



Shakespeare and Material Culture (Oxford Shakespeare Topics)

By Catherine Richardson

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What is the significance of Shylock's ring in *The Merchant of Venice*? How does Shakespeare create Gertrude's closet in *Hamlet*? How and why does Ariel prepare a banquet in *The Tempest*? In order to answer these and other questions, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* explores performance from the perspective of the material conditions of staging. In a period just starting to be touched by the allure of consumer culture, in which objects were central to the way gender and social status were experienced but also the subject of a palpable moral outrage, this book argues that material culture has a particularly complex and resonant role to play in Shakespeare's employment of his audience's imagination.

Chapters address how props and costumes work within the drama's dense webs of language - how objects are invested with importance and how their worth is constructed through the narratives which surround them. They analyse how Shakespeare constructs rooms on the stage from the interrelation of props, the description of interior spaces and the dynamics between characters, and investigate the different kinds of early modern practices which could be staged - how the materiality of celebration, for instance, brings into play notions of hospitality and reciprocity. *Shakespeare and Material Culture* ends with a discussion of the way characters create unique languages by talking about things - languages of faerie, of madness, or of comedy - bringing into play objects and spaces which cannot be staged. Exploring things both seen and unseen, this book shows how the sheer variety of material cultures which Shakespeare brings onto the stage can shed fresh light on the relationship between the dynamics of drama and its reception and comprehension.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Richardson's carefully researched, beautifully written study offers valuable critical insights into Shakespeare's plays and argues for the importance of things in Shakespeare's work...Highly recommended."
--*Choice*

About the Author

Catherine Richardson is senior lecturer in Renaissance literature at the University of Kent. Her research focuses on the material experience of daily life in early modern England, on and offstage: on narrative and storytelling, on houses and furniture, and on the social, moral and personal significance of clothing. She is the author of *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy: the material life of the household* (2006) and editor of *Clothing Culture 1350-1650* (2004) and, with Tara Hamling, *Everyday Objects: medieval and early modern material culture and its meanings* (2010).

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