



Francis
Bacon,
Shakespeare
& Religion

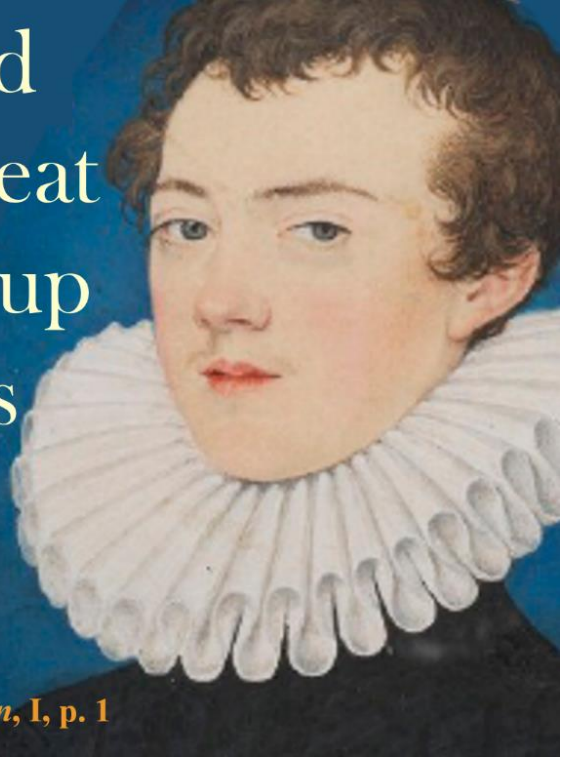
By

Sally Gibbins

Francis Bacon, Shakespeare & Religion

Francis Bacon, 'had
been born among great
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James Spedding *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon, I, p. 1*



People & Events

On account of his family background alone it is of little surprise that Francis Bacon took a deep interest in all matters of biblical scholarship, religion, and the Church of England. This paper will explore the background and links to his many acknowledged religious works, some of the Shakespeare plays and a little known play called *The Misfortunes of Arthur*.

I want to start with a quote from Bacon's great Victorian biographer and editor James Spedding who states Francis Bacon:

'had been born among great events, and brought up
among the persons who had to deal with them.'

Such a plain statement in many ways but of vital importance, as events and people are central to what life and Shakespeare is all about. These people and events would profoundly shape the man that Francis Bacon would become and in turn give birth to the Shakespeare era which actually began a lot earlier than people think and with a play most people are completely unfamiliar with. A play that is a direct political allegory about the religious division and upheaval of the times. But more of that later.

The Reformation

Firstly, I'm going to take you back around 500 years to the German priest Martin Luther and what has become known as the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther is generally regarded as the most influential figure in the history of the western church. Francis Bacon's parents Nicholas and Anne Bacon were Luther's contemporaries and were strong followers of the

EVENTS



Martin
Luther



King Henry
VIII



Pope
Clement VII

Protestant faith and through them Bacon would have been very familiar with Luther's teachings.

The Protestant Reformation began in 1517 in Wittenberg, Germany when Martin Luther published a document called *95 Theses* which challenged the Churches' authority and strongly criticised abuses within the Church. These ideas were extremely radical and controversial as they directly challenged the Catholic Church's teachings. It's difficult to underestimate the profound impact on modern history that the Reformation set in motion.

Luther was a Doctor of theology and spent most of his life teaching at Wittenberg University. Of course if we mention Wittenberg most of us will probably think of Hamlet who Shakespeare made a student of Wittenberg University. Of all the universities in all the world. . .but in fact, at the time there were over 70 that could have been chosen but Shakespeare chose Wittenberg as Hamlet's university, the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation that dominated Bacon's life and that of his family as we shall see.

So, these were the early reformation events in Germany that had begun to spread to other parts of Northern Europe. But what about England?

It's important to realise that Henry VIII was not a Lutheran in any way. He didn't have a great theological awakening. His take on things were completely from his own perspective, his desires and his need for a son. He was increasingly irritated by the Pope's power and further infuriated when the Pope wouldn't grant him a divorce. He was not a convert to Protestantism but was always a Catholic, but with himself as the head of the church instead of the Pope. A situation which no doubt suited him rather nicely.

After Henry VIII's death, his son Edward VI who was a Protestant came to the throne, but his untimely death as a teenager meant his half sister Mary converted the country back to Catholicism when she became Queen.



Queen Elizabeth I & a Dangerous Age

In many ways it was extraordinary that Elizabeth even became Queen, but she did and came to embody England's great representation of Protestantism. In a commendable piece of Tudor marketing, the Catholics had the virgin Mary and the Protestants now had the virgin Elizabeth.

It's possibly difficult for us to imagine what a dangerous and brutal time this was and statistics can make us lose sight of the people behind the numbers. Safe to say there was much persecution, torture and execution of people of all religious persuasions. Throughout Bacon's early life, religious wars raged across Europe and he learned from a young age to greatly fear religious fanaticism and its destabilising influences.

Writing was an incredibly dangerous profession in Elizabeth's reign. It was particularly oppressive regarding what could and couldn't be written, with religion and politics being top of the not to do list for writers. In 1579 writer John Stubbs famously dared to publish a pamphlet on the Queen's proposed French marriage and lost his right hand and was then thrown in prison for 18 months. Stubbs was one of many writers whose pen caused him a lot of trouble.

When Elizabeth came to the throne of England, she immediately appointed William Cecil as her Principal Secretary and Nicholas Bacon as her Lord Keeper. The two statesmen and brothers-in-law were the grand architects of the Elizabethan Protestant Reformation and the two most powerful and important people of her early reign. They were also Francis Bacon's father and uncle and he came from a family that were absolutely central to the sweeping and perilous changes of the religious and political landscape of Tudor England. Incredible to think how a precocious young boy like Bacon would have soaked up the people and momentous events and how they would have later found their way into his writings. During her long reign, Elizabeth had countless plots against her life. Keeping Elizabeth alive was certainly a full-time job for the people around her.



Family & Friends

The Bacon family had a long history of intellectual and practical involvement with religion and religious disputes beginning with Francis Bacon's maternal grandfather Sir Anthony Cooke, who as one of Henry VIII's personal bodyguards was at the very beating heart of the administration at a time when England broke from Rome. Humanist scholar, devout Protestant and tutor to Edward VI, Cooke went on a self-imposed exile on the continent when Catholic Mary came to the throne, where he met regularly with Protestant leaders.

When Elizabeth was made Queen, he returned home serving on several religious commissions. He was famed for enlightened attitudes to the education of his daughters the celebrated Cooke sisters who received an education in the Bible and the early Christian writers, the classics, Greek, Latin and Hebrew and the modern languages of Italian and French. They also avidly read the works of contemporary Protestant thinkers and writers from home and abroad. Anne Bacon was one of his five daughters who had received an all-round excellent humanist education.

She had been tutor to King Edward VI and Lady in Waiting to both Catholic Mary and Elizabeth so was a trusted, dutiful and discreet courtier. A devout Puritan, classics scholar, translator and theologian, her erudition was widely admired. Much of Francis and Anthony Bacon's early learning was undertaken by the best scholars of the day and would have been aided and encouraged by Lady Anne and Sir Nicholas.

She anonymously translated the sermons of the Italian preacher Ochino one edition issued by the famous Protestant printer and publisher John Day and William Seres. Anne Bacon was also a frequent visitor to the Italian churches in London and well-respected by the Italian community with whom of course she could converse with in their own language. Her love of the Italian language and Italian culture passed to her sons Francis and Anthony whom she would have taught the language from an early age.

ITALIAN LOCATIONS FOR SHAKESPEARE PLAYS



A slight digression but important. Contrary to widespread belief, Bacon travelled widely in Europe. Bacon's earliest French biographer Pierre Amboise tells us that 'I wish to state that he employed some years of his youth in travel in order to polish his mind. . .France, Italy, and Spain. . .were those whither his desire for knowledge carried him.' As we know, Shakespeare located or partly located thirteen of his plays in Italy.

In 1564 Lady Anne anonymously translated and published Bishop John Jewel's famous landmark defence of the newly established church. Her universally celebrated translation became the official English version and was placed in parish churches up and down the country alongside John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.

The devotion of the learned and virtuous Lady Anne Bacon in furthering religious reform was part of her own strong puritan belief system which included her clandestine support for the nonconformists. She filled her home Gorhambury with a succession of radical preachers with a strong puritan leaning and through the influence of her husband secured them livings in the local parishes and financially supported and facilitated their publications.

The feisty Elizabeth Russell identified by orthodox scholars as Dowager Countess of Rousillon in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* was Anne's sister and Bacon's formidable aunt. She was extremely litigious and a regular in the law courts and no doubt took advice from her nephew. She was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth and her son married the daughter of Henry Carey Lord Hunsdon patron of Shakespeare's Lord Chamberlain's men.

Sir Nicholas Bacon was from a family of Suffolk sheep farmers and at 13 he won a Bible scholarship to Cambridge University followed by legal training at Gray's Inn. He was a learned lawyer and an eloquent and witty speaker as well as being solid, dependable and loyal with a great love of learning and a dedication to the establishing of the Protestant faith in England. He



pursued moderation and tolerance and his family motto was *mediocria firma* or moderation is strength, a principal he followed throughout his life.

At Elizabeth's first Parliament in 1559, Lord Keeper Nicholas Bacon delivered the opening speech and mission statement, 'to unite the people of this realm into a uniform order of religion'. Abstract theological debates were to be avoided and matters were to be debated in a respectful fashion. Extremism, name-calling and mudslinging would not be tolerated.

In 1564 Nicholas Bacon ran into some trouble when he was involved in the publication of an anonymous pamphlet about the succession question and was banished from court. He was restored quickly to favour but while Francis was only a child, he learned of the dire potential consequences of being associated with political writings. Both Sir Nicholas and Lady Anne were involved in clandestine writings and writing anonymously and from them Bacon learnt the necessity, power and security of concealment.

Nicholas Bacon with his brother-in-law William Cecil organised the Protestant underground intelligence networks of printers and publishers both in England and abroad.

Sir Francis Walsingham was a key figure in this period and well known as Elizabeth's spymaster, what we would now term head of the secret service or the intelligence services. Less known is that Francis Bacon's brother Anthony was Walsingham's protégée. When a young inexperienced Anthony was just starting out on his secret career in France, Walsingham wrote to give him some fatherly advice. It's certainly amusing when we get glimpses of the more human side of history. He writes,

'I have been informed you too easily and too often give yourself to the taking of physic'

The great spymaster carries on to advise Anthony to ditch the pills and potions, take exercise and follow a good diet. It seems some advice remains the same down the centuries.

Walsingham needn't have worried about Anthony's proclivity for 'physic' as he went on to become the key intelligencer of the period, gathering information from across Europe, handling the incoming and outgoing of intelligence through a vast spy network and having as his close correspondents some of the most powerful people of the day including James VI of Scotland, the Earl of Essex and Henry the King of Navarre. Like his brother Francis, many of Anthony's letters and papers were written in cipher as the secrecy of his work and the times would demand. Many of Anthony's letters and papers are still at the Lambeth Palace Library in London and some remain undeciphered.

Mary Queen of Scots



One of the main protagonists of the Elizabethan period was Mary Stuart Queen of Scots and it's probably not too much of an exaggeration to say that she would forever haunt the people involved in her incarceration and eventual execution and was a figure that loomed large across this whole period of history and most of Elizabeth's reign.

Henry VIII was Mary's great uncle, so Mary had a good claim to the English throne especially as she was Catholic and many English Catholics considered Elizabeth not to be the rightful heir. Whilst Mary lived, she would always represent a threat to Elizabeth's throne and a focal point and figurehead for all Catholics in England and abroad, many of whom wanted to see England Catholic once more.

In Scotland, Mary had problems of her own, and in 1568 she fled across the border to England to seek the protection of her royal cousin Elizabeth, an act which shaped English policy for the next two decades. The complex issues relating to the forces of Catholicism and Protestantism, and the fight for the very soul and future direction of Europe, in many ways all converged in the figure of Mary, Queen of Scots.

As a small Protestant country in a Catholic dominated Europe, England was caught up in volatile and extremely dangerous events. Queen Elizabeth was permanently under the threat of assassination via conspiracies inspired by, relating to, or involving, her royal cousin Mary.

Almost twenty years after first coming to England, on 8th February 1587, Mary Queen of Scots was executed at Fotheringhay castle.

Francis Bacon had grown up with the problem of Mary, otherwise known as the ‘Great Cause’. He was related to and surrounded by all the key people in the real-life drama as we have already seen, as well as Sir Amias Paulet and the decipherer and code-breaker Thomas Phelippes, both custodians of Mary.

Writing - A Dangerous Profession

So these are some of the great events and people involved in Francis Bacon’s formative years. Now imagination is a great thing, but here’s a couple of quotes from writers that identify how important a writer’s life, the people in it and their experience is to their written work. Apart from if you’re a Stratfordian of course, when a good imagination and genius is all you appear to need.

Virginia Woolf remarks, ‘every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works.’ And Ernest Hemingway talking about writing characters said, ‘People must be projected from the writer’s assimilated experience, from his knowledge, from his head and from his heart and from all there is of him.’

WRITER'S LIVES IN THEIR WORKS

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Virginia Woolf

‘People must be projected from the writer’s assimilated experience, from his knowledge, from his head and from his heart and from all there is of him.’
Ernest Hemingway

So, talking of writing, what about this elephant in the writer’s room?

Whilst it’s true most writers would avoid at all costs writing about the political and religious events of the period for fear of severe punishment, Francis Bacon was in an unusual position in that he had special access to Elizabeth and as a great orator and a formidably skilful and persuasive writer he was called upon often in the service of the state. Three years before Mary’s execution, Bacon wrote a political intelligence tract which surveyed the dangers faced by England from Catholic threats at home and abroad. He also spoke and wrote on a special commission debating Mary Queen of Scots.



Bacon grew up at the political heart of these events and as a young man his advice both in person and in writing was actively sought by Elizabeth and her government.

Given their close relationship and knowing Elizabeth's love of theatre (especially if it was about her) Bacon began writing and organising a propaganda play with Elizabeth as the main protagonist.

The Misfortunes of Arthur

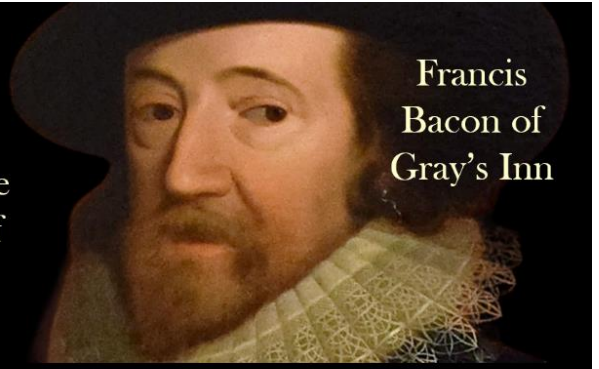
So now we come to that play - an incredibly rare and little-known work called *The Misfortunes of Arthur* which is a religio-political allegory directly commenting upon and chronicling the great religious events of the period, and Bacon was actively commissioned to write it.

The Misfortunes of Arthur is an unknown drama but is of the utmost critical importance. Written sometime during 1587 and performed in February 1588 at Greenwich Palace before Queen Elizabeth I, it immediately pre-dates the generally recognised Shakespearean era and all the evidence makes it clear that the writer who wrote *The Misfortunes of Arthur* also wrote the Shakespeare poems and plays.

This play is the first work to carry the name of Francis Bacon in print. It is presented as the joint enterprise of eight individuals but there is extensive evidence for Bacon's sole authorship. The main supposed author was Thomas Hughes who is listed as being a lawyer at Gray's Inn and a dramatist on the sole attribution of this work. He has no other dramatic works and neither do any of the other supposed authors with the exception of Yelverton who had written a short epilogue to a Gascoigne play twenty years previously. All the other men were associated with Gray's Inn where Bacon had lived for many years and where he was a regular writer and organiser of the famous Gray's Inn masques and entertainments.



Gray's Inn Hall
scene of many
masques &
entertainments & the
first performance of
*The Comedy of
Errors* in 1594



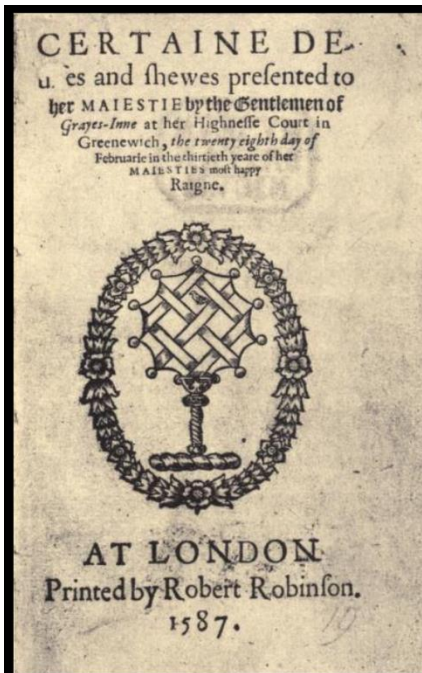
Francis
Bacon of
Gray's Inn



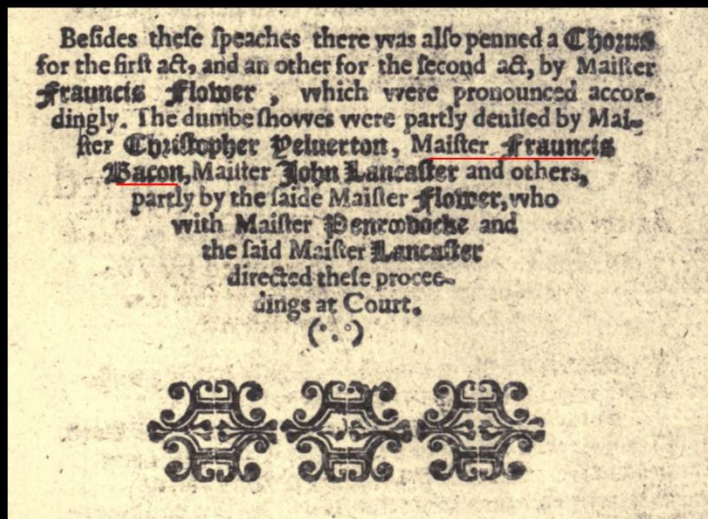
Greenwich Palace scene of many masques and entertainments and Shakespeare Plays including *The Misfortunes of Arthur* by the Gentlemen of Gray's Inn in 1588

Most scholars including orthodox Bacon scholars have passed over or downplayed Bacon's involvement in this play, but there is no doubt that the author was close to the seat of power and had special permission to produce this work. Writing over a hundred years ago, Evangelina Waller grasped the more significant role played by Bacon saying, 'He is given credit for "partly devising the dumbe shoves."' This would imply a knowledge of the entire play as the dumb shows presented before each act set forth the exposition of the plot.'

The recent modern editor Professor Corrigan also states, 'Francis Bacon appears to have been instrumental to the inception of the play. His known involvement in theatrical presentations, especially masques, and his association with *The Misfortunes of Arthur* make it likely that he was privy to an Arthur masque to be presented before the Queen.'



THE MISFORTUNES OF ARTHUR



'And yet no doubt thou art but one man's child'

Interestingly, there exists an anonymous contemporary poem referring to *The Misfortunes of Arthur* that was discovered in a collection of letters and papers at the British Library belonging to Francis' brother Anthony Bacon. This poem strongly suggests the play's multi-authorship was a contrivance or illusion and makes fun of the fact that the play had so many 'father's' or 'authors'. It makes the confirmatory statement about the play's sole authorship when it says,

‘And yet no doubt thou art but one man’s child.’

Even though Bacon's name is attached to this play his role is downplayed because of the undeniable links and parallels to the Shakespeare plays.

Several orthodox scholars over the years have highlighted the political allegory hidden beneath the surface of *The Misfortune of Arthur* and that the play alludes to contemporary affairs in Scotland and England and in particular the events surrounding Queen Elizabeth and the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. In this thinly veiled historical allegory Arthur represents Elizabeth and Mordred represents Mary. Other characters in the play represent other figures from the period and the Gray's Inn lawyers represent the good counsellors on both sides. Most importantly, the faithful counsellor and adviser Conan is clearly an allusion to Bacon himself and interestingly Conan is a near anagram of Bacon and in Irish history represents loyalty and protector of royalty.

Art & Allegory as Propaganda

The play charts the complex historical events that dominated the political landscape of the first three decades of the Elizabethan reign, influenced by the two towering figures of Queen Elizabeth and her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots.

THE MISFORTUNES OF ARTHUR: A RELIGIO-POLITICAL ALLEGORY

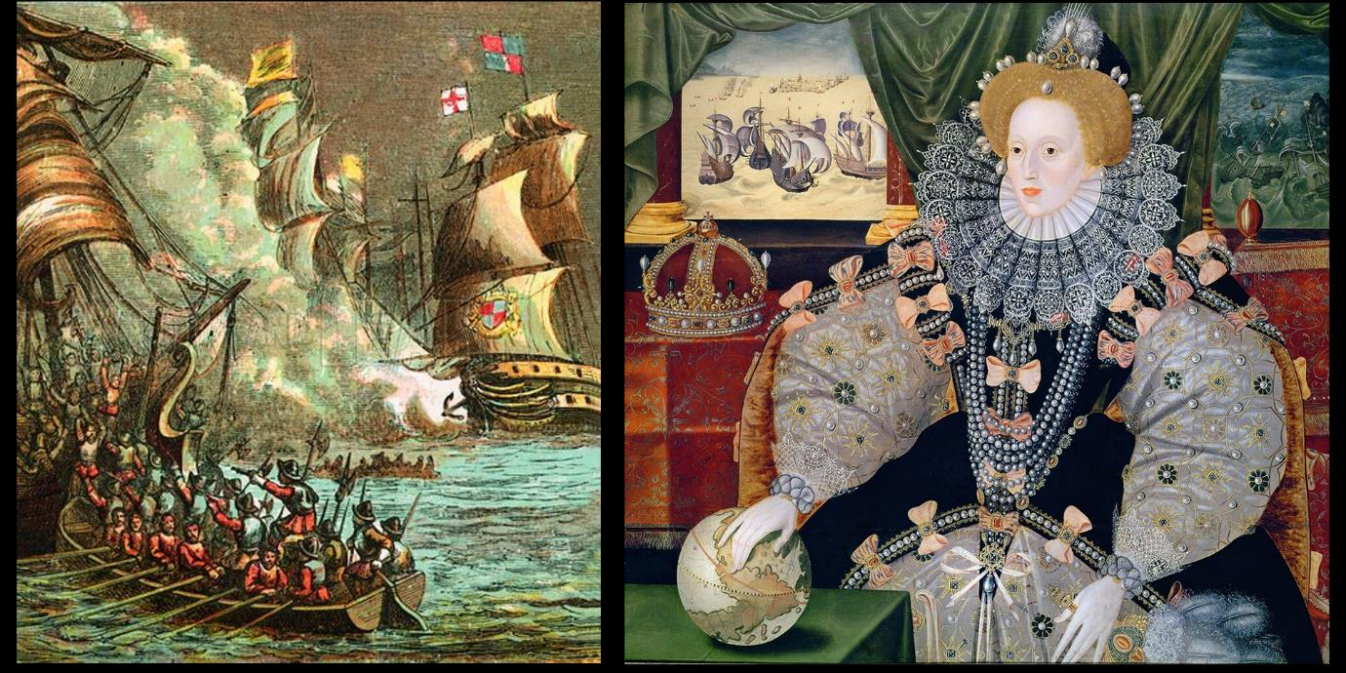


King Arthur &
Mordred



Elizabeth I &
Mary Queen of Scots

EVENTS



So why write this play at this time? Well, it was rumoured that the Spanish were preparing an invasion to revenge the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, assassinate Elizabeth, and restore England to the Catholic faith. Indeed a few months following the performance of the play at Greenwich, the Spanish armada set sail for England. Bound up in this toxic mix was the continuing burning question of the succession of the English crown with the main theme of the play being the fear of another civil war and the destruction of the kingdom. *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was a dramatic, rallying propaganda play.

The play stresses the fact that Elizabeth sought to keep Mary alive, but her statesmen forced her to see the political necessity of the execution and other scholars emphasise that *The Misfortune of Arthur* was a justification for the execution of Mary. The play opens and closes with praise of Elizabeth and for her assurance to England of the golden age promised by King Arthur.

But there is more in the play than a justification of Mary's death, and Mordred stands for more than a single figure of the Queen of Scotland. The play was written not only with an eye to past events, but also with one to future dangers. Mary was dead, but a Spanish invasion was likely. Mordred is a general symbol of all Catholic Englishmen who might be tempted to oppose Elizabeth. The play is a warning against civil war caused by Catholic Englishmen joining with foreign powers against their queen, just as Mordred had allied himself with foreign powers against King Arthur.

Bacon understood well the powerful nature of allegory. In fact, his *Wisdom of the Ancients* work is based entirely on this premise wherein he uses classical figures in order to comment on contemporary people and events. So allegory was a way of reaffirming the necessity of Mary's execution and also as a warning about future threats.



Thematic Baconian Trilogy reveals the history of Elizabeth's reign with the spectral presence of Mary, Queen of Scots present throughout

Part I *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587/8)

Part II *The Troublesome Reign of King John*
(1591)

Part III Bacon's *Of Tribute, or, Giving that
which is due* (1592)

Francis Bacon, Shakespeare & The Bible

Whilst direct commentary on the religious and political affairs of the day was rare, Francis Bacon's acknowledged works and writings are saturated with quotations, references and allusions from the Bible and other scriptural texts. He was familiar with many different versions as well; the Latin Vulgate, the Geneva Bible, the Bishop's Bible, the Douay-Rheims and the Erasmus Bible. He drew on Genesis, Kings, Acts, Job, Matthew, Gospels, Psalms, Proverbs, Romans, Corinthians, Ecclesiastes and a range of other books and passages. All in all, the number of direct biblical quotations, references and allusions found in Bacon's acknowledged writings runs to in excess of a thousand as is the case with the Shakespeare poems and plays. Indeed Shakespeare contains more allusions to the Bible than any other Elizabethan dramatist.

The biblical allusions in Shakespeare are not of the nature of common day allusions and well known passages either, but are informed by deeply learned theological teachings which is suggestive of a long studied and intimate familiarity that goes beyond a casual understanding.

There's no doubt that Bacon possessed an incredibly profound and extensive knowledge of the Bible as you would perhaps expect with Sir Nicholas' and Lady Anne's tutelage. In his known writings and in the Shakespeare works around 40 books from the bible are alluded to. Religious scriptures are deeply embedded in the Shakespeare works and provide an undercurrent to some of its themes and plots with stories often being dramatised and infused with Biblical significance and meaning.

So, it appears Bacon and Shakespeare were extraordinarily knowledgeable with regard to religious scriptures and both used them extensively in their works.



Mary Queen of Scots in Bacon & Shakespeare

The first Shakespeare Play *The Troublesome Reign of King John* was written and published in 1591 before William Shakspere of Stratford had even arrived in London. *King John* is closely linked with *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and is part of a thematic trilogy of dramatic literature relating to Elizabeth and Mary which was to preoccupy Bacon for the rest of his days.

There are many commentators that detail *King John* references with contemporary events. Shakespeare deliberately altered or deviated from the chronicles for the purposes of indirect references and allusions to contemporary politics, in particular, to Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots. That *King John* serves as a mirror for the times and the two Queens, is repeatedly referred to by Professor Honigmann in the Arden edition of the play.

Mary Queen of Scots actually features heavily in Shakespeare in a more personal and intimate way than would be expected from just chronicling a mere historical figure.

There are many allusions to Mary in a range of Shakespeare plays, besides *King John* including, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.

In his acknowledged writings, the Scottish Queen with whom Bacon privately sympathized preoccupied him and as Professor Frye strikingly observes both Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots haunt the Shakespeare plays.

The Tragedy of King Richard II was given a private performance at the London residence of Bacon's cousin Sir Edward Hoby on 7 December 1595 to which Hoby invited Bacon's other cousin Sir Robert Cecil. Certain aspects of Holinshed's history of Richard II were altered in order to draw analogies with Queen Elizabeth and her reign and Mary, Queen of Scots.

The early Shakespeare comedies *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are also replete with allusions to Elizabeth and Mary in a way which is not only historical and political but also represents some of Bacon's personal reflections on both monarchs.

The history and spectral presence of Mary, Queen of Scots appears in the Shakespeare tragedies *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. The presence of Mary in *Hamlet* was first extensively identified in 1796 by James Plumptre. He says, 'Shakespeare had the unfortunate Queen *directly* in mind when he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*; and in others', and as for the parallels, 'his *mind was so full of them*, that her story *involuntarily* gave him ideas.'

There are striking parallels between historical developments in Scotland relating to Mary, and the fictional events in *Hamlet*. The case of Hamlet's conscience and indecision is one of the central themes of the play likened by Professor Frye to the case of Elizabeth as, 'she wavered back and forth over what to do with Mary Stuart'.

Eliza Langland in her recent work commented that Shakespeare was a grand master of subtext and he encoded into *Hamlet* a Stuart allegory running throughout the play.

There are also similarities between Shakespearean portrayals of Katherine in *Henry VIII* and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and Mary, Queen of Scots explained by Susan Frye: 'The Scottish queen haunts both plays. Shakespeare was writing *Henry VIII* and *The Winter's Tale* when attempts to defend Mary were at their height, and the spectre of her female sovereignty was leaking out from that new crypt in Westminster Abbey.'

As you would expect living closely to such momentous events, there is much compelling evidence from many scholars that have recognised clear references to Mary Queen of Scots and contemporary events in the Shakespeare plays.

Bacon on State & Stage



That *The Misfortunes of Arthur* is based upon recent great historical events is immediately indicated by the carefully positioned question and declaration at the end of its introduction:

‘How sutes a Tragedie for such a time?. .
All Tragedies are fled from State, to stadge.’

More than a decade later Bacon would reproduce this very phrase when writing about the Essex uprising and the role played by Sir Gilly Merrick in commissioning the Shakespeare play *Richard II* with its explosive deposition scene which the Essex supporters hoped would serve as a rallying call to arms for what followed the next day:

‘So earnest he was to satisfy his eyes with the sight of that tragedy, which he thought soon after his Lord should bring from the stage to the state’

We see the same thought pattern though subverted—in the play *The Misfortunes of Arthur* a tragedy is being referred to - All Tragedies are fled from State to stage. A tragedy is also being referred to in the historical account of Essex where this time the desired actions are transferred from the stage to the state.

Francis Bacon, Shakespeare & Seneca

Literature scholars comment on the extensive use of Seneca in *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and the author’s remarkable knowledge and familiarity with Senecan literature. The incredible extent of the borrowing and use of Seneca is undeniably demonstrable. Professor Cunliffe identified at least 309 lines in *The Misfortunes of Arthur* as being translations of Seneca. Several critics have pointed out that Shakespeare must have read and re-read Seneca throughout his lifetime such was the use of him in the Shakespeare works.

Bacon breathed in Seneca from his learned parents Sir Nicholas and Lady Anne Bacon, and read and re-read Seneca throughout his entire life; and in the words of his modern orthodox biographers Jardine and Stewart, at the very end of his life Bacon, ‘took as his models the authors who had shaped his outlook in those early years, Cicero and Demosthenes, along with the stoic philosophical writer Seneca.’

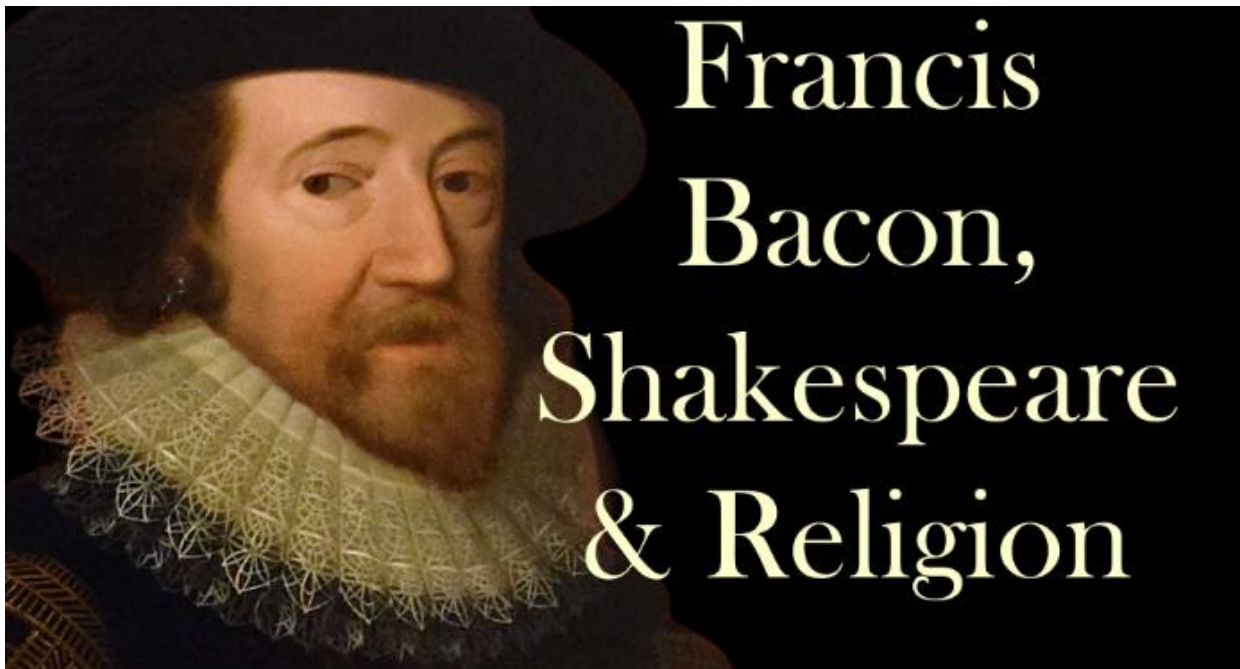
Conclusion

The Misfortunes of Arthur is permeated with Baconian and Shakespearean DNA and serves as a direct source for at least half-a-dozen Shakespeare plays and has important links to more than half of the Shakespeare canon from the first early history plays, the *Henry VI* trilogy, *Richard III*, the tragedies *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* through to the last plays of *Cymbeline*, *Henry VIII* and *The Tempest*.

The Misfortunes of Arthur should be recognised as Francis Bacon’s first unacknowledged Shakespeare play. Instead, for over four hundred years *The Misfortunes of Arthur* has been surrounded by silence. This unknown historically important drama marks the first appearance of the name of Francis Bacon in print and is by that definition alone, unique in his acknowledged writings. The play, written, performed and published in 1587-8 immediately pre-dates the Shakespearean era and is of untold importance in the history of the authorship of the Shakespeare plays.

So, we are back to events and people and how they are dramatically presented as well as that elephant in the writer's room. As far as I am aware there are no other documented performances of *The Misfortunes of Arthur* other than in February 1588 at Court before the Queen, her councillors and an invited audience. In the play, the events and people although allegorised are overt and celebrated with the full sanction of the Queen and her government. In other words, Bacon was given full freedom to speak of politics, religion and current events. With Shakespeare however, many of the plays were publicly performed which made their transmission more potentially dangerous. Contemporary people and events are deliberately distanced and disguised somewhat within the plot even though they are of course still very much there.

As we have seen, religion and politics were very dangerous topics to write about. So, the elephant in the writer's room, depends on the audience and is very much dependent upon who that writer was and their relationship to the power of the day. Francis Bacon was certainly no ordinary writer and grew up amongst the most momentous events of the period and the extraordinary people who had to deal with them.



Further Reading

This paper was originally given as a talk, for further reading see:

For a full-length discussion of this important play see A. Phoenix, 'Francis Bacon and his First Unacknowledged Shakespeare Play *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and its Extensive Links to his other Shakespeare Works, (2021), pp. 1-136.

https://www.academia.edu/45006687/Francis_Bacon_and_his_First_Unacknowledged_Shakespeare_Play_The_Misfortunes_of_Arthur_and_its_Extensive_Links_to_his_other_Shakespeare_Works

Alan Stewart with Harriet Knight, eds., *The Oxford Francis Bacon: Early Writings 1584-1596* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2012), *passim*; Michael Kiernan, ed., *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2000), *passim*; Michael Kiernan, ed., *The Advancement of Learning* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2000), *passim*; Graham Rees with Maria Wakely, eds., *The Instauration magna Part II: Novum Organum and Associated Texts* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2004), *passim*; Graham Rees with Maria Wakely, eds., *The Instauration magna Part III: Historia naturalis et experimentalis: Historia*

ventorum and Historia vitae & mortis (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2007), *passim*; Michael Kiernan, ed., *The Historie of the raigne of King Henry the seventh and other works of the 1620s* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 2012), *passim*.

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