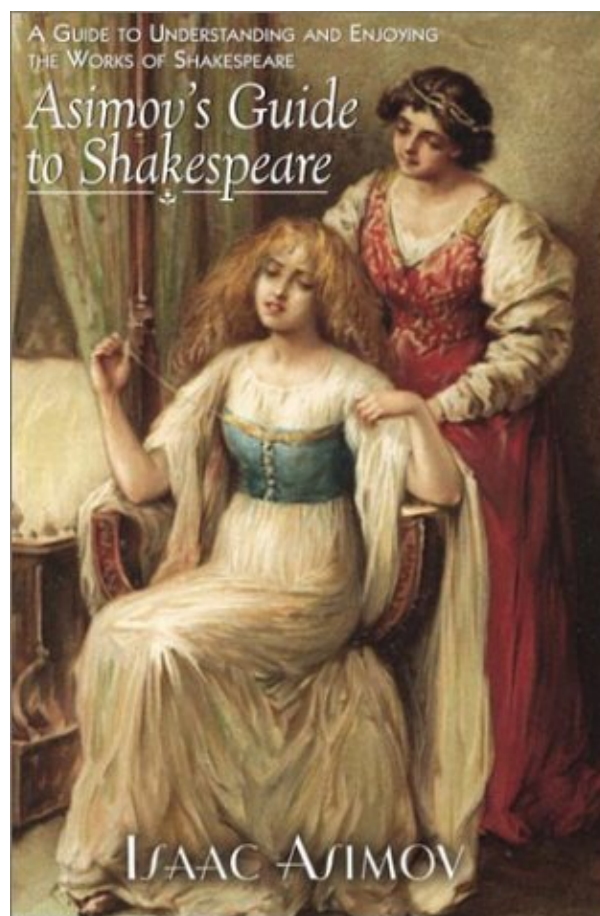


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Accessible to scholars and novices alike

By Patrick Mcgranaghan

When I first saw Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare in a bargain book section of a local bookstore, I was a bit surprised that Asimov had a guide to Shakespeare. I decided to pick it up because it was on sale and read his entries on some plays that I have read.

I didn't know what to expect, but after reading a few pages into it, I was hooked. Asimov, with amazing astuteness, has given a thorough analysis of twenty three of Shakespeare's plays and the poems Venus and Adonis and the Rape of Lucrece. At the beginning of every play he has a map of all the locations pertinent to the play. I found this to be very helpful in understanding the varied settings in Shakespeare's plays.

The chapters on the plays read a bit like something you might find in Monarch or Cliffs notes. He goes through the tale and gives pertinent information along the way. However this book isn't merely a substitute for reading Shakespeare, nor is the aim of it to prepare you for an exam. Rather this book's aim is to guide

the modern reader, who is distanced by time and geography from Shakespeare's stories, along to better understand Shakespeare.

If you're looking for a down-to-Earth book on Shakespeare, this is it. No one, quite as well as Asimov does, can make the reader feel so at ease in reading the fancy language of Shakespeare.

47 of 48 people found the following review helpful.

Useful Historical Analysis

By Richard R

While watching or reading one of Shakespeare's plays, it's interesting to read the notes of some of the different critics. Peter Levi does a wonderful job following the poetry and language of Shakespeare as it develops over his lifetime, in the context of the other writers of his era. Harold Bloom, of course, finds in Shakespeare both a mirror and an impulse for a leap forward in literature and therefore in society. Bloom has fallen in love with certain of Shakespeare's characters (Falstaff, Hamlet, etc.) and uses them as a yardstick for all others.

Asimov takes a more historical view. He has done impressive research into the characters and times. His "Guide to Shakespeare" is useful for its insights into all of the plays, but I found it most useful for the English histories. In the eight plays of the Wars of the Roses --from Richard II, through the Henrys, and culminating in Richard III-- Asimov tracks the family trees and politics of the nobility, spots anachronisms, and does a wonderful job of simplifying the sometimes bewildering array of characters and historical references. Of course, even uneducated audiences in Shakespeare's day would have understood some of these arcane references without a guidebook, much as a modern US audience would easily understand references to Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln. With his research and clear writing, Asimov brings the history plays --and indeed all of the plays-- back to life.

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Five Stars

By William

VERY helpful in understanding all of Shakespeare's references and events. A must have for anyone who loves Shakespeare.

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