

Emily Buffey, University of Birmingham

Imagining Shakespeare's Wife: The Afterlife of Anne Hathaway by Katherine West Scheil. 294 pp. ISBN-10: 1108404065, ISBN-13: 978-1108404068. \$19.95 (paperback); \$89.99 (hardcover). Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Until Nicholas Rowe's *Some Account of the Life, etc. of Mr William Shakespear* in 1709, Anne Hathaway's existence was largely overlooked, with visitors to Stratford-upon-Avon "literally standing on her grave" to get a proper look at her husband's epitaph (Scheil, xx). Yet Rowe's simple mention of Shakespeare's "Wife" as "the Daughter of one *Hathaway*" sparked a desire to remember, restore and eventually re-imagine Anne's role within the Shakespeare story. Katherine West Scheil's book, *Imagining Shakespeare's Wife: The Afterlife of Anne Hathaway* (2018) is a long-awaited attempt to trace Anne's journey from her "discovery" in the early eighteenth century, right up to the present day. From her depiction in early published accounts of Shakespeare's life, to the "increasingly idealized portrait" (47) of Anne fostered by the Stratford-upon-Avon tourism industry, through to modern-day re-imaginings of Anne in fiction and biography, we see how the figure of "Shakespeare's Wife" has been remembered, crafted, and at times exploited, to coincide with "various social, political, and personal agendas" (xv). Underlying Scheil's work is the suggestion that "versions of Anne do not necessarily exist on a trajectory of female progress over time" (200), yet the many contrasting and conflicting Annes that have emerged all "resonate within their historical moments" (95). Anne's evolution from anonymous "Wife" to "global obsession" thus offers a barometer of "ideas about women, wives, marriage, artistic inspiration, domesticity, and sexuality" and how they "have shifted over the last few centuries" (xvi).

The book is divided into two parts, with both sections proceeding chronologically through representative examples of Anne's cultural and literary afterlife. The first section, "Establishing Anne," traces the evolution of Anne Hathaway from a marginal (or altogether excluded) aspect of Shakespeare's biography to a fully-fledged character in the story of Shakespeare's Stratford years. This development, Scheil argues, is driven largely by a post-Romantic desire to "create a 'Shakespeare' who is a lover and a poet" (35). A "flesh-and-blood" Shakespeare thus emerges through increased interest in his real-life interactions, and becomes "accessible" through the material objects that are believed to have both shaped and been shaped by those experiences. The notorious bequest of the "second-best bed" is just the starting-point for Scheil's analysis of an array of domestic artefacts and "relics," including a wooden casket and "courting chair" (both carved with

the initials W.A.S.), that have given Anne's role as Shakespeare's wife and lover both shape and validity. These items are presented as part of a much larger gamut of objects, fakes and forgeries that offer a vital conduit to Shakespeare "the man."

The eighteenth-century desire to revive the Shakespeare courtship and marriage develops in the nineteenth century into the wholesale enshrinement of Anne Hathaway's Cottage, onto which devotees have projected their desires and fantasies about the Bard as "wooer, lover and native English son" (49). The Cottage's location in the heart of the Warwickshire countryside served its purpose as "commemorative space" (xx) for also establishing memories of a pastoral "merry England," and Scheil usefully notes how this development coincided with the growth of English tourism and the development of the railways. Scheil's account illustrates the "immersive" nature of the experience, which ensured that the Cottage maintained an "indisputable claim over the physical space where Shakespeare's courtship took place" (64). Unlike other Shakespeare "shrines," however, the Cottage gave Anne a more prominent role in the Shakespeare story, which Scheil aligns with a growing "female investment" in Shakespeare. This investment is embodied by the work of Mary Baker: chief custodian of the Cottage for over seventy years until her death in 1899. Scheil also shows how the Cottage was mobilized for use in wartime propaganda, and has since become a portable "repository of myths of romantic love" (87) through a number of trans-Atlantic reproductions. Though the Cottage remains one of the least-changed of the Shakespeare monuments, Scheil's findings also show it to be a highly impressionable space through which Anne and her descendants have managed to assert their relevance and visibility for over two centuries.

The second section of the book, "Imagining Anne," explores Anne's textual afterlives, from early Shakespeare biographies to modern-day "biofiction." While Shakespeare's wife is an unavoidable part of the Shakespeare story, Scheil suggests that she has proven difficult to reconcile with the glamour and mystique suggested by Shakespeare's London years; an incompatibility that is largely to do with her "ordinariness" (96). Thus, in order for Shakespeare to pursue his alternative city-boy existence, biographers and fiction writers have been required to fashion Anne in ways that suggest a far less happy image than that of the devoted wife we see in the first half of the book. Though Anne's "stay-at-home" image maintained important currency during the first- and second-world wars, the latter halves of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the growth of more unpleasant depictions of Anne, forging a reputation for her as shrewish, illiterate, nagging and sexually repulsive, leading biographers to speculate on Shakespeare's motives to play away from home. These developments also witnessed the births of numerous "anti-Annes" as more suitable candidates for the Bard's erotic muse. As Scheil notes, Annes from the 1960s, 70s and 80s are often working-class and "out of touch with Shakespeare's artistic life" (145), a major surprise

given the growth of socialist feminism and women-centred studies of Shakespeare: "this was not necessarily an era of progressive Annes," Scheil quietly concedes (147). The texts covered in these final sections are selective, and span a range of fictional genres, from Anthony Burgess' highly-acclaimed *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964) to mainstream "popular" fiction, including the genres of historical romance and young adult fiction. Scheil highlights how, despite Anne's continued role as a "conduit" for accessing details of the Bard's life in modern fiction, modern fiction has also sought to reconcile prior understandings of Shakespeare's London years with Anne's "stay-at-home" role. "Millennial Annes" (such as Grace Tiffany's 2004 *Will*, for example) address the challenges faced by modern couples, and by presenting Anne as an intelligent and independent-minded woman, Scheil also shows how Anne's experiences might resonate with those of a twenty-first century, usually female, readership. Drawing from the comments of book reviewers and bloggers, Scheil also shows how social networking has helped to maintain Anne's circulation and relevance amongst diverse audiences from across the globe.

The distribution of materials across the two sections is pragmatic, though the presentation of chapter headings produces some unnecessary page clutter. The author also has a habit of concluding paragraphs with quotations, leaving some crucial matters unresolved. While this is frustrating at times, it also serves to highlight the central idea of the book: "that Anne's afterlife is fluid, flexible, and adaptable" (103) and her character is ultimately unattainable. *Imagining Shakespeare's Wife* thus manages to address the developments and contradictions in Anne's story with subtlety and restraint, and Scheil's interdisciplinary approach provides insight into areas that are seldom traversed. As the female figures of history continue to gather the interest of authors, readers and scholars, Scheil's turn towards a silent and largely invisible female player in English literary history is both timely and significant, and the book's detailed Appendix should encourage readers to delve into this area in even further depth and detail.