

*Shakespeare's Medical Language: A Dictionary.* Sujata Iyengar.  
Arden Shakespeare Dictionaries. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. xvi + 416 pp. \$36.99.

---

Sujata Iyengar's *Shakespeare's Medical Language: A Dictionary* is a rare find: a compendium genuinely useful to both students and scholars, which is comprehensive enough to serve as an index to the agues and aches that pepper the author's work. The text, as one might expect, is arranged alphabetically, from "Abhorson" to "Zany." Part of the Arden Shakespeare Dictionary series, it is pleasingly presented as a true encyclopedia, and additionally includes an index in which some modern terms are cross-referenced with their early modern relatives ("eczema" with "scab" [299], for example). Larger entries, such as those for "purge" (281–83) or "melancholy" (215–19), include three sections: an overview of the term's meanings and significance in early modern society; a summary of where, and in what

sense, it is used in Shakespeare's work; and a guide to further reading on the subject, both primary and secondary.

By necessity, each of these sections is brief. The entry on melancholy, for example, cannot deal with complexities of this subject in the detail of specialist works such as Jennifer Radden's *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* or Adam H. Kitzes's *The Politics of Melancholy from Spenser to Milton*, nor is it intended to. Where this book comes into its own, however, is in the myriad entries on less discussed topics. "Rhubarb," for instance, may not be of sufficient interest in itself to generate articles or book chapters, but nevertheless possesses a material significance that might enhance one's reading of Macbeth's question: "What rhubarb, cyme, or what purgative drug / Would scour the English hence?" (5.3.55–56). Moreover, Iyengar's impressively detailed research provides the first critical discussion (to my knowledge) of some obscure terms such as "tisick" ("A consumption or wasting disease" [338]) and "darnel" (a common weed of numerous medicinal uses [91]). While primary sources are generally taken from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the definitions presented herein are, with a few exceptions, relevant to writing from across the sixteenth and up to the late seventeenth century.

The main challenges for a work such as this are ones of scope and pitch. Under the Galenic system of medicine, dominant throughout much of the early modern period, a wide range of "natural" and "non-natural" influences determined both bodily and psychological health (4). Iyengar asserts that "the experience of health and disease in the early modern world is experiential, phenomenological, embedded in everyday life" (6). As such, the net is cast wide for medical terminology, including phenomena and characteristics now deemed social rather than pathological. The book takes a similarly inclusive approach to its audience. The brief introduction guides readers through the maze of scholarship on early modern gender, embodiment, medicine, and materiality. It will contain much that is familiar to scholars of medical history and humanities, but is particularly valuable as an entry to the vibrant field of early modern health humanities for students or scholars new to the area. As to the body of the text, Iyengar herself identifies a number of potential uses for the compendium, from those "wishing to understand specific references in the plays" (6) to others interested in embodied experience and medicine in this period more generally. Although one might read this work from cover to cover, it is clearly intended as an addition to the scholar's or student's bookshelf, to answer minor queries and provide a point of departure for more complex investigations.

*Shakespeare's Medical Language* makes a valuable contribution to the fields of early modern studies and medical humanities, both collating current literature on a broad range of medical topics and contributing new research on many more "material, medical, metaphorical" (6) phenomena. It will prove a welcome addition to the collections of many scholars and students working in this area.

ALANNA SKUSE, *University of Bristol*