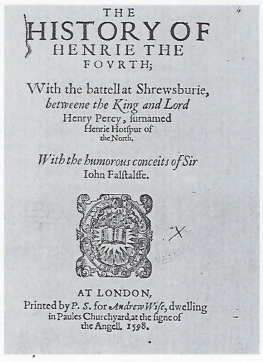
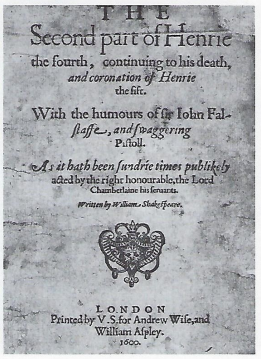
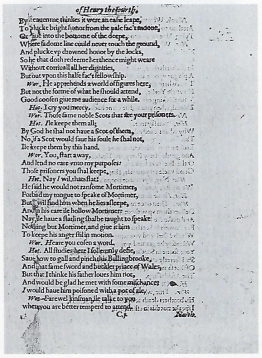
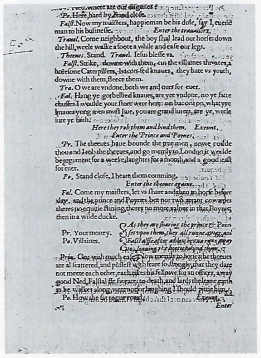


THE
HISTORY OF
HENRIE THE
FOVRTH;
With the battell at Shrewsburie,
betweene the King and Lord
Henry Percy, surnamed
Henrie Hotspur of
the North.
With the humorous conceits of Sir
Iohn Falstaffe.
AT LONDON,
Printed by P. S. for Andrew Wise, dwelling
in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of
the Angell. 1598.



THE
Second part of Henrie
the fourth, continuing to his death,
and coronation of Henrie
the fift.
With the humours of sir Iohn Fal-
staffe, and swaggering
Pistoll.
As it hath been sundrie times publikely
acted by the right honourable, the Lord
Chamberlaine his seruants.
Written by William Shakespeare.
LONDON
Printed by V. S. for Andrew Wise, and
William Aspley.
1600.



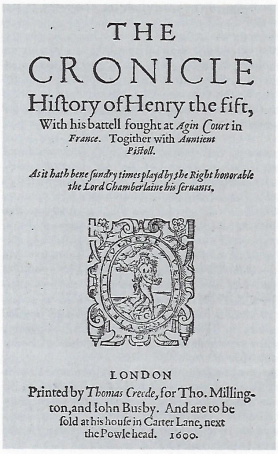


Title pages for 1598 and 1600 quarto editions of Shakespeare's examination of the reign of Henry Bolingbroke after his usurpation of the English crown (top left, Trinity College, Cambridge; top right, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery) and the first and last pages of an eight-leaf fragment from an earlier 1598 quarto edition, now preserved at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

as a play about the evils of anti-Semitism (as critical of the Christian society that has persecuted the Jew as it is of the vengeance he vents in response), its central trial scene is profoundly disturbing for an audience that has difficulty viewing Shylock's forced conversion as a manifestation of mercy. Shylock's "hath not a Jew eyes" speech impels us to see him as a fellow human being–notwithstanding the rapacious demand for "justice" that all but yields him Antonio's life before Portia's clever manipulations of the law strip the usurer of his own life's fortune–so that even if we feel that the Jew's punishment is less severe than what strict "justice" might have meted out to him, his grim exit nevertheless casts a pall over the festivities of the final act in Belmont.

By contrast with *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* a play in which the disparate components of the action are resolved in a brilliantly satisfying synthesis, *The Merchant of Venice* remains, for many of us, a prototype of those later Shakespearean works that twentieth-century critics have labeled "problem comedies." Even its fairy-tale elements, such as the casket scenes in which three would-be husbands try to divine the "will" of Portia's father, seem discordant to a modern audience that is asked to admire a heroine who dismisses one of her suitors with a slur on his Moroccan "complexion." Though it seems to have been written in late 1596 or early 1597 and, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* was first published in a good quarto in 1600, *The Merchant of Venice* feels closer in mood to *Measure for Measure*–which also pivots on a conflict between justice and mercy–than to most of the other "romantic comedies" of the mid to late 1590s.

But if *The Merchant of Venice* strikes us now as a play that looks forward to a later phase of Shakespearean dramaturgy, the plays he worked on next were a return to his beginnings. Possibly as early as 1595, and certainly no later than 1597, Shakespeare began a fresh exploration of the "matter" of English history with a play focusing on the events that precipitated the Wars of the Roses. It is impossible to say whether Shakespeare knew, when he began composing *Richard II,* that he would go on to write the two parts of *Henry IV* and the drama on *Henry V* that would furnish the link between *Richard II* and the *Henry VI* trilogy with which he had begun his career as a playwright. But complete the cycle he did, and the four English history plays Shakespeare wrote between 1595 and 1599 were even more impressive in their epic sweep than the four plays he had completed prior to the theatrical hiatus of 1593-1594.



THE
CRONICLE
Hiſtory of Henry the fift,
With his battell fought at *Agin Court* in
France. Together with *Auncient*
Piſtoll.
As it hath bene ſundry times playd by the Right honorable
the Lord Chamberlaine his ſeruants.
LONDON
Printed by *Thomas Creede,* for Tho. Milling-
ton, and Iohn Busby. And are to be
ſold at his houſe in Carter Lane, next
the Powle head. 1600.

Title page for one of the first, if not the first, of Shakespeare's plays to be performed at the Globe theater, which opened in 1599 (Anderson Galleries, sale number 1405, 4-5 March 1919)

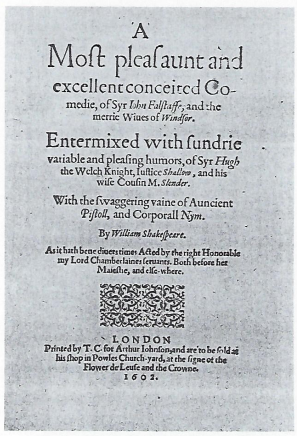
Richard II was, among other things, a major advance in Shakespeare's development as a poetic dramatist. Not only does the play contain the dying John of Gaunt's paean to "This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, . . . This other Eden, demi-paradise," it also affords us a telling contrast between the laconic bluntness of Henry Bolingbroke, a man of action who is not quick to speak, and the self-indulgent lyricism of Richard II, a man of words who is, finally and fatally, not quick to act.

At the beginning of the play Richard's security in his presumption that God's deputy is above the law leads him to disregard the principles of primogeniture that are the basis of the King's own position as head of state. He disre-

gards the counsel of his elders, seizes the estates of John of Gaunt and other nobles, banishes in Bolingbroke a former ally who has maintained a discreet silence about crimes that would taint the monarch himself, and sets in motion the rebellion that will eventually render his throne untenable. By the climax of the play Richard is forced to surrender his crown in a deposition scene that neatly counterpoises the declining King's complicity for his own downfall with the rising King's usurpation of a throne to which he has no legitimate title. And by the end of the play Richard's pastoral musings in the Tower transform him into a quasi-martyr whose meditations on "the death of kings" are as deeply moving as anything that Shakespeare had written up to this point in his career. As Richard prophesies, his murder at the hands of Henry IV's henchmen releases a tide of bloodshed that will not be stemmed until another legitimate monarch ascends the throne nearly a century in the future.

When *Richard II* was published in a good quarto in 1597 it lacked the crucial deposition scene, owing almost certainly to the censor's awareness that it would seem threatening to the aging Queen Elizabeth. That such apprehensions were justified was borne out four years later when the play was performed on the eve of the abortive rebellion of the Earl of Essex. The deposition scene's first appearance in print was in the fourth quarto of 1608.

As with the earlier English history plays, *Richard II* and the three *Henry* plays that followed derived in large measure from the 1587 second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles.* But in all probability, they were also influenced by, and possibly even inspired by, the 1595 publication of Samuel Daniel's *Civil Wars.* In any event, it seems more likely that within a year of the completion of *Richard II* Shakespeare began work on its sequel, the first part of *Henry IV.* Taken together, parts 1 and 2 of *Henry IV* focus our attention on the immediate consequences of Henry Bolingbroke's usurpation of the crown. The first consequence is signaled by the opening lines of the first part, where the new King, "shaken" and "wan with care," announces his desire to lead a crusade to the Holy Land, both as a means of expiating his guilt and as a means of unifying a "giddy-minded" nation that is now divided into warring factions. Unfortunately, rest is not to be attained by this tainted monarch. His claim to the throne is immediately challenged by his former allies, the Percies, and thereafter his reign is disturbed



A
Moſt pleaſaunt and
excellent conceited Co-
medie, of Syr *Iohn Falſtaffe,* and the
merrie Wiues of *Windſor.*
Entermixed with ſundrie
variable and pleaſing humors, of Syr *Hugh*
the Welch Knight, Iuſtice *Shallow,* and his
wiſe Couſin M. *Slender.*
With the ſwaggering vaine of Auncient
Piſtoll, and Corporall *Nym.*
By *William Shakeſpeare.*
As it hath bene diuers times Acted by the right Honorable
my Lord Chamberlaines ſeruants. Both before her
Maieſtie, and elſe-where.
LONDON
Printed by T. C. for Arthur Iohnſon, and are to be ſold at
his ſhop in Powles Church-yard, at the ſigne of the
Flower de Leuce and the Crowne.
1602.

Title page for the 1602 quarto edition of the play that was probably first produced before Queen Elizabeth and George Carey, Lord Hunsdon, patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, at Windsor Castle on 23 April 1597, in honor of the awarding of the Order of the Garter to Hunsdon (British Library)

by one threat after another. The King does eventually arrive at "Jerusalem" near the end of *Henry IV,* part 2, but ironically this destination turns out to be a room in the castle, and the setting for his deathbed scene, rather than the city he had hoped to wrest from pagan occupation at the birthplace of Christendom.

The price that Henry IV pays for his usurpation turns out to be a nagging consciousness that "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." And as significant as any other cause of the King's uneasiness is his fear that God has chosen to punish him with a wayward son whose "loose behavior" will forfeit the throne his father has expended so much anguish to mount and maintain. For all the King and his rivals can tell, the "nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales" is squandering his royal inheritance in the dissolute company of "that villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff," and a low-life lot of tavern keepers, thieves, and

prostitutes. But as we learn early in *Henry IV,* part 1, Prince Hal is actually "redeeming time" in ways that surpass the political sagacity of even so Machiavellian a ruler as his father. Hal is acquiring firsthand knowledge of his nation's ordinary citizens, and the benefit he anticipates is that once he is King of England he will be able to "command all the good lads in Eastcheap." As he prepares himself for the military trials with which he must be tested, moreover, he does so in the awareness that once he throws off the "base contagious clouds" that "smother up his beauty from the world," he will emerge as England's true "sun," rather than the flawed monarch he knows his father to be.

And so he does. In the battle of Shrewsbury at the end of *Henry IV,* part 1, the valiant Hal defeats the fiery warrior the King would have preferred for a son. By winning Hotspur's honors, Hal finally earns, at least for a moment, the respect and gratitude of a father whose life and kingdom he has saved. But it is not enough for Hal to have demonstrated the courage and prudence required of an heir apparent. In part 2 Shakespeare has him back at the Boar's Head tavern once again, and it is only after he has demonstrated the remaining kingly virtues of temperance and justice–by casting off the influence of Falstaff and claiming as his second surrogate father the Lord Chief Justice–that Hal is finally granted the crown for which he has been so thoroughly educated.

His epic reaches its apogee in *Henry V,* a play described by its Chorus as a pageant in honor of "the mirror of all Christian kings." Whether or not we are to feel that the new King has dismissed some of his humanity in his rejection of the "old fat man" at his coronation, and whether or not we are to regard with suspicion the ambiguous "Salic Law" that the Bishops invoke to justify the King's invasion of France, and whether or not we are to see the King as cruel in his threat to allow the maidens and children of Harfleur to be raped and slaughtered if the town refuses to surrender, the dominant impression that *Henry V* has made on most readers and producers is one of heroic celebration. The King proves firm and resourceful in battle, mingling with his men in disguise on the eve of the engagement and exhorting them to noble valor in his famous St. Crispin's Day address. And once his "happy few," his "band of brothers," have triumphed against all odds and won the day, the King gives the glory to God. He thus illustrates those qualities of the nurturing mother pelican–piety, self-sacrifice, humility, and magnanimity–that "Christian kings" were to display in addition to the monarchial attributes that Machiavelli and other political theorists had long associated with the lion and the fox. And in his wooing of his French bride, Katherine, at the end of the play, the King also exhibits the wit and charm that had endeared the historical Henry V to his admiring countrymen.

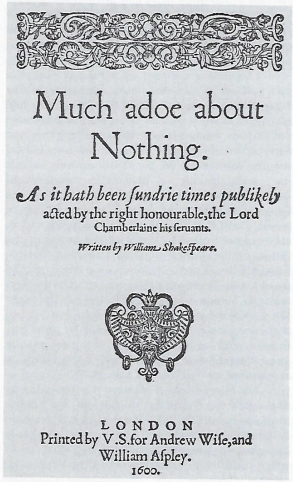
It is possible that the "wooden O" referred to in the Chorus's opening prologue was the Globe, newly opened on Bankside in 1599, and hence that *Henry V* was one of the first, if not *the* first, of Shakespeare's plays to be performed in that now-famous playhouse. Be that as it may, the play was probably completed in 1599, a year after *Henry IV,* part 2, and two years after *Henry IV,* part 1. All three plays had made their first appearances in print by 1600, the two parts of *Henry IV* in good quartos and *Henry V* in a bad quarto. The first reliable text of *Henry V* was that published in the First Folio in 1623.

The first good text of a related play, *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* also appeared in the Folio, but it too was initially published in a bad quarto, this one a memorial reconstruction dated 1602. Just when *Merry Wives* was written, and why, has been vigorously debated for decades. According to one legend, no doubt apocryphal but not totally lacking in plausibility, Shakespeare was commissioned to write the play because the Queen wanted to see Falstaff in love. If so, it seems likely that the play was also produced as an occasional piece in honor of the award of the Order of the Garter to Lord Hunsdon, the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, on 23 April 1597. There are references to a Garter ceremony at Windsor Castle in act five of *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* and Leslie Hotson has argued that even though the play may well have been performed later at the Globe, its first presentation was before Queen Elizabeth and Lord Hunsdon at Windsor on St. George's Day 1597.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is unique among Shakespeare's comedies in having an English town for its setting. Its bourgeois characters have delighted audiences not only in the playhouse but also on the operatic stage, in what many critics consider the most successful of Verdi's numerous achievements in Shakespearean opera. Despite its obvious charms, however, the play has never been a favorite among Shakespeare's readers and literary interpreters. The reason is that

the Falstaff we see in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a Falstaff largely lacking in the vitality and appeal of the character we come to love in the first part of *Henry IV*. Without Prince Hal and the wit combats afforded by his jokes at Falstaff's expense, the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* is merely conniving and crude. We may laugh at the comeuppances he receives at the hands of the merry wives he tries to seduce–the buck-basket baptism he gets as his reward for the first encounter, the beatings and pinchings he suffers in his later encounters–but we see nothing of the inventiveness that makes Falstaff such a supreme escape artist in part 1 of *Henry IV*. So attenuated is the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that many interpreters have argued that it is simply a mistake to approach him as the same character. In any case, we never see him in love. His is a profit motive without honor, and it is much more difficult for us to feel any pity for his plight in *Merry Wives* than it is in the three Henry plays that depict the pratfalls and decline of the young heir-apparent's genial lord of misrule.

The play does have the clever Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. And in the jealous Master Ford and the tyrannical Master Page it also has a pair of comic gulls whose sufferings can be amusing in the theater. But it is doubtful that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* will ever be among our favorite Shakespearean comedies, particularly when we examine it alongside such contemporary achievements as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*.


Much adoe about Nothing.

As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants.

Written by William Shakespeare.

LONDON
Printed by V.S. for Andrew Wise, and William Aspley.
1600.

Title page for the 1600 quarto edition of one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies (Anderson Galleries, sale number 2078, 24-25 May 1926)

Much Ado About Nothing and *As You Like It* were probably written in late 1598 and 1599, respectively, with the former first published in a good quarto in 1600 and the latter making its initial appearance in the 1623 First Folio. Both are mature romantic comedies, and both have enjoyed considerable success in the theater.

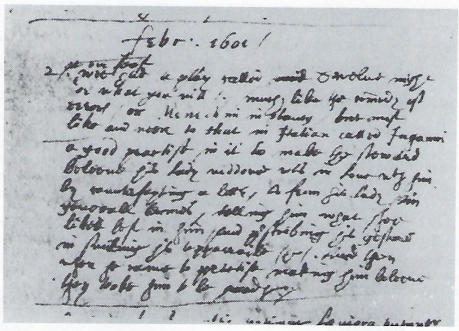
"Nothing" is a word of potent ambiguity in Shakespeare (the playwright was later to explore its potential most profoundly in the "nothing will come of nothing" that constitutes the essence of *King Lear*), and in *Much Ado About Nothing* its implications include the possibilities inherent in the wordplay on the Elizabethan homonym "noting." Through the machinations of the surly Don John, who gulls the superficial Claudio into believing that he "notes" his betrothed Hero in the act of giving herself to another lover, an innocent girl is rejected at the altar by a young man who believes himself to have been dishonored. Fortunately, Don John and his companions have themselves been noted by the most incompetent watch who ever policed a city; and, despite their asinine constable, Dogberry, these well-meaning but clownish servants of the Governor of Messina succeed in bringing the crafty villains to justice. In doing so, they set in motion a process whereby Hero's chastity is eventually vindicated and she reappears as if resurrected from the grave. Meanwhile, another pair of "notings" have been staged by the friends of Benedick and Beatrice, with the result that these two sarcastic enemies to love and to each other are each tricked into believing that the other is secretly in love. At least as much ado is made of Benedick and Beatrice's notings as of the others, and by the time the play ends these acerbic critics of amorous folly, grudgingly acknowledging that "the world must be peopled," have been brought to

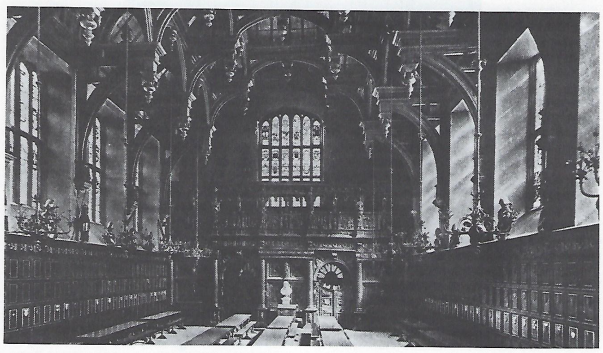
This portrait of Shakespeare was once attributed to Richard Burbage and said to have belonged to Sir William Davenant, but it is now believed to have been painted in the eighteenth century (by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London)

the altar with Claudio and Hero for a double wedding that concludes the play with feasting and merriment.

Shakespeare could have drawn from a number of antecedents for the story of Hero and Claudio, among them cantos from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. But the nearest thing to a "source" for Beatrice and Benedick may well have been his own *The Taming of the Shrew*, where another pair of unconventional would-be lovers struggle their way to a relationship that is all the more vital for the aggressive resistance that has to be channeled into harmony to bring it about. In any event, if there is some doubt about where Benedick and Beatrice came from, there is no doubt about the direction in which they point–to such gallant and witty Restoration lovers as Mirabell and Millamant in William Congreve's *The Way of the World*.

With *As You Like It* Shakespeare achieved what many commentators consider to be the finest exemplar of a mode of romantic comedy based on escape to and return from what Northrop Frye has termed the "green world." As in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (where the young lovers flee to the woods to evade an Athens ruled by the edicts of tyrannical fathers) and *The Merchant of Venice* (where Belmont serves as the antidote to all the venom that threatens life in Venice), in *As You Like It* the well-disposed characters who find themselves in the Forest of Arden think of it as an environment where even "adver-





Top: passage from the diary of law student John Manningham, who reports having seen a performance of Twelfth Night *on 2 February 1602 (1601 according to the calendar then in use) at a feast in the hall of the Middle Temple (British Library, MS. Harley 5353, f. 12; by permission of the British Library Board). Bottom: the hall in which the play was performed. Manningham compares the play to* The Comedy of Errors, *Plautus's* Menaechmi, *and the Italian comedy "called 'Ingannati'" (*Gl'Ingannati, *which may in fact have been one of Shakespeare's sources for* Twelfth Night*), and he praises the scene in which Malvolio the steward, having been tricked into believing the Countess Olivia loves him, dresses and acts in a way that convinces the lady he is mad.*

sity" is "sweet" and restorative.

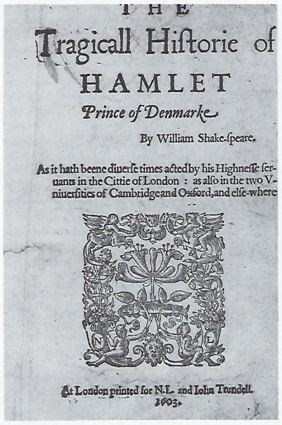
Duke Senior has been banished from his dukedom by a usurping younger brother, Duke Frederick. As the play opens, Duke Senior and his party are joined by Orlando and his aged servant Adam (who are running away from Orlando's cruel older brother Oliver), and later they in turn are joined by Duke Senior's daughter Rosalind and her cousin Celia (who have come to the forest, disguised as men, because the wicked Duke Frederick can no longer bear to have Rosalind in his daughter's company at court). The scenes in the forest are punctuated by a number of reflections on the relative merits of courtly pomp and pastoral simplicity, with the cynical Touchstone and the melancholy Jaques countering any sentimental suggestion that the Forest of Arden is a "golden world" of Edenic perfection, and her sojourn in the forest allows the wise and witty Rosalind to use male disguise as a means of testing the affections of her lovesick wooer Orlando. Eventually Orlando proves a worthy match for Rosalind, in large measure because he shows himself to be his brother's keeper. By driving off a lioness poised to devour the sleeping Oliver, Orlando incurs a wound that prevents him from appearing for an appointment with the disguised Rosalind; but his act of unmerited self-sacrifice transforms his brother into a "new man" who arrives on the scene in Orlando's stead and eventually proves a suitable match for Celia. Meanwhile, as the play nears its end, we learn that a visit to the forest has had a similarly regenerative effect on Duke Frederick, who enters a monastery and returns the dukedom to its rightful ruler, Duke Senior.

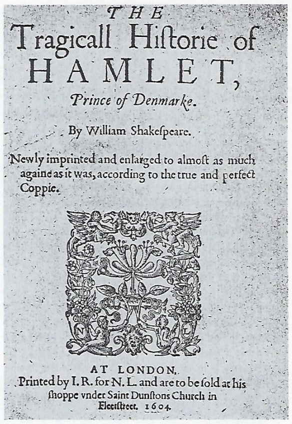
As You Like It derives in large measure from Thomas Lodge's romance *Rosalynde or Euphues' Golden Legacy*, a prose classic dating from 1590. But in his treatment of the "strange events" that draw the play to a conclusion presided over by Hymen, the god of marriage, Shakespeare hints at the kind of miraculous transformation that will be given major emphasis in the late romances.

The last of the great romantic comedies of Shakespeare's mid career, probably composed and performed in 1601 though not published until the 1623 First Folio, was *Twelfth Night*. Possibly based, in part, on an Italian comedy of the 1530s called *Gl'Ingannati*, *Twelfth Night* is another play with implicit theological overtones. Its title comes from the name traditionally associated with the Feast of Epiphany (6 January, the twelfth day of the Christmas season), and much of its roistering would have seemed appropriate to an occasion when Folly was allowed to reign supreme under the guise of a Feast of Fools presided over by a Lord of Misrule. In Shakespeare's play, the character who represents Misrule is Sir Toby Belch, the carousing uncle of a humorless countess named Olivia. Together with such companions as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the jester Feste, and a clever gentlewoman named Maria, Sir Toby makes life difficult not only for Olivia but also for her puritan steward Malvolio, whose name means "bad will" and whose function in the play, ultimately, is to be ostracized so that "good will" may prevail. In what many consider to be the most hilarious gulling scene in all of Shakespeare, Malvolio is tricked into thinking that his Lady is in love with him and persuaded to wear cross-gartered yellow stockings in her presence–attire that he believes will allure her, but attire that persuades her instead that he is deranged. The "treatment" that follows is a mock exercise in exorcism, and when Malvolio is finally released from his tormentors at the end of the play, he exits vowing revenge "on the whole pack" of them.

As with the dismissal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, the punishment of Malvolio's presumption in *Twelfth Night* has seemed too harsh to many modern viewers and readers. But that should not prevent us from seeing that *Twelfth Night* is also a play about other forms of self-indulgence (Count Orsino's infatuation with the pose of a courtly lover, and Olivia's excessively long period of mourning for her deceased brother) and the means by which characters "sick of self-love" or self-deception are eventually restored to mental and emotional sanity. Through the ministrations of the wise fool, Feste, and the providential Viola, who arrives in Illyria after a shipwreck in which she mistakenly believes her brother Sebastian to have died, we witness a sequence of coincidences and interventions that seems too nearly miraculous to have been brought about by blind chance. By taking another series of potentially tragic situations and turning them to comic ends, Shakespeare reminds us once again that harmony and romantic fulfillment are at the root of what Northrop Frye calls the "argument of comedy."

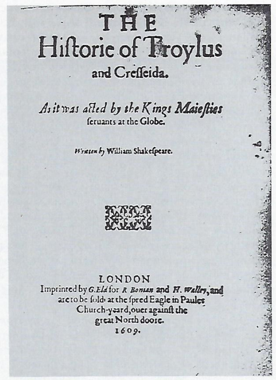
If Shakespeare's middle years are notable for sophisticated achievements in the genre we now refer to as romantic comedy, they are equally notable for the playwright's unprecedented strides in the development of two other

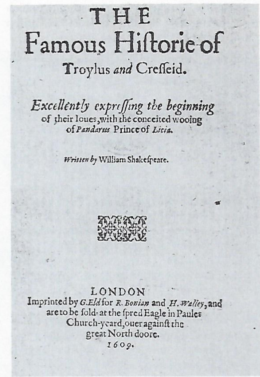

THE
Tragicall Hiſtorie of
HAMLET
Prince of Denmarke
By William Shake-ſpeare.
As it hath beene diuerſe times acted by his Highneſſe ſer-
uants in the Cittie of London : as alſo in the two V-
niuerſities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elſe-where
At London printed for N.L. and Iohn Trundell.
1603.

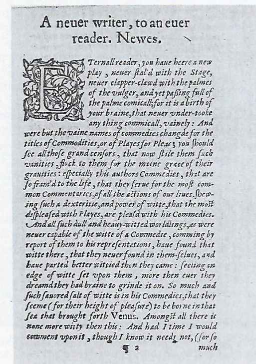

THE
Tragicall Hiſtorie of
HAMLET,
Prince of Denmarke.
By William Shakeſpeare.
Newly imprinted and enlarged to almoſt as much
againe as it was, according to the true and perfect
Coppie.
AT LONDON,
Printed by I. R. for N. L. and are to be ſold at his
ſhoppe vnder Saint Dunſtons Church in
Fleetſtreet. 1604.

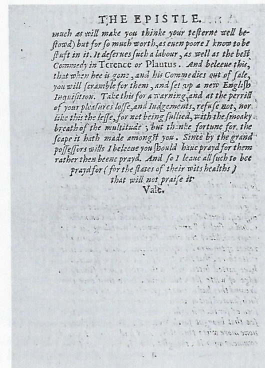
Title pages for the 1603 corrupt quarto edition (Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery) and the 1604 good quarto edition (Library of the Earl of Verulam) of Shakespeare's first great tragedy

genres: tragedy and tragicomedy. In 1599, probably at the Globe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men offered the earliest recorded performance of *Julius Caesar* (the first of three mature tragedies, now grouped as "the Roman Plays," which all saw print for the first time in the 1623 Folio). Two years later, in late 1600 or early 1601, the company probably added to its repertory *Hamlet* (a play whose immediate and sustained popularity was attested to by its 1603 publication in an unauthorized bad quarto, succeeded a year later by a good quarto that most textual scholars still rely upon for all but a few passages, in preference to the slightly revised text in the 1623 Folio, which was set principally from a copy of the promptbook). Then in late 1601 or early 1602–once again drawing on the "classical" matter that had been the basis for the action of *Julius Caesar* and for many of the allusions in *Hamlet*–Shakespeare completed *Troilus and Cressida*, a play so uncompromisingly "intellectual" in its insistence that the audience "by indirections find directions out" that critics from the seventeenth century to the present have found it all but impossible to classify. If *Troilus and Cressida* is a comedy, as the epistle prefacing the 1609 First Quarto would indicate, it is at best a specimen of black humor very different in tone and treatment from Shakespeare's other efforts in tragicomedy. If it is a tragedy, as its equivocal placement (occupying a no-man's-land between the Histories and the Tragedies) in the First Folio has led some scholars to argue, it is unique to the genre in the way its language and action undercut the dignity of its heroic protagonists. *Troilus and Cressida* was followed, in 1602-1603 and 1604 respectively, by two other plays, again ambiguous in tone, that are also frequently discussed today as "problem plays." *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* (both of which made their initial appearances in print in the First Folio) are tragicomedies that turn on "bed tricks," and in their preoccupation with the seamier aspects of sexuality they can be viewed as links between *Hamlet,* the first of Shakespeare's


THE
Hiſtorie of Troylus
and Creſſeida.
As it was acted by the Kings Maieſties
ſeruants at the Globe.
Written by William Shakeſpeare.
LONDON
Imprinted by G.Eld for R. Bonian and H. Walley, and
are to be ſold at the ſpred Eagle in Paules
Church-yeard, ouer againſt the
great North doore.
1609.


THE
Famous Hiſtorie of
Troylus and Creſſeid.
Excellently expreſſing the beginning
of their loues, with the conceited wooing
of Pandarus Prince of Licia.
Written by William Shakeſpeare.
LONDON
Imprinted by G.Eld for R. Bonian and H. Walley, and
are to be ſold at the ſpred Eagle in Paules
Church-yeard, ouer againſt the
great North doore.
1609.


A neuer writer, to an euer
reader. Newes.
Eternall reader, you haue heere a new play, neuer ſtal'd with the Stage, neuer clapper-clawd with the palmes of the vulger, and yet paſsing full of the palme comicall; for it is a birth of your braine, that neuer under-tooke any thing commicall, vainely: And were but the vaine names of commedies changde for the titles of Commodities, or of Playes for Pleas; you ſhould ſee all thoſe grand cenſors, that now ſtile them ſuch vanities, flock to them for the maine grace of their grauities: eſpecially this authors Commedies, that are ſo fram'd to the life, that they ſerue for the moſt common Commentaries, of all the actions of our liues ſhewing ſuch a dexteritie, and power of witte, that the moſt diſpleaſed with Playes, are pleaſd with his Commedies. And all ſuch dull and heauy-witted worldlings, as were neuer capable of the witte of a Commedie, comming by report of them to his repreſentations, haue found that witte there, that they neuer found in them-ſelues, and haue parted better wittied then they came: feeling an edge of witte ſet vpon them, more then euer they dreamd they had braine to grinde it on. So much and ſuch ſauored ſalt of witte is in his Commedies, that they ſeeme (for their height of pleaſure) to be borne in that ſea that brought forth Venus. Amongſt all there is none more witty then this: And had I time I would comment vpon it, though I know it needs not, (for ſo
¶ 2 much


THE EPISTLE.
much as will make you thinke your teſterne well beſtowd) but for ſo much worth, as euen poore I know to be ſtuft in it. It deſerues ſuch a labour, as well as the beſt Commedy in Terence or Plautus. And beleeue this, that when hee is gone, and his Commedies out of ſale, you will ſcramble for them, and ſet vp a new Engliſh Inquiſition. Take this for a warning, and at the perrill of your pleaſures loſſe, and Iudgements, refuſe not, nor like this the leſſe, for not being ſullied, with the ſmoaky breath of the multitude; but thanke fortune for the ſcape it hath made amongſt you. Since by the grand poſſeſſors wills I beleeue you ſhould haue prayd for them rather then beene prayd. And ſo I leaue all ſuch to bee prayd for (for the ſtates of their wits healths) that will not praiſe it.
Vale.

Variant title pages for the 1609 quarto edition of the play that has been variously classified as comedy, tragedy, and tragicomedy; and the epistle to the reader in the second state, which contradicts the statement on the title page of the first that the play had been performed (top left: Elizabethan Club, Yale University; top right and bottom: British Library)

"great tragedies," and *Othello,* the second (which seems to have been composed in 1604, when there is a record of performance at Court).

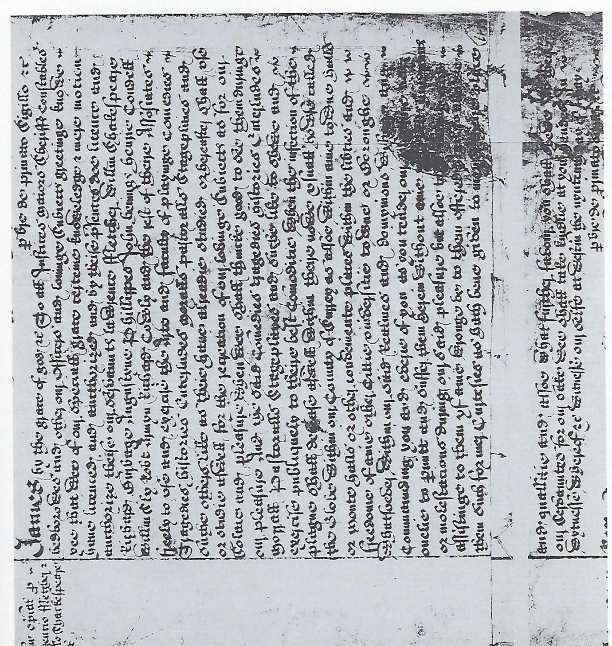
Julius Caesar–a play that may owe something to sources as seemingly remote as St. Augustine's *City of God* and Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* in addition to such obvious classical antecedents as Plutarch's *Lives* and Tacitus's *Annals*–is now regarded as a dramatic work of considerable complexity. On the one hand, the play captures with remarkable fidelity the ethos and rhetorical style of late-republican Rome–so much so, indeed, that it may be said that Shakespeare's portraits of Caesar and his contemporaries have largely formed our own impressions of how the ancient Romans thought and talked and conducted their civic affairs. Recent studies of the play's references to "philosophy" indicate, moreover, that Shakespeare knew a good deal about Roman Stoicism and perceived it as one of the characterizing traits that differentiated Brutus from Cassius, an Epicurean continually nonplussed by his companion's mental rigidity and emotional aloofness.

But if Shakespeare brought to his dramatic art a historical imagination capable of reconstructing a self-consistent Roman world–and one that was distinct in significant ways from his own Elizabethan England–he was also capable of embodying in his representation of that world a perspective that amounted, in effect, to a Renaissance humanist critique of pre-Christian civilization. Thus it was quite possible for Shakespeare to portray the conspirators and their cause, as it were, "sympathetically"–so much so, indeed, that a twentieth-century audience, unwittingly misreading the play, finds it almost impossible not to hear in such exclamations as "peace, freedom, and liberty!" the precursors of America's own founding fathers. At the same time, however, Shakespeare would have known that he could rely on his Elizabethan contemporaries to regard as foredoomed any attempt to achieve social harmony through what they would have seen on the stage as bloody butchery and regicide. By the same token, of course, Shakespeare could encourage his audience to "identify" with Brutus through participation in his soliloquies, while simultaneously assuming that alert members of that audience would recognize that Brutus's thought processes are often misguided and self-deceptive.

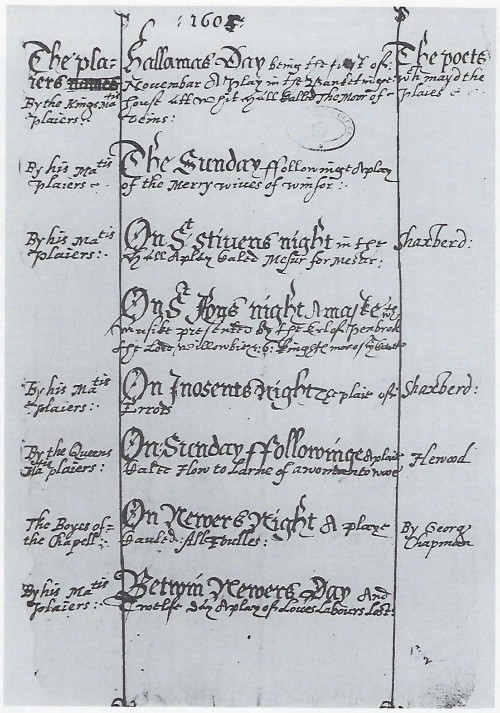
In the late 1930s Mark Van Doren observed that, whatever Brutus's positive qualities as a high-minded patriot, he tends to come across in the play as a self-righteous, almost pharisaical prig, particularly in the quarrel scene with Cassius. In recent years a number of scholars have confirmed the validity of Van Doren's perception by showing that it is consistent with the hypothesis that in his portrayal of Brutus Shakespeare was drawing on a widely held Christian tradition that regarded Stoicism as a philosophy that rendered its adherents hard-hearted, arrogant, and so assured of their own virtue as to be largely incapable of recognizing or repenting of their faults. If this reading of Brutus is closer to Shakespeare's intention than the more sentimental view that approaches everything in the play from the retrospective vantage-point of Mark Antony's eulogy for "the noblest Roman of them all," it tends to cast much of *Julius Caesar* in an ironic light–and by implication to require an audience alert to clues that are not always so self-evident as a twentieth-century reader or viewer might expect.

Such an audience seems called for by *Hamlet* as well, at least if we are going to take seriously Hamlet's admonition that the players address their performance to "the judicious," to those who are capable of viewing all the action, including that involving the most engaging of protagonists, with a critical eye. This is difficult for us, because we have long been accustomed to thinking of Hamlet as the "sweet prince" who epitomizes the ideal Renaissance courtier.

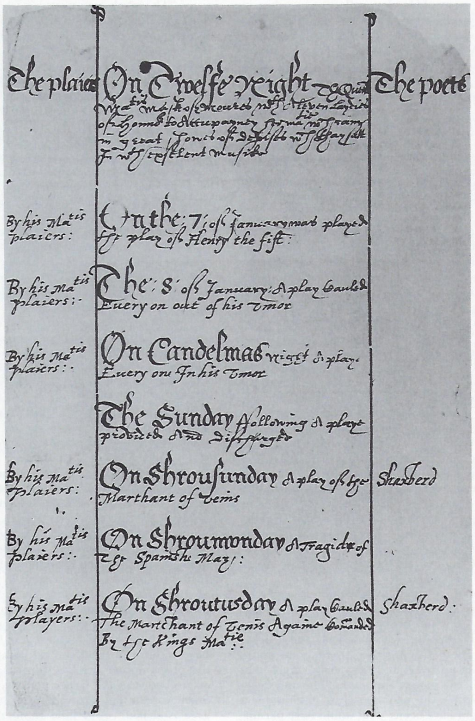
There is no danger, to be sure, that Hamlet will ever lose his appeal as an articulate and ardent existentialist–as the prototype of modern man in spiritual crisis. But recent critical studies and productions of the play have raised questions about the "matter" of *Hamlet* in Elizabethan terms that suggest a somewhat less admirable protagonist than most of us would like to believe the play presents. It is no longer universally assumed, for example, that the play within the play, by proving the Ghost "honest" in his testimony about Claudius's guilt, is sufficient to prove the Ghost "honest" in Hamlet's more fundamental sense. Enough evidence remains in the play to suggest that the Ghost may yet be a "devil" intent on "abusing" the melancholic Hamlet by exhorting him to the kind of vengeance that Elizabethan Christians believed to belong only to God or to his deputed magistrates. And Hamlet's disinclination to "try" the spirit earlier in the play is but one of many indications in the text that he fails to put to proper use what he elsewhere describes as "godlike reason." A close exam-



Shakespeare's company becomes the King's Men: Letters Patent under the Great Seal, 19 May 1603 (Public Record Office, Chancery, Patent Rolls, C.66/1608, m. 4; by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office)



Pages from the account book of Sir Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, in which a scribe listed eleven court performances by the King's Men from 1 November 1604 to 31 October 1605. Seven of the plays were by Shakespeare: Othello *(first recorded performance),* The Merry Wives of Windsor, Measure for Measure *(first recorded performance),* The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labor's Lost, Henry V, *and* The Merchant of Venice, *which was performed on two occasions. Though the authenticity of these records was once challenged, they are now generally accepted as genuine (Public Record Office, Audit Office, Accounts, Various, A.O. 3/908/13; by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office).*



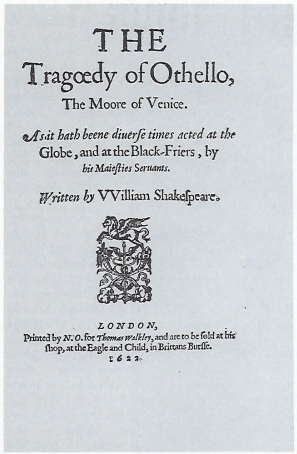
ination of many of Hamlet's reflective speeches, including his celebrated "To be nor not to be" soliloquy, will show that they serve functions similar to those of Brutus in *Julius Caesar.* By bringing the audience into the protragonist's confidence, they endear him to us and incline us to see everything and everyone else in the action through his eyes. But if we pay careful attention to the nuances of thought in these reflections, we will notice that many of them tend to be irrational–peppered with non sequiturs and disclosing the kind of emotional stress that renders a man prone to error.

A dispassionate scrutiny of the roles of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will reveal that, however conventionally ambitious these young courtiers may be, they mean Hamlet well and are anything but the "adders fanged" that Hamlet regards them as having become. The play provides no evidence that they deserve the "sudden death, not shriving time allowed" that Hamlet gleefully bequeaths them; and it is arguable that Shakespeare expected his audience to feel that they *should* be "near Hamlet's conscience" when he assures Horatio that they are not. And near the end of the play, when Hamlet disregards the "gaingiving" that warns him not to accept the "wager" proffered by the treacherous Claudius–when he dismisses Horatio's prudence and disdains the kind of premonition that "would perhaps trouble a woman"–he allows himself to be seduced (and in a way that parallels Julius Caesar's being led to the Capitol) into a trap that means certain death. Far from being guided by providence, as his New Testament allusions would suggest at this point in the action, Hamlet is being lured by pride into an ambush that he might have avoided by heeding his "godlike reason." As Claudius had predicted, Hamlet shows himself to be "remiss."

None of which in any way diminishes the attractiveness of Hamlet's wit and fervor, or suggests that he is not infinitely to be preferred to the "mighty opposite" whose regicide and usurpation he puts to scourge. No, there is no doubt that Hamlet uncovers and "sets right" much that is "rotten in the state of Denmark." The only question is whether the play invites us to consider a set of "might have beens" that would have permitted us to approve of the protagonist even more unreservedly than we do. If the findings of recent commentators are to be credited, it would seem likely that our identification with Hamlet's cause should be qualified by an awareness that he did not completely find the way "rightly to be great."

"The whole argument is a whore and a cuckold." So the acid-tongued Thersites sums up the "matter of Troy" and the occasion of *Troilus and Cressida.* We may not wish to see our legendary forebears reduced so unceremoniously to the base matter of lust and dishonor, but there is little in the plot or dialogue of Shakespeare's play to cite in refutation. The Trojan War is in fact a conflict over the ravishingly beautiful but thoughtless Helen (the "whore" whom Paris has stolen away from the "cuckold" Menelaus), and one would have to search hard to find anything to admire in most of the principals who figure in the inconsequential council scenes, squalid intrigues, and interrupted combats that dominate the action. Because what *Troilus and Cressida* is largely "about" is a ludicrously unheroic siege to determine whether the Trojans return Helen to the Greeks or see their city fall in defense of a cause that even the greatest Trojan warrior considers unworthy of their "several honors."

As Hector points out, the Trojans can appeal to neither justice nor reason in support of their determination to keep Helen; the best that anyone can say of her is that, quite apart from what she may be in and of herself, "she is a theme of honor and renown,/A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds." But when we look for such deeds in the play, what we find on both sides are acts of questionable valor at best (as when Hector, having challenged the Greeks to find a combatant to uphold their honor as lovers, breaks off a hand-to-hand duel with Ajax on the grounds that they are cousins) and downright cowardice at worst (as when Achilles, having come upon Hector at a moment when he has removed his armor to rest, merely summons his Myrmidons to slaughter the champion of the Trojans). In the meantime we are treated to the voyeurism of Pandarus, an impotent and diseased bawd whose only pleasure in life is to serve as gobetween for Troilus and Cressida, and the homoerotic indulgence of Achilles and Patroclus, who have withdrawn from combat because of a slight the prima donna Achilles thinks he has suffered at the hands of the Greek general, Agamemnon. Small wonder that Ulysses should observe that "degree is shak'd." And little wonder that director Jonathan Miller, in his 1982 BBC television production of *Troilus and Cressida,* hit upon *M*A*S*H* as the most apt twentieth-century analogue for a satiric seventeenth-century depiction of war as the triumph of unreason, ennui, and depravity.



THE
Tragœdy of Othello,
The Moore of Venice.

As it hath beene diuerſe times acted at the Globe, and at the Black-Friers, by *his Maieſties Seruants.*

Written by VVilliam Shakeſpeare.

LONDON,
Printed by *N. O.* for *Thomas walkley*, and are to be ſold at his ſhop, at the Eagle and Child, in Britans Burſſe.
1622.

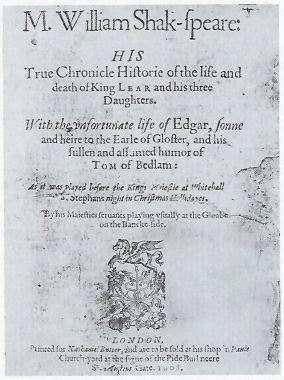
Title page for the 1622 quarto edition of the second of Shakespeare's four major tragedies (Elizabethan Club, Yale University)

There is, to be sure, some momentary relief in the scenes depicting the wooing of Troilus and Cressida. And when Cressida is eventually delivered back to the Greek camp at the request of her father, one feels that her surrender to Diomede is more a result of her feminine helplessness in a male-controlled world than a manifestation of some prior proclivity to infidelity. But despite the lyricism of Troilus and Cressida's lovemaking, and the agony both lovers feel upon parting, one emerges from this play moved less by the pathos of the love story than by Shakespeare's presentation of what T. S. Eliot, writing three centuries later about another literary work deriving ultimately from Homer, praised as a reflection of "the immense panamora of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." It may well be that *Troilus and Cressida* seemed just as "modern" and puzzling in the early seventeenth century as Joyce's *Ulysses* seemed when it appeared in the early twentieth.

Modern in another sense may be a good way to describe *All's Well That Ends Well.* After a long history of neglect, this tragicomedy has recently enjoyed a good deal of success in the theater and on television, and one of the explanations that have been given is that it features a heroine who, refusing to accept a preordained place in a hierarchical man's world, does what she has to do to win her own way.

Orphaned at an early age and reared as a waiting-gentlewoman to the elegant and sensitive Countess of Rossillion, Helena presumes to fall in love with the Countess's snobbish son Bertram. Using a cure she learned from her dead father, who had been a prominent physician, Helena saves the life of the ailing King of France, whereupon she is rewarded with marriage to the man of her choice among all the eligible bachelors in the land. She astonishes Bertram by selecting him. Reluctantly, Bertram consents to matrimony, but before the marriage can be consummated he leaves the country with his disreputable friend Parolles, telling Helena in a note that he will be hers only when she has fulfilled two presumably impossible conditions: won back the ring from his finger, and borne a child to him. Disguised as a pilgrim, Helena follows Bertram to Florence. There she substitutes herself for a woman named Diana, with whom Bertram has made an assignation, and satisfies the despicable Bertram's demands.

One of the "problems" that have troubled critics of *All's Well That Ends Well* is the device of the "bed trick." But we now know that Shakespeare had biblical precedent for such a plot (Genesis 35), and that it was associated in the Old Testament with providential intervention. Which may be of some value to us in dealing with the other major issues: why should Helena want so vain and selfish a man as Bertram in the first place, and how can we accept at face value his reformation at the end? If we suspend our disbelief enough to grant the fairy-tale premises of the plot (which derived from a story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*), we should be able to grant as well that in a providentially ordered world, the end may not only justify the means but sanctify them. And if the end that Helena has in view is not only to win Bertram but to make him "love her dearly ever, ever dearly," we must grant the playwright the final miracle of a Bertram who can be brought to see his evil ways for what they are and repent of them.



M. William Shak-speare:

HIS

True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King LEAR and his three Daughters.

With the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Glosster, and his fullen and assumed humor of TOM of Bedlam:

As it was played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall upon S. Stephans night in Christmas Hollidayes.

By his Maiesties seruants playing vsually at the Globe on the Bancke-side.

LONDON,

Printed for Nathaniel Butter, and are to be sold at his shop in Pauls Church-yard at the signe of the Pide Bull neere St. Austins Gate. 1608.

Title page for the 1608 quarto edition of what many scholars now regard as a memorial reconstruction of an earlier version of King Lear *than the text published in the 1623 First Folio (Bodleian Library, Oxford)*

A similar miracle would seem to be the final cause of *Measure for Measure*. At the beginning of the play, Duke Vincentio, noting that he has been too lenient in his administration of the laws of Venice, appoints as deputy an icy-veined puritan named Angelo, whom he expects to be more severe for a season of much-needed civic discipline. Almost immediately upon the Duke's departure, Angelo finds himself confronted with a novitiate, Isabella, who, in pleading for the life of a brother condemned for fornification, unwittingly arouses the new deputy's lust. Angelo offers her an exchange: her brother's life for her chastity. Astonished by the deputy's disregard for both God's laws and man's, Isabella refuses. Later, as she tries to prepare Claudio for his execution and discovers that he is less shocked by the deputy's offer than his sister had been, Isabella upbraids him, too, as a reprobate.

At this point the Duke, who has been disguised as a friar, persuades Isabella to "accept" Angelo's offer on the understanding that his former betrothed, Mariana, will sleep with him instead. Once again the bed trick proves effectual and "providential." In the "trial" that takes place at the entrance to the city upon the Duke's return, Isabella accuses Angelo of having corrupted his office and executed her brother despite an agreement to spare him (an order of the deputy's that, unknown to Isabella, has been forestalled by the "friar"). But then, in response to Mariana's pleas for her assistance, she decides not to press her claim for justice and instead kneels before the Duke to beg that Angelo's life be spared. The Duke grants her request, and Angelo–illustrating Mariana's statement that "best men are molded out of faults"–repents and accepts the Duke's mercy.

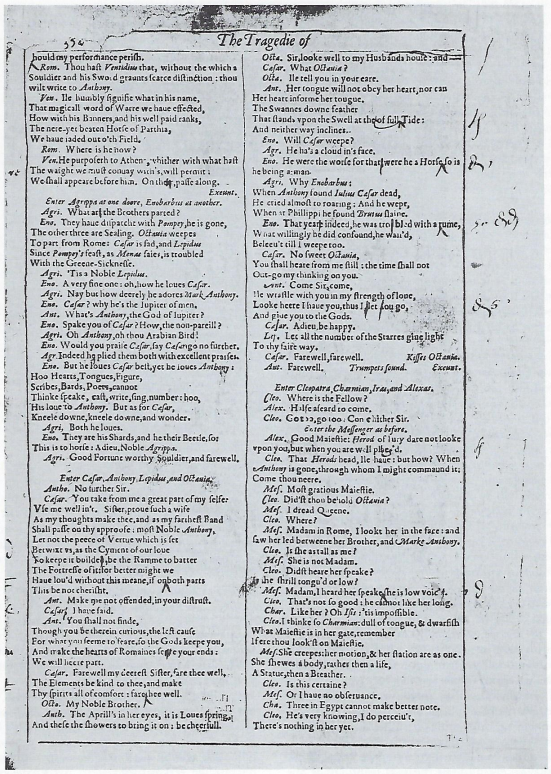
Measure for Measure qualifies as a tragicomedy because the questions it raises are serious (how to balance law and grace, justice and mercy, in human society) and the issue (whether or not Angelo will be executed for his evil intentions with respect to Claudio) is in doubt until the moment when, by kneeling beside Mariana, Isabella prevents what might have been a kind of revenge tragedy. (The Duke tells Mariana, "Against all sense you do importune her./Should she kneel down in mercy of this fact,/Her brother's ghost his paved bed would break,/And take her hence in horror.") In Shakespearean comedy, of course, all's well that ends well. Revenge gives way to forgiveness or repentance, and characters who might have died in self-deception or guilt are given a second chance. As for Isabella, she too gains insight and sensitivity as a consequence of her trials, and at the conclusion of the play she finds herself the recipient of a marriage proposal from her previously disguised counselor, the Duke. Whether she accepts it, and if so how, has become one of the chief "problems" to be solved by directors and actors in modern productions.

After *Measure for Measure*, so far as we can tell, Shakespeare turned his attention entirely to tragedy for three or four years. By 1604, apparently, he completed *Othello*, the second of the four major tragedies. By 1605 he seems to have completed *King Lear*, the third and, in the estimation of many, the greatest of the tragedies. And by 1606 he had evidently written the last of the "big four," *Macbeth*. During the next two to three years Shakespeare turned once more to classical sources, completing *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, respectively, in 1606-1607 and 1607-1608, and abandoning *Timon of Athens* (if we are correct in thinking that it was left unfinished and uncated) sometime around 1607 or 1608. Only two of these plays appeared in quarto printings, *King*

Macbeth and the Witches *from the first illustrated edition of Shakespeare's works, edited by Nicholas Rowe in 1709 (Maggs Bros., catalogue number 550, 1931)*

Lear in 1608 in what many scholars now regard as a memorial reconstruction of an early version of the play, and *Othello* in 1622 in a text of uncertain provenance. Most modern editions of *King Lear* and *Othello* follow the First Folio texts as their prime authorities, supplementing those texts where appropriate with readings or passages from the quartos (although, particularly with *King Lear*, where the two printings of the play are thought by some to derive from discrete and self-consistent earlier and later scripts of the play, there is now a school of thought that opposes conflating the Folio and quarto versions). The other three tragedies all appeared for the first time in the 1623 Folio.

When we come to *Othello* fresh from a reading of either *Hamlet* or *Measure for Measure*, we can see links with the earlier plays in *Othello*'s treatment of sexual love and in the play's preoccupation with ethical questions that turn, ultimately, on revenge versus forgiveness. For whatever else *Othello* is, it is a species of revenge tragedy. To the extent that Iago is impelled by something more specific than what Coleridge termed



Proof, with corrections in an unknown hand, for Antony and Cleopatra *in the 1623 First Folio (by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library)*

"motiveless malignity," he is motivated by a determination to prove Othello "egregiously an ass" for promoting Michael Cassio rather than Iago to the lieutenancy. And Iago's vengeance extends to Cassio as well as to Othello. But more to the point, once Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona has slept with Cassio, he transforms Othello into the principal tool as well as the prime object of his revenge.

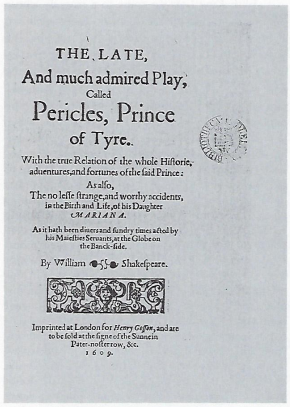
Iago's "poison" is administered in two doses. First he provides enough circumstantial "proof" to make plausible his insinuation that Desdemona has been unfaithful to Othello. But second and far more crucial, he works Othello into such a frenzy that he is unable to give serious consideration to any response to his "knowledge" other than revenge. Once Othello becomes persuaded that Desdemona is indeed guilty of infidelity, his instinctive reaction is to exclaim "But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!" To which Iago replies "If you are so fond over her iniquity, give her patent to offend, for if it touch not you, it comes near nobody." Here as elsewhere Iago's method is to get Othello to focus, not on Desdemona, but on himself. By constantly reiterating such terms as "reputation," "good name," and "honor," Iago plays upon Othello's insecurity as a Moorish alien and implies that his wife's behavior will make him the laughingstock of Venetian society.

It is a mark of his worthiness as a tragic hero that, to the end, Othello retains the "free and open nature" that made him vulnerable to Iago in the beginning. Iago may manipulate Othello into committing a rash and terrible murder, but he cannot reduce Othello entirely to a blunt instrument of the ensign's vengeance. Before Othello can bring himself to suffocate Desdemona, he must first delude himself into believing that he is an agent of divine justice. And even in that role his innate compassion leads him to offer his wife a moment to prepare her soul for heaven. It is true that Othello becomes angry again when Desdemona fails to confess to a crime that would have been inconceivable to her, but one of the things that makes his act pathetic rather than malicious is the fact that he continues to express his devotion for Desdemona even as he forces himself to snuff out her life. In that sense as well as in Iago's more cynical sense, then, Othello becomes "an honorable murderer." And no matter how we judge Othello's final speech and "bloody period," we have to agree with Cassio's assessment that "he was great of heart."

With *King Lear* we come to a tragedy whose pattern is without parallel in the Shakespearean canon. In all the other tragedies, despite the beauty of the benedictions that convey the protagonists to their eternal destinies, we are left at the end with a nagging sense of "purposes mistook" that might have been averted or deflected. The basic movement of the plot has been downward, and we come away feeling that we as audience have perceived something that the tragic protagonists themselves have been unable or unwilling to see. In those tragedies in which the protagonists have committed suicide, we are shown that in so doing they are wittingly or unwittingly admitting failure or surrendering to despair, notwithstanding their best efforts to keep their spirits up and evade the full consequences of the choices that have brought them to their present pass. But this is not the pattern we find in *King Lear*. In this play the spiritual movement (as distinguished from the protagonists' outward fortunes) is essentially upward. To be sure, there are terrible errors and terrifying consequences; in this play, however, we are led to believe that at least some of the pain is cathartic. There can be little doubt that both Lear and Gloucester are in some sense "better" men at the end of their lives than they were at the beginning of the action. And if the play is performed in such a way as to emphasize the degree to which the protagonists have been able to learn and grow through the endurance of tragic suffering, the audience is likely to emerge with a sense of uplift rather than with the weight of unmitigated pity and fear.

This is not to suggest, of course, that there is any less agony and tragic loss in *King Lear* than in Shakespeare's other works in the same genre. Indeed, given the play's cosmic resonance–the honored place it now holds in the tradition represented by such theodicies as the Book of Job–*King Lear* has been thought by many to evoke more existential terror than all of Shakespeare's other tragedies combined.

Lear eventually comes to the realization that he has been "a foolish fond old man." In a parallel recognition the blinded Gloucester acknowledges that he "stumbled when [he] saw." But first both fathers must feel the brunt of the savagery their earlier misdeeds have unleashed upon the world. Having abdicated his throne and divided his kingdom, Lear soon discovers that he is powerless to prevent his "pelican daughters" from joining with Gloucester's bastard son in an all-out


THE LATE,
And much admired Play,
Called
Pericles, Prince
of Tyre.
With the true Relation of the whole Historie, aduentures, and fortunes of the said Prince:
As also,
The no leſſe ſtrange, and worthy accidents,
in the Birth and Life of his Daughter
MARIANA.
As it hath been diuers and ſundry times acted by his Maieſties Seruants, at the Globe on the Banck-ſide.
By William Shakeſpeare.
Imprinted at London for Henry Gaſſon, and are to be ſold at the ſigne of the Sunne in Pater-noſter row, &c.
1609.

Title page for the 1609 quarto edition of the late romance that was omitted from the 1623 First Folio and not included in a collection of Shakespeare's works until 1664 (Bodleian Library)

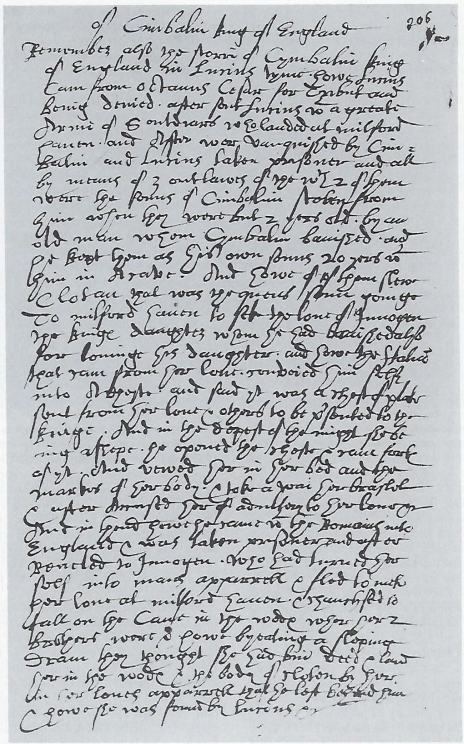
effort to devour it–and each other. Lear's faithful Fool wastes away. The loyal Kent and Edgar are reduced to "wretches." And, most insupportable of all, at the end of the play the innocent Cordelia is hanged. For Lear as he enters cradling his beloved daughter in his arms, this is the ultimate punishment for the arrogance and folly that had led him, at the beginning, to spurn and disinherit her.

But as heartrending as this concluding pietà is for any of the play's audiences, it can represent "a chance which does redeem all sorrows" if it is staged in harmony with the psychological and spiritual undulations of Lear's dying moments. Just before he says "Pray you undo this button," Lear believes that, as Kent puts it, "all's cheerless, dark, and deadly." After he says "Thank you, sir," however, Lear utters what can be read as an exclamation that by some miracle Cordelia yet lives: "Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips,/Look there, look there!" In our time these words have most often been interpreted as expressions of bleak despair. But a reading that is at least as consistent with the rest of the play is that Lear, like Gloucester, " 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,/[Bursts] smilingly."

We know, of course, that Cordelia is "dead as earth." But it seems fitting that as he dies Lear should see her as alive. If so, it may be nothing more than a merciful hallucination. It may be a desperate man's last grasp at something to sustain a flicker of faith. But it may also register an experience comparable to that of another long-suffering king, the protagonist in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. In short, it may be that Lear is here granted a last epiphany that takes him out of this "tough world" to a glimpse of something better beyond: because by the end of his long pilgrimage, in the words of T. S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*, it would seem that Lear has finally arrived at the true meaning of "nothing": "a condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything."

Near the end of Macbeth's bloody reign, as he braces for the closing in of his adversaries, he too would like to achieve a kind of simplicity: "I gin to be aweary of the sun,/And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone." But in Macbeth's case the goal to be obtained is "mere oblivion," not the brief but beatific vision of a broken old man for whom at last something has come of nothing. For, unlike Lear's, Macbeth's career has charted a downward course, from the magnificently heroic champion whom Duncan has greeted as "valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!" to the desperate tyrant whose acts of regicide and wanton slaughter have "tied [him] to a stake" as the "fiend" who must be executed to set the time "free."

As a tragic action, *Macbeth* is almost the polar opposite of *King Lear*. Whereas in *Lear* we may be inclined to feel that "death is swallowed up in victory," in *Macbeth* we feel that the protagonist's defeat is merely the prelude to final judgment and damnation. Lear's is the kind of "fortunate fall" that results from a miscalculation born of habitual self-indulgence; it forces the King to contemplate "unaccommodated man" in all his vulnerability, and it subjects him to a refining "wheel of fire" that purifies him spiritually. Macbeth's, on the other hand, is the kind of fall that results from premeditated murder in the service of "vaulting ambition." As he himself acknowledges, there are no extenuating circumstances behind which he can shield his crime, and the only change it brings about in Macbeth is tempo-



Dr. Simon Forman's description of a performance of Cymbeline *that he saw at the Globe, perhaps in 1611 (Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 208, f. 206; by permission of the Curators)*

rarily to rob him of sleep and security until, "supp'd full with horrors," he eventually loses all capacity for "the taste of fears" or any other humanizing emotion or sensation. By the final act, life for Macbeth is "but a walking shadow," "a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing."

And yet, despite his infamy, we still find it possible to participate in, and even in some fashion to identify with, Macbeth's descent into hell. In part this results from our awareness of his auspicious beginnings–our recollection of that period at the outset when we see Macbeth tempted but nevertheless resisting the promptings of the Witches and Lady Macbeth. Because Macbeth himself is aware of the heinousness of the deed he is on the verge of committing, we can sympathize with him as a man like one of us. And then, once he has taken the fatal plunge, we become parties to his inner turmoil. By means of the soliloquies and meditations that Shakespeare allows us to "overhear," we share Macbeth's torment and anxiety, his feverish desire to put out of mind that which he cannot bear to dwell upon. And thus, even though what he and Lady Macbeth do is beyond the pale of thinkable human behavior, we can still bring pity and fear to both their stories–recalling, in the words of a famous prayer, that "there, but for the grace of God, go I."

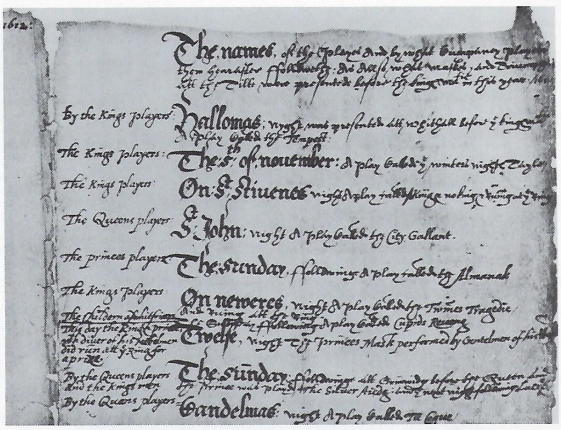
Moving from *Macbeth*'s Scotland to the Mediterranean ambience of *Antony and Cleopatra* is a culture shock so disorienting as almost to make us lose our bearings. Can the same author who gave us Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, two potent personalities who seize power and then degenerate into tremulous tyrants, so soon thereafter have created Antony and Cleopatra, two mercurial rulers who seem, at least in their grandiloquent gestures, to become increasingly engaging as their fortunes wane and they almost willfully throw their power away? And how do we graph the movement of the action in a play where at least part of the problem is to assess the relative merits of a "Roman" way of looking at things (which judges both lovers as failures because they have declined to elevate civic and military duty above all other human concerns) as opposed to an "Egyptian" way of looking at things (which is based on the premise that one should be willing, in Dryden's later phrase, to sacrifice "all for love")? Is it likely that Shakespeare expected his audience to bring a coherent "Elizabethan" perspective to bear on both ancient cultures? And if so, what would an audience viewing the play from that perspective have thought about Antony and Cleopatra?

These are the kinds of questions a reading of *Antony and Cleopatra* elicits, and the majority of its interpreters during the last three centuries have answered them in such a way as to place this second "Roman play" in a category largely its own. Noting that the "Roman" characters are bloodless and coldly calculating–particularly Octavius and his sister Octavia, whose hand Octavius gives to Antony in an effort to resolve the political differences he has been having with his slothful counterpart in Egypt–most critics and theater professionals have found them much less appealing than they do the two lovers. The consequence has been that readers and viewers have tended to see Antony and Cleopatra as the characters see themselves and thus to regard the play primarily as a dramatization of what John Donne termed "the canonization of love."

The main problem with this interpretation of the action is that it requires us to ignore the many indications, throughout the play, that both lovers are impulsive and escapist. A sentimental approach to *Antony and Cleopatra* blinds us to clues that the "new heaven and new earth" to which the lovers direct their suicides is little more than a fantasyland that they have created as a way of palliating their defeat and impending capture. We may be stirred by the magic of Enobarbus's descriptions of Cleopatra's transcendent charms, and we cannot help but admire the eloquence with which Antony and Cleopatra prepare themselves for death. But we should remember at the same time that it is relatively simple to count the world well lost if through neglect one has already handed it over to one's enemies. An apt Elizabethan gloss on *Antony and Cleopatra* might well be borrowed from Shakespeare's Sonnet 129: "All this the world well knows, yet none knows well/To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell."

Because of the vividness of its central figures and the exoticism and luxuriousness of its language, *Antony and Cleopatra* has long been one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. But nothing could be farther from the case with its successor. *Coriolanus*, the third and last of Shakespeare's mature "Roman plays," is sparing and harsh in its diction and spartan in its spectacle. And only rarely–but usually with distinction–has it been performed, even in our own production-rich century.

The hero of the play is one of the least endearing of Shakespeare's major characters. Godlike in battle, where his feats of valor and



A portion of a page for 1611-1612 from the account book of Sir George Buc, Master of the Revels, in which a scribe listed a performance of The Tempest *at Court on Hallomas (1 November) 1611 (Public Record Office, Audit Office, Accounts, Various; by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office)*

leadership are so extraordinary as to seem Herculean, Coriolanus becomes a veritable beast when called upon to participate in the civic affairs of early republican Rome. His contempt for the moblike plebeians is exceeded only by his hatred of the tribunes and senators who play the soldier-general and the common people off against one another. Coriolanus refuses to flatter anyone for any reason, and he lashes out at the hypocrisy required of him when he is told that he must bare his wounds and beg for the "voices" of the citizens in order to be elected tribune, an office he has not sought and a responsibility he makes clear he does not want. Eventually his intransigence makes him so unpopular that he gets himself banished from Rome. To which he offers an arch retort that is perfectly in character: "I banish you!"

Confident that "there is a world elsewhere," Coriolanus departs from the city as "a lonely dragon." But soon, to the astonishment and terror of his former fellows, he joins forces with Rome's arch-enemies, the Volscians. In the final movement of the play we see him lead an army to the gates of Rome that threatens to destroy the Empire in its infancy. But at this point Coriolanus's mother, Volumnia, intervenes and pleads with the hero to spare his native city for her sake. Reluctantly, and with a premonition that his decision will prove fatal to him, Coriolanus accedes to his mother's request. Then, cunningly provoked to one last intemperate outburst by the foxlike Volscian general Aufidius, who calls him a "boy of tears," Coriolanus brings down upon himself the wrathful hordes of the Volscians he has just betrayed.

Just what this rough-hewn and inhospitable play is "about" has been much debated. But critics as varied as T. S. Eliot and Frank Kermode, and actors as distinguished as Laurence Olivier and Alan Howard, have shown that it can be a challenging and at times a thrilling dramatic achievement. In all likelihood it will receive more attention–and admiration–in the future than it

John Lowin, who joined Shakespeare's company in 1603 and became shareholder in the King's Men in 1604 (Dulwich College, by permission of the Governors). By tradition Lowin was the first actor to play Henry VIII and took over the role of Falstaff in the Henry IV plays.

has tended to receive in the past.

Whether this will be true of Shakespeare's final experiment in tragedy, *Timon of Athens,* is less certain. Derived, like the three major Roman plays, primarily from Plutarch's *Lives, Timon of Athens* is generally regarded as a play that the author left unfinished. There is no record of its having been performed in Shakespeare's lifetime, and it has only appeared sporadically (and seldom notably) in the centuries since.

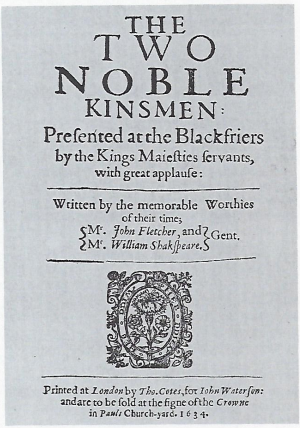
As a character, Timon has affinities with Lear and Coriolanus. Like Lear, he comes to think of himself as a victim of ingratitude, a man "more sinned against than sinning." And, like Coriolanus, he responds to his mistreatment by "banishing" all society from his presence. Unlike either character, however, Timon is incapable of growth or compromise. Once he has spurned the "friends" who have refused to help him with the creditors his excessive generosity has brought to the door, Timon retreats to a cave and disregards every entreaty to concern himself with his fellow man. His foil, Alcibiades, can forgive Athens its injustices and return to save the city from ruin. But Timon elects to spend the rest of his life in solitude, cursing all of humanity with an invective that eventually becomes tedious in the extreme.

Critics such as G. Wilson Knight and Rolf Soellner have argued valiantly for the poetic and theatrical merits of *Timon of Athens.* But thus far their adherents have proven only slightly more numerous than the followers of Timon himself. Original the play may be; but few have come to praise it as a fully realized work of dramatic art.

After *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens,* Shakespeare seems to have shifted his focus again. He wrote no more tragedies, so far as we know, and the single "history play" that appeared was so different from his previous efforts in that genre that it seems to belong to the realm of romance rather than to the world of ordinary political and social interaction. And indeed "romance" is now the generic term most frequently applied to the mature tragicomedies that critics once referred to somewhat loosely as "the Late Plays." If we include *Henry VIII* in their number, there are six surviving works that qualify as late romances. One of them, *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* we know to have been written by Shakespeare in collaboration with his fellow dramatist John Fletcher. Two others, *Pericles* and *Henry VIII,* are also regarded by many scholars as likely to have resulted from joint authorship–as was evidently the case, too, with the lost *Cardenio,* attributed to Shakespeare and Fletcher in a Stationers' Register entry of 1753. Which leaves us with three plays–*Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest*–that are unanimously accepted as works entirely by Shakespeare.

Since all but one of the Late Plays (*Pericles,* which seems to have been completed in 1606-1608) appeared after Shakespeare's company added the Blackfriars as a venue for performance–and since even that work may have been written with indoor staging in view (we know that *Pericles* was presented at Court sometime between January 1606 and November 1608)–it seems eminently possible, as Gerald Eades Bentley has suggested, that Shakespeare's modifications in dramaturgical style resulted, at least in part, from changes in emphasis by the King's Men. If Shakespeare and his colleagues were easing away from total dependence on the comparatively broad-based audiences they had long attracted to the Globe and were beginning to cast their fortunes more confidently with the aristocratic clientele they served at Court or would be able to cultivate at the private Blackfriars theater, they may well have begun to rethink their dramatic repertory. Under these circumstances, Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders could readily have arrived at a determination to concentrate on offerings such as their more well-to-do audiences had grown accustomed to seeing: masquelike entertainments of the sort that Court patronage encouraged, and mythological and fanciful diversions of the type that the children's companies had made their specialty in indoor halls like the Blackfriars.

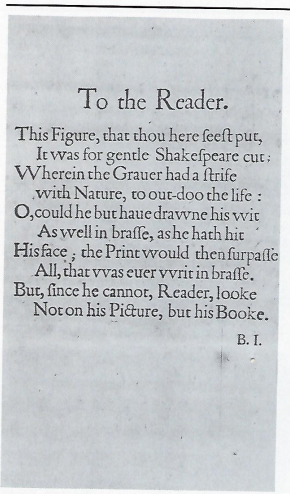
In any event, the sequence of dramatic works initiated by *Pericles* is strikingly different in many respects from the sequence that preceded it. Relying as many of them do on such devices as a choral "presenter" (Gower in *Pericles,* or Time in *The Winter's Tale*) to narrate background incidents, the romances tend to be rambling and panoramic by comparison with the earlier plays (the salient exception being *The Tempest,* which is unusually focused in time, place, and action). Frequently, they contain incidents that are wildly implausible (as when Antigonus exits "pursued by a bear" in *The Winter's Tale*), and most of them draw heavily on storms, shipwrecks, and other violently disruptive "acts of God" to move the action forward. Families are separated at sea, left to wander for years in adversity, and then miraculously reunited at the close. Symbolically named children (Marina in *Pericles,* Perdita in *The Winter's Tale,* Miranda in *The Tempest*) function dramatically as instruments of special grace, restoring faith and vision to parents who have temporarily


THE
TWO
NOBLE
KINSMEN:
Presented at the Blackfriers
by the Kings Maiesties servants,
with great applause:

Written by the memorable Worthies
of their time;
M^r. *John Fletcher*, and
M^r. *William Shakspeare*. Gent.

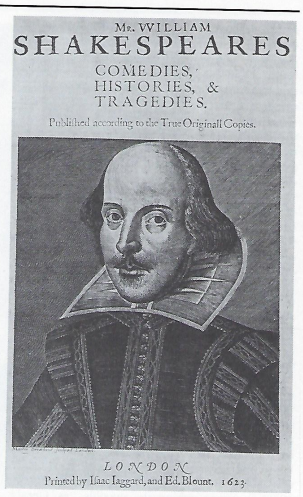
Printed at *London* by *Tho. Cotes*, for *John Waterson*:
and are to be sold at the signe of the *Crowne*
in *Paul's* Church-yard. 1634.

Title page for the 1634 quarto edition of a play that Shakespeare wrote with the playwright who succeeded him as chief dramatist for the King's Men (Maggs Bros., catalogue number 493, 1927)


To the Reader.

This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut:
Wherein the Grauer had a strife
with Nature, to out-doo the life:
O, could he but haue drawne his wit
As well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face; the Print would then surpasse
All, that was euer writ in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

B. I.

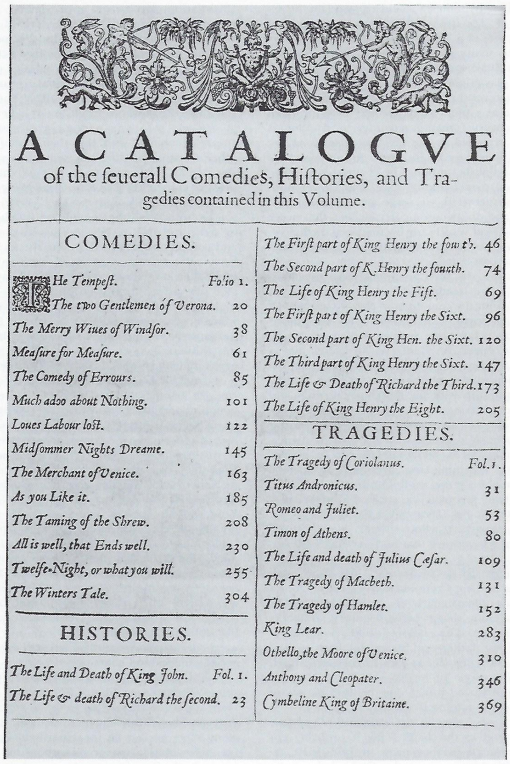

M^r. WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARES
COMEDIES,
HISTORIES, &
TRAGEDIES.
Published according to the True Originall Copies.

LONDON
Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

Note to the reader by Ben Jonson and title page for the First Folio (Folger Shakespeare Library). The engraved portrait is by Martin Droeshout the younger, who was fifteen when Shakespeare died and twenty-two when this volume was published. Droeshout is unlikely to have drawn Shakespeare from life and probably worked from a drawing given to him. It has been pointed out that the volume's editors, John Heminge and Henry Condell–both shareholders in Shakespeare's company–accepted the portrait for inclusion in the volume, though the fact that it was twice revised during the printing of the First Folio indicates that it was considered to be less than perfect.

lost their way. Terrible calamities are but narrowly averted, and then only because of sudden reversals that depend either upon some character's astonishing change of heart or upon an inexplicable visitation from above. Rather than conceal their artifice, the romances tend to display it openly, on the one hand reminding the audience that what it is witnessing is only make-believe, on the other hand manipulating viewers' responses so as to prepare the audience for some climactic "wonder" toward which the entire sequence has been directed.

The first three acts of *Pericles* seem so naive dramaturgically that many scholars consider them to be by a playwright other than Shakespeare. Among the contemporaries whose names have been proposed for the dubious honor of collaborator in accordance with this hypothesis is George Wilkins, whose novel *The Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre* appeared in the same year (1608) as the entry for *Pericles* in the Stationers' Register. All we know for certain is that the play was first published in 1609 in a relatively crude quarto that was reprinted several times before *Pericles* made its initial folio entry when it was added to the second issue of the Third Folio in 1664. Just why *Pericles* was not included in the First Folio has never been determined. Its omission may have had something to do with the poor condition of the only available text. Or it may have stemmed from the assumption that the play was not completely by Shakespeare. The sec-


A CATALOGVE
of the seuerall Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume.

COMEDIES.

HISTORIES.

TRAGEDIES.

Table of contents for the First Folio (Folger Shakespeare Library). In addition to the plays listed here the volume contains Troilus and Cressida.

ond of these hypotheses would also explain the exclusion of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (though of course it would not explain the *in*clusion of *Henry VIII* if, as many scholars believe, that too was a play that Shakespeare wrote in collaboration with another playwright).

Whatever the case, *Pericles* is immediately recognizable as a point of departure. Drawing from a fifth-century romantic narrative by Apollonius of Tyre as retold in the *Confessio Amantis* of the fourteenth-century English poet John Gower, the play is studiously "antique" in its apparently unsophisticated presentational style. Old Gower himself is resurrected to serve as the barnacled chorus, and the singsong tetrameters that serve as the metrical vehicle for his medieval diction remove the play's events from the present to a dreamlike past more suited to fairy lore than to realistic fiction. In such an atmosphere the audience is more readily induced to suspend its disbelief–with the consequence that we become vicarious participants in episode after episode as the hero's adventures convey him from youth (when he solves the riddle of Antiochus and is immediately forced to flee for his life upon disclosing his knowledge of the wicked King's incestuous relationship with his daughter) through old age (when, having been reduced almost to despair by decades of wandering and loss, Pericles is miraculously rejoined with his radiant daughter, Marina). As we allow ourselves to be hypnotized into accepting the premises of such a providential universe, we fall under the spell of a "moldy tale" peopled by such characters as a wicked stepmother (Dionyza), a Bawd, and a Governor (Lysimachus) who becomes so enraptured by Marina's innocence that he forswears a life bedimmed by vice.

Pericles' final "awakening" has often been compared to Lear's reunion with Cordelia. And a lovely lyric ("Marina") by T. S. Eliot is eloquent in its testimony that twentieth-century audiences can still be moved by a beloved child's power to regenerate her father and renew his faith in life. Until recently *Pericles* has rarely been performed, but as the magic of its marvels becomes more widely appreciated it may one day find its way to a more secure footing in the repertory.

Such may also be the case with *Cymbeline*. First printed in the 1623 Folio, it probably enjoyed its initial performances in 1609-1610, either at Blackfriars or at the Globe (where the physician Dr. Simon Forman saw it, probably in 1611). Its historical frame, featuring a pre-Christian monarch from approximately the same era as King Lear, Shakespeare derived primarily from Holinshed's *Chronicles*. In this portion of the play, wherein Cymbeline at first refuses and then later volunteers Britain's annual tribute to Emperor Augustus Caesar, Shakespeare adumbrates the commingling of British and Roman traits that Renaissance Englishmen believed to be at the root of their nation's greatness. Shakespeare combined with this theme a number of other romantic motifs, his sources varying from Boccaccio's *Decameron* to a pair of anonymous plays of the 1580s, *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* and *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*. The result is a romantic tragicomedy unusually episodic in structure and so bewildering in the rapidity and complexity of its concluding disclosures as to leave an audience wondering how any agency other than providence could possibly have untangled the various strands of the plot.

At the heart of the play is Imogen, a woman of exemplary chastity whose foolhardy husband Posthumus allows himself to be tricked into thinking that she has been seduced by a braggart named Iachimo. Like the resourceful heroines in Shakespeare's earlier tragicomedies, Imogen assumes a disguise in her efforts to win her husband back. In time her circumstances bring her to the cave where Cymbeline's long-lost sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, have been reared in rustic exile by an old lord, Belarius, whom the King had unjustly banished. She casts her lot with them and becomes a participant in Britain's war against Rome. Once the conflict is over, the King and his sons are reunited in the same denouement in which Posthumus recognizes Imogen as his "most constant wife." And in a reconciliation scene that carries overtones of the Augustan "pax Romana" under which Christ was born, Cymbeline announces that "Pardon's the word to all." Evil has been exorcised (Cymbeline's "bad angels," his wicked Queen and her doltish son Cloten, have died), and the wayward characters who survive have all experienced enlightenment and contrition.

Enlightenment and contrition are prerequisite to the happy ending of *The Winter's Tale*, too. Here again a husband falls victim to vengeful jealousy, and here again the plot builds up to the moment when he can be forgiven the folly that, so far as he knows, has brought about his innocent wife's death. Based primarily on Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, a prose romance first published in 1588 and reprinted under a

new title in 1607, *The Winter's Tale* was probably completed in 1610 or 1611. Its initial appearance in print was in the 1623 Folio.

The action begins when Leontes, King of Sicilia, is seized with the "humour" that his wife Hermione has committed adultery with his childhood friend Polixenes. It is abundantly clear to everyone else, most notably Hermione's lady-in-waiting Paulina, that Leontes' suspicions are irrational. But he refuses to listen either to the counsel of his advisers or to the oracle at Delphi–persisting with this "trial" of Hermione until he has completely devastated his court. He drives Polixenes away with the faithful Sicilian lord Camillo; he frightens to death his son Mamilius; and he pursues Hermione so unrelentingly that she finally wilts into what Paulina declares to be a fatal swoon. At this point, suddenly recognizing that he has been acting like a madman, Leontes vows to do penance for the remainder of his life.

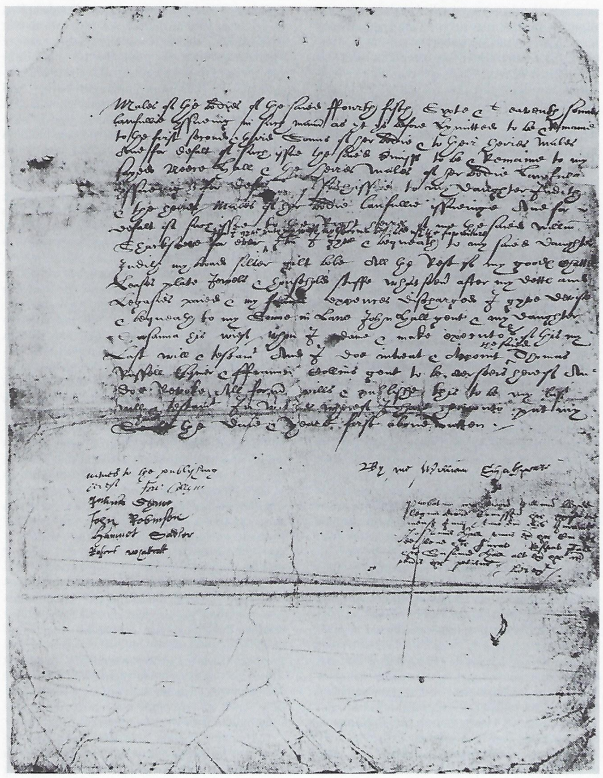
Years later, after Perdita (the "lost" child whom the raging Leontes has instructed Paulina's husband Antigonus to expose to the elements) has grown up and fallen in love with Florizel, the heir to Polixenes' throne in Bohemia, the major characters are providentially regathered in Leontes' court. Leontes is reunited with his daughter. And then, in one of the most stirring and unexpected moments in all of Shakespeare's works, a statue of Hermione that Paulina unveils turns out to be the living–and forgiving–Queen whom Leontes had "killed" some sixteen years previously. In a speech that might well serve to epitomize the import of all the late romances, Paulina tells the King "It is requir'd/You do awake your faith." The regenerated Leontes embraces his long-lamented wife, bestows the widowed Paulina on the newly returned Camillo, and blesses the forthcoming marriage of Perdita to the son of his old friend Polixenes, the object of the jealousy with which the whole agonizing story has begun.

The circle that is completed in *The Winter's Tale* has its counterpart in *The Tempest*, which concludes with the marriage of Prospero's daughter Miranda to Ferdinand, the son of the Neapolitan king who had helped Prospero's wicked brother Antonio remove Prospero from his dukedom in Milan a dozen years previously.

Like *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* was completed by 1611 and printed for the first time in the 1623 Folio. Because it refers to the "still-vext Bermoothes" and derives in part from three accounts of the 1609 wreck of a Virginia-bound ship called the *Sea Adventure*, the play has long been scrutinized for its supposed commentary on the colonial exploitation of the New World. But if the brute Caliban is not the noble savage of Montaigne's essay on cannibals, he is probably not intended to be an instance of Third World victimization by European imperialism either. And Prospero's island is at least as Mediterranean as it is Caribbean. More plausible, but also too speculative for uncritical acceptance, is the time-honored supposition that the magician's staff with which Prospero wields his power is meant to be interpreted as an analogy for Shakespeare's own magical gifts–with the corollary that the protagonist's abjuration of his "potent art" is the dramatist's own way of saying farewell to the theater. Were it not that at least two plays were almost certainly completed later than *The Tempest*, this latter hypothesis might win more credence.

But be that as it may, there can be no doubt that Prospero cuts a magnificent figure on the Shakespearean stage. At times, when he is recalling the usurpation that has placed him and his daughter on the island they have shared with Caliban for a dozen lonely years, Prospero is reminiscent of Lear, another angry ruler who, despite his earlier indiscretions, has cause to feel more sinned against than sinning. At other times, when Prospero is using the spirit Ariel to manipulate the comings and goings of the enemies whose ship he has brought aground in a tempest, the once and future Duke of Milan reminds us of the Duke of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*. But though his influence on the lives of others turns out in the end to have been "providential," Prospero arrives at that beneficent consummation only through a psychological and spiritual process that turns on his forswearing "vengeance" in favor of the "rarer action" of forgiveness. Such dramatic tension as the play possesses is to be found in the audience's suspense over whether the protagonist will use his Neoplatonic magic for good or for ill. And when in fact Prospero has brought the "men of sin" to a point where they must confront themselves as they are and beg forgiveness for their crimes, it is paradoxically Ariel who reminds his master that to be truly human is finally to be humane.

Uniquely among the late tragicomic romances, *The Tempest* has long been a favorite with both readers and audiences. Its ardent young lovers have always held their charm, as has the effervescent Ariel, and its treatment of the temptations afforded by access to transcendent power gives it a political and religious resonance com-



The last page of Shakespeare's will, written by lawyer Francis Collins or his scribe in January 1616 and revised in March, when Shakespeare signed each of the three pages (Public Record Office, Principal Probate Registry, Selected Wills, Prob. ¼ ; by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office)

mensurate with the profundity of its exploration of the depths of poetic and dramatic art. In the end its burden seems to be that an acknowledgment of the limits imposed by the human condition is the beginning of wisdom.

The last of the plays attributed wholly to Shakespeare by its inclusion in the First Folio, where it first achieved print, is *Henry VIII*. Modern stylistic analyses have called Shakespeare's sole authorship into question, of course, but since the case for collaboration has never been definitively proven we may do just as well to proceed on the assumption that *Henry VIII* was mostly if not entirely a play for which the playwright was responsible. Its theatrical history has had more ups and downs than is true of many of Shakespeare's other dramatic works (the most notable occurrence on the down side being the accident during its earliest recorded performance, on 29 June 1613, that burned the Globe to the ground), and its critical reception, like that of *Troilus and Cressida*, has been complicated by debates about the play's genre.

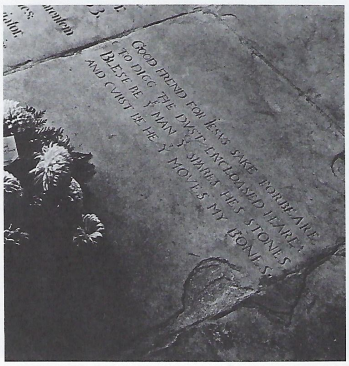
In many respects *Henry VIII* seems to be the capstone to Shakespeare's nine earlier English history plays. It focuses on kingship as the key to a nation's political and social stability, and it glorifies the Tudor dynasty as God's means of bringing peace, prosperity, and empire to an England whose greatness had reached new heights during the reigns of the two monarchs under whom Shakespeare had served. Fittingly, the play's "final cause" is the birth of Elizabeth, the "royal infant" whose advent, according to the prophecy uttered by Archbishop Cranmer at the end of the play, "promises/Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings." But, as is so often true in Shakespeare, it also offers the audience a topical glance at an event of contemporary significance, the February 1613 wedding of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of King James I and his Queen, to Frederick, the Elector of Palatine.

Like the earlier English history plays, *Henry VIII* is epic in its scope and in its patriotic impulse. And like them, it reflects Shakespeare's interest in the grand themes of English historiography, as derived not only from the 1587 second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* but also from other sources as varied as John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563) and John Speed's *History of Great Britain* (1611). In its earliest performances the play even seems to have had an alternate title, *All is True*, to assert its fidelity to the essence of its historical subject matter. But a close examination of its way of treating that matter will indicate that *Henry VIII* is more "cosmic" than the history plays that preceded it–a play that presents the events it dramatizes almost solely in the light of eternity.

Though the King is not without his faults, he is portrayed more positively in Shakespeare than he had usually been depicted by historians prior to *Henry VIII*. During the first half of the play the bluff Henry may be misled by his "bad angel" Cardinal Wolsey; but the King's intentions are noble, and after Wolsey's discomfiture he evolves into a creditable exemplar of God's deputy. Meanwhile, there is an unmistakable emphasis on providential design throughout the play. The action is structured around a succession of "trials," each of which serves to test a character's mettle and to induce in him or her a new degree of self-knowledge, humility, faith, and compassion. Buckingham is framed by Wolsey's machinations, but as he proceeds to his execution he forgives his enemies and blesses the King who has condemned him. Katherine, another of Wolsey's victims, pleads eloquently and forcibly in her own defense; but once her fate is settled, she resigns herself with patience to the destiny prepared for her and goes so far as to express pity for her archenemy Wolsey. And once he recognizes that there is no escape from the noose he has unwittingly prepared for himself, Wolsey himself dies penitent and "never so happy." In each instance death is swallowed up in a victory of sorts, and the sequence as a whole reinforces the audience's sense that even in the often-brutal arena of English history all's well that ends well.

Perhaps the best way to describe *Henry VIII* is to call it a tragicomic historical romance. But whatever it is generically, it is a play that offers a plenitude of majestic pageantry. As the 1979 BBC television production reminded us, it is Shakespeare's version of *Masterpiece Theatre*.

Whether or not it is the last play in which Shakespeare had a hand, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is the last surviving instance of his dramaturgy. With but a handful of exceptions, modern scholars regard the play as a collaborative effort in which the guiding hand may have been John Fletcher's rather than William Shakespeare's. It was probably completed in 1613, and its first appearance in print was in a quarto edition of 1634 that attributed it to both playwrights. It was reprinted in the Beaumont and Fletcher second folio of 1679, but it never appeared in any of the



The Shakespeare Monument (top) and grave (bottom) in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon. The monument was made by Gheerart Janssen, a stonemason from Amsterdam whose name was anglicized to Gerard Johnson and who may have been acquainted with Shakespeare.

seventeenth-century folios of Shakespeare's dramatic works.

The play is a dramatization of Geoffrey Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" about two cousins, Palamon and Arcite, who come to blows as a consequence of their both having fallen in love with the same damsel, Emilia. Like the other late romances of Shakespeare, it has a remote Mediterranean setting (ancient Thebes and Athens), it invokes the gods for intervention in human affairs, and it depends for its effects on scenes of grand pageantry such as the wedding procession of Theseus and Hippolyta. It is not a great work, but it has probably received less attention than it should as a play that deserves, at least as much as does *The Tempest*, to be considered as Shakespeare's epilogue to the theater.

Tradition holds that Shakespeare returned to Stratford for his declining years, and three years after the burning of the Globe his own flame went out. Following his death on 23 April 1616, he was laid to rest where fifty-two years earlier he had been christened. Shortly thereafter, a monument to his memory was erected above the tomb in Holy Trinity, and that monument is still in place for Shakespeare admirers to see today. But an even greater monument to his memory appeared seven years later, when his theatrical colleagues, John Heminge and Henry Condell (both of whom had been mentioned in the playwright's will) assembled a large volume of his collected plays. The 1623 First Folio was a labor of love, compiled as "an office to the dead, to procure his orphans guardians" and "to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive as was our Shakespeare."

Our Shakespeare. It is not without exaggeration that the book that preserves what is probably his most reliable portrait and the most authoritative versions of the majority of his dramatic texts (indeed the *only* surviving versions of half of them) has been called "incomparably the most important work in the English language." In the words and actions that fill his poems and plays, in the performances that enrich our theaters and silver screens, in the countless offshoots to be found in other works of art, and in the influence the playwright continues to have on virtually every aspect of popular culture throughout the world, now as much as in the age of Elizabeth and James, Shakespeare lives.

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Papers:

The Booke of Sir Thomas More (a play probably written principally by Anthony Munday, with revisions by Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle, William Shakespeare, and possibly Thomas Heywood) survives in a manuscript now at the British Library (Harleian MS. 7368). Most scholars now believe that two brief passages are Shakespeare's work, circa 1594-1595, and that one of them represents the only surviving example of a literary or dramatic manuscript in Shakespeare's own hand. For a convenient summary of *Sir Thomas More* and the evidence linking it with Shakespeare, see G. Blakemore Evans's discussion of the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp. 1683-1700; and Scott McMillin's *The Elizabethan Theatre &* The Book of Sir Thomas More.