

PART VIII

HIGH CULTURE

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“Culture” as an all-encompassing system of myths, rituals, customary practices, and social structures did not yet exist in Shakespeare’s time, but certain skills and bodies of knowledge – especially fluency in Latin and familiarity with Greek and Roman literature – did function as markers of social distinction. Gentlemen who failed to become proficient in Latin risked being regarded as uncivil by other gentlemen, whereas women and men of lower birth who possessed enough classical learning might challenge a degree of respect to which their gender or birth would not otherwise entitle them. To the extent that a recognized high tradition existed, it was a predominantly Greco-Roman tradition. Moreover, ancient learning was often valued less for its own sake than for its utility in solving various practical problems, from design of a house to the formulation of military strategies.

Early modern culture does not fit readily into pigeonholes with labels such as “elite” and “popular,” “Protestant” and “Catholic,” or “humanist” and “medieval.” It often works in surprising ways that contradict preconceived ideas about boundaries separating periods, social classes, and opposing religious or political ideologies. Uses of historical scholarship are an example. Shakespeare shared a contemporary interest in political causation, as reflected in stories about the past. He knew most, if not all, of the standard school texts and other fashionable ancient writings favored in the period, but to an extraordinary degree he also shared the creative eclecticism of educated sixteenth-century readers: the ability to combine raw material from different sources in novel and unexpected ways.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Schooling
- Commonplace books
- University and/or the inns of court
- Noble patrons
- The grand tour
- A humanist culture?
- Manuscript culture
- Beyond the academy
- Medieval versus modern traditions
- Gender and cultural outlooks
- Religion and cultural outlooks
- Vocations
- War and governance
- Diplomats and foreign policy experts
- Agriculture and gardening
- Architecture, the visual arts, and drama
- Amateurs, patrons, and professionals
- Historiography and politics

70. POETRY

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Shakespeare’s understanding of the poetic forms and styles that defined high and court culture date to the start of his career. By the early 1590s, his plays had earned him a reputation as a premier English Ovidian poet. When the theaters were closed because of the plague in 1594, Shakespeare turned to nondramatic verse and produced his two major narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. We do not know when he wrote the *Sonnets*, but the collection shows that Shakespeare was eager to imitate and challenge the poetry of social superiors like Sir Philip Sidney. It is likely that Shake-

Shakespeare's interaction with the verse, rhythm, and diction of court poetry is in part responsible for what many critics have defined as Shakespeare's "late style" in his last four or five plays.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Publication in verse miscellanies
- Competition with other poets
- Petrarchism and beyond
- Love and patronage: erotic poetry
- Ovidian influence

71. CLASSICAL GENRES: EPIC, TRAGEDY, COMEDY, SATIRE

Heather James, University of Southern California, United States

Unlike some of his contemporaries, who worried about creating plays that were a "hodge-podge" or "mingle-mangle" of styles and genres, Shakespeare trusted his fellow actors and audiences alike to know their classical genres inside and out: they could catch the finest nuances in a particular genre and simultaneously revel in freewheeling adaptations of the genres, even when they were freely mixed. Classical genres flowed copiously into England from antiquity and the Continent. Some were great and others small, some high and others low, some universal and others narrow. English readers had time for both high and low strains of classical verse. In Shakespeare's England, the classical genres spurred readers to study their forms and uses and inspired poets and dramatists to imitate, adapt, reinvent, or parody them.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Classical genres in practice
- Classical genres and Northrop Frye
- Shakespearean character and classical genres
- Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poetry*
- Shakespeare's response to classical genres

72. EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: RHETORIC

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Renaissance humanism was based equally on the acquisition of knowledge, a revival of classical learning through translation and education, and on cultural refinement, the ideal of shaping an aristocratic courtier or "gentleman" through literature and the arts. Central to this humanist program was "eloquence," the art of expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness. The classical education that Shakespeare likely received at Stratford-upon-Avon's grammar school taught him tools of eloquence that are put to signal use in his plays: fable writing, confirmation and refutation, praise and blame, impersonation and description, ethical and legal argumentation, and copiousness of style.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Rhetoric in humanist culture
- Shakespeare's rhetorical education
- Building blocks of eloquence: The *Progymnasmata*
- From fable to narrative
- Argument for beginners
- Praise and blame
- Impersonation and description
- Advanced argumentation
- The art of copiousness
- Rhetoric and ethics
- Rhetoric between high and low culture

73. EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: RELIGION AND GENDER

Stephanie Sleeper, independent scholar, United States

In the sixteenth century, Protestant reformers' emphasis on scriptural literacy, orthodox doctrine, and moral reform led to enhanced attempts to provide a rudimentary education for everyone, including women and lower-class men. The rapid increase in literacy over the period demonstrates that the new emphasis on education met with some success. On the other hand, printed texts, oral culture, religious belief, and archival evidence indicate the existence of an often contradictory constellation of practices and experiences. Attention to the differences among men and women regarding stages of life, social class, occupation, and educational opportunity provides a fuller picture of the connections among religion, education, and the gendered social order.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Religious literacy
- Religious differences
- Social and gender differences
- Educational methods
- Education for the semiliterate and nonliterate
- Religious education and female virtue
- Biblical heroines and female exemplars
- Marriage
- Motherhood and character
- Shakespeare's learned and pious women

74. PHILOSOPHY

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To be a "philosopher" during the early modern period did not necessarily entail purely academic study. We might more usefully ask what it meant to take on a philosophical persona, a shift that recognizes the presence of philosophy and philosophizing in a range of professions and social positions, among them logicians, rhetoricians, doctors, theologians – and playwrights. Eclecticism was the dominant philosophical mode of the era, one in which key texts and authors defining particular strains of philosophy were regularly combined by those who studied them. Shakespeare was no exception to this eclectic paradigm.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Stoicism and the pursuit of constancy
- Epicureanism: atoms, tranquility, and pleasure
- Skepticism and productive doubt
- Political philosophy and early modern drama
- Divine-right monarchy and absolutism
- Republicanism and the English commonwealth
- Resistance, tyrannicide, and the Machiavellian counter
- Machiavelli and the maintenance of authority
- Natural philosophy: mastering the world and the soul

75. HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Atsuhiko Hirota, University of Kyoto, Japan

More than a third of Shakespeare's plays are based on historical events and legends printed in monuments of Elizabethan historiography such as Edward Hall's *Union* and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*. This group includes not only the plays classified as "Histories" in the First Folio but also such plays as *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*, all included in the "Tragedies" section. In these plays, Shakespeare not only dramatizes historiographers' narratives but also mixes them with other genres. He reveals the limitations of historiography by dramatizing the uncertainty in his sources as well as the process of narrative development in his repetitive use and elaboration of stories such as those about Richard III.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Rumor and the unreliability of historiography in the *Henry IV* plays
- Shakespeare's questioning of the reliability of an eyewitness
- Young York's tale about Richard's teeth in *Richard III*
- Shakespeare's dramatization of Richard's abnormal birth
- The problems of historiography highlighted by young York's speeches

76. MUSIC

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We learn a lot about music in high culture from the ways in which Shakespeare invokes music, especially in what he can assume of his audience. At the very core is literacy, both the ability to read music and a familiarity with musical genres. Shakespeare makes reference to more than 300 musical terms, many of them technical. The play texts themselves are a rich source of evidence concerning attitudes and beliefs about music and its powers, as well as about the contexts of music making, in low culture as well as high. By considering the life and career of Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Morley – and the kinds of music he composed, published, and performed – we can see some of the institutional structures that undergirded the production and consumption of music.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- “Practicall musicke”
- “The discourse of musicke”
- “He sings psalms to hornpipes”
- “The sounds of music”
- “Get you hence”
- “It was a lover and his lass”
- Music in high culture: Thomas Morley

77. MILITARY AND CHIVALRIC CULTURE

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Thanks to the publication of Holinshed's *Chronicles* in 1577 and 1587, written with an eye toward preparing England for war with a major foreign power, Elizabethan noblemen and gentlemen were acutely aware of the martial deeds of their forebears and sought to live up to their memory. When the Earl of Essex, the greatest English military figure of the 1590s, departed on expeditions, literally hundreds of gentlemen followed him to war at their own expense. Disappointed in rewards expected from Queen Elizabeth, many gentleman soldiers looked instead to the Earl of Essex, whose personal charisma and energy seemed to prefigure the impending rise to political influence of the younger generation, who bore the brunt of the fighting in the war. The implosion of the Earl of Essex's career after his failure in Ireland in 1599 left pent-up expectations for Elizabeth's successor, James I.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Rearmament and “deniable” operations
- The war with Spain, 1585–1604
- Martial zeal and the burdens of war

78. THE ROYAL COURT

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The theatrical company in which Shakespeare was a shareholder was commissioned to perform at court more than 200 times during his lifetime. In the plays themselves, there is no single predominant image of the royal court to be detected. The court is represented as magnificent and trifling, traditional and newfangled, vital and impotent, the seat of masculine

government and the hideaway of effeminate vices, a symbol of civil order and a little, insular world, cut off from the experiences of all other subjects. Shakespeare did have some practical, firsthand knowledge of the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts and courtiers, but what we find in the plays is a wide range of ideas concerning the royal court that reflect the heterogeneity of ideas and stereotypes in circulation among Shakespeare's contemporaries.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Institutions and patrons
- Shakespeare as court writer?
- The Lord Chamberlain's man
- The King's man
- Venues and audiences
- Rival traditions?
- Court stereotypes onstage
- Stereotypes and nostalgia
- Other images of courts