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SHAKESPEARE AND TOLERANCE

Shakespeare's remarkable ability to detect and express important new currents and moods in his culture often led him to dramatise human interactions in terms of the presence or absence of tolerance. Differences of religion, gender, nationality, and what is now called 'race' are important in most of Shakespeare's plays, and varied ways of bridging these differences by means of sympathy and understanding are often depicted. The full development of a tolerant society is still incomplete, and this study demonstrates how the perceptions Shakespeare showed in relation to its earlier development are still instructive and valuable today. Many recent studies of Shakespeare's work have focused on reflections of the oppression or containment of minority, deviant, or non-dominant groups or outlooks. This book reverses that trend and examines Shakespeare's fascination with the desires that underlie tolerance, including in relation to religion, race, and sexuality, through close analysis of many Shakespearian plays, passages, and themes.

B. J. SOKOL is Emeritus Professor of English at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His many publications include *Art and Illusion in 'The Winter's Tale'* (1994) and, with Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law and Marriage* (Cambridge, 2003).

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For Mary Sokol, my collaborator, with love

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Abbreviated titles

Unless otherwise noted all Shakespeare texts will be cited from the electronic version of the Oxford Shakespeare, edited by Wells and Taylor. This edition supplies the title abbreviations used in the notes, which follow:

1H4	<i>Henry IV, part 1</i>
2H4	<i>Henry IV, part 2</i>
1H6	<i>Henry VI, part 1</i>
ADO	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
AIT	<i>All Is True (Henry VIII)</i>
ANT	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
AWW	<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>
AYL	<i>As You Like It</i>
COR	<i>Coriolanus</i>
CYL	<i>The First Part of the Contention (Henry VI, part 2)</i>
CYM	<i>Cymbeline</i>
ERR	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
H5	<i>Henry V</i>
HAM	<i>Hamlet</i>
JC	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
JN	<i>King John</i>
LC	<i>A Lover's Complaint</i>
LLL	<i>Love's Labor's Lost</i>
LRF	<i>The Tragedy of King Lear (Folio)</i>
LRQ	<i>The History of King Lear (Quarto)</i>
LUC	<i>The Rape of Lucrece</i>
MAC	<i>Macbeth</i>
MM	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
MND	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
MV	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
OTH	<i>Othello</i>

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PER	<i>Pericles, Prince of Tyre</i>
R ₂	<i>Richard II</i>
R ₃	<i>Richard III</i>
RDY	<i>Richard, Duke of York (Henry VI, part 3)</i>
ROM	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
SHR	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
SON	<i>The Sonnets</i>
STM	<i>Sir Thomas More</i>
TGV	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
TIM	<i>Timon of Athens</i>
TIT	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>
TMP	<i>The Tempest</i>
TN	<i>Twelfth Night, or What You Will</i>
TNK	<i>Two Noble Kinsmen</i>
TRO	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>
VEN	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>
WIV	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
WT	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>

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Introduction

A great deal has been written of late about early modern patriarchy, racism, bigotry, exploitation, hegemonic relations, oppression of ‘outsiders’, and ‘containment’ of human difference; it has often been claimed that these intolerant traits and practices are reflected from Shakespeare’s culture into his work. A counterpoise seems in order in the form of an attempt to explore Shakespeare and tolerance.

Although there has been much research and debate about early modern tolerance, especially religious tolerance, little of this has been applied to Shakespeare studies, or literary studies generally. Indeed, I feel that a subject area of ‘literature and tolerance studies’ is needed, and hope my efforts may contribute somewhat towards that.

This Introduction discusses what ‘tolerance’ might mean in relation to a study of Shakespeare. It is a tricky question, although only a subdivision of the much-discussed issue of what tolerance means in general.

Some of the problems can be identified by posing a simple riddle: why is it that, in popular parlance, ‘to be tolerant’ and ‘to tolerate some particular X’ may seem in some sense diametrically opposed? For instance, to say that ‘I tolerate gays’ may be seen as offensive, because acceptance on such terms may seem derogatory and, in its condescension, not in accordance with ‘being tolerant’. Allied with this paradox is the political/ethical question: should a programme to advance the social good of ‘toleration’ promote ‘tolerant persons’, or alternatively merely induce a public to ‘tolerate X, Y or Z’?

I originally had hoped to dodge paradoxes and a need for fine distinctions by titling this work *Shakespeare’s Tolerancy*, using a word called ‘rare’ by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) yet seen in an English play of 1556. But I quickly realised that I had to use such formulations as ‘to tolerate’, ‘to behave tolerantly’, or ‘to support toleration’, and so had to share some of the problems of defining ‘tolerance’ faced also by historians, philosophers, political theorists, or framers of human-rights documents.

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In addition, I have found that the topic of Shakespeare and tolerance forces me to use the word ‘tolerance’ in a way that does not square with its usual definition in most post-Enlightenment and modern philosophical discussions (although it may match up with much popular usage). The usual philosophical definition equates ‘tolerance’ with forbearance from hampering or harming persons or groups who are disliked because of their practices, beliefs, or even physical appearance (such as might be the case with ‘racial intolerance’). It follows from this formulation that tolerance is pertinent only when some aspect of a person or group is felt to be morally or aesthetically unacceptable, or at least very offensive, and only when the party practising tolerance has sufficient power to oppress the party disliked (otherwise forbearance from oppression has no meaning). The requirement for dislike prior to tolerance is often expressed as being axiomatic, but sometimes a supporting argument is offered along the lines that it cannot be an instance of tolerance to accept or allow that which one likes, approves of, or agrees with.

Usages of ‘tolerance’ here, on the contrary, will orbit around a notion that ‘tolerance’ entails a person’s willed or chosen extension of goodwill or sympathy towards a person, practice, behaviour, or belief that lies outside their usual experience – even towards someone or something shockingly or frighteningly strange.¹ My explorations will concern the forces driving the dramatised dynamics of such human interactions.

Because my focus will be on dramatised inter-personal relations, or on artistic representations of the inner aspects of situations that demand tolerance, another divergence will arise between the studies here and many of the numerous recent studies of early modern tolerance. These latter often concentrate on the emergence and underpinnings of modern ‘regimes of tolerance’, for example tolerationist legal or social arrangements. Many of these focus on collective mindsets or political forces, and question whether regimes of tolerance genuinely existed at all in the early modern or even the Enlightenment period. These revisionists typically argue that earlier ‘liberal’ scholars have perpetrated ‘Whiggish’ myths, and by misinterpreting the chronology, provenance, and original meanings of certain early developments have painted a false picture of an early modern and Enlightenment march towards toleration. Such revisionists, and those who counter them,² address a similar question: what processes produced our current political and conceptual commitments to tolerance? This, however, will not be the central question asked here. The main focus instead will be on Shakespearian dramatisations of successes or failures of tolerance.

Yet, of course, the present book cannot wish to be historically blind. It will always attempt to place Shakespeare's poetic explorations of the dynamics of tolerance within the contexts of his time and culture. Since the focus will be on tolerance as a choice expressed by dramatised agents, it will be especially important to question what sorts of choices were possible in the culture surrounding Shakespeare and his audiences. It will also be important to question what sorts of intolerance were possible within that historical culture, and what sorts (although possibly common in later times) may have been then unknown or impossible. With the help of recent scholarship I think I will be able to show that certain allegations made concerning some types of Elizabethan intolerance are anachronistic.

It may be useful, before beginning this, to discuss further why the definition of tolerance as merely non-harming cannot serve the purposes of this study. For one thing, within the concept that tolerance by definition must apply to that which is strongly disapproved of, there may be a paradoxical demand to tolerate persons or practices that are themselves intolerant or in other ways wicked. This paradox has been discussed at length.³ It need not be further considered here, however, for Shakespeare never imputes any value to tolerating the intolerable – so an Iago, or an Angelo of *Measure for Measure*, does not attract our acquiescent acceptance.

Also, Shakespeare presents counter-possibilities to a notion that tolerance may arise or be called for only after dislike sets in, for he dramatises circumstances in which tolerance is required *before* any dislike is established. These are circumstances in which confusion, anxiety, or uncertainty (rather than a settled and known dislike) arise in encounters with the seemingly outlandish or mysterious in humanity. Such encounters fascinated Shakespeare's time, when voyagers or explorers met unknown varieties of humanity with trepidation and surprise. The shock of such encounters was more strongly felt then, and more remarked on, than even quite soon afterwards. Then, also, Europeans did not automatically assume they possessed superiority over exotic others in sophistication, power, or even the ability to survive, for such overweening assumptions were not yet either justifiable or established prejudices.⁴

There is another level, as well, on which recent discussions of tolerance may run counter to an account of tolerance appropriate to Shakespeare studies. This may be encapsulated in the paradox that a simple like/dislike, attack/forbear model of tolerance makes possible a sharp division of attitudes from actions, thereby making room for an intolerant 'tolerance'. The important discussion of this paradox by philosophers and

political theorists might be circumvented here by making the observation that for Shakespeare the mysteries of human motivations always matter. But because we live in a time dominated by questions of intra-ethnic and similar collisions, it is necessary, I think, to clarify the grounds of certain modern discourses so that these can be more clearly held to one side when they are inappropriate to discussions of early modern circumstances.

The action/attitude division concerning tolerance has recently been highlighted in an attempt by Andrew R. Murphy to desynonymise ‘toleration’ and ‘tolerance’. In the preface to a political-theoretical book on seventeenth-century notions of toleration he writes:⁵

Generally speaking, I shall avoid using the term ‘tolerance’ throughout this study. Elsewhere I have argued that we may avoid some long-standing conceptual confusions by using ‘tolerance/intolerance’ to refer to attitudes, and ‘toleration/antitoleration’ to refer to institutional or behavioral phenomena. Without making that argument here, I shall merely suggest that *no* set of attitudes is necessarily related to tolerationist outcomes in politics.

The ‘elsewhere’ Murphy refers to is a 1997 article in which he reserved the term ‘tolerance’ for use only in the personal-attitudinal realm. That distinction has not taken hold in general, and in their traditional uses the *OED* defines both ‘tolerance’ and ‘toleration’ in terms of an ‘action or practice’, giving the verb ‘to tolerate’ and the adjective ‘tolerant’ meanings in both the attitudinal and actional spheres.

Terminology aside, it is very important to note Murphy’s surprising assertion that ‘*no* set of attitudes is necessarily related to tolerationist outcomes in politics’. This has been echoed by many other writers. Many hold that a political ‘regime of toleration’ may be founded upon motives that include ones that are not tolerant at all – such as expedience, cynical indifference, relativism or amoralism, or prudential fears of consequences. Although some take exception to this,⁶ others actually find reasons to prefer a ‘regime of toleration’ that is so founded. For instance, Bernard Williams has argued that since ‘genuine’ tolerance is equivalent to satisfying a Kantian demand for respecting others’ autonomy as a good in itself, and since this kind of respect is unlikely to be widespread, it is ‘as well’ that the real-world ‘practice of toleration’ does not depend upon it.⁷ Martin Walzer likewise describes a wide range of toleration-supporting, although not tolerant, positions, and holds that ‘it is a feature of any successful regime of toleration that it does not depend on any particular form of this virtue’.⁸

According to such notions, any means of restraining violence against hated persons, communities, beliefs, or ideas is equivalent to toleration,

and therefore toleration does not require individuals' inner tolerance or sympathy for others. That will not do for the purposes here, which are to examine tolerant impulses and behaviours represented in Shakespeare's plays. Here, in contrast, even restricted or symbolic violence may play a part in the dynamic development of tolerance. For Shakespeare's plays often represent robust expressions of friction arising from human differences, and such expressions sometimes in the end lead not only to peaceful coexistence, but also to an enlarged and more flexible sense of the humanity of others. The forms taken by eventually profitable human collisions or frictions, as depicted by Shakespeare, range from the wrangling of a Beatrice and Benedick (surely a more likely couple than Claudio and Hero) to the much more violent mistakings of Imogen and Posthumus, and include many instances of intra-communal jesting, friendly teasing, mock-insulting, and the mistaking of one identity for another (a Shakespearian favourite).

Another problem that arises for us with notions that tolerance consists of forbearance from harming is that tolerance is then only possible for those who are dominant or have a powerful upper hand. If accepted, this restriction would eliminate some of the most interesting Shakespearian explorations of tolerance, especially those involving *mutual* tolerance between the socially unequally empowered genders.⁹ Bernard Williams has partially addressed the definitional one-sidedness that excludes a consideration of a symmetrical tolerance between unequals by making the distinction that toleration 'as a *political undertaking* . . . introduces the asymmetry [between groups] associated with the concept' but 'a tolerant attitude . . . can obtain just as much between groups who are not equal in power'.¹⁰ However, Williams still apparently cleaves to the common notion that tolerance can arise only following disliking, for he claims that there must be a 'history or background of intolerance' to make 'room for the concept of toleration'.¹¹

In summary, since Shakespeare can conceive of tolerance without prior disliking and of tolerance on both sides between unequals – and since he is prone to disfavour a vapid or indifferent response to human variances and to favour responses that are emotionally vivid – his reflections on tolerance do not match those commonly held by many current thinkers.¹² What we will meet in Shakespeare's portrayals of tolerance is the celebration of those who can transcend rancour arising from human differences, and the tragic disasters of those who are misguidedly or pathetically unable to do so.

Such assertions need to be tested against Shakespeare's plays and their contexts; this is to follow . . .

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STRUCTURE, CONVENTIONS, AND THANKS

This book's six chapters pursue topics that often overlap. The first chapter's topic of humour and tolerance, for instance, will recur in every other chapter; two chapters are so closely linked that the last sentence of one becomes the first sentence of the next; the Afterword presents an example bridging the topics of every other chapter of the book. All this is not accidental.

My heavy reliance on others' researches is attested to by the bibliography. This contains as well a number of my own former single or joint efforts. Several of the latter are here amplified or revised; the topic of Shakespeare and tolerance has been on my mind for a long time.

A few points of convention or procedure should be mentioned. The term 'Elizabethan' will be used as a shorthand for the period of Shakespeare's lifetime except where this may cause confusion. Quotations from early works will not be modernised except where modern editions are used.¹³ I have often used numerical evidence, some of which comes from measures applied to electronic texts. I am also very grateful for parish record data and analyses supplied for my use by the 'People in Place: Families, Households and Housing in Early Modern London' project of Birkbeck, University of London, the Centre for Metropolitan History at the Institute of Historical Research, and the University of Cambridge. I want especially to thank the co-directors of the project, Professor Richard Smith of Cambridge University, Dr Vanessa Harding of Birkbeck, and Dr Matthew Davies of the London University Institute of Historical Research. Professor Smith led me to the project and gave me illuminating initial and continuing advice, and the staff, especially Mark Merry, have been immensely helpful. My thanks also go to Leonora Gummer and David Moore-Gwyn at Sotheby's, London, for very kind assistance.

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A NOTE ON THE COVER ILLUSTRATION

The cover reproduces the *Portrait of the Princess of Zanzibar with an African Attendant*, sold at Sotheby's on 14 June 2001 (lot 1). I am most grateful to the painting's owner, and to those thanked in the Introduction and to Sotheby's for arranging the permission for its use, and for supplying the image. This painting, by Walter Frier, is an eighteenth-century copy of a lost seventeenth-century original. See www.artnet.com/Artists/LotDetailPage.aspx?lot_id=1C928D15FD04B3BD.

An inscription on the painting reads:

Sir John Henderson of Fordel, travelling in his youth through several parts of Asia and Africa from ye year 1618 to ye year 1628, was delivered into slavery by a Barbarian in Zanzibar on the coast of Africa. There a princess of that countrey falling in love with him, even to the renouncing of her religion and country, contrived the means of both their escape and getting aboard a ship trading up ye red sea landed at Alexandria where she died, whose picture John Henderson caused take with her black maid after their own country habit. From ye original picture at Osterston by W Frier, 1731.

(See 'In Zanzibar: Stone Town, Tanzania', by William Dalrymple, at www.travelintelligence.net/wsd/articles/art_52.html.) The romantic implications of this inscription and image overlap with many of the themes of this book: in particular, early modern attitudes to differences of nationality, religion, and 'race', gender relations, and slavery.