



## FAMOUS ENGLISH AND AMERICAN POETS

### William Shakespeare

62 a) Read the text *He Was Not of an Age but for All Time*. Use a dictionary when necessary.

## "He Was Not of an Age but for All Time"

*Benjamin Jonson*<sup>1</sup>

Who was that William Shakespeare [ˈʃeɪkspɪə] of Stratford? More has been written about him than about any writer that ever lived. And yet, although we know more about him than most of his contemporaries, there are certain things that historians cannot say with a firm: "This, then, is the final, the absolute truth".

While reading any biographical book about Shakespeare, we may be surprised at a large number of such sentences as "It is possible that ...", "We have no trace of what Shakespeare did during these years ...", or "We don't know why Shakespeare left Stratford", or "History doesn't help us to break the silence of the seven years he spent in London", and so on.

The facts are very few. Shakespeare was probably born on the 23rd of April, 1564, in Stratford-on-Avon [ˈstrædfəd əvən ˈeɪvən]. His father was a respectable shopkeeper, and dealt in wool, skins, leather and gloves. His mother, Mary Arden, was a farmer's daughter. William was the eldest of eight children. We know that when Shakespeare was 18, he married Anne Hathaway [ˈæn ˈhæθəweɪ], a woman eight years older than himself, that in 1583 Susanna, their first child, was born, and that twins Hamnet and Judith followed in 1585. At the age of 22 Shakespeare left



(1564–1616)

Stratford alone, for London. He is reputed to have been all manner of things, from sailor and soldier to lawyer's clerk and horseholder outside an early London playhouse. We know that in 1593 and 1594 he wrote two early poems, *Venus and Adonis*<sup>2</sup> and *Lucrece*<sup>3</sup>.

Later, he became a member of the company known as "Chamberlain's Men" which played at the "Theatre"; and he wrote for the company. He was already reaching the height of his fame when the Globe Theatre was built in 1593. He often acted at court, and retired, about 1611, to Stratford.

The day of his death was the 23rd of April, 1616, fifty-two years exactly after the supposed day of his birth. That is all we know about William Shakespeare.

There has been a good deal of debate about the extent of Shakespeare's learning. It is true that he never went to university or travelled abroad. Some romantics have made him out to be an unlettered man of the people. They declared that an illiterate could never have written such poetry — therefore someone else must have done it instead. Such reactions are unnecessary. Shakespeare learned grammar, logic and Latin at the grammar school, and he had enough education to develop his literary skill.

<sup>1</sup> These words were said by Benjamin Jonson (1573–1637), a playwright and player, and a good friend of Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> *Venus* [ˈvɪ:nəs] and *Adonis* [əˈdɒnɪs] — «Венера и Адонис»

<sup>3</sup> *Lucrece* [luːˈkri:s] — «Лукреция»

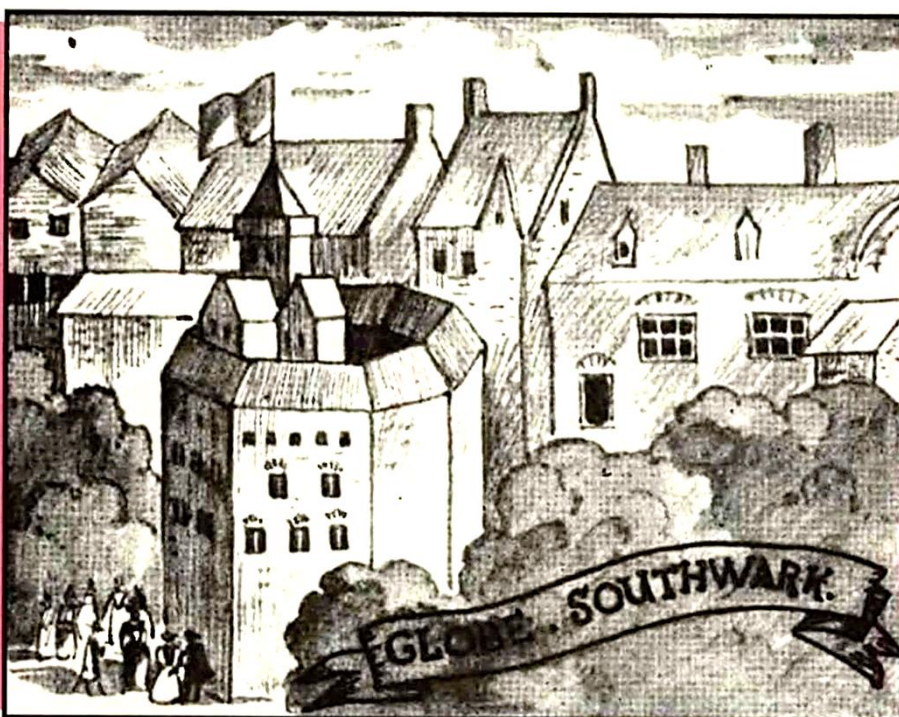
We do not know whether Shakespeare went to London with the intention of becoming an actor. He may have done so; there would have been plenty of opportunity for him to be attracted to the stage in his youth, quite apart from any natural inclinations towards poetry. Theatre was very popular at that time. Classical plays were acted at schools, with educational purposes in view; travelling companies of professional actors often visited Stratford and performed there. We cannot prove anything for certain, but it is highly possible that William Shakespeare joined one of these companies when they passed through Stratford.

The London to which young Shakespeare came was a splendid place where painters, musicians and poets shone. Theatre was the most exciting entertainment. If genius could be accounted for, it might perhaps be said that Shakespeare's acquaintance with the art of the actor helped him in an understanding of the art of the playwright. But this explanation is not enough. To it must be added an observing mind, a profound sympathetic understanding of life, an

acquaintance with all classes of men and women, and above all an ability to see human nature.

Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, among them comedies (*The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, etc.), tragedies (*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and others), historical plays (*Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, etc.) and sonnets.

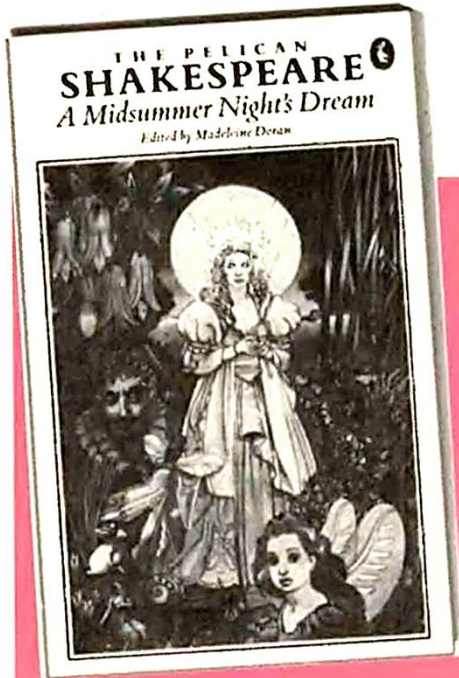
Shakespeare's genius did not lie in his ability to originate plays (for almost all of the stories were borrowed from chronicle, biography, prose tale, or earlier play), but rather in his capacity for revealing life in its full richness and movement. Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are masterpieces. Shakespeare expressed in them the variety of human nature. All human life is there in his plays, its greatness and its imperfections alike. Shakespeare possesses some special merit for every generation, and almost every person in turn. Whether he is writing of history, or love, or tragedy, or comedy, things have meaning and value. It was his genius that gave the world poetry of a deathless beauty.



b) Say what made Shakespeare the greatest of all poets.

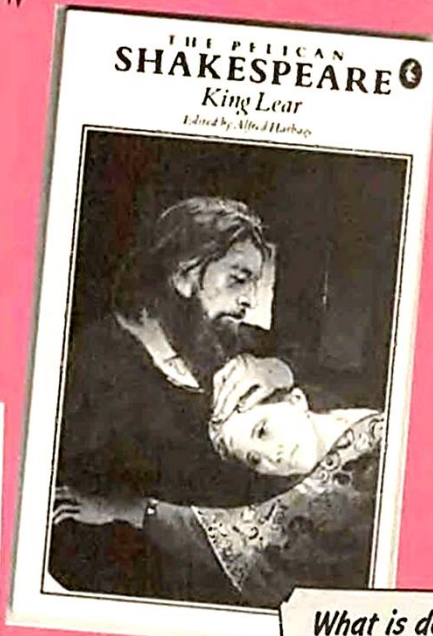
# WE READ AND DISCUSS

- 63 Read these quotations from Shakespeare. Say how you understand them. Express your opinion about the quotations. Say in what way they are true and in what situations you can use them.



*Brevity is the soul of wit.<sup>1</sup>  
O shame! Where is thy blush?<sup>2</sup>  
We know what we are, but we know  
not, what we may be.*

*(Hamlet<sup>3</sup>)*



*What is done can't  
be undone.*

*(Macbeth<sup>4</sup>)*



*Better a witty fool than a  
foolish wit.*

*(Twelfth Night)*

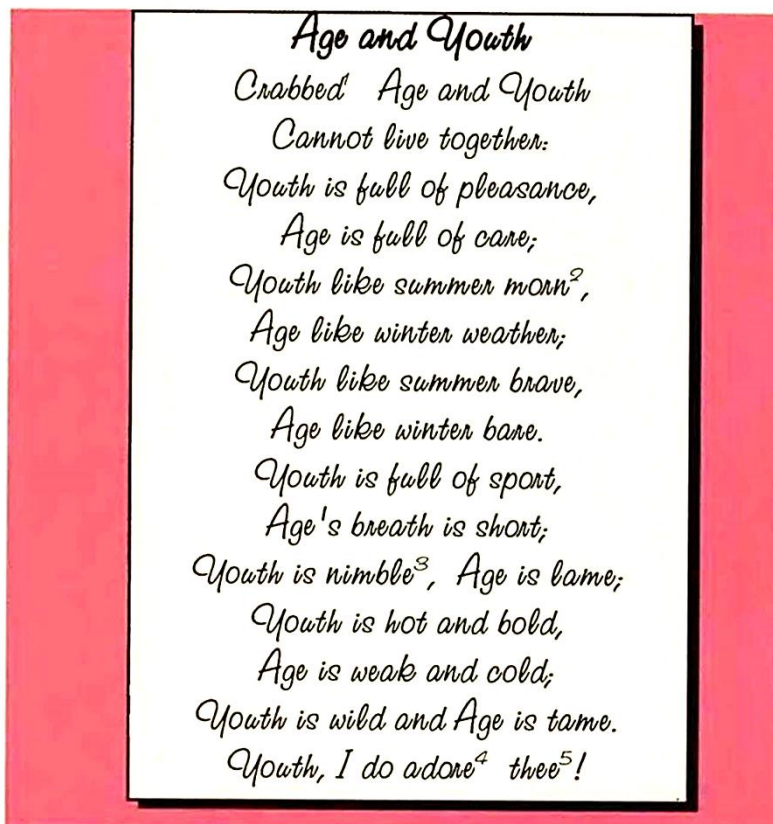
*Time is the nurse and breeder  
of all good.*

*(The Two Gentlemen of Verona<sup>6</sup>)*

<sup>1</sup> wit — ум, разум, остроумие  
<sup>2</sup> thy [ðai] blush [blʌʃ] — твоя стыдливость  
<sup>3</sup> Hamlet ['hæmlɪt] — Гамлет  
<sup>4</sup> Macbeth [mæk'beθ] — Макбет  
<sup>5</sup> breeder ['brɪ:də] — производитель  
<sup>6</sup> Verona [və'rounə] — г. Верона

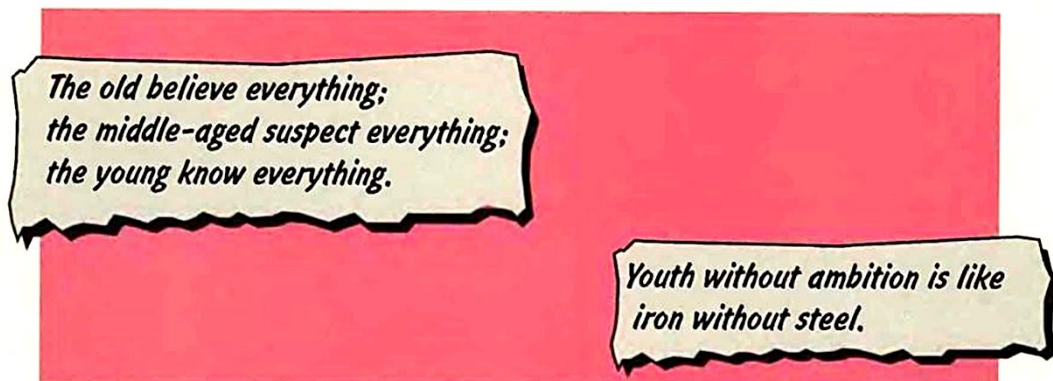
64 a) Listen to Shakespeare's poem *Age and Youth*, then read it. Answer the questions:

- What words does Shakespeare choose to describe youth and age?
- What thoughts and feelings does he express most exactly?



b) Speak about the theme of the poem. Say how you understand it.

65 Read these lines about age and youth and say in what way they are true.



<sup>1</sup> crabbed ['kræbɪd] — ворчливый, сварливый

<sup>2</sup> morn = morning

<sup>3</sup> nimble ['nɪmbl] — проворный, ловкий

<sup>4</sup> adore [ə'dɔː] — обожать

<sup>5</sup> thee = you *поэт.* ты