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Writers of Influence: Shakespeare to J K Rowling From the National Portrait Gallery

‘And thereby hangs a tale...’

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) **attributed to John Taylor, about 1610** **oil on canvas**

William Shakespeare is the most celebrated English playwright and poet, and one of the greatest writers of all time. Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* were first published in 1609 and the First Folio of his collected *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* appeared in 1623. His surviving works include 38 plays, 154 sonnets and several other poems. Nearly 400 years after his death Shakespeare’s plays are still performed more frequently than those by any other writer. This is the only portrait of Shakespeare that has a good claim to have been painted from life. It is known as the ‘Chandos portrait’ after a previous owner and was the first portrait to be acquired by the National Portrait Gallery in 1856.

*‘Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.’*
William Shakespeare
National Portrait Gallery, London

John Keats (1795-1821) **by Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1816** **plaster cast of life-mask**

John Keats was one of the Romantic poets, best known for his series of great odes such as *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819). Keats was a remarkable poet who had a natural gift for language. His earliest surviving poem was written when he was 19 and he died in Rome from tuberculosis aged 25. Oscar Wilde later described him as ‘A Priest of Beauty slain before his time’.

Keats adored Shakespeare. He was inspired by the language of Elizabethan poetry and is said to have carried Shakespeare’s image around with him. Keats saw Shakespeare as a kind of Poet guardian angel.

‘I remember you saying that you had notions

Captions for paintings are often just 75-100 words long. How can you say everything you want to say with so few words? How can you write about Shakespeare in 100 words? Rather than try to say everything, pick the one most interesting or exciting story or fact about that person.

The quotations from each writer offer a flavour of their work.

After the title of the work, include the artist and the medium.

*of a good Genius presiding over you. I have
of late had the same thought...Is it too daring
to fancy Shakespeare this Presider?'*

John Keats

National Portrait Gallery, London

William Blake (1757-1827)

by James S Deville, published 1823

plaster cast of head

William Blake was a British artist and poet who believed his work was divinely inspired. His illustrated poems include *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) which contains 'Tyger! Tyger! burning bright'. Blake's later work was highly symbolic and complex.

Blake had unorthodox religious views and believed in human spirituality. His preface to *Milton: a Poem* provided the words for the hymn, 'Jerusalem', which is now often viewed as an alternative to the English national anthem. Blake was influenced by Shakespeare and illustrated several scenes from his plays, as well as symbolic paintings such as *The Genius of Shakespeare*.

*And lead us not to read the Bible, but let
our Bible be Virgil and Shakespeare.'*

William Blake

National Portrait Gallery, London

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

by William Say, 1840

mezzotint on paper

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a Romantic poet who was inspired by the French Revolution. In 1798 he collaborated with fellow poet William Wordsworth and created *Lyrical Ballads*.

Wordsworth later added *Preface* (1800) to it and it became a manifesto for revolutionary poetry. Coleridge's best-known poems include *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), and *Kubla Khan* (about 1797).

Coleridge was a huge admirer of 'our myriad minded Shakespeare' and became the leading Shakespeare commentator of his day. He gave a series of lectures on Shakespeare in 1811-12 and like many of the Romantics, Coleridge was fascinated by the character of Hamlet.

*'I have a smack of Hamlet about myself,
if I may say so.'*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

National Portrait Gallery, London

Virginia Woolf
(born Virginia Stephen, 1882-1941)
by Vanessa Bell,
(born Vanessa Stephen), 1912
oil on board

Virginia Woolf was a novelist, diarist and critic. She was a central figure and co-founder of the Bloomsbury group and a pioneer of the 'stream of consciousness' novel. Her writing explores ideas about identity and gender, and *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is thought of as a key feminist work.

Woolf used Shakespeare to show how history and society have led to there being so few women writers in English literature. She asks the important question 'what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister?'

This was painted by her sister, Vanessa Bell. *'It would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare.'*

Virginia Woolf
National Portrait Gallery, London

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)
by Man Ray, 1934
bromide print

Aldous Huxley was a novelist and essay writer. His early books which include *Crome Yellow* (1921) lightly satirise society in the 1920s. Later works such as *Brave New World* (1932) show a deep mistrust of contemporary life and expose a bleak vision of the future. Huxley had already achieved success by the time this photograph was taken in Paris.

Huxley was a great admirer of Shakespeare and used quotations from Shakespeare's plays as titles for his writing. These include *Brave New World*, *Mortal Coils* and *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*. Huxley also wrote philosophical essays around ideas in Shakespeare's writing.

'If you say absolutely everything, it all tends to cancel out into nothing. Which is why no explicit philosophy can be dug out of Shakespeare.'

Aldous Huxley
National Portrait Gallery, London

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)
by Yousuf Karsh, 1943
bromide print

George Bernard Shaw was the leading Irish playwright of his generation. He was also a critic of the arts, a committed socialist and a

vegetarian. Shaw explored contemporary social issues in his work and was greatly admired for his wit. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

Shaw invented the term 'Bardolator' to describe someone who worships Shakespeare. He was fascinated by the Bard and wrote widely about him, however he was also critical of Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist. His puppet show play *Shakes versus Shav* (1949) wittily dramatises a debate between the two of them. *'I have striven hard to open English eyes to the emptiness of Shakespeare's philosophy, to the superficiality and second-handedness of his morality, to his weakness and incoherence as a thinker, to his snobbery, his vulgar prejudices, his ignorance...'*

George Bernard Shaw
National Portrait Gallery, London

**Thomas Stearns ('T S') Eliot
(1888-1965)**

**by Patrick Heron, 1949
oil on canvas**

T S Eliot was a poet, playwright and literary critic. He was born in America but settled in England before the First World War. Eliot's writing style was innovative and his works include *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Four Quartets* (1944). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

Eliot was a great admirer of Elizabethan verse drama and used this style in his own plays. In 1922 he published an important critical essay on Hamlet explaining why he thought the play was 'an artistic failure'.

'Of all the plays [Hamlet] is the longest and is possibly the one on which Shakespeare spent most pains; and yet he has left in it superfluous and inconsistent scenes which even hasty revision should have noticed.'

T S Eliot
National Portrait Gallery, London

**Edward James ('Ted') Hughes
(1930-98)**

**by Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1971
bromide print**

Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd in West Yorkshire. He spent much of his childhood around farmyards and his writing often reflects the violence of nature and animal life. Hughes said 'My first 6 years shaped everything'. He is best known for works such as *Crow* (1970) and children's stories including *The Iron Man* (1968).

He was Poet Laureate from 1984 until his death. Hughes spent much of his National Service reading Shakespeare and committing the words to memory. He published a selection of Shakespeare's verse in 1971 and wrote a lengthy and complex book, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992).
'In spite of its Elizabethan ruff, Shakespeare's language is somehow nearer to the vital life of English, still, than anything written down since.'
Ted Hughes
National Portrait Gallery, London

Carol Ann Duffy (born 1955)
by Sue Adler, 1990
digital bromide print

Carol Ann Duffy began writing poems when she was 11. Her writing explores everyday experiences and the rich fantasy lives of people. Duffy is especially good at writing in realistic and humorous personas. Collections of her poems include *Selling Manhattan* (1987) and *Rapture* (2005) which won the T S Eliot Prize for poetry. She was appointed Poet Laureate in 2009.

Duffy uses Shakespeare as a symbol of positive creativity in her poems *Education for Leisure* (1985) and *Stealing* (1987). Her sonnet *Anne Hathaway* (1999) is a love poem that imagines how Shakespeare's widow responded to the gift to her in his will of his 'second best bed'.
'I squash a fly against the window with my thumb. we did that at school. Shakespeare. It was in another language and now the fly is in another language.'

Carol Ann Duffy
National Portrait Gallery, London

Benjamin Zephaniah (born 1958)
by Donald MacLellan, 1996
toned bromide print

Benjamin Zephaniah is an accomplished writer and political activist. When he was younger he was rebellious and uncontrollable and ended up in prison. However, he turned from crime to music and poetry.

Zephaniah is dyslexic and although he can compose poems very easily, he found them hard to write down into words. Instead, he uses the traditions of Jamaican music and oral poetry from his childhood. Zephaniah published his first book *Pen Rhythm* (1980) when he was 22. He has been writing and performing ever since. Zephaniah's writing has been influenced by

earlier English poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Shakespeare.

*'Dis poetry goes wid me as I pedal me bike
I've tried Shakespeare, respect due dere
But did is de stuff I like'*

Benjamin Zephaniah
National Portrait Gallery, London

**Zadie Smith (born Sadie Smith, 1975)
by Ben Murphy, 2000**

c-type print

Zadie Smith is a novelist and essay writer. She became a literary sensation with her debut novel *White Teeth* (2000), which won the Whitbread First Novel Award. Smith was born in Willesden in London and she uses this as the setting for the book. She has written two other novels, *The Autograph Man* (2002) and *On Beauty* (2005).

Smith has frequently discussed the influence other writers have had upon her own work. She gave a lecture at the New York Public Library in December 2008 praising Barack Obama's multiple perspectives on society and likening them to Shakespeare's own view.

'In our artists we look for the many-coloured voice, the multiple sensibility...Our Shakespeare sees always both sides of a thing, he is black and white, male and female - he is everyman.'

Zadie Smith
National Portrait Gallery, London

'I have unclasp'd to thee the book even of my secret soul'

**Dame Catherine Ann Cookson (1906-98)
by Chris Hay, 1987**

cibachrome print

Catherine Cookson was born in East Jarrow, in the north east of England. She didn't begin writing until she was in her 40s and she went on to publish almost 100 historical romance novels. Cookson's stories explore the lives and relationships of working-class people in the north east. The emotions of her characters are an important focus for her writing. She used her own life experiences as inspiration for her books.

Several of her novels trace the fortunes of a single character or family. During the 1980s a third of all fiction borrowed from public libraries in Britain was written by Cookson.

*'I was a story-teller from the time I could talk...
I used to pass the time, telling myself wonderful stories about us living in a nice house with lino*

on the stairs...'

Catherine Cookson
National Portrait Gallery, London

Robert Ranke Graves (1895-1985)

by Peter Stark, 1970s

bromide print

Robert Graves was a poet, novelist, essayist and critic. He served in the Royal Welch Fusiliers and was severely wounded at the Battle of the Somme in the First World War. Graves was one of the first war poets to write realistic descriptions of the experience of fighting on the Western Front. He was deeply traumatised by his war experiences which he recalled in his autobiography *Good-bye to All That* (1929). Graves later went on to write historical novels, including *I Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God* (1935). His most significant critical work is *The White Goddess* (1948) which influenced modern spiritual thinking.

'To be a poet is a condition rather than a profession.'

Robert Graves
National Portrait Gallery, London

Seamus Justin Heaney (born 1939)

by Tai-Shan Schierenberg, 2004

oil on canvas

Seamus Heaney's poetry is often inspired by details from his childhood in Derry and his life in Ireland. In 1957 Heaney discovered the poetry of Ted Hughes which inspired him to write. He was Professor of Poetry at Oxford University from 1989 to 1994 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. Heaney's work includes *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and an acclaimed translation of *Beowulf* (2000). He explores deeper human experiences and unspoken emotions. His poems include profound observations about the small details of everyday life. Heaney was influenced by the work of Chaucer, Shakespeare and John Keats.

'I rhyme, to see myself, to set the darkness echoing'

Seamus Heaney
National Portrait Gallery, London

Sir William Gerald Golding

(1911-93)

by Mark Gerson, 1970

modern bromide print

The novelist William Golding was born in Cornwall. After he graduated from Oxford University, Golding worked in small theatre companies before becoming a teacher. His first novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954) was an immediate success.

Golding is interested in the darker side of humanity and his novels are often set in closed communities. They examine the cruelty of human nature when it is forced into extreme situations.

Golding won the Booker Prize in 1980 for *Rites of Passage*. In 1983 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and was knighted for services to Literature in 1988.

*'Ralph wept for the end of innocence,
the darkness of man's heart.'*

William Golding

National Portrait Gallery, London

Ian Kevin Curtis (1956-80)

by Kevin Cummins, 1979

bromide fibre print

Ian Curtis displayed a love of music from a young age and his idols included David Bowie and Iggy Pop. Curtis was the lead singer and lyricist in the band Joy Division. He married and had one daughter in 1979, and in this year he was diagnosed with epilepsy. His condition inspired him to write 'She's Lost Control'.

Curtis's lyrics focus on emotional anguish and the darker side of relationships. He had a volatile personality which influenced his writing.

On 18 May 1980, Curtis committed suicide.

*'She said I've lost control again
And she screamed out kicking
on her side and said*

I've lost control again'

Joy Division

National Portrait Gallery, London

Monica Ali (born 1967)

by Edward Barber, 2002

bromide fibre print

Monica Ali is a British writer of Bangladeshi origin. She was born in Dhaka and moved to Britain when she was three. She grew up in Bolton and studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford University.

Her debut novel, *Brick Lane* (2003), was inspired by her own experiences of moving to Britain. It explores the inner life and forbidden love of a Bangladeshi woman in London's Tower

Hamlets. *Brick Lane* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2003. She published her second novel, *The Kitchen* in 2009.

'She longed to be enriched by this hardship... to wear this suffering that was as rich and deeply coloured as the saris that enfolded Amma's troubled bones.'

Monica Ali

National Portrait Gallery, London

John Donne (1572-1671)
by William Marshall, 1649
line engraving on paper

John Donne is one of the Metaphysical Poets, a group whose style is characterised by the use of witty and unusual metaphors. In his youth Donne wrote persuasive love poems such as *The Bait* and *The Flea*. He was a very passionate man who spent time in prison for his secret marriage to his employer's niece. Donne was ordained in 1615. He began to write passionate religious verse and sermons. He was Chaplain to King James I and in 1621 he was appointed Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London.

'But why should I beg more love, whenas thou Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine'

John Donne

National Portrait Gallery, London

Kate Bush (born 1958)
by Patrick Lichfield, 1980
archival inkjet print

Kate Bush is one of Britain's most individual and successful female singer-songwriters. When she was signed to her record company aged 16 she had already written 200 songs. Bush insisted her debut single should be 'Wuthering Heights' leading to her becoming the first woman to have written her own UK number-one hit. Bush's poetic lyrics are imaginative and romantic. She has been inspired by writers including James Joyce and Philip Pullman. Bush is a very private person who isn't interested in fame and she has consistently refused to court the media.

*'You had a temper, like my jealousy
Too hot, too greedy
How could you leave me?'*

Kate Bush

National Portrait Gallery, London

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)
after Joseph Simpson, 1902
lithograph after woodcut

Robert Louis Stevenson was a Scottish author and traveller. He is most famous for his adventure stories which include *Treasure Island* (1883). Stevenson spent his last years in the South Sea Islands for the good of his health. Stevenson's work was very influential. One of his other well-known books is *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). This explores the inner conflict of good and evil in human beings. The characters of Jekyll and Hyde have captured the popular imagination since their creation. Their names have been absorbed into everyday language and are used to describe particular character traits in people. *'...all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil.'*

Robert Louis Stevenson
National Portrait Gallery, London

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)
by William Strang, 1893
oil on panel

Thomas Hardy was one of the last great novelists of the 19th century. He thought of himself as a poet who wrote novels to support himself financially. His stories are set in the semifictional county of Wessex which was inspired by his native Dorset. Hardy's major works include *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Hardy's characters are doomed and tragic. His novels bring to life the inner conflicts and troubles of the rural working classes. Their circumstances show how powerless people were against the social constraints of the time. *'The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things.'*

Thomas Hardy
National Portrait Gallery, London

Simon Armitage (born 1963)
by Roderick Field, 1998
bromide print

Simon Armitage was born in Huddersfield and trained in social work at Manchester University. He won several awards for his poetry and was made Poet in Residence for the New

Millennium Experience Company in 1999. Armitage uses his experiences as a probation officer in his poetry which often tackles themes of class, identity, and masculinity. His subject matter, along with his energetic and down-to-earth style, has made Armitage one of the most popular poets of his generation.

Like Shakespeare, Armitage enjoys playing with the styles, subjects and formats of sonnets. He has published translations of Homer's *Odyssey* and the medieval poem *Gawain and the Green Knight*.

'People can't put on an opera, but they can write a poem. It's accessible art.'

Simon Armitage

National Portrait Gallery, London

'Something is rotten in the state'

Dizzee Rascal (born Dylan Mills, 1985)

by Emma Hardy, 2006

c-type colour print

Dizzee Rascal is a star of the British garage and grime music scene. He grew up in a highrise estate in East London and was named 'rascal' by his teachers. He was 19 when he won the prestigious Mercury Prize for his debut album *Boy in da Corner* (2003) and is the youngest person ever to win it. Dizzee Rascal's second album *Showtime* was released in September 2004 and achieved gold status in the UK by selling over 1 million copies.

Dizzee Rascal's lyrics explore social issues that are 'problems' for the government, such as teenage pregnancy and street violence.

'Talk like you're the man (I mean)

If you want beef you'll get a fair share

Dizzee got a masterplan (I mean)

I'm a problem for Anthony Blair'

Dizzee Rascal

National Portrait Gallery, London

George Eliot

(Mary Ann Cross (born Evans), 1819–1880)

replica by Francios D'Albert Durade, 1849

oil on canvas

Mary Ann Evans felt that 'lady novelists' only wrote 'silly novels'. She used the pen name George Eliot to hide her gender and stop people from making assumptions about her writing. She rejected the usual romances.

Her work is socially conscious and satirically sharp. Eliot's novels include *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871–2).

Eliot rejected social conventions as well as literary ones. She was a religious dissenter who dismissed traditional Christian values. She scandalised polite Victorian society by openly living with a married man.

'The important work of moving the world forward does not wait to be done by perfect men.'

George Eliot

National Portrait Gallery, London

John Milton (1608–1674)
by an unknown artist, about 1629
oil on canvas

John Milton is one of the greatest English poets. He is best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667). Milton was forceful and idealistic and not afraid of publicly declaring his opinions. He went blind in 1652 and his later work was dictated to his daughter.

Milton published many political pamphlets on extremely controversial subjects. He wrote *Areopagitica* in 1644 which condemned government censorship. Five years later Charles I was executed. Milton became Secretary for Foreign Tongues for Oliver Cromwell's government. His duties included censorship and writing propaganda.

'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.'

John Milton

National Portrait Gallery, London

Jean Rhys
(born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams, 1890–1979)
by Bill Brandt, 1975
bromide print

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica and moved to London when she was 16. She had an eventful and turbulent life. Rhys spent time in Paris and met writers such as James Joyce and Ford Madox Ford, who encouraged her writing. Ford said that Rhys had a 'terrifying insight and... passion for stating the case of the underdog'.

Rhys is best known for her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). This is a feminist inspired response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Rhys challenged the romantic ideals in Brontë's novel.

'Reading makes immigrants of us all. It takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere.'

Jean Rhys

National Portrait Gallery, London

Olaudah Equiano (about 1745–97)
by W Denton, after Daniel Orme, 1789
stipple engraving on paper

Olaudah Equiano was a slave from Nigeria. He was kidnapped when he was 11 and made to work for various masters in America, the West Indies and Europe. Equiano was an entrepreneur who used his voyages to make a profit on goods he carried with him and resold. The money he made enabled him to buy his freedom and he chose to return to Britain. Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789), was a powerful argument against the slave trade. Its first-hand account of the horrors of slavery drew people to the Abolitionist movement. This led to the outlawing of the slave trade in Britain in 1807. *'Tortures, murder, and every other imaginable barbarity and iniquity are practised upon the poor slaves with impunity.'*
Olaudah Equiano
National Portrait Gallery, London

George Orwell
(born Eric Arthur Blair, 1903–50)
by Felix H. Man (Hans Baumann),
about 1947
bromide print

George Orwell was an author, essayist and critic and one of the most important political journalists of the 20th century. He was a socialist who had a great awareness of social injustice. Orwell wrote extensively about his experiences of living with the poorer classes in society. He is best known for his novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). These explore the horrors of oppressive political regimes. The word 'Orwellian' is used to mean extreme state control harmful to a free society. 'Big Brother' and 'Room 101' are both ideas from the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and have inspired popular TV programmes. *'Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it.'*
George Orwell
National Portrait Gallery, London

John Lennon (1940–80)
by Harry Goodwin, 1970

c-type colour print

John Lennon was a singer, songwriter and member of The Beatles. In 1970 he began his solo career. His first album *Imagine* reflected his personal and idealistic dreams for the world. He was assassinated by a crazed fan when he was 40 years old.

Lennon challenged the establishment throughout his lifetime. In 1965 he caused outrage by declaring that The Beatles were 'more popular than Jesus'. Lennon was an outspoken pacifist and campaigner against the Vietnam War. The FBI had a 281 page file on him. In 1969 he returned his MBE to the Queen in protest against Britain's involvement in Vietnam.

'Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. I think we're being run by maniacs for maniacal ends and I think I'm liable to be put away as insane for expressing that. That's what's insane about it.'

John Lennon

National Portrait Gallery, London

James Joyce (1882–1941)

by Renee Mendel, 1934

wood

James Joyce was an Irish novelist, poet and short-story writer. He is best known for his experimental 'stream of consciousness' novels *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Joyce's writing reacted against traditional literary techniques and he created a radical new method of writing novels. He is one of the most significant authors in 20th century Modernism

Joyce's most influential work, *Ulysses*, was published in Paris in 1922 by the avant-garde bookshop Shakespeare and Co. It was banned in Britain until 1936 as it was thought to be obscene. Copies of *Ulysses* were burnt in Folkestone by British customs.

'Irresponsibility is part of the pleasure of all art; it is the part the schools cannot recognise'

James Joyce

National Portrait Gallery, London

Jarvis Branson Cocker (born 1963)

by Barry Marsden, 1995

bromide fibre print

Jarvis Cocker is one of Sheffield's most famous songwriters. He was lead singer in the band Pulp. They were widely celebrated in the 1990s for the originality of their albums

His 'n' Hers (1994) and *A Different Class* (1995). Cocker's lyrics are imaginative and ironic. They comment on the commonplace experiences of working-class people. Cocker's 'geek chic' style challenged conventional ideas of pop fashion at the time.

Pulp hit the headlines in 1995 when they were accused of corrupting the nation's youth with drug references in the single 'Sorted for Es and Whizz'. However, the media missed the ironies contained in the song.

*'We won't use guns
We won't use bombs
We'll use the one thing we've
got more of – that's our minds'*

Pulp

National Portrait Gallery, London

Johnny Rotten

(born John Joseph Lydon, 1956)

by Steve Pyke, 1982

bromide print

John Lydon was the frontman of the punk band The Sex Pistols. They were among the initiators of the punk movement in Britain.

This was founded on anti-establishment feeling, both against society and against the mainstream pop scene of the time. Lydon's lyrics were rude, brash and deliberately controversial.

The Sex Pistols released the single 'God Save the Queen' during the week of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, causing outrage. Since The Sex Pistols split up John Lydon has written and performed solo and with his band Public Image Limited (PiL). He was accused of 'selling out' for advertising Country Life butter in an advertising campaign of 2008.

*'God save the queen
She ain't no human being
There is no future
In England's dreaming'*

Sex Pistols

National Portrait Gallery, London

'The Moor', Sir (Ahmed)

Salman Rushdie (born 1947)

by Bhupen Khakar, 1995

oil on linen

Salman Rushdie's writing explores the history and relationships between East and West. His novels are often set in the Indian subcontinent.

Midnight's Children won the Booker Prize in 1981 and the Booker of Bookers in 1993

and 2008.

Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) caused outrage among some people in the international Islamic community. It was seen as being blasphemous and a fatwa was issued against him as a result, condemning him to death. The title of this portrait refers to his novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and shows the author surrounded by scenes from the story. *'A book is a version of the world. If you do not like it, ignore it; or offer your own version in return.'*

Salman Rushdie
National Portrait Gallery, London

'Some are born great, some achieve greatness and others have greatness thrust upon them'

**Enid Mary Blyton (1897-1968);
Gillian Mary Baverstock (born Pollock,
1931-2007); Imogen Mary Pollock
(born Smallwood, 1935)
by John Gay, 1949
bromide print**

Enid Blyton worked as a governess until her stories began to be published regularly in magazines. This enabled her to focus on writing full-time. She is well-known for her adventure stories about ordinary children in extraordinary circumstances and fantastic lands. *The Famous Five* and *Noddy* are among her most popular series of books.

Blyton had a huge fan base. She is the fifth most translated author after Shakespeare and has sold over 600 million books worldwide. At one point in her life she wrote 10,000 words a day. New books are still published under the Enid Blyton brand, but they are written by other authors.

*'This is going to be awfully exciting', said Dick.
'We always seem to have adventures when we come to Kirrin. It's absolutely full of them.'*

Enid Blyton
National Portrait Gallery, London

**Charles Dickens (1812-70)
by Ary Scheffer, 1855
oil on canvas**

Charles Dickens was the most popular British novelist of the Victorian era. His childhood provided the inspiration for many of his novels. When Dickens was 12 his father was imprisoned for debt, forcing Dickens to find work in a factory.

His writing career was a success from the publication of his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, in December 1833. Over the next 37 years Dickens wrote 27 books, many of which were serialised in popular newspapers. Dickens gave public readings of his work and embarked on a British tour in 1858. The demand to see him was so high that he performed 87 readings in 3 months.

'The way to your good opinion, favour, and support, has been to me very pleasing - a path strewn with flowers and cheered with sunshine.'

Charles Dickens

National Portrait Gallery, London

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

by Elliott & Fry, 1881

half-plate glass negative

Oscar Wilde was a writer and commentator who wrote highly successful stories and plays including *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895). He was famous for his exceptionally witty remarks and flamboyant dress. However, it was Wilde's unconventional behaviour that made him notorious.

In 1895 there was a flurry of gossip and court cases as Wilde was sentenced to two years' hard labour for homosexuality. His imprisonment inspired his poem, 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' (1898). In his own lifetime Wilde was seen as a controversial figure, but today audiences appreciate him for his work and biting wit.

'There is only one thing worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about.'

Oscar Wilde

National Portrait Gallery, London

Amy Jade Winehouse (born 1983)

by Mischa Richter, 2006

c-type colour print

Amy Winehouse is a singer and songwriter from north London. Her music is a fusion of jazz, R&B and soul. Winehouse's debut album *Frank* (2003) was nominated for the 2004 Mercury Music Prize, but it was *Back to Black* (2006) that brought her major success. She has won the Ivor Novello Award three times for her music and lyrics.

Winehouse is equally famous for her incredible writing talent and self-destructive exploits. Images of her 'misbehaving' are forever being documented by the paparazzi. Winehouse is

loved and loathed in almost equal measure
and her reputation sometimes overshadows her
outstanding achievements as a songwriter.

'They tried to make me go to rehab but

I said 'no, no, no''

Amy Winehouse

National Portrait Gallery, London

Lord George Gordon

Byron (1788-1824)

by William Finden, 1814

print on paper

George Gordon Byron was one of the most celebrated Romantic poets. He rejoiced in the extremes of life and rejected rationality. Byron's publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) made him famous overnight. He was also a scathing critic and his *Don Juan* (1819-24) is the ultimate satire of Regency society.

Byron was famous for his swaggering good looks and his brilliant, reckless personality. The British public followed and enjoyed his scandalous exploits which were continually reported in the press. In 1816 Byron moved abroad into self-imposed exile but English tourists followed him as a kind of tourist attraction.

'Fame is the thirst of youth.'

Lord George Gordon Byron

National Portrait Gallery, London

Aphra Behn (born Johnson, 1640-1689)

by Thomas Unwins, 1822, after the painting

by James Fittler

line engraving on paper

Aphra Behn was one of the first successful female playwrights and the most productive and popular of her generation. She published her anti-slavery novel *Oronooko* in 1688. At this time slavery was almost universally accepted. Behn had a turbulent and exotic life. She was a spy for Charles II and was imprisoned for debt when he failed to pay her. However, Behn was also an astute business woman who managed to support herself by writing successful plays. She was well-known in her own day but has since faded from fame. Behn has only been rediscovered by feminist scholars in the last forty years or so.

*'One hour of right-down Love, Is worth
an Age of living dully on.'*

Aphra Benn

National Portrait Gallery, London

**Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle
(1859-1930) Mr Punch's Personalities
by Sir (John) Bernard Partridge, 1926-9
pencil, ink and wash**

Arthur Conan Doyle created one of literature's best-known detectives, Sherlock Holmes. His first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in 1887. Conan Doyle's stories were so successful that he gave up his medical practice in 1891 to write full-time.

Doyle felt so trapped by his own celebrity creation that he killed Holmes off in the *Final Problem* (1893). There was public outcry and people wore black armbands in response to 'the desperate event'. Conan Doyle eventually gave in to popular opinion and Holmes reappeared eight years later.

'I think of slaying Holmes... & winding him up for good & all. He takes my mind from better things.'

Arthur Conan Doyle
National Portrait Gallery, London

**Geoffrey Chaucer (1342/43-1400)
by an unknown artist, (after 1400)
oil on panel**

Geoffrey Chaucer was a poet who is best known today for writing *The Canterbury Tales* published in 1475. He is often called 'the father of English literature' and was a celebrated writer in his own lifetime. Chaucer held important positions at court and dedicated several poems to aristocratic ladies. He was one of the first poets to write in English at a time when poetry in England was mainly written in French.

Chaucer wrote *The House of Fame* in about 1379. In this poem he explored celebrity and exposed the Goddess of Fame as fickle and unreliable.

'[He looked]... a long while upon these walls made of beryl, which shone more brightly than glass, and made all things, in truth, to seem greater than they were, as is natural to fame.'

Geoffrey Chaucer
National Portrait Gallery, London

**David Bowie
(born David Robert Jones, 1947)
by Terry O'Neill, 1974
bromide fibre print**

David Bowie is known as the chameleon of pop for his ever-changing appearance and often outlandish makeup. He has produced 28 albums over 5 decades, and is one of the most influential figures in modern British culture. Bowie has actively courted celebrity and controversy throughout his career. His androgynous image, his publicly acknowledged bisexuality and his one-time approval of fascism (he later withdrew this remark) have added to his celebrity. Bowie has explored fame through his music, film and stage personas such as Ziggy Stardust. This photograph captures Bowie's flamboyance. It was taken for the 1974 album *Diamond Dogs*, which was inspired by George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

*'Fame, makes a man take things over
Fame, lets him loose, hard to swallow
Fame, puts you there where things are hollow'*
David Bowie

National Portrait Gallery, London

Ian Lancaster Fleming (1908-64)

by Lewis Morley, 1963

toned bromide print

Ian Fleming was involved in naval intelligence during the Second World War. He drew on this experience when creating his famous character James Bond. Fleming wrote his first Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, in 1953. Since then the Bond franchise has become a worldwide phenomenon. Over 100 million novels have been sold throughout the world and the successful film series which made Bond a household name, has grossed over 5 billion US dollars worldwide. James Bond's name is arguably more famous than his creator's.

Fleming wrote other successful novels too, including the children's story *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

'Goldfinger could not have known that high tension was Bond's natural way of life and that pressure and danger relaxed him.'

Ian Fleming

National Portrait Gallery, London

Joanne Kathleen

('J K') Rowling (born 1965)

by Stuart Pearson Wright, 2005

oil on board construction with

coloured pencil on paper

J K Rowling shot to fame as the author of the Harry Potter series of seven books. The first novel

in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published in 1997. Since that time Rowling and her characters have gained worldwide fame and attention. Her books are the fastest selling in history. They have been translated into 61 languages and sold over a quarter of a billion copies worldwide. Rowling has won multiple awards and her books have been made into successful films. In 2010 Rowling was even made into a Barbie doll! This portrait shows the author sitting at a table which suggests the Edinburgh café where she wrote the first Harry Potter novel.

'I really don't know where the idea came from. It started with Harry, then all these characters and situations came flooding into my head.'

J K Rowling

National Portrait Gallery, London

**Probably Jane Austen (1775-1817)
by an unknown artist, about 1810-15
hollow-cut silhouette**

Jane Austen's writing was inspired by her observations of genteel social relations, courtship and the position of women at the time she was writing. She was a writer of refinement and charm. Her honesty and sense of irony helped shape some of the masterpieces of nineteenth century fiction such as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816).

Austen has gained both popular affection and critical respect. Her followers have been dubbed 'Janeites', a term first used by Rudyard Kipling in a short story about First World War soldiers who were fans of her writing. Her novels continue to inspire writers today including Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996).

'I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life.'

Jane Austen

National Portrait Gallery, London

**Morrissey
(born Steven Patrick Morrissey, 1959)
by Eric Watson, 1985**

2½ inch square colour transparency

Morrissey shot to fame in the 1980s as the lyricist and lead singer of The Smiths. His songs include 'This Charming Man' and 'The First of the Gang to Die'. He began a solo career in 1987 after The Smiths broke up. His lyrics are darkly romantic and anarchistic and often include

mundane details from everyday life. Morrissey's own writing is influenced by writers such as Oscar Wilde.

Morrissey's insightful lyrics and witty one-liners quickly made him into a cult figure. He has inspired fierce loyalty in his international fan base and his lyrics are now studied on university courses.

'Fame fame fatal fame

It can play hideous tricks on the brain

*Still I'd rather be famous than righteous
or holy, any day'*

The Smiths

National Portrait Gallery, London

'O brave new world'

**Dame Agatha Mary Clarissa
Christie (born Miller, 1890-1976)**

by John Gay, 1949

vintage bromide print

Agatha Christie wrote hugely successful detective novels, plays and short stories, earning her the title 'Queen of Crime'. She is the second most translated writer in the English language after Shakespeare. Christie holds the Guinness World Record for the best-selling fiction writer of all time.

Christie's first novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) introduced the fictional Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. Her other famous detective, Jane Marple, first appeared in *The Murder at the Vicarage* ten years later.

Christie's stories are often associated with stylish social settings of the 1920s to the 1940s. They have been frequently adapted for film and TV.

*'I specialise in murders of quiet,
domestic interest.'*

Agatha Christie

National Portrait Gallery, London

**(Joseph) Rudyard Kipling
(1865-1936)**

by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, 2nd Bt, 1899

oil on canvas

Rudyard Kipling was known as 'the poet of Empire' and his writing was very popular during his lifetime. However his work has become less well-liked since the end of the British Empire.

Kipling was born in Mumbai and educated in England. His novels include *The Jungle Book* (1894), and *Kim* (1901).

Kipling's writing brought the world of British

rule in India, the Raj, to life. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907. George Orwell disapprovingly described him as 'the prophet of British Imperialism'. Despite his decrease in popularity Kipling's poem 'If' was voted the 'Nation's Favourite' in 1995.

'If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.'

Rudyard Kipling

National Portrait Gallery, London

Douglas Noel Adams (1952-2001)

by Brian Griffin, 1986

bromide print

Douglas Adams was born and educated in Cambridge. He worked as a script editor on the *Dr Who* TV series from 1978 to 1980 and also collaborated with the Monty Python team. He is best known as the author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. This started life in 1978 as a BBC radio comedy before developing into a 'trilogy' of five books which sold over 15 million copies in his lifetime.

Adams' fans commemorate his writing every year on 25 May. This day is also known as 'Towel Day' which refers to a joke from the first book in the series. Adams created a quirky humorous sci-fi world populated with extraordinary characters.

'In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and has been widely regarded as a bad move.'

Douglas Adams

National Portrait Gallery, London

John Le Carré (born David Cornwell, 1931)

by Barry Ryan, 1994

bromide print

John Le Carré is a novelist and journalist who worked as a British diplomat in Germany and also for MI5 and MI6. Le Carré left the secret service in 1964 to become a full-time writer. He is best known as the creator of the character George Smiley and for novels such as *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1963) and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974). Much of his writing is inspired by his own experiences of working in British intelligence.

Le Carré's spies inhabit a cold and unglamorous world which is morally complex. The world he portrays is very different from that of Ian Fleming's James Bond.

'A spy, like a writer, lives outside the mainstream'

population. He steals his experience through bribes and reconstructs it.'

John Le Carré

National Portrait Gallery, London

Sir Terence David John ('Terry')

Pratchett (born 1948)

by Harry Borden, 2001

c-type print

Terry Pratchett has achieved enormous popular success with his discworld series of humorous fantasy novels. The first of the series, *The Colour of Magic*, was published in 1983. Since then he has sold more than 55 million books worldwide and has been translated into 36 languages.

Pratchett uses a wide range of sources in his work, including history, classical and popular literature, folklore and mythology. He also uses plots and characters from Shakespeare to great comic effect. In 2009 Pratchett was knighted for services to literature.

'The discworld offers sights far more impressive than those found in universes built by Creators with less imagination but more mechanical aptitude.'

Terry Pratchett

National Portrait Gallery, London

Herbert George ('H G') Wells

(1866-1946)

by Feliks Topolski, 1943

oil on canvas

H G Wells wrote futuristic and science fiction novels such as *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The Time Machine* (1895). His story *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) predicted the atomic bomb.

Wells was a socialist and supporter of 'free love'. He is shown here holding his last bookpamphlet, *The Mind at the End of its Tether*

(1945). Wells was an important influence

on science fiction writing. He was a friend of George Bernard Shaw and taught A A Milne.

'...we cannot regard this planet as ... a secure abiding place for Man; we can never anticipate the unseen good or evil that may come upon us suddenly out of space.'

H G Wells

National Portrait Gallery, London

Alan Alexander ('A A') Milne

(1882-1956)

by Madame Yevonde, 1920s

photogravure mounted on tissue and cream card
A A Milne was the assistant editor of Punch and was a signaling officer in the First World War. After the war he wrote comedies for the stage. His first books for children include two volumes of poetry, *When We Were Very Young* (1924) and *Now We Are Six* (1927).

Milne is best known and loved for his stories about Winnie the Pooh. The character of Christopher Robin is named after his son and the animals are based on Christopher's toys. Milne found it hard to express his emotions and so wrote these adventures for his son to try and bond with him.

"What?" said Piglet, with a jump. And then, to show that he hadn't been frightened, he jumped up and down once or twice more in an exercising sort of way.'

A A Milne

National Portrait Gallery, London

**Clive Staples ('C S') Lewis
(1898-1963)**

by Arthur Strong, 1947

bromide print

C S Lewis wrote many books for adults, however he is best known for his seven children's novels, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949-54). Lewis was an avid reader and a skilled writer from a young age. He was good friends with J R R Tolkien and both writers were important figures in the English faculty at Oxford University.

The Chronicles of Narnia describe the adventures of children in the fictional world of Narnia. This is a magical place where animals talk and good battles evil. Although these books have strong Christian themes, Lewis also uses ideas from Greek and Roman mythology, and traditional folklore.

'[Narnia] all began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn't anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord.'

C S Lewis

National Portrait Gallery, London

Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932)

by Anthony Wysard, about 1930

pen and ink and bodycolour on paper

Kenneth Grahame was a well known children's

writer. He worked at the Bank of England but retired after an incident where he was shot at three times, luckily he wasn't injured. Grahame's most famous work is *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) which describes the carefree lives of Toad, Badger, Ratty and Mole.

The Wind in the Willows originally appeared as a series of letters from Grahame to his son, Alistair. Grahame found it hard to show affection to his son and he wrote these in an attempt to be close to him. Alistair died just before his 20th birthday.

'The world has held great Heroes, As history books have showed; But never a name to go down to fame Compared with that of Toad!'

Kenneth Grahame

National Portrait Gallery, London

Philip Pullman (born 1946)

by Eamonn McCabe, 2001

c-type print

Phillip Pullman wrote school plays as a teacher in the 1970s. He stopped teaching in the 1980s to focus on writing. He is most famous for *His Dark Materials*, a trilogy of books: *Northern Lights* (1995); *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000). These are set in a parallel fantasy universe and follow the coming of age of two children.

Pullman took inspiration from a range of sources when writing these books, including Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. In this photograph Pullman stands at the door of his garden shed with his dog Hogarth. This is where he writes in total seclusion.

'Why shouldn't a work of fantasy be as truthful and profound about becoming an adult human being as the work of George Eliot or Jane Austen? Well there are a few fantasies that are. One of them is Paradise Lost.'

Philip Pullman

National Portrait Gallery, London

Roald Dahl (1916-1990)

by Jan Baldwin, 1989

cibachrome print

Roald Dahl is best known for his short novels and his stories for children. He wrote his first children's book, *The Gremlins*, in 1943. However, it wasn't until Dahl became a father that he returned to children's stories. He published *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

in 1964, after that a new Roald Dahl story appeared almost every year. His grotesque characters and subversive humour have delighted children ever since.

Dahl's life experiences shaped his writing. He was a fighter pilot in the Second World War which he describes along with his childhood in *Boy* (1984) and *Going Solo* (1986).

In Jan Baldwin's photograph, he is cosily ensconced in his writing hut.

'Two hours of writing fiction leaves this writer completely drained. For those two hours he has been in a different place with totally different people.'

Roald Dahl

National Portrait Gallery, London

Lewis Carroll

(Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, 1832-1898)

by unknown photographer,

about 1856-1860

albumen carte-de-visite

Lewis Carroll is best known for his novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). Carroll was a philosopher, mathematician, Anglican Deacon and photographer. He was a shy man with hearing problems, a stutter and epilepsy. His novels were based on his own life experiences and the people he met often inspired his characters. Alice's Wonderland is populated with memorable characters such as the Cheshire Cat, Mad Hatter and White Rabbit. Carroll's tales have influenced many other writers such as John Lennon, Terry Pratchett and James Joyce.

"It was much pleasanter at home," thought poor Alice, "when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits."

Lewis Carroll

National Portrait Gallery, London

Angela Carter (1940-92)

by Sally Soames, 1981

silver gelatine print

Angela Carter was best known for her novels, short stories and journalism. She used her fiction to explore feminist ideas. Carter's writing is admired for its rich language and magical, grotesque worlds which are inhabited by fantastic characters.

Carter's most famous works include *The Magic*

Toyshop (1967) and *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) which is a short story collection based on folk tales. Carter was a Fellow in Creative Writing at the University of Sheffield from 1976-78. She was working on a sequel to *Jane Eyre* at the time of her death in 1992.
*'Is not this whole world an illusion?
And yet it fools everybody.'*
Angela Carter
National Portrait Gallery, London

**John Ronald Reuel Tolkien
(1892-1973)**

**by Lord Snowdon, 1972
vintage bromide print**

J R R Tolkien was a medieval scholar and writer of fantasies. He was interested in old languages and mythology from an early age and wrote Norse-style poetry and drama as a teenager. Tolkien's friend C S Lewis encouraged him to write stories about Middle Earth. The most famous ones are *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5). Tolkien's books are international bestsellers, and have inspired many fantasy writers.

As well as creating a mythological world Tolkien wrote academic publications including a study on Chaucer.

*'Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory ...
If we value the freedom of mind and soul...then
it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as
many people with us as we can!'*

J R R Tolkien
National Portrait Gallery, London