ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

Bravo, Mr. William Shakespeare!
Candlewick Press
978-0-7636-1209-2
(November 2000)

Shakespeare's work has been presented in many formats especially for children. In Bravo!, Williams presents seven of Shakespeare's plays in a more accessible format for young people.

She presents the plays in three parts: the actual words Shakespeare wrote for the characters to say are reproduced in cartoon-like strips on the page, some in "bubbles" above the character's heads, and the plot of the play is summarized below in standard English. Surrounding the borders of each page are more cartoon-like illustrations that represent the spectators who, in Shakespeare's day, would make rude and noisy comments during the play.

The illustrations should capture the interest of the reader. Though they are comic in appearance, they do add to the mood of the play. In the comedies: As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Merchant of Venice, and Much Ado about Nothing, the illustrations are bright, colorful, and have a sense of fun to them. In Antony and Cleopatra the illustrations have a definite Egyptian feel to them through the use of the gold and turquoise colors and the clothing and ships. The tragedies: Richard III and King Lear have the appropriate darker feel to them through the use of blacks, grays, and more somber tones.

By reading both Shakespeare's own words and the paraphrased plots, children can understand the plays, yet get the sense of Shakespeare's English without being confused. As they grow older, it is hoped, they will be more open to reading the actual plays.

Readers may find the comments of the spectators that appear around the page borders distracting as there may be too much for a young person to read and observe. The first few times the book is read it would be best to have an adult share the book with the child to discuss vocabulary and traditions.

The front endspaper reproduces a Playbill as it may have appeared to the audience at the Globe Theatre. It contains the table of contents for the book. Williams has retold other classics for children, including the Greek Myths, King Arthur Tales and The Illiad and the Odyssey. Bravo! is Williams' second book of the retelling of Shakespeare's plays.

Diane Pozar