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Bringing Richard Brome Online

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Bringing Richard Brome Online

Brett D. Hirsch

Abstract

This review essay assesses *Richard Brome Online*, an online edition of the collected works of Richard Brome, in terms of the design, functionality, and usability of its features.

KEYWORDS: Richard Brome, electronic edition, critical edition, Caroline drama

Review Essay

BRETT D. HIRSCH

Bringing Richard Brome Online

Richard Cave (gen. ed.), *Richard Brome Online* (An Online Edition of the Collected Works of Richard Brome). Royal Holloway, University of London, and Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield, 2010. <<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome/>>

In 1874 the poet and critic John Addington Symonds reviewed John Pearson's three volume facsimile reprint of the fifteen non-collaborative works of Richard Brome. At the outset of his review, Symonds begrudgingly acknowledges that 'perhaps there is sufficient reason for reprinting ... the three bulky volumes before us', since 'in this age of exhaustive study and antiquarian scholarship ... every hole and corner of our literature is being ransacked for forgotten curiosities'.¹ For Symonds, as the remainder of his caustic review makes clear, the plays of Brome are curiosities better left forgotten. Unlike Ben Jonson, for whom Symonds has nothing but adulating praise, Brome is 'almost always dull', his comedies 'tedious to read from their lack of poetry and life', and his 'tedious, laboured, and oftentimes offensive scenes' of interest only insofar as they 'contain much information about the vulgar amusements of old London which we should otherwise have lacked'.² Symonds dismisses the popularity of Brome's plays in performance as evidence that 'our drama was then in its decrepitude' during these earlier periods, when 'the taste of the town, surfeited with a continual feast of nectared sweets, turned

with gladness to novelties, however rank, so long as they were piquant'.³ Just as 'the cock in the fable scratched up a pearl from the dunghill', so Symonds allows for the possibility that 'some ingenious student may discover pearls in what is certainly the rubbish heap of Brome's plays'.⁴

Other than its value as a stunning specimen of vitriol and bitter hyperbole masquerading as review, Symonds's comments are of note because many of his contemporaries and, indeed, critics of earlier generations shared his sentiments. As Martin Butler has suggested, Brome's 'comedy has often seemed too directly reflective of topical matters to be worth retrieving and his frankness over sexual matters did not recommend him to the early Victorian editors who did so much to recover the work of his contemporaries'.⁵ This recognition goes some way to explaining the enduring scarcity of editions of Brome's plays in comparison to those of other dramatists. Other factors contributing to the dearth of editions of non-Shakespearean dramatists, economic and scholarly, have been sufficiently discussed elsewhere and need not be rehearsed here.⁶ Until the launch of *Richard Brome Online* in March 2010, Pearson's 1873 facsimile reprint of the fifteen non-collaborative plays of Brome so viciously dismissed by Symonds remained the most recent edition of many of the plays. There have been notable exceptions, of course, with the publication of modern critical editions of *The Antipodes*,⁷ *The English Moor*,⁸ *A Jovial Crew*,⁹ *A Mad Couple Well Matched*,¹⁰ *The Northern Lass*,¹¹ *The Sparagus Garden*, and *The Weeding of Covent Garden*,¹² as well as two editions of Brome's collaboration with Thomas Heywood, *The Late Lancashire Witches*,¹³ but these titles only cover half of Brome's extant works.¹⁴ The editorial neglect of Brome is both a contributing factor to, and a reflection of, the limited critical interest in his plays. For example, a cursory search of the *MLA International Bibliography* returns only ninety-two entries in its index of scholarly books, chapters, articles, and dissertations published on Brome between 1884 and 2010; similar searches retrieve 36,464 entries on William Shakespeare, 2,573 entries on Jonson, 1,785 entries on Christopher Marlowe, and 773 entries on Thomas Middleton. Arguments about quality over quantity aside, the numbers speak for themselves.¹⁵

Editorial neglect is one thing; scholarly access is another. Access facilitates choice, for both research and pedagogy. By providing easier access to facsimile images and transcriptions of the period texts, albeit by expensive institutional subscription, electronic services such as *Literature Online* (LION), *Early English Books Online* (EEBO), and the *EEBO Text Creation Partnership* (EEBO-TCP) have had enormous impact on the depth and scope of research

in the field over the last decade. As the aforementioned publication counts bear out, however, this increase in availability has not been enough to make a considerable impact on the canon. What is needed to truly stimulate research and teaching outside of the canon — that privileged part of the literary kingdom where, as Jonathan Goldberg aptly noted, Shakespeare continues to ‘reign supreme’¹⁶ — is the creation of freely accessible, rigorously scholarly, electronic critical editions of non-Shakespearean, non-canonical plays. For that very reason, *Richard Brome Online* is an important project.

Unlike Symonds, I wish to begin my review of the edition of the works of Brome with a confession. I am not a Brome scholar, and I cannot claim familiarity save for two of his plays, *The Antipodes* and *The Late Lancashire Witches*. The sixteen plays that constitute *Richard Brome Online* easily (and rightfully) deserve dedicated individual critical reviews, separately attending to the particular strengths and weaknesses of the texts, commentaries, critical apparatus, and annotations they offer — a task better left to a team of scholars, not one Antipodean. While I will offer a brief discussion of the individual editions, my chief concern in this review is with *Richard Brome Online* as the sum of its parts, focusing on the design, functionality, and usability of the features common to all of the editions. As the coordinating editor of a series that seeks to publish electronic editions of non-Shakespearean renaissance plays, I must also confess a critical bias in favour of the electronic medium; a bias made clear, no doubt, by the preceding paragraphs.

Like the early modern drama at its heart, *Richard Brome Online* is the product of multiple collaborations. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and supported by Royal Holloway, University of London, and the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Sheffield, *Richard Brome Online* brings together a formidable team of editors and scholars with varied research specialties and technical expertise from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Headed by Richard Cave (general editor and project manager), the editorial team consists of Michael Leslie, Eleanor Lowe, Lucy Munro, Marion O’Connor, Helen Ostovich, Julie Sanders, Elizabeth Schafer, Matthew Steggle, and Brian Woolland (director of the performance workshops). ‘Scholarly editing has always been a collaborative enterprise’ and, as Peter Robinson reminds us, ‘the real revolution in the digital world is not the hardware, the software, [or] the wonderful new machines’ but rather that ‘it is creating new models of collaboration’, changing ‘who we collaborate with, how we collaborate, and what we mean by collaboration’.¹⁷ The electronic platform adopted by *Richard Brome Online* con-

sequently facilitates innovative collaborations between textual scholars and theatre practitioners, and between editors, performers, and digital humanists. In addition to making edited period and modernized texts freely available on the Internet, *Richard Brome Online* offers dynamic features — such as digital video clips of performances, parallel linked texts and pop-up annotations, and a sophisticated full-text search function — that simply cannot be supported by the print medium.

While all of these features have particular strengths and limitations, as this review will outline in more detail below, it is important to recognize that electronic editions of renaissance drama are still very much in their infancy. The pioneer project in this field, the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (Michael Best, coordinating editor), remains an ever evolving work in progress. The great strength (and, in a sense, the great irony) of electronic publication is that it is capable of being organic, dynamic, and revised with relative ease. Other large editorial projects that promise electronic components — such as the Cambridge Jonson, Oxford Middleton, Oxford Ford, and Oxford Shirley — have still to be published, and will no doubt benefit from the successes and failures of the features implemented by *Richard Brome Online*.

The design of *Richard Brome Online* is slick, simple, and elegant, allowing users to easily navigate between the individual editions and their associated critical materials, a gallery of video-recorded performance clips, a centralized bibliography and master glossary, essays on the plays and other relevant topics, as well as information about the project and how to use and cite its contents. Each of the sixteen individual editions consists of an edited period text and an edited modernized text with extensive annotations, notes, and commentaries. Period and modernized texts may be viewed individually or simultaneously side by side, with linked speech prefixes allowing the user to align both texts. The user is able to print out a printer-friendly version of either text in its entirety, along with all of the annotations and notes. Each edition also includes a critical introduction, typically situating the play within its cultural, political, and theatrical contexts, and a textual introduction addressing bibliographical issues and details of editorial procedures. These introductory essays also reproduce modernized texts of any prefatory and paratextual materials accompanying the original printed quartos and octavos.

Richard Brome Online does not offer digital facsimile images of the original printed quarto and octavo texts, due to the prohibitive expense of obtaining the necessary copyright permissions. Instead, the project presents

each period text in the form of an edited transcription. Each of the period texts, with the exception of *The Late Lancashire Witches*, was initially prepared from a scanned copy of Pearson's 1873 facsimile edition of Brome's non-collaborative plays. Researchers at the Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis at Queen's University Belfast then prepared electronic texts derived from these digital facsimile images using optical character recognition (OCR). The resulting transcriptions were subsequently proofread by their respective editors against other extant witnesses, and then lightly encoded, following the standards developed by the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). While the TEI has been adopted with varying degrees of success by other large editorial projects, its suitability for encoding renaissance texts remains a topic of debate: as Ian Lancashire has argued, 'embedded in TEI tags are modern assumptions of language, text, and genre partly incompatible with Renaissance thought'.¹⁸ The text of a typical renaissance play has a physical structure (divisible by book, gatherings or quires, formes, leaves, pages, columns, sections, paragraphs, and lines) and a literary or conceptual structure (divisible by play, acts, scenes, speeches, and lines). Renaissance dramatic texts therefore present a particular challenge for encoding, since there will be overlapping hierarchies between tags that describe the physical attributes of the text and tags that define the literary or conceptual organization of the work. In its current iteration, the TEI, or more precisely TEI-XML, is unable to accommodate the simultaneous representation of these multiple hierarchies. Its guidelines, moreover, privilege a conceptual markup, which is often of less importance to renaissance scholars working with primary materials. Several projects, such as the *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, are finding ways of working around these limitations but, at present, there is no universally accepted standard. The decision to adopt the TEI as an encoding standard for the *Richard Brome Online* texts, however, is less problematic, since the project favours a conceptual markup for both period and modernized texts.

As outlined in the project's 'General Introduction', the *Richard Brome Online* team 'endeavoured to create transcriptions that are as close to the original copies as possible, but inevitably there have been some features which are impossible to replicate, given the exigencies of computer formatting'. Thus, only some features of the printed quarto and octavo texts are represented in some fashion: individual pages are separated with a horizontal line, and each page displays its running title, catchwords, and signatures. Printer's ornaments and other pictorial elements are not replicated. The decision to reproduce the long 's' in the edited period texts is problematic and raises

issues of textual fidelity and accessibility. In order to display this character, the *Richard Brome Online* texts rely on Unicode standard character encoding. Reliance on Unicode is not an issue in and of itself, since UTF-8 (the 8-bit Unicode Transformation Format schema) is the default character encoding for XML (and by extension TEI-XML), the markup language used to encode the *Richard Brome Online* texts. However, the long ‘s’ character will only display correctly if the user’s web browser supports Unicode and appropriate Unicode fonts are installed in the user’s operating system. Most users will not find this to be a problem since the latest browsers and operating systems easily meet these requirements. Older browsers still in use (such as Netscape and Internet Explorer 6), however, can only display characters supported by the current font associated with the character encoding of the page. In other words, the decision to reproduce the long ‘s’ necessitates a dependency on fonts and software that, although widely supported, are not yet universal. For users viewing the period texts without Unicode support, the long ‘s’ will simply not be displayed.

Users could have easily discerned various typographical elements for themselves had the project been able to provide facsimile images of the original printed texts. Without them, and without access to services such as *Early English Books Online* (EEBO), users cannot check the texts against the facsimiles and must rely on the transcriptions provided by the editors alone. Unicode currently supports only a limited set of the ligatures, digraphs, abbreviations, and macron letters typically found in renaissance texts. These include the capital and lowercase ae and oe digraphs; the lowercase ff, fi, fl, ffi, ffl, ij, st, and long st ligatures; and the macron letters a, e, i, o, and u. Frustratingly, Unicode does not currently support other commonly employed ligatures — ct, sh, si, sl, sp, ss, ssi, and ssl — as well as swash characters. Given its current limitations, any attempt to render and display *all* of the characters that appear in the original printed quartos and octavos of Brome’s plays cannot be accomplished with Unicode. Such a display can be accomplished by the creation of a custom-built font, which users need to install in order for the characters to display correctly, but this solution ultimately raises more issues than it solves and only adds another layer of software dependency to the mix. Technical issues and computing difficulties aside, the decision by *Richard Brome Online* to reproduce the long ‘s’ is of concern for textual reasons, because it is the only non-standard typographical element rendered in the edited period text. Put simply, the exclusivity of the long ‘s’ distorts the

text, and ultimately its inclusion serves no beneficial purpose other than to make the text *look* archaic.

Unlike the period texts, the modernized texts are extensively annotated with glosses, notes, and commentaries, often incorporating insights gleaned from workshopped performance sequences and links to video-recordings where available. British spelling is observed throughout, punctuation has been effected lightly for rhythm and sense, and each text has been edited as a play for performance. Whereas other editions of Brome's plays have expurgated and standardized the language, the *Richard Brome Online* texts retain the dialects that occur in many of the plays (and add to their colour and humour), and the originals have not been sanitized in any way. Unlike the period texts, the modernized texts have speech numbers rather than line numbers: according to the 'General Introduction', this break with convention 'is partly the result of the computerised processes involving the search engine and partly the result of the modern texts often relineating prose as verse and vice versa'. Given that the modernized texts are intended as performance texts, the use of speech numbers rather than line numbers is not incongruous. While this departure from convention will raise few eyebrows with theatre practitioners, the necessary creation of an idiosyncratic (and inelegant) style for citations (such as 3.1.speech 406) will no doubt prove irksome to students and scholars wishing to reference the texts. That said, line numbers are a bibliographical and scholarly convention designed to assist with the citation of print materials; electronic editions, free from the physical constraints of print, need not be constrained by the conventions of that medium.¹⁹

Annotations in the modernized texts are indicated by a dagger (for short glosses) or an asterisk (for extended notes) placed above a line of text or adjacent to the relevant word or phrase. When clicked and activated, the annotations pop up in static boxes which overlay the text. In order to support the pop-up display function of the annotations, the user's web browser must support and enable JavaScript. In the event that users have disabled JavaScript or their browsers do not support it, the annotations will not display. Since they are shared by all of the individual editions, the short glosses are also accessible via the central 'Glossary' link on the navigation bar. No alternative methods allow for the accessing of edition-specific annotations. Fortunately, most current browsers (such as Firefox and Safari) support and allow JavaScript content by default, but a more prudent design would provide a dependency-free alternative.

The navigation bar, which appears consistently throughout the site, also includes the project's search function. Users can quickly search the full text of all of the plays and essays, collectively or individually, by keyword. As Gabriel Egan has shown, however, the search functionality of full-text databases such as *Literature Online* (LION) is open to 'indeterminacy',²⁰ with the result that a researcher has had to retract a published count for the article *an*, since this turned out to include instances of the speech prefix 'An.'. When we read the 1603 quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, we instinctively distinguish between the word 'Hamlet' when it appears to serve different functions — as part of the play's title ('The Tragicall Historie of HAMLET, Prince of Denmarke'), as part of the running title ('*The Tragedie of Hamlet*'), as the name of a character referred to in speeches ('Hamlet'), and as an instruction in stage directions (such as '*Enter Hamlet*'). The process of tagging these elements in an electronic text — that is, explicitly marking them up in the document metadata — makes these distinctions more formal and machine-readable, allowing the computer to display and interact with the text more intelligently.²¹ Texts prepared for *Literature Online* (LION) and the EEBO *Text Creation Partnership* (EEBO-TCP) have not been explicitly marked up in such a way as to distinguish between elements particular to dramatic literature, whereas the electronic texts for *Richard Brome Online* have. This choice effectively limits some of the indeterminacy of the search function, and allows the user to limit searches of both period and modernized texts to speeches, stage directions, notes, or glosses. The search facility is thus capable of fulfilling many functions of the traditional concordance. A level of indeterminacy will always be present, however, even in the most sophisticated of search functions. For example, since the search function incorporated by *Richard Brome Online* requires search phrases to be of at least four characters, a search for a word of fewer characters (such as 'jew' or 'cat') necessitates the use of a wildcard character (that is, 'jew*' or 'cat*'), which inevitably returns unwanted results (such as instances of 'jewel', 'jewels', and 'jewelry', or 'catch', 'catched', and 'catchpoles', for example). For most users of *Richard Brome Online*, this particular limitation is unlikely to be an issue.

Perhaps the most innovative feature of *Richard Brome Online* is its incorporation of digital video content. During workshops, editors and actors drawn from the alumni lists of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe explored the theatrical possibilities of selected sequences of the plays. The intention was not to produce finished performances, but rather

to explore the rich potentiality of the plays; to encourage this, no play was performed in its entirety, and the actors frequently exchanged roles. All of these workshops were video recorded, and some thirty hours of footage (divided into some 640 clips) are available in the ‘Gallery’ of the *Richard Brome Online* site, where they are indexed by play and act and accompanied by brief descriptions. According to the project’s ‘General Introduction’, these workshops serve as ‘a record of the process of exploration that editors shared with actors’, an opportunity for the actors to work ‘in the company of a range of scholars versed in seventeenth-century theatre and drama’, and an invaluable resource for the editors to turn to and ‘inform their discussions of their particular texts’. Whether accessed through the main ‘Gallery’ or via the many links throughout the editions, these short video clips offer the user a glimpse into the rehearsal room, where the static text is given theatrical life and dynamic through action, tone, pace, and gesture. It is fascinating to watch the performers interact with the editors as both collaboratively explore the sequences. My own favourite clip comes from act two of *The Late Lancashire Witches*, where the performers, directors, and editors grapple with the question of staging the following sequence:

Goody Dickieson Now, sirrah, take your shape and be
 Prepared to hurry him and me.
 Now look and tell me where’s the lad become?
Boy The boy is vanished, and I can see nothing in his stead but a white
 horse ready saddled and bridled.
Goody Dickieson And that’s the horse we must bestride,
 On which both thou and I must ride,
 Thou, boy, before and I, behind.
 The earth we tread not, but the wind,
 For we must progress through the air,
 And I will bring thee to such fare
 As thou ne’er saw’st. Up and away,
 For now no longer we can stay! (2.5.speech 333–5)

How are the three actors (*Goody Dickieson*, *Boy*, *Boy 2*) to stage the diabolical transformation of a boy into a horse on which to spirit away the witch (*Goody Dickieson*) and her young victim (*Boy*)? Without giving too much away, the final sentence of the editorial note associated with this clip should tease the reader with a taste of the ingenious, bawdy, and utterly hilarious possibilities that were acted out: ‘The stage picture is both appalling and

preposterously funny' (Video LW_2_14). As Noël Carroll remarked, 'sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words, though, of course, sometimes a single word can do the work of a thousand pictures'.²² Sometimes, in the case of *Richard Brome Online*, the video clips are immeasurably valuable in their function as annotations that explore the dynamics and theatrical possibilities of the texts. This capacity for rich multimedia integration makes the electronic edition a very powerful platform for research and pedagogy.

As with the use of Unicode characters in the period texts, the implementation of video content in *Richard Brome Online* raises technical issues of accessibility and dependency. Flash Video is a container file format used by many websites (such as YouTube and Google Video) to deliver video over the Internet, and it is the format adopted by the project. In order to display the videos, users require a software application that supports the container format (Flash Video) as well as the compression format (or codec) used to encode and decode the video and audio data. Current web browsers (such as Firefox and Safari) support Flash Video, and most current operating systems support the codecs commonly used (such as the Sorensen H.263 format used to encode the project's videos) out of the box, but users without the appropriate software support will not be able to watch the video clips. Another technical consideration is that of bandwidth, since downloading the (relatively) large files fast enough to stream the videos requires a broadband connection. Future iterations of *Richard Brome Online* might consider offering a selection of streaming video formats and resolutions, allowing users to choose the most appropriate option for their browsers and connections, and perhaps providing users with the option to download videos instead.

The remaining components of *Richard Brome Online* include the critical and textual introductions that accompany each individual edition, the table of stage histories, and the additional essays by invited contributors. These additional essays cover various topics such as Brome's employment by the Salisbury Court theatre (Eleanor Collins), the experience of directing Brome for the project's workshops (Brian Woolland), directing an Australian production of *The Antipodes* (Kim Durban), and the use of natural and artificial beards (Eleanor Rycroft) and cosmetics and blackface (Farah Karim-Cooper) in Brome's plays. These disparate topics certainly furnish a more detailed picture of Brome's place in the Caroline theatre and our own, but more mainstream topics or even a brief biography of the playwright himself are noticeably lacking. This section of the site will undoubtedly grow in time, and there could be no fitter testament to the project's success than seeing its

editions stimulate scholarship on Brome and encourage new essay contributions.

Tucked away beneath the additional contributions in the 'Essay' section is a link to the 'Stage Histories', a dynamic table detailing known performances of all of Brome's plays, compiled by Elizabeth Schafer. Viewable by individual play or entire corpus, the table includes information about the date(s), theatre, director, and company and cast where available, as well as comments about the production, lists of published reviews, and other pertinent details. With so much meticulously gathered data, the 'Stage Histories' are of immense interest and value to performance critics and theatre historians alike. As with the 'Essay' section, the 'Stage Histories' database will no doubt grow as more plays are staged, perhaps as a direct result of the editions themselves. The future iteration of the site may better foreground this valuable resource, perhaps allocating it a dedicated link on the navigation bar.

The critical and textual introductions that accompany each of the individual *Richard Brome Online* plays are of the highest caliber and scholarly erudition. As outlined in the 'General Introduction', members of the project's editorial team brought with them varying expertise in 'literary and cultural criticism, performance and theatre history', and 'theatre in practice'. To capitalize on this diversity and wealth, the editors were given free rein as to the content and format of their introductions, and encouraged to pursue 'different lines of enquiry with their particular texts' in order to 'illuminate the rich potential of Brome's dramaturgy both for study and for staging'. Since it is outside the scope of the present review to offer a detailed examination of each critical introduction, I will limit my discussion to brief outlines and only indulge in the occasional personal highlight, leaving the task of evaluating the textual introductions to others. Since most readers will be more familiar with *The Antipodes* than any other play, I devote considerably more attention to it here.

Richard Cave's introduction to *The Antipodes* begins with a survey of the critical literature, justifiably lamenting the 'surprisingly scant attention [that] has been paid to the theatrical context' of the play (4). Cave urges for more critical attention to the play's theatrical potential and its use of metatheatrical devices, since '*The Antipodes* is best appreciated as a play that interrogates theatre in its myriad manifestations' (4). An extended discussion of the play-within-the-play device follows, particularly in terms of its deployment as a defence of the theatre itself. After considering analogous contemporary examples in John Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy* and Philip Massinger's *The*

Roman Actor, Cave argues that *The Antipodes* is 'a far more nuanced and sophisticated defence of theatre' since the play 'engages with classical Aristotelian and Horatian theories of health through art ... less to endorse than to interrogate and problematise them' and 'Brome dares to do this through the medium not of tragedy ... but through comedy' (22). Cave then turns to a discussion of Brome's handling of 'supposed' or 'scripted' improvisation, emphasizing the opportunities to 'display a gamut of acting styles' and the 'ability to deftly change the tone and focus within an instant' afforded by the technique, 'a superb vehicle for a good ensemble' (23). Cave's discussion of the political resonances of the play for its Caroline audience begins typically enough with an exploration of the trope of the topsy-turvy world: '*The Antipodes* is a place where everything is the exact opposite of what would obtain in London, a place of inversions and reversals' (27). Cave avoids simply rehearsing well-trodden critical paths by anchoring the discussion to Peregrine's role and function in the play-within-the-play and its relation to the satire, particularly the play's spoof of England's (then still) limited colonial ambitions. 'What surprises is the accuracy of Brome's perception', Cave notes, 'given that England's colonial experience was at this date so limited and so little theorised, debated or interrogated' (34). After an extended discussion of gender and the difficulties of disengaging modern critical sensibilities from colouring our perception of Caroline attitudes and theatrical practices, the introduction concludes with a summary of the dramatic potential of the play and the demands it makes of the company staging it. Cave's introduction successfully explores the rich and varied theatrical contexts of *The Antipodes*, and makes a strong case for its inclusion in any theatre repertory.

The rest of the critical introductions are equally penetrating, measured, and scholarly, and fulfill their remit of exploring each editor's individual lines of enquiry according to his or her research expertise — lines of enquiry that might have been unduly constrained by the arbitrary imposition of a standard or fixed format. Elizabeth Schafer's introduction to *The City Wit* attends to the play's theatricality and the concept of 'wit', as well as providing a thorough discussion of the play's provenance and dating, Brome's sources, and detailed critical and stage histories. Marion O'Connor's introduction to *The Court Beggar* is understandably fixated on the vexed question of dating the play, through careful examination of the documentary evidence and meticulous explication of topical references to contemporary state and theatrical politics. Topicality serves as a vehicle for O'Connor to draw in and discuss other aspects of the play, such as its use of masque and anti-masque.

Michael Leslie's introduction to *The Weeding of Covent Garden* is equally meticulous, attending to the play's title (which appears in no less than three forms in its only printing before the nineteenth century), its date, stage history, and use of verse and prose. Leslie offers extended discussions of the play within the context of the drama of the 1620s and 1630s and of some major themes, before concluding with a consideration of selected performance issues. Lucy Munro's introduction situates *The Demoiselle* in terms of its theatrical, cultural, and social contexts, all yoked together by the play's generic and thematic concerns with commodification and 'consumption ... of fashion, of foodstuffs, of money and, not least, of women' (7). Munro also usefully traces the play's many allusions to Jonson and proposes that their function in *The Demoiselle* is to 'rework' aspects of *Epicoene*, *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Devil is an Ass*, and *The New Inn*. Her conclusion poignantly reminds us that editors of renaissance plays must balance attention paid to their early modern contexts, since 'these are elements which require the most explanation for modern readers and practitioners', with the potential risk of 'making the play's concerns seem remote or archaic' (62). As Munro rightly observes, despite being 'thoroughly embedded' in the cultural moment of its production, the 'attraction' of much renaissance drama 'lies in the way in which it feels both excitingly alien and surprisingly modern' (62).

Matthew Steggle, whose *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester, 2004) is a justly lauded reference throughout the editions of *Richard Brome Online*, edited *The English Moor*. In his introduction, Steggle considers the play as 'an exploration of race, and of the power of the idea of race' and suggests that 'it is one of the most considerable creative traces of what Imtiaz Habib calls the lost black renaissance of earlier seventeenth-century England' (1). Steggle urges, however, that 'there is more to *The English Moor* than its racial dimension' (2), and to support this claim offers an extensive consideration of the play's experimentation with genre, its metatheatricality, and its representation of disability, along with a discussion of the play's date, sources, style, and form. *A Jovial Crew* stands out from other editions because of its collaborations: Eleanor Lowe prepared the period text and textual introduction; Helen Ostovich prepared the modernized text; Elizabeth Schafer provided the stage history; and the critical introduction was largely prepared by Richard Cave, with the assistance of Helen Ostovich and Brian Woolland. The critical introduction focuses on issues of dramaturgy, performativity, and metatheatricality; considers the theme of hospitality; and concludes with Elizabeth Schafer's notes toward a stage

history of the play. Eleanor Lowe, the project's erstwhile postdoctoral fellow, begins her introduction to *The Love-Sick Court* with a discussion of the practicalities of performance, and the Salisbury Court theatre and staging of the play. After providing a detailed outline of the play's critical reception and a consideration of its performance opportunities, Lowe examines the dramatic influences on the play and its place in the constellation of satires of love in its various guises then in vogue. Lowe defends the play against charges that the action is wooden: 'while the scenes are sometimes static, even undramatic, they are intentionally so, mainly as part of Brome's criticism and exploitation of the comical elements' (38). Lowe's introduction to *A Mad Couple Well Matched* is similarly attentive to the play's critical reception, early performance history, and theatrical possibilities, with sections devoted to Aphra Behn and dramatic spectacle, doubling and casting, and clothing and the business of theatre.

Whereas her textual introduction attends to the issue of collaborative authorship, Helen Ostovich's critical introduction to *The Late Lancashire Witches* situates the play within the contexts of the Pendle Witches on whom the play is based, and on early modern attitudes to witchcraft; sport and game; and hospitality, food, and social dynamics. Rather than placing too much emphasis on the fears associated with witchcraft, Ostovich usefully reminds us that we are dealing with comedy: 'The problem of maleficent witchcraft in Lancashire belongs to another world, which Heywood and Brome place as rustic comedy, not meant to be taken seriously by the intelligent and sophisticated' (48). Michael Leslie's introduction to *The New Academy* follows the same comprehensive format as his introduction for *The Weeding of Covent Garden*. In addition to discussing the date, first performance, and the allusions in and affinities of the *The New Academy* to the plays of Jonson, Fletcher, Massinger, James Shirley, and William Hawkins, the introduction explores the play in terms of the broad themes of civility, education, and the social body. In her introduction to *The Northern Lass*, Julie Sanders focuses on Constance, 'a striking character from the history of the early modern stage' who 'serves to challenge a number of critical *donnés* and suppositions about early modern drama and dialect as well as female roles' (5). With Constance as the constant thread of her discussion, Sanders explores the play in terms of voice and dialect; music, song, and ballad culture; Shakespeare and intertheatricality; courtship and wooing rituals; and the culture of service. Richard Cave locates *The Novella* within its critical reception before explicating the important intertextual references in the play, particularly to

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and to John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*. Cave also addresses the figure of the Venetian courtesan and her patrons, the politics of the play, and Brome's evident command of the stage. Lucy Munro begins with a discussion of the 'similarities' and 'peculiar relationship' between *The Queen and the Concubine* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, but carefully stresses that it is a mistake to suggest that Brome's play 'is merely a derivative work, that it cannot stand on its own merits, or that it lacks independence from its sources' (6). Her introduction focuses on the play's interest with female subjectivity and its engagement with the political and cultural issues associated with Queen Henrietta Maria in the early-mid 1630s. Munro concludes that the play 'challenges many common preconceptions about early modern drama in general and Caroline drama in particular' and 'thoroughly deserves renewed attention' (75). As with her introduction to *The Court Beggar*, Marion O'Connor deftly and scrupulously unravels the vexed issue of dating *The Queen's Exchange*. Just as O'Connor employs topical references as a vehicle for drawing in other pertinent aspects of *The Court Beggar* for discussion, Julie Sanders uses the remarkable correlations between *The Sparagus Garden* and Henry Peacham's 1642 pamphlet on 'The Art of Living in London' to illustrate how both texts respond to the 'cultural zeitgeist of the day' (6). After sketching the issues associated with the city and urban life; commerce, property, and ownership; service, servitude, and social dependencies, Sanders concludes that 'the social circulation and consumption of money, food, sex, and power that for Brome lay at the heart of Caroline London provides the beating heart of this remarkable play' (38).

In a sense, it is inappropriate to write a conclusion for an electronic edition such as *Richard Brome Online* since, unlike print, the electronic medium resists conclusiveness and finality. I have no doubt that many, if not all, of the limitations that I have carefully outlined in this review will be addressed by successive upgrades and revisions of the site and its infrastructure. *Richard Brome Online* is an outstanding and monumental accomplishment, sporting scholarship of the highest caliber, innovative collaborations between textual editors and theatre practitioners, and editions and scholarly apparatus that will certainly stimulate research and promote renewed interest in seeing Brome's plays performed. The project sets a very high standard not only for future electronic editions of renaissance drama, but for print editions. That the project is made freely available online is nothing short of a gift to scholarship and the community at large, and all of the individuals, institutions,

and funding bodies involved are to be commended for their imagination, generosity, and intellectual rigour.

Notes

- 1 J.A. Symonds, 'Review of *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome*', *The Academy* 5 (1874), 304.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Martin Butler, 'Brome, Richard (c 1590–1652)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
- 6 In particular see Gary Taylor, 'The Renaissance and the End of Editing', George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (eds), *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities* (Ann Arbor, 1993), 121–49.
- 7 Ann Haaker (ed.), *The Antipodes* (London, 1967); Anthony Parr (ed.), *Three Renaissance Travel Plays* (Manchester, 1995); David Scott Kastan and Richard Proudfoot (eds), *The Antipodes* (London, 2000).
- 8 Sara Jayne Steen (ed.), *The English Moore, or, The Mock-mariage* (Columbia, 1983).
- 9 Ann Haaker (ed.), *A Jovial Crew* (London, 1968); Robert G. Lawrence (ed.), *Jacobean and Caroline Comedies* (London, 1973).
- 10 Steen H. Spove (ed.), *A Critical Old-Spelling Edition of Richard Brome's 'A Mad Couple Well Match'd'* (New York, 1979); Anton-Ranieri Parra (ed.), *A Mad Couple Well Matched (Due dissennati ben accoppiati)*, 2nd ed. (Pisa, 2003).
- 11 Harvey Fried (ed.), *A Critical Edition of Brome's 'A Northern Lasse'* (New York, 1980).
- 12 Donald S. McClure (ed.), *A Critical Edition of Richard Brome's 'The Weeding of Covent Garden' and 'The Sparagus Garden'* (New York, 1980).
- 13 Laird H. Barber (ed.), *An Edition of 'The Late Lancashire Witches'* (New York, 1979); Gabriel Egan (ed.), *The Witches of Lancashire* (London, 2002).
- 14 A number of Brome's plays have been edited as unpublished dissertations: Burnam MacLeod, 'Richard Brome's "The Love-Sick Court": A Critical Edition', PhD thesis (University of Missouri–Columbia, 1977); Paul J. Matte III, 'Richard Brome's "The City Wit": A Critical Edition', PhD thesis (Arizona State University, 1976); Leroy L. Panek, 'A Critical Old-Spelling Edition of Richard Brome's "The Sparagus Garden"', PhD thesis (Kent State University, 1968); Giles R. Floyd, 'A Critical Edition of Brome's "A Jovial Crew"', PhD thesis (University of Iowa, 1943); A.E.R. Jenkins,

'*The English Moor, or The Mock-marriage*, by Richard Brome, edited from the manuscript in the library of Lichfield Cathedral', BLitt thesis (Oxford University, 1941). Other editions of Brome's plays have been prepared in connection with the *Editing a Renaissance Play* module of Sheffield Hallam University's MA in English Studies: Katherine Wilkinson (ed.), *The City Wit* (Sheffield, 2004); Richard Wood (ed.), *The Queen's Exchange* (Sheffield, 2005). Electronic versions of these editions are hosted on the iEMLS section of the online journal *Early Modern Literary Studies*, <<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/resources.html>>.

- 15 The *MLA International Bibliography* is, admittedly, neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. Any search will only return results matching the limited metadata of each entry, and newer entries are far more detailed than earlier ones. Moreover, since the *Bibliography* maintains separate entries for edited collections as well as each of the constituent chapters, the resulting publication counts are certainly inaccurate. The figures offered should therefore be appreciated only as rough estimates for the purpose of comparison.
- 16 Jonathan Goldberg, 'Textual Properties', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986), 215.
- 17 Peter Robinson, 'Editing Without Walls', *Literature Compass* 7.2 (2010), 58.
- 18 Ian Lancashire, 'Encoding Renaissance Electronic Texts', William R. Bowen and Raymond G. Siemens (eds), *New Technologies and Renaissance Studies* (Tempe, 2008), 251.
- 19 On the necessity and desirability of line numbers for electronic editions see the series of discussions archived on the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* site, <<http://internet-shakespeare.uvic.ca/Annex/discussion.html>>.
- 20 Gabriel Egan, 'Impalpable Hits: Indeterminacy in the Searching of Tagged Shakespearean Texts' (paper presented at the Shakespeare Association of America Meeting, Bermuda, March 2005).
- 21 I am indebted to Michael Best for this example, which I have drawn from 'Shakespeare and the Electronic Text', Andrew Murphy (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text* (Malden, 2007), 145–61.
- 22 Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge, 1996), 245.

