Laurie E. Maguire. *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The "Bad" Quartos and Their Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvii, 427.

Although non-specialists often assume that Shakespeare's canonical work survives in autograph manuscripts — a notion perhaps perpetuated by over-publicised conspiracy theories that his plays were "really penned" by a Person of Quality such as Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford — in fact our only sources are early printed texts. Chief of these is the collected volume known as the First Folio, issued by Shakespeare's fellow actors in 1623, seven years after the playwright's death. Before then single-volume editions of certain plays appeared in quarto or octavo (*i.e.*, smaller and cheaper format books), but often in markedly different versions, which partly reflect the influence of stage production in Shakespeare's London. While this gives the quartos potential value as performance documents, verbally many of their texts appear to be abbreviated and/or debased versions of the Folio plays, which on the whole are fuller and more aesthetically refined. Yet because the Folio is fraught with textual problems of its own, the pre-1623 quartos often supply corrective or more compelling readings. Since the late seventeenth century, textual scholars have tried to account for their provenance and authenticity. In 1909 A. W. Pollard categorised texts such as *Romeo and Juliet* (Q1 1597), *Henry V* (Q1 1600), and *Hamlet* (Q1 1603) as "bad" quartos, which he distinguished from "good" ones such as *King Lear* (1608), whose variants seem to reflect legitimate alternatives rather than corruption stemming from manuscript-copy obscurity, printing house errors, illicit publication, or other causes.

Soon after Pollard introduced his Manichean division, W. W. Greg advanced a theory for one of these other causes. The "bad" state of the quartos, he argued, was the result of "memorial reconstruction," in which players wrote down versions of Shakespeare's work they had recently performed. The quartos' "badness" could be explained by lapses in memory resulting in categorisable errors such as omission, repetition, anticipation, and substitution of general terms for specific details. Gradually, other critics buttressed Greg's theory and extended it to non-Shakespearean play-texts seeming to exhibit the same anomalies. The anti-canon of memorial reconstructed or reported plays grew to over 40.

Of late, however, Greg's theory has come under attack by scholars on the grounds that it is under-theorised, over-applied, based on woolly notions about the real operation of memory, and dependent on subjective assessments of textual and aesthetic "badness." Although objections to memorial reconstruction have been voiced from the very beginning, this negative reaction can effectively be dated from the early 1980s, when critics reassessing quarto and Folio *King Lear* advanced a competing theory: that the alleged signs of corruption in the pre-1623 quartos are actually evidence of deliberate theatrical adaption and revision, probably by Shakespeare himself. In other words, the quartos are different versions produced by agencies undeserving of the morally freighted epithets "good" and "bad." Since

then the “revision” thesis has gained strength, although it remains contested and suits some quartos better than others.

Laurie E. Maguire has taken the measure of these developments to offer a much-needed revaluation of 41 Shakespearian and non-Shakespearian “bad” quartos. This comprehensiveness earns unprecedented authority, since past investigations have too often been based on piecemeal diagnoses of a few texts subsequently built up into overreaching generalisations. In Part Two, the heart of her book, she rigorously appraises 28 features that since W. W. Greg’s 1910 study of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Q 1602) have been used to identify memorial reconstruction. In the end she demonstrates that very few of these are relevant to the primal scene of actors recalling and transcribing play-scripts from memory. Maguire follows up this purging of spurious diagnostic criteria and imprecise terminology with point-form textual summaries of all 41 suspect texts. Her tables aim to present accessible information while avoiding “the ‘cause and effect’ scenario inherent in the narrative method” (p. 227) of textual criticism. The latter, as she shows tellingly in Part One, has often adopted certain generic features of detective fiction, in which the textual sleuth tracks down incriminating evidence to piece together a devastating exposure of memorial fraud. Part of reconstruction’s persuasiveness, in other words, has been a function of its rhetorical enactment of investigative expertise and consummate closure. While Maguire’s analysis in this regard is astutely convincing, her tables do not completely avoid the determining presence of narrative argument. In fact they partly occlude it, since what this study offers — as Maguire herself recognises — is not formula and proof but critical interpretation of historically unique combinations of theatrical scripts and agencies. The textual “facts” and non-dogmatic conclusions she chooses to disclose have been selected, prioritised, and internally narrativised before being set down in verbally abstemious form.

This presentation also seems like a curious throwback to the “scientific” approach to textual scholarship which was fashionable earlier this century and helped to impel and legitimate memorial reconstruction. Maguire examines this intellectual context in Part One: from the theory’s roots in the New Bibliography, which successfully systematised the editing of texts based on the material production of early modern books, to the positivist yearnings of its early exponents. Her fascinating and admirably historicised account shows how these “Men of Science” sought deductive laws to explain the “badness” of the quartos, while ignoring the necessity of interpreting the infinitely variable human factors involved in the scripting and performance of each one, factors that must inevitably resist uniform laws or macro-principles. The unsuspected hero of her story is W. W. Greg, who, while failing to offer the comprehensive survey which might have provided a surer basis for detecting reported texts, nonetheless remained aware of his own methodological weaknesses, presented his conclusions tentatively, and continued to be sceptical of memorial reconstruction as an interpretive theory. Later scholars swept

away Greg's provisionality, however, and corralled the "bad quartos" into an artificially homogeneous group.

Maguire's revisionary work successfully proves there is only one universal amongst these texts: that each is a law unto itself, even though each one does not necessarily demand unique rules to be explained. In the end she does not quite dismiss the idea of memorial reconstruction, but narrows it to a probability in only a few cases. Her timely book provides a fresh point of departure from which textual scholars will test and re-evaluate received claims about these texts and their relationship to Shakespeare's Folio plays.

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Philip Beitchman. *Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. Pp. xiv, 364.

All published occult texts are paradoxical, in that they expose to vulgar eyes secrets understood only by initiates. The Cabala, here identified mainly with the late thirteenth-century Zohar (Book of Splendour), epitomizes this contradiction by purporting to represent the oral instruction that God vouchsafed to Moses as a supplement to the inscribed decalogue. (One meaning of *cabal* in Hebrew is "that which is not, cannot be written down" [p. 19].) Far from being a direct revelation, however, the Zohar is actually a commentary on the Torah (or Pentateuch) whose textual fluidity and indeterminacy can only invite further speculation: while it explicates enigmas (especially those confronting theodicy) in the canonical text, its own style is so enigmatic that any "secret revealed is immediately reconstituted as another order of mystery" (p. 63). It is this "contemporary" aspect of Cabala that most fascinates Philip Beitchman. For him, the Zohar, whose "floating . . . signifiers" (p. 116) provoke "wonder, imagination, curiosity, and insecurity about its own status as a text" (p. 31), is "a consummately Renaissance problematization of writer, reader, and work, which anticipates, prepares, and probably helped to create contemporary critical attitudes and ambivalences as well as modern textual strategies and deconstructions" (p. 7).

Beitchman's four long chapters imply a straightforward organization: "In the Beginning" (origins and early traditions of Jewish Cabala); "The Secret of Agrippa" (Christian Cabala in the Renaissance); an annotated "Bibliographica Kabbalistica" of mainly continental works; and "Cabala in England, 1497–1700." But this is neither a linear history, nor a conventional bibliographical tool, nor a traditional scholarly synthesis. Rather, by honouring the dialogic style and inherently provisional meanings of the Zohar, Beitchman renders *Alchemy of the Word* itself a "cabalistic" text, in that its mode and aims are ultimately speculative. This is "a study of the *impact and implications*, immediate and long range of the Cabala