
ERNE, Lukas Christian

Available at: http://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:34575

Disclaimer: layout of this document may differ from the published version.
simultaneously witnessed the first serious founding fathers' optimism in developing famous words. The 1970s, while being the demonstration that many of the New hundred years. In the first half of the century, Alfred Pollard, R. B. McKerrow, and, above all, W. W. Greg, to whom we owe the influential classification of play manuscripts ('foul papers', 'fair copy', 'promptbook', etc.), break with 18th and 19th-century pessimism, believing that much of Shakespeare's lost manuscripts can be recovered from the extant printed editions. The 'Virginian School' adds to the founding fathers' optimism in developing tools like compositor analysis to 'pierce' or 'strip the veil of print', in Fredson Bowers' famous words. The 1970s, while being the 'heyday of New Bibliography', simultaneously witnessed the first serious challenges to it, led by D. F. McKenzie's demonstration that many of the New Bibliographers' most cherished beliefs were not grounded in actual printing house practices. From the 1980s, the plot thickens, with revisions and refinements of the New Bibliography existing alongside the 'new' New Bibliography and the New Textualism. The 'new' New Bibliography is Egan's label for the pursuit of the editors of the Oxford Complete Works (1986) to recover not what Shakespeare wrote but what his company performed. 'The New Textualists' objections to the project of the New Bibliography is more fundamental, in that their post-structuralist model of textuality deprives the author of the agency editors could hope to recover, leading to the advocacy of 'unediting' (thereby supposedly undoing the harm done by the New Bibliographers) or 'version-editing' (editing the extant documents rather than irrecoverable intentions that may have informed them).

Summed up this way, the account may seem circular (from pessimism to optimism to pessimism), and the outlook bleak. But Egan does not disguise his impatience with the New Textualists' a priori skepticism, and makes clear that he aims to 'help push the pendulum back from a currently fashionable dispersal of agency and insist upon authors as the main determinants of what we read'. His concluding advocacy of a 'high New Bibliography' is hopeful and compelling: the editorial attempt to represent 'the author's pre-theatrical script' is worthwhile, Egan argues, and what it shows is 'not a disdain for theatrical art but rather a celebration of writing's capacity to generate so much of it'.

The Struggle for Shakespeare's Text is remarkable not only for its levelheaded advocacy of the importance of the author in thinking about Shakespeare's texts, but also because of its lucid explanations of textual and bibliographic concepts of which many have heard but of which far fewer have grasped the intricacies and repercussions. If you have long been wondering but have not known where to turn, then here is an eminently readable guide to all the key concepts and tools in engaging with Shakespeare's text, substantives and accidentals, copy-text and control text, the Hinman collator, setting by formes, continuous copy — and much more.

Lukas Erne is Professor of English Literature at the University of Geneva.