

## **2. Treacherous Doubts**

*"Our doubts are traitors, And make us lose the  
good that we oft may win,  
By fearing to attempt"*

—Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

Questioning the Shakespeare authorship is almost as sacrilegious as challenging Holy Writ. The general academic assumption is that no one in their right mind would do it. And, what is more, the madness is said to be a fairly recent phenomenon, having developed since the late 19th century and having no root in contemporary hearsay. Thus Jonathan Bate writes: "No one in Shakespeare's lifetime or the first two hundred years after his death expressed the slightest doubt about his authorship" (see *The Genius of Shakespeare*, 1997, p73; italics in original).

But Bate is completely mistaken. In fact, the doubt existed from the very beginning, in the first known reference to Shakespeare. It persisted through several contemporary allusions and has been the subject of speculation, on and off, ever since.

### **Groats-Worth Of Wit**

Robert Greene was a classical scholar and Cambridge graduate who wrote plays and pamphlets. His prose romance *Pandosto, the Triumph of Time* provided the main plot of *The Winter's Tale*. He regarded himself as a failure for which he blamed scheming rivals who robbed him of his works and fame. On his deathbed he purportedly wrote a pamphlet which was published by fellow playwright Henry Chettle, who gave it the title *Greene's Groats-worth of Wit, bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592). It ends with a personal letter addressed to three unnamed fellow scholars and dramatists, generally thought to be Nashe, Peele and Marlowe—fellow 'university wits'. Greene warns them about actors whom he calls "those puppets that speak from our mouths, those anticks garnished in our colours". He continues:

"Yes, trust them not; for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that, with his tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide, supposes he is well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. O, that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let those apes imitate your past excellence, and

never more acquaint them with your past inventions..." (Many of the older works cited in this chapter can be read online: see Bibliography of this book, section 1.C. 'Relevant Others'. Greene's work is at: <http://luminarium.org/renlit/greenebib.htm> ).

'Shake-scene' is generally taken to refer to Shakespeare. Certainly, the line 'tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide', is a parody of the line 'O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide', which appears in the third part of *Henry VI*, Act 1, Scene 4. Orthodox scholars assume from the pun and the parody that Greene is deploring the fact that the actor from Stratford is also an author of plays in blank verse. Bate, in the work cited above, interprets it in this way. But Greene is doing nothing of the sort. What Greene is deploring in general is that actors receive more credit and financial reward than the writers of the plays they perform. In particular, he refers to one actor who, like the rest, is a puppet and an ape and who merely speaks the playwright's words on the stage. This is surely the meaning of 'bombast out a blank verse', just as 'Shake-scene' also means that he is a stage-shaker, trying to steal the scenes by his exaggerated acting.

But what really annoys Greene about this particular actor is that plays are being presented as having been written by him when clearly they are not. Greene is objecting to the fact that this actor is receiving credit which is denied to the real author or authors. This meaning of Greene's statement is suggested by his description of the actor as an 'upstart crow, beautified with our feathers'. Bate, along with many others, argues that this is a reference to Shakespeare's plagiarism from other authors, but there was nothing unusual in stealing lines or phrases from other writers and therefore it was hardly worth remarking. Greene would have had no reason to complain about mere plagiarism because he did it himself. That makes no sense at all. But it is the only explanation which Stratfordians will accept because to do otherwise would be to face up to the distinct possibility that Robert Greene was spilling the beans about the authorship at the very beginning.

As a classical scholar, Greene is probably referring to Aesop's fable about the jackdaw, a member of the crow family. In this story Jupiter decided to create a sovereign over the birds and so proclaimed that, on a certain day, they should all present themselves before him, when he would choose the most beautiful among them to be king. The jackdaw, realising his own ugliness, collected the feathers which had fallen from the wings of other birds and stuck them all over his body in order to make himself the most beautiful. On the appointed day when Jupiter proposed to make

him king, the other birds protested and each plucked from the jackdaw his own feathers.

So in terms of Greene's attack, what William Shakspere was doing was passing off as his own plays which were not his at all. Recall Greene's other remark about the 'ass made proud' by this 'underhand brokery' because some noblemen get others to set their name to their verses. Note that Nashe's remark, quoted earlier from the preface to another work of Greene's, talks of tricking up a company of taffeta fools 'with their feathers'. It is precisely the same point that Greene is making in his 'Shake-scene' comment. He is saying that William is one of these 'taffeta fools', tricked up or beautified with verses he has not himself written.

After the publication of the *Groats-worth*, the man who had prepared it for the printer (and perhaps actually wrote it in the first place under Greene's name), Henry Chettle, came out with a statement that it had been "offensively...taken" by "one or two" of the "divers play-makers" addressed by Greene. In the case of one of these, he said he was sorry he had not spared him because he himself had seen his civil misdemeanour and "divers of worship"—persons of high degree —had "reported his uprightness... and grace in writing".

Is Shakespeare not only the upstart Crow but also the playwright whom Chettle says he was sorry he had not spared, as many orthodox claim? But surely Chettle was not apologising to the victim of the attack but expressing regret on account of one of two playwrights offended by it. Moreover, when a person has been excoriated as the upstart Crow was in *Groats-worth*, it makes no sense to refer to him as one of those who took offence because the intention was to offend him in the first place! Anyway, Chettle states explicitly that the playwright about whom he was sorry was one of those addressed by Greene. That means that if the playwright and the actor attacked in *Groats-worth* were the same and were Shakespeare, then Greene (or Chettle) in warning the playwrights about the actor would have been warning Shakespeare about himself! We should add that clearly the authorship of *Groats-worth* was in dispute at the time. The playwright Thomas Nashe protested, "God never have care of my soul, but utterly renounce me, if the least word or syllable of it proceeded from my pen". The extremity of Nashe's fear lest he be thought implicated is sufficient indication in itself that someone a good deal more important than a Johnny-come-lately from the provinces could have been expected to be antagonised by the pamphlet.

Greene, Nashe and Marlowe had all been to Cambridge, and therefore it is surely possible that at least some of the noblemen poets who concealed their identity also attended that university and were known to them, either as contemporary students or through the Cambridge grapevine. But the link with Cambridge doesn't end here. For our interpretation of Greene's 'Shake-scene' comment is reinforced by a later reference to William Shakspere the actor which distinguishes him from the dramatist.

### **The Return From Parnassus**

Greene felt cheated by a greedy, moneylending actor who brokered plays and passed them off as his own. But he wasn't alone. The anonymous author(s) of the three Parnassus plays, presented by the students of St. John's College, Cambridge, in the years 1598-1601, shared Green's anger. The first play, *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, does not concern us. It is *The Return from Parnassus*, Parts 1 and 2, which mention Shakespeare and appear to distinguish the poet and dramatist from the actor. In Part 1 there are references to Shakespeare the author and it is clear that the writers, whoever they were, hold him in high esteem. Indeed he is sometimes painted in glowing colours: one character says he will "worship sweet Mr Shakespeare, and to honour him will lay his *Venus and Adonis* under my pillow".

In Part 2, however, we find a rather different story. This play is about the problems faced by graduates in finding employment suited to their academic qualifications. They try the stage, but do not like the company of actors. Studioso says:

*"But is't strange, this mimicke ape should prize  
Unhappy scholars at a hireling rate?  
Vile world, that lifts them up to high degree,  
And treads us down in groveling misery.  
England affords those glorious vagabonds,  
That carried erst their fardels on their backs,  
Coursers to ride on through the gazing streets,  
Sweeping it in their glaring Satin suits,  
And pages to attend their masterhips:  
With mouthing words that better wits have framed,  
They purchase lands, and now esquires are made".*

Studioso is directing his hostility at one actor in particular, and there are good grounds for believing that it is William Shakspere. As long ago as 1914, F.S. Boas in *University Drama in the Tudor Age*, noted: "There can be little doubt that the last line refers in part to Shakespeare's acquisition

of New Place in 1597 and the grant of a coat of arms to his father in 1596". But there is more evidence than that. Just before the above speech, another character, Philomusus, quotes the opening lines of *Richard III*:

*"Now is the winter of our discontent,  
Made glorious summer by the [this] sun of York".*

The proximity of this quotation to the above speech surely establishes a clear link.

Secondly, a year or less before, Ben Jonson had poked fun at the actor William over his coat of arms in *Every Man out of his Humour* (1600), where he ridicules its motto 'non sanz droict' ('not without right') and substitutes a headless boar for a crest and the motto 'not without mustard'. The authors of the *Parnassus* plays would have had Jonson's jibe fresh in mind when they wrote their own work.

Why this discrepancy? Why is there praise for Shakespeare in Part 1 and apparent scorn for him in Part 2? The explanation which makes sense is that while the praise refers to the poet, the scorn applies to the actor. The important point about that actor is stated in the second last line of the main quote above: he merely mouths words that 'better wits have framed'.

### **Ratseyes Ghost**

If there is any doubt that this refers to William, confirmation can be found in a similar but even more definite allusion in an anonymous pamphlet called *Ratseyes Ghost*, published in 1605. It was loosely based on the life of highwayman Gamaliel Ratsey who was notorious in the Cambridge area until he was caught in 1605 and hanged in Bedford. He wore a mask in which the features were made hideously ugly. Thus Ben Jonson wrote in *The Alchemist* (1610) of "a face cut... worse than Gamaliel Ratsey's".

According to the stories in circulation, Ratsey demanded a scene from *Hamlet* of a rifled player, and could not rob a Cambridge scholar without bidding him deliver an oration in a wood. In one of the stories in the pamphlet Ratsey meets a group of actors at an inn. He reflects that while some are poor, "others there are whom Fortune hath so well favoured that... are grown so wealthy that they have expected to be knighted". He asks the company to perform something for him, offering gold as payment. Afterwards, he says to the leading actor:

"Get thee to London, for, if one man were dead, they will have much need of such a one as thou art... I durst wager all the money in my purse on thy head to play Hamlet with him for a wager. There thou shalt learn..."

to feed upon all men, to let none feed upon thee; to make thy hand a stranger to thy pocket, thy heart slow to perform thy tongue's promise; and when thou feelest thy purse well lined, buy thee some place or lordship in the country, that growing weary of playing, thy money may bring thee to dignity and reputation; then thou needest care for no man, nor not for them that before made thee proud with speaking their works upon the stage".

The reference to *Hamlet* surely clinches the matter. Even Haliwell-Phillips believes that this passage refers to Shakespeare, and its similarity to the *Parnassus* characterisation above is striking. Again, we are informed that the actor who performed in this play and who made himself rich and retired to a "place or lordship in the country" was not its author: he merely engaged in speaking this and other works on the stage. And again, too, there is the depiction of William—expressed first in print by Greene and confirmed by many of the known documents—as a tight-fisted moneygrabber: "thy hand a stranger to thy pocket".

### **Willobie His Avis**

In 1593 and 1594 two long poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, signed 'William Shakespeare' were published with dedications to Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton. Four months after the publication of *Lucrece*, an enigmatic work entitled *Willobie His Avis* appeared. A dedication was written by 'Hadrian Dorrell' who claimed to have found the poem in a room associated with one 'Henry Willobie'. Whether any of the names are real is unknown—there was a Henry Willobie at Oxford a few years earlier but there is no record of a Hadrian Dorrell. One reason this otherwise unexceptional poem has gathered a lot of attention is that it contains the first ever direct literary reference to Shakespeare, in its prefatory poem where it mentions *The Rape of Lucrece*:

*"Yet Tarquyne pluckt his glistering grape,  
And Shake-speare, paints poore Lucrece rape".*

The hyphenated name is a deliberate attempt to inflict scorn and so is what follows. The author recounts a story about an innkeeper's wife who was courted by a nobleman before her marriage, and by four foreign suitors after it. The story in prose and verse is thought to parallel the love life of Queen Elizabeth, whose Latin motto was *semper eadem* (always the same), just as Avis signs herself, "always the same Avis". As the fourteen-year-old Lady Elizabeth she had been courted by Thomas, Lord, Seymour, who was eventually accused of trying to marry her by "secret and crafty means" and condemned to death as a traitor in 1549. Elizabeth

later announced that she was "married to England".

*Willobie his Avis* was popular, but it was suppressed, and the second edition contains an elaborate disclaimer stating that it had been written decades earlier and concerned imaginary characters, disclaimers that are generally assumed to have been the result of pressure. A closer look may reveal why this poem was suppressed. The story is the unsuccessful attempt by five different suitors to woo Avis. The suitors are a Nobleman, a Caveleiro, a Frenchman, Dydimus Harco and Henrico Willobego. The final wooer, also referred to as H. W., hopes to get some help. He consults W. S., who is referred to as "the old player", one who was previously unsuccessful in wooing Avis. Of course, W. S. are the initials of William Shake-speare and H. W. are the initials of Henry Wriothesly, the Earl to whom 'Shake-speare' had dedicated *Adonis* and *Lucrece* and who was attending the Queen at court at this very time. But which one of the five is W.S.? None of them fits William Shakspeare, who was not a military officer, a Frenchman or, presumably, Dydimus Harco. But nor was William of noble birth. On the other hand, if 'Shake-speare' was the allonym of a nobleman, then we have the solution.

### **Phaethon**

Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598), refers to Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets among his private friends". One of these friends was almost certainly John Florio, brother-in-law to Meres. Florio was the son of an Italian Protestant refugee who had settled in London. For a time, probably from 1588 onwards, Florio was secretary to the Earl of Southampton. Florio also compiled an Italian-English dictionary and translated Montaigne's *Essays* into English.

Prefixed to his *Second Fruits* (1591) is a sonnet, *Phaethon to his friend Florio*, which many scholars believe was written by Shakespeare and therefore qualifies as one of these 'sugred sonnets among his private friends' alluded to by Meres:

*"Sweet friend, whose name agrees with thy increase,  
How fit a rival art thou of the Spring!  
For when each branch hath left his flourishing,  
And green-locked Summer's shady pleasures cease,  
She makes the Winter's storms repose in peace,  
And spends her franchise on each living thing;  
The daisies sprout, the little birds do sing;  
Herbs, gums and plants do vaunt of their release.  
So when that all our English wits lay dead  
(Except the laurel that is ever green)*

*Thou with thy fruits our barrenness o'erspread  
And set thy flowery pleasance to be seen.  
Such fruits, such flow'rets of morality,  
Were ne'er before brought out of Italy".*

There are many reasons for suggesting that this sonnet is the work of Shakespeare. The story of Phaethon is told in detail in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and Ovid was at this time Shakespeare's favourite poet. The story itself, with Phaethon being struck by Zeus's thunderbolt, is often taken to indicate the transitoriness of human life, a favourite theme of Shakespeare's. There are also many Shakespearean touches, such as the play upon the name Florio, "whose name agrees with thy increase", which is typical, as is the procession of the seasons and the use of 'sweet' to refer to a friend or lover. Sir Sidney Lee believes that this sonnet is the work of Shakespeare, as do many other perfectly orthodox scholars.

Move on to 1598 and to Florio's next published work *A World of Words*. It refers to an attack by 'H.S.' on a "good" sonnet by a friend "who loved better to be a poet than to be counted so". Does this remark refer to the Phaeton sonnet? Florio does not say so, but in the context he does hark back to "my last epistle to the reader", so it seems highly likely that it does. But if Phaeton is indeed Shakespeare, why on earth would he be described as someone who "loved better to be a poet than to be counted so"? Such a person would be a concealed poet, which certainly doesn't fit the orthodox claimant.

### ***Labeo***

Joseph Hall was a Cambridge Fellow who eventually became Bishop of Norwich. He was a Puritan who was highly critical of much contemporary poetry and drama and in 1597 he published anonymously a satire which aimed to scourge the evils of the day and was called *Virgidemiae* (from the Latin for 'bundle of rods'). He writes disapprovingly of the concealed literary activities of a poet and dramatist whom he calls Labeo. From Hall's words, it is clear that he believes Labeo wrote *Love's Labour's Lost*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Here is an unmistakable reference to the two plays, in Book 2 Satire 1:

*"There's so much labour lost,  
That's good, that's great: nay, much is seldom well,  
Of what is bad, a little's a great deal.  
Better is more: but best is nought at all.  
Less is the next, and lesser criminal.  
Little and good, is greatest good save one,  
Then Labeo write little, or write none".*

Marcus Antistius Labeo was a celebrated jurist at the time of Caesar Augustus who was also interested in literature and philosophy. Hall does not merely disapprove of Labeo's works; he also *rebukes him for passing them off as someone else's*. That this is undoubtedly the case can be shown from two extracts. The first comes at the end of the satire just quoted. It states:

*"For shame write better Labeo, or write none  
Or better write, or Labeo write alone.  
Nay, call the Cynick but a witty fool,  
Thence to abjure his handsome drinking bowl:  
Because the thirsty swain with hollow hand  
Conveyed the stream to wet his dry weasand.  
Write they that can, tho they that cannot do:  
But who knows that, but they that do not know".*

Line 2 seems to imply that Labeo, whom he also calls the 'Cynick', is writing in conjunction with someone else. But what is the nature of this partnership? Line 5 provides the answer that this someone else, the 'thirsty swain', is very much a sleeping partner because he has a 'hollow hand'. Line 6 implies that Labeo let the 'thirsty swain' moisten his parched throat (weasand) with draughts from the Muses' spring—in other words, obtain credit for poetical inspiration which was not really his but Labeo's. This interpretation is reinforced by the last two lines, which Hall himself italicised. They are in effect saying: do let us have literary work from those who *can* write properly, and not from those who cannot but yet appear in print as authors.

Another extract, this time from Book 4 Satire 1, corroborates this interpretation. Here Hall describes how Labeo hides like a cuttle fish,

*"In the black cloud of his thick vomiture;  
Who list complain of wronged faith or fame  
When he may shift it on to another's name?"*

The last two lines unmistakably show that Hall is castigating a writer who publishes verse under another person's name.

Nor can there be any possible doubt that Hall was referring to Shakespeare. For in Book 6 Satire 1 he returns to attack Labeo:

*"Tho' Labeo reaches right (who can deny)  
The true strains of Heroic Poesy,  
For he can tell how fury reft his sense  
And Phoebus fild him with intelligence".*

This is clearly a reference to Shakespeare's selection of the two lines from Ovid's *Amores* (Elegy 1, 15) which he placed at the head of *Venus and Adonis*.

Then Hall writes:

*"While big 'But ohs' each stanza can begin".*

*The Rape of Lucrece* has 29 stanzas which begin with either 'But' or 'Oh'. Another feature of both poems is the use of hyphenated words as epithets, and this fact does not escape Hall's comment since he writes a little further on:

*"In epithets to join two words in one,  
Forsooth for adjectives cannot stand alone".*

*Venus and Adonis* alone has no fewer than four compound adjectives in the first 6 lines.

Yet, while Hall implies that Labeo wrote the Shakespeare plays and poems under another name, he does not clearly identify the author. Nevertheless, we note again his choice of Labeo. The original Labeo was a celebrated Roman lawyer and educator in the time of Augustus. He had a wide general culture and his works are either lost or are known under other names.

### ***Mutius and Canaidos***

A positive identification of Labeo is given by another contemporary writer. John Marston was a lawyer, satirist and dramatist, whose best known work is *The Malcontent* (1604). He knew at first hand all about the dangers of playwrighting, for he was imprisoned along with Ben Jonson and George Chapman for their part in *Eastward Ho*, which contained references to opportunistic Scottish countrymen that James I did not like. Earlier, in 1598, the year after Hall's work appeared, Marston published *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalion's Image and Certain Satires*.

The first part of this work reconstructs the story of the sculptor who fell in love with the statue of the woman he had created. It includes an addendum, 'The AUTHOR in praise of his precedent poem'. It also points to Labeo as the author of *Venus and Adonis*:

*"So Labeo did complain his love was stone,  
Obdurate, flinty, so relentless none:  
Yet Lynceus knows, that in the end of this  
He wrought as strange a metamorphosis.  
Ends not my poem then surpassing ill?  
Come, come, Augustus, crowne my laurat quill".*

The first two lines are an obvious allusion to the stanza in *Venus and Adonis* which begins:

*"Are thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel?  
Nay more than flint, for stone at rain relenteth".*

The rest of this passage proves that Marston points to Labeo as the author of *Venus and Adonis*, because he compares the metamorphosis of Pygmalion, as described in his work, to that of Adonis as described by Shakespeare in his poem.

In the same year, 1598, Marston published another work, *The Scourge of Villanie*, in which he returns to Hall's attack on Labeo:

*"What icy Saturnist, what northern pate  
But such gross lewdness would exasperate?  
I think the blind doth see the flame-god rise  
From sisters couch, each morning to the skies,  
Glowing with lust. Walk but in dusky night  
With Lynceus eyes, and to thy piercing sight  
Disguised gods will show, in peasants shape,  
Prest to commit some execrable rape".*

This is a clear parody of Hall and is also very close to the lines of *The Rape of Lucrece* where the sun rises on her rape. The reference to a disguised god in peasant's shape is intriguing, not to say revealing, if it refers to the author of that poem.

Later, Marston writes about a man whom he calls 'Mutius' in the following passage:

*"My soul adores judicial scholarship;  
But when to servile imitatorship  
Some spruce Athenian pen is prenticed,  
'Tis worse than apish...  
Fond affection  
Befits an ape and mumpion babion.  
O what a tricky, learned, nicking strain  
Is this applauded, senseless, modern vein.  
When late I heard it from sage Mutius lips  
How ill, methought, such wanton jiggling skips  
Beseemed his graver speech. 'Far fly thy fame,  
Most, most of me beloved! whose silent name  
I ever honour; and, if my love beguile  
Not much my hopes, then thy unvalued worth  
Shall mount fair place, when apes are turned forth'.  
I am too mild. Reach me my scourge again*

*I once did know a tinkling pewterer,  
That was the vilest stumbling stuturer  
That ever hack'd and hew'd our native tongue,  
Yet to the lute if you had heard him sung,  
Jesu! how sweet he breathed! You can apply.  
O senseless prose, judicial poesie,  
How ill you're match'd".*

Hall is here being compared unfavourably to this 'Mutius'. The former is called the 'vilest stumbling pewterer' who 'ever hack'd and hew'd our native tongue'. He did not really write poetry but 'senseless prose'. Mutius, on the other hand, is called a sage and 'Athenian pen'—Athens to both Hall and Marston was Cambridge. Mutius writes 'judicial poetry' and has 'judicial scholarship', which point to his being a lawyer. He frequently abandons his 'graver speech' for 'wanton jiggings skips', obviously meaning drama. He is a man who to Marston is 'most of me beloved'. Yet he has a 'silent name'. Indeed; for '*mutus*' is Latin for 'dumb' or 'mute'. But poets are not normally described as mute. The question is whether this Cambridge-educated lawyer who writes poetry and drama is Labeo again. Well, when we realise that Mutius is actually a character in *Titus Andronicus* it does seem highly probable.

Marston returns to the man who is 'most of me beloved' in a play called *What You Will* (1607), which is indeed related to *Twelfth Night* both in title and theme (his plays are replete with echoes of Shakespeare). In the play the characters sometimes step out of their roles, usually to talk about the author. In one such speech, however, the following lines appear:

*"No sir; should discreet Mastigophoros  
Or the dear spirit acute Canaidos  
(That Aretine, that most of me beloved  
Who in the rich esteem I prize his soul  
I term myself) should these once menace me,  
Or curb my humours with well governed check,  
I should with most industrious regard  
Observe, abstain, and curb my skipping lightness;  
But when an arrogant, odd, impudent,  
A blushing forehead, only out of sense  
Of his own wants, bawls in malignant questing  
At others means of waving gallantry".*

So again Marston defends him who is 'most of me beloved' against Hall's 'malignant questing'. He refers to him this time as 'Canaidos', which

harks back to the terms 'Cyned' and 'Cynick' which Hall had used as alternatives for Labeo. It seems a fair conclusion that Labeo, Mutius and Canaidos are all names which Marston gives to the author of Shakespeare. As we have seen, Marston—imprisoned twice for his writings—was fully cognisant of the difficulties facing poets and dramatists and therefore their motives for concealment. Yet he was prepared to risk his own neck to defend someone who was a source of great inspiration to him. As to whom Marston identifies as Shakespeare, we shall return to that question in later chapters.

### ***Terence***

John Davies of Hereford was a poet and calligrapher who about 1610 published his *Scourge of Folly* which, he tells us, is a work "consisting of satyricall epigrams". One of them is addressed to "our English Terence, Mr Will. Shakespeare". Why Davies should associate Shakespeare with Terence is puzzling because only comedies were published under that name, yet by that time Shakespeare had written *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Othello*, and so on. But, even more important, is the question of why he compares the playwright with Terence at all. Plautus was a more common comparison, not only because of style but also in view of the frequent plagiarism in Shakespeare of the plots of Plautus.

There is, however, a possible explanation which makes sense because Davies is writing a 'satire', namely that Terence was then widely regarded as a *nom de plume* for the writings of others who wished to keep their identity secret. The view that he did not write the plays ascribed to him can be found in the writings of other famous Latin authors. For example, Quentillian says: "The writings of Terence are ascribed to Scipio Africanus". Cicero alludes to the alleged part played by Laelius in their composition. And even in Terence we find a puzzling allusion in the preface to *Adelphi*, where the author remarks about "what spiteful people say, that great personages help the author and continually compose along with him".

Montaigne, whose *Essays*, as we have said, were translated into English in 1603 by John Florio, refers to the case in one of his essays: "If the perfection of well speaking might bring any glorie suitable unto a great personage, Scipio and Laelius would never have resigned the honour of their comedies, and the elegancies and smooth-sportfull conceits of the Latine tongue, unto an African servant; for, to prove this labour to be theirs, the exquisite eloquence and excellent invention thereof doth sufficiently declare it". Although many modern scholars are dismissive of this mask theory, it is clear that it was widely believed not only in

Terence's own time but in Shakespeare's as well. So it is possible that by referring to 'Shake-speare' as 'our English Terence', Davies was implying that this name, too, was a mask.

## Poet Ape

Ben Jonson wrote a large number of short poems that he called epigrams. Epigram No 56, *On Poet Ape*, is generally taken to be a reference to Shakespeare, though whether it does or not is not clear:

*"Poor Poet Ape, that would be thought our chief,  
Whose works are e'en the frippery of wit,  
From brokage is become so bold a thief,  
As we, the robb'd, leave rage, and pity it.  
At first he made low shifts, would pick and glean,  
Buy the reversion of old plays, now grown  
To a little wealth, and credit in the scene,  
He takes up all, makes each man's wit his own,  
And told of this, he slights it. Tut, such crimes  
The sluggish gaping auditor devours;  
He marks not whose 'twas first, and aftertimes  
May judge it to be his, as well as ours.  
Fool! as if half-eyes will not know a fleece  
From locks of wool, or shreds from the whole piece".*

This poem appeared in the *Folio* edition of Jonson's poems, published in 1616, the very year of William's death. Seven years later this same Ben Jonson wrote a poem prefaced to the *First Folio* of Shakespeare and addressed to 'My Beloved, THE AUTHOR', in which he praised Shakespeare to the skies as the "soule of the age", the "starre of poets", who was "not of an age, but for all time". Yet, if William is indeed the target of this epigram, here we have in 1616, or a little earlier, this same beloved author called "poor poet ape", a "thief", who "takes up all, makes each man's wit his own". What is the explanation? A quarrel at the time of this earlier poem? A later appreciation of Shakespeare's real worth? Flattery of the dead in 1623? The last solution is ruled out by the extent of the praise: to refer to a poet as the greatest of all time must presumably be sincere.

The problem here is that *On Poet Ape* is not merely a criticism: it is a complete dismissal of any poetic claims at all. A poet ape is someone who apes or mimics a poet while not actually being one. The contrast with the *Folio* verse is so great that it seems as if Ben is referring to two quite different people. And perhaps this is the solution: *On Poet Ape* does not

refer to Shakespeare the author but to William the actor. Nowhere in the epigram does Jonson imply that 'poet ape' actually writes anything. 'Works' could refer to deeds or actions on the stage rather than writings. Alternatively, the clause beginning 'whose works...' might qualify 'our chief', not 'poet ape', in which case 'our chief' is someone else who also (e'en) steals from other writings. Line 10 certainly means a spectator in an audience (auditor), rather than a reader, 'gaping' at the performance. The last two lines therefore surely mean that in speaking the lines of others on the stage, 'poet ape' remembers only shreds rather than complete speeches. (Ben had a poor opinion of William's acting ability — a point to which we shall return.)

'Ape' itself harks back to Greene's 'Shake-scene', where actors whose names are used as stand-ins for dramatists are called 'apes'. And in line 4 Ben uses another term employed by Greene in the same context, though on a different occasion. In his *Farewell to Folly* Greene remarks about the underhand "brokery" whereby noblemen, "being loth to have any profane pamphlets pass under their name, get some other Batillus to set his name to their verses". Jonson says that 'from brokage' poet ape is 'become' a bold thief. A broker was a buyer of plays for a company and perhaps both Greene and Jonson are telling us that this is precisely the role that William played: he only brokered the works but was given credit for writing them. I would suggest, therefore, that in *On Poet Ape* Ben Jonson is repeating the words from 'Shake-scene', *The Return from Parnassus* and *Ratseyes Ghost* to the effect that William of Stratford has been given credit for and grown 'to a little wealth' from poetry that he did not himself write.

### **The Great Assizes**

In 1645 the poet and satirist George Wither published an anonymous poem entitled *The Great Assizes holden in Parnassus by Apollo and his Assessors*, in which William of Stratford is said to have been exactly what *Poet Ape* asserts: a mimic who pretended to be a poet. The poem tells how Apollo assembles a group of poets and playwrights on Mount Parnassus, the mountain where the Muses of music and poetry live, in order to help him bring about a reformation of the world. The sun god convenes a high court for the trial of the trashy and misleading literature of the period and appoints twenty of the greatest authors as assessors, as well as a jury of of twelve lesser poets and dramatists. On trial are twelve malefactors, who are identified with the twelve jurors. Wither places himself at the head of the lesser poets/malefactors. 'William Shakespeare' is listed as 'the writer of weekly accounts' and in the trial itself it is declared: "Shakespeare's a

mimicke". We shall have more to say about this revealing work later, for it does identify someone else as the greatest poet of the day and second only to Apollo himself.

### **Wits Recreation**

In 1640 an anonymous publication, *Wits Recreation*, contains the following lines:

*"Shakespeare, we must be silent in thy praise  
'Cause our encomiums will but blast thy bayes,  
Which envy could not".*

It is not easy to understand these cryptic lines. Why should the literary men of the time be 'silent' about Shakespeare? And why would their praise damage his reputation? The lines make more sense if indeed they are saying that the real author of Shakespeare cannot be publicly praised as a poet.

It seems reasonable to conclude that—contrary to what modern scholars such as Bate maintain—there *was* contemporary doubt about the authorship of Shakespeare. We can say that it was probably voiced by Robert Greene, the authors of the *Parnassus* plays, the writer of the pamphlet *Ratseyes Ghost*, by Ben Jonson, John Davies of Hereford and John Florio, and it was certainly raised by Joseph Hall and John Marston. 'Upstart Crow', 'mimicke ape', 'thirsty swain', 'Poet Ape', 'writer of weekly accounts' are all nicknames for William of Stratford, while 'Terence', 'Phaethon', 'Labeo', 'Mutius' and 'Canaidos' are all cover names for the real mastermind behind Shakespeare.

Of course, contemporary sceptics may have been mistaken. After all, such doubts were likely to arise simply because other writers would inevitably find it difficult to accept the notion that a Stratford butcher's or glover's son could achieve what they could not, even with their superior education. Nevertheless, it should now be apparent that this scepticism did exist at the time. Moreover, it may well have been more than a suspicion—some writers may have had full knowledge of William's non-participation in the writing of the works that passed under his name. The extracts do suggest that they were aware of the character and abilities of William and also of the 'underhand brokery' by which 'gentlemen of the court' presented their poetry to the world.

### ***Edward Ravenscroft***

Jonathan Bate, in the second part of the comment quoted at the beginning of this chapter, stated that no one "expressed the slightest doubt" about the

authorship in the first two hundred years after William's death. Again, he is mistaken. In 1678 the dramatist Edward Ravenscroft revised *Titus Andronicus* for a new staging. He commented unfavourably of the original that "it seems rather a heap of rubbish than a structure". He also wrote: "I have been told by some anciently conversant with the stage that it was not originally his but brought by a private author to be acted, and he only gave some master-touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters". Now here we have a 17th century statement of the belief that one of the Shakespeare plays was largely the work of a "private author" —i.e. someone who did not want to be known —and only touched up here and there by 'Shakespeare'.

### **Essay Against Too Much Reading**

In 1728 a certain Captain Goulding published his *Essay Against Too Much Reading* in which he writes about the background Shakespeare would have needed for his historical plays. He suggests that the author probably had to keep "one of those chuckle-pated Historians for his particular associate...or he might have starvd upon his History". Goulding says that he had this information from "one of his intimate Acquaintances". This, in itself, perhaps doesn't amount to much: it suggests that Shakespeare received assistance in his writing, not that he was not the main author, and anyway it is difficult to know whether Goulding is writing in earnest.

### **The Life and Adventures of Common Sense**

A stronger scepticism is found in *The Life and Adventures of Common Sense*, an historical allegory anonymously published in 1769 though allegedly written by a medical man, Herbert Lawrence. It introduces a character named 'Wisdom', who travelled in time back to 1588 and "made an acquaintance with a person belonging to the Playhouse" who "was a profligate in his youth and some say a *Deerstealer*". Wisdom had a "Common Place Book" containing "rules on the combinations and connections upon every subject or occasion that might arise in dramatic writing". "The person" proceeded to steal the book and began play-writing. "His name was Shakespeare", a "shifty character... and incorrigible thief." The theft was known to everyone except for the narrator, "Common Sense", and his mother, until the mask itself revealed the theft to them: "But we agreed, tho' much against my Mother's inclination, to take not notice of the robbery, for we conceived that my Father [and] his friends would easily recover their loss, and were likewise apprehensive that we could not distress this Man without depriving his Country of its greatest

Ornament". The message of this tale is clear: 'Shakespeare' is a national myth.

### ***James Wilmot***

The Rev James Wilmot was a scholar and clergyman and, according to his niece, the author of *The Letters of Junius*. He was rector of Barton-on-the-Heath, 14 miles from Stratford. In 1781 he was asked by a London publisher to write a biography of Shakespeare and spent four fruitless years trying to link the Stratford man to the works attributed to him. He set out to find Shakespeare's books, surmising that even if they were not listed in the will, there must have been books and papers, and they had probably passed out of the family into nearby collections and libraries in the family homes of the gentry. So he drew a 50-mile circle around Stratford and proceeded to search every grand house and library in the area. He found—nothing: no book owned by Shakespeare, no letter written by him, not a single page of a manuscript, nor any mention by local gentry of their ever having met the dramatist.

Wilmot concluded William was not the author of the works but was so upset by this conclusion and so worried about the implications for his friends in Stratford, that he felt it better to destroy everything. He gave instructions that on his death a local schoolmaster and his housekeeper were to "burn on the platform before the house all the bags and boxes" that they could "discover, in the cabinets in my bedroom" and these instructions were scrupulously carried out.

We would not know of Wilmot's investigations at all had he not, in about his eightieth year, confided their gist to a visitor, one James Corton Cowell. A member of the Ipswich Philosophic Society, Cowell had undertaken to obtain information for a paper he read before the Society in 1805 on the life of Shakespeare. His audience was in for a shock. Cowell reported that he had come to a "strange pass". He confessed himself a "pervert, nay a renegade to the faith I have proclaimed and avowed before you all". So serious was his fall from grace that he expressed himself "prepared to hear from you as I unfold my strange and surprising story cries of disapproval and even of execration". What had happened was that he had failed to find any adequate information on Shakespeare's life either in books or through personal inquiries at Stratford. "Everywhere", he declared, "was I met by a strange and perplexing silence". Cowell confessed that he had reached the same alarming conclusion as Wilmot: that Stratford was built on a hoax.

In *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (1992), Charlton Ogburn

comments that this failure by Wilmot and Cowell is doubly perplexing in view of the fact that New Place in Stratford could not possibly have been a more propitious location for the survival of such documents. It was not subject to the 1666 Fire of London, which consumed many important historical documents. Few persons in England had cause for as great pride of descent as Shakspeare's daughter Elizabeth Hall, who still retained New Place, as did her husband until his death in 1674. Circumstances could hardly have been more favourable to the preservation of the great writer's papers, if Shakspeare were he. Yet Stratford has never produced a scrap of them, or anything in its illustrious son's hand but the three signatures on the will.

Cowell was right: most of the members of the Ipswich Philosophic Society were outraged by his views and the issue was quietly buried. Nothing more was heard of Wilmot and his controversial theory until 1932, when Cowell's paper was rediscovered and Professor Allardyce Nicholl recounted his story in the *Times Literary Supplement* ('The First Baconian', 25th February, 1932).

### **The Learned Pig**

In 1786 there appeared an anonymous allegory called *The Story of the Learned Pig* anonymously written by an 'Officer of the Royal Navy' which some believe was written by Wilmot, though there is no real evidence for this suggestion. The Pig describes himself as a soul which has passed through many bodies—a greyhound, deer, bear and a human being who worked as horseholder at a playhouse where he met the 'Immortal Shakespeare'. The pig reports that Shakespeare didn't "run his country for deer-stealing" and didn't father the various plays, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest* and *Midsummer's Night Dream*. Instead, the Pig himself confesses to be author. Here is the relevant passage:

"I am now come to a period in which, to my great joy, I once more got possession of a human body. My parents, indeed, were of low extraction; my mother sold fish about the streets of this metropolis, and my father was a water-carrier celebrated by Ben Jonson in his comedy of 'Every Man in his Humour'. I was early in life initiated in the profession of horse-holder to those who came to visit the playhouse, where I was well-known by the name of 'Pimping Billy'. My sprightly genius soon distinguished me here from the common herd of that calling, insomuch that I added considerably to my income by standing 'pander', as it is politely called, to country ladies and gentlemen who were unacquainted with the ways of the town. But this employment getting me frequently engaged in lewd quarrels, I was content to give it up at the expense of

many a well-tanned hide. I soon after contracted a friendship with that great man and first of geniuses, the 'Immortal Shakspeare', and am happy in now having it in my power to refuse the prevailing opinion of his having run his country for deer-stealing, which is as false as it is disgracing. The fact is, Sir, that he had contracted an intimacy with the wife of a country Justice near Stratford, from his having extolled her beauty in a common ballad; and was unfortunately, by his worship himself, detected in a very awkward situation with her. Shakspeare, to avoid the consequences of this discovery, thought it most prudent to decamp. This I had from his own mouth.

"With equal falsehood has he been father'd with many spurious dramatic pieces. Hamlet, Othello, As you like it, the Tempest, and Midsummer's Night Dream, for five; of all which I confess myself to be the author. And that I should turn poet is not to be wondered at, since nothing is more natural than to contract the *ways* and *manners* of those with whom we live in habits of strict intimacy.

"You will of course expect me to say something of the comments that have been made by various hands on these works of mine and his: but the fact is, they all run so wide of the real sense, sense, that it would be hard to say who has erred most.

"In this condition I for some time enjoyed an uninterrupted happiness, living at my ease on the profits of my stage-pieces, and what I got by horse-holding. But, alas! How transient is all human felicity! The preference given to Shakspeare over me, and the great countenance shewn him by the *first* crowned head in the world, and all people of taste and quality, threw me into so violent a fit of the spleen, that it soon put a period to my existence".

The book was signed 'Transmigratus', which means one who has passed into a different body and is an apt description of the story which concerns the many incarnations through which the 'learned pig' passed during his long existence. Samuel Schoenbaum in *Shakespeare's Lives* (1970) ignores this incarnation motif in claiming that the work is just what it appears: a work written by an officer in the Royal Navy in order to draw attention to "the sad neglect of former naval officers by an ungrateful nation". But the allegory does seem to be more than this, though whether its author was seriously asserting that Shakspeare didn't write Shakespeare rather than merely joking about the idea is impossible to say.

## **The Romance of Yachting**

*The Romance of Yachting*, published in 1848 by Joseph C. Hart, a former American consul at Santa Cruz, is a book of travel sketches but it also includes a number of literary essays in one of which, *The Ancient*

*Lethe*, Hart writes:

"Alas, Shakespeare! Lethe is upon thee! But if it drown thee, it will give up and work the resurrection of better men and more worthy. Thou hast had thy century; they are about having theirs. He was not the mate of the literary characters of his day, and none knew it better than himself. It is a fraud upon the world to thrust his surreptitious fame upon us. He had none that was worthy of being transmitted. The enquiry will be, who were the able literary men who wrote the dramas imputed to him? The plays themselves, or rather a small portion of them, will live as long as English literature is regarded as worth pursuit. The authorship of the plays is no otherwise material to us, than as a matter of curiosity, and to enable us to render exact justice; but they should not be assigned to Shakespeare alone, if at all..."

### ***Floodgates of Doubt***

From the 1850s onwards the floodgates of doubt opened and sceptics advanced from all directions. It is impossible to do justice to the range and direction of anti-Stratfordian speculation in the last 150 years. Baconians, Oxfordians, Marlovians, Derbyites, Rutlanders have all added colour if not light to the controversy. Even Queen Elizabeth I has her proponents. By 1962 the number of rival claimants was said to be 57. It is interesting that a large percentage of the prominent anti-Stratfordians have been Americans like Hart. Harold Bloom and Jonathan Bate offer a Freudian explanation for this: they are anxious to throw off the burden of their literary patrimony: "They cannot actually kill Shakespeare, so the next best thing is to kill his name, for it is as a name that a literary father exercises authority. The works are thus displaced onto a different name which carries the weight of aristocratic instead of literary tradition" (*The Genius of Shakespeare*, p97). This is not very convincing, but at least they are spared the usual charge against heretics of snobbery, if not lunacy. Another possible explanation which Bloom and Bate do not consider is that, not being English, they can view the question more objectively while at the same time enjoying the game of dispelling England's greatest myth. It is certainly worth examining what they have thought in some detail.

### ***Delia Bacon***

One of the first modern heretics in the frame was Delia Bacon, a novelist and playwright from Ohio. Encouraged by Ralph Waldo Emerson, she wrote an article in *Putnam's Monthly* in 1856. Nathaniel Hawthorne covered the publisher's losses in the follow-up book, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded* (1857) for which he contributed a

preface. In the book she rejected the claims of the "Stratford poacher", the "stupid, ignorant, third-rate play-actor", and instead considered the possibility that the plays were published to impart a political philosophy by several authors, all members of "a great philanthropic association", a secret society devoted to enlightenment. "This enterprise was not the product of a single individual mind, and it is important that this fact should be fully and unmistakably enunciated here", she wrote.

According to Delia, the plays were not written as commercial entertainment to line the author's pockets but under the cover of the "cap and bells" there was a deeper philosophical and educational purpose. The key players in the enterprise—Raleigh, Bacon and Spenser—were promoting philosophies of love and reason that were both anti-royalty and anti-Church. The core of the book is comprised of extended close readings of *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus*, in which the three plays are read as coded attacks on the Tudor and Stuart monarchies in favour of a republic of self-governing individuals.

### ***Ralph Waldo Emerson***

Emerson himself had his doubts. He had nothing but praise for Shakespeare the author: "His mind is the horizon beyond which, at present, we do not see", he wrote in his essay on Shakespeare in *Representative Men* (1850). He also included these thoughts:

"So far from Shakespeare's being the least known, he is the one person, in all modern history, known to us. What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office, or function, or district of man's work, has he not remembered? What king has he not taught state, as Talma taught Napoleon? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What lover has he not outloved? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behaviour?"

Clearly, Shakespeare the writer is Emerson's idol—and indeed almost any writer would view him in this same light.

Yet a little later he writes:

"As long as the question is of talent and mental power, the world of men has not his equal to show. But when the question is to life, and its materials, and its auxiliaries, how does he profit me? What does it signify? It is but a Twelfth Night, or Midsummer-Night's Dream, or a Winter Evening's Tale: what signifies another picture more or less? The Egyptian verdict of the Shakspeare Societies comes to mind, that he was a jovial actor and manager. I cannot marry this fact to his verse. Other

admirable men have led lives in some sort of keeping with their thought; but this man, in wide contrast. Had he been less, had he reached only the common measure of great authors, of Bacon, Milton, Tasso, Cervantes, we might leave the fact in the twilight of human fate: but, that this man of men, he who gave to the science of mind a new and larger subject than had ever existed, and planted the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into Chaos,—that he should not be wise for himself,—it must even go into the world's history, that the best poet led an obscure and profane life, using his genius for the public amusement..."

### ***Walt Whitman***

Emerson's difficulty in marrying the man to the verse was shared by Walt Whitman, whose poem *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 was praised by Emerson as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed". Whitman's most well-known comment on the question appears in *November Boughs* (1888):

"Conceiv'd out of the fullest heat and pulse of European feudalism—personifying ill unparalleled ways the medieval aristocracy, its towering spirit of ruthless and gigantic caste, with its own peculiar air and arrogance (no mere imitation)—only one of the 'wolfish earls' so plenteous in the plays themselves, or some born descendant and knower, might seem to be the true author of those amazing works—works in some respects greater than anything else in recorded literature..."

Whitman's letters and conversations were recorded by his friend Horace Traubel in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. These five volumes cover more than a million words, and there are hundreds of references to Shakespeare and the authorship controversy. In one comment Whitman says: "It is remarkable how little is known of Shaksper the actor as a person and how much less is known of the person Shakespeare of the plays. The record is almost a blank—it has no substance whatever: scarcely anything that is said of him is authorized". And again: "I am firm against Shaksper—I mean the Avon man, the actor". In another comment, he has the orthodox scholars down to a tee:

"The typical literary man is no more able to examine this question dispassionately than a priest is to pass on objection to the doctrine of the atonement, hell, heaven: not a bit more able: the scribblers are blind from the start: they are after effects, technique, what a thing looks like, not what it is: they don't read farther up or farther down than the surface of the ground they walk on".

On another occasion he says:

"The Shakespeare plays are essentially the plays of an aristocracy:

they are in fact not as nearly in touch with the spirit of our modern democracy as the plays of the Greeks—as the Homeric stories in particular. Look at the Homeric disregard for power, place: notice the freedom of the Greeks—their frank criticism of their nabobs, rulers, the elect. You find the Greeks speaking of 'the divine hog-keeper', 'keeper of the hogs'—saying things like that—very convincing things—which prove that they had some recognition of the dignity of the common people—of the dignity of labour—of the honour that resides in the average life of the race. Do you find such things in the Shakespeare plays? I do not—no, nothing of the kind: on the contrary everything possible is done in the Shakespeare plays to make the common people seem common—very common indeed. Although, as I say, I do not admit Bacon, this is an argument which may go to the Bacon side".

The legal knowledge displayed in the plays—to which we shall return in the next chapter—bothered him a lot.

"Did you ever notice—how much the law is involved with the plays? Long before I heard of any characteristic turns, the sure touch, the invisible potent hand, of the lawyer—of a lawyer, yes: not a mere attorney-at-law but a mind capable of taking the law in its largest scope, penetrating even its origins: not a pettifogger, perhaps even technically in its detail defective—but a big intellect of great grasp. I go with you fellows when you say no to Shaksper: that's about as far as I have got. As to Bacon, well, we'll see, we'll see."

### ***Mark Twain and George Greenwood***

Mark Twain was interested in the Shakespeare authorship on and off for half a century. He recalls how as a young man in his early 20s he used to argue about it with the pilot of the *Pennsylvania* steamboat as an apprentice on the Mississippi during the late 1850s. Then, 50 years later, he returned to the theme in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* (1909). He explains: "A friend has sent me a new book, from England—*The Shakespeare Problem Restated*—well restated and closely reasoned; and my fifty years' interest in that matter—asleep for the last three years—is excited once more. It is an interest which was born of Delia Bacon's book—away back in the ancient day-1857, or maybe 1856". Twain doesn't name the author of *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* but he actually incorporated a larger part of a chapter from the work, written by the Liberal MP George Greenwood. This takes up 22 of the 150 pages in Mark Twain's book, and it is worth digressing to consider the politician's interest in the debate.

George Greenwood (1850-1928) had two great passions: the

Shakespeare authorship and the welfare of animals. It was he who was instrumental in introducing the Protection of Animals Act, 1911, probably the most important piece of animal legislation in the 20th century. Greenwood was also a scholar and a formidable anti-Stratfordian who wrote a number of books on the matter, including *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* (1908) and *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* (1916). Greenwood offers what many consider to be the classic formulation of the case against Will Shakspeare, presenting it as a matter of evidence and reasonable probability. Although he was not the first to claim it, he presents the case for Shakespeare as a lawyer very convincingly, and it was this part of his earlier book that Twain included in his own work. Greenwood himself believed that there were many pens but that "there must have been one Master Mind, whence flowed all that glorious literature which has made the name of 'Shakespeare' supreme among the poets for all time" (*Is There a Shakespeare Problem?*, p456). Nevertheless, he refused to commit himself as to the identity of this master mind on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

Twain echoes much of Greenwood's argument. Although William's will meticulously itemised every single asset, conspicuously missing was any mention of books. Twain notes that books were valuable then, much more than the second-best bed Shakspeare left his wife. The will mentioned not a play, not a poem, not an unfinished literary piece, not a scrap of manuscript of any kind. "If Shakespeare had owned a dog", said Twain, "but we need not go into that: we know he would have mentioned it in his will. If a good dog, Susanna would have got it; if an inferior one his wife would have got a dower interest in it. I wish he had had a dog, just so we could see how painstakingly he would have divided that dog among the family, in his careful business way".

"How curious and interesting", writes Twain, "is the parallel—as far as poverty of biographical details is concerned—between Satan and Shakespeare. ...They are the best-known unknown persons that have ever drawn breath upon the planet". Most of what biographers tell about Shakespeare are conjectures, pure and simple.

"And these conjectures have to support a crushing burden. He was taken from school at the early age of around 13, and he must have put aside his Warwickshire dialect, which couldn't be understood in London, and studied English very hard indeed, to produce the letter-perfect English of *Venus and Adonis* in the space of ten years, and at the same time to learn all the intricacies and complex procedures of the law courts, and all about soldiering, and sailing, and the manners and customs and

ways of royal courts and aristocratic society, and likewise accumulate in his one head every kind of knowledge that the learned then possessed, and every kind of humble knowledge possessed by the lowly and ignorant, and at the same time acquire a wider and more intimate knowledge of the world's great literatures, ancient and modern, than was possessed by any other man of his time; for he was going to make brilliant and easy and admiration compelling use of these splendid treasures the moment he got to London. And according to the surmises, that is exactly what he did, although there was no one in Stratford able to teach him these things, and no library in the little village to dig it out of..."

In a letter written in 1909 Twain alludes to the issue:

"It always seemed unaccountable to me that a man could be so prominent in Elizabeth's little London as historians and biographers claim that Shakespear was, and yet leave behind him hardly an incident for people to remember him by; leave behind him nothing much but trivialities; leave behind him little or nothing but the happenings of an utterly commonplace life, happenings that could happen to the butcher and the grocer, the candlestickmaker and the undertaker, and there an end—deep, solemn, sepulchral silence. It always seemed to me that not even a distinguished horse could die and leave such biographical poverty behind him..."

### ***Henry James***

Henry James, the American novelist, was also a doubter. His only recorded remark on the subject, expressed in a letter to Miss Violet Hunt in 1903, is a clarion call for heretics everywhere: "I am sort of haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practised on a patient world". But perhaps the fraud has succeeded only too well, or is in danger of losing its impact, as more and more ridiculous claimants are thrust forward and as defenders of orthodoxy write biographies in which they reduce the world's greatest poet to an empty-headed bore. Perhaps it is time to expose the fraud and resurrect the extraordinary genius who perpetrated it. In this way we can ensure Shakespeare's pre-eminence for another 400 years.

### **3. The Literary Colossus**

*"Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world  
like a colossus"*

—Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*

Ben Jonson tell us us that if we want to discover the real Shakespeare we must look not on his picture but his book. The same warning applies to the picture of William's life. We must avoid the trap of trying to marry the verse to his biography, for that is not only to beg the question of the authorship but it also serves to denigrate the real author. Instead, we must first of all examine what the works themselves reveal. If we construct a mental map of the author of Shakespeare, then we can ask whether or not it directs us to William. As I shall argue, it points us in an entirely different direction altogether.

What sort of mind and personality do the Shakespeare works reveal? At first glance, this is a difficult question because a playwright puts thoughts and feelings into the mouths of his characters which he may not himself experience. Yet there are inevitably times when the dramatic mask will slip. People are made up of careers, knowledge, gifts and talents—and also of themselves. Prospero in *The Tempest* is a character who is generally acknowledged as being close to the author, and he describes himself as "for the liberal arts, without a parallel". A high claim indeed, but one which is fully supported by the works.

They reveal a cultural giant, a writer who bestrides the literary world like a colossus—the veritable god of literature. Coleridge got it right in referring to "our myriad-minded Shakespeare". The plays and poems display the products of a highly cultured man, a reader of foreign literature, a foreign traveller, a Cambridge student, a legal expert, an acute poet of human nature, an aristocrat, an educator and a philosopher. They map a mind with an immense range of knowledge and culture for its time and an unparalleled facility of expressing it all in a ravishing way of words, metaphors and allusions. Let there be no semblance of a doubt: Prospero's description of himself fits the genius that was Shakespeare like a glove.

#### ***The Highly Cultured Mind***

The 18th century writer John Upton, author of *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (1746) made the telling point: "I have often wondered

with what kind of reasoning anyone could be so far imposed on as to imagine that Shakespeare had no learning; when it must at the same time be acknowledged that, without learning, he cannot be read with any degree of understanding or taste" (cited in Greenwood, *op.cit.*, 1916, p167, note).

Shakespeare's learning was recognised by his contemporaries. Ben Jonson in the dedicatory poem 'To My Beloved, The Author', prefixed to the First Folio, compares him to Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, to name but three; and in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598 Francis Meres likens the author to the great classical writers Plautus and Seneca for the writing of plays, and to Ovid for his mellifluous and honey-tongued poetry. Plautus was the great comic dramatist of ancient Rome, Ovid was the great love poet, and Seneca was the great philosopher-playwright of tragedy. He is thus telling us that Shakespeare was the great philosopher, poet and dramatist of his age, which is precisely what the works reveal.

The author of Shakespeare used the following Latin authors, often in the original and not in translation: Ovid, Plautus, Virgil, Homer, Pliny, Tacitus, Horace, Tibullus, Terence, Herodotus, Lucretius, Juvenal, Statius, Livy, Catullus and Seneca. He also frequently uses latinisms. Take a few examples. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he refers to rivers "that have overborne their continents", where 'continents' refers to containing banks, as it does in "contiente ripa" in Horace. He also appreciates the derivation of the word "capricious" from 'caper', a goat, when he makes Touchstone say in *As You Like It*: "I am here with thee, and thy goats, as the most capricious poet, honest Ovid, was among the Gothes" (Act 3, Scene 3). Ovid in his banishment dwelt among the Goths or Gotes, so here we have a double pun on 'Gotes' and 'caper'.

The author or mastermind is very particular in his adjectives. He refers to a "captious and intenable sieve", here using 'captious' in its precise classical meaning of that which is capable of receiving but incapable of retaining. And he always uses the word "expedient" in strict accordance with its derivation from Latin—"that disengages itself from all entanglements". "Premised" is another case in point: he always uses it in the sense of the word from which it is derived, "proemissus"—"sent forth". These usages are of a writer so imbued with the Latin language that he incorporates them into English.

Evidence that Shakespeare was an omnivorous reader also lies in many of the sources of the plays. Let us take some Italian and French examples to illustrate the point. The plot of *Measure for Measure* is taken from Cinthio's tragedy *Epitia* and his collection of prose tales, the *Hecatommithi*. Although Whetstone had written an English treatment and a prose version,

Shakespeare seems to have consulted the original Italian, first because the name Angelo appears as Angela in Cinthio's play but is not adapted in Whetstone and second because the story of Othello comes from another tale in the *Hecatommithi* not in Whetstone, though it had been translated into French.

Let us consider the case of *Twelfth Night*. In 1562 Niccolo Secchi published his comedy *Gl Inganni* and in 1592 Curzio Gonzaga published his comedy *Gl Ingannati*. In the former the name assumed by the lady in disguise is Cesare, while in Shakespeare's play it is Cesario. In the latter the name Melevolti appears in the poetical induction. In Italian it means 'disused, or sick face'. In Shakespeare we have Aguecheek and, of course, Malvolio. In Gonzaga's play is also found the name Fabio, while in *Twelfth Night* we have Fabian. John Manningham, a contemporary barrister, certainly noticed the similarity between Shakespeare's play and the Italian works. He kept a diary and under the date of 2nd February 1601 he states: "At our feast wee had a play called Twelve Night, or What You Will, much like the Commedy of Errors, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni". Neither of these Italian plays was available to Shakespeare in English translation.

Whether or not Shakespeare could read Italian, there can be no argument that he could read French, for Act 3 scene 4 of *Henry V* is entirely in that language. And there were French translations of some of these Italian works by the likes of Belleforest which may have been sources. It is in fact Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* which is one of the undoubted sources of *Hamlet*. Yet Belleforest's account was not published in English until 1608. Shakespeare must, therefore, have read it in the original French.

Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* was published in Paris in the 1570s. How did Shakespeare obtain a copy unless he had visited France? Further evidence of such travel is *Love's Labour's Lost*, which is set in the court of Navarre. The names of some of the characters—Berowne, Longaville, Dumain, Moth and Boyet—are those of men important in French politics, mostly at different time periods: Marechal Biron, Longueville, Duc de Mayne, Mothe and Bois. There are also references in the play to French historical events which were not recorded in English. So the author must have obtained them either through personal contact or from the *Chronicles* of Monstrelet of which no translation existed. He knew, for example, that the sum of 200,000 crowns was paid by the King of France to the King of Navarre in exchange for the castle of Cherbourg, the county of Evreux and its dependencies.

The whole play of *Henry VI* has twenty scenes set in France. In one

(Act 3, Scene 3) occurs an interview in the open field between Joan of Arc and the Duke of Burgundy in which the eloquent pleading of the Maid overcomes all resistance on the part of the Duke. No such meeting ever took place, but in 1780 was published in France for the first time a letter dated 17th July 1429 which Joan of Arc wrote to the Duke, making a passionate plea to take precisely the same course which is urged on him in the play. The existence of this letter was presumably unknown in England in the time of Shakespeare. Certainly, neither Hall nor Holinshed nor any other English chronicler mentions it. It also appears to have been unknown in France, for it remained in manuscript for a period of 350 years. And yet this very letter clearly helped to open the series of negotiations resulting in the peace treaty of 1435, as represented in the play. The dramatist simply changed its form to a spoken address in the open field as better suited to his stage purposes. Only someone who had visited France and Burgundy and studied the archives would have known of the letter's existence.

Did the author also travel in Italy? There are examples in the plays which suggest he did, such as the reference in *The Winter's Tale* to Julio Romano as a sculptor, though he was known outside Italy as only a painter, or the reference to an evening mass in Verona in *Romeo and Juliet*, or the authentic Venetian atmosphere captured so well in *Othello*. On the other hand, in both *The Tempest* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Milan is a sea-port. His knowledge of Italian geography was thus patchy, and perhaps through the trickery of the artist, the plays give the impression that their creator had travelled widely. Almost certainly, he had visited France; perhaps he also travelled in parts of Italy.

### ***The Wordspinner***

The extent of Shakespeare's vocabulary is quite unique—indeed it is far greater than any other writer in history.

George Greenwood in *Is There A Shakespeare Problem?* quotes from Max Muller in the 19th century:

"The Hebrew Testament says all that it has to say with 5642 words; Milton's works are built up with 8000, and Shakespeare, who probably displayed a greater variety of expression than any writer in any language, produced all his plays with about 15000 words" (p472).

Other estimates put the figure higher, some as high as 21,000. Muller's calculation, however, is supported in B. Efron and R. Thisted, *Estimating The Number Of Unknown Species: How Many Words Did Shakespeare Know?* (1976), who give a figure of 14,376.

In fact, the English language owes a great debt to Shakespeare. He invented 1500-1700 of our common words by changing nouns into verbs, changing verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original. We are talking of words like: accused, amazement, assassination, employer, engagements, exposure, fixture, luggage, mountaineer, pedant, reinforcement, rumination, besmirch, misquote, submerge, swagger, torture, circumstantial, gloomy, laughable, lacklustre, lonely, monumental, olympian, remorseless, sanctimonious, traditional, unmitigated and worthless.

In their introduction to *Coined By Shakespeare: Words And Meanings First Used By The Bard* (1998), Jeffrey McQuain and Stanley Malless write:

"Shakespeare's words are current in business (*employer* and *manager*; *investment* and *retirement*), as well as in law (*circumstantial* evidence and *foregone* conclusion) and politics (especially among those who *negotiate* or *petition*). The *advertising* world looks for new *designs* and *exposure*. Reporters profess familiarity with the word *reword*, if not with *misquote*, and activists actively use the Bard's best in phrases from 'civil rights *protesters*' to 'human rights *violations*'".

It is not just a matter of coining new words; it's a matter of phraseology. Here is what Bernard Levin has to say:

"If you cannot understand my argument, and declare "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise—why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you

have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then—to give the devil his due—if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I were dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then—by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts—it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare" (*The Story of English*, 1986).

Of course, the problem for Stratfordians—and it is a major one which they nevertheless avoid—is whether such extensive wordspinning is within the capability of one individual. If Shakespeare used 15,000 different words and the nearest achievement is Milton with 7,000-8,000, then Shakespeare used twice as many words as any other writer. Is this humanly possible for one man? If not, then it does rather point us in the direction of group authorship of the plays.

### ***The Cambridge Student***

Where did Shakespeare acquire this cultural and linguistic facility? The evidence of the works suggests that at least some of it is derived from university learning. Specifically, this evidence points to the author as a Cambridge student. Some of the clues are found in his use of certain idioms peculiar to that university, such as 'keep' for 'dwell'—"in what room do you keep?" Shakespeare uses the word in this sense on several occasions. Thus in *Titus Andronicus* we read: "Knock at his study where, they say, he keeps".

Again, a candidate for a degree at the university, until fairly recently, was required to maintain a syllogistic dispute in the schools called 'the act'. If he was successful and became a graduate he was said to 'commence', and the ceremony at which he was admitted was, and still is, called the 'commencement'. If a candidate went to a higher degree he was said to 'proceed'. Falstaff, in *Henry IV, Part Two*, says in praise of sack: "Learning is a mere hoard of gold till sack commences it and sets it out in act and use". 'Commence' and 'act' are also used in correct conjunction in the prologue to the play and in *Henry VI, Part Two*. Again, in *Timon of Athens*, Timon exclaims:

*"Hadst thou, like us from our first swath proceeded  
The sweet degrees that this brief world affords..."*

and concludes his speech:

*"Thy nature did commence in sufferance, time  
Hath made thee hard on't".*

Another example occurs in *King Lear* when the King says to Regan:

*"'Tis not in thee to scant my sizes".*

A 'size' was an allowance of bread and drink to poor scholars and to be scant of sizes was a punishment for such undergraduates. Many years ago Mary Cowden Clarke said of the works in her *Complete Concordance to Shakespeare* (1845) that "they bear palpable tokens of college elegance and predilection, both in story and treatment, with almost unmistakable signs of having been written by a schoolman; his famous acquaintance with college terms and usages makes for the conclusion that he had enjoyed the privilege of a university education".

A further clue to the author's attendance at Cambridge comes in a work called *Polimenteia*, which was published in 1595 by John Legate, then printer of the university, and dedicated to the Earl of Essex by 'WC', which is generally supposed to stand for William Clark. This work contains a letter to Oxford and Cambridge and the Inns of Court in which Clark, or whoever, alludes to writers of the "university school". He names Spenser and Daniel, and then also "all praiseworthy Lucrecia, sweet Shake-speare". The sentence continues by referring to Marlowe and Watson, both university men. Clearly, 'WC' conceived of Shakespeare as having been a member of one of the two universities.

A final clue lies in the character of Dr. Caius in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. John Caius, a lecturer at Cambridge, and the co-founder of Gonville and Caius College, died in 1573, yet he is clearly the model for the character in the play. Like the latter, he was a physician. He was also educated abroad, like the character, and he was inclined to ape foreign manners, as the character does. His real name was actually Kaye but he changed it to the Latin 'Caius'. Again, like Shakespeare's character, he was extremely quarrelsome and had an antipathy to Welshmen. In the ordinances of the college founded by him, Welshmen were expressly excluded from the privileges of fellowship. When the real Caius died, William Shakspeare was living in Stratford, nine years old.

### ***The Legal Expert***

The assertion of Shakespeare's peculiar intimacy with the law does not emanate only from heretics, even though modern orthodox scholars have unsuccessfully attempted to refute it. The conviction actually originated with some of the most learned Stratfordians. Malone, a distinguished 18th century Shakespearean critic and lawyer, wrote in 1790: "His knowledge of legal terms is not merely such as might be acquired by the casual observation of even his all-comprehending mind; it has the appearance of

technical skill; and he is so fond of displaying it on all occasions that I suspect he was early initiated in at least the forms of law" (cited in Greenwood, *Shakespeare Problem Restated*, 1937 edn. p112). In 1858 William Rushton, a well known barrister, published *Shakespeare as a Lawyer*, in which he wrote:

"His works contain passages displaying not merely a knowledge of the principles and practice of the law of real property, but also of the common law, and of the criminal law, and a thorough intimacy with the exact letter of the Statute Law..."

In 1859 Lord Campbell, formerly Lord Chief Justice of England and Lord Chancellor, published *Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered* (1859), in which he stated:

"To Shakespeare's law, lavishly as he propounds it, there can be neither demurrer, nor bill of exception, nor writ of error. The jests in *The Comedy of Errors* cannot be supposed to arise from anything in the laws or customs of Syracuse, but they show the author to be very familiar with some of the most abstruse proceedings in English jurisprudence. Let a non-professional man, however acute, presume to talk law, and he will speedily fall into laughable absurdities".

Richard Grant White, a 19th century American Shakespearean scholar and lawyer, added his opinion that—

"among the dramatic writers of that period, whose works have survived, not one uses the phraseology of the law with the frequency, the freedom, and the correctness of Shakespeare... the technical language of the law runs from his pen as part of his vocabulary and parcel of his thought" ('William Shakespeare: Attorney at Law', *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1859).

Even Sir Sidney Lee, who was entirely orthodox, spoke of "Shakespeare's accurate use of legal terms, which deserves all the attention that has been paid to it" (see *A Life of William Shakespeare*, 1899, p30. Lee, however, later modified his opinion when it became apparent that he was providing ammunition for Baconians).

All the above nevertheless accepted William's claim. But others who entered the fray were more doubtful. In 1866 Nathaniel Holmes, Justice of the Supreme Court of Missouri and afterwards Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University, published *The Authorship of Shakespeare* in which he rejected the Shakespearean theory. In 1897 E.J. Castle, KC, published *Shakespeare, Bacon, Jonson and Greene*. He makes the important point that the constant occurrences in the works of legal expressions, remarkable though it is as showing that the man who used them must have had a legal

training, is less valuable as a test than "the more subtle evidence which points to the life and habits of a lawyer". Speaking of Malone and Lord Campbell, he adds: "Both these authors, I think, have taken too narrow a view of the subject, and have therefore failed to recognise the evidence of the social and professional life of an English barrister, which is to be found by those who look for it".

In 1902, two other lawyers came down on the side of the heretics. Lord Penzance, regarded as one of the finest legal authorities of his day, published *The Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy: A Judicial Summing-Up*. He speaks of Shakespeare's—

"perfect familiarity with not only the principle, axioms and maxims, but the technicalities of English law, a knowledge so perfect and intimate that he was never incorrect and never at fault... at every turn and point at which the author required a metaphor, simile, or illustration, his mind ever turned first to the law. He seems almost to have thought in legal phrases, the commonest of legal expressions were ever at the end of his pen in description or illustration".

In the same year, Judge Thomas Webb of Trinity College, Dublin, published *The Mystery of William Shakespeare*, in which he states emphatically: "If anything is certain in regard to the Sonnets, the Poems and the Plays, it is certain that the author was a lawyer".

Apart from the sonnets (in particular 46 and 134), the plays themselves teem with legal terms and legal doctrines. Here are some of the illustrations given by Webb:

"In *The Merchant of Venice* Antonio settles the property of the Jew in so lawyer-like a manner that Mr Lewin, in his *Treatise on Trusts*, cites his language in illustration of a 'use'... in *King John* the law of adulterine bastardy is laid down with the precision of a textbook... In *Hamlet* the Prince of Denmark talks of statutes, recognisances, fines and recoveries, and double vouchers, as glibly as if he were fresh from reading Bacon's *Law Tracts*... in *Love's Labour's Lost* the French Maid of Honour refuses to make her lips "a common of pasture"; in *As You Like It* Rosalind talks of "dying by attorney"; in *The Merchant of Venice* Portia proposes to be "charged with interrogatories"; and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Mrs Page, speaking of the fat knight, says, "if the devil have him not in fee-simple, with fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of waste, attempt us again"."

The last person to be noted here among the heretics is Sir George Greenwood, the barrister and MP noted in chapter 2, who was a formidable and worthy exponent of the negative case against William. In his first work on the subject, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* (1908), Greenwood

includes a chapter on 'Shakespeare as a Lawyer'. After this book appeared, a fellow MP, J.M. Robertson, challenged Greenwood's contention in *The Baconian Heresy: A Confutation* (1913). Robertson maintained that a large number of writers, contemporary with Shakespeare, although devoid of legal training, not only use legal terms with the same frequency as he does, but also display as much knowledge as is found in the works. The use of legal phraseology was rather a trick or fashion of the day, and Shakespeare merely indulges in this vogue like any other writer of the time.

Greenwood's replies in *Is There A Shakespeare Problem?* (1916) and *Shakespeare's Law* (1920) were devastating but have been largely ignored by Stratfordians who focus exclusively on Robertson's flawed and inaccurate work. Greenwood demonstrates that Shakespeare's legal knowledge is precise and indicates a mind well-trained and practised in the idioms and conceptual terminology characteristic of lawyers and judges. It is not only the *quantity* but also the *quality* of the legal terms and allusions that is the issue. Greenwood's argument is given recent weight by Sokal and Sokal:

"The overall impression given by this Dictionary may well contradict frequently reiterated claims that Shakespeare's interest in law was at best superficial, and that Shakespeare exploited legal ideas, circumstances, and language with no regard for any factor aside from 'poetic' effect. It is our view, derived from cumulative evidence, that on the contrary Shakespeare shows a quite precise and mainly serious interest in the capacity of legal language to convey matters of social, moral, and intellectual substance..." (Sokal, B and Sokal, M: *Shakespeare's Legal Language*, 2000; quoted online at: [shakespearefellowship.org](http://shakespearefellowship.org) ; see also Mark Andre Alexander: *Shakespeare's Knowledge of Law*, on the same website).

Consider as an example the reference in *Hamlet* to the famous case of Hales v. Petit. It was decided in 1564, reported by Plowden in Norman-French and found in his *Commentaries and Reports*, first published in 1571. Sir James Hales, a puisne judge, was so worried by proceedings which had been brought against him that he committed suicide by drowning himself and a judge had found a verdict of *felo de se*. Hales had been a joint tenant with his wife of some land. If he had died a natural death she would have taken it by the right of survivorship, but since he had died by his own hand the Crown claimed the whole of his property as forfeited by that felony and had actually conferred it on the defendant, Cyriac Petit. Lady Hales, however, contended that no forfeiture had been incurred during her husband's lifetime, since the crime which involved the forfeiture

was not complete so long as her husband was alive, for as long as he was alive he had not killed himself, and the moment he died the estate vested in the widow, his joint tenant, by right of survivorship. So the question was whether the crime was committed in Sir James's lifetime.

According to Plowden, Counsel for the widow argued: "Two things were to be considered: first, the cause of death; secondly, the death ensuing the cause; and these two make the felony, and without both the jury is not consummate". For the defendant it was argued: "The act of felony consists of three parts—the first is the imagination whether or not it is convenient for him to destroy himself, and what way it can be done; the second is the resolution, which is a determination of the mind to destroy itself; and the third is the perfection, which is the execution of what the mind had resolved to do". The Crown gave judgment for the defendant, i.e. in favour of the contention of the Crown, arguing:

"Sir James Hales is dead. How came he to his death? By drowning. And who drowned him? Sir James Hales. And when did he drown? In his lifetime; and the act of the living man was the death of the dead man, for Sir James Hales being alive caused Sir James Hales to die..."

If we turn to the beginning of Act 5 Scene 1 of *Hamlet*, the two gravediggers are discussing the death of Ophelia, who has just drowned herself:

*1st Clown:* "Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?"

*2nd Clown:* "I tell thee she is; and therefore make her grave straight; the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial".

*1st Clown:* "How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?"

*2nd Clown:* "Why, 'tis found so".

*1st Clown:* "It must be '*se offendendo*'; it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act; and an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform; argal, she drowned herself wittingly".

*2nd Clown:* "Nay, but hear you, goodman Delver".

*1st Clown:* "Give me leave. Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes—mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself; argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life".

*2nd Clown:* "But is this law?"

*1st Clown:* "Ay, marry, is't; crowner's quest law".

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion from this dialogue that the author had

read the case, but why should he have done so unless he was himself studying law? It was, after all, written in Norman-French, and therefore required considerable effort to study. And why include the allusion in the play unless he wanted to please the young legal students at the universities, inns of court or stately mansions where *Hamlet* and the other plays were frequently performed. It is also worth noting that James Hales was a member of Gray's Inn and that Robert Greene dedicated his *Menaphon* to Lady Hales, and of course it is in the preface to Greene's work where Nashe refers to *Hamlet*.

### ***The Poet Of Human Nature***

Shakespeare does not lyricise the countryside in the manner of a naturalist poet. He does not 'warble' about banks and braes; he does not write sonnets to nightingales or odes to skylarks; he neglects to mention woodpeckers in the woods, squirrels in the trees or fishes rising from streams. If his plays have rural settings, as in *As You Like It* or *The Tempest*, they are fantastical, not realistic. The more usual settings are: faraway places such as Verona, Milan, Padua, Mantua, Venice, Messina, Rome, Troy, Athens, Bohemia, Vienna, Ephesus, Paris, Navarre or Marseilles; the courts, gardens and castles of kings, princes and the nobility; and London, the Tower, and Windsor.

In other words, the poet gives no indication of having lived a country life. If the author were William and had passed his boyhood roaming through the woods and fields around Stratford, we would expect this local flora and fauna to feature in at least some of the works, but it is totally absent. There is no indication whatsoever of the poet having observed the habits of birds, insects or rural animals. Not only is there no Stratford colour in the works, but there is a lack of the use of dialect from that area. Indeed, there is no mention of the town at all.

Stratfordians often refer to 'the forest of Arden' in *As You Like It* and point out that there was a Warwickshire Arden. But this is irrelevant. The play is founded on Lodge's novel *Rosalynde*, where the banished king lives as an outlaw in the forest of *Ardenne* in France. Nevertheless, here surely would have been an opportunity for the dramatist to interpolate some Warwickshire colour. Yet he does nothing of the kind. Instead, Lodge's fantastical mixture of European and tropical trees and animals is transferred directly to the play. So we are presented with an oak and a palm tree, a deer and a lioness, and a "green and gilded snake". None of the characters hears or sees a single bird or insect the whole time. We cannot even gather at what time of the year the action is set. The Duke complains of "the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter's wind", but

the allusion to the forest as a "desert" occurs six times. All this is far removed from the green forest, filled with happy animal life and summer blossoms that has been wildly conjured up by some commentators.

Animals are generally employed in Shakespeare to serve in illustration, or as similes; they do not slip naturally into his landscape. There are exceptions, however. They are the "beasts of the chase", the boar, the deer and the hare. *Venus and Adonis* includes superb descriptions of a boar hunt and a hare hunt. He is also thoroughly familiar with hawks and hawking. As for the deer, he seems to sympathise with it against the sportsmen. In *As You Like It* Jaques refers to the "poor sequester'd stag" that "from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt". These were, of course, the recreations of the upper class, though Shakespeare describes them not so much as one of the sportsmen but more as the thinking observer, with sometimes more sympathy for the victims.

Inanimate nature is described from the perspective of a city or suburban, not a rural, background. The author watched and meditated on natural phenomena: the winds, the tides, the clouds, the thunder, the lightening and the rain. Flowers and gardens feature prominently throughout the works, and it is clear that the author had an especial affection for them. In *The Winter's Tale*, for example, Perdita, who has been brought up from infancy by two illiterate rustics, does not talk about sheep but in considerable detail about garden flowers and the science of horticulture. So what we are saying is that Shakespeare's treatment of animate and inanimate nature does not point to a rural background, and certainly gives no indication of a Warwickshire life; rather, it indicates a city or suburban upbringing and environment.

It is, however, human nature which is the poet's overriding interest here, and his power of representing human character and personality is one of his greatest achievements. Samuel Johnson, echoing Hamlet's praise of the actors, put it well in the preface to his 1765 edition of the works: "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and life". In Shakespeare we are confronting as profound a student and interpreter of human nature as perhaps the world has not seen before or since. All human life is laid before us in an unparalleled panorama: the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, the innocent and the cunning, the happy and the miserable, the drunken and the sober. In its scope and variety, the Shakespeare universe mirrors the human universe itself.

But it is more than mere superficial character. The power and enduring greatness of Shakespeare lies partly in his insights into what lies underneath

the surface. He delves deep into the psyche, whose existence he practically discovered centuries before Freud. He dissects the most powerful and enduring emotions such as love, lust, envy, and ambition with razor-sharp exactitude. In Shakespeare we are clearly dealing with a master mind which possessed a unique combination of imaginative power and incisive intellect—a mind which can portray at one and the same time the pangs of love and the rational comment on it, a mind with both the 'fine frenzy' of the poet and the cool intellect of the dispassionate observer. To put it in the terms of later ages, he was at once both Romantic and Rationalist and could see equally into both worlds.

### *The Aristocrat*

In his autobiography Charlie Chaplin wrote that "in the work of the greatest of geniuses humble beginnings will reveal themselves—but one cannot trace the slightest sign of them in Shakespeare". Chaplin concluded of the works that: "whoever wrote them had an aristocratic attitude" (*My Autobiography*, 1964). Chaplin's verdict is well founded. We have seen that Shakespeare must have had a fairly extensive classical education; that he must have travelled abroad, certainly in France and possibly in Italy; that he must have studied law in depth; that his knowledge of the natural world is more consistent with a city or suburban than a rural lifestyle; and that he was perfectly familiar with the types of sport which were mainly the preserve of the nobility. In those days someone from a humble, or even a petty bourgeois, background *could* have acquired a classical education and a training in the law, *could* have travelled abroad and *could* have acquired a knowledge of the 'noble' sports. But all with considerable difficulty. The question is whether, when we consider the evidence of William Shakespeare's life, these difficulties become surmountable.

But we have not exhausted the difficulties, because the evidence of aristocracy lies also in other areas. There is, for example, the subject matter of the works. As Sir Cedric Hardwicke suggested:

"I am not entirely satisfied that there is some mystery about Shakespeare, the enigma of the ages, although with few exceptions modern scholarship dismisses any suspicion that his work came from other pens. My speculating turns on the fact that his contemporaries wrote in the main about middle-class Elizabethans or underlings of the Court. Yet without exception Shakespeare's principals were kings or queens or noblemen of rank. He created no hero less than a knight, in Sir John Falstaff. Of his age, only Will wrote exclusively of kings, dukes and earls. I am tempted to wonder what the reason might be..." (*A Victorian in Orbit*, 1961, p217).

There is no doubt that the language of the courts in the plays is refined and noble. "What has perhaps puzzled readers most is the courtesy of Shakespeare: his easy movement in the give and take of social intercourse among persons of good breeding". These are the words of the orthodox critic E.K. Chambers.\* Chaplin was certainly right in observing that the works give not the slightest sign of humble beginnings. All of the signs are of someone familiar with the manner and customs of the court. In *Henry VIII* he even shows that he is familiar with the court order of precedence at a coronation. Queen Elizabeth's speeches and letters have also a self-dramatising rhetoric similar to Shakespeare's own kings. However, this familiarity does not *prove* that the author had an aristocratic background. But it certainly proves that he knew what he was writing about.

Then again there is the fact that he had aristocratic friends. This is shown by the dedications. The poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are dedicated in affectionate and familiar terms to the Earl of Southampton. Is it likely that a man of William's background would have addressed a nobleman in such a way as "the love I dedicate to your lordship is without end"? The tone here is that of one upper class person addressing another. Certainly, actors were regarded as 'rogues and vagabonds' and did not normally fraternise with the nobility. None is mentioned in William's will. And much of Southampton's correspondence survives, yet there is no mention of William or Shakespeare anywhere. No biographer of Southampton has been able to trace any association whatsoever between him and the Stratford man. Nor is there any mention of him in the extant correspondence of either the Earls of Pembroke or Montgomery, to whom the *First Folio* is dedicated. Shakespeare was obviously friendly with the nobility but equally obviously they were not at all friendly with him—under that name, at any rate.

Then there is the problem of the author's sympathies. According to Churton Collins, "the author of the Shakespeare plays was essentially aristocratic in temper and sympathy". Take *The Tempest* itself. Just as Prospero performs his magic arts on the island through other characters, so too does Shakespeare perform his poetic magic through the actors who speak his lines. Prospero's magic has indeed close affinities to dramatic

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\* E.K. Chambers: *Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, Oxford, 1930; quoted on the web in *Post- Shakespeare Chronology, 1800-2004*—at: <http://www.bc.edu/publications/relarts/meta-elements/pdf/shakes3.pdf> .

invention: he can wreck ships without destroying them, conjure banquets where no food is eaten, and direct the movement of characters throughout the island. Yet Prospero is also a nobleman, the rightful Duke of Milan. Indeed, Prospero is often seen as the personification of aristocracy, just as Caliban is seen to personify democracy. If the play dramatises the relation of the poet to his art and to the world, why would its author identify himself with an aristocrat unless he was one, or at least had aristocratic sympathies?

Or take *Coriolanus*. Hazlitt writes that—

"Shakespeare has in this play shown himself well versed in state affairs. Coriolanus is a store-house of political commonplaces. Anyone who studies it may save himself the trouble of reading Burke's *Reflections* or Paine's *Rights of Man*, or the Debates in both Houses of Parliament since the French Revolution or our own. The arguments for and against aristocracy or democracy, on the privileges of the few and the claims of the many...are here very well handled, with the spirit of the poet and the acuteness of the philosopher..." (*Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, 1817).

Hazlitt goes on to say that the author seems to have a leaning on the arbitrary side of the question. This is surely the case. The contrasts between the commanding figure of Coriolanus and the baseness of the 'rabble' are emphasised by a series of images which show the author's dislike of the masses. Thus, of animal names applied to the latter, we have: dogs, cats, curs, hares, geese, camels, mules, crows, minnows and goats. They are all represented as cowardly creatures which are to be hunted. The masses are also associated with evil smells of breath and body. In contrast, the author's admiration for great men leads him to characterise Coriolanus by images of boldness and force. He is a dragon, an eagle, a steed, and a tiger. Volumnia compares him to the bear from which enemies flee like children, and Aufidius likens him to the osprey, which takes fish by "sovereignty of nature". In this play, as throughout the works, Shakespeare tends to treat the masses as a kind of brute force, easily incited to violence or adulation but uninfluenced by rational appeal.

### ***The Great Educator***

But how to change them? That was the question. Did Shakespeare have a classical education, go to Cambridge University, travel abroad, receive legal training, acquire knowledge of 'noble' sports, acquire noble friends, choose aristocratic subjects, learn about upper class behaviour,

and display upper class tastes and opinions merely in order to write plays that would please lower class audiences? Clearly not. And there is much evidence in support of the contention that he did not write merely in order to please.

According to Burgess, the works are "merely plays, entertainments for a couple of idle hours". This nonsense reflects a long-held opinion that Shakespeare wrote simply to fill the public theatres and his own pockets. Pope's famous couplet sums it all up:

*"For gain not glory winged his roving flight  
And grew immortal in his own despite".*

In his *Life Of William Shakespeare* (1899) Sir Sidney Lee perpetuates this myth by stating that "his literary attainments and successes were chiefly valued as serving the prosaic end of making a permanent provision for himself and his daughters". Of course, these absurd notions are necessitated by the apparent literary indifference and monetary preoccupations of the orthodox claimant. They denigrate Shakespeare the author and are in any case refuted by recent evidence of the original performances of many of the plays, as well as by the internal evidence of the works themselves—not by the 'picture' but by the 'booke'.

Twentieth Century research has indicated that several of the plays were not written for the groundlings of the Rose, the Globe or the Blackfriars, as was once imagined, but for audiences more worthy of them. In *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (1950) Professor H.N. Paul argues strongly that the play was written for a performance at Hampton Court on 7th August 1606. In *Measure for Measure as Royal Entertainment* (1966) Professor J.W. Bennett demonstrates that it was designed for production at Whitehall on 26th November 1604. Glynne Wickham and others believe that *The Winter's Tale* was written for a performance in the autumn of 1610 before the King and heir apparent to celebrate the latter's investiture as Prince of Wales. Wickham extended this discovery to include *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* by showing that they also bear the hallmark of court commission.

Even orthodox scholars such as Leslie Hotson accept that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written for a Garter Investiture in Westminster on 23rd April 1597, that *Twelfth Night* was composed for the visit of the Duke of Bracciano at Whitehall on 6th January 1601 and that *Henry VIII* was written for the court festivities attending the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine in February 1613. *King Lear*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Othello*, we are often assured, were also 'royal plays' written expressly for the ruling monarch and his retinue. Others were

probably written, or revised, for the Inns of Court, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Timon of Athens* and *Troilus and Cressida* being examples. *Hamlet* is often thought to have been composed for performance at Oxford or Cambridge, and *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew* were probably commissioned to celebrate the weddings of members of the aristocracy at the 'great halls' of their residences. Here are half of the Shakespeare plays which were almost certainly not originally composed for the public theatre at all, but for royal, aristocratic or learned audiences.

Yet this is hardly surprising. In those days only about 5% of the population could read or write, and illiteracy was almost total among "the youth that thunder at a playhouse and fight for bitten apples". They would have understood little or nothing of the classical allusions, the big words, the legal references and the historical details. Yet the plays were performed at the public theatres, and arguably this was part of the author's educational purpose.

On the other hand, the myth that they were written exclusively for the *stage*, wherever constructed, must also be laid to rest. Charles Lamb went so far as to say:

"It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. Their distinguishing excellence is a reason that they should be so. There is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do..." (*On the Tragedies of Shakespeare*, 1811; quoted in W.T. Andrews, ed. *Critics on Shakespeare*, 1973, p37).

Lamb continues by saying that the characters are the objects of meditation rather than of interest or curiosity as to their actions. So with the great criminal characters such as Macbeth, Richard and Iago, we think not so much of the crimes which they commit as of the ambition and intellectual activity which prompts them to overleap these moral fences. But when we see those things represented, the acts which they do are almost everything, their impulses nothing. Lamb even argues that *King Lear* cannot be acted: "On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of Lear. While we read it, we do not see Lear, but we are Lear..."

Lamb's insight amounts to heresy nowadays because it calls into question the orthodox insistence that only an actor could have written the plays. It is a point to which we shall return. Here let us register our

agreement with Lamb's view. For the great psychological insight of the master mind to which we have already referred is demonstrated uniquely in the plays precisely because the great characters subject themselves to relentless self-analysis through dialogues with themselves as much as with others. It is mainly through close study of the texts that we come to understand the depth of this analysis, which is one of the chief reasons why Shakespeare is central to the literary canon and why his plays are mandatory texts in literary courses throughout the world.

A cursory glance at some of the plays will confirm the view that they were written to be studied as well as acted. *Antony and Cleopatra* is more than twice as much in length as the "two hours" traffic of the stage at that time. It has no fewer than 42 scenes, one of 10 lines being followed by one of 5, and the action shifts swiftly between Rome, Egypt, Athens and elsewhere. There is no evidence that the play was ever acted in Shakespeare's time, which comes as no real surprise. The longer plays that were performed in the public theatres were drastically cut, a practice which has prevailed ever since. Nor can the last 'romances' be called plays in the conventional sense. *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* are all basically fantasies which have been staged with only mixed success.

And then, of course, there is *Hamlet*, regarded by many as the greatest play by the greatest writer who ever lived. Swinburne refers to:

"the especial store set by Shakespeare himself on this favourite work, and the exceptional pains taken by him to preserve it for after time in such fullness of finished form as might make it worthiest of profound study. Of all vulgar errors the most wanton, the most wilful, and the most resolutely tenacious of life, is that belief bequeathed from the days of Pope, in which it was pardonable to the days of Carlyle, in which it is not excusable, to the effect that Shakespeare threw off *Hamlet* as an eagle may moult a feather or a fool may break a jest; that he dropped his work as a bird may drop an egg or a sophist a fallacy; that he wrote 'for gain, not glory', or that having written *Hamlet*, he thought it nothing wonderful to have written... that he was in the fullest degree conscious of its wonderful positive worth for all time, we have the best evidence possible—his own; and that not by mere word of mouth, but by actual stroke of hand... scene after scene, line for line, stroke upon stroke, and touch after touch, he went over all the laboured ground again; and not to ensure success in his own day, and fill his pockets with contemporary pence, but merely and wholly with a purpose to make it worthy of himself and his future students. Not one single alteration in the whole play can possibly have been made with a view to stage effect or to present popularity and profit... every change in the text of *Hamlet* has impaired

its fitness for the stage, and increased its value for the closet in exact and perfect proportion..." (*A Study of Shakespeare*, 1880).

Swinburne draws attention to three indisputable aspects of Shakespeare the author that are often denied nowadays. First, the great dramatist wrote for the study as much as the stage. Second, partly to this end he subjected his work to constant revision. Third, he was himself fully conscious of his especial qualities. All three aspects give the lie to the legend that he was a kind of unconscious genius, as if genius furnished him with a vocabulary, as if genius provided him with the carefully constructed dialectic of themes and ideas interwoven into so many of the plays, as if genius offered him an instantaneous understanding of the complexities of human behaviour displayed throughout.

Coleridge, like Swinburne, knew the truth of the matter:

"What, then, shall we say? Even this, that Shakespeare, no mere child of nature, no automaton of genius, no passive vehicle of inspiration possessed by the spirit, not possessing it; first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood deeply, till knowledge became habitual and intuitive" (S.T. Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, chapter 15. At: <http://www.fullbooks.com/Biographia-Literaria4.html> ).

Ben Jonson, like Swinburne and Coleridge, also knew the truth. In his dedicatory lines to the *First Folio* he writes:

*"Yet must I not give Nature all: Thy Art,  
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.  
For though the Poet's matter Nature be,  
His Art doth give the fashion. And that he,  
Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,  
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat  
Upon the Muses Anvil; turn the same,  
(And himself with it) that he thinks to frame:  
Or for the laurel he may gain a scorn;  
For a good Poet's made as well as born.  
And such wert thou. Look how the father's face  
Lives in his issue, even so the race  
Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines  
In his well-turned and true-filed lines,  
In each of which he seems to shake a Lance  
As brandisht at the eyes of ignorance."*

Jonson tells us that a poet has to be 'made' as well as born and if he wants to write anything worthy of immortality he must 'sweat' and 'strike the second heat' on the Muse's anvil. He must, in other words, amend and

polish, rewrite and revise. And, he says, Shakespeare was just such a poet, his 'well-turned and true-filed lines' being the mirror of his 'mind and manners'. Jonson emphasises the fact that he was no mere 'natural wit', writing by divine inspiration. Nature was the 'matter', but it was his 'art' that gave the 'fashion'.

Jonson, in another part of the poem, tells that Shakespeare was "not of an age, but for all time", and Swinburne stresses that his revisions were done to make his work worthy of future students. The works themselves give us ample evidence of their author's obsession with immortality and indifference to immediate material gain. In the first 19 sonnets he reasons himself whether he should marry and have a son in whom his name and memory will survive, or give himself entirely to the creation of 'heirs' of his invention which his genius will assure him of immortal fame. The question is decided in favour of the latter: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, so long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (sonnet 18); and: "My love shall in my verse ever live young" (sonnet 19). The author is clearly obsessed with his own genius which, like Ovid, he calls "the better part of me" (sonnets 39 and 74), and for which he promises immortality in one sonnet after another. Only blindness to the facts can lead to a denial of Shakespeare's full awareness of the extraordinary nature of his own intellect and poetic greatness.

Moreover, line after line can be repeated to demonstrate beyond question that he attached great importance to learning and knowledge. In *2 Henry VI*, (4,7) we read:

*"Ignorance is the curse of God,  
Knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven".*

In *Troilus and Cressida* (2,3) we are informed of "the common curse of mankind, folly and ignorance".

Hamlet tells the players that "the purpose of playing is to hold as "twere a mirror up to Nature; to shew Virtue her own features, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure"". In *As You Like It*, Jaques asks: "Give me leave to speak my and I will through and through cleanse the foul body of the infected world, if they will patiently receive my medicine". These remarks are undeniably the voice of the author himself. Even Ben Jonson draws our attention to the appropriateness of the 'Shakespeare' name for an author who shook a lance as if "brandished at the eyes of ignorance".

In *The Tempest* epilogue, Prospero informs us that his purpose was "to please" but, as Samuel Jonson noted, the end of poetry is to instruct by

pleasing. The works tell us that Shakespeare "took all knowledge to be his province" and employed the drama to educate the people. He was also deeply interested in the public events of the time and his plays as a means of political education. He was also deeply interested in the past and wrote the plays as a means of historical education. He was also deeply interested in words and ideas and employed the drama as a means of literary and philosophical education. Above all, he was profoundly interested in human nature and wrote the plays as a means of extending our awareness of the human condition.

The Elizabethan era was one of semi-barbarism. As Lodge puts it in his preface to *Josephus*: "Learning (alas the while!) is nowadays like a commodity without request, scarce saleable by the hands of a cunning broker". It was an age when poetry was despised and plays were scarcely recognised as literature. Yet into it stepped the world's greatest literary genius, the man whose mind Emerson described as "the horizon beyond which at present we do not see". There is nothing fantastic in maintaining that this genius saw himself as the great educator. Emerson certainly thought so: "What king has he not taught state? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behaviour?" And Shakespeare's essentially didactic purpose was also understood by Ruskin: "The intellectual measure of every man born since, in the domains of creative thought, may be assigned to him according to the degree to which he has been taught by Shakespeare".

Few admit to being influenced by advertising, yet that is precisely its purpose and the proof of its effectiveness is the massive sums which large companies expend on it every year. Similarly—despite reassurances to the contrary by literary critics who nevertheless devote considerable time and effort studying and teaching the works—the Shakespeare enterprise was nothing less than a monumental project for the advancement of learning through the medium of dramatic entertainment, directed and guided by a man who, for the liberal arts, was indeed without a parallel.

### ***The Nature of the Genius***

No mental map of Shakespeare the author would be complete without an attempt to trace the chief attributes of his unique genius. What are those qualities which make him supreme among the poets for all time? Why is homage paid to this writer above all writers in every corner of the

earth? Why is there a Cuban *Tempest*, a Zulu *Macbeth* and a Russian *Hamlet*? In short, why is Bardolatry, in Harold Bloom's phrase, a universal "secular religion"? Bloom indeed maintains that the worship of Shakespeare "ought to be even more a secular religion than it already is". The plays, he argues, "remain the outward limit of human achievement: aesthetically, cognitively, in certain ways morally, even spiritually". Bloom actually goes so far as to claim that Shakespeare invented us, i.e. that he invented human personality. Although Bloom overstates his case—self-awareness and individuality are present in Greek tragedy, Chaucer, and so on—there is no denying that Shakespeare's representation of character is without parallel. The richness, depth and intelligence of many of his main characters has never been equalled. No one, before or since, in Bloom's phrase, made so many separate selves. Bloom also rightly deduces that the creations directly reflect their creator: his intelligence is more comprehensive and more profound than that of any other writer we know. "The aesthetic achievement of Shakespeare cannot be separated from his cognitive power" (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Fourth Estate, 1999, p729).

We are dealing therefore with a writer who combined a powerful imagination with a brilliant intellect. It is curious that this writer invented few of his plots. Apart from *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they are all taken from other sources. Why did he do this? Why did he allow others to provide the bricks and mortar while he performed the task of master builder? And this truth does not merely apply to the plots. It also applies to many of the very words and phrases put into the characters' mouths. Here a phrase of Ovid, there a line of Holinshed; here an idea of Aristotle, there a thought of Erasmus. Yet, and here's the point, whether it is the plot or the phrase, Shakespeare transforms it into pure gold. He makes it greater than it was. In short, he lights his torch at every man's candle. We could put in another way: what he is trying to do is nothing less than to give light to other men's minds. It is as if he is saying to us: here is what Ovid or Pandosto or Chaucer or Lodge or Brooke or whoever really meant to say. And it is as if he deliberately sought to encompass much of the corpus of literature, both ancient and contemporary, within the plays in order to pass on the imagination and wisdom of the known culture to future generations. What therefore is often mistakenly regarded as theft was in fact something much more noble and grand. It was, as we have already said, nothing less than an enterprise to preserve and enhance the status of culture and learning. And it worked magnificently.

If this is true, and I believe it is, then we are dealing with someone who

bestrides both the intellectual and imaginative worlds like a colossus. The evidence is in any case there before our very eyes. It is there in the mastery of language, with its unforgettable turns of phrase, its extremely powerful imagery, and its enduring wisdom and truth. Despite the complexity of the plays, the words are often clear and unforgettable: "the madman sees more devils than vast hell can hold", "the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling", "the last syllable of recorded time", "all the world's a stage", "to be or not to be", "I know thee not, old man", "we have kissed away kingdoms and provinces", "in my mind's eye, Horatio", "the lady doth protest too much, methinks", "the rest is silence". Indeed, the list is endless, and we all have our own favourites. This writer's way with words is, beyond any shadow of doubt, far beyond anything ever achieved in human history.

There are thus three key elements of the Shakespeare genius: the insight into human nature, the mastery of language, and the depth of intellect. We are dealing with a great writer who was also a great psychologist and a great philosopher. It is his triumph in all three worlds that secures his pre-eminence among poets for all time.