

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SHAKESPEARE

By Alfred J. Drake

TO READ, OR NOT TO READ?

There is a huge volume of critical work on Shakespeare. Since nobody could read all of the critical work on Shakespeare in one lifetime, *serendipity* may be your best guide. Isn't progress in learning a matter of our own reading in primary texts combined with luck in choosing critics whose ideas we find valuable? Any good critic (or even any bad critic) is a point of departure for the quest to form a well-rounded view.

HOW TO APPROACH A CRITICAL TEXT

In his essay "Of Studies," Sir Francis Bacon writes the following:

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others; but that would be only in the less important arguments....

Great advice—and it's good that Sir Francis points out the metaphoric quality of it, lest we go out and eat some books—but how do we know which is which? "Ay, there's the rub," as Hamlet would say. Any book could, if we let it, turn into a huge waste of time. So we must develop "good book radar" that tells us whether this or that volume is worth our time. To adapt Bacon's categories: do the book's contents, attended to for a short but focused period, make us want to read very selectively and pick up a few good ideas? Do they make us feel like skimming the whole book quickly to get the gist? Or does our initial encounter inspire us to pay close attention because the book seems to be a classic in its field, or because it resonates with us and promises to give us exactly the kind of information we want? Practice makes near-perfect.

OTHER LISTS AND LINKS

www.goodreads.com offers a fine list of "[Best Books about Shakespeare.](#)"

My site www.ajdrake.com/shakespeare offers a [Shakespeare Links](#) page with subsections on large-scale text repositories, sources that Shakespeare used, and so forth. There are now hundreds of links available, so check it out if you're so inclined.

You can find additional books, many of them recent, by typing into Amazon.com's search box "Shakespeare Criticism" and similar terms.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

Editions of Shakespeare

*See also editions of individual plays by publishers such as Folger Library, Arden Shakespeare, and Norton Critical Editions.

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