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## SHAKESPEARE'S FAME

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He made his name with a highly accomplished erotic narrative poem, freely adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which convention is flouted and gender is bent, as a female woos a male. Among his friends and drinking companions were poets and playwrights, such as Ben Jonson and the Warwickshire man, Michael Drayton. Some of his early theatrical works had mixed success; one of them was a parody of the older conventions of drama so clever that many of the original audience members failed to see the joke. Another was a forceful study of misogyny set in Italy. His later plays pioneered a new genre of tragi-comic romance, full of sea voyages, families lost and found, mistaken identities and pastoral interludes. They worked particularly well in his acting company's intimate new indoor theatre at Blackfriars, targeted at a sophisticated and well-to-do audience of lawyers and citizens. At the end of his career, he worked closely with the prolific dramatist John Fletcher. Who knows where he would have taken the drama had he lived. But from 1613 onwards he wrote no more plays. Ill health may be presumed. He died in the spring of 1616 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, beside Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser, the greatest writers in the language. Elegies of praise and mourning poured from the pens of the leading poets of the day, many of whom knew him intimately from their collaborations in the theatre. His immortality seemed to be assured when, after his death, his plays were gathered in a Folio volume.

I am of course talking about the life, work and death of Francis Beaumont, author of the Ovidian poem *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, the parodic *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and, with Fletcher, the comedy of *The Woman Hater* and the tragi-comic romance of *Philaster; or, Love Lies a-Bleeding*. During the Restoration era of the late seventeenth century, the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher were performed twice as often as those of Shakespeare. But fashion changed in the eighteenth century. Beaumont has been eclipsed, his place in the House of Fame taken by the man from Stratford who died and was buried in his home time seven weeks later.

The monument erected in Shakespeare's memory in the parish church where he is buried in his own town says that he has the genius of Socrates, the judgment of Nestor and the poetic art of Virgil. Before long, a writer called John Weever visited the church and transcribed into his notebook the words on the monument and the epitaph on Shakespeare's tomb. In the margin opposite the heading "Stratford upon Avon", he wrote "Willm Shakespeare the famous poet".

Then in 1619, a minor poet named William Basse admired both the monument and the man in the grave below it: "Under this carved marble of thine owne / Sleep rare Tragedian Shakespeare, sleep alone". Local poet Leonard Digges soon chipped in, suggesting that Shakespeare's real immortality would come through "thy works, by which, outlive / Thy tomb, thy name must: when that stone is rent, / And time dissolves thy *Stratford* Monument". In the late 1620s, a book collector transcribed into the margin of his copy of the First Folio his own transcription of the poem on the monument, together with the epitaph on the grave and a somewhat clunky poem of his own: "Here Shakespeare lies whom none but death could Shake / And here shall lie till judgment all awake; / When the last trumpet doth unclothe his eyes / The wittiest poet in the world shall rise." In 1630, the author of an anonymous pamphlet recorded "travelling through Stratford upon Avon, a town most remarkable for the birth of famous William Shakespeare". Four years later, a Lieutenant Hammond wrote in his diary: "we came by Stratford upon Avon ... in the church there are some monuments ... those worth observing ... a neat Monument of that famous English Poet, Mr William Shakespeare, who was born here."

These half dozen early references to the monument show that Shakespeare had quickly become Stratford-upon-Avon's favourite son, but his national and international posthumous fame was only established when his fellow-



actors gathered thirty-six plays in the Folio-sized volume called *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, published in 1623. The arrangement by genre was a self-conscious attempt to turn Shakespeare into a classic, the author of tragedies to match those of Seneca, histories that offered a dramatic equivalent to Livy and Plutarch, comedies worthy of Plautus and Terence.

For all sorts of reasons, the immortality of writers is not assured. There were many successful and admired dramatists in ancient Athens, but the only survivals in the corpus of Greek tragedy, other than fragments, are 33 plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. According to Ben Jonson, in a poem we will come to, Shakespeare was a worthy successor to the Roman tragedians “Pacuvius, Accius, [and] him of Cordova dead” – but the only one of these whose plays survive is the unnamed third, Seneca of Cordova. Marcus Pacuvius was only known to Jonson by way of some admiring quotations in Horace and Cicero. The latter, in his *De Optimo Genere Oratorum* (“On the best kind of orators”), ranked Pacuvius first among Roman tragic poets. But all his tragedies are lost, as are the fifty or so plays of Lucius Accius. As, too, are the vast majority of the plays staged by producer Philip Henslowe in the Rose Theatre, the home of the leading rival companies to Shakespeare’s. As, for that matter, are many of the plays of the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men, including, it would seem, Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Won* and Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Cardenio*.

Even when a playwright’s body of work is gathered and preserved for posterity, there is no guarantee of the continuation of their fame. The Puritans closed the London theatre in 1642. Had history gone differently, they might not have been reopened, as they were with the return of the monarchy in 1660. As it happens, when the theatrical profession came back to life in the Restoration era, the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, which had been collected in Folio in 1647, were staged twice as often as those of Shakespeare. Their romantic style and monarchical sympathies were more in keeping with the sensibility of the new age. In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the taste for Beaumont and Fletcher declined precipitously as that for Shakespeare rose exponentially. The one non-Shakespeare play of the Elizabethan and Jacobean era that remained a theatrical hit throughout the eighteenth century was Philip Massinger’s *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, featuring the monstrous anti-hero Sir Giles Overreach, a must-play part for every leading actor. This is a nice irony, since many of the plays in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon were part-written by Massinger, but with no credit to his name.

Such are the vicissitudes of literary fame. In this, the last of my lectures on Shakespeare and the classical tradition, I want to ask three questions: where did Shakespeare’s idea of fame come from? Did he want to achieve posthumous fame for himself? And when, and by what means, did he become famous? The last of these questions is a very large one, which I have written about at length elsewhere, so I shall offer only the briefest of sketches, leading up to a moment of particular significance, with which I will end.

Where does the idea of fame come from? For Shakespeare’s generation, the answer was, as I have sought to show it was for so many aspects of their culture, from classical antiquity. This is one of the pressure points in their dual inheritance of pagan values and the Holy Bible. In Christian terms, the only afterlife that matters is that of the soul in Heaven (or Hell – or, in the Catholic tradition, of Purgatory). Worldly fame is evanescent, posthumous reputation immaterial. This could hardly be a more different attitude from that of ancient Greek and Roman literature, all the way back to Homeric epic, the primary purpose of which was to immortalise the heroic deeds of gods, demi-gods and heroes: in Homer the key word *kleos* denotes the idea of transcending mortality through fame. But the history of the idea is complicated. After Homer came Hesiod, who in his *Works and Days* contrasted the positive, immortalising sense of *kleos* (for which another word might be “glory” or “renown”) with a negative term, *phēmē*, suggestive of rumour or gossip. Fame is always accompanied by her dark shadow, ill repute, the blackening as opposed to burnishing of a name. Public figures, especially military heroes, are acutely conscious of this: Othello cares so deeply about his reputation, which Iago systematically destroys through malicious gossip, because his fame has been hard won, against the odds, in voyage and battle.

In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Greek *phēmē* becomes Latin *fama* and the word carries the double sense of fame and rumour. In the first book, Aeneas announces himself as “pius Aeneas” (pious or dutiful Aeneas), whose fame or glory is noted in the heavens above: “fama super aethera notus”. But in the second book, during his narration to Dido of the fall of Troy, which so influenced Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, “fama” is among the watchwords of deceitful



Sinon, the feigned deserter from the Greeks who insinuates himself into Troy, opens up the wooden horse and thus brings the destruction of the city. Sinon's lies are paradigmatic of "fama" as false rumour: some of the other terms associated with him are "falsa", "mendacemque improba", "ficto pectore" and "insidiis periurique arte" ("false", "flagrant lies", "feigned feelings", "insidious and skillful rhetorical art"). He is the Iago of the *Aeneid*. For writers such as Virgil and Shakespeare, addicted to ambivalence and complexity, the double sense of *fama* holds a peculiar attraction: they give full rein to their muse of fire when glorying the fame of such heroic warriors as Aeneas, Othello and Coriolanus, but they also recognize that their own fictions, their art of spinning tales, is a form of rumour that puts them in the same camp as Sinon and Iago.

In his fourth book, Virgil cuts away from Dido and Aeneas as they are making love in a cave during a storm. To what does he cut? A personification of *Fama* in her malicious guise: "Fama, malum qua non alius velocius ullum", Rumour, the evil of the highest velocity. Word spreads through all the cities of Libya that Queen Dido is having a clandestine affair. It reaches Iarbas, son of Jupiter, who was once rejected by Dido; he tells Jupiter; Jupiter tells Mercury; Mercury reminds Aeneas that his destiny is to found a city in Italy, not waste his time with a love affair in Carthage. Rumour has ignited the chain reaction that will end with Dido on a pyre, stabbing herself with Aeneas' sword, at which point the language comes full circle and *Fama* is invoked again: "it clamor ad alta / atria; concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem", a scream rises to the lofty roof; Rumour riots like a bacchant through the stunned city. What does Rumour look like? She is, in the words of Thomas Phaer's Elizabethan translation, a

Horrible monster, immense, and beneath each plume of her body  
Lurk just so many vigilant eyes – astounding to utter!  
Tattle just so many tongues, and mouths, and so many ears hear.

This personification became a familiar figure in Renaissance iconography. The top half of the title page of Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, published in 1614, shows *Fama bona* and *Fama mala*, fame with tongues on her wings, infamy spotted with them all over. The latter gives us a clear idea of the costume of the character who speaks the prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 2*, which begins (in the quarto text) with the stage direction "Enter Rumour painted full of Tongues":

Open your ears; for which of you will stop  
The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?  
I, from the orient to the drooping west,  
Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold  
The acts commenced on this ball of earth.  
Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,  
The which in every language I pronounce,  
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.  
... Rumour is a pipe  
Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,  
And of so easy and so plain a stop  
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,  
The still-discordant wav'ring multitude,  
Can play upon it. But what need I thus  
My well-known body to anatomize  
Among my household?

Rumour anatomizes her own body, her props and her motions – those tongues, her "pipe / Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures", the wind on which she flies with winged speed – even though her characteristics are already "well-known" to Shakespeare's audience. By spreading further rumours about Rumour, Rumour is redoubling the already proved power of Rumour.

Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* gave Virgil's *Fama* a home: in his thirteenth book he describes the House of Fame, suspended between earth and sky, built of brass, the better to defuse, as John Dryden would have it in his



translation, “The spreading sounds, and multiply the news; / Where echoes in repeated echoes play”. This iconography of Fame became widespread in the Renaissance: she flew on wings borrowed from the figures of Victory and Glory, Chaucer rebuilt her House, Petrarch in his *Triumph of Fame* bestowed upon her a trumpet as if she were an angel announcing the last judgment. Ben Jonson, in turn, staged a version of the Ovidian-Chaucerian House in his *The Masque of Queens, Celebrated from the House of Fame by the Queen of Great Britain, with her Ladies, at Whitehall, Feb 2, 1609*, which featured an anti-masque of witches spreading malice and dancing to strange music, until

*In the heat of their Dance, on the sudden, was heard a sound of loud Musick, as if many Instruments had made one blast; with which not only the Haggs themselves, but the Hell, into which they ran, quite vanished, and the whole face of the Scene altered, scarce suffering the memory of such a thing: But in the place of it, appeared a glorious, and magnificent Building, figuring the House of Fame, in the top of which, were discovered the twelve Masquers, sitting upon a Throne triumphal, erected in form of a Pyramid, and circled with all store of light.*

There is a very strong case for the argument that this *coup de théâtre* gave Shakespeare the idea for the vanishing of the masquers in *The Tempest* and Prospero’s speech about the fading of the insubstantial pageant of our little lives.

So let me now turn to some examples of Shakespeare’s treatment of fame in his plays.

The prologue to *Henry IV Part 2* is only the most elaborate of Shakespeare’s references to the corrosive power of Rumour. In *Titus Andronicus* we hear that “The emperor’s court is like the house of Fame, / The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears”, while in *Troilus and Cressida* Ulysses chides Achilles on the grounds that he “Grows dainty of his worth” because he has “his ear full of his airy fame”. The collapse of fame is a key element of Shakespeare’s undoing of the heroic Homeric idiom in this play. Torn between his desire for Patroclus, his obligation to Polyxena and his duty as a soldier, Achilles concludes that whatever he does he will “fail fame”. And in a complex exchange, Ulysses reports to Agamemnon that Aeneas has reported to him that the Trojans call Troilus the “second hope” among their warriors – that is to say, the prospective successor to Hector. ‘Tis report upon report is itself an example of Rumour. It is also a knowing literary allusion. According to Ulysses, Aeneas did “thus translate him [Troilus] to me”. Here we need to remember the theory of *translatio imperii*: as part of the project to represent Rome as a second Troy, the *Aeneid* was shaped as a *translatio* of both the *Iliad* (in its martial aspect) and the *Odyssey* (in its voyaging aspect). When Shakespeare’s Aeneas speaks to his Ulysses (Odysseus) of a “second hope”, the more educated members of his audience would hear an echo of a famous line in the final book of the *Aeneid* in which the hero’s son Ascanius is described as “Magnaes spes altera Romae”, great Rome’s second hope. But the image of Troilus saving Troy in the wake of Hector’s death is a false hope: shattered by Cressida’s infidelity – which will in turn lead to her historic *fama mala* – Troilus goes willingly to his death. The audience knows that the city will not be saved, because false Sinon will come to do his work. *Troilus and Cressida* ends not with the trumpet of fame, but with Pandarus’ images of prostitution and the spread of sexual disease.

Several early readers of Shakespeare put a more positive spin on Virgil’s phrase *spes altera* by using it as the title to their manuscript copies of his Sonnet 2, “when forty winters shall besiege thy brow”. In the Renaissance, *spes altera vitae*, a second hope of life, became a popular emblem, motto or inscription. One finds it for example, dated 1590, carved above the entrance to Advocate’s Close on Edinburgh’s Royal Mile. Whereas the Christian conscience is focused on the second life of Heaven, the classical inheritance offers other wagers on the future, predicated upon *Fama* as the daughter of Hope: a monument, a child and a work of art are all created in defiance of mortality. Shakespeare’s own monument in Holy Trinity church, Stratford-upon-Avon not only preserves his image in stone, with pen in hand, but also claims him as a second Virgil (and a second Nestor and second Socrates to boot). The frequently copied second sonnet ends with the idea that to beget a child is “to be new made when thou art old / And see thy blood warm when thou feel’st it cold”. Then, as the sonnet sequence unfolds, the poems themselves become the weapon against the ‘bloody tyrant, Time’: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee”; “Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong / My love shall in my verse live ever young”; “And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand, / Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand”; “Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life, / So thou prevent’st his



scythe and crooked knife”.

Shakespeare began working on his sonnets around the time that he wrote *Love's Labour's Lost*. The King of Navarre begins that play with a bid for Fame that shares many of the tropes of the sonnets:

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,  
Live registered upon our brazen tombs  
And then grace us in the disgrace of death;  
When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,  
The endeavor of this present breath may buy  
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge  
And make us heirs of all eternity.

These words proclaim instant allegiance to the classical as opposed to the Christian tradition. In Christianity, you become heir to eternity by way of heavenly salvation, not earthly fame. Fame achieved in life is no guarantee of grace in death. The brazen tomb is but a temporary resting-place, thanks to the empty tomb of the resurrected Jesus. Navarre, who goes on to suggest that his “little academe” will achieve fame through the life of the mind, is signing up himself and his team as Renaissance humanists. We must grant that the play has a lot of fun mocking their aspirations: the life of the mind is rudely interrupted by the arrival of the ladies, and by the end of the play the second life to which the gentlemen aspire is that achieved through making babies (though the ladies deprive them of that pleasure for a year); meanwhile, the famous heroes of both the classical and the Judaeo-Christian traditions are rendered bathetically by means of the farcical pageant of the Nine Worthies.

For all the subsequent deflation, there is no denying the eloquence of the king's opening speech. His language is a tissue of allusion: to the classical idea of *Fama*; to the commonest form of ancient epigraphy (namely an epitaph inscribed upon a tomb); to the Latin tag *Vivit post funera virtus* (virtue outlives death); to the Ovidian image of personified Time as devourer (*Tempus edax rerum*); to the Roman code of “honour”; to the Renaissance elision of *chronos*, the Greek personification of time, and Kronos, Greek equivalent of Saturn, Roman god of harvest, which created the figure of Father Time with his scythe. Above all, to Horace's bold claim at the climax of his third book of *Odes*, “Exegi monumentum aere perennius”: “I have made a monument more enduring than brass”. The essence of Horace's poem is: I will achieve immortality through my literary work. Ovid made the same bold claim at the end of his *Metamorphoses*. Whereas Virgil ended the *Aeneid* promising immortality for the Emperor Augustus, Ovid confers it upon himself. His last word is “vivam”, I shall live, and the last word in the English translation used by Shakespeare is “fame”:

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis  
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas ...  
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,  
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.

Now have I brought a woork to end which neither Joves feerce wrath,  
Nor sword, nor fyre, nor freating age with all the force it hath  
Are able too abolish quyght ...

... And tyme without all end

(If Poets as by prophesie about the truth may ame)  
My lyfe shall everlastingly been lengthened still by fame.

Shakespeare uses very similar language throughout his sonnets, but gives the impression of being more interested in bestowing immortality upon his beloved than himself: “Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn / The living record of your memory.” We may grant that Thomas Thorpe, the man who saw *Shakespeare's Sonnets* into print in 1609, prefaced them with a dedication laid out in the style of a Roman monumental inscription, including the epithet “OVR. EVER. LIVING. POET”, suggesting the idea of immortalization through publication. But there is a fierce debate amongst scholars as to whether or not this publication was authorized by Shakespeare, with the majority view tending to not. This raises a question that the





great Romantic essayist William Hazlitt asked in 1814: “On Posthumous Fame,—whether Shakespeare was influenced by a love of it?”

Hazlitt argued that the love of fame is culturally determined. We only crave fame if we are working in a tradition that values fame:

When those who succeed in distant generations read with wondering rapture the works which the bards and sages of antiquity have bequeathed to them,—when they contemplate the imperishable power of intellect which survives the stroke of death and the revolutions of empire,—it is then that the passion for fame becomes an habitual feeling in the mind, and that men naturally wish to excite the same sentiments of admiration in others which they themselves have felt, and to transmit their names with the same honours to posterity.

Thus, according to Hazlitt, the works of self-conscious admirers of the classics such as Dante, Chaucer, Spenser and Milton are suffused with a desire for posthumous fame. Not so Shakespeare, he argues, on the grounds that the love of fame is a form of egotism, whereas Shakespeare “seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own, but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass successively through ‘every variety of untried being,’—to be now Hamlet, now Othello, now Lear, now Falstaff, now Ariel”. This was Hazlitt’s first articulation of his idea of Shakespeare’s lack of positive identity, his absorption into all his characters, an idea that would eventually shape John Keats’s thinking about the poet as chameleon and the opposition between the Wordsworthian “egotistical sublime” and Shakespeare’s “negative capability”.

Hazlitt is certainly correct in saying that there is no Shakespearean equivalent to Ovid’s *vivam*, “I shall live”. And for a long time there was a commonplace view that Shakespeare could not have been interested in posthumous fame, since he did not bother to publish his works. A contrast is often made with Ben Jonson, who in 1616 carefully oversaw the publication of his plays, poems and court masques in a volume called *The Workes of Beniamin Jonson*, a title deliberately echoing the notion of the collected works, *Opera*, of a classical author. Published in grand Folio format, its title-page was branded with triumphal arch, sculptural figures and Latin inscriptions all designed to suggest a classical work destined for enduring fame.

Shakespeare, the story goes, had no such aspiration. He wrote for the theatre; half the corpus of his plays remained unpublished in his lifetime and of the other half, many were put into print only as a way of displacing poor quality pirated texts. Recent scholarship has challenged this narrative, suggesting that Shakespeare was actually a much more “literary” dramatist than has customarily been supposed and indeed that in the case of his longer tragedies the editions printed in his lifetime were deliberately fashioned as “reading texts” of a length that could not have been performed in full within the time constraints of the public theatre.

As with so many aspects of Shakespeare, we will never be able to recover his overt intentions on this matter. Besides, desire for print does not necessarily mean desire for posthumous fame – proprietorial rights and desire for money could equally well have played a part. What we can say, however, is that some of Shakespeare’s friends began making him resemble a classic. The process started with his schoolfellow Richard Field, who printed *Venus and Adonis* with a title-page ornament (which he used on many of his books) portraying a crowned female figure who resembles a classical goddess (possibly Juno, since she is flanked by peacocks), together with two smaller figures blowing horns suggestive of the trumpet of fame. Field also included his own emblem and its motto *anchora spei*, the anchor of hope. Either he or Shakespeare himself furnished an epigraph in the form of a quotation from Ovid’s *Amores*: “*Vilia miretur vulgus; nibi flavus Apollo / Pocula Castalia plena minister aqua*”, “Let the rabble admire worthless things; / may golden Apollo supply me with cups full of water from the Castalian spring”. Shakespeare is ushered into print not as author writing for the vulgar (the rabble of the public theatre), but as a successor of an admired classical exemplar, paying homage to the god of poetry and seeking inspiration from the Castalian spring on Mount Parnassus that was sacred to the Muses.

The title-page of the first folio of Shakespeare’s plays, the text of which was overseen by his fellow-actors John Hemmings and Henry Condell, does not have the pretensions of Jonson’s (a simple engraving of the author as opposed to an elaborate show of classical architecture), but the prefatory matter, in the creation of which Jonson



himself played a leading part, fully institutes the idea of Shakespeare's posthumous fame. Jonson's dedicatory poem "To the memory of my beloved, the AUTHOR Master William Shakespeare and what he hath left us" returns again and again to the idea of the contemporary dramatist outdoing his antique forebears, joining them on Mount Parnassus or even displacing them from the pantheon:

Leave thee alone for the comparison  
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome  
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come. ...  
The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,  
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please,  
But antiquated and deserted lie  
As they were not of nature's family.

He even goes so far as to compare Shakespeare with the very gods of poetry and communication, Apollo and Mercury. Similarly, in another of the prefatory poems, Leonard Digges, who was brought up in a village neighbouring Stratford-upon-Avon, attaches to Shakespeare the lines that Ovid (Naso) had written about himself at the end of the *Metamorphoses*:

Nor fire, nor cank'ring age, as Naso said  
Of his, thy wit-fraught book shall once invade. ...  
Be sure, our Shakespeare, thou canst never die,  
But crowned with laurel, live eternally.

\* \* \*

Whereas Jonson's works got only a single reprint after his death, Shakespeare's Folio was reprinted three times before the end of the century. And through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a major new edition of his Complete Works once every twenty years or so. That is a mark of the posthumous fame he has achieved.

In his dedicatory poem, Jonson described Shakespeare as a "star" whose "influence" would "chide or cheer" the future course of British drama. Once the Folio was available to, in the words of its editors, "the great Variety of Readers", the plays began to influence not just the theatre, but poetry more generally. The works of John Milton, notably his masque *Comus*, were steeped in Shakespearean language. The young Milton's first published poem was a sonnet prefixed to the second edition of the Folio, in which Shakespeare was said to have built himself "a live-long Monument" in the form of his plays. Shakespeare was Milton's key precedent for the writing of *Paradise Lost* in blank verse rather than rhyme. Even later seventeenth-century poets who were committed to rhyme, such as John Dryden, acknowledged the power of his dramatic blank verse; as a homage to "the Divine Shakespeare", Dryden abandoned rhyme in *All for Love* (1678), his reworking of the Cleopatra story.

The London theatres were closed during the years of civil war and republican government in the middle of the seventeenth century, and the years after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 were characterized by a conflicting attitude towards Shakespeare. On the positive side, he was invoked for his inspirational native genius, used to support claims for English naturalness as opposed to French artifice and for the moderns against the ancients. In his sweeping *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Dryden described Shakespeare as "the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul". He brushed off charges of Shakespeare's lack of learning with the memorable judgment that "he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature".

The learned Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, praised Shakespeare for his extraordinary ability to enter into his vast array of characters, to "express the divers and different humours, or natures, or several passions in mankind". Yet, at the same time, the courtly elite had spent their years of exile in France and come under the influence of a highly refined neoclassical theory of artistic decorum, according to which tragedy should be kept apart from comedy and high style from low, with dramatic "unity" demanding obedience to



strict laws. For this reason, Dryden and his contemporaries took considerable liberties in polishing and “improving” Shakespeare’s plays for performance. According to the law of poetic justice, wholly innocent characters should not be allowed to die: Nahum Tate therefore rewrote *King Lear* (1681) with a happy ending in which Cordelia marries Edgar. Tate also omitted the character of the Fool, on the grounds that such a figure was beneath the dignity of high tragedy.

The more formal classicism of Jonson and the courtly romances of Beaumont and Fletcher answered more readily to the Frenchified standards of the Restoration theatre. Actors, though, were demonstrating that the most rewarding roles in the repertoire were the Shakespearean ones. Thomas Betterton (1635-1710), the greatest player of the age, had enormous success as Hamlet, Sir Toby Belch, Henry VIII, Macbeth, Timon of Athens, Lear, Falstaff, Othello and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (some of these in versions close to the original texts, others in heavily adapted reworkings). Playhouse scripts of individual plays found their way into print, while the Folio went through its third and fourth printings. By the end of the century, Shakespeare was well entrenched in English cultural life, but he was not yet the unique genius that he would become.

Betterton’s veneration for the memory of Shakespeare was such that late in his life he travelled to Warwickshire in order to find out what he could about the dramatist’s origins. He passed a store of anecdotes to the poet, playwright and eventual poet laureate Nicholas Rowe, who wrote “Some Account of the Life of Mr William Shakespeare”, a biographical sketch published in 1709 in the first of the six volumes of his *Works of Shakespeare*, the collection that is usually regarded as the first modern edition of the plays. Rowe’s biography offered a mixture of truth and myth, calculated to represent Shakespeare as a man of the people. It tells of how young Will was withdrawn from school when his father fell on hard times, how he then got into bad company and stole deer from the park of local grandee Sir Thomas Lucy. The resultant prosecution forced him to leave for London, where he became an actor and then a dramatist. Rowe’s account is a symptom of how every age reinvents Shakespeare in its own image. The road from the provinces to London was a familiar one in the eighteenth century: Samuel Johnson and David Garrick walked it in real life, Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones in fiction. Shakespeare served as exemplar of the writer who achieved success, and an unprecedented degree of financial reward, from his pen alone. The Earl of Southampton may have helped him on his way in his early years, but he was essentially a self-made man rather than a beneficiary of court and aristocratic patronage. For writers such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, struggling in the transition from the age of patronage to that of Grub Street professionalism, Shakespeare offered not only a body of poetic invention and a gallery of living characters, but also an inspirational career trajectory.

If we had to identify a single decade in which the “cult of Shakespeare” took root, in which his celebrity and influence grew to outstrip that of his contemporaries once and for all, it would probably be the 1730s. There was a proliferation of cheap mass-market editions, while in the theatre the plays came to constitute about a quarter of the entire repertoire of the London stage, twice what they had been hitherto. The promotion of Shakespeare was driven by a number of forces, ranging from state censorship of new plays to a taste for the shapely legs of actresses in the cross-dressed “breeches parts” of the comedies. The plays were becoming synonymous with decency and Englishness, even as the institution of the theatre was still poised between respectability and disrepute.

David Garrick (1717-79), the actor who may justly be claimed as the father of what later came to be called “Bardolatry”, arrived in London at a propitious moment. Shakespeare was growing into big business and the time was ripe for a new star to cash in on his name. As in many a good theatre story, Garrick’s first break came when he stepped in as an understudy and outshone the actor who normally took the part. This was followed by a more formal debut, again of a kind that established a pattern for later generations: the revolutionary new reading of a major Shakespearean part. For Garrick, it was Richard III (for Edmund Kean in the next century, it was Shylock). After this, there was no looking back. Garrick did all the things we have come to expect of a major star: he took on the full gamut of Shakespeare, he had an affair with his leading lady (the gorgeous and talented Peg Woffington) and he managed his own acting company, supervising the scripts and directing plays while also starring in them. It was because of Garrick’s extraordinary energy in all these departments that he not only gave unprecedented respectability to the profession of actor, but also effectively invented the modern theatre. The “actor-manager” tradition that he inaugurated stretched down to Laurence Olivier and beyond.





It was in the art of self-promotion that Garrick was unique. His public image was secured by William Hogarth's vibrant painting of him in the role of Richard III, confronted with his nightmares on the eve of the battle of Bosworth Field. The most frequently engraved and widely disseminated theatrical portrait of the eighteenth century, this iconic image simultaneously established Garrick as the quintessential tragedian and inaugurated the whole tradition of large-scale Shakespearean painting. Previously, the elevated genre of "history painting" had concentrated on biblical and classical subjects. With Hogarth's image – created in the studio, though influenced by Garrick's stage performance – Shakespearean drama joined this august company.

The climax of Garrick's career in Bardolatry was the Jubilee that he organised to commemorate the bicentenary of Shakespeare's birth. The event took place in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, on the occasion of the opening of a new Town Hall, a mere five years later than the anniversary it was supposed to mark. It lasted for three days, during which scores of fashionable Londoners descended on the hitherto obscure provincial town where Shakespeare had been born. The literary tourist industry began here: local entrepreneurs did good business in the sale of Shakespearean relics, such as souvenirs supposedly cut from the wood of the great Bard's mulberry tree. Not since the marketing in medieval times of fragments of the True Cross had a single tree yielded so much wood. The Jubilee programme included a grand procession of Shakespearean characters, a masked ball, a horse race and a firework display. In true English fashion, the outdoor events were washed out by torrential rain. At the climax of the festivities, Garrick performed his own poem, "An Ode upon dedicating a building and erecting a statue to Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon", set to music by the leading composer Thomas Arne. In the manner of a staged theatrical "happening", Garrick had arranged for a member of the audience (a fellow actor), dressed as a French fop, to complain – as French connoisseurs of literary taste had complained for generations – that Shakespeare was vulgar, provincial and overrated. This gave Garrick the opportunity to voice his grand defence of Shakespeare. Though the whole business was much mocked in newspaper reports, caricatures and stage farces, it generated enormous publicity for both Garrick and Shakespeare across Britain and the continent of Europe. The Jubilee did more than turn Stratford-upon-Avon into a tourist attraction: it inaugurated the very idea of a summer arts festival.

In an age when orthodox religion was facing severe challenges, the cult of Shakespeare was becoming a secular faith. Thanks to the enthusiasm of poets, critics and translators such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt and John Keats in England, Goethe and the Schlegel brothers in Germany, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas in France, during the 19th-century era of Romanticism, the grammar-school boy from the edge of the forest of Arden became the supreme deity not just of poetry and drama, but of high culture itself. Shakespeare's unique fame was assured.

But perhaps the development that did more than any other to give him high cultural status, to make him *classical* as well as *popular*, was his introduction into the education system. That, after all, was the place where the classics of antiquity survived – Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Cicero, Seneca and the rest. So it is that we are brought full circle to where my series of six lectures on Shakespeare and the classics began.

Those of you who have followed the course over the months will recall that I began by telling the story of the establishment of the Gresham Professorship of Rhetoric, here in the city of London, round the corner from the house in Bishopsgate where Shakespeare was lodging, and how, throughout the series, I have demonstrated that the classical devices of rhetoric and memory, in all their manifold forms, are perhaps the most important key to his art. His works, I have suggested, had their birth in his Latin lessons in that Stratford-upon-Avon schoolroom.

Rhetoric shaped both thinking and compositional art. It was taught as preparation for a life of service to the state. Middle-class boys such as young Will Shakespeare and John Milton were given their training in the arts of language so that they could become lawyers and clerks and Church of England ministers and secretaries to politicians. But the Tudor educational revolution had an unintended consequence. Many of the brightest boys put their talents to very different uses: as poets, actors and playwrights. Their plays and poems assisted in the work of nation-building by bringing alive the history and the myths that shaped the English people's sense of who they were, but by dramatizing the conflicts of both public and private life—tyrannical rulers being



overthrown, arbiters of morality exposed as hypocrites, wives rebelling against their husbands—the poets and playwrights also made a huge contribution to the emergence of modern liberties.

English literature itself did not become the object of formal academic study until the second half of the eighteenth century. When the philosopher Adam Smith was invited to deliver a series of public lectures on ‘rhetoric and belles lettres’ in Edinburgh in the late 1740s, he broke with tradition by speaking in the English language and using vernacular as well as ancient Roman examples of rhetorical technique and fine writing. Hugh Blair followed Smith’s example when in 1760 he was appointed to the position of Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh. Upon his retirement, Blair published his lectures and they went through dozens of editions, remaining the standard academic introduction to the art of literary criticism for more than half a century. They were especially widely studied in the United States.

In England, meanwhile, only men who subscribed to the articles of faith of the Church of England could attend the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where the language of instruction was Latin and the humanities side of the curriculum was confined to the ancients. Religious non-conformists or ‘dissenters’ accordingly set up academies of their own, where ‘polite literature’ (*belles lettres*) was taught in the English language. The teaching of what we now call English Literature was one of John Aikin’s duties when he took up the tutorship in *Belles Lettres* at the Warrington Academy in 1758. His daughter Anna Letitia Aikin (later Barbauld) grew up to become a popular and influential poet and editor, an apologist for the French Revolution, a passionate advocate of the abolition of the slave trade, and an important early analyst of the novel—her fifty-volume anthology *The British Novelists*, published in 1810, did more than any other publication to establish the repertoire of English fiction.

Aikin was succeeded in the literature tutorship at Warrington by the radical theologian and scientist Joseph Priestley, who also welcomed the French Revolution. From its very institutional origin, then, the discipline of English literature was associated with dissent, with the democratization of education, and with resistance to the elitism of the established universities. It was helpful in this regard that the most sublime English poet was considered to be John Milton, author not only of the defining religious epic *Paradise Lost* but also of prose treatises in defence of the freedom of the press (*Areopagitica*, 1644) and the sovereign right of the people to depose their rulers (*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, 1649).

The new discipline also provided educational opportunities for women. When Priestley left Warrington, the tutorship in *Belles Lettres* passed to the Unitarian minister William Enfield, who created an anthology called *The Speaker* (1774), subtitled “miscellaneous pieces, selected from the best English writers, and disposed under proper heads, with a view to facilitate the improvement of youth in reading and speaking”. This became the standard textbook for the teaching of eloquence and elocution in English throughout the land—at girls’ schools as well as boys’. In 1811 Anna Barbauld published *The Female Speaker*, a companion volume specifically aimed at young women.

Enfield’s categories of literature included narrative, didactic pieces (for instance a series of passages from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* in rhyming couplets), orations and harangues (political speeches, some from modern parliament, others from Shakespeare), dialogues (mostly from the drama, especially Shakespeare), descriptions (notably from eighteenth century landscape poetry), and ‘pathetic’ pieces (examples of strong feeling, with a huge majority taken from Shakespeare, though some more modern, such as Yorick’s death in *Tristram Shandy*). The idea was that a thorough grounding in these four hundred pages of extracts would improve the vocabulary and articulacy of pupils, while also cultivating their emotions and their moral sense. And Shakespeare was by far the most extracted author, represented across the full gamut of literary kinds.

Enfield laid the foundations for what Vicesimus Knox, compiler of a similar anthology (*Elegant Extracts*, 1783), called a “liberal education”. Its beneficiaries were not the ruling class, who continued to be schooled in the Greek and Roman classics until well into the twentieth century, but middle-class non-conformists, women, and soon the working classes (through radical Chartist educational projects and more conservative working men’s colleges) and colonial subjects (beginning with the reform of Indian education in the 1830s). Looked at from one point of view, the teaching of elocution and the emergent discipline of English were intended to instil



conformity of linguistic usage and moral values. But for non-conformist pupils in the dissenting academies, for Victorian labouring class autodidacts, for the first women to gain access to universities, for colonial subjects such as Gandhi and Nehru, and for mid-twentieth century northern working-class grammar school boys and girls, the study of English literature was as often a crucible of liberal thought and an engine of social mobility. And, from Enfield's *Speaker* onwards, the author at the heart of that study – the one enduringly canonical writer – has been Shakespeare. It is the ultimate mark of his fame that he is to us what those ancient Roman authors were to him: the basis of a liberal education, the core of the *studia humanitas*. He is *our* singular classic.

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