



April 4 - May 13, 2001

Ex-
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William Shakespeare's

the
taming
the SHREW

an IRT Study Guide



Upperstage

The *Taming of the Shrew* is set in the city of Padua, a center of learning and commerce. Baptista Minola, a widower, has two daughters. The younger, Bianca, is demure and beautiful, and she has many suitors, including Gremio and Hortensio, wealthy men of Padua. But Baptista declares that he will not allow Bianca to be married until his elder daughter, Katherina, is wed. Katherina is unpopular; she is called a shrew, which means "a woman given to railing or scolding."

Baptista announces his intention to find schoolmasters to teach his daughters. A newcomer to town, Lucentio, a rich young man from nearby Pisa, observes Bianca and determines to win her hand. In order to get close to her, he develops a plan with his servant, Tranio: Tranio will masquerade as Lucentio, living in style and presenting himself to Baptista as a suitor to his daughter; Lucentio will disguise himself as a humble poetry teacher, and get himself hired to teach Bianca.

Meanwhile, Hortensio runs into his old friend Petruchio, a visitor from Verona. Petruchio has come to Padua to find himself a wealthy wife, and asks his friend if he has any suggestions. Hortensio tells him about the beautiful Katherina, but warns him of her ill manners. Petruchio determines at once to woo her and wed her, despite her temper.

Petruchio presents himself to Baptista as a suitor to Katherina, and offers the services of Litio, a tutor in music and mathematics (who is really Hortensio in disguise). Gremio presents Cambio, a language scholar (Lucentio in disguise). Tranio presents himself as Lucentio, a new suitor to Bianca.

After learning from Baptista what dowery comes with Katherina, Petruchio asks to meet her. The two match wits in one of the most famous scenes in all Shakespeare. Katherina attacks Petruchio with scorn and insults, but he responds with flattery and announces his intent to

The Story of the Play

marry her when he returns to town the following Sunday.

Now that Katherina is engaged, the suitors press Baptista to choose a husband for Bianca. Baptista asks each for an account of his holdings, and Tranio (disguised as Lucentio) offers the larger amount. Baptista declares that if by Sunday Lucentio can provide assurance from his father as to his inheritance, Bianca will be his.

Meanwhile, Lucentio and Hortensio, in disguise as the tutors Cambio and Litio, wrangle over who will have lessons with Bianca first. While Hortensio tunes his lute, Lucentio reveals his true identity and his love to Bianca, who indicates she is not indifferent to his suit. Hortensio also offers his love, but Bianca rejects him. Both "tutors" are suspicious of the other, and plan to watch carefully.

Sunday arrives and all wait at the church for Petruchio, who is late. Katherina is humiliated. The groom finally arrives, inappropriately dressed, and turns the wedding ceremony into a shambles. He then refuses

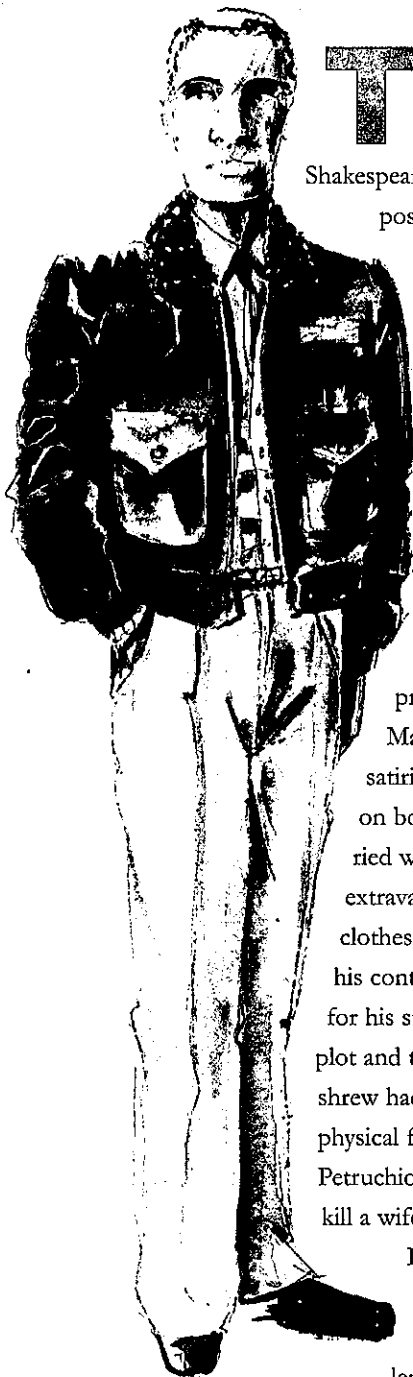
all entreaties to stay, and drags the furious Katherina away before the wedding feast. The others laugh that these two wild characters are well matched.

The scene shifts to Petruchio's country home, and his servant Grumio relates the tumultuous tale of the newlywed couple's trip, filled with muddy accidents. Katherina and Petruchio enter, filthy and bedraggled, starving and exhausted. Petruchio sends Grumio for water so Katherina can wash, then strikes him, spilling the water. Likewise he throws the dinner to the floor, declaring it is burnt and unfit to eat. Petruchio apologizes to Katherina for the household's ill-prepared state and sends her to bed. He then reveals to us his plan: to "kill" Katherina with kindness. He will starve her by perpetually declaring the food is unfit. He will keep her from sleep by complaining about the bed. Thus he hopes to "curb her mad and headstrong humor."

Meanwhile, back in Padua, Hortensio and "Lucentio" (Tranio in disguise) eavesdrop on Bianca and "Cambio" (Lucentio in disguise) as they declare their love for each other. Hortensio resolves to abandon his pursuit of Bianca and to marry a wealthy widow who has long pursued him.

Back in Verona, Katherina is still starving and sleepless. The Widow, who is a tailor, arrives with Hortensio to show Petruchio the new dress he has ordered for Katherina to wear at Bianca's wedding. As he did with the food and the bed, however, Petruchio finds fault with the dress and rips it to shreds, much to Katherina's dismay.

In the final scenes of the play, we learn how effective Petruchio's plan has been; we witness the final revelation of disguises and the untangling of confusions; and, most importantly, we get a sense of how each of the three marriages—Petruchio and Katherina, Hortensio and the Widow, and Lucentio and Bianca—will fare. The results are perhaps not what one might expect. Exactly who has tamed whom? ★



The *Taming of the Shrew* was probably written in 1589, making it Shakespeare's earliest comedy and possibly his first play. The character of the shrewish wife dates from ancient times, and had been treated in the Noah story of medieval miracle plays and by Chaucer in the character of the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Popular sermons were preached on the State of Matrimony, and serious and satirical pamphlets appeared on both the subject of a married woman's duty and also the extravagant fashions in women's clothes. Shakespeare's play was his contribution to the debate, for his story is original both in plot and treatment. Hitherto a shrew had only been tamed by physical force, usually a beating. Petruchio discovers the way "to kill a wife with *kindness*."

In *The Revolution of the Saints*, Michael Waltzer writes about ideas prevalent among the Marian

exiles, the Puritans who returned to England after exile under Mary Tudor (Queen of England 1553-58). He stresses that for the Puritan—and by the time Shakespeare was writing, there was a substantial Puritan merchant middle class—the Calvinistic view was of the world as a fallen place in which we had all inherited the sin of Adam congenitally. On this potentially unruly and unmanageable earth, sovereign authority was needed in order for there to be some kind of control.

For the Puritans, there were two magistrates deputed by God to supervise order in an otherwise fallen world: in the state it was the monarch, and in the family it was the husband and father. The woman was required to obey, not simply because it flattered the vanity of man, but because authority had to be invested in one unquestionable person, whether or not he was necessarily qualified for this responsibility.

In other plays, *Richard II*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* for example, Shakespeare obviously makes us question whether certain men are fit to wield authority. But in *The Taming of the Shrew*, we have an instance of Shakespeare writing about the need for order. Here is a play in which we have tuition exercised by a man, and not, as is often the case in his comedies, by a woman. What we see is not the bullying and subordination of a high-spirited but otherwise well-behaved girl, but rather the education of someone whose unruly behavior poses a threat to society. If we accept Petruchio as a serious man, we can take and develop the implications of lines such as "To me she's married, not unto my clothes" and "Tis the mind that makes the body rich" and see how consistent these are with a Puritan view.

Men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seldom bothered to deny that they beat their wives; rather they focused on their spouse's disobedience, since that "justified" such discipline. While the law was unwilling to penalize men for using

violence in their households, wife-beating reforms succeeded in changing the cultural meaning of such violence. The issue of wife beating was taken up by many Puritan preachers and other Protestant moralists. The reformers argued for subordination through policy based on civility; policy was preferable to violence, not because it was humane but because it was more effective. As if illustrating these reformers' arguments, Petruchio makes Kate "stoop" not by beating her but by "alluring" her in the same way that he would train a falcon. His rule by policy—"Thus have I politicly begun my reign"—works better than blows.

Romantic love is a presence in the play from beginning to end, and it functions as a kind of prolonged and delicious illusion, sustained in the face of a plethora of contrary facts.

The Tamer Tamed?

Staging The Taming of the Shrew in the Twenty-First Century

Romantic love is allowed full weight in the play. It is not mocked. It is seen as the source of endless ingenuity, invention and youthful exuberance. But the illusions and delusions of romantic love are seen as essentially a young man's passion. One thinks of Petruchio as somehow older than the other characters. When he became a man he put away the adolescent fantasies of romance, and learned to see his mistress not through a glass, darkly, but face to face. And, by contrast with Lucentio's youthful romanticism, this makes his few, hard-won moments of tenderness all the more moving and convincing. Near the end of the play Petruchio demands a kiss from Kate in the middle of the public street. After some resistance, she kisses him, and he says,

Is not this well? Come, my sweet Kate.

Better once than never, for never too late.

In one brief question—"Is not this well?"—is established a mutuality, a gentle and loving concern for union which shows that the teaching is over, the pupil has graduated, and all that is left is love.

We are staging this production in an age which author and cultural critic Umberto Eco has described as one of "new Medievalism" in the West. Like the Neo-Platonists of Shakespeare's day, the popular imagination is gripped by rumors of Angels, and we once again seek out the magic of the Tarot card, astrology, and Feng Shui to make sense of our increasingly splintered lives. We are staging this production in 2001; a year in which, once again, women have failed to break through the glass ceiling of American politics to claim either the highest, or indeed the second highest office in the land. We stage this production at a time when men with the financial clout can and do use the media to purchase wives, and when political conservatism seeks to place restrictions on a woman's right to make decisions about her own body as a reproductive organ.

Viewed from this perspective, *The Shrew* is a very contemporary play. We have chosen to stage it in a setting that audiences will recognize as (nearly) their own, rather than risk diluting it through the safety net of an historical perspective. *Shrew* is one of a small number of Shakespeare's plays that can withstand a contemporary treatment and may actually benefit from

it, providing we do it with care and do not resort to gimmickry.

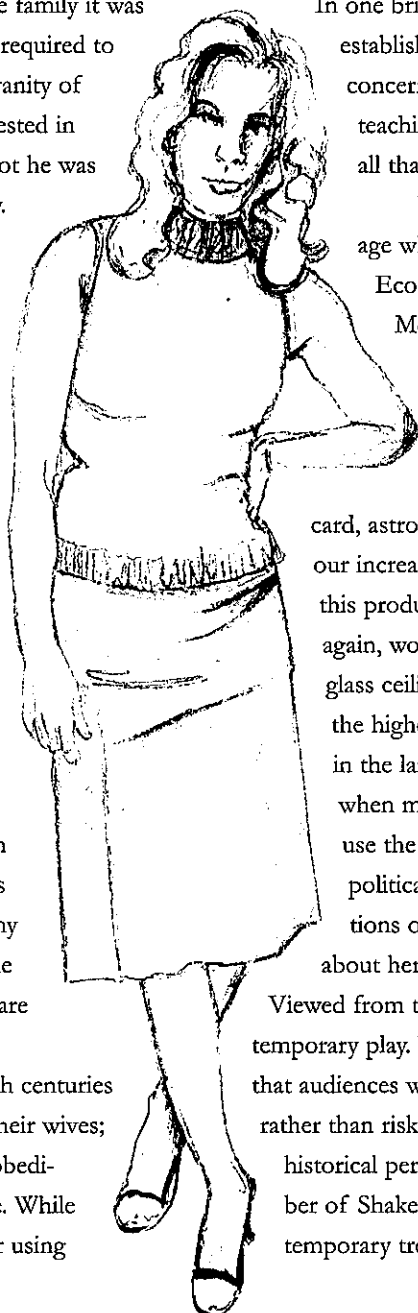
In his book *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Harold C. Goddard writes, "The play ends with the prospect that Kate is going to be more nearly the tamer than the tamed, Petruchio more nearly the tamed than the tamer, though his wife naturally will keep the true situation under cover. So taken, the play is an early version of *What Every Woman*



Knows—what every woman knows being, of course, that the woman can lord it over the man so long as she allows him to think he is lording it over her." ★

—adapted by Richard J Roberts
from notes by director John Green

Sketches by costume designer Holly Evans:
(clockwise from top left)
Petruchio, the Widow, Grumio, and Bianca.



The Globe

Going to see a play at the Globe was an adventure. The theatre was located on the south bank of the River Thames in London, and on performance days a yellow silk flag fluttered above the roof. The Globe stood out like a beacon above the low, narrow houses that lined the streets in this rather disreputable part of the city.

In Elizabethan times, playgoing had become enormously popular for all classes of people, and a new generation of brilliant playwrights—like Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe—had done much to make the new theaters that were springing up highly successful. Of all the theaters, none was more popular than the Globe, built in 1599 by Shakespeare's company. A round wood and plaster building, it featured galleried walls that were only about 30 feet high with just a few tiny windows; the only public entrance was through a narrow door in a small tower.

By noon on a performance day, a crowd would begin to gather for the three o'clock performance, and soon the air was filled with shouts and cries as people jostled for a place near the front of the line. Before long, the noisy, colorful crowd began to file through the small entrance door. Above the door was a hanging sign like a wooden flag. It showed the Greek god Hercules holding a globe on his shoulders.

As you entered, you paid your penny entrance fee and stepped through into the large round yard, open to the sky. Then, there was a rush to grab the best spots just in front of the huge stage. The theater held more than 2,000 spectators, and popular plays often sold out.

Once you had your place, though, you could talk with your friends for a couple of hours before the play began. It was difficult to get bored. Sometimes a man selling nuts would thread his way through the mass of bodies or a woman carrying jugs of ale would trip and spill the ale down someone's neck—much to everyone's amusement. An exchange of insults between two noisy wits near the stage would bring hoots of laughter from the people nearby. And soon everyone would start pointing and joking, as the richer people began to file into the galleries that fringed the yard.

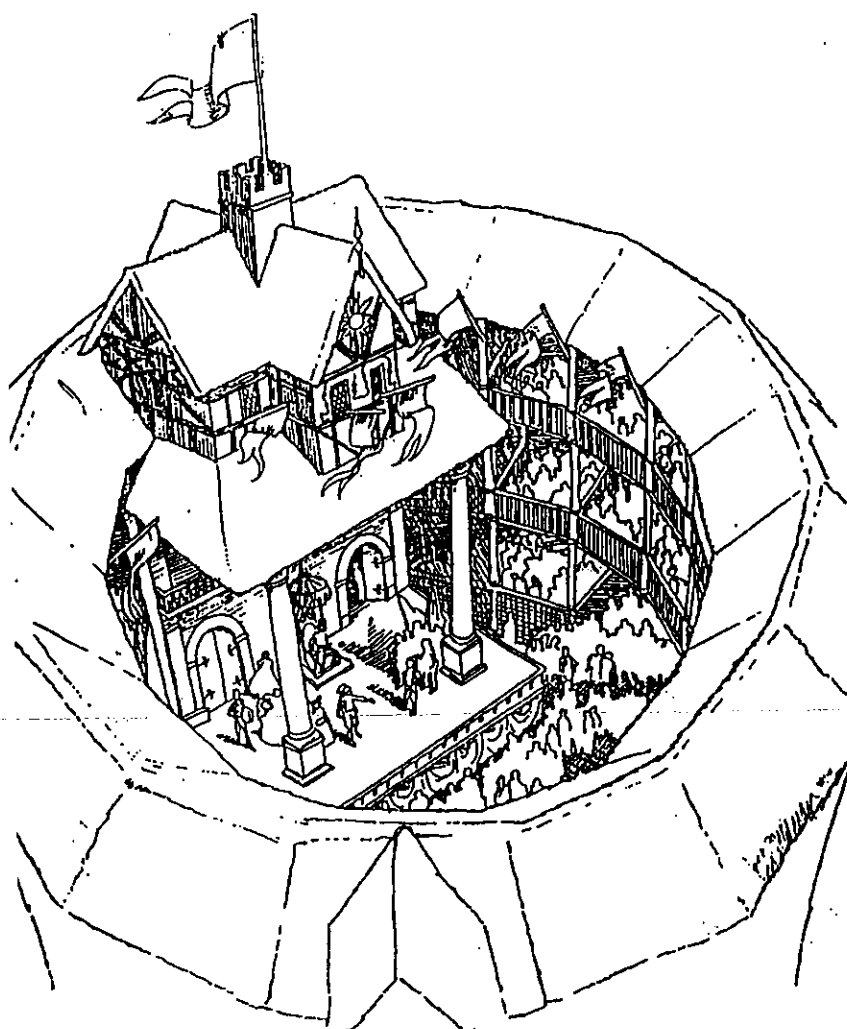
You paid a few pennies more for a place in the gallery, but it was more comfortable and bought a seat protected from the weather. Even more money bought a seat in a private box, or lord's room, near the back of the stage, so close to the actors you could almost touch them. Fashionably dressed youths often sat there, whiling away the time before the performance playing cards on a dashingly red cloak spread over their knees.

Newcomers to the theater gazed in amazement at the splendor of the empty stage that jutted out into the center of the yard. On each side of the stage, supporting the roof above, towered two tall pillars painted in gold and bright colors to resemble the palaces of kings and princes. Underneath the roof, the "heavens" were painted sky blue and decorated with silver stars. At the back of the stage, on each side, were two doors through which the players usually made their entrances and exits.

Between the doors, a small alcove called the "discovery" area was hidden by a brightly painted curtain; during the play, actors could stay here out of sight.

Once everything was ready for the play to begin, a trumpeter announced the play with three loud calls. Latecomers hurried in and, for a moment, the audience was hushed. Then the actors stepped onto the stage to transport the audience to an imaginary world where all sorts of strange and magical things could happen.

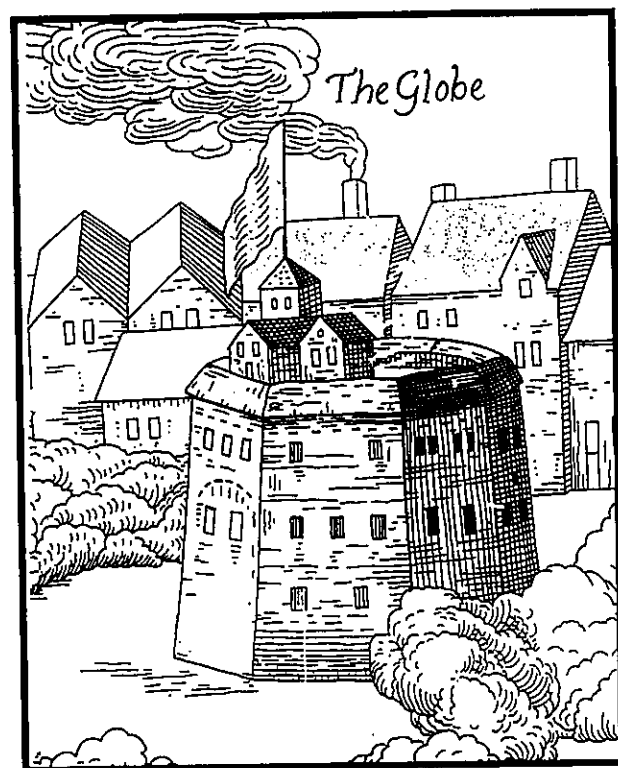
There was very little scenery on the Elizabethan stage, but there were gorgeous costumes. Fine taffeta, silk, lace, and tinsel in brilliant colors dazzled the eye; and soldiers



appeared in shining armor, their swords and shields gleaming. All the parts were played by men, since women were forbidden by law to act on the stage; young boys, about 12 years old, played the female roles.

Because there was so little scenery, actors relied on words, costumes, and special effects to create a scene. People loved noise and spectacle, and the plays had lots of action and violence. The noise of thunder and lightning was created by rolling a cannonball across a wooden floor. Loud trumpets and drums gave the impression of a battle. Ghosts and other spirits could be raised from below the stage through trap doors. The most spectacular effect, however, was when an actor was lowered from the "heavens" onto the stage by a small crane. This machinery was housed in the "hut" which capped the stage; and to hide the noise of its creaking, there was normally thunder, fanfares, or music, which made the entrance even more dramatic.

It was not always easy to concentrate on the play, as playgoers were not always well behaved. They might throw apples or oranges at each other or at the actors on the stage. Some talked loudly through the play or called for more ale and other refreshments, and most people thought it quite normal to make remarks about the actors while the play was in progress. Scuffles frequently broke out between groups of rowdy playgoers. Small wonder then that getting the attention of the audience and keeping them silent was challenging—far more so than it is today, when such behavior is no longer acceptable. ★



The Globe and Society

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, in its shape and design, functioned as a metaphor—a map, if you will, of the Elizabethan concepts of society, civilization, and the universe. The name of the theatre itself—the Globe—suggested that the events which were portrayed on its stage were symbolic of events which happened in the world. The building's shape, an octagon, suggested the round shape of the world itself—a roundness which had only been discovered one hundred years before.

(Shakespeare frequently toys with the name of the Globe in his plays. For example, in *Othello*, at the height of the play's tragic climax, Othello says:

Methinks, it should be now a huge Eclipse
Of Sun and Moon, and that th'affrighted Globe
Should yawn at Alteration.

Literally he means that the earth should quake or "yawn" (open wide) at such terrible deeds. But he also refers to the audience of "th'affrighted Globe," gasping in horror at the tragedy they have just witnessed.)

Inside the theatre, the stage represented the stage on which world events are enacted. The trap doors in the stage floor could open for demons rising from Hell—or descending thereto. The two massive columns which held up the stage roof were known as the Pillars of Hercules. High above, the stage ceiling was painted with the stars of the Zodiac—the heavens. And tucked under that ceiling was a small balcony where the theatre's musicians played "the Music of the Spheres."

The audience surrounding the stage was likewise arranged to reflect society. Standing around the stage itself, in the area known as the Pit, were the groundlings—those of the lowest classes who paid the least for admittance. Three surrounding levels of balconies arose above them, with correspondingly rising admission prices—so that Elizabethan society, from top to bottom, was clearly divided and arranged for all to see in the Globe Theatre.

Thus an audience member at the Globe could not help but feel his place in the world order, and as he watched the play he could not help but see the action on the stage as emblematic of life in the world at large. For example, in *King Lear*, when Lear enters at the end of the play carrying the body of his dead daughter, we see not only a sad image of a bereft father, we see an archetypal image of tragedy itself. As you watch *The Taming of the Shrew*, look for those moments which link the world of the play to the world at large—not only Shakespeare's world, but the world we live in today. ★

Shakespeare

Although William Shakespeare is generally considered the greatest dramatist in the English language, few facts are known about his life. A handful of legal documents verify his existence, but much of Shakespeare's biography has been creatively reconstructed from general knowledge about the historic period and life in that time.

He was baptized in the Church of England at Stratford-upon-Avon, a Warwickshire market town, on April 26, 1564. This fact leads us to believe that he was born on April 23, because it was the custom in those days to baptize children about three days after their birth. His father, John, was a glove maker who became High Bailiff of Stratford, a position very much like our mayor. His mother, Mary Arden Shakespeare, was the eldest daughter of a wealthy landowner. William, with his three younger brothers and two younger sisters, grew up in a middle-class family of good local repute.

As the son of a leading citizen and public official, Shakespeare would have been expected to go to school as soon as he had learned to read and write. The Stratford grammar school, one of the town's prized institutions, was excellent by comparison to similar schools in bigger towns. School was in session in summer and winter, and students attended for nine hours a day. The curriculum was limited, consisting almost entirely of Latin: grammar, reading, writing, and recitation. It is possible that as an older student, Shakespeare might have had the opportunity to act out some of the classical plays written in Latin as part of a school assignment.

By the time Shakespeare was a youth, many traveling theatre companies of significance had visited Stratford, so it is fair to guess that Shakespeare had seen some of them and admired their art. One of the leading companies was the Earl of Leicester's Men (named after their patron), led by James Burbage, who built the first permanent theatre structure in London when Shakespeare was twelve. Burbage's son Richard was destined to become Shakespeare's future colleague and friend. If one side of young Shakespeare's life was dominated by the stern discipline of school and religious morality, the other suggests the color and enthusiasm of the medieval world. From this contrast must have come eventually the impulse that sent Shakespeare to London and theatrical fame.

The next fact that exists regarding Shakespeare's life seems to suggest that his path to London was not a

direct one: a document dated November 27, 1582, states that at age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior. Six months later, Shakespeare's eldest child, Susanna, was born. Two years later he became the father of twins, Hamnet and Judith. Little is known of Shakespeare's life at this time. It is clear that by the early 1590s, however, Shakespeare was very much a part of the theatrical scene in London, although we know nothing of the circumstances by which he left Stratford

turn of the century he was the most popular playwright in London, and his company enjoyed a unique advantage in the city's highly competitive theatrical world. He seems to have attained some degree of wealth and prestige, for he was granted a coat of arms, thus officially making him a gentleman, and he bought sizeable pieces of real estate in and around Stratford with his earnings. His plays also exhibit not only a fine sense of poetry and stagecraft, but an excellent awareness of the political and literary atmos-

phere in which he lived. These were tempestuous times socially and politically, and Shakespeare used his plays metaphorically to suggest how order could be made out of chaos in a changing society.

By 1604 his company was named the King's Men, for they had attracted the favorable attention of the new monarch, King James I. Their fortunes continued to rise as their plays drew well at the Globe, and the number of command performances at Court doubled and tripled. It may be significant that most of Shakespeare's great tragedies—*Othello*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*—were written within the first five years of the new century. It suffices to say that within a single decade, Shakespeare created a wealth of drama, some of it comic, some tragic, such as the world has never seen.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616—his 52nd birthday—and is buried in the church chancel in Stratford. The epitaph carved on his gravestone, perhaps written by Shakespeare himself, reads:

*Good friend for Jesus sake forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here!
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.*

The greatest testament to Shakespeare's genius occurred in 1623, when two of his fellow actors, John Heminge and Henry Condell, cooperated with a London printer in publishing a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays. This kind of publication was rare in its day, as plays were valued for their commercial appeal on the stage, with little thought of them as literature to be preserved. It is

safe to say that Heminge and Condell reconstructed some of the texts from memory or from a stage manager's promptbook. In any case the First Folio, as this first collection has come to be called, is a document of great historic and literary importance, for it preserved for posterity some of the greatest writing in the English language, allowing us to study and perform Shakespeare's plays over 400 years later and for generations to come. ★

MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARES

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L O N D O N
Printed by Iaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

and his family to become an actor and playwright in the city. In 1594 Shakespeare was established at the center of theatrical activity, for he is recorded as a shareholder, along with Richard Burbage, in the famed Globe Theatre, located on the south bank of the Thames, across from the Tower of London.

Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, several narrative poems, and over 150 sonnets in the next fifteen years. By the

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