



Faith in Shakespeare

Richard C. McCoy

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Speculation about Shakespeare's own religious beliefs and responses to the Reformation have dominated discussions of faith in the playwright's work for decades. As a result, we often lose sight of what's truly important—the plays themselves. By focusing on those plays in several succinct, fluently written chapters, Richard McCoy reminds us of the spell-binding power inherent in works like *Othello*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale* and shows why they continue to cause audiences to gladly exercise what Samuel Taylor Coleridge called the "willing suspension of disbelief."

Faith in Shakespeare ruminates on what it means to believe in the Bard's plays, exploring how their plots can be both preposterous and gripping, and how their characters seem more substantial and enduring than the people surrounding us in the theater. Informed by Coleridge's "poetic faith," the book discusses what this concept shares with religious faith and how it departs from recent historicist approaches to the dramatist's work. *Faith in Shakespeare* concentrates more on text than context, finding the afterlife of Shakespeare's language more vivid and engaging than theological controversies. The book confirms its convictions in literature's intrinsic powers by exploring the causes for our paradoxical belief in theater's potent but manifest illusions. Plays that ask their audience to "awake your faith" or "believe then, if you please" ultimately enable us to "mind true things by what their mockeries be." Rather than faith in God or the supernatural, McCoy argues that faith in Shakespeare is sustained and explained only by the complex, subtle, and entirely human power of poetic eloquence and dramatic performance.

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