



# Shakespeare in America (Oxford Shakespeare Topics)

Alden T. Vaughan, Virginia Mason Vaughan

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### **Shakespeare in America (Oxford Shakespeare Topics)**

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**Shakespeare in America (Oxford Shakespeare Topics)** Alden T. Vaughan, Virginia Mason Vaughan This book traces Shakespeare's contributions to America's cultural history from the colonial era to the present, with substantial attention to theatre history, publishing history, and criticism.

It identifies four broad themes that distinguish Shakespeare in the United States from the dramatist's reception in other countries. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Americans in search of self-improvement took a utilitarian approach to the plays, mining them for moral insights and everyday wisdom; beginning in the nineteenth century, American entrepreneurs collected, edited, and adapted Shakespeare for their own pleasure and profit; while America's public schools and theatre practitioners sought to make the works widely accessible; and throughout American history, Americans have had fun with Shakespeare in spoofs, parodies, and other appropriations and the collection of Shakespeare kitsch.

Shakespeare in America also examines America's evolving awareness of Shakespeare, initially through the importation of his writings in the early eighteenth century, the staging a few decades later of English adaptations of the plays, and in the nineteenth century and beyond, through the promotion of Shakespeare and his works at Lyceums, Chautauquas, Shakespeare Clubs (both scholarly men's associations and more socially-oriented women's clubs), and America's literary 'renaissance' as championed by Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, and others. The nineteenth century also witnessed growing attention to Shakespeare in schools, especially in William H McGuffey's Readers, and later in colleges, while simultaneously American familiarity with Shakespeare encouraged burlesques on stage, including the popular 'black' minstrel shows of the 1840s through 1870s.

The twentieth century witnessed new organizations for promoting Shakespeare, such as the Shakespeare Association of America, and new venues for amateur and professional performances, such as Shakespeare summer festivals beginning in the 1930s and still going strong; and in new media for enjoying Shakespeare, such as feature films, Broadway musicals, and, toward the end of the twentieth century, radical adaptations of the plays on stage, on film, and in fiction, often aimed at persuading American youth that Shakespeare speaks to them. The story of Shakespeare in America is ever-changing.



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