



Hamlet: Poem Unlimited

Harold Bloom

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In Harold Bloom's *New York Times* bestselling *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, the world's foremost literary critic theorized on the authorship of the historic play *Hamlet*. In this engaging new stand-alone work, he offers a full and warmly personal account of the play itself, explores its extraordinary impact throughout the history of western literature, and seeks to uncover the mystery at its heart.

Hamlet: Poem Unlimited Details

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From Reader Review Hamlet: Poem Unlimited for online ebook

Sarah Hofhine says

Some interesting insights into the play...I didn't agree with everything he said, but he brought up some stuff i've never considered, i'll have to read Hamlet again. My biggest complaint is that he's a bit pompous and I have to read it with a dictionary next to me. Which is saying quite a bit, because I read the dictionary for fun.

Chris says

Dear Dr. Bloom, high grand poobah of Literature,

I sometimes agree with you, and sometimes I don't (in particular, I strongly disagree with your opinion about dogs). This is cool. I don't like to read things that I agree 100% with; that way lies stagnation. I really enjoyed your book about Blake, and I think Naomi Wolf needs to have her head examined. I have to ask you something, however. The question is no doubt influenced in part by The Shakespeare Wars Clashing Scholars, Public Fiascoes, Palace Coups.

The question is this.

You do realize that you are NOT Falstaff, right?

Honestly, this book is suppose to be about Hamlet, not about how much you love Falstaff and see yourself as him. I honestly don't think good ole Shakespeare based his Falstaff on you. I doubt Gertrude wishes her son had been Falstaff either.

Sorry, if I sound snarky, but I had to ask. I did find it interesting that you pointed out that there are seven soliloquies in *Hamlet*. Do you think, considering, how the good Dane seems to age over the course of the play, that the seven soliloquies are in reference to the Seven Ages of Man? Or do you think Shakespeare just got lucky? I really think you should have gone into that much more.

Additionally, I found your comments about Gertrude to be interesting. Do you wish you were Falstaff so you could date her? Your comments were nice and well thought out. The only other male critic I've seen be so nice to Gertrude was A.C. Bradley. He called her a happy sheep who wanted all the other sheep to be happy. When you read that, do you also think about the sheep in *Wallace and Grommit*? I do. I will forever have a picture in my mind of Gertrude as one of the sheep from "A Close Shave".

Your points about Horatio were interesting as well, in particular, how Horatio allows the audience to identify or to feel sympathy towards, Hamlet. The same is true for your analysis of Hamlet in terms of religion. The discussion about the Company Wars and the players in the play was really enlightening. It's amazing that you were able to fit such astute remarks in while expounding on the joys of Falstaff.

Incidentally, how can Hamlet have nothing of his father in him, if, as you claim, Hamlet as all the qualities of the world in him? Won't Hamlet Jr. then have something of his father at least?

If you think Orson Welles was right, and Hamlet became Falstaff, then wouldn't it be kinda icky for Gertrude

to date him?

Don't get mad at me for this letter, Dr. Bloom. After all, you pointed out that *Hamlet* mixes high and low brow.

Karl says

Another great work by Harold Bloom, his writings on Shakespeare are inexhaustible, his insights deep, and his observations keen.

Having the pleasure of reading The Tragedy Of Prince Hamlet a number of times, a lot of what consists in this small work is not new to me.

One of the most original questions Bloom poses in this work is questions like, and I am paraphrasing here, Why do Fortibas and Hamlet never meet? And what would they talk about? There's lots of other questions like this, that Bloom supposes are additonal examples of Shakespeare's genius (As if he needed more confirmation).

I'd recommend this to anyone interested in Shakespeare in general, or anyone who loves Hamlet as much as me or for anyone who wants something informative and well written by one of the world's greatest Shakespearian scholars.

Leigh says

Here's the thing: Harold Bloom is utterly fucking nuts, and I disagree with or laugh at the majority of his pronouncements.

But here's the other thing: he loves *Hamlet* unabashedly and very personally, the way almost no other critic I've read will admit to loving it. And while I don't agree with all of his secondary comments, I think he's got the play (and the character) nailed: *Hamlet* and Hamlet as representations of modern consciousness straining to transcend worldly limitations. The play Bloom analyzes is the play I fell in love with; I appreciate him for that.

Carol Storm says

Harold Bloom, Fuddy Duddy Unlimited.

Harold Bloom at 12: Mama, mama, the bad boys took my hat!

Harold Bloom at 72: Fortinbras is a killing machine. Hamlet has nothing to say to him. ("He has my dying voice.") Old Hamlet is a killing machine. Hamlet doesn't really love him. ("Alas, poor ghost.")

Any questions?

Robert Lukins says

This very short book is something of an afterthought to the much more comprehensive 'Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human'. As another goodreads reviewer astutely observes, Bloom is "fucking nuts", but simultaneously fantastically interesting and insightful on Shakespeare and the plays in general, and particularly Hamlet. This is Bloom just wantonly reckoning things about H. in no particular order or to any unified effect. But dammit it's great.

Petergiaquinta says

Harold Bloom says that Hamlet knows more than we do, and he's probably right because Harold Bloom knows more than we do. In fact, I'm tempted to say that Harold Bloom knows more than just about everyone in the known universe. Except my wife, of course, but I don't have time to get into that right now...

I revel in Bloom's bardolatry like some ignorant celebrant exposed to the mysteries of a sacred passion that he really doesn't understand. But I also realize that Bloom is kinda full of shit, and if he wasn't Harold Bloom he could never get away with what he does in print. And what he does is ride the fire truck at the front of the Shakespeare parade like some overly chubby Homecoming queen tossing out tootsie rolls and lollipops to the unwashed multitudes and then moving right on down the road without ever stopping.

This incredibly small book is just stuffed to the gills with incredibly thought provoking observations about *Hamlet* and Hamlet (and of course about Falstaff, but enough already). Bloom will challenge just about every notion you have about the play and he's probably right. But what he refuses to do is stop and explain. There's almost no textual support or development or analysis for these pearls of wisdom he throws out on every page, and, when he does go to the play, the text is just laid out for the reader as if it's so very obviously demonstrating exactly what he is talking about and you just don't get it. But he's Harold Bloom...he doesn't have time to waste on you and me with any actual discussion or exegesis of the text.

So that, in a word, is maddening.

I'm going to read the book again (it's tiny!), and then, if the spirit moves, me I'll deign to add some specific examples here. After all, as much as I might wish I were, I'm no Harold Bloom.

Jim says

In Hamlet, Polonius gives a long winded description of actors coming to play before the king from which this book gets it's name. Poem Unlimited.

"The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men."

I think Shakespeare pokes fun at the ridiculousness of play criticism at the time. I love the bunching of the categories like tragical-comical-historical-pastoral .

This is a between a 3 and a 4 for me. Hamlet is a far more complex play than Macbeth. Having a book of analysis is interesting , helpful and fun to agree and disagree with. A quick read.

Vicki Cline says

This is a pretty short book with an interesting analysis of Shakespeare's play. Some of it was way too scholarly for me.

Rachel Terry says

I enjoy seeing what goes on in Harold Blooms brain, and this book is a nice little peek. Somehow, it seems perfectly natural for him to throw in random parenthetical asides like (Rosenstern and Gildencrantz--for the sake of variety) because you realize that's just how your brain would work, if only you were 1/16 as deep and quick as Bloom. I love Hamlet, except when he talks to Ophelia.

Jamie Grefe says

Bloom has managed to smoothly give voice to those otherwise voiceless feelings I have for Hamlet and Shakespeare. He takes us through the play via characters, scenes, and plays within plays within plays, only to leave us leaping into boundless space, left agape at all of those things we wish to hear Hamlet talk to us about, but never will.

Hannah says

Thoughtful and not without value or good points, this book suffers from being hugely pretentious and presenting huge claims without, for me, full explanation or proper textual backing.

Matt McCormick says

All the reviews of this book may be right. It's a 1, it's a 5. It's horribly ostentatious and it's replete with learning. It's opaque and it's insightful.

One comment I read in a review stuck with me - why can't he just explain stuff. Often I wanted to really understand why he had come to a conclusion and all I was left with was a beautiful generalized statement and a quote from the play.

I picked this up because, in truth, I am always so horribly lost reading a Shakespeare play from start to finish. If I see one performed I have no idea, from the dialogue, what the heck is going on. My plan is to read a number of critiques of a Shakespeare play before reading it in full. I hope to understand the cast and the basic plot before my eyes fall on a line like, "To fust in us unus'd.". With Bloom I obviously started at a higher rung than needed.

Enough whining, Bloom is so very knowledgeable, passionate, and often interesting. He says things about literature that don't often come to a reader's mind. I'm glad I read it. I'm glad it was short.

Lesley says

My husband and I have a perennial bet whenever we read a Bloom Shakespeare critique: how long before he shoehorns in a totally irrelevant or ludicrous comment about Falstaff? This time it was at page 6: Falstaff's command of prose is "greater than that of any other" Shakespearean character...except possibly Hamlet. Okayyyyy...

Falstaffian hyperbole aside, this is actually a pretty good book, once Bloom gets all his harrumphing about "irresponsible" Hamlet productions out of his system. Bloom wrote this as a follow-up to his wonderful Shakespeare, the Invention of the Human, fearing he had failed to express all his ideas about Hamlet in one short chapter, (and who could?) Here he has the leisure to explore each character, demonstrating the warmth and affection for these old friends that bespeaks years of reading and writing about a beloved yet perplexing play. I was particularly struck by his evaluations of Ophelia and Gertrude: as an apologist for the "dead white male" canon, Bloom is often accused of patriarchy and downright misogyny, but he demonstrates true empathy and understanding of these two much abused female characters.

Bloom is probably not much fun as a theatre companion, (he admits to having enjoyed only 2 or 3 of the many Hamlets he has seen) but as a guide to the complexities and richness of the text he is unparalleled....except possibly for Marjorie Garber.

Dominick says

I guess if you're Harold Bloom, you can get away with writing a book like this. Not that Bloom does not have interesting things to say, or that he's not a good writer, but this feels like it was tossed off over lunch rather than thought through and laboured over. What Bloom can toss off over lunch is of course still insightful and digestible, but it's not exactly a deep study. In some cases, short chapters consist of over 50% direct quotation from the play, with little or no close reading or analysis of the text, just Bloom basically saying, "here, isn't this great?" Well, yes it is, but I don't need Harold Bloom to tell me that. He rarely bothers to cite other scholars, even when floating ideas that have been much debated, and when he does, he provides nothing in the way of appropriate documentation--not even a bibliography. I suppose one could justify that sort of casualness by saying that this is a book for general readers, not scholars, but that seems weak to me. The book feels lazy, frankly. It's not even clear what text Bloom is discussing: quarto? folio? conflated? *Seems* to be the conflated text, which is fine, I guess, but one would expect in this day and age at least an explicit if brief address of this sort of question, with explanation. Basically, if you want to enjoy some extravagant bardolatry (and there's nothing wrong with that), this may be a book for you, but if you want something that justifies its claims, explicates the text, contextualizes, etc., you had better look elsewhere.

