



## Palfrey, Simon and Emma Smith. Shakespeare's Dead

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**Palfrey, Simon and Emma Smith.**

***Shakespeare's Dead.***

Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2016. Pp. 191 + ill. ISBN 978-1-85124-247-4 (paperback) US\$35.

Fueled by deeper ruminations on death than might initially be inferred from the book's coffee-table format, professors Simon Palfrey and Emma Smith's *Shakespeare's Dead* promises to embrace and celebrate the paradox of Shakespeare's bringing death to life on the early modern stage. Featuring seventy spectacular, full-colour, large-format images, this attractive and affordably priced souvenir memorializes a Bodleian Libraries exhibition aimed at a generalist public reliably eager to consume all things Shakespeare and morbidly drawn to historically and aesthetically distanced depictions of death and dying.

Presenting and explicating passages from the plays that grapple with mortality, Palfrey and Smith divide their material into nine topical chapters, beginning with a discussion of religious faith in—and existential anxiety about—the afterlife, and cannily concluding where they began with ruminations on ghosts, memorials, and miraculous revivals. Throughout, readers are encouraged to disambiguate dramatic and actual deaths—to distinguish between death itself and its staged simulacrum. While the first chapter considers *Hamlet's* existential crisis (the prospect of being in not being) in relation to Catholic and Reformation theologies, chapter 2 explores the *ars moriendi* tradition of learning how to die well in *Measure for Measure*, focusing on the profundity of the play's linguistic engagements with uncertainty and negation. Occasionally, the images of death upon which the authors dwell are relatively obscure; such is the case with the lengthy exposition on the contents of Portia's caskets from *The Merchant of Venice*, discussed in the book's third chapter on death in comedy, for example, which also dwells on scenes from *The Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labours Lost*. A similar phenomenon haunts the subsequent chapter on plague death in Shakespearean drama—largely an absent threat, but one that ostensibly provokes the *carpe diem* inspired sexual haste in *Romeo and Juliet*. Chapter 5's engagements with the theme of sex and death predictably provoke discussion of *la petit mort*, pausing over scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* that trope death and decay as the ultimate states of erotic penetration and orgasmic transcendence. Regarding

the history play as an extended exercise in necromantic revival that resurrects and parades the dead ultimately in order to restage their deaths, the sixth chapter muses over representations of heroism, martyrdom, cowardice, and feigning death, especially in Shakespeare's *Henriad*. The seventh and eighth chapters consider the exigencies of the early modern playhouse in relation to Shakespearean stagings of death: the significances of the physical fabric of the stage or scaffold, and the living bodies of the players or shadows that haunted it; and the scripted aspects of staged death that are exposed by the features of early dramatic texts. The book's final chapter returns to *Hamlet's* Ghost, together with Gertrude's memorialization of Ophelia and the miraculous resuscitations of the romances, as examples of life-in-death, while a final coda muses over the comparative obscurity of Shakespeare's own death and his subsequent immortalization.

The wealth of illustrations on display, culled from the Bodleian Library's vast stores, undoubtedly constitute a powerful part of this book's appeal, but Palfrey and Smith have endeavoured to complement the detailed images with impressive textual complexity and profundity. A tacit paradox worrying this methodology, however, is that, while the graphics are appended by meticulous explanatory notes and careful copyright credits, the ideas advanced throughout the text are presented as virtually unindebted to the considerable intellectual networks through which they have evolved, as if unburdened by generations of performance, criticism, scholarly research, and so forth. Admirably attempting on the one hand to push beyond the reductive oversimplifications typical of the souvenir program genre, the authors simultaneously fail on the other hand to acknowledge the full extent of their intellectual debts, to provide a critical history for the insights they contemplate. This deficiency is perhaps most pronounced in the book's penultimate chapter on stage history and performance cues—indebted to both the trailblazing efforts of Alan Dessen and to subsequent work by myriad editors, scholars, actors, and directors—but the entire volume suffers from an identical dearth of citation. Equipped with a sparse works cited page and a brief list of fewer than twenty titles for further reading on the topic (which curiously includes tomes like Sigmund Freud's complete psychological works and Arthur Miller's collected plays among Palfrey and Smith's own former publications), *Shakespeare's Dead* not only attempts rather uncomfortably to blur the boundaries between trade, exhibition, and academic publications but, more egregiously, erases the import of erudition in the cultural production

of knowledge—a risky enterprise at a time when the value of scholarship, the rationale supporting publicly funded research, and the utility of institutions like the Bodleian Library itself, are coming under increasing attack. Crucial to the study of Shakespeare's dead, then, is acknowledgement of the many whose life work has helped ensure the perpetuity of his posthumous legacy.

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**Radziwiłłowa, Franciszka Urszula.**

***Selected Drama and Verse.* Ed. Patrick John Corness and Barbara Judkowiak.**

**Trans. Patrick John Corness. Trans. ed. Aldona Zwierzyńska-Coldicott.**

**Intro. Barbara Judkowiak.**

*The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 37 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 478.* Toronto: Iter Academic Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp. xv, 395 + 7 ill. ISBN 978-0-86698-532-1 (paperback) US\$45.95.

This collection features a selection of Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa's poetry and plays in first-time English translations chosen to capture her previously overlooked personal lyrical voice. Princess Radziwiłłowa (1705–53) is generally remembered as Poland's first woman dramatist, who founded the court theatre at Nieswiez, but Barbara Judkowiak's excellent introduction claims that the somewhat dismissive treatment of her as a bluestocking of minor talent needs to be revised to recognize her literary and dramatic output as powerful examples of women's writing. Judkowiak foregrounds Radziwiłłowa's feminine tone of voice, noting how it reflects the influence of French culture on eighteenth-century Polish women and their ability to speak about feelings regarding romantic love in marriage and selfless devotion to husband and children. Judkowiak reads the princess's lyrical confessions as portraying "a woman enslaved by cultural conventions, yearning for reciprocity and fidelity [...] whose life is slowly slipping away in heartfelt torment" (23). By providing crucial autobiographical details of Radziwiłłowa's love match with Prince Michal—and her endless struggles in fulfilling her duties running their estate and bearing a constant stream of children, most of whom died in infancy or early youth—Judkowiak