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Shakespeare's First Folio: All the Plays: A Children's Edition,

abridged by Anjna Chouhan and illustrated by Emily Sutton

Meet the author/editor



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

My name is Anjna and I'm a Shakespearian! I used to research and teach Shakespeare in his home town, and now I work with libraries to make all kinds of literature come to life.

What made you interested in Shakespeare?

When I was young, my aunty gave me a copy of *Twelfth Night*, which is one of his comedies. From that moment I was hooked. I spent many years reading and studying all of the plays, poetry and history. I have a special interest in Shakespeare in the Victorian period, and how people performed and thought about his plays throughout history. When I finished studying, I was lucky enough to get the perfect job in Stratford-upon-Avon (Shakespeare's home town), talking to people from all around the world, and sharing as well as developing my knowledge with other people. I got to explore archives, books that were older than Shakespeare, and work with amazing human beings.

What was the hardest thing about editing the book?

There are 36 plays in the First Folio, and each of them has a unique feel, style and subject matter. Some of them are extremely famous, so the hardest thing was trying to balance keeping the famous bits, telling the stories, and making each play accessible without interrupting the heart of what makes it uniquely Shakespearian.

What was it like to work with Emily as the illustrator?

Emily is very thorough and enjoys detail. Luckily, I love those things, too! Not only are her illustrations beautiful, colourful and inspired by Victorian images (that I love), they also include details like textures, patterns, architecture and even furniture. I made lots of notes and sent so many instructions over to Emily about every character, what they're doing and the best bits in each play to illustrate – and she always created something magnificent and inspiring. I remember when I saw the beautiful border for *As You Like It* with Orlando's poetry in the trees, I did a little happy cry! Emily is the most incredible illustrator, and I really enjoyed working with her.

Do you have a favourite quote from the plays?

I have so many! Shakespeare was so talented at capturing the essence of what it is to feel and to be alive in so many situations. If I had to choose one, it would be 'I'd rather have a fool to make me merry, than experience to make me sad'. Rosalind says this to Jacques after he explains that he has travelled and gained much experience, which has made him sad.

SHAKESPEARE WEEK
Shakespeare birthplace trust
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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Do you have any pets?

I have a cat called Betsy. She is very diva-like and rules the household. Betsy was very involved while I worked on the book – she always sat with me, sometimes she walked over the keyboard while I typed, and she was always there to cheer me up when it got hard. She can't read, but she does enjoy sitting next to the book and sleeping on it. Unlike Mouse (Emily Sutton's dog), who is very well behaved, Betsy doesn't like to wear a ruff and has made it very clear that it spoils her natural look.

If Shakespeare had a pet, what do you think it would be called?

I think if Shakespeare had a pet, it would be called something really pretentious from a Greek play like Laertes, Iphigeneia or even Cerberus, after the mythological three-headed dog. There were also some fun popular names at the time like Lettice and Fulke. So, I like to think he had a dog named Cerberus Lettice Shakespeare!

Meet the illustrator – Emily Sutton



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm an artist and illustrator from York. So far I have illustrated over 20 books for children plus book jackets, packaging for food, toys and other products, wallpaper and fabrics. I also make work for exhibitions. I use quite traditional materials and techniques - pencils, ink pen, watercolour, acrylic, print making and collage. I find working in this low-tech way suits me best, and I enjoy the hand-made look that it produces. I find inspiration in nature, animals (especially dogs), battered old toys and other treasures I find in antiques shops.

What inspired you to be an illustrator?

I didn't quite realise that being an illustrator was an actual job when I was a child, but drawing and making were always my absolute favourite things to do. I loved reading too, and had a huge collection of picture books. As well as reading the stories, I would spend hours carefully copying the pictures. My favourites were always the most detailed - in particular Richard Scarry books and the 'Brambly Hedge' series.

It was when I did an art foundation course after finishing school that I was introduced to all of the different specialisms within art. Illustration seemed the natural choice for me with my passion for drawing and working in a narrative form, and I eventually went on to study visual communication at Edinburgh College of Art. A year or so after graduating, in 2008, I illustrated my first book, *Clara Button and the Magical Hat Day* for the V&A museum.

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What was your favourite thing to illustrate in the book?

My favourite play to illustrate in the book was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I love to paint night scenes as I think the dark, starry skies make the colours really pop out. The play itself is so full of magic and mischief so it was great fun to depict that in my artwork for the title and cast pages. A very close second would have to be the title page for *The Merchant of Venice*. Venice is a place I've been to many times and it's by far the most beautiful city I've seen. Drawing some of the intricately detailed buildings was so fun, and I even managed to sneak in a cameo appearance by my little grey dog Mouse and her friend Edgar! If you look closely you might be able to spot them.

What was the most exciting thing you learnt while illustrating the book?

One of the exciting facts I learned whilst illustrating the book was how the different types of swords were used to signify status and rank amongst the characters. I'm a very detail-oriented person, so learning particularities like that is fascinating for me.

What was it like to work with Anjna as the editor?

Anjna was the most brilliant editor; she was able to explain the plays in a clear and straightforward way, and point to the key moments that would make the best scenes for the title page illustrations. She was also able to help me with some of the fine details regarding costume and characters so I could make sure that my artworks were as accurate as possible. There are just such a lot of plays and my job would have been pretty much impossible without her huge depth of knowledge and enthusiasm for all things Shakespeare!

Do you have any pets?

I have a little, very scruffy, grey dog called Mouse. She accompanied me on nearly all of the signings and events for this book and looked very proud all dressed up in her Tudor style silk ruff. She is some sort of schnauzer/poodle mixture and is the very best studio companion. She often finds her way into my illustrations – it's very hard to resist featuring her in every scene.

If Shakespeare had a pet dog, what do you think it would be called?

I found a funny video on Instagram that listed some medieval/Elizabethan dog names and there were some fantastic ones included there. I'm not sure what Shakespeare would have picked but my favourites were Havegoodeday and Nosewise! I've heard it was common to name your dog after your profession (for example Little Hammer for the dog of a blacksmith), so using that logic perhaps Little Quill for Will the playwright?

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