



Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare's Settings and a Sense of Place* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016). Print, 144 pp., US\$30.00, ISBN: 9781783168088.

Review

Ralph Berry's latest book asserts Shakespeare's fascination with settings and locations, arguing that they 'structure, and sometimes define, the drama' (p. xvi). He takes a broad approach to his subject matter by exploring stage spaces that Shakespeare was familiar with (including Berry's own suggestion of Haddon Hall as an 'envisaged' setting for *Richard II*), as well as addressing the settings that he chooses, both in England and internationally (p. 36). As Ralph Berry suggests, Shakespeare probably never left England and yet a number of his plays imaginatively travel across Europe, situating characters everywhere from Denmark to Italy to Scotland. Berry nevertheless proposes that visiting these locations that Shakespeare himself never saw can enrich how we understand the plays and even provide new insights into the locations that he wrote for. Indeed, Berry comments on the affective experience of place, noting that the phrase 'Denmark's a Prison' took on a 'never before felt [...] resonance' in the claustrophobic space of the inner courtyard at Kronborg Castle, which is 'enclosed on all sides by the palace elevations.' Berry concludes that 'This is a play where doors close, not open. They act as barriers. Nobody gets out of Elsinore if the authorities want to keep them in' (p. 4). Indeed, Berry's familiarity with each of these locations appears to be the organising principal behind the book: he acknowledges that there are many more settings worthy of discussion, but offers the particular insights of his own first-hand experience in having visited each location.

It should be acknowledged that Berry's book is not a typical scholarly work. It does not situate itself within a wider scholarly milieu, drawing only occasionally

from insights gleaned from other critical works. Each chapter offers minimal notes, if any, and the introduction makes no claim to originality. It is also noteworthy that the acknowledgements state that half of the chapters (One, Two, Three, Four, Six, and Twelve) have all been published elsewhere and appear unrevised in this book. Chapter Twelve was published recently, in 2015, in *Notes and Queries*, but the other chapters range from 1998 to 2005. This means that the opening four chapters republish material that is at least a decade old and may have profited from an update for the current book. Indeed, Chapter Four (published in 2005) describes the momentum behind E. A. J. Honigmann's *Shakespeare: The 'Lost Years'* building over 'recent years,' but the notes only reference the 1985 book (p. 29). It would have been useful to update the notes to assert the continuing impact of this research.

Nevertheless the book does give the reader an accessible account of Shakespeare's particular fascination with places. The chapters are succinct and yet wide-ranging, offering the reader a taste of the cultural, religious, and economic contexts that underpin these locations. Each chapter is thoughtfully organised around the places, rather than the plays, allowing the reader to appreciate how Shakespeare returned to certain locations with different goals, and perhaps had places in mind when he wrote specific plays. The effect is to foreground locations themselves as important to Shakespeare, a goal that Berry enthusiastically pursues.

The chapters themselves read as discreet essays. The introduction provides little guidance on the organisation of the chapters, and the reasoning behind the order is not immediately evident. Indeed, in lieu of explicitly describing the organising principle behind the chapters, readers either take each chapter in isolation from those preceding and following it, or is forced to try and create such links for themselves. It would perhaps have been useful to group the locations according to those that function predominantly as settings and those that are stage

spaces, and further to divide the settings between those that Shakespeare was intimately familiar with and those that he imaginatively created through contemporary accounts. Instead, the book opens with two chapters on Kronborg Castle as the setting for *Hamlet* — the first focussing on the castle itself, and the second upon a modern performance — and then the next chapter explores the performance space in Middle Temple, followed by another chapter arguing that first Shakespeare may have been familiar with Haddon Hall and second pictured the space while writing *Richard II*. The next eight chapters shift between settings and stage spaces without discussing the differences between spaces that Shakespeare's plays were performed in and settings that Shakespeare may have been thinking of as he wrote his plays. The introduction also sees him acknowledge that he has 'added' two chapters on Jonson. Rather than considering how Jonson's sense of location complements his discussion, he simply states that Jonson's staging of London 'contains a vista on the same scene that Shakespeare knew' (p. xiv). While these two chapters are interesting, Berry does not really present a case for why Jonson's approach to location is important for a study of Shakespeare's settings.

Some of the assertions that Berry makes are difficult to substantiate because he does not seem to have always tested his ideas. In the introduction, he makes an interesting distinction between place-names and locations. Where Shakespeare used a number of place-names to stand in for what feels essentially to be an English setting — such as *Love's Labour's Lost's* Navarre and *Twelfth Night's* Illyria — Berry distinguishes locations as an 'imaginative and visual apprehension of setting' (p. xvi). Yet in his final chapter Berry seems to leave open the question of whether, beyond the issues of patronage that he discusses, the location of Jonson's *Entertainment* actually matters: could it have been on any family's property? As Berry himself suggests, the place has a sense of '*genius loci*' but the 'precise spot in

the grounds [...] where Queen Anne beheld the Entertainment is not I think discoverable today' (p. xiv). Similarly, he never seems to consider the limitations of visiting locations that were only imagined by Shakespeare. While visiting places may help to confirm how accurate (or indeed inaccurate) Shakespeare's travel knowledge may have been, Berry perhaps eclipses the imaginative travel that Shakespeare invites his audiences to participate in. That is, if Shakespeare's apprehension of place is so detailed and evocative — while never having actually visited these places himself — might it not be unnecessary, and even impossible, to travel to such settings? Berry, no doubt, has his own reasons for believing that physically experiencing these locations adds something to the plays, but it would have strengthened his case to have at least addressed the delights and fascinations of early modern mind-travelling for Shakespeare's audiences as much as Shakespeare himself.

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