



Constructing a World: Shakespeare's England and the New Historical Fiction

Martha Tuck Rozett

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Constructing a World: Shakespeare's England and the New Historical Fiction Martha Tuck Rozett
Examines recent developments in historical fiction, with particular attention to the way contemporary writers have portrayed Shakespearean England.

Taking its title from Umberto Eco's postscript to *The Name of the Rose*, the novel that inaugurated the New Historical Fiction in the early 1980s, *Constructing the World* provides a guide to the genre's defining characteristics. It also serves as a lively account of the way Shakespeare, Marlowe, Raleigh, Queen Elizabeth I, and their contemporaries have been depicted by such writers as Anthony Burgess, George Garrett, Patricia Finney, Barry Unsworth, and Rosalind Miles. Innovative historical novels written during the past two or three decades have transformed the genre, producing some extraordinary bestsellers as well as less widely read serious fiction. Shakespearean scholar Martha Tuck Rozett engages in an ongoing conversation about the genre of historical fiction, drawing attention to the metacommentary contained in "Afterwords" or "Historical Notes"; the imaginative reconstruction of the diction and mentality of the past; the way Shakespearean phrases, names, and themes are appropriated; and the counterfactual scenarios writers invent as they reinvent the past.

"Martha Tuck Rozett gracefully handles a great deal of material with economy and precision, at once rehearsing traditional views of the subject while also offering an adventurous review of the contemporary scene. Though the subject of historical fiction has been a topic of interest for many years, no one to my knowledge has managed to deal so effectively as Rozett does with the postmodern development of what she calls the New Historical Fiction." — George Garrett, author of *Death of the Fox*

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