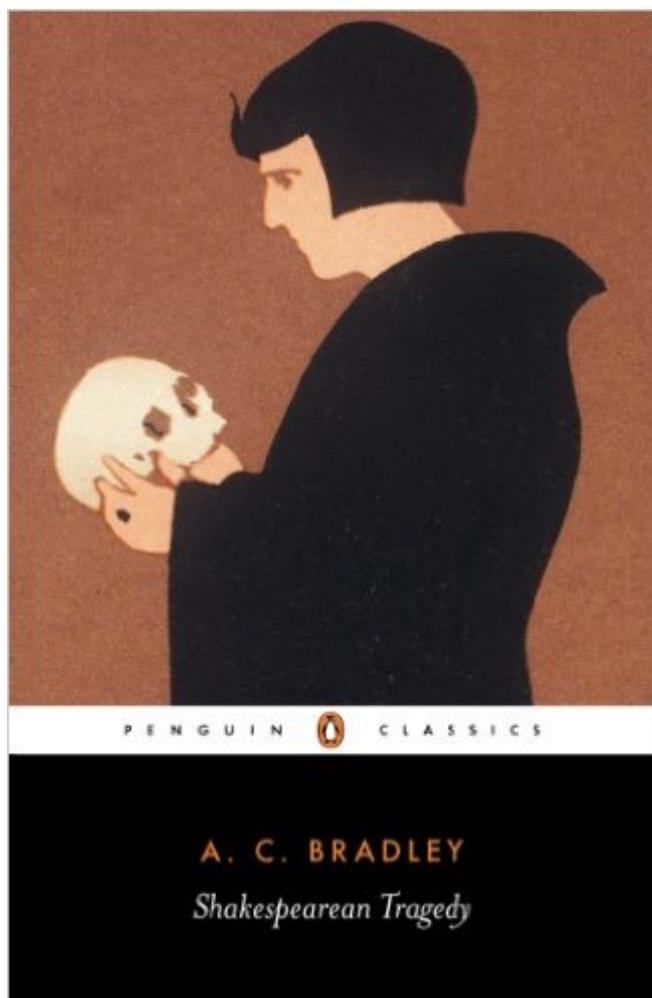


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# Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures On Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, And Macbeth (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

"A.C. Bradley put Shakespeare on the map for generations of readers and students for whom the plays might not otherwise have become 'real' at all" writes John Bayley in his foreword to this edition of *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth*. Approaching the tragedies as drama, wondering about their characters as he might have wondered about people in novels or in life, Bradley is one of the most liberating in the line of distinguished Shakespeare critics. His acute yet undogmatic and almost conversational critical method has "despite fluctuations in fashion" remained enduringly popular and influential. For, as John Bayley observes, these lectures give us a true and exhilarating sense of "the tragedies joining up with life, with all our lives; leading us into a perspective of possibilities that stretch forward and back in time, and in our total awareness of things." For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics (October 1, 1991)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140530193

ISBN-13: 978-0140530193

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1.1 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #526,654 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #346 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Shakespeare > Literary Criticism #792 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Shakespeare > Works #4182 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Criticism & Theory

## Customer Reviews

( should spell Macbeth's name correctly - not as "MacBeth"!) This has for almost a century been, and continues to be today, one of the most important books on Shakespeare's best and most

popular tragedies. For much of the time since around 1930, it has been severely criticised: on the grounds, chiefly, that the author is too much inclined to respect or have sympathy for the heroes (which he is), and that he treats them too much like "real" people (which he does, and which they aren't). Yet, for all that, Bradley's approach to the heroes as though they were characters we all know has revealed a great deal about what Shakespeare has made those characters, and those who see the characters as complex and psychologically worth exploring identify a more significant aspect of Shakespeare's interest in humans and his art than do many of Bradley's opponents. Moreover, the detail of his examinations of the texts makes it possible to probe much with him, even if one continues to question or quarrel with him on the way (and he is not infrequently demonstrably wrong). Thus this remains a work of criticism which is inspirational and searching even if at times quite wrongheaded; and every serious reader of Shakespeare (including actors and directors) should read this book and own it. - Joost Daalder, Professor of English, Flinders University, South Australia

Bradley offers some of the most eloquent, complete, and balanced criticisms of the tragedies that I have yet read. Unlike so many literary critics of today, Bradley does not disdain to view Shakespeare's characters as actual people, which lends his view of the works a sense of import and meaning which so few critics manage to convey. These lectures are necessary reading for anyone at all who wishes to understand Shakespeare's tragedies better, actors, directors, and academics alike.

I am so glad this book is still in print (it was first published in 1904, I think). My original copy was second-hand and it would be awful to think I couldn't get another! Bradley is so illuminating on Shakespeare's intentions, and on the characters of his great tragic figures. If nothing else, read his brilliant discussion of Macbeth - it will convince you that, for a perspective on human nature, for conceiving a dramatic character whole, Bradley was as great a critic as Shakespeare was a playwright. Don't miss him!

In his opening chapter Bradley defines for us the essence of Shakespearean tragedy. He points out that Tragedy involves the fall of a great hero, but that this fall does not come as random event or as willful act of God , but rather through the results and consequences of the action of the hero himself. He points out too that the effect of this fall is not to leave us in despair or depression, but rather to leave us with a sense of the wonder, mystery and greatness of life i.e. that paradoxically

Shakespearean tragedy has an effect on its audience which is uplifting. And this though the hero invariably is killed at the end. Bradley points out also that the death in tragedy is not the slow crawling death of an illness, but comes out of a sudden violent effect of the action. This too sharpens our sense of wonder and mystery. The heroes of tragedy and their stories somehow give us a feeling of life and its terrible end which magnifies our feeling of 'greatness' while somehow leaving us more humbled. I do not know if the paragraphs written above translate Bradley in a completely accurate way. I do know his writing is inspirational, moving and uplifting. The criticism of the plays makes you want to know and read the plays more. This is the kind of Literary criticism which is great literature in and by itself.

A.C. Bradley wrote these lectures in 1904, and the book has gone through at least 26 printings. It is significant that the Folger Shakespeare Library has republished these lectures. They are hugely important and vibrantly written. I am sure my father read these in college, and I know my son did, too. I'm glad I finally got around to them! You will be, also, for all the reasons that other reviewers have noted.

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