“What Would the Neighbors Think”: *Othello* and London’s Africans

Peter C. Herman

The question of *Othello* and racism has become more urgent in the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the resulting wave of anti-racism both inside and outside academia. Did the early modern period witness the beginnings of what we call today racism? Was Elizabethan England a “white supremacist” culture? Are William Shakespeare’s plays “full of problematic, outdated ideas, with plenty of misogyny, racism, homophobia, classism, anti-Semitism, and misogynoir [hatred of Black women]”? (MacGregor 29). These sentiments are far from unusual and have a long history. Distinguished academics have said pretty much the same for years now. Karen Newman, for instance, refers to the “stock prejudices against blacks in Elizabeth and Jacobean culture: the link between blackness and the devil . . . .” (Newman 147). For Arthur L. Little, Jr., Shakespeare’s play enacts “the primal scene of racism,” confirming “what the audience suspects it already knows about the essence of blackness as the savage and libidinous Other.”[1]

The question, however, of Shakespeare’s relationship to racism received a jolt in 2008 when the late Imtiaz Habib published *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677*.[2] The question of how Blackness and Africans were considered in early modern England could now be answered by looking at actual examples of Black people, as opposed to strictly literary treatments. Like I suppose many others, I had assumed, if I thought about the topic at all, that there were no Black people in England, that Shakespeare’s audience was uniformly lily-white. But I was wrong. Through extraordinary archival research, Habib found numerous references to “Negros,” “Neygars,” and “Blackamoores” in parish registers, legal documents, and other sources. Habib proved that London housed a substantial

number of Blacks who mainly worked as servants and maids, and that their numbers significantly increased during the Elizabethan era. Some occupied positions with the highest in the land. William Cecil, Lord Burghley, for example, had a Black servant named Fortunatus. Others worked for less prestigious masters. A lucky few worked for themselves. One was a prostitute.

Slavery

Habib, however, believed that all Africans in England were slaves, but this is not true, as slavery was disallowed in England.[3] In 1569, the Star Chamber made this point explicitly: "*Flagellation* for Slaves. In the Eleventh of *Elizabeth*, one *Cartwright* brought a Slave from *Russia*, and would scourge him, for which he was questioned; and it was resolved, That *England* was too pure an Air for Slaves to breath in."[4] William Harrison, in his description of England prefacing the 1577 edition of *Holinshed's Chronicles*, makes exactly this point. After naming the various manual occupations that make up the "fourth sorte," the lowest classes, Harrison adds: "As for slaves & [bondmen?] we have none."[5] He then describes how the fourth sort has no voice in parliament, etc. For the 1587 revision of the *Chronicles*, Harrison significantly expands England's prohibition against slavery, making it a point of nationalist pride:

> As for slaves and bondmen we have none, naie such is the privilege of our countrie by the especiall grace of God, and bountie of our princes, that if anie come hither from other realms, so soone as they set foot on land they become so frée of condition as their masters, whereby all note of servile bondage is utterlie remooved from them, where|in we resemble (not the Germans who had slaves al|so, though such as in respect of the slaves of other countries might well be reputed frée, but) the old Indians and the Taprobanes, who supposed it a great injurie to nature to make or suffer them to be bond, whome she in hir woonted course dooth product and bring foorth frée.[6]

Note that England not only has no slaves, but if a slave sets foot on English soil, they are automatically as free as their master. The objection could be raised that Harrison has in mind white people, not Africans, but note also that "the old In|dians and the Taprobanes," the denizens of the New World, also hold that slavery is fundamentally unnatural.

Two subsequent historians, Onyeka and Miranda Kaufmann, have challenged the notion of "unspoken English bondage" (Habib 96). The former (also a novelist and playwright), in *Blackamoores: Africans in Tudor England,* proposed that "Africans brought skills with them in Tudor England from where they came from, and that these skills meant they did not automatically have the status of slaves. Instead, most Africans in Tudor England seem to have occupied positions ranging from household servants to visiting dignitaries" (xii). Most of the references Habib found give us only names and dates, however, but Kaufmann, in *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*, writing for a predominantly nonacademic readership, managed to flesh out the stories of ten Africans living in England, perhaps best referred to as Afro-Britons. To get a sense of the place of Afro-Britons in English society, and consequently, the context for Shakespeare's *Othello*, I want to turn to a few specific instances, and then look at Elizabeth's infamous attempt at expelling Africans from England.[7]

Black Lives in England

We begin with a death. In January1591, the Parish Clerks' Memorandum Books for St. Botolph Church, Aldgate, recorded the following:

> Jhon Blackman Cittizen and grocer of London Dwelling at Stapleford Abott hall in Essex who being sick ded lye at the howse of Jhon Graundge a sawlt peterman dwelling in mr Turpin his Rente' being in a garden howse as we go towarde' sparrowes Corner where he endid his lyfe and was buried in the sowth church yeard Close by the heather butterise the xixth day of Januarie anno'

> 1591. yeares lxxxvii and being no p'ishioner w't vs [no parishioner with us].[8]

As names usually indicated origin, we can safely assume that John Blackman was African, or a "Black Man." He was, as the record indicates, far from indigent, and certainly no slave. Blackman was a "grocer," meaning, he was admitted to the Worshipful Company of Grocers. To get a sense of their status, we need look no further than the advice Simon Eyre gives to Rose in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday:* "marry me with a Gentleman Grocer like my Lord Mayor your father. A grocer is a sweet trade. Plums. Plums!" (sc.11, 44–45). Second, the late Blackman was also a "citizen," a category that carried with it the privilege of representation "both at law and in Parliament," and the expectation of civic involvement.[9] While I am obviously speculating, I do not think it is too far to imagine that Blackman, no longer capable of independent living and apparently without family, was taken in by a friend ("Jhon Graundge"), who cared for him until he died. Blackman then received a substantial funeral (whoever paid for the ceremony used "the best cloth" [Aldington 73]). To state the obvious, Blackman was a respected (and one hopes loved) man, a member of the community, a guild member, whose skin color was irrelevant to his civic and professional status.

Next, Mary Phyllis's adult baptism at St. Botolph's on June 3, 1597. Fortunately, the clerk left a detailed record of this event:

> Marye Phyllis A Blackmore beinge aboute twentye yeres of age and dwelling with millicen porter sempster. 2. Mary Phyllis of Morisco being a blackamore she was late servant with one Mr Bar[k]er of Marke Lane a widower she said her father's name was Phyllis of Morisco a blackamore being both a basket maker and shovel maker. This Marye Phyllis being about the age of .xx years, and having been in England for the part of .xii or .xiii yeares and as yet not christened now being bound servant with one Millicent

> Porter a sempster dwelling in the liberties of east Smithfield and now taking part . . . of faith in Iesus Christ was desirous to become a christian whereof she made suit . . . to have some conversation with the curat of this the parish of st. buttolph without Aldgate London . . . the curat named Christopher Threlkeld demanding of her certen questions concerning her feyth whereunto she answering him quite Christian like; and afterward she being by the said Christopher Threlkeld . . . to say the lords prayer and also to repeat the articles of her belief which she did both say and repeat both decently and well. Concerning her faith then the said curat demanded of her if she weare desirous to be baptized in the said fayth [wherat?] shee said yes. Then the said curat did go with her unto the fonte and desiring the congregation with him to call upon god the father through our Lord Iesus Christ that of his Bownteous mercie he would graunt her that thing . . . by nature she could not have, that she may be baptized.[10]

Marye Phyllis was far from alone in her baptism. In fact, many African adults underwent this ceremony. The only unusual aspect of her baptism is the detail that Thomas Harridance, the parish clerk for St. Botolph's gives for her background and the ceremony.[11] She was born in 1577 in present-day Morocco, and precisely how she came to England remains unknown. Nonetheless, while still a child, she became a servant to John Barker, a merchant and member of parliament, who also employed several other Africans in his household. After Barker died, Phyllis continued to serve his widow, but in 1597, she left her service for Millicent Porter, a seamstress. Why precisely she chose to leave, once more, remains unknown, but her changing employers suggests, as Kaufmann writes, "that Marye was able to choose her employer" (154). Slaves, obviously, do not choose their masters.

CRITICAL CONTEXTS

Othello's Iago as Male Witch: The Relevance of Scottish Witchcraft Trials

Robert C. Evans

In an essay published a few years ago (cited below), I argued that Iago, the diabolically evil character in William Shakespeare's *Othello*, strongly resembles a male witch. Today, of course, we commonly think of witches as females, but in fact male witches were well known and widely feared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In that earlier essay, I laid out many of the reasons for thinking that Iago might have reminded some readers and playgoers in Shakespeare's time of a person literally or metaphorically in the service of Satan. Witchcraft, after all, is a very prominent theme in the play almost from the start, when Brabantio accuses Othello of having used witchcraft to charm and then marry Desdemona, and also when Othello explicitly—and quite eloquently—defends himself against that very charge. But references to witchcraft, devils, damnation, demons, and hell (to mention just a few relevant terms) run all throughout the play. One of the most memorable invocations of the theme occurs right before Othello kills himself, when he openly raises the possibility that Iago might literally be a devil.

As I sought to show in that earlier essay, one person who may have taken a special interest in witchcraft as a theme in *Othello* was none other than England's new king, James VI and I. James, the sixth king of Scotland named "James," was the first king of England with that name. He had succeeded Elizabeth I as ruler of England in 1603—the same year in which *Othello* may have been written. He saw the play performed at court in 1604 on the day after Halloween. As everyone knew, James had an intense interest in witchcraft. He had published an entire book on the subject—*Demonologie*—in 1599, and a new edition of that work had recently appeared in England in 1603. In the essay already mentioned, I tried to show,

in detail, how often *Othello* draws on ideas and situations James himself had discussed in *Demonology*. Here, however, I want to examine the play in light of a different but related text: *Newes from Scotland*, which bears the interesting subtitle "A true discourse, | Of the apprehension of sundrye | Witches lately taken in Scotland: | wherof some are executed, and some are | yet imprisoned. || With a particuler recitall of their examinations, *taken in the presence of the Kinges Maiestie*."[1] This text, in many ways, provides some fascinating contexts for *Othello*, especially when it describes the role a handkerchief played in an attempted heinous murder of a person even more prominent than Othello.[2]

But First . . .

Before discussing that particular incident, however, it seems worthwhile to set the stage by surveying the parts of the *Newes* that precede it. The pamphlet opens by emphasizing how God inevitably "defeats the wicked practises and euil intents of all such as by any meanes whatsoeuer, seeke indirectly to conspire any thing contrary to his holy will." (In order to make the parallels between this incident and *Othello* easier to spot when re-reading, I have emphasized them by placing them in boldface type.) God showed his power and determination in Scotland when James was still a young king and "**a great number of vngodly creatures, no better then Diuels**" allowed "themselues to be allured and inticed by the Diuell whom they serued, and to whome they were pritiatelye sworne." They "entered into y[e] detestable Art of witchcraft, which they studied and practised so long time, that in the end they had **seduced by their sorcery a number of other [sic] to be as bad as themselues**"—phrasing that, for any reader of *Othello*, suggests Iago's malign influence first on Roderigo and then, even more spectacularly, on Othello himself. But the devils referred to by the unknown author of the *Newes* had tried to use "their detestable wickedness . . . against the Kings Maiestie" himself. Their "actions," in all ways, "were contrarye to the lawe of God, and the naturall affection which we ought generallye to beare one to another"—words that again seem

definitely applicable to Iago, one of the greatest, most demonic villains in all of world literature.

It all began when “a maide seruant called *Geillis Duncane*” began to be suspected, by her employer or “Maister,” a man named David Seaton, of using witchcraft to effect miraculous cures. When Seaton asked her how she had achieved such powers, she refused to answer him—a response that turns up often in the *Newes* and in other contemporary accounts of witchcraft, and a response that will remind any reader of *Othello* of Iago’s refusal, in the play’s last scene, to explain why he chose to bring so much destruction down upon the heads of so many innocent people. Faced with Geillis Duncane’s same kind of refusal to explain herself, Duncane’s questioners chose the same solution chosen by the questioners of Iago: they decided to torture her. Thus Seaton “did with the helpe of others, torment her with the torture of the Pilliwinckes vpon her fingers, which is a greeuous torture, and binding or wrinching her head with a corde or roape, which is a most cruell torment also, **yet would she not confesse any thing.**” This absolute refusal to confess resembles, once again, the same refusal Iago displays.

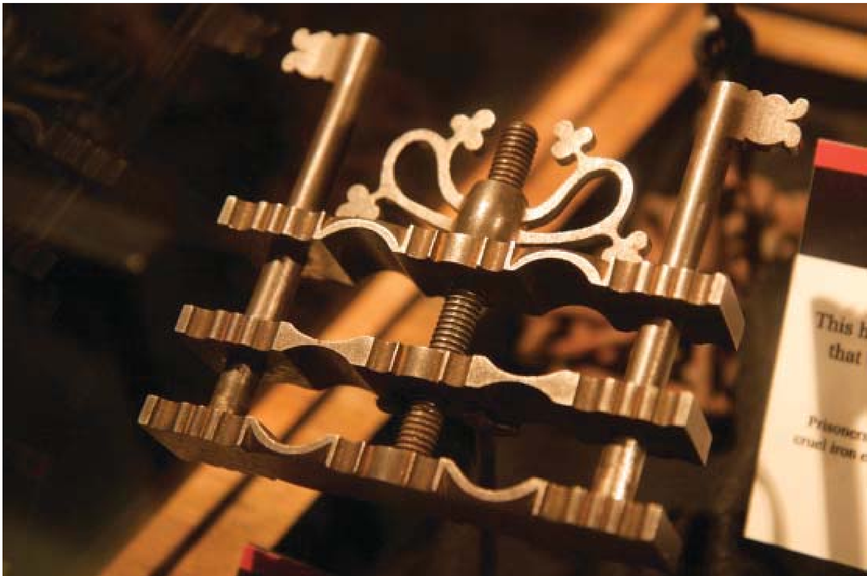

Illustration 1. Pilliwinks (“or thumb screws”). Interestingly enough, the particular device pictured here is from Venice.
Photo by Marcin Wichary, CC BY 2.0, National Museum of Crime and Punishment, via Wikimedia.

Eventually, however, Duncane *did* confess "that all her dooings was doone by the wicked allurements and inticements of the Diuell, and that she did them by witchcraft." Duncane displayed far less resilience than would soon be shown by some of the other witches—one male witch in particular. In fact, Duncane eventually accused a whole host of other persons of being "notorious witches," and caused them foorthwith to be apprehended one after another, including

Illustration 2. Accused witches being "encouraged" to confess. King James has been identified as the man standing on the platform. From Newes from Scotland, via Wikimedia. [Public domain.]

"*Agnis Sampson* the eldest Witch of them al, dwelling in Haddington, *Agnes Tompson* of Edenbrough, Doctor *Fian*, alias *Iohn Cunningham*, maister of the Schoole at Saltpans in Lowthian," as well as numerous others.[3] Fian, as will soon be seen, was the ringleader of the massive group of witches and is the figure who in many ways most resembles Shakespeare's Iago.

One of the witches was a woman named "*Ewphame Meealrean*," who had "vsed her art vpon a gentleman being one of the Lords and

Iustices of the Session, for **bearing good will to [i.e., presumably, being too familiar with] her Daughter**"—a motive with which Shakespeare's Brabantio might well sympathize. Revenge, in fact, was one of the most common motives of many witches described in *Newes*, and revenge was also one of the most common motives ascribed to numerous witches in many different times and places during this period. *Othello*, of course, opens with both Roderigo and Iago plotting revenge against the title character, while Iago himself also seeks revenge against Cassio and, eventually, leads Othello to plot revenge against both Cassio and Desdemona.

Among the many women involved in this nefarious activity, an especially important figure was the aforesaid "*Agnis Sampson*," who was the "elder Witch," and who was eventually examined by James himself. Yet despite "all the perswasions which the Kings maiestie vsed to her with ye rest of his counsell," they were unable to "prouoke or induce her to confesse any thing,"—the common behavior (at least initially) of almost all the witches examined and behavior that, once again, resembles Iago's refusal to confess at the end of *Othello*. Agnes, in fact, "**stood stiffely in the deniall of all that was laide to her charge**," just as Iago at first refuses to accept responsibility for his deeds (and even kills Emilia, his own wife, to keep her quiet). But Agnis, like most of the other witches, eventually changed her mind when she was "conueied awaye to prison, there to receiue such torture as hath been lately prouided for witches" in Scotland. Agnis had "all her haire shauen of, in each parte of her bodie," so that any marks made by Satan could more easily be discovered. Then she had "her head thrawen [i.e., twisted] with a rope according to the custome of that Countrye, beeing a paine most greeuous, which she continued almost an hower, during which time **she would not confesse any thing** vntill the Diuels marke was found vpon her priuities." Shakespeare leaves it to our imaginations to decide how well and how long Iago would bear up under the torture he will, in fact, endure after the play ends, but almost all the witches described in *Newes* eventually confessed, even if some of them also quickly recanted their confessions.

CRITICAL READINGS

A Prince and a Scholar Watch *Othello* in 1610

Matthew Steggle

There survive two accounts of people watching *Othello* on stage in 1610. They describe performances by Shakespeare's own company, and since they were within Shakespeare's lifetime, performances that Shakespeare himself, in theory at least, might have been present for. Such survivals are unusual: few other Shakespeare plays, indeed, few other plays from the whole era, have any comparably direct and early witnesses to what actually happened on stage, who was in the audience, and how they reacted. Each of these two accounts has often been cited, but rarely has either been investigated at length, and the two have never been compared in detail. That is the project of this essay.

It should be said at the start that in many respects both documents are completely maddening. They are both very brief, and uninformative about many of the things that now might be considered the most important aspects of the play (most notably in respect of race, since both of them simply take the race of the protagonist for granted). Nonetheless, that very quality of frustration is part of what makes them fascinating witnesses to the original worlds of *Othello*, in all their variety and unfamiliarity. The subject of this essay, then, consists of the accounts that record Louis Frederick Württemberg seeing *Othello* at the Globe in April 1610, and Henry Jackson seeing *Othello* at Oxford in August or September 1610.

Louis Frederick Württemberg

Louis Frederick (1586–1631) was the younger brother of Johann Friederich, the seventh Duke of Württemberg, a powerful protestant leader whose territories included possessions in what is now Southern Germany and also the city of Montbéliard, in modern France. Louis Frederick could reasonably expect that his whole career would be

spent in the higher echelons of European nobility, as indeed it was. He himself would end up as Duke of Montbéliard. In March 1610 he set off on a four-month diplomatic journey to build relations with allies of Württemberg, travelling from Southern Germany, across the United Provinces, to Britain and back. This was a round trip sufficiently epic that his secretary kept a careful travel diary (in French) which in due course found its way into the collections of the British Museum (British Library: Add. MS 20001; Rye, 1865, cxii–cxx; Wolfe, 2020). According to that diary, his visit to Britain involved networking both with British royalty and aristocracy, and also with several European ambassadors based in London. He also fitted in a substantial amount of cultural tourism, so that while in London he saw attractions including bearbaiting, monkeys riding on horseback, a perpetual motion machine, and a self-playing keyboard. And, on Monday, April 30, 1610, he saw *Othello*:

> His Excellency went to the Globe, the usual place where plays [or comedies] are performed; the history [or story] of the Moor of Venice was represented there. (Wolfe, 2020)

Brief though it is, the account contains a number of significant details. Firstly, it is evidence that *Othello* was still being played, six or seven years after its initial performance around 1603. Secondly, the play is framed not as a literary text that happens to be on stage but as an entrant in a cultural marketplace, competing with nontheatrical and paratheatrical attractions such as the horse-riding monkeys. The play is not named as *Othello* but as *The Moor of Venice*, which, as Gerald Baker has shown, is the case in almost all early references to the play in performance (Baker, 2016). But that his secretary bothered to record the title at all speaks to how it struck Louis Frederick's party, because both Venice and also the North African territories were significant players in the many-cornered and continuous competition of European politics. No one knew this better than the leaders of Württemberg, a protestant territory in the Holy Roman Empire with distant enemies in the form of the Turks and other more familiar ones in the form of fellow-Christians closer

to home. Indeed, other evidence in the diary shows that for Louis Frederick, Venice was more than just a theoretical place. He had met with the Venetian ambassador in London twice in the fortnight before seeing the play, in the hope of bolstering Württemberg's international position and would do so again later in his visit (Rye, 1865, 59, 60). Louis Frederick would doubtless have particularly noted the play's geographical sweep, Iago's visit to England, and his references to the Danes, the Germans, and the swag-bellied Hollander (2.3.62–64). But the important thing is that for him, as for some others in Shakespeare's early audiences, Venice was by no means an impossible distant neverland.

Henry Jackson

The play's second observer that year was a young academic, Henry Jackson (1586–1662). He had entered Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in 1602 as a scholar, that is, someone whose education was paid for by the college. Unusually for an Oxford undergraduate, he was local to Oxford: his father was a mercer in the town. He stayed at Corpus for nearly thirty years, gaining a succession of degrees there and becoming a Fellow of the College in 1612. In 1630, Corpus appointed him rector of Meysey Hampton in Gloucestershire, a village around thirty miles from Oxford, of which it owned the living. Jackson stayed as rector at Meysey Hampton until his death in 1662 (Eppley, 2004; Sutton, 2006; for wide context, *History of the University of Oxford,* 1986).

In September 1610, Jackson wrote a letter, in Latin, to a correspondent he calls "G. P." G. P. is still unidentified, though Jackson describes him in another letter as "*amico suo*," his friend. Geoffrey Tillotson guessed that the recipient might be George St. Poll (1562–1613), alumnus of Corpus, MP, and future benefactor of the college (Tillotson, 1942; for a fuller life, see Mimardière, 1981). Tillotson's guess remains the best available. To G. P., Jackson offered the following description of plays he had seen in Oxford recently:

> - These last few days the King's stage-players have been here. They have acted with the greatest applause, with the theater full. But they justly

> struck pious and learned men as impious, because, not content to hit at the alchemists, they most foully besmirched Holy Writ itself. That is, they taunted the Anabaptists, as if improbity hid behind this mask.
>
> - Our clergymen, who (I am ashamed to say) most eagerly gathered together. . .
>
> - Our theater never rang with greater applause than when that hypocritical buffoon made his entrance, who, to hold up the false sanctity of the Anabaptists before the spectators as an object of derision, impiously and monstrously sullied Scripture. They also had tragedies, which they acted with decorum and fitness. In these they elicited tears not only with their speaking but also with their physical action.
>
> - But that Desdemona, murdered by her husband in our presence, although she always pled her case excellently, yet when killed moved us more, while stretched out on her bed she begged the spectators' pity with her very facial expression.
>
> (Folger, 2020, using the translation of Sutton, 2006)

Most readers today see this letter at at least two removes. Firstly, the original letter is in Latin, the usual medium of communication between learned people at this date, the language of instruction in the universities, and the language in which much university drama was conducted. These are comments on English drama by someone who prefers to write in Latin. And here, for reference later on, is the crucial last sentence in Latin:

> *- At vero Desdemona illa apud nos a marito occisa, quanquam optime semper causam egit, interfecta tamen magis*

movebat; cum in lecto decumbens spectantium misericordiam ipso vultu imploraret.

(Cited from the facsimile at Folger, 2020)

Secondly, what survives is not, in fact, the original letter at all. The lines quoted above are four separate extracts from the letter, copied out by William Fulman (1632–88), scholar and antiquary. Forty-six years younger than Jackson, Fulman followed a very similar career to him: the son of a carpenter, he attended Corpus Christi College, became a fellow, and succeeded Jackson at Meysey Hampton (Fowler, 1893; Sherlock, 2004). Fulman copied out material from sixty-nine of Jackson's letters, to various recipients, in the course of his own work collecting materials for a history of Corpus Christi College (Elliott, 2004, 648). Fulman's notebooks, having made their way into the safe hands of the college's archives, are the documents that survive. One might note that the very fact that Fulman copied so many shows that he was evidently working not from the actual sent documents, which would be scattered around in the hands of their recipients, but from some sort of letter-book kept by Jackson and recording his outward correspondence. Crucially, Fulman's copying out also creates a problem by leaving apparent gaps in Jackson's accounts. The account as we have it, as the reader will note, is notably interested in Desdemona, to the point of barely mentioning Othello at all: but does that reflect Jackson's lack of interest in him? Or Fulman's? In either case, the effect is the same: the letter attests that some combination of Jackson and Fulman found Desdemona more newsworthy than Othello.

Another point that emerges from looking at the Jackson/Fulman axis is that the world of Corpus was close-knit to the point of incestuousness. This tiny college, with only twenty fellows, was very much a universe of its own. Jackson himself spent much of his time as a scholarly editor, preparing for publication editions of the works of Puritan-leaning clergymen including Richard Hooker, John Rainolds, and Sebastian Benefield, all of whom had also been members of the college. Benefield had, in fact, been Jackson's tutor, and Rainolds the college president when Jackson was admitted

RESOURCES

Chronology of William Shakespeare's Life

1564	William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon in April, 1564. He is baptized in the local church on April 26. His date of birth is usually assumed to have been April 23. His parents are John and Mary Shakespeare. John is a successful glove-maker who, in the years preceding and following William's birth, is a respected member of the local government, although later he suffers financial and social reversals. In addition to giving birth to William, Mary bears seven other children. William almost certainly attends the local grammar school.
1582	William marries Anne Hathaway, daughter of a prominent local farmer. Anne is three months pregnant at the time of the wedding and eight years older than William.
1583	Anne gives birth to a daughter (Susanna).
1585	The couple has twins (Hamnet and Judith). Hamnet dies in 1596.
1585-92	Details of Shakespeare's life during this period are unclear and have been the subject of much speculation. One legend (now widely doubted) suggests that he had to leave Stratford to escape the law after he allegedly poached deer from the property of a prominent local landowner. Other writers have speculated that during his time in Stratford Shakespeare may have worked for a lawyer and/or may have taught school. Some recent scholars have suggested that during part of this period Shakespeare may have been living, teaching, and (as an amateur) acting while part of the household of a prominent Catholic family in Lancashire. Numerous other theories abound concerning these "lost years."

Works by William Shakespeare

For an exceptionally detailed discussion of the chronology of Shakespeare's works (including discussion of the many disputes about the chronology) see William *Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Norton, 1997), pp. 69–144. See also the similarly detailed discussion by David Bevington, editor, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Longman, 1997), pp. A1–A21. Bevington helpfully gives the full titles of quarto (small format) printings and also makes their dates of publication quite clear.

Plays were usually first performed not long after they were written. In some cases we have evidence of first (or at least early) performances; in some cases we do not. Whereas dates of first printings are usually very solid, dates of first performances are often conjectural.

Even the best experts often disagree about the dates of probable composition of Shakespeare's works. In the listing below, Bevington's suggestions are cited alongside those of G. Blakemore Evans (in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed. Houghton Mifflin, 1997, pp. 77–87) and Wells and Taylor. The frequent variances will give some idea of how often even the best students of these issues can disagree.

Love's Labor's Lost (Bevington: c. 1588–97; G. B. Evans: 1594–95 ["revised 1597 for court performance"]; Wells and Taylor: 1593–95; comedy; first known printing, 1598).

The Henry the Sixth Plays (Bevington: c. 1589–92; G. B. Evans: 1589–90 [revised 1594–95 for Part One; 1590–91 for Part Two; 1590–91 for Part Three]; Wells and Taylor: Part Three, 1590–92; Part Two: 1590–91; Part One: 1591–92 [with other authors]. Three history plays; the second part was first printed in 1594; the third part was first printed in 1595; the first part [perhaps the last written of the three] was first printed in 1623).

Titus Andronicus (Bevington: c. 1589–92; G. B. Evans: 193–94; Wells and Taylor: 1590–91; tragedy; first known printing, 1594).

The Comedy of Errors (Bevington: c. 1589–94; G. B. Evans: 1592–94; Wells and Taylor: 1592–94; comedy; first known printing, 1623).

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