

## INTRODUCTION

### Date

*King Richard II* was written in 1595 as the initial play in a sequence planned as three or four plays about the Lancastrian phase of English history. Shakespeare probably had a contract with the playing company formed in 1594, the Chamberlain's Men, in which he was one of the ten shareholders, to provide his players with about two plays a year, one tragedy and one comedy. The history plays – *Richard II*, *Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2 and *Henry V*, together with *Julius Caesar*, all written between 1595 and 1599 – fulfilled Shakespeare's commitment to provide tragedies for the last five years of the sixteenth century.

Besides the circumstantial evidence for the writing of the *Henry IV* plays in 1596–7, which would make 1595 the most likely date for Shakespeare to initiate his sequence of history plays, the debt he almost certainly owed to Daniel's *The Civil Wars* confirms that he started the sequence in 1595. Daniel used Lucan as a model for the opening of his poem (1, 1–2) and Shakespeare echoes Daniel rather than the original Lucan in Carlisle's speech, 4.1.140–1.<sup>1</sup> Examination of the links between the passages confirms the view that Shakespeare borrowed from Daniel rather than the other way about. Daniel's first four books of *The Civil Wars* were registered for publication on 11 October 1594, and were probably on sale some time in the following year. A letter of 3 November 1595 mentions them as one of the currently interesting new works available in London,<sup>2</sup> which suggests a date of publication towards the middle of that year. The fact that Shakespeare on average wrote two plays a year does not mean it took him six months for each play, and in practice it would have been quite possible for him to add Daniel to the list of authorities consulted for *Richard II* at a point well advanced in the play's composition.

That *Richard II* was on stage in 1595 is suggested most clearly in a letter written by Sir Edward Hoby on 7 December of that year. It was addressed to Sir Robert Cecil, son and successor to Elizabeth's chief minister Burghley,<sup>3</sup> and invites him to eat and be entertained:

Sir, findinge that you wer not convenientlie to be in London tomorrow night I am bold to send to knowe whether Teusdaie maybe anie more in your grace to visit poore Channon rowe where as late as it shal please you a gate for your supper shal be open: & K. Richard present

<sup>1</sup> See George M. Logan, 'Lucan–Daniel–Shakespeare: new light on the relation between *The Civil Wars* and *Richard II*', *S. St.* 9 (1976), 121–40.

<sup>2</sup> Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney, 3 November 1595, quoted in Arthur Collins, *Letters and Memorials of State*, 2 vols., 1746, 1, 357. I am indebted for this observation to John Pitcher.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil had been knighted and made a Privy Councillor in 1591. He became Secretary of State in 1596 and succeeded his father as Elizabeth's chief minister when his father died in 1598. If the connections made by some of his contemporaries between Elizabeth and Richard II had any cogency Cecil would have had good reason to be entertained by a performance of Shakespeare's play.

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1 An engraving of Richard II. From Thomas Tymme, *A book... containing the true portraiture of the kings of England* (1597).

him selfe to your vewe. Pardon my boldnes that ever love to be honored with your presence  
nether do I importune more then your occasions may willingly assent unto, in the meanetime &  
ever restinge At your command Edw. Hoby.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 2 vols., 1930, II, 320–1.

The letter is endorsed ‘7 Dec. 1595... readile’. It is possible that Hoby, who collected historical portraits, had a painting to show his guest, and there is no indication which King Richard was intended. But the very lack of precision in specifying which King Richard he meant, together with the known popularity of Shakespeare’s play and the circumstantial evidence for its composition late in 1595, make it most likely that Hoby was offering his guest a specially commissioned evening performance by Shakespeare’s company of one of their newest plays.<sup>1</sup>

A measure of the play’s popularity is the readiness with which its owners, the playing company, released it to the printers in 1597, presumably after its early success on stage had waned. The first edition (Q1) was promptly followed by two further issues in 1598 (Q2 and Q3). It was the first play-text to prove so popular as to warrant three printings in the space of two years, and the second quarto appeared with Shakespeare’s name on its title page, the first time he was acknowledged as the author of one of his plays in print.

Also in 1598 Francis Meres issued his little survey of the arts in England, *Palladis Tamia*, and recorded the view that *Richard II* was foremost amongst the tragedies of the day. In 1600 six passages from the play, three by Gaunt, were anthologised in *England’s Parnassus*. All this evidence for its popularity – Hoby’s command performance, Meres’s praise, the three editions in quick succession and the quotations – makes it likely that Elizabeth was thinking of Shakespeare’s play in particular when she told William Lambarde, the antiquary and Keeper of the Tower of London, in the course of a conversation in 1601 that she was a second Richard II, and that ‘this tragedy was played 40tie times in open streets and houses’.<sup>2</sup> A similar notion that Elizabeth was another Richard led the followers of the Earl of Essex to commission a performance of the play on the eve of the Essex rebellion, 7 February 1601. The relationship of Shakespeare’s play to the current interest in the story of Richard II will be examined below.

1595 was a likely time in Shakespeare’s career as a play-maker for him to launch such a substantial enterprise as the sequence about Lancastrian history. The years from 1590 to 1594 had been an unsettled time for writers, with the playing companies’ fortunes frequently changing as the plague and other discomforts kept them on the move. Shakespeare’s own uncertainty showed in his two attempts to advertise his status as a poet with the carefully supervised printings of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594. Curiously – he was alone in his time in doing so – he seems to have retained the ownership of all his early plays. Every other play-maker sold his texts to the exclusive ownership of the playing companies. Shakespeare’s seem to have travelled with him. The unsettled times meant that Shakespeare’s first sequence of history plays, 1, 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, was performed piecemeal by different companies. The plays were probably never performed as a

<sup>1</sup> The question of what sort of ‘K. Richard’ Hoby had in mind has been the subject of some argument. See David M. Bergeron, ‘The Hoby letter and *Richard II*: a parable of criticism’, *SQ* 26 (1975), 477–80. A. N. Kincaid, *NQ* n.s. 28 (1981), 124–6, suggests that Hoby meant a lost tract by Bishop Morton about Richard III. It is unlikely that anything but a new and newsworthy ‘K. Richard’ would be offered to such a distinguished guest.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers, *Shakespeare*, II, 326–7.

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sequence until he was settled with the Chamberlain's Men, the company he joined when it was formed in mid 1594. He stayed with them for the rest of his working life, and they prospered as no other company ever did. His early plays might well have been the capital with which he bought his share in the new company. The fact that he kept possession of them reflects both his own business acumen and also perhaps his own esteem for his early work. He probably saw the launching of a second sequence of history plays for the new company as both good art and good business.

**History**

By 1595 the Chamberlain's Men were firmly established in a London playhouse, with the protection of the most useful peer at Court, the Lord Chamberlain, to whom the Master of the Revels reported and who organised the Court's entertainments. It was a promising time which openly invited the launching of a second ambitious sequence of plays from English history. That *Richard II* was designed from the start to launch a sequence of plays can hardly be doubted. Young Harry Percy, the Hotspur of *1 Henry IV*, and young Prince Hal are foreshadowed in 2.3 and 5.3 as the antagonists they are to become in the following play. Their opposition involved Shakespeare in more juggling with the facts than he generally allowed himself in *Richard II*, since historically the prince was a whole generation younger than Harry Percy, who was two years older than Bullingbrook, and there was no evidence that the two ever even met, as they are described as doing in 5.3.13–14. It has been suggested that the Hotspur–Hal links in *Richard II* were late insertions made because the idea of a sequence came to Shakespeare only after the play was nearly finished,<sup>1</sup> but that seems unlikely in view of the careful preparation of such other links as the idea of pilgrimages and crusades to the Holy Land. This idea begins in 1.3 of *Richard II* and runs right through to the end of *Henry V*. Jerusalem forms a leitmotif through the whole sequence.

Essentially Shakespeare took the story of the old prophecy that Henry IV would die in Jerusalem and enlarged its frame of reference. It is mentioned by Holinshed, Shakespeare's main source for the whole sequence, only in the account of Henry's death, where it is offered with some scepticism. Daniel also refers to the story, though again only over Henry's death, and otherwise merely laments what might have been done by a united Christendom if Henry V's claim to France had been more substantial. Shakespeare makes it a recurrent question for Henry IV and his son. At the beginning of *1 Henry IV* Bullingbrook, now firmly Henry IV, refers to Cain's fratricide in the book of Genesis, with its evil precedent for the murder of his cousin Richard, and proposes not the expiatory pilgrimage to the Holy Land which he promises at the end of *Richard II* but a crusade (1.1.19–27). By the end of *2 Henry IV*, when he is about to die in the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster, he bequeaths the task to his son, still as a crusade but now with the expedient purpose of keeping the nobles occupied, 'to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels' (4.5.213–14). In *Henry V*

<sup>1</sup> Guy Lambrechts, 'Sur deux prétendues sources de *Richard II*', *Etudes Anglaises* 20 (1967), 118–39.

the new king demotes the crusade still further into a campaign against his Christian neighbour France. After Agincourt he in his turn bequeaths the crusade, in characteristically flamboyant fashion, to his son. With more than a hint of his father's expediency he tells his French bride

if ever thou beest mine, Kate, as I have a saving faith within me tells me thou shalt, I get thee with scrambling, and thou must therefore needs prove a good soldier breeder. Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople to take the Turk by the beard? (H5 5.2.203–10)

Henry's implication is that the scrambling and disordered circumstances by which he secured his title to France are likely to demand yet more, though conveniently Christian, foreign quarrels in the future.

All these allusions are prepared for in *Richard II*. As the initiating play in the sequence it carefully presents both kinds of journey to Jerusalem, pilgrimage and crusade. Gaunt speaks of Richard's ancestors as royal crusaders (2.1.51–6), contrasting the wasteful king of peace with his militant namesake Richard I, the Lion-heart. Richard, who calls himself a lion at 1.1.174 and is exhorted by his queen to behave like one at 5.1.29–30, sets himself at 3.3.151 in the opposite role, offering to exchange his sceptre for 'a palmer's walking staff'. Palmers were pilgrims who had made the journey to Jerusalem. By contrast Mowbray, whom Bullingbrook describes along with himself as a pilgrim, ends his life of exile as a crusader according to Carlisle's account at 4.1.92–5. Mowbray and Bullingbrook are described as making a pilgrimage to death at 1.3.49. They both go on what Bullingbrook calls the 'enforcèd pilgrimage' of exile (1.3.263), a living equivalent of the journey to death which Gaunt (1.3.228–9) and Richard (2.1.154) describe as a pilgrimage. Mowbray's enforced pilgrimage turns into a crusade, while Bullingbrook wishes to convert his crusade at the end of the play (5.6.49–50) into a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to expiate his guilt over Richard's murder. That wish changes at the beginning of *1 Henry IV* into a crusade.

There are several verbal hints which link the alternatives of the militant journey to Jerusalem and the peaceable pilgrimage with the opposition between Christian patience and militancy in resisting an unlawful king. This is the underlying point of the leitmotif in the first play. Bullingbrook gives as the motive for his appeal against Mowbray in 1.1 the urge to revenge the murder of his kinsman Gloucester. Citing Cain's murder of Abel, Bullingbrook proposes to take vengeance with his own hand, not leaving it, as required in Genesis, to God. The scene which follows between Gloucester's widow and his brother Gaunt reinforces the point, since Gaunt's choice, Christian patience, is the opposite of his son's (it is also the opposite of the motivation given to the Gaunt of the anonymous play *Woodstock*, another of Shakespeare's sources). Gloucester's widow urges vengeance but Gaunt insists on the Christian posture. Precisely the same choice is put to Richard by his Queen in 5.1.26–34, and Bullingbrook's allusion to Abel is also balanced by his order in 5.6 that Richard's murderer should be exiled like Cain. Bullingbrook by the end of the play is, through his intermediary Exton, a murderer of his kinsman as was Richard at the beginning through his intermediary Mowbray. It is Cain's crime which first turns Bullingbrook



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to thoughts of Jerusalem. Similarly, Aumerle's request in 4.1 for a gage from 'some honest Christian' to allow more duelling challenges (83), and Carlisle's hope that England is 'a Christian climate' (130), together with Richard's claim in 5.1.20–5 that he is 'sworn brother' to necessity – a brotherhood simultaneously of chivalry and a monastic order – are other hints of the radical choice between prayer and the sword in the service of truth. Carlisle's prophecy in 4.1 about what will happen to the Christian climate if the sacred power of majesty is overturned with the sword is that 'peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels' (139). The Christian patience invoked by Gaunt at 1.2.29 and 33–4 and by his brother York at 2.1.207 was the only choice offered, by the Homilies and the apologists for the crown, to the problem of an unjust king.<sup>1</sup> This issue, counterpoising pilgrimage against crusade, runs through all the sequence of history plays. The growth of expediency in the idea of a crusade is one of the many changes which the sequence traces.

Shakespeare launched a sequence which covered seventeen years of English history, from the contest between Bullingbrook and Mowbray in 1398 to the aftermath of Agincourt in 1415. The subject of the first play, however, the deposition of Richard II, had a special political interest in the 1590s which the later plays were free of, and *Richard II* had some trouble with the censors as a result. The interest developed out of a comparison between the position of Richard, surrounded by bad counsellors and lacking a direct heir, and Elizabeth. In the 1580s and 1590s the comparison was used to score political points chiefly about advice from favourites, but in the 1590s deposition also came into the question.<sup>2</sup> Towards the turn of the century it began to focus on the Earl of Essex.

Essex's distant ancestor was the Duke of Gloucester, youngest son of Edward III and Richard's victim. An anonymous play, *Woodstock*, which seems to have been chiefly composed in 1592–3, elevates Gloucester (also known as Thomas of Woodstock) into a plain truth-telling hero, the leading opponent and victim of Richard's flatterers.<sup>3</sup> In 1595 Daniel was more open and wrote a direct address to Essex at the end of Book 11 of *The Civil Wars*, calling him a leader capable of supplying better material for a poem than Bullingbrook.<sup>4</sup> Finally in the years following the staging of Shakespeare's play the historian Sir John Hayward wrote *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII* dealing substantially with Richard's deposition. Published in February 1599, it was dedicated to Essex as 'futuri temporis expectatione', a term suitable for an heir apparent to the throne. This was too much for Elizabeth, who not only accepted the identification of herself with Richard II but was acutely hostile to any open speculation about her successor. The Parliamentarian Peter Wentworth was already in the Tower for publishing a pamphlet arguing that James VI of Scotland was the heir with the best claim. Hayward's book was censored and its dedication removed. When the abortive Essex coup did take place, on 8 February 1601, both

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3, p. 231 below.

<sup>2</sup> See Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's 'Histories': Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*, 1947, pp. 168–94. The connections between the play and the Essex conspiracy were debated by Evelyn M. Albright and Ray Heffner in *PMLA* 42 (1927), 45 (1930), 46 (1931) and 47 (1932).

<sup>3</sup> See A. P. Rossiter (ed.), *Woodstock: A Moral History*, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2, p. 208 below.

Hayward and Shakespeare's company were drawn into the trial which followed because of the publicity they had given to Richard's deposition.

Hayward's book was used in evidence against Essex, both in his trial over the failure of his 1599 campaign in Ireland and subsequently at his trial for treason. Hayward was put in the Tower in 1600 and remained there until after Elizabeth's death. The other publicists, Shakespeare's company, got off more lightly. Essex was said at Hayward's trial to have frequently attended performances of the play and to have applauded it warmly.<sup>1</sup> On the day before the coup his followers persuaded the company to stage the play once more, presumably as propaganda for their plans. According to Augustine Phillips, the player who testified on their behalf at the trial, the company objected that the play was now 'so old and so long out of use that they should have small or no company at it'.<sup>2</sup> The Essex conspirators agreed to pay an additional £2 to the players, and the play was performed. There is no certain evidence that the performance was of Shakespeare's play, but since it was a play 'of King Henry the Fourth, and of the killing of Richard the second',<sup>3</sup> it seems the most likely of the possible candidates and was certainly in the company's repertoire. In the event the players were cleared of any suspicion of complicity and went unpunished.

One other small piece of evidence about finding parallels in Shakespeare's play to contemporary political events is worth noting, because it emphasises the extent to which the parallels were in the eye of the beholder. Everard Guilpin, a young Inns-of-Court gallant, a satirist and frequenter of Shakespeare's company in the days when they performed at the Curtain, 1597–8, evidently knew *Richard II* quite well. In an epigram in *Skialetheia* (Sat. 1, sig. C3<sup>v</sup>) he adapted the account at 1.4.25–34 of Bullingbrook's journey into exile and his humble manner in order to make it fit Essex, very much to his disadvantage.

For when great *Foelix* passing through the street,  
 Vayleth his cap to each one he doth meet,  
 And when no broom-man that will pray for him  
 Shall have less truage than his bonnets brim,  
 Who would not think him perfect curtesy?  
 Or the honey suckle of humility?  
 The devil he is as soone...

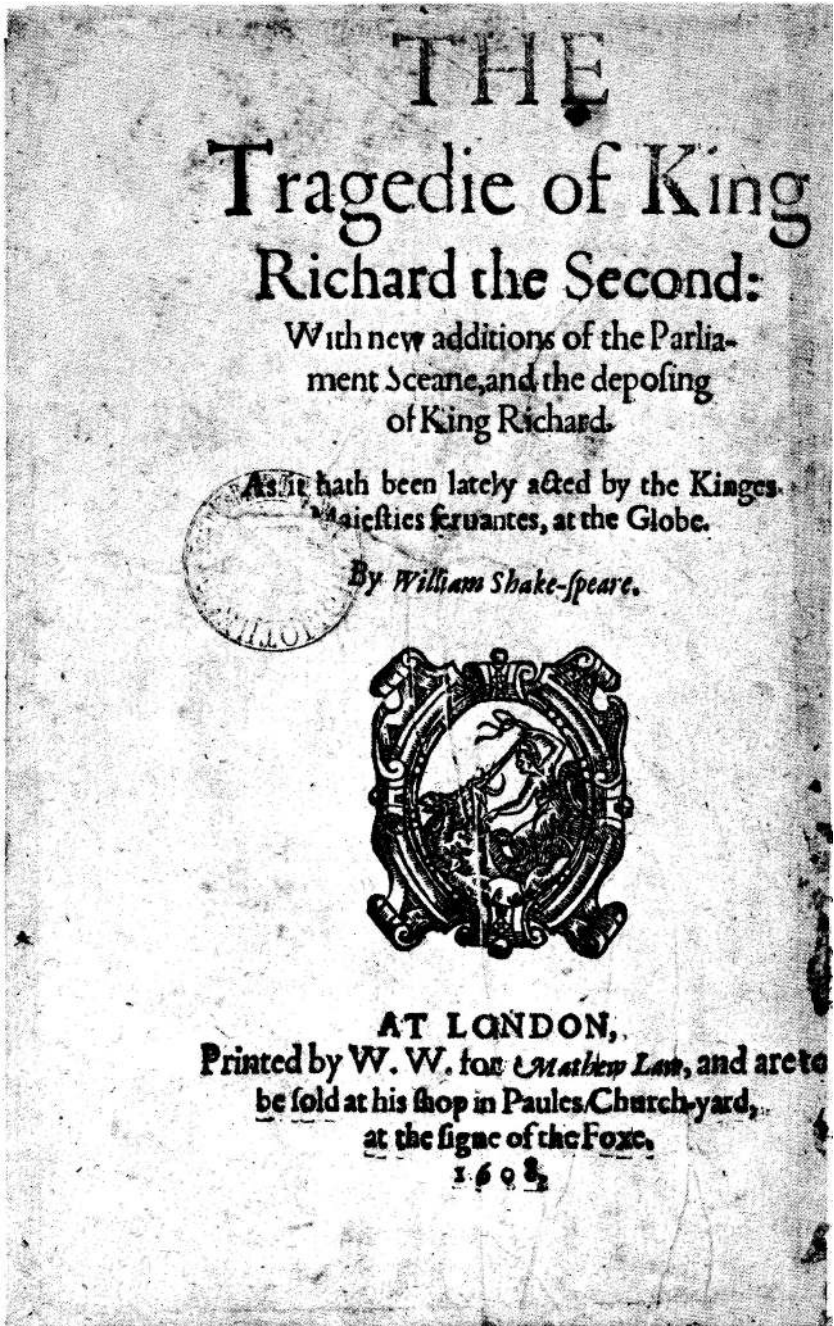
He is ambitious, and 'Signor Machiavell / Taught him this mumming trick.' If Elizabeth was Richard, then the earl was Bullingbrook. What Guilpin did was to adapt Shakespeare's Bullingbrook to fit contemporary Essex.<sup>4</sup> It confirms Elizabeth's own identification of herself with the deposed king, and makes Shakespeare's explicit reference to Essex in the prologue to Act 5 of *Henry V*, written in the summer of 1599 when Essex was campaigning in Ireland, seem almost like an apology for his identification with Bullingbrook.

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of State Papers (Dom.) 1598–1601*, pp. 435–6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 575.

<sup>4</sup> An attack on Walter Raleigh in 1603 described Essex as Bullingbrook even more precisely: 'Renowned Essex, as he past the streets, / Would vaile his bonnet to an oyster wife.' J. O. Halliwell (ed.), *Poetical Miscellanies*, 1845, p. 17.



2 The title page of the fourth quarto, the Malone copy, advertising the addition of the deposition scene.



Guilpin's association of Bullingbrook with Essex is no guarantee that most audiences made the same identification, and in any case it is emphatically a hostile parallel. It was rather the underlying parallelism than anything in the content of the play itself which attracted attention. Nevertheless it confirms that the subject of the play was politically sensitive. It undoubtedly did attract the attention of the queen's censors. The editions published in Elizabeth's lifetime all lack the central deposition scene from 4.1.

The deposition scene poses several problems. It was evidently deleted from the early printed quartos as an act of censorship, but whether the same censorship affected the performed text is not known. Matthew Law, who first published the deposition scene in the fourth quarto (Q4) in 1608, was evidently not given access to any original manuscript, and relied on a transcription at least some of which was probably dictated and infected by memories of the staged version. That of course implies that the scene was appearing on stage in 1608. Possibly Law asked the players to supply him with a transcript once the censorship was lifted. The company certainly had a reasonable copy of their own, since a better version than the Q4 text was fitted into the edited copy of the third quarto (Q3, 1598) which the Folio printers used for the great collected edition of the plays in 1623. Perhaps the stage version of the play never lost the deposition scene, so that the playhouse always had a full version of the text. The supporters of Essex who commissioned the performance of the play which we assume to be Shakespeare's would have had much more reason to want it if they knew it contained the scene in which Richard hands over his crown to the new king. But there is unfortunately no clear indication whether the deposition scene stayed in the performed text when it was deleted from the printed versions, or alternatively whether it was deleted from the performed text in 1595 and restored after Elizabeth died in 1603.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole the latter of these alternatives is the less likely, if only because it would have required very positive action by the players. First they would need to have retained the censored scene in the expectation that at some future time they might be allowed to restore it, and then once they were free to do so they would have had first to secure fresh permission from the censor, then write it back not only into the prompt-book and the 'plot' which hung in the playhouse recording entries, exits and properties used, but also into the players' 'parts' which were usually transcribed as soon as the text had been 'allowed' by the censor. The pattern of censorship in play-texts moreover was quite different from that of the censors of printed books. The bishops who descended on the verse satirists in 1599,<sup>2</sup> the Archbishop of Canterbury in particular, had a sharp and sophisticated eye for anything dangerous in theology or

<sup>1</sup> David Bergeron has conjectured that the deposition scene was not written until after 1601. The only evidence is negative, however. It would be more plausible if there were a real reason for the scene to have been created so late and so specially. See David Bergeron, 'The deposition scene in *Richard II*, *Renaissance Papers* (1974), 31–7. It is not inconceivable that the 'woeful pageant' as Westminster calls it (4.1.320) is alluded to by Duke Senior in *AYLI* before Jacques's 'All the world's a stage' speech. The Duke says 'This wide and universal theatre / Presents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play in.'

<sup>2</sup> See Richard A. McCabe, 'Elizabethan satire and the Bishops' ban of 1599', *Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981), 188–94.

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politics. Their record in the last years of Elizabeth is a tribute to their sensitivity. Not so the censor of stage-plays. Edmund Tilney's record as censor is undistinguished, and that of his understudy from 1597 and eventual successor, George Buc, not much stronger. In the month when *Richard II* was entered in the Stationers' Register for printing, August 1597, *The Isle of Dogs* got several players and poets (not of Shakespeare's company) imprisoned and the play suppressed because it contained 'seditious' material. But sedition to the various Masters of the Revels was rarely anything much more dangerous than insults to foreign countries which had powerful ambassadors at Court. In the case of *The Isle of Dogs* it seems to have been the Polish ambassador.<sup>1</sup> An astonishing amount of political comment or display seems to have been acceptable. The censorship of plays hardened a little under James, but this was partly because James himself took a closer interest in plays and sponsored the 1606 act against stage profanity. The different records of the two kinds of censor make it entirely possible that a scene not acceptable to the bishops might be allowed by the Master of the Revels. If so, of course, the force of the contemporary parallels must have been less widely felt than Elizabeth and the Court politicians assumed.<sup>2</sup>

The restoration of a cut made through censorship in a performed text would have been unique, so far as we know, in the history of the drama at this time. For that admittedly circumstantial reason it seems likely that the deposition scene never was cut from the stage version. Its survival on stage would have given Matthew Law an impetus to secure leave to print it in 1608 which he might not have had if audiences were accustomed to the cut version. It was politically sensitive and therefore a good advertisement for Law's quarto. But it was not as explosive as Essex's followers thought.

**Sources**

Writing history even for such a populist medium as the stage, or turning it into epic poetry as Daniel set out to do, was a major undertaking in Tudor times, and Shakespeare took pains with his material. His primary source was the second edition (1587) of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, which covers the period of the play in about 24 double-column folio pages. He also made use of the anonymous play *Woodstock* for the first two acts dealing with Richard's injustices, and almost certainly consulted Berners's translation of Froissart's *Chronicle*, besides Daniel's *The Civil Wars*. It is possible that he also looked at Edward Halle's

<sup>1</sup> So E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols., 1923, III, 455. William Ingram, *A London Life in the Brazen Age*, 1978, pp. 179–84, gives the circumstantial evidence about the *Isle of Dogs* issue.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1609 edition of *The Civil Wars* Daniel wrote in the Epistle Dedicatorie: 'this Argument was long since undertaken (in a time which was not so well secur'd of the future, as God be blessed now it is with a purpose), to shewe the deformities of Civile Dissension, and the miserable events of Rebellions, Conspiracies, and bloody Revengements, which followed (as in a circle) upon that breach of the due course of Succession, by the Usurpation of Hen. 4'. Bacon also raised the political issues relating to the deposition in 1615 (*Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, 7 vols., 1864, v, 145). Shakespeare had already dramatised the question as an irresolvable dynastic and legal tangle in *3H6*. The two sides of the question are given concisely in 1.1.132–50 by Henry, Bullingbrook's grandson, and York, Richard's descendant.