saw these arguments as frighteningly absolutist in their implications, but Eppley writes that nonetheless, "I believe that Hooker is correct in judging that a thoroughly subjective hermeneutic not only destroys community but also increases the likelihood of well-intentioned, sincere Christians falling into error" (225). Putting aside the appropriateness of this comment, I feel obliged to point out that whatever St. German and Hooker may have desired or claimed, control of textual interpretation remained as much a fantasy in the sixteenth century as it is in the twenty-first.

1969  2009

The Shakespearean International Yearbook. Vol. 6, Shakespeare and Montaigne Revisited. Ed. Graham Bradshaw, Tom Bishop, and Peter Holbrook. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 416 pp. \$99.95. ISBN 978-0-7546-5589-3.

REVIEWED BY: Andrew Vorder Bruegge, Winthrop University

The Ashgate Web site provides useful information about this almost-annual series inaugurated in 1999. This 2006 edition is typical in format; the bulk of the essays focus on a particular topic—in this case, Shakespeare/Montaigne skepticism—with a variety of other essays rounding out the volume. The Shakespeare/Montaigne scholarship here elaborates a long-standing tradition of scholarship that Peter Holbrook, the volume's editor, elegantly outlines in his introduction. The tight focus of these seven essays (and a summary essay by Hugh Grady) makes the volume a terrific contemporary resource on the topic, for the content arises out of specific Shakespeare/Montaigne research seminars at two recent professional conferences on Shakespearean studies. The complementary essays on gender, performance, language, historical context, and comparative philosophy all offer interesting, concise arguments that amply justify their publication.

The organization of the volume raises some questions. The inclusion in this volume of the several complementary essays alongside the bundle dedicated to Shakespeare/Montaigne, however, baffles the reader, especially since the volume editor makes no reference to them or the reasons for their inclusion. A review of the publisher's Web site reveals that the more recent volumes in the series all follow this pattern, so regular readers of this series apparently know what to expect. Also puzzling is the editor's expansive discussion in his introduction of Shakespeare's sonnets as "Montaignesque." It comes as a disappointing surprise that no essay in the volume discusses the sonnets. The section of Shakespeare/Montaigne essays is bracketed at the end by Hugh Grady's "Afterword: Montaigne and Shakespeare in Changing Cultural Paradigms." On one level this essay functions in a contextualizing way; hence it seems like a needless repetition of the editor's introduction, and

by putting Grady's very useful, well-argued essay *after* the content seems like putting the horse behind the cart as well as in front of it. On another level, though, Grady's essay does provide an overarching critique of the essays featured in the volume. While some of the scholars included in this volume might be self-deprecatingly modest with their conclusions, he unabashedly concludes that such investigations of Shakespeare and Montaigne are valuable because our own era continues to grapple with the issues they raise.

Most of these essays investigate the many nuanced threads of skepticism in Shakespeare's and Montaigne's writings. Virtually all the authors open their arguments by cautioning their readers not to expect too much, for the thread of skepticism in Shakespeare and Montaigne is shadowy at best. Interested readers might expect more assertive confidence from these well-credentialed experts in this very specific subcategory of Shakespearean studies; then again, in this postmodern era perhaps not. Russell Jacoby recently commented in an essay entitled "Not to Complicate Matters, but..." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 29 February 2008: B5-6) that much scholarship today simply muddies the interpretive waters, so to speak, rather than clarify, classify, or contain. Jacoby's lament resonated with me as I read some of the essays in this volume. Many of the authors chose to play it safe with ambiguity rather than risk asserting conclusions—a rhetorical strategy that they must have supposed would make them appear as naive enthusiasts. Anita Gilman Sherman ("The Aesthetic Strategies of Skepticism") concludes that her scholarship *complicates* the traditional scholarly understanding of the mood of the early modern period. Rob Carson ("Hearing Voices in *Coriolanus* and Early Modern Skepticism") dwells upon the *lack of resolution* for characters in *Coriolanus*. Lloyd Davis ("Rethinking Misogyny: Shakespeare, Gender, and the Critical Tradition") makes the point that Shakespeare's dramas provide evidence that misogyny was *more complex* in the sixteenth century than recent feminist scholarship has established. Perhaps the volume editor was feeling the same kind of intellectual ennui as Jacoby and I when he conceded in the introduction that attempts to interpret literary works as practical moral guides are now frowned upon by the reigning junta of historical/cultural/deconstructionist theorists. As I have observed in numerous earlier reviews in this journal, though, theatre artists such as myself are perplexed by our literary studies colleagues' pursuit of ambiguity. Whenever we present a drama on the stage, we feel obligated to banish ambivalence as we make thousands of decisions intended to clarify the dramatist's or our own vision for the audience. Highlighting the ambiguities in a Shakespeare script offers little help when actors, designers, technicians, and a director are trying to make sense of the thing. Moreover, at its most elementary level any theatre event occurring on a stage speaks to a way of living in the world, the very issue that Peter Holbrook celebrates about Shakespeare and Montaigne in the introduction to this volume.

Particularly gratifying to read is Marcus Nordlund's "Pride and Self-Love in Shakespeare and Montaigne," which posits a concise thesis and then applies it narrowly to two dramas, *Troilus and Cressida* and the always problematic *All's Well That Ends Well*. In this tightly argued essay, Nordlund affirms Shakespeare's dependence on Montaigne for his moral explorations in these two dramas. Among the complementary essays, Rebecca Nesvet's "Martiniengro's 'Grecians' and Shakespeare's Cyprus" stands out as impressive. She provides marvelously researched backstory for the geographical and political setting of *Othello*. She amasses her historical evidence not only toward a richer understanding of some of the tensions among characters in that tragedy but also to support a convincing conclusion that the drama functions as a politically charged allegory about Anglo-Irish affairs. These two nuggets of excellent scholarship—in scope, evidence, argument, and clarity of writing—provide all of us with examples to emulate, regardless of our varying fields of study in the humanities.