



Lesser, Zachary. *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619, Bibliography in the Longue Durée*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.

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Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes addresses one of the most contentious volumes in Shakespeare print history, the 1619 collection of plays known as the Pavier Quartos. Sometimes referred to as the “False Folio,” plagued with false dates and inconsistent collation, the Pavier Quartos were for the New Bibliography school a project that validated the authority and purity of the 1623 First Folio. However, by turning away from the often prescriptive bibliography of the early twentieth century to “close looking” — reexamining these same materials, but with the advantage of fresh theoretical perspectives, revisionist thinking about the limits of the New Bibliography, and new technologies — Zachary Lesser argues that we are able “quite literally to see things that the New Bibliographers could not” and make new discoveries about these oft-examined texts (19). This book began as a co-authored chapter with Peter Stallybrass in *Shakespeare and Textual Studies* (2015, eds. Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai), in which Lesser and Stallybrass posit that William Jaggard printed the 1619 collection, which included Shakespeare plays but also Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, in a form that intentionally evoked a reader’s “sammelbände” more than an authorial collection. Ultimately, they suggest the name shift from Pavier Quartos to Jaggard Quartos, a convention Lesser follows in this book (and I use in this review). *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* extends and expands upon Lesser’s earlier work on this important 1619 collection of Shakespeare’s plays: via personal examination of 289 of the extant 372 copies of the Jaggard Quartos, with an additional 53 copies examined on his behalf, Lesser reevaluates the New Bibliographical narrative of this edition which has remained mostly unquestioned since W. W. Greg’s 1908 essay “On Certain False Dates in Shakespearean Quartos.”

The central methodological claim of Lesser’s case study is that an attention to the long and disparate lives of each individual copy helps us to better understand the making of the Jaggard Quartos and allows us to complicate the studies conducted by New Bibliographers, whose bibliographic descriptions and attendant explanations of the texts’ extant forms still condition contemporary approaches to bibliography. By carefully studying individual copies across long periods of time, Lesser provides a fuller picture of the material conditions of their production and use. He

asserts that “the plays we read today in rare book libraries represent only the current stage of a long historical process that has changed, and often obscured, the material forms they took in the past” (72). Though ghosts, holes, rips, and scrapes act as chapter titles and as starting points for Lesser’s reevaluation of the New Bibliographic narrative of what “Shakespeare” meant in 1619, Lesser’s analysis integrates a broad range of evidence. One revealing example of how Lesser’s chronologically attentive close reading leads to new discoveries is a text he examined at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The copy’s blue paper binding led cataloguers to label it as a “made-up volume” put together probably in the 18th or 19th century, but Lesser’s attention to the book’s unusual organization led him to question that description (48). Looking underneath the later binding showed evidence of a contemporary leather and glue binding, proving it as a copy of Jaggard Quartos. A laser focus on the paradigm of “ideal copy” and a disregard for later interventions on the seventeenth century books allowed this copy to escape prior notice.

Throughout the book, Lesser grapples with a sensationalizing trend in which bibliographic research casts itself as crime scene investigation or *sÅ©ance*. He observes in the introduction that “there is a genre problem that seems almost inherent in bibliographic studies, as [Laurie] Maguire has noted: they tend to take the form of the detective story” (18-19). The bibliographer-as-detective trope hides its assumptions and fixates on stable, complete solutions. Wary as he is of the sensationalizing aspects of bibliography which undergird the New Bibliography’s narratives of discovery and success, Lesser sometimes falls into this rhythm, quoting Sherlock Holmes, using Agatha Christie in an epitaph, and occasionally making observations such as “these title pages have a secret” (87). In reference to the copy of the Quartos at the Newberry Library mentioned above, Lesser observes that “cataloging practices have obscured our understanding of its true nature” (47-48). Likewise, Lesser’s usage of “ghosts” as both bibliographic details and suggestive presences haunting catalog records is useful insofar as it reiterates the continued gaps in our knowledge of these copies in the *longue durÃ©e*, but this is no more a ghost story than detective novel. Playing into the suggestiveness of language such as “the ghost who returns to haunt the Pavier Quartos is the ghost of ‘Shakespeare,’” (33) or using ghostly as a descriptor (“ghostly evidence” (36), “ghostly copies” (75), “ghostly form” (100), “ghostly palimpsest” (130), among others) Lesser illustrates the importance of a point that he makes throughout the volume: we operate in response to prior historiographical milieu, and we need to continually examine these influences.

Lesser’s conclusion compellingly argues for the value of bibliographic rigor and for the potential that “close looking” offers to contemporary textual studies. Therein, Lesser offers a summary of the new set of facts we have to work with in regards to the 1619 Quartos, their implications, and some of his conjectures based on those facts. He concludes with a series of questions about the Jaggard Quartos, a move I found to be full of intellectual humility, generosity, curiosity, and excitement for future study of these texts. Perhaps most importantly, *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* is a persuasive argument in favor of archival research and the integral role descriptive bibliography continues to play in historical and literary scholarship. Although digital access changes the ways we research and allows us to see what prior scholars could not, the types of conclusions Lesser is able to draw are only possible if one can look closely at the objects themselves. *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* is an important foray into the revived question of the Jaggard Quartos, a testament to what one can learn from close looking as well as to what remains unanswered.

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Date Created

03/28/2023