Quoting the Bard

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Casual Shakespeare: Three Centuries of Verbal Echoes by Regula Hohl Trillini. Routledge, 2018. £120. ISBN 9 7811 3871 0146

THE TITLE OF REGULA HOHL TRILLINI'S NEW MONOGRAPH is obscure. Some may be struck by an apparent oxymoron: what could be casual about Shakespeare, the great treasure of English literature? Others may see a reference to 'casual' (as opposed to professional) readers of Shakespeare. Others still may think of Shakespeare-themed T-shirts and other mass-produced, 'casual' products of twenty-first-century bardolatry. Although the main title leaves the first-time reader at a loss, the subtitle gives much-needed direction. This is a book about 'verbal echoes'. In the preliminary 'Notes on the Text', the idea of 'verbal echoes' is expanded to the over-arching term 'quotation'. Quotation is here defined in broad terms as 'a verbal, semantic or structural **overlap** between two texts' (p. xiii). The bold type is Hohl Trillini's own and is used throughout the book to desig-nate the 'verbal echoes' which she identifies in her excerpts from primary sources. Since Hohl Trillini is interested both in how Shakespeare quotes and in how Shakespeare is quoted, these sources span Shakespeare's cor-pus as well as a diverse range of texts by later writers. At the book's heart lies a special kind of quotation which she calls 'casual quotation', hence 'Casual Shakespeare'.

Casual quotations are so called because they are 'casual' about the texts which they echo. That is, casual quotations are observed when a writer or speaker echoes an earlier text (or texts) without interest in, or awareness of, the context or concerns of the earlier text(s). Hohl Trillini's first example of a casual quotation is 'to be or not to be'. The phrase is almost always encountered at a remove from its Shakespearean context. Hohl Trillini therefore judges that most tokens of 'to be or not to be' qualify as casual quotations. She writes with panache that 'to be or not to be' has become 'a kind of verbalized Boolean function, an elaborate synonym for "either-or"' (p. 3). Although 'Casual Shakespeare' is initially confusing as a title, one starts to see why it is a useful title for this book. Casual quotations are used by professional and 'casual' readers alike. Moreover, casual quotations indeed qualify as mass-produced offshoots of bardolatry: employed not only by Shakespeare, they have also been churned out by later writers and speakers according to how the Bard's reputation has modulated through

the ages. 'Casual Shakespeare' as a title is enriched by its nexus of meanings, with casual quotations being 'casual' for more reasons than one.

Working with this central concept, Hohl Trillini's monograph quickly strikes a different tone from existing work on Shakespeare and quotation. There are two reasons for this. First, the concept of casual quotation allows Hohl Trillini to look as much at Shakespeare's quotation practice as at how later writers have quoted Shakespeare. With a handful of exceptions, past scholarship has focused on either the former or the latter. Focusing on the former, scholars such as Douglas Bruster and Julie Maxwell have considered Shakespeare's quotation practice in light of the rhetorical norms and commonplace book culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It would be anachronistic to apply modern-day notions of plagiarism and intellectual property to this period: literary appropriation, 'borrowing', and creative misquotation flourished.[1] Focusing more on the latter are scholars such as Jonathan Bate, Margreta De Grazia, Marjorie Garber, and, more recently, Frans De Bruyn and Christopher Reid.[2] These scholars rely to varying extents on the idea that Shakespeare has been quoted both consciously and with good reason.

Although there are many instances of quotations where this idea is doubtless correct, the underlying assumption behind the idea is challenged by the concept of casual quotations. This is the second reason for the ingenuity of Hohl Trillini's monograph. Consider, for instance, when Bate in *Shakespearean Constitutions* cites Hazlitt's quotation of 'Fine word, Legitimate!' from *King Lear* ('What is the People?', 7 March 1818). Bate argues that Hazlitt, in deploying this quotation, 'is adopting the role of the Edmund who anatomizes the *ancien régime*'.[3] Adopting Hohl Trillini's terminology, we might instead read Hazlitt's 'Fine word, Legitimate!' as a casual

[1] Douglas Bruster, *Quoting Shakespeare: Form and Culture in Early Modern Drama* (Lincoln, Nebr. 2000); Julie Maxwell, 'How the Renaissance (Mis)Used Sources: The Art of Misquotation', in *How To Do Things with Shakespeare: New Approaches, New Essays* (Oxford 2008) pp. 54–76.

[2] See, for instance, Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730–1830* (Oxford 1989); Margreta De Grazia, 'Shakespeare in Quotation Marks', in Jean Marsden (ed.), *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (New York 1991) pp. 57–71; Marjorie Garber, *Quotation Marks* (London 2003); Frans De Bruyn, 'William Shakespeare and Edmund Burke: Literary Allusion in Eighteenth-Century British Political Rhetoric', in Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin (eds.), *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot 2008) pp. 85–102; Christopher Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers: The Rhetorical Culture of the House of Commons, 1760–1800* (Oxford 2012) pp. 214–39. See also Julie Maxwell and Kate Rumbold (eds.), *Shakespeare and Quotation* (Cambridge 2018), which was published several months after *Casual Shakespeare* and to which Hohl Trillini contributed part of an essay.

[3] *Shakespearean Constitutions*, p. 190.

quotation, a verbal flourish, 'a gesture which means itself and nothing else' (p. 8). The concept of casual quotation rejects the idea that deeper meaning must be at work when an author, or anyone for that matter, quotes Shakespeare. Hohl Trillini makes this point emphatically by resurrecting Roland Barthes's essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967). She argues that Shakespeare must 'die' (in a Barthesian sense) and be approached like less canonical authors. An early title for the book, she tells us, was *Kill Will* (p. 4).

Admittedly, using this kind of theory to study Shakespeare and quotation is not, by itself, entirely new. *Casual Shakespeare* relies on no fewer than three theorists associated with deconstruction: Julia Kristeva, Barthes, and Michel Foucault. Besides Barthes's 'Death of the Author', Hohl Trillini also works closely with Kristeva's concept of intertextuality to argue that quotations point sideways to other texts rather than back to one main source (p. 8). So too has Kate Rumbold, in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford 2016), used Kristeva's work on intertextuality to contextualise her analysis of eighteenth-century quotation cultures. However, what really distinguishes Hohl Trillini's work from that of Rumbold and others is how *Casual Shakespeare* yokes deconstruction with cutting-edge work in the digital humanities. Her monograph emerges from 'Passages We Live By', a Swiss-funded research project which has led to the creation of *HyperHamlet* (www.hyperhamlet.unibas.ch). The website presents a hypertext of *Hamlet* which is keyed against a database of quotations from and allusions to the play. Most of the quotations and allusions have been added by a team of academics led by Hohl Trillini, but any Internet user – on proving their 'non-robotness' by answering questions such as 'Do you hate spam? (yes or no)' – can suggest new additions. In her introduction to *Casual Shakespeare*, Hohl Trillini claims that '*HyperHamlet* allows students to revel in the abundance of infinite, jumbled echoes' (p. 11). The value of this book lies in processing these infinite echoes to inspire fresh arguments and close reading.

The book's first chapter, charting 'to be or not to be' across time, elucidates the two-pronged approach of deconstruction and digital humanities as outlined in her introduction. Hohl Trillini shows that 'to be or not to be' itself had sixteenth-century (and earlier) precursors and was thus far from an original utterance in *Hamlet*. In adopting Barthes's concept of the echo chamber, whereby quotation is seen as a repetition of signifiers with no original signified, Hohl Trillini is sceptical of the very concept of 'originals'. Chapter 1 goes on to illustrate how 'to be or not to be' has been quoted casually in texts ranging from the seventeenth century to the present day, culminating with snowclones. 'Snowclone' is a term coined in 2004 for phrasal templates such as 'X is the new Y'. Hohl Trillini shows that 'to be

or not to be' has itself become a snowclone (to X or not to X), 'an anony-mous structural blueprint' available for infinite reuse (p. 34). Although chapter 1 actually exceeds Hohl Trillini's ambitious claim to study 'Three Centuries of Verbal Echoes', the rest of the book confines itself to the subti-tle's stated chronological span: chapters 2 to 4 consider quotation practices used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries; chapters 5 to 7 turn to how Shakespeare was quoted in the long eighteenth century. A line is drawn at the Victorian era and the twentieth century because of the former's rapidly expanding print culture and the emergent digital age in the latter. Neither period, we are told, can yet be documented fully with the current resources of the *HyperHamlet* project.

This project, then, has both enriched and imposed limitations on *Casual Shakespeare*, but Hohl Trillini is careful to acknowledge such limitations and mitigate them where possible. For example, since *HyperHamlet* is based solely on *Hamlet*, the book could have focused excessively on that play at the expense of the wider Shakespeare corpus. Thankfully this is not the case. Although the book always returns to *Hamlet*, it regularly branches out into discussions of other texts. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, an initial focus on *Hamlet* gives way to readings of *Julius Caesar* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and to image clusters found across the works of Shakespeare and his contempora-ries. Chapter 2 focuses on biblical quotations, chapter 3 on classical quota-tions, and chapter 4 on how Shakespeare was quoted by his contemporaries. Marston's Shakespeare quotations are here described memorably as looking less like homage, more 'like a kind of verbal stalking' (p. 89). These three chapters work towards the argument that Shakespeare was 'goal-orientated' with his quotations, and that he had 'minimal care for context and content' when incorporating others' words into his poems and plays (p. 78). One is reminded of T. S. Eliot's well-worn adage, 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.'

Chapters 5 to 7 follow the same methodology as chapters 2 to 4, using empirical data to drive arguments. However, in turning to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these chapters broaden the scope of Hohl Trillini's enquiry to yield unexpected and exciting results. Indeed, although the beginning of chapter 5 at first feels awkward in reprising 'to be or not to be' (already analysed at length in chapter 1), this chapter's analysis of Bachelor Soliloquies proves to be an exhilarating take on non-canonical texts. The *HyperHamlet* database reveals that there were seventy-six rewrit-ings of 'to be or not to be' published between 1744 and 1837. Chapter 5 focuses on a few. Quoting the anonymous 'Bachelor's Soliloquy' of 1744 in its entirety, Hohl Trillini painstakingly shows how this poem quotes Hamlet's famous speech in terms of its syntactic units.

Chapter 6 is also impressive, starting with an observation, based on *HyperHamlet* data, that the 1770s and 1830s witnessed shifts in how Shakespeare was quoted. Of course, there are issues in using data based solely on *Hamlet* quotation to account for Shakespeare quotation in general. Not all will be satisfied by the justification that *Hamlet* data, since *Hamlet* was the most-quoted Shakespeare play of the period, are 'reasonably representative' of Romantic Shakespeare quotation as a whole (p. 119). Chapter 6 nevertheless breaks new ground with its survey of how writers such as Hazlitt, Mary Shelley, and Walter Scott quoted Shakespeare casually. The seventh chapter, shorter than others in the book, develops Hohl Trillini's argument in chapter 6 that Romantic writers castigated casual quotation as insincere while hypocritically practising it in their writing. Hohl Trillini finds that Jane Austen genuinely cast casual quotation aside. Casual quotations do not feature in Austen's private correspondence and they are deployed in her novels only when her characters are betraying their vapidity. A short conclusion summarises the book's major findings, reflects on the aptness of 'casual' as an adjective, and highlights avenues for further research.

There is clearly much to celebrate in this innovative contribution to Shakespeare studies. In many ways this is digital humanities scholarship at its best. Although data-based approaches to literature can risk drowning readers in figures, *Casual Shakespeare* is careful to use tables and graphs sparingly and effectively. In the midst of its lucid analyses, the book only enters less comfortable waters when assumptions about what authors did *not* think are stated too strongly, despite the excellent close readings on which these assumptions are typically based. When chapter 3 examines image clusters in Shakespeare, Hohl Trillini wonderfully traces the so-called 'tiger cluster' (which includes the motifs of hard warrior, mourning queen, parents, tears, and sometimes fire) through *Aeneid* IV, *Heroides* VII, Chaucer's *Legend of Dido*, Marlowe's *Dido*, the anonymous *Selimus*, and then in *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, and *Titus Andronicus*. However, the reader may be left uneasy when it is argued that such clusters derive from Shakespeare's 'unconscious memory' and 'seem to be based on deeply ingrained memories which [Shakespeare] did not consciously draw on' (pp. 69, 74). Strong cases are made for these kinds of conclusion, but the content remains too speculative for the absolute terms in which they are sometimes presented. *Casual Shakespeare* feels so anxious to get away from authorial intention that the book at times broaches the opposite extreme, performing a kind of inverted intentional fallacy. It is as much an overstatement to say what authors did not think as to say what they consciously thought.

This reservation, which more concerns aspects of phrasing than any of Hohl Trillini's arguments, should not detract from the book's many

successes. Perhaps a greater cause of regret is the book's current retail price of £120. Even university libraries may think twice about paying so much for what is ultimately a short, though insightful, monograph. Priced at just over £30, the e-book is a more attractive alternative. *Casual Shakespeare* is so invested in the digital humanities that the e-book may even offer a reading experience which lies closer to the book's methodological ethos. If the implicit question tackled by any review is 'to read or not to read', for this book the answer may depend on the medium in which a reader is willing to give it a try.