



## Book Review

**Names as Metaphors in Shakespeare's Comedies.** By Grant W. Smith. Delaware: Vernon Press. Series in Literary Studies. 2021. Pp. 371. \$73.00 (Hardback). ISBN 13: 978-1-64889-018-5. Multiple formats available.

In his ambitious study of *Names as Metaphors in Shakespeare's Comedies*, Grant W. Smith analyzes names in William Shakespeare's fourteen comedies, beginning with *The Tempest* and ending with *A Winter's Tale*, two plays scholars often classify as romances and not comedies. Smith defends their inclusion by noting both were listed as comedies in the First Folio; further, he reminds readers that the purpose of his study is to explicate the meanings of names, not to settle matters of disagreement regarding genres. Sandwiched between these two problem plays are chapters on names in the Bard's indisputable comedies: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. Through a wide semiotic lens, Smith identifies onomastic patterns and practices both within these fourteen individual plays and across the Bard's comedic oeuvre. Further, Smith narrows his focus to examine the associative and lexical properties of individual names in a scrupulous fashion, play by play. His extensive, organized, and informative study will benefit Shakespearean scholars and will, no doubt, be of interest to more general names enthusiasts. Because each play receives its own chapter in *Names as Metaphors in Shakespeare's Comedies*, readers have several options as they maneuver through Smith's study.

Readers may progress through the chapters in the order in which Smith places them, an arrangement that coincides with their sequence in the First Folio. Or they may choose to read chapters out of order on the basis of their own interests in specific plays. Additionally, they may opt to pursue a topical approach that cuts across

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comedies to focus on specific onomastic interests, perhaps reading exclusively those passages pertaining to classical references or to pseudonyms, sections easily found by scanning the work's subheadings. This latter approach, especially useful to researchers, is made convenient by the study's organizational schematic. Each chapter begins with an alphabetized list of references (names) followed by summaries of theme and plot. Remaining sections are identified by headings and subheadings that distinguish the types of referents to be analyzed. Chapter conclusions summarize the meanings and functions of names in that particular comedy and often relate them more broadly to Shakespeare's patterns of naming across the genre.

Regardless of the approach you select, I recommend you first orient yourself to the study by reading the book's front matter, especially the Preface by linguist Richard Coates and Grant W. Smith's useful Introduction. Even if you plan to engage nonlinearly with chapter content, you may want to peruse the front matter in its entirety. Skip past these preliminaries and you miss some jewels, like Smith's summative observation in his abstract that "Shakespeare's names and references show his descriptive imagination, his indebtedness to previous literature, and his immersion in the culture of his time", three compelling reasons to read this volume. Initially, I was caught off guard by Coates's references to *Romeo and Juliet* throughout his preface to the volume. But placed within that tragedy, as Coates reminds us, is perhaps the greatest of Shakespearean maxims: "That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet". Coates acknowledges the author's lifelong dedication to the study of Shakespeare's names and welcomes Smith's "return to one of his most abiding themes—the theory of the types of meaning that names may have, as exemplified in the practice of one of the world's great literary figures, among whose virtues was that he was no mean namesmith" (ix). Coates is correct; in this study, Smith is in his element.

In his Introduction, Smith elucidates the concepts behind his examination of names in Shakespeare's comedies. Via Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, Smith explains how names in literature can refer "to more than one thing at a time, i.e., as signs with symbolic meaning" (xiii). In addition to offering a theoretical foundation, Smith's Introduction provides definitions for terms essential to his study of literary names, specifically the iconic, indexical, and symbolic properties of names as signs. Examples for each category are provided by Smith, most drawn from the vast pool of names in Shakespeare's comedies. In reference to the symbolic, Smith explains how the name *Quince* "refers both to a character on stage and to a tradesman's tool" (xvi), the two referents in tandem forming a new idea. Additionally, the author supplies a chart identifying the three semantic categories around which his study is organized: associative references (borrowed and topical), lexical equivalents (etymological and phonological), and references by characters (epithets, endearments, and forms of address and personifications). With some minor deviations, this chart outlines Smith's organization of names analysis in each of his chapters. The author observes that most of Shakespeare's associative names derive from literary or historical contexts, while his lexical equivalents reinforce themes in his comedies. The Introduction offers a necessary primer or review, as the case may be, of terms and methods associated with literary onomastics. Smith concludes his introduction by reminding readers "that names [in literature] are not just individual identifiers for momentary purposes, but have been chosen as part of an artistic flow that pursues an entertainment goal and expresses a sense of coherence" (xxiv), a statement which his study not only reinforces but effectively proves. In addition to the Works Cited listing Smith's extensive sources, the volume's back matter includes a collated index of names and references in the comedies, both useful resources for scholars of Shakespeare's names.

As a reader with clear favorites when it comes to Shakespeare's comedies, I admit I read Smith's chapters out of sequence and skipped ahead to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; *As You Like It*; and *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* before returning to the remaining chapters. These three plays I have read, taught, attended, and viewed numerous times, attracted as I am to their characters, plots, themes—and names. Since my interest is in literary onomastics, I was confident I knew many of the literal meanings and figurative associations behind the names of, at least, the main characters mentioned in these plays. Suffice it to say, Smith's extensive and insightful analyses of names in these several works far exceeded my prior knowledge. Having attended a number of Smith's presentations and read some of his published articles over the years, likely some of my understanding was gleaned from or influenced by his very scholarship. Still, whether you begin Smith's study with foreknowledge or little knowledge of the meanings behind the names, you will have much to learn, as I discovered. In the chapter on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, Smith notes how associative names dominate all three storylines but are drawn from different, albeit indelibly appropriate, sources. In the main plot, the realm of the elite, references are classical as is the case with *Theseus* and *Hippolyta*. In the subordinate plot, the realm of the mechanicals, references are topical as indicated by the names *Quince*, *Snout*, and *Starveling*. In the fairy realm, references are chiefly folkloric as represented by the name *Robin Goodfellow*, also called *Puck*. In his discussion of Titania's fairy attendants, Smith first observes that their names reference the therapeutic herbs used in home remedies of the time and then explains how Shakespeare ameliorated negative folkloric associations through honorifics:

All four names, *Cobweb*, *Peaseblossom*, *Mustardseed*, and *Moth*, function as endearments, and Bottom repeatedly addresses them with honorifics, *Master*, *Mounsier*, and *Cavalery*, probably because the roles were played by the noble children who attended the wedding for which this play was originally written. At the least, the secondary references of these attendant spirits suggest endearing attributes, and the actions of these characters show their eagerness to please. They represent Shakespeare's radical reinterpretation of the fairy world that contrasts sharply with the scary folklore published in his own time. (181)

The perceptiveness of Smith's names analysis in his chapter on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is representative of his scholarship throughout the volume. In each chapter, Smith is adept at identifying associations within and among and beyond the names of a comedy's particular cast of characters.

My review of *Names as Metaphors in Shakespeare's Comedies* began with the pronouncement "ambitious". I conclude by noting that, while ambitious in its scope, Grant W. Smith's study has succeeded two-fold: first, by providing the comprehensive analysis of names as metaphors in Shakespeare's comedies that has been lacking in Shakespearean studies until now, and, second, by providing a systematic approach, one grounded in theory and realized in practice, for the study of names in other works of literature. Even literary onomasticians who are not particularly interested in names in Shakespeare's plays, should such people exist, would learn much from reading Smith's meticulous study, as it may provide a veritable model for their own research. The author admits he selected the comedies as his focus because "Shakespeare was much less constrained by historical sources and thereby much more inventive with names when writing his comedies" (xiv), but this reviewer hopes Smith will follow up his study of names in Shakespeare's comedies with studies of names in Shakespeare's histories and names in Shakespeare's tragedies so that readers may have a complete set.

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