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William Shakespeare, demonstrably the best loved writer world-wide for four centuries, was born in April, 440 years ago, in a small village in England. In a quixotic, though pernicious, form of grave robbing, critics with too much time and too little insight attempt to make a case for turning Shakespeare into someone else as year after year thousands of times Hamlet agonizes and dies on stages around the globe.

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William Shakespeare

by M H Perry

William Shakespeare, demonstrably the best loved writer world-wide for four centuries, was born in April, 440 years ago, in a small village in England. In a quixotic, though pernicious, form of grave robbing, critics with too much time and too little insight attempt to make a case for turning Shakespeare into someone else as year after year thousands of times Hamlet agonizes and dies on stages around the globe.

In 1999, *Harper's* magazine presented a concise summary of the debate between the pro- and anti-Shakespeare proponents. One of the *anti* people asserted that William Shakespeare could not have written the sonnets because of the lines:

*When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,...*

The idea is that Shakespeare was never in disgrace, and therefore would not have written about being so. They attribute the works to someone who was a pedophile and truly in disgrace. The Shakespearean works, however, are as universal as they are because they speak to everyone. In every life there is a time when there is strife—difficulties in the family, backbiters at work, disagreements in the neighborhood. If there is anyone alive who feels that the world has always been on their side and that they have never felt in disgrace, they should count themselves blest among all humankind.

As it was, Shakespeare was tooling around in London when he had a wife and children some distance away in Stratford. In the early twentieth century before the automobile was common, five miles was considered a substantial distance to travel and was not undertaken often by ordinary people. Sisters living five miles apart were known to communicate by way of post cards. Distance in Elizabethan England had to be more difficult to traverse than that, and Shakespeare could not have visited Stratford often. It is known that Shakespeare had been engaged to a woman other than the one he married. Though the details of his life may be little known, there is ample evidence to suggest that happiness eluded him in the early years and he may well have felt in disgrace.

Contradictorily, one of the *anti* writers thinks that Shakespeare was too disgraceful, pointing to records indicating that he was involved in a brawl after he returned to Stratford—and the writer of such great works, the critic argues, could not have been a brawler. He would rather have Shakespearean works written by a pedophile.

Another of the *antis* makes the point that there is no record that William Shakespeare was bi-sexual and, therefore, the sonnets referencing such could not have been written by him. Few people, however, broadcast their sexual alignment—especially if they are gay or bi-sexual and married.

Many people ruminate on the lack of information about Shakespeare's life and the lack of attention at his death; in particular, they consider the fact that the plays were not in his will. It has been pointed out, however, that he did not own the plays. They were the property of the acting company of which

he was a part. Because the Shakespearean works are admired world-wide, many would have liked his life to be as documented as England's Princess Diana's was with pictures of him at every turn. Nonetheless, the works stand on their own.

The most persistent of the assertions is that Shakespeare was not educated, and could not have been erudite enough to produce the plays. Ironically, therein lies the proof that he must have.

Any university-trained playwright would have felt compelled to follow the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action. Shakespeare violated them with abandon and set the stage for doing so. A university education is usually an advantage—but when originality is required, it can result in Blakeian *mind forged manacles*. Had the Bard acquired university training, he would have written *Antony and Cleopatra* in the manner in which John Dryden wrote *All for Love*. It would have been easier to present on stage; it would have been more smoothly crafted, adhering to the unities; and it would have lacked depth of character and passion.

In one of the *pro* articles Jonathan Bate, in the April '99 *Harper's* issue, states:

The best response to skeptics who doubt that the Stratford man could have written his plays on the foundation of nothing more than a grammar-school education is an invitation to read the complete plays of Ben Jonson. They are vastly more academic than Shakespeare's, yet they, too, were written on the foundation of nothing more than a grammar-school education. The thing is, Elizabethan grammar schools were very good. They put our high schools to deep shame.

On the basis of education, it would be as reasonable to claim that Samuel Clemens—ironically—could not have been Mark Twain. Beyond question, Benjamin Franklin, a runaway apprentice at the age of seventeen with no formal education well before the age of twelve, could not have written his autobiography nor any of his other works and certainly could not have discovered electricity nor have invented anything. Henry Ford could not have been Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, no Thomas Edison, and back in Shakespeare's time—using that kind of rationalizing—Queen Elizabeth certainly could not have been Elizabeth Tudor. Even though she was a princess, certainly no woman could have been well enough educated nor as strong minded to be one of the greatest rulers of all ages. [She and her brother must have secretly changed places, she dying not he, while he ruled disguised as a woman—no wonder "she" never married.]

In fact, Elizabeth I ruled so wisely that she brought a nation hanging over the cliff of political and economic disaster to a position of unparalleled strength and stability. It is only under such an awning that an insightful intellect, such as Shakespeare was, can use and expand an unfettered genius.

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Casting Stones

by Charles Miess

A faint trail of dust hung motionless in the calm morning air and snaked its way around curves in the tree-lined dirt road. I pressed the accelerator to the floor as I followed that trail with the intensity of a bloodhound that has the scent of his prey deep in his nostrils. I was in a furious rage. It was a rage so powerful that I lost any fear of personal danger. My life at that moment had a single purpose—to confront those who had committed an offense against nature, and an outrage against me.



It all began early that Sunday morning in April. The snow had finally melted, robins were singing as they scouted out spots to build their nests, and the air was as warm as a day in June. It was hard to imagine that a week before, cold winds tossed the emerging crocuses as they pushed their colorful heads through a layer of lingering snow. Now, the golden rays of the rising sun exploded on the blooms of daffodils. I loved this time of year, and I loved my place in the country. All was right with the world. All, except for one thing. The melting snowbanks along the road had exposed a winter's crop of trash that had been blatantly thrown from windows of passing cars. As was my custom in the spring of each year, I got out my large garden cart and started a roadside clean-up.



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My task was not an easy one. Many of the bottles had been intentionally dashed against rocks—their deadly shards waiting like poisonous snakes to maim the unwary. Other bottles and cans lay half submerged in the cold mud and water at the bottom of the roadside ditches. Styrofoam cups from McDonalds and Burger King looked like unsightly white pimples on the face of the nearby fields—many cups had *Please Don't Litter* printed in bold red lettering on the side. Empty cigarette packs, soiled underwear, and other trash completed the nauseating inventory. I picked up everything, on both sides of the road, to within a mile of my house. By the time I was finished I found that my love of nature was more than matched by my disgust for humanity.

My cart was advertised to hold thirteen bushels. I'm sure that I had at least twenty in the heaping load now parked in front of my house. I sat on my front steps, sipped a cool glass of lemonade, and admired the clean road. Meanwhile, I cursed the hedonistic arrogance of those who had so little respect for nature or for other people's property. I wondered if they had ever marveled at the

renewed life that burst from the earth each spring. Did they ever listen in rapture to the melody of the spring peepers? Would they thrill at the miracle of a monarch butterfly emerging from its chrysalis? My guess was that they were blind and deaf to the wonders of nature, and found pleasure only in destroying it.

An old car made its way slowly down the road toward me. I watched mesmerized as the window on the passenger side slowly opened. I saw a can fly from the open window and bounce in the grass no more than six feet to the side of my driveway. There were three of them in the car—three longhaired punks. To me, their hair was a symbol of belligerence; their act, a gesture of contempt; and my cart-full of trash, testimony to their depravity. I raced into the house for my car keys.

~

The dust trail ahead was getting thicker now as I headed down toward the valley. My wheels slid precariously across the dirt and gravel, but I was determined to catch them before they reached the main road at the foot of the hill. As I rounded the last curve and peered down, I saw their car approaching the stop sign for Route 240. I *knew* their kind. There was no question in my mind that they would be belligerent when I confronted them. They would be ready for me, of that I was sure. But if it was a fight they were after, I was prepared.



The fact that I was outnumbered three to one, and that they were near their physical prime while I was well past mine, meant nothing to me. I was still in good shape and would at least get a piece of each of them before they took me down. My pleasure was in knowing that their contemptuous act would not go unchallenged. They were at the stop sign now. I sped toward them like a maniac, swerved around, and skidded to a stop sideways in front of their car. I got out and marched toward them like a raging bull.

Then I stopped dead in my tracks. I felt as if the wind was suddenly knocked out of me. A moment before I could have faced the most fearful incarnation of the Devil and spit in his eye without the slightest qualm. Now, I felt weak, powerless, and perplexed. In that car sat the prettiest and most frightened young girls that I had ever seen. Each was in a flowered print dress as if on her way home from Sunday school—and they probably were, as it was a Sunday morning. They looked to be as soft and sweet and delicate as daffodils quivering in the spring breeze. They were so frozen in fear that they didn't even think to lock their doors or close their windows.

"You threw a can on my property!" I stammered to no one in particular.

"We're sorry mister, we're so sorry," they all answered in unison. "We weren't thinking, mister—please, we'll never do it again," they pleaded. Despite their alarm, I sensed an unmistakable sincerity in their voices.

I suddenly realized how wild and irrational I must have appeared to them. I desperately wished to be somewhere else. "Well don't do it again," I said hoarsely, with as much conviction as I could

muster. I escaped back into my car. My adrenaline-filled muscles ached for combat, but my confused and humiliated mind wanted me out of there fast. I drove away wondering how I could get so much out of control. I questioned if I had misjudged the motives of people. I considered how my own priorities had changed over the years. I even recalled throwing a thing or two from my car when I was their age.



I took the long way home that day. Eventually, my senses recovered and the sights and sounds and smells of spring flooded back into my brain. I waved to someone walking along the road that I didn't even know. People didn't seem so bad after all. The world was at peace, and so was I.

The empty Coca-Cola can still lay alongside my driveway in the spot where it had been carelessly thrown a half-hour before. I picked it up and playfully tossed it in the cart as if practicing for a game of basketball. "A man could do worse than have kids like

that," I said to myself.

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William Shakespeare

(bapt. 26 April 1564, died 23 April 1616)

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west;
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
 Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

From *Much Ado about Nothing*

SIGH no more, ladies, sigh no more,
 Men were deceivers ever,
 One foot in sea and one on shore,
 To one thing constant never:
 Then sigh not so, but let them go,
 And be you blithe and bonny,
 Converting all your sounds of woe
 Into Hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no moe,
 Of dumps so dull and heavy!
 The fraud of men was ever so,
 Since summer first was leavy:
 Then sigh not so, but let them go,
 And be you blithe and bonny,
 Converting all your sounds of woe
 Into Hey nonny, nonny.

Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
 I all alone bewep my outcast state,
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
 And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
 Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
 With what I most enjoy contented least;
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
 Haply I think on thee—and then my state,
 Like to the lark at break of day arising
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Ariel's Song from *The Tempest*

Full fathom five thy father lies:
 Of his bones are coral made;
 Those are pearls that were his eyes;
 Nothing of him that doth fade
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange.
 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
 Ding-dong!
 Hark! now I hear them—Ding-dong, bell!

Sonnet 98

From you have I been absent in the spring,
 When proud-pied April dressed in all his trim
 Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing:
 That heavy Saturn laughed and leaped with him.
 Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
 Of different flowers in odor and in hue,
 Could make me any summer's story tell:
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew:
 Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the Rose;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
 Yet seemed it winter still, and you away,
 As with your shadow I with these did play.

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
Oh, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

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