

# Dictionary of Literary Biography

## Volume 62: Elizabethan Dramatists

Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Sixty-two

## Elizabethan Dramatists

Edited by  
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University of Virginia

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### Contents

Plan of the Series.....vii	George Peele (1556-1596)..... 242
Foreword.....ix	<i>Stanley J. Kozikowski</i>
Acknowledgments.....xxi	Henry Porter (birth date and death date unknown)..... 254
George Chapman (1559 or 1560-1634)..... 3	<i>Karen Wood</i>
<i>Gordon Braden</i>	Thomas Preston (1537-1598)..... 257
Samuel Daniel (1562 or 1563-1619).....30	<i>Irby B. Cauthen, Jr.</i>
<i>James L. Harner</i>	Thomas Sackville (1536-1608) and Thomas Norton (1532-1584)..... 261
John Day (circa 1574-circa 1640).....40	<i>Irby B. Cauthen, Jr.</i>
<i>Raymond S. Burns</i>	William Shakespeare (1564-1616)..... 267
Thomas Dekker (circa 1572-1632).....45	<i>John F. Andrews</i>
<i>Cyrus Hoy</i>	Nicholas Udall (1504-1556)..... 354
Richard Edwards (1524-1566).....71	<i>Marie Aston</i>
<i>D. Jerry White</i>	<i>Arden of Faversham</i> ..... 361
Robert Greene (1558-1592).....77	<i>Robert F. Fleissner</i>
<i>Daniel Kinney</i>	<i>Gammer Gurton's Needle</i> ..... 365
Fulke Greville, First Lord Brooke (1554-1628)..... 94	<i>Stanley J. Kozikowski</i>
<i>Charles Larson</i>	<i>Lochnie and Selimus</i> ..... 369
Thomas Heywood (1573 or 1574-1641)..... 101	<i>Peter Bereh</i>
<i>Peter Davison</i>	<i>Mucedorus</i> ..... 373
Ben Jonson (1572?-1637)..... 136	<i>Paul G. Kreuzer</i>
<i>Kevin J. Donovan</i>	Appendices:
Thomas Kyd (1558-1594)..... 183	The Theater in Shakespeare's Time..... 387
<i>Gordon Braden</i>	<i>Andrew Gurr</i>
John Lyly (circa 1554-1606)..... 196	The Publication of English Renaissance Plays..... 406
<i>Leah Scragg</i>	<i>Fredson Bowers</i>
Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)..... 212	Sources for the Study of Tudor and Stuart Drama..... 417
<i>Roma Gill</i>	<i>Albert H. Tricomi</i>
Anthony Munday (1560-1633)..... 232	Contributors..... 433
<i>Philip J. Ayres</i>	Cumulative Index..... 437

### William Shakespeare

(on or about 23 April 1564-23 April 1616)

John F. Andrews  
National Endowment for the Humanities

PLAY PRODUCTIONS: *Henry VI*, part 1, London, unknown theater (perhaps by a branch of the Queen's Men), circa 1589-1592; *Henry VI*, part 2, London, unknown theater (perhaps by a branch of the Queen's Men), circa 1590-1592; *Henry VI*, part 3, London, unknown theater (perhaps by a branch of the Queen's Men), circa 1590-1592; *Richard III*, London, unknown theater (perhaps by a branch of the Queen's Men), circa 1591-1592; *The Comedy of Errors*, London, unknown theater (probably by Lord Strange's Men), circa 1592-1594; London, Gray's Inn, 28 December 1594; *Titus Andronicus*, London, Rose or Newington Butts theater, 24 January 1594; *The Taming of the Shrew*, London, Newington Butts theater, 11 June 1594; *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, London, Newington Butts theater or the Theatre, 1594; *Love's Labor's Lost*, perhaps at the country house of a great lord, such as the Earl of Southampton, circa 1594-1595; London, at Court, Christmas 1597; *Sir Thomas More*, probably by Anthony Munday, revised by Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle, Shakespeare, and possibly Thomas Heywood, evidently never produced, circa 1594-1595; *King John*, London, the Theatre, circa 1594-1596; *Richard II*, London, the Theatre, circa 1595; *Romeo and Juliet*, London, the Theatre, circa 1595-1596; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, London, the Theatre, circa 1595-1596; *The Merchant of Venice*, London, the Theatre, circa 1596-1597; *Henry IV*, part 1, London, the Theatre, circa 1596-1597; *Henry IV*, part 2, London, the Theatre, circa 1597; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Windsor, Windsor Castle, 23 April 1597;



*The Flower Portrait of Shakespeare, which came into the possession of Mrs. Charles Flower in 1895 (Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Picture Gallery); by permission of the Governors. When the previous owner, H. C. Clements, acquired the portrait in 1840, he said he had seen it exhibited seventy years earlier, but his claim is unsubstantiated. Once thought to have been the original from which the engraving on the title page of the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was copied, this portrait is now generally believed to have been based on that engraving.*

*Much Ado About Nothing*, London, the Theatre, circa 1598-1599; *Henry V*, London, Globe theater(?), between March and September 1599(?);

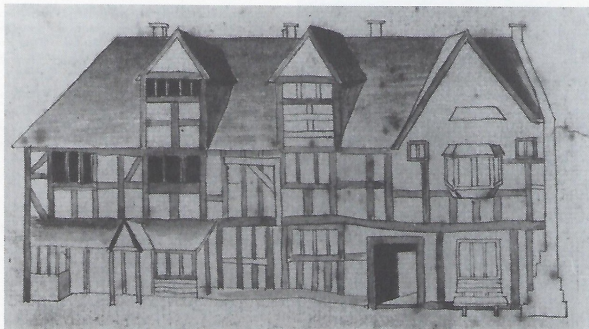
*Julius Caesar*, London, Globe theater, 21 September 1599;  
*As You Like It*, London, Globe theater, circa 1599-1600;  
*Hamlet*, London, Globe theater, circa 1600-1601;  
*Twelfth Night*, London, at Court(?), no earlier than 6 January 1601(?); London, Globe theater(?), circa 1601-1602(?); London, Middle Temple, 2 February 1602;  
*Troilus and Cressida*, London, Globe theater(?), circa 1601-1602(?);  
*All's Well That Ends Well*, London, Globe theater, circa 1602-1603;  
*Measure for Measure*, London, Globe theater(?), 1604(?); London, at Court, 26 December 1604;  
*Othello*, London, Globe theater(?), 1604(?); Westminster, Whitehall, 1 November 1604;  
*King Lear*, London, Globe theater(?), by late 1605 or early 1606; London, at Court, 26 December 1606;  
*Timon of Athens* (possibly unperformed during Shakespeare's lifetime); possibly London, Globe theater, circa 1605-1608;  
*Macbeth*, London, Globe theater(?), 1606(?); London, at Court, probably 7 August 1606;  
*Antony and Cleopatra*, London, Globe theater, circa 1606-1607;  
*Pericles*, possibly by Shakespeare and George Wilkins, London, at Court, between January 1606 and November 1608; London, Globe theater, probably circa 1607-1608;  
*Coriolanus*, London, Globe theater, circa 1607-1608;  
*Cymbeline*, London, Blackfriars theater or Globe theater, 1609;  
*The Winter's Tale*, London, Globe theater, 15 May 1611;  
*The Tempest*, London, at Court, 1 November 1611;  
*Cardenio*, probably by Shakespeare and Fletcher, London, Globe theater(?), circa 1612-1613;  
*Henry VIII*, possibly by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, London, Globe theater, 29 June 1613;  
*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, by Shakespeare and Fletcher, London, probably Blackfriars theater (possibly Globe theater), 1613.

BOOKS: *Venus and Adonis* (London: Printed by Richard Field, sold by J. Harrison I, 1593); *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster* [abridged and corrupt text of *Henry VI*, part 2] (London:

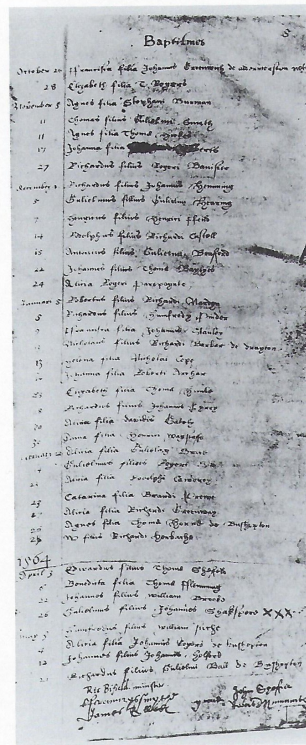
Printed by Thomas Creede for Thomas Millington, 1594);  
*Lucrece* (London: Printed by Richard Field for John Harrison, 1594); republished as *The Rape of Lucrece. Newly Revised* (London: Printed by T. Snodham for R. Jackson, 1616);  
*The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus* (London: Printed by John Danter, sold by Edward White & Thomas Middleton, 1594);  
*A Pleasant Conceited Historie, Called The Taming of a Shrew* [corrupt text] (London: Printed by Peter Short, sold by Cuthbert Burbie, 1594);  
*The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York, and the death of good King Henrie the Sixt* [abridged and corrupt text of *Henry VI*, part 3] (London: Printed by Peter Short for Thomas Millington, 1595);  
*The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* (London: Printed by Valentine Simmes & Peter Short for Andrew Wise, 1597);  
*The Tragedie of King Richard the second* (London: Printed by Valentine Simmes for Andrew Wise, 1597);  
*An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet* [corrupt text] (London: Printed by John Danter [ & E. Allder], 1597); *The Most Excellent and lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet, Newly Corrected, Augmented, and Amended* (London: Printed by Thomas Creede for Cuthbert Burby, 1599);  
*A Pleasant Conceited Comedie Called, Loves Labors Lost* (London: Printed by William White for Cuthbert Burby, 1598);  
*The History of Henrie the Fourth* [part 1] (London: Printed by Peter Short for Andrew Wise, 1598);  
*A midsummer nights dreame* (London: Printed by R. Bradock for Thomas Fisher, 1600);  
*The most excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice* (London: Printed by James Roberts for Thomas Heyes, 1600);  
*The Second part of Henrie the fourth, continuing to his death, and coronation of Henrie the fift* (London: Printed by Valentine Simmes for Andrew Wise & William Aspley, 1600);  
*Much adoe about Nothing* (London: Printed by Valentine Simmes for Andrew Wise & William Aspley, 1600);  
*The Cronicle History of Henrie the fift* [corrupt text] (London: Printed by Thomas Creede for Thomas Mullington & John Busby, 1600);  
*The Phoenix and Turtle*, appended to *Loves Martyr*;

or, *Rosalins Complaint*, by Robert Chester (London: Printed by Richard Field for E. Blount, 1601);  
*A Most pleasant and excellent conceited Comedie, of Syr John Falstaffe, and the merrie Wives of Windsor* [corrupt text] (London: Printed by Thomas Creede for Arthur Johnson, 1602);  
*The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmark* [abridged and corrupt text] (London: Printed by Valentine Simmes for Nicholas Ling & John Trundell, 1603); *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. Newly Imprinted and Enlarged to Almost as Much Again as It Was, According to the True and Perfect Coppie* (London: Printed by James Roberts for Nicholas Ling, 1604);  
*M. William Shak-speare: His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three daughters* (London: Printed by N. Okes for Nathaniel Butter, 1608);  
*The Historie of Troilus and Cresseida* (London: Printed by G. Eld for R. Bonian & H. Walley, 1609);  
*Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Printed by G. Eld for Thomas Thorpe, sold by W. Aspley, 1609);  
*The Late, and Much Admir'd Play, Called Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (London: Printed by W. White for Henry Gosson, 1609);

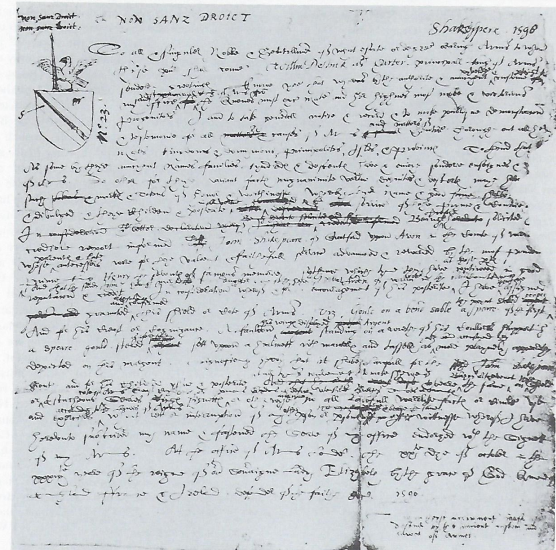
*The Tragedy of Othello, The Moore of Venice* (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes for Thomas Walkley, 1622);  
 Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies (London: Printed by Isaac Jaggard & Edward Blount, 1623)—comprises *The Tempest*; *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; *Measure for Measure*; *The Comedy of Errors*; *Much Ado about Nothing*; *Love's Labor's Lost*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; *The Merchant of Venice*; *As You Like It*; *The Taming of the Shrew*; *All's Well That Ends Well*; *Twelfth Night*; *The Winter's Tale*; *King John*; *Richard II*; *Henry IV*, parts 1 and 2; *Henry V*; *Henry VI*, parts 1-3; *Richard III*; *Henry VIII*; *Troilus and Cressida*; *Coriolanus*; *Titus Andronicus*; *Romeo and Juliet*; *Timon of Athens*; *Julius Caesar*; *Macbeth*; *Hamlet*; *King Lear*; *Othello*; *Antony and Cleopatra*; *Cymbeline*;  
*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, by Shakespeare and John Fletcher (London: Printed by Thomas Cotes for John Waterson, 1634).  
 Editions: *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, 29 volumes to date, volumes 1-15, 18, edited by Horace Howard Furness; volumes 16-17, 19-20, edited by Horace Howard Furness, Jr. (Philadelphia & London: Lippincott, 1871-1928); volumes 1-25, general



The earliest depiction of the house where Shakespeare spent his childhood, a watercolor painted by Richard Greene circa 1762 (by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library; Art Vol. d 75, no. 27c)



Page from the baptismal register of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, recording Shakespeare's christening on 26 April 1564 (Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust Records Office, Stratford-upon-Avon; by permission of the Trustees and Guardians of Shakespeare's Birthplace)



Grant of Arms to John Shakespeare, the first of two rough drafts prepared by William Dethick, Garter King-of-Arms (College of Arms, MS Vincent. 157, art. 23; by permission of the Chapter)

editor Joseph Quincy Adams; volumes 26-27, general editor Hyder Edward Rollins (Philadelphia & London: Lippincott for the Modern Language Association of America, 1936-1955); volumes 28-30, general editors Robert K. Turner, Jr., and Richard Knowles (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1977- );  
*The Works of Shakespeare*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, edited by J. Dover Wilson, Arthur Quiller-Couch, and others, 39 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921-1967);  
*The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by

George Lyman Kittredge (Boston: Ginn, 1936); revised by Irving Ribner (Waltham, Mass.: Ginn, 1971);  
*Shakespeare Quarto Facsimiles*, edited by W. W. Greg and Charlton Hinman, 14 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939-1966);  
*William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Peter Alexander (London & Glasgow: Collins, 1951; New York: Random House, 1952);  
*The Arden Shakespeare*, general editors Harold F. Brooks and Harold Jenkins, 38 volumes to date (London: Methuen, 1951- );  
*The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by

Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1961); revised by Craig and David Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1973); revised again by Bevington (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1980);

*The New Penguin Shakespeare*, general editor T. J. B. Spencer, 33 volumes to date (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967- );

*The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare*, edited by Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968);

*William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, general editor Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969);

*The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, general editor Sylvan Barnet (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972);

*The Riverside Shakespeare*, general editor G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974);

*Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited, with analytic commentary, by Stephen Booth (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1977);

*Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto: A Facsimile Edition of Copies Primarily from the Henry E. Huntington Library*, edited by Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982);

*The Complete Works*, general editors Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986);

*The Complete Works: Original-Spelling Edition*, general editors Wells and Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

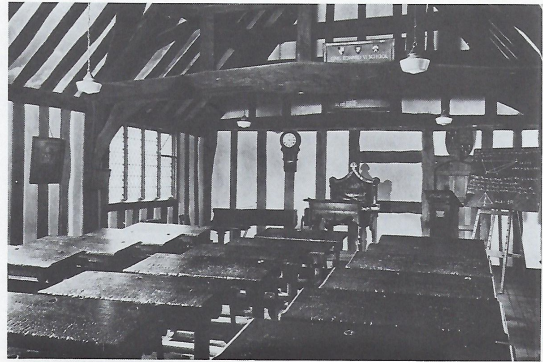
mains that Shakespeare's vocabulary and Shakespeare's cadences are even more pervasive in our ordinary discourse today than the idiom of the King James Bible, which Bartlett lists as only the second most plentiful source of *Familiar Quotations*.

And much the same could be said of those mirrors of our nature, Shakespeare's characters. From small delights like Juliet's Nurse, or Bottom the Weaver, or the Gravedigger, to such incomparable creations as Falstaff, King Lear, and Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare has enlarged our world by imitating it. It should not surprise us, therefore, that personalities as vivid as these have gone on, as it were, to lives of their own outside the dramatic settings in which they first thought and spoke and moved. In opera alone there are enough different renderings of characters and scenes from Shakespeare's plays to assure that the devotee of Charles-François Gounod or Giuseppe Verdi, Richard Wagner or Benjamin Britten, could attend a different performance every evening for six months and never see the same work twice. Which is not to suggest, of course, that the composers of other musical forms have been remiss: Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Claude Debussy, Jean Sibelius, Sergey Prokofiev, and Aaron Copland are but a few of the major figures who have given us songs, tone poems, ballets, symphonic scores, or other compositions based on Shakespeare. Cole Porter might well have been addressing his fellow composers when he punctuated *Kiss Me Kate* with the advice to "Brush Up Your Shakespeare."

Certainly the painters have never needed such reminders. Artists of the stature of George Romney, William Blake, Henry Fuseli, Eugene Delacroix, John Constable, J. M. W. Turner, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti have drawn inspiration from Shakespeare's dramatic personae; and, thanks to such impresarios as the eighteenth-century dealer John Boydell, the rendering of scenes from Shakespeare has long been a significant subgenre of pictorial art. Illustrators of Shakespeare editions have often been notable figures in their own right: George Cruikshank, Arthur Rackham, Rockwell Kent, and Salvador Dalí. Meanwhile, the decorative arts have had their Wedgwood platters with pictures from the plays, their Anne Hathaway's Cottage tea cozies, their mulberry-wood jewelry boxes, and their Superbad T-shirts.

"He was not of an age, but for all time." So wrote Ben Jonson in his dedicatory verses to the memory of William Shakespeare in 1623, and so we continue to affirm today. No other writer, in English or in any other language, can rival the appeal that Shakespeare has enjoyed. And no one else in any artistic endeavor has projected a cultural influence as broad or as deep.

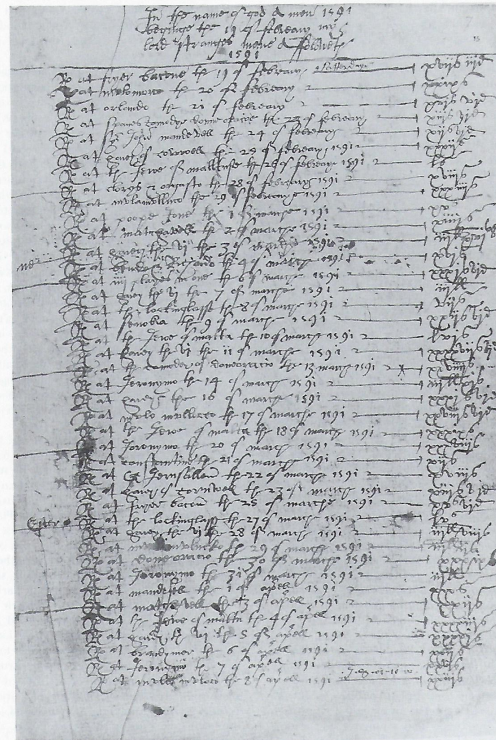
Shakespeare's words and phrases have become so familiar to us that it is sometimes with a start that we realize we have been speaking Shakespeare when we utter a cliché such as "one fell swoop" or "not a mouse stirring." Never mind that many of the expressions we hear most often—"to the manner born," or (from the same speech in *Hamlet*) "more honored in the breach than the observance"—are misapplied at least as frequently as they are employed with any awareness of their original context and implication. The fact re-



The Guild Chapel and the Guild Hall with the schoolroom of the King's New School on the second floor (top) and the interior of the schoolroom (bottom). Though no school records for the period survive, Shakespeare may have attended this grammar school.



George Vertue's sketches and description of New Place, the house Shakespeare bought in 1597. The house was torn down in 1702, and Vertue, who visited Stratford-upon-Avon in autumn 1737, based his notes and drawings on the reminiscences of a local inhabitant, perhaps a descendant of Shakespeare's sister Joan Hart (British Library, MS Portland Loan 29/246, p. 18; by permission of the British Library Board).



The first mention of a Shakespeare play in the diary of Philip Henslowe came on 3 March 1592 (1591 according to the calendar then in use) when the receipts for a performance of Henry VI ("Henry the 11") by the Lord Strange's Men were recorded. Now considered a forgery, the page shown above also records performances of the play on 7, 11, 16, and 28 March and 5 April. It was staged fourteen times between 3 March and 20 June of that year earning large receipts (MSS VII, L 7; by permission of Dulwich College, London).

Every nation that has a theatrical tradition is indebted to Shakespeare, and in language after language Shakespeare remains the greatest living playwright. Not merely in terms of the hundreds of productions of Shakespeare's own plays to be blazoned on the marquees in any given year, either: no, one must also bear in mind the dozens of film and television versions of the plays, and the countless adaptations, parodies, and spinoffs that accent the repertory—from musicals such as *The Boys from Syracuse* (based on *The Comedy of Errors*) and *West Side Story* (Leonard Bernstein's New York ghetto version of the gang wars in *Romeo and Juliet*), to political lampoons like *Macbird* (contra LBJ) and *Dick Deterred* (the doubly punning anti-Nixon polemic), not to mention more reflective dramatic treatments such as Edward Bond's *Bingo* (a "biographical drama" about Shakespeare the man) and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (an absurdist re-enactment of *Hamlet* from the perspective of two innocents as bewildered by the court of Renaissance Elsinore as their twentieth-century counterparts would be in a play such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*).

When we broaden our survey to include the hundreds of novels, short stories, poems, critical appreciations, and other works of serious literature that derive in one way or another from Shakespeare, we partake of an even grander view of the playwright's literary and cultural primacy. Here in America, for example, we can recall Ralph Waldo Emerson's awestruck response to the Stratford seer, his exclamation that Shakespeare was "inconceivably wise," all other great writers only "conceivably." On the other side of the coin, we can indulge in the speculation that Shakespeare may have constituted an aspect of the behemoth that obsessed Herman Melville's imagination, thus accounting for some of the echoes of Shakespearean tragedy in the form and rhetoric of *Moby-Dick*. In a lighter vein, we can chuckle at the frontier Bardolatry so hilariously exploited by the Duke and the King in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Or, moving to our own century, we can contemplate William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* as an extended allusion to Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy. Should we be disposed to look elsewhere, we can puzzle over "the riddle of Shakespeare" in the meditations of the Argentine novelist and essayist Jorge Luis Borges. Or smile (with perhaps but an incomplete suspension of disbelief) as the Nobel Prize-winning African poet

and dramatist Wole Soyinka quips that "Sheikh Zepir" must have had some Arabic blood in him, so faithfully did he capture the local color of Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Implicit in all of these manifestations of Shakespeare worship is a perception best summed up, perhaps, in James Joyce's rendering of the charismatic name: "Shakespeare." For in showing "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (as Hamlet would put it), Shakespeare proved himself to be both the "soul of the age" his works reflected and adorned and the consummate symbol of the artist whose poetic visions transcend their local habitation and become, in some mysterious way, contemporaneous with "all time" (to return once more to Jonson's eulogy). If Jan Kott, a twentieth-century existentialist from eastern Europe, can marvel that Shakespeare is "our contemporary," then, his testimony is but one more instance of the tendency of every age to claim Shakespeare as its own. Whatever else we say about Shakespeare, in other words, we are impelled to acknowledge the incontrovertible fact that, preeminent above all others, he has long stood and will no doubt long remain atop a pedestal (to recall a recent *New Yorker* cartoon) as "a very very very very very very important writer."

So important, indeed, that some of his most zealous admirers have paid him the backhand compliment of doubting that works of such surpassing genius could have been written by the same William Shakespeare who lies buried and memorialized in Stratford-upon-Avon. Plays such as the English histories would suggest in the writer an easy familiarity with the ways of kings, queens, and courtiers; hence their author must have been a member of the nobility, someone like Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. Plays such as *Julius Caesar*, with their impressive display of classical learning, would indicate an author with more than the "small Latin and less Greek" that Ben Jonson attributes to Shakespeare; hence the need to seek for their true begetter in the form of a university-trained scholar such as Francis Bacon. Or so would urge those skeptics (whose numbers have included such redoubtable personages as Henry James and Sigmund Freud) who find themselves in sympathy with the "anti-Stratfordians." Their ranks have never been particularly numerous or disciplined, since they have often quarreled among themselves about which of the various "claimants"—the Earl of Derby, Christopher Marlowe, even Queen

276

Greene

Sweet boy, might I doubt thee, he awhile, and get not many enemies by bitter words: inuich against beine men, for thou canst do it, no man better, no man so well: thou hast a libertie to reppoune all, and name none, for one being spoken to, all are offended; none being blamed, no man is intred. So top shallow water still running, it will rage, or tread on a woime and it will turne: then blame not Schollers bered with tharpe lines, if they reppoue thy too much libertie of reppoue.

And thou no lesse deferring than the other two, in some things rarer, in nothing inferior; diuine (as my selfe) to extreme shifts, a little haue I to say to thee: and were it not an idolatrous oth, I would swaure by sweet S. George, thou art vntwoy better hay, litch thou dependest on to meane a flap. Wise minded men all three of you, if by my miserie you be not waarmed into none of you (like mee) fought these burres to cleane: those puppets (I meane) that shake from our mouths, those Anticks garnish in our colours. 'Tis it not strange, that I, to whom they all haue beene beholding, is it not like that you, to whom they all haue beene beholding, shall (were yee in that case as I am now) bee both as once of them forsaken? Yes truth them not: for there is an vphant Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Iohannes fac totum, in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey. O that I might intreat your rare wits to be imployed in more profitable courses: & let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and neuer more acquaint them with your admired inuentions. I knowe the best husbands of you

Robert Greene's attack on "Shake-scene" in Greene's Groatworth of Wit (1592; British Library). In saying that Shakespeare is "as Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde," Greene was alluding to a line in Henry VI, part 3, where the Duke of York calls Queen Margaret "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide."

Elizabeth herself—should be upheld as the "true Shakespeare." And because many of their arguments are methodologically unsophisticated, they have never attracted adherents from scholars with academic credentials in the study of English Renaissance history and dramatic literature. But, whatever their limitations, the anti-Stratfordians have at least helped keep us mindful of how

frustratingly little we can say for certain about the life of the man whose works have so enriched the lives of succeeding generations.

One thing we do know is that if Shakespeare was a man for all time, he was also very much a man of his own age. Christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564, he grew up as the eldest of five chil-

277

Greene

Sweet boy, might I doubt thee, he awhile, and get not many enemies by bitter words: inuich against beine men, for thou canst do it, no man better, no man so well: thou hast a libertie to reppoune all, and name none, for one being spoken to, all are offended; none being blamed, no man is intred. So top shallow water still running, it will rage, or tread on a woime and it will turne: then blame not Schollers bered with tharpe lines, if they reppoue thy too much libertie of reppoue.

And thou no lesse deferring than the other two, in some things rarer, in nothing inferior; diuine (as my selfe) to extreme shifts, a little haue I to say to thee: and were it not an idolatrous oth, I would swaure by sweet S. George, thou art vntwoy better hay, litch thou dependest on to meane a flap. Wise minded men all three of you, if by my miserie you be not waarmed into none of you (like mee) fought these burres to cleane: those puppets (I meane) that shake from our mouths, those Anticks garnish in our colours. 'Tis it not strange, that I, to whom they all haue beene beholding, is it not like that you, to whom they all haue beene beholding, shall (were yee in that case as I am now) bee both as once of them forsaken? Yes truth them not: for there is an vphant Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Iohannes fac totum, in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey. O that I might intreat your rare wits to be imployed in more profitable courses: & let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and neuer more acquaint them with your admired inuentions. I knowe the best husbands of you

Robert Greene's attack on "Shake-scene" in Greene's Groatworth of Wit (1592; British Library). In saying that Shakespeare is "as Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde," Greene was alluding to a line in Henry VI, part 3, where the Duke of York calls Queen Margaret "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide."

Elizabeth herself—should be upheld as the "true Shakespeare." And because many of their arguments are methodologically unsophisticated, they have never attracted adherents from scholars with academic credentials in the study of English Renaissance history and dramatic literature. But, whatever their limitations, the anti-Stratfordians have at least helped keep us mindful of how

frustratingly little we can say for certain about the life of the man whose works have so enriched the lives of succeeding generations.

One thing we do know is that if Shakespeare was a man for all time, he was also very much a man of his own age. Christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564, he grew up as the eldest of five chil-

277

dren reared by John Shakespeare, a tradesman who played an increasingly active role in the town's civic affairs as his business prospered, and Mary Arden Shakespeare, the daughter of a gentleman farmer from nearby Wilmcote. Whether Shakespeare was born on 23 April, as tradition holds, is not known; but a birth date only a few days prior to the recorded baptism seems eminently probable, particularly in view of the fear his parents must have had that William, like two sisters who had preceded him and one who followed, might die in infancy. By the time young William was old enough to begin attending school, he had a younger brother (Gilbert, born in 1566) and a baby sister (Joan, born in 1569). As he attained his youth, he found himself with two more brothers to help look after (Richard, born in 1574, and Edmund, born in 1580), the younger of whom eventually followed his best-known prominent eldest brother to London and the theater, where he had a brief career as an actor before his untimely death at twenty-seven.

The house where Shakespeare spent his childhood stood adjacent to the wool shop in which his father plied a successful trade as a glover and dealer in leather goods and other commodities. Before moving to Stratford sometime prior to 1552 (as the records show that he was fined for failing to remove a dunghill from outside his house to the location where refuse was normally to be deposited), John Shakespeare had been a farmer in the neighboring village of Smitterfield. Whether he was able to read and write is uncertain. He executed official documents, not with his name, but with a cross signifying his glove's "signature." Some scholars interpret this as a "signature" that might have been considered more "authentic" than a full autograph; others have taken it to be an indication of illiteracy. But even if John Shakespeare was not one of the "learned," he was certainly a man of what a later age would call upward mobility. By marrying Mary Arden, the daughter of his father's landlord, he acquired the benefits of a better social standing and a lucrative inheritance, much of which he invested in property (he bought several houses). And by involving himself in public service, he rose by sure degrees to the highest municipal positions Stratford had to offer: chamberlain (1561), alderman (1565), and bailiff (or mayor) and justice of the peace (1568). A few years after his elevation to the office of bailiff, probably around 1576, John Shakespeare approached the College of Heralds for armorial

bearings and the right to call himself a gentleman. Before his application was acted upon, however, his fortunes took a sudden turn for the worse, and it was not until 1596, when his eldest son had attained some status and renewed the petition, that a Shakespeare coat of arms was finally granted. This must have been a comfort to John Shakespeare in his declining years (he died in 1601), because by then he had borrowed money, disposed of property out of necessity, ceased to attend meetings of the town council, become involved in litigation and been assessed fines, and even stopped attending church services, for fear, it was said, "of process for debt." Just what happened to alter John Shakespeare's financial and social position after the mid 1570s is not clear. Some have seen his nonattendance at church as a sign that he had become a recusant, unwilling to conform to the practices of the newly established Church of England (his wife's family had remained loyal to Roman Catholicism despite the fact that the old faith was under vigorous attack in Warwickshire after 1577), but the scant surviving evidence is anything but definitive.

The records we do have suggest that during young William's formative years he enjoyed the advantages that would have accrued to him as the son of one of the most influential citizens of a bustling market town in the fertile Midlands. When he was taken to services at Holy Trinity Church, he would have sat with his family in the front pew, in accordance with his father's civic rank. There he would have heard and felt the words and rhythms of the Bible, the sonorous phrases of the 1559 Book of Common Prayer, the exhortations of the Homilies. In all likelihood, after spending a year or two at a "petty school" to learn the rudiments of reading and writing, he would have proceeded, at the age of seven, to "grammar school." Given his father's social position, young William would have been eligible to attend the King's New School, located above the Guild Hall and adjacent to the Guild Chapel (institutions that would both have been quite familiar to a man with the elder Shakespeare's municipal duties), no more than a five-minute walk from the Shakespeare house on Henley Street. Though no records survive to tell us who attended the Stratford grammar school during this period, we do know that it had well-qualified and comparatively well-paid masters; and, through the painstaking research of such scholars as T. W. Baldwin, we now recognize that a curriculum such as the one offered at the

279

The Workes of William Shakespeare,  
containing all his Comedies, Histories, and  
Tragedies: Truly set forth, according to their first  
ORIGINALLS.

The Names of the Principall Actors  
in all theſe Playes.

**W**illiam Shakespeare.  
Richard Burbadge.  
John Hemmings.  
Augustine Phillips.  
William Kemp.  
Thomas Poope.  
George Bryan.  
Henry Condell.  
William Slye.  
Richard Cowly.  
John Lovine.  
Samuell Groſſe.  
Alexander Cooke.

Samuel Gilbarne.  
Robert Armin.  
William Ofſter.  
Nathan Field.  
John Underwood.  
Nicholas Tooley.  
William Eccleſtone.  
Joſeph Taylor.  
Robert Benſfield.  
Robert Gyngebe.  
Richard Robinſon.  
John Shancke.  
John Rice.

List, from the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's works (1623; Folger Shakespeare Library), of the members of the company that Cuthbert and Richard Burbage formed as the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594. In 1603 the company came under the patronage of James I and was renamed the King's Men.

King's New School would have equipped its pupils with what by modern standards would be a rather formidable classical education.

During his many long school days there, young Shakespeare would have become thoroughly grounded in Latin, acquired some background in Greek, and developed enough linguistic facility to pick up whatever he may have wanted later from such modern languages as Italian and French. Along the way he would have become familiar with such authors as Aescop, Caesar, Cicero, Sallust, Livy, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Seneca. He would have studied logic and rhetoric as well as grammar, and he would have been taught the principles of composition and oratory from the writings of such masters as Quintilian and Erasmus. In all probability, he would even have received some training in speech and drama through the performance of plays by Plautus and Terence. If Shakespeare's references to schooling and schoolmasters in the plays are a reliable index of how he viewed his own years as a student, we must conclude that the experience was more tedious than pleasurable. But it is difficult to imagine a more suitable mode of instruction for the formation of a Renaissance poet's intellectual and artistic sensibility.

Meanwhile, of course, young Shakespeare would have learned a great deal from merely being alert to all that went on around him. He would have paid attention to the plant and animal life in the local woods that he would later immortalize in *As You Like It*, as the Forest of Arden. He may have hunted from time to time; one legend, almost certainly apocryphal, has it that he eventually left Stratford because he had been caught poaching deer from the estate of a powerful squire, Sir Thomas Lucy, four miles upstream. He probably learned to swim as a youth, skinny-dipping in the river Avon. He may have participated in some of the athletic pursuits that were the basis of competition in the Elizabethan equivalent of the Olympics, the nearby Cotswold Games. He would undoubtedly have been adept at indoor recreations such as hazard (a popular dice game), or chess, or any of a number of card games. As he grew older, he would have become accustomed to such vocations as farming, sheep-herding, tailoring, and shopkeeping. He would have acquired skills such as fishing, gardening, and cooking. And he would have gathered information about the various professions: law, medicine, religion, and teaching. Judging from the astonishing range of daily life and human en-

deavor reflected in his poems and plays, we can only infer that Shakespeare was both a voracious reader and a keen observer, the sort of polymath Henry James might have been describing when he referred to a character in one of his novels as "a man on whom nothing was lost."

Once his school years ended, Shakespeare married, at eighteen, a woman who was eight years his senior. We know that Anne Hathaway was pregnant when the marriage license was issued by the Bishop of Worcester on 27 November 1582, because a daughter, Susanna, was baptized in Holy Trinity six months later on 26 May 1583. We have good reason to believe that the marriage was hastily arranged: there was only one reading of the banns (a church announcement preceding a wedding that allowed time for any legal impediments against it to be brought forward before the ceremony took place), an indication of unusual haste. But whether the marriage was in any way "forced" is impossible to determine. Some biographers (most notably Anthony Burgess) have made much of an apparent clerical error whereby the bride's name was entered as Anne Wateley of Temple Grafton in the Worcester court records; these writers speculate that Shakespeare was originally planning to marry another Anne until Anne Hathaway of Shotton (a village a mile or so from Shakespeare's home in Stratford) produced her embarrassing evidence of a prior claim. To most scholars, including our foremost authority on Shakespeare's life, S. Schoenbaum, this explanation of the Anne Wateley court entry seems farfetched. Such hypotheses are inevitable, however, in the absence of fuller information about the married life of William and Anne Hathaway Shakespeare.

What we do have to go on is certainly compatible with the suspicion that William and Anne were somewhat less than ardent lovers. They had only two more children—the twins, Hamnet and Judith, baptized on 2 February 1585—and they lived more than a hundred miles apart, so far as we can tell, for the better part of the twenty-year period during which Shakespeare was employed in the London theater. If we can give any credence to an amusing anecdote recorded in the 1602-1603 diary of a law student named John Manningham, there was at least one occasion during those years when Shakespeare, overhearing the actor Richard Burbage make an assignment, "went before, was entertained, and at his game before Burbage came; then, message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shake-

peare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third." If we read the sonnets as in any way autobiographical, moreover, we are shown a poet with at least one other significant liaison: a "Dark Lady" to whom Will's lust impels him despite the self-disgust the affair arouses in him (and despite her infidelity with the fair "Young Man" to whom many of the poems are addressed and for whom the poet reserves his deepest feelings).

But even if there is reason to speculate that Shakespeare may not have always been faithful to the marriage bed, there is much to suggest that he remained attached to Anne as a husband. In 1597 he purchased one of the most imposing houses in Stratford-New Place, across the street from the Guild Chapel—presumably settling his wife and children there as soon as the title to that property was clear. He himself retired to that Stratford home, so far as we can determine, sometime between 1611 and 1613. And of course he remembered Anne in his will, bequeathing her the notorious "second-best bed"—which most modern biographers regard as a generous afterthought (since a third of his estate would have gone to

the wife by law even if her name never occurred in the document) rather than the slight that earlier interpreters had read into the phrasing.

Naturally we would like to know more about what Shakespeare was like as a husband and family man. But most of us would give just as much to know what took place in his life between 1585 (when the parish register shows him to have become the father of twins) and 1592 (when we find the earliest surviving reference to him as a rising star in the London theater). What did he do during these so-called "dark years"? Did he study law, as some have suspected? Did he travel on the Continent? Did he become an apprentice to a butcher, as one late-seventeenth-century account had it? Or—most plausibly, in the view of many modern biographers—did he teach school for a while? All we can say for certain is that by the time his children were making their own way to school in rural Stratford, William Shakespeare had become an actor and writer in what was already the largest city in Europe.

Shakespeare probably traveled the hundred miles to London by way of the spires of Oxford, as do most visitors returning from Stratford to



Self-portrait of Richard Burbage, who played roles such as Richard III, Othello, and King Lear (by permission of Dulwich College Picture Gallery, London)

London today. But why he went, or when, history does not tell us. It has been plausibly suggested that he joined an acting troupe (the Queen's Men) that was one player short when it toured Stratford in 1587. If so, he may have migrated by way of one or two intermediary companies to a position with the troupe that became the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594. The only thing we can assert with any assurance is that by 1592 Shakespeare had established himself as an actor and had written at least three plays. One of these—the third part of *Henry VI*—was alluded to in that year in a posthumously published testament by a once-prominent poet and playwright named Robert Greene, one of the "University Wits" who had dominated the London theater in the late 1580s. Dissipated and on his deathbed, Greene warned his fellow playwrights to beware of an "upstart crow" who, not content with being a mere player, was aspiring to a share of the livelihood that had previously been the exclusive priv-

ilege of professional writers such as himself. Whether Greene's *Groatworth of Wit* accuses Shakespeare of plagiarism when it describes him as "beautified with our feathers" is not clear; some scholars have interpreted the phrase as a complaint that Shakespeare has borrowed freely from the scripts of others (or has merely revised existing plays, a practice quite common in the Elizabethan theater). But there can be no doubt that Greene's anxieties signal the end of one era and the beginning of another: a golden age, spanning two full decades, during which the dominant force on the London stage would be, not Greene or Kyd or Marlowe or even (in the later years of that period) Jonson, but Shakespeare.

If we look at what Shakespeare had written by the early 1590s, we see that he had already become thoroughly familiar with the daily round of one of the great capitals of Europe. Shakespeare knew St. Paul's Cathedral, famous not only as a house of worship but also as the marketplace

(72)

This Comoedie was first  
Acted, in the yeere  
1598.

By the then L. CHAMBERLAYNE  
in Swaine.

The principall Comedians were,

WILL. SHAKESPEARE. RIC. BURBAGE.  
AVG. PHILLIPS. ION. HEMMING.  
HEN. COOKE. CHAS. DUFF.  
WILL. SLYE. CHAS. DIXTON.  
WILL. KEMP. ION. DICE.

With the allowance of the Majer of REVELLS.

When the first volume of Ben Jonson's Works was published in 1616, Shakespeare was listed as a cast member for the first performances of *Every Man in His Humour* (left) and *Sejanus* (right) (Bodleian Library)

(438)

This Tragedie vvvas first  
acted, in the yeere  
1603.

By the Kings Maiesties  
SERVANTS.

The principall Tragedians were,

RIC. BURBAGE. WILL. SHAKESPEARE.  
AVG. PHILLIPS. ION. HEMMING.  
WILL. SLYE. HEN. COOKE.  
ION. LOWIN. ALEX. COOKE.

With the allowance of the Majer of REVELLS.

where books were bought and sold. He knew the Inns of Court, where aspiring young lawyers studied for the bar. He knew the river Thames, spanned by the ever-busy, ever-fascinating London Bridge. He knew the Tower, where so many of the characters he would depict in his history plays had met their deaths, and where in his own lifetime such prominent noblemen as the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh would be imprisoned prior to their executions. He knew Westminster, where Parliament met when summoned by the Queen, and where the Queen herself held court at Whitehall Palace. He knew the harbor, where English ships, having won control of the seas by defeating the "invincible" Spanish Armada in 1588, had begun in earnest to explore the New World.

In Shakespeare's day London was a vigorous city of somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000 inhabitants. If in its more majestic aspects it was dominated by the court of Queen Elizabeth, in its everyday affairs it was accented by the hustle and bustle of getting and spending. Its Royal Exchange was one of the forerunners of today's stock exchanges. Its many market-places offered a variety of goods for a variety of tastes. Its crowded streets presented a colorful pageant of Elizabethan modes of transport and dress, ranging from countrywomen in homespun to elegant ladies in apparel as decorative as their husbands' wealth—and the Queen's edicts on clothing—would allow. Its inns and taverns afforded a rich diversity of vivid personalities—eating, tipping, chatting, and enjoying games and pleasures of all kinds. It was, in short, an immensely stimulating social and cultural environment, and we can be sure that Shakespeare took full advantage of the opportunity it gave him to observe humanity in all its facets. Like Prince Hal, he must have learned "to drink with any tinker in his own language," and it was this as much as anything he was taught at school (or might have acquired by attendance at university) that equipped him to create such vibrant characters as Mistress Quickly, proud Hotspur, and the imperturbable Bottom.

Not that all was always well. Like any major city, London also had its problems. Preachers and moralists were constantly denouncing the excessive use of cosmetics. Thus, when Hamlet speaks out against "your paintings," telling Ophelia that "God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another," he would have been sounding a note familiar to everyone in Shake-



Robert Armin, who specialized in "wise fool" parts such as Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and the Fool in *King Lear* (woodcut from the title page of the 1609 quarto edition of Armin's *The Two Maids of Moreclack*; *Anderson Galleries*, sale number 2077, 20-21 May 1926)

peare's audience. So also with the "furred gowns" so roundly cursed by Lear: courtiers and their ladies were accustomed to lavishing as much "pride" on a single article of bejeweled finery as a modern man or woman might pay for a very expensive automobile. But luxury was only one of the evils of the age. London's Puritan authorities, regarding the theaters as dens of iniquity, closed them down on any available pretext, particularly when the plague was rampant. Meanwhile, even without the plague or the theaters to concern them (and one gathers that some of the authorities were anything but sure about which was the greater peril), the city fathers had to contend with gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, and other vices, especially in the Bankside district south of the Thames and in the other "liberties" outside the city walls to the west, east, and north (such as Shoreditch, where James Burbage had erected the first permanent commercial play-

house, the Theatre, when Shakespeare was only twelve, and where many of Shakespeare's plays prior to 1590 were first performed). Here, most blatantly, but elsewhere as well, pickpockets, vagabonds, and other members of the fraternity of urban lowlife lay in wait for "conies," as they called their unsuspecting victims. Given so many "notorious villainies" for spokesmen like Thomas Dekker's "Belman of London" to bring to light, it is hardly surprising that among the most prolific literary genres of the period were the scores of books and tracts that spewed forth from reformers incensed by the decadence of the Renaissance metropolis.

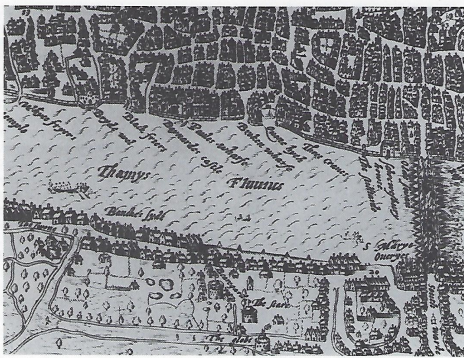
In such a setting did Shakespeare write and help perform the greatest theatrical works of the world as ever experienced. And he did so in suburbs known primarily for entertainments that we would regard as totally alien from the sweet Swan of Avon's poetic grace. For if Shoreditch and, later, Bankside were to blossom into the finest theatrical centers of that or any other age, they were also, for better or worse, the seedbeds for such brutal spectator sports as bearbaiting, bullbaiting, and cockfighting. This may help account for the blood and violence so frequently displayed on the Elizabethan stage, most notably in such early Shakespearean experiments as the *Henry VI* trilogy and *Titus Andronicus*, but also in mature works such as *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*. But of course there was a good deal more than murder and mayhem in the "wooden O" that served as amphitheatre for most of Shakespeare's dramatic productions.

On a stage largely devoid of scenery but by no means lacking in spectacle, the playwright and his actors made efficient use of language, properties, and gesture to establish time, locale, situation, and atmosphere. In the process, through all the resources of rhetoric, symbolism, and what Hamlet in his advice to the players calls "action," the "artificial persons" of the drama (its dramatic personae) imitated humanity in such a way as to convey whatever "matter" an author and his company envisaged for a scene, an act, or a full dramatic sequence. By twentieth-century standards, the means they used were relatively primitive—no spotlights, too few furnishings to achieve verisimilitude through setting and dress, only the crudest of "special effects," no curtains to raise and lower as a way of signaling the beginning and end of a scene or act—but by any standards, the results they achieved were brilliant. It has taken us nearly four centuries to rediscover what they

seem to have understood intuitively: that in some things theatrical, less is more.

Our best estimate is that approximately 3,000 spectators could be crammed into a ninety-nine-foot-wide, polygonal structure such as the Theatre (which opened in 1576 and was dismantled in 1598, after the owner of the land on which it stood refused to negotiate a lease acceptable to Shakespeare's acting company) or its successor the Globe (which opened in 1599, after the company transported the lumber from the Theatre across the Thames and used it as the scaffolding for an even more handsome playhouse on the Bankside). More than half of the audience stood in the yard (which measured about fifty-five feet in diameter); the remainder sat in the three galleries that encircled the yard and rose to a thatched roof some thirty-six feet above the ground.

The stage was probably about forty-three feet wide, and it thrust some twenty-seven feet into the yard from the "tiring house" at the rear of the building. It was covered by a pillar-supported superstructure—the "heavens"—that protected the actors and their costumes from the elements and housed the equipment Elizabethan companies used for ascents, descents, and other "flying" effects. In the floor of the stage platform (about five feet above the surrounding yard) was a trapdoor that could be opened for visitations from below or for access into what, depending on the context, might represent a grave or a pit or even hell itself. At the back of the stage in all likelihood, concealing the tiring house where the actors effected their costume changes and awaited their cues to enter, were three doors. The two at the corners were probably used for most of the entrances and exits of the actors; the large middle one was capable of being employed as a shallow, draped "discovery space" that might be drawn open for tableaux (as when Ferdinand and Miranda are disclosed playing chess in *The Tempest*) or adapted to represent small enclosures such as closets, studies, bedchambers, or shops like the Apothecary's cell in *Romeo and Juliet*. On the level above the tiring house, probably divided into five bays, was a balcony that accommodated a select number of the theater's highest-paying customers and functioned in many of the plays as the "upper stage" where brief scenes requiring a higher vantage point could be enacted. Sentinels on watch, lovers at a second-story bedroom window, seamen crying out from a ship's crow's nest: these and other situations called for the use of



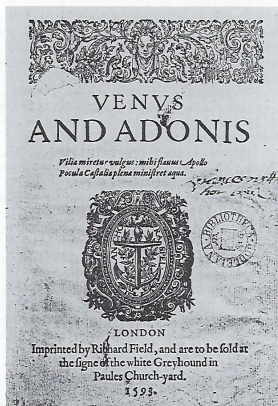
A portion of the inset John Norden prepared for the panorama of London he published in 1600 as *Civitas Londini* (Royal Library, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm). The first Globe theater, built from the timbers of the Theatre in 1598, is shown just south of the Rose theater (here mislabeled "The Stare").

one or more of the upper-level bays (probably the central one in most instances) for characters to speak their lines and render the movements called for in the script.

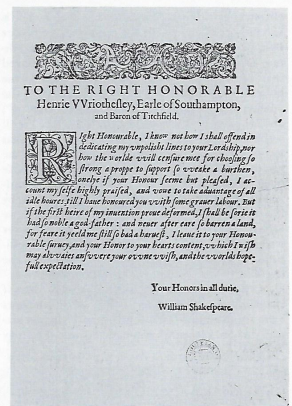
Because the main playing area was surrounded on all four sides by spectators, the poet and the performer benefited from a more intimate relationship with the audience than is customary in present-day theaters fitted with a curtain and a proscenium arch. For Shakespeare, this meant that he could allow a character to confide in a nearby playgoer through asides, as does Iago in *Othello*, or to be overheard while he meditates in solitude, as does Brutus in the soliloquy in which he talks himself into joining the plot to assassinate Caesar. Such devices may strike a modern viewer as less sophisticated than, say, the cinematic voice-over, but they proved eminently acceptable to an audience that was willing to "piece out" a performance's "imperfections with [its] thoughts." And it says a great deal about the intelligence and sensitivity of Elizabethan theatergoers that they attended and were capable of appreciating dramatic works which, in many respects, were both responses to and sublimations of the coarser activities that competed for at-

tention (and people's entertainment budgets) only a short distance away from the magic circle defined by the walls of a Theatre or a Globe.

Just who composed the audiences of these public playhouses is still a matter of debate, but recent research by Ann Jennalie Cook and Andrew Gurr suggest that they were a more affluent cross-section of Elizabethan society than earlier writings by such scholars as Alfred Harbage would have led us to believe. An examination of wages and prices during the period indicates, for example, that those who attended performances on weekday afternoons would have had to have more leisure, and more disposable income, than seems compatible with the view that even the groundlings (who paid the lowest admission, a penny to stand in the yard and risk getting soaked in the event of rain) were predominantly working-class people and illiterate apprentices. Because their position in the yard put their eyes on a level with the feet of the players, the groundlings were sometimes derided as "understanders"; it now begins to appear that a substantial percentage of these theatergoers were "understanders" in a more favorable sense. To be sure, some of them may at times have been a bit ob-



Title page and dedication page from the 1593 quarto edition of Shakespeare's first book, an erotic mythological poem based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bodleian Library, Oxford)



streperous, and their number may well have included an assortment of men and women (including prostitutes) preoccupied with extra-theatrical pursuits. It may be, too, that the groundlings were more susceptible than other members of the audience (if merely because of their greater proximity to the stage) to manipulation by what we now call "naughty" actors, the overweening "clowns" whom Hamlet rebukes for their tendency to ply the crowd for inappropriate laughter, interrupting the flow of the action and causing spectators to miss "some necessary question of the play." But even if the groundlings were not quite as cultivated, on the average, as those members of the audience who could afford to sit while they watched a play, it is difficult to reconcile the subtlety and indirection of Shakespeare's plotting and characterization, not to mention the complexity of his language and the incomparable music of his verse, with the assumption that the majority of an average house at the public theaters was unable to respond to any thought more elevated than the broad humor of a

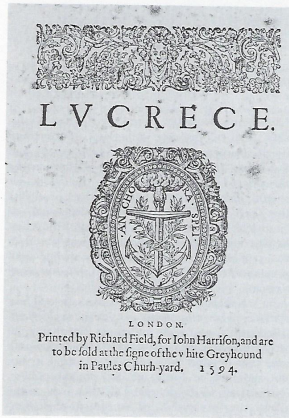
launce or a Dogberry. Even if we still find it valuable, then, to preserve something of the traditional distinction between the groundlings and the more "privileged" spectators who sat in the three-tiered galleries encircling the yard, we should now open our minds to the possibility that there were more of what Hamlet would call "judicious" viewers in every segment of the Elizabethan audience, including those who stood in the yard, than we have tended to assume until very recently in our analyses of Shakespearean drama.

Which is not to say, of course, that Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists were completely satisfied with any of their audiences (but then what writer ever is?). Hamlet bestows high praise on a play that he says "was never acted, or if it was, not above once," for "it pleased not the million, 'twas caviary to the general." He then exhorts the players to disregard "a whole theatre of others," if necessary, in order to please "those with judgments in such matters." Whether Hamlet's creator would himself have endorsed such extreme

clitism is difficult to determine, but such a view is certainly consonant with the epistle to the reader that prefaced the revised 1609 first quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida*. Here we are assured that we have "a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical"; and we are given to believe that it is to the credit rather than the discredit of the work that it has never been "sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude." Inasmuch as this preface and the title page preceding it replaced an earlier title page advertising *Troilus and Cressida* "as it was acted by the King's Majesty's servants at the Globe," we are probably correct to assume that whoever wrote it had in mind the kind of vulgar "multitude" who would have seen the play at one of the outdoor public theaters.

All of which is to acknowledge that even if the audiences that attended the public theaters were sophisticated enough to support the vast majority of Shakespeare's dramatic efforts, they may

nevertheless have proven deficient in their response to some of the extraordinary challenges he placed before them after he arrived at his artistic maturity. This should not surprise us, given Shakespeare's continual experimentation with inherited generic forms and his ever-more-complex approaches to traditional material. Nor should we assume that by terms such as "the million" and "the general" he and his fellow playwrights referred only to the groundlings. Writers of the period were equally acidulous in their criticism of the gallants who attended the theater to be "the observed of all observers"—the ostentatiously attired young men who sat not only in the galleries near the stage (where the admission price was thrice as much as for the places in the yard) and in the balconies above and behind the stage (which cost six times as much as the places in the yard), but even on the stage itself at some performances in the indoor "private" theaters (where the least expensive seat cost six times the price of general admission to the Theatre or the Globe, and where



Title page and dedication page from the 1594 quarto edition of the long narrative poem that was later republished as *The Rape of Lucrece* (Elizabethan Club, Yale University)

288



Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated his first two books (miniature by Nicholas Hilliard, 1593 or 1594; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, by permission of the Syndics)

some of the seats cost a full thirty times as much). It is difficult to believe that Shakespeare any more than Dekker (who satirized such gallants in *The Gull's Hornbook*) would have considered these foppish Orics even slightly more "judicious" than their fellow spectators at the lower end of the economic scale. And one can easily imagine that after 1609, when his company began using the Blackfriars theater as its primary venue during the colder months (the London authorities having finally dropped the restrictions that had prevented James Burbage from operating a commercial adult theater in the old monastery he had purchased and adapted in 1596), Shakespeare felt that he had simply exchanged one kind of less-than-perfect audience for another.

One gathers, nevertheless, that, like other playwrights of the period, Shakespeare was careful not to refer too overtly to deficiencies in the well-to-do members of his audiences, especially when such members might include the nobility or persons close to them. After all, an acting company's livelihood depended upon its securing and retaining favor at Court—not only because of the extra income and prestige that accrued from periodic Court performances commissioned by the Master of the Revels, but even more fundamentally because a company could perform in or near London only if it were licensed to do so by the Crown and enjoyed the protection of a noble or royal patron. A prudent playwright would not wish to jeopardize his company's standing with the monarch. And Shakespeare and his colleagues—the other "sharers" who owned stock in the company that was known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men from 1594 until 1603 (when Queen Elizabeth died and was succeeded by King James I) and the King's Men thereafter (having received a patent as the new monarch's own players)—must have been prudent, because theirs was by far the most prosperous and the most frequently "preferred" theatrical organization in the land, from its inception in the early 1590s until the triumph of Puritanism finally brought about the closing of the theaters half a century later in 1642.

Shakespeare's position with the Lord Chamberlain's Men was a source of professional stability that probably had a great deal to do with his growth and maturation as a writer. For one thing, it freed him from some of the uncertainties and frustrations that must have been the lot of other playwrights, virtually all of whom operated as free-lancers selling their wares to impres-

arios such as Philip Henslowe (often for as little as five pounds), and most of whom thus forfeited any real say about how their plays were to be produced and, in time (if a given acting company so wished or if chance provided), published. From at least 1594 on Shakespeare was a stockholder of the theatrical organization for which he wrote his plays. After 1598 (when the sons of the recently deceased James Burbage, Cuthbert and Richard, invited four of the principal actors in the Lord Chamberlain's Men to become their partners and put up half the capital needed to rebuild the Theatre across the Thames as the Globe), Shakespeare was also a co-owner of the playhouse in which that company performed the plays. As such, he shared in all the profits the Lord Chamberlain's Men took in at the gate, and he was undoubtedly a participant in most, if not all, of the major decisions affecting the company's welfare. We know from the surviving legal records of the playwright's various business transactions that he prospered financially by this arrangement: like his father, Shakespeare invested wisely in real estate, purchasing properties in both Stratford and London. And we can infer from the evidence of his rapidly developing sophistication as a dramatist that Shakespeare's membership in a close-knit group of theatrical en-

289

trepreneurs also helped him flourish artistically.

It meant, for example, that he could envisage and write his plays with particular performers in mind: Richard Burbage for leading roles such as Richard III, Othello, and King Lear; Will Kempe for clowning parts such as Launce or Dogberry in the early years of the company, and thereafter (following Kempe's departure from the Lord Chamberlain's Men around 1599) Robert Armin, who seems to have specialized in "wise fools" such as Touchstone, Feste, and Lear's Fool; Shakespeare himself, perhaps, for "old men" such as Adam in *As You Like It*; "hired men" (adult actors who, not being shareholders in the company, were simply paid a sum of money for each job of work) for most of the lesser roles; and apprentice boy-actors for the youthful parts and many, if not all, of the female roles (there being no actresses on the English stage until the theaters reopened after the Restoration). Working as the resident playwright for a company in

which he was both an actor and a business partner meant that Shakespeare could revise and re-write his scripts in rehearsal prior to a given play's first performance, and that he could adapt and further revise them later as differing circumstances required: such as performances commissioned at Court during holiday seasons or on ceremonial occasions, or performances solicited by the great houses of the nobility, or during sieges of plague when the London theaters were closed) performances on tour in the provinces, during which, in all likelihood, the troupe was reduced to entertaining with fewer actors and was required to make do with provisional playing areas in guild halls, inn yards, and other less-than-ideal theatrical spaces.

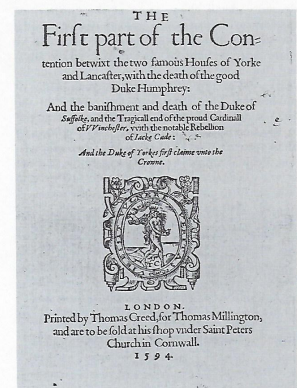
Because the conditions under which Shakespeare worked required him, above all, to be pragmatic and flexible, we would probably be correct to infer that as he composed his plays he thought of his scripts, not as fixed "literary" texts, but as provisional production notes—susceptible of lengthening or shortening or other modes of alteration as determined by the constraints of particular venues and performance situations. He would have had to prepare each script with an eye to the number of actors available for speaking parts (one recent scholar has concluded that most of Shakespeare's plays were composed with a cast of thirteen performers in mind), and he probably planned each scene with a view to the possibilities for "doubling" (a principle of theatrical economy whereby a given actor would alternate among two or more roles in the same play). It may well be that, in the absence of anyone else in the organization designated to function in that capacity, Shakespeare was the first "director" his plays had. If so, we can be sure that he approached the task with an awareness that the devising of a production was a collaborative process and that the playwright, though normative, was never to be revered as a monument carved in stone. Shakespeare was, after all, a playwright (that is, a "maker" rather than merely a writer of plays), and he would have been the first to recognize that the final purpose of a dramatic text was a fully realized performance rather than a piece of literature to be read in the privacy of a patron's parlor or pondered in the lamplight of a scholar's study.

If in his capacity as theater professional Shakespeare conceived of himself, then, as a maker of "plays" (by definition ephemeral and "insubstantial" pageants, as Prospero observes in

*The Tempest*) rather than as an author of literary "works" (the term that earned Ben Jonson the derision of his fellow playwrights when he came out with a pretentiously titled folio volume of his collected plays in 1616), it is hardly surprising that he appears to have had little or nothing to do with the publication of any of his own dramatic scripts. Nor is it surprising that several of the texts that were published in Shakespeare's lifetime or shortly thereafter have come down to us in forms that vary from one printing to another.

Some of these variations probably result from authorial revisions or from theatrical adaptations of one kind or another. Others undoubtedly derive from the vicissitudes of textual transmission, with the extant state of a given text or passage dependent on whether it was printed from the author's own manuscript (either in draft form or in a more finished version) or from a manuscript prepared by someone else (a scribe's "fair copy" of a manuscript owned by the author or the company, for example, or a rough compilation by one or more actors relying on faulty memories to pull together an abridged script for a reduced cast touring the provinces)—quite apart from any further complications that may have occurred in the printing house itself (where one copy editor, one compositor, or one proofreader differed from another in the accuracy with which he reproduced the manuscript before him). Whatever their origins, these variations are eloquent testimony to the difficulty—if not indeed the impossibility—of our ever arriving at an absolutely "final" version of a Shakespearean play. For if the conditions under which plays were written, performed, and preserved make it clear that a "definitive" playtext was rare, if not unknown, in Shakespeare's own time, we must recognize that any effort to produce an authoritative edition for our own time can aspire, at best, to reconstitute as accurately as possible the closest surviving approximation to a given script at some point in its compositional or theatrical history.

And even this kind of edition will remain stubbornly "incomplete," for the simple reason that a Shakespearean script was originally intended for the use, not of a reading audience, but of a small company of theater professionals who would employ it as a "score" from which to orchestrate a complex, multidimensional performance. The texts that do survive are mostly dialogue, and a sensitive analysis of them can tell us a great deal about how the words were meant



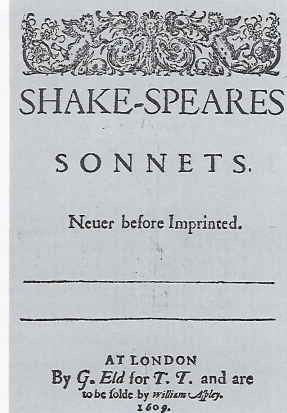
Title page for the 1594 quarto edition of an abridged and corrupt text of Henry VI, part 2 (Folger Shakespeare Library)

to be spoken, where the emphases were to be placed, and what character motivations were to be indicated at specific points in the action. But because we can no longer recover the context in which these scripts were first realized—a context that would have included a good deal of oral communication about gesture, movement, blocking, and other stage business—we must content ourselves with editions that will always be to some degree indeterminate. Perhaps this is just as well: it ceases the critic and the director with enough interpretive liberty to ensure that we will never be faced with a dearth of innovation in Shakespearean commentary and production!

We should bear in mind, of course, that a considerable investment of additional work would have been required to transform a production script into a reading text for the public—not altogether unlike what is required nowadays to turn a screenplay into a coherent piece of narrative fiction—and that Shakespeare may never have had the time (even if we assume that he ever had the inclination) to effect such a generic adaptation. Still, those of us who would not object to a lit-

290

291



Title page for the 1609 quarto edition of the volume published by Thomas Thorpe dedicated to "Mr. W. H.," fueling speculation about the identity of the young man in the sonnets (Anderson Galleries, sale number 1405, 4-5 March 1919)

290





tures. "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," he says in Sonnet 130; and far from being ethereal and inaccessible in her idealized spirituality, the woman described in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is sensual, coarse, and promiscuous. Petrarch's Laura may have inspired that earlier poet to Platonic transcendence, but Shakespeare's mistress leaves only the bitter aftertaste of "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame," "A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe" (Sonnet 129). And what is more, she alienates the affection of the fair young man to whom most of the first 127 sonnets in the sequence are addressed: the friend who occasions some of the deepest verses in English on such themes as fidelity, stewardship (Shakespeare seems to have been preoccupied with the Parable of the Talents, as rendered in Matthew 25: 14-30), and man's struggle against "never-resting time."

As one reads the sonnets directed to the young man, one detects a descent from unquestioned devotion ("This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong/To love that well, which thou must leave ere long"—Sonnet 73) to a fear that the older man's love may be unrequited or at least taken for granted by the young friend to whom he has given so much of himself ("For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds/Lilies that feaster smell far worse than weeds"—Sonnet 94) to a courageous but probably quixotic determination to remain true to his convictions despite his doubts about the young man's worthiness of such absolute faith ("love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds/Or bends with the remover to remove"—Sonnet 116). The intensity of feeling expressed in these sonnets has led many interpreters to infer that they must have been based on a homoerotic passion. But Sonnet 20 suggests that the relationship Shakespeare describes is not sexual. Nature, he says, has given the young man "one thing to my purpose nothing." And "since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure/Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure."

Several of the sonnets addressed to the friend refer to a "rival poet" who is also bidding for his favors and affection (Sonnets 79, 80, 83, and 86, for example), and others (Sonnets 78, 82, 84, and 85) imply that the young aristocrat is the subject of praise by a great many poetic suitors. As he reflects upon his own position vis-à-vis his many competitors for the friend's love, the speaker in Shakespeare's sonnets is subject to a depth of insecurity that sometimes borders on de-

spair: "Wishing me like to one more rich in hope/Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd/Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope" (Sonnet 29). And many of the greatest sonnets in the sequence derive their peculiar power from what Robert Frost has termed a "sense of difficulty overcome"—the poet working through the tensions and conflicts described in the first three quatrains (linked by an *abab cdcd efef* rhyme scheme) to some kind of hard-won (though perhaps not completely convincing) resolution in the concluding couplet (rhymed *gg*): "For thy sweet love rememb'rd such wealth brings/That then I scorn to change my state with kings" (again Sonnet 29).

Because the other personalities who figure in the psychodrama of the *Sonnets* seem so vivid, at least as they impinge upon the personality of the speaker, interpreters of the sequence have been inexorably drawn toward speculation about real-life identities for the Dark Lady, the Young Man, and the Rival Poet. Some commentators (such as Oxford historian A. L. Rowse) have persuaded themselves, if not everyone else, that these characters can be positively linked with such contemporaries of Shakespeare as Emilia Lanier, the Earl of Southampton (or, alternatively, the Earl of Pembroke), and Christopher Marlowe (or possibly George Chapman). Unless further information should come to light, however, we are probably best advised to content ourselves with a position of agnosticism on such questions. Until we can be sure about how the *Sonnets* came to be published, and just what kind of debt the publisher Thomas Thorpe refers to when he dedicates the 1609 quarto to the "only begetter" of these poems ("Never before Imprinted"—the mysterious "Mr. W. H."—we are unlikely to be able to pin down the "real names" of any of the persons who inhabit the world of the *Sonnets*. Until then, indeed, we cannot even be certain that the *Sonnets* have any autobiographical basis in the first place.

Turning from Shakespeare's nondramatic poetry to the fruits of his two decades as a playwright, we should probably begin where scholars now think he himself began: as the principal practitioner, if not in many ways the originator, of a new kind of drama that sprang from native patriotism. The most immediate "source" of the English history play appears to have been the heightened sense of national destiny that came in the wake of the royal navy's seemingly providential victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588. Proud of the new eminence their nation had

296



Richard III as portrayed by David Garrick in the eighteenth century (top); engraving by Thomas Cook from a painting by William Hogarth, Edmund Kean in the nineteenth century (bottom left); mezzotint by Charles Turner, and Laurence Olivier in 1949 (bottom right)

297



The hall in Gray's Inn, where *The Comedy of Errors* was performed on 28 December 1594

achieved, and immensely relieved that the threat of invasion by a Catholic power had been averted, many of Shakespeare's contemporaries were disposed to view England's deliverance as a sign of heaven's favor. As such, it seemed to be a vindication of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and a substantiation of the Tudor order's claim to divine sanction—a claim that had been asserted by a succession of Renaissance chroniclers from Polydore Vergil (circa 1470-1555) through Edward Hall (circa 1498-1547) to Raphael Holinshed (circa 1529-1580), and a claim that was implicit in such government documents as the "Exhortation concerning Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," a 1547 homily read in churches throughout England.

Given this context, it must have seemed entirely fitting that sometime in the late 1580s or early 1590s an enterprising young playwright began dramatizing a sequence of historical developments that were almost universally regarded as

the "roots" of England's current greatness. Most of the material for the four history plays with which Shakespeare began his career as playwright he drew from Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548) and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587 edition). Here he found narratives of late-medieval English history that began with the reign of King Richard II (1377-1399), focused on Richard's deposition and execution by Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV), described the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) that were the eventual consequence of Bolingbroke's usurpation, and concluded with the restoration of right rule when Henry Richmond defeated the tyrannical Richard III (1483-1485) and acceded to the crown as Henry VII, inaugurating a Tudor dynasty that was to last until the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603. Here he also found a theological reading of political history that treated England as a collective Everyman—falling

298

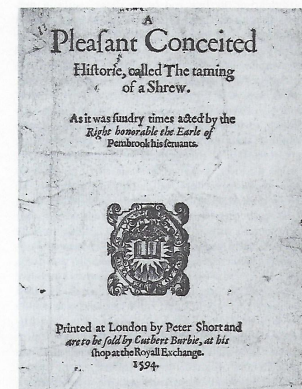
into sin, undergoing a terrifyingly bloody punishment for its disobedience, and eventually finding its way back to redemption through the emergence of Henry VII.

The chances are that as Shakespeare matured in his craft he came to view the "Tudor myth" (as E. M. W. Tillyard has termed this official dogma) with a degree of skeptical detachment; but even so, he seems to have found in its clear, broad sweep a pattern that served quite well as a way of organizing the disparate materials he chose to dramatize. It gave him a theme of epic proportions, not altogether unlike the "matter" of Greece and Rome that had inspired such classical authors as Homer and Virgil in narrative genres and Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca in dramatic genres. It accorded with the biblical treatment of human destiny that Shakespeare's age had inherited from earlier generations, an approach to historical interpretation that had been embedded in such didactic entertainments as the Morality Play (allegorizing the sin, suffering, repentance, and salvation of a typical member of mankind) and the Mystery Play (broadening the cycle to a dramatization of the whole of human history, from man's fall in the Garden of Eden to man's redemption in the Garden of Gethsemane to man's bliss in the Paradise of the New Jerusalem). And it provided a rationale for Shakespeare's use of such powerful dramatic devices as the riddling prophecy and the curse-projecting retribution for present crimes, as the Old Testament would put it, to the third and fourth generations.

When we approach the four plays known as Shakespeare's "first tetralogy" (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, all written, so far as we can tell, by 1592) from the perspective of his "second tetralogy" (*Richard II*, *Henry IV*, parts 1 and 2, and *Henry V*, all of which appear to have been written between 1595 and 1597), the earlier plays seem comparatively crude. Like their sources, they place more emphasis on providential design and less on human agency. Their verse is more declamatory and less supple. And they provide less individuation of character. Still, they have their virtues, and successful recent productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the British Broadcasting Corporation have proven that they can be surprisingly effective in performance.

*Henry VI*, part 1 did not achieve print until the 1623 First Folio, but it is now generally thought to have been written prior to parts 2 and 3, which first appeared in bad texts, respectively,

in a 1594 quarto edition titled *The First Part of the Contention between the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster* and in a 1595 octavo entitled *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York, Henry VI*, part 1, begins with the funeral of King Henry V (which occurred in 1422), details the dissension at home and the loss of life and territory abroad that result from the accession of a new monarch too young and weak to rule, and concludes with King Henry VI's foolish decision to marry Margaret of Anjou—a step that places the saintly King in the very unsaintly hands of an ambitious woman and a lustful nobleman (the Earl of Suffolk, who plans to enjoy Margaret as his own mistress and thereby "rule both her, the King, and realm") and virtually assures the further degradation of a kingdom that has been in decline since the death of Henry VI's famous warrior-father, Henry V, part 2, covers a ten-year span from Margaret of Anjou's arrival in England (1445) to the Duke of York's victory over his Lancastrian enemies at St. Albans in the first major battle of the Wars of

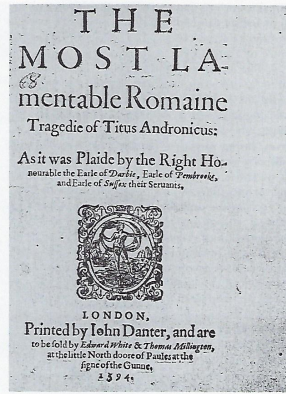


Title page for the 1594 quarto edition of what is generally believed to be a corrupt text of *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery*). The authoritative version of the play, first published in the 1623 First Folio, is significantly different from the text of this quarto.

299

the Roses (1455). The same kind of internecine strife that has left the noble Talbot exposed to the forces of the trumpet-witch Joan of Arc in Henry VI, part 1, works here to undo Henry VI's protector, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, topple two of the good Duke's enemies (Cardinal Beaufort and Suffolk), unleash the anarchic rebellion of the peasant Jack Cade, and further divide the warring factions (the Yorkists, who have chosen the red rose as their symbol in the famous Temple Garden scene, II.iv, of part 1, and the Lancastrians, who have rallied behind the white rose) that seem hell-bent to tear the kingdom asunder. In Henry VI, part 3, the war is at full pitch. As the feeble Henry VI withdraws into a private realm of pastoral longing, his brutal Queen and her allies exchange outrages with one Yorkist enemy after another, father killing son and son killing father in a nightmarish world that has degenerated into a spectacle of unmitigated cruelty. By the time the dust settles, Henry VI and a number of other would-be claimants to the throne are dead or on their way to the grave, and the ominously crooked-backed figure of Richard, Duke of Gloucester is slouching his rough way to the crown he will don in the blood-drenched final movement of this hitherto unprecedented cycle of historical tragedies.

Richard III was first published in a 1597 quarto edition that many scholars believe to have been reconstructed from memory by actors plagued out of London theaters between July and October of that year. The play was evidently quite popular, because it went through at least five more printings before it appeared in the 1623 First Folio edition based largely on the third and sixth quartos. And it has remained popular ever since, with a stage tradition highlighted by Richard Burbage in Shakespeare's own theater, David Garrick in the eighteenth century, Edmund Kean in the nineteenth, and Laurence Olivier in the twentieth. Nor is the reason hard to find. For despite the bold strokes with which he is portrayed, Richard III is a character of sufficient complexity to sustain a great deal of dramatic interest. However much we find ourselves repelled by his ruthless treachery, we cannot help admiring the eloquence, resourcefulness, and virtuosity with which he confides and then proceeds to execute his wicked intentions. His wooing of the grieving Lady Anne in the first act is a case in point: having set himself the seemingly impossible task of seducing a woman whose husband and father-in-law he has recently mur-



Title page for the only surviving copy of the 1594 quarto edition of Shakespeare's first experiment with revenge tragedy (Folger Shakespeare Library)

dered, Richard is just as astonished as we are by the ease with which he accomplishes it.

In many ways Richard seems, and would have seemed to Shakespeare's first audiences, a conventional, even old-fashioned stage villain: the quick-witted, clever, self-disclosing Vice of the late-medieval Morality Play, the dissimulating Devil familiar from the scriptures. In other, more important, ways he seems, and would have seemed, disturbingly modern: the Machiavellian politician who acknowledges no law, human or divine, in restraint of his fustle cunning and leonine rapacity; the totalitarian dictator who subverts every social and religious institution in pursuit of his psychopathic grand designs; the existentialist cosmic rebel whose radical alienation is a challenge to every form of order. But if Richard seems in many ways a relentlessly twentieth-century figure, we learn by the end of the play that his "vaulting ambition" (so prophetic of Macbeth's) is ultimately but an instrument of the same providential scheme that he scorns and seeks to circumvent. Richard may be a "dreadful minister of hell," as Lady Anne calls him, but

members of Shakespeare's audience (familiar with the story through such earlier renderings of it as the portrait painted by Thomas More) would have seen him simultaneously as a "scourge of God," unleashed to punish England for her sins of the past. Prophetic Margaret reminds us over and over that had there not been strife in the kingdom prior to the advent of Richard, there would have been no ripe occasion for "this poisonous bunch-backed toad" to ascend the throne in the first instance. And as the play ends, an action that has drawn our attention again and again to the past looks optimistically to the future. "By God's fair ordinance," the "bloody dog is dead," and Richmond and Elizabeth (the forebears of Shakespeare's sovereign Elizabeth) are ushering in "smooth-faced peace, / With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days."

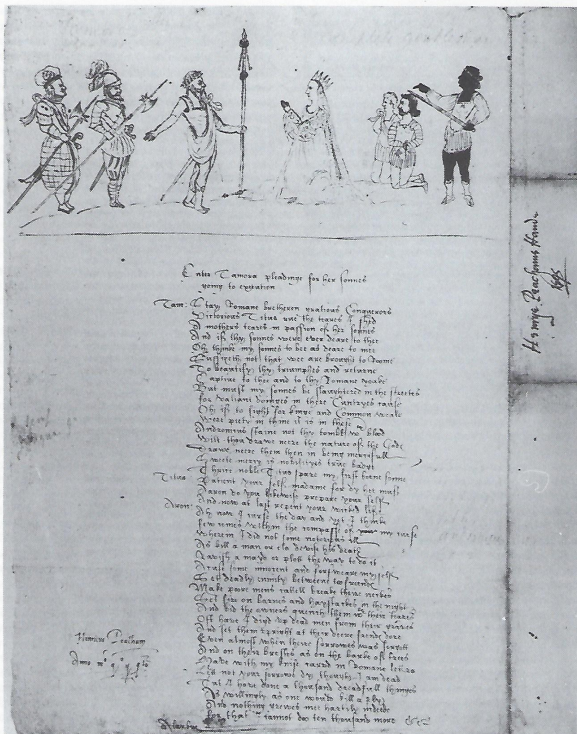
One other English history play is now commonly believed to have been written during Shakespeare's apprenticeship, though scholars differ about whether to date it in the early 1590s or (more probably, in the opinion of most) in the transition years 1594-1595. The earliest surviving text of King John is the version printed in the 1623 First Folio, and it offers a drama about a king of doubtful title whose reign (1199-1216) had been viewed in widely divergent ways. Medieval Catholics, focusing on King John's presumed complicity in the death of his nephew Arthur (whose claim to the throne was stronger than John's) and on his feud with Pope Innocent III (which had resulted in the King's excommunication before he finally capitulated five years later and "returned" his kingdom to the church), had seen him as a usurper, a murderer, and a heretic. Sixteenth-century Protestants, on the other hand, had rehabilitated him as a proto-Tudor martyr and champion of English nationalism. In many respects, Shakespeare's own portrayal is closer to the medieval view of King John: he does away with any ambiguity about John's role in the removal of Arthur, for example, presents the saintlike Arthur and his impassioned mother, Constance, as thoroughly engaging characters, and endows John with few if any sympathetic traits. At the same time, however, Shakespeare's King John continues to receive the loyalty of characters who are portrayed sympathetically—most notably the bastard son of Richard the Lionhearted, Philip Faulconbridge—and by the end of the play it seems evident that a higher cause, the good of England, is to take precedence over such lesser concerns as John's weak title, his execution

of a potential rival, and his ineptitudes as a leader. The Bastard, a political realist who seems quite Machiavellian at first—particularly in his analysis of the all-pervasiveness of "commodity" (self-interest) in human affairs—eventually becomes a virtual emblem of patriotism. To him is given the concluding speech of King John, and it is frequently cited as Shakespeare's most eloquent summary of the moral implicit in all his early history plays:

This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
... Naught shall make us rue  
If England to itself do rest but true.

If Shakespeare's earliest efforts in the dramatization of history derived from his response to the political climate of his day, his first experiments in comedy seem to have evolved from his reading in school and from his familiarity with the plays of such predecessors on the English stage as John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Greene, and Thomas Nashe. Shakespeare's apprentice comedies are quite "inventive" in many respects, particularly in the degree to which they "overgo" the conventions and devices the young playwright drew upon. But because they have more precedent behind them than the English history plays, they strike us now as less stunningly "original"—though arguably more successfully executed—than the tetralogy on the Wars of the Roses.

Which of them came first we do not know, but most scholars incline toward *The Comedy of Errors*, a play so openly scaffolded upon Plautus's *Menachmi* and *Amphitruo* (two farces that Shakespeare probably knew in Latin from his days in grammar school) that one modern critic has summed it up as "a kind of diploma piece." Set, ostensibly, in the Mediterranean city familiar from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, the play begins with a sentence on the life of a luckless Syracusan merchant, Aegeon, who has stumbled into Ephesus in search of his son Antipholus. After narrating a tale of woe that wins the sympathy of the Duke of Ephesus, Aegeon is given till five in the afternoon to come up with a seemingly impossible ransom for his breach of an arbitrary law against Syracusans. Meanwhile, unknown to Aegeon, the object of his search is in Ephesus too, having arrived only hours before him: Antipholus had set out some two years earlier to find a twin brother



A 1959(?) transcription from memory of lines from a performance of Titus Andronicus, with sketches of some of the characters. At center Tamora is shown begging Titus to spare her two sons, kneeling behind her Aaron the Moor is at far right. Henry Peacham, whose name is at lower left, may have made the transcription and perhaps the drawing (Harley Papers, vol. i, f. 159r; Longleat; by permission of the Marquess of Bath).

by the same name who was separated from the rest of the family in a stormy shipwreck more than twenty years in the past. By happy coincidence, the other Antipholus has long since settled in Ephesus, and so (without either's knowledge) has their mother, Aegeon's long-lost wife, Aemilia, who is now an abbess. To complicate matters further, both Antipholuses have slaves named Dromio, also twins long separated, and of course both sets of twins are indistinguishably appareled. Into this mix Shakespeare throws a goldsmith, a set of merchants, a courtesan, a wife and a sister-in-law for the Ephesian Antipholus, and a conjuring schoolmaster. The result is a swirling brew of misunderstandings, accusations, and identity crises—all leading, finally, to a series of revelations that reunite a family, save Aegeon's life, and bring order to a city that had begun to seem bewitched by sorcerers.

*The Comedy of Errors* reached print for the first time in the 1623 First Folio. We know that it was written prior to 28 December 1594, however, because there is record of a performance on that date at one of the four Inns of Court. Some scholars believe that the play was written for that holiday Gray's Inn presentation, but most tend to the view that it had been performed previously, possibly as early as 1589 but more likely in the years 1592-1594. Most critics now seem agreed, moreover, that for all its farcical elements, the play is a comedy of some sophistication and depth, with a sensitivity to love that anticipates Shakespeare's great comedies later in the decade: when Luciana advises her sister Adriana about how she should treat her husband Antipholus, for example, she echoes Paul's exhortations on Christian marriage in Ephesians. And with its use of the devices of literary romance (the frame story of Aegeon comes from Apollonius of Tyre), *The Comedy of Errors* also looks forward to the wanderings, confusions of identity, and miraculous reunions so fundamental to the structure of "late plays" such as *Pericles* and *The Tempest*.

What may have been Shakespeare's next comedy has also been deprecated as farce, and it is frequently produced today with staging techniques that link it with the commedia del arte popular in Renaissance Italy. But for all its knockabout slapstick, *The Taming of a Shrew* is too penetrating in its psychology and too subtle in its handling of the nuances of courtship to be dismissed as a play deficient in feeling. Its main event is a battle of the sexes in which Petruchio, who has "come to wive it wealthy in Padua," takes on a

dare to no other potential suitor would even consider: to win both dowry and docility from a sharp-tongued shrew avoided as "Katherine the curst." Apparently recognizing that Katherine's willfulness is a product of the favoritism her father has long bestowed upon her younger sister, and having the further good sense to realize that the fiery Kate is capable of becoming a much more attractive wife than the much-sought-after but rather devious Bianca, Petruchio mounts a brilliant campaign to gain Kate's love and make her his. First, he insists that Kate is fair and gentle, notwithstanding all her efforts to disabuse him of that notion. Second, he "kills her in her own humour," with a display of arbitrary behavior—tantrums, scoldings, peremptory refusals—that both wears her down and shows her how unpleasant shrewishness can be. At the end of the play Petruchio shocks his skeptical fellow husbands by wagering that his bride will prove more obedient than theirs. When Kate not only obeys his commands but reproaches her sister and the other wives for "sullen, sour" rebellion against their husbands, it becomes manifest that Petruchio has succeeded in his quest: Katherine has succeeded in his quest: Kate freely and joyfully acknowledges him to be her "loving lord." If we have doubts about whether Kate's transformation can be accepted as a "happy ending" today—and alterations of the final scene in many recent productions would suggest that it may be too offensive to current sensibilities to be played straight—we should perhaps ask ourselves whether the Kate who seems to wink conspiratorially at Petruchio as she puts her hands beneath his foot to win a marital wager is any less spirited or fulfilled a woman than the Kate who drives all her would-be wooers away in the play's opening scene.

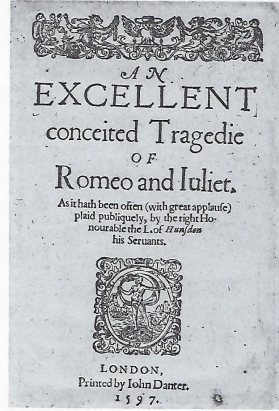
Whether or not *The Taming of the Shrew* is the mysterious *Love's Labour's Won* referred to by Francis Meres in 1598, it seems to have been written in the early 1590s, because what is now generally believed to be a bad quarto of it appeared in 1594. *The Taming of a Shrew* differs significantly from the version of Shakespeare's play that was first published in the 1623 Folio—most notably in the fact that the drunken tinker Christopher Sly, who appears only in the induction to the later printing of the play, remains on stage throughout *The Taming of a Shrew*, repeatedly interrupting the action of what is presented as a play for his entertainment and resolving at the end to go off and try Petruchio's wife-taming techniques on his own recalcitrant woman. Some directors retain the later Sly scenes, but no one seriously ques-

tions that the Folio text is in general the more authoritative of the two versions of the play.

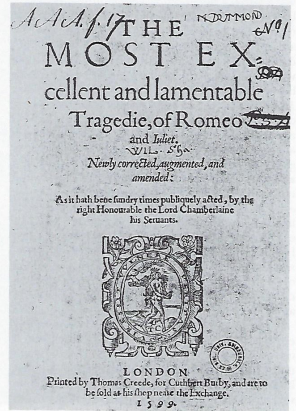
The Folio provides the only surviving text of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a comedy so tentative in its dramaturgy (for example, its ineptitude in the few scenes where the playwright attempts to manage more than two characters on the stage at once), and so awkward in its efforts to pit the claims of love and friendship against each other, that many scholars now think it to be the first play Shakespeare ever wrote. Based largely on a 1542 chivalric romance (*Diana Enamorada*) by Portuguese writer Jorge de Montemayor, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* depicts a potential rivalry between two friends—Valentine and Proteus—who fall in love with the same Milanese woman (Silvia) despite the fact that Proteus has vowed his devotion to a woman (Julia) back home in Verona. Proteus engineers Valentine's banishment from Milan so that he can woo Silvia away from him. But Silvia remains faithful to Valentine, just

as Julia (who has followed her loved one disguised as his page) holds true to Proteus, notwithstanding the character he discloses as a man who lives up to his name. In the concluding forest scene Valentine intervenes to save Silvia from being raped by Proteus; but, when Proteus exhibits remorse, Valentine offers him Silvia anyway, as a token of friendship restored. Fortunately, circumstances conspire to forestall such an unhappy consummation, and the play ends with the two couples properly reunited.

Unlike *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has never been popular in the theater, even though it offers two resourceful women (whose promise will be fulfilled more amply in such later heroines as Rosalind and Viola), a pair of amusing clowns (Launce and Speed), and one of the most engaging dogs (Crab) who ever stole a stage. In its mixture of prose and verse, nevertheless, and in its suggestion that the "green world"



Title pages for the 1597 quarto edition (Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery) and the 1599 "corrected, augmented, and amended" quarto edition (Edinburgh University) of the play for which Shakespeare drew on a didactic narrative poem of the same title by Arthur Brooke, first published in 1562. The copy of the second quarto shown here once belonged to William Drummond of Hawthornden, who wrote his name on the title page.



put him at the mercy of the Queen of the Goths, Tamora, and her two sons (Demetrius and Chiron). They ravish and mutilate Titus's daughter Lavinia, manipulate the Emperor into executing two of Titus's sons (Martius and Quintus) as perpetrators of the crime, and get Titus's third son (Lucius) banished for trying to rescue his brothers. Along the way, Tamora's Moorish lover Aaron tricks Titus into having his right hand chopped off in a futile gesture to save Martius and Lucius. After Lavinia writes the names of her assailants in the sand with her grotesque stumps, Titus works out a plan for revenge: he slits the throats of Demetrius and Chiron, invites Tamora to a banquet, and serves her the flesh of her sons baked in a pie. He then kills Tamora and dies at the hands of Emperor Saturninus. At this point Lucius returns heading a Gothic army and takes over as the new Emperor, condemning Aaron to be half-buried and left to starve and throwing Tamora's corpse to the scavenging birds and beasts.

As Fredson Bowers has pointed out, *Titus Andronicus* incorporates a number of devices characteristic of other revenge tragedies: the protagonist's feigned madness, his delay in the execution of his purpose, his awareness that in seeking vengeance he is taking on a judicial function that properly rests in God's hands, and his death at the end in a bloody holocaust that leaves the throne open for seizure by the first opportunist to arrive upon the scene.

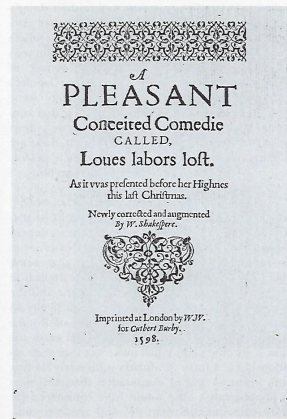
Revenge is also a significant motif in Shakespeare's other early tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, usually dated around 1595-1596. It is a blood feud between their two Veronan families that forces the lovers to woo and wed in secret, thereby creating the misunderstanding that leads Mercutio to defend Romeo's "honor" in act three when the just-married protagonist declines his new kinsman Tybalt's challenge to duel. And it is both to avenge Mercutio's death and to restore his own now-sullied name that Romeo then slays Tybalt and becomes "fortune's fool"—initiating a falling action that leads eventually to a pair of suicides and a belated recognition by the Capulets and the Montagues that their children have become "poor sacrifices of our enmity."

But it is not for its revenge elements that most of us remember *Romeo and Juliet*. No, it is for the lyricism with which Shakespeare portrays the beauty and idealism of love at first sight—all the more transcendent for the ways in which the playwright sets it off from the calculations of

Juliet's parents (intent on arranging their daughter's marriage to advance their own status) or contrasts it with the earthy bawdiness of Juliet's Nurse or the worldly-wise cynicism of Romeo's friend Mercutio. The spontaneous sonnet of Romeo and Juliet's initial meeting at Capulet's ball, their betrothal vows in the balcony scene later that evening, the ominous parting that concludes their one night together and foreshadows their final meeting in the Capulet tomb—these are the moments we carry with us from a performance or a reading of what may well be history's most famous love story.

*Romeo and Juliet* may strike us as an "early" tragedy in its formal versification and in its patterned structure. It has been faulted for its dependence on coincidence and on causes external to the protagonists for the conditions that bring about the tragic outcome—an emphasis implicit in the play's repeated references to Fortune and the stars. And critics have encountered difficulty in their attempts to reconcile the purity of Romeo and Juliet's devotion to each other ("for earth too dear") with the play's equal insistence that their relationship is a form of idolatry—ultimately leading both lovers to acts of desperation that audiences in Shakespeare's time would have considered far more consequential than do most modern audiences. But whatever its supposed limitations and interpretive problems, *Romeo and Juliet* seems likely to hold its position as one of the classics of the dramatic repertory.

*Romeo and Juliet* first appeared in a 1597 quarto edition that most scholars believe to be a memorial reconstruction, though one with isolated passages (such as Mercutio's celebrated Queen Mab speech) printed in a form that some scholars believe superior to their rendering in the text today's editors accept as the best authority: the 1599 second quarto, "newly corrected, augmented, and amended," and apparently derived primarily from Shakespeare's own "foul papers." Two more printings appeared before the 1623 Folio, whose text—essentially a reprint of the third quarto edition (1609)—has no independent authority. The principal source for the play was a 1562 narrative, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, by Arthur Brooke, a didactic poem urging children to be obedient to their parents. By telescoping three months into four days and by dramatizing the story in a manner more sympathetic to the young lovers, Shakespeare transformed a sermon into a tragedy whose urgency must have been just as moving in the Elizabethan theater as



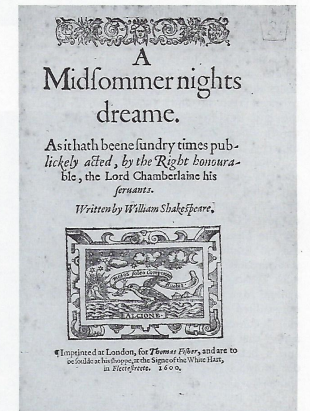
Title page for the 1598 quarto edition of a play that was performed before Elizabeth I during the 1597 Christmas season (British Library)

of the woods is where pretensions fall and would-be evildoers find their truer selves, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* looks forward to the first fruits of Shakespeare's maturity: the "romantic comedies" of which it proves to be a prototype.

The one remaining play that most critics now locate in the period known as Shakespeare's apprenticeship is a Grand Guignol melodrama that seems to have been the young playwright's attempt to outdo Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (produced circa 1589) in its exploitation of the horrors of madness and revenge. The composition of *Titus Andronicus* is usually dated 1590-1592, and it seems to have been drawn from a ballad and *History of Titus Andronicus* that only survives today in an eighteenth-century reprint now deposited in the Folger Shakespeare Library. (The Folger also holds the sole extant copy of the 1594 first quarto of Shakespeare's play, the authoritative text for all but the one scene, III.ii, that first appeared in the 1623 Folio.) If Shakespeare did take most of his plot from the *History of Titus*

*Andronicus*, it is clear that he also went to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (for the account of Tereus's rape of Philomena, to which the tongueless Lavinia points to explain what has been done to her) and to Seneca's *Thyestes* (for Titus's fiendish revenge on Tamora and her sons at the end of the play).

Although *Titus Andronicus* is not a "history play," it does make an effort to evoke the social and political climate of fourth-century Rome; and in its depiction of a stern general who has just sacrificed more than twenty of his own sons to conquer the Goths, it anticipates certain characteristics of Shakespeare's later "Roman plays": *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. But it is primarily as an antecedent of *Hamlet* (influenced, perhaps, by the so-called lost *Ur-Hamlet*) that *Titus* holds interest for us today. Because whatever else it is, *Titus Andronicus* is Shakespeare's first experiment with revenge tragedy. Its primary focus is the title character, whose political misjudgments and fiery temper



Title page for the 1600 quarto edition of the Shakespeare comedy that probably dates from 1595-1596, the same period as the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery)



A Midsummer Night's Dream: (top) Titania and Bottom, painting by Henri Fuseli, 1780-1790; and (bottom), William Blake's watercolor, Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing, circa 1785-1787 (Tate Gallery, London)

