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The National Portrait Gallery's collection of portraits of British men and women constitutes a complete survey of both historical and contemporary personalities. A national pantheon of great figures - from King Henry VIII to David Bowie - portrayed by great artists - from Holbein to Avedon - the Gallery's collection includes likenesses of political, artistic and scientific characters, including Mary, Queen of Scots, William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, James Joyce, Winston Churchill, Laurence Olivier, Barbara Hepworth and Salman Rushdie. The book includes a selection of the finest portraits in the Gallery, ranging from the Middle Ages to the present day. It forms a permanent record of the range and diversity of British life over the last 400 years, and provides a view of the faces that created Britain's history and culture. Charles Saumarez Smith is the author of "The Building of Castle Howard" and "Eighteenth Century Decoration".