

PART X

RELIGION

Lori Anne Ferrell, Claremont Graduate University, United States

Shakespeare's career spanned an age defined, as it had been since time out of mind, by the outward profession of Christianity. The idea of individual choice and free will in religious matters was still centuries in the future. Although there was nothing particularly private about religion in early modern England, the reformations of religious doctrine and worship meant that matters of *corporate* belief were controversial topics with sometimes fatal consequences. Under such circumstances, religious toleration was, quite simply and literally, inconceivable. Protestants, Catholics, and even sectaries for Christian dogma of other kinds all believed that *their* version of the Christian faith was the only true one.

Books, pamphlets, and broadsides, some of them printed abroad and illegally imported, proliferated. In this small, insular kingdom – from which the Jews had been expelled in 1260 and wherein “The Turk” was more likely to be found strolling the stage than strolling the streets – the struggle for Christian souls was intraconfessional in nature, waged entirely between Catholic and Protestant champions. William Shakespeare was a curious, observant, and well-informed observer of this clamorous religious culture, which was continually under construction during his lifetime.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Public conditions of faith
- Loss of shared faith
- Christian doctrine in the west, AD 100–700
- Obsession with death
- Schemes of time
- The origins of a national church, 700–1500
- Seven sacraments
- Purgatory
- Dramatizing the Bible
- Belief and the senses
- The triumph of the word, 1500–1625
- The state of religion/the religion of state in Shakespeare's time
- Catholic holdouts
- Calvinist challenges
- Religion and the English language

89. THEATER AND RELIGION

Kristin Poole, University of Delaware, United States

“Theater” and “religion” are not merely abstract concepts. Both involve *people*. London was a populous and socially diverse place, and Shakespeare's audience was comprised of a religious hodge-podge. Within the Globe or Blackfriars Theatre, there was hardly a common theology or religious ideology. Playwrights' own religious positions were not necessarily clear-cut and consistent. The enormous success of the new commercial theaters, with their steady traffic of substantial audiences, positioned them as a premier cultural venue for representing contemporary social concerns – and those concerns revolved, in large part, around religion.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Christian unity and religious pluralism
- Diversity of religious opinion in public life
- Theological mixing
- The religious diversity of Shakespeare's audience

- The religion of Shakespeare's fellow playwrights
- Religious diversity on the stage
- Censorship and literary forms
- The history of religion and the history of the theater
- Religious genres
- Appropriation in history plays
- Private religion
- Hamlet and the afterlife

90. SELFHOOD AND SANCTIFICATION

Kathleen Lynch, Folger Shakespeare Library, United States

The selves that Shakespeare's characters present can seem to be very much like our own, especially in their introspection. Indeed, our sense of self is rooted in one that was just emerging in Shakespeare's time. To fully understand the conceptual underpinnings of that sense of self, however, we need to examine how closely an emphasis on interiority was entwined with the religious controversies of Shakespeare's time. Further, we need to understand how attention to the self in solitude obscures the contestability of truths of religious conviction. Currently, the received version of early modern selfhood is being rethought in light of the discovery of many more first-person texts and self-aware authors in a wide variety of written forms. The monolithic Protestant self is being challenged by a proliferation of Protestant selves.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Transhistorical readings of selfhood
- Finding more saints in the archive
- A culture of presence
- Witness, sanctification, and performing godliness

91. THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Peter Carlson, Bloy House/Episcopal Theological School, Claremont University, United States

References to the Christian religious calendar are widespread throughout the works of Shakespeare and in early modern English literature generally. Those references are not necessarily religious, however. The liturgical calendar supplied reference points for court life, the legal system, agriculture – and professional theater. The feasts and fasts of the liturgical year were structured around the most important feasts of the Church: Christmas and Epiphany, which celebrate the nativity of Jesus and his divinity, and Easter, which commemorates Jesus's resurrection from the dead.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The liturgical year in Shakespeare's plays
- Advent and Christmas
- Epiphany
- Lent, Easter, and Pentecost
- Holy days associated with Christ
- Holy days associated with the Virgin Mary
- Saints' days
- Secular understandings of the church year
- Dramatic performances and the liturgical year

92. JUDAISM AND JEWS

Brett D. Hirsch, University of Western Australia, Australia

Anti-Semitic narratives inherited from the medieval past or developed in response to contemporary events at home and abroad held that Jews were a monstrous race of usurers, poisoners, cannibals, and criminals, who crucified Christian children and used Christian blood for ritual purposes, threatening church and state. At the same time, interest in Hebrew

and Jewish biblical scholarship, millenarian expectations, international trade, or typological comparisons to Old Testament figures inspired more positive attitudes. These positive and negative associations rendered “Jewishness” a flexible label in Shakespeare’s England, a symbolically potent, fluid, and composite identity construct projected onto oneself and others to suit changing social, cultural, theological, national, and political agendas.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Jews as polarizers
- Jews and usury
- Ways to know a Jew
- Jewish doctors
- Demonic rituals
- Sorcery
- Figurative and former Jews
- Covert and current Jews
- Aliens, conversion, diasporas
- Inalienable Jewishness
- Positive interest in Judaism

93. WITCHCRAFT

Sarah Kennedy, Mary Baldwin College, United States

By the time William Shakespeare created his three weird sisters for *Macbeth* in 1606, the witchcraft hysteria in Europe had already waxed and waned a number of times. England’s spectacular and melodramatic trials had only recently begun. Shakespeare would have had a wealth of information by the turn of the seventeenth century, from pamphlets and other popular accounts, of trials from Italy to Scotland. After the death of Shakespeare, the century would witness one of the fiercest and bloodiest periods in this dismal chapter of European history, and many of these later trials would be held in England.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The first phase of witch hunts
- Witch trials in the seventeenth century
- The witchcraft obsession of James VI and I
- Trials in England before James
- Some notable trials
- Skepticism
- The witch craze and *Macbeth*
- Rejection of witchcraft as superstitious

94. ATHEISM

Alec Ryrie, University of Durham, United Kingdom

There were in Shakespeare’s England no atheists in the modern sense of the word; that is, individuals who held and articulated coherent philosophical positions that denied the existence of a god or gods. And yet “atheist” was one of the most readily used early modern insults, and warnings against the dangers of atheism were ubiquitous and urgent. Unlike Christopher Marlowe and Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare was never accused of atheism, but his plays repeatedly flirt with godlessness and skepticism about divine providence. The philosophical tools for coherent atheism had not yet been forged in Shakespeare’s time, and the voices of skepticism and unbelief that do survive are too scattered, filtered, and incoherent for us to force them into a single category and call them an “-ism.” But such voices from the period do survive, a persistent fringe presence in the early modern intellectual world.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The early modern animus against “atheism”
- Functional atheism
- Scoffers and railers

- Heretics and freethinkers
- Catholics and Protestants
- Tortured doubters

95. ISLAM

Daniel Vitkus, University of California San Diego, United States

New cross-cultural, commercial, and diplomatic exchanges with the Islamic world inspired and provoked English authors, including many playwrights, to write about Muslims (called “Mahometans” by Shakespeare’s contemporaries). Educated English readers would know more about Islam, the religion founded by the prophet Muhammed, and its history of imperial, territorial expansion. Although they would know about the Crusades and the fact that Jerusalem, the Holy Land, was under Islamic control, the average London playgoer might not have had a very clear understanding of the various groups that made up the complex, layered societies of the Islamic world, where Muslim rulers presided over a multiethnic and multifaith conglomeration of cultures – and tolerated the practice of Judaism and Christianity.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Muslims/Turks/Moors
- Christian responses to Islamic power
- Trade and diplomacy
- Turk plays on the London stage
- Shakespeare’s Moors
- Tracing the Turk in Shakespeare

96. ROME, CATHOLICISM, AND ITALY

Stefania Tutino, University of California Santa Barbara, United States

For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Rome did not mean just the capital of the ancient Roman Empire, nor did Italy mean just the array of cities, territories, and kingdoms that were setting the standard for modern art, architecture, technology, music, and literature. From the perspective of the British Isles in the late sixteenth century, Rome and Italy were synonymous with the Catholic Church. The theme of Rome as a Catholic place in Shakespeare’s England allows us to triangulate the relationship between Shakespeare and Italy, the relationship between Shakespeare and Catholicism, and the notion of Italy as an ideological and cultural repository.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Shakespeare and Italy
- Shakespeare and Catholicism
- Rome as cultural repository
- Contested time concerning post-Reformation Rome
- The city at the end of the journey
- Competing histories of Christianity
- Contested space in post-Reformation Rome
- The view from England
- Catholic Rome/Roman Catholicism

97. FORMS OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

Molly Murray, Columbia University, United States

Early modern English Christians cared deeply about the forms of their religious expression, nowhere more so than in the verbal articulations of faith. This chapter concentrates specifically on written forms of religious expression, the volume and variety of which reflected not only the post-Reformation diversification of Christianity but also the post-Gutenberg explosion of textuality during the period. Like play scripts, the texts of such hymns, psalms, prayers, and sermons would

only truly come to life in performance, when augmented and animated by the sights and sounds of lived experience. In their verbal texture, however, these modes of expression demonstrate the conceptual and aesthetic richness of early modern devotional language, language that existed in dialogue with the broader literary culture of Shakespeare's England.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Biblical translation
- Prayer
- Preaching
- Polemic
- Spiritual autobiography
- Poetry
- Psalms
- Devotional lyrics
- Controversy
- Theology and poetry
- Holy sonnets

98. HERESIES

Genelle Gertz, Washington and Lee University, United States

Although Queen Elizabeth I is often remembered for tolerating religious difference, her bishops in the Church of England in fact burned dissenting Protestants, and her magistrates tortured and hanged Catholics – not as heretics but as traitors to the crown. Although the difference appears only semantic (conviction for either heresy or treason resulted in death), it highlights the extremely politicized nature of religion in early modern England. As head of the Church of England, Elizabeth interpreted Catholic belief as political dissent. Any Catholic who found official church services harmful to his or her faith, and who boycotted them, could be suspected of treason.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Who was a heretic?
- Heresies as represented in Shakespeare's writing
- Origins of heresy
- The scripting and staging of heresy trials