

# Shakespeare in Virginia

## Synopsis

In February 1616 Shakespeare is recruited by the English secret service to go to the Virginia Colony as a spy. The Virginia Colony is at this point run by a private company and a faction in the English establishment, seeing the Virginia Company's lack of progress in developing Virginia and their ongoing warfare with the native Powhatans, want the government to take over running of the Colony directly. Shakespeare is to pose as a planter and to supply useful information to the government. Shakespeare had worked previously as an agent earlier in his life and is well regarded. Shakespeare agrees to the plan as retirement does not suit him, his finances are precarious and he has an unhappy marriage. As he is so well known it is necessary to stage his death, which is done on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1616. After this Shakespeare, under the name of Mr Surrey, cultivates John Rolfe and his wife Matoaka (aka Pocahontas) who are in London to promote the Colony. After Matoaka's death, he and Rolfe travel on to Virginia.

In Virginia Shakespeare lives on Rolfe's plantation south of the James River to learn about tobacco cultivation, and then spends the next winter in Jamestown during which he takes part in a performance of *The Comedy of Errors*. The next summer he takes up a plantation near Rolfe's. However he becomes bored with his life, as once he has given his advice to the government—that the Colony should be a partnership between the English and the Powhatans with the English respecting Powhatan title to land—there nothing further for him to do. He learns Powhatan and interests himself in Powhatan culture.

Melwoaka, the sister of Matoaka and wife of the chief of the Chesapeake south of the James River lives with her father, Wahunsenacawh, the paramount chief of the Powhatan, north of the river in winter, and as she travels between these two locations she visits her brother-in-law Rolfe. That autumn, on one of these trips, Melwoaka takes Shakespeare back to her father's capital, the location of which is kept a secret from the English. He travels there blindfolded and is not allowed to leave, but other than this he is free to live there. He marries a Powhatan woman and stages plays for the people, becoming an advisor to Wahunsenacawh.

Shakespeare's journey to the Powhatan capital causes suspicion in the Colony and London, and his salary is cut off, including payments that were to be made to his wife Anne. However Rolfe arranges for payments to her to continue. Rolfe is ordered to go the Powhatan capital and make Shakespeare return. He makes the journey but Shakespeare refuses to return; Rolfe witnesses one of his plays, but Rolfe is dying of tuberculosis and he travels back to his plantation knowing that Shakespeare will never return and he will never see him again.

Rolfe continues to hear news of Shakespeare from Melwoaka, and the last he hears is that Shakespeare has been made Wahunsenacawh's envoy to allied tribes to the west and that he has made the journey and will remain there.

The novel is mainly written in episodes of dialogue between the principal characters and would be easy to turn into a film or TV script.

Length 43,800 words