

Cambridge University Press

0521616948 - Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honour of Kenneth Muir

Edited by Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank and G. K. Hunter

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## PREFACE

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More than thirty years ago, Kenneth Muir published an essay on 'The Future of Shakespeare' (*Penguin New Writing*, summer 1946), in which he outlined what he saw as the likely directions and concerns of Shakespeare scholarship and criticism in the next few decades. Now that the 'future' of that essay has become the past, we can see his predictions as uncannily accurate. Most of the books and articles which he then described as needed have now been written – many of them, indeed, by himself. (The Checklist at the end of this volume speaks for itself of the range of his activities in Shakespearian study.) But there are omissions; and when colleagues who have been associated with Professor Muir during his long, fruitful and happily continuing career wished to honour his achievement, it seemed best to do so by trying to remedy one such omission. Hence the focus of this collection of essays is the question of 'Shakespeare's styles'. It is strange that the era of 'close reading' and 'practical criticism' has almost passed without any volume appearing which concerned itself exclusively with this question.

There are obvious reasons for the presence of the plural in the title. Whether we think of how Shakespeare's ways with language changed and developed between the *Henry VI* plays and *The Tempest*, or of how each of his plays, almost without exception, employs a variety of modes of expression, it becomes necessary to speak of his 'styles' rather than his 'style'. But beyond that we wished by our title to indicate some of the difficulty that lies in the way of 'practical criticism' of Shakespeare; for such is the variety of responses which Shakespeare's writing offers us that no single characterisation of his style will suffice. This very variousness may, of course, be considered an advantage. It was hoped that the volume could offer its readers a conspectus of the various ways in which Shake-

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**Shakespeare's styles**

Shakespeare's stylistic techniques may be discussed, of the variety of levels on which those techniques may be seen to operate, and above all of the interrelationships between his poetic power and his dramatic purpose.

The primary plan for the volume was that each contributor should take one or two passages and base his critical observations on the stylistic features appearing there. Essays of this kind form the bulk of those printed here. Some contributors have, however, preferred a greater degree of generalisation and have ranged more widely. The editors have arranged the volume so that the more narrowly focussed essays on style come first: the list of contents thus develops towards a greater degree of distance between the stylistic evidence and the critical generalisation. The essays based on specific passages are placed by chronological order of the plays from which passages have been chosen (following the E. K. Chambers order). It seemed more important that each contributor should write on passages and problems which particularly interested him or her than that a complete chronological survey should be attempted. But we hope that the variety of passages chosen for comment, the range of deductions made and the diversity of critical methods used will give the reader a sense of scope in the critical vocabularies that can be employed as well as an enhanced appreciation of key passages in the plays.

The untimely deaths of Ernest Schanzer, Clifford Leech and Terence Spencer have deprived the volume of the contributions which we had looked forward to receiving from them. Illness forced Michel Grivelet to set aside work on his essay. We are all of us the poorer for these losses.

The essays printed use the Peter Alexander text of Shakespeare (*The Complete Works*, London and Glasgow, 1951) as the norm (with the alteration of final -'d to -ed, and -ed to -èd). If another text is drawn on for a particular purpose, that fact is noted.

Philip Edwards  
Inga-Stina Ewbank  
G. K. Hunter