

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human Study Guide

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom

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Plot Summary

Many authors have published critiques of the plays of Shakespeare. Some of the best known romantic critics are Hazlitt, W. H. Auden and A.C. Bradley. Contemporaries of Shakespeare include the playwrights Ben Jonson, a critic of Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, a playwright who had much influence on Shakespeare. The author, Harold Bloom begins this monumental book with the thesis that Shakespeare with his plays invented the modern notion of human personality. Actually, this claim is based largely on the famous characters Hamlet, Falstaff, Iago, Macbeth, Edmund, Edgar, Lear, Rosalind and Cleopatra, who appear in a total of 8 plays. While the plays, Hamlet, Macbeth, Henry IV Part I and II, King Lear, Othello, As You Like It, and Antony and Cleopatra, are considered by the author to be Shakespeare's masterpieces, many other plays have characters of a nearly similar quality. The author has mined the rich literature of Shakespeare criticism to make his evaluation of Shakespeare and his plays.

A particularly strong influence on the author's interpretation of Shakespeare is the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche had the idea that Hamlet thought too well, and even though often Dionysian, was not nearly Dionysian, or wild and spontaneous enough. Another interesting observation of the author is that many of Shakespeare's plays were influenced and were a response to the plays of Christopher Marlowe. Shakespeare also may have become politically cautious after the murder of Marlowe by English intelligence agents. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, mainly an out-of-control evil character, is answered by the late Shakespeare play The Tempest, with the conflicted sorcerer Prospero, who ultimately abandons his sorcery to return to his post as the Duke of Milan. In Marlowe's Jew of Malta, Barnabas' wickedness is stopped by boiling him in a pot of oil. In Shakespeare's play, The Merchant of Venice, Shylock is forced to match his wits in court with Portia disguised as a man, and to admit guilt and to convert to Christianity. The author sees Shakespeare as endowing his characters with a superb amount of inward thinking that Marlowe's characters, despite their loud speeches, never had.

The author looks at the first 9 plays by Shakespeare as rehearsals for the greatness to come. Already, the play Julius Caesar had a fantastic compactness and unity to it, and Romeo and Juliet had been a popular play because it deserved to be. Shakespeare's comedies had begun to introduce introspective characters such as Shylock and the ever resourceful female character Rosalind in As You Like It. The history plays had been far from boring, with the play Henry IV being the home of the rollicking and ironic character Falstaff, probably the favorite of all the author's characters. Henry V had been written as a great patriotic play with great speeches, though it had shown that Shakespeare could also still construct plays without characters saying soliloquies. This had ushered in the era of Shakespeare's greatest plays such as Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra. The late plays of Shakespeare are the most troubling for the author. The Tempest is one of Shakespeare's great plays, but the author complains it barely has any plot. The conflicting forces of good and evil do not leave the viewer with easy choices in this problematic play. The author is not sure whether to regard

Prospero, the leading character of the Tempest, as being the center of a comedy or a tragedy.



Shakespeare's Universalism, Chap. 1-2

Shakespeare's Universalism, Chap. 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Shakespeare's Universalism

Pp 1-20

Many authors have published critiques of the plays of Shakespeare. Some of the best known romantic critics are Hazlitt, W. H. Auden and A.C. Bradley. Contemporaries of Shakespeare include the playwrights Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe. The critic Dr. Sam Johnson reminded us that we owe Shakespeare for the invention of the human personality. Some characters from Shakespeare like Hamlet and Falstaff seem larger than life. Hamlet and Falstaff are charismatic in the way they move the reader and can be compared to the Old Testament God in the Bible.

Later authors copied Shakespeare in creating characters that have personalities and true inner mental lives. Shakespeare plays made writers tend toward self-reflection. The critic G. K. Chesterton thought that Shakespeare was a Catholic moralist like himself, while others saw the secular side of Shakespeare. A key influence on the author's view of Shakespeare was the philosopher Nietzsche, who saw Shakespeare create memory with pain. The critic Dr. Sam Johnson dreaded seeing the painful death of Cordelia in the play King Lear, as well as the death of Hamlet in the play Hamlet. For this and many other reasons, such critics saw the collected Shakespeare plays as powerful as the Bible in shaping the reality and thinking of the Western world.

Part I, the Early Comedies

Comedy of Errors

Pp 21-27

The Comedy of Errors is Shakespeare's shortest and most unified play. Antipholus arrives in Ephesus with his servant Dromio, and both are soon confused by their long lost identical twins being on the scene. There is much madcap violence in the play, but only Dr. Pinch gets hurt. Shakespeare confronts the viewer's personality with his method of having the characters lose themselves to find themselves. There is a lot of thought on how social relationships determine society, when a woman to whom a man looked to be his future wife suddenly is declared to actually be his sister. The audience's confrontation with the difference between thought and reality is tempered by the clowns in the play and much humor including some of a bawdy nature.

The Taming of the Shrew

pp. 28-35

The play began with a strange scene in which it is said to be performed before a nobleman, thus being largely a play within a play. Petruchio set out to tame Kate, but the question remained if she will ultimately tame him as master of their relationship. The play was a farce as well as a romantic comedy, as Kate slowly but surely was forced to abandon her wild ways and marry Petruchio. The play became extremely ironic at the end when Kate delivered a speech on the proper behavior of a wife to her husband. Her beautiful speech about being an obedient wife showed her development, though the audience wondered if it was true. Shakespeare tended to make his women stronger characters than the men, except for Hamlet and Falstaff.



Chaps. 3-5

Chaps. 3-5 Summary and Analysis

Two Gentlemen of Verona

pp. 36-40

The author sees Two Gentleman of Verona as a weak play. The main saving grace of the play is Proteus' man, Launce, where Launce makes a lot of jokes about his dog. Proteus is in love with Julia, while Valentine has a stronger love relationship with Silvia. Proteus ends up slandering Valentine and driving him into exile. Julia disguises herself as a boy and searches for Proteus. Things get complicated with disguises and at one point Proteus tries to rape Silvia. Everyone ends up reconciling, with Proteus implying that whatever woman with whom a man ends up is fine. The play is seen as sort of a trying out of themes better used in Love's Labor's Lost and in Twelfth Night.

Part II- The First Histories

Henry VI

pp. 43-50

The author sees resemblances of the play Henry VI to the play Tamberlaine the Great, by Christopher Marlowe. The play begins with a funeral dirge for Henry V that reminds the author of Marlowe's work. The author is disturbed by Shakespeare's brief portrayal of Joan of Arc, who is in the play as what the author calls a whore at the same time being a heroine. There is some fun in Part II with the depiction of Cade running his rebellion against King Henry VI. There is a depiction of anarchy with choice lines quoted of Cade and a wild mob that hangs a poor clerk. The villain, the future king Richard III makes his appearance in the third part of the play. Henry VI dies in the Tower of London, and Shakespeare is ready to make his next plays about the English War of the Roses.

King John

pp. 51-63

The author looks at Faulconbridge as the first real Shakespearean character who goes beyond a Marlowe-type character. Faulconbridge is the bastard son of Richard the Lion Hearted, and a larger-than-life character like Hamlet would later be. Faulconbridge is tough as he deals with his royal heritage, and the so-called poisonous potion, the truth. The author loves the self-reflective quality of Faulconbridge, who sees his own mind developing while in action.



King John is a less sympathetic protagonist, but has some interesting parallels to Shakespeare's Queen Elizabeth. King John has the problem of Arthur who is a rival heir to his throne. John's biggest problem is he is mother dominated. Faulconbridge makes speeches about the duplicity of the world that are also reflected in Shakespeare's sonnets. Faulconbridge maintains the honor of his late, proud father, Richard the Lion Hearted.



Chaps. 6-8

Chaps. 6-8 Summary and Analysis

Richard III

pp. 64-73

The author admits that Richard III is a successful, popular play, though he still sees the strong influence of Marlowe on it. Richard III is an overwhelming character, who is also a parody of himself. He is so evil that it is almost a joke. The author is most overwhelmed by the spectacle in which Richard seduces Lady Anne after killing her father and husband. The author is unsatisfied by the lack of inner dialogue and a self-critical self in the mind of Richard. Thus, Richard as a villain does not reach the heights of Shakespeare villains like Iago in Othello, and Macbeth in the play of the same name. The author thinks that at the end of the play where Richard loses his battles, the play is quite disorganized. Ironically, Richard III says some of his most famous lines then; for example, the one about offering his kingdom for a horse. Richard puts on a great show and is very theatrical, but in a sense his character is a rehearsal for the internally defined monsters in later plays.

Part III

The Apprentice Tragedies

Titus Andronicus

pp. 77-86

The author remembers performances of Titus Andronicus that had been alternately funny and horrifying. Aaron the Moor is a funny character, but otherwise this is too serious a play unless the playgoer sees the ironies in it. Titus is made unsympathetic when he orders the sacrifice of Tamora's eldest son. It is a horrifying play, ending with Titus killing his daughter Lavinia. The author makes the point that there is a basis to compare the Marlowe character Barabas to Titus Andronicus's Aaron the Moor. The author makes the point that Aaron the Moor is a more outrageous character than Barabas and Shakespeare has outdone Marlowe. Shakespeare had gotten the opportunity to get the Marlowe style out of his system, and to progress by developing the personalities of his characters. The author makes the point that the reader should remember that Marlowe was assassinated by English government agents.

Romeo and Juliet

pp. 87-103



The play, *Romeo and Juliet* is extremely popular, but overwhelmed by the tragic ending, according to the critic T. S. Eliot. The author acknowledges the intensity of the love relationship between Romeo and Juliet. Mercutio and the Nurse are minor characters who steal the show when they are present. Before his death, Mercutio makes a long speech about Queen Mab or in this case the whore Mab. This is a device used by Shakespeare to clearly address the erotic, while the more poetic passages are spoken by Romeo and Juliet.

There is considerable irony about the young lovers, in that the chief rival for each of them is the death that has sought them out. This is reinforced with the two funniest characters in the play, Mercutio and the Nurse being the ones most associated with death. The Nurse in particular is a dark figure, who ends up tempting Juliet to her death by poisoning. The mixture between the sweet love speeches between Romeo and Juliet, and the oncoming deaths of the lovers is what gives the play its bittersweet quality and its power. The odds are against the lovers, and prefigure the bigger tragedy of the play *Hamlet*.



Chaps. 9-11

Chaps. 9-11 Summary and Analysis

Julius Caesar

pp. 104-118

Due to its tight plot, Julius Caesar has long been a favorite in the school curriculum. The author looks at the play as the tragedy of Brutus, because Caesar has only 150 lines and is killed mid-play. Even in this short appearance, Caesar is a grand person, with a real inner life. The bombast of Caesar as he faces death, makes him a fascinating character, though somewhat overwhelming for the early critic Ben Jonson.

The author makes a close connection between the assassin Brutus, and the later evil character, Macbeth from the play Macbeth. The author believes that Brutus is not as consistently an evil character as Macbeth. The play Julius Caesar is full of irony, as the tension of the Caesar-Brutus relationship is developed. The play maintains its ambiguity in that there is no clear so-called good guy.

Part IV— The High Comedies

Love's Labour's Lost

pp. 121-147

The author calls Love's Labour's Lost his favorite Shakespeare play due to the fireworks of great lines spoken by the characters. Here the male protagonist Berowne is pitted against his clever and aggressive love interest, Rosaline. The tension in the play is around Berowne's narcissistic approach to women, versus Rosaline's intellect and humor. Many pages are covered by Berowne's rhetoric of love and eroticism. Like other of Shakespeare's plays, in Love's Labour's Lost, the social classes mix with characters such as the King meeting Armado, a base soldier and Armado's comic sidekick Moth.

The play comes together in Act V, Scene II as the four women analyze their lovers' tactics and wait for them. The wit of the women overcomes the men, with love's labor actually being lost and it not being resolved if the men will get their women. There is comedy though Rosaline gets to torture her love interest Berowne. Another of the women, the Princess, shows her wit in denying her love to Navarre. The comedy is not produced with the success of love, but from the fear of the men losing their loves to other men and being cuckolded.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

pp. 148-170



A Midsummer Night's Dream is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, with three marriages finishing the final act. The author resents recent productions that oversexualize the play. The mélange of characters is divided among the lovers versus the faeries and other mythological creatures. Bottom is a very funny clown who has something for everyone, though not reaching the intellectual level of the later character Sir John Falstaff. The supernatural couple Oberon and Titania provide an extra dimension with their feuds before they are finally reconciled. Part of the confusion of the play is Oberon's struggle to get Titania back. The author, like the critic Empson, does his best to defend the faeries from charges that they are purely arbitrary as they have Puck make people fall in love. Puck has the ability, like a Cupid, to arrange human's and immortal's affections. The dreamy atmosphere of the play is made so by the faeries' magic and the poetic speeches of characters like Puck and Bottom.



Chaps. 12-14

Chaps. 12-14 Summary and Analysis

The Merchant of Venice

pp. 171-191

The author defines Shylock as a comic villain, and the one who gives Portia the power to dominate the play. Antonio, as the good Christian, is overtly anti-Semitic. The play is largely a reaction formation to Marlowe's play, the Jew of Malta. Shylock has the full character of a human being with mixed feelings, yet still can demand his pound of flesh. The author is somewhat upset that Shakespeare ends with Shylock agreeing to a forced religious conversion to Christianity. There is an added dimension, in that unlike in the Marlowe play, the Christians in the play are shown to be often as vicious as the Jew, Shylock. The author also finds Shylock to be a predecessor for later Shakespeare villains Edmund in King Lear, and Iago in Othello.

Much Ado About Nothing

pp. 192-201

Beatrice and Benedick are not as funny a couple as those in the play Love's Labour's Lost, but they are still pretty funny. Being such a play out of nothing, it is a very Nietzschean play, but the nothing to which the title refers is love. Beatrice is a merry character according to the author, although she bids Benedick to try to kill Claudio. Claudio himself has his love for Hero, so that is the play's subplot. In the end, Benedick is married to Beatrice, which may not be a perfect marriage, but is good enough.

As You Like It

pp. 202-225

George Bernard Shaw was very impressed with the character Rosalind, who spends much of the play, As You Like It, masquerading as a boy. This gives her a chance to be aggressive as a woman and get her man, Orlando. Rosalind is a strong character like Hamlet would be later. Rosalind could be a genius in a play in which all the leading characters are not harmed. Rosalind and Orlando play at love, but in a way that is not overly full of romantic illusions.

Another reviewer, G.K Chesterton claims that Rosalind seeks to find her father in the woods more than her lover, Orlando. The author disagrees, and says that Rosalind is giving Orlando a chance to become mature. There may also be an attack in the play against moralizing playwrights, like Shakespeare contemporary Ben Jonson. This is seen in the famous speech by the character Jaques on how all the world is a stage and on the different ages of man. Other touches in the play are the character Touchstone,

who while chasing his own Audrey, refers to the death by stabbing of the playwright Marlowe. Shakespeare refers to his overall political cautiousness, after Marlowe had been killed by English secret government agents.



Chaps. 15-17

Chaps. 15-17 Summary and Analysis

Twelfth Night

pp. 226-246

Twelfth Night is a zany comedy that is best performed at a fast exuberant pace. Everyone seems quite mad including the shipwrecked Viola, who immediately falls in love with Orsini. The critic C. L. Barber calls the play a festive comedy, but it has a strongly Nietzschean tendency of anarchy as well. The lusty Orsini seeks Olivia, and ends up using Viola, disguised as a boy as his go-between. The play develops with Orsini leading a wild celebration that is not dragged down by other characters. There is a sort of duel between the two leading ladies, Viola and Olivia. The author sees that Olivia, in a way, falls in love with the Viola disguised as a boy, though her love ends up with Cesario, and the author thinks that this has lesbian implications.

The subplot revolves around Olivia's house steward Malvolio, and his being nagged and harassed by the sarcastic character Maria. Malvolio is the sham Puritan, of whom fun is made like a Puritan from a Ben Jonson play. Malvolio is also tormented by the character Feste, who haunts Malvolio while he is tied up in a dark room. At the end of the play nearly everyone gets married, while Malvolio flees and Feste sings a song.

Part V

The Major Histories

Richard II

pp. 249-270

Richard II is a lyrical play, where the king's poetry gets better as his fate becomes worse, until he is executed. As the critic Graham Bradshaw states, Richard's lyricism is countered by the deadly character Bolingbroke, the usurper of the throne. Richard's poetry and metaphors are described by the author as a sort of Nietzschean escape from reality. The play is very reserved and the audience does not suffer with Richard II when he dies since the language does not make Richard a very sympathetic figure.

The Irish poet Yeats found glory in the submission of Richard II to Bolingbroke who became the new king Henry IV. The play is staged in Shakespeare's time just after a failed rebellion of the Earl of Southampton against Queen Elizabeth I. This has a strong resonance since, afterward, the Earl of Southampton is executed. Richard has dignity before his death, giving a long soliloquy that reminds the reader of Hamlet's speeches. There is finally rage in Richard II before being put to death. Bolingbroke, the new king,

is a hypocrite who promises to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land after his success through murder.

Henry IV

pp. 271- 314

The prominent character Sir John Falstaff is the favorite character of the author. Falstaff is the close companion of King Henry IV's son, Prince Hal. Sir John is a sort of comic Socrates, full of philosophy for the wild Prince Hal, later King Henry V. Falstaff appears in both plays Henry IV Part I and II, and at the end is violently rejected by the new King Henry V. Before then, Falstaff appears while Hal is arranging sex with the prostitute Doll Tearsheet. Unlike a Christopher Marlowe character, Falstaff philosophizes for amusement, not to persuade. The author disagrees with the critic W. H. Auden, who says that Falstaff promotes some sort of Christian justice or charity through his remarks.

The play Henry IV has other comics in it like Hotspur, who is quite bloody minded, calling out from the stage, to die all, die merrily, as battles are fought. Hal has Hotspur killed at the end of Henry IV Part I, but not Falstaff. The critic Graham Bradshaw compares Falstaff to the villain Iago in the play Othello, since Falstaff is a disturbing force to Hal. Falstaff tells the truth, but other characters like Hal do not want to hear him. Prince Hal accuses Falstaff of cowardice, but the author agrees with critic Maurice Morgan's defense of Falstaff's courage.

Critic A. C. Bradley enjoys Falstaff's ability to not moralize. Falstaff is not bent down by the institutions like Prince Hal is, the future king. Hal ends up cursing Falstaff as a corrupter of the youth, after for years enjoying the company and education he has gotten from Falstaff. In a rage, Hal fights Sir John, and when Sir John Falstaff lays down and pretends to be dead, Hal feels sorry. It's a lot of fun when Falstaff jumps up, alive and well at the end of Henry IV, Part I.



Chaps. 18-20

Chaps. 18-20 Summary and Analysis

The Merry Wives of Windsor

pp. 315-318

The author mainly admires The Merry Wives of Windsor play as the basis for Verdi's opera Falstaff. The Falstaff shown here is a false Falstaff compared with the Henry IV plays. The play could be funny as a sadomasochistic exercise, but not in a serious way. The Sir John Falstaff in love theme is perhaps a play to propitiate Queen Elizabeth I with some light humor. Shakespeare knew that Marlowe had fallen out of favor and had been murdered by the English Secret Service, so he did not want to end up the same way.

Henry V

pp. 319-324

The play Henry V had been used as a patriotic statement, but actually it does not have the variety of expression of the play Henry IV. Amid the glory of battles and the famous speeches by Henry V, there is much suspicion that Shakespeare was writing to be ironic on the subject of war. The character Fluellen compares Henry V the conqueror of France to Alexander the Great of the ancient world. Then he adds that Henry V like Alexander the Great also ends up killing his friends and turning away from friends like the fat knight Sir John Falstaff. The play is a superb pageant, but the reader or viewer needs to know its limits.

Part VI

The Problem Plays

Troilus and Cressida

pp. 327- 344

As part of the ancient story of the siege of Troy, the hero Hector was killed by Achilles and his thugs, and the woman Cressida betrayed Troilus for her lover Diomedes. The character Thersites avoided being killed by his cowardliness, and spent the play moralizing on lust, war and other subjects. It was sort of a satire of the playwright Ben Johnson. The critic Graham Bradshaw saw Thersites as a nihilist, but the author found Thersites' reactions justifiable since he was forced to be a clown for first Achilles and then Ajax.



Troilus at the opening of the play displayed his dog-like lust for Cressida, who betrayed him for the Greek Diomedes. Another character who livened up the play was the politician Ulysses. Ulysses' speeches were about the power of the command behind him and Achilles, which seemed to refer to the state apparatus in England that killed the playwright Marlowe. The play had other political allusions, and probably never was played in Shakespeare's England.



Chaps. 21-23

Chaps. 21-23 Summary and Analysis

All's Well That Ends Well

pp. 345-357

The critic Dr. Samuel Johnson complains that Helena, after much work, marries Bertram, a useless man. This is one of the many mismatches that Shakespeare set up in his plays, where the women are usually smarter. The author notes that it is not important if these marriages are happy, because ironically the happiest marriage in Shakespeare is that of the murderers Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. All's Well That Ends Well is a fun play with the famous "bed trick" where Helena manages to conceive Bertram's child. The author notes the joke that for men, women are all the same in the dark. Helena becomes the heroine of this bittersweet comedy.

Measure for Measure

pp. 358-380

Measure for Measure begins with the Duke on holiday, and his deputy Angelo taking over Vienna. Soon, Angelo has Claudio charged with unlawful fornication with Juliet and he is sentenced to death. The critic Marc Shell argues that by Shakespeare making fun of Angelo's strict enforcement of the law on fornication, this is a metaphor for Shakespeare's using the play to attack the notion of law and order altogether. Shell views the center of the play as being when Isabella refuses to bed Angelo in order to save Claudio, her brother. There is much madcap humor in the play, with the would-be executioner Vincentio letting the murderer Barnadine escape execution, after the Duke in disguise proclaims that Barnadine is unfit to live or die. In the end, the three people classified as criminals, Barnadine, Claudio and after exposure Angelo, are all freed. Claudio and Juliet and other couples are married, making this a barely happy ending.

VIII-

The Great Tragedies

Hamlet

pp. 383-431

The critic T.S. Eliot says that the play Hamlet is too long, and that Hamlet is too big a character for the play. Hamlet is haunted by his father's ghost, giving the play a supernatural aspect. Hamlet displays the skepticism of Shakespeare's contemporary, the philosopher Montaigne. The critic and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche insisted that Hamlet's problem was that he thought too well and too much. Perhaps this explains why



Hamlet takes so long to act against the King, the murderer of his father. Critics like William Empson and Graham Bradshaw claimed that Shakespeare copied from other plays, but the author disagrees with this. There are other versions of Hamlet plays, but Shakespeare often used well-known stories as the basis of his plots. The part that makes Hamlet the play fascinating is the long soliloquies where Hamlet shows his personality. Though Hamlet says he had been a prisoner in Denmark, in a way he had been a free personality, as claimed by the philosopher Hegel. He could have decided to kill King Claudius early in the play but does not do it. The play Hamlet became the standard by which subsequent plays by Shakespeare were judged.



Chaps. 24-26

Chaps. 24-26 Summary and Analysis

Othello

pp. 432-475

The critic William Hazlitt views the center of the play Othello to be the character Iago. Iago's love of power makes him use his genius to spread chaos and death, which then leads to his own death. The critic W. H. Auden finds Iago to be the ultimate practical joker. Shakespeare's Iago has a strong influence on the poet John Milton's construction of the character Satan. Critic A. C. Bradley sees Othello as a dumb, bestial figure who is easily manipulated, and thinks that if the character Hamlet had had to confront Iago, Hamlet would have easily figured out Iago's schemes. In the play Othello, Iago might have totally triumphed in the destruction of Othello and Othello's wife Desdemona, if it were not for Iago's wife Emilia's unexpected exposure of Iago.

Othello is a tragic heroic figure, who is destroyed by his jealousy and psychologically castrated. Ironically, the motivation for Iago's manipulation and destruction of Othello is that Iago has been un-manned and castrated by not being promoted, at least in terms of his thoughts of himself. Shakespeare finds a way to show that the great military hero Othello could still be passive to Desdemona in their courtship as a potential fatal flaw. Iago is Machiavellian enough to evilly destroy Othello. In this way, Shakespeare uses the character Iago to display a nihilistic philosophy like Nietzsche's. Iago's evil greatness is a triumph over the well-known evil characters of Marlowe's plays, due to Iago's developed internal dialogue and seizure of new opportunities. Iago is far more calculating and brilliant than Marlowe's Barabas in the Jew of Malta, or Dr. Faustus in the play of the same name. Some critics like the writer Tolstoy complain that Iago does not have sufficient reason to mount his horrible assault.

King Lear

pp. 476-515

King Lear is one of Shakespeare's great plays that is difficult to perform. Some critics say that the character King Lear is like Job in the Bible, but the author compares Lear more to the old King Solomon in the Bible, who divides his kingdom after death. As Lear is going mad, the play has a second center around Edgar, who bears much suffering disguised as Bedlam Tom, before he can try to help Lear. The leading characters Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, the Duke of Gloucester and Regan love and hate too intensely and they are manipulated by the cool villain Edmund. According to the writer Yeats, love bewilders Lear until he dies. For the critic Dr. Sam Johnson, Act V with the deaths of Lear and his daughter Cordelia is too painful to watch. However, according to the author, the play shows the limits and perils of family love, and how it can conflict with



romantic or sexual love. The critic A. D. Nuttall says that King Lear illuminates realities of human relations that otherwise are not seen.

The writer Emerson warns readers to look for Shakespeare's image in King Lear, or at least the vision that Shakespeare had wanted in it, and not to arbitrarily put the reader's own ideas into the play. Shakespeare shows forced nihilism, with Edgar turning himself into Bedlam Tom, according to the author. Unlike romantic plays, love does not dominate the play King Lear. The author differs with claims by feminist critics such as Janet Adelman, who says that Cordelia is murdered so that Shakespeare could defend masculinity in the play. Edmund's desire for power manages to destroy his alliance with Regan and Goneril against King Lear and in the end Edgar rules the kingdom after Lear's death.

Macbeth

pp. 516-545

In the play Macbeth, Macbeth is a great villain, but the audience ends up identifying with Macbeth. The play takes the viewer into the dark soul of Macbeth, with his character dominating the play. In Nietzsche's work Daybreak (1881) it is argued that Macbeth is not a morality play warning people against tyranny. Instead, Nietzsche claims that in Macbeth, Shakespeare shows the extremes available to choose for the human soul. Macbeth is not free, since he is inexorably forced to commit one crime after another once he has decided to murder King Duncan. Macbeth continues in his evil, but is chased down by failure and runs out of time. The critic Hazlitt comments that Macbeth lives in the present only and is unable to plan for the future.

A sub-theme of Macbeth is the equivocation that enables Macbeth to lie to himself about what he is doing. The witches promise Macbeth easy success, but he fails to realize that he is tearing apart the social fabric of his society. When Macbeth is attacked, he believes that Birnam Wood could never come to Dunsinane, but the opposing army uses part of the trees from the Wood as camouflage. The comic character the porter jokes on the subject of equivocation that drinking alcohol brings on lust, but takes away the ability to have sex. The other character who is suddenly caught up in the consequences of her crimes is Lady Macbeth. Ironically, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, according to the author, are the perfect Shakespearean couple.



Chaps. 27-29

Chaps. 27-29 Summary and Analysis

Antony and Cleopatra

pp. 546-574

Cleopatra dominates the play Antony and Cleopatra, with the critic A. C. Bradley calling her an inexhaustible character. The battle between East and West is the focus of the action of the play, with even Antony and Cleopatra's love affair being a political act. Antony first leaves Cleopatra to go back to Rome to marry the Emperor Octavius' sister, but then his lust for power and for Cleopatra bring him back to the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra. The focus of the play is power politics, with Antony and Cleopatra appearing together in only a few scenes.

Antony is the shallower of the two lead characters. He is in decline already at the beginning of the play. The author contends that the audience does not feel that Antony's death is a tragic event, but merely a historic event. After Antony and Cleopatra have died, a triumphant Roman Emperor Octavius comes in to acknowledge the dead lovers as he triumphs over them. Cleopatra's devotion to Antony increases after Antony's suicide. And yet there is almost a sense of comedy as the dying Antony is brought to Cleopatra, with Cleopatra interrupting Antony's last words and advice to her. The final ironic scene is when a clown presents Cleopatra with the deadly asps, asking if the asps would eat her as they sting her with deadly poison.

Coriolanus

pp. 577-587

The critic William Hazlitt sees in the play Coriolanus a strong representation of the insolence of power. It is a political play where Coriolanus cannot find a home after alienating first the Romans and later the Volprians. Coriolanus' given name is Caius Maritus and he has received the name Coriolanus while defending Rome. The critic T. S. Eliot actually prefers the play Coriolanus to the play Hamlet. Coriolanus ends up surrendering to his mother's Romans and being put to death. According to the author, the character Coriolanus was not introspective like previous plays' characters like Hamlet. Thus, the reader does not know the motivations of Coriolanus when he gives in to the pleas of his mother Voluminia.

Timon of Athens

pp. 588-599

The play Timon of Athens was not finished by Shakespeare for unknown reasons. Timon is a wrathful character who invites friends to a feast and then throws stones at



them. Timon then runs off into the woods. The author thinks that Timon's denunciation of the whores and liars of Athens is actually a veiled denunciation by Shakespeare of the London where he lived. That might be the reason Shakespeare never stages a performance of the play. Timon denounces the camp followers of Alcibiades as whores, in a nasty attack on Alcibiades, a character from a Plato dialogue. The critic and actor Wilson Knight finds this to be an unmatched play with its attack on corruption and venereal disease, but the author disagrees. The play ends with Timon's death by suicide.



Chaps. 30-32

Chaps. 30-32 Summary and Analysis

IX. The Late Romances

Pericles

pp. 603-613

The author insists that the first two acts of *Pericles* were written by a hack named Wilkins, who was employed by Shakespeare. In the beginning, Pericles solves the riddle of the incestuous King of Antioch and is forced to flee. After a shipwreck, Pericles is rescued and marries Thaisa. Shakespeare takes over the writing in Act III, with the god Neptune causing a shipwreck while Thaisa seems to have died while giving birth to Pericles' daughter Marina. The author compares Pericles' speech to Neptune to the later writer Melville, and the character Ahab in *Moby Dick*. Thaisa survives somehow in a coffin that ends up onshore, and eventually is reunited with Pericles and Marina at Diana's Temple. There is comedy when Marina is forced into a brothel, but then persuades all the men there that they should not ravish her. The critic M.C. Bradbrook describes the play *Pericles* as half spectacle and half prophetic vision. The most beautiful vision is at the end when Pericles, his wife Thaisa and daughter Marina are reunited.

Cymbeline

pp. 614-638

The play *Cymbeline* has some resemblances to *Othello*, with a similarly evil character Iachino, who tries to make it appear that Posthumus' wife Imogen has cheated on him. The critic Dr. Sam Johnson complains that there are too many sudden shifts in the play's plot. There are some strange shifts, with Posthumus being exiled from Ancient Britain and ending up in Italy of the Renaissance period. King Cymbeline's daughter Imogen is separated from her two brothers at infancy. While Posthumus is absent, Iachino unsuccessfully tries to trick Imogen into having sex. When this is impossible, he shifts to manipulating her to hold a large chest in her room, where he ends up concealed. Iachino then gathers intimate evidence to boost a claim that Imogen has been unfaithful. Posthumus orders his servant Pisanio to murder Imogen, though Imogen manages to avoid this and tell Pisanio that she is not guilty. At the end, the plot gets more complicated as Imogen is reunited with her brothers, and Posthumus is reconciled to his wife. The play *Cymbeline* has a touch of dark humor, in that Posthumus, even when he repents, is still jealous.

The Winter's Tale

pp. 639-661



The author views the *Winter's Tale* as a strong play, though somewhat jarring in its originality. Leontes is married to Hermione, and fears his wife has committed adultery with his friend Polixenes. The author sees a Nietzschean aspect to Leontes as Leontes' jealous rage explodes against his wife. There is much fantasy and even a supernatural quality to the play, with Hermione seeming to die and then surviving or being resurrected to appear later in the play, along with Hermione's daughter Paulina. Leontes is only shocked into sanity by the apparent death of his wife.

There is a shift in the play in Act IV with the appearance of Autolycus, Prince of Thieves. Autolycus sings poems of love and joy and is the opposite of the jealous Leontes. He is a breath of fresh air when he saves Perdita, just as Paulina has saved Hermione's life. Finally in Act V, Leontes is reunited with Hermione and Perdita. As Ben Jonson writes in introducing Shakespeare's folio, the *Winter's Tale* unites the dark fears of Leontes with the fresh hope of the spring.



Chaps. 33-35

Chaps. 33-35 Summary and Analysis

The Tempest

pp. 662-684

Sadly, the play the Tempest has been badly performed, with the half-human Caliban appearing as an African freedom fighter and other absurdities. A production by Jonathan Miller had Caliban as an American Indian, which the author approved over another production which had Caliban and Ariel as black slaves. The critic and poet Dryden was more accurate when he noted that a half-human could not be classified as a natural man. The critic Browning saw Caliban suffering much because Prospero would not fully adopt him.

The play, the Tempest is centered on the development of the sorcerer Prospero. The author describes Prospero's story as being both comical and tragic. Prospero, with his spirit Ariel, adopts secret hermetic magic. In the course of the play Prospero abandons his magic and decides to return to his life as the Duke of Milan. At the same time, Prospero's daughter Miranda is married to the Prince of Naples. There is drama in Act III in Caliban's declaration of intent to murder Prospero, but Caliban is neutralized by Ariel's presence and music. Still, Caliban continues in evil thoughts and Prospero nearly forgets to stop Caliban's attack in time.

Henry VIII

pp. 685-692

The author believes that the play Henry VIII was written by Shakespeare, with only slight help from John Fletcher. The author complains that the play is a sort of royal pageant with no inward personality for the characters. Some characters fall in position like the divorced Katherine, while the infant Elizabeth is prophesized to be the glorious Queen Elizabeth I. The playwright Ben Jonson was pleased by this praise of the British royal line. There is also a certain amount of drama around Buckingham, who is on the way down in the court of Henry VIII.

The Two Noble Kinsmen

pp. 693-713

According to the author, only Act I and parts of Act III and V were written by Shakespeare, with the rest of the play written by John Fletcher. The character Theseus is Shakespeare's last poetic voice. Theseus is partially based on the character of the knight in Chaucer's Knight's Tales. The brothers Palamon and Arcite compete for the love of Emily, who is wife to Theseus. Somehow, Theseus gives away his wife in a

competition between the two brothers. There is a mournful element in Act I with three queens who tell the story of their husband's execution by the cruel Cleon. The city of Thebes seems to be a veiled representation of London in 1613.



Coda: The Shakespeare Difference, A Word at the End: Foregrounding

Coda: The Shakespeare Difference, A Word at the End: Foregrounding Summary and Analysis

Coda: The Shakespearean Difference

pp. 714-735

Large numbers of Shakespeare's characters involve different shadings of heterosexuality to bisexuality, according to the author. This is seen in Antonio the Merchant in the play, the Merchant of Venice, with Antonio's apparent desire to die for his friend. Then there is Queen Cleopatra with a strong component of eroticism. In terms of the development of human personality, Shakespeare's works could be compared to the Bible. Since English has become the world's leading language, Shakespeare has become the world's leading author. The most fascinating characters of Shakespeare are Hamlet, John Falstaff, Rosalind and Cleopatra.

Shakespeare was not only a writer, because he directed most of his plays at the Globe Theater in London. The author read Shakespeare with a Nietzschean sort of skepticism, but he admits that there are many other possible readings of Shakespeare. The critic Empson thought that Sir John Falstaff in Henry IV Part I and II had too big an ego, but Falstaff's ego is part of what makes him a great character. The intelligence and depth of Hamlet, Iago, and Falstaff are overwhelming to the author. The critic A. D. Nuttall was astounded that Shakespeare could create problem-setting plays like Hamlet, and yet provide no solution. That, it seems, is the definition of tragedy.

A Word at the End: Foregrounding

pp. 737-745

The author has attempted to look at the foreground, or the prominent features of Shakespeare's work. The audience can see the love of Othello for Desdemona, but it seems to the author that they have no sexual relationship. Hamlet seems to be sad over his father's death, but there could be other reasons for his melancholy. A possible influence on Shakespeare is the philosopher Montaigne, who was a very introspective philosopher and writer. The philosopher Nietzsche saw Hamlet as a wild Dionysian man, who thought too well and so was not able to act in time to save himself. Shakespeare responded to the playwright Marlowe's Doctor Faustus with his own sorcerer Prospero in the Tempest. The character Shylock could be looked at as Shakespeare's answer to the Jew of Malta.



Characters

The Author, Harold Bloom

The author, Harold Bloom, has many opinions about Shakespeare and about Shakespeare's plays. The author tends to reject modernist and politically correct versions of Shakespeare and search for a more traditional outlook on Shakespeare. Radical ideas on Shakespeare production are roundly criticized by him, such as over-sexualizing plays like *Twelfth Night*, or a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The author takes early critics of Shakespeare seriously such as the playwright Ben Jonson, and the later critic Dr. Samuel Johnson. The author does try to give many of Shakespeare's plays an interpretation based on Friedrich Nietzsche's views, which is somewhat disconcerting, with a viewpoint of Hamlet as a wild or Dionysian man. However, the author's idea of Shakespeare being the originator of the modern idea of human personality is certainly a new interpretation of Shakespeare. The author is fascinated by the great scope of the inner psychological life of characters such as Hamlet, Sir John Falstaff, Rosalind and Cleopatra.

William Shakespeare

The author tries to look closely at the life of Shakespeare, and to see what relationship Shakespeare's life had to his plays. The author does note several times that Shakespeare must have developed political caution after the assassination of Marlowe by the English Secret Service and the beating up and ruining of Thomas Kyd. This is given as a possible reason for Shakespeare not staging some of his later plays such as *Pericles*. The author credits this caution for the lack of clear political slants in Shakespeare's plays. Several plays like the *Merry Wives of Windsor* are clear attempts to befriend the current English monarch Elizabeth I and later James I. The author makes attempts to see if Shakespeare's sonnets have connections to the plays, and also if Shakespeare displays homosexual and bisexual elements as well as strictly heterosexual ones in his characters. The author has some questions on whether some of the elements of the play *Hamlet* come directly from the life of Shakespeare. Still, much about Shakespeare's life is not known to the author.

Christopher Marlowe

The playwright Christopher Marlowe, who was assassinated at the young age of 29, was a strong influence on Shakespeare's work. Marlowe's plays, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta* and *The Great Tamberlaine* had a strong influence on Shakespeare. Indeed, Prospero in the *Tempest*, and Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*, directly correspond to characters in Marlowe's plays. Marlowe characters are astonishing in their speeches and bombast, but lack any internal dialogue revealed to the audience. Shakespeare worked off Marlowe and then developed his Shakespearean characters



with their rich internal mental life and personality. Marlowe was also known for his physical aggressiveness and tendency toward atheism. Of course, some of these statements about Marlowe could be considered slanderous and part of the set up for his assassination.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The author was a close student of Friedrich Nietzsche's critical writings on Shakespeare. Nietzsche, for the author, was a philosopher of the moment and the now. Thus for Nietzsche, Hamlet's words, though eloquent, are dead because they cannot really tell what is in his heart at the moment of action. The author's citations of Nietzsche could be fairly distracting, since they do not agree with the author's main idea of Shakespeare the development of the human personality.

Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson was a playwright at the same time as Shakespeare, who lived longer than Shakespeare, and also was a critic of Shakespeare. Ben Jonson had a reputation for writing moralizing plays, and Shakespeare was believed to have written spoofs of Ben Jonson's plays in some of his works. Ben Jonson later became the editor of the published folios of Shakespeare's plays.

Dr. Samuel Johnson

Dr. Samuel Johnson was a critic of Shakespeare from the 19th century. Johnson often found Shakespeare's characters appalling in their nasty behavior. He was a bit offended that Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well*, ends up happily married and with a child, despite Bertram's despicable behavior towards Helena, his eventual wife. Dr. Johnson's criticisms often echo similar sentiments of the earlier Ben Jonson. Dr. Johnson loved Shakespeare's work, but became shocked at such horrifying scenes as the murder of Cordelia at the end of the play *King Lear*.

Sir John Falstaff

Sir John Falstaff is the great friend of Prince Hal, and the comic presence of *Henry IV Part I* and *II*. Falstaff's humor, inner personality and character inspired the author to declare Shakespeare the inventor of the modern human personality.

Hamlet

The moody Hamlet, Prince of Denmark is the other example cited by the author of a character in Shakespeare that has his own developed interior personality and mental life. In fact, Nietzsche saw Hamlet as the man who thinks too well. Hamlet was more



concerned with his mental life, since he felt that his actions could not really change anything in Denmark.

Chaucer

Chaucer was the classical English author from the medieval period. Chaucer's works such as the Knight's Tale had a direct influence on Shakespeare plays like Romeo and Juliet. The author cites Chaucer as a previous English author who had developed the personalities and inward thinking of his characters.

Montaigne

Montaigne was a philosopher from the time of Shakespeare. Montaigne, according to the author, taught that pain was the source of memory. Some of Montaigne's ideas were later developed by the philosopher Nietzsche.

Prospero

Prospero is in the play The Tempest. He is a sorcerer in the mold of Doctor Faustus from the Marlowe play of the same name, but with a totally different character development. Prospero ends up abandoning sorcery and returning to his job as the Duke of Milan.

Cleopatra

Cleopatra, the model for a seductive woman, is the Queen of Egypt in the play Antony and Cleopatra. Cleopatra thinks she has her situation under control, but feels compelled to commit suicide rather than being forced to march in a triumphant victory parade in a hostile Rome.

Rosalind

Rosalind is the smart and resourceful lead female character in the play As You Like It. During most of the play, she is dressed as a man and pretending to be a man. Rosalind is an admirable character, including her man-like aggressiveness and control with her lover Orlando.

Iago, Iachimo, Edmund, Evil Plotting Characters

Iago, in the play Othello, is Shakespeare's lead archetype of an evil plotting character. This type of character is also developed in the cases of Iachimo in the play Cymbelline and the notorious manipulative character Edmund in King Lear.



The Critics, Chesterton, A. C. Bradley, William Empson, T.S.

The Critics include G. K. Chesterton, A. C. Bradley, William Empson, T. S. Eliot, and so on. The critics are people who are often cited by the author on their opinion about various plays. Their many opinions are used as foils by the book's author against his own opinions of Shakespeare's works.



Objects/Places

Hamlet- play

The play Hamlet is Shakespeare's tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, and his attempts to avenge the death of his father. This is often cited as Shakespeare's best play, though some critics like T.S. Eliot thought it was too long. Still, most critics view Hamlet as Shakespeare's most successful play.

Henry IV, Part I and II- plays

The author finds Henry IV, Part I and II to be Shakespeare's best history plays, mainly because of the comic relief provided by Sir John Falstaff. Falstaff is the friend and companion of Prince Hal, who later becomes King Henry V.

The Tempest- play

The Tempest is often mentioned as the leading play of Shakespeare's late period. The author finds it to be a great play but often frustrating because of its lack of plot. It centers around the development of the sorcerer Prospero.

London, England, and the Globe Theater

Shakespeare did his work as a playwright and as an actor at the Globe Theater in London, England. For a long time, Shakespeare was the in-house playwright of the Globe Theater. He was succeeded in this position by John Fletcher, with whom Shakespeare collaborated on several plays.

France, battles

France is the setting of many of the historical plays, especially of the play King Henry V. Especially, France is the setting for the Battle of Agincourt, where Henry V makes a triumphant speech in the play Henry V. He thinks he has conquered France forever, but the achievement would be short-lived.

Venice, Italy; Verona, Italy

Italy is the setting for many of Shakespeare's plays. Notably, the city-state of Venice is the setting of The Merchant of Venice, and the play Othello. Venice was a leading military power and center of trade. Another northern Italian city used by Shakespeare as



a play setting is Verona, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Other Italian cities mentioned include Padua, and Milan.

Roman Empire, Rome, Italy, Egypt

Ancient Rome and the Roman Empire are the settings of several Shakespeare plays including *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. By the time of the play *Antony and Cleopatra*, Egypt was part of the sphere of the Roman Empire, where Antony and Cleopatra plotted to gain power before being defeated by Roman Emperor Octavius.

The Ancient Greek World

The Ancient Greek world, which stretched from Greece to what is now Turkey, Syria and Lebanon is the setting of several Shakespeare plays including *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, and the play *Troilus and Cressida*. The time period of these plays precedes Rome, with *Troilus and Cressida* going back to the Trojan War.

The English War of the Roses, King Richard II, Richard III

Shakespeare's history plays go through the period of the War of the Roses, where the House of Lancaster fought the House of York for the English Throne. Plays of this period include *Richard III*, where Richard III commits murder against Clarence and other of his relatives. In the play *Richard II*, Richard II is put to death by Bolingbroke, who becomes King Henry IV.

Tower of London

The Tower of London was an ancient and imposing structure in London that was used as a prison for members of the English royal family who were out of favor with the current English King. Richard III had the Duke of Clarence executed in the Tower.

Imaginary Settings for Shakespeare Plays, Twelfth Night, A M

Many of Shakespeare's plays take place in fantasy settings, or settings that were arbitrary. The play *Twelfth Night* nominally takes place in the Kingdom of Illyria, where Viola ends up shipwrecked. However, the setting is a generic nature and could have been anywhere. The play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, takes place in a kingdom of faeries and mortals.



The Bed Trick, All's Well That Ends Well

The Bed Trick is a prominent element of the plot in several Shakespeare plays, most notably All's Well That Ends Well. In the bed trick, a man such as Bertram wants to have sex with a prostitute or other woman. He is told that he can do it if he enters a pitch dark bedroom. Then he has sex, but ends up bedding Helena, his wedded wife.

Suicide, Antony and Cleopatra, Julius Caesar

Suicide plays a prominent role in Shakespeare plays such as Antony and Cleopatra, and Julius Caesar. The defeated party in a war in the Roman Empire often commits suicide to avoid being paraded and humiliated in Rome by the victor. Suicide is the fate of Ophelia in Hamlet, and a mix of murder and near-suicide ends the play Hamlet.

Murder, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Julius Caesar

Murder plays a prominent part in many Shakespeare tragedies. The murder of Cordelia in the play King Lear is seen as one of the most heartbreaking scenes in Shakespeare. Othello murders his wife Desdemona in the play Othello. Macbeth commits many murders beginning with the assassination of King Duncan. The murder of Julius Caesar in the play Julius Caesar begins the war for the mastery of the Roman Empire.

Plays of Marlowe

The author cites several plays of Christopher Marlowe, which had a strong influence on Shakespeare. Shakespeare obviously studied the Marlowe plays The Jew of Malta, and Doctor Faustus. Shakespeare's plays on these Marlowe themes are The Merchant of Venice, and The Tempest. The author also compares the Marlowe play Tamberlaine the Great to the early Shakespeare play Henry VI.

Plays of Ben Jonson

The plays of Ben Jonson had some influence on Shakespeare, but in an ironic fashion, according to this book's author. Ben Jonson's plays tended to be moralistic, and Shakespeare wrote plays that were much more ironic than moralistic. An example of this is the play Twelfth Night, where the moralistic character Malvolio is humiliated and is the only one to not get married at the end of the play.



Themes

Shakespeare as the Inventor of the Human Personality

The title of the book shows that an important theme that Shakespeare was the inventor of the human, or of the modern notion of human personality. The author compares Shakespeare with the contemporary author Marlowe who wrote great plays, but whose characters had no inward thoughts. By the time of the Shakespeare play Richard III, Shakespeare was well on the way to break out of this mold. Richard III is ironic and almost ridiculous, but still fascinates audiences with his soliloquies on his wickedness and his planned murders. In the play Julius Caesar, the audience is provoked by the inward thoughts of Julius Caesar as he avoids his danger and walks to his assassination. Shylock in the Merchant of Venice is a difficult character for the author to analyze due to his suffering of anti-Semitism. Still, Shylock's great soliloquy on how he is also a human being was a grand step towards Shakespeare's development of characters with a human personality.

A breakthrough play is As You Like It, with the resourceful and plotting Rosalind dominating the play with her plans to develop her lover Orlando. In Henry IV, Falstaff is the ultimate thinker and ironic speaker, as he plays with and abuses the young Prince Hal, later King Henry V. Hamlet in the play Hamlet is a further development of personality with his soliloquies and vacillating plans on dealing with the murderous King. These three characters, Rosalind, Falstaff and Hamlet set the standard for Shakespeare's characters with personality. Later, Shakespeare retreated from this mode of writings, but its echoes sometimes return, such as with the character Prospero in The Tempest.

The Line Between Comedy and Tragedy

The author makes the point that many of Shakespeare's comedies have a strong tragic element, and only through a sort of magical event do they acquire a happy and comic ending. Conversely, many of Shakespeare's tragedies have large comic elements, even to the point of near absurdity, such as the Clown character who delivers the asps to Cleopatra to use to commit suicide. Shakespeare seems to the author to be stronger at comedy, and the comic element in his tragedies is what makes them tolerable despite the horror that often ensues in the play. The character Hamlet is not sure of the guilt of King Claudius, so then has his player friends stage the Mousetrap, a play within a play. Although this play astounds the king, it was funny that even at a tense time as this, Hamlet could be so amusing to stage a play. Later, Hamlet plays with the skull of the clown Yorick, thinking upon death as the fate of all humankind. This somehow softens the blow and makes the final scene palatable, when in a duel and fight scene all the leading characters of the play die.



Conversely, the plays Henry IV Part I and II are primarily comic, but with tragedy always threatening. The viewer ends up hoping for the best more for Sir John Falstaff than for Prince Hal. Prince Hal at first is amused and educated by Falstaff, but later grows to resent and even hate Falstaff. Still, Hal never is able to kill Falstaff. The closest Hal gets to killing Falstaff is when they stage a duel. At some point Falstaff appears to be dead, and Hal laments that his old friend and teacher Falstaff is dead. As the audience prepares to weep, suddenly Sir John steps up alive and well, and there is a pandemonium of laughter.

The Change in Interpretation of Shakespeare by Critics

The author spends much time looking at the interpretation of Shakespeare by critics, and changing critical opinions of Shakespeare over time. To some extent, the author is a traditionalist in his interpretation and relies heavily on the early critics such as Ben Jonson and Dr. Samuel Johnson. The author is quite appalled by the modernist interpretation of Shakespeare, with sexual explicitness being put into productions of Twelfth Night and A Midsummer Night's Dream, steps that the author considers cheap tricks. The author is most incensed with the politically correct games of production of The Tempest, particular around the half-human Caliban and the spirit Ariel, who are portrayed as freedom fighters, for example.

The author is concerned about Shakespeare's universal appeal and how he changes Western thought through his powerful intellect. What makes Shakespeare so powerful is the developed intellect, inner thought and personality of his leading characters. These are things that lasts eternally, beyond any politically correct interpretation. Often the author uses Dr. Johnson as his guide, because Dr. Johnson viewed Shakespeare's plays from the standpoint of what he believed to be Shakespeare's intention. One critic whom the author often cites is the philosopher Nietzsche, who was subtle in his reinterpretation of Shakespeare characters. Nietzsche applied his own theories of nihilism's role in the human personality to deny the ordered structure of plays such as Hamlet, and its leading character Hamlet. The critic G. K. Chesterton tried to interpret characters such as Hamlet from the standpoint of his Catholic moralist philosophy. The author realizes that critics' interpretation of Shakespeare was usually clouded by their own philosophy.



Style

Perspective

The perspective of the author is that of a critic. The author is fascinated by Shakespeare's plays and certain characters like Falstaff and Hamlet. The author tries to look at Shakespeare from the standpoint of what Shakespeare has contributed to Western civilization over the 400 years since his passing. This involves a considerable amount of historical study of criticism concerning how the view of Shakespeare's work has changed over the years. At the same time, the author sees the universal quality of Shakespeare's plays. For the people of Shakespeare's London, the history plays about the English kings were episodes from history only a few hundred years old or less. Yet, by putting the comic and irreverent character Sir John Falstaff in King Henry IV Part I or II, the author sees how these plays would amuse and provoke people for all time. The author sees how many critics had descended into total idolatry of Shakespeare, the Bard of London. The author makes an effort to cite critics who were not so in love with the work of Shakespeare that they lost all critical judgment. Thus, the author cites the criticism by T. S. Elliot of the play Hamlet that it is too long and complicated. Then the author does his best to refute these statements. In this way, the book is refreshing in its comparison of various critical judgments of Shakespeare, and also maintains an academic viewpoint.

Tone

The tone of the book is somewhat skeptical and looks towards research to discover new facets of meaning in Shakespeare plays. At the same time, the author is obviously a great fan of Shakespeare and is quite frank in showing this. The author tries to balance his tone of a scholar and a describer of Shakespeare's plays with his study of distinctive features and highlights of the plays. Thus, in reviewing the play the Merchant of Venice, the author is clear that it is hard to appreciate this play with its strong elements of antisemitism. The author then investigates what sort of Jewish community, if any, existed in London at the time of Shakespeare, and says that it was very small and the antisemitism was largely symbolic. Also, the author notes that unlike Christopher Marlowe's play, The Jew of Malta, where the Jew is executed, in the Merchant of Venice, Shylock is only forced to convert to Christianity and only after losing a nasty legal case in trying to obtain his pound of flesh from the merchant. Therefore, the author develops how the play Merchant of Venice could be interesting and enjoyable despite the negative elements within it.

When reviewing the play King Lear, the author shows that great critics like Dr. Sam Johnson found it to be overwhelmingly sad, but then looked for other viewpoints. The author sees how the extremely tragic elements of Lear are also balanced by the very funny comic elements of the fool, and of Edgar who masquerades as Bedlam Tom.

Thus, the author does his best to maintain a balanced view of Shakespeare, while being clear about his overwhelming respect for and approval of Shakespeare's work.

Structure

The book is divided into introduction, chapters for the 35 plays attributed to Shakespeare, and two chapters of words of conclusion. In the introduction, the author begins his overall thesis that the modern notion of personality began with Shakespeare's plays and great characters. There are then 35 chapters for each of the plays that Shakespeare wrote, and these are broken up into 9 sections for periods of Shakespeare's work. The 3 early comedies show Shakespeare's abilities, which were soon to be developed much further. The 3 History Plays that follow strongly show the influence of Marlowe, and are capped off by the violent and popular tragedy Richard III. The 3 Apprentice Tragedies began Shakespeare's deep development of characters such as Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, and the conflicted assassin Brutus in Julius Caesar. The 6 High Comedies are known as some of Shakespeare's great works with their intense poetry and great characters like Rosalind in As You Like It.

The 4 Major Histories include the author's favorite character, Sir John Falstaff, and shift the author's focus to the developed personality of Shakespeare's characters. The 3 Problem Plays defy classification, with plays like Measure for Measure being comedies with strong tragic elements and happy endings that appear at the last minute. The 5 Great Tragedies, with characters like Macbeth, Hamlet and Antony and Cleopatra are what made Shakespeare known as such a strong developer of the notion of human personality. The 2 plays of the Tragic Epilogue are great but somewhat confusing to the author of this book. The 6 plays, The Late Romances, are some of the most confusing, and most challenging works of Shakespeare's career, capped by success of The Tempest and The Winter's Tale. The book ends with two afterwords that make a summary of what makes Shakespeare's work so special to the author.



Quotes

"A. D. Nuttall, in his admirably Johnsonian, *A New Mimesis* (1983), suggests that Shakespeare, like Chaucer, 'implicitly contested the transcendentalist conception of reality.'"

Forward, p. 3

"Though you have to read carefully to see it, Petruchio is accurate when he insists that Kate fell in love with him at first sight. How could she not?"

Chapter 2, p. 29

"King Henry VI becomes a figure of authentic pathos, not at all heroic, in Parts Two and Three, but in Part one his true piety and childlike decency are only hinted at, he rarely appears on stage, and only as a presage of future disaster."

Chapter 4, p. 46.

"Tradition has left us no anecdotes concerning any encounters between Marlowe and Shakespeare, but they must have met frequently, sharing the leadership of the London stage until Marlowe's murder by the government in early 1593. Marlowe personally may have frightened Shakespeare rather in the way that Richard III shocks audiences."

Chapter 6, p. 64

"Chaucer, as I have remarked, rather than Ovid or Marlowe, was the ancestor of Shakespeare's greatest originality, that invention of the human that is my prime concern in this book. Chaucer's ironic yet amiable version of the religion of love, more perhaps in his *Troilus and Criseyde* than in *The Knight's Tale*, is the essential context for *Romeo and Juliet*."

Chapter 8, p. 87

"It is uncanny that Brutus, awaiting the night visit of Cassius and the other conspirators, suddenly becomes a prophecy of Macbeth, in a further soliloquy that seems to belong in the first act of Macbeth."

Chapter 9, p. 109

"Risking the wrath of his friend and rival Ben Jonson, Shakespeare delightfully indulges himself by emphasizing what Samuel Johnson called 'the longest word known: honorificabilitudinitatibus,' or 'the state of being loaded with honors.'"

Chapter 10, p. 133

"Bassanio, we have to assume, is bisexual, but Antonio clearly is not, and his homoeroticism is perhaps less relevant than his sadomasochism, the doom-eagerness that could allow him to make so mad a contract with Shylock."

Chapter 12, p. 179



"Rosalind is unique in Shakespeare, perhaps indeed in Western drama, because it is so difficult to achieve a perspective upon her that she herself does not anticipate and share."

Chapter 14, p. 204

"The hidden heart of Twelfth Night lies in Shakespeare's seriocomic rivalry with Ben Jonson, whose comedy of humors is being satirized throughout."

Chapter 15, p. 228

"One could feel chagrin at Shakespeare's juxtaposition of a word man and a brutal politician if a critique of poetry were the issue, but of course it is not, and Richard's juggling with word plays distracts him from any effective resistance."

Chapter 16, p. 263

"Algernon Charles Swinburne, now mostly forgotten as both poet and critic, yet frequently superb as both, adroitly compared Falstaff to his true companions, the Sancho Panza of Cervantes and the Panurge of Rabelais."

Chapter 17, p. 281

"Bradley's Falstaff is not sentimentalized, the critic knows full well that he would literally not be safe in Falstaff's company. But he knows also that Falstaff teaches us not to moralize."

Chapter 17, p. 297

"Russell Fraser compares the 'prologue armed' of Troilus and Cressida to the armed prologue— clearly resembling burly Ben himself (infamous for killing a fellow actor in a duel)— who begins Jonson's Poetaster (1601), an attack upon rival poet-playwrights."

Chapter 20, p. 328

"Whether Isabella, in her revulsion from a vision of universal incest, somehow speaks for the play, we cannot know, though this is the implicit conclusion of Mac Shell's *The End of Kinship* (1988), the best full-length study of *Measure for Measure*."

Chapter 22, p. 361

"I have been arguing that what critics like Empson and Graham Bradshaw regard as 'grafting problems' will not illuminate Hamlet, because Shakespeare was not grafting onto a Kydian melodrama but was revising his own earlier play."

Chapter 23, p. 392

"Yet we worship (in a secular way) this all-but-infinite consciousness; what we have called Romanticism was engendered by Hamlet, though it required two centuries before the prince's self-consciousness became universally prevalent, and almost a third century before Nietzsche insisted that Hamlet possessed 'true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth,' which is the abyss between mundane reality and the Dionysian rapture of endlessly ongoing consciousness."

Chapter 23, p. 421



"I build upon A. C. Bradley's emphasis on the passed-over ancient's 'resentment,' and add to Bradley the idea that resentment can become the only mode of freedom for such great negations as Iago's Dostoevskian disciples, Svidrigailov and Stavrogin."

Chapter 24, p. 465

"Dr. Johnson said that he could not bear Act V of the play because it outraged divine justice and so offended his moral sense, but the great critic may have mistaken his own reaction. What the drama of King Lear truly outages is our universal idealization of the value of familial love."

Chapter 25, p. 484

"Nietzsche links up here with William Blake's adage that the highest art is immoral, and that 'Exuberance is beauty.'"

Chapter 26, p. 520

"Wilbur Sanders, acknowledging Wilson Knight, explores Macbeth as the Shakespearean play where most we 'submit ourselves to an unknown fear.'"

Chapter 26, p. 542

"Shakespeare, as Hazlitt would not admit, allows some justice to the people's side of the clash."

Chapter 28, p. 578

"Only in the brothel scenes does Shakespeare's mimetic art return, wonderfully refreshing in the stiff world of Pericles. Pandar, Bawd, and Boulton have personalities, Pericles, Marina and Thaisa do not."

Chapter 30, p. 609

"Shakespeare has shown us the valor and battle prowess of Posthumus, Belarius, and the prices, and now in a Falstaffian reversal he tells us again, 'There's honour for you!'"

Chapter 31, p. 638

"In a ghastly Peter Brook version of the 1960s, which I gaped at unbelievably, Caliban was Java Man, a ferocious primitive who accomplished the rape of Miranda, took over the island, and celebrated his triumph by bum-buggering Prospero."

Chapter 33, p. 663

"Poetically, this entertainment seems to be the nadir of The Tempest, and I suggest it may be, in some places, a deliberate parody of the court masques that Jonson was composing for James I at the moment that Shakespeare's play was written."

Chapter 33, p. 679

"If someone can say too readily or too eloquently how much they love us, we incline not to believe them, because Hamlet has gotten into us, even as he inhabited Nietzsche."

Coda, p. 714



"In his later Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche returned to the Dionysiac Hamlet, though without mentioning him."
A Word at the End, p. 741



Topics for Discussion

What does the author mean by saying that Shakespeare invented the human, or the human personality? Is this an exaggeration?

Discuss Shakespeare and the interpretation of Shakespeare by the philosopher Nietzsche. What does Nietzsche mean by the Dionysian element in Hamlet? What about nihilistic and anarchistic elements in other Shakespeare plays?

Discuss Shakespeare tragedies such as Richard III and Macbeth. What is Shakespeare's point in studying evil characters like Richard III and Macbeth? Are either of them amusing in their evil actions? What other comic elements are in these plays?

Discuss Shakespeare's mixing of tragedy and comedy. In the play Love's Labour Lost, none of the men obtain their lady love. How does this play and other plays that are comedies also have tragic elements?

Discuss the comparison between Shakespeare's and Marlowe's works, such as the Merchant of Venice, versus the Jew of Malta. Does Shakespeare give Shylock a personality, and is he a comic villain? Is it credible for Shylock to end up accepting conversion to Christianity?

Discuss Hamlet's confrontation with his father's ghost. Is there a generation gap between father and son? Why does Hamlet hesitate to act to avenge his father's death?

Discuss the author's Nietzschean views on Hamlet. The author quoted Nietzsche that Hamlet has reached the Dionysian stage of man. What does Nietzsche mean when he says that Hamlet thinks not too much, but too well?

Discuss Shakespeare's tragedies King Lear, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra. Some critics cited King Lear as a tragedy almost too horrible to bear. Macbeth is more an internal study of an evil character Macbeth, while Antony and Cleopatra has tragic as well as comic elements. Are these plays more different than alike?

Discuss the late romance plays The Tempest, and the Winter's Tale, also usually referred to as comedies. The author finds these plays somewhat confusing in that the tragic elements nearly outweigh the comic elements. Is this the case?