



This Rough Magic

A Peer-Reviewed, Academic, Online Journal

Dedicated to the Teaching of Medieval and Renaissance Literature



Teaching the Early Modern Period. Edited by Derval Conroy and Danielle Clark. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 273pp.

Reviewer(s): Darlene Farabee

Reviewed Work(s):

Source: *This Rough Magic*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (June 2012), pp. 86-89.

Published by: www.thisroughmagic.org

Stable URL: <http://www.thisroughmagic.org/farabee%20review.html>

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This wide-ranging collection of twenty-three essays offers discussions of theories of teaching materials from the early modern period and descriptive essays on particular approaches. Derval Conroy provides an invaluable introductory chapter on the scholarship of teaching the early modern, which presents clearly and succinctly a great deal of useful information about the various directions pedagogical scholarship has taken. The book is divided into four sections, linking each section to the early modern and these other areas: the digital age, Others, the contemporary classroom, and performing the early modern. The first and last sections of the book (digital age and performance) are shorter than the middle two sections, making it seem that the meat of the volume appears in these two heftier sections. The two essays in the digital age section (by Danielle Clark and Paul M. Dover) both explore links between the early modern period and the emergence of the digital age; Danielle Clark's essay emphasizes two areas of recent scholarship (both resting heavily on earlier scholarly work) that might provide directions other than new historicist approaches: bibliographic approaches and early modern pedagogy.

In the more substantial second and third sections of the book, some of the essays are longer and provide more in-depth discussion of particular examples while some are shorter descriptions of issues at hand. In the second section, for example, Andrew Hadfield's "Shakespeare and the Problem of the Early Modern Curriculum" discusses the blessing and curse of Shakespeare's stature and makes the inarguable point that we need "to meet the students where they are and to convince them that [we] can teach them something they need to know" (147). Hadfield's short essay sets out a compelling argument for the usefulness of current research in the contemporary classroom. Jane Grogan's more in-depth essay, "Paradise Regained? Teaching the Multicultural Renaissance," considers the ways new historicist approaches to texts have altered approaches in the classroom—sometimes not for the better. Grogan points out that in some cases "students are disabused of the Elizabethan World Picture only to be mollified with something approximating the Liberal World Picture instead" (129). Grogan includes descriptions of specific classroom exercises that might mitigate some of these problems and encourage, as she puts it, "relinquishing a certain amount of pedagogic authority and releasing the texts to our students" (131).

The third section of the book, "The Early Modern in the Contemporary Classroom: Course Design and Classroom Practice" draws on a wider range of texts and offers ways to integrate these texts in the classroom. Patrick Cheney's short essay, "Finding the Student In-road," lovingly teases out an example from *Antony and*

Cleopatra to show one way to allow students purchase on the material. Most of the material in this section does not address Shakespeare and helpfully discusses many less-taught texts. The short final essay in this section (by Ceri Sullivan) makes the claim that “Boring texts are the antidote to cultural narcissism” (222). The main point of the essay is that the discipline and boredom of grappling with early modern texts (which “rapidly turns into pleasure” (222)) offers students the chance to truly explore boundlessness of thought. Sullivan includes a bullet-pointed list of the implications for teaching, and often these points take issue with explorations in other essays in this section. Bernadette Höfer’s essay on interdisciplinary approaches describes a course that uses the mind/body problem to explore seventeenth-century French literature on the question. Sullivan, however, calls for “text-based, not theme-based, introductory courses to the period” (223). The differences in levels of courses account for many of the apparent contradictions. But the collection of essays offers, in thought provoking ways, truly useful dialogue amongst the approaches.

The final section of the book, “Performing the Early Modern,” seems to reflect the likelihood that performance-based pedagogy has been nearly completely accepted in Shakespeare classrooms and thus barely addresses Shakespeare and performance. Instead, these essays address other (mainly French) texts and questions of teaching films. The discussions of pedagogy around films (particularly those by Guy Spielmann and Amy Wygant) are helpful and provocative. As a whole, this collection of essays will

appeal to many teachers of early modern materials. Its range of example texts ensure multiple levels of engagement, and the range of the discussions continue many of the important pedagogical debates described in the introductory chapters.