



1601 And Is Shakespeare Dead? (Mark Twain Works)

Mark Twain

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1601, or *Conversation, as it was by the Social Fireside, in the time of the Tudors* is a hilarious ribald send-up of Elizabethan England in which Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Sir Walter Raleigh, and other luminaries of the period are pictured sitting about the fireplace amusing one another with risqué tales. During a visit to West Point in 1881, Twain met Lieutenant Charles Erskine Scott Wood, adjutant to the commanding general. As Leslie Fiedler notes in his afterword, "he discovered not only that Wood, like him, was a freethinker, but that he had at his disposal a well-equipped printing plant." He asked Wood to publish the piece, and it is the West Point edition--complete with the Old English-style type Wood selected--that is printed here.

If "in *1601* Twain both parodied and paid homage to Shakespeare's liberating bawdry," Erica Jong observes in her introduction, in "*Is Shakespeare Dead?*" he tried to come to terms with his conflicting responses to Shakespeare as mentor and muse." Jong suggests that Twain's real concern in this book may well be his own "place in literary history."

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