

A POSSIBLE SHAKESPEAREAN SCENE FROM *ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM*

The lamentable and true tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham in Kent. Who was most wickedly murdered by the means of his disloyal and wanton wife who, for the love she bore to one Mosby, hired two desperate ruffians, Black Will and Shakebag, to kill him. Wherein is showed the great malice and dissimulation of a wicked woman, the insatiable desire of filthy lust and the shameful end of all murderers.

Date and Authorship:

Published in Quarto in 1592 (registered April 1592), with no playwright's name. Almost certainly postdates the publication of the second, 1587, edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the source for the story. First attributed to Shakespeare in the eighteenth century (Edward Jacob, 1770), though had been ascribed to him in an unreliable play-catalogue of 1656. Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe and others have also been proposed as possible authors or part-authors. The most cogent case for Shakespeare's authorship of at least the quarrel scene is made by MacDonald P. Jackson, in 'Shakespeare and the Quarrel Scene in *Arden of Faversham*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Volume 57, Number 3, Fall 2006, pp. 249-293. To date, stylometric tests have not resolved the authorship question satisfactorily, but largely because of such tests opinion is leaning more strongly towards at least a partial Shakespearean hand than at any time since the late nineteenth century, when such major Shakespeareans as Charles Knight and A. C. Swinburne argued powerfully for his authorship of the play.

Source/Plot:

The play is a dramatisation of actual historical events, recorded in Holinshed's *Chronicles*: Thomas Arden was a successful businessman in the early Tudor period. Born in 1508, probably in Norwich, Arden took advantage of the tumult of the Reformation to make his fortune, trading in the former monastic properties dissolved by Henry VIII. In fact, the house in which he was murdered (which is still standing in Faversham) was a former guest house of the Benedictine abbey near town. His wife Alice had taken a lover, a man of low status named Mosby; together, they plotted to murder her husband. After several bungled attempts on his life, two ex-soldiers from the former English dominion of Calais, known as Black Will and Loosebag (called Shakebag in Holinshed and the play), were hired and continued to make botched attempts. Arden was finally killed in his own home on 14 Feb 1551, and his body was left out in a field during a snowstorm, in the hope that the blame would fall on someone who had come to Faversham for the St Valentine's Day fair. The snowfall stopped, however, before the killers' tracks were covered, and

the tracks were followed back to the house. Bloodstained swabs and rushes were found, and the killers quickly confessed. Alice and Mosby were put on trial and convicted of the crime; he was hanged and she burnt at the stake in 1551. Black Will may also have been burnt at the stake after he had fled to Flanders: the English records state he was executed in Flanders, while the Flemish records state he was extradited to England. Loosebag escaped and was never heard of again. Other conspirators were hanged in chains. One, George Bradshaw, a local goldsmith, who was convicted by an obscure passage in a sealed letter he had delivered, was wrongly convicted and posthumously acquitted.

Parts in the possible Shakespearean scene:

Mistress ALICE Arden

MOSBY, her lover (of lower social origin)

BRADSHAW, a goldsmith

POSSIBLE SHAKESPEAREAN SCENE

(a lovers' quarrel)

Scene 8

Here enters Mosby

MOSBY Disturbèd thoughts drives me from company

And dries my marrow with their watchfulness:

Continual trouble of my moody brain

Feebles my body by excess of drink

5 And nips me as the bitter northeast wind

Doth check the tender blossoms in the spring.

Well fares the man, howe'er his cates do taste,

That tables not with foul suspicion:

And he but pines amongst his delicates

10 Whose troubled mind is stuffed with discontent.

My golden time was when I had no gold.

Thoughⁱ then I wanted, yet I slept secure:

My daily toil begat me night's repose,

My night's repose made daylight fresh to me.

15 But since I climbed the top bough of the tree
And sought to build my nest among the clouds,
Each gentle staryⁱⁱ gale doth shake my bed
And makes me dread my downfall to the earth.
But whither doth contemplation carry me?

20 The way I seek to find, where pleasure dwells,
Is hedged behind me that I cannot back,
But needs must on, although to danger's gate.
Then, Arden, perish thou by that decree,
For Greene doth ear the land and weed thee up

25 To make my harvest nothing but pure corn.
And for his pains I'll heaveⁱⁱⁱ him up a while,
And, after, smother him to have his wax:
Such bees as Greene must never live to sting.
Then is there Michael, and the painter too,

30 Chief actors to Arden's overthrow,
Who, when they shall see me sit in Arden's seat,
They will insult upon me for my meed,
Or fright me by detecting of his end.
I'll none of that, for I can cast a bone

35 To make these curs pluck out each other's throat,
And then am I sole ruler of mine own.
Yet Mistress Arden lives: but she's myself,
And holy church rites makes us two but one.
But what for that I may not trust you, Alice?

40 You have supplanted Arden for my sake,
And will extirpen me to plant another.
'Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent's bed,
And I will cleanly rid my hands of her.

Here enters Alice \$With a prayerbook\$

But here she comes, and I must flatter her.—

45 How now, Alice? What, sad and passionate?

Make me partaker of thy pensiveness:

Fire divided burns with lesser force.

ALICE But I will dam that fire in my breast

Till by the force thereof my part consume.

50 Ah, Mosby!

MOSBY Such deep pathaires, like to a cannon's burst

Discharged against a ruined wall,

Breaks my relenting heart in thousand pieces.

Ungentle Alice, thy sorrow is my sore:

55 Thou know'st it well, and 'tis thy policy

To forge distressful looks to wound a breast

Where lies a heart that dies when^{iv} thou art sad.

It is not love that loves to anger love.

ALICE It is not love that loves to murder love.

60 **MOSBY** How mean you that?

ALICE Thou knowest how dearly Arden loved me.

MOSBY And then?

ALICE And then — conceal the rest, for 'tis too bad,

Lest that my words be carried with the wind,

65 And published in the world to both our shames.

I pray thee, Mosby, let our springtime wither:

Our harvest else will yield but loathsome weeds.

Forget, I pray thee, what hath passed betwixt us,

For now I blush and tremble at the thoughts.

70 **MOSBY** What, are you changed?

ALICE Ay, to my former happy life again,

From title of an odious strumpet's name
To honest Arden's wife — not Arden's honest wife.

Ha, Mosby, 'tis thou hast rifled me of that

75 And made me sland'rous to all my kin:

Even in my forehead is thy name engraven,

A mean artificer, that low-born name.

I was bewitched: woe worth the hapless hour

And all the causes that enchanted me!

80 **MOSBY** Nay, if thou ban, let me breathe curses forth,

And if you stand so nicely at your fame,

Let me repent the credit I have lost.

I have neglected matters of import

That would have stated me above thy state,

85 Forslowed advantages, and spurned at time.

Ay, Fortune's right hand Mosby hath forsook

To take a wanton giglot by the left.

I left the marriage of an honest maid

Whose dowry would have weighed down all thy wealth,

90 Whose beauty and demeanour far exceeded thee:

This certain good I lost for changing bad,

And wrapped my credit in thy company.

I was bewitched — that is no theme of thine! —

And thou unhallowed hast enchanted me.

95 But I will break thy spells and exorcisms,

And put another sight upon these eyes

That showed my heart a raven for a dove.

Thou art not fair, I viewed thee not till now:

Thou art not kind, till now I knew thee not.

100 And now the rain hath beaten off thy guilt,

Thy worthless copper shows thee counterfeit.
It grieves me not to see how foul thou art,
But mads me that ever I thought thee fair.
Go, get thee gone, a copesmate for thy hinds!
105 I am too good to be thy favourite.

ALICE Ay, now I see, and too soon find it true,
Which often hath been told me by my friends,
That Mosby loves me not but for my wealth,
Which, too incredulous, I ne'er believed.
110 Nay, hear me speak, Mosby, a word or two:
I'll bite my tongue if it speak bitterly.
Look on me, Mosby, or I'll kill myself:
Nothing shall hide me from thy stormy look.
If thou cry war, there is no peace for me.
115 I will do penance for offending thee,
And burn this prayer book, where I here use
The holy word that had converted me.
See, Mosby, I will tear away the leaves,
And all the leaves, and in this golden cover
120 Shall thy sweet phrases and thy letters dwell;
And thereon will I chiefly meditate,
And hold no other sect but such devotion.
Wilt thou not look? Is all thy love o'erwhelmed?
Wilt thou not hear? What malice stops thine ears?
125 Why speaks thou not? What silence ties thy tongue?
Thou hast been sighted as the eagle is,
And heard as quickly as the fearful hare,
And spoke as smoothly as an orator,
When I have bid thee hear or see or speak,

130 And art thou sensible in none of these?
 Weigh all thy good turns with this little fault,
 And I deserve not Mosby's muddy looks.
 A font once troubled^v is not thickened still:
 Be clear again, I'll ne'er more trouble thee.

135 **MOSBY** O no, I am a base artificer:
 My wings are feathered for a lowly flight.
 Mosby? Fie, no! Not for a thousand pound.
 Make love to you? Why, 'tis unpardonable:
 We beggars must not breathe where gentles are.

140 **ALICE** Sweet Mosby is as gentle as a king,
 And I too blind to judge him otherwise.
 Flowers do sometimes spring in fallow lands,
 Weeds in gardens, roses grow on thorns:
 So whatsoe'er my Mosby's father was,
145 Himself is^{vi} valued gentle by his worth.

MOSBY Ah, how you women can insinuate,
 And clear a trespass with your sweet-set tongue!
 I will forget this quarrel, gentle Alice,
 Provided I'll be tempted so no more.

Here enters Bradshaw

150 **ALICE** Then with thy lips seal up this new-made match.

\$Makes to kiss him\$

MOSBY Soft, Alice, for here comes somebody.

ALICE How now, Bradshaw, what's the news with you?

BRADSHAW I have little news, but here's a letter
 That Master Greene importuned me to give you.

155 **ALICE** Go in, Bradshaw, call for a cup of beer:
 'Tis almost supper time, thou shalt stay with us.

Exit [Bradshaw]

Then she reads the letter:

'We have missed of our purpose at London but shall perform it
by the way. We thank our neighbour Bradshaw. Yours, Richard
Greene.'

160

How likes my love the tenor of this letter?

MOSBY Well, were his date completed and expired.

ALICE Ah, would it were! Then comes my happy hour:

Till then my bliss is mixed with bitter gall.

Come, let us in to shun suspicion.

165

MOSBY Ay, to the gates of death to follow thee. *Exeunt*

TEXTUAL NOTES

ⁱ **Though** = Q2 (1599). Q = Thought

ⁱⁱ **stary** i.e. 'starry', perhaps meaning 'from the star-filled element', though some editors emend the phrase to 'gentlest airy gale'

ⁱⁱⁱ **heave** some editors emend to 'hive'

^{iv} **when** = Q2. Q = where

^v **font once troubled** = Ed. Q = fence of trouble

^{vi} **is** = Ed. *Not in Q.*