



# *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*

*(abridged) [revised]*

by Adam Long, Daniel  
Singer, & Jess Winfield

Know-the-Show  
Audience Guide

researched and written by  
the Education Department of  
The Shakespeare Theatre  
of New Jersey





# In *This Guide*

- About the Creators ..... 2
- The Life of William Shakespeare ..... 4
- *The Complete Works... (abridged) The Origins: A Timeline* ..... 5
- The Complete Plots of William Shakespeare ..... 7
- Explore Online: Links ..... 9
- Commentary and Criticism ..... 10
- In This Production ..... 11
- Sources and Further Reading ..... 12





# About *The Creators*



Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield, founding members of The Reduced Shakespeare Company, ca. 1987. (Source: ReducedShakespeare.com)

## **THE REDUCED SHAKESPEARE COMPANY:**

Since its pass-the-hat origins in 1981, the Reduced Shakespeare Company has created ten world-renowned stage shows, two television specials, several failed TV pilots, and numerous radio pieces, all of which have been performed, seen, and heard the world over. The company's itinerary has included stops off-Broadway, at the White House, the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, London's West End, Seattle Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre and Montreal's famed Just For Laughs Festival, as well as performances in Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan, Malta, Singapore and Bermuda, plus countless civic and university venues throughout the USA, the UK, and Europe.

The company's first three shows, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*, *The Complete History of*

*America (abridged)* and *The Bible: The Complete Word of God (abridged)* ran for nine years at the Criterion Theatre in Piccadilly Circus. They were London's longest-running comedies, and the RSC had more shows running in the West End than Andrew Lloyd Webber. They were also funnier.

In 2016, in honor of the company's 35th anniversary and the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the RSC premieres its tenth stage show, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)*, at the Folger Shakespeare Theatre in Washington DC.

The RSC won the prestigious Shorty Award in New York City and the Delft Audience Award in Holland. They've also been nominated for an Olivier Award in London, two Helen Hayes Awards in Washington, DC, the SF Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award, and several podcast awards.

On April 23, 2014 the company set a Guinness World Record™ for the Highest Theatrical Performance at 37,000 feet aboard an EasyJet flight from London to Verona. The RSC also creates unique entertainments for corporate events, working with such companies as Sky-TV, Time Magazine, Motorola, and Rotary International.



Hyperion published their irreverent reference book *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide for the Attention-Impaired (abridged)*.

## **ADAM LONG:**

Adam Long (Founding Member/Writer/



Performer) began his professional life as an accountant for an anti-nuclear political action committee by day and bassist for an acoustic punk band by night. Then he put on a skirt and wig and became a founding member of the Reduced Shakespeare Company. Adam toured with the RSC, spent five years following The Grateful Dead, performed stand-up comedy in Canada, became a Buddhist, and finally settled in England where he lives in London with wife Alex, son Joe, daughter Tilly, friend John, four guinea pigs, a fish, two tortoises, a cat, and a small grey rabbit called Willard.



### DANIEL SINGER:

Daniel Singer (RSC Founder/Writer/Performer), has been a theatrical impresario from the moment he looked up the word 'impresario' in the dictionary, founding his first company, General Amazement Theater in Santa Rosa, California, when he was just 18. Upon his return from studying "proper dramatic technique" in London, he became

a director at the original Renaissance Pleasure Faire, where he founded the subversive Reduced Shakespeare Company, whose three-man farce *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* enjoyed a record-breaking run in London's West End and has since become one of the world's most popular comedy shows. In 1989 Daniel hung up his doublet-and-hose to design theme park attractions at Walt Disney Imagineering, where he also co-founded the Flower Street Players, an in-house theater company for Disney employees. Since 2000, Daniel has been a freelance designer, writer and event producer in Los Angeles. His new hit comedy *A Perfect Likeness* chronicles Lewis Carroll's

(fictitious) attempt to get his literary hero Charles Dickens to pose for a photograph in 1866 Oxford. Coming soon to a theater near you!



### JESS WINFIELD:

Jess Winfield (Founding Member/Writer/Performer) was an original member of the RSC, co-author of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*, and performed with the troupe from its founding in 1981 until 1992, when he realized he'd played the title role of Hamlet more times than John Gielgud and Laurence

Olivier combined and suddenly felt very old. He left the troupe to write and produce animated television for the Walt Disney Company, which made him feel young again — until he'd been there for ten years, at which point he felt old again. He left Disney to write *My Name Is Will — A Novel of Sex, Drugs, and Shakespeare (Twelve Books)*. Depicting excessive drug use and promiscuous sex by both a would-be young Shakespeare scholar in the 1980s and the 18-year old Immortal Bard himself in the 1580s made Jess feel young again; but then he and Daniel Singer revised the *Complete Works* in honor of its 20th anniversary and directed it in the West End, which made him feel old again. He now lives in Hollywood with his wife (and original RSC costume goddess) Sa, and is working on his second novel... which makes him feel like he's in his forties. [www.jesswinfield.com](http://www.jesswinfield.com).

Biographies from [ReducedShakespeare.com](http://ReducedShakespeare.com)

# The Life Of William Shakespeare



National Portrait Gallery, London

William Shakespeare, widely recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare's father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare's childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been

quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592, he was a successful

actor and playwright. He wrote approximately 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While the plays were well-liked, Shakespeare's work was not considered by his educated contemporaries to be exceptional. By 1608, Shakespeare's involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died in 1616.

Most of Shakespeare's plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the First Folio. Other early printings of Shakespeare's plays were called quartos, a printer's term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the First Folio texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare's plays.



The Shakespeare Family  
Coat of Arms

# The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)

## *The Origins: A Timeline*

**1981:** The Reduced Shakespeare Company begins as a pass-the-hat act, performing a twenty-minute version of *Hamlet* at Renaissance Faires outside of Los Angeles and San Francisco where the entertainment slots allow a maximum performance time of thirty minutes. The company develops a fast, funny, and physical performance style to keep their audiences from walking away. It works. Among those in the cast that first summer are the three performers who would come to be considered the “original” RSC – Daniel Singer (whose idea it all was in the first place), Jess Borgeson and Adam Long. Until 1987, the RSC performs only on weekends in the summer months at these faires.

**1983:** The RSC adds a short *Romeo & Juliet* to its repertoire at the Renaissance Faires.

**1987:** The first, one-hour version of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (written by Borgeson, Long & Singer) premieres and the company performs it at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The company thinks that this will be its swan song. Instead, interest in the RSC begins to snowball.

**1988:** The RSC begins to tour the United States. In order to make

*Shakespeare* a full-length show, audience participation is added in the second act.

**1989:** The company tours the U.S. and performs at the Montreal Just for Laughs Festival and in Melbourne, Australia. Singer leaves the company to become an Imagineer for Disney and is replaced by Reed Martin, a UC Berkeley classmate of Borgeson and former Ringling Brothers clown. Martin contributes additional material to *Shakespeare*.

**1991:** With a six-week sold out season at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal, the RSC becomes a full-time gig and the boys finally quit their day jobs. They now make a living with the RSC, but just barely. It only took ten years. The company has its first British tour, and its first London season, which includes a December run at the Lillian Bayliss Theatre. The company tours to Tokyo and Ireland. They make their New York debut as part of the New York International Festival of the Arts.

**1992:** The RSC tours the U.S. and Singapore, as well as Perth and Adelaide, Australia. In March, the boys open their second season in London, this time at the Arts Theatre. The show runs eleven months. The boys provide voices for Steven Spielberg’s animated film *Balto*.

**1993:** The RSC premieres its second stage show – *The Complete History of America (abridged)* (written by Long, Martin, and Tichenor).

**1995:** *The Bible: The Complete Word of God (abridged)* (written by Long, Martin, and Tichenor, with additional material by Croke)



premieres in July at the Kennedy Center. *Bible* and *America* run at the Kennedy Center for twelve sold-out weeks.

**1996:** *Bible* is nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play. The RSC tours the U.S., Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The RSC performs *Bible* in Jerusalem. *Bible* has its U.K. premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In March the RSC U.K. opens at the Criterion Theatre in London performing *Shakespeare* and *America* in rep. The script of *Shakespeare* is published in the U.S. by Applause Books. It is performed by countless professional and amateur companies all over the world, and translated into sixteen languages.

**1997:** *Shakespeare* is nominated for an Olivier Award for Best New Comedy – seventeen years after its inception. The RSC has three shows running in the West End at the same time – only one fewer than Andrew Lloyd Webber.

**2000:** Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor reunite with Adam Long to film *Shakespeare* for television; RSC founder Daniel Singer makes an anonymous cameo as the Ego.

**2001:** PBS airs the TV special *Reduced Shakespeare*. The company has a four-week sold-out run at the Kennedy Center.

**2003:** *Bible* joins *Shakespeare* and *America* in rotating repertory at the Criterion Theatre in London. The RSC has more shows running in London than Andrew Lloyd Webber. *The Reduced Shakespeare* PBS special is released on DVD.

**2006:** *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide For The Attention-Impaired (abridged)* is published by Hyperion. In December, the RSC also premieres *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast*,

a free weekly audio blog of all things reduced, featuring backstage conversations with the casts and creators of RSC shows, as well as special appearances by guest authors, NPR personalities, comic actors, and actual celebrities like Brian Dennehy, Scott Bakula, David Koehn, Anne Heche, Emmy-winning actor Eric Stonestreet, United States Senator Cory Booker, and ‘Weird Al’ Yankovic.

**2014:** In honor of William Shakespeare’s 450th birthday in April, the guys set a Guinness World Record for Highest Theatre Performance by performing *Shakespeare* on board an EasyJet flight from London to Verona in honor of the attempt to make Shakespeare’s birthday (April 23rd) a UK national holiday. Representatives from Guinness were actually on board to verify both the performance and the altitude (37,000 feet).

**2016:** In addition to being the 400th Anniversary of William Shakespeare’s death, 2016 is also the 35th anniversary of the Reduced Shakespeare Company’s very first performances. To commemorate both these occasions, the RSC returns to its Shakespearean roots by unveiling its tenth stage show – William Shakespeare’s *Long Lost First Play (abridged)* – at the prestigious Folger Theatre at the Folger Shakespeare Library in April in Washington DC.





# The Complete Plots of William Shakespeare

*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) (revised)* cast will cover 37 Shakespeare plays in just over 90 minutes. To help you keep up, here are some very abbreviated plot descriptions for each of the plays.

(One sentence plots from  
*Shakespeare for Dummies* Cheat Sheet)

## THE COMEDIES:

***All's Well That Ends Well:*** Bertram runs away to avoid his new wife, Helena, but she follows him and tricks him into being her faithful husband.

***As You Like It:*** A romp in the Forest of Arden, where everyone falls in love.

***The Comedy of Errors:*** Two sets of twins turn the town of Ephesus upside down.

***Love's Labour's Lost:*** The King of Navarre and his court try to study in seclusion but succumb to the temptations of love.

***Measure for Measure:*** Power corrupts Angelo, the substitute Duke, who tries to seduce the sister of a condemned man.

***The Merchant of Venice:*** Moneylender Shylock tries to recover his "pound of flesh" collateral for a loan he made to Antonio, a merchant of Venice.

***The Merry Wives of Windsor:*** Sir John Falstaff puts the moves on the Merry Wives, who turn the tables on him.

***A Midsummer Night's Dream:*** Mix-and-match couples in the woods near Athens. "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

***Much Ado About Nothing:*** Claudio loves Hero. Benedick doesn't like Beatrice. Then Claudio hates Hero, and Benedick loves Beatrice. Eventually, everyone gets married.

***The Taming of the Shrew:*** Petruchio "tames" his wife, Katherina.

***Troilus and Cressida:*** In ancient Troy, Troilus and Cressida vow undying love, which dies all too quickly.

***Twelfth Night:*** Orsino loves Olivia. Olivia loves Cesario. Cesario is really Viola, who loves Orsino.

***The Two Gentlemen of Verona:*** Nothing can come between best friends Valentine and Proteus, except a girl: Sylvia.

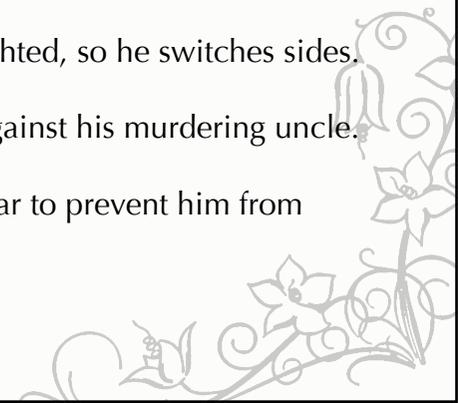
## THE TRAGEDIES:

***Antony and Cleopatra:*** Antony tries to balance love and war but sacrifices everything for love.

***Coriolanus:*** Rome's best general feels slighted, so he switches sides.

***Hamlet:*** A young prince plans revenge against his murdering uncle.

***Julius Caesar:*** Brutus and others kill Caesar to prevent him from becoming king.





**King Lear:** Lear gives up his kingdom to his daughters and then gives up his mind.

**Macbeth:** Witches' prophecies prompt Macbeth to seize the throne of Scotland.

**Othello:** Iago preys on Othello's jealousy and drives him to murder.

**Romeo and Juliet:** Forbidden love tempts and destroys a young couple.

**Timon of Athens:** Overgenerous Timon learns who his true friends are when he runs out of money.

**Titus Andronicus:** Bloody revenge in ancient Rome, with the emphasis on bloody.

## THE HISTORIES:

**King John:** John turns over England to the Pope.

**King Richard II:** Henry Bolingbroke deposes King Richard and becomes King Henry IV.

**King Henry IV, Part 1:** Henry wonders why his son can't be more like that nice Hotspur boy, until Hotspur rebels against the King.

**King Henry IV, Part 2:** Henry's son Hal continues to act up, and rebels still threaten the throne, but Hal comes out all right in the end and becomes King Henry V.

**King Henry V:** Henry invades France.

**King Henry VI, Part 1:** Joan of Arc leads the French army against England. The Houses of York and Lancaster start a spat that lasts through the next three plays.

**King Henry VI, Part 2:** Peasants and the House of York rebel against King Henry.

**King Henry VI, Part 3:** The House of York deposes King Henry, despite help from France. Edward, son of the Duke of York, takes the throne as King Edward IV.

**King Richard III:** Edward's brother, Richard, kills everyone in his way and seizes the throne, only to lose it and his life.

**King Henry VIII:** King Henry divorces his wife, starts a new church, remarries, and fathers a daughter who becomes Queen Elizabeth I.

## THE ROMANCES:

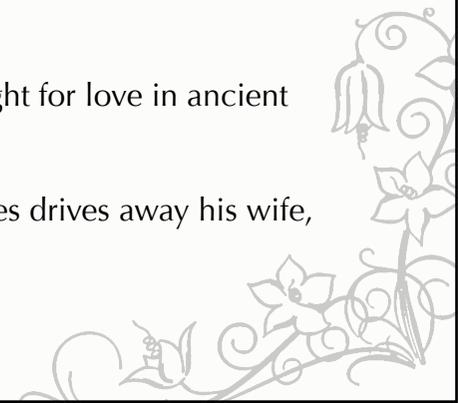
**Cymbeline:** A jealous husband believes a false story about his wife. She runs away and meets her long-lost brothers.

**Pericles:** Pericles lives, loves, loses, and regains his family while touring the Mediterranean Sea.

**The Tempest:** Prospero uses magic to reclaim his dukedom and find a husband for his daughter, Miranda.

**The Two Noble Kinsmen:** Two brothers fight for love in ancient Greece.

**The Winter's Tale:** Jealous husband Leontes drives away his wife, children, and best friend.





# Explore Online

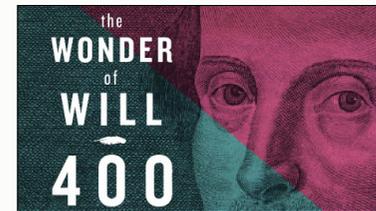
Explore more of the exciting history, new projects, and upcoming events of THE REDUCED SHAKESPEARE COMPANY through their web site:

[ReducedShakespeare.com](http://ReducedShakespeare.com)



Take a deeper look into the works of William Shakespeare by visiting the Folger Shakespeare Library website:

[www.Folger.edu](http://www.Folger.edu)



Check out these Shakespeare Related TED-talks for some different takes on the the Bard in our time.

-“Shakespeare is Everywhere”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsESSyMnwmU>

-“Hip Hop and Shakespeare?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSbtkLA3GrY>



# Commentary & Criticism

"If you like Shakespeare, you'll like this show; if you HATE Shakespeare, you'll LOVE this show."

-THE TODAY SHOW

"This show is a rare combination of broad physical comedy, bawdy gags and fiercely honed acting... turning an evening of Shakespeare into something out of *Saturday Night Live*."

-John Laviviere, TALKINGBROADWAY.COM

"We know that brevity is the soul of wit, but this is ridiculous...Ridiculously nutty. And foolish. And original...[would] tickle anyone who's ever squirmed through dry classroom Shakespeare."

-Robert Koehler, LOS ANGELES TIMES (1987)

"Thrift, thrift, Horatio! could be the motto of the R.S.C. That's R.S.C., as in the Reduced Shakespeare Company, which should not be confused with that august English company with the same initials. This iconoclastic American troupe does more with less. Or is it less with more? The title of the show... says it all: "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." In other words, this is clearly a case of *reductio ad absurdum*...Though everything is good-natured, the approach might be called one of Will-ful destruction... The pithier-than-Python parodies defolio Shakespeare."

-Mel Gussow, THE NEW YORK TIMES (1991)

"The RSC may mock Shakespeare but at the same time acknowledge his genius. The show they produce is not dissimilar to Shakespeare in his own time—men in women's clothing, loud audience participation—long before the hushed respectful silence of the great tomb of the Barbican."

-WHAT'S ON LONDON, quoted in CRITICAL CONSENSUS  
IN THE COMPLEAT WORKS OF WLLM SHKSPR (ABRIDGED)

"And yet, even in agreement, the reviews differ shockingly on major issues of the Reduced approach. For example, at what intellectual level does the material in the show operate? Many a critic has labelled the script 'sophomoric.' 'Collegiate' is the assessment of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Daily News*. *Newsday* at least bestows a diploma when it describes the company as 'big sloppy puppies with bachelor degrees.' At the extremes, *Variety* plumbs the depths by likening the show to 'a smart-alecky teen who doesn't know when it's time to shut up already' while a Dublin paper launches the troupe into the intellectual stratosphere with 'positively PhD!' Personally, the company favors the assessment of the *Montreal Gazette*, which cautiously posits that the show is 'Much more intelligent than it appears to be at first...'"

-CRITICAL CONSENSUS IN THE COMPLEAT WORKS OF WLLM  
SHKSPR (ABRIDGED)

"Critics have also offered widely disparate guesses as to the Company's comic influences: The *L.A. Weekly* calls the troupe 'Part Three Stooges, part Smothers and Marx Brothers and part circus clowns.' *The Guardian* accuses the RSC of being under the influence of 'Monty Python, the Marx Brothers, Mel Brooks and cannabis.' 'Bugs Bunny' says one paper; 'Buster Keaton, Harpo Marx and The Three Stooges,' suggests another. The Marx Brothers seem to keep popping up, sometimes in unusual fashion: 'A Marxist interpretation of [Shakespeare's] Comedies is perfectly valid, even if it is Harpo, Groucho and Chico rather than Karl,' theorizes *The Scotsman*."

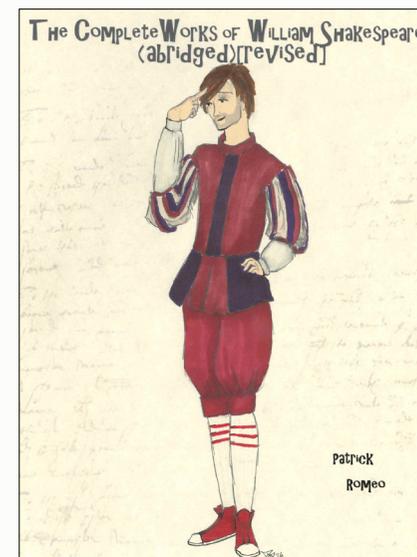
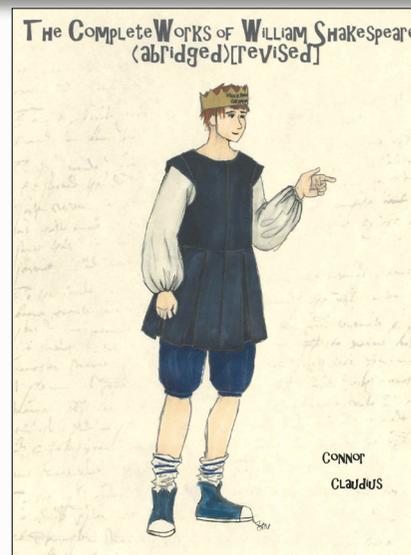
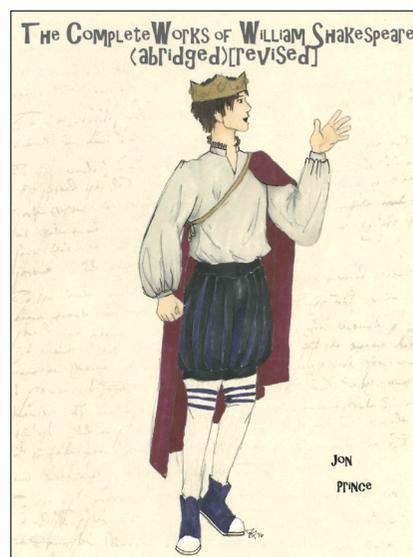
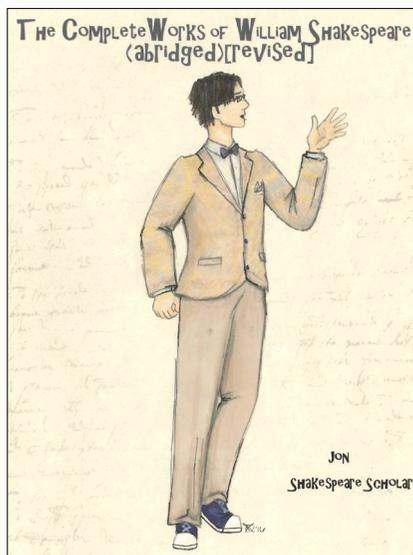
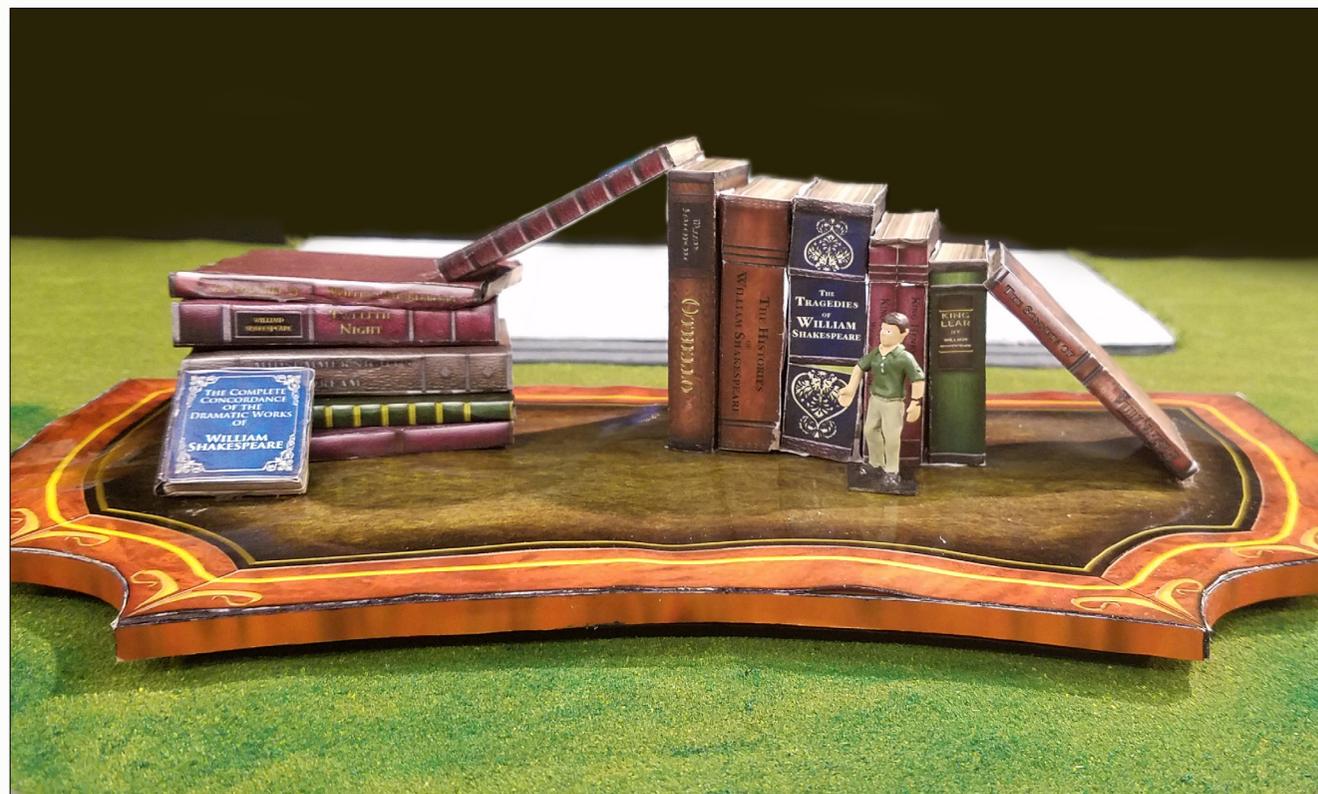
-CRITICAL CONSENSUS IN THE COMPLEAT WORKS OF WLLM  
SHKSPR (ABRIDGED)



# In This Production

Right: Scenic design for *The Complete Works...* by Benjamin Kramer.

Below: Costume renderings for *The Complete Works...* by Tiffany Lent.





# Sources & Further Reading

## **BOOKS:**

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE, Introductions, Notes, and Bibliography by A.L. Rowe

A READER'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Muriel B. Ingham

ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Isaac Asimov

THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE, by Laurie Rozakis

THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein

SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce

SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov

SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES by Doyle, Lischner, and Dench

SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE, Consultant Editors Keith Parsons and Pamela Mason

THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding

## **ONLINE RESOURCES:**

ReducedShakespeare.com (The official website of The Reduced Shakespeare Company)

www.Folger.edu (The Folger Shakespeare Library digital resources)

