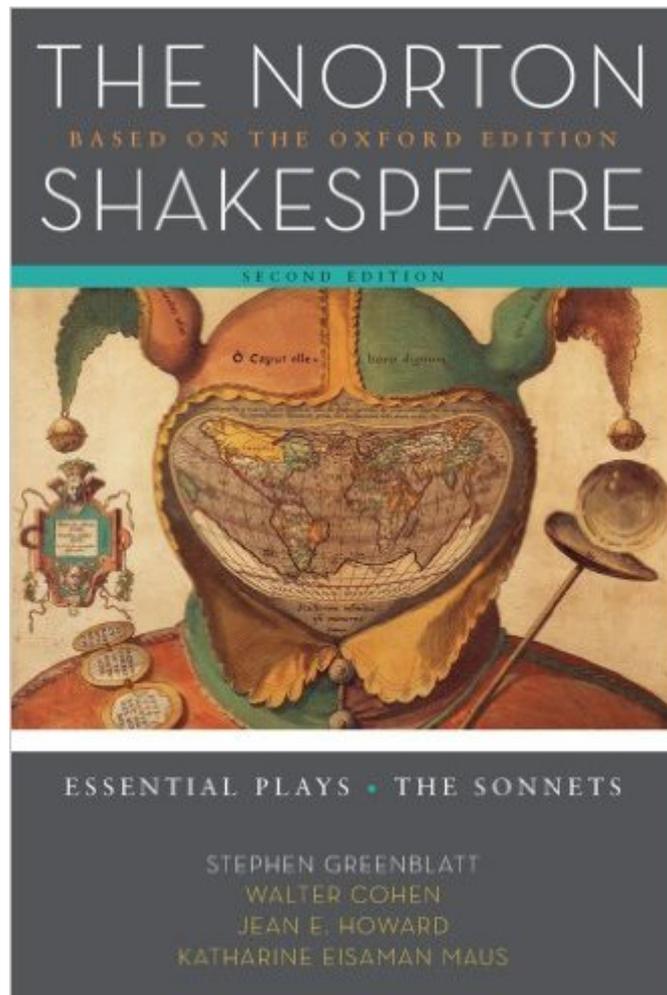


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# The Norton Shakespeare: Based On The Oxford Edition: Essential Plays / The Sonnets (Second Edition)



## Synopsis

The Norton Shakespeare: Essential Plays / The Sonnets offers the twenty most-assigned plays and all the sonnets in a compact, portable, and value-priced paperback with a host of features.

Organized by genre, this volume includes the genre introductions enthusiastically received in The Norton Shakespeare, Second Edition: *Shakespearean Tragedy* • by Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Comedy* • by Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Shakespearean History* • by Jean E. Howard, and *Shakespearean Romance* • by Walter Cohen. Like its parent volume, this concise edition gives students the vibrant introductions, readable single-column format, helpful glosses and notes, and extensive reference materials—maps, a timeline, annotated bibliographies and film lists, documents—that have made The Norton Shakespeare, Second Edition the best-selling classroom edition worldwide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was quite interested in this volume, wanting something less bulky and more convenient than the full Norton Shakespeare (which I own), but having the same layout and editorial content. This volume looks ideal, but none of the reviews that I've seen list the contents. How can we decide if we're interested if we don't know what it contains? After some searching on the internet, I found a copy of the contents hidden away on the Norton site. According to Norton, here is what is contained in "The Norton Shakespeare: Essential Plays / The Sonnets":-----List of IllustrationsPrefaceAcknowledgmentsGeneral IntroductionStephen Greenblatt Shakespeare's World The Playing Field Shakespeare's Life and Art The Dream of the Master TextThe

Shakespearean Stage, Andrew Gurr  
Comedies  
Shakespearean Comedy, Katharine Eisaman Maus  
The Taming of the Shrew  
A Midsummer Night's Dream  
The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice  
Much Ado About Nothing  
As You Like It  
Twelfth Night, or What You Will  
Measure for Measure  
Histories  
Shakespearean History, Jean E.

This book is clearly meant to "compete" with David Bevington's *The Necessary Shakespeare*. Both books cover the same 21 plays and the complete sonnets...which can hardly be a coincidence. Both include background and performance material that is meant to contextualize the material for the intended audience (primarily students in undergraduate Shakespeare courses). The Bevington book is superior. The prefatory material is better and more wide-ranging (the section on Shakespeare in performance is particularly good), the accompanying illustrations are far superior, and the plays themselves are better annotated. Even functional details lean toward the Bevington...the book is more bulky, but easier to read, with far higher quality paper and binding. Part of this is certainly because the Bevington book is now in its third edition and has been gradually improved in each subsequent edition. My main problem with all volumes/editions of the Norton Shakespeare is the average (at best) editing of Stephen Greenblatt at this time. Dr. Greenblatt is certainly a gifted theorist and commentator; he does not, however, edit these plays in a consistent manner. His work on King Lear is particularly spotty. The distinctions and differences between Quarto 1 and Quarto 2 of Lear are known to every serious Shakespearean scholar. The way that an individual editor chooses to combine or edit or disregard these works could, indeed, be interesting and informative to students. Greenblatt reprints extra material from Q1 without indicating that the rest of his play has several passages from and emendations resulting from Q1. He goes into depth to "show" the non-standard material in some places without indicating how, in other places, it is used (and useful).

A major flaw infects the Oxford Shakespeare, from which the Norton Shakespeare is derived: the editing of Shakespeare's texts themselves. The editors seem to have been driven by a desire to make a splash, even if this meant questionable and arbitrary editing of the texts, and so the Oxford/Norton Shakespeare features such oddness as:  
\* Two versions of King Lear, 90% identical and each missing some familiar lines (the Norton has three versions)  
\* A Macbeth that has had non-Shakespearean material added in to it, allowing it to be co-credited to Thomas Middleton (one editor is a Middleton fan)  
\* A Hamlet that has lost some of its most significant passages to an appendix  
\* Significant, damaging cuts to many of the other plays  
\* A Pericles with huge chunks of

non-Shakespearean material added in, all of it terrible.\* Falstaff renamed to "Oldcastle" in Henry IV Part 1, though not in Part 2\* Wholly new stage directions that have been added in without note\* A horribly inept poem, "Shall I die", near-universally agreed upon not to be by Shakespeare, yet claimed as such Yes: good Shakespeare material has been removed from the plays, and bad non-Shakespeare material has been added in. So be aware that you will be reading versions of the plays that are substantially different than from what most people have read over the last century, or indeed, the last few centuries. And, usually, substantially worse versions. The changes tend to damage the plays, not improve them. The Norton Edition removes some of the most grotesque alterations (like Falstaff/Oldcastle), but hardly enough to undo the damage. It also raises the question of why Norton chose to use Oxford in the first place.

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