SHAKESPEARE’S THEATRE

WORKSHEET 2: SHAKESPEARE IN HIS CONTEXTS

I. Cultural, Socio-political, Economic Contexts

Please read Helen Hackett’s introduction to A Short History of English Renaissance Drama (2013) and then answer the following questions:

1. What is the Renaissance and when did it take place? What are its main values?

2. In recent years, some scholars have preferred to use the term ‘early modern period’ instead of Renaissance. What are some of the developments (cultural, economic, political, social, technological) associated with ‘early modernity’? What different conceptions of identity does each term imply?

3. What is the Reformation and when did it take place? What are some of its main assumptions?

II. Women in Early Modern England

Please read pp. 195-201 of Maggie O’Farrell’s chapter from Hamnet (2020) and then answer the following questions:

1. Write down some aspects which you think characterized the life of an Early Modern woman and/or mother. Are they depicted as having any agency or power? (see also Belsey’s “Gender and Family” (2013) and McDonald’s “Men and Women: Gender, Family, Society” (2001) on the Virtual Campus). What was their life like, and why, do you think, does O’Farrell convey the experiences of infant mortality from the simultaneous perspective of different women?

2. Stephen O’Neil claims that Hamnet invites us to take seriously the idea that Hamlet was inspired by the death of Shakespeare’s son, and that “by narrativizing the Hamnet story and focusing on the maternal the novel asserts an imaginative right to interrogate Hamlet and the kind of traditional, patriarchal modes of recollection the play values” (2021, p. 221). To what extent would you claim that this passage invites the reader to fill in the gaps and silences of Shakespeare’s earlier play, Hamlet, or questions the facts considered of value in traditional Shakespearean biographies?

Reference List


