

A WHO'S WHO IN KIT/WILL CONVERSATIONS by Philippa Kelly, Dramaturg

“That great hag who rules them;” “one old woman’s lust for power”– refers to Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1158 to 1603

Lord Strange (Ferdy): he had a playing company called “Lord Strange’s Men.” The Lord Mayor of London hated theater and forbade acting companies to perform within London City. Lord Strage took his company outside the city to Cross Keys to perform. But they gained favor with the queen, and in the winter of 1591 gave 6 performances at Court. Several members of Lord Strange’s Men (which perhaps included, for a while, William Shakespeare) would join Shakespeare’s company, The Lord Chamberlain’s Men in 1594 after Lord Strange’s death.

“Feckless little Southampton”: Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, who was exactly 10 years younger than Shakespeare and Marlowe, and became Shakespeare’s patron. He is said to be the young man addressed in half of Shakespeare’s sonnets. In 1593 Shakespeare dedicated his narrative poem Venus and Adonis to 19-year-old Southampton, and in 1594 he prefaced *The Rape of Lucrece* with the dedication:

The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end ... What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours.

“My fellow” (who “won’t pay up for that”): **Sir Robert Cecil** – high-ranking government official – Elizabeth I’s Secretary of State. Cecil was less than 5’ tall and had severe scoliosis, resulting in Queen Elizabeth I unkindly calling him “my little pygmy.”

Holinshed: Raphael Holinshed, who died ten years before this play is set, leaving behind one of Shakespeare’s most important source materials: *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande*.

Talbot: Lord Talbot, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury, who fought valiantly for England in the Hundred Years War with France and was killed in battle. (Kit says, “He’s far too roast beef for me: beef was thought to dull people’s wit.) After the Hundred Years War with France, England turned in on itself and the two ruling factions of the Plantagenet family, York and Lancaster, brutally battled each other in the Wars of the Roses. Shakespeare and Marlowe used the Wars of the Roses for the foundation of the Henry VI and Richard III tetralogy.

La Pucelle, Joan: during Henry VI’s minority (he was a child king aged 8), a visionary teenage French peasant, called Joan la Pucelle or Joan of Arc, successfully led a French force to break the English hold on Orleans. This began the reversal of England’s fortunes, largely caused by the quarrelsome nobles who fought to control the child king. When the French forces suffered setbacks, however, the visionary Joan was then blamed, cast as a witch and burned at the stake. In 1920 Joan was canonized by the Catholic church (# *why do women have to wait so long?*)

Winchester: Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, was the young King Henry VI’s uncle, who battled with Henry’s Protector, Gloucester, for control over the king.

Tom: Thomas Kyd, one-time roommate of Kit Marlowe and celebrated playwright, his biggest hit being *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587). Tom is said to have informed on Kit.

Essex: after Sir Francis Walsingham's death in 1590 (the year before this play is set), some of the secret agents he had recruited were bought by the Earl of Essex, and some by **Robert Cecil (R.C, or "my fellow")**. The two would become bitter rivals in the lead-up to Elizabeth I's death without an heir, with Essex (frustrated after years of courting Elizabeth with flirtation, extravagant gifts and more, and not being offered her hand in marriage) leading an unsuccessful rebellion against her. Under Cecil's authority, Essex was executed for treason in 1601, and Elizabeth is said to have deeply mourned him.

Raleigh: Sir Walter Raleigh, explorer, pillager of the Americas, suppressor of rebellions, a favorite of Queen Elizabeth because of his drive to spread the Protestant faith in Ireland. He married Bess Throckmorton without Elizabeth's knowledge and was imprisoned when the queen found out about the marriage. He was released to lead another successful plundering expedition for the queen and was then sent back to the Tower. It took several years for him to return to royal favor.

Greene: playwright Robert Greene, author of *Pandosto*, and notoriously jealous of Will. On his deathbed Greene wrote of Shakespeare as "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers."

Jack Cade – a famous rebel against corruption in the government of the weak Henry VI. Cade's rebellion was suppressed and he was fatally wounded. As a warning, his dead body underwent a mock trial and was beheaded.

Greenes and Nashes and Fletchers – all three were playwrights, contemporaries of Kit and Will.

A BRIEF TIMELINE: WILL/KIT AND THEIR WORLD

by **Philippa Kelly, Dramaturg**

1532: King Henry VIII breaks with Rome and Catholicism in order to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn

1533: Elizabeth, future Queen Elizabeth I, born to Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII

1553: Elizabeth's half-sister Mary becomes Queen and reinstates Catholicism as England's state religion

1558: Elizabeth I ascends the throne, reinstates the Church of England

1564: both playwrights are born, Will in Stratford, Kit in Canterbury. This is the same year that the pencil was invented, although playwrights continued to use feathers dipped in ink

1568: bottled beer was invented in London

1582: Will's marriage to the pregnant Anne Hathaway

1583: Birth of Anne and Will's daughter Susannah.

1584 (approx.): While at Cambridge, Kit is recruited to be a spy for Elizabeth I's secret service under Sir Francis Walsingham.

1585: Anne and Will's twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born

1587: Kit finishes his Bachelors and Masters at Cambridge

1587-88: Marlowe writes the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*, which is first entered into the Stationers' Register (the record book for the publishing industry) in August 1590.

1590: Walsingham dies, and his spies are divided between Robert Cecil and the Earl of Essex, competing spymasters. Marlowe is taken up by Cecil.

1592: the first reference to William Shakespeare as a playwright: written by the playwright Robert Greene on his deathbed, Shakespeare is referred to as "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers..."

1593: Shakespeare's poem, *Venus and Adonis*, appears, and Galileo invents the thermometer.

1593: Death of Kit Marlowe, having written 7 influential plays by the age of 29

1616: Death of William Shakespeare, having written dozens of plays including *Hamlet*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Othello*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *King Lear*.