

Background notes

Rex (king)

A) SETTING

- April 22, 1616 (eve of Shakespeare's death at 52)
- Shrove Tuesday/Ash Wednesday 1601 (curfew as the Lord Chamberlain's Men perform for Elizabeth I at one of her palaces on the eve of the intended execution of Essex and Southampton)
- April 22, 1616

Historical figures

- Elizabeth I (1558-1603) the "Virgin Queen" a.k.a. "Gloriana."
- Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (raising a rebellion in Ireland; towered for treason)
- Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (Shakespeare's patron/lover)

Ned Lowenscroft

- actor of women's roles
- dying of syphilis

B) THEMES

- * gender stereotyping
- * integrity "to thine own self be true"
- * self-discovery

Prologue (pp.13-15)

Look closely at Ned's opening song and explain what you think it thematically foreshadows.

How does Findley indicate shifts in time?

Shakespeare made famous the analogy that "all the world's a stage" in his play *As You Like It*. What corollary does Findley use in the prologue?

How can you tell that Will is anxious about what is about to be revealed?

List the "emblems of who they were":

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-
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Act One (pp. 16-50)
Shrove Tuesday, 1601

Scenes 1-3

In the opening scenes of the act, Findley uses comic relief as counterpoint to the seriousness of Ned's illness and the impending deaths of Essex and Southhampton. In so doing, Findley imitates Shakespeare in his tragedies. Recall the porter in *Macbeth*, for one.

Provide several examples.

Percy
Tardy
Luddy

Kate Tardwell reminds one of Shakespeare's paradoxically wise fools.

Comment on her remark,

"That a woman has more 'pacity for love than a man. So a fellow has to mock it—make it seem Cheapside, for fear we find him standing in the shallows when it comes to his own 'pacity for love."

Scene 4

With the arrival of Queen Elizabeth, the Lord Chamberlain's men are on their best behaviour. That is, with the exception of Ned.

The Queen is a great fan of the theatre. So much so that she remembers specific lines from the recently performed play *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Explain why the lines she recalls are appropriate in the context of her life.

- a) "Sigh no more." (30)

- b) "I will live a bachelor." (30)

- c) "I cannot be a man with wishing—therefore, I will die a woman [with grieving]" (32)

What is ironic about the play title, *Much Ado About Nothing* considering the plot of *Elizabeth Rex*?

Do you think there is any truth to Elizabeth's observation to Will that "*when my sex is joined with yours, whatever else we lose, we also lose our wit?*" (30)

The opening verse of the song the Queen remembers from the play is as follows:

Sigh, no more
Ladies, sigh no more
Men were deceivers ever
One foot at sea
And one on shore
To one thing
Constant never

Explain the relevance to Elizabeth's current situation of those lines.

Show how sewing is used as a metaphor in this scene. (34-35)

Scene 5

Explain why Elizabeth is driven by the proper use of language:

Not reprobate. Learn your language. The word you seek is ingrate. Ingrate! A word with which every man is imbued-- and every woman, familiar. (36)

Do you agree with Elizabeth that, "*We are all poxed, Master Lowenscraft—one way or another. Life is a pox. It leaves scars on all of us?*" (40)

How do you think each of the following characters is “poxed?”

Will	
Elizabeth	
Luddy	
Tardy	

Why do you think that Elizabeth lets Ned get away with treating her the way that he does?

Scene 6

Provide evidence of Elizabeth’s amusement of wordplay.

Why does Elizabeth begin to rant after receiving the petition from Eliza Vernon?

Why is it appropriate that “*kill Claudio*” is the line that Elizabeth claims she will never forget? (44)

Scene 7

What role do you think Ned's bear plays?

In this scene we discover information about the past loves of both Will and Ned. What do we learn about each of their lovers?

a) Will's lover

b) Ned's lover

Scene 8

The repartee between Ned and Elizabeth mimics that between Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. List some of their rapid fire insults below:

Will becomes the voice of reason and equivocation in their passionate argument and forces Elizabeth to admit that she “*killed the woman in [her] heart, that England might survive.*” (49) How do you think she feels about having done this?

ACT ONE

Writing Assignment: Writing in Role

Pretend you are Elizabeth and write a diary entry in which you reflect on the events that have occurred since the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed *Much Ado About Nothing*. Be sure to explain your feelings clearly and provide specific support from the play.

Length: About 350 words

Evaluation

Item	Value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Mark
Supporting Evidence	25	limited demonstration of Elizabeth's feelings, relevant examples and commentary (15)	some demonstration of Elizabeth's feelings, relevant examples and commentary (17)	considerable demonstration of Elizabeth's feelings, relevant examples and intelligent commentary (20)	thorough demonstration of Elizabeth's feelings, relevant examples and intelligent commentary (25)	
Grammar	5	more than ten errors (2)	six to ten errors (3)	one to five errors (4)	no errors (5)	
Spelling	5	more than ten errors (2)	six to ten errors (3)	one to five errors (4)	no errors (5)	
Style	10	Communicates with limited clarity (4)	Communicates with some clarity (6)	Communicates with considerable clarity (8)	Communicates with a high degree of clarity (10)	
Punctuation	5	More than ten errors (2)	Six to ten errors (3)	One to five errors (4)	No errors (5)	

/50 marks

ACT TWO (51-79)

Scenes 1-3

What purpose does Will's opening monologue serve in Scene One?

Provide evidence that art imitates life.

Explain what scatological humour is and provide an example from these scenes.

Scene 4

The line becomes blurred between reality and seeming in this scene. Show how Elizabeth "plays" the role that she is.

We learn about three tragic love affairs in detail in this scene. Make a chart in which you record what is revealed about Elizabeth, Shakespeare and Lowenscraft. What effect does this information have? What dramatic purpose could it serve?

SHAKESPEARE "Master of Words"	ELIZABETH	LOWENSCRAFT

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Ned articulates the power of love paradoxically to create and destroy. (62) Explain how this paradox works thematically in *Elizabeth Rex*.

Scene 5

“Playing” or “acting” serves as a motif throughout *Elizabeth Rex*. Show how Elizabeth adopts it to show its past relevance in her life. What does she hope Ned will learn from that experience?

Scene 6

What symbolic purpose could the “glass” serve?

Why is it significant that Elizabeth refers to the players in the company by their roles? For example, “Where is Hero?” (65)

Show how the central motif of the play is explored here through the conversation between Elizabeth and Harry.

Do you agree with Ned that “To find the woman,...you must hide the man?” Explain your response.

Scene 7

Why does Elizabeth fall to her knees when Ned produces a severed “head” at the opening of this scene?

The pace of repartee between Ned and Elizabeth crescendos in this scene. What effect does it have?

Why do Ned’s bullying tactics work? What does he force Elizabeth to admit?

The scene closes with a breakdown of gender stereotyping. Copy the lines that reveal that breakdown. (70)

Scene 8

What is Elizabeth's perspective on the way she rules versus the way her father, Henry VIII, ruled?

What evidence is there that Elizabeth respects life (even though she has condemned her lover to death and will not pardon him) ?

Scene 9

What does Cecil report about Essex's response to his death sentence?

Because Elizabeth cannot see Essex before his decapitation, she insists on acting out a reconciliation with Jack. Why does Ned step in and play "Bess" to Jack's "Robin?" (76)

Scene 10

List the “gift” Elizabeth gives to each of the following characters and explain why it is an appropriate one.

GIFT

APPROPRIATENESS

Tardy	
Will	
Jack	
Percy	
Bear	
Ned	

Do you think the ending is an appropriate one? Why do you think Findley framed the play the way he did?

In-class Essay

You will have one class to prepare a detailed point-form outline, which you will bring with you on the day you write your 5-paragraph essay in class.

In a short paper (about 500 words), examine ONE of the following topics:

- Findley's use of humour
- The appropriateness of the title
- Findley's use of Shakespeare's canon (sonnets, excerpts from *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, etc.)
- Gender stereotyping and breaking its boundaries

Include brainstorming below:

Be sure to refer specifically to passages in the play to support your argument. Use direct quotations.

Please submit this sheet with your essay. Attach your OUTLINE as well.

Evaluation Rubric In-Class Essay

Item	Value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Mark
Supporting Evidence	25	limited support, only one quotation used (15)	some support, two-three quotations used (17)	considerable support, four-five quotations used (20)	thorough support, more than five relevant quotations used (25)	
Grammar	5	more than ten errors (2)	six to ten errors (3)	one to five errors (4)	no errors (5)	
Spelling	5	more than ten errors (2)	six to ten errors (3)	one to five errors (4)	no errors (5)	
Outline	5	limited detail, below expectations (2)	some detail, approaching expectations (3)	considerable detail, meets expectations (4)	thorough detail, exceeds expectations (5)	
Style	10	Communicates with limited clarity and sentence structure variety (4)	Communicates with some clarity, appropriate diction, sentence structure variety (6)	Communicates with considerable clarity, uses appropriate diction, sentence structure variety (8)	Communicates with a high degree of clarity, uses appropriate diction, sentence structure variety (10)	
Punctuation	5	More than ten errors (2)	Six to ten errors (3)	One to five errors (4)	No errors (5)	

/55 marks

The Queen is bald

by J. Timothy Hunt

Long live Diane D'Aquila, the bold star of Stratford's production of *Elizabeth Rex*. D'Aquila is raising eyebrows at the Festival with her spirited, hair-shorn portrayal of the Tudor queen.



"Mary -- my hair." Sitting before a looking glass, an elderly Queen Elizabeth I asks for help in removing her famous bejewelled red wig. The Queen's maid of honour, Lady Mary Stanley, demurely takes Elizabeth's hairpiece and sets it aside.

The Queen is completely bald. "You stand amazed," Elizabeth says to William Shakespeare and his company of gaping actors. And we stand amazed, too. The few stray wisps of red hair clinging to the Queen's pale scalp is a piteous, heart-rending sight, one that never fails to elicit a collective gasp from the audience in the Stratford Festival's Tom Patterson Theatre. But our shock doesn't come from the impact of seeing Queen Elizabeth reveal her naked vulnerability; it comes from our realization that Diane D'Aquila, the actress playing her, is revealing hers. Arguably, this scene in Timothy Findley's new play *Elizabeth Rex* is the most powerful theatrical image of the year. But

it has also proven to be a life-changing moment, both onstage and off, for the woman playing the title character. After seven seasons of doing star-calibre turns at the Festival in mostly supporting roles, this year D'Aquila is learning what it's like to be a "meat-and-potatoes actor" who suddenly looks like a star, as well as an ordinary woman and mother who suddenly looks like a man.



D'Aquila's perfervid, multi-layered performance in Findley's drama is but one of her three major roles turning heads at Stratford this season. She can also be seen at the Patterson as Tamora, Shakespeare's vengeful femme fatale in *Titus Andronicus*; and as Edith Frank, the long-suffering matriarch in *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the



Avon.

"Diane has a gift of emotion and intelligence and focus that is riveting," says Al Waxman, director of *Anne Frank*. "You can just feel her presence and skill as an actress. I had known of her work before, of her depth and strength onstage, but as I began to work with her, it was such a joy to find out she really does have it."

"She's got a tremendous presence," agrees *Titus* director Richard Rose. "But presence seems too small a word. Power. She's like power on stage." It seems fitting that D'Aquila's sparring partner in *Elizabeth Rex* would be the mercurial Brent Carver, who returns to Stratford after a long absence. Playing a frail and embittered actor who specializes in Shakespeare's female roles, Carver adroitly matches the fire of D'Aquila's too kingly Queen. Like two magnets that alternately attract and repel, they infuriate and amuse one another, swapping taunts and swapping outfits with such ferocity that, by the end of the play, they even start to look alike.

In real life, D'Aquila and Carver do physically resemble one another, so much so, in fact, that the eerie photo-manipulated melding of their two faces on the award-winning *Elizabeth Rex* poster has become a Stratford Festival icon this year.



At her house on a quiet Stratford side street, D'Aquila comes bounding out of her kitchen wielding a piece of souvenir kitsch from the Festival's gift shop. "I'm a fridge magnet!" she says, giving a delighted, open-throated laugh. "Who thinks these things up?"

Proudly displaying her image on the magnet, she points out just how little the photo artist had to do to create the Brent/Diane portrait. "The shapes of our faces are actually very similar," she says. "We have the same nose; our lips are the same and we have the same square jaw. I've always said that if I was blond and had blue eyes, we could be brother and sister."

She's right of course, but at the moment she looks more like she could be Carver's father. Just like her character in *Elizabeth Rex*, D'Aquila

has no hair. "It is hard publicly to go bald," she says, "but I shave my head every time I do Elizabeth. I've got one of those little rechargeable Philco razor things. It takes me about 10 minutes -- bzzzzt! bzzzzt! bzzzzt! -- and I do it without a mirror. My head's not very bumpy, so it's easy."

It's true. D'Aquila's head is a lovely shape that makes the bald look she sports seem more like a bold fashion statement than anything else. Interestingly enough, going bald was D'Aquila's own idea. The makeup and wig artists at Stratford desperately tried to talk her into using a latex cap, but their initial attempt at simulated baldness took two hours to apply and ran the risk of coming unglued during the performance. Shaving just seemed to D'Aquila like the sensible thing to do.

"It is quite a fantastic look," says Rose. "All the directors, including myself, said 'We have to use that!' but of course we couldn't because it's reserved for one play. I think it is used very effectively in *Elizabeth Rex*. It is a striking image with a lot of dramatic power."

"Uta Hagen said I was very brave. She would never, ever shave her head for a role," says D'Aquila giving another huge, raucous laugh apparently at the thought of the legendary Miss Hagen taking a razor to herself.

Martha Henry, the director of *Elizabeth Rex*, is another theatrical legend thoroughly impressed with D'Aquila's bravery. "The thing that surprised me the most about her was her absolute willingness to try anything at all," says Henry. "She has more courage and more guts than anybody I have ever met."

Born in 1953 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, D'Aquila first exhibited her flair for theatrical risk-taking while she was a high school student in Minneapolis. Stage-struck and dying to be an actress, at age 16, she told her parents she was going to a slumber

party, but instead hopped a northbound train for Montreal where she got accepted to the National Theatre School. Remaining in Canada for most of her early career, in 1973 D'Aquila landed a role in the infamous production of *Clear Light* at the Toronto Free Theatre. The show, written by Michael Hollingsworth, was a psychedelic celebration of sick sexual acts, extreme violence, graphic nudity and a touch of infant cannibalism. The police closed the play after receiving more than 400 complaints from revolted theatregoers -- an impressive statistic given the fact that only 400 people attended the production.

Since then, D'Aquila has acted across the United States and Canada, appearing in many original plays that were not closed by the vice squad, most notably George F. Walker's *Zastrozzi* and *The Art of War*, and Michael Cook's *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*. She has performed in more than 30 film and television projects as well as many Shaw and Stratford productions including, *Oedipus Rex*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Winter's Tale*.



"This is the eighth rep company I've been in," says D'Aquila. "I'm well suited to this. Not all actors are. Some really fine actors, you watch them come, and they'll do a season or two and you can just see them chomping at the bit -- they're not happy because the workload is outrageous."

"Diane works harder than anyone I know," says Martha Henry. "She comes in early. She stays late. She is absolutely 100% there every minute of the time. Before we ever started rehearsals, she and I were reading biographies of Elizabeth I. I read one in great detail. She read seven."

When D'Aquila first came to the part of the script where the Queen removes her wig, she pondered the prospect of baldness long and hard. "It's a bit like being nude in a play," she says. "You have to ask yourself, 'Is this gratuitous? Does it help to tell the story?' Well, in the script, emotionally and in the storytelling it makes sense so I went, 'Guys, I think I'm going to have to shave my head.'"

"Elizabeth, of course, had no hair," says Henry, "so this was something we talked about. Eventually it was Diane's decision. She said she thought she should do it and she did it brilliantly."

Actually, when it came to shaving her head for the first time, D'Aquila could not bring herself to do it -- so she gave the job to her two children. "I gave them each a few dollars, I said go to the corner store and get as much candy as you can muster, invite your

friends and come on back and shave Mother's head. So they did. It was every kid's fantasy, I guess."

The theatre, of course, provided D'Aquila with a hairpiece to wear during the daytime so that she would look "normal." The first wig she was given was a black shoulder-length blunt-cut with bangs. Unfortunately, D'Aquila wears a pair of black-framed glasses during the daytime and was immediately mistaken by one and all for Greek pop star Nana Mouskouri.

"And I said, 'Enough with the Greek jokes. I can't go around looking like Nana Mouskouri.' So we got we got rid of Nana and ordered a new one from a brochure." The new wig was a short kinky 'do called "Tammy." D'Aquila wore "Tammy" for a week until her son, Sam, said, "You know Mom, it looks better without the wig."



Sam's comment caught D'Aquila by surprise. "When you get a 10-year-old boy telling you to get rid of the wig, I think you really should listen," she says. "They tend to be quite honest when it comes to how you present yourself to the world. So soon as he said that, I went, 'Yes, Sam, I think you're right. I think I'll get rid of the wig' -- and, in fact, the moment I said that he absconded with it. I just found it a week ago; it was in his room. He probably hid it from me just to make sure that mother wouldn't wear that silly thing."

D'Aquila's resolution to live out the rest of the year with no hair had an unforeseen consequence, however. Stratford is a small town and before the word got out that she had lost her hair for a play, the townsfolk naturally assumed D'Aquila had lost her hair to cancer.

"They know me around town. I have my little rounds I do at the store and the bank, and people who normally talked very clearly and articulately, all of a sudden their voices got very soft and high. 'Are you all right?' They had the best of intentions, but if I had had cancer, I think with my personality, all these people fawning about would have driven me nuts."

The reaction of ordinary people to the sight of a hairless woman has ignited in D'Aquila what can best be described as an intense sense of Bald Pride. "I don't mind being bald," she says. "It's rather nice, actually. But I'm quite shocked at the prejudice toward people who have no hair. It's not that people are cruel, it's just that they can be so condescending."

"Whenever I see anyone who doesn't have any hair on their head I wave madly. I'm in the car, waving and saying: 'Hey, all you baldies in Stratford! I love you all!'"

<http://members.rogers.com/jtimothy/diane.htm>