

# Books



## Ernest G. Anderson 1891-1973

Ernest G. Anderson, professor of genetics emeritus, died on January 30 in Columbia, Missouri. He was 81.

A native of Concord, Nebraska, Anderson received his BSc from the University of Nebraska in 1915 and his PhD from Cornell in 1920. He came to Caltech in 1928 as associate professor of genetics, became full professor in 1946, and retired in 1961.

Anderson was known for his research in the field of cytogenetics, particularly in corn. Using plantings of descendants of seeds exposed to radiation in the Bikini and Eniwetok atom bomb tests, and normal corn exposed to measured doses of X rays, he made fundamental studies of heredity and transmitted traits—and of the effects of radiation on food crops.

## SHAKESPEARE'S ROMANCES A Study of Some Ways of the Imagination

by Hallett Smith

The Huntington Library . . . . . \$8.50

Reviewed by J. Kent Clark  
Professor of English

Hallett Smith brings to his study of Shakespeare's last plays three priceless assets besides critical finesse and careful scholarship. These are an ear for the music and weight of words, a feeling for dramatic values and the demands of stage presentation, and an almost unique sanity. Employing these gifts and a crisp, incisive style of writing, he illuminates Shakespeare's romances—*Pericles*, *Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*—in a way that not only adds to our abstract knowledge of sources, dramatic strategies, and essential themes but actually sharpens our appreciation of the plays themselves.

In the process he brings us close to Shakespeare's creative methods, showing how the poet's mind selected and stored words, phrases, and images and how these appear transmuted into dramatic poetry and sometimes expanded into whole scenes. On a larger scale, he shows how Shakespeare, responding to contemporary tastes in romance, transformed the wild, violent, and implausible tales of the Greek-cum-medieval tradition into something rich and strange—and magical.

Since Shakespeare's romances do not fit into any traditional or easily definable genre, since they defy most canons of literary "realism," and since they often explore (or obliterate) the boundaries between dream and reality, they are a fertile source of insanity among critics. With a little coercion, a little selective misreading, and a little evasion or ignorance of their sources, they can be made to yield an alarming number of "interpretations," according to the intellectual fads of the time or the particular mania of the critic. In combating these aberrations, particularly the recent tendency to transform the plays into elegant restatements of primitive cultural myths or into crypto-theological tracts, Dr. Smith employs several essential strategies. He places the dramas in the literary and historical context of their times, traces and describes the sources

from which Shakespeare drew his materials, compares and contrasts important elements in the romances with similar materials in the comedies and tragedies, and analyzes Shakespeare's use of imaginative "landscaping," theatrical spectacle, and verbal stage setting. For this task he is able to draw upon the rich fund of scholarship that has accumulated since Shakespeare's time, especially in the last 50 years, and upon the critical insights of many great literary men. The result is much more than a clearing away of scholarly underbrush and critical aberration; it is a remarkable synthesis of scholarly and critical materials into a coherent, illuminating, and sane perspective. To Dr. Smith, I should add, even absurd theories have their value. Like the inhabitants of Arden, who found sweet uses in adversity, he can draw meat from nuts.

If all this sounds recondite and formidable, I hasten to testify that it is not. Non-scholarly readers of Shakespeare may find the tour through the grotesque plots of Renaissance tales a bit exhausting and they will certainly wish they had read the later plays more thoroughly and more recently, but they will find themselves gracefully entertained along the way and they will find their imperfections pieced out with the author's thoughts. They will also notice that Hallett Smith has improved their perceptions of *King Lear*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, and the "problem comedies" in the process of explaining the romances. If, like him, they have an ear for music and a feeling for style, they will find his chapters on landscape and language a delightful contribution to their understanding of poetry. In short, although *Shakespeare's Romances* will be required reading for all future scholars and critics of Shakespeare's last plays, it will also serve as a permanent source of wisdom and pleasure for readers who do not fancy themselves experts.