

# Shakespeare Illustrated: A Guide to the Shakespeare Collection



Drawn by Sir John Gilbert.

"UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE"

*As you Like it. Act II. Sc. II.*

John Gilbert illustration for *As You Like It*. S 188.2 Q

## Introduction

The Shakespeare Collection (formerly known as the Shakespeare Memorial Library) is the first Shakespeare library in the world and one of the biggest centres for Shakespeare studies in the UK. With more than 100,000 items, including books, production posters and photographs, scrapbooks and illustrations, it is one of the Library of Birmingham's most important cultural treasures and, in effect, belongs to the people of Birmingham.

## Illustrating Shakespeare

Shakespeare's plays were first printed with illustrations in 1709, by an editor called Nicolas Rowe. As printing technology and levels of literacy improved in the following century, illustrated editions quickly became an important part of reading Shakespeare. The Shakespeare Collection's vast holdings show us how visual depictions of Shakespeare's plays has helped audiences of all ages to re-imagine the plays and make them relevant to their own life, but also how they have been used and repurposed in the national imagination.

## Nicholas Rowe

The first illustrated edition of *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709) is a beautiful set of six volumes edited by Nicolas Rowe (1674-1718), who was better known as a writer and poet. The illustrations, showing Shakespeare's characters in typical 18th century costumes and wigs, were designed by the French-born artist François Boitard (1670-c.1715) and engraved by the British engraver Elisha Kirkall (c.1682-1742). There is one image for each of the 37 plays by Shakespeare and six others for additional plays previously thought to be written by him.

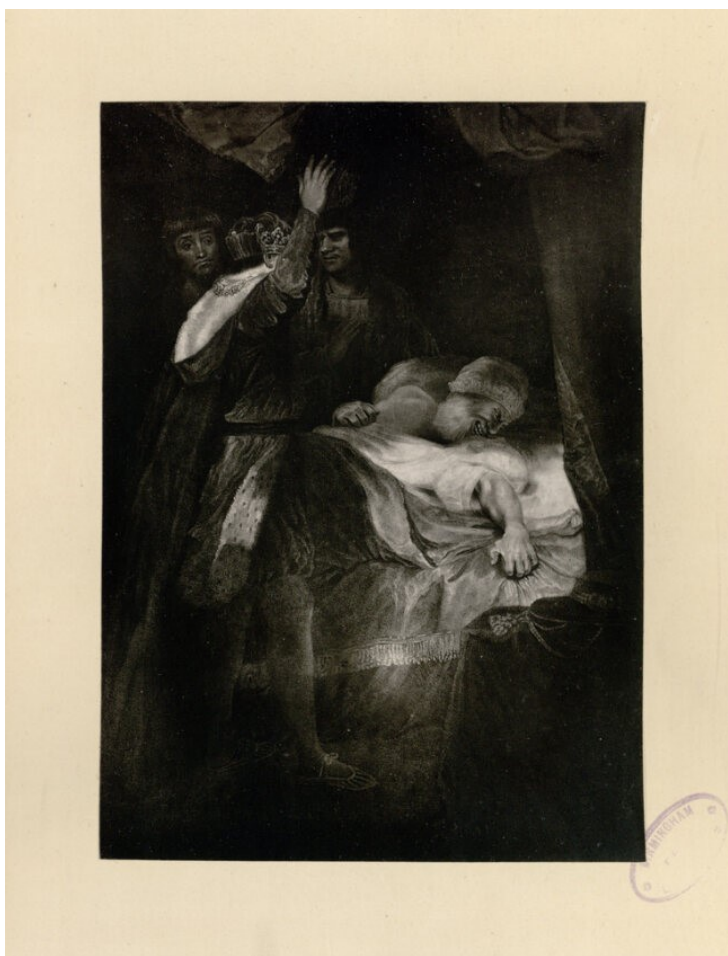


Nicholas Rowe, *Works of Mr. William Shakespear*. S 170.9

Alongside the images, Rowe's edition is innovative in a number of other ways. It was the first to include a list of characters at the start of each Shakespeare play, to divide the plays into acts and scenes, and to include stage directions.

### **John Boydell**

Shakespeare was big business in 18th century Britain, with books and memorabilia becoming very popular as printing techniques improved. Publishing tycoon John Boydell (1720-1804) established the 'Shakespeare Gallery' in London's Pall Mall in 1789, exhibiting paintings by artists such as Joshua Reynolds, George Romney, James Barry, Benjamin West, and Henry Fuseli, representing scenes from Shakespeare's plays. Prints of the paintings were later bound in books, copies of which can be found in the Shakespeare Collection.



Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, Scene from Henry VI. S 793.1874 F



Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, Scene from Hamlet. S 793.1874 F

## Charles Knight

The first of several editions of Shakespeare published by Charles Knight (1791-1873) appeared in 56 monthly magazine parts between 1838 and 1841, before being issued in seven volumes of the works with an eighth biographical volume. Knight supplemented the plays with background essays and notes, however the main feature was the pictures. There was a full-page title panel for each play, evoking its themes and characters, and six or seven internal vignettes, combining text and illustration on a single page. Knight's aim was educational and the smaller wood engravings, executed by a range of anonymous artists, were intended to set the scenes and help readers visualise the historical plays. There are several different editions of Knight's Pictorials in the Shakespeare Collection, dating from 1839-43, 1846 and 1865-1890.



Charles Knight, *Pictorial edition of Shakespeare*, 1839. S

## Kenny Meadows

The style of caricaturist and illustrator Kenny Meadows (1790-1874) contrasts dramatically with what had come before. While his work included historically accurate depictions of costume worn by Shakespeare's characters, he also made use of grotesque exaggeration of the characters and often paired two images on the right and left sides of the same page leading to a comic effect by comparison.

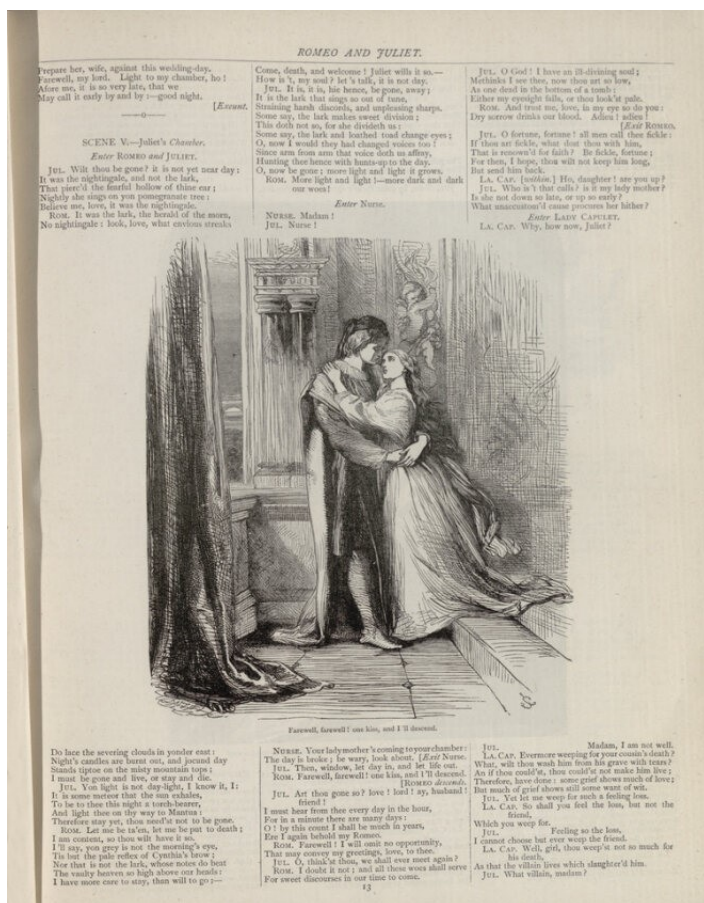


The Merry Wives of Windsor, illustrations by Kenny Meadows, 1854. S 185.4 Q

## Henry Selous and John Gilbert

As Shakespeare's popularity continued to grow in the years leading to his 300th anniversary in 1864, the British publishing industry produced even more illustrated Shakespeare editions.

*Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare* appeared in instalments between 1864 and 1868. Edited by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, the edition claimed to be produced to the highest critical and scholarly standards and was illustrated by Henry Selous (1803-1890) and John Gilbert (1817-1897). Selous's illustrations captured the emotional aspects of the plays while, in contrast, John Gilbert was more concerned with the setting and action.



John Gilbert illustration for *Romeo and Juliet*, 1882. S 188.2 Q



Henry C Selous illustrations for *Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare*, 1865. S 186.5

## Shakespeare's Heroines

Mary Cowden Clark (1809-1898) was a prolific writer and author who produced many essays about Shakespeare, along with a series of short stories published under the title *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*. There are several editions of these in the Shakespeare Collection, illustrated with engravings by prominent artists of the day.

The Collection also includes Charles E. L. Wingate's 1895 photographs and prints of '*Shakespeare's heroines on the stage*', and a volume of engravings of an 1888 exhibition of 21 paintings of Shakespeare's heroines organised by the weekly newspaper *The Graphic*.





'Katherine' from *The Taming of the Shrew* and 'Rosalind' from *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's Heroines pictorial edition. S 794 Q

## 20th century artists

The early 20th century was a golden era for Shakespeare illustrators. The "gift book" was developed in response to a combination of social and economic shifts, including a growing middle class with the wealth and leisure time to buy and enjoy them. These frequently-folio-sized, limited editions of books by well-known authors, of whom Shakespeare was particularly popular, featured sumptuous illustrations and decorative bindings. Developments in print technology, such as the introduction of colour reproductions and more efficient modes of production, also contributed to the emergence of these deluxe publications. There are many examples of these in the Shakespeare Collection.

Shakespeare's plays also inspired many leading artists. The Collection holds examples of illustrated editions by Arthur Rackham (1867-1939), Edmund Dulac (1882-1953) and Walter Crane (1845-1915). Of particular note is William Heath Robinson's (1872-1944) first project illustrating Shakespeare, an edition of *Twelfth Night* published in 1908. Robinson aimed to capture the overall atmosphere of the play in his colourful plates rather than depict the dramatic development. At this time in the development of colour technology, plates were "tipped in" i.e. printed separately and glued onto

the page, rather than embedded directly on the same paper as the text, and this can be seen in many of these editions.



*The Tempest* illustration by Arthur Rackham. S347.1926 Q



*The Tempest* illustration by Edmund Dulac. S 347.1908 Q

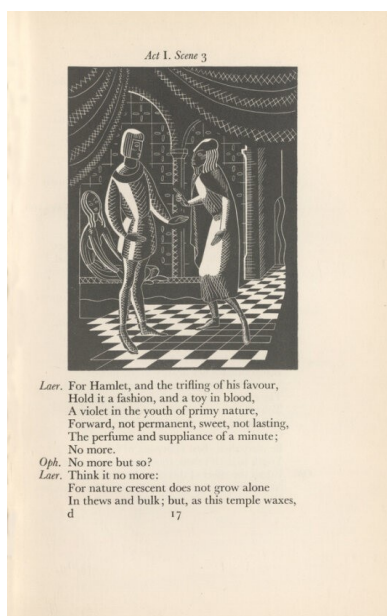


The Shakespeare Collection has around 50 limited edition prints based on the works of William Shakespeare by the American artist Rockwell Kent (1882-1971). He was an American painter, printmaker, illustrator and writer. He illustrated books for several contemporary writers as well as works by Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Melville.



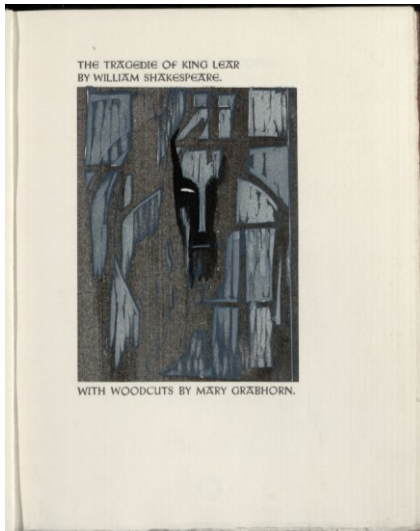
Rockwell Kent, *Romeo and Juliet*. S 794 E

Another key treasure of the collection is *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, printed at the Birmingham School of Art in 1940. It was illustrated by Robert Bird and is a remarkable achievement for the apprentice printing students who were mostly under 16 years of age. It is produced in black and green, using Monotype Baskerville type decorated with woodcut prints.



Birmingham School of Printing, *Hamlet*. S 317.194

The Shakespeare Collection also has a rich collection of fine art editions by small private presses such as Dove, Golden Cockerel and Circle Press. Highlights include Eric Ravilious' (1903-42) evocative engravings for the 1932 edition of *Twelfth Night* and Mary Grabhorn's shadowy woodcut images for *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.



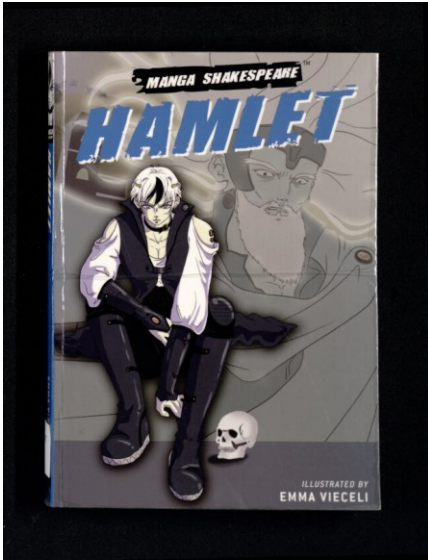
*King Lear* by Grabhorn Press. S 332.196 Q

As part of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964, a delegation from the Soviet Union visited Birmingham and presented over 300 items including books, photographs, and production ephemera, in a variety of languages, as a gift to the Shakespeare Collection. This pen and ink drawing from Kazakhstan was amongst them. It represents stage and costume design for *Henry IV*, one of the most popular Shakespeare productions in Kazakhstan.



Kazakhstan drawing from *Henry VI*. S Ka 601.18 E

The 21st century has seen Shakespeare retold in more and different visual artforms. The 'Manga Shakespeare' series uses the Japanese comic book to retell the stories in a completely new way. The Shakespeare Collection includes *Hamlet* (2007), a sci-fi inspired version adapted by Richard Appignanesi and illustrated by Emma Vieceli.



Manga Hamlet. S 317.6

### Scrapbooks and ephemera

Scrapbooks were a popular pastime in Victorian England. People would collect all sorts of memorabilia – photos, articles, illustrations, cartoons, production material – and paste them into books of all sizes. There are more than 200 scrapbooks in the Shakespeare Collection, both British and international. They show us how generations of Shakespeare fans celebrated their interest, and how Shakespeare has been used as a cultural touchstone in many cultures and different forms of printed media for centuries.

One of the largest and most intriguing items in the Shakespeare Collection is the Forrest Collection. Between 1830 and 1886, Mr Henry R Forrest and his family, from Manchester, compiled 76 scrapbooks, at least one for each of Shakespeare's plays. They include selected text and illustrations to all Shakespeare's plays, rare portraits of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, illustrations inspired by scenes, and portraits of popular performers of the time. Some illustrations are hand-coloured or hand-reproduced by Mr Forrest's family, and include hand-written notes and jokes between the family members.



Forrest collection. S 790.1 F



Another set of highly illustrated Shakespeare scrapbooks was donated in 1955 by Walter Turner, a subscriber to the Shakespeare Memorial Library, known as the Turner Collection. There is a volume of illustrations for each of the plays.



Beatrice from Much Ado About Nothing, Turner collection. S 790.3 Q

The Shakespeare Collection also contains some personal bequests from famous Shakespeare critics and performers, including George Wilson Knight, who donated lots of stage memorabilia relating to Shakespeare and other performances. The Dramatic Papers of Wilson Knight includes a variety of photographs, notes, letters, and programmes illustrating his modern, and at times risqué, staging of Shakespeare.



G. Wilson Knight as Caliban, from the Dramatic papers of G Wilson Knight. S 650.8 F

## Costume and Stage Design

The Shakespeare Collection has many examples of stage and costume design, including works by Jean Hugo (1894-1984), Salvador Dali (1904-89) and others. The rest of the production material—photos, programmes and posters, are also a source of visual inspiration for re-imagining Shakespeare's plays on stage.

### Jean Hugo

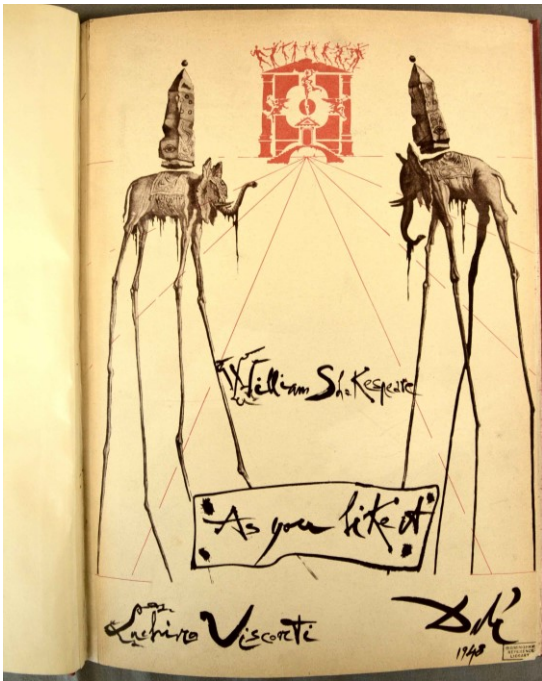
Jean Cocteau's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was first performed at La Cigale Theatre in Paris on 2nd June 1924. The stage and costumes designs were by Jean Hugo, grandson of the novelist Victor Hugo, and are hand-coloured woodcuts.



Jean Hugo stage and costume designs for *Romeo and Juliet*. SF 345.3 F

### Salvador Dali

A series of sketches in the collection represent Salvador Dali's stage and costume designs for the Luchino Visconti 1948 production of *Rosalinda* at Rome's Teatro Eliseo, a take on Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Visconti took inspiration for the play's stage design from the mid-16th century gardens at Bomarzo in Italy. Among the many statues at the gardens, there was a giant sculpture of Hannibal's war elephants, which can be seen in several of the designs.



### Production photographs

The Shakespeare Collection holds over 17,000 photos, capturing theatre, film and television performances from UK and around the world. The earliest date from the 1890s. Arranged by play, the Collection is unique because it includes professional, school, amateur and community productions. They provide a visual record of how Shakespeare has been interpreted, performed and remade in different cultures and countries at different times for over 100 years. This includes through key moments of world history, such as photographs of Shakespeare productions from pre- and post-independence in India, and during apartheid in South Africa. Many of the images feature recognisable actors and actresses in early roles, and illustrate past theatrical conventions and raise questions about how we cast and perform Shakespeare today.

Many are visually spectacular, such as the 1988 production of *The Tempest* at the Edinburgh Festival, by the Japanese director Yukio Ninagawa. One of the most glamorous items is an album of photos from Max Reinhardt's 1935 film *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Over 100 black and white photographs record the production costumes, actors and the director himself.

The collection also contains UK landmark productions, such as photographs from the 1970 Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Brook, known as Peter Brook's Dream. It is often described as one of the 20th century's most influential Shakespeare productions.



Photographs from Max Reinhardt's 1935 film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. S 338.8 F



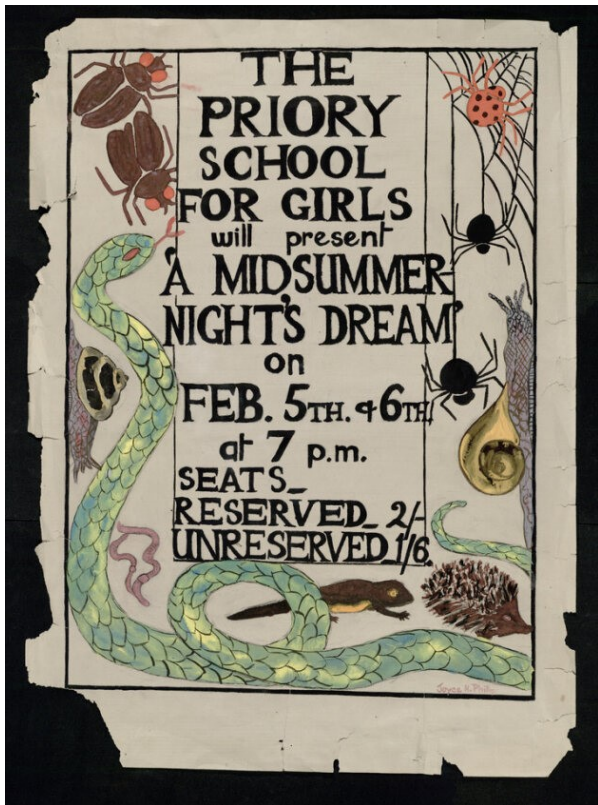
Peter Brook's 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. S 601.38



Yukio Ninagawa's *The Tempest*, 1988. SJ 601.47

### **Production posters**

The Shakespeare Collection holds several hundred posters, from professional, amateur and school productions both in the UK and across the globe. Highlights include a hand-painted poster for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from the Priory Girl's School in Birmingham (1930s), *Macbeth* in Bengali by the Nagorik Theatre Company in collaboration with the British Council (1984), and several visually striking posters from the Polish School of Posters dated 1950s-1970s.





Posters. S 699

## How to see items from the Collection

Anyone who is interested in Shakespeare is welcome to view items from the Shakespeare Collection. Due to the size and value of the collection it is essential to decide what you would like to see in advance by searching our catalogues.

This can be found by visiting our website:

[www.birmingham.gov.uk/ShakespeareCollection](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/ShakespeareCollection)

From 2020-2023, the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City Council collaborated on a £1.7 million plan to revive the city's almost-forgotten Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library, housed in the iconic Library of Birmingham – the first great Shakespeare library in the world and one which, from the very beginning, has belonged to all the people of the city.

The Everything to Everybody Project united this Shakespeare archive with the George Dawson Collection, also held at LoB. This neglected treasure-trove documents the career of the radical preacher, lecturer and activist, who founded the Shakespeare Library as part of a pioneering 'Civic Gospel' in 19th century Birmingham.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded the Everything to Everybody Project funding to open access to the collections and deliver an exciting programme of engaging events for people and communities across the city. The project was also generously supported by History West Midlands.

