

Shakespeare

His World and His Work
Revised Edition

M. M. Reese



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Edward Arnold

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Hereafter in a better world than this
I shall desire more love and knowledge of you
AYLI I ii 296.

Preface

A revised edition of a book first published more than twenty-five years ago requires a few words of explanation. When, after two reprintings, the original version quietly expired a short while ago, it was felt that a shortened form of the book would be more acceptable in a less leisurely age. Some of the material has therefore been reduced. On the other hand, there are also changes and additions. Shakespearean study has not stood still in the intervening years, and in some matters one inevitably changes one's mind.

In essentials, however, it is still the same book, with the original object of providing anyone interested in Shakespeare with a fairly full and uncomplicated account of his age, his life and his work. It still needs, therefore, the two apologies that accompanied it on its first appearance.

First there is the problem of method: whether the material should be treated chronologically or in sections devoted to particular themes. I have preferred the second method, but the divisions that I have adopted necessarily overlap and the reader must excuse a certain amount of repetition. While each chapter aims to be complete in itself, I have tried to link it with all the other chapters that are associated with it; and this has sometimes obliged me to refer again to matters that have been more fully discussed in another place. Thus the history of certain Elizabethan companies cannot be divorced from the theatres in which they played; an account of the theatres for which Shakespeare wrote his plays, and of the actors who performed in them, leads to some consideration of his stagecraft, and his stagecraft is an important facet of his dramatic art; or again, the study of his mind and thought that is attempted in Chapter XI often infringes the study of his artistic method. My classifications, then, are not as rigid or as exclusive as they might appear. Indeed they are only approximate, as each chapter, beginning with a brief general discussion of its subject, leads in the end to Shakespeare, and the intention is that each chapter should be more or less self-contained.

Secondly, most of the book's suggestions and conclusions are only tentative. But, like Hamlet, many of Shakespeare's commentators know not *seems*, and I have tried always to indicate where a statement rests upon no certain evidence. Much, therefore, has had to be introduced with a *maybe*,

and if the result is sometimes blurred and unsatisfactory, I may plead that it is the more honest.

Upon thy certainty and confidence
What darest thou venture?

Sometimes far too much.

Any book of this kind owes a debt to previous scholars that is too large and various to be precisely acknowledged. In matters of fact the monumental work of Sir Edmund Chambers has been supplemented and brought up to date in Professor S. Schoenbaum's *William Shakespeare: a Compact Documentary Life* (1977), and Miss Muriel Bradbrook's *Shakespeare* (1978) is the fruit of a lifetime's study of the Elizabethan theatre. Although relatively brief and on some matters superseded, Peter Alexander's *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1939) is perhaps the book that most Shakespearean critics wish they could have written. Reference to some of my other sources is included in the text and the notes.

Hindhead, October 1979.

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Part I Beginnings

Chapter I Shakespeare's Youth

Like one that stands upon a promontory,
And spies a far-off shore.

3 *Hen VI* III ii 135.

The Warwickshire town of Stratford had its beginnings when the Romans carried a road across the Avon and built a military post to police the Celtic tribes that had taken refuge in the wooded valleys of the great forest of Arden. In Saxon times the district came under the authority of the bishops of Worcester, and a little colony of houses grew up around a monastery that was built near the site of the present church. At the Norman Conquest it was an agricultural community numbering about 150 inhabitants, and so it remained until, at the very end of the twelfth century, one of its bishops transformed it into a little town by encouraging building, laying out primitive streets and obtaining a charter for a weekly market. This was soon followed by royal charters sanctioning fairs at which local produce was displayed and sold.

Slowly Stratford grew in importance through the energy and initiative of its citizens. About a hundred years later the remarkable man known as John de Stratford left his midland parsonage for the dangers and responsibilities of a larger service to Church and State. As Bishop of Winchester he first attempted to reconcile Edward II with his enemies; and when reconciliation proved impossible, with the pragmatism characteristic of medieval prelaty he gave his support to the party which seemed likelier to prevail and he helped to remove Edward from the throne as decorously, but also as rapidly, as possible. His brief appearances in Marlowe's *Edward II* do not represent his historical importance during this crisis. In the new reign he became Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England, and until he quarrelled with Edward III and defied the secular power, he was for ten years the trusted adviser of the throne, travelling on important diplomatic missions. His brother Robert, Bishop of Chichester, also held the Great Seal; and Ralph de Stratford, probably Robert's son, became Bishop of London. While the people of Stratford presumably drew good example from the swift rise of this family, they also profited from the

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material benefactions which accompanied it. The beautiful church of the Holy Trinity, where Shakespeare was baptized and buried, took its present form chiefly through the gifts of John de Stratford, who enlarged the original building and endowed a chantry to say Masses for his soul. Ralph built a stone house for the residence of the chantry priests, under whose control the church came to be known as the Collegiate Church of Stratford.

But a mark of the sturdier medieval towns was their insistence upon withdrawing their civic affairs from ecclesiastical domination, and Stratford was run neither by the collegiate priests nor by its bishop. Although dedicated by its origins to the simple performance of religious rites and duties, the thirteenth-century Guild of the Holy Cross soon became the principal administrative body of the town. A medieval guild exercised a vast paternal authority. The fixing of wages and prices and the general supervision of a town's economic pursuits were only one part of its responsibilities. It framed and administered sumptuary laws which detailed the clothing held to be appropriate to each class, prescribed the people's diet and regulated their pastimes; it sent the children to school, paved and swept the streets, gave charity to the poor and decreed the privileges and obligations of visiting merchants and travellers. The wide range of its activities invested it with a considerable civil jurisdiction, so that towns with an energetic and efficient guild were the first to outgrow the restraints of feudal and ecclesiastical control and virtually to become self-governing communities. In Stratford all citizens of any standing belonged to the guild. It was richly endowed and had its own chapel and school. The foundations of the chapel were laid by Robert de Stratford, and it was rebuilt and enlarged in 1496 by Sir Hugh Clopton, a Stratford man who went to London to seek his fortune and, in story-book fashion, prospered as a mercer and became sheriff and lord mayor. The school was founded in 1427 to give a free education to children of the guild's members, and its generous endowments enabled it to take its place among the free grammar-schools, some three hundred in number, which were scattered over England as a reminder that not all medieval learning was monastic.

Thus at the end of the Middle Ages Stratford was already a flourishing little town. Baconians (and some others) have used words like *oaf* and *peasant* in reference to Shakespeare, in the belief that his birthplace was a benighted hamlet whose rude inhabitants toiled from sunrise to nightfall in the less exacting tasks of the agricultural round. At the time of the Reformation Stratford had a population of about 2000, but neighbouring Coventry, one of the half-dozen largest cities in England, had only 7000. The stone bridge with fourteen arches which Sir Hugh Clopton had built over the Avon disputed the town's architectural pride with the Collegiate Church and the Guild Chapel. The little stucco houses, with their timbered beams and thatched roofs, mostly had their own kiln-houses for

brewing and yeling-houses for cooling the beer, their apple-chambers, powdering-tubs and bolting-houses, all marks of an energetic independence. They were occupied by weavers, woolmen, tanners, millers, maltsters and the like, together with sprinkling of men of more specialized accomplishment. Stratford, described by Camden as '*emporium non inelegans*', did not depend for its prosperity merely on farming and the marketing of agricultural produce. Many of its citizens were engaged in glove-making, weaving, dyeing, rope-making, leather-dressing and similar crafts, and the complexities of this trading required the presence of professional men competent to adjudge the legal niceties and keep the accounts. The town's economic life as well as its civic life reflected an active, resourceful and essentially mature community.

The English Reformation was unusual in being one of the few revolutions in history to be initiated by a ruling class, and in a place like Stratford it took the form, at least in its earlier stages, of a series of arbitrary changes decreed by an external authority whose impact had seldom been experienced. The concept of a sovereign law-giving power being theoretically unknown in the Middle Ages, these changes were little understood at first and, whether they were understood or not, were largely resented. In Stratford, as elsewhere, religious innovation was accompanied by social interference that struck at the root of the town's traditional life. Because the saying of perpetual Masses seemed to Protestants to arrogate to man the Almighty's prerogative of forgiveness, the chantry college was suppressed and the house built by Bishop Ralph de Stratford became a private residence which was occupied in Shakespeare's day by his friend Thomas Combe. Charitable guilds too were denounced as nurslings of superstition, and the Guild of the Holy Cross was dissolved, its school dispersed and its property appropriated by the Crown. The town was bereft not only of education but of its organs of self-government.

But Stratford was more fortunate than some. In 1553, after a few years of confusion and uncertainty, Edward VI gave the town a charter which revived the old guild as the new Corporation of Stratford. In the meantime the Bishop of Worcester had forfeited his two Stratford manors to the Duke of Northumberland. On their reverting to the Crown, they were transferred in 1562 to his son Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, who was lord of the manor for the first twenty-six years of Shakespeare's life.

In the long run, therefore, the early changes of the Reformation did not seriously interrupt Stratford's steady growth in importance and prosperity. The chantry priests were gone, but maybe they were not much missed: perpetual Masses tied up money whose worldly uses might be more conspicuously efficacious. The people were still christened, wed and buried at Holy Trinity, as most of them always had been, and the new corporation at once resumed the powers and duties of the vanished guild. King Edward's charter endowed it with the guild's properties in the chapel, guildhall,

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school, almshouse and sundry holdings in real estate; the guild's former officers became municipal officers sitting on the new corporation, or town council, and Stratford became once more a community allowed in the main to direct its own affairs. The progression of offices soon to be held by Shakespeare's father would show the long reach of its paternal activities. Wages and prices were controlled and local industry was protected — quite literally protected when the corporation equipped an armed force to repel the traders of Coventry: the commercial feud between Ephesus and Syracuse, in which Aegeon's life might be forfeit, was the sort of thing that Shakespeare knew on his own doorstep, although he would colour it for dramatic purposes. Provisions for the public health imposed penalties for those who fouled the streets with refuse (John Shakespeare himself was fined the considerable sum of one shilling for leaving a '*sterquinarium*' outside his house, and his friend John Sadler fined for winnowing peas in Chapel Lane and offering the chaff to his pigs) or left their dogs unmuzzled or let their ducks wander unrestrained. Growing Protestant influence on the council was to be seen in the fines levied for profanity, card-playing and similar infractions. At the same time the guild's old school was re-founded as the King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon (to persist in the whim of acknowledging Edward VI as its pious founder), with funds to provide the schoolmaster with a house and a salary of £20 a year. This was double the emolument of masters of most comparable schools and larger than that of many university Fellows. He had still to be in holy orders and to receive a licence from the bishop, and he still taught the fortifying discipline of classical studies that had been the staple nourishment of grammar-schools since grammar-schools began. So having repossessed themselves of their traditional forms of education and the only form of government they could remember, by the date of Shakespeare's birth the citizens of Stratford had recovered the familiar pattern of their useful lives.

In the middle years of the century — certainly before 1552, when he was fined for leaving garbage outside his house instead of using the 'common muckhill' provided — John Shakespeare, a farmer of the neighbouring village of Snitterfield, came to live in Stratford. Tradition has declared him to have been, among other things, a butcher, wool-merchant, corn-chandler and maltster, but principally he traded as a glover and whittawer, or dresser of white leather: a skilled craft in which he sold not only gloves but soft leathers like aprons, belts and purses. His son grew up in the shop and the plays attest his knowledge of the business: he could distinguish the uses of the various hides and skins, as that cheveril, the skin of kids, made the finest gloves because of its softness and flexibility, and men of a certain sort would have a 'soft cheveril conscience' (*Henry VIII* II iii 32). But in the modern phrase John Shakespeare evidently 'diversified' his interests. He had no wish to continue as a farmer because on his father's death in

1561 he parted with the copyhold of the substantial property at Snitterfield, but he appears to have traded in wool, malt and timber. Indeed the eastern wing of the house in Henley Street was for long known locally as the Woolshop. This was probably the house which, along with another in Greenhill Street, he bought in 1556, having previously lived as a tenant at the adjoining house to the west. These two properties, the traditional Birthplace, were joined together at some later date unknown.

A year or two later John married Mary, youngest of the eight daughters of Robert Arden of Wilmcote. The Shakespeares have not been traced farther back than John's father Richard, who was a prosperous yeoman farmer, but the Ardens claimed a lineage which stretched back beyond the Norman Conquest. The Saxon Turchill accommodated himself to the new settlers and avoided the confiscation of his estates. Adopting the Norman practice of taking a surname, he chose the name of Arden from the forests where his ancestors had lived, and in this he is recorded in the Domesday survey as a holder of land. It has not been established to which branch of this important family Robert Arden belonged, but possibly he took his descent from a minor branch of the Ardens of Park Hall, which was near Coleshill. With his father Thomas he bought an estate at Snitterfield in 1501, and Richard Shakespeare was his tenant in one of his holdings there.

Through her family connections, however distant, Mary Arden was of a higher social class than her husband, and she could bring to the house in Henley Street the advantages of birth and an assured inheritance. At his death in 1556 her father had left her, the youngest of his daughters, the largest of his Wilmcote properties, Asbies, as well as other land in the parish. It often happens that in the parentage of genius the mother is the stronger partner and a woman of commanding personality, but Mary Shakespeare has remained in the shadows. Her involvement in the vicissitudes of her husband's career is unknown. She bore him eight children, seemingly acquiesced in his mortgaging of her inherited property, and outlived him by seven years. We may wonder about her influence upon her famous son, but we wonder in vain.

Having established his business and his marriage, John Shakespeare undertook a career of public service of a kind to be expected of a substantial citizen. His first municipal appointment, in 1556, was to the post of ale-conner, reserved for 'able persons and discreet', who had to see that brewers, and also bakers, sold goods of prescribed quality and price. In 1558 he was made a constable and was reappointed in the following year, when the duties of *affeeror*, who assessed penalties for offences for which no punishment was prescribed by statute, were added to him. Elected then as a burghess on the town council, from 1561 to 1563 he served two terms as chamberlain, with responsibility for borough property and accounts. He was diligent in restoring dilapidated property, so long as it was not

ecclesiastical, and in raising money for people in distress, and on the expiry of his term he was deputed to assist his successors. In 1565 he became an alderman and in 1568 he attained the highest office that the town could offer, that of bailiff, or presiding officer of the corporation. In this role he also served the borough as coroner and Justice of the Peace. His year of office was touched by important national events. Mary Queen of Scots, the focus of Catholic revolt, was detained in the midlands, and the recruiting-officers of the Earls of Leicester and Warwick were mustering soldiers for the army that would suppress the Northern Rebellion. By way of diversion Stratford was visited for the first time by professional companies, the Queen's Men and Worcester's Men, and John Shakespeare as bailiff granted them licences to act in the guildhall. For some years yet his prosperity was on a rising tide. In 1571 he was chief alderman and deputy-bailiff to his friend Adrian Quiney, and four years later he paid £40 for two houses in Stratford, one of them possibly the western house in Henley Street where previously he may have been only the tenant. In 1576 he proposed to set a crown upon his career when he applied for a coat-of-arms and the status of 'gentleman'.

Thus the home to which William Shakespeare was born was blessed with material prosperity and the esteem due to active and disinterested service. His mother was of gentle birth and came from an old and distinguished Warwickshire family; his father, although of yeoman stock, had developed a successful business in the town and by virtue of his public service and his connections through marriage might reasonably aspire to attain the same social level as his wife. John Shakespeare was not a rough, unlettered tradesman. His habit of signing official documents not with his name but with a mark — usually a drawing of his glover's compasses — led the eighteenth century to believe that he was illiterate; but a mark of this sort was commonly set on public documents and was thought to be somehow more authentic than an autograph signature. We do not know whether William grew up in an atmosphere of books and cultured intercourse; probably he did not. But his father was a man of enterprise and practical ability, and of a higher social standing than, for instance, Marlowe the shoemaker or Jonson the bricklayer; his status was nearer to that of Spenser the clothier, Greene the saddler or Lodge the grocer — or even Milton the scrivener.

William was not the eldest child of the marriage. First came two girls, Joan and Margaret, who died in infancy; and when William was hurried to his baptism on 26 April 1564,¹ his parents probably feared that within a few weeks they might be following another little coffin to the churchyard.

¹ It is merely a convention which accepts 23 April, St George's Day, as the date of his birth. In days of high infant mortality it was customary to have babies christened as soon as possible, and this was the date — the beginning of a child's spiritual life — usually entered in the registers.

At the end of the long, meatless winter April was the cruellest month; and in 1564 Stratford was gripped by a plague which carried off nearly 250 people within six months. But the child survived, and a certain physical toughness must have been born in him: the Elizabethan theatre was no place for weaklings. Five more children followed: Gilbert in 1566, a second Joan in 1569, Anne in 1571, Richard in 1574 and Edmund in 1580. All but Anne outgrew the dangerous years of childhood, but only Joan outlived William.²

So far the picture is firm and definite. We know surprisingly *much* about Shakespeare's background, about his family, the town where he was born and the avocations of his fellow-citizens. It is a very ordinary picture, and in its surface features his life continued to be ordinary, presenting the familiar tale of one who went to London to seek a living, achieved the sort of material success that could be recognized in his own lifetime, and in due course retired to his home town to make careful testamentary provisions on behalf of his family. Of course this is not quite what his destiny should have been. He should have gone to the grammar-school, apprenticed himself to his father's craft and eventually, having married a Sadler or a Quiney or a Rogers, have as the eldest son taken over the business in Henley Street, possibly enlivening the unchanging years with an occasional turn of municipal office. But his future had a different pattern, and it is disappointing that after the stage has been set, as it were, in full view of the audience, the curtain should fall just when the action is due to begin. We are faced now with two mysteries which have not yet yielded their secret: there is no certain explanation of the sudden change in John Shakespeare's fortunes after 1576, and we know nothing of the formative years which ended in his son's going to London to become a common player. After the record of his baptism in 1564 the next certain fact about Shakespeare is that in 1582 he was granted a licence to marry. Ten years later a well-known London dramatist wrote of him as one who had begun to make a name as actor and playwright. Of the years between there is no trace.

The Shakespeare boys would have been expected to go to the King's New School, where most of the sons of Stratford were educated, and probably they did. Visitors today, especially if they are American, are sometimes shown the very desk at which William sat and the horn-book at which he acquired the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer, but the registers of the period are missing and there is no evidence that he attended the school at all. If he did not, it may have been because he had the singing voice and presentable appearance which could earn country boys a place in the choir of some nobleman's household; or maybe his mother, with ambitions to

² All eight children were baptized at Holy Trinity and all but Edmund, the youngest, were buried there. Only William and Joan were married, neither at Holy Trinity.

remove him from his apparent destiny in the glover's shop, importuned her father's family to use their influence to this effect. Against this, however, it is evident that at some time in his life Shakespeare acquainted himself with the formal routine of grammar-school studies, even if they brought him, by Ben Jonson's standards, 'small Latin and less Greek'.

Education began, at the age of four or five, at the petty school, where an 'abecedarius', an unqualified usher, gave instruction in the three Rs. At the grammar-school an Elizabethan schoolboy's lessons, enforced by not infrequent 'jerks of the breech', continued from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. The curriculum consisted chiefly of Latin, and its hard core was Lyly's *Grammatica Latina*, which by royal decree was the sole authority for use in schools. Having mastered the rudiments of grammar, the pupils went on to read certain approved works and authors, such as the fables of Aesop, the maxims of Cato, the eclogues of Virgil and Baptista Spagnolo (the 'good old Mantuan' beloved of Holofernes), Cicero, Sallust, Horace, Ovid and the *Copia Rerum et Verborum* of Erasmus. They learned little else. They had a smattering of arithmetic, but they were not seriously troubled with French, which was the language of the traditional enemy. Perhaps they had sufficient Greek to read the New Testament in the original, but they would be more familiar with the Bishops' Bible, an English version prepared early in the reign under the direction of Matthew Parker, or possibly, in towns which like Stratford came increasingly under Puritan influence, with the Geneva Bible, a tendentious version compiled by Calvin and a committee of Marian fugitives.

For all its rigidity, this austere curriculum provided a common stock of legend and story that gave enrichment to the lives of many diverse men, and its solid grounding in classical history was held to furnish statesmen with a fund of warnings and examples sufficient for the conduct of public affairs. But its most valuable achievement was that its objective and undeviating investigation of all the arts of language — not its grammar and syntax merely, but its use as an instrument of reason or a key to unlock the heart — taught its pupils an unrivalled mastery of expression.

If Shakespeare did not receive this discipline at the Stratford school, it is surprising. His plays and poetry seem to reveal an intimate familiarity with the whole process of education as it existed in his youth. It is not just that he could at will illustrate his work by allusion to the myths and heroes of classical antiquity, for no writer of the Renaissance period could help doing that. He seems to be always giving indications of having in the first instance acquired his Latin and little Greek at the feet of Holofernes himself, and of having failed to relish the experience. The study of the *Grammatica Latina*, which Elizabethan schoolboys had to learn by heart, is recollected in the scene (*MWW* IV i) in which Sir Hugh Evans puts young William through his paces; Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel litter their speech with snatches of grammar, as the sublimely absurd 'A soul

feminine saluteth us', and of the formal phrases of the *Sententiae Pueriles* (*LLL* IV ii and V i). From *King John* the lines

'I shall beseech you' — that is *Question* now.
And then comes *Answer*, like an absey-book:
'O, sir,' says *Answer*, 'at your best command:
At your employment; at your service, sir'

KJ I i 195.

are founded on the students' Primer. Again, Katherine's 'Fair as a text B in a copy-book' (*LLL* V ii 42) refers to the exercises by which schoolboys were taught to write the 'old English' script that was fashionable at the time. Everywhere Shakespeare's attitude to the aridities of professional Logic and Rhetoric is that of a man who has been obliged to submit to their discipline rather by compulsion than by choice. We need not attach much importance to his

whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school,

AYLI II vii 145.

or to such remarks as

Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books,

RJ II ii 157.

as a man does not need to have gone to school himself to know that most schoolboys would rather be elsewhere. But we do seem to find evidence of a positive dislike of the pains attendant on a formal education and of the sort of man who enjoyed being 'a domineering pedant o'er the boy'. It has frequently been observed that schoolmasters were the only class of being whom he excluded from his capacious sympathy. He appears to have found them ridiculous. Sir Hugh, who combined teaching with his pastoral duties, is a strutting bantam, Pinch a superstitious ass; and Holofernes, named after one of whom 'it is declared through the whole earth that only thou art excellent and of a wonderful knowledge,' struggles to a fleeting humanity only when the courtiers have punctured his self-esteem.

Shakespeare could have acquired this outlook if, as some commentators believe, he was for a time a teacher himself, but he had other opportunities of studying the habits of the profession. In a little town like Stratford the dominie, although not necessarily respected, was something of a personage. The first schoolmaster whom he might have known when a very young boy was Walter Roche, who arrived in 1569 but resigned two years later to practise law in the town although apparently retaining an ecclesias-

tical living at Droitwich. Later he was a neighbour of the Shakespeares in Chapel Street. His successor at the school was Simon Hunt, who has been identified, though not with total assurance, as the Simon Hunt who went to Douai in 1575, became a Jesuit and died in Rome. If this was the man and Shakespeare was his pupil, it would have been between the ages of seven and eleven: hypotheses on which bold and far-reaching constructions have been founded. After Hunt came Thomas Jenkins, a man of humble origins who in 1579 seems to have bought himself out of the post in order to become a soldier. His name and presumed ancestry have helped to identify him with Sir Hugh Evans, even with Fluellen, but by birth he was a Londoner and there was a Welsh actor available to the London companies at the time of these creations. Having to find a replacement as a condition of his departure, Jenkins chose John Cottam, who resigned, or was dismissed, after two years. He was a Catholic recusant, brother of Father Thomas Cottam who was arraigned before the same tribunal as Edmund Campion (when a principal informer for the Crown was the playwright Anthony Munday) and martyred in 1582. All these four schoolmasters were Oxford graduates, which shows the calibre of man that Stratford could afford, but the God-fearing Puritan town was less than blessed when two of them — or one at least — proved to be obdurately Catholic.

After this sequence of rapid changes the school acquired a master who reigned for more than forty years. This was the locally-celebrated Alexander Aspinall, again an Oxford graduate and, like Roche and Cottam, a Lancastrian. His academic attainments were combined with a shrewd capacity for civic and commercial affairs. He held various municipal offices, serving as chamberlain and alderman, and he conducted successful transactions in wool, yarn and malt. In recognition of this versatility, and perhaps of the vast esteem in which he held himself, he was known in Stratford as 'Great Philip Macedon'. He is the likeliest model for Holofernes. Shakespeare certainly knew him because he married a widow who lived nearby in Henley Street. Perhaps he generalized a distaste for Aspinall's academic conceit into a distaste for the whole profession. But all this is conjecture. In the absence of the registers we do not know whether Shakespeare went to the grammar-school or whether he did not; and if we think it probable that he did, it is safer to base the supposition on the common practice of citizens' sons in Stratford than on a version of his schooldays derived from selected passages from the plays.

When Shakespeare was about thirteen, some unexplained disaster fell upon his father. In January 1577 the prosperous alderman who had just applied for a coat-of-arms missed a meeting of the council for only the second time since his election some twenty years earlier; and apart from an appearance in 1582 to support the election of his friend John Sadler as bailiff, he did not attend again before he was expelled in 1586. In 1578 he mortgaged part of his wife's estate at Asbies to her brother-in-law Edmund