Jane Mattisson, Kristianstad University, Sweden

Wordsmiths & Warriors

Review of Wordsmiths & Warriors: The English-Language Tourist's Guide to Britain by David and Hilary Crystal.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 424pp.

Wordsmiths & Warriors relates a real journey of thousands of miles undertaken by David and Hilary Crystal. The result is a fascinating combination of English-language history and travelogue (the study gives detailed instructions on how to find each place mentioned). David is responsible for the descriptions, and Hilary, for the full-colour photographs. The book comprises a guide for those wishing to follow in their footsteps; at the same time, it reflects the chronology of the language. The Crystals visit places associated with such well-known writers as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth; dictionary compilers such as Johnson and Murray; and a number of well-known and lesser-known dialect writers, elocutionists, and grammarians. Warrior wordsmiths such as King Alfred are also mentioned.

Wordsmiths & Warriors emphasises the centrality of the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and early modern periods in the development of the English language as it is known today. A progressive view of language change and transition is generally avoided in the study in favor of a more personal selection of texts. The scope of the book is wide, incorporating small villages as well as major cities, ancient texts and more modern ones. Fifty-seven chapters take us to places as far apart as St Albans, Peterborough, West Malvern, Grasmere, Bath, Pegwell Bay, Lindisfarne, Cerne Abbas, Bourne, Canterbury, and Oxford. Wordsmiths & Warriors gives its readers an appetite to know more as fascinating details about the relationship between places and literary works emerge. The most important names are included: Chaucer (Southwark and Canterbury); Shakespeare (Stratford-upon-Avon and Park Street, London – the location of the original Globe Theatre), Dryden, Burns, Wordsworth, Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, and Dylan Thomas. The Bible is

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discussed in detail in relation to a number of geographical locations, including Lutterworth, Leicestershire, where Wycliffe translated the Bible in the 14th century, and Hampton Court Palace, where the King James Bible evolved at the famous Hampton Court conference.

A number of chapters consider works of reference, such as dictionaries and encyclopedias. Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language (1755) takes the reader to Lichfield and London. The original Encylopaedia Britannica, known as Chambers Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, compiled upon a New Plan (1768), introduces the reader to Peebles and Edinburgh in Scotland.

The Crystals also discuss poor writers who became rich as a result of their literary productions. A case in point is Joseph Wright of Saltaire, a so-called 'donkey boy' (a donkey cart driver) who ultimately became Professor of Philology in Oxford and compiler of the English Dialect Dictionary (1898-1905). The Crystals conclude that spoken language puts people on the same level; writing, for some of our most famous authors, is a way to achieve social advancement.

Wordsmiths & Warriors is an excellent reference book for teachers and students of English literature and language alike. It relates developments in English to historical moments and places in Britain, making the study of English literature and language both fascinating and accessible. A scholarly work by one of the most famous contemporary writers, editors, lecturers, and broadcasters in the world (David Crystal), and the accomplished sub-editor of encyclopedias published by Cambridge and Penguin (Hilary Crystal), Wordsmiths & Warriors demonstrates that language is a living thing. Beautifully illustrated and with a comprehensive general index as well as an index of places, Wordsmiths & Warriors is a valuable resource for all interested in learning more about the English language and the places associated with it.

The Crystals' journey is based on a love of the English language, English literature, and of Britain itself. In his introduction, David Crystal writes that the journey "has been a hugely rewarding experience, which added a sense of place to my knowledge of language topics and personalities, and I strongly recommend it as a powerful way of making language study come alive". Picking up David's challenge and embarking on this journey, the reader will certainly not be disappointed with Wordsmiths & Warriors as a guide.



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