



Will in the World

HOW SHAKESPEARE
BECAME SHAKESPEARE

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CHAPTER 4



Woong, Wedding, and Repenting

IF WILL RETURNED to Stratford in 1582 in the wake of a tense sojourn in Lancashire, if he agreed to go to Shottery that summer to convey a risky message or pass along a secret religious token to the Debdales, then his wooing of Anne Hathaway was manifestly a rebellion against the empire of fear. Anne's world was the diametrical opposite of the dangerous world to which he may have been exposed: the powerful all-male bonds formed by Simon Hunt, the schoolmaster who had gone off to the seminary with his student Robert Debdale; the conspiracy to protect Campion, Parsons, Cottam, and the other Jesuit missionaries; the secret sodality of pious, suicidal young men. But even if the circumstances were far less dire, even if Will were merely an inexperienced Stratford adolescent whose principal social points of reference had been his family and the boys at the King's New School, Anne Hathaway must have represented a startling alternative. Will's family almost certainly leaned toward Catholicism, and Anne's almost certainly leaned in the opposite direction. In his will, Anne's father, Richard, asked to be "honestly buried," the code phrase for the simple, stark burials favored by Puritans. Anne's brother Bartholomew also asked

for such a burial, "hoping to arise at the Latter Day and to receive the reward of His elect." "His elect": these are people far different from Campion or, for that matter, the Catholic Ardens to whom Shakespeare's mother was related.

Anne Hathaway represented an escape in another sense: she was in the unusual position of being her own woman. Very few young, unmarried Elizabethan women had any executive control over their own lives; the girl's watchful father and mother would make the key decisions for their daughter, ideally, though not always, with her consent. But Anne—an orphan in her midtwenties, with some resources left to her by her father's will and more due to her upon her marriage—was, in the phrase of the times, "wholly at her own government." She was independent, in a way virtually ordained to excite a young man's sexual interest, and she was free to make her own decisions. Shakespeare's lifelong fascination with women who are in this position may have had its roots in the sense of freedom Anne Hathaway awakened in him. He would have felt a release from the constraints of his own family, a release too, perhaps, from the sexual confusion and ambiguity that Elizabethan moralists associated with playacting. If the imaginary schoolboy performance of Plautus had any equivalent in reality—if Will ever experienced a disturbing erotic excitement in acting a love scene with another boy—then Anne Hathaway offered a reassuringly conventional resolution to his sexual ambivalence or perplexity.

Quite apart from this imaginary resolution—whose appeal, albeit temporary, is not to be underestimated—Anne offered a compelling dream of pleasure. So at least one might conclude from the centrality of wooing in Shakespeare's whole body of work, from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew* to *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Lovemaking, not in the sense of sexual intercourse but in the older sense of intense courting and pleading and longing, was one of his abiding preoccupations, one of the things he understood and expressed more profoundly than almost anyone in the world. That understanding may not have had anything to do with the woman he married, of course, and, theoretically at least, it need not have had anything to do with his lived experience at all. But the whole impulse to explore Shakespeare's life arises

from the powerful conviction that his plays and poems spring not only from other plays and poems but from things he knew firsthand, in his body and soul.

The adult Shakespeare is very funny about the love antics of rustic youths. In *As You Like It*, for example, he mocks the besotted bumpkin so in love with a milkmaid that he kisses "the cow's dugs that her pretty chapped hands had milked" (2.4.44-45). But somewhere lurking behind the laughter may be a distorted, wry recollection of Shakespeare's own fumbling adolescent efforts, efforts that were perhaps more amply rewarded than he had anticipated. By the summer's end, Anne Hathaway was pregnant.

Shakespeare's marriage has been the subject of almost frenzied interest, ever since a great nineteenth-century bibliophile, Sir Thomas Phillipps, found an odd document in the bishop of Worcester's registry. The document, dated November 28, 1582, was a bond for what was in the period a very large sum of money, forty pounds (twice the annual income of the Stratford schoolmaster; eight times the annual income of a London clothworker), put up in order to facilitate the wedding of "William Shagspere" and "Anne Hathwey of Stratford in the Dioces of Worcester maiden."

The couple—or someone close to the couple—wanted the marriage to take place without delay. The reason for the haste was not specified in the bond, but for once there is a properly documented explanation: the baptism six months later—on May 28, 1583, to be exact—of their daughter Susanna. The language of the bond notwithstanding, a "maiden" Anne Hathaway of Stratford in the diocese of Worcester was definitely not.

Normally, a wedding ceremony could take place only after the banns—the formal declaration of an intent to marry—had been publicly proclaimed on three successive Sundays in the local parish church. The interval that this process necessarily entailed could be compounded by the vagaries of canon law (the code of ecclesiastical rules and regulations), which did not permit the reading of banns during certain periods in the church calendar. In late November 1582 such a prohibited period was fast approaching. By submitting a sworn assurance that there were no impediments of the sort that the banns were designed to bring to

light, it was possible, for a fee, to obtain a dispensation, enabling a marriage license to be issued at once. But to back up the sworn assurance, there had to be a way to indemnify the diocesan authorities and to guarantee that something—a prior contract to marry, for example, or the objection of a parent to the marriage choice of a minor, or a covenant not to marry until the end of a term of apprenticeship—would not unexpectedly turn up, solemn oaths notwithstanding, and send the whole business into court. Hence the bond, which would become void if no impediment surfaced.

It is not known if Will's parents approved of the marriage of their eighteen-year-old son to the pregnant twenty-six-year-old bride. Then as now, in England eighteen would have been regarded as young for a man to marry; the mean age upon marriage for males in Stratford in 1600 (the earliest date for which there are reliable figures) was twenty-eight. And it was unusual for a man to marry a woman so much his senior; women in this period were on average two years younger than their husbands. The exceptions were generally among the upper classes, where marriages were in effect property transactions between families and very young children could be betrothed. (In such cases, the marriages were not consummated until years after the wedding, and the newlyweds often waited a very long time before they began to live together.) In the case of Anne Hathaway, the bride had something of an inheritance, but she was hardly a great heiress—in his will her father had stipulated that she was to receive six pounds thirteen shillings fourpence on her marriage—and a financially embarrassed, communally prominent John Shakespeare might have hoped that his son's bride would bring a larger dowry. Had they bitterly objected, Shakespeare's parents could have made a legal fuss, since their son was a minor. (The age of majority was twenty-one.) They did not do so, perhaps because, as legal records show, Shakespeare's father had been acquainted with Anne's father. Still, it is likely that in the eyes of John and Mary Shakespeare, Will was not making a great match.

And Will? Through the centuries eighteen-year-old boys have not been famously eager in such situations to rush to the altar. Will might, of course, have been an exception. Certainly, he was able as a playwright to imagine such impatience. "When and where and how / We met, we

wooded, and made exchange of vow / I'll tell thee as we pass," Romeo tells Friar Laurence on the morning after the Capulet ball; "but this I pray, / That thou consent to marry us today" (2.2.61–64).

Romeo and Juliet's depiction of the frantic haste of the rash lovers blends together humor, irony, poignancy, and disapproval, but Shakespeare conveys above all a deep inward understanding of what it feels like to be young, desperate to wed, and tormented by delay. In the great balcony scene, though they have only just met, Romeo and Juliet exchange "love's faithful vow" with one another. "If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage," Juliet tells Romeo at the close of the most passionate love scene Shakespeare ever wrote, "send me word tomorrow." When she knows "Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite," she declares, "All my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay, / And follow thee, my lord, throughout the world" (2.1.169, 185–86, 188–90).

Hence the urgency of Romeo's visit to the friar early the next morning, and hence the wild eagerness of Juliet for the return of her nurse, whom she has sent to get Romeo's response. "Old folks, many feign as they were dead," the young girl complains, "Unwieldy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead." When the nurse finally trundles in, Juliet can scarcely pry the all-important news from her:

NURSE: I am a-weary. Give me leave a while.

Fie, how my bones ache. What a jaunce have I!

JULIET: I would thou hadst my bones and I thy news.

Nay, come, I pray thee speak, good, good Nurse, speak.

NURSE: Jesu, what haste! Can you not stay a while?

Do you not see that I am out of breath?

JULIET: How art thou out of breath when thou hast breath

To say to me that thou art out of breath?

The excuse that thou dost make in this delay

Is longer than the tale thou dost excuse.

.....

What says he of our marriage—what of that?

(2.4.16–17, 25–46)

Exasperated impatience has never been more deftly and sympathetically chronicled.

Romeo's urgency is sketched rather cursorily; it is Juliet's that is given much fuller scope and intensity. Similarly, it is eminently likely that Anne, three months pregnant, rather than the young Will, was the prime source of the impatience that led to the bond. To be sure, this was Elizabethan and not Victorian England: an unmarried mother in the 1580s did not, as she would in the 1880s, routinely face fierce, unrelenting social stigmatization. But the shame and social disgrace in Shakespeare's time were real enough; bastardy was severely frowned upon by the community, as the child would need to be fed and clothed; and the six pounds thirteen shillings fourpence would only be given to Anne when she found a husband.

The substantial bond to hurry the marriage along was posted by a pair of Stratford farmers, Fulke Sandells and John Rychardson, friends of the bride's late father. The young bridegroom and father-to-be may have been grateful for this handsome assistance, but it is far more likely that he was a reluctant, perhaps highly reluctant, beneficiary. If the playwright's imagination subsequently conjured up an impatient Romeo, eager to wed, it also conjured up a series of foot-dragging bridegrooms shamed or compelled to wed the women with whom they have slept. "She is two months on her way," the clown Costard tells the braggart Armado, who has seduced a peasant girl. "What meanest thou?" Armado demands, trying to bluster his way out of the situation, but Costard insists: "She's quick. The child brags in her belly already. 'Tis yours" (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.658–63). Armado is no romantic hero; like Lucio in *Measure for Measure* and Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well*, he is treated with irony, distaste, and contempt. But these may have been precisely the feelings evoked in Shakespeare when he looked back upon his own marriage.

In one of his earliest works, the *1 Henry VI*, he had a character compare a marriage by compulsion to one made voluntarily:

For what is wedlock forcèd but a hell,
An age of discord and continual strife,

Whereas the contrary bringeth bliss,
 And is a pattern of celestial peace.
 (5.7.62–65)

The character is an earl, cynically persuading the king to make what will be a bad match, but the dream of bliss seems valid enough, along with the sense that “wedlock forcèd” is an almost certain recipe for unhappiness. Perhaps at the time he wrote those lines, in the early 1590s, Shakespeare was reflecting on the source of his own marital unhappiness. Perhaps too there is a personal reflection in Richard of Gloucester’s sly observation “Yet hasty marriage seldom proveth well” (*3 Henry VI*, 4.1.18) or in Count Orsino’s advice in *Twelfth Night*:

Let still the woman take
 An elder than herself. So wears she to him;
 So sways she level in her husband’s heart.
 (2.4.28–30)

Of course, each of these lines has a specific dramatic context, but they were all written by someone who at eighteen years of age had hastily married a woman older than himself and then left her behind in Stratford. How could he have written Orsino’s words without in some sense bringing his own life, his disappointment, frustration, and loneliness, to bear upon them?

Suspicion that Will was dragged to the altar has been heightened by another document. The bond for the grant of a marriage license to William Shagspere and Anne Hathwey is dated November 28, but the Worcester archives also record a marriage license dated one day earlier, November 27, for the wedding of William Shaxpere and Anne Whatley of Temple Grafton. As there were other Shakespeares in Warwickshire, a different William could conceivably have happened to wed at just this time. Assuming, however, that such a coincidence would be unlikely, who on earth is Anne Whatley of Temple Grafton, a village about five miles west of Stratford? A woman Will loved and was hastening to marry until

he was strong-armed by Sandells and Rychardson into wedlock with the pregnant Anne Hathaway?

The possibility has a novelistic appeal: “And so he was still riding to Temple Grafton in cold November,” wrote Anthony Burgess in a fine flight of fancy, “winter’s first harbingers biting. Hoofs rang frosty on the road. Hard by Shottery two men stopped him. They addressed him by name and bade him dismount.” But most scholars have agreed with Joseph Gray, who concluded in 1905, after extensive study, that the clerk who entered the names on the license simply became confused and wrote Whatley instead of Hathaway. Most scholars imagine too that Will was in some measure willing. But the state of his feelings at the time of his wedding is not known, and his attitude toward his wife during the subsequent thirty-two years of marriage can only be surmised. Between his wedding license and his last will and testament, Shakespeare left no direct, personal trace of his relationship with his wife—or none, in any case, that survives. From this supremely eloquent man, there have been found no love letters to Anne, no signs of shared joy or grief, no words of advice, not even any financial transactions.

A sentimental nineteenth-century picture shows Shakespeare at home in Stratford, reciting one of his plays to his family—his father and mother listening from a distance, a dog at his feet, his three children gathered around him, his wife looking up at him adoringly from her needlework—but such a moment, if it ever occurred, would have been exceedingly rare. For most of his married life he lived in London, and Anne and the children apparently remained in Stratford. That in itself does not necessarily imply estrangement; husbands and wives have often been constrained for long periods to live at a considerable distance from one another. But it must have been exceptionally difficult in Shakespeare’s time to bridge this distance, to keep up any intimacy. All the more difficult, of course, if, as seems likely, his wife Anne could not read or write. Of course, most of the women in his world had little or no literacy, but the commonness of the condition does not change the fact: it is entirely possible that Shakespeare’s wife never read a word he wrote, that anything he sent her from London had to be read by a neighbor,

that anything she wished to tell him—the local gossip, the health of his parents, the mortal illness of their only son—had to be consigned to a messenger.

Perhaps the optimists are right and their relationship, notwithstanding the long years apart, was a good one. Biographers eager for Shakespeare to have had a good marriage have stressed that when he made some money in the theater, he established his wife and family in New Place, the fine house he bought in Stratford; that he must have frequently visited them there; that he chose to retire early and return permanently to Stratford a few years before his untimely death. Some have gone further and assumed that he must have had Anne and the children stay with him for prolonged periods in London. “None has spoken more frankly or justly of the honest joys of ‘board and bed,’” wrote the distinguished antiquarian Edgar Fripp, pointing to lines from *Coriolanus*:

I loved the maid I married; never man
Sighed truer breath. But that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold.

(4.5.113–17)

But if these lines were, as Fripp thought, a recollection of the dramatist’s own feelings many years before, the recollection was far more bitter than sentimental: they are spoken by the warrior Aufidius, whose rapt heart dances at seeing the hated man he has long dreamed of killing.

It is, perhaps, as much what Shakespeare did *not* write as what he did that seems to indicate something seriously wrong with his marriage. This was an artist who made use of virtually everything that came his way. He mined, with very few exceptions, the institutions and professions and personal relationships that touched his life. He was the supreme poet of courtship: one has only to think of the aging sonneteer and the fair young man, panting Venus and reluctant Adonis, Orlando and Rosalind, Petruccio and Kate, even twisted, perverse Richard III and Lady Anne.

And he was a great poet of the family, with a special, deep interest in the murderous rivalry of brothers and in the complexity of father-daughter relations: Egeus and Hermia, Brabantio and Desdemona, Lear and the fearsome threesome, Pericles and Marina, Prospero and Miranda. But though wedlock is the promised land toward which his comic heroes and heroines strive, and though family fission is the obsessive theme of the tragedies, Shakespeare was curiously restrained in his depictions of what it is actually like to be married.

To be sure, he provided some fascinating glimpses. A few of his married couples have descended into mutual loathing: “O Goneril!” cries the disgusted Albany, in *King Lear*. “You are not worth the dust which the rude wind / Blows in your face.” “Milk-livered man!” she spits back at him. “That bear’st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs: . . . Marry, your manhood! mew!” (4.2.30–32, 51–69). But for the most part, they are in subtler, more complex states of estrangement. Mostly, it’s wives feeling neglected or shut out. “For what offence,” Kate Percy asks her husband, Harry (better known as Hotspur), in *1 Henry IV*, “have I this fortnight been / A banished woman from my Harry’s bed?” She has in point of fact committed no offence—Hotspur is deeply preoccupied with plotting a rebellion—but she is not wrong to feel excluded. Hotspur has chosen to keep his wife in the dark:

But hark you, Kate.
I must not have you henceforth question me
Whither I go, nor reason whereabouts.
Whither I must, I must; and, to conclude,
This evening must I leave you, gentle Kate.
(2.4.32–33, 93–97)

The rebellion is a family affair—Hotspur has been drawn into it by his father and his uncle—but though the fate of his wife will certainly be involved in its outcome, the only knowledge she has of it is from words she has overheard him muttering in his troubled sleep. With bluff, genial misogyny Hotspur explains that he simply does not trust her:

I know you wise, but yet no farther wise
 Than Harry Percy's wife; constant you are,
 But yet a woman; and for secrecy
 No lady closer, for I well believe
 Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.
 And so far will I trust thee, gentle Kate.

(2.4.98–103)

The words are all good-humored and exuberant, in the way most of the things Hotspur says are, but the marriage they sketch is one at whose core is mutual isolation. (The same play, *1 Henry IV*, gives another, more graphic vision of such a marriage in Edmund Mortimer and his Welsh wife: "This is the deadly spite that angers me: / My wife can speak no English, I no Welsh" [3.1.188–89].)

Shakespeare returned to the theme in *Julius Caesar*, where Brutus's wife, Portia, complains that she has been deliberately shut out of her husband's inner life. Unlike Kate Percy, Portia is not banished from her husband's bed, but her exclusion from his mind leaves her feeling, she says, like a whore:

Am I yourself

But as it were in sort or limitation?
 To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
 And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
 Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
 Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

(2.1.281–86)

The question here and elsewhere in the plays is the degree of intimacy that husbands and wives can achieve, and the answer Shakespeare repeatedly gives is very little.

Shakespeare was not alone in his time in finding it difficult to portray or even imagine fully achieved marital intimacy. It took decades of Puritan insistence on the importance of companionship in marriage to change the social, cultural, and psychological landscape. By the time Milton published *Paradise Lost*, in 1667, the landscape was decisively differ-

ent. Marriage was no longer the consolation prize for those who did not have the higher vocation of celibacy; it was not the doctrinally approved way of avoiding the sin of fornication; it was not even principally the means of generating offspring and conveying property. It was about the dream of long-term love.

But it is not clear how much of this dream could have been envisaged when Will agreed, whether eagerly or reluctantly, to marry Anne Hathaway. It is no accident that Milton wrote important tracts advocating the possibility of divorce; the longing for deep emotional satisfaction in marriage turned out to depend heavily upon the possibility of divorce. In a world without this possibility most writers seemed to agree: it was better to make jokes about endurance, pass over most marriages in discreet silence, and write love poetry to anyone but your spouse. Dante wrote the passionate *La vita nuova* not to his wife, Gemma Donati, but to Beatrice Portinari, whom he had first glimpsed when they were both children. So too Petrarch, who was probably ordained as a priest, wrote the definitive European love poems—the great sequence of sonnets—to the beautiful Laura, and not to the unnamed, unknown woman who gave birth to his two children, Giovanni and Francesca. And in England, Stella, the star at which Sir Philip Sidney gazed longingly in his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, was Penelope Devereux, married to someone else, and not his wife, Frances Walsingham.

It was reasonable to hope for stability and comfort in marriage, but not for much more, and if you did not find anything that you wanted, if relations deteriorated into sour-eyed bitterness, there was no way to end the marriage and begin again. Divorce—even as an imagined solution, let alone a practical one—did not exist in 1580 in Stratford-upon-Avon, not for anyone of Shakespeare's class, scarcely for anyone at all. Like everyone who wedded at that time, he married for life, whether the marriage turned out to be fulfilling or disastrous, whether the person he had chosen (or who had chosen him) continued after a year or so to touch his heart or filled him with revulsion.

Yet diminished cultural expectations can at best only partially explain Shakespeare's reluctance or inability to represent marriage, as it were, from the inside. For he did in fact register the frustrated longing for spousal intimacy, though he attributed that longing almost exclusively to

women. Along with Kate Percy and Portia, there is Shakespeare's most poignant depiction of a neglected wife, Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*. Since *The Comedy of Errors* is a farce and since it is based on a Roman model that has absolutely no emotional investment in the figure of the wife—Plautus jokingly has her put up for sale at the close of his play—it is all the more striking that Shakespeare registered so acutely her anguish:

How comes it now, my husband, O how comes it
That thou art then estrangèd from thyself?—
Thy 'self' I call it, being strange to me
That, undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self's better part.
Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;
For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled thence that drop again
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself, and not me too.

(2.2.119–29)

The scene in which these words are spoken is comical, for Adriana is unwittingly addressing not her husband but her husband's long-lost identical twin. Yet the speech is too long and the pain too intense to be altogether absorbed in laughter.

Though the comedy rushes on to madcap confusion and though at the play's end Adriana is blamed (erroneously, as it happens) for her husband's distracted state—"The venom clamours of a jealous woman / Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth" (5.1.70–71)—her suffering has an odd, insistent ring of truth. The situation seized Shakespeare's imagination, as if the misery of the neglected or abandoned spouse was something he knew personally and all too well. Amid the climactic flurry of recognitions, the play does not include, as it would have been reasonable to expect, a scene of marital reconciliation. In *The Comedy of Errors*, as in

most of his plays, the substance of such a reconciliation—what it would mean fully to share a life—seems to have eluded him.

Occasionally, as in *The Winter's Tale*, there is a glimpse of something more than a frustrated craving for intimacy. Hermione, nine months pregnant, manages lightly to tease her husband, Leontes, and her teasing discloses marital emotions that go beyond anxious dependence. Leontes, who has been trying unsuccessfully to persuade his best friend to extend his already lengthy visit, enlists his wife's aid. When his wife succeeds, Leontes pays her a hyperbolic compliment whose potential awkwardness Hermione immediately seizes upon:

LEONTES: Is he won yet?
HERMIONE: He'll stay, my lord.
LEONTES: At my request he would not.
 Hermione, my dearest, thou never spok'st
 To better purpose.
HERMIONE: Never?

(1.2.88–91)

As befits a play fantastically sensitive to intonation, there is nothing on the surface of these simple lines to suggest that anything is going wrong. But perhaps Hermione has already sensed something slightly edgy in Leontes' response, and she instinctively tries to turn it into marital playfulness:

HERMIONE: Never?
LEONTES: Never but once.
HERMIONE: What, have I twice said well? When was't before?
 I prithee tell me. Cram's with praise, and make's
 As fat as tame things.

(1.2.91–94)

There is here, as so often in the ordinary conversation of husbands and wives, at once nothing and everything going on. As befits convention,

Hermione calls Leontes her lord, but she speaks to him on easy, equal footing, mingling sexual banter and gentle mockery, at once welcoming her husband's compliment and making fun of it. Grasping his initial misstep, Leontes quickly qualifies what he has said, turning "Never" into "Never but once," and then gives his pregnant wife what she says she longs for:

Why, that was when
Three crabbèd month had soured themselves to death
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
And clap thyself my love. Then didst thou utter,
"I am yours for ever."

(1.2.103-7)

This is one of the most extended marital conversations that Shakespeare ever wrote, and despite its slight air of formality—husband and wife are speaking, after all, in the presence of their close friend and others—it is powerfully convincing in its suggestion of entangled love, tightly coiled tension, and playfulness. Leontes and Hermione can look back with amusement at their shared past. They are not afraid to tease one another; they care what each other thinks and feels; they still experience sexual desire even as they go about forming a family and entertaining guests. But it is precisely at this moment of slightly edgy intimacy that Leontes is seized by a paranoid fear of his wife's infidelity. At the end of the catastrophic events brought on by this paranoia, there is a moving reconciliation scene, but Hermione's words then are focused entirely on the recovery of her lost daughter. To Leontes, whom she embraces, Hermione says precisely nothing.

The Winter's Tale suggests that the marriage of Leontes and Hermione could not sustain—and could certainly not recover—the emotional, sexual, and psychological intimacy, at once so gratifying and so disturbing, that it once possessed. So too in *Othello*, a tragedy with strong affinities to *The Winter's Tale*, Desdemona's full, bold presence in the marriage—

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world

(1.3.247-49)

—seems to trigger her husband's homicidal jealousy. But perhaps it is wrong even to speak of that particular relationship as a marriage: it seems to last something like a day and a half before it falls apart.

At least these *are* couples. Many of the significant married pairs in Shakespeare have been divorced by death long before the play begins. For the most part it is the women who have vanished: no Mrs. Bolingbroke, Mrs. Shylock, Mrs. Leonato, Mrs. Brabantio, Mrs. Lear, Mrs. Prospero. Very infrequently there is a faint trace: Shylock's wife was named Leah, and she gave her husband a turquoise ring that their daughter Jessica heartlessly trades for a monkey. Even less frequently, there is a tiny hint, such as this one from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, of what has taken a missing woman from the world: "But she, being mortal, of that boy did die" (2.1.135). But for the most part Shakespeare doesn't bother.

Demographers have shown that the risks of childbirth in Elizabethan England were high, but not nearly high enough to explain the wholesale absence of spouses from the plays. (Shakespeare's mother outlived his father by seven years, and despite their age difference, his own wife would also outlive him by seven years.) Clearly Shakespeare did not want a *Taming of the Shrew* in which Mrs. Minola would have her own ideas on her daughters' suitors or a *King Lear* in which the old king's wife would dispute his plans for retirement.

There are few happy marriages in all of literature, just as there are rather few representations of goodness. But most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels have an important stake in persuading the reader that the romantic young couple, with whose wedding the work ends, will find their deepest fulfillment in each other, even if most of the marriages actually depicted in the course of the narrative are humdrum or desperate. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. and Mrs. Bennett have a miserable relationship, as do Charlotte Lucas and the asinine Mr. Collins, but Eliz-

abeth Bennett and Darcy will, the reader is assured, beat the odds. Shakespeare, even in his sunniest comedies, had no stake in persuading his audience of any such thing.

"Men are April when they woo, December when they wed," says Rosalind in *As You Like It*. "Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives" (4.1.124–27). Rosalind may not herself believe what she says—disguised as a young boy, she is playfully testing Orlando's love for her—but she articulates the cynical wisdom of the everyday world. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, there are the same hard-edged sentiments tumbling inadvertently from the mouth of the simpleton Slender: "if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance, when we are married and have more occasion to know one another. I hope upon familiarity will grow more contempt" (1.1.206–10). What is envisaged is an almost inevitable sequence summed up in Beatrice's succinct formula, from *Much Ado About Nothing*: "wooing, wedding, and repenting" (2.1.60).

The tone in which these views are uttered is not so much gloomy as humorous and jauntily realistic, a realism that does not actually get in the way of anyone's wedding. At the play's end Beatrice and Benedick too will embark on marriage, as do all the other lovers in Shakespearean comedy, despite the clear-eyed calculation of the likely consequences. Part of the magic of these plays is to register this calculation without inhibiting the joy and optimism of each of the couples. Shakespeare expended little or no effort to persuade the audience that these particular pairs will be an exception to the rule; on the contrary, they themselves give voice to the rule. The spectators are invited to enter into the charmed circle of love, knowing that it is probably a transitory illusion but, for the moment at least—the moment of the play—not caring.

Shakespeare's imagination did not easily conjure up a couple with long-term prospects for happiness. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the love between Lysander and Hermia vanishes in a second, while Demetrius and Helena will cherish each other as long as the love juice sprinkled in their eyes holds out. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, a pair of good actors can persuade audiences that there is a powerful sexual attraction half-hidden in the quarreling of Petruccio and Kate, but the end of the play goes out of its

way to offer two almost equally disagreeable visions of marriage, one in which the couple is constantly quarreling, the other in which the wife's will has been broken. The end of *As You Like It* succeeds only because no one is forced to contemplate the future home life of Rosalind and Orlando or of the rest of the "country copulatives," as Touchstone calls them (5.4.53). Since Viola keeps on the male attire with which she has disguised herself, *Twelfth Night* relieves the audience of the burden of seeing her dressed as a demure young woman; even at the end of the play Orsino seems betrothed to his effeminate boyfriend. Nothing about their relationship in the course of the play suggests that they are well matched or that great happiness lies ahead of them. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica and Lorenzo may take pleasure together in spending the money they have stolen from her father, Shylock, but their playful banter has a distinctly uneasy tone:

LORENZO: In such a night

Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
As far as Belmont.

JESSICA: In such a night

Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne'er a true one.

(5.1.14–19)

The currents of uneasiness here—mingling together fears of fortune hunting, bad faith, and betrayal—extend to Portia and Bassanio and even to their comic sidekicks Nerissa and Graziano. And these are newlyweds with blissful prospects compared to Hero and the callow, cruel Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Only Beatrice and Benedick, in that play and indeed among all the couples of the principal comedies, seem to hold out the possibility of a sustained intimacy, and then only if the audience discounts their many insults, forgets that they have been tricked into wooing, and assumes, against their own mutual assertions, that they genuinely love each other.

It is worth pausing and trying to get it all in focus: in the great succession of comedies that Shakespeare wrote in the latter half of the

1590s, romantic masterpieces with their marvelous depictions of desire and their cheerfully relentless drive toward marriage, there is scarcely a single pair of lovers who seem deeply, inwardly suited for one another. There is no end of longing, flirtation, and pursuit, but strikingly little long-term promise of mutual understanding. How could earnest, decent, slightly dim Orlando ever truly take in Rosalind? How could the fatuous, self-absorbed Orsino ever come to understand Viola? And these are couples joyously embarking on what officially promise to be good marriages. There is a striking sign that Shakespeare was himself aware of the problem he was posing in the romantic comedies: a few years after these plays, sometime between 1602 and 1606, he wrote two comedies that bring the latent tensions in virtually all these happy pairings right up to the surface.

At the close of *Measure for Measure*, Mariana insists on marrying the repellent Angelo, who has continued to lie, connive, and slander until the moment he has been exposed. In the same strange climax, Duke Vincentio proposes marriage with Isabella, who has made it abundantly clear that her real desire is to enter a strict nunnery. As if this were not uncomfortable enough, the duke punishes the scoundrel Lucio by ordering him to marry a woman he has made pregnant. "I beseech your highness, do not marry me to a whore," Lucio pleads, but the duke is implacable, insisting on what is explicitly understood as a form of punishment, the equivalent of "pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" (5.1.508, 515–16). *All's Well That Ends Well* is, if anything, still more uncomfortable: the beautiful, accomplished Helen has unaccountably fixed her heart on the loutish Count Bertram, and in the end, despite his fierce resistance to the match, she gets her nasty bargain. There cannot be even the pretence of a rosy future for the mismatched pair.

In both *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, virtually all the marriages appear to be forced upon one party or another, and the pattern of celestial peace seems infinitely remote. The sourness at the end of these famously uncomfortable plays—often labeled "problem comedies"—is not the result of carelessness; it seems to be the expression of a deep skepticism about the long-term prospects for happiness in marriage, even though the plays continue to insist upon marriage as the only legitimate and satisfactory resolution to human desire.

There are two significant exceptions to Shakespeare's unwillingness or inability to imagine a married couple in a relationship of sustained intimacy, but they are unnervingly strange: Gertrude and Claudius in *Hamlet* and the Macbeths. These marriages are powerful, in their distinct ways, but they are also upsetting, even terrifying, in their glimpses of genuine intimacy. The villainous Claudius, fraudulent in almost everything he utters, speaks with oddly convincing tenderness about his feelings for his wife: "She's so conjunctive to my life and soul," he tells Laertes, "That, as the star moves not but in his sphere, / I could not but by her" (4.7.14–16). And Gertrude, for her part, seems equally devoted. Not only does she ratify Claudius's attempt to adopt Hamlet as his own son—"Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended," she chides him after he has staged the play-within-the-play to catch his uncle's conscience (3.4.9)—but, more telling still, she heroically defends her husband at the risk of her own life, when Laertes storms the palace. Bent on avenging the murdered Polonius, Laertes is out for blood, and Shakespeare here provided, as he often did at crucial moments, an indication within the text of how he wanted the scene staged. Gertrude apparently throws herself between her husband and the would-be avenger; indeed, she must physically restrain the enraged Laertes, since Claudius twice says, "Let him go, Gertrude." To Laertes' demand, "Where is my father?" Claudius forthrightly answers, "Dead," whereupon Gertrude immediately adds, "But not by him" (4.5.119, 123–25).

In a play heavily freighted with commentary, those four simple words have received little attention. Gertrude is directing the murderous Laertes' rage away from her husband and toward someone else: Polonius's actual murderer, Prince Hamlet. She is not directly contriving to have her beloved son killed, but her overmastering impulse is to save her husband. This does not mean that she is a co-conspirator—the play never settles the question of whether she knew that Claudius murdered old Hamlet. When Claudius confesses the crime, he does not do so to his wife but speaks to himself alone, in his closet, in a failed attempt to clear his conscience in prayer.

The deep bond between Gertrude and Claudius, as Hamlet perceives to his horror and disgust, is based upon not shared secrets but an intense mutual sexual attraction. "You cannot call it love," declares the son, sickened by the very thought of his middle-aged mother's sexuality, "for at your

age / The heyday in the blood is tame." But he knows that the heyday in Gertrude's blood is not tame, and his imagination dwells on the image of his mother and uncle "In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love." The dirty-minded obsession with the greasy or semen-stained ("enseamed") sheets calls up a hallucinatory vision of his father—or is it an actual haunting?—that provides a momentary distraction. Yet as soon as the ghost vanishes, the son is at it again, pleading with his mother to "Refrain tonight" (3.4.67–68, 82–83, 152).

If spousal intimacy in *Hamlet* is vaguely nauseating, in *Macbeth* it is terrifying. Here, almost uniquely in Shakespeare, husband and wife speak to each other playfully, as if they were a genuine couple. "Dearest chuck," Macbeth affectionately calls his wife, as he withholds from her an account of what he has been doing—as it happens, arranging the murder of his friend Banquo—so that she can better applaud the deed when it is done. When they host a dinner party that goes horribly awry, the loyal wife tries to cover for her husband: "Sit, worthy friends," she tells the guests, startled when Macbeth starts screaming at the apparition, which he alone sees, of the murdered Banquo sitting in his chair.

My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
The fit is momentary. Upon a thought
He will again be well.
(3.4.52–55)

Then, under her breath, she tries to make him get a grip on himself: "Are you a man?" (3.4.57).

The sexual taunt half-hidden in these words is the crucial note that Lady Macbeth strikes again and again. It is the principal means by which she gets her wavering husband to kill the king:

When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man.
(1.7.49–51)

If these taunts work on Macbeth, it is because husband and wife know and play upon each other's innermost fears and desires. They meet on the ground of a shared, willed, murderous ferocity:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.
(1.7.54–59)

Macbeth is weirdly aroused by this fantasy:

Bring forth men-children only,
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males.
(1.7.72–74)

The exchange takes the audience deep inside this particular marriage. Whatever has led Lady Macbeth to imagine the bloody scene she describes and whatever Macbeth feels in response to her fantasy—terror, sexual excitement, envy, soul sickness, companionship in evil—lie at the heart of what it means to be the principal married couple conjured up by Shakespeare's imagination.

What is startling about this scene, and about the whole relationship between Macbeth and his wife, is the extent to which they inhabit each other's minds. When Lady Macbeth first appears, she is reading a letter from her husband that describes his encounter with the witches who have prophesied that he will be king: "This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee." He cannot wait until he gets home to tell her; he needs her to share the fantasy with him at once. And she, for her part, not only plunges into it immediately but also begins almost in

the same breath to reflect with studied insight upon her husband's nature:

It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness
 To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
 Art not without ambition, but without
 The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
 That which cries 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it,
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do
 Than wishest should be undone.

(1.5.9–11, 15–23)

The richness of this account, the way it opens up from the first simple observation to something almost queasily complicated, is vivid evidence of the wife's ability to follow the twists and turns of her husband's innermost character, to take her spouse in. And her intimate understanding leads her to desire to enter into him: "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear" (1.5.23–24).

Shakespeare's plays then combine, on the one hand, an overall diffidence in depicting marriages and, on the other hand, the image of a kind of nightmare in the two marriages they do depict with some care. It is difficult *not* to read his works in the context of his decision to live for most of a long marriage away from his wife. Perhaps, for whatever reason, Shakespeare feared to be taken in fully by his spouse or by anyone else; perhaps he could not let anyone so completely in; or perhaps he simply made a disastrous mistake, when he was eighteen, and had to live with the consequences as a husband and as a writer. Most couples, he may have told himself, are mismatched, even couples marrying for love; you should never marry in haste; a young man should not marry an older woman; a marriage under compulsion—"wedlock forcèd"—is a hell. And perhaps, beyond these, he told himself, in imagining *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*, that marital intimacy is dangerous, that the very dream is a threat.

Shakespeare may have told himself too that his marriage to Anne was doomed from the beginning. Certainly he told his audience repeatedly that it was crucially important to preserve virginity until marriage. Though she calls the vows she has exchanged in the darkness with Romeo a "contract," Juliet makes it clear that this contract is not in her eyes the equivalent of a marriage (as some Elizabethans would have held) and that she must therefore on that night leave Romeo "unsatisfied" (2.1.159, 167). Once protected by the wedding performed by the friar—not a social ritual in *Romeo and Juliet* but a sacrament hidden from the feuding families—Juliet can throw off the retiring coyness expected of girls. The young lovers are splendidly frank, confident, and unembarrassed about their desires—they are able, as Juliet puts it, to "Think true love acted simple modesty" (3.2.16)—but their frankness depends upon their shared commitment to marrying before enacting these desires. That commitment confers upon their love, rash and secret though it is, a certain sublime innocence. It is as if the formal ceremony of marriage, performed as the condition of sexual consummation, had an almost magical efficacy, a power to make desire and fulfillment, which would otherwise be tainted and shameful, perfectly modest.

In *Measure for Measure*, written some eight years after *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare came closer to depicting the situation in which he may have found himself as an adolescent. Claudio and Juliet have privately made solemn vows to one another—"a true contract," Claudio calls it—and have consummated their marriage without a public ceremony. His wife is now visibly pregnant—"The stealth of our most mutual entertainment / With character too gross is writ on Juliet" (1.2.122, 131–32). When the state embarks on a ruthless campaign against "fornication," Claudio is arrested and condemned to die. What is startling is that he seems ready to concede the point. Without the public ceremony, his "true contract" appears worthless, and in lines saturated with self-revulsion, he speaks of the fate that looms over him as the result of unrestrained sexual appetite:

Our natures do pursue,
 Like rats that raven down their proper bane,

A thirsty evil; and when we drink, we die.
(1.2.108–10)

The natural desire that can be so frankly and comfortably acknowledged within the bounds of marriage becomes a poison outside of it.

The intensity of the dire visions of premarital sex and its consequences may have had much to do with the fact that Shakespeare was the father of two growing daughters. His most explicit warnings about the dangers of premarital sex take the form, in *The Tempest*, of a father's stern words to the young man who is courting his daughter. Yet in Prospero's lines from this play, written late in his career, there is a sense that Shakespeare was looking back at his own unhappy marriage and linking that unhappiness to the way in which it all began, so many years before. "Take my daughter," Prospero says to Ferdinand, and then adds something halfway between a curse and a prediction:

If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be ministered,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
Sour-eyed disdain, and discord, shall bestrew
The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both.

(4.1.14–22)

These lines—so much more intense and vivid than the play calls for—seem to draw upon a deep pool of bitterness about a miserable marriage. Instead of a shower of grace ("sweet aspersion"), the union will inevitably be plagued, Prospero warns, if sexual consummation precedes the "sanctimonious ceremonies." That was precisely the circumstance of the marriage of Will and Anne.

Even if these bleak lines were a summary reflection on his own marriage, Shakespeare was not necessarily doomed to a life without love. He certainly knew bitterness, sourness, and cynicism, but he did not retreat

into them, nor did he attempt to escape from them by renouncing desire. Desire is everywhere in his work. But his imagination of love and in all likelihood his experiences of love flourished outside of the marriage bond. The greatest lovers in Shakespeare are Antony and Cleopatra, the supreme emblems of adultery. And when he wrote love poems—among the most complex and intense in the English language, before or since—he constructed a sequence of sonnets not about his wife and not about courtship of anyone who could be his wife but about his tangled relationships with a fair young man and a sexually sophisticated dark lady.

Anne Hathaway was excluded completely from the sonnets' story of same-sex love and adultery—or at least almost completely. It is possible, as several critics have suggested, that sonnet 145—"Those lips that love's own hand did make"—alludes to her in its closing couplet. The speaker of the poem recalls that his love once spoke to him the terrible words "I hate," but then gave him a reprieve from the doom that the words seemed to announce:

"I hate" from hate away she threw,
And saved my life, saying "not you."

If "hate away" is a pun on Hathaway, as has been proposed, then this might be a very early poem by Shakespeare, perhaps the earliest that survives, conceivably written at the time of his courtship and then casually incorporated into the sequence. Such an origin might help to explain its anomalous meter—it is the only sonnet in the sequence written in eight-syllable, rather than ten-syllable, lines—and, still more, its ineptitude.

He could not get out of it. That is the overwhelming sense of the bond that rushed the marriage through. But he contrived, after three years' time, not to live with his wife. Two days' hard ride from Stratford, at a safe distance from Henley Street and later from New Place, he made his astonishing works and his fortune. In his rented rooms in London, he contrived to have a private life—that too, perhaps, is the meaning of Aubrey's report that he was not a "company keeper," that he refused invitations to be "debauched." Not the regular denizen of taverns, not the familiar companion of his cronies, he found intimacy and lust and love

with people whose names he managed to keep to himself. "Women he won to him," says Stephen Daedalus, James Joyce's alter ego in *Ulysses*, in one of the greatest meditations on Shakespeare's marriage, "tender people, a whore of Babylon, ladies of justices, bully tapsters' wives. Fox and geese. And in New Place a slack dishonoured body that once was comely, once as sweet, as fresh as cinnamon, now her leaves falling, all, bare, frightened of the narrow grave and unforgiven."

Sometime around 1610, Shakespeare, a wealthy man with many investments, retired from London and returned to Stratford, to his neglected wife in New Place. Does this mean that he had finally achieved some loving intimacy with her? *The Winter's Tale*, written at about this time, ends with the moving reconciliation of a husband and wife who had seemed lost to one another forever. Perhaps this was indeed Shakespeare's fantasy for his own life, but if so the fantasy does not seem to correspond to what actually happened. When Shakespeare, evidently gravely ill, came to draw up his will, in January 1616, he took care to leave virtually everything, including New Place and all his "barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements" and lands in and around Stratford, to his elder daughter, Susanna. Provisions were made for his other daughter, Judith; for his only surviving sibling, Joan; and for several other friends and relatives, and a modest donation was made to the town's poor, but the great bulk of the estate went to Susanna and her husband, Dr. John Hall, who were clearly the principal objects of the dying Shakespeare's love and trust. As he left the world, he did not want to think of his wealth going to his wife; he wanted to imagine it descending to his eldest daughter and thence to her eldest son, yet unborn, and thence to the son of that son and on and on through the generations. And he did not want to brook any interference or hindrance in this design: Susanna and her husband were named as the executors. They would enact the design—so overwhelmingly in their interest—that he had devised.

To his wife of thirty-four years, Anne, he left nothing, nothing at all. Some have argued in mitigation of this conspicuous omission that a widow would in any case have been entitled to a life interest in a one-third share of her deceased husband's estate. Others have countered that thoughtful husbands in this period often spelled out this entitlement in

their wills, since it was not in fact always guaranteed. But as a document charged with the remembering of friends and family in the final disposition of the goods so carefully accumulated during a lifetime, Shakespeare's will—the last trace of his network of relationships—remains startling in its absolute silence in regard to his wife. The issue is not simply that there are none of the terms of endearment—"my beloved wife," "my loving Anne," or whatever—that conventionally signaled an enduring bond between husband and wife. The will contains no such term for any of those named as heirs, so perhaps Shakespeare or the lawyer who penned the words simply chose to write a relatively cool, impersonal document. The problem is that in the will Shakespeare initially drafted, Anne Shakespeare was not mentioned at all; it is as if she had been completely erased.

Someone—his daughter Susanna, perhaps, or his lawyer—may have called this erasure, this total absence of acknowledgment, to his attention. Or perhaps as he lay in his bed, his strength ebbing away, Shakespeare himself brooded on his relationship to Anne—on the sexual excitement that once drew him to her, on the failure of the marriage to give him what he wanted, on his own infidelities and perhaps on hers, on the intimacies he had forged elsewhere, on the son they had buried, on the strange, ineradicable distaste for her that he felt deep within him. For on March 25, in a series of additions to the will—mostly focused on keeping his daughter Judith's husband from getting his hands on the money Shakespeare was leaving her—he finally acknowledged his wife's existence. On the last of the three pages, interlined between the careful specification of the line of descent, so as to ensure that the property would go if at all possible to the eldest male heir of his daughter Susanna, and the bestowal of the "broad silver-gilt bowl" on Judith and all the rest of the "goods, chattel, leases, plate, jewels, and household stuff" on Susanna, there is a new provision: "Item I gyve vnto my wife my second best bed with the furniture."

Scholars and other writers have made a strenuous effort to give these words a positive spin: other wills in this period can be found in which the best bed is left to someone other than the wife; the bequest to Anne could have been their marriage bed (the best bed possibly being

reserved for important guests); “the furniture”—that is, the bed furnishings, such as coverlets and curtains—might have been valuable; and even, as Joseph Quincy Adams hoped, “the second-best bed, though less expensive, was probably the more comfortable.” In short, as one biographer in 1940 cheerfully persuaded himself, “It was a husband’s tender remembrance.”

If this is an instance of Shakespeare’s tender remembrance, one shudders to think of what one of his insults would have looked like. But the notion of tenderness is surely absurd wishful thinking: this is a person who had spent a lifetime imagining exquisitely precise shadings of love and injury. It is for legal historians to debate whether by specifying a single object, the testator was in effect attempting to wipe out the widow’s customary one-third life interest—that is, to disinherit her. But what the eloquently hostile gesture seems to say emotionally is that Shakespeare had found his trust, his happiness, his capacity for intimacy, his best bed elsewhere.

“Shine here to us,” John Donne addressed the rising sun, “and thou art every where; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.” Donne may have been the great Renaissance exception to the rule: he seems to have written many of his most passionate love poems to his wife. In “The Funeral,” he imagines being buried with some precious bodily token of the woman he has loved:

Who ever comes to shroud me, do not harm
Nor question much
That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arm.

And in “The Relic” he returns to this fantasy—“A bracelet of bright hair about the bone”—and imagines that whoever might open his grave to add another corpse will let the remains alone, thinking “that there a loving couple lies.” For Donne, the dream is to make it possible for his soul and that of his beloved “at the last busy day” to “Meet at this grave, and make a little stay.”

Shakespeare’s greatest lovers—Romeo and Juliet, in the sweet frenzy of adolescent passion, and Antony and Cleopatra, in the sophisticated,

lightly ironic intensity of middle-aged adultery—share something of the same fantasy. “Ah, dear Juliet,” poor, deluded Romeo muses in the Capulet tomb,

Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that I still will stay with thee,
And never from this pallet of dim night
Depart again.

(5.3.101–8)

When Juliet awakes and finds Romeo dead, she in turn hastens to join him forever. So too, feeling “Immortal longings” in her, Cleopatra dresses to meet and to marry Antony in the afterlife—“Husband, I come” (5.2.272, 278)—and victorious Caesar understands what should be done:

Take up her bed,
And bear her women from the monument.
She shall be buried by her Antony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous.

(5.2.346–50)

So much for the dream of love. When Shakespeare lay dying, he tried to forget his wife and then remembered her with the second-best bed. And when he thought of the afterlife, the last thing he wanted was to be mingled with the woman he married. There are four lines carved in his gravestone in the chancel of Stratford Church:

GOOD FRIEND FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIGG THE DUST ENCLOSED HEARE:
BLESTE BE YE MAN YT SPARES THES STONES,
AND CURST BE HE YT MOVES MY BONES.

In 1693 a visitor to the grave was told that the epitaph was “made by himself a little before his death.” If so, these are probably the last lines that Shakespeare wrote. Perhaps he simply feared that his bones would be dug up and thrown in the nearby charnel house—he seems to have regarded that fate with horror—but he may have feared still more that one day his grave would be opened to let in the body of Anne Shakespeare.

CHAPTER 5



Crossing the Bridge

IN THE SUMMER of 1583 the nineteen-year-old William Shakespeare was settling into the life of a married man with a newborn daughter, living all together with his parents and his sister, Joan, and his brothers, Gilbert, Richard, and Edmund, and however many servants they could afford in the spacious house on Henley Street. He may have been working in the glover's shop, perhaps, or making a bit of money as a teacher's or lawyer's assistant. In his spare time he must have continued to write poetry, practice the lute, hone his skills as a fencer—that is, work on his ability to impersonate the lifestyle of a gentleman. His northern sojourn, assuming he had one, was behind him. If in Lancashire he had begun a career as a professional player, he must, for the moment at least, have put it aside. And if he had had a brush with the dark world of Catholic conspiracy, sainthood, and martyrdom—the world that took Campion to the scaffold—he must still more decisively have turned away from it with a shudder. He had embraced ordinariness, or ordinariness had embraced him.

Then sometime in the mid-1580s (the precise date is not known), he tore himself away from his family, left Stratford-upon-Avon, and made

(London: Williams and Norgate), remains authoritative; Evelyn Waugh's *Edmund Campion* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935) is eloquent and highly partisan. See also E. E. Reynolds, *Campion and Parsons: The Jesuit Missions of 1580-1* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1980); Malcolm South, *The Jesuits and the Joint Mission to England during 1580-1581* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1999); and James Holleran, *A Jesuit Challenge: Edmund Campion's Debates at the Tower of London in 1581* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999).

CHAPTER 4: WOOING, WEDDING, AND REPENTING

On Shakespeare's marriage, the principal source remains J. W. Gray, *Shakespeare's Marriage* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905). David Cressy's *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) is an illuminating guide to the contemporary conduct of the major life-cycle events. For the demographic estimates, I have relied on E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Anthony Burgess's amusing novel, *Nothing Like the Sun*, is built around the presumption that Anne Whatley of Temple Grafton was a real person, Shakespeare's lost love, rather than the trace of a clerical error.

For the sentimental picture of Shakespeare in the bosom of his family, see the nineteenth-century lithograph, by an unknown artist, reproduced in Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: Records and Images*, 199. The idea that sonnet 145 might be an early poem to Anne Hathaway is discussed in Andrew Gurr, "Shakespeare's First Poem: Sonnet 145," *Essays in Criticism* 21 (1971): 221-26.

The second-best bed is interpreted as a "tender remembrance" in Lewis, *The Shakespeare Documents*, 2:491, who cites Joseph Quincy Adams. For a more realistic reading of Shakespeare's last will and testament, see E. A. J. Honigmann, "Shakespeare's Will and Testamentary Traditions," in *Shakespeare and Cultural Traditions: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Tokyo, 1991*, ed. Tetsuo Kishi, Roger Pringle, and Stanley Wells (Newark: University of Delaware, 1994), 127-37. Frank Harris, in *The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life-Story* (New York: Michael Kennerley, 1909), depicts a Shakespeare consumed with loathing for his wife; it is from Harris that I take the suggestion that the curse on the person who moves his bones was

Shakespeare's way of keeping his wife from being laid, at her death, by his side. On the late seventeenth-century visitor to the grave who was told that the curse was Shakespeare's last poem, see Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 2:259.

CHAPTER 5: CROSSING THE BRIDGE

On hunting (and its illegal cousin, poaching), see Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Samuel Schoenbaum's irenic view of Thomas Lucy's character is found in *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*, 107. There is a suggestive chapter on Somerville in Stopes, *Shakespeare's Warwickshire Contemporaries*. In *Secret Shakespeare* Richard Wilson revives the theory, first advanced by the Victorian critic Richard Simpson, that Somerville was not an isolated lunatic but rather a participant in a serious conspiracy. He did not commit suicide in the Tower, the theory goes, but was murdered by fellow conspirators in order to prevent his revealing incriminating evidence at the moment of his execution. (Why he should have waited until that moment is not readily apparent.) At some point before he wrote *Hamlet* (1600-1601), Shakespeare probably read Luis de Granada's *Of Prayer and Meditation* (1582), but the link to Somerville should not be exaggerated: there was another edition of Luis's work, published in 1599, without the incendiary dedicatory letter by Richard Harris that led Somerville to his fatal resolution.

On touring, the ongoing volumes of the *Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979-) are invaluable. Peter Greenfield, "Touring," in *New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 251-68; and Sally-Beth MacLean, "The Players on Tour," in *Elizabethan Theatre*, vol. 10, ed. C. E. McGee (Port Credit, Ontario: P. D. Meany, 1988), 55-72, are useful and suggestive. On the possible connection of Shakespeare to the Queen's Men, see McMillan and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*.

For the impression London made upon first-time visitors, the place to begin is William Rye, *England as Seen by Foreigners* (London: John Russell Smith, 1865). See also A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay, eds., *London 1500-1700: The Making of a Metropolis* (London: Longman, 1986); N. L. Williams, *Tudor London Visited* (London: Cassell, 1991); Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995);