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Shakespeare's Family

Kate Emery Pogue

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While many things about Shakespeare's life are unknown, certainly, like everyone else, he had a family. This book gathers into a single source as much information as possible concerning Shakespeare's immediate family, from his grandfathers on the maternal and paternal sides to his granddaughter, the last member of his direct family line. But readers may ask, to what extent did the relationships in the plays reflect the actual familial structures of Shakespeare's day? To what extent did Shakespeare experience personally the familial dynamics about which he wrote so eloquently? And to what extent were Shakespeare's own family experiences typical or atypical of other Elizabethan or Jacobean families? These questions can be addressed because more is known of Shakespeare's family than of the families of any of his fellow writers and actors. For several generations members of Shakespeare's family were important local figures in and around Stratford-upon-Avon, and, fortunately, from the Middle Ages until the present day, Stratford-upon-Avon has been one of the best-documented towns in England.

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In vivid detail, Pogue provides an overview of the various members of Shakespeare's family and, where possible, draws conclusions concerning Shakespeare's relationships with his various family members. Further, the author notes to what extent Shakespeare's family experiences were typical or atypical of the time, and includes at the end of each chapter a discussion of scenes from Shakespeare's plays presenting the relevant familial relationship, juxtaposing the relational scenes he wrote with what we know of his own experience. Such a comparison impresses us once again not just with his skill at holding the mirror up to the nature of his time, but with the imaginative insight into humanity that lay at the heart of his dramatic genius.

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