probably drew the attention of the greatest of all the Lancashire families, the Stanleys. The head of the family, Henry Stanley, Earl of Derby, and his heir, Ferdinando, Lord Starnge, were active patrons of the drama, and in 1585, having become the father of the twins Shakespeare joined Lord Strange's household 'as one of his company of players'. Honigmann also suggests that Shakespeare might have toured France with the team in 1585, which means he was absent from Stratford when the twins were born.

The popular playwrights in Shakespeare's time lived under patrons, who were the noblemen of the court. They gave shelter and lodging to the writers, and they often kept playing companies supplying them with liveries or uniform. Shakespeare's first patron, Lord Strange was one of the most flamboyant noblemen in Elizabeth's court, and his company was the finest in London between 1591 and 1593. Shakespeare's next patron was the Earl of Southampton (the young man of the sonnets), to whom Shakespeare had dedicated his two poems written during the plague years and published in quartos: *Venus and Adonais* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594).

Every genius is born, but he also becomes. Though the most gifted of his time, Shakespeare had to go through his own learning curve. As an actor and writer he must have driven himself hard, as a line from a sonnet proves: 'Weary with toil I haste me to my bed' (Sonnet 27). From his childhood, like every Elizabethan child, Shakespeare had a very good grounding in the elements of speech.

Briefly speaking, Shakespeare's development in the craftsmanship of writing dramatic poetry may be understood by observing his early plays, *Henry VI*, for example, where he is almost depending on Thomas Kyd's trite versification like 'o eyes, no eyes', and his mature style in the great tragedies where he comes out of rhetorical formalism and assumes a natural cadence as employed in soliloquies like 'To be or not to be', which is neither prose nor poetry, but a way of expressing the deepest feelings.

'If you tickle us, do we not laugh?'

Syed Badrul Ahsan



YOU cannot escape Shakespeare. It matters little that you may not have studied English literature. The fact that you may have gone through life along a route hugely removed from the Bard is no reason for you not to have come by him, or by part of his legacy. Shakespeare, as so many have been saying for centuries, is for all time. And that timelessness has of course to do with the wisdom he dispensed through his works, through his poetry. You watch Hamlet. Or you read him. The point here is that you do it and would like to do it a lot more times because you feel you have an affinity with the Prince of Denmark. And how does that happen to be? It comes through the universality of his indecisiveness. But indecision is again, in truth, symbolic of the reflective nature of man. To be, or not to be, is a question that comes to you over and over again. It holds you back from a demonstration of romantic ardour, to a point where you drive your lover to despair with that cruelty of a statement: 'Get thee to a nunnery!'

In Shakespeare, you seem to be looking into a mirror that casts your image back at you. Consider the centuries that have gone by. Consider the conspiracies, the little men who have down the ages made a mess of life and a mockery of nobility. 'Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look / Such men are dangerous'. Something of an eerie feeling courses down your spine as you relate these words to the predatory times you have known. Think here of Bangladesh, of Chile, of Pakistan. Cassius' descendants have been all over the place. And yet, when you observe Caesar, it is Olympian grandeur that passes in your vision. 'I am constant as the North star', says he. And that is not all. Danger, he believes to the core of his being, knows full well that Caesar is more dangerous than danger itself. That is arrogance, sure. But in the great, in the one reaching for the skies, arrogance sometimes adds to the charisma of the personality. But, of course, the arrogant soon come to quick confusion. 'The Ides of March are come', a cheerful Caesar tells the man who had warned him of the darkness hovering over the day. 'Aye, Caesar, but not gone', comes the answer. Moments later, the dictator is dead at the feet of Pompey's statue. Everything palls, everything pales, everything falls.