

**SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY
OF HAMLET: A
STUDY FOR CLASSES
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649703548

Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet: A Study for Classes in English Literature by William Shakespeare & Carroll Lewis Maxcy

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & CARROLL LEWIS MAXCY

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A Study for Classes in English Literature

BY

CARROLL LEWIS MAXCY

BOSTON, U.S.A.

GINN & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

1892

TO

My life-long Friend

The Rev. Louis Norman Booth,

this little volume is dedicated

as a token of respect

for his broad scholarship, and his deep appreciation

of Classic Literature

PREFACE.

UNTIL recently, Shakespeare's plays have been taught like Caesar's Commentaries and Xenophon's Anabasis; in many cases with the same unfortunate result. The young student of Shakespeare, unless gifted with a phenomenal appreciation of historical research and critical analysis, has been brought to regard the works of the poet as a schoolroom bugbear. As in the study of the ancient classics, so in the classic English, the main object — if indeed not the sole object — has been critical *notes, notes, always notes*, until, save for mechanical purposes, the text might have been omitted and not missed.

Lately, however, with the inquiries into methods and principles of teaching, there has come the realization that this system is wrong, — and harmful as well; that the young student of Shakespeare is not to "cram," for examination purposes, data about the early editions, but that he is to learn to love the writings of the poet for their own sake.

This new system of teaching Shakespeare has been advocated by eminent authorities in this country and in England, and it has been found successful in practice. It is to further this method and to present, in a tangible form for study, questions on the text, that the following pages have been prepared.

How are we to read a play of Shakespeare? Richard Grant White says: "The way to read Shakespeare is — to read

him. The rest follows as a matter of course. If, not having read before, you read anywhere, you will know a new delight; you will read more; you will go on; in your eager reading you will consume the book. Having read all, you will read again, and now will begin to ponder, and compare, and analyze, and seek to fathom; and having got thus far, you will have found an occupation which lights with pleasure the whole of your leisure life. This seems to me to be the natural way of reading Shakespeare."

Let the student follow this plan; let him throw to the winds every commentary, every note, every recollection of any stage-presentation which he may have seen. Then let him follow the advice of Professor Ransome in his admirable "Short Studies in Shakespeare's Plots," — "The work in hand should first be read through as a whole, and the students taught to ask themselves at the end of each scene . . . the following or similar questions: 1st, What has this scene done to advance the story? 2d, What light has been thrown by it upon the characters of the persons concerned? 3d, What light has been thrown upon the circumstances under which the events which form the plot took place?"

The questions here presented, collected from actual class work, as well as from the writings of others, — have been arranged with the purpose of bringing out the development of the plot and emphasizing those points of the great tragedy which are most frequently discussed. It is believed that a class which has accomplished the work in the manner suggested, will not only be able to converse intelligently upon the play, but will have read it with interest and pleasure.

At the close of each act are "Observations," taken from various sources and bearing upon the plot. The object of *these is to bring out points which could not be brought out*

in the questions and, in some cases, to furnish hints for the answers of certain questions. Some of the most familiar passages in "Hamlet" will be found after the respective acts wherein they occur. Every student should be familiar with, at least, a portion of them.

After the regular series of questions, are additional and general questions upon the play. They are of a more difficult character, and are for those making a rather deeper study of the play than frequently is required. It is intended, however, that the great majority of the questions should be of such a character that they may be answered from a study of the text.

At the suggestion of teachers of experience, a few explanatory notes have been appended to each act. In them, all grammatical and critical references have been carefully avoided. The sole purpose has been to aid the student in understanding what might otherwise have been unintelligible. In cases where the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases has seemed to be implied from the context, no note has been added. In those instances where the questions are answered neither in the text nor in the "Observations," it has been deemed better to leave the teacher to suggest their bearing, by judicious questions of his own, than to burden the work with additional explanatory notes. It is the author's opinion, that, in view of the purpose of the work, — *thoughtful study* on the part of the *student*, — it is better to err upon the side of a paucity rather than of a multiplicity of notes.

CARROLL LEWIS MAXCY.

TROY ACADEMY, November, 1891.

