



Shakespeare's Political Realism: The English History Plays

Tim Spiekerman

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This book provides fresh interpretations of five of Shakespeare's history plays (King John, Richard II, Henry IV, Parts I and II, and Henry V), each guided by the often criticized assumption that Shakespeare can teach us something about politics. In contrast to many contemporary political critics who treat Shakespeare's political dramas as narrow reflections of his time, the author maintains that Shakespeare's political vision is wide-ranging, compelling, and relevant to modern audiences. Paying close attention to character and context, as well as to Shakespeare's creative use of history, the author explores Shakespeare's views on perennially important political themes such as ambition, legitimacy, tradition, and political morality. Particular emphasis is placed on Shakespeare's relation to Machiavelli, turning repeatedly to the conflict between ambition and justice. In the end, Shakespeare's history plays point to the limits of politics even more pessimistically than Machiavelli's realism."

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