



## Shakespeare, Renan and Weber: an interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm and what it means to law and the nation-state

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## Personal observations

The original idea was to write a dissertation on both Shakespeare and Nietzsche. It started out as a sure future failure. Many eyebrows were raised when I unfolded this resolve. And indeed, it made little sense at first. I had, as yet, no idea where to find some common ground between the two. Only on a hunch, an unfounded, headstrong intuition that refused to disappear, I continued: there were tragic heroes and *Übermenschen*, interconnected vaguely by violence. Eventually, the idea evolved and grew into what it is now: Shakespeare, Renan, Weber, the violence paradigm and its influence on the nation-state. And yes, also Nietzsche stood his ground in this thesis, be it on a slightly different level.

By the bureau for external PhD candidates Leiden, I was coupled to my promotor Paul Cliteur because he is reputed to be an experienced promotor, not afraid to take on a challenge, and moreover “a sympathetic Mensch”. The latter remark about him proved absolutely true, as I experienced later. The first said something about his competence, but also about the success-prognosis of my endeavor, but I chose to remain blissfully unaware of this undertone. Even though, initially, I had my doubts to be coupled to a professor of jurisprudence – for what was I supposed to do at the Faculty of Law? Philosophy, yes, but Law?! – I decided to take it on anyway.

Paul, I am very grateful for your expertise, your unswerving optimism and encouragement, your perseverance, and your courage. For surely, it must take some courage on your part as well to tackle the early modern English metaphors of a literary genius, the Leonardo da Vinci of world literature: William Shakespeare.

I owe thanks to another Paul: Paul Franssen, emeritus professor of English Letters at the University of Utrecht. Paul, I greatly appreciated your wise advice in the Shakespearean field, your editorial expertise, and your friendly encouragement and support.

I also thank my partner, Herbert van Hoogdalem, who always supported me: thank you dear. A thank-you also to my brother-in-law: Herman van Hoogdalem, for his impeccable German translations.

A class by themselves are my true and loyal friends. Veronica Verbeek, I thank you for your humor, your laughter and our many talks on English Letters and Linguistics and your unwavering support. Marry Lut, you proved a true friend who never failed to support and encourage me. Thank you for

our many talks on literature and life. I also thank Patricia Olthof for her support.

Finally, long live serendipity that made me find what I was not looking for: an interpretation of Shakespearean tragedy hugely differing from the traditional interpretative canon, but standing its ground firmly *and* the expressiveness and significance of his tragedies for the field of law and justice. Thanks to lateral thinking along these lines, this thesis could be finished.

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## Appendices



## Appendix 1

### Summary of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

“The Thane of Glamis, Cawdor to be; King of Scotland thereafter”.

Of course, Macbeth is meant here. His story is well-known: Macbeth is a loyal thane<sup>1</sup> (thane of the territory of Glamis) of King Duncan. On his way home after his victorious battle against the rebellious thane Macdonald, who had helped the Norwegian King Sweno to invade Scotland, Macbeth meets three witches who predict that he will soon also be thane of Cawdor and, after that, king of Scotland. Arriving at Duncan’s abode, Macbeth learns that the first half of the prediction is immediately fulfilled: he is given the title of Cawdor by Duncan as a reward for his valor during battle. In spite of initial doubts and hesitation, he is so caught by ambition (enthusiastically urged on by his wife) that he decides to murder King Duncan to hasten the realization of the second half of the prediction. After this assassination, Macbeth increasingly mistrusts his former friends and peers, bordering on a psychopathic frenzy, and initiates a whirlwind of bloody murders. Most former friends are killed. Those who escape flee to England to prepare a war against Macbeth. The latter loses contact with reality and goes to the moors to consult the witches again. His wife falls ill: she starts to hallucinate. Macbeth realizes what he has done and how vain it all was: he is alone and isolated. He faces death in the final battle, knowing that his death will restore peace and end the practice of blood law. Harmony is restored in Scotland and Duncan’s son Malcolm installs a new and more humane rule.

Main characters:

- *Macbeth*: Thane of Glamis, then Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland
- *Lady Macbeth*: his wife
- *Duncan*: King of Scotland
- *Macdonald*: rebellious thane of Cawdor, conspiring with the king of Norway. After Macdonald is defeated by Macbeth and condemned to death by Duncan, the latter gives his title – Thane of Cawdor – to Macbeth
- *Malcolm and Donalbain*: sons of King Duncan
- *Banquo*: a fellow thane and friend of Macbeth, later on killed by Macbeth
- *Macduff*: Thane of Fife; later on in the play, his wife and children are murdered by Macbeth because Macduff had fled the country.
- *Sweyn or Sweno*: King of Norway
- *Lennox*: a fellow Thane

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<sup>1</sup> Thane: a vassal of noble birth to the Scottish king.



## Appendix 2

### Summary of *The Tragedy of Hamlet*

The plot revolves around the Danish prince Hamlet, who is named after his warlike father. Shortly after Hamlet Sr. has slain the Norwegian king Fortinbras, and thus secured the latter's dominion, he dies, supposedly in his sleep.

Claudius, Hamlet Sr.'s brother, is then crowned king and marries Gertrude, the late Hamlet's widow.

Hamlet Jr. is ordered to avenge his father's death by a ghost. The apparition claims to be the wandering soul of Hamlet Sr. It also reveals the true cause of the late king's death: his own brother Claudius killed him. This makes the latter a usurper and a perpetrator of two capital crimes: fratricide and regicide.

Hamlet, already downcast by his father's death, gets even more depressed because of his indecision as to complying with the ghost's wishes; his behavior becomes more and more erratic and mad.

Claudius and Gertrude try to cheer him up by inviting two of his former study friends to Elsinore castle: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They can keep him company and meanwhile keep an eye on him.

When the pompous Lord Chancellor Polonius suggests that Hamlet's behavior is caused by the young man's infatuation with his daughter Ophelia, Claudius spies on the couple to see if this is true. However, Hamlet rudely repudiates Ophelia, telling her to enter a nunnery and generally rejecting the concept of marriage.

A group of actors visits Elsinore Castle. The royal couple thinks this is a fine distraction for Hamlet. Hamlet, however, decides to test Claudius' guilt by changing the script: the actors are to enact a scene similar to Claudius' alleged crime. The king's reaction tells Hamlet that Claudius is guilty.

When Hamlet confronts his mother with this new information, he accidentally kills Polonius, who is hidden behind a tapestry, overhearing the conversation. Hamlet stabs Polonius, acting as if he assumed there was a rat behind the hangings, but in actual fact, he thinks it is Claudius. After having killed Polonius, Hamlet is dispatched in a hurry to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Claudius hands Hamlet's two friends a sealed letter for the English king, requesting him to kill Hamlet as soon as he arrives. Hamlet, however, having intercepted the letter, returns to Denmark. Meanwhile, Ophelia has gone mad because of her father's death, she drowns herself in grief.

Polonius' son Laertes also arrives. He has come back from France upon his father's death. Claudius sets the two young men against each other; this is not difficult as Laertes wants to avenge his father. Claudius suggests a rapier fight between them; Laertes poisons his sword to secure Hamlet's death when hit. To be completely on the safe side Claudius also prepares a poisoned goblet of wine, intended for Hamlet.

Laertes is stabbed by his own sword and dies. Instead of Hamlet (who refuses), Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup and also dies. Hamlet is wounded by the

poisoned sword and knows he will die soon. Before he dies he stabs Claudius and asks his friend Horatio to keep his story alive in order to be remembered and so that the truth may be known: “*report me and my cause aright/ to the unsatisfied*”. Then Hamlet dies.

Main characters:

- *Hamlet Sr.*: former King of Denmark, now a ghost, murdered by his brother Claudius
- *Claudius*: usurper of the throne of Denmark after having killed his brother
- *Hamlet Jr.*: Prince, son of Hamlet Sr., and the protagonist of the play
- *Gertrud*: initially married to Hamlet Sr., after the latter’s death, she married Claudius
- *Polonius*: Lord Chancellor to Claudius
- *Ophelia and Laertes*: Polonius’ children. Ophelia is Hamlet’s sweetheart
- *Horatio*: Hamlet’s college friend from Wittenberg University
- *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*: fellow students from Wittenberg University
- *Fortinbras*: Prince of Norway, named after his father, who was king of Norway before him. The latter does not figure in the play; he is only mentioned.

## Appendix 3

### Summary of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*

In this play, the murder of the historical Julius Caesar is enacted. In act 1, we see Julius' victorious entrance in Rome after he has slain Pompey's sons: his arch-rivals in the fight for supremacy over Rome. The triumphal procession is watched by the two friends Brutus and Cassius. The two have a confidential conversation in which Cassius speaks of his doubts concerning Julius' ambitions to become an autocratic ruler. Cassius thus tries to draw Brutus into a conspiracy against Caesar.

After having returned home, Brutus ponders Cassius's words. During a storm that night, some letters are hurled through the window of Brutus's home. Apparently, they are from citizens urging Brutus to act against Caesar's ever-increasing power and supremacy. In fact, Cassius has concocted the letters and thrown them into Brutus's window.

Brutus, who also fears a possible dictatorship, is won over by the "citizens' letters" to partake in Cassius's plot. The conspirators meet in Brutus's house; Brutus takes control of the meeting. They decide to kill Caesar when he attends a meeting of the Senate.

After this has been decided and the men are gone, Portia, Brutus's wife, notices that her husband seems extremely preoccupied. She begs him to confide in her, but he rebukes her.

When Caesar goes to the Forum the next day, he is killed by all the conspirators. Marc Antony, a general and a member of Julius's entourage, swears that the latter's death shall be revenged.

In the next scene (act 3, scene 2), both Brutus and Marc Antony give an address to the general public at the Forum. Brutus explains his murderous act in a rational, argumentative manner and Marc Antony plays to the emotions of the populace. His speech is an example of superior rhetoric in the best Roman tradition; he lavishly heaps his praises upon Brutus' head, at the same time exposing him mercilessly. As a result, the populace revolts and Brutus and Cassius have to flee. Meanwhile, Octavius arrives in Rome and forms a coalition with Antony and the senator Lepidus. Brutus and Cassius raise an army against this newly formed triumvirate.

On the battlefield they have a fall out on matters of money and honor. During the night Brutus has a nightmare in which the ghost of Caesar appears who warns him that they will meet again on the battlefield. Octavius and Antony also have their differences. There is a contention on matters of tactics.

Some of Cassius's men flee the battle; he sends his orderly Pindarus to a hilltop to see how the battle is getting on. Pindarus misinterprets the army movements: the general Titinius is being surrounded by cheering crowds, but Pindarus thinks Titinius is captured by enemy forces. Cassius panics and orders Pindarus to kill him. Titinius arrives at the suicide scene and upon perceiving Cassius's slain corpse he also commits suicide.

Seeing his army decimated by the deaths of Titinius and Cassius, Brutus loses heart and impales himself on his sword. He realizes that, with his death, Caesar (or rather Caesar's ghost) will finally be satisfied. Octavius and Antony arrive. Octavius orders Brutus to be buried with all due Roman honors. Antony states that Brutus is the noblest among the Romans. This statement is a variation on his theme during his oration after Caesar's death. However, the gravity of this scene implies that this time, Antony isn't playing the audience. He is in earnest.

Main characters:

- *Brutus*: Roman patrician, senator, adopted son of Julius Caesar, one of the conspirators against Caesar
- *Julius Caesar*: general, consul, aspiring to become *Emperor*.
- *Calpurnia*: his wife
- *Mark Antony*: patrician and senator, belonging to the entourage of Julius Caesar
- *Lepidus and Octavius*: patricians, together with Mark Antony they form the ruling Triumvirate after Julius' murder
- *Portia*: Brutus' wife
- *Cassius*: co-conspirator and friend of Brutus, general
- *Cicero*: statesman, philosopher
- *Flavius and Murellus*: Tribunes in the Senate, critical of Julius Caesar
- *Casca, Cinna, Metellus*: co-conspirators of Brutus

## Appendix 4

### Biography of William Shakespeare

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a concise biography of William Shakespeare, explores the theories and speculations surrounding his identity, lists his bibliography, and provides a brief overview of life and thought during the Elizabethan era.

Very little is factually known about Shakespeare. Some written sources have survived, mainly transcripts of official (legal or clerical) documents. The biographers used for this overview are Greenblatt, Schoenbaum, Rowse, and Ellis. As a general reference, I have used the standard work by E.K. Chambers. In the paragraph on Shakespeare's identity, I have used Buisman De Savornin Lohman and Gibson as main referents. For the bibliography, *The Oxford Shakespeare, the complete works* (2005) was of great help.

#### 4.2 BIOGRAPHY

William Shakespeare was born into solid middle-class stock from Warwickshire; Stratford-upon-Avon to be precise. His parents were John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, the daughter of a prosperous yeoman and a gentleman.

John Shakespeare became bailiff in the politically difficult year 1569.<sup>1</sup> Each year, a new bailiff was elected, so after his year as bailiff, John became chief alderman. He had some debts he didn't pay, but also stood surety for others' debts.

William was baptized on April 26, 1564. The family had eight children; William was the third in this row and the first son.

When signing legal documents, both parents used a symbol: Mary with a cross and John with a pair of compasses, emblematic of the glover's trade.<sup>2</sup> It is not known whether they were illiterate, yet their mode of signing documents makes it highly probable.

Stratford was a small town tucked in a rich landscape. John Leland,<sup>3</sup> touring the country from 1538 to 1543 and describing it, was much impressed with the surroundings. According to Rowse, it is defined as follows:

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1 In that year, Mary Queen of Scots tried an uprising against her cousin Elizabeth, which failed.

2 Source: S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 26.

3 Leland, John, *Itinerary in England and Wales*, ed. by Lucy Toulmin Smith, four vol.s., G. Bell and Sons Ltd., London, 1910. [http://www.archive.org/stream/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft/itineraryofjohnl05lelauoft_djvu.txt)

From early times, and right through the Middle Ages, the primary division in the landscape was that made roughly by the River Avon. The north was a countryside of scattered farms and hamlets in the woodland; the south was more populous, with large villages and open fields, plenty of arable [land], richer. [...] Warwickshire in general was a county of landowners of middling status, where the gentry ruled, no great baronial families [...] no stranglehold on this free shire.<sup>4</sup>

It was mainly the memory of this scenery that young William brought to London in the 80s of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, planning for a career as an actor/writer. Even so, before he had reached that point, he still had to go through a cycle of Stratfordian experiences, such as attending grammar school. There is no written evidence that he went to the Stratford Grammar school, however, his later writings show a familiarity with the curriculum of this type of school as well as with the school procedures. Also, no other school was available in the vicinity. It therefore seems plausible to state that William went to the King's New School in Stratford. Tuition there was free for boys, which was lucky as business didn't prosper for father John.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century an average school curriculum for primary and secondary schools was imbued with the medieval scholastic principles.<sup>5</sup> In practice, it was built up as follows:<sup>6</sup> At the age of four or five, a boy attended a petty school. Here he was taught how to read and write, the alphabet and the elementary numbers; some fundamentals of religion and Catechism, saying grace before and after meals, the psalms in metre. Literacy was learned using a horn book.<sup>7</sup>

After the petty school came lower grammar school. A pupil would be approximately seven years old. The standard book here was Lily's *Short Introduction of Grammar*. In this book, grammar, of course, meant Latin grammar as in lower grammar school the education was entirely Latin based. Quotations from Lily would appear throughout Shakespeare's early work.<sup>8</sup> Also treated were the literary and

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4 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 2.

5 R. Williams in his *The Long Revolution*, p. 130, has it that the concept of the Seven Liberal Arts (the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, the *quadrivium* of music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) dates back as far as the fifth century, however, only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century did it begin to be fully realized in education because new material from classical learning became available. Further Scholastic influences on early Renaissance society are discussed below.

6 Sources: S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 29 ff. And: T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine&LesseGreek*. Vols. 1 and 2.

7 Hornbook (in Dutch: *leesplankje*): a single printed leaf with on it printed the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer. The leaf was attached to a wooden board and protected by a transparent horn leaf. The pupil could copy the letters and the prayer.

8 Just one example is the hilarious conversations in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* between Sir Hugh Evans, his pupil William, in the presence of the latter's mother, Mrs. Page (Act IV, scene 1 – 63 – 75):

Evans: [...], art thou lunatics? hast thou no understandings for thy cases, and the numbers of the genders? Thou art as foolish Christian creatures as I would desires.

Mrs Page: Prithee, hold thy peace.

Evans: Show me now, William, some declensions of your pronouns.

Will: Forsooth, I have forgot.

rhetorical classics, the comedies of Plautus and works by Ovid (for instance, *Metamorphoses*). Furthermore, simple texts by Aesop and Cato, providing moralizing tags that were a feature of Elizabethan education and life.<sup>9</sup>

Lower School was duly followed by Upper School where the schedule was as follows: the Greek New Testament was taught for grammatical improvement and moral instruction. From this William could gather a little Greek.

Much later, after Shakespeare's demise in 1616, his friend and fellow-writer Ben Jonson, in his eulogy, mentions Shakespeare's "small Latine & Lesse Greeke".<sup>10</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum<sup>11</sup> subtly remarks that Shakespeare's achievements are respectively small and less in the contemporary perception, but not in ours.

On the schedule were furthermore: Virgil, Ovid, Cicero<sup>12</sup> and Horace and the basic principles of logic and rhetoric. "Again and again we find Shakespeare's expertise in dialectical argument according to the text-book turned to use, especially in the earlier plays. [...] Even more useful when he came to write was the training in rhetoric, so important to Elizabethans – and to which he took like a duck to water. There it all is easily recognizable: the high, low and medium styles."<sup>13</sup>

History was taught as a subject. Sallust and Livy were treated, again, for moral purposes. "The moment the young dramatist gets to work on the story of the Wars of the Roses, with *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, it is not only the events, the drama that interests him: these plays are held together by the moral of it all, which is as constantly enforced as any schoolmaster could wish. So also with *Richard II*, and *King John*, with *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, with *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, and at the very end with *Henry VIII*".<sup>14</sup>

The King's New School was visited by another remarkable pupil: Richard Field, the tanner's son. He was a couple of years older than Shakespeare. He became one of the important publishing printers in London.

When William was five years old in 1569, the Queen's men visited Stratford: this group of professional actors might very well have been the first the young boy ever encountered. John Shakespeare was the bailiff then. They performed in the Guild Hall of Stratford. Other companies followed: e.g., Leicester's Men<sup>15</sup> (led by John Burbage) in 1573 and the Earl of Worcester's Men.

As stated above, there is no written record of his school entrance, nor is there a record left of his leaving school. Schoenbaum<sup>16</sup> assumes that he was drawn from

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Evans: It is qui, quæ, quod: if you forget your 'quies,' your 'quæs,' and your 'quods,' you must be preeches. Go your ways, and play; go.

9 Source: A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 36.

10 Ben Jonson, "To the memory of my beloved Master William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us", from: *The Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 3. London: Chatto&Windus, 1910, pp. 287-9. <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/jonson/benshake.htm>

11 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 29.

12 Especially his *Catilinarians*, his orations against Cataline, see chapter 7, were used to drill pupils.

13 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 39.

14 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 40.

15 Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1532 or 1533 – 1588), was the Queen's favorite for many years.

16 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 43.

school as his father John had fallen on hard times. Father Shakespeare borrowed money and parted with plots of land, formerly his property. The exact cause of John's setbacks is unknown; likewise, we don't know why (or even when; supposing he had entered) his son William left grammar school.

In 1575, John had tried to obtain a Coat of Arms, however, he dropped the request later on. Probably (but, again, not known for a fact) because of the expenses involved.

In 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. There is no record as to where the marriage took place. Six months later, their daughter Susanna was born; she was baptized in May 1583. Twenty months later, twins were born: Hamnet and Judith. Greenblatt<sup>17</sup> supposes, like many girls at that time, that Anne couldn't read or write.

After the birth of his twins, Shakespeare cannot be traced for seven years. There is no record as to when exactly Shakespeare left Stratford. Most biographers agree that it must have been in the 1580s, as the first written record about Shakespeare's person<sup>18</sup> stems from 1592, when Robert Greene, poet and university wit,<sup>19</sup> was on his deathbed. He was embittered because he was dying in poverty, all his possessions pawned. He wrote a pamphlet entitled the "Groatsworth of Witte"<sup>20</sup> to warn his fellow writers about this upstart<sup>21</sup> without even a university title.

Yes trust them not: for there is an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute Iohannes factotum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.<sup>22</sup>

The publisher, Henry Chettle, apologized in his preface (written after Greene's death) for the lash out at Shakespeare, so obviously Shakespeare had been able at this stage to obtain himself a respectable reputation as an author and actor (as appears from the text).

Rowse observes<sup>23</sup> that Greene's attack is one more indication that Shakespeare was considered an outsider among his fellow writers: he was neither a university wit nor a literary journalist. Up till then, nearly all writers had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. However, his not having a university degree didn't harm Shakespeare's career. An account of Shakespeare's work is given below.

The London Shakespeare came to was a lively city: expanding, growing richer under Elizabeth's reign (from 1558 to 1603). In 1588, the Armada had been defeated, leaving England free from fear of Spanish invasion. "Shakespeare's London lives

17 S. Greenblatt, *William en de Wereld*, p. 118.

18 Apart, of course, from the recording of his baptism.

19 University wit: a group of playwrights that had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. Thus, Christopher Marlowe, the above-mentioned Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe were from Cambridge and John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, George Peele were from Oxford.

20 Groatsworth: something that can be sold or bought for a groat. A groat is a coin of low value. In Dutch: *vierstuiverstuk*.

21 He meant Shakespeare.

22 Robert Greene: "Groatsworth of Wit", 20 September 1592, published by Henry Chettle, London. <http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/essays/greene/greeneorig.html>

23 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 99.

too in the splendid sweep of the panoramas engraved by Claes Jan Visscher and Wenceslaus Hollar. These depict, in lovely detail, the metropolis as viewed from Bankside – in the foreground, to the west, the playhouses; a single bridge cluttered with buildings [...] spanning the great tidal river; on the opposite bank the Tower, St. Paul's [...], the Blackfriars, the Royal Exchange, innumerable church steeples, huddled tenements, an abundance of trees, and here and there a windmill.<sup>24</sup>

London was also the center of the book trade. The above-mentioned Richard Field from Stratford became an important publisher. In fact, he published Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* in book form in 1593. Some biographers (e.g., Ackroyd<sup>25</sup>) have it that Shakespeare resorted to poetry in these years since 1592 – 1593 were notorious plague years and theatres were consequently closed. Theatre companies used to leave London and then to tour the country.

After he arrived in this bustling Tudor metropolis, Shakespeare joined the company under James Burbage, playing at The Theatre. This was the first playhouse in town, established in 1576. Of course, an acting tradition had been established in England long before that, coming from the mystery plays (religious enactments of Biblical stories and hagiographies) and the morality plays (showing a shift from religious topics towards more secular themes). As early as 1497, the first fully secular play had been performed during a banquet hosted by Cardinal Morton, who entertained the Flemish and Spanish ambassadors. The play was: *Fulgens and Lucres*, a comedy by Henry Medwall.<sup>26</sup>

In 1596, Hamnet Shakespeare, William's son, died. In that same year, William renewed his father's request for a coat of arms, which was granted soon after the request. In the autumn, Shakespeare went across the Thames to live on Bankside in the vicinity of the Swan, the theatre played by the Chamberlain's Men. Shakespeare is known to have been a member of this company for some time.

Shakespeare wrote his plays first and foremost for the theatre, not for the printing press. This implies that we cannot be sure of the exact date of conception of the works; only of certain publication dates.

He started with his history plays; the *Henry VI* plays were a success. They were most probably followed by *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus* and the *Comedy of Errors*.<sup>27</sup>

When *Titus Andronicus* was published in 1594, in a good text almost certainly from the author's manuscript, the title-page says, 'as it was played by the right honourable the Earl of Derby, Earl of Pembroke and Earl of Sussex their servants'. This seems to indicate that performances had been staged by those three companies in succession. Pembroke's men may have been a troupe splitting off from the main grouping of Alleyn's and Stranges's Men. These took the name of Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke. [...] This group did not last long, but during its brief spell it acted *Titus Andronicus*, 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.<sup>28</sup>

24 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 56.

25 P. Ackroyd, *Shakespeare, de Biografie*, p. 202.

26 A. Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, p. 35.

27 Source: A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 100.

28 Ibid.

This citation<sup>29</sup> is exemplary of the disorderly and confused dynamics in which the theatre changed and developed. It is believed by some biographers that Shakespeare was associated with the Lord Pembroke's Men.

The world of the theatre was peopled with actors, writers/producers, supernumeraries, loiterers, rummagers, prostitutes and hustlers; a sanctuary for the marginalized of society indeed. A part of the audience stood before the stage on the ground floor: the theatre yard or pit. These were also called the groundlings and on hot days, they were called *stinkards*. The well-to-do gentlemen and noblemen – the theatre patrons and the interested – watched the play from the galleries or balconies, where the Lord's Rooms were situated: the most expensive places. It might be assumed that Shakespeare met his second patron here: Henry Wriothesley, the young Earl of Southampton. He was nine or ten years Shakespeare's junior. Shakespeare dedicated his long poem *Venus and Adonis* to Southampton.

The sonnets were dedicated to a Mr. W.H. It is not known who that is, but it is surmised that this is in fact Henry Wriothesley with reversed initials. Other theories have it that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, Shakespeare's earlier patron is meant.

In 1597, Edward Alleyn left the stage, after which Richard Burbage (James Burbage's brother) became the leading tragedian. Burbage and Shakespeare were still in the same company, which was increasingly successful. They were called the Lord Chamberlain's Men.<sup>30</sup> As the local authorities of London had decided earlier to restrict the theatre companies to two, it left London with two rivaling companies: The Chamberlain's Men and (at the Rose theatre) the Admiral's Men.

At the Theatre in Shoreditch the Burbages were having trouble with landlord and tenants as to the lease, and [in the] winter of 1598-99 they decided to move the theatre. Lock, stock and barrel, across the Thames to a new site on Bankside. Thus was the famous Globe arrived at [...] and the Chamberlain's men had a permanent place to play in. Under the new contract, 21 February 1599, the Burbages had one moiety of the interest, the other moiety was shared by Shakespeare, Pope, Phillips, Heminges and Kemp. Shortly afterwards Kemp left, making his share over to the other four. Shakespeare had thus an one-eighth interest in the Globe theatre: a substantial and profitable investment.<sup>31</sup>

In 1601, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, ventured upon an insurrection. To rouse popular feeling against Elizabeth I, some of his co-conspirators had commissioned a performance of Shakespeare's play *Richard II*,<sup>32</sup> which featured the deposition of

29 In the quotation, reference is made to Alleyn's and Strange's men. Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange and later Earl of Derby, was a notable patron of the theatre and maintained a group of players, led by Edward Alleyn and known as Lord Strange's Men.

30 After the accession to the throne of James I, the group came under the patronage of James and was called the King's Men.

31 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 286.

32 An early history play (1596 – 1597) by Shakespeare. In it the story of Richard II (1367 – 1400) is told, who was deposed by Henry Bolingbroke and imprisoned in the Tower. Later on Richard was murdered there. This made him the first victim of the Wars of the Roses, a series of struggles for the crown of England between the houses of York and Lancaster.

a king. The revolt ended in a debacle and a trial followed, convicting Essex to death. The Chamberlain's Men were suspected of having favored the rebellion as they had performed this rabblerousing play. It brought Shakespeare's company into an uneasy position. Luckily, the magistrates were convinced by Augustine Phillips, one of the actors who spoke on behalf of the company during the trial, that they had known nothing of the conspiracy: they just got an extra 40 shillings for the special performance, which was why they had played it. When all the commotion around the insurrection was over, the Queen<sup>33</sup> herself allegedly snapped angrily: "I am Richard II, know ye not that!"<sup>34</sup>

Around 1613, Shakespeare retired to New Place in Stratford, where he died on 23 April 1616. In 1623, two of his fellow actors published 36 of his plays, 18 of which had not been published before: this was the First Folio. In later years authorship and authenticity of some of the plays (either incorporated in the Folio or not) were disputed.

#### 4.3 SHAKESPEARE'S CONTROVERSIAL IDENTITY

As stated above, little is known about the personal life of the Bard of Stratford. It was, of course, prudent and wise of Shakespeare to remain silent about personal matters and preferences of creed, as too much openness in times of religious discord could prove to be devastating for one's well-being.

As the popularity of Shakespeare's plays soared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the question of his true identity popped up. For surely, an inconsequential actor from a provincial town couldn't have written such fine poetry, have known his classics that well and given evidence of inside knowledge of court life. Certainly, the name William Shakespeare must have been an alias of a high-born person:

it was not until 1857, more than 200 years after the great works had been written, that the storm actually broke, though, unknown to the world at large, there had been a forerunner of it in 1781. In that year the Rev. J. Wilmot [...] who had spent a great deal of time searching for records of Shakespeare in and around Stratford-on-Avon, came to the conclusion that such a man as he appeared to have been could never have possessed the necessary education and experience to write the plays ascribed to him.<sup>35</sup>

James Shapiro is far more precise when he describes Wilmot's research.<sup>36</sup> The Rev. Wilmot had informed James Corton Cowell, a fellow researcher from Ipswich, that

33 In spite of being a very successful ruler, "Elizabeth's reign was a turbulent one, and she was the target of an almost constant series of rebellions and conspiracies designed to drive her from the throne." Source: <http://hfriedberg.web.wesleyan.edu/engl205/wshakespeare/plotsandrebelions.htm>

34 A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 235.

35 H.N. Gibson, *The Shakespeare Claimants*, p. 17.

36 J. Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p.p. 11 – 14. Also courtesy of the fine scholarship of Dr. Paul Franssen.

he had not found any new documentation on or documents by William Shakespeare in Stratford, while he was researching there and had begun to think the famous author couldn't have been the man William Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon. When Wilmot died, he did not leave any notes on this research. Cowell, however, mentions Wilmot's findings in several lectures for the Ipswich Philosophical Society.<sup>37</sup> In these lectures (delivered in 1805), there is mention, among other things, of the fact that Shakespeare's household stored grain to sell to malt dealers. Shakespeare was also supposed to have been engaged in moneylending. Allegedly, Wilmot had doubted that a household involved in these kinds of activities could be the household of the esteemed author. However, these facts didn't become known until 1844, when John Payne published documents<sup>38</sup> proving storage of grain and some moneylending by the Shakespeare family. Shapiro nicely pinpoints the dangers of anachronistic thinking when he mentions that Wilmot, in 1785, couldn't have known facts that became known in 1844.

Complex argumentations were developed to underpin a diversity of theories. Gibson in *The Shakespeare Claimants* roughly distinguishes two schools of thought on this item: the Stratfordians and the Theorists. The Stratfordians believed that, indeed, William Shakespeare was W. Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon. The Theorists claimed it to be some nobleman's pen name. Which nobleman qualified best was a matter of – at times – heated debate.

Up to the second half of the last century, several theories switched first places in importance, till the fine research of two scholars put an end to it. Gibson and Muir<sup>39</sup> made it clear that, by all odds, William Shakespeare was indeed just William Shakespeare, the glover's son from Stratford-upon-Avon. Yet we will never be able to prove this with absolute certainty. "All we know positively is that the plays have come down to us bearing his name, that he was generally accepted as their author in his own day, and that he has been generally accepted as such ever since."<sup>40</sup> Still the debate sometimes flares up again, as it did in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche also took a stance in this discussion.<sup>41</sup>

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37 J. Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p. 1.

38 J. Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p. 12.

39 H.N. Gibson: see previous note and K. Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1977.

40 H.N. Gibson, *The Shakespeare Claimants*, p. 301.

41 Nietzsche frequently mentions Shakespeare; in the *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, he mentions the name Shakespeare; shakespeareischen, Shakespeares, Shakespear, Shakespearischen and Shakespearisches, the name Verulam plus Shakespeare's works in total 173 times. In his letters (K.S.A.: *Sämtliche Briefe*) Shakespeare is mentioned 33 times. In total, this amounts to 205 times.

Verulam is Sir Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount of Saint Alban, whom was called Verulam by Nietzsche. I add these qualifications because Nietzsche assumed that Shakespeare was in fact Sir Francis Bacon.

The DIGITAL CRITICAL EDITION (eKGWB): <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB> has a count of 178 for the mention of Shakespeare and his oeuvre. As this study is not a lexicographical one, I will put the issue of this difference in numbers aside. In my opinion, the difference can be (partly) explained because in the K.S.A. the counts in volume 14 (the commentaries) are added, while in the digital edition, these are neglected.

I will outline the major points sketchily and refrain from details. The arguments of the theorists can usually be ranged under a number of principal headings. The way in which evidence is gathered is leading here:

- The so-called internal evidence<sup>42</sup> emphasizes the importance of literary and textual sources. Quotations from plays and poetry are used in evidence.
- The historical approach: biographical data such as letters, official documents are used.
- Graphological evidence: based on handwriting analyses conclusions are reached.
- Often, a mix of the above methods is used to prove a certain identity.

Withal, no conclusive proof could be established in favour of any of the suggested identities that were put forward.

Some of the most popular candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare's works were the following:<sup>43</sup>

- Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550 – 1604)
- Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam and Viscount of St. Albans (1561 – 1626)
- William Stanley, Lord Strange, the later Earl of Derby (1561 – 1642)
- Christopher Marlowe, playwright (1564 – 1593)

Sometimes even William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery (1580 – 1630), and Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton (1573 -1624), are mentioned in this context, as they had a close connection to Shakespeare. They both had been Shakespeare's patrons at some stage and poems had been dedicated to them.

Some famous Baconians were: S.T. Coleridge, Gervinus, Lamb, Tennyson, Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, Whitman, Mark Twain, Nietzsche, Henry James and Freud.<sup>44</sup> Derbyite scholars are amongst others: A.W. Thitherley and A.E. Evans and A. Lefranc. Practically the whole body of serious scholars is Stratfordian. I but mention E. Chambers and F.E. Halliday. Abel Lefranc, apart from being an advocate of the Derbyite theory, stresses the great consanguinity between Shakespeare and John Dee (1527 – c 1608) a contemporary magician, astrologer and alchemist.

#### 4.4 BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRICAL WORKS

Above, I have already mentioned some of the major plays of Shakespeare. As indicated, it is hard to pinpoint the exact date of creation of these works, as they were meant to be played, not published. Several scholarly publications of the complete works of Shakespeare attempt a chronology on several grounds.

The list of plays below follows the ranking of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, which is one of the standard academic editions. Behind the titles are the

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42 F. Buisman de Savornin Lohman, *Wie was Shakespeare*, p. 55.

43 They were mentioned as candidates because they were: 1) of nobility – the earls and lords – and had connections to the court; Francis Bacon had the added advantage that he was a man of learning. 2) The literary talents were beyond question (Christopher Marlowe)

44 Arthur E. Briggs, "Did Shaxper Write Shakespeare?", *American Bar Association Journal*, April 1960, vol. 46., p. 410.

assumed timespans in which the plays are presumably created. Only surviving and canonical plays are included; sonnets and narrative poems are excluded as they are outside the scope of the present research.

*The two Gentlemen of Verona* (1589 – 1591)  
*The Taming of the Shrew* (1590 – 1591)  
*Henry VI, part two* (1590 – 1591)  
*Henry VI, part three* (1591)  
*Henry VI, part one* (1591)  
*Titus Andronicus* (1593-94)  
*Richard III* (1592-93)  
*Edward III* (1594)  
*The Comedy of Errors* (1594)  
*Love's Labour's Lost* (1594 – 1595)  
*Richard II* (1595)  
*Romeo and Juliet* (1595-96)  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595)  
*The Life and Death of King John* (1596)  
*The Merchant of Venice* (1596 -97)  
*Henry IV, part one* (1596 – 1597)  
*The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597 – 1598)  
*Henry IV, part two* (1596 – 1597)  
*Much Ado About Nothing* (1598 – 1599)  
*Henry V* (1598 – 1599)  
*Julius Caesar* (1599)  
*As You Like It* (1599 – 1600)  
*Hamlet* (1600 – 1601)  
*Twelfth Night* (1601)  
*Troilus and Cressida* (1602)  
*Measure for Measure* (1603 – 1604)  
*Othello* (1603 – 1604)  
*King Lear* (1605 – 1606)  
*Timon of Athens* (1606)  
*Macbeth* (1606)  
*Antony and Cleopatra* (1606)  
*All's Well That Ends Well* (1606 – 1607)  
*Coriolanus* (1608)  
*The Winter's Tale* (1609 – 1610)  
*Cymbeline* (1610 – 1611)  
*The Tempest* (1610 – 1611)

#### 4.5 SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

In the above paragraphs, I have already sketched theatre life and the main aspects of Elizabethan London. The reign of Elizabeth I is often characterized as a relatively

secular period.<sup>45</sup> During her rule, Humanist<sup>46</sup> and Renaissance notions would have had leeway and opportunity to become ingrained in the English mind, especially the humanities (which were being reconsidered), the arts and sciences. As true as this may seem, a considerable proportion of the English population, be they either nobility, gentry, or further down the feudal ladder, were still steeped in the old medieval lore and thought.

The medieval world view<sup>47</sup> was dominated first and foremost by a predilection for universal order, the harmonizing of the sublunary with the eternity of the celestial spheres. The Elizabethans saw the universe as a strictly hierarchical system. This heavenly order was mirrored in the feudal order in society. On earth, the order could be fractured by human sin of every kind. Immediately, the disruptive sin was mirrored as some perturbation in the heavenly spheres as well. This could be noticed by man as strange and unnatural phenomena in the skies or on earth.<sup>48</sup> In Shakespeare, we find like descriptions in abundance when the intrigue of the play reaches a climax. Just one example:

The night has been unruly. Where we lay  
 Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,  
 Lamentings heard i'th' air, strange screams of death,  
 And prophesying with accents terrible  
 Of dire combustion and confused events  
 New-hatched to th' woeful time. The obscure bird  
 Clamoured the livelong night. Some say the earth  
 Was feverous and did shake.<sup>49</sup>

The order could be restored by (the hope for) redemption that would restore the proper hierarchy.

Among the avalanche of didactical prose<sup>50</sup> published from the early years of Elizabeth's reign onwards, one can also find fine examples of the medieval penchant

45 For instance, by Rowse and Ellis. I would characterize Elizabeth's reign as relatively tolerant in a world that was permeated by religion, Protestantism as well as Catholicism. Elizabeth's predecessor was the strictly Catholic Mary. The early Stuarts were Protestants.

46 Humanism: in the 14th and 15th centuries, new ideas spread through Europe, much helped by the invention of the printing press in 1540. This movement entailed a new and open approach towards the classical canon and new scientific methods in painting (the perspective), sculpture, architecture and the humanities. During the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, prominent humanists were:

- Sir Walter Raleigh, explorer (he colonized North America *inter alia* Virginia), politician and writer (*inter alia* *The History of the World*) and poet.
- Sir Francis Bacon: Lord Chancellor of England, philosopher, lawyer, writer, made important contributions to the development of the empirical scientific method.
- John Dowland, musician and composer of Renaissance music.

47 The source of the following is Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*.

48 For instance, inexplicable mortality among the piglets throughout the country, strange behavior of birds or falling stars.

49 *Macbeth*, act 2, III, ll. 53 – 59. The Scottish thane Lennox describes the night during which Macbeth murdered the king.

50 See above on the prevailing educational principles.

towards the hierarchical format. For instance, the well-known *Boke named The Governewour* by Thomas Elyot:

Beholde the foure elementes wherof the body of man is compacte, howe they be set in their places called spheris, higher or lower, accordynge to the soueraintie of theyr natures, that is to saye, the fyre the most pure element, having in it nothing that is corruptible, in his place is higheste and aboue other elementes. The ayer, whiche next to the fyre is most pure in substance, is in the seconde sphere or place. The water, whiche is somewhat consolidate, and approcheth to corruption, is next unto the erthe. The erthe, whiche is of substance grosse and ponderous, is set of all elementes most lowest.<sup>51</sup>

The above practices went hand in hand with the everyday superstitions. Not only gentry, tenants and peasantry shared a common belief in witches, sorcerers, the magical skills of augurs, piss-poking clairvoyants and “signs in the sky”; King James himself was a staunch believer in witchcraft.<sup>52</sup>

The medieval lore found its more sophisticated pendant in medieval Scholasticism,<sup>53</sup> the most important representative of which was Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> century). The Scholastic<sup>54</sup> perspective was a thoroughly theocentric one, heavily relying, however, on Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian concepts. It comprises a logic-based way of thinking in opposites: the dialectical method, practiced by Greek philosophers. The scholastic procedure was indisputable and meticulously described in chronological and hierarchical steps; another manifestation of the medieval inclination towards harmony and (hierarchical) order.

After Thomas, scholasticism had become the prevailing philosophical-scientific method. Initially, it was responsible for the profound study and analysis of the classics

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51 Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named The Governewour Devised by Sir Thomas Elyot, Knight*, Book 1, paragraph I, published in 1531.

In modern English: Behold the four elements, whereof the body of man is composed, how they be set in their places called spheres, higher or lower according to the sovereignty of their natures. Which is to say: fire has the highest place and is above the other elements. Air, which is next to fire, is most pure in substance, is in the second sphere or place. Water, which is more solid [than the ones mentioned before] and prone to corruption, is next to the earth. Earth, which is quite solid and heavy, is set lowest of all elements.

52 He considered himself to be an expert on witchcraft. In order to ban this nefarious evil from his kingdom he wrote a book on the topic: *Daemonologie* in 1597. He also introduced a harsh witchcraft act in 1604, to replace the milder one from Elizabeth's reign.

53 See above for the average school curriculum, based on scholastic principles.

54 General note on the scholastic method: from the early Middle Ages (approximately the year 1000 – which is the period of Macbeth, William the Conqueror etc. – see chapter on *Macbeth*) medieval philosophy began to develop. The method can be characterized as a scientific method characterized by going back to authoritative doctrines of the earlier ecclesiastical fathers (Johannes Scottus Eriugena, Anselmus of Canterbury, Pierre Abélard and later on Thomas Aquinas) and the falling back on an established corpus of concepts, distinctions, definitions, rhetoric and logic based on Aristotelian and Boethian philosophy. This method was highly didactical and resulted in Shakespeare's time in the school curriculum as described in this chapter. Source: Jan Bor, Errit Petersma, ed., *De Verbeelding van het Denken*, p. 174

and classical languages and a fundamental and sophisticated Bible exegesis. Withal, in the second half of the 16th century, it had worn slightly thin, depleted as it had become with rhetorical tricks that had made it, by then, hackneyed and irrelevant.<sup>55</sup>

Towards the 16th century, a mix of Old Testament views and occultism became rooted in European thought, influenced especially by the Alexandrine Jewish<sup>56</sup> communities.<sup>57</sup> They had been trading with and employed at the courts of early Renaissance Italian city-states. Another Italian influence is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). Some critics see him as a Renaissance humanist, as he published on the dignity of man: the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, published in 1486. This work is seen as one of the earliest humanist manifestos. Yet he was also interested in the *Kabbala*; he believed to be able to prove the reliability and verity of the Christian creed by using Kabbalistic numerology. He can be seen as a transitory figure between occultism and scholasticism on the one hand and the Renaissance on the other.

Humanist formative influences on the English Renaissance were: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527), also extensively mentioned in the above thesis, was an Italian philosopher and diplomat who wrote *Il Principe; The Ruler* (1513). It gave the principal rules for successful government<sup>58</sup> according to Machiavelli. These rules were ruthlessly pragmatic and completely devoid of moral codification. Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592), a French philosopher and politician, wrote *Essaies* (1580), a series of essays on the nature and disposition of man. Thomas More (1478 – 1535) is a well-known English humanist and a friend of the Dutch humanist Erasmus. More wrote *Utopia*, the description of a flawless, blissful society in 1516. Another authoritative English scientist of the period is Francis Bacon, known for the development of a new scientific methodology.<sup>59</sup> He developed empiricism or experiential philosophy.

Of course, these different perspectives: Renaissance humanism, Scholasticism, the medieval worldview and mundane superstition, could easily be at odds with each other. Not much was needed for relations within society to become strained or even hostile. Tensions became evident in street and pub brawls and a general preference for cruel pastimes such as hangings, public tortures and bear and dog fights to the death in the bear pits<sup>60</sup> on the Southbank.

The unfortunate's heads, executed by the hands of the Tower's headsman, could be seen perched on stakes on London Bridge.

Religious tensions had been part and parcel of 16th century England since Henry VIII chose to separate England's church from the Catholic Church of Rome in 1534. Henry died in 1547 and was succeeded by his son Edward, who reigned for 6 years.

55 Shakespeare often jibed at this kind of rhetoric.

56 Jews from Alexandria, Egypt. This community had a strong occult Kabbalistic tradition.

57 Sources for this short account on cultural influences were: E.M.W. Tillyard: *The Elizabethan World Picture* and Frances Yates: *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*.

58 Educational treatises for (future) rulers were extremely popular in those days. See e.g. *The Boke named The Governour* by Thomas Elyot mentioned above.

59 As I mentioned above, for this reason and because he was of noble birth, he was thought to be the real William Shakespeare by some.

60 The venues (often literally pits) where animals (bears or dogs in a variety of combinations) were set against each other to fight to the death.

He died before attaining majority in 1553. His half-sister Mary<sup>61</sup> ascended the throne. She was the Catholic daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon. She tried to bring England back to the holy mother church by hunting down and executing a large proportion of well-known Protestants. The most important victim of her reign of terror was Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1489 – 1556), who died burning at the stake. He was commemorated in *Actes And Monuments Of These Latter And Perilous Dayes* also called: *Book of Martyrs* (1563) by John Foxe, which covered some three hundred executions. Schoenbaum calls this book one of the most influential books of Elizabethan England and a powerful weapon of Protestant propaganda.<sup>62</sup>

It should be noted that, amidst all this religious fervor and turmoil, Shakespeare's father, allegedly, remained a protestant while the Ardens, John Shakespeare's in-laws, were professed Catholics.<sup>63</sup>

Apart from the religious tensions, there were medical and health issues. "Shakespeare's overcrowded, rat-infested, sexually promiscuous London, with raw sewage flowing in the Thames, was the hub for the nastiest diseases known to mankind."<sup>64</sup> There were smallpox and syphilis<sup>65</sup> (often called the pox as well). But worst of all was, of course, the Bubonic Plague. There were outbursts of the Black Death in 1563-64 (during Shakespeare's childhood), 1578-79, in 1582, in 1592-93 and 1603.

Park Honan has it that the biggest plague in Shakespeare's lifetime was the one of 1592-93 when Shakespeare must have been in London.<sup>66</sup> A good 14% of the city's population died then. Courtiers were not exempt from diseases. Queen Elizabeth herself caught smallpox when she was 29 years old. She barely survived.<sup>67</sup>

At court, the queen gathered around her men of learning and sophistication. Some famous courtiers were: Sir Francis Drake, explorer, who sailed the Americas and defeated the Spanish Armada; Sir Walter Raleigh, poet, writer and soldier. William Cecil was an elder statesman. After his death, his son Robert Cecil replaced him as chief advisor to Elizabeth. Christopher Marlowe, the gifted dramatist and poet, was possibly a spy for Elizabeth's court. He was killed – this murder was allegedly related to his intelligence work for the queen.

During Elizabeth's reign, Christopher Saxton made his atlas of England, on which he worked for six years and for which he travelled throughout the kingdom. In 1579, he published it. "Saxton deserves a place beside Shakespeare as an interpreter of

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61 Mary went down in history as Bloody Mary.

62 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 17.

63 According to A.L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare*, p. 60.

64 Taken from the introduction of <http://www.shakespeareonline.com/biography/londondisease.html>

65 Especially distressing because the level of medical care never reached above that of – at best – well-intentioned herbalists. Chirurgeons (like the fun-fair quacks) had next to no knowledge of the human body and its workings, based as medicine was on the medieval principles of the four humours: black bile (melancholic), phlegm (phlegmatic), blood (sanguin) and yellow bile (choleric).

66 Park Honan, *Shakespeare, a life*, p. 145.

67 The illness left her with bad and thin hair. Later on, she grew almost completely bald; after which her impressive red wigs became famous. Moreover, as Her Majesty had a sweet tooth, she had – in her riper years – no healthy teeth to speak of or with. Source: A.L. Rowse, *The Elizabethan Renaissance: The Life of the Society*, p. 44 ff.

the national consciousness, unity and pride which were the greatest achievements of Elizabethan England.”<sup>68</sup>

In this chapter, I have explained that Shakespeare lived in an England that gave him the standard education of the day, based on and formatted along the lines of scholasticism. Also, his country was a nation in transition between medieval feudalism and superstitions on the one hand and Renaissance humanism on the other. Scientists, explorers, statesmen and men of letters gave shape and content to new developments.

However, it was also an agitated and strained society. The tension releasing itself in cruelty and criminality. Of course, the theatre was another important stress release these days. Shakespeare, being the best playwright, was famous and venerated, yet despised by the jealous.

The changes the Tudor years saw, were intensified by the religious discords, the most important chronicle of which was, of course, John Fox’s influential book; an important reflection of the conflicts and tensions between Anglican (or Evangelists as they were sometimes called, especially when they read – or had in their home – the Wycliffe or the Tyndale bible) and Roman Catholics.

Insurrections threatened the throne of the maiden queen. In short, this period was determined by, alternately, uncertainty and growing self-consciousness; conservatism and progress.

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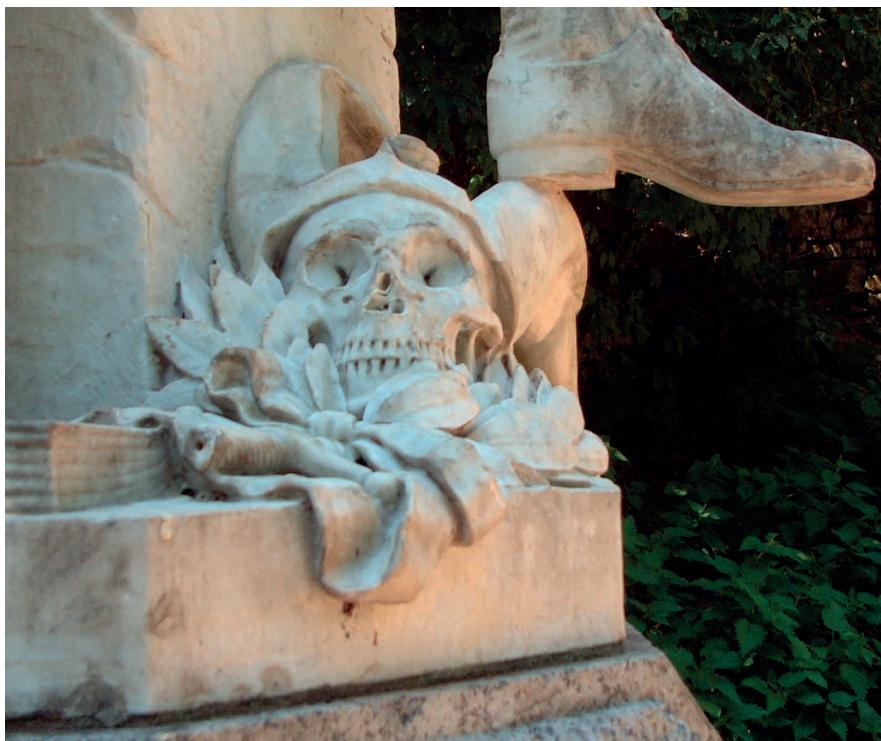
68 S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*, p. 16.



## Curriculum vitae

R.C.G. Brouwer is independent philosopher and Anglicist (special interest: English Renaissance literature and philosophy). She enrolled in the Meyers graduate school at Leiden Law School of Leiden University in 2013.







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