

**REMEDIOS PERNI (ED.), *SHAKESPEARE'S
FIRST FOLIO REVISITED:
QUADRICENTENNIAL ESSAYS.*
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It might be thought that, after the infinite proliferation of all kinds of critical editions of the Shakespearean canon, studies on the *First Folio* would have been exhausted and only a commemorative occasion could justify the appearance of a volume on this seminal work, which has been corrected, augmented, and reinterpreted so many times. Such an assumption is suggested by the title of this volume, with its inclusion of the word "Quadricentennial." However, the commitment of editors and contributors to the endeavor of once again turning a critical eye to this Alpha of Shakespearean studies goes far beyond the commemorative formality. It is an ambitious yet brief study on the presence of this icon of Western culture. Indeed, the book's three sections ("The First Folio: Textual and Editorial Approaches," "Disseminating the First Folio," and "The First Folio: More than a Book") address Heminges and Condell's famous edition from these three perspectives.

The book begins with a note from the General Editor in which, very clearly, we are informed that the objective of the series is "to reflect and encode the overwhelming diversity that has characterized the English-speaking world both historically and in contemporary times" (p.9). Certainly, there is no work that more aptly fulfils the mission stated here than this small volume.

Remedios Perti, the editor of the book, has managed to bring together a cast of contributors, specialists from different fields of literary research and diverse nationalities, which confirm "the overwhelming diversity that

has characterized...” (p.9) the *First Folio*, as stated by the General Editor in his inaugural note: Jesús Tronch, Sir Jonathan Bate, Sonia Massai, Miguel Ramalhte Gomes in the first part; Eric Ramussen, Rosa García-Periago, Ángel-Luis Pujante, in the second; and Marta Cerezo, Craig Dionne and Evelyn Gajowski, in the third. These specialists offer approaches to the Shakespearean volume from different academic fields that once again influence the diversity to which the Shakespearean volume lends itself.

To begin with, Emma Smith, a Shakespeare scholar at the University of Oxford, provides an inspired presentation of the volume’s content, focusing on its ghostly nature with reference to her novel *The Small Hand*. Like the spectral girl of the story, *The First Folio*, she says, is imbued with a certain revenant air in the wake of multiple appearances, disappearances and voids that the material or imaginary copies of the work evoke; after all, objects of desire and fascination that critical research, such as that exercised in this compilation, never exhausts.

After the prologue comes the editor’s contribution. Based on some erudite notes that invoke Derridas, Borges and Foucault (referring in turn to Nietzsche), Remedios Perni reflects on the futility of the obsessive search for a pure origin applied to the *First Folio* and advocates, following Foucault, not an approach to the work from the inviolable identity of its origin, but rather its dissent with other readings and interpretations. This does not exclude textual and historical studies, which, understandably, will also have a place in this volume. Ultimately, it is about celebrating “new ways, new perspectives, and an endless generative capacity for revelation and creation when studying Shakespeare” (p.26). And this is what the editor offers in this volume, the celebratory and interpretive affirmation from the diversity of fields of study and nationalities of critics to continue and complement previous scholarship. This editorial reflection, which occupies the first four pages (23-26), is followed (pages 26-35), as is customary, by the justification of the division of the volume into its parts and the summaries of the theses supported by the different authors of the articles. Although it cannot be denied that Remedios Perni makes an eloquent defense of the unity in the diversity of its parts, it does not, however, dispel the shadow of a certain incongruity beyond the incidental-commemorative character of the endeavor as the latent link between all the articles.

The first section, dedicated, as mentioned, to textual studies, opens with a very interesting contribution from Jesús Tronch on the textual and editorial constraints that influenced the creation of the *First Folio* as a

prestigious collective edition, compared to the same kind of venture in Italy, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain at the time. After an exhaustive survey of the drama collections published in these countries prior to 1623, Tronch rightly concludes that there were partial precedents and analogous editorial enterprises, being the Graeco-Roman classical authors and, more conspicuously, the Spaniard Lucas Fernández' *Farsas y Églogas* (1514) the closest approximations to the Shakesperean volume. He finally argues that all in all, in terms of containing only drama, complete plays, being in the vernacular, and by a single author in a single volume in folio size and posthumously published, the *First Folio* shows its outstanding singularity in the European context.

The second contribution in this field corresponds to Jonatha Bates, editor, together with Eric Rasmussen, of the *First Folio* edition for the Royal Shakespeare Company. As it could be expected, this long and detailed exposition is a defense of their work. And a good one for that matter. He starts by defending the need of a *First Folio* edition on the account that it was particularly suitable for the purpose of the RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company), on the ground that now, as it happened in 1623, it presents an edition which is equally valuable for actors and audience; but even editing a well-established work poses its textual quandaries, which Bates proceeds to discuss minutely and with great acumen. The chapter, indeed, provides a detailed analysis of the history and significance of Shakespeare's *First Folio*, delving all throughout in the complexities and subtleties of editorial criticism. It discusses the shifts in editorial preferences over centuries, emphasizing the move from favoring *quartos* to further recognizing the value of the *Folio* during the twentieth century, which the Oxford edition of 1986 started. This reflected an ongoing shift in Shakespearean scholarship from original manuscript to original performance, in line with contemporary interest in performance studies. This is not to say that the edition has been conceived as a template for performance, but rather as a compromise between this approach and a text for reading, which, after all, was the initial intention of Heminges and Condell. Ultimately, editing Shakespeare involves navigating theoretical assumptions and practical decisions as the *Folio*'s texts were often based on playhouse copies, but in more than one case, the role of printed copies is evident as the editors and printers of the *First Folio* did a labor than in many respects are close to the role attributed to modern editors. In this regard, the author argues for a modernized edition of the *First Folio*, emphasizing its importance in preserving the plays as authorized by Shakespeare's own

company, the King's Men. Overall, Bates advocates for a consistent approach to editing Shakespeare's works, favoring the *Folio's* versions to capture the plays' original performance contexts and significance.

In "A Portrait of Shakespeare's *Folio*: Sarah Siddons's Editorial Legacy in Current Editorial Theory and Practice," Sonia Massai illuminates the contributions of two previously overlooked women, suggesting they may have anticipated modern editorial practices: Sarah Siddons and Elizabeth Inchbald. Massai highlights the often underestimated editorial talents of theatrical celebrity Sarah Siddons. She is not directly engaged with the *First Folio*, except for her famous portrait by Thomas Lawrence in which she self-fashioned herself "in the act of turning its pages" (p.87) as an act of "claiming nominal ownership of the iconic book and the cultural value it had by then accrued" (p. 87). However, both her abridged edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1822) and her notes and declarations on interpretation of Shakespeare reveal her adeptness at interacting with literary personalities such as Reynolds, Boswell, or Reverend William Harness. Moreover, Elizabeth Inchbald recognized Siddons as a credible source of critical insight, which inspired her integration of a critical apparatus into the editorial process, extending beyond mere text establishment. Inchbald is brought in here on account of her prefacing and an opening essay to the collection of plays entitled *The British Theatre*, which in twenty-five volumes deals with Jacobean (Shakespeare included), Caroline, Restoration, and eighteenth-century plays. After deepening on how Inchbald suffered the misogynistic prejudices of her time, Massai argues that neglecting editions like Inchbald's prevents a comprehensive understanding of how the official editorial tradition intersects with alternative traditions shaping the modern critical edition of Shakespeare. Massai's contribution is no doubt valuable and interesting, although one cannot avoid the feeling that it is a little outside the main scope of the book, despite its claim that "[it] seems therefore appropriate to mark the anniversary of the publication of the *Folio*, which Siddons most likely chose to be included in the 1804 portrait, by thinking of her as a 'closer bluestocking' and of Inchbald and Bell, who channelled Siddons's critical thinking into their editions of Shakespeare, as integral contributors to the editorial tradition" (p.99).

In "From Folio to Tragedy. *First Folio* Revisited", Miguel Ramalho Gomes explores the genre classification of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* as presented in the *First Folio*. His study delves into the complexity and hybridity of the play's genre. It is challenging to categorize the play either

as a comedy or tragedy due to its mixed elements. Indeed, its status has been traditionally complex as it oscillates between comedy, tragedy, satire, and history. The categorization in the *Folio* makes the generic ascription of the play even more problematic, for it seems that the editors were not completely sure of its tragic status, as shown by its absence in the table of contents and its insertion between the last of the histories and the first of the tragedies. Moreover, the *First Folio*'s designation as a tragedy is considered less convincing since the only onstage death is that of Hector, who does not serve as a typical tragic protagonist. It does not fit either in the contemporary classification of histories, although it presents typical features of this overdetermined genre, such as a broad scope of time and historical material. The play's genre has attracted the attention of modern scholars, suggesting that its indeterminacy and hybridity reflect the complexities of historical representation and dramatic experimentation in Shakespeare's works. The final conclusion is that paradoxically, by recodifying the genre of this recalcitrant play from "history" as appeared in the earlier *Quarto*, the *First Folio* "reinforces the play's claim to be a 'historic,' a representation of a contingent and unfinished process, by its very form open to the possibility of a promised but ultimately unrealized sequel," that is to say, the *Folio* highlights the enduring debate over the genre classification of "Troilus and Cressida," illustrating how its multifaceted nature contributes to its rich interpretive possibilities.

Eric Rasmussen opens the second block of this book with a brief but very interesting case of forensic textual nature concerning the alleged *First Folio* preserved in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Roorkee. The chapter combines the folio's intriguing historical trajectory with technical details of its preservation and examination. Thus, Rasmussen starts with an account of the historical vicissitudes of the book and follows with the report of his exam of the same. This copy found its way to India as part of the library collection transferred from the East India Company's Military Seminary to the College of Civil Engineering in Roorkee (now IIT Roorkee) in the 1860s. Then it went through a series of discoveries (1923) and rediscoveries (1988 and 2019) with intertwined periods of oblivion. Eric Rasmussen visited the IIT Roorkee in 2022 to authenticate the folio. He noted the size matched historical records (but many pages were fragmented), examined it for watermarks unique to the original *First Folio* print run finding none and took into account a carbon-dating test which proved inconclusive. Finally, Rasmussen suggests that, despite its deteriorated state, the IIT Roorkee's *Folio* is not an original 1623 folio, but

most likely a rare facsimile reproduction, reflecting early photo-lithographic reproduction techniques published in 1866 by Howard Staunton. This is clearly a very tactful, persuasive and impartial piece of forensic work which no doubt imparts great value to the volume.

The article by Rosa García Perago, while on the wake of Dr. Rasmussen, adopts a different perspective in her consideration of the *First Folio*. It is a case study on decolonization of Shakespeare focusing on the ups and downs throughout both colonial and postcolonial India. Through its significant appearances and disappearances, the different readings of its librarians (Veale, Rana, and Jayakumar), who played their own roles in its rediscovery and promotion, and significantly enough (and we may add that through the renaming of the host institution: College of Civil Engineering in 1847, Thomason College in 1854, University of Roorke in 1949, and Indian Institute of Technology in 2001), the folio's presence in India is witness to the broader themes of colonial influence and postcolonial reappropriation. Thus, the folio's story reflects changing perceptions of Shakespeare in India, moving from a symbol of colonial dominance to one of cultural exchange and postcolonial identity. This is particularly evident in the exhibition of the folio in Mumbai in 2017, which marked three significant anniversaries: India's 70th year of independence, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and the official declaration of UK-India Year of Culture by the English Prime Minister David Camero. In conclusion, the article is a very perceptive and insightful analysis of a specific case illustrating the role of national cultural icons as a dynamic symbol within the contexts of colonialism and postcolonialism.

Finally, the section devoted to the study of existing or alleged copies of the *First Folio* is brought to a close by Professor Ángel Luis Pujante, with an almost detective-like work on an elusive *Spanish Folio* supposedly owned by the Count of Gondomar, the well-known Spanish ambassador to King James's court and a keen bibliophile. The existence and fate of this *Folio* have been subjects of speculation and controversy, fueled by sparse documentation and anecdotal accounts. In an 1860 letter, Pascual de Gayangos, a Spanish Arabist and bibliographer, claimed that he had seen the *Folio* at Gondomar's Valladolid palace, the Casa del Sol, around 1835, but subsequent narratives, including those by Mrs. Humphry Ward, add layers of drama and inconsistency. Several accounts, including reports of Gayangos' further declarations, have raised doubts about the accuracy and truthfulness of his first account. In particular, Pujante rejects Eric Rasmussen's interpretation

asserting that the *Folio* existed and was likely purloined by Gayangos. Contrariwise, Dr. Pujante claims that documentary proofs do not show evidence of the existence of the copy and that Gayangos' testimony might have been the result of his attempt to make himself accepted and recognized in the English antiquarian circles at a time when his economic and social situation was precarious. Pujante's final conclusion is that the story of the Gondomar *Folio* remains speculative and with no solid proof of its existence. It constitutes a blend of historical possibility, bibliographic intrigue, and unresolved mystery, for despite exhaustive searches and scholarly debates, its existence has yet to be demonstrated, illustrating the challenges in tracing the provenance of rare books and the allure they hold in cultural history. The case is undoubtedly rigorously argued, although it would be necessary to know the response of Dr. Rasmussen, whose thesis is refuted here by Dr. Pujante. In any case, the impartiality of the latter is to be praised in a context that could so easily lend itself to nationalist chauvinism eager to display the existence of a Spanish *First Folio*.

In "Randall T. Davidson's Aldermanbury Shakespeare Sermon (1923): A Religious and Theatrical Commemoration of the *First Folio*," Marta Cerezo provides a detailed account of Archbishop Randall T. Davidson's sermon delivered on April 21, 1923, at St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury. This event was part of the tercentenary celebrations of Shakespeare's *First Folio*, organized by the London Shakespeare Commemoration League. The church, once a key site for Shakespeare's editors John Heminges and Henry Condell, served as a symbolic location for the event, embodying the intersection of religious and theatrical traditions. Davidson's sermon, attended by various prominent figures from intellectual, literary, musical, and theatrical communities, emphasized the significance of Shakespeare's works, the role of Heminges and Condell in preserving them, and the broader cultural importance of the *First Folio*. The relevance of this sermon that justifies its inclusion in the volume lies in the highlighting of the unity between scholarship and performance, reflecting the contemporary scholarly view that the *First Folio* was a crucial collection of theatrical documents.

In a chapter far removed from the topic of the volume, Craig Dionne explores the spontaneous and prolific nature of Shakespeare's creativity, highlighting how the bard's writing process was marked by rapid invention and a seemingly effortless flow of words. The evolutionary perspective (cognitive ethology) introduced by the author is to be appreciated, as this type of approach is not common in a landscape dominated by the Standard

Model of Social Sciences. His reference to evolutionary critics such as Andrey Vyshedskiy, Mark Turner, Andy Clark, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, and Daniel Kahneman is productively combined with researchers in Renaissance rhetoric and education (Leonard Barkin, Kenneth Gouwens, Donald Hebb, Lynn Enterline, Charles Martindale) to explain Shakespeare's creative power as the result of his reliance on habitual and automatic processes in his writing, which allowed him to continuously refine and expand his poetic forms. These processes were the consequence of the application of the common theory and practice of Renaissance humanism, which relied heavily on rote training, *i.e.*, the repetitive learning of grammatical structures and vocabulary, tantamount from the point of view of modern cognitive ethology to the phenomenon of recursion. This kind of training advocated by such Renaissance figures as Juan Vives, Roger Ascham, and Erasmus fostered a type of cognitive conditioning to increase mental acuity and creativity. Once this base has been expounded by the author, he projects his argument on the *Sonnets* and more specifically on *Hamlet*. Here Dionne elaborates on the rhetorical and pedagogical tradition of Renaissance in modelling the figure of the character Hamlet. His conclusion is that his hesitation to pursue his desire for revenge is further complicated by his awareness of established patterns, shaped by his memorization of earlier literary works and cultural traditions, which have influenced his perception of appropriate behavior. Again, the connection with the main topic of the volume is tenuous, being only an incidental allusion to Heminges and Condell's testimony (p.170), in their preface to the *First Folio*.

In "Romancing the Stone: the *First Folio*, Fragmentation, and Wholeness," Evelyn Gajowski, taking as her point of departure two classical sculptures (the Belvedere Torso and the Venus de Milo), explores the metaphorical tension between unity and disintegration through the lens of the *First Folio*, which likewise embodies this dynamic in its compilation of diverse plays. Gajowski highlights that the *First Folio*'s assembly of Shakespeare's diverse plays into a single volume creates a sense of wholeness from disparate parts. This compilation not only preserves the texts but also shapes our understanding of Shakespeare's *oeuvre*. The *First Folio* itself, she argues, is a composite, much like the Belvedere Torso, which embodies both the fragmented and the complete. Then, the chapter delves into the thematic elements of fragmentation and wholeness within "The Winter's Tale," where characters undergo literal and metaphorical fragmentation and eventual restoration. Gajowski connects this to the broader context of

Shakespeare's work, suggesting that the *First Folio* enables a comprehensive view of his exploration of these themes across different genres and periods. Ultimately, she emphasizes the *First Folio*'s role in preserving the multiplicity of Shakespeare's work and its thematic preoccupations with fragmentation and wholeness, making it a cornerstone for understanding his literary legacy. Although the chapter demonstrates high scholarship and a profound understanding of the Shakespearean universe, it often feels digressive as it transitions between concepts. Additionally, it tends to overindulge in metaphorical interpretations of terms and plays, which, nonetheless, is characteristic of postmodern and feminist paradigms.

Overall, the book, which is very manageable and convenient to carry and read, is highly valuable as a comprehensive view of the influence and relevance of the *First Folio* beyond its memorial significance. The five sections are well-balanced and reveal new dimensions and nuances both of its physical aspect and content, showing that the increasing digitalization and telematic dissemination do not exhaust the possibilities of this iconic book.