

(7) Period 1600-1604

Time	Event	Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford	William Shakespeare of Stratford
1600	<p>December 1600: Marriage of Henri IV and Marie de Medicis.</p>	<p>July 1600: Letter to Robert Cecil. Asks him to support his suit to the queen for the governorship of the isle of Jersey, having become vacant at the death of Sir Anthony Paulet. Without result. (1)</p>	
1601	<p>Death of Thomas Nashe at the age of 34 (exact date is unknown).</p> <p>February 8: Aborted attempt at a coup d'état by Essex and his followers, among them the Earl of Southampton.</p> <p>The main purpose was to dislodge Robert Cecil from power.</p> <p>At the eve of the rebellion some conspirators pay the Chamberlain's Men 40 shillings to stage <i>Richard II</i>, including the deposition scene (IV.1) which was left out from the quarto edition of 1597 and the subsequent reprints.</p> <p>Augustine Phillips, one of the actors, is examined.</p> <p>The staging of <i>Richard II</i> remained without consequences for the Chamberlain's Men.</p> <p>The Earls of Essex and Southampton are sentenced to death for High Treason. Essex is beheaded on February 25, Southampton's punishment is changed into lifelong imprisonment. Sir Robert Cecil seems to have played a decisive role in Southampton's reprieve.</p>	<p>February 2: Letter to Robert Cecil. Asks to support his suit for the office of Lord President of Wales. Without result. (2)</p> <p>February 19: As Lord Great Chamberlain of England, the highest ranking peer of the jury at the trial, he was the last of the peers to render the guilty verdict.</p>	

		<p>March: An unusually pathetic letter to Robert Cecil. (3)</p> <p>May 11: Letter to Robert Cecil: Oxford calls himself “a hater of ceremonies”</p> <p>October 7: Letter to Robert Cecil: Complains of bad health. (4)</p> <p>November 22: Letter to Robert Cecil: Refers to his illness again. Request of the attained estate of Sir Charles Danvers. (executed for his participation in the Essex Rebellion).</p> <p>December 4: Letter to Robert Cecil: Writes he has few friends. (5)</p>	
<u>1602</u>		<p>January : Letter to Robert Cecil: Complains another time of lack of friends and of his lame hand. (6)</p>	<p>May 1: Purchases the Old Stratford Freehold from the brothers John and William Combe. In the conveyance he is mentioned as a resident in Stratford-on-Avon: “William Shakespere of Stretford upon Avon”. Was represented by his brother Gilbert at the transaction. He never signed the conveyance, though. John and William Combe did put their signature to the conveyance.</p>
<u>1603</u>	<p>March 24: Queen Elizabeth dies.</p> <p>April 10: Southampton released from the Tower, recovers his title of earl.</p>	<p>April 27: Letter to Robert Cecil: He is hindered by an infirmity, then remembers the dead queen. (7)</p> <p>June 19: Letter to King James, thanking him for being restored to the stewardship of the forest of Waltham in Essex. The grant is officially recorded on July 18.</p>	<p>May 19: Chamberlain’s Men receive their new charter as the King’s Men. Officially they are now the king’s servants.</p>

	<p>Because of the severe plague epidemic in London the theatres are closed and will so remain for approx. 1 year.</p> <p>September 9: Death of George Carey, 2nd Baron Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain.</p> <p>November 17: Trial of Sir Walter Raleigh for High Treason (the so-called Main plot). Raleigh is sentenced to death. The sentence is not executed until 1618.</p> <p>December: Execution of the conspirators of the Bye plot. (8)</p> <p>December 26: Ben Jonson's <i>Sejanus</i> is staged at court, probably on December 26.</p>	<p>July: Officiates as Lord Great Chamberlain of England at James I's coronation (the coronation procession is delayed till March of the next year).</p>	<p>"Will. Shake-Speare" plays in Jonson's <i>Sejanus</i>.</p>
<p><u>1604</u></p>	<p>March 15: Coronation procession.</p> <p>The printing of the second quarto of Hamlet (the good text) is started, probably in the second half of 1604 so as to be finished by the end of the year.</p>	<p>January 10: Letter to King James to thank him for the grant of the stewardship of Waltham Forest and Havering Park.</p>	<p>March 15: Together with the other King's Men Shakespeare takes part in the coronation procession, delayed by almost one year because of the plague.</p>

	<p>June 18: 6 days before his death Oxford makes several arrangements to prevent his estates from falling under wardship. Without these arrangements, some of the estates would have passed to the Crown until Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford, then 11 years old, came of age.</p>	
	<p>June 24: Death of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. (9)</p>	<p>1604 Sues Philip Rogers for 35 shillings and 10 pence.</p>

- (1) The tone of the letter is desperate. “Although my bad success, in former suits to her Majesty, haue given me cause to bury my hopes, in the deep Abyss and bottom of despair, rather then now to attempt, after so many trials made in vaine, & so many opportunities escaped, the effects of fair words, or fruits of golden promises. Yet for that, I cannot belieue, but that there hath been always a true correspondency of word and intention in her Majesty. I do conjecture, that with a little help, that which of itself hath brought forth so fair blossoms will also yield fruit.”
- (2) The governorship was given Sir Walter Raleigh.
- (3) In 1602 Baron Zouch became Lord President of the council of Wales.
- (4) “My very good Brother, I have received by Henry Lok your most kind message..... I do assure you that you shall have no faster friend & wellwisher unto you then myself either in kindness, which I find beyond mine expectation in you; or in kindred, whereby none is nearer allied then myselfe, since of your sisters, of my wife only you received nieces. A sister I say not by any venture, but borne of the same father, and the same mother yourself. I will say no more, for wordes in faithfull minds are tedious.”
- (5) “if my health had been to my minde I woulde have been before this at the Court, as well to have given you thanks for your presence, at the hearing of my cause debated as to haue moved her Majesty for her resolution.”
- (6) “for in the beginning of my suit to her Majesty I was doubtful to enter thereinto, both for the want I had of friends, and the doubt of their cares.” It should be noted that in sonnet 29 Shakespeare too states that he has few friends: “When in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes, / I all alone beweepe my outcast state, / And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, / And look upon myself and curse my fate, / Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, / Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, / Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope. “
“I find my state weak and destitute of friende for having only relied always on her Majesty” and “thus with a lame hand, to write I take my leave, but with a mind well disposed to hope the best of my friends.”
- (7) “for by reason of mine infirmity, I cannot come among you so often as I wish,... I cannot but find great grief in myself to remember the Mistress which we have lost, under whom both you and myself from our greenest years have been in a manner brought up; and although it hath pleased God after an earthly kingdom to take her up into a more permanent and heavenly state, wherein I do not doubt but she is crowned with glory; and to give us a Prince wise, learned, and enriched with all virtues, yet the long time which we spent in her service, we cannot look for so much left of our days as to bestow upon another, neither the long acquaintance and kind familiarities wherewith she did use us, we are not ever to expect from another Prince as denied by the infirmity of age and common course of reason. In this common shipwreck mine is above all the rest, who least regarded though often comforted of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the alterations of time and chance, either without

sail whereby to take advantage of any prosperous gale, or with anchor to ride till the storm is overpast.”

- (8) The Bye Plot: a rather harebrained plot by two Catholic priests and Sir George Brooke to kidnap King James and to compel him to revoke anti-Catholic legislation. The Main Plot was also a conspiracy by Catholics to replace King James on the throne by his niece Arabella Stuart. Sir Walter Raleigh had probably nothing to do with it. His trial was a farce. For the trials of the Earls of Essex and Southampton, see http://www.constitution.org/18th/ccst1-1742/ccst1-1742_0201-0250.pdf, for the trial of Sir Walter Raleigh http://www.constitution.org/18th/ccst1-1742/ccst1-1742_0201-0250.pdf and http://www.constitution.org/18th/ccst1-1742/ccst1-1742_0251-0300.pdf Contrary to a view held for a long time, Oxford cannot have died of the plague. In June 1604 the plague was over. The fact that six days before he died he was able to provide for legal dispositions in the interest of his son also contradicts this hypothesis. Moreover he died without having made a last will. Why? If a person died intestate and, which is the same, did not appoint an executor, an administrator was appointed by the Court of Probate. According to The Statute of 21 Henry VIII c. 5 the administrator had to be the widow or the next of kin. Indeed, the Court of Probate did appoint the Countess of Oxford as administrator, but she declined the administratorship. From a subsequent suit by a creditor we learn why she declined. The proper object of a testament (last will) was the succession of chattels. Real estate could be bequeathed by testament, but it was not obligatory. Now, at some time, likely shortly before his death, Oxford had transferred all his chattels to the Countess. There was no longer anything to bequeath. This makes it plausible to think that in the last days of his life Oxford had decided to commit suicide. If a person committed suicide *compos mentis* (“sound of mind”), the rule was that all his chattels were seized by the crown. The arrangement Oxford made, namely transferring all his chattels to his wife, would have made it impossible for the Crown to seize his chattels because his wife owned them before the suicide and, hence, before the Crown. The paradigmatical law case in this regard is the suit *Hales vs. Petit*, to which Shakespeare refers in the gravediggers scene (V.1) in *Hamlet*. The suicide theme is central in *Hamlet*. The famous monologue “To be or not to be” is essentially about that.:

- i. To be, or not to be, that is the question:
- ii. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
- iii. The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
- iv. Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
- v. And by opposing end them... (III.2. ll. 56-60)
- vi. ...
- vii. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
- viii. Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
- ix. The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
- x. The insolence of office, and the spurns
- xi. That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
- xii. When he himself might his quietus make
- xiii. With a bare bodkin? (ll. 70-76)

Lines 70-76, especially 76, to Seneca's epistle on suicide: “If you would pierce your heart, a gaping wound is not necessary - a lancet will open the way to that great freedom, and tranquillity can be purchased at the cost of a pin-prick.” Opposed to the Stoic view is the Platonic/Christian view on suicide can be briefly characterized as the “sentry or soldier theory”. It is expressed in the lines 57-8. However outrageous the wrongs and pains suffered, one has to hold out. In this view suicide was equal to cowardice, defection. “I am more an antique Roman than a Dane,” Horatio will say in the final scene.

The suicide theme is also present in sonnet 71:

No longer mourn for me when I am dead,
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell:
To “flee from the world” is actively to leave life, suicide.