

# Renaissance and Reformation

## Renaissance et Réforme



### How the Classics Made Shakespeare

Jonathan Locke Hart

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with the Edwardian view of Eucharistic presence (157). She proceeds to develop her thesis by demonstrating the establishment and continuity of Eucharistic theology, from Cranmer's figurative interpretation of spiritual presence in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer to its recapitulation in the Elizabethan Settlement in 1559. From this, she concludes that the return of the English exiles from Geneva in 1559 did not contribute to the theological landscape of the Elizabethan era.

Allen's work successfully examines the three critical texts of the Eucharistic debate and properly places them in the theological and political world of Tudor England. Her most notable strength is the skill to extrapolate the arguments of Cranmer and Gardiner from the texts and to pinpoint the inconsistencies and ruptures in each of their arguments. She also successfully captures the political intrigue of Henry VIII's court and persuasively demonstrates the connection between that and the personal ambitions even of religious, spiritual men. This work is an essential addition to the library of any scholar or student of theology or church history and is especially recommended for those interested in the intersection between religion and politics in the early modern period.

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**Bate, Jonathan.**

***How the Classics Made Shakespeare.***

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv, 361. ISBN 978-0-691-16160-0 (hardcover) US\$24.95.

Shakespeare and his relation to the classics—that is, to the languages, literatures, and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome—was a question much alive in his lifetime, at the time of his death in 1616, and in the bringing out of the First Folio in 1623. It has been discussed on and off ever since. For instance, in 1592, Robert Greene seems to warn Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, and George Peele, university wits, against this upstart crow—William Shakespeare. *The Parnassus Plays* (parts 1 and 2, ca. 1598–1601, part 2 published 1606), performed at the University of Cambridge, allude to Shakespeare, including Will Kemp, a player in Shakespeare's company, in part 2, preferring Shakespeare to

Ben Jonson who in the *War of the Theatres* gave Horace a pill to the poets. The play admits Shakespeare's popularity but the praise for him comes from those who do not know or confuse the classics (Kemp seems to think *Metamorphosis* is a writer and not Ovid's poem). In 1598, Francis Meres praises the English poets, including Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, for doing what the great Greek and Roman poets had done for their tongues, and he praises Shakespeare for being the best in comedy and tragedy as Plautus and Seneca were respectively. Francis Beaumont's poem to Ben Jonson in 1615 and John Milton's poem in the Second Folio in 1632 see Shakespeare as a poet of nature, not one of classical learning. Jonson's poem in the First Folio is great and intricate and even ambivalent. He declares: "*And though thou had'st small Latine, and lesse Greeke, / From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke*" but he sees Britain as coming from the ashes of "*insolent Greeke, or haughtie Rome*" and in a triumph to which all Europe needs to pay homage and says of Shakespeare: "He was not of an age, but for all time!" (First Folio). Jonson's ambivalence toward Shakespeare also appears in his conversation with Drummond and in *Timber*.

Shakespeare went to the classical world in his narrative poems and plays, drawing on Greece and Rome from Venus to Troilus. When writing in tongues ancient and modern, however, even when he knew the languages, he preferred to go to translations such as Plutarch's *Lives* and John Florio's Montaigne: texts written in the English in which Shakespeare himself was making and echoing. W. W. Skeat edited *Shakespeare's Plutarch* in 1875 and W. H. D. Rouse brought out *Shakespeare's Ovid* in 1904, while T. W. Baldwin published his *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* in 1944, a year after his study of Shakespeare's petty school. Geoffrey Bullough and Kenneth Muir edited separately Shakespeare's sources from the 1950s to the 1970s. Shakespeare and the classics is well-tilled ground.

Enter Jonathan Bate, an accomplished scholar and biographer who has done much to help us to understand Shakespeare, the Romantics, ecocriticism, and contemporary poetry, such as the work of Ted Hughes. In my own role as a poet and a literary and historical scholar who has written fiction and for the theatre, I admire Bate's work and recommend it, including this book on how the classics made Shakespeare, the maker. It is all the more admirable in Shakespearean scholarship, which has considered so much for so long.

Bate makes a sound and elegant contribution, noting that we do not know what Shakespeare believed but have a better chance of knowing what he thought

(1). Poets are not thinkers, and even Plato's dialogues are not monological philosophical arguments but involve speakers, dialogue, and contention, while plays are representations of action and characters as Aristotle saw, and not mouthpieces for their authors. So Bate, speaking of Shakespeare and Athens, aptly says: "There is philosophy in his works, but he was not a philosopher" (6). It is good that Bate turns to Shakespeare's imagination, but I am not certain that Shakespeare, although schooled in classical antiquity, always took up what the ancients bequeathed to him, "a way of thinking" (7). The playacting, exemplary stories, and textbooks all make sense in influencing Shakespeare in school, and it is true that he adapted Plautus and read Ovid, Livy, and Plutarch (9–11). Bate is well aware of all this and what he calls the groaning bookshelf in Shakespearean studies. What he wishes to contribute is Shakespeare's periodic Horatian tone and Cicero as an example to Shakespeare (12).

Moreover, Bate's interest is to show the diverse ways that Shakespeare encountered the classics and to fill in gaps in the scholarship. Bate sees Shakespeare as "almost always Ovidian," often Horatian, "sometimes Ciceronian, occasionally Tacitean," a mix of "Senecan and anti-Senecan," anti-Virgilian because he was anti-heroic, or anti-epic because he was attuned to sexual desire (15). Shakespeare can be Virgilian and Ovidian at once, as I think Bate admits, and has the ability to mix the heroic and anti-heroic in works such as *Henry V* and *Troilus and Cressida*. He focuses on the magical, erotic, and imaginative in Shakespeare's art (16). Bate places his work in the context of Ernst Robert Curtius, Amy Warburg, and others and is interested in the visual and the verbal, in art and literature (16–20).

Shakespeare's *Venus* is a reanimation of the classical animation (35); his mode of writing was rhetorical composition (36); his writing appealed to the many "republics" in England, "the diverse reading and listening communities of his age" (49); his early works were practice or testing (as Quintilian recommended) (64); his history plays, ancient and modern, were marked by the Ciceronian idea of the ills of civil war (109). Bate observes neutrality, perhaps like John Keats's negative capability, in Shakespeare, but also thinks Shakespeare is warning, as Cicero did, the patricians of his age (125). In Shakespeare's satire, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, Bate sees Horace, and he also thinks that Shakespeare aspired, as Horace had, to be a gentleman (145–46, 159). In the Epilogue to *Tempest*, Prospero is abjuring his magic "but is still enchanting his audience with the power of poetry" (184). Shakespeare learned

about the love and desire of women characters from Ovid's *Heroides* (195). Seneca provided three models for the climax of a tragedy (230). In discussing ghosts and spirits in Shakespeare, Bate examines, for instance, Plutarch in relation to *Julius Caesar* (235–38).

For those not educated in the British or colonial elite, based on classics well into the twentieth century, Shakespeare became a classic (275–76). Through him, we still get something of a classical education. Bate is excellent at discussing text and context, Shakespeare and his contemporaries as well as the classics. Bate's style is elegant, his learning informative, and his book rich beyond what a review can tell.

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**Beer, Michelle L.**

***Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain: Catherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor, 1503–1533.***

Martlesham, UK: Royal Historical Society / Boydell Press, 2018. Pp. xv, 185 + 4 charts. ISBN 978-0-86193-348-8 (hardcover) US\$90.

The history of early modern British queenship is dominated by studies of the two Tudor queens regnant, Mary and Elizabeth, and the six wives of Henry VIII. Michelle L. Beer argues that the model for Renaissance queens that these women followed was well-established in the early sixteenth century, as shown in the experiences of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first and longest-lasting wife, and her sister-in-law, Margaret Tudor, who reigned in Scotland as the consort of James IV and briefly as regent to their son, James V. Beer reconstructs these queens' courtly conduct using a wide range of sources, particularly manuscripts at the National Archives, Kew, and the National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh. She shows how the women asserted their identities and importance at the courts and beyond in nuanced yet assertive ways. Beer's work is an impressive achievement, given that much of the queenly households can be reconstructed only through a determined synthesis of fragmentary remains and tangential documentation.