

In Our Own Image:



**Fictional
Representations
of
William
Shakespeare**

David Livingstone



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Palacký University Olomouc

2019

Reviewers: Filip Krajnık, Brad Vice

First Edition

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Dedication

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A Note On References

I have, for the most, part, kept the original punctuation and formatting used in the primary texts. Unless otherwise indicated, references to Shakespeare's plays are to the one-volume *The Norton Shakespeare* edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine E. Maus and Andrew Gurr. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

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Introduction:

Fictional Biographies and Biographical Fiction

“Shakespeare lives on in each of us and all Shakespearian criticism, either factual or fantastical, is a form of autobiography.”¹

“Every man writes what he is, and I am a player. I see now that not just this Life of Shakespeare but all Lives of Shakespeare will be peculiar autobiographies. The sublimity of the subject ensures empathy and the impersonality of the life-record teases speculation.”²

“A biography of Shakespeare can be a thinly disguised self-portrait of the biographer.”³

I have come across a number of variations on “in his own image” over the course of my research. This is, of course, a reference to God creating humanity at the beginning of the Bible. It reads as follows in the *King James*

1 Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw The Pursuit of Power* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), 271.

2 Robert Nye, *The Late Mr. Shakespeare A Novel* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), 192.

3 Graham Holderness, *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 12.

(perhaps partially edited by Shakespeare himself according to Kipling, Burgess, Nye and Winder): “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Gen 1:27 King James Version) Samuel Schoenbaum in his monumental work *Shakespeare’s Lives*, which I draw on extensively in this book, employs a variation on the phrase when discussing the bad boy of Shakespeare studies Frank Harris and the picture he provides of the Dark Lady: “Here the biographer, the amorist who lusted after dark-haired beauties, fashions his subject in his own image.”⁴ Maurice J. O’Sullivan Jr. also makes use of it in the preface to his inspirational anthology of fictional treatments of Shakespeare: “Long before Samuel Schoenbaum and Gary Taylor traced the ways each generation unconsciously reinvented Shakespeare in his own image, these writers had consciously recreated him.”⁵ Additionally, Sonya Freeman Loftis in an essay discussed in more detail later in the work wittily appropriates this celebrated Bible verse when discussing Shaw’s approach to Shakespeare in his short play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* and Stoppard’s contribution to the screenplay of *Shakespeare in Love*: “In short, both one-act and screenplay present Shakespeare in the author’s own image.”⁶ Fictional biographies of Shakespeare, and undoubtedly many classic biographical treatments, often tell us much more about the author than the actual subject. There is not necessarily anything wrong with this, but it usually helps when there is at least some awareness of the tendency on the author’s part. This is unfortunately not always the case.

This book will examine a wide range of works (novels, short stories, plays, occasional poems, films, television series and several comics) which focus on Shakespeare as a character. A number of the works are lacking in literary quality and have been a chore to slog through. A particularly en-

4 Samuel Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare’s Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 485.

5 Maurice J. O’Sullivan Jr., “Preface,” in *Shakespeare’s Other Lives*, ed. Maurice J. O’Sullivan Jr. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1997), vii.

6 Sonya Freeman Loftis, “A Less Than Original Screenplay: Bernard Shaw’s Influence on *Shakespeare in Love*,” *South Atlantic Review*, Vol 76. No. 3 (summer 2011): 117.

tertaining account, however, consists of a fairly obscure sketch by Mark Twain from 1882 entitled *1601: Conversation, As It Was By the Social Fireside, In the Time of the Tudors*. This short story or sketch consists of a bawdy get-together involving Queen Elizabeth, various ladies of the court, Shakespeare/Shaxpur, Jonson, Raleigh, Bacon and Beaumont. The piece focuses on farting, sexual anecdotes, pissing, etc, written in quasi-Elizabethan language. This meeting of Elizabethan luminaries is rudely interrupted by a thunderous passing of gas by one of the persons present. The Queen, instead of pretending nothing happened, enthusiastically investigates the identity of the perpetrator. After several denials, she turns her attention to Shakespeare. The first-person narrator is a cup-bearer, a venerable old man, forced to observe the goings-on but with unfeigned disapproval:



A fireside conversation with Ye Quene Elizabeth, Shaxpur, Sr. Walter Raleigh, Ben Jonson, Lord Bacon, Francis Beaumont, the Duchess of Bilgewater, Lady Helen, and maides of honor, from the diary of Ye Quene's cup-bearer, the Mask Tosin of that day.

THE QUEEN.—What saith the worshipful Master Shaxpur?

SHAXPUR.—In the great hand of God I stand and so proclaim mine innocence. Though the sinless hosts of Heav'n had foretold the coming of the most desolating breath, proclaiming it a work of uninspired man, its quaking thunders, its firmament-clogging rottenness his own achievement in due course of nature, yet had not I believed it; but had said the pit itself hath furnished forth the stink, and Heaven's artillery hath shook the globe in admiration of it.⁷

The topical reference to the Globe is particularly apt in this context. Sir Walter Raleigh finally admits to having been the author of the fart, but

⁷ Mark Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead and 1601* (Richmond: Alma Classics Ltd., 2013), 110.

apologizes for not being in proper form as it far from equaled his usual volume and rankness. The conversation moves on to more delicate matters:

Then conversed they of religion, and the mighty work the old dead Luther did doe by the grace of God. Then next about poetry, and Master Shaxpur did read a part of his King Henry IV., the which, it seemeth unto me, is not of the value of an arseful of ashes, yet they praised it bravely, one and all.

The same did read a portion of his “Venus and Adonis,” to their prodigious admiration, whereas I, being sleepy and fatigued withal, did deem it but paltry stuff, and was the more discomforted in that ye bloody buccaneer had got his wind again, and did turn his mind to farting with such villain zeal that presently I was like to choke once more.⁸

Mark Twain in his *Autobiography* relates that this was a side-production from his research and preparation for the writing of the historical novel *The Prince and the Pauper*: “I was reading ancient English books with the purpose of saturating myself with archaic English to a degree which would enable me to do plausible imitations of it in a fairly easy and unlaboured way.”⁹ He admits to having done this on a lark, for the pure fun of it: “I put into the Queen’s mouth, and into the mouths of those other people, grossness not to be found outside of Rabelais, perhaps. I made their state-liest remarks reek with them, and all this was charming to me – delightful, delicious -...”¹⁰

Mark Twain does make mention of Shakespeare elsewhere, once again disrespectfully in the short piece *Is Shakespeare Dead* where he takes the part of the Anti-Stratfordians with his usual irreverent humour.¹¹ The con-

8 Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead*, 113, 114.

9 Benjamin Griffen and Harriet Elinor Smith, eds. *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, Volume 2. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 155.

10 Griffen, *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, 156.

11 For more on Twain and Shakespeare, see the chapter in James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

clusion is unmistakably Twain with its Tom Sawyerish reference to his hometown:

‘Injun Joe’, ‘Jimmy Finn’, and ‘General Gaines’ were prominent and very intemperate ne’er-do-weels in Hannibal two generations ago. Plenty of gray-heads there remember them to this day, and can tell you about them. Isn’t it curious that two ‘town-drunkards’ and one half-breed loafer should leave behind them, in a remote Missourian village, a fame a hundred times greater and several hundred times more particularized in the matter of definite facts than Shakespeare left behind him in the village where he had lived the half of his lifetime?¹²

I include this quotation, not in order to debate its validity, but to appreciate its saucy flavouring; if only more anti-Stratfordians shared Twain’s sense of humour and absurdity. This irreverent approach should serve to set the tone for the present book. Twain’s *1601* provides zero insight into Shakespeare’s life, literary output or romantic loves, but is nevertheless highly amusing and exhibits the unmistakable voice of the author. I admittedly have a preference for treatments which actually seem to be enjoying the subject. I whole-heartedly agree with Louis Potter when he writes in *The Life of William Shakespeare*: “Few fictitious Shakespeares are downright unpleasant, though Edward Bond’s *Bingo* (1973) depicts his political and social views as evil and his final state as despair. The problem, for more of them, is excessive awe.”¹³ We have more than enough dry-as-dust biographies on the subject, so why add to the list with more works of the same ilk. I consequently have a decided preference for playful works. The more serious they are, the worse, although there a number of exceptions. O’Sullivan comes to a similar conclusion: “If the least successful attempts

¹² Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead*, 90-91.

¹³ Lois Potter, *The Life of William Shakespeare* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 433.

to fictionalize Shakespeare spring from his idolaters, the most successful ones arise from those who approach him with a twinkle in their eyes.”¹⁴

In terms of time-frame, I have chosen to limit myself to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with the exception of the afore-mentioned Twain piece.¹⁵ As concerns the concrete selection of the works analyzed herein, the amount of material in existence has been daunting, to say the least and it has been difficult to distinguish at times between the wheat and the chaff. The flourishing of self-publishing has also meant ever-increasing reams of material, much of which has proved less than edifying. Consequently, apart from the primary works chosen for analysis, I will also make cursory mention of additional treatments, often of questionable artistic merit, of a similar ilk if not quality. I do not want to pretend to have provided a comprehensive bibliography of all the relevant material. This may be a worthy project, but it is beyond the scope of this particular project.

While completing the present book, I came across a very recent publication by arguably the leading scholar in the field of fictional Shakespeares, Paul Franssen, *Shakespeare's Literary Lives: The Author as Character in Fiction and Film*,¹⁶ which covers much of the same ground. I have consciously chosen not to read this in order to avoid unconscious copying or paraphrasing. I have read, however, and do cite from a number of articles he has written previously and which I assume have been partially incorporated into his book.

In terms of the organization of the text, I have pondered for some time the most logical approach. I contemplated dividing the book into cat-

14 Maurice J. O'Sullivan Jr., "Introduction," in *Shakespeare's Other Lives*, ed. Maurice J. O'Sullivan Jr. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1997), 18.

15 For an overview of relevant literary works involving Shakespeare from the nineteenth century see Peter Holland, "Dramatizing the Dramatist." In *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 58, Writing About Shakespeare* (specifically theatre plays), O'Sullivan, "Introduction," and Michael Dobson's relevant entry, "Shakespeare as a Fictional Character" in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 423.

16 Paul Franssen, *Shakespeare's Literary Lives: The Author as Character in Fiction and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

egories, based on the approach used in the particular treatment, and I am indebted, of course, to a number of scholars for their scholarly efforts along these lines. Not surprisingly, however, the majority of these works analyzed do not neatly fit into one category, but exhibit a number of approaches and influences. I have therefore decided to organize the work, more or less, chronologically and at times thematically.

The first chapter focus on works by writers of the early twentieth century, with the coiner of the term Bardolatry, G.B. Shaw, being the most prominent figure along with Rudyard Kipling, an author not necessarily associated with Shakespeare. These authors were all professional men of letters who dabbled in various genres of literature. Most of the treatments presented here are plays along with several short stories and sketches. Thematically, they touch on a wide range of topics, including but not limited to, the identity of the Dark Lady, Shakespeare's departure from Stratford for London, Shakespeare's approach to art (Shaw often criticizes Shakespeare's lack of intellectual vigour), Shakespeare's life within the theatre and Shakespeare's possible involvement in the King James translation of the Bible. I have also included short discussions of the Shakespearian references by the great Modernist masters James Joyce and Virginia Woolf at the end of this chapter. Although Shakespeare is not the main focus of their work, they have both cast long shadows on later representations of Shakespeare and his family.

The second, shorter chapter explores a delightful, unjustly neglected, minor masterpiece in the genre, *No Bed for Bacon*, by the authorial duo Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon. This book is clearly the primary source of inspiration for the most well-known Shakespearian fictional treatment of recent years *Shakespeare in Love*. The novel includes a cross-dressing female aristocrat slumming in the theatre and eventually romancing Shakespeare, meetings with Queen Elizabeth and a range of additional prominent personages of the age, including Francis Bacon of course. The work makes no pretense at accuracy but nevertheless convincingly brings alive

the ‘behind the scenes’ atmosphere of the Elizabethan theatre. The novel evokes the feeling that if it was not this way, it should have been.

The third chapter revolves around Anthony Burgess, a giant in Shakespearean fictional depictions, having written one novel, *Nothing But the Sun*, focused exclusively on the Bard and two novels and one short story with a partial focus. Burgess also delved into non-fiction with a biography of Shakespeare, although the distinctions between fact and fiction are often blurred to say the least. Burgess provides a great deal of insight into Shakespeare’s psychology, economic background and sexuality with many of the expressed concerns obviously reflecting his own issues and prejudices. We read Shakespeare explicitly through the lens of Burgess, but what an entertaining perspective he provides.

Chapter four is referred to as a serious interlude as it is concerned with Edward Bond’s political play *Bingo* focused on Shakespeare’s final days in retirement back in Stratford, this being another popular phase of his life for fictional treatments. Bond pulls no punches, taking Shakespeare to task for his supposed exploitation of the working class back in his hometown. Bond has an obvious agenda, made abundantly clear in the lengthy prefaces written for the play. Although far from an easy read or theatrical experience, the play raises questions central to this book. Should an artist have a social conscience? Was Shakespeare interested in bigger questions of social justice or merely in his own artistic, economic and social advancement?

Chapter five focuses on Robert Nye’s two Shakespeare-focused novels. His shorter work *Mrs. Shakespeare: The Complete Works* is a refreshing take on Shakespeare’s life and work from his wife Anne’s perspective. She is portrayed with sympathy and wit for a change, instead of as the ubiquitous shrew. Nye’s *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* takes a seeming traditional approach with its subject from birth to death, but actually amounts to a Joycean encyclopedic treatment with practically every possible theory thrown into the pot.

More recent treatments are examined in chapter six. These works mostly take an ‘alternative’ approach to the subject casting Shakespeare as an Elizabethan super hero, detective, spy, ladies’ man or general righter of wrongs. Shakespeare’s macho dealings practically always take precedence over his seemingly effete writing. There is also a focus on science fiction works and time travelling pieces. Additionally, works that have a feminist approach are included with the focus on one of the historical or fictional women in Shakespeare’s life. Several of the works take a more traditional attempt at sticking to the biographical ‘facts’ and have a more or less linear narrative from birth to death. There are also a few works dealing with alternative candidates to the authorship of the plays.

The seventh chapter analyzes film, television and comics treatments of the subject starting with two early film treatments, moving to the TV film *Will Shakespeare* from 1978 based on the novel by John Mortimer, up to the afore-mentioned *Shakespeare in Love*, on to a film inspired by the sonnets *A Waste of Shame* and the two recent anti-Stratfordian works *Anonymous* and *No Lovers Left Alive*, which advocate the authorship of the Earl of Oxford and Christopher Marlowe respectively. Several recent productions are also discussed including the film *All Is True*. A number of television shows are discussed including two episodes of *Doctor Who*, several sketches from the *Black Adder* series and the recent television series *Upstart Crow*. Two comics treatments of varying effectiveness, *Kill Shakespeare* and Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* series, are also analyzed.

I have been inspired and influenced by categories introduced by Maurice J. O’Sullivan, Jr. in the introduction to his anthology *Shakespeare’s Lives*. He creates a list of seven categories for classifying fictional treatments of Shakespeare. I have not made use of them in the arrangement of my own treatment, but have taken to heart some of his suggestions as to what has value for deeper analysis. In narrowing the selection of works analyzed, I have deliberately chosen to ignore the ‘wealth’ of what O’Sullivan refers to

as ‘Cygnetts’.¹⁷ These works focus on Shakespeare’s childhood with almost always hackneyed clichés involving the English countryside and bucolic way of life. These mawkish, cringe-worthy, works serve some purpose I suppose, but have little merit as literature and contribute nothing to our imaginative picture of Shakespeare. There are some notable exceptions, however, such as *King of Shadows* by Susan Cooper which won a number of literary prizes. Having said that, a number of the works included here do partially focus on Shakespeare’s childhood, but only as part of the larger narrative.

The label “Domestics” focus on Shakespeare’s family life and are further divided by O’Sullivan into ‘anti-Annians’ and ‘pro-Annians’. The majority of the works discussed herein tend to portray Anne in a negative light. Interestingly, O’Sullivan states that “Supporters of Anne, however, outnumber her critics.”¹⁸ This might very well have been the case with the treatments O’Sullivan examines from the nineteenth century, but tends not to be the case in the twentieth century. The tide seems to be turning, however, with the advent of feminist treatments of the subject. “Players” focus on the theatre scene and Shakespeare’s interactions with his fellow playwrights and actors. A number of the analyzed works once again fit the bill.

The fifth category ‘Shakespeare as Contemporary’ encompasses mostly moralistic or educational works which again are not of much interest or artistic merit. An exception is Shaw’s *Dark Lady of the Sonnets* which was expressly written in order to generate interest in establishing a National Theatre. The only one of the works discussed which inserts contemporary political and social satire into the narratives is *Upstart Crow* which has ongoing references to class elitism in Britain, sexism and in particular public transport. Those works involving time travel also inevitably require us to compare the two respective time periods.

¹⁷ O’Sullivan, *Shakespeare’s Other Lives*, 2.

¹⁸ O’Sullivan, *Shakespeare’s Other Lives*, 5.

‘The Obsessed’ could be used to characterize the work of Frank Harris on the whole and Shaw as well due to his almost manic insistence on comparing himself to, and criticizing of, Shakespeare. The recent film *Anonymous*, which champions Edward de Vere as the author of the plays and Shakespeare as an illiterate impostor, would also fit the bill.

Finally, the last category ‘Wits’ seems to be those works which O’Sullivan values the most for their playfulness, inventiveness and willingness to experiment. I am fully in agreement here, as will become apparent over the course of the book.

The question arises as to what is the actual line between biography and fiction. There are, of course, a plethora of self-proclaimed biographies out there, many of which have more to do with fiction than objective historical scholarship. James Shapiro comes to a similar conclusion: “Conventional biographies of Shakespeare are necessary fictions that will be always be with us – less for what they tell us about Shakespeare’s life than for what they reveal about our fantasies of who we want Shakespeare to be.”¹⁹ Even as established a scholar as Stanley Wells has to resort to fictional approaches at times. The first page of his recent comparative work *Shakespeare and Co.* is a classic example:

Early one morning in 1600 or 1601, boys ran around London sticking up bills announcing that if you went to the Globe playhouse on the south bank of the River Thames that afternoon you could see a new play called Hamlet. They pasted the bills on the doors of taverns and houses, and on pissing-posts provided for the convenience of those who walked the streets. The lads pulled down out-of-date bills announcing earlier performances and chucked them away.²⁰

19 James Shapiro, *1599 A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2005)

20 Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare and Co.: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher and the Other Players in His Story* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1.

Another recent book *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography* edited by Paul Edmondson and again Stanley Wells consists of a collection of essays focused on Shakespeare's family members, friends and acquaintances. In the introduction they admit to having encouraged their contributors to go "beyond narrowly documented evidence, relying on their familiarity with Shakespeare's life and times to exercise their imaginations in the attempt to illuminate obscure areas of his existence and experience."²¹ Given the scanty amount of information available on Shakespeare, these imaginative leaps are understandable, but as Germaine Greer points out in her recent work *Shakespeare's Wife*: "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."²²

One might argue that traditional biographies have exhausted all the possibilities and therefore only fictional biographies still have something left to offer.²³ Perhaps, with fictional treatments, the lack of facts can actually be an advantage, giving free-reign to the imagination. Anthony Burgess, for example, has dabbled in both biography and fiction when it concerns Shakespeare in his work of the same name and with his novel focused on Shakespeare's love life, *Nothing Like the Sun*. At times, however, the reader struggles to tell the difference between the two. Samuel Schoenbaum in his *A Compact Documentary Life* makes express reference to this blurring of fact and fiction in reference to the Ann Whateley theory and Burgess' treatment of the topic in his 'biography' entitled *Shakespeare*: "Colourful, if a trifle tawdry, this 'persuasive reading' certainly is; but it is not so much biography as imaginative invention, and hence more ap-

21 Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, "General Introduction," in *The Shakespeare Circle An Alternative Biography*, edited by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

22 Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare's Wife*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 9.

23 This is more or less the argument of Graham Holderness, a renowned scholar who has written several critical works on literary biographies and fictional treatments, see Graham Holderness, *Tales From Shakespeare. Creative Collisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Graham Holderness, *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011).

propriate to a novel, which Mr. Burgess, in *Nothing Like the Sun*, earlier gave us.”²⁴

Perhaps the most famous example of Shakespeare-related blurring of fact and fiction is Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* from 1889 where we discover the true identity of Mr. W. H., this time a beautiful boy actor Willie Hughes not Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton or William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. This of course tells us much about Mr. Wilde’s homoerotic leanings more than Shakespeare, and whether Shakespeare shared his interests is debatable. The work itself ends in an ambiguous fashion, making it unclear if Wilde really meant it all to be taken seriously. Schoenbaum comments as follows on the work: “The fantasist thus joins those many who have refashioned the master in their own image.”²⁵ Wilde’s piece has, of course, been influential in opening up the possibility of Shakespeare’s homosexuality or bisexuality, a theme which is explored in a number of the works below.

The present book therefore focuses, almost exclusively, on works which are self-proclaimed fiction, but which are often fruitful food for thought for both a popular reader and even a scholar of Shakespeare. A number of these works have provided me not only with new perspectives and readings of the plays and poems, but also imaginative inspiration concerning Shakespeare’s life and times.

24 Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare A Compact Documentary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 85.

25 Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare’s Lives*, 323.

1

Playing with the Bard: Literary Treatments of William Shakespeare the Man in the Early Twentieth Century

This chapter will examine a collection of shorter, occasionally obscure works, by mostly prominent writers of the early twentieth century who treat William Shakespeare as a fictional character. The stories and plays focus in particular on certain controversial questions connected with Shakespeare's biography: the identity of the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, his possible involvement in the translation of the King James' Bible, the link between the plots of his plays and his own life and his sexuality in general.

RICHARD GARNETT (1835-1906) was an English writer, critic, poet and librarian. He was one of the Garnett family of writers and translators along with Edward, Constance and David. The play, *William Shakespeare: Pedagogue and Poacher*, from 1904 is written in blank verse and exhibits certain parallels in terms of plot with the recent novel by Jess Winfield *My Name is Will*. The play takes place in Stratford and its environs in March 1585 making Shakespeare 20 years of age. Shakespeare is working as a schoolmaster

and is suspected of poaching on Sir Thomas Lucy's grounds²⁶ but, more interestingly, of having an interest in his wife. Various lines from the plays are assigned to the characters, seemingly at random.

Lady Lucy, who is romantically interested in the young schoolmaster, cattily denounces Anne Hathaway for having trapped him into marriage:

This mirror of the maidenhood of Stratford,
 This wan, ungathered rose, this vestal ogress,
 Sets cap and trap for Shakespeare, he is caught,
 And frequent seeks her cot past call of curfew.
 There rapture reigns, till, one autumnal even,
 Sudden the chamber swarms with angry brothers,
 And cousins in a most excited state.
 Poor Shakespeare hangs his head, a manifest villain,
 And creeps like snail unwillingly to church,²⁷

The adaptation of the lines from *As You Like It* is particularly apt. Shakespeare is popular with his students as he is prone to telling stories which do not fit with the strict Latin curriculum. The young schoolmaster informs his wife he will be off to seek his fortune with the theatre in London and to add insult to injury tells her she has already inspired him to write *The Taming of the Shrew* by means of: "The rattle and the rasp of thy shrill tongue,/ Thy waspishness and indocility/ Have lent me matter for a merry jape."²⁸ We hereby have the first, of many, depictions of Anne Shakespeare as an unbearable harridan who drives her poor long-suffering husband away from the family hearth. Shakespeare inexplicably takes his students

26 For a discussion of the origin of the story, see Nicholas Rowe, *Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080723160054/http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/ROWE.HTM>.

27 Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare: Pedagogue and Poacher* (London and New York: John Lane, 1904), 21.

28 Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare*, 55.

out poaching with him on Lucy's land, only to be caught at the end of Act 1. With Shakespeare waiting judgment in prison, Lady Lucy presses her husband for mercy while Anne encourages the opposite, the latter hoping this will teach her recalcitrant husband a lesson, as well as break his spirit. The women almost come to blows.

The final scene takes place in court where Shakespeare, to everyone's surprise, pleads guilty to the charges of poaching but uses the forum to lambaste Lord Lucy for the impact his greed has had upon the poor. Shakespeare appears here as a self-proclaimed Robin Hood and "people's poet"²⁹ with his pupils/accomplices in the role of the Merry Men. In contrast to Edward Bond's *Bingo*, which takes a diametrically opposite approach to Shakespeare in his waning years, the young Shakespeare is a champion of the poor and downtrodden:

But you, Sir Thomas, rob both earth and water,
 And would the sun and moon too, could you grasp them.
 How many commons have you not devoured?
 What paths not barred? where erst the villager
 Was used to trip, but now slinks sullen, conscious
 Both of his trespass and your injury,
 And all for your game's sake.³⁰

Just as he is about to be whipped (at his wife's behest), imprisoned (Lord Lucy's wishes) and finally banished (at the request of Lady Lucy), the proceedings are interrupted by the dramatic arrival of the Earl of Leicester who demands Shakespeare's release at the request of the Queen herself who has been so impressed by *The Taming of the Shrew*, which has reached her ears via the Stratford printer Richard Field, that she has called for the author's attendance at the court. Shakespeare takes this fortunate turn of

²⁹ Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare*, 90.

³⁰ Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare*, 88.

events very much in stride, insists his period of banishment be extended from three years to ten, and sets off with words of farewell to his students and finally to his wife:

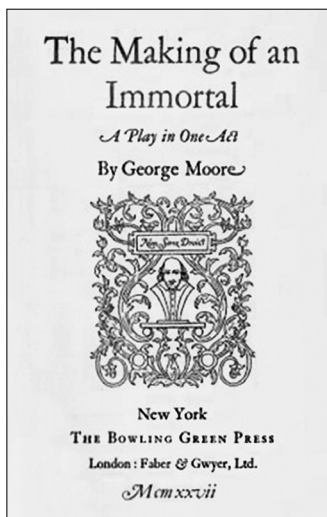
Fix, thou thy appetence on things supernal;
 Guide our fair children in the paths of virtue;
 Cherish the harmless necessary cat,
 Who will for my departure wring her hands;
 Speak of me sometimes, rail at me but seldom;
 So for ten years farewell.³¹

The play definitely has its moments and displays a certain wit. This is one of the first works to display certain motifs that become established tropes in the later works. Lines from Shakespeare's plays are given to characters in the fictional treatment. Events in the fictional account of Shakespeare's life provide inspiration for the plots of the plays, in this case *The Taming of the Shrew* and to a lesser extent the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*. This is one of the numerous anti-Anne narratives portraying her as a ferocious monster doing everything in her power to torment her poor genius husband. We are also provided, via Lady Lucy's clearly prejudiced account, of the background to Shakespeare's much debated, seemingly less than fortuitous, marriage with Anne, once again trapping the young innocent genius with her feminine wiles and sexual charms. Finally, the play raises the question of Shakespeare's social conscience, this being a question which is returned to again and again throughout the works discussed herein. Garnett is one of the few writers to portray Shakespeare as an anti-establishment figure bravely standing up to the social inequalities of his day. Later accounts almost always view him in either the opposite light, almost exclusively concerned with either his art or improvement of

31 Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare*, 111.

his social standing or both, or at best only regretting his lack of social engagement as an older man.³²

GEORGE MOORE (1852-1933) was an Irish novelist, short story writer, poet and occasional dramatist. He was a quite controversial figure, in his day, due to the frank sexuality of his books. *The Making of an Immortal* from 1927 is one of his last works and certainly not one of his best or most well-known. The anti-Stratfordian play is also not all that realistic or interesting as theatre. It opens with a performance of *Richard II* before Queen Elizabeth written by Francis Bacon under the pseudonym Shakspeare. William Shakespeare is an actor in the play. The Queen suspects Essex



is behind the story in line with her supposed statement “I am Richard II knowe you not that”³³ recorded by William Lambarde. Shakespeare’s possible involvement with the Essex Rebellion is also dealt with in Burgess and plays a major part in the film *Anonymous*. Bacon and Ben Jonson come up with the convenient plan to assign the work to the actor with the almost identical name as he will be less likely to be punished due to his inferior status: “Bacon: Then believe me, a simple man with little wisdom in his mouth and the semblance of any small trader will be accepted more easily than a garrulous poet...”³⁴

32 Actually a number of the most recent accounts tend to buck this trend, turning Shakespeare into a superhero putting wrongs to right.

33 For background on this supposed incident, see A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare the Man* (Frogmore: Grenada Publishing Limited, 1976), 172.

34 George Moore, *The Making of an Immortal: a Play in One Act* (New York: Bowling Green Press, 1927),

Shakespeare is portrayed as an absurdly pragmatic materialist type in this treatment, this being a sign for Moore of his lack of authentic genius.

SHAKESPEARE: I trust, Master Bacon, that you will plead against the closing of the theatre, for all my present poor savings lie in it; and since maid tavern has been mentioned I would have you know, sir, that I spend less money there than any other member of the company. Indeed, my thrift has become a by-word amongst my merry masters yonder.³⁵

Bacon and Jonson convince Shakespeare to accept the deception, not out of an interest in fame, but as a material incentive. They present him to the Queen as a natural genius.

BACON: Our poet here was formerly a poor lad who held horses for a pittance in the streets of London.

ELIZABETH: But a man must have knowledge whereof he writeth.

BACON: He must truly, and the best knowledge comes to him he knows not whence nor how. Such knowledge is known as inspiration.³⁶

If this play was a parody, it might have more merit. After meeting Shakespeare, she commissions the play about Falstaff in love, once again corresponding to the popular legend, recorded in the early eighteenth century, wherein *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was expressly written at the request of the Queen.³⁷

Shakespeare is all in a panic, wondering how on earth he will be able to perform this formidable task.

35 Moore, *The Making of an Immortal*, 41-42.

36 Moore, *The Making of an Immortal*, 53.

37 For more on the legend, see Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare A Compact Documentary Life*, 197-198.

SHAKESPEARE: Master Bacon, Master Jonson, I told you this would end in my ruin, for now a play is laid upon me which cannot be written by me. Falstaff in love! Falstaff in love! How may such a play be written? Why did I not throw myself at the Queen's feet and beseech her mercy, telling the truth, that I was but a player, able to blast out a blank line, but no more, no more.³⁸

Bacon and Marlowe quickly assure him of having his back, promising to write *Merry Wives* for him, among other things: "Bacon: The title will be: The Merry Wives of Windsor. What sayest thou to that for a title? Did not her Majesty say she would like a forest and must insist on some fairies?"³⁹

The play ends rather predictably with a reference to the title of the work: "Jonson: I think to-day we have assisted at the making of an immortal."⁴⁰

The play is meant to be amusing, but falls flat. Paul Franssen comments adroitly on the elitist nature of the play, "Cleverly deploying Shakespeare's well-documented business sense as an argument against his authorship, as if a shopkeeper could not be a literary genius, Moore stands in a long tradition of anti-Shakespearean snobbery."⁴¹

This is the first example, of more to follow, of a treatment in the Anti-Stratfordian vein. Another Baconian work in the same style, *Clipt Wings A Drama in Five Acts* by William R. Leigh, has even less literary merit. This time Shakespeare, provided with the name Shaxper, is a complete imbecile who is finally killed off by Jonson and Drayton in order to maintain the secret of the true author of the plays, Francis Bacon, who also happens to be Queen Elizabeth's son.

38 Moore, *The Making of an Immortal*, 58.

39 Moore, *The Making of an Immortal*, 58.

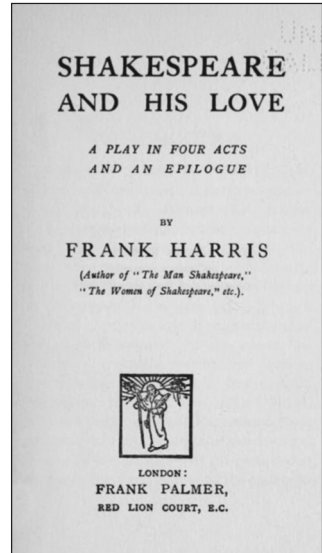
40 Moore, *The Making of an Immortal*, 59.

41 Paul Franssen, "Fictional Treatments of Shakespeare's Authorship," in *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy*, edited by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 191.

FRANK HARRIS (1855-1931) was a literary celebrity most famed in his day for his erotic testimony *My Life and Loves*, 1922-1931, which was banned for a number of years in various countries due to its supposed immorality. Harris also wrote a number of both non-fictional and fictional works (the line between these being extremely thin at times) on Shakespeare. The most celebrated of these was the literary criticism/biography/rant *The Man Shakespeare and his Tragic Life Story* published in 1909.

This memoir created a sensation upon its publication. It was lauded to the skies by established writers such as Arnold Bennett, Upton Sinclair and even G. B. Shaw, the last-mentioned perhaps out of mere politeness on his part.⁴² Harris was even less modest in praise for his own work.

Harris is an admirer of the mysterious Anne Whateley who is everything positive in his books in contrast to the haggard, nagging Anne Hathaway. His candidate for the Dark Lady was the most popular choice of the day, Mary Fitton,⁴³ with William Herbert being the young aristocratic muse. He also wrote a non-fictional work *The Women of Shakespeare* from 1912 which is cringe-worthy at times, completely blurring fact and fiction without any qualms or seeming self-awareness. An example from the Introduction to the book should suffice:



42 See the discussion in Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 482-483.

43 First espoused by Thomas Tyler, see G. B. Shaw's acknowledgement of Tyler's research in the preface to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*.

In 1608 Mary Fitton married for the second time and left the Court and Shakespeare forever. Her desertion, and if you will, the passionate devotion of twelve years to her earthy-coarse service had broken down Shakespeare's health. In 1608, too, his mother died, and he returned for a year or so to village Stratford to recover some measure of health and hope.⁴⁴

The focus here will be on Harris' play *Shakespeare and His Love: A Play in Four Acts and an Epilogue* from 1910, arguably the first piece to speculate in depth about Shakespeare's love life during his working years in London. The play is slow-going and was never performed, with good reason.⁴⁵ Harris, however, had very little capacity for self-criticism and instead viewed his lack of success as prejudice stemming from a conspiracy directed against his genius. Harris is openly angry with G. B. Shaw in the Introduction, more or less accusing of him of plagiarizing his ideas and themes. It is embarrassingly obvious that Harris has a chip on his shoulder and is jealous of his much more successful colleague. Harris refers here to Shaw's reaction to the play:

A little while later I met Mr. Shaw in the street; he told me that he, too, had read my play which I had sent to the Court managers, and added, 'you have represented Shakespeare as sadder than he was, I think; but you have shown his genius, which everyone else has omitted to do...'⁴⁶

After going on and on in this vein making reference to various perceived slights, he moves to the play itself. His insistence on taking himself so seriously is immediately suspicious, in particular his claim that he has somehow finally discovered the truth about Shakespeare:

44 Frank Harris, *The Women Of Shakespeare* (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1912), xii.

45 Schoenbaum provides once again background concerning Harris' failure to have his 'masterpiece' staged successfully in *Shakespeare's Lives*, 489-490.

46 Frank Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love* (London: Frank Palmer, 1910), vii.

I wanted to give a dramatic picture of Shakespeare and his time; but above all a true picture. It seemed to me that no one had the right to treat the life/story, the soul-tragedy of a Shakespeare as the mere stuff of a play. Within the limits of the truth, however, I did my best.⁴⁷

The drama opens after a performance of *Merchant of Venice*. Various nobleman and fellow playwrights comment on the play. The playwright Henry Chettle wants Shakespeare to write another comedy with Falstaff in it, but the author is not in the mood: “Shakespeare: Laughter and youth go together, Chettle, and I am too old for comedies.”⁴⁸ Shakespeare is already friends with Southampton who has paid him money allowing him to pay off his debts and buy the largest house in Stratford for his mother. He expresses both interest and admiration for Herbert.

A woman named Violet is in love with Shakespeare but the passion is seemingly unrequited. Shakespeare informs his private audience that she has been the model for Jessica in *Merchant* and the inspiration for Viola in *Twelfth Night*. Once again there is a parallel with the plot of *Shakespeare in Love*.

Mary Fitton and a group of ladies of the court visit the theatre and Shakespeare is immediately enthralled by her, but unable to say anything witty, he stands staring dumbfounded. The celebrated word-smith is lost for words. Shakespeare describes her to Herbert: “Eye to eye with me. Dark as night, and as night mysterious, wonderful.”⁴⁹ He asks his aristocratic friend to speak to her on his behalf and rather pathetically cannot think of anything even remotely poetic to capture her attention.

Herbert tells Shakespeare to come to a masked ball which Fitton will be attending, (reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*), and plead his case in person.

⁴⁷ Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, xiv.

⁴⁸ Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 10.

⁴⁹ Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 29.

Shakespeare confesses his love to her, but not particularly eloquently (Harris interestingly does not fall prey to the temptation to overly insert quotes from the plays and poems into the characters' mouths.). Mary is interested but cautious.

Ben Jonson, just out of prison, meets Shakespeare and additional colleagues in an inn. He is described as violent and passionate, while Shakespeare is more subdued and sober. Chettle relates the celebrated Richard III, William the Conqueror, anecdote/urban legend, which becomes a re-occurring subject for dramatization in many of the other treatments.⁵⁰

The pretty mercer's wife, who often has a room to see the play, made a meeting with King Richard III, Dick Burbage, there. Quiet Will overheard the appointment, and after the play followed the lady. Poor Dick, having to change his robes, came late, and knocked. "'Who's there?' asked Will, from the inside.

'Richard III,' whispered Dick. 'Ah,' quoth Will, 'Richard III comes after William the Conqueror.' Ho ! ho ! ho !"⁵¹

Even the other poets present seem to doubt the story's veracity, supporting the view of it being a mere rumour. Harris' timid Shakespeare would certainly be a very unlikely candidate for such a brash, cheeky act.

Shakespeare visits Mary, bringing her a song sung by the boy actor Willie Hughes; the lyrics are from John Dryden strangely enough. They make a date to meet at midnight, a detail which Shaw also employs in his one-act, only for Mary to immediately become furious upon hearing about Violet Herbert (the fair youth) steals Mary from William in the end. When Shakespeare finds out, he is distraught: "I had two idolatries -- my friendship for

50 For a discussion of the origin of the story from the diary of John Manningham from 1601, see Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare A Compact Documentary Life*, 205-206.

51 Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 59.

you; I loved your youth and bravery! And my passion for her, the queen and pearl of women. And now the faith's dead, the love's befouled."⁵²

Harris' overly earnest Shakespeare is tedious, to put it mildly.

On the bright side, he is generous with money, paying off extravagant Chettle's debts, which meets with Jonson's disapproval. Shakespeare responds: "Money! What is money to me?"⁵³ Shakespeare is only interested in true love. He is not shown spending any time writing or worrying about his finances. This is in marked contrast to Burgess' characterization in particular.

The troupe performs *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Queen. Mary expresses her love for both Shakespeare and Herbert, the latter of which is placed in the Tower by the Queen because of the affair. Mary finally leaves him and Shakespeare ends up meeting the Queen, turning down the job as Master of the Revels, and pleading for the release of Herbert. Harris again provides background to the legend of the genesis of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

I wanted to see the fat Knight in love, and you
wrote this "Wives of Windsor" to show it:
'tis not ill done, but the Knight was better in the
earlier piece, much better; the story better too.
Still, I wished it, and now — They say you're
witty, and rhyme well, and would make a good
Master of the Revels to save my Lord Chamberlain there
— some labour.⁵⁴

Shakespeare meets up in the Epilogue with Jonson and Drayton in Stratford and they drink too much in accordance with the account first record-

⁵² Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 130-131.

⁵³ Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 137.

⁵⁴ Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 161.

ed by Rev. John Ward and which perpetuated a certain view that Shakespeare had difficulty holding his liquor.⁵⁵ “I have poor unhappy brains for drinking: one cup, you know, was always too much for me.”⁵⁶

Shakespeare dies after altering his will in front of his daughters. The playwright seems to imply on his death bed that losing the Dark Lady broke him in some manner. His final words on his deathbed come out of nowhere: “Ah ! My mother ! The/ gentlest, sweetest — the noblest mother in the world ! I often call to her as if she were still/ here, and feel her hands upon my forehead.”⁵⁷ It would seem Harris himself had mother issues and passes them on to the subject of the play.

Schoenbaum in his masterful *Shakespeare's Lives* dedicates a number of, mostly scornful, pages to Frank Harris and makes brief mention of the play:

Meanwhile Harris had written a play, *Shakespeare and His Love*, dramatizing—if that is the word for so theatrically unrealized a piece-- some of his biographical obsessions ... Harris's play reveals, more nakedly than his critical works, the cloying sentimentalism of his conception of Shakespeare. Lovelorn and wallowing in self-pity, he mopes about the stage, mouthing dialogue which consists of trite modern phrases interlarded with snatches and phrases from (among others) *Othello*, *Troilus and Cressida* and the *Sonnets*.⁵⁸

Schoenbaum is spot on in his final analysis and captures succinctly the primary thesis behind this book: “To Harris the plays scarcely exist as objective works of theatrical art. All literature is autobiography, disclosing

55 See Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare A Compact Documentary Life*, 95-97.

56 Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 168.

57 Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*, 176.

58 Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 489.