

Stratford and the Canonization of Shakespeare

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Some years ago, visitors entering Shakespeare's Birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon passed a huge metal globe, gratingly turned by an electric motor, on which it read: 'From the four corners of the earth they come / To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing *saint*' (*Merch.* 2.7.39-40).¹ In Shakespeare, these lines do not, of course, refer to his birthplace; they are Morocco's extravagant praise of Portia in the casket scene. But sacred language does not depend on the legitimation of context; it *creates* legitimacy.

The vocabulary of religion, in particular that of pilgrimage, has frequently been used in speaking about Stratford-upon-Avon; a recent brochure begins with the sentence: 'For 400 years, Stratford-upon-Avon has been a shrine to one man's genius'.² But increasingly this vocabulary has been used between quotation marks, as it were. It seems to be inappropriate for something outside institutionalized religious forms,³ especially something so closely associated with commercial interests. At the beginning of this century, Marie Corelli, the popular novelist living in Stratford, had to advise American tourists: 'Don't expect to buy picture postcards, photographs, or sweets at Shakespeare's Birthplace. It is a shrine, not a shop'.⁴ Since then, shops have become part of the prescribed itinerary at most of the Shakespeare properties; and Stratford now seems to derive a considerable part of its sedate wealth from the assumption that a world-famous author was born there.

Discussions of Stratford therefore tend to play pilgrimage and tourism against each other, often in a jocular, occasionally in a stern manner. Graham Holderness, in his cultural materialist's guide to Stratford-upon-Avon, takes the view that the town lives on a Shakespeare myth, characterized by 'an atmosphere of unscrupulous opportunism, commercial exploitation and gross imposture; the *laissez-faire* environment of a cultural industry in which the free play of market forces determines all values'.⁵ But while Holderness is good at exposing what he rightly sees as abuses,⁶ his historical account has little to say about how Stratford became the sacred place that made desecration possible.

¹ It had to make room for the new exhibition space in 1995, and has been put in storage until another deserving place can be found for it.

² Anon., *In and Around Stratford-upon-Avon*, 4th edition (Bath: Unichrome Press, 1995). Obviously this is meant to be a popular publication for tourists; it appears in three languages.

³ Cf. Ivor Brown and George Fearon, *Amazing Monument A Short History of the Shakespeare Industry* (London: Heinemann, 1939); F.E. Halliday, *The Cult of Shakespeare* (London: Duckworth, 1957).

⁴ Marie Corelli ed., *The Avon Star: A Literary Manual for the Stratford-on-Avon Season of 1903* (Stratford-upon-Avon: A.J. Stanley, 1903), p. 124.

⁵ Graham Holderness, 'Bardolatry: or, The Cultural Materialist's Guide to Stratford-upon-Avon', in *The Shakespeare Cult*, ed. Graham Holderness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 2-15, p. 5.

⁶ On how business and reverence went together from the beginning, see Michèle Willems, *La Genèse du Mythe Shakespearien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), p. 354.

Such a limited, and limiting, view makes it difficult for us to describe the status of Shakespeare in contemporary Western culture. It does not take into account the fact that the anthropological study of pilgrimage and tourism in recent years has shown the similarity of the patterns underlying them.⁷ In the following study, I shall therefore take seriously the notion of pilgrimage, and of Stratford as a sacred place. I shall describe Stratford as a site where, in the words of the most influential anthropological study on pilgrimage, 'miracles once happened, still happen, and may happen again', a site marked out by 'symbolic structures: religious buildings, pictorial images, statuary, and sacralized features of the topography'.⁸ I shall also give a <356> brief account of how Stratford acquired the status and the shape it has today.

But this account is not an end in itself. It will lead to more general conclusions concerning the way Shakespeare became canonized, and how his texts should be considered in their interaction with other types of cultural symbolism.

With the exception of Anne Hathaway's cottage, added for its romantic interest, and beyond these borders,⁹ all the important sanctuaries are to be found within a perimeter marked by the Avon, Old Town, Chestnut Walk, Rother Street, Windsor Street, and Guild Street (Fig. 1). This hallowed ground has two main approaches, one from the railway station to the west, the other from the car park in the east. Both approaches are marked by imposing monuments, the American Fountain on the market square and the Gower Memorial at Bridge Foot.¹⁰ The Birthplace is located at one end, Shakespeare's grave in Holy Trinity Church at the other, and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the Shakespeare Centre and the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham, the seminary, as it were, on the margins. The symbolic centre of the sacred precinct is marked by the profound hole where New Place, Shakespeare's home after his retirement, used to stand.

Inside this perimeter, basic activities like eating, shopping and resting are often distinguished by Shakespearean associations in the names of restaurants, shopping malls and hotels, such as Sir Toby, Bards Walk, and the Arden Hotel. At the same time these Shakespearean associations are universalized by references to nations and institutions all over the world: in addition to the American Fountain, the

⁷ For a review of research, see Udo Tworuschka, *Sucher, Pilger, Himmelsstürmer: Reisen im Diesseits und Jenseits* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1991), pp. 101-13, and Udo Tworuschka, ed., *Heilige Stätten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

⁸ Ann Hathaway's Cottage was added to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in 1892. Mary Arden's House has also belonged to the Trust since 1930, but is properly a countryside museum.

⁹ Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 6, 10. A version of this paper was first presented at the 1995 SAA convention in Chicago. Since then, I have got to know Péter Dávidházi and we have discovered our shared interests. I have also become aware of his article 'Cult and Criticism: Ritual in the European Reception of Shakespeare', *Literature and its Cults/La littérature et ses Cultes; An Anthropological Approach/Approche Anthropologique*, ed. Peter Dávidházi and Judit Karafiáth (Budapest: Argumentum, 1994), pp. 29-45.

¹⁰ The American Fountain combines a clock tower and a drinking fountain for cattle in a neo-Gothic structure, avoiding striking sculptural elements, offering on its four sides quotations from Shakespeare and Washington Irving (one of its aims being the celebration of good Anglo-American relations). The Gower Memorial shows Shakespeare restlessly sitting on a chair, clutching a sheaf of manuscripts, placed on a high pedestal, on which lines from Shakespeare are inscribed. This pedestal stands in the centre of a square platform today, at the corners of which are figures, also in bronze, of Falstaff, Henry V, Hamlet and Lady Macbeth Cf. Michael Kimberley, *Lord Ronald Gower's Monument to Shakespeare* (Stratford: The Stratford-upon-Avon Society, 1989).

lamp posts along Waterside have been donated by, for example, Jordan, Israel, Portugal and the Hungarian People, but also by the Douglas Corporation, presumably as the manufacturer of the planes that used to bring Americans there.<357>>

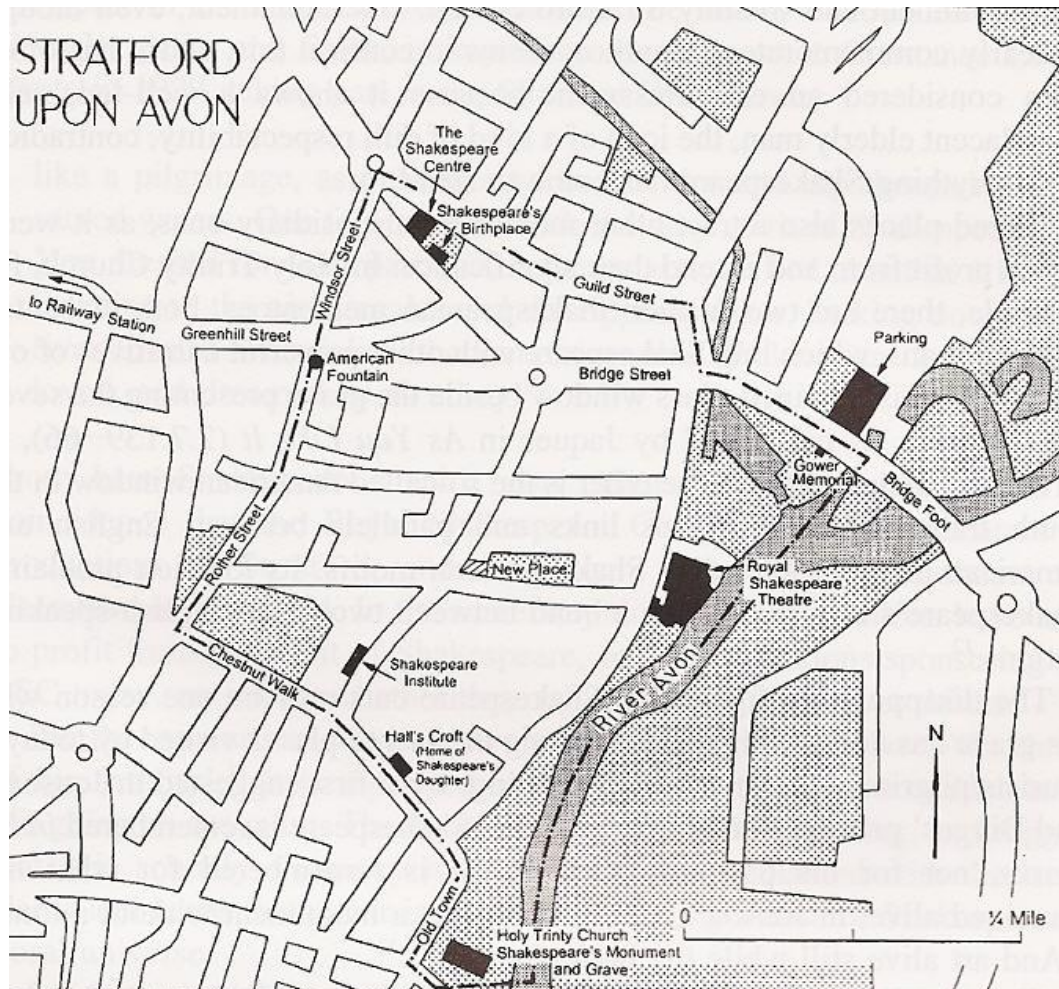


Fig. 1. The sacred precinct at Stratford. (Courtesy Geographisches Institut, University of Basel.)

Buses take visitors on an itinerary from one site/sight to the next. Not all of these have the same status; some of the more important landmarks are Holy Trinity Church, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the Birthplace.

Holy Trinity Church (no bus stop) is picturesquely located on the banks of the Avon. It contains the oldest shrine, Shakespeare's grave. In our culture, this is traditionally the place of veneration for a great person,¹¹ and therefore also the place where on official occasions, like the annual celebration of Shakespeare's birthday, homage is done to his person. Unusually though, other members of his family are also buried beside him, which suggests that the prominent place in the chancel accorded to him may not be due to his fame as a poet in the first place, but rather to his standing <358>> as a prominent and wealthy Stratford citizen. His monument, even though it clearly commemorates an author, seems to confirm

¹¹ Dávidházi tells the story of the Hungarian writer Magda Szabó, who, in 1962, fulfilled a childhood dream of hers, to kneel at Shakespeare's grave ('Cult and Criticism', p. 37).

this, and it has often been considered an embarrassment because it shows a well-fed, self-complacent elderly man, the icon of a kind of dull respectability, contradicting everything Shakespeare has come to stand for.

Sacred places also attract other monuments, subsidiary ones, as it were, which profit from and extend their significance. In Holy Trinity Church, for example, there are two further Shakespearean mementoes, both presented by Americans, which link Shakespeare with other powerful narratives of our culture. One is a stained-glass window beside the grave presenting the seven ages of man, as celebrated by Jaques in *As You Like It* (2.7.139-66), in terms of Biblical figures. The other is the so-called American window in the south transept, which shows links and parallels between English and American history rather than Shakespearean motifs. Its location proclaims Shakespeare's role in creating a bond between two great English-speaking nations.¹²

The disappointing figure that Shakespeare cuts may be one reason why his grave has no very high status among the sacred places visited by today's tourists/pilgrims; others, more compelling, were first suggested in Jonson's and Digges' prefatory poems to the Folio: Shakespeare is remembered *in his works*, not for his past achievement; he is, remembered for what has remained alive, in Jonson's words: 'Thou art a monument without a tomb, / And art alive still while thy book doth live'.¹³

The Royal Shakespeare Theatre is the place where Shakespeare's plays are brought to life daily. Here, his spirit is supposed to be present in the reenactment of his texts. These may be modified only cautiously, and only with the aim of presenting Shakespeare authentically (in the full meaning of the word) to the needs of a modern audience.¹⁴ It is the place where people from all over the world gather in the hope of being reinvigorated by <359> the spirit of Shakespeare. Its location on the Avon, surrounded on three sides by parks and fields, is important. As the actress Constance Collier wrote in 1929, taking part in the Stratford Festival was

like a pilgrimage, as believers go to Lourdes and dip themselves in sacred waters. One felt in touch with the very spirit of Shakespeare.... You dressed for your part and, between acts, drifted about in a boat, listening to the nightingales and the rippling water; looking down the river toward Warwick — the same river that Shakespeare knew, and loved, and dreamed by as a boy.¹⁵

From here Shakespeare's spirit also radiates to other places; it is no coincidence

¹² This topic can also be pursued elsewhere in Stratford, cf. the American Fountain, and the buildings of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. The main building was rebuilt with substantial American Funds after it had burned down in 1926; its design was chosen from a competition in which only British and American architects were allowed to take part (Marian J. Pringle, *The Theatres of Stratford-upon-Avon, 1875-1992*, Stratford-upon-Avon Papers, no. 5 (Stratford: The Stratford-upon-Avon Society, 1993), pp. 26-28). The Swan Theatre was built entirely with American funds.

¹³ 'To the memory of [...] William Shakespeare', in William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. xliii, lines 22-3.

¹⁴ In no other theatre I know do the programmes mention the number of lines that have been cut from a canonical text that is being performed.

¹⁵ Constance Collier, *Harlequinade: The Story of My Life* (London: John Lane, 1929), pp. 194-5; cf. also Frank Benson, 'Memories of Stratford-upon-Avon' in M.C. Day and J.C. Trewin, *The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre* (London: Dent, 1932), vii—xi, p. viii.

that the Royal Shakespeare Company usually rehearses its productions in Stratford, and from there takes them to London and elsewhere in the world. In the same way that public institutions have tried to profit from the spirit of Shakespeare, so do corporations sponsoring the RSC- today, no matter whether they sell insurance policies or drinks.

But the most sacred site is certainly Shakespeare's Birthplace, 'the shrine of his nativity'.¹⁶ It is separated by open spaces from the mundane town life going on around it. These raise the prestige of the building, and suggest that it is actually a country house. The garden is planted with the trees, plants and herbs that occur in his works, forming a kind of Shakespearean floral universe.

Inside the building, on the top floor, the best sleeping room has come to be considered the birthroom, a sort of inner sanctum. Here poets and members of the acting professions have done what so many visitors would like but are forbidden to do: they have inscribed their names to mark the fact that they did homage here, drew inspiration from here, and wanted to be associated by later visitors with this scene of origin.¹⁷

<360>> The importance of Shakespeare's Birthplace, along with the relative unimportance of his grave, reinforces the view that he was born into the world as a natural genius.¹⁸ And the way the Birthplace has been separated from its urban surroundings, along with the locations of Holy Trinity Church and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, strengthens the view of him as a poet of nature, specifically of a genial English nature of lanes and hedges.

The situation as it exists today has its history; it is the story of Shakespeare's emergence as the greatest poet of mankind, as the very icon of poetic genius. There are several accounts of this history, written from different perspectives, and with different interests.¹⁹ In this history two phases may be distinguished. During the first, largely from the Restoration to the mid-eighteenth century, Shakespeare stood for specific positions in debate, and he had to be established as a great author against certain odds; he played a crucial part in the process of displacing rule poetics by the poetics of genius, legitimizing the interest in complex characters (as they appeared in novels), and defining a sense of English nationhood.²⁰

¹⁶ Henry C. Shelley, *Shakespeare and Stratford* (London: Simpkin, Marshall Hamilton, Kent, 1911), p. 2.

¹⁷ On the window, there are the signatures of Scott, Carlyle, John Toole, on the beam, Helen Faucit and the little that remains of Robert Browning's. On the ceiling, a few letters of Thackeray's. On the side of the fireplace, a red ink mark shows where Byron's signature had been. On the front, or actors' column the names of Madame Vestris, G.V. Brooke, Edmund and Charles. Kean (C.J. Ribton-Turner, *Shakespeare's Land*, revised by Edward Hicks [London: Courier Press, 1932], p. 10). The latest example of this kind of inspirational journey is to be found in Al Pacino's film *Looking for Richard*.

¹⁸ For other examples of the associations between Shakespeare and Christ, see Balz Engler, 'Shakespeare in the Trenches', *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1991), 105-11.

¹⁹ See, for example, Robert W. Babcock, *The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, 1766-1799* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931); Brown and Fearon, *Amazing Monument*; Halliday, *The Cult of Shakespeare*; Louis Marder- *His Exits and His Entrances: The Story of Shakespeare's Reputation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1963); Willems, *Genèse du Mythe Shakespearien*.

²⁰ This aspect has been much dealt with in recent years, due to the English need to develop a post-imperial sense of nationhood in the context of European unification. See, for example, Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

In the second phase, properly starting with Garrick's Jubilee of 1769, culminating in the second half of the nineteenth century²¹ and still continuing today, Shakespeare's position has become unassailable, indeed continues to be extended; in the eyes of many, attacks on it automatically disqualify the attacker. It is the position that came to be called 'idolatry' as soon as it was established.²² Shakespeare has risen above controversy; indeed all positions in cultural debate may now be articulated in terms of <361>> Shakespeare.²³ His works have been taken to support both patriarchal and feminist positions, both conservative notions of a stable political order and the need for political struggle. However, the increasingly bitter conflict between the positions for which they have been enlisted seems to be bringing to an end this second phase, at least to the extent that the conditions shaping it become visible and can be debated.

The sanctification of Stratford is a phenomenon of the second phase. In 1769, at Garrick's Jubilee, when Stratford first saw a large gathering of people who met in the name of the Bard, but without a line of his being delivered, it was first declared 'enchanted ground'.²⁴ When Washington Irving came to Stratford in 1815, on what he called his 'poetical pilgrim age',²⁵ he took in three sights in particular. After visiting the Birthplace and Shakespeare's grave, then already 'the usual objects of a pilgrim's devotion',²⁶ he took a walk in the countryside, out to Charlecote, where young Shakespeare was supposed to have done some poaching (a deed of romantic transgression), reflecting on Shakespeare's ability 'to spread the magic of his mind over the very face of nature'.²⁷ His account of Stratford with its emphasis on Shakespeare as a poet of nature proved influential with many later pilgrims, especially Americans, who came to Stratford with his *Sketch Book* in hand.

Stratford thus gradually became what Garrick had anticipated, a place of pilgrimage. It acquired its symbolic structures from the 1840's onwards (no doubt helped by the opening of a railway line in 1861). The Birthplace was the first site to be adapted to the purpose of a religious building. It used to be part of a row of houses as we find them everywhere in the centre of Stratford (Fig. 2); in the late eighteenth century, it had served as a butcher's shop. By 1844, it had acquired enough significance for P.T. Barnum, the American entrepreneur, to consider buying the house and taking it to his <362>>

²¹ Péter Dávidházi, in his paper 'From Royal Patronage to Ecclesiastical Approval: The Victorian Use of Shakespeare', at the World Shakespeare Congress in Los Angeles 1996, has shown the importance of jubilee celebrations, especially those of 1864, in establishing and confirming Shakespeare as a cultural icon.

²² On this, see in particular Babcock, *The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry*.

²³ In terms of Victor Turner's analysis of social processes Shakespeare has become a symbol of solidarity, whereas in the first phase he was a symbol of dissidence; see *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974)- pp. 38-41.

²⁴ Martha Winburn England, *Garrick and Stratford* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962), p. 33. In a letter of 1770 Garrick refers to Stratford as 'the Holy Land' (Winburn England, p. 67). On the Garrick Jubilee cf. also Johanne M. Stochholm. *Garrick's Folly: The Stratford Jubilee of 1769* (London: Methuen, 1964); and Christian Deelman, *The Great Shakespeare Jubilee* (London: Michael Joseph, 1964).

²⁵ Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book* (New York: New American Library, [1820] 1981), p. 254.

²⁶ Irving, *The Sketch Book*, p. 259.

²⁷ Irving, *The Sketch Book*. p. 270.



Fig. 2. Shakespeare's Birthplace in 1847. From Halliwell's biography of Shakespeare.

American Museum, a kind of early theme park, in New York.²⁸ Instead, it was eventually bought for the nation in 1847,²⁹ and restored between 1857 and 1864 (when the tercentenary was celebrated in Stratford). It was then that the adjoining houses were pulled down, an act serving the apparent technical purpose of fire protection, but also fulfilling the ideological programme formulated in the eighteenth century, and anticipated by an idealizing picture in James Orchard Halliwell's 1848 biography.³⁰

Other religious structures soon followed: The Memorial Theatre, to which a library and a picture gallery were later attached, opened on 23 April 1879, <363>>

²⁸ P.T. Barnum mentions this in his autobiography, *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (London: Sampson Low- 1855), p. 344; he had visited Stratford in August 1844 (p. 275).

²⁹ It was then that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was first founded. It acquired its modern shape and organization in 1892.

³⁰ James Orchard Halliwell, *The Life of William Shakespeare* (London: John Russell Smith, 1848), p. 33.



Fig.3. Shakespeare's Birthplace as a house in the country. From Halliwell's biography. The illustration is actually based on an engraving in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1769, where the countryside surrounding the building is not developed in as much detail, however.

but it only housed its own resident company from 1919 onwards.³¹ The American Fountain (Fig. 4) on the Market Square was erected in 1887,³² in Queen Victoria's Jubilee year (thus constituting a triple link between Shakespeare, the Crown, and the United States), the Gower Monument on the river in 1888. This monument, then located in the gardens behind what is now the Swan Theatre, was moved to its present site in 1933. People sometimes find it strange that Shakespeare now overlooks the car park, but the location of the Gower Monument shows the consistent development of the sacral topography I have outlined. The latest addition to it has been the bronze statue of a jester, unveiled in 1994, where Henley Street meets the perimeter near the Shakespeare Centre.³³

How was a pattern established? How did the single sites acquire the significance they possess today? Pilgrimage and its history, as it has been described by anthropologists, is helpful in answering these questions. At the beginning, pilgrimages may be spontaneous and haphazard, but they soon become routinized.³⁴ The pilgrims, on their journeys and in their behaviour at the sacred site, are aware that they follow practices established before <364>>

³¹ Cf. Pringle, *The Theatres Of Stratford-upon-Avon*; also Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: a -History of Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 68.

³² *The Story of the Memorial Fountain to Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon*, ed. L. Clarke Davis (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1890).

³³ 'The Jester' by James Butler, shows a dancing Fool, holding one sceptre behind his back, balancing another on one of his fingers. On the four sides of the pedestal there are quotations from *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*.

³⁴ Turner and Turner- *Image and Pilgrimage*, p. 25.

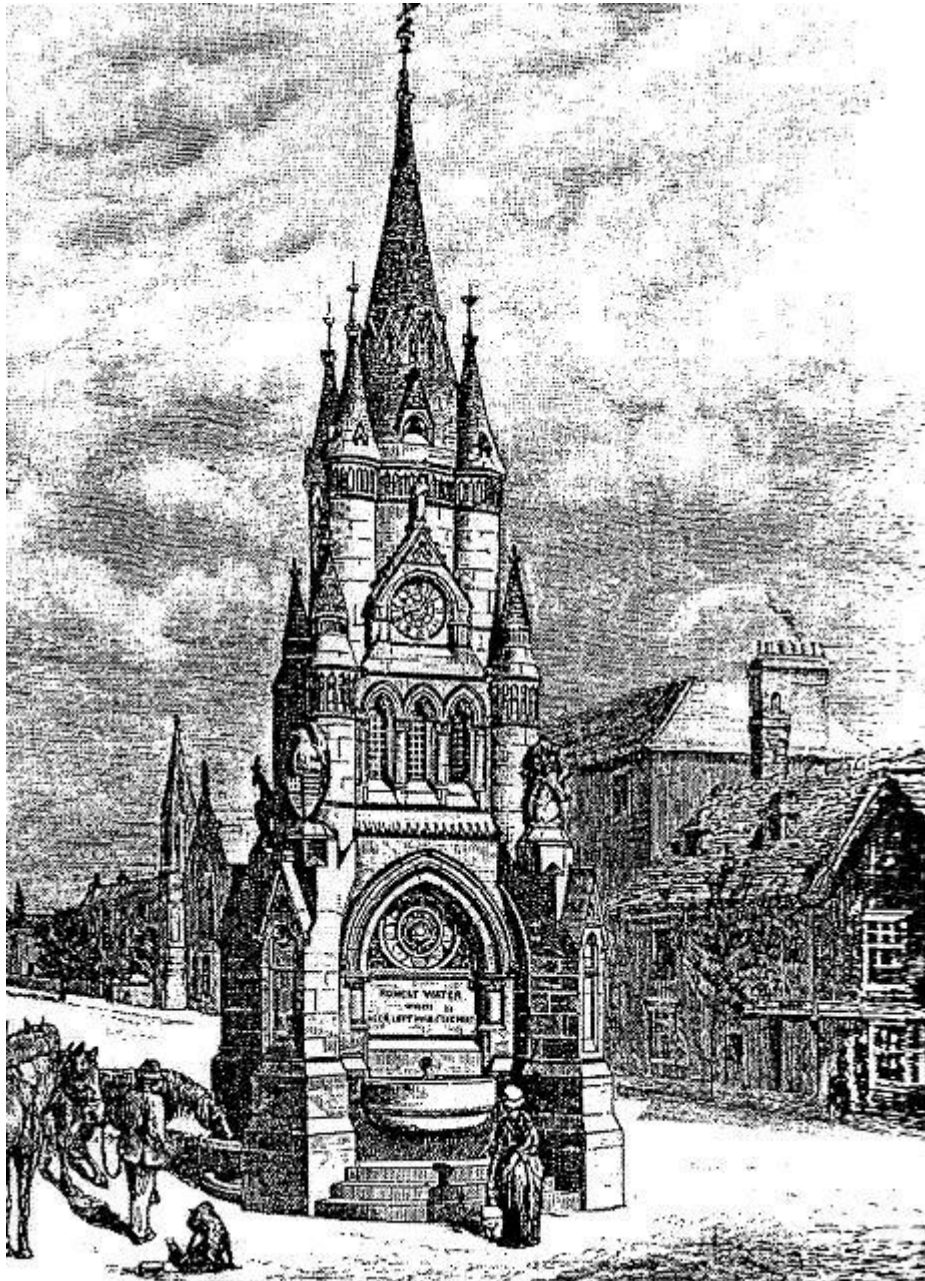


Fig. 4. The American Fountain. From *The Graphic*, Oct. 22, 1887. (Courtesy The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office.)

them, practices the meaning of which they need no longer reflect on, but can take for granted. In other words, they begin ritually to repeat the performance of certain acts; and it is this kind of repetition which highlights acts and objects, isolates them from their mundane contexts, and gives them the significance of cultural symbols.

Significance, as I have introduced the term here, is distinct from meaning; it refers to a pragmatic notion of cultural symbolism rather than the common semantic one. The anthropologist Dan Sperber, who rejects 'the absurd idea that symbols mean', considers symbolism 'not a means of encoding information-

but a means of organizing it'.³⁵ he therefore rejects what he disparagingly calls the cryptological notion of symbolism.³⁶ Cultural symbolism, according to him,

focuses the attention of the members of a single society in the same directions, determines parallel evocational fields that are structured in the same way, but leaves the individual free to effect an evocation in them as he likes. Cultural symbolism creates a community of interest but not of opinions.³⁷

We need not subscribe to the notion of individual freedom that seems to be implied here to see the usefulness of this account. The symbol, according to this definition, does not *have* meaning, but it invites the ascription of meaning — it has what I have called 'significance'. The hole at New Place is therefore the perfect symbolic site.³⁸

It is the ritual process, in the form of pilgrimage and its secularized successor, tourism, that has shaped the sacred topography of Stratford, the buildings and monuments defining it, and the institutions founded within its boundaries over a long period.

The process of creating significance as it has been sketched here is not restricted to sites and institutions, but is at work in all areas of cultural practice. Ritual repetition also creates significance in areas more familiar to students of literature, drama and the theatre. It functions with the performance of plays (not least with the Shakespeare productions at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre), and with the reading of texts (not least with the works of Shakespeare). And it is in this light, I suggest, that we should understand Jonson's remark, 'Thou art [...] alive still while thy book doth live'.

Works may at first have been performed and read because they seemed to offer something specifically new and interesting. If they are later reproduced, reread, ritually repeated, the process becomes self-sustaining, and they gradually develop as part of what, in Sperber's words, focuses our attention and creates a community of interest. They become part of cultural symbolism, of what students of literature in their field usually call the canon. They become the site where acts, objects and texts may be used to articulate contending meanings. But in doing so, these articulations, no matter whether they are radical or conservative, themselves sustain the process of ritual repetition, and thus contribute to the continuing effectiveness of cultural symbolism. Even where critics try to make visible the way 'Shakespeare' has been constructed, and how he has been used and abused, they extend this process, by drawing attention to the need of doing so, and, often, by suggesting alternative constructs.

³⁵ Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975), pp. 84, 70. Sperber is best known today for a bold book he co-authored with Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*— 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, [1986] 1995). It develops a new communication theory on the basis of pragmatics, of which, unfortunately, few people in literary studies have so far taken much notice.

³⁶ On the problems of cryptological and Freudian notions of symbolism, see Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, p. 44, and Balz Engler, *Poetry and Community*. (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1990), pp. 65-71.

³⁷ Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, p. 137.

³⁸ For the same reason, the relative lack of evidence on Shakespeare's life has stimulated so much speculation on his person.

But the sacred topography of Stratford also reminds us of the precarious status of texts. Though students of literature may posit that texts need to be contextualized, even that they are not accessible in any pristine form, in their practice they still tend to take the text to be the ultimate if elusive authority, a consequence of the unassailable status it has acquired in the process of ritual repetition. But the reading and interpretation of texts is always preceded and accompanied by other, often non-verbal kinds of symbolic presence in the culture, which affect the readers' critical understanding.³⁹ In these circumstances, the division between the history of the Shakespeare myth, or Shakespeare cult, on the one hand, and the history of Shakespeare production and criticism, on the other, does not make sense.⁴⁰ They affect and complement each other to form, in more generally valid terms, the history of Shakespeare as a cultural symbol.

³⁹ As Peter Dávidházi has pointed out in his account of Shakespeare worship in Europe, 'the usual sequence of initiation [is] reverence *before* knowledge' (Cult and Criticism', p. 39).

⁴⁰ Michèle Willems, writing about Garrick's Jubilee, distinguishes between 'le Shakespeare de la critique et le Shakespeare du public.... C'est précisément cette dualité, résolue et dépassée dans la vénération, qui reste la caractéristique principale du mythe shakespearien aujourd'hui encore' [the Shakespeare of criticism and the Shakespeare of the public.... It is precisely this duality, resolved and transcended in veneration, which remains to this day the main characteristic of the Shakespeare myth] (*La Genèse du Mythe Shakespearien*, pp. 345-46).