The 1980s were the last great heyday of Shakespeare studies. Many new approaches were coming to light: feminists scholars inaugurated the ongoing appraisal of gender politics in the plays; New Historicism and
Cultural Materialism began to place the works in their social and political contexts in a way informed by French cultural theory; scholars such as Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor changed the way Shakespeare's works are edited; Graham Holderness and others were placing Shakespeare in a history of reception continuing into the present; queer theory and postcolonial studies both began to rewrite the meaning of his works; Terry Eagleton brought Marxism to the task of reevaluation; there was new, less judgmental, work on adaptations across the centuries. The study of Shakespeare was not only breaking new grounds of its own but also leading the way for new approaches to the study of other literature in English. It was a heady time to be young and working on Shakespeare. But that was all fifteen or twenty years ago. The study of Shakespeare is now like a once trendy, groundbreaking enterprise that has flourished but settled into entrenched and established — if robust — institutionality. As much, if not more, work is now being produced under the rubric of Shakespeare studies than ever before, but it is a solid, consolidating work more than it is cutting edge. Be that as it may, if any new trend emerges from recent work, it is a full and enthusiastic engagement with all aspects of Shakespeare in performance. More and more performance studies are taking their place as an equal partner alongside more textually-based studies. What follows is a sampling of recent work, from a number of approaches and concerns (but dominated by performance interests), on Shakespeare.

One task of consolidation is to organize and anthologize the onslaught of the last two decades. Routledge's series "Shakespeare Criticism" follows on other attempts — by Harold Bloom, for instance — to anthologize recent work. Actually, there is some discrepancy in the stated aims of this series. In the volume on *The Tempest*, the "General Editor's Introduction" says that the goal of the series is "to provide the most influential historical criticism" from "over the centuries" (xi). The somewhat different, and sloppily proofread, version in the volume on *The Taming of the Shrew* says the goal is "to provide the most significant and original contemporary interpretations of Shakespeare's works" reflecting "the most recent approaches in Shakespeare studies" (ix). Harmonization might be in order.

The volume on *The Tempest* is well over 500 pages, an indication of the continuing prominence of this play in Shakespeare scholarship. As Patrick M. Murphy writes in his introduction: "*The Tempest* has a complex history of performances, editions, adaptations, parodies, rewritings, allusions and critical interpretations" (3), and "The relations among the dramatic work, its sources, performances, reviews, printed editions, and criticism continue to perplex the priorities and values of *Tempest* interpretations" (4). This introduction provides a wide-ranging account of takes on the play from Ben Jonson to the present volume itself. The essays start with Dryden, proceeding through Coleridge and Hazlitt, and cover almost 100 pages before we get to
the 1980s. There are fifteen more recent pieces, including such often anthologized chestnuts as Lorie Jerrell Leininger’s “The Miranda Trap” and Stephen Orgel’s “Prospero’s Wife,” and eight articles commissioned expressly for this volume (enough to constitute a new collection on its own). There is also an eleven-essay section on performances of the play. This section is more spotty than the rest. It lacks the sense of a thorough overview of performance history that the introduction provides for the criticism, and the choice of performances is engaging but not necessarily representative and certainly not encyclopedic. I wonder if a student production at the University of Delaware is really important enough to highlight. Also, Robert Brustein’s piece on George C. Wolfe’s 1995 production is a belle-lettriste review rather than a serious piece of scholarship.

In short, this is a useful compendium for those who do not have easy access otherwise to this criticism, although it is only partly an original contribution to the field.

The volume on The Taming of the Shrew is shorter than that on The Tempest, although still more than substantial at 388 pages. This is largely because the play has a much less complex critical history. All the criticism collected here focuses on gender politics and Dana E. Aspinall, following Lena Cowen Orlin, writes in his introduction that these essays, like almost all critical work on the play, are concerned with “a rather narrow range of issues” (3). In fact, there are three: the significance of Kate’s final speech, the significance of the Induction, and the relation between Shakespeare’s play and the anonymous The Taming of a Shrew. Aspinall’s introduction and the essays collected here show that there are many, many facets to these issues and no end of thinking about them. It is, however, somewhat deflating, if reassuring, to be told that the critical story can be summed up so succinctly.

Following its version of the series mandate, Aspinall’s volume is much less historically based than is Murphy’s: the criticism begins with Arthur Quiller-Couch in 1928 and we are into the 1980s by the third essay, less than twenty pages in. There are eleven more recent pieces and six more on performances of the play. It is in the performance essays that the study goes farthest back in history — to the 1913 production of William Poel and Martin Harvey — although most give accounts of more recent performances. Unlike The Tempest volume, here the performances include those in film and on television. Strangely, given the mandate and focus of the essays, most of the illustrations go farther back in time still, to such figures as John Lacey and David Garrick. Similarly, Aspinall’s introduction spends ten pages on historical productions and only a page or two on the twentieth century. There seems a slight lack of coordination here. Moreover, as in Murphy’s volume, the account of performances is neither comprehensive nor unpuzzling. Why
we need a very brief review of a theater production in Pittsburgh in 1994 (given other possibilities) remains unclear.

Despite any caveats, each of these volumes provides a useful and wide-ranging critical apparatus for the study of the play it focuses on.

The burgeoning importance of performance (and its interactions with textual studies) can also be seen in two recent volumes from the University of Delaware. The University of Delaware Press has developed a relatively prominent stature in publishing books on Shakespeare. Recently it has published two Festschriften, one in honor of the press’ former chair of the board of editors, Jay Halio, and one in honor of the prominent scholar R. A. Foakes. Each volume is well stocked with essays by those who have come into contact in their careers with those being honored. Some distinction accrues to those who have had links to both men and contribute to both collections: Alexander Leggatt and Stanley Wells.

*Shakespeare: Text and Theater: Essays in Honor of Jay L. Halio*, edited by Lois Potter and Arthur F. Kinney, is divided into three sections: “Texts,” “Performances,” and “Text and Performance.” The book lacks an introduction and an afterword, so its connections remain somewhat implicit. Stanley Wells opens the first section with a somewhat obvious exploration of what Shakespeare would be if the first folio had never existed. Tom Clayton reads the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in order to undermine recent critical and performative readings of the play that follow on Jan Kott and Peter Brook. He presents his own “natural” approaches against those of his hasty contemporaries. His is a sober, sour, and limiting approach, correct but dampening of creative enthusiasm. Indeed, there is a streak of traditional conservatism in some of these essays. When theory arises — which it rarely does — it is rejected, as in Kinney’s passing reference to Michel Foucault (325). Peggy Muñoz Simonds suggests a reading of *The Tempest* from rather arcane alchemical theory in order to suggest a performance of the play far removed from its recent post-colonial manifestations. She reads against the discord in the play’s exchange between Prospero and Miranda about the “brave new world” to suggest that “The modern audience should share as fully as possible in her wondrous vision of regeneration” (224-25). This is not the whole story, however: R. B. Parker is much more open to the contemporary in his account of a 1988 production of *Coriolanus* in San Diego, directed by John Hirsch. This production drew heavily upon invocations of Oliver North. Parker writes, “Such staging was brilliantly inventive, but it was effected at considerable cost to Shakespeare’s text, which Hirsch was willing to acknowledge as a trade-off but which most reviewers, to various degrees, regretted” (205). He adds, “From a scholar’s point of view the text was vandalized. Yet it was done intelligently, not carelessly, with a particular aim clearly in mind — to focus on the play’s
politics; and it worked well in production, as even reviewers who lamented the alterations admitted” (206). Parker concludes, “Not an interpretation for all seasons, certainly; but one brilliantly calculated for the political climate of Southern California in the summer of 1988” (207).

David Bevington turns to recent performance in an interesting way to illuminate the textual possibilities of *Troilus and Cressida*. This play has next to no performance history before the twentieth century, so when Bevington asks if performance success can tell us anything about the authenticity of Pandarus’ rather unsavory epilogue, he has to turn to relatively recent productions. He writes that directors and actors “of the latter half of the twentieth century have found in Pandarus’ sleazy farewell a key to the dispiriting play as a whole” (303) and concludes, “Its gloating and uncomfortably salacious mockery does not strike modern directors or actors as an anomaly devised for some special performance and thereafter abandoned. The Epilogue is by now an essential part of our vision of *Troilus and Cressida*” (306). Certainly this analysis tells us more about ourselves than about Shakespeare’s intentions, but that is not a bad thing. As one who came of age academically in the 1980s, I have more sympathy with Parker’s and Bevington’s openness to the contemporary than with Clayton’s dismissiveness and Simonds’ prescriptiveness.

The second volume, *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, edited by Grace Ioppolo, features an afterword by Stanley Wells, in which he points out tensions such as I have been tracing in the Halio collection. He chalks them up to a division between “those interested primarily in ideas and those concerned above all with factual investigation” (299). “Ideas” and “factual investigation” are, I would suggest, largely buzz words for postmodern, post-structuralist, theory-minded scholars on the one hand and more traditional scholars on the other. The tenor of these volumes is weighted to the traditionalist, which Wells attributes to the way that “the current (if waning) emphasis on post-structuralist theory has stimulated belief in the value to literary studies of factual investigation.” In other words, a certain drive in these volumes is, for better or worse, reactionary: solid tradition stands up against fleeting fashion.

When Ioppolo writes in her preface, therefore, “These essays, then, reflect the current state of Shakespeare study in all its breadth, richness, and diversity” (9), this is not completely true. The index indicates a paucity of references to the big names of contemporary critical theory. Carol Chillington Rutter’s essay, however, is informed by recent feminism, and she uses the word “deconstructing” (232); Peter Holland uses the word “logocentrism” (282) and draws upon New Historicism (292). As a whole, however, we are not getting an engagement with contemporary critical approaches in all their breadth, richness, and diversity. Ioppolo suggests that her collection shows
that “old and new fields do not merely coexist but must work concurrently and interactively” (9). I applaud the sentiment. I’m skeptical, however, that *Shakespeare Performed* practices what Loppolo preaches.

A quite different volume from Delaware is Alexander Shurbanov and Boika Sokolova’s *Painting Shakespeare Red*. To begin with, this volume deals with the reception of Shakespeare (through theater, scholarship, and education) in the former East Bloc and specifically in Bulgaria, where the oppositions familiar in the West are either irrelevant or transformed — left and right, for instance, mean quite different things, we are told, in the East than in the West (134). *Painting Shakespeare Red* is, therefore, firstly, an interesting study of a specific situation likely to be unfamiliar to many of us; it is also, however, part of a number of bigger projects. This study is part of what the authors call “European Shakespeare” or “International Shakespeare.” This project vehemently opposes the narrow and proprietary nationalism of English Shakespeare to see Shakespeare, especially in translation, as part of the “heritage of the human race” (15). *Painting Shakespeare Red* is also part of the general history, which the authors trace back to the staging of *Richard II* during the Essex rebellion of 1601, of the “adaptation of Shakespeare to the political exigencies of the moment” (13). Unlike some of those contributing to the Delaware Festschriften, Shurbanov and Sokolova see nothing inherently objectionable to such adaptation — they take it to be inevitable. Although their context is very different from those dominant in British history, the authors align their project, at important moments, with British cultural materialism: Shakespeare worked in Communist education just as Alan Sinfield says it worked in British education (133); Shakespeare’s work helped prepare the way for the fall of the East Bloc just as Jonathan Dollimore says radical tragedy helped prepare the way for the English civil war (249). We are here within the study of “alternative Shakespeares” (18). *Painting Shakespeare Red* makes much more use of political and post-structuralist criticism than any of the essays in the Festschriften.

The optimistic and laudatory reading of Shakespeare’s place in political history is worth pausing over. According to Shurbanov and Sokolova, Shakespeare’s “dialogical” work (17) could never be quite contained by authoritarian appropriations; something subversive always remained — which is why the plays helped undermine totalitarianism. After the fall of the East Bloc, in a world of “harrowing ambiguities and paradoxes” (255), of “uncertainty and moral relativism” (261), Shakespeare seems more at home: his work, postmodern and genuine at once (251), provides “a source of hope, inspiration, and challenge” (266). Shakespeare is, perhaps, just a bit too liberatory and positive in all this. Don’t those of us who try to teach Shakespeare as liberatory find ourselves, often enough, running up against
intractable and oppressive elements in his work? Shakespeare, alas, speaks to conservatives and totalitarians too. Perhaps his work is no more nor less at home before the fall as after. Nonetheless, *Painting Shakespeare Red* is a very engaging and thought-provoking book.

A different historical study, yet again, of the particulars of Shakespearean performance history, can be found in Tiffany Stern’s *Rehearsal From Shakespeare to Sheridan*. This purports to be the first study of the history of the rehearsal process. Stern takes a “factual,” historical approach, rather than “an overtly modern” one informed by performance theory (19). What this approach reveals is that from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries theater companies used a radically different mode of rehearsal from the lengthy, creative, exploratory mode we are so familiar with after figures such as Stanislavski. The most important element of historical rehearsal was private or individual study, in which actors worked for two or three weeks in solitude learning their parts. Before this study, the playwright would have read the play to the assembled company, so that the actors had some sense of the whole work, but private study meant that the play appeared to the actor much more as an individual part. Parts were crafted in light of this: cues for mood and action were inserted into each role, since the actor had little sense of what other parts contained; actors (and perhaps playwrights) made more basic connections between their various, often typecast, roles in different plays than between their part and others in the same play; in performance actors often fell out of the action and out of character when they weren’t themselves speaking; writing, revision, and editing often proceeded along a part rather than across the play as a whole. There was, usually, only one collective rehearsal for a new play and often none for a remounting; such rehearsals occurred at breakfast (which would no doubt horrify the modern, “night owl” performer). Collective rehearsal did little creative work, merely putting together the already finished individual parts. Contrary to a later emphasis on originality, new performances and productions of old plays tended to be slavish imitations of previous ones.

Stern draws several points from such an historical understanding: she illuminates the way that the plays themselves are structured to suit a particular rehearsal process; she works against conflating rehearsal in history with modern assumptions; she offers practicable knowledge to the theater historian, those (at the new Globe in London, for instance) who wish to mount historically authentic productions, editors who attempt to see how these plays were put together, and even theorists of performance exploring notions of theatrical “authorship” (19).

What Stern doesn’t say, and what should not be the conclusion of her study, is that modern rehearsal practices are somehow incorrect for producing Shakespeare. Rehearsal is only one, albeit important, factor in where these
plays come from, but they escape any restrictive historical grounding, in rehearsal or elsewhere. We can see how Shakespeare's work has always had only one foot in history in Stern's discussion of the rehearsal scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a number of ways these scenes point to the reality of early modern rehearsal: private study, unfamiliarity with the parts of others; a single group rehearsal; on the other hand, "the kind of acting group depicted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* never actually existed at all: the classical play put on by Quince and his company is unlike anything that their counterparts ever performed" (30). The same principle holds true if one looks at any other aspect of Shakespeare's work: his trials are not quite like real trials, his marriages are not quite like historical marriage. In 1601 *Richard II* was wrenched from its place in the chronicles to deal with a new moment in history — one which it failed to reflect — and its history since has been to take up a place in ever new and unforeseen historical circumstances. It is valuable to know about rehearsal in the past, but that knowledge will not tell us how to conduct rehearsals of Shakespeare in the present and the future.

The modern approach to production Stern contrasts with Shakespeare's is explored in detail in Steven Adler's *Rough Magic: Making Theatre at the Royal Shakespeare Company*. Although Adler is an academic and although his book is published by a university press, it isn't a particularly sophisticated work of scholarship. His title, for instance, from *The Tempest* is rather obvious and facile without being particularly apt: what is so rough about the slick production values of the Royal Shakespeare Company? what magic do they abjure? why is "rough magic" more suited to the practices of this company than to those of any other? The book itself is chatty and anecdotal as much as analytical. Here is a typical passage: "Katie Mitchell possesses keen and passionate insight into the subtle alchemy of making theater as well as an impressive self-awareness and a refreshing degree of humility. She is articulate, funny, and fiercely intelligent" (203). Moreover, Adler is a bit of a cheerleader. Adler writes that the "RSC's ability to sustain its record of innovation and excellence throughout the past decades . . . serves as a testament to the perseverance, wisdom, and talents of its company members" (250). Adler's book is intended as a similar testament: *Rough Magic* reads like a theater company's equivalent of an authorized biography.

Nevertheless, it is a well researched study, chock-full of voices and detail from a wide range of interviews. Adler covers a great deal of very practical concerns: theater buildings, touring, scheduling, administration, finances, education and marketing, physical production, directing, rehearsal, and acting. If a future Tiffany Stern were, centuries from now, to try to reconstruct the practices of performance in the twentieth century, the existence of this book would provide a wealth of detailed information. In the present context, the discussion with the aforementioned articulate, funny,
and fiercely intelligent Katie Mitchell is particularly interesting. Mitchell is committed to a Stanislavskian rehearsal process of creation and exploration: “Mitchell, whenever possible, seeks to create an ensemble in rehearsals, one in which trust — in the text, in the director, in the company, in the process — enables the actors to experiment freely and to contribute willingly” (208). She finds this process cramped by the demands and tight schedule at the RSC: “It’s hard for me to justify time spent on anything other than the work, so if I’m asked to do a tremendous amount of administration, I dwindle, the artist in me is like a caged animal” (210). What we see here is that contemporary rehearsal and production, just as in the past, are constrained by the vicissitudes of the work environment. In practice, there is rarely time for Stanislavskian or other ideals.

Another work of documentation concerning a twentieth-century theater company is Orson Welles on Shakespeare: The W.P.A. and Mercury Theatre Playscripts, edited by Richard France. France presents the texts for three adaptations of Shakespeare by Welles from the 1930s, accompanied by an informative apparatus. France’s critical position is genuine but not particularly current. He takes his prescriptions for adaptation from “recent” pronouncements made by Daniel Seltzer in 1969. As appropriate as Seltzer’s endorsement of adaptation may be, there is a wide range of truly recent material on the subject that France might have consulted. At any rate, Welles’ work takes its place in the history of making Shakespeare contemporary for new times and audiences — Julius Caesar becomes, in the 1930s, a pressing play about dictatorship, “the most contemporary of Shakespeare’s plays” (18), with the ring of the headlines about it (103). The situation in 1930s New York bears some comparison to that in Bulgaria presented in Painting Shakespeare Red. Culturally, at least, leftist theater was very much under the sway of the communist party, “which set about to organize a theater of unquestioned ideological purity” (2). The Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.), under whose mandate Welles and the Mercury Theatre were working, was designed to create theater for the people, “the working masses” (1). Welles’ projects were very much part of a leftist agenda — his “voodoo” Macbeth, was part of the Negro Theatre Project, meant to help promote culture and create jobs in Harlem. Welles, however, was a man of “casual eclecticism, open to any idea of theater, no matter how radical or traditional” (4). We are told, “Welles seems not to have had the slightest interest in history” (3). What we see, therefore, is, once again, the discrepancy between political dictates and the freewheeling impetus of theatrical creativity. The texts of the plays themselves — Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Five Kings (which squeezes the second tetralogy into 124 pages) — are less interesting to those not experts in Welles’ work. Much of the work of adaptation was in the production rather than the text, and the play scripts are nothing but edited
down versions of Shakespeare as used in many productions. For the student of Welles, however, these are invaluable resources. Moreover, these theater texts illuminate his later work in cinema: the “voodoo” Macbeth later became a film; Five Kings is the forerunner of Chimes at Midnight.

An area of Shakespearean performance with its own burgeoning history is cinema. Accounts of performance histories of Shakespeare’s plays almost always now end by turning to film versions. The literature proliferates. A new addition to this topic — following, *inter alia*, on the recent *Shakespeare the Movie* (Routledge 1997), edited by Linda E. Boose and Richard Burt, and Kenneth S. Rothwell’s *A History of Shakespeare on Screen* (Cambridge 1999) — is Stephen M. Buhler’s *Shakespeare in the Cinema: Ocular Proof*. The title of Buhler’s book reveals the contradictions in its purpose and structure. “Shakespeare in the Cinema” implies a broad, general coverage, and as Lois Potter says in her blurb on the back of the book, “Buhler’s book is comprehensive. He covers just about every Shakespeare film in existence.” As far as this is true (and the coverage is impressive), in a book just over 200 pages the analysis will be of the cursory kind. “Ocular Proof” implies, however, some thematic idea, wrenched out of this phrase from *Othello*, which will tie the discussion together. Alas, no such idea exists. Buhler claims that his book “investigates what the Shakespearean project reveals about individual films and about film in general” (2) and that film is subjected to a kind of testing when linked with a Shakespearean text (3). That sounds like a generalized truism that could just as easily be said about many another of film’s concerns. The “Shakespearean project” is another vague idea that does not lend itself to clear and focused analysis. The subtitle perhaps also suggests a depth of analysis the book cannot deliver. Individual films are never given more than a few pages of discussion. The essays in *Shakespeare the Movie*, for instance, are much more thorough and sophisticated than the treatments here.

Buhler does work at arranging his discussion around certain themes rather than through a neutral chronology. Sometimes this works better than at others: the chapter on Olivier, Welles, and Branach as “Actor-Managers” makes eminent sense; the conclusion, on three films from 1999 (*Shakespeare in Love, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *Titus*) fails to find much significance in the grouping, and the idea that *Titus* points somehow to the future of Shakespearean film seems a pipe dream. *Titus* is an impressive piece of work, but let’s not put too much on its shoulders. The pairing of these three films underscores a certain slackness in Buhler’s choice of films: *Shakespeare in Love* is hardly even an adaptation let alone a film treatment of a play by Shakespeare — Buhler’s stated topic. But once you open that door it’s impossible to be comprehensive. Ultimately Buhler’s book is interesting but light, casual rather than scholarly. For instance, the information we are
given that a young Kenneth Anger was in the cast of the 1935 *Midsummer Night's Dream* (59-60) is really more a curiosity than part of any argument.

In our world, Shakespeare spends as much time in the classroom as he does on the stage or in the study. Highly engaging for anyone who teaches Shakespeare will be Bernice W. Kliman's *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's Hamlet*, in the MLA series *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*. Each book in the series is meant as "a sourcebook of material, information, and ideas on teaching the subject of the volume to undergraduates" (xi). This volume, like its predecessors, presents a wide array of scholars with a wide array of pedagogical approaches. Among the more noteworthy contributors here are Arthur Kinney, Maurice Charney, John Drakakis, Barbara Hodgdon, and Dympna Callaghan. As a Canadian, I chafe slightly at the underrepresentation of my fellow countrymen and women: only two, both from the University of Toronto, took part in the survey behind the book and neither of these made the cut to become contributors; American schools, large and small, are, on the other hand, well represented.

Among the areas covered are verse, editing, performance, and various critical and theoretical approaches to themes and scenes in the play. Theory plays less of a part in teaching than one might expect. Other than Freud, Lacan, and Greenblatt, there's not much here. No Foucault, no Derrida, no Marx. (I must confess that despite my own interests in theory, I find little time for it in my Shakespeare survey course.) There is one reference to Harold Bloom's rich but profoundly untrustworthy *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, probably the most widely disseminated study of Shakespeare in recent memory. This omission is perhaps unfortunate, because untrustworthiness can be a highly effective pedagogical tool. Those of us who teach Shakespeare will find ourselves comparing our own practices to those represented here. I find, for instance, that many others use the Signet editions for the same reasons I do — price and apparatus. On the other hand, I am somewhat taken aback by all the elements other than the texts of the plays that teachers find time to employ. I feel lucky in a Shakespeare survey course if I can merely do a modicum of justice to the texts themselves. Indeed, what often happens, it appears from this book, is that instructors let close study of an aspect of the play stand in for study of the whole: Stephen Buhler, who turns up here, focuses on filmic representations of the ghost; Laurie MacGuire takes a close look at fencing; Nona Paula Fienberg turns to Ophelia's songs; Ellen J. O'Brien has students dance to the rhythms of the verse. My own experience in teaching *Hamlet* is to feel that so much is always left unlooked at, and I would tend to err on the side of trying to treat as much of the play as possible.

Nevertheless, I don't think anyone could come away from this book without encountering many stimulating and useful strategies for studying
Hamlet. One is also likely to have more trouble with some approaches than with others. I found myself being somewhat unsympathetic to the approach of Robert H. Ray. Ray sees Hamlet as an interrogative text, full of questions. His pedagogical approach, however, seems to work by providing pat answers. He begins by “telling” his students that Maynard Mack’s “The World of Hamlet,” from which the importance of questions arises, is “the best short commentary on the play” (97). He “inform[s],” “hasten[s] to note,” and “proposes” his reading to the students: “the overriding question in the play that Hamlet is trying to answer is nothing less than the nature of human beings” (98). Given Ray’s indicative certainties, it is not surprising that questions evaporate not only for his reading but for Hamlet himself: “After penetrating the darkness of the world and human nature, Hamlet not only answered all the questions about them but also found a way to reconcile himself to their real nature and to live as an ideal human being” (100). Ray’s pedagogical style and his reading of the play are interrogative only in a facile and disingenuous sense. I too think Hamlet is an interrogative text, but for me the questions linger and are not about to be answered or go away.

When The Woman’s Part appeared in 1980, it started a revolution in Shakespeare studies. When Jonathan Dollimore’s Radical Tragedy arrived in 1984, it had a tremendous impact on the thinking of many Shakespeareans. Other works at the time made similarly profound changes to how Shakespeare is perceived. Certainly, however, it is a rare book that has a groundbreaking impact on an area of scholarly study. This is true even of most works on Shakespeare in the 1980s. Although together they point to the important and impressive reconsideration of Shakespeare in performance currently underway, I don’t think any of the books reviewed in this essay will be legends twenty years from now, as solid as many of them are. There is, however, not much point in lamentation. Moreover, as this review has indicated, not everybody looks on the works of the 1980s and their influences with fondness. Whatever their persuasion, however, people with very different positions continue to take a deep interest in what they take to be Shakespeare. Some may see in that an abiding universalism; others would credit it to certain ongoing historical and cultural circumstances.

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