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FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

The Tragedy of
Macbeth

By
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

AN UPDATED EDITION

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT
AND PAUL WERSTINE

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From the Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library

It is hard to imagine a world without Shakespeare. Since their composition four hundred years ago, Shakespeare's plays and poems have traveled the globe, inviting those who see and read his works to make them their own.

Readers of the New Folger Editions are part of this ongoing process of "taking up Shakespeare," finding our own thoughts and feelings in language that strikes us as old or unusual and, for that very reason, new. We still struggle to keep up with a writer who could think a mile a minute, whose words paint pictures that shift like clouds. These expertly edited texts, presented here with accompanying explanatory notes and up-to-date critical essays, are distinctive because of what they do: they allow readers not simply to keep up, but to engage deeply with a writer whose works invite us to think, and think again.

These New Folger Editions of Shakespeare's plays are also special because of where they come from. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, where the Editions are produced, is the single greatest documentary source of Shakespeare's works. An unparalleled collection of early modern books, manuscripts, and artwork connected to Shakespeare, the Folger's holdings have been consulted extensively in the preparation of these texts. The Editions also reflect the expertise gained through the regular performance of Shakespeare's works in the Folger's Elizabethan Theater.

I want to express my deep thanks to editors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine for creating these indispensable editions of Shakespeare's works, which incorporate the best of textual scholarship with a richness of commentary that is both inspired and engaging. Readers who want to know more about Shakespeare and his plays can follow the paths these distinguished scholars have tread by visiting the Folger itself, where a range of physical and digital resources (available online) exist to supplement the material in these texts. I commend to you these words, and hope that they inspire.

Michael Witmore
Director, Folger Shakespeare Library

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Editors' Preface

In recent years, ways of dealing with Shakespeare's texts and with the interpretation of his plays have been undergoing significant change. This edition, while retaining many of the features that have always made the Folger Shakespeare so attractive to the general reader, at the same time reflects these current ways of thinking about Shakespeare. For example, modern readers, actors, and teachers have become interested in the differences between, on the one hand, the early forms in which Shakespeare's plays were first published and, on the other hand, the forms in which editors through the centuries have presented them. In response to this interest, we have based our edition on what we consider the best early printed version of a particular play (explaining our rationale in a section called "An Introduction to This Text") and have marked our changes in the text—unobtrusively, we hope, but in such a way that the curious reader can be aware that a change has been made and can consult the "Textual Notes" to discover what appeared in the early printed version.

Current ways of looking at the plays are reflected in our brief introductions, in many of the commentary notes, in the annotated lists of "Further Reading," and especially in each play's "Modern Perspective," an essay written by an outstanding scholar who brings to the reader his or her fresh assessment of the play in the light of today's interests and concerns.

As in the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare, which The New Folger Library Shakespeare replaces, we include explanatory notes designed to help make Shakespeare's language clearer to a modern reader, and we place the notes on the page facing the text that they explain. We also follow the earlier edition in including illustrations—of objects, of clothing, of mythological figures—from books and manuscripts in the Folger Shakespeare Library collection. We provide fresh accounts of the life of Shakespeare, of the publishing of his plays, and of the theaters in which his plays were performed, as well as an introduction to the text itself. We also include a section called "Reading Shakespeare's Language," in which we try to help readers learn to "break the code" of Elizabethan poetic language.

For each section of each volume, we are indebted to a host of generous experts and fellow scholars. The "Reading Shakespeare's Language" sections, for example, could not have been written had not Arthur King, of Brigham Young University, and Randal Robinson, author of *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language*, led the way in untangling Shakespearean language puzzles and shared their insights and methodologies generously with us. "Shakespeare's Life" profited by the careful reading given it by S. Schoenbaum; "Shakespeare's Theater" was read and strengthened by Andrew Gurr, John Astington, and William Ingram; and "The Publication of Shakespeare's Plays" is indebted to the comments of Peter W. M. Blayney. We, as editors, take sole responsibility for any errors in our editions.

We are grateful to the authors of the "Modern Perspectives"; to Leeds Barroll and David Bevington for their generous encouragement; to the Huntington and Newberry Libraries for fellowship support; to King's University College for the grants it has provided to Paul Werstine; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which has provided him with Research Time Stipends; to R. J. Shroyer of Western University for essential computer support;

and to the Folger Institute's Center for Shakespeare Studies for its fortuitous sponsorship of a workshop on "Shakespeare's Texts for Students and Teachers" (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by Richard Knowles of the University of Wisconsin), a workshop from which we learned an enormous amount about what is wanted by college and high-school teachers of Shakespeare today.

In preparing this preface for the publication of *Macbeth* in 1992, we wrote: Our biggest debt is to the Folger Shakespeare Library: to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Library, who has made possible our edition; to Jean Miller, the Library's Art Curator, who combed the Library holdings for illustrations, and to Julie Ainsworth, Head of the Photography Department, who carefully photographed them; to Peggy O'Brien, Director of Education, who gave us expert advice about the needs being expressed by Shakespeare teachers and students (and to Martha Christian and other "master teachers" who used our texts in manuscript in their classrooms); to the staff of the Academic Programs Division, especially Paul Menzer (who drafted "Further Reading" material), Mary Tonkinson, Lena Cowen Orlin, Molly Haws, and Jessica Hymowitz; and, finally, to the staff of the Library Reading Room, whose patience and support have been invaluable.

As we revise the play for publication in 2013, we add to the above our gratitude to Michael Witmore, Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, who brings to our work a gratifying enthusiasm and vision; to Gail Kern Paster, Director of the Library from 2002 until July 2011, whose interest and support have been unfailing and whose scholarly expertise continues to be an invaluable resource; to Stephen Llano, our production editor at Simon & Schuster, whose expertise, attention to detail, and wisdom are essential to this project; to

Deborah Curren-Aquino, who provides extensive editorial and production support; to Alice Falk for her expert copyediting; to Michael Poston for unfailing computer support; and to the staff of the Library's Research Division, especially Christina Certo (whose help is crucial), David Schalkwyk (Director of Research), Mimi Godfrey, Kathleen Lynch, Carol Brobeck, Owen Williams, Sarah Werner, and Adrienne Schevchuk. Among the editions we consulted, we found A. R. Braunmuller's New Cambridge edition especially useful. Finally, we once again express our thanks to Jean Miller for the wonderful images she has unearthed, and to the ever-supportive staff of the Library Reading Room.

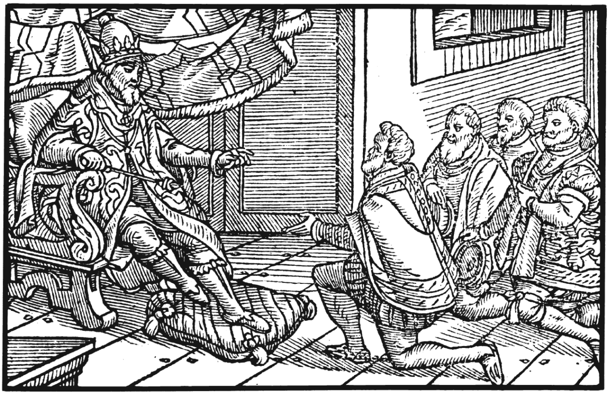
Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine
2012

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

In 1603, at about the middle of Shakespeare's career as a playwright, a new monarch ascended the throne of England. He was James VI of Scotland, who then also became James I of England. Immediately, Shakespeare's London was alive with an interest in things Scottish. Many Scots followed their king to London and attended the theaters there. Shakespeare's company, which became the King's Men under James's patronage, now sometimes staged their plays for the new monarch's entertainment, just as they had for Queen Elizabeth before him. It was probably within this context that Shakespeare turned to Raphael Holinshed's history of Scotland for material for a tragedy.

In Scottish history of the eleventh century, Shakespeare found a spectacle of violence—the slaughter of whole armies and of innocent families, the assassination of kings, the ambush of nobles by murderers, the brutal execution of rebels. He also came upon stories of witches and wizards providing advice to traitors. Such accounts could feed the new Scottish King James's belief in a connection between treason and witchcraft. James had already himself executed women as witches. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* supplied its audience with a sensational view of witches and supernatural apparitions and equally sensational accounts of bloody battles in which, for example, a rebel was "unseamed . . . from the nave [navel] to th' chops [jaws]."

It is possible, then, that in writing *Macbeth* Shakespeare was mainly intent upon appealing to the new interests in London brought about by James's kingship. What he created, though, is a play that has fascinated generations of readers and audiences that care



A Scottish king and his court.
From Raphael Holinshed, *The historie of Scotland* (1577).

little about Scottish history. In its depiction of a man who murders his king and kinsman in order to gain the crown, only to lose all that humans seem to need in order to be happy—sleep, nourishment, friends, love—*Macbeth* teases us with huge questions. Why do people do evil knowing that it is evil? Does Macbeth represent someone who murders because fate tempts him? because his wife pushes him into it? because he is overly ambitious? Having killed Duncan, why does Macbeth fall apart, unable to sleep, seeing ghosts, putting spies in everyone's home, killing his friends and innocent women and children? Why does the success of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—prophesied by the witches, promising the couple power and riches and "peace to all their nights and days to come"—turn so quickly to ashes, destroying the Macbeths' relationship, their world, and, finally, both of them?

In earlier centuries, Macbeth's story was seen as a powerful study of a heroic individual who commits an evil act and pays an enormous price as his conscience—and the natural forces for good in the universe—destroy him. More recently, his story has been applied to nations that overreach themselves, his speeches of despair quoted to show that Shakespeare shared present-day feelings of alienation. Today, the line between Macbeth's evil and the supposed good of those who oppose him has been blurred, new attitudes about witches and witchcraft are being expressed, new questions raised about the ways that maleness and femaleness are portrayed in the play. Like so many of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* speaks to each generation with a new voice.

After you have read the play, we invite you to read "*Macbeth:* A Modern Perspective" by the late Professor Susan Snyder of Swarthmore College.

Reading Shakespeare's Language: *Macbeth*

For many people today, reading Shakespeare's language can be a problem—but it is a problem that can be solved. Those who have studied Latin (or even French or German or Spanish) and those who are used to reading poetry will have little difficulty understanding the language of poetic drama. Others, however, need to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures and of recognizing and understanding poetic compressions, omissions, and wordplay. And even those skilled in reading unusual sentence structures may have occasional trouble with Shakespeare's words. More than four hundred years of "static"—caused by changes in language and in life—intervene between his speaking and our hearing. Most of his vocabulary is still in use, but a few of his words are no longer used, and many of his words now have meanings quite different from those they had in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the theater, most of these difficulties are solved for us by actors who study the language and articulate it for us so that the essential meaning is heard—or, when combined with stage action, is at least *felt*. When we are reading on our own, we must do what each actor does: go over the lines (often with a dictionary close at hand) until the puzzles are solved and the lines yield up their poetry and the characters speak in words and phrases that are, suddenly, rewarding and wonderfully memorable.

Shakespeare's Words

As you begin to read the opening scenes of a Shakespeare play, you may notice occasional unfamiliar words. Some are unfamiliar simply because we no longer use them. In the opening scenes of *Macbeth*, for example, you will find the words *aroint thee* (begone), *coign* (corner), *anon* (immediately), *alarum* (a call to arms), *sewer* (butler), and *hautboy* (a very loud wind instrument designed for outdoor ceremonials, the forerunner of the orchestral oboe). Words of this kind are explained in notes to the text and will become familiar the more Shakespeare plays you read.

In *Macbeth*, as in all of Shakespeare's writing, more problematic are the words that are still in use but that now have different meanings. In the second scene of *Macbeth* we find the words *composition* (meaning "terms of peace") and *present* (meaning "immediate"); in the third scene, *choppy* is used where we would use "chapped" or "wrinkled," *addition* where we would use "title"; in the seventh scene, *receipt* is used to mean "container." Again, such words will be explained in the notes to the text, but they, too, will become familiar as you continue to read Shakespeare's language.

Some words are strange not because of the "static" introduced by changes in language over the past centuries but because these are words that Shakespeare is using to build a dramatic world that has its own space, time, and history. *Macbeth*, for example, builds, in its opening scenes, a location and a past history by references to "the Western Isles," to "thanes," "Sinel," "Glamis," and "Cawdor," to "kerns and gallowglasses," to "the Weïrd Sisters," to "Norweyan ranks," to "Inverness" and "Saint Colme's Inch." These "local" references build the Scotland that Macbeth and Lady

Macbeth inhabit and will become increasingly familiar to you as you get further into the play.

Shakespeare's Sentences

In an English sentence, meaning is quite dependent on the place given each word. "The dog bit the boy" and "The boy bit the dog" mean very different things, even though the individual words are the same. Because English places such importance on the positions of words in sentences, on the way words are arranged, unusual arrangements can puzzle a reader. Shakespeare frequently shifts his sentences away from "normal" English arrangements—often in order to create the rhythm he seeks, sometimes to use a line's poetic rhythm to emphasize a particular word, sometimes to give a character his or her own speech patterns or to allow the character to speak in a special way. When we attend a good performance of the play, the actors will have worked out the sentence structures and will articulate the sentences so that the meaning is clear. When reading the play, we need to do as the actor does: that is, when puzzled by a character's speech, check to see if the words are being presented in an unusual sequence.

Often Shakespeare rearranges subjects and verbs (i.e., instead of "He goes," we find "Goes he"). In the opening scenes of *Macbeth*, when Ross says (1.3.101–2) "As thick as tale / Came post with post," and when the witch says (1.3.24) "Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine," they are using constructions that place the subject and verb in unusual positions. The "normal" order would be "Post with post came as thick as tale" and "He shall dwindle. . . ." Shakespeare also frequently places the object before the subject and verb (i.e., instead of "I hit him," we might find "Him I hit"). Banquo's statement to the Weïrd Sisters at 1.3.57–58, "My noble partner /

You greet with present grace and great prediction," is an example of such an inversion. (The normal order would be "You greet my noble partner with present grace and great prediction.") Lady Macbeth uses such an inverted structure in 1.7.73–74 when she says to Macbeth, "his two chamberlains / Will I with wine and wassail . . . convince" (where the "normal" structure would be "I will convince [i.e., overpower] his two chamberlains with wine and wassail").

In some plays Shakespeare makes systematic use of inversions (*Julius Caesar* is one such play). In *Macbeth,* he more often uses a different kind of unusual sentence structure, one that depends on the separation of words that would normally appear together. (Again, this is often done to create a particular rhythm or to stress a particular word.) Malcolm's "This is the sergeant / Who, like a good and hardy soldier, fought / 'Gainst my captivity" (1.2.4–6) separates the subject and verb ("who fought"); the Captain's "No sooner justice had, with valor armed, / Compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels" (1.2.32–33) interrupts the two parts of the verb "had compelled" (at the same time that it inverts the subject and verb; the normal order would be "No sooner had justice compelled . . ."); a few lines later, the Captain's "the Norweyan lord, surveying vantage, / With furbished arms and new supplies of men, / Began a fresh assault" (1.2.34–36) separates the subject and verb ("lord began") with, first, a participial phrase and then a lengthy prepositional phrase. In order to create for yourself sentences that seem more like the English of everyday speech, you may wish to rearrange the words, putting together the word clusters and placing the remaining words in their more familiar order. You will usually find that the sentences will gain in clarity but will lose their rhythm or shift their emphases.

Locating and, if necessary, rearranging words that "belong together" is especially necessary in passages that separate subjects from verbs and verbs from objects by long delaying or expanding interruptions—a structure that is used frequently in *Macbeth*. For example, when the Captain, at 1.2.11–25, tells the story of Macbeth's fight against the rebel Macdonwald, he uses a series of such interrupted constructions:

> *The merciless Macdonwald*
> (Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
> The multiplying villainies of nature
> Do swarm upon him) from the Western Isles
> Of kerns and gallowglasses *is supplied*. . . .
> . . .
> But all's too weak;
> For *brave Macbeth* (well he deserves that name),
> Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
> Which smoked with bloody execution,
> Like Valor's minion, *carved out his passage* . . .

Here the interruptions provide details that catch the audience up in the Captain's story. The separation of the basic sentence elements "the merciless Macdonwald is supplied" forces the audience to attend to supporting details (of why he is worthy to be called a villain, of how he has been supplied with soldiers from the Western Isles) while waiting for the basic sentence elements to come together. A similar effect is created when "brave Macbeth carved out his passage" is interrupted by a clause commenting on the word "brave" ("well he deserves that name"), by a phrase that describes Macbeth's mood ("Disdaining Fortune"), and by two further phrases, one of them the complex "with his brandished steel / Which smoked with bloody execution," and one of them—"Like Valor's minion"—simple in structure but a richly rhetorical figure that makes Macbeth the chosen darling of Valor.

Occasionally, rather than separating basic sentence elements, Shakespeare simply holds them back, delaying them until much subordinate material has already been given. Lady Macbeth uses an inverted structure that provides this kind of delay when she says, at 1.6.22–24, "For those of old, / And the late dignities heaped up to them, / We rest your hermits" (where a "normally" constructed English sentence would have begun with the basic sentence elements "We rest your hermits"); Macbeth, in his famous soliloquy at 1.7.1–28, uses a delayed construction when he says (lines 2–7), "If th' assassination / Could trammel up the consequence and catch / With his surcease success, that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, / We'd jump the life to come" (where the basic sentence elements "We'd jump the life to come" are delayed to the end of the very long sentence).

Shakespeare's sentences are sometimes complicated not because of unusual structures or interruptions or delays but because he omits words and parts of words that English sentences normally require. (In conversation, we, too, often omit words. We say, "Heard from him yet?" and our hearer supplies the missing "Have you." Frequent reading of Shakespeare—and of other poets—trains us to supply such missing words.) In *Macbeth,* Shakespeare uses omissions to great dramatic effect. At 1.3.105–8, Angus says to Macbeth, "We are sent / To give thee from our royal master thanks, / [We are sent] Only to herald thee into his sight, / Not [to] pay thee" (the omitted words, shown in brackets, add clarity but slow the speech). At 1.4.48–49, Duncan's cryptic "From hence to Inverness / And bind us further to you" would read, if the missing words were supplied, "Let us go from hence to Inverness, and may this visit bind us further to you." Lady Macbeth's soliloquy, at 1.5.18–20, would read, with the omitted subjects and verbs in place, "Thou wouldst be great, / [Thou] Art not without ambition, but [thou art] without / The illness [that] should attend it." Later in the scene, at 1.5.51–54, she again omits words in saying, "Stop up th' access and passage to remorse, / [So] That no compunctious visitings of nature / [Will] Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between / Th' effect and it," and again at 1.7.80–82, where she asks Macbeth, "What [can]not [you and I] put upon / His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt / Of our great quell?" In reading *Macbeth* one should stay alert for omitted words, since Shakespeare so often uses this device to build compression and speed in the language of this play.

Shakespearean Wordplay

Shakespeare plays with language so often and so variously that books are written on the topic. Here we will mention only two kinds of wordplay, puns and metaphors. A pun is a play on words that sound the same but have different meanings. In many plays (*Romeo and Juliet* is a good example) Shakespeare uses puns frequently; in *Macbeth* they are rarely found (except in such serious "punning" as Macbeth's "If it were done when 'tis done . . ." [1.7.1–2]). More such serious punning occurs in the exchange between Donalbain and Macbeth just after Duncan's murder. To Donalbain's request for information, "What is amiss?" (i.e., what's wrong?), Macbeth responds, "You are," punning on *amiss* as "damaged" (2.3.113–14). Perhaps the play's most famous (and the most shocking) pun is Lady Macbeth's "If he do bleed, / I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal, / For it must seem their guilt" (2.2.71–73), where she seems to be playing with the double meaning of *guilt/gilt*. Such wordplay is rare in *Macbeth*.

Metaphor, though, fills the play. A metaphor is a play on words in which one object or idea is expressed as if it were something else, something with which it is said to share common features. For instance, when Lady Macbeth says (1.5.28–29) "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear," she is using metaphoric language: the words that she wants to say to Macbeth are compared to a liquid that can be poured in the ear. Metaphors are often used when the idea being conveyed is hard to express; through metaphor, the speaker is given language that helps to carry the idea or the feeling to his or her listener—and to the audience. Lady Macbeth uses metaphor to convey her contempt for Macbeth's cowardice (1.7.39–42): "Was the hope drunk / Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since? / And wakes it now, to look so green and pale / At what it did so freely?" And Macbeth expresses his own lack of valid motivation before the murder through a complex metaphor in which his "intent" is a horse and ambition is the knight preparing to ride the horse (1.7.25–27): "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself. . . ."

Macbeth's Language

Each of Shakespeare's plays has its own characteristic language. The range of registers in *Macbeth*'s language, along with the denseness of its poetry, has attracted considerable critical attention. (See, e.g., " 'What do you mean?': The Languages of *Macbeth*," in A. R. Braunmuller's New Cambridge edition of the play [updated edition, 2008, pages 43–55].) We would note here in particular the deliberate imprecision of some of the play's words. Macbeth's lines (1.7.1–2) "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly" not only play with the imprecise verb "done" but also refer to some unnamed "it." In the next sentence, we learn that "it" is "th' assassination" (a word that Shakespeare invents for this play)—but the imprecision is characteristic of *Macbeth*'s language. We hear it again in Lady Macbeth's "Wouldst thou have that / Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life / And live a coward in thine own esteem . . . ? " (1.7.45–47), where "that which thou esteem'st the ornament of life" is, perhaps, the crown—or, perhaps, the kingship. The sense is clear, but the language seems deliberately vague, deliberately flowery, as if designed to cover over the serpent under it. Macbeth's prayer (3.2.52–56) that night use its "bloody and invisible hand" to "cancel and tear to pieces that great bond / Which keeps me pale" is a precisely relevant example of the kind of resonant imprecision that characterizes this play. (See longer note to 3.2.55, page 195.)

Implied Stage Action

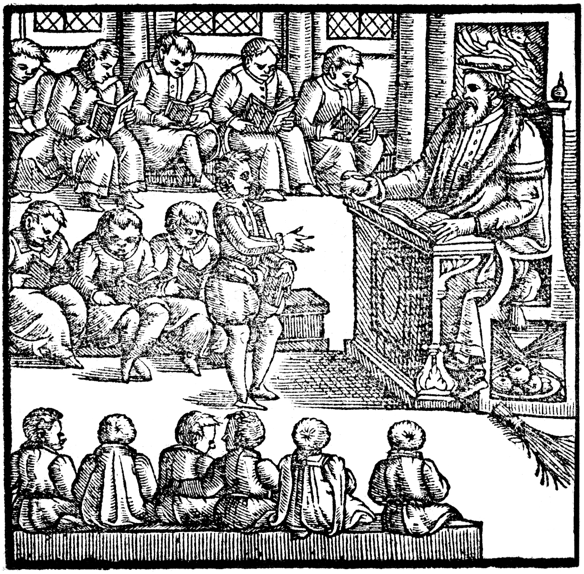
Finally, in reading Shakespeare's plays we should always remember that what we are reading is a performance script. The dialogue is written to be spoken by actors who, at the same time, are moving, gesturing, picking up objects, weeping, shaking their fists. Some stage action is described in what are called "stage directions"; some is suggested within the dialogue itself. We must learn to be alert to such signals as we stage the play in our imaginations. When, in the third scene of *Macbeth*, Banquo says (1.3.44–47), "You seem to understand me / By each at once her choppy finger laying / Upon her skinny lips," the stage action is obvious. Again, his words to Macbeth (1.3.54–55), “Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?,” indicate that the actor playing Macbeth gestures in a fairly obvious way. It is less easy later in the scene to imagine exactly what is to take place just before Banquo says (1.3.82–83), “The earth hath bubbles, as the water has, / And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?” The director and the actors (and the reader, in imagination) must decide just how the witches melt “Like breath into the wind.” The battle scenes in the fifth act of the play present a different kind of challenge to the reader’s imagination, as Malcolm’s army becomes a marching forest, and as Macbeth arms for battle, hears the ominous cry of women, kills young Siward, and then goes to meet his fate on the sword of Macduff. Learning to read the language of stage action repays one many times over when one reaches a crucial scene like that of the banquet and its appearing and disappearing ghost (3.4) or that of the final duel in 5.8—scenes in which implied stage action vitally affects our response to the play.

It is immensely rewarding to work carefully with Shakespeare’s language so that the words, the sentences, the wordplay, and the implied stage action all become clear—as readers for the past four centuries have discovered. It may be more pleasurable to attend a good performance of a play—though not everyone has thought so. But the joy of being able to stage one of Shakespeare’s plays in one’s imagination, to return to passages that continue to yield further meanings (or further questions) the more one reads them—these are pleasures that, for many, rival (or at least augment) those of the performed text, and certainly make it worth considerable effort to “break the code” of Elizabethan poetic drama and let free the remarkable language that makes up a Shakespeare text.

Shakespeare's Life

Surviving documents that give us glimpses into the life of William Shakespeare show us a playwright, poet, and actor who grew up in the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon, spent his professional life in London, and returned to Stratford a wealthy landowner. He was born in April 1564, died in April 1616, and is buried inside the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

We wish we could know more about the life of the world's greatest dramatist. His plays and poems are testaments to his wide reading—especially to his knowledge of Virgil, Ovid, Plutarch, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and the Bible—and to his mastery of the English language, but we can only speculate about his education. We know that the King's New School in Stratford-upon-Avon was considered excellent. The school was one of the English "grammar schools" established to educate young men, primarily in Latin grammar and literature. As in other schools of the time, students began their studies at the age of four or five in the attached "petty school," and there learned to read and write in English, studying primarily the catechism from the Book of Common Prayer. After two years in the petty school, students entered the lower form (grade) of the grammar school, where they began the serious study of Latin grammar and Latin texts that would occupy most of the remainder of their school days. (Several Latin texts that Shakespeare used repeatedly in writing his plays and poems were texts that schoolboys memorized and recited.) Latin comedies were introduced early in the lower form; in the upper form, which the boys entered at age ten or eleven, students wrote their own Latin orations and declamations, studied Latin



Title page of a 1573 Latin and Greek catechism for children.
From Alexander Nowell, *Catechismus paruus pueris primum Latine* . . . (1573).

historians and rhetoricians, and began the study of Greek using the Greek New Testament.

Since the records of the Stratford "grammar school" do not survive, we cannot prove that William Shakespeare attended the school; however, every indication (his father's position as an alderman and bailiff of Stratford, the playwright's own knowledge of the Latin classics, scenes in the plays that recall grammar-school experiences—for example, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 4.1) suggests that he did. We also lack generally accepted documentation about Shakespeare's life after his schooling ended and his professional life in London began. His marriage in 1582 (at age eighteen) to Anne Hathaway and the subsequent births of his daughter Susanna (1583) and the twins Judith and Hamnet (1585) are recorded, but how he supported himself and where he lived are not known. Nor do we know when and why he left Stratford for the London theatrical world, nor how he rose to be the important figure in that world that he had become by the early 1590s.

We do know that by 1592 he had achieved some prominence in London as both an actor and a playwright. In that year was published a book by the playwright Robert Greene attacking an actor who had the audacity to write blank-verse drama and who was "in his own conceit [i.e., opinion] the only Shake-scene in a country." Since Greene's attack includes a parody of a line from one of Shakespeare's early plays, there is little doubt that it is Shakespeare to whom he refers, a "Shake-scene" who had aroused Greene's fury by successfully competing with university-educated dramatists like Greene himself. It was in 1593 that Shakespeare became a published poet. In that year he published his long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*; in 1594, he followed it with *The Rape of Lucrece*. Both poems were dedicated to the young earl of Southampton (Henry Wriothesley), who may have become Shakespeare's patron.

It seems no coincidence that Shakespeare wrote these narrative poems at a time when the theaters were closed because of the plague, a contagious epidemic disease that devastated the population of London. When the theaters reopened in 1594, Shakespeare apparently resumed his double career of actor and playwright and began his long (and seemingly profitable) service as an acting-company shareholder. Records for December of 1594 show him to be a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. It was this company of actors, later named the King's Men, for whom he would be a principal actor, dramatist, and shareholder for the rest of his career.

So far as we can tell, that career spanned about twenty years. In the 1590s, he wrote his plays on English history as well as several comedies and at least two tragedies (*Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*). These histories, comedies, and tragedies are the plays credited to him in 1598 in a work, *Palladis Tamia*, that in one chapter compares English writers with "Greek, Latin, and Italian Poets." There the author, Francis Meres, claims that Shakespeare is comparable to the Latin dramatists Seneca for tragedy and Plautus for comedy, and calls him "the most excellent in both kinds for the stage." He also names him "Mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare": "I say," writes Meres, "that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speak English." Since Meres also mentions Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets among his private friends," it is assumed that many of Shakespeare's sonnets (not published until 1609) were also written in the 1590s.

In 1599, Shakespeare's company built a theater for themselves across the river from London, naming it