

**SELECT PLAYS: THE  
MERCHANT  
OF VENICE**

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Select Plays: The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

**SELECT PLAYS: THE  
MERCHANT  
OF VENICE**



Clarendon Press Series

# SHAKESPEARE

*SELECT PLAYS*

## THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

5 acts

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE voluminous works and immense fame of Shakespeare are in striking contrast with the scanty records of his life. Rowe was the first who attempted a biography of the poet, prefixed to his edition of 1709. Malone, with unwearied industry, gathered all that bore upon this subject from the records of the Corporation of Stratford, from the library at Dulwich, &c., together with all the notices of or allusions to Shakespeare in the works of his contemporaries. Since Malone's time many persons have employed themselves in re-sifting the evidence, and some have succeeded in discovering new facts. Unfortunately most of the documents lately brought to light are with good reason believed to be spurious.

We propose here to state in chronological order the main facts of the poet's life, referring those who desire fuller information to the detailed biographies written by Malone, Knight, Collier, Dyce, and Grant White. William Shakespeare was christened in the parish church of Stratford-on-Avon on the 26th of April, 1564. His father was John Shakespeare of Stratford, originally, as some suppose, a glover by trade. He had married in 1557 Mary Arden, one of the seven daughters and coheiresses of a yeoman in the neighbourhood, who brought him a small landed property. William doubtless acquired his 'small Latin and less Greek' at the Grammar School of Stratford. From his fondness for legal phraseology and his accuracy in using it, some have supposed that he was placed in an attorney's office after leaving school. Another account says that he was appren-

ticed to a butcher. From some unknown cause his father's circumstances became embarrassed between 1574 and 1578, and continued so for years afterwards, so that the poet was familiarized in his youth with the humiliations of poverty—an experience which widened his knowledge of life, and doubtless worked for good upon a nature not easily soured. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.' At the close of the year 1582, before he was nineteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was his senior by seven or eight years. This hasty and ill-assorted marriage could scarcely be a happy one, and Shakespeare must have thought of his own case when he wrote (*Twelfth Night*, ii. 4. 30)—

'Let still the woman take  
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,  
So sways she level in her husband's heart.'

Three children were born to him, Susanna in 1583, and Hamnet and Judith, twins, in 1585. Soon after this he seems to have left Stratford (where his wife and children remained) for London, where he joined the players at the Blackfriars theatre. The story of his having left Stratford in consequence of being detected in a poaching adventure in Sir Thomas Lucy's park at Charlecote, rests upon no certain evidence, and is incapable of being either verified or refuted. His love of the drama may have been first excited by witnessing the performances of some of the London companies who acted at Stratford from time to time while making a provincial tour, and he may have been led to join the Blackfriars company by the fact that the Burbages and Thomas Greene, who were among its members, were also natives of Warwickshire, if not of Stratford itself. Tradition said that he was first employed to hold the horses of the 'gallants' who frequented the theatre, but the tale may have been invented to sharpen the contrast between his high achievements and his humble beginnings. Of his powers as an actor we have no certain information. Rowe says: 'The top of his performance was the Ghost in his own Hamlet.' His name



stands first in the list of 'principal comedians' prefixed to Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in his Humour' (1598), and fifth among the 'principal tragedians' who played in the same author's 'Sejanus' (1603). He is also said to have personated Adam in *As You Like It*. He probably first developed his skill as a dramatist in furbishing old plays, and even, as it appears, those of authors still alive. It is certain that Greene in his 'Groatsworth of Wit,' a pamphlet published 1592, alludes to Shakespeare in the following words: 'There is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers, that with his "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a player's hide," supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.' Greene here parodies a line, 3 Henry VI. i. 4. 137, borrowed by Shakespeare from 'The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York.' It was doubtless his fame as a dramatist which recommended him to the notice of the young Earl of Southampton, to whom in 1593 he dedicated *Venus and Adonis*, 'the first heir of his invention,' as he calls it, and in the following year *Locrine*. In 1595 the Blackfriars Company opened their new theatre, the Globe, in Southwark, where they acted during the summer season, returning to Blackfriars for the winter. Probably by this time Shakespeare was already one of the proprietors of the theatre. In 1597 he had saved money enough to buy New Place, one of the best houses in Stratford. He doubtless paid frequent visits to his native place, where his family continued to reside, and where he made subsequent investments.

His only son, Hamnet, died in August 1596, in his twelfth year, and John Shakespeare, his father, in 1601. In 1607 his eldest daughter, Susanna, married John Hall a physician resident at Stratford, and in the following year a daughter was born to them—the only grandchild of the poet, in whom, as she died childless, his line became extinct. In September of the same year his mother died. In February 1616 his younger daughter, Judith, married Thomas

Quiney, a vintner of Stratford, and on the 23rd of April following the poet died, at the age of 52.

He had probably withdrawn, not only from the stage, but from all connection with the theatre, several years before, and lived uninterruptedly at New Place—to use Rowe's words—'in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends.' His contemporaries have commemorated his 'gentleness,' his 'uprightness of dealing,' his 'honesty,' his 'open and free nature.' His works show that he had a constant sense of human responsibility and an awful reverence for the mysteries which encompass our life. We might apply to him what Don Pedro says of Benedick (*Much Ado About Nothing*, ii. 3. 204), 'The man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests he will make.'

In person he was 'handsome and well-shaped;' his hair and beard were auburn, and the expression of his face grave yet kindly.

There is no ground for the assertion that Shakespeare was not duly appreciated during his life, and neglected afterwards. On the contrary we have ample evidence that his popularity was immediate and continuous. He was perhaps the only literary man of his time who made a large fortune, and there is no poet whose works, separately and collectively, have been so often reprinted.

Of the thirty-seven plays now included in editions of Shakespeare, the following were published separately in small quarto while the author was still alive:—*Richard II.* 1597; *Richard III.* 1597; *Romeo and Juliet*, 1597; *Love's Labour's Lost*, 1598; *Henry IV.* part i. 1599; *Henry IV.* part ii. 1600; *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1600; *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1600; *The Merchant of Venice*, 1600; *Henry V.* 1600; *Titus Andronicus*, 1600; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1602; *Hamlet*, 1603; *King Lear*, 1608; *Troilus and Cressida*, 1609; *Pericles*, 1611.

Of these, *Henry V.*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Pericles*, and the first editions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* were

surreptitious and unauthorized, being printed in all probability from copies made from shorthand notes taken during the representation.

Othello was also published separately after the author's death, but before the appearance of the first folio, 1622.

The first folio was published in 1623, with a Preface by Heminge and Condell, two of Shakespeare's fellow-actors and partners in the theatre. It contained thirty-six plays, and professed to be printed from the author's MSS. It is however demonstrable that in nearly every case where a previous quarto existed the text was printed from it, and it is almost certain that where there was no previous edition the text of the folio was taken, not immediately from the author's MS., but from a more or less faulty transcript.

The second folio, reprinted from the first, was published in 1632; the third folio in 1664, and the fourth in 1685. The two last included seven other plays, of which *Pericles* alone has been retained in modern editions.

The *Passionate Pilgrim* was published in 1599.

Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, together with *A Lover's Complaint*, were printed in 1609, doubtless without the sanction of the author. Some pieces now included among the poems were printed in 'England's Helicon' and 'England's Parnassus,' collections from divers authors, in 1600; and one, *The Phoenix and Turtle*, first appeared in Chester's 'Love's Martyr' in the year following.

The first attempt really to 'edit' Shakespeare's Plays was made by Rowe, 1709, who published a second and much improved edition in 1714. Pope's first edition appeared in 1725, his second in 1728. Theobald, who surpassed both his predecessors in learning, diligence and critical ingenuity, published his first edition in 1733. Subsequent editors were Hanmer, 1744, Warburton, 1747, Johnson, 1765. Afterwards Steevens was associated with Johnson. Capell, who first made a complete collation of the quartos and folios, published his text in 1768. In 1790 appeared an edition by Malone, the most learned and laborious of all Shakespeare's commentators.