

# *The* JOURNAL

OF THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

---

VOLUME LIII

DECEMBER 1991

NUMBER 2

---

## FANCIES AND GOOD NIGHTS:

### A Shakespearean Journey

BY S. ISENBERG

Dr. Isenberg is Editor and Publisher of *Stages: The National Theatre Magazine*

“Do not go gentle into that good night,” Dylan Thomas advises, but when, on April 23, 1616, William Shakespeare, a writer of popular stage entertainments, died in his home town of Stratford-Upon-Avon, he went so gently there was scarce a ripple. Unlike the premature reports of the death of Mark Twain, the reports of Shakespeare’s death were not highly exaggerated; they were non-existent.

There was not much reason why his passing should have been marked. He had been retired from the stage for several years and his plays, though still being performed, were no longer new and were, or at least seemed, less pertinent to the times than those of the more “modern” younger men Beaumont and Fletcher. Little attention, in any event, was paid to authors of stage works which were considered transient endeavors. Ben Jonson, the first playwright to have his “works” published in folio, was the subject of derisory comment because of this even from his fellow playwrights.

The man most likely to have the facts of Shakespeare’s death was his physician, Dr. John Hall. Hall was also Shakespeare’s son-in-law, being married to Susannah, the oldest of Shakespeare’s two daughters. A son Hamnet, had died young. Hall, however, like the citizens in *Richard III*, is mum. He mentions nothing about this interesting patient in his book, *Observations on Select English Bodies*, nor anywhere else. Perhaps, being a strict Puritan, Hall disapproved of Shakespeare, the man of the theatre; perhaps the death was so ordinary there was nothing to remark upon. Or perhaps there was some foul deed involved, something so terrible that it was

better to keep the facts hidden; this would be easy enough for a family member.

But Shakespeare's death at the age of 52, little noted at the time, has been the subject since of a good deal of speculation and no small amount of special pleading. "Good night, sweet prince," has been proffered in many ways.

Edward Bond, for instance, gives us his version of Shakespeare's final moments in his play *Bingo* when he has The Bard, a man tormented by devils and at end of his rope, declare:

What does it cost to stay alive? I'm stupefied at the suffering I've seen. The shapes huddled in misery that twitch away when you step over them. Women with shopping bags stepping over puddles of blood. What it costs to starve people. The chatter of those who hand over prisoners. The smile of men who see no further then the end of a knife. It was all a mistake. There's a taste of bitterness in my mouth. God made the elements but we inflict them on each other. I could have done so much. I talk to myself now. I know no one will ever listen.

Bond's Shakespeare dies by his own hand, and asks, as he takes the poison, "Was anything done?"

"Nothing. A little attack," says daughter Judith who, with her father dead on the floor, searches the room to see if he's made a new will.

On the other hand, *The Lancet*, the British medical journal, opted for natural causes in an article in 1944, claiming that Shakespeare's death was attributable to ". . . a complication of fever, typhus, typhoid paralysis, epilepsy, apoplexy, arteriosclerosis, excessive smoking, chronic alcoholism, gluttony, Bright's disease, pulmonary congestion, and locomotor ataxia." *The Lancet's* argument was based on Shakespeare's handwriting in his will.

If that seems a bit excessive, the fact is that going overboard when dealing with Shakespeare is pretty much the name of the game in almost any discipline.

Continuing on the disease theme, there are those who, considering the homosexual overtones of sonnets 1 to 127, are tempted to add an early case of AIDS to the list. Others, going by the "love's fire" of sonnets 153 and 154, the last two in the series (which seem to have nothing in common with the preceding ones) opt for syphilis:

Which from Love's fire took heat perpetual  
 Growing a bath and healing remedy  
 For men diseas'd; but I, my mistress' thrall,  
 Came there for cure, and this by that I prove  
 Love's fire heats water, water cools not love. (Sonnet 154)

Anthony Burgess is in this camp. In the epilogue to his pseudo-autobiographical book *Nothing Like the Sun* he has Shakespeare infected with syphilis—a gift from the dark lady of the sonnets who turns out to be a prostitute. His Shakespeare gives us more or less a translation of the end of sonnet 154:

I rode to Bath for the waters when the apothecaries and herbalists afforded no help. What she had given me she had to be herself first given. There was no one to blame; we all choose what we will have, but it is unfair that the choice must so often be made in the dark.

Shakespeare provides additional fuel for this fire in Lear's speech:

Down from the waist they are centaurs  
 Though women all above  
 But to the girdle do the gods inherit  
 Beneath is all the fiends':  
 Burning, scalding, stench, consumption . . .

Then there are those who believe Shakespeare's death was due not to a disease, not to suicide, but to a hovering Salieri-type, as in Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus*, waiting to do the playwright in. Various individuals have been proposed as possibilities but, as Leslie Hotson has pointed out in his search for evidence through the rolls of the Queen's Bench; described in his 1931 book, *Shakespeare versus Shallow*:

At first glance it might seem a hopeless business to search among such violent quarrels for traces of Ben Jonson's 'gentle Shakespeare, 'and Anthony Scoloker's 'friendly Shakespeare', whose demeanor Henry Chettle had seen 'no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes'.

Yet it was Hotson who came up with an entry for "A suretie of the peace" against Shakespeare by one William Wayte "for fear of death, and so forth." Did this writ of attachment, or order for Shakespeare's arrest in 1596, bear some sort of fruit in 1616? Elizabethan quarrels were frequent and long-

standing. Did Wayte wait, standing in the wings all those years to finally get his hand in?

Or was it Thomas Quiney who performed the deed, Shakespeare's other son-in-law, Judith's husband? Charles Hamilton, the famous autograph authority and Shakespearean, thinks it was Quiney. Not long before Shakespeare's death, Judith married Quiney, a somewhat scurrilous figure, a vintner-tobacconist. He was 27, she 31. They were married during Advent and didn't get the necessary license at the time, but that was not the reason Quiney was called before the church court at Stratford also known as The Bawdy Court. Rumor had it that a woman named Margaret Wheeler was in the last stages of a pregnancy of which he was the cause; she died in childbirth shortly thereafter. Adultery was a serious charge. A citation was made out against Quiney and he was served personally by the court apparitor, Greene. As E.R.C. Brinkworth puts it in his book *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford*: "The whole affair was the talk of the town. The most prominent people in the place were involved. It must have been the biggest scandal that Stratford had seen for years." Quiney confessed and received one of the severest punishments on record, being ordered to perform public penance in a white sheet before the whole congregation on three successive Sundays during church service. He and the Shakespeare family had to face this "open shame," a humiliation all the greater because of the social position of the family.

Brinkworth commented: "For Shakespeare, a man noted for his deep family ties, his sense of place, and his determination to preserve and protect his family name, the whole affair must have been a shocking experience; did the shock kill him? Certainly, for a man already sick, it must have contributed, but there's more to the story. Shakespeare, in January, had given instructions for the drawing up of his will but, though the draft was ready, put off the execution. Then on or just before March 25, Shakespeare sent for Francis Collins, the Warwick attorney who had drawn the will, and made substantial changes. On March 25 he signed the new will." This was one day prior to Quiney appearing to face the charges in court. According to Charles Hamilton in his book *In Search of Shakespeare* these changes reduced Judith's share in the estate. Indeed, the revision beginning on the lower half of the first page of the will shows a remarkable change in penmanship in the middle of a sentence. Some experts say this is either the sign of a stroke or the effect of poisoning by arsenic. Hamilton thinks Quiney wanted Shakespeare dead before the will could be changed; was the hope, here, father to an act of murder? New Place, the large home Shakespeare purchased in

Stratford with the money he had made in London, was already associated with murder; two of its former owners were involved one way or another with that crime.

And then, some fifty years after Shakespeare's death, John Ward, then vicar of Stratford added his once widely accepted solution to the playwright's demise: not murder, not suicide, not disease, not natural causes but excess. According to Ward: "Shakespeare, Drayton (Michael Drayton, the poet) and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever contracted there." This has passed into myth, like the deer hunting episode and the mulberry tree. But nowhere else is Shakespeare noted to have been a heavy drinker; in fact, according to reports, when asked to partake in a spree of this nature he would opt out on the grounds of having a headache. "I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking. I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment," Cassio says in *Othello*. According to his contemporaries, Shakespeare felt the same way.

Those who favor natural causes point out that the males of Shakespeare's family were not long-lived. Will had already outlived his three brothers: Edmund, the actor, died in 1607; Gilbert, the haberdasher in 1612, and Richard, the youngest, in 1613. His sister, Joan, survived him, as did his wife, Ann, his daughters Susannah and Judith, his grandchild Elizabeth—Susannah's daughter—and three nephews.

Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of the parish church of the Holy Trinity, a place of honor due to his local standing as a land or tithe-holder, not for any literary accomplishment. Over his grave at some point the famous doggerel epitaph was placed, no name accompanied it:

Good friend for Jesus sake forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed here  
Blest be the man that spare these stones  
And curst be he that moves my bones

If Shakespeare's death could bring about such a range of speculative opinion, certainly what we know about his life may be an equal mixture of fact and fancy. I've brought along, this afternoon, a few commentators to give their opinion of the man at various stages of his life, including, of course, some comments by himself.

We start in Stratford. For Shakespeare, Stratford was always home. London was merely where he lodged. The town is small. It stands upon the banks of the river Avon in Warwickshire. The sturdy stone arches of the

Clopton bridge may have furnished the young Shakespeare pillars from which to swing early on a summer's day. There is meadow all around. Here is Lucy Wedgewood who lives on Henley street right next to John and Mary Shakespeare. She can tell you about the four boys, Will, Gilbert, Edmund, and Richard, about the daughter Joan, about the three other girls who died young, about the mother, Mary Arden, whose name was also the name of the forest in *As You Like It*. She can also tell you about the fine John Shakespeare got for keeping a dunghill at his front door. She might tell you why he no longer appears in church these days . . . but she won't. And, of course, she will talk about Will's bride . . . Anne Hathaway. Aptly named, Lucy might say, for she had her way with Will. Older than him by four years, she was two months pregnant when they were married . . .

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun  
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red . . .  
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
 I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks.  
 In some perfumes is there more delight  
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
 I love to hear her speak yet well I know  
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound  
 I grant I never saw a goddess go—  
 My mistress when she walks, treads on the ground.  
 And yet by heaven I think my love as rare  
 As any she belied with false compare. (Sonnet 127)

Walking home late one winter's afternoon from a sexual romp with Anne Hathaway—they had a pre-nuptial contract, after all—Shakespeare fell into the Avon and would have drowned if it hadn't been for his dog, Hooker, who jumped in and pulled him out. As Hooker tells it in Leon Rooke's magnificent tour-de-force, *Shakespeare's Dog*: "I thought, the stinker's drowned." but no; something was tugging at Hooker's tail and when he reached back to snap at it he saw Shakespeare hanging on. "Pull me home, old darling." And Hooker did his best but it was nip and tuck. "This is no good, Hooker," he sobbed. "I'm for kings and history, the shoreline's broader sweep. I'm not for this small-fisted, randy, cheapsified sailor's grave . . . Save me, Hooker," he said, "and I'll never browbeat you again. I'll work and study hard. I'll give you

my best bed.” “Oh, yes, I thought, when they’re at death’s door they sing another tune.”

But Hooker got Will to shore, got him artificial respiration, and saved his life, possibly passing into history as Crab, Launce’s dog in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*:

When a man’s servant shall play the cur with him, look you, it goes hard: one that I brought up of a puppy; one that I saved from drowning . . . if I had not taken a fault upon me that he did, I think verily he had been hanged for’t; he thrusts me himself under the Duke’s table; he had not been there, bless the mark, a pissing while but all the chamber smelt him. Out with the dog, says one. Whip him out. Hang him up says the Duke. I, having been acquainted with the smell before, knew it was Crab; and goes me to the fellow that whips the dogs. Friend, quoth I, you mean to whip the dog? Ay, marry do I, quoth he. You do him the more wrong, quoth I; ’twas I did the thing you wot of. He makes me no more ado but whips me out of the chamber. How many masters would do this for his servant? Nay, I’ll be sworn, I have sat in the stocks for puddings he hath stolen; I have stood on the pillory for geese he hath killed . . .

But there were more potent catastrophes in Stratford than drowning in the Avon. The plague was an ever-constant danger; it had struck Stratford in the summer of 1564 when Shakespeare was three months old. One sixth of the town died. Will’s Aunt Margaret remembers in National Public Radio’s “William Shakespeare: A Portrait in Sound”:

I remember it well. The church bell tolled often that summer. It was a miracle that little Will survived. Richard Simons, the town clerk buried two sons and a daughter. Roger Greene lost four children. In August the town council held an emergency session. They sat in the chapel garden rather than in the Guild Hall to avoid contagion. The garden was so fragrant with the smells of apples and peas. Death was stalking all around. All of Stratford seemed so close to heaven that afternoon. And indeed it was, for some of us . . .

No one understood the cause of plague. The most effective remedy was: “Fuga cito, vade longe, rede tarde” (flee quickly, go far, return slowly). Most did –those who could afford to. Those who couldn’t stayed inside with doors and windows shut fast, or interposed suitable fumes, such as tobacco, to turn aside the conjectured poisonous vapor.

Ring around the rosy  
 Pocket full of posy  
 Ashes, Ashes  
 All fall down.

The Genoese fleet that brought the plague to Europe in 1347 had most of its crew dead or dying when they docked in Sicily. The harbor masters tried to quarantine the fleet, but the rats and the fleas that lived on the rats scurried ashore to spread the pestilence. In six months half the region's population died. It was the first of many onslaughts of what became known, because of the multiple hemorrhages under the skin, as the Black Death. Thomas Nash, a fellow playwright of Shakespeare, describes the hopelessness of this ghastly event:

Rich men trust not in wealth  
 Gold cannot buy you health  
 Brightness falls from the air  
 Queens have died young and fair  
 The plague full swift goes by  
 I am sick, I must die.  
 Lord, have mercy on us.

Of the epidemics in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the first, the most virulent, raged almost without interruption from the late summer of 1592 to the spring of 1594. The closing of the theatres during that period may have given Shakespeare the time and the impetus to write his two long erotic poems, "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece". Both of these were dedicated to Henry Wriotesley, the Earl of Southampton, quite possibly Shakespeare's patron at the time, very likely the same Southampton to whom the majority of the Sonnets were written. Was the content of these two long poems—in both cases the defloration of a virgin—a more personal matter between these two men that meets the eye? There are those who would like to think so. But the seduction of Adonis by the lovesick Venus is both erotic and funny.

I know not love, quoth he, nor will not know it,  
 Unless it be a boar . . . and then I chase it . . .  
 Fondling, she saith since I have hemmed thee here  
 Within the circuit of this ivory pale  
 I'll be a park, and thou shall be my deer  
 Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale;

Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry,  
 Stray lower where the pleasant fountains lie.  
 Within this limit is relief enough,  
 Sweet bottom grass, and high delightful plain,  
 Round rising hillocks, brakes, obscure and rough  
 To shelter thee from tempest and from rain.  
 Then be my deer, since I am such a park  
 No dog shall rouse thee, though a thousand bark.

Both “Venus” and “Lucrece” are works full of classical allusions both historical and mythological. Obviously Shakespeare had to learn these things somewhere. Probably he went, at least for a time, to the free grammar school in Stratford—at any rate, until his father’s affairs began to go sour.

Schoolmaster Alexander Aspinall holds his charges at bay for the moment and explains the grammar school system:

The boys of Stratford enter here as soon as they can read and write . . . it is a free school, we are very proud of that . . . Look at them. Why are you country louts gawking up here? Your eyes are to be fixed on your Latin grammars, nowhere else . . . we use William Lily’s Latin grammar. The boys will work till eleven and then have breakfast . . . salt meat, dark bread and sour ale . . . we do not pamper our boys . . . they come at six in the morning and go home at six in the evening . . . there is no mischief allowed. I know of Will Shakespeare but I never taught him. Simon Hunt taught him, and Thomas Jenkins . . . they preceeded me in this position . . . an actor . . . well, it’s his father’s fault. Rob Young, the dyer, tells how John Shakespeare, years ago, right here in Guild hall, brought the boy to see a company of actors. The boy stood between his father’s legs, his eyes like great round saucers watching all that murder and lust . . .

It would appear that Shakespeare understood Latin fairly well and probably had more than a smattering of Italian and French. He also knew something of law, medicine, theology, history and economics. His biblical references in the plays are numerous if strictly evidential. Shakespeare used his knowledge for purposes of illustration and often, by straining a fact, made it conveniently fanciful. The historical background of many of the history plays are often inaccurate; if Shakespeare was aware of the confusions caused by his artistic compressions and parallelisms as well as his own errors of fact, they fortunately didn’t impress him enough to add footnotes to the text. This would have done away with an entire gaggle of editors.

Boys in Shakespeare's station in life rarely went to school after their fourteenth year, and the growing financial embarrassments of John Shakespeare probably took his son out of the Grammar School a year earlier than that. No one has discovered just what John's problems were; all sorts of theories have been proposed, all are in the realm of fancy. All that is known for certain is that he was successful early on and later on wasn't. What William did after leaving school remains a mystery. Between his 14th and 18th years there is a blank.

But we do know something he did when he turned 18. He married Anne (or Agnes) Hathaway. But if so, who is the Anne Whateley whose name appears on the marriage bond? Research has failed to turn up this other Anne. Could the clerk have erred to the extent of mistaking Whateley for Hathaway? A Whateley, moreover, from Temple Grafton rather than a Hathaway from Shottery? Even Elizabethan spelling, as freewheeling as it was, would be hard put to achieve that sort of alchemy. Once again, fancy takes hold and Anthony Burgess in his biography of Shakespeare speculates on the possibility of their having been two Annes—a Whateley and a Hathaway—with both of whom William was involved, one for love and one for lust. It rather seems almost like the plot of one of Shakespeare's own comedies.

Anne—the Hathaway one—was already two months pregnant when she went to the altar; she either was then or later became a rigid Puritan. One wonders what this relationship . . . such as it was with Will in London and Anne in Stratford . . . could have been like? "I did love you, once," Hamlet tells Ophelia. "Indeed, my lord," she replies, "you did make me believe so."

According to S. Schoenbaum in his book *William Shakespeare, a Documentary Life*, Shakespeare might have written at least one sonnet to Anne that is still extant, sonnet 145, which contains as its couplet the lines:

"I hate' from hate away she threw/  
And saved my life saying not you."

Hate-away could be a pun for Hath-away, though as Schoenbaum admits, "Hate-away is not precisely equivalent to hath-away but then not all the rhymes in this sonnet which is sufficiently ungainly to suggest creative adolescence are all that precise, either." Such is the realm of fantasy.

Anne's response to her husband's work would very likely be the standard reply of the Puritans who would have gladly done away with theatres, actors, and playgoing entirely—which of course they did in the Revolution of 1640, as well as doing away with the king and Parliament. It's an intriguing thought

that if Shakespeare had left any manuscripts at New Place, his wife probably would have treated them as the wife of Sir Richard Burton, the translator of *The Arabian Nights*, did his manuscripts upon his death: destroyed them with the utmost satisfaction.

But let Anne Shakespeare speak for herself:

Where is Will? Will's in London. He's been there ten years. He comes home once a year for a fortnight. He's mixed up with those vipers and hellhounds in the playhouses, painted sepulchres they are, I wouldn't give you a louse for them. Apes and caterpillars, fooling folks with their fancy pride and their prodigality. Shame. Better to live in low content than in glided infamy, I say . . .

Dr. Appleton Morgan describes Shakespeare's wife and her relation to his work in his book, *Mrs. Shakespeare's Second Marriage* (1922) :

A bereaved lady who would permit the mortal remains of her consort to be carted away and disposed of under a ready-made stone upon which neither name nor date nor epitaph should be inscribed but a bit of vile doggeral quite as applicable to the town pump as to her dear departed, would make short shrift of his manuscripts.

But even if the Puritans could have closed the playhouses, they couldn't have kept plays from the public. The invention of printing had produced a running tide of books, pamphlets, ballads, broadsides—and playbooks, Shakespeare's among them. These were published at first in quarto form. The quarto play of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* published in 1594 represents his second appearance in print (his first was the 1593 edition of *Venus and Adonis*.) Not all, by half, of Shakespeare's plays were printed in quarto, many of those that were appeared in a corrupted form for one reason or another which scholars are still arguing over.

Shakespeare was also England's most popular lyricist and the songs from his plays were heard everywhere. Loving music as he did, he would be pleased to know that 23 out of his 36 plays have at one time or other been turned into operas—an art form born during his lifetime (in 1597)—to say nothing of those used as a basis for symphonic works, ballets and musicals from *Kiss Me Kate*, and *West Side Story*, to *The Boys From Syracuse* . . . from the haunting Willow Song from Rossini's *Othello*, to the musical comedy *How Now Dow Jones* which is not based on any Shakespeare play whatsoever, but which makes a hilarious number out of a single line from *As You Like It*:

“Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love.”

Above all else, Shakespeare wanted to found a dynasty, but the death of his son, Hamnet, (twin of Judith) at age eleven in Stratford ruined that plan. Anne was past childbearing age and anyway they had at that point lived apart for too many years. The ultimate irony is that the coat of arms that John Shakespeare applied for years earlier was now granted. Shakespeare had become a gentleman . . . but with no heir.

Grief fills the room up with my absent child,  
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,  
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,  
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,  
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.  
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,  
To him that did but yesterday suspire  
There was not such a gracious creature born.  
Oh lord, my boy, my Arthur, my fair son  
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world. (*King John*)

Shakespeare's loss of a son was, either fancifully or factually, made up for by the Restoration playwright William Davenant who claimed Shakespeare as his father. Davenant was born in 1606 to a woman who was, according to tradition, quite beautiful and who, with her husband, ran a tavern along the road from London to Stratford. According to John Aubrey, that notorious gossip, in his *Brief Lives*:

Mr. William Shakespeare was wont to go into Warwickshire once a year, and commonly in his journey lies at this house . . . Now Sir. Willam (Davenant) would sometimes when he was pleasant over a glass of wine with his most intimate friends, say that it seemed to him that he writ with the very spirit of Shakespeare and was contented enough to be thought his son. He would tell them the story, as above, in which way his mother had a very light report, whereby she was called a whore.

On 19 March 1603, in anticipation of Queen Elizabeth's imminent death, the Privy Council ordered the London playhouses to be closed. Due to a fierce outbreak of plague, they remained closed until 9 April 1604. This long interruption in public performances has seemed significant to theatre historians, if only because it demarcates Elizabethan from Jacobean drama, and the Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company under Queen Eliz-

abeth, from the King's Men, his same company under James I. Shakespeare's company was a repertory company with himself the major playwright. Over the years from 1601 to 1605 the company appears to have made no radical changes in their usual repertory practices. They continued to put on a large number of plays, mixing new offerings with ones continued from the previous year and with revivals.

Nevertheless there was a change, certainly in Shakespeare's output. Though each year, comedic materials were the largest part of his company's offerings, it was during this period that Shakespeare was writing dark plays like *Measure For Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. From 1605 to 1608 he produced *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, ending this run of grim masterpieces with the odd *Timon of Athens*. With *Timon* a black cloud seemed to lift and he settled down to writing romances: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and, of course, *The Tempest*. These plays all deal with loss and recovery and end on a note of hope and rejuvenation.

Many would fancy that Prospero, breaking his staff and drowning his book, is representative of Shakespeare's feelings regarding his own career. Perhaps, after 20 years of living in rented rooms in London, it was time to go home to Stratford for good. Winifred Burbage looks back over this long association:

I am Winifred Burbage wife to Richard who is a King's Man. Many of the roles he has played in William Shakespeare's great dramas. Yet Dick and I grieve. Will's parents are dead in Stratford, and Will talks of returning there to the house he calls New Place. How can we let him go? We love the man. He has of late written his finest works . . . but now, to leave his comrades, his life here, and return to a woman who, all these years had not lifted a finger to help him . . . she with two pitchballs stuck in her face for eyes . . . I hold it a tragedy to marry a proud and stiff necked religious—a waste . . . better he stay with those who love him . . . at the flush of his career, Will is . . . I'm sorry, I can say no more.

If there were thoughts of calling it quits in Shakespeare's mind, doubtless the decision was implemented in 1613 by the Globe burning down. Shakespeare's theatre has had a curious history, from its inception to its present-day rediscovery. Built in Shoreditch in 1576 by John Brayne and James Burbage, it was called simply The Theatre. When in 1597 James Burbage died, he left The Theatre to his sons Richard and Cuthbert. The 21-year lease ran out also at that time and the landlord, one Giles Allen, refused to

renew it. The Burbages, together with Shakespeare and the other partners (The Theatre was owned jointly by the acting company that used it), engaged the builder, Peter Street, to pull it down. The timbers were rowed over the Thames and rose anew as The Globe in a rather disreputable new site famed for a profusion of brothels, tenements, theatres and prisons, called the Liberty of The Clink. This was outside the jurisdiction of the London Council though within the jurisdiction of the Bishop Winchester, who was thus of fattening himself on rents that were provided through sin. The prostitutes of the area, for that reason, were known as Winchester geese.

This first Globe had a less than 21-year lease on life. Near the end of a production of *Henry VIII*, the final play Shakespeare wrote, or had a hand in, the actor playing the king made his usual entrance announced by the thunder of a cannon. No one either noticed or cared that sparks from the cannon fell on the circular thatched roof of the otherwise open-air theatre. The Globe burned to the ground in two hours, the finest fire London had seen since St. Paul's steeple burned up in 1561. No one was hurt, one man had the burning seat of his pants put out with a pint of ale, and Ben Jonson wrote a poem about it the next day. The Globe was rebuilt within the year, but Shakespeare was not part of the combine that was assessed for its funding. It is this second Globe which we have drawings of; none exist for the first. Shakespeare probably saw no reason to hand over money for a theatre he would shortly be retiring from in any event. He was never prodigal with money. Three years later he was dead.

His plays continued to be performed. Some twenty-five performances of them are on record as being acted in London from 1616 to 1642 and they are probably just a small percentage of the total. According to Ben Jonson, he wanted art, his writing was careless, and he got his facts wrong. But his plays continued to hold the stage, even though, in many instances, very fancifully rewritten to the times. *King Lear*, for instance, in the Nahum Tate version, became a romance in which Lear lives and Cordelia marries Edgar. Romeo and Juliet was played on alternate nights with a happy ending.

In the summer of 1769, at Stratford, David Garrick presented the ultimate fantasy with his Great Shakespeare Jubilee, wherein the town of Stratford rediscovered the commercial possibilities of its long dead and long ignored son. Garrick was not the first to make this pilgrimage. In 1622, six years after Shakespeare's death, his old troupe, the King's Men, who were on tour, decided to stop at Stratford. Perhaps they wanted to look up the tomb of their old comrade, perhaps to see the highly-colored bust that had been made of him looking, as some have remarked, like a prosperous burgher.

They knew, of course, that the Puritan council now forbade players to play in Stratford. But they came anyway. Here in the town where Shakespeare was born and bred, the town which today lives mostly by his name, we find the following entry in the Borough Chamberlain's accounts: "To the Kings Players for not playing in the Hall—6 shillings." But by Garrick's time, the Puritans had gone and the businessmen had taken over. The Jubilee that ensued, described by Christian Deelman in his 1964 book, *The Great Shakespeare Jubilee*, was the first "example of illogical if splendid hero worship. It marks the point at which Shakespeare stopped being regarded as an increasingly popular and admirable dramatist, and became a god."

From thence to become the literary icon who stares us down in the classroom, the posted property of the Shakespeare industry, the darling of doctoral candidates, the compost heap for the culture-vultures. The incomparable critic S. Schoenbaum, struck a balance between idolatry and reason in his lecture on "Dark Ladies":

Standards of propriety of course vary with the time and with individuals. One man's grossness is another's refreshing candor; still the Shakespeare of the dark lady sonnets sorts incongruously with our received image of the National Poet, smiling and still, out-topping knowledge, that monumental figure carved by reverence in the Mount Rushmore of Bardolatry. In an earlier and less reticent day I would have hesitated to quote and gloss some of these passages in a lecture under such dignified auspices. But if we may occasionally lament the loss of past reticences, I prefer flesh and blood Shakespeare to the impassive statuary of the culture worshippers who wend their pious way to the Shakespeare shrine and cough through a performance by the Royal Shakespeare company at the Festival theatre. We do well every now and then to remind ourselves that Shakespeare, father of three, had a penis. Nature was similarly benevolent to the artist Renoir. He said he painted some of his best pictures with his."

But if Shakespeare is not a God, neither is he our contemporary as Jan Kott fancies. Many of the words he uses have become obsolete or changed their meanings entirely since his time; the society he speaks to and of is in most ways completely foreign to our own; his in-jokes are indecipherable, and his treatment of women has raised a whole new industry of feminist critics. Add to this that he writes in verse, never a popular reading pastime, and confines his efforts to play scripts. It's hard enough to read a modern play let alone one 400 years old, with notes, yet.

Why is it, then that he continues to thrive on stage, in film, in multiferous editions in every language? Because listening to or seeing these plays expertly done or reading them through without the notes is like looking at a very dark, glazed picture in the National Portrait Gallery. As we stare, at first we see nothing, then we begin to make out details, then we begin to recognize features. And then we realize that they are our own.

This is a summary of comments made by Dr. Isenberg at the Fifth Louis Faugères Bishop III Lecture on the occasion of the opening of the exhibit "The Age of Shakespeare: Examples from Popular Culture" at Alexander Library, February 1990.