



William Empson: Essays on Shakespeare

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At the time of his death in 1984, the poet and critic William Empson was preparing and revising a collection of his essays on Shakespeare. This collection edited by David Pirie, is a book which the literary world has wanted for over half a century. Here, in a single volume, are major readings of Hamlet and Macbeth; a witty and sometimes impassioned defence of Falstaff, and a new piece on the architecture of the Globe theatre and other Renaissance playhouses, in which Empson explores the problems that the design of contemporary stages posed for a working playwright; there are also essays on the narrative poems, A Midsummer Night's Dream and the last plays. The essays demonstrate the subtlety and agility of Empson's mind, as well as his remarkable breadth of knowledge, while the almost racy wit of his informal prose style argues for a literary criticism which should never become solemn if it is to be truly serious.

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