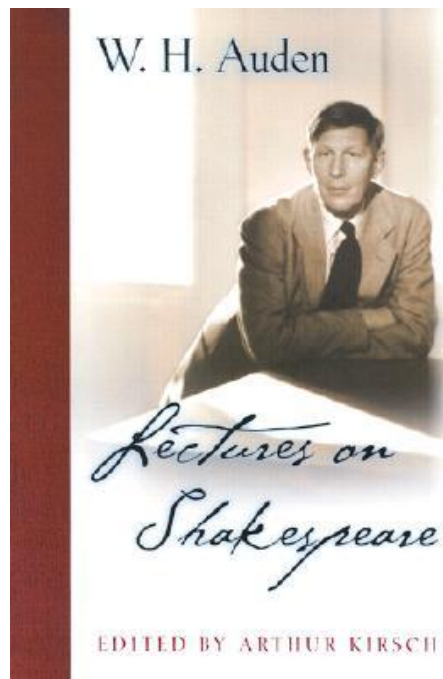




Lectures on Shakespeare

W.H. Auden , Arthur Kirsch

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"W. H. Auden, poet and critic, will conduct a course on Shakespeare at the New School for Social Research beginning Wednesday. Mr. Auden has announced that in his course . . . he proposes to read all Shakespeare's plays in chronological order." *The New York Times* reported this item on September 27, 1946, giving notice of a rare opportunity to hear one of the century's great poets comment on one of the greatest poets of all time. Published here for the first time, these lectures now make Auden's thoughts on Shakespeare available widely.

Painstakingly reconstructed by Arthur Kirsch from the notes of students who attended, primarily Alan Ansen, who became Auden's secretary and friend, the lectures afford remarkable insights into Shakespeare's plays as well as the sonnets.

A remarkable lecturer, Auden could inspire his listeners to great feats of recall and dictation. Consequently, the poet's unique voice, often down to the precise details of his phrasing, speaks clearly and eloquently throughout this volume. In these lectures, we hear Auden alluding to authors from Homer, Dante, and St. Augustine to Kierkegaard, Ibsen, and T. S. Eliot, drawing upon the full range of European literature and opera, and referring to the day's newspapers and magazines, movies and cartoons. The result is an extended instance of the "live conversation" that Auden believed criticism to be. Notably a conversation between Auden's capacious thought and the work of Shakespeare, these lectures are also a prelude to many ideas developed in Auden's later prose--a prose in which, one critic has remarked, "all the artists of the past are alive and talking among themselves."

Reflecting the twentieth-century poet's lifelong engagement with the crowning masterpieces of English literature, these lectures add immeasurably to both our understanding of Auden and our appreciation of Shakespeare.

Lectures on Shakespeare Details

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Kiof says

Master poet- but I find the criticism in the book mediocre. Is it just me?

Kristen Gongora says

Auden the iconoclast - fascinating, bold opinions on Shakespeare. It is quite something to read this celebrated poet's ideas on the most celebrated poet ever.

Emmapeel says

E' difficile leggere le lezioni di Auden e non pensare a George, il professore universitario di 'Un uomo solo' di Isherwood. Stesso humour asciutto, stessa erudizione noncurante, stesso imprinting da brit lievemente deplacé nel nuovo mondo. Sarebbe stato bello assistere e contestare la sua lettura antiromantica di Romeo e Giulietta, applaudire l'analisi di Giulio Cesare o restare a bocca aperta per l'interpretazione di Shylock nel Mercante di Venezia (nel '46 ci voleva un certo fegato a dichiarare - a New York! - che l'usuraio non è discriminato in quanto ebreo o eretico, ma solo perché pecca di stile, unico personaggio serio non sintonizzato sull'estetismo fatuo della società che lo circonda). Auden non si fa schiacciare dalla grandezza del Bardo, è sincero, ha il coraggio di dire che alcune opere gli fanno francamente schifo, altre sono piene di difetti, una è così noiosa che non c'è nulla da dire, dunque farà ascoltare un'opera lirica ad essa ispirata per l'intera durata della lezione. Ma nel contempo riesce a trasmettere tutta la passione che prova per un autore che è riuscito a raccontare fin nelle più recondite pieghe l'intera gamma delle emozioni umane. Shakespeare è sempre stato uno dei miei scrittori, attraverso le sue parole ho finalmente capito perché: 'C'è chi passa gran parte della sua esistenza a elaborare un capolavoro: è il caso di Dante o Proust. Scrittori come questi si distinguono per l'impegno con cui si dedicano alla loro impresa, rischiando di morire prima che produca frutti. E c'è chi non cessa di ricercare nuove soluzioni. Non appena ha imparato a fare una cosa, questo artista eclettico si ferma e cerca di farne un'altra: è il caso di Shakespeare... In che modo creano le loro opere questi due tipi di artisti, e cosa è essenziale per loro? Al primo tipo interessa scoprire come sarà il suo capolavoro, al secondo come affrontare un nuovo problema - senza preoccuparsi dell'eventuale successo o insuccesso. Shakespeare è sempre pronto a rischiare un fallimento.' Grazie, professor Auden.

Gaia says

Un libro semplicemente prezioso. Le lezioni di Auden aprono gli occhi su aspetti generalmente poco trattati dalla critica e sono un saggio della lucidissima sensibilità del suo autore. Per chi ama Shakespeare, ma non solo.

peaseblossom says

This intriguing book is compiled from class notes from a series of lectures Auden gave. They often veer way off-topic, but they usually offer some worthwhile criticism.

Pavel says

This is more director's lectures, then literature professor's ones. Bold treatments of Shakespeare's plots, characters and themes are of course subjective. But since Auden is so educated and talented man you read those treatments as if they should be implemented on-stage.

Jay Carraway says

Especially for one sharp, dry line: "Lear does not benefit from a stage performance."

Ty says

Far too pompous and long winded. Some accuse Auden of making things too common and accessible. Not only do I not agree that that is possible, I certainly do not agree he did it. Not in this book of lectures, anyway.

Shakespeare critical essays vary widely. They can go from simple reflections on what the author does and doesn't like about a given play, to meticulous, footnote infested, self-aggrandizing dissections of each and every single last aspect of every word of every play, complete with pages upon pages of references to other works, both related and far from related to Shakespeare.

These lectures are not in the latter category. Not quite, anyway. But they linger on that side of the continuum for certain.

It's all subjective. It's all someone's opinion. But when I want to hear what somebody thinks of a Shakespeare play, I really want to hear more about the play, and about Shakespeare, than about anything else. References to other works as guide posts are fine, but half an essay on King Lear should not be taken up by rehashing of Fried, Aeschylus, Marx, or whoever else it may be. Make your point about the plays themselves, as opposed to finding ways of pinpointing their universal truths in the writing of others.

Cesar says

Should have been titled "Conversations about Shakespeare." Not at all comprehensive, Auden simply talks about whatever he feels like, and it's all very entertaining. He disliked "The Merry Wives of Windsor" so much that he refused to lecture on it to his class.

