

SHAKESPEARE'S WIFE
Germaine Greer
On Sale 4/8/08
Harper

An Interview with Germaine Greer

1. Other biographers of Shakespeare claim that Ann was “a homely wench” who may have set out to catch herself a much younger husband by seducing him.

GG: It wasn't Ann's but rather Will's age at marriage that would have raised eyebrows in Elizabethan England, where 25 was the conventional and most common age for young men to marry. Will was 18 (Ann was 26).

2. Other Shakespeare biographers claim that Ann and Will had a shotgun marriage, because Ann was pregnant at the time.

GG: Evidence from the local archives shows that it was not at all unusual for Elizabethan brides to be a few months pregnant at the time of their marriage ceremony. It's only in our own time that there remains some shame attached to this condition.

3. Other Shakespeare biographers claim that Ann and her children went to live with Shakespeare's parents when he moved to London.

GG: The local census shows that it is extremely rare to find 3 generations of a family under one roof in Elizabethan times.

4. Other Shakespeare biographers claim that Shakespeare, in purchasing New Place in 1597, provided Ann and the children with a dream house.

GG: The house was more likely in disrepair and a wreck of a building. It was Ann who restored it and made it habitable.

5. Other Shakespeare biographers claim that Ann had no life in Stratford while Shakespeare wrote plays and sonnets and dallied with dark ladies and young men in London.

GG: Ann ran a malt business, and probably brewed ale and raised pigs. She raised silkworms, started a haberdashery and knitting business, and was an industrious, resilient, and unusually capable woman. She also had a wide circle of friends, acquaintances, and business contacts.

6. Other Shakespeare biographers claim that Shakespeare abandoned his family, leaving them destitute and helpless.

GG: It was common for men in Elizabethan England to move to where the work was, often away from their families. Shakespeare's move to London should be seen in that light. Ann supported the family and managed quite well without him.

7. Other Shakespeare biographers maintain that Ann was illiterate and could neither read nor write.

GG: Given Ann's strongly Protestant family, it is very likely that she had been taught to read and write. Shakespeare himself may have taught her to write. In any case, she was literate.

8. Other Shakespeare biographers contend that Ann was an invisible woman, and Shakespeare felt her to be a burden. They claim she had nothing to do with his work, and never inspired any of it. They also contend that Shakespeare's fellow players published the First Folio of 1623.

GG: Ann's partnership with Shakespeare played an important part in his life and works. Sonnet 145 was written by Shakespeare for his wife. Why should not others, too, have been addressed to her? Greer proposes that at least half a dozen other sonnets may have been addressed to Ann as well, including Sonnet 110. Greer also suggests that Ann deserves credit for seeing "Shakespeare's Sonnets" into print in 1609. Greer also argues (and she is not alone in this) that it was Ann who published the First Folio of 1623, not Shakespeare's fellow players.

Germaine Greer marshals a convincing body of evidence for her assertions in *SHAKESPEARE'S WIFE*: local archives that provide a rich social context for the lives of men and women like Ann Hathaway and William Shakespeare who grew up, worked, married, had children, bought homes, grew old and died in Warwickshire in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Greer is the first literary scholar to do this kind of historical research.