

Was Shakespeare a Papist?

Cf, My book published by Sapientia Press 2005, *Shakespeare the Papist*

Answering the question, raised by Richard Davies, "He died a Papist" (17<sup>th</sup> century)

Raising the further question, Did he live and write as a Papist? And again, "What kind of a Papist was he?"

Note 1, Two kinds of Papist, Church Papist (conforming) and Recusant (refusing)

Two approaches, biographical (what is known of his life), literary (from his plays)

Note 2, Three religions distinguished in Elizabethan age, as 3 P's

Cf, Newman, *Idea*. "Shakespeare has so little of a Protestant about him..."

Chesterton, "That Sh was a Catholic... by every sort of convergent common sense."

(from Newman's *Grammar*, proof from convergence of independent probabilities)

Literary approach from the plays

a) *Marian heroines*, from Luciana in CE to Miranda in T, described in terms of grace, esp.

Desdemona in *Othello*, first play in Jacobean age 1604, away from persecuting queen,

Greeted by Cassio on safe arrival in Cyprus, "Hail to thee, lady, and the grace of

heaven". With function of intercession for Cassio, "She is of so free, so kind", from the

*Memorare*, but "my advocacy is not now in tune", from the *Salve Regina*, "*advocata nostra*"

Marina in *Pericles*, born at sea, from the name of Mary, *Stella Maris*, met after long

separation by grieving father, "Thou that begettst him that did thee beget (giving new

life to her father) from the hymn *Alma Redemptoris Mater... Tu quae genuisti tuum*

*sanctum genitorem*. Under patronage of Diana at Ephesus, Diana = Virgin Mary (NPI)

b) *Franciscan Friars*, from Fr Laurence in RJ, as respected spiritual adviser to both

Romeo and Juliet, devising remedy of seeming death for Juliet, but unsuccessful, by

way of Fr Francis in MA, officiating at wedding of Claudio and Hero, but bridegroom

says "No!" Hero swoons, seeming to die, but Claudio repents, happy ending (as not in

RJ), to Duke Vincentio as Fr Lodowick in MM (same year as *Othello* 1604), coming to

assistance of lovers, Claudio and Juliet, "His givings out of an infinite distance from

true design". *Note* syllogism of lovers, Romeo and Juliet, Claudio and Hero, Claudio and

Juliet. Favorable characterization as contrasted with Protestant divines, Sir Nathaniel

in LLL, Sir Hugh Evans in MWW, Sir Oliver Martext in AL (echoing Marprelate

controversy). c) *Recusancy in Hamlet*. Though setting seemingly in 11<sup>th</sup> cent. Denmark,

really in 16<sup>th</sup> cent England. Four students from Wittenberg, Luther's univ. founded in

early 16<sup>th</sup> cent. Hamlet and Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, while Laertes from

Paris univ of Calvin, riot "as the world were now but to begin, antiquity forgot, custom

not known". Names of characters varied, Greek, Latin, Italian, as well as German.

Basic contrast between former regime as described by Ghost, Catholic belief in Purgatory, prayer for dead, last sacraments, and new regime under Claudius, not Protestant but secular (Erastian = Church controlled by State), effected by Polonius (= Lord Burghley). Hamlet though from Lutheran univ. finds himself as Recusant, opposed to new regime. Family of Polonius seemingly Puritan, offering moral advice to each other, but in outcome Laertes revealing Calvinist rejection of all tradition, Ophelia in madness reverting to childhood memories of Catholic pilgrimages, prayers for dead. Above all, soliloquy "To be or not to be", applicable to Catholic recusants, either to be = to go on enduring the unendurable, as penal laws stepped up, or not to be = to take up arms against queen, as in Essex Rebellion of 1601 and Gunpowder Plot of 1605, eg. Robert Catesby (cousin to Sh)

Hamlet's dying concern about his "wounded name" = reputation of recusants as traitors.

d) *Three plays of disinheritance*, the situation of Catholics leaving England for exile. *Richard 2* King deposed, imprisoned, reduced to beggary, meeting weeping queen on way to Tower and comforting her, "Our holy lives must win a new world's crown" (spiritual) contrasted with temporal idea of thriving in a new world by Lord Fitzwater *As You Like It*. Duke Senior deposed by younger brother Frederick, living in Forest of Arden with loving lords, sitting round fire for meal in wintry setting, "Now my co-mates and brothers in exile", all equal like disciples with Jesus at last supper, or like friars, learning in school of adversity, finding "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything", echoing the teaching of A Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, speech of Friar Laurence in RJ. Place partly in Sh's Arden, family home including Wroxhall Abbey (Isabella Sh), partly Allen's Douai near Ardennes, with many young gentlemen flocking to him every day (= seminarians), "as in golden world"

*King Lear*, composed of two parallel plots, Lear and three daughters, Earl of Gloucester and two sons, both old men deceived, Lear by two elder daughters, banishing youngest Cordelia over Nothing, Gloucester by young bastard Edmund also over Nothing causing legitimate Edgar to take to flight, old men disabused turned out of home into tempest, so that the good all driven into exile, having come to know themselves and their true children. Edgar comes to assist blinded father, Cordelia returns from France to help maddened father. Everything moves towards Dover, as only place-name in the play, and the double ending, supremely happy at the end of Act IV, with the reunion of Lear and Cordelia, from Nothing to I am, as it were a resurrection, yet supremely sad at the end of Act V, with Lear tottering on stage with dead body of Cordelia hanged in prison, as in statuary of *Pieta*, echoing words of Jeremiah *Lam*. "Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow" – as inversion of previous resurrection with passion. But

rectified in final tragi-comedies from *Pericles* onwards, as Sh's final word leading on to Epilogue at end of T, beseeching prayer for God's mercy.