

# Book Review: Gerit Quealy, "Botanical Shakespeare"

Book Review: Gerit Quealy, *Botanical Shakespeare: An Illustrated Compendium of All the Flowers, Fruits, Herbs, Trees, Seeds, and Grasses Cited by the World's Greatest Playwright*, illustrated by Sumié Hasegawa-Collins. Harper Collins, 2017. \$22.99. 205 pp.

This book, conceived by the illustrator Sumié Hasegawa-Collins, is stunningly beautiful. The color illustrations that appear on virtually every page of the main text are gorgeous and appear to also be most accurate. But the book's beauty is far from its only value. The list of plants in this text is extremely thorough and the information provided about them of great worth. There are close to two hundred fruits, herbs, trees, seeds or grasses illustrated and discussed. The author and illustrator designed the book so that the reader can see what any plant mentioned by Shakespeare looks like, and Gerit Quealy also provides many quotations about these plants from the plays, the sonnets, and Shakespeare's other poetry.

The sources that Quealy and Hasegawa-Collins used were primarily herbals and gardening books contemporary with Shakespeare, especially those by John Gerard, with also an acknowledgement of Henry Nicholson Ellacombe's exhaustive *The Plant-lore and Garden-craft of Shakespeare* (1878). I was especially interested in the clear connections that Quealy showed between Shakespeare's use of plants and Gerard's *Herbal*, demonstrating that Shakespeare must have read the book with some care and referred to it frequently. Quealy carefully notes the various texts, both early modern and recent, that she utilized in her research. It is an impressive range.

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*interested in the topic. It is perfect to dip into, reading a few pages at a time. With the stunning illustrations and a fascinating topic, this book should have a very wide appeal. It would be lovely to own and lovely to give as a gift.*

The introduction has a number of useful sections. I found the section, "The Birth of Botanicals," especially valuable. Quealy describes how not only herbals but also books about gardens and tree planting were published during Shakespeare's time.

There is also a fascinating short piece on the connections between Shakespeare's references to fruit, plants, and flowers and sexuality, as well as a discussion of Shakespearean characters whose names imply plants.

There is such a range in the book. The page on garlic has two lovely illustrations and quotations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *1 Henry IV*, *Coriolanus*, and the *Winter's Tale*. Another page has both the poppy and the potato with lovely illustrations. Though I am familiar with both the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Troilus and Cressida*, I was surprised to see that there are mentions of potatoes in them. There are nine lovely pages of rose illustrations and quotations.

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The book concludes with nearly twenty pages of thorough descriptions of each plant and what was known about it in Shakespeare's time. This section is of such great value as well. The information is fascinating to read about. The author describes seven different kinds of apples and eight

varieties of roses.

– *Carole Levin, University of Nebraska*