

CYMBELINE

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Cymbeline by William Shakespeare

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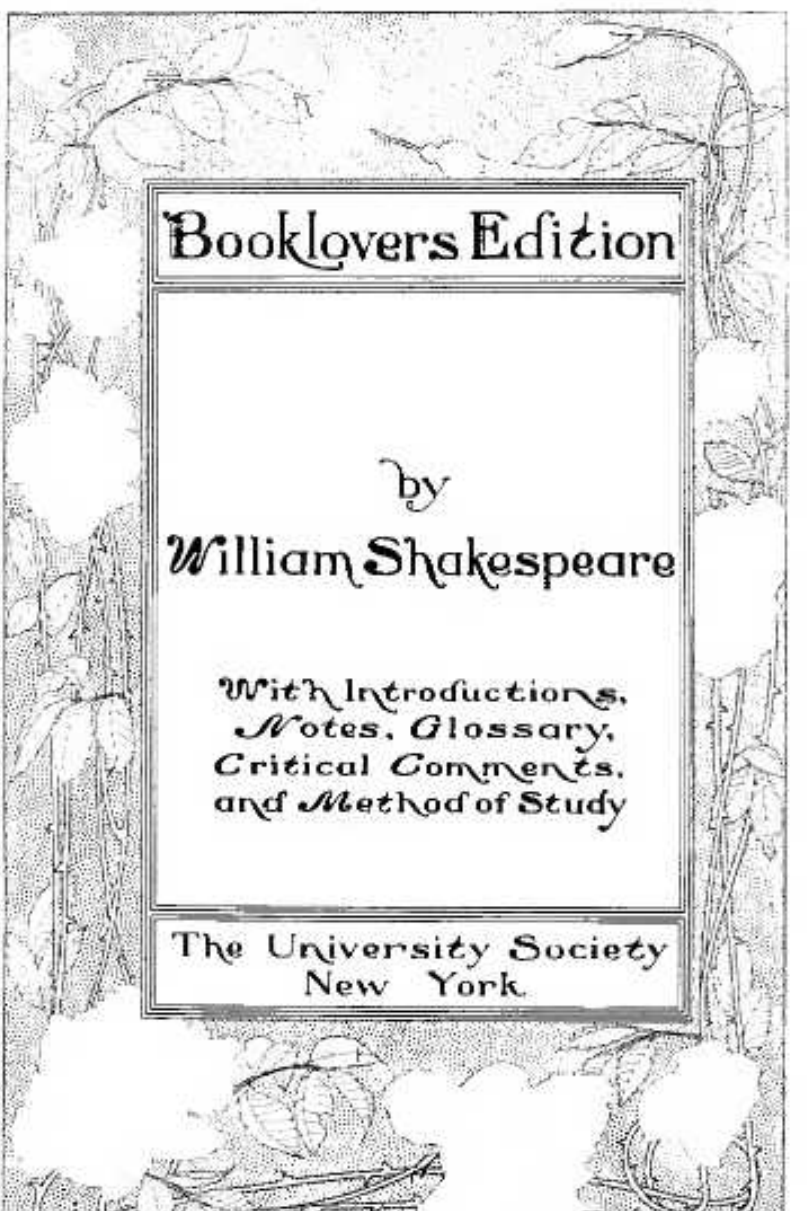
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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CYMBELINE



IMOGEN BEFORE THE CAVE OF BELARIUS

A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves surrounds the central text. The flowers are large and light-colored, with detailed leaves and stems. The border is composed of several rectangular panels, each containing a different floral motif.

Booklovers Edition

by
William Shakespeare

*With Introductions,
Notes, Glossary,
Critical Comments,
and Method of Study*

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CYMBELINE.

Preface.

The First Edition. "*The Tragedie of Cymbeline*" was first printed in the Folio of 1623; it is the last play in the volume, where it occupies pp. 369-399 (misprinted 993). It has been found desirable to remove it from its position in the Folio so that it may be included in this volume of "Comedies."

The place of *Cymbeline* in the First Folio has led some critics to infer that it was included late, and as an afterthought. The text of the play is certainly unsatisfactory, and possibly represents in many cases the Poet's "rough-cast notes" rather than his finished work.

Doubtful Passages. The Vision in Act V. Sc. iv. was probably by some other hand than Shakespeare's; it recalls the problems connected with the *Masque* in the Fourth Act of *The Tempest*; in both cases it is important to remember the fondness for this species of composition during the reign of James I. The Vision may have been inserted for some special Court representation.

The exquisite simplicity of the dirge sung by the brothers over the grave of Fidele (Act IV. Sc. ii.) seems to have raised doubts in the minds of certain commentators as to the authenticity of the lines; they have found "something strikingly inferior" in the concluding couplets, both in thought and expression; they would reject, as "additions,"

*"Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust,"*

preferring no doubt Collins's more elegant rendering:—

*"To fair Fidel's grassy tomb
 Soft maids and village hind's shall bring
 Each opening sweet of earliest bloom,
 And rife all the breathing spring!"*

The "Tragedy" of Cymbeline. The editors of the First Folio erred in describing *Cymbeline* as a "Tragedy," and in placing it in the division of "Tragedies": 'all is outward sorrow' at the opening of the story, but its close is attuned to the harmony of peace and happiness, and the play thus satisfies the essential conditions of "Romantic Comedy," or more properly of Shakespearian "Tragi-Comedy,"—life's commingling of tears and laughter, sorrow and joy, joy triumphant in the end.

Date of Composition. No positive evidence exists for the date of composition of *Cymbeline*; the probabilities are in favour of 1609-10.

This limit may be fixed from a notice in the MS. *Diary* of Dr. Simon Forman, a notorious quack and astrologer. His "*Book of Plaies and Notes thereof for common Politie*"* shows him an enthusiastic play-goer; it contains his reports of three Shakespearian representations at the Globe Theatre in 1610-11; *Macbeth* is referred to under the former year (possibly an error for 1611); *The Winter's Tale* was witnessed on the 15th of May, 1611, two or three months before the diarist's death; *Cymbeline* unfortunately has no date assigned; there is merely the statement, preceding an epitome of the plot,—

"Remember also the story of Cymbalin, King of England in Lucius' time."

Cymbeline's influence on Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* (cf. the characters of Imogen and Euphrasia†) is

* Among the Ashmolean MSS. (2c8) in the Bodleian Library; privately printed by Halliwell-Phillipps.

† As a single instance of the borrowings, in thought and phraseology, the following may be noted:—

*"The gods take part against me; could this boor
 Have held me thus else?"* (*Philaster*, IV. i.).

Cp. Cymbeline, V. ii. 2-6.

noteworthy: the date of the latter play cannot be definitely fixed, but the evidence points to *circa* 1610-11; 1608 is the earliest date critics have assigned to it. Similarly Webster's "*White Devil, or Vittoria Coromboua*," printed in 1612, and written *circa* 1608, owes some of its tenderest touches to the most striking scenes in *Cymbeline*.

The relation of these two plays, to the present play, as well as certain striking resemblances between scenes and situations in *Cymbeline* and *Macbeth* (e.g. Act II, ii., compared with *Macbeth*, Act II.*), have led to the conjecture that some portions of the work were written as early as 1606-7, the whole being completed in 1609-10; one scholar assigns to the former date Act II. Sc. i., and Act V. Sc. ii.-v.† Another scholar‡ calls attention to a change of treatment to be found in the character of Cloten; in the earlier scenes "he is a mere fool" (e.g. I. iii., II. i.); in the later "he is by no means deficient in manliness, and the lack of his counsel is regretted by the King in Act IV. Sc. i." He finds in Act III. Sc. v. corroboration of his view, pointing out that the prose part is a subsequent insertion, having some slight discrepancies with the older parts of the scene. According to this view the story of *Cymbeline* and his sons, the tribute, etc., in the last three acts, was written at an earlier time, in 1606.§

More important than these questionable theories are the unmistakable links connecting *Cymbeline* with the Shakespearian fragment of *Pericles*, with *The Tempest*, and especially with *The Winter's Tale*—the crowning glories of the close of the Poet's literary life; what the

* Some of the parallels are certainly noteworthy; thus, the reference to Tarquin (ll. 12-14) recalls '*Tarquin's ravishing strides*' (*Macb.*, II. i. 35, 36); "*laced with blue of heaven's own tinct*" (ll. 22, 23) may be compared with Duncan's '*silver skin laced with his golden blood*' (*Macb.*, II. iii. 118), etc.

† G. M. Ingleby (*cp.* his edition of "*Cymbeline*," 1886).

‡ F. G. Fleay.

§ *Cp.* "*A Chronicle History of the Life and Works of William Shakespeare.*"

present writer has said of one of these may be said of all: "On all of them his gentle spirit seems to rest; "Timon the Misanthrope" no longer delights him; his visions are of human joy—scenes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace—a world where father is re-united with child, husband with wife, brother with brother, friend with friend. Like his own Miranda, Shakespeare in these Romances again finds the world beautiful:—

*'O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in 't!'*

Perhaps, after all, John Heminge and Henry Condell knew what they were about, when, in defiance of chronology and of their own classification, they opened their precious Folio with the wonders of Prospero's enchanted island, and closed it with 'the divine comedy' of 'Posthumus and Imogen.'

Sources of the Plot. The main plot of the play is the love-story of Posthumus and Imogen: this theme, with the famous 'wager-motif' and the 'chest intrigue,' is set in a framework of pseudo-British History, and blended with episodes belonging to that mythical epoch.

I. The Historical Element. So far as the names of the British King (whose reign was contemporary with the birth of Christ), his two sons, and stepson, are concerned, the historical element was derived from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England* (Bk. III.; ch. xiii.-xviii.); some few meagre incidents were taken from the same source, notably the original of Posthumus's account of the battle, and of his description of the changed fortunes of the fight, summed up in 'a narrow lane, an old man, and two boys.' The source of this episode is found in Holinshed's *History of Scotland*, near the chapters dealing with the story of *Macbeth*.