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SHAKESPEARE, ESSEX, AND THE DARK LADY: SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS[1]

In *Willobie His Avisa*, the long satiric poem published pseudonymously in 1594, six rather oddly passionate characters attempt successively and unsuccessfully to conquer the virtue of the miraculously chaste heroine, Avisa. They are identified in the poem only as A Nobleman, Caveleiro, D. B., D. H., W. S., and H. W., in that order, but the last two—the "old player" W. S. and his friend the scatterbrained adolescent H. W.—are generally agreed to represent William Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's young patron Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton.

The hitherto unsuspected key to the much-discussed mysteries of *Willobie His Avisa* proves to be simply that the heroine, Avisa, is in fact a hero, and is none other than Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth's favourite, who at the time of the poem's publication was at the height of his prestige. The scandal-mongering implications of such a portrayal are obvious. It can be concluded, in particular, that the "Castle" where Avisa lived in the country "at east" of "A rosy vale in pleasant plain" was the eighteen-year-old Essex's residence, Lamphey Palace, lying a few yards from the plain at the east end of Rose Valley near Pembroke in South West Wales. That A Nobleman who tried to entice Avisa to town for immoral purposes was the Earl of Leicester, Essex's stepfather, who did indeed entice a reluctant Essex to come from Lamphey to London and accept his guidance. That the "husband" to whom Avisa was "chastely" and lovingly wedded was Queen Elizabeth herself. That the unruly Caveleiro was Christopher Marlowe, the Rival Poet of Shakespeare's sonnets, and a servant of Essex's. That the grave-faced D. B. and the sober-sided D. H. were aspects of Shakespeare the secretly passion-crazed sonneteer, the subtle and ambitious admirer of Essex who liked to pass himself off as a solid citizen. That W. S. was Shakespeare after he had come to his senses about Essex and stopped writing his sonnets. And that H. W. was the teen-age Earl of Southampton whose insanely adolescent worship of Essex the military hero led him to form a friendship with Shakespeare, the poet Essex had had for a friend, and eventually to suffer a nervous collapse

when Essex would not take him to the wars because he was not yet old enough and not yet mature enough to be a soldier.[2] It was during Southampton's illness in 1593 that psychiatrist Shakespeare wrote and dedicated to him *Venus and Adonis*, partly to channel his libido towards the making of love not war, and shortly afterwards that he wrote and dedicated to him *The Rape of Lucrece*.

To sum up, *Willobie His Avisa* turns out to be an account of Shakespeare's sonnets and their background, of *Love's Labours Lost* and its background, and of a great deal of the scandal and frivolity allegedly associated with Essex, with Shakespeare, and with some of Essex's other friends. It also turns out to be written in exactly (yes exactly) the spirit of *Private Eye* or *That Was The Week That Was*, and with a correspondingly cavalier attitude to the truth. It is at times hilarious, especially when you know the people. It was deservedly popular in its own day, and at one point was deservedly banned as seditious and obscene. Who was the pseudonymous author? The matter is not entirely clear: but one person with the necessary talent, rank, bravado, political affiliations, motives, and information was the spectacularly eccentric Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, who was not only the father of Southampton's discarded fiancée, Elizabeth de Vere, but was also the chief victim of Shakespeare's satire in *Love's Labours Lost*.

Having worked out the main lines of this interpretation of *Willobie His Avisa*, this writer began investigating Essex's life and Shakespeare's sonnets to see if Essex was indeed the person to whom most of the sonnets are addressed. There is no doubt at all that this is so. And the story that the sonnets reveal of Shakespeare's life in association with Essex is far more genuinely sensational than the manufactured and factitious gibes of *Willobie His Avisa*. It shows in great detail what Shakespeare was doing during the "lost years" between the record of him in Stratford at the age of twenty in 1585, and the next accepted record of him in London seven years later as the playwright and actor; it shows that in the first five of those years Shakespeare was active and adventurous beyond even the wildest dreams of the speculative biographers.

The Earl and Countess of Leicester, Essex's stepfather and mother, and probably Essex himself, then aged nearly nineteen, came to London from Kenilworth about September 1, 1585, and Shakespeare, who had entered Leicester's service a few days earlier as a junior aide and player, was probably with them. Shakespeare and Essex were certainly in London by late September when the

English plans for massive military intervention in support of the crumbling Dutch rebellion against Spain, virtually for war against Spain itself, were made apparent. Shakespeare began writing sonnets to Essex at about this time, and by early December had written six (1-6), in the images of which one can clearly trace the attitudes of Essex to the glories of war, his nascent charisma as a leader, and his misadventures in borrowing usurers' money to buy first-rate equipment for his personal troop of cavalry.

In allusive images of one sort or another it is possible to follow Shakespeare's and Essex's participation in Leicester's triumphal progress through Zeeland and Holland in December, 1585, and January, 1586. One reads of a splendid welcome and of a feast with musical accompaniment in Middelburg (7-8); meditations in Dordrecht, the cradle of Dutch independence, on the assassination and assassin of William of Orange (9 & 10—a double-sonnet); of winter scenes and war-ruined monasteries near Delft (11-13); a poem for New Year's Day, 1586, in the Hague (14); of a horrifyingly realistic drama staged at Leiden presenting the terrible sufferings of the town during the great siege of 1574 (15); of a ceremonial visit to Leiden University at which much high-flown academic and poetic verbiage was recited in praise of Leicester's loftiness of soul (17).

Shakespeare remained in the Hague with Leicester's Court for five weeks (18-23) following Leicester's ceremonial installation on January 25 by the States General as Absolute Governor of the United Provinces. Shortly after the ceremonies he had seduced (129) the recently orphaned nineteen-year-old Jeanne de la Kethulle, or Johanna van der Kethulle, or Jane Rehova, alias the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, who later became Jane Daniel (1566-1613), the wife of John Daniel of Daresbury (c. 1546-1610). She was dressed in mourning black (127). She had been a lady in waiting to Louise de Coligny, the widow of William of Orange, but had joined Leicester's Court early in 1586. A few months later she became lady in waiting to Sir Philip Sidney's eighteen-year-old wife, Frances Walsingham, who was the only daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen's Secretary, and who in 1590 married Essex; Jeanne remained in Frances Walsingham's service for nearly ten years until her own marriage to the much older John Daniel on December 1, 1595.

Jeanne was an extraordinarily interesting person, and became Shakespeare's lifelong friend—though only intermittently and hesitantly his mistress—and she has left a great many traces in his plays. Her father, François de la Kethulle, seigneur de Ryhove, is well known to history as a fanatical proponent of religious toleration and Dutch independence, and as a fiery lieutenant of

William of Orange. It was he who in 1577 successfully overthrew Spanish authority in the great metropolis of Ghent, imprisoning the Governor of Flanders and others in his own house, but in subsequent years proved unable to control the Calvinist mobs that had brought him to power. To read the amazing story of Ryhove's exploits in the restored republic of Ghent, especially in his own autobiographical *Apologie,* is to be transported immediately into the world of Shakepeare's Cassius, Brutus, Mark Antony, and above all Coriolanus. The Shakespearean Julius and Octavius Caesar also have some of the characteristics of William of Orange and of his son Maurice of Nassau, both of whom were familiar figures to Ryhove and his daughter.

Jeanne was witty, multilingual, a serious reader, a devotee of conversation, and a reckless but earnest Protestant; some evidence even suggests that both Shakespeare and Marlowe drew on her knowledge of French (her mother tongue) and German in making use of source materials in those languages for their plays. A successful professional artist in her own right, she specialized in the designing of "tyres", or jewelled head-dresses, and it can hardly be a coincidence that early in 1602, a few months after circumstances had forced her to begin earning her family's living in this way, Shakespeare, as is well known, took up lodgings in the house of Christopher Mountjoy, a francophone Protestant refugee who was the most prominent maker of "tyres" in London. Her husband's passion for litigation, which was excessive even for an Elizabethan, has left in the Public Record Office a mountain of documentary evidence about her life, including several drafts of her partial autobiography, *A True Declaration of the Misfortunes of Jane Danyell,* and of her husband's, *Danyell's Disasters,* both dating from about 1605, which the present writer hopes to publish in due course. Her final sentences in the autobiography, which are perhaps worth quoting here, run as follows: "For to conclude: I have been more faithful than fortunate, more constant than beloved, more dutiful than well rewarded. Opinion now like a cloud shadoweth the Sun, yet the Sun is still the same."

Shakespeare participated with Essex in Leicester's triumphal entry into Haarlem on March 3, then left for England as a courier, found an enraged Elizabeth threatening to destroy Leicester for disobedience in accepting the Governorship of the United Provinces (25), was himself disgraced for failing to ensure the proper delivery of his letters (29-30), and returned to Leicester's Court at Utrecht about April 7, just as news of a very costly—and perhaps mismanaged—battle near the besieged Dutch-held town of Grave (31-32) was coming in.

Soon afterwards Shakespeare learned that during his absence in England Jeanne had been seduced by Essex (33-36, 131-132) and he could not help suspecting that Essex had sent him to England mainly to get him out of the way. On April 23, Shakespeare was a participant in a comedy given by an outstanding troupe of English actors, acrobats, dancers, and musicians—William Kempe, Daniel Jones, Thomas Pope, George Bryan, Thomas Stevens, Thomas King, and Robert Percy—at Leicester's sumptuous St. George's Day feast in the Great Hall of the Duitschehuis in Utrecht. In the evening he watched Essex fighting brilliantly at a tournament at barriers in the hall and being crowned as the victor (37). As usual at festive occasions there had been an influx of poets and litterateurs, and many literary discussions, which led the twenty-two-year-old Shakespeare to explain, somewhat defensively and sweepingly, the real meaning of humanism in poetry (38).

A further battle was shaping up for Grave. Leicester took his forces to Arnhem, sent Essex ahead in an advance guard (39), and arrived with Shakespeare opposite Nymegen, only ten miles from the besieged town, on May 16. In the next days Shakespeare presumably participated in some way in minor but hazardous operations against various forts nearby. On the evening of May 21, in circumstances very closely parallelling those of "The Argument" prefaced to *The Rape of Lucrece*, Leicester's whole entourage including Shakespeare and Essex left the army and rode dramatically back on political business to Arnhem, where Essex found Jeanne waiting for him, and Shakespeare found her waiting for Essex. A day or two later Shakespeare heard an announcement that the players, including himself, would leave shortly on a semi-diplomatic visit to Denmark. It is probable that he blamed Essex for his inclusion in the party at a time so convenient for Essex's affair with Jeanne (40-42, 133-134), although his feelings seem to have been complicated by his expectation that while he himself would be safe, Essex would soon be in the thick of the heavy fighting that was in prospect at Grave.

Shakespeare left Arnhem with the players about May 28, and after a tedious journey (43-51) reached the Danish Court on June 17, probably at Frederiksborg Castle, a few miles south of Elsinore. One or two days later, having met Henricus Ramelius, the local Polonius, the players prepared for (52) and gave (53) a performance at the Danish Court, and Shakespeare found to his amazement that every detail of the whole scene before him in the foreign castle was forcing itself upon his mind in terms darkly symbolic of Essex (53). On June 20 the King and his entourage left Frederiksborg for a conference in Germany. After accompanying him for a week or two (54), Shakespeare,

who seems to have been completely fluent in spoken Latin, and who was probably gathering intelligence as well as acting, returned swiftly to report to Leicester in the Netherlands, arriving at the Hague by about the middle of July.

A series of military and political disasters was occurring for Leicester's Englishmen, including the loss of Neuss with an appalling massacre and an uncontrollable fire that gutted almost the whole town (55). There followed a punitive English raid from Geertruidenberg into enemy-controlled Brabant, in which Essex participated and in which Shakespeare was either a participant or a somewhat disgusted observer (56). After this massacre of the peasantry, there were two famous drunken celebrations to which Shakespeare was not invited (57-58).

About August 6, Shakespeare left Geertuidenberg and Essex, and went to Flushing with Sir Philip Sidney to visit Jeanne, whom he had not seen since leaving Arnhem for Denmark more than two months before, and who was in Flushing as lady in waiting to Lady Sidney. After an uncertain beginning, Shakespeare was able once again to become Jeanne's lover (135-138, 59-62). About nine days later he and Sidney left Flushing to join the large field-army that Leicester was at last managing to assemble.

A full account of Leicester's triumphant autumn campaign, a series of once famous but now unjustly neglected actions that were as surely the turning of the tide as the Battle of Britain, cannot be given here, though Shakespeare drew very extensively on them for *Henry V*. At dusk on August 29, Shakespeare was with the army at Elten, on the Rhine a few miles above Arnhem. As Essex and the advance guard set out to establish a surprise siege of Doesburg, Shakespeare stood on the high hill at Elten with his heart in his mouth, watching the column of horsemen and infantry vanishing out of sight into the darkness (63). Four days later the battery at Doesburg smashed the town's old-fashioned high brick walls and towers. There was a surrender at the last moment before the assault, wild looting by the troops, and towards evening a false report that the main Spanish army was only eleven miles away at Elten, and could easily trap the Anglo-Dutch forces on the wrong side of the river Ijssel in the morning. Agincourt was staring Shakespeare in the face and no escape seemed possible (64 & 65).

On September 22, after Leicester had taken the army ten miles down the Ijssel to besiege Zutphen, and had directed it in several days of dogged skirmishing and entrenching, the celebrated Battle of Zutphen took place, an engagement which is now best remembered because Sidney was wounded at it, but which in its own day was considered remarkable for the sensationally fine

performance of the English heavy cavalry—for whose training Essex, as General of the English Horse, had been responsible—against far more numerous élite opponents. At this crucial but indecisive mainforce action, during which a third of the Prince of Parma's army was in close proximity to all of Leicester's, but at which only the cavalry on both sides clashed seriously with each other, Essex won considerable glory and distinction. Shakespeare probably did not participate directly in the fighting, but he is likely to have had a grandstand view of the later stages, by which time Leicester and a large force of infantry had assembled in and behind Warnsveld village about a quarter of a mile from the Spaniards' rallying point in the ruined Galilee Abbey just outside the town. A few days later Parma's entire army arrived, camped overnight, deployed threateningly throughout the next day, then ignominiously withdrew without having accomplished anything.

On October 7 or 8, when heavy rains and cold had halted operations, Leicester, Essex, Shakespeare, and others rode back to Arnhem to visit the wounded Sidney, whose wife had already arrived from Flushing to be with him, and had brought her lady in waiting with her. Shakespeare was uneasy at Sidney's suddenly total and rigid piety and at his horror at the world's vainglory, and seems to have regarded these as indications of terror and incommunicable loneliness. To try to bring Sidney some ease, Shakespeare composed in Sidney's voice a poem using the ideas which in Sidney's mind had become harsh with fear, but which in the poem are bathed in consolatory harmonies (66). This is probably the poem referred to in Fulke Greville's memoir of Sidney as "la cuisse rompue", one which at Sidney's request was repeatedly sung, presumably by Shakespeare himself and to his own accompaniment, in the sick man's bedchamber.

After a promising first two weeks the condition of Sidney's severe flesh wound in the thigh was just beginning to cause alarm. In the images of the next sonnets the gradual deterioration can be traced, with the general bloodlessness and the beginnings of apparent infection (67), the noisome odour (69), the horrifying and probably bungled second operation to which the already weak man subjected himself (139), and the testy, querulous piety of his final hours (140). At the same time Essex and Jeanne were all too obviously longing to rush into each other's arms, and the contrast between this and the dying Sidney's cosmic horror at all his past sins, especially the sexual ones, was too much for Shakespeare. Jeanne, no longer in black mourning for her father, was dressed gaudily and had made herself up as an English rose (67-68). Empathizing more and more closely with Sidney, Shakespeare wrote of Jeanne

and Essex and made repeatedly the horrifying logical and causal connection between sexual sin and bodily dissolution by which Sidney himself up until the very last was appalled and obsessed (67-70, 139-140). On the afternoon before Sidney died, Shakespeare—"that young man . . . extraordinarily witty, and surprisingly well educated"—seems to have spent several hours as Sidney's sole executive attendant and secretary while others rushed about trying to secure extra medical help.

Sidney died on October 17, 1586, and in the next few days Shakespeare wrote four poems to his memory, the first in a kind of paranoid anger and loneliness while the great bell was tolling (71), the next in utter horror that Sidney's friends should comfort themselves by inventing the Sidney legend, that "virtuous lie", while seemingly blotting their knowledge of the real, complicated, suffering man at once from their memories (72), the third and fourth in more measured recollection of the bare ruined choirs of Galilee Abbey, the September sun on the now wintry battlefield, the consuming fever of Sidney's last four days, and the disastrous second operation by a "wretch" of a surgeon (73 & 74).

About October 19, Leicester, Essex, Shakespeare, Lady Sidney, and Jeanne left Arnhem for Utrecht, and a day or so later Essex left the others and went to Middelburg, where Leicester's party did not join him until a month afterwards. On November 24, 1586, they all set sail for England, arriving in London on the following day.

Jeanne, as Lady Sidney's lady in waiting, was henceforth a member of Sir Francis Walsingham's large household, so that presumably Shakespeare had some degree of contact, through both her and Essex, with the influential Sir Francis himself. Shakespeare at once left Leicester's service and entered Essex's apparently on very favourable terms that left him free to function as the great poet his sonnets had claimed he was. A week or so later, hearing of Leicester's or Essex's return, and perhaps of Essex's extreme generosity to great poets, the tall, much-educated Christopher Marlowe threw aside his books and gown, took French leave from Corpus Christi, rushed like a man of action from Cambridge down to London, and staged a notably successful confrontation with Essex which very quickly resulted in a relationship not unlike that between Essex and Shakespeare. Shakespeare, parading his friendship with the hero of Zutphen in the London streets and great houses, began now to be a little uncertain of his standing with Essex (75).

With the undeniable victories at Doesburg and Zutphen, and with the

enormous boost to morale that these had brought, a militaristic nationalism and belligerence were in the air, and Marlowe, with Essex's enthusiastic encouragement, was beginning to write the violent, revolutionary, belligerent *Tamburlaine,* drawing many details for Tamburlaine himself from Essex, others for Zenocrate from Jeanne, and a few for the feckless and misguided Agydas, the indiscreet and petty-minded philosopher of love, from Shakespeare. Essex, against the grain of Shakespeare's inclination, was pressing Shakespeare to imitate Marlowe's style and approach, regarding this as the road forward to national progress in literature (76). Shakespeare meanwhile may have begun writing *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, a mediocre but actable prose play which has political premises very similar to those of *Tamburlaine*, but which lacks its flair as well as its violence. Shakespeare wrote a halting sonnet to Essex for New Year's Day, 1587 (77), then entirely lost his touch as a writer of verse for the next three months, daunted by the resonance of Marlowe's mighty line and by his friendship with Essex.

Early in April the learned Marlowe returned to London after the briefest possible visit to Cambridge to take his final M.A. examinations. With the shock of Marlowe's entry at this point into Essex's service on the same basis as his own, Shakespeare began writing verse again (78). In the next quickly-written group of sonnets about Marlowe and literature (79-86), he also alludes in passing to Drake's daring venture into the Spanish Main to singe the King of Spain's beard at Cadiz (80), to the entirely fulsome dedication to Essex of John Newton's *An Herbal for the Bible* (82-83), to an anthology made by Essex's sister, Penelope Rich, of all the beautiful things written about Essex and his deeds (84-85), and to Drake's return from Cadiz and the Azores with a fabulous prize in company, the "all-too-precious" *San Felipe* (86). At about this time Thomas Kyd also entered Essex's service as a dramatist.

All hell broke loose at Plymouth when *San Felipe* was brought in. Within a day of beginning frantic efforts to prevent the Queen from being robbed blind, the Privy Council also wrote the well-known letter to Cambridge University demanding that Marlowe's degree not be withheld at the Commencement on July 4, and explaining that Marlowe was not a genuine Catholic would-be defector as the University had heard, but that he had pretended to be one for reasons of state security. What appears to have happened is that on finishing *Tamburlaine* Marlowe had cut loose in an orgy of wild living, James Bond counter-espionage, and homosexuality, that both Essex and Cambridge had heard something of his escapades, and that Essex, while being willing to vouch for him to the Privy Council and to Cambridge, and to continue

patronizing him as a dramatist, had been so horrified to discover the homosexual and unscrupulous side of Marlowe's life that he had abruptly ended all personal dealings with him; he had felt in effect that the proud full sails of Marlowe's great verse were to Essex as the pursuing sails of the piratical and gold-hungry Drake's great-ships had been to the all-too-precious *San Felipe* (86). Shakespeare's poem was thus a complex, final portrait of Marlowe after Marlowe's sudden loss of Essex's favour.

On June 18, 1587, Essex's sensational rise to the Queen's favour in April and May had received formal recognition in her grant to him of the patent of the office of Master of the Horse, a responsible and important position that soon, however, led to a certain swelling of his head (87). On summer progress with the Queen in the country, Shakespeare watched Essex become increasingly jealous, irritated, and suspicious about Sir Walter Ralegh's efforts to prevent the Queen from sending large English reinforcements to Flushing to swell out the large amphibious relief force with which Leicester was preparing to challenge Parma's violent siege of Sluys, a potential invasion port that was being desperately defended by an Anglo-Dutch garrison. Unable to carry the tactical argument (though he may well have had right on his side), Essex, who was also beginning to fall in love again with Jeanne, began compulsively casting aspersions on the low birth, low character, mean intellect, and probably treasonous intent, of Ralegh, and allowed some of the disdain to rub off onto his low-born friend Shakespeare. Somewhat circumspectly, but hilariously to anyone who might notice that Essex's intensity was a little excessive and ambiguous, Shakespeare worked what Essex had been saying and hinting about Ralegh and Sluys, and about the necessity of personal patriotism, high birth and good character, into a pair of sonnets (88-89) about his personal willingness to help his master win a few easy battles—by fighting them against Shakespeare.

Shakespeare watched Essex perform as the Queen's champion in the Accession Day tilting at Westminster on November 18 (91). Belatedly realizing the depth of Essex's new interest in Jeanne (92-93), he implored Essex not to risk hurting her by imitating the unscrupulousness of the newly-returned Leicester—the Lord Steward of the Household, who was also His Excellency, the Governor of the United Provinces—who was viciously hounding those whom he supposed to have undermined his credit with the Queen during his absence abroad (94). To cut a long story short, Jeanne shortly afterwards became Essex's mistress, and continued to be so for several months until, about April, 1588, Essex suddenly abandoned her (141-150). Utterly revolted, Shake-

speare left Essex's service and for a period regarded him as an enemy, during which time he composed *A Lover's Complaint* in an unsuccessful attempt (cf. 95) to set down a powerful, dismissive satire against Essex's treatment of Jeanne.

Among the sonnets connected with Essex's affair with Jeanne, at least two have images deriving from the Faustus story (144-145), which suggests that in the winter of 1587-8, when the Armada threat first became immediate, Marlowe had very appropriately been writing of an almost but not quite inevitable approaching damnation in his *Dr Faustus*. A third sonnet (146)—in which the misprinted segment at the beginning of the second line happens to be the key word in the poem, and the line ought to read "Musing these . . ."—is one of the greatest poems of madness in the English language, a foreshadowing of Lear's disrobing of himself in the storm, and a close-up vision of Shakespeare's personal hell; Shakespeare sanely describes the madness in the next sonnet (147), but the episode shows how great his distress had become at the moment that he knew Jeanne to be lost to him.

Essex took the initiative in healing the breach (cf. 121), and by about early June, 1588, Shakespeare had accepted with somewhat mixed feelings Essex's invitation to resume his old position in Essex's service (95-96). While the Armada was at sea, its precise whereabouts unknown, Shakespeare visualized the English spring countryside in surrealistic images of bloodshed and fear (97-99), found a perhaps fearful Jeanne at last willing to become his permanent mistress (151, the images, bizarrely, telling the story of the political revolution and street fighting in Paris on May 2, 1588), and was shattered when she almost at once became hysterical, and denounced and abandoned him for reasons he did not really understand (152). While awaiting the Armada's long-delayed appearance he also wrote 100-102. He was at Tilbury with Essex for the Queen's famous visit to the great army assembled there (103), and there is even the possibility that the much-remarked Shakespearean quality of the Queen's magnificent speech to the army on that occasion is due to Shakespeare's having prepared the record of it to be used when the speech was repeated to troops who had been out of earshot when the Queen herself was speaking. A further sonnet is based on some uncanny resemblances between Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and a military display staged by Essex before the Queen on August 26 (106), and another sonnet shortly afterwards, as Leslie Hotson has shown, sums up Shakespeare's total experience of the great Anglo-Spanish confrontation (107).

From September, 1588, until July 1589, Shakespeare wrote only one sonnet

(108) but several plays. To be brief, the first play, probably staged at Court for Christmas, 1588-9, was probably a semi-political drama entitled *Love's Labours Won,* based on Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, on the recent rivalry between Shakespeare and Essex for Jeanne's love, and on a controversial plan to mount a huge Anglo-Dutch invasion of Portugal to restore that country's independence under the exiled Pretender, Don Antonio, and his followers. Next, *The Taming of A Shrew.* Then the early version of *Hamlet*, after Essex's newly widowed mother had suddenly and surprisingly married a much younger man, and after Essex had gone into a Hamlet-like state of shock and had sought to regain his honour by escaping from London on April 3 and risking his life against the Queen's orders in the invasion of Portugal. Shakespeare had loosely based the play on the old story of the barbaric Hamlet, on the inter-relationships of Essex and his relatives and friends, and on his own recollections of the contemporary Danish Court. To give himself inward freedom to make use of these materials for the play, he had cut loose from his strict Essex affiliations and had "ranged" (109) here and there in his social life across literary and political London.

At the beginning of July, 1589, Essex returned with considerable glory from the valiantly conducted but strategically unsuccessful invasion, apparently to find that Shakespeare was out of town, and, perhaps a week or two later, that a very private and not unrecognizable part of his life was being acted and applauded on the public stage as *Hamlet.* In answer to a summons, Shakespeare appeared punctually to explain himself, and presented Essex with a not very repentant poetic apology (109) which entirely failed to soothe Essex's injured feelings. There was an altercation of some sort, and Shakespeare was struck this time with genuine remorse at the effect his actions had had on his friend: his life in the play's imaginative world collapsed, and he suddenly saw the whole affair with Essex's eyes—the "strange" vision of truth in the play, the commercial exploitation of friendship, the minor political disloyalty, the indignity (110). He apologized, and the apology was accepted.

Several weeks later there was published the pastoral romance *Menaphon* by Robert Greene (M. A., Cantab. & Oxon.), containing a preface by Thomas Nashe (B. A., Cantab.) in which the Essex coterie of ignorant and misguided popular dramatists—Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Kyd—were violently attacked. A talkative country bumpkin, Doron, who appears in the pastoral romance itself, also became a vehicle for an attack on Shakespeare. In all, Greene and Nashe managed very specifically to suggest of Shakespeare that he had a poxy French mistress, a personal arrogance, a heartless and yokelish relationship

with a countrywoman in the sticks, a need to compensate for sexual impotence with a flow of flowery speech, no understanding of love, no education, no originality, no gentility, and—with numerous examples—no talent of any description as a dramatist.

Essex tried to ease the very considerable pain that Shakespeare felt from these attacks (111-112), and early in September suddenly found an opportunity to give practical demonstration to his confidence in Shakespeare both as a person and as a responsible and competent dramatist. King James VI of Scotland was about to marry the very young Princess Anne of Denmark, who was scheduled to arrive in Leith in a great fleet from Copenhagen within a few days; James had not expected her quite so soon, and had sent urgent requests to Elizabeth for supplies for the festivities, among other things for the loan of the Queen's Majesty's players. Essex appears to have secured for Shakespeare the job of writing, and probably directing, a special wedding masque that the Queen's Men would perform. Elaborate costumes were hastily made for it by the Master of the Revels, and, about the middle of September, Shakespeare set off for Edinburgh with them. Besides attending to the masque, Shakespeare was also to act as an agent in a dangerous secret intrigue by which Essex hoped to marry a possible heir to the English and Scottish thrones, Arabella Stuart.

What followed is too extraordinary to be set down here in detail. Suffice it to say that Shakespeare soared dramatically into the King's favour, and found himself having frequent private discussions with the King in the tower-house of Craigmillar Castle—where he later set the events of *Macbeth*—about Essex's marriage, the succession to the English throne, the psychology of royal love, and the technique and the cathartic value of the writing of passionate love sonnets. The love-crazed King, desperate for his unseen bride, afraid for her safety at sea, and fearful that the infernal powers and local witches had raised the recent series of storms to keep her from him, seems to have turned insistently to Shakespeare for counsel and support. Shakespeare for his part was swept off his feet and led to almost hallucinatory visions (113 &114) resembling those that Macbeth experienced when he saw the visionary dagger before him, its handle toward his hand. He began to hope for a brilliant future in Scotland as the King's favourite. News came that the Princess's fleet had been driven, damaged, back to Norway (115), and the King begged Shakespeare to accompany him on a physically and politically hazardous voyage to fetch her. Accepting the offer, and ceasing to regard himself as a servant of Essex's, Shakespeare wrote sonnet 116—"Let me not to the marriage

of true minds / Admit impediments. Love is not love / That alters when it alteration finds, / Or bends with the remover to remove . . ."—urging the King to be true to himself and his love by going ahead with the voyage and disregarding both the Danish and the Scottish opposition to it. On October 22 the King's ships left Leith, and on November 23 the marriage was celebrated in Oslo, with Shakespeare acting as a bearer of the canopy in the ceremonial processions. About five days later, however, after the marriage had been consummated, and when the King had become very embarrassed at his earlier grand passion and at his excesses in the role of great lover, Shakespeare found himself suddenly and unceremoniously packed off back to Scotland, enraged and thunderstruck, his excited dreams in total disarray.

Shakespeare returned to London about Christmas, 1589, and attempted unsuccessfully to make his peace with Essex, arguing in effect that his underlying motivation in Scotland had been personal friendship for the King rather than political ambition as such (117-122). About February, 1590, having given up the attempt to convince Essex, Shakespeare wrote a final sonnet in the series to Essex (125), making what was, in effect, his considered farewell to the political game and a prelude to committing himself fully and finally to writing and acting. He had previously lived as a writer and an actor, and thought of himself as such, but he had probably held in the back of his mind the reservation that his skills and activities might ultimately be justified as preparation for some important secretarial post in administration; he had now discarded that reservation. Even when the quarrel with Essex had been patched up, Shakespeare seems never afterwards to have sought political position for himself, although he continued, as before, to use his drama sometimes for political ends.

A year or so later he rounded off the sonnets with three poems of conclusion (126, 153, & 154), the last two of which are deliberately cryptic surveys of the biographical background to the sonnets[3]. Anne Hathaway figures in them as "the fairest votary" among "many Nymphs that vowed chaste life to keep"; Shakespeare's marriage to her at Temple Grafton, a village near Stratford, is alluded to in the references to the adjacent Caldwell spring ("a cold valley fountain", "a cool well"); his health-giving meeting with Essex nearby is also mentioned; Jeanne appears as "my mistress"; and there is an implicit defence against charges that his relationship with Essex was in any way homosexual.

II

After Essex's rebellion and execution in 1601, Shakespeare's friend and

former mistress, Jane Daniel, née Jeanne de la Kethulle, fell on very hard times. John Daniel, her husband, had stolen some indiscreet letters of Essex's early in 1600 and had used them as blackmail to extort money that he considered Essex owed him. Allegedly but doubtfully treasonable passages in the letters had had an important role in Essex's trial, and when a public revulsion of feeling in the dead Essex's favour swept the country, Sir Edward Coke, the Vyshinski-like prosecutor at the trial, decided to protect his skin by joining in a hue and cry against Daniel and charging him not only with blackmail, of which he was guilty, but with having forged and fabricated the allegedly treasonable passages in Essex's letters, of which he was completely innocent.

Meanwhile, amid emotions of Profumo-affair proportions, only worse, Jane Daniel was being ostracized and vilified as a kind of alien Mata Hari, a woman of dark and compelling sexual powers who had somehow conjured her aging husband into betraying her friend and former lover Essex. Shakespeare stood by her, and a few days before her husband's trial opened, amid the worst of the public outcry, apparently became godfather to her third son, William Daniel; it was an act at that point of some courage. Daniel was fined and imprisoned, and Coke by a piece of blatant dishonesty contrived to have the Daniels' lands placed under administration in such a way that no revenue came from them, with the result that Jane alone had to support a husband and five children by her craft of tyre-making. Within a very few months of the disappearance of the Daniels' income, Shakespeare moved to new lodgings in the house of Christopher Mountjoy, the tyre-maker, probably, as suggested above, for reasons connected in some way with Jane's need. Despite continuing efforts, it was not until 1609 that the Daniels began to have their first prospects of finding redress for their barbaric treatment at the hands of Coke and the English law. In the interim one or both of them had been continually persecuted by the Dogberrys and Vergeses of Hackney and Westminster, continually robbed, judicially evicted from one house, and harassed by vigilantes in a minor riot in another. The period from 1601 to 1609 is not only the period of the Daniels' apparently doomed struggle, but the period in which Essex's death remained a living political issue and, interestingly, the period of Shakespeare's major tragedies.

In 1604, after the accession of his former friend and patient, King James, Shakespeare himself took a hand in publicly fighting what must have seemed to him a terrible and oppressive decadence of English justice and decency under the administration of the Attorney General, Sir Edward Coke, of which the Daniel's troubles were but one symptom. In *Measure for Measure,* which had

its first performance before the King on December 26, 1604, Shakespeare almost recklessly included two major characters intended to suggest real people: the Duke of Vienna, as is well known, was an oblique portrayal of the King himself, and, as is not well known, the hypocritical Puritan, Angelo, the director of the absent Duke's system of justice, was a much less oblique portrayal of the handsome, fastidious, self-righteous, puritanical Sir Edward Coke, Attorney General, whose recent, hasty, turbulent, and illegally contracted second marriage to an attractive young widow was causing a good deal of comment. Shakespeare himself acted the part of the Duke, and must have had the audience repeatedly on the edges of their seats as they wondered how he was going to twist the plot so as to get himself (representing the King) out of one outrageously suggestive situation or speech after another without irrevocably saying what he was appearing to say about the King's and Coke's conduct of the realm's tangled affairs, and the play's even more tangled affairs, and without going totally beyond the bounds of the permissible. Apparently, however, James was not amused, and it appeared to John Davies of Hereford that Shakespeare, perhaps fortunately, lost on that occasion whatever chance he might have had of becoming one of King James's powerful favourites:

> Some say, good Will, which I in sport do sing,
> Hadst thou not played some Kingly parts in sport,
> Thou hadst been a companion for a King,
> And been a King among the meaner sort. . . .

In 1609, with the wheels of justice at last beginning to turn in the Daniels' favour, Shakespeare's friend and admirer William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, joined with the publisher Thomas Thorpe in a benevolent conspiracy to print Shakespeare's sonnets without Shakespeare's permission in order to make sure that they were handed down to posterity. Wishing to make certain that in the event of trouble Pembroke came forward with the protection he had promised, Thorpe composed and printed the famous and deliberately obscure dedication to Pembroke under the disguise of "Mr. W. H.", making it as clear as possible to anyone who thought of asking questions that the instigator in the conspiracy had been the powerful Pembroke, not the vulnerable Thorpe. Shakespeare, who nineteen years earlier had in Sonnet 119 metaphorically described King James's heart as a witches' cauldron, must have done everything he possibly could to get the edition suppressed, and so few copies of it survive that it is probable that he succeeded.

What alterations in traditional concepts of Shakespeare does this new

information require? It is to be hoped that one result will be a reconciliation between Baconians, Stratfordians and others, for while it is clear that the so-called orthodox are correct in supposing the author of the plays to have been the actor William Shakespeare of Stratford, it is also clear that the so-called heretics are correct in supposing him to have been deeply involved in affairs, extremely experienced in the details of Elizabethan politics at a high level, widely acquainted with the leading figures of the day, and accepted by them as a social equal in many respects and as a man of status in his own right. Another result may be that scholars and, on occasion, theatrical directors, will look more closely at the original political backgrounds and intentions of the plays. A perfect recent example of the relevance of this to their performance was the suddenly and enormously enhanced power of the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Troilus and Cressida*, supposedly one of Shakespeare's weaker plays, during the week of the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962. Shakespeare set to work on the play in the weeks preceding the outbreak of Essex's rebellion when the Essex and Cecil factions seemed locked in a collision course and intent on provoking a totally and horrifyingly unnecessary civil war: he probably did not complete it in time to have it produced in an attempt to bring the Essex faction to their senses, and the 1962 performances were probably the first in a situation comparable to the one for which the play was intended. Only Jan Kott, among well known contemporary literary critics, has given prime emphasis to such aspects of the plays, and it is probably no accident that he is also almost alone among such critics in having had much influence on performances in the theatre. A third result may be that the images and other details in the plays, as in the sonnets, are looked at somewhat less from the point of view of pure literature, and somewhat more from the point of view of their potential as oblique commentary. In the sonnets, especially, the main point of the images is to force or surprise the reader into seeing a contemporary personal, military, or political situation as it might appear were it transposed into a world where love was the strongest, almost the sole, reality.

Such, then, was William Shakespeare, "an absolute *Johannes fac totum*" (as Robert Greene described him in 1592), actor, writer, jester, old soldier, retired politician, psychiatrist, philosopher of love, friend and conscience of the younger Essex, associate of great men, entertainer of the more politically conscious Elizabethan public, their artistic, cultural, and political mirror, the Elizabethan and European who wrote knowingly both for his own age and for all time.

NOTES

1. Sources. General debts to Elizabethan historical and literary scholarship are too numerous to be mentioned here. In particular, the assistance of the following works is gratefully acknowledged: above all, Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated* (London 1949), and *Mr. W. H.* (London 1964), *passim;* J. A. van Dorsten, *Poets, Patrons and Professors* (Leiden and London 1962), an excellent account of the inter-relations of literary thought and personalities in Leiden and England, especially in 1585-6 (especially pp. 152-3, 218-219); Robert Gittings, *Shakespeare's Rival* (London 1960), pp. 109-112; G. B. Harrison, ed., *Willobie His Avisa* (London 1926); B. M. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (London 1928); and standard scholarly works on Shakespeare. The finished autobiographies of Jane and John Daniel are in the Public Record office at S.P. 46/50; other Daniel papers are at S.P. 14/11; S. P. 14/52; S.P. 46/51-56; and elsewhere. Still others of importance are in the collections of the Marquess of Salisbury at Hatfield House.
2. At the time of going to press, B. N. de Luna's *The Queen Declined*: *Willobie His Avisa,* which was announced for publication this summer, had still not appeared. Advance publicity for the book suggests that Mrs. de Luna may independently have reached some of the conclusions about *Willobie His Avisa* outlined in the present article. G. P. V. Akrigg, too, in *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 216-219, has recently made a correct and independent identification of "A Nobleman" in *Willobie His Avisa* as the Earl of Leicester. A full-length, documented account of *Willobie His Avisa* will be included in a book on Shakespeare's sonnets to be published by the present author in the near future.
3. An understanding of the sonnets leads fairly easily to the unravelling of most of the mysteries in *Love's Labours Lost*, Shakespeare's only true *drame à clef.* In brief, the setting is Lamphey Palace; the King of Navarre is Essex; the Princess of France is Frances Walsingham (who had been Essex's wife since 1590 and who remained Jeanne's employer); Lord Berowne and Lady Rosaline are Shakespeare and Jeanne de la Kethulle, Lady Maria is Essex's sister, Penelope Rich; Lord Longaville is the very able soldier Sir Charles Blount (later Lord Mountjoy and Earl of Devonshire) who was Penelope's lover and Essex's friend; Lord Dumain is the young Earl of Southampton; Lady Katharine is Southampton's impatient, and eventually rejected, fiancée, Elizabeth de Vere; Moth, as is well known, is Thomas Nashe; Costard and Jaquenetta remain a mystery; the Pedant and the Curate are probably Gabriel Harvey and his brother Richard; Lord Boyet is the eccentric and many-sided Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford; and the amazing Don Adriano de Armado is *also* Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. (A similar, and similarly unsuspected, double character may also be present in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in Falstaff and Fenton.)