

# **THE READING OF SHAKESPEARE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649113644

The reading of Shakespeare by James Masson Hoppin

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**JAMES MASSON HOPPIN**

**THE READING OF  
SHAKESPEARE**



# THE READING OF SHAKESPEARE

BY

JAMES MASON HOPPIN

PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF THE HISTORY  
OF ART IN YALE UNIVERSITY



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY

*The Riverside Press, Cambridge*

1906

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

932  
H 198

COPYRIGHT 1906 BY JAMES MASON HOFFIN  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*Published April, 1906*

TO THE  
LIBRARY OF  
CONGRESS

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIFE AND LEARNING . . . . .	4
STYLE . . . . .	18
NATURE AND ART . . . . .	22
MORALITY . . . . .	26
HISTORICAL PLAYS . . . . .	39
COMEDIES . . . . .	73
GREEK PLAYS . . . . .	108
ROMAN TRAGEDIES . . . . .	130
ITALIAN PLAYS . . . . .	157
SOME LAST GREAT PLAYS . . . . .	179

M188565





## THE READING OF SHAKESPEARE

---

ALMOST every English-speaking man with literary tastes has had, at some time in his life, a bout with Shakespeare, since this dramatist represents the highest object of his literary curiosity, and it may also be affirmed that one who possesses any virility of mind is made stronger by the study of Shakespeare; our strenuous chief magistrate, it is said, is fond of Shakespeare, and reads him for refreshment while stretched before the fire in his Montana log cabin. The subject itself of Shakespeare aids us in our reading by its very magnitude.

Nature has produced three poets who stand like mountain peaks higher than the rest—Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. Homer delineated the “throned gods” of Olympus, and gave expression to the splendid Hellenic race; Dante, leaving the

miserable strifes of Italian factions, tracked the soul's flight into spiritual realms, following the leadings of Celestial Love; while Shakespeare interpreted to us our common humanity, and was the poet of universal humanity; which of these three poets is to be considered the greatest, depends upon our nationality, trend of studies, and sympathetic tastes.

The following brief talk on Shakespeare makes no pretense to add anything new to such a vast theme, and it originated in this wise: I spent the summer of 1903 in the country—a dreadfully rainy summer—and for recreation and instruction, I took up the reading of Shakespeare's plays; and although I had been, all my life, more or less a reader of Shakespeare in a cursory way, I continued this reading in a more regular manner, though at intervals, until the present time, giving myself to it, and enjoying the beauties of his work from a purely literary point of view, not dwelling too critically on them. In this year, 1903, and the succeeding years I went through, more or less carefully, thirty-six plays, accompanying, it is true,

the delightful task by reading Professor Lounsbury's volumes on "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist," and "Shakespeare and Voltaire;" but leaving aside Dr. Furness's clean sweeping "Variorum Shakespeare" and other critical and philologic authors, truly rejoicing that I was born to speak English and could read Shakespeare in his own tongue. I did this, I may repeat, not only for instruction but for enjoyment. In a true work of art, be it literary or otherwise, there is always the element of joy—it gives delight because it aims for perfection; this is the meaning of æsthetics, which is pleasure derived from the contemplation of beauty in nature and art. A work of art may have in it the element of the useful and practical, but it also from its beauty awakes joy. Take any of the arts—Architecture, for example, on a College campus: while there should be as much of the ample space, air, and light of nature as possible, and the grounds should be laid out with simple taste, the buildings themselves should be of noble form drawn from sound classic principles and of essentially academic character, telling what they