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**Elisa Fortunato**

**Medicine Matters in Five Comedies of Shakespeare. From the Renaissance Context to a Reading of the Play**

***Luisa Camaiora & Andrea A. Conti. 2016. Medicine Matters in Five Comedies of Shakespeare. From the Renaissance Context to a Reading of the Play. Peter Lang, pp. 246, EUR 63.30, Formats: EPUB, PDF, Paperback, ISBN 9783034323130***



The two-authored volume examines the presence of medicine, in all its facets, in five comedies of Shakespeare (*The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and investigates the role that medicine matters play in the critical analysis of Shakespeare's comedies.

The book is divided in two parts and has ten chapters. In the first part (*Some Features of the Renaissance Context*), Andrea A. Conti presents a fascinating overview of the medical professionals during the Renaissance and of the medical topics mostly debated at the time. These topics, in turn, are the ones that could be considered Shakespeare's background (from the theory of the humours to the ocular pathologies, from syphilis to the "green sickness", e.g. hysteria, melancholia). He also discusses the most significant achievements of Western medicine and the instrumental role played in this context by an enhanced knowledge of human anatomy and innovative operative techniques.

In the second part of the book, Luisa Camaiora combines the medical matters addressed by Conti with a close reading of five Shakespeare's comedies, offering to the reader an illu-

minating and unexpected perspective from which to interpret the plays. The second part (*A Reading of Five Comedies of Shakespeare*) is organised into five chapters, each one devoted to a comedy and to the specific dominant medical topic that the authoress identifies in it. The first chapter is devoted to *The Comedy of Errors*, to the centrality of sight, and to the dangers hidden in a diagnosis based exclusively on one and univocal parameter of interpretation. The authoress shows how an undifferentiated diagnosis, by ignoring the distance between the visual and the actual, could falsify the reality itself. Luisa Camaiora then turns to *Love's Labour's Lost*. Apart from a general concern with language, the play examines the disorders inherent in certain excessive uses of speech and its functions. Camaiora's scrutiny originally contributes to the study of the Shakespearean comedy identifying two driving motives: a minor one, linked to the concept of love as a contagious disease, and a major motif relating to the presence of logorrhoeic symptoms in the characters. The third chapter, building on the previous one, continues investigating love and centres on its problematic effects and on the consequences of passion ("the chameleon syndrome") in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The chapter "Homoeopathic Necessity in *The Taming of Shrew*: Interactive Therapy" brilliantly focuses on the 'efficacy' of an interactive cure which leads to the final outcome: Katherina's recovery coincides with her transformation into the anodyne wife. Camaiora dedicates the last chapter to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Of particular interest here is her analysis of the dermatological pathologies in the play: if a damaged skin can expose men to maladies, a moral distemper can weaken the spiritual temper.

The entire book is characterized by an impressive and well-documented variety of medical matters (first part) always linked with a thorough scrutiny of the medical allusions identified in the five comedies of Shakespeare analysed (second part). In Shakespeare medicine matters because it provides an unexpected perspective from which to interpret the plays and their multifaceted characters. The book as a whole adds meaningful and original insights into Shakespeare's study.

**Elisa Fortunato** is research fellow in English Language and Translation at the University of Bari. Her main research areas include the language of irony in XVIIIth century, the rhetoric of history in XVIIIth and XIXth centuries and censorship and translation during the XXth century. She teaches ESP university courses (English for medicine) and has translated several novels and short stories.

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