VINTAGE

SHAKESPEARE

ANTHONY BURGESS

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About the Book

Among Shakespeare’s many biographers none brings to his subject more passion and feeling for the creative act than Anthony Burgess. He breathes life into Shakespeare the man and invigorates his times. His portrait of the age builds upon an almost personal tenderness for Shakespeare and his contemporaries (especially Ben Jonson), and on a profound sense of literary and theatrical history. Anthony Burgess’s well-known delight in language infuses his own writing about Shakespeare’s works. And in the verve of his biography he conveys the energy of the Elizabethan age.

About the Author

Born in Manchester in 1917, Anthony Burgess was educated at the Xaverian College in the city and at Manchester University, of which he held a doctorate. He served in the army from 1940 to 1956, and as a colonial education officer in Malaya and Borneo from 1954 to 1960, in which year, as he put it, ‘his brief but irreversible unemployability having been decreed by a medical death sentence, he decided to try to live by writing’. His output comprises over fifty books. He was a Visiting Fellow of Princeton University and a Distinguished Professor of City College, New York. He was created a Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres by the French President and a Commandeur de Merite Culturel by Prince Rainier of Monaco. He died in 1993.

ALSO BY ANTHONY BURGESS IN VINTAGE

Fiction

Abba Abba
A Dead Man in Deptford
Byrne
The Complete Enderby

Non-Fiction

A Mouthful of Air

Autobiography

Little Wilson and Big God
You've Had Your Time

Alla mia cara moglie

. . . O meraviglioso mondo nuovo
Che hai di questa gente . . .

LA TEMPESTA

Shakespeare

Anthony Burgess

VINTAGE

Foreword

This is not a book about Shakespeare's plays and poems. It is yet another attempt—the *n*th—to set down the main facts about the life and society from which the poems and plays arose. If I discuss the content or technique of what Shakespeare and other men wrote, it is not with a view to providing literary history or literary criticism; it is because the people in this book are mostly professional writers, and what they attempted in their art often relates closely to what they did with their lives. But it is the lives that come first, and especially one particular life. I know that, as the materials available for a Shakespeare biography are very scanty, it is customary to make up the weight with what Dr. Johnson would have termed encomiastic rhapsodies, but we are all tired of being asked to admire Shakespeare's way with vowels or run-on lines or to thrill at the modernity of his philosophy or the profundity of his knowledge of the human heart. Genuine criticism is a different thing, but that has become very highly specialized, and there is certainly no room for it in a book of this kind.

What I claim here is the right of every Shakespeare-lover who has ever lived to paint his own portrait of the man. One is short of the right paints and brushes and knows one is going to end up with a botched and inadequate picture, but here I have real pictures to help me out. Or, put it another way, my task is to help the pictures.

I have already written two imaginative works on Shakespeare—a novel composed somewhat hurriedly to celebrate in 1964 the quatercentenary of his birth, and a script for a more than epic-length Hollywood film of his life.

There is a great deal of verifiable fact in both these works, but there is also a great deal of guesswork, as well as some invention that has no basis even in probability. This present book contains conjecture—duly and timidly signaled by phrases like “It well may be that . . .” or “Conceivably, about this time . . . ,” but it eschews invention. There is, however, a chapter which attempts to reconstruct the first performance of *Hamlet,* and here I have silenced the little cracked fanfares of caution. Instead of saying that the actor Rice was probably, or possibly, a Welshman, I have asserted that he was, and even assigned parts like Fluellen and Sir Hugh Evans to him. The reader will recognize the fiction writer at work and, I hope, will make due allowances. All other assertions, in other chapters, can be accepted as true.

I once wrote an article in which I said that, given the choice between two discoveries—that of an unknown play by Shakespeare and that of one of Will’s laundry lists—we would all plump for the dirty washing every time. That Shakespeare persists in presenting so shadowy a figure, when his friend Ben Jonson is as clear as a bell and somewhat louder, is one of our reasons for pursuing him. Every biographer longs for some new gesture of reality—a fingernail torn on May 7, 1598, or a bad cold during King James I’s first command performance—but the gestures never materialize. We have Shakespeare’s unlocked heart in the Sonnets, but these only prove that he fell in love and out of it, which happens to everybody. What we want are letters and doctors’ prescriptions and the minutiae of daily life which build up to a character. It is maddening that Shakespeare gives us nothing when Ben is only too ready to accost us with his mountain belly and his rocky face. It is only among the unsound gossips in both past and present Warwickshire that we learn of Will’s having no head for drink and his doses of clap. But gossip denotes concern, even love, and it is encouraging to see Shakespeare sometimes emerging today as a living folk-spirit in lavatory graffiti and

pub jokes. Unfortunately, this book has no place for such things. It is, with all its faults, all too sound.

Prologue

QUEEN ELIZABETH I came to the throne of England in 1558, at the age of twenty-five—some six years before the birth of the man whom we regard as her greatest subject. She was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Henry's determination to marry that young woman had been the cause of a royal divorce and the establishment of a national Protestant church in England. To English and foreign Catholics, Elizabeth had no claim to the throne: she was a bastard. Nevertheless, the King of Spain himself—soon to be the great enemy—supported her claim: the alternative to Protestant Elizabeth was Catholic Mary, Queen of the Scots, and Mary was married to the Dauphin of France. The rivalry between the two great Catholic powers, France and Spain, kept Protestant England afloat until the death of the Dauphin. When Spain was thus free to subdue England, in the name of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, England was too strong to be subdued, but the struggle to prove this was stiff and lengthy.

The England of the young Elizabeth was poor in money, in ships, and in armed men. It was too poor to defend itself from enemies without, and the enemies within—chiefly those who thought her Protestantism had gone too far, and those who thought it had not gone far enough—were not easily kept under: the apparatus of true despotism, with a large bureaucracy and a secret police, was too costly for a whole revenue of only half a million pounds. If Elizabeth was to prevail—to keep peace within and keep invaders out—it could only be by the exercise of such personal endowments

as cunning, charm, apparent pliability, real strength. She had the mind of a man and the arts of a woman.

She was an intellectual, a linguist, theologian, musician, poet, a great lover of plays, pageants, hunting and dancing. She was too clever to marry: she used her spinsterhood (termed virginity) as a bait and as a weapon. She had inherited her father's stubbornness and patriotism but not his capacity for blind and tyrannous rages. She had inherited her mother's allure and coquetry but not her foolishness and indiscretion. She kept her head and she would keep her head. This applied also to her heart. The Queen of Scots would lose one and then the other. Elizabeth died in her bed—almost forty-five years after her accession. She was lucky in her chief ministers—men like Sir William Cecil and Sir Francis Walsingham, and they were lucky in her.

She liked her own way but she had no love of the techniques of despotism. "I thank God," she told her Parliament, "I am endued with such qualities that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat, I were able to live in any place in Christendom." Prizing her own individuality, she prized individualism in others—so long as it could be turned to promoting the welfare of the state. In her reign, England became a great maritime power. This was because there were men whose skill at sea was sharpened by personal acquisitiveness. There was untold wealth waiting for the brave and curious in the new worlds that were opening up. Fire such acquisitiveness with patriotism and a liking for the Cranmer prayer book, and you could get a naval force that would mop up any number of invincible armadas.

England had once been on the very edge of the world. Now, with America discovered and even colonized, England was in the middle of it. The islanders' sense of their new importance, as well as the discovery of their new strength, promoted a zest and an energy and a love of life that had hardly been known before. There was even a pride in their

language, that remote and once disregarded dialect, and an urge to make a literature that would match modern Italy's or even approach that of ancient Rome. The language itself was in the melting pot—not fixed and elegant and controlled by academics, but coarsely rich and ready for any adventures that would make it richer. English was a sort of Golden Hind.

The times were propitious for the birth of a great English poet.

1

Home

THE PLAYS OF Shakespeare have much to say against the evils of social ambition, but they are merely plays, entertainments for a couple of idle hours; they are not considered and sober testimonies of their author's convictions. For one of the few things we certainly know about the character of this glover, playwright, poet, actor, gentleman, is that he was socially ambitious. We may take that as an inherited quality, for his father was socially ambitious too. John Shakespeare was the son of Richard Shakespeare, a yeoman farmer of Snitterfield, which is a village a few miles to the northeast of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. John was not content to plow the land for small profit, nor to live out his days among horny yokels. He turned himself into a tradesman and rose to the dignity of alderman of a fair borough.

Stratford, even in the middle of the sixteenth century, was all of that. A town of about fifteen hundred inhabitants, it sat in a fine wooded valley and was surrounded by crops and cattle. *Emporium non inelegans* was the summing-up of a contemporary gazetteer—a market town not lacking in grace, charm, and beauty. It was no backwater; it lay no more than a hundred miles from London and it had good communications with the historic towns of the Midlands—Worcester, Warwick, Banbury, Oxford. Its architecture was distinguished. Holy Trinity Church and the chapel of the

Guild of the Holy Cross dated from the thirteenth century. The Avon was spanned by a not inelegant bridge, built in 1490 by Sir Hugh Clopton. Sir Hugh Clopton was a perpetual reminder that there were greater ambitions than those that a John Shakespeare might fulfill, for that pontifex had left Stratford to become lord mayor of London. Not even William Shakespeare became that, but his ambitions were not civic. It was enough for him to be able to buy Sir Hugh's house in Stratford and act his last part there—that of a retired private gentleman.

John Shakespeare's ambitions were decent enough in the field of what a yeoman's son might reasonably attain—prosperous small-town tradesman, respected small-town burgess; but he had an ambition in a different sphere, and this was mystical and concerned with blood. He wanted the Shakespeare name to carry an aura not only of present achievement but of past glory. The name was, and is, a very satisfactory one: it connotes aggression, libido, and no fantastication of the spelling—Shogspar, Choxper, or whatever else the scrivener's ingenuity could contrive—can totally mask the image of some remote warlike progenitor. But John knew that the name was not an aristocratic one. When, in the 1570s, he first made application for a coat of arms, which meant confirmation in the rank of Gentleman, he conjured some vague great ancestor honored by Henry VII. The conjuration did not achieve any sharpness of definition, for the application was, for reasons we can deal with later, speedily withdrawn. But when, in 1596, a new application was made, its confidence owing much to William's achievement (in money more than in art), the main claim of blood was a vicarious one. It was hoped that Garter King-of-Arms would be moved by John's having married "the daughter and heir of Arden, a gentleman of worship." As we know, the arms were granted, and we may assume that the grounds were Shakespeare achievement more than Arden blood. Still, when the grant was confirmed

in 1599, there was an official addition: “We have lykewise uppon an other escutcheone impaled the same with the Auncyent Arms of the said Arden of Wellingcote.”

Wellingcote was really Wilmcote, three miles northwest of Stratford. The locals, including William Shakespeare himself, called it Wincot, and as Wincot it appears in the introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew*. The daughter and heir of Arden was Mary, and the Shakespeares had, up to the time of John’s striking out, been tenants of the Ardens. There is something satisfyingly romantic about a yeoman’s son wooing and winning the daughter of the aristocratic landlord. But the Ardens were, in their circumstances if not in their blood, not all that aristocratic. Robert Arden, farmer of Wilmcote and owner of the Snitterfield farm where Richard Shakespeare was tenant, was comfortable, but he had to work for his comfort. He was in the position of the runt of the litter, what the French call the *cadet*. The real glories and wealth of the Ardens lay elsewhere—in, for instance, the mansion called Park Hall near Birmingham. Still, a younger son could take pride in belonging to a family that had been vigorous before the Conquest and had lost few of its possessions to the Conqueror. The Ardens had been called Turchill in the days when England was an Anglo-Saxon kingdom; when an Anglo-Saxon name became a badge of the conquered, they took the name of the great Midland forest. It is not this forest that appears in *As You Like It;* the Forest of Arden there is Shakespeare’s own exotic invention, but it is a creation to which he gives—with pride, one presumes—his mother’s family name. And in this forest which is also a dukedom he carefully plants a William.

Mary was the eighth daughter of Robert Arden. When he died in 1556, her portion was surprisingly large—six pounds odd and a sixty-acre farm called Asbies. This, to the man she married, must have seemed a useful piece of potential collateral, its cash value more important than its cultivability. He was glad, when hard times came in 1578, to

mortgage it for forty pounds. But in 1557, the probable year of their marriage, there was only the exhilaration of a new life. The yeoman's son was an independent tradesman, the aristocrat's daughter a tradesman's wife, and they had their own house and shop in a bustling, not inelegant, country town. In a sense, they were very Elizabethan in their willingness to break away from the old inherited agrarian pattern, but Mary was probably the more conservative of the two. The family house and estate were only a few miles away, there were undoubted contacts with the greater Ardens, who might even call at the shop-house in Henley Street to break a journey from Park Hall to London via Oxford. In religion, the Ardens tended to the ancient Catholic loyalty, while John Shakespeare, as a tradesman, probably favored the strict Brownist or Puritan faith that was eventually to flourish in the Midlands and turn England into a holy republic. We have no evidence of strong piety on either John's or Mary's side, and this lukewarmness, along with social ambition and fiery (or ardent) family pride, seems to have been passed on to the eldest son.

John Shakespeare's trade was that of glover. There must also have been a penumbra of cognate trades around this central one: he was surely interested, commercially, in other products of the calf than its skin. He may have bought calves on the hoof and sold the flesh before cutting the tranks. There is certainly a tradition that turns him into a butcher and has young William recapitulating the evolution of drama from bloody sacrifice by making him kill the calves to the accompaniment of highflown speeches, as though he were Brutus and the little brutes all Caesars. Remember *Hamlet*:

POLONIUS: I did enact Julius Caesar; I was kill'd i' the Capital;
Brutus kill'd me.

HAMLET: It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.

This is all fancy, and we believe what we wish, so long as we do not assume the Shakespeare house to be sweetly lavender-smelling. It may not have been a shambles, but William must have been born into certain characteristic stinks. As for the trade of glover, we must not imagine John Shakespeare's entering on it with amateur's lightness, like a man of today opening a tobacconist's shop. He had to be a member of the Craft of Glovers, Whitetawers (dressers of white leather) and Collar-makers, and this entailed the prior serving of a seven-year apprenticeship. Stratford records show that he was already selling gloves in Henley Street in 1552, so that his marriage to Mary Arden comes presumably in a period of certainty, people buying Shakespeare gloves and the future bright. John was good at clothing five fingers, as his son was to be good at clothing five feet.

In the civic sphere, John Shakespeare began to do well as soon as he achieved the settled gravity of marriage. A bachelor father of the community is an uncleanly idea: a borough councilor needs a wife to take to mayoral banquets and to serve wine and kickshawses when brother dignitaries call at the house to play politics ("If we can get enough votes together we can have *him* thrown out as well as his proposal"). In 1557 John was elected to the Common Council and made borough ale-taster—a job for a sober man. He was constable in 1558, affeeror in 1559 (an affeeror assessed amercements; amercements were mulcts or penalties imposed by a local court; these were of a discretionary kind, unfixed by statute). Then 1562 saw him appointed chamberlain and—this was quite without precedent—he held the office for four years. The chamberlain's duties were highly responsible ones: they entailed keeping the borough accounts, paying relief money when catastrophes like plague hit the town (this happened

in 1564, the year of William's birth), doling out the meager fees of visiting troupes of actors. Thus it was John who gave nine shillings to the Queen's Players and twelve pence (it sounds more put like that) to the Earl of Worcester's Men when they came to entertain Stratford. I need not stress the relevance of this aspect of the office to our main subject. The young William knew about players—how they were organized and what they did. In 1568 John was made bailiff, and it was by virtue of this appointment that he might justly claim to be a gentleman and seek his coat of arms.

The claim, as we know, was made, but it was withdrawn. In 1577, after twenty years of service and high office, John ceased to attend the meetings of the Council. Something had gone wrong. In 1578 he was one of six aldermen who failed to contribute to the cost of a constabulary—four men with bills, three men with pikes, and one man with a bow and arrow. He stopped paying the statutory aldermanic subscription of four-pence a week for poor relief. He was in debt. In 1579 his wife's estate Asbies had to be mortgaged. It is conceivable that John Shakespeare had been neglecting his shop for the sake of his civic duty, which was also his civic glory. In 1586, reasonably enough, he was stripped of the one because he had not fulfilled the other: "Mr. Shaxpere dothe not come to the Halles when they be warned nor hathe not done of longe tyme." Farewell the aldermanic fur.

There was other trouble. In 1580 he was summoned before the Queen's Bench in Westminster, along with 140 other men of the region, to provide sureties that he would maintain the Queen's peace. He did not go, and he was fined twenty pounds. He was at the same time fined another twenty pounds in respect of a man in the same position for whom he had stood surety. John Shakespeare had not been breaking the peace in any spectacular way. He had probably been acting sullen and had been keeping away from church as well as from "the Halles." And it was breaking the law, or

the peace, not to go to the services of the Church of England. We must not think of him, much as we would like to, as talking loudly in his cups of the superiority of the Puritan God over the Angelic one; recusancy could be a negative thing. Three years later, recusancy of a more positive kind flashed out from the family of Mary Shakespeare. An Arden had his head cut off for being involved in a Catholic conspiracy, and the head was stuck for men to see and kites to eat on London Bridge. There was, well known to the Shakespeares, a man very ready to harry both the flanks of heresy—Catholic and Puritan indifferently. This was Archbishop Whitgift of Canterbury, elevated from the diocese of Worcester to be the official scourge for England's God and a great bore. John Shakespeare failed in his modest ambitions and knew penal fear. Things only came right again in the final years of the century, when William had made money and restored the family honor.

William was the Shakespeares' third child, but the first to live beyond infancy. Joan was born in 1558. There is no record of her death, but we must assume she was already dead in 1569, when another Joan was born. This new Joan was to demonstrate that there was nothing essentially feeble about the name. She lived to the age of seventy-seven and, through her marriage to William Hart the hatter, became the sole instrument of transmitting the Shakespeare genes to far posterity. The Harts beat on today with Shakespeare blood in them. John and Mary's second child, Margaret, was born in November 1562 and died the following April. April has always been a cruel month in England, and not just in the ironical sense of *The Waste Land*. The daffodils are there but the winds are bitter and the body weak after the long English winter. Another daughter, Anne, died in her eighth year in April 1579. William himself was to die in April. He also dared the fates by being born in April. That was 1564, in a bad season of

plague. Undoubtedly his mother, determined that this third child and first son should survive, bundled him away to Wilmcote and the clean secluded air.

We do not know the exact date of William's birth, but the parish register records that Gulielmus, son of Johannes, was christened on April 26, 1564. The old Catholic custom of christening children as soon as possible after birth had not yet gone: wash original sin off the child's soul and, if he died immediately after, it was some comfort to know he was not languishing in Limbo. As William died on April 23, 1616, it has been found convenient to make that also his birthday. It is St. George's Day and helps to reinforce Shakespeare's function as one of England's chauvinistic glories. The neat symmetry is a kind of harmless magic. As we shall see, it fits in with the forty-sixth Psalm's eternization of the great name Shake-spear by including it, piecemeal, among its other resplendent words. Shakespeare was also once thought to have produced a genetic miracle. His first child was born six months after his marriage and lived and flourished. No delinquent imputation dare be attached to him, the Bard. Ergo, God had speeded up the process of gestation as a mark of special favor.

Because we love the man, or rather his works, this side idolatry, we are all prone to attach magic to the very name. We like to feel, for instance, that the only English pope, Nicholas Breakspear, was drawn by the gods into the right onomastic area for international greatness, but that for him to be called Shakespeare would have been going too far. Adrian IV, with his bull *Laudabiliter*, broke the spears of the Irish. His rimesake is caught in a pose of entirely benevolent aggression. The gods knew what they were doing. As for the baptismal name, we like to think of it as wholly appropriate in its familiar form Will. We would not want to call Milton Jack, but Shakespeare seems to ask for an intimacy of address. This has something to do with a great creative

libido, a love of bawdry, and the compound invitation we find in the following sonnet:

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will,
And Will to boot, and Will in overplus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious,
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will
One will of mine, to make thy large Will more.
Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one Will.

There the connotations of the name Will are exploited to the limit—lust, phallus, vagina. The sonnet is wittily lecherous and must have begged to be copied out, learnt by heart, grinned over in taverns and the Inns of Court. And there, walking the London streets, is Will with the large will. Will Shakespeare—the name is a small hymn to male thrust, Him that shaketh his spear and breaketh hymens. From now on we shall say Will, and not William.

With the birth and survival of Will, the male Shakespeare element became assertive. Another son, Gilbert, was born in 1566, and yet another, Richard, in 1574. The last child was Edmund, born in 1580, the child of a year of ill fortune. The total record of longevity, if we leave the second Joan out of the tally, is not impressive. Will was to die at fifty-two, Gilbert at forty-five, and Richard at thirty-eight. Edmund, who became an actor like Will, was to die at twenty-seven. None of these sons left any issue except Will, and Will’s own son was to die at eleven. Mary Shakespeare, then, bore a

total of eight children, three of whom were lost very early and only one of whom was to reach old age.

We wonder what Will's brothers and sisters were like. We know nothing at all about them: there is not even any record of Edmund's acting career. There is an eighteenth-century tradition that Gilbert went once to London and saw his brother Will act the part of a decrepit old man with a long beard, who had to be carried to a table to eat and, while he ate, somebody sang a song. This is evidently Will as Adam in *As You Like It.* As for Richard, Richard is a mere name.

There is no harm in imposing appearance and character on the brothers and sisters, so long as we regard this as a mere device for solidifying Will's physical background. We are entitled to visualize him as a boy eating, singing, and sleeping in the house on Henley Street, and it is convenient to have him surrounded by something thicker than swatches of ectoplasm with name tags. For my part, I seize on the song in *Loves Labor's Lost* to visualize the sister Joan as a greasy girl who spends much of her time washing pots and pans in cold water. Gilbert I see as dully pious and possibly epileptic, the source of the falling sickness that comes in both *Julius Caesar* and *Othello.* I think of him as a stolid carver of tranks and snipper of gussets, a natural successor to his father in the glover's trade. Of Richard, Stephen Dedalus in the Scylla and Charybdis chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* has taught us to think in more sinister terms. Will's wife was Anne. In *Richard III* the villainous eponym seduces an Anne. He is hunchbacked and he limps. In *Hamlet* another brother seduces the widow of a man whose son's name is close enough to the name of Will's own son—Hamnet. Will is believed to have played the father's ghost when the play was performed at the Globe Theatre. The brother's name is Claudius, which means a limper. Richard III and Claudius conjoin in the real brother Richard. He may have been sly and lecherous and, in Will's absence

in London, ready to post to incestuous sheets. He may have limped. On the other hand, he may have been an upright well-made young man who loved his eldest brother and respected his sister-in-law. I cannot push Edmund beyond the image of a baby crawling and dribbling among the rushes of the living-room floor. I see nothing of him in the Edmund of *King Lear*.

The parents John and Mary seem, without benefit of novelist's fancy, already solid enough for all practical purposes. Mary talks of her great connections but, when her husband has sunk low, is perhaps too much of a lady to make many wounding comparisons between the respective achievements of the Ardens and the Shakespeares. She has borne many children and seen too many of them die. She has learnt to be a philosophical and prudent housewife, quiet in sorrow, patient under affliction; but she has not learnt to subdue the family pride. John is ebullient but capable of depression and of sullenness. He is a voluble talker and perhaps something of a blusterer and bluffer. From such a combination, with the addition of literary talent, an actor-dramatist might well emerge. It is doubtful if the elder Shakespeares had much time for literature, but we need not assume that either was illiterate. John Shakespeare was known to make his mark with a cross, but that is no proof of illiteracy: many literate Elizabethans seem to have wearied occasionally of signing their names (or perhaps wearied of trying to establish a consistent spelling) and scratched a cross instead. Even today businessmen, to show how busy they are, sign letters with an indecipherable ideogram. Mary might well have gone to school, as many Elizabethan girls did. There may even have been a few books in the house on Henley Street—the Geneva Bible, a prayer book, a manual like Andrew Boorde's *A Breviarie of Health* (useless at best, at worst lethal). But it was Will who was to import the real literature.

That the Shakespeare parents were kind to their children we have no reason to doubt. Samuel Butler, author of the classic study of father-son enmity, *The Way of All Flesh*, points out that in Shakespeare's plays the father and son are always friends. The notion of the rude son striking the father dead is one of the most terrible symptoms of the breakdown of social order that Ulysses, in *Troilus and Cressida,* can conceive. If this seems to imply that the status of the Elizabethan father was godlike, we can take it that this was an easy convention, healthy like all conventions, for conventions do not have to be taken seriously. The loving paterfamilias of Victorian England was the true, terrible, unpredictable, vindictive Jehovah, weaving numinous clouds under his smoking-cap. One cannot think that there were frightful Freudian repressions bubbling away in the young Shakespeare. Whatever troubles he knew in his father's house were imposed, not immanent. His love of his parents seems proved by certain gifts of his maturity—the pastoral kingdom of *As You Like It* for his mother, and for his father the coat of arms of a gentleman. The two men could toast that in a pot of ale, smiling at each other, brothers in achieved ambition.

2

School

SHAKESPEARE BIOGRAPHERS OF the romantic school have always been ready to give us full-blown portraits of the artist as a young dog. F. J. Furnivall, for instance:

> So our chestnut-haired, fair, brown-eyed, rosy-cheekt boy went to school. . . . Taking the boy to be the father of the man, I see a square-built yet lithe and active fellow, with ruddy cheeks, hazel eyes, a high forehead, and auburn hair, as full of life as an egg is full of meat, impulsive, inquiring, sympathetic; up to any fun and daring; into scrapes, and out of them with a laugh . . .

One reads this uneasily and then wonders what, apart from the *Boy's Own Paper* tone, is really wrong with it. We possess a couple of mature portraits of Shakespeare; we know his coloring and the shape of his face. The high forehead probably came with baldness, and we can see the boy with chestnut locks tumbling over his eyes if we wish. Dr. Caroline Spurgeon, in her *Shakespeare's Imagery,* invites us, on the strength of certain descriptive preoccupations in the plays and poems, to believe that he flushed and whitened easily, and that he was strongly aware of the mechanism of the face's responses to emotional stimuli. He could probably hide little and was bad at the dissimulation needed to escape lawful punishment. We can assume that he was healthy. He had survived the normal hazards of an April birth as well as the free gift of the plague. We cannot doubt the intelligence and quickness and the emotional

lability. Being myopic myself, I suspect that Shakespeare was myopic. He sees the minutiae of the natural world, as well as the writing on the human face, with the excessive clarity of one who peers. He was undoubtedly a reader. He probably read while other boys got into scrapes.

Not that, by our standards, there was much to read. Nor was the public education of the times likely to encourage, save in the exceptional, a love of books. Will possibly started his public education early, entering a petty school at the age of seven. He would already know how to read and write English, having worked through the alphabet with a hornbook—"A per se A, B per se B," and so on to "& per se &," which gives us *ampersand.* If you knew the alphabet, you could put English words together: no learning of phonic groups, "i before e except after c," *symmetry* and *cemetery, harass* and *embarrass*. The spelling of English then was gloriously impressionistic. It awaited the rough-and-ready rationalization of Civil War journalism, when editors were too rushed to bother with anything except the most economical spellings and ignored the old need to fill out or to "justify" a line of type with supernumerary letters (turning, for instance, *then* to *thenne* or *wit* to *witte* or even *only* to *ondelyche* at the end of a line, so as to secure a uniform right-hand margin). More than that, it awaited the systematization of Dr. Johnson's great Dictionary of 1755. To learne to wrytte doune Ingglisshe wourdes in Chaxper's daie was notte dificulte. Nobody rapped you for orthographical solecisms, for there were none. Anything went, from Queen Elizabeth downwards.

The purpose of the petty school, whose qualification for entry was minimal literacy in English, was to prepare scholars for the hard grind of the grammar school. A grammar school had one purpose only and that was proclaimed in its name—to teach grammar, Latin grammar. No history, geography, music, handicrafts, physical training, biology, chemistry, physics; only Latin grammar. William

Lily, first high master of St. Paul's School, dead in 1522, lived on in a *Grammaticis Rudimenta* which was the secular bible of Stratford Grammar School as much as Eton or Westminster. It was to the grind of Lily's Grammar that the young Shakespeare was committed, a dull pedantic gateway to the glories of Rome.

Latin is disappearing from our modern curricula. There are even self-proclaimed students of Roman literature who have never read Ovid or Virgil in the original. But Elizabethan England looked to the Roman Empire as a model of the civic virtues; the heroes of the English were Roman heroes. A Brutus had once been believed to be the founder of Britain, and a textbook of English history could be called, as Layamon's chronicle had been called, simply a Brut. The Romans, though dead, inhabited a higher plane of reality than the English, dead or living. The English language, being alive, moving and untidy, lacked the calm and finished patterns that Lily laid out on his anatomist's slab. Admittedly there had been Geoffrey Chaucer, but his language was quaint and his verses did not seem to scan. To find culture a man had to go to the ancient world. The greatness of the Greeks was acknowledged, but there were not many Greek scholars around, especially in small towns like Stratford. The universities were your proper Greekmongers. Roman culture had absorbed Greek, and you could learn all about Troy and the wanderings of Ulysses from Latin authors. Latin had everything. The learning of Latin did not, as today, require any justification. "Today, boys, we start Latin, and perhaps you'll wonder why we bother, in this day and age, with the tongue of a long-dead nation. Don't yawn, Wetherby." None of that. The Elizabethan Latinists wielded rods of authority. Sometimes, alas, all too literally.

It was generally acknowledged among Elizabethan educationists that children had to have knowledge crammed, and sometimes beaten, into them. There were