Shakespeare's in Town: Four Things to Know Before Visiting the First Folio Exhibit

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William Shakespeare gave us important narratives about love, passion and betrayal through the lives of some of the most iconic literary characters in history.

In honor of that legacy, and the 400-year anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the UA is serving as the state's host site of "First Folio! The Book That Gave Us Shakespeare," on tour from the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The Arizona State Museum was competitively selected by the Folger Shakespeare Library as an exhibition site for the First Folio, a printed collection of Shakespeare's plays, which contains original notes by actors from that time.

The exhibition opened Monday, and will remain on display through March 15.

With the announcement that the UA would serve as a host site, UA Provost Andrew Comrie said: "I'm excited about the opening of the First Folio exhibit from the Folger Shakespeare Library. For our students and faculty, seeing original documents can inspire and re-energize a lifetime of scholarly passion and personal enjoyment."

Here are four things to consider before you check out the exhibit.

**What is the First Folio?**

Shakespeare is arguably the world's most famous dramatist and playwright, and some of his experiments with characterization, language and plot remain evident on the globe's stages and in contemporary film.

The First Folio, printed in 1623, grouped his 36 plays for the first time into comedies, histories and tragedies.

"Folio" references the folding style of the paper — it is folded once in half.

UA Special Collections is offering a companion exhibit, "Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Elizabethan Culture," through April 30. In addition to examining specific plays and other literary works, the exhibit includes historical snapshots of documents that shaped Shakespeare's culture.

**Shakespeare Said it First**
Shakespeare is known by scholars and historians to have either invented or popularized the widespread use of dozens of words and phrases used over the last several hundred years— including the first known use of the name spelled “Jessica.”

For example, we have Shakespeare to thank for the phrase, “Forever and a day,” which he coined in 1596 with "The Taming of the Shrew." Shakespeare wrote: "If this be not that you look for, I have no more to say, But bid Bianca farewell forever and a day." He used the phrase again in "As You Like It."

Brent Gibbs, an associate professor in the UA’s School of Theatre, Film & Television, notes that Shakespeare also gave us phrases like: "Love is blind," "Neither here nor there" and "To thine own self be true."

"The world would be so much poorer without Shakespeare," says Gibbs, also the artistic director for the Arizona Repertory Theatre. "Our understanding of what it means to be human would be so much poorer if we didn't have these First Folio plays."

The Arizona Repertory Theatre will present "The Comedy of Errors" through April and "The Tempest" in March and April. Also, March 30 is UA Night, with discounts available for UA employees and students. Patrons are asked to wear UA red and blue to the theater that day. Also, those who wear the classic black-and-white UA School of Theatre, Film & Television T-shirt to that performance will get a free snack item at the concession counter.

Without First Folio, We Might Not Have "Macbeth"

When Shakespeare died in April 1616, only half of his plays had been printed. Just 18 of the 36 plays in First Folio had been printed before the folio was printed in 1623. Thus, without it, we may have lost works including "All's Well That Ends Well," "As You Like It" and "Macbeth."

It is believed that fewer than 750 First Folios were printed and only 233 of the original prints are known to still exist today. The Folger Shakespeare Library maintains 82—the largest collection in the world.

Shakespeare Got That "It's Complicated"

Shakespeare wrote about human connections. He complicated issues of race and gender. And to this day, his influence is unquestionably enduring.

"Macbeth" and "Romeo and Juliet" remain required reading for English students. Popular films such as "West Side Story" and "The Lion King" took cues from his plays.

Involved with the First Folio’s presentation at the UA is Meg Lota Brown, a UA English professor who has authored numerous books and articles on Shakespeare, Reformation politics and Renaissance literature, among other topics.
About her appreciation for Shakespeare, Brown said, "Every time I teach, they are new and infinite and exciting. The texts always change. They never seem stale or too familiar. People are complicated, and Shakespeare was very good at exploring the three-dimensionality of people."

A number of events are taking place on campus and around Tucson to celebrate First Folio, including film screenings, lectures and more. Learn more on the First Folio website.

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