

Shakespeare's World of Words. Paul Yachnin, ed.
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Arden Shakespeare has long enjoyed the highest reputation for Shakespeare scholarship through its editions of the works. Recently it has widened its scope to include critical studies. This is a welcome development, and for those of us who feel that Shakespeare's language is a topic until recently somewhat neglected, it is particularly pleasing to see that a number of these studies are related to language. Yachnin's edited collection falls into this category.

The volume has ten chapters, plus an introduction setting out the book's central idea. This is to explore Shakespeare's "world of words" — networks of words and their associations that Shakespeare draws on to enrich his theatrical world. Each chapter involves a case study based around a key item — usually a word or phrase, though other linguistic features are not excluded. The focus is on one play, occasionally two. For example, in chapter 1, Michael Bristol and Sara Coodin consider the word *well* in *The Merchant of Venice*, looking at the different kinds of *well* mentioned in the play and relating them to the Jewish Bible and Judaic traditions. In chapter 2, David Schalkwyk looks at proper names, especially in relation to *Troilus and Cressida*; in chapter 8, Paul Yachnin and Patrick Neilson consider the word *slip* in *Measure for Measure*; in chapter 9, Meredith Evans looks at linguistic complexity, particularly in one scene of *All's Well That Ends Well*. In the final chapter, Jennifer Roberts-Smith considers *time* and meter in *The Comedy of Errors*. Discussion of the chosen key items embraces an impressive breadth of cultural reference: we learn about aspects of biblical language, of Latin, and of criminal and commercial registers, among many other things.

A major value of the book is the considerably detailed treatment given to the key items, mapping out meanings, connotations, and usages of words and phrases. Thus in chapter 3 Lucy Munro gives a fascinating account of the words *antique* and *antic* in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *2 Henry IV*, focusing particularly on the characters of Don Armado and Pistol, who manage simultaneously to be both "antique" and "antic" in their linguistic

behavior. Munro succeeds in showing how, through characters like this, “Shakespeare satirizes both sides of Elizabethan language debate” (87) — archaism and neologism. Similarly fascinating is J. A. Shea’s account of *angling* in *The Winter’s Tale* (chapter 5), which explores in detail the particular associations of the term with (among other things) various types of theft. In chapter 6, the concern is with grammatical items. Lynne Magnusson looks at the subjunctive, optative, and potential moods in *1 Henry IV*. Her absorbing account of how these started to come into English relates back to Latin and touches on how that language was taught in Renaissance England.

As well as supplying linguistic detail, the authors also explore networks of associated references, and identify ways in which their key items play important roles in the works in which they appear. Sometimes, though perhaps not always, this linking of words and phrases to broader themes is credible and illuminating. Among those that convince are Miriam Jacobson’s focus in chapter 5 on the verb *to color* in *Hamlet*. One connotation sees coloring as a “masking” or “disguising.” It is easy to see how the theme resonates through the play, among other things in Hamlet’s “antic disposition,” which might be seen as a form of coloring. Similarly convincing is Sara Werner’s account in chapter 7 on unclear anaphoric references in the early scenes of *Othello*. It is credible to see this adding to the atmosphere of doubt and ambiguity in the play.

There is some variation in the extent to which contributors utilize the considerable early modern English linguistic resources now available to us, particularly in the form of corpora and lexicons. One might imagine resources like these to be of great potential benefit to studies of this sort. The book, with its detailed explorations into some of Shakespeare’s linguistic practices, will be of interest to academics, as well as to students, particularly advanced ones who already have background knowledge of areas touched on.

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