

GENERAL EDITORS
STANLEY WELLS AND GARY TAYLOR

THE OXFORD SHAKESPEARE

THE COMPLETE WORKS

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY
JOHN JOWETT, WILLIAM MONTGOMERY,
GARY TAYLOR, AND STANLEY WELLS



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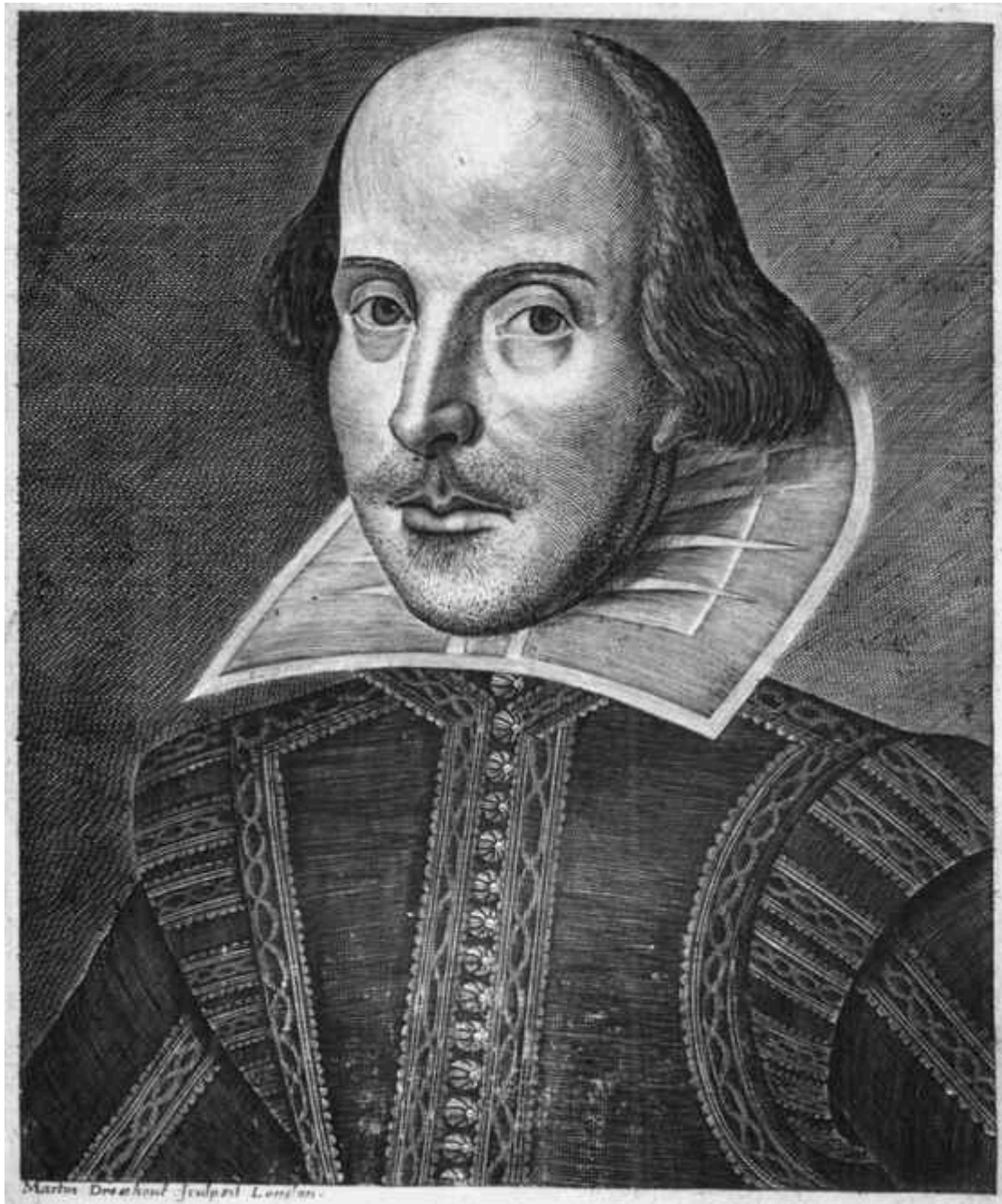
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Martin Droeshout's engraving of Shakespeare, first published on the title-page of the First Folio (1623)



To the Reader

This figure that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut,
Wherein the graver had a strife
With nature to outdo the life.
O, could he but have drawn his wit
As well in brass as he hath hit
His face, the print would then surpass
All that was ever writ in brass!
But since he cannot, reader, look
Not on his picture, but his book.

BEN JOHNSON

WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

THE COMPLETE
WORKS

SECOND EDITION

General Editors

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STANLEY WELLS, GARY TAYLOR
JOHN JOWETT, AND WILLIAM MONTGOMERY

With Introductions by
STANLEY WELLS

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STANLEY WELLS

The Complete Works has been edited collaboratively under the General Editorship of Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. Each editor has undertaken prime responsibility for certain works, as follows:

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WILLIAM MONTGOMERY *The First Part of the Contention*; *Richard Duke of York*; *Edward III*; *The Merchant of Venice*; *All Is True*; *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

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S.W.W. G.T.

J.J. W.L.M.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THIS volume contains all the known plays and poems of William Shakespeare, a writer, actor, and man of the theatre who lived from 1564 to 1616. He was successful and admired in his own time; major literary figures of the subsequent century, such as John Milton, John Dryden, and Alexander Pope, paid tribute to him, and some of his plays continued to be acted during the later seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries; but not until the dawn of Romanticism, in the later part of the eighteenth century, did he come to be looked upon as a universal genius who outshone all his fellows and even, some said, partook of the divine. Since then, no other secular imaginative writer has exerted so great an influence over so large a proportion of the world's population. Yet Shakespeare's work is firmly rooted in the circumstances of its conception and development. Its initial success depended entirely on its capacity to please the theatre-goers (and, to a far lesser extent, the readers) of its time; and its later, profound impact is due in great part to that in-built need for constant renewal and adaptation that belongs especially to those works of art that reach full realization only in performance. Shakespeare's power over generations later than his own has been transmitted in part by artists who have drawn on, interpreted, and restructured his texts as others have drawn on the myths of antiquity; but it is the texts as they were originally performed that are the sources of his power, and that we attempt here to present with as much fidelity to his intentions as the circumstances in which they have been preserved will allow.

Shakespeare's Life: Stratford-upon-Avon and London

Shakespeare's background was commonplace. His father, John, was a glover and wool-dealer in the small Midlands market-town of Stratford-upon-Avon who had married Mary Arden, daughter of a prosperous farmer, in or about 1557. During Shakespeare's childhood his father played a prominent part in local affairs, becoming bailiff (mayor) and justice of the peace in 1568; later his fortunes declined. Of his eight children, four sons and one daughter survived childhood. William, his third child and eldest son, was baptized in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 26 April 1564; his birthday is traditionally celebrated on 23 April—St. George's Day. The only other member of his family to take up the theatre as a profession was his youngest brother, Edmund, born sixteen years after William. He became an actor and died at the age of twenty-seven: on the last day of 1607 the sexton of St. Saviour's, Southwark, noted 'Edmund Shakspeare A player Buried in y^e Church wth a forenoone knell of y^e great bell, xxs.' The high cost of the funeral suggests that it may have been paid for by his prosperous brother.

John Shakespeare's position in Stratford-upon-Avon would have brought certain privileges to his family. When young William was four years old he could have had the excitement of seeing his father, dressed in furred scarlet robes and wearing the alderman's official thumb-ring, regularly accompanied by two mace-bearing sergeants in buff, presiding at fairs and markets. A little later, he would have begun to attend a 'petty school' to acquire the rudiments of an education that would be continued at the King's

New School, an established grammar school with a well-qualified master, assisted by an usher to help with the younger pupils. We have no lists of the school's pupils in Shakespeare's time, but his father's position would have qualified him to attend, and the school offered the kind of education that lies behind the plays and poems. Its boy pupils, aged from about eight to fifteen, endured an arduous routine. Classes began early in the morning: at six, normally; hours were long, holidays infrequent. Education was centred on Latin; in the upper forms, the speaking of English was forbidden. A scene (4.1) in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* showing a schoolmaster taking a boy named William through his Latin grammar draws on the officially approved textbook, William Lily's *Short Introduction of Grammar*, and, no doubt, on Shakespeare's memories of his youth.

From grammar the boys progressed to studying works of classical and neo-classical literature. They might read anthologies of Latin sayings and Aesop's *Fables*, followed by the fairly easy plays of Terence and Plautus (on whose *Menaechmi* Shakespeare was to base *The Comedy of Errors*). They might even act scenes from Latin plays. As they progressed, they would improve their command of language by translating from Latin into English and back, by imitating approved models of style, and by studying manuals of composition, the ancient rules of rhetoric, and modern rules of letter-writing. Putting their training into practice, they would compose formal epistles, orations, and declamations. Their efforts at composition would be stimulated, too, by their reading of the most admired authors. Works that Shakespeare wrote throughout his career show the abiding influence of Virgil's *Aeneid* and of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (both in the original and in Arthur Golding's translation of 1567). Certainly he developed a taste for books, both classical and modern: his plays show that he continued to read seriously and imaginatively for the whole of his working life.

After Shakespeare died, Ben Jonson accused him of knowing 'small Latin and less Greek'; but Jonson took pride in his classical knowledge: a boy

educated at an Elizabethan grammar school would be more thoroughly trained in classical rhetoric and Roman (if not Greek) literature than most present-day holders of a university degree in classics. Modern languages would not normally be on the curriculum. Somehow Shakespeare seems to have picked up a working knowledge of French—which he expected audiences of *Henry V* to understand—and of Italian (the source of *Othello*, for instance, is an Italian tale that had not been published in translation when he wrote his play). We do not know whether he ever travelled outside England.

Shakespeare must have worked hard at school, but there was a life beyond the classroom. He lived in a beautiful and fertile part of the country, with rivers and fields at hand. He had the company of brothers and sisters. Each Sunday the family would go to Stratford's splendid parish church, as the law required; his father, by virtue of his dignified status, would sit in the front pew. There Shakespeare's receptive mind would be impressed by the sonorous phrases of the Bible, in either the Bishops' or the Geneva version, the Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer. From time to time travelling players would visit Stratford. Shakespeare's father would have the duty of licensing them to perform; probably his son first saw plays professionally acted in the Guildhall below his schoolroom.

Shakespeare would have left school when he was about fifteen. What he did then is not known. One of the earliest legends about him, recorded by John Aubrey around 1681, is that 'he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country'. John Cottom, who was master of the Stratford school between 1579 and 1581 or 1582, and may have taught Shakespeare, was a Lancashire man whose family home was close to that of a landowner, Alexander Houghton. Both Cottom and Houghton were Roman Catholics, and there is some reason to believe that John Shakespeare may have retained loyalties to the old religion. When Houghton died, in 1581, he mentioned in his will one William Shakeshafte, possibly a player. The name

is a possible variant of Shakespeare; conceivably Cottom found employment in Lancashire again for his talented pupil as a tutor who also acted. On the other hand, the name 'Shakeshaft', common in Lancashire, is not found in Warwickshire. If Shakespeare did leave Stratford, he was soon back home. On 28 November 1582 a bond was issued permitting him to marry Anne Hathaway of Shottery, a village close to Stratford. She was eight years his senior, and pregnant. Their daughter, Susanna, was baptized on 26 May 1583, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, on 2 February 1585. Though Shakespeare's professional career (described in the next section of this Introduction) was to centre on London, his family remained in Stratford, and he maintained his links with his birthplace till he died and was buried there.

I. The Shakespeare coat of arms, from a draft dated 20 October 1596, prepared by Sir William Dethick, Garter King-of-Arms



One of the unfounded myths about Shakespeare is that all we know about his life could be written on the back of a postage stamp. In fact we know a lot about some of the less exciting aspects of his life, such as his business dealings and his tax debts (as may be seen from the list of Contemporary Allusions, pp. lxv-lxviii). Though we cannot tell how often he visited Stratford after he started to work in London, clearly he felt that he belonged where he was born. His success in his profession may be reflected in his father's application for a grant of arms in 1596, by which John Shakespeare acquired the official status of gentleman. In August of that year William's son, Hamnet, died, aged eleven and a half, and was buried in Stratford. Shakespeare was living modestly, and, so far as we know, alone in the Bishopsgate area of London, north of the river, in October of the same year, but in the following year showed that he looked on Stratford as his real home by buying a large house, New Place. It was demolished in 1759.

In October 1598 Richard Quiney, whose son was to marry Shakespeare's daughter Judith, travelled to London to plead with the Privy Council on behalf of Stratford Corporation, which was in financial trouble because of fires and bad weather. He wrote the only surviving letter addressed to Shakespeare; as it was found among Quiney's papers, it was presumably never delivered. It requested a loan, possibly on behalf of the town, of £30—a large sum, suggesting confidence in his friend's prosperity. In 1601 Shakespeare's father died, and was buried in Stratford. In May of the following year Shakespeare was able to invest £320 in 107 acres of arable land in Old Stratford. In the same year John Manningham, a London law student, recorded a piece of gossip that gives us a rare contemporary anecdote about the private life of Shakespeare and of Richard Burbage, the leading tragedian of his company:

Upon a time when Burbage played Richard III there was a citizen grew so far in liking with him that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Richard the Third. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before, was entertained, and at his game ere Burbage came. Then, message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third.

In 1604 Shakespeare was lodging in north London with a Huguenot family called Mountjoy; in 1612 he was to testify in a court case relating to a marriage settlement on the daughter of the house. The records of the case provide our only transcript of words actually spoken by Shakespeare; they are not characterful. In 1605 Shakespeare invested £440 in the Stratford tithes, which brought him in £60 a year; in June 1607 his elder daughter, Susanna, married a distinguished physician, John Hall, in Stratford, and there his only grandchild, their daughter Elizabeth, was baptized the following February. In 1609 his mother died there, and from about 1610 his increasing involvement with Stratford along with the reduction in his dramatic output suggests that he was withdrawing from his London responsibilities and spending more time at New Place. Perhaps he was deliberately devoting himself to his family's business interests; he was only forty-six years old: an age at which a healthy man was no more likely to retire then than now. If he was ill, he was not totally disabled, as he was in London in 1612 for the Mountjoy lawsuit. In March 1613 he bought a house in the Blackfriars area of London for £140: he is not known to have lived in it. Also in 1613 the last of his three brothers died. In late 1614 and 1615 he was involved in disputes about the enclosure of the land whose tithes he owned. In February 1616 his second daughter, Judith, married Thomas

Quiney, causing William to make alterations to the draft of his will, which he signed on 25 March. His widow was entitled by law and local custom to part of his estate; he left most of the remainder to his elder daughter, Susanna, and her husband. He died on 23 April, and was buried two days later in a prominent position in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church. A monument was commissioned, presumably by members of his family, and was in position by 1623. The work of Gheerart Janssen, a stonemason whose shop was not far from the Globe Theatre, it incorporates a half-length effigy which is one of the only two surviving likenesses of Shakespeare with any strong claim to authenticity.

As this selective survey of the historical records shows, Shakespeare's life is at least as well documented as those of most of his contemporaries who did not belong to great families; we know more about him than about any other dramatist of his time except Ben Jonson. The inscription on the Stratford landowner's memorial links him with Socrates and Virgil; and in the far greater memorial of 1623, the First Folio edition of his plays, Jonson links this 'Star of poets' with his home town as the 'Sweet swan of Avon'. The Folio includes the second reliable likeness of Shakespeare, an engraving by Martin Droeshout which, we must assume, had been commissioned and approved by his friends and colleagues who put the volume together. In the Folio it faces the lines signed 'B.1.' (Ben Jonson) which we print beneath it. Shakespeare's widow died in 1623, and his last surviving descendant, Elizabeth Hall (who inherited New Place and married first a neighbour, Thomas Nash, and secondly John Bernard, knighted in 1661), in 1670.

2. Shakespeare's monument, designed by Gheerart Janssen, in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon



Shakespeare's Professional Career

We do not know when Shakespeare joined the theatre after his marriage, or how he was employed in the mean time. In 1587 an actor of the Queen's Men—the most successful company of the 1580s—died as a result of manslaughter shortly before the company visited Stratford. That Shakespeare may have taken his place is an intriguing speculation. Nor do we know when he began to write. It seems likely (though not certain) that he became an actor before starting to write plays; at any rate, none of his extant writings certainly dates from his youth or early manhood. One of his less impressive sonnets—No. 145—apparently plays on the name 'Hathaway' (' "I hate" from hate away she threw'), and may be an early love poem; but this is his only surviving non-dramatic work that seems at all likely to have been written before he became a playwright. Possibly his earliest efforts in verse or drama are lost; just possibly some of them survive anonymously. It would have been very much in keeping with contemporary practice if he had worked in collaboration with other writers at this stage in his career. We believe that other writers, including Thomas Nashe, contributed to *I Henry VI*, that George Peele is part-author of *Titus Andronicus*, and that Shakespeare wrote part of *Edward III* (not included in the first edition of the Complete Works). Other writers' hands have been plausibly detected in *The First Part of the Contention* (2 *Henry VI*) and *Richard Duke of York* (3 *Henry VI*).

The first printed allusion to Shakespeare dates from 1592, in the pamphlet *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, published as the work of Robert Greene,

writer of plays and prose romances, shortly after he died. Mention of an ‘upstart crow’ who ‘supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you’ and who ‘is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country’ suggests rivalry; though parody of a line from *Richard Duke of York* (3 *Henry VI*) shows that Shakespeare was already known on the London literary scene, the word ‘upstart’ does not suggest a long-established author.

It seems likely that Shakespeare’s earliest surviving plays date from around 1590, possibly earlier: they include comedies (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*), history plays based on English chronicles (*The First Part of the Contention*, *Richard Duke of York*), and a pseudo-classical tragedy (*Titus Andronicus*). We cannot say with any confidence which company (or companies) of players these were written for; *Titus Andronicus*, at least, seems to have gone from one company to another, since according to the title-page of the 1594 edition it had been acted by the Earl of Derby’s, the Earl of Pembroke’s, and the Earl of Sussex’s Men. Early in his career, Shakespeare may have worked for more than one company. A watershed was the devastating outbreak of plague which closed London’s theatres almost entirely from June 1592 to May 1594. This seems to have turned Shakespeare’s thoughts to the possibility of a literary career away from the theatre: in spring 1593 appeared his witty narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*, to be followed in 1594 by its tragic counterpart, *The Rape of Lucrece*. Both carry dedications over Shakespeare’s name to Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, who, though aged only twenty in 1593, was already making a name for himself as a patron of poets. Patrons could be important to Elizabethan writers; how Southampton rewarded Shakespeare for his dedications we do not know, but the affection with which Shakespeare speaks of him in the dedication to *Lucrece* suggests a strong personal connection and has encouraged the belief that Southampton may be the young man—or one of the young men—addressed so lovingly in Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

3. Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton (1573-1624), at the age of twenty: a miniature by Nicholas Hilliard



Whether Shakespeare began to write the Sonnets at this time is a vexed question. Certainly it is the period at which his plays make most use of the formal characteristics of the sonnet: *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, both incorporate sonnets into their structure; but *Henry V*, probably dating from 1599, has a sonnet as an Epilogue, and in *All's Well That Ends Well* (1606-7) a letter is cast in this form, and so is Jupiter's speech in *Cymbeline* (1610). Allusions within the Sonnets suggest that they were written over a period of at least three years. At some later point they seem to have been rearranged into the order in which they were printed. Behind them—if indeed they are autobiographical at all—lies a tantalizingly elusive story of Shakespeare's personal life. Many attempts have been made to identify the poet's friend (or friends), the rival poet (or poets), and the

dark woman (or women) who is both the poet's mistress and the seducer of his friend; none has achieved any degree of certainty.

After the epidemic of plague dwindled, a number of actors who had previously belonged to different companies amalgamated to form the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In the first official account that survives, Shakespeare is named, along with the famous comic actor Will Kemp and the tragedian Richard Burbage, as payee for performances at court during the previous Christmas season. The Chamberlain's Men rapidly became the leading dramatic company, though rivalled at first by the Admiral's Men, who had Edward Alleyn as their leading tragedian. Shakespeare stayed with the Chamberlain's (later King's) Men for the rest of his career as actor, playwright, and administrator. He is the only prominent playwright of his time to have had so stable a relationship with a single company.

With the founding of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's career was placed upon a firm footing. It is not the purpose of this Introduction to describe his development as a dramatist, or to attempt a thorough discussion of the chronology of his writings. The Introductions to individual works state briefly what is known about when they were composed, and also name the principal literary sources on which Shakespeare drew in composing them. More detailed discussion of dating is to be found in the *Textual Companion*. The works themselves are arranged in a conjectured order of composition. There are many uncertainties about this, especially in relation to the early plays. The most important single piece of evidence is a passage in a book called *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury*, by a minor writer, Francis Meres, published in 1598. Meres wrote:

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness *his Gentlemen of Verona*, *his Errors*, *his Love Labour's Lost*, *his Love Labour's Won*,

his Midsummer's Night Dream, and his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard II, Richard III, Henry IV, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet.

Some of the plays that Meres names had already been published or alluded to by 1598; but for others, he supplies a date by which they must have been written. Meres also alludes to Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets among his private friends', which suggests that some, if not all, of the poems printed in 1609 as Shakespeare's Sonnets were circulating in manuscript by this date. Works not mentioned by Meres that are believed to have been written by 1598 are the three plays concerned with the reign of Henry VI, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Edward III*, and the narrative poems.

Shakespeare seems to have had less success as an actor than as a playwright. We cannot name any of his roles for certain, though seventeenth-century traditions have it that he played Adam in *As You Like It*, and Hamlet's Ghost—and more generally that he had a penchant for 'kingly parts'. Ben Jonson listed him first among the 'principal comedians' in *Every Man in his Humour*, acted in 1598, when he reprinted it in his 1616 Folio, and Shakespeare is also listed among the performers of Jonson's tragedy *Sejanus* in 1603. He was certainly one of the leading administrators of the Chamberlain's Men. Until 1597, when their lease expired, they played mainly in the Theatre, London's first important playhouse, situated north of the River Thames in Shoreditch, outside the jurisdiction of the City fathers, who exercised a repressive influence on the drama. It had been built in 1576 by James Burbage, a joiner, the tragedian's father. Then the company seems to have played mainly at the Curtain until some time in 1599. Shakespeare was a member of the syndicate responsible for building the first Globe theatre, in Southwark, on the south bank of the Thames, out of the dismantled timbers of the Theatre in 1599. Initially he had a ten-per-cent

financial interest in the enterprise, fluctuating as other shareholders joined or withdrew. It was a valuable share, for the Chamberlain's Men won great acclaim and made substantial profits. After Queen Elizabeth died, in 1603, they came under the patronage of the new king, James I; the royal patent of 19 May 1603 names Shakespeare along with other leaders of the company. London was in the grip of another severe epidemic of plague which caused a ban on playing till the following spring. The King's processional entry into London had to be delayed; when at last it took place, on 15 March 1604, each of the company's leaders was granted four and a half yards of scarlet cloth for his livery as one of the King's retainers; but the players seem not to have processed. Their association with the King was far from nominal; during the next thirteen years—up to the time of Shakespeare's death—they played at court more often than all the other theatre companies combined. Records are patchy, but we know, for instance, that they gave eleven plays at court between 1 November 1604 and 31 October 1605, and that seven of them were by Shakespeare: they included older plays—*The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*—and more recent ones—*Othello* and *Measure for Measure*. *The Merchant of Venice* was played twice.

Some measure of Shakespeare's personal success during this period may be gained from the ascription to him of works not now believed to be his; *Lochrine* and *Thomas Lord Cromwell* were published in 1595 and 1602 respectively as by 'W.S.'; in 1599 a collection of poems, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, containing some poems certainly by other writers, appeared under his name; so, in 1606 and 1608, did *The London Prodigal* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. Since Shakespeare's time, too, many plays of the period, some published, some surviving only in manuscript, have been attributed to him. In modern times, the most plausible case has been made for parts, or all, of *Edward III*, which was entered in the registers of the Stationers' Company (a normal, but not invariable, way of setting in motion the publication process) in 1595 and published in 1596. It was first ascribed to Shakespeare in 1656. When this edition of the Complete Works first appeared, we said that if any

play deserved to be added to the canon, this was it. Since then the scholarly case for Shakespeare having written part, or even all, of the play has grown, and we reprint it here according to its conjectural date of composition.

4. King James I (1566-1625): a portrait 1621) by Daniel Mytens



In August 1608 the King's Men took up the lease of the smaller, 'private' indoor theatre, the Blackfriars; again, Shakespeare was one of the syndicate of owners. The company took possession in 1609. The Blackfriars served as a winter home; in better weather, performances continued to be given at the Globe. By now, Shakespeare was at a late stage in his career. Perhaps he realized it; he seems to have been willing to share his responsibilities as the company's resident dramatist with younger writers. *Timon of Athens*, tentatively dated to early 1606, seems on internal evidence to be partly the work of Thomas Middleton (1580-1627). Another collaborative play, very successful in its time, was *Pericles* (c. 1607-8), in which Shakespeare probably worked with George Wilkins, an unscrupulous character who gave up his brief career as a writer in favour of a longer one as a tavern (or brothel) keeper. But Shakespeare's most fruitful collaboration was with John Fletcher, his junior by fifteen years. Fletcher was collaborating with Francis Beaumont on plays for the King's Men by about 1608. Beaumont stopped writing plays when he married, in about 1613, and it is at this time that Fletcher began to collaborate with Shakespeare. A lost play, *Cardenio*, acted by the King's Men some time before 20 May 1613, was plausibly ascribed to Shakespeare and Fletcher in a document of 1653; *All is True* (*Henry VIII*), first acted about June 1613, is generally agreed on stylistic evidence to be another fruit of the same partnership; and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, also dated 1613, which seems to be the last play in which Shakespeare had a hand, was ascribed to the pair on its publication in 1634. One of Shakespeare's last professional tasks was the minor one of devising an *impress*—which has not survived—for the Earl of Rutland to bear at a tournament held on 24 March 1613 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the King's accession. An *impresa* was a paper or pasteboard shield painted with an emblematic device and motto which would be carried and interpreted for a knight by his squire; such a ceremony is portrayed in *Pericles* (Sc. 6).

Shakespeare received forty-four shillings for his share in the work; Richard Burbage was paid the same sum 'for painting and making it'.

The Drama and Theatre of Shakespeare's Time

Shakespeare came upon the theatrical scene at an auspicious time. English drama and theatre had developed only slowly during the earlier part of the sixteenth century; during Shakespeare's youth they exploded into vigorous life. It was a period of secularization; previously, drama had been largely religious in subject matter and overtly didactic in treatment; as a boy of fifteen, Shakespeare could have seen one of the last performances of a great cycle of plays on religious themes at Coventry, not far from his home town. 1567 saw the building in London of the short-lived Red Lion, and in 1576 the Theatre went up, to be rapidly followed by the Curtain: England's first important, custom-built playhouses. There was a sudden spurt in the development of all aspects of theatrical art: acting, production, playwriting, company organization, and administration. Within a few years the twin arts of drama and theatre entered upon a period of achievement whose brilliance remains unequalled.

The new drama was literary and rhetorical rather than scenic and spectacular: but its mainstream was theatrical too. Its writers were poets. Prose was only beginning to be used in plays during Shakespeare's youth; a playwright was often known as a 'poet', and most of the best playwrights of the period wrote with distinction in other forms. Shakespeare's most important predecessors and early contemporaries, from whom he learned much, were John Lyly (c.1554-1606), pre-eminent for courtly comedy and elegant prose, Robert Greene (1558-92), who helped particularly to develop the scope and language of romantic comedy, the tragedian Thomas Kyd (1558-94), and Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), whose 'mighty line' put

heroism excitingly on the stage and who shares with Shakespeare credit for establishing the English history play as a dramatic mode. As Shakespeare's career progressed, other dramatists displayed their talents and, doubtless, influenced and stimulated him. George Chapman (c.1560-1634) emerged as a dramatist in the mid-1590s and succeeded in both comedy and tragedy. He was deeply interested in classical themes, as was Ben Jonson (1572-1637), who became Shakespeare's chief rival. Jonson was a dominating personality, vocal about his accomplishments (and about Shakespeare, who, he said, 'wanted art'), and biting as a comic satirist. Thomas Dekker (c.1572-1632) wrote comedies that are more akin to Shakespeare's than to Jonson's in their romantic warmth; the satirical plays of John Marston (c.1575-1634) are more sensational and cynical than Jonson's. Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) brought a sharp wit to the portrayal of contemporary London life, and developed into a great tragic dramatist. Towards the end of Shakespeare's career, Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625) came upon the scene; the affinity between Shakespeare's late tragicomedies and some of Fletcher's romances is reflected in their collaboration.

The companies for which these dramatists wrote were organized mainly from within. They were led by the sharers: eight in the Lord Chamberlain's Men at first, twelve by the end of Shakespeare's career. Collectively they owned the joint stock of play scripts, costumes, and properties; they shared both expenses and profits. All were working members of the company. Exceptionally, the sharers of Shakespeare's company owned the Globe theatre itself; more commonly, actors rented theatres from financial speculators such as Philip Henslowe, financier of the Admiral's Men. Subordinate to the sharers were the 'hired men'—lesser actors along with prompters ('bookholders'), stagekeepers, wardrobe keepers ('tiremen'), musicians, and money-collectors ('gatherers'). Even those not employed principally as actors might swell a scene at need. The hired men were paid by the week. Companies would need scribes to copy out actors' parts and to make fair copies from the playwrights' foul papers (working manuscripts), but they

seem mainly to have been employed part-time. The other important group of company members were the apprentices. These were boys or youths each serving a formal term of apprenticeship to one of the sharers. They played female and juvenile roles.

The success of plays in the Elizabethan theatres depended almost entirely on the actors. They had to be talented, hard-working, and versatile. Above all they had to have extraordinary memories. Plays were given in a repertory system on almost every afternoon of the week except during Lent. Only about two weeks could be allowed for rehearsal of a new play, and during that time the company would be regularly performing a variety of other plays. Lacking printed copies, the actors worked from 'parts' written out on scrolls giving only the cue lines from other characters' speeches. The bookholder, or prompter, had to make sure that actors entered at the right moment, properly equipped. Many of them would take several parts in the same play: doubling and more was a necessary practice. The strain on the memory was great, demanding a high degree of professionalism. Conditions of employment were carefully regulated: a contract of 1614 provides that an actor and sharer, Robert Dawes (not in Shakespeare's company), be fined one shilling for failure to turn up at the beginning of a rehearsal, two shillings for missing a rehearsal altogether, three shillings if he was not 'ready apparelled' for a performance, ten shillings if four other members of the company considered him to be 'overcome with drink' at the time he should be acting, and one pound if he simply failed to turn up for a performance without 'licence or just excuse of sickness'.

There can be no doubt that the best actors of Shakespeare's time would have been greatly admired in any age. English actors became famous abroad; some of the best surviving accounts are in letters written by visitors to England: the actors were literally 'something to write home about', and some of them performed (in English) on the Continent. Edward Alleyn, the leading tragedian of the Admiral's Men, renowned especially for his performances of

Marlowe's heroes, made a fortune and founded Dulwich College. All too little is known about the actors of Shakespeare's company and the roles they played, but many testimonies survive to Richard Burbage's excellence in tragic roles. According to an elegy written after he died, in 1619,

No more young Hamlet, old Hieronimo;
Kind Lear, the grieved Moor, and more beside
That lived in him have now for ever died.

There is no reason to suppose that the boy actors lacked talent and skill; they were highly trained as apprentices to leading actors. Most plays of the period, including Shakespeare's, have far fewer female than male roles, but some women's parts—such as Rosalind (in *As You Like It*) and Cleopatra—are long and important; Shakespeare must have had confidence in the boys who played them. Some of them later became sharers themselves.

The playwriting techniques of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were intimately bound up with the theatrical conditions to which they catered. Theatre buildings were virtually confined to London. Plays continued to be given in improvised circumstances when the companies toured the provinces and when they acted at court (that is, wherever the sovereign and his or her entourage happened to be—in London, usually Whitehall or Greenwich). In 1602, *Twelfth Night* was given in the still-surviving hall of one of London's Inns of Court, the Middle Temple. Acting companies could use guildhalls, the halls of great houses, the yards of inns, or even churches. (In 1608, *Richard II* and *Hamlet* were performed by ships' crews at sea off the coast of Sierra Leone.) Many plays of the period require no more than an open space and the costumes and properties that the actors carried with them on their travels. Others made more use of the expanding facilities of the professional stage. No doubt texts were adapted as circumstances required.

5. Richard Burbage: reputedly a self-portrait



6. The hall of the Middle Temple, London