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that the problem of ordering the fragments, which has so vexed *Canterbury Tales* criticism, is a deliberately built-in problem. Each tale and each group of tales can be related to the others in any number of ways, depending on one's point of view. Theme, parody, genre, teller—apply any one of these criteria and a different grouping of the tales will emerge. (Howard compares the form to the interlace structure of medieval romance and visual art.) Furthermore, the form is infinitely expandable, because of the gaps. It would accommodate 120 tales, or any number, between morning and evening, between creation and apocalypse. Chaucer has sketched the outlines and left the rest to our imaginations. This discussion, and the close reading of the individual tales which occupied Chapters 5 and 6, I found most stimulating. I suppose that one's point of view will determine what one finds important in this book, as well as in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Point of view will probably also determine what one finds to dispraise. A long comparison between *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales* I found singularly unenlightening. It had an aroma of leftovers from *The Three Temptations*. Howard is somewhat too ready to reach for Christian doctrine to help him over the hard places, although he scorns Robertsonian exegesis. He says, for example, that one reason the *Franklin's Tale* cannot be Chaucer's last word on marriage is that it does not promote the Christian ideal of marriage. Apparently Howard will allow the famous Chaucerian irony and detachment to go so far and no farther, not realizing that it is difficult to stop that sort of thing once it gets started. Finally, and most unsettling, is the lack of a clear sense of where one has been and where one is going. Howard compares the *Tales* to a labyrinth, and perhaps he is trying to make his work imitate the original. I cannot recall, however, feeling so lost while reading Chaucer as I do while reading Howard. With shame I confess that I cannot tell what the "idea of the *Canterbury Tales*" is.

But read the book. The footnotes and the illustrations are worth the price of admission. (There is, alas, no bibliography.) Howard writes in an engaging style, acknowledging the struggling and, at times, exasperated reader, avoiding both too magisterial and too chatty a tone. While you may not agree with all of his conclusions, he raises important questions, and the experience of mentally arguing with him will clarify your own idea of the *Canterbury Tales*, whatever it is.

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William G. Leary. *Shakespeare Plain: The Making and Performing of Shakespeare's Plays*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977. Pp. xi+298. \$4.95.

"Plain and not honest is too harsh a style"; Shakespeare's Queen Elizabeth might direct this same condemnation onto many popular guides to Shakespeare's plays, but not onto William G. Leary's honest and artful *Shakespeare Plain*. By bringing

out the dramatic richness and complexity of situations and characters which modern preconceptions obstruct us from seeing clearly, Leary attacks the *cliché* of "plain and simple":

Plain refers to the *view* of Shakespeare's plays that can be attained by a reader or playgoer who comes to understand Shakespeare's customary ways of composing and performing them. (p. 2)

Habitual patterns of motivation, morality, language, and structure emerge in their paradoxical "complex simplicity":

Precisely because he [Shakespeare] follows no dogmas, adheres to no doctrines, and subscribes to no programs, his meanings will never be easy even while, paradoxically, they appear to be familiar. (p. 124)

Shakespeare Plain is at once a manual and model of such balanced appreciation, Leary's goal for his readers.

Nearly every distinguished Shakespeare scholar has undertaken an introduction to the study for novice readers: Marchette Chute, G. B. Harrison, Irving Ribner; the stellar list lengthens each year. Leary acknowledges his own indebtedness to Alfred Harbage, Mark Van Doren, and Bernard Beckerman, but he has capitalized on his borrowings to produce a book with all the obligatory scholarship plus elements only a master *teacher* could provide. While his credentials as a writer and editor are impressive, Leary is best known as a speaker, a man who has made Shakespeare plain in classrooms, forums, and television studios. From classical times, the plain style has been a teaching style. This book points up rather than explains away the challenges of a playscript or performance, and the obstacles become delights once in plain sight. Consider this description of Falstaff, a character who has stoutly tossed off the labels heaped on him by Prince Hal ("reverend vice," "grey iniquity," "old white-bearded Satan") and more recent critics:

Through the glass of paradox, we see how many of the seeming inconsistencies that complicate Falstaff's character can be reconciled. We come to see that a very clumsy body can house a very agile mind, that a very rusty cloak and doublet can encase a wit kept clean and shining from constant use, that a corrupter of youth may be at the same time youth's wisest mentor, that a seemingly dirty joke may disclose a healthy sense of humor, that a decaying knight already in the winter of his days may nourish the spirit of spring, that the apparent butt of the laughter of others appears always to have the last laugh, that one often labeled a coward appears frequently in places of danger without going to pieces. (p. 26)

This is the succinct but not simple truth.

Leary calls the book a "celebration" rather than a guide, and while it is intended for the general reader and playgoer, it commands the specialist's respect. Moreover, its evocative style and analyses of individual plays redeem it for advanced students and non-specialist teachers.

Leary turns the tables on many handbooks by making *Shakespeare Plain* an assault on false simplicity. Here the terms of the trade become processes, not static labels, matters of "how" not "what." *Theme* becomes *vision* (Ch. 6); *world picture* becomes *world of the play* (Ch. 3): "a structure of structures, a skein of relationships, the container *and* its contents" (pp. 42-43). Leary shows how Shakespeare uses ideolects to create character (Ch. 2) and how he expands dramatic time (Ch.

5). At the same time, he removes dogmas and obstructions such as "five-part structure" and Neo-Aristotelian "unities" (Ch. 4). "Unity in multiplicity" was Shakespeare's greatest achievement, Leary argues. This value suggests a formalist bias, but the unity Leary describes is also affective, the *product* as much as the process of the plays' orchestration.

Concision is the counterpart of clarity, and each of the ten chapters on paired topics ("Playscript and Performance" to "Actor and Audience") does double duty. The book bears initial likeness to Maurice Charney's *How to Read Shakespeare* (1971), but it is at once more informative and less didactic. While Leary's readings of the major plays are uniformly sound, his comments on the teacher's standbys, *I Henry IV*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*, are models of delightful instruction.

Shakespeare Plain is a respectable answer to students' queries about what to read first. In a section on "Further Reading" Leary replies with "more Shakespeare" and a practical reading program. But more than any other recent guide, Leary's justifies itself by being both clear and the cause that clarity may be in others. Pompey's quip to Enobarbus, "Enjoy thy plainness, / It nothing ill becomes thee," is an apt recommendation for *Shakespeare Plain*.

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