

Dictionary of Literary Biography

Yearbook: 1985

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Edited by
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Taylor-Made Shakespeare? Or Is "Shall I Die?" the Long-Lost Text of Bottom's Dream?

John F. Andrews

As 1985 drew to a close the burning question among students of the English Renaissance was whether or not the Shakespeare canon had been enlarged by its first new entry since the seventeenth century.

In mid-November, while checking manuscript references in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, a young American named Gary L. Taylor happened upon a poem attributed to Shakespeare in a manuscript miscellany apparently dating from the 1630s. Although other scholars of Elizabethan

literature had examined Rawlinson Poetic Manuscript 160 in the past, and at least two Bodleian cataloguers (Falconer Madan in 1895 and Margaret Crum in 1969) had noted the attribution to Shakespeare of an untitled lyric beginning "Shall I die," no one before had ever seen any reason to make a fuss over the poem, and hence no one had reprinted or discussed it. For many a researcher, this would have suggested that the poem was probably nothing more than another contemporary work erroneously ascribed or deliberately misascribed to Shakespeare. But Gary Taylor is not just another researcher.

During his seven years as Joint General Editor of the new Oxford edition of Shakespeare's complete works, Taylor has moved increasingly to the vanguard of the current effort to demand a fresh look at all the poems and plays. In 1983 he appeared in print as one of the principals behind *The Division of the Kingdom*, a collection of essays in support of coeditor Michael Warren's 1976 thesis that *King Lear* can no longer be approached as a single, conflated text (as it has been presented to readers in virtually every edition since the eighteenth century) but must now be viewed instead as two separate texts: an early version of the play published in the 1608 First Quarto, and a later, revised version published in the 1623 First Folio. Warren and Taylor's views about *King Lear* will be reflected in the two-text edition of Shakespeare's tragedy to be included in the forthcoming Oxford complete works. Meanwhile, in another departure from editorial tradition, Taylor announced in a 1984 paper at Stratford's International Shakespeare Conference that the Oxford edition of *Henry IV, Part 1* will restore Sir John Oldcastle to the role the dramatist had originally written for him, even though Falstaff will continue to be the name the same character bears in the Oxford texts for *Henry IV, Part 2*, *Henry V*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

In light of this background, one is hardly surprised to learn that the Oxford Shakespeare will



A portrait of Shakespeare engraved by Martin Droeshout for the title page of the 1623 First Folio (Folger Shakespeare Library)

probably also be the first collection of the playwright's works to contain the Bodleian poem that Gary Taylor declared to be by Shakespeare in a 24 November 1985 front-page story in the *New York Times*.

According to the *Times* report, Taylor believes "Shall I die?" to be a "technical exercise" from the years (1593-1595) when Shakespeare was writing such plays as *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Love's Labor's Lost*. It was during this period in his career that the playwright published his two long narrative poems, "Venus and Adonis" (1593) and "The Rape of Lucrece" (1594), and many scholars believe that it was also at this time that he wrote most if not all of his sonnets.

Taylor has analyzed the vocabulary of "Shall I die?" with particular attention to its rhyming words, and he finds strong parallels with Shakespeare generally and with the works of Shakespeare's early period in particular. Together with the other evidence he presented in a 15 December article in the *New York Times Book Review*, these parallels persuade Taylor that the poem is much more likely to have been written by Shakespeare than by, say, Spenser, and is much more likely to have been written prior to 1596 than subsequent to that date. Among other things, Taylor analyzes "Shall I die?" for the frequency with which it employs rare words, including several words or word forms not previously recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. On the basis of this analysis, he concludes that the lyric parallels Shakespeare's other works not only in its use of rare words characteristic of Shakespeare but also in its use of words that appear nowhere else in the canon. "Paradoxically," he says, "if a poem of any length does not contain words that Shakespeare never used elsewhere, then that poem cannot be by Shakespeare."

Taylor makes no extravagant claims for the literary merit of "Shall I die?" "It's not *Hamlet*," he admits. But he thinks it considerably better than do many of the lyric's outspoken detractors. He describes "Shall I die?" as "a kind of verbal obstacle course in which one of every three syllables is a rhyme." "If the effort to rhyme distorts the syntax and weakens the sense in places," Taylor says, we must remember that "Shakespeare's rhymed poetry is often awkward and much of the rhyme in the plays was once dismissed as spurious because it is awkward." A poem as "artificial" as "Shall I die?" was probably "as admirable to Elizabethan critical taste as it seems perverse to ours."

If "Shall I die?" is in fact a lyric by Shakespeare,

it is at the very least an anomaly, with its unusual structure (nine ten-line stanzas with an *abedefghij* rhyme scheme, the end-rhyming third and sixth lines only half the length of the trochaic tetrameters used elsewhere in each stanza), its rapid-fire delivery of internal rhymes ("Yet I must vent my lust"), its uneven rhythms ("If she scorn, I mourn"), its crabbed phrasing ("Thin lips red, fancy's fed/With all sweets when he meets"), and its frequent banality ("If she scorn I mourn/I retire to despair, joying never"). Taylor explains it as "a kind of virtuoso piece, a kind of early Mozart" composition. The University of Maryland's S. Schoenbaum agrees. In a 24 November *New York Times* sidebar, Schoenbaum classifies "Shall I die?" as one of Shakespeare's occasional poems. "It is artificial in the largest sense of the word," he says. "It is extremely ingenious in its rhyme scheme, it has seductive qualities, ironies, a mixture of moods, the rich complexities that you don't often find in this period. And it's different—who else could have written it if not Shakespeare?"

Other readers have been less generous in their appraisals. According to the 24 November *New York Times*, scholar and publisher Robert Giroux regards the poem as at best "adolescent." "If it is Shakespeare's," he is quoted as saying, "I can see why he never published it." Similar sentiments are expressed in the 9 December story about "Shall I die?" in *Time* magazine. The University of Chicago's David Bevington describes Taylor's find as "a really bad poem, a piece of doggerel." Princeton's Alvin Kernan confesses that the poem "does not sound much like Shakespeare to me." And Columbia's Frank Kermode says, "True, Shakespeare wrote some bad poems, but the way this one is bad is not similar in any fashion to the way Shakespeare was bad." Meanwhile, writing in the 22 December issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, Anthony Burgess invokes "the subtle testimony of the ear to argue that 'Mr. Taylor's poetic discovery' is not Shakespeare but 'the work of an Elizabethan songwriter, a man who has either devised a lyric to be set to music or, with no such intention, is nevertheless haunted by the sound of song.'"

Gary Taylor has insisted that his case for the authenticity of "Shall I die?" be tested, not on the basis of the lyric's poetic quality (a criterion by which "much of Shakespeare's work would be relegated to the foot of the page"), but on the strength of the internal and external evidence he has marshaled in support of the Rawlinson manuscript's attribution to Shakespeare. Such a position was

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bound to attract challengers, and several scholars have already entered the lists with arguments to counter those advanced by Taylor.

In the 20 December issue of London's *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), for example, Robin Robbins raises fundamental questions about Taylor's methods of literary detection. He points out, among other things, that Taylor appears to be guilty of the "salmons in both" fallacy, the assumption that because two literary samples are similar to one another in certain respects, they are similar in all essential respects and for the same reasons. In response to Taylor's list of phrases and rhyme pairs paralleling "Shall I die?" to other works by Shakespeare, Robbins offers an equally persuasive list of parallels from the poetry of Edmund Spenser, Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and Sir Philip Sidney. And in response to Taylor's claim that the parallels he has identified establish a prima facie

case for Shakespeare's authorship, Robbins notes that there could be other explanations for such parallels even if they more closely resembled Shakespeare's works than those of any of his contemporaries, particularly if the manuscript in question is late enough for its compiler to have included works by poets consciously or unconsciously imitating Shakespeare's stylistic characteristics.

In the 27 December issue of *TLS*, I. A. Shapiro of the University of Birmingham carries Robbins's arguments a step further. "If it could be claimed that the poem's vocabulary and other characteristics could be paralleled only, or even almost only, in Shakespeare's acknowledged works," says Shapiro, "then we would have to weigh seriously the ascription" in the Rawlinson manuscript. "But such a claim will immediately be laughed at by anyone familiar with the verse and drama of 1580-1660." Shapiro demonstrates that two of the words

Another Untitled Anapestic Center Conjecturally (though unreliably) attributed to Taylor the Water-Scholar

1
Shall I say that, today,
What I took from a book
is in the bodley
Is the work of a jerk?
Or would Will, with his quill,
write thus oddly?
There's his name—can I claim
That this sounds like a genuine poem?
Like a shot! And why not?
I'm an editor, aren't I? I'll show 'em!

2
Not a portion of caution
I'll use, but my views
I'll state proudly—
And I guess that the press
Will turn out, if I shout
very loudly,
I'll add fame to my name,
And the glory will bring much enjoyment—
And just think how the stink
That I'll raise will help get me employment!

(Several illegible stanzas here omitted)

3
I'll concede that the creed
(If it is really his)
is his oddest,
But I'll huff and I'll puff
(With a touch—though not much—
that sounds modest),
And I'll muster such bluster
That soon with my brass I'll surround it.
I've got clout—who can doubt
That it's genuine? (Given who found it.)

4
There'll be those who oppose:
Who will say that I may
be too hasty,
But the name of the game
Is the fame that I'll claim—
and that's tasty!
Wait and see? Not for me:
When you're job-hunting, caution's a drawback.
No, my word must be heard—
And the burden of proof is on your back!

Chr. Marlowe

Parody of the poem in question, posted at the Duke University English Department

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The Poem

1
Shall I die? Shall I fly
Lovers' baits and deceits,
sorrow breeding?
Shall I tend? Shall I send?
Shall I sue, and not rue
my proceeding?
In all duty her beauty
Binds me her servant for ever.
If she scorn, I mourn,
I retire to despair, joying never.

2
Yet I must vent my lust,
And explain inward pain
by my love breeding.
If she smiles, she exiles
All my moan; if she frown,
all my hopes deceiving—
Suspicious doubt, O keep out,
For thou art my tormentor.
Fly away, pack away;
I will love, for hope bids me venture.

3
'Twere abuse to accuse
My fair love, ere I prove
her affection.
Therefore try! Her reply
Gives thee joy—or annoy,
or affliction.
Yet however, I will bear
Her pleasure with patience, for beauty
Sure [will] not seem to blot
Her deserts, wronging him doth her duty.

4
In a dream it did seem—
But alas, dreams do pass
as do shadows—
I did walk, I did talk
With my love, with my dove,
through fair meadows.
Still we passed till at last
We sat to repose us for our pleasure.
Being set, lips met,
Arms twined, and did bind my heart's treasure.

5
Gentle wind sport did find
Wantonly to make fly
her gold tresses,
As they shook I did look,
But her fair did impair

all my senses.
As amazed, I gazed
On more than a mortal complexion.
[Them] that love can prove
Such force in beauty's inflection.

6
Next her hair, forehead fair,
Smooth and high; next doth lie,
without wrinkle,
Her fair brows; under those
Star-like eyes win love's prize
when they twinkle.
In her cheeks who seeks
Shall find there displayed beauty's banner;
Oh admiring desiring
Breeds, as I look still upon her.

7
Thin lips red, fancy's fed
With all sweets when he meets,
and is granted
There to trade, and is made
Happy, sure, to endure
still undaunted.
Pretty chin doth win
Of all [the world] commendations;
Fairest neck, no speck;
All her parts merit high admirations.

8
A pretty bare, spot compare,
Parts those plots which besots
still asunder.
It is meet naught but sweet
Should come near that so rare
'tis a wonder.
No mishap, no scape
Inferior to nature's perfection;
No blot, no spot;
She's beauty's queen in election.

9
Whilst I dreamt, I, exempt
[From] all care, seemed to share
pleasures in plenty;
But awake, care take—
For I find to my mind
pleasures scanty.
Therefore I will try
To compass my heart's chief contenting.
To delay, some say,
In such a case causeth repenting.

Poem from the Rawlinson Poetic Manuscript 160 that Gary Taylor attributes to Shakespeare

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Taylor identifies as Shakespearean "neologisms" (because they had not been recorded prior to 1596 in the *OED*) can be found earlier than the presumed date for "Shall I die?" in poems by Marlowe and Spenser, and he says that a thorough survey of the extant literature of the period would also eliminate a good number of additional words and usages now regarded as having been first employed by Shakespeare. Like Robbins, Shapiro suggests that much of Taylor's argument is either naive or circular.

Meanwhile, though he professes himself to be uninterested in "taking sides in the debate on the authorship of 'Shall I die?'" Peter Beal cast further doubt on Taylor's claims in a letter published in the 3 January 1986 *TLS*. Taylor asks us to base much of our confidence in the Rawlinson attribution for "Shall I die?" on the assurance that "fifty other poems in the manuscript are attributed to specific authors; none of those other attributions are demonstrably wrong, most are demonstrably right, and only two ambiguous initials are even dubious." Like Robbins, Beal points out that in fact one of the Rawlinson poems, "Sir Walter Raleigh's Pilgrimage," has "long been rejected from the Raleigh canon," and that several others, including one ascription to Donne, are either "suspect" or uncertain. He goes on to note that there are a number of reasons, quite apart from any transcriber's "motives," for poems to get misascribed in manuscript miscellanies. Among his suggestions for "Shall I die?" is the possibility that the lyric was a song introduced in some early-seventeenth-century stage performances of one of Shakespeare's plays. . . . This would account for its association with Shakespeare whether he were actually the author or not."

So where does this leave us? Do we credit the Rawlinson manuscript's attribution of "Shall I die?" to Shakespeare, or do we align ourselves with those who either reject the poem as unworthy of the playwright or insist that it is necessary to have more evidence before we can adjudicate the issue? And how do we respond to a later development in the case, the 25 December announcement in the *New York Times* that Stephen Parks, curator of pre-1800 manuscripts at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, has turned up another manuscript copy of "Shall I die?" Since the Yale copy of the poem is unattributed, Parks contends that its existence constitutes yet another "challenge to Mr. Taylor to prove that what he has is a poem by Shakespeare."

In the original *New York Times* article about

the discovery of "Shall I die?" Gary Taylor and his Oxford colleague Stanley Wells were said to believe that "the burden of proof is now with anyone who wants to cast doubt on the attribution." In Taylor's words, "All the evidence says this poem belongs to Shakespeare's canon and, unless somebody can dislodge it, it will stay there." Similar sentiments were expressed by their American colleague S. Schoenbaum: "It's authentic until proved otherwise." At the moment, the only thing that appears certain is that not everyone is prepared to accept that formulation of the situation.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER SCHOLARS AND POETS

RONALD BERMAN

It will be hard to prove or disprove that Shakespeare wrote the untitled poem. Anything is possible. But the main point is probably that the poem is so bad that if Shakespeare wrote it he rarely returned to its example. There were many quite terrible verses done in England in the sixteenth century. Many schoolboys were copying the "cat-alogs" of female beauty which were then in vogue, or just going out of vogue. These catalogues, like this poem, began with praising the hair of the beloved, then proceeded south to adore the brow, cheeks, nose, lips, teeth, neck, etc. Sometimes, as in the case of John Donne, these poems became explicit and satirical. But in any case, even if Shakespeare did write this imitative and mindless poem, he lived to recant in other more significant work like the mockery of catalogs in *The Comedy of Errors* (III, ii, 100 ff.) and Sonnet 130. So, the poem is either not Shakespeare's, which accounts for its badness, or it is, and was stylistically rejected by him when he learned to write well.

PETER DAVISON

It seems to me extremely unlikely that whoever wrote this jejune piece of Euphuism could be the author of Shakespeare's plays and poems. The metrics are not Shakespeare's, the rhythms are not Shakespeare's. The ear is not Shakespeare's, even at his worst.

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GEORGE L. GECKLE

Is "Shall I die? Shall I fly . . . ?" by Shakespeare? That is the question. Gary Taylor's attribution (*New York Times Book Review*, 15 December 1985) is based upon a great deal of argument about the so-called verbal parallels between words, phrases, and images in the manuscript poem and Shakespeare's acknowledged plays and poems. Such internal evidence is open to much interpretation; i.e., it is subjective. Taylor argues that unless another poet is identified whose works provide better verbal parallels we must accept his argument. Given the nature of poetic convention and imitation in Shakespeare's time, Taylor's argument is not a strong one, as Anthony Burgess has already demonstrated in his contention that the poem was more likely written by a songwriter named "Anonymous" (*New York Times Book Review*, 22 December 1985).

But is there external evidence to support Taylor's claim? Ay, but there's the real rub. The poem was attributed to Shakespeare by an anonymous scribe in the seventeenth-century manuscript in which Taylor found it at the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Although Taylor at first believed that no other copy existed, one came to light at the end of December 1985 in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. This copy is unattributed. The external evidence, therefore, is insufficient; i.e., we lack real objective proof that Shakespeare wrote the poem.

Until someone finds better factual evidence that attributes the poem to Shakespeare, I do not think that scholars should accept Taylor's arguments. As it stands now, the case for or against Shakespeare's authorship is basically conjectural. Those who want to believe for whatever reasons that Shakespeare is the author will find stylistic evidence to support their claims. Those who do not want to believe will also find reasons.

As for me, I do not believe that Shakespeare wrote "Shall I die? Shall I fly . . . ?" Why? Because I think that it is a conventional, trite Elizabethan poem, the kind found in such miscellanies as *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, *A Gargous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, and such other repositories of bad (and sometimes very good) Elizabethan poetry. If Shakespeare did write the poem in question, then I would like to believe that it was intended as a parody, perhaps in the vein of Orlando's poems in *As You Like It*. But it is more likely that, as Burgess has argued, the author was "Anonymous."

O. B. HARDINSON, JR.

Nowhere does the genius of great authors show itself more clearly than in their habit of inverting the linkers that they inevitably produced from time to time. If "Shall I die?" was written by Shakespeare, he showed his genius by answering the question: "Yes." It is sad that this drab little poem has been dug up. *Requiescat in pace.*

ANTHONY HECHT

It seems to me highly doubtful that Gary Taylor's "discovery," the poem beginning "Shall I die? Shall I fly," was written by Shakespeare; and if it was, it adds nothing whatsoever to his stature. It is a work of very little merit; it is distinctly inferior not only to all the songs (for this is very evidently a song) in Shakespeare's plays, but also to the song texts of almost all of his contemporaries, both playwrights and song writers. It is guilty of clumsy and inept prosody, musical tediousness, and the fatal error of going on too long.

The musical settings of verse, even in the painstaking Elizabethan period, could sometimes accommodate and smooth over a few metrical deficiencies, but in this case it would have been impossible. For starters, the poem shifts back and forth between anapestic (or possibly cretic) feet, and dactylic feet with catalectic closures. Purely as rhythm these are badly assorted, bouncy, and suitable at best for lighthearted frolics like "Lustily, lustily, lustily let us sail forth. . . ." It is emphatically not a rhythm suitable to a love poem, unless in the spirit of parody. Secondly, the musical setting would presumably have been identical for all stanzas, and so the corresponding lines of each stanza would have to be accommodated to the same musical phrases. This would mean that lines three and six of stanza one ("sorrow breeding," "my proceeding?") would have to fit the same musical text as the same two lines in the next stanza ("by my love breeding," "all my hopes deceiving"). I do not know a single poet of the period guilty of that kind of slovenliness. The whole text abounds in such metrical and musical discrepancies, and seems to me throughout conspicuous for its clumsiness. This was a great age of English composers: Pilkington, Lawes, Gibbons, Morley, Farneby, Byrd, Dowland, Campion, Cavendish and Wilbye, to name a few. These composers were expert at setting texts, but

my guess is that they wouldn't have touched this one with a ten-foot pole.

WILLIAM HEYEN

The truth is (since time and space avail not, as his best friend in heaven says [best friend, but still testy about Willy's "art language"]) that William Shakespeare cannot remember if he wrote the deft and shallow poem only recently found and attributed to him. The controversy, in fact, is part of human nature's unfolding revelation for him, and he's thinking of writing a comedy whose main character is a scholar who discovers in a never-before-opened amphora in a British Museum vault a manuscript he believes to be in the hand of Jesus of Nazareth. Christ himself will likely appear to the scholar in his cell in the Tower of London into which he has been thrown for heretical insanity, but may not save him, and will himself not be able to remember if the manuscript in question is His. Nor will He care. He knows He spoke much more incisively and poetically elsewhere, and believes Himself to be adequately on record. Our scholar will lecture Jesus, will insist that the authorship of the manuscript matters. Jesus will listen patiently, but will not be able to understand, no matter how hard he tries.

DANIEL HOFFMAN

We are told by Mr. Gary Taylor that attribution in an anonymous commonplace book and the appearance in the text of many words a concordance locates also in Shakespeare's voluminous works makes an unbeatable case for authorship.

In foggy waters one must navigate as did the Maine lobsterman, by the taste of the brine. Better immerse the text in Shakespeare's canon and taste it: Does it blend well with the various surrounding seas, or is it a puddle of oil on the swell?

A conclusion, instantaneously reached, is that this extended piece of jingling balderdash is not by the author of Shakespeare's plays, songs, sonnets, and poems. Someone has suggested in the *New York Times Book Review* that W. S. might have run up these feeble rhymes as a spoof, but even a middling poet would have known to terminate the send-up after a dozen lines. To drag it on shows that whoever pulled his ear to find so many rhymes was a poetaster.

Has anyone computerized a concordance to the writings of the Earl of Oxford?

X. J. KENNEDY

Read for its sense alone, the poem may seem a vacuous lump of piffle unworthy of the Bard, but if read for the pleasure of its meter and rhyme, it appears a reasonably dexterous technical exercise: deserving of low praise, perhaps, yet not to be spat upon. Shakespeare wrote many a hey-nony-nony song that says nothing much, and to write as a musician who for fun scrapes out a piece on his fiddle (rather than to write as a thinker who delineates an idea or a dramatist who portrays a character, as one might expect him to do) would be, I think, entirely like him. Viewed soberly, the poem is a mere string of forgettable conventions; but taken lightly, it has a pretty fair tune to it.

MAYNARD MACK

The authorship of this rather dreary little poem is not a matter about which one can speak with comfortable assurance, and I find it troubling that it is now presented to the world with more confidence than present evidence justifies.

Conceivably, the work is Shakespeare's. If so, it belongs to an apprentice period of which we have no other example so hackneyed in theme, imagery, and diction. More likely, it is not Shakespeare's but the work of any of the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease throughout the period. That it has Shakespeare's name attached to it in the Bodley manuscript proves nothing save that someone, well-informed, or ill-informed, or uninformed, attributed it to him. It is a matter of record that such manuscript collections, from the sixteenth century down through the eighteenth, contain and help perpetuate misattributions along with textual misreadings. In the Yale manuscript, the poem remains anonymous. This proves nothing either, but it does argue that the poem was not in those times universally known to be by Shakespeare.

So far, the arguments put forward for the attribution do not convince. Particularly unfortunate is the notion that recognizably un-Shakespearean usages in the poem guarantee its authenticity. On this principle, not even the Bodleian will be

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able to house all the poems and plays assignable to Shakespeare's pen.

JOHN FREDERICK NIMS

My own researches, achieved by the use of stiff twin compasses, stowed mandrakes, and a sundial, confirm that this poem is a product of the prolific quill of Willibald Skilmer (1563-1615), putative forerunner of Joe E. Skilmer. No other Elizabethan had the *unbeschreibliche Schrecklichkeit* (as Schiller called it) to produce an opus of this yucky ilk.

[John Frederick Nims, "The Greatest English Lyric?—A New Reading of Joe E. Skilmer's 'Threse,'" *Studies in Bibliography*, 20 (1967): 1-14. *Editor.*]

A. L. ROWSE

There is no likelihood that this long-winded, repetitive poem is by Shakespeare. It is obviously a song—and all Shakespeare's songs are short and pithy.

He was so famous a writer in his own day that people—especially publishers—would not have missed anything that he wrote. Quite the contrary: they published in *The Passionate Pilgrimage* poems under Shakespeare's name that we know definitely were written not by him, but by others.

Those who would like to think that this rambling song is by him say that it might be an early work. But we know what Shakespeare's early work was like from his early poems, "A Lover's Complaint" and "Venus and Adonis." And they are quite different.

This long song is obviously a piece of madrigal verse, just like a dozen such pieces in *The Oxford Book of Madrigal Verse*. They mostly begin like that—the best-known, "Shall I come, sweet love, to thee?" None of them by Shakespeare.

Computers are useful machines, not judges of poetry. To be a good judge of poetry you need to be, not just an academic nor museum-minded, but a practicing poet who is also a scholar. As I am.

STEPHEN SANDY

It could, possibly, be an example of Shakespeare's rural juvenilia, but reading "Shall I Die?" the mind's ear does not hear Shakespeare, rather a fowler of Wither or some other.

THEODORE WEISS

One is tempted to believe that the same poem, whatever its merits, written by Shakespeare and by some lesser poet, would be different for each and much more meaningful in Shakespeare's case; for it would reverberate within the mighty network of his other oeuvre. But when the poem is as indifferent as the one now being attributed to Shakespeare, its attribution hardly seems—except for scholars—to matter. Something that does not add to his work may not subtract from it, but it little enhances it. Of course our best poet should be respected as having it in him to write a bad, not to say the worst poem. Shakespeare, if the poem is his, was certainly entitled to an occasional nod. But when he sank into a deep sleep scored mainly by raspy snoring?

RICHARD WILBUR

If the attribution were certain, it would interest us to know that Shakespeare was at some point capable of such an overwrought jingle. But as it is, I can't feel that the poem adds much to our knowledge or pleasure.

GEORGE W. WILLIAMS

The parallels that Mr. Taylor draws between the Bodley poem and the canon of Shakespeare's works cluster around the period 1593-1595, the years of the nondramatic poem. If the parallels are valid, the poem would have been produced when Shakespeare was between twenty-nine and thirty-one years of age. The poem would not, therefore, have been a youthful piece; it would have been the work of an accomplished poet, a man of mature power and beyond hesitant experimentation. When James Joyce published *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he included in it a poem he had written when he was seventeen or eighteen. It is a brilliant tour de force, a villanelle of extraordinary poetic contrivance. The technicalities of its form are as demanding as are those of the Bodley poem, yet we never feel that Joyce is not absolute master of their severe limitations. Had Shakespeare at thirty decided to indulge—uncharacteristically—in such a poetic scheme as this one, he would have been in command of it. The author of these lines is imprisoned in his form; Shakespeare, like Joyce, would have been able to find within the confines

of the form the very means of liberating his zest and imagination.

Shakespeare never sought rhyme for its own sake in the fashion of this poem, nor did he indulge (so far as we have record) in the mannered artificiality of such pieces. But if he had ever—perhaps as a game—engaged in the production of such a disciplined exercise, Shakespeare would have brought to the work lightness, flair, sprightliness, and joy. None of these attributes is here. The facility that we find in his use of form in, for example, the sonnet in which Romeo and Juliet first speak together is entirely absent in this poem.

MARGARET YORKE

I feel that if this is a poem by Shakespeare—and I accept the deductions made by scholars such as Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells—then because it is so inexpressibly bad it must be a real piece of juvenilia, written at a much earlier age than suggested. I have no such reservations about Edmund Ironside, an extract from which I have recently read, and would instinctively attribute that to William Shakespeare; it has the right feel about it.

A Selection of Published Responses

- Peter Beal, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 January 1986, p. 13;
Beal, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 January 1986;
Paul K. Benedict, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 25;
M. C. Bradbrook, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 January 1986, p. 115;
Anthony Burgess, "Is It Really Shakespeare?" *New York Times Book Review*, 22 December 1985, p. 3;
Thomas Clayton, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 January 1986, p. 115;
Philip Edwards, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 January 1986, p. 37;
Charles M. Fair, "The Maid Replies to W. S.," *Poem*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 25;
Donald W. Foster, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 4;
Foster, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 January 1986, pp. 87-88.

Otto Friedrich, "Shall I Die? Shall I Fly . . . ?" *Time* (9 December 1985): 76;Sally M. Gall, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 25;Roma Gill and Graham Matthews, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 January 1986, p. 37;Robert Giroux, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, pp. 4, 24;Charles Hamilton, *Letter*, *New York Times*, 8 December 1985;Shirley Strum Kenny, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 24;Edwin McDowell, "Copy of Disputed Poem Found at Yale," *New York Times*, 25 December 1985, p. 23;Thomas H. Pendleton, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 24;Anne Riddler, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 January 1986, p. 37;Robin Robbins, ". . . And the Counter Arguments," *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 December 1985, pp. 1449-1450;A. L. Rowse, *Letter*, *New York Times*, 8 December 1985, p. E26;I. A. Shapiro, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 December 1985, pp. 1481, 1492;Eric Sheen and Jeremy Maule, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 January 1986, p. 61;John J. Soldo, *Letter*, *New York Times*, 8 December 1985, p. E26;Gary Taylor, "A New Shakespeare Poem? The Evidence. . ." *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 December 1985, pp. 1447-1448;Taylor, *Letter*, *New York Times*, 9 February 1986;Taylor, "Shakespeare's New Poem: A Scholar's Clues and Conclusions," *New York Times Book Review*, 15 December 1985, pp. 11-14;Taylor, "Shall I die? Immortalized," *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 January 1986, pp. 123-124;Taylor, "The Shakespeare Revolution," *London Sunday Times*, 15 December 1985, p. 33;Jo Thomas, "Critics Say Poem Isn't Shakespeare," *New York Times*, 6 December 1985, p. C36;"Too hard to be true," *Poem*, *Economist*, 3 November 1985, p. 61;Ira Wallach, *Letter*, *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1986, p. 25;Stanley Wells, *Letter*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 January 1986, p. 37;Roger Woddis, *Poem*, "A Word from Will," *Punch*, 8 January 1986.

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