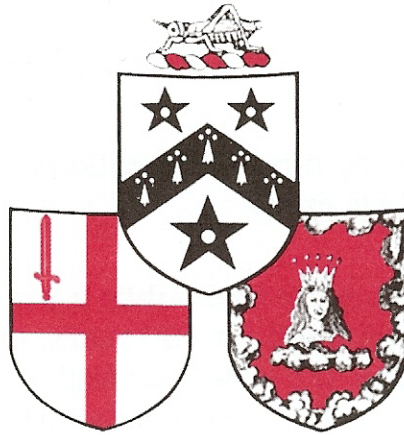


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SHAKESPEARE, *THE TEMPEST* and its CITY CONNECTIONS

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I cannot produce William Shakespeare as a Gresham Lecturer, as Andrew Gurr did with Ben Jonson so successfully last week. Nor is the connection between Blackfriars and *The Tempest* so symbiotic as he demonstrated it to be with Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Yet I hope to show that there were important City connections, including Blackfriars, in the hinterland of Shakespeare's play.

First, let me remind you about *The Tempest*, this strange, wonderful, puzzling play. First performed in the Autumn of 1611, it is the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone. After it he wrote two, or more likely three, plays with John Fletcher -- *Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Henry VIII*, and most probably *Cardenio*, a play now lost. *The Tempest* is the last of a group of four Shakespeare plays which we call the Romances, all written after 1608. In that year Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, were able to begin to use the small, elite, indoor, upstairs Blackfriars Theatre, which they had bought ten years earlier, but were at first prevented from using. This theatre, by the time they got into it in 1608, had a reputation for Romance plays, often by John Fletcher. This may be the chief, but not the only, reason why Shakespeare so astonishingly stopped doing what he could by then do better than anyone else before or since, that is, make the internal and complex development of character, right across a great tragedy, totally control the events, something seen wonderfully in *King Lear*, for example, of 1605. Three years and a few plays later (all tragedies) he left that remarkable dramatic concentration and turned to wild Romance plots with little character-development in them at all. The first of the new kind was *Pericles* of 1608; then *Cymbeline* of 1609, *The Winter's Tale* of 1610, and now finally *The Tempest* of 1611.

The Tempest is commonly labelled 'Shakespeare's Farewell To His Art'. This makes Prospero into Shakespeare, and his renunciation of his magic, drowning his books and breaking his staff, into Shakespeare laying down (or breaking) his pen and then, presumably, retiring to Stratford, to rest his now empty white head on a cushion for the rest of his days. That is not what the evidence reports. We should think of *The Tempest* as the middle one of seven plays: and as I shall show, Shakespeare was clearly involved in what his company could newly do in *The Tempest*. The sentimental identifying of Prospero and Shakespeare (an identification which doesn't happen with the equally highly imaginative Hamlet, Macbeth or Antony) seems to be an invention needed by a public that is mystified by, and therefore frightened of, a certain kind of high art, and is then reassured by a devaluing equation of the work and the man.

The Tempest is Shakespeare's last solo play: yet it stands first in the Folio and thus in most of our complete Shakespeares. That great book, intended as a definitive edition of

Shakespeare's thirty-six plays (though it omitted *Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*), was prepared lovingly in 1623, seven years after his death, by two King's Men players, fellow-sharers in the company, John Heminge and Henry Condell. It included eighteen plays never in print before. It is divided into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. *The Tempest* heads the Comedies, and thus it is first in the volume. Why does Shakespeare's last solo play come first? Was it good commercial sense, so that the book-browser would meet the play most recently in mind? Hardly, as one Folio play, *Henry VIII* (now often called by its other title *All Is True*) came after *The Tempest*, and many plays, including *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, had been frequently performed since Shakespeare's death in 1616. A more likely explanation is that the placing of *The Tempest* was arranged to attract readers: the stage directions give a clue that the text of this play was prepared for its printed state unusually, being made specially for reading, not performing. Consider the stage direction at IV.i.138:

Enter certain Reapers, properly habited; they join with the Nymphs in a graceful dance; towards the Iend whereof Prospero starts suddenly, and speaks; after which, to a strange, hollow and confused noise, they heavily vanish.

Those lines are not instructions to stage-staff; they are what somebody saw, and now needs to make a reader see. We know that a professional copyist called Ralph Crane wrote the play out for the printer in 1623, and it does look as if he was specifically asked to prepare a reading-text: 'Whatever you do, buy', wrote Heminge and Condell in the Preface 'To the great Variety of Readers', printed only a few pages before *The Tempest*. The play's position in Folio, however, remains one of the rather niggling puzzles about the play.

The Tempest is Shakespeare's second shortest play, roughly half the length of *Hamlet* and *Richard III*. The shortest, *The Comedy of Errors*, was written over twenty years earlier, at the start of his playwriting career. It is a comedy also dominated by the sea. Both plays, uniquely for Shakespeare, obey the doctrine of the Three Unities, a classical prescription based on a misunderstanding of Aristotle, whereby there must be one action (no sub-plots), one place (no switching between Rome and Egypt) and one time, that is, the three hours of stage time must match three hours of action (no royal birth, youth, manhood and death in one play). This neo-classical notion, bowed to by Ben Jonson, was immensely important in the 17th century, particularly in French classical theatre. It was largely ignored by Shakespeare except in these two plays at each end of his career. Certainly *The Tempest* has effectively one plot, happens on one patch of an island, and takes place on one, sea-haunted, afternoon.

Our first record of it is a Royal Command Performance, by the King's Men. It was the second play of the 1611 winter season at court: it was played in the Blackfriars before that. In late October 1611 ten men spent six days preparing the Banqueting House in Whitehall for the performance of an unknown play, then *The Tempest* on 1 November, and then, four nights later, *The Winter's Tale*. That room had often been fitted up for court masques, with machinery for transformation scenes, flying chariots, clouds and so

on, many inserted dances, and much music. (No other Shakespeare play is so full of music as *The Tempest*.) The court, and Blackfriars, audiences were sophisticated.

The principal player, the Prospero, was Richard Burbage, then at the height of his powers, and famous throughout Europe. Prospero speaks 600 of the 2064 lines, nearly a third of the play, which he dominates utterly: in such omnipresence he rivals Richard III, Prince Hamlet and Caius Martius Coriolanus. The company consisted of thirteen adults and four boys, and a squad of supernumeraries, back-stage staff who were used for mariners, the mysterious 'Shapes' at III.iii, and at IV. i. for the dancers of nymphs and reapers, and the hunting dogs. In spite of Prospero's dominance, however, it is not properly an actor's play. Soliloquies are not so much the forcing out of inner thoughts under great dramatic pressure (as in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, for example) as words making pictures:

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves;
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back ... (V. i. 33-36)

It is almost a designer's play, highly visual, full of symbolism, having a succession of stage shows which move like a dream, and so rich with a new kind of poetry that it seems, even so, to have been written for radio. *The Tempest*, the climax of Shakespeare's new interest in Romance, is a special play, mystifying, beautiful, dream-like and frightening. I want to go on to expand these epithets.

But before I can do that we have to try to settle the problem of its genre. With excellent reasons *The Tempest* has been claimed as romance, morality play, initiation ritual, refinement of *commedia dell'arte*, topical response to King James's New World colonising policy, masque, tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, wedding celebration (for James's daughter Elizabeth), fairy tale, myth, autobiographical palinode, political analysis, a set of magical devices, or a revenge play. This is like Polonius in *Hamlet* ('tragicomical-historical-pastoral') gone mad. Even in its classification *The Tempest* keeps shifting just out of view like a dream -- and it is unusually full of sleeps and wakings. The best description of it is a pastoral tragicomedy. The notion of this new, and highly unorthodox, mixed genre had arrived in 1601 with the publication of Giambattista Guarini's *Compendia della Poesia Tragicomica* and his play *Il pastor fido*. In England a few years later Samuel Daniel took up the new form in his *Queene's Arcadia*, and then in 1608 John Fletcher produced, probably for the Blackfriars Theatre, and even just possibly stimulated by Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, *The Faithful Shepherdess*. As Fletcher wrote, such a play 'wants (lacks) deaths ... yet brings some near it ... a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy', words which match *The Tempest*. Prospero's island can easily be seen as a pastoral retreat. It can be expressed rather like a strategy for some big business corporation with Prospero as Multinational Executive Director. If he can get the difficult members of the board to experience an event in the country for a few hours, he can win them to a new attitude. After early-evening drinks in the senior common room,

and a one-night stop-over, return transport is laid on next morning. Almost the last lines of the play are Prospero's

Sir, I invite your Highness and your train
To my poor cell, where you shall take your rest
For this one night ... And in the morn
I'll bring you to your ship, and so to Naples ... (V. i. 300-7)

The pastoral event laid on includes a hidden princess, fawning local fauna, a transformation wrought by local solitude, and so on. (Recent criticism sees this as an American rather than a European pastoral, wrongly, I believe, as will be apparent.)

Yes, a pastoral tragicomedy, and the finest example of the form. But also its opposite, a morality play. Several important recent critics see the play as a secularised religious drama -- not a miracle play, though at the end Sebastian does say, of the Providential conclusion of the drama of Alonso's family 'A most high miracle !' (V. i. 177). True pastoral is artifice: the court, as in *As You Like It*, playing at shepherds and shepherdesses, where even the philosophy is a sort of intellectual game. A morality play is deeply serious. In this reading the heart of the action is Prospero's discovery at the start of Act Five, when all the conspirators are at last in his power, that

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th'quick
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance ... (V. i. 25-8)

In truth, *The Tempest* is an exceptionally mixed play. Like all high art, it can be read in many ways. Yet, here, use of the various coloured filters gives extraordinarily complete (and independent) pictures. Take *The Tempest* as Revenge Play. Deprive Prospero of any halo, and he's a powerful man, even a tyrant, driven to avenge a felt wrong. The traditional delay, which that genre requires, is in the recapitulation at I.ii, the long explanations to Miranda and then to Ariel. Prospero has stage-managed a play (as in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, or as in *Hamlet*, the classic examples of Revenge Play) and then got everyone exactly where he wants them for the last act so that he can take action. (It is like the tradition of the Detective Play of the 1930s, where in the last scene, in the library, the detective begins 'You may be wondering why I have brought you all here this afternoon ...')

We know *The Tempest* today as a Romance, a form mainly from prose stories from ancient Greece, about lost royal children of unimpeachable virtue and beauty; adventures on, over, or beyond the sea; tremendous travels and encounters with wild beasts and rugged terrain; separations, griefs, coincidences, escapes from death, disguises; and final reconciliations and harmonies, especially between the generations, as in the royal marriages.

All these conflicting schemes suggest a critical mystery. Now, *Hamlet* criticism has for several centuries been the playground where anyone with a new theory can feel free to run about a bit. So Hamlet is, or isn't, mad; is, or isn't, Oedipal; is, or isn't, fat, a Catholic, a murderer, a saint, a melancholic, a sceptic, a Modern, an Ancient, too young, too old, a Calvinist, a theatre director (good or bad), a poet (ditto), and so on. Oscar Wilde got it right in the title of his projected essay 'Are the Commentators on Hamlet Really Mad or only Pretending To Be?' The puzzle of *Hamlet* involves moving pieces in and out of the light until a convincing shape appears: too much information seems to be given. The puzzle that is *The Tempest* is of a quite different order.

The Tempest has both dazzling symmetries of structure and haunting silences. Both can be strongly felt as an invitation to interpret. It is easily possible to make structures linking characters in pairs -- Caliban and Ferdinand, Caliban and Miranda, Caliban and Antonio, Prospero and Sycorax, and so on. Two fathers (Prospero and Alonso), who have been enemies, have children (Miranda and Ferdinand) who fall in love. Two brothers, Prospero and Antonio, are opposed in nature. On the island are two kinds of magician, black (Sycorax) and white (Prospero); their children, (Caliban, Miranda) are antithetical. The shipwreck produces two parties, nobles and clowns (kept, incidentally, well apart until the very end, unlike Shakespeare's usual practice) and two conspiracies, each led by a pair: Antonio and Sebastian, and Stephano and Trinculo. Prospero has two totally contrasted servants, Ariel and Caliban. Symmetries extend wherever you look: the underlying structure of *The Tempest* is like snowflakes under the microscope -- patterns that are always different, and always symmetrical. To quote David Palmer

The complexity of Shakespeare's pattern is illustrated by Caliban. In that he cannot respond to Prospero's attempt to teach him, he is a foil to Miranda: in that he resents the tasks imposed upon him by Prospero, he is a foil to Ferdinand; in that he plots with Trinculo and Stephano, he is a foil to Antonio; in that he urges his fellow conspirators to ignore the flashy clothes left by Prospero to distract them, he is a foil to Stephano and Trinculo. He is both villain and clown -- in one respect an unnatural hybrid monster, in another the savage man of pastoral tradition.

The Tempest: a Casebook (1968, pp. 15-16)

The parallels extend to the scenic structure: Act 11 scene ii begins with the monster Caliban carrying logs for his master. The next scene, Act 111 scene i, opens with the prince, Ferdinand, carrying logs for his mistress. Moreover, as soon as we allow planes to shift, other binary systems come into sight, strikingly alive and suggestive, held together, like double stars, in a gravitational bond -- like sovereignty and conspiracy, for example. Who in the play is sovereign Prospero? Alonso? Stephano? Caliban? Who is conspiring? Prospero? Alonso? Antonio? Caliban?

The exquisiteness of *The Tempest* lies partly in this network of correspondences. But that is in itself only half the story, as the very network itself corresponds to, or opposes, unique silences and opacities. The strongly present supernatural, the controlled magic and the sense of wonder match a curious, and unique, bafflement in the reader. There

often feels to be far more going on than we are told. Adequate cause is not always given for the -- always strong -- feelings in Prospero. He controls the action, but what that action is can puzzle everyone in the theatre -- audience, actors and characters alike. Examining closely why Prospero does what he does reveals an enigma; but that is not greatly distressing, as it matches the way that a good deal of the play is unknowable. Prospero seems over-impatient with Miranda in the long second scene, demanding that she understand. Why is Miranda's mother, Prospero's wife, so remarkably absent, so that Miranda can remember ladies-in-waiting but not her? What was the 'one thing' Sycorax did which reduced her punishment? What were the 'grand hests' that Ariel refused? Claribel married a Muslim, a matter of horror to a Jacobean audience: why had Alonso agreed? Why, in spite of all that Prospero has told her about Alonso, does Miranda say nothing at all about him when she knows that he is the father of her lover Ferdinand, and greet the courtiers as if nothing had ever gone amiss? What exactly are the 'Shapes' up to in III.iii.? At V.i.232 we are told that the sleeping sailors awoke to hear strange and horrific sounds and we are never told what made them. Exactly how does the conspiracy of Caliban and the others break up the masque? What does it mean that Antonio is virtually silent in the last scene? What, precisely, is the state of mind of Prospero at the end of the play? What the play doesn't say can make an unusually long list. There are so-called 'loose ends' all over the plays of Shakespeare: here we are dealing with something different.

Moreover, Shakespeare works here with new qualities of suggestiveness. The 'Be not afraid. The isle is full of noises' speech at III.ii. 130-8, poetry of the highest Renaissance power about sweet sounds and sleep, is given to the 'debosh'd fish' Caliban. Such extraordinary resonance of the verse matches the disturbing way that reality shifts about. Music 'creeps by' on the waters, or is in the air; 'strange, hollow and confused noise' goes with the vanishing reapers and nymphs; Alonso hears the name 'Prosper' in the wind and thunder.

These seemingly infinite symmetries and silences, with the underlying story of magic, make *The Tempest* irresistible to interpreters of the wilder sort, and for over a hundred years the play has been the subject of 'explanations' varying from the unlikely to the plain loony. This does not matter. Uniquely, this play responds to any strong magnetic field, it seems -- a cause in itself of some wonder. But there is always the sense that the play is 'about' something that is just out of sight.

The last twenty years have brought Caliban forward as representing the native Caribbean or American, viciously exploited and punished by the wicked coloniser Prospero, who is a type of the sadistic absolute ruler of black slaves. It has been only a step from that to *The Tempest* as 'Shakespeare's American play'. There has been much throwing about of brains, and much playing of Caliban as mixture of noble savage and, in Jonathan Miller's words, 'dispossessed field hand'. The malignity of European influence on the young and innocent America has been frequently said to be Shakespeare's subject. Yet Prospero is a Renaissance Mage, a theurgist, a white magician at the highest levels of enlightenment, his great Art being the disciplined exercise of virtuous knowledge. The debate, sometimes rather noisy, is a localisation of

the ancient contention between Nature and Nurture. Much ink has also been used to give us a Prospero who civilises the unruly natives for their own good, in the name of religion and good authoritarian governorship, so that Shakespeare may be seen to be on the side of the Virginia Company and its Jacobean aims. Here come into play the so-called 'Bermuda Pamphlets', which Shakespeare is said to have used as sources, giving details of a shipwreck in a phenomenal tempest, and news from the Virginia colony. These documents maintained that government policy on colonisation was firmly on course -- lest the City should panic and subscriptions to the venture should not continue. But also clearly visible is the admission of calamitous 'dissension and ambition' among the leaders of the Virginia colony, and 'the idleness and bestial sloth of the common sort' -- though it is also suggested that the latter were scandalous reports spread by the 'unruly youth' just returned from America. The shipwreck of Sir Thomas Gates (and I'll come to that) was both hideously dreadful and at the same time miraculous, both a calamity and evidence of Providence at work.

Yet E. E. Stoll in 1927 pointed out that Shakespeare says not a word in *The Tempest* about America or Virginia, about colonies or colonising, though the matter was common among Elizabethan poets. Indeed, we can now see that the 'Shakespeare's-American-play' critics have not only to take in that uncomfortable fact: what is much worse, they have to face what the play actually does say, which is that the island is between Carthage and Italy. Worse still, the American mythology which isn't there has to be replaced by the European facts which are there, accurate and accumulating references to Virgil's *Aeneid* ('widow Dido' and all that, and a good deal more which mirrors Aeneas's final voyage to Italy), a classical, epic, substructure to the play which makes it high art in the name of the foundation of a great nation and empire -- the task for which Aeneas left Dido in Carthage.

Yet again, however, the planes shift and the picture looks different once again. On that model of Rome, which great nation is being founded? Britain, as a result of James I's union of England and Scotland? Or the New World? The name 'Setebos' comes from Patagonia, and Trinculo refers to a dead Indian (II.ii.33). Through the constantly changing refraction of light, *The Tempest* is able to suggest, in a peculiarly Shakespearean way, multiple experiences. The Virgilian theme can be Virginian after all.

Because there is no escaping Blackfriars and the City of London, that theatre was a City theatre and the only one City financiers as well as courtiers attended it. It clearly had, in 1611, a remarkable company. Burbage led fine adult actors: and he can be seen in the second scene working with two boys. One was Miranda. The other was an Ariel, whatever that is -- then an athletic boy, probably new to the company, who could sing, and play instruments, and who could above all safely make complicated costume-changes very rapidly - for his first change, at I.ii.316, *Re-enter Ariel like a water-nymph*, he has only a dozen lines.

The company must have treasured this boy, and he makes a marker for their power at the time. The King's Men were at their height, playing in the two best London theatres,

the Globe and the Blackfriars, and commanded to open the Court season. And they had in the opening four and a half minutes of *The Tempest* a theatrical *tour-de-force* never achieved anywhere else before. Andrew Gurr has recently (in *Shakespeare Survey* 41, 1989) demonstrated in detail how Shakespeare wrote and arranged that magnificent ship-board storm scene, even to which ropes were pulled when and by whom, and how he worked with his company to make that a theatrical *coup* well ahead of what any rivals could do. Very far from Shakespeare saying farewell to his art, he and his company are pushing out into new theatrical territory. We know that Shakespeare in March 1613 bought the Blackfriars Gatehouse: no doubt it was an investment, but it was a new London pad for him very close to his adventurous company. Only this company, in that theatre, could put on this play, with its mysterious stage effects, amazing boy as Ariel, and that storm effect, pulled off time after time. So remarkable, and famous, must the theatrical triumph of the tempest have been that the play is actually named after it -- rather oddly, as it is over so quickly and then largely forgotten: it is if Hamlet were called *The Sentinels* or *The Watch*. Such a tremendous tempest on a City stage might have been thought to have reference to famous storms in Homer, or the *Aeneid*, or the Acts of the Apostles, or even Erasmus: but the City was acutely aware, if the Bermuda Pamphlets tell us anything, of tempest in the New World.

I end with something -- not enough -- about the Virginia Company. Roughly, it was a City of London enterprise with strong connections at Court to finance the colonisation of the New World, especially that wonderfully fertile area a little to the south named, after the Virgin Queen, Virginia. The idea of settling in North America had been first seriously studied thirty years before, by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, in 1578. After his death, in 1584, Raleigh (Gilbert's half-brother) sailed from the West Indies to Carolina and Virginia, and found the Indians friendly. In 1585, Sir Richard Grenville's men settled Roanoake, but then fell out with the natives. A year later those colonists were so reduced by illness and attack that, when Drake put in, they all went home with him. Later attempts were unsuccessful until in 1606 the first Virginia Charter gave new authority for expeditions in 1606, and Christopher Newport sailed with artisans, labourers and gentlemen. They chose a site for James Town, but quarrelled among themselves. In 1609, Christopher Newport was Vice-Admiral of another expedition, with Sir George Somers as Admiral and Sir Thomas Gates as Acting Governor General until Lord de la Warr could take over.

The 'Bermuda Pamphlets' describe the shipwreck of Gates, his 'loss' in a fearful tempest, his eventual arrival in Virginia, and what he found there. (The wreck of Gates's ship, *The Sea Venture*, was discovered in the Bermudas in the late 1970s. It lacked the timbers that were used by the castaways to make a smaller boat, *The Deliverance*, in which they had continued to Virginia.).

Roughly, the enterprise was controlled by a Virginia Council set up in London in November 1606, parallel to other councils, like those controlling the Muscovy ventures, and the East India Company. This one was to colonise that bit of the eastern seaboard of the New World below 41 degrees (those earliest limits are still reflected in state boundaries in the USA). The Council in London consisted of three great City

merchants, all also in the East India Company; Sir Thomas Smythe, Sir William Romney and John Eldred: and four public figures, with Lord Salisbury as patron. The Virginia Company was the executive end of the Council. First reports were very promising for investment profit from Virginia's natural resources. But by 1608, Newport was bringing back to London news of famine, death, unfriendly Indians, and boisterous disputes within the colony. Conditions in James Town were not good. A good deal of work, now nearly a century old, has been done on the Virginia Council, which included the Earls of Southampton and Pembroke, both associated in some way with Shakespeare's sonnets. Much more remains to be done. The problem with bringing Shakespeare into the orbit of the Council (or the other way round) is in trying to get beyond that slippery phrase 'must have known', to hard connections. Though Shakespeare's first poems are dedicated to Southampton, there is not a scrap of evidence that they ever met, or even corresponded. An Earl of Pembroke, once proposed, like Southampton, as the 'Mr W.H.' of the Sonnets dedication, does not have a firm dedication himself until seven years after Shakespeare's death, in the 1623 Folio. Another member of the Council was Sir Dudley Digges, whose brother Leonard contributed memorial verses to the 1623 Folio. Shakespeare knew friends of the influential group round the Earl of Essex, a group which included Lord de la Warr. Recent work of my own, for the new Arden edition of *Julius Caesar*, makes that group important for ideas about Caesar in London in 1599, as Shakespeare was writing that tragedy; but again, without firm evidence of direct contact. One of the authors of one of the Bermuda pamphlets, William Strachey, was secretary to Sir William Gates at James Town: his report was not published until 1625, so that if we can establish that Shakespeare definitely drew on it, and no other, we have to assume he was close enough to the group to be shown it in manuscript. The associations all seem to be deliberately elusive, as if Ariel is at work. Strachey, for example, contributed laudatory verses to Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* in 1605, a play in which we know Shakespeare acted.

The picture I want to leave with you is of very powerful City merchants working with courtiers who were heavily involved in the newest, exciting but problematical, New World ventures. William Shakespeare, since 1603 a courtier, and since 1608 with a remarkable theatre inside the City boundaries, is somehow within the network, and writing his last solo play for that theatre about brave new worlds of theatre, of enterprise and of imagination.

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