

From the Editor

This is the second volume of the new online journal *Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference*. Because of the deep recession that began in October, the 2008 meeting of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference had a lot of “no shows” as universities and colleges throughout America began the agonizing task of immediate cuts, often mandated by state legislatures and Boards of Regents. In the end, 47 papers were delivered during the conference, as compared to 69 the year before. Nonetheless, the Editorial Board selected four essays for inclusion in this volume, each of which is top notch. These essays focus in different ways on the theme of our 2008 meeting: “Working Shakespeares,” a topic broad enough to include how Shakespeare represents “work” in his plays (Langis and Nelson), how Shakespeare has been “reworked” in the past (Parlin), and how we can “rework” him now (O’Dair).

The first essay in this volume, by Unhae Langis, begins with an historical overview of leisure, idleness, and virtuous “work” from the Greeks up to the Renaissance, followed by a close and insightful analysis of how Shakespeare makes these concepts his own and dramatizes them in his plays. The author’s conclusions may make us rethink the old chesnut about how Shakespeare “was a man of his time” and how much he, supposedly, liked to hobnob with the nobility and the rich.

Next comes Byron Nelson’s analysis of “work” in *Pericles* and *Measure for Measure*, and his astute observation that Shakespeare portrayed “sex workers” sympathetically in these plays and elsewhere. Nelson’s insights about the two heroines of these plays, Isabella and Marina, respectively, are some of the most acute and persuasive I have read in recent years. Nelson also suggests an underlying Shakespearean view that we are all “tainted” by experience, and that, perhaps, such “tainting” is necessary in a fallen world where innocence itself cannot cope with the complexities of life.

Byron Nelson’s essay is followed by Melissa Parlin’s sophisticated and multi-disciplined study of the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron, 19th-Century poet and photographer, and how she “reworked” contemporary notions of femininity through her photographs of Shakespeare’s heroines. Using the disciplines of art history, photographic analysis, feminist history, the history of Shakespearean reception, and her own sensitive observations, Parlin

interprets Cameron's photographs of Cordelia, Ophelia, and Juliet, clearly demonstrating how Cameron's innovations and techniques transform these heroines from 19th-Century stereotypes of women into symbols of "feminine perseverance" and heroism, in spite of their suffering.

Last – but by no means least – is Sharon O'Dair's masterful "presentist" essay entitled "Working My Way Back to You: Shakespeare and Labor," which argues that the winds of change are sweeping through the Shakespeare profession, and that, above all, a new emphasis on ethics and the ethical is where this mighty gale is blowing us. Using King Lear's insight while suffering the wrath of the storm on the Heath -- that all of us need to learn "to feel what wretches feel" (3.4.34) -- O'Dair argues that academics -- in particular Shakespearians and Democrats -- need to "work their way back" to respecting labor as much as mind. So, new ways of looking at labor and class are what will regenerate both Shakespeare studies and national and local politics. Whether you agree with O'Dair or not (I agree), what she really has done with this essay – and with others she has written – is to reclaim the role of public intellectual that our profession used to have (Think of Edmund Wilson, the Trillings, Mark Van Doren, and others.). This essay belongs in a Shakespeare journal AND in *Harpers* or *The Atlantic* or *The New Yorker*. This fact alone moots the sterile argument over whether or not "presentist" essays are "legitimate scholarship." The real truth is that now, especially, they are absolutely essential if our profession is ever to thrive again.

The editor wishes to thank the members of the OVSC Editorial Board for a job well done, and special thanks go to Sandee Lloyd, the Technical Editor, for her computer expertise and for the photograph from *Romeo and Juliet* that graces the cover of this volume of the journal.