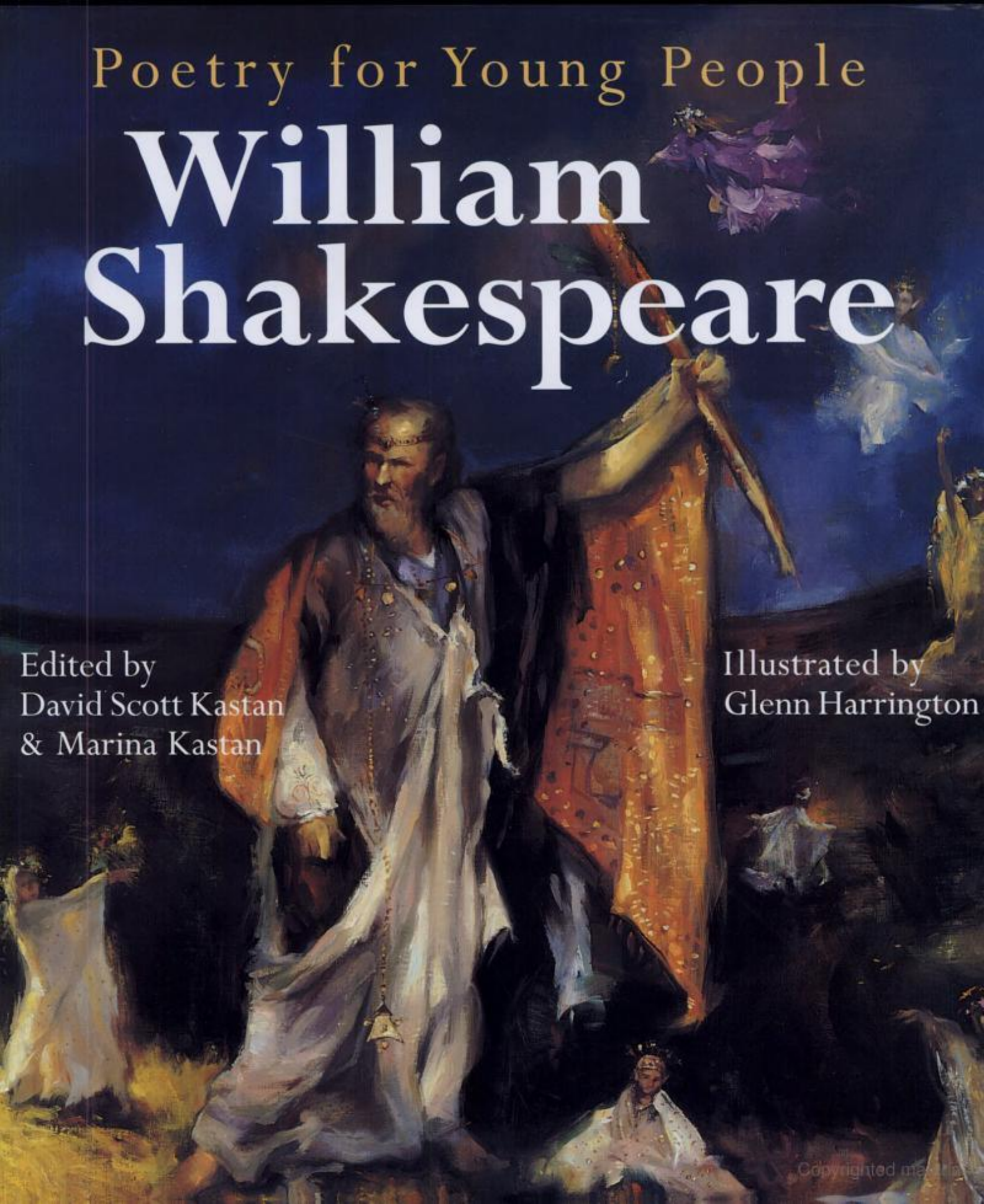


Poetry for Young People

# William Shakespeare

Edited by  
David Scott Kastan  
& Marina Kastan

Illustrated by  
Glenn Harrington



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Sterling Publishing Company, Inc.  
New York

For John Regis and, of course, for SEVWK

—David and Marina

To Evan and Sean—for whom Queen Mab's coach waits till your little noses grow, and Christine, who knows my mind true, and of course, Mom and Dad.

—Glenn

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## INTRODUCTION



William Shakespeare is the world's best-known dramatist. His plays have been performed more often—and more widely around the world—than those of any other playwright who ever lived. His writing has been translated into over 100 languages, and his plays and poems are sold in virtually every country.

“Shakespeare” is literally a household name. His first name, “William,” is not needed to identify him. Shakespeare is the world's most famous writer, and there is never any doubt which Shakespeare is meant. Even a quickly drawn sketch—a broad-faced, middle-aged man with a high forehead and hair reaching just below his ears, especially if he is wearing a ruff around his neck and holding a quill pen—is

usually instantly identifiable, even by those who have never read a word he has written.

His words are, however, what we know best about him. We quote him all the time, even when we are unaware of it. Many familiar words—“admirable,” “attorney,” “bedroom,” “distasteful,” “fashionable,” “frugal,” “laughable,” “mimic,” “solicit,” “successful,” “unreal,” and “useful”—first appeared in print in his plays. Some of his phrases, like “at one fell swoop” or “sick at heart” are now so common they seem as if they have always been part of the language. Sentences that he wrote have become proverbial, seemingly timeless wisdom rather than the invention of some individual: “all the world's a stage”; “to thine own self be true”; “the course of true love never did run smooth.”

We hear Shakespeare also from other mouths. His words have provided hundreds of writers with titles for books and films: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (from *Macbeth*) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (from *The Tempest*), to name just two. His plots and characters have been the inspiration for many hundreds of artists. The Italian composer Verdi turned *Othello* into an opera, and Disney transformed *Hamlet* into *The Lion King*.

How has all this happened? How is it that his words still echo in our ears? How is it that not only has he become the inspiration for other artists but also that his art still inspires us? How is it that Shakespeare still speaks *to* us and often *for* us? How is it that we can hardly escape him, even now, well over four hundred years after his birth?

We read his plays in school, experience them in the theater, and now, increasingly, see them on video and the movie screen. In the last decade, ten full-length, feature films of his plays have been released, including *Romeo and Juliet*, starring Clare Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio. Shakespeare has a whole new generation of admirers.

There is no simple explanation for his popularity. He is our greatest entertainer and our most profound thinker. Though he wrote more than four centuries ago, Shakespeare, more than any other writer, is able to make us laugh and feel deeply. His plays and poems engage our hearts and our minds, exploring our most complex emotions and our most fundamental ideals, our fondest hopes and our most disturbing dreams.

Shakespeare didn't expect to have such a powerful effect or find such lasting fame. He had few literary ambitions, at least for his plays. He was a practical man of the theater: an actor, a playwright, and a part owner of the acting company for which he wrote. He was a member of a troupe of actors called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which was renamed the King's Men soon after James succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of England in 1603.

During his career in the theater, Shakespeare became rich, but it was from the success of the acting company rather than from the sale of his plays. He received no direct payments for publication of any of them. He wrote them for actors to perform, not as texts to be published and read. Though nineteen of his plays were printed in his lifetime, not one was published with his involvement, nor even, perhaps, with his knowledge. Shakespeare seems not to have paid attention to these early printed playbooks. He cared only that the plays were successful on stage. The first seven actually appeared in print with no indication that Shakespeare was their author.

This is not, however, as surprising as it might seem. Plays then were very much like today's movies, a popular entertainment where star actors, rather than writers, attracted all the attention. Plays had not yet become a form of literature, and playwrights were not yet thought of as distinguished authors.

Only after his death was an effort made to publish a carefully edited volume of Shakespeare's collected plays. Two fellow actors, John Heminges and Henry Condell, joined with a group of publishers to produce a large and expensive edition, known today as the First Folio. This book, published in 1623, contains thirty-six of Shakespeare's plays, eighteen of which had not previously been published.

Heminges and Condell offered the book to the public with the aim, they said, not of achieving their own “self-profit” or “fame,” but “only to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend and Fellow alive.” And so they did.

After the publication of the First Folio, Shakespeare’s artistic reputation and achievement were secure. Nonetheless, some people passionately believe that someone else was the author of Shakespeare’s plays and poems. Little can be said for this view, except for the humor that it sometimes produces. Three prominent Anti-Stratfordians (those who deny Shakespeare’s authorship) are men named Looney, Battey, and Silliman.

The argument that someone other than Shakespeare wrote the plays seems to be based on simple snobbery: a belief that only someone educated at court or at a university would be capable of such wonderful writing. But Shakespeare’s life was not much different from that of the other major writers of his time. Like Shakespeare, most came from the lower middle class and most were not university educated.

We actually know a lot about Shakespeare, especially considering how long ago he lived. He was born in late April of 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small but prosperous market town in the middle of England, with wide streets and handsome houses roofed with thatch (straw). His father was John Shakespeare, a glovemaker and later a wool merchant, and his mother was Mary Arden, daughter of a successful farmer in the nearby village of Wilmcote. William was the third child of the eight they would eventually have. He was their firstborn son.

The parish church in Stratford records Shakespeare’s baptism on April 26, so his birthday was probably three days earlier, on April 23. April 23 is St. George’s Day, the holiday celebrating the patron saint of England, and it was also the date of Shakespeare’s death in 1616, fifty-two years after he was born.

We believe that from about the age of five Shakespeare attended the local Stratford grammar school, whose rigorous curriculum was based largely on the study of Latin and the major classical writers. The school day was long; it began at six in the morning in the summer (seven in the winter) and lasted until early evening. School was usually open all year, except for major religious holidays. It closed for two weeks at Christmas, two weeks at Easter, and a week at Whitsuntide in early June.

We know for certain that at age 18 Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, from the nearby village of Shottery. Their daughter, Susanna, was born on May 26, 1583. On February 2, 1585, Anne gave birth to twins: Hamnet, a boy, and Judith, a girl.

Sometime after the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left Stratford for London. There he began to prosper as both an actor and a playwright. There are many references to his activity in the theater. By 1598, a schoolmaster, Francis Meres, claimed that Shakespeare could be compared

even with the great classical dramatists for tragedy and for comedy, and that among English writers he was “the best of both kinds for the stage.” His plays were the most popular of his day, performed usually at the Globe Theater, which was built on the south bank of the River Thames in 1599.

His friends talked about his modesty and his good nature; scholars in his day commented on the excellence of his writing, and the contemporary court records revealed his prosperity. In 1597 he bought a substantial house in Stratford, known as New Place, for £60 (the equivalent today of about \$50,000). In 1602, he purchased 107 acres north of the town for £320. In 1605 he bought a half-interest in a Stratford farm for £440, and in 1613, with three other investors, he acquired a house in Blackfriars, a district in London, for £140. These large sums of money reveal the considerable wealth he earned through his theatrical successes.

Shakespeare’s work in the theater meant he spent most of the year in London. His family, however, remained in Stratford. Their lives and deaths can be traced through the Stratford parish register. His son, Hamnet, died at the age of eleven and was buried on August 11, 1596. Shakespeare’s father died in September 1601, his mother in 1608. His elder daughter, Susanna, married John Hall, a well-respected Stratford physician, in Holy Trinity Church on June 5, 1607. His younger daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney on February 10, 1616. Shakespeare’s wife died on August 6, 1623. She had lived to see a monument to her husband erected in Stratford’s Holy Trinity Church, but died just before the publication of the first collected edition of his plays, the more important memorial to his greatness.

Shakespeare himself had died over seven years earlier, in late April of 1616. According to one report, his death came after a “merry meeting” with fellow writers, Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton, where Shakespeare “drank too hard.” He was buried on the north side of the chancel of Holy Trinity Church.

His will has survived. He left £10 for “the poor of Stratford,” remembered friends, and provided for his family. He left money for commemorative rings to three surviving members of his acting company: Richard Burbage, John Heminges, and Henry Condell (the last two would later serve as the “editors” of the First Folio). He left £150 to his younger daughter, Judith, and another £150 to be paid if “she or any issue of her body be living” three years after the will was settled. But most of the estate was left to his older daughter, Susanna.

Oddly, Shakespeare’s wife, Anne, is referred to only once in the will, in an apparent afterthought. Added between two lines of the document is: “Item, I give unto my wife my second best bed with the furniture” (the “furniture” was the bedding and canopy). Some people have seen this as a deliberate snub. Whether or not it was, Anne would not have been left penniless. English law usually provided the widow with one-third of the estate, which in Shakespeare’s case





## POETRY/LITERATURE

William Shakespeare's verses—illustrated in remarkable color paintings created especially for this edition—engage hearts and minds, and provoke laughter as well as deep feelings.

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*"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts."*

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