

# AN UNFORTUNATE LIKENESS

by W. S. Gilbert

I've painted SHAKESPEAR all my life--  
    "An infant" (even then at-play),  
"A boy," with stage-ambition rife,  
    Then "Married to ANN HATHAWAY."

"The bard's first ticket night" (or "ben."),  
    His "First appearance on the stage,"  
His "Call before the curtain"--then  
    "Rejoicings when he came of age."

The bard play-writing in his room,  
    The bard a humble lawyer's clerk,  
The bard a lawyer<sup>1</sup>--parson<sup>2</sup>--groom<sup>3</sup>--  
    The bard deer-stealing, after dark.

The bard a tradesman<sup>4</sup>--and a Jew<sup>5</sup>--  
    The bard a botanist<sup>6</sup>--a beak<sup>7</sup>--  
The bard a skilled musician<sup>8</sup> too--  
    A sheriff<sup>9</sup> and a surgeon<sup>10</sup> eke!

Yet critics say (a friendly stock)  
    That, though with all my skill I try,  
Yet even I can barely mock  
    The glimmer of his wondrous eye!

One morning as a work I framed,  
    There passed a person, walking hard:  
"My gracious goodness," I exclaimed,  
    "How very like my dear old bard!



“Oh, what a model he would make!”  
I rushed outside--impulsive me!--  
“Forgive the liberty I take,  
But you’re so very”--“Stop!” said he.

“You needn’t waste your breath or time,---  
I know what you are going to say,--  
That you’re an artist, and that I’m  
Remarkably like SHAKESPEARE. Eh?

"You wish that I would sit to you?"  
I clasped him madly round the waist,  
And breathlessly replied, “I do!”  
“All right,” said he, “but please make haste.”

I led him by his hallowed sleeve,  
And worked away at him apace,  
I painted him till dewy eve,--  
There never was a nobler face!

“Oh, sir,” I said, “a fortune grand  
Is yours, by dint of merest chance,--  
To sport *his* brow at second-hand,  
To wear *his* cast-off countenance!

“To rub *his* eyes whene’er they ache--  
To wear *his* baldness ere you’re old--  
To clean *his* teeth when you awake--  
To blow *his* nose when you’ve a cold!”

His eyeballs glistened in his eyes--  
I sat and watched and smoked my pipe;  
“Bravo!” I said, “I recognise  
The phrensy of your prototype!”

His scanty hair he wildly tore:  
“That’s right,” said I, “it shows your breed.”  
He danced--he stamped--he wildly swore--  
“Bless me, that’s very fine indeed!”

“Sir,” said the grand Shakespearian boy  
(Continuing to blaze away),  
“You think my face a source of joy;  
That shows you know not what you say.

“Forgive these yells and cellar-flaps,  
I’m always thrown in some such state  
When on his face well-meaning chaps  
This wretched man congratulte.

“For, oh! this face-this pointed chin--  
This nose--this brow--these eyeballs too,  
Have always been the origin  
Of all the woes I ever knew!

“If to the play my way I find,  
To see a grand Shakespearian piece,  
I have no rest, no ease of mind  
Until the author’s puppets cease!

“Men nudge each other--thus--and say,  
‘This certainly is SHAKESPEARES son,’  
And merry wags (of course in play)  
Cry ‘Author!’ when the piece is done.



“In church the people stare at me,  
Their soul the sermon never binds;  
I catch them looking round to see,  
And thoughts of SHAKESPEARE fill their minds.

“And sculptors, fraught with cunning wile,  
Who find it difficult to crown  
A bust with BROWN’S insipid smile,  
Or TOMKINS’S unmannered frown,

“Yet boldly make my face their own,  
When (oh, presumption!) they require  
To animate a paving-stone  
With SHAKESPEARE’S intellectual fire.

'At parties where young ladies gaze,  
And I attempt to speak my joy,  
'Hush, pray,' some lovely creature says,  
'The fond illusion don't destroy!'



“Whene’er I speak my soul is wrung  
With these or some such whisperings;  
“’Tis pity that a SHAKESPEARE’S tongue  
Should say such un-Shakespearian things!”

“I should not thus be criticised  
Had I face of common wont:  
Don’t envy me--now, be advised!”  
And, now I think of it, I don’t!

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1. “Go with me to a notary--seal me there  
Your single bond”  
--*Merchant of Venice*, Act I., sc. 3.
  2. “And there she shall, at Friar Lawrence’  
cell,  
Be shrived and married.”  
--*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II., sc. 4.
  3. “And give their fasting horses provender.”  
--*Henry the Fifth*, Act IV., sc. 2
  4. “Let us, like merchants, show our foulest wares.”  
--*Troilus and Cressida*, Act I, sc. 3
  5. “Then must the Jew me merciful.”  
--*Merchant of Venice*, Act, IV, sc. 1

6. "The spring, the summer,  
The childing autum, angry winter, change  
Their wonted liveries."  
--*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act IV, sc. 1
7. "In the county of Glo'ster, justice of the peace and  
coram."  
--*Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act I, sc. 1
8. "What lusty trumpet thus doth summon us?"  
-- *King John*, Act V, sc. 2
9. "And I'll provide the executioner."  
--*Henry the Sixth* (Second Part), Act III, sc. 1
10. "The lioness had torn some flesh away,  
Which all this while had bled."  
--*As You Like It*, Act IV, sc. 3