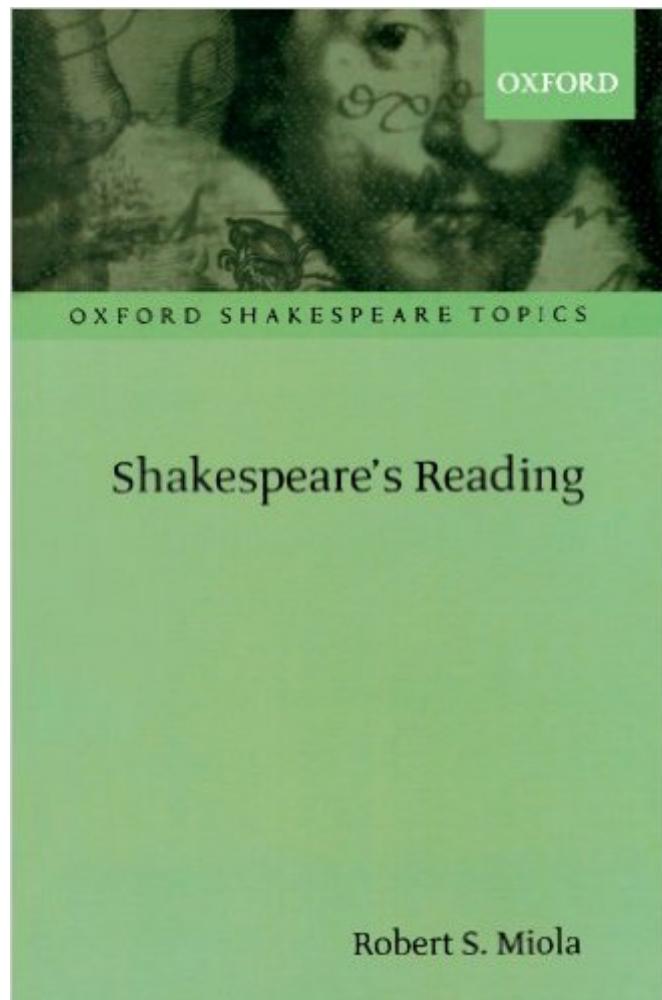


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Shakespeare's Reading (Oxford Shakespeare Topics)



Synopsis

Oxford Shakespeare Topics (General Editors Peter Holland and Stanley Wells) provide students, teachers, and interested readers with short books on important aspects of Shakespeare criticism and scholarship, including some general anthologies relating to Shakespeare. Shakespeare's Reading explores Shakespeare's marvelous reshaping of sources into new creations. Beginning with a discussion of how and what Elizabethans read—manuscripts, popular pamphlets, and books—Robert S. Miola examines Shakespeare's use of specific texts such as Holinshed's Chronicles, Plutarch's Lives, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. As well as reshaping other writers' work, Shakespeare transformed traditions—the inherited expectations, tropes, and strategies about character, action and genre. For example, the tradition of Italian love poetry, especially Petrarch, shapes *Romeo and Juliet* as well as the sonnets; the Vice figure finds new life in *Richard III* and Falstaff. Employing a traditional understanding of sources as well as more recent developments in intertextuality, this book traces Shakespeare's reading throughout his career, as it inspires his poetry, histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. Repeated references to the plays in performance enliven and enrich the account.

Book Information

Series: Oxford Shakespeare Topics

Paperback: 200 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (October 26, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0198711697

ISBN-13: 978-0198711698

Product Dimensions: 7.8 x 0.5 x 5.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.0 out of 5 stars Â See all reviews Â (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #545,201 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #117 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Books & Reading > History of Books #351 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Shakespeare > Literary Criticism #826 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Shakespeare > Works

Customer Reviews

Robert Miola's *Shakespeare's Reading* was first published in 2000. It is showing its age. The first few pages are unfortunate in a number of respects. First, after having explained that Elizabethan

culture was an oral one in which people read aloud and developed acute inner ears, he cites the eerie chant that begins Act IV of Macbeth ('Double, double, toil and trouble'). Unfortunately, these lines are now attributed to Thomas Middleton. Next, he discusses the sonnets, stating that they were 'probably composed in the 1590s'. Again, things have moved on, with scholars now believing that although many sonnets were written in this decade, others in the sequence were added in the Jacobean period, during which the sequence as a whole was probably also revised. These are minor quibbles, but worse is to follow. Summarising Elizabethan printing practices, Miola explains the difference between quarto and folio, and gives a page size for the large folio as 'measuring about 6 by 4 centimeters (15 by 10 inches).' Really? Ironically, he then outlines the task of a corrector, who checked printed sheets for errors, adding that publishers would routinely sell uncorrected sheets as well as corrected ones. (Whereas the OUP apparently publishes just the uncorrected.) Worse still, perhaps, we are invited to imagine the erotically-charged lines of 'Venus and Adonis' being 'spoken in the sexy female voice of your choice à | Lauren Bacall, Kathleen Turner, or Sharon Stone, for example.' While Miola believes that Shakespeare's reading was wide-ranging and skilful, it's clear he doesn't have much faith in his readership's reading. Not that Miola's study is without merit à "far from it. As with other volumes in the series, his close readings of texts are often illuminating, and witty.

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