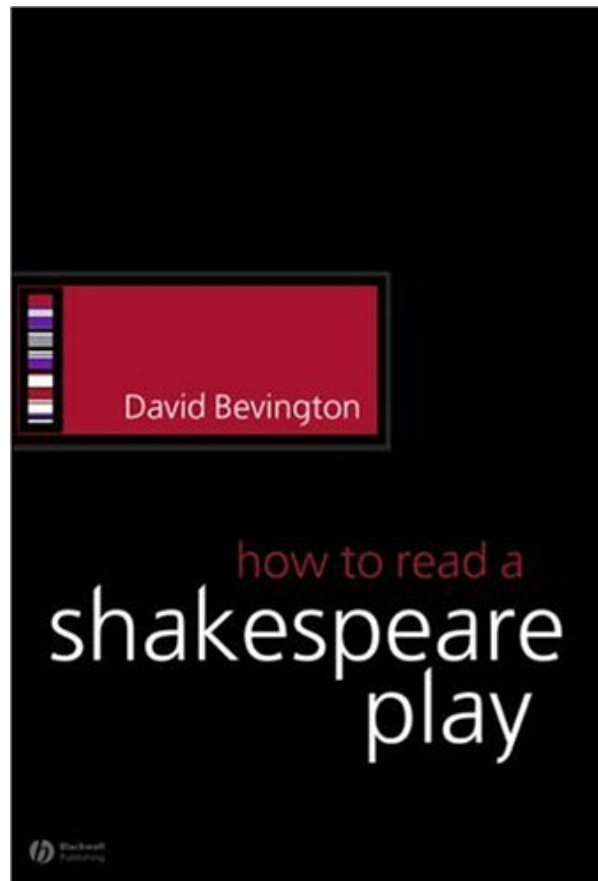
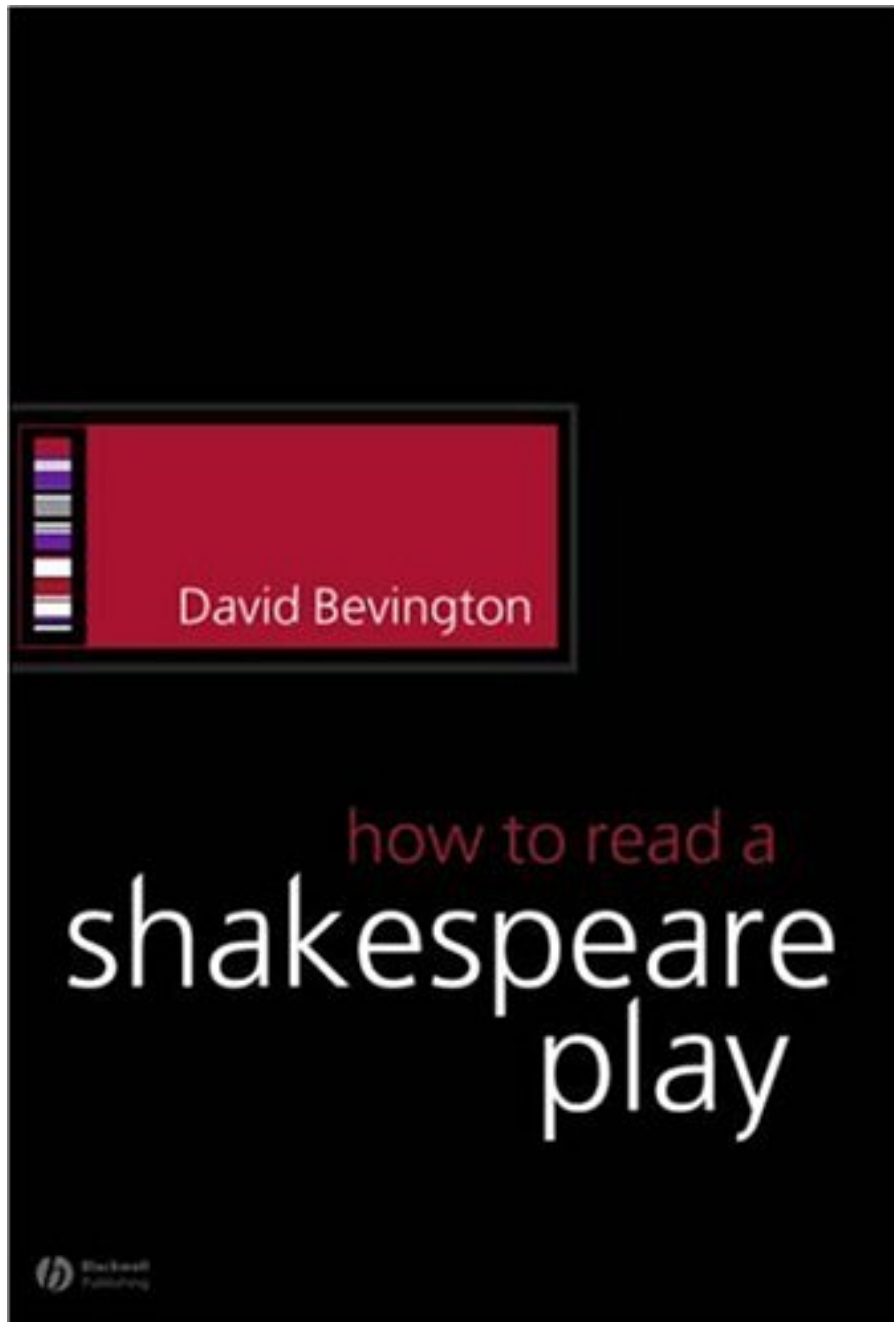


# HOW TO READ A SHAKESPEARE PLAY BY DAVID BEVINGTON



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## Review

"In just a few pages, the author manages to unearth the full richness of the Bard, opening the reader's mind and asking questions rather than providing glib, easy answers. This is a terrific beginner's volume for the novice English literature student tasked with studying the works of William Shakespeare, and a valuable re-entry point for the intermediate Shakespeare reader looking for additional analytical methods." (Simply Shakespeare, November 2009)

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## From the Back Cover

How should we read Shakespeare plays? In this clear and succinct book author David Bevington, who has extensive experience of teaching Shakespeare to students, encourages readers to approach his works aggressively, interactively, and questioningly. Bevington suggests that readers think of themselves as armchair directors, deciding what the actors should wear, what social class they represent, why they are there, and, most importantly, what they are after.

Bevington's introduction incorporates fresh and incisive readings of a handful of popular Shakespeare plays: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV Part I, Hamlet, King Lear and The Tempest. Using these plays as examples, he demonstrates how Shakespeare worked his way forward by genres, focusing at first on romantic comedies and English history plays, and taking on the daunting assignment of writing tragedies only when he felt he was ready.

## About the Author

David Bevington is Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago. His recent publications include

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This clear and succinct book is designed for general readers who want to know how to go about reading Shakespeare's works for pleasure.

- Encourages readers to approach Shakespeare's works aggressively, interactively, and questioningly
- Focuses on six popular Shakespeare plays - A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV Part I, Hamlet, King Lear and The Tempest
- Recommends the best editions, recordings and DVDs / videos of these plays
- Discusses the production of the plays on stage and screen
- Introduces readers to different genres in Shakespeare – romantic comedy, English history, tragedy and romance
- Avoids jargon and abstract literary theory

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Five Stars

By Ariel

Awesome book! Loved the plastic cover it came with! Great book in great condition!

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

A Delightful Guide to the Bard

By Q

Bevington is one of the leading editors and scholars of Shakespeare today. He brings a deep and broad knowledge to the enjoyment of Shakespeare. His aim here is simple: to make Shakespeare as enjoyable and understandable as possible to ALL readers and viewers of his plays--and he succeeds admirably. His method for reading is not really a "method" at all, but rather an inquisitive and open attitude. He writes, in regard to *HAMLET*,

"The best thing is to start afresh, at the beginning, with as few preconceptions as possible. Ask probing questions. Why, at every point, is the dramatist doing what he is doing? Who are the characters, and what are they saying to one another? Be especially wary of cliched interpretations, as for example that Hamlet's 'tragic flaw' lies in his morbid delaying of what his father's ghost urges him to do. Be skeptical. Does a tragedy have to have a 'tragic flaw'? Is Hamlet's delay unreasonable? What is his problem?"

In addition to a brief (and largely dispensable) introduction and conclusion, there are substantial chapters on *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, *ROMEO AND JULIET*, *HENRY IV: PART ONE*, *HAMLET*, *KING LEAR*, and *THE TEMPEST*. The chapters lead us step by step through the plays, considering key scenes in detail. His main focus is plot, character, and language, giving the novice lots of helpful information for understanding and appreciating Shakespeare's dramatic genius. There is a lot of line-by-line commentary that students will find invaluable. He discusses some of the possibilities for dramatic interpretation for actors and

directors, and he advocates viewing the plays in performance or on DVD. You won't get bogged in the scholarly controversies with this book: it's squarely aimed at beginners, but even experienced Shakespeare fans and scholars will find many original tidbits here. A couple of his interpretations are pretty cheesy, such as when he claims that Falstaff is actually brave at the Gadshill robbery (Henry 4), or that the Capulets are nouveau rich social climbers.

Bevington is one of the best writers on Shakespeare for a general audience. I also highly recommend his COMPLETE SHAKESPEARE, which has marvelous introductions quite similar to the chapters in HOW TO READ . . . For more on the historical background and criticism, I also recommend Sean McEvoy's wonderful SHAKESPEARE: THE BASICS.

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Highly recommended especially for literature students and professors.

By Midwest Book Review

Written by professional Shakespearean play editor David Bevington (professor emeritus, University of Chicago), How To Read A Shakespeare Play is a guide to experiencing Shakespeare's classic works with an open, inquisitive, and receptive mind. Chapters especially focus upon the nuances of six of Shakespeare's most famous plays: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV Part I, Hamlet, King Lear, and The Tempest. A scholarly introduction to fresh perspectives on Shakespeare's genius in playing to his strengths in different genres, observing that Shakespeare practiced upon romantic comedies first before transitioning to the more emotionally demanding tragedies. Highly recommended especially for literature students and professors.

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