

# **Shakespearean Biografiction:**

**How modern biographers rely on context, conjecture  
and inference to construct a life of the Bard**

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## Abstract

Modern biographies of William Shakespeare abound: new studies appear almost every year, each claiming new research and new insights, while affirming that there are enough records for a documentary life. In this thesis, I argue that no biography of Shakespeare is possible due to insufficient material, that most of what is written about Shakespeare cannot be verified from primary sources, and that Shakespearean biography did not attain scholarly or academic respectability until Samuel Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life* (1975). The thesis therefore is concerned with demythologising Shakespeare by exposing numerous "biogra-fictions." I begin by reviewing the history and practice of biography as a narrative account of a person's life based on primary sources. Next I assess the very limited biographical material for Shakespeare identifying the gaps, e.g. there is no record that he spent any of his childhood in Stratford or ever attended school. A historical review of writing about Shakespeare demonstrates that there were no serious attempts to reconstruct his life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, merely some comments and unverifiable anecdotes. I demonstrate that the greatest Shakespearean scholar, Edmond Malone, realised that no narrative account of Shakespeare's life was possible. I show how the earliest biographies of Shakespeare emerged in the 1840s in line with the Victorian need to identify national heroes. Schoenbaum's deeply flawed study has greatly influenced academics who have followed his structure and myths in their own biographies. My analysis of the contrasting descriptions of Shakespeare's relationships with Southampton and with Jonson demonstrate that the very limited biographical material can only be expanded through speculation and inference. Finally, I propose that study of Shakespeare's life should be confined to discrete topics, starting from a sceptical examination of primary sources. Any attempt at an account of his life or personality amounts, however, merely to "biografiction".

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## References and abbreviations

I have followed throughout the author-date style for citations and references, according to the fourteenth edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (1993) as the most economical in space and time.

Quotations of the works of Shakespeare are taken from Stanley Wells & Gary Taylor, eds. (1986) *William Shakespeare: the Complete Works*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

WS        E. K. Chambers. 1930. *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

STC        *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad 1475-1640*. Second edition, revised and enlarged, begun by W. A. Jackson and F. S. Ferguson, completed by K. F. Pantzer. London: The Bibliographical Society. Vol. I (A-H). 1986. Vol. II (I-Z). 1976. Vol. III (Indexes, addenda, corrigenda). 1991.

The English Short Title Catalogue is available online through the British Library website: [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

## Clarification

*Account*     *Some Account of the Life &c.* which Nicholas Rowe prefixed to his six-volume edition of *The Plays of Shakespeare* (1709).

*Account*     The version of *Some Account of the Life &c.* which Alexander Pope had slightly altered for the prolegomena to his edition of the plays 1723-5. This revised version, attributed to Rowe alone, appeared in subsequent reprints. The two versions are compared in Annex A.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. Authorisation for Brunel University to lend this thesis to others for the purpose of research will be granted when any further papers or other publications deriving from the research underlying the thesis have been completed.

Kevin Gilvary

Titchfield, Hampshire.

1 November 2014

## Introduction

### Shakespearean Biografiction

*What, will the line stretch out to the crack of doom? Another yet!*

*Macbeth*, 4.1.130

Like Macbeth confronted by the interminable line of Banquo's progeny, any person wanting to read about the life of Shakespeare must be astonished at the sheer number of modern biographies about the Bard. Since the release of the popular (but highly fictional) film *Shakespeare in Love* in 1998, there have been over twenty-five such biographies, many written by eminent academics such as Katherine Duncan-Jones (2001), Stephen Greenblatt (2004), and Lois Potter (2012). The number of these biographies is all the more surprising when we recall that no new contemporary document naming Shakespeare has been discovered since 1931 when Leslie Hotson published his transcription and analysis of the Langley writ of 1596. Before that, the last new documents bearing the name of William Shakespeare, from the Belott-Mountjoy case, were discovered and published by Charles Wallace in 1910 (Nicholl 2007). Thus any "new" evidence or research concerns only the history of the period and Shakespeare's assumed place in it.

Modern biographies vary considerably in their portrayal of Shakespeare according to their own imaginations, using selective inference from the works to identify a speech, a character or an idea with Shakespeare himself. Against readers, who claim to find Shakespeare's Protestant outlook in the works (e.g. Honan, 79-80), there are those who point to apparent Catholic sympathies in the plays (e.g. Greenblatt, 102-3). Against some who find republican ideals in the plays (Hadfield 2008), there are others who find monarchical tendencies (Saccio 2000). Echoing the sentiments of T. S. Eliot, Blair Worden explains:

In modern times, we have had a monarchist Shakespeare and a republican Shakespeare, an aristocratic Shakespeare and a bourgeois Shakespeare, Terry Eagleton's Marxist Shakespeare and Michael Portillo's Tory Shakespeare. . . . each interpretation tells us more about the interpreter, not the interpreted (2006, 29-30).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Worden's paper was given at a conference, which I attended, entitled "Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson: New Directions in Biography," organised by the University of Warwick and held at Stratford-upon-Avon in September 2001. It appeared in the resultant collection of papers (Kozuka & Mulryne 2006).

Similar differences emerge over descriptions of his supposed relationships with his wife, his patron and his colleagues and rivals. These differences of interpretation have been summarised by David Bevington (2010) but they all depend on one basic assumption: that it is possible to provide an evidence-based description of Shakespeare's life in a narrative, cradle-to-grave account. For the reader wishing to know more about Shakespeare and how he came to compose his works, the difficulty lies in choosing between these different biographies: which one gives the portrait of the "real Shakespeare"? Which one tells the story most accurately?

To answer this question, a distinction needs to be made between primary sources and myths. A primary source is a "document, image or artefact that provides evidence about the past. It is an original document created contemporaneously with the event under discussion" (Williams 2003, 58). A primary source must directly reference the subject to be considered part of the biographical material. On the other hand, a myth or legend is a story which "comes down from the past whose truth is popularly accepted but cannot be checked" (Mirriam-Webster). I do not dismiss myths about Shakespeare as false or fabricated but assess that their historical value is limited because they are unverifiable.<sup>2</sup> Myths are propagated for their significance to the culture of a people rather than for their historical accuracy:

Mythology was therefore designed to help us cope with the problematic human predicament. It helped people find their place in the world. . . . We have created myths about our forefathers that are not historical but help to explain current attitudes. (Armstrong 2005, 6).<sup>3</sup>

E. K. Chambers referred to unverifiable claims as the "Shakespeare-mythos". He lists fifty-eight writers between 1640 and 1858 whose comments about Shakespeare cannot be verified with regard to contemporary or near-contemporary records (*WS* ii. 238-302). Richard Dutton (2007), Helen Hackett (2010) and Laurie Maguire & Emma Smith (2012) use myth in the same neutral sense. However, because the term "myth" suggests a narrative, I prefer to use the term "biografiction" in a wider sense to include undocumented assertions on a small scale along with myths on a larger scale. Frequently, biographers of Shakespeare refer to an "early source" or a "credible tradition" to justify a line of interpretation that does not have any basis in contemporary documents.

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<sup>2</sup> The definitions of the word "myth" in the *OED* do not seem to be useful when dealing with posthumous anecdotes concerning Shakespeare. *OED* gives the primary meaning of myth as "a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events." It gives as a secondary meaning "a widely held but false belief or idea."

<sup>3</sup> A similar view that myths were developed according to aesthetic rather than historical standards was expressed by G. S. Kirk (1972, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth, Pelican, 172) who noted how myths evolve according to "conscious literary elaboration and refinement."

The next stage for the inquisitive reader is to seek the contemporary records on which these biographies are (or should be) based. Actual transcriptions are hard to find. Instead, biographers offer summaries and interpretations as E. K. Chambers observed of the biographies by Lee (1917) and Adams (1923): writers using continuous narrative “do not set out *in extenso* the original documents on which they are based. These are summarised, and subjective interpretations [are] added” (1946, 7). This observation remains true of modern biographies, and even of booklets which claim to show Shakespeare in the records: *Shakespeare in the Public Records* by D. Thomas (1964), *William Shakespeare: a Documentary Life* by Schoenbaum and *Shakespeare in the Stratford Records* by Robert Bearman (1994) describe and interpret the contents of the documents without giving any transcriptions.

The inquisitive reader will eventually make use of documentary collections, such as the two volume study by Sir Edmund Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (1930). Chambers published accurate transcriptions of records held by offices such as the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust at Stratford-upon-Avon, the British Library in London, the PRO (now The National Archives at Kew), the London Metropolitan Archives at Finsbury, and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D. C. While Chambers’s organisation is helpful and analytical, he often merges his report of the records with his own discussion and interpretation, especially when dating the plays. In short, Chambers allowed his own subjective interpretation to intrude into his presentation of the historical record, as he himself recognised later (1946, 8).

Other documentary collections are very difficult for the modern reader to consult. James Halliwell-Phillipps’s *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (7<sup>th</sup> edn. 2 vols. 1887) is awkward to read as it is not organised or indexed, and is interlaced with extensive discussion.<sup>4</sup> Three other collections are rarely available in the U.K. Daniel Lambert’s *Cartae Shakespeareanae* (1904), in which he gave transcriptions without discussion; B. Roland Lewis’s *The Shakespeare Documents* (1940), in which transcriptions are presented in date order with extensive discussion; and Catherine Loomis’s *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Volume* (2002), the most useful as it presents records in date order with only brief accompanying comments, but it has no index.

I first felt the need to consult primary sources after becoming dissatisfied with modern biographies of Shakespeare. I had long been intrigued by anecdotes in my home village of Titchfield in Hampshire, which claimed that the third Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley, had employed Shakespeare in the family home, Titchfield Abbey. Here our “immortal poet” may

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<sup>4</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, James O. 1881. *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1<sup>st</sup> edn. Each later edition was expanded: 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1882; 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1883; 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 1884; 5<sup>th</sup> edn. 1885. 6<sup>th</sup> edn. 2 vols, 1886; 7<sup>th</sup> edn., vol. I: 416pp. ; vol. II: 432 pp; 1887. There were posthumous reprints: an Eighth Edition (1889), a Ninth Edition (1890), and a Tenth Edition (1898).

have composed *Romeo & Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost* or even *Hamlet* (Dover Wilson, 1932; Trotter 2002). Eager for details, I read various biographies of Shakespeare, finding wildly different accounts of Southampton's patronage with little reference to any primary documents. Next, I consulted biographies of Southampton (Stopes, 1922; Rowse, 1965; Akrigg, 1968) hoping to find more about Southampton's relationship with Shakespeare, but with a similar sense of frustration. Finally, I consulted collections of Shakespearean documents (firstly Chambers, then Lewis, then Loomis) only to realise that there is no contemporary document which stated that Southampton ever patronised Shakespeare or that the two people ever met. I wondered if Southampton was generally known as a generous patron of poets and playwrights in the late Elizabethan period. Again, the evidence was lacking. I pieced together details of Southampton's finances and came to the conclusion that from when he turned twenty-one in 1594 until 1603, he was always in heavy debt and never in the position to patronise anyone during the reign of Elizabeth (subsequently affirmed by Honan, 2004). I scrutinised allusions to Shakespeare and found that no patronage by Southampton was mentioned before Rowe in 1709. As an unverifiable story, it is a myth. These findings were developed into Chapter Seven, "Inventing a Patron."

Since stories of Southampton's patronage were unfounded, what then of other tenets of Shakespeare's life? Did we have primary sources to indicate his childhood and education in Stratford, his departure to London, his writing practices, or his ultimate retirement to Stratford? Were all these events and many other topics in Shakespeare's life merely myths? I therefore began to investigate the traditions of writing lives of Shakespeare in an attempt to distinguish what was verifiable from contemporary records and what was simply accepted in biographies of Shakespeare without any firm basis in the primary sources. My investigations led me to posit the following my thesis in three parts: firstly that no evidence-based biography is possible due to insufficient biographical material. Secondly, that Shakespearean Biography by scholarly writers does not stretch back to Nicholas Rowe in 1709, but is a post-modern phenomenon, beginning with the work of Samuel Schoenbaum (1975). Thirdly, that consideration of Shakespeare's life should be confined to those aspects for which there are primary sources. When these have been identified, with a careful re-statement of the original wording (not a summary), an informed discussion and analysis may be undertaken.

This thesis begins with a critical examination of biography and literary biography as a genre in Chapter One. Biography is typically defined as a narrative account of a person's life, while a literary biography attempts to relate the works of a writer to a life. Biography is shown to have a history from antiquity when the lives of great men (kings, emperors, and commanders) were described by Suetonius and Plutarch. The tradition continued in the medieval period when

the main subjects in biographies were the exemplary lives of saints. Both of these strands continued among English biographers from the early modern period through the Victorian period. The New Biography of the twentieth century, however, attempted a more intimate description of a subject's life. Techniques such as the speculative reporting of the subject's personal thoughts, experiences and motives were increasingly used by biographers in the 1920s and 1930s. Although these practices were dismissed by Durling and Watt as "biografiction" (1941, 2-3), they remain part of the standard account in modern biographies.

The extant biographical material for Shakespeare is assessed in Chapter Two, "Gaps in our Ignorance", not just with regard to the extent of the surviving records, as has been attempted by many biographers such as Chambers (1946) and Schoenbaum (1970, 3-72), but more importantly with regard to the limitations of the material and the lack of key records. The small number of historical documents which reference William Shakespeare offer no insight into the poet's thoughts and motives, but consist mainly of legal documents and references in printed texts to Shakespeare or his works. As no reliable chronology of his works is possible, any attempt at a biography of Shakespeare, therefore, lacks both a framework for his literary career and any indication of the playwright's personal thoughts, experiences and motives.

Biographical comments about Shakespeare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are considered in Chapter Three, "Inventing the Myths," where it is noted that in the absence of any firm evidence about the Bard, various claims were made which have not been verified subsequently from extant sources. The most influential account of this period was written by Nicholas Rowe for his new edition of the works in 1709. Special attention is given to the claim, made by Schoenbaum (1975) and subsequent biographers, that Rowe's *Account of the Life of William Shakespear &c* can be considered a biography and how reliable his biographical comments might be. Rowe's *Account* was widely republished in the following 150 years but was held in poor repute by subsequent editors, such as Theobald, Capell and especially Malone. The biographical investigations of Edmond Malone form the subject of Chapter Four, "Doubting the Myths". Malone discovered many new documents concerning the life and times of Shakespeare, but rejected many of the unfounded assertions made by previous critics such as Rowe. Malone cautiously offered a chronology of the plays which has been very influential but its reliability is uncertain. Malone's great ambition was to write a life of Shakespear, but this was never achieved.

Popular narrative biographies in the Romantic and Victorian periods are considered in Chapter Five, "Inventing Details," where the main focus was to produce an exemplary biography worthy of the National Poet. Much of the description of Shakespeare's life was either derived from an uncritical acceptance of the myths first attested in the eighteenth century or through selective biographical inference from the works. This Chapter also traces the developments of the

New Biography in the twentieth century (up to 1975). Through the period from 1803-1875, there was considerable scepticism as to the value of such biographies, e.g. by J. Parker Norris in 1888. The sceptical outlook was reaffirmed when the biographical approach to literature was dismissed as a fallacy by the New Critics such as Winsatt & Beardsley (1946) as deriving from each reader's subjective estimation of the author's character and personality. In the twentieth century, it was widely accepted that there was insufficient material for a biography of Shakespeare based on contemporary records. Any attempt at a biography would involve some or all of the following practices of limited biographical value: (i) use of uncorroborated posthumous anecdotes; (ii) excessive description of the context; (iii) biographical inferences from selected passages in the works; (iv) speculation based on the biographer's own intuition or imagination. This perception changed radically with the publication of Samuel Schoenbaum's highly acclaimed *William Shakespeare: a Documentary Life* (1975).

Samuel Schoenbaum's pivotal work (1975; compact edition 1977; revised compact edn. 1987) is considered in Chapter Six, "Re-Inventing the Life." It is found to be deeply flawed. This weighty volume gives large scale reproductions of over 200 documents, some relating to Shakespeare, others to the historical context. It begins with the claim that there are more records than popularly supposed and proceeds to construct a chronologically linear narrative, linking events and situations in an imaginative way, interpreting as it progresses. Schoenbaum perpetuates many myths that cannot be verified: that Shakespeare spent his childhood in Stratford where he received his education; that he was patronised by Southampton; that he inspired envy in Jonson; and that he retired to Stratford. These myths can be traced back to Nicholas Rowe (1709) but not to primary sources. Yet they persist in the life written by Schoenbaum and remain immune to revisionism. Few modern biographers look any earlier than Samuel Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (1975), each acknowledging their reliance on this publication as still "the standard life of Shakespeare" in which he gives "the documentary evidence and assesses difficult questions with even-handed restraint" by Maguire & Smith (2012, 207). Modern biographers, not only professional writers such as Michael Wood and Peter Ackroyd (2005), but also academics such as Greenblatt and Weis accept the two of the most misleading assumptions of Schoenbaum: that Shakespearean biography is feasible and dates back to Rowe. These writers show a commendable desire to understand Shakespeare and share their insights regarding the great works. However, they use a range of historically dubious techniques to embellish and expand the established narrative outline.

These techniques are evidenced in the final two chapters. Chapter Seven, "Inventing a Patron," reviews the thin evidence linking Shakespeare with the Earl of Southampton. Most biographers accept the myth that Shakespeare enjoyed this aristocratic patronage and project the

playwright into the earl's life, often by identifying him with the "fair youth" of the sonnets. The wide variety of interpretations concerning their relationship are shown to be without foundation. Chapter Eight, "Inventing a Rival," considers how Ben Jonson is cast as the antagonist to Shakespeare. Biographers express widely different views on how well they knew each other. The claims that Jonson was a close colleague, intimately acquainted with Shakespeare or that he admired his work to the point of envy. These views are shown to have no basis in primary sources. While Shakespeare never mentions Jonson and alludes only rarely, if at all, to his works, Jonson's comments about Shakespeare are found to be either commendations, literary puffs for which he was likely to have been paid, or occasional remarks disparaging Shakespeare's works.

This thesis is therefore concerned with demythologising Shakespeare, arguing, *pace* Schoenbaum and many modern scholars, that no documentary life or evidence-based biography of the poet and playwright is possible due to the paucity of historical records. The thesis further argues that what passes for Shakespearean biography is based on historically dubious practices amounting merely to "biografiction." The process of demythologising Shakespeare was first undertaken by Edmond Malone and it was continued by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps and E. K. Chambers. A small number of academics such as David Ellis (2005), Michael Benton (2009) and Graham Holderness (2011) have been critical of modern attempts at re-telling Shakespeare's Life. In *That Man Shakespeare*, Ellis is mainly concerned to show how Shakespeare emerged as a national icon. In doing so, he highlights six dubious historical practices used to develop a biography (examined in this thesis in Chapter 6.4). To these, I identify five further practices. However, Ellis does not go far enough. Firstly, he tends to over-state (8-9) the significance of the ambiguous allusion in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, failing to acknowledge that the allusion might refer to another writer: Lukas Erne argues against the interpretation that Chettle was apologising to Shakespeare: "The cumulative effect of the evidence against Shakespeare [as the recipient of the Chettle apology] is such that it partakes of mythology, rather than biography, to keep drawing inferences about Shakespeare's early years in London from Chettle's apology" (1998, 440). Secondly, Ellis assumes that Shakespeare and Jonson were closely acquainted (2005, 29-32), against which I argue in Chapter Eight. Next, he believes that the present monument in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford showing Shakespeare with an up-turned moustache, a pen and some paper remains substantially unaltered from the time of Digges's reference to it in the First Folio (1623). Ellis does not mention that the present-day monument depicts a very different person from the illustration in William Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656, 525). Dugdale made his sketch (showing a man with a droopy moustache and a woollack) when he visited the Church in 1634. The engraving was made by Wenceslaus

Hollar.<sup>5</sup> Ellis also tends to find value in posthumous anecdotes: he calls John Aubrey's slight report about Shakespeare "testimony" (40).<sup>6</sup>

In *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare*, Holderness considers different interpretations of Shakespeare's life. Each one is fictionalised but cannot be disproved due to the lack of records, thus indicating that a biography of Shakespeare, based on contemporary documents is "an almost impossible brief" (2011, 16). I go further and argue that it is indeed an impossible brief. David Ellis's *The Truth about William Shakespeare* (2012) adopts a more analytical approach to fourteen topics in Shakespeare's life, including a chapter on Boyhood and Youth. Ellis shows how recent biographers have speculated beyond the limited records. Holderness and Ellis limit themselves for the most part to modern studies.

I argue in this thesis that the processes of demythologising Shakespeare and exposing biografictions have not gone far enough. Traditional elements in the traditional life of Shakespeare are in urgent need of detailed reconsideration. I offer a much wider and more sceptical analysis of Shakespearian biography firstly by considering the generic characteristics of biography and then by assessing the limitations of the biographical record for Shakespeare. I identify the earliest mention of five key myths in the traditional story of Shakespeare's Life. Then I relate the differing interpretations of Shakespeare's life to wider movements in both biography and literary theory, identifying that, in the tradition of dealing with Shakespeare's life, scepticism was the norm.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that biographies of Shakespeare are no more than historical fiction, or as Durling and Watt would say, "biografiction." There is insufficient material upon which to construct a coherent linear account of the subject's life. Scarcely any of the claims made about Shakespeare as a writer can be verified by reference to historical records. Biographers therefore resort to the historically dubious practices of using later anecdotes, offering much contextual detail as a basis for speculating what Shakespeare might have experienced, and making wide-ranging biographical inferences from the works. As a result, the biographies of Shakespeare only offer historical fact in their treatment of the context and in dealing with a few of the external events of his life. For the inner man, these narratives treatments are conjectural. Finally, I propose that the only possible methodology for considering Shakespeare's life is to undertake sceptical examination of those topics for which there are

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<sup>5</sup> Dugdale's drawing is described by C. C. Stopes. 1904. *The True Story of the Stratford Bust: A Contemporary Likeness of Shakespeare*. London: John Murray. Most modern biographers believe that Dugdale made serious mistakes in his drawing.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis refers to Rowe's *Account* (1709) as the "first real attempt at a biography of Shakespeare" (37), against which I argue strongly in Chapter Three. Moreover, he shows considerable enthusiasm for Samuel Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life*, failing to notice the weaknesses which I explore in Chapter Six.

primary sources and to begin by a restatement of these sources, followed by a reasonable account of the topic in hand. To some extent, this has been undertaken by Ellis, Hackett and Holderness. It is also the intended approach of Maguire & Smith (2012). Any picture of Shakespeare will thus be very limited, but will have the merit of being historically based, verifiable, and not simply biografiction.

## Chapter 1

### Biography: Much Practice, Little Theory

This chapter considers definitions and practices of biography so as to provide a basis for deciding whether a biography of Shakespeare is feasible. In this thesis, I follow the broad definition of biography as the “written record of the life of an individual” providing a factually-based account of a life in a linear narrative. Literary biography, as a recognised sub-genre, offers not just an account of a subject’s life with an evaluation of their works, but also an attempt to show how the author’s writings came into being and to trace an author’s development. The chapter then deals with the popularity of biography in the twentieth and twenty-first century. A historical review shows that biography has been a recognised genre from the classical period and became established in early modern England with the primary intention of describing exemplary lives. In the early twentieth century, exponents of the New Biography put emphasis on a more realistic appraisal of a subject, often enhanced by reporting their inner thoughts and feelings. During this period, the sub-genre of psychobiography emerged with an assessment of the subject’s childhood experiences and influences. The chapter finally considers the background to biographers, some academic, others professional, as well as publishers whose main concern is good business. Biography is a profitable genre for publishers and writers.

#### 1.1 Definitions and key elements of biography and literary biography

There is broad agreement that a biography gives “a narrative history . . . of the life of a notable individual from birth to death” (Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2008). Margaret Drabble notes that a good biographer maintains “high scholarly standards” combined with “imaginative insight and narrative skill” (*Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 1985). The emphasis on a narrative describing the character’s development or the trajectory of a subject’s life is the preferred approach since the advent of the New Biography (Winslow 1995). Literary biographers likewise offer a narrative history of a writer’s life and development, both externally by considering literary and other influences on the subject, and from an internal point of view, by describing the subject’s talent, usually offering an account of their development. Jenny Stringer emphasises the former approach in *The Concise Oxford*

*Companion to English Literature* (1996) by stating that literary biographers relate texts “to the social and cultural conditions prevailing at the time of composition.” Midge Gillies makes the same point, defining literary biography as “the study of the life of a writer or poet which examines the influence of their life on their work” (2009, 123). Catherine Parke emphasises the latter approach, defining literary biography as “recreating the life and personality of the artists to account for the particular bent of their talent” (2002, 29), as does Michael Benton, who expects literary biographers to “probe the creative imagination” and to “explore the artistic process” so as to account for a writer’s works (2009, 3).

While the broad definitions of biography and literary biography are widely accepted, the formal characteristics of biography as a genre have been formulated less often. Two acclaimed literary biographers attempted to initiate such analysis in the latter part of the twentieth century: Leon Edel offered introductions to *Literary Biography* (1957) and *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (1985). Edel was keen to explore convincing links between the subject’s achievements and the life. Ira Nadel attempted his own survey of the genre in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* in 1984 only to lament ten years later the absence of any further “sustained theoretical discussion of biography” (1994, 73).<sup>7</sup> Susan Tridgell notes that “biography continues to be neglected as a literary study” (2004, 11). Biography is mentioned only briefly by John Peck and Martin Coyle in their guide to literary terms (1984). Terry Eagleton has little to say about biography in his introduction to literary theory (1994) while there is no mention by Jeremy Hawthorn in his glossary of literary theory (1994) or by Raman Seldan *et al.* (2005).<sup>8</sup> David Ellis notes that few biographers indicate the principles informing their work (2002, 1-3). Michael Holroyd agrees: “[T]here are no absolute rules - each subject differs in the opportunities and problems he or she offers, and what works best is what appeals instinctively and calls forth our most original and potent language.”<sup>9</sup> Michael Benton points out that biography “seems uninterested in questioning the principles of composition upon which it is based, which is odd since it draws upon approaches to writing in both history and literature, where theoretical battles have been continuously fought” (2011, 68).

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Edel (1907-1997) wrote a five-volume biography of Henry James and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1963 and set up the Department of Life-Writing at the University of Hawaii. Ira B. Nadel (b. 1943) of the University of British Columbia has written biographies on *James Joyce* (1989), *Tom Stoppard* (2000), and *Ezra Pound* (2004)

<sup>8</sup> John Peck & Martin Coyle. 1984. *Literary Terms and Criticism: a Student’s Guide*. London: Macmillan. Terry Eagleton. 1994. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell. Jeremy Hawthorn. 1994. *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Edward Arnold. Raman Seldan et al. 2005. *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Pearson.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Holroyd. 2002. “Our Friends the Dead.” In *The Guardian*, 1 June.

Until the end of the Edwardian period, the emphasis in biography was to reveal personality in a portrait, on the assumption that character is were fixed (Winslow 1995, 51). Since the advent of the New Biography after World War I, the need for a coherent narrative has assumed greater importance. Leon Edel argued that a good biographer uses biographical material to develop a narrative which is continuous, harmonious, and literary (1978, 1-2). Hermione Lee, Head of the The Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, also expects biographers to use their own interpretation to select, arrange and comment on events, thereby linking disparate parts of the life story (2008). Thus a biography is not just a presentation of facts about someone's life, but a coherent narrative which the biographer constructs, adding their own insights and evaluations. Michael Benton expands the analysis by stating that this story-telling element in biography offers a linear account of a subject's life, based on selection, continuity, coherence and closure (2009, 18-34).

For an account of someone's life that is both narrative and truthful, there must be sufficient primary sources from which a narrative can be constructed. The requirement of a historically documented basis for biography was stated by historian John Garraty (1957, 115) and reaffirmed when he became general editor in the late twentieth century of *American National Biography* (1999). He explains how factual accuracy is the highest priority for each entry undertaken:

After the staff at Columbia University had approved an essay, it was factchecked under the supervision of the ANB staff of Oxford University Press in Cary, North Carolina. The Oxford factcheckers generated well over a hundred thousand queries, and their work has immeasurably strengthened the factual foundation of our understanding of the American past (Garraty, Preface, *ANB*).<sup>10</sup>

According to Benton (2009, 6), the audience assumes that the biographer has undertaken scrupulous research before embarking on a continuous, coherent narrative, offering a unified view of the subject within a clear start and end. For any literary biographer, it is essential to establish a factually accurate framework of an author's life, including dates and times of composition of their works, whether and when any revisions were made and the date(s) of publication. Only then can the literary biographer begin to relate biographical material towards a critical appreciation of their texts.

The academic study of biography was enhanced when the first university department devoted to its specific study was established in Hawaii in 1976, under the guidance of the acclaimed literary biographer, Leon Edel. Their Center for Biographical Research has published *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* since 1978, the earliest academic journal so dedicated. Since then, other specialist university departments have been established in British and American universities, e.g. at Harvard and Wolfson College Oxford. There has been a corresponding

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<sup>10</sup> Garraty's preface appears online at <http://www.anb.org/foreward.html> (accessed 21 May 2014).

growth in the publication of related, academic journals.<sup>11</sup> Many academic conferences have been held in recent years, some of which have resulted in the publication of collections of essays (e.g. Donaldson *et al.* 1992; Ellis 1993; Bostridge 2004; and Kozuka & Mulryne, eds. *Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson: New Directions in Biography*, 2006).

International prizes are also awarded for biography, although the lack of consensus as to what biography is, how it should be practised, or how it should be evaluated, makes such awards appear subjective. The James Tait Black Memorial for biography has been awarded by the Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh University since 1919. It was given to Lytton Strachey for his study of Queen Victoria in 1921.<sup>12</sup> In the U.S.A., the Pulitzer Prize for the most distinguished biography or autobiography by an American author was first awarded in 1917 to L. E. H. Richards.<sup>13</sup> Stephen Greenblatt's biography of Shakespeare was nominated in 2005. Other awards include the Duff Cooper Prize for the best writing of history, biography, political science or poetry,<sup>14</sup> and the Whitbread Prize (renamed the Costa Book Award in 2005).<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 The Western Tradition of Biography

Biography has been a notable genre in Western Literature dating back to the ancient Sumerian civilisation. One major eastern text, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 2000 BC), is an early biography in describing the heroic exploits and death of the King of Uruk (West 1997, 63-68). Biography plays an important part in religions through the lives of religious founding figures such as the Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed. The story of the Buddha's life is based on historical facts about Siddhartha Gautama with "some wondrous stories" (Smart 1989, 57). In Judaism, the Old Testament contains many biographies of important figures such as Moses (Smart, 203-6).

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<sup>11</sup> There are now other academic journals which specialise in life writing, including *a/b: Auto/biographical Studies* (published by the Universities of Wisconsin and West Georgia since 1986); and the *Journal of Historical Biography* (published by the University College of Fraser Valley, Canada).

<sup>12</sup> There are no published criteria for the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for biography. Various Shakespearean biographers have been awarded the prize (E. K. Chambers in 1938; Peter Ackroyd in 1998; and Jonathan Bate in 2004) but it has never been awarded for any biography of Shakespeare.

<sup>13</sup> Laura E. H. Richards won the award for her study of Julia Ward Howe (1916. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin). There are no published criteria for the Pulitzer Prize, which is made by a small committee within each category.

<sup>14</sup> The Duff Cooper Prize has been won by various literary biographers: Jocelyn Baines for his critical literary biography of Conrad (1960); George Painter for his second volume on Proust (1965). Quentin Bell for his biography of Virginia Woolf (1972). There are no published criteria for the award.

<sup>15</sup> In 2003, the Whitbread Prize was given for a study of George Orwell by D. J. Taylor. The published criteria for making the award for biography merely state that three judges select a winner from a short-list of four "well-written, enjoyable books, which they would strongly recommend anyone to read."

For Christians, the four gospels form a restricted biography of Jesus, mainly covering his last three years of his life when he was active as a teacher (Smart, 238-240).<sup>16</sup> The life of the Prophet Mohammed is more factually based than the lives of the Buddha or of Jesus (Smart, 278-281).

Ancient Greek biography was mainly concerned the lives of political figures who affected the lives of many people (Momigliano 1993). During the classical period at Athens, Herodotus (died c. 425 BCE) employed mini-biographies, e.g. of Croesus, in his grand sweep of the *History of the Persian Wars* (Lateiner 1989, 116). His successor, Thucydides (d. c. 395 BCE), continued the use of mini-biographies in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, e.g. of Pericles (Westlake 1968, 23-41). The Athenian historian, Xenophon (d. 354 BCE), wrote various memoirs about Socrates and devoted one text to his biographical panegyric of the Spartan king, Agesilaus.<sup>17</sup> In the Hellenistic period, Theophrastus (d. c. 287 BCE) produced his study of stock characters. His notion of fixed personality was influential on English writers of the early modern period, e.g., the “Humours” plays of Jonson.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, however, was more concerned with action and dismissed the idea of stock characters: “The Unity of a Plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. An infinity of things befall that one man, some of which it is impossible to reduce to unity.”<sup>19</sup> Although *The Poetics* was mainly concerned with the forms of tragedy, comedy and epic poetry, his astute comments about biography were not echoed until Virginia Woolf. The historian, Satyrus (c. 300 BCE), wrote an extant biography of the poet Euripides in dialogue form and seems thus to have been the earliest literary historian (Momigliano 1993, 115-6). He engaged in a form of biographical criticism, reading works of literature as source material about the authors, e.g. using Euripides’ imagery of the sea to suggest that the Athenian dramatist lived reclusively in a maritime cave (Kennedy 1993, 205).

In Rome, the historian Sallust (c. 85 - 35 BCE) included short biographies, e.g. of the Roman general Sulla, within his larger treatment of *Bellum Jugurtham*, ‘The Jugurthian War’. However, the practice of biography as the limitation of a text to the treatment of a single person did not emerge until the first century BC in Rome at the hands of Cornelius Nepos (d. c. 25 BCE). His *De Vita Ciceronis* ‘Life of Cicero’ and *De Viris Illustribus* ‘Lives of Famous Men’ are not extant, but were widely praised by other writers in classical Rome (Mellor 1999, 132-143).

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Burridge (1992) has reviewed attempts to find a genre for the gospels; in the nineteenth century, they were taken to be biographies, whereas in the twentieth they were generally considered religious tracts, with a biographical element.

<sup>17</sup> John Dillery (1995, 114-122) examines Xenophon as an early exponent of biography in *Xenophon and the history of his times*. London: Routledge.

<sup>18</sup> K. Hume. 2012. “Character, Theophrastan.” In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* ed. Rolande Greene et al. (2012, 224).

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* I, viii (translated by Ingram Bywater, 1920, Oxford: Clarendon, 41).

His *Excellentium Imperatorum Vitae* ‘Lives of Outstanding Commanders’ has survived. The dramatist, Seneca (d. 65 AD), often chose a single figure for his tragedies and might be considered to have expressed an early interest in biography. The historian Tacitus (55 AD – 117 AD) wrote a short biography in praise of his father-in-law, Agricola. The most important Roman biographer was Suetonius (c. 70 AD – c. 130 AD) whose *De Vita Caesarum* ‘Lives of the Caesars’ described the lives of Julius Caesar and the first eleven Emperors (Mellor 1999, 146-157). This work was greatly valued by the Emperor Hadrian and was so well received by the public that political biography became more important than narrative history for the next 250 years (Mellor 1999, 156). Suetonius wrote on the assumption that a subject’s character was fixed and therefore sought to relate any anecdotes which would illuminate that character, often with reduced emphasis on the subject’s achievements or influence. Suetonius divided his biographies into three parts: firstly how the subject rose to power; secondly what he did in power; thirdly what he was like in private. All of these principles are evident in the biographies written by a contemporary Greek writer, Plutarch (c. 46 AD – c. 120 AD), who was also rewarded by the Emperor Hadrian. Plutarch wrote 23 pairs of *Parallel Lives* in which he linked the biographies of illustrious Greeks with famous Romans (e.g. Alexander and Julius Caesar). Plutarch announced his intention in this, his most important comparison of lives:

For it is not Histories (ἱστορίας) that I am writing, but Lives (βίους); and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities (*Life of Alexander*, 1).<sup>20</sup>

Timothy Duff explains Plutarch’s practice of showing the subject’s character (“the signs of the soul”) with the intention of improving the reader’s character (2002, 13-16). This moralising element remained a consistently strong element of biography until the early part of the twentieth century. While Suetonius’ *Lives of the Caesars* was in Latin and consistently read during the medieval period in Western Europe, e.g. influencing Einhard’s ninth century biography of Charlemagne,<sup>21</sup> Plutarch’s Greek text was more famous in the Byzantine Empire and only came to the attention in the west with the publication of a Latin version in Rome in 1470.

During the period of late antiquity (c. 250 AD – 450 AD), the Roman Empire became Christian and biography became increasingly involved with panegyric in praising emperors and

<sup>20</sup> Plutarch *Parallel Lives*, vol. VII ed. and trans. Bernadoitte Perrin, Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1919.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Innes. 1997. “The classical tradition in the Carolingian renaissance: ninth-century encounters with Suetonius.” In *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3, 265-82.

hagiographic in the description of the holy man.<sup>22</sup> As literacy during the medieval period was the preserve of clerics, biography increasingly flourished in the form of hagiography. A few panegyrics of emperors remained e.g. about Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor (Head 2001), but most biography was concerned with exemplary lives, often derived from fables and legends. St Jerome's influential *De Viris Illustribus* was completed by 400 AD and contained 135 mini-biographies mainly of Christian writers. Biography was introduced into England during the Anglo-Saxon period with Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* "Life of St. Columba" written c. 700 AD. Adomnán's religious intentions are clear in the book's organisation into prophecies, miracles, and apparitions. Many such hagiographies and panegyrics were translated during the early medieval period into English and were brought together by Ælfric of Eynsham (died c. 1010) in *The Lives of the Saints*. After the Norman Conquest, many of Ælfric's *Lives* were translated into Anglo-Norman for use by the French-speaking clergy. Negative events in the subject's life were passed over in silence and any gaps were filled by speculation. Because historical material was only included when it helped to idealise the subject, the term 'hagiography' has developed negative connotations, referring to any uncritical biographies which "treat their subjects reverentially as if they were saints" (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*). During the later medieval period there was some interest in secular biography, either in Latin, e.g., *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis* ("The Deeds of Hereward the Saxon") c. 1100,<sup>23</sup> *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi* ("Life and Reign of Richard II", c. 1400) or in Anglo-Norman French, e.g. Jean Froissart's *Chroniques* (c. 1400) which takes a biographical approach to English kings.

### 1.3 English Biography in the Early Modern and Victorian periods

In early modern England, the advent of print culture and the growth of literacy led to greater interest in biography (Parke 2002, 13). Much of the reading matter was derived from the classics, which exercised a discernible influence on English biographers. In his *History of King Richard III* (composed 1512-1519; first printed 1543), Thomas More consciously follows classical models, especially Sallust's *Jugarthan War* in seeking to denigrate a defeated king.<sup>24</sup> In 1559,

<sup>22</sup> These ideas are fully explored by Patricia Cox. 1983. *Biography in late antiquity: a quest for the holy man*.

Berkeley: University of California Press; and by Tomas Hägg and P. Rousseau, eds. (2000) *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press; and by

<sup>23</sup> This medieval biography has been studied by Hugh Thomas. 1998. "The *Gesta Herwardi*, the English, and their Conquerors." *Anglo-Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference* 21, 213-32.

<sup>24</sup> More's *Richard III* was published posthumously as a continuation of Jhon Hardyng's *Chronicle* in 1543 (STC 12767) and five years later as a continuation of Edward Hall's *Union of the two noble and illustre famelies* (1548, STC 12721). The classical influence on More has been described by George Logan, in his introduction to

*The Mirror for Magistrates* (STC 1247) presented advice to rulers in the form of mini-biographical poems about leaders and their mistakes. Expanded editions appeared in 1563, 1574, 1578, 1587, and 1610. Medieval hagiography survived after the Reformation as English writers had to reformulate their religious history so as to forge a Protestant past: the most successful and prolific of these was John Foxe, whose *Acts and Monuments* (1563, STC 11222; later editions appeared in 1570, 1576, 1583) described the exemplary lives and deaths of many Protestant Martyrs (Forbush 2004, x-xi). Interest in biography increased with the publication of English translations of classical biographies: Thomas North's *Plutarch's Lives* appeared in 1579 (STC 20066) and Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* appeared in 1606 in Philemon Holland's translation (STC 23422). These classical texts informed the work of English biographers for the next three centuries. North's *Plutarch* was very influential on Shakespeare, providing much material and interpretation for *Julius Caesar*, *Antony & Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*.

The earliest literary biography in English, according to Richard Altick (1967, 1), was attempted by Thomas Speght in 1598. His edition of *The Workes of Chaucer* included an introduction about "The Life of Our Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer" and listed "so much as we can find by Herauldes, Chronicles and Records . . ." Speght reported such data as he had discovered but he did not attempt a coherent, linear narrative of his subject. Francis Bacon was the first English writer to identify biography as a separate form of writing in classical literature in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605, STC 1164). He was surprised that his contemporaries were not very interested in writing biography:

For Lives, I do find strange that the writing of lives should be no more frequent. For although there be not many sovereign princes or absolute commanders, . . . yet there are many worthy personages that deserve better than dispersed report or barren eulogies. (ed. Wright 1869, 94)

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) was also interested in life-writing, composing *The Masque of Queens* (1609) and *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610) to promote the idea of British Worthies for King James. Jonson intended "to perfect ane Epick Poeme intituled Heroologia of the Worthies of his Country" but did not carry the project through (Herford & Simpson 1925, i. 132). Izaak Walton (1593-1683) had a religious purpose when describing the lives of writers, such as John Donne (1640). Walton wished to show "the ideal character produced by the Christian humanism of the Anglican Church" – a literary figure that was "placid, devout, essentially passive, irreproachable" (Altick 1967, 20-1). The nationalistic tendencies of Fox and Jonson were expanded by Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), who attempted a much wider treatment of great Englishmen in *The History of the Worthies of England* (1662). Taking each county in turn, Fuller

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his edition (2005) *The History of King Richard The Third, by Thomas More*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

included brief descriptions of local saints, clerics, politicians, author and landowners. Within this framework, Shakespeare was accorded a few comments. John Aubrey (1626-97) compiled notes about people's lives between 1669 and 1693, but showed less interest in the biographies of men of national significance than Fuller had done. Like Fuller, Aubrey included some anecdotes about Shakespeare.

The earliest English writer to use the terms "biography" and "biographer" was John Dryden.<sup>25</sup> For his edition of *Plutarch's Lives* in 1683, Dryden defined the scope of biography to include the private life of the subject: "Here you are led into the private lodgings of the hero; you see him in undress, and are made familiar with his most private actions and conversations" (1683 i. 58). For his *Life of Plutarch*, he was the earliest biographer in English to derive biographical data from a writer's works: "We are forced to glean from Plutarch what he has scattered in his writings concerning himself, and his original" (1683, xi-xii). This is possible for writers such as Plutarch, who make explicit comments about themselves. Dryden praises Plutarch for applying himself with "extreme diligence to collect not only all the books which were excellent in their kind" but also recording "the records and instruments preserved in cities which he had visited in his travels."<sup>26</sup> Since then, readers have continued to expect a strong factual basis to any biography.

Biographical dictionaries emerged in the late seventeenth century and expanded in the eighteenth. Shakespeare is given an increasingly important entry in these but without any contribution to the biographical material. The first such dictionary in English, *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum* (1675), compiled by Edward Phillips, mixed some biography with much appreciation, an approach which influenced Nicholas Rowe in his introduction to the works of Shakespeare (1709). More literary biographical dictionaries followed, notably by Gerard Langbaine (1691), Jacob Giles (1719-20) and by Theophilus Cibber (1753). Celebrity biography developed in the eighteenth century, especially concerning actors such as David Garrick and Sarah Siddons (Wanko, 2003). The publication of many literary biographies of Alexander Pope after his death in 1744 was part of the growing process of "Poet-worship" which was applied to writers such as Milton, Sterne and especially Shakespeare (Altick 1965, 42-5). A biographical dictionary of English drama was written by David Erskine Baker in 1764, brought up to date by

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<sup>25</sup> According to Stauffer 1930, Dryden in "The Life of Plutarch" in *Plutarch's Lives* (1683) was the first English writer to use the terms "biography" and "biographer". Dryden states: "The Perfection of the Work, and the Benefit arising from it, are both more absolute in Biography than in History." (1683, i. 57). The *OED* cites Fuller as the first to use "biographist" (1662); Joseph Addison as the first to use the term "biographer", in 1715; William Oldys as the first to use the term "biographical", in 1738.

<sup>26</sup> Edmond Malone, ed. 1800. *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden*. London: Cadell & Davies ii. 352; 363.

Isaac Reed in 1782. Great national pride was also expressed by Dr. Johnson in his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-1781), in which he instigated the biographical approach to criticism, relating his criticism and appreciation of each writer to his own life and situation. Thomas Warton (1728-1790) wrote a *History of English Poetry* in six volumes (1774-81), in which he continued the promotion of national pride in English literature (Lipking 1970). This nationalistic interpretation of English Literature was continued by Joseph Ritson (1802). Such biographical literary dictionaries tended to be derivative, undocumented and anecdotal (Altick 1965, 17-9).

During the eighteenth century biography in general followed the trend in literary biography with its concern to establish a national identity. In 1747, the *Biographia Britannica* was established with its aim clearly enunciated in its subtitle: *The Lives of the Most Eminent People who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Times*. It sought to preserve the memory of “our countrymen as have been eminent” and to construct a “British Temple of Honour, sacred to the piety, learning, valour, publicke-spirit, loyalty and every virtue of our ancestors” (volume I, Preface, viii). The work initially comprised six volumes (1747-1766) and Philip Nichols (according to Schoenbaum 1970, 316) made the lengthy entry for Shakespeare in twelve folio pages of double-columns. Shakespeare’s significance as a national poet was here established before anyone had properly investigated Shakespeare’s life.

In 1750, Dr. Johnson celebrated the writing of biography with a number of precepts that became widely accepted.<sup>27</sup> He defined biography as a mixture of history with romance *i.e.* fiction (1750, 30). He rejected the idea that one could discover the inner life of a subject, stating “by conjecture only can one man judge of another’s motives or sentiments” (1759, para. 8). He also realised that the material for writing personal lives tended to diminish with time:

History can be formed from permanent monuments and records; but Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost for ever. What is known can seldom be told; and when it might be told, it is no longer known. (Morley 2008, 26).

While Dr. Johnson might be accused of a certain laziness when investigating his subjects, the same cannot be said for his biographer, James Boswell, who in 1791 described his undertakings:

Were I to detail all the books which I have consulted, and the enquiries which I have found necessary to make by various channels, I should probably be thought to be ridiculously ostentatious. Let me only observe, as a specimen of my trouble, that I have sometimes been obliged to run half over London, in order to fix a date

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<sup>27</sup> Johnson’s principles appeared in a succession of articles in *The Rambler* 60, 13 Oct. 1750, pp 28-33. Later precepts were published in *The Idler* 84, 24 Nov. 1759 (both republished in Clifford 1962, 39-45).

correctly; which when I had accomplished, I knew well would obtain me praise, though a failure would have been to my discredit (Boswell 1791 i, 7).

Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* has been widely praised but both Boswell and his editor, Malone, knew Dr. Johnson well. However, writing about Shakespeare is different as no biographies about him were ever written by any personal acquaintance. Not all biographers, however, were as hard-working as Boswell and Malone.

The first full-scale attempt to deal with biography as a genre (according to Elinor Shaffer 2002, 115) was James Stanfield's *Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography* which emphasised the didactic nature of biography in "developing the principles of man's active and moral nature" (1813, v). This approach dominated the genre throughout the Romantic and Victorian periods. The nationalistic purpose of literary biography was confirmed when it acquired the patronage of George IV in 1820 with the foundation of the Royal Society of Literature (RSL) "to reward literary merit" which resulted in their two volume *Biographia Britannica Literaria* in 1842. The work's national significance was emphasised in the sub-title: *Biography of literary characters of Great Britain and Ireland*. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) at this time enunciated the significance of the biography of great men. His Lecture, "The Hero as Poet: Dante and Shakespeare," showed his greater interest in a writer's reputation than in his life:

Consider what this Shakspeare has actually become among us. Which Englishman we ever made, in this land of ours, which million of Englishmen, would we not give up rather than the Stratford Peasant? . . . We cannot do without Shakespeare! (Carlyle 1841, 132)

Many literary biographies during the nineteenth centuries dealt with national heroes. During the Victorian Period, the dominant approach to literature was historical-biographical criticism which sought to relate literary works to the historical and biographical context from which they emerged (Guerin 1998, 22-5). One major development during this period was increased interest in childhood, especially with the publication of novels by Charles Dickens. The dystopian vision of Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* appeared in 1843 (Cunningham 2006, 151-3). Since there was no record of Shakespeare's childhood between his baptism and the issue of a marriage licence, Victorian writers such as Charles Knight (1843) and John Payne Collier (1844) chose to invent one, a utopian vision of a warm and caring family. Hence the exceptional interest created by the purchase of the Birthplace in 1847 and the consequent description of Shakespeare's idealised childhood (Thomas 2012). This process of national celebration through biography reached its zenith with the publication of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, beginning in 1885 and amounting to 63 volumes by 1900, with supplements being issued regularly until 1996. The first editor was Leslie Stephen (the father of Virginia Woolf), who defined the biographer's task as the

revelation of character in line with principles which stretched back to Suetonius and Plutarch (1893, 182).

Establishing the life of a national hero with little or no regard to verifiable facts has been called “biomythography” by Michael Benton (2009, 47-66). He notes that these heroes are often literary figures, such as Byron and Dickens and that biographers continue to exalt their subjects charting their subject’s moves from success through celebrity and martyrdom to idolatry. He offers a five-stage paradigm for this process of biomythography:

- (i) facts – selection and ‘spin’: an early biographer selects and establishes a factual history with his/ her own interpretation;
- (ii) fact into fiction: the facts become fictionalised through reference to the subject’s writings;
- (iii) fiction into myth: the fiction becomes mythologised as its characters and landscape become symbols;
- (iv) myth into ‘Faction’: stories with a basis in fact but embellished with invented elements;
- (v) demythologising: biographers return to primary sources.<sup>28</sup>

The process of demythologising many heroes was enhanced by Stephen’s successor as editor of the DNB, Sidney Lee. He identified “unconditional hero-worship” as his major concern for biography, stating that the biographer is “a narrator, not a moralist.” He therefore insisted on the investigation of primary material (1911, 25-6; 41). His *Life of Shakespeare* is examined in Chapter Five. Despite the observations of Lee and the emergence of the New Biography, uncritical eulogy has remained evident in celebrity biography into the twenty-first century.

## 1.4 New Biography and New Criticism

The emergence of a “New Biography” after the First World War has been attributed to Lytton Strachey’s publication of *Eminent Victorians* (1918), in which he attempted to debunk some of the more extreme myths surrounding Victorian heroes such as General Gordon. In the preface, Strachey rejected the majority of existing biographies for “their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design” (1918, viii). The New

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<sup>28</sup>The process of biomythography can be seen in American stories of settling the west. “When the legend becomes fact,” says the newspaper editor at the end of John Ford’s 1962 western, *The Man who Shot Liberty Vallance*, “print the legend!” The film itself, of course, is one attempt at demythologising the standard account of the American frontier.

Biography was characterised by three features: firstly, in line with Sidney Lee's principle, there was a demand for factually-based judgements, selectively used. The second major development was interest in the subject's failures and failings. Strachey wanted to demystify the lives of great subjects by including less pleasant aspects of their lives, as indicated in his widely quoted dictum: "Discretion is not the better part of biography" (Holroyd 1968, i. xv). A third innovation for biographies was the attempt to reconstruct the thought processes of the subject. Virginia Woolf in "The Art of Biography", written in 1939, noted that reliable, personal material was indispensable for any psychological portrait. Contrasting Lytton Strachey's portraits of Queen *Victoria* (1921) and Queen Elizabeth in *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), Woolf explains:

it is clear that the two Queens present very different problems to their biographer. About Queen Victoria everything was known. Everything she did, almost everything she thought, was a matter of common knowledge. No one has ever been more closely verified and exactly authenticated than Queen Victoria. The biographer could not invent her, because at every moment some document was at hand to check his invention. . . [Of Queen Elizabeth] very little was known – he was urged to invent (Woolf, "The Art of Biography," edn. 2008, 119).

Woolf then concluded that biography "must be based upon fact. And by fact in biography we mean facts that can be verified by other people besides the artist" (2008, 120). Woolf was aware that fiction was common in biography in the 1920s.

Literary biographies, written by well-known writers for a broad audience, became very popular after the First World War. The 1920s was described in 1930 as the "day of the biographer" by one of the most celebrated biographers of inter-war period, Hesketh Pearson.<sup>29</sup> Biographers became famous in their own right, often describing a literary figure without claiming any specialist knowledge. Among Pearson's later subjects were writers as diverse as Erasmus Darwin (1930) William Hazlitt (1934) and Conan Doyle (1943). He published his biography of Shakespeare in 1943. Another writer of the period who popularised literary biography was the diplomat, Sir Harold Nicolson, whose subjects were equally diverse, including Paul Verlaine (1921), Alfred Lord Tennyson (1923) and Lord Curzon (1934). As with biography in general, much of the content was fictional, according to Robert Altick (1965, 393-6), who notes that many scenes were simply undocumented with extensive conversations being invented and "thought processes" being conjectured. Similarly, many an exponent of the New Biography was deplored by Durling & Watt for an assumed ability to "read his [sic] subject's mind, freely using the interior monologue or stream of consciousness made popular by novelists" so that the biographer "not only manipulated deeds for dramatic effect but supplied an accompaniment of speech, motives, and audible thoughts as well" (1941, 2). They then criticised the use of novelistic techniques such as the "tricks of suspense and surprise, climax and anti-climax" to establish a

<sup>29</sup> Hesketh Pearson. 1930. *Ventilations: Being Biographical Asides*. London: Lippincott, 68.

narrative or by imposing a single interpretation – “a well-hidden harmony” or a “mysterious rhythm” – on a subject. For Durling & Watt, however, the most deplorable evil was the use of inference, conjecture and speculation, which they dismissed as “biografictions” (1941, 3).

Amongst literary scholars during the twentieth century, there was little enthusiasm for literary biography. T. S. Eliot, in his review of *Ben Jonson* by Gregory Smith (1919), expounded the purpose of literary biography: to show how the life of the poet informs the work. Eliot simply noted that little if anything in Smith’s biography added to the critical understanding of Jonson’s works. Eliot’s interest lay in textual analysis and he became a major influence on the New Critics, reducing interest in literary biography among academics. I. A. Richards developed this approach by requiring students to read texts closely and respond to their form and structure. His book, *Practical Criticism* (1929), set the tone against any biographical interpretation of texts making a strong contribution to the movement known as the New Criticism (Eagleton 1983, 44-51). Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946, 470) likewise rejected interest in the author when approaching literary appreciation: “The design or intention of a work is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.” They accordingly ignored any external evidence about a work of literature and exposed the biographical fallacy that a literary work could be taken as a guide to the author’s own experience. According to this view, literary biography is possible but of no, or very limited, relevance to the understanding of literature (Guerin 1998, 17-22).

Another approach to biography emerged in the twentieth century: psychobiography was as an attempt to show the inner life, by relating internalised experience especially from childhood to the subject’s later motives and behaviour. The starting-point for this was Sigmund Freud’s study of Leonardo da Vinci in 1910. While Freud has been criticised for errors in this study, Elms (1994) shows that fundamentally Freud’s approach was tenable because there was suitable biographical material – in Leonardo’s case, his description of recurrent dreams. Psychobiography became especially popular after the Great War (e.g. Joseph Krutch on Edgar Allen Poe in 1926), where links were posited between traumatic experiences and mental health issues. Edmund Wilson identified the absence of a father as a key influence of Ben Jonson (1948, 207) as did Barton (1984, xi) and (Riggs 1989, 18). Another psychobiographical approach to a literary figure was offered by Walter Bate (1977), who included a section on Dr. Johnson’s “formative years” offering insights “based on available facts and on responsible use of Freudian theories without unnecessary jargon” (Alkon 1978, 131).

The main difficulty for any psychobiography is to find reliable, documentary evidence for childhood experiences. Very often, such experiences have not been reported and the biographer works backwards from the adult in undocumented speculation (Elms 1994, 208). In addition to

obtaining suitable and reliable evidence for the construction of a psychobiography, i.e. a precise and ordered account of childhood experiences, the next difficulty lies in demonstrating a causal effect between those childhood experiences and later behaviour. The psychiatrist and author, Anthony Storr, accepts that a psychoanalytical approach can be useful if childhood experiences or mental disorders were documented (e.g. Dickens's bi-polar episodes) but very misleading when used in undocumented speculation about supposed infantile experiences (1995, 84). Any psychobiography for a figure whose childhood is undocumented is thus flawed. For some psychobiographers, the application of Freudian concepts to the lives of historical figures has become as "mechanical as bricklaying" (Cioffi 1998, 266-7).

## 1.5 Biography from the late twentieth century onwards

The latter part of the twentieth century has witnessed a huge increase in the sales of biography. Authors of printed works, as Eagleton has emphasised, are employed in capitalist business whose function was to "produce a commodity to be consumed by an audience for profit" (1976, 28). Many modern biographers are professional writers who depend directly on sales to the public for their livelihood. When these biographers become famous, they (and their publishers) know that they have a reading public who will buy their works as noted by Deirdre Blair (1989, 70-1). They rarely give explanations as to why a new biography is needed or why they feel more competent than others to conduct such a study. What is important is a good narrative style. Another popular biographer, Meryle Secrest, describes how she pitches to the publisher: "Deciding on a subject is mostly a cold-blooded business of weighing the subject against potential markets, timeliness, the availability of material, and the likelihood of getting the story, the kinds of factors publishers have to worry about." (Secrest 2007, 180). Ultimately, as Sutherland explains (2004, 149), a deal for any biography is made only if the publisher believes that there is a good business case – not because it might offer fresh research, exciting new insights, or attempts to correct previous mistakes, misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

These weaknesses are also evident in the revival of academic interest in literary biography from the late twentieth century, in line with new approaches to criticism. Relating a work of literature to the social conditions in which it was produced is an axiom of the Marxist reading of literature, credited to Terry Eagleton (1976, 28). Another movement led away from the narrow study of literary texts by firmly locating them in their historical and cultural contexts. This approach, New Historicism, adopted historically informed literary criticism: Stephen Greenblatt argued that the social context in which literary texts were produced was of great significance (1980). Greenblatt later stated that his critical practice was "to subvert the tendency to think of aesthetic representation as ultimately autonomous, separable from its cultural context" (1985,

164). Some academics were thus encouraged to return to literary biography so as to relate texts in line with New Historicist principles “to the social and cultural conditions prevailing at the time of composition” (Stringer in *Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 1996). Various critics have criticised Stephen Greenblatt and the New Historicists for evincing “little interest in the systematic, archivally based study of history” while academic historians “have at best shown indifference to the work of Greenblatt and his followers,” according to Sarah Maza (2004). Similarly, Terry Eagleton in his review of *Will in the World*, noted that “Greenblatt seems to have ditched the rest of his new-historicist baggage” (2004). It is important that an approach such as New Historicism establishes a causal link between a text and its environment.

A similar critical approach to literature, which came to be known as Cultural Materialism was initiated by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (*Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* 1985), who emphasised “the implication of literary texts within history.” Critics from these schools were keen to locate the author firmly within their particular social and cultural contexts, which therefore involved a consideration of the author. The effect was helpful in re-establishing biography as a major genre of writing, not just for popular audiences but also among academics (Burke 1998). Most literary biographers, however, while constructing the social circumstances of a literary work, focus mainly on the author’s production of that work. Literary biographies, such as Walter Jackson Bate’s on Samuel Johnson (1977) and Richard Ellmann’s on James Joyce (1982), gained academic recognition for reconstructing the author’s creative process by which authors produced great works. Since 1978, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* has described the subject and their works “while placing writers in the larger perspective of literary history.”<sup>30</sup> Literary biography has thus become even more popular at the turn of the twentieth-first century, with Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Brontë among the favourites (Benton 2009, 3).

## 1.6 Linear Narrative and Coherence in Biography

Biographies tend, as Terry Eagleton observed, to follow a given pattern: “The structure of biography is biology: even the most wayward of geniuses have to get themselves born and educated, fight with their parents, fall in love and die” (Eagleton 1993, 12). Thus biographers are confined to a cradle-to-grave account of a subject’s life. Continuous narrative was a notable feature of classical biography as evident in Plutarch’s *Lives* and in Suetonius’ *The Twelve*

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<sup>30</sup> Gale, the American publishers of the *DLB*, give prominence to British and American authors, now totalling almost 400 volumes. Gale states that “the series is dedicated to making literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students and interested readers, while satisfying the standards of librarians, teachers and scholars.” ([www.gale.engage.com](http://www.gale.engage.com) accessed 5 March 2012).

*Caesars* (Mellor 1999, 148; 156-7). The linear and seamless narrative first emerged in fictional English (auto-) biography, when novelists adopted a chronologically ordered account of the subject's life, such as Defoe's fictional *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Life of Mr. Richard Savage* (1744), which Dr. Johnson published as if it were entirely historical. Julian Barnes explored the use of narrative in biography in his fictional novel *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984). Michael Holroyd makes the same point about biography (2003, 20), calling it "a strange mix between old fashioned history and the traditional novel." A. S. Byatt praises the "aesthetic energy" of narrative techniques in biography, as with Ackroyd's use of fictional conversations in his biography of Dickens (2000, 55). A. S. Rousseau has commented that modern biographers have shown a "new awareness of the importance of artistic narrative in the recounting of all history," adding:

Writers such as Peter Ackroyd, Malcolm Bradbury, A. S. Byatt, and Rose Tremain are among the best who have been turning to historical plots with increasing frequency, not merely as the basis for novels, but as the basis for biographies that blend history and fiction in varying proportions (Rousseau 2001, 47-5).

The result is a tendency towards fictional biography – when biographers place more emphasis on their own imagination, speculation or reconstruction than on documentary evidence (Parke 2002, 29). Even if the "facts" are documented, the process of presenting them in a narrative form amounts to fiction. Fictional biographies thus arise from the use of "factual materials about real people and events and developing them by applying fictional narrative techniques" (Erickson 1993, ii. 313-4). Readers do not expect the chaotic presentation of data about a subject but a coherent account often using foreshadowing or flashback to indicate cause and effect.

James Stanfield laid down a generic structure for biography (1813, x-xi), beginning with a historical review of the period and an account of the subject's character. The subject's life should then be described in the following stages: infancy; childhood; adolescence; youth; manhood; and declining age. The biography should connect the "distinct characteristics of each with the general progression of the whole." The biography should finish with the "professional biography" of the subject's career and contribution to his field of specialisation. The German psychologist, Charlotte Bühler, followed a similar pattern of life divisions but referred to the following phases: Youth; Trials; Early Maturity; full Maturity and Decline (1935, 405-9).

I suggest that most biographies adopt the following pattern:

I. Introduction

The significance of the subject of the biography and the reasons for the biographer to attempt the life.

- |      |                       |   |
|------|-----------------------|---|
| II.  | Family and Background | involves treatment, often extensive, in which the biographer attempts to identify key influences in subject's family, the family connections, and their cultural milieu.  |
| III. | Birth scene           | frequently described in detail.   |
| IV.  | Life                  | The narrative then proceeds through a series of episodes, as the subject settle upon an objective to follow, which is usually achieved in some kind of climax.  |
| V.   | Death                 | For many biographers, the Death Scene often has a key significance, as noted by Hermione Lee (2008) in her chapter 'How to end it all'.   |
| VI.  | Surviving Family      | The biographer might treat the subsequent history of a widow or a widower, their children etc. but not in so much detail so as not to detract from the subject or protagonist who has departed the scene. For literary biographers, this section also includes posthumous publications. |
| VII. | Significance          | A final verdict of the importance of the subject.   |

A critical literary biography such as Jocelyn Baines's study of Joseph Conrad (1960), also contains discrete analysis of the subject's literary works.

This structure might be analysed in the more pronounced pattern of narrative as put forward by James Campbell in his 1949 study *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*:

<b>Departure</b>	
1	The Call to Adventure
2	Refusal of the Call
3	Aid of a Mentor
4	Crossing of the First Threshold
5	Belly of The Whale
<b>Initiation</b>	
6	The Road of Trials
7	The Meeting With the Goddess
8	Woman as Temptress
9	Atonement with the Father
10	Apotheosis
11	The Ultimate Boon
<b>Return</b>	
12	Refusal of the Return
13	The Magic Flight
14	Rescue from Without
15	The Crossing of the Return Threshold
16	Master of Two Worlds
17	Freedom to Live
<b>Table 1: Campbell's narrative structure: <i>The Hero of a Thousand Faces</i> (1949).</b>	

Campbell describes the standard journey of a hero in three divisions: departure, initiation, and return, which can be broken down into 17 stages (not all of which need be present in any given narrative). The basic plot is: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (1949, 23).

Campbell's analysis was derived from a study of a wide range of myths and legends, and it is clearly applicable to many biographies. His structure corresponds closely to the phases (up to thirty-one) of the hero's adventure as proposed by Vladimir Propp in *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928).

However, creating a continuous narrative can have a distorting effect, according to Humphrey Carpenter, as "people's lives aren't seamless" (1995, 274). Biographers often identify one moment in their subject's life, which sets them off on their route to success, which Campbell identifies as the first stage of the hero's journey, the Call to Adventure. For Montaigne, this moment occurred when he was thrown from his horse in 1569/70 and thought he died (Bakewell 2010, 17-9). Many biographers liked to portray "the trials of life and spiritual tussles" out of

which, they claim, “great writers are made”, as W. A. Craik noted (1978, 354). Craik’s point was that while Elizabeth Gaskell had endured few such trials herself, she nevertheless believed that Charlotte Brontë was a great writer for experiencing and surmounting great difficulties. This conforms to the Road of Trials, the sixth stage proposed by Campbell (1949, 89-93).

Campbell’s Stage 3 ‘Aid of a Mentor’ consists of help provided by some kind of friend. Modern biographies invariably locate the subject in a context and identify the influential “environmental forces” on the development of the subject (Altick 1965, 222). Literary biographers restrict their search for influence to a relative with similar talents or a great teacher. The death scene has held even more significance for biographers giving closure to the narrative. Donald Stauffer has shown how important it was for Quaker and Methodist biographers in the eighteenth century to depict a subject experiencing a Christian death (1941 318). Anthony Cockshut describes how such a scene retained its importance in nineteenth-century biography, citing among other examples the death scene of Charles Kingsley (1974, 41). Hermione Lee believes that there is a psychological need on the part of the biographer to offer a dramatic farewell to the subject (2008, 95-121). Lee documents how changes in death scenes in biography indicate varying methods in which narrators (and readers) understand and interpret their subject.

Lee further notes that even when vital documents such as intimate letters are frequently not available, still “biographers try to make a coherent narrative out of missing documents as well as existing ones” (2008). Benton has also been critical of adopting a linear narrative since it derives from a deterministic view of history: modern literary biography invariably adopts “a unidirectional, teleological reading of a literary life” (2009, 65). One example of such a reading is Leighton Hodson: “All that Proust wrote flows directly or indirectly towards *La Recherche*” (1989, 6). Other biographers use their subject’s ultimate suicide as a kind of prism to understand their life, e.g. Ronald Hayman’s *Death and Life of Sylvia Plath* (1991).

Coherence is a central feature of biography because of the human need to find coherence in each individual, even though few lives demonstrate coherence (Ellman 1971, 19). The Roman biographer, Suetonius, presented his subjects as a single character or self, which informed the subsequent development of biography in antiquity (Adams 2012, 4). Dr. Johnson had been among the first writers to make this assumption when focussing on a hidden story or fact, which is taken to be the key to understanding the character as a whole.<sup>31</sup> David Ellis shows how the principle of a single self was also a major characteristic of medieval lives and of Marxist biographers (2000, 44). The expectation for a single explanation is welcomed, according to Mary Evans (1999, 131), because readers enjoy the opportunity “to stabilise existence.” Such a drive

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<sup>31</sup> Jonson’s comment appeared in *The Rambler* 60, 13 Oct. 1750, 31 (reprinted in Clifford 1962, 39-45).

for a coherent approach often results in the positing of an over-arching key to a character, a device for simplifying the understanding of a person, recently called a “Rosebud assumption”.<sup>32</sup> Morris Beja used the term in trying to explain her own quest for the real James Joyce (2002, 13-22).

However, many biographers are aware of the paradox between the expectation of single-explanation biography and the impossibility of meeting the demand. The idea of a single self or explanation for a life was challenged by Virginia Woolf in the part biographical novel *Orlando* (1928, 295) in which the protagonist comments: “a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand.” James Thurber, the American essayist (1894-1961) made the same complaint:

I loathe the expression “What makes him tick.” It is the American mind, looking for simple and singular solution, that uses the foolish expression. A person not only ticks, he also chimes and strikes the hour, falls and breaks and has to be put together again, and sometimes stops like an electric clock in a thunderstorm. (Thurber & Weeks 1980, 121)

Richard Holmes describes how “biographers struggle with a particular tension between the scholarly drive to assemble facts as dispassionately as possible and the novelistic urge to find shape and meaning within the apparent randomness of the subject’s own life and work” (2002, 16-17). Another biographer to express concern about the coherent picture offered of a subject was Ian Donaldson (1991, 254-5). He contrasted the portrait of “a fully coherent and self-consistent personality” – as presented by Herford and Simpson (1925, volume i) – with the portrait by David Riggs (1989) of a complex character, holding conflicting elements in tension within himself. It is thus a subjective task to write a coherent account about a subject such as Ben Jonson, for whom there is considerable biographical data.

It often seems that biographies are derivative. James Clifford’s advice for would-be biographers is to read all accounts of the subject before embarking on fresh research (1970). The obvious danger is for successive biographers to be offering a derivative account. Any writer adopting Clifford’s strategy would be influenced by previous biographies, which Glen Jeansonne (1989, 64) has called the “inertia of literary myth”. Jeansonne extends this to readers and publishers who are only prepared to accept small changes to an established narrative (1989, 63-4). Similarly, David Gates in his *New York Times* review (3 November 2011) notes that “the recent biographies [of Dickens] are remixes of familiar episodes and anecdotes.”

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<sup>32</sup> The term ‘Rosebud Assumption’ was used by Louis Menand, Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University in his review of three books about biography (*New Yorker*, August 6, 2007). In the 1941 classic film *Citizen Kane*, a young reporter sets out to find the significance of the subject’s last word ‘Rosebud’, hoping to find a single explanation to understand a complex life.

## 1.7 Types of Biographical Material

When talking about his editorship of the *DNB*, Sir Sidney Lee asserted that “the biographer begins his [*sic*] task by sorting heaps of written or printed papers, by exploring official records; by ransacking many a dark and dismal cavern of research.” The biographer then has to “sift his sweepings” before giving “essential form” to his findings. Lee makes an important distinction: “Unlike the dramatist or the novelist, the biographer cannot invent incident to bring into relief his conceptions of the truth about the piece of humanity which he is studying.” (1918, 8). Modern readers have the same expectations, according to the biographer, Alan Shelston, who states that the research biographer inevitably takes as his standard ‘truth of fact’ (1977, 69). As we have seen, the *American National Biography* (1999) also made factual accuracy the highest priority of each entry. Philip Furbank agrees:

[A] biography is expected to supply dates, information about family trees and about birth, marriage and death; a chronological progression; and various other practicalities. Readers and critics, further, tend to speak, in Boileauesque fashion,<sup>33</sup> as though there were ‘rules’ as to how a biography should be written (Furbank 2000, 18).

Another biographer, Anne Chisholm, made a similar case for factual accuracy:

The biographer can, and should, select and arrange the facts about the subject's life; but the facts themselves should be demonstrably true. No words or thoughts, motives or actions should be ascribed to the subject without evidence. The sources of the evidence should be clear and verifiable (Chisholm 2001).

Without suitable materials, the biographer (and publisher) might decide to proceed to publish an account of a particular subject’s life, resulting in “fictional biography” in which the author “relies of secondary sources and treats the life of the historical subject as a novelist would treat a character, adding and inventing as the author sees fit” (Clifford 1970, 84-7). The first step towards the preparation of any biography, therefore, is to review the biographical material to see if a biography is possible. The prolific biographer, André Maurois, recognised this in his 1928 *Aspects de la bibliographie* (Kolbert 1985, 88-9). Only then would he undertake careful reading of the subject: archives, police records, scribblings, manuscripts, unpublished works. The kind of data used for biographies has been reviewed by many theorists including John Garraty (1958, 149-176), and listed by David Schwalm (1980, 26 n2) as follows:

- (i) autobiographical documents (e.g. letters, diaries, literary works);
- (ii) testimony of witnesses;
- (iii) official documents (e.g. parish registers, county records, contracts);

<sup>33</sup> The French critic, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711), tried to prescribe rigid rules for literary genres in the manner of the ancient writer, Longinus. (Brody, Jules. 1958. *Boileau and Longinus*. Geneva: E. Droz.)

- (iv) physical objects (e.g. clothes, furniture, residences, neighborhoods, institutions);
- (v) images (e.g. portraits, photographs);
- (vi) biographer's first-hand experience of the subject e.g. private interviews (unless deceased or unreachable).

Of these, autobiographical documents are thought to be the most valuable for imparting insight into a subject's character. Autobiographical documents are not always reliable: subjects may not be fully aware of their own motives and feelings, or they might be mis-representing them. With regard to a writer's literary output, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) rejected any author's own testimony as reliably useful towards an understanding of their work. The second major source of material comprises testimony of witnesses: personal opinions about the subject (*e.g.* diaries, correspondence, and judgments) expressed by others. The biographer has to make similar judgments about their accuracy. It is not easy to decide how dependable such records are. Holmes notes that "memory is fallible, memoirs are inevitably biased; letters are always slanted towards their recipients; even private diaries and intimate journals have to be recognised as forms of self-invention (1995, 17). Thus the biographer should evaluate every detail in any diaries, correspondence and personal opinions expressed by or about the subject.

The third major source of biographical evidence is found in public records and archives, *e.g.* births, marriages, deaths, contracts etc. Biographers trawl through such records and give a framework to the life. Some biographies only report the archival record and have been labelled by James Clifford as "objective biography" (1970, 84). Examples of this style, also known as the 'dossier' approach, include the 2001 biography of William Blake by G. E. Bentley Jr. However, no such biography can ever be completely objective, according to Susan Tridgell (2004, 25-46), as biographers have to select, omit and organise material about their subject for the biography. A fourth major area of biographical evidence concerns context, which includes physical objects (*e.g.* clothes, furniture, possessions), images (*e.g.* portraits), and physical remains (*e.g.*, the house and locality where a subject grew up. Norma and June Buckley's 2010 *Walking with Wordsworth* proves very popular for those wishing to "follow in the Lakeland laureate's footsteps by the lakes and tarns, rivers and valleys he celebrated in verse." The biographer may broaden this to include institutions where the subject may have been education or worked. This list will be used to analyse the kind of biographical material available for Shakespeare.

This chapter has identified the key characteristics of biography as a coherent narrative account of a person's life. Primary sources are the essential basis for events described; biographers use their own preferences to select the events and connect them in a linear narrative according to their own preferences and inclinations. Biographers seek to identify important influences on the subject and

their accomplishments. Literary biography concerns the writing of the lives of people who were themselves writers, so as to illuminate their writings. The rationale proceeds from the hypothesis that a writer's oeuvre can be understood better in the light of their own life experiences. Modern biographers in Britain and America are part of a continuous tradition in western civilisation of over two thousand years. For a long period, biography was mainly concerned with describing exemplary lives and uncovering the subject's character and personality. Although a biographer's methodology is rarely stated, most follow the pattern of The standard linear narrative used in biography follows the pattern of narrative fiction identified by Joseph Campbell (1949). Different types of biographical data are explored and it is noted that any reconstruction of a subject's experiences of life events must derive from suitable primary sources such as personal correspondence, diaries, journals, and comments by friends and acquaintances. The next chapter will consider these sources of biographical material for the life of William Shakespeare.

## Chapter 2

### Gaps in Our Ignorance

#### The limited Biographical Material for William Shakespeare

Biographers of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) of Stratford-upon-Avon agree on two points: that there are gaps in our knowledge about the bard but that there are sufficient contemporary records for a reconstruction of his life. Maguire & Smith (2012) devote a chapter in their review of *30 Great Myths* to the myth that “We don’t know much about Shakespeare’s life.” For them, “it is not true to say that the records are scant” (106). After a brief review of what is known, they state: “We lack comparable information for many of Shakespeare’s Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporaries” (107). This may be true, but biographers of Shakespeare are not attempting a series of life studies about early modern dramatists, but one study of one particular writer. Is there enough biographical material for a coherent, narrative account of Shakespeare’s life? This chapter assesses the primary material for Shakespeare not just to its extent (as invariably happens) but more importantly as to its limitations. The material is mainly confined to his lifespan (1564 to 1616), but some consideration is given to allusions after this date, *e.g.*, by Ben Jonson, who died in 1637, and whose observations were published in 1641. The review consists of identifying the types of evidence concerning Shakespeare and what these records can indicate. The next part of the chapter deals with Shakespeare in the Public Records (mainly in Stratford and in London). About seventy-nine records mention Shakespeare by name or refer unambiguously to him (Bearman 1994). Then an assessment is made of the literary and theatrical records from London, concerning performances and publication of Shakespeare’s works. The final section of the chapter deals with allusions to Shakespeare. Most modern scholars refer to Chambers (1930), who discusses and evaluates the material in volume I, and presents transcriptions of most documents in an orderly manner in volume II. All documents referring to Shakespeare in this chapter are to Chambers’s two-volume study.

The handwritten records which mention Shakespeare by name are fewer than eighty (according to Bearman 1994, vii), the majority of which are in the National Archives at Kew. For the first 28 years of his life, only five or six records mention William by name:

1564 baptism	1574	-	1584	-
1565	-	1575	-	1585 baptism of Hamnet and Judeth
1566	-	1576	-	1586
1567	-	1577	-	1587
1568	-	1578	-	1588 Lambert Lawsuit <sup>1</sup>
1569	-	1579	-	1589
1570	-	1580	-	1590
1571	-	1581	-	1591
1572	-	1582 marriage licence (x2)	1592 possible allusion in <i>Groatsworth</i>	
1573	-	1583 baptism of Susanna	1593 publication of <i>Venus &amp; Adonis</i>	

**Table 2: Documented references to William Shakespeare: 1564-1593**

From the list in Table 2, it is clear that any comments about Shakespeare's childhood, youth and education are speculative. There is no confirmation that he was even in Stratford at any time after his baptism. Even his place of birth cannot be established with any exactitude (Thomas 2012, 95), despite the claims of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Another biogfiction concerns his education at the King's School. There are no records for the period and so no confirmation that Shakespeare attended this school (or any other school) or what he might have studied there if he did. Any comments about Shakespeare's education depends on contextual inference of the kind performed by T. W. Baldwin in *William Shakespere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (1944). Baldwin gathers all information known about school education in England during the Tudor period and generalises into a kind of National Curriculum, as if this was being uniformly followed throughout England. In their attempt to address *30 Great Myths*, Maguire & Smith (2012, 12) accept Baldwin's enormous number of contextual inferences without question.

<sup>1</sup> The Lambert Case (1588) involved a Bill of Complaint presented at the Court of King's Bench respecting an Estate at Wilmcote (transferred in 1578; the subject of further litigation in 1597). William is only mentioned as a beneficiary (WS ii, 31-4). The earliest allusion to Shakespeare in print is taken to be the "Johannes fac totum" in Green's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592). The earliest printed mention of the name "William Shake-speare" is in the dedication to *Venus & Adonis* (1593).

## 2.1 Source Material for Shakespeare

Using Schwalm's list, (1980, 26 n2), we can assess the source material for Shakespeare as follows:

### (i) autobiographical documents e.g., letters, diaries, literary works

Autobiographical documents are the most important for understanding a subject's character and experiences. From study of intimate sources of biographical data, according to the historian John Worthen, biographers attempt to explain motive and rationalise the subject's life decisions (1995, 231). Such personal writings are not always reliable, as various critics have observed (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946; Garraty 1958; Saunders 2010). It is the task of the historian and biographer to assess the validity and significance of such comments. Biographers are spared this problem with Shakespeare as he left few comments about himself or his contemporaries. For the narrative poems in 1593 and 1594, he composed two short dedications to the Earl of Southampton, using the form of self-abatement common at the time (as will be seen in Chapter Seven). In his will, he distributed his possessions among over twenty named people. However, he left no letters, opinions, or comments about family members, neighbours, townsmen, business associates, colleagues, rivals or patrons: he only presented characters in a dramatic situation. Biographers thus resort to making inferences from the works of Shakespeare on the assumption that he was writing from experience; but as Ian Donaldson asks: if a subject's "writings reveal something about their author's life," how exactly and how dependably do they do their revealing? (1991, 261). Unlike Jonson, Shakespeare did not refer to himself explicitly in any of his works. James Shapiro accepts the problem:

Those committed to discovering the adult Shakespeare's personality in his formative experience end up hunting for hints in the plays which they then read back into what little can be surmised about his early years. . . . But the plays are not two-way mirrors (2005, xviii-xix).

Bill Bryson agrees: "It cannot be emphasised too strenuously that there is nothing – not a scrap, not a mote – that gives any certain insight into Shakespeare's feelings or beliefs as a private person" (2007, 17). Thus biographical inferences remain entirely subjective due to the lack of explicit testimony either from Shakespeare or from a close friend or family member.

### (ii) testimony of witnesses

The second most informative material comes from the records of witnesses who expressed personal opinions about the subject (e.g., diaries, correspondence, and judgments). Only a small number of contemporary witnesses pay testimony to Shakespeare: one of his townsmen was in London in 1598 and hoped that Shakespeare would loan him £30. Another document, dated 11 September 1611, contained a list of about seventy Stratford citizens who were prepared to

promote a “Bill in Parliament” for highway repair; the name “Mr William Shackspere” seems to have been added in the right margin. A second townsman, Thomas Greene, made notes about the proposed enclosure of lands and recorded his hopes that Shakespeare would oppose them (WS ii. 142). From these few witnesses, we only find out that Shakespeare was an affluent citizen of Stratford. The earliest allusion in London is taken to be in Greene’s *Groats-worth of Wit* (1592, STC 12245) but William Shakespeare is not actually named as the “upstart crow” and the meaning is ambiguous. Van Es (2010) argues that the reference is not to Shakespeare as an actor or company member but as a writer, i.e. that he was passing off as his own work by other authors. Even Greene’s authorship is in dispute. It was certainly mediated by Henry Chettle, who conceded that he prepared the manuscript for publication after Greene’s death. *Groats-worth* may have been written by him as well (Jowett 1993). Chettle makes only one other reference to Shakespeare, chiding him as one of a number of poets who did not lament the death of Queen Elizabeth (WS ii. 189), a complaint of very limited value. Erne (1991) argues that the reference is not even to Shakespeare. Another reference of limited value is a 1602 diary anecdote, in which, John Manningham described how Shakespeare managed to secure the delights of a lady before Richard Burbage (WS ii. 212). The brief account does not state when or where the incident took place and adds only a very little to the biographical knowledge of Shakespeare.

Another category of witness consist of literary allusions by writers in print. These references contain no personal knowledge of Shakespeare but attest to his growing reputation as a printed poet. Chambers lists fifty-three contemporary allusions to Shakespeare from 1590-1640 (WS ii. 186-237). Most of these refer to Shakespeare’s poems after 1593 (e.g. *Willobie his Avis*, 1594, STC 25755), and then to plays after 1598. The most important allusion was by Francis Meres (*Palladis Tamia* 1598: STC 17834), who named twelve plays of Shakespeare, which indicate that these plays were in existence (although *Love’s Labour’s Won* has not been identified with certainty). Meres compiled a balanced list of six comedies with six histories and tragedies; he did not produce a definitive list of all works composed by Shakespeare to date and he does not indicate any special personal acquaintance with Shakespeare. Unsigned jottings in the Northumberland Manuscript (1598-1603), attributed to the little known Adam Dyrmonth, suggest that Shakespeare was the author of *Richard II* and *Richard III*. In his book of epigrams (1599, STC 25224), John Weever only writes one epigram (iv. 22) to “Honie-tong’d Shakespeare” out of about 160 (Honigmann 1987, 90-1). There are impersonal references to an author called Shakespeare in *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* and *The Return from Parnassus*, Parts I and 2 (Leishman 1949). Similar allusions to a published author were made by Covell (1595, STC 5884), Barnfield (1598, STC 1485), Allot (1680, STC 380), the otherwise unknown Anthony Scoloker (1604, STC 21853), William Camden (1605, STC 4521) and John Davies (1610, STC

6341). These allusions only confirm Shakespeare's reputation as a poet and a dramatist and give no information about the man.

Although Jonson makes more comments about Shakespeare than any other writer does, he did not dedicate any epigram to Shakespeare, out of the 133 epigrams included in his 1616 folio *Works* (STC 14751), implying that they did not have any close relationship. Jonson's contradictory opinions - he was publicly fulsome in the First Folio (1623) but privately dismissive when conversing with Drummond – are only documented after Shakespeare's death in 1616. Jonson's view of Shakespeare is considered in Chapter Eight. Other writers of commendations, such as Digges, Mabbe and Holland in the First Folio (1623), only offer conventional praise to Shakespeare as an author and few biographers claim they show any particular insights.

**(iii) official documents e.g., parish registers, county records, contracts**

The third major source of biographical evidence is found in public records and archives, e.g., births, marriages, deaths, contracts. Biographers investigate such records so as to give an objective framework to the life. Biographers then select, omit and organise material according to their emphasis and interpretation (Tridgell 2004, 25-46). There are official documents which record Shakespeare's baptism, issue of a marriage licence, property dealings, court cases, tax evasion, and burial (Bate 1977, 184). However, these extant records are mainly legal and public, imparting no insight as would come from personal documents, such as letters and journals (Loomis 2012, xxix). They are considered in detail later in this chapter.

**(iv) physical objects**

Objects such as personal possessions, his house and localities known to the subject have limited significance. Regarding actual objects, there is very no surviving material for Shakespeare. None of Shakespeare's clothes, furniture, manuscripts, books owned or borrowed have survived. The so-called Birthplace in Henley Street has been extensively restored and might not be the place of his birth at all. A record in 1556 states that John Shakespeare bought leases for two houses, one in Henley Street and another in Greenhill Street. The record does not confirm where exactly these houses were or if he ever lived in either of them.

In 1575, John Shakespeare paid £40 for two houses in Henley Street. Two houses owned by John Shakespeare can be identified from records in the 1590s. As to where William was born in 1564, any house out of four properties might have been the family home at the time (*WS* ii. 32-4; Thomas 2012, 60-95). The myth of the "Birthplace" was firmly established in 1847 and assumes the family was living in one particular house in Henley Street and that he was born at home. Other locations for the birth are possible: Mary Arden might have stayed at the Arden family farm at Wilmcote for her confinement, or she might have gone into labour unexpectedly

when visiting other people. Another house with a documented connection to William was pulled down. He bought New Place in 1597 and passed it on in his will to his daughter Susanna who in turn passed it on to her daughter Elizabeth. George Vertue made a drawing of it in 1737 showing an imposing gabled house. However, a later owner, the Reverend Francis Gastrell, demolished it in 1759 (Malone 1790 i. ii. 118).

The Blackfriars Gatehouse, which Shakespeare bought in 1613, was demolished in 1655. It is not known whether Shakespeare bought this house for himself to live in or whether it was some kind of investment. The King's School survives, but there are no records for the period. So there is no record that he actually attended there. The Parish Church of the Holy Trinity survives with its register, for which the earliest dates are 1558, indicating very briefly details of baptisms, marriages and burials for William and many members of his family.

#### (v) images

There is no known likeness of Shakespeare. Martin Droeshout produced an engraving for the First Folio, but he was then in his early twenties and unlikely ever to have met Shakespeare and did not know Shakespeare personally. It is not known if Droeshout used a source image for his engraving. This portrait has been heavily criticised on a number of counts and has been dismissed as a reliable representation of Shakespeare (Cooper 2006, 48).<sup>2</sup> A second image can be found in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church at Stratford, showing the bust of a man apparently with a pen in his hand. However, William Dugdale's illustration in the *Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated* (1656, 520) shows the monument with a bust of a man holding a woolsack, and a similar representation in a pencil drawing exists among his papers. George Vertue may have made this drawing when he visited Stratford in 1737.<sup>3</sup> The monument was restored in 1748-9 and the bust may have been substantially altered from its original appearance (WS ii. 183-5). Another possible likeness is the Chandos Portrait, the first item acquired by The National Portrait Gallery in London when it was established in 1856. The NPG claims that this oil painting is the "the only portrait of Shakespeare that has a good claim to have been painted from life" but it was not attested as a likeness of Shakespeare before 1719 (Malone 1790 i. ii. 126-7; Cooper 2006, 54). Another painting, the Cobbe Portrait, has recently been claimed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust as a likeness (Wells, 2009). However, most scholars follow Tarnya Cooper, curator of sixteenth century portraits at the National Portrait Gallery, who believes this portrait is more

<sup>2</sup> Mary Edmond ("It was for gentle Shakespeare cut." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42.3 (1991, 339-44) argues that the portrait was by Martin Droeshout, the Elder, but this is rejected by June Schlueter ("Martin Droeshout Redivivus: Reassessing the Folio Engraving of Shakespeare" *Shakespeare Survey* 60. (2007, 237-251).

<sup>3</sup> Rather surprisingly, neither Dugdale's illustration nor the pencil drawing attributed to Vertue are included in the NPG's expensive publication *Searching for Shakespeare* (ed. T. Cooper, 2006).

likely to be a study of Sir Thomas Overbury (Higgins 2009). Overall, we have no reliable representation of Shakespeare's appearance.

(vi) **biographer's first-hand experience of the subject**

Malone lamented the fact that those who might have known Shakespeare or his family left no record of their acquaintance: Malone repeats a complaint that previous writers had missed the opportunity to interview surviving relatives of Shakespeare: "our poet's grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, who did not die till 1670. His sister, Joan Hart, was living in 1646; his eldest daughter, Susanna Hall, in 1649; and his second daughter, Judith Queeny, in 1662" (1821, ii. 7).

## 2.2 Public Records: Stratford-upon-Avon

The relevant Public Records at Stratford are held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Robert Bearman (1994) describes and assess the 30 or 31 records regarding William Shakespeare in his lifetime.<sup>4</sup> Some documents relevant to William's life in Stratford are held at the Worcestershire Archives (concerning his marriage) and at The National Archives (property documents and will). The entries in the Parish Register at the Church of Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon cover the period from in 1558 to 1600. They were written by just one scribe, probably the Vicar, Richard Byfield, acting in accordance with government instructions. The baptism of "Gulielmus Shaksper" was recorded on 26 April 1564 (WS ii. 1), but the actual date was not recorded. The Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer (1559, STC 16292) ordained that baptism should take place on Sunday or another holy day "when the most nombre of people may come together." Baptism might have taken place at home "if necessitie so require" (Booty 1976, 269).

William is not recorded again until he is aged eighteen. The Worcester Diocesan Register records granting on 27 November 1582 a marriage licence to *Willelmum Shaxpere et Annā Whateley de Temple Grafton*. The next day a pledge for a surety was signed on behalf of a proposed marriage between "Willm Shagspere" and "Anne Hathwey of Stratford in the diocese of Worcester maiden" (WS ii. 41-42). Almost all biographers take these names as referring to the same man and the same woman. The next two records which mention William concern the births of his children: the Parish Register of Holy Trinity record the baptism of Susanna daughter of William Shaksper on 29 May 1583 and of Hamnet and Judith Shaksper on 2 February 1585 (WS ii. 2-3). On 11 August 1596, the Parish Register records the burial of "Hamnet filius William Shaksper" (WS ii. 4). There is no record of the cause of death.

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<sup>4</sup> The final total depends on which "mr Shaxpere" sold a "lod of ston" to the Corporation in 1598 (WS ii. 96).

The name William Shakespeare next occurs in 1598, when he is aged thirty three: he is listed among townsmen holding malt, in his case ten quarts (*WS ii.* 99-100). In 1595, the Privy Council had ordered the Justices to regulate the trade of corn and require excessive stocks to be sold. Shakespeare's name did not appear on an earlier list of corn-holders (7 Dec 1595), possibly because he was not yet a householder. As Shakespeare became one of the more affluent citizens, he and his family were able to store a reasonable amount of malt during a time of shortage. Not all biographers accept that his holding was excessive enough to constitute "hoarding."

There are no extant letters by Shakespeare to any recipient. The only extant letters either to Shakespeare or about him concern business in the correspondence of Richard Quiney dating to 1598-9 (*WS ii.* 100-3). Quiney received two letters from Abraham Sturley suggesting that "Mr Shaksper" / "Mr Wm Shak", then in London be approached for the loan of £30 for an unspecified cause. As the letter was found among Quiney's possessions in Stratford, it seems that it was not delivered – although of course the extant letter may have been returned or it may have been a draft.

William Shakespeare acquired various properties in Stratford. Two documents – recording his purchase of New Place in 1597 for £60 (*WS ii.* 95-7), and some land at Old Stratford in 1602 at a cost of £320 (*WS ii.* 107-111) – were drawn up in London. In 1602, he bought a cottage in Chapel Lane in 1602, close to New Place (*WS ii.* 111-2). This cottage might have been used by some of his family or his servants (or possibly both). According to the will, his daughter Judith had to surrender any claim to the property to her sister (*WS ii.* 175). In 1605, he is recorded as purchasing a half-interest in a lease of "Tithe Lands in Stratforde vpon Avon, Olde Stratforde, Welcombe and Bushupton" from Ralph Hubaud for £440 (*WS ii.* 118-122).

Shakespeare appears in a few petty court cases in Stratford. The earliest was in 1604, when he sued the apothecary Philip Rogers for 35*s.*10*d.* plus 10 shillings damages; four years later, he sued John Addenbrooke for a debt of £6 (*WS ii.* 113-8). In 1611, Shakespeare and others went to court to try to make William Combe pay more for the rents attached to the Stratford tithes (*WS ii.* 122-127). A kinsman of William Combe, John Combe, left Shakespeare £5 in his will in 1613. Shakespeare in turn bequeathed his sword to another member of the family, Thomas Combe (*WS ii.* 127-141).

In 1611, Shakespeare seems to have made a late contribution towards promoting a Bill in Parliament for the improvement of highways around Stratford as his name is added in the right hand margin to a list of contributors. It is not known how much he contributed. Shakespeare is mentioned as "cosen" by Thomas Greene in various notes about possible land enclosure at Welcombe in 1614-15 (*WS ii.* 141-3). Greene records on 17 November 1614 that he had visited Shakespeare a day earlier in "town", which is usually interpreted as London. Shakespeare's

agreement with a man called William Replingham seems to have ensured that Shakespeare did not suffer from the enclosures. It is not clear what degree of relationship Greene is claiming with “my cosen Shakspeare.”

William Shakespeare was buried at the Holy Trinity Church on 25 April, 1616, having died on or about his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday (*WS* ii. 8). There is no record of the cause of death. The present monument to Shakespeare in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford shows a man holding a pen as if about to write. In his will, proved on 22 June 1616, he gave detailed instructions as to his final wishes (*WS* ii. 169-181). The first page was dated March 1616; pages 2 and 3 were dated January 1616. It is thought that he may have decided to amend his will after the marriage of his younger daughter, Judith, to Thomas Quiney in February 1616. Each page is signed “William Shakespeare” though not in a consistent manner suggesting that the will was signed on his behalf. The bulk of Shakespeare’s bequests went to his eldest daughter, entailed to her eldest male heir. His younger daughter was to receive £150 on certain conditions. His sister Joan and her three sons were remembered in the will. In an interlinear addition, he left his wife “my second best bed with the furniture.” A variety of small bequests were made to ten people. Another interlinear addition assigned money to three members of the King’s Men: “to my ffellowes John Hemynges, Richard Burbage and Heny Cundell xxvis viij*d* A peece to buy them Ringes.” These documents contain three of the six known Shakespeare signatures to survive.

Other records show that his wife, Anne, died in 1623 at the age of 67, which would have made her about eight years older than her husband. Their elder daughter, Susanna, married Dr John Hall in 1607 and died in 1649, aged 66. Their younger daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney in 1616 and died in 1662, aged 74. Susanna’s daughter, Elizabeth, was born in 1608 and was married twice, firstly to Thomas Nashe in 1626 and secondly to Sir John Barnard in 1649. She died without issue in 1670 aged 62 (*WS* ii. 4-13). Her will was transcribed by Malone (1821 ii, 625-8). Descendants of Shakespeare’s nephew, Thomas Hart, continued to live in Henley Street until 1807.

Overall the documents in Stratford only indicate William Shakespeare’s growing prosperity and his standing as an affluent citizen of Stratford. They give no indication of his thoughts or experiences of his life in Stratford. There are three major gaps in the records at Stratford concerning William Shakespeare, any of which would preclude the possibility of writing a coherent narrative account of his life as a writer: firstly, there is no record of William from his baptism until the issue of a marriage licence at the age of eighteen. Thus any references to his childhood, youth or education are entirely speculative. Most writers believe that he lived a normal life in Stratford, studied at the local grammar school and was inspired by the visits of travelling players, either at Stratford or at Kenilworth. None of these assumptions is documented.

It has been argued by Gray (1926) and by Honigmann (1985) that Shakespeare might not have spent his childhood in Stratford.

The second obstacle against constructing a life of Shakespeare is the absence of personal records. There are only passing references to him by his fellow townsmen concerning finance and property: a possible loan, the improvement of the highway, and the possible enclosure of land. There is no contemporary reference to William Shakespeare as a man; no personal letters to or from him, and none concerning his family or friends. Thus it is not known which years he was in Stratford, how often he visited or for how long. Nor is it known whether his wife and children ever accompanied him to London (although it is usually assumed that they did not). It is not known whether he was present at the death or burial of his son (died 1596), his father (died 1601) or his mother (died 1608).

The third gap in the Stratford records is the lack of any reference to him as a writer. The epitaphs in the Holy Trinity Church do not mention him as such. Shakespeare does not claim to be a writer in his will and mentions nothing literary by way of manuscripts of eighteen or so unpublished plays, any books owned or borrowed or any reference to any other literary figure. He did not remember the Stratford School in his will. There is only one reference in a Stratford document which suggests involvement in the theatre: the interlinear addition to his will (in 1616) of the bequest to Hemmings, Burbage and Condell. The will also refers to his ownership of the Blackfriars Gatehouse, the only evidence among the Stratford documents that Shakespeare ever travelled outside Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

Most biographers fill these gaps with unfounded assertions about his family life, his youthful experiences and his education. Discussion is reserved for topics such as whether he was born or died on St George's Day, whether he only conformed outwardly to the Church of England, and how he came to leave his wife only his "second best bed". There is little attempt to explain how he came to finance considerable outlays of money to buy New Place (£60) the land at Old Stratford (£320) and the share in the tithes (£440).

## 2.3 Public Records: London

The Public Records in London which concern William Shakespeare show his avoidance of small tax payments and involvement in minor court cases (including being bound over to keep the peace). Thirty-five hand-written documents are held at The National Archives in Kew, London, reviewed by David Thomas (1964).

The earliest mention of William Shakespeare in a London document occurred in a complicated legal suit heard at the Queen's Bench (*WS* ii. 35-41). This case was brought by his

parents against Edmund Lambert in 1588-89 concerning possession of property at Wilmcote which they were seeking to recover. As William, then aged 24, was merely named as heir to the plaintiffs, it is not evidence that he was actually in London at the time. His parents moved the suit again in 1597, suggesting that the earlier suit had not been resolved in favour of the Shakespeare family; William is not mentioned. The next mention of William Shakespeare in public records in London occurred in the Langley Writ of 1596 when William Wayte took a case to the Judge of Queen's Bench saying that he feared for his life from William Shakspere, Francis Langley and two women. The magistrate ordered the Sheriff of Surrey to produce the accused "who had to post bond to keep the peace, on pain of forfeiting the security." The document, discovered and published by Leslie Hotson in 1931, is the most recent to be found with Shakespeare's name. This case suggests that Shakespeare and Langley were involved in extortion and perhaps prostitution, but it is usually overlooked by commentators. Five documents in London state that Shakespeare was a defaulter on tax, providing evidence as to where he was living – near Bishopsgate in 1597-8 and on Bankside 1599-1600 (WS ii. 87-90). Shakespeare's name does not appear in any tax record for Cripplegate in 1602 (or indeed any other ward apart from Bishopsgate). After 1600, Shakespeare has not been traced on any further subsidy rolls (whether in London, Surrey or Stratford) and there is no record of any tax payment by him in the Royal Household, for which he was an officer from 1603.

Three records in London confirm the purchase of property: a large town house called New Place in Stratford for £60 in 1597 (WS ii. 95-9); 107 acres of arable land and 20 acres of pasture in Old Stratford for £320 in 1602 (WS ii. 107-111); a share in the Blackfriars Gate-House for £140 in 1613 (WS ii. 154-168). These documents contain two of the six known Shakespeare signatures to survive. The documents concerning Shakespeare's tax avoidance are puzzling as to why he should put his liberty at risk for so small an amount of tax (less than a pound) in 1597 when he was paying £60 for New Place in Stratford and helping to set up the Chamberlain's Men in the Globe in 1599. William Shakespeare is mentioned in the third of three documents (1596-1602) concerning his father's application for a coat of arms. These records are important for detailing John Shakespeare's career in Stratford and his family background, but add no knowledge to William's career. The phrase "Non Sanz Droict" occurs on the first two documents and is taken to be a motto ("Not Without Right"); Jonson presents a character Sogliardo in *Every man out of his Humour* (1599), whose motto was "Not Without Mustard", which might be a parody of Shakespeare's. The third document dated 1602 cites a complaint against Sir William Dethick, the Garter King-of-Arms, and his associate William Camden (Clarenceux King-of-Arms). In this complaint, William is described as "y<sup>e</sup> player", not as a poet or playwright (WS ii. 18-31).

There is a ten year gap until Shakespeare's name next appears in public records in London. For the lawsuit *Belott v Mountjoy*, held in 1612, Shakespeare was called as a witness to certain dowry arrangements. His name occurs eighteen times (*WS* ii. 90-95). The relevant documents were discovered by Charles Wallace in 1909-10 and have been re-presented and contextualised by Charles Nicholl (2007). However, these twenty-five documents add little to his biographical materials. He was described as "William Shakespeare of Stratford vpon Aven in the Countye of Warwicke gentleman of the age of xlvij [aged 48]" The Mountjoy's maid, Johane Johnson, affirmed that Shakespeare "laye in the house" which was in Silver Street, near Cripplegate, about ten years previously. Neither the exact date nor the duration of Shakespeare's stay with the Mountjoys was recorded. In his deposition, Shakespeare was unable to provide any information to help settle the case. This is the only occasion when Shakespeare can be unquestionably located to any particular place on any particular day in his entire life: he made his deposition on 11 May 1612 in Westminster Hall. These documents contain one of the six known Shakespeare signatures to survive. These signatures vary so much as to suggest that he was in failing health e.g. he may have suffered a stroke; a few people suggest that the signatures may have been made by legal officers.

The *Belott-Mountjoy* case raises many unanswered questions: why was Shakespeare unable to recall details of the marriage settlement? Assuming a certain intimacy with the Mountjoys, why is there no mention of French Huguenots in the plays? Why did he lodge in Silver Street, which was not particularly convenient for the Globe on Bankside? Overall, the case adds little to the biographical material beyond the place of his lodging c. 1604 and his whereabouts on 11 May 1612.

## 2.4 Literary and Theatrical Records 1593-1634

The literary and theatrical records which concern Shakespeare as an author, actor or sharer and / or his works derive from the Stationers' Register (SR), the Revels Accounts, Henslowe's Diary, and the title pages to the various individual pre-1623 editions in quarto or octavo. Two references to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in 1634 cite Shakespeare as a co-author. The details are taken from Chambers, who considers the plays in the supposed order in which they were composed and deals with poems in a separate section (*WS* i. 275-576).<sup>5</sup> Printed records, such as title pages and allusions to Shakespeare in print, are not strictly primary sources as to some extent they have been mediated.

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<sup>5</sup> Another review of the primary sources was conducted in *Dating Shakespeare's Plays* (2010, ed. K. Gilvary).

The name “William Shakespeare” is first associated as the author of a literary work with the publication of the narrative poem *Venus & Adonis* in 1593 (STC 22354). The name does not appear on the title page but below a dedication to the Earl of Southampton. The same arrangement is used on all subsequent editions (1594, 1595 (?), 1596, 1599, 1602, and 1617). This pattern is repeated the following year with the publication of *Lucrece* (STC 22345). This lack of attribution on the title page is repeated in subsequent editions (1598, 1600, 1607, and 1616). In 1609, a collection of 154 sonnets was published entitled *Shake-speares Sonnets* (STC 22353), but the author is not named in the conventional manner.

The name “William Shake-speare” (or a variant spelling) appears on the title page of a play for the first time in 1598 for reprints of *Richard II* and *Richard III* and for the earliest version of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. The title pages usually offer useful information about plays in the following arrangement:

- (a) title (sometimes with an outline of the plot)
- (b) playing company (but not always) and occasionally venues
- (c) author (increasingly during the 1590s)
- (d) sometimes for a later edition whether the text was corrected or augmented
- (e) place, date and printer of the work

Between 1594 and 1600, at least nine plays were published anonymously that were subsequently attributed to Shakespeare: *Titus Andronicus* (1594; 1600; 1611), *The First Part of the Contention* [2 *Henry VI*] (1594; 1600), *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York* [3 *Henry VI*] (1595; 1600), *Richard II* (1597), *Richard III* (1597), *Romeo & Juliet* (1597; 1599; 1609), *Henry IV Part 1* (1598) and *Henry V* (1600; 1602; 1619). From 1598, Shakespeare’s name appeared on the title pages of thirteen plays published in his lifetime. These plays, and eighteen other plays as yet unpublished, were collected seven years after his death by colleagues and published in the massive First Folio (1623, STC 22273), containing 36 plays set in double columns in about 900 pages.

Another document of great importance for the Elizabethan theatre sheds little light on Shakespeare’s career. The theatre owner, Philip Henslowe, kept a notebook comprising 238 folios, in which he recorded payments to playwrights, actors, costume makers, carpenters and the Master of Revels. Henslowe also recorded his takings from individual performances at the Rose Theatre, mainly for the period 1592-8 (Foakes 2002 and Carson 2005). Out of 280 plays mentioned in the Diary, Henslowe cites seven or eight plays with Shakespearean titles; only two or three of these are thought to be performances of plays by Shakespeare: *Henry VI* (1592-3) usually taken to be Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part 1*; *Titus Andronicus* (1593-94) and *The Taming*

*of a Shrew* (1594) usually taken to be the play published in 1594, but with divided opinion as to whether this was a version by Shakespeare. Performances of plays which had Shakespearean titles but are thought to be by other authors include: *King Lear* (1594) usually taken to be the anonymous play *King Leir* (published in 1605) and not Shakespeare's play (published in 1608); *The Mawe* (1594-5) not usually taken to be Shakespeare's play *Othello*. Similarly, performances of the plays *Hamlet* (1594), *Henry V* (1595-6), and *Troilus & Cressida* (1598) are not usually taken to be of Shakespeare's plays. Henslowe names 27 other playwrights but not Shakespeare. Nor does Henslowe record any payments for any plays with Shakespearean titles. Henslowe's Diary reveals much about the practices in one Elizabethan theatre but reveal nothing specifically about Shakespeare. By contrast, Ben Jonson is frequently mentioned in Henslowe's Diary, e.g. for a loan of £4 in July 1597 Henslowe paid Jonson as a co-author of various plays, including *Hot Anger Soon Cold* (1597). Henslowe records the death of one his men "slayen in hoges den fylldes by the hands of benge[men] Jonson bricklayer." Nevertheless, Henslowe paid Jonson for further collaborations, e.g., *The Lamentable Tragedy of Page of Plymouth* and *Richard Crookback*, in 1599-1602 (Carson 2004, 59-62).

The limited records for Shakespeare leave many unanswered questions. Firstly, it is not clear whether Shakespeare retained ownership of his plays and allowed their publication. The standard view that manuscript playbooks were owned by the company, under licence from the Master of the Revels, and that Shakespeare was indifferent to the printing of his plays has been called into question by Peter Blayney (1997) and Andrew Gurr (2009). The fragmentary evidence suggests that there were many different practices at the time. Of the estimated 3,000 plays written between 1570 and 1642, about 800 were published. Only about 21 survive in manuscript, of which only a handful were printed. None of the printer's copies survive from the period (Werstine 2013). Regarding Shakespeare's plays, there is no evidence that he was ever paid for them or that they were owned by the company during his lifetime or that it was the company ever authorised publication. It is possible that Shakespeare retained ownership of his plays and controlled their publication (Gurr 2009).

Secondly, there is dispute over whether some anonymous plays were composed by Shakespeare, including *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1591); *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594); and *True Tragedie of Richard III* (1594). *Taming of a Shrew* (1596; 1607) and *Famous Victories of Henry V* (1598; 1617). Additionally, *King Leir* (mentioned twice in 1594) was published anonymously in 1605, three years before a similar but longer version *King Lear* appeared in print attributed to Shakespeare. The majority view remains that these plays were by other playwrights and that Shakespeare revised them, but Lukas Erne has argued that the shorter

versions were composed by Shakespeare for the stage and the longer versions were revised for publication (*Shakespeare as a Literary Dramatist* 2003).

Thirdly, it is not known whether Shakespeare colluded over the pseudonymous use of his name on various title pages: *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599, STC 22341); *Sir John Old-Castle* (anon in 1600; “by William Shakespeare” in 1619); *The London Prodigal* (“By W. Shakespeare” in 1605); *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (“by VV. Shakspeare” in 1608 and 1619); and *Troublesome Raigne of King John* (anon. in 1590 and 1611; “W. Shakespeare” in 1622). Of the four references to Shakespeare in the Stationers’ Register, one, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608), is taken by be a mis-attribution.

Only eight or nine of Shakespeare’s plays are reported to have been acted at The Globe by the time of Shakespeare’s death in 1616. The most famous performance was of *Richard II* in 1601.<sup>6</sup> In 1609, three plays appeared in quarto; on the title page of each it was stated that the play had been performed at the Globe: *Romeo & Juliet*, *Pericles*, and *Troilus & Cressida*. Three other plays were witnessed at The Globe in 1610/11 by Simon Forman as noted in his diary: *Macbeth*, *A Winter’s Tale* and *Cymbeline*. There are also accounts that *Henry VIII* was in performance when The Globe burnt down in 1613. The next play to announce a performance at the Globe was *Othello* in its first publication in 1622. The Stationers’ Register for 1607 specifically states that *King Lear* was performed at court by the King’s Men who normally performed at the Globe (as does the title page); this seems to imply that the play was not performed at the Globe.

The records of performance of Shakespeare’s plays are very patchy. “William Shakespeare” was named alongside Burbage and Kempe as members of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men who were paid on 15 March 1595 for two performances at court on 26 and 27 of December 1594 but no plays are named (*WS* ii. 319). The following details of known performances are derived from Chambers (1930) but are more easily found in Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company* (2004). The “most sensitive duty” of the Chamberlain’s Men was to provide Queen Elizabeth and her court with dramatic entertainment, usually over Christmas and New Year. The Chamberlain’s Men were recorded as making 33 performances at Court in the period 1594-1603, but no plays have been identified. However, the Stationers’ Register and various title pages claim that the Chamberlain’s Men performed 12 plays by Shakespeare: *Richard II* in 1597 (and again on quartos in 1598 and 1608); *Richard III* in 1597 or before (again on quartos in 1598, 1602 and 1605); *Romeo & Juliet* by Hunsden’s Men in 1597 and then by the Chamberlain’s in 1599 or

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<sup>6</sup> From the Examination of Sir Gelly Merrick before Lord Chief Justice Popham and Edward Fenner (17 February 1601): “The play was of King Henry the Fourth, and of the killing of Richard the Second, and played by the Lord Chamberlain's players.” (*WS* ii, 324). The title page to the 1608 quarto of *Richard II* also states that it had been acted at The Globe.

before. In 1600, five title pages indicated performance by the Chamberlain's Men: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*. The title pages of two plays in 1602 claim performance by the Chamberlain's Men: *Merry Wives* and the falsely attributed *Thomas Cromwell*. There is a note in the SR (?1600) which states that the Chamberlain's Men were intending to have *As You Like It* published, but this play did not appear in print until 1623. Only about half of the 28 identified plays performed by the King's Men between 1603 and 1616 can be identified with plays by Shakespeare.<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare was named among the nine players "and the rest of their associates" who were established by a royal licence of 19 May 1603 as the King's Men.

Shakespeare's role as a sharer in the Globe from 1599 is more fully documented from legal records.<sup>8</sup> The original deed was adjusted in 1601, 1608 and 1615 (Gurr 2004). The record of the case of Ostler v Heminges (1615) records many details about the arrangement about the sharers' interests in the Globe and Shakespeare's holding. According to the suit of Witter v Heminges and Condell (1619), Shakespeare also held a share of the Blackfriars Theatre from its inception in 1608. Because Shakespeare makes no specific mention of shares in the Globe or the Blackfriars in his will, it is argued that he must have sold his shares by 1610 (WS ii. 64-5). There is no record of when Shakespeare parted with his shares: they are not mentioned in the will. His annual income from the Globe has been estimated at £40 over a decade, and from the Blackfriars Theatre for two or three years at £80 - £90 (Thomas, *Shakespeare in the Public Records* 1964, 17).

No date of composition for any play of Shakespeare was recorded in the extant sources. The fragmentary evidence which survives refers only to performance and publication. There are records of some performances of some plays, but it is not known how soon after composition the plays were performed or whether any of these performances were premières. The main issue in the literary and theatrical records concerning Shakespeare is the "Problem of Chronology" as

<sup>7</sup> In the winter season of 1604-5, they performed at least six plays of Shakespeare: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Henry V* and *Merchant of Venice*. They also performed a play called *The Spanish Maze*, which has been suggested as a version of *The Tempest* (Stritmatter & Kositsky 2013, 55). In 1607-8, *King Lear* was performed before the king and court. In 1611-12, there were 22 performances at court: among the five identifiable plays were *The Tempest* and *A Winter's Tale*. In the winter season of 1611-12, the King's Men performed *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. There was also a performance of *Lucrece* and in 1612-13 of the following plays with Shakespearean-sounding title: *Much Ado*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Hotspur*, (?1 *Henry IV*), *Falstaff* (?2 *Henry IV* or *Merry Wives*), *Othello* and perhaps *Julius Caesar*.

<sup>8</sup> The post-mortem inventory of Sir Thomas Brend, dated May 1599, states that the Globe theatre was *in occupacione Willielmi Shakespeare et aliorum* "occupied by William Shakespeare and others". An affidavit in the case Witter v. Heminges and Condell (1619) cites Shakespeare as one of the sharers (WS ii. 52-8).

Chambers calls one of his chapters (WS i. 243-275): in what order did Shakespeare compose the plays? When did he write them? Did he work on them *seriatim* or did he leave some works to one side while he worked on others? Vickers indicates the type of evidence which is extant and can help date the plays: “entries in the Stationers’ Register, its publication date; any historical references it contains; allusions in contemporary letters or other documents to its theatrical performance or existence in manuscript” (2002, 126). What is clearly missing are any personal papers by Shakespeare to him or about him concerning the actual composition of the works. For many plays, e.g. *All’s Well* and *Coriolanus* there is no record of any performance in Shakespeare’s lifetime. The Stationers’ Register records the right of a stationer to publish a particular work, but there is no suggestion as to the time lapse between composition and publication: *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is mentioned by Meres in 1598 but does not appear in the SR until 1623. Allusions to plays in performance offer no information as to date of composition, merely a *terminus ad quem*. Thus there is no possibility of a reliable chronology of the plays.

Without such an outline, it is impossible to trace the development of Shakespeare’s dramatic art or to link any of the plays into his personal life. Any such attempt amounts merely to impressionistic biography. It is therefore astonishing that Chambers deals with the plays in his supposed order in which they were written (WS i. 275-499) and that Wells & Taylor also present the plays in their preferred order of composition (1986). They revised their opinion of the date of *All’s Well* in placing it four years later in the 2005 edition. The general outline was put forward cautiously by Malone (in 1778, 1790 and 1821) and was accepted by Chambers (1930) and Schoenbaum (1975). The structure posits that Shakespeare began writing in the early 1590s, publishing two narrative poems in 1593 and 1594. His plays were published from 1594 anonymously but from 1598 attributively. However, neither the date nor the title, not even the genre, of Shakespeare’s earliest play is known. Against this “late-starter theory” which suggests that Shakespeare did not begin writing plays until he was in his later twenties, an “early-starter theory” dating the first plays to c. 1587-8 has been argued in detail by Honigmann (1982, 88-90) and by Duncan-Jones (2001, 31-50). Both interpretations are feasible on the limited records available.

Additional problems arise from the lack of knowledge about working practices. There are a number of plays known from the late 1580s and early 1590s which have titles similar or identical to the titles of Shakespeare’s plays. In some cases, such as *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1591) and *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594), the early texts differ considerably from the text printed in the First Folio. However, it is not known whether the earlier versions were by Shakespeare which he himself revised, or whether he revised the plays of others. The notion that Shakespeare “never blotted a line” was previously taken literally to mean that he never revised

any works of his own. However, there has been a more recent move towards the notion that Shakespeare revised some plays at least: Wells & Taylor print two versions of *King Lear* (1987, 509). Chambers expressed the standard view that Shakespeare composed only one version of *Hamlet*, which was substantially reported in Q2 and that Q1 is a “bad quarto” (WS i. 412). Chambers thus dismisses references to a *Hamlet* play in 1589, 1594 and 1596 as a different play by another author (the *Ur-Hamlet* hypothesis). These assumptions have been challenged by Laurie Maguire (1996) and most recently in detail by Margrethe Jolly (2014), thus supporting the possibility that Shakespeare revised his own play, as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note in their Arden edition (2006, 44-6). Thus, no assumptions about Shakespeare’s working practices as a playwright can be verified on present evidence.

The nature and extent of Shakespeare’s collaboration with other playwrights is unclear. Following stylistic studies by Brian Vickers (2002), it is now generally accepted that two authors worked on different parts of a play such as *Henry VIII*. Their actual working practices remain unknown. With modern co-authors such as Ray Galton and Alan Simpson (the script writers for *Hancock’s Half Hour* and for *Steptoe and Son*) or Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn (*Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*), it is impossible to state that one writer composed some scenes and that the other writer scripted the remainder.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Shakespeare’s co-authorship, however, it seems that sections of co-authored plays are sufficiently different to suggest that each part was composed separately. But whether the authors were working in different parts of the same room or in different places or even at different times is impossible to determine. It is plausible to argue that Shakespeare revised some shorter plays e.g. a version of *Titus Andronicus* perhaps by George Peele, or that a short play of Shakespeare’s, e.g. *Pericles*, was later expanded by another writer such as George Wilkins. Ten Hoenselaars argues that we ought to re-examine the Romantic notion of Shakespeare as a lonely genius and give far more consideration to Shakespeare’s place in the early modern theatre (2012, 114). For the moment, we do not know how co-authorship worked.

Another concern is with the reliability of information printed on title pages. Apart from the mis-attributions of *The London Prodigall* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, some title pages state that a play had been “newly corrected” but only occasionally does this seem accurate, as with the title page of *Hamlet* (Q2, 1604-5) which states correctly that it was “Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was.” However, “newly corrected” is used more often as an empty formula, frequently re-printed from a previous edition. Thus, the third edition of *Hamlet* (Q3, 1611) merely repeats the title page and the “newly corrected” formula when it has the same text

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<sup>9</sup> Ray Galton & Alan Simpson. 2011. *The Masters of Sitcom From Hancock to Steptoe*. W. F. Howes: Leicester.

Anthony Jay & Jonathan Lynn. 2011. *The Yes Minister Miscellany*. Biteback Publishing: London.

as Q2. The Q5 edition in 1615 simply repeats this claim without any changes to the text. The name of the playing company or companies is usually taken to indicate that the company mentioned had held ownership of a particular play but it might just be an indication that the play had been licensed for their performance by the Master of the Revels (Edmund Tilney from 1579-1610). Thus the mention of a playing company might be a fictitious claim by the stationer so as to circumvent licensing laws.

Other puzzles concern Shakespeare's assumed relationship with his assumed patron the Earl of Southampton, which is considered in Chapter Seven. Apart from the two dedications, there is no record of any contact between the two men. Nicholas Rowe (1709) was the first to claim that Southampton was Shakespeare's patron but this is not borne out by any evidence. Another concern is whether Shakespeare was writing for the general public at the Theatre and at the Globe, as is generally believed, or whether his plays were intended for the more sophisticated audience at court (as argued by Kernan 1995, among others). It has been suggested that Shakespeare was the in-house writer for the Chamberlain's Men and King's Men (Gurr 2004, 150-2) but there is scarcely any evidence to support this: firstly, there is no specific record of a contract for such services or even payment for the composition of any plays by Shakespeare; secondly, only a quarter of Shakespeare's plays are ever recorded in performance at the Globe in the period 1599-1616. Finally, Shakespeare's plays do not form a significant part of the repertory of the Chamberlain's / King's Men. The combined records (Revels' accounts, SR, title pages, Forman's diary and witnesses to *Henry VIII*) only indicate that the King's Men performed about 20 of the 36 plays from the First Folio, out of over 200 named plays which they performed.

In contrast to the material for Shakespeare, the case of Ben Jonson proves most instructive. David Bevington compares the absence of personal material about Shakespeare with the extensive personal material for Jonson:

A central problem is that Shakespeare wrote essentially nothing about himself. Unlike Ben Jonson, his younger contemporary, who loudly proclaimed in prologues, manifestos, essays and private conversations his opinions on the arts and writers from antiquity down to the Renaissance, and who has left us vivid testimonials of his feelings about the death of a son, about his wife ("a shrew, but honest"), about his conversion to Catholicism, and much more, Shakespeare has left us his plays and poems (2010, 3).

A fair amount of Ben Jonson's correspondence has survived; Drummond kept a detailed journal of some of their conversations together which exists in a copy; Jonson published poems and prose which were personal. He wrote introductions in his own person to his published works. We know exact details about Jonson's patrons, his travels, his hosts, his library and his personal grief. Despite all this documentation, Jonson's most recent biographer, Ian Donaldson, states that biographical materials for Jonson's life "though comparatively well documented in relation to the lives of Shakespeare and other contemporaries" can only be known "imperfectly and in part." He

adds that “Jonson’s life is mainly a matter of gaps, interspersed by fragments of knowledge” (2011, 8-9). If so, Shakespeare’s life is largely undocumented: it is less accurate to say that there are gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare than to admit that there are “gaps in our ignorance” about him.

Overall, the main gaps in the contemporary records concerning Shakespeare are:

- (a) absence of personal papers written by Shakespeare such as letters, diaries, notes or journals;
- (b) absence of personal records about Shakespeare;
- (c) absence of allusion in the Stratford records to his work as a poet and playwright. The public records in Stratford state his birth, marriage, children's births and their deaths. The records indicate his increasing wealth and standing there.
- (d) absence of records of William Shakespeare from his birth in 1564 until his marriage at the age of 18;
- (e) absence of records about William Shakespeare from the birth of his twins in 1585 until the possible allusion in a 1592 pamphlet when aged 28;
- (f) absence of records that he was in London between 1604 and 1612; he attended the Belott-Mountjoy case at Westminster Hall on 11 May 1612 – the only record to locate Shakespeare to a particular place on a particular day in his life;
- (g) absence of dates of composition for his poems and plays; no document records any sequence of composition;
- (h) absence of full performance list, including premières. The extant records are fragmentary and ambiguous (e.g. the play witnessed by Platter in 1599 might not have been Shakespeare's play);
- (i) absence of records concerning his working practices: there is no evidence as to whether he worked on one play or one poem at a time, whether he ever revised his own works either for the stage or for publication, whether he ever revised the works of others, whether he ever actively worked alongside other playwrights, whether his works were initially intended for performance at court, whether he ever enjoyed the patronage of any person, or what he might have thought about other poets and playwrights;
- (j) no insight into the person among the allusions to Shakespeare as a poet and/or as a playwright, which only attest his reputation.

The extant records give a very limited framework for the life of William Shakespeare. They are lacking in detail and offer no insight into his character or personality. The literary and theatrical records are so fragmentary that no reliable account of Shakespeare as a playwright can be constructed. Moreover, no direct connection between any of the plays and any events in

Shakespeare's life, such as the deaths of his son, father or mother, can be reliably demonstrated. The records do not provide sufficient material for an evidence-based biography of Shakespeare. David Bevington notes that Shakespeare's silence on himself and his outlook "positively invites speculation" (2010, 13). This may be so, but it is not justified in biography. The next chapter will show how speculations, i.e. non-evidenced assertions, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gradually accumulated in the treatment of Shakespeare's life.

## Chapter 3: Inventing the Myths

### The seventeenth & eighteenth centuries

The last chapter shows the limitations of the biographical material about Shakespeare which has been established, despite extensive researches into the subject over the past two hundred years. The essential characteristics of biography identified in Chapter One – a coherent, narrative account of a person’s life based on primary sources – were never present in any text relating to Shakespeare during this period. Although Shakespeare’s works were increasingly appreciated during the seventeenth century and achieved canonical status in the eighteenth century, a surprising indifference about his life persisted. The few known details concerned his year and place of birth, some of his family members and the year and date of his death. Despite this documentary vacuum, many writers made claims which have remained unverifiable as there is no contemporary evidence to corroborate them. Many readers from the eighteenth century onwards have been happy to accept and repeat myths such as the deer-poaching story, the schoolmaster in the country episode, and the opportunist holding of horses at the stage door. These legends were repeated so frequently and play such an important role in the traditional story of Shakespeare’s life that they have attained the status of “facts” – the first two stages of biomythography, according to Benton.

By far the most influential of these writers was Nicholas Rowe, who introduced his 1709 edition with a short essay called *Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear*. The *Account* was modified by Alexander Pope (1725) and then appeared frequently for the next century and a half. Five claims by Rowe have endured almost unchallenged until the present day:

- (a) he spent his childhood in Stratford, where he attended the local school;
- (b) he was caught deer-stealing and punished, writing a ballad in revenge against Sir Thomas Lucy;
- (c) he enjoyed the patronage of the Earl of Southampton;
- (d) he inspired envy in Ben Jonson;
- (e) he retired to Stratford.

This chapter also considers the biographical insights offered by those editors who did not include Rowe's *Account*, viz. Lewis Theobald (1733) and Edward Capell (1767).

A few modern Shakespearean scholars have reviewed these early biographical comments. Samuel Schoenbaum (*Shakespeare's Lives* 1970, 126-162) gives an account of them, drawing attention to some of their weaknesses. Gary Taylor (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 1991, 7-99) examines the increasing cultural importance of Shakespeare's works during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without much concern for what was known or reported about Shakespeare's life. Jack Lynch in *Becoming Shakespeare* (2007) also gives a historical review of Shakespeare's reputation, mainly from 1660-1830, but with little reference to specific biographies. Only David Ellis (*That Man Shakespeare* 2005) expressed dismay that Shakespeare's reputation rose without a corresponding interest in his life. He states that biographical interest in Shakespeare

. . . tended to follow the growing popularity of the plays after the Restoration of Charles II but, by that time, too little reliable or interesting information was available to allow people to form an interesting and accurate picture of his life (Ellis 2005b, 35).

Even Ellis is over-stating the case. There was only virtually no interest in the life of Shakespeare after the Restoration and no serious effort was made to research his life until Malone began his investigations in the late 1770s.

### 3.1 Early Biografictions

During the seventeenth century, Shakespeare was mentioned by three writers who compiled biographical material: Dr. Thomas Fuller (1608-61), John Aubrey (1626-1697), and the Rev. John Ward (1629-1681). The gleanings of Aubrey and Ward were not published until 1813 and 1837 respectively. Fuller, whose researches were published posthumously in 1662, spoke of Shakespeare in three paragraphs, when reviewing famous people from Warwickshire in *Worthies of England*. His final paragraph consists of a description of the "wit-combates" with Jonson:

Many were the wit-combates betwixt him and *Ben Johnson*, which two I behold like a *Spanish great Gallion* and an *English man of War*; *Master Johnson* (like the former) was built far higher in Learning; *Solid*, but *Slow* in his performances. *Shake-spear*, with the *English-man of War*, lesser in *bulk*, but lighter in *sailing*, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his Wit and Invention. He died *Anno Domini* 16 . . ., and was buried at *Stratford upon Avon*, the Town of his Nativity (Fuller 1662, 126).

Fuller's work is a kind of early dictionary of national biography. The significance of his entry regarding Shakespeare lies not in any factual accuracy but in the recognition that Shakespeare deserved to be remembered. Fuller justifies his inclusion of Shakespeare, comparing him favourably with classical poets (Martial, Ovid, and Plautus) and somewhat surprisingly with

classical philosophers (Heraclitus and Democritus). This style of literary criticism, comparing modern English with classical writers, had been set by previous writers such as Puttenham (*The Arte of English Poesie* 1589; STC 20519). Fuller offers only three biographical facts about Shakespeare: that he was born in Stratford; that he died there; and that he had “wit-combates” with Ben Jonson. For this last point, Fuller advertises his use of conjecture both in using the phrase “I behold” and in the laboured comparison of the authors with ships. Later, Malone would dismiss Fuller’s comments as a “short quibbling account of our poet, furnishing very little information concerning him” (Boswell 1821, ii. 4). The linking of Shakespeare and Jonson was commonplace in the seventeenth century, with Shakespeare’s reputation in the ascendancy from the Restoration (Bentley 1945). Fuller seems to have been the first writer to claim any kind of rivalry between Jonson and Shakespeare.

Another writer, the Rev. John Ward, also made notes about Shakespeare in 1662, but these remained unpublished until 1839. Ward was vicar at Stratford-upon-Avon from 1662-81 and collected much information about other people in the town. When Charles Severn published Ward’s diary in 1839, he described his excitement at the mention of Shakespeare, about whom “few, if any, undoubted particulars are known, and whose resources and final illness have been, for want of the information exclusively confined to the shelves of the [Medical Society’s] library” (1839, x). Extracts from Ward’s note-books occupies pages 88-315. However, Ward’s description of Shakespeare is confined to just one page in over 200 of printed text.<sup>1</sup> He mentions Shakespeare’s daughters and grand-daughter in accord with the parish registers, to which as vicar he had direct access. However, he does not state his sources for the claims (not supported elsewhere) that Shakespeare provided two plays a year, or that he spent “att y<sup>e</sup> Rate of 1,000/l. a year” (Severn 1839, 181). This amount is excessive: there is no evidence of Shakespeare receiving money at that rate while his outlay on property including tithes amounted to less than £1,000 in his lifetime. Similarly, there is no other source to suggest that “Shakespear, Drayton and Ben Jhonson, had a merry meeting, and itt seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a feavour there contracted” (61). In fact, there is no document before his death in 1616 that Shakespeare ever met either of those two writers.<sup>2</sup> Overall, Ward added very little to the biographical material about Shakespeare.

However, biographers have tended to accept Ward’s account of a “merry meeting” in the absence of any evidence to the contrary: Halliwell-Phillipps decided that the anecdote was a “late

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<sup>1</sup> Severn’s volume (1839) is slim, with about 22 lines per page averaging about seven words per line.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest document linking Shakespeare and Jonson was the list of actors in Jonson’s *Works* (STC 14751) in 1616. Michael Drayton mentions Shakespeare only once: in an elegy of 1627. Shakespeare did not refer to these writers anywhere.

but apparently authentic tradition” without explaining why it was “apparently authentic” (1887 i. 267). Chambers sees “no reason to reject this report” (WS i. 89). Schoenbaum finds that the story of a drinking bout “does not stretch credulity” and even suggests an occasion for the event – Judith Shakespeare’s marriage in February 1616 (1970, 120-1). No biographer of Jonson takes this anecdote seriously and there is no evidence that Jonson ever visited Stratford. In 1615-16, Jonson was busy in London working on his edition of his *Works* with the publisher William Stansby (Donaldson 2011, 323-4). Anne Lake Prescott calls it implausible (“Michael Drayton” *ODNB* 2004).

A little more biographical material about Shakespeare was being collected at the same time by John Aubrey (1626-97), who recorded many anecdotes about famous people. Aubrey’s manuscripts were deposited with the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 1693 and at the instigation of Malone they were in part published in 1813.<sup>3</sup> Like Fuller, Aubrey combines mainly critical judgements with some biographical comments. Apart from the birth place, every biographical point is either false or unverifiable.

Malone rejects the claim, vaguely attributed to “some of the neighbours,” that John Shakespeare was a butcher, or that William ever killed a calf in high style (1790, i. pt. ii. 166-170). The high style anecdote gained partial confirmation in a letter (dated 10 April 1693) by a lawyer named Dowdall, who described how he was shown around Holy Trinity Church at Stratford by a clerk “above eighty years old”. Dowdall adds that “Shakespear was formerly in this Towne bound apprentice to a butcher, but that he Run from his master to London” (Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a.74). Many commentators report the high-style butchery as an “early tradition” (Lee 1917, 25; WS i. 17) without attaching any significance. The phrase “early tradition” is ambiguous, suggesting that the tradition occurred soon after Shakespeare’s death. However, “early” indicates no more than that Aubrey was the first to make this claim, there being none earlier. Aubrey reports this anecdote c. 1680, about 100 years after the event might have happened. Schoenbaum is inclined to accept the story which was reported by the “earliest authorities” i.e. Aubrey and Rowe (1987, 74-5). It is difficult to demonstrate that either of these writers is entitled to be called an “authority” and Schoenbaum claims a more rigorous biographical tradition regarding Shakespeare than actually existed. Duncan-Jones finds the anecdote “entirely believable” (2001, 15-16) without stating if she thinks it is true.

Next, Aubrey suggests that William went to London when he was about eighteen years old, but at this time he was about to become a father and there is no other evidence that he was in

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<sup>3</sup> John Aubrey’s manuscripts were transferred to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in 1860 and are now classed as Bodl. Aubrey MSS. The manuscripts were published in part in 1813 (ed. T. Hearne) and more thoroughly in 1898 (2 vols. ed. Andrew Clark).

London as early as 1582. Aubrey was the only person to mention Shakespeare's appearance and thus may be here "safely relied on" for the sole reason of "there being no contradictory testimony" (Malone 1821, ii. 493). However, Aubrey offers no authority for his statement and he uses such vague terms, "handsome, well shap't man" as to suggest that the description is not based on personal acquaintance. Nor is there any authority for the assertion that Shakespeare made an annual return to Stratford. His claim that Shakespeare left an annuity for his sister suggests some acquaintance with the affairs of Joan Hart, who died in 1646, and whose descendants were still living in Henley Street in 1794 (Malone 1821, ii. 93). However, there is a huge discrepancy in the details: Joan did not receive £200 or £300 annually, but only a single payment of £20, some clothing, and the right to live in the family house for a nominal rent.<sup>4</sup> Aubrey clearly did not visit Stratford himself, as he refers the reader to the epitaph on Shakespeare's tomb in Dugdale's *Antiquities* (1656). Another unlikely claim concerns the anecdote about the constable at Grendon as the inspiration for Dogberry (who appeared in *Much Ado* not in *Midsummer Night's Dream* as Aubrey writes). Aubrey states that he was still working as an officer of the law in 1642, over 40 years after the play appeared in print. Malone accepts the Grendon officer as the inspiration for Dogberry, despite Aubrey's confusion of plays (1821, ii. 491).

Aubrey's final comment that Shakespeare spent time as a "schoolmaster in the country" report is dismissed by most commentators, among them: Malone 1790, i. pt. ii. 349; Schoenbaum 1987, 113-4; Duncan-Jones 2001, 23; Wells 2003, 103; Wood 2003, 165; and Weis (2007, 187).

However, the schoolmaster comment is accepted by other biographers despite the lack of contemporary documentation. Sidney Lee states that the period as a school-master occurred after the deer-poaching episode (1915, 36). Chambers suggests that Shakespeare may have worked in a school as an usher or *abecedarius* (*WS* i. 22), which many biographers follow (e.g., Ackroyd 2005, 73). J. Dover Wilson claims Shakespeare was working as a tutor and as a master of revels at Southampton's country house in Hampshire (1932, 64-5), which other biographers such as Muriel Bradbrook accept (1978, 77-8). E. A. J. Honigmann argues that Shakespeare was a private tutor in Lancashire (1985, 2-3); Stephen Greenblatt, for whom "this particular item [of gossip] has more authority than most [other items of gossip]," accepts the schoolmaster in Lancashire interpretation (2004, 88). Greenblatt does not explain the logic by which he came to this conclusion. Lois Potter also accepts the anecdote (2012, 50). Overall, the totally divergent opinions about the "schoolmaster in the country" comment are only possible because of the

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<sup>4</sup> The relevant part of Shakespeare's will states: "I gyve and bequeath unto my saied sister Jone xx <sup>li</sup> [i. e. £20] and all my wearing Apprell to be paied and delivered within one yeare after my deceas. And I doe will and devise unto her the house with thappurtenances in Stratford where in she dwelleth for her naturall lief under the yearelie Rent of xij<sup>d</sup>" (*WS* ii. 171).

absence of any contemporary record concerning Shakespeare during the so-called lost years 1585-1592.

In general, John Aubrey's reliability was called into question by the writer who commissioned his investigations. For Anthony Wood, Aubrey was

a shiftless person, roving and magotie-headed, and sometimes little better than crased. And being exceedingly credulous, would stuff his many letters sent to A. W. with folliries and misinformations, which would sometimes guid him into the paths of errour.<sup>5</sup>

Malone was equally dismissive of Aubrey, calling him "a dupe to every wag who chose to practise on his credulity" (1790, i. pt. ii. 254). Schoenbaum makes little use of Aubrey's anecdotes and states that they "belong not to the biographical record proper but to the mythos: that accretion of legend and lore which comes to surround the names of famous men" (*Documentary Life* 1975, 72). However, as noted, Schoenbaum accepts some anecdotes. Other biographers have read through his comments and picked one or another that looks attractive, labelling it a "credible tradition" or a "reliable testimony" and incorporating it into their narrative. No modern biographer of Shakespeare cites academics such as John Kite (1993) or Allan Pritchard (2005) who have studied Aubrey, finding him generally less interested in factual accuracy, and more interested in curiosities (Pritchard 2005, 172).<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, Shakespeare's reputation was attaining canonical status. Three dictionaries of the stage mention Shakespeare's greatness without contributing anything to the biographical record. Edward Phillips in *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum* (1674/5, lxi); William Winstanley in *Lives of the Most Famous Poets* (1687); Gerard Langbaine in his *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691, 453-469). Shakespeare's history plays had proved popular on the Restoration stage in line with Charles II's liking for the royalist heroic play. Shakespeare's history plays were chosen not merely because they depict so many English kings, but because they "foregrounded the message against rebellion."<sup>7</sup> In 1679, Dryden

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Wood (1632-1695) was seeking information for his great biographical register *Athenae Oxonienses*:. 4 vols (1691-2) London: Bennet. The first volume, covering the period 1500- 1640, only mentions Shakespeare as a contemporary of Marlowe. Freeman and Gager. Wood's opinion of Aubrey was reported in *The Life of Anthony à Wood* ed. Thomas Hearne (1772). Oxford: Clarendon, 209.

<sup>6</sup> I have been unable to ascertain if Aubrey's reputation is higher in the forthcoming *John Aubrey: Brief Lives with An Apparatus for the Lives of our English Mathematical Writers* (ed. Kate Bennett) due to be published by OUP in October 2013. This study is said to be "the first to include the complete text of the three *Brief Lives* manuscripts (including censored and deleted material, title-pages, antiquarian notes, and the indices), and the first to provide a full general and critical introduction and comprehensive commentary."

<sup>7</sup> Owen, Susan. 1996. *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4. Adaptations of plays such as *Hamlet* became "unmistakeable parodies of the Parliamentarians who had overthrown Charles I" (Taylor 1989,

introduced his adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* with the ghost of Shakespeare appearing in the prologue to lend authority (Taylor 1989, 45). This may have given rise to the anecdote, reported by Rowe in 1709 that Shakespeare had acted the ghost of Hamlet's father. It is curious that while Shakespeare's plays were so frequently performed on stage, very little biographical information was circulating about the person who wrote them.

The plays of Shakespeare also rose in critical esteem among the reading public from the Restoration. The Third Folio of 1663-4 reprinted the 36 original plays and added seven. The Fourth Folio containing 43 plays was published in 1685. John Dryden placed Shakespeare at the apex of English theatre: "*Shakespeare was the Homer, or Father of our Dramatick Poets*" (*Essay of Dramatick Poesie* 1668). Dryden remained, however, completely indifferent to any knowledge of Shakespeare's life, which is rather strange as he himself had trawled through Plutarch's *Lives* in search of information to add to his coherent *Life of Plutarch*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, while Shakespeare was being elevated to the status of national poet by the reading public, only very limited biographical details were available.

Within this biographical vacuum, a lesser playwright, John Dennis, was able to claim a royal connection in the preface to his 1702 adaptation of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Dennis stated that Elizabeth I had commanded Shakespeare to write another play about Falstaff in two weeks.<sup>9</sup> The claim, repeated by Rowe (1709 i. ix), is not mentioned in any earlier document. It may be that Dennis was trying to lend royal authority to his own play which was unsuccessful in the theatre. Two years later, Dennis had changed the story so that Elizabeth specified a ten-day period for the play's composition. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen are doubtful about any such royal command.<sup>10</sup> In her review of this anecdote, Helen Hackett notes the royal connections for *Merry Wives* with its performance at court in 1602 and setting near a royal castle. Hackett concludes:

When Dennis in 1704 used the story of Elizabeth's commission for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to expound upon the Queen's encouragement of and pleasure in drama, he was making a polemical point about the contemporary neglect of playwrights by the Crown (2009, 25-6).

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24). The adaptation of *Cymbeline* (1682) not only presented the divine right of kings but also omitted the voluntary submission to Rome at the end of Shakespeare's version (Dobson 1992, 85-89).

<sup>8</sup> John Dryden, ed. 1683-6. *Plutarch's Lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands. To which is prefixt the Life of Plutarch*. 5 vols. London: Tonson. Dryden's Life of Plutarch appears in volume I, 1-126.

<sup>9</sup> John Dennis. 1702. *The Comical Gallant*. London: A. Baldwin, sig A2r. "This comedy [*Merry Wives*] was written at her command, and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it acted that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days; and was afterwards, as tradition tells us, very well pleased at the representation" (WS ii. 263).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Bate & Eric Rasmussen, eds. 2011. *Merry Wives of Windsor*. (Arden3) London: Palgrave Macmillan.

In other words, Dennis used the story in an attempt to gain the same kind of royal patronage which he had assumed Shakespeare had received. Overall, Dennis does not appear to be a very reliable witness as to the occasion of Shakespeare's composition of either *Merry Wives* or of *Julius Caesar*. As Shakespeare's were prepared for a re-issue in a more portable format, it became necessary for some biographical comments to be developed in line with this status.

### 3.2 Nicholas Rowe's *Some Account of the Life &c. (1709)*

Early in the eighteenth century, the publisher Jacob Tonson acquired the rights to publish most of Shakespeare's plays. Tonson invited Nicholas Rowe to prepare an edition of the plays in eight volumes, octavo – a much smaller format than the folios (Murphy 2003, 58-9). Subsequent editions were issued at regular intervals as the Act for the Encouragement of Learning (Statute of Anne 1710, 1/6) restricted copyright to a period of fourteen years (Murphy 2003, 73). Nicholas Rowe was chosen to edit the plays as a prominent playwright: he had been enjoying his own success with plays such as *Tamerlane* (1702), *The Fair Penitent* (1703) and *Ulysses* (1706). Rowe and Tonson made the following important additions to his edition: lists of *dramatis personae* for each play, stage directions, act/scene divisions, and illustrations based on contemporary stage performances of the plays. The edition was immediately reprinted (1709/10), and reissued in 1714 in duodecimo. Rowe introduced the first volume with two letters or addresses: a dedication to the Duke of Somerset, Charles Seymour, and a preface entitled *Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear*. The *Account* amounts to 40 pages in octavo format, at 28 lines per page, a little over 8,000 words in total. The rest of the first volume comprised the texts of the first seven comedies in sequence from the Fourth Folio of 1685.

While Rowe was the first critical editor of the works, it is wrong to cite him as Shakespeare's "first biographer". Almost two hundred years later Sidney Lee referred to Rowe's *Account* as "a more ambitious memoir than had yet been attempted" (1898, 363; repeated verbatim 1917, 642). Lee's claim is extravagant: neither Rowe's nor any previous memoirs of Shakespeare merit the description "ambitious". E. K. Chambers believes that Rowe made "the first attempt at a systematic biography of the poet" (WS i. 12). Like Lee, Chambers is going beyond the text in claiming that Rowe's preface was either "systematic" or a "biography". Samuel Schoenbaum states that Rowe made the "first attempt at a connected biography of Shakespeare" (1970, 131), but the *Account* is neither connected nor a biography. Gary Taylor calls it the "first substantial biography of Shakespeare ever published" (1989, 74). These adjectives – ambitious, systematic, connected and substantial – afford far greater authority to Rowe's essay than it actually merits. Such claims however continue to be repeated in recent times: Michael Dobson calls it a "pioneering biography" (2001, 423); Stanley Wells refers to it as the "first formal biography"

(2003, 200); Peter Ackroyd states that Rowe was Shakespeare's "earliest biographer" (2005, 476), while Lois Potter claims that Rowe "compiled the first biography of Shakespeare" (2012, 432). Even David Ellis, who is normally dismissive of Shakespearean biographies – he used the metaphor of bricks without straw to describe them (2000, 313) – refers to Rowe's *Account* as "the first real attempt at a biography of Shakespeare" (2005b, 37). In this way, modern biographers of Shakespeare have attempted to present their own efforts at the end of a respectable tradition of Shakespearean biography stretching back to 1709, less than a hundred years after his death, and not to Knight's biography of 1843, almost three hundred years after Shakespeare's birth.

Eighteenth century editors, however, accorded little value to Rowe's *Account* and never referred to it as a "biography". Dr Johnson only included it after his own widely acclaimed essay of appreciation as there was nothing better:

As of the other editors I have preserved the prefaces, I have likewise borrowed the author's life from Rowe, though not written with much elegance or spirit; it relates however what is now to be known, and therefore deserves to pass through all succeeding publications (Johnson 1765, i. sig. C8<sup>r</sup>).

Later still, Malone referred to "Mr. Rowe's meagre and imperfect narrative" (1821, ii. 11) and sought to show that the biographical statements were for the most part mistaken. The first biography of Shakespeare did not in fact appear until 1843 when Charles Knight included a narrative account of Shakespeare's life as volume VIII of his *Illustrated Edition of Shakespeare's works*. Shortly afterwards, John Payne Collier wrote his own biography for his edition in 1844. These biographies of Shakespeare will be assessed in Chapter Five.

Rowe himself is doubtful about the value of literary biography. At the outset of his *Account of the Life &c*, Rowe notes that personal descriptions are offered out of "Respect due to the Memory of Excellent Men, especially of those whom their Wit and Learning have made Famous" (1709 i. i.), Rowe dismisses such curiosity as "trifling" – adding that only sometimes does knowledge of an Author "conduce to the better understanding his Book." A careful reading of *Some Account* reveals little biographical material about the poet's life, as noted by Samuel Monk in his introduction to the reprint:

The biographical part of Rowe's *Account* assembled the few facts and most of the traditions still current about Shakespeare a century after his death. It would be easy for any undergraduate to distinguish fact from legend in Rowe's preface; and scholarship since Steevens and Malone has demonstrated the unreliability of most of the local traditions that Betterton reported from Warwickshire (Monk 1948, 5).

Rowe's *Account* is mostly a critical review of the works (more than seven-eighths of the essay) rather than a biography (less than one-eighth).<sup>11</sup> His purpose is to justify Dryden's view of Shakespeare as the "epitome of excellence" (1688 i. 138) against the censure of Thomas Rymer *Short View of Tragedy* (1693). In the essay, Rowe mentions thirty-three plays from the First Folio as well as *Pericles* and *Venus & Adonis*. He also refers to almost forty named characters in the plays which demonstrates his great interest in appreciation rather than biography.<sup>12</sup> Rowe refers to Shakespeare's genius six times and mentions his "Fire, Impetuosity, and even beautiful Extravagance" (iii).<sup>13</sup> Later, Rowe states that:

Every one who had a true taste of merit, and could distinguish men, had generally a just value and esteem for him. His exceeding candor and good nature must certainly have inclin'd all the gentler part of the world to love him, as the power of his wit oblig'd the men of the most delicate knowledge and polite learning to admire him (x, 6).

Although he asserted that he had "resolv'd not to enter any Critical Controversie" (xxxiv), Rowe devotes most of *Some Account of the Life &c* to answering adverse criticisms made by Rymer: "If he [Rymer] had a Pique against the Man, and wrote on purpose to ruin a Reputation so well establish'd, he has had the Mortification to fail altogether in his Attempt, and to see the World at least as fond of Shakespear as of his Critique" (xvi). While conceding Rymer's point about that Shakespeare not following the classical unities in his plays, Rowe retorts that the dramatist had been forced to leave school early due to the "narrowness of his Circumstances, and the want of his assistance at Home" (ii). He continues his discussion of Shakespeare's learning with the statement: "It is without Controversie, that he had no knowledge of the Writings of the Antient Poets" (iii). Rowe quotes the "All the world's a stage" speech (xxi) as especially deserving of notice. He emphasises Shakespeare's poetic abilities: "His Images are indeed ev'ry where so lively, that the Thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess ev'ry Part of it" (xxii). At the end, Rowe answers some of Jonson's adverse comments (xxxviii-xxxix). Overall, Rowe's *Some Account of the Life &c of Mr. William Shakespear* is a disjointed collection of critical judgments interspersed with a little biographical material. This analysis has been very detailed so as to demonstrate that it does not merit the title of "biography" because it is not a

<sup>11</sup> See Annex A for the original text of Rowe's *Account*, with the biographical comments highlighted. Pope's changes are also indicated.

<sup>12</sup> Rowe mentions Falstaff, Mistress Quickly, Prince Hal, Ford, Slender, Ann Page, Malvolio, Parolles, Petruchio, Benedick, Beatrice, Rosalind, Thersites, Apemantus, Shylock, Antonio, Bassanio, Portia, Jaques, Caliban, Prospero, Ferdinand, Juno, Ceres, Antony, Cleopatra, Beaufort, Gloucester, Henry VIII, Wolsey, Katherine (of Aragon), Coriolanus, Brutus, Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, and Macbeth. Rowe also refers to the Pedant, the Ghost of Hamlet's father, fairies, and witches, as well as quoting from various scenes and speeches involving the Queen (Gertrude) or a Maid in Love (Viola).

<sup>13</sup> In the following quotations from Rowe, roman numerals (iii) refer to the original pagination of the 1709 edition, Volume I.

coherent narrative of the life of Shakespeare. Annex A presents the text of Rowe's *Account* (1709) in such a way that the biographical elements are clearly indicated.

Only one-eighth of Rowe's *Account*, as little as 1,000 words, is concerned with making statements about the life. The need for some kind of preface involving a few biographical comments in addition to a critical appreciation was probably included as a requirement by Jacob Tonson, the publisher. For *The works of Mr Abraham Cowley* (1668. London: Henry Herringman), Thomas Sprat had written "An Account of the Life and Writings of Abraham Cowley." Similarly, John Dryden wrote a substantial *Life of Plutarch* for his 1683 edition of *Plutarch's Lives*.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Sprat had known Cowley personally and was his literary executor, Dryden was forced to find out about Plutarch's life from various small asides scattered throughout the *Lives* and in other written documents.

Since there was no contemporary memoir of Shakespeare and no clues in the text about himself, Jacob Tonson attempted to discover more about Shakespeare's life by advertising in the *London Gazette* and in the *Daily Courant* in March 1709. He requested materials that may be "serviceable to this Design" and that "it will be a particular Advantage to the Work, and acknowledg'd as a favour by the Gentleman who has Care of this Edition" (Murphy 2003, 60). Little or nothing seems to have been forthcoming about Shakespeare's life from these advertisements. In the end, Rowe only mentions one authority, his friend the actor Thomas Betterton (1635-1710), who was by this time very elderly. In line with his own inclination for an aesthetic or critical approach to Shakespeare, Rowe clearly values Betterton for his acting:

I cannot leave *Hamlet*, without taking notice of the Advantage with which we have seen this Masterpiece of *Shakespear* distinguish itself upon the Stage, by Mr. *Betterton's* fine Performance of that Part. A Man, who though he had no other good Qualities, as he has a great many, must have made his way into the Esteem of all Men of Letters, by this only Excellency (1709, xxxiii-xxxiv).

He adds that Betterton had contributed to the biographical record but is not specific:

I must own a particular Obligation to him, for the most considerable part of the Passages relating to his Life, which I have here transmitted to the Public; his Veneration for the Memory of *Shakespear* having engaged him to make a Journey into *Warwickshire*, on purpose to gather up what Remains he could of a Name for which he had so great a Value (1709, xxxiv).

As the Rev. John Ward makes no mention of Betterton (or any other visitor to Stratford) enquiring about Shakespeare in the period 1662-1681, the date of Betterton's visit is best placed after 1681. However, there is doubt whether Betterton himself made the journey at all. According to Malone, William Oldys had left his notes in which a member of Betterton's company, John

<sup>14</sup> John Dryden, ed. 1683. *Plutarch's Lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands. To which is prefixt the Life of Plutarch*. London: Jacob Tonson.

Bowman, denied that Betterton had ever been to Stratford (1790, i. pt. ii. 157). Malone merely lamented Betterton's lack of rigour:

If Betterton the player did really visit Warwickshire for the sake of collecting anecdotes relative to our author, perhaps he was too easily satisfied for such as fell in his way, without making any rigid search into their authenticity (1790 vol. i. pt. ii. 121n).

A little later, Malone expands this note:

Mr. Betterton was born in 1635, and had many opportunities of collecting information relative to Shakespeare, but unfortunately the age in which he lived was not an age of curiosity. Had either he or Dryden or Sir William Davenant taken the trouble to visit our poet's youngest daughter, who lived till 1662, or his grand-daughter, who did not die till 1670, many particulars might have been preserved which are now irrevocably lost (1790 vol. i. pt. ii. 154n).

There must remain some doubt that Betterton ever visited Stratford as it is not mentioned by his contemporary biographer, Charles Gildon (1710), or by his modern biographer, David Roberts (2010).<sup>15</sup> Overall, Rowe's citation of Betterton as the authority for the Stratford records is not very strong. Nevertheless, somebody was able to provide information about Shakespeare from an inspection of the parish register at the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

Rowe makes the following biographical comments about Shakespeare: he begins with a brief description of his family and his year of birth and. He states that his father was a "considerable dealer in wool" and sent the young William to a "free-school" for some time (1709 i. page ii) but that he had to withdraw him due to straitened circumstances. William married young (p. iv) but was caught deer-poaching and punished. After writing a ballad against Sir Thomas Lucy by way of revenge, he was forced to leave Stratford (v). Rowe's gives a vague mention of his arrival in London and joining "the company", saying that he attempted research but "though I could never meet with any further Account of him this way, than that the top of his Performance was the Ghost in his own *Hamlet*" (vi). However, his natural ability "soon distinguished him, if not as an extraordinary Actor, yet as an excellent Writer." He came to the attention of the Queen, who commanded him to portray Falstaff in love, which was "said to be the Occasion of his Writing the *Merry Wives of Windsor*" (viii-ix). Rowe states that Shakespeare dedicated *Venus and Adonis* to the Earl of Southampton but mentions Southampton's gift of £1,000 with a certain scepticism: he would not repeat it but for the fact that "the Story was handed down by Sir *William Davenant*, who was probably very well acquainted with his Affairs" (x) Rowe states that Shakespeare commended an early work of Jonson (xii) to the Company, but

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Gildon. 1710. *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, the late eminent tragedian*. London: R. Gosling. David Roberts. 2010. *Thomas Betterton: the Greatest Actor of the Restoration Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A text purportedly from 1715 entitled "Some Further Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear" with reports of Betterton's conversations at Stratford has been dismissed as a forgery by Holderness (2009).

does not state which play, which company or which year. Rowe notes that in his writings, Jonson is less than generous in his written opinions of Shakespeare. Rowe mentions his coat of arms only in passing (xviii) but describes Shakespeare's return to Stratford in lengthy terms: "The latter Part of his Life was spent, as all Men of good Sense will wish theirs may be, in Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends" (xxxv). Rowe relates a story that Shakespeare composed an epitaph for Mr Coombe, the only acquaintance at Stratford that Rowe mentions (xxxvi). He notes the age of Shakespeare when he died, his place of burial and his three children whom he calls daughters (xxxvi-xxxvii).

Most of Rowe's biographical comments are inaccurate, according to Malone (1821, ii. 69): only two were correct, concerning his baptism and his burial. Otherwise, according to Malone, Rowe was wrong in claiming that:

- John Shakespeare had ten children whereas only eight are mentioned in the Stratford Register (1821 ii. 610-1);
- John Shakespeare was a woolman but records of the Bailiff's court show him to have been a glover (1821 ii. 78);
- when the poet came to London "he was received into *the company* of actors then in being" as if there was but one company (1821 ii. 69);
- he must have been quite a good actor when he was an indifferent actor (1821 ii. 279-282);
- he changed the name of Oldcastle to Falstaff under obligation (1821 ii. 480);
- Lord Southampton gave him £1,000 ("extremely exaggerated" [*sic*] 1821 ii. 163);
- he had three daughters, whereas he had two daughters, one son (1821 ii. 118);
- he stole deer from Sir Thomas Lucy's Park; there was no deer park at Charlecote in Elizabethan times (1821 ii. 147-9).

Of these, most commentators accept that Malone was correct about all of these except Falstaff/Oldcastle.<sup>16</sup>

George Steevens noted that the epitaph about John Combe had been published by Richard Braithwaite in 1618 without reference to Shakespeare. Moreover, he noted that two of the lines

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<sup>16</sup> The evidence suggesting that Shakespeare revised the name from Oldcastle to Falstaff has been reviewed briefly by Chambers (WS i. 382-3) and in more detail by David Bevington, ed. 1987. *Henry IV*, Part One. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3-10. The original role had been written for a character named "Old-Castle" in the anonymous *Famous Victories* (1598). It is not known whether Shakespeare composed *Merry Wives* before, during or after his composition of the *Henry IV* plays.

had previously appeared in 1608 and 1614. Malone follows this with a further discussion in which he quotes extensively from John Combe's will to indicate that the epitaph must have been composed after his death and not as Rowe describes (*Johnson-Steevens* 2 1793, ii. 319-321). As a result of this analysis, we can dismiss claims that Rowe was responsible for the earliest biography of Shakespeare: he merely made some comments about Shakespeare's life, most of which have been proved wrong or at least unverifiable.

I suggest that the following myths or legends, which have not been verifiable according to contemporary documents, constitute Rowe's biografictions regarding Shakespeare:

- (a) he spent his childhood in Stratford, where he attended the local school.

There is no evidence as to where Shakespeare spent his childhood or that he ever attended school, either in Stratford or anywhere else. The suggestion by Arthur Gray (1926) that Shakespeare was brought up at an aristocratic household is tenable in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

- (b) he was caught deer-stealing and punished, writing a ballad in revenge against Sir Thomas Lucy.

Malone showed that there was no deer park at Charlecote at this time. This myth is sometimes down-graded as rabbit-catching.

- (c) he enjoyed the patronage of the Earl of Southampton.

There is no evidence that Southampton ever knew Shakespeare or ever patronised any writer during the reign of Elizabeth (as will be shown in Chapter Seven).

- (d) he inspired envy in Jonson.

Jonson is very dismissive at times about Shakespeare's works but there is no evidence that Jonson was ever jealous of Shakespeare. His comments about Shakespeare are considered in Chapter Eight. The association of envy with Jonson may have arisen from the dedication to the 1623 Folio: "To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name".

- (e) he retired to Stratford.

Rowe seems to be arguing from norms in asserting his retirement "as all Men of good Sense will wish theirs may be." The latest evidence of Shakespeare's home is the testimony in the Belott-Mountjoy case that he "laye in the house" of Mountjoy *c.* 1604. After this, there is no record as to where he lived, whether in London, Stratford or elsewhere. A retirement to Stratford in 1611 is difficult to reconcile with his purchase of the Blackfriars Gatehouse on 10 March 1613.

Whereas none of these biografictions has been confirmed by any contemporary record, they have remained in the standard account of Shakespeare's life and constitute essential elements of the biomythography of Shakespeare.

### 3.3 Reprints of Rowe's *Account of the Life &c.*

While there was little interest in Shakespeare's life before Malone began his biographical researches in the late 1770s, Shakespeare achieved iconic status. Quotations from his works were collected in common-place books and were made "to give dignity and authority" to biographies of other people (Stauffer 1941, 16). His plays were studied in secondary education, from 1728 at Westminster School. A special monument was commissioned and Scheemakers's statue was set up in Westminster Abbey in 1740 (Dobson 1992, 3). David Garrick's performances in Shakespeare plays astonished his audiences and led to large numbers of people attending at the belated Jubilee at Stratford in 1769 (Kendall 1985). Shakespeare had by now fully achieved the status of National Poet, but without any interest in the actual events in his life.

Mindful of the Act for the Encouragement of Learning (1710) which gave the printer exclusive licence to print works for fourteen years only, the Tonson family of publishers reissued the works of Shakespeare at regular intervals in the eighteenth century. In almost all of these, Rowe's *Account* was included as some kind of biographical preface. The next editor was Alexander Pope, invited in the early 1720s by the Tonsons as another prominent poet to edit the plays in a lavish new format (Murphy 2003, 64). The resultant six-volume edition was published in 1723-5, volume I with Pope's own preface (of about 5,600 words) in which he described his own critical appreciation of Shakespeare and justified his editorial methods.<sup>17</sup> Pope (or perhaps the publisher, Jacob Tonson) also included Rowe's *Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear* which was abridged and slightly rearranged. As Pope did not acknowledge these changes, it was later believed that Rowe himself had made them for the 1714 edition. Pope left the biographical comments intact but omitted some critical discussion, e.g., he cut two sets of comments about the Pedant in *Love's Labour's Lost* and the mention of the scene in French in *Henry V* (1728 i. xxxii).<sup>18</sup> These omissions make no difference to Rowe's comments about Shakespeare's life. The revised *Account* (from now on it was spelt with a double letter) consists of just over 7,000 words, of which only about 1,000 words are biographical. Pope added the text of the document regarding John Shakespeare's Coat of Arms (taken from Rymer) but made no

<sup>17</sup> Reproduced in D. Nichol Smith 1903, 47-62; and in Vickers 1974b, 403.

<sup>18</sup> Pope omitted Rowe's reference to Shakespeare's use of Latin in the plays (at 1725 i. xxvi): "some *Latin* without question . . ." (Rowe 1709, iv; Smith 1903, 3).

comments about the life beyond adding one statement to Rowe's account: "The highest [i.e. earliest] date of any I can yet find is *Romeo and Juliet* in 1597, when the author was 33 years old, and *Richard the 2d* and *3d* in the next year, viz. the 34th of his age." He probably obtained this information from the title pages of these quartos, which Tonson had obtained for him.

Pope was no more interested in the life of Shakespeare than subsequent editors who simply added their own preface to those of preceding editors. Thus Rowe's revised *Account* appeared without comment in the editions of Hammer (1743), Warburton (1747), Johnson (1765) and Johnson-Stevens (1773, 1778, 1785, 1793, 1803, 1813). At no point in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries did anyone call it a biography, even though the term was increasingly used as shown by over 150 titles in the eighteenth century in the ESTC. Malone was astonished that Rowe's *Account* remained the only attempt to offer biographical details about Shakespeare:

That almost a century should have elapsed, from the time of his death, without a single attempt having been made to discover any circumstance which could throw a light on his private life, or literary career; that, when the attempt was made [by Rowe in 1709], it should have been so imperfectly executed by the ingenious and elegant dramatist who undertook the task; and that for a period of eighty years afterwards, during which this "god of our idolatry" ranked as high among us as any poet ever did in any country, all the editors of his works, and each successive biographer, should have been contented with Mr Rowe's meagre and imperfect narrative; are circumstances which cannot be contemplated without astonishment (1821 ii. 10-11).

Like previous editors, Malone included Rowe's *Account of the Life &c.*, in his edition (1790 i. ii. 102-54) but "endeavoured, in some degree, to supply the defects of Mr. Rowe's short narrative, by adding to it copious annotations" (as reported in 1821, ii. 11n). These notes are printed in a smaller font and are so extensive that some pages have no running text. About half the notes were the result of Malone's own researches, the other half are attributed to other writers, especially Theobald. Malone further elaborated these comments "for the purpose of demolishing almost every statement [by Rowe] which it contained" (1821, i. xix). Boswell however offered an apology in the prolegomena: "I have printed the prefaces which have been prefixed to the modern editions of the poet, among which Mr. Rowe's life, as being partly prefatory and partly biographical may be classed." Rowe's *Account* had been repeated so often and its content had become so ingrained in the study of Shakespeare that Boswell conceded: "Notwithstanding its defects in the second point of view, I should not have thought myself justified in omitting it altogether" (1821, i. xix).

### 3.4 Lewis Theobald's Neglected Preface (1733)

Alexander Pope's text was heavily criticised by Lewis Theobald (1688-1744) in *Shakespeare Restor'd* (1726; Jarvis 2010, 99), for cutting passages according to his own preference – a charge which applies equally to his treatment of Rowe's *Account*. Recognised as a superior editor by Jacob Tonson in the early 1730s, Theobald was invited to produce his own edition of the plays, published in 1733 and this edition was frequently reprinted (Seary 1990, 134).<sup>19</sup> He replaced the prefaces of Rowe and Pope with his own preface, offering his own appreciation of the works (pages xv-lxix, about 53 of 68 pages). He began with an outline of Shakespeare's life, frequently citing Rowe (iv-xv), adding a few details, such as the family background described in the 1599 Grant of Arms (v), the charter for the licence awarded to the King's Men in 1603 (ix), the dates and ages of his wife and children (vi; xv), the 1614 fire at Stratford (xiv), the bequests of Hugh Clopton to the town (xii-xiii) and the fact that Queen Henrietta stayed at New Place in 1643 (xiv).<sup>20</sup>

Theobald accepts with little reserve three of Rowe's biografictions, but omits any reference to Southampton or rivalry with Jonson. He accepts the claim that Shakespeare attended the school in Stratford (iv-v), that he poached deer (vii) and that he retired to Stratford (x) where he gently satirised his neighbour, John Combe (x). Theobald is most useful in his admissions of ignorance as to Shakespeare. He states that he is unable to answer certain questions: how long he continued in his father's business (v); how long his father lived (iv-v); when he left his native Stratford (v) or when he relinquished the Stage (ix). Theobald dismisses the suggestion of John Roberts (1729, 45) that Shakespeare's papers were burnt by an ignorant baker of Warwick or in the Great Fire of 1614 (xiv-xv). Nor is he convinced by the usual account of John Shakespeare, which he relates, beginning with "we are told" (iv) and ending with "Be this as it will" (v). Theobald made many incisive comments about the lack of biographical material for Shakespeare, but since he did not advertise that he was writing a biography, few commentators have paid attention to these biographical insights. Theobald's admissions of uncertainty have been lost on modern commentators. Schoenbaum (1970, 136-7) merely notes that Theobald added some details about New Place.

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis Theobald. 1733. *The Works of Shakespeare: In Seven Volumes. Collated with the Oldest Copies, and Corrected; with Notes, Explanatory, and Critical: by Mr. Theobald*. Theobald's was the most reprinted edition of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, appearing in 1740, 1752, 1757, 1762, 1767, 1772, 1773, and 1777 (Murphy 2003, 76).

<sup>20</sup> Theobald states that King Charles the First's queen stayed three weeks at New Place, but Halliwell-Phillips established that the sojourn lasted only three days from 11 to 13 July 1643 (*Outlines* 1886, ii., 108).

Shortly after Theobald's edition appeared, Peter Scheemakers's monument to Shakespeare was set up in Westminster Abbey in 1740. However, Theobald's insights into the life of Shakespeare were ignored when a separate 37-page pamphlet in duodecimo format of Rowe's *Account* was published anonymously under the title *The life of Mr. William Shakespear. Whose monument was lately erected in Westminster-Abbey, at the expence of the publick* (1743, London). The differently worded title was in keeping with the increased public interest in the life of Shakespeare and in biography generally. Schoenbaum dismisses this as "no more than a catchpenny attempt to capitalize on public interest in the Bard" (1970, 137). While it added nothing new to the existing material for the life of Shakespeare, it spread notions that Shakespeare attended school in Stratford, was caught deer-poaching and was patronised by Southampton. The next two major editors of Shakespeare, Sir Thomas Hanmer and Dr William Warburton, included Rowe's *Account* as a biographical preface. Hanmer reprinted it without comment in his "Oxford edition" (1744 volume I, pages xxix-xliii; placed after Pope's Preface). An abridged version of Rowe's *Account* was included by Warburton (1747 volume I, pages xxxix-lx), who had earlier referred to Rowe's "meagre account of the Author's Life" (viii). Like Hanmer, he added nothing to the biographical material of Shakespeare's life.

The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the increase of biographical surveys and dictionaries, in which Shakespeare featured. Theophilus Cibber (1703-1758) in his four-volume *Lives of the Poets* (1753)<sup>21</sup> was aware of interest in the lives of famous writers: "All men have discovered a curiosity to know the little stories and particularities of a great genius," but in the case of Shakespeare, he notes "but few things known of this great man; few incidents of his life have descended to posterity" (i. 125). Cibber gave a significant account of Shakespeare in about 6,000 words, based on Rowe's *Account*. Cibber includes a new anecdote, being well-aware of the tortuous route by which it was passed down:

Here I cannot forbear relating a story which Sir William Davenant told Mr. Betterton, who communicated it to Mr. Rowe; Rowe told it Mr. Pope, and Mr. Pope told it to Dr. Newton, the late editor of Milton, and from a gentleman, who heard it from him, 'tis here related (1753 i. 130).

This explanation introduces the story about Shakespeare holding horses at the stage door:

At that time coaches not being in use, and as gentlemen were accustomed to ride to the playhouse, Shakespear, driven to the last necessity, went to the playhouse door, and pick'd up a little money by taking care of the gentlemens horses who came to the play (1753 i. 130).

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<sup>21</sup> Theophilus Cibber. 1753. *The lives of the poets of Great Britain and Ireland*. London: R. Griffiths. Samuel Johnson asserted that Robert Shiel(d)s was actually the author of *The Lives of the Poets* (a point accepted by Leonard Ashley. 1965. *Colley Cibber*. New York: Twayne, 156).

This story does not add to our understanding of how Shakespeare joined a theatrical company. It was doubted by Richard Farmer in 1767, who found it as ridiculous as the suggestion that Shakespeare had no learning when he first came to London. Farmer praises himself for salvaging Shakespeare's reputation regarding his knowledge of the classics: "had I not stepped in to his rescue, poor Shakespeare had been stript as naked of ornament, as when he first *held Horses* at the door of the Playhouse."<sup>22</sup> The story was also rejected by Malone (1790, i. i. 155-7). It thus holds no value for Shakespeare's literary biography. The convoluted explanation of its provenance and the limited value of the anecdote serve to reinforce Cibber's original statement that there are "but few things known of this great man." One major addition was the first publication of the text of Shakespeare's will, a copy of which had been discovered at Stratford by Joseph Greene in 1747. The will, however, failed to give any insight into Shakespeare's literary career, mentioning no books and no contact with the theatre beyond the interlinear addition on the final page "to my ffellowes John Hemynges, Richard Burbage and Henry Cundell xxvis viijd A peece to buy them Ringes."

A less important anecdote, and one which has not attracted much credibility, was recorded in 1762 by an anonymous contributor to the *British Magazine* who was lodging at the White Lion in Stratford and was informed of Shakespeare's involvement in a competition with some "deep drinkers and merry fellows" at the nearby village of Bidford and was "forced to take up his lodgings" under a crab-tree for some hours (WS ii. 286-7). The anecdote was embellished by John Jordan c. 1770 (WS ii. 291-2).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, critics were less concerned with the life and more with extolling Shakespeare's greatness as a poet. He was called: "the Glory of the British nation" in *Beauties of Biography* (1777, ii. 121); "the glory of his age and of his country" by Joseph Towers in *British Biography* (1766-72, iv. 106). Another compiler, John Berkenhout, called him "The Prince of Dramatic Poets and the Glory of this Nation" in *Biographia Literaria* (1777, 397). George Sael in *Moral Biography* called him "the father of the English theatre, the great poet of nature, and the Glory of the British nation" (1798, 160); John Aitken in *General Biography* called him "the favourite of a whole enlightened nation" by (1799-1815, ix. 121). The similarity of sentiment and of wording indicates the derivative nature of these biographical dictionaries, which added nothing new to the life. In 1762, *The British Plutarch* entry on "the Life of William Shakespear" (v. 1-28) was mainly concerned with Shakespeare's reputation. Rowe's claim that Shakespeare personally enjoyed "the Queen's bounty" was expanded in

<sup>22</sup> Richard Farmer. 1767. *An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare: Addressed to Joseph Cradock, Esq.* 1767. The comment comes early in the preface. Farmer's essay first came out in 1767 and was expanded into a second edition in the same year. This expanded version also appeared as a third edition in 1789 and was included in Steevens's 1793 edition (*Johnson-Steevens* 4) and in later editions.

another encyclopaedic entry about Shakespeare, which appeared in *Biographia Britannica* in 1763 (volume vi. part i. 3627-39). In this version, the contributor “P” (possibly Philip Nichols) generally added the conjecture that Elizabeth not only forgave Shakespeare in person for his youthful transgression in the deer park but also intervened directly with Sir Thomas Lucy, a story which was frequently repeated by later writers. Helen Hackett dismisses this tale as an invention (2009, 25-27). The entry was repeated almost verbatim in *Biographia Dramatica* (1782).

With Shakespeare’s growing popularity during the latter part of the eighteenth-century, many people visited Stratford-upon-Avon in numbers in search of his birthplace and church monument, but little emerged that was new for the biographical materials concerning Shakespeare. Altick (1965, 42-5) describes how the “poet-worship” accorded to Shakespeare resulted in the owner of New Place being so angry with the flood of visitors wishing to see Shakespeare’s mulberry tree that he chopped it down in 1759 (ten years before Garrick’s Stratford Jubilee). The timber from the tree was apparently acquired by a local business man, George Cooper, who for the next forty years sold mementoes made from the wood.<sup>23</sup>

Another edition of Shakespeare’s works was commissioned by the Tonson family in the 1760s, this time from the great Dr. Samuel Johnson, which appeared in 1765. The edition included a large amount of prefatory material written by previous editors (Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer and Warburton). Johnson only “retained the authour’s life [from Rowe] though not written with much elegance or spirit” (1765, i. sig. C8<sup>r</sup>) as little or nothing about Shakespeare’s life. He added the text of the Will and the anecdote about holding horses (Smith 1903, 143). This edition was lauded for the great doctor’s brilliant prefatory essay, but it produced little new either textually or biographically (Murphy 2003, 80-1). It is remarkable that a writer such as Johnson who so promoted the genre of literary biography should ignore the life story of such a greatly admired writer.

In 1774, the House of Lords adjusted the fourteen-year rule in copyright when deciding the case of *Donaldson v Beckett*. The Lords ruled that copyright could be limited in its duration.<sup>24</sup> One of the printers to benefit from this judgment was John Bell (1745-1831), who published the works of a large number of authors, including his *Edition of Shakespeare’s Plays* in 1773-4. To this, he added a ninth volume of poems, which was introduced with a “Life of Shakespeare” by Francis Gentleman (1774, ix. 5-36). This brief account, like Rowe’s, contains mainly critical

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<sup>23</sup> Reported in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 70 (1791) 602-3. The *Stratford Observer* mentioned that “a tea caddy made from the famous mulberry tree” was sold at auction for £13, 750 (14 November 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ronan Deazley. 2004. *On the Origin of the Right to Copy: Charting the Movement of Copyright Law in Eighteenth Century Britain (1695-1775)*. Oxford: Hart, 191-212.

judgments, regarding both the genius of Shakespeare and the best readings, with a few biographical comments. He warns against excessive admiration:

We are willing to allow an author of Shakespeare's merit every secular homage, but what we have now mentioned [the Stratford Jubilee] is beyond doubt a degree of profane idolatry, which is even carried to popish extravagance by searching after, and most curiously preserving, in different shapes, pieces of a mulberry tree planted by his own hand (ix. 27).

Like Johnson, Gentleman adopts a biographical approach to the works: "As to his character, it must be fished out of his writings" (ix. 8). He is cautious about Shakespeare's religious views, suggesting that he followed the established church "though some strokes of popery appear in *Hamlet*" (ix. 28). He also finds a contradiction of Shakespeare apparently promulgating "the noblest ideas of general and particular liberty" in some plays while the English history plays promote the argument of "Divine right and passive obedience" (ix. 29). Paulina Kewes finds that these opinions anticipate Historicist arguments about Shakespeare by two centuries (2002, 70). Bell's edition was important for bringing the works of Shakespeare to a wider reading audience by its lower price. Francis Gentleman's "Life of Shakespeare" also reached a wider audience, but offered nothing in the way of new research and only a few suggestions of Shakespeare's character "fished" from the plays. In his very limited way, Bell was slightly ahead of Malone.

### 3.5 Edward Capell's Neglected Insights (1767)

Not all editors simply reprinted Rowe's *Account of the Life*. Edward Capell eschewed the use of re-printing prefatory material altogether in his edition of 1767-8 (10 vols, octavo). Capell had been working in isolation on the texts of Shakespeare from the late 1730s. After the dedication to Lord Grafton (then First Lord of the Treasury), Capell wrote his own introduction, offering a detailed analysis of the sources for each play. Capell added a considerable amount of new information from the Stationers' Register and took note of Farmer who had discovered the passage about Shakespeare in *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury* by Francis Meres (which he cites in a note on pages 7-8).<sup>25</sup> Capell lamented the lack of biographical material necessary for a life of Shakespeare, the lack of personal records which by now were beyond recovery:

The truth is, the occurrences of this most interesting life (we mean, the private ones) are irrecoverably lost to us, the friendly office of registering them was overlook'd by those who alone had it in their power, and our enquiries about them now must prove vain and thrown away (1767 i. 71-2).

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<sup>25</sup> Francis Meres. 1598. *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury* London: C. Burbie. This book was first mentioned by Richard Farmer in his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767, 24).

This insight has been lost on many later biographers. Capell merely hopes that some kind of external biography might be written: “his publick [life] as a writer would have consequences more important” (i. 72). Capell realises that there are important questions for a literary biography of Shakespeare:

When he commenc'd a writer for the stage, and in which play; what the order of the rest of them, and (if that be discoverable) what the occasion; and, lastly, for which of the numerous theatres that were then subsisting they were severally written at first, are the particulars that should chiefly engage the attention of a writer of Shakespeare's Life, and be the principal subject of his enquiry (i. 72).

Capell encourages the biographer to include not just the texts of related documents but also “such anecdotes of common notoriety as the writer's judgment shall tell him are worth regard” (i. 73). Capell's final point is prophetic: “the world of letters [would be] enrich'd by the happy acquisition, of a masterly Life of Shakespeare” (i. 73-4).

Edward Capell's edition was published in time for the delayed Stratford Jubilee in 1769. Capell is fully aware that the standard *Account* of Shakespeare (attributed to Rowe) was inadequate as it failed to give an overall or coherent picture of Shakespeare's life as a dramatist. Clearly, Capell, after forty years study of Shakespeare, found himself unequal to the task of writing a literary biography of Shakespeare. After his edition came out, Capell worked for a further decade during which time he repeatedly clashed with George Steevens over textual matters (Murphy 2003, 89-91). Nevertheless, Capell finally published *Notes and Various Readings of Shakespeare* in 1779-83, the second volume of which (divided into two parts) gives his own rather brief attempt at establishing a chronology of the plays (ii. ii. 183-6; reprinted in Vickers 1981, 252-3). Capell's attempt at an outline chronology of the works appeared slightly after Malone's first *Attempt to Ascertain* was published in 1778. The third volume of Capell's *Notes and Various Readings*, was published posthumously with the sub-title *The School of Shakespeare*, and gives extracts from contemporary books, either as sources or as contemporary history – the “most thorough-going scholarly exercise in contextualising interpretation of Shakespeare before Malone.”<sup>26</sup> Overall, Capell issued a challenge for a man of letters to write a Life of Shakespeare, even though the material could only deal with the external events of his life.

During this period, George Steevens (1736-1800) had been comparing the readings in the First Folio with those in the extant quartos. The Tonsons published Steevens's text of the twenty known quarto versions in 1766 and invited him to assist Johnson with a new edition of the complete works which appeared in 1773 (known as *Johnson-Steevens* 1) According to Murphy (2003, 84), this edition was almost entirely Steevens's work and that the Great Doctor's name

<sup>26</sup> Marcus Walsh. 1998. “Eighteenth Century Editing, ‘Appropriation’, and Interpretation.” *Shakespeare Survey* 51, 136.

was included on the title page as a major sales inducement.<sup>27</sup> Like Johnson, Steevens reprinted the prefaces of most previous editors of Shakespeare including Rowe's *Account of the Life &c.* He mentions (1778, i. 203) the intention of William Oldys (who had died in 1761) to write "a regular life of our author" and reports some of Oldys's notes, e.g., that Shakespeare had played the part of Adam in *As You Like It* and that his younger brother visited London. Most importantly, he included Malone's earliest *Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the Plays attributed to Shakespeare were written* (1778, i. 269–346). Steevens delegated to Malone the task of editing a supplement in two volumes to his 1778 edition to include several apocryphal plays, the narrative poems, and the sonnets.

Overall, there were so few documented references to Shakespeare's life known by 1780 that George Steevens, the most respected editor of his day, was able to declare that scarcely anything was known for sure about Shakespeare:

All that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is –that he was born in Stratford upon Avon, –married and had children there, went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays, –returned to Stratford, made his will, died and was buried. I must confess my readiness to combat every unfounded supposition respecting the particular occurrences of his life. STEEVENS (Malone 1780 ii. 653).<sup>28</sup>

This dictum has been quoted frequently, often by those who wish to counter-claim that much information is known.

In their own ways, both Edward Capell and George Steevens issued a challenge about the writing of a biography of Shakespeare: Capell gave guidelines as to how an impersonal or external biography could be constructed; Steevens believed that no biography was possible. Malone took up these challenges and followed Capell's recommendations. How Malone attempted to meet this challenge through his scholarly investigations and the reasons for his ultimate failure will be analysed in the next chapter.

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<sup>27</sup> George Steevens. 1773. *The plays of William Shakespeare*. Steevens issued a revised edition in 1778 (known as *Johnson-Steevens 2*), with the help of Isaac Reed and Edward Malone. Further editions were published in 1785 (*Johnson-Steevens 3*) and in 1793 (*Johnson-Steevens 4*). After Steevens's death in 1800, Reed used Steevens's text as the basis of the first variorum edition (*Johnson-Steevens 5*, 1803), and of the second variorum edition in 1813 (*Johnson-Steevens 6*, edited by William Harris, who took over the project after the death of Isaac Reed in 1807). All of these editions contained Rowe's *Account*. In fact, almost all the prefatory material in these editions was simply taken from previous editions.

<sup>28</sup> This note is buried in the commentary to Sonnet 93. The name "STEEVENS" occurs in upper case according to the customary practice at the time of indicating the author of such a note.

## Chapter 4:

### Doubting the myths

#### Malone's unwritten life of Shakespeare

Edmund Malone (1744-1812) adopted a sceptical approach towards the study of Shakespeare's life. For his research, discussion, and publications, he is highly regarded by modern scholars. Schoenbaum refers to him as "perhaps the greatest of all Shakespearian scholars" (1970, ix). Similarly, Wells & Taylor describe him as "the most talented and influential of all scholars to have dedicated his energies to the explication of Shakespeare's life and work" (1987, 55). Marcus Walsh pays tribute to Malone's "brilliant contextualizing scholarship" (2010, 160):

To the existing body of known and reproduced documents associated with the bard, Malone added a number of deeds and several wills, including a new and accurate text of Shakespeare's own will, and transcripts, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, of the wills of John Hall, husband of Susannah Shakespeare, the playwright's daughter, and of Thomas Nashe, husband of his granddaughter Elizabeth (Walsh 2010, 185).

Starting from scratch, Malone spent forty years establishing what was known about Shakespeare and where it was documented. In this respect, his approach was in line with the Enlightenment, and David Hume's scepticism regarding belief and evidence.<sup>1</sup> Malone instigated the search for chronological development in Shakespeare's biography and established periods in history of the English theatre. He intended to take up the challenge of Edward Capell and George Steevens in constructing a life of Shakespeare. However, as Walsh noted, many contemporary documents published by Malone relate to contextual matters: Shakespeare's family, life in Stratford and Warwickshire, and the history of the theatre in English, but little appertains directly to Shakespeare's life. His chronology of the plays, an essential pre-requisite for any literary biography, remained in his own estimation conjectural. Malone's great ambition, announced in 1790, was to write the definitive life of Shakespeare as "one uniform and connected narrative"

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<sup>1</sup> Malone is unlikely to have met David Hume (1711-1776), whose final years were spent in Edinburgh. However, Malone probably read Hume's "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy," *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, London, 1748.

but this ambition remained unfulfilled on his death in 1812. He conceded that the known materials were not sufficient for a coherent narrative and doubted that such materials would ever be recoverable. His vast array of materials relating to Shakespeare's life and times were published posthumously by his friend and literary executor, James Boswell Jr., in the edition of 1821, which became known as the "third variorum."

#### 4.1 Attempt at a chronology of the works

Malone's earliest contribution to the biographical study of Shakespeare was his *Attempt to Ascertain the Order in Which the Plays Attributed to Shakspeare Were Written*, which was published in *Johnson-Steevens 2* (1778, i. 269–346) when Malone was part of Steevens's editorial team. Malone revised and expanded the *Attempt to Ascertain* for his own edition (1790 volume I, part I, 261-386) and another expanded version was published in the posthumous edition (1821, ii. 288-468). Previous editors of Shakespeare had shown little interest in dating the plays: Rowe had vaguely wondered which plays of Shakespeare were among his earliest (1709, i. vii; 4). Pope suggested that Shakespeare would have shown gradual improvement in his plays (quoted by Smith 1903, 51). Dr Johnson noted in his preface: "By what gradations of improvement he proceeded, is not easily known; for the chronology of his works is yet unsettled" (1765, i. sig. C3<sup>v</sup>; Smith 1903, 137-8). Capell had emphasised this same point in his preface but was aware that the chronology might not be "discoverable" (1767, 71-2). Other editors such as Theobald, Hanmer and Warburton did not even mention the possibility of chronology.

Malone accepted this challenge both for his chronology of Shakespeare's works and for his *Rise and Progress of the English Stage* (1790 i. i). Echoing the words of Johnson and Capell, Malone explained why the attempt should be made:

[S]urely it is no incurious speculation to mark the gradations by which he rose from mediocrity to the summit of excellence; from artless and uninteresting dialogues to those unparalleled compositions, which have rendered him the delight and wonder of successive ages" (1778, i. 270-1; repeated in 1790, i. i. 262 and again in 1821, ii. 290).

Malone in a footnote states that he is not presenting a "regular scale of gradual improvement" or that such a scale would be evident – even if Shakespeare had left "a chronological list of his dramas" (1780, i. 270 note a). In a note on *Cymbeline* (1790, i. i. 357), he reported with sadness that Heminges and Condell "manifestly paid no attention to chronological arrangement" when compiling the First Folio according to genre rather than in the chronological sequence of performance preferred by Jonson (1616). Malone outlines his own method "to collect into one view, from his several dramas, and from the ancient tracts in which they are mentioned, or alluded to, all the circumstances that can throw any light on this new and curious enquiry" (1778,

i. 272; repeated verbatim 1790, i. ii. 264; 1821, ii. 292). He also read other critics carefully and made much use of Thomas Tyrwhitt's *Observations and Conjectures upon Some Passages of Shakespeare* (1766) and Richard Farmer's *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767). Malone inferred that Shakespeare did not start writing plays before 1591 (1778, i. 276-7) as his name was absent from the reviews of William Webbe (*A Discourse of Poetrie* 1586, STC 25172), George Puttenham (*The Arte of English Poesie* 1589, STC 20519), and Sir John Harington ("Brief Apologie of Poetrie" 1590-1):<sup>2</sup>

If even *Love's Labour's Lost* had then appeared, which was probably his first dramattick composition, is it imaginable, that Harington should have mentioned the Cambridge Pedantius, and *The Play of Cards* (which last he tells us was a *London* comedy) and have passed by, unnoticed, the new prodigy of the dramattick world? (1778, i. 278).

Malone thus placed Shakespeare's earliest play in 1591, immediately after Harington published his essay. Malone accepted Tyrwhitt's identification of Shakespeare with the "upstart crow" in *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) soon after Shakespeare began his career as a professional writer. Malone considers the limited evidence for each play in turn, noting which plays were mentioned by Meres in 1598, and whether they were published in quarto or recorded in performance. After reviewing such evidence as was available, Malone felt able to offer a table of dates for the plays, ranging from 1591-1614. The chronologies of Chambers (1930) and Wells & Taylor (1987) accept Malone's starting point and generally adopt his sequence and dating.

However, Malone was aware of the difficulties from the outset: the title of his essay, *An Attempt to Ascertain the Order*, indicated his own caution. He was very reluctant to draw firm conclusions: "However, after the most diligent enquiries, very few particulars have been recovered, respecting his private life, or literary history" (1778, i. 270). He continues: "The materials for ascertaining the order in which his plays were written are indeed so few, that, it is to be feared, nothing very decisive can be produced on this subject" (1778, i. 271). Therefore, Malone concedes, "probability alone is pretended to." He expands this point in his 1790 version:

The silence and inaccuracy of those persons, who, after his death, had the revisal of his papers, will perhaps for ever prevent our attaining to any thing like proof on this head (1790, i. i. 264).

Malone originally suggested that *Love's Labour's Lost* was the earliest play due to the "frequent rhymes," "its artless and desultory dialogue, and the irregularity of the composition" (1778, i. 280-1). Then he gave a later date for the play to 1594, even though his view of the play remained unchanged (1790, i. 294; and again in 1821, ii. 327 with expanded footnote). In his revised essay (1790, ii. 296), Malone changed his criteria for dating the earliest play, stating that *Love's*

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Harington (1561-1612) published "Preface, or rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie" prefixed to his translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591, STC 746).

*Labour's Lost* must have come after *Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as there is "more attempt at delineation of character" than in other comedies. None of these criteria (incidence of rhyme, desultoriness of dialogue or extent of characterisation) are established indicators of time of composition.

Malone places *Romeo and Juliet* in 1595, ignoring Tyrwhitt's suggestion that the Nurse ("Tis since the earthquake now eleven years", *Romeo & Juliet*, 1. 3. 23) was referring to the earthquake of April 1580, thus dating the play eleven years later to 1591. Malone believes that Shakespeare in the Nurse's speech is simply portraying "the characteristic traits, which distinguish old people of the lower class who delight in enumerating a multitude of minute circumstances that have no relation to the business immediately under their consideration" (1778, i. 290-2). His initial date for *Hamlet* was 1596 (1778, i. 292), based on the allusion by Thomas Lodge to "the ghost which cried so miserably at the theatre, like an oyster-wife, Hamlet, revenge!" After the discovery of another allusion to a play about Hamlet, which had been made by Thomas Nashe in his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (STC 12273, 1589), Malone postulated another play about Hamlet by another author. Malone later revised his preferred date for *Hamlet* to 1600 by assuming that the reference in Lodge was to the assumed earlier play on the same subject (1821, ii. 373).<sup>3</sup>

He presents many tenuous criteria for dating plays. After noting no reference to either *Timon of Athens* or *Coriolanus* before 1623; Malone assigns these plays to 1609 and 1610, "a period, to which we are not led by any particular circumstance to attribute any other of his works" (1778, i. 337). Malone dates *Macbeth* to 1606 mainly by linking it with the welcome given by three weird sisters to King James upon his arrival in Oxford; it is possible that the two events were not connected or that *Macbeth* was earlier. Just as arbitrarily as with *Coriolanus*, Malone assigned a date of 1607 to *Julius Caesar*, shortly after William Alexander's play of the same name had been performed and published: "This, I imagine, was prior to our author's performance." Malone's use of the phrase "I imagine" signals his own conjecture, to which he adds a further: "[N]o contemporary writer was daring enough to enter the lists with him in his life-time, or to model into a drama a subject that had already employed his pen" (1778, i. 332). Malone continued to maintain this date, even though he later admitted that Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* might not have post-dated Alexander's play (1821, ii. 445).

Malone expanded his *Attempt to Ascertain* from 77 pages to 126 pages for his 1790 edition. He made a small number of corrections to his suggested dates as he explains in his preface:

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of an earlier play, referred to as the *Ur-Hamlet*, has generally found acceptance among scholars but the latest Arden editors of the play conclude their discussion by stating that a version of Shakespeare's play might date back to 1589 (Thompson, Ann and Neil Taylor, eds. 2006. *Hamlet*. London: Thomson Learning, 44-7).

On a careful revisal of that essay [written in 1778], which, I hope, is improved as well as considerably enlarged, I had the satisfaction of observing that I had found reason to attribute but two plays to an era widely distant from that to which they had been originally ascribed; and to make only a minute change in the arrangement of a few others (1790, i. lxi-lxii).

From the original essay, Malone makes only two significant changes of dates: he brought forward the date of *The Taming of the Shrew* from 1606 to 1594; and he put back *The Winter's Tale* from 1594 to 1604. In the preface, he mentions one further change:

Some information, however, which has been obtained since that essay was printed in its present form, inclines me to think, that one of the two plays which I allude to, *The Winter's Tale*, was a still later production than I have supposed; for I now have good reason to believe, that it was first exhibited in the year 1613; and that consequently it must have been one of our poet's latest works (1790, i. i. lxi-lxii).

Malone saw an allusion to *A Winter's Tale* in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and he associates a first performance with recent composition. Malone also finds a reference in Henry Herbert's *Account Book of the Revels* which states that *A Winter's Tale* had been licensed by Sir George Buc, who did not start licensing plays before 1610 (according to Malone's researches). Malone is making certain assumptions which cannot be verified: an alternative is that the play was written earlier, but not performed in public until 1610. Regarding the three parts of *Henry VI*, Malone reported in the earlier *Attempt* (1778, i. 281-2) that he once thought that Part 1 had been composed as a "prequel" about two years after Parts 2 and 3, but had come to accept Dr Johnson's assertion that they were composed in sequence in 1591-2. Malone reviewed his reasoning in a separately published *Dissertation on the Three Parts of "King Henry VI"* in 1787.<sup>4</sup>

A further, expanded version of the *Attempt to Ascertain the Order* was published by Boswell Jr. in volume II of the 1821 edition of the works pp 288-468, where it follows the incomplete "Life of Shakespeare" (considered later in this chapter). At 179 pages, this version is almost half as long again as the second version published in 1790. He retained his note of pessimism:

The period at which Shakespeare began to write for the stage will, I fear, never be precisely ascertained, unless some manuscript or printed document, relating to him, which has hitherto eluded all our researches, shall fortunately be hereafter discovered" (1821, ii. 167).

He adjusted the dates of seventeen plays slightly; only the dates of three plays have been radically revised by subsequent scholars. Malone (1821, ii. 388-401) dates *Henry VIII* to 1603, discarding Sir Henry Wotton's description of the play as "new" in his description of the fire at

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Malone. 1787. *A Dissertation on the Three Parts of "King Henry VI", tending to shew that those plays were not written originally by Shakspeare*. London: Henry Baldwin. This dissertation was printed in the 1790 edition (vol. vi. 375-429 after the text of *1, 2, 3 Henry VI* and before the text of *Richard III*).

the Globe in 1613. Malone is aware of Wotton's letter but considers that the performance in 1613 was a revival. Malone's position is tenable. Secondly, Malone originally dated *Twelfth Night* to 1614 but revised this to 1607 (1821 ii. 441-445) due to Maria's reference to "the new map with the augmentation of the Indies" – an apparent allusion to *Eastward Ho!* (performed in 1604; published in 1607), Dekker's *Westward Ho!* (published 1607) and Marston's *What You Will*. Malone was unaware of Manningham's Diary which records a performance of the play (or at least of a similar play) at the Middle Temple on 2 February 1602.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, Malone revised his original date for *Othello* from 1611 to 1604 after he discovered a reference to a performance in that year; Boswell was "unable to discover upon what evidence he knew this important and decisive fact" (1821, ii. 404n).<sup>6</sup> Malone continued to date *Julius Caesar* to 1607, strongly that Shakespeare composed it shortly before *Antony & Cleopatra*, which was listed in the Stationers' Register in 1608, noting that neither play was published until 1623.<sup>7</sup>

Although Malone made exceptional efforts in the search for contemporary records, the documentary gaps were so large that his chronology remained conjectural. Thus he retained the sequence of plays in the First Folio (Comedies, then Histories, then Tragedies) in line with most previous editors. At the end of the first version of his essay, Malone confirms that he is only making an attempt:

If the dates here assigned to our author's plays should not in every instance, bring with them conviction of their propriety, let it be remembered that this is a subject on which conviction cannot at this day be obtained; and that the observations now submitted to the publick, do not pretend to any higher title than that of "An ATTEMPT to ascertain the chronology of the dramas of Shakspeare" (original emphasis; 1778, i. 346).

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<sup>5</sup> Manningham's Diary was discovered in the British Library by John Payne Collier, who made the reference known in 1831 in *The History of English Dramatic Poetry* (i. 320). The difficulty for modern writers in dating this play has been illustrated by the quotation from Potter (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Malone may have had access to the Revels Accounts of 1604-5, where *The Moor of Venis* is recorded as one of seven Shakespeare plays performed "by the King's Maiesties plaiers" before the King at the Banqueting Hall, Whitehall in November and December 1604. The Revels Accounts were not published until 1842 by Peter Cunningham. They are accepted as genuine by Chambers, who reviews the controversy surrounding their publication (*ES* 1923, iv, 135-141).

<sup>7</sup> Malone was unaware of the 1599 diary entry by Thomas Platter, whose description of *Julius Caesar* in performance is usually taken to be Shakespeare's play. Platter's account was first published in 1899 by Gustav Binz, "Londoner Theater und Schauspiele im Jahr 1599," *Anglia* 22, 456-64. Chambers (1930, i. 397) and Wells & Taylor (1987, 121) believe that Platter was referring to an early performance of Shakespeare's play. As the play was not listed by Meres, Wells & Taylor are confident that it was composed in 1599. Ernest Schanzer (1956) argues that Platter was referring to a different play ("Thomas Platter's Observations on the Elizabethan Stage." *Notes and Queries* 201, 466-7). Doubt remains as to whether Platter saw Shakespeare's play or whether it was composed in 1599.

Malone expressed a hope for the future which he himself had not been able to attain:

Should the errors and deficiencies of this essay invite others to deeper and more successful researches, the end proposed by it will be attained: and he who offers the present arrangement of Shakespeare's dramas, will be happy to transfer the slender portion of credit that may result from the novelty of his undertaking, to some future claimant, who may be supplied with ampler materials, and endued with a superior degree of antiquarian sagacity (1778, i. 346).

This warning remained true when it was repeated in 1790 (i. i. 395) and in 1821 (ii. 467). The following are some examples of Malone's uncertainty about his chronology:

- "it is probable that our author's plays were written nearly in the following succession" (1821, ii. 292);
- "it appeared to me probable that the two elder dramas [i.e. *The Contention* of 1594 and *The True Tragedy* of 1595], which comprehend the greater part of *King Henry VI.* were written by the author of [*The Troublesome Reign of*] *King John*, whoever he was" (1821, ii. 313);
- "it seems to me probable that it [the deposition scene] was written with the rest [of *Richard II*], and suppressed in the printed copy of 1597" (1821, ii. 326);
- "I think it probable that our author's first draft of this play [*Love's Labour's Lost*] was written in and before 1594" (1821, ii. 328);
- "it is extremely probable that this tragedy [*Romeo & Juliet*] was first acted at the Curtain Theatre in the autumn of 1596" (1821, ii. 345);
- "it is extremely probable that it [*Henry VIII*] was written" in 1602 or 1603 (1821, ii.394);
- It is "probable that the three plays of *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *Macbeth*, were written about the same time, and in the order in which I have placed them" (1821, ii. 452).

Malone was aware that to some readers the "inquiry will appear a tedious and barren speculation" (1821, ii. 468). Despite these shortcomings and Malone's own cautionary words, most modern editors accept that an outline is possible and follow his approach to dating the plays.

Malone realised that a chronology of the works was an essential pre-requisite for a literary biography of Shakespeare. His approach and his findings have been very influential on subsequent commentators such as Dowden (1874) and editors such as Chambers (1930) and Wells & Taylor (1987). However, the following general criticisms can be made not only against Malone but also against these editors:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In this section I expand criticisms made in *Dating Shakespeare's Plays* (ed. K. Gilvary, 2010).

- (i) Malone's starting date of 1590-1 depends on Harington's omission of Shakespeare's name or plays from his "Brief Apologie of Poetrie" (1590-1). Malone's assumption is that Shakespeare must always have been such an outstanding playwright that he would have attracted the attention of these writers. This assumption is open to question on a number of points. Firstly, most of Harington's tract engages with Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*, both of which were written in rural seclusion. Malone may not have been aware that Harington was banished from court for much of the 1580s at the queen's command, not to return until he had completed his translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. His tract was written during his period of rustication. Thus Harington, absent from London until 1591, was not a reliable authority for recent performances of plays at court or in the London theatres. Secondly, Harington, Puttenham and Webbe were dealing not primarily with dramatists, but with poets; they might have heard of Shakespeare as a dramatist but not mentioned him. Thirdly, Shakespeare may have been writing plays during the so-called "lost years" 1585-92 without any of them being performed (Honigmann 1982). Fourthly, it is also possible that Shakespeare was a member of a playing company such as the Queen's Men, who performed plays without any attribution of the playwright's name (McMillan & MacLean 1998, 84-93).
- (ii) Acceptance of the assumption by editors from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries that the texts in many quartos were "surrepticiously and lamely Printed in his Life-time" (Rowe 1709, i. x; Steevens 1766; Pollard 1909; Chambers 1930). More recently, many quartos have been accepted as early versions by Shakespeare (Maguire, *Shakespeare's Suspect Texts* 1996; Erne *Shakespeare as a Literary Dramatist* 2003; Jolly, *The First Two Quartos of Hamlet* 2014).
- (iii) Shakespeare produced one version of a play and that any variations were due to outside interference. However, it is possible that Shakespeare produced different versions of the same play, possibly years apart, as Wells & Taylor concluded for *King Lear* (*Works* 1987).
- (iv) Shakespeare confined himself to working on one or two plays at a time; it is possible that Shakespeare would have a number of plays in preparation at the same time; or that he would have ceased working on one play mid-composition only to resume it at a later stage.
- (v) Plays were performed shortly after composition: "it is improbable that he should have suffered it [his earliest attempt at a play] to lie in his closet, without endeavouring to derive some profit by it" (1821, ii. 308). It remains a possibility that Shakespeare completed a play which was not performed for some time or even in his lifetime: there

are no references to either the composition or performance of *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens* and *All's Well* before their first publication in the First Folio of 1623.

- (iv) Inconsistent application of the word “date” as referring to original composition, first performance, or first publication; these distinctions were made by Thomson and Taylor who imply that there could be as many as nine dates for *Hamlet* – three each for Q1, Q2 and F1 (2006, 44).
- (v) Assumption that Shakespeare began by revising the works of others (generally discarded) and unaware or unwilling to accept co-authorship or collaboration, as was established by Vickers (2002) and is now accepted by biographers such as Potter (2012).
- (vi) Subjective criteria used for accepting some contemporary allusions, e.g., to Essex in the phrase “the general of our gracious empress” (*Henry V*, Chorus to Act V) or rejecting others e.g., to the possible allusion to the 1580 earthquake in *Romeo and Juliet* which he dismissed in 1778, but later found “not so improbable” (1821 ii. 350).
- (vii) The conjecture that more rhyme in a play is an indication of earlier composition. *Love's Labour's Lost*, which has most rhyme,<sup>9</sup> is now placed in the mid-1590s. While rhyme is no longer accepted as an indication of date, other stylistic variations are now taken as evidence of change in the author's style (i.e. not as a conscious control over his style).
- (viii) Over-reliance on Meres for negative evidence that Shakespeare had not composed *Hamlet* by 1598 as he made no mention it. In fact, Meres did not refer to any play called *Hamlet* (whether Shakespeare's or by anyone else) even though there were references to a play about Hamlet in 1589, 1594 and 1596. The play might have been composed by Shakespeare before then but remained unknown to the public. Malone suspected that Meres was not a particularly reliable authority, noting Meres's omission of *The Taming of the Shrew* was not sufficient to prove that Shakespeare had not written his version by 1598 (1790, i. i. 293). Malone also observed that Meres “enumerates Jonson among the writers of *tragedy*, though no tragedy of his writing, of so early a date [by 1598], is now extant” (1790, i. i. 399).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Chambers's Table II 'Rhyme' (1930 ii. 399) puts the incidence of rhyming lines in *Love's Labour's Lost* at 62% of the total lines in verse; second is *Midsummer Night's Dream* at 43% with three other plays at 19%.

<sup>10</sup> Meres in *Palladis Tamia* (1598) simply names two groups of plays (six comedies balanced by six histories or tragedies) without any regard for sequence of composition or performance. Malone doubtless noticed, as De Grazia points out (1991, 175), that Meres does not mention any dates in his 333-page common-place book, but gives “long heterogeneous inventories of classical authors and their British counter-parts, and contains many sententious and poetic passages freely transcribed from quotation books, epithet books and compendia of universal knowledge.”

- (ix) The possibility that some dateable items in the plays were later additions, e.g., the reference in *Henry V* to the return of “the general of our gracious empress,” which is usually associated with Essex in Ireland in 1599 or the reference to the Porter’s speech in *Macbeth* to the “farmer that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty” which is usually taken to refer to food shortages in 1605-6. Even if these references are contemporary with the composition of the play, they do not specifically allude to these events and might refer to another general or another food shortage.

In addition, some of Malone’s approaches have been discarded:

- (x) Malone asserts the “strong probability” that unpublished works were late. One play, mentioned by Meres, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, was not published until 1623 but is usually placed in the early 1590s.
- (ix) Malone makes judgements about anonymous quartos, as Shakespearean or not, despite the lack of evidence as to their attribution, e.g., *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594).

Like Malone, E. K. Chambers in his chapter “The Problem of Chronology” (WS i. 243-274) offers his chronology only with an extreme caution that later commentators ignore. Wells & Taylor (“The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Plays” in *Textual Companion* 1987, 69-144) are much more assured in determining their preferred sequence of composition and assigning dates. The result is the assumption made by most modern commentators, e.g. Sidney Thomas, that the chronology is well established and “in its final form” (1988, 167).

A few modern scholars, however, have proposed a radical change to the Malone / Chambers starting point, thus undermining the entire dating scheme. E. A. J. Honigmann argues that Shakespeare began writing plays in the late 1580s when he was staying in Lancashire with the Hesketh family (*Shakespeare’s Impact* 1982). His “early starter theory” (but not the Lancastrian hypothesis) has been accepted and developed by Katherine Duncan-Jones, who imagines how Shakespeare joined the Queen’s Men in the mid-1580s and began writing plays for them c. 1588 (*Ungentle Shakespeare* 2001). This theory, which brings the dates of the composition of most plays earlier than is usually accepted, and is tenable, despite the criticisms of Wells & Taylor (1987). However, neither the early-starter, nor the late-starter theory can be verified as there are no contemporary records as to the date of composition of any play by Shakespeare. On present evidence, therefore, any chronology of the works appears to be no more than “tedious and barren speculation.”

## 4.2 Use of the poems for biographical inference

Malone was also the first editor to offer any biographical interpretation of the Poems in the first (of his two) volume supplement (1780) to the *Johnson-Steevens* 2 edition. He revised and expanded his extensive commentary on, and biographical inferences from, Shakespeare's poems in the 1790 edition volume X, and again in 1821, volume XXI. Very few previous commentators had published biographical inferences from the plays, among them Francis Gentleman in his brief "Life of Shakespeare" (1774, ix). Malone however, made his inferences from the poems. The narrative poems and the sonnets were excluded by Rowe in his 1709 edition, but were published in an additional volume by Charles Gildon (1710; 1714), using the 1640 Benson text. Neither Rowe nor any other editor until Malone offered any biographical interpretations of the poems although Rowe did mention the dedication to Southampton in *Venus and Adonis* and inferred he "had the Honour to meet with many great and uncommon Marks of Favour and Friendship from the Earl of *Southampton*" (1709, i. x). Although Steevens reprinted the sonnets in his 1766 edition of the early quartos, he felt uneasy as to their literary merit. Regarding the phrase "master-mistress of my passion" (Sonnet 20.2), Steevens stated: "It is impossible to read this fulsome panegyrick, addressed to a male object, without an equal mixture of disgust and indignation" (Malone 1780, i. 596). When Steevens brought out subsequent editions of Shakespeare, he refused to include the sonnets and other poems, claiming that "the strongest Act of Parliament that could be framed, would fail to compel readers into their service" and that Malone's "instruments of criticism" had been disgraced by being applied to the poems (1793, i. vii; repeated verbatim 1803, i. 31; and again 1813, i. 30-1).

Despite Steevens's opposition, Malone remained keen on the poems throughout his life: he included the sonnets with the other poems in the tenth and final volume of his 1790 edition with extensive notes. Boswell published the poems in Volume XX (of 21 volumes) in the third variorum (1821). Margreta de Grazia points out that, unlike previous editors, Malone began his editing with the sonnets which may have encouraged his view of them as autobiographical (1991, 205). From the beginning, Malone restored the 1609 sequence which he saw as significant, claiming that 1-126 were addressed to a male friend and the remaining twenty-eight sonnets to a mistress. The 1609 sequence is thus a crucial basis for Malone's narrative interpretation. In addition, Malone argued that the "rival poet" in Sonnets 78-80 was a real person identifying him as Edmund Spenser. Many others have followed Malone in seeing the "rival poet" as a real person, but offering different identifications: e.g., George Chapman (by Acheson 1913) Francis Davison (by Duncan-Jones 1997, 64, but not in 2001); Christopher Marlowe (by Bate 1998); as Marlowe, Chapman, Jonson, and others, "who posed various kinds of threats to his pre-eminence" (Jackson 2005). From the time of Malone, most biographers have sought to reveal not

only the “rival poet” but also the “dark lady” and the “fair youth”. Some of these identifications are considered in Chapter Eight. Malone made another biographical connection in response to the phrase “As an unperfect actor” in Sonnet 23: while Shakespeare may have witnessed performances by visiting acting companies in Stratford, e.g., by the Earl of Warwick’s Men in 1574, Malone suggests that perhaps he composed this sonnet only after his own first performances in London. On this, as on other inferences, Malone was very cautious: “Whether the lines before us were founded on experience, or observation, cannot now be ascertained. What I have advanced is merely conjectural” (Malone 1790 x, 210-1).

Malone wrote a lengthy note on Sonnet 93 (1778, i. 653-7; repeated verbatim 1790, x, 265-9; and 1821 xx, 305-9) contrasting his own interpretation with Steevens’s. Malone formed the opinion that on the subject of jealousy, Shakespeare was writing from personal experience. Steevens rejected this line of interpretation:

That Shakespeare has written with the utmost power on the subject of jealousy, is no proof that he ever felt it. Because he has, with equal vigour, expressed the varied aversions of Apemantus and Timon to the world, does it follow that he himself was a Cynic or a wretch deserted by his friends? STEEVENS (1778, i. 656).

Believing himself to have full awareness of “the whole tenour of his [Shakespeare’s] character”, Malone deemed himself able to pronounce which feelings Shakespeare derived from personal experience and which he did not:

Every author who writes on a variety of topics will have sometimes occasion to describe what he himself has felt. To attribute to our great poet (to whose amiable manners all his contemporaries bear testimony<sup>11</sup>) the moroseness of a cynick or the depravity of a murderer, would be to form an idea of him contradicted by the whole tenour of his character, and unsupported by any kind of evidence. MALONE (1778, i. 656-7).

Malone referred to “our author’s forgetfulness of his wife” which he deduced from the bequest of his “second-best bed” to her in his will, showing that he remembered her, but did not “esteem” her highly. Malone linked this idea of an unhappy marriage with the theme of “the deceived husband” in Sonnet 93.

George Steevens had rejected the idea that Shakespeare’s first-person poetry constitutes biographical evidence. James Boswell Jr. agreed with Steevens when he added his own note to the discussion on Sonnet 93 (1821 xx, 305-9). Malone, however, did not adopt a literal or biographical interpretation of every reference in the sonnets. In Sonnet 37, he reads, *pace* Capell, the phrase “made lame by fortune’s dearest spite” as metaphorical (1780 i. 60). Since then,

<sup>11</sup> Malone may have been alluding to John Weever who called Shakespeare “Honie-tong”d” (c. 1599), Anthony Skolker, who called Shakespeare “friendly” (c. 1604), or to Augustine Phillips or John Combe who left Shakespeare some money in their wills.

biographers especially have treated the sonnets as for the most part literal. They have not only accepted Malone's assumption that there was a real-life "rival poet", but also a "dark lady", and a "fair youth". They accept that the sonnets were placed in the 1609 sequence by Shakespeare and believe that all of the first 126 are to a friend or lover who is male. A few commentators have rejected any autobiographical interpretation, saying that the poems are part of a tradition of courtly poetry in a line involving poets such as Petrarch, Ronsard and Sidney (Stallybrass 2000, 77). James Schiffer has conducted a thorough review of the different biographical claims and the various counter-claims (in his Introduction to *Shakespeare's Sonnets* 2000, 3-71). All of the positions are tenable, but none can be verified. Edmondson & Wells discuss whether the sonnets were written as confessional poems or as literary exercises and conclude that without external corroborating evidence, such attempts at identifying personas in the poems with historical figures are futile (2004, 22-27).

### 4.3 Ambition for a Life of Shakespeare

When Malone published his edition of the Works of Shakespeare in 1790, he included so much prefatory material that the first volume, which was printed last, had to be divided into two: part 1, approximately 500 pages, contained previous prefatory material and Malone's expanded *Attempt to Ascertain the Order*. Part II contains approximately 600 pages, beginning with his new essay the *Rise and Progress of the English Stage* and the text of many documents. He realised that the diffuse material needed to be brought together and he announced his ambition to collect the biographical material into a Life of Shakespeare: "At some future time I hope to weave the whole into one uniform and connected narrative" (1790, i. i. page lxiii). At this time he was cautious about the extent of the existing material, conceding that despite "the most diligent inquiries, very few particulars have been recovered, respecting his private life or literary history" (1790, i. i. 262). Much of the material related to the historical, social or literary period, not to the man himself. He included text of various documents, such as John Shakespeare's application for a coat of arms and James I's Licence for Acting and the List of Players (1790, i. ii. 40) Privately, Malone lamented the fact that his predecessors had not been more diligent in collecting information when it was more likely to be available, especially from living memory (letter to James Davenport, 19 May 1788, quoted by Martin 1995, 129).

Malone discovered Edward Alleyn's Diary in 1780 and borrowed *Henslowe's Diary* in 1789 from Dulwich College. He included extensive notes and a transcript of thirty-eight pages in his treatise on *Rise and Progress of the English Stage* (which amounted to over 300 pages, 1790 volume i. part ii). He added his own research about each of the actors (1790, i. ii. 204-218); and a five page review of the life of Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton, placed in the same

volume as the poems (1790 x). He included some prefaces of previous editors (Rowe, Pope and Johnson) but omitted the prefaces of Theobald, Hanmer, and Warburton “because they appeared to me to throw no light on our author or his works” (1790, i. i. lxiii). He included Rowe’s *Account of the Life &c.* but dismissed it as “meagre and imperfect” (1790, i. i. 102-154). Malone added his own extensive commentary, mainly as Boswell explains “for the purpose of demolishing almost every statement which it contained” (1821, i. xix). Malone also discusses every additional anecdote reported by Oldys, Farmer and other scholars (1790, i. i. 155-170). Malone added an essay on Ford and Jonson (1790, i. 387-414), which demolished claims that linked these two dramatists to Shakespeare.

Malone also devoted much effort to the exposure of forged texts. The late eighteenth-century witnessed growing interest in Shakespeare, with a large number of assertions, documents, and souvenirs of the great poet, many of them of dubious origin. Malone sought to distinguish what was based on documentary evidence from what was hearsay or forgery:

From iconography, to forgeries, to Shakespearean relics, to unreliable Stratford legends disseminated by self-appointed local historians, to bitter editorial rivalries, the country was awash with erroneous, unreliable, or misleading information. One of the tasks Malone took upon himself from the beginning was to stem the flow, or at least to purify it with facts (Martin 1995, 28).

In 1796, Malone responded promptly to William Henry Ireland, who claimed to have discovered letters written by Shakespeare, Southampton and Elizabeth. In this tract, Malone demonstrated his scholarly approach when carefully explaining why they were forgeries. He also drew on exceptional knowledge of Elizabethan texts (Schoenbaum 1970, 221-233; Ellis 2005, 86-100).

All of these activities – reviews of previous writers, new research and exposure of forgeries – were essential pre-requisites for his proposed *Life of Shakespeare*. In addition, Malone’s interest in biography was heightened by his close friendship with two authors of pioneering biographical works: Samuel Johnson, who published his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* in 1779-81 and James Boswell, who published his *Life of Samuel Johnson* in 1791. Malone had known Boswell from their time at the Inner Temple together in 1763 and knew Dr. Johnson from 1764 (Martin 1995, 5-6). When Malone was invited to join the Literary Club in 1782, he had become a close friend of Johnson, Boswell and many other literary figures. However, their attempts at biography were different from Malone’s proposed *Life of Shakespeare*. Boswell had known Johnson well for over twenty years and had recorded many of the great doctor’s *bons mots*: his *Life of Samuel Johnson* was a personal memoir expanded with comments and anecdotes from

other friends and acquaintances, not least Malone himself.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Johnson had written the *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81) relying almost entirely on secondary material; Johnson's main concern was to state his own critical evaluations of writers and their works, without any primary research.<sup>13</sup> Johnson's biographical approach to the appreciation of literary authors, however, accorded well with Malone's own inclination.

Whereas Malone was keen to investigate primary sources and was sceptical of any assertion for which there was no evidence, Johnson was entirely dependent on secondary sources. Johnson's approach was evident in his "Life of Dryden" (*Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (reprinted 1783 ii. 1-214). Malone writes in his own *Life of Dryden*:

Having, however, as he told me, made no preparation for that difficult and extensive undertaking, not being in the habit of extracting from books and committing to paper those facts on which the literary history in a great measure depends, and being still less inclined to go through the tedious and often unsatisfactory process of examining ancient registers, offices of records, and those sepulchres of literature, publick repositories of manuscripts (1800, i. i. 2).

Malone then explains the shortcomings when relying on previous accounts:

He was frequently, as in the present instance, obliged to rely for incidents and dates, on such information as had been transmitted by preceding biographers. Unfortunately, all the accounts of Dryden and his works were one continued tissue of inaccuracy, error, and falsehood. Very little had been handed down, and of that little the greater part was untrue (1800, i. i. 2).

Malone decided to "take nothing on trust" (1800, i. i. page vi) regarding his *Life of Dryden* and researched many primary sources that had previously been ignored. He even included a list of places where these documents had been located and the text of all the known letters of Dryden (1800, i. ii. 1-133). Malone hoped to make similar finds about Shakespeare, but his ambition was never achieved.

For Malone, his friendship with Dr. Johnson, his assistance to James Boswell, and his preparation of the *Life of Dryden* helped develop a critical and informed approach to biography in general and to his proposed Life of Shakespeare in particular. As for Dryden, so for Shakespeare, Malone wanted to take nothing on trust, but to consider the subject as wholly new. At Stratford Corporation, he found the letter dated 1598, by Richard Quiney asking Shakespeare for a loan.

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<sup>12</sup> Adam Sisman (2001) describes how Malone assisted James Boswell Sr. in preparing the second edition of his *Life of Johnson* (1791). After the death of Boswell Sr. in 1795, Malone took responsibility for further editions, adding a little new material such as letters as they became available (1799; 1804-5; 1807; sixth and seventh editions 1811).

<sup>13</sup> Greg Clingham. 1997. "Life and literature in the *Lives*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 161-191

He wrote to Boswell on 1 September 1793,<sup>14</sup> expressing the hope that he would find Shakespeare's reply and more correspondence, but no further letter was found. From the parish register at the Holy Trinity Church, he found many new details about Shakespeare's family and corrected various errors including the name of Shakespeare's son from Samuel to Hamnet – a mis-reading by Rev. Joseph Green, which was passed onto Mr. James West in 1770 (Boswell 1821, ii. 118n4). He received much material about Stratford, but nothing useful about Shakespeare's actual life. Upon his return to London, Malone issued an advertisement for material in 1795, reprinted at the end of his examination of the Ireland material (1796). This four-page appeal sought any documents relating to Malone's proposed Life of Shakespeare, which was "now nearly ready for the Press." Malone wished to expand his proposed life of Shakespeare "by drawing from some hitherto unexplored Repository papers of a very different complexion from the miserable trash [the Ireland forgeries] we have now been examining." This point was developed:

Though Mr. Malone has already obtained several very curious and original Materials for the Life of Shakspeare, he will be extremely obliged by any further Communications on that Subject. He has always thought that much Information might be procured, illustrative of the History of this extraordinary Man, if Persons possessed of ancient Papers would take the trouble to examine them, or permit others to peruse them; and he has already pointed out the sources from which such Information may probably be derived (1796, sig. 3 I 2').

Unlike the similar appeal for information about Dryden, this advertisement was unsuccessful. Malone's new Life of Shakespeare, which was "now nearly ready for the Press" in 1796, remained unfinished when he died in 1812.

Next, Malone tried to find relevant material from identified three people who might have kept papers relating to Shakespeare: Lady Barnard, the poet's grand-daughter; Ralph Hubaud, a business associate from Stratford, and John Heminges, the theatre manager, but no documents from these sources were forthcoming. Malone consulted various archives at Chancery, the Stamp Office, the Tower of London, the Exchequer, the office of the Lord Chamberlain, and the Diocese of Worcester. He discovered the Office Book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels (1623-42) and made extensive transcripts. The original had disappeared by 1849 when Edward Rimbault advertised for any information about the manuscript in *Notes & Queries* December 1849, 130.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> James Boswell. 1986. *The Correspondence of James Boswell with David Garrick, Edmund Burke and Edmond Malone* (ed. By P. S. Baker *et al.*) New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, iv 427.

<sup>15</sup> George Chalmers (1742-1825) also made extensive quotations. J. Q. Adams collected the transcripts and published *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert: Master of the Revels 1623-1673*. Yale, 1917.

Malone wrote to his friend Thomas Warton in Oxford, asking him to consult John Aubrey's manuscript in the Bodleian Library, and send transcriptions of various passages about Jonson and Shakespeare, much of which was previously unknown (Martin 1995, 132-3). Malone was also in touch with people in Stratford. A wheelwright named John Jordan sent him various accounts of Shakespeare and his family, including a Spiritual Testament purporting to be a Catholic will of John Shakespeare. Malone gave an account of its provenance and at first declared that it was probably genuine and published part of it in his *History of the English Stage* (Malone 1790, i. ii. 161-5). Malone changed his mind, saying he intended to show in the forthcoming *Life* why he believed it could not have been by any one of our poet's family (1796, 198-9). However, Boswell made only a brief reference to Malone's dismissal of this document (1821, ii. 517). The spiritual testament has become a topic of controversy. The original document has disappeared and for a long time it was considered a forgery (Lee 1915, 646). Chambers believes that, if genuine, the document could only pertain to John Shakespeare for a brief period of his earlier life (*WS* ii. 383). Schoenbaum was more sympathetic and printed a facsimile of the Folger copy of a similar document (1975, 43-6). Robert Bearman has reviewed the controversy, concluding that a free-standing copy of the printed testament was genuinely discovered as Jordan recounted, but that John Shakespeare's name was added later (2003). The spiritual testament is accepted by biographers who propose that William followed his father in adhering to the old religion e.g., Michael Wood, who accepts it as "unquestionably" genuine (2003, 83) and Stephen Greenblatt, who is slightly less confident (2004, 101). This controversy arises from the lack of any reliable evidence as to what Shakespeare's religious views were. Even if the document is accepted as genuine for the father's affiliations, it does not afford evidence as to what the son believed.

During the 1790s, Malone often wrote to Thomas Percy about his ambition to write "the Life of Shakespeare, on which I am now employed" (21 September 1793).<sup>16</sup> He describes with joy the various documents which he had found in Stratford, including the Quiney letter (21 September 1793). A year later, Malone wrote: "I have got through half his life and hope to finish it this summer" (3 June 1794). Almost a decade after that, he seems to have regressed: "I have above half the life of Shakespeare to write" and says he has been delayed by "so many discoveries with respect to the plays" (3 January 1803). Little changed in the next four years: "my favourite object is the Life; of which about a third part remains to be written" (6 June 1807). Another two years later, Malone had become desperate: "I still cherish a hope that I shall live to finish the Life of Shakespeare, about two thirds of which are done" (21 March 1809). He continued work on his second edition of Shakespeare's works, which he had held back pending

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<sup>16</sup> Quotations of Malone's letters are taken from Tillotson, 1944.

the new, definitive life. In the meantime other editions were published: *Johnson-Steevens* 4 in 1793, *Johnson-Steevens* 5, the first variorum in 1803, Chalmers's nine-volume edition of the works with illustrations by Fuseli, and a facsimile of the First Folio in 1807. Sadly for Malone, twenty years after announcing his ambition to write a life of Shakespeare, it remained unfulfilled at his death in 1812. He appointed his godson, James Boswell Jr. (1778–1822) as his literary executor, having worked with him on later editions of Johnson's biography. Boswell struggled to manage the mass of disorganised papers left by Malone. There is no way of knowing whether he included everything that Malone had left or whether Malone would have included every discussion and opinion as it was ultimately published.

Eventually, Boswell published the new edition of the works from Malone's papers in 1821, nine years after Malone died. This edition, known as the third variorum, became the scholarly standard in the nineteenth century until the publication of the Cambridge edition of 1863-1866 (Murphy 2003, 280). Whereas previous editors had generally followed the sequence of the Folio, this edition presented plays to some extent in Malone's supposed order of composition.<sup>17</sup> The first volume began with Boswell's own "advertisement to the reader" in 50 pages, defending Malone against various critics such as George Steevens, Octavius Gilchrist and William Gifford.<sup>18</sup> There followed Boswell's brief memoir of Malone before the usual reprints of earlier prefaces, including Rowe's *Account of the Life*. Unlike the 1790 edition, Boswell omitted Malone's excessive notes "written for the purpose of demolishing almost every statement which it [Rowe's *Account*] contained" and incorporated these points into "Mr. Malone's more extensive and correct work on the same subject" (1821, i. xix). In volume III, Boswell included Malone's expanded *History of the English Stage* (now at 294 pages) and the text of many other documents. Boswell offered his own opinions throughout the edition, taking into consideration many points raised by William Gifford in his edition of Jonson (1816).

Malone's unfinished account of Shakespeare's life appeared in Volume II, divided into four sections: he began with Malone's narrative account of Shakespeare's life, mistakenly called "The Life of Shakespeare," which presented an outline life of Shakespeare as far as 1592 (in 287 pages). Next, Boswell placed Malone's expanded version of *Attempt to Ascertain*, now in 179 pages (1821, ii. 288-467). Then, Boswell placed Malone's discrete discussions on topics in

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<sup>17</sup> The sequence of plays in the 1821 edition does not follow a coherent pattern: the first two volumes of plays, IV-V, contain three comedies each; the next six volumes, VI-XI, include one comedy and one tragedy each; XII-XIII contain two tragedies each; XIV has one tragedy and one comedy; XV has *The Tempest* and *King John*; XVI-XIX present the Histories in sequence of reign; XX contains the poems; XXI contains *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus* with notes and the glossary.

<sup>18</sup> William Gifford attacked Malone over his acceptance of Rowe's assertion that Jonson was jealous of Shakespeare (1816, vi. 364).

Shakespeare's life and family (1821, ii. 469-524). Finally, Boswell placed (1821, ii. 525-697) transcriptions of documents with Malone's notes which contextualised Shakespeare's life but did not mention him directly: including John Shakespeare's Bill of Complaint against John Lambert; Robert Arden's Will; the Grant of Arms to John Shakespeare; the Grants to Robert Arden; a Genealogical Table of Robert Arden; a list of bailiffs at Stratford; and the Incorporation of Stratford.

At the start of volume II, Malone sets out an ideal situation for any biographer:

Of all the accounts of literary men which have been given to the world, the history of the life of Shakspeare would be the most curious and instructive, if we were acquainted with the minute circumstances of his fortunes, the course and extent of his studies, and the means and gradations whereby he acquired that consummate knowledge of mankind, which, for two centuries, has rendered him the delight and boast of his countrymen: (1821, ii. 1-3).

Malone was however well aware that neither his own investigations nor his appeal to other researchers had found much of relevance:

[B]ut many of the materials for such a biographical detail being now unattainable, we must content ourselves with such particulars as accident has preserved, or the most sedulous industry has been able to collect (1821, ii. 3-5).

Malone recorded the large number of writers who might have written about Shakespeare's life but did not. Previous researchers missed the opportunity to interview surviving relatives of Shakespeare: "our poet's grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, who did not die till 1670. His sister, Joan Hart, was living in 1646; his eldest daughter, Susanna Hall, in 1649; and his second daughter, Judith Queeny, in 1662" (1821, ii. 7). Among those writers who should have enquired further was Sir William Dugdale,

whose *Antiquities of Warwickshire* appeared in 1656, only thirty years after the death of our poet, we might reasonably have expected some curious memorials of his illustrious countryman: but he has not given us a single particular of his private life; contenting himself with a very slight mention of him in his account of the church and tombs of Stratford upon Avon (1821, ii. 4).

Thomas Fuller in *Worthies of England* (1662) only gives "a short quibbling account of our poet, furnishing very little information concerning him" (1821, ii. 4). That Anthony Wood "should not have collected any anecdotes of Shakspeare, has always appeared to me extraordinary" (1821, ii. 5). Malone next considers two contemporaries of Shakespeare, who did not publish their projected surveys of English poets: Thomas Heywood (c. 1573 – 1641) mentioned "a work which he appears to have long had in contemplation . . . a general, though summary, description of all

the poets.”<sup>19</sup> William Browne (c. 1590 – c. 1645), the pastoral poet, “had a similar intention of writing the *Lives of the English Poets*; which, however, he never executed” (1821, ii. 6). Malone then regrets the omission of Isaac Walton, who wrote lives of Hooker, Donne, Wotton, and Herbert (1679) but did not write a life of Shakespeare. Similarly,

[N]either the booksellers, who republished our author’s plays in 1664 and 1665, employed any person to write the Life of Shakspeare; nor did Dryden, though a warm admirer of his productions, or any other poet, collect any materials for such a work, till Mr. Rowe, about the year 1707, undertook an edition of his plays (1821, ii. 6-7).

Malone lists many others who might have researched Shakespeare’s life and is astonished that “almost a century should have elapsed, from the time of his death [in 1616], without a single attempt having been made to discover any circumstance which could throw a light on the history of his private life, or literary career” (10-11). Malone notes that Rowe offered some account of Shakespeare’s life and works but notes that it was “imperfectly executed.” Malone is equally surprised that the later “editors of his [Shakespeare’s] works, and each successive English biographer, should have been contented with Mr Rowe’s meagre and imperfect narrative” (11).

Overall, Malone fell well short of his stated intention of providing “one uniform and connected narrative” of the Life of Shakespeare. Volume II of the 1821 edition is unreadable from start to finish; it only provides a series of discussions on different topics. Malone cannot be blamed for any lack of effort on his own part – he was a prolific researcher and writer throughout his life. He was prevented from writing his intended coherent life of Shakespeare by a lack of suitable biographical materials, due to the deficiencies and omissions of previous writers and researchers. Almost half of volume II (pp. 1-287) deals with Shakespeare’s early life. Much of this involves a lengthy and tedious refutation in 113 pages that Spenser was alluding to Shakespeare in *Tears of the Muses* (1821, i. 167-279). For Shakespeare’s early life, Malone quotes only three contemporary documents which name him: his own baptism and that of his children. The vast majority of the text and discussion of Malone’s “Life of Shakespeare” is concerned with family background, everyday life in Stratford, description of legal documents and his discussion of posthumous anecdotes. He rejects the deer-poaching story, which he traces to the unpublished material of William Fulman (1632-88), a fellow of Corpus Christ College, Oxford. Malone shows that every version refers to a deer-park and park gates, but Charlecote did not have a deer-park during this period (1821, ii. 118-148). He also rejects the anecdote about horse-holding, firstly, noting that the originator of the anecdote was unreliable, secondly by

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Heywood. 1635. *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels*. 9 vols. London: Adam Islip. Heywood briefly mentions his proposed “Lives of all the Poets, Forreine and Moderne, from the first before *Homer*, to the *Novissimi* and last, of what Nation or Language soeuer” (i. 245); and within the poem echoes Meres when briefly referring to “Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose enchanting Quill / Commanded Mirth or Passion, was but Will” (iv, 206).

questioning the tortuous manner by which it was passed down from Davenant to Cibber; and thirdly, offering his own interpretation that Shakespeare's father was sufficiently affluent that his son would never have needed to earn a precarious livelihood by holding horses at a theatre door (1821, ii. 157-166). Malone's *Life of Shakespeare* is a series of discrete discussions about a wide range of topics mainly about Shakespeare's family and times. It neither offers a full life, nor a continuous narrative, nor a coherent view of Shakespeare as a person.

One modern scholar, David Ellis, in *That Man Shakespeare* (2005), describes Malone's ambition to write the life of Shakespeare as "impossible" due to lack of materials as Malone himself acknowledged. After quoting Malone's catalogue of Shakespeare's contemporaries who reported nothing about the poet, Ellis observes:

No biographer ever introduced his work with a more convincing and dispiriting account of why what they were about to attempt was impossible. Malone's frustration is self-evident and does much to explain why he never finished what he came to regard as his life's work (2005, 104).

Another modern scholar, Margreta de Grazia (*Shakespeare Verbatim*, 1991), has criticised Malone as over-reliant on external documentary evidence and ignored what had been established by "consensus and authority" which she defines as the "contributions which had been passed down over the generations linking his period to Shakespeare's" (1991, 50-1). She defends Rowe's use of the deer-poaching anecdote as concerned not with "recording facts" but with "a significant occasion" when Shakespeare had to leave Stratford and seek his fortune in London. For de Grazia, the deer-poaching story "dramatized the critical juncture of his life" (1991, 107). In this, she displays a greater interest in following the narrative paradigm suggested by Joseph Campbell in *Hero of a Thousand Faces* (1949) rather than in historical accuracy, an approach consistent with many modern biographers of Shakespeare. De Grazia also observes that Malone's single rationale for the life is the "gradual attainment of prosperity" and that he rejected instances where the traditional accounts conflicted with Shakespeare's respectability (1991, 137). Despite his general scepticism, Malone took for granted some myths which had been prompted by Rowe: that Shakespeare spent his childhood in Stratford and attended the school there; that he was patronised by Southampton and that he retired to Stratford.

Finally, Edmond Malone merits the greatest respect for having placed so much emphasis on obtaining, recording and publishing biographical material about Shakespeare. He was a scrupulous researcher who questioned many claims about Shakespeare and traced their origins, revealing that myths such as the deer-poaching story was unlikely. He undertook the difficult task of establishing a chronology of the plays on limited and patchy evidence and he remained cautious about his outline. However, Malone was unable to meet the challenge of Edward Capell and George Steevens in writing a biography of Shakespeare due to a lack of biographical

material. The next chapter will show that Malone's scepticism was respected and quoted by many, but not all, commentators during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when presenting the information known about Shakespeare's life. The chapter traces the earliest biographies of Shakespeare, by Knight (1843) and Collier (1844) which were informed by much speculation, inference and to some extent forgeries.

## Chapter 5

### Inventing Details

#### Constructing a life of Shakespeare: 1805-1975

Nothing could be more highly gratifying than an account of the early studies of this wonderful man, the progress of his pen, his moral and social qualities, his friendships and failings, and whatever else constitutes personal history. But on all these topics, his contemporaries and his immediate successors have been equally silent.

Alexander Chalmers, 1805.

Like Steevens and Malone, Alexander Chalmers held serious doubts about the possibility of writing a biography of Shakespeare. This caution remained dominant during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries despite increasing pressure to write exemplary biographies, especially of literary figures. Such scepticism was repeated in the nineteenth century by literary historians such as John Payne Collier and Henry Hallam and by editors such as Alexander Dyce. The first real attempt at a biography of Shakespeare – a continuous narrative account of his life published as a separate monograph - did not appear until after Carlyle’s famous lecture on Shakespeare in “Hero as Poet” appeared in print in 1841. Charles Knight in his *Pictorial Life* (1843) created an idealised picture of dramatist for the Victorian reading public. After Knight’s *Life*, other biographies of a similar nature, combining contextual description with inference and speculation, began to appear. Shakespeare, the greatest writer in English, was presented as “a respectable citizen, a successful businessman, and a moral paragon” (Kewes 2002, 78). Perhaps the most important Shakespearean researchers of the Victorian period, James Halliwell(-Phillipps),<sup>1</sup> abandoned the idea at writing a biography and concentrated on researching, transcribing and assessing documents (*Outlines*, seven editions, 1881-7). The most influential biography of the twentieth century was written by Sidney Lee originally for the *Dictionary of National Biography*

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<sup>1</sup> James Orchard Halliwell (1820-1889) added his wife’s surname ‘Phillipps’ in 1873 so as to take over management of her property (*DNB* xxiv, 119).

(1897). However, as the study of English Literature developed at universities in the twentieth century, scholars remained cautious about the possibility of any biography of Shakespeare, or whether it should play any part in the appreciation of the works (Eagleton 1983, 43-53). Another distinguished researcher of Shakespeare's life and theatre during this period was Sir Edmund Chambers who also eschewed traditional biography (1930). Some new documents naming Shakespeare have been discovered since the time of Malone, but these do not enhance the understanding of Shakespeare's literary career. Summing up his great review, Samuel Schoenbaum wondered whether it was possible to write any biography of Shakespeare at all (*Shakespeare's Lives* 1970, 767).

## 5.1 Scepticism in the nineteenth century

In the first half of the nineteenth century, three important literary historians, Alexander Chalmers, John Payne Collier, and Henry Hallam, recognised that it was not possible to write a biography of Shakespeare. Alexander Chalmers (1759-1834) edited the works of Shakespeare in 1805, for which he drew together the known biographical facts and anecdotes in a *Sketch of the Life of Shakespeare* covering birth to retirement in 13 pages (i-xiii) and posthumous material in 33 pages (xiii-xlvi). Chalmers offered this apology about the thinness of the account:

From these imperfect notices, which are all we have been able to collect from the labours of his biographers and commentators, our readers will perceive that less is known of Shakespeare than of almost any writer who has been considered as an object of laudable curiosity (1805 i. xxii; verbatim 1823 i. xxix).

As a biographer who revised the *General Biographical Dictionary* in 32 volumes (1812-37) and published *The British Essayists: With Prefaces Historical and Biographical* in 45 volumes (1817), Chalmers was in a very good position to compare what was known about the life of Shakespeare with the biographical material available for other writers. In particular, Chalmers would have welcomed information of Shakespeare's education, his development as a writer, his personal attributes, and his intimate relationships. His acknowledgement of the missing evidence coincided with the research areas that Malone was investigating; these gaps in the record remain for any would-be biographer in the twenty-first century. Chalmers's revised his *Sketch* for his 1823 edition (volume I, xi-xlvii) in the same proportion of life-to-reputation as before, making a few alterations according to Malone's findings. The *Sketch* was reprinted with *The Works* many times in the first half of the nineteenth century and as late as 1884 in an edition published in Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> Schoenbaum dismissed Chalmers's *Sketch* because it added nothing new to the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Bohn's *Biography and Bibliography of Shakespeare* (1863), Chalmers's *Sketch* was repeated in his later editions of the plays in 1811, 1823, 1826, 1837, 1838, 1840, 1847, 1848 and 1856. His *Sketch* was printed

existing material (1970, 248). However, Schoenbaum completely ignored Chalmers's insights on the lack of suitable material for a life of Shakespeare.

Another major literary figure of the nineteenth century who recognised the paucity of material available for the life of Shakespeare was John Payne Collier (1789-1883), more famous for his later forgeries. Collier began his career as a very successful critic, publishing his three-volume *History of English Dramatic Poetry* in 1831. Regarding Shakespeare, he noted:

On looking back to the life of Shakespeare, the first observation that must be made is, that so few *facts* are extant regarding him: nearly everything interesting is derived from tradition, or depends upon conjecture (1831 i. 329).

Collier reinforces his point by quoting Steevens's dictum about the small extent of knowledge concerning Shakespeare. Collier's own investigations at the British Library had revealed the diary of John Manningham, with two interesting references: the entry for 2 February 1601-2 described the performance of *Twelfth Night* (1831 i. 327-9).<sup>3</sup> The entry for 13 March 1601-2 gives the anecdote about Shakespeare enjoying the delights of a young lady before Burbage could arrive (i. 332). Collier finds it remarkable that within the diary, there is only one notice of a play (i. 328) and only one mention of Ben Jonson (i. 333).<sup>4</sup>

Another literary historian, Henry Hallam (1777-1859), made the same point about the small extent of knowledge concerning Shakespeare, but in a way that was more relevant to literary biography. Whereas Collier noted that "nearly everything interesting is derived from tradition, or depends upon conjecture," Hallam states in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (1837-9) that "we scarcely know anything" about William Shakespeare. He continues that what facts are known offer little to an understanding of the author:

All that insatiable curiosity and unwearied diligence have hitherto detected about Shakespeare serves rather to disappoint and perplex us than to furnish the slightest illustration of his character. It is not the register of his baptism, or the draft of his will, or the orthography of his name that we seek. No letter of his written, no record of his

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separately in 1838, 1846, 1849 and 1853. It also appeared in editions published by Diprose & Bateman (1878), David Douglas (1881), and J. P. Lippincott (1884).

<sup>3</sup> The anecdote occurs in the *Annals of English Theatre* for 1602. Manningham's Diary (BL Harl. MS 5353) was discovered by John Payne Collier, who made it known in 1831 in *The History of English Dramatic Poetry* (1831 i. 320). The Diary was published as volume 99 in the Camden Old Series, ed. Bruce, 1868. *Diary of John Manningham, of the Middle Temple, and of Bradbourne, Kent, Barrister-At-Law, 1602-1603*. The entry by Manningham is used in support of a composition date of 1601 (*e. g.* Wells & Taylor 1987, 123).

<sup>4</sup> For these and other reasons, Sydney Race rejected the Diary as a forgery (1954, 380-383). The diary entries regarding Shakespeare were accepted as genuine by Schoenbaum (1975: 152). Lois Potter (2012, 159 n23) believes that the diary itself might be a forgery, while the entry about William the Conqueror was probably genuine, adding "but that does not mean it is true."

conversation, no character of him drawn with any fulness by a contemporary has been produced (1837 ii. 237-8).

Like the observations of Chalmers and Collier, Hallam's statements remain valid in the twenty-first century.

Three other writers in their biographical prefaces to the *Works* lamented the lack of details for a life of Shakespeare. In 1826, Charles Symmons wrote *A Life of William Shakespeare* (volume I. 3-92) for Samuel Weller Singer's edition of the works. Symmons began by paraphrasing Steevens's dictum before stating:

If we should be solicitous to fill up this bare and most unsatisfactory outline, we must have recourse to the vague reports of unsubstantial tradition, or to the still more shadowy inferences of lawless and vagabond conjecture (Singer 1826 i. 4).

Symmons argued against the claim by Skottowe of Shakespeare's apparent love affair with "the fair youth" of the sonnets (1826 40-1), referring to Shakespeare's "friendship with the young Thomas [*sic*] Wriothesley; a friendship which adhered to him throughout his life" (1826 i. 19). Symmons is inclined to accept posthumous anecdotes, *e. g.* that "Shakespeare's fortunes were essentially promoted by the munificent patronage of Southampton", accepting Davenant's claim about the gift of £1,000 (1826 i. 22). In general, Symmons accepts, that with almost all periods of Shakespeare's life, nothing is known for certain:

But over this [period of retirement], as over the preceding periods of his life, brood silence and oblivion; and in our total ignorance of his intimacies and friendships, we must apply to our imagination to furnish out his convivial board where intellect presided, and delight, with admiration, gave the applause (Singer 1826 i. 32).

For the second edition (1856), Singer invited W. W. Lloyd to provide not only a critical essay for each play but also a "biographical sketch" of the poet. Lloyd adopted the same kind of "abridged commentary" that Singer had advocated for his previous text and began his *Life of Shakespeare* with a similar admission of ignorance:

The scantiness of the notices that have come down to us of the life of William Shakespeare is as disappointing to what seems a rational and grateful interest as to trivial curiosity (1856 i. xix).

Lloyd continues with an outline of the life, derived from Rowe, whom he quotes. At the end, Lloyd states his relief, fearing that "zeal for the biography will not ordinarily improve the feeling and zest and purer enthusiasm of the critic" (1856 i. xcvi-xcvii). Unlike Rowe, and many other biographers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Lloyd separated the biographical comments from his critical appreciation.

In the following year, Alexander Dyce issued another edition of the works of Shakespeare to which he added a biographical preface *Some Account of the Life of Shakespeare*, (which

echoes the title of Rowe's preface). Dyce also begins his *Account* with Steevens's famous dictum about the very limited evidence available for Shakespeare. Much of his biography, which derives from Rowe's *Account*, consists of pointedly rejecting almost every suggestion made by his former friend, J. Payne Collier, *e. g.*, that Shakespeare had composed *Venus & Adonis* before he left Stratford for London (1857 i. xlv). Echoing the words of Malone and Lloyd, Dyce finishes his preface with an admission of the impossibility of the task of relating the Life of the poet to the Works:

Owing to the scantiness of materials for his history and to our ignorance of what we most wish to know concerning him, a Life of Shakespeare, in spite of its subject, is generally among the least readable efforts of the biographer; and I cannot but feel that, if my own memoir of the poet has any claim to another character, it is solely on account of its relative shortness (Dyce 1857, i. xvi).

Another memoir, issued in 1863 by the publisher, Henry Bohn, in *The biography and bibliography of Shakespeare*, began with the lament of the lack of even a "moderate public interest" in dramatic biography when the First Folio was published in 1623, resulting in the current "dearth of information" (1863, 2-4).

## 5.2 Romantic Biografictions

Malone's highly sceptical approach to writing the life of Shakespeare is evident in the pronouncements of Chalmers, Collier and Hallam. However, it had little effect on publishers who felt compelled to print something about the life of Shakespeare. Alongside Chalmers's *Sketch*, they continued to issue Rowe's "meagre and imperfect" *Account* despite awareness that it contained few accurate statements about Shakespeare's life. It was published as a preface as late as 1859 for George Routledge's reprint of *Johnson-Steevens 6*. This publisher even issued Rowe's *Account* as a separate pamphlet in 1848, 1854 and 1856. The *Account* also served as the basis for numerous publications during the nineteenth century such as encyclopaedias, magazine articles, compilations, travel writing, and even guidebooks to Stratford. Rowe's account was expanded by John Severn who was the first to publish the Diary of John Ward in 1839. Severn elaborated Ward's brief allusion to the "merry meeting" with Jonson and Drayton (183) by describing Shakespeare's death in very moving terms:

Shakspeare was sick, and they came to cheer, to sooth and to sympathize with his sufferings. Animated and excited by their long-tryed and much-loved society, as the sound of the trumpet rouses the spirit of the dying war-horse, their presence and voices made him forget the weakness that even then was bowing him to the very dust (65).

None of these details are contained either in Ward's account or in any other source material. Further speculation emerged in Thomas de Quincey's entry about Shakespeare, which was

written in 1838 for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (7th. edn., 1842). This life contained many more conjectures than might be expected in an encyclopaedia. On Shakespeare's appearance, de Quincey offered the unfounded claims: "We believe ourselves warranted in assuming that William Shakespeare was a handsome and even noble looking boy" (1864, 58) About the retirement, he states: "The four or five latter years of his life Shakespeare passed in dignified ease, in profound meditation, we may be sure, and in universal respect, at his native town of Stratford; and there he died, on the 23d of April, 1616" (1864, 68). Many writers expressed doubt at the content of this entry, including intellectuals such as Matthew Arnold, who was very critical: "its approbation weeps hysterical tears and its disapprobation foams at the mouth."<sup>5</sup>

During the Romantic period, there was a significant change in attitude towards the sonnets. George Steevens had taken the view that the sonnets were poor poetry and offered no biographical insights (1793 i. 103) and Malone was very cautious as to whether the sonnets could be taken as a source of biographical understanding. Romantic writers, however, found Shakespeare's own feelings and experiences everywhere in his poetry. Biographical study was becoming an increasingly important part of literary criticism in the early part of the nineteenth century on the "assumption that writing springs from and expresses the personal experiences of the author" (Lanier 2007, 100). Thus writers in the Romantic period were delighted to interpret Shakespeare's poems, especially the sonnets, as confessional biography, making inferences as each saw fit. George Chalmers claimed that the "sugr'd sonnets were addressed by Shakspeare to Elizabeth" (1797, 53) and that the printer made a mistake in printing the pronouns 'he' for 'she.' In 1808, A. W. von Schlegel, who had translated the works of Shakespeare into German (1797–1810), stated that the sonnets "paint most unequivocally the actual situation and sentiments of the poet; they make us acquainted with the passions of the man; they even contain remarkable confessions of his youthful errors."<sup>6</sup> Wordsworth declared that "Shakespeare expresses his own feelings in his own person" and wrote:

*Scorn not the sonnet. Critic, you have frowned,  
Mindless of its just honours; with this key  
Shakespeare unlocked his heart.*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The publishers, Adam and Charles Black, issued de Quincey's entry as a short monograph entitled *Shakespeare, a Biography* in time for the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth. Matthew Arnold's criticisms were published in "The Literary Influence of Academies" *Cornhill Magazine* 10, (1864, 154-172) and reprinted in *Essays in Criticism: First Series*, London: Macmillan, (1865, 66).

<sup>6</sup> A. W. von Schlegel. 1808. *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (trans. John Black and A. J. W. Morrison. London: Henry G. Bohn 1846, 352).

<sup>7</sup> William Wordsworth. 1815. Essay, Supplementary to the Preface. In Owen, W. J. B. and Jane Worthington Smyser, eds. 1974. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press iii. 69.

Anna Jameson in 1829 avoided any suggestion of a love triangle or homoerotic overtones by claiming that only some of the poems were addressed to Southampton but that most of the others were addressed “in Southampton’s name to that beautiful Elizabeth Vernon.”<sup>8</sup> In 1832, William Hazlitt, whose criticism of Shakespeare was very influential, called them “interesting as they relate to the personal feelings of the author.” In the same year, James Boaden labelled a persona in the sonnets as the “fair youth” and identified him with William Herbert (1580-1630, who became the third earl of Pembroke in 1601).<sup>9</sup> In 1833, another influential critic, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, on a biographical approach to the sonnets, in which Shakespeare showed his “love towards a male object – an affection beyond friendship, and wholly aloof from appetite” (quoted by Foakes 1989, 31). The approach of supplying the deficiency of documented records by referring to the works was well understood by D. L. Richardson:

A regret has often been expressed that we have little beyond a collection of barren dates in what is called the life of Shakespeare. Now I conceive and in this opinion I do not stand alone, that if any new light be thrown on Shakespeare’s life and character, it must result from a careful and profound study of these sonnets (*Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1835).<sup>10</sup>

Richardson reviews previous historical identifications of personas in the sonnets and offers his own opinions as to the intended recipients (mainly Elizabeth Vernon on behalf of Southampton). In 1835-6, an anonymous writer published “The Confessions of William Shakespeare” which expanded a literal interpretation to the sonnets into a continuous account of Shakespeare’s own thoughts and feelings.<sup>11</sup> In 1838, Charles Armitage Brown reconstructed Shakespeare’s adult life based on this extended interpretation.

A different approach towards satisfying the Victorian appetite for information about Shakespeare was to describe the context in detail. In 1806, Robert Bell Wheler published newly discovered documents relating to the Shakespeare family: the conveyance in 1602 of the freehold in Old Stratford by William and John Combe; writs from the Addenbrooke case; and he dated Shakespeare’s acquisition of New Place to 1597. In 1814, he published a shorter guide to Stratford-upon-Avon, reporting Shakespeare’s purchase of the Stratford tithes in 1605 and some

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<sup>8</sup> Anna Jameson. 1829. *Loves of the Poets: The Romance of Biography; or Memoirs of Women Loved and Celebrated by Poets, from the Days of the Troubadours to the Present Age*. London: Colburn, i. 240.

<sup>9</sup> Boaden’s essay “On the Sonnets of Shakespeare” first appeared in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (1832) and was published separately in 1837. It has been reprinted in Boaden and Wivell (2013).

<sup>10</sup> D. L. Richardson. 1835. “On Shakespeare’s Sonnets, their Poetical Merits, and on the question to whom they are addressed” in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 250-6; 361-370.

<sup>11</sup> This was published anonymously in four instalments in 1835 –6: “The Confessions of William Shakespeare” in the *New Monthly Magazine*. London: Henry Colburn; volume 43, 1-9 & 306-312; volume 44, 319-336; volume 45, 47-69.

documents relating to the proposed enclosure of Welcombe in 1614. These documents were not mentioned by Boswell in his appendix to Malone's account (1821, ii 521-697). In 1836, Wheler published the newly-discovered marriage license bond from the archives of the Consistorial Court of Worcester.

Five years after Malone died, Nathan Drake (1766-1836) published *Shakespeare and His Times* (1817). Drake's study was scarcely a biography as it consisted mainly of contextual description with the figure of Shakespeare acting as "the medium for a comprehensive and connected view of the Times in which he lived" (1817 i. iii). Drake's subtitle "A History of the Manners, Customs and Amusements, Superstitions, Poetry and Elegant Literature of his Age" indicates its main emphasis on describing the historical context (1817 i. v). The two-volume study is derivative, collecting together all the material separately published by the main eighteenth century editors of Shakespeare (Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Harmer, Warburton, Johnson, Steevens, Reed and Malone), as well as other researchers such as Tyrwhitt, Farmer, Oldys, and Ritson, loosely organised in volume I around Stratford and Shakespeare's early life in ten chapters (i. 1-412). Amongst other unverifiable claims, Drake follows the suggestion of Malone,<sup>12</sup> that that the young Shakespeare had been present at the 'Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth' in 1575 (i. 37). Drake brings Shakespeare to London in 1586-87

Volume II begins with a brief biographical sketch of Southampton (ii. 1-20) before a lengthy consideration of the poems (ii. 21-86). Drake is the first commentator to suggest that Southampton was the object of desire in many of the sonnets. In Chapters VI-VIII, he gives a guide to the lifestyle of "the Inhabitants of the Metropolis (ii. 87-168), a description of life at court (ii. 168-226), and of dramatic poetry prior to Shakespeare (ii. 227-257). In the next chapters, Drake offers his own critical appreciation ("observations") of the works (ii. 258-580) following Malone's chronology. The strictly biographical elements are contained in three brief chapters at the end, dealing with Shakespeare's life in London (ii. 581-602), anecdotes relative to his retirement in Stratford (ii. 603-610), and his death and will (ii. 611-624). For Drake, tradition is sufficient authority for many assertions: that Shakespeare had a "bosom-friend" and "munificent patron" in Southampton (ii. 359); that he wrote *Merry Wives of Windsor* at the command of the Queen (ii. 590); and that he himself planted the mulberry tree in the garden of New Place (ii. 599-600). Drake speculates that Shakespeare's repeated references to the plague probably derived from the "recollected narrative of those who tended his infancy" (ii. 581) and

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<sup>12</sup> In a footnote, Malone stated: "In one of those progresses, she visited Leycester at Kenelworth Castle, in 1576, when our youthful bard, among the crowds that flocked thither from all the neighbourhood, might have seen her" (1796, 150 n82). Malone later asserted in his note to *Midsummer Night's Dream* (at 5. 1) that "nothing can, I think, be more probable than that young Shakspeare, then in his twelfth year of his age, was taken there by some of his relations" (1821 v, 314).

deduces from the sonnets that Shakespeare benefitted from the “salutary yet severe lessons of adversities” (ii. 582-3).

Drake’s excess of contextual information becomes a substitute for a literary portrait of the subject. One anonymous reviewer wrote in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* that “with indefatigable diligence, the Author has illustrated every possible point that has the smallest reference to his subject” (1818, no. 88, 242). Another reviewer, in the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* (1819, 357-383), noted “in sober sadness,” Drake’s vice in setting Shakespeare as an “object almost of idolatry” (360) and that he had “failed to explain the bearing and tendency of the circumstances that affected the genius of Shakespeare” (360). A third reviewer, in *The Monthly Review* (1819, N. S. 89, 357-372), was similarly doubtful, concluding:

[There is] such infinitesimal detail concerning the literature of the age, the manners of the people, or the history of the theatre, that we loose [*sic*] sight of the circumstances of the poet; and, like one of those wooden mannikins which serve to exhibit suits of antient armour, he is often scarcely to be perceived through the grate of the visor, or the mail of the hauberk (*Monthly Review* 1819. 357).

Drake’s study was imitated by Augustine Skottowe’s two-volume *Life of Shakespeare* in 1824, another account of times, as the sub-title announces.<sup>13</sup> Skottowe accepted many of the posthumous anecdotes about Shakespeare, *e. g.* the deer-poaching story (1824 i. 9-11), but offered no new material.

Four years after Malone’s third variorum edition appeared, the Rev. William Harness published his edition of *The Works* (eight volumes) in which he included a biographical preface in 74 pages (1825, volume I, i-lxxiv). In his “Life of William Shakespeare”, Harness scorned biographical inferences from the works: regarding the Shakespeare marriage, he dismisses Malone’s idea that William “lived to repent his marriage” saying that it is “hardly fair to apply personally to the poet the general maxims that may be discovered in his works” (viii). Similarly, he rejects Malone’s inference from the abundant legal references in the works that Shakespeare spent time working in a law office. However, Harness is fully inclined towards accepting the posthumous anecdotes which Malone had doubted. He believes that Shakespeare would kill “a calf in high style” (viii), that he was involved in a drinking competition at Bidford (xii-xiii), as well as “deer and coney stealing” (xv) and that he received “the splendid present of a thousand pounds” from Southampton (xlv). He is aware of severe limitations in the chronologies of Malone, Chalmers and Drake: “the grounds of their conjectures are so uncertain that little reliance can be placed in them” (xxxvii). Overall, Harness offers nothing new in his “Life of Shakespeare”, simply accepting posthumous anecdotes and rejecting biographical inferences.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine Skottowe. 1824. *Life of Shakespeare: enquiries into the originality of his dramatic plots and characters; and essays on the ancient theatres and theatrical usages*. 2 vols. London: Longman &c.

In 1838, Thomas Campbell edited a two-volume edition of Shakespeare's plays, to which he prefixed his own narrative memoir entitled "Remarks on the Life and Writings of William Shakespeare" in about 56 pages (1838 i. ix-xlv). Thomas begins with the standard admission: "It is justly regretted by the present age that so little has come down to us respecting the personal history of Shakespeare." He continues by synthesising details from Malone, Chalmers, Drake and Harness (among others) into a continuous account. Thomas was the first to claim that Prospero's abjuration of magic was also Shakespeare's farewell to the stage: "Here Shakespeare himself is Prospero, or rather the superior genius who commands both Prospero and Ariel. But the time was approaching when the potent sorcerer was to break his staff" (1838 i. lxiv). Although there is no evidence that *The Tempest* really was Shakespeare's last play or that he ever retired from the stage, this biographical claim has been established as another myth in the traditional story of Shakespeare's life (e. g. Weis 2007, 337). Stephen Orgel further noted that "the notion of Prospero as autobiography has remained solidly within the critical canon" (ed. *The Tempest*, 1987, 10).

### 5.3 Exemplary Life and National Biography

James Stanfield in his seminal *Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography* (1813, 49) required biographers to express "national heroism and national genius." This idealism was enthusiastically embraced throughout the Victorian period. In 1840, Thomas Carlyle accorded the highest praise to Shakespeare in his lecture *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*:

This King Shakespeare, does not he shine, in crowned sovereignty, over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rallying-signs; indestructible; really more valuable in that point of view than any other means or appliance whatsoever? (1841, 184).

Carlyle gave Shakespeare special significance for the British Empire:

We can fancy him as radiant aloft over all the Nations of Englishmen, a thousand years hence. From Paramatta, from New York, wheresoever, under what sort of Parish-Constable soever, English men and women are, they will say to one another: 'Yes, this Shakspeare is ours; we produced him, we speak and think by him; we are of one blood and kind with him' (1841, 184).

Carlyle's biographer, J. A. Froude, praised *On Heroes* for setting figures of national importance, e. g. Shakespeare, in their historical context. However, Froude was aware that due to the absence of biographical material, such efforts were novelistic, akin to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

(1759-67).<sup>14</sup> Carlyle's view was typical of Victorian accounts of Shakespeare, combining idealisation with sycophancy (Hollingsworth 2012, 419).

In the same year as Carlyle's lectures, The Shakespere Society was founded by Charles Knight, John Payne Collier, Alexander Dyce, and James Halliwell-Phillipps (among others). Each of these co-founders not only went on to edit their own edition of the works, they each attempted a biography of Shakespeare. As Carlyle undertook to praise Shakespeare's genius in the most lavish terms, Knight determined to write a suitable life of the National hero. He seems to have been the first writer to use the term 'biography' for his life of Shakespeare. This account, which consisted of a continuous narrative from birth to death, was published as an independent monograph entitled *William Shakspeare, a Biography* (1843). It was the final volume to his *Pictorial Edition of the Works* (1838-41) and included lavish illustrations in its 550 pages. Knight included many fictional elements in his narrative, such as the description of the joy attendant upon his baptism at the Holy Trinity Church; Victorian biographers liked to emphasise the Christian outlook of their heroes. Knight also described the domestic bliss enjoyed by the youthful William:

The happy days of Shakespeare's boyhood are nearly over. William Shakespeare no longer looks for that close of day when, in that humble chamber in Henley Street, his father shall hear something of his school progress, and read with him some English book of history or travel – volumes which the active presses of London had sent cheaply among the people (1843, viii. 110-1).

This is simply speculation as there is no record of Shakespeare's youth. He accepts without comment the suggestion that William witnessed the Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth in 1575, and describes them as if Shakespeare had attended (76-89).<sup>15</sup> This myth remains current (*e. g.* Greenblatt 2004, 46). Knight uses the material published by John Payne Collier in 1835, but had to delete these points from later editions when some of Collier's materials were shown to be forgeries. Knight followed John Ward's recently published account (Severn 1839) of Shakespeare's death from fever after "a merry meeting" with Jonson and Drayton. However, he dismissed the idea of excessive drinking as the cause of the fever, emphasising instead Shakespeare's Christian piety in the final moments, as was important to Victorian writers (Jallard 1996, 23-6). In a further attempt to redeem Shakespeare, Knight argued Shakespeare did not need to mention his wife in his will as she would automatically receive one-third dower arrangements:

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Froude. 1882. *Life of Thomas Carlyle*. London: Longmans, i. 200-4.

<sup>15</sup> Hackett (2009, 54-70) has traced the Kenilworth myth to Bishop Thomas Percy ("Essay on the Origin of the English Stage" in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn.1794). Malone had accepted the idea in his *Inquiry into the authenticity* (1796) but it was not included in the third variorum (Boswell 1821). Walter Scott (*Kenilworth* 1821) developed the myth by imagining an encounter between Elizabeth and an adult William who was already an established playwright.

His wife was entitled to dower She was provided for amply, by the clear and undeniable operation of the English law. Of the houses and gardens which Shakspeare inherited from his father, she was assured of the life-interest of a third, should she survive her husband (1843 viii. 530).

Subsequent commentators have argued over this point ever since. It is not clear whether a widow in Stratford would be entitled to the same right of dower as in London, York or Wales (Greer 2007, 320-2).

That Knight was indulging his imagination was immediately recognised by a reviewer in *The Athenaeum* (2 March 1844), who criticised his building “hypothesis upon hypothesis,” wishing he would “confine his fancy within the bounds.” For the 1850 and 1867 editions, Knight reduced his *Biography*, but it remained largely fictional as recognised by J. Parker Norris:

In this work [Knight’s *Biography of Shakespeare*, 1867], which is very well known, the author did not tie himself down to bare facts, but gave free rein to his imagination. As a chronicle of what might have happened to the poet and what he probably did, the people he was likely to have met, etc., this is not surpassed by anything which has been written on the subject. But those who wish to ascertain what we really know of Shakespeare must consult other books.<sup>16</sup>

Parker Norris noted that Knight did not confine himself to “bare facts” but indulged his “imagination.” Knight’s biography of Shakespeare, however, was widely read and remained in print until at least 1900 (by Peter Collier: New York).

While Knight, de Quincey and various other writers simply speculated about Shakespeare’s life, a few went further and forged documents to support their views of Shakespeare. The forgeries of William Henry Ireland (1775-1835) who had claimed to possess letters and other texts, including Shakespeare’s love letters to his wife, were exposed by Edmond Malone (1796).<sup>17</sup> The most infamous fabricator, however, was originally seen as an eminent critic and a dedicated Shakespeare scholar. John Payne Collier discovered and published new documents concerning Shakespeare, which are now accepted. In addition to Manningham’s diary, from which he had published excerpts in 1831, he noted that Shakespeare was listed as hoarding ten bushels of corn in February 1598 (1844, i. clxiv); he found a suit in Chancery regarding Shakespeare’s non-payment of tithes (1844, i. ccxl) and documents concerning the proposed enclosure at Welcombe (1844, i. ccxliii-ccxliv). He made use of the Revels Accounts recently

<sup>16</sup> J. Parker Norris 1888. “The Editors of Shakespeare.” in *Shakespeariana: a critical and contemporary review of Shakespearian Literature* 5, January 1888, 72-75.

<sup>17</sup> There are two detailed accounts of Ireland’s forgeries: Bernard Grebanier. 1965. *The Great Shakespeare Forgery: A New Look at the Career of William Henry Ireland*. New York: W. W. Norton. Patricia Pierce. 2004. *The Great Shakespeare Fraud. The Strange, True Story of William-Henry Ireland*. Stroud: Sutton Press.

discovered by Peter Cunningham (1844, i. 3).<sup>18</sup> He was the first writer to link an allusion in *Willobie His Avis* with Shakespeare (1858, i. 115n) and to publish the examinations of Sir Gilly Meyrick (i. 153-4) and of Augustine Phillips (iii. 214), following Essex's "desperate affair." These last documents were significant contributions to the political and theatrical history of 1601.

To these discoveries, Collier added a number of documents, allegedly found in the Duke of Devonshire's Library at Bridgewater House in London, published in *New Facts Regarding the Life of Shakespeare* (1835), claiming that Shakespeare was a member of the Blackfriars company in 1589 and that Southampton wrote a letter of support in 1608. For his own edition of the works, he included a *Life of Shakespeare* in about 200 pages (1844, i. pp. lxxix-cclxvi; revised in 1858, i. 39-235). By now, he had changed his opinion as to the lack of documentary evidence. In his preface, Collier stated:

I have been anxious to include the most minute particles of information, whether of tradition or discovery. This information is now hardly as scanty as it was formerly represented, and by the favour of friends and my own research, I have been able to add to it some particulars entirely new, and of no little importance (emphasis added, 1844, i. viii; repeated verbatim 1858, i. xli).

He also added many textual emendations based on handwritten comments in the Perkins copy of the Second Folio of Shakespeare (1632). Eventually, his friend James Halliwell expressed his doubts about some of these documents in his privately circulated *Observations on the Shakespearean Forgeries at Bridgewater House* (1853). The manuscript marginalia were eventually exposed as fabrications by (among others) Nicholas Hamilton, the Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum (1860). Another scholarly critic, Clement Ingleby, collected all the criticisms into one publication in 1861 (Freeman & Freeman 2004, ii. 882).<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the major significance of forgers such as John Payne Collier lies in demonstrating the paucity of relevant literary documentation in the biographical material concerning Shakespeare. Three further points of significance emerge from the case of Collier's forgeries, regarding the public, the publishers, and the scholars. Firstly, the reading public then and now are so avid for information about Shakespeare that many accept these forgeries as uncritically as they accept unfounded myths. Secondly, publishers are clearly interested in the Shakespeare industry

<sup>18</sup> Peter Cunningham. 1842. *Revels at Court, being Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court in the time of Queen Elizabeth and James I.* London: Shakspeare Society, 203-217. Because Cunningham was something of a protégé of Collier, the *Revels at Court* was a suspect text during the nineteenth century and rejected as forged by Sidney Lee (1898, 368-9) and by S. A. Tannebaum, *Shakspeare Forgeries in the Revels Accounts*. (New York: Columbia University Press (1928). Freeman & Freeman trace the suspicions about Cunningham (2004 i. 403-07).

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Hamilton. 1860. *An Inquiry into the Genuineness of the Manuscript Corrections in Mr. J. Payne Collier's Annotated Shakspeare, Folio, 1632: and of Certain Shaksperian Documents Likewise Published by Mr. Collier.* London: R. Bentley. Ingleby, C. M. 1861. *A Complete View of the Shakspeare Controversy.* London: Nattali.

from a financial point of view, without regard to the authenticity or reliability of documents quoted: despite suspicions surrounding Collier, Joseph Whitaker published editions by Collier in 1853 and 1858 without eliminating his textual emendations based on the Perkins Folio. Thirdly, the verdicts of writers such as Sidney Lee, who lists the forgeries (1898, 367-369), and Samuel Schoenbaum, who gives a detailed account of his exposure (1970, 348-361), have become part of the dominant narrative of Shakespearean biography, overlooking the significance of Collier's authentic findings. Nevertheless, Lee and Schoenbaum might well be considered as culpable as Collier in failing to question their own assumptions, *e. g.* that Shakespeare spent his childhood in Stratford, where he was educated, and enjoyed the patronage of the Earl of Southampton. These myths are presented as established fact in almost every modern account of Shakespeare's life.

## 5.4 Halliwell-Phillipps, Dowden and Lee

Another co-founder of The Shakespere Society James Halliwell-Phillipps, also devoted much of his adult life to researching and publishing material regarding the life of Shakespeare.. He lamented the fact that recent biographers of Shakespeare had resorted to conjecture and imagination in constructing a biography, "each one bitterly complaining of the paucity of facts, but making ample amends by conjectures of their own" (1848, vi). He pointed out that most accounts are derivative:

A small portion only of the writers of the history of Shakespeare's life lay claim to the merit of having instituted original enquiries, the majority being content with appropriating the information recorded by their predecessors, and giving us the results of their own reasonings upon them (1848, vi).

As a result of his disenchantment at the deceptions by his one-time friend, Collier, he concentrated on primary research, transcribing many documents about Shakespeare. The results were published in *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, first issued in 1881 in a restricted format, but successively expanded until the seventh edition appeared in 1887.<sup>20</sup> This edition of *Outlines* appeared in two volumes with over 550 pages of supportive material (transcriptions of documents and illustrative notes). The index is rather poor and the documents and notes are in no particular order.

Despite all his efforts, Halliwell-Phillipps only added two new documents about Shakespeare: the 1594 payment "to William Kempe, William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage"

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<sup>20</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, James O. 1881. *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1<sup>st</sup> edn. Each later edition was expanded: 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1882; 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1883; 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 1884; 5<sup>th</sup> edn. 1885. 6<sup>th</sup> edn. 2 vols, 1886; 7<sup>th</sup> edn., vol. I: 416pp. ; vol. II: 432 pp; in 1887. There were posthumous reprints: an Eighth Edition (1889), a Ninth Edition (1890), and a Tenth Edition (1898).

for court performances (1887, i. 121); and the Great Wardrobe list of 15 March 1604 with its allotment to “diverse persons” of red cloth for the Coronation Procession (i. 212). He also published transcriptions of newly discovered documents, such as the Shakespeare marriage licence from the Worcester Diocesan Register (ii. 55-6) with his own extensive discussion (i. 61-7). He further reported other documents of less significance: that William had a grandfather called Richard and an uncle called Henry (ii. 207-9); that John Shakespeare sold some property in 1597 (ii. 13); that Anne Hathaway was named as Agnes in the 1581 will of her father (ii. 195); that he sued Philip Rogers in 1604 (ii. 29); and that he was paid in 1614 for entertaining a preacher (ii. 244). These documents offer very limited interest to the biographer or to the literary biographer. Like Malone, he came to accept that a biography of Shakespeare was not possible, comparing the biographical material for Shakespeare to the contents of a poor apothecary’s shop:

It will thus be seen that, no matter what pains a Shakespearean biographer may take to furnish his store, the result will not present a more brilliant appearance than did the needy shop of Romeo’s apothecary. He is baffled in every quarter by the want of graphical documents, and little more can be accomplished beyond a very imperfect sketch or outline (*Outlines* 1887, i. xvii).

Overall, Halliwell-Phillipps achievement lies in the collective publication and evaluation of all the texts relevant to the biography of Shakespeare, however disorganised they were presented.

During the Victorian period, scholars addressed Dr. Johnson’s desire to know “by what gradations of improvement he proceeded,” and began to promote an intellectual or spiritual biography of Shakespeare. Such an approach is not possible due to lack of reliability in any chronology of the works. At a public lecture in Dublin in 1863, John Kells Ingram issued a challenge to establish the chronological order of Shakespeare’s works so as to trace the poet’s development.<sup>21</sup> A decade later, F. J. Furnivall asserted (1874, xxii) that Shakespeare’s works “must be studied in chronological order” so as to appreciate the development of his imagination and he issued the same plea at Trinity Hall Cambridge to the inaugural meeting of the New Shakspeare Society which he had founded. In his opinion, the only work of criticism to consider the issue of Shakespeare’s development was *Commentaries on Shakspeare* by Georg Gervinus, originally in German, and translated into English in 1863:

It is a disgrace . . . that no book by an Englishman exists which deals in any worthy manner with Shakspeare as a whole, which tracks the rise and growth of his genius from the boyish romanticism or the sharp youngmanishness of his early plays, to the

<sup>21</sup> John Kells Ingram. 1863. *A paper on the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays*. Dublin: Trinity College Library, Ms. I. 6. 34. This was published as ‘Shakespeare’ in *The Afternoon Lectures on English Literature*. London: Bell & Daldy, (1863) 95-131. The significance of Ingram’s part in the biographical tradition was overlooked by Schoenbaum (1970) and Taylor (1989) but has been described by Andrew Murphy. 2010. “Shakespeare and Chronology: Edward Dowden's Biographical Readings” in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 46, 130-7.

magnificence, the splendour, the divine intuition which marks his ablest works (Furnivall, introduction to Gervinus' *Commentaries on Shakspeare* 1875, xix).<sup>22</sup>

Furnivall presented a chronology in his introduction to Gervinus, listing the plays in a table, which was “merely tentative, and open to modifications for any good reasons” (1875, xlv). Furnivall made minor adjustments to Malone's final attempt at dating the plays (1821, ii. 288-468), in the light of allusions by Weever, Manningham, and Forman's *Bocke of Plaies*,<sup>23</sup> and the Revels Accounts of court performances in 1604-5 and 1611-12. He argued that Shakespeare should be approached scientifically “as the geologist treats the earth's crust, as the comparative anatomist treats the world” and that the study of verse patterns would establish chronology. His chronology was apparently supported by the verse tables of F. G. Fleay. Statistical analysis of various stylistic features Shakespeare's language has enjoyed a vogue ever since. However, according to Gary Taylor, subsequent analyses showed that such tables were unreliable:

Chambers demolished the reputation of Fleay and other Victorian scholars by showing that their observations of metrical practice could not be duplicated, that their criteria were not systematically applied, that their figures varied from one publication to the next, that their columns did not add up (1989, 254).

There must be some concern as to how Fleay could use defective tables to support the established chronology. Wells & Taylor compiled statistical tables of style, which they claim helps to date the composition of the works (1987, 93-108). They refer to undefinable categories such as colloquialisms and rare words, which they use in a very subjective manner to reinforce their own chronology. Brian Vickers accepts that stylistic or linguistic features are of “secondary value” and can only “play a part in confirming or questioning a date established on other grounds” (2002, 126). Since neither the dates nor the sequence of Shakespeare's plays can be dated, there is no hard base to such styles of language and meter. Two assumptions are open to doubt: that Shakespeare's writing evolved gradually and unconsciously, without retrograde; and that Shakespeare exercised no control over them.

Another member of the New Shakespere Society was working on his own study of Shakespeare's development. Unlike Furnivall and Fleay who claimed to follow a scientific approach, Edward Dowden followed his own thoughts and feelings for a personal account of Shakespeare's supposed development in *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* in 1875. This study proved very influential and was frequently repeated: its twelfth edition was published in 1901. Dowden confidently delineated the playwright's development of “intellect and

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<sup>22</sup> Georg Gervinus. 1849-52. *Shakspeare* (4 vols; 4th ed. 2 vols, 1872). Translated into English by F. E. Bunnett in 1863 as *Commentaries on Shakspeare*. 2 vols. London: Smith, Elder & Co (Second edition 1875).

<sup>23</sup> James Halliwell picked out significant details from Forman's *Bocke of Plaies* (in *Shakespeareana* 1841), attributing the discovery to a Rev. W. H. Black. Halliwell cited Weever in *Works of William Shakespeare* (1853-65, xiii. 374).

character from youth to full maturity” (1875, xiii). He assumed that the chronology was “sufficiently ascertained” so as to enable the study the development of Shakespeare as an artist and as a man. He only notes Malone’s “ingenuity and wit” but otherwise accepts the chronology without further comment (1875, 5). Dowden added his own doubtful categories for dating plays such as the frequency of classical allusions and imagery. Ignoring Furnivall’s reservations, Dowden felt able to group the plays into four phases, which he believed corresponded to phases in Shakespeare’s life: (a) in the workshop (b) in the world (c) out of the depths (d) on the heights. Dowden added another category of the Romance plays, identifying it as a late style. This identification was a major addition to the myths of Shakespeare’s life and has been widely accepted in critical approaches to Shakespeare’s career and in “mainstream accounts of the life” (MacMullan 2007, 159).

Dowden proposed that characters such as Romeo, Hamlet, and Prospero reflect Shakespeare’s personality at different stages of his career. He postulated links between the genre of plays and Shakespeare’s emotional state:

From 1604 to 1610 a show of tragic figures, like the kings who passed before Macbeth, filled the vision of Shakspeare; until at last the desperate image of Timon rose before him; when, as though unable to endure or to conceive a more lamentable ruin of man, he turned for relief to the pastoral loves of Prince Florizel and Perdita; and as soon as the tone of his mind was restored, gave expression to its ultimate mood of grave serenity in *The Tempest*: and so ended (1875, 223).

Although Dowden’s psychological approach to Shakespeare predates Freud, his subjective extrapolation of Shakespeare’s inner feelings from the plays proved very influential on subsequent scholars (Schoenbaum 1970, 496-7). His division of the plays into four phases and assignment of dates within these phases has remained established. E. K. Chambers refers to the “admirable treatment of Professor Dowden” which greatly influenced his own sequencing and dating of the plays (1930, i. 251). The chronology of Chambers continues to exert the most influence when scholars attempt to date works. Dowden’s findings were also adopted by Peter Alexander who groups the plays in Dowden’s four phases in *Shakespeare’s Life and Art* (1939). Dowden’s study was still being issued as late as 1967 by Routledge. Dowden’s ‘third period’ which he claimed arose out of some terrible emotional upset, has been welcomed so as to explain the impulse behind the great tragedies and the problem comedies.

Some scholars criticised Dowden’s phases and his attempts at a psychological approach to the plays. An anonymous reviewer in *The Examiner* (6 March, 1875, 272-4) disparaged Dowden for purporting to uncover “central principles” about Shakespeare, which are “too relative for precise explanation” and then putting them into “dogmatic propositions.” The reviewer notes that Dowden’s theory is not borne out by the surviving “slender facts” of Shakespeare’s life. In 1909,

Sidney Lee took further issue with Dowden's "personal theory" of authorship which assumed that Shakespeare's tragedies arose out of his personal suffering:

I would contend that had Shakespeare been in the "third period" the victim of a private calamity or the prey of searing anxiety, he could never have approached the highest pitch of artistic perfection, and could never have written the work assigned to him. No such unfaltering equilibrium, in treatment of plot and character, as distinguished for example *Othello* and *Coriolanus*, would have been within his power, had he sought expression in tragedy for agonies of his own heart, for moral and mental catastrophe within the scope of his own conscience (1909, 14).

Lee emphasised Shakespeare's breadth of reading as the basis for his portrayal of subjects such as Antony (1909, 11). He rejected the "personal theory" that Shakespeare composed plays according to variations of private sensation and personal experience, a point emphasised by C. J. Sisson in his lecture on "the mythical sorrows of Shakespeare" (1934, 8). Sisson remained highly sceptical about that Dowden's four phases "which prevails invulnerable to criticism as orthodox faith" (1950, 1).

Furthermore, Dowden completely ignores Shakespeare's activity in the theatres, mentioning neither the Globe nor the Blackfriars. Taylor notes that Dowden's evolutionary view of literature corresponds to Darwin's vision of life (1989, 181). Perhaps the important criticism of Dowden concerns the chronology, which he believes is generally well-established. Dowden is unaware that there is no hard evidence to the date of composition of any of Shakespeare's plays, that Shakespeare may have revised some, many, all or none all of his works, and that Shakespeare's texts may have interpolations from other people. Finally, there is no evidence that Shakespeare composed plays consecutively, rather than the possibility that he worked on two or more texts at the same time, or that for a time he left unfinished one play while working on others. Overall, Dowden's critical study offers an interesting and thought-provoking theory about Shakespeare's apparent development which cannot be verified. Since there is no independent testimony as to Shakespeare's thoughts and feelings, modes of composition, or sequence of composition, Dowden was offering his own subjective interpretations as if they were objectively valid. Thus it is impossible to trace the Shakespeare's development from extant records. Nonetheless, Dowden's approach to the notion that we can trace Shakespeare's intellectual development has been imitated by Bevington (2008) and Bate (2008).

In 1897, the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sidney Lee, gave a similar estimation of Shakespeare's national value, allotting him the longest entry in the *DNB* at about 63,000 words. The entry about Shakespeare was only exceeded on the death of the only person deemed to have greater importance for the nation, Queen Victoria.<sup>24</sup> Smith, Elder & Co.

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Holland gives some figures (2006, 139-140). The entry for Queen Victoria appeared in a supplement in 1901. Like the entry for Shakespeare, the publishers Smith, Elder & Co. issued it as a separate monograph in 1902.

published both entries as separate monographs. Lee's *Life of William Shakespeare* first appeared in 1898 and was re-issued in many later editions.<sup>25</sup> The significance of Lee's study rests not so much on his views of "critical points" in the life of Shakespeare but the fact that he attempted a coherent narrative at all – against the admissions by many nineteenth century biographers from Chalmers to Halliwell-Phillipps. Echoing Collier who had asserted that the biographical material for Shakespeare was "hardly as scanty as it was formerly represented" (Collier *Works* 1844 i. viii), Lee makes the following claim at the beginning of the lengthy appendix, under the heading "The Sources of Biographical Knowledge,":

The scantiness of contemporary records of Shakespeare's career has been much exaggerated. An investigation extending over two centuries has brought together a mass of detail which far exceeds that accessible in the case of any other contemporary professional writer (*DNB* 1897, li. 395; repeated verbatim 1899, 361).

Lee is prepared to make a concession that there are gaps, but he believes that these gaps are not so large as to render the attempt at a biography impossible:

Nevertheless, some important links are missing, and at some points appeal to conjecture is inevitable. But the fully ascertained facts are numerous enough to define sharply the general direction that Shakespeare's career followed. Although the clues are in some places faint, the trail never eludes the patient investigator (*DNB* 1897, li. 395; repeated verbatim 1899, 361).

Whereas in the earlier editions, he noted that "some important links are missing", by 1915 he had downgraded the omissions to just "a few links" (1915, 637). Lee's claim that there is sufficient material for a coherent narrative account of Shakespeare's life was repeated by the Danish scholar, Georg Brandes (1898, 3-6), but not by any serious writer in the twentieth century until Schoenbaum (1975).

In some ways, Lee's *Life* was an important counter to tendencies among Victorian bardolaters. He saw himself as a "narrator, not a moralist" and his aim was "not the moral edification which may flow from the survey of either vice or virtue; it is the truthful transmission of personality" (1911, 22; 25-6). Lee insisted firstly on the investigation of primary material and then on a suitable selection as there is "imperative need of winnowing biographic information, of dismissing the voluminous chaff while conserving the grain" (1911, 41). Lee's study was far better organised than Halliwell-Phillipps's *Outlines* and very well indexed. Lee's aim was to write "an exhaustive and well-arranged statement of the facts of Shakespeare's career, achievement, and reputation," reducing "conjecture to the smallest dimensions consistent with

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According to the *ODNB* website, the entry for Shakespeare remains the joint longest (with Churchill's and Elizabeth I's) in the 2004 edition at about 35,000 words.

<sup>25</sup> Sidney Lee. 1898. *A Life of William Shakespeare*. London: Smith, Elder & Co. 4<sup>th</sup> edn. 1899; 5<sup>th</sup> edn. 1905. The original edition amounted to just under 500 pages. The edition of 1915 was expanded to 776 pages.

coherence” (1899, vi). He gives a linear account of Shakespeare’s life in seventeen chapters (about 60% of the work, pp 1-283), with fourteen additional chapters dealing with specific issues (1899, 284-446). Lee allotted some space to each play, indicating the main sources, early performances, earliest known publication, and assumed dates of composition. Unlike other commentators, he generally avoids making inferences from the plays, *e. g.* observing that in Prospero “traces have been sought without much reason of the lineaments of the dramatist himself” (257). He takes the sonnets to be mainly “literary exercises” in contrast to critics who believe that “Shakespeare avows the experiences of his own heart.” Although he had previously identified Mary Fitton as the “dark lady” in the earlier *DNB* entries for Mary Sidney and William Herbert, he later rejected close identification of historical figures with assumed personas in the sonnets.

Despite this statement of approach, Lee frequently makes conjectures. He asserts that Shakespeare was forced into marriage by Anne Hathaway’s kinsmen, who “doubtless secured the deed [marriage licence] on their own initiative, so that Shakespeare might have small opportunity of evading a step which his intimacy with their friend’s daughter had rendered essential to her reputation.” Lee solves the problem of the name Anne Whateley by stating with confidence: “The husband of Anne Whateley cannot reasonably be identified with the poet. He was doubtless another of the numerous William Shakespeares who abounded in the diocese of Worcester” (1899, 24). Lee states that Nicholas Rowe was “Shakespeare’s first adequate biographer” (126) despite the fact that only a small fraction of what Rowe offered in *Some Account of the Life &c* was biographical.

Lee maintains the myths initiated by Rowe that Shakespeare spent his childhood in Stratford, where he attended the local school (1899, 13-5), that he was caught deer-stealing and punished, which he accepts as “a credible tradition” (27-9); that Shakespeare had “no patron but one” based on the “trustworthy tradition” of the Davenant anecdote that Southampton gave Shakespeare a thousand pounds (125-7). Lee does not clarify why this tradition should be considered trustworthy. He also states that Shakespeare inspired envy in Jonson (176); he also accepts the unfounded myth of Shakespeare’s retirement to Stratford (264).

Lee’s speculation is indicated by his frequent use of the adverb “doubtless” on over seventy occasions. Among debatable assertions are the following: “The Rose Theatre was doubtless the earliest scene of Shakespeare’s pronounced successes alike as actor and dramatist” (37). Lee refers to Christopher Beeston’s son, William, as Aubrey’s informant, who was “doubtless in the main a trustworthy witness” (361) without stating in what ways Beeston might not have been trustworthy. When referring to plays published as so-called “bad” quartos, Lee states that “Criticism has proved beyond doubt that in these plays Shakespeare did no more than

add, revise, and correct other men's work" (59). Lee also paints his own vivid picture of Marlowe and Shakespeare not according to the prevailing trend as rivals but as collaborators on history plays, for which there is no evidence (60-1).

Lee issued an expanded edition of *A Life of William Shakespeare* in 1915:

The biography of Shakespeare, which I originally published seventeen years ago, is here re-issued in a new shape. The whole has been drastically revised and greatly enlarged. Recent Shakespearean research has proved unexpectedly fruitful. My endeavour has been to present in a just perspective all the trustworthy and relevant information about Shakespeare's life and work which has become available up to the present time (1915, vi).

The "recent Shakespearean research" included the findings by the Wallaces of twenty-six documents relating to the Belott-Mountjoy law suit (1612), which had been discovered in 1909 and published in the *Nebraska University Studies* (1910). Lee found it hard to attribute any significance to these papers which merely stated that Shakespeare had lodged with the Mountjoy family in Silver Street c. 1604. Most of his discussion is confined to a long footnote (1915, 276-7). The Wallaces also published details of other law suits: *Keysar v Burbage* (1610), *Ostler v. Heminges* (1615) and *Witter v. Heminges and Condell* (1619). These cases added to the material for the history of the King's Men and of the Globe, but only referenced Shakespeare indirectly. Lee also accepted the revised view that the Revels Accounts was a genuine document and he adapted his life at the appropriate places.<sup>26</sup> The newly discovered documents mainly concerned the performances of Shakespeare's plays at court and the history of the playing company.

Overall, Sidney Lee's *Life of William Shakespeare* uses speculation and the testimony of later anecdotes to expand the extant material, confining biographical inference to the sonnets. Notwithstanding these defects, it was frequently reprinted and remained the most respected narrative account of Shakespeare's life for the next seventy-five years – "a domination amounting almost to a monopoly" (Schoenbaum 1970, 524). For Schoenbaum, Lee's most important contribution was to "demonstrate the feasibility of Shakespearean biography on the larger scale" (1970, 525).

## 5.5 Scepticism in the twentieth century

Victorian writers held Shakespeare in such great reverence that in 1901 Bernard Shaw coined the word "bardolatry" to dismiss the "indiscriminate eulogies". A few years later, Shaw

<sup>26</sup> Sidney Lee: "A very thorough investigation carried out by Mr. Ernest Law has recently cleared the 'Reuells Booke Ano 1605' as well as that of 1611-2, and the papers of 1636-7 of all suspicion" (1917, 386; 450). Ernest Laws. 1911 (*Some Supposed Shakespeare Forgeries*. London: Bell) and 1913 (*More about Shakespeare 'Forgeries'*. London: Bell).

reviewed the stage adaptation of Frank Harris's *The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life-Story*, observing: "Everything we know about Shakespeare can be put into a half-hour sketch."<sup>27</sup> In the early twentieth century, another notable figure to doubt the possibility of a biography of Shakespeare was rather surprisingly Sidney Lee himself. In a lecture to the English Association in 1909, he rejected the practice of making biographical inferences from the plays: "In his own work, he did not air his own woes." He concluded his lecture with the following pronouncement:

Imaginative genius enables its possessor to live in fancy more lives than one. The number of Shakespeare's lives was greater than that of any other human being because of the supreme pliancy of his imaginative genius. To seek in his drama close-fitting links with the life which he led by his own hearth-stone is in my view to misapprehend the most distinctive note of his miraculous genius (1909, page v).

Newspaper reviewers, however, were not impressed with Lee's *Life*. An anonymous reviewer in *The Times* wrote on 2 December 1915 that the material for Shakespeare's life has "been twisted by a master artificer into the cunning semblance of a biography." A similar view was taken by Thomas Seccombe in *The Observer* (12 Dec. 1915): "No data exist for personal interpretation." In *The Daily Telegraph* (15 Dec. 1915), the reviewer states: "There is so little to say about Shakespeare the man. It would all go into one or two chapters of direct narrative, and it is all a record of external events. . . [Lee's descriptions] are not the exhibition of a human soul, not biography, not Shakespeare." These acknowledgements of the lack of sufficient materials for a life of Shakespeare were echoed by many academics throughout the twentieth century. In 1921, George Saintsbury reviewed the knowledge about Shakespeare and decided:

All this information really comes, as a matter of fact, to very little . . . . The more impartially, the more patiently and the more respectfully, so far as regards the laws of critical and legal evidence, we examine the results of Halliwell-Phillipps among dead, and of Sidney Lee among living, enquirers, the more convinced do we, in some cases, at least, become that almost the whole matter is "a great Perhaps."<sup>28</sup>

Sidney Lee was admired and respected by his predecessor's daughter, Virginia Woolf (née Stephen, 1882-1941). In an essay originally written in 1927, she described Lee's evidence-based life of Shakespeare as dull for not revealing personality:

Truth being thus efficacious and supreme, we can only explain the fact that Sir Sidney's life of Shakespeare is dull and that his life of Edward the Seventh is unreadable, by supposing that though both are stuffed with truth, he failed to choose those truths which

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<sup>27</sup> G. B. Shaw (1901) *Three Plays for Puritans*. London: Richards, intro. page xxxi. (1910). Review of Frank Harris's play (*Shakespeare and his Love*, 1910) in the *Nation* 8, 24 December; repr. in *Bernard Shaw's Book Reviews*, ed. Brian Tyson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 ii., 240-254).

<sup>28</sup> George Saintsbury. 1921. "The Character of our Knowledge about Shakespeare." In *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*. 18 Vols. Volume V. *The Drama to 1642: Part 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

transmit personality (Woolf, “The New Biography” in the *New York Herald Tribune* 30 October 1927; edn. 2008, 95).

Woolf implies that there were “truths” which could transmit Shakespeare’s personality but that Sidney Lee had not chosen them. Woolf seemed to change her mind as to whether any records existed to indicate Shakespeare’s personality. In an essay unfinished at her death in 1941, she noted:

It is a commonplace to say that every critic finds his own features in Shakespeare. His variety is such that everyone can find scattered here or there the development of some one of his own attributes. The critic then accentuates what he is responsive to, and so composes his own meaning, in Shakespeare’s words (Woolf “‘Anon’ and the ‘Reader’” ed. Silver 1979, 431).

Woolf was speaking during a time when many speculative and romantic biographies were published. In 1934, the British Academy invited C. J. Sisson to deliver its prestigious lecture, in which he attacked Shakespearean biographers for their imaginary reconstructions of the life. In “The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare” Sisson stated that “the dramatizing of Shakespeare the man has gone too far” and showed that there was no evidence to a portrait of “a man shaken by personal passion, moving from mood to mood, from optimism to pessimism and back again to resigned imperturbability” (1964, 10). Sisson points out the inconsistency of interpretation:

It appears that in 1607 Shakespeare's brother Edmund died, an event which helped to infuriate him. Fortunately, in 1608 his mother died, an event which restored him to a kindlier mood. So various are the effects of deaths in the family upon a great poet (Sisson 1964, 15).

A similar verdict was made in a review of “Shakespeare’s Life and Times” which used to appear annually in *Shakespeare Survey*. In 1949, D. J. Gordon noted that there “is no end to the exploration of the age in which Shakespeare lived out his life” adding that no serious biographer would attempt the life itself: “to write of this life itself or of the ‘personality’ of Shakespeare is now it seems reserved for the bold, the crazy, or the amateur” (*Shakespeare Survey* 1949, 144). One such bold biographer was Ivor Brown, who declared that “all excursions in discovery of Shakespeare are essays in conjecture and any one may compete” (1949, 29). Ernest Brennecke of Columbia University expressed his distaste when reviewing biographies about Shakespeare:

A short time ago the Editor of [*Shakespeare*] *Quarterly*, in what must have been a particularly sadistic mood, asked me to read a dozen or so of the latest Shakespeare biographies (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1950).<sup>29</sup>

Brennecke praises E. K. Chambers *Sources for a Biography of Shakespeare* (1946) which describes the limited types of evidence available and accepts Marchette Chute *Shakespeare of*

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<sup>29</sup> Ernest Brennecke. 1950. “All kinds of Shakespeare – factual, fantastic, fictional.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 1, 272-280.

*London* (1949) for the detailed description of the context: events, towns and legal documents. In 1953, F. P. Wilson spoke for many scholars: “We *know* we cannot write a biography of Shakespeare; we *think* we can write one of Marlowe.”<sup>30</sup> The lack of biographical material continues to be the case with Shakespeare. One modern philosopher, Ray Monk, considers that lengthy biographies of Shakespeare depend on “supposition, speculation, and plain guess-work.” He continues:

The “truths which transmit personality” [as described by Virginia Woolf] are simply not available to the biographer of Shakespeare; there are no letters, no recorded conversations, no diaries, no autobiography and no vivid recollection of his personal foibles from his closest friends.<sup>31</sup>

In the absence of such personal papers, biografictions in the form of inferences and speculations accumulate.

### **Documentary Collection**

In the twentieth century, by far the most influential review of documents relating to Shakespeare was conducted by Chambers (1930). Its sub-title *A Study of Facts and Problems* showed that he was avoiding any attempt at a coherent, narrative biography. Sir Edmund Chambers (1866-1954) devoted a large part of his long life towards elucidating the biography of Shakespeare. His research and collations of previous periods resulted in the two-volume *Mediaeval Stage* (1903) and the four-volume *Elizabethan Stage* in 1923. The title of his findings about Shakespeare indicates his reluctance to write the biography as he had originally envisaged. He merely states his purpose: “I collect the scanty biographical data from records and tradition, and endeavour to submit them to the tests of a reasonable analysis” (1930 i. ix). Chambers’s study of the “facts” has been accepted as accurate in its transcriptions of documents relating to Shakespeare, his works and the context. His discussion of the “problems” has also been widely lauded as “dispassionate, aloof from bardolatry, meticulous, totally informed” (Schoenbaum 1970, 711-2). Chambers found the narrative biographies of Sir Sidney Lee and J. Q. Adams inadequate as they “do not represent the sources with precision” and that “some of the subjective inferences are too confident” (1946, 7). These criticisms are valid for any narrative biography. Chambers’s study of facts and problems work has remained the handbook for scholars ever since despite later documentary collections, notably by Roland Lewis, who adds considerable discussion (1940) and Catherine Loomis (2002).

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<sup>30</sup> F. P. Wilson. 1953. *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1. Wilson was the Merton Professor of English Literature at Oxford University when he stated that a biography of Shakespeare was unattainable.

<sup>31</sup> Ray Monk. 2007. “This Fictitious Life: Virginia Woolf on Biography, Reality, and Character.” *Philosophy and Literature* 31, 32.

Chambers admits to making his own conjectures, *e. g.* that unevenness in stage-directions and character naming “is not inconsistent with what we may suspect of Shakespeare's temperament” (1930, i. 203). According to this view, anything can be passed as “not inconsistent” with Shakespeare's temperament as we have no record of what it was like. Regarding the length of plays, Chambers offers his views on the longest and on one of the shortest:

Probably *Hamlet* was always too long for performance as a whole. Shakespeare may have been more intent upon his poetry, than upon getting it over the stage-rails. One hopes that he remained unperturbed when some of his best lines were sacrificed. Cutting may be suspected also in plays for which we have not parallel-texts. The very short *Macbeth* possibly represents a substantial abridgement (1930, i. 229).

Chambers accepts the prevailing opinion as to which text of *Hamlet* was authoritative:

Q2 substantially represents the original text of the play, as written once and for all by Shakespeare, and that F1, Q1, and *Der bestrafte Brudermord (B. B.)* are all in various ways based upon derivatives from that text (1930, i. 412).

All of these conjectures seem plausible, but they also indicate that Chambers's presentation of the “facts” is made with a certain amount of editorialising. Elsewhere, he is prepared to accept a state of ignorance on critical points, such as the so-called lost years:

The main fact in his earlier career is still that unexplored hiatus, and who shall say what adventures, material and spiritual, six or eight crowded Elizabethan years may have brought him. It is no use guessing. As in so many other historical investigations, after all the careful scrutiny of clues and all the patient balancing of possibilities, the last word for a self-respecting, scholarship can only be that of nescience (1930, i. 26).

Apart from the documentary collections of Lewis (1940) and Loomis (2002), there have also been various encyclopaedias (Halliday 1952; revised 1964; O. J. Campbell 1964; Dobson & Wells 2001). This approach to Shakespeare is an acceptable but limited alternative to an attempt at a narrative life.

## 5.6 Twentieth century biographies of Shakespeare (to 1975)

“Creative biographies” was the phrase used by the sceptical C. J. Sisson in his review of studies of Shakespeare's life written between 1900 and 1950 (in *Shakespeare Survey* 1950). Sisson's only exceptions were the *Life* by Sidney Lee (revised 1925) and *A Life of William Shakespeare* (1923) by J. Q. Adams. Joseph Quincy Adams (1880-1946) was a respected scholar who later became the first Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library. His *Life* is characterised

by admissions of uncertainty, linguistic hedges, as noted in a contemporary review:<sup>32</sup> Regarding the Shakespeare marriage, Adams offered his opinion that there is “no reason to suppose that the marriage was not one of true love” and that there are “no grounds for the theory that Anne failed to make a good wife,” claiming that “he seems to have had her with him in London” (1923, 76). Adams’s view that Anne Hathaway attended her husband in the capital is unusual; there is no evidence either way. He presents lengthy arguments in favour of the “school-master in the country”, without stating any location (1923, 91-97). Adams makes an appeal to norms as to patronage, stating that just as Spenser was patronised by Sir Philip Sidney and Daniel by the Countess of Pembroke, so Shakespeare must have enjoyed the patronage of Southampton after the youthful earl came into “control of his fortune and was just beginning a career of extravagance” (1923, 150-1). While none of these claims can be disproved, they can all be called into question and in effect Adams is merely giving his opinion on a series of gaps in the biographical record for Shakespeare.

Frank Harris in *The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life-Story* (1909) gave a very speculative account of how Shakespeare’s biography was to be found in his works. He identified Shakespeare at different times in his life with Hamlet, Romeo and Jaques. He found further characters to represent not only his friends but more importantly his loves. *The Man Shakespeare* was very well received in its day: “This is the book for which we have waited a life-time” enthused Temple Scott in the *New York Times* of 6 November 1909. However, Harris’s conjectures were largely overlooked until Stephen Greenblatt’s biography appeared in 2004. Similarly, J. Dover Wilson gave his own interpretation of the dramatist in *The Essential Shakespeare: A Biographical Adventure* (1932). Accepting the lack of biographical material, he acknowledges that his account is “largely conjectural.” He announces in the preface: “Here, in a nutshell, is the kind of man I believe Shakespeare to have been.” He believes that John Shakespeare was “almost certainly” an ardent Catholic, who refused to allow his son to be educated by a Protestant minister at the Stratford Free School (40-1). There is some suggestion, but no definite proof, that John Shakespeare was a Catholic. Nor is there any evidence that Shakespeare either attended the Free School in Stratford or was prevented from doing so. Wilson asserts that the attack on him as “an upstart crow” (45-7) resulted from Shakespeare’s early career as a reviser of other people’s works, an argument popular among Victorians but now largely discredited. He claims that Shakespeare enjoyed close friendships with various nobles, including Lord Strange (61-2), Essex and Southampton, for whom he apparently provided dramatic entertainment at Southampton’s house in Titchfield, Hampshire (64-5). He assumes that

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<sup>32</sup> G. H.C. 1925. Review of *A Life of William Shakespeare* by Joseph Quincy Adams; *Shakespeare* by Raymond Macdonald Alden; *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas* by Joseph Quincy Adams. *The Sewanee Review*. 33.1, 95-101.

Shakespeare was a member of the Essex circle, luckily avoided implication in the 1601 uprising and went into mourning for two years after Essex's execution (107). As a result of this bitter experience (and not of his son's death in 1596), according to Wilson, Shakespeare resumed his writing composing his problem comedies and tragedies (119). Wilson's study drew sharp criticism from C. J. Sisson (1934), who felt that the that the dramatising of Shakespeare's life had gone too far and recommended that readers should use Sidney Lee's less romantic *Life of Shakespeare*.

One of the few biographers to challenge the dominant narrative was Sir Arthur Gray (1926), who speculated how Shakespeare had been brought up with Michael Drayton at Polesworth Hall, near Coventry. Gray, Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, argued that Shakespeare served as a page to Sir Henry Goodere. His theory has been dismissed by subsequent biographers but has the merit of explaining Shakespeare's access to a wide range of literature during his youth. Gray's account cannot be ruled out because there is no evidence as to where William actually spent his childhood.

The twentieth century also saw many psychobiographies of Shakespeare. Psychobiographers use and evaluate the subject's own testimony, such as diaries, journals and letters, and accounts from trustworthy witnesses so as to establish the subject's personality with the intention of explaining his or her motives and decisions. However, in the case of Shakespeare, such personal materials are conspicuously lacking, as noted by James Lake, a psychiatrist at Stanford University Hospital (1983, 70). Those who attempt a psychobiography of Shakespeare select passages from the works on the assumption that they have autobiographical relevance. Some writers have followed the claim made by Karl Elze (1857, xxii) that the death of Hamnet in 1596 influenced Shakespeare's revision of *Hamlet*. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900),<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud developed the connection: "it can only be the poet's own psychology with which we are confronted in *Hamlet*." Accepting the consensus that *Hamlet* was revised immediately after the death of his father in 1601, Freud offered a further connection to "a son of Shakespeare's, who died early, bore the name of Hamnet (identical with Hamlet)." Freud argued that in composing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare reflected a typical response to mourning, both of his father and of his son. In his 1910 essay on *Hamlet and Oedipus*, Ernest Jones, (1949, 108),

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<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud. 1900. *Die Traumdeutung*. Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke (Tr. A. A. Brill. 1913. *The Interpretation of Dreams: the Material and Sources of Dreams*. London, Macmillan.). Freud's comments come in a note to his lengthy section on 'Typical Dreams'. See Marinelli, Lydia & Andreas Mayer. 2003. *Dreaming by the Book: Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams' and the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*. New York: Other Press.

posited a link between the death of Hamnet and the writing of *Hamlet*.<sup>34</sup> Jones also claimed that Hamlet had an Oedipal complex, which is apparently “an echo of a similar one in Shakspeare.” Laurence Olivier portrayed Hamlet in such a Freudian manner in the 1948 film, with Gertrude, played by Eileen Herlie (b. 1918) who was actually ten years younger than Olivier (b. 1907). Peter Dow Webster (1949) adopted a Jungian approach and stated that in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare was portraying a “poetic version of his own infantile fantasy of his mother” (298).<sup>35</sup> Greenblatt is the only modern biographer to offer a psychobiography of Shakespeare (2004). Whereas the works of Shakespeare have been used very successfully to illustrate psychoanalytic theories,<sup>36</sup> they do not constitute any trustworthy witnesses to Shakespeare’s own experiences or feelings and led many critics to comment on the biographical fallacy (*e. g.* Winsatt & Beardsley 1946).

In 1970, Schoenbaum published his monumental review of Shakespeare’s biography - *Shakespeare’s Lives*. The opening section, “Materials for a Life” (3-71), describes the biographical material. The rest of the study contains his verdict on the various attempts at a life of Shakespeare (72-768). Schoenbaum is contemptuous of most biographies of Shakespeare for their reliance on uncorroborated posthumous anecdotes, their excessive description of the context, their biographical inferences from selected passages in the works or their use of intuition. Schoenbaum is particularly disparaging of biographies in the twentieth century – both by reputable scholars such as Sidney Lee and Dover Wilson, and by popular writers, such as Hesketh Pearson and F. E. Halliday – for being too speculative. He uses the term ‘Shakespeare Industry’ to refer not just to the commercialisation of Stratford but also to the plethora of studies of Shakespeare’s life and times (1970, 754). He observes that biographers discovered no new documents but used the existing framework to include their own subjective interpretations and insights (1970, 754-5).<sup>37</sup> However, Schoenbaum makes a serious error in his method by referring

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<sup>34</sup> Emrys Jones studied under Freud in Vienna and in 1920 published “The Oedipus-Complex as An Explanation of Hamlet’s Mystery: A Study in Motive” in *The American Journal of Psychology*. This paper was expanded in 1923 (*Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*. London: International Psycho-Analytical Press) and published as a monograph in 1949 as *Hamlet and Oedipus*. London: V. Gollancz.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Dow Webster 1949. “A Critical Fantasy or Fugue.” *American Imago* 6, 297-309.

<sup>36</sup> Janet Adelman *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of material origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, ‘Hamlet’ to ‘The Tempest’* 1992. London: Routledge. Coppélia Kahn. 1981. *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (1981) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Philip Armstrong has reviewed and dismissed many other such writers (2001).

<sup>37</sup> Schoenbaum briefly dismisses the following biographers: Hazelton Spencer (1947. *The Art and Life of William Shakespeare*. London: Harcourt, Brace And Company); Charles Norman (1947. *So Worthy a Friend: William Shakespeare*. New York: Collier); Leonard Dobbs (1948. *Shakespeare Revealed*. London: Skeffington); Frank Ernest Hill (1949. *To Meet Will Shakespeare*. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co.); Hesketh Pearson (1949. *A Life of Shakespeare*. New York: Walker); M. M. Reese (1953. *Shakespeare: His World & His Work*. London: Edward Arnold); F. E. Halliday (1956. *Shakespeare: A Pictorial Record*. London: Thames & Hudson; 1960. *Shakespeare in*

to various studies as ‘biographies’ when they were something else. Firstly, he claims that Rowe’s 1709 *Account of the Life &c.* was the “first full-dress biography of Shakespeare” (1970, 76), rather than a critical appreciation of Shakespeare with a few biographical statements included. Secondly, he repeatedly refers to Malone’s posthumous “Life of Shakespeare” (1970, 236-248), whereas the first three volumes of the Boswell edition of 1821 contains many essays and illustrative notes, not a continuous, coherent narrative. The outcome is that Schoenbaum has invented a much longer tradition of Shakespearean biography than actually exists, affording it a respectable pedigree which it does not deserve. By so doing, he follows Lee in placing his own biography of Shakespeare (1975) as the culmination of a tradition which never really existed.

Many editors and critics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries agreed a biography was not possible. They recognised the the “meagre store” (1970, 260), the “meagre light” (324), and the “meagre store” (634) of the documentary record as Schoenbaum recorded. Much of the material which surfaces in the narratives of Shakespeare’s biography in this period derives from subjective, biographical interpretations of the poems. Almost all biographers since then have relied on their interpretations of the sonnets as at least in part autobiographical, with a wide range of ingenious identifications for personas such as the “fair youth,” the “rival poet,” and the “dark lady.” Schoenbaum’s concluding remarks strike a pessimistic note about the feasibility of Shakespearean biography:

Perhaps we should despair of ever bridging the vertiginous expanse between the sublimity of the subject and the mundane inconsequence of the documentary record (1970, 767).

Those who tried to create a biography used a series of techniques to enhance the limited facts: they speculated, inferred, or merely described the historical record. In the next chapter, we shall see how Schoenbaum not only offered his own biography of the bard, but enabled academics to write their own life of Shakespeare.

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*His Age.* London: Duckworth; 1961. *The Life of Shakespeare.* London: Duckworth); Hugh R. Williamson (1962. *The Day Shakespeare Died.* London: Michael Joseph); Peter Quennell (1963. *Shakespeare: The Poet and His Background.* London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson); Roland Mushat Frye (1968. *Shakespeare’s Life and Times: A Pictorial Record.* Princeton: Princeton University Press).

## Chapter 6

### Re-Inventing the Life:

#### Schoenbaum and modern Shakespearean biography

Anyone with a normal threshold of evidentiary sufficiency will have to want very much to believe in order to find such a work [as a biography of Shakespeare] credible.

David Schwalm 1980.

This chapter considers the validity and influence of another study by Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (1975).<sup>1</sup> Five years after expressing his doubt as to whether any biography could be written at all, he took a different view about the “meagre store” of biographical material, deciding instead that there are enough records to enable a biography based on contemporary records. Modern Shakespearean biographies follow Schoenbaum in accepting this claim and they also follow his narrative structure from birth to death. Up until that time, academics attached to University English Departments had followed the New Critics and concerned themselves mainly with close analysis of texts. Wider study of the context was usually confined to identification of sources, as is evident in the Arden 2 series. One of the last of these to be published was Harold Jenkins’s edition of *Hamlet* (1982), which gives less than half as much space (Introduction 1-13) towards a consideration of the date of composition and early performance than it does to sources (82-112). Study of Shakespeare’s life and times was comparatively neglected. However, different perspectives on literature in the 1970s and 1980s permitted a biographical approach by seeking connections between the text and its cultural background. Thus the advent of Marxist and New Historicist approaches coincided with the influence of *A Documentary Life*. This chapter assesses the validity and influence of Schoenbaum’s study and concludes with a wide ranging critique of Shakespearean biography.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum’s *Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* was originally issued in 1975 as a hardback, large size format, approx. 36 x 26 cm, and included facsimiles of 218 documents. It was issued two years later as *Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (1977), a reduced format with the same text but smaller images. The small format was reissued in 1987 with changes to the introduction and brief additions to the text concerning the Lancastrian hypothesis and William Bott, a former owner of New Place. Another large-sized volume about subsidiary documents was published as *William Shakespeare, Records and Images* in 1981.

## 6.1 A Documentary Life (1975)

In *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*, Schoenbaum claims to combine “a straightforward account of Shakespeare's life” with facsimiles of “records and documents” (1975, ix). In the original preface, he observes that few original records survive and there are no personal papers of Shakespeare detailing his thoughts and feelings. He thus concedes that “it would be idle to deny some legitimate basis to scepticism regarding the whole enterprise of Shakespearian biography” (ix). By this convoluted sentence, he concedes doubt as to whether a biography of Shakespeare is possible, without drawing too much attention to the concession. Nevertheless, in line with Collier and Lee, he insists that “the records themselves are more numerous than is popularly supposed” (ix) and he proceeds on the assumption that these are sufficient to write a narrative account of Shakespeare's life based on contemporary records. He wishes to distinguish his own work from “most of the innumerable popular biographies of Shakespeare that augment the facts with speculation or imaginative reconstructions or interpretative criticism of the plays and poems” (x).

Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life* was enthusiastically reviewed by many academics not only for its reproductions of documents, but also for its narrative account. It has been highly acclaimed since. According to Nina Bawcutt in *Shakespeare Survey*:

Pride of place in this year's review must undoubtedly go to Samuel Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*. . . . nothing is included simply because it is picturesque or typical of the age. . . . As a biography, it deals scrupulously with the facts of Shakespeare's everyday life, making no attempt to explore his inner development. The legends that grew up after his death are affectionately dismissed (1976, 168).

Bawcutt made some criticisms of the original publication as bulky and lacking transcriptions. However, neither she nor any other reviewer has ever challenged Schoenbaum's framework for Shakespeare's life. Susan Snyder was also very impressed, calling it “a splendid life.” David Bevington praised its “factual and lucid account of Shakespeare's life” amounting to a “sound and expert summary of our knowledge about Shakespeare the man.”<sup>2</sup> When the book was issued with a number of revisions in a more compact form in 1977, reviewers tended to concentrate their praise on the narrative account of Shakespeare's life in very generous terms. Kenneth Muir states that the value of the *Compact* version “lies in the fact that, while it never deviates into fiction, it actually gives us a more interesting account of Shakespeare's life than do those biographers who

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Snyder. 1976. Review in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 27, 125-7. David Bevington. 1979. Review in *Modern Philology* 77, 217-221. Douglas Hamer makes a few small criticisms in *The Review of English Studies* 27, 1976, 203-205.

let their imaginations work overtime.”<sup>3</sup> Stanley Wells stated that “with this book, Dr. Schoenbaum joins the ranks of the heroes of Shakespearean scholarship” and that no writer before “had ever so comprehensively studied attempts to discover the facts about Shakespeare’s life and to assemble them into biographical narratives” (1996, 15). Gary Taylor calls it the “most respected biography of Shakespeare in the second half of the twentieth century” (1989, 332). Throughout *Shakespeare and Biography* (2010), David Bevington quotes *Documentary Life* for records of Shakespeare’s life rather than Chambers (1930).

These reviewers, however, did not notice the weaknesses as outlined in the previous chapter: that very few documents mention William Shakespeare in his childhood, youth or early adulthood; that there is very limited evidence for Southampton as Shakespeare’s patron; that there is no evidence as to when Shakespeare began to write plays, whether he ever revised his own plays or those of others, whether he was ever paid for any play, or whether he ever collaborated with any other writer. Nonetheless, academics now felt they had a framework of Shakespeare’s entire life, within which they could offer their own interpretations but outside which they could not stray.

Despite the title, much of *A Documentary Life* is contextual or speculative. Schoenbaum describes the Shakespeare family and Elizabethan Stratford in about a quarter of his study (1987 3-95), dismissing the suggestion that Shakespeare was a poor Warwickshire peasant as “a myth”, arising from the impoverished backgrounds of Shakespearean biographers (1970, 261). He perpetuates Rowe’s unevidenced assumption that Shakespeare spent his childhood in Stratford, where he attended the local school (62-72). Schoenbaum states: “we need not doubt that Shakespeare received a grammar school education” (63). The phrase “we need not doubt” indicates the absence of any supporting evidence. He adds: “Shakespeare was lucky to have the King’s School at Stratford-upon-Avon. It was an excellent institution of its kind, better than most rural grammar schools” (65). He uses the circular argument that Shakespeare was so well-read that he must have received a good education there, supported only by the comparatively high wage paid to the schoolmaster. In his introduction, he notes that historical researches show how “children were educated, families worshipped, and officials busied themselves with the task of local government” (xi). The unspoken assumption is that the experiences of any one child somewhere in England during the Elizabethan period coincided with the experiences of any

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Muir. 1978. “A More Interesting Life”. Review in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, 126. In *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1979, 177), E. D. Pendry began his review with this: “Samuel Schoenbaum’s *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (Oxford, 1975) has already won high praise for its elegance and scholarship. Now, in *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* we are given the substance of the lavish parent volume in a more portable form.” Other favourable reviews include Geoffrey Bullough in *Renaissance Quarterly* 31 (1978), 411-2; J Bernard Haviland in *College Literature* 4, 1977, 262-263.

other. However, we are uncertain whether Shakespeare even attended the King's School at Stratford, what exactly was taught there, or even if he was in Stratford during this period at all: no record mentions William from his baptism in 1564 until his marriage licence in 1582.

Having ignored the undocumented years from 1564-1582, Schoenbaum considers as "lost" only the years from 1585-92 (95-117). He assesses Rowe's myth that Shakespeare was caught deer-stealing and punished, writing a ballad in revenge against Sir Thomas Lucy (95-109). Although Schoenbaum stops short of accepting its literal truth, the fact that Schoenbaum gives it so much prominence suggests significance. Schoenbaum is unsure of the Lancashire hypothesis, but when returning to a consideration of Stratford, he offers the opinion that "we are on safer ground" (114). He takes up a suggestion by A. W. Pollard (1909) that Shakespeare joined the Queen's Men when they played in Stratford in 1587, shortly after one of their company was killed in a fight. Schoenbaum asks: "If these players [the Queen's Men] came after 13 June [1587], they lacked one man. Before leaving Stratford, had they enlisted Shakespeare, then aged twenty-three, as their latest recruit?"<sup>4</sup> Like many other biographers, Schoenbaum asks questions rhetorically so that readers can come to the answer apparently of their own accord. His chapter on London and the theatres is entirely contextual (118-142), prefaced by the assumption that Shakespeare made his way alone on foot to seek his fortune in London, ignoring the possibilities that he came with a group of players or even that he may have attended his father in the legal action against John Lambert heard at the King's Bench in 1588-9 (Thomas 1964). Schoenbaum accepts further myths of Rowe without question: that he enjoyed the patronage of Southampton (170-179); that he inspired envy in Jonson, basing his account on various anecdotes "however dubious" (256-9); and that he retired to Stratford (178-319). There is no evidence for any of these claims.

Despite his professed intention to avoid speculation, Schoenbaum believes that in "the absence of a firm chronology, one must speculate and some guesses are better than others" (161). While it is likely to be true that "some guesses are better than others," it is impossible to judge which guesses are better when it comes to deciding the order and dates in which Shakespeare composed the plays: there is no evidence on when he composed any play or on his compositional practices. Schoenbaum shows his awareness of biomythography in his consideration of Richard Ryan's anecdote, first recorded in 1825:

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Eccles (1961. *Shakespeare in Warwickshire*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 82-3) reported the record that the actor William Knell had been killed in a brawl with John Towne at Thame on 13 June 1587, and suggested that Shakespeare was recruited to take his place. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean (1998, 160-1) see the speculation as "hard to resist" but believe that the matter cannot be settled. Others believe that a London-based acting company was unlikely to recruit personnel from the provinces.

It is well known that Queen Elizabeth was a great admirer of the immortal Shakspeare, and used frequently . . . to appear upon the stage before the audience . . . dropped her glove, and re-crossed the stage, which Shakspeare noticing, took up (WS ii. 300-1).

Schoenbaum is dismissive of this story: “While not enhancing the biographical record, it contributes to the Shakespeare mythos” (1970, 308). Somewhat curiously, Schoenbaum refers to other stories, especially those from Stratford as “traditions” e.g. the “famous tradition” that Elizabeth commissioned a play about Falstaff in love which “first reaches print in 1702” (196). There is no earlier mention and therefore no tradition. Like many biographers, Schoenbaum is intrigued by the anecdotes of the ‘Shakespeare-mythos’ because “in some may reside a kernel of truth” (1970, 85). Thus Schoenbaum situates himself in the privileged position of deciding which anecdotes have “the kernel of truth” and which do not. This is a subjective process as biographers are thus dependent on their own inclinations, since there is no contemporary evidence to corroborate the comments.

Although Schoenbaum discarded many conjectures, he indulged in some others. He asserted that the company who performed *A Comedy of Errors* at Gray’s Inn on 28 December 1594 must have been the Chamberlain’s Men (161) despite their documented performance on the same night at Greenwich, which he mentions (183). Schoenbaum gives his own opinion as to the original audience of a problem play: “To suggest that *Measure for Measure* was a royal play planned and written expressly for court performance is no doubt to strain credulity” (250). Schoenbaum has offered no definition for what might “strain credulity.” Some have argued strongly that this play was indeed intended for court performance.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the original edition of *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (1975) is an important resource for its high-quality, facsimile reproduction of so many documents. It has also served an important (but in my view undeserved) role for establishing the view in academic circles that it is possible to write a life of Shakespeare based on contemporary records. Its claim that more is known of Shakespeare’s life than is usually realised has been frequently repeated. It also sets the outline of the life allowing a few variables or “unknowns.” However, as a narrative account of Shakespeare’s life, it mainly relies on context and conjecture – in much the same way as the popular biographies which Schoenbaum had himself dismissed in *Shakespeare’s Lives*. Moreover the records which he presents in *A Documentary Life* “afford no insight into the interior life of the artist, wherein resides the chief fascination of literary biography” as Schoenbaum elsewhere observed (1971, 1).

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<sup>5</sup> Both Nina Baym (ed. *Measure for Measure*, 1991, Oxford Shakespeare edn. pp. 1-6) and Alvin Kernan (*Shakespeare, the King’s Playwright*, 1995, 50-70) present a strong case for courtly composition.

## 6.2 “Gentle” Shakespeare

Samuel Schoenbaum was not the first to refer to Shakespeare as “gentle” but he re-established it as the dominant view of his personality. Noting that “literary geniuses are not on the whole celebrated for their amiable disposition,” Schoenbaum cites Greene in *Groatsworth* as the only person who saw Shakespeare in a bad light (1987, 255). Schoenbaum then quotes a series of contemporary writers who seem to have taken a favourable view of Shakespeare’s personality. These citations, however, are not secure as they are brief, fragmentary and ambiguous. If they do allude to Shakespeare, then it is as a poet and playwright, not as a man.

Firstly, Schoenbaum claims that Henry Chettle reported that “divers of worship commended Shakespeare’s uprightness of dealing” (255). Chettle used the pronoun “his” and did not in fact name Shakespeare or any other playwright in his address to the Gentleman Reader in *Kind-harts Dreame* (S. R. December 1592):

. . . the diver of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing that approves his art (Henrie Chettle. *Kind Heart’s Dream*. STC 5123; WS ii. 189).

Whereas Chambers had stated that it was only “probable” that Chettle was referring to Shakespeare as the second play-maker (WS, i. 58-9), Schoenbaum has no doubts. However, this interpretation was attacked by Lukas Erne as lacking “any credible textual evidence” amounting to “mythographic rather than biographic” interpretation (1998, 430). Erne showed that Chettle was apologising to Marlowe and either Peele or Nashe, concluding:

The cumulative effect of the evidence against Shakespeare [as the person who showed uprightness of dealing] is such that it partakes of mythology, rather than biography, to keep drawing inferences about Shakespeare’s early years in London from Chettle’s apology (Erne 1998, 440).

However, Schoenbaum’s interpretation is followed by most modern biographers of Shakespeare (e. g. Honan 1998, 158-162; Greenblatt 2004, 212-15; Ackroyd 2005, 176-8; Duncan-Jones 2011, 37-44), even though Chettle does not mention Shakespeare by name in this or any other publication.<sup>6</sup>

Another writer cited by Schoenbaum (1987, 255) who stated that Shakespeare had an amiable disposition is identified as “Anthony Scoloker.” In the epistle to the reader’s preceding *Daiphantus, or the Passions of Loue*, 1604, the author refers to “Friendly Shake-speare’s tragedies” and signs himself “An. Sc.” Since this cannot refer to a printer called Anthony Scoloker from the time of Edward VI, it must be a relation, about whom nothing is known. The

<sup>6</sup> In *Englandes Mourning Garment* (1603, STC 5121) Chettle wonders why a “silver tongued Melicert”, usually identified as Shakespeare, has not loosed ‘one sable tear’ to mourn the death of Elizabeth.

poem likens his protagonist to the character of Hamlet, as suffering the passions of love and for wearing just his shirt, which suggest that the author of *Daiphantus* did not know Shakespeare personally, but only through a performance of *Hamlet*.<sup>7</sup> It is extremely tenuous to base an estimation of someone's character on the printed testimony of an unidentifiable writer without any known personal connection to the subject.

The third writer cited in support of a "gentle" Shakespeare is John Davies of Hereford, who referred to "good Will" in *The Scourge of Folly* (1611).<sup>8</sup> Schoenbaum over-interpret the allusion as the phrase "good Will" not only appears in parenthesis but also after a qualifying phrase "Some say":

*To our English Terence, Mr. Will. Shake-speare.*

Some say (good Will) which I, in sport, do sing,  
 Had'st thou not plaid some Kingly parts in sport,  
 Thou hadst bin a companion for a King;  
 And, beene a King among the meaner sort.  
 Some others raile; but, raile as they thinke fit,  
 Thou hast no railing, but a raigning Wit:  
 And honesty thou sow'st, which they do reape;  
 So, to increase their Stocke which they do keepe.

John Davies, *Scourge of Folly* Epigram 159 (1611)

Davies's comment does not amount to any special praise, especially as the sub-title of the work "satyricall epigramms, and others in honor of many noble and worthy persons", suggests that there may be more than a touch of irony about the poems. John Davies has no recorded connection with Shakespeare. Jonathan Bate has speculated that he might have been the "rival poet" of the sonnets but accepts that this interpretation might be "fanciful" (2008, 230-5).

Finally, Schoenbaum refers to a minor poet, William Barksted, whose allusion to a "deere lov'd" neighbor might be a reference to Shakespeare (*WS*, ii. 216). Barksted makes no suggestion as to his personality, only to his "worthie merit" as a poet.<sup>9</sup> Taken together, these suggestions remain vague and do not confirm whether Shakespeare was gentle or not. Nonetheless, from these sparse references, Schoenbaum concludes:

<sup>7</sup> *Daiphantus, or the passions of loue. Comicall to reade, but tragicall to act: as full of wit, as experience. By An. Sc. gentleman.* (1604, STC 21853). A. B. Grosart, ed. 1880. *Daiphantus, or the Passions of Love, Etc.* (*WS* ii. 214-5).

<sup>8</sup> John Davies. 1611. *The scourge of folly. Consisting of satyricall epigramms, and others in honor of many noble and worthy persons of our land.* (STC 6341). (*WS* ii. 214).

<sup>9</sup> William Barksted. 1607. *Mirrha, or the Mother of Adonis.* (STC 1429). (*WS* ii. 216).

Shakespeare is enshrined in the consciousness as Gentle Will Shakespeare. One cannot imagine a more fitting designation for the innate gentleman who was not gently born (1987, 255).

Schoenbaum also has to play down the less gentle references to Shakespeare. Regarding the 1596 writ of attachment against Shakespeare, Langley and two women, Schoenbaum calls it a “minor legal drama” (1987, 198) and states that “somehow Shakespeare was drawn into this feud” rather than concede that Shakespeare had violent tendencies and was threatening the life of Wayte.

Overall, Schoenbaum conflates the original sense of “gentle” in terms of social status with the more modern notion of “gentle” as amiable. It was Jonson in the prefatory material to the First Folio (1623) who first referred to “gentle Shakespeare” in the address to the reader and “my gentle Shakespeare” in the address to the memory. Years later, Ben Jonson described him as “honest and of a free and open nature”, which is reminiscent of Iago’s estimation of Othello (*Timber or Discoveries*, first published in 1640-1). Nevertheless, Schoenbaum’s interpretation of Shakespeare as a “gentle” person is followed by almost all modern biographers, with the exceptions of Duncan-Jones (2001) and Greer (2007). Bevington finds it “comforting to realize that many people have wanted to think of him as not only a great writer but a splendid person” (2010, 28).

### 6.3 Modern Shakespearean Biographies after Schoenbaum

Samuel Schoenbaum’s *Documentary Life* (1975; revised 1977 and 1987) has been very influential in establishing the structure of Shakespeare’s life, which had only been hinted at by Rowe, Malone and Dowden. This is most clearly evident in following the established chronology of the plays, despite the absence of evidence to date the composition of any single play to any particular year. The derivative nature of modern Shakespeare biographies is also clearly signalled by a perusal of the acknowledgements and/or lists of further reading in Shakespearean biographies. Instead of noting any debt to scholars who assembled the records, perhaps E. K. Chambers (1930) or Roland Lewis (1940), biographers of Shakespeare cite their most important debts to other biographers. The best such collection, involving transcriptions without much discussion or interpretation, is by Catherine Loomis (2002) but this work seems to have been completely overlooked by all modern biographers. Anthony Holden (1999) in his prologue pays his most important tributes to Harold Bloom and to Anthony Burgess, neither of whom are known for their work on the biographical material for Shakespeare. Michael Wood (2003, 345) lists a wide range of over thirty historical studies of Elizabethan England as essential reading, prior to mentioning his debt to *Shakespeare’s Lives* (1970) and *A Documentary Life* (1975), neither of which offer a comprehensive list of references to Shakespeare. Stephen Greenblatt

(2004, 390) introduces his Biographical Notes with fulsome praise for Schoenbaum (1970) and for Gary Taylor (1989), both being narrative accounts of the history of Shakespeare's reputation, not lists of records. Peter Ackroyd (2005, 511) begins his bibliographical list with a note of thanks to recent biographers (Duncan-Jones, Holden, Sams, Wells, Wilson, and Wood) but does not mention any historical records. Likewise, René Weis (2007, 420) starts his biographical note with a page of praise for Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life*, without noting that this is a narrative biography with its own assumptions and limitations. Laurie Maguire & Emma Smith cited *A Documentary Life* as still "the standard life of Shakespeare" in which he gives "the documentary evidence and assesses difficult questions with even-handed restraint" by (2012, 207). However, it should be essential for any biographer to consult primary evidence with scepticism and not rely on summaries by a previous biographer or "to use a piece of evidence just because respected predecessors have used it can only be considered reckless and irresponsible" (Hume 1999, 160). Thus modern Shakespeare biographies are derivative, mainly dependent on previous narrative accounts, which necessarily has a limiting effect on their own accounts.

Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life* also played an important part in re-establishing a consideration of the author and the cultural context when approaching literary texts, in an approach that came to be known as New Historicism. In addition to close readings of the texts, critics now attempted to relate them to their social and historical context. As a result, it became acceptable for academics to compose literary biographies about Shakespeare, relating works of literature to the author and to the author's own milieu. Many scholars came to accept Schoenbaum's illusory claim that there is sufficient material for a biography of Shakespeare. As with previous biographies, these modern lives of Shakespeare rely on the use of uncorroborated posthumous anecdotes, contextual description, imaginative conjectures and selective biographical inferences from the works. In the final quarter of the twentieth century many respected academics published a biography of Shakespeare. Each dismissed as a myth that notion that there was insufficient material for a life of Shakespeare and derided other biographies for indulging in undue conjecture and speculation. Each followed the narrative account established by Schoenbaum, consisting of: Shakespeare's childhood and education in Stratford; his arrival in London, early patronage by Southampton, and his eventual retirement to Stratford. Like Rowe's *Account*, they involve description of the context and appreciation of the works. In line with New Historicist principles, these studies attempt to link the plays to the context of the public theatres. All of them cite Schoenbaum as a major source. Their lack of references indicates that the authors are aiming at a general audience.

It was only after Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life* that academics, especially those involved in teaching English Literature at university, attempted a Life of Shakespeare. In *Shakespeare and Biography* (2010), David Bevington has reviewed the varying solutions offered

in modern studies to recurring mysteries. He surveys the gradual accumulation of biographical materials in his opening chapter, “The Biographical Problem,” and describes earlier biographies in the second chapter, “The Art of Biography,” without ever observing that the entire enterprise is flawed due to insufficient records. Muriel Bradbrook *Shakespeare: The Poet in His World* (1978) was the first major biography to appear after 1975. After noting the reservation of F. P. Wilson that no biography of Shakespeare could be written, she offers mainly an appreciation of the works set in Schoenbaum’s biographical framework. Peter Levi in *The Life and Times of William Shakespeare* (1988) takes issue with Schoenbaum, insisting that some conjecture is desirable in biography, as “it would be a great pity if his inevitably negative influence on conjecture were to check conjectures that might usefully be tested” (1988, 383). Levi is very critical of unnamed biographies that are “full of hasty attempts to build on conjectures” (1988, xix). Paradoxically, Levi’s own biography is full of opinions which are unevidenced, *e. g.*, that Shakespeare and Southampton were in love but not “complete lovers” (1988, 100). Dennis Kay in *Shakespeare: His Life, Work and Era* (1991), which was subsequently adopted in the Twayne’s World Author Series, also attempts to “tell the story of Shakespeare’s life within the context of his age” (ix). Kay concedes “the frustration of knowing so little about Shakespeare’s formative years” (46). While he notes that Shakespeare’s childhood and education in Stratford are not documented, he believes that “nobody has seriously questioned the assumption that the young William was a pupil at the King’s New School.” (20). Peter Thomson in *Shakespeare’s Professional Career* (1992) portrays the actor and playwright, attempting to show how Shakespeare adapted his works according to his immediate circumstances. As with the other studies, much of the content involves describing the works and the context of the Elizabethan playhouse. Like Schoenbaum, Stanley Wells not only conducted his own review of Shakespearean biography (1991-4) but also produced his own life, which was mainly concerned with describing and appreciating the works in their assumed chronological order in *Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life* (1994) – published in the U.S.A as *Shakespeare: a Life in Drama* (1995); it was reissued in Britain as *Shakespeare: the Poet and his Plays* (1997).

A decade after publishing a revised edition of *A Compact Documentary Life*, Oxford University Press commissioned a new biography by Park Honan, *Shakespeare A Life* (1998). In this, OUP claimed that the biographer “uses a wealth of fresh information to dramatically alter our perceptions of Shakespeare the actor, poet, and playwright.” The claim of fresh information turns out to be entirely contextual and as such is merely a publisher’s lure no different from the “newly corrected” formula used by early modern stationers who simply reprinted a previous quarto. Honan deals with the contextual material more thoroughly than any of the preceding five titles, often using an appeal to norms: since this is what normal people in Stratford were doing (although such evidence is fairly thin), then this is what Shakespeare must have been doing under

his mother's "urgently watchful, intense love" (19). Honan's main departure from the traditional narrative confirmed by Schoenbaum is his consideration of the Lancashire hypothesis. Without accepting it outright, he devotes enough space to suggest that he is persuaded (61-70). Otherwise, there is very little new information or interpretation, presenting Shakespeare as a caring, hard-working man. The final major biography of the 1990s was written by a celebrated biographer Anthony Holden in *William Shakespeare: His Life and Work* (1999) is more speculative than the previous works. He imagines that Shakespeare was "trapped into a reluctant marriage by a desperate woman" and that her kinsmen "came knocking on the door of Henley Street that autumn, demanding that the son of the house do the right thing by their deceased's friend homely daughter" (63-70). He accepts the Lancashire hypothesis, that William of Stratford was Catholic and the William "Shakeshafte" mentioned in the Hesketh will. He describes how he worked as a tutor and actor at the home of a Catholic Lancastrian nobleman. He believes the deer-poaching myth, the "time-honoured thesis," adding an element of religious vindictiveness about his subsequent punishment. He also makes inference from the works, asking: "Is it entirely idle to wonder if Shakespeare himself was suffering sleepless nights while writing *Macbeth*?" (237). Some readers might be tempted to answer: "Yes, it is entirely idle!" Nonetheless, Holden assumes a positive answer in his continuation.

### **Biographies since the turn of the millennium.**

Other major publishers have issued biographies of Shakespeare. In line with their emphasis on the text, The Arden Shakespeare had never issued a biography in their history from the 1890s. This omission was remedied by Katherine Duncan-Jones who in *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes From his Life* (2001) portrayed Shakespeare as selfish. She departed from the traditional narrative firstly by describing Shakespeare as an "early starter" who joined the Queen's Men in the mid 1580s and began working as a playwright c. 1588. Secondly, she consciously wished to explode the hagiographic tradition of Shakespeare as gentle by depicting him as ambitious and obsessed with "social class, sex and money" (x-xi). She uses conjecture to put "some spectral, or speculative, flesh on those well-guarded bones" (x). Rather surprisingly, she makes no mention of the 1596 Langley writ, in which Shakespeare was bound over to keep the peace (Hotson 1931). Without any personal papers, it is not possible to form any reliable view either of Shakespeare's personality as gentle or ungentle or his feelings: "It was important to him [in the mid 1590s] to be accepted and respected" (83) is deduced solely from his father's application for a coat of arms. This assertion is plausible but by no means established. Regarding the context of the theatres and London life, Duncan-Jones offers much useful information; Jonathan Bate asserts that in line with New Historicism *Ungentle Shakespeare* "has a profounder and more persuasive grasp of his literary and social milieu than any of its competitors." But this is

contextual description without any direct link to Shakespeare. There may have been a touch of irony, however, when Jonathan Bate called *Ungentle Shakespeare* “unquestionably the best Shakespearean biography of the new century.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2003, Michael Wood presented *In Search of Shakespeare* as a mini-series for the BBC with an accompanying printed biography. For Wood, the most important aspect of Shakespeare’s personality was his adherence to the old faith (an interpretation which Duncan-Jones had rejected). He develops this by accepting the Lancastrian hypothesis. The tie-in book contains many lavish illustrations, more than in any similar publication; the map of the Shoreditch theatre district (119) is particularly useful. The chief value lies in its wealth of circumstantial evidence which does little to say anything new about the person who wrote the works. Wood often states conjecture as fact when speaking to camera on location, confidently describing an event at Stratford Grammar School: “One day in class, when Shakespeare was about nine, his schoolmaster Simon Hunt introduced him in Latin to the Roman poet Ovid” (61). This is plausible, but he should at least mention that the relevant records have not survived. Although he states that it is “dangerous to read auto-biography into the plays,” he proceeds to do just that in linking the ghost of Hamlet’s father with his own father’s death in 1601 (240-1). Regarding his marital life, Wood makes unverifiable claims that Anne “would be the rock on which he relied throughout his life, supporting his career in London” (87), adding “for all we know . . . he loved Anne till the end and still felt as he had on the marriage day that she had ‘sav’d my life’.” (339). Wood does not make clear the enigmatic text of Sonnet 145 from which the quotation is taken and makes the suggestion without stating possible alternatives, *e. g.* that they were entirely indifferent to each other. Wood claims that “he had the patronage of noblemen,” (165) but does not name either Southampton or any other patron. He identifies the “fair youth” of the sonnets as William Herbert (178-183) and the “dark lady” as Emilia Lanier (195-203) without considering alternatives or even whether any identification is possible. Overall, Wood manages to combine much contextual description with biographical inference and his own speculation.

The most eagerly awaited biography of the twenty-first century was by Stephen Greenblatt *Will in the World: how Shakespeare became Shakespeare* (2004). As the founder of New Historicism, he more than anyone would be able to provide clear and causal links between the playwright’s social setting and the works. However, many academics were disappointed that Greenblatt relied more on his own imagination than on documentary evidence. Like Wood, his principal focus is on Shakespeare’s Catholicism. He claims to discern this struggle to avoid the religious and political upheavals of the day in the works. However, he begins with the following

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Bate. 2001. “Not such a sweet Swan of Avon.” Review of *Ungentle Shakespeare*. In the *Sunday Telegraph*, 21 April.

disclaimer: “There are huge gaps in knowledge that make any biographical study of Shakespeare an exercise in speculation” (18). He opens *Will in the World* with the request: “Let us imagine” (23). In the absence of archival material regarding Shakespeare’s childhood, he indulges in speculation based on the slimmest of inferences, e. g. William first heard poetry from his mother singing a nursery rhyme, which is possible but unverified (23) or that John Shakespeare the ale-taster suffered from alcohol problems (66-7) which Greenblatt deduces from the reference in *Hamlet* to the Danes’ reputation for drinking (1.4.184) and from Hal’s disdain for Falstaff (*I Henry IV*). He openly follows Frank Harris (1909) in claiming that Shakespeare had an unhappy marriage. He identifies Shylock with Roderigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth’s Jewish physician (285-6), and he asserts that the description of the death of Falstaff in *Henry V* is based on the account of the death of Robert Greene (219). Like Wood, he sees Shakespeare as an adherent of the old religion and imagines a casual meeting between the young William and the Edmund Campion. He adds: “Not surprisingly, Shakespeare never referred openly to Campion” (108-117). Such a line of argument could be made to support any contact with anybody as Shakespeare makes no reference to any person before his will in 1616.

M. G. Aune (2006) analysed many reviews of *Will in the World*, noting that Greenblatt was “promoted as a celebrity scholar inside the profession and promoted as a popular author outside the profession.” Some academics welcomed the book. Despite the conjectures and speculation, Terry Eagleton asserted (2004) that “what matters is the stylishness and lucidity with which this most accomplished of narrators delivers his well-thumbed fable.” Similarly Lois Potter accepts that when “a book’s chief allegiance is to imagination, it is pointless to criticize it by the standards of biographical scholarship.” Potter admires how “Greenblatt writes beautifully and appreciatively of the events that catch his imagination” (2005b). However, other academics were very disappointed, especially as Greenblatt was clearly departing from his usual approach to literary criticism.<sup>11</sup> Colin Barrow was surprised that “the founding father of New Historicism” should resort to “the individuating anecdote and the “simple psychologising of the plays” when constructing his biography of the bard. Katherine Duncan-Jones stated that “*Will in the World* combines a good deal of insight and sensitivity with a strangely uncritical mish-mash of idées fixes and nonsense.” Jonathan Bate wondered how Greenblatt could “possibly know that Mary Arden sang the song of Pillicock when Will was a babe in arms?” After giving further examples

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<sup>11</sup> Colin Barrow. 2005. “Who Wouldn’t Buy it?” Review of Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the World*. In *London Review of Books*, 20 January 2005. Duncan-Jones, Katherine. 2004. “Will-o’-the Wisp Forever.” Review of *Will in the World*, by Stephen Greenblatt. *The Spectator*, 9 October. Jonathan Bate. 2004. “The Sweet Swan and the Porcupine.” Review of Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the World*. In *The Daily Telegraph* 17 October. Tom Healy notes similar discrepancies between Greenblatt’s adoption of New Historicism earlier in his career and the use of imagination in *Will in the World*. (Review in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 2006, 142, 227-33).

of a similar nature, Bate concludes that many of Greenblatt's interpretations are "entirely arbitrary." In other words, they are merely unevidenced assertions or biografictions. The most wide-ranging criticisms were made in a review article by David Ellis (2005b).

Peter Holland's entry in the *ODNB* for "William Shakespeare" (2004) was seldom reviewed and is rarely cited; however, it offers a very reasonable view of Shakespeare's life. It considers alternate theories and states the writer's preference for one interpretation over another. Another good feature is its awareness of the limited evidence: "Neither at this period nor later is there any firm evidence of the roles Shakespeare acted or of the quality of his performances." A major shortcoming, however, is its use of the works as evidence of Shakespeare's life: he states that "Viola's passionate mourning for the apparent death of her twin brother in *Twelfth Night* could have been generated by the loss of Hamnet" and adds that it "is not too fanciful to see Shakespeare drawn as a result towards the subject matter of Hamlet, where son grieves for father rather than father for son." Local affiliations may have clouded his judgment when he describes the school at Stratford as "splendid", despite the total absence of any records concerning the institution in the Elizabethan period. He states that William left "school at about fifteen" for which there is no evidence; he considers the Lancastrian hypothesis as "not impossible" but is wary of the possible Catholic adherence of the Shakespeare family members. He vaguely dismisses the "fanciful narratives" during the so-called lost years and observes that "none have any foundation." He believes that Southampton was his patron with enough money to acquire either a share in a playing company, or a coat of arms for his father or a property in Stratford. He accepts that there is "no evidence for Shakespeare's having retired to Stratford." He seems to adopt a biographical reading of the sonnets: "Read as biographical, they [the Sonnets] also make plain that fidelity to Anne was not something Shakespeare was much concerned about, though adulterous sex with the "dark lady" induced deep shame." With regard to his courtship, Holland states that it "is reasonable to give in to temptation and assign Shakespeare's Sonnet 145 to this period." One wonders whether it is ever reasonable in an academic context to "give into temptation."<sup>12</sup> Just over half of the entry is concerned with the afterlife (Holland 2006, 140).

Another professional biographer to undertake a life was Peter Ackroyd in *Shakespeare, the Biography* (2005). Like Holden, he accepts uncritically many speculations, *e. g.* that he attended the funerals of his son (270-1) and his father (373) which he describes in some detail. He accepts the possibility that Shakespeare died of syphilis and describes the Protestant funeral which he

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<sup>12</sup> The apparent pun on Hathaway in Sonnet 145, 13-14: '*I hate' from hate away she threw, / And saved my life, saying 'not you.'*' is taken to show the poet's true feelings towards her; Andrew Gurr argues that this poem was written in 1582 when William was attempting to woo Anne ("Shakespeare's First Poem: Sonnet 145." *Essays in Criticism*, (1971) 21.3, 221-226). This pun is accepted by other biographers including Wood (2003).

received, for which there is no evidence. Regarding the deer-poaching legend, Ackroyd states that “there may well be truth at the bottom of this well of conjecture” (69). He accepts Southampton as his patron (190-2). He makes other unfounded claims: *e. g.* that a dinner at Oxford in 1593 – “a matter of historical record”, which he does not cite – attended by Southampton, Essex, Lord Strange and the Lord Admiral Howard, was the inspiration for a “satire on some of Shakespeare’s most notable contemporaries” *i.e.* *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (205), a view which is not endorsed by G. R. Hibbard (Oxford edition, 1990, 56-8) or by H. R. Woudhuysen (Arden 3, 1998 70-2). He places a high value on unverifiable claims: “In matters of [Shakespeare’s] lineage, however, what can be asserted or suggested is more important than that which can be proved” (2005, 27). Overall, Ackroyd’s biography follows the dominant narrative structure set out by Schoenbaum but with considerable addition of inferences and conjectures.

Two years later, the next biography emerged, this time by a Shakespeare editor, René Weis with *Shakespeare Revealed* (2007). Weis again follows the traditional narrative but adds many inferences from the works. He believes that references to schoolboys in *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet* (20) are autobiographical. Weis imagines that Hamnet was resurrected briefly on stage in the person of Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* (268). He accepts many later myths, *e. g.* that Southampton was his patron and gave him £1,000, as Rowe claimed (115). He adds new speculation, *e. g.* that he built up a library at New Place (251). There is no contemporary evidence supporting either claim. Weis also repeats James Joyce’s suggestion in *Ulysses* that Anne had an affair with a younger Shakespeare brother, “so that Hamlet remonstrating with Gertrude may reflect Shakespeare imagining his son arguing with Anne” (2007, 275-6). He takes the sonnets as autobiographical: Chapter 13 is entitled “A Will ‘made lame by Fortune’s Blows’” and he adopts a literal interpretation of Sonnet 37.

Jonathan Bate wrote two books about Shakespeare which have been taken as biographical. He described the earlier study, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1997), as a “biography of the poet’s talent and reputation.” In this, he surveyed the influences on his works and showed Shakespeare’s originality and versatility in transforming them. He argued that the Marlowe’s premature demise afforded a special opportunity for Shakespeare. While saying that the sonnets should not be read biographically (326), he identified the “fair youth” Southampton and the “dark lady” as Samuel Daniel’s sister, who married John Florio. Bate’s later work, *Soul of the Age* (2008), attempts to be more biographical, as announced by its sub-title *the life, mind and world of William Shakespeare*. In this, he adapts the chronological approach of the traditional narrative into the more thematic pattern of Jaques’ speech about the Seven Ages of Man. Bate states his main method lies in “[g]athering what we can from his plays and poems: That is how we will write a biography that is true to him” (5). He states that “we must always be wary of attempts to map Shakespeare’s life on to his work” (52) but does just that when shortly afterwards he claims: “of all his plays,

*Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* are the ones that have the most distinctive air of having been written back home in Stratford" (55). While both plays have a strong pastoral element, there is nothing in them to suggest a peculiarly Warwickshire location for their composition. When Bate summarily dismisses the Lancastrian hypothesis and describes Shakespeare's Warwickshire upbringing, he lays himself open to sharing a vested interest in the Shakespeare industry, according to Anthony Holden (2008), as Bate at that time held a professorial chair at nearby Warwick University, and had forged close professional links with Stratford, "not least as a governor of the RSC." Bate also attaches significance to the "strong possibility" that Shakespeare spent some time in the service of Southampton at his country seat in Titchfield during the period 1592-4 (12). He enlarges on the advantages of Southampton's patronage without ever stating the basis for the assumption that Southampton was ever his patron. His own "instinctive sense" points to Shakespeare's self-portrait in Bassanio's wooing of the wealthy Portia in *A Merchant of Venice* (165). Bate's efforts to link the life and times with the works are for the most part idiosyncratic.

Like Bate, David Bevington's *Shakespeare's Ideas* (2008) considers in an approximate chronological order how "the writings of Shakespeare reveal the workings of a great mind" (1). Unlike Bate, Bevington remains continuously aware that any philosophy is only expressed through the fictitious voices of characters, never directly in prologues, manifestoes, satirical diatribes or recorded conversations. Rather surprisingly, in *Shakespeare and Biography* (2010), Bevington omits to point out that modern biographers frequently take an individual speech character or dramatic situation as evidence of Shakespeare's own experience. Bevington summarises and contrasts their different interpretations of Shakespeare's outlook on his supposed sexuality, religion and politics but never criticises them for the biographical fallacy in assuming that Shakespeare's own views can be inferred from the works.

Like Schoenbaum and Wells, Lois Potter first conducted her own review "Having Our Will: Imagination in Recent Shakespeare Biographies" (2005a) before setting to work on her own study *The Life of William Shakespeare: A Critical Biography* (2012). She addresses key issues overlooked by Stephen Greenblatt (2005b) such as "which of the constantly metamorphosing theatrical companies, separately or in combination, might have produced which plays, or how much Shakespeare might have collaborated with other playwrights." Her own study is indebted to the work of Brian Vickers on co-authorship (2002). She identifies many possibilities for Shakespeare's collaboration, but remains cautious as there is no evidence as to how co-authorship was conducted by Shakespeare. She is open about the use of her own imagination so as to understand the imagination of Shakespeare: "the only Shakespeare I can imagine is one whose imaginative life was fed essentially by words" (vii). The even-handedness of *Shakespeare Quarterly* is shown by the juxtaposition of David Riggs's very positive review of Potter's

biography (2013, 378-380) immediately after an equally enthusiastic review by Robert Bearman of David Ellis's *The Truth about William Shakespeare* (2012), which argued against the possibility of any biography of Shakespeare.

### Partial biographies

These biographies follow much the same continuous, cradle-to-grave narrative outline of Shakespeare as established by Schoenbaum in 1975. Another approach was to offer a partial biography, a slice of a subject's life. Ernst Honigmann in *Shakespeare: the 'lost years'* (1985) developed the Lancastrian hypothesis, first proposed by O. L. Baker (1937), that William Shakespeare spent much of his youth in Lancashire and returned to Stratford to marry in 1582. This case is based on identifying William Shakespeare, the future poet and playwright, with a person named "William Shakeshafte, now dwelling with me" in the 1581 will of Alexander Houghton. Much contextual material has been found to support this hypothesis, especially among those who view Shakespeare as a closet Catholic (Wood 2003; Greenblatt 2004; Wilson 2004). The theory does offer an explanation as to how Shakespeare might have been introduced to drama. The Houghton family had links with Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, whose company of players acted a number of Shakespeare's plays. However, the case lacks direct evidence (Bearman 2002).

Another study to offer a slice of Shakespeare's life was James Shapiro *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (2005). Shapiro attempts to describe a key year in Shakespeare's life but only manages to describe some of the important political and theatrical events of this year, e. g. the death of Spenser or the return from Ireland of Essex. Shapiro is unusual among Shakespeare biographers in recognising insufficient biographical material for a cradle-to-grave account of Shakespeare's life, as he explained in a review article of "Five Books" to do with Shakespearean biography:

I keep coming back to the impossibility of writing a cradle-to-grave story of Shakespeare's life, but for the last 15 years of my life and probably for the next 10, all I'm going to be doing is trying to do what Charles Nicholl did in *The Lodger* and which I did in my book *1599*, which is to find an interesting period about which we know a considerable amount of Shakespeare's life, and try to tell the story of that time. A micro-history rather than a biography (Shapiro 2011).

James Shapiro's entire study *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (2005) depends on the following unverifiable claims: "In the course of 1599, Shakespeare completed *Henry the Fifth*, wrote *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It* in quick succession, then drafted *Hamlet*" (xv). While these dates are often accepted (although many would place the drafting of *Hamlet* to 1600 or 1601), there is no record which states when Shakespeare was actually composing these plays

(or any other plays). Shapiro is offering plausibility, not certainty, in his slice of Shakespeare's life, as a careful reading of the preface indicates:

Rather than awkwardly littering the pages that follow with one hedge after another – “perhaps”, “maybe”, “it's most likely”, “probably” or the most desperate of them all “surely”, I'd like to offer one global qualification here: this is necessarily my reconstruction of what happened to Shakespeare in the course of the year (2005, xxiii).

Shapiro's omission of such terms of uncertainty encourages readers to accept that what he is saying is factually based. As a matter of record, there are only seven documented references to William Shakespeare in 1599, none of which states which plays or poems (if any) Shakespeare was writing at this time. There are no entries for any plays of Shakespeare in the Stationers' Register for 1599; three entries in 1600 for *Henry V*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado* might indicate composition in the preceding year. Shapiro ignores *Much Ado* but it has an equal claim to a 1599 date for composition. The earliest reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is usually taken to be in the SR in 1602. There are other references to a play about Hamlet (in 1589, 1594 and 1596) which might refer to a version by Shakespeare (Jolly 2014).

Despite Shapiro's claim that “we know a considerable amount of Shakespeare's life” in the year 1599, there are only seven documented references to him, three handwritten and four printed (Loomis 2002, 90-102):

- (1) named as tax defaulter in parish of St Helen's, Bishopsgate;
- (2) named as a sharer in the Globe in the post-mortem inventory of Sir Thomas Brend (c. 16 May 1599);
- (3) named as an original sharer in the Globe in the lawsuit Witter vs Heminges and Condell (1619).

A draft of the grant of arms in 1599 only mentions John Shakespeare and his “posteritie”; it does not refer to William (WS ii. 18-20). It might also be possible to date some allusions in the *Return from Parnassus* to 1599, but this play is generally dated to 1600-1 (Leishmann 1949). There are also four references in print to Shakespeare:

- (4) named on the dedication to *Venus & Adonis* (O5, STC 22358);
- (5) named on the title page of *1 Henry IV* (Q2, STC 22281);
- (6) named on the title page of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (STC 22341);
- (7) mentioned in an epigram (iv. 22) by John Weever in *Epigrammes in the Oldest Cut, and Newest Fashion* (STC 25224).

These printed allusions to Shakespeare only contribute to our knowledge of Shakespeare's standing, not to his life: *Venus & Adonis* and *1 Henry IV* are reprints. *The Passionate Pilgrim* is a

collection of poems by various authors. Weever's epigram gives a poetic tribute to the narrative poems, and to plays about Romeo and a King Richard. As he only writes one epigram to Shakespeare out of a total of 160 (Honigmann 1987, 90-1), it seems unlikely that the two were acquainted. The epigram might be a Puritan attack on the moral deficiency of the works (Jones 2010). None of these printed references shows what Shakespeare was actually doing in 1599.

The title of Shapiro's book suggests that he has located Shakespeare in various places at various times in 1599. All that is possible, however, is to describe some important events in this particular year such as Spenser's funeral at Westminster and speculate whether Shakespeare might have attended or what he might have felt: there is no record that Shakespeare even knew of Spenser's death. Altogether, there is virtually no evidence as to what Shakespeare may have been doing in 1599. Nonetheless, this study won the Samuel Johnson Prize for the best non-fiction writing in the English language and the Theatre Book Prize.

Thirdly, Charles Nicholl *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (2007) starts from the Belott-Mountjoy lawsuit in 1612. Nicholl described the historical and archaeological records for the area around Cripplegate to give an his informative portrait of the Mountjoy home in the period 1601-3. His detailed account gives the social context for the playwright at this time including marital law and contemporary fashion but is unable to say anything about the person himself. The Belott-Mountjoy documents mention Shakespeare by name on 26 occasions, but they only affirm that he was lodging with a French family about ten years previously. We are not told how long this stay lasted. Shakespeare was well known to the parties in the legal suit but could remember nothing about the particulars of the dowry arrangements. Other descriptions, *e. g.*, as to what in particular Shakespeare may have been reading or writing in 1604, are only conjectures. The papers, however, give the only occasion in his life when we can locate Shakespeare to a particular time and place: on 11 May 1612, he was making his deposition at Westminster Hall, London. There are no other accounts which locate him to any other precise location on any particular day. *The Lodger*, like *1599* and *The 'Lost Years'* are not studies of Shakespeare, but detailed accounts of one part of the historical context, which are tenuously connected to the few contemporary records for Shakespeare at the time. These attempts in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries show the continuing reliance on inference, imagination and context for a life of Shakespeare.

Another study which claims to offer oblique insights into Shakespeare's character and life was Germaine Greer's *Shakespeare's Wife* (2007). Most biographers of Shakespeare refer to the lack of material or the difficulty of writing about Shakespeare from contemporary records. That of Germaine Greer is one of the more curious:

All biographies of Shakespeare are houses built of straw, but there is good straw and rotten straw, and some houses are better built than others (2007, 9).

Greer suggests that her biography *Shakespeare's Wife* is built from “good straw” and “built better than others” despite the very limited biographical material for Ann Hathaway: her marriage bond, her burial record, her epitaph, and three citations in her lifetime in the wills of men. She is also mentioned in law suits after her death. She is the implied mother of Susanna, baptised in May 1583, and of twins, Hamnet and Judeth, baptised in February 1585. There is no contemporary report, either by Shakespeare or any of his friends, family or acquaintances, describing the relationship between Shakespeare and any members of his family. We do not even know whether his wife or children ever saw any of his plays in performance. Only Shakespeare’s will might be taken as an indication of feelings towards his wife, his daughters and his grand-daughter; the will however has been the subject of differing interpretations. Despite the paucity of records about Ann, Greer feels confident enough to dispute and revise previous claims about Shakespeare’s relationship with his wife. Greer claims “We can find no evidence of Shakespeare having supported his family, especially during the lost years” (2007, 138). Greer needs to be reminded that we can find no evidence about Shakespeare at all during the period from 1585 to 1592, hence the term “lost years.” Greer asserts that Ann has been undervalued by generations of male biographers, leaving “a wife-shaped void in the biography of William Shakespeare, which later bardolaters filled up with their own speculations, most of which do neither them nor their hero any credit” and that these “Shakespeare wallahs” have “succeeded in creating a Bard in their own likeness, that is to say, incapable of relating to women, and then vilified [Ann] in order to exonerate him” (356). Katherine Duncan-Jones concedes that there is “no reason why Ann(e) may not have been a loyal and patient wife, an excellent mother, a good brewer of malt and a superb domestic manager.” The use of the linguistic hedge “no reason why not” implies that there is no evidence that such was the case. In fact, Greer only manages to exchange one “set of unsupported hypotheses” with another set as Charles Nicholl observed in his review. He believes that the “best way to learn more about Ann Shakespeare would be actually to discover something new about her.”<sup>13</sup> Katherine Scheil (2013) compares the widely different interpretations of Shakespeare’s marriage in six recent biographies.

The number of biographies that have been published by academics who are experts in English Literature is astonishing, not just because they are so similar, but for the claim that any

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<sup>13</sup> Katherine Duncan-Jones states that Greer has the temerity to exercise her imagination with “scatter-gun attacks on shadow squadrons of other scholars” *Literary Review*. July 2007. Charles Nicholl believes that *Shakespeare's Wife* is “marred by a tendency to play ideological ping pong with her reputation.” *Guardian* 1 September 2007.

biography can be attempted at all.<sup>14</sup> It seems that readers are expected to accept an eminence-based biography rather than an evidence-based biography.

There are various reasons as to why there have been so many biographies of Shakespeare. Perhaps the most important is that publishers have realised that the reading public's respect for Shakespeare means that a biography is likely to sell. F. E. Halliday (1961, 9) introduced his biography of Shakespeare with the apology that he had been asked to write it by his publisher. Colin Burrow notes that readers are a lot more likely to buy books about Shakespeare's life than they are to buy books by Shakespeare (2005). Stephen Greenblatt mentions the public's enduring interest in the "rags-to-riches" story (2004, preface). Additionally, it has been noted that there is a continuing attraction for writers such as Wood and Ackroyd to write about a great writer (the emphasis of Schoenbaum's study 1970). Anthony Burgess asserted the "the right of every Shakespeare-lover who has ever lived to paint their own portrait of the man" (1972, 11). Michael Dobson has called it a craving for "someone to feel grateful to" (reported by Higgins 2009). Furthermore, the continuing iconic status of Shakespeare (as explained by Taylor 1991 and Dobson 1992) entails that popular writers such as Bill Bryson will attempt the Life of Shakespeare as he did in 2007.

## 6.4 Critique of Modern Shakespearean Biography

"A psychological journey, allegorically expressed by his work" Barroll (1991, 1).

For earlier Shakespearean scholars such as Malone, Halliwell-Phillips and Chambers, such records as have survived are by no means sufficient for a narrative account of Shakespeare's life. Despite the large number of biographies written by academics since 1975, the documentary record does not offer any indication of the subject's thoughts and feelings: there are no extant diaries, journals or personal letters by him or which mention him. Maurice J. O'Sullivan Jr. advocates historical fiction as a means to depicting a highly personalised view of Shakespeare's character since "attempts at serious biography seem to shed so little light on the figure behind the plays" (1997, 22). Historical fiction is a very effective way for writers to explore insights into

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum was attached to North-Western University (Chicago) City (New York) and Maryland. Others include Muriel Bradbrook, Professor of English at Cambridge; Peter Levi, Oxford Professor of Poetry, Dennis Kay (Lincoln College, Oxford), Peter Thomson (Drama, Exeter), Park Honan (Leeds), Katherine Duncan-Jones (Somerville College, Oxford), Stanley Wells and Peter Holland (Shakespeare Institute, Birmingham), Richard Wilson (Lancaster & Cardiff), James Shapiro (Columbia, New York), Stephen Greenblatt (Harvard), René Weis (University College, London), Jonathan Bate (Warwick & Worcester College, Oxford), David Bevington (Chicago), Ernst Honigmann (Newcastle) and Lois Potter (Delaware).

their chosen subjects. It remains essential, however, to label it as fiction not biography so that the reader can understand that such interpretations are personal and cannot be verified.

The literary theorist, Meyer Abrams, presents a broader criticism, noting that life-writing about Shakespeare contains “the largest mass of conjectural biography under which any author has ever staggered on his way to immortality” (1953, 249). The same point is made by the critic, Richard Altick, who states that it is not possible to write a biography of Shakespeare (or of most authors before Swift) because “not enough revelatory personal documents survive” (1965, 353). After listing various types of evidence which form biographical material, David Schwalm notes the situation regarding Shakespeare:

A serious lack of information about a biographical subject (*e. g.*, Shakespeare) makes it rather difficult for us to feel that the man has been accounted for, and biographies of such subjects can contain little but “must have’s” and “probably’s” based on virtually no hard evidence at all. Anyone with a normal threshold of evidentiary sufficiency will have to want very much to believe in order to find such a work credible (1980, 27 n7).

One of the foremost biographers in agreement on the need for caution is Stephen Greenblatt who states that:

the inward springs of his art . . . would be difficult enough to glimpse if biographers could draw upon letters and diaries, contemporary memoirs and interviews, books with revealing marginalia, notes and first drafts. Nothing of the kind survives, nothing that provides a clear link between the timeless work with its universal appeal and a particular life that left its scratches in the humdrum bureaucratic records of the age (Greenblatt 2004, 13).

The difficulty lies in making a reliable link between the mundane records about Shakespeare and the great works associated with his name. The lack of biographical materials, however, seems to allow Greenblatt to base his own narrative on his own imaginative interpretations. This is not New Historicism; it is biogfiction. J. Leeds Barroll noted in 1991 that little attention had been paid by biographers to the prevailing conditions of the theatre when Shakespeare composed his plays. Up to that point a biography offered only a “psychological journey, allegorically expressed by his work” (1991, 1). Barroll attempted to see the effect of the closure of the theatres on Shakespeare’s career. J. R. Mulryne (2006, 1) advises against “the pitfalls of a slipshod historicism” in a collection of essays in which Alan Nelson (2006) insists on “documentary discipline” among Shakespearean biographers. M. G. Aune, in a lengthy review article of *Will in the World*, stated:

Academics expect right Shakespeare, a historically accurate biography, fully informed by new historicist practices. Providing something conjectural betrays the commitment to the academic pursuit of truth, as well as the implicit commitment to propagating factual or right Shakespeare (Aune 2004, n.p.).

David Bevington (2010, 8) agrees that writers of Shakespearean biography need to exercise caution.

Mulryne, Nelson and Bevington insist along with modern biographers of Shakespeare that there are sufficient records to make it possible to construct a traditional biography of Shakespeare. This claim was made originally by John Payne Collier in 1844. It was repeated by Sidney Lee: “The scantiness of contemporary records of Shakespeare's career has been much exaggerated” (1899, 361). This curious claim was revived by Schoenbaum who asserted: “The records themselves are more numerous than is popularly supposed” (*Documentary Life* 1975, xi). Most modern biographers follow this claim explicitly. Jonathan Bate states. “We know a great deal more about Shakespeare's life than we do about the lives of his fellow-dramatists and fellow-actors” (1997, 4). The implication is that sufficient material is extant for a biography of Shakespeare, which is wrong. A more glaring mistake is that much more is known about the life of Ben Jonson than about William Shakespeare (Barton 2006). Park Honan makes a similar claim regarding the material for the life of Shakespeare “Research into the Elizabethans is of such quality today that new material about Shakespeare, his town, his parents, his schooling, his friendships, or his career continually come to light” (1998, ix). Duncan-Jones repeats the idea, stating that there is a “remarkably substantial body of documents relating to Shakespeare” (2001, ix). These writers seem unaware that no major contemporary document bearing Shakespeare's name has been discovered since the Wallaces published the papers in the Belott-Mountjoy case in 1910 and Hotson published the Langley writ (1931). Any “new biography of Shakespeare should begin with an apology,” wrote F. E. Halliday (1963, 9) as very many biographies have been attempted but very few reveal any new document of relevance.

### **Biografiction**

Far from accepting this documentary vacuum, biographers offer their own conjectures and interpretations. However, for any claim which cannot be verified with regard to contemporary records, I use the term “biografiction”, which was popularised by the American critics, Durling and Watt, in their 1941 review of literary biographies which in the 1920s and 1930s had increasingly sought to portray the inner person, the thoughts and feelings of an author (1941, 6). One such book, J. Dover Wilson's *The Essential Shakespeare* (1932), described as “a biographical adventure,” made many unfounded claims, including the following:

Shakespeare loved Essex, loved him more than most and admired him, this side idolatry, as much as any. Thus he not only shared in the general horror and grief at the earl's fall; he felt it in a personal fashion (Wilson 1932, 107).

Many of these claims were refuted in a detailed review by Charles Sisson in 1932, who distinguished facts, such as the execution of Essex in 1601, from speculation about Shakespeare's

reaction to this event. Sisson states that Dover Wilson put forward “a theory deduced from a series of conjectures which, once made, are assumed to be facts” (1932, 475-6). Peter Levi warns readers to guard against stretching conjecture into evidence, but argues that some conjecture is desirable so as to test the evidence (1988). The problem persists that few conjectures about Shakespeare can be tested against contemporary documents. Levi himself frequently stretches conjecture into evidence, *e. g.* he is convinced that Lord Strange was the victim of deliberate poisoning, which he then takes as established fact (42-3). Levi also gives the impression that he is advancing a new idea, but the suspicion of poisoning was widespread at the time.<sup>15</sup>

Biographers display their critical acumen when considering insoluble issues: his marital relationship; his sexuality; his political outlook; and his religious affiliations. They often seek coherence in their subject’s life, even though few lives demonstrate coherence (Ellman 1971, 19). Margreta de Grazia observes that the standard account of Shakespeare’s life followed “novelistic trajectory of increasing prosperity and respectability” as outlined by Rowe in 1709 and Malone in 1790 (1991, 138). This has become the dominant interpretation and was followed by Schoenbaum (1975). Another important feature of biography is the birth scene and Shakespearean biographers have shown great interest in describing the house where Shakespeare was born in Henley Street, Stratford. However, there is no record where the actual birth took place, as has been described by Julia Tomas (2012). Any description of the circumstances of Shakespeare’s birth, therefore, is entirely conjectural.

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<sup>15</sup> The death was “wondrous strange” according to John Stow (1600) *The Annales of England ... from the first inhabitation untill this present yeere 1600* (STC 23335). The description of onset and development of the malady is given on pages 767-8 in the 1931 edition. The contemporary accounts are considered by Lawrence Manley and Sally-Beth MacLean in *Lord Strange's Men and Their Plays* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2014, 323.

Modern biographies of Shakespeare follow the pattern identified in Chapter One:

- I. **Introduction.** Biographers of Shakespeare have no difficulty in explaining the significance of their subject. They invariably dismiss the notion of lack of information, often vaguely claiming “new evidence.” It is usually the publisher’s blurb which explains why the biographer is particularly qualified to present a new study, either as a specialist in the field or as an acclaimed writer such as Bill Bryson: “From bestselling author Bill Bryson comes this compelling short biography of William Shakespeare” (publisher’s blurb, 2007).
- II. **Family Background** is treated in much detail because there is so much actual documentation both in the Stratford records and in John Shakespeare’s application for a coat of arms. Some of the description entails mention of his mother’s family to the Anglo-Saxon period (*e. g.* Wood 25-7). Attempts to make such description relevant to William’s life are rarely convincing.
- III. **Early Life.** The birth scene at Henley Street is frequently described in detail, but has no foundation in any records. Every description of Williams’s childhood and education, however, is conjectural as there are no records that he was even in Stratford from the time of his baptism until the issue of the marriage licence.
- IV. The **Life** is then described in a series of chronologically arranged episodes. There is much contextual description of London, the theatres, the courts of Elizabeth and of James. Shakespeare is assumed to have known a patron, a rival poet, a dark lady who is usually his mistress, and a fair youth of whom he is very fond – all of whom receive different identifications. Eventually, Shakespeare enjoys an easy retirement in Stratford, again undocumented. Some biographers quote extensively from the works and describe them in detail (*e. g.* Bradbrook, 1978), but others only mention them in passing (*e. g.* Schoenbaum, 1975).
- V. His **death** and funeral are often described in detail (again no evidence) and his will is analysed for his attachment to his elder daughter and acquaintances in Stratford.
- VI. His **surviving family** are considered summarily. The biographer mentions the subsequent history of his widow, children and grand-daughter.
- VII. The **afterlife** usually receives very brief treatment. One exception is Holland (*ODNB*, 2004.). Over half of his entry concerns posthumous reputation

Biographers often identify one moment in their subject’s life, which sets them off on their route to success, which Campbell identifies as the first stage of the hero’s journey, the Call to Adventure. For Rowe, the Call came when he was caught poaching inside Sir Thomas Lucy’s

enclosed park. After he was punished, it was claimed, Shakespeare wrote a satirical ballad against Lucy (1709, i. v). This episode was accepted by Lewis Theobald (1733 i. vi) and enhanced by Edward Capell who cited the testimony of an old woman whose grandfather had heard it from one Thomas Jones who had died in 1703 aged upwards of ninety (1779 iii. pt. ii 75). This story was never doubted until Malone showed that there was no enclosed park at Charlecote at that time (1821, ii. 119-132). Nevertheless, biographers continue to accept it. Sidney Lee calls it “a creditable tradition” (1917, 34). E. K. Chambers notes that the “story of deer-stealing has been the subject of much controversy. . . . It has been held that the whole story is nothing but a myth which has grown up about the passage in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* itself. But I do not think that” (1930, i. 19-20). Schoenbaum is also keen to accept the anecdote which he calls a “satisfying story – an exciting sequence of theft, discovery, punishment, and escape. What a dramatic scene!” (1970, 108-14) Margreta de Grazia defends Rowe’s use of the anecdote as concerned not with “recording facts” but with “a significant occasion” when Shakespeare had to leave Stratford and seek his fortune in London; for de Grazia the deer-poaching story “dramatized the critical juncture of his life” (1991, 107). Similarly, Greenblatt states that regarding the deer-poaching story, the question is “not the degree of evidence but rather the imaginative life that the incident has” (2004, 151). For most biographers of Shakespeare, this anecdote remains the only Call to Adventure in the Shakespeare mythos even though it was not recorded until 1709.

Campbell’s Eighth Stage, the Woman as temptress, is usually reserved for the “dark lady” of the Sonnets, whom Shakespearean biographers like to identify with a historical person such as Emilia Lanier, Mrs. Florio (née Daniel) or Mary Fitton. Katherine Duncan-Jones rejects all such attempts at identification (1997, 50-5) because there is no external evidence as to the identity of the “dark lady” or even if one or more historical persons were being portrayed. For the final stage of his life, most people follow Rowe’s account in which he stated that Shakespeare returned to Stratford, ceased working and enjoyed “Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends” (Rowe 1709, i. xxxv). Rowe indicates that he is arguing from norms by adding “as all Men of good Sense will wish theirs may be”. There is no evidence that Shakespeare ever retired, either in the sense that he stopped working or in the sense that he returned to make Stratford his principal home: he invested in the Blackfriars Gate House in 1613. Rowe introduced the notion of retirement to provide closure to Shakespeare’s life and it has featured ever since. Overall, the process for biographers is to try and adapt the limited biographical data for Shakespeare to the standard pattern of a linear narrative.

Description of his death scene plays an important part in the biographies of Shakespeare, despite the absence of record as to the cause of death or any burial ceremonies. There are only two surviving records: his will in the National Archives, January 1616, with corrections dated 25

March 1616, and a parish record of his burial dated 25 April, 1616. Peter Ackroyd describes his ritual laying-out and burial according to the Protestant custom (2005, 485), whereas Michael Wood describes how he received the sacrament of extreme unction from a Catholic priest (2003, 377). One later anecdote recorded by the Reverend John Ward (at some time between 1662 and 1679): “Shakespear Drayton and Ben Jhonson had a merry meeting and it seems drank too hard for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted” (Severn 1839, 183). Some biographers accept this story: Park Honan diagnoses the fever as typhoid (1999, 409). Other biographers reject Ward’s account: Katherine Duncan-Jones (2001, 266) changes the cause of death from typhoid to syphilis. Ackroyd later accepts the possibility that Shakespeare might have died of syphilis: “Nothing in Shakespeare’s life or character would exclude the possibility” (2005, 294). Germaine Greer (2007, 304) also believes he had contracted syphilis and later died of mercury poisoning used in the attempted cure. Although there is no evidence for the cause of death or the style of burial, biographers present their own speculations as fact. Due to the limited biographical material for William Shakespeare means that a full-length biography can only be constructed by supplementary techniques, giving detailed exposition of the context or through the use of imaginative reconstruction and conjecture.

### Linguistic Hedges

In 1910, a senior official in the American government, William Stoddard explained why he came to write his own small book in which he reported all the known records for Shakespeare “expurgated” of all conjectures:

Naturally, I turned for information to the biographies of the poet-actor. But I was doomed to a disappointment. For there in the welter of quoted, copied, and sometimes photographed documents, among “allusions” that alluded to Shakespeare and “allusions” that did not allude to him at all, in the confusion of skilfully deployed adverbs implying various degrees of uncertainty in the mind of the biographer (as, “doubtless,” “probably,” “credibly,” and all their kind) . . . I felt myself strangely lost (Stoddard 1910, 3).

Expressions which “imply various degrees of uncertainty” about a proposition are now known as linguistic hedges. They have been widely used in Shakespearean biography. One set of examples comes from a biographical sketch by Stanley Wells (2006b), who begins with the usual disclaimer about the existence of more records than is generally realised: “In spite of the legend that all we know about him can be written on the back of an envelope, in fact much information about his life and family survives in legal and other records.” Wells then outlines Shakespeare’s education in a series of unsupported claims:

- Shakespeare would have taken his first steps in education at a “petty” (junior) school . . .

- Yet the real foundations of his success were most probably laid at the local grammar school . . .
- His education in Latin would perforce have originated in . . .
- Among Shakespeare’s favourite books that he would have studied . . . (Wells 2006b, 13, emphasis added).

Wells is clear that there are no contemporary documents about Shakespeare’s education; his claims are possible, perhaps even likely, but not certain. They remain conjectures or biografictions. By stating one possibility as fact, he precludes discussion of other possibilities: perhaps young William was educated at home; perhaps he was educated at Polesworth as argued by Arthur Gray (1926) or in Lancashire (Honigmann 1985).

However, biographers rarely attempt to explain either the absence of a record or the converse interpretation. Lois Potter makes an interesting suggestion: in 1604, James I made his triumphal entry into London and after noting that “the speeches were made by professional actors” she adds: “Shakespeare may have been among them” (Potter 2012, 306). What Potter fails to address is why Shakespeare’s name was not mentioned in this context where she might reasonably have expected him to make a speech, or why there is no record of his making any of the speeches. Potter identifies many opportunities when Shakespeare might have co-authored works with other writers:

- If Shakespeare visited his Peele in January [1596] to report on the success of their play [*Titus Andronicus*], he would have found his former collaborator very ill (203).
- [Middleton] may have been involved in revising some Shakespeare plays, but this would have been a case of consecutive rather than concurrent collaboration (340).
- Shakespeare’s choice of Wilkins as collaborator [in the composition of *Pericles*] may have been inspired by a play that the latter wrote for another company, with two other dramatists, in 1607 (344).
- The [Belott-Mountjoy case] may have brought the former collaborators together again [i.e. Shakespeare with Wilkins who was in court in 1612 in different cases but] . . . they were not called on the same day (387).
- Assuming that they did write *Cardenio* in 1612, Fletcher and Shakespeare probably began planning *Henry VIII* shortly afterward (393).

Potter’s linguistic hedges clearly indicate the sense of uncertainty in each case. The evidence is so limited that many scenarios can be constructed. However, Potter fails to consider why direct evidence is lacking or to explore alternative interpretations.

As Stoddard noted above, expressions of certainty or near certainty imply lack of documentation. In the following examples, the key words have been underlined: Chambers offers the widely-accepted opinion: “There can be no doubt that the play [about Richard II, performed prior to the Essex Rebellion] of 7 February [1601] was Shakespeare’s” (1930, i. 354). However, the author of the play is not stated explicitly and at least one academic historian has argued that it was not Shakespeare’s play (Worden 2006). Katherine Duncan-Jones states that it is “almost certain that William left the Grammar School precipitately” (Duncan-Jones 2001, 14). In stating that it is “almost certain”, Duncan-Jones paradoxically indicates that there is a lack of reliable evidence. Imagining a conflict between Shakespeare’s personality and his marriage, Park Honan uses a string of negative words and prefixes in making the following claim: “Ambitious, dissatisfied, and restless as he undoubtedly was with no outlet for the energy of his talents at Henley Street, he was not to behave as a man ensnared by an unsuitable woman” (Honan 1998, 87). Peter Ackroyd describes the burial of John Shakespeare in 1601. Although there is no record of any people in attendance, Ackroyd asserts: “His son was undoubtedly present” (2005, 373) and continues by describing William walking behind the coffin alongside the bailiff.

### **Conjecture as fact**

So far I have dealt with statements where the biographer has indicated either explicitly, or implicitly, that a claim does not rest on a documented record. Biographers also assert propositions as factual which cannot be verified by reference to any known records. Duncan-Jones suggests that as a member of Leicester’s Men from 1584-6, which is undocumented, Shakespeare “would have quickly showed his versatility” and that he “would be a natural choice” to join the Queen’s Men in 1587 (36). Duncan-Jones then has a whole section based on the supposition that from 1588 “Shakespeare was indeed a Queen’s Man” (36). Similarly, Greenblatt imagines an encounter between the Jesuit Edmund Campion and a young William Shakespeare: “Let us imagine the two of them sitting together then” (2004, 108-9). For Greenblatt, what matters is “not the degree of evidence [about an anecdote such as the deer-poaching story] but rather the imaginative life that the incident has” (Greenblatt 2004, 151). By calling it an “incident” rather than an “anecdote” or a “tradition”, Greenblatt encourages readers to accept the undocumented story as authentic.

Another recent biographer who asserts unverifiable claims as facts is René Weis, assuming a novelist’s insight into his protagonist’s thoughts (*Shakespeare Revealed* 2007). Weis claims that Shakespeare never intended for *Coriolanus* to be performed and that the play is a re-enactment of Shakespeare’s relationship with a dominating mother (2007, 328-331). Weis can make such pronouncements because there is no evidence to the contrary: thus they cannot be proved wrong. Nonetheless, they remain speculations as there are no records (1) of Shakespeare’s

attitude towards any of his family members or (2) of his attitude towards the publication of any of his works; or (3) of the play *Coriolanus* in his lifetime. It was registered and published six years after his death in the First Folio of 1623. The assumed date of composition, *c.* 1608, cannot be proved or contradicted. It could equally be speculated as representing the downfall of a brilliant nobleman such as the Earl of Essex, who over-reached himself and paid the ultimate price (Jorgensen 1956).<sup>16</sup> Either way, we do not know, but for Weis to present his opinions without reservation marks his life not as biography based on historical fact but as historical fiction or biogfiction.

### Ellis's six strategies

David Ellis (2005a, 273-305) is one of the few scholars to consider the various strategies used by Shakespeare biographers to fill the information deficit; he posits six strategies:

- (a) Argument from Absence: Ellis cites the argument used by Michael Wood (2003, 147), who said that during the early modern period, it was dangerous to adhere to the old religion in England, so if Shakespeare was Catholic, he would have had to practise in secret. Since there is no document linking Shakespeare to Catholicism, Shakespeare must have kept his Papist affiliations secret. Ellis then refers to Katherine Duncan-Jones (2001, 118-9) who states: "The fact that the leading player [Shakespeare] in Jonson's first *Humour* play took no part in his second is rather striking." Duncan-Jones uses this "striking fact" to support her contention of an on-going feud between Shakespeare and Jonson.

Elsewhere, Ellis (2012, 38) questions the validity of Stephen Greenblatt's claimed meeting with Campion. Greenblatt argues that there was a relationship and Shakespeare had a motive to keep it quiet. Another way to explain Shakespeare's silence regarding Campion is that they never met.

- (b) Minding your Language (linguistic hedges and rhetorical questions): Ellis bemoans the use of "the weasel words of biography" such as "perhaps," "if," "probably," "could have," "may," as well as rhetorical questions which are used at first to raise suggestions, but which are subsequently dropped so that the conjectures are presented as established facts.

Jonathan Bate wonders about Shakespeare's attitude towards his family: "Perhaps the hopes that he once placed in Hamnet, then in Edmund, and his son, now rested in Hall and his daughter" (2008, 54; emphasis added). He then supports this with reference to fathers longing for their

<sup>16</sup> *Coriolanus* might even be dated to 1601 or 1602; William Barlow, Bishop of London, preached a sermon at St Paul's, shortly after Essex' execution in February 1601. Barlow specifically compared the Earl of Essex to Coriolanus, who might "make a fit parallel for the late Earle, if you read his life" (M. MacLure 1958, 89).

absent daughters in *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*. However, in both of these plays, the father is estranged from his daughter, which he does not project onto Shakespeare's relationship with Susanna. The use of linguistic hedges is particularly prominent in Lois Potter's biography. One example involves many conjectures about the origin of *Twelfth Night*:

It is tempting to think that a revised *Twelfth Night* manuscript was fetched at the last moment from Stratford, since this play . . . feels exceptionally "finished" . . . Shakespeare might have introduced the name [Orsino] as a reminiscence of the 1601 performance. . . . He might have been reminded of the Orsini visit because Webster made Orsini's ancestor, Paulo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, a central character in *The White Devil*, published in 1612 (Potter 2012. 417-8; emphasis added).

The use of four linguistic hedges shows that Potter's view of the genesis of this play is very unlikely. There is no record for further conjecture on the date of composition of *Twelfth Night*, whether it was revised and whether it was written before, after or at the same time as *The White Devil*.

- (c) Using the Plays to make biographical inferences about Shakespeare's inner life. Ellis observes that many people identify Shakespeare himself with Hamlet, Prospero, Touchstone and other characters. Ellis observes (286): "Almost any state of mind, opinion or feeling which biographers can conjecture in Shakespeare himself will be expressed by someone, somewhere in the plays."

Making biographical inferences from the works is the basis for much speculation on Shakespeare's thoughts and feelings. Biographers scour the plays and poems, selecting suitable quotations, characters and episodes to project onto their life of Shakespeare. One example is offered by Park Honan, who, accepting the mention "Shake-shaft" as Shakespeare, suggests that Gloucester's image of the person stranded on a promontory would have been inspired by the Lancastrian coastline (1998, 62-3):

Why then, I do but dream of sovereignty;  
Like one that stands upon a promontory,  
And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,  
Wishing his foot were equal with his eye,  
And chides the sea that sunders him from thence,  
Saying he'll lade it dry to have his way (*3 Henry VI*, 3.2.134-39).

While it is true that such a description does not correspond with the inland county of Warwickshire, it might have been inspired by another stretch of coastline. It is also a common simile in Latin literature and used by Marlowe in *Hero and Leander* (ii. 148-151). Treating Shakespeare's works as a source of biography has been heavily criticised by Richard Altick who echoed T. S. Eliot when noting the following contrasting interpretations of Shakespeare "as a Tory and a Radical, a Protestant and a Catholic (or else a free-thinker), a widely-travelled cosmopolitan and a stay-at-home" (1965, 98). Similarly, Raymond Williams in his "Afterword"

to *Political Shakespeare* criticised the scraps of conjectural biography. He speaks of a central methodological error that involves the “isolation of speeches by particular characters” and then taking them as “authorial confession” (1984, 281). In 2008, Anthony Holden includes himself among modern biographers who use inference:

Over the past decade alone, biographies of Shakespeare have been published by writers as disparate as Peter Ackroyd and Stephen Greenblatt, Bill Bryson [2007] and myself, with more refined offerings from James Shapiro and Charles Nicholl. Germaine Greer has mounted a spirited apologia for his oft-maligned wife, Anne. All began by deploring the practice of deducing details of his character, values and curriculum vitae from his writings, then proceeded, in differing degrees, to do just that. (Review of Bate *Soul of the Age* in *The Guardian*, 9 November 2008).

Michael Benton (2010, 67-70) believes that most comments on the adult period of Shakespeare’s life are based not on contemporary records but on inferences from the works. Bevington (2010, 4-5) notes that Shakespeare could dramatise different aspects of a controversy, making it difficult to isolate his own beliefs on many issues. Therefore, biographers select a character or a speech to support a case that Shakespeare was pro-establishment or radical, either a Roman Catholic or an Anglican Protestant. Opposing interpretations regarding Shakespeare’s supposed feelings towards his wife and towards his son are explored in detail in Chapter Six.

- (d) Using the Sonnets to make biographical inferences about Shakespeare’s inner life. Ellis contrasts A. L. Rowse (1973), who claimed that the sonnets were “autobiography throughout” with Jonathan Bate who warned that the sonnets were not to be read as autobiography (1997, 36-44). However, Bate then contradicts himself and identifies the Young Man as a composite of the earls of Southampton and Pembroke and the “dark lady” as Samuel Daniel’s sister, the wife of John Florio (56-58).

William Oldys (d. 1761) seems to have been the first to make such connections, some of which were mentioned by Steevens in the *Johnson-Steevens* 2 edition of the works (1778, i.) In his supplement to the poems, Malone (1780, i. 633-6) reported Oldys’s biographical inferences from the sonnets, added his own observations and Steevens’s reservations. Malone made his points cautiously, mainly with reference to the sonnets and stated that “it must be acknowledged that the present hypothesis is built on uncertain foundation” (Malone 1780 ii. 653-4). Few biographers subsequently have shared Malone’s misgivings over such biographical inferences and identify personas in the sonnets as the “fair youth”, the “rival poet” or the “dark lady” as individual entities, linked to historical figures. Although he notes that the “dark lady” has proved a tempting pitfall to biographers,” Michael Wood states that “it is really not doing Shakespeare justice if we do not take his words at face value” (2003, 184). Wood moves from questions of historical accuracy to questions of justice. He confidently believes that the “fair youth” was William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (179) and asserts that Shakespeare’s “dark lady” was Emilia Bassano

after her marriage to Alfonso Lanier in 1592 (195). René Weis (2007), however, believes that Emilia Bassano was Shakespeare's mistress (undocumented) at the same time as she was Henry Carey's mistress (well documented), but only before her marriage in 1592. Weis also identifies the "rival poet" as Christopher Marlowe (126), and the "fair youth" as Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton (149). Against these biographers, Germaine Greer (2007) argues that Shakespeare's "dark lady" was his wife Ann. The problem is that outside the works, there is no documented evidence to fix any of these identifications: no love letters, no court appearances, no contemporary gossip. Other biographers tend not to read the sonnets biographically (as Ackroyd 2005, 288; Shapiro 2010, 56-64; Edmondson & Wells 2004, 22-7; 2012). Various identifications of the "fair youth" are considered in Chapter Seven.

- (e) History to the Rescue. Ellis points (293-4) out that much of what is written in Shakespearean biography is contextual, that lives of Shakespeare are "rather history books disguised as biographies" and cites Anthony Holden's study as a good example.

Almost all biographers spend much time describing contextual features, such as Shakespeare's family background, Stratford-upon-Avon in the Elizabethan period and the London theatres. All of this material can be related to a biography of Shakespeare but it cannot be used as a substitute for it. Since there are only two records about Shakespeare's youth (his baptism in 1564 and his marriage licence issued in 1581 when he was seventeen), any account of this period is therefore either contextual or speculative. Schoenbaum takes over 100 pages to describe Shakespeare's background prior to arriving in London (1987, 3-117, amplifying five allusions in contemporary documents); he then considers the London theatre in 1592 (28 pages; no allusions); the *Groatsworth* allusion (16 pages; one ambiguous allusion). Similarly, Michael Wood's biography (2003) devotes the first six out of sixteen chapters to describing Shakespeare's life before he arrives in London, amounting to 95 pages (pp. 14-105) out of his 344 page biography. This material may well be factually correct, but it is almost entirely contextual. Michael Benton may have been contemplating Wood's biography when he asserts:

Biography can tell us a great deal about the social, cultural and political world Shakespeare lived in and can deduce from such history what Shakespeare *might* have experienced. But no amount of inference and imagination can produce the "Life" (2009, 67)

These studies concentrating on background attempt to find meaningful links with the author's subsequent life and works, but such links are entirely speculative.

- (f) The Argument from Proximity: Ellis shows how biographers present people only distantly associated with Shakespeare as close friends. Ellis refers especially to Honigmann (1985) and Wood (2003).

Another argument from proximity concerns Shakespeare and Leonard Digges, who supplied some commendatory verses to the First Folio in 1623. Digges's mother Anne was re-married to Shakespeare's friend, Thomas Russell, whom Shakespeare appointed as overseer to his will in 1616. Leslie Hotson (1938) assumed that Leonard must have known Shakespeare in Stratford. However, Digges was studying at Oxford when his mother settled near Stratford in 1603. After graduating, Digges travelled to Spain with his friend James Mabbe. While it is possible that Shakespeare and Digges knew each other in Stratford or in London, there is no direct evidence, just an argument from proximity. A similar argument from proximity concerns Shakespeare's undocumented contact with the Sirenaicals at the Mermaid Club. Again, this is based solely on the fact that Shakespeare may have been in the area at the time, but both Shapiro (1950) and O'Callaghan (*ODNB*, 2004) argue that it is most unlikely that Shakespeare attended the Mermaid. The weak case for Shakespeare's acquaintance with Jonson is considered more fully in Chapter Eight.

### Five more strategies

To the six strategies listed by Ellis, five others are also in evidence:

- (g) Accept the testimony of posthumous anecdotes. It is common among biographers to accept stories about Shakespeare which were recorded after his death, *e. g.*, by John Aubrey or Nicholas Rowe. As with the preceding method, biographers present their own opinions when deciding which to accept.

Biographies are full of legends which have so important a part of the story as to attain the status of "facts". Malone was ambivalent over the reliability of later reports: "the most fictitious accounts which tradition has handed down to us, have generally had some little semblance or admixture of truth in them" (1821, ii. 72). However, Malone, Chambers and Schoenbaum generally rejected later anecdotes.

- (h) Self-projection of the biographer: or biographical displacement.

Schoenbaum (in *Shakespeare's Lives* 1970) repeatedly claims that biographers of Shakespeare are simply describing themselves. He describes how he heard about this:

I quickly recognised the truth of the observation that biography tends towards oblique self-portraiture. How much this must be so with respect to Shakespeare, where the sublimity of the subject ensures empathy and the impersonality of the life record teases speculation! I remember once mentioning this pattern to the late John Crow on the porch of the British Museum, and he reminded me that Desmond McCarthy<sup>17</sup> had said

<sup>17</sup> John Crow (1904-69) was a lecturer at King's College London and wrote "Deadly Sins of Criticism, or Seven Ways to Get Shakespeare Wrong". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 1958, 9. 301-6, which dealt with literary criticism. Desmond McCarthy (1877-1952) was a member of the Bloomsbury Group and founder of *Life and Letters*, a London literary

somewhere that trying to work out Shakespeare's personality was like looking at a very dark glazed picture in the National Portrait Gallery: at first you see nothing, then you begin to recognise features, and then you realise that they are your own (1970 viii-ix).

When considering Rowe's *Account* in which Shakespeare emerges as a very well-mannered, mild tempered gentleman, Schoenbaum asks:

Is it too fanciful that perhaps this author, like so many biographers of Shakespeare after him, is gazing into his own mirror and finding there his subject's reflection? For he emphasised those qualities in the poet for which he was himself cherished (1970, 133).

I took up this suggestion in Chapter Three and argued that Rowe's description of the patronage enjoyed by Shakespeare from the Queen and from the Earl of Southampton is a thinly disguised appeal for patronage from Queen Anne and the Duke of Somerset. The idea of biography as displaced autobiography is a motif of Schoenbaum's study. About Thomas Carlyle's 1840 lecture "The Poet as Hero", Schoenbaum remarks:

He [Shakespeare] has always been a spring in which men discover, Narcissus-like, their own reflection, and so we need feel no surprise that Carlyle, who came of Ecclefechan peasant stock, should seize on the myth that the Bard was a "poor Warwickshire peasant," and in turn help to propagate it.<sup>18</sup> (Schoenbaum 1970, 261).

Of Anthony Burgess's speculative *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964), Schoenbaum states (766): "One may also discern in the sexual degradation of the protagonist [named in the novel as "WS"], a working out of the author's obsession rather than the fictionalisation of fact . . . It is our last recurrence of our ubiquitous mirror."

Schoenbaum's notion of the biographer's mirror can be found in Virginia Woolf's essay "'Anon' and 'The Reader'" (ed. Silver 1979, 431-2). He uses it to dismiss any interpretation which is outside his own view of Shakespeare, launching an *ad hominem* attack on biographers who "Narcissus-like" stray from the dominant narrative interpretation of Shakespeare's life. Schoenbaum attacks Carlyle for "seizing a myth" that Shakespeare was a "poor Warwickshire peasant," apparently wishing to distance Shakespeare from the modern pejorative associations of the word "peasant". Finally, Schoenbaum is not able to offer compelling evidence that Shakespeare avoided the "sexual degradation" described by Burgess. In these cases, the biographers might be depicting the subject accurately even if it is also true of the biographer. Graham Holderness (2011, 21) makes a similar point: "All biographical writing is to some degree autobiographical, always inflected by personal ideological and subjective considerations." He goes on to show how Shakespeare's biographers are more autobiographical than others. The idea of biographical displacement is a common criticism of biography in general: Frederick Karl

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magazine, which he edited until 1934. His reported comment about Shakespearean biography is in line with the opinion of biography of Virginia Woolf, some of whose essays he published in his magazine.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan, a village in Dumfriesshire, southwest Scotland, in 1795.

refers to this as “countertransference” and explains it as an “emotional tie that develops between biographer and subject and often leads to the former placing a subjective template on the latter” (2005, 6).

- (i) Appeal to Norms. This approach involves seeing Shakespeare as a “normal” person and then describing how such a normal person might be expected to behave in the various situations of Shakespeare’s life.

The appeal to norms is usually sociological – how ordinary people behaved. Halliwell-Phillips states that Shakespeare’s marriage must have been normal for the age: “It can never be right for a biographer, when he is unsupported by the least particle of evidence, to assume that the subject of his memoir departed unnecessarily from the ordinary usages of life and society” (1887, i. 65). Park Honan (1998, 44) presents Shakespeare as a typical Elizabethan boy, kneeling to his father dutifully every morning. “Of course, somebody made the boy’s satchel and one or two greasy Joans collected ashes and grease all winter to make soap for that shining face” because William as a grammar school boy “was part of an élite.” None of this is documented for Shakespeare. The appeal to norms can also be psychological, but not always necessarily acknowledged as such. Many biographers assume that Shakespeare must have suffered grief at the deaths of his son and his father, which he portrayed in works such as *Hamlet*. These writers use or assume theories of bereavement to infer Shakespeare’s state of mind, without external corroboration. It is possible that either John or Hamnet or both suffered from painful and debilitating illnesses, where eventual death might have been taken as a welcome release from suffering.

- (j) Absence of evidence to the contrary: Biographers often begin sentences with phrases such as “There is no reason to suppose / doubt” that Shakespeare did or did not perform some action or feel some emotion.

Greenblatt accepts the notion of a delayed reaction to the death of Hamnet: “Nor is it implausible that it took years for the trauma of his son’s death fully to erupt in Shakespeare’s work or that it was triggered by an accidental conjunction of names.” (emphasis added, 2004, 290). The hedge “nor is it implausible” with its double negative indicates the absence of any evidence as to immediate or delayed grief or both. Similarly, Lois Potter maintains that Shakespeare portrays his grief at his son’s death in his revised *Hamlet*: “It would not be strange if Shakespeare, the actor, found it easiest to dramatize his response to Hamnet’s death by taking on another man’s voice” (emphasis added 2012, 228). Potter’s hedge “it would not be strange” indicates a lack of evidence.

- (k) Suggestion by juxtaposition: Biographers express a puzzle about some aspect of the subject’s life and then place a piece of contextual information next to it, thus encouraging readers to make a connection between the two halves of the sentence.

Ackroyd notes that the “cause of the death of Shakespeare’s son is not known, although at the end of the year Stratford suffered a severe rise in mortality from typhus and dysentery” (2005, 270). Ackroyd does not actually state that Hamnet died of typhus or dysentery, but strongly suggests that he did. This suggestion, however, seems to contradict the record that Hamnet was buried in August, a good few months before the outbreak. Laurie Maguire & Emma Smith imply a different cause in a similar way: “The cause of Hamnet’s death is not known (but August, the month in which he died, was always a bad month for plague deaths)” (2012, 81). Maguire & Smith use juxtaposition to link Hamnet’s death to the plague. However, both claims are unlikely: there are only four other burials recorded in the Parish Book during the first three weeks of August 1596, ruling out any epidemic of typhus, dysentery or plague. We are no more able to ascertain why Hamnet died than to posit a definite link between Hamnet and Hamlet.

After academics had neglected the literary biography of Shakespeare in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, Schoenbaum’s *Documentary Life* established that such a life was both feasible and academically respectable, as well as providing the structure which modern biographies have followed. Upon analysis serious shortcomings are found in *A Documentary Life* which remain in the subsequent studies. A broad critique indicates the many ways in which Shakespearean biographers overcome the lack of biographical material. The next chapter will demonstrate how these techniques have been used on one important topic in Shakespearean biography: his apparent patronage by the Earl of Southampton, which has occasioned a wide range of different interpretations by modern biographers.

## Chapter 7

### Inventing a Patron: the Earl of Southampton

In almost every narrative, the protagonist receives help at the outset of his quest from a person identified as a mentor by Campbell (1949). This help might be a physical object, such as Arthur's sword Excalibur, or it might be less tangible, perhaps the encouragement given by Venus to Aeneas. This help allows the protagonist to overcome the ordeal which had been set. In the story of a writer, a patron assumed this role of Mentor. John Dryden enjoyed the positions of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal under Charles II from 1668 to 1685. Nahum Tate was Poet Laureate from 1692 – 1715. When Nicholas Rowe came to write *Some Account*, he placed both Elizabeth and Southampton in this role. Since the time of Rowe, writers on Shakespeare, including Malone, Chambers and Schoenbaum, along with three major biographies of Southampton, have accepted that the earl patronised the poet.<sup>1</sup> Yet only the dedications to the two narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594) actually provide any kind of link between the poet and the earl. To supplement the limited biographical material, biographers have made inferences from the works, especially the sonnets. In this chapter, the primary sources concerning Southampton, mainly the Wriothesley Papers at the Hampshire Archives (H. A.) in Winchester (Collection number, 5M53), are reviewed but no mention of Shakespeare has been found. Secondly, different interpretations regarding the patronage are assessed. Only two writers note that Southampton was not in a position to patronise any writer in the late Elizabethan period (Heinemann 1993; Honan 2004).

The general details of the life of Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton (1573-1624) are related by Honan (*ODNB*, 2004). Upon the death of the second earl, Henry succeeded to the title in 1581, shortly before his eighth birthday. The seat of the earldom was at Titchfield Abbey, Hampshire, and his estates were legally established in an *Inquisitio Post Mortem* of 13

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<sup>1</sup> C. C. Stopes (1922) *The life of Henry third earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's patron*. A. L. Rowse (1965) *Shakespeare's Southampton: Patron of Virginia*. G. P. V. Akrigg (1968) *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*.

June 1582. The third earl remained a royal ward until his twenty-first birthday that is from 1581 until 1594. During this time, some of the estates were managed by his mother, Mary the dowager countess, and others by the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard earl of Nottingham. Southampton spent most of his wardship at Cecil House, on the Strand, London, and was allowed only a “pitifully small exhibition” as Burghley received the “necessary expenses and honorable maintenance of the young Earl” (Akrigg 1968, 34). At the age of 12, he was sent to St. John’s College Cambridge and at the age of 16 he was enrolled at Gray’s Inn. He was still a ward when he attended the Earl of Essex’s expedition to Normandy in 1591. In the following year, a letter to Michael Hicke, one of Burghley’s secretaries, confirms that Southampton had little control over his income or his property:

Whereas I am gyven to understand that my manor house at Beaulye [Beaulieu, Hants] with dyvers parcels of my inheritance there, are lyke to fall in greate decaye and daunger to be lost thorough wante of meanes to supplye the charges of the reparacions during my wardship – I would hartely request you to move my Lord Treasurer, according to the note I doe sends, to yelde me his honorable favor in taking course as shall seeme best to his wisdom whereby the sayd chardges and reparacions may be supplied . . . from my lodging in the Strand this 26<sup>th</sup> June 1592.

*Lansdowne MS. LXXI. 72 (quoted by Stopes 1922, 49).*

When Southampton came of age on 6 October 1594, his annual income was estimated to be in the region of £3,000 p.a., one third of which was reserved for his mother as dowager countess (Akrigg 1968, 38).

Southampton was not able to enjoy his net income of £2,000 p.a. for three main reasons. Firstly, he had to “sue his livery”, which involved payment of a large kind of registration fee for him to gain control of his estates. The exact amount is not known, but when the Earl of Oxford attained his majority in 1571, he had to pay £4,000 for suing his livery as well as a £3,000 fee for his wardship.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, Southampton was fined £5,000 (almost two years’ total income) for refusing to marry his guardian’s choice of bride, Burghley’s grand-daughter, Elizabeth Vere: the Jesuit priest, Thomas Garnet recorded in January 1595 (*Stonyhurst MSS., Ang. i. 82*): “The young erle of Southampton refusing the Lady Veere payeth 5000<sup>li</sup> of present payment.” By “making him pay this great sum in one payment, Burghley probably forced Southampton to go to the moneylenders” (Akrigg 1968, 39). Thirdly, by the terms of the second earl’s will, the executors had to pay for a lavish family monument in the village church at Titchfield (Stopes 1922, 14-5). This monument was constructed in expensive Italian marble in 1594-5 under the supervision of

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<sup>2</sup> *Salisbury MSS VI, 533* mentions the need to make the payment but does not state the amount. The matter is described by Joel Hurstfield 1958. *The Queen’s Wards: wardship and marriage under Elizabeth I*. London: Longmans Green, 171-9. The payments made by Oxford when suing his livery have been recorded by Alan Nelson. 2003. *Monstrous Adversary*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 70-1.

Gerard Johnson (Gheerart Janssen), the Dutch sculptor.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Southampton entered his majority heavily in debt in 1594 and acquired further debts when his step-father died in 1595. His mother the second countess married Sir Thomas Heneage in May 1594. Mary might not have realised the extent of the loans which her elderly husband had taken out against future income as treasurer of the queen's chamber and of the duchy of Lancaster. When he died in October 1595, Mary was liable for Sir Thomas's debts of £7,800, which her son Henry helped to pay with the sale of the manor of Faringdon (near Alton, Hants). To service his own debts, Southampton sold five other manors, including those at Portsea and Bighton (Akrigg 1968, 49-51). Southampton, either before his twenty-first birthday, or in the immediate years afterwards, was scarcely in a position to patronise anyone.

Southampton received five other literary dedications in the period 1591-5, i.e. about the time he attained his majority. The earliest dedication was made in 1591, by John Clapham, a secretary to Lord Burghley, who dedicated a Latin poem entitled *Narcissus* to the young earl (STC 5349). The title and content suggests that Southampton was excessively aware of his handsome looks. In 1593, Barnabe Barnes published *Parthenophil and Parthenope* with a dedicatory sonnet to Southampton. In 1594, Thomas Nashe in the dedication of *The Unfortunate Traveller* praised Southampton as a "dere lover and cherisher you are, as well of the lovers of Poets, as of Poets themselves." Nashe's description has sometimes been interpreted as an indication that the earl enjoyed homosexual relations with various writers. In 1595, Gervase Markham also included a dedicatory sonnet to Southampton in *The Most Honorable Tragedy of Richard Grinvile, Knight*. In the following year William Burton dedicated to Southampton a translation of the Greek Romance *Clitophon and Leucippe*, which includes a lament by a homosexual who has to marry (Akrigg 1968, 54).<sup>4</sup> None of these writers repeated the dedication and there is no other connection with Southampton. Perhaps they were misled into thinking that he might patronise them.

Another writer, sometimes suggested as a link between Southampton and Shakespeare, is John Florio. An official report on a fracas at Titchfield in October 1594 stated that Florio attended the earl there. The report indicates that Southampton was not a regular visitor to the seat of his earldom at this time. A few years later, in the dedication to his *Italian Dictionary*, entered into the Stationers' Register in 1596 but not published until 1598, Florio described Southampton

<sup>3</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner. 1967. *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 624.

<sup>4</sup> Barnabe Barnes. 1593. *Parthenophil and Parthenophe. Sonnettes, madrigals, elegies and odes. To the right noble and vertuous gentleman, M. William Percy Esquier, his deerest friend* (STC 1469). Thomas Nashe. 1594. *The vnfortunate traueller. Or, The life of Iacke Wilton. Newly corrected and augmented* (STC 18381). Gervase Markham. 1595. *The Most Honorable Tragedy of Richard Grinvile, Knight* (STC 17385). William Burton. 1597. *The Most Delectable and Pleasaunt History of Clitiphon and Leucippe* (STC 90).

as the “most noble vertuous and most Honourable Earle of Southampton, in whose paie and patronage I have lived some yeeres.”<sup>5</sup> What is not clear is Florio’s actual position within the Southampton household; Frances Yates has suggested that Burghley planted Florio as Southampton’s Italian tutor so as to keep an eye on him. Coming from a Catholic family, the young earl’s sympathies may have been suspected.<sup>6</sup> Florio did not dedicate any other works to Southampton and had no recorded contact with Shakespeare. Thus Florio’s connection with Southampton is limited and no link with Shakespeare is established.

Florio also dedicates his *Dictionary* to Roger Manners, Earl of Rutland and Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford. The dedication is very long and obsequious, giving rise to the notion that Florio might be identified with the pedant Holofernes. By far the largest share of the eulogy is aimed at the Countess of Bedford, who later brought Florio into her household to finish his translation of Montaigne.<sup>7</sup> If Florio was one of the government’s informers, he may have joined this household to monitor the activities of the Countess’s husband, Edward Russell, third Earl of Bedford (1572 –1627), who was a follower of Essex and was later convicted of taking part in the 1601 uprising. In contrast to the Earl of Southampton, the countess of Bedford was indeed a patron of writers. Ben Jonson thanked her for her support in Epigrams 76, 84 and 96. She also patronised Chapman, Daniel, Donne and Drayton, but not Shakespeare (Lawson 2007). Some commentators have linked all these writers into a “Southampton circle” similar to the group known to have been promoted by Philip and Mary Sidney. Although possible connections have been reviewed by John Klause (2008), there is no direct evidence of any “Southampton circle.”

While it is usually taken that a dedication was intended to elicit some kind of reward, the system of royal and aristocratic patronage was breaking down towards the end of the Elizabethan era:

Due to changes in the social, economic and literary conditions during Elizabeth’s reign, patronage could no longer support literature as it had previously done. The growth of a middle class in prosperity demanding reading of their own, the widening popularity of poetry and especially of the drama begot writers as well as an ever increasing clientele of readers (Gebert 1933, 20).

Alistair Fox (1995) has shown how writers in the 1590s complained that they were no longer receiving the patronage which they claimed to deserve, while Paul Voss (1998) has outlined the various ways in which stationers at this time began to promote their books to the buying public.

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<sup>5</sup> John Florio. 1598. *A vvorlde of wordes, or Most copious, and exact dictionarie in Italian and English, collected by Iohn Florio*. London: Edw. Blount (STC 11098), sign. a3v.

<sup>6</sup> Frances Yates. 1934. *John Florio: the Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 126.

<sup>7</sup> Lawson, Lesley. 2007. *Out of the shadows: the life of Lucy, Countess of Bedford*. London: Hambledon Continuum.

Overall, Southampton is the object of a number of dedications in the early 1590s, but no writer apart from Shakespeare makes a second dedication, suggesting that these writers made a pitch for Southampton's patronage without ever receiving anything in return.

A second reason for seeing Southampton as a patron of Shakespeare is the claim that Southampton frequented the public theatres. This claim is based on a letter about Southampton's visits in 1599 when avoiding Queen and Court. Rowland White wrote to Sir Robert Sidney on 11 October, 1599:

My Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland come not to the court [at Nonsuch Palace]: the one doth but very seldom. They pass away the time in London merely in going to plays every day (*Sidney Papers* ii. 132).<sup>8</sup>

The mention of theatre visits is made somewhat disparagingly, although this might reflect the opinion of the writer more than Southampton's. During this time, Southampton was very involved with the political and military affairs of Essex. He joined the naval expeditions to Cadiz in 1596 and to the Azores in 1597. After secretly marrying Elizabeth Vernon, one of the Queen's maids, Southampton joined Essex in Ireland in the first part of 1599, where he was appointed General of the Horse despite the Queen's "express prohibition to the contrary."<sup>9</sup> After an unsuccessful campaign, Southampton accompanied Essex back to court. On 28 September 1599, Essex famously burst into the Queen's Bed-Chamber at Nonsuch Palace and a few days later was placed under house arrest (Akrigg 1968, 9-6). Southampton's absence from court soon after was therefore more a tactful retreat from the Queen's displeasure rather than any special interest in drama. He continued his courtly intrigues on behalf of Essex, revisiting Ireland in 1600 "in a futile attempt to recruit the lord deputy, Lord Mountjoy, for Essex's cause" (Honan *ODNB*, 2004). In 1601, he took part in the Essex Rebellion, for which he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. Thus from 1594, when he came into his estates, until Elizabeth's death in 1603, Southampton had little or no means to patronise poets and writers, and spent his time in political and military affairs.

James I released Southampton on 5 April 1603 and pardoned him on May 1603 (Hants Archives 5M53/1001). The King then granted him a lucrative monopoly in the farming of sweet wines, as well as estates in Romsey, Compton Magna, and Dunmow.<sup>10</sup> From this point onwards,

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur Collins, ed. 1746. *H. Sydney and others, Letters and memorials of state*, ii. 132; reported by Malone 1778, i. 402 and by Akrigg 1968, 96. Sir Robert Sidney was at the time governor of Flushing and had sent Roland White to keep him informed of events in England in the late 1590s. Further details are reported by Lisle C. John. 1961. "Rowland Whyte, Elizabethan Letter-Writer," in *Studies in the Renaissance*, 217-235.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from the Privy Council at Greenwich to Essex, 10 June 1599, *Calendar of State Papers (Ireland), 1599-1600*, 62 (quoted by Akrigg 1968, 83).

<sup>10</sup> Akrigg (1968, 135-142) derives these from the *Salisbury MSS*, XVI, 187 and the *Cal. S. P. (Dom)* 1603-10, 137.

Southampton's finances improved and he became a patron of writers (Heinemann 1993). In 1609, he was one of seven earls and over 650 other investors in the Virginia Company. He also invested in the East India Company and the North-West Passage Company. He contributed expensive titles to the new Bodleian Library in 1605 and 200 manuscripts along with 2000 printed books to a new library at St John's College, Cambridge (Stopes 1922, 372). He remained involved in politics at court and in parliament for the rest of his life. According to Margot Heinemann (1993, 135-141), Southampton patronised many writers during the Jacobean period, but there is no evidence that Shakespeare was one of them. Southampton made no mention of the Shakespeare family in his will, nor had Shakespeare mentioned the Earl of Southampton in his will. Only two sources link Southampton with Shakespeare – the dedications to the narrative poems.

## 7.1 Shakespeare's dedications to Southampton

It was during the last years of Southampton's minority that Shakespeare dedicated to him two narrative poems: *Venus and Adonis* was entered into the Stationers' Register on 18 April 1593, when the Earl was aged nineteen and six months; *Lucrece* was entered into the Stationers' Register on 9 May 1594, when the Earl was aged twenty years and seven months. Both poems are preceded by a short epistle. The opening of the first dedication ("I know not how I shall offend in dedicating . . .") suggests that Shakespeare was not personally acquainted with the nineteen-year-old earl. The phrasing of both dedications "fall well within the normal scope of dedicatory formulas," according to Chambers (*WS* i. 61-2). Gebert points out that in a writer's dedication to a nobleman, decorum is duly observed with regard to rank, where a writer of talent verbally prostrates himself before his superior patron, employing a false humility about his work which he describes as "vanities, shadows, imperfect patterns more mete for the pedlar than for the printer, toys, trifles, trash, trinkets" (1933, 12; the list is quoted from Robert Greene's preface to *Mamillia*, 1593 STC12270).

Shakespeare's dedications are shorter than the average (Gerber 1933). The author adopts the conventional pose of humility in contrast to the noble's greatness. The first dedication appears less assured with conditional clauses "if your Honour . . ." and "if the first heir . . ." Although Chambers cannot detect any "great advance in the poet's intimacy with his patron between the two addresses" (*WS* i. 61-2), most commentators see the second dedication as more intimate than the first, and therefore cite it as evidence that Southampton become Shakespeare's patron. Akrigg is aware that this does not constitute evidence, when he states, "presumably, Southampton generously rewarded both Shakespeare and Barnes" (1968, 38, emphasis added). These are the only two documents linking Shakespeare to Southampton in either of their lifetimes.

The dedications in *Venus and Adonis* and in *Lucrece* were printed as follows:

<p><b>Dedication to <i>Venus &amp; Adonis</i> (1593)</b></p> <p>TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE Henrie VVriiothesley, Earle of Southampton, and baron of Titchfield.</p> <p>Right Honourable, I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my vnpolisht lines to your Lordship, nor how the worlde vwill censure mee for choosing so strong a proppe to support so vveake a burthen, onelye if your Honour seeme but pleased, I account my selfe highly praised, and vowe to take aduantage of all idle houres, till I haue honoured you vvith some grauer labour. But if the first heire of my inuention proue deformed, I shall be sorie it had so noble a god-father : and neuer after eare so barren a land, for feare it yeeld me still so bad a haruest, I leaue it to your Honourable suruey, and your Honor to your hearts content, vvwhich I wish may alvvaies ansvere your ovvne vvish, and the vvorlds hopefull expectation.</p> <p>Your Honors in all dutie</p> <p>William Shakespeare</p>	<p><b>Dedication to <i>Lucrece</i> (1594)</b></p> <p>TO THE RIGHT HONOVABLE HENRY</p> <p>VVriiothesley, Earle of Southampton, and Baron of Tichfield.</p> <p>THE love I dedicate to your lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet, without beginning, is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your Honourable disposition, not the worth of my vntutord Lines, makes it assured of acceptance. VVhat I haue done is yours; what I haue to doe is yours; being part in all I haue, deuoted yours. VVere my worth greater, my duety would show greater; meane time, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship, To whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happinesse.</p> <p>Your Lordships in all duety,</p> <p>William Shakespeare.</p>
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That Southampton was Shakespeare's patron has been accepted from the time of Rowe who claimed that Southampton gave Shakespeare "many marks of favour and friendship" (1709 i. ix). In his own preface, Pope refers to Southampton as Shakespeare's "noble patron" (1725, i). The prefaces of Rowe and Pope containing these assertions were reprinted in most subsequent editions of Shakespeare's plays in the eighteenth century (*e. g.* Warburton, 1747 i; Johnson 1765, I; Steevens 1766 i. 3). Edward Capell (1767, i. 10) makes a similar statement. Thus the claimed patronage by Southampton was repeated so often as to become established before scrutiny of evidence which might support the claim. Malone accepted the notion of Southampton's patronage without question, adding details about Southampton's public activities without offering any indications of how he might have interacted with Shakespeare (1778, i. 402-3). Malone included an expanded version of his essay "Memoirs of Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton" in the final volume of the complete works (1790, x. 4-9), where he refers to the earl as "our great poet's patron" and accepts Rowe's anecdote about the £1,000 which alone will

“immortalise” Southampton. Malone’s third variorum contains a much longer account of the earl’s life, including many eulogies written on his death (1821 xx. 427-468). In volume ii (477-480), Malone makes an effort to suggest how Shakespeare might have known Southampton. Malone offers two supporting allusions: the 1599 letter to Sir Robert Sidney about Southampton attending the plays and the Dowager Countess’s marriage to Thomas Heneage “probably before 1580.” As Heneage was treasurer to the Chambers of the Queen, he was responsible for payments to the players. Lord Southampton “would, of course, be a frequent visitor at his mother’s” (emphasis added), a clearly signalled deduction. Malone cites dedications by Barnes, Nashe, and Gervaise Markham’s 1617 sonnet as evidence of patronage. Malone concludes: “That Shakespeare partook of this nobleman’s bounty, there can be no reason to doubt.” The final phrase – “no reason to doubt” – indicates that someone had doubted the proposition. Malone’s conclusion is not recorded in any document. Based on two brief dedications and two allusions, Malone has inferred how Southampton would have acted as Shakespeare’s patron.

There are major difficulties in Malone’s account. Southampton’s mother, Mary dowager Countess of Southampton did not marry Thomas Heneage in the 1580s but in May 1594 (Akrigg 1968, 41), after the dedications in *Venus* and in *Lucrece* were published. Even if the marriage had taken place earlier, it is unlikely that Lady Mary could have taken her son on a visit to anyone as Henry was still a royal ward and his activities were dictated in minute detail by Lord Burghley. Finally, Malone was unaware that Southampton had no access to his income at the time to reward the dedications so does not comment on the parlous state of Southampton’s finances when he came of age. Park Honan states clearly that he had no cash to spare:

Southampton had little but enthusiasm to offer any poet. He hardly had funds to spare; he lived on a fixed allowance and faced paying a gigantic fine to Burghley, plus another vast sum to get his estates out of wardship. After he turned twenty-one in 1594, his need for money became desperate (*ODNB*, 2004).

Nonetheless, modern biographers, *e. g.* Schoenbaum (1987, 159-183), Bate (1997, 46-9), Honan (1998, 169-195), Holden (1999, 124-137), Duncan-Jones (2001, 58-81), Wood (2003, 154-163), Greenblatt (2004, 229-245), Potter (2012, 108-123) repeat the claim that Southampton was Shakespeare’s only patron. They remain vague as to how such patronage might have been exercised. Colin Burrow is unusual in surveying the possible gifts that Southampton might have bestowed: “friendship, love, hospitality during the plague, or money, or any or all of those things” without doubting that some form of patronage must have occurred (2000, 10-15). Few biographers acknowledge that there is no record that Southampton ever gave any financial reward to Shakespeare or that Shakespeare’s dedications were addressed to an aristocrat while still a minor with no control over his own finances.

A different reason might lie behind dedications to an aristocrat. The author (probably at the request of the stationer) might present an aristocrat as an ideal reader for that work. In this way, Thomas Danett might have dedicated his translation of Lodovico Guicciardini's *Description of the Low Countries* to William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1593, STC 12463), to indicate his anticipated audience (government officials), a kind of celebrity endorsement. While Burghley probably welcomed the translation for his own purposes of state, he had no need to have the work printed. In 1599, John Hayward may have dedicated his prose *Life and Raigne of King Henry III* to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, as the most prominent aristocrat interested in the deposition of a prince (1599, STC 12995), but Essex does not seem to have paid for it.<sup>11</sup> According to this view, Shakespeare might have been interested in dedicating his narrative poems to a youthful earl more as a sales pitch to the reading public than for direct patronage, trying to persuade any buyer that if a volume is good enough for such and such an earl, it must be good enough for an ordinary person to buy.

## 7.2 Rowe's mention of a £1000 gift

Southampton's supposed gift of £1,000 to Shakespeare was first mentioned by Nicholas Rowe in 1709, who claimed that the poet enjoyed both royal and aristocratic patronage. In *Some Account &c.*, Rowe writes: "Queen *Elizabeth* had several of his Plays Acted before her, and without doubt gave him many gracious Marks of her Favour" (1709, i. viii). Rowe is vague as to what these "marks of her favour" might have been. The phrase "without doubt" indicates the lack of evidence or authority for his assertion.<sup>12</sup> Having mentioned the royal patronage apparently enjoyed by Shakespeare, Rowe then assumes aristocratic patronage for the aspiring poet and playwright:

He had the Honour to meet with many great and uncommon Marks of Favour and Friendship from the Earl of Southampton, famous in the Histories of that Time for his Friendship to the unfortunate Earl of *Essex*. It was to that Noble Lord that he Dedicated his *Venus* and *Adonis*, the only Piece of his Poetry which he ever publish'd himself, tho' many of his Plays were surrepticiously and lamely Printed in his Life-time (Rowe 1709, i. ix-x).

Rowe is vague about dates and is apparently unaware that Shakespeare published and dedicated more than one poem. Pope corrected the mistake by omitting "the only Piece of his Poetry which

<sup>11</sup> John J. Manning, ed. 1991. *The First and Second Parts of John Hayward's Life and Raigne of King Henry III*, London: RHS, 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Helen Hackett (2009) finds no evidence that Elizabeth ever patronised Shakespeare directly as a poet, only indirectly as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Moreover, Elizabeth never attended the public playhouses and there is no record of any private audience with Shakespeare or any other actors.

he ever publish'd himself" when he reprinted Rowe's *Account* in his 1725 edition (Smith 1903, 305n6). Rowe then adds the story of the thousand pounds:

There is one Instance so singular in the Magnificence of this Patron of *Shakespear's*, that if I had not been assur'd that the Story was handed down by Sir *William D'Avenant*, who was probably very well acquainted with his Affairs, I should not have ventur'd to have inserted, that my Lord *Southampton*, at one time, gave him a thousand Pounds, to enable him to go through with a Purchase which he heard he had a mind to. A Bounty very great, and very rare at any time, and almost equal to that profuse Generosity the present Age has shewn to *French Dancers* and italian *Eunuchs* (Rowe 1709, i. x-xi).

Rowe can only say somewhat apologetically that he has been "assured" that the story originated with Davenant, who had died over forty years earlier in 1668, before Rowe was born. Rowe's use of "probably" indicates the hypothesis that Davenant was an authority on Shakespeare, which is unevidenced. The story also implies that Southampton only knew at second hand of the playwright's intended dealings but did not know Shakespeare personally. Rowe states that "he [Southampton] heard he [Shakespeare] had a mind to." Helen Hackett has noted that the playwright John Dennis's claim about the Queen's commission was "a polemical point about the contemporary neglect of playwrights by the Crown" (2009, 25-6). However, no biographer has suggested that Rowe carefully arranged this *Account* to follow his own dedication to the Duke of Somerset. Rowe may have been hinting at patronage for himself, both royal and aristocratic. The comment which follows, that similar generosity had been shown in his day to "French Dancers and Italian eunuchs", seems to confirm that Rowe was indirectly seeking patronage for himself. It is not known whether he ever obtained patronage from Charles Seymour, sixth Duke of Somerset (1662-1748), who was Master of the Horse to Queen Anne and a patron of the arts (Bucholz, *ODNB* 2004). At about this time, Rowe secured a post under James Douglas, second duke of Queensbury, who became Secretary of State for Scotland in the newly formed Union. Rowe eventually achieved royal patronage when he was appointed Poet Laureate in 1715.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of biographical material about Shakespeare means that most biographers refer to this anecdote in some way. Since Rowe's figure exceeded the combined total of all Shakespeare's property dealings,<sup>14</sup> Malone changed his mind as to the amount involved in the gift: he finds the sum of £1,000 to be "extravagantly exaggerated" and declares that it was "much more likely" to have been a gift of one hundred pounds in return for the dedications (1821 ii. 480). Most biographers subsequently accept that the amount was exaggerated. Lee (1899, 378) sees the story as evidence of Southampton's patronage but is otherwise vague. E. K. Chambers suggests that the figure was much less and that the purchase probably concerned a share in the

<sup>13</sup> Wiltshire Austin, ed. 1853. *The Lives of the Poets-Laureate*. London: Bentley, 227-8.

<sup>14</sup> According to Chambers, Shakespeare spent £60 on New Place, £320 on land at Old Stratford, £440 on the tithes, and £140 on the Blackfriars gatehouse, totalling £960.

newly-formed Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594 (1930, i. 62). However, there is no mention of any such involvement in the extant records of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. J. Dover Wilson follows Chambers (1932, 66-7) as does Rowse (1965, 85) who reports the story as "an authentic tradition" without stating when the earliest mention of the tradition (i.e. in 1709, more than a century after it was supposed to have occurred) or why he considers it "authentic." Akrigg also accepts the anecdote and reduces the amount (1968, 220). Duncan-Jones agrees and reports a personal communication from Andrew Gurr that Shakespeare may have sold his playscripts to Southampton (2001, 85 & 295n). Gurr does not mention this conjecture in *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642* (2004). However, Weis accepts the amount as literally true (2007, 114-5)

Various other biographers who take Southampton to have been Shakespeare's patron, ignore Rowe's report of a £1,000 gift, including Stopes (1922), Holden (1999), Wood (2001), and Greenblatt (2004). Both Schoenbaum (1987, 179) and Wells (2007, 55) are very doubtful and Burrow (2002, 13) calls it "wildly improbable." Potter (2012, 432) also finds the gift unlikely and believes that Rowe derived the story from Donatus's *Life of Virgil*. She argues that Donatus' account was used as an exemplar of a literary life. Since Virgil enjoyed the wealthy patronage of Maecenas and indirectly of Augustus Caesar, the idea of patronage was thus applied to Shakespeare.<sup>15</sup> Overall, most biographers of Shakespeare accept that Shakespeare must have attracted patronage in his lifetime. However, the evidence that this patronage came from Southampton during the late Elizabethan period is very thin.

### 7.3 Plays written for Southampton?

It has also been suggested that Shakespeare wrote various plays when he apparently enjoyed a close relationship with Southampton, especially between 1593 – 1595; two plays in particular *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are taken to reflect such a relationship. The date(s) of these plays, as with all others of Shakespeare, is conjectural since there is no allusion to either play before Meres in 1598. Following Stopes (1922, 75-6) and Acheson (1933, 184-8), A. L. Rowse claims that Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the wedding of Sir Thomas Heneage and the widowed Countess of Southampton (1965, 86-7). While several editors accept that the play was probably written or revised for a wedding, they tend to prefer the wedding of William Stanley Earl of Derby with Elizabeth Vere

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<sup>15</sup> Donatus was a grammarian from the fourth-century A.D. An English translation was first available in 1573. Thomas Twyne. *Virgils life, set fourth, as it is supposed, by Aelius Donatus, and done into English*. In *The whole .xii. Bookes of the Aeneidos of Virgill* (STC 24801). The biography of Virgil has been discussed by H. Nettleship. 1879. *Ancient Lives of Vergil, with an Essay on the Poems of Vergil in Connection with His Life and Times*. Oxford: Clarendon.

in January 1595 (WS i. 358-9) or Thomas Berkeley with Elizabeth Carey in February 1596 (Alexander 1939, 105; Brooks 1979, lvi). Holland rejects the notion that the play was an epithalium (Oxford edn. 1995, 112) and R.A. Foakes is sceptical (Cambridge edn. 2003, 2-3).

Another play which Shakespeare is said to have written for Southampton at that time is *Love's Labour's Lost* (Akrigg 1968, 207-15). Biographers (e.g. Lee 1918, 383-4) have noted that the Earl of Southampton is likely to have seen it in performance in his town house – but that did not happen for another decade. In 1604-5, Burbage was due to bring an acting company to Southampton House for a performance of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Sir Walter Cope wrote to Viscount Cranborne (as Robert Cecil was known from 20 August 1604 until he was created Earl of Salisbury on 4 May 1605) as follows:

Burbage is come, and says there is no new play that the Queen [Anne] has not seen; but they have revived an old one called *Love's Labour's Lost*, which for wit and mirth he says will please her exceedingly. And this is appointed to be played to-morrow night at my Lord of Southampton's, unless you send a writ to remove the *corpus cum causa* to your house in the Strand. Yours most humbly, Walter Cope.

*MSS Marquis of Salisbury, Hatfield House*, vol.16, 415

A further reference to Southampton hosting revels at this time occurs in a letter by Dudley Carleton to John Chamberlain on 15 January 1605:

But it seems we shall haue Christmas all the yeare, and therefore I shall neuer be owt of matter. The last nights reuels were kept at my Lord of Cranborns, where the Q: with the D: of Holst and a great part of the court were feasted. and the like two nights before at my Lord of Southamptons.

*TNA, London SP/14/12, f. 32r.*

H. R. Woodhuysen (1998, 83-5) accepts that the letters refer to the same events, although it is not known whether the performance of *Love's Labour's Lost* took place at all, or if it did whether at Southampton House or at Robert Cecil's House. It can only be assumed that Southampton witnessed the play and that Shakespeare was part of the playing company.

Austin K. Gray (1924) offers a scenario in which Shakespeare wrote *Love's Labour's Lost* at the request of Southampton for performance before the queen and court at Titchfield on 2-3 September, 1591. The Queen's Progress in that year had also taken her to Cowdray Park. Gray argues that *Love's Labour's Lost* was specially written for this occasion at the time Southampton's marriage was being discussed. The intention behind the play would have been to demonstrate Southampton's unwillingness to marry. Southampton had been with Essex in France and there he might have known or heard about Charles de Gontaut, duc de Biron, on whom the character of Berowne may have been based (Woodhuysen 1998, 68). Gray's scenario has not gained widespread support. Stopes (1922, 45-8) describes Elizabeth's Progress and the

entertainment at Cowdray but finds no evidence that “there were any masques prepared or performed.” Nor has the early date of 1591 for this play been accepted, with 1594-5 suggested by Chambers (1930, i. 335) and accepted by most modern commentators.<sup>16</sup> Bullough does not mention Southampton in his review of the sources for *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1957 i. 425-433) but believes that for this play Shakespeare drew principally on two accounts: de la Primaudaye’s *L’Académie française* (1577) and Marguerite de Valois’ *Memoires* (printed 1628). As these two texts seem to be the main sources for the plot of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* with the *commedia dell’arte* providing the stock characters, there is no need to posit any link between Shakespeare and Southampton’s experiences in France.

## 7.4 The “fair youth” of the sonnets

Shakespeare’s sonnets were first published in 1609 (STC 22353). The order of the sonnets was changed for a second edition in 1640 (STC 22344). Most commentators believe that Shakespeare wrote his sonnets in the early 1590s when there was a vogue for sonnets. Sir Philip Sidney published his sonnet sequence in 1591 under the title *Astrophel and Stella* (STC 22537). Edmund Spenser called his sonnet sequence *Amoretti* (1595, STC 23076). Other Elizabethan sonneteers included Samuel Daniel (1592, STC 6243), Barnabe Barnes (1593, STC 1469), and Michael Drayton (1593-4, STC 7203).<sup>17</sup> However, it is not known when Shakespeare composed his sonnets, whether they date to a short period of a year or two, or to a long time span of a decade or more, or in what sequence they were composed, or whether Shakespeare himself placed them in any sequence. Three personas in particular have been identified within Shakespeare’s sonnets: the “fair youth”, the “dark lady”, and the “rival poet”. It is not known whether Shakespeare envisaged these as single or multiple entities, or even if they correspond to historical figures. In other words, it is possible to postulate a wide range of dates and identifications for the sonnets, as reviewed by Richard Dutton (2007).

Almost all modern biographers of Shakespeare identify Southampton as the “fair youth” against the prevailing opinion of editors of the sonnets, who tend to prefer Pembroke. Malone was the first editor to give critical attention to the sonnets in his 1780 supplement to the *Johnson-*

<sup>16</sup> Peter Alexander (1939, 58) suggested *Love’s Labour’s Lost* was written by Shakespeare in his “first period” of playwriting in London, 1592-4, before he joined the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. H. R. Woudhuysen notes that the play is usually dated to 1594-5 but that “the evidence for it is fairly thin”; he considers attempts to date the play through its French associations or the Gray’s Inn revels as “unsatisfactory,” and other topical allusions as “not convincing” (1998: 59-60).

<sup>17</sup> J. W. Lever. 1956. *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet*. London: Methuen. John Fuller. 2000. *The Oxford Book of Sonnets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Steevens* 2 edition. In his own edition he stated that sonnets 1-126 were addressed to a young man (1790 x. 191). Although unable to adduce further details, Malone states: “To this person, whoever he was, one hundred and twenty six of the following poems are addressed. The remaining twenty-eight are addressed to a lady.” Five years after Malone’s death, Nathan Drake made a detailed case for identifying Southampton as the “fair youth”, pointing out verbal parallels between the phrasing of the sonnets with the narrative poems, and noting that Southampton was the only dedicatee named by Shakespeare in his lifetime (1817 ii. 62-73). He argued that the purpose of Sonnets 1-17 was to persuade Southampton to marry Elizabeth Vernon, despite the Queen’s opposition to the match. Drake’s identification of Southampton as the “fair youth” was accepted by Lee (1898, 142) and most subsequent biographers including Stopes (1922, 40-1), Holden (1999, 116-7), and Greenblatt, who takes the sonnets as “a cunning sequence of beautiful locked boxes to which there are no keys” – except that Greenblatt provides two keys in identifying Southampton as the “fair youth” and Marlowe as the “rival poet” (2004, 227-236). Weis also accepts Southampton as the “fair youth” and believes that Sonnet 104 (‘To me fair friend you can never be old’) was a gift to the earl on his twenty-first birthday in 1594 (2007, 122).

Editors of the sonnets on the other hand identify the “fair youth” as William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. This idea seems to have been first proposed in 1832 by James Boaden (1762-1839) and elaborated by Thomas Tyler (1890) and H. C. Beeching (1904) in their editions of the Sonnets.<sup>18</sup> The Cambridge editor, J. Dover Wilson (1966, lxxxviii-xci), believes that Shakespeare began writing the sonnets in the late 1590s, by which time Southampton could no longer be considered the youth. He believes that Sonnets 1-17, imploring the “fair youth” to marry, were commissioned by Pembroke’s mother, Mary Sidney, who wanted her wayward son to settle down. Pembroke had been betrothed to Lady Bridget Vere, but subsequently rejected her. He had also been imprisoned for an affair with Mary Fitton, a lady in waiting to the Queen (1966 xci-ciii; repeating ideas from 1963, 59-74). In the Arden<sup>3</sup> edition, Katherine Duncan-Jones (1997, 55-69) agrees with Dover Wilson on the date and the identification. She does add a reservation: “If some of the “fair youth” sonnets, or versions of them, were written as early as 1592-5, these may have been originally associated with Southampton. . . . But as completed and published in 1609 the sequence strongly invites a reference to Pembroke.” Burrow also dates the majority of the sonnets to the late 1590s and 1600s and therefore inclines towards Pembroke (2002, 100-3). Only a few biographers agree with the Pembroke identification: Schoenbaum (1987, 269) finds that

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<sup>18</sup> Boaden’s essay first appeared in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (1832, CII: 217-221; 308-314; 407) and was published separately in 1837. It has been reprinted in Boaden and Wivell (2013). Thomas Tyler, ed. 1890. *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. London: David Nutt. Henry Charles Beeching, ed. 1904. *The Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Boston: Ginn.

there is “no strained ingenuity” in presenting Pembroke as the “fair youth”, a surmise that is followed by Ackroyd (2005, 284-7).

Only a few scholars prefer not to read the sonnets biographically. Lee said: “While Shakespeare's poems bear traces of personal emotion and are coloured by personal experience, they seem to have been to a large extent undertaken as a literary exercise” (*DNB* 1897). However, Lee was still inclined to think that Southampton had inspired the fair youth of the sonnets (1898, 134-143). Kerrigan states outright that “the sonnets are not autobiographical.”<sup>19</sup> Dutton also rejects any biographical reading of the sonnets (1989; 2007). Honan likewise believes that the sonnets “do not sketch ‘real’ characters, scenes, or experiences as candidly as modern sonnets may” (*ODNB*, 2004). Orgel in his introduction to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition describes why it is difficult to offer any kind of date for the sonnets or any identification of the “fair youth” (2006, 106-7). Edmondson and Wells (2012) give further detailed arguments as to why it is not possible to identify any historical figures with assumed personages in the sonnets. Overall, the identification of the “fair youth” with either Southampton or Pembroke (or both) is very tenuous. The sonnets do not name any person or give any unambiguous allusion to any person. The uncertainties about the time of composition also makes it impossible to them link with historical figures or events.

## 7.5 The “classless milieu” of Elizabethan theatre

Another question to puzzle biographers concerns where and how Southampton might have met Shakespeare. Most biographers suggest a first encounter at the playhouse, which they see as some kind of egalitarian environment where youthful earls could happily engage the attentions of playwrights:

Only in the theatre did the professional writer find a natural context of colleagues: a classless society, in a sense, where noble patrons rubbed shoulders with apprentices (Sheavyn & Saunders 1967, 100).

Biographers date this putative encounter in the year or two prior to the dedication in *Venus & Adonis*, which was entered into the Stationers’ Register on 18 April 1593. After admitting that there is no evidence for any encounter, Stopes offers her own interpretation, detailing how Southampton left Dieppe sometime after 2 March 1591, spent his leisure time at the London Theatres (not attested until 1599), and met the promising playwright in the spring of 1591. She continues her description of this imaginary encounter by saying that Southampton would give advice “to the players, as is often the way with amateurs” and was drawn to Shakespeare by “a

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<sup>19</sup> John Kerrigan, ed. 1986. *Shakespeare's Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 11.

subtle intuition”, had private talks with him, and took him home to supper. None of this is recorded. Apparently, Southampton was able to stimulate the young playwright by showing him some of his books on poetry. These “feasts of reason” took place, according to Stopes’s account, not in Cecil House but in Southampton House at Holborn. Stopes seems unaware that before he came of age in October 1594, Southampton was unable to control his time, his finances, or his place of residence (1922, 40-4). Akrigg follows Stopes to some extent, accepting a back-stage meeting in a London playhouse (1968, 193), followed by Greenblatt (2004, 227-8) and Ackroyd (2005, 190-5).

F. E. Halliday (1963, 120-4) thinks it likely that Shakespeare first admired Southampton when Elizabeth and her Court visited Oxford in September 1592: a poem in Latin by John Sanford includes fulsome descriptions of Essex and Southampton (Akrigg 1968, 35-6). As the poet returned to Stratford, according to Halliday, he composed Sonnet 104 (“To me, fair friend, you never can be old”). There is no evidence that Shakespeare was in Oxford at this time or whether he would have been admitted to courtly entertainments, or even if he did admire Southampton. Other venues for this assumed first meeting have been suggested. Holden believes that they met through Catholic connections (1999, 112). Wood develops this possibility, but adds, “we are never likely to know about them; these were not the sort of things people talked about” (2003, 147-8).

A. L. Rowse (1965, 58) admits that “we know nothing whatever of the player-playwright’s introduction to the notice of the young Earl.” Park Honan (2004) also realises that it is unclear how the earl might ever have met Shakespeare. He suggests two possibilities: Southampton attended the royal court with the younger Fulke Greville, whose father at Stratford had known a board of aldermen which included the dramatist’s father: “Young Fulke Greville could have put the earl in touch with Shakespeare.” This theory suggests that the elder Fulke Greville (1536-1606) visited Stratford, where he knew John Shakespeare, took notice of William whom he introduced to his own son (born 1554), who in turn presented him to nobles such as the young earl of Southampton. Honan offers another suggestion: that Southampton, as a keen playgoer, might have met the dramatist at Gray’s Inn (1998, 172-9). Weis believes that Shakespeare and Southampton met even earlier – in the summer of 1590, when Southampton was 16 years old. He conjectures that Southampton may have been introduced by Nashe or Greene, two playwrights with connections to St. John’s College Cambridge (2007, 112). The range of dates and venues for the assumed first meeting between Shakespeare and Southampton indicate the lack of any record that they ever met at all.

Some biographers have seen the strong attachment between Southampton and Shakespeare as a homosexual relationship. That Southampton enjoyed homosexual relations was heavily

implied in various dedications mentioned earlier (Nashe *The Unfortunate Traveller* 1594; Markham *Tragedy of Richard Grinvile, Knight* 1595; Burton *Clitophon and Leucippe* 1596). It was also graphically described, in a letter of 1601 to Sir Robert Cecil. The writer, William Reynolds, had served with Essex and Southampton in Ireland, and was describing a man wanted in connection with the Essex Rebellion:

[Piers Edmonds] was corporal general of the horse in Ierland under the earl of Sowthampton. he eate & drancke at his table and lay in his tente. . . . the earl sowthampton would cole and huge [embrace and hug] him in his arms and play wantonly with him (Cecil Papers, 83, 62).

Duncan-Jones dismisses this testimony saying that Reynolds may have been a paranoid schizophrenic, as by his own admission he had written over 200 letters to the Queen, Privy Council, and members of the clergy to complain of “al the abewses and vilent opresseones & sodometicall sines over flowing this land” (1993, 481-4). Shakespeare is also thought to have shown homosexual tendencies, not from the testimony of observers but from a reading of his own poems. W.H. Auden argued that the sonnets showed that he too was gay and that they amounted to “naked auto-biographical confession.”<sup>20</sup> In Sonnet 20, the speaker addresses the younger man as the “master-mistress of my passion.” Duncan-Jones describes the tone to this poem as homoerotic (1997, 150-2). Burrow considers whether Shakespeare was expressing homosexuality in this and other sonnets without coming to a conclusion (2002, 124-130). Most biographers stopped short of stating that Shakespeare and Southampton were lovers. Perhaps because of this implication, Steevens had expressed distaste for the poems (1793 i. vii). Peter Levi (1988, 100) thinks that Southampton and Shakespeare were very close but were not “complete lovers” and that “the sonnets are not about buggery.”

More recently, biographers have been more forthright about the possible homosexuality of Shakespeare and/ or Southampton. Honan (1998, 177) believes that Southampton had bisexual and homosexual tendencies while Shakespeare’s sonnets shows his understanding of homoerotic attraction. Greenblatt (2004, 308; 254) sees Shakespeare and Southampton as part of an intimate circle of close friends who would understand the covert references in the poems (234) and that Southampton was Shakespeare’s “patron, friend and possible lover” (308). Weis (2007, 112) makes the unrecorded claim: “That Shakespeare knew Southampton well is a matter of record.” He states without any evidence that Shakespeare’s relationship with Southampton was not of a physical nature but was still a kind of infidelity.

Only a few biographers have imagined a detached acquaintance between Southampton and Shakespeare. Southworth claims that a proper distance was maintained between the poet and his

<sup>20</sup> Richard R. Bozorth in “Auden: Love, Sexuality, Desire” In *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005, 178).

patron (2000, 70-2). In his account of Southampton, Honan also states that Shakespeare “cannot have intruded often in Southampton's set, or some notice of this would have survived . . . . In all probability, Shakespeare's meetings with his patron were few” (*ODNB*, 2004). Bate raises a far more pressing issue about Shakespeare's assumed access to and intimacy with either Southampton or Pembroke:

How likely is it that so great a figure as an earl would have allowed a player and a play-maker of lower middle-class origins, however talented and successful he may have been, sufficient access to achieve the kind of intense intimacy that the sonnets purport to describe? (Bate 2008, 221-2).

According to this view, Shakespeare might have been patronised early in his career through an agent.

The variety of interpretation as to the degree of friendship between Shakespeare and Southampton arises from the lack of evidence which would associate them. There are only two contemporary documents linking Shakespeare and Southampton: the dedication to *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and *Lucrece* in 1594. Shakespeare might have dedicated his poems to the earl in the hope of patronage but there is no evidence he ever received any rewards, financial or otherwise. The earl lacked access to funds when these dedications were written as he was still a minor. He was very unlikely to have patronised Shakespeare or any other writer during the remainder of Elizabeth's reign as he was heavily in debt. When Southampton enjoyed the grace and favour of James I, there are records that he patronised writers, but Shakespeare is not listed among them. It is also possible that Shakespeare dedicated his poems to Southampton not as a patron but as an ideal reader as the author and more likely the publisher believed he could be used to help promote the product. The social distance between the playwright and the nobleman suggests that any close relationship was unlikely. Overall, the enormous variation shown by biographers as to how Shakespeare and Southampton may have known other clearly illuminates the unevidenced nature of their biographical imaginings, or ‘biografiction’.

This chapter has considered the very limited evidence for Southampton as Shakespeare's literary patron. The next chapter considers the evidence and wide variety of interpretations regarding a different kind of relationship: how Shakespeare related to his younger contemporary, Ben Jonson – if at all.

## Chapter 8

### Inventing a rival: Ben Jonson

Most narratives contain a foil to the protagonist, some kind of rival or opponent. Often, this person is originally a friend or relative. In Joseph Campbell's *Hero of a Thousand Faces* (1949), the protagonist has to overcome the friend-turned rival to achieve the goal set out. In the plays of Shakespeare, the protagonists often have friends and allies who become rivals and opponents, among them Hotspur, Banquo and Laertes. In the recorded events of his life, however, there is no person or entity to stand in the way of Shakespeare's success. Various attempts have been made to identify such an antagonist as the "rival poet" in the sonnets, including Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton and Barnabe Barnes, but there is no evidence that any of these were Shakespeare's rival in love or in any other sense. Thus when writing about the life of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson (1573-1637) was cast by critics after the Restoration in the role of Shakespeare's friend and later his rival. Despite the misgivings of Gifford, this notion of rivalry persists in modern biographies. Holland is typical in referring to Shakespeare's "close friendship and genial rivalry with Jonson" (*ODNB* 2004). In the commendation to Shakespeare's First Folio, Jonson calls him "Soul of the age! The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage" and "Sweet swan of Avon" suggesting that he admired Shakespeare for his achievements. However, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers increasingly described an unfriendly relationship between them, with Jonson thought to show envy. A review of allusions, however, shows that few records link Jonson directly with Shakespeare, and that there is only limited evidence to suggest that Shakespeare and Jonson were personally acquainted. As with Southampton, biographers imagine that Shakespeare had a far closer relationship with Jonson than is evident in the records.

The biographical material for Ben Jonson differs enormously both in kind and in extent from the material about Shakespeare. Anne Barton (whose biography of Jonson appeared in 1984) explains:

Our knowledge of Jonson's year-by-year existence is not only enormous compared with the totality of what can be gleaned (mostly from scattered and laconic legal or church records) about Shakespeare's but of a strikingly different provenance and kind.<sup>1</sup>

Barton continues:

We have many of the private letters Jonson wrote, a detailed record of his conversation, and an impressive body of explicitly self-revelatory poetry and prose. We know exactly who Jonson's many friends and patrons were, where he travelled and with whom he stayed, when and why he suffered prison sentences, and when his private library (along with several as yet unpublished works) was destroyed by fire.

These personal writings by and about Jonson have allowed four additional literary biographies in the last thirty years.<sup>2</sup> Despite all this material, Donaldson is tempted to say "that his life is mainly a matter of gaps, interspersed by fragments of knowledge" (2011, 9).

Born in 1573, Ben Jonson was about nine years younger than Shakespeare. He was a member of Pembroke's Men in the 1590s and was arrested in 1597 for contributing to the play *Isle of Dogs*. His earliest publication was *Every Man out of his Humour* (EMO), which was performed in 1599, entered into Stationers' Register on 8 April 1600 (Arber iii, 159) and published in 1600 (STC 14768). Although Jonson published fewer plays in the next decade, eight compared to about fifteen of Shakespeare's,<sup>3</sup> he also published various masques and panegyrics.<sup>4</sup> By 1616, with the publication of a folio of his works (STC 14751), more of Jonson's plays and poems had appeared in print than Shakespeare's. Jonson's popularity remained greater until the Restoration (Bentley 1944). Given their inter-related activities and overlapping careers, it is obvious that biographers should look for contacts between them. After the Restoration, the tendency was to depict Jonson's pique at his own inferiority. Fuller imagined the "wit-combats" between Shakespeare and Jonson (1662 iii. 284). Dryden doubted Jonson's sincerity in his commendation (1693, vii). Rowe asserted that Jonson was proud, insolent and very jealous of

<sup>1</sup> Anne Barton. 2006. "The One and Only." *New York Review of Books*, 11 May (Collective Review of Shapiro, 1599, Richard Wilson *Secret Shakespeare*, Clare Asquith *Shakespeare Hidden Beliefs*, Peter Ackroyd *Shakespeare*, David Ellis *That Man Shakespeare*).

<sup>2</sup> Anne Barton. 1984 *Ben Jonson: dramatist*. Rosalind Miles. 1986. *Ben Jonson: his life and work*. David Riggs. 1989. *Ben Jonson: a life*. W. David Kay. 1995. *Ben Jonson: a literary life*. Ian Donaldson. 2011. *Ben Jonson, a Life*. Donaldson also contributed the entry in the *ODNB* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Jonson's plays were published as follows: *Every Man out of his Humour* (STC 14768, 1600), *Every Man in his Humour* (STC 14766, 1601), *Cynthia's Revels* (STC 14773, 1601), *The Poetaster* (STC 14781, 1602), *Seianus his fall* (STC 14782, 1605), *Eastward Ho!* (with Chapman and Marston, STC 4970, 1605), *Volpone* (STC 14783, 1607), and *The Case is Altered* (STC 14758, 1609). *Catiline his Conspiracy* (STC 14759) was published in 1611.

<sup>4</sup> Jonson's first six masques were published as follows: *Arch's of Triumph* (with Dekker, STC 12863, 1604); *King James Royal Entertainment* (STC 14756, 1604), *Hymenaei* (STC 14774, 1606), *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty* (STC 14761, 1608), and *The Masque of Queens* (STC 14778, 1609).

Shakespeare (1709, i. viii). Steevens claimed that Jonson was overly critical of Shakespeare while Malone declared that Jonson viewed Shakespeare with “scornful and yet jealous eyes” (1778 iv. 153). Not all critics at this time took such a view: Betterton repeatedly stated that no rivalry existed between Shakespeare and Jonson.<sup>5</sup> This envy was re-imagined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when critics tended to depict a friendly relationship. Octavius Gilchrist in 1808 showed that Jonson’s comments about Shakespeare were capable of a positive interpretation. Similarly, William Gifford described “the uncommon fondness of Jonson for Shakespeare” (1816, viii 332). Lee saw the two as close friends (1899, 176) and many modern commentators follow this. Holden asserts that “Shakespeare and Jonson show every sign of having remained firm friends until Shakespeare’s death” (1999, 158). Donaldson imagines “the two men working and talking together, watching and pondering each other’s inventions, observing and retaining certain phrases, ideas, names, turns of plot” (2006, 249). Most modern biographers continue to see them in opposition, (e. g., Shapiro *Rival Playwrights*, 1991, and Bednarz *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War*, 2001). Just a few biographers of Shakespeare find little or no suggestion of any significant relationship between the two playwrights, scarcely mentioning Jonson, most notably Levi (1988) and Greenblatt (2004).

## 8.1 Did Shakespeare purge Jonson?

Whatever is claimed about this relationship originates in Jonson’s biographical record since Shakespeare never mentions or alludes to Jonson (or any other writer). He left no record of what he thought about Jonson or any other writer. In his will, Shakespeare did not remember Jonson or the Jonson child sometimes claimed as his godson. While Shakespeare was named among the members of the newly-formed King’s Men in 1603, Jonson was not mentioned in any document concerning them.

The only allusion linking Shakespeare in his lifetime to Jonson occurs in the anonymous Cambridge play *Return to Parnassus* Part 1, (4.3), where the following speech is assigned to Will Kempe:

Why heres our fellow Shakespeare puts them all downe, I [aye] and Ben Jonson too. O that Ben Jonson is a pestilent fellow, he brought up Horace giving the Poets a pill, but our fellow Shakespeare hath given him a purge that made him beray his credit (Leishman 1949, 337).

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Spence. 1820. *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*. London: John Murray (page 81 in an entry for 1728). Spence (1699-1768) collected various opinions about writers such as Pope. His manuscript was read by Dr. Johnson. Betterton died in 1710 when Pope was about twenty-two years old. It is possible Betterton’s comments were passed to Spence by a third party, perhaps Rowe.

Various interpretations have been offered as “the purge” which Shakespeare is said to have given Jonson. The passage seems to be part of a broader ‘War of the Poets’, a view elaborated by James Bednarz (2001, 19-52). Bednarz is unsure whether Shakespeare was directly involved or was merely an observer. The *Return to Parnassus* seems to have been performed in 1602 (there is a reference to Elizabeth as still alive) but it was not published until 1606 (STC 19309). Edmond Malone expressed the opinion that the purge did not refer to any particular play: “In what manner Shakespeare put him down or made him bewray his credit, does not appear. His retaliation, we may well be assured, contained no gross or illiberal abuse” (1790 i. ii. 321). Lee agreed that the purge meant “no more than that Shakespeare had signally outstripped Jonson in popular esteem” (1898, 219-20). Chambers wondered whether the author of the Parnassus plays was mistaken and that the ‘purge’ was administered to Jonson not by Shakespeare but by Dekker in *Satiromastix* (1923, iv, 40). Donaldson doubts whether Shakespeare’s purge was anything more than “a passing quip” and he makes no attempt to identify which play or character it might have been (2011, 173-4).

A number of passages in Shakespeare’s plays have been seen as covert references to Jonson but these are not secure and do not command wide recognition. In the late nineteenth century, Fleay identified Shakespeare’s “purge” of Jonson with his description of Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida* at 1.2.19 (1886, 45). E. K. Chambers accepted that this passage might parody Jonson as it “seems unnecessarily elaborate for its place, refers to ‘humours’, and has not much relation to the character of Ajax as depicted in the play” (1930, i. 72). Fleay also declared that “Sir Toby represents Jonson and Malvolio Marston” (1886, 220). G. Sarrazin in 1904 argued that Jonson was portrayed as the insignificant Nym in *Henry V* and in *Merry Wives of Windsor* as he rarely speaks without using the word ‘humour’, a point accepted by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in 1921. David Riggs (1989) also sees Malvolio as a comic satire on Ben Jonson, especially with Malvolio’s conversion in prison mirroring Ben Jonson’s. Henk Gras (1989) agreed that *Twelfth Night* was a direct response to overt criticisms made by Jonson in his Humours plays, an interpretation developed by Janet Clare in 2005. Tyson (1978) suggested that *Othello* and *Volpone* were composed at much the same time.<sup>6</sup>

Henry Gray (1915) suggested that *Hamlet* was Shakespeare’s purge on Jonson. However, any reference to the so-called War of the Poets is very brief:

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<sup>6</sup> G. Sarrazin. 1904. “Nym und Jonson”. *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 40 213. Arthur Quiller-Couch, ed. 1921. *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press xxxi. Henk Gras. 1989. “*Twelfth Night, Every Man Out Of His Humour*, and the Middle Temple Revels of 1597-98.” *Modern Language Review* 84, 545-64. Janet Clare. 2005. “The Complexion of *Twelfth Night*.” *Shakespeare Survey*, 58, 199-207. Brian F. Tyson. 1978. “Ben Jonson’s Black Comedy: A Connection between *Othello* and *Volpone*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29.1, 60-66.

*Rosencrantz*: Faith, there has been much to do on both sides; and the nation holds it no sin to tar them to controversy: there was, for a while, no money bid for argument unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

*Hamlet*: Is't possible?

*Guildenstern*: O, there has been much throwing about of brains.

*Hamlet* 2.2.352-9 (Folio 1623, not in Q2).

Arthur Gray (1928) put forward the view that the melancholic Jaques in *As You Like It* was Shakespeare's satire on Jonson.<sup>7</sup> Duncan-Jones accepts this and believes that Shakespeare "engaged in increasingly fierce and hostile competition with Jonson" in the late 1590s and early 1600s (2001, 123-4; 136).

There is little in these lines to suggest that Shakespeare is specifically referencing Jonson in any of these passages. It seems that almost any unfavourable depiction of a character in a Shakespeare play can be interpreted as an attack on Jonson.

Against this 'offensive Shakespeare', some critics have seen Shakespeare writing in a 'defensive' or 'reactive' mode against Jonson. Ernst Honigmann (1982, 111) sees Shakespeare defending himself against Jonson's demand to maintain the unities with this speech: "The lunatic, the lover and the poet / Are of imagination all compact" (*Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.7-8), but this play is usually dated to 1595-6, earlier than Jonson's first recorded play. Honigmann also sees a response in *A Winter's Tale* where the Chorus asks the audience: "Impute it not a crime / To me or my swift passage that I slide / O'er sixteen years." (4.4.90). In these passages, as in the speeches by the Chorus to *Henry V*, Shakespeare may have been answering more general criticism by writers such as Philip Sidney, whose *Apologie for Poetrie* was published in 1595 (STC 22534).

Overall, there is no record in which Shakespeare mentioned Jonson and no confirmed allusion to any of the works. Jonson might, or might not, have been satirised in the portrayal of Ajax, Sir Toby, Corporal Nym or Malvolio, or in the plays *Troilus and Cressida*, *As You Like It*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare might, or might not, have been answering Jonson's criticism in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*. Whichever allusion is selected, none constitutes evidence of any respect, rivalry or even acquaintance on the part of Shakespeare.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Gray. 1928. *How Shakespeare Purged Johnson: A Problem Solved*. Cambridge: Heffer. Henry David Gray. 1932. "The Date of Hamlet". *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 31, 51-61.

## 8.2 “Shakespear wanted Arte”

While Shakespeare’s opinion of other writers is carefully concealed, Ben Jonson’s opinions of other writers, including Shakespeare, is well documented in various ways: (i) in his plays, especially where he speaks in *propria persona* in the prologue or epilogue; (ii) in conversations recorded by William Drummond in 1619, published as *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden* (Sage & Ruddiman 1711; Patterson 1923); (iii) in his commendatory poems to Shakespeare in the 1623 Folio; (iv) in his own notes, collected and published posthumously as *Timber or Discoveries* (1641). These references, taken to indicate the relationships between the two playwrights, will be considered in turn. In 1616, Jonson published his works including 133 epigrams, four of which praised contemporary writers such as John Donne. Jonson did not include any epigram about Shakespeare, good or bad, which suggests that they did not have a close relationship.

Ben Jonson appears to refer to Shakespeare in *Every Man in his Humour*, (*EMI*) a version of which was performed in 1598 by the Lord Chamberlain's Men (according to the title page). The play was entered into the Stationers’ Register on 14 August 1600 (Arber 3, 169) and published in 1601. The play was among those performed at court in 1605. In the Prologue to the play, which was not printed in the 1601 quarto but appears in Jonson’s *Workes* in 1616, Jonson criticises various aspects of contemporary comedies:

Though need make many Poets, and some such As art and nature have not bettered much; Yet ours, for want, hath not so loved the stage, As he dare serve th'ill customs of the age, Or purchase your delight at such a rate,	5
As, for it, he himself must justly hate. To make a child, now swaddled, to proceed Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed, Past threescore years; or, with three rusty swords, And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,	10
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars; And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars. He rather prays you will be pleased to see One such, today, as other plays should be. Where neither Chorus wafts you o'er the seas;	15
Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please; Nor nimble squib is seen, to make afear'd The gentlewomen; nor rolled bullet heard To say, it thunders; nor tempestuous drum Rumbles, to tell you when the storm doth come;	20
But deeds, and language, such as men do use; .....	

Ben Jonson *Every Man in his Humour* Prologue (1616).

Although Jonson does not mention the name of any particular author or play, many of the criticisms readily apply to Shakespearean drama. Jonson's first point concerns characters depicted across a large period of time: "To make a child, now swaddled, to proceed Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed, Past threescore years" (vv. 7-9). Perhaps he is referring to Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* or Marina in *Pericles*. Henry VI is depicted growing from a baby to a man aged about fifty when he is murdered, but this takes place across a trilogy. Jonson's second point concerns the theatrical practice, using a small number of actors to represent large gatherings: "with three rusty swords, And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words, Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars" (vv. 9-11). Jonson apparently alludes to the *Henry VI* trilogy (normally dated 1590-5). His third main criticism, the use of a Chorus to announce changes of scene (v.15), seems to refer to *Henry V* although the Chorus's speeches were not printed in the 1600 or 1602 quartos but only in F1 in 1623. His derisory mention of the descent of a "creaking throne" (v. 16) might refer to Juno in *The Tempest* or Jupiter in *Cymbeline*. Jonson criticises the use of speeches by actors rather than stage effects for a drum or a storm (vv. 18-21). This might refer to the witch who announces, "A drum! A drum! Macbeth doth come!" Only one criticism might relate to the plays of Shakespeare which were also performed at Court in 1604-5, thus making it unlikely that Jonson's prologue was written at this time.<sup>8</sup> In general, Jonson was very disparaging of the dynamic staging, a key feature of Shakespearean plays. His view is thus completely at odds with the adulation claimed in the commendatory verses in Shakespeare's Folio.

In trying to establish a link between Shakespeare and Jonson, a few critics have suggested that one of the characters in *EMI*, Bobadilla, owed something to Shakespeare's Falstaff — who had been presented on stage by the same company a few months earlier (Miola 2000, 33). However, the braggart soldier was a stock character in Comedy, stretching back from Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*. There are differences between them: Bobadilla is not witty and "has no talent for the monstrous and witty lie that ingeniously wrenches a true cause" (Barton 1984, 50). Ian Donaldson notes that Jonson had served as a soldier on the continent and that the name Bobadilla links the character to one of the Spanish commanders aboard the Armada (2011, 130). Derek Traversi saw the influence operating in the reverse direction, with the portrayal of Falstaff due to the "realistic moral influence of Ben Jonson" (1957).<sup>9</sup> Few biographers note a direct link between Bobadilla and Falstaff.

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<sup>8</sup> For the Court performances of 1604-5, Jonson provided two plays: *EMI* and *EMO*. Seven plays of Shakespeare were performed: *Othello*, *Merry Wives*, *Measure for Measure*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Henry V*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *The Merchant of Venice* (Chambers 1923, ii. 211).

<sup>9</sup> Derek Traversi. 1957. *An Approach to Shakespeare*. London: Hollis & Carter, ii. 32.

One character from *EMI* seems to have had a great influence on Shakespeare. In the Q1 version of Jonson's play, a jealous husband called Thorello, broods over the imagined infidelities of his wife and complains of headaches. Not only is the character's name a near anagram of Shakespeare's hero, Othello, he also undergoes similar mental torment. The Italian setting of *EMI* in Q1 was altered to London when published in the Folio of 1616. The names of the characters were similarly changed and many references to contemporary city life were added. Nevertheless, the jealous husband features largely in the revised version. J. W. Lever lists many verbal echoes between the two plays while MacDonald considers similarities of characters and structure.<sup>10</sup>

Miola sums up:

Shakespeare's experience acting in the original *Every Man In His Humour* bore fruit several years later in *Othello* (1604) – his tale of jealous husbands and innocent wives. Shakespeare remembers Thorello in the choice of name for Cinthio's Moor; perhaps also in his addition of a subordinate instance of male jealousy (2000, 65).

Not every editor is so convinced. Michael Neill plays down the similarity of name and counters that Othello is close to 'Ottoman'. The similarity between Thorello and Othello is ignored by both the Arden 2 and the Arden 3 editors and by Geoffrey Bullough (1973, vii. 193-208).<sup>11</sup>

If there is a link between Thorello and Othello, the direction of influence depends on the relative date of composition. Most commentators follow Chambers and date *Othello* to 1603-4, due to the mention of a performance of *The Moor of Venis* "in the Banketinge house att Whit Hall on Hallowmas" i.e. 1 November 1604 (WS ii. 331). Such a date for *Othello* would place it after *EMI* appeared on stage and in print. However, an earlier date for the play might be inferred from an entry in Henslowe's Diary. On 14th December 1594, Henslowe recorded a performance of 'the mawe', and again on 2, 17, and 28 January 1595 (Foakes 2002, 26-7). This play has not otherwise been identified, but might refer to *The Mawe/Moor of Venice*. If Henslowe is recording a performance of Shakespeare's play (or a version of it), then it would be Jonson who borrowed the details from *Othello*. The case of Thorello and Othello indicates the perils in assuming that the dates of composition of Shakespeare's plays are well-established.

In *EMO*, Jonson again seems to mock Shakespeare, but this time on a more personal or familial level. At 3.1.2010-47, the character of Sogliardo proudly announces his new coat of arms with the motto "Not without mustard." This phrase seems to be an echo of Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the diuell* (1592, STC 18372), in which a shipwrecked

<sup>10</sup> Russ McDonald. 1979. "Othello, Thorello, and the Problem of the Foolish Hero." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.1, pp. 51-67. J. W. Lever, ed. 1971. *Every Man in his Humour*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, xxiv-xxvi.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Neill, ed. 2006. *Othello*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 193. M. R. Ridley, ed. 1958. *Othello*. London: Methuen (Arden2). E. E. J. Honigmann, ed. 1998. *Othello*. London: Thomas Nelson (Arden 3). Michael Neill, ed. 2006. *Othello*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 193.

character promises to give up Haberdine if he is saved; when he steps onto land, he shouts: “Not without mustard good lord, not without mustard as though it had been the greatest torment in the world to have eaten Haberdine without mustard.”<sup>12</sup> Nashe’s protagonist is not, however, obtaining a coat of arms. Jonson’s Sogliardo announces: “I can write myself a gentleman now. Here’s my patent, it cost me thirty pounds, by this breath.” Jonson thus appears to be mocking families, perhaps even the Shakespeares, for buying, rather than deserving, their coat of arms which seems to have had the motto *Non Sanz Droict* “Not Without Right.” The grant of arms to John Shakespeare occurred sometime between 1596-9 (*WS* ii. 23-4). A few years later, in 1602, the York Herald of Arms, Ralph Brooke, made a complaint against Sir William Dethick (Garter King-of-Arms) and his associate William Camden (Clarenceux King-of-Arms) “for elevating base persons, and assigning devices already in use”, naming Shakespeare as the fourth in a list of 23 cases (Loomis 2002, 126). If Jonson was satirising a cash-for-honours scandal, he would have been implicating his headmaster at Westminster, William Camden. There is further irony as Jonson himself had acquired arms by 1606 when he is described as ‘armiger’ (Donaldson 2011, 163). Greenblatt imagines that Shakespeare endured Jonson’s taunt in rehearsals and “probably laughed uncomfortably” (2004, 79-81). Maurice Hunt compiles a long list of reasons to identify Sogliardo with Shakespeare (2008, 107-9). Against these interpretations, Honan is unsure whether any taunt was intended (1998, 228). Other commentators do not accept that Jonson is satirising the upwardly mobile Shakespeare in his character of Sogliardo. Schoenbaum notes that Sogliardo is not a man of the theatre and that the motto *Non Sanz Droict* does not appear to have been used by Shakespeare or his family (1987, 229). Duncan-Jones simply asserts that “Sogliardo, a country bumpkin of manifest stupidity, could not possibly be construed as a portrait of Shakespeare” (2001, 96). The most detailed treatment is by Donaldson (2011, 159-160), who concludes that Jonson could not have been satirising Shakespeare. The reference is ignored by Bate (1997), Holden (1999), Wood (2003), Ackroyd (2007), and Potter (2012). E. A. J. Honigmann makes an alternate case for identifying Sogliardo with John Weever (1987, 45).

A third play *Bartholomew Fayre* (performed in 1614, published 1631) also seems to criticise Shakespeare: the speaker of the Induction ridicules theatre-goers who have old-fashioned tastes regarding Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1589; Q 1592) and *Titus Andronicus* (Q1, 1594):

Hee that will swear *Ieronimo*, or *Andronicus* are the best plays, yet shall pass vnexpected at, heere, as a man whose Iudgement shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these fiue and twentie, or thirtie yeeres.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Wells, ed. 1964. *Thomas Nashe: Selected Works*. London: Edward Arnold, 35-6.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Kyd. 1592. *The Spanish tragedie* (STC 15086). Anon. 1594. *The most lamentable Romaine tragedie of Titus Andronicus* (STC 22328). Beniamin Jonson. 1614. *Bartholmevv fayre: a comedie, acted in the yeare, 1614* (STC 14753).

Jonson reiterates this criticism in his 1629 Ode to Himself, in which he views *Pericles* as “some mouldy tale” and “stale as the Shrieve's crusts.” He censured its episodic nature as having “scraps out of every dish Throwne forth, and rak't into the common tub.” Jonson might also be satirising Shakespeare in Epigram 56 as one who steals from the work of others, *On Poet-Ape* (1616). This is the only Jonsonian epigram to follow the scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet (*abab cdcd efef gg*). These passages seem to indicate that Jonson held Shakespeare in low regard, quite different from the excessive praise which he made of Shakespeare in the 1623 folio.

While Shakespeare and Jonson are said to have written plays with other authors, there have been very few suggestions that Shakespeare and Jonson ever worked together. Jonson is known to have worked with many other playwrights of the time: with Dekker, Chettle and Marston in the composition of *Robert II* in 1599 (Chambers 1923 ii. 171) and with Marston and Chapman in *Eastward Ho!* (1605, STC 4970).<sup>14</sup> While Shakespeare was not known as a co-author until the publication of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1634 STC 11075), he seems to have co-authored works with other playwrights, *e. g.* produced *Pericles* in conjunction with George Wilkins, *Macbeth* with Thomas Middleton and *Henry VIII* with John Fletcher (Vickers 2002). It is therefore surprising that two prolific playwrights, connected with the same company and known to have collaborated with other authors, are not known to have worked together on any plays. Malone suggested that Shakespeare might have been the unnamed author who had originally helped Jonson with *Sejanus* (Boswell 1821 i. 356). Few if any subsequent critics have accepted this. Barton thought it more likely that the other writer was George Chapman (1984, 91-4), which is accepted by Donaldson (2011, 472n33).

In the 1616 *Workes of Beniamin Ionson* (STC 14751), six plays are presented with their own list of actors. Shakespeare is mentioned in two lists: *EMI* “acted, in the yeere 1598”, and *Seianus* “acted, in the yeere 1603.”<sup>15</sup> Four other play-lists do not include Shakespeare’s name: *EMO*, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Catiline*. The lists are otherwise consistent in naming Richard Burbage and John Heminges, often with William Sly (until his death in 1608) and Henry Condell. While it is not clear who prepared these lists and upon what authority, the absence of a particular actor’s name may suggest that the actor had little or no part in the play. Duncan-Jones

<sup>14</sup> George Chapman et al. 1605. *Eastward hoe. As it was playd in the Black-friers. By the Children of her Maiesties Reuels. Made by Geo: Chapman. Ben: Ionson. Ioh: Marston* STC 4970.

<sup>15</sup> Jonson composed *Sejanus* despite the edict issued on 1 June 1599 banning all history plays. Jonson was summoned before the Privy Council for this play to answer charges “both of poperie and treason” (*Informations* II. 325-7). The play had been printed in 1605, but Jonson seems to have omitted the offensive references. That Jonson was called to account for composing a history with contemporary resonance renders it surprising that Shakespeare had not been summoned similarly after the Lord Chamberlain’s Men apparently performed *Richard II* on the eve of the Essex Rebellion in 1601.

uses the argument from absence to support her idea that Shakespeare was angry at his apparent portrayal in *EMI* and so boycotted *EMO* a year later. She states: “The fact that the leading player [Shakespeare] in Jonson’s first ‘Humour’ play took no part in his second is rather striking” (2001, 118-9). Duncan-Jones uses this “striking fact” to support her contention of an on-going feud between Shakespeare and Jonson. On the other hand, Shakespeare might have been ill or injured and unable to play a part. He might have been busy in 1599 writing various plays as Shapiro suggests (2005). He might have been busy trying to obtain his coat of arms. It is also conceivable that Shakespeare’s name was included as he was a sharer in the company and not an actor. Donaldson finds any such feud unlikely (2011, 438-9), contrasting the many records which show a feud between Jonson and Inigo Jones (423). Overall, Shakespeare’s appearing twice on a cast list of Jonson’s plays does not provide evidence that the two were friends and rivals.

There are many allusions by Jonson to Shakespeare’s plays, showing that he was very conversant with them on stage, but these allusions do not indicate that they knew each other personally. Jonson’s criticises Shakespeare’s disregard of the unities and other features of classical drama. As he remained unaffected by Shakespeare’s style of composition, which undermines the claim that the commendations in the First Folio (1623) were genuine. The same can be said of the other commendations. Whereas Jonson’s *Works* (1616) had a dozen commendatory verses by established writers such as Hayward, Chapman, and Beaumont, only three other poets minor poets, Digges, Mabbe and Holland, contributed commendations to Shakespeare’s 1623 Folio.

### 8.3 Dedications in the First Folio

Seven years after Jonson’s *Works, Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* appeared in a publication that has become known as the First Folio (F1). In the preliminary matter appeared two poems signed by Jonson, the shorter of which accompanied the engraving by Martin Droeshout, and consisted of ten lines. Jonson’s point was that the engraver is unable to do justice to the wit of “gentle Shakespeare” and that the reader of the poem should read the volume:

*This Figure, that thou here seest put,  
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut,  
Wherein the Graver had a strife  
With Nature, to out-doo the life :  
O, could he but have drawne his wit  
As well in brasse, as he hath hit  
His face ; the Print would then surpass  
All, that was ever writ in brasse.*

*But, since he cannot, Reader, looke  
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.*

That this is a generic comment appears from a comparison with the beginning of Jonson's Folio (1616), where two lines of verse in English express the same sentiment:

*O could there be an Art found out that might  
Produce his Shape so lively as to Write.*

Lee (1915, 525) believes that this point derives from the French poet Malherbe, who attached similar verses to the portrait of Montaigne in the 1611 edition of the *Essaies*.

*Voicy du grand Montaigne une entiere figure,  
Le Peinctre a peinct le corps et luyesme l'esprit:  
Le premier par son art égale la Nature  
Le second la surpasse en tout ce qu'il escrit.*

[Here is a full portrait of the great Montaigne  
The painter has painted his body and illuminated his soul  
In the first part, his art equals nature  
In the second he surpasses it in all that he has written.]

T. J. B. Spencer (1974, 25) draws attention to the same sentiment expressed by the Roman poet Martial about a portrait of Marcus Antonius Primus:

*Ars utinam mores animumque effingere posset!  
Pulchrior in terris nulla tabella foret* (Martial X, 32).

[If art could show his mind and character!  
No picture in the world would show lovelier.]

Jonson's references to French and/or Latin literature raise the question as to whether he was more interested in showing off his own learning or in praising Shakespeare. However, most modern commentators follow Schoenbaum who accepts that the commendation is sound and that only an "over-subtle reader will detect a latent irony in Jonson's conclusion" (1987, 317).

The address to the reader is followed by a commendatory poem to the memory of "my beloved." While Jonson calls Shakespeare the "Soul of the age! The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage" and "Sweet swan of Avon", the praise remains general not personal. This address contains 80 lines, forty couplets, arranged in the following formal manner:

- |     |                        |                         |
|-----|------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) | Introduction           | eight couplets (1-16).  |
| (2) | Address to Shakespeare | twelve couplets (17-40) |
| (3) | Address to Britain     | twelve couplets (41-64) |
| (4) | Peroration             | eight couplets (65-80)  |

In the introduction, Jonson claims that he will not offer excessive praise to Shakespeare out of “seeliest ignorance” (v.7), “blinde Affection”, (v.9) or “crafty malice” (v.11), which suggests that he has such a reputation himself. Blaine (2009) finds that Jonson’s “disavowal of envy” is important to counteract his growing reputation as a “a contemner and scorner of others.” Jonson then marks his address to Shakespeare in the second section with “I therefore will begin.” He praised Shakespeare as superior to many recent writers, *e. g.* Lily, Kyd and Marlowe (vv.29-30), and to the Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles (vv.34-5). In the third section, which invites “my Britaine” to triumph, he compares Shakespeare favourably to the ancient comic writers, Aristophanes, Terence and Plautus (vv.51-2). In the final section Jonson attests to the enduring influence of the work. Jonson calls him “Sweet Swan of Avon” (v.71) and is glad that he appeared on the River Thames to delight both Elizabeth and James. Jonson also calls on him as “thou Starre of Poets” (v.77). Overall, Jonson offers no personal details about Shakespeare, merely paying tribute to his achievement.

In the commendatory poem, Jonson appears to suggest that Shakespeare had limited knowledge of the classics: “Though thou hadst small *Latine*, and lesse *Greeke*” (v. 31). Most writers have seen this as censure. Yet, immediately afterwards Jonson praises Shakespeare as superior to the Greek tragedians. Jonson’s apparent censure that Shakespeare had limited classical knowledge is usually linked with his comment reported by Drummond “that Shakesperr wanted *Arte*.” This opinion has sparked a debate which continues into modern times. Like many other of his opinions, Jonson’s comment about Shakespeare’s “small *Latine*, and lesse *Greeke*” derives from a foreign writer. Antonio Minturno in *L’Arte Poetica* (1564) wrote:

Perciocche alcuni, i quali per avventura sanno poco del Latino, e pochissimo del Greco, non pur nella Tragedia Seneca appena da’ Latini scrittori consociato ad Euripide, ed a Sofocle da tutti principi nella Tragica Poesia riputati antipongano.<sup>16</sup>

[‘For this reason there are some, who happen to know little Latin and even less Greek, who rate Seneca (who was barely known to Latin writers) above Euripides and Sophocles (famously the best tragic poets) - even for tragedy!’]

This allusion was recognised by J. E. Spingarn in 1908,<sup>17</sup> and repeated by Herford & Simpson in Volume 11 of *Ben Jonson Complete Works* (1952, 145) but it seems to have escaped the notice of most Shakespearean biographers (apart from Schoenbaum in *Shakespeare’s Lives* 1970, 58). The derivative origin of Jonson’s opinion and its ambiguous interpretations only mark it as significant for our understanding of Jonson, not for Shakespeare.

<sup>16</sup>Antonio Minturno. 1563. *L’arte poetica del Signor Antonio Minturno*. Venice: Valvassori. (Quotation comes from Book 2 of the 1725 edition, published in Naples by Stamperia di G. Muzio, page 158).

<sup>17</sup>J. E. Spingarn. 1908. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 89n.

Most modern biographers believe that the poem offers Shakespeare the highest praise. Halliwell-Phillipps (1883, 271) calls it “a matchless eulogy.” Chambers believes that “Jonson’s considered judgement of Shakespeare is to be found in his First Folio lines and in his later *Timber*. It shows both admiration for the poet and affection for the man” (1930, i. 70). Sydney Musgrove stated that Jonson’s eulogy was “the greatest praise that any poet could be given” (1957, 9). Schoenbaum affirms that we “may rest assured” that Jonson “would not have penned so noble a tribute if he did not esteem Shakespeare as an artist and treasure him as a comrade” (1970, 18-19). Others who accept the praise as literal are Barton (1984, 258), Marcus (1988, 2-25), Honan (1998, 405), and Holden (1999, 326). Weis begins his biography with quotations from this poem and asserts that Jonson knew Shakespeare well (2007, 7-8). Bate uses Jonson’s phrase “Soul of the Age” as the title of his intellectual biography of Shakespeare, and accepts Jonson’s praise as literal (2008, 429). Although these poems constitute by far the most important commendation of Shakespeare among contemporaries, some biographers do not even mention Jonson’s commendation at all, including Brown (1949), Halliday (1961), Bradbrook (1978), and Greenblatt (2004). One reason might be that the content is predictable. Every literary panegyric claims that the subject rivalled and surpassed both contemporary and classical authors.

Jonson’s commendations to Shakespeare in the First Folio need not have arisen from any close relationship between the two men. No biographer of Shakespeare mentions that Jonson wrote for money. In Epigram 73 (1616), he demands payment for various compositions on behalf of “Fine Grand”. In this satirical poem, structured like a detailed invoice, the poet appears to list a wide range of compositions for which he should receive payment. It ends: “For which, or pay me quickly, or I’ll pay you.” Jonson seems to be admitting that he was a pen for hire; if so, the commendations to F1 might not be genuine. Some critics during the next two centuries thought them insincere. Dryden found the address “insolent, sparing and invidious” (1693, vii). Malone referred to Jonson’s comments as “clumsy sarcasm and many malevolent reflections” (1790 i. ii. 321).

A few modern commentators have reverted to the judgement of Dryden, Rowe, and Malone in seeing Jonson’s praise as unnecessarily extravagant, with little that is informative or personal. Wesley Trimpi finds the poem formulaic and obscure in places: “if I thought my judgement were of years” is very difficult to interpret (1962, 149-151). T. J. B. Spencer also finds obscurity in the references to the Roman tragedians, Pacuvius and Accius. Few readers could draw on knowledge of Horace *Epistles* II.i 55-6 or Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* (X 97). He argues that Jonson’s poem “has something of the flavour of a blurb, designed to sell a book;” and that it is “primarily a literary composition, entertainingly making use of literary conventions” (1974, 39-40). Richard Peterson takes a similar view that Jonson was mainly interested in imitating and adapting quotations from classical authors. He has appreciated the poem as a lyric

in the form used by the Roman poet Horace, and finds that Jonson was more concerned with showing his awareness of classical panegyric than in praising a friend (1980, 129-158).<sup>18</sup>

The only previous publication of so many plays in the expensive folio format was Jonson's own folio of 1616, which included dedications by writers such as John Heywood and Francis Beaumont. While their tributes might well be genuine, the main purpose of any printed commendation was to entice readers to buy the volume in hand. The 1623 folio was a greater undertaking, "by far the most expensive playbook that had ever been offered to the English public."<sup>19</sup> Thus, Jonson may have been invited, and paid, to write the dedications by the publishers or by his patron, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, one of the "incomparable brethren" to whom Shakespeare's First Folio was dedicated. Jonson's dependence on Pembroke seems to date twenty years or so before the publication of the First Folio. While in prison in 1605, Jonson wrote to Pembroke: "You have ever been free and noble to me" (Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V. a. 321). Jonson dedicated *Catiline* (1611) and his *Epigrams* (1616) to Pembroke and was grateful to the earl for an annual allowance of £20 towards new books (reported in *Informations* 239-240). Pembroke contrived Jonson's award of an honorary degree from Oxford in 1619 (according to Donaldson 2011, 268). As Lord Chamberlain from 1615 until 1626, Pembroke was responsible for the theatre. Jonson was in no position to refuse to compose a commendation to the First Folio. Thus Jonson's eulogy, apparently the greatest tribute to Shakespeare paid by any contemporary writer, might only be an exercise in panegyric intending to promote the sale of an expensive volume of plays.

Overall, it is hard to accept that Jonson was praising Shakespeare in a simple and direct manner. His commendation of Shakespeare in the 1623 folio is inconsistent with the superior attitude that he shows towards the plays. Jonson is likely to have been pressed into writing the panegyric (and paid for it) either by the publishers, Blount and Jaggard, or by the dedicatees, Pembroke and Montgomery, or by a combination of them.

Jonson's fulsome praise of another writer is completely at odds with the view formed by William Drummond (1585-1649), who found Jonson utterly egotistical. About Christmastide, 1618-9, Ben Jonson stayed at Drummond's castle near Edinburgh. The host made notes of Jonson's opinions which were eventually published as *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Drummond recorded:

<sup>18</sup> Wesley Trimpi. 1962. *Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 148-52.

T. J. B. Spencer. 1974. "Ben Jonson on his beloved, The Author Mr. William Shakespeare." In *The Elizabethan Theatre IV*, ed. G. R. Hibbard. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 22-40. Richard Peterson. 1980. *Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 158-94.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Blayney. 1996. "Introduction to the Second Edition". *The Norton Facsimile: the First Folio of Shakespeare*. New York: Norton, xxviii.

Ben Johnson was a great Lover and Praiser of himself, a Contemner of those about him, . . . thinketh nothing well done, but what either he himself or some of his Friends have said or done (Sage & Ruddiman 1711, 226; Patterson 1923, 56).

Drummond's original notes of the meeting are lost but a transcript was made by Sir Robert Sibbald (1641-1722) who published it as "Heads of a Conversation betwixt the Author & Ben. Johnson" in *The Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden* (1711, eds. John Sage and Thomas Ruddiman). The editors reorganised the material and brought together comments on the same person or topic. Sibbald's transcript was published again in 1842 by Laing and then in 1923 in its original order by R. F. Patterson, who added a commentary.<sup>20</sup>

Drummond was very interested in contemporary poetry and owned a large library, later donated to Edinburgh University (MacDonald 1971). He recorded his purchase of a quarto of *Romeo & Juliet* for 6d; the Works of Samuel Daniel for 7s, and Sidney's *Arcadia*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Bartholomew Yong's translation of Montemayor's *Diana*. He also owned a quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* and many books by other English writers, including Lily, Chapman, Dekker, Marston and Middleton. In his library there was also an edition of Jonson's *Works* (1616). Drummond made a note in his journal of his reading, which in 1606 included the following works attributed to Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *A Midsummers Night's Dream*. In another list of 1611, Drummond included *Venus & Adonis*, *Lucrece*, *Romeo & Juliet*, and *A Midsummers Night's Dream*. Because of his own interest in poetry and drama, Drummond would show interest in Jonson's views on poets and playwrights, especially Shakespeare. Yet Drummond only records two comments by Jonson, fewer than his wider ranging opinions about other writers. Thus Jonson seems to have had little acquaintance with Shakespeare. This comparison can readily be made in Sage & Ruddiman's edition as they collected Jonson's opinions under the title "Jonson's Censure of the English Poets" (see Annex B).

Jonson's opinions about Shakespeare were juxtaposed by Sage & Ruddiman who added the phrase "and sometimes sense" (1711, 225), but as they were recorded in separate parts of the manuscript, they were likely to have been spoken at different times. According to Drummond:

- He said, Shakespear wanted Arte (Patterson 1923, 5).
- for in one of his Plays he brought in a Number of Men, saying they had suffered Shipwreck in Bohemia, where is no Sea near by 100 Miles (Patterson 1923, 20).

<sup>20</sup> David Laing, ed. 1842. *Notes of Ben Jonson's conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*. January, M.DC.XIX. London: Shakespeare Society. C. H. Herford, P. Simpson, and E. Simpson, eds. 1925-52. *Ben Jonson*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 11 vols. *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, i. 128-78. David Bevington, Martin Butler & Ian Donaldson, eds. 2012. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

The reproach “that Shakespear wanted Arte” is usually linked with Jonson’s more famous suggestion that Shakespeare had “small Latine and lesse Greeke.” Patterson believes that Jonson’s criticism was “fair” (1923, 5) probably because Shakespeare did not imitate classical models as Jonson did. The second of Jonson’s adverse judgements concerns Shakespeare’s geography and most commentators accept that Shakespeare made a mistake. It is possible to exonerate Shakespeare of geographical error by one or two simple arguments: Shakespeare was following Robert Greene’s 1588 prose romance, *Pandosto*, the main source for *The Winter’s Tale*, in which Bohemia is given a sea-coast.<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Bullough (1975, viii. 118-125) describes how Shakespeare reverses the locations. Greene’s story involves drifting from the sea-coast of Bohemia to Sicily and back. Jonson’s attack should therefore be directed at Greene. However, both Greene and Shakespeare might be correct, and Jonson wrong, because the Kingdom of Bohemia did have a sea-coast from the time of Ottokar II (1233-1278), according to Pafford (Arden 2 edition, 1962, 66). The Austro-Hungarian Empire retained its Adriatic port until the end of the First World War when the citizens of Trieste opted to join Italy.<sup>22</sup> Jonson’s criticism of Shakespeare’s geography is therefore not entirely valid.

Since Drummond was known to have read Shakespeare’s plays and poems, he would have recognised the name at once. However, Drummond only recorded two brief comments by Jonson on Shakespeare from a series of private conversations in which Jonson passed his censure on many other contemporary writers. From these records, Jonson does not appear to have known Shakespeare personally and confines his specific disapproval to one scene which could have been witnessed in the theatre. These views contrast sharply with the admiration professed only a few years later in the First Folio.

Ben Jonson is also thought to have ghost written the epistle, apparently signed by Heminges and Condell “To the great Variety of Readers”. The main purpose of this as with any epistle to the readers was to encourage them to purchase the volume: “But, whatever you do, Buy.” Part of the sales drive rests on the claim that the plays were based on the author’s true and original copies whereas readers previously only had “stolne and surreptitious copies.” A further appeal lies in the claim that “[Shakespeare’s] mind and hand went together, and what he thought, he vttered with that easinesse, that wee haue scarce receiued from him a blot in his papers.” While this reference was previously interpreted in a literal manner, it is now accepted that this is merely conventional praise rather than an actual description.<sup>23</sup> E. K. Chambers realised that the address

<sup>21</sup> Robert Greene. 1588. *Pandosto the triumph of time*. (STC 12285).

<sup>22</sup> Maura Elise Hametz, 2005. *Making Trieste Italian 1918-1954*. London: Boydell, 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> According to Michael Dobson. 2001. Review of Anthony West’s *The Shakespeare First Folio, vol I* (2001). *London Review of Books*, 15 November 2001, 8-10.

was intended as an “advertisement, rather than an affidavit” (WS i, 144). Steevens suspected Jonson of writing this address (1803 i, 166) due to the resemblance of phrases concerning the statement about the importance to the stationer of sales, citing Epigram 3 (*Works* 1616) in support. W. W. Greg cites many further similarities between Hemmings and Condell’s address and the works of Jonson and concludes that Jonson probably wrote this address (1955, 17-21). Like Jonson’s commendation, the address apparently signed by Heminges and Condell was composed to encourage readers to buy and does not constitute personal evidence about Shakespeare.

The names of John Heminges and Henry Condell also appear at the end of the dedicatory epistle to the Incomparable Pair of Brethren, the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery. Various commentators have noticed the inconsistency between the epistle, in which readers are urged to buy, and the dedication, in which they claim that their sole intention was to preserve the memory of their friend. One reason to suspect Jonson’s involvement in the dedicatory epistle is that it follows the classical model of Pliny’s dedicatory epistle to Vespasian, prefixed to his *Natural History*: the author(s) of the Epistle in F1 had a high standard of Latin as the wording does not follow Philemon Holland’s translation (STC 20029, 1601). Malone (1790, i. ii. 99) thought it unlikely that Heminges and Condell would be responsible. Leah Scragg (1997) has argued in detail that it was the stationer, Edward Blount, who wrote the dedication. He held the copyright of sixteen Shakespeare plays and was responsible with William Jaggard for publishing the First Folio. He had published works by Jonson, including the first play to include dedications, *Seianus His Fall*, which was entered into the Stationer’s Register on 2 November 1604 (Arber 1876, iii. 273). Blount also composed a number of dedications, including one for the 1598 translation of *Hero and Leander* and another for the 1632 collected edition of Lyly’s plays. While Blount was an important stationer in the Jacobean period, he was not known as a publisher of Shakespeare’s plays. Since Blount has little known acquaintance with Shakespeare and his works, there is no biographical value in his (contribution to the) Dedication to Pembroke and Montgomery.

#### 8.4 Jonson's *Timber or Discoveries* (1641)

Among the papers found after Jonson’s death in 1637 were many judgements about contemporary writers. A literary executor, possibly Sir Kenelm Digby, organised and published Jonson’s opinions in Volume III of Jonson’s *Works* in 1640-1 entitled *Timber or Discoveries, Made upon Men and Matter: As They have How'd out of his daily Readings; or had their refluxe to his peculiar Notion of the Times*.<sup>24</sup> The French scholar Maurice Castelaïne attempted to

<sup>24</sup> *The vvorkes of Benjamin Jonson* 1640, volume I consisted of a second edition of his 1616 folio. Volume II consisted of a reprint of his 1631 volume of plays. Volume III (STC 14754a) contained many previously unpublished works,

identify all of Jonson's allusions and borrowings and found many of his comments to be derivative.<sup>25</sup> *Discoveries* turns out to be a book of common-places, a collection of striking passages mainly from classical and continental authors (Donaldson 2011, 11-13).

What is surprising is that within the dense text amounting almost to 50 folio pages, (numbered 85-132 inclusive), only one paragraph deals with Shakespeare. The editor gave it a side heading "**De Shakespeare nostrat.**" usually taken to mean "About our Shakespeare":

I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakspeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, "Would he had blotted a thousand," which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour, for I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any.

He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. "*Sufflaminandus erat*," as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so, too.

Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter, as when he said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him, "Cæsar, thou dost me wrong." He replied, "Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause;" and such like, which were ridiculous.

But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned (paragraph breaks added; ed. Walker 1953, 52).

Jonson's comments have been accepted as approval about Shakespeare. Schoenbaum states: "From Jonson, there can be no higher praise" (1987, 259). The comments, however, do not form a coherent view and contain contradictory estimations of Shakespeare's writing ability. They may well have written down at different times.

There are four points about Shakespeare's ability, all of them derivative:

- (1) That he never blotted a line, which recalls the Epistle to the Reader signed by Heminges and Condell in Shakespeare's First Folio. Jonson sees the facility of composition as a fault, lacking revision and crafting.
- (2) His estimation of Shakespeare's character as "honest, and of an open and free nature" seems to derive from *Othello* ("The Moor is of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem so" 1.3. 398-9).

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including six plays and fifteen masques. *Timber or Discoveries* is placed at the end of the volume. The complex publication of these volumes has been described by William P. Williams in "Chetwin, Crooke, and the Jonson Folios" *Studies in Bibliography* 30, (1977) 75-95.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Castelaïne, ed. 1906. *Introduction, Discoveries: A Critical Edition, Ben Jonson*. Paris: Librairie Hachette (quoted by Donaldson 2011, 13-15).

(3) He refers to Shakespeare's prolixity and assumes the position of Augustus. He seems misquote *Julius Caesar* as the Folio text of reads: "Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause / Will he be satisfied."

(4) He concludes with a generalisation from Seneca: "he redeemed his vices with his virtues."

Many critics, however, doubt that Jonson is praising Shakespeare as so many of the opinions are derived from Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae*. John Atkins (1954) reviewed literary criticism from the time of antiquity and observed: "Few things in critical history are indeed more remarkable than the use made of this volume of Seneca by Ben Jonson." Atkins refers to many of Jonson's opinions in *Discoveries* and cites the following as direct borrowings:<sup>26</sup>

<u>Seneca's <i>Controversiae</i></u>	<u>Translation of Seneca</u>	<u>Jonson on Shakespeare</u>
Tanta erat illi uelocitas orationis, ut uitium fieret. itaque diuus Augustus optime dixit: Haterius noster sufflaminandus est. . . .  In sua potestate habebat ingenium, in aliena modum (4.7)	So fast was his speech, that it became a fault. As a result, the divine Augustus cleverly said: Our Haterius must be checked . . . .  His wit ( <i>ingenium</i> ) was in his own power, its regulation under someone else's.	he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. " <i>Suffla-minandus erat</i> ," as Augustus said of Haterius.  His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too!
Saepe incidebat in ea quae derisum effugere non possent. (4.10)	He often used to fall into those things which could not avoid derision . . . .	Many times he fell into those things could not escape laughter.
redimebat tamen vitia virtutibus et persaepe plus habebat quod laudares quam cui ignosceres. (4.11)	However, he redeemed his vices with his virtues and frequently he had more to praise than to be pardoned.	But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.

Jonson's adverse criticism seems to have aroused indignation among some of his audience that he had to defend himself by saying that he expresses his opinion with candour not malevolence and that he "loved the man." Overall, the opinions expressed about Shakespeare in *Discoveries* are

<sup>26</sup> John Atkins. 1952. *Literary Criticism in Antiquity: A Sketch of Its Development*. London: Methuen, Vol. II. 154.

derivative, which suggests that Jonson was not genuine in his professed admiration for Shakespeare.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, it is interesting that Jonson did not seem to have rated Shakespeare as a dramatist highly enough to have imitated his style. Whereas Shakespeare's plays involve "jumping o'er times, / Turning the accomplishment of many years / Into an hour-glass," Jonson continued to observe the unities in his own plays. Furthermore, Jonson does not seem to have owned any copies of Shakespeare's works. Although he lost much of his library to a disastrous fire in 1623, described in a poem called 'The Execration against Vulcan' (*The Underwood*, 43. 85-106, 1640), over 200 books in 40 libraries have been identified as owned by Jonson (McPherson 1974). Of these, McPherson found only nine books by English authors: Chaucer, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Fulke Greville, and Marston, but no copy of any work by Shakespeare. If Jonson's was expressing genuine admiration in the 1623 folio, we might reasonable expect him to have owned a copy of Shakespeare's works. However, McPherson found none.

A number of posthumous accounts link Jonson with Shakespeare. An anecdote ascribed to Sir Nicholas L'Estrange (1629-1655) states that Shakespeare was godfather to a son of Jonson and gave "a douzen good Lattin Spooones" (*WS* ii. 243). There are serious doubts about the story: in his will, Shakespeare mentions only one godson, William Walker, the son of a Stratford bailiff, Henry Walker, baptised in 1608. There is no mention of Ben Jonson or of his children. This anecdote is discarded by most biographers; the same story appeared in note-book c. 1657 by Thomas Plume with the roles of Shakespeare and Jonson reversed (*WS* ii. 247). After the Restoration, Thomas Fuller described the wit-combats in a laboured simile (1662, *History of the Worthies of England* iii. 284). John Ward reported a story about Shakespeare, Drayton, and Jonson in "a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard" (Severn 1839, 1-24). Michael Drayton (1563-1631), however, was not known for his ale-house bravado: *The Returne from Parnassus* (c. 1601) satirises him for lacking "one true note of a Poet of our times, and that is this, hee cannot swagger it well in a Taverne, nor dominere in a hothouse" (Leishman 1949, 240). There is no other suggestion that Drayton knew Shakespeare personally although they both came from Warwickshire.<sup>27</sup> However, there are letters by Drayton to Ben Jonson, William Drummond, and to others. Some of Drayton's works were collected and published in a folio edition in 1619, for which various other poets such as Jonson wrote commendatory verses. Drayton, however, did not write anything for Shakespeare's First Folio of 1623.

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Drayton (1563- 1631) was born at Hartshill near Atherstone, Warks, about 30 miles north of Stratford. Drayton's 1597 dedication to Sir Henry Goodere suggests close ties to the Goodere family at Polesworth. Jean Brink argues that Drayton overstated his connections with this family as with other important people (1990. *Michael Drayton Revisited*. Bostin, MA: Twayne, 3-6).

It is sometimes said that Shakespeare drank with Jonson and other companions at the Mermaid Tavern (*e. g.* Ackroyd 2005, 324). This myth cannot be traced earlier than Gifford's biography of Jonson (1816) and features strongly in historical fiction.<sup>28</sup> Shakespeare certainly knew the owner of the Mermaid, William Johnson, whom he named among the trustees of the recently-purchased Blackfriars gate-house in 1613 (*WS* ii. 154-8). There is no evidence that Shakespeare ever attended the Mermaid (Shapiro 1950) or was ever part of the political club which met there (Michelle O'Callaghan, "Mermaid Club" in *ODNB* 2004). The earliest testimony that Shakespeare knew Jonson comes from an anecdote recorded by Nicholas Rowe in 1709, who believes that Jonson wrote a play which Shakespeare recommended "After this they were profess'd Friends; tho' I don't know whether the other [Jonson] ever made him an equal return of Gentleness and Sincerity" (Rowe 1709, i. xii). Rowe does not mention the authority for this anecdote, the place or time of the supposed encounter, nor does he state which play Jonson had shown Shakespeare. This story runs counter to the known method by which the Companies selected their plays (*WS*, i. 95). Donaldson believes that the anecdote was invented to contrast the "imagined characters of Shakespeare and Jonson: the one, gracious, gentle, generous, gifted; the other surly, grudging, envious and ungrateful" (Donaldson 2011, 128). The posthumous anecdotes regarding Jonson and Shakespeare are not reliable as evidence that the two writers knew each other well or were even acquainted.

Overall, there is no firm basis for stating that Jonson and Shakespeare were well known to each other personally. Shakespeare made no direct reference to Jonson and the possible references in Shakespeare's plays to Jonson's works are oblique and could have been intended for other authors. Jonson expressed more opinions about Shakespeare than any other contemporary did, these comments concern the works and offer little indication of direct personal acquaintanc. He clearly knew Shakespeare's plays well enough to criticise them both on stage and in private, but he does not seem to have known the person. There is no evidence either of a "close friendship" or of any "genial rivalry." As with Southampton, so with Jonson, the biographers of Shakespeare have imagined a relationship, which goes far beyond the existing evidence.

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<sup>28</sup> Alfred Noyes's *Tales of the Mermaid Tavern* (1913); George Cronyn's *Mermaid Tavern: Kit Marlowe's Story* (1937); Shirley Barker's *Liza Bowe: A Novel of Elizabethan Times and the Mermaid Tavern* (1956); Robert Nye's *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* (1998); Patrick Page's play *Swansong* (2002); Robert Brustein's play *The English Channel* (2008).

## Conclusions and Inconclusions

I set out to establish what evidence supports the notion that the Earl of Southampton was Shakespeare's patron. It developed into an exploration of the types of evidence which constitute biographical material and the characteristics of literary biography. Eventually, I came to present the thesis that there is insufficient documentation for an evidence-based biography of Shakespeare and that such attempts are a post-modern phenomenon, coming after the publication of Schoenbaum's *Documentary Life* (1975).

This thesis therefore is concerned with identifying and combatting the many biografictions which have accrued in the traditional account of Shakespeare's life. I have identified the earliest allusion to various important myths. I have also explored the validity of modern biographies about William Shakespeare. Readers expect a literary biography to explain how a writer came to compose his or her works, the main purpose of literary biography. Shakespeare's biographers, however, do not use the life to explain the works — rather they use the works to inform the life. This thesis offers a new view on the history of Shakespearean biography, rejecting the claims of a tradition stretching back to 1709 by showing that attempts before 1975 were poorly valued by contemporaries. Although a biography of Shakespeare, that is to say a narrative account of his life based on primary sources, is not possible on existing material, biographies continue to be published primarily because publishers realise that the reading public has an endless fascination with the man due to his iconic status. Secondly, many people enjoy the novelistic approach to reading the life story, interspersed with a few famous quotations. Thirdly, the traditional view of Shakespeare is akin to Dick Whittington, a rags-to-riches story of a “young man from a small provincial town - a man without independent wealth, without powerful family connections and without a university education - moves to London in the late 1580s and, in a remarkably short time, becomes the greatest playwright not of his age alone but of all time” (Greenblatt 2004, preface 11). Other possible motives for writing a biography of Shakespeare include new research (invariably claimed but never involving Shakespeare directly), correction of previous mistakes, and the very lack of biographical materials which allows the biographer to indulge narrative flair and imaginative insight within an established framework, but without the need for much historical research. For Ben Jonson, there is far more material to read, evaluate, appraise, and either report or discard.

Since 1975, there has been little scepticism regarding the prospect of writing the life of Shakespeare. Notable among these are two monographs by David Ellis in 2005 and 2012, and

one by Graham Holderness (1988, 2001, and 2011). In addition, Helen Hackett (2009) has demonstrated a very cautious approach to those myths which have linked Shakespeare with Elizabeth. Many other excellent reconsiderations of Shakespearean myths have been advanced: Maguire & Smith (2012) are interested in considering myths the biografictions surrounding Shakespeare's life, as well as other myths concerning his works and his reputation. Ten Hoenselaars (2012) re-examines the Romantic myth of Shakespeare as a lonely genius and placed him among other playwrights working in the early modern theatre.

The works of Shakespeare are an essential element of our culture and the implications of my findings are important for almost the full range of Shakespearean criticism. Every editor of a Shakespeare play or poem, and almost every director of a theatrical production, includes a section on the date of composition, invariably choosing a date suggested by Malone and reaffirmed by Chambers and Wells & Taylor, despite the lack of direct evidence. These chronologies are arbitrary and subjective: they depend on the undocumented assumption that Shakespeare started to compose plays in the early 1590s. The date of composition thus assigned is then considered for resonance in Shakespeare's personal life, echoes of contemporary events in London and a literary debt to sources. It is possible, however, to assign earlier dates, perhaps by as much as five years, to Shakespeare's plays. One of the few editors who admitted to doubt was Edward Burn: the final section of his introduction to the Arden<sup>3</sup> edition of *1 Henry VI* was entitled: "What is Henry the Sixth Part One? Controversies and (In)conclusions." Before reviewing possible authorship, composition, performance and whether it was intended as part of a cycle, he reminds his readers of important limitations:

We should always bear in mind the paucity and obliquity of the contemporary documentation of Elizabethan theatre. Any supposition that we build on such 'evidence' must be precarious, as we cannot quantify what texts and documentation have been lost. But then again we should be suspicious when this uncertainty is evoked to allow room for a view that is in itself subjective (2000, 70).

Burn shows that it is possible to review the different elements in a controversy without having to express a verdict for which there is little foundation.

There seems no prospect of an end to speculative accounts of Shakespeare's life. Both publishers and authors seem assured of a title that will sell. Works of historical fiction by Dame Hilary Mantel and Philippa Gregory are widely read and admired, even though there are considerable more sources for the historical figures they depict than there are for Shakespeare. However, historical fiction concerning Shakespeare (*e. g.*, by Robert Nye and Gary Blackwood) does not enjoy such prestige as a work entitled "biography." Thus many academics present their own work as biography rather than as fiction. Historicism has made it acceptable for academics to offer plausible narratives as biography rather than historical fiction. Stephen Greenblatt

departed from his own “new historicist” approach to literature by offering many imaginative interpretations in his 2004 “biography” *Will in the World*. A New Historicist approach is welcome and enlightening for the study of Shakespeare’s works but only so far as suitable primary sources exist and causal connections can be made. We should accept Dr. Johnson’s observation that the material for writing personal lives tended to diminish with time and not substitute the primary material with our own imaginings.

My most important recommendation is that those who wish to adopt a biographical approach to Shakespeare should beware the biographical fallacy of deducing details about a writer’s life from the works; instead, the investigator should only undertake sceptical examination of topics for which there are primary sources. It is essential not to accept the opinion of previous editors or merely to refer to evidence which respected predecessors have used (Hume 1999, 160) or even to offer a summary of the sources (Chambers 1946, 7). Instead, it is essential to re-state the primary sources (showing where a full transcription can be found) before undertaking an analysis of the topic in question. To some extent, this has been undertaken by the more sceptical of modern scholars. Any picture of Shakespeare will thus be very limited, but will have the merit of being historically based and verifiable, and not simply biografiction. My second recommendation is that writers who wish to present a single and consistent view of Shakespeare as man and as writer should openly use historical fiction. My third recommendation is aimed at reviewers: before reading any life of Shakespeare, they should first read the criticisms of David Ellis (2005; 2012). My final suggestion is that those who admire the works of Shakespeare should accept that little is known about Shakespeare: in other words they should take to heart the view of Sir Edmund Chambers (*WS* i. 26): “after all the careful scrutiny of clues and all the patient balancing of possibilities [regarding Shakespeare], the last word of self-respecting scholarship must be that of nescience.”

## ANNEX A

### ***Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear***

**by Nicholas Rowe (1709)**

Rowe's *Account* originally contained about 8200 words, most of which concern his judgment as to Shakespeare's merit. Only about 1020 words are biographical (approx. 12% of the total). His biographical comments **are highlighted in bold** and it is clear that there is no attempt to write a continuous narrative of Shakespeare's life. Hence, it is wrong to refer to this essay as a "biography".

Alexander Pope reprinted Rowe's essay in 1725 but omitted sections amounting to about 1165 words. None of the omissions [which are enclosed by square brackets and are ~~crossed through~~] refer to Shakespeare's life. Thus the biographical content of the abridged version is about 1000 words out of 7,000 (approx. 14%). Paragraph numbers have been added.

(Word count)

1. IT seems to be a kind of Respect due to the Memory of Excellent Men, especially of those whom their Wit and Learning have made Famous, to deliver some Account of themselves, as well as their Works, to Posterity. For this Reason, how fond do we see some People of discovering any little Personal Story of the great Men of Antiquity, their Families, the common Accidents of their Lives, and even their Shape, Make and Features have been the Subject of critical Enquiries. How trifling soever this Curiosity may seem to be, it is certainly very Natural; and we are hardly satisfy'd with an Account of any remarkable Person, 'till we have heard him describ'd even to the very Cloaths he wears. As for what relates to Men of Letters, the knowledge of an Author may sometimes conduce to the better understanding his Book: And tho' the Works of Mr. *Shakespear* may seem to many not to want a Comment, yet

I fancy some little Account of the Man himself may not be thought improper to go along with them. (181)

2. **He was the Son of Mr. *John Shakespear*, and was Born at *Stratford upon Avon*, in *Warwickshire*, in *April 1564*. His Family, as appears by the Register and Publick Writings relating to that Town, were of good Figure and Fashion there, and are mention'd as Gentlemen. His Father, who was a considerable Dealer in Wool, had so large a Family, ten Children in all that tho' he was his eldest Son, he could give him no better Education than his own Employment. He had bred him, 'tis true, for some time at a Free-School, where 'tis probable he acquir'd that little *Latin* he was Master of: But the narrowness of his Circumstances, and the want of his assistance at Home, forc'd his Father to withdraw him from thence, and unhappily prevented his further Proficiency in that Language.** (138)

3. It is without Controversie, that he had no knowledge of the Writings of the Antient Poets, not only from this Reason, but from his Works themselves, where we find no traces of any thing that looks like an Imitation of 'em; the Delicacy of his Taste, and the natural Bent of his own Great *Genius*, equal, if not superior to some of the best of theirs, would certainly have led him to Read and Study 'em with so much Pleasure, that some of their fine Images would naturally have insinuated themselves into, and been mix'd with his own Writings; so that his not copying at least something from them, may be an Argument of his never having read 'em. Whether his Ignorance of the Antients were a disadvantage to him or no, may admit of a Dispute: For tho' the knowledge of 'em might have made him more Correct, yet it is not improbable but that the Regularity and Deference for them, which would have attended that Correctness, might have restrain'd some of that Fire, Impetuosity, and even beautiful Extravagance which we admire in *Shakespear*: And I believe we are better pleas'd with those Thoughts, altogether New and Uncommon, which his own Imagination supply'd him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful Passages out of the *Greek* and *Latin* Poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a Master of the *English* Language to deliver 'em. (247)

4. [~~Some *Latin* without question he did know, and one may see up and down in his Plays how far his Reading that way went: In *Love's Labour lost*, the Pedant comes out with a Verse of *Mantuan*; and in *Titus Andronicus*, one of the *Gothick* Princes, upon reading *Integer vitæ seclerisque purus Non eget Mauri jaculis nec arcu* says, 'Tis a Verse in *Horace*, but he remembers it out of his Grammar: Which, I suppose, was the Author's Case. Whatever *Latin* he had, 'tis certain he undrstood *French*, as may be observ'd from many Words and Sentences~~

scatter'd up and down his Plays in that Language; and especially from one Scene in *Henry the Fifth* written wholly in it.] (119)

5. Upon his leaving School, he seems to have given intirely into that way of Living which his Father propos'd to him; and in order to settle in the World after a Family manner, he thought fit to marry while he was yet very Young. His Wife was the Daughter of one *Hathaway*, said to have been a substantial Yeoman in the Neighbourhood of *Stratford*. In this kind of Settlement he continu'd for some time, 'till an Extravagance that he was guilty of, forc'd him both out of his Country and that way of Living which he had taken up; and tho' it seem'd at first to be a Blemish upon his good Manners, and a Misfortune to him, yet it afterwards happily prov'd the occasion of exerting one of the greatest *Genius's* that ever was known in Dramatick Poetry. He had, by a Misfortune common enough to young Fellows, fallen into ill Company; and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of Deer-stealing, engag'd him with them more than once in robbing a Park that belong'd to *Sir Thomas Lucy* of *Cherlecot*, near *Stratford*. For this he was prosecuted by that Gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and in order to revenge that ill Usage, he made a Ballad upon him. And tho' this, probably the first Essay of his Poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the Prosecution against him to that degree, that he was oblig'd to leave his Business and Family in *Warwickshire*, for some time, and shelter himself in *London*. (266)

6. It is at this Time, and upon this Accident, that he is said to have made his first Acquaintance in the Play-house. He was receiv'd into the Company then in being, at first in a very mean Rank; But his admirable Wit, and the natural Turn of it to the Stage, soon distinguished him, if not as an extraordinary Actor, yet as an excellent Writer. (66)

7. His Name is Printed, as the Custom was in those Times, amongst those of the other Players, before some old Plays, but without any particular Account of what sort of Parts he us'd to play; and tho' I have inquir'd, I could never meet with any further Account of him this way, than that the top of his Performance was the Ghost in his own *Hamlet*. I should have been much more pleas'd, to have learn'd from some certain Authority, which was the first Play he wrote; [Pope added: "The highest date of any I can yet find is *Romeo and Juliet* in 1597, when the author was 33 years old, and *Richard the 2d* and *3d* in the next year, viz. the 34th of his age."] it would be without doubt a pleasure to any Man, curious in Things of this Kind, to see and know what was the first Essay of a Fancy like *Shakespear's*. Perhaps we are not to look for his Beginnings, like those of other Authors, among their least perfect

Writings; Art had so little, and Nature so large a Share in what he did, that, for ought I know, the Performances of his Youth, as they were the most vigorous, and had the most fire and strength of Imagination in 'em, were the best. I would not be thought by this to mean, that his Fancy was so loose and extravagant, as to be Independent on the Rule and Government of Judgment; but that what he thought, was commonly so Great, so justly and rightly Conceiv'd in it self, that it wanted little or no Correction, and was immediately approv'd by an impartial Judgment at the first sight. [~~Mr. Dryden seems to think that *Pericles* is one of his first Plays; but there is no judgment to be form'd on that, since there is good Reason to believe that the greatest part of that Play was not written by him; tho' it is own'd, some part of it certainly was, particularly the last Act.~~] But tho' the order of Time in which the several Pieces were written be generally uncertain, yet there are Passages in some few of them which seem to fix their Dates. So the *Chorus* in the beginning of the fifth Act of *Henry V.* by a Compliment very handsomly turn'd to the Earl of Essex, shews the Play to have been written when that Lord was General for the Queen in *Ireland*: And his Elogy upon Q. *Elizabeth*, and her Successor K. *James*, in the latter end of his *Henry VIII*, is a Proof of that Play's being written after the Accession of the latter of those two Princes to the Crown of *England*. Whatever the particular Times of his Writing were, the People of his Age, who began to grow wonderfully fond of Diversions of this kind, could not but be highly pleas'd to see a *Genius* arise amongst 'em of so pleasurable, so rich a Vein, and so plentifully capable of furnishing their favourite Entertainments. Besides the advantages of his Wit, he was in himself a good-natur'd Man, of great sweetness in his Manners, and a most agreeable Companion; so that it is no wonder if with so many good Qualities he made himself acquainted with the best Conversations of those Times. Queen *Elizabeth* had several of his Plays Acted before her, and without doubt gave him many gracious Marks of her Favour: It is that Maiden Princess plainly, whom he intends by *A fair Vestal, Throned by the West. Midsummer Night's Dream*, Vol. 2. p. 480.

(600 words; 14 biographical; 38 added by Pope)

8. And that whole Passage is a Compliment very properly brought in, and very handsomly apply'd to her. She was so well pleas'd with that admirable Character of *Falstaff*, in the two Parts of *Henry* the Fourth, that she commanded him to continue it for one Play more, and to shew him in Love. This is said to be the Occasion of his Writing *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. How well she was obey'd, the Play it self is an admirable Proof. Upon this Occasion it may not be improper to observe, that this Part of *Falstaff* is said to have been written originally under the Name of *Oldcastle*; some of that Family being then remaining, **the Queen was pleas'd to command him to alter it; upon which he made use of *Falstaff*.** The present Offence was indeed avoided; but I don't know whether the Author may not have been

somewhat to blame in his second Choice, since it is certain that *Sir John Falstaff*, who was a Knight of the Garter, and a Lieutenant-General, was a Name of distinguish'd Merit in the Wars in *France* in *Henry* the fifth's and *Henry* the Sixth's Times. (195; 17 biographical)

9. **What Grace soever the Queen confer'd upon him, it was not to her only he ow'd the Fortune which the Reputation of his Wit made. He had the Honour to meet with many great and uncommon Marks of Favour and Friendship from the Earl of Southampton, famous in the Histories of that Time for his Friendship to the unfortunate Earl of Essex. It was to that Noble Lord that he Dedicated his *Venus* and *Adonis*, [the only Piece of his Poetry which he ever publish'd himself, tho' many of his Plays were surrepticiously and lamely Printed in his Life-time]. There is one Instance so singular in the Magnificence of this Patron of *Shakespear's*, that if I had not been assur'd that the Story was handed down by *Sir William D'Avenant*, who was probably very well acquainted with his Affairs, I should not have ventur'd to have inserted, that my Lord *Southampton*, at one time, gave him a thousand Pounds, to enable him to go through with a Purchase which he heard he had a mind to.** (177)

10. A Bounty very great, and very rare at any time, and almost equal to that profuse Generosity the present Age has shewn to *French* Dancers and italian *Eunuchs*. (29)

11. What particular Habitude or Friendship he contracted with private Men, I have not been able to learn, more than that every one who had a true Taste of Merit, and could distinguish Men, had generally a just Value and Esteem for him. His exceeding Candor and good Nature must certainly have inclin'd all the gentler Part of the World to love him, as the power of his Wit oblig'd the Men of the most delicate Knowledge and polite Learning to admire him. (84)

12. [~~Amongst these was the incomparable Mr. *Edmond Spencer*, who speaks of him in his *Tears of the Muses*, not only with the Praises due to a good Poet, but even lamenting his Absence with the tenderness of a Friend. The Passage is in *Thalia's Complaint* for the Decay of Dramatick Poetry, and the Contempt the Stage then lay under, amongst his Miscellaneous Works, p. 147.~~] (66)

13. — [~~And he the Man, whom Nature's self had made  
To mock her self, and Truth to imitate  
With kindly Counter under mimick Shade,  
Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late:  
With whom all Joy and jolly Merriment  
Is also deaded, and in Dolour drent.~~]

~~[Instead thereof, scoffing Scurrility  
And scorning Folly with Contempt is crept,  
Rolling in Rhimes of shameless Ribaudry;  
Without Regard or due Decorum kept;  
Each idle Wit at will presumes to make,  
And doth the Learned's Task upon him take.~~

~~[But that same gentle Spirit, from whose Pen  
Large Streams of Honey and sweet Nectar flow,  
Scorning the Boldness of such base-born Men,  
Which dare their Follies forth so rashly throw;  
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,  
Than so himself to Mockery to sell.~~

(131)

14. ~~[I know some People have been of the Opinion, that *Shakespear* is not meant by *Willy* in the first *Stanza* of these Verses, because *Spencer's* Death happen'd twenty Years before *Shakespear's*. But, besides that the Character is not applicable to any Man of that time but himself, it is plain by the last *Stanza* that Mr. *Spencer* does not mean that he was then really Dead, but only that he had with drawn himself from the Publick, or at least with held his Hand from Writing, out of a disgust he had taken at the then ill taste of the Town, and the mean Condition of the Stage. Mr. *Dryden* was always of Opinion these Verses were meant of *Shakespear*; and 'tis highly probable they were so, since he was three and thirty Years old at *Spencer's* Death; and his Reputation in Poetry must have been great enough before that Time to have deserv'd what is here said of him.]~~

(159)

15. His Acquaintance with *Ben Johnson* began with a remarkable piece of Humanity and good Nature; Mr. *Johnson*, who was at that Time altogether unknown to the World, had offer'd one of his Plays to the Players, in order to have it Acted; and the Persons into whose Hands it was put, after having turn'd it carelessly and superciliously over, were just upon returning it to him with an ill-natur'd Answer, that it would be of no service to their Company, when *Shakespear* luckily cast his Eye upon it, and found something so well in it as to engage him first to read it through, and afterwards to recommend Mr. *Johnson* and his Writings to the Publick.

(117)

16. ~~[After this they were profess'd Friends; tho' I don't know whether the other ever made him an equal return of Gentleness and Sincerity. *Ben* was naturally Proud and Insolent, and in the Days of his Reputation did so far take upon him the Supremacy in Wit, that he could not but look with an evil Eye upon any one that seem'd to stand in Competition with him. And if~~

~~at times he has affected to commend him, it has always been with some Reserve, insinuating his Uncorrectness, a careless manner of Writing, and want of Judgment; the Praise of seldom altering or blotting out what he writ, which was given him by the Players who were the first Publishers of his Works after his Death, was what *Johnson* could not bear; he thought it impossible, perhaps, for another Man to strike out the greatest Thoughts in the finest Expression, and to reach those Excellencies of Poetry with the Ease of a first Imagination, which himself with infinite Labour and Study could but hardly attain to.] (176)~~

17. *Johnson* was certainly a very good Scholar, and in that had the advantage of *Shakespear*; tho' at the same time I believe it must be allow'd, that what Nature gave the latter, was more than a Ballance for what Books had given the former; and Judgment of a great Man upon this occasion was, I think, very just and proper. In a Conversation between Sir *John Suckling*, Sir *William D'Avenant*, *Endymion Porter*, Mr. *Hales* of *Eaton*, and *Ben Johnson*; Sir *John Suckling*, who was a profess'd Admirer of *Shakespear* had undertaken his Defence against *Ben Johnson* with some warmth; Mr. *Hales*, who had sat still for some time, hearing *Ben* frequently reproaching him with the want of Learning, and Ignorance of the Antients, told him at last, *That if Mr. Shakespear had not read the Antients, he had likewise not stollen any thing from 'em; (a Fault the other made no Conscience of) and that if he would produce any one Topick finely treated by any of them, he would undertake to shew something upon the same Subject at least as well written by Shakespear.* (186)

18. [~~*Johnson* did indeed take a large liberty, even to the transcribing and translating of whole Scenes together; and sometimes, with all Deference to so great a Name as his, not altogether for the advantage of the Authors of whom he borrow'd. And if *Augustus* and *Virgil* were really what he has made 'em in a Scene of his *Poetaster*, they are as odd an Emperor and a Poet as ever met. *Shakespear*, on the other Hand, was beholding to no body farther than the Foundation of the Tale, the Incidents were often his own, and the Writing intirely so, there is one Play of his, indeed, *The Comedy of Errors*, in a great measure taken from the *Menæchmi* of *Plautus*. How that happen'd, I cannot easily Divine, since, as I hinted before, I do not take him to have been Master of *Latin* enough to read it in the Original, and I know of no Translation of *Plautus* so Old as his Time.] (164)~~

19. As I have not propos'd to my self to enter into a Large and Compleat Criticism upon Mr. *Shakespear's* Works, so I suppose it will neither be expected that I should take notice of the severe Remarks that have been formerly made upon him by Mr. *Rhymer* I must confess, I can't very well see what could be the Reason of his animadverting with so much Sharpness, upon the Faults of a Man Excellent on most Occasions, and whom all the World ever was and

will be inclin'd to have an Esteem and Veneration for. If it was to shew his own Knowledge in the Art of Poetry, besides that there is a Vanity in making that only his Design, I question if there be not many Imperfections as well in those Schemes and Precepts he has given for the Direction of others, as well as in that Sample of Tragedy which he has written to shew the Excellency of his own *Genius*. (164)

20. [~~If he had a Pique against the Man, and wrote on purpose to ruin a Reputation so well establish'd, he has had the Mortification to fail altogether in his Attempt, and to see the World at least as fond of *Shakespear* as of his Critique. But I won't believe a Gentleman, and a good natur'd Man, capable of the last Intention. Whatever may have been his Meaning, finding fault is certainly the easiest Task of Knowledge, and commonly those Men of good Judgment, who are likewise of good and gentle Dispositions, abandon this ungrateful Province to the Tyranny of Pedants. If one would enter into the Beauties of *Shakespear*, there is a much larger, as well as a more delightful Field; but as I won't prescribe to the Tastes of other People, so I will only take the liberty, with all due Submissions to the Judgment of others, to observe some of those Things I have been pleas'd with in looking him over.~~] (164)

21. His Plays are properly to be distinguish'd only into Comedies and Tragedies. Those which are called Histories, and even some of his Comedies, are really Tragedies, with a run or mixture of Comedy amongst 'em. That way of Trage-Comedy was the common Mistake of that Age, and is indeed become so agreeable to the *English* Tast, that tho' the severer Critiques among us cannot bear it, yet the generality of our Audiences seem to be better pleas'd with it than with an exact Tragedy. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* are all pure Comedy; the rest, however they are call'd have something of both Kinds. 'Tis not very easie to determine which way of Writing he was most Excellent in. There is certainly a great deal of Entertainment in his Comical Humours; and tho' they did not then strike at all Ranks of People, as the Satyr of the present Age has taken the Liberty to do, yet there is a pleasing and a well-distinguish'd Variety in those Characters which he thought fit to meddle with. *Falstaff* is allow'd by every body to be a Master-piece; the Character is always well-sustain'd, tho' drawn out into the length of three Plays; and even the Account of his Death, given by his Old Landlady Mrs. *Quickly*, in the first Act of *Henry V.* tho' it be extremely Natural, is yet as diverting as any Part of his Life. If there be any Fault in the Draught he has made of this lewd old Fellow, it is, that tho' he has made him a Thief, Lying, Cowardly, Vain-glorious, and in short every way Vicious, yet he has given him so much Wit as to make him almost too agreeable; and I don't know whether some People have not, in remembrance of the Diversion he had formerly afforded 'em, been sorry to see his Friend *Hal* use him so scurvily, when he comes to the Crown in the End of the Second Part of *Henry* the

Fourth. Amongst other Extravagances, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he has made him a Deer-stealer, that he might at the same time remember his *Warwickshire* Prosecutor, under the Name of Justice *Shallow*; he has given him very near the same Coat of Arms which *Dugdale*, in his *Antiquities* of that County describes for a Family there, and makes the *Welsh* Parson descant very pleasantly upon 'em. That whole Play is admirable; the Humours are various and well oppos'd; the main Design, which is to cure *Ford* of his unreasonable Jealousie, is extremely well conducted. *Falstaff's Billet-doux*, and Master *Slender's Ah! Sweet Ann Page!* are very good Expressions of Love in their Way. In *Twelfth-Night* there is something singularly Ridiculous and Pleasant in the fantastical Steward *Malvolio*. The Parasite and the Vain-glorious in *Parolles*, in *All's Well that ends Well*, is as good as any thing of that Kind in *Plautus* or *Terence*. *Petruchio*, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, is an uncommon Piece of Humour. The Conversation of *Benedick* and *Beatrice*, in *Much ado about Nothing*, and of *Rosalind* in *As you like it*, have much Wit and Sprightliness all along. His Clowns, without which Character there was hardly any Play writ in that Time, are all very entertaining: And, I believe, *Thersites* in *Troilus* and *Cressida*, and *Apemantus* in *Timon*, will be allow'd to be Master-Pieces of ill Nature, and satyirical Snarling. To these I might add, that incomparable Character of *Shylock the Jew*, in *The Merchant of Venice*; but tho' we have seen that Play Receiv'd and Acted as a Comedy, and the Part of the *Jew* perform'd by an Excellent Comedian, yet I cannot but think it was design'd Tragically by the Author. There appears in it such a deadly Spirit of Revenge, such a savage Fierceness and Fellness, and such a bloody designation of Cruelty and Mischief, as cannot agree either with the Stile or Characters of Comedy. The Play it self, take it all together, seems to me to be one of the most finish'd of any *Shakespear's*. The Tale indeed, in that Part relating to the Caskets, and the extravagant and unusual kind of Bond given by *Antonio*, is a little too much remov'd from the Rules of Probability: But taking the Fact for granted, we must allow it to be very beautifully written. There is something in the Friendship of *Antonio* and *Bassanio* very Great, Generous and Tender. The whole fourth Act, supposing, as I said, the Fact to be probable, is extremely Fine. But there are two Passages that deserve a particular Notice. The first is, what *Portia* says in praise of Mercy, pag. 577; and the other on the Power of Musick, pag. 587. The Melancholy of *Jaques*, in *As you like it*, is as singular and odd as it is diverting. And if what *Horace* says *Difficile est proprie communia Dicere*, 'Twill be be a hard Task for any one to go beyond him in the Description of the several Degrees and Ages of Man's Life, tho' the Thought be old, and common enough.

(857)

22. --All the World's a Stage;  
 And all the Men and Women meerly Players;  
 They have their Exits and their Entrances,

*And one Man in his time plays many Parts,  
 His Acts being seven Ages. At first the Infant  
 Mewling and puking in the Nurse's Arms:  
 And then, the whining School-boy with his Satchel,  
 and shining Morning-face, creeping like Snail  
 Unwillingly to School. And then the Lover  
 Sighing like Furnace, with a woful Ballad  
 Made to his Mistress' Eye-brow. Then a Soldier  
 Full of strange Oaths, and bearded like the Pard,  
 Jealous in Honour, sudden and quick in Quarrel,  
 Seeking the bubble Reputation  
 Ev'n in the Cannon's Mouth. And then the Justice  
 In fair round Belly, with good Capon lin'd,  
 With Eyes severe, and Beard of formal Cut,  
 Full of wise Saws and modern Instances;  
 And so he plays his Part. The sixth Age shifts  
 Into the lean and slipper'd Pantaloon,  
 With Spectacles on Nose, and Pouch on Side;  
 His youthful Hose, well sav'd, a world too wide  
 For his shrunk Shank; and his big manly Voice  
 Turning again tow'rd childish treble Pipes,  
 And Whistles in his Sound. Last Scene of all,  
 That ends this strange eventful History,  
 Is second Childishness and meer Oblivion,  
 Sans Teeth, sans Eyes, sans Tast, sans ev'ry thing* (212).

23. His Images are indeed ev'ry where so lively, that the Thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess ev'ry Part of it. I will venture to point out one more, which is, I think, as strong and as uncommon as any thing I ever saw; 'tis an Image of Patience. Speaking of a Maid in Love, he says, (62)

24. --*She never told her Love,  
 But let Concealment, like a Worm i'th' Bud  
 Feed on her Damask Cheek: She pin'd in Thought,  
 And sate like Patience on a Monument,  
 Smiling at Grief* (34)

25. What an Image is here given! and what a Task would it have been for the greatest Masters of *Greece* and *Rome* to have express'd the Passions design'd by this Sketch of Statuary? The Stile of his Comedy is, in general, Natural to the Characters, and easie in it self; and the Wit most commonly sprightly and pleasing, except in those places where he runs into Dogrel Rhymes, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, and a Passage or two in some other Plays. As for his Jingling sometimes, and playing upon Words, it was the common Vice of the Age he liv'd in: And if we find it in the Pulpit, made use of as an Ornament to the Sermons of some of the Gravest Divines of those Times; perhaps it may not be thought too light for the Stage. (141)

26. But certainly the greatness of this Author's Genius do's no where so much appear, as where he gives his Imagination an entire Loose, and raises his Fancy to a flight above Mankind and the Limits of the visible World. Such are his Attempts in *The Tempest*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Of these, *The Tempest*, however it comes to be palc'd the first by the former Publishers of his Works, can never have been the first written by him: It seems to me as perfect in its Kind, as almost any thing we have of his. One may observe, that the Unities are kept here with an Exactness uncommon to the Liberties of his Writing: Tho' that was what, I suppose, he valu'd himself least upon, since his Excellencies were all of another Kind. I am very sensible that he do's, in this Play, depart too much from that likeness to Truth which ought to be observ'd in these sort of Writings; yet he do's it so very finely, that one is easily drawn in to have more Faith for his sake, than Reason does well allow of. His Magick has something in it very Solimm and very Poetical: And that extravagant Character of *Caliban* is mighty well sustain'd, shews a wonderful Invention in the Author, who could strike out such a particular wild Image, and is certainly one of the finest and most uncommon Grotesques that was ever seen. The Observation, which I have been inform'd three very great Men concurr'd in making upon this Part, was extremely just. *That Shakespear had not only found out a new Character in his Caliban but had also devis'd and adapted a new manner of Language for that Character.* (288)

27. ~~[Among the particular Beauties of this Piece, I think one may be allow'd to point out the Tale of *Prospero* in the First Act; his Speech to *Ferdinand* in the Fourth, upon the breaking up the Masque of *Juno* and *Ceres*; and that in the Fifth, where he dissolves his Charms, and resolves to break his Magick Rod. This Play has been alter'd by Sir *William D'avenant* and Mr. *Dryden*; and tho' I won't Arraign the Judgment of those two great Men, yet I think I may be allow'd to say, that there are some things left out by them, that might, and even ought to have been kept in. Mr. *Dryden* was an Admirer of our Author, and, indeed, he owed him a great deal, as those who have read them both may very easily observe. And, I think, in Justice to 'em both, I should not on this Occasion omit what Mr. *Dryden* has said of him.]~~ (160)

28. [~~Shakespear, who, taught by none, did first impart To Fletcher Wit, to lab'ring Johnson Art.~~

~~He, Monarch like, gave those his Subjects Law,~~

~~And is that Nature which they Paint and Draw:~~

~~Fletcher reach'd that which on his heights did grow,~~

~~Whilst Johnson crept and gather'd all below:~~

~~This did his Love, and this his Mirth digest,~~

~~One imitates him most, the other best.~~

~~If they have since out writ all other Men,~~

~~'Tis with the Drops which fell from Shakespear's Pen.~~

~~The Storm which vanish'd on the neighb'ring Shoar,~~

~~Was taught by Shakespear's Tempest first to roar.~~

~~That Innocence and Beauty which did smile~~

~~In Fletcher, grew on this Enchanted Isle.~~

~~But Shakespear's Magick could not copied be,~~

~~Within that Circle none durst walk but he.~~

~~I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you now~~

~~That Liberty to vulgar Wits allow,~~

~~Which works by Magick supernatural things:~~

~~But Shakespear's Pow'r is Sacred as a King's.~~

Prologue to *The Tempest*, as it is alter'd by Mr. Dryden]

(166)

29. It is the same Magick that raises the Fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Witches in *Macbeth*, and the Ghost in *Hamlet*, with Thoughts and Language so proper to the Parts they sustain, and so peculiar to the Talent of this Writer. But of the two last of these Plays I shall have occasion to take notice, among the Tragedies of Mr. *Shakespear*. If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these by those Rules which are establish'd by *Aristotle*, and taken from the Model of the *Grecian Stage*, it would be no very hard Task to find a great many Faults: But as *Shakespear* liv'd under a kind of mere Light of Nature, and had never been made acquainted with the Regularity of those written Precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a Law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a Man that liv'd in a State of almost universal License and Ignorance: There was no establish'd Judge, but every one took the liberty to Write according to the Dictates of his own Fancy. When one considers, that there is not one Play before him of a Reputation good enough to entitle it to an Appearance on the present Stage, it cannot but be a Matter of great Wonder that he should advance Dramatick Poetry so far as he did. The Fable is what is generally plac'd the first, among those that are reckon'd the constituent Parts of a Tragick or Heroick Poem; not, perhaps, as it is the most

Difficult or Beautiful, but as it is the first properly to be thought of in the Contrivance and Course of the whole; and with the Fable ought to be consider'd, the fit Disposition, Order and Conduct of its several Parts. As it is not in this Province of the *Drama* that the Strength and Mastery of *Shakespear* lay, so I shall not undertake the tedious and ill-natur'd Trouble to point out the several Faults he was guilty of in it. His Tales were seldom invented, but rather taken either from true History, or Novels and Romances: And he commonly made use of 'em in that Order, with those Incidents, and that extent of Time in which he found 'em in the Authors from whence he borrow'd them. So *The Winter's Tale*, which is taken from an old Book, call'd, *The Delectable History of Dorastus and Faunia*, contains the space of sixteen or seventeen Years, and the Scene is sometimes laid in *Bohemia*, and sometimes in *Sicily*, according to the original Order of the Story. Almost all his Historical Plays comprehend a great length of Time, and very different and distinct Places: And in his *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Scene travels over the greatest Part of the *Roman* Empire. But in Recompence for his Carelessness in this Point, when he comes to another Part of the *Drama*, *The Manners of his Characters, in Acting or Speaking what is proper for them, and fit to be shown by the Poet*, he may be generally justify'd, and in very many places greatly commended. For those Plays which he has taken from the *English* or *Roman* History, let any Man compare 'em, and he will find the Character as exact in the Poet as the Historian. He seems indeed so far from proposing to himself any one Action for a Subject, that the Title very often tells you, 'tis *The Life of King John, King Richard, &c.* What can be more agreeable to the Idea our Historians give of *Henry* the Sixth, than the Picture *Shakespear* has drawn of him! His Manners are every where exactly the same with the Story; one finds him still describ'd with Simplicity, passive Sanctity, want of Courage, weakness of Mind, and easie Submission to the Governance of an imperious Wife, or prevailing Faction: Tho' at the same time the Poet do's Justice to his good Qualities, and moves the Pity of his Audience for him, by showing him Pious, Disinterested, a Contemner of Things of this World, and wholly resign'd to the severest Dispensations of God's Providence. There is a short Scene in the Second Part of *Henry VI Vol. III pag. 1504.* which I cannot but think admirable in its Kind. Cardinal *Beaufort*, who had murder'd the *Duke of Gloucester*, is shewn in the last Agonies on his Death-Bed, with the good King praying over him. There is so much Terror in one, so much Tenderness and moving Piety in the other, as must touch any one who is capable either of Fear or Pity. In his *Henry VIII.* that Prince is drawn with that Greatness of Mind, and all those good Qualities which are attributed to him in any Account of his Reign. If his Faults are not shewn in an equal degree, and the Shades in this Picture do not bear a just Proportion to the Lights, it is not that the Artist wanted either Colours or Skill in the Disposition of 'em; but the truth, I believe, might be, that he forbore doing it out of regard to Queen *Elizabeth*, since it could have been

no very great Respect to the Memory of his Mistress, to have expos'd some certain Parts of her Father's Life upon the Stage. He has dealt much more freely with the Minister of that Great King, and certainly nothing was ever more justly written, than the Character of Cardinal *Wolsey*. He has shewn him ~~Tyrannical, Cruel, and~~ Insolent in his Prosperity; and yet, by a wonderful Address, he makes his Fall and Ruin the Subject of general Compassion. The whole Man, with his Vices and Virtues, is finely and exactly describ'd in the second Scene of the fourth Act. The Distresses likewise of Queen *Katherine*, in this Play, are very movingly touch'd; and tho' the Art of the Poet has skreen'd King *Henry* from any gross Imputation of Injustice, yet one is inclin'd to wish, the Queen had met with a Fortune more worthy of her Birth and Virtue. Nor are the Manners, proper to the Persons represented, less justly observ'd, in those Characters taken from the *Roman* History; and of this, the Fierceness and Impatience of *Coriolanus*, his Courage and Disdain of the common People, the Virtue and Philosophical Temper of *Brutus*, the irregular Greatness of Mind in *M. Antony*, are beautiful Proofs. For the two last especially, you find 'em exactly as they are describ'd by *Plutarch*, from whom certainly *Shakespear* copy'd 'em. He has indeed follow'd his Original pretty close, and taken in several little Incidents that might have been spar'd in a Play. But, as I hinted before, his Design seems most commonly rather to describe those great Men in the several Fortunes and Accidents of their Lives, than to take any single great Action, and form his Work simply upon that. However, there are some of his Pieces, where the fable is founded upon one Action only. Such are more especially, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. The Design in *Romeo and Juliet*, is plainly the Punishment of their two Families, for the unreasonable Feuds and Animosities that had been so long kept up between 'em, and occasion'd the Effusion of so much Blood. In the management of this Story, he has shewn something wonderfully Tender and Passionate in the Love-part, and very Pitiful in the Distress. *Hamlet* is founded on much the same Tale with the *Electra* of *Sophocles*. In each of 'em a young Prince is engag'd to Revenge the Death of his Father, their Mothers are equally Guilty, are both concern'd in the Murder of their Husbands, and are afterwards married to the Murderers. There is in the first Part of the Greek Trajedy, something very moving in the Grief of *Electra*; but as Mr. D'Acier has observ'd, there is something very unnatural and shocking in the Manners he has given that Princess and *Orestes* in the latter Part. *Orestes* embrues his Hands in the Blood of his own Mother; and that barbarous Action is perform'd, tho' not immediately upon the Stage, yet so near, that the Audience hear *Clytemnestra* crying out to *Aeghystus* for Help, and to her Son for Mercy: While *Electra*, her Daughter, and a Princess, both of them Characters that ought to have appear'd with more Decency, stands upon the Stage and encourages her Brother in the Parricide. What Horror does this not raise! *Clytemnestra* was a wicked Woman, and had deserv'd to Die; nay, in the truth of the Story, she was kill'd by her own Son; but to represent

an Action of this Kind on the Stage, is certainly an Offence against those Rules of Manners proper to the Persons that ought to be observ'd there. On the contrary, let us only look a little on the Conduct of *Shakespear*. *Hamlet* is represented with the same Piety towards his Father, and Resolution to Revenge his Death, as *Orestes*; he has the same Abhorrence for his Mother's Guilt, which, to provoke him the more, is heighten'd by Incest: But 'tis with wonderful Art and Justness of Judgment, that the Poet restrains him from doing Violence to his Mother. To prevent anything of that Kind, he makes his Father's Ghost forbid that part of his Vengeance. (1549)

30. *But howsoever thou pursu'st this Act,  
Taint not thy Mind; nor let thy Soul contrive  
Against thy Mother ought; leave her to Heav'n,  
And to those Thorns that in her Bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her.* (38)

Vol. V. p. 2386.

31. This is to distinguish rightly between *Horror* and *Terror*. The latter is a proper Passion of Tragedy, but the former ought always to be carefully avoided. And certainly no Dramatick Writer ever succeeded better in raising Terror in the Minds of an Audience than *Shakespear* has done. The whole Tragedy of *Macbeth*, but more especially the Scene where the King is murder'd, in the second Act, as well as this Play, is noble Proof of that manly Spirit with which he writ; and both shew how powerful he was, in giving the strongest Motions to our Souls that they are capable of. I cannot leave *Hamlet*, without taking notice of the Advantage with which we have seen this Masterpiece of *Shakespear* distinguish it self upon the Stage, by Mr. *Betterton's* fine Performance of that Part. A Man, who tho' he had no other good Qualities, as he has a great many, must have made his way into the Esteem of all Men of Letters, by this only Excellency. No Man is better acquainted with *Shaespear's* Manner of Expression, and indeed he has study'd him so well, and is so much a Master of him, that whatever Part of his he performs, he does it as if it had been written on purpose for him, and that the Author had exactly conceiv'd it as he plays it. I must own a particular Obligation to him, for the most considerable part of the Passages relating to his Life, which I have here transmitted to the Publick; his Veneration for the Memory of *Shakespear* having engag'd him to make a Journey into *Warwickshire*, on purpose to gather up what Remains he could of a Name for which he had so great a Value. (291)

32. ~~[Since I had at first resolv'd not to enter into any Critical Controversie, I won't pretend to enquire into the Justness of Mr. *Rhymer's* Remarks on *Othello*; he has certainly pointed out~~

~~some Faults very judiciously; and indeed they are such as most People will agree, with him, to be Faults: But I wish he would likewise have observ'd some of the Beauties too; as I think it became an Exact and Equal Critique to do. It seems strange that he should allow nothing Good in the whole: If the Fable and Incidents are not to his Taste, yet the Thoughts are almost every where very Noble, and the Diction manly and proper. These last, indeed, are Parts of *Shakespear's* Praise, which it would be very hard to Dispute with him.]~~ (132)

33. His Sentiments and Images of Things are Great and Natural; and his Expression (tho' perhaps in some Instances a little Irregular) just, and rais'd in Proportion to his Subject and Occasion. It would be even endless to mention the particular Instances that might be given of this Kind: But his Book is in the Possession of the Publick, and 'twill be hard to dip into any Part of it, without finding what I have said of him made good. (80)

**34. The latter Part of his Life was spent, as all Men of good Sense will wish theirs may be, in Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends. He had the good Fortune to gather an Estate equal to his Occasion, and, in that, to his Wish; and is said to have spent some Years before his Death at his native *Stratford*. His pleasurable Wit, and good Nature, engag'd him in the Acquaintance, and entitled him to the Friendship of the Gentlemen of the Neighbourhood. Amongst them, it is a Story almost still remember'd in that Country, that he had a particular Intimacy with Mr. *Combe*, an old Gentleman noted thereabouts for his Wealth and Usury: It happen'd, that in a pleasant Conversation amongst their common Friends, Mr. *Combe* told *Shakespear* in a laughing manner, that he fancy'd, he intended to write his Epitaph, if he happen'd to out-live him; and since he could not know what might be said of him when he was dead, he desir'd it might be done immediately:** (174)

35. Upon which *Shakespear* gave him these four Verses.

*Ten in the Hundred lies here engrav'd,  
'Tis a Hundred to Ten, his Soul is not sav'd:  
If any Man ask, Who lies in this Tomb?  
Oh! ho! quoth the Devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe.*

But the Sharpness of the Satyr is said to have stung the Man so severely, that he never forgave it. (63)

**36. He Dy'd in the 53d Year of his Age, and was bury'd on the North side of the Chancel, in the Great Church at *Stratford*, where a Monument, as engrav'd in the Plate, is plac'd in the Wall. On his Grave-Stone underneath is,**

*Good Friend, for Jesus sake, forbear  
To dig the Dust inclosed here.  
Blest be the Man that spares these Stones,  
And Curst be he that moves my Bones.*

**He had three Daughters of which two liv'd to be marry'd; *Judith*, the Elder, to one Mr. *Thomas Quiney*, by whom she had three Sons, who all dy'd without Children; and *Susannah*, who was his Favourite, to Dr. *John Hall*, a Physician of good reputation in that Country. She left one Child only, a Daughter, who was marry'd first to *Thomas Nash*, Esq; and afterwards to Sir *John Bernard of Abington*, but dy'd likewise without Issue. (148)**

37. This is what I could learn of any Note, either relating to himself or Family: The Character of the Man is best seen in his Writings. But since Ben Johnson has made a sort of an Essay towards it in his Discoveries, [~~tho' as I have before hinted, he was not very Cordial in his Friendship, I will venture to give it in his words.~~] (66)

38. I remember the Players have oftent mention'd it as an Honour 'to *Shakespear*, that in Writing (whatsoever he penn'd) he never 'blotted out a Line,. My Answer hath been, *Would he had blotted 'a thousand*, which they thought a malevolent Speech. I had not 'told Posterity this, but for their Ignorance, who chose that 'Circumstance to commend their Friend by, wherein he most 'faulted. And to justifie mine own Candor, (for I lov'd the Man, 'and do honour his Memory, on this side Idolatry, as much as 'any.) He was indeed, Honest, and of an open and free Nature, 'had an Excellent Fancy, brave Notions, and gentle Expressions; 'wherein he flow'd with that Facility, that sometimes it was 'necessary he should be stopp'd: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as *Augustus* 'said of *Haterius*. His Wit was in his own Power, would Rule 'of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things could 'not escape Laughter; as when he said in the Person of *Caesar*, 'one speaking to him, '*Caesar thou dost me Wrong*. 'He reply'd: '*Caesar did never Wrong, but with just Cause*. 'and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeem'd his Vices 'with his Virtues: There was ever more in him to be Prais'd 'than to be Pardon'd. (212)

39. As for the Passage which he mentions out of *Shakespear*, there is somewhat like it in *Julius Caesar*, Vol. V. p. 2260. but without the Absurdity; nor did I ever meet with it in any Edition that I have seen, as quoted by Mr. *Johnson*. Besides his Plays in this Edition, there are two or three ascrib'd to him by Mr. *Langbain* which I have never seen, and know nothing of. He writ likewise, *Venus* and *Adonis*, and *Tarquin* and *Lucrece*, in Stanza's which have been printed in a late Collection of Poems. As to the Character given of him by *Ben Johnson*, there

is a good deal true in it: But I believe it may be as well express'd by what *Horace* says of the first *Romans*, who wrote Tragedy upon the *Greek* Models, (or indeed translated 'em) in his Epistle to *Augustus*. -*Naturâ sublimis & Acer Nam Spirat Tragicum satis & Fæliciter Audet, Sed turpem putat in Chartis metuitq; Lituram.* (163)

40. [~~There is a book of Poems, publish'd in 1640, under the Name of Mr. *Willikam Shakespear*, but as I have but very lately seen it, without an Opportunity of making any Judgment upon it, I won't pretend to determine, whether it be his or no.~~] (46)

## ANNEX B

### Jonson's Censure of the English Poets

In the following extract Drummond reports Jonson's censure of about eighteen contemporary writers, showing special acquaintance with Donne but not with Shakespeare. *The Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Eds John Sage & Thomas Ruddiman. Scotland: James Watson, 1711, 225-6 (emphasis added).

That **Sidney** did not keep a Decorum in making every one speak as well as himself. **Spencer's** Stanza's pleased him not, nor his Matter; the Meaning of the Allegory of his Fairy Queen he had delivered in Writing to Sir Walter **Rawleigh**, which was, That by the bleating Beast he understood the Puritans, and by the false Duessa the Queen of Scots. He told, That **Spencer's** Goods were robbed by the Irish, and his House and a little Child burnt, he and his Wife escaped, and after died for want of Bread in Kingstreet; he refused 20 Pieces sent him by my Lord Essex, and said he was sure he had no Time to spend them. Samuel **Daniel** was a good honest Man, had no Children, and was no Poet; and that he had wrote the Civil Wars, and yet hath not one Battle in all his Book. That Michael **Drayton's** Polyolbion, if he had performed what he promised, to write the Deeds of all the Worthies, had been excellent. That he was challenged for intituling one Book Mortimariades. That Sir John **Davis** play'd on Drayton an Epigram, who in his Sonnet concluded his Mistress might have been the Ninth Worthy, and said, he used a Phrase like Dametas in Arcadia, who said, his Mistriss, for Wit, might be a Giant. That **Silvesters** Translation of Du Bartas was not well done, and that he wrote his Verses before he understood to confer; and these of **Fairfax** were not good. That the Translations of Homer and Virgil in long Alexandrines were but Prose. That when Sir John **Harrington** desired him to tell the Truth of his Epigrams, he answered him, That he loved not the Truth, for they were Narrations, not Epigrams. He said, **Donne** was originally a Poet, his Grandfather on his Mother Side was **Heywood** the Epigrammatist. That Donne for not being understood would perish. He esteemed him the first Poet of the World for some Things; his Verses on the lost Ochadine he had by Heart, and that Passage of the Calm, That Dust and Feathers did not stir, all was so quiet. He affirmed that Donne wrote all his best pieces before he was Twenty five Years of Age. That Conceit of Donne's Transformation or [Greek: Metempsychosis], was, that he sought the Soul of that Apple which Eva pulled, and thereafter made it the Soul of a Bitch, then of a She-wolf, and so of a Woman: His general Purpose was to have brought it into all the Bodies of the Hereticks from the

Soul of Cain; and at last left it in the Body of Calvin. He only wrote one Sheet of this, and since he was made Doctor; repented hugely, and resolved to destroy all his Poems. He told Donne, That his Anniversary was prophane and full of Blasphemies, that if it had been written of the Virgin Mary, it had been tolerable. To which Donne answered, That he described the Idea of a Woman, and not as she was. He said, **Shakespear** wanted Art and sometimes Sense; for in one of his Plays he brought in a Number of Men, saying they had suffered Ship-wrack in Bohemia, where is no Sea near by 100 Miles. That Sir Walter **Rawleigh** esteemed more Fame than Conscience: The best Wits in England were employed in making his History. Ben himself had written a Piece Ground for an Heroick Poem, as King Arthur's Fiction; and that Sir P. **Sidney** had an Intention to have transformed all his Arcadia to the Stories of King Arthur. He said, **Owen** was a poor Pedantick Schoolmaster, sweeping his Living from the Posteriors of little Children, and has nothing good in him, his Epigrams being bare Narrations. Francis **Beaumont** died before he was 30 Years of Age, who, he said, was a good Poet, as were **Fletcher** and **Chapman**, whom he loved. That Sir William **Alexander** was not half kind to him, and neglected him, because a friend to Drayton. That Sir R. **Ayton** loved him dearly. He fought several Times with **Marston**, and says, That Marston wrote his Father-in-Law's Preachings, and his Father-in-law his Comedies.

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