‘DARK AEMILIA’ A NOVEL RE-IMAGINING HISTORICAL CHARACTERS WITHIN A FICTIONAL STORY: AND A CRITICAL THESIS: ‘INVENTING SHAKESPEARE’: IS THIS RELEVANT TO 21ST CENTURY WRITERS? A SHORT HISTORY OF MADE-UP SHAKESPEARES AND AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHALLENGE OF RE-INVENTING ICONIC HISTORICAL CHARACTERS.’

Volume II

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Inventing Shakespeare: an analysis of the historical and cultural development of imagined versions of William Shakespeare in drama and fiction since 1709; and reflections on the way in which these versions have informed and inspired the invention of Shakespeare in my historical novel 'Dark Aemilia'.

Contents:

Inventing Shakespeare

Introduction to critical thesis

This reflective thesis accompanies my PhD novel *Dark Aemilia*, a fictitious account of the relationship between two historical characters: Aemilia Bassano (later Lanyer) and William Shakespeare. [1] The novel is fiction based on fact, drawing on research which is outlined in Chapter One of this thesis.[2] Both the protagonist (Lanyer) and the antagonist (Shakespeare) are known to have lived, but there is little surviving biographical information about their lives.

My creative process when writing this novel was a synthesis of imagination and research. As a doctoral student, I was able to pursue a number of lines of research, and as the primary component of my PhD was a work of fiction, my aim was to focus on research that helped me to do one of the following:

i. Develop my understanding of the social history/culture of the period;

ii. Gain an insight into the world view of early modern women;

iii. Enrich the plot/themes of the novel;

iv. Establish key facts relevant to the timeline of the novel (1593 – 1616) such as the death of Elizabeth I; the dates of major plague outbreaks; the accession of James I to the Engish throne etc.

In this reflective thesis, I have taken an analytical overview of my creative process in constructing the narrative, paying particular attention to the development of the fictitious version of William Shakespeare that I constructed. I have also outlined my

[1] Sally O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia' (Unpublished PhD novel thesis, Brunel University, 2012)

[2] Sally O'Reilly, 'Inventing Shakespeare: an analysis of the historical and cultural development of imagined versions of William Shakespeare in drama and fiction since 1709; and reflections on the way in which these versions have informed and inspired the invention of Shakespeare in my historical novel *Dark Aemilia* .' (Unpublished PhD reflective thesis, Brunel University (2012) pp. 10 - 19

creative and critical process more generally, looking at the way I approached the novel's protagonist, Aemilia Lanyer. My research question addresses the single most challenging aspect of the writing process, both in research terms and in relation to my imaginative process.

I have a particular interest in Shakespeare's cultural status because my protagonist is a frustrated female poet, anxious to prove that she is equal to this task. There is no historical record of Aemilia Lanyer's motivation or her approach to her creative work: I have drawn this conclusion from what is known of her biography. If she was indeed the Dark Lady, as this novel supposes, then her role has traditionally been perceived as being that of muse to Shakespeare, not an artist in her own right. Ultimately – in 1611 - she became a published poet herself. Her publication: *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is an account of Christ's Passion, told from a female perspective. The volume also includes a country house poem *The Description of Cooke-ham* and *Eve's Apologie in defence of Women*, in which Eve asserts that it was Adam who was really to blame for the Fall of Man.[3] Therefore, the idea that there was conflict between Aemilia's role as muse and her artistic aspiration has some basis in historical fact. However, there is an important caveat: it is not known if she was the Dark Lady to whom Shakespeare dedicated Sonnets 127 – 152, nor indeed if this person existed at all. This tension between the role assigned to her and the role to which she aspires is central to the novel, and central to the relationship between the two characters. Creating a compelling and psychologically credible version of William Shakespeare was essential to the integrity of my work. Ultimately, it was essential to make both characters plausible.

[3] Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (London: Valentine Simms, 1611) STC 15227.5 Modern edition: Suzanne Woods, ed., *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, Women Writers in English 1350 - 1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part One, Chapter One looks at Shakespeare's *Macbeth*[4] as the creative inspiration for the novel; Chapter Two considers Shakespeare's factual biography; Chapter Three looks at the invention of Shakespeare's biography, the Romantic theory of authorship and Shakespeare as national poet. Part Two presents a selection of key texts which illustrate the development of the invented Shakespeare from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. Part Three is an assessment of my own creative process in relation to my research, and includes reflections on my drafting, and the development of the characters of Aemilia Lanyer and William Shakespeare in my own work.

Research methodology

My research question and the subject of my novel offered a useful framework, but my reading still ranged over a wide area of both fiction and non-fiction. My research fell into the following categories:

i. First person accounts, including the notebooks of astrologer and occultist Simon Forman[5]; the diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, nee Dakins, the first woman known to have kept a diary in England[6] ; material relating to life to William Shakespeare[7];

[4] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 Modern edition: Muir, K. ed., *Macbeth: The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare* (London, The Arden Shakespeare, 2006)

[5] Alfred Leslie Rowse, *Simon Forman, Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age,* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974)

[6] Joanna Moody, ed., T*he Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady 1599 – 1605* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001)

[7] Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare, A Documentary Life* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press in association with The Scolar Press, 1975)

ii. Original texts by Aemilia Lanyer: *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* [8] William Shakespeare: *Macbeth,* [9] *Othello,* [10] *The Taming of the Shrew* [11] *Sonnets* [12]) and the work of other contemporary poets and playwrights including Christopher Marlowe (*Dr Faustus*[13]) and Ben Jonson (*The Alchemist*[14]);

iii. Printed historical texts relating to the social, political and religious contexts of early modern London;

iv. Fictional accounts of Shakespeare since 1709.

I am particularly interested in the imagining of fact. This is an idea I will explore in Part One, Chapter 1, section iii. Related to this is the ambivalent relationship which a novelist has with pre-existing texts; whether these are works of fiction or contemporary records. There is a challenge here when writing a piece of imaginative fiction as a component of a creative writing doctorate. Fiction writers do not know exactly what they are searching for when they begin to write; but they know that they need to embark on a process which will reveal themes, characters and narrative shape over time. However, PhD research questions need to be made explicit, and the writing process must be examined and analysed.

[8] Woods, T*he Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*

[9] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

[10] William Shakespeare, *Othello,* First Folio, *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 Modern edition: Coles, J. (ed) *Othello (Cambridge, Cambridge School Shakespeare,* Cambridge University Press, 2005

[11] William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew,* First Folio, *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 (Modern edition: C. Watts (ed) *The Taming of the Shrew, Wordsworth Classics* (London, Wordsworth Editions, 2004)

[12] William Shakespeare, *Shake-speares Sonnets,* (Q1), (London: G. Eld for Thomas Thorpe, 1609) STC 22353 Modern edition: S.Booth (ed) *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Yale, Yale University Press, 2000)

[13] Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of D. Faustus* (Q1), (London: Valentine Simms, 1604) STC 17429 Modern edition: J. O'Connor (ed) *Dr Faustus: A-text (1604)* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2003)

[14] Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Ben Jonson* (London: William Stansby, 1616) STC 14751 Modern edition: F.H. Mares (ed) *The Alchemist* (London, Methuen & Co, 1982)

With this in mind, I started asking questions about the themes of my novel at an early stage. I worked on this novel in a more structured way than I had with my first two novels because I wanted to integrate my research into my creative process; previously my approach to writing novels had been more intuitive and unstructured. In this instance, I wanted to look at the conflict between male artists and female artists, particularly during the early modern period. Women had to overcome all the obstacles confronting men, but also the obstacle of being female. Virginia Woolf addresses this issue in *A Room of One's Own*, positing the Restoration playwright Aphra Behn as the first woman to write for money and therefore validate her art.[15] [16] A woman in Shakespeare's time could not have hoped to be a poet of genius, Woolf suggests. She famously gives an account of the short life of 'Judith', Shakespeare's fictitious sister who follows her brother to London but is seduced, becomes pregnant and kills herself at the Elephant and Castle.[17] Genius exists among women, but it has been suppressed:

> When…one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Bronte who dashed her brains out on the

[15] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929) Modern edition: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1985)

[16] Ibid. 15 p.61

[17] Ibid. 15 p.47

> moor or moped and mowed along the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to.[18]

And finally, I also set out to reflect on the nature of historical fact and its relationship to fiction, and to ground my narrative in historical research material. (I will talk about this in more detail in Part Three.)[19] From the outset, my imagination was stirred by the actuality of the past, the detail and solidity of everyday things, and the fact that what would be extraordinary to us now would have been ordinary then. Rather than consulting archives, I visited museums, great houses and other historic sites, such the tombs of Elizabeth I and Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, in Westminster Abbey. The research bibliography for my novel includes books about illness, nature and the occult as well as more conventional source books.[20]

[18] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 48

[19] O'Reilly, 'Inventing Shakespeare' pp. 103 - 108

[20] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ' Bibliography, Appendix I

Inventing Shakespeare

Part One

Chapter 1 Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Dark Aemilia*

i. Dark Aemilia: genesis and inspirations

My original intention was to write a novel set in eleventh-century Scotland, written from the perspective of Lady Macbeth in the play *Macbeth*. I was interested in the contrasting responses that she and Macbeth have to the murder of King Duncan. Macbeth's initial hesitation is caused by his horror at the implications of murdering a king, and his understanding that he will ally himself with the forces of chaos and evil if he commits this act.[21] But Lady Macbeth blinds herself to everything except the political advantages of killing Duncan while he is their guest.[22] Yet in the aftermath of the murder she faints (though this may be part of her subterfuge.)[23] She is certainly unable to retain her sanity once the true meaning of the king's death becomes clear to her.[24] Was Shakespeare implying that women are less morally sophisticated than men, and yet that they are instinctively more revolted by violence? Lady Macbeth's monologue when she first hears of the witches' prophecy is particularly striking:

> The raven himself is hoarse
>
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan

[21] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II, I, i l 50 – 55

[22] Ibid 21, I, V, i l 66 – 70

[23] Ibid 21, II, iii, l 125

[24] Ibid 21, V, iii, l 47 – 49

Under my battlements. Come, you Spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full

Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,

Stop th'access and passage to remorse;

That no compunctious visitings of Nature

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

Th'effect and it! Come to my women's breasts,

And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,

Wherever in your sightless substances

You wait on Nature's mischief! Come, thick Night,

And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,

Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,

To cry, 'Hold, hold!'[25]

Again, I realised that what most intrigues me about this play is not the fact that it is a revenge tragedy, but its language, imagery and symbolism.[26] Another source of inspiration was Terry Eagleton's interpretation of the play. In his view, the witches represent an alternative source of power in the play, and one which remains unchallenged:

[25] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I, v l 39 – 54

[26] *Oxford Dictionaries Online Definition* of revenge tragedy: A style of drama, popular in England during the late *16th and* 17th centuries, in which the basic plot was a quest for vengeance and which typically featured scenes of carnage and mutilation. Examples of the genre include Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592) and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623). (http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/revenge%2Btragedy) Accessed 20 September 2012.

> To any unprejudiced reader- which would seem to exclude Shakespeare himself, his contemporary audiences and almost all literary critics - it is surely clear that positive value in *Macbeth* lies with the three witches. The witches are the heroines of the piece, however little the play itself recognizes the fact, and however much the critics may have set out to defame them.[27]

Fear of the feminine also informs this portrayal, according to Janet Adelmen. In *'Born of Woman': Fantasies of Male Power in Macbeth*, she writes: 'Maternal power in *Macbeth* is not embodied in the figure of a particular mother (as it is, for example, in *Coriolanus*); it is instead diffused throughout the play, evoked primarily by the figures of the witches and Lady Macbeth.'[28] Adelman sees the play as 'a representation of primitive fears about male identify and autonomy itself, about those looming female presences who threaten to control one's actions and one's mind, to constitute one's very self, even at a distance.'[29] This conflict between male and female principles provided me with another imaginative cue: supposing this play was written by a woman, and supposing its portrayal of a parallel reality subverted and dominated by female Furies was the product of her own violent and terrifying experience?

ii. Historical fact as a cue to imagination

I was intrigued by Shakespeare's treatment of Lady Macbeth, and concluded that I was more interested in his interpretation of her character than I was in the original historical facts. I also found it difficult to imagine the interior life of a woman in the eleventh century. The seminal

[27] Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare,* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1986)

[28] Harold Bloom, ed., *Macbeth*, Janet Adelman, *'*"Born of Woman" : Fantasies of Male Power in Macbeth" (New York: Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, Chelsea House Publishers, 2010) p. 33 – 59, p. 34, ll. 1 - 3

[29] Ibid 28, pp. 33 – 59, ll. 6, 7

work in the field is Norwegian writer Sigrid Undset's trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter*,[30] an account of the life of a woman in medieval Northern Europe which won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1928. Lavransdatter is a fictional character, but Undset has been widely praised for the verisimilitude and historical accuracy of her work. My research into more recent novels included *Lady Macbeth* by Susan Fraser King.[31] Like a latter-day Undset, Fraser-King sets out to create a historically accurate novel, set in the remote past, with a female protagonist: Gruadh, later Lady Macbeth. In this 'true story', Macbeth is a decent man who rules Scotland peacefully for many years. (Raphael Holinshed, the author of the primary source for Shakespeare's play, includes a reference to Macbeth's strengths as King of Scotland, and the fact that he ruled for seventeen years.[32]) Fraser King devotes several chapters of her novel to describing various aspects of life in eleventh century Scotland.

My primary interest is in character and conflict in novels, both as a reader and a writer. But historical novels set before the early modern period are often simplistic, with only a rudimentary exploration of moral issues and individual psychology. Of course there are exceptions: I grew up reading the novels of Rosemary Sutcliff, many of which are set in the Dark Ages, such as *Beowulf: Dragonslayer* or in Roman times, such as *The Eagle of the Ninth*[33] [34]. Other examples of powerful and credible stories set in the distant past include *I, Claudius* by Robert Graves and *The Once and Future King* by T.H. White[35] [36]. However, I also felt uncomfortable about assuming that modern psychology and consciousness can be imposed

[30] Sigrid Undset, *Kristin Lavransdatter* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1921)

[31] Susan Fraser King, *Lady Macbeth*, (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2008)

[32] Raphael Holinshed, *The firste... volume of the chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande conteyning the description and chronicles of England, from the first inhabiting vnto the conquest...* (London, John Hunne, 1577) STC 13568b via The Holinshed Texts http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_1263 (Accessed 20 July 2012)

[33] Rosemary Sutcliff, *Beowulf, Dragonslayer* (London: The Bodley Head, 1961)

[34] Rosemary Sutcliff, *The Eagle of the Ninth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954)

[35] Robert Graves, *I, Claudius* (London: Arthur Baker, 1934)

[36] Terence Hanbury White, *The Once and Future King* (London:Collins, 1958)

on characters from the past. I felt that either the author is tempted to create anachronistic characters, who might be understandable in modern terms but conspicuously lack authenticity, or else to create crude, two-dimensional characters. The website Historical Novels Information illustrates this point[37]. More than 800 novels are listed on its 'Medieval' page. The commentary asserts:

> Medieval Europe offers historical fiction fans the grandeur of medieval royalty contrasted with the stark struggle for survival of the common folk. It features conflicts between Christianity and the remnants of paganism, and the open warfare of the Crusades. It offers towering, often controversial historical figures like William the Conqueror, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Richard the Lionheart, and Richard III, as well as the medieval Celts, the Vikings and the Byzantine Empire.

While the conflict between Christians and pagans is clearly dramatic and extreme, I find it hard to relate to its effect on individual characters. Its remoteness from the modern age makes it difficult for me to engage with the motivation and emotions of the people involved. To some extent, this is a matter of personal preference, I believe. Some writers may find remote historical periods more imaginatively accessible than I do. However, I would also suggest that 'remoteness' is not necessarily a function of the distance created by time, but by the absence of written records. The words of the play *Macbeth* were the initial starting point for my novel, and attempting to immerse myself in the atmosphere and aesthetic of this play required an understanding of

[37] Historical Novels Information (http://www.historicalnovels.info) Accessed 30 May 2011

historical context of the drama itself, rather than the historical period in which it was set. Furthermore, the portrayal of Lady Macbeth relates to that of other female characters in Shakespeare's work, including Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*[38] and Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*[39]. Therefore, I began to research the London playhouses and the theatrical conventions and political background at the beginning of the reign of James I and the subtext which informs Shakespeare's version of the story. Returning to the play I was struck even more forcefully than on previous readings by the sparse yet haunting language, the dark imagery and the remorseless efficiency of the plot. This convinced me that the primary element of my novel was embedded in this drama. I began to read more widely about Shakespeare's own time, looking for another way into the story. However, at this point I was still thinking of making Lady Macbeth the focal character.

iii. Aemilia Bassano Lanyer

My 'eureka' moment came when I started looking at Shakespeare's later sonnets, which echo the language of *Macbeth* in their cruelty and sense of physical disgust. This led me to read about the alleged 'Dark Lady' of the sonnets. One particular candidate stood out. Aemilia Bassano (1569 – 1645) was the illegitimate child of a Jewish Venetian musician and she became the mistress of the Lord Chancellor, Henry Carey at the age of seventeen. The liaison lasted until she became pregnant in 1593.

[38] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 (Modern Edition: Craig, W. J. (ed) W. Shakespeare, Complete Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

[39] William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew* First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 (Modern edition: Craig W. J. (ed) W. Shakespeare, Complete Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

(Carey was the son of Mary Boleyn, and therefore the cousin of Elizabeth I.) At this point, Aemilia Bassano was married off to a cousin, Alfonso Lanyer, a recorder player at court. Alfonso Lanyer spent her dowry within a year of the marriage, and Aemilia Lanyer spent the rest of her life in relative poverty. This descent from being the mistress of one of the most powerful men in the country to an impoverished housewife was dramatic. (This information is taken from the edition of Lanyer's poetry edited by A.L. Rowse, and his main source is the journal of Simon Forman.)[40]

As a young girl, Lanyer had been highly educated. She appears to have been educated at court, under the supervision of the Protestant humanist Susan Bertie, Countess of Kent (1554 – after 1596) who was herself a protégée of Katherine Parr. Lanyer spoke and wrote Latin and Greek, and was widely read. In 1611 Lanyer became one of the first published woman poets in England, and the first to demand that her work be treated professionally by producing a substantial volume of work which was dedicated to a number of aristocratic and influential women, presumably in the hope of attracting patronage. [41] As set out in the introduction to this thesis, Lanyer's poem *Salve Deus Rex Judeaorum* gives an account of the Passion of Christ from a female and proto-feminist perspective, expressing the view that Eve has been unfairly blamed for the Fall of Man. Rowse became convinced that Lanyer was the Dark Lady; though his claim is disputed by Marshall Grossman[42]. But for the purposes of fiction, the possibility was enough.

If Aemilia Lanyer had indeed been Shakespeare's mistress, what form would this relationship take? They were both outsiders in a sense; there is no record of

[40] Alfred Leslie Rowse, *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Salve Deus Res Judaeorum, by Aemilia Lanier*,(London: Jonathan Cape, 1978) pp. 9-15

[41] Marshall Grossman, *Aemilia Lanyer, Gender, Genre and the Canon* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998) pp. 18 – 24

[42] Ibid 41, pp. 21 - 24

his attending grammar school even though this is likely, and he did not study at Oxford or Cambridge. He was also the son of a bankrupt. Would he encourage her writing? Would he admire her mind? Was theirs, as the agonized poems might suggest, a destructive, obsessive, violently sexual relationship? Or was their relationship a complex and conflicted one, with all these factors playing a part? Sonnet 129, for example, seems to suggest a strange and contradictory attitude on the part of the poet:

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action; and till action, lust
> Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
> Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
> Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait
> On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
> Mad in pursuit and in possession so;
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
> A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
> Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
> All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
> To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell. [43]

This raises the following question: how does an obscure female poet born in the sixteenth century relate to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, an invented character based

[43] Stephen Booth, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p.111

on a marginal historical figure? The connection was initially thematic: Lady Macbeth is fuelled by her ambition for her husband, and her myopic insistence that he kills Duncan pushes him into an action he himself knows he will regret. Her language and her willingness to ally herself to the forces of darkness make her an accessory to the witches. I did not want to make the invented Aemilia Lanyer as demonic as Lady Macbeth, but I did want to dramatize her connection with this character, in the sense that she too is motivated by ambition and impatience, frustrated by the position she has been allocated in society and heedless of the usual constraints placed on a woman. To achieve this end, I decided to make her the author of the fictitious play, *The Tragedie of Lady Macbeth*, which is based on her own experience as well as her knowledge of Holinshed. The definitive links between the two characters are ambition, transgression and black magic. In addition to this, I felt there was a degree of artistic synergy and energy in the fact that the source character for Aemilia herself occupies a 'grey area' between historical fact and historical fiction, and that in taking liberties with the extant 'facts' I would be following the Shakespearean model. Thus, when it came to inventing incidents – such as the murder of Aemilia's father and her meeting with the three witches – I was reassured by Shakespeare's cavalier treatment of his source material. This relationship between fact and fiction in historical fiction is a complex area, which I will explore further in the next section.

iv. Shakespeare as antagonist

The few surviving biographical facts about Lanyer's life fitted easily into my story outline. I soon lost any sense of inhibition and created a fictional identity for her which dramatized and crystallized my themes. In the early part of the story she is a kept woman, exquisitely dressed, installed in Whitehall Palace and superficially

glorying in her status as the mistress of the Lord Chamberlain. But she is aware that she is trapped and dependent on a man for her security, and is therefore infuriated by the performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*.[44] Her pregnancy and fall from grace mean that she is poor and entrapped in a different way, living in a small house with a foolish and improvident husband. However, she has a new freedom, is able to speak her mind and run the house as she wishes, and she is fulfilled in one aspect of her life at least: by motherhood and her love for her son Henry. He is the illegitmate child of William Shakespeare, not Henry Carey, but she keeps this to herself. (This is a fiction – though there is no way of knowing if Carey was really the father of her child.)

Not only are her ambitions for her writing subversive in gender terms, her maternal love is in itself 'over-reaching'. She loves her son unreasonably. There was a challenge here in terms of history's lack of a clear storyline. I had to interweave three different 'needs': her need to write, her passion for Shakespeare and her love for Henry. Making Shakespeare the father of Henry simplified this to some extent. I attempted to make her writing ambition a facet of her intelligence and unusual education: a way of expressing herself which was essential to her. Here there is an element of autobiography which I would argue is present in all fiction, beneath various layers of disguise. I have found myself that writing is essential to my sanity; publication is pleasant and affirming but I would not go mad without it.

The narrative proceeds from this. In refusing to let Henry die of the plague and using supernatural power to cure him, she is challenging the will of God. According to the logic of the period – and the plays of Shakespeare – any subversion of the natural order must have consequences. The price Aemilia has to pay is the theft of her play, the loss of her lover, and ultimately she believes she is responsible for the death

[44] Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew,* 1623

of the boy player Tom Flood. She is an unreliable narrator in the sense that we cannot 'rely' on her perceptions: she is writing what she intends to be an honest and straightforward account, but her view of the world is skewed. She is a witness living in a world charged with spirits, demons and superstition. An all-seeing, all-powerful God was a perceived reality at that time and I wanted to dramatize this as vividly as I could.

But in drafting and redrafting the narrative, and in discussion with my supervisor Celia Brayfield, it became apparent that while I was developing Aemilia as a psychologically compelling protatogist, her antagonist remained a somewhat shadowy and under-realised creation. My challenge when recreating the character of William Shakespeare was not only that he was the most famous poet in the English language, but also that he *was* the antagonist, Aemilia's lover and therefore one of the most important characters in the story. My intention was to be historically accurate, but I also wanted to allow the character of William Shakespeare to exist in my own narrative, on its own terms. This is an aspect of creative writing which is difficult to analyse in a thesis: it is an intuitive and instinctive process, but it is based, as I have demonstrated, on research.

Ian Mortimer has warned against 'ignoring the mythical holy grail of historical accuracy'. Mortimer is also a historical novelist, publishing under the name James Forrester, so he has a dual perspective on this issue. Writing in *The Guardian* newspaper, he asserts:

> By far the most commonly cited book in this respect is *The Da Vinci Code*, even though it is not a historical novel at all. The historical context of the plot is what excites criticism in this respect. The same

> could be said of many historical films. My particular favourite historical error appears at the end of *Braveheart,* where it is suggested that the future Edward III (born in 1312) was the product of a union between the Scottish rebel William Wallace (executed in London in 1305) and Princess Isabella of France, who was nine at the time of Wallace's death. It would be funny – if I had not met so many people who believed it.[45]

If an author includes well-known historical characters in their work, mistakes or false notes are more noticeable, and more likely to undermine the credibility of the narrative. I was reluctant to create a detailed portrait of William Shakespeare for this reason. The dilemmas and challenges that I faced are summed up in Maurice J. O'Sullivan's introduction to *Shakespeare's Other Lives: Fictional Depictions of the Bard*.[46] This is a collection of sixteen fictional versions of Shakespeare, which includes both short, complete works and extracts from longer novels and plays. In his introduction, O'Sullivan argues:

> The large body of conscious fictions involving Shakespeare offers a rich variety, ranging from anachronistic fantasy to scrupulous fidelity, from bardolatrous flights to Marxian dialectics and from Catholic apologetics to an attempt to establish Ulysses S. Grant as head of a state-governed Church of America. Most authors have larger ambitions than mere art. They offer solutions to the identities

[45] Ian Mortimer, 'The lying art of historical fiction', *The Guardian*, 6/8/2010 http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2010/aug/06/lying-historical-fiction) Accessed 17 November 2011

[46] Maurice J. O'Sullivan, Jr., *Shakespeare's Other Lives: Fictional Depictions of the Bard* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1997)

> of W.H. and the Dark Lady, suggest Shakespeare's role in shaping the King James Bible, and trace the relationship with Sir Thomas Lucy, Francis Bacon, Elizabeth I, Kit Marlowe and Ben Jonson. They celebrate, mourn and demean Anne. And they speculate endlessly about Shakespeare's pets and poaching, his sources and inspirations, his melancholy and death.[47]

v. Factual historical figures in fictional work

As well as considering the biography of Shakespeare, I also looked at the work of a number of writers who had recreated a factual historical character in their fiction. These writers included Beryl Bainbridge (*Young Adolf*)[48]; Tracy Chevalier (*Burning Bright*)[49]; Hilary Mantel (*Wolf Hall*)[50]; and Virginia Woolf (*Orlando: A Biography*)[51]. Though these books are set in various historical periods, they also share a number of common features, including an intense sensory re-imagining of period and a fresh perspective on a known historical character. In other words, every single one of these writers uses the technique of 'defamiliarisation', a device first defined by Viktor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay *Art as Technique*. [52] (I will explore this in more detail Part III, Chapter Two, section v, 'New historical fiction.)

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[47] O'Sullivan Jr., *Shakespeare's Other Lives: Fictional Depictions of the Bard*, p. 1

[48] Beryl Bainbridge, *Young Adolf*, (London: Fontana,1979)

[49] Tracy Chevalier, Tracy, *Burning Bright*, (London: HarperCollins, 2007)

[50] Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)

[51] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1928) Modern edition: Woolf, Virginia, *Orlando* (London, Wordsworth editions, 1995)

Bainbridge imagines the young Adolf Hitler as a callow bellboy in a Liverpool hotel; Chevalier's William Blake is the eccentric next door neighbour of her central character; Mantel's melancholic Thomas Cromwell is far removed from the ruthless operator of popular history and Woolf's Orlando is a fanciful recreation of her friend Vita Sackville West as an ageless, gender transcending buccaneer, striding through the centuries. These writers do not allow their imagination to be constrained by the demands of biographical accuracy. I also had an advantage, in taking Shakespeare as my subject. In spite of his global fame, relatively little biographical information has survived. My research includes popular non-fiction as well as academic and primary resource material. I found Bill Bryson's short memoir *Shakespeare* sensible and succinct. Bryson suggests:

> After four hundred years of dedicated hunting, researchers have found about a hundred documents relating to William Shakespeare and his immediate family – baptismal records, title deeds, tax certificates, marriage bonds, writs of attachment, court records (many court records – it was a litigious age) and so on. That's quite a good number as these things go, but deeds and bonds and other records are inevitably bloodless. They tell us a great deal about the business of a person's life, but almost nothing about the emotions of it.[53]

[52] Viktor Shklovsky, *Art as Technique*, 1917 Modern edition *Theory of Prose*, Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991

[53] Bryson, *Shakespeare, The World as a Stage,* p. 7

Bryson then argues: 'Facts are surprisingly delible things, and in four hundred years a lot of them simply fade away.'[54] Indeed, I found that when writing about the character of Shakespeare, dealing with the myth of the 'Bard of Avon' was a greater challenge than satisfying the demands of scholars. It was my responsibility to create my own version, a Shakespeare for my own story. And there were others who had accomplished this task before me: some of them fiction writers, some of them his alleged biographers.

[54] Bryson, *Shakespeare, The World as a Stage*, p. 18

Chapter Two

Nicholas Rowe's *Some Account of the Life etc. of Mr William Shakspear* and early biographies.

i. Shakespeare: the 'facts'

The essential facts about Shakespeare's life that are a matter of historical record are these: he was born in Stratford on Avon and he died there fifty three years later. He married Anne Hathaway and had three children with her. He went to London, where he was an actor, writer and "sharer" in the theatre. His name appears as the author of the Sonnets in 1609 and the plays in the First Folio in 1623. I am including a lengthy extract from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography as a footnote, excluding sections devoted to his work. Even here, the words 'probably' and 'would have' occur several times.[55]

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) playwright and poet, was baptized, probably by the parish priest, John Bretchgirdle (or Bracegirdle), in Holy Trinity, the parish church of Stratford upon Avon, on 26 April 1564, the third child of John Shakespeare (*d.* 1601) [*see below*] and Mary Arden (*d.* 1608). It seems appropriate that the first of many gaps in the records of Shakespeare's life should be the exact date of his birth, though that is a common problem for the period. He was probably born on 21, 22, or 23 April 1564, given the 1559 prayer book's instructions to parents on the subject of baptisms. But, ever since Joseph Greene, an eighteenth-century Stratford curate, informed the scholar George Steevens that Shakespeare was born on 23 April, with no apparent evidence for his assertion, and Steevens adopted that date in his 1773 edition of Shakespeare, it has been usual to assume that Shakespeare was born on St George's day, so that England's patron saint and the birth of the 'national poet' can be celebrated on the same day. Where he was born is clearer: in 1564 his parents appear to have been living in Henley Street, probably in part of the building now known as Shakespeare's Birthplace but, equally probably, not in that part of the building in which the room traditionally known as the place of Shakespeare's birth is located. The accretion of myth and commerce around Shakespeare's biography and its material legacy produces such paradoxes.

Shakespeare's education Shakespeare would also have acted, as part of his education, either in Latin plays or in oratorical declamation, the latter a crucial part of the performative training in classical rhetoric. William's own education was not likely to have been affected by his father's fluctuating fortunes. It was also probably far better than either of his parents had received. There is no evidence that either John or Mary Shakespeare could write: each signed with a kind of mark. But the marks were not the awkward crosses of the totally illiterate: John often drew a fine pair of compasses; Mary's mark in 1579 was a complex design, apparently incorporating her initials and fluently written. Both may well have been able to read: many who could not write could read. Certainly, given John's status in the community, his four sons would have gone to Stratford's grammar school where their education would have been free.

(William Shakespeare, continued)

At the King's New School, Stratford's splendid grammar school, William would have learned an immense amount of Latin literature and history, perhaps using the Latin–English dictionary left to the school by John Bretchgirdle who had baptized him. Among the works that Shakespeare later used as sources for his plays are a number that he would have read as part of his grammar-school education: the history of Livy, the speeches of Cicero, the comedies of Plautus and Terence, the tragedies of Seneca, and the poetry of Virgil and, above all, Ovid, who remained his favourite poet. The range of Latin writing that formed the curriculum was, by modern standards, vast. The mode of teaching, by a good teacher assisted by an usher, was one calculated to ensure the arts of memory, facility in composition, and rhetorical skills.

In addition, regular attendance at church, a legal requirement which his father does not appear to have avoided until later, guaranteed prolonged exposure to the Book of Homilies (fairly dull), the Book of Common Prayer (rather more exciting), and, especially, the exhilarating language of the Bible in English, a resource that Shakespeare, like his contemporaries, knew well, used extensively, and embedded deeply into the fabric of his language.

After school, and marriage Leaving school at about fifteen, Shakespeare would have had a series of options open. He might have gone into his father's trade as an apprentice and there is anecdotal evidence to that effect recorded by John Aubrey in the late seventeenth century, also noting that 'when he kill'd a Calfe, he would doe it in a *high style*, & make a Speech' (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 58), though, since John Shakespeare's trade did not involve slaughtering, this could possibly refer to William's acting in a mumming play or Whitsun 'pastime' of the kind the town council paid for in 1583—pretending to kill a calf was a trick often included in such plays.

John Aubrey's conversation with William Beeston, son of Christopher who had worked with Shakespeare later in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, produced the snippet of information that Shakespeare 'had been in his younger yeares a Schoolmaster in the Countrey' (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 59). The theory is not impossible and has gained ground in the wake of the re-examination of the evidence surrounding the mention in 1581 of a 'William Shakeshafte' in the will of Alexander de Hoghton of Lea Hall in Lancashire, encouraging Sir Thomas Hesketh to take on Shakeshaft as a servant. Shakeshaft was a common name in Lancashire, not least in the area surrounding the Hoghton family estates, and an extremely uncommon one in Warwickshire; none of the many variant spellings of William Shakespeare's own name even begins to approximate to Shakeshaft.

John Cottom, who was the teacher at Stratford grammar school from 1579 to 1581 and hence during or just after Shakespeare's last year at school, then returned to his family in Lancashire; his younger brother was a Catholic priest who was tried with Edmund Campion and executed in 1582. Perhaps, the theory runs, Cottom encouraged Shakespeare, as a member of a recusant Catholic family, to be a schoolteacher in a staunchly Catholic household in the north of England. The evidence is purely circumstantial and the crucial evidence, the mention of William Shakeshaft, is insufficient for proof. In any case, Shakespeare was rather less qualified to be a schoolmaster than any of the Stratford teachers he had studied under.

One advantage of the theory is that it suggests a route for Shakespeare to move to London since there were links between Hesketh and Hoghton and Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange (later earl of Derby), whose company of players might well have included Shakespeare but was more certainly the troupe that acted a number of Shakespeare's early plays.

But there is no reason to posit a direct link for Shakespeare between Lancashire and London, if he was ever in Lancashire at all, since by 1582 he was certainly back in Stratford. On 27 November a marriage licence was issued for Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway (1555/6–1623) (though the record in the bishop of Worcester's register mistakenly refers to the bride as Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton) and on the following day a bond was issued binding Fulke Sandells and John Richardson for the sum of £40 as surety for the marriage, a necessary step since William was at eighteen still a minor and needed his father's consent to the match. Sandells and Richardson had both in 1581 been named in the will of Richard Hathaway, Anne's father, a yeoman farmer of Shottery, a village just outside Stratford; the will left Anne 10 marks, to be paid when she married.

Anne (whose name also appears as Agnes) was the eldest of Richard's seven children (three with his first wife and four with his second); William may have been a minor, distinctly young for marriage at this time, but Anne was of a normal marrying age. The Shakespeares and Hathaways knew each other: John Shakespeare had acted as surety for Richard Hathaway and twice paid his debts. Whatever the nature of William's relationship with Anne may have been—and biographers and novelists have frequently speculated about it—by the end of summer 1582 Anne was pregnant and the marriage in November was performed after only a single reading of the banns, rather than the more normal three, presumably in order to speed up the process. The vicar who officiated at Temple Grafton, if that was indeed where they married, was John Frith, known for his ability to cure hawks but also 'Unsound in religion', according to a survey in 1586 of the Warwickshire clergy, again a possible indication of Shakespeare's Catholicism (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 71). It is reasonable to give in to temptation and assign Shakespeare's Sonnet 145 to this period, making it Shakespeare's earliest extant work: its final couplet puns on Hathaway ('"I hate" from hate away she threw, / And saved my life, saying "not you."' Sonnet 145, ll. 13–14) and its octosyllabics, unusual in the sonnets, suggest that it may not have been part of the sequence originally. There is no especial reason why a man should write a love poem to a woman only at the beginning of their relationship and the poem need not relate to any actual moment in the history of William and Anne.

(William Shakespeare, continued)
Six months after the marriage, on 26 May 1583, Susanna Shakespeare was baptized, followed on 2 February 1585 by William's and Anne's twins, Hamnet and Judith, probably named after Hamnet and Judith Sadler. Hamnet Sadler, a local baker, was in 1616 one of the witnesses of Shakespeare's will, and his name also appears in local records as Hamlet. With these three children Shakespeare's family seems to have been complete: there are no records of further children. Some have used this as evidence that the marriage was distant or unhappy, though many happily married couples both then and later have had no children at all and it is perhaps relevant that Susanna and Judith had few children (one and three respectively).

The 'lost years' From 1585 to 1592 the records of Shakespeare's life are almost silent. He is briefly referred to in records concerning the attempts of his parents to retrieve property in Wilmcote, part of what had been Mary's inheritance and should have been passed on to William, land that had been mortgaged and was now lost, another indication of John's financial troubles. But the reference does not indicate his presence in Stratford. Biographers have created fanciful narratives for this period; none have any foundation. Perhaps this was when he was 'a Schoolmaster in the Countrey'. The traditional explanation, first set out by Nicholas Rowe in his biographical sketch prefixed to his 1709 edition of Shakespeare's plays, was that William poached deer from Sir Thomas Lucy's estate at Charlecote, was caught and prosecuted, wrote a ballad against Lucy, and was forced to escape to London to avoid further prosecution. Shakespeare's apparent jibe at the Lucy coat of arms in The Merry Wives of Windsor (I.i, ll. 13–20) has been explained as belated revenge, though why Shakespeare waited so long and revenged himself so obscurely is not adequately justified.

Shakespeare the player The next print reference to Shakespeare is in Greenes Groats-Worth of Witte (1592), a pamphlet ostensibly by Robert Greene (though possibly written by someone else, probably Henry Chettle) and published after Greene's death in September 1592; the pamphlet attacks Shakespeare as: an upstart 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 fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey. (Greenes Groats-Worth of Witte, 1592, sig. F1*r*)The passage transforms the Duke of York's vicious attack on the even more vicious Queen Margaret in 3 Henry VI: 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!' (I.iv, l. 138).

Whatever else Shakespeare may have been doing between 1585 and 1592 it is clear that he had been and was still an actor, that he had now become a playwright, and that, whatever other jobs this jack of all trades ('Iohannes fac totum') was doing in the theatre, he had become well enough known to irritate Robert Greene or whoever wrote the pamphlet. The attack was so sharp that Henry Chettle, who had been responsible for its publication, is often thought to be apologizing to Shakespeare later that year in his Kind-Hartes Dreame for not having 'moderated the heate' in preparing the piece for the press, praising Shakespeare for as 'divers of worship have reported, his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his fa[ce]tious grace in writting, which aprooves his Art' (H. Chettle, Kind-Hartes Dreame, 1592, sigs. A3*v*–4*r*), though the passage is probably an apology to someone other than Shakespeare.

Neither at this period nor later is there any firm evidence of the roles Shakespeare acted or of the quality of his performances. Anecdotes ascribe to him various roles in his own plays, for example Adam in As You Like It, a choice which does not suggest any especially great thespian talent. He is named first in the list of 'the Principall Actors in all these Playes' in the collection of his own works in 1623 and appears in the lists of actors in Ben Jonson's Workes (1616) for Every Man in his Humour ('first Acted, in the yeere 1598') and Sejanus his Fall (1603). However much or little he may have acted, it is significant that he was known as a player, for example in the sneer by Ralph Brooke, the York herald, in 1602 at the grant of arms to 'Shakespear the Player' (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 172).

When Shakespeare became a player is not clear but it is at least possible that he joined the Queen's Men. They played in Stratford in 1587 and their repertory included a play based on Montemayor's Diana (the source for Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona), anonymous plays on the reigns of King John (The Troublesome Reign), Richard III (The True Tragedy), Henry IV, and Henry V (both covered by The Famous Victories of Henry V), all subjects of plays by Shakespeare himself in the 1590s, as well as King Leir which, as well as being the major source for Shakespeare's King Lear, has possibly left its trace on a number of his earlier works. Though he was influenced by many other plays, not least the work of Christopher Marlowe, in developing his own style in his early works, there is no comparable body of sustained influence. If not actually in the Queen's Men, he certainly seems to have known their work especially well and the plays that belonged to them were crucial to Shakespeare's histories, the works that established the Lord Chamberlain's Men as the pre-eminent company of the age. The Queen's Men's works were virulently anti-Catholic and the company may even have owed its existence to a political aim of touring anti-Catholic propaganda; Shakespeare's plays that owe something of their existence to the Queen's Men's repertory, while hardly being Catholic apologetics, are strikingly less factional in their religion. The idea that Shakespeare joined the company in 1587 after one of their actors, William Knell, died in a fight in Thame, Oxfordshire, is no more improbable than the deer-poaching narrative.

Death of Hamnet Shakespeare On 11 August 1596 Hamnet Shakespeare was buried. It is too easy to assume that all expressions of grief in the plays thereafter were a reaction to his son's death, but something of Viola's passionate mourning for the apparent death of her twin brother in Twelfth Night could have been generated by the loss of Hamnet, Shakespeare's only male heir. It is not too fanciful to see Shakespeare drawn as a result towards the subject matter of Hamlet, where son grieves for father rather than father for son.

(William Shakespeare, continued)

The coat of arms and purchase of property in Stratford Two months later John Shakespeare was granted a coat of arms, about twenty-five years after he had first applied for them, but it was probably William who reactivated the application. It was an opportune moment, for the Garter king of arms, Sir William Dethick, was fairly unscrupulous about entitlement and hence was attacked later by the York herald for granting arms not to John Shakespeare but to 'Shakespear the Player'. The draft spoke eloquently but probably fraudulently of the 'valeant service' done by John's 'late grandfather' for which he was 'advanced & rewarded by the most prudent prince King Henry the seventh'. But it more accurately identified John as an erstwhile bailiff in Stratford (albeit getting the date of office wrong). It also noted that John 'hathe Landes & tenementes of good wealth, & substance 500^{li,}' (Chambers, 2.19–20). Even allowing for some exaggeration the statement suggests either a remarkable turnaround in John Shakespeare's fortunes or, more probably, an indication of William's rapidly accumulating wealth, enough to make the player and playmaker wish to be able to sign himself as a gentleman. The coat of arms, with gold and silver as its metals, was an expensive option if it was to be reproduced on the bearer's possessions. But the arms are surmounted by an arrogant falcon, punningly displayed shaking its angled spear which, with its silver tip, looks as much like a pen as a weapon. The bird may also be an allusion to the four silver falcons in Southampton's coat of arms. The design and its motto, *Non sancz droict* ('Not without right') , were soon mocked by Jonson whose character Puntarvolo in Every Man out of his Humour (Lord Chamberlain's Men, 1599) jeers at Sogliardo, the country clown, by suggesting he should have as his motto 'Not without mustard', an allusion both to Shakespeare's motto and to the yellow colour of his arms.

In 1599 John Shakespeare made an application, probably never approved, to quarter the Arden arms with Shakespeare's and thereby cement the claim to gentility by association with a far more distinguished family. But Dethick's actions were challenged: Brooke, the York herald, identified twenty-three wrongly awarded coats of arms and, though Shakespeare's claim was defended, Shakespeare might never have been confident that the grant of arms had been fair.

Soon afterwards, Shakespeare took another step towards establishing his status and position. While he was in London his wife and children had probably continued to live in Henley Street with his parents; there is no sign that Anne ever moved to London to be with her husband there. In May 1597 Shakespeare bought New Place, reputedly the second largest house in Stratford, with five gables, ten fireplaces, and a frontage of over 60 feet, together with two barns, two gardens, and two orchards. The price is unclear but was probably in excess of £120. There may have been some rebuilding—a load of stone was sold to the town council in 1598 for 10*d*.—and by February 1598 Shakespeare was listed as living in Chapel Street ward, where New Place was situated, when he, together with many of his neighbours, was shown to be hoarding malt. Shakespeare's store (10 quarters or about 80 bushels) was about the average in the ward but, after three bad harvests, such hoarding was a serious action.

Correspondence in 1598 between two Stratford men, Abraham Sturley and Richard Quiney, shows that they thought of Shakespeare both as 'our countriman' and as someone wealthy enough to be worth Quiney's approaching for a loan of £30 to pay his London debts. In London, Quiney wrote a letter to Shakespeare, in which he is addressed as 'Loveinge Contreyman'; though probably never sent, it is the only surviving piece of correspondence with him. Clearly Shakespeare's finances were sufficient to establish him as a highly visible member of the Stratford community and one seeking to rise further as a local worthy, showing him to have been considered a Stratford resident: Sturley's plan to sell Shakespeare 'some od yardeland or other att Shottri or neare about us' was something that 'would advance him in deede' (Chambers, 2.101–2).

Over subsequent years Shakespeare consolidated his position in Stratford and it was there, rather than in London, that he made his major investments, perhaps because property in Stratford was considered, mistakenly, to be less vulnerable to fire than in London. In May 1602 he paid £320, an enormous sum, for 107 acres of land in Old Town in Stratford, bought from John and William Combe, and in September 1602 he acquired a cottage in Chapel Lane, probably to extend his land at New Place. In 1605 he paid £440 for a share in the tithes for Stratford, amounting to approximately one-fifth of the total value and worth £60 a year.

Shakespeare in London, 1598–1601 In the course of less than a decade Shakespeare had earned, borrowed, or been given enough to spend nearly £900 in his home town. By comparison, it is not clear what sort of property Shakespeare lived in while in London at this time. Late in 1596 he was known to have been living in the parish of St Helen's, Bishopsgate, by having failed to pay various levies due at this time. His goods were valued in 1598 at a mere £5, a comparatively small sum. The location was reasonably convenient for walking to The Theatre. He had moved away by 1599 and was now resident in the Clink parish in Surrey, in the Liberty, conveniently close to the site of the new Globe Theatre where the company was resident for the rest of his career, once it had rebuilt The Theatre on its new site south of the Thames when the lease expired on the land it had occupied. None of this suggests much of a commitment to living in London by comparison with the sustained, substantial, and frequent investment in and around Stratford.

But the move to be near the Globe Theatre marks a new stage in Shakespeare's professional career and it is an apt moment to take stock. He had become a widely known and admired playwright and poet. The Parnassus plays, performed by students of St John's College, Cambridge, at the Christmas celebrations between 1598 and 1601, mock Gullio who speaks 'nothinge but pure Shakspeare, and shreds of poetrie that he hath gathered at the theators' and praises 'sweet Mr. Shakspeare!'; Gullio will sleep with 'his Venus, and Adonis under my pillowe' (Chambers, 2.200–01). Poets like Richard Barnfield, John Marston, Robert Tofte, and John Weever referred to Shakespeare's plays and poems in their own poems and epigrams published in 1598 and 1599. In 1598, in Palladis tamia: Wits Treasury, Francis Meres praised Shakespeare fulsomely (all Meres's praise is fulsome): 'As

(William Shakespeare, continued)
Plautus and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so *Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage', going on to list six comedies and six tragedies (four of which would now be identified as histories) as proof of Shakespeare's status (F. Meres, Palladis tamia, fol. 282*r*). In 1600 a collection of quotations, Belvedere, or, The Garden of the Muses included over 200 passages from Shakespeare, mostly from Venus and Adonis, Lucrece, and Richard II.
In March 1602 John Manningham, a barrister at the Middle Temple where Shakespeare's Twelfth Night had been performed the previous month, noted a bawdy story about Shakespeare and Burbage in his diary; whether true or not, the story (of Shakespeare having sex with a woman who had wanted an assignation with Burbage whom she had fallen for as Richard III) indicates that Shakespeare was a figure to be gossiped about, though Manningham had to remind himself of Shakespeare's first name. Sir George Buck, unsure who had written George a Greene (1599), wrote on his copy that Shakespeare had told him it was by 'a minister who acted the pinners part in it himself' (Nelson, 74); Shakespeare's information was probably wrong but Buck saw him as someone worth consulting on such matters. Finally, in this sequence of contacts, Shakespeare's success was sufficient to make one of his colleagues mock him: Jonson's Every Man out of his Humour (1599) has a number of satirical allusions to Shakespeare's recent plays as well as to his gentrified status. This amounts to more than a private dig at a friend: Jonson appears to have expected the audience to understand the barbs, yet another sign of Shakespeare's popularity.
Shakespeare's plays were also starting to appear in print both in versions that give unauthorized and often inaccurate versions of the plays and in reasonably carefully prepared versions, the latter often in response to the former: for example the quarto of Romeo and Juliet published in 1599, 'Newly corrected, augmented, and amended', in answer to the imperfections of the 1597 quarto. The suspect quartos often bear apparent traces of performance in their more elaborate stage directions. A positive flurry of editions appeared in 1600: 2 Henry IV, Henry V, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Much Ado about Nothing, as well as reprints of three other plays and The Rape of Lucrece. Some of these published editions of his plays now carried the author's name on their title-pages—for example, Love's Labour's Lost, the second quartos of Richard II and Richard III all published in 1598, or the third quarto of 1 Henry IV in 1599—another indication of Shakespeare's growing reputation and significance, since playwrights were not usually named on their plays in print.
In 1605 the placing of Shakespeare's name on the title-page of The London Prodigal, a play certainly not by Shakespeare, is a further sign that his name was a good marketing ploy; the same (presumably deliberate) misattribution happened with the publication of Middleton's A Yorkshire Tragedy in 1608 (though some have argued that the play is by Shakespeare).
Similarly, in 1599 William Jaggard published the second edition of a collection of poems called The Passionate Pilgrim (the date of the first edition is uncertain) which the title-page also attributed to Shakespeare, much to Shakespeare's annoyance that Jaggard, as Thomas Heywood noted, 'altogether unknowne to him … presumed to make so bold with his name' (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 219). Very little of the collection was by Shakespeare but it included pirated and unattributed printings of three extracts from Love's Labour's Lost offered as poems and of two of Shakespeare's sonnets (138 and 144). Meres had noted that 'the sweete wittie soule of *Ovid* lives in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.' (F. Meres, Palladis tamia, fols. 281*v*–282*r*). Whenever the sonnets were written, these two at least were by 1599 available in versions Jaggard could use.
Shakespeare in Stratford, 1601–1609 In March Thomas Whittington, who had been shepherd to Shakespeare's father-in-law, made his will, bequeathing to the poor the £2 which Anne Shakespeare had and which William therefore owed to his estate. Quite why the money had been loaned or deposited with Anne is unclear but it seems to indicate Shakespeare's absence from her. On 8 September 1601 John Shakespeare was buried in Stratford. No will survives but William, as the eldest son, would have inherited the house in Henley Street, though, with New Place, he had no need of it: his mother and his sister Joan, who had in the 1590s married William Hart, a hatter, together with her family continued to live there.
Unsurprisingly, most of the documents that speak of Shakespeare in connection with Stratford over the next few years concern legal matters: in spring 1604 he sold malt to a neighbour, Philip Rogers, and subsequently lent him 2*s*.; Rogers repaid 6*s*. and Shakespeare sued for the remainder of the debt, 35*s*. 10*d*. There was another suit for a debt owed by John Addenbrooke: Shakespeare pursued him in the courts from August 1608 to June 1609, seeking £6 plus 24*s*. damages. Clearly Shakespeare was not willing to let such matters drop whether the sums were substantial or not, though in 1608 he may have been short of income with the theatres again shut by plague.
Friends and lodgings Records of Shakespeare's friends and family provide other suggestions about his life at this time. Augustine Phillips, a fellow sharer in the King's Men, died in 1604, leaving 'my ffellowe william Shakespeare a Thirty shillings peece in gould' (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 204), as he did to other players but naming Shakespeare first. It is reasonable to assume that his fellows in the theatre company were among his closest friends. William Barksted, a minor playwright, wrote warmly of Shakespeare as 'so deere lov'd a neighbor' (Chambers, 2.216). Perhaps to this period too belong the stories, anecdotal but not contradicted by the evidence of surviving comments, of his close friendship and genial rivalry with Jonson.
As becomes apparent from the records of a case in 1612, Shakespeare was living from 1602 to 1604 as a lodger with Christopher Mountjoy and his family in Silver Street in the respectable neighbourhood of Cripplegate. The case provides rare glimpses of Shakespeare's London life in 1602–4 and in 1612. Mountjoy, a French Huguenot refugee, with his wife and daughter, was a successful tiremaker who made wigs and headdresses; Shakespeare might have met them through the French wife of the printer Richard Field who lived nearby, but theatre

(William Shakespeare, continued)
companies always needed the services of wigmakers and the Lord Chamberlain's Men may have been the connection. Other dramatists lived near, including Jonson, Dekker, Munday, and Field, while John Heminges and Henry Condell, fellow sharers, were pillars of a local church, St Mary Aldermanbury.
The case of 1612 was brought by Stephen Belott, Mountjoy's former apprentice, who had married Mountjoy's daughter in 1604 and claimed that Mountjoy had failed to pay the dowry promised. Shakespeare was called as a witness and is mentioned by other witnesses. He helped in the marriage negotiations: Mountjoy asked him to encourage Belott to agree to the match and the young couple made their troth-plight in his presence. Six months after the wedding, the Belotts moved out and stayed with George Wilkins, a petty crook who ran a tavern and a brothel. Wilkins was also a writer whose work included a play and a novella, The Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre (1608), which combines material from Twine's romance The Pattern of Painful Adventures (reprinted in 1607) and from Shakespeare's Pericles, written in 1607, probably in collaboration with Wilkins who may have contributed the first two acts. Mrs Mountjoy died in October 1608 and the Belotts returned to Silver Street. Arguments continued and Belott sued in 1612 for the unpaid £60 dowry and £200 to be included in Mountjoy's will.
Shakespeare was one of three witnesses examined on 11 May 1612. His deposition brings the closest record of Shakespeare speaking, albeit through the court style of the examiner's clerk. Shakespeare attested that Belott was, in his view, 'A very good and industrious servant' who 'did well and honestly behave himselfe', though he also said that Mountjoy had not 'confesse[d] that he hath gott any great proffitt and comodytye' from Belott's service. He also deposed that the Mountjoys showed Belott 'great good will and affecceon' and that Mrs Mountjoy 'did sollicitt and entreat [him] to move and perswade [Belott] to effect the said marriadge and accordingly [he] did'. On the matter of money Shakespeare could not remember (or chose not to remember) how large the marriage portion was to have been, nor whether there was to have been a sum in Mountjoy's will, nor 'what Implementes and necessaries of houshold stuffe' Mountjoy gave Belott as part of the marriage settlement (Schoenbaum, Records, 25). Further witnesses were examined on 19 June but Shakespeare, though named in the margin of the interrogatories, did not depose again.
In the event the matter was referred to the elders of the French church, who ordered Mountjoy to pay Belott 20 nobles; but Mountjoy, who had fathered two bastards and was excommunicated for his dissolute life, never paid. Whatever the neighbourhood may have been, the Mountjoys were hardly the respectable family they might at first have appeared. The case is trivial enough but it shows Shakespeare caught up in the kind of arguments over money and marriage that figured in many plays of the period.
Shakespeare and Stratford, 1606–1608 Events in Shakespeare's family in Stratford in this period balanced good and bad news. In May 1606 his daughter Susanna was listed with other residents of Stratford for refusing to take holy communion at Easter, perhaps a sign that she might be a covert Catholic since such actions were bound to be noticed in the tense aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot. Susanna married in June 1607; her husband, the physician John Hall (1574/5?–1635), was known to be strongly protestant in his faith. There appears to have been a substantial marriage settlement in which Shakespeare settled on Susanna 105 acres of his land in Old Stratford, probably retaining a life interest in it; it amounts to a very valuable dowry. Shakespeare's younger brother Edmund had become a player, following his eldest brother to London, where both he and his infant son died in 1607; William may well have been the person who paid 20*s*. for his brother's burial in St Saviour's, Southwark, 'with a forenoone knell of the great bell' (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 26). In February 1608 Shakespeare became a grandfather with the birth of Elizabeth Hall. In September 1608 his mother died.
The last years In 1613, at the very end of his playwriting career, Shakespeare made a substantial investment in property in London, buying the gatehouse of the old Dominican priory in Blackfriars, where the Blackfriars Theatre was located, for £140. Burbage had also bought property in the area and Shakespeare's purchase may have been simply an investment, since one John Robinson was a tenant there in 1616. But the gatehouse was large enough for Shakespeare to have let part of it and used the rest himself. Wherever he was living in London after leaving the Mountjoys, he could have been in the Blackfriars gatehouse from 1613. Shakespeare paid £80 of the purchase immediately and mortgaged the remainder. Though he was the purchaser, the property was held by him with three others as trustees: John Heminges of the King's Men, William Johnson, the landlord of the Mermaid Tavern, and John Jackson, possibly the husband of the sister-in-law of Elias James the brewer. The effect may well have been, whether by Shakespeare's design or not, to exclude Anne Shakespeare from having a widow's claim on a third share of the property for her life, her dower right, unless Shakespeare survived the other trustees.
The King's Men remained successful: at the celebrations for the marriage of James I's daughter to the elector palatine in February 1613 they performed fourteen plays, four of which were by Shakespeare (including the not exactly propitious Othello). But in June 1613, during a performance of Shakespeare's Henry VIII, the Globe Theatre burnt down after some of the stuff shot out of a small cannon, for a sound effect, lodged in the thatch. The sharers decided to rebuild at the cost of over £1400, each sharer contributing between £50 and £60. Shakespeare had certainly sold his share in the company by the time he made his will in 1616; this may have been a good moment to get out.
In 1709 Nicholas Rowe suggested that Shakespeare spent his last years 'in Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends … and is said to have spent some Years before his Death at his native *Stratford*' (Works, ed. Rowe, 1.xxxv). But, though the story has taken permanent hold, there is no evidence for Shakespeare's having retired to Stratford. In November 1614 Thomas Greene, Stratford's town clerk from 1603 to 1617, who repeatedly refers to Shakespeare as his cousin, was in London and noted that, Shakespeare

(William Shakespeare, continued)
‘commyng yesterday to towne I went to see him howe he did’ (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 231). Where Shakespeare came from he does not say—it might well have been Stratford—but Shakespeare still came to London. Greene had been at Middle Temple when Twelfth Night was performed there and, with his wife and his children, Anne and William (perhaps the Shakespeares had stood godparents to them), were living in New Place in 1609.
Events in Stratford continued to involve Shakespeare, whether he was there or not. He was one of seventy-one Stratford citizens who subscribed to contribute to the cost of promoting a bill in parliament for the repair of roads, being named first, added in the margin, after the town's officials. A visiting preacher was entertained at New Place in 1614, though it is not clear whether Shakespeare was there at the time. There were family sadnesses too: two of his brothers died, Gilbert in February 1612 and Richard in February 1613, leaving only William and his sister Joan alive in that generation. In July 1613 his daughter Susanna brought a case in the bishop's consistory court that John Lane, a wild young man, had slandered her with an accusation of adultery with Rafe Smith and of having gonorrhoea; she won.
There was a local crisis too that affected Shakespeare. William Combe was the son of the William Combe from whom Shakespeare had bought the land in Old Stratford, and cousin of John Combe who left Shakespeare £5 in his will in 1614. Combe and Arthur Mainwaring, steward to Lord Ellesmere, wanted to enclose land at Welcombe from which Shakespeare and Thomas Greene had tithe income. The Stratford corporation opposed the enclosure. Shakespeare covenanted with Mainwaring's agent to be compensated, along with Greene, ‘for all such losse detriment & hinderance’ consequent on the enclosure (Schoenbaum, Documentary Life, 231). Greene's notes on his conversation with Shakespeare in London in November 1614 showed that Shakespeare knew how much land was intended to be enclosed and that compensation would be fixed the following April. Neither Shakespeare nor his son-in-law, John Hall, believed that the enclosure would go ahead. In December the corporation wrote to Shakespeare and Mainwaring to explain their opposition, not least because a fire in July 1613 had left many residents homeless. Combe's men began enclosing in the same month, but the ditch was filled in by women and children. Combe tried bribing Greene unsuccessfully. The struggle dragged on for years until Combe more or less abandoned his plans. Shakespeare's position in all this seems consistent: he was far more concerned to safeguard his income than to protect the townspeople's rights.
Shakespeare's will In January 1616 Shakespeare summoned his lawyer, Francis Collins, to draft his will. The decision was probably provoked by the impending marriage of his other daughter, Judith, to Thomas Quiney, son of Richard Quiney who had sought a loan from Shakespeare in 1598. Thomas was five years younger than Judith and Shakespeare had good reason to distrust him. The marriage took place in February 1616 in the middle of Lent without a special licence, an ecclesiastical offence for which Quiney was excommunicated. But, far more seriously, in March, Margaret Wheeler died giving birth to Quiney's child. Quiney admitted fornication in the ecclesiastical court and was ordered to do public penance, but paid a fine of 5*s*. instead. The first of the three pages of the will was revised late in March, apparently taking account of his son-in-law's crimes by altering the bequests to Judith.
Perhaps nothing in Shakespeare's plays has provoked quite as much commentary as his will (Chambers, 2.170–74). The three pages with their many corrections and interlineations seem full of afterthoughts and adjustments. Shakespeare's first concern is with Judith who would immediately inherit £100 and a further £50 in return for giving up her rights in a copyhold in Rowington to her sister and a further £150 in three years' time; if she were to die before then and without issue, the money would go to Shakespeare's granddaughter Elizabeth Hall and his sister, Joan Hart. But Judith would only receive the interest on the second tranche if she were married, unless her husband matched the capital sum. Thomas Quiney is never named and the will's phrase about ‘such husbond as she shall att thend of the saied three Yeares be marryed unto’ at the very least suggests that she might be married to someone other than Quiney by then. Shakespeare moved on to take especial care of his sister. In the event, Joan's husband, William Hart, died in April 1616, a week before Shakespeare; but she was clearly in need of help. She received £20, his clothes, and the house in Henley Street during her lifetime at a peppercorn rent; £5 went to each of Joan's three sons. Shakespeare's plate was to go to his granddaughter Elizabeth except ‘my brod silver & gilt bole’ which went to Judith. Shakespeare left £10 to the poor of Stratford, not a particularly large sum given his wealth and the fact that his lawyer would receive £13 6*s*. 8*d*.; his sword went to Thomas Combe and there were other bequests to local friends. He had been going to leave a small sum to Richard Tyler but Tyler's name is deleted for some reason. There were extra bequests to buy rings to Hamlet Sadler, his godson William Walker, and others. Of his ‘ffellowes’ in the King's Men, Shakespeare remembered, belatedly and in an interlineation, only three—Burbage, Heminges, and Condell—who would each receive 26*s*. 8*d*. for rings. Almost everything else went to Susanna, some in reconfirmation of the marriage settlement but the rest carefully tied up for the future for any sons she might have (up to seven) and only then to Elizabeth Hall or thereafter to Judith and her future sons. The generosity to Susanna and therefore to John Hall who were also appointed executors is offset by the tightly limited bequests to Judith. There is no mention of books or papers in the will—hardly a surprise since these would be part of his household goods which the Halls would receive; they did not need special reference.
Interlineated as an afterthought on the third page is the only reference to Anne, like Quiney unnamed: ‘Item I gyve unto my wief my second best bed with the furniture’. The second-best bed may well have been the marriage bed with the best bed reserved for guests. But it is not clear whether in Stratford Anne would automatically have received the widow's dower rights of one-third of the estate; there were sharp regional variations in practice. Certainly the will's silence prevents her having control over any part of the estate. Other

The obsessive sifting of Shakespeare's work to which Bryson refers has formed the basis of varying conclusions about his life, and these conclusions have formed a mythological biography which has had a strong hold on popular imagination. So much so that certain events are believed to be factually true, even though there is no historical evidence for them, such as the idea that he was a school-teacher or a deer-poacher, and even that he was unhappily married. Germaine Greer argues that the fact that he was working in London while his family were domiciled in Stratford is not sufficient evidence to support such a view. It cannot be established that Shakespeare deserted his wife, which was a criminal offence at the time.[56] In that sense, the 'true' story of Shakespeare's life is an evolving folk tale, which is retold and re-imagined by biographers. One example of this is James Shapiro's *1559*[57], an account of one year in Shakespeare's life. There is very little surviving documentary evidence about Shakespeare's personal life in 1599. Shapiro's story is based on surviving material relating to his professional life, and his aim is to show 'how deeply Shakespeare's work emerged from an engagement with his times'.[58] He concedes that most Shakespeare biography is fabrication: 'Conventional biographies of

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(William Shakespeare, continued)
wills were far more explicit: Burbage's 'wellbeloved' wife was his executor; Henry Condell's 'wellbeloved' wife received all his property (E. A. J. Honigmann and S. Brock, Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642, 1993, 113, 157). The lack in Shakespeare's will of even a conventional term of endearment, of specific and substantial bequests to Anne, or even of the right to continue living in New Place amounts to a striking silence.
Death and burial On 23 April 1616 Shakespeare died. John Ward, a clergyman living in Stratford in the 1660s, recorded that 'Shakespear, Drayton, and Ben Jhonson had a merry meeting, and itt seems drank too hard, for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted' (Chambers, 2.250). The story is not impossible but quite what Shakespeare died from is unknown. He was buried two days later in Holy Trinity, inside the church rather than in the churchyard because his purchase of an interest in the Stratford tithes in 1605 made him a lay rector. The epitaph, possibly written by himself, warning future generations to leave his bones where they lay, was inscribed on the grave, though the grave may not originally have been where the stone is now placed. Anne lived until 1623 (she was buried on 8 August) but her tombstone makes no mention of her husband, and refers to only one daughter; Judith seems to have been ignored. Peter Holland, 'Shakespeare, William (1564–1616)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2012 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25200, accessed 31 Aug 2012]

[56] Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare's Wife* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p 146

[57] James Shapiro, *1599*: *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005)

[58] Ibid. 57 p. xxii

Shakespeare are necessary fictions that will always be with us – less for what they tell us about Shakespeare's life than for what they reveal of our fantasies about who we want Shakespeare to be.'[59] And yet, Shapiro himself follows this pattern in asserting:

> As a resident playwright as well as actor in the Chamberlain's Men, a playing company that performed nearly year-round, most of Shakespeare's mornings were taken up with rehearsals, his afternoons with performances, and many of his evenings with company business, such as listening to freelance dramatists pitch new plays to add to the repertory. He had precious few hours late at night and early in the morning free to read and write – often by flickering candlelight and fighting fatigue.[60]

Shapiro is making a number of unsupported assumptions here. For example, while it may be possible to establish the frequency with which plays were performed in London at the close of the sixteenth century, there is no archive material which suggests that this was the schedule to which Shakespeare worked. It may be important to establish that this elusive 'Shakespeare' worked in a busy and pressurized field, but extrapolating a work-programme from that is just as fanciful as suggesting that he must have based King Lear's grief on losing Cordelia[61] on his own grief at losing his son Hamnett. A readiness to base 'fact' on supposition is entrenched in Shakespeare biography. Therefore, when considering the history of 'invented' Shakespeare, the

[59] Shapiro, *1599*: *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, 56, p. xx

[60] Ibid. 59 p. xxiii

[61] William Shakespeare*, King Lear,* First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 Modern edition: Craig W. J.,(ed) W. Shakespeare, Complete Works (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974) V. II, l. 302 – 367

development of his supposedly factual biography must also be taken into account. This chapter will briefly explore that biography.

ii. Nicholas Rowe: *Some account of the Life etc. of Mr William Shakespear* [62]

The earliest surviving full-length biography of Shakespeare was written by Nicholas Rowe and published in 1709, almost a century after Shakespeare's death.[63]His *Life* formed the introduction to a six volume publication of Shakespeare's works. In the introduction to the Pallas Athene edition of the *Life*, published in 2009, Charles Nicholl describes the account as 'cheerful'[64] and 'nonchalant'[65], but defends it against historians who have dismissed it as mere hearsay by pointing out that Rowe was writing less than a century after Shakespeare's death, and that oral history should not be discounted just because it is impossible to verify in historic terms.[66] One of the sources used by Rowe is John Aubrey, who included Shakespeare in his 1681 *Brief Lives.*[67] Despite his relative proximity to primary source material and first-hand accounts, Rowe sets the precedent for trawling Shakespeare's work in search of information about his life. Rowe assumes that he '…has no Knowledge of the

[62] Nicholas Rowe, *Some account of the Life &c. of Mr William Shakespear* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709) Modern edition: Nicholas Rowe, Some account of the Life &c. of Mr William Shakspear (London: Pallas Athene, 2009)

[63] Nicholas Rowe, **Nicholas Rowe,** (born June 20, 1674, Little Barford, Bedfordshire, Eng.—died Dec. 6, 1718, London), English writer who was the first to attempt a critical edition of the works of Shakespeare http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/511077/Nicholas-Rowe (accessed 1st September 2012)

[64] Rowe, *Some account of the Life etc. of Mr William Shakespear* p. 20

[65] Ibid. 64, p. 20

[66] Ibid. 64, p. 22

[67] John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 1681 (Rev. A. Clark (ed) J. Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1898) (Copy read: J.Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Jaffrey, New Hampshire, US, 1999), pp.275 – 277

Writings of the Antient (sic) Poets…' because '…we find no traces of anything that looks like an Imitation of 'em,'[68] but admits that in that case it is surprising that Shakespeare wrote *The Comedy of Errors*[69] as it is 'in great measure taken from the *Menaechmi* of Plautus'.[70] Rowe's account of Shakepeare stealing deer from a local nobleman is plausible, but there is no historical record of this, and his assumption that Shakespeare worked his way up from the lowliest job in the theatre is only that: an assumption.

Another myth promulgated by Rowe is that Shakespeare spent his final years enjoying: 'Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends.'[71] There is no evidence to support the idea that Shakespeare's final years were a period of complete serenity. In fact, surviving records show that he was involved in legal proceedings which do not convey an impression of 'ease'. One of the last surviving examples of his signature on a public record appears at the top of a list of 'Auncient ffreeholders in the ffeldes of Oldstratford and Welcombe'[72] drawn up by the Town Clerk in Stratford in response to a scheme to enclose the common fields of Welcombe, an area of land from which Shakespeare was paid tithe-income by his tenants. Edward Bond dramatizes this dispute in *Bingo: Scenes of money and death* (1975)[73], and uses Shakespeare's role in the affair to support his view that Shakespeare died corrupted by his wealth and catatonic with depression. But this signature is not – in impartial terms - evidence about either Shakespeare's state of mind or his moral character.

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[68] Rowe, *Some account of the Life etc. of Mr William*, p. 42

[69] William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors First Folio, Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 Modern edition: Craig W. J., (ed) W. Shakespeare, Complete Works (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974)

[70] Ibid. 68, p. 42

[71] Ibid. 68, p. 72

[72] Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*, p. 230

[73] Edward Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of money and death,* (London: Methuen, 1975)

Rowe applauds Shakespeare's great natural talent[74], and asserts in a somewhat patronising tone that this absolves him from abiding by the unities of time and place described by Aristotle: '...as Shakespeare liv'd under a kind of mere Light of Nature, and had never been made acquainted with the Regularity of these written Precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a Law he knew nothing of.'[75] Rowe's version is not reverential: he speaks of Shakespeare as a notable poet and public figure, but not as a demi-god. This was all to come.

iii. David Garrick and the myth of Shakespeare

In his book *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* James Shapiro outlines the process of mythologising Shakepeare which took place after his death.[76] Shapiro points out that Shakespeare's elevation to poetic godhead was '…a crucial precondition for…all subsequent controversies about his identity.'[77] Inevitably, the deification of Shakespeare was in itself a fictionalizing process. After Nicholas Rowe's *Life* was published in 1709, a mythical biography was concocted in which Shakespeare's poetic genius transcended talent, industry and chance.

One of the reasons for this was that historical fiction as a genre did not exist at this time. Mythologised biography was a more intelligible form than purely fictional biography would have been. O'Sullivan points out that Shakespeare was depicted in the early eighteenth century as if he was '…a contemporary of his audiences…At first, the eighteenth century, with its fairly limited understanding of the possibilities of

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[74] Rowe, *Some account of the Life etc. of Mr William Shakespear* p. 54

[75] Ibid. 74, p. 58

[76] Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare*?

[77] Ibid. 76, p. 29

historical fiction, resurrected him as a ghost, often appearing spectrally in prologues to comment on his own plays.'[78]

The only example that survives of words written in Shakespeare's own voice. comes in the Epilogue of *Henry IV part II*[79], which would conventionally have been spoken at the end of each performance before the players danced a jig. But when this was played at court, a more decorous ending was required, so this speech was written in the voice of the poet himself. Shapiro sees this as persuasive evidence that William Shakespeare of Stratford is the author of the plays that were collected in the First Folio.[80] The speech is arch and witty, and lays no claim to lasting greatness, beginning: 'First my fear; then my curtsy; last my speech. My fear is, your displeasure, my curtsy, my duty, and my speech, to beg your pardon.'[81] Shakespeare goes on to apologise for the quality of the play, which in its turn had been written to compensate for the poor workmanship of an earlier play – probably Henry IV part one. The speech concludes:

> One more word more, I beseech you. If you're not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue with the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France: where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a' be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man. My tongue is weary; when my legs

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[78] Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare*?, p. 11

[79] William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part II First Folio, Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273 Modern edition: Craig W. J., (ed) W. Shakespeare, Complete Works (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974)

[80] Ibid. 78, p. 262

[81] Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part II* Epilogue, ll. 1 - 4

are too, I will bid you good night: and so kneel down before you;

but, indeed, to pray for the queen.[82]

This is not the 'real' Shakespeare; it is a created persona, and the lines are spoken by a dancer, a boy dressed as a woman. (Hence the 'curtsy'.) Shakespeare's playful attitude to his own identity has an ironic postscript. Less than a century after his death, the line between fact and fiction in relation to the life of Shakepeare was already uncertain. The authorship debate is not part of my reflective thesis, though in my novel there are a number of implied assumptions: that William Shakespeare is the author of his plays; that 'authorship' involves a degree of collaboration; that Aemilia Lanyer is the Dark Lady of the sonnets, and that she wrote an early version of *Macbeth*. The first two points are 'factual' though a matter of debate; the third is supposition; and the fourth is 'fictional'. But the authorship debate is relevant to this thesis because Shakespeare's identity has become controversial, and his biographers are all (to a greater or lesser extent) partisan.

My view is that the authorship debate and the issue of Shakespeare's biography are linked. His works have come to be held in such high esteeem that many commentators have felt, and still feel, that Shakespeare was too uneducated and limited a character to have produced them. Two things have contributed to this controversy: a scarcity of biographical fact, and extreme veneration of his work. If there was a substantial paper trail connecting William Shakespeare to every one of his surviving plays, there would be no possibility of putting forward other candidates as the true authors of his work. If it was understood that someone apparently ordinary could produce extraordinary art, then the debate might never have begun.

[82] Shakespeare*, Henry IV, Part II* Epilogue, Epilogue, ll. 28 – 38

But the paper trail is fragmentary. And the desire to make William Shakespeare something more than merely mortal was evident from the eighteenth century. Shapiro points out that as early as 1724 the French writer and philosopher Voltaire noticed that Shakespeare was 'rarely called anything but divine in England'[83] and by 1794 the newly rebuilt Drury Lane was rededicated as a shrine to the Bard.[84] The actor David Garrick built a temple to Shakespeare in the grounds of his house and lost £2,000 when he organised a Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford. The climax was Garrick's delivery of an *Ode to Shakespeare*, which included the words: 'Tis he! Tis he – that demi-god!/Who Avon's flowery margin trod.'[85] Despite substantial financial losses incurred after staging the Jubilee, Garrick managed to profit from the Shakespeare legend. He restaged the event at Drury Lane over ninety-two nights, and made a fortune, even selling mulberry wood relics, which were allegedly crafted from wood from the mulberry tree that grew in Shakespeare's Stratford garden. (A blatant example of treating Shakespeare like a second Messiah, as it imitated the sale of relics alleged to be fragments of cross on which Christ was crucified.)

There was soon a reaction against this deification of Shakespeare, however. After Garrick's death in 1779, William Cowper lampooned him as 'Great Shakespeare's priest': 'For Garrick was a worshipper himself;/He drew the liturgy, and framed the rites/And solemn ceremonial of the day,/And called the world to worship on the banks/Of Avon famed in song."'[86] The myth-making process was taking on its own life.

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[83] Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare*, p. 31

[84] Ibid. 83, p. 33

[85] David Garrick, 'Jubilee Ode to Shakespeare, 1769', lines 7 -8 Brian Vickers, ed., *William Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage, Volume 5, 1765 – 1774* (London: Routledge, 1996*)* p. 345

[86] Ibid. 83, p. 33

iv. Shakespeare and 'bardolotory'

George Bernard Shaw invented the satrical term 'Bardolotry' in the early twentieth century, but this did not put and end to the deification industry.[87] The belief that Shakespeare embodied quintessentially English values, which in turn were the gift of the British Empire to the world, was one that endured until World War II and the break up of that empire. In 1926, the author and educationalist Arther Mee edited *A Children's Shakespeare,* a collection of shortened plays, each one accompanied by an explanatory synposis. Mee also included a foreword and afterword with the intention of giving his young readers some 'biographical'. information about Shakespeare. His tone was typically 'bardolatrous':

> Did it just happen, one wonders, that Shakespeare came to us out of the very heart of England, in the very dawning of her greatness, and at the very centre of her glory? Does it not seem, looking back through our immortal years, that it was written in the skies that Shakespeare should come when he did? He came into this precious isle, set in the silver sea, at a point where Time and Place seemed to be meeting with some mighty work in hand. The world was filled with wonder; it was the very hour for an Imagination to be born. And for our greatest Englishman what place was there like

[87] George Bernard Shaw, *Misalliance, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and Fanny's First Play* (London, Constable and Company, 1914) Modern edition: Shaw, George Bernard, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (Accessible Publishing Systems, 2008, www.readhowyouwant.com)

> Warwickshire? What glory could have stirred his soul like hers? He walked about unguessed at the heart of this dear land.[88]

We can therefore conclude that by the middle of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare had been mythologized, venerated, castigated and doubt had been cast on his ability to write his own plays. The mystery of his 'true' identity remained, as it does today. But the nature of this identity had become controversial, and freighted with cultural significance.

[88] Arthur Mee, *The Children's Shakespeare* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1900) p.965

Inventing Shakespeare

Chapter Three

The Invented Bard Pre-Twentieth Century: the rise of the Romantic Individual

i. The Romantic theory of authorship

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been identified by both Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault as the period when the concept of authorship, as we now understand it, first came into being. In *The Author*[89] Andrew Bennett asserts:

> The Romantic theory of authorship, in which the author is designated as autonomous, original and expressive, may be said to account for everything that is commonly or conventionally taken to be implied by talk of the 'the author' and certainly much that Barthes and Foucault take exception to in their critiques of authorship.[90]

Bennett argues that while the 'discovery of individuality' may date back as early as the eleventh century, and although individuality is 'fundamental to facets of classical culture', there was a significant shift in perception during the Renaissance to 'a new individualistic order based around a particular emphasis on a subject's "personal existence", an emphasis that can be related to Protestantism's insistence on the priority of the individual's direct and personal relationship with God, (which) emerges

[89] Andrew Bennett, *The Author, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2005)

[90] Ibid. 89, p.57

in the early modern period.'[91] But while this idea of the author as lone and independent individual has its beginnings in the early modern period, it developed and became preeminent during the following centuries. And he asserts that the eighteenth century saw further developments in the idea of originality: 'The Renaissance conception of the author gradually moved away from the medievalist sense of the author as "auctor", as "authority", and from the classical idea of composition as "mimetic", as essentially invoking the idea of generic, discursive stylistic and formal traditions.'[92]

This concept reached its apotheosis in the following century, and was both exemplied and analysed by poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. In his literary biography *Biography Literaria*[93] Coleridge expounds his theory that the poet and poetry are so closely identified as to be almost interchangeable. The poet is his poetry, his identity is expressed through his art. Coleridge argues:

> For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind. The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, and spirit of unit, that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This

[91] Bennett, *The Author*, p.58

[92] Ibid. 91, p.58

[93] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of MY LITERARY LIFE and OPINIONS* (London: R. Fenner, 1817) Modern edition: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6081 (Accessed 1 September 2012)

> power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control…reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image: the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound and vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and artificial, still subordinates art to nature: the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.[94]

This is a vivid and persuasive account of the imaginative process. However, while it is admirable in its clarity, 'admiration of the poet' can segue into the cult of the poetic personality.

ii. Shakespeare the national poet

It was during this period that the focus on Shakespeare as national poet grew most intense, and became established as part of the nation's mythology. His status as a poet whose genius superseded all that came before, and overshadowed all who came afterwards was established as received truth. Arguably, the backlash against

[94] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of MY LITERARY LIFE and OPINIONS* 2.15 – 17

'Bardolotary' was an inevitable consequence. Bennett argues that this insistence on individual genius was both unhelpful and misleading:

> The Romantic conception of authorship involves an ideal, an impossible ideal, of autonomy. While the Romantic author is seen as self-originating and original in a fundamental, radical sense, as wholly detached from social context, just the fact that she uses language, exploits certain genres and operates within certain literary traditions and with certain conceptual and poetic conventions, defines her as an unequivocally social being.[95]

In fact, the Romantic movement has left an enduring legacy in that the contemporary view of creativity is that it is an individualistic and independent process. While Malcolm Gladwell and Daniel Levitin have written about the importance of practice and the learning process in creative work, it is the aberrant and solitary aspect of 'genius' which attracts popular attention.[96] [97]

iii. Shakespeare and collaboration

However, among Shakespeare scholars this view of Shakespeare as 'lone genius' or supremely gifted anomaly has been superseded by a more nuanced view of his role as author and artist. Shapiro makes this point in *Contested Will*. Three of Shakespeare's

[95] Bennett, *The Author*, p.71

[96] Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (London: Penguin, 2008)

[97] Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human* Obsession (London: Atlantic Books, 2007)

plays – *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens* and *Pericles* were co-authored, and both *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are collaborative efforts. Shapiro asserts:

> A revolution has… occurred in how Shakespeare professors think about collaboration, largely as a result of new and creative generations of scholars interested in attribution, especially MacDonald Jackson, Ward Elliott, Jonathan Hope, David Lake and Gary Taylor. Working for the most part independently, they established irrefutable cases for Middleton's, Wilkins's and Fletcher's contributions to Shakespeare's Jacobean plays, as well as for George Peele's hand in the much earlier *Titus Andronicus*. They did so by painstakingly teasing out the habits, conscious and unconsious, that characterise each writer's style.[98]

This is now the 'official version'. The1986 Oxford Shakespeare[99] acknowledges the existence of contributors to several of Shakespeare's plays. This research was also collated and presented in Brian Vickers' *Shakespeare Co-Author.*[100]

[98] Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* p.289

[99] John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, Stanley Wells, eds., The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works (Second Edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)

[100] Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Part Two

Invented Shakespeare

Introduction

In the following chapters I will be considering a number of fictional representations of Shakespeare, placing them in chronological order. My intention here is to look for connections and common themes or tropes, and to chart the development of Shakespeare's fictional identity before comparing these earlier versions with my own invention. This is not a comprehensive list, but I have set out to include some obscure and out-of-print versions, as well as including well-known versions, such as those of Burgess and Shaw.

The works I will consider include plays, short stories and novels, and in terms of sub-genres of historical writing, they fall into the categories of romance, literary fiction and magical realist fiction. Such works are sometimes playful, referencing previous versions of Shakespeare's life, and sometimes polemical, making a case for or against William Shakespere as a heroic figure, definitive artist and author of his plays.

Chapter 1

Invented Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century

i. Walter Scott, *Kenilworth* [101] [102]

'William Shakespeare' makes a brief appearance in Sir Walter Scott's 1821 novel *Kenilworth*, though this invented Shakespeare does not speak. [103] Written in the verbose and archaic idiom which was characteristic of Scott, the novel gives an account of the life and death of Amy Robsart, the wife of the Earl of Leicester, who died in mysterious circumstances. Scott puts her at the centre of a melodrama, making her 'warder' Sir Richard Varney into a moustache-twirling villain and schemer. Ultimately he murders her.

The reference to Shakespeare is made in a scene at Kenilworth Castle in which Elizabeth I is indulging in some rather ponderous banter with her courtiers. They are discusssing the relative merits and demerits of 'the players' and bear-baiting. He is also addressed in passing by the Earl of Leicester, who says:

> '- Ha, Will Shakespeare – wild Will! – thou hast given my nephew Philip Sidney love powder – he cannot sleep without thy Venus and Adonis under his pillow. We will have thee hanged for the veriest wizard in Europe. Hark thee, I had not forgotten the matter of the patent, and of the bears.'

[101] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, Second edition, s.v. 'Scott, Sir Walter'

[102] Walter Scott, *Kenilworth* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co, 1821) Modern edition: Scott, Walter, *Kenilworth* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, Undated)

[103] Ibid 102 p.218

> The player bowed, and the Earl nodded and passed on – so that age would have told the tale – in urs, perhaps we might say the immortal had done homage to the mortal. [104]

Leicester describes Shakespeare as a 'wild wit' and a 'wizard', but this contrasts with the opinion of the Earl of Sussex who calls Shakespeare 'a stout man at quarter-staff and single falchion, though, as I am told, a halting fellow…' [105] These two descriptions of the character of Shakespeare appear to be contradictory. He is a manly man, able to handle himself well in a fight, and keen on sport, and he is also 'wild'. And yet he is 'a halting fellow'. This, presumably, is to indicate that he is sensitive, part of the crowd and yet apart from it. There is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare displayed any of these characteristics, as we have no information about his interests or his disposition. This contradictory account demonstrates a wish to see Shakespeare as exemplifying attributes of robust maleness, while at the same time exhibiting qualities of withdrawal, introspection and uncanny giftedness. He must be brilliant without being too effete. (Not, in the current slang, any kind of 'geek'.)

But what is even more interesting is that this encounter is anachronistic: Amy Robsart died in 1560, so this scene must take place in 1558 – 60. This was between four and six years before the birth of William Shakespeare in 1564. Shakespeare's cultural significance clearly over-rides concerns about historical accuracy. If Scott was going to have Elizabeth and her courtiers discuss the players, then 'immortal' Shakespeare must appear, if only fleetingly. The reality - that Shakespeare's work was an integral part of a dramatic tradition - was of little interest to Scott, certainly as far as his own fiction was concerned. (In fact, he might usefully have omitted references

[104] Scott, *Kenilworth*, p.218

[105] Ibid. 104, p.224

to drama at the court altogether, since the first tragedy performed for Elizabeth I was *The Tragedy of Gorbuduc* written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville. The first English play written in blank verse, it was not performed until 1561/2.)[106]

ii. Walter Savage Landor, *The Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare Touching Deer Stealing* [107] [108]

Landor's eccentric novella/drama was written thirteen years after *Kenilworth*, and presents a much more detailed picture of the Bard, though it focuses entirely on an early stage of his life. He is twenty, still in love with his new wife 'Hannah Hathaway', and is a cocky, confident young man who appears to be undaunted by his predicament: he has been accused of killing deer on the estate of Sir Thomas Lucy. The story is based on one of the many apocryphal tales that Shakespeare has inspired, and which first appeared in print in Rowe's *Life of Shakespeare* in 1709.[109]

Landor has created a Shakespeare who is brimming with ideas and energy, and who is evidently on the brink of his new career, experimenting with his poems and dramatic dialogue in the court room, and impressing the genial (and intoxicated) Sir Thomas Lucy in the process. His quick-wittedness contrasts with the bumbling pomposity of the inebriated knight, and with the po-faced chaplain, Sir Silas Gough, who is assisting him. The piece is presented as if it is a historical document, the record kept by the parish clerk, Ephraim Barnett, and includes a number of peculiar author's

[106] Lionel Charles Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (London: Chatto & Windus (1937) Modern edition: Lionel Charles Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (London: Peregrine Books, 1962) p.205

[107] Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia, Second edition, s.v.' Landor, Walter Savage'

[108] Walter Savage Landor, *The Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare Touching Deer Stealing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1834) Modern edition: General Books, www.General-Books.net Print on Demand

[109] Ibid 108 p.29

notes similar to those in Lawrence Stern's *Tristram Shandy*[110]. The 'Editor' who is responsible for these, and for the preface, is anonymous, and perhaps the reader must assume this Editor is Landor himself. Or perhaps not. This is a sophisticated piece of work, full of humour and arch asides, which mines the Shakespeare myth with great panache.

And yet, the account presents itself as completely artless and even accidental, starting off as a piece of supposedly verbatim reportage, then switching to a dramatic format, laid out like a play. The self-referential nature of the piece as a literary artefact is made clear in the preface. The Editor writes: 'Indeed, there is little of real history, excepting in romances. Some of these are strictly true to nature; while histories in general give a distorted view of her, and rarely, a faithful record either of momentous or of common events.'[111]

This Shakespeare is ebullient, charming, articulate, reckless. There is none of the hesitancy that is suggested in *Kenilworth*. Perhaps because of his youth, what we are presented with here is the artist as Puckish rogue, unstoppable and fearless. His legal understanding is explained because he has worked "in the office of an attorney"[112] for a year, and he makes it clear to the court that he is quick to learn: 'I could sail to Cathay or Tartary with half the nautical knowledge I have acquired in this glorious hall.'[113] Despite the fact that the penalty for his crime may be hanging, Shakespeare teases Sir Thomas Lucy continually. Fortunately, Lucy is too drunk and dim-witted to notice. At one point William compares his relation to his 'superiors' to someone walking in a forest: 'While we stand under these leaves, our protection and

[110] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Ann Ward (vol.1-2, Dodsley (vol 3-4), Becket & DeHondt (vol 5-9) 1759 – 1767)

[111] Landor, *The Citation and Examiniation of William Shakespeare Touching Deer Stealing*, p.2

[112] Ibid. 111, p.9

[113] Ibid. 111, p.19

refuge from heat and labour, we see only the rougher sides of them, and the gloominess of the branches on which they hang. In the midst of their benefits we are insensible to their utility and their beauty, and appear to be ignorant that, if they were placed less high above us, we should derive from them less advantage.'[114] To which Lucy complacently replies: "Ay; envy of superiority makes the angels kick and run restive". [115]

But again, we have a Shakespeare who is contradictory, and who is described in terms of his paradoxical nature. Lucy says he is 'shallow but clear'; 'simple but ingenuous'. He concludes: 'He doth not dwell upon the main; he is worldly; he is wise in his generation; he says things out of his own head.'[116] Silas, however, takes the opposing view: "In my mind he is as deep as a big tankard; and a mouthful of rough beverage will be the beginning and end of it.'[117] The drunken knight tries to advise Shakespeare, telling him to focus on the ordinary folk, rather than attempting to write about great men, but the piece also communicates a strong sense that Shakespeare is already a serious and committed writer – he might tease his 'superiors' but he is in deadly earnest about his own work. In this extract, Shakespeare makes a speech which creates a particularly vivid sense of his life in Stratford, and fulfils Landor's promise of wrapping 'truth' in fiction. He is talking about a fragment of his work that he has read out to the court:

> 'I wrote not down all the words, fearing to mis-spell them, and begged them of the doctor, when I took my leave…and verily he

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[114] Landor, *The Citation and Examiniation of William Shakespeare Touching Deer Stealing*, p.49

[115] Ibid. 114, p.49

[116] Ibid. 114, p.50

[117] Ibid. 114, p.51

> wrote down all that he had repeated. I keep them always in the tin-box in my waiscoat pocket, above the eel-hooks, on a scrap of paper a finger's length and breadth, folded in the middle to fit. And when the eels are running, I often take it out and read it before I am aware. I could as soon forget my own epitaph as this.'[118]

There is an attempt here to create an immediate and tactile engagement with his creative process, embedding his inspiration in his experience of the everyday. There is also a sense that words are precious and that the means of recording them are limited and valued. The 'scrap of paper a finger's length and breadth' recalls Jane Austen's reference to 'the little bit (two inches wide) of Ivory on which I work'.[119]

[118] Landor, *The Citation and Examiniation of William Shakespeare Touching Deer Stealing*, p.56

[119] The Republic of Pemberley, Jane Austen, 'Letter to James Edward Austen (December,1816)' http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/janeart.html (Accessed 1st September 2012)

Chapter Two

Invented Shakespeare in the early twentieth century

Introduction

In the fictions I have considered which featured Shakespeare in the early twentieth century, there was a shift towards subverting received truths, though within the framework of the 'received' biography based on the Roe version. The notion of Shakespeare as god-like poet came under close scrutiny, and accounts of his life became increasingly partisan.

i. Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare, Pedagogue and Poacher*[120] [121]

Richard Garnett was a member of the Bloomsbury group, and an author and critic as well as Keeper of the Books at the British Museum. *William Shakespeare, Pedagogue and Poacher* was written two years before his death. Like Landor's *Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare Touching Deer-Stealing,* this is an account of the apocryphal deer-stealing incident in Shakespeare's early life. The idea that Shakespeare poached deer from a rich man's estate has wide appeal, perhaps because this puts him on the side of the common people, as well as showing that he is manly and robust. (As we have seen with earlier versions, the popular view of Shakespeare is that he might have been a genius, but he was also a bold and vigorous fellow, rather than febrile and sickly like John Keats, or a dissolute hedonist like Lord Byron.)

[120] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Alan Bell 'Garnett, Richard' www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33334, Richard Garnett (1835–1906) (Accessed 31 Aug 2012)

[121] Richard Garnett, *William Shakespeare, Pedagogue and Poacher* (London: The Bodley Head, 1904) Modern edition: Garnett, Richard, *William Shakespeare, Pedagogue and Poacher* (BiblioLife, LLC, www.bibliolife.com/opensource, 2010)

Sir Thomas Lucy is not inebriated in this version, but merely pompous and verbose. His absurdly highflown language is contrasted with the cryptic comments of his forester, Moles. At the beginning of the play, Sir Thomas is complaining that there are no deer in his woods. Shakespeare is set up for the offence of deer-stealing because Sir Thomas is jealous of him and believes – with some justification – that his wife is infatuated with him. Indeed, this version of Shakespeare is a young blade, a man, in Sir Thomas's eyes at least, accustomed: '…to caper idly in a lady's chamber, to the lascivious pleasing of a lute…'[122] His masculinity is beyond question: '…though he be a main soft hearted fellow, You may not stay him from a bear-baiting.'[123]

In this depiction of Shakespeare we see him working as a schoolteacher – another facet of the popular myth. He skimps on Latin and the classics, focusing instead on inspirational insights, human warmth and quirky ideas about the curriculum. We learn that he has not 'plagued' the boys in his charge 'overmuch with study' but has taught them 'the liberal arts' including fencing, card playing, kettle making and hedgehog cooking.[124] This has proved popular with his pupils, as have his stories. He has told them numerous old tales of 'princely captains, mermaids, ghosts',[125] and has written a play. He now intends to go to London, to feed his imagination and try and make his way in the theatre world. But Sir Thomas has other ideas, and is looking forward to giving Shakespeare a whipping. In the courtroom scene in which Shakespeare is tried for deer stealing, the speech he makes in his defence puts him in the tradition of Robin Hood as a champion of the poor. He

[122] Garnett, *William Shakespeare, Pedagogue & Poacher*, p.17

[123] Ibid. 122 p. 18

[124] Ibid. 122, p.30

[125] Ibid. 122, p.32

challenges Sir Thomas Lucy, accusing him of selfishness and greed, and claiming that his rapacity has created 'a poachers' school'.[126] Shakespeare adds: 'Deem you that I had robbed you of your deer,/If you had taken nought from me and mine?' [127] Even more radically, he asserts:'I am the people's poet, not their tribune.'[128]

Both Ann Shakespeare and Lady Lucy appear, but neither woman is a match for the lure of London. Shakespeare asks Sir Thomas to banish him for ten years, giving him time to make his name in the capital city. The proceedings are interrupted by the Earl of Essex, who has been sent by Queen Elizabeth to bring Shakespeare to court. She has seen his new play *The Taming of a Shrew* and is impressed. In spite of his apparent immaturity, this Shakespeare is a forceful and charismatic rebel, and those around him have to accede to his demands. Sir Thomas must let his man go, and the play ends. Young Shakespeare triumphs, and embarks on his great career.

[126] Garnett, *William Shakespeare, Pedagogue & Poacher*, p. 87

[127] Ibid. 126 p. 88

[128] Ibid. 126 p. 90

ii. Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Christmas (*published as part of *Shakespeare's Christmas and Other Stories)*[129][130]

The academic, critic and author Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (also known as 'Q') was a prodigious author and Shakespeare critc, but also produced a short story about Shakespeare, which gave its name to this collection. It is a vividly written account of Shakespeare and the players in the winter of 1598. The City of London was threatening to close the playhouse down, so they dismantled it and rebuilt it on the south bank of the river, in the Liberties. This area was outside the city walls, and therefore beyond the council's jurisdiction. Quiller-Couch's story is a snapshot of the life of the London players. The action of the story takes place on Christmas Eve, and the story ends with a description of sunrise on Christmas Day. It demonstrates the camaraderie and resourcefulness of the players as they dismantle and re-assemble the theatre, under the shocked gaze of a surprise visitor, John Shakespeare, who has come to London from Stratford to see his son. The story provides an incomplete and tantalizing glimpse of William Shakespeare, told from the point of view of a young 'apprentice'. As the story goes on, it seems he is an apprentice writer, though this is not made clear. He might be John Webster (who was born around 1580 and died in 1634 and also appears as a young boy in *Shakespeare in Love*[131]) but his identity is never revealed.

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[129] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Michael Douglas Smith, 'Couch, Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch[*pseud.* Q]' (1863–1944), [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35640] (Accessed 31 Aug 2012)

[130] Arthur Quiller-Couch *Shakespeare's Christmas (*published as part of *Shakespeare's Christmas and Other Stories) (*New York, Longmans, Green, and Co, 1905) Modern edition: Quiller-Couch, Arthur, Shakespeare's Christmas and Other Stories (Charleston, Bibliolife, 2010 www.bibliolife.com)

[131] Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love* (London, Faber & Faber, 1999) p. 32; pp. 53 – 84; p.118

The idea of authorship is mooted at the beginning of the story, during the performance of a new play *Henry V*. The apprentice observes John Shakespeare with alarm as he sits in the audience, shouting with laughter at inappropriate times, and a cutpurse warns him that his excessive laughter and applause will lead people to suppose he is the author. The elder Shakespeare is a Falstaffian figure: raucous, bibulous and naïve. William Shakespeare is the Prince Hal to his father's Falstaff: regal and commanding. He is first heard, not seen, a dark presence carrying a lantern. (Again, this fits in with the glimpsed nature of this portrayal.) His voice is 'dark, strong and masculine'[132] and when he does appear in the light of his lantern, his father says '…thou has sobered, thou hast solidified.'[133] He is a mature Shakespeare, a man in his prime: practical, assured, established. He is also businesslike and meticulous, asking his father about the state of his Stratford property. When Shakespeare arrives at the Boar's Head tavern to meet the other players, he is applauded by the company and he bows 'as might a king'[134] Quiller-Couch is reminding us how little we know of the man, but there is nothing here to undermine reader expectations. This Shakespeare has the presence and confidence of a leader. Indeed, as he enters the room there is a moment when he appears to be almost Christ-like: 'As he pressed down the latch, the great man turned for an instant with a quick smile, marvellously tender.[135]

We do not see very much of Shakespeare after this scene: the apprentice, now drunk as well as overawed, witnesses a brawl, then a murder, and sees a body floating in the Thames. He appears to be confused and disturbed by what he sees, as well as (we infer) inspired. The vivid, sensual picture of London concludes with a paragraph

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[132] Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Christmas*, p.26

[133] Ibid. 132, p. 27

[134] Ibid. 132, p. 39

[135] Ibid. 132,p. 39

which conjures up a moment in time, once again suggesting that our view of this lost time and place is incomplete: 'The sun's gold, drifted through the fog, touched the side of a small row-boat nearing the farther shore. Behind, and to right and left along Bankside, a few guitars yet tinkled. Across the tide wafted the voices of London's Christmas bells.'[136] Like Landor, Quiller-Couch engages with the physical environment which surrounds Shakespeare, and attempts to integrate his environment and his creative output.

iii. George Moore, *The Making of an Immortal: A Play in One Act* [137] [138]

Although George Moore is not widely read today, critics such as Richard Ellman see him as a key influence on the development of English literature.[139] Moore's early realist novels were banned by the circulating libraries because of their explicit sexual content. His subjects were often controversial: his 1916 novel *The Brook Kerith*[140] tells the story of a non-divine Christ who is nursed back to health after his crucifixion. Moore took a similarly radical and revisionist line when he wrote the one-act play *The Making of an Immortal*. The play, set in 1599, suggests that 'Shak'spere' is a semi-educated player and that Francis Bacon is the true author of the plays. These have been falsely attributed to Shak'spere as a cover, because Queen Elizabeth believes

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[136] Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Christmas*, p.63

[137] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, George Augustus Moore (1852–1933), writer. Edwin Gilcher, 'Moore, George Augustus (1852–1933)'(Accessed 31 Aug 2012]

[138] George Moore, *The Making of an Immortal: A Play in One Act* (New York, The Bowling Green Press; London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927) Modern edition: Moore, George, *The Making of an Immortal: A Play in One* Act (Kessinger Library Imprints, Kessinger Publishing, www.kessinger.net , 2010)

[139] Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press,1959) Modern edition, Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.98

[140] Moore, George, *The Brook Kerith: A Syrian Story* (London: T. Warner Laurie, 1916)

that *Richard II* is the work of her former favourite, the Earl of Essex. She insists on meeting the playwright in person.

Bacon is nervous, commenting: 'The play has been given in the streets within the last two months – I have not the date in mind – and some ill rumours of it having reached her Highness she hath now sent for the players that she may judge for herself what mischief may lie in it. And having heard the play, or most of it, she is now bent on finding the author of it. I said: Shakspere, but she answered: Pens do not rise from their inkstands and write tragedies; a human hand holds the pen, and I must see that hand. Jonson, she thinks the hand is the hand of Essex.'[141] Bacon is a close associate of Essex, and wants to protect himself and his friend, and he comes up with the idea of attributing the play to an ordinary player who will not be seen as a threat by the Queen. This must be, says Bacon: 'A simpler liver, who would as lief range with simple livers in content than – How do the words go? Something about a golden sorrow.'[142]

Shakespeare is an anonymous, inoffensive person. His first lines are: 'Well, I am one of several', (meaning one of several sharers in the company) and Moore shows him to be a literal-minded, slightly timid character. Until this point his main claim to fame has been that he is an entertaining drinking companion. Far from being a poet or visionary, Shakespeare is a man who advises Bacon to: 'Put money in houses…They are safer far than crops; crops rot in the fields and cattle die, but your houses stand firm. And if the theatre be not closed and it yields me what I look for, I will purchase some more houses and end my days peacably, using belike the good

[141] Moore, *The Making of an Immortal: A Play in One Act* p.33

[142] Ibid. 141 139, p.37

sense for which I am reputed over a tankard in the ale-house down in Stratford.'[143] And finally, in case we are in any doubt, Shakespeare the player makes it clear that he is not Shakespeare the poet, saying: 'A poet, not, though twice called one by Master Jonson. I only the speak the words of poets, 'bombasting out a blank verse', as that losel Greene once wrote of me.'[144]

The true creator of 'the immortal' William Shakespeare is Queen Elizabeth, who seizes on the idea of an ordinary villager who achieves greatness after receiving a royal blessing. She says: 'The village begets the poet and the world proclaims him. We have given ear to thy muse, Shakespeare, ere now, and have found her delightful and harmless in the telling of our story from the reign of King John onwards. And the telling of the dramatic feuds between Lancaster and York have pleased us, and the happy imaginations of fairyland – Titania, Puck, Ariel – have charmed us and helped us forget the heavy cares of our life.'[145]

[143] Moore, *The Making of an Immortal: A Play in One Act*, pp. 42 -43

[144] Ibid. 143, p. 46

[145] Ibid. 143, p. 56

iv. William T. Saward, *William Shakespeare, A Play in Four Acts*[146]

This play dramatizes the relationship between William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, and is a romanticized account of the early stages of his career. Again we have the deer-stealing episode, and again the need for Shakespeare to leave Stratford for London to further his career. But in this version Shakespeare is a loyal husband who leaves his wife and children with great reluctance. His initial departure is in fact forced on him by the fact that he is being set up for the offence of deer-stealing by Sir Thomas Lucy and Nathan Green, a fictional cousin of Anne Hathaway who is also a player, and who is jealous of her relationship with Shakespeare – so much so that he tries to steal her away from Shakespeare even after they are married.

This is a hagiographical account, which is so idealised that neither William Shakespeare nor Anne Hathaway have any credibility as rounded characters. Shakespeare is, we learn in the first scene, no 'scholar', but has 'a sharp eye for a crank,/A devil for sport or mischief…'[147] The customary desire to show he is a good hearty fellow, not an effete poet, is taken further than usual in this version. He is outspoken and fearless, challenging 'a great preaching man' about his sermon, and he has superlative artistic talent. Three locals talking outside a tavern agree that: '…when he set his course/And went to it, he'd carry everything.'[148] As in other versions, he is also a schoolmaster, and is uneasy in the role.

Anne Hathaway is portrayed as his loving supporter, believing in his immense talent and future fame even before he has done anything to inspire such high hopes.

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[146] William Saward, *William Shakespeare, A Play in Four Acts* (London, Elkin Mathews, 1907) Modern edition: Saward, William, *William Shakespere: A Play in Four Acts* (Nabu Public Domain Imprints, www.ICTtesting.com , 2010)

[147] Saward, *William Shakespeare, A Play in Four Acts* p.14

[148] Ibid. 147, p.14

In Scene II she says: 'Does thou not think the glorious day will come/When all the world will listen to thy voice?'[149] Far from being an impediment to him, she supports the idea of his going to London, though she is taken aback by the suddenness of his actual departure. Shakespeare's reluctance to leave goes against the received idea that he was bored and frustrated by provincial family life: only desperation drives him to go. Act III takes place three years later, and Nat Greene is still trying to steal Anne from William. He pretends that he has seen William consorting with prostitutes in London, and does not pass a love letter from William to Anne. Tragedy is averted by the intervention of Dominie, a kindly schoolmaster, and Anne and William are reunited.

Queen Elizabeth offers a knighthood to William, but he refuses, wanting to remain a common man like the other players. Again, a key motif in the Shakespearean myth-making tradition: he is exceptional, and his qualities are recognised; yet he is modest and insists on taking his place amongst his peers. More unusually, in this version he also insists on taking his place alongside his wife. At the end of the play, he is allowed to return home, after asking to be allowed to 'go in peace'.[150] One of the most significant speeches comes at the end of Act IV. Queen Elizabeth declares:

> When men look for landmarks, on the way –
> By which our England rose and keep its sway –
> Forged its proud progress and dominion free
> Unto the utmost of the farthest sea! –
> A line of monarchs, whose majestic tread

[149] Saward, *William Shakespeare, A Play in Four Acts*,, p. 31

[150] Ibid. 149, p.120

Still echoes through the land they habited!

A race of heroes on the sea and land!

Whose voices were still, but for thy magic hand!

There shall a grey form, in the distance, loom,

One foot in Heaven, and one upon the tomb!

Who touched the gamut of all Nature's store,

Laid bare the human heart for evermore!

The Bard of Avon and of all mankind!

Our Shakespeare of the Universal mind![151]

Saward's determination to make William Shakespeare the poster boy for the Empire may seem little short of bizarre. (Surely Drake or Raleigh would have been better suited to the role?) However, as poet of England, inevitably Shakespeare must be poet of Empire. This is not an aberration, but part of a pattern which has repeated itself in the four hundred year period during which Shakespeare has been fictionalized. His familiar story was retold to create a totemic character whose pre-eminence as a poet legitimized Britannia's pre-eminence as a colonial power. In this play his god-like status dignifies the common man, and the implication is that this gives the English the right to rule.

[151] Saward, *William Shakespeare, A Play in Four Acts*, p. 118

v. George Bernard Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, published as part of: *Misalliance, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and Fanny's First Play* [152] [153]

In Shaw's play, Shakespeare encounters an articulate Beefeater who is guarding the palace, then meets and flirts with Queen Elizabeth. The Dark Lady - Mary Fitton – then appears. She is in thrall to Shakespeare and baffled and frustrated by his strange sonnets. Mary protests to the Queen: 'Oh, madam, if you would know what misery is, listen to this man that is more than man and less at the same time. He will tie you down to anatomize your very soul: he will wring tears of blood from your humiliation; and then he will heal the wound with flatteries that no woman can resist.'[154] Shakespeare's soul mate is the Queen herself: the Dark Lady is dismissed and Shakespeare and the queen part with the subdued tenderness of secret lovers.

This one act drama was written partly as a riposte to Frank Harris's play *Shakespeare and His Love: A Play in Four Acts and an Epilogue*,[155] which tells the story of the love affair between Shakespeare and the Dark Lady, in this case Mary Fitton, one of Queen Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting. Shaw had a number of objections to this play, but chief among them was that Harris treated Shakespeare too reverently. In the introduction to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* Shaw accuses Harris of creating 'his ideal Shakespear'. [156] This idealised Bard 'is rather like a sailor in a melodrama,

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[152] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, Second ed, s.v.,'George Bernard Shaw, (1856 - 1950)'

[153] George Bernard Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, published as part of: *Misalliance, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and Fanny's First Play.* (London: Constable and Company, 1914) Modern edition: G. B. Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, Read How You Want Classics Library, www.readhowyouwant.com, 2008)

[154] Ibid. 153, p. 17

[155] Frank Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love: A Play in four Acts and an Epilogue* (London: Frank Palmer, 1910 Modern edition: Harris, Frank, *Shakespeare and His Love: A Play in four Acts and an Epilogue* (Kessinger Legacy Imprints, www.ICGtesting.com, 2011)

and a sailor in a melodrama must adore his mother. I do not at all belittle such sailors. They are the emblem of human generosity; but Shakespear (sic) was not an emblem: he was a man and the author of Hamlet, who had no illusions about his mother. In weak moments, one almost wishes he had.'[157]

Shaw believed that Shakespeare produced extraordinary art, but his sources would have been ordinary. Likewise, his character would have been flawed and contradictory: he was a human being. Equally, Shaw objected to the notion that Shakespeare was in some sense defeated by the Dark Lady and his thwarted passion. Harris conceives the Bard as being: '…a broken hearted, melancholy, enormously sentimental person, whereas I am convinced that he was very like myself: in fact, if I had been born in 1556 instead of 1856, I should have taken to blank verse and given Shakespeare a harder run for his money than all the other Shakespeareans put together.'

Shaw positions 'his' Shakespeare as a true artist. There is no question that he is the author of the works of Shakespeare. His lack of education did not signify his lowly status but merely the fact that his father had fallen on hard times; he sees himself as a gentleman of good family. Constantly on the look-out for new ideas and useful fragments of language, he picks up his ideas and memorable lines from the conversations that he hears around him. Uncontroversial as this idea might seem, the suggestion that Shakespeare jotted down ideas and lines based on random observations caused great offence to members of Shaw's audience. The play was written to raise money for the first national Shakespeare theatre, but Shaw was offended by what he saw as the wilful stupidity of his audience. In his introduction he writes: 'I had unfortunately represented Shakspear as treasuring and using (as I do

[156] Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, p.xii

[157] Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, p.xii

myself) the jewels of unconsciously musical speech which common people utter and throw away every day; and this was taken as a disparagement of Shakspear's 'originality'. Why was I born with such contemporaries? Why is Shakspear made ridiculous by such a posterity?'[158] The phrase 'as I do myself' is – of course - significant.

vi. Clemence Dane, *Will Shakespeare, An Invention in Four Acts*[159] [160]

Clemence Dane's play, written a decade later, is a much more solid and serious affair. Her version of Shakespeare is an idealist, committed to his work from the beginning. The four act play tells the story of his love affair with the Dark Lady (Mary Fitton once again) and his poignant relationship with Anne Hathaway. Anne understands Shakespeare and appreciates his genius. She doesn't want to stop him from going to London; she wants him to take her with him. Her unrequited love for Will is mirrored by his unrequited love for Mary Fitton, who is in love with Kit Marlowe. This ends in tragedy: Shakespeare and Marlowe fight over Mary and Marlowe is accidentally stabbed in the eye. (He falls on his own dagger: I did not come across an invented Shakespeare who was a murderer.)

The Mary Fitton character is a classic *femme fatale*. Utterly fickle and even promiscuous, she appears dressed as a man in two of the scenes, and takes to the stage as Juliet in this disguise. (Prefiguring the plot of *Shakespeare in Love* by some eighty years.) The moral ambiguity of the play reflects the period – post World War I, pre-

[158] Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* p. xl

[159] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Leonard R. N. Ashley ' Clemence Dane, pseudonym of Winifred Ashton (c 1891 - 1965)' www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30475 Accessed 31 Aug 2012]

[160] Clemence Dane, *Will Shakespeare, A Play in Four Acts* (London: William Heinmann, 1921)

Depression, in an altered world in which women had the vote and old certainties were finished. Love is portrayed as being a passing madness, no more than sentimentalized lust, and the characters are flawed and deceitful. But this is not a Shakespeare who would have satisfied Shaw – he is another heartbroken, lovelorn victim who becomes more than human after losing his mistress, his son and his best friend. In Act IV Queen Elizabeth hands the bruised and penitent Shakespeare the mantle of being England's Poet. This is another 'Bard of Empire' moment which may have stirred contemporary audiences but which is jarring now: 'I crown my heir. I, England, crown my son.'[161] Elizabeth tells him that she has renounced passion for duty, and that he must do the same. She identifies with him, and suggests that his vocation is parallel to her own. Then she declaims:

> I send my ships where ships have never sailed,
> To break the barriers and make wide the ways
> For the after world
> Send your ships to the hidden lands of the soul
> To break the barriers and make plain the ways
> Between man and man. Why else were we two born? [162]

This is another Shakespeare whose genius sets him apart, who must suffer for his art and whose all-seeing, all-knowing potency is Messianic. At the close of the play, the Queen sends him off to do his duty with these words:

[161] Dane , *Will Shakespeare, An Invention in Four Acts*, p.120

[162] Ibid. 161, p.121

You shall put grief in irons and lock it up,

And at the door set laughter for a guard,

Yet dance through life on knives and never rest,

While England knows you for a lucky man.

These are your days. I tell you, I, a queen,

Ruling myself and half a world. I know

What fate is laid upon you. Carry it![163]

Maurice O'Sullivan suggests that the most successful depictions of Shakespeare are the least reverential, and this account certainly bears this out.[164] The idea that the plays of Shakespeare represent Englishness is a crushingly dull one, in my view, and paradoxically lacking in ambition. The plays which make him a de facto Poet Laureate sap the energy from his character and from the narrative.

vii. H.F. Rubinstein and Clifford Bax *Shakespeare, A Play in Five Episodes*[165]

Written in the same year as Clemence Dane's drama, this play presents a far more critical portrayal of Shakespeare. While Dane might be said to be clinging on to the idea of Shakespeare as demi-god, Rubinstein and Bax were determined to present him as a flawed human being. Dane is looking back to the pre-war England, represented by a Messianic Bard, while Rubinstein and Bax present a Shakespeare whose despair

[163] Dane , *Will Shakespeare, An Invention in Four Acts*, p. 123

[164] O'Sullivan, *Shakespeare's Other Lives*, p.18

[165] H.F. Rubinstein and Clifford Bax, *Shakespeare, A Play in Five Episodes* (London: Benn Brothers,1921) Modern edition: Rubinstein, H.F. and Bax, Clifford, *Shakespeare, A Play in Five Episodes* (BiblioLife, www.bibliolife.com/opensource, 2011)

foreshadows the agonised mental state of the central figure in Bond's nihilistic *Bingo*[166] some fifty years later.

Rubinstein and Bax divide their play into five 'episodes' set in 1592, 1596, 1602, 1608 and 1616. Shakespeare ages accordingly: a sprightly twenty-eight year-old in the first episode and a 'broken' fifty-one year-old in the final episode. The main life events which affect him – and bring about his despairing mood – are the death of his son Hamnett in Episode II[167] and the souring of his affair with the heartless Dark Lady, Rosaline. It's a cool, dispassionate evocation of his life, with little sense of emotional engagement, although in some scenes Shakespeare himself is apparently distraught. Even in the first scene, which shows Shakespeare's confidence brimming over, there is a coldness about him. He laughs at Ned Alleyn, a stuffy, stolidly ambitious character, but also at Joan, the daughter of Philip Henslowe, the theatre manager and paymaster. His pretended romantic interest in her is a harsh contrast with with earlier depictions which presented his romantic, sensitive nature. In this case, we are presented with an egotistical Shakespeare. He tells Alleyne: 'The future is mine, Mr Alleyne! For me renown is a ripe fruit on a high wall, and for the plucking of it I lack nothing but a three-foot ladder.'[168]

Shakespeare is punished for his hubris: Joan curses him for his heartlessness when she finds that he is already married, saying: 'I pray heaven that you shall meet your match, and meet her soon.'[169] Almost immediately, Shakespeare sees the Dark Lady for the first time, and is struck by her. No good comes of this relationship – she deceives him with 'Proteus' or 'Mr WH' (clearly the Earl of Southampton) and their

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[166] Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of money and death*

[167] Rubinstein and Bax, *Shakespeare, A Play in Five Episodes*, p.46

[168] Ibid. 167, p. 22

[169] Ibid 167, p.18

affair is arid and directionless. His greatest love is for his son Hamnett, but he evades his parental responsibilty, telling himself that he will go to Stratford and bring Hamnett to live with him in London once he is successful. That day never comes – instead, a letter arrives from Stratford informing him that Hamnett has died. From this point, Shakespeare's confidence and ebullience and passion are replaced by self-loathing and bitterness. Episode IV is the nadir for Shakespeare, who buys poison from an apothecary and is only prevented from killing himself because Ben Jonson has brought his daughter Judith from Stratford. The final episode sees Shakespeare back with his family, but there is no loving rapprochement with Anne in this case – and the only pleasure Shakespeare takes in life is through his daughter – and his garden. Perhaps there are shades of Voltaire's *Candide* here, and its final advice: 'Il faut cultiver le jardin.'[170] Certainly, it seems that Shakespeare must accept his humanity and that he is part of the natural order of things, facing bereavement, disappointment and death just like anyone else.

This is a very different from earlier inventions, as we have seen, in which he is presented as superhuman, godlike and exceptional in his understanding, virtue and compassion. At the end, when questioned by a Young Poet about his attitude to his work, Shakespeare refuses to have his work bound and published, as Jonson has. Of his plays, he says: 'If they are of value to men, they will not perish.'[171] And when the poet asks if he takes pride in them, he replies: 'None – I thank God, none! I have learned my lesson.'[172] This bleak view is both persuasive and engaging: the 'great artist' is obliged to acknowledge his moral shortcomings.

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[170] Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism* (Paris: Cramer, Marc-Michel Rey, Jean Nourse, Lambert, and others, 1759) Modern edition: Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006) p. 94

[171] Rubinstein and Bax, *Shakespeare, A Play in Five Episodes*, p. 106

[172] Ibid. 171, p. 106

viii. Rudyard Kipling, *Proofs of Holy Writ* [173] [174]

Proofs of Holy Writ is a one-scene sketch which shows Shakespeare during his retirement, drinking in his garden at New Place with Ben Jonson. Kipling is remembered now as an apologist for the British Empire, but he turned down the Poet Laureateship in 1896, and his body of work has impressed critics as diverse as T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and Billy Bragg, who has recently suggested that Kipling's work should be part of a reappraisal of 'Englishness'. [175] The title is a quotation from Othello (III. iii.328) when, referring to Desdemona's handkerchief, Iago says: 'Trifles light as air/Are to the jealous confirmation strong/As proofs of holy writ.'

The play does not refer to 'trifles' but puns on the word 'proofs': the proofs of holy writ in question being the drafts of the pages of the new Bible, authorized by James I. The story centres on a conversation between the ageing Shakespeare and his younger friend Ben Jonson. The two writers exchange opinions and criticize each other's work, and then work on the new translation of Isaiah that has been sent to them by the committee which is putting the new Bible together. It transpires that Shakespeare's natural ear for the rhythms of English is more useful than Jonson's superior knowledge of Latin. The story does not sketch out Shakespeare's character in any detail, beyond making him both scholarly and competitive. The conversation is also based on an account given by Ben Jonson in his 'Conversations with William

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[173] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* s.v. '(Joseph) Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936)'

[174] Kipling, Rudyard, *Proofs of Holy Writ* (London: Strand Magazine,1932) Reproduced on *The New Reader's Guide to the Works of Rudyard Kipling,* www.kipling.org.uk/proofs.htm (Accessed 31 August 2011)

[175] Bragg, Billy, *The Progressive Patriot* (London: Bantam, 2006) pp. 21 - 37

Drummond of Hawthornden'. [176] Kipling uses the process that Shakespeare engages in, when revising and editing the draft, to dramatize his own working methods and feelings about the English language. Taking up the draft sent by Miles Smith, Shakespeare says:

> How shall this open? "Arise?" No! "Rise!" Yes. And we'll have no weak coupling. 'Tis a call to a City! "Rise - shine" . . . Nor yet any schoolmaster's "because" - because Isaiah is not Holofernes. *"Rise-shine; for thy light is come, and -!*" ' He refreshed himself from the apple and the proofs as he strode. "'And - and the glory of God!" - No "God's" over short. We need the long roll here.
>
> *"And the glory of the Lord is risen on thee."* (Isaiah speaks the part. We'll have it from his own lips.) What's next in Smith's stuff? . . . "See how?" Oh, vile - vile! ... And Geneva hath "Lo"? (Still, Ben! Still!) "Lo" is better by all odds: but to match the long roll of "the Lord" we'll have it "Behold." How goes it now? *For, behold, darkness clokes the earth and* - and -"What's the colour and use of this cursed *caligo*, Ben? - *"Et caligo populos."* [177]

This fits into the tradition of writers claiming Shakespeare as the definitive Englishman. But it is a miniature, and the story is primarily of interest to readers concerned with the mechanics of poetic composition. As to how this Shakespeare relates to the other inventions of the early twentieth century, once again he is made in

[176] Ben Jonson, *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* (London,1619) (Modern edition: Jonson, Ben, *Notes of Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden January 1619* (Kessinger Publishing Co, http://www.kessinger.net/)

[177] Rudyard Kipling, *Proofs of Holy Writ*, *The New Reader's Guide to the Works of Rudyard Kipling,* http://www.kipling.org.uk/proofs.htm

his creator's image – a writer, donnish and ageing, just like Kipling, who wrote this in his late sixties, four years before his death – and thus he is a mouthpiece for Kipling's own thoughts and beliefs. There is no overt reference to Empire in the piece, but the potency and primacy of the English language is central to the story.

Chapter Three

Invented Shakespeare in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century

Introduction

Each of the versions I looked at which were written during this period exemplifies a new approach to historical writing. These versions are as partisan as the earlier works, but with a different focus. There is less interest in Shakespeare's interaction with the nobility, and a stronger interest in his struggles with his sexual nature, his imagination and even his sanity.

i. Anthony Burgess, *Nothing like the sun: A story of Shakespeare's Love Life* [178] [179]

Though this novel is subtitled: *A story of Shakespeare's Love Life*, it is his sex life which is really under scrutiny. The story charts the development and ultimate decline of his sexual passion and the suffering caused by his sexual infatuation. Three lovers dominate his life: Anne Hathaway; the Earl of Southampton and the Dark Lady, who in this instance is Lucy Negro, a prostitute from the West Indies. The lover with whom he has the closest connection is Southampton. But he does have a brief and tender reconcilation with Lucy towards the end of the novel, marred by the fact that they discover that Southampton has infected both of them with gonorrhea.[180]

[178] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia* (Second ed.) s.v. Burgess, Antony, Pseudonym of John Anthony Burgess Wilson (1917 - 93)'

[179] Anthony Burgess, *Nothing like the sun: A story of Shakespeare's Love Life* (London: Heinemann,1964)

[180] Ibid. 179, pp. 216 - 234

Throughout the book there is a dual focus: on Shakespeare's obsessive interest in sex, and the way that his raw experience is mediated through language. Burgess writes with great energy and versatility, and his evocation of every day early modern speech is persuasive, though sometimes obscure. Here is an example:

> Drink, then. Down it among the titbrained molligolliards of country copulatives, of a beastly sort, all, their browned pickers a-clutch of their siplliwilly potkins, filthy from handing of spade and harrow, cheesy from udder new-milked, slash mouths agape at some merry tale from that rogue with rat-skins about his middle, coneyskin cap on's sconce. Robustious rothers in rural rivo rhapsodic. Swill thou then among them, O London Will-to-be, gentleman-in-waiting, scrike thine ake's laughter with Hodge and Tom and Dick and Black Jack the outlander from Long Compton.[181]

Burgess writes impressionistically, creating the effect of being at least partially witness to Shakespeare's developing artistic process, and his intense relationship with language. He has 'storing up spaniel's eyes'.[182] He is seeing everything, and transforming it into his own language. His first 'experience' of sex is seeing his parents 'in flagrante delicto'. This sets the scene for his future ambivalence about the sexual act: 'Spring and battering and belabouring his ears, the moans of

[181] Burgess, *Nothing like the sun: A story of Shakespeare's Love Life*, p.26

[182] Ibid. 181, p.3

another sort of dying, another sort of beast – all white, all clawing fingers, froglegs swimming on the bed, sepulchrally white.'[183]

At this stage in his life, William has sex with any local girl who will let him.[184] This leads to his marriage to the lusty and depraved Anne Hathaway.[185] He eventually leaves for London after several years of unhappy marriage. In London, his relationship with Southampton is fraught and unequal, but intellectually and physically more satisfying than his claustrophobic relationship with Anne.[186] But it is another complex union, marred by guilt and fear. The relationship with Lucy Negro is written in the first person, in a diary format, and her influence on him is beneficial to his art if not his peace of mind. Their affair and her betrayal with Southampton is the inspiration for a burst of creativity and he writes his tortured sonnets.[187]

Nothing Like the Sun was published four years after the Lady Chatterley trial, in which Penguin books was cleared of wrongdoing under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. The defence was based on the fact that D.H. Lawrence's novel had literary merit, and therefore its content could not be suppressed.[188] Writers whose work included sexual or violent material had much more freedom following this judgment. Burgess was writing in this more liberal climate, and was able to scrutinize the sexual act in explicit detail. However, what I found most engaging about Burgess's portrayal was his dramatization of the artistic process. He is as unsparing about this as he is about Shakespeare's unhappy sex life: 'WS sighed to think he

[183] Burgess, *Nothing like the sun: A story of Shakespeare's Love Life*. 181, p.3

[184] Ibid. 183, pp. 110- 118, 179 - 182

[185] Ibid. 183, pp. 28 - 38

[186] Ibid. 183, pp.100 – 118; 124-127; 135-137; 194 - 203

[187] Ibid. 183, pp. 154 – 157, p. 179

[188] Geoffrey Robertson, 'The Trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover' (London, *The Guardian*, 22/10/2010) www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/oct/22/dh-lawrence-lady-chatterley-trial (Accessed 13 September 2011)

would always be, in some manner, unable to provide the right biting word, the shaming image, and the little evils of his own time.'[189]And yet, almost immediately after having this thought, he discusses a play by George Chapman with his fellow player Richard Burbage and comes out with something close to a mission statement about his own work:

> 'But,' said WS afterwards as they sat over cheese and ale in the Dog, 'they are not true people. They are not built out of warring elements; they are a sort of potion. Do you follow me? Human souls are not smooth mixtures like that, fixed forever in choler or melancholy or amorousness. These creatures of Chapman's are flat, like very crude drawings. They cannot surprise themselves or others by becoming other than what they are. Do you follow me?[190]

Later, having found Anne in bed with his brother, he completes this statement: 'There's a devil in all of us,' said WS. 'We are full of self-contradiction. It is best to purge this devil on the stage.'[191] The final lines of the novel are almost unbearably painful to read, but they have a ring of true emotion about them. Burgess manages to create a world of intensity and immediacy, which is compelling and convincing, full of tactile detail and quotidian horror. Shakespeare's shortcomings and obsessions are vividly dramatized, and Burgess makes a compelling case for these being the wellspring of his art, rather than some higher calling or Christ-like omniscience.

[189] Burgess, *Nothing like the sun: A story of Shakespeare's Love Life* p.183

[190] Ibid. 189 p.184

[191] Ibid. 189, p. 196

ii. Edward Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death*[192] [193]

Edward Bond's bleak play is an account of the last months of Shakespeare's life. His contention is that Shakespeare ends his life filled with bitter melancholy and doubt about the value and relevance of his work. He finally commits suicide, and continually repeats the phrase: 'Was anything done?' Bond creates a tortured Shakespeare rather than a benign incarnation of Merrie England. Shakespeare is suffering from pangs of conscience partly because he has signed a contract which protects his landholdings, putting self-interest above the rights of local peasant farmers. Although the events in *Bingo* are fictional, this contract has a factual basis: in a footnote to his introduction, Bond points out that he has based the historical circumstances of his play on research cited in E.K. Chambers' two volumes: *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*.[194]

However, Bond is also candid about the fact that he didn't stick to the known biographical facts. This is a play written with polemical intent: Bond is taking the idea of Shakespeare as the quintessential Englishman, displaying values of decency and good sense, and subverting it. This is not only a political decision, but an artistic one, and to gain the dramatic and catastrophic effects he is seeking, he needs to tamper with historical truth. Shakespeare's despair is caused by emotional exhaustion; by a sense of his own moral weakness; by the hanging of a young woman he fails to assist and by news brought to him by Ben Jonson that the Globe theatre has just burned down. In the introduction to the play, Bond explains:

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[192] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, Second edition, 'Bond, Edward (1934 -)'

[193] Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death*

[194] Chambers, Edmund Kerchever, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (London: Clarenden Press, 1930)

> I've also altered some dates. For example, Shakespeare's theatre was burned down in 1613, not 1616. I made (all) these changes for dramatic convenience. To recreate in an audience the impact scattered events had on someone's life you often have to concentrate them. I mention all this because I want to protect the play from petty criticism. It is based on the material truths so far as they're known, and the psychological truth so far as I know it.[195]

Shakespeare's refusal to side with the peasants against the landowner is central to his corruption and his despair, in Bond's view. He argues, again in the Introduction: 'Lear divided up his land at the beginning of the play, when he was arbitary and unjust – not when he was shouting out his truths on the open common.'[196] The term 'open common' is significant: critics usually talk about 'the heath'. Bond's terminology makes Lear's self-discovery more overtly political, implying that he only finds his true identity on land that is commonly owned. Shakespeare also wanders around on a snowy landscape in this play, accompanied by his surrogate Fool, the brain-damaged Old Man, who is soon to be killed by his own son.[197]

It is also significant that the sub-title of this play is *Scenes of money and death*. Money is the death of Shakespeare, in the terms of the play. His suicide is not a sudden event: it is the inevitable outcome of his despair and the fact that his service to money and mammon has sucked the life-force out of him. 'To get money, you must behave like money,' Bond suggests. 'I don't mean by that money creates certain

[195] Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death,* p.4

[196] Ibid, 195, p.6

[197] Ibid, 195, p 43 - 58

attitudes or traits in people, it *forces* certain behaviour out of them'.[198] Though this version of Shakespeare is certainly a radical depature from previous inventions, Bond's view is consistent with that of more traditional writers in that he sees Shakespeare as a universal, representative figure. He comments:

> I wrote *Bingo* because I think the contradictions in Shakespeare's life are similar to the contradictions in us… We believe in certain values but our society only works by destroying them, so that our daily lives are a denial of our hopes. That makes our world absurd and often it makes our own species hateful to us.[199]

Shakespeare ends up hating his wife and daughter, and commits suicide while they weep outside his bedroom door.[200] His corruption is representative of the corruption of society as a whole. Bond's conclusion may be influenced by his Marxist ideology, but like other artists he has used Shakespeare as a universal emblem, a symbol of both the poet/artist and Everyman, trapped and thwarted by social hierarchies and the culture of materialism. This is a relentlessly unromantic picture of Shakespeare, which highlights his place in the social system, and the function of his work in mercantile terms. Worldly success has sapped his energies completely, and instead of revelling in 'ease, comfort and the society of his friends' he feels trapped and enfeebled. As a writer, I found this interpretation useful in that it is both partisan – defamiliarising the Shakespeare myth – and engages imaginatively with historical fact. Bond explains: '…I'm not interested in Shakespeare's true biography in the way

[198] Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death,* p.7

[199] Ibid. 198, p. 10

[200] Ibid. 198, p. 60

a historian might be. Part of the play is about the relationship between any writer and his society.' [201]

iii. John Mortimer, *Will Shakespeare* [202] [203]

Burgess sees 'Mr WS' as a depraved sensualist and Bond as a despairing existential anti-hero. John Mortimer claims him for the 'liberated' seventies when sexual freedom was conflated with sexual equality. Mortimer's priapic Shakepeare is an artist who is clubbable and sexually voracious: a 'man's man' in a rutting, bawdy London. (What struck me most about Mortimer's well-researched and lively portrayal was its lack of humanity and emotion. This is a cold and selfish Shakespeare, childish and narrowly ambitious. I am not sure that this was Mortimer's intention, but ironically, this may be one of the most convincing portrayals of a jobbing genius in the pantheon of fake Shakespeares.)

Mortimer's narrator is an old sexton, John Rice, who was once a boy player in Shakespeare's company. He tells the story of Shakespeare's life from the time he joins the players. At first he works in the stables, then he lands the part of a crowing cock in *Dr Faustus*. Later he becomes an actor and ultimately the writer for Burbage's company. The story gives an account of his relations with Anne Hathaway, the Dark Lady and the Earl of Southampton. Mortimer's main departure from the received myth is that Shakespeare treats Hamnett very poorly. His neglectful treatment may even contribute to Hamnett's death.

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[201] Bond, *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death,* p. 4

[202] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, Second edition, s.v. ' John (Clifford) Mortimer, (1923 – 2009)'

[203] John Mortimer, *Will Shakespeare* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1977)

Though Shakespeare mellows after the death of his son, it does not affect his complacent sexism. This is emphatically a man's world, and a world in which to be male is 'normal', while femininity is threatening or aberrant.Women are treated accordingly: when Kate the pot girl, Shakespeare's casual lover, dies of the plague,[204] his strongest emotion is humiliation. This is because the disguised Earl of Southampton dares him to kiss the dying girl's lips, but Shakespeare is too concerned about his plays to risk infection. When John Rice's mother falls victim to the pestilence, the players dump her corpse in the Thames to avoid informing the authorities and keep the playhouse open. [205] And yet when one of the players dies later on, this option is unthinkable – a man could not disappear in this way.[206] The treatment of homosexuality is ambivalent, despite Mortimer's liberal stance on the issue. Bisexuality is established as part of the bawdy mix – Rice says that he himself has had male and female lovers of all ages during his life. This is the context in which Shakespeare's affair with Southampton should be seen, suggests Rice. He concedes that Shakespeare is referring to Southampton in the sonnets to the Fair Youth, but says:

> On the other side, I must agree that Shakespeare, unlike his teacher Marlowe, would rather lie with a girl or woman if one could be had, and although he may have been bewitched by some boys, he never, by a nod, a wink, or a hand to the waist, far less to the buttock, made me a suggestion when I was young and parted as all his Fairest Ladies. This I find most strange.[207]

[204] Mortimer, *Will Shakespeare,* p.68

[205] Ibid. 204, pp. 90,91

[206] Ibid. 204, p. 96

[207] Ibid. 204, p.113

Even so, he concedes that Southampton and Shakespeare were lovers: 'If they did not the act of darkness, which is the act of loving, they could not have loved each other more; and if they did it they could not thereby have loved each other less. I hold to the opinion, all things being considered, that they did. Let us say no more upon the subject but proceed with our history.'[208]

Mortimer acted as defence counsel at the Oz conspiracy trial in 1971; defended *Gay News* editor Denis Lemon for publishing James Kirkup's poem *The Love that Dare Not Speak its Name* against charges of blasphemous libel and defended Virgin records right to use the word 'bollocks' on the sleeve of the Sex Pistols album *Never Mind the Bollocks* in 1977, the year that this novel was published. His liberal views on homosexuality were clear, but these were the days before 'homophobia' had been identified as an aspect of mainstream social attitudes, and it is my view that he was uncomfortable about the idea that the Bard was 'gay'.

I found Mortimer's version the least likeable, perhaps because I have had direct experience of the 1970s and the supposedly liberal attitudes that left sexism intact. However, like the Bond version, I found that his interpretation opened up new possibilities for me, and gave me a greater sense of freedom in terms of developing my own version of Shakespeare's character.

[208] Mortimer, *Will Shakespeare,* p. 114

iv. Robert Nye, *Mrs Shakespeare, the complete works* [209]

Robert Nye tells the story of William Shakespeare from Anne Hathaway's point of view. Her 'complete works' are written in a notebook. She is 'blessed or cursed with a very good memory',[210] and this version of Shakespeare is comical and bathetic. Far from being the deity lauded by nineteenth century writers, he is an unimpressive figure, with rotten teeth and 'the stoop of a clerk'.[211] His grandiose moments are undermined by his grubby humanity:'And just at that moment…a seagull went and shat on my husband's head./ It trickled down his eyebrows./He smiled at me again./ This time there was a sadness in his smile, but it was out of all proportion to the seagull.'[212] He is also a snob, in Anne's eyes. His affair with Southampton is part of a pattern, his interest in 'great and lordly men' and what they might offer him.[213]

Nye uses several of the myths which have attached themselves to Shakespeare, such as the story that Southampton loaned him £1000, which was an enormous amount of money in the sixteenth century. His take on the legend is that Southampton was paying him for his sexual favours, and also bought him the 'best bed' which was missing from his bequest to his wife and which has been the cause of much speculation. Nye also makes speculative use of his research about the period. For example, Anne explains that while she is writing her story on the 'creamy' pages of a notebook,[214] Shakespeare prefers loose pages: 'He'd write fifty lines on one side, fifty lines on the other./That way he always knew how much he'd done./Each page was

[209] Robert Nye, *Mrs Shakespeare, the complete works* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1998)

[210] Ibid. 209, p.8

[211] Ibid. 209, p.81

[212] Ibid. 209, p.17

[213] Ibid. 209, p. 47

[214] Ibid. 209, p. 29

divided by folding it into four columns.On the left side Mr Shakespeare would put the name of the speaker, on the right side he'd put the exits and the entrances.'[215] Whether or not Shakespeare really did use pages in this way is not relevant to Nye's version of Shakespeare's life; what is vital is the solidity of his creation and the apparent verisimilitude of his invention.

However, in spite of her lack of reverence for the great poet, this is also a love story. The semi-estrangement between them ends when Anne visits London and she and Shakespeare have anal sex, dressing up and acting out various fantasies based on his plays – or which are the initial inspiration for his plays.[216] Nye makes Anne herself the Dark Lady, a rival for the affections of Southampton. She has '…white parchment cheeks…hair like black wire…two pitchball eyes…'[217] And in the end, William and Anne are reunited: 'I was his Alpha and his Omega, his beginning and his ending, his mother, his bride, and his layer-out./He was born in my hands./He came alive in my backside./Reader, he died in my arms.'[218]

For all its irreverence, this is an affectionate portrayal which brings Shakespeare to life in domestic close-up. The picture is not flattering, but it is intimate and dynamic. And it is a 'woman's-eye' view which is relevant to my own interpretation.

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[215] Nye, *Mrs Shakespeare, the complete works*, p. 25

[216] Ibid. 215, pp. 84 - 86

[217] Ibid. 215, p. 209

[218] Ibid. 215, p. 208

v. Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love*[219] [220]

The screenplay *Shakespeare in Love*, written by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, presents a Will Shakespeare who is passionate, impulsive, brooding and Byronic in the best leading man tradition. His virile intensity and recklessness fit the received image of the buccaneering young Shakespeare, and his wild adventuring in London make him seem both an authentic early modern poet and recognisable as a young artist of our own times. (An ambitious script writer?) The play is full of post-modern jokes: the watermen speak like London cabbies; audiences cough and wheeze through a play, and one actor is described as 'a drunkard's drunkard'.[221] Norman and Stoppard include the following stage direction in an early scene:

> INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY.
> A small cramped space in the eaves of a building. A cluttered shelf containing various objects, wedged between crumpled pieces of paper. Among these we have time to observe a skull, a mug that says A PRESENT FROM STRATFORD ON AVON.
> At infrequent intervals further pieces of crumpled paper are tossed towards the shelf. The man who is throwing them, WILL SHAKESPEARE, is bent over a table, writing studiously with a quill.[222]

[219] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, Second ed, s.v. 'Sir Tom Stoppard, originally Tom Straussler (193 -)'

[220] Marc Norman and Stoppard, Tom, *Shakespeare in Love* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999)

[221] Ibid. 220, p. 28

[222] Ibid. 220, p. 5

This cleverly subverts the idea of 'authenticity'. The 'Memento Mori' skull symbolizes the constant presence of death in the midst of life, but is juxtaposed with the anachronistic mug. Will hurls screwed up bits of paper around the room as he struggles to write. This association is with the frustrated writer, tearing pages from a manual typewriter (usually a Remington), screwing them up and throwing them to the ground. Speed and desperation characterise this screenplay. Money is tight, ideas are botched, the plague is an ever-present threat. Will chases around the hectic streets of London pursuing his latest love interest, caught up in the frenzy of the unstable theatre world. He sells his unwritten play 'Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter' to both Philip Henslow and Richard Burbage, and is suffering from writer's block as well as impotence. His secret love affair with the aristocrat Viola Lesseps changes all that – she plays first Romeo and then Juliet in the finished play and ultimately is transformed by his art into the Viola of *Twelfth Night.*

The screenplay's broad humour and romantic intensity are reflected in the character of Will. He is a familiar Shakespeare 'type' – intense, quick-witted, charming – but also a recognisable romantic hero in contemporary cinematic terms. Will's love affair and his renewed confidence in his work are entwined – he rushes from Viola's bed to write the love scenes between Romeo and Juliet.[223]Although the title specifies that Shakespeare's love life is the subject of the play, this is in fact a play about the integration of his life and his work – or in the space of this narrative, his love and his work. Shakespeare does not win either Fair Lady or Fair Youth in this story, and yet the ending is not downbeat. In the final scene, Viola Lesseps is seen striding up a blurred white beach after a shipwreck – she is physically lost to

[223] Norman and Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love*, pp. 75 - 84

Shakespeare, but he has recreated her as the Viola of *Twelfth Nigh*t. And what he is left with is his Art – the play has been commissioned by Elizabeth I. [224]

The idea that love is snatched, uncertain, transient is fundamental to the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*, the source play for this screenplay. And it is true of *Shakespeare in Love* itself. The youthful characters hardly stop to draw breath. Will and Viola run, hide, fornicate, adopt mad disguises, lie, weep and, in the Shakespearean term: 'dissemble'. Their love affair is desperate and theatrical from the first moment they meet – it is not a relationship which is conducted in private, even though it is clandestine. And both Will and Viola will survive its loss. Ultimately, work is more important than love. Both characters are tougher and more pragmatic than the conventional heroes and heroines of modern romance.

Norman and Stoppard emphasise, as Shaw did, the chaotic and collaborative process of creation. The working title for Will's play is 'Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter' till quite late in the play, and Marlowe makes some key suggestions in a couple of throwaway comments in the tavern. His ideas are not all brilliant: the name 'Ethel' is his idea, for example. However, he also proposes that Romeo falls for 'the daughter of his enemy'[225] and then goes on to say: 'His best friend is killed in a duel by Ethel's brother or something. His name is Mercutio.'[226]

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[224] Norman, Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love*, p. 150

[225] Ibid. 224, p.30

[226] Ibid. 224, p. 30

vi. Jorge Luis Borges, *Shakespeare's Memory*; *Everything and Nothing*, extract from *Labyrinths* [227] [228] [229]

Argentinian writer, essayist and poet Jorge Luis Borges wrote these two short pieces towards the end of his life. 'Shakespeare's Memory' is the last story in the collection *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare's Memory.* Hermann Sorgel, an academic, is the author of *Shakespeare's Chronology*. This is a work of reference designed to help readers understand Shakespeare's texts, which has been translated into several languages. He mysteriously acquires the memory of Shakespeare from Daniel Thorpe, another scholar who he meets at a conference. The story gives only the most fleeting glimpses of this memory, and the way that it affects Sorgel's own life. But these fragmentary recollections are evocative, and the suggestion that Sorgel's mind has absorbed that of Shakespeare is intriguing. The story is fable-like, with little physical description. Sorgel does not name the conference at which he meets Daniel Thorpe, because: 'I know all too well that such specifics are in fact vagueness.'[230]

Thorpe is cursed or doomed by his strange gift, and eager to hand it on to Sorgel. When he receives the memory, at first Sorgel feels no real difference, just a slight sense of tiredness. But gradually, fragments of the dead poet's memory seep into his waking mind, and his dreams. These fragments are not coherent or overtly meaningful, and their dreamlike fragility is strangely compelling and surreal. While the world inhabited by Sorgel and his associates lacks tactile solidity, these memories

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[227] *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, Second edition, s.v., 'Borges, Jorge Luis (1899 - 1986)'

[228] Borges, Jorge Luis, *Shakespeare's Memory (London: Penguin, 1998)*

[229] Borges, Jorge Luis, *Everything and Nothing* (Extract from *Labyrinths)* (London: Penguin, 1999)

[230] Ibid. 228, p.123

are flashes of sensory experience: a recited alphabet, a whistled tune, 'unknown rooms and faces', a memory of Jonson asking him to recite Latin and Greek verse and the 'hilarity of his followers' when he gets it wrong.

There are different phases: at one point he believes he really is Shakespeare. Later he wakes with the memory of a deep-seated guilt. 'I did nothing to define it; Shakespeare himself has done so for all of time.'[231] Finally, Sorgel concludes: 'Shakespeare's memory was able to reveal to me only the circumstances of the man Shakespeare. Clearly these circumstances do not constitute the uniqueness of a poet; what matters is the literature the poet produced with that frail material.'[232] This short tale stands as a riposte to those who want to learn about the 'real Shakespeare' from his work, scanning the poetry for biographical evidence, and it reaffirms the importance of sheer invention: 'Chance, or fate, dealt Shakespeare those terrible trivial things that all men know; it was his gift to be able to transmute them into fables, into characters that were much more alive than the gray man who dreamed them, into verses which will never be abandoned, into verbal music.'[233]

And yet, this elusive, insubstantial Shakespeare represents 'Everyman' more effectively than the brighter, more charismatic physical inventions constructed by earlier writers. 'Personality' and 'character' aren't necessarily experienced from within; they are often constructed or imposed from the outside, by opinion and the interpretation (or invention?) of behaviour. As editor Andrew Hurley points out in his Afterword to the collection, this inwardly imagined Shakespeare gives Borges the chance to offer some unusual insights into what Borges calls the 'caverns' of memory.

[231] Borges, *Shakespeare's Memory* p.128

[232] Ibid. 231, p.129

[233] Ibid, 231, p.129

Hurley argues: '…it's only when all the outwardness, the accidents and circumstances of life are stripped away that one begins more fully to discover oneself.'[234]

Everything and Nothing[235] presents the last of the invented Shakespeares in this thesis. *Labyrinths*, from which it is taken, is not the last sequentially, as it was published in 1962. But I wanted to finish with this example because of its brevity and the way in which it encapsulates many of the ideas and literary tropes developed by other writers in the last four hundred years. In this novel Borges tells another fable based on the life of Shakespeare. He becomes an actor and later a writer because he knows he is empty to the point of non-existence. Behind his 'fantastic and stormy'[236] words, there is only 'a bit of coldness'.[237] His hallucinatory London life finally disgusts him so much that he returns home. When writing his will 'he deliberately excluded all traces of pathos or literature'.[238] (An aside aimed at those who find such omissions baffling or proof that he could not have been the author of his plays?) When Shakespeare dies, he tells God: 'I who have been so many men in vain want to be one and myself'. But God replies: 'Neither am I anyone; I have dreamt the world as you dreamt your work, my Shakespeare, and among the forms in my dreams are you, who like myself are many and no one.'[239]

Godlike and all-seeing; an Everyman with a Protean identity. Both ideas are dramatized in this short tale, as is the idea of the Artist as a lost soul, trying to invent himself (or herself) by conjuring stories. Borges has put his own brand of magical

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[234] Borges, *Shakespeare's Memory,* p. 136

[235] Borges, *Everything and Nothing*, *Labyrinths* (New York, New Directions, 1962)

[236] Ibid 235, p. 284

[237] Ibid 235, p. 284

[238] Ibid. 235, p. 285

[239] Ibid. 235, p. 285

realism onto the legend, but stayed faithful to the accumulated mythology. And - from the perspective of this writer - the beauty of this myth is that Shakespeare's 'identity' is still just a succession of inventions, with barely any facts to limit re-interpretation.

Invented Shakespeare: overview

In Part Three of this thesis I have considered some of the common themes addressed by my sixteen chosen writers. Each writer gives a slightly different version of Shakespeare's character, varying from a prototype for Prince Hal (*Shakespeare's Christmas*) to a semi-educated player (*The Making of an Immortal*). The most divergent portraits are those in *Nothing like the Sun* and *Bingo,* which respectively show him as sexually obsessed and suicidal. His status as an artist is similarly variable: in *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* he is a creative magpie, snatching up ideas and inspirations from the everything around him; in *Proofs of Holy Writ* he is meticulous but also intuitive, immersed in the music and magic of the English language. Of the four accounts that dramatize the Dark Lady, two depict her as Mary Fitton, (*The Dark Lady of the Sonnets; William Shakespeare, An Invention in Four Acts*) one as the fictional character 'Rosaline' (*William Shakespeare, A Play in Five Episodes*) and one as Lucy Negro (*Nothing Like the Sun*). Anne Hathaway is treated unsympathetically in most of the accounts: only Nye makes her the focal character (*Mrs Shakespeare*). In the other narratives she varies from being a depraved nymphomaniac (*Nothing Like the Sun*) to a miserable shadow (*Bingo*). Her idealized portrait in *William Shakespeare: A Play in Five Acts* is lifeless and implausible. The Earl of Southampton is most fully developed in *Nothing Like the Sun,* in which he is a congenial though unreliable lover and close to being Shakespeare's soul mate, and

Mrs Shakespeare, in which he is a dazzling and powerful rival for Shakespeare's love-lust.

Part Three

The Shakespeare of Dark Aemilia

Chapter One

Introduction

In this chapter I will consider the role of genre in writing 'Dark Aemilia' and the way that this has influenced the development of the character of William Shakespeare. As discussed, Aemilia Lanyer is the central character in 'Dark Aemilia', and the narrative focuses on her struggle for self-actualization. William Shakespeare's role in the narrative is defined by his relationship to her. A female protagonist and a male antagonist is an established convention in romantic fiction, but it is usual for such ficitions to put the romantic relationship in the foreground. In 'Dark Aemilia', however, the relationship between the two main characters is not the main focus of the narrative. The readership for romantic fiction is predominantly female[240] and the convention is that readers can identify with a heroine who falls in love but whose romance is problematic – a series of challenges and misunderstandings or mishaps prevent her from connecting with the male antagonist until the end of the story. This is a convention which I subverted.

i. Historical context for Aemilia Bassano Lanyer

As established in the introduction, Aemilia Bassano Lanyer was an illegimate woman of Venetian Jewish descent, who was the mistress of Queen Elizabeth's I's chief advisor, Lord Hunsdon, for six years, and was later married off to her cousin Alfonso

[240] Romance Writers of America (US) 'Romance Literature Statistics: Readership Statistics', Romance Writers of America, (Accessed 1st September 2012)

Lanyer, a musician at the court. Lanyer was also one of the first female poets published in England, and (allegedly) the mistress of William Shakespeare. Also allegedly, this would make her the subject of sonnets 127 – 152, which are addressed to a black haired mistress who is 'tyrannous' and unfaithful: the 'Dark Lady'. The first historian to suggest that Lanyer was the Dark Lady was A.L. Rowse.[241] Rowse gleaned his information from the journals of Simon Forman, a London physician notorious both for dabbling in the occult and his voracious sexual appetite.[242] While Rowse is cautious about the veracity of any primary source material, he is impressed by Forman as a witness, stressing that his notes about his clients needed to be reliable so that he could cast their horoscopes.[243] Forman's notes include biographical information about Lanyer and her family, and details about their meetings.

Rowse compares the information in Forman's notebooks to the later sonnets, and concluded that there was evidence that Forman's client: dark, exotic, educated, flirtatious, was the Dark Lady. In common with many Shakespeare scholars, Rowse seeks biographical information in Shakespeare's work. And like many others, he finds evidence to support his theories. The sonnets, he believes, indicate that Shakespeare was obsessed with a woman he knew to be deceitful and unreliable. In the introduction to *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady*, Rowse writes: ' We learn that she is promiscuous, and being dishonest with him; yet Shakespeare cannot help himself, he is completely subjugated. His position is a humiliating one, reduced as he is to ask for a share in her love, enjoyed by others.'[244] Other historians have agreed

[241] Alfred Leslie Rowse, (introduction) *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady, Salve Deus Rex Judaerum* (London: Jonathan Cape,1978)

[242] Ibid. 241, p. 9

[243] Ibid. 241, p.11

[244] Ibid. 241, pp. 6, 7

that Aemilia Lanyer is a plausible candidate. They include David Lasocki and Roger Prior[245], Martin Green[246] and Stephanie Hopkins Hughes.[247]

But this identification has been disputed by Susanne Woods, who challenges the assumption that Lanyer was promiscuous.[248] Commenting on Forman's notebooks, Woods concedes that Forman was interested in Lanyer, but sees no evidence that he managed to seduce her. She contends: 'There is, however, nothing in them to suggest Forman ever did manage to "halek" with Lanyer. His casebooks …are peppered with accounts of his sexual encounters, about which he is quite explicit except for the curious "halek" euphemism; nevertheless, he records about Lanyer only his own hope and disappointment.'[249] (Forman coined the term 'haleck' to refer to sexual intercourse.) And Barbara Kiefer Lewalski believes that Rowse's theory that Lanyer was Shakespeare's Dark Lady has overshadowed her own artistic achievements.[250]

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* were first published in 1609.[251] The collection included one hundred and fifty four sonnets, and *A Lover's Complaint*, a longer poem in rhyme royal. The convention is that sonnets 1 – 126 are addressed to a 'Fair Youth' and 127 – 152 to a 'Dark Lady'. The sonnets have traditionally been assumed to be based on Shakespeare's experience: Wordsworth wrote: 'Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have

[245] David Lasocki and Roger Prior, *The Bassanos:Venetian Musicians and Instrument makers in England 1531–1665* (Hampshire, England: Scolar Press,1995)

[246] Martin Green, 'Aemilia Lanier IS the Dark Lady' *English Studies* vol. 87, No.5, October, 2006

[247] Stephanie Hopkins Hughes, 'New Light on the Dark Lady' *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, 22 September, 2000

[248] Suzanne Woods, ed., *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum: Women Writers in English 1350- 1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)

[249] Ibid. 248 p. xxiv

[250] B.K. Lewalski, *Writing Women and Reading the Renaissance. Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter, 1991), pp. 792–821

[251] Shakespeare, S*hakespeare's Sonnets*

frowned,/Mindless of its just honours; with this key/Shakespeare unlocked his heart.' [252] While Keats wrote: 'One of the three Books I have with me is Shakespear's (sic) Poems: I never found so many beauties in the Sonnets--they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally--in the intensity of working out conceits.'[253] However, John Kerrigan suggests that it is equally misleading to assume that the Sonnets achieve their effects accidentally: 'The text is neither fictive nor confessional. Shakespeare stands behind the first person of his sequence as Sidney had stood behind Astrophil – sometimes near the poetic 'I', sometimes further off, but never without some degree of rhetorical projection. The Sonnets are not autobiographical in a psychological mode.'[254]

Indeed, autobiographical writing was virtually non-existent in Elizabethan England. Informal records such as Simon Forman's journal are a source of information about Forman's life and that of his clients. But the notebooks are a meticulously recorded set of case notes rather than a confessional diary. They remained unpublished in his lifetime, and extracts from the notebooks and a commentary were eventually published by A. L. Rowse in 1974.[255] What attracted Rowse's attention in particular were the personal annotations – usually about his sexual activity – which Forman made in the margins of his crowded pages.

The lack of primary source material which casts light on the inner life of Shakespeare and his contempories can be frustrating for historians. However, this lack

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[252] William, Wordsworth, *Scorn not the Sonnet, Poems in Two Volumes* (London, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807)

[253]English History.Net *John Keats,* 'Keats' Letters, 22 November 1817, 1.188 ' www.englishhistory.net/keats/letters.html (Accessed 1st September 2012)

[254] John Kerrigan, Introduction, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare and A Lover's Complaint* (London :Penguin, 1986) p.11

[255] Alfred Leslie Rowse, *Simon Forman: Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974)

of information was useful to me as a creative writer. It is not necessary for me to establish that the Dark Lady existed as a matter of historical fact. Neither does it matter that a number of possible alternatives have been suggested. George Bernard Shaw chose Mary Fitton[256]; Anthony Burgess dramatized the life of Lucy Negro[257]. My choice was Aemilia Lanyer, the future poet, and the cue for her relationship with Shakespeare was the rage and ambivalence which the sonnets express.

I have quoted the extract from Sonnet 147 at the beginning of 'Dark Aemilia' because I was struck by its violent cynicism.[258] The classification of sonnets 127 - 152 as love poetry interested me. Elizabethan sonnets did not solely express romantic sentiments; they covered a wide range of subjects including death and the passing of time. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's exploration of the obsessive and painful nature of sexual love is a new departure. As Helen Vendler argues in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*:

> As I see it, the poet's duty is to create aesthetically convincing representations of feelings felt and thoughts thought. Readers have certainly found the feelings and thoughts of Shakespeare's speaker with respect to his mistress convincingly represented. Whether or not we believe that such *should* have been the speaker's feelings and thoughts is entirely irrelevant to the aesthetic success of the poem, as irrelevant as whether the fictive speaker *should* have found himself sexually aroused by the knowledge that his mistress was promiscuous. Whether he should have experienced self-loathing

[256] Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*

[257] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*

[258] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p. 2

> once he discovered the motive for his arousal is equally irrelevant. What is important, for the advance of the representational power of lyric as it historically evolved, is that Shakespeare discovered a newly complex system of expression, unprecedented in the Renaissance lyric, through which he could, accurately and convincingly, represent and enact that arousal and that self-loathing – just as he had found strategic ways in the first subsequence to represent and enact his speaker's abject infatuation with a beautiful face.[259]

If I was writing this thesis as a student of English literature my research would need to express originality in terms of my analysis of the text, based on a close reading, or a new reading of the existing criticism. As a creative writing research student, however, the role of research as a cue to originality diverges from this model. It is essential that the researcher reads the relevant texts attentively, however the goal is the creation of a new text. In essence, a creative writing thesis needs to embody an original *imaginative* departure from the existing literature. This is the process that was set in motion when I re-read sonnets 127-152. As I have stated in Part One, Chapter one[260], my initial intention was to write an alternative, feminized version of *Macbeth*, set in the eleventh century, and told from the perspective of either the witches or Lady Macbeth. But I felt too distanced from the experience of people living at that time. Returning to the text of *Macbeth* was the first step in a new research direction, looking at the society and culture of Elizabethan and Jacobean London. The

[259] Helen H. Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1997) pp. 16,17

[260] O'Reilly, 'Inventing Shakespeare', pp. 11- 14

complexity of the early modern world appealed to my imagination, and the immediacy and conflicted passion in these poems reflect that complexity.

I wanted my narrative to co-exist with these poems in a credible way, just as the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*[261] co-exists with *Jane Eyre*,[262] and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*[263] coexists with *Hamlet.*[264] Furthermore, I was interested in the universality of the experience of desperate love, the inverse of the pure, transcendent devotion that Shakespeare is apparently expressing in the earlier sonnet sequence.[265] And finally, my intention was to look at the relationship from the perspective of the maligned Dark Lady. I was particularly interested to find that her own published poetry *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*[266] was considered to be proto-feminist in terms of subject matter and tone. In her introduction, Woods writes: '…the book is dedicated and addressed only to women, and makes no serious apology for a woman publishing her own work. This unapologetic creation of a community of good women for whom another woman is the spokesperson and commemorator is unusual and possibly unique in seventeenth century England.' [267] I saw the possibility of telling a story in which her fury at being consigned to the role of muse and nemesis was the force behind her own artistic development.

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[261] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: W.W. Deutsch, 1966)

[262] Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (London: Smith, Elder& Co, 1847)

[263] Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Grove Press, 1967)

[264] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, First Folio, Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London:, William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273

[265] Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*

[266] Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

[267] Suzanne Woods, ed. *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum. Women Writers In English 1350 – 1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. xxxi

Chapter Two

i. Genre and *Dark Aemilia*: constraints on the invention of Shakespeare

Genre is currently dictated largely by the publishing industry which since the 1980s has become a global, corporate business. But genre is not simply a marketing categorization. In *The Realist Novel,* Dennis Walder attests that the critic Northrop Frye attempted to establish a comprehensive overview of literature in terms of 'genre archetypes' in his *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957. [268] [269] Other critics have applied this same process to a single genre, as I have suggested. Walder argues: '…a general interest in genre has reasserted itself as a way of understanding the generation of meaning through the way one literary text is like or relates to others.'[270] This is a process which I have engaged with in the course of researching and writing this reflective thesis.

More recently, however, genre and marketability have become more closely linked. There is a tendency in mainstream publishing to see replication as favourable to economic success, though I have yet to see any conclusive evidence to support this. Walder suggests that genre should not be seen as 'fixed or transcendent'[271] but as something that emerges 'through the circulation of ideas and practices within a specific culture'.[272] The novel I have written for this doctorate is an exploration of form (the historical novel) and it is a piece of creative work which has sufficient depth

[268] Dennis Walder, ed. *The Realist Novel: Approaching Literature* (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 3

[269] Herman Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957)

[270] Ibid. 268, p. 217

[271] Woods, ed. *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,* p. 4

[272] Ibid. 268, p 220

and complexity to be submitted for a research degree. However, in order to ensure that it was a credible piece of work, I also wanted to give some consideration to the demands and conventions of the commercial book publishing industry.

As a postgraduate student producing a novel for a doctorate, I am seeking publication in the book publishing sector, rather than publication in an academic journal. When setting out to write a historical novel, it was therefore necessary to consider how it might relate to the existing market, and what the requirements of the various genres and sub-genres might be. Jerome de Groot gives a coherent over-view of the genre of historical fiction in *The Historical Novel*. [273] Historical fiction written by women, for women was, he suggests, one of the dominant forms of genre fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, and one which continues to offer women the opportunity to reinterpret the past. He cites the work of Diane Wallace, who has argued that women's historical fiction 'develops from the hybrid potentialities of the Gothic novel rather than the rationality of Scott'. [274] [275] De Groot writes: '…women writers have used the historical novel to express multiple, complex identities and used them as sites of possibility and potential.'[276]

There was a tension between my initial intention to situate the story in the tradition of popular, mainstream historical fiction, and my growing interest in presenting Aemilia Bassano as a feminist protagonist. As a published novelist [277] [278] one of my priorities was to write a novel in a genre new to me, and to ensure this novel was written with professionalism. I initially set myself the task of writng an

[273] Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010)

[274] Diane Wallace, *The Women's Historical Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

[275] Ibid. 273, p. 67

[276] Ibid. 273, p. 67

[277] Sam O'Reilly, *The Best Possible Taste* (London, Penguin, 2004)

[278] Sam O'Reilly, *You Spin Me Round* (London, Penguin, 2007)

intelligent novel which abided by the conventions of writers like Philippa Gregory, one of the most established writers in this field. Her best known novel *The Other Boleyn Girl*[279] was adapted for both television and film, and her work has been widely imitated.

But during the process of researching the period and potential themes, I became absorbed by the idea of Aemilia Lanyer's struggle for self-actualization, and I wanted to focus on her struggle against the limits society placed on her because of her gender. I became increasingly interested in this aspect of her biography, though it was not central to my initial creative idea. Therefore, I felt it was not appropriate to make the romance with Shakespeare central to the plot as this would undermine the emerging central theme: the challenge faced by a talented and ambitious illegitimate woman who had had the protection of a powerful courtier and then lost this status and privilege. In this narrative, her achievement was that she ultimately became a published poet – the relationship with Shakespeare would be an ironic reflection on this, but not the focus of her energies. I realised that this narrative arc would not conform to existing conventions, and that in order to achieve the effects I felt were necessary in artistic and intellectual terms, I would need to subvert or challenge these conventions. I still hoped that I might find a readership for this novel, but decided that I would approach agents and publishers with more literary interests, as well as the smaller independent presses. My inspirations are historical novels with love stories, which are integral to the narrative, but not conventional in romantic terms, such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement* [280]and Rose Tremain's *Music and Silence*[281].

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[279] Philippa Gregory, *The Other Boleyn Girl* (London: Harper Collins, 2001)

[280] Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Jonathan Cape 2001)

[281] Rose Tremain, *Music and Silence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999)

Not only does this set my story apart from mainstream romantic fiction currently on the market, it also distinguishes it from the earlier works of fiction which have dealt with Shakespeare and the Dark Lady which I studied for this thesis. Robert Nye[282] makes Anne Shakespeare the narrator of his novel, but Shakespeare is the central character. And although George Bernard Shaw[283] and Clemence Dane[284] are demonstrably interested in the character of the Dark Lady, their focus is - again - on Shakespeare and the pre-existing narratives and myths that were attached to him at the time. However, once I had come up against the restrictions of mainstream historical fiction, I decided to investigate the genre of historical fiction in more depth.

ii. Historical fiction

So what is historical fiction? And what are its particular challenges? The Historical Novel Society offers the following definition: 'To be deemed historical (in our sense), a novel must have been written at least fifty years after the events described, or have been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events (who therefore approaches them only by research)'.[285] Clearly it is important to have some boundaries for any genre. And the Society is open to writers of alternate history and time-shift novels. But I would argue that the reference to 'research' is over-simplistic. All novels draw on the knowledge of the writer, and this is a combination of what they know before they begin to write and what they discover during the writing

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[282] Nye, *Mrs Shakespeare, The Complete Works*

[283] Shaw, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*

[284] Dane, *William Shakespeare, An Invention in Four Acts*

[285] The Historical Novel Society, Richard Lee 'Defining the Genre' www.historicalnovelsociety.org (Accessed 21 September 2012)

process. These discoveries may or may not be based on formal research. To a lesser or greater extent, writers of both historical and contemporary fiction will use sensory descriptions based on their physical experience of the world. (The extent is dependent on their style, and their use of descriptive writing.) Therefore, as individuals, all writers use their experience as primary source material. Historical writers use their historical research as an imaginative cue, so they can write with assumed authority about the past. In the introduction to *The Historical Novel*, De Groot writes: 'History is other, and the present familiar. The historian's job is often to explain the transition between these states. The historical novelist similarly explores the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar.'[286]

De Groot makes the point that historical fiction should not be overloaded with a sense of its own responsibility. Facts are important, but the task is not to recreate, but to invent. Moreover, the idea of authentic unfamiliarity is relevant to my own work, and to the development of New Historical Fiction, which I will consider in more detail later in this chapter. As Umberto Eco argues in *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*: 'The fact is that everyone has his own idea, usually corrupt, of the Middle Ages. Only we monks of the period know the truth, but saying it can sometimes lead to the stake.'[287] My own research and writing in the field has confirmed my belief that historical writers do indeed depend on historical research, but that they combine this with their own experience. In that sense, all writing is autobiographical.

[286] De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p.3
[287] Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* (San Diego/New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1983) p. 77

iii. Romantic fiction

Romantic fiction puts the love relationship between two main characters at the centre of the narrative. Though it has traditionally had a lower status than other novel genres, it is also one of the oldest. One of the most important antecedents for this genre is William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.[288] Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded,* published in 1740[289], is a romance novel. And the genre includes some of the most highly regarded novels in the language, including the works of Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters. Though Richardson, Austen and the Brontes were interested in creating characters who experienced moral conflict and had a greater or lesser degree of psychological complexity, this genre has become increasingly rigid in its requirements over time.

Mainstream fiction publishers still publish a wide range of titles in this genre, but their range has narrowed. Chick-lit is an influence here. As Imelda Whelehan argues in *The Feminist Best Seller*: 'Chick-lit seems to be built on an acknowledgement of the "failure" of feminism and in each case "empowered" women must find true self-determination through the right kind of men…'[290] Now, convention dictates that the central couple should be likeable, but very slightly flawed characters whose love ultimately overcomes the obstacles that are placed in their path. Women are perceived as achieving self-actualization only through heterosexual love relationships.

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[288] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet, First Folio Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) STC 22273

[289] Samuel, Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (London: Messrs Rivington and Osborn, 1740)

[290] Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 188

iv. Romantic historical fiction

Romantic historical fiction is a sub-genre of both romance fiction and historical fiction. As with romance fiction, it is most widely read by women. Typically, this describes the love relationship between a man and a woman and is set more than fifty years before the date it was written. Similar constraints apply in terms of characterization and complexity. One key complicating factor is the difference between the gender roles of men and women at the relevant period. Evading that issue can fatally undermine the credibility of a work of historical fiction.

In *The Art and Craft of Writing Historical Fiction*, Thorn argues: 'Most early American white men thought that women should be seen but not heard. As a historical novelist you might wish to make your hero "politically correct" but if you do that, you'll be lying to your readers.'[291] Therefore, a female protagonist who displays overtly feminist characteristics would be anachronistic in any time but the modern age. However, it would also be impossible for modern readers to identify with a female protagonist who is consistently pious and submissive, although this may have been conventional behaviour until the early twentieth century. As with language, I have concluded, it is necessary to construct an artificial but convincing hybrid, creating a facsimile of a woman of the period, but retaining certain modern characteristics – such as determination or independence – to make her more appealing to modern readers.

[291] James Alexander Thorn, *The Art and Craft of Writing Historical Fiction* (New York: Writer's Digest Publishing, 2010) p.17

v. New historical fiction

It was also necessary to take literary developments and theories relating to historical fiction into account. In the early twentieth century, Russian Formalist critics like Viktor Schklovsy pioneered new ideas in literary theory. They believed it was an essential function of the artist to defamiliarise the conventions used in making previous art, so that the audience would be more conscious of the artistic processes involved, and shake off their preconceptions. This process was known as 'defamiliarization' or 'estrangement'. Shklovsky explained the concept in the essay *Art as Technique* which was the first chapter of *Theory of Prose*.[292] He argued for the need to turn concepts that have become over-familiar into something revitalized. As David Lodge suggests in '*The Art of Fiction'* the theory is a vindication of the dislocations of modernist, experimental writing – but it also applies to the realistic novel – and to both mainstream and post-modern historical fiction. [293] Lodge also attests that this connects with the artistic originality itself. Pure originality is impossible – art is always a reaction to what has gone before. The originality of a particular artist relates to their ability to undermine received assumptions and shift perception in some way '…deviating from the conventional, habitual ways of representing reality'.[294]

In the late twentieth century, the theory of structuralism was developed by the Canadian critic Northrop Frye. His aim was to create a scientific and systematic framework within which literature could be analysed objectively. Frye intended this to

[292] Shklovsky, Viktor, *Theory of Prose*

[293] Lodge, David, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from classic and modern texts* (London, Penguin Books, 1992)

[294] Ibid. 293, p. 55

sharpen literary analysis and move beyond 'subjective value judgements'.[295] The theory influenced historical writing, and there was a shift away from analysing literature in terms of themes, character and moral content – an approach championed by F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*[296] - and towards analysing the text in its semiological context, as an aesthetic artefact. In 1980 Umberto Eco, professor of linguistics at the University of Bologna, published *The Name of the Rose* (*Il nome della rosa*)[297] which has had a lasting influence on the genre.

This monolithic work exemplified a new way of approaching historical fiction. In *Constructing a World* Martha Tuck Roett asserts: 'Widely celebrated as a postmodern historical novel, this dazzling mixture of 'thick' historical research and popular detective fiction elements invited its readers to view historical fiction as an academically respectable genre, and a vehicle for recovering and reimagining the past in unconventional ways.'[298] (The anthropologist Clifford Geertz used the labels 'thin' and 'thick' to describe cultures, but these terms have since been applied to other disciplines, such as fiction.[299] 'Thin' research focuses on a certain aspect of a social situation, while 'thick' research attempts to capture its context, taking a more exhaustive and meticulous approach.)

Eco used his research not just to set the scene, but to create the context and mood of his novel. After the publication of his seminal novel, he wrote a commentary: *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*.[300] In this, he states that the writer of historical

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[295] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory, An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1983) p. 79

[296] Frank Raymond Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948)

[297] Umberto Eco, *Il nome della rosa* (Rome: Bompiani, 1980)

[298] Martha Tuck Roett, *Constructing a World, Shakespeare's England and the New Historical Fiction (*New York: State University of New York Press, 2003) p.

[299] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)

[300] Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1984)

novels must immerse themselves in research and relevant historical fact. To tell a story it is necessary the writer must 'first of all construct a world, furnished as much as possible, down to the slightest detail'[301] Roett – who used part of this quotation as the title for book on the subject of new historical writing - comments: 'In his case, this required committing himself to a specific date, reading architectural plans and registers of the holdings of medieval libraries, and even counting the steps in a medieval stairway. Eco's *Postscript* is also a manifesto proclaiming the authority to which serious historical fiction can lay claim. The characters in a historical novel may not appear in encyclopaedias, he notes, but everything they do could only occur in that time and place.'[302]

In recent years, writers of new historical fiction have sought out innovative and original ways of presenting historical narrative. This may mean using arcane facts, or highlighting less familiar aspects of the past, or it may involve the subversion of what is expected of historical narrative. There is a sub-genre of new historical writing which takes this further, and creates an alternate past, giving the writer the freedom to play with the facts and situate fantasy within a historical context. One example of this is Harry Turtledove's *Ruled Britannia*[303], in which the victorious Spanish Armada invades England, Elizabeth I is locked up in the Tower and Shakespeare must write a new play called *Boudicca* as part of a strategy to free her. Though I am interested in the possibilities of this genre, I did not want to twist this particular story away from the known facts to such an extent. My intention was to write a story in the gaps in factual knowledge that already exist, rather than create a new space artificially.

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[301] Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, p. 512

[302] Ibid. 301, p. 2

[303] Harry Turtledove, *Ruled Britannia* (New York: Roc Books, 2002)

Reading work in this genre convinced me that my own story would have more freedom to expand and find its own logic if I wrote it with an awareness of these developments, and a sense of the breadth of possibility offered by literary historical fiction. I found the approach Hilary Mantel takes in *Wolf Hall* particularly helpful.[304] Speaking at the *Novel Approaches to History* conference at the Institute of Historical Research in November 2011, Mantel commented:

> What happens in most historical fiction is – the author dresses up twenty-first century figures in the costume of the period. Conventional historical fiction – offers moral teaching about the lives of women. I did not want a cocked or disguised way of writing about the present. The past has a value in itself. Fact and fiction are not two neat categories. If I were to distinguish fact from fiction in *Wolf Hall*, I would have to footnote every line.[305]

Mantel is interested in the aspects of the past that historians cannot access. This is what she calls 'the activated Power of Rumour' and this is where an author's imagination can operate, free of accusations of inaccuracy. Mantel argues: 'I can operate in this "off the record" area. So much of what we have now – pageantry, painting, gift giving culture – is what is demonstrated or shown. I am more interested in what is going on on the back stairs, what is said behind the hand. I might be able to

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[304] Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)

[305] Hilary Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel and David Loades In Discussion' (*Novel Approaches to History*, Institute of Historical Research, London, 21 November 2011) www. ihrconference.wordpress.com/2011/11/21/hilary-mantel-and-david-loades-in-discussion/ (Accessed 21 September 2012)

make my readers feel what it was like to live through those terrifying days. I will walk you forward with the characters who don't know the end of the road.' [306]

One of the harbingers of new historical fiction was *Death of the Fox: A novel of Elizabeth and Ralegh,* by George Garrett, published in 1971. Garrett had struggled for many years, attempting to write a biography of Walter Raleigh. Eventually, he decided this was impossible and decided to write a novel instead, filling in the gaps as Mantel was later to do with *Wolf Hall*. Garrett produced a sophisticated novel which played with the textuality of history – the fact that we draw conclusions from surviving texts and form an incomplete notion of what has disappeared. In particular, Ralegh is aware of John Stow's survey of London[307] and thinks about it when he is imprisoned in the Tower. He writes: 'Yes, thanks be to God and John Stow, his Survey of London restored the freedom of the city to me even as I was penned in the Tower. Thanks to his pen, I could walk those streets again.'[308]

Another text which helped focus my ideas was Patrick Susskind's *Perfume*[309] which recreates eighteenth century France through the eyes of a serial killer with a preternaturally acute sense of smell. Susskind's defamiliarization of the place and time – particularly eighteenth century Paris – is stunningly effective. All of his characters are invented, but the fantasy elements of the narrative are offset by the intricacy and accuracy of his historical research, particularly his recreation of the delicate art of the perfumer. My reading gave me an increasing sense of confidence in relation to the development of the historical characters in my own story. I found that

[306] Mantel, *Novel Approaches to History*

[307] John Stow, *A survay of London· Conteyning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that city, written in the yeare 1598* (London: John Winder, 1603) STC 23343 Modern edition: John Stow, *A Survey of London Containing the Original Antiquity, Increase, Modern Space and Description of that City, Written in the Year 1598 (*Whitefish MT, Kessinger Publishing, 2010)

[308] George Garrett, *Diary of the Fox, a novel about Ralegh* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1971) p. 193

[309] Patrick Susskind, *Perfume* (London: Penguin, 1985)

the more detail I accumulated – about the organisation of the players and the playhouses in Elizabethan/Jacobean London, for example – the greater my sense of freedom when dramatizing the individual characters who lived at the time, including Richard Burbage, Thomas Dekker and Christopher Marlowe. Rather than being an impediment, research was liberation. De Groot summarizes this effectively in his conclusion *to The Historical Novel.* He attests: 'Finally, it is here, in the gaps of history, in the spaces between knowledges, in the lacking texts, within the misunderstood codes, that historical novelists work, and it is the very insubstantiality of the past that allows them to introduce their version of events.'[310]

Fiction has an advantage over 'factual' writing: it can offer a partial, biased or untrustworthy account, or a sequence of contradictory accounts. (As demonstrated in Akira Kurasawa's 1950 film *Rashomon*[311], for example, which gives a number of conflicting versions of a rape.) This very incompleteness and partiality may cast more light on a complex subject than one tightly argued 'factual' interpretation.

[310] De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 182

[311] Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon* (Japan, Daiei Motion Picture Company, 1950)

Chapter Three

i. Developing the idea/character of William Shakespeare

In this chapter I will look at my own method when developing the character of Shakespeare. I will also summarize my inspirations and imaginative cues.
The starting point for this story was the play *Macbeth*. As Shakespeare was the author of this play, he was a relevant factor at this early stage. But as I intended to set the story at the time the historical character Macbeth lived, there was no reason to include Shakespeare as a character in the narrative. It was only when I decided to shift the focus to Aemilia Bassano and early modern London that this became an issue that I needed to address.

Once I had focused on sonnets 127 – 152 as central to the story, and the effect these sonnets might have on the dedicatee, then William Shakespeare became an important presence in the story. At first, my intention was to keep his character shadowy and marginal to the central action. This was partly because I wanted to give Aemilia Bassano's ambitions and struggle for self-determination prominence, rather than immerse her in a love story with Shakespeare, and partly because I was unsure how to approach him as a character. As I have outlined, there have been so many previous versions of his life, 'biographical' and otherwise, that a potent myth is attached to his name. My initial feeling was that this would inhibit my imagination, making me fearful about creating an unsatisfying or stilted 'Shakespeare' of my own, and also that even if I made a successful attempt to create this character, his preeminence as an English icon might overbalance or distort my narrative. But it became increasingly obvious that if I failed to dramatize Aemilia's love affair with

him, the story would feel incomplete. And if I was going to dramatize their love affair, then I needed to dramatize him. So I tried to set my feelings of reluctance and nervousness aside, and began to flesh out the version of Shakespeare that my story needed.

My first cue was visual. I continually returned to the Chandos portrait of Shakespeare[312], which depicts a dark-haired man in early middle age, with a piratical gold earring and a confident gaze. This 'cue' is not necessarily historically accurate. There is no record of any portrait of Shakespeare being commissioned during his lifetime, though the National Gallery now lists ninety two portraits of Shakespeare on its website.[313] Furthermore, the only surviving description of his appearace is Robert Greene's pen portrait of him as 'an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers', which presents him as a generic actor and perhaps show-off. [314] (Actors would often wear feathered headdresses at this time.) The poet Ros Barber has talked of using similar methods when writing her novel *The Marlowe Papers*.[315] Speaking at the conference Other Voices, Other Times she revealed that although she read the complete works of Shakespeare and Marlowe as part of her research, she also had the Chandos portrait pinned over her desk and would stare into the eyes of its subject when trying to access her imagination and the 'words' of Marlowe/Shakespeare.[316]

Although it is unlikely that the Chandos picture will ever be proved to be Shakespeare's portrait, and although it has no more validity than any of the other

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[312] John Taylor, (attrib) William Shakespeare, oil on canvas, feigned oval, circa 1610, London: National Gallery

[313] http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp04051/william-shakespeare

[314] Robert Greene, *Greenes, groats-vvorth of witte, bought with a million of repentance* (London: William Wright, 1592) STC 12245

[315] Ros Barber, *The Marlow Papers* (London: Sceptre, 2012)

[316] Ros Barber, 'Resurrecting Marlowe' (*Other Voices, Other Times,* Bath Spa University, 29 June 2012)

supposed portraits, I still find it imaginatively compelling. I like the expression on the sitter's face, the attitude it suggests of alert self-containment. Charles Dickens wrote of his own dread of a new discovery about Shakespeare, fearing that greater knowledge would bring inevitable disappointment. In the Preface to *A Face to the World: on Self-Portraits,* Laura Cumming writes: 'Dickens despised the public's need for a face and could not contain his scorn when asked to help fund a statue of Shakespeare, replying that he would not contribute a farthing for a likeness because the work must be the only lasting monument.'[317]

My response to this portrait was emotional rather than rational. Paradoxically, books such as John Stow's *Survey of London* [318] and *The A to Z of Elizabethan London,*[319] made me feel that I was marooned, separated from the real place by the facts. I could absorb these facts, but I couldn't see them or feel them. I wanted to be able to walk under the arch of London Bridge on the south bank of the Thames, passing under the spiked heads and walking in the shadow of the shops and houses that loomed over the water. But I couldn't. Human faces can produce a greater sense of immediacy. And the Chandos image seems unembellished, as if the sitter was painted in an off-duty moment, rather than in his finest clothes.

Like Barber, I found this face offered a way into the world he once inhabited, whoever he was. I felt that if I could imagine meeting this person (rather than *being* this person) then I could know enough to include a convincing Shakespeare in my story. The animation of the past is not an intellectual construct, though it relies on

[317] Laura Cumming, *A Face to the World: on Self-Portraits* (London: Harper Collins, 2009) p. 3, citing Letter to William Hepworth Dixon, EL3.DS548 MS3, Rosenbach Museum, Philadelphia

[318] Stow, *A Survey of London, Written in the year 1598*

[319] Adrian Prockter and Robert Taylor, *The A to Z of Elizabethan London* (London: London Topographical Society, 1979)

intellectual construction. It also depends on artistic trickery, and on the author's ability to channel his or her knowledge into a form of hallucination.

ii. Shakespeare the antagonist

As I have suggested, it was essential to develop the character of William Shakespeare in relation to the character of Aemilia Lanyer. This was necessary in order to make their love affair plausible and dramatically compelling. It was also important that their qualities are both compatible (drawing them together) and conflicting (driving them apart). Aemilia's talents and education are important here: my intention was to make her 'freakish' and unique, with more in common with Queen Elizabeth in terms of her attitude than to other ladies at the court. In one key scene she dreams of meeting the Queen, who comments: *'"We two – freakish black, and freakish red, wouldn't you say?"'*[320] This may strain credulity in purely historical terms, but it worked in the context of the genre. I saw Aemilia as an archetypal, passionate, rebellious heroine in the tradition of Cleopatra[321], Catherine Earnshaw,[322] Jane Eyre [323]and Scarlett O'Hara[324]. She is an outsider, a shrew, a disobedient wife, who dominates her husband, rules the household and yet indulges her son. She is clever, educated at court, and talented. Her fatal flaw is over-reaching ambition.

Beyond his role as Aemilia's lover, I also needed to develop the character of William in a way that I found credible and appealing. I did not set out to challenge

[320] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p. 139

[321] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*

[322] Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847)

[323] Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1847)

[324] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1936)

the received view of William Shakespeare in such a radical way as either Bond[325] or Burgess.[326] But as I have suggested, my aim was to find a space between the two most familiar stereotypes: secular saint and stereotypical bohemian. My invented William Shakespeare shares Aemilia's frustrations and social unease. He is from a middle-class, provincial, yeoman family, and while he considers himself to be gentleman, he did not attend either Oxford or Cambridge, the alma mater of his rival Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe, the son of a bricklayer, prides himself on his education and when Aemilia summons his demon, he is scornful about William's limitations as a scholar.[327]

Creating a character called 'William Shakespeare' who is both plausible in terms of his legendary status and believable as a fictional player in an invented story depends on audacity and trickery. I did not want to invent an unrecognisable or divergent Shakespeare, but to rework the myth in my own way, so that he fitted into the narrative seamlessly. I wanted to invent a character who I found plausible and appealing, and whose flaws were venal and understandable. Chief among these are what modern readers might call 'sexism': his assumption that a woman was incapable of competing with him or his male peers.

I found it easiest, after some initial experimentation, to think of him in terms of a dominant characteristic, and an opposing characteristic. His dominant characteristic is emotional intensity – related to his writing, his ambition and his relationship with Aemilia. His opposing characteristic – the negative counterpoint to his intensity – is an obsessive nature. Again, this relates to his work, his determination to succeed and his attitude to Aemilia. Once she has transgressed, as he sees it, he is

[325] Bond, *Bingo*

[326] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*

[327] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p.430

vitriolic and publically humiliates her. (Although in the novel, as in historical fact, the sonnets are published without his permission.) Both characteristics link his emotion about his work to his love for her, and this is demonstrated most clearly in the sonnets. I also wanted to suggest – as Burgess and Norman and Stoppard have done[328] [329] – that his love affair has a formative effect on his writing, and that just as he teaches Aemilia about the need to craft her work, his relationship with her deepens his understanding – when he sees her with Southampton, his first reaction is to scrawl down words. [330]

iii. Function of William Shakespeare in the plot

In Part Two of this thesis I outlined the approach to the invention of Shakespeare taken by my sixteen chosen authors. In this section, I will give a brief outline of my own invention, using the same template. A precis of his role in the plot of 'Dark Aemilia' will follow.

a. Shakespeare's character: Clemence Dane's depiction of William Shakespeare comes closest to my own. She highlights his idealism and commitment to his work, and the way in which his experience both bruises him and forms his work. I have also included aspects of the sexually addicted Mr WS created by Burgess and and the impulsive romantic presented by Norman and Stoppard.

[328] Burgess, *Nothing like the Sun*

[329] Norman, Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love*

[330] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia '

b. Shakespeare the Artist. His artistic life is demonstrated primarily through action. Four plays are performed in the course of the narrative and he is also seen discussing stagecraft with Burbage. This is consistent with Borges' view that the work is dominant and everything else is supposition, whether or not one accepts that 'emptiness' lies behind. His outpouring of emotion when he finds Aemilia with Southampton is the genesis of the sonnets. We don't know how close this is to the final version, but I wanted to show how this violent language might have erupted from him.

c. The Dark Lady. As I have outlined, my version of Shakespeare is distinct from the sixteen Shakespeares I have read in that it presents the story from her point of view. Clemence Dane was a female writer and Robert Nye tells Anne Hathaway's story, but none of these writers express the ambitions and frustrations of the Dark Lady herself.

d. Anne Hathaway. My own version of Anne Hathaway is influenced by Germaine Greer's *Shakespeare's Wife*. I was engaged by Nye's version of her as a fictional character, but she was not plausible in terms of my story. I felt that her high intelligence, good looks and dignity made William's predicament more interesting. On meeting Aemilia, Anne observes that they are alike. Aemilia herself is wrong-footed by the discovery that her rival is so formidable.

e. The Earl of Southampton. His role in my narrative meant that he needed to display a degree of louche ill-behaviour and arrogance. In my story, his treatment of Aemilia, blackmailing her and scaring her

into having sex with him makes him a rapist, using his *droit de signeur* to destroy her relationship with William.

Shakespeare is introduced in the first scene of the first Act of the novel, at a performance of *The Taming of the Shrew* at Whitehall palace. Aemilia is there as the mistress of the Lord Chamberlain, who is the patron of the players. She is infuriated by the play, and disturbed by it, seeing a parallel with her own situation even though she is reluctant to make this connection. After the play has ended, William comes to speak to her: 'I felt a presence, shadow-like, and turned my head.'[331] At first, he is nameless, and is referred to as 'the playwright'[332] I wanted to convey the idea that Shakespeare is astonished by her intelligence, and shocked by her intransigence. After she criticises his play he says: 'I…*what* did you say?'[333] Rather than being loquacious and confident, I wanted to show that he is wrong-footed by her, unsure how to treat her or what to think.

The rest of the first Act, 'Passion' is an account of their affair, and was a departure for me in terms of its romantic and sexual content as well as its historical context. I tried to prevent this section of the story becoming too derivative or prurient by keeping their meetings short and focusing on character rather than salacious physical detail. The relationship cannot last and is dangerous to both of them: she is betraying Lord Hunsdon by seeing him, and Hunsdon is the patron of Shakespeare's company as well as her protector. Both are outsiders with no financial resources of their own (Shakespeare becomes wealthy later on). Both are utterly dependent on the goodwill of courtiers and aristocrats and stand to lose everything: the affair is a *folie a*

[331] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p.8

[332] Ibid. 331, p. 8

[333] Ibid. 331, p14

deux. In addition to his obsession with Aemilia, I also wanted to show that Shakespeare was more rational, or open to rationality, than his peers. There is no historical evidence for this, other than the psychological sophistication of his plays.

After witnessing a riot at the theatre after a demon appears to manifest during a production of *Dr Faustus*[334] Shakespeare is unconvinced: '"It was a stage trick," he said, as he watched the fire grow higher. He seemed to be returning to himself, making a pattern out of what seemed unfathomable. "He is ambitious. What better way to make his name?"'[335] In a later scene at Southampton's country house, there is also an ironic conversation between them, in which William suggests that Aemilia teaches him Latin and Greek, and helps him polish his writing in what is essentially a superficial way. This demonstrates his social and artistic ambition, and also contrasts with the reality that she actually teaches him about love, not Latin.[336]

William is mentioned in the first scene of Act II, Prophecy, which takes place ten years later. Aemilia meets Lettice Cooper, a lady-in-waiting at the court, who patronises her and makes much of her aged and unattractive appearance. Then she says: "'…that jumped-up fellow'"[337] has been asking after Aemilia. "'Face of a clerk, but wears an earring. Arrogant, for a provincial.'"[338] Aemilia is not impressed: "'If you see him again, tell him I hope he burns in hell.'"[339] When she meets William again, the scene is painful and I wanted to communicate his awkwardness, but also his sensitivity to her. Almost immediately, he tells her that his son Hamnett is dead, as if

[334] Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*

[335] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p. 46

[336] Ibid 335, p.70

[337] Ibid. 335, p 126

[338] Ibid 335, p126

[339] Ibid, 335, p126

they are intimate even though they are estranged.[340] They argue, and his arrogance conflicts with his obsession with her: he calls her a 'whore' but finally says 'It is not finished.'[341] He is unsettled by her, and thrown off balance.

William's next appearance is in Act III, Pestilence. He has joined Thomas Dekker in the search for her son Henry, who is also Shakespeare's son, though she has never admitted this to him. In this encounter, I wanted to show him losing some of his assumed dignity, pared down to a humbler, more honest version of himself in his anxiety about Henry and his feelings for Aemilia. He is not the great poet here, but an estranged lover, awkward and unsure of himself. He is on the point of apologising to her: "'Aemilia – those poems – the words I used against you…'" But the moment is lost as they search for Henry among the plague pits.[342] This mood continues at their next meeting, when he attempts to persuade her to leave London with him, bringing Henry with her though he has been infected with the plague. [343]

I had a particular difficulty with the scene in which Aemilia meets him in the Anchor tavern. She finds the boy player Tom in bed with a whore, and when William walks in buttoning up his shirt, she assumes that he has been similarly engaged. We never know the truth about this – William denies it later – but it seemed to me that as the story is told from Aemilia's point of view, it is appropriate that the reader is as unsure as she is.[344]

In Act V, they meet once more at a performance of *Macbeth*. William is playing the part of the ghost of Banquo, and the production ends in disaster during a

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[340] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ' , p170

[341] Ibid. 340, p.173

[342] Ibid. 340, p 262

[343] Ibid. 340, p. 309

[344] Ibid. 340, p 397

violent storm. Aemilia believes the demon or ghost of Marlowe is on the stage, and that this apparition is responsible for the death of Tom, the boy player. In this scene, in spite of the all the chaos and drama, William is the most rational person present:

'I looked at Marlowe and saw that he was smiling… I pointed, wildly, at the shadowed figure. 'Him – Marlowe! Look! He called Lucifer! He has brought this curse upon the play!'

'*Marlowe*?' said Will. 'Poor, slaughtered Kit? Are you *mad*?'"[345]

After saving Aemilia from the lynch mob (a Lancelot moment), William expresses his horror and disbelief at her demon-summoning activities. "'What lunacy was this? What manner of falling off from what you were, and what you could be?'"[346] And finally he says: "'If this is love, then we must leave it. Once and for all, and till we die.'"[347] But before they part he tells her that not only is she the Dark Lady, she is also the inspiration for all his greatest heroines: "'Don't you see how it was? That all my heroines are versions of my Dark Aemilia? Black-eyed Rosalind, clever Portia, the Egyptian queen who drove poor Anthony to madness – all you! All you. Each one.'"[348]

During his final meeting with Aemilia, William reveals that he ran into the burning Globe to save his latest play *Dark Aemilia,* written in her honour. He believes this might be the only play he is remembered for. But although he manages to retrieve the manuscipt, it smoulders and falls apart in his burnt hands.[349] This is pure invention, though it is inspired by lost plays such as *Cardenio* and *Love's Labours*

[345] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p. 453

[346] Ibid. 345, p. 462

[347] Ibid. 345, p. 463

[348] Ibid. 345, p.463

[349] Ibid. 345, p. 484

Won[350]. (The theory that Shakespeare was badly burned in the Globe fire has also been put forward by Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman in *The Shakespeare Conspiracy*.[351]) His foolish and hubristic attempt to save the play fits in with the theme of over-reaching and unrealistic ambition, and also illustrates a continuing theme in the story, that of the unreliability and incompleteness of the historical record and the documents on which that record is based.

Finally, William persuades Aemilia that her idea that she conjured Marlowe's demon is an illusion, and that she is not responsible for the death of Tom Flood. In the end, he offers her a form of absolution: 'You are many things, Aemilia, but you are not evil.'[352] and the chance to redeem herself.

iv. Shakespeare and language

Finding the right tone and register for the novel was an initial challenge, as the early drafts I include in the next section will demonstrate. I resolved this problem only after deciding to use the first person voice. Initially I was intending to write the novel in the third person, written from Aemilia's perspective but not from her direct point of view. The source and inspiration for Aemilia's voice was contemporary sixteenth and seventeenth century writing. This included diaries, notebooks and published poetry and plays. The most important documents relating specifically to the character of William Shakespeare and his depiction were his own words: the words of his plays and poetry. As David Crystal writes, this language is characterized by its audacity and

[350] Andrew Dickson, *The Rough Guide to Shakespeare* (London, Rough Guides, 2009) p. 201

[351] Graham Phillips, Martin Keatman *The Shakespeare Conspiracy* (London: Arrow, 1995)

[352] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p. 486

variety.[353] Again, *Macbeth* was an essential source for this, as were Sonnets 127 – 152.

I have always responded to the intensity and drama of *Macbeth*, its mysterious atmosphere and violent poetry. As G.K. Hunter argues in the introduction to the New Penguin edition: 'Darkness, blood, fire, the reverberation of noise like thunder, the world of the actor, of the man wearing clothes that are too grand for him – these are continually invoked to give us…the sense of an inferno barely controlled beneath the surface crust.'[354] I wanted to communicate something of the bleak, inhuman world that Shakespeare created, in which each character is isolated and apart. The lack of connection, familial or otherwise, is striking. Scenes of mutual affection, such as those between Lady Macduff and her son[355] are followed by murder[356]. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth inhabit separate worlds once the murder of Duncan has taken place, there is no direct conversation between them after the banquet scene at which he sees the ghost of Banquo,[357] and when Macbeth hears she is dead he barely seems to register the loss.[358] I was also inspired by the sense of evil personified by the witches, but palpable throughout the play, in which 'Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,Whilst night's black agents to their prey do rouse.'[359] The idea that the 'Scottish play' is cursed springs from this, and adds to its mystique and notoriety. My intention was to try to recreate this sense of fear and unease in my story, but rather than make William an agent of darkness, like Macbeth, I made him as close to being a

[353] David Crystal, *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p.233

[354] G. K. Hunter, *Introduction, Macbeth by William Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1967) p.28

[355] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, IV.2 l 30 – 64

[356] Ibid. 355, IV.2 l. 80 - 86

[357] Ibid. 355, III. l. 4

[358] Ibid. 355, V.5 l. 27

[359] Ibid. 355, III.2 l. 52 - 53

rationalist as I could, given the period in which the story is set. His character is closer to that of Banquo, aware of the power of evil and careful to keep his distance. Light and dark are juxtaposed throughout the novel, and though their final meeting takes place in a dark room, William asks Aemilia to open the shutters so that sunlight floods into the room and she can see what has happened to him.[360]

I made a decision to make his own language plain and simple, and to avoid including the words of his plays in his dialogue. (There are two exceptions to this: the scene at the end of Act I in which he begins to write the sonnets, and final scene with Aemilia, in which he says she is 'troubled with thick-coming fancies'. This is an example of black humour on William's part – he is referring to the play he/Aemilia wrote, and the scene in which the Doctor is commenting on Lady Macbeth's mental state.[361] [362] In general, however, I felt that using Shakepeare's own lines would be discordant and distracting, and that it is implausible that a writer or poet would speak the words precisely as they were written. Furthermore, I wanted to break away from being reverential or over-cautious: putting Shakespearean words into the mouth of the ficional William Shakespeare seemed to weigh the character down, reminding the reader (and the writer) of his iconic status. This would separate him from the invented world of my novel. My intention was to achieve the opposite effect: to integrate his character into the plot so that his reputation and literary status fade into the background.

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[360] O'Reilly, 'Dark Aemilia ', p. 487

[361] Ibid. 361, p.118

[362] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V. III l. 40 – 41

v. Shakespeare and gender equality

Essentially, 'Dark Aemilia' is a feminist interpretation of the Shakespeare myth. But this is a twenty-first century view. Gender equality was not an issue in the early modern period: women were assumed to be inferior to men. Therefore, attempting to create any sense of equality between William and Aemilia would be anachronistic. However, one of the central ideas in the novel is that being a poet's 'muse' is a passive and colourless role, even if the poetry is flattering and romantic. (And sonnets 127 – 152 are neither.) The fact that Aemilia is a poet herself is an essential part of her nature, and is connected to her interest in witchcraft, demonology and occult power. In this respect, *Antony and Cleopatra*[363] is a source of inspiration, though I gave the play greater prominence in earlier drafts of the novel. (In the original draft, Shakespeare explicitly compares Aemilia to Cleopatra. I decided this seemed too contrived.) As Janet Dillon points out in the *Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies*, the love-match between Antony and Cleopatra is a competitive one; they are continually sparring with each other.[364] Their love banter centres on putting a measure on love, giving it an exact economic equivalent.[365] William and Aemilia are not rulers, but they are rival poets: in the sense that she has to force him to acknowledge her entitlement to write anything at all. Dillon observes that the combative relationship between Antony and Cleopatra contrasts with that of Romeo and Juliet. However, it is not the only combative romantic relationship in Shakespeare's work. Berowne and Rosalind[366], Portia and Bassanio[367] and Katherine

[363] Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*

[364] Janet Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 127

[365] Ibid. 363, 1.1 l. 14 - 17

and Petruchio[368] all clash, with varying degrees of wit and pain. But the directness of the competition - slugging it out as verbal equals - is unique to Antony and Cleopatra. Like Cleopatra, Aemilia is exotic, mysterious, foreign. Like Cleopatra, she also expects to be treated with respect, in a man's world. The William Shakespeare I have created shares some of Antony's qualities – he is proud and dignified until the affair distracts him, and like Antony he is unable to reconcile his conflicting needs and desires.

My view of Shakespeare as a playwright is also influenced by the way that he constructed *Antony and Cleopatra*. Although it would have been customary to give Antony the last word, and what Dillon describes as 'the climactic death',[369] this is given to Cleopatra. Ultimately, the play becomes her tragedy, and her perception of their relationship and Antony's greatness is the lasting impression that the play leaves behind.

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[366] Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) [366] STC 22273 Modern edition: Craig, W.J. ed., W. Shakespeare, Complete Works, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

[367] Shakespeare, William, *The Merchant of Venice*, First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) [367] STC 22273 Modern edition: Craig, W.J. ed., W. Shakespeare, Complete Works, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

[368] Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, First Folio *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London: William Blount & William and Isaac Jagger, 1623) [368] STC 22273 Modern edition: Craig, W.J. ed., W. Shakespeare, Complete Works, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

[369] Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies*, p. 137

vii. Revisions and developments

In early drafts I was dissatisfied with my version of Shakespeare's character. It was difficult to establish a voice and mode of behaviour that fitted the story, and his role seemed amorphous and inconsistent. I did not want him to be the 'great poet' and therefore 'superior person', but neither did I want him to be an artistic *roué*. Both of these are stereotypes, and neither fitted into the narrative in a believable way. Even so, it was difficult to animate this character in a new way. For example, here is the first scene I wrote which showed his attitude to Aemilia:

> He came towards her, his eyes holding that particular glimmer she had yet to work out and did not quite like. If lust, he belittled her mind. If laughter, he lacked regard for her looks.
>
> "Aemilia," he said. He took her by the shoulders, still staring with that camp intensity. Was he practising for a part? She could smell his breath, booze and tobacco evenly mixed. Filthy tavern stench, out of the mouth of the great man.
>
> "Will."
>
> "You look so…"
>
> "What do you think?"
>
> "…satisfying…"
>
> "What?"
>
> "Like a long drink of warm ale."
>
> "You're drunk, Will, and dull with it. I may as well go home."

"Glorious, glorious girl. Gloriouser and gloriouser. Gloriouser than Gloriana. And we can say that now the old bitch is dead."

"What did you think of the play?"

"What play?"

She turned away from him, and picked up her fine gloves. "I'm sick of this."

He came up behind her. "One kiss? Just the tiniest kiss?"

She flipped the gloves in his face. "No kisses. What did you think of my play, all-knowing one? Mister Shakespeare, play-maker? The play I sweated over, and gave into you keeping for the express purpose of receiving…"

"One sweet fuck?"

"An opinion."

He took a step back, frowning.

"Ah. Your *play*, yes."

She waited, face hard, the gloves clutched tightly in one hand. Her guts were twisting. It was worse than childbirth, this, worse than the miscarriage that came so late you thought the infant was pushing live into the world, only to have it slip from you cold.

He went over to the table by the window, opened a drawer and pulled out a bundle of paper. It was wine-stained and torn.

"Your *versification*."

"Do not patronise me, William, or I will be obliged to kill you."

"There are a few problems with this," he said.

Agony, oh, most mortal, evil agony! "Problems?"

"The witches, for a start. What's that all about?"

The second example is a short piece which I cut from the final draft of the final section, in which Aemilia remembers her first meeting with William:

You come across the room towards me. It is you. Eyes: mathematical. Gold earring: most piratical. I cannot breathe. I cannot think. I curtsey, in the courtly style, to mock you. You raise me to my feet.

"No need to pay me such respect," you say. "I am just an ordinary fellow."

"But I have heard that you outwit the Wits."

"Unwittingly, if so."

"Out-strut all players, in your borrowed feathers."

"Out-feather them, I'll grant you."

"That you are, indeed, the King of paint and boards."

"Of bawds?"

I stamp my foot. "Of wooden boards."

You smile, very slowly. "So who rules you?"

"Almighty God, sir, and no other."

Both of these scenes present a version of his character that is at variance with the 'Shakespeare' in my finished novel. These two extracts demonstrate that sometimes

it is only possible to know how to approach a character by writing experimental sketches and scenes. The first scene was written before I had decided that I would tell the story in the first person. Though Aemilia was always going to be the focal character in the novel, I was undecided about whether the first person point of view could work, partly because of the language I would need to use if I was to present a convincing 'voice'. The Shakespeare that emerges here is indeed the text-book tavern lizard, a cliché character. His emotions may run deep, but his treatment of her is lecherous and off-hand. Although this may well have been consistent with the way in which a player and theatre manager might treat a former mistress, I was not comfortable about his role in this scene. To fulfil the role of lover and worthy antagonist, he needed to be more obviously unsettled by her presence. However, this was also one of the first scenes in which either Aemilia or Shakespeare speak, and it did help me to work towards the hybrid style I felt worked best for the purposes of my narrative.

I wrote the second scene when I was nearing the end of the first draft of the novel. Again, there was a level of experimentation here, as it was inserted into one of the final scenes in the novel, in which Aemilia and Shakespeare meet for the last time. I wanted to present a sharp flashback, the moment that they first met, with the aim of highlighting the degree to which both of them had been changed by their relationship and their uneasy love for each other. In this version, they speak as equals and he is less facetious, but I felt the the language and the pitch of the exchange were wrong – it was too arch and too pleased with itself. At this point in the story, their relationship has been pared down to the bare fact that they love each other, but it is too late for them to have any time together. So this jarred too much with that mood. But equally, this scene was inconsistent with the Shakespeare I had now created. His intensity of

feeling and his directness were the two most consistent aspects of his character so far, and this scene undermined that.

Conclusion

i. The 'Shakespeare' of *Dark Aemilia*

One of the ironies of establishing my own invented character for my own fiction is that it has enabled me to re-interpret the known facts about Shakespeare's life, some of which are controversial in themselves. For instance, the fact that he was a sharer in his playing company; that he lent money and pursued those who did not repay on time; that he delayed paying his tax; and that he owned substantial properties in Stratford-on-Avon are held up as examples of his materialistic nature; and with the implied criticism that poets should not concern themselves with these things. His application for a Shakespeare coat of arms is also seen as suspect: this is man too concerned with worldly fame and dignity. One of his early critics was Alexander Pope, who wrote in 1737: 'Shakspear, (whom you and every Play-house bill/Style the divine, the matchless, what you will)/For gain, not glory, wing'd his roving flight,/And grew Immortal in his own despight.' [370]

Once I had decided on the nature of the Shakespeare in my novel, who is driven, insecure, determined, there was no difficulty in making him prosperous or (to a degree) materialistic. This was a society in which aristocrats and townsfolk alike would wear their wealth, or build houses as symbols of their success. A coat of arms was also, arguably, a symbol of 'glory' just as much as 'gain'. Far from making me

[370] Pope, Alexander, *Imitations of Horace, John Butt*, 2nd ed, 1953 (S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 161)

uneasy about the consistency or otherwise of my invention, this desire to achieve social eminence is one of the aspects of his nature that make him sympathetic to Aemilia's situation. Elizabethan London was heaving with insecure, desperate people, trying to assert and maintain their importance, trying to get preferment, trying to find a patron, or keep one. Aemilia Lanyer's life exemplified this turbulence and insecurity. The symbolic power of a coat of arms would be similar to the symbolic status of being a published poet: both Shakespeare and Aemilia were looking for tangible external symbols of their achievements. Although Lanyer was not the first woman to be a published poet in England, she was the first to take herself as seriously as a man would, and present her work as a man would, with a series of fulsome and yet dignified dedications to a succession of eminent Jacobean women, beginning with the Queen.[371] Thus she put a decidedly proto-feminist stamp on the opening pages of her book. Not only did she write a poem extolling the virtues of maligned Eve and find a (male) publisher to print her work, she also demanded a hearing in the public domain by addressing these influential women as her dedicatees. (The dedications fill forty seven pages.) It is notable that in her dedication to Queen Anne she makes no mention of her being the consort of James I, but rather addresses the 'renowned Empress'[372] as if she is the monarch in her own right. Again, in my narrative I give relatively little prominence to the publication of her poetry. This is partly because Aemilia would have discovered, as I have done, that publication is a symbolic rather than a dramatic event, and partly because it happened beyond the time-frame of my novel. But her desire to be a published poet, and her success in becoming one, reflect Shakespeare's determination and ambition. My interpretation of Shakespeare and

[371] Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, p.3

[372] Ibid. 371, p.3

Aemilia is that they are both restless outsiders, who assert their will and the primacy of their talent in order to earn the respect of their social superiors and establish themselves as artists. I also saw Shakespeare as a predecessor of writers like Defoe[373] and later Dickens [374] who were brilliant, prolific and understood that writing was a mercantile business as well as an art form.

And finally, in common with almost all the writers who have invented him before me, I saw the theatre as being central to Shakespeare's life. He is a member and part-owner of a theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later the King's Men. He demonstrates more loyalty to Richard Burbage and the other players than to his own family. The London play-world of this period had a short, glittering history of its own, starting in 1580 and ending in 1640.[375] This febrile, fertile world of hysterical imagination and reinvigorated tradition, manic and competitive, fluid and contentious, is the backdrop against which Aemilia and William meet.

Equally important, I wanted to use their relationship to dramatize the continuing inequality between male and female artists. The Elizabethan Chain of Being, based on the teaching of Plato, set out the view that all of creation had a prescribed place, with Man just below the angels and above the higher animals.[376] Woman was rarely mentioned – the comparative status of women in relation to men is not addressed in Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* which reintroduced general readers to this

[373]*Encyclopedia of World Biography* s.v. 'Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)'www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404701709.html (Accessed 1 September 2012)

[374] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Michael Slater 'Charles Dickens, novelist (1812 – 1870) www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7599 (Accessed 31 Aug 2012)

[375] Judith Cook, *At the Sign of the Swan: Introduction to Shakespeare's Contemporaries* (London, Harrap, 1986) p.17

[376] Eustace Mandeville Wetenhall, Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1943) pp. 33 – 44

subject when it was published in 1943.[377] The teachings of both St Paul and Aristotle suggested that women were inferior to men, less fully developed, and morally weaker.[378] Their artistic lives reflected this, to the extent that the existence of a Renaissance for women has been questioned ever since Joan Kelly raised the issue in 1984.[379]

Writing about this period in *Shakespeare's Wife,* Germaine Greer argues: 'Literature was a particularly laddish enterprize, the province of young bachelors who usually gave it up when – or if – they married.'[380] In my narrative, William Shakespeare, already encumbered with a wife, does not want a mistress who is also an artistic rival. He loves Aemilia, but sees her as his muse. Aemilia loves William, but his innate presumption of gender superority is a threat to her self-actualization.

ii. Is this an anachronistic Shakespeare?

In the 1920s the Victorian world view was lampooned by intellectuals like Lytton Strachey[381], so it is not surprising that George Moore put his stamp on the Shakespeare invention genre in 1926 by suggesting that the mighty Bard of Avon was a semi-literate fake.[382] Anthony Burgess, writing in the liberal sexual context of the early 1970s, suggests that William Shakespeare is driven mad by sexual obsession

[377] Eustace Mandeville Wetenhall, Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1943)

[378] R.A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450 – 1700, Themes in British Social History* (Harlow: Longman, 1984) pp. 96 – 100

[379] H. Osrovich and E. Sauer (ed) *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print 1550 – 1700,* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.2 citing J.Kelly, 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 19 – 50

[380] Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare's Wife* (London, Bloomsbury, 2007) p. 3

[381] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, Chatto, 1918)

[382] Moore, *The Making of an Immortal*

and self-hatred.[383] Twenty five years later, in Borge's bizarre and surreal story, Shakespeare's confused and impressionistic memory is customised by the magical realist school.[384]

In this sense, all inventions of Shakespeare are to some extent anachronistic. Reflecting the writers' time must mean they falsify the 'real' Shakespeare they appear to recreate. And yet, as I have suggested, the 'factual' biographies follow much the same pattern. This figure, this hybrid of biography, collective imagination and cultural will, has been influenced by the interpretations which writers have made of his plays. For example, Bond has him wandering Lear-like in the snow[385], while Norman and Stoppard build their plot around *Romeo and Juliet* and elements of *The Tempest*.[386] But my reading of earlier inventions of his character has shown that the primary source has often been his own flimsy biography, with writers returning time and time again to the same alleged facts, most of them lifted from the Rowe biography, which was published almost a century after his death.[387] The 'idea' of Shakespeare – that he is the embodiment of English genius and that he is the definitive poet – is powerful. But it allows for personal reinterpretation. What, for example, is understood by 'English' as a term? As a 21st century woman, living in post-colonial world, I interpret that word very differently to the way in which it was understood by Arthur Mee.[388]

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[383] Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*

[384] Borges, *Shakespeare's Memory*

[385] Bond, *Bingo*

[386] Norman, Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love*

[387] Rowe, *Some account of the Life of William Shakespear*

[388] Mee, Arthur, *The Children's Shakespeare* (London, Amalgamated Press, 1900)

iii. The writing process

I have found the contrast between what I *need* to do as a writer and what I am *required* to do as an academic interpreting my own process interesting, though sometimes frustrating. Most if not all fiction writers work intuitively during the creative process, particularly when beginning a new piece of work. There is plenty of written evidence for this in writers' journals, letters and interviews. Rose Tremain believes that 'the imagination conjures gifts'[389], while Graham Swift attests:

> The imagination has the power of sheer, fictive invention but it also has the power to carry us to the truth, to make us arrive at knowledge we did not possess and may even have felt, taking an empirical view of our experience, we had no right to possess. I confess I do not understand this power and I cannot explain it, but I have absolute faith in its existence. It is what for me constitutes the magic of writing, and I trust, the magic of reading.[390]

Creative writing is often taught alongside English Literature, and can be seen as its poor relation: less intellectually robust, more uncertain about its objective standards. This is because the standards we are working to are not entirely intellectual; they are also imaginative. There is an intuitive element to analysing a

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[389] Boylan, Clare, ed., *The Agony and the Ego: The Art and Strategy of Fiction Writing Explored* (London, Penguin, 1993) p. 2

[390]Boylan, ed., The *Agony and the Ego*, p. 25

text, inevitably, but in creative writing intuition is fundamental. It is easier to understand and quantify intellectual innovation or academic interpretation than a new work of imagination; and so creative writers are set the task of producing sub-titles – or exhibition notes - for their own text. I can explain 'process' but I cannot entirely explain its creative element, and I would suggest this is why writers like Tremain and Swift speak of conjuration and magic.

Therefore, the imprecision about the character and factual basis of Shakespeare's life was helpful to me – I 'invented' a character who suited the purposes and conventions of my own narrative. The William Shakespeare in my novel seemed a plausible figure to me, and while I was writing the novel he was as integral a character as any other. And yet, I kept my invention within certain limits. To return to the theme of dark magic: I made a demon out of Christopher Marlowe, but could never have given William Shakespeare such a malign nature. The reason for this may have been that I have not researched the character of Marlowe in so much detail, and therefore I did not have the same feeling of responsibility and empathy towards the actual historical figure. But ultimately, I could not present Shakespeare as amoral or cruel because of an intuition; a feeling.

All fiction depends on other fictions, and feeds off them to some extent. As Lodge suggests, orginality is a matter of juxtaposition and interpretation as much as an expression of new ideas or pure imagination. Shakespeare's own work demonstrates this, in terms of subject matter and theme, but also in terms of the language he used. And so it is with my own invented Shakespeare. The character in my story is a reinterpretation of a succession of reinterpretations. In particular, I took account of the work of Antony Burgess, Edward Bond, Marc Norman and Tom Stopppard, as I have indicated. The key difference between my interpretation and

these previous interpretations is that I wanted to look at him from a female and proto-feminist perspective and Aemilia Lanyer's view of him offered this possibility.

And yet this female viewpoint did not lead me in a radically new direction. Like Bond, I stayed within the framework of known facts for most of the narrative, only departing from this in relation to lesser-known historical figures, like Baptiste Bassano, and only when I felt that a pre-existing gap could accommodate my supposition. I was satisfied with my own version, insofar as a writer is ever really satisfied with anything once it is finished. I felt ultimately that his character worked effectively in narrative terms – he needed to be a 'twin soul' of my ambitious, middle class heroine, and in this sense he was the William Shakespeare I needed. Ultimately, he recognises that Aemilia is an artist, as he is. And that is enough.

Inventing Shakespeare is an act of imagination, not of literary detection. Each writer sets out to ask the questions that are relevant to them, and to create a character who answers these questions. The identity of William Shakespeare as a historical figure is as much a mystery now as it ever was, and like Charles Dickens I am happy for this to continue. Shakespeare the poet is unseen, unknown: a vacancy.

Appendix 1.

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Appendix III.

'Dark Aemilia': Synopsis

The story begins in 1593, at the Palace of Whitehall. Aemilia Bassano is the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chancellor. She is happy with him, though he is much older than she is, and proud of her wealth and status at court. After seeing a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* she argues with the playwright, William Shakespeare, shocked by the portrayal of Katherine.

Aemilia is unnerved by the emotional reaction she has to him, and goes to see the astrologer Simon Forman to find out her fortune. Forman tells her that she will see Shakespeare again, but predicts a difficult future. When Shakespeare sends her a strange love letter, asking to meet her at a performance of Dr Faustus, Aemilia can't resist the temptation to see him again. The play is a disaster. The crowd believes that the Devil has appeared on the stage. In the uproar, Aemilia and William flee from the scene, her takes her to a secret room he has prepared for them, and they become lovers.

Their affair is reckless: they make love at the country seat of the Earl of Southampton, while Hunsdon is asleep, and even in daylight in the garden of the castle. They are obsessed, taking greater and greater risks. In due course, Aemilia becomes pregnant. Hunsdon marries her off to her cousin Alfonso Lanyer, and builds her a small house in Long Ditch, not far from Whitehall. William begs her to live with him, though he is married and lives in cheap lodgings. She refuses, saying she needs what protection she can get from Hunsdon. But Will turns against her when he sees her in bed with the lecherous Earl of Southampton, not knowing that Southampton is blackmailing her. Will rages against her and accuses her of betraying their love.

Ten years later, the plague comes to London. Aemilia is unhappily married to Lanyer who has spent all her money. Her son Henry is ten years old. She meets three witches who predict death and loss. They also conjure the ghost of her murdered father, and she realises they are connected with his death. Her friend Anne Flood insists she go with her to the Globe theatre, where her son Tom is a boy player. Henry runs into the tiring room, and Aemilia meets William again. He insists there is unfinished business between them. When the plague worsens, Henry runs away again, into the festering streets, and fights with the owner of a dead cart who is cavorting with corpses at an open grave. Henry is rescued by Aemilia and William, who has come to help her. (Tom Flood told William that Henry was missing.) Soon after, the theatres are closed, William tries to persuade Aemilia to leave London with him and the players. But Henry is too ill, having caught the plague during his escapade, and she angrily refuses any help from him. William gives her the keys to his lodgings and reluctantly leaves. He recognises that Henry is his son, who strongly resembles his dead son Hamnett.

In spite of the predictions of the witches, and the advice of her servant Joan, a wise woman, Aemilia cannot accept that Henry will die. She also denounces Parson John, a Puritan clergyman who attempts to give Henry the last rites. In the confusion that follows, a mob lynches the innocent Joan. Aemilia goes to see Forman again, demanding a cure for the plague. He refuses to give it to her, and she witnesses him killing a homunculus, a manikin he has created using the technique of alchemy. Horrified and desperate, she steals a spell book from him, and conjures up the demon Hecate, who enables Aemilia to enter a strange realm of magic and terror and return Henry to life. In the weeks that follow, she writes a strange play, *The Tragedie of Lady Macbeth* based on all she has seen and heard, with the witches at its heart.

Two years later Aemilia has hidden her play away. But when Tom Flood hears about it from Henry, word reaches Richard Burbage who is looking for a play to please the witch-hating new king, James I, and he asks to see it. She goes to the Globe where the actors are discussing a new crane system which lowers actors onto the stage. Burbage turns the play down, but then Aemilia finds out from her landlord Inchbald that a very similar play is being staged at the Globe, called *The Tragedie of Macbeth*. When she establishes that William and Burbage are using her play, Aemilia is furious. Driven mad with frustration and anger, she decides to use magic once again. She summons the demon of the murdered Kit Marlowe, and asks him to help her take revenge. But she miscalculates her spellmaking, and Marlowe steps outside the chalk circle that should enclose him to contain his power. The demon escapes and she has no control over it. She is also distracted by the plight of her servant girl Marie, who is pregnant by Tom Flood and gives birth to conjoined twins. Attending to Marie, Aemilia misses an assignment with William who is begging to see her.

Aemilia goes to see the new play at the Globe, and a dense fog descends, followed by an unearthly storm. The ghost of Banquo should be played by Will, but Marlowe appears above the stage instead, suspended in the crane she saw on her visit. The demon is seen only by Aemilia. A moment later, Tom is killed by the falling contraption, and Anne runs screaming onto the stage. In the chaos that follows, Aemilia screams at the demon Marlowe, accusing him of murdering Tom, and suspicion falls on her. Anne attacks Aemilia, who falls from the stage and into the crowd below. Chased through the streets by an angry mob accusing her of witchcraft, she is saved from lynching by a mysterious figure on a black horse who she thinks is Marlowe, but is in fact William.

Twelve years later – Stratford, 1616. The Globe has been burned down, and is in the process of being rebuilt. William has not been seen in London for many years. Aemilia has published a book of poems and sent them to William, but heard nothing from him. She is surprised to be summoned by Anne Shakespeare, who says that William is in poor health and now wants to see her. Aemilia is shocked to find that William stays in a dark room, unable to read or write. He tells her his daughter has read Aemilia's poems to him, and he thinks it is a great piece of work. He also apologises for using her play and offers to put her name on it. Aemilia says she doesn't want her name on the play. She still blames herself for Tom's death, and feels that she should be punished for her part in it. Will tells her she is a victim of superstition – there was no demon, just her febrile imagination. In effect, he absolves her of guilt, and also begs her forgiveness. Aemilia realises that if they forgive each other 'they are all done'. Will says there is no other way, and asks her to open the shutters.

William has been hideously burned, having run into the burning Globe theatre to rescue his last play, the play he thought he would be remembered for. But although he rescued it, the pages burned up in his hands, and were unrecognisable. Aemilia - but no one else – knows that the title of the lost play was *Dark Aemilia*.

In the final scene, in London, Aemilia and Henry are at the newly rebuilt Globe to see a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* They have just heard that William is dead. Aemilia is dressed in black velvet, like the Prologue on the stage. Looking around the theatre, Aemilia sees her old friends and acquaintances, and also the models for the characters in William's plays, dressed in their finest clothes as if to celebrate his life. The story ends just as the Prologue steps forward to utter the first words of the play.