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Book Reviews

Stephen Orgel, *The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature*. Oxford Textual Perspectives. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 224.

Reviewed by ***Bradin Cormack****

In ways that will seem familiar to scholars and students of book history, the argument of Stephen Orgel's most recent monograph insists on the materiality and historicity of literary texts and the priority of process over product in the conceptualization of literature. It insists on the irreducible importance of mediation, including in the printing house but also across time, in the shaping and reshaping of the text in light of what publishers, editors, and readers want the literary text, the literary author, and the literary itself to be. And it insists on the importance of reading, therefore, not only for the reception of texts (as if there were a fully stable origin subtending that reception) but also for the constitution of the text as such.

Readers will notice also that, in his particular arguments, Orgel is revisiting topics that, over his long and distinguished career, he has made distinctively and decisively his own, including the always relational character of early modern genre; and the ways in which poems and plays participate in the cultural shaping of desire and relation along axes of sexual and gender difference as unsteady as desire itself; and the making of dramatic authorship as the relation among print and performance and the visual arts. Notable, too, is the fact that, even more particularly, this new monograph constitutes a bravura reflection on questions Orgel has been taking up in an outpouring of volumes across just the last decade: on the making of selves, often iconic selves, in textual, dramatic, and visual representation (*Spectacular Performances*, 2011); on readers and their ways of marking up the books they're using, reading,

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and thinking with (*The Reader in the Book*, 2015); on the early modern conceptualization of the classical past and the very idea of the classic (*Wit's Treasury*, 2021); and on the making of Shakespeare in text and edition and performance and image (*The Invention of Shakespeare*, 2022). One happy effect of *The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature* will surely be to encourage readers, including Orgel's newer and younger readers, to go back to these companion volumes (and beyond), in order to reckon with the full complexity of Orgel's singular scholarly achievement.

The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature is, at its core, also an editor's book. From his earliest work on Jonson and the masque through his editing of Marlowe, Milton, and Shakespeare, including in the permanently important editions of *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, Orgel has been for the early modern field one of its most distinguished editors and thinkers about editing. Across its chapters, this book repeatedly comes to a basic question that has in part driven that editorial achievement, since it is the editor's question to ask what it is that's in front of them, and what are the implications for the editor's work of that which the object can be seen to be. This open but fundamentally empirical orientation might direct the editor, for example, to the gap between text and the performance indexed by the text but not really held there; it might direct their thinking to "paratextual" details that, as part of the book's performance of its meaning, are already managing the reader's apprehension of the text; it might direct their thinking to details of orthography and typography and punctuation that, on the page, carry the text's historicity in ways that can either facilitate understanding or hinder understanding; and it might direct their attention (and here we only seem to be leaving book history) to the contexts that once made the page legible and to the different contexts, therefore, that now, in the present, might make the page differently legible. Since editing is a practical art, noticing such details does not resolve the question of what to do with them; and one of Orgel's key insights has been to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that editing must always and *decisively* be a kind of translation, as indeed reading itself must be, if we return reading to the material contexts that make it possible without ever, of course, determining the reading's shape. So many parameters, so much freedom.

How does a material object create its effects? How does it make or, in the sense proposed in Orgel's title, create the quasi or apparently permanent forms the book might seem to have carried all along? In the individual chapters, Orgel's argument offers case histories in how books get to be the books they become; in how authors emerge as an effect of the textual representation of their persons and (take the case of drama) of their genres; and, centrally, in how the *book* might work, in a productive triangulation, to make a *text* into the *work*, now in the sense of the textual after-image we posit as literary or canonical or classic.

The force of the argument lies in its details, and the book ranges widely in its examples of how the material organization of the text shaped its status and reception. As an introductory gesture that seems also paradigmatic, there's a wonderful reading of George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and of the difference made when, orienting the original horizontal disposition of text into the more familiar vertical disposition, editors remade the text as one poem rather than as two. This is a story, for Orgel, less of error and of losing track of the original text than of shaping another text that gives us an adjusted Herbert: in light of the distortion, it is the translation that is of interest; in light of the translation, it is the original intention that is of interest. In a similar spirit, Orgel is fascinated by the changing norms for what counts in the book's self-representation (as, for example, in the ever evolving form of the title page and the information that seems to belong there). And when he asks what makes a book attractive to readers and potential buyers, those details are important not as marks either of an evolution or a decline in the medium's operation and efficacy, but because those details are material guides to the specificities of the elusive readerly engagement that, at any time in its reception, alone enlivens the book. It is not surprising, therefore, that Orgel is especially acute and playful about textual features that contribute to the book's status and its value, even when they have an only attenuated relation to their purported or posited function: the index that promises an access to the text that it fully or partially withholds; the illustration that works less as clarification than as pure entertainment; the elaborate decoration that brilliantly showcases and celebrates a text's value (Orgel's example is a gloriously elaborate Aristotle) but only by freezing it as an object to be admired and not otherwise used. We are not helped by thinking here of fetishism. So it goes, the argument goes: in the making and apprehension of material histories, one should not narrow in advance one's sense of what is going to matter.

The first major case study concerns the printing of plays. It starts with the familiar position, forcefully argued by Orgel himself, that the printed text of the play is not the play but only a guide to the performance. Taking as the analytic starting point that commonplace that "the book is not the play," Orgel notes, however, that "there is more of the book in the drama" than this would seem to imply, not least because, before the performance, drama begins always with a script, with the "book" and playbook that is the written whole made up of the individually scripted "parts" that the particular actors would have as their entry onto the coordinated thing they are making together. Avoiding a default binarism (and almost completely bypassing the question of dramatic vs. print authorship as it has often been explored), Orgel theorizes the primacy of performance by insisting that this primacy does not quite make writing secondary, including by noting just how often dramas turn to their own status precisely as writing, in the highly self-reflexive representation of writing on stage as prompt for action. If "the book is not the play," the complementary and

not contradictory thought is, yet, that "the life of the play is in its text" (40-41). In a fascinating reading of *Hamlet* and of Hamlet's pursuit of the efficacious performance and imitation (what is it to get Claudius to react? what is it Claudius is reacting to?), this tension registers as that between the energies of script and improvisation, with Hamlet playing both manager and, disorientingly, clown. The value of Orgel's so embedding the performance and play in the proto-plays underlying the performance rests in its nimbly allowing no version of the complex that the play is (as shuttle among script and performance and printed book) to be hypothesized into the merely authentic thing.

In a superb and brilliantly teachable chapter on "Some Works," Orgel considers what it takes for a text, in print, to become legible as a *work*, as having, in some emergent way to be sure, a permanent rather than ephemeral status, a value that makes it worthy of preservation. Focusing on the Jonson and Shakespeare folios, the chapter offers a concise account of Jonson's well known efforts to curate his writing career in the 1616 collection; and in so doing to make his texts, including the commercial plays and court masques, into the works they had not quite hitherto been. There is a compelling comparison with Daniel's 1601 *Works*, which, though a model for Jonson's collection, lacked as a volume the kind of unity which might penetrate the individual works and change their status *qua* works. So the details adduced by Orgel suggest not just that Jonson learned from "the defects in the production of Daniel's *Works*" (74) how to make his book more effective, but also that the "works" in the two volumes can't really refer to quite the same thing, since it is the shaping of the part towards a whole that holds the part in a new way that gave the individual work its new (and audacious and, for Jonson's irritated contemporaries, notorious) aspect. The chapter revels in the fact that Shakespeare's more famous Folio follows Jonson's innovations only haphazardly (in its design and organization and its act and scene divisions), which permits Orgel to track the rise of the volume's reputation as the fate instead of its details. The author portrait is important here. If Jonson excluded his portrait from the 1616 folio (as a way to amplify a textual authority and locate his authorship there), Orgel delights in noticing that, readers being readers, Jonson's portrait drifted into the book as a later supplement that, *because of Jonson's very success in making his book*, seemed then to be lacking: readers will determine what's needed. For the highly self-conscious construction of "Shakespeare" undertaken by his Company in the 1616 volume, Shakespeare's portrait on the title page is the most provocative innovation in that opening, though Orgel points us most to the effort in Jonson's poem on the opposite page to subordinate that authorial image to the author the reader will get by turning the page. The Shakespeare made even here is made by the reader, including the later editors who shaped the canon inaugurated in 1616 by adding the plays their Shakespeare needed and the genres their Shakespeare benefitted from. As with Jonson's failure to control his

readers' sense that an author portrait might be appropriate, the lesson for literary formation here (though it is not a proposition so much as a frame) is that the difficulty of predicting what creates the author and creates the work is surely the difficulty of knowing what the next reader desires.

In a chapter on "How to Be a Poet," the book extends these arguments by considering how poetic writing, especially for writers who are not professional poets, becomes recognizable as carrying the authority of a literary work, whether through generic affiliation or patronage culture, or, critically for Orgel, the idea of the classical, in which the vernacular adopts, absorbs, translates from antiquity a status that the antique is, as it were, allowed to carry in order to find it re-expressed in the present. The chapter nicely locates the quantitative metrical experiments through which Spenser, Sidney and others hoped to approximate English verse to its classical counterparts in the broader culture of translation and adaptation. Shakespeare is the key case here, and Orgel offers a marvelous account especially of how Shakespeare's writing, in the two narrative poems and in the Sonnets, makes its erotic arguments by restlessly testing an already restless Ovidianism, for example in the discovery of eroticism in the irreducibly ambiguous language of male friendship and patronage or, in *Venus and Adonis*, through the tracking of desire in Venus's relentless objectification of the male youth, which Orgel reads beautifully both as a playful overturning of gender conventions and, contrariwise, as the expression of a wholly conventional and misogynist norm, following as it does "the sexual objectification of women to its logical conclusion" by so defining Venus "by her libido" (136) The critical weighing of these energies unsteadies the reading of the poem in response to the shifting terms of the poem's own critique. As in the earlier chapters, Orgel's testing of how alternative interpretive trajectories might in fact be complements gives us a translation of the classical past and of classical erotics in which, again, the reader is primary, in their enlivening testing of how a "disorienting passion" (148) might be narratively oriented in the text.

These individual chapters are easily read on their own, even as they offer together a complex view onto the non-casual effects of the sometimes casual and sometimes intentional ways in which, materially, socially, and conceptually, early books were imagined, produced, received. Since *The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature* is available for download both as a single text and as individual chapters, its own format will, quite appropriately, be shaping its scholarly and pedagogical reception. This lovely book serves as a reminder of how powerfully Orgel's distinctive reading has animated the objects that have long drawn his attention to *their* animation of the culture; and it also serves as a prompt, always, to take up, again, maybe in Special Collections and maybe at your own desk, the reading of and in and around the book that allows texts which might otherwise be lost (to time or anachronism or presentism or just abstraction) to remain unpredictably and surprisingly *here*.

Hao Tianhu, *Commonplace Reading and Writing in Early Modern England and Beyond,* Material Readings in Early Modern Culture. London and New York: Routledge, 2024. Pp. 203.

Reviewed by ***Penelope Geng****

The seventeenth-century commonplace compiler, John Evans, was neither a famous poet nor a notorious celebrity. Not much is known about him. He was styled as a "Gentleman" (according to Evans's commissioning publisher Humphrey Moseley), and his extracts evince a distinctly "royalist and anti-rebellion" ethos (118-120). Evans might have been forgotten by literary historians but for his ambitious, yet never published, English commonplace book: *Hesperides, or the Muses' Garden*. Containing quotations of "no fewer than 365 titles" (103), *Hesperides* aids in the scholarly analysis of distinctly literary matters, including the development of the commonplace book tradition, the state of the dramatic canon in the seventeenth century, and even the degree to which the Renaissance commonplace book resembled the Chinese *leishu*. In *Commonplace Reading and Writing in Early Modern England and Beyond*, Hao Tianhu situates readers in the intellectual world of Evans, his publisher Moseley, and the anticipated (if ultimately unrealized) readers of *Hesperides*. This well-researched monograph on a truly remarkable manuscript commonplace book will appeal to those interested in seventeenth-century English literature, manuscript studies, book history, and comparative literary history.

The literary significance of *Hesperides* was intuited by scholars as early as the nineteenth century. One of the few manuscript copies of the book came into the possession of James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps (b. 1820 – d. 1889). To aid his editing of Shakespeare, Halliwell-Phillipps did something that no scholar today would dream of doing: he cut the book into fragments to compile a Shakespeare scrapbook (2-5). Halliwell-Phillipps's scrapbook is now safely housed in the library of the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon, U.K. In 1973, Gunnar Sorelius discovered a second, uncut version of *Hesperides* in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C., U.S.A. Interest in *Hesperides* has been steadily growing. The book is discussed in Peter Beal's influential *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (1980). To date, however, no publisher has commissioned a modern critical edition of Evans's vast project, which

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means that this commonplace book is still relatively unknown to the non-specialist. Readers are encouraged to explore the high resolution digital images of the book provided by the Folger: https://digitalcollections.folger.edu/node/53691/pages?display=grid (last accessed 12 July 2024).

Hao makes a strong case for the recovery of Evans's literary reputation and, by extension, his book. Evans is worthy of attention not least because his commonplacing exemplifies the phenomenon of the active and creative reader-editor; furthermore, the kinds of passages he extracted for his book offers a snapshot of the state of the literary canon in the mid- to late seventeenth century. Thus, Evans's manuscript book—specifically, the two distinct versions of it that survive (the subject of chapter 1)—offers a unique opportunity to study the intellectual, moral, and above all, literary concerns of a discerning "gentleman" reader (Evans) and the canon-formation ambitions of his publisher (Moseley).

The story of Evans, Moseley, and *Hesperides* is told in six chapters. *Chapter* 1 introduces readers to the two extant manuscript versions of *Hesperides*. Version 1, which Hao calls "*Halliwell*," refers to the aforementioned Halliwell-Phillipps's Shakespearean scrapbooks: "[t]hese bits and pieces constitute what we see today of a version of *Hesperides* (referred to as *Halliwell* henceforward), which was once whole and intact before Halliwell-Phillipps's scissor work in the nineteenth century" (5). Version 2, which Hao terms "*V.b.93*," refers to the Folger's copy MS V.b.93, a book of over 900 folio pages. After establishing the locations and state of the texts (and additional fragments), Hao engages in a rigorous round of fact-checking, correcting Sorelius's and Beal's "misdescription of what *Hesperides* is" (6). Hao's analysis makes good use of digital resources, including LION (Literature Online, a ProQuest subscription-based database), EEBO (Early English Books Online, another ProQuest subscription-based database), and ESTC (English Short-Title Catalogue, a free database formerly hosted by the British Library, but as of the time of this publication, down due to a cyber attack). Through a labor-intensive process of checking and double-checking quotations, Hao discovers a number of authors hitherto missed by Sorelius and Beal. Hao's major conclusion is that, pace Beal, the Folger's *V.b.93* "is not a duplicate or an enlarged version, but Evans's master copy of *Hesperides* on which *Halliwell* was based" (16). This first chapter is very detailed and, at times, overly technical. In his effort to fact-check others, Hao somewhat burdens the reader with bibliographical minutiae.

Chapters 2 through 6 are both easier to follow and of general interest to the non-expert reader. Chapter 2, "*Hesperides* in the Commonplace Book Tradition," situates *Hesperides* in the European commonplace book tradition. While this chapter covers familiar topics in book history and historical formalism, it offers an exceptionally well argued account of the manuscript book tradition dating back to Erasmus's *Adagia* (28). Hao concludes that Evans

"displays an Erasmian understanding and ambition for the range of his commonplace material" (35). That said, Evans also displays a distinctly English taste: "Evans's vernacular edition parts company with Erasmus's Latin allegiance and reveals its different understanding of its intended audience… Evans promotes vernacular literature, English vernacular literature, in his commonplace book, continuing the nationalistic emphasis of *England's Parnassus* and *The English Treasury of Wit and Language*, confident about the language, as well as the literature and the taste of a nation of readers" (36). In this chapter, we learn about popular print commonplace books, such as John Bodenham's "Wit" series: *Politeuphuia. Wits Common Wealth* (1597), *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury* (1598), *Wits Theater of the Little World* (1599), and *Palladis Palatium: Wisedoms Palace* (1604) (38).

Chapter 3, "Commonplace Writing in Early Modern England," is thematically oriented around the topic of imitation versus plagiarism. Using a case study approach, Hao examines the "seeming plagiarism" of Joseph Browne and John Dunton (58). The payoff of this chapter is that "[t]he commonplace in the Renaissance is not just 'a universal possession,' but it is also a source of authority. By borrowing the commonplace authority wisely, the early modern writer invents his own authorship… We must take seriously Dunton's claims of originality and authorship" (61). While this reader-response inflected conclusion is familiar, it does affirm the distinctiveness of the Renaissance theory of invention: that invention arises from imitation.

Chapter 4, "*Hesperides* and Early Modern Reading Practice," elaborates on the topic of the active nature of early modern reading as captured by commonplacing. This chapter introduces the (helpful) concept of the "three kinds of quotations" through an analysis of Milton's commonplace book:

> …there are three kinds of quotation: the scholar's quotation, the writer's, and the commonplace book compiler's. The scholar has the responsibility to quote verbatim and accurately, with full respect for the content and form of the original. The writer often cites out of memory and without checking the original… productively transforming the original into something that is their own… The third kind, the commonplace book compiler's quotation, sits somewhere between the scholar's and the writer's, faithful to and deviating from the original at the same time, usually faithful to its language but creating a new context in which it will exist. (80)

Milton's commonplace book, "discovered in 1874 by Alfred J. Horwood among the papers of Sir Frederick Graham" (75), displays all three kinds of quotations. Through a close reading and comparison of source and quoted texts, Hao establishes that Milton's commonplace book is a veritable "storehouse of his reading" (77), and argues that Milton's quotations reveal the practice of "spontaneous editing as a way of reading" (80). (Hao builds on Ruth Mohl's and

William Poole's scholarship throughout this chapter.) Like Milton, Evans's commonplacing also shows a similar degree of intellectual engagement. Indeed, Hao documents "11 types of spontaneous editing" in Evans's commonplacing: "change of word order," "change of verb form," "change of diction," "paraphrase," "clarifying the reference," "slips of the pen, or rather, of the quill," "metrical revision," "expansion," "omission," "conversion of verse into prose," and "emendation" (81-85).

Chapter 5, "*Hesperides* and Early Modern Canon Formation," begins with a review of established facts about the two extant versions of this book (101-102). Having spent quite a bit time with the author, Evans, Hao now turns to a discussion of the publisher, Humphrey Moseley, a fascinating character in his own right. Moseley published *The English Treasury of Wit and Language* (1655), and had a hand in the shaping of the dramatic canon in the seventeenth century. Hao cites Pauline Kewes's important study on the importance of Moseley's production of play editions for the formation of a "canonical hierarchy of literary reputation and esteem" (Kewes, qtd. in Hao 107). Hao emphasizes that the "role of the commonplace book in canon formation has been underestimated… *Hesperides* demands to be recognized in the history of canon formation" (101).

Chapter 6, the final chapter, attempts an exciting comparative analysis of commonplacing in Elizabethan and Stuart England and Ming and early Qing China. We learn that "in East Asia… the long tradition of *leishu* 类书 embodies a certain species of commonplacing" (125). Although the *leishu* existed well before the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE), it gained literary ascendency during this exceptionally flourishing period for literature and the arts. The late Ming *leishu* bears both a formal and ideological resemblance to the European commonplace book. Like the commonplace book, the *leishu* emphasized education and civil service, as well as the "*preservation* of books and texts, collation, recovering scattered or lost writings" (original emphasis, 130). This final chapter spotlights a project little known outside of China: Beijing Erudition Digital Technology Research Center's Database of Ancient Chinese Encyclopedias 中国类书库. This subscription-based database currently contains 300 *leishu* and will eventually house 1,000 (126).

In conclusion, Hao's book-length study immerses readers in the intellectual world of the late Renaissance. Hao sets the record straight on a number of bibliographical fronts. In his enthusiasm for the subject, Hao has favored the maximalist approach to the selection of evidence. Reading this book requires a concerted effort. This book is recommended to those who are about the cultural and intellectual history of early modern commonplace books. Those invested in authorship studies, the history of canon formation, manuscript studies, and comparative English-Chinese formalism will also learn much from this fine study.