



# **Word against Word: Shakespearean Utterance (Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture)**

*James R. Siemon*

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*Word against Word* offers a new approach to Shakespearean drama, and in particular to Shakespeare's *Richard II*, through an extended engagement with the Bakhtinian concept of art as a form of social utterance. The book is the first to explore this central Bakhtinian conception and its associated notions of social accent, dialogism, and heteroglossia in the context of drama and of Shakespeare studies.

James R. Siemon begins by examining the variety of accents, discourses, and behaviors that competed for the social space of early modern England. He surveys Shakespeare and his contemporaries, including dramatists, poets, and other writers, in order to document early modern attitudes toward the implications of sociolinguistic behavior in a heteroglot environment. While ranging broadly, the book takes *Richard II* as an exemplary instance of Bakhtinian utterance, showing the play to be, despite its apparent thematic and formal unities, an arena marked by struggles among competing groups and orientations, with their socially defined languages and assumptions. The figure of Shakespeare's King Richard emerges as a revealing example of a form of subjectivity constructed amid the demands of conflicting voices.

Taking his lead from V. N. Volosinov's stress on the social implications of formal elements of utterance, Siemon argues for the utility of formal analysis in historical and new historical study. To this end he reconsiders the social implications of such features as tonality, diction, timing, gesture, and metaphor. His analysis extends not only to *Richard II* but also to the materials on which historians and new historians have based arguments about the sociopolitical location of the theater, the role of honor culture, the rise of agrarian enclosure, and the cultural polarization of English society.

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