

Old England, Nostalgia, and the "Warwickshire" of Shakespeare's Mind

MAURICE HUNT

"He was wont to go to his native country once a year," the seventeenth-century biographer John Aubrey pronounced concerning the playwright Shakespeare's relationship with his native place, the Midlands town Stratford-upon-Avon.¹ No one can gauge the accuracy of the gossipy Aubrey's anecdotes; but considered in light of the Elizabethan difficulty of negotiating the nearly one-hundred miles between Shakespeare's rural home and the largest city in Renaissance Europe, Aubrey's claim may very well be true. Russell Fraser has memorably taken us hand-in-hand with Shakespeare on an imaginative, late-sixteenth-century journey from the Stratford home over the muddy, sometimes flooded, highwayman-threatened roads that Shakespeare probably took to Newgate.² This trip one-way took at least four days, even if the traveller normally walking occasionally hired horses between inns. But, as Fraser comments, "at three pence a mile this [probably] wasn't an option available to young Shakespeare."³ In any case, walking was how players travelled on their provincial tours.

The journey most likely took Shakespeare initially east through Compton Wynyates to Banbury, past "stone farmhouses, grayish brown . . . dark against the fields"⁴—poor pelting villages—through Buckinghamshire and the hamlet of Grendon Underwood. John Aubrey, getting his Shakespeare plays wrong, proclaimed that "the humour of the constable in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he happened to take at Grendon in Bucks . . . which is the road from London to Stratford, and there was living that constable about 1642, when I first came to Oxford: Mr. Josias Howe is of that parish, and knew him."⁵ From there, a bemuddled, tired Shakespeare

passed over the Chiltern Hills, through the Vale of Aylesbury, to Uxbridge, twelve miles northwest of London Wall, where the Banbury road joined the Oxford road. From there he walked through Southall and Acton, along the edge of today's Hyde Park and the sixteenth-century Tyburn gallows, through St. Giles in the Fields, to the vicinity of Gray's Inn and Holborn Bars.

Fraser's detailed imaginative reconstruction of Shakespeare's journey makes Aubrey's report of a single annual visit to Stratford believable. No record or report of Shakespeare's presence at his son Hamnet's internment exists. Given the ardors of the journey, one would be surprised to learn of his attending a dying son's body and then corpse. Moreover, Shakespeare's inclination to visit his "native country"—to use Aubrey's quaint phrase—may have been negatively colored by any one or more of the plausible reasons for his original leaving Stratford for London. These may include John Shakespeare's apparent financial debts and the loss of young William's patrimony (the mortgaging of the land and property which had been bequeathed to his mother); the probable lack of living space (and livelihood) for a newly married minor with two children—Hamnet and Susanna; and the conjectured legal persecution of the Catholic-hating Sir Thomas Lucy for deer-poaching on his grounds.

Despite these possible negative overtones, Stratford was most likely never far from Shakespeare's thoughts in London. His brother Edmund followed him there to the trade of actor, to be buried in 1607 near the Globe Theatre in Southwark Cathedral; and Richard Field, the Stratford tanner's son and three years Shakespeare's senior, in London printed Shakespeare's carefully prepared *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Field, in fact, at one time lived "on Wood Street in Cripplegate ward, just around the corner from Shakespeare."⁶ Still, Edmund Shakespeare and Richard Field could not have helped Shakespeare home during those moments that all men and women suffer, when they wish for whatever reason that light or time could instantaneously convey them back to the countryside, to the town, to the house where they first lived, where they first met the world, typically on their own, fresh terms. Like them, Shakespeare generally could only return vicariously, in his case through his art. The

often fanciful way in which he did so constitutes what could be called a Warwickshire of the mind.

For centuries commentators on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have located the comedy's folklore in the Warwickshire countryside; they have imagined young Shakespeare listening to illiterate Stratfordites telling of the fairies' mischief, of Robin Goodfellow's beguiling village maidens and housewives in their dairy labors; and they have supposed that the nascent playwright himself experienced in his native woodlands something like the Athenian youths' amorous adventures. Less speculative, however, is the apparent allusion to a celebrated event that occurred only fourteen miles from Stratford on Monday, July 18, 1575, when Shakespeare was eleven years old. "My gentle puck, come hither," Oberon beckons early in Act II of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,

Thou rememb'rest
 Since once I sat upon a promontory
 And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
 To hear the sea-maid's music? (II.i.148-54)⁷

James Boaden in 1832 was the first Shakespearean to assert in print that certain details of this remarkable passage configure elements of a Summer 1575 allegorical pageant presented by the Earl of Leicester to Queen Elizabeth at the estate she had given him—Kenilworth.⁸ According to separate accounts of this entertainment written by Robert Laneham and George Gascoigne, the Queen, returning to the castle after late-afternoon deer-hunting, at a small lake came upon "*Triton, Neptune's blaster*," seated "upon a swimming mermayd (that from top too tayl was an eyghteen foot long)."⁹ (Gascoigne, in *The Princely Pleasures at the Courte at Kenelwoorth, 1575*, however, asserts that "*Tryton, in likenesse of a mermaide, came towards the Queene's Majestie as she passed over the bridge, returning from hunting.*")¹⁰ Triton tells the Queen that her mere appearance will be sufficient to make the captor of the Lady of the Lake release the maiden. After several allegorical speeches and the appearance of the Lady of the

Lake herself, Elizabeth, passing farther onto the bridge, encountered Arion “ryding alofte upon hiz old freend the dolphin.”¹¹ (Gascoigne, however, states that “Protheus appeared, sitting on a dolphyn’s back.”)¹² One concludes that the impressions made on eye-witnesses of this pageant did not exactly correspond. Nevertheless both Laneham and Gascoigne agree that the mythological personage seated upon a dolphin sang a lyrical song and that especially ravishing music issued from a consort hidden within the sea creature.

No account exists of the size of the crowd surrounding Leicester’s lake. If it was large, it is not difficult to imagine one of the most prominent officials of a town fourteen miles away and his eleven-year-old son watching.¹³ Recollection plays tricks with Laneham and Gascoigne (and the minds of their possible informants). Recollecting in relative tranquility, Shakespeare may have thought he “heard a mermaid on a dolphin’s back / Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath / That the rude sea grew civil at her song.” Triton, in Laneham’s account of the 1575 entertainment, charges “both *Eolus* with al his windez, the waters with hiz springs, hiz fysh and fooul, and all his clients in the same, that they ne be so hardye in any fors to stur, but keep them calm and quiet while this Queen be prezent.”¹⁴ Likewise, Gascoigne has Triton “commanding . . . the waves to be calme.” “You waters wilde, supresse your waves, and keepe you calme and plaine,” he orders.¹⁵

To this developing collation of details should be added a final ingredient from Leicester’s pageantry: the spectacular fireworks that blazed on different July nights in the Warwickshire sky. Laneham describes “very straunge and sundry kindez of *Fier-works*, compeld [on the night of Thursday, July 14th] by cunning to fly too and fro, and too mount very hye into the ayr upward, and also too burn unquenshabl in the water beneath. . . .”¹⁶ On the previous Sunday, Jupiter displayed “hiz mayn poour; with blaz of burning darts, flying too and fro, leamz of starz coruscant, streamz and hail of firie sparkes, lightnings of wildfier a water and lond, flight & shoot of thunderbolz, all with such countinauns, terror, and vehemencie, that the Heavins thundred, the waters soourged, the earth shooke.”¹⁷

The reconstruction of the mermaid-passage out of details of the Kenilworth pageantry suggests a Coleridge-like imaginative recollection on Shakespeare's part, rather than a reaction to texts read such as Laneham's or Gascoigne's. The clear allusion to Queen Elizabeth in the passage following this one in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the "fair vestal thronèd by the west" (II.i.158), may in some way be linked with the Kenilworth context of our primary passage, either as provoking it or, more likely, as stimulated by the likely resonances of the Queen in the mermaid-dolphin recollection. If the focused allusion amounts to Shakespeare's Warwickshire journey of the mind, it is also Oberon's—or rather Shakespeare-Oberon's—for Oberon is Shakespeare's surrogate in the play, an authoritative stage manager trying to script the lives of his characters: the four Athenian youths and their love relationships. "Thou rememb' rest," Oberon prefaces the lyrical poetry under discussion; "I remember" (II.i.154), Robin Goodfellow concludes it. Memory thus becomes part of the passage's thematics, just as it does in the discrepancies among Laneham's, Gascoigne's, and their possible informants' recollections of what they saw and heard during several Warwickshire late July 1575 nights. If Puck is confirming the accuracy of Oberon's memory, a thick unintended irony materializes; for the human witnesses to the Warwickshire equivalent of Oberon's pageant apparently could not remember accurately. This irony applies to Shakespeare, who most likely forged a poetic composite out of elements that, as experienced, had the quality of a dream in a young boy's mind—a midsummer night's dream, in fact. From the beginning the problem of distortion involves itself in Shakespeare's Warwickshire of the mind.

Critics rarely note that it is the near-divine harmony of the mermaid's song that gives Oberon a supernatural vision of Love—armed Cupid—and of the means to control erotic desire (through the juice of the flower love-idleness, the flower given that power by Cupid's potent arrow, which missed the heart of the "imperial vot'ress" Elizabeth).¹⁸ A sociopolitical allegory likely informs the passage about Cupid, his arrow intended for Queen Elizabeth, and the purpled "little western [English] flower" (II.i.166), an allegory perhaps involving Leicester, his missed amorous intentions

with regard to the Queen, and his love-affair with a western flower, Lettice Knollys, Countess of Essex.¹⁹ But political allegory is too intellectually detached, too cold a signification to throw over the warmly resonant meaning of the mermaid/dolphin passage. Shakespeare's Warwickshire of the mind in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about the knowledge of how to control falling in and out of romantic love, an irony if we are to judge the inference by the anguished feelings of helplessness concerning the Dark Lady's amours that are registered in the Sonnets. Still, in this early comedy Shakespeare suggests that the secret to controlling one's love lies hidden in the memorial reconstruction of an event occurring early in life, in recollections of—to use Aubrey's phrase—one's "native country."

The lyrical power and dramatic importance of the recollection of a mermaid singing upon a dolphin's back in my reading derive from memory's distortion of far-off events, a distortion typically traced to nostalgia. Shakespeare self-consciously interrogates this association in certain dialogue between Shallow, Silence, and Falstaff in 2 *Henry IV*, and he does so in a context that has the distinctive feel (if not the actuality) of the Warwickshire countryside.²⁰ In the folksy details of their talk about times past, the two Justices could be petty country officials about Stratford:

SHALLOW And how doth my cousin your bedfellow? And your fairest daughter and mine, my god-daughter Ellen?

SILENCE Alas, a black ouzel, cousin Shallow.

SHALLOW By yea and no, sir, I dare say my cousin William is become a good scholar. He is at Oxford still, is he not?

SILENCE Indeed, sir, to my cost.

SHALLOW A must then to the Inns o' Court shortly. I was once of Clement's Inn, where I think they will talk of mad Shallow yet.

SILENCE You were called 'Tusty Shallow' then, cousin.

SHALLOW By the mass, I was called anything; and I would have done anything indeed, too, and roundly, too. There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Barnes, and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squeal, a Cotswold man; you had not four such swinge-bucklers in all the Inns o' Court again. And I may say to you, we knew where the bona-robas were, and had the best of them all at commandment. Then was Jack

Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray,
Duke of Norfolk.

SILENCE This Sir John, cousin, that comes hither anon about
soldiers?

SHALLOW The same Sir John, the very same. I see him break
Scoggin's head at the court gate when a was a crack, not thus
high. And the very same day did I fight with one Samson Stock-
fish, a fruiterer, behind Gray's Inn. Jesu, Jesu, the mad days
that I have spent! And to see how many of my old acquaintance
are dead.

SILENCE We shall all follow, cousin.

SILENCE Certain, 'tis certain; very sure, very sure. Death, as the
Psalmist saith . . . (III.ii.5-34)

This homely talk has qualities of a Shakespearean Warwickshire of the mind: the knowledge of villagers' habits and the desire and ability to follow the course of their lives; the good-natured (but not deeply seated) inquiry after the welfare of countrymen and women; the sudden *non sequiturs* in a narrative, generally to focus on rural matters such as the price of bullocks and ewes; the sheer loquaciousness of men isolated in the countryside, replete with folksy repetitions. Added to the list might be the self-indulgent recall of hare-brained adventures a younger self enjoyed:

SHALLOW O, Sir John, do you remember since we lay all night
in the Windmill in Saint George's Field?

FALSTAFF No more of that, good Master Shallow, no more of
that.

SHALLOW Ha, 'twas a merry night! And is Jane Nightwork alive?

FALSTAFF She lives, Master Shallow.

SHALLOW She never could away with me.

FALSTAFF Never, never. She would always say she could not
abide Master Shallow.

SHALLOW By the mass, I could anger her to th' heart. She was
then a bona-roba. Doth she hold her own well?

FALSTAFF Old, old, Master Shallow.

SHALLOW Nay, she must be old; she cannot choose but be old;
certain she's old; and had Robin Nightwork by old Nightwork
before I came to Clement's Inn.

SILENCE That's fifty-five year ago.

SHALLOW Ha, cousin Silence, that thou hadst seen that that this
knight and I have seen! Ha, Sir John, said I well?

FALSTAFF We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.

SHALLOW That we have, that we have; in faith, Sir John, we have. Our watchword was 'Hem boys!' Come, let's to dinner; come, let's to dinner. Jesus, the days that we have seen! Come, come. (III.ii.179-202)

Obviously these poetic recollections are soaked in nostalgia, a mental process that distorts the past to make it satisfy present wishes and needs. Falstaff names Shallow's memorial recreations a lie:

. . . I do see the bottom
of Justice Shallow. Lord, Lord, how subject we old men are to this vice of lying! This same starved justice hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildness of his youth and the feats he hath done about Turnbull Street; and every third word a lie, duer paid to the hearer than the Turk's tribute. I do remember him at Clement's Inn, like a man made after supper of a cheese paring. When a was naked, he was for all the world like a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife

And now is this Vice's dagger become a squire, and talks as familiarly of John o' Gaunt as if he had been sworn brother to him, and I'll be sworn a ne'er saw him but once, in the Tilt-yard, and then he burst his head for crowding among the marshal's men. (III.ii.275-84, 286-90)

In many respects, *2 Henry IV* is a play about the distortions of nostalgic remembrance as characters struggle in hard times to recreate a past ideal England in their minds.²¹ Lady Percy, for example, in recollection refashions the flawed Hotspur playgoers perceived in *1 Henry IV* into the perfect mirror of chivalry, a model whose thick accents aspiring youth once imitated (II.iii.10-44). Nostalgic memory makes Hotspur "the mark and glass, copy and book, / That fashioned others"—a "miracle of men" (II.iii.31, 33). The self-consciousness of Shakespeare's exploration in *2 Henry IV* of nostalgia's false warping of memory, conducted partly in the context of what might be called a Warwickshire of the mind, suggests that when through his art the playwright again journeys to his native country, the resulting images will be less nostalgic, more unsentimental, more

truthful to the recollections of life actually lived in and around Stratford. Such indeed is the case in *As You Like It* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, wherein the playwright makes an appearance as the character William who possesses some of the notorious traits later attributed to Shakespeare himself.

In Shakespeare's time, the Warwickshire Forest of Arden was so dense that it has been said that a squirrel could journey from Stratford to the vicinity of Birmingham without once touching the ground. Hunters, gatherers, masterless men and women, and cottage industries populated this forest more densely than has been commonly recognized, a fact justifying Shakespeare's locating there in *As You Like It* a cast of characters ranging from exiled courtiers to simple country folk such as William and his love Audrey. In many respects, *As You Like It* concerns the problematical process of personal ripening under the influence of time and love, and of learning how to recognize *kairos*, the moment for realizing one's ripened being.²² Touchstone's complaints about rotting in the Forest of Arden and Jaques' portrait of humankind waxing and waning through the seven ages of life are only two of many contexts in the play that focus the issue of ripeness and its relationship to seizing the opportune moment. Orlando seizes that moment when he chooses love over hate and intervenes to save sleeping Oliver from the lioness and serpent threatening him.

My thesis precludes a full exploration of these ideas, but reference to them becomes necessary for grasping the significance of Shakespeare's imaginative journey home in creating William, a comic younger self. Jaques has earlier persuaded Touchstone against being married to Audrey irregularly by the priest Sir Oliver Martext, and Touchstone begins Act V by protesting, "A most wicked Sir Oliver, Audrey, a most vile Martext. But, Audrey, there is a youth here in the forest lays claim to you" (V.i.5-7):

AUDREY Ay, I know who 'tis. He hath no interest in me in the world. Here comes the man you mean.

Enter William

TOUCHSTONE It is meat and drink to me to see a clown. By my troth, we that have good wits have much to answer for. We shall be flouting; we cannot hold.

WILLIAM Good ev'n, Audrey.

AUDREY God ye good ev'n, William.

WILLIAM And good ev'n to you, sir.

TOUCHSTONE Good ev'n, gentle friend. Cover thy head, cover thy head. Nay, prithe, be covered. How old are you, friend?

WILLIAM Five-and-twenty, sir.

TOUCHSTONE A ripe age. Is thy name William?

WILLIAM William, sir.

TOUCHSTONE A fair name. Wast born i'th'forest here?

WILLIAM Ay, sir, I thank God.

TOUCHSTONE Thank God—a good answer. Art rich?

WILLIAM Faith, sir, so-so.

TOUCHSTONE So-so is good, very good, very excellent good. And yet it is not, it is but so-so. Art thou wise?

WILLIAM Ay, sir, I have a pretty wit.

TOUCHSTONE Why, thou sayst well. I do now remember a saying: "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." The heathen philosopher, when he had a desire to eat a grape, would open his lips when he put it into his mouth, meaning thereby that grapes were made to eat, and lips to open. You do love this maid?

WILLIAM I do, sir.

TOUCHSTONE Give me your hand. Art thou learned?

WILLIAM No, sir.

TOUCHSTONE Then learn of me: to have is to have. For it is a figure in rhetoric that drink, being poured out of a cup into a glass, by filling the one doth empty the other. For all your writers do consent that *ipse* is he. Now you are not *ipse*, for I am he.

WILLIAM Which he, sir?

TOUCHSTONE He, sir, that must marry this woman. Therefore, you clown, abandon—which is in the vulgar, leave—the society—which in the boorish is company—of this female—which in the common is woman: which together is, abandon the society of this female, or, clown, thou perishest; or, to thy better understanding, diest; or, to wit, I kill thee, make thee away, translate thy life into death, thy liberty into bondage. I will deal in poison with thee, or in bastinado, or in steel. I will bandy with thee in faction, I will o'errun thee with policy. I will kill thee a hundred and fifty ways. Therefore tremble, and depart.

AUDREY Do, good William.

WILLIAM God rest you merry, sir.

Exit

"Wast born i'th'forest here?" Touchstone asks and William replies affirmatively. Like this namesake, William Shakespeare could be said to have been born in the vicinity of the Forest of Arden. By 1599—the date usually assigned to *As You Like It*—William Shakespeare, again like his namesake in the play—was said to have "a pretty wit." Francis Meres had essentially said so in print in 1598, terming Shakespeare an English Ovid.²³ "Art thou learned," Touchstone asks and receives a negative answer. In *2 Henry IV*, Shallow asks Silence, "I dare say my cousin William is become a good scholar. He is at Oxford still, is he not?" (III.ii.8-9). Warwickshire-like recollections are drenched in nostalgia in *2 Henry IV*, and Shallow's question receives a positive reply. Nostalgia, however scarcely colors Shakespeare's creation of a comic alter ego in *As You Like It*, and the charge of "small Latin" that Ben Jonson would later level against Shakespeare was perhaps beginning to characterize the playwright as early as the 1590s. "For all writers do consent that *ipse* is he," Touchstone sarcastically lectures William. "Now you are not *ipse* [the successful lover of this woman], for I am he." "Which he, sir?" William thickly replies.²⁴

Why would Shakespeare distort a recreation of himself in a plain, naked manner at the other extreme from aggrandizing nostalgic recollection? What positive value could an imaginative return to his native country and an unnostalgically seen self have? After all, Touchstone insults William by calling his age of twenty-five "ripe." William may have a pretty wit, but an uncultivated life in Arden has never ripened it, as Oxford might have (the university town through which William Shakespeare likely passed a number of times on the road to-and-from Stratford and London). Twenty-five was an age at which most Englishmen who attended Oxford or Cambridge had matriculated B.A. or M.A. At age twenty-five, the thirty-four or thirty-five-year-old creator of *As You Like It* was most likely writing—by Shakespearean standards—aesthetically immature works such as the *Henry VI* trilogy, which the playwright almost certainly must have recognized as unripe compared to intervening plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*.²⁵ In a play in which ripeness is much, if not all, of what matters in life, William, like his twenty-five-year-old playwright namesake, is

unripe—a self-deprecating foil accentuating the noble ripeness of Orlando and Old Adam, among others.

Shakespeare's Warwickshire of the mind in *As You Like It* deeply involves the question of artistic ripeness in the context of the poet's origins and death. "I am here with thee and thy goats," Touchstone tells Audrey in Act III, "as the most capricious poet Ovid was among the Goths" (III.iii.5-6). Exile among the barbarous Goths may have precluded Ovid's full ripening as a poet; conversely, an origin among goatherds and peasants might seem to threaten the full flowering of the English Ovid, William Shakespeare. Twice in *As You Like It* Shakespeare alludes to his former rival, Christopher Marlowe. Quoting a verse from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (V.i), Phoebe, concerning her passion for Ganymede, exclaims, "Dead Shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,/ Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight" (III.v.82-83). "When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a good man's wit seconded with the forward child, understanding," Touchstone tells Audrey, "it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room" (III.iii.9-12). For decades, Shakespeare scholars have recognized an allusion in Touchstone's final phrases to Marlowe's death by stabbing in a small room in a likely alehouse in Deptford, purportedly over "the reckoning," the bill.²⁶ Shakespeare thus focuses on Marlowe's art preserved by memory and on his premature death in 1593, when he was twenty-nine. In a play about ripening, the force of the allusions is clear: Marlowe may have written single lines or passages of memorable poetry but his early death precluded his ripening into the rare poetic dramatist that Shakespeare may have hoped he could become (and was in the process of becoming). Touchstone's allusion to details of Marlowe's death appears only seconds after (only 3 lines, in fact) his reference to himself in Arden as "honest Ovid among the Goths." This proximity is not accidental when considered in the larger context of Shakespeare's return to Warwickshire in the person of the bumpkin William. If "a man's good wit is [not] seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room." The intellectual understanding that an education at Pembroke College, Cambridge had developed, had "seconded" Marlowe's "good wit"—but he was dead. The lack of that

enriched understanding might strike William Shakespeare *more* dead, in the sense that his dramatic and non-dramatic poetry might not be quoted by after-ages to the degree that prematurely dead Marlowe's apparently would be. The William of the Forest of Arden at twenty-five has "a pretty wit," but it is not "seconded with the forward child, understanding," especially as the developed knowledge of the Classical languages and of rhetorical tropes facilitates that process.

At this point, my reader might object that in 1598 or 1599 Shakespeare had demonstrated to everyone (including himself) that he had acquired as much (or more) mastery of Classical ideas and rhetorical tropes as Marlowe ever did. After all, Meres had complimented Shakespeare lavishly. One might argue that Shakespeare's attitude in *As You Like It* to the recreation of a Warwickshire self is tongue-in-cheek, completely self-confident in its evocation of a younger self that the playwright felt no longer resembled him in the slightest. The recreation in this reading would reassuringly allow him to measure the immense distance that he had professionally traveled. One may grant these arguments and still maintain that the recreation of young William by its very process precipitated an old anxiety within Shakespeare about whether his humble origins might someday, somehow, become the obstacle to enduring artistic greatness.

I have argued elsewhere that impiety in *As You Like It* partly results from certain failures and inadequacies of language, especially courtly language, and that conversely pious deeds replace this speech as an expressive medium.²⁷ William's answers to Touchstone's progressively hostile and abusive speech are straightforward, pious, and charitable. The play's William answers the jester's query "Wast born i'th'forest here?" with the reply "Ay, sir, I thank God." "Thank God—a good answer. Art rich?" Touchstone continues; "Faith, sir, so-so" is William's reply (V.i.21-24). William's "Faith," coming soon after his "I thank God," reinforces auditors' impression of his piety. Touchstone's increasingly violent threats regarding William's presence and his status as Audrey's lover cannot shake William's charitable disposition. Threatened by Touchstone with death "a hundred and fifty ways," William exits goodnaturedly, exclaiming "God rest you merry, sir."²⁸ Touchstone's Ovid is "honest Ovid . . . among the Goths";

the poet-playwright whom Francis Meres would term the English Ovid was "honest" because of his simple origins. At least the logic of Shakespeare's figurative journey home and recreation of a comic self suggests so. Obedient, hat-in-hand, William often replies "Ay, sir" (V.i.22, 27) or "No, sir" (V.i.36). Essentially William dramatizes a version of Celia's humorous notion of an ideal uttered response to life. When Rosalind begs her to answer all of her huddled questions about Orlando in one word, Celia jokes, "You must borrow me Gargantua's mouth first, 'tis a word too great for any mouth of this age's size. To say ay and no to these particulars is more than to answer in a catechism" (III.ii.205-07). William in effect says "ay" and "no" in his unequivocal genial speech. Heard within the context of her remark about catechism, Celia's "ay" and "no" allude to simple, direct spiritual speech. King Lear judges that "'Aye' and 'no' too was no good divinity" (IV.vi.98). In his madness and disgust over Regan and Goneril's flattering abuse of these terms, Lear denies the truth of a passage found in James 5:12—" . . . let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay." Celia less distinctly but nonetheless certainly refers to this Biblical passage in her joke about "ay," "no," and catechism—a joke that gets lightly staged in the rustic William's "divinely" declarative speech.²⁹ If Shakespeare's Warwickshire of the mind anxiously includes his lack of higher education and its potential troubling significance for his art, in *As You Like It* it also includes his rediscovery of a native goodness, a piety, perhaps not appreciated by a worldly court and London.

Shakespeare's inclusion of an even younger alter ego William in the 1597 comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* anticipates the implication that the playwright's "native country" bred a piety and relative innocence but in this case that it was challenged very early by the knowledge of evil. Commentators often remark that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the only Shakespeare comedy located in England. Set in and about Windsor, the play nevertheless involves Stratford. "The dozen white luces" (pike) that Slender mentions in Shallow's coat of arms, the fish that Sir Hugh Evans calls a "dozen white louses" (I.i.14, 16), have been heard as a satiric allusion to the coat of arms of Sir Thomas Lucy, a notorious Warwickshire persecutor of Catholics and, according to John Aubrey, the nemesis of

young William Shakespeare caught poaching deer and rabbits on his estate.³⁰ Stratford reemerges later in *The Merry Wives* when young William's "small Latin" becomes the dramatic focus of Act IV, Scene i. Critics of this play have been hard put to explain the overall relevance of the following dialogue:

Enter MISTRESS PAGE, [MISTRESS] QUICKLY, [and] WILLIAM Page

...

MISTRESS PAGE I'll but bring my young man here to school.

Enter [Sir Hugh] EVANS

Look where his master comes. 'Tis a playing day, I see.—How now, Sir Hugh, no school today?

EVANS No, Master Slender is let the boys leave to play.

MISTRESS QUICKLY Blessing of his heart!

MISTRESS PAGE Sir Hugh, my husband says my son profits nothing in the world at his book. I pray you ask him some questions in his accidence.

EVANS Come hither, William. Hold up your head. Come.

MISTRESS PAGE Come on, sirrah. Hold up your head. Answer your master; be not afraid.

EVANS William, how many numbers is in nouns?

WILLIAM Two.

MISTRESS QUICKLY Truly, I thought there had been one number more, because they say "Od's nouns".

EVANS Peace your tattlings!—What is 'fair', William?

WILLIAM 'Pulcher'.

MISTRESS QUICKLY Polecats? There are fairer things than polecats, sure.

EVANS You are a very simplicity 'oman. I pray you peace.—What is 'lapis', William?

WILLIAM A stone.

EVANS And what is 'a stone', William?

WILLIAM A pebble.

EVANS No, it is 'lapis'. I pray you remember in your prain.

WILLIAM 'Lapis'.

EVANS That is a good William. What is he, William, that does lend articles?

WILLIAM Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined. *Singulariter nominativo: 'hic, haec, hoc'.*

EVANS *Nominativo: 'hig, hag, hog'.* Pray you mark: *genitivo: 'huius'.* Well, what is your accusative case?

WILLIAM Accusativo: 'hinc'—

EVANS I pray you have your remembrance, child. *Accusativo:*
'hing, hang, hog'.

MISTRESS QUICKLY 'Hang-hog' is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.

EVANS Leave your prabbles, 'oman!—What is the focative case,
William?

WILLIAM O—*vocativo*, O—

EVANS Remember, William, focative is *caret*.

MISTRESS QUICKLY And that's a good root.

EVANS 'Oman, forbear.

MISTRESS PAGE [*to* MISTRESS QUICKLY] Peace.

EVANS What is your genitive case plural, William?

WILLIAM Genitive case?

EVANS Ay.

WILLIAM *Genitivo:* 'horum, harum, horum'.

MISTRESS QUICKLY Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie on her!
Never name her, child, if she be a whore.

EVANS For shame, 'oman!

MISTRESS QUICKLY You do ill to teach the child such words. He
teaches him to hick and to hack, which they'll do fast enough
of themselves, and to call 'whorum'. Fie upon you!

EVANS Oman, art thou lunatics? Hast thou no understanding
for thy cases, and the number of the genders? Thou art as
foolish Christian creatures as I would desires.

MISTRESS PAGE [*to* MISTRESS QUICKLY] Prithee, hold thy peace.

EVANS Show me now, William, some declensions of your pro-
nouns.

WILLIAM Forsooth, I have forgot.

EVANS It is '*qui, que, quod*'. If you forget your '*qui*'s, your '*que*'s,
and your '*quod*'s, you must be preeches. Go your ways and
play; go.

MISTRESS PAGE He is a better scholar than I thought he was.

EVANS He is a good sprag memory. Farewell, Mistress Page.

MISTRESS PAGE Adieu, good Sir Hugh. [*Exit* EVANS]

Get you home, boy. [*Exit* WILLIAM]

[*To* MISTRESS QUICKLY] Come, we stay too long. *Exeunt*

(IV.i.1-73)

Eric Sams has recently challenged T. W. Baldwin's hallowed reconstruction of the Classical curriculum of the Stratford grammar school the boy Shakespeare almost certainly attended, describing how "small" indeed the student's acquisition of Latin language and literature most likely was.³¹

Despite his timidity and Mistress Quickly's comic interruptions, young William does quite well in his Latin recitation. Still, he erroneously pronounces that "hinc" rather than "hunc" is an accusative article. More important, Hugh Evans's Welsh skewed pronunciation of English and Latin and Mistress Quickly's ignorance of Latin heard by a ribald understanding abruptly make this episode a demonstration of how the knowledge of evil can misconstrue a relatively innocent understanding (William's and those of playgoers of the Latin uttered). Assaulted by an adult harangue involving coarse sexual euphemisms, William not surprisingly has trouble with his declension of pronouns.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a play partly about how the knowledge of evil vilely misconstrues reality (one recalls Frank Ford's jealous idea of his wife's adultery and Falstaff's conviction that the wives would reciprocate his lust), and about how the knowledge of evil poisons its bearer and redounds to his or her discredit (one recalls Falstaff burnt and pinched by the fairies). "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*" (V.v.66): "Shame to him who thinks evil of it." *The Merry Wives* very likely was written to commemorate the installation of knights of the Order of the Garter, and the quotation in the comedy—by Mistress Quickly of all people—of the Order's motto makes Shakespeare's comedy a Garter play.³² In this case, Shakespeare has writ the Order's motto large, throughout the play's characterizations and dramaturgy—even to the scene of young William's short-circuited attempt to parse his Latin.

Shakespeare's Warwickshire of the mind thus concentrates upon the countrified context of young William's "small" Latin, upon unlettered townspeople, and upon the suggestion that earthy, peasant minds, rather than representing simply charming amusements, can perceive or imagine evil where none exists. It is likely that Robin, Falstaff's diminutive page, originally doubled as young William Page in the episode just analyzed. The doubling has a thematic relevance, besides the obvious pun on "page/Page." Falstaff's and his cohorts' urban immorality threatens to corrupt Robin, whereas Mistress Quickly comically introduces young William to the knowledge of evil at the same time that she would keep him from it. In both *As You Like It* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Shakespeare figuratively returns home and to his younger selves to realize the educational disadvantages of his origins and yet, in the 1599 play at least, an original strength of character that the older playwright may have imagined partly compensated for them.

1595, 1597, 1599—these are the years of the plays in which Shakespeare figuratively returns to his native place. For some reason, they cluster in comedy near the end of Elizabeth's reign. Jeanne Addison Roberts, in an essay titled "Shakespeare's Forests and Trees," has noted that the representation of trees virtually disappears in those plays that Shakespeare wrote presumably between the year 1600 and the composition of *The Winter's Tale*.³³ Yet trees are often lushly depicted in plays such as *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *As You Like It*. It is as though Shakespeare's imagination between 1600 and 1610-11 was either unable or unwilling to revisit figuratively the wooded countryside of his youth. In fact, one could say that Shakespeare's only significant imaginative revisiting of Warwickshire during this period occurs in *Coriolanus*, in the plangent allusions to 1597-98 social disturbances occasioned by Stratford Maltsters' and farmers' hoarding of corn.³⁴ Shakespeare's mind does not richly recreate figurative Warwickshire until certain pastoral scenes of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, wherein Stratfordesque speech rhythms, dialect, and the details of planting and growing, sheep-shearing, and animal husbandry can be heard in the talk of the Old Shepherd, Perdita's clownish brother, Mopsa, Dorcas, the sturdy rogue Autolycus, and finally in that of the magician Prospero.

Modally, Renaissance pastoral entailed mythic archetypes and the backward running of time to recover a golden age (or golden world). In *The Winter's Tale*, the evocation of realistic Stratfordesque talk jars with the conjuring of Flora, Apollo, the myth of Proserpina, and the recovery of a symbolic spring and a lyrically pure love (heard in Florizel's aria "what you do/ Still betters what is done").³⁵ The realistic Stratfordesque dialogue of *The Winter's Tale* upon analysis does not resonate with the thoughtful meanings generated by the recreation of Young William in the Forest of Arden. Serving mainly to qualify the idealization of the mythic pastoral

of *The Winter's Tale*, this talk never becomes a vehicle for Shakespeare's figurative return home.

Prospero's emotion-laden, loving portrayal in Act IV of *The Tempest* of the bounteous fields and hills of the English countryside, including the pasturing of sheep and harvest time (IV.i.60-138), might seem to represent the exception to these claims. Theater audiences through the centuries have sensed that in certain aspects of the magician/artist Prospero's characterization Shakespeare begs a comparison between himself and this near-omnipotent creator of scripts for others' lives, primarily as regards abandonment of their art and their professional retirement. John Russell Brown has suggested in conversation that, considered in light of this comparison, Prospero's rich agrarian word picture, uttered during the Masque of Ceres, constitutes Shakespeare's figurative return home, a nostalgic final trip to the world of "rich leas, / Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and peas," of "nibbling sheep, / And flat meads thatched with stover, them to keep," of "Earth's increase, and foison plenty, / Barns and garners never empty, / Vines with clust'ring bunches growing," of (finally) "sunburned sicklemen of August weary" (IV.i.60-64,110-12,134).

Nevertheless, this imaginative return to the native place—if it is that—is patently unreal, false in fact. The fancy motivating the recreation may be Prospero's (IV.i.120-22), but its enactment, its material shape, is that of his magical spirits, airy beings who dissolve along with the fantastical landscape and its non-human inhabitants when Prospero suddenly remembers Caliban's plot against his life. Moreover, as a version of pastoral, the evoked countryside entails mythic archetypes—Juno, Ceres, and Iris; nymphs and naiads; the specters of Persephone and Dis, Venus and Cupid—all of which once again universalize rural details and natural processes so that any trace of Warwickshire vanishes in the image of a golden-age paradise that Ferdinand identifies for us, a paradise that quickly proves a depressing illusion.

Whatever possessed Shakespeare through his art to recreate a Warwickshire, complete with himself in it, in comedies written in the last years of the sixteenth century did not move him to do so afterwards. His investing the countryside in his late romances with universality becomes

equally apparent in the c.1612-13 romance history *King Henry VIII*. Cranmer's play-ending vision of the infant Elizabeth's mythic identities of Sheba and the Phoenix colors his prophecy that

In her days every man shall eat in safety
Under his own vine what he plants, and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours. (V.iv.33-35)

The nostalgic recollection of Queen Elizabeth that especially determined her representation between 1610 and 1615 is Cranmer's (and perhaps Shakespeare's), compounding the nostalgic distortion latent in pastoral in the above-quoted verses.³⁶ Many Elizabethans starved beneath the vines they had planted, whose fruit and revenue typically went to a landlord. Cranmer's vision predicts a miraculous future for Henry VIII's heir, yet it amounted to Old England in 1612, the Old England of Shallow's rambling reminiscences. Old England conclusively swallowed Shakespeare's Warwickshire of the mind, his figurative trips home, and the function of self-definition such imaginary journeys made possible.

Baylor University
Waco, Texas

NOTES

¹John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 1993) 286.

²Russell Fraser, *Young Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 79-86.

³Fraser 80.

⁴Fraser 81.

⁵Aubrey 285-86.

⁶Fraser 30.

⁷All quotations of Shakespeare's plays come from the texts in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997).

⁸Boaden's claim has been further established and developed by N. J. Halpin, *Oberon's Vision in The Midsummer-Night's Dream, Illustrated by a Comparison with Lylie's*

Endymion (London: Shakespeare Society, 1843) 16-25, 90-95; George Brandes, *William Shakespeare; A Critical Study*, trans. William Archer, Mary Morison, and Diana White (1898; rpt. London: William Heinemann, 1905) 65-66; John Dover Wilson, *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) 195; and Roger Warren, "Shakespeare and the Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth," *Notes and Queries*, N. S. 18 (1971): 137-39.

⁹Robert Laneham, *A Letter: Whearin, part of the Entertainment, unto the Queenz Maiesty, at Killingworth Castl, in Warwik Sheer . . . iz signified . . .*, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. John Nichols (1788-1805; rpt. London: Printed by N., 1823) 1:420-84, esp. 457.

¹⁰Nichols 1:485-523, esp. 498.

¹¹*A Letter*, Nichols 1:458.

¹²*The Princely Pleasures*, Nichols 1:500.

¹³Halpin makes a strong case for the likelihood of the boy Shakespeare's presence at Kenilworth in 1575 (20-25, 43-46).

¹⁴*A Letter*, Nichols 1:457.

¹⁵*The Princely Pleasures*, Nichols 1:499.

¹⁶*A Letter*, Nichols 1:440.

¹⁷*A Letter*, Nichols 1:435.

¹⁸See Maurice Hunt, "The Voices of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34 (1992): 218-38, esp. 218-19.

¹⁹See Maurice Hunt, "The Countess of Pembroke's *Arcadia*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the School of Night: An Intertextual Nexus," *Essays in Literature* 23 (1996): 3-20, esp. 13-14.

²⁰This is the conclusion of both C. Elliot Browne, "Master Robert Shallow: A Study of the Shakespeare Country," *Fraser's N. S.* 15 (1877): 488-98; and Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 141.

²¹For an excellent account of the role of nostalgia in Shakespeare's recreation of English history, especially in the Second Henriad, see Rackin 86-145.

²²See Maurice Hunt, "Kairos and the Ripeness of Time in *As You Like It*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 52 (1991): 113-35.

²³"As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to live in *Pythagoras*: so the sweete wittie soule of *Ouid* lives in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witness his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c." (Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* [1598] [New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1938] 281b-282).

²⁴For more on the identification of the William of *As You Like It* as William Shakespeare, see William Jones, "William Shakespeare as William in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11 (1960): 228-31; and Howard Cole, "The Moral Vision of *As You Like It*," *College Literature* 3 (1976): 26-27.

²⁵Hunt, "Kairos and the Ripeness of Time" 124.

²⁶Eric Sams, in *The Real Shakespeare: Retrieving the Early Years, 1564-1594* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), has remarked that "[i]n the inquest on Marlowe's death the key word was 'le recknynge,' which was given as the cause of the quarrel. . . . The reckoning was not mentioned in contemporary accounts of Marlowe's death and this detail was

not discovered until 1925, so the author of *As You Like It* must have had more than common knowledge about the Deptford incident" (238).

²⁷Maurice Hunt, "Words and Deeds in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Yearbook* 2 (1991): 23-48.

²⁸Hunt, "Words and Deeds" 39-40.

²⁹Positive traits of William's character have been described by R. Chris Hassel, Jr., *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1980) 113-14; and by A. Stuart Daley, "The Dispraise of the Country in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985): 300-14, esp. 306.

³⁰See Sams 44-48, 206-9; cf., however, Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare versus Shallow* (London: Nonesuch P, 1931) 85-92.

³¹*The Real Shakespeare* 17-18.

³²See Jeanne Addison Roberts, *Shakespeare's English Comedy: "The Merry Wives of Windsor" in Context* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1979) 27-50 passim; and William Green, *Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1962) esp. 7-72.

³³Jeanne Addison Roberts, "Shakespeare's Forests and Trees," *Southern Humanities Review* 11 (1977): 117-23.

³⁴Richard Wilson, "Against the Grain: Representing the Market in *Coriolanus*," *The Seventeenth Century* 6 (1991): 111-48, esp. 111-21.

³⁵See, for example, F. David Hoeniger, "The Meaning of *The Winter's Tale*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 20.1 (1950-51): 11-26.

³⁶This nostalgic recreation of Elizabeth appears, for example, in Fulke Greville, *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986): 127.