



Skepticism and Belonging in Shakespeare's Comedy (Routledge Studies in Shakespeare)

Derek Gottlieb

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This book recovers a sense of the high stakes of Shakespearean comedy, arguing that the comedies, no less than the tragedies, serve to dramatize responses to the condition of being human, responses that invite scholarly investigation and explanation. Taking its cue from Stanley Cavell's influential readings of *Othello* and *Lear*, the book argues that exposure or vulnerability to others is the source of both human happiness and human misery; while the tragedies showcase attempts at the evasion of such vulnerability through the self-defeating pursuit of epistemological certainty, the comedies present the drama and the difficulty of turning away from an epistemological register in order to productively respond to the fact of our humanity. Where Shakespeare's tragedies might be viewed in Cavellian terms as the drama of skepticism, Shakespeare's comedies then exemplify the drama of acknowledgement. As a parallel and a preamble, Gottlieb suggests that the field of literary studies is itself a site of such revealing responses: where competing research methods strive to foreclose upon (or, alternatively, rejoice in) epistemological uncertainty, such commitments bespeak an urge to avoid or circumvent the human in the practice of scholarship. Reading Shakespeare's comedies in tandem with a "defactoist" view of teaching and learning points in the direction of a new humanism, one that eschews both the relativism of old deconstruction and contemporary Presentism and the determinism of various kinds of structural accounts. This book offers something new in scholarly and popular understanding of Shakespeare's work, doing so with both philosophical rigor and literary attention to the difficult work of reading.

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