

# A Hand Painted Map of the Plays of William Shakespeare



To mark the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare on 23rd April 2016, artist Jane Tomlinson painted a schematic map in his honour, showing all The Bard's plays in their approximate locations.

William Shakespeare is a towering figure in my life. I too was born and bred in Stratford-upon-Avon and his influence permeated my childhood. At primary school we got a day off on Shakespeare's birthday to take part in the town's celebrations. As a small child, he was as important to me as Father Christmas! Decades on, and now with a much deeper understanding of his genius, it seemed only right that I, a girl from Stratford, lover of the English language, and painter of maps, should attempt to depict all his plays on a single sheet of paper.

It's a very simple idea: put the plays in their approximate geographic position. In the north there's Macbeth in Scotland and Hamlet in Denmark. In the south, The Tempest in the Mediterranean and Antony and Cleopatra in Egypt.

## Which ones to Include?

There were many questions to be answered before I could even get my brushes wet. I have seen maybe 50% of his plays over the years, and I thought I knew a fair bit about Shakespeare. It turns out I knew very little. So this painting has been a fascinating way of examining each play to discover its essence and themes. But which plays should I include? In the end, I went for all those featured in the First Folio, plus Pericles. Shakespeare aficionados may argue about the lack of Two Noble Kinsmen or no referencing of the 'lost plays'.

Each play's title is shown alongside a quotation and an illustration to give something of its flavour. The bulk of the plays take place in the British Isles or in Italy, and to squeeze so many into such a small space on the paper would be impossible. I had to distort the underlying drawing of Europe considerably, and abandon any notion of 'to scale' entirely. Think of it as a visual pantomime. Luckily, many plays have more than one location, so Shakespeare built in a bit of wiggle room for me. Henry V, for example; on my map he's over in northern France, a nod to Agincourt.

I tried not always to use the 'obvious' or most famous quote, but to find something else that gave a flavour of the main themes of the play or a particularly dramatic moment. For example, in Julius Caesar, it would have been so easy to go for 'Et tu, Brute', or 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen...' But the irony and pathos of 'Brutus is an honourable man' is, I think, way more powerful.

Shakespeare purists might wonder why Sir John Falstaff is the only character depicted in his own right. He appears in three plays and was a hugely popular character among Elizabethan audiences. The only reason he's sitting in the Netherlands is that there was a convenient space in my composition to put him there!

Another point of controversy might be putting As You Like It in the heart of England. Some suggest that Shakespeare was referring to the Ardennes Forest in Belgium. I think it is more likely that Shakespeare is referring to the Arden Forest – his and my home turf – which in the 17th century stretched north from Stratford.

## A Bard for all Time

I wasn't commissioned to make this painting, it was just a bit of fun for me and a way of learning more about my fellow Stratfordian. Including research time, it took me six weeks of my so-called spare time to complete.

Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare "He is not for an age but for all time". That a boy from an insignificant market town in leafy Warwickshire was able to observe such deep universal human traits, and convey them with such creativity is remarkable. That's precisely why I painted this map.

Prints of the Map of the Plays of Shakespeare are available at [janetomlinson.com/artworks/shakespeare-map/](http://janetomlinson.com/artworks/shakespeare-map/)

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