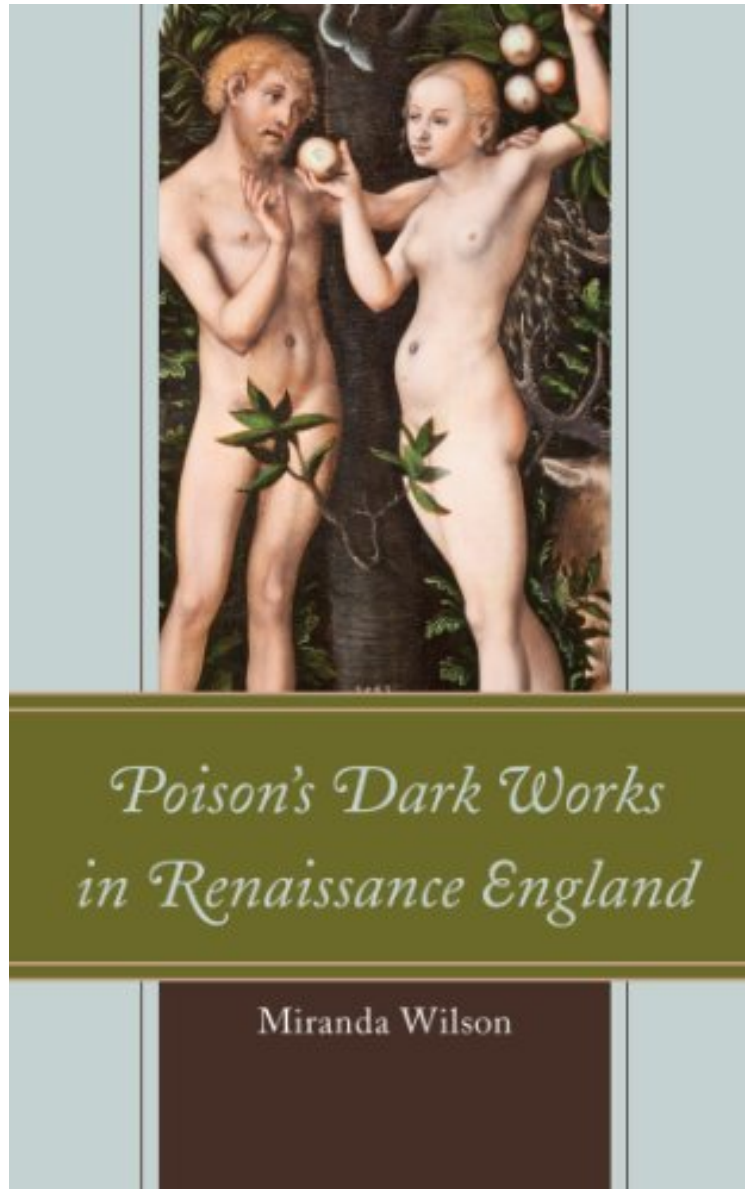


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## Poison's Dark Works in Renaissance England

*Miranda Wilson*

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**Miranda Wilson : Poison's Dark Works in Renaissance England** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Poison's Dark Works in Renaissance England:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Too much philosophy and opinion, not enough historical data  
By Lady de Winter  
This is a work of academic research. The writer focused mostly on the contemporary social attitudes TOWARD poisoning. There were a few specific historical anecdotes, which was the material I was looking for, but not as many as I would have liked.

Poison's Dark Works in Renaissance England considers the ways sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fears of poisoning prompt new models for understanding the world even as the fictive qualities of poisoning frustrate attempts at certainty. Whether English writers invoke literal poisons, as they do in so many revenge dramas, homicide cases, and medical documents, or whether poisoning appears more metaphorically, as it does in a host of theological, legal, philosophical, popular, and literary works, this particular, "invisible" weapon easily comes to embody the darkest elements of a more general English appetite for imagining the hidden correlations between the seen and the unseen. This book is an inherently interdisciplinary project. This book works from the premise that accounts of poisons and their operations in Renaissance texts are neither incidental nor purely sensational; rather, they do moral, political, and religious work which can best be assessed when we consider poisoning as part of the texture of Renaissance culture. Placing little known or less-studied texts (medical reports, legal accounts, or anonymous pamphlets) alongside those most familiar to scholars and the larger public (such as poetry by Edmund Spenser and plays by William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton) allows us to appreciate the almost gravitational pull exerted by the notion of poison in the Renaissance. Considering a variety of texts, written for disparate audiences, and with diverse purposes, makes apparent the ways this crime functions as both a local problem to be solved and as an apt metaphor for the complications of epistemology.

Wilson is quite effective on how poison serves the culture as a way to think through sin and error, on the one hand, and to confront the limits to knowledge, on the other. (American Behavioral Scientist) This book convincingly argues that a 'preoccupation' with poison unifies texts across 'a variety of discourses' (xx). (Modern Philology) If identifying social flashpoints around poison is shooting fish in a barrel, the fish are worth the shooting and Wilson is a skilled marksman. Drawing lucidly on a wide range of early modern sources, Wilson shows that poisoning obsessed the early modern imagination largely because it seemed so difficult to detect and to prevent. . . . As a final note, I must commend the author for her choices of absorbing illustrations from Renaissance books; they enhance the present volume immensely. In all, this book is fascinating in its subject matter, articulate in its presentation, and admirable in its scholarship. It will, no doubt, provoke much thought in students and scholars of the Renaissance. (Renaissance Quarterly) About the Author Miranda Wilson is assistant professor of English at the University of Delaware.