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Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare

Clare Asquith

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A revelatory new look at how Shakespeare secretly addressed the most profound political issues of his day, and how his plays embody a hidden history of England In 16th-century England many loyal subjects to the crown were asked to make a terrible choice: to follow their monarch or their God. The era was one of unprecedented authoritarianism: England, it seemed, had become a police state, fearful of threats from abroad and plotters at home. The age of terror was also the era of the greatest creative genius the world has ever known: William Shakespeare. How, then, could such a remarkable man born into such violently volatile times apparently make no comment about the state of England in his work? He did. But it was hidden. Revealing Shakespeare's sophisticated version of a forgotten code developed by 16th-century dissidents. Clare Asquith shows how he was both a genius for all time and utterly a creature of his own era: a writer who was supported by dissident Catholic aristocrats, who agonized about the fate of England's spiritual and political life and who used the stage to attack and expose a regime which he believed had seized illegal control of the country he loved. Shakespeare's plays offer an acute insight into the politics and personalities of his era. And Clare Asquith's decoding of them offers answers to several mysteries surrounding Shakespeare's own life, including most notably why he stopped writing while still at the height of his powers. An utterly compelling combination of literary detection and political revelation, Shadowplay is the definitive expose of how Shakespeare lived through and understood the agonies of his time, and what he had to say about them.

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