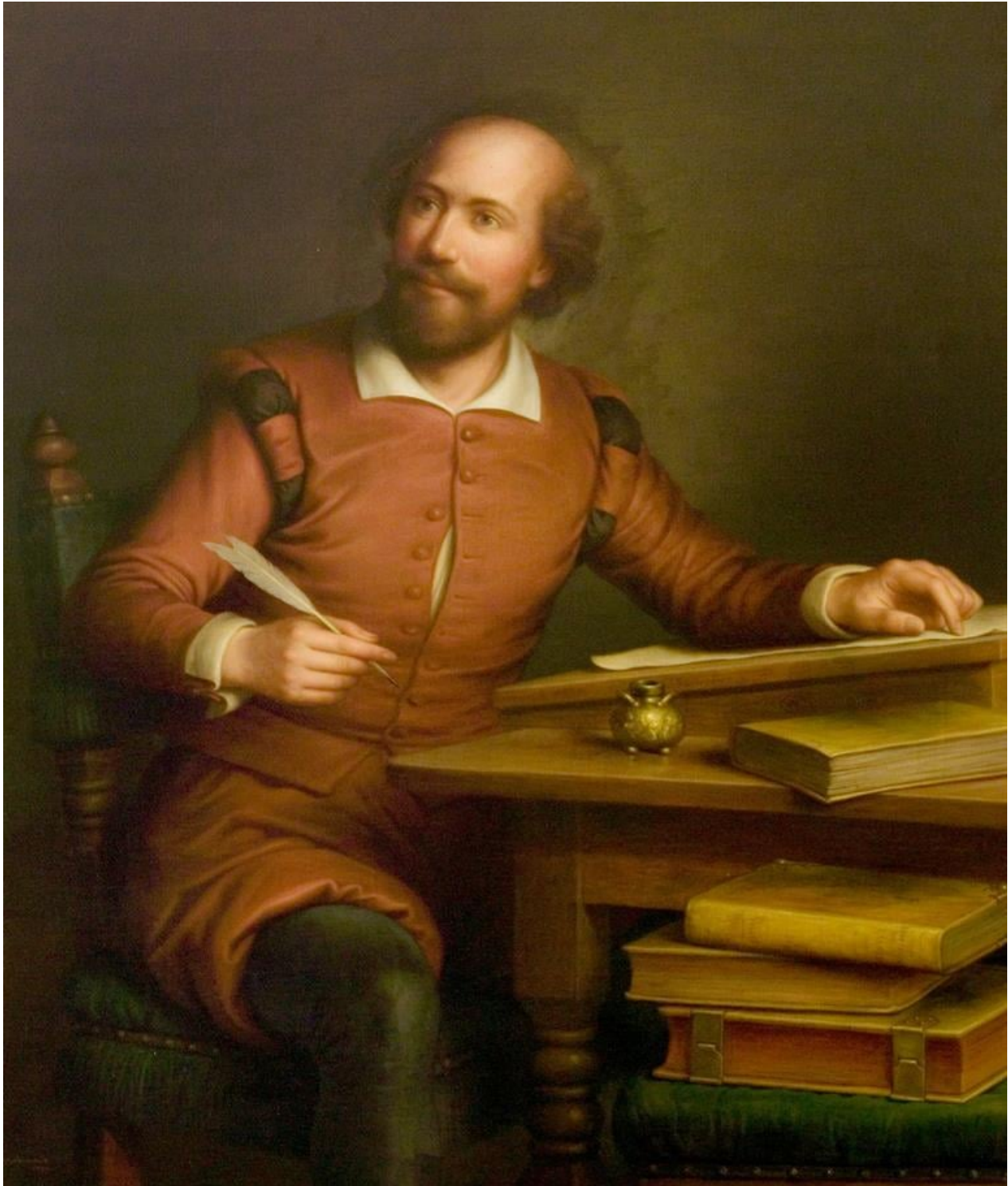


Blotted Lines

by [Peter Dreyer](#) (February 2024)



An Ideal Portrait of William Shakespeare, George Henry Hall, 1896

The players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that [...] he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, "Would he had blotted a thousand." –Ben Jonson

Jonson was right! Superlative he may be,
but Shakespeare also wrote crap—e.g.:

With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,

*In springtime, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding**

Best bards are permitted a rubbish bin
And freedom to flog the trash therein!

Strive, then, to resist the double dutch,
Avoid synecdoches and such;
Never strong-arm a feeble refrain,
The words you win you scarcely gain.
Think, "I'm a *poet*, and should be still!"
Publish only what comes of its own free will,
Has luggage, books, and a proper name,
Paying no heed to prosodic design.
What is wanted's just the one fine line
That none but you alone can free.
From igneous cliff and ironwood tree;
Just one line need be remembered, see,
Then followed up through Dante's woods.
If vexed by the nonnegotiable bill of goods,
*O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,***

Why, look on the bright side of your doom,

Alligator,

I'll see you later!

*From Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

**Milton, "The Blindness of Sampson."

January 23, 2024

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Peter Richard Dreyer is a South African American writer. He is the author of *A Beast in View* (London: André Deutsch), *The Future of Treason* (New York: Ballantine), *A Gardener Touched with Genius: The Life of Luther Burbank* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan; rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California Press; new, expanded ed., Santa Rosa, CA: Luther Burbank Home & Gardens), *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Secker & Warburg), and most recently the novel *Isacq* (Charlottesville, VA: Hardware River Press, 2017).

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