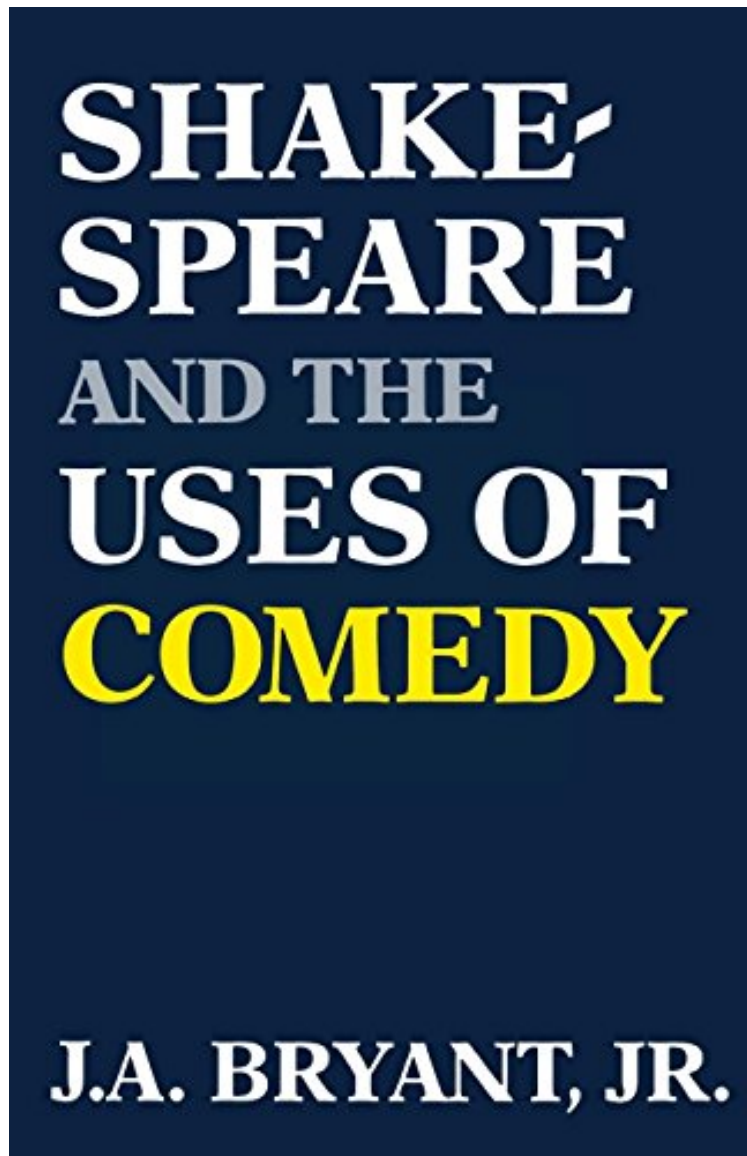


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Shakespeare and the Uses of Comedy

J. A. Bryant Jr.

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J. A. Bryant Jr. : Shakespeare and the Uses of Comedy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shakespeare and the Uses of Comedy:

In Shakespeare's hand the comic mode became an instrument for exploring the broad territory of the human situation, including much that had normally been reserved for tragedy. Once the reader recognizes that justification for such an

assumption is presented repeatedly in the earlier comedies?from *The Comedy of Errors* to *Twelfth Night*?he has less difficulty in dispensing with the currently fashionable classifications of the later comedies as problem plays and romances or tragicomedies and thus in seeing them all as manifestations of a single impulse. Bryant shows how Shakespeare, early and late, dutifully concerned himself with the production of laughter, the presentation of young people in love, and the exploitation of theatrical conventions that might provide a guaranteed response. Yet these matters were incidental to his main business in writing comedy: to examine the implications of an action in which human involvement in the process of living provides the kind of enlightenment that leads to renewal and the continuity of life. With rare foresight, Shakespeare presented a world in which women were as capable of enlightenment as the men who wooed them, and Bryant shows how the female characters frequently preceded their mates in perceiving the way of the world. In most of his comedies Shakespeare also managed to suggest the role of death in life's process; and in some?even in plays as diverse as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*?he gave hints of a larger process, one without beginning or end, that may well comprehend all our visions?of comedy, tragedy, and history?in a single movement.

"Joseph Bryant, Jr. writes serenely, and with great southern urbanity and courtesy, of Shakespeare's comedies as portrayals of human life as it always will be and as the expression of eternal values."?Yale "The distillation of many years' study and teaching by a scholar who has produced distinguished and influential books on the drama of the Renaissance period. . . . A stimulating book."?Shakespeare Quarterly
About the Author
J.A. Bryant Jr., is professor of English at the University of Kentucky and author of other studies in comedy, including *The Compassionate Satirist: Ben Jonson and His Imperfect World*.