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Fair Copies: Reproducing the English Lyric from Tottel to Shakespeare / Matthew Zarnowiecki

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Matthew Zarnowiecki. *Fair Copies: Reproducing the English Lyric from Tottel to Shakespeare*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. 248 pp.

Reviewed by EMILY RUTH ISSACSON

Matthew Zarnowiecki's *Fair Copies: Reproducing the English Lyric from Tottel to Shakespeare* explores the publication of English lyrics in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century and in doing so pulls at the threads of critical commonplaces about the reproduction of those lyrics in order to spin a new web of understanding about how they accrue meaning. This book at once embraces historicist thinking by acknowledging in particular the shifting understanding of reproduction in the early modern era, and resists it by using that very metaphor to consider the way that the meaning in later copies of the poems is just as fair as the original.

Zarnowiecki proposes a system of what he calls "medium-close reading." While this system of reading grounds itself in New Criticism, it views as the object of close reading not only the well-wrought urn of the individual poem, but also the entire construction of the printed object. He explains, "rather than relying only on the text, or primarily on context, I wish to read early modern English lyrics . . . both temporally and spatially [and] to recognize that lyrics exist through time, and that rather than being single, static instantiations, they vary and mutate when reproduced" (7). Thus the book explores the ways that the various collections of poems operate as objects on the page, and it turns its attention not only to the solitary poet, but also the poet in collaboration (sometimes posthumous) with the editors, the printers, and even the readers.

In this exploration of printed texts, and particularly of the mutability of reproduction, Zarnowiecki turns to the emergent ideas about reproduction in the early modern era. Concepts of reproduction, Zarnowiecki argues, are at a crux, both in terms of textual reproduction (through printing) and human reproduction. This then raises the question of what exactly might be a fair copy of the text. What is fair? And what is degraded? Zarnowiecki suggests that the texts created by those studied here – Tottel, Gascoigne, Spenser, Sidney, and Shakespeare – "[are] collected, transformed, and mutated even in [their] own supposed originary form," and thus textual fidelity is not what constitutes a fair copy (14). The shifting language of human reproduction, while Zarnowiecki acknowledges that it is not the central topic of this study, undergirds the metaphor of poetic creation through the poets' self-conscious metacommentary. This study combines the emergent ideas about reproduction with the material practices of publishing poetic collections to trace an increasing awareness of the collaborative nature of published poetry and an increasingly complex response to the palimpsestic object in the hands of the reader.

As a starting point, Zarnowiecki looks at the mid-sixteenth century work of Richard Tottel, known best for his *Songes and Sonnettes* (1557), but who also

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published legal titles. Zarnowiecki looks at Tottel's works published at the same time that he was producing the first edition of *Songes*, texts that demonstrate a "simultaneous reproduction and effacement" of legal statutes (29). That is, the legal documents from Tottel both reproduce historically existing laws, but then efface them by later in the same document reproducing their repeal. From here, Zarnowiecki turns his attention to the similar reproduction and effacement of meaning through the *Songes*, which, in Zarnowiecki's medium close reading, "demonstrate how the new conditions of reproducibility combine with the lyric's concern with the present" (33). In Tottel poetry resides in a space replete with paratexts that is "resistant to existing in a single time or a single version" (43). Tottel, instead of producing a single definitive text, preserves ephemeral poetry, a paradox in itself.

From Tottel, the book turns to George Gascoigne's *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573), which Zarnowiecki describes as "a watershed moment in the printing and reproduction of English lyric verse, because this collection . . . demonstrate[s] an increased awareness of the part of printers and poets that the poetic creative process is changing" (47). That Gascoigne dramatically revises and reproduces this work in 1575 as *The Posies of George Gascoigne* increases the multiplicity of voices and points to a conscious awareness of the paradox of preserving an originary text and reproducing it for later consumption. Like the flowers of the poesy, the poetic moment is fleeting; but in its printed form and later reprinted, hand-copied and sometime counterfeited forms, the poetic moment is freed from temporal restraint.

In contrast, Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* and *Colin Clouts* attend less to the temporal paradox of reproduced poems, and more to the paradox that arises from the solitary endeavor of the poet and the necessarily communal effort of publication. Zarnowiecki argues, "Colin Clout's breaking of the bagpipe [is] a positive and forward-looking action, rather than a simple and unproductive withdrawal" (73), because it turns from isolated contemplation to the community-engaged verses of the second part of *Colin Clouts, Astrophel*. While in many ways, much of this pastoral work suggests Spenser's increased isolation from the courtly community, his participation in elegiac writing for Philip Sidney repositions him in the reproductive poetic community. In reading these pieces, Zarnowiecki points out the essential part of poetry: no matter the need for solitude, the poet ultimately will need an audience. Even if Colin Clout "could not bring himself to participate in [a poetic community] in the *Calendar*," Spenser self-consciously participates in one in the reproduction of this poetry through printing (98). Like the flowers of Gascoigne, Colin Clout is preserved through the reproducibility of the printed page.

As Zarnowiecki moves towards Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and the *Arcadia* (both the Old and the New), he more steadily returns to the early modern language of human reproduction as a paradigm for textual reproduction. Zarnowiecki describes a "lyric surrogacy" in both the text itself and in the reproduction of the text, with Mary Sidney's control over posthumous publication. Within *Arcadia* itself are moments of textual reproduction, when characters speak poetry that is then written down by other characters. Most interesting in terms of

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the surrogate ownership of the poem, and something emphasized by Zarnowiecki's method of medium-close reading, is the fact that in a copy of *New Arcadia* a blank space exists, where a later reader filled in the intended epitaph by hand. Here Zarnowiecki suggests that readerly action takes ownership of the physical book – and using medium-close reading, contributes further meaning to the poem.

Zarnowiecki ends his examination of the early modern lyric with his most significant divergence from critical assumptions, unpacking the layers of complexity in the reader's and the editor's actions in the sonnets of Shakespeare. While acknowledging a discussion of the artistic chronology and the standard editorial order of the sonnets, Zarnowiecki argues for a very different reading than one that is seeking a "fair copy." He suggests that "Shakespeare's treatment of reproduction in the sonnets . . . reveals his deep interest in the imperfection of human and textual copies, and the mutation of material objects as they exist through time" (130). Zarnowiecki argues that it is not the poems themselves that create the immortality of their subject, but rather the later reception and repetition of the poems, whether printed or recited. Shakespeare's sonnets constantly reveal his "deep suspicions of exact copies" whether human or printed (139), and thus the poems trouble the notion of the purity of any copy of them. The poems accrue meaning over time. The fair copy does not exist, but rather becomes fair through the multiple iterations.

It is that meaning over time that Zarnowiecki ends on. He points to the ways that Shakespeare's poems in particular enact "an identity that exists out of time," but are certainly of their own moment. The interpretive act is one that must be aware of that simultaneity. Throughout this book, Zarnowiecki, with wit and with a dexterous examination of poetics and textual materials, presents us with the tensions between the stultifying effect of the preservation of the poem and the interpretive possibilities of adaptation right up into our contemporary world. In doing so, this book overlays the interpretive work of formalist close reading onto the published object-as-text, finding a space for careful reading of the text-as-object.

Emily Ruth Isaacson is an associate professor of English at Heidelberg University (Tiffin, Ohio), where she teaches Shakespeare, British Literature, women's literature, literary theory, and writing courses. In her scholarship, she specializes in early modern comedy and in pedagogical practices in the contemporary college classroom.