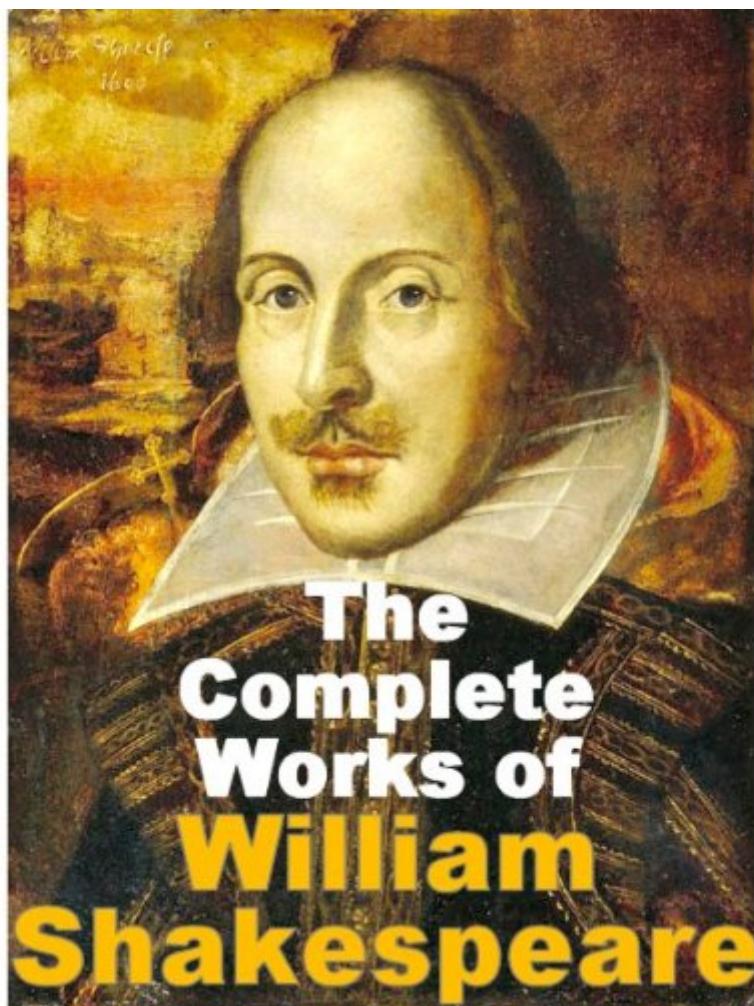


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The Actually Complete Works Of William Shakespeare



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Customer Reviews

Students and various e-mail correspondents often ask me which single-volume Shakespeare edition I would recommend, and I never hesitate in naming this one, as I think it has a long lead over its rivals. I have myself used the 1992 printing with amazing frequency both in research and in teaching, and always with advantage.Why is this the best edition for a reader who wants as much

as possible within the confines of a single book? First, it should be pointed out that unannotated editions such as the Oxford Complete Works are all in all of comparatively little use as even expert Renaissance scholars - leave alone inexpert readers - cannot read Shakespeare's language unaided; there are simply far too many words, features of grammar, etc., which a modern reader is certain to interpret inaccurately or not to understand at all. So it is essential to have intelligent and well-informed annotation that will help one to understand the text. Bevington's is extraordinarily good: knowledgeable, precise, and helpfully clear. Second, an editor needs to be able to produce a responsible modernised text. Shakespeare cannot be understood by many unless he is read in modern spelling, and the punctuation of his period, too, often leads most modern readers astray. Bevington's modernisation of the text is exemplary. Furthermore, his handling of the many thorny textual problems is also outstanding for the knowledge and the judgement that he brings to bear. For example, the Oxford people unwisely and on poor grounds print two separate versions of **King Lear**, and Bevington has been exceptional in rejecting that approach and producing a persuasively and intelligibly "conflated" text (much better, by the way, than the conflated version in the Arden text edited in 1997 by R.A. Foakes).

Perhaps, like me, you have held on to the Complete Works of William Shakespeare you've had since college and are wondering if the world really needs yet another edition of the Bard's complete output. Well, the Modern Library edition of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Shakespeare has a lot to recommend it. The text is beautifully set in single column format, making it easier for actors and those who wish to read the text aloud to scan the poetic lines and to distinguish between poetry and prose. Jonathan Bates's General Introduction is comprehensive, engaging, and lively. As with the introductions to the individual plays, Bates gives special attention to the performance traditions from which these plays emerged as well as those which would shape their interpretation over the centuries. This concern for performance issues is also addressed in the "Key Facts" boxes that follow every play introduction. Here the editors summarize the plot, identify the major parts (with percentage of lines and number of speeches assigned to each character, etc.), take a stab at identifying a dates of composition and first performance, and discuss the plays' sources and state of the texts available. There are ample, but not an overwhelming number of footnotes. And these notes, Bates assures us, do not shy away from discussion of Shakespeare's bawdier puns (something that may not be true of your old college textbook). Another real plus is the inclusion of a fragmentary scene from "Sir Thomas More" based on the only manuscript known to be in Shakespeare's own hand. But the best reason to buy the RSC Shakespeare is because the editors

have gone to great lengths to preserve the First Folio (1623) edition of Shakespeare.

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