

*Music in Shakespeare: A Dictionary*. Christopher R. Wilson and Michela Calore. Arden Shakespeare Dictionaries. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2014. xiv + 508 pp. £25.99.

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This dictionary of music in Shakespeare was originally published by Thoemmes Continuum in 2005. Professor Wilson published his own *Shakespeare's Musical Imagery* in 2011, and now the dictionary has reappeared as one of the Arden Shakespeare Dictionary series. Readers of Professor Wilson's own book will recognize a similarity of approach; for example, the dictionary's long entry for "bird" has a partner in his later chapter on birdsong. The dictionary's purpose is "to provide a comprehensive survey of Shakespeare's musical vocabulary — his knowledge of technical terms, his allusions to instruments, musical genres and performance techniques"; but it is not a dictionary of the songs and other music that appear in the plays. For that kind of information we are still dependent upon specialized studies and conscientious editors.

The entries are arranged in three parts. First there is an explanation of the musical meaning of a word, then there is some account given of its Shakespearean use, and then the entry closes, usually though not invariably with a bibliographical note. For instance, the entry for "lute" describes the instrument and gives some account of its origin and its use in Shakespeare's time as the "quintessential" instrument for domestic and public use, both singly and in consort. There is a brief mention of its literature and its most distinguished exponent, John Dowland. The Shakespearean application that follows draws attention to Shakespeare's many references to the instrument, beginning with some comment upon its Apollonian and Orphic associations. Oddly enough, though, there is no explanation of Shakespeare's unclassical substitution of the lute for the lyre or harp in those contexts, and no hint that Shakespeare may himself have been able to play the lute.

One wonders about the usefulness of a compilation like this. While it may be true that "few editors of Shakespeare have much expertise in the historical place of musical terminology," it is unlikely that a dictionary will bring such editors up to speed, and equally unlikely that musically informed editors will learn much from it. Most people who pick the dictionary up will probably turn to particular entries, looking for information, and the question is, will they find it? As a test of this approach, I began with "angel," and was immediately told that the "tradition" of angelic singing was "hardly older than the Middle Ages." Surely, this is a rather dubious statement. The "tradition" is far older than that. The sung Sanctus and its preface, linking human worship at Mass with angelic worship in heaven, is one of the oldest elements of the Mass, going back to Saint Clement of Rome, supposed to have been ordained by Saint Peter himself. As to whether angels sing in scripture, it all depends upon who one thinks the "morning stars" are in Job 38:7, and how one understands the range of meaning we attach to the word translated as "saying" in the account of the angels' Gloria (Luke 2:13–14).

I then turned to a term that has puzzled everyone, the “old laudes” that (according to Q2) Ophelia sang before her death. An informative article, “laudes,” based on Grove, tells us that that these were the Italian *lauda*, monophonically sung religious poems of medieval origin. The suggestion is by no means new, but it remains problematic because “lauds” used in that sense is found nowhere else in English, and there is no evidence that Shakespeare had ever heard of the Italian *lauda*. What he and everyone else had heard of were the “old lauds” of the pre-Elizabethan daily office. Why, though, would Ophelia have been singing snatches of the office? But, then again, why not? Her Denmark, like England, seems to have been recently Catholic. The dictionary, perhaps prudently, does not raise these questions, but leaves Q2’s reading as puzzling as ever.

One of Shakespeare’s more interesting examples of onstage music appears in *2 Henry IV* when a local ensemble called “Sneak’s Noise” plays for Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet at the Boar’s Head. Years ago in his Arden 2 edition, A. R. Humphries pointed out that the same band’s name turns up in Heywood’s *Iron Age*, and wondered whether it was a real band. Can our dictionary add anything to this note upon Sneak and his Noise? It proves to be informative about the musical uses of “noise,” including its meaning as “ensemble,” but has nothing at all to say about Sneak and his boys.

Other users may be luckier than I was, but I was surprised to find nothing on the musical implications of words related to “temper” and “temperament” in Shakespeare, and to find “sweet music” very briefly disposed of — a serious lack, since today’s students will probably have an understanding of the phrase that is very different from Shakespeare’s. There are no doubt things that Shakespeare’s editors do not know, perhaps cannot be expected to know. This is especially true of Shakespeare’s knowledge of music and of religion, but one suspects that a dictionary of this kind will not supplement that kind of lack. What it can do is provide less demanding but nonetheless interested readers with useful information on a range of musical topics under one cover, neatly and helpfully presented. And that is what it does.

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