

Shakespeare's Double Helix (Shakespeare Now!)

By Henry S. Turner


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What does it mean to make life? This book focuses on one of the key questions for culture and science in both Shakespeare's time and our own. Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* during a period when the 'new science' had begun to unsettle the foundations of knowledge about the natural world. Through close analysis of the play and reflection on modern genetic engineering, Turner examines developments in early modern culture as it sought to come to terms with the new forces of magic, astrology, alchemy and mechanics - fields of knowledge that preoccupied the most adventurous intellects of Shakespeare's period and that promised limitless power over nature. Shakespeare's writing sheds light on current developments in science, ethics, law, and religion in contemporary culture. This book reveals the richness and peculiarity of early scientific thought in Shakespeare's time and shows how the questions he poses remain fundamental as the nature of 'life' has become one of the most pressing political, ethical, and philosophical problems for society today.

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Editorial Review

Review

Mention in Today's Books/ Bookweek

Reviewed by Peter J. Smith in *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2008.

"the conjoined pieces of Turner's book provide a fresh double reading of *A Midsummer Night's dream*. The book's imbricated left face/right face presentation makes every page mirror, echo or pre-empt themes from the opposite essay.

In this year of Darwin's birth, the Globe Theatre's 2009 takes *A Midsummer Night's dream* on a national tour. Shakespeare Now! seems thus doubtly apt."

Flux Magazine, 1 July 2009

(Tim Huntley)

"...both an eye-catching attempt to assert Shakespearian contemporaneity and a genuine reflection of aspects of the volume's content...has a definite novelty value in the context of Shakespearian criticism, and it is raised above the merely gimmicky here by the highly apposite image that Turner finds for his title...a very readable, clear and informative quick overview of the development of modern genetic research...there is much interesting and stimulating comment in Turner's study, and the book itself ins undeniably memorable and thought-provoking."

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English Vol. 58, 2009

"In Turner's text past, present and the 'posthuman future' come together and Francis Bacon, Philip Sydney, and Bottom rub shoulders playfully with Richard Dawkins, Roland Barthes, and Puck."

English Vol. 58, 2009

Briefly reviewed in the [Year's work in English Studies](#) journal, vol 89, No. 1

'The Shakespeare Now! series of 'minigraphs' aims to appeal to both Shakespeare specialists and the educated public by producing 100- to 140-page texts that purportedly reduce or eliminate arcane endnotes and scholarly jargon and that address timely topics- mainly post-modern ones- in readily understandable prose.'

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About the Author

Henry S. Turner is Assistant Professor at Rutgers University, USA. He is the author of *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts* (OUP, 2006).

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