

JOURNAL *of the* NORTHERN RENAISSANCE

<http://northernrenaissance.org> | ISSN: 1759-3085



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Issue 9 (2017) - Early Modern Voices

Shakespeare's DNAs and the daughters of his house

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[1] The extent to which Shakespeare's life is reflected in his work remains a contested issue in Shakespeare studies and has done so at least since the Romantic period. Ever since readings of the Sonnets as a poetic diary of the poet's turbulent emotional relationships with real people have been vigorously challenged. And yet at the same time it seems inconceivable that in the course of twenty years and some forty plays and poems Shakespeare's own life would not bleed through into his works. An important caveat is to acknowledge that if there are clearly identifiable areas of overlap these do not therefore diminish the works or impose biographical readings on them. In a letter of 1819 Keats famously remarked that

A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory – and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life – a life like the scriptures, figurative – which such people can no more make out than they can the hebrew Bible. Lord Byron cuts a figure – but he is not figurative – Shakespeare led a life of Allegory; his works are the comments on it. (Keats 1970: 218)

Keats's train of thought is a complex web of whimsical playing on figure and figurative while suggesting that the mysterious imaginative potential of each life, its hidden parable, needs be acknowledged. Some, he suggests, have the supreme gift to recognize and render the parable, foremost among them Shakespeare. For Keats, Shakespeare the private man from Stratford and Shakespeare the dramatist and poet are not separable, even if the link is allegorical and therefore not literally accessible. I propose going one step further than Keats and would argue that the connections are also literal. Why, for example, would Shakespeare pun on 'Will' the way he does in sonnet 135 ('So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will | One will of mine, to make thy large Will more') and conclude 136 with 'Make but my name thy love, and love that still | And then thou lovest me, *for my name is Will*' [emphases added] unless his name was indeed William? [1] To deny such a subjective, self-reflexive gesture by the speaker would seem to be counter-intuitive. Rather, there appear to be multiple overlaps between the life and work. This essay seeks to tease out some of the more striking links between Shakespeare's literary and literal 'DNA'. I will argue that identifiable, real life footprints in the works are complemented by the story of the Shakespeare family graves and that these in turn may cast new light on the women of the Shakespeare family and the mark they left on his works.

1. Literary DNA in the plays and poems

[2] At times the plays appear to refer demonstrably to real life events as, for example, in Gloucester's 'These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us'. It is hard not to see in this an allusion to the eclipses of 17 September and 2 October 1605, which would have been very recent ('late') at the time of the first act of *King Lear*, which was almost certainly written during the winter and spring of 1605-6, that is in the immediate wake of the Gunpowder Plot of 5 November 1605. The 'Powder Plot' (as it was known at the time) is itself directly evoked by the Porter's drunken speech in *Macbeth*. Not only does he allude to the Jesuitical practice of using equivocation in their defence, but his reference to the farmer who hanged himself 'on th' expectation of plenty' (2.3.4) is more specific than may appear at first sight, as 'Farmer' was the alias of the very person who was thought to have orchestrated the plot, Father Henry Garnett, whose grisly death outside St Paul's Cathedral in May 1606

Shakespeare may echo in the blood-soaked imagery of *Macbeth*: 'As they had seen me with these hangman's hands' (2.2.30).

[3] Political allusions in the drama of the period were not uncommon but potentially dangerous and in any case were bound to attract the censor's interest. Shakespeare learnt that lesson the hard way with the near fiasco over the naming of Oldcastle, which resulted in the apologetic disclaimer of the epilogue of *2 Henry IV*: 'For Oldcastle died martyr, and this is not the man.' (Epilogue, 28). Similarly, it is widely, though not universally, accepted that the reference in *Henry V*, to the 'General of our gracious Empress' returning from Ireland bringing 'rebellion broachèd in his sword' (Chorus 5.0.30-33), alludes to Essex's contemporary campaign in Ireland (March 1599 – September 1599). The reference to the maverick earl may well account for the absence of the Act V chorus from the early printed texts of the play (it first appears in the First Folio, which may be based on Shakespeare's 1599 foul papers), as Essex was in disgrace by the summer of 1600.

[4] The reason why Simon Forman does not mention the Porter's scene after seeing *Macbeth* at the Globe Theatre on 20 April 1611 is because the scene was not staged: it had clearly been cut for performance. It survives in the only extant source text of *Macbeth*, which is printed in the 1623 Folio and probably derives from a scribal transcript of Shakespeare's foul papers, with bits of Middleton's 1616 *The Witch* grafted on to it. The fact that the play that Forman saw in 1611 and the 1623 Folio text are essentially the same suggests that Shakespeare's surmised collaboration with Middleton on *Macbeth* was minimal, if it happened at all. Certainly the Folio syndicate seemed to think that the play was all Shakespeare's even if they did allow incrustations from *The Witch*.

[5] But there are more intimate, personal echoes across the divide of life and literature, where the rhymes would seem to be not so much between history and the works but between Shakespeare the private individual and the plays and poems. The most intriguing of all these rhymes across the life / art divide is probably the reference to Richard Field in *Cymbeline*. When Imogen is asked her master's name she replies with 'Richard du Champ. If I do lie and do | No harm by it, though the gods hear, I hope | They'll pardon it.' (4.2.374-76) There is no doubt that the allusion is to the Stratford printer Richard Field ('Champ' is French for 'field' and Imogen in disguise is 'Fidele'), Shakespeare's senior by three years, who sixteen years earlier had printed his fellow Stratfordian's *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. This mystifying gesture, probably an act of affectionate friendship, should put paid to any notion that Shakespeare's work is ethereally disembodied from its author.

[6] Moreover, Shakespeare, the father of cross-gender twins wrote two comedies about twins, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*. The first of these was staged before the poet's twins, Hamnet and Judith, were ten years old while the second, *Twelfth Night*, was written and performed five years after the boy twin's death. The Shakespeare twins were christened at Holy Trinity on Candlemas 1585 while *Twelfth Night* appears to have had its famous premiere on that very day (2nd February) in Middle Temple in 1602. This puts it, probably, right after *Hamlet* (c.1601) which may have been written during Shakespeare's father's last illness (John Shakespeare died in September 1601), if not immediately after his death. The timing of Shakespeare's famous father-son tragedy, in close proximity to his own father's death, would seem to be echoed in his mother-son play *Coriolanus* (1608): 'O mother, mother! | What you have you done?' says the play's protagonists whose heroic deeds were all done, according to his detractors, to 'please his mother' (5.4.182-83; 1.1.32-33). The play, which alludes to the severe frost of 1607-8, was written the same year in which Shakespeare's mother died, an unlikely coincidence.

[7] Nor is *Hamlet* the first of his plays to intersect allusively with Shakespeare's life: his daughter Susanna was aged 13 in 1596, the probable date of *Romeo and Juliet* while the thirteen-year-old Juliet's dead double, Nurse's daughter, is another Susan. The name Susan is moreover unique to *Romeo and Juliet*. At least two other names in the works would appear to have been carried over from life. Thus Shakespeare's wife Anne's maiden name of 'Hathaway' may have found its way into Shakespeare's poetry very early on. Sonnet 145, written uniquely in octosyllabic lines and, perhaps, a piece of callow juvenilia, perhaps a poem written by the teenage Shakespeare during his courtship of Anne Hathaway, concludes with the couplet "I hate" from "hate" away she threw | And saved my life, saying "not you". Andrew Gurr (1971: 221-6) first noted that this short lyric might allude to Anne Hathaway in line 13, while Stephen Booth further thought that 'And' punned on the name 'Anne. The poet's later playing on his own name in sonnets 135 and 136 would suggest that he saw nothing strange in feeding private autobiographical information into his work, and particularly into poems that seem to be tantalizingly personal to the point where many have searched for confessional clues in them, notably with regard to the fair friend and the dark lady.

[8] Finally, and in a play contemporary with (probably) the writing of most of the *Sonnets*, the name of Emilia Bassano, mistress of Lord Hunsdon, who was patron of Shakespeare's company, should be considered. This Venetian Jewish musician at court has been a favoured real life claimant for the Dark Lady of the *Sonnets* since A. L. Rowse first argued this in 1973 in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: the Problems Solved*. Rowse's theories about the Dark Lady and the ramifications of her presence in the *Sonnets* were called into question by Samuel Schoenbaum's researches but they are not to be discredited self-evidently, contrary to Schoenbaum's assertions (Schoenbaum 1970: 761-64). Rowse's extensive use of Simon Forman's diary when writing about Emilia Bassano and her husband Will Lanier sheds interesting light on the Will poems 135 and 136, notably with regard to the surplus Wills of the Dark Lady, an echo perhaps of her two wills (or Wills), Will Shakespeare and Will Lanier. Emilia Bassano's surname moreover occurs prominently in *The Merchant of Venice* albeit in the guise of a feckless young fortune hunter, Bassanio, who seems to be as embroiled in a gender-bending triangle (Bassanio – Antonio – Portia) every bit as ambiguous as that of the fair youth, poet, and dark lady scenario envisaged in the *Sonnets*. The *Sonnets* would suggest that Shakespeare's answer to Juliet Capulet's 'What's in a name' might have been 'quite a lot'.

[9] But the most intriguing link between the life and work may be the poet's twice-married granddaughter Elizabeth Barnard, née Hall. Her parents Susanna Shakespeare and John Hall married on Friday 5 June 1607 and Elizabeth was born 9 months later, on 21 February 1608. At the time her grandfather was working on *Pericles*, which was entered on the Stationers Register on 20 May 1608. The first of Shakespeare's two uses of the word 'childbed' in that play occurs at the birth of Marina in Act 3. Parting from his 'dead' queen, her father Pericles notes 'A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear, | No light, no fire.' (3.1.55-56). The only other occurrence is in *The Winter's Tale*, when Hermione claims that she was 'the childbed privilege denied, which 'longs | To women of all fashion'(3.2.101-02)

[10] Connecting contemporaneous events in the poet's life to *Pericles*, the Arden editor Suzanne Gossett writes that

Susanna Shakespeare delivers a daughter in the week of 21 February 1608. Shakespeare, with painful memories of losing a child revived by the death of Edmund's son and obsessed with the possibility that Susanna will die in childbirth, is relieved. Around this time he takes over the play, pouring his grief

over the deaths of Edmund and his infant son, his fears for Susanna and his delight at his granddaughter's birth into the scenes of birth and apparent death in the third and fourth acts. (Gossett 2004: 61)

Elizabeth Barnard is a significant figure in the Shakespeare story, as the last survivor of the poet's direct line and the one about whom we probably know most. Her father, the distinguished doctor John Hall, husband of Shakespeare's eldest child Susannah, wrote at length about her health which is how we know that she suffered from a neurological condition known as Bell's palsy, a form of temporary facial paralysis. Also it is because of the importance of 22 April in her life (she returned from London in 1626 on that date and she married her first husband Thomas Nash on 22 April 1626) that people have wondered, ever since Thomas De Quincey first remarked upon it, whether this was not after all Shakespeare's real birthday. Moreover she reputedly moved books from her home in New Place with her when she joined her husband in Abington. All these, taken together with her generous, family-minded last will (she included the Hathaways in it, unlike her grandfather), suggest that she may have seen herself as the guardian of her family's memory. By the time she died in 1670 the Shakespeares had become the first family of Stratford, after the Cloptons. Not only did Elizabeth know her illustrious grandfather during the first eight years of her life, at a time when she quite probably lived in the same house, New Place, as him and her grandmother, but he remembered her in his will. In the long years that followed – she survived him by 54 years – she would every Sunday have seen his bust in Holy Trinity from the Halls' prestigious pew next to the Clopton Chapel in the north aisle.

2. The DNA of the Shakespeare graves

[11] In June 1981 Elizabeth Barnard was exhumed in Abington. Given her importance in the Shakespeare story, it seems extraordinary in retrospect that her exhumation did not cause more of a stir in the national press. It took *The Times* nearly three months to report it (18 September 1981: 'Shades of Shakespeare's Past'). It remained virtually unknown until the publication of *The Shakespeare Circle*, when the manuscript account of the exhumation, by Arthur Marlow, was discovered in the archives of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, after an extract from it had been shared by the genealogist John Taplin with the author of this paper (Edmondson & Wells 2015: 122-134). The details of the exhumation of Elizabeth Barnard need not detain us here, but a unique opportunity of taking a DNA sample from her was missed.

[12] Quite how permission for exhuming Elizabeth Barnard was sought and granted is not known. The prospect of a similarly full exploration of the Shakespeare graves in Holy Trinity has long exercised researchers and the wider public. On Saturday 26 March 2016 Channel 4 broadcast a programme called 'Secret History: Shakespeare's Tomb'. The timing was presumably not fortuitous, with the following day being Easter Sunday 2016. Not that Channel 4 were quite implying that Shakespeare would rise from the dead, but they wanted to find parts of him and particularly his skull. A rumour held that the poet's head had been removed at some point from the tomb in the chancel of Holy Trinity and had migrated to Beoley. According to the *Telegraph* of 23 March 2016,

St Leonard's Church, located 15 miles north-west of Stratford in Beoley, is home to a lone skull in a sealed crypt that some have thought could be Shakespeare's. The current vicar ... sought permission from the Church of England's Consistory Court to have the skull tested for DNA, but had the application rejected on a lack of firm evidence.

When permission to test was eventually secured it turned out that the bardic pretender skull belonged to a woman in her 70s. Not that this proof was needed. The afterlife of the famous grave in Stratford-upon-Avon is after all reasonably well documented through the ages, thanks to a number of Stratford antiquarians, in particular the Stratford grammar school teacher Reverend Joseph Greene (1712-90), the Reverend James Davenport (1787-1841), and Robert B. Wheler (1785-1857). They are among the largely unsung heroes of the Shakespeare story. It is thanks to them that we have Shakespeare's will, which was found by Greene, and his wedding licence or 'bond', which Wheler unearthed in 1836 thus confirming the identity of Shakespeare's bride. Until then all that was known about her was Nicholas Rowe's remark in 1709 life of Shakespeare that 'his wife was the daughter of one Hathaway, said to have been a substantial yeoman in the neighbourhood of Stratford', an assertion not helped by the fact that the grant on the Shakespeares' wedding licence preserved in the Worcester Register gives her name as 'Whateley'. It is courtesy of the upright Reverend Davenport that we know that Shakespeare's grave was inadvertently disturbed when the newly widowed Davenport was having a grave dug for his wife in 1796. What happened, it seems, is that the gravedigger broke through the side of Shakespeare's burial place, realized what he had done, and resealed it, after taking care to ensure that the poet's grave remained safe from prying eyes. He did not poke around in it nor did he leave an account of what he did not see. Writing about these events in 1820, Washington Irving noted that it was likely that when the 'adjoining vault' was dug [for Margaret Davenport, the vicar's wife], 'the earth caved in', leaving a space through which it might be possible to reach Shakespeare. The same sexton who acted as Irving's guide in Holy Trinity had kept watch in 1796 until the work was finished. He did however look through the hole himself 'but could see neither coffin nor bones; nothing *but dust*. It was something, I thought, to have seen the dust of Shakespeare.' (Irving 1861: 324-325).

[13] Documenting these events years later, Halliwell-Phillipps concurred:

The most scrupulous care, however, was taken not to disturb the neighbouring earth [...] the clerk having been placed there till the brickwork of the adjoining vault was completed to prevent anyone making an examination. No relics whatever were visible through the small opening that thus presented itself, and *as the poet was buried in the ground, not in a vault*, the great probability is that dust alone remains. (emphases added; Halliwell-Phillipps's comments are reproduced in the *Gettysburgh Compiler* of 17 June 1908.)

To explore the same space some 220 years later, Channel 4 were allowed to use Ground Penetrating Radar. But it did not in truth yield much by way of information, even if it appeared to suggest that the poet was buried not in a coffin or shell but wrapped in a winding sheet directly in the earth, in an essentially shallow grave. Can this really be so when his granddaughter instead was buried in a vault? What would have been needed is for a laparoscopic camera to be lowered into the grave in Holy Trinity but that was a step too far even if it would probably not have disturbed the poet's bones. The injunction on the grave, or the 'curse' as some have called it, to leave his remains alone ('Good friend for Jesus sake forbear, | To dig the dust enclosed here! | Blessed be the man that spares these stones, | And cursed be he that moves my bones') has been one of the main reasons why Shakespeare's grave has not so far been opened. It is as if the nation's favourite son's writ were still running.

[14] Or maybe not. The *Pittsburgh Gazette Times* of Sunday 1 December 1912 reports that Charles Knight (publisher and editor of a well-known 19th century illustrated Shakespeare), had apparently *seen* Shakespeare's remains during the restoration of Holy Trinity in,

presumably, 1835. In *Shakespeare's Lives* Schoenbaum calls Knight 'an honourable man' and a champion of 'Victorian humanitarianism' (Schoenbaum 1970: 384). In 1842 Knight settled in Stratford to write the biographical volume of his *Pictorial Shakespeare*. The source of the assertion that Knight claimed to have seen Shakespeare in his grave ('the positive statement') is not given. If true, it is odd that Knight should not mention this in his 1843 biography of Shakespeare, which is reticent about anything relating to the grave in Holy Trinity.

[15] According to the *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, '[Knight] subsequently made the positive statement that he had seen the remains of the poet.' But did he? In a forceful letter to the *London Times* of 30 January 1888 ('Stratford-on-Avon Church: its ancient charnel-house and Shakespeare's grave'), Halliwell-Phillipps voiced strong reservations about more proposed restoration ('mischief') of Holy Trinity at just that time as it might compound the damage done to this famous building by earlier so-called restorations, of which there were moreover were no proper records. The works that fifty years earlier had allegedly allowed Knight to gaze on Shakespeare's remains are singled out for special opprobrium:

No detail later extant of the extensive alterations made in the chancel in the closing years of the last century, and, strangely enough, no particulars are recorded of the deplorable metamorphoses of the interior of the entire building that was effected so recently as 1835.

The dreaded restorations that Halliwell-Phillipps feared would go the same way as the 1835 ones went ahead anyway, it seems, and no better records appear to have been kept than were of the earlier restoration. Moreover, and for a third time in the space of less than a hundred years, they may have exposed Shakespeare's remains again. If the *Pittsburgh Gazette Times* can be believed, after Charles Knight it was the turn of the Holy Trinity sexton Martin Bird sexton to see Shakespeare:

The last time the grave was opened was about 30 years ago [1892], and the remains viewed by Martin Bird, who was then the sexton of the church, and who is still alive and residing at Stratford. Mr Bird is now in his ninetieth year and lately made an affidavit setting forth the following facts: 'I have lived in Stratford-on-Avon 70 years. About 30 years ago I was present when Shakespeare's remains were exposed to view, at which time a stone was moved, a candle let down and I could see the bones of Shakespeare ... In the short minute they were exposed to view, I could plainly see, by the aid of the light of the candle, a perfect skeleton.'

There is no obvious reason to doubt the trustworthiness of Martin Bird. The *Gazette Times* did not make him up. A quick genealogical check in *ancestry.co.uk* reveals that a Richard Martin Bird, born about 1823, died in Stratford in 1918 at the age of 95, so he would indeed have been in his ninetieth year in 1912. The 1911 census gives his address as 'Arondale Alveston, Stratford-on-Avon' and his profession as wine merchant. Did he double as sexton? He does not refer to himself as sexton (the *Gazette* does that), only noting that he had been a resident in Stratford at the time of the 1892 removal (or temporary shifting?) of the grave stone. Did he really see 'a perfect skeleton' 276 years after Shakespeare's burial? While this may chime with Charles Knight's apparently seeing the poet's remains 57 year earlier, it hardly does with Irving's and Halliwell-Phillipps's reporting of what was (or rather was not) seen in 1796. Then again, in 1796, it seems to have been a matter of peering through an accidental aperture while Bird specifically mentions the moving of the gravestone.

[16] The Shakespeare graves in the chancel in Holy Trinity as given by the authoritative *Victoria County History* volume (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol3/pp269-282>) on Shakespeare's church are laid out as follows:

Carefully preserved in the floor, east of the communion rails, are the grave-slabs connected with Shakespeare's family and others. (1) Northernmost, with a brass inscription to Anne wife of William Shakespeare, died 6 August 1623, aged 67. (2) (William Shakespeare) ... (3) Thomas Nash, married Elizabeth daughter of John Halle, gent., died 4 April 1647, aged 53... (4) John Hall, married Susanna daughter of William Shakespeare and died 25 November 1635, aged 60 ... (5) Susanna, wife of John Hall, died 11 July 1649, aged 66. (6) Francis Watts of Rine Clifford, 1691. (7) Anne, wife of last, 1704. There is also a slab for Judith Combe with a white marble border for the inscription.

The wife of Malone's trusted correspondent, the former vicar James Davenport, is buried west and down the chancel from Shakespeare's grave.

3. Judith Shakespeare, daughter of her father's house

[17] If Shakespeare's granddaughter Elizabeth Hall naturally rests with her second husband in Abington, what of that absent member of the Shakespeare family who should be in the chancel of Holy Trinity, Judith Quiney, née Shakespeare, the twin sister of Hamnet? She is not mentioned in the row of graves even though she almost certain rests here too. Judith was buried on 9 February 1662; she was 77 years old. Is the reason for her absence that she wanted to be interred next to her twin brother Hamnet? Unlike us she would have known exactly whereabouts in Holy Trinity or in its churchyard little Hamnet Shakespeare was buried. She was eleven when he died and she must have attended his funeral on 11 August 1596 along with other members of her family.

[18] There may of course be a more mundane reason for her not being in the family row in the chancel: like her sister and her niece in Abington Judith too may have been buried next to her husband, the reckless Thomas Quiney who may have died in in the same year as her, around 1662-3 when the registers of Holy Trinity show a gap. The obvious place of burial for Judith and her husband would be to be buried alongside her sister Susanna and Dr John Hall. This notwithstanding the fact that 46 years earlier Thomas Quiney had darkened William Shakespeare's last days on earth by betraying Judith and plunging his new family into scandal. In other words, Judith and her husband should rest next to Susanna and John Hall, in graves numbers 6 and 7, occupied by Francis and Ann Watts who have no connection to the Shakespeare clan. In the light of this it seems likely that the Quiney-Shakespeare grave was opened at some point to receive the Watts couple and that a new stone was laid down with their names on it. Certainly that would seem to be indicated by the arrangement of the graves in the chancel, particularly as the Watts graves are at the outer edge of the Shakespeare row on the south side and therefore furthest from the Shakespeare nucleus. This might account for the fact that it was Judith and Thomas who were disturbed rather than Susanna and her husband, in spite of the fact that Judith had only been dead for 29 years when Francis Watts was buried in her and Thomas's grave (if they were).

[19] There is a further possibility regarding Judith's and Thomas's graves. By 1639 the couple's three sons had all died. One can only imagine their heartache. Would it not be natural for them to be resting alongside their children, perhaps somewhere in the churchyard of Holy Trinity? Unless the Quiney-Shakespeare boys occupied the grave that now bears the Watts' name long before their parents. Which leads one to wonder whether or not Hamnet Shakespeare may not after all be buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity. Eleven

years later, on New Year's Eve of 1607, the little boy's father had paid twenty shillings to honour Hamnet's uncle Edmund in St Saviour's in Southwark, by 'a forenoon knell of the great bell'. From the record it is clear that Shakespeare arranged for his younger brother to be buried in the church rather than outside of it. It stands to reason that the 'gentle' playwright, who bought the largest home in Stratford, also wanted to ensure that his only son rested somewhere where his family, his twin sister, and his mother and father could share the presence of his mortal remains at the very least in church every Sunday. If in the future the Shakespeare graves are examined in full it would make sense to search in the graves for the children of the Shakespeare families, Hamnet and his three nephews by his sister Judith.

[20] The most salient documentary fact about Judith Shakespeare is her father's rewriting of his legacy to her in the second draft of his will of 25 March 1616, introducing her specifically into his will by name, replacing his son-in-law. We don't know for certain why he did so but it is widely surmised that this astringent act intended to ring fence her share of the estate against her husband Thomas Quiney. Judith married Quiney on 10 February 1616. A Lenten marriage required a special dispensation. This had clearly been granted. As Judith was not pregnant, it seems that she was keen to marry before her father died, to be given away by him, further proof perhaps that Shakespeare was seriously ill during the two months that separate the January and March 1616 drafts of his will. Within six weeks of the marriage Quiney was exposed as the father of the baby of Margaret Wheler who died in childbirth with her infant so that Judith's marriage was followed not long afterwards by the funeral of her newly-wed husband's lover and baby, on 15 March 1616.

[21] Ever since 1616 Judith has been overshadowed by her elder sister Susanna who received the lion's share of her father's estate and who had married one of the most brilliant physicians in the country. Susanna is moreover credited on her grave with being like her father: 'Witty above her sex, but that's not all, | Wise to salvation was good Mistress Hall, | Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this | Wholly of him with whom she is now in bliss.' Neither the redrafting of the will nor the tribute to Susanna turn Judith into a Cinderella figure, even if she was evidently less fortunate than her elder sister in her wedded state. And Judith is not quite as shadowy as is sometimes assumed: on 4 December 1611, over four years before her father's death, she witnessed a deed of sale for a family who had resided at New Place until the summer of 1611, an action that implies considerable trust and legitimate authority.

[22] Did Judith stand in for her father on this occasion, traditionally a time when, we think, he would be in London, earning the money that allowed the Shakespeares to live in style in Stratford-upon-Avon? That her father may have been absent during this wintry period is suggested by the fact that a new play of his, *The Tempest*, had just recently opened in London. By the time *The Tempest* was staged at Court on 1 November 1611 (its first recorded performance), the household at New Place appears to have contracted to Shakespeare, his wife Anne, and his daughter Judith. Shakespeare's lawyer cousin, Thomas Greene (the same Greene who in 1614 refers to 'my cousin Shakespeare coming yesterday to town I went to see him how he did': Chambers 1930: 143) had moved out by then. So too, probably, had the Halls and their daughter, following the Greenes to Old Town. The house, for centuries known locally as 'Hall's Croft', is in all likelihood the house that the Halls had built for them at just that time, with dendrochronology dating the timber of the building conclusively to around 1612-13.

[23] Along with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* is probably the Shakespeare play least indebted to a structuring source even if its debt to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is

pervasive at local levels. So is his use of Montaigne's *Essays* and, perhaps above all, the tribulations, including shipwrecks, of the Virginia Company as it sought to explore new worlds. It has long been seen as perhaps Shakespeare's most overtly autobiographical play, if one dare put it like that. In *Ungentle Shakespeare*, Katherine Duncan-Jones singles out *As You Like It* for this accolade because of its 'William' and the fact that the work seems to play in Shakespeare's family's own rural backyard, the Forest of Arden.

[24] What people usually mean by calling *The Tempest* autobiographical is no more than to note the obvious parallel between Prospero's bidding farewell to his magic and Shakespeare's retiring from the stage. The play is his last solo effort, even though he would return to collaborate on *Two Noble Kinsmen* and, finally, two years later, on *Henry VIII*.

[25] That Shakespeare 'retired' is not a solecism while at the same time retirement was clearly differently understood from today. He would have known all about the idea of retiring from reading Virgil and his Roman historians about, among others, Cincinnatus and Sulla. He had been a grandfather for three years by the time he wrote *The Tempest*, a magnificent neo-classical fable about nature and nurture, innocence and guilt, sexuality and power. Its prominence in the 1623 commemorative First Folio – it opens the collection – is in itself revealing about the valedictory status of the play and the esteem in which it was held by Shakespeare's friends and fellow actors. And also, perhaps, because they knew that it had been his own leave-taking from the stage that had made his fortune and to which he must have been profoundly attached. It stands to reason that the most acclaimed dramatist of all time loved his stagecraft and the invigorating madness and camaraderie of writing and acting. What better way to part company from it than with a masterpiece that moreover demonstrated to all and sundry that he could be as neoclassically disciplined as the best of them, including his friend Ben Jonson, who would pay tribute to him twice in the 1623 Folio?

[26] The creative arc of Shakespeare's work concludes with the group commonly classed as romances, not a genre recognized by the First Folio which lists them under tragedies (*Cymbeline*) and comedies (*The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*), with *Pericles* left out probably because it was a collaborative venture. As in the comedies so in the romances young women rule the roost, even if their play worlds have darkened and death enters into lists as it never quite did in the comedies, not even in *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare's last comedy and probably his bleakest. But the young women of the romances, starting with Marina in *Pericles*, followed by Imogen, Perdita and, particularly perhaps Miranda, are imagined quite differently from Portia, Viola, and Rosalind. They are daughters of fathers first and young women second, and their marriages form part of a process that helps to redeem and reestablish the domestic world. Whereas Portia, Viola, and other comedy heroines are cut off from mother and father (dead in both their cases), the young women of the romances carry different burdens from romantic union. Time and again they seem to be connected imaginatively to redemptive yearnings which is why these works are sometimes thought to resonate with religious motifs, whether in the Pauline echoes of *The Winter's Tale* and its repeated returns to faith or the monastic life fervently embraced, or so he claims, by Prospero on his return to Milan.

[27] There may well be something in this. Shakespeare, though still only in his late forties at the time of the romances, may have been mellowing after the searing play *Coriolanus* which coincided with his own mother's death. Just before *Pericles* Shakespeare became a grandfather and by the time he wrote *The Tempest* he shared his house New Place with, mostly, women: his wife Anne, his daughters Susannah and Judith, his granddaughter Elizabeth and of course his son-in-law John Hall, who may have spent much time out of the

house, riding across Warwickshire tending to his many patients. Is it entirely fanciful then to wonder whether the reemergence of young women as powerful benign forces in late Shakespeare might not after all have its roots in his domestic circumstances?

[28] Twins were ever close to Shakespeare's heart and his dramatic imagination. It would be counter-intuitive to think that *Twelfth Night* could be divorced from his real life twin children, not least because of the play's close proximity to *Hamlet*, a play that even if it is not named after his dead son – there was an earlier, now lost, play *Hamlet* by a dramatist (Thomas Kyd?) other than Shakespeare – at least shares his name. Hamlet and Hamnet, the name commonly given to Shakespeare's son, were used interchangeably in Stratford-upon-Avon about Hamnet / Hamlet Sadler, the very person after whom Shakespeare's little boy was almost certainly named, with Shakespeare's friends Judith and Hamnet Sadler acting as godparents to the Shakespeare twins by the same names. It seems inconceivable that Shakespeare could ever have pronounced the name Hamlet without thinking of his dead son who, if he had lived, would have been well into his teens when his father wrote *Hamlet*, the ultimate father-son play. In *Shakespeare's Language* (2001) Frank Kermode remarked that after *Hamlet* everything in Shakespeare changed. The scale of the play's philosophical range, its drive, and the texture of its rhetoric, hitherto unparalleled even in Shakespeare, not to mention its epic scale – why would Shakespeare write a play that is twice the expected length of a tragedy – all may point to a profound personal investment in the work. If we are right to propose a date of composition for *Hamlet* after Shakespeare's father's death or during his final illness, that is a date close to the play's entry on the Stationers' Register of 26 July 1602, that might firm up the idea that the play carries an autobiographical punch, with Shakespeare forcibly reminded in 1601/02 of his own roles as both father and son. (In their edition of *Hamlet*, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note that the 'firmest external evidence' for dating the play is the 1602 entry in the Stationers' and, of course, Q1's 1603 title-page (Thompson and Taylor 2006: 43-59)).

[29] The chronology of the plays matters because *Hamlet* may intimately connect with *Twelfth Night* in a context of real life domestic parallels with imaginative motifs. The first recorded reference to the famous comedy occurs in the diary of the law student John Manningham, who saw the play performed at Middle Temple on the 17th anniversary of the christening of Shakespeare's twins in Holy Trinity. This may be a coincidence – could Shakespeare really dictate the performance calendar at Middle Temple? – but a play about cross-gender twins by a father of boy-girl twins would hardly be so. It would stretch credulity as a fortuitous connection, the more so since other evidence suggests that Shakespeare may not have been averse from drawing on his own life. If the imaginative drive of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Pericles* may at least in part be powered by personal concerns, to the point where *Romeo and Juliet* may be response to the loss of Hamnet, as Julia Kristeva has argued (Weis 2012: 55), so that *post hoc > propter hoc*, then to argue that *Hamlet* Shakespeare and *Hamlet* the Dane are somehow linked may not be entirely outlandish. Such an interpretative arc, however tentative, would suggest that *Twelfth Night* fits perfectly into this narrative.

[30] *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night* are not an immediately obvious pair, but they may become so when set against the backdrop of Shakespeare's family. If the most famous father-son play in the world resonates with the domestic memories of the Shakespeare family, as it may well do, then *Twelfth Night*, the play that immediately and perhaps surprisingly follows it, also needs to be seen in that light. How could it not given that it is, quite independently from context, the play that most directly engages the Shakespeare family's children. The hero of the tragedy is of course Hamlet while the protagonist of *Twelfth Night* is Viola. Is this most vulnerable yet hugely charismatic of heroines inspired by Judith

Shakespeare? If so, it is tempting to view the play as a ritual almost of thanksgiving for her life. And whereas in real life she spent the six years that separate the Middle Temple premiere of 1602 from the death of her twin brother in 1596 missing him, in the play Shakespeare grants the twins the fantasy of a happy ending, of that 'deity in my nature | Of here and everywhere' that reunites two halves. To simplify, if *Hamlet* shows Shakespeare privately wrestling with the loss of Hamnet, in *Twelfth Night* he indulges in an impossible dream featuring his daughter Judith as Viola. What this all would seem to suggest is that Shakespeare's family, his mother and father, his three children and his granddaughter all left a profound trace history in his writing to the extent where consciously or unconsciously his pattern of writing was influenced by events. If the writing of the anomalously positioned tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* – chronologically it comes too early and who has ever heard of children as tragic protagonists? – was triggered by the death of Hamnet, then all the other surmised links between the works and the life acquire a logic of their own. In the process Shakespeare emerges as a Romantic writer long before any such concept ever existed. It also creates links between Viola and the young women of the last plays, all of them perhaps sharing in Judith Shakespeare.

NOTES

[1] All references to Shakespeare's works are to *The Norton Shakespeare*. 3rd ed. (2016). Ed. by Stephen Greenblatt *et al* (New York: Norton) [\[back to text\]](#)

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