



SHAKESPEARE

思想家莎士比亚

Germaine Greer 著 毛 亮 译

通识教育
双语文库

A VERY SHORT
INTRODUCTION



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北京 BEIJING

京权图字: 01-2006-6841

Shakespeare was originally published in English in 1986.

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

思想家莎士比亚:英汉对照/(英)格里尔(Greer, G.)著;毛亮译. —北京:外语教学与研究出版社, 2013. 1

(通识教育双语文库)

书名原文:Shakespeare

ISBN 978-7-5600-8552-4

I. ①思… II. ①格… ②毛… III. ①英语—汉语—对照读物 ②莎士比亚, W. (1564~1616)—文艺思想—思想评论 IV. ①H319.4:I

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2013) 第 026142 号



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出 版 人: 蔡剑峰

项目负责: 姚 虹 周渝毅

责任编辑: 高耿松

封面设计: 覃一彪

版式设计: 吕 茜

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

社 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷: 三河市北燕印装有限公司

开 本: 650×980 1/16

印 张: 810

版 次: 2013 年 4 月第 1 版 2013 年 4 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5600-8552-4

定 价: 1980.00 元

* * *

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物料号: 185520001

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Chapter 1

Life

The notices of the life and career of England's greatest poet are not only sparse and brief, but unusually cryptic. If ever their meaning was precisely understood it is so no longer. All attempts to break the unselfconscious code have failed. The name, Shakespeare, in one form or another, was a common one in sixteenth-century Warwickshire. The poet was probably the grandson of Richard Shakespeare, a husbandman of Snitterfield, a hamlet 4 miles to the north of Stratford. It is assumed that the 'Johannem Shakesper de Snytterfylde . . . agricolam' who was named administrator of his father's estate in 1561 is the same John Shakespeare who already figures in the records as having been fined for keeping a dung-heap in front of his house in Henley Street in 1552 (the house that is still revered as the Birthplace) and who in a suit of 1556 is described as a glover.

When Richard Arden, Richard Shakespeare's Snitterfield landlord, drew up his will in 1556, his youngest daughter Mary was still single. In 1558, her first child by John Shakespeare was baptized in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford. There her third child was christened, on 26 April 1564, 'Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakespeare'. From that day nothing is heard of him for more than eighteen years.

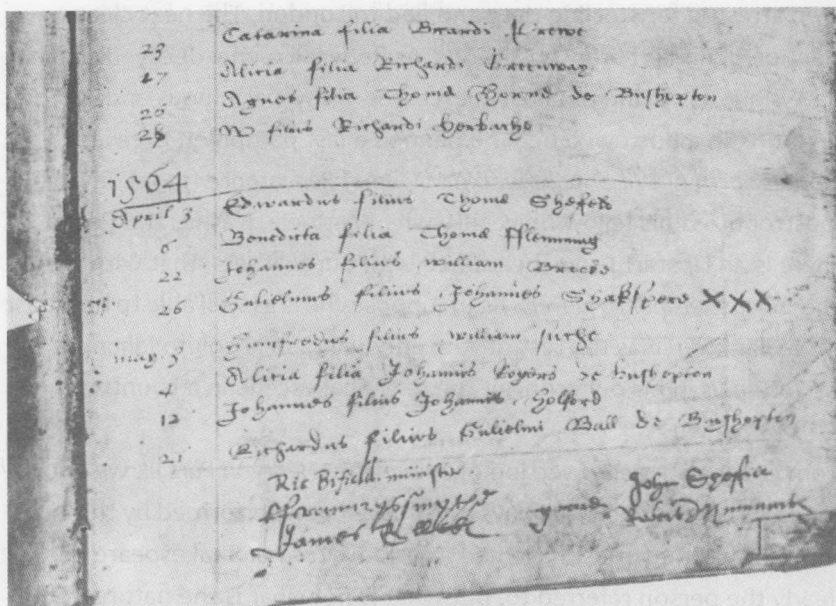
John Shakespeare prospered. Although illiterate, he was named one of the chief burgesses, then chamberlain, then alderman in 1565, and



1. Shakespeare's birthplace in Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon.

finally High Bailiff in 1568. We know from allusions in the plays that Shakespeare must have had at least a grammar-school education, and we assume that as the son of an alderman, and therefore entitled to education free of charge, he must have attended the Stratford grammar school, but the school archives for the period have not survived. From 1578 onwards, John Shakespeare began to find himself in financial difficulties. In 1586, after ten years of absence from council meetings, his name was finally struck off the list of aldermen.

On 27 November 1582, the clerk noted in the Episcopal Register of the Diocese of Worcester the application for a special marriage licence 'inter Willelmum Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton'. The bond posted the next day clearly identifies the groom as William Shagspere and the bride as Anne Hathway of Stratford. Even in so straightforward a business, Shakespeare has left an unusually puzzling trail which would lead some scholars off on a wild goose chase for 'the other woman'; nowadays the discrepancy is usually taken to be merely the result of a scribal error. From the brass marker on Ann Hathaway's grave, which



2. Stratford baptismal register.

gives her age as 67 when she died in 1623, we know that in 1582 she must have been about 26. The special licence was required for a number of reasons: the groom was a minor, the penitential season of Advent when marriages might not be solemnized was only five days away, Ann's father was dead, and she was pregnant. Of all of these circumstances the most unusual is William's age: he was not yet 19.

Six months later the Shakespeares' first child, Susanna, was baptized, on 26 May 1583. On 2 February 1585 her brother and sister, the twins Hamnet and Judith, were baptized. Eleven years later the parish register records the burial of the poet's only son.

The years following the baptism of his children and preceding Shakespeare's emergence as a figure in the theatrical world of London are called the 'lost' years. Theories abound: Shakespeare might have worked as a schoolmaster, have trained for the law, have gone for a soldier, have travelled in Europe in the train of some great man, have

been arrested for stealing deer and fled to London. The next clear mention of him is hardly auspicious. As Robert Greene, decayed scholar-playwright, lay dying of his own excesses, filthy, verminous and destitute, in a borrowed bed, he penned a last pamphlet, *Greenes Groatesworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592). In it he apostrophized his fellow university wits, Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele: 'there is an Upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the rest of you; and being an absolute *Johannes Fac Totum*, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country'.

From Greene's twisted version of a line from *Henry VI Part III*, we know not only that the Henry VI plays must have been performed by this time, but also that they must have had a certain success. Shakespeare is clearly the person referred to, but what is not clear is the nature of the offence of which he is being accused. As an actor reciting lines written by the university men, Shakespeare could not have merited such a venomous attack. If Greene is using the image of the crow as Horace does in his third epistle, which Greene and his fellow-graduates must have known well, then he is accusing Shakespeare of passing off the work of others as his own.

Greene died before anyone could find out exactly what he meant. Nashe dissociated himself from such 'a scald, trivial, lying pamphlet'. Shakespeare evidently took the trouble to speak to Henry Chettle, who had prepared the fair copy of Greene's work for the publisher, and Chettle apologized handsomely to him in the preface to his own *Kind-Heart's Dream* published a few months later. 'I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault, because myself have seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes. Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art.' Clearly Chettle had understood the accusation to be one of plagiarism, but as a refutation his words leave something to

be desired. We learn that Shakespeare had refined and agreeable manners and upper-class friends who were prepared to take his part, together with a certain literary talent. There is no good reason for supposing sixteenth-century commercial theatre to be any less protean than that of the twentieth century, where plays are not so much written as rewritten in performance. As a successful actor, Shakespeare may well have turned to the university wits for additional material and felt perfectly free to revise what they provided in production. The copying out of plays was a laborious business; usually the actors' parts were written out with their cues, while the stage-manager worked from a 'platt' listing cue lines and exits and entrances. There can seldom have been an entire copy to spare for a publisher, and besides, the players' companies reckoned their play-books among their chief assets. Many plays were never published, and many were published anonymously. Few were ascribed to single authors, unless the authors were particularly well known, in which case their names appeared on plays they had nothing to do with.

Thomas Heywood claimed to have worked on at least 220 plays, many of which, he said, 'by shifting and change of the companies have been negligently lost'. Henry Chettle wrote thirteen plays, of which one survives, and collaborated on thirty-six others, of which four have survived. If Shakespeare, as is thought, collaborated with Heywood, Dekker, Munday, and Chettle on *The Book of Sir Thomas More* at some time in the 1590s it is not far-fetched to assume that all four, and perhaps others whose names have perished, were at some time called upon to provide material for him. The only serious contender for the title of Shakespeare's collaborator is John Fletcher, whose hand is detected on internal stylistic grounds in *Henry VIII*, who is named as co-author of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* on the title-page of the 1634 quarto, and again as co-author with Shakespeare of a lost play *Cardenio* in the Stationers' Register (1653). The evidence is far from conclusive, but if conclusive proof of collaboration should be found, it would not

