



# The Shakespeare Wars: Clashing Scholars, Public Fiascos, Palace Coups

*Ron Rosenbaum*

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“[Ron Rosenbaum] is one of the most original journalists and writers of our time.”

–David Remnick

In *The Shakespeare Wars*, Ron Rosenbaum gives readers an unforgettable way of rethinking the greatest works of the human imagination. As he did in his groundbreaking *Explaining Hitler*, he shakes up much that we thought we understood about a vital subject and renews our sense of excitement and urgency. He gives us a Shakespeare book like no other. Rather than raking over worn-out fragments of biography, Rosenbaum focuses on cutting-edge controversies about the true source of Shakespeare’s enchantment and illumination—the astonishing language itself. How best to unlock the secrets of its spell?

With quicksilver wit and provocative insight, Rosenbaum takes readers into the midst of fierce battles among the most brilliant Shakespearean scholars and directors over just how to delve deeper into the Shakespearean experience—deeper into the mind of Shakespeare.

Was Shakespeare the one-draft wonder of *Shakespeare in Love*? Or was he rather—as an embattled faction of textual scholars now argues—a different kind of writer entirely: a conscientious reviser of his greatest plays? Must we then revise our way of reading, staging, and interpreting such works as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*?

Rosenbaum pursues key partisans in these debates from the high tables of Oxford to a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop in a strip mall in the Deep South. He makes ostensibly arcane textual scholarship intensely seductive—and sometimes even explicitly sexual. At an academic “Pleasure Seminar” in Bermuda, for instance, he examines one scholar’s quest to find an orgasm in *Romeo and Juliet*. Rosenbaum shows us great directors as Shakespearean scholars in their own right: We hear Peter Brook—perhaps the most influential Shakespearean director of the past century—disclose his quest for a “secret play” hidden within the Bard’s comedies and dramas. We listen to Sir Peter Hall, founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company, as he launches into an impassioned, table-pounding fury while discussing how the means of unleashing the full intensity of Shakespeare’s language has been lost—and how to restore it. Rosenbaum’s hilarious inside account of “the Great Shakespeare ‘Funeral Elegy’ Fiasco,” a man-versus-computer clash, illustrates the iconic struggle to define what is and isn’t “Shakespearean.” And he demonstrates the way Shakespearean scholars such as Harold Bloom can become great Shakespearean characters in their own right.

*The Shakespeare Wars* offers a thrilling opportunity to engage with Shakespeare’s work at its deepest levels. Like *Explaining Hitler*, this book is destined to revolutionize the way we think about one of the overwhelming obsessions of our time.

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