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## English Language Notes

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*WORKING WITH SHAKESPEARE.* By Howard Mills. Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993; Lanham, MD: Barnes & Noble, 1993. Pp. viii + 247. \$49.50. 0-389-21009-9.

Howard Mills' *Working with Shakespeare* undertakes two tasks, which, when attempted in a book that is readable to undergraduates and interesting to professionals, are formidable. While training the novice to read Shakespeare along the axes that Shakespeare worked out in his own plays, Mills also seeks to "rescue from recent attacks the more practical parts of traditional critics" (vii). This book will be found useful by students of Shakespeare who refuse to forego the "pleasures of the . . . texture" of the plays in pursuit of the bigger picture; by teachers of Shakespeare interested in strategies for leading their students beyond ideological criticism to an aesthetic experience of the words themselves; and by critics who are willing to witness a rebuttal of many latter-twentieth century critical trends that is carried out on a practical, rather than a theoretical, level.

First, the book attempts to help the student "study in a way that cultivates rather than kills off the pleasure" of Shakespeare (2). It offers an antidote to the general-to-particular, thematic approach to Shakespeare that frequently fails to proceed beyond the general to the particular, producing only "premature conclusions and facile overviews" (3). The antidote is a "nuts-and-bolts approach to language and structure" (4) that avoids the tedium of endless definitions of metrical terms and instead invests itself in the construction of speeches and scenes in order to see how they do and do not work. Using scenes from eleven plays (primarily *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry IV, Part One*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Winter's Tale*; secondarily *Henry IV, Part Two*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, and *Coriolanus*), Mills begins each discussion with a quotation of reasonable length and proceeds to listen aloud to those lines, pointing to the minutiae that vivify the drama to the (sensitive) reader. Although every chapter varies in its emphasis, taking on larger and larger components of a play, each chapter gives the reader something every ideal classroom would offer: the chance to look over the shoulders of an



experienced, witty, and pleasantly empathic professor as he (or she) reads a play for its own sake.

The second task places traditional critics such as Johnson, Coleridge, Bradley, Granville-Barker, and Eliot on one side of the scales, and the critics who became especially prominent in the 1980s on the other. Following Jonathan Dollimore, Mills categorizes these 1980s critics as the Cultural, who see Shakespeare leaning toward the left, the New Historicists, who see him leaning toward the right, and the feminists, who see him leaning in both directions. The plea from Mills is for a recognition of the continuities among old and new critics, and the caveat is that newer critics should remain consistent with their stated goals. For example, in the Introduction, Mills cites many critics of the '90s who praise the heterogeneity of post-structuralist criticism, yet at the same time sound increasingly alike — much more alike than were many of their predecessors to each other. Although he doesn't formulate it as such, Mills' contention is that many contemporary critics are blinded by their own mimetic tendencies, and that in over-differentiating their criticism from older criticism, they unhappily comprise a highly homogeneous school that is more indebted to, and less aware of, the past than it realizes. In Mills' words: "those who throw stones shouldn't live in glass houses camouflaged as whited sepulchres" (14).

While the book brandishes such volatile complaints, it is not reactionary. Its main business concerns the effects of Shakespeare's word choice and wordplay on the construction of voices, characters, and scenes. It praises three dispassionate surveys by Terrace Hawkes, Jonathan Dollimore, and Ann Thompson, as well as contributions by other critics of the '80s, including Gary Taylor, Margaret Ferguson, and Graham Holderness. Almost every page concerns itself with close textual analysis, references to a range of critics, and commentary that ties the discussion together. The resulting tapestry is witty, reminiscent of A. P. Rossiter's prose, the scope daring but well defined, and the writing necessarily dense. At times Mills grinds slowly, only to grind exceedingly fine.

Louis Burkhardt