

The mysterious case of queen elizabeth's decision to censor the works of william ...

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Shakespeare's World

" In April 1559... Queen Elizabeth drafted a proposal that [created] a system for the prior review and regulation of plays throughout her kingdom," (Greenblatt 38). Queen Elizabeth's actions limited the number of playwrights who were at liberty to speak of " sensitive" issues in their works, (e. g. politics), because they only permitted " learned men" to write of them. I find Queen Elizabeth's decision to censor her people's work interesting for a few reasons. First, it makes her time seem more accessible to Shakespeare's modern readers. Since we live in the twenty-first century as opposed to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when she was alive, Elizabeth's world may seem distant, foreign, and unrelatable. The knowledge that both Shakespeare's and Elizabeth's time contained censorship makes it appear all the more tangible because it is something familiar to the modern reader. Although we are meant to have freedom of speech, we are limited in what we can say about " delicate" topics like government officials. There are also strict laws pertaining to censorship in many foreign countries.

Secondly, knowing that censorship existed in Shakespeare's time causes the contemporary reader to wonder if the things we read are truly reflective of life during the Renaissance. The knowledge also raises a number of questions like: what would have been written without the presence of censorship? How would the things that were written have changed? How much were the plays written during the Renaissance changed before they were allowed to be published? Would the plays even remotely resemble the things we read today without censorship? Is our impression of this time

period true to what the people of the Renaissance experienced? Is our perception of the Renaissance entirely wrong? Is it fictionalized or romanticized? What could Queen Elizabeth have been trying to hide? The list is simply endless!

The knowledge that Queen Elizabeth censored the plays that were allowed to be performed in her kingdom is going to influence how I experience Shakespeare's works. As I complete the assigned readings for this course, I am always going to wonder if Shakespeare's plays are reflective of the socio, political and economic climate of his time or if they depict Elizabeth's approved fabrication of the time. Since we have no way of confirming the truth, (everyone who lived during Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare's time is dead), I will never know.

Source:

1. Greenblatt, Stephen, et al. The Norton Shakespeare. 2nd ed., W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009.