

CREATIVE CAREERS

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Writers Thematic Sections text panels

Document Developed by Museums Sheffield

As Shakespeare was the star portrait in the exhibition, the young curators at Sheffield decided to use quotations from Shakespeare to group the portraits into thematic sections. Each section started with a text panel that introduced the theme.

‘And thereby hangs a tale...’

William Shakespeare is highly respected all over the world. His writing is continuously studied and performed in various cultural and political contexts worldwide. The characters and situations in his plays can be reinterpreted in many different ways. This, along with the beauty of his language, gives him a wide appeal. Shakespeare has inspired countless writers, actors, directors and artists. He is known as ‘the Bard’ and has been often described as a ‘genius’. Many of the writers throughout this exhibition have been influenced by him. Shakespeare is an icon. This makes him an attractive target for controversial writers and critics. The figures in this section have responded to him in a variety of different ways. Some admire him while others are more critical.

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

Writing is a powerful tool for exploring and making sense of human thoughts, emotions and experiences. Many writers use their work to try and make sense of their own experiences and to explore what is special and unique about being human. All of the writers in this section explore aspects of private human experience in their work. These range from the emotional anguish and explorations of a dark inner life, to musings on love and God. Writers explore big subjects such as personal identity, love, loss and spiritual experience. Some are concerned with their own experiences, while others explore these themes in the inner lives of their characters.

‘Something is rotten in the state’

The written word can be a powerful tool for challenging ideas and attitudes in society. This is often prompted by dissatisfaction with authority or convention. Many writers have helped to bring about cultural change while others have had their works criticised, censored or destroyed. Each of these writers may be seen as ‘anti-establishment’ because aspects of their writing, beliefs or lifestyles have rocked the status quo. All of these writers have criticised conventional ideas in one way or another. Some have published openly political writing while others have challenged the traditions of literature. Some of these anti-establishment figures have since been absorbed into the mainstream. They have actually become part of the establishment they were reacting against.

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

Celebrity may seem to be a modern concept, but in fact the idea of fame has fascinated writers for centuries. Authors can achieve immortality through the words they leave behind them. The nature of fame has been widely explored by writers, from Shakespeare’s sonnets to Morrissey’s lyrics. Fame can be sudden or gradual, desirable or damaging. Some writers were celebrities in their own lifetimes, whereas the fame of others has increased after their

death. Some writers have been deliberately outrageous to become famous, but have later been tainted by scandal. In some cases, their characters are the famous ones, either overshadowing the author or propelling them to celebrity status. Certain famous characters have become so popular that they have become a burden to the writer. Through celebrity, writers can become figures of adoration or repulsion, heroes or villains.

'O brave new world'

Writers can create whole worlds through language and the power of their imaginations. The writers in this section have all created distinctive 'brave new worlds' where the reader can experience and escape into fascinating and unfamiliar territory. Science-fiction, fantasy and children's fiction tell stories of vibrant and imaginative worlds. These places are full of strange creatures, children with magical powers, two-headed people, talking animals and walking trees. Detective and spy stories expose places and situations where danger and murder can be exciting and enjoyable while keeping the reader safe. From Middle-Earth to Kipling's India, Winnie-the-Pooh's Hundred Acre Wood to the discworld, millions of readers have been transported to new worlds through the magic of writing.