

VU Research Portal

[Book review of:] Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture
Steenbergh, Kristine

published in
English Studies
2021

DOI (link to publisher)
[10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766](https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766)

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license
Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)
Steenbergh, K. (2021). [Book review of:] Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture. *English Studies*, 102(8), 1177-1179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:
vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture

Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture, edited by Simon Smith, Arden Shakespeare Intersections, London, Bloomsbury, 2020. 382 pp., £130.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-4742-7323-7

Kristine Steenbergh

To cite this article: Kristine Steenbergh (2021) Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture, English Studies, 102:8, 1177-1179, DOI: [10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766](https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766>



Published online: 26 May 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 70



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

melancholy and made extensive use of performative exaggeration. These entertainments both confirmed traditional gender roles and allowed women some autonomy. Chapter 6 is dedicated wholly to Mary Wroth's *Urania* and her sonnet sequence. In these texts, Wroth is capable of creating a distinctly female Baroque subject, one who both accepts her place in society and simultaneously tries to resist it by trying to find the language to express her gendered experiences. In chapter 7, Waller traces the move away from Baroque style in the works of Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn. While both these women and their texts are traditionally recognised as sharing many features of the Baroque, Waller shows that they also contain elements of the emerging Enlightenment. As such, *The Female Baroque* charts the emergence and fading out of the Baroque period, style, and ideology in England.

While Waller convincingly demonstrates that many of the texts in his study share some features with the Baroque style, some of the texts are labelled as only "accidentally" Baroque, as in the case of Anne Bradstreet (p. 150). Of Aemilia Lanyer's work, Waller admits that there are only "some (though by no means consistent) connections with the Baroque" (p. 127). This opens up the possibility that the presence of Baroque characteristics in these women's texts as identified by Waller is not evidence of adherence to a style or even awareness of the Baroque on the part of these women, but that "Baroque" is a label that can be arbitrarily assigned. This is particularly the case because all of these women pick and choose from the list of characteristics Waller sees as typical for Baroque discourse – none of them seems to include all characteristics in her literature. What is more, some of these women's texts were produced by men, so are examples of cross-gendered, collaborative texts at best, as in the case of Gertrude More, whose biography was penned by Father Baker. This complicates the suggestion that there was such a notion as a distinctively "Female Baroque". Waller is, however, aware of these potential problems, and acknowledges them throughout his admirably self-reflexive study.

The Female Baroque offers an important contribution to studies of the Baroque and of women's writing. Accidentally left there or not, Waller deftly reveals traces of the Baroque in the works of various women, showing that it allowed them to accept their assigned place in society, while challenge it at the same time, when conventional vocabulary and discourse fell short in allowing them to do so.

Lotte Fikkers

Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands

 l.e.m.fikkers@hum.leidenuniv.nl  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2079-4966>

© 2021 Lotte Fikkers

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1966927>



Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture, edited by Simon Smith, Arden Shakespeare Intersections, London, Bloomsbury, 2020. 382 pp., £130.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-4742-7323-7

The hardcover edition of this edited volume comes in glossy black laminate, with neon letters that jump out at the reader. With its sturdy cover, this 382 page-volume would survive a trip to the park, although it would not fit in the average coat pocket. Reading the book while away from the desk may well serve to strengthen the arm muscles, since the volume weighs just under 750 grammes. When opened, the book's binding makes a crisp crackling sound as it reveals the widely-spaced lines printed on groundwood white paper that feels smooth to

the touch. There is no distinctive smell, but if the reader tucks her nose deep into the leaves, she may distinguish a waft of the black ink used by Lighting Source Ltd to print its pages.


This rather unusual beginning of a book review follows Adam Smyth's instructions for a "sense-alert" description of material texts in the closing chapter of this stimulating collection of essays on Shakespeare and sensory culture. Looking to Shakespeare's works to shape a vocabulary that describes the heft, smell, and sound of books, Smyth makes a case for introducing sensory terms into bibliographical studies. For although they play a role in most people's stories of consuming old books as well as in Shakespeare's representations of material books in his works, the senses "fall outside the parameters of most academic discussions of the material text" (p. 353). Wondering what Samuel Pepys felt, smelt, and touched when he was "sorting his books", as he characteristically puts it in his diaries, Smyth suggests that rather than separating out the various senses, bibliographically inclined literary critics could introduce a more subjective description rooted in the multisensory encounter with the book. Providing a taste of the genre, he includes a description of the sensory experience of *Hamlet's* 1611 quarto and notes, for example, that "the book is neat in the hand, comfortable to hold", while its spine feels fragile: "How many more times can this book be opened?" (p. 364).

Smyth's closing chapter foregrounds two of the many strengths of this volume. Firstly, his invitation to think of the encounter with the material text as a sensory experience shows that if attention to the role and representation of the senses in the works of Shakespeare is perhaps becoming more mainstream, the study of sensory culture can still open up inspiring new avenues in Shakespeare studies. Such new categories of analysis are precisely what the Arden Shakespeare Intersections series at Bloomsbury aims to put forward. Even if sensory studies has grown from a marginal to a core area in certain strands of Shakespeare studies – "rare is the international Shakespeare conference without at least one session explicitly dedicated to the senses", Simon Smith writes in his lucid introduction (p. 1) – this volume not only consolidates the centrality of sensory scholarship, but also succeeds in offering new inroads, methodologies and concepts. Smyth's chapter is an example of such an intervention in a new field, as is the chapter by Patricia Akhimie, which analyzes the role of touch and pinching in *The Tempest* from the perspective of early modern race studies, and the chapter by Natalie K. Eschenbaum, which brings a sensory approach to bear on the question of the animal-human boundary in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The second strongpoint of the volume is its attention to multisensory approaches. The volume opens with a theoretical section, in which Bruce R. Smith takes an inimitable conceptual approach to Shakespeare's senses in five critical framings culminating in historical phenomenology; Steven Connor explores the role of insensibility in early modern sensory studies; while Tanya Pollard analyses the intertextual conversations between Plato and early modern antitheatrical texts to situate early modern appraisals of the ethics of the commercial theatre's appeal to the senses. This is followed by a set of chapters each devoted to one of the five senses, and the final two parts' multidisciplinary and multisensory approaches to the plays and their (twenty-first-century) performance practice. These chapters not only make the reader aware of Shakespeare's tendency to use synaesthetic metaphors in his work, discussed most prominently in Darryl Chalk's contribution on "synaesthetic overload" in *Cymbeline*, but also offer new perspectives on the entanglement of the senses both in early modern thought and in current theatre practice. Holly Dugan, whose chapter discusses the "smell of mortality" in *King Lear*, had earlier called for closer study of the interrelations between the senses (qtd on p. 246), and many of the chapters take up this challenge. The attention to the intermingling of the senses is an attractive and innovative aspect of the volume. Exploring how the recent discovery of mirror neurons can help to rethink the sensory experience of early modern theatre-goers, for example, Jackie Watson's chapter connects the senses to questions of sympathy

and social in- and exclusion at the historical performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Inns of Court in 1602. Erin Sullivan's contribution beautifully traces the interconnectedness of the senses with emotion and cognition in early modern treatises on the passions, and links this historical phenomenology to twenty-first-century productions' reliance on "the visceral language of the senses". She suggests that next to the central role of the five senses in these productions, there are two "additional, 'inner' senses in the contemporary theatrical sensorium: emotion and thought" (p. 295).

The volume is thoughtfully edited by Simon Smith, as appears for example from the valuable cross-references in which authors engage with each other's arguments. The addition of a useful "further reading" section is another thoughtful touch, providing a quick overview of foundational texts and recent work in sensory Shakespeare studies, as well as a list of key books on each of the five senses. *Shakespeare / Sense* will need its sturdy cover, as readers will find themselves returning to its stimulating and careful treatment of sensory studies.

Kristine Steenbergh
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
 K.Steenbergh@vu.nl

© 2021 Kristine Steenbergh
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1926766>



The Fall of a Sparrow: Vivien Eliot's Life and Writings, by Ann Pasternak Slater, London, Faber, 2021, xiii + 770 pp., £35 (hardback), ISBN: 9780571334032

This book is about Eliot's first wife, Vivien Eliot. She was born Vivienne (later called Vivien) in Bury in Lancashire, but her mother came from London. This filled Vivien, unreasonably, with an inferiority complex. She began to feel that she was a working-class girl simply because she was born in Bury in Lancashire. Early in life, she had suffered from several health and psychological problems. She had colitis, menstrual problems, and early in her life, there were fears of tuberculosis. Knowing about her health problems, her mother gently told this to the various suitors who had come along. One such was Charles Buckle, a school master who in any case died in the war. The other one was Scofield Thayer, an American student who had come to Oxford, and he too was forewarned. During his flirtations with Vivien, Scofield had kept Vivien's mother's warning in mind and soon dropped her though he remained friends with her.

Vivien had gone to Switzerland where she met Scofield Thayer's sister Lucy. Lucy soon came to England, and together with Vivien, she went to Oxford where her brother was. Scofield had invited his various (mainly, American) friends to his rooms in his College. Among them was T. S. Eliot who had recently arrived from America. Some English girls had also come to the party. Eliot was young and was keen to lose his virginity. He was charmed by the girls' English looks and accents and was particularly smitten by Vivien, though he did not know her background, and her mother's fears about her. Mysteriously, Vivien and Eliot suddenly got married without the presence of their respective parents in 1915. Eliot's father Henry Ware Eliot was outraged when he learned this. T. S. Eliot had foreseen it all and had asked his friend Ezra Pound to write to his father that he had suddenly got married to a young English girl, and that he had intended to stay in England. Mr Eliot ignored the letter from Ezra Pound. Meanwhile, T. S. Eliot also wrote to his older brother Henry on 2