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## SHAKESPEARE AS AN EGALITARIAN

### Abstract

Shakespeare's tragedy is anything but conventional. Besides the gross violation of Aristotelian dictum of three unities, Shakespeare also pointedly disregarded the rule of noble heroes as the main characters, introducing memorable characters of low birth and not-all-English-blood-cells who often outwitted the royal and made a paragon of virtue and stamina. Truth be told, the "commoners" who make outstanding examples of virtue turn out to be of royal blood, like Perdita, the poor shepherdess in *The Winter's Tale*, who has always had an air of nobility about her, but this was Shakespeare's deference to the high society. In reality, he knew that a servant could emulate his/her master in excellent faculties, the point he made through Cornwall's intrepid servant in *King Lear*, Emilia's stout defence of Desdemona and defiance of her husband's commands in *Othello* or the integrity and dignity of poor Diana who rejected the Count in *All's Well*.

In war or peace times, in inter-cultural and inter-religious encounters, humanity always wins the day and this accounts for Harold Bloom's title attached to the name of Shakespeare – "the Invention of the Human". Indeed, he invented the human and all we know about the human. Any boundaries are automatically obliterated and all barriers shattered, in the face of Shakespeare's men and women as players on this global stage, from Venice to Antioch and from Denmark to Syracuse: they all have eyes, hearts and minds, they suffer at the peak of power and rejoice in familial happiness despite austerity and deprivation; they are "the richest being poor" and they "reason not the need" because the irrational is sometimes the most natural. Proto-feminist, egalitarian, left-wing, proletarian... that is the Shakespeare of our time and that is why he is the "gymnasium where we can rehearse all life disciplines in a safe environment", to paraphrase Dominic Dromgoole, former artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe (Edmondson and Holbrook 2016: 140).

**Key words:** Shakespeare, equality, feminism, racism, anti-semitism

### 1. Introduction

Professor Laurie Maguire declares in the very title of her book that all you need to know in life, you learn it from Shakespeare. She calls Shakespeare a self-help guru

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(Maguire 2006: 3). What is so instructive and universal about Shakespeare? What made him a panacea-maker or a sage that we address when discussing love, jealousy, *coup d'état* or incest? How did he know the matters of the heart and of state so well?

In his talk delivered in Belgrade, within the 2016 campaign “Shakespeare Lives”, Professor Ewan Fernie reminded us of the Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1769, with the leading Shakespeare actor of the day, David Garrick, celebrating Shakespeare and opening the new Town Hall. They declared Shakespeare the first ever ‘Freeman’ of Stratford. As Steward to the Jubilee, Garrick took Shakespeare out of the scholar’s study, even out of the theatre, and quite literally onto the streets. Thomas Cooper and Chartists established Shakespeare Association and, in 1842, held one or two meetings in the Shakspearean Room during the week, and one on a Sunday. He called himself the ‘Shakspearean General’ and later lectured in Belfast, on Milton, Shakespeare and Byron.<sup>1</sup> For the same reasons, Louis Kossuth under the Habsburgs dreamt of freedom inspired by Shakespeare’s verses. Nelson Mandela chose him and turned the Robben Island prison into a new Elsinore, signing particular places in the book of Shakespeare’s works and subsequently quoting Shakespeare very often as the President of the South African Republic.

The New Historicists like Greenblatt, Goldberg and Tennenhouse argued that Shakespeare’s plays and the theatre as a social institution worked as a conservative ideological practice that served the interest of political orthodoxy, and Michael Bristol wrote in 1996 that Shakespeare was “morally unprincipled and opportunistic, shrewdly strategical and market-driven”. (Logan and Rudnytsky 1991: 77). This should not come as a surprise, given the status of both monarchs’ favourite playwright, but it is too hard on Shakespeare because he needed subaudition and subversion (and all other *sub-* stuff) to stay alive and to stay in business. Having witnessed the execution of the Earl of Essex and experienced the *Richard II*’s precarious staging following it, it was clear that Shakespeare had to sit on the fence at best. With suspicion of his own practicing Catholicism, his father definitely being a Catholic and his mother’s family too, Shakespeare knew that religion was a slippery slope more than anything else in politics of the day. Although “only” 200 Catholics (even fewer!) were killed throughout the entire reign of Queen Elizabeth (Bryson 2007: 45), in comparison to massacres of Catholics against Protestants (let us mention only the 1572 St. Bartholomew’s Eve in Paris, when thousands of Huguenots were brutally killed; two years earlier, the Pope had excommunicated Queen Elizabeth from the Catholic Church). Professor Greenblatt reminds that a decade later Pope Gregory XIII suggested that killing England’s Queen would not be a mortal sin (Greenblatt 2018: 9). Alliances were built around religion

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<sup>1</sup> As explained by Professor Ewan Fernie in his Belgrade talk “Shakespeare for Freedom”, the 2016 “Shakespeare Lives” tour.

too, so the Catholic France sided with Spain against England, and Scotland was unruly precisely for the same reason, which concurred with the constant uprising against the imposed English crown.

In the wake of Europe's rising national feelings and liberation wars, Serbia also tapped into this fountain of Romanticist ideas and dreams, where romantic love coalesced with the love for one's country and nation. Laza Kostic, poet and freedom fighter, political prisoner just like Kossuth, thought it possible that this wave could lap the Serbian shore and bring the craved freedom, which Kossuth implied only for the Hungarians oppressed in the Habsburg monarchy. In his poem devoted to the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth, Kostic describes Shakespeare's creation as part of the Biblical Genesis, a perfect creature in the making, voicing a wish that Shakespeare become a Serb so that we have a potent figure as a landmark of our national identity. And a landmark he was, and still is, for the British crown. The Falklands War is particularly related to the *Scrutiny* group of critics, which emerged almost one hundred years ago with an identified need to defend "Englishness" from the threats poised by Marxism and war in Europe. Even when Tillyard departed from the group, he still supported their view of Shakespeare's canon consolidating the social order and hierarchy. So, in 1982, the book *Authors Take Sides on the Falklands*, records George Wilson Knight voicing his support for the role of the British Empire as "the precursor or prototype of the world order". He invoked the words from *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare's last play, to reiterate that position of democracy, "but democracy is strict subservience to the crown as a symbol linking love to power and the social order to the divine" (Barker 1986: 183–85).

But it was not just for the British crown that Shakespeare irradiated power and influence. Alive to the ultimate and inherent equality of all humans, Shakespeare was certainly of the same position regarding "big" and "small" nations, those "yet unborn" (Shakespeare 1997: 612), in the words of the conspirators in *Julius Caesar*. Despite the obvious propaganda at times, Shakespeare ascribed many vices and not so honourable properties to the English precisely, by having other characters speak about them disparagingly or by commenting on other nations while clearly indicating that the signified is actually England.

So, despite the English insularity and the innate arrogance towards "minor" nations and religions, Shakespeare kept his mind open to all, indiscriminate against race, religion, birth status or gender. This is why he mixed the high and the low in his plays, the language of the court and philosophy with that of taverns and brothels; he sympathised with the resentful Jew and the "base hue" of black<sup>2</sup>; empowered his women to demonstrate their strength and wits on a par with those of men. Not

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<sup>2</sup> *Titus Andronicus*, "Is black so base a hue?" (IV.ii.824).

judging or prescribing, just describing, exactly as his Hamlet instructed the players to do (“hold the mirror up to Nature”, III.ii.), Shakespeare has always told us the story of ourselves, without censorship or beautification, which he despised as falsity. His “oceanic mind” fathomed all the depths of human heart and soul, penetrating the world of the unconscious as a keen behavioural scientist would. How can a king be different to a beggar then, with the same morphology and physiology, the same sinews and as Blake put it? The king ends up in the beggar’s intestines, as we are explained to by the gravediggers in *Hamlet*; the Earth is ultimately home to everyone irrespective of the home they were born and lived in. The superior “piece of work”, man, shivers without shelter (having “abjured all the roofs”) and is powerless against the elements, the raw force of Nature, and against gods who “play with us like wanton boys with flies”. That is the Nietzschean, depressed version of nihilism, of Hamletian futility in the “unweeded garden” (I.ii.). And, in a depressing way, that is what also makes us all equal.

In the midst of WWI, marking the tercentenary of Shakespeare’s death, a memorial event was held in London with the Serbia’s representatives attending. Father Nikolaj Velimirović presented his paper “Shakespeare the *Pananthropos*”, originally written in English, accounting for Shakespeare’s popularity in the Slavic world by his panhumanism. “I do not know Shakespeare. Even I *cannot* know him. But he knows me; he described me, he painted all the secrets of my soul...” (Milanović 1995: 90).

## 2. Politics – the Union then and now

Shakespeare was a zoon politician, perhaps merely because it is impossible for theatre to avoid politics and not to be a litmus test for any change or popular motion. This is why his Henry VI is about feuds and divides in our country too, as the Serbian cast stated after the standing ovation at the 2012 Globe Olympics: “This is a play about us”; Coriolanus is just like the zealous Norwegian physician who refuses to make moral and professional compromises and turns against his family, his town and the entire community in Ibsen’s *The Enemy of the People*. Claudius is the CEO of a multinational corporation in Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000) and Julius Caesar offers the deals wound up by the smart-suited Balkan war lords over whiskey, with the blaze of civil war in the background. To the Soviet dissidents, Richard III seemed benevolent in comparison to Stalin, judging by the respective numbers of their victims; Poland as a collateral damage of the Norwegian attack diverted from Denmark resonated with acrimonious memories of Hitler’s 1939 invasion of the little Baltic cape and the US Army generals opulently quote Henry V in their Afghan and Iraqi operations. Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* is one of the most successful Asian appropriations of Shakespeare, striking the cord of universality and timelessness across the Globe.

Kristin Bezio of Richmond University, USA, provides an insightful analysis of *Pericles* through diachronic political lenses: the sentiment against Union in post-Elizabethan England and the same attitude towards the EU nowadays (Bezio 2017: 59). Bezio's point of departure is Spradley's identification of Cleon's wife Dionyza with the position of Great Britain in this familial analogue of Union. His daughter Philoten derives her association with Scotland from her status as Cleon's *natural* daughter, given that James's own "natural" political family was Scottish. Marina, as already noted, figures as the familial analogue of the late Queen Elizabeth's natural daughter, England, here caught in the role of a foster-daughter in Cleon's Unionesque family. The English anxiety addressed by this familial situation is the fear that "Great Britain" was just another name for Scottish domination.

Allegorically, according to Bezio, Pericles's abandonment of his daughter parallels James's importation of Scots nobles into the court and Privy Council, handing the English nation over to the questionable judgment of foreigners with considerable power.

Although *Pericles* presents an argument against Union, that argument is not based on the xenophobic fear of all things foreign; rather, *Pericles*'s objection is based on a fear of tyranny.

Bezio argues that

While in Shakespeare's time, collectivising nationalism helped to preserve proto-democratic participatory monarchy, modern Western nationalism, like that in the United Kingdom and the United States, is rooted in a neoliberal conception of separatism in which historical exceptionalism can only be maintained through isolationism and exclusion. ...[It] is secondary to an internet-fostered sense of global, rather than national, citizenship. A citizenship which is, interestingly, more like that of Pericles or Marina, developed through their movements from nation to nation. Those under 25 are therefore much more likely to identify with people of other nations who share some of their ideologies, much like Marina, whose ability to share goodness was unrestricted and uncorruptible. (Bezio 2017: 59)

As such, concludes Bezio, Marina represents the ability of England as a collective nation to survive the ravages of famine, war, and even a barbaric foreign king. Needless to say, this is applicable to the other Union that the English shunned and, ultimately, decided to leave. England's fortitude, like that of Marina, will, Shakespeare suggests, persuade James (eventually) to adopt the English style of rule

for a united Great Britain under the helm not of Scotland, but of England— she returns triumphantly to Tyre where Pericles re-assumes the throne and rules wisely and well (Bezio 2017: 59).

In the fisherman's allegory of the life of fish in the sea, Kiernan Ryan (Ryan 2015: 81) noticed political allusions similar to those of unweeded garden, *Richard II* or *Hamlet*. The whale devours the fry. But, the solution is to “purge the land of these drones that rob the bee of her honey” (Scene 5, 69–75, 87–88). These ‘drones’ could be the plebeians in *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*, who highlighted the social inequities and uneven distribution of wealth. Unlike these two, *Pericles* is not much of a political play at the face value; the eponymous hero is not a single man fighting the system, taking his personal revenge after his idealism was crushed; but he is a single man coping with real vicissitudes, not fighting windmills. His is not the madness of Don Quixote or Hamlet, he is melancholic and mournful with a most obvious cause, not in the least lacking “objective correlative”. And, unlike King Lear's madness furthered by “filial ingratitude”, Pericles is saved precisely by the magic of filial love, sacrifice and the in(di)visible bond, inviolable by time and/or crime. Not even fourteen years of separation could make any estrangement between the father and daughter and the incestuous desire that Leontes felt when he first saw Perdita after a similar period of separation was impossible to happen to Pericles – he is an epitome of virtue just like his daughter. This is why the play is a romance, not a tragedy like Lear, or a problem play like *The Winter's Tale*. All three of them deserved unqualified happiness and a fresh start after reunion. As Trevor Nunn put it, “before *Pericles*, there is no joy. Almost *nothing* to relieve the gloom” (Zarin 2016).

Karen Bezio suggests that “the play's highly romanticised final acts serve largely as Shakespeare's means of escaping censorship or even imprisonment for being too political, ...” (Bezio 2017: 59). Nevertheless, Shakespeare's *Pericles* concludes with a reminder to James to rule England wisely, for, as Helicanus reminds both Pericles and the audience, if “you love us, we you, and we'll clasp hands, / When peers thus knit, a kingdom ever stands” (2.4.57–58).

Cynthia Zarin recalls another production of *Pericles*, directed by David Bell in 2014 at the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre (Zarin 2016). Bell, like Nunn, was interested in what happened to Shakespeare between *King Lear* and *Pericles*. He explains, “Pericles is perhaps the best example of profound discovery through metaphor. The first half of life is about acquisition, and then suddenly, you are divested of things, and you are left with a single man in a corner of a boat, going from port to port. But then, like Pericles, you may be able to experience sympathy and empathy.” Like in *King Lear*, it takes deprivation and solitude to begin to notice other people's needs and suffering. “Reason not the need”, says Lear. Bezio suggests that Pericles is capable of

changing and learning from other monarchs' mistakes (those of Antiochus and Cleon), thus avoiding the trap of being an absolutist himself (Bezio 2017: 55).

What *Pericles* is to us and what we are to Pericles, in view of presentism, could be found in its topical issues: the Middle East, refugees and sex trafficking. But, first and foremost, it is about love and family, about hope and reconnection, about belonging. It is about the joy of all that. No matter the calamities and all the political wheeling and dealing, if there is a place called 'home', sooner or later we'll return to it and reconnect with our most profound *self*. When the father and daughter eventually meet, the fog lifts. Pericles ecstatically implores Helicanus to: "Give me a gash, put me to present pain; Lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me / O'erbear the shores of my mortality, / And drown me with their sweetness." (*Pericles*, V.i.)

T.S. Eliot was inspired by this play to write his poem "Marina", which recapitulates the story of restless voyage, quest and finding<sup>3</sup>:

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands  
What water lapping the bow  
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog  
What images return  
O my daughter.

### 3. Feminism

Marina is a nice punch line for the topic of women (daughters) in Shakespeare. According to Oliver Ford Davies, renowned English actor, father-daughter relationships and murderous brothers were of Shakespeare's utmost interest (Davies 2017: 1). It might be traced back to Shakespeare's rapport with his own daughters (and wife), and it is one of the cornerstones of his entire oeuvre. Davies discusses the issue of motherless daughters, as almost all Shakespeare's heroines are, but from the aspect of the remaining single parent, unused to raising a female child and faced with the sudden challenge of her adolescence and sexuality. Jung's theory of "psychic revolution" (Davies 2017: 5), when a daughter either throws off her father's paternal authority or retreats into childhood to gain approval has been superseded by the "Birth Order" theory of the first-born daughters as assertive and conscientious (Juliet, Rosalind, Marina) and second daughters as a mixture of people-pleasing and rebellious (Bianca, Regan?).

Though tragedies are said to be full of women-hating voices, it is precisely in a tragedy that Shakespeare placed his most famous proto-feminist speech:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/marina-0>



But I do think it is their husbands' faults If wives do fall: say that they slack their duties, And pour our treasures into foreign laps, Or else break out in peevish jealousies, Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us, Or scant our former having in despite; Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace, Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know their wives have sense like them: they see and smell And have their palates both for sweet and sour, As husbands have. What is it that they do When they change us for others? Is it sport? I think it is: and doth affection breed it? I think it doth: is't frailty that thus errs? It is so too: and have not we affections, Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have? Then let them use us well: else let them know, The ills we do, their ills instruct us so. (*Othello*, IV.iii.)

These are the words of Emilia, Desdemona's companion – someone who dares speak up despite the social and gender inferiority. Pericles' daughter Marina, a pirates' captive, puts the Governor to shame as a brothel client and reforms him by making him love her purity instead of her charms – a great triumph of someone who rose from multiple subordination (status, gender, age) and such was the story of Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, who wouldn't stoop to Lord Deputy, but marries the Duke in the end. Professor Stanley Wells (Wells 2010: 29) reminds that Shakespeare fellow playwright and George Wilkins wrote the play *The Miserie of Enforced Marriage* around 1607 and collaborated with Shakespeare on the composition of *Pericles*, the play of Shakespeare's which offers the most sordid portrayal of life in a brothel. He also kept an inn on the notorious Turnbul (Turnmill) Street, which doubled as a brothel. Katherine Duncan-Jones believes that Shakespeare was a client and may have been venereally infected. Besides prostitution, *Pericles* features incest as another extreme opposite the saintly purity of the heroine (Wells 2010: 223–225). Incest was regarded with abhorrence and Shakespeare rarely mentions it (*Lear*, *Hamlet*). The tutelary goddess of the play is Diana – the goddess of chastity. When Pericles leaves his daughter in the care of Dionyza, he swears 'by bright Diana' that his hair will remain 'unscissored' until she is married (Sc.13.27-30). His wife Thaisa becomes a handmaid in Diana's temple and in the concluding episodes Diana appears to Pericles in a vision guiding him to Thaisa. Both Leontes and Pericles grow mature in their respective wives' long absence, both women being devotresses in Diana's temple. Their respective daughters are pure, chaste and innocent, but also strong and vocal in defending their integrity. This yarn was spun off by Cordelia, who won the heart of the French king precisely by being herself, stripped of all augmenting layers of royalty and dowry:



Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,  
Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised!  
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,  
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away. (*King Lear*, I.i.)

Women's status is better in comedies, at least women are given the same billing (as many words as men), but Portia and Olivia are disciplined and Viola's self-abnegation is rewarded, concludes Jean Howard (Taylor 2001: 202). Shakespeare wanted to prove that, when dressed like men, women could behave like men and be even cleverer, like Portia. Yet, cross-dressing in Shakespeare is always connected with the demonic, like his androgynous weird sisters in *Macbeth* or Joan D'Arc in *1 Henry VI*. He has been accused of sexism because of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but, as Peter Brook said, one slight smile of the actress declaring "thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper..." changed all the relationships (Bruck 2018: 78).

Juliet Dusinberre (Dusinberre 2003: xxix) argues that the importance of Shakespeare as a means to dissidence can be seen in an unfree society, more like his own and less like today's modern world. She believes that for him they were equal to men in the world which declared them unequal. He refused to separate their worlds physically, spiritually and intellectually (Dusinberre 2003: 308). She gives Shakespeare credit for refusing the conventional view of women as necessarily inferior, thus earning the title of feminist *avant la lettre*. (Taylor 2001: 197). And feminism is associated with progressive politics, always on the political left.

#### 4. Anti-semitism

Serbian stage director Egon Savin placed his *Merchant of Venice* in the 1930's Italy with the insurgent fascism and the overall anxiety about it.<sup>4</sup> A German actor Max Reinhardt (Garber 2008: 141) emigrated to the US and staged *The Merchant of Venice* with Richard Schildkraut, who was celebrated for his impersonation of Shylock until the year 1933, when Goebbels ordered that Schildkraut's portrait be removed from Berlin's Deutsches Theatre and publicly burned. A pro-Nazi actor Werner Krauss played all the Jews in the following period, presenting them as comic and sinister. Shylock insists that human biology should be the basis, our literal consanguinity as human beings:

He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,

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<sup>4</sup> Jugoslovensko dramsko pozorište (The Yugoslav Drama Theatre) 2004, [www.jdp.rs](http://www.jdp.rs)

cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute—and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction. (*The Merchant of Venice*, III.i.)

In this retort, Shylock actually vindicates the same principle to which he appeals by violating them through revenge.

## 5. Racism

There is racism in this play as well, notably, when Portia comments on the Moroccan prince “Let all of his complexion choose me so” (II.vii.79), and he replies “Bring me the fairest creature northward born... and let us make the incision for your love, to probe whose blood is reddest”. Same as with feminism, ethnic criticism shows admiration for Shakespeare’s daring and sophistication to show a Black man whiter than a Venetian and the latter one diabolic. Black is sensual, white is ensnaring (to some extent also in *Antony and Cleopatra*, encounter of civilisations). The love between a Moor and a white Venetian was a “startling reversal of the norm”, says Ruth Cowhig (Taylor 2001: 210). Marjorie Garber reminds of a conundrum: “What’s black and white and read all over?” (Garber 2008: 154), which comes in handy in terms of play with colours and homophony (read-red). Red is the colour of blood that Othello refuses to spill from Desdemona’s body and saves her alabaster-white beauty, though regrettably begrimed by sin (V.ii.). Despite the racist and abusive comments, uttered by the character with the name of a Moor-extinator, Santiago de Compostella, Shakespeare makes his Black hero honourable and virtuous, though malleable. It has become popular to have African American actors in lead roles of the latest Shakespearean stage productions, so we have seen dark-skinned Gertrude and Hamlet at the RSC, or a fatally seductive African American Lady Macbeth in the 2017 British film by Kit Monkman. Shakespeare surely provided solid grounds for such shifts, otherwise they would be implausible.

## 6. Social status

The same *utopian realism*, as Kiernan Ryan called it (Ryan 2015: 128), of human beings treating each other by what they have in common, as free citizens instead of being prisoners of dehumanising reality, is rendered by no less than the King himself in *All's Well*, when he rebukes Bertram's snobbery:

'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her,  
the which I can build up. Strange is it that our bloods,  
Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,  
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off  
In differences so mighty. If she be  
All that is virtuous, save what thou dislikest,  
A poor physician's daughter, thou dislikest  
Of virtue for the name: but do not so:  
From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,  
The place is dignified by the doer's deed:  
Where great additions swell's, and virtue none,  
It is a dropsied honour. Good alone  
Is good without a name. Vileness is so:  
The property by what it is should go,  
Not by the title.

...  
... honours thrive,  
When rather from our acts we them derive  
Than our foregoers: the mere word's a slave  
Debauched on every tomb, on every grave  
A lying trophy, and as oft is dumb  
Where dust and damn'd oblivion is the tomb  
Of honour'd bones indeed. What should be said?  
If thou canst like this creature as a maid,  
I can create the rest: virtue and she  
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.

(The King in *All's Well*, II.iii)

In *The Winter's Tale*, the enamoured Perdita is painfully sobered by the realisation that social status is an irreconcilable difference that stands between her and her happiness:

The selfsame sun that shines upon his court  
Hides not his visage from our cottage but  
Looks on alike. Will't please you, sir, be gone?  
I told you what would come of this: beseech you,  
Of your own state take care: this dream of mine,—  
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,  
But milk my ewes and weep. (IV, iv)

Shakespeare had his King Henry V, disguised as a common soldier, involved in conversation with other rank-and-file fellows on the eve of Agincourt, say: “The King is but a man, as I am” (IV.i.). He used to mingle with the rank-and-file before, of course, as the sun blurred by those unworthy clouds, but that was more of a spoiled youngster sowing his wild oats than the saintly asceticism of a devout king. King Lear learned this the hard way, with his Fool left to him as the only company, with his daughters’ “filial ingratitude” making him the child and them the parents: it is with exposure and utmost vulnerability that he opens his eyes to see life around himself, to feel palpable suffering and hardship of his subjects. It took him reduction to nothing to grasp everything. In the zero-sum game, Lear is given another chance as a father, just like Pericles or Leontes. But his tragedy is not given a *volte-face* as in these two, nor does it end on a high note like *The Merchant of Venice*. Michael Jacobs reads the whole spiral that Lear launched in the “love contest” scene in the Freudian way (Jacobs 2008: 32) – having chosen death by choosing the silent of the three (like Cinderella, Aphrodite or the leaden casket), he can only embrace it as *anagnorisis*-stricken and penitent, yet obdurate old man who still refuses to realise that his baby daughter is a grown woman, now married to the French king. In all the shame and contrition of their encounter, when the hubris of a king stoops to apologise in his awkward way, the daughter has nothing to blame him for: “No cause, no cause” (IV.vii.), answers Cordelia, larger than life. She completely disregards her royal status, as well as her father’s offence against her, and enables us to see her without her rich attire once again, just as at the moment of disinheriting and banishment.

## 7. Conclusion

Professor Richard Wilson defines the role of Shakespeare’s legacy in the following way: “Shakespeare is too valuable to British society to be disposed of like the family silver. As an art object, a monument to the old gods, Shakespearean drama must be re-interpreted, re-deployed, re-occupied. In the works of directors like David Thacker and Michael Bogdanov, Shakespeare may yet prove the Trojan horse to storm

the cultural citadel” (Taylor 2001: 185). Such urges to radicalise Shakespeare, to “aid the process of social change”, as Michael Bogdanov put it in the discussion with Jan Kott<sup>5</sup> and others, on Shakespeare as our contemporary (Elsom 1989: 185). As Erich Freid added, Shakespeare was not a defender of democracy, democracy wasn’t born in his time and it isn’t born in our time although we choose to think otherwise. But he lived in a time of transition and he did notice inequities and corruption. And so we may find him in the “archaeology of the future” (Ryan 2015: 68). We are never in our selves, but beyond, because our fears and desires always draw us toward what is to come. Marjorie Garber called this temporality in Shakespeare’s plays “retrospective anticipation” (Ryan 2015: 53).

So, would Shakespeare support the EU enlargement or build walls? Would he vote for BrExit or for Europe? Would he welcome the migrants as his Thomas More did in the eponymous play?

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise  
Hath chid down all the majesty of England;  
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,  
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,  
Plodding tooth ports and costs for transportation,  
And that you sit as kings in your desires,  
Authority quite silent by your brawl,  
And you in ruff of your opinions clothed;  
What had you got? I’ll tell you. You had taught  
How insolence and strong hand should prevail,  
How order should be quelled; and by this pattern  
Not one of you should live an aged man,  
For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,  
With self same hand, self reasons, and self right,  
Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes  
Would feed on one another.  
(II.iv.)

Professor Richard Wilson, a great Shakespearean and European, confronts the “Brexiteers” with Shakespeare’s pan-Europeanism, with England and France interchangeable in his plays (Arden-Ardenne) and with his dream of reunion:

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion was held on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jan Kott’s famous book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, so the question was whether he still was one.

Shakespearean theatre is one long battle between Brexit and Remain. ‘Mad world, mad kings’, is how the Bastard reports the first Brexit in *King John*, when to block European law in England, the hapless Lackland ‘willingly departs with a part’ of Europe itself. Shakespeare wrote this in the aftershock of the most seismic Brexit of all, Protestant England’s divorce from Catholic Europe, and he fuelled his plots with the violence of that split. So, no wonder he peopled his plays with Remainers like Gaunt, who complain how England is tied up in the ‘rotten parchment bonds’ of Protestant capitalism. (Wilson 2014)

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