

ZACHARY LESSER. *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619, Bibliography in the Longue Durée*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. Pp. 232. \$49.95 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.81

Zachary Lesser ends *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* with a call for book historians to “look closely enough—and again and again” at their objects of study (146). Lesser’s balanced phrase echoes the plea, extended in a preface to the 1623 First Folio of William Shakespeare’s works, to “Read him, therefore; and again, and again,” where it is preceded by the wry caveat “Do so, but buy it first.” Lesser’s call also captures two features of his study that distinguish it as not only a field-altering work of bibliographical scholarship but also as a valuable model for research across the humanities. By demonstrating the iterative nature of his approach (“again and again”) and framing his bold conclusions as nevertheless intellectually contingent, historically situated, and fundamentally provisional (“closely *enough*,” my emphasis), Lesser proves his book worth buying for researchers and students alike.

Lesser’s object of study is not the First Folio but a series of texts that have been identified as an even earlier attempt to create a collected works of Shakespeare: the so-called Pavier Quartos. Although these editions of Shakespeare’s plays bear title pages with publication dates ranging from 1600 to 1619, bibliographers of the early twentieth century used exact matches in their alignment of type and watermarked paper to demonstrate that they had all been printed during a brief period in 1619. Based on this and other apparent deceptions, those scholars concluded that the person most often named on the pages—the eponymous Thomas Pavier—must have attempted to profit from Shakespeare’s growing appeal before canceling the piratical project under some threat of reprisal.


Most narrowly, *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* is a successful attempt to challenge and provisionally rewrite this story. More broadly, however, Lesser also rebuts (even as he partially recapitulates) a foundational 1908 essay by W. W. Greg (“On Certain False Dates in Shakespearean Quartos,” *The Library*, n.s. 9, no. 34 [1908]: 113–31), who used these editions as the proving ground for a forensic method of looking at texts that would come to be known as the New Bibliography. Where the so-called New Bibliographers usually limited their inquiries to those factors preceding the printing of books, Lesser’s approach reflects a more recent scholarly turn toward studying their afterlives across the *longue durée* of his subtitle. His early statement, “Each copy of an edition is a unique object, with its own bibliographical evidence to argue about its particular history,” could serve as the manifesto for a study that is, in its own way, as much a polemic as Greg’s article (21). Indeed, Lesser intermittently invokes the roughly contemporary form of the Holmesian detective story as a model for his investigation—albeit one that is similarly updated from this century-old foundation.

In chapter 1, Lesser examines ghost images: faint imprints of text chemically transferred onto a facing page that can reveal which works were bound next to each other before being separated again. Reconciling a series of ghostly shadows with the words that cast them (in some cases divided by centuries and continents), Lesser illustrates that many of the Pavier Quartos had originally been arranged as bound collections of plays before being broken up into the individual volumes where most of them are found today. In the second chapter he analyzes the common binding method of stab-stitching: using a needle and thread to join a book’s sheets at the spine, leaving a telltale set of holes along the center crease. It is in part the relative lack of such holes in the Pavier Quartos that suggests to Lesser that the binding order of these plays must have been deliberately manipulated. In this section he also advances his most overtly polemical proposal: the collection should instead be called the Jaggard Quartos, after the father-and-son pair of printers who likely made these decisions. As does any good detective story, though, the third act introduces an even more vexing datum in the form of tear-and-repair forgeries. Lesser argues in chapter 3 that this method, which involves tearing out text from one part of a leaf and replacing it with a facsimile, was surreptitiously used to alter the

dates on some quarto title pages not in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries (when the technique was openly employed by restorers and collectors) but shortly after their printing in 1619. Here, the subtexual notion of scholarship as detective work briefly becomes text as Lesser quotes Sherlock Holmes's famous aphorism about the impossible and the improbable—and then revises it by insisting on the ineluctably blurry boundaries between these categories.

That interrogation of the underlying epistemology of bibliography leads into the fourth chapter, “Questions.” Here, Lesser sets forth his conclusions before revealing the new narratives and lines of inquiry they generate. These conclusions call into question the supposedly Shakespearean basis of the collection, the claim that its printing and sale were halted when its deceptive provenance was discovered, and the fingering of Pavier as the primary suspect of that deception. But it is the resulting research questions articulated in the final section that are most intriguing here. While it is common for authors to describe their scholarship as raising new questions rather than simply providing answers, *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* is the rare work that delivers on this promise. The effect is to frame premises for articles (or entire monographs) ready to be taken up by future scholars—a generous final gesture in a study that continually registers Lesser's own collaborative, open-ended creation.

Lesser's interlocutors make frequent appearances throughout the text; he cites email correspondence with conservators, acknowledges the dozens of copies examined on his behalf by colleagues, and recounts conversations that revealed new layers within the collection's palimpsest. And in one last nod to the detective story, which traditionally encourages readers to track clues and form conclusions, Lesser also opens up the same possibility to his readers through the inclusion of high-quality color images that visibly reproduce much of his evidence. That fact is especially significant because Lesser concludes by formulating a humanistic version of the scientific phenomenon known as the observer effect, in which the very act of viewing a process has the power to transform it. The most enduring value of *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* lies in Lesser's invitation for readers to participate in that transformation, again and again.

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JOHN F. McDIARMID and SUSAN WABUDA, eds. *The Cambridge Connection in Tudor England: Humanism, Reform, Rhetoric, Politics*. St Andrews Studies in Reformation History. Leiden: Brill, 2021. Pp. 346. \$172.00 (cloth).
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Over forty years ago, Winthrop S. Hudson published an attractive little book entitled *The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559* (1980). This was a study of a group of Cambridge men known to contemporaries as the “Athenian tribe,” who in the 1540s succeeded the “Paduan humanists” (chief among them Sir Richard Morison and Thomas Starkey) as the leaders of English humanism, some of them taking up major positions of government under Edward VI and Elizabeth I. *The Cambridge Connection in Tudor England: Humanism, Reform, Rhetoric, Politics* is not intended to be a remake of Hudson's classic. Instead, co-editors John McDiarmid and Susan Wabuda offer a collection of specialized essays about the Cambridge connection and its members, based on the proceedings of a 2014 conference held at St John's College, Cambridge to mark the quincentenary of the birth of Sir John Cheke, the greatest of the Athenians. It is dedicated to the memory of McDiarmid, perhaps best known for his edited collection *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson* (2016).