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Shakespeare the Thinker

A. D. Nuttall

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Shakespeare the Thinker A. D. Nuttall
A. D. Nuttall's study of Shakespeare's intellectual preoccupations is a literary tour de force and comes to crown the distinguished career of a Shakespeare scholar. Certain questions engross Shakespeare from his early plays to the late romances: the nature of motive, cause, personal identity and relation, the proper status of imagination, ethics and subjectivity, language and its capacity to occlude and to communicate. Yet Shakespeare's thought, Nuttall demonstrates, is anything but static. The plays keep returning to, modifying, and complicating his creative preoccupations. Nuttall allows us to hear and appreciate the emergent cathedral choir of play speaking to play. By the later stages of Nuttall's book this choir is nearly overwhelming in its power and dimensions. The author does not limit discussion to moments of crucial intellection but gives himself ample space in which to get at the distinctive *essence* of each work.
Much recent historicist criticism has tended to "flatten" Shakespeare by confining him to the thought-clichés of his time, and this in its turn has led to an implicitly patronizing view of him as unthinkingly racist, sexist, and so on. Nuttall shows us that, on the contrary, Shakespeare proves again and again to be more intelligent and perceptive than his 21st-century readers. This book challenges us to reconsider the relation of great literature to its social and historical matrix. It is also, perhaps, the best guide to Shakespeare's plays available in English.

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