

*What Shakespeare Teaches Us about Psychoanalysis: A Local Habitation and a Name.* Dorothy T. Grunes and Jerome M. Grunes.

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The Gruneses have written a commendable survey of several Shakespeare plays, showing that a psychoanalytic perspective enriches our understanding of characters and their motives. They acknowledge, “we look to Shakespeare to teach us about the psyche” (134). Although Shakespeare scholars will find little that is new here, the Gruneses’ book shows general readers how a deeper understanding of both Shakespeare’s plays and psychoanalysis can illuminate one another.

The Gruneses explicitly choose certain characters as their “patients.” They limit their study to the texts. Surprisingly for two psychoanalysts, they “cannot speculate upon the nature of [Shakespeare’s] creative process or the effect his life experience had on his writing” (17), since they believe, reductionistically in my opinion, that “psychobiography leads only to reductionism” (18). Perhaps we all fear that the as-if nature of theater will be spoiled unless, as in Oz, we pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. But that is hardly psychoanalytic, since “ideally, psychoanalysts should be truth seekers” (xii).

In their superb introduction, the Gruneses note that, in Shakespeare, “characters develop . . . as a result of reconceiving themselves” (xiii). They speculate that Iago reflects a “sinister” (8) aspect of Shakespeare, interacting with the audience, and manipulating the other characters to do his will. They wisely caution against formulaic oversimplification, and state that their focus “is on our emotional reaction” to

Shakespeare's plays (18). They convincingly characterize "imaginary places" such as Belmont and the Forest of Arden as those "where magical events take place with the metaphor of entering nature and entering the true nature of man with fantasy and transformations. Shakespeare traditionally uses nature as a place where love objects can be interchangeable" (56).

Discussing *Othello*, they observe that Iago's motivation in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* is removed in Shakespeare's retelling of the story. They make a related point about Antonio's devotion to Bassanio. Their few references to the critical literature suggest they might be unaware that Greenblatt has identified such "strategic opacity" as a recurrent feature in Shakespeare's later plays, magnifying their complexity. The Gruneses idiosyncratically blame Cordelia for Lear's downfall. While Lear's faults "seem minor" (164) to them, Cordelia allegedly fails to see that "Lear needs positive comments to feel worthwhile and to deny his aging and infirmities" (166). Although, in sonnet 62, Shakespeare confesses "sin of self love," the Gruneses adopt the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's efforts to normalize some pathological forms of narcissism. In the parallel plot involving Gloucester and his two sons, the Gruneses (father and daughter) once again seem to overidentify with the parent, while implausibly calling Edgar sadistic for staging his father's mock suicide. In their defense, they "caution against any definitive reading" (181) of Shakespeare, acknowledging the subjectivity of their commentaries, since our experience of all art "is a private and intensely personal relationship" (181).

The book is marred by repeated errors, such as "psychopathic" for neurotic (xvi) and "gerontologies" for gerontocracies (173); or asserting that Miranda's mother is never mentioned in *The Tempest* (26), and that her name means "mirror" (145). Seemingly unaware that the Bible is one of Shakespeare's leading literary sources, they say of Iago's "I am not what I am" that "Shakespeare uncharacteristically references the Bible" (4). The Gruneses might have made more use of Shakespeare to understand the mind, as their title suggests, rather than so often use Freudian language to explicate Shakespeare. By contrast, they are silent on Freud's most controversial theory about Shakespeare.

The Gruneses cogently describe the currently high status of *Lear* as reflecting a shift in the response of an audience that once rejected the original text for Nahum Tate's more saccharine adaptation. In fact, some of the Gruneses' most astute observations are about the audience, starting with Freud's insight about parallels between neurotic conflicts depicted on the stage and the audience's unconscious conflicts. Consequently, "Once we identify with these characters we are at the mercy of the dramatist" (134). Further, they emphasize the operation of what some psychoanalysts would call projective identification from character to audience: "Those [characters] whose motivations are beyond their awareness leave us to feel the burden of their ambivalence" (2). This perspective captures the sort of relevant insights that clinical psychoanalysts can contribute to Shakespeare scholarship.

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