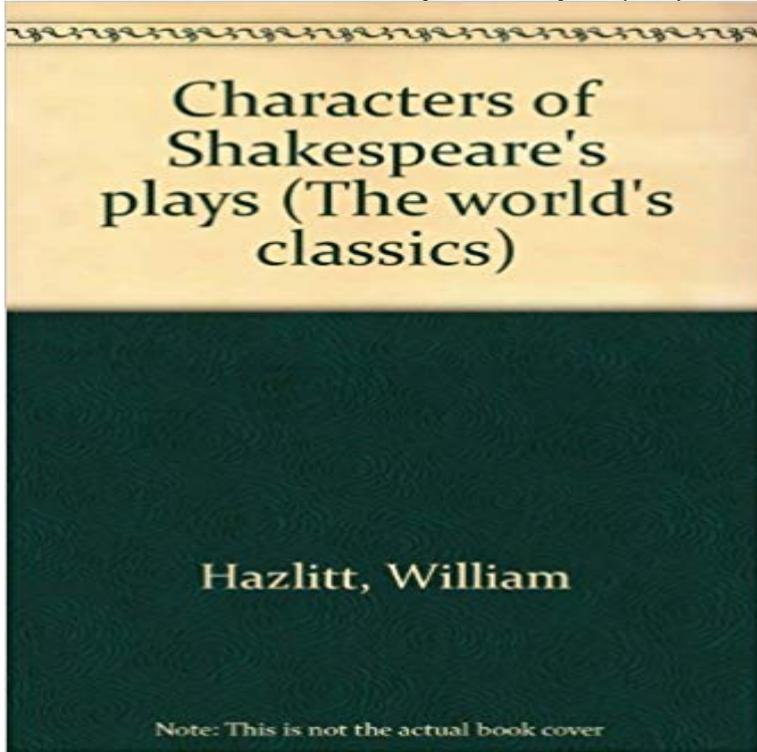


Characters of Shakespeares plays (The worlds classics)



It is observed by Mr. Pope, that If ever any author deserved the name of an ORIGINAL, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through AEGyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakespeare was inspiration: indeed, he is not so much an imitator, as an instrument of nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him. His CHARACTERS are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shows that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image: each picture, like a mock-rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakespeare, is as much an individual, as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such, as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of character, we must add the wonderful preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays, that had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker. The object of the volume here offered to the public, is to illustrate these remarks in a more particular manner by a reference to each play. A gentleman of the name of Mason, [Footnote: Hazlitt is here mistaken. The work to which he alludes, Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare, by the Author of Observations on Modern Gardening, was by Thomas Whately, Under-Secretary of State under Lord North. Whately died in 1772, and the Essay was published posthumously in 1785 [2nd edition, 1808;

3rd edition, with a preface by Archbishop Whately, the authors nephew, 1839]. Hazlitt confused T. Whatelys Observations on Modern Gardening with George Masons Essay on Design in Gardening, and the one error led to the other.] the author of a Treatise on Ornamental Gardening (not Mason the poet), began a work of a similar kind about forty years ago, but he only lived to finish a parallel between the characters of Macbeth and Richard III which is an exceedingly ingenious piece of analytical criticism. Richardsons Essays include but a few of Shakespeares principal characters. The only work which seemed to supersede the necessity of an attempt like the present was Schlegels very admirable Lectures on the Drama, which give by far the best account of the plays of Shakespeare that has hitherto appeared.

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