

# Shakespeare's WORLD AND WORK



## VOLUME 1

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# SHAKESPEARE'S WORLD AND WORK

## AN ENCYCLOPEDIA FOR STUDENTS

John F. Andrews, *Editor in Chief*

### Volume 1

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## PREFACE

In 1985, under the auspices of the gracious and visionary Charles Scribner, Jr., one of the world's most respected publishing houses issued a three-volume reference set about the dramatist Samuel Taylor Coleridge described as "the greatest man that ever put on and off mortality." This collection, *William Shakespeare: His World, His Work, His Influence*, featured sixty articles by noted interpreters of the writer a famous contemporary, Ben Jonson, had declared "not of an age, but for all time."

Happily, the set was greeted with enthusiastic applause—so much so, in fact, that teachers, librarians, and parents soon began asking for a new collection of Shakespeare-related information that would be organized and attractively presented for the enjoyment and edification of young people. In response, thanks in no small measure to the resourcefulness and perseverance of publisher Karen Day, Scribners is now delighted to issue another title, *Shakespeare's World and Work*, that combines the breadth of its predecessor with an accessible, lively format that should make it appealing both to youthful browsers and to a considerably broader audience than the parent work.

Among the details that distinguish this student encyclopedia from its precursor are (a) the alphabetical arrangement of its topics, (b) time lines that place significant dates and developments in historical context, (c) sidebars that illuminate and provide further insight into major subject areas, (d) brief definitions that appear in the margins of most articles to explain any terms or concepts that might pose special difficulties, and (e) cross-references that direct readers of each discussion to related entries elsewhere in the anthology. The result—beautifully enhanced by more than 200 illustrations, many of them in color—is a vivid and multifaceted introduction to the personalities, settings, and events that made Renaissance England so rich and diverse a backdrop for the poems and plays that have established Shakespeare as our most reliable guide to the mileposts of life.

As editor I'm honored to welcome back several of the eminent contributors who graced our previous endeavor. I think, for example, of Ralph Berry, Maurice

Charney, Werner Habicht, Joseph G. Price, George T. Wright, and David Young. I'm pleased to observe, moreover, that we've been able to attract a stellar company of their academic colleagues, among them Judith Ackroyd, William C. Carroll, Kent Cartwright, Susan Cerasano, Robert Clare, Eric Collum, Charles Frey, Jay Hallo, Joan O. Holmer, Ivo Kamps, Kate Levin, Pamela Mason, Michael Ouellette, Lois Potter, Jeanne A. Roberts, Ian Spiby, Alden and Virginia Vaughan, Gary Williams, and Susan Willis.

To coordinate all the efforts that went into this ambitious undertaking, and to supervise a capable staff of research professionals and freelance writers under the aegis of the Visual Education Corporation in Princeton—a team that included Amy Livingston, Paula Deverell, and Joseph Ziegler—we've been blessed with a splendid, indefatigable Senior Project Editor, Jewel Moulthrop. Jewel and her associates can take pride in already boasts such highly regarded compilations as *Ancient Greece and Rome*, *Latin America: History and Culture*, and *North America in Colonial Times*.

As these remarks go to press, an author who might once have been dismissed, in the parlance of modern show business, as a 436-year-old has been enjoying another winning streak as Hollywood's hottest screenwriter. It may be worth recalling, then, that Shakespeare was already being recognized in his own lifetime as the "soul of the age" his works reflected and adorned. During the 18th century one of the playwright's greatest editors and commentators, Samuel Johnson, was fully prepared to confirm the accuracy of his forebears' judgments. "This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare," Johnson observed, "that his drama is the mirror of life." Within a few years the most prominent actor of the mid-1700s was speaking in even more emphatic terms. "Shakespeare had a genius," argued David Garrick, "perhaps excelling anything that ever appeared in the world before him."

By the mid-19th century, America's leading man of letters, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was ready to accord the Stratford sage a unique position in the pantheon of history's deepest thinkers. "He was inconceivably

## Preface

wise," asserted Emerson, "the others conceivably." Owing in part to George Bernard Shaw's skepticism about such Bardolatry, our most recent century has been somewhat less hyperbolic in its critical estimate of the foremost Renaissance dramatist. But this has not discouraged such testimonials as those of James Joyce, the author who gave us several monuments of the modern sensibility, among them *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce referred to the creator of Hamlet and Prospero as the man who "wrote the great folio of the world," and his preferred nickname for this peerless artist was "Shakespeare."

No other dramatist, in English or in any other language, can approach Shakespeare's unique eminence as poet, psychologist, and philosopher; and no one else in any humanistic endeavor has afforded us a perspective as comprehensive or has commanded an influence as all-pervasive. Shakespeare's phrases and cadences have become so familiar that it is sometimes with a start when we realize how many of our everyday expressions were first minted in his fertile mind. Every time we utter a cliché like "one fell swoop," for example, or misapply a sentiment such as "more honored in the breach than the observance," whether we realize it or not, we are speaking Shakespeare. When we attend a stage performance or watch a cinematic version of *Kiss Me Kate* or *West Side Story* and participate vicariously in the lives that Shakespeare's characters continue to have outside the dramatic settings in which they first moved and breathed, we are benefiting from just a few of the ways in which the "sweet Swan of Avon" has enlarged our cosmos by imitating it.

No matter where we turn—whether we find ourselves chucking over a *New Yorker* drawing in which a

queen asks her husband, "You gave your kingdom for a what?" or pausing for a double take at a Superbowl T-shirt—we are continually reminded of the ubiquity of Shakespeare. In nearly every nation that has a theatrical or literary tradition, he turns out to be the playwright whose works are most frequently performed, the poet whose writings furnish the most convenient and memorable source of allusion. And because he is so central to our lives, sooner or later we're almost bound to feel a desire to know and understand him better.

That, of course, is the reasoning behind this publication. Appropriately, many of its articles elicit as many queries as they provide answers, because it is not the purpose of *Shakespeare's World and Work* to attempt definitive solutions to any of the problems the study of so inexhaustible a subject occasions. As Matthew Arnold reflected in a celebrated sonnet about the author he most admired, "Others abide our question. Thou art free."

These volumes will have achieved their aim if each reader emerges from them with an enhanced awareness of the complexity of Shakespeare's world and an expanded appreciation of the playwright's incomparable mastery of the means to immortalize it through the prose and verse for which we continue to gravitate to him. Meanwhile, it is our hope that those who peruse these pages will be helped to the same discovery that has thrilled millions of previous adventurers—that one of the most liberating experiences a person can enjoy is the privilege of falling under the spell of William Shakespeare.

John F. Andrews  
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