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*Reflections of Contemporary Socio-political and Religious Controversies in
William Shakespeare's
Henry IV Parts I and 2, Henry V and Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3*

by
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Abstract

While the general idea is to illustrate how William Shakespeare reflected the contemporary conflicts and problems of the Elizabethan society, the particular aim of the thesis is to offer a close critical analysis of Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* and *Part 2*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI Part I*, *Part 2* and *Part 3* plays in an eclectic critical approach derived from the theoretical principles of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. In order to provide a better understanding of the plays studied in the thesis, there is a presentation of the development of drama, both religious and secular, in the Reformation period. In addition to this, main features of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism are given. The English Reformation and its effects on drama have been given in the introductory chapter. In the first chapter, contemporary religious controversies as reflected in Shakespeare's *1 and 2 Henry VI* plays are discussed. The second chapter deals with the reflections of contemporary social conflicts in especially the Jack Cade episode of Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*. In the third chapter, reflections of political conflicts in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *Henry V*, and *Henry VI* plays are analysed in terms of the appropriation of commoners by the ruling class for the preservation of the dominant order. The thesis concludes that the plays are polyvalent in meaning and thus open to further academic discussions for the years to come.

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***REFLECTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-POLITICAL AND
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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
Reformation: The Church.....	5
The English Reformation and Drama.....	9
Traditional Criticism	33
Cultural Materialism and New Historicism.....	41
Chapter I: Reflections of Contemporary Religious Controversies: Shakespeare's <i>1</i> and <i>2Henry VI</i>	50
Chapter II: Reflections of Contemporary Social Conflicts: Shakespeare's Jack Cade Rebellion	68
The Social Setting: London Between the Years 1580 and 1602.....	68
Reflections of Contemporary Social Conflicts and Shakespeare's Jack Cade Rebellion	77
Chapter III: Reflections of the Contemporary Political Conflicts:	98
Conclusion	113
Bibliography	116

INTRODUCTION

The Tudor state intentionally and systematically produced a national culture which would express, confirm and naturalise its own power and the literature, particularly the chronicles and the drama written in this period played an important role in promoting this intention. Such patriotic prose chronicles as those by Raphael Holinshed (1577) and John Stow (1580); or verse chronicles by William Warner (1586) and the additions of 1587 to the *Mirror for Magistrates*; and works such as Richard Hakluyd's *The Principall Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589-1600) were written with a possible aim of raising a consciousness for national unity by rewriting past events and emphasising the glory of Tudor Dynasty.

Similarly, the Elizabethan drama can be seen, not as the reflection or expression of a pre-existent national culture, but as a systematically constructed national culture, stemming from an ideology based on national unity and designed to confirm the state's authority. The gradual and deliberate centralization of cultural power, along with political power, constituted a national ideology which reflected the national sovereignty of the state.¹ The initial requirement for the centralization of power was the creation of a sentiment of nationhood and political unity, which had already begun with the political and religious break with Rome during the reign of Henry VIII. Furthermore, during the Elizabethan period, this same sense of national unity was strengthened by

¹ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 122.

Queen Elizabeth's excommunication² by the papal bull of 1570. The aim of the bull was to bring to the throne Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots who was a catholic by faith. Ironically, the excommunication of the Queen contributed greatly to the sentiment of nationhood and political unity as English people rallied to their queen and she almost became a symbol of Englishness and nationalism.

Another factor that contributed to the growing sentiment of national unity in the Elizabethan period was the threat of Spanish invasion which culminated in the launching of the Great Armada in 1588. It was destroyed by a violent storm even before it got to the shores of England. The defeat of the Armada refreshed the already existent sentiment of national unity among the English, as they perceived it as an act of God who seemed to be on their side.

In line with the growing sense of national unity and the strong desire to praise Tudor power, facilitated by the above mentioned two factors there seems to begin an interest in the writing of history plays which appear to have met the popular demand on the part of the playgoing public for the satisfaction of their national sentiments. There is no doubt about the popularity of history plays during, roughly, the last quarter of the sixteenth century. From (c. 1586), the estimated date of composition of the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry V* to the early years of James I, when they began to disappear, the number of history plays "accounted for more than a fifth of the plays written, sharing the popularity of 'the multiform romantic drama' with which they overlapped."³

² For more information about the papal bull that excommunicated Elizabeth, see for example, Henry Bettenson ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 240-241.

³ L. G. Salinger, 'The Elizabethan Literary Renaissance', in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by Borris Ford (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 51-118 (p. 62).

William Shakespeare, Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, and Michael Drayton were among the major contributors to this vogue.

William Shakespeare's contribution to the long series of national chronicle plays is especially important since nine out of the eighteen plays he produced in the first decade of his career (c. 1590-1599) were histories. The Elizabethan verdict on the popularity of Shakespeare's *1Henry VI* was written down by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, a pamphleteer and a playwright, Thomas Nashe. After seeing a stage performance of *1Henry VI*, Thomas Nashe, wrote: "How it would haue ioyed braue *Talbot* (the terror of the French) to thinke that ... hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and haue his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least, (at seuerall times) who ... imagine they behold him fresh bleeding."⁴ Moreover, it is also known that the three parts of *King Henry VI* plays were performed seventeen times between the years 1592-1593.⁵ The popularity of *King Henry IV* plays is apparent in the epilogue of *2Henry IV* where the audience is promised that "our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France" (27-29).⁶ It seems that the popularity of *Henry IV*

⁴ As quoted in 'Introduction' to William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part 1*, ed. by Andrew S. Cairncross, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1962; repr. London: Routledge, 1995), from *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by R. B. McKerrow, 2nd edn, rev. by F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), I, p. 212.

⁵ For the stage performances of the plays between the years 1576-1613, see, *The Revels: History of English Drama*, vol. III, 1576-1613, ed. J. Leeds Barroll et al. (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 61-65.

⁶ William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part II*, ed. by A. R. Humphreys, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1966; repr. London: Routledge, 1994). All citations of the play are from this edition.

plays encouraged Shakespeare to inform his spectators of yet another history play he had been planning, *Henry V*.

The aim of this thesis is to first introduce how the state control affected dramatic activities during the Reformation period and then present a critical reading of Shakespeare's *1 and 2Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *1, 2 and 3Henry VI* plays in relation to their topicality, in the sense that they reflect contemporary religious, social and socio-political conflicts in the Elizabethan society. The method used in the critical reading of these plays will be an eclectic approach derived from the theoretical principles set by New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. The traditional "historical" and "literary" criticism of Shakespeare's history plays, which dominated the discussions of the plays for many years, will also be referred to.

In order to have a full understanding of the importance of socio-political and religious developments in the shaping of history plays it is necessary to give an account of these developments.

Reformation: The Church

The term 'Reformation' refers to a set of historical events: a theological attack on Roman Catholic doctrine, the abolition of papal authority, the reduction of priestly power, the suppression of monasteries and chantries, the abolition of the mass, the introduction of simplified Protestant worship, the enforcement of Protestant ideas, the conversion of people from Catholic to Protestant loyalties.

Such events did not come as pre-planned programme. They came “as the accidents of everyday politics and the consequences of power struggles.”⁷

In some European countries especially in some cities of Germany and Switzerland, the Reformation came with enthusiasm and violence; people cast down images and altars and even smashed them. In England, however, the change was fragmentary. There was a long tradition of dissidence with the established church in England going back to 14th century in the form of Lollardy. The Lollards had a desire to return to a simpler Christianity purged of the trappings of worldly institutions. They emphasised the primal authority of Scripture made accessible by translation into English: hence their nickname, the ‘Bible-men’.⁸ Despite the strict measures and harsh executions, ideas and teachings of John Wycliffe continued to exist through the centuries until they began to merge with the rising forces of Protestantism in the time of King Henry VIII. In the 16th century, there was a twenty-year gap between the first attack on Church jurisdiction in 1532 to the first Protestant church service in 1552; “and then it was almost all undone by Queen Mary. Only in 1559 did an English regime opt for a full Reformation, and still there were theological, liturgical, and legal loose ends to be tied up.”⁹

⁷ See, for example, Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 13.

⁸ C. Babington ed, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* 2 vols. (RS, 1860), I. p. xxii.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Christopher Haigh argues that “English Reformations¹⁰ were about changing minds as well as changing laws, but it was the changing of laws which made the changing of minds possible.” England would have had a different religious history if its rulers had not decided to break with Rome, and finally to break with Catholicism. However, a Protestant movement would still have taken place without the backing of the state; there was a Protestant movement before it got the backing of the state. But, as Haigh adds, “it is hard to see how it could have captured the Church without the state’s endorsement.”¹¹

There were a number of Acts that made it treasonable to interfere with the succession to the throne as established from time to time by statute. Recognition of the sovereignty of the Pope, as well as performing other acts hostile to the religious settlement was also made treasonable. The treason Act of 1534 during Henry VIII’s reign “formalized the notion that treason could be committed through written or spoken words, as well as through overt actions.”¹²

The promotion of Protestantism was achieved through various ways. One of them was the printed word. “The Reformation is virtually unimaginable without the invention of the printing press, and from the mid sixteenth century England was flooded with books on reformed religion and, of course, editions of

¹⁰ Haigh uses the plural here in order to point to the diversity of English Reformations that were more than just imports of Lutheran religious ideas flourishing on the continent. He argues that “the religious changes of sixteenth-century England were far too complex to be bound together as ‘the Reformation’, too complex even to be ‘a Reformation’”(p. 14). England had discontinuous Reformations in which there were both political and religious Reformations, at times, inseparable from one another.

¹¹ Ibid., p.20.

¹² Ibid., p. 108.

the bible itself.”¹³ Many books written in order to defame Catholicism were supported by illustrations. These illustrations were necessary, of course, to be able to reach the less educated or uneducated people on the streets. John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563) gave the most famous account of the persecutions of Protestants. This work was the source of the popular conception of Roman Catholics for generations of English people. Its accuracy was attacked and a second edition, corrected by Foxe, was published in 1563 under the title *Ecclesiastical History, Contayning the Actes and Monuments of Things Passed in Every Kynges Tyme*. In 1570 the Anglican Convocation ordered this edition to be placed in every collegiate church in England. The aim of the book was to “expose the persecutions and ‘horrible troubles ... wrought by the Romish prelates’.”¹⁴ Some woodcut illustrations were used in the book to supplement the text. One of them showed Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London under Queen Mary, who was considered to be an ardent papist and career politician, beating heretic prisoners with his own hands. In the picture, an abbreviated caption and his tonsured head signal his name and religion.

Another medium was preaching: the Protestant notion of a preaching ministry was central to the objective of bringing the true word of God to the population at large. After the 1570s, when it became apparent even to enthusiastic Protestants that encouraging godliness was going to take time, instructing people about religion in the form of questions and answers also achieved a vital role. This was called “catechising” and it was seen as a handy

¹³ J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760*, (London: Arnold, 1987) p. 234.

¹⁴ *The Cambridge Cultural History: Sixteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Boris Ford, 9 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1992), III, p. 257.

means of instructing in right religion, especially the young, and a much less risky method of bringing people to the true light than bible reading. Disciplining the people was also emphasised, not least through the ecclesiastical and secular courts.¹⁵

The English Reformation and Drama

Although the English Reformation has its roots in the late 14th, and 15th centuries, it is during the reign of Henry VIII that government took first steps to control religious drama. Before Henry VIII's reign, religious drama was in the hands of the clergy and within the confines of the church both physically and administratively. Thus, the plays were disciplined by the Church whenever necessary.¹⁶ However, when Miracle and Mystery Plays started to be performed outside the Church precincts, they became subject to secular as well as ecclesiastical authority as illustrated in the bans and proclamations for the Chester Cycle:

Wherefore maister mair in the kynges name straitly chargeth and commaundeth that euery person and persons of what astate degre or condicion so euer he or they be resortyng to the said plaiez do use themselues pecible without makyng eny assault affrey or other disturbans wherby the same playes shallbe disturbed and that no maner person or persons who so euer he or they be do use or weyre unlafulf wepons whitin the precynct of the said Citie during the thyme of the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Norman Sanders, 'The Social and Historical Context', in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. 2, 1500-1576, ed. by Norman Sanders et. al., (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 1-67 (pp. 7-8). The Bishop of Hereford's proclamation of an order in 1348 illustrates the disciplining of the plays by the Church: "Whereas many of the plays performed in churches contain evil jesting forbidden by the Apostle at any time, and especially unbecoming in the house of the Lord, and further, the devotions of the faithful are disturbed by these exhibitions, the bishop desires to root them out of the diocese, and formally forbids them in the church of L ..., where they have been frequent, under penalty of excommunication." Quoted in G. Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. II, Pt 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 55.

said playes not only upon payn of cursyng by thauctoritie of the said Pope Clement bulles but also upon payne of enprisonment of their bodiez and makyng fyne to the king at maister mairs pleasure.¹⁷

There was a gradual increase of governmental pressure on the producers of religious drama even before Henry VIII's divorce from Katherine of Aragon and the actual break with Rome. The playlet of the Assumption of the Virgin was suppressed at Chester probably as early as 1515; all the plays at Ipswich were 'laid aside' in 1518, 1519 and 1521; a mandate was brought to the barons of the town at New Romney by the Sergeant of the Warden of the Cinque Ports indicating that they must not permit the playing of the Passion of Christ until they had the king's leave; and the plays at Beverly are not mentioned after 1520.¹⁸ These records, as Norman Sanders points out, "bear witness not only to the government's reformist attitudes but also to the continuing centralizing tendency of Henry's reign."¹⁹ By 1531 Henry VIII, having substituted his own authority for that of the Pope, also assumed "complete rather than merely secular control of the cycles."²⁰ He was excommunicated in July 1533, and his leadership of the English church was confirmed by Act of Parliament in January 1534-5. The effects of Henry's break with Rome and his subsequent assumption of supreme authority over the English Church were immediate for the religious drama of England. In 1532 the town clerk of Chester made alterations to the document used annually for advertising the local Cycle of Miracle Plays. He

¹⁷ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. I, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p.343.

¹⁸ Norman Sanders, 'The Social and Historical Context', p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

deleted “from the banns and proclamations all reference to papal control of the audience; and at Ipswich the city play was ‘laide aside for ever by order’.”²¹

During the reign of Henry VIII, reformers such as Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and politicians such as the Lord Chancellor Thomas Cromwell knew the power of drama in the promotion of Protestantism against Catholicism. Henry himself had “enormously enjoyed dramatic representations of his defiance of the Pope.”²² The Spanish Ambassador Chappuys relates how Henry VIII walked a distance of ten miles to see a show based on a chapter of the Apocalypse. Once he was there, he concealed himself in a house to watch the performance without being seen by the public, but he became so delighted with seeing “himself represented as cutting off the hands of the clergy, that in order to laugh at his ease, and encourage the people he disclosed himself.”²³ As E. K. Chambers points out, Henry VIII secretly encouraged questionings of papal authority while openly condemning them.²⁴ Archbishop Cranmer’s interest in Protestant drama is proved by his being the dedicatee of the most remarkable propagandist play in 1538, Thomas Kirchmayer’s *Pammachius*,²⁵ in which the Antichrist character was identified with the Pope. When *Pammachius* was performed by the students

²¹ Ibid., p. 9. See also G. Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. II, Pt 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 15, and *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. I, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 342-343.

²² Norman Sanders, ‘The Social and Historical Context’, p15.

²³ As quoted in Norman Sanders, ‘The Social and Historical Context’, p.16., from *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*. Ed. by J. S. Brewer, (London, 1862-1918), vol. XIV, Pt I, pp. 22-23.

²⁴ E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), p. 220.

²⁵ *Pammachius* was an example of Antichrist plays the tradition of which goes back to the 12th century. The Antichrist plays belonged to a dramatic tradition which related human to divine history. They take up as the theme the legend of the false messiah who sends Hypocrisy and Heresy to corrupt the laity and clergy while the rulers of Europe fight vainly against him, until the Antichrist is finally destroyed by divine fire. See Lois Potter, ‘The Plays and the Playwrights’, in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. II, 1500-1576, ed. by Norman Sanders et. al., (London: Methuen, 1980), p.182. See also E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), p. 217-218.

of Christ's College at Cambridge University in 1537, Bishop Gardiner, the Chancellor of the university found some parts of the play "soo pestiferous as were intolerable."²⁶ However, the full-scale, government directed theatrical attack on papistry came into existence with Cromwell's employment of John Bale. Bale, as an actor-playwright:

Had a long career of heretical activity even while he was still in holy orders. When a Catholic prior he had openly mocked the idea of transubstantiation, he left his order and married; and his own congregation in Thornton, Suffolk, had indicted him for his radical beliefs.²⁷

Bale wrote his *King John* under the influence of Kirchmayer's *Pammachius*, of which he was the translator. *King John* was performed at Archbishop Cranmer's house at Christmas 1538-9. The chief Antichrist figure in the play was Seditio, a political figure, who uses the disguise, and the help, of the churchmen to accomplish his ends. The propagandist moment in the play occurs at the end, when, after the death of John, the three estates are confronted by a new character called Imperial Majesty, presumably Henry VIII.²⁸ The play treats the Papacy as a foreign political institution trying to dominate the English State and overthrow divinely sanctioned monarchical authority. Paul Whitfield White argues that the play reflects the Crown's wish to extend propaganda against the Papacy in order to "sway public opinion against Rome."²⁹ In an account of a trial after one of the performances of *King John*, John Alforde, who had seen the play, was so much

²⁶ E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. II, p. 220.

²⁷ Norman Sanders, 'The Social and Historical Context', p.16. About the famous people who were concerned with "the suppression of the Pope and all popish idolatry", see John Foxe *Acts and Monuments of the Church*, vol. 5 (London, 1838), p. 403.

²⁸ Lois Potter, 'The Plays and the Playwrights', pp.183-184.

²⁹ Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 27.

persuaded by it that he said, “It was a pity that the bishop of Rome should reign any longer, for he would do with our King as he did with King John”; and Thomas Brown expressed, “King John was as noble a prince as ever was in England, and thereby we might perceive that he was the beginner of the putting down of the bishop of Rome, and thereof we might all be glad.”³⁰ Bale’s other play, *Three Laws* follows the same line as *Pammachius*. In the play, God establishes his three laws: the Law of Nature, the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. These correspond to the three persons of the Trinity and the three ages of human history. Infidelity the Vice and his two helpers corrupt each of the three Laws until God finally punishes sin and restores the Laws to their original purity. In his note on costume, Bale gives the name of Vice both to Infidelity and to his followers whose names—Idolatry, Sodomy, Ambition, Avarice, False Doctrine and Hypocrisy—are all associated with Roman Catholicism.³¹

Such plays, being government-commissioned, reflected the official view of the Catholic Church. Of course there were other plays, such as the popular interludes that simply echoed the aspects of current religious ideas. However, the significance of the drama’s role in the English Reformation seems obvious from the indications that John Bale even designed a Protestant mystery cycle to replace its Catholic counterparts. The surviving fragments of it – *God’s Promises, John the Baptist* and *The Temptation of Our Lord* – “suggest that the

³⁰ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*. Ed. by J. S. Brewer, (London, 1862-1918), vol. XIV, Pt I, pp. 22-23. See also, Paul Whitfield White, p. 29.

³¹ Lois Potter, ‘The Plays and the Playwrights’, p. 183.

main emphasis was to be on the personal virtue of Christ and salvation through faith.”³²

Government-oriented propagandist drama of the period came to an end with Henry’s reversal of his religious policy in 1540.³³ Henry married Anne of Cleves from Germany in 1540 in order to create alliances with German Lutheran States so that he could counterbalance a perceived threat to England from Roman Catholic France and the Holy Roman Empire. Henry’s chief minister Thomas Cromwell arranged the marriage. However, Henry was extremely disappointed by Anne’s appearance. When the joint threat from France and the Holy Roman Empire failed to materialize Henry divorced Anne and abandoned the Lutheran alliance. Cromwell, who had arranged the marriage with Anne, fell from favour and was executed in 1540. Cromwell’s execution resulted in the disbanding of Bale’s troupe and the Playwright’s own exile. With the accession of Edward VI to English throne the break with Rome became full-scale Protestantism. Within a few weeks of his accession to throne, he repealed his father’s Act of 1543, which had allowed the performance of all religious plays on condition that they did not attempt to interpret the Scripture.³⁴ This repeal gave a great opportunity to the Protestant propagandist playwrights to criticise in their performances the Mass and the Eucharist. Bale returned to England and performed his refurbished *King*

³² Norman Sanders, ‘The Social and Historical Context,’ p. 17.

³³ For the Six Articles Act, popularly called by the protestants as ‘the bloody whip with six strings,’ that was passed through Parliament which meant a return to catholic practices, see, *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. by Henry Bettenson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 233-234.

³⁴ For the Act of Parliament (1543) ‘for the advancement of true religion and for the abolishment of the contrary’, see *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. I, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 59 onwards and pp. 249 onwards, see also *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. II, Pt 1, pp. 15-16, 63, 66.

John to welcome the arrival of “the young royal prophet who would restore God’s laws to the realm.”³⁵ There were many heavily polemical morality plays. Nicholas Grimald’s *Archipropheta* (1547) is an indirect attack on papist practices; the fragmentary *Somebody, avarice and Minister* (1547-50) anatomizes Henry VIII’s mistakes in backing off from the full implementation of Protestant ideals; and R. Wever’s *Lusty Juventus* is a “moderate consideration of papist error and the need for reforming responsibility”.³⁶ However, the defamation of Catholicism is most strikingly evident in a nameless court interlude of the Seven Deadly Sins which apparently had dramatis personae of “pride, a Pope; wrathe, a bisshopp; envie, a fryer, couetous, a person; glotonye, a Sole preste; lecherye, a Muncke; Slothe, a hermett.”³⁷

Although propagandist drama was encouraged by the state in order to promote Protestantism during Edward VI’s reign, restrictions and regulations were also imposed whenever it was thought to be necessary. One example of these restrictions came out as a result of the realisation that polemical drama in fact could be a two-edged weapon. In 1549 Robert Kett blockaded Norwich with 16,000 men. The rebellion took place at a time when Kett knew that there would:

Be a publike plaie kept at Wimondham, a towne distant from Norwich six miles, which plaie had beene accustomed yearelie to be kept in that towne, continuing for the space of one night and one daie at the least. Wherevpon the wicked contriuers of this vnhappy rebellion, tooke occasion by the assembling

³⁵ Norman Sanders, ‘The Social and Historical Context,’ p. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ As quoted in Norman Sanders, p. 18, from H. C. Gardiner, *Mysteries’ End* (New Haven, Conn., 1946), p. 57 note.

of such numbers of people as resorted thither to see that plaie, to enter further into their wicked enterprise.³⁸

The uprising was initially a revolt against enclosures, but it also “had a Protestant flavour in so far as it took notice of religious issues. The manifesto urges that the priests should not be permitted to buy any more lands and that their present properties should be let to laymen... .”³⁹ The connection between drama and rebellion led to immediate government action: a government Proclamation prohibited all English plays on 6th August 1549 for two months.⁴⁰ Two years after this Proclamation, government took another step to extend state control over dramatic activities. The Proclamation on 28th April 1551 required the licensing of all professional acting companies and “provided severe controls to prevent the performance of anything smacking of sedition.”⁴¹

With the accession of Queen Mary to the English throne, there appeared a revival of mystery cycles, which were suppressed during the Edwardian era. Catholic biased polemical Interludes such as *Respublica*, “if not positively encouraged, were at least admitted under written license.”⁴² The continuation of the Protestant Interludes under the Catholic government resulted in a government proclamation, which indicated the government’s attitude towards such plays on 18th August 1553:

... Her highnes therefore strayghtly chargeth and commaundeth all and every her sayde subiectes ... that none of them presume henceforth to preache ... or

³⁸ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1577, 2nd edition 1587, facsimile reprint New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. III, pp. 963-4.

³⁹ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: BT Batsford, 1964), p. 246.

⁴⁰ For the Proclamation of 6th August, 1549, see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. II, Pt 1, p. 67.

⁴¹ Norman Sanders, ‘The Social and Historical Context,’ p. 18.

⁴² G. Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, vol. II, Pt 1, p. 70.

to interprete or teache any scriptures, or any maner poyntes of doctryne concernynge religion. Neyther also to prynte any bookes, matter, ballet, ryme, interlude, processe or treatyse, nor to playe any interlude, except they haue her graces speciall licence in wrytynge for the same, upon payne to incurre her highnesse indignation and displeasure. ...forasmuche also as it is well knowen, that sedition and false rumours haue bene nourished and maynteyned in this realm ... by ...playinge of Interludes and pryntyng false fonde bookes ... concernynge doctryne in matters now in question and controuersye... .⁴³

In respect of censoring the plays and performances, Mary followed a similar policy as her brother and father. The proclamations issued (except the ones issued to bring complete prohibitions for a time) tended to ban performances unless they had the Crown's 'speciall licence in wrytynge'. The difference, of course, is that Mary's government would grant licences to the Catholic-biased plays whereas Henry VIII and Edward VI had favoured plays that promoted Protestantism. Among the pro-Catholic plays performed during Mary's reign, *Respublica* is notable for its close relation with the religious questions of the time. Performed at court during the Christmas festivities of 1553, it dealt with the restitution of the church lands, "which the queen found in practice to be politically and financially impossible, despite her personal desire to restore the church to its pre-Henrician splendour."⁴⁴

With Elizabeth's accession to the throne, anti-papal theatrical performances started to reappear. During the first year of her reign, the new Queen witnessed a mumming of "crows in the habits of Cardinals, of asses

⁴³ W. C. Hazlitt, *The English Drama and Stage under the Tudor and Stuart Princes: 1543-1642* (London, 1869), pp. 15-18.

⁴⁴ Norman Sanders, 'The Social and Historical Context,' p. 20.

habited as Bishops, and of wolves representing Abbots.”⁴⁵ Some of the earlier propagandist plays such as Bale’s *Three Laws*, also started to appear in print. Apparently, Elizabeth’s principal Secretary, William Cecil, was also keen, like Cromwell before him, on using the stage for political purposes as illustrated in Count de Feria’s report:

She [i.e. Elizabeth] was emphatic in saying that she wished to punish certain persons who had represented some comedies in which your Majesty was taken off ... I knew that a member of her Council had given the arguments to construct these comedies, which is true, for Cecil gave them, as indeed she partly admitted to me.⁴⁶

The “comedies” mentioned in the letter were so abusive and unpleasant that,

It was marvellous that they should have been so long tolerated, for they brought upon the stage all personages whom they wished to revile, however exalted their station, and among the rest in one play, they represented King Philip, the late Queen of England, and Cardinal Pole, reasoning together about such things as they imagined might have been said by them in the matter of religion.⁴⁷

Partly because of the international complaints and pressures and partly because she did not want big divisions among her subjects, the Queen issued the Proclamation of 1559 which banned all performances without licenses. The Proclamation warned all magistrates not to license plays “wherin either matters of religion or of the gouernaunce of the state of the common weale shalbe handled or treated, beyng no meete matters to be wrytten or treated vpon, but by mene of auctoritie, learning and wisdom, nor to be handled before any

⁴⁵ Quoted by David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1968), p. 127, from a letter of Il Schifanoia to Castellan of Mantua, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, VII (1558-1580), p. 11.

⁴⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, N.S., I (1558-67), p. 62.

⁴⁷ The Venetian Ambassador, Paulo Tiepolo’s report in 1559. *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, VII (1558-1580), pp. 80-81.

audience, but of graue and discrete persons.”⁴⁸ However, despite the international complaints and the Proclamation of 1559, the publications of such plays continued: *Juventus* and *Nice Wanton* were registered in 1560, *Three Laws* in 1562-1563, *Cruel Debtor* in 1566, *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* in 1568-1569.⁴⁹

The Proclamation of 1559 indicates that the religious controversies and issues of governance were matters of national politics, and that they must only be handled by “grave and discrete” persons. However, the Proclamation’s insufficiency is proved by the fact that the Elizabethan government kept on taking action in regard to the theatre. Between the years 1570 and 1603, the Revels offices were reorganized; the Censorship commission was set up, in which the Revels Office, the Church and the City of London were directly represented.⁵⁰ After 1570, the question of censorship shifted gradually from what should be censored to who should have the right to exercise power upon censorship. There appeared a difference in the attitude to the theatre between the Church and the Court. While the Church wished all plays to be banned forever,⁵¹ Earl of Leicester’s company received a patent in 1574, to perform regularly in London on weekdays, which resulted in the building of the company’s own playhouse, the Theatre within two years.

⁴⁸ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1923), IV, p. 263.

⁴⁹ For brief summaries of these plays, see David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, pp 130-140.

⁵⁰ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p. 76.

⁵¹ Edmund Grindal, Bishop of London, sent a letter to Sir William Cecil in 1564, urging that they should issue a proclamation to “inhibitte all playes for one whole yeare (and iff itt wer for ever, it wer nott amisse) within the Cittie” E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 266-267.

Glynne Wickham divides the censorship between 1570 and 1603 into four distinct phases each lasting approximately a decade. During the first phase covering the 1570s, the government suppressed the religious stage and attempted to place the performances under the control of the Master of Revels, who officially represented the wishes of the Privy Council in general, and the Lord Chamberlain in particular. During the 1580s, there was a reaction of the City of London, helped by the Church, against the Court's centralized licensing power. This resulted in the establishment of a licensing Commission on which City, Church and Crown were equally represented.⁵² The 1590s saw the "virtual elimination of the Church from active control of the drama, leaving a precarious balance between City and Crown and inviting a final duel for the ultimate authority."⁵³ During the last phase, covering the first decade of James I's reign, the Crown assumed almost full control of the plays and players, "leaving to the cities and shires only a limited authority over the actual places of playing within their local jurisdiction."⁵⁴

The first measure to regularize the position of players in the Elizabethan society was 'An Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes and for Relief of the Poore & Impotent'. The Act proclaimed that:

... All Fencers Bearewardes Common Players in Enterludes & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable Personage of greater Degree; all Jugglers Pedlars Tynkers and Petye Chapmen; whiche seid Fencers Bearewardes Common Players in Enterludes Minstrels Juglers Pedlers Tynkers & Petye Chapmen, shall wander abroad and have not lycense of two Justices of the Peace at the leaste, whereof one to be of the

⁵² Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p. 79.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Quorum, when and in what Shier they shall happen to wander ... shallbee taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars. ...⁵⁵

It was first put on the Statute Book in 1572 and subsequently amended in 1576, in 1584-85, and again in 1597-98. Wickham argues that the specific purpose of the Act was “to give magistrates power to deal with tramps and felons ... who passed themselves off as actors when arrested as vagabonds” and that no actor “who could prove himself” belonging to an “honorable personage” had anything to worry about this Act.⁵⁶ This may be true for the immediate effects of the Act. However, seen in a wider context, this Act becomes one of many attempts by the government to control and regulate the activities of marginal social groups like the unemployed, beggars, wandering traders and travelling entertainers. It can also be considered as another step by the government towards the centralisation of power, since, as a result of this Act, the Master of Revels was given the power to license plays.

Most of the proclamations issued until the 1570s point to the fact that the state was in the process of taking over the power from the Church to decide what subject matter should or should not be dealt with on the stage. It was also becoming within the power of the Crown to decide who should perform. However, the municipal authorities were not so keen to concede to the government wishes, as they wanted to preserve their traditional right to control the places of the performances. In March 1574, when the Crown, through the Privy Council, attempted to nominate a certain Mr. Holmes for the allocation of places for performances in London, the Lord Mayor and Alderman refused it,

⁵⁵ Quoted in, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 269-271.

⁵⁶ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p. 80.

arguing that it would be a threat to their liberties.⁵⁷ The friction between the government and the City Council become clearer when we consider the following incident that occurred later in the same month. When the Lord Mayor of London prohibited certain players to perform in the city, he was required by a Privy Council Minute “to advertise their Lordships what causes he hath to restrain plaies, to thintent their Lordships may the better aunswer suche as desyre to have libertye for the same.”⁵⁸ Two months later, on May 10, 1574 a patent was granted to Leicester’s men to perform “both in London and elsewhere.”⁵⁹ By the mid 1570s the Elizabethan government “had established its right of control over acting companies,” but at the same time, “City Councils both in London and the Provinces could, if they so wished, deny these same companies a place in which to perform.”⁶⁰ The Church also kept its interest in the theatrical activities. The three influential powers, Crown, City and Church, made temporary alliances with each other in order better to achieve their individual institutional aims. In the North of England, in the mid 1570s, Crown and Church united against the City authorities “to suppress the last of the Miracle Cycles and popular Moralities,” and in London, Church and the City authorities united against the Crown “to suppress the public performance of the new secular plays.”⁶¹ York, Wakefield, Coventry, and Chester lost their Cyclic dramas: in London, frequent epidemics of plague were interpreted as signs of God’s vengeance for the “withdrawinge of the Queenes Maiesties Subiectes from dyvyne service on Sonndaies and

⁵⁷ For the letter from Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London to Lord Chamberlain Sussex, see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 271-272.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p. 82.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

hollydayes.”⁶² There was also an opposition to theatre as an institution. In 1597, the Lord Mayor of London sent letters to the Privy Council complaining about the theatres. They claimed that theatres kept people away from sermons and they encouraged the apprentices to absent themselves from work. They caused traffic jams and spread infection in time of plague: and they gave an opportunity for the unemployed and idle to meet in riotous assemblies.⁶³ The problem was not what was being performed, nor was it a moral issue. The real problem, as Leonard Tennenhouse rightly argues, was a political one: “who had control of the means for representing power. Only those performances could be authorised in London which in turn authorised the governing powers of that city.”⁶⁴

By the 1580s, the suppression of the religious stage had established both Crown and the City authorities as “the partners of a Reformed Church which, prior to that Reform, had exercised a virtual monopoly in the licensing of play texts.”⁶⁵ In 1581, Crown takes another step forward to strengthen its power to control the theatrical activities: the position of the Master of Revels was fortified by the grant of another Patent. With this Patent, Edmund Tilney, who had been the Master of the Revels since 1578, was given the authority to “warne commaunde and appointe in all places within this our Realme of England, as well within franchises and liberties as without, all and euey plaier or plaiers with

⁶² Act of Common Council of London during the mayoralty of Sir James Hawes, December 6, 1574. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 273-276.

⁶³ Lord Mayor’s letter to the Privy Council, see, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 321-322. See also, Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and the Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 32.

⁶⁴ Leonard Tennenhouse, “Strategies of State and political plays: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII”, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edition with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 109-128 (p. 116).

⁶⁵ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p.83.

their playmakers ... as shalbe thought meete or vnmeete vnto himselfe or his said deputie....”⁶⁶ However, continuous epidemics of plague provided the city authorities with a powerful weapon to compete with the Crown over the supremacy problem. In London in 1582, City authorities issued a proclamation to ban all performances on grounds that:

The playing of Enterludes, & the resort to the same are very daungerous for the infection of the plague, whereby infinite burdens and losses to the Citty may increase, and are very hurtfull in corruption of youth with incontinence & lewdnes, and also great wasting both of the time and thrift of many poore people and great prouoking of the wrath of God the ground of all plagues, great withdrawing of the people from publique prayer & from the seruice of God: and daily cryed out against by the graue and earnest admonitions of the preachers of the word of God: Therefore be it ordered that all such Enterludes in publique places, and the resort to the same shall wholly be prohibited as ungodly, and humble sute be made to the Lords that lyke prohibition be in places neere unto the Cittie.⁶⁷

About a year later, Lord Mayor of London had something concrete in his hands to justify his complaints about big gatherings of crowds for performances. An accident occurred, on Sunday, January 13th, in 1583, when part of the auditorium for bear-baiting, in Paris Garden on the South Bank, collapsed, killing some spectators and injuring more. The very next day, Lord Mayor wrote a letter to Lord Burghley, attributing the misfortune to “the hande of god for suche abuse of the sabboth daie”, and asking him “to give order for redresse of suche contempt of gods service.”⁶⁸ Lord Burghley promised, in reply, that he would discuss the

⁶⁶ Quoted from the Patent of Commission for Edmund Tilney as Master of the Revels, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 286.

⁶⁷ Quoted from an extract from *Orders Appointed to be Executed in the Citty of London for Setting Rogues and Idle Persons to Work, and for Releefe of the Poore*, in E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 291.

⁶⁸ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 292.

matter with the Privy Council, and in the meantime gave him permission “to make a generall prohibition within euerie warde of that Citie and liberties, that no person vnder your commaundement shold on the Saboth daie resort to any such prophane assemblies or pastimes.”⁶⁹ The following year, the City’s request to pull down the Theatre and the Curtain was granted. However, for some reasons, the order was not carried out.⁷⁰

The Crown’s dependence upon the City authorities in controlling the plagues and breaches of law inevitably weakened its position of supremacy over the theatrical activities. The performances, in the 1580s and 1590s, were frequently prohibited as a result of epidemics of the plague.⁷¹ There was not much that the government could do to oppose the city authorities when the reasons for the restraints of plays were linked with the plague. However, the government did find a way to circumvent the City barrier for the public performances of plays. The government argued that public performances of the plays were necessary in the preparations for the Queen’s entertainment, otherwise Her Majesty’s “seruantes cannot conueniently satisfy hir recreation and their owne duties.”⁷² These public performances were supposed to furnish and set adequate standards for acting and presentation at Court.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ It is highly probable that the Lord Chamberlain intervened to save The Theatre because his own company of players performed there. William Fleetwood, in a letter to Lord Burghley in June 1584, writes that all the Lords in the Court agreed to “pulling down of the Theatre and Curten ... saving my Lord Chamberlen and mr. Viz-chamberlen, but we obteyned a lettre to supresse theym all.” For the extracts from the letter, see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 297-298.

⁷¹ For a chronological list of the play restraints between 1576 and 1613, see J. Leeds Barroll, ‘The Social and Literary Context’, in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. 3, 1576-1513, ed. by J. Leeds Barroll et. al., (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 1-94 (pp. 34-35).

⁷² The Secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham’s letter to the Lord Mayor, on December 1st, 1583. For the letter, see, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 296-297.

In 1589, as a result of the Martin Marprelate controversies a commission was set up giving both City and the Church equal rights with the Court in censorship and control. The Martin Marprelate controversy arose from an attack on the authoritarianism of the Church of England, in the form of satirical pamphlets issued in 1588 and 1589 by a reformist writer, or group of writers under the pen name Martin Marprelate. They advocated a single Puritan form of church organisation. The government, contrary to its prohibition of the representations of matters of religion, supported anti-Martinist propaganda in the form of dramatic satire composed by Lyly, Greene and Nashe and performed by the Queen's Men and Paul's Boys. However, even at the very beginning of the campaign, there were some worries at allowing playwrights and players the freedom to deal with religious matters in a satiric line. Francis Bacon condemned the use of the stage and the policy of treating the Martinists with their own weapons. Writing at the time of the controversy, he expressed his agreement with an anonymous bishop who commented on the first Marprelate tract that "a fool was to be answered, but not by becoming like unto him."⁷³ Despite such uncertainties, there were plays performed in the private and public theatres that showed the playgoers a ridiculous spectacle of Martin, with "a cocks combe, an apes face, a wolfs bellie."⁷⁴ Apparently, plays of this kind continued for about five months before the Elizabethan government began to have doubts about the convenience of its policy. Consequently, with the Star Chamber decree of 12

⁷³ 'Advertisement touching the controversies of the Church of England', *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, 14 vols., (London, 1857-74), VIII, p. 77.

⁷⁴ See, Thomas Nashe, 'A counter-cuffe given to Martin Junior' in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, 2nd edn, rev. by F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), I, p. 59.

November 1589 that gave the Church equal rights with the City and Court in censorship and control, constraints were applied on the satire which had recently been invigorated. Instructions were given to Edmund Tilney and the two nominees of the Lord Mayor and the Archbishop of Canterbury “to stryke oute or reforme suche partes and matters as they shall fynd unfytt and undecent to be handled in playes, bothe for Divinitie and State.”⁷⁵ Companies that performed plays without a license were threatened with extinction. No more is heard of Paul’s Boys, after 1589, for a decade. It is highly probable that the company was suppressed in direct consequence of its performance of the anti-Martinist plays.⁷⁶ This contradictory movement by the government indicates its recognition that “satire, despite its effectiveness to undermine opposition, is potentially anarchic and once loosed cannot be consistently harnessed to orthodoxy and state interests.”⁷⁷

Another aspect of the Star Chamber decree was that the Church, which had been ignored previously in regard to licensing plays, was now able to censor and suppress not only the puritan books and other publications, but also the plays and players, who took “upon themselves to handle in their plaies certen matters of Divinitye and of State unfitt to be suffred.”⁷⁸ Accordingly, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift,

Is desired that some fytt persone well learned in Divinity be appointed by him to joyne with the Master of the Revells and one other to be nominated by the

⁷⁵ The Star Chamber decree of 12th November 1589 is given in, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 306-307.

⁷⁶ See E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁷ Janet Clare, ‘Art made tongue-tied by authority’: *Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 25.

⁷⁸ E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II, pp. 18-19.

Lord Mayour, and they joyntly with some spede to viewe and consider of suche comedyes and tragedyes as are and shalbe publickly played by the companies of players in and aboute the Cyttye of London, and they to geve allowance of suche as they shall thincke meete to be plaied and to forbydd the rest.⁷⁹

There is no clear evidence about how this partnership worked in practice. What is known is that the Master of Revels, Edmund Tilney, turned his position into a profitable business. Philip Henslowe's papers show that he was paying Tilney for licensing plays at his own Rose Theatre in 1592, for licensing both the Rose Theatre itself and the plays performed in it in 1596, and for licensing the Fortune Theatre in 1600.⁸⁰ The commission, set up by the Star Chamber decree, was short-lived.⁸¹ By 1592, the Master of Revels was the undisputed licensor of the English stage, responsible only to the Lord Chamberlain.

The struggle over the control of the theatre comes to an end with James I's accession to throne. Within the first few years of his coronation James I "appropriated into his own hands control of players, plays, playmakers and theatres."⁸² The actors known as the Lord Chamberlain's Company, including Shakespeare and Burbage, became members of the Royal Household in May 1603 with the rank of Grooms of the Chamber, and they were given the title of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ W. W. Greg, *Henslowe's Diary*, Pt. 2, (London: Bullen, 1908), pp. 116-118.

⁸¹ The correspondences which passed between the Lord Mayor of London, Archbishop Whitgift and the Master of Revels in 1592 reveal that Tilney had monopolised the commission for the licensing of plays. The exchanged letters indicate that the Lord Mayor could not persuade Tilney in the matter of prohibiting the plays in London, and he asked the Archbishop Whitgift for help. Whitgift, apparently, agreed to discuss the matter with Tilney and suggested trying bribery. Lord Mayor wrote a letter to Merchant Taylors Company, asking them to consider "the paymente of one Anuytie to one Mr. Tylney, mayster of the Revelles" so "that those playes might be abandoned out of this citie". However, the Company did not agree. From 1592 onwards, the City and the Church gradually lost their influence on the censorship and control of the plays. For the above argument, see, Glynne Wickham, pp. 88-89, and for the correspondences between the Lord Mayor of London, Archbishop Whitgift and the Master of Revels, see, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 307-309.

⁸² Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p. 90.

The King's Men. The Admiral's Company was transferred by Royal Patent into the Household of Prince Henry, and the actors of the Earl of Worcester's Company became the Household servants of Queen Anne. Thus, the three companies that employed the leading actors of the day were freed from the restrictive hands of their enemies such as the City authorities and the Church, and put under the personal protection of the King, or that of his family. The Patents specifying the places in which they were authorised to perform protected the Royal companies, their performances and their property—the King's Men were to perform at the Globe, the Queen's Men at the Curtain and Prince Henry's Men at the Fortune.⁸³ There were also provisions made in the Patents to give the companies the right to perform in provincial cities. The Privy Council wrote a letter to the magistrates of Middlesex, Surrey and London on April 9th 1604, requiring them to “permitt and suffer the three Companies of Plaiers to the King, Queene, and Prince publickly to Exercise ther Plaies in ther severall and vsual howses.”⁸⁴

The state policy towards the centralisation of power to control the theatre appears to have continued during James I's reign. The Elizabethan ‘Acte for the Punishmente of Rogues, Vagabondes and Sturdie Beggars’ was revised by the Parliament in July 1604, withdrawing the formerly granted privilege to “any Baron of this Realme or any other honourable Personage of greater Degree” to license players to travel in his name. After the revision, it was stated that no authority given by “any Baron of this Realme or any other honourable Personage

⁸³ For the Patents for the Royal companies, see, E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 335, 338.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

of greater Degree, unto any other person or persons, shall be available to free and discharge the saide persons.”⁸⁵ The effects of this Act, as Wickham argues, could only be the deprivation of the provinces of their remaining local acting companies while at the same time strengthening the three Royal London companies by giving them the unopposed right to tour the provinces previously open to competition.⁸⁶

Contrary to Elizabeth, whose policy was to stay neutral, James makes it a policy to seek control of the theatre. Having brought the theatres under state control, he encouraged not only drama but also the festivals and sports, arguing that they improved the workers health. But the real motif was as Leonard Tennenhouse argues, to keep people away from subversive political thoughts and actions.⁸⁷ James I’s autocratic actions brings to an almost complete end the long succession of pleas and protests about the theatre from the Lord Mayor of London and his Council, from provincial magistrates and from the Church.⁸⁸ The Master of Revels who was directly responsible to Lord Chamberlain administered control of the theatre. Elizabeth’s last Master of Revels, Edmund Tilney, was replaced by Sir George Buck at James I’s accession in 1603. By 1606, he was licensing plays for printing as well as for acting. The Royal companies were informed by the Master of Revels, acting on the orders of the

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 336-337.

⁸⁶ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300-1660*, p. 91.

⁸⁷ Leonard Tennenhouse, “Strategies of State and political plays: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII”, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edition with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 109-128 (p. 116).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 91-92.

Lord Chamberlain, to discontinue their performances during the periods of plague, Lent or other hindrance.

That the theatre underwent a great transformation during the reigns of Tudor monarchs and James I is obvious. From being an amateur activity in the hands of the Church, it came to be regarded at the beginning of the Reformation, because of its religious character, first as a political annoyance and then as a threat to social stability.⁸⁹ When the king became the head of the church in England with Henry VIII, the state initiated a process of destroying the religious drama because it was the drama of Roman Church. In 1569, the Crown appointed an Ecclesiastical Commission to censor and suppress the provincial mystery cycles out of existence. Instead, the Tudors tried to establish a Protestant drama with the help of John Bale, but it was short-lived. The year 1572, in which the 'Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds' was passed and the Master of Revels was given the right to licence plays, marks the beginning of the efforts made to bring the theatrical activities under the control of the central government. The theatre companies found themselves in the middle of a power struggle between the Church, the municipal authorities and the Court. For their very survival, they looked for patronage from the lords in order to perform their plays. While the amateurs, lacking organisational strength, could not continue to fight for long against the suppression from the authorities, the professionals found champions among both the powerful merchant class and the Court. Towards the end of the Tudor period, the theatre became a commercial metropolitan organisation designed for leisure and recreation for those who supported it instead of an

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

occasional national pastime organized as a component part of all festive celebrations.⁹⁰ This theatre as a metropolitan organisation, for all the forcefulness and vitality it displayed, was essentially conformist in its tone. It helped to reinforce the dominant order reflecting the values of contemporary élites, and of the “aristocrats who were Shakespeare’s patrons or of the London merchants whose morality provided Johnson’s basic frame of reference.”⁹¹

The pre-Reformation theatrical activities were amateur and universal in the sense that they represented a cultural vitality throughout the national community. The oldest tradition was the popular folk-drama about which very little is known. Theoretically it was universal not only because it was a popular form of dramatic activity but also it had connections with magic, ritual and the superstitions of primitive religion. It took place within the “material conditions and everyday experience of rural life in small village communities of agricultural small towns.”⁹² Secondly, there was the private drama aimed at the entertainment of the nobleman in whose household it took place. The performers were either the household residents or travelling entertainers. The Morality Plays during the early Tudor period were the continuation of this type of drama. They were performed in the halls, which formed the centre of social life in a feudal community and a meeting-place for all social classes. In these halls, dramatic entertainment took place within the wider context of ordinary social activities. The entertainment, commissioned by the lord, brought together the whole

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, p.290.

⁹² Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 118. About the history and development of popular folk-drama, see especially, E. K. Chambers, *The English Folk-Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

community without any discrimination.⁹³ There was also the religious drama controlled by the Church and also supported by the local craft guilds as the street theatre in the form of mystery play cycles, originally performed on the feast of Corpus Christi.

The Tudor period marks the end of this ‘national’ drama and the establishment of a metropolitan drama being played to a much smaller section of the society. The Reformation, actually, produced the conditions for a secular drama, licensed, regulated and controlled by the state authorities. And this drama reflected the state’s own dominant tendencies towards centralization and appropriation of political and cultural power, controlled by a centralized government. However, this did not prevent the dramatists of the period such as Shakespeare from reflecting upon the problems and conflicts of the Elizabethan England.

Indeed, over the years, many different approaches to Shakespeare’s plays have revealed various aspects of the Elizabethan society depending on the theoretical standpoint of critics. The following section will deal with the major trends of criticism that have dominated the discussions of Shakespeare’s history plays in connection with the Elizabethan context.

Traditional Criticism

Leonard Tennenhouse argues that for over fifty years Shakespeare’s history plays have been read either as overt political texts interpreted by

⁹³ See, Richard Southern, ‘The Technique of Play Presentation’, in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. II, 1500-1576, ed. by Norman Sanders et. al., (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 69-99.

reference to the historical source material or as dramatic entertainment in comparison with other types of drama or as a part of Shakespeare's development as a playwright. This division was first noted by Harold Jenkins and his categories still hold.⁹⁴

The traditional "historical criticism" of Shakespeare's history plays involved a celebration of the dominant ideology as being the morally and intellectually satisfying structure of understanding and belief, the stable and coherent world picture, that is shared by all members of the social body.⁹⁵ One of the major critics in favour of historical criticism of Shakespeare's histories was E. M. W. Tillyard. A great deal of criticism of Shakespeare's history plays originates from Tillyard's pioneering work, *Shakespeare's History Plays*.⁹⁶ Whether one agrees or disagrees with it, Tillyard's has become the traditional interpretation of the history plays.⁹⁷ In his book, Tillyard argues that Shakespeare was primarily influenced by the "historical vision" that he found in Edward Halle's chronicle;⁹⁸ and he expressed successfully a universally held scheme of history, one fundamentally religious by which events evolve under a law of justice and under the ruling of God's Providence. According to the Elizabethan concept of world order, as explained by Tillyard, God created a perfect order in

⁹⁴ Leonard Tennenhouse, 'Strategies of State and Political Plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII*', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn, with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 109-128 (p.109). See also Harold Jenkins, 'Shakespeare's History Plays: 1900-1951', *Shakespeare Survey*, 6 (1953), 1-25.

⁹⁵ Louis Montrose, 'New Historicism', in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 392-418, p397.

⁹⁶ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944).

⁹⁷ David M. Bergeron, *Shakespeare: A Study and Research Guide* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).

⁹⁸ Edward Halle, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (London; In officina R. Graftoni, 1548).

which angel is set over angel, man is set over man, beast over beast, and a king must be set over all his subjects. Man is addressed as of so noble a nature that he must carry in his understanding the image of God and thus govern himself as fit for a creature of understanding. The ruler of a state possessed power which reflected, but was also subject to, that of God: a king therefore ruled by God. The natural condition of the state, like the natural condition of the cosmos, was order. Any breaking of this pattern would produce disorder or chaos; “since the state was a component of divine order, such alterations could not be accepted as legitimate social change, but had to be condemned as a disruption of the divine and natural order, to the displeasure of God.”⁹⁹ The deposition of a king and usurpation of a throne would be considered an extreme form of such disruption and would constitute a gross violation of order, inevitably punished by the vengeance of God, working through the machinery of providence.

Tillyard states that the protagonist of Shakespeare’s histories is England. The idea of a “Tudor Myth” is emphasised by Tillyard, arguing that the Tudors successfully ended the War of the Roses under Henry VII and brought a new unity and peace to the land. For Tillyard, the first tetralogy (*1, 2, and 3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*) involve the testing of England, including the assumption of divine interference i.e. in *1Henry VI*; the problem of dissension at home in *2Henry VI*, with the Duke of York as the emergent figure and chaos itself, as full-scale civil war breaks out in *3Henry VI*. *Richard III* involves the working out of God’s plan to restore England to prosperity. The second tetralogy (*Richard II*, and *1, and 2Henry IV*) is seen as a central chapter in “the great nationalistic epic”

⁹⁹ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 3.

of England. Tillyard interprets all the histories as a linked and integrated series, revealing a broad and complex panorama of national life. For him, the plays display national life as unified and balanced into a coherent aesthetic order mirroring the political order of the Elizabethan state.

Tillyard's interpretation of Shakespeare's history plays dominated the discussion of these plays for many years. He approached the plays from a historicist methodology, which differs from traditional forms of literary history that preceded him, which presented the history of literature as an independent field of art and thought. With the "historicist" approach "literature became identified as the 'voice' or 'spirit' of an age or a society."¹⁰⁰ Graham Holderness considers Tillyard's study of Shakespeare's history plays to be revolutionary because "both the critical orthodoxy it established and the counter-currents it provoked assume the historical as a basic premise", thus opening up the debate for some concerns of contemporary criticism.¹⁰¹

Lily B. Campbell's *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*, also puts forward an orthodox political approach to Shakespeare's history plays.¹⁰² For Campbell, the history play is a medium for history, concerned with politics as it mirrors patterns of behaviour. She argues that *Richard II* reflects contemporary problems or concerns, namely, the deposition of a king; thus Shakespeare uses Richard to set forth the political ethics of the Tudors with regards to the rights and duties of a king. For Campbell, Henry IV was punished for his sins by rebellion because he was a rebel and usurper. Meanwhile Henry V

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰² Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1947).

is an ideal hero, and the play mirrors the English as triumphant in a righteous cause, achieving victory through the blessing of God.

M. M. Reese, in his work *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays*¹⁰³, also follows a similar line of argument to that of Tillyard. For Reese, one of the main purposes of history as reflected in Shakespeare's work is to demonstrate the logic and reason of God's control of human affairs. History also teaches through the example of the past how to bear misfortune in the present. The idea is that Shakespeare searches for the ideal public figure through the history plays and finds in Henry V the man who best fits. Reese suggests that Shakespeare argues in *Richard II* that rebellion is always wicked, but character and destiny cooperate in Bolingbroke's ruthless drive toward the crown. Like Tillyard, Reese also considers England as the real victim of Richard's tragedy. The two parts of *Henry IV* are about the education of the Prince, and the morality pattern is inherent. *Henry V* is the celebration of England's recovered majesty in the mirror of the Christian king.

Derek Traversi in *Shakespeare from "Richard II" to "Henry V"*, concentrating mainly on the second tetralogy, argues that the plays are centred around the life and career of Prince Hal.¹⁰⁴ He follows a similar line of argument to that of Tillyard. He also finds in *Henry IV* the development into full consciousness of an effective political Prince, set against the background of the English realm, which is threatened by anarchy. Falstaff's exuberance, Traversi

¹⁰³ M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Arnold, 1961).

¹⁰⁴ Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare from "Richard II" to "Henry V"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press:1957).

argues, does not affect the fact that he is a “disintegrating, ultimately corrupting force”. He considers the theme of *Henry V* as the establishment in England of an order based on consecrated authority and crowned successfully by action against France.

Tillyard’s method of interpretation of Shakespeare’s history plays was opposed by certain other critical positions. Tillyard suggested that there was a particular relationship between the writer and ideology:

Those who, like myself, believe that Shakespeare had a massively reflective as well as a brilliantly opportunistic brain will expect these matters of Elizabethan life to serve more than one end and will not be surprised if through them [the history plays] he expresses his own feelings about his fatherland.¹⁰⁵

Critics who adhered to a more traditional notion of art as free from ideology, denied the Tillyardian idea that Shakespeare held and expressed the orthodox thought of his time. S. C. Sen Gupta in his *Shakespeare’s Historical Plays*¹⁰⁶ reacts against the “Tillyard school” arguing that the notion that Shakespeare tried to express the Tudor view of history is somewhat “naïve”. His view, that Shakespeare’s greatness comes from his ability to create men and women who have the vividness of living characters, also differs from Tillyard’s view that there is some pattern of morality throughout the plays. For Sen Gupta, Shakespeare’s histories are neither “moral homilies” nor “practical treatises”. The emphasis instead is on the conflict and clash of “Nature and Fortune” in the lives of men and women. He sees *3Henry VI* as a chronicle of events rather than a historical play, *Richard III* as the first attempt to organise the various materials

¹⁰⁵ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944), p. 299.

¹⁰⁶ S. C. Sen Gupta, *Shakespeare’s Historical Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

of history by placing the centre of interest in a tragic character. He views *Richard II* as a human drama rather than a political document or a moral homily. Sen Gupta is against Tillyard's argument that *Henry IV* is about the education of Prince Hal; for him, it is about the fortunes of Falstaff and the plays are not morality plays centred on Hal's struggle between virtue and vice.

Michael Manheim in *The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play* discusses the dilemma over whether an inadequate monarch ought to be deposed in the *Henry VI* and *Richard II* plays.¹⁰⁷ He argues that Shakespeare's history plays carry the implications that Machiavellianism¹⁰⁸ is an alternative to the weak king; the successful and strong king is the one who is able to learn the practical lessons and act accordingly. Henry V is a strong king who is not plagued by the vacillation and weakness of other kings because he is able to make desirable and attractive his brand of strength and Machiavellianism.

James Winny in *The Player King: A Theme of Shakespeare's Histories* also argues against Tillyard's view that Shakespeare's histories form a coherent thematic unit embracing a moral argument.¹⁰⁹ Winny believes that in the tetralogies, the historical order of the six reigns is not relevant to Shakespeare's imaginative purpose, but the chronological order of the plays is important. He emphasises the idea of the king not as a political concept, but as an imaginative one, developed from play to play.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Manheim, *The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973).

¹⁰⁸ "Machiavellianism" is the doctrine that the reason of state recognises no moral superior and that, in its pursuit, everything is permitted. The word derives from the name of the Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). See especially his *The Prince*, trans. by George Bull (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961).

¹⁰⁹ James Winny, *The Player King: A Theme of Shakespeare's Histories* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968; London: Chatto & Windus).

Henry A. Kelly in *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* deals with the role of Providence in Shakespeare's history plays. He suggests that the providential aspect of the Tudor myth as described by Tillyard is an “*ex post facto* Platonic form not substantiated by the drama or literature itself”.¹¹⁰

Robert Ornstein also emphasises the aesthetic qualities of Shakespeare's histories. Arguing against Tillyard and Campbell, he suggests that the histories must be judged by artistic standards and not by any effort to recreate the Elizabethan world picture. Ornstein disagrees that Shakespeare wrote his tetralogies to create the Tudor myth of history, a myth that, if existed, should be called a “Yorkist myth”. Contrary to Tillyard and Campbell's argument that Shakespeare's historical vision was identical to that of Edward Halle, which in turn reflected the orthodox Tudor political position of the homilies against disobedience and rebellion, Ornstein argues that Shakespeare's historical plays seem closer to the more empiricist historical writing of Holinshed. He adds that, in any case, Shakespeare used a wide range of sources with widely differing ideological origins and political inflections. He considers the history plays as Shakespeare's journey of artistic exploration and self—discovery that led him to the universal themes and concerns of his “maturest art”—the tragedies.¹¹¹

Roughly speaking, all these historical and literary criticism dominated the first half of the twentieth century. Although there are various and differing ideas

¹¹⁰ Henry A. Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹¹¹ Robert Ornstein, *A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievements of Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

that can be detected in both historical and literary criticism, they seem to be wavering between the extremes of textual clearness on the historical side and textual autonomy on the literary side. Historical criticism led by Tillyard seems to be characterized by the conception that text is something transparent and it provides the reader with an immediate grasp of reality to which the words refer. Thus, the reality they retrieve from Shakespeare's history plays is that the plays are loyal celebrations of Tudor power, and, they function within the context of a general ideology which conceives that power as a constituent of an inclusive natural power.

Literary criticism, practised by formalists, New Critics and many others, claimed that the text is an autonomous entity. Their criticism claimed to be objective in that it aimed at speaking about the meaning and literariness of a text in terms of its inherent language system. However, the problem with this kind of criticism seems to be that its principles of analysis close all links with the external environment. Thus, they analyse Shakespeare's history plays as texts free from ideology, environment, and social and historical circumstances in which they were written.

Cultural Materialism and New Historicism

Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield argue that the break up of traditional assumptions about the values and aims of literary criticism accompanied the break up of consensus in British political life during the 1970s. Literary texts began to be related to the new and challenging discourses of

Marxism, feminism, structuralism, psycho-analysis and poststructuralism.¹¹² Although they accept that all those discourses have given a new strength and excitement to literary discussions, the strongest challenge to traditional practice, they claim, comes from a “combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis.” Historical context is important in terms of weakening the transcendent significance traditionally granted to the literary text and allowing the critic to recover its histories; theoretical method detaches the text from immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it in its own terms; political commitment challenges the conservative categories in which most criticism has been conducted; finally, textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored. This is called “cultural materialism”.¹¹³ The word “culture” is used in two ways:

The analytic one is used in the social sciences and especially anthropology: it seeks to describe the whole system of significations by which a society or a section of it understands itself and its relations with the world. The evaluative use has been more common when we are thinking about ‘the arts’ and ‘literature’: to be ‘cultured’ is to be possessor of superior values and a refined sensibility, both of which are manifested through a positive and fulfilling engagement with ‘good’ literature, art, music and so on.¹¹⁴

However, cultural materialist criticism draws upon the analytic sense of culture. It includes work on the cultures of “subordinate and marginalised groups [such

¹¹² Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, ‘Foreword to the First Edition: Cultural Materialism’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn, with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. vii.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

as] schoolchildren and skinheads, and on forms like television and popular music and fiction”.¹¹⁵

Materialism, as opposed to idealism insists that culture does not transcend the material forces and relations of production. Cultural materialism involves the studying of the implication of literary texts in history. Therefore, “a play by Shakespeare is related to contexts of its production - to the economic and political system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England and to the particular institutions of cultural production (the court, patronage, theatre, education, the church).”¹¹⁶

“Cultural materialism” as a term was “borrowed from its recent use by Raymond Williams;¹¹⁷ its practice grows from an eclectic body of work in Britain in the post-war period which can be broadly characterised as cultural analysis.”¹¹⁸ The work includes the convergence of history, sociology and English cultural studies, some of the major developments in feminism, as well as continental Marxist-structuralist and post-structuralist theory, especially that of Althusser, Macherey, Gramsci and Foucault.

Materialist criticism “refuses what Stephen Greenblatt calls the monological approach of historical scholarship of the past, one ‘concerned with discovering a single political vision, usually identical to that said to be held by

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. viii.

¹¹⁷ Raymond Williams, *Problems of Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980).

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn, with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 2-3.

the entire class or indeed the entire population’.”¹¹⁹ E.M.W. Tillyard is the target of criticism here. Tillyard in his *The Elizabethan World Picture*,¹²⁰ “... was concerned to expound an idea of cosmic order ‘so taken for granted, so much part of the collective mind of the people, that it is hardly mentioned except in explicitly didactic passages’”.¹²¹ Materialist criticism is against the idea of “falsely” unifying history and social process in the name of “the collective mind of the people”. Dollimore argues that didacticism was a strategy of ideological struggle, and the didactic stress on order was a reaction to the emergent social forces which were perceived as threatening. In other words it was an ideological means to keep order by way of stressing the importance of cosmic order, and thus legitimizing the existing social order. Dollimore refers to Francis Bacon’s remark to some circuit judges in 1617: “There will be a perpetual defection, except you keep men in by preaching as well as law doth by punishing”.¹²² It appears that sermons were expected to serve not only as occasions for the collective mind to celebrate its most cherished beliefs but also as means for teaching the unruly populace what to think and how to behave in order to keep them in their place.

Cultural materialists are more concerned with the marginalised and subordinate groups of Elizabethan and Jacobean culture whose exploitation is partly secured ideologically. One concept of this ideology that concerns

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹²⁰ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), pp. 7-15.

¹²¹ Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn, with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 5.

¹²² Francis Bacon, *Works*, 14 vols., ed. by J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis and D.D. Heath, 1857-61 (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1961-3), XIII, 213.

materialist criticism “traces the cultural connections between signification and legitimation: the way that beliefs, practices and institutions legitimate the dominant social order or *status quo* - the existing relations of domination and subordination. Such legitimation is found (for example) in the representation of sectional interests as universal ones”.¹²³ Cultural materialists argue that the ruling class, although they may be serving their own interests, together with the institutions and practices through which they exercise and maintain power, pretend that they are working for the interests of the whole community. Secondly, they naturalize the existing social order through legitimation. This “legitimation further works to efface the fact of social contradiction, dissent and struggle. Where these things present themselves unavoidably they are often demonised as attempts to subvert the social order”.¹²⁴ So, when the conflicts generating from within the existing order are seen as attempts to subvert it from without, “that order strengthens itself by simultaneously repressing dissenting elements and eliciting consent for this action: the protection of society from subversion.”¹²⁵

“New Historicism” as a critical movement originated in America. It was strongly influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, and the Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser.¹²⁶

¹²³ Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn, with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 6-7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 32.

Old historicism relied on a basically empiricist form of historical research, confident in its capacity to excavate and define the events of the past, New Historicism drew on poststructuralist theory, and accepted 'history' only as a contemporary activity of narrating or representing the past. ... New Historicism dismisses the claims of traditional scholarship to objectivity and disinterestedness: historians reconstruct the past in the light of their own ideological preoccupations and constraints.¹²⁷

New Historicists do not believe in unified historical periods such as the "England of Elizabeth". New Historicism replaces what it regards as a propagandist myth by the alternative notion of different, contradictory and discontinuous "histories" experienced by the different groups within a society; so the history of the Elizabethan aristocracy is not the same as that of the Elizabethan peasantry. In the light of these theoretical principles, New Historicism "began to examine Renaissance drama as a functional 'discourse' in which the ideological conflicts and material power struggles of the age would be fought out in more or less overt forms":

If history is always a contemporary narrative, then what Tillyard saw as the intellectual spirit of an age becomes merely that story the Tudor government wished to have told about its own rise to power and continuing dominance; and it becomes legitimate for a modern critic to refashion that story otherwise, to disclose a different range of meanings and values. If the notion of historical totality needs to be replaced by the alternative concept of a fragmentary and discontinuous series of historical differences, then the drama should be able to speak of diverse and contradictory ideologies. If the kinds of writing traditionally separated off as 'literature' need to be restored to their intertextual relations with other kinds of writing, then new methods of inquiry and explication become appropriate.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Graham Holderness, "Introduction", in *Shakespeare's History plays: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. by Graham Holderness (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992) p. 10. See also Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 32.

¹²⁸ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 32-33.

New Historicism challenges the traditional perceptions of history and literature. Indeed, it gives scholars, as H. Aram Veenser points out, “new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people’s practical lives.”¹²⁹

Although the New Historicism and cultural materialism cross each other at many points with respect to the political investigation of Renaissance culture, there are significant differences between the two. New Historicists find Shakespeare’s history plays as reinforcing the dominant order. They tend to read the history plays in relation to Jacobean and Elizabethan theatre “whereby potentially subversive social elements are contained in the process of being rehearsed”.¹³⁰ In contrast, cultural materialist criticism “finds in this theatre a substantial challenge; not a vision of political freedom so much as a subversive knowledge of political domination, a knowledge which interrogated prevailing beliefs, submitted them to a kind of vandalism...”.¹³¹ Cultural materialism is more concerned to deal with contemporary cultural practice, where New Historicism restricts its focus of attention to the past. Cultural materialism can be openly polemical about its political implications, where New Historicism is

¹²⁹ H. Aram Veenser, *The New Historicism*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. ix.

¹³⁰ See the introduction to second edition, Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 2nd ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. xxi. For an account of “New Historicist” approach see also Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV and Henry V*’ in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edition with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 18-47.

¹³¹ See the introduction to second edition, Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 2nd ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. xxi.

inclined to obliterate them. Cultural materialism derives its theory from Raymond Williams' cultural criticism:

...[Stretching] its roots into the British tradition of Marxist cultural analysis, and thence into the wider movement of socialist education and emancipation; New Historicism has no sense of a corresponding political legacy, and takes its intellectual bearings directly from 'poststructuralist' theoretical and philosophical models.¹³²

Roughly speaking, most of the major trends of criticism in the twentieth century appear to be centring around the two conflicting views of drama that were prominent in Tudor and Stuart England. According to one view, drama was effective in terms of instructing people. This view was emphasized in Thomas Heywood's *An Apology for Actors*.¹³³ Heywood claimed that the aim of plays was "to teach 'subjects obedience to their king' by showing them 'the untimely end of such as have moved tumults, commotions and insurrections'."¹³⁴ The other view emphasized that the plays demystified authority to the extent of subverting that authority. According to this view, the plays depicted "the present Time, not sparing either King, State or Religion, in so great Absurdity, and with such Liberty, that any would be afraid to hear them."¹³⁵ This liberty in the handling of the monarchy and religious issues on the stage, it was assumed, would form a threat to the established order, which, the ruling class was so keen

¹³² Graham Holderness, "Introduction", in *Shakespeare's History plays: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. by Graham Holderness (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992) p. 30. See also Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 32-50.

¹³³ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, reprinted for the Shakespeare Society (London, 1841), p. 53.

¹³⁴ Jonathan Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, cultural materialism, and the new historicism', p.8.

¹³⁵ This was Samuel Calvert's complaint about the theatres in 1605. Quoted in Jonathan Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, cultural materialism, and the new historicism', p.8, from the quotation in V. C. Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama* (New York, 1961), p. 101.

to preserve. Thus, it was vital for the government to have complete control over dramatic activities.

However, different from the two views mentioned above, Dollimore argues that subversive thoughts and political conservatism may be in harmony in the individual writer or text. The writer “can be intellectually radical without necessarily being politically so”.¹³⁶ In this perspective, Shakespeare’s historical plays as texts should not “be considered as either [merely] conservative or [merely] subversive, but as sites of contest.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 2nd ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 22.

¹³⁷ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 94.

Chapter I: Reflections of Contemporary Religious Controversies: Shakespeare's *1 and 2 Henry VI*

Even before the establishment of the Tillyard School, Elizabethan drama in general, because it addressed all kinds of classes, was believed even by critics like T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, to represent a unified national history. According to this point of view, the Elizabethan drama brought together the popular and the sophisticated. Taking its roots from the popular traditions of folk-drama and religious rituals, it produced a highly developed form of theatre which appealed to all members of society: labourers, merchants, artisans, gentry, and aristocracy. The Elizabethan drama as a “common culture”, according to this view, displayed a great cohesion and unanimity in Elizabethan society.¹³⁸ Activated within the mechanisms of culture and education, this image of a unified history, as well as Tillyard's, was meant to provide the ground for a common, shared social discourse, a mechanism of ideological reconciliation. Elizabethan drama, in fact, did not represent a unified national history; on the contrary, it marked the end of national drama and the beginning of ‘metropolitan’ drama. Thus, Shakespeare's plays, represent a drama which:

[...] was ‘national’ in a sense that has to be located in the specific kind of nation-state that developed out of medieval Europe, a process signalled in England by the Reformation. When the Tudor administration began to suppress by legal violence the traditional religious drama as part of its campaign against Catholicism and political dissent, it initiated a process of theatrical ‘nationalization’ which produced the drama of Shakespeare's stage - a centralized and professionalized theatre, adopted by the ruling class but

¹³⁸ L. G. Salinger, ‘The Social Setting’ in *The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by Boris Ford, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), pp. 16-17.

actually a bourgeois industry, flourishing in the intensive cultural life of the metropolis and kept firmly under government control.¹³⁹

Shakespeare's historical plays, in this respect, represent "an ideology of national unity developed in the limited cultural space prescribed by the state for that purpose."¹⁴⁰ However, "an ideology of national unity" is the product of a society which is divided and contradictory, looking for a resolution of its internal conflicts by a cultural agreement. It has already been discussed, in the previous chapter, how the Court, the Church and the City authorities competed with each other in regard to control of the theatrical activities. The real issue was the question of who had control of the means for representing power, and only those performances were authorised in London which in turn authorised the governing powers of that city. In 1581, the Court came out as the victor as it strengthened its power to control the theatrical activities by fortifying the position of the Master of Revels by the grant of a supplementary Patent. The Master of the Revels, Edmund Tilney, who only carried out the orders of the Court, was given the authority to command and appoint all players and plays at his discretion. Thus, the drama, being licensed, regulated and controlled by the state authorities, reflected the state's own dominant tendencies towards centralisation and appropriation of political and cultural power. Shakespeare's historical plays may be appropriated by the Tudor state as well as by the critics such as Tillyard, to be the loyal celebrations of Tudor power, functioning within the context of a general ideology in which that power was understood as an element of natural order.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 121-122.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁴¹ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944), pp. 20-22.

However, a materialist criticism will discover in Shakespeare's historical plays, not an extraordinary cultural variety victoriously controlled into a harmony, but the tensions and divisions, the conflicts and contradictions running along with the imperfections of a society. I shall attempt, in the following pages, to illustrate that, while, indeed, the *1* and *2 Henry VI* plays of Shakespeare may be serving the Tudor ideology in terms of defaming Roman Catholicism,¹⁴² they also disclose a wider play of contradictions beyond authorial consciousness, rooted in the divisions and tensions of history. By touching the heart of the contemporary religious problems, the plays, rather than being either conservative or subversive, become a functional 'discourse' in which the ideological conflicts and material power struggles of the age would be fought out in more or less overt forms.

In his historical plays Shakespeare's knowledge and use of the chroniclers, such as Edward Halle and Raphael Holinshed, is obvious. Yet he could not have stayed indifferent to the Marprelate controversies that took place no more than three years before the first *known*¹⁴³ performance of his *1Henry VI*—two years before *2* and *3Henry VI*¹⁴⁴. Being both an actor and playwright, he could not possibly have avoided being affected by the heavy censorship and bans applied by the commission in which the participants were the Court, the City authorities and the Church. Thus, it should not be surprising to find

¹⁴² See, David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 200-202.

¹⁴³ In my opinion, it is quite probable that Shakespeare might have written *1Henry VI* in 1591 together with the *2* and *3Henry VI* and that it might have been censored so much that Shakespeare preferred not to stage it until a more proper time.

¹⁴⁴ See the chronological table of the dates of notable plays in *The Revels: History of English Drama*, vol. III, 1576-1613, ed. J. Leeds Barroll et al. (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. xiii-xxxiv.

reflections, in his plays, of the contemporary religious controversies, as a result of which many plays were banned and companies were fined.

After Elizabeth's accession to the throne, the first parliament of 1559 enacted the Act of Supremacy by which "all foreign spiritual jurisdiction" was abolished and the monarch became the supreme governor of the church. The Anglican hierarchy, for the next three decades, was confronted by problems posed by the rise of Presbyterians under the leadership of Thomas Cartwright, Walter Travers, and John Field; by the emergence of the Separatists under Greenwood, and Henry Barrow; and by the revival of the Catholic party under the direction of Cardinal William Allen, Robert Persons, and Edmund Champion.¹⁴⁵ The revolutionary Presbyterian Thomas Cartwright who was a professor at Cambridge wanted to replace archbishops, bishops, deans, chancellors, commissaries, and archdeacons, and their ecclesiastical courts, with a tetrarchy of pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons, and with a system of discipline at the congregational, classis, and synodical level. He was deprived of his professorship in December 1570. From 1570 to 1590 he remained the acknowledged leader of the Presbyterian classis movement.

In June 1572 there appeared the provocative *An Admonition to the Parliament*, written by two reformers, John Field and Thomas Wilcox. This Presbyterian manifesto attracted immediate attention, and was followed in October or November by Throckmorton's *Second Admonition to the Parliament*. Both books were attacks upon the Book of Common Prayer, vestments, prelates

¹⁴⁵ Leland H Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman* (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1981), p. 3.

and unlearned non-preaching clergy of the Church of England. John Whitgift, then master of Trinity College, Cambridge, published his *An Answer to a Certain Libel Intituled, An Admonition to the Parliament*. These attacks and answers went on until 1575. When John Whitgift became the archbishop of Canterbury in 1583, supported by the Queen, he started and sponsored a rigorous policy designed to achieve the medieval ideal of unity and uniformity. To carry out his mission he utilized the Court of High Commission. He was an ardent supporter of the famous Star Chamber proclamation of 23 June 1586, which commanded stricter censorship of the press and more careful supervision of printers—especially of those who printed “presbyterian” or Catholic books. Nonconformists were to be suspended, deprived or imprisoned.¹⁴⁶ In the Parliaments of 1584/85 and 1586/87 the “Court party opposed efforts to promote reform.” Presbyterian bills were postponed by “governmental spokesmen in the House of Commons, effectively blocked by the spiritual peers in the House of Lords or quashed by the firm order of the Queen, who was kept *au courant* by her faithful ‘little black husband,’ Archbishop Whitgift.”¹⁴⁷ This resulted in exasperation and frustration of the reformers who reflected their sense of frustration in their writings.

Marprelate tracts argued that having discarded the Mass, the nation should not preserve the Pope in the person of Whitgift, nor dress their ministers in the garments of the Church that burnt the martyrs and excommunicated the Queen. It was notorious that Elizabeth’s early bishops were strongly averse to the “relics of the Amorites.” The “seekers after reformation” protested against the

¹⁴⁶ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 303.

¹⁴⁷ Leland H Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman*, p. 5.

rich clothing of the clergy, and this was not a new protest—when the exiled Bishops returned with Elizabeth’s accession to throne, along with the newly made Bishops, they did all they could to avoid receiving “papistical habits” and argued that all the ceremonies should be laid aside.¹⁴⁸

The “Martinist” series comprised six books and a broadside: *The Epistle* (October 1588), *The Epitome* (November 1588), *Certaine Minerall*, and *Metaphisicall Schoolpoints* (a broadside, February 1589), *Hay Any Worke for Cooper* (March 1589), *Martin Junior* (July 1589), *Martin Senior* (July 1589), *Protestatyon* (September 1589). *More Worke for Cooper* was intended as the eighth treatise, but it was never published because the authorities in the course of printing seized the manuscript. The Marprelate books included attacks on the Church of England, a series of threats against the supporters of English Church, and a defense of well-known Presbyterians. They labeled the archbishop and the bishops as “that swinishe rable,” as “pettie Antichrists, pettie popes, proud prelates, intolerable withstanders of reformation, enemies of the gospel, and most covetous wretched priests.”¹⁴⁹ They also accused the bishop of London, of blasphemy and insolent behavior. It was also argued that in the Church of England, bribes and simony were factors in clerical promotion.

When analyzed within their contemporary historical contexts in the light of materialist criticism, the echoes of these conflicts and contradictions that existed in the Elizabethan society become visible in Shakespeare’s *1* and *2 Henry VI* plays. The First Part of *King Henry VI* opens with the lamenting speeches of

¹⁴⁸ William Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts: 1588, 1589* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1911), pp. xxv-xxvi.

¹⁴⁹ See ‘*The Epistle*’ in William Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts: 1588, 1589*, pp. 1-101, (p. 56).

the English nobility at King Henry V's funeral. However, even before the funeral is over, in fact, at the fifth speech of the opening scene, there is a sudden attack by the Duke of Gloucester on the Church and the churchmen:

WINCHESTER The battles of the Lord of the Hosts he fought;
The Church's prayers made him so prosperous.

GLOUCESTER The church! Where is it? Had not churchmen pray'd,
His thread of life had not so soon decay'd.
None do you like but an effeminate prince,
Whom like a school-boy you may overawe. (*1Henry VI*, I. 1. 31-36)¹⁵⁰

It is well known that Shakespeare's source material for the division between the Duke of Gloucester and the Bishop of Winchester was the chroniclers Halle and Holinshed, and this very first quarrel is usually handled within the wider context of the quarrels that are centred in a struggle for power among the English nobility.¹⁵¹ Although this criticism is directed to the Bishop of Winchester on the personal level, its significance lies in the fact that Gloucester blames *the* Church in general, and churchmen. However, Gloucester's criticism will also take the form of direct attacks on Winchester alone, but it will still be related to his position as a religious representative in the course of the play. The Church is accused of not only praying for the death of King Henry V, but also, of preferring an "effeminate" monarch, whom they could manipulate, to a "strong" ruler. When John Whitgift was still the Master of Trinity College, he was summoned to preach before the Queen. She was so impressed by his sermon that

¹⁵⁰ *King Henry VI, Part I*, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1962; repr. London: Routledge, 1969). All citations of the play are from this edition.

¹⁵¹ See, Michael Manheim *The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play*, pp. 95-105; Moody E. Prior *The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973); James Winny, *The Player King: A Theme of Shakespeare's Histories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968). See also the Introduction to, *King Henry VI, Part I*, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross.

she punningly declared him to be her “White-gift” and ordered him to be sworn one of the royal chaplains. Elizabeth felt herself even closer to Whitgift in time as she called him “her little black husband”, and treated him as her confessor after he had become the Archbishop of Canterbury. She even declared that the whole care of the Church was delegated to him.¹⁵² Whitgift was a disciplinarian, and he was famous for his harsh treatment of the Puritan writers and printers. Elizabeth valued his counsel, and “bore without resentment his occasional blunt reminder of her duty as a Christian prince.”¹⁵³ Knowing that the Presbyterian bills were barred in the House of Commons and the House of Lords by the influence of Whitgift, the Marprelate Tracts argued that if the Queen “but knew how her loyal Protestant subjects were being mishandled by the Bishops, she would graciously interfere for their protection.”¹⁵⁴ The Queen was in a way being manipulated by the Archbishop to whom she herself gave the whole care of the ecclesiastical matters.

Another reflection of the religious controversies of the Elizabethan reign occurs in the Tower Scene where the Bishop of Winchester denies entrance to the Duke of Gloucester in Act I, scene 3.

GLOUCESTER I'll canvas thee in thy broad cardinal's hat,
If thou proceed in this thy insolence.

WINCHESTER Nay, stand thou back; I will not budge a foot:
This be Damascus, be thou cursed Cain,
To slay thy brother Abel, if thou wilt.

GLOUCESTER I will not slay thee, but I'll drive thee back.
Thy scarlet robes as a child's bearing-cloth,

¹⁵² See, Isaac Walton *The Life of Mr. Rich. Hooker* (London, 1665).

¹⁵³ Powel Mills Dawley *John Whitgift and the Reformation* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955), p. 225.

¹⁵⁴ William Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts*, p. xix.

I'll use to carry thee out of this place.

WINCHESTER Do what thou dar'st, I beard thee to thy face.

GLOUCESTER What! am I dar'd and bearded to my face?

Draw, men, for all this privileged place—

Blue coats to tawny. Priest, beware your beard;

I mean to tug it and to cuff you soundly.

Under my feet I'll stamp thy cardinal's hat;

In spite of Pope or dignities of church, (*1Henry VI*, I. 3. 36-50)

Shakespeare's tone in the above speeches is obviously "anticlerical" as well as anti-papal. After all, as it has been already discussed earlier in this chapter, anti-Papal plays were popular and they were even encouraged at times by the Tudor governments during the Reformation period. However, at a time when plays suffered heavy censorship and needed to be licensed, "writing about Rome gave dramatists a means of circumventing [that] censorship while at the same time raising issues that went to the heart of contemporary politics."¹⁵⁵ Thus, Gloucester's defiance of Winchester "In spite of the Pope or dignities of church" would be considered by the censorship committee as one of the many anti-papal plays that they had been used to for a long time. Indeed, as compared to earlier plays such as Bale's *Three Laws* and the "mumming" which showed "asses habited as bishops", Shakespeare's anticlericalism would look comparatively "mild." From a cultural materialist and new historicist point of view, "a mild anti-Catholicism" is, in fact, what the Elizabethan government would wish the public to find in the plays, and, indeed, this is exactly what David Bevington finds.¹⁵⁶ However, Gloucester's threat that he will canvas Winchester in his "cardinal's hat", and that he will use his "scarlet robes" to carry him "out of this

¹⁵⁵ John Peck, and Martin Coyle, *How to Study a Shakespeare Play*, 2nd ed., (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 214.

¹⁵⁶ David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning*, pp. 200-202.

place”, also point to the conflicts and contradictions that ran along with the Elizabethan society; the puritan attacks on the clothing of the clergy. Elizabeth’s early bishops were against the rich and “pompous” clothing of the clergy:

The first bishops that were made, and who were but newly returned out of their exiles, as Cox, Grindal, Horne, Sandys, Jewel, Parkhurst, Bentham, upon their first returns, before they entered upon their ministry, laboured all they could against receiving into the Church the papistical habits, and that all the ceremonies should be clean laid aside.¹⁵⁷

Three years after the Convocation of 1562/1563, when the “attempt to promote reform failed”, the vestment struggle came to a crisis. The Queen and the Archbishop Parker insisted that “dignity and uniformity of priestly apparel be observed”. Some of the clergy who refused to wear the “hated popish rags” and the badges of “Antichrist” were suspended or deprived.¹⁵⁸ Both, John Field and Thomas Wilcox’s *An Admonition to the Parliament*, and Throckmorton’s *Second Admonition to the Parliament* written in 1572 as Presbyterian manifestos included attacks upon the vestments. The Puritans continued to protest against what they considered to be “the garments of the Church that burnt the martyrs and excommunicated the Queen” in the Marprelate tracts during 1588 and 1589. Although Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* plays mainly deal with the past history, they, nevertheless, reflect upon the contemporary issues. The “grave ornaments” that Winchester is clothed in, in Act V, scene 1 of the *1Henry VI*, are the very ornaments that the Puritan clergy refused to wear and suffered for it.

¹⁵⁷ John Strype, *Annals of Reformation*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1824), I, p.263.

¹⁵⁸ Leland H Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman*, pp. 3-4.

The Marprelate Tracts were puritan attacks on the Church of England in the form of written pamphlets in which the bishops were called “that swinish rabble, [who] are petty antichrist, petty popes, proud prelates, intolerable withstanders of Reformation, enemies of the Gospel, and most covetous wretched priests.”¹⁵⁹ For the clergy in the Anglican Church, however, they were certain libels devised to attack the Archbishop and the Bishops. When Gloucester brings a list of charges against Winchester, he snatches the bill and tears it:

WINCHESTER Com'st thou with deep-premeditated lines,
With written pamphlets studiously devis'd, (*1Henry V, I III. 1. 1-2*)

However, The Duke of Gloucester does not need to read the accusations from the bill and recites them:

GLOUCESTER Thou art a most pernicious usurer,
Forward by nature, enemy to peace;
Lascivious, wanton, more than well beseems
A man of thy profession and degree;
And for thy treachery, what's more manifest,
In that thou laid'st a trap to take my life,
As well at London bridge as at the Tower?
Beside, I fear me, if thy thoughts were sifted,
The king, thy sovereign, is not quite exempt
From envious malice of thy swelling heart. (17-26)

Winchester is called an “enemy to peace”, as the bishops are accused of being “enemies of the Gospel”, in the Marprelate tracts, because “they wound God’s religion, and corrupt the State ... and so call for God’s vengeance upon us all, even under the colour of religion.” Therefore “I call them to be the greatest enemies that now our State hath.”¹⁶⁰ Winchester is also accused of being

¹⁵⁹ ‘*The Epistle*’ in William Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts: 1588, 1589*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁰ ‘*Hay Any Worke For Cooper*’ in in William Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts: 1588, 1589*, p. 239.

“Many conjectural speeches” flew abroad that the Elizabethan Bishops were “covetous, [and] give not to the poor” during 1588 and 1589.¹⁶³ Winchester is not poor and everyone knows it in Parliament House as well as the Elizabethan playgoers, in fact, historically he was called the “rich Cardinal of Winchester,”¹⁶⁴ and this is also confirmed by another member of the Church, Priest Hume, in *2Henry VI*. When Gloucester’s wife Dame Eleanor consorts with witches, as one of her associates, the priest Hume, speaks his mind in soliloquy:

Dame Eleanor gives gold to bring the witch:
 Gold cannot come amiss, were she a devil.
 Yet have I gold flies from another coast:
 I dare not say from the rich cardinal
 And from the great and new-made Duke of Suffolk;
 (*2Henry VI* I. 2. 91-95)

However, Gloucester’s accusations of Winchester are not over yet. He accuses Winchester of being a thief and using the Church to defend his theft:

WINCHESTER And am not I a prelate of the church?
 GLOUCESTER Yes, as an outlaw in a castle keeps,
 And useth it—to patronage his theft.
 (*1Henry VI*, III. 1. 45-47)

This was again one of the charges brought forward by the Marprelate tracts against the Elizabethan Bishops during 1588 and 1589. In the *Epistle*, Martin writes about some stolen goods that were hidden by the thieves in Fulham, which was a place within the territories of the Bishop of London, John Alymer. Martin writes:

¹⁶³ ‘*Hay Any Worke For Cooper*’, p.260.

¹⁶⁴ See, Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1577; 2nd edition 1587; facsimile reprint New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. III, p. 156.

The thieves were apprehended. The cloth come within your clutches, Don John of London; and all is fish that comes to the net, with your good Honour, the thieves being taken, the dyers came to challenge [claim] their cloth. John London, the Bishop said it was his own, because it was taken within his own lordship ... It is plain theft.¹⁶⁵

Another serious charge against the Elizabethan clergy was simony and bribery. Martin alleged that simony and bribery played a big role in clerical promotion. In *Hay Any Work For Cooper*, he accuses John Bridges of giving “a hundred pounds and a gelding” to his patron Sir Edward Horsey for helping him to his deanery of Sarum.¹⁶⁶ Shakespeare’s clergy in *1* and *2Henry VI* plays are also depicted as bribers and simoniacs. In these plays, the corruption seems to be evident at all levels of the religious institution, from top to bottom. The Priest Hume takes bribes from Winchester and from others in the nobility such as the Duke of Suffolk and Dame Eleanor. Simony gets the Bishop of Winchester to a new position as the Cardinal of Winchester. Having achieved his goal to become a Cardinal, he pays back his debt as he had promised:

Stay, my lord legate: you shall first receive
The sum of money which I promised
Should be deliver'd to his holiness
For clothing me in these grave ornaments.
(*1Henry VI* V. i. 51-54)

Now that Winchester has fulfilled his role in the depiction of a ‘corrupt’ clergy, he has to take his part in the political corruption of the country indicating a kind of interrelation between the two:

¹⁶⁵ *The Epistle*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁶ ‘*Hay Any Worke For Cooper*’, p. 261, see also note 1 in the same page.

[Aside] Now Winchester will not submit, I trow,
 Or be inferior to the proudest peer.
 Humphrey of Gloucester, thou shalt well perceive
 That, neither in birth or for authority,
 The bishop will be overborne by thee:
 I'll either make thee stoop and bend thy knee,
 Or sack this country with a mutiny. (*1Henry VI* V. i. 56-62)

Indeed he keeps both promises: he plays the leading role in the killing of Gloucester, the Protector of the Realm, in Act III, scene 2 of *2Henry VI*, and the country is driven into a state of chaos, Winchester being no less guilty than any other English nobility.

Shakespeare's depiction and handling of the clergy in *1* and *2Henry VI* plays shows big similarities to the "Puritan" Marprelate tracts which attacked the Elizabethan clergy. And these plays, in regard to religion, are more reflections of contemporary religious conflicts and controversies in Elizabethan society than just being historical ideas taken from the Tudor chroniclers.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the chronicles did include such references to the Bishop of Winchester as Holinshed wrote:

For by a bull legantine, which he purchased from Rome, he gathered so much treasure, that no man in maner had monie but he: so that he was called the rich Cardinall of Winchester.¹⁶⁸

However, Shakespeare's Winchester reflects a more contemporary religious problem than the historical Bishop of Winchester does. He is more the

¹⁶⁷ It has been generally agreed that Shakespeare took the idea that Winchester was a briber from the Tudor Chroniclers. See, Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1577, 2nd edition 1587, facsimile reprint New York: AMS Press, 1965). vol. III.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Archbishop John Whitgift of Shakespeare's own time than he is the historical Bishop of Winchester. The parallelism between Shakespeare's Winchester and the Archbishop John Whitgift is extremely striking in one of the Marprelate tracts, *Martin Junior*, where Martin addresses and warns the Archbishop of Canterbury:

But here, by the way, John Canterbury, take an odd advice from your poor nephew, and that is this. First, in regard of yourself, play not the tyrant as you do, in God's Church. If you go on forward in this course, the end will be a woful reckoning. Thou hast been raised up out of the dust, and the very dunghill, to be President of her Majesty's Council, being of thyself a man altogether unmeet for any such pre-eminence, as neither endued with any excellent natural wit, nor yet with any great portion of learning. The Lord hath passed by many thousands in this land, far meeter for the place than is poor John Whitgift. Well, then, what if thou, having received so great blessings at the Lord's hand (being of all others in no comparison anything near the fittest for it, or the likeliest to obtain it), shalt now show thyself ungrateful unto thy merciful Lord God, or become a cruel persecutor, and a tyrant in His Church, a cruel oppressor of His children, shall nor all that thou hast received be turned unto a curse unto thee, even into thine own bosom? Yea, verily. For the Lord in one day is able to bring more shame upon thee, and that in this life, than He hath heaped blessing upon thee now for the space of thirty years and upward. But when I do consider thy pre-eminence and promotion I do sensibly acknowledge it to be joined with a rare curse of God, even such a curse as very few (I will not say none) in God's Church do sustain. And that is thy wicked and antichristian prelacy. The consideration of which popedom of thine maketh me think that thy other place in the civil magistracy, being in itself a godly and a lawful calling, is so become infectious, that it will be thy bane, both in this life, and in the life to come. And I am almost fully persuaded that that archbishopric of thine, together with thy practices therein, show verily that the Lord hath no part nor portion in that miserable and desperate caitiff, wicked John Whitgift, the Pope of Lambeth. Leave therefore both thy popedom and thy ungodly proceedings, or look for a fearful and.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ *'Martin Junior'*, in William Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts: 1588, 1589*, pp. 330-331. The long quotation is necessary as there are important parallels with the speeches that follow.

Shakespeare's Winchester through his "pre-eminence" and "promotion" does become a "cruel persecutor" and kills the Duke of Gloucester, and "with a rare curse of God" his actions become his "bane" and he suffers a terrible death. In Act III, scene 3 of *2Henry VI*, Winchester has gone mad on his deathbed, and King Henry VI, Salisbury and Warwick enter:

KING How fares my lord? Speak, Beaufort, to thy sovereign.

CARDINAL If thou be'st death, I'll give thee England's treasure,
Enough to purchase such another island,
So thou wilt let me live, and feel no pain.

KING Ah, what a sign it is of evil life
Where death's approach is seen so terrible!

WARWICK Beaufort, it is thy sovereign speaks to thee.

CARDINAL Bring me unto my trial when you will.
Died he not in his bed? where should he die?
Can I make men live, whe'r they will or no?
O, torture me no more! I will confess.
Alive again? Then show me where he is:
I'll give a thousand pound to look upon him.
He hath no eyes, the dust hath blinded them.
Comb down his hair; look! look! it stands upright,
Like lime-twigs set to catch my winged soul.
Give me some drink; and bid the apothecary
Bring the strong poison that I bought of him.

KING O thou eternal Mover of the heavens.
Look with a gentle eye upon this wretch;
O! beat away the busy meddling fiend
That lays strong siege unto this wretch's soul,
And from his bosom purge this black despair.

WARWICK See, how the pangs of death do make him grin!

SALISBURY Disturb him not; let him pass peaceably.

KING Peace to his soul, if God's good pleasure be.
Lord cardinal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss,
Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope.
He dies, and makes no sign. O God, forgive him!

WARWICK So bad a death argues a monstrous life. (1-30)

The Marprelate tracts were the results of the long lasting religious conflicts during the Tudor period. The religious conflicts and controversies did not affect the Church alone. The theatres, the plays and the playwrights were also subjected to the outcomes of these struggles. And it seems just natural for a dramatist, like Shakespeare, who lived through the divisions and conflicts of his society, to reflect upon those divisions and conflicts in his plays.

Chapter II: Reflections of Contemporary Social Conflicts: Shakespeare's Jack Cade Rebellion

The Social Setting: London Between the Years 1580 and 1602

As the thousands of new apprentices, discharged mariners and soldiers, deserters and vagrants arrived each year, the population of London doubled between the years 1580 and 1600 from 100,000 to 200,000. This rapid growth of population created serious problems in maintaining public order. There were many popular disturbances that became a “prominent feature of the late Elizabethan period.”¹⁷⁰ These disturbances were attributed to “apprentices”, a loosely used term which included servants, vagrants, discharged soldiers and sailors as well as apprentices. These apprentices were:

So considerable a Body, that they have sometimes made themselves formidable by Insurrections and Mutinies in the City, getting some Thousands of them together, and pulling down Houses, breaking open the Gates of Newgate, and other Prisons, and setting the Prisoners free. And this upon Occasion sometimes of Foreigners, who have followed their Trades in the City, to the supposed Damage of the Native Freemen, or when some of their Brotherhood have been unjustly, as they have pretended, cast into Prison and punished. But they have been commonly assisted, and often egged on and headed by Apprentices of the Dreggs of the Vulgar, Fellows void of worthy Blood, and worthy Breeding; yea, perhaps not apprentices at all, but forlorn Companions, masterless Men, and Tradeless, and the like. Who prying for mischief, and longing to do it, have been the very authors of all that is vile, discourteous to honourable Strangers, ... rude towards Natives, seditious among their own, and villainous every where.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Roger Burrow Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640*, pp. 187, 189, 190.

¹⁷¹ John Stow, *Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, ed. John Strype, 2 vols. (London, 1720), II, pp. 332-333.

The task of preserving the peace was becoming more and more difficult as the number of vagrants and “masterless men” grew rapidly during the late Elizabethan London. As opposed to rural protests, London crowds, who “were more likely to offer personal violence”, were also more difficult to control because the size of the crowd could grow very quickly “if participants called upon sympathetic bystanders for assistance.”¹⁷² There were 35 outbreaks of disorder between 1581 and 1602. Roger Burrow Manning attributes 12 of these riots and unlawful assemblies to economic distress:

The largest category of popular disorder consists of the 14 insurrections and riots, which protested the administration of justice. This category includes symbolic acts such as rescuing prisoners from pillories and prisons, a riot at an execution, an assault upon constables, and violent demonstrations that directly challenged the authority of the mayor. Of the nine remaining instances of disorder during this period, four riots were directed against gentlemen and lawyers.¹⁷³

The situation worsened because of conflicts between the City administrators and the Crown in attempts to maintain public order. Queen Elizabeth constantly interfered in the government of London. She and the Privy Council often criticised the mayors and sheriffs for lacking firmness in suppressing popular disturbances and punishing rioters. The Crown appointed officials, such as the attorney general and the master of the Rolls, to investigate popular disturbances. On several occasions, Crown officials went even so far as to interrogate prisoners under torture.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Roger Burrow Manning, p. 194.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 202.

¹⁷⁴ G. Norton, *Commentaries on the History, Constitution and Chartered Franchises of the City of London* (London: H. Butterworth, 1829), pp. 203-208.

The Crown also insisted on having the right to appoint the city recorder, who was to act as a correspondent between the Crown and the City. William Fleetwood was appointed as the Recorder in 1572 and held the office until 1592. Backed by the 1572 ‘Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes and for Relief of the Poore & Impotent’, Fleetwood was leading a large-scale sweep of vagrants and masterless men.¹⁷⁵ The Privy Council demanded that widespread searches were to be conducted and the results reported by the JPs. When Fleetwood heard the news that some rogues surrounded the Queen in her coach near Islington in January 1582, his reaction was swift and sharp. Searches were carried out and eighty-four “vagrants” arrested for punishment. Most of the arrested “vagrants” apparently came from elsewhere and only a few of them had been in London for more than three or four months.¹⁷⁶

The first late Elizabethan outbreak of disorder was the rioting of the prisoners in Ludgate Prison on 7 September 1581, who responded to the attempts of a crowd outside to rescue them.¹⁷⁷ As the leading figure behind the “operation clean sweep”, Fleetwood wrote many letters mainly to Lord Burghley describing the riots, brawls and sweeps of beggars. In one such letter, he gives the accounts of three large-scale riots that took place during Whitsuntide in 1584. According to the letter, the first riot began on Monday evening when a gentleman did a pirouette on the stomach of an apprentice who had been sleeping on the grass near the entrance of a theatre. Afterwards “they fell to plain blowes. The company increased of bothe sides to the number of 500, at the

¹⁷⁵ John Stow, II, 436-38.

¹⁷⁶ R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, *Tudor Economic Documents* 3 vols. (1924), II, pp.335-36.

¹⁷⁷ *Acts of the Privy Council, 1589-90*, ed. J. R. Dasent, (London, Norfolk Chronicle Company, 1899), XVIII, pp. 222, 267.

least.” The former “exclaimed ... that he was a gentleman, and that the apprentice was but a rascal, and some there were littel better than roogs, ... and saide the prentizes were but the skumme of the worlde.” Upon these troubles, the apprentices began the next day, “being Tuesdaye, to make mutinies and assemblies, and did conspyre to have broken the prisoners” to rescue the imprisoned apprentices. However, receiving intelligence before the deed, Fleetwood boasts that he arrested the chief conspirators and put them in Newgate Prison for their indictment.¹⁷⁸ On Wednesday, when a certain Browne, a serving man, “did at a theatre-doore quarrel with certayn poore boyes, and handicraft pretizes, and strooke some of them, ... wounded and maymed one of the boyes”, a riot began drawing a crowd of “near a thousand people.” In the evening of the same day a tailor and a clerk of the Court of Common Pleas “fell out aboutt an harlott, and the tailor raised the prentises and other light personnes” and attacked the attorneys and gentlemen living in Lyon’s Inn “with 300 at the least.” They broke down the windows of the house and wounded some of the gentlemen. As a result of the continuing disorders, which included a riotous rescue of an apprentice imprisoned in a cage in Aldersgate Street, Fleetwood was able to obtain a letter to suppress and close the theatres.¹⁷⁹

In late September 1590, when a lawyer allegedly insulted a crowd of apprentices, they sacked Lincoln’s Inn in order to take revenge. After the event the Privy Council reprimanded the Lord Mayor and the sheriffs of London for

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Wright ed., *Queen Elizabeth and Her Times: A Series of Original Letters, Selected from the Inedited Private Correspondence of the Lord Treasurer Burghley, the Earl of Leicester, the Secretaries Walsingham and Smith, Sir Christopher Hatton, and most of the Distinguished Persons of the Period*, 2 vols, (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), II, pp. 227-31.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

failing to provide the names of the criminals.¹⁸⁰ This is also indicative of the ongoing power struggle between the City authorities and the Crown over the problem of regulation, control and the punishment of the marginalized groups described in the Act of 1572.¹⁸¹

The trials of Thomas Cartwright and other Puritan leaders for their alleged authorship of the Marprelate Tracts apparently raised sympathy among the populace. On the morning of 16 July 1591, Edmund Coppinger and Henry Arthington, who had helped William Hacket prepare anti-Catholic and anti-government pamphlets, were urged by him to go out and proclaim Hacket the Messiah. Assuming the respective roles of Mercy and Judgement and collecting a huge crowd on their way, they arrived at the cross in Cheapside and started preaching. Later that day, first Coppinger and Arthington and later on Hacket were all arrested by the Mayor and his officials who arrived there with the counsellors dispatched by the Queen. Apart from their religious teachings, they were also accused of planning to rescue the Puritan prisoners from prison.¹⁸² All three were interrogated under torture as the City authorities were told by the Privy Council in a letter to:

examin by oath or otherwise (as you shal think fit) the said Hacket, Coppinger, Ardington and al others whome you shal have notice of or have cause to suspect to be parties of previe to this foule attempt upon such interrogatories as her Majesty's Attorney and Sollicitour shal deliver unto you in this behalf.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ *Acts of the Privy Council*, XIX, pp. 476-7, XX, pp. 63, 85.

¹⁸¹ The conflicts between the Crown and the City were mainly the results of the government's tendency towards centralisation of power, which has already been discussed in the first chapter.

¹⁸² See Richard Cosin, *Conspiracie, for Pretended Reformation: viz. Presbyteriall Discipline* (London, 1592), p. 59; John Stow, *Annales, or a Generall Chronicle of England*, ed. E. Howes (London, 1631), p. 1289.

¹⁸³ *Acts of the Privy Council*, XXI, p. 297.

The Privy Council, preferring swift action and harsh punishment of disorder as usual, once again reprimanded the Lord Mayor for failing to apprehend the rioters more quickly.¹⁸⁴ Hacket was tried and sent to the gallows on 28 July in front of a mass crowd denouncing his opponents. Soon after, Coppinger starved to death in jail and Arthington saved his life by writing a confession of his “seduction”.¹⁸⁵

About a year later another popular riot broke out in London. Apparently, the trouble started when a felt-maker was “violently” arrested and imprisoned by the deputies of the knight marshal. On Sunday, 11 June 1592, a large group of felt-makers gathered, pretending to be attending the theatre, to make plans to break into the Marshalsea Prison and rescue their colleague. When they approached the Marshalsea, the felt-makers were attacked by the knight marshal’s men with “cudgels and daggers” and “several innocent persons” were killed.¹⁸⁶ Upon hearing rumours that further disturbances were being planned for Midsummer Eve and Midsummer Night the Privy Council issued orders to close the theatres and impose a curfew. However, the disturbances did not stop. In July, the felt-makers seized one of the knight marshal’s men, Levenson whom they accused of killing one of the “rioters” and took him to Newgate to demand justice. After the examination of the case, it was decided that Levenson should be charged with manslaughter which meant that his offence could be bailed.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 300, see also Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 328-329.

¹⁸⁵ *The Seduction of Arthington by Hacket especiallye ... Written by the said Henry Arthington, the third person, in that woful Tragedy* (London, 1592).

¹⁸⁶ David J. Johnson, *Southwark and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 277-78.

After his appearance at the Surrey Assizes, he was set free.¹⁸⁷ Obviously, Londoners perceived a double standard in the administration of justice as they witnessed the trial of a man accused of killing an “officer”. The case ended with the conviction of the man of homicide. At his execution in Holborn in October, a large riot broke out which ended with the arrest of the leaders of the riot. They were committed to Newgate by the Lord Mayor but released on bail the next day; an action that infuriated the Privy Council who ordered the Mayor to rearrest them. This time they were held for questioning without bail. A few days later, after the interrogations of the prisoners in the Marshalsea, it was revealed that the rioters talked freely about rebelling and killing Elizabeth.¹⁸⁸

In December 1592, there was another unlawful, riotous assembly of 200 or 300 discharged mariners. They “assembled themselves together at Paule’s cross with the sounde of a dromme” and started to march towards Hampton Court to claim their arrears of pay from the Queen. Once more the Crown accused the Lord Mayor of London for not acting more swiftly to prevent this unlawful assembly.¹⁸⁹ The Elizabethan Government always wanted harsh punishments for the rioters, although this triggered further popular protests against the lord mayor and the administration of justice. The leaders of the riots were rigorously interrogated and tortured, as the “Privy Council had demanded exemplary punishment—even of innocent men.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ *Acts of the Privy Council*, XXII, pp. 549-50, XXIII, pp. 19-20, 28-29.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XXIII, p.242.

¹⁸⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council*, XXIII, p. 342.

¹⁹⁰ Roger Burrow Manning, pp, 203-205.

There was also a serious economic distress in the country which gave way to food riots. Food riots were mainly the results of high prices. On 12 June 1595, the rioters sold fish at “popularly-established” prices. The next day, a group of apprentices in Southwark enforced the sale of butter at 3d. a pound whereas the butter-women had been asking 5d. a pound. According to the Government’s point of view, any attempt to regulate prices by the populace would constitute an attempt to change the laws of the country. Any such attempt would be considered as no different from rescuing prisoners or attempting to kill the Lord Mayor, which would also mean a war against the Queen.¹⁹¹ The rioters were arrested and punished by the Court of Star Chamber on 27 June by whipping, pillorying, and imprisonment. However, their punishment created another riot in which their fellowmen destroyed the pillories in Cheapside and Leadenhall.¹⁹² While trying to punish the rioters, the authorities ironically seem to be creating new ones because of the harsh punishment they apply.

London was living one of its most troublesome years in the year 1595. There were “at least 13 insurrections, riots, and unlawful assemblies that year in a dozen different parts of London and Southwark, of which 12 took place between 6 and 29 June.” Ironically, Sir John Spencer, the Lord Mayor of London in 1595 was one of the strictest mayors the City had ever seen. At first, he was favoured by the Queen and the Privy Council for his firmness: a farmer from Knightsbridge complained that “where the Council had punished two, the

¹⁹¹ Sir Matthew Hale, *The History of the Pleas of the Crown*, 2 vols (London, 1800), I, p. 144; Sir John Popham, *Reports and Cases* (London, 1656), pp. 122-23.

¹⁹² *Historical Manuscripts Commission: Salisbury*, 15 vols (London, 1906 *et seq.*), V, p. 249; John Stow, *Annales, or a Generall Chronicle of England*, ed. E. Howes (London, 1631), pp. 769-70; *Public Record Office, State Papers 12/252/94*; Manning, pp. 204-5.

lord mayor punished seven". Obviously, he was hated by the rebels who made speeches "against him threatening to kill him and burn his house," and erected gallows in front of his house.¹⁹³

There were a series of problems starting on 6 June with a silk-weaver's speech against the government. The Lord Mayor assumed that the man was mad and should be committed to Bedlam. But before he was confined, a crowd of 200 or 300 gathered and rescued him. After this event, the number of riots intensified:

On 12 June there were anti-alien riots in Southwark and elsewhere; on the same day and again on 13 June the two instances of popular market regulation occurred. Once again, the crowd attempted to prevent prisoners from being taken. On the 15th more crowds attacked the Counter Prison, and rescued prisoners on their way to the Counter. On 16 June leaders of the apprentices conferred with some discharged soldiers in the vicinity of St Paul's and, after discussing the assassination of the mayor, agreed to join forces.¹⁹⁴

The riots were gaining popular support event after event. In Cheapside and Leadenhall a crowd of 1,800 rioted, protesting the whipping of the butter-rioters. They tore down the pillories and erected gallows in front of the Lord Mayor's house shouting at him to come out. On 29 June, a crowd of 1,000 persons, including shoemakers, girdlers, silk-weavers, husbandsmen, apprentices, discharged soldiers, and vagrants, gathered on Tower Hill intending to "break open the city armouries, rescue prisoners, and kill the lord mayor."

¹⁹³ Roger Burrow Manning, p. 208.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.209.

After their arrest and trial the leaders of the rebellion were eventually drawn on hurdles from Newgate to Tower hill and executed.¹⁹⁵

Reflections of Contemporary Social Conflicts and Shakespeare's Jack Cade Rebellion

Ronald Knowles states that Shakespeare's Jack Cade is "arguably the most complex figure of *Henry VI* plays."¹⁹⁶ Indeed, the variety of ways that critics have handled the Cade episode in *2Henry VI* justifies this. The Tillyardian line that advocated the view of a unified Elizabethan social order supported a negative reading of Shakespeare's Cade. In fact, Shakespeare's representation of Cade was seen as further evidence of his anti-populism as opposed to his great love for harmony and social order.¹⁹⁷ For Pieter Geyl, there is no doubt about Shakespeare's condemnation of Jack Cade's rebellion; "that he does so is only natural". What is more important for Geyl is that Shakespeare does not show any sign of sympathy for the reasons behind the rebellion; "he is silent about the distress that gave rise to it; he makes it, in all its manifestations, silly and foolish."¹⁹⁸ However, some recent critical readings of the Cade episode have reached diverse conclusions, suggesting that Shakespeare's representation of Jack Cade rebellion is not "univocal".

Stephen Greenblatt finds the representation of Jack Cade's rebellion "a grotesque and sinister farce, the archetypal lower class revolt both in its motives and its ludicrousness". He is interested in the ways in which different genres,

¹⁹⁵ Stow, *Annales*, pp.769-70.

¹⁹⁶ Ronald Knowles, 'The Farce of History: Miracle, Combat, and Rebellion in *2 Henry VI*', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 21, (1991), 168-86 (p. 176).

¹⁹⁷ See E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944).

¹⁹⁸ Pieter Geyl, *Encounters in History* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 37.

responding to different historical pressures, represent the victory of the high over the low. For him the main problem is how to shield the victor's dignity from the danger of being tainted by the enemy's base condition. Focussing on the killing of Cade by a small property-owner, Alexander Iden, he argues that in Shakespeare's "simple, effective and, in its way, elegant" solution, "the aristocrat has given way to the man of property, and heroic commemoration has been absorbed into a new genre, the history play."¹⁹⁹ In other words, considering the low status of the rebel, the "new genre" implies a lowering of the victor's social status.

Richard Wilson claims that Shakespeare was always a law-and-order playwright. He criticises Shakespeare's account of Jack Cade rebellion in *Henry VI, Part 2*, assuming it to have been an immediate response to the event that took place in Southwark in 1592,²⁰⁰ a "travesty" of historical fact, and "an instance of the brazen manipulation of records practiced to buttress the regime."²⁰¹ This argument depended on a re-dating of the play between March and August 1592,²⁰² but more likely, Wilson argued, subsequent to 23 June,

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion', in *Representing the English Renaissance* ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 1-29, (pp. 23-25).

²⁰⁰ Richard Wilson, ' "A Mingled Yarn": Shakespeare and the Cloth Workers', *Literature and History*, 12, (1986), 164-180, (p. 174). This was a confrontation between a group of Southwark feltmakers and the guards of the Marshalsea prison in London, in 1592, which resulted in the killing of several people by the prison guards. Wilson, sympathising with the feltmakers' demonstration, argues that, although sparked by the arrest of one of their colleagues, it was a summer festival only accidentally staged near the Marshalsea prison, and misread by the prison governor. For an opposite interpretation of the event, see Roger Burrow Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), where Manning believes that "under the Pretext of attending the theatre" a group of feltmakers made plans to break into the prison and rescue their colleague. In any case, theatre's involvement was obvious as the Privy Council imposed a ban on 23 June, claiming that the main actors in the riot "had assembled by occasion of a play". See *Acts of the Privy Council, 1591-92*, ed. J. R. Dasent, (London: Mackie, 1901), XXII, p.550.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁰² Hanspeter Born, 'The Date of 2, 3 *Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 25, (1974), pp. 323-334.

when the ban on theatre would have released Shakespeare from acting and given him time to write. By producing a play hostile to popular protest, Wilson argued, Shakespeare and his company hoped, to earn “exemption from their ban.”²⁰³

Annabel Patterson deals explicitly with the issue of Shakespeare’s political stance, arguing against the idea that Shakespeare was an anti-populist playwright. Examining the Jack Cade rebellion, she argues that there was a cultural tradition of popular protest in Shakespeare’s time and that he was aware of that tradition. For Patterson, Jack Cade is far from being a part of that tradition. In fact, he is “an imposter aristocrat, a traitor to his class,” therefore, Patterson adds, “little is proved by demonstrating how inconsistent is Cade in his recapitulation of the ancient tropes of levelling, or how much Shakespeare simplified and darkened the model he found in Hall.”²⁰⁴

Phyllis Rackin examines a series of characters in the first tetralogy that she sees as ‘subverters of history’. The lower-class persons in the *Henry VI* trilogy all “share the Machiavellian attributes of treachery and selfish, amoral ambition that define them as demonic Others.”²⁰⁵ Rackin argues that although their presence is undeniable, the characterization, roles and interests of the plebeian characters “are finally determined by the requirements of the historical plot and the conventions of dramatic representation, subsumed under hegemonic structures that expressed the interests of the elite.” Although potentially dangerous, the theatrical energy of these characters is in the end contained and neutralized. Rackin concludes that Shakespeare’s Cade “proposes a revolution so

²⁰³ Richard Wilson, P. 176.

²⁰⁴ Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 49.

²⁰⁵ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 75.

radical and so ludicrous that it discredits the just grievances it addresses.” The potentially subversive” Cade scenes “seem finally designed to justify oppression.”²⁰⁶

Martin Randall likens Shakespeare’s Jack Cade rebellion to a “popular interlude” framed “by Part Two’s context of court intrigue.”²⁰⁷ He draws attention to the parallelism between the representation of Cade and the dramatic rebellion of William Hackett, who claimed to be an apocalyptic prophet and reformer, eventually claiming to be the messiah and king of all Europe. Also pointing to the physical similarities between Cade and Hackett, Randall concludes that if Hackett’s rising is “seen as a topical analogy for Cade’s, it reveals Shakespeare drawing directly on spontaneous contemporary street shows for his scenic ideas as well as official public spectacles.”²⁰⁸

Derek Cohen examines the ideological apparatuses, which produce and naturalise oppression and the political structures through which that oppression is sustained. He argues that, although in *2Henry VI* “rage and murderous hatred are pervasive within the ruling class, the poor and the working people are seen as so many fools and dolts, easily misled by a villain who promises them anarchy, wealth, and revenge against their enemies, the rich.”²⁰⁹

Paola Pugliatti examines the Jack Cade scenes in accordance with Shakespeare’s manipulation of the source materials. She argues that, examined

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 219.

²⁰⁷ Martin Randall, ‘Elizabethan Civic Pageantry in *Henry VI*’, *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities*, 60:2, (1990-1991), pp. 244-264 (p. 255).

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

²⁰⁹ Derek Cohen, *The Politics of Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 60.

separately from the rest of the play, “source manipulation seems to speak loudly against the rebels.” However, when the manipulation of source material is considered in the entire play, “the monstrosity of the rebels will appear as a consequence of the monstrosity of the power that rules over them.”²¹⁰ Shakespeare’s alterations to the sources, Pugliatti claims, “point to the same general effect: a levelling to the lowest plane both of those who intrigue at court for their own advancement and profit and of those who rebel out of material need and hunger.”²¹¹

Michael Hattaway argues that the Jack Cade rebellion is neither an illustration of the dangers of disorder nor an occasion when the energies of the people are diverted into carnival. The scenes indicate a moment when popular grievances were becoming demands. For Hattaway, Jack Cade and his men both serve as “figures” of disorder created by aristocratic factionalism, and are made the instruments of disorder themselves.²¹²

Concentrating mainly on the issue of class conflict in *2Henry VI*, Thomas Cartelli examines the relation between Jack Cade and Alexander Iden. The relationship between the two is “that of ‘stray’ and ‘lord’.” Arguing for Shakespeare’s awareness of class conflict and class consciousness, Cartelli concludes that, by separating his disorderly Cade from Hall’s more respectable figure, Shakespeare “may be said to have foregrounded class distinctions which

²¹⁰ Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 155.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²¹² Michael Hattaway, ‘Rebellion, Class Consciousness, and Shakespeare’s *2 Henry VI*’ *Cahiers Elisabethains*, 33 (1988), 13-22.

a more accurate (or less prejudicial) estimate of the historical Cade would have occluded.”²¹³

Ellen C. Caldwell also claims the meaning of the Jack Cade scenes to be polyvalent, like that of the uprising itself. She believes that one should first analyse the historical rebellion in order to “determine how Cade and his demands are represented.”²¹⁴ She concludes that at worst, Shakespeare’s *2Henry VI* presents Jack Cade “as a self-serving pretender, a nihilist, a threat to law, literacy, and order, a murderer of innocents, a scourge,” and at best, “Cade’s appeals for social, economic, and political reforms are couched in language and accompanied by actions which, if ambiguous or polyvalent, may be inaccessible or unpalatable to a modern audience.”²¹⁵

The Jack Cade episode in *2Henry VI* can be interpreted in different ways. Moreover, Shakespeare can be shown both as a populist and an anti-populist playwright depending on the approach to the plays. What I would like to do is to analyze the episode, and the handling of the commoners²¹⁶ in general within their historical context and thus, hope to demonstrate that Shakespeare is reflecting upon the contemporary divisions and problems that the Elizabethans were confronted with.

²¹³ Thomas Cartelli, ‘Jack Cade in the Garden: Class Consciousness and Class Conflict in *2Henry VI*’, in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. by Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 48-67 (p. 57).

²¹⁴ Ellen C. Caldwell, ‘Jack Cade and Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 2*’ *Studies in Philology*, (1995), 18-79, (p.50).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

²¹⁶ The word “commoner” is used to cover all the people of less than gentle status. For a description of the sorts of people in Tudor times, see Keith Wrightson, “‘Sorts of People’ in Tudor and Stuart England” in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. by Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 28-51.

The Rebellion was regularly re-assessed by the Tudor historiographers such as Edward Halle, John Stow, Robert Fabyan, and Raphael Holinshed. It may be assumed that these Tudor chroniclers, writing “official” histories, would be condemning the Jack Cade rebellion. Indeed, disobedience and rebellion were denounced by Tudor administrators and constantly condemned in the Elizabethan “Homily against disobedience and wilfull rebellion” where rebellion was considered to be the “greatest of all mischiefes”.²¹⁷ However, the sixteenth-century chroniclers do not seem to be as cohesive and consistent in their presentation of the Jack Cade rebellion as the state authorities would have liked them to be. Edward Hall’s account of the uprising, for example, is contradictory in itself. He claims that the Duke of York’s friends initiated the rebellion in Kent because the people of Kent were “impatient in wronges disdayning of to much oppression, and euer desirous of new chaung, and new fangelnes.”²¹⁸ Apparently, the problems of the country created uneasiness among all classes of people:

For many of the nobilitie, and more of the meane estate, wisely ponderynge the estate and condicion of the Realme, perceyuyng more losse then encrease, more ruyne then auancement, daily to ensue: Rememberyng also that Fraūce was conquered, and Normandy was gained, by the Frenche people in shorte space, thought with them selves and imagened, that the faulte of all these miserable chaunces, happened, either because the Kynge was not the true enheritor to the crowne, or that he or his counsaill were not able of wit, pollicie, and circumspeccion, to rule and gouerne so noble a Realme, or so famous a region.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ See Ronald B. Bond ed., *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and, A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570)* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

²¹⁸ Edward Hall, *The vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke...* (London: 1548; modern ed. Henry Ellis 1809; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1965), p. 219.

²¹⁹ Edward Hall, *Vnion*, p. 219.

Hall praises Cade's "wit" while the rulers of the country are criticised for the lack of it. He finds Cade presumptuous, criticizes his actions, and moralizes on the spectacle of Cade's head over the bridge: "This is the successe of all rebelles, and this fortune chaucheth euer to traytors."²²⁰ However, the criticism is directed to both Cade's and the King's parties in the account of the contents of the petition. In order to prevent any misunderstanding of the cause of his "coming thither" Cade:

... Sent to [King] an humble supplicacion, with louyng woordes, but with malicious entent, affirming his cōmyng, not to be against him, but against diuerse of his counsail, louers of them selves, and oppressers of the pore comonaltie, flatterers to the kyng and enemyes to his honor, suckers of his purse, and robbers of his subiectes, perciall to their frendes, and extreme to their enemies, for rewardes corrupted, and for indifferencie, nothing doing. This proud byll, was both of the kyng, and his counsail, disdainfully taken, and thereupon great consultacion had, and after long debatying, it was concluded, that such proude rebels, should rather be suppressed and tamed, with violence and force then with fayre woordes or amicable aunswer.²²¹

Robert Fabyan's account of the Jack Cade rebellion mentions that some members of the king's army sympathized with Cade's plans upon hearing that the rebels had killed the Staffords: "they sayd playnly boldly, that except the lorde Saye and other before reheerced were comytted to warde, they wolde take the capitaynes partye."²²²

John Stow's account of the Cade rebellion also appears to be somewhat sympathetic towards the rebels' grievances. When King Henry VI sends some

²²⁰ Edward Hall, *Vnion*, p. 222.

²²¹ Edward Hall, *Vnion*, p. 220.

²²² Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France, In Two Parts (Concordance of Histories*, ed. Pynson [London: 1516]), modern ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1811), p. 623.

“notable” men to learn the rebels’ purpose and the reason for their rebellion Jack Cade answers:

That he and his company were assembled there to redresse and reform the wrongs that were done in the Realme, and to withstand the malice of them that were destroyers of the common weale, and to amend the defaultes of them that were chiefe counsellors to the king, and shewed vnto them the articles of complaints touching the misgouernment of the realm, wherein was nothing contained but seemed reasonable, wherof a copie was sent to the Parliament holden that time at *Westminster*, with also one other byll of requestes by them made, of things to be reformed, and to haue answeere therof agayne, but he had none.²²³

The grievances of the rebels are also to be found in the 1577 and 1587 editions of Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. Apparently, the grievances were printed in order to make sure that “a full report of this insurrection maie passe to the knowledge of the readers.”²²⁴

It should be noted then, that the complexity Knowles²²⁵ attributes to Jack Cade of *2Henry VI* is also to be found in ways the Tudor historians handled the rebellion. Shakespeare may be said to have made the Jack Cade rebellion even more problematic and complex by blending it together with the “peasants’ revolt” of 1381 under Jack Straw. Some of the wretched actions Jack Cade and his followers perform in the play come from accounts of the 1381 peasants’ revolt.²²⁶ It is impossible to know exactly why Shakespeare conflated the two rebellions. However, it appears that what he had in mind was a lot more than just

²²³ John Stow, *The Chronicles of England, from Brute vnto this present yeare of Christ 1580*, (London, 1580), pp. 653-4.

²²⁴ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1577; 2nd edition 1587; facsimile reprint New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. III, p. 221.

²²⁵ Ronald Knowles, ‘The Farce of History: Miracle, Combat, and Rebellion in *2 Henry VI*’, p. 176.

²²⁶ Shakespeare’s probable sources, for the rebels’ hatred of learning and books, their sending clerks and lawyers to death, their burning of all written records, their wish for equality, are: Richard Grafton, *Chronicle at Large*, (London, 1569); Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles*, and the anonymous play *The Lifef and Death of Jack Straw*.

a representation of the Jack Cade rebellion that occurred during Henry VI's rule. This may be justified by the fact that he made many alterations to his source material. It is the main argument of this chapter that Shakespeare, by playing so freely with time and manipulating his sources, may be said to be reflecting upon the contemporary problems that the Elizabethan England was facing. His presentation of the complaints of the rebels and commoners in general would have enabled his audience to build connections between the problems of the past and the problems of Elizabethan England. Diverse conclusions have been reached by the critics in terms of defining Shakespeare's attitude towards the Jack Cade rebellion and commoners in general. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to decide what Shakespeare's political or ideological position was, if he had ever needed one, from the various ways he treats the commoners of England in his *Henry VI* trilogy. This chapter is concerned with the depiction of the characteristics of the rebellion that find their reflections in Shakespeare's England.

The historical "Jack Cade rebellion" originated in Kent during 1450 and 1451. The participants of the rebellion assembled at Blackheath and petitioned King Henry VI to address their grievances. They were refused by the king who sent an army against them. The participants of the rebellion defeated the king's force killing its leaders. After the king's withdrawal from the city, they entered London and executed the Lord Treasurer and his son-in-law, the sheriff of Kent. Having lost the support of the citizens of London because of their plundering and excessive violence, they dispersed after a battle to control the bridge.

Through negotiations, most of the participants were pardoned by King Henry VI. Their leader was eventually hung, quartered and beheaded.

The Jack Cade rebellion in Shakespeare's *2Henry VI*, however, differs from the historical rebellion in that Cade is much more a device of the Duke of York, for his own advancement to the throne, in the play than it is in the sources. The rebellion is said in the sources to have been inspired by the Duke of York's friends and supporters.²²⁷ In Shakespeare, Jack Cade is presented as the minister of the Duke's own ambitions:

And for a minister of my intent,
I have seduc'd a headstrong Kentishman,
John Cade of Ashford,
To make commotion, as full well he can,
Under the title of John Mortimer. (*2Henry VI* III. i. 55-59)²²⁸

So, prior to the second scene in Act IV, which starts the Jack Cade scenes, Shakespeare informs the audience of his alterations to the historical materials. It is through his source manipulation as well as direct analogies that he builds connections between the problems of the past and the present.

Shakespeare uses the real names of the actors for the two characters who open the Jack Cade scenes, Bevis and Holland.²²⁹ This may be said to build, from the very start, a bridge between the world of reality and the world of fiction as well as between the past and the present. The "alienation effect" may be said to be carried further by the first speech of the scene. Bevis tells Holland to get

²²⁷ Edward Hall, *Vnion*, p. 219.

²²⁸ William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part 2*, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1957; repr. London: Routledge, 1988). All citations of the play are from this edition.

²²⁹ See Cairncross' note to Act IV, Scene ii.

himself a “sword, though made of lath” (IV. ii. 1). We are reminded not only that the characters are merely actors but also that their weapons are made of wood. The insertion of the names of actors into a play that deals with the past could blend together that past and the present.

The beginning speeches of Act IV Scene ii may be worth further analysis. Except for the mentioning of the name “Jack Cade”, the dialogue between the two actors/artisans,²³⁰ until the entrance of Cade and his followers, can be interpreted as the two actors/artisans’ thoughts on the contemporary problems of their country. The first reference is to the economic problems in the country; England is “threadbare” (IV. ii. 7). Almost everyone among Shakespeare’s audience, no matter which class they belonged to, would be familiar with the economic distress in the country that had resulted in riots and disturbances especially since 1581.²³¹ The next thing they complain about is the nobility as “It was / never merry world in England since gentlemen came / up” (IV. ii. 7-9). It is true that Shakespeare is referring to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 in these lines. The lines echo John Ball’s famous slogan in the revolt complaining about inequality among people: “When Adam delu’d, and Eue span / Who was then a gentleman?”²³² However, it may also point to the ongoing conflict between the gentlemen of the country and the commoners during the

²³⁰ Shakespeare’s change of the occupations of the rebels also has references to Elizabethan industrial dispute over the monopolies and regulations of the guilds. There were at least two popular riots against monopolies between 1581-1602. See Manning, *Village Revolts*, p. 328. For the London workers’ fight against the capitalisation of textile industry see, A. L. Beier, “Engine of Manufacture: The Trades of London”, in A. L. Beier and R. Finley, *The Making of Metropolis: London, 1500-1700*, (London: ?, 1986).

²³¹ See Roger Burrow Manning, *Village Revolts*, pp. 328-329, where he gives a list of the insurrections, riots and unlawful assemblies in London between the years 1581-1602. Twelve of these were attributed to the economic distress in the country.

²³² See Cairncross’ note to line eight of Act IV, Scene ii. Also Raphael Holinshed p. 749.

Elizabethan era. The commoners were usually scorned by the Elizabethan gentry who considered them to be “rascals” and “the skumme of the worlde.”²³³ Sir Humphrey Stafford who is sent by king Henry VI to put down the rebellion also calls Cade and his followers “Rebellious hinds, the filth and scum of Kent” (IV. ii. 116). This only infuriates Cade and his followers as they are determined not to “leave one lord, one gentlemen” and “spare none but such as go in clouted shoon” (IV. ii. 177-178). It appears that not much had changed since the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. Moreover, in early modern England, the tension between the commoners and the gentry seems to have increased to such heights at times as to cause a crowd of 500 people from both sides to fight each other.²³⁴

One of the main concerns of the Elizabethan populace was the double standard they witnessed in the administration of justice. The gentlemen seem to have enjoyed the privilege of protection against commoners in the cases brought to the courts. The commoners had indeed witnessed homicide cases against gentlemen ending with release of the accused. They had also seen the trial of a commoner accused of killing an officer ending with the conviction of the man of homicide.²³⁵ So it is not surprising that Bevis and Holland go on to complain about the bad governance in the country and finally decide that they should run the country and “Let the magistrates be / labouring men” (IV. ii. 16-17). Their wishes as rebels in the play are not much different from the “utopian” dreams of

²³³ Thomas Wright, *Queen Elizabeth and Her Times*, II, p. 227.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Acts of the Privy Council*, XXII, pp. 549-550; XXIII, pp. 19-28.

the commoners in early modern England who often rebelled and rioted to fulfil those dreams.²³⁶

After the explanation of his physical fitness to be a ruler Jack Cade's first promise is the reformation of economy. His words develop the main theme of economic crisis introduced by Bevis and Holland. Cade promises that: "There shall be in England seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hoop'd pot shall have ten hoops; and I will make it felony to drink small beer" (IV. ii. 62-65). His promises of low prices and abundant food clearly echo the grievances of the poor in the early modern England as there was a considerable number of food riots in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Apparently, the average food prices in England "which had remained fairly stable throughout the later fifteenth century, had trebled by the 1570s, and by the early decades of seventeenth century they had risen sixfold."²³⁷ The situation was worsened by the fact that there was also a decline in the wages of the workers. The gravity of the REPETITION?matter may be evident in the fact that although popular attempts of price regulation would be considered by the government as an attempt to change the country's law, there were at least two instances of such attempts in 1595. On 12 June food rioters themselves determined the fish prices and the following day a group of people forced the "butter-women" to sell the butter for 3d. a pound where they had been asking 5d. per pound. The rioters

²³⁶ Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 88-90.

²³⁷ For an account of popular food riots in early modern England, see Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1982), pp. 173-174; and Manning, *Village Revolts*, pp. 187-219, 328-329.

were severely punished.²³⁸ Cade then becomes the voice of the commoners' utopian dreams: "There shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score," (IV. ii. 69-70). However, the people will be eating and drinking freely on condition that they "worship me [Cade] their lord" (IV. ii. 72). Reference to hunger continues when Cade enters London with his forces and declares himself lord Mortimer of the city. He sits on the London stone and commands that "the pissing-conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign" (IV. vi. 3-4). "The little Conduit" was apparently called "the pissing Conduit, by the Stokes Market, ... A place from which the lower classes fetched water."²³⁹ Obviously, there is exaggeration in Cade's words, nevertheless, his promises appear to be "addressing genuine grievances that created actual hunger among the poor."²⁴⁰

Cade's promise of lower prices will just be a start for his "reforms". He then touches on another significant issue that created problems between the landlords and the commoners, the problem of land enclosures.²⁴¹ When he becomes king, Cade promises, "all the realm shall be in common" (IV. ii. 65). Shakespeare, in fact, had introduced this problem earlier in the play as a problem of the commoners. Three or four petitioners in the first act take their complaints

²³⁸ Roger Burrow Manning, *Village Revolts*, p. 204.

²³⁹ See the Arden note to IV. vi., line three.

²⁴⁰ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 213.

²⁴¹ In England, land enclosure began in twelfth century. The initial aim was to increase production or to convert arable land to pasture. Statutes in 1235 and 1285 provided that enough unenclosed land must be left to meet the common grazing rights of tenants. However, landlords often expelled tenants, purchased common rights, and enclosed lands after tenancies had expired. The widespread enclosures caused poverty among large numbers of peasants and many of these peasants either joined the growing urban working class or became beggars. In the sixteenth century, the monarchs discouraged enclosure for fear of unrest among the displaced peasantry but they were unsuccessful. By the seventeenth century, landlords became dominant in the government.

to the Duke of Gloucester. However, they find themselves in the situation of showing their petitions to the Queen and the Duke of Suffolk because one of the petitioners mistakes him for Gloucester. Petitions include a complaint “against the Duke of Suffolk for enclosing the commons of Long Melford” (iii. 20-22). Indeed, it was one of the complaints of the commons of Kent that:

Though diuerse of the poore people and commons of the realme, haue neuer so great right, truth, and perfect title to their land: yet by vntrue claime of infeoffement made vnto diuerse states, gentles, and the king’s meniall seruants in maintenances against the right, the true owners dare not hold, claime, nor pursue their right.²⁴²

This was one of the items in the petition sent to king Henry VI by Jack Cade and his followers in 1450. Apparently, land enclosure, which could “depopulate a whole village”, was one of “the principle grievances” of Elizabethan England.²⁴³ Riots caused by enclosures of common fields and wastes were a continuing problem for the Elizabethan England as well. Powerful landlords continued to enclose common fields and wastes, which left poor people with no place to graze their sheep and cattle. Also, the fact that privileged courtiers could easily get special licences from the monarch to enclose the common fields gave way to anti-enclosure riots.²⁴⁴ Obviously, Shakespeare was not simply dealing with the *past* conflicts between the social classes. Rather, it can be argued, he was echoing the contemporary conflicts by conflating them with the conflicts of the past. It appears that about a century and a half after the Jack Cade rebellion the sentiment remained the same among the commoners. In the Oxfordshire rising

²⁴² Raphael Holinshed, p.222.

²⁴³ Boris Ford ed., *The Age of Shakespeare*, Volume 2 of the New Pelican Guide to English Literature, (London: Penguin, 1955; repr. with further revisions to bibliography, 1993), p. 30.

²⁴⁴ Roger Burrow Manning, *Village Revolts*, p. 27.

of 1596, the miller Richard Bradshawe “was reported to have declared ‘that he hoped that before yt were long to see some of the ditches throwne downe, and that yt wold never be merye till some of the gentlemen were knocked downe’”.²⁴⁵

Although poverty, injustice and the double standards in the administration of justice are shown in Tudor chronicles as the grievances of the commoners of Kent during the rebellion, they do not record any attempt by the rebels to rescue or free the prisoners. However, there were at least nine cases of protests in London alone against the administration of justice including rescue of prisoners and mutiny of prisoners between the years 1581 and 1602.²⁴⁶ Shakespeare as a conscious intellectual, well aware of the problems in his society, does not hesitate to reflect upon those problems. If the historical rebels will not, Shakespeare’s rebels will, “if we mean to thrive and do good, break open the gaols and let out the prisoners” (IV. iii. 14-15). The alterations Shakespeare makes to the source material enable him to give voice to the current social conflicts and problems of his own time.

In *2Henry VI*, Jack Cade and his followers are against “all scholars, lawyers, courtiers, [and] gentlemen” whom “they call false caterpillars, and intend their death” (IV. iv. 35-36). There appears to be an association as Rackin observes “between learning, law and privilege.”²⁴⁷ Literacy seems to be a dividing line between power and powerlessness. Thus, the “first thing” the

²⁴⁵ Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1640*, (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1980, p. 38.

²⁴⁶ Roger Burrow Manning, *Village Revolts*, 328.

²⁴⁷ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 210.

rebels plan to do is “kill all the lawyers” (IV. ii. 73). The clerk of Chartam who “can write and read and cast accompt” is their first victim. Besides his ability to read and write, he is accused of having “a book in his pocket” and being able to “make obligations, and write courthand” (IV. ii. 86-88). When he confesses arrogantly “I have been so well brought up that I can write my name” (IV. ii. 99-100), Cade orders his men to “hang him with his pen and ink-horn about his neck” (IV. ii. 103-104). The privilege of “benefit of clergy”²⁴⁸ that would have protected the clerk from death penalty in the official courts, ironically, becomes the very cause of his death in the hands of the illiterate.

For Jack Cade and his followers, there is a close connection between literacy and social injustice as well. This is expressed most fully in Cade’s accusation of Lord Say who is initially attacked because he could speak French (IV. ii. 159):

Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar-school; and whereas, before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caus’d printing to be us’d, and contrary to the King his crown, and dignity, thou hast built a paper-mill. It will be prov’d to thy face that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a noun, and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear. Thou hast appointed justices of peace, to call poor men before them about matters they were not able to answer. Moreover, thou hast put them in prison; and because they could not read, thou hast hang’d them.... (IV. vii. 30-43)

Lord Say worsens his situation by starting to answer the accusations with a Latin phrase, “bona terra, mala gens” (IV. vii. 54), which immediately identifies him

²⁴⁸ “Benefit of clergy” gave prisoners the privilege of exemption from death sentence. Anyone who could read a set text, also called “neck-verse”, in the Bible could claim the “benefit of clergy”. See David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 16.

with learning. Although his moving answers stir Cade for a moment, he quickly restrains his remorse and orders, “he shall die, and it be but for pleading so well for his life. Away with him.” (101-102)

For the rebels, reading, writing, printing and the institution of grammar schools, because of their decisive role in life and death, are the very causes of corruption in the Country. After all, it is the literate in the country who make laws, “appoint justices of peace”, and put “poor men” in prison and “hang them” because they fail read their neck-verse. No wonder these “poor men” wish that “the laws of England may come out of your [Cade’s] mouth” (IV. vii. 5-6), who orders them to “burn all the records of the realm” and declares that his “mouth shall be the parliament of England” (12-14). The power of literacy to create privileged people was the concern of not only the rebels of 1381²⁴⁹ and 1450 but also the commoners of Tudor and Stuart England. Apparently, as late as 1663 some prisoners lost their lives for failing to read their neck-verse, and in Tudor and Stuart England, “the opportunity remained ... for the literate felon to claim ‘benefit of clergy’ and escape the full severity of the law.”²⁵⁰ The grievances of rebels seem to be reflecting the problems of the commoners in Shakespeare’s own time.

When Jack Cade first appears, his first promise is the reformation of economy. He wants to get rid of the problem of hunger among the poor by

²⁴⁹ Holinshed records that the rebels of 1381 Peasants’ Revolt forced teachers “of children in grammer schooles to swear neuer to instruct any in their art.” See Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1577, 2nd edition 1587, facsimile reprint New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. II, p. 746.

²⁵⁰ David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*, pp. 16-17.

making “seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny” (IV. ii. 62-63). However, there seems to be no remedy for the poor as it is also the very hunger that causes Cade’s death at the hands of Iden. Just before he dies, he declares that he is “vanquish’d by famine, not by valour” (IV. x. 74). And Iden will thrive on the famine vanquished Cade just as the wealthy thrive on the poor:

Hence will I drag thee headlong by the heels
 Unto a dunghill, which shall be thy grave,
 And there cut off thy most ungracious head;
 Which I will bear in triumph to the King,
 Leaving thy trunk for crows to feed upon. (IV. x. 79-83)

Esquire Iden will be rewarded a thousand marks and made a knight by the king (V. i. 76-79) for Cade’s head while his body is left for the crows to feed upon. Contrary to his earlier statement that he did not seek to “wax great by others’ waning” (IV. x. 79-83) he becomes a knight, having clearly waxed great by Cade’s waning. And Cade’s anti-enclosure statement that “all the realm shall be in common” (IV. ii. 65) dies in the hands of a small “property owner”.

Shakespeare’s handling of the Jack Cade rebellion in *2Henry VI* does not give us a clear picture about his ideological position. Whether he was a populist or an anti-populist playwright depends on different theoretical approaches by the critics. Because of the rebels’ loathing of the nobility, law and literacy, and their violent actions, the general tendency has been towards a negative reading of the Jack Cade rebellion. Even critics like Caldwell, who claims the meaning of the Jack Cade scenes to be polyvalent, calls the rebels a “buffoonish rabble” whose rebellion “is inevitably suppressed in top-down comic violence.”²⁵¹ However, one might do well to remember the political and social conditions of Elizabethan

²⁵¹ Ellen C. Caldwell, ‘Jack Cade and Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 2*,’ p.50.

England echoed in the representation of the Jack Cade rebellion. It seems that for the commoners among the mixed audience, everything is there in the play to grieve for. Shakespeare's Cade may function as a vehicle of protest against practices or conditions, "perhaps suggested by the various historical accounts and grievances, but certainly mediated by contemporary issues."²⁵² He gives voice to the marginalized, no matter how, to address their demands which had been ignored by most of the Tudor historians. The key to his representation of contemporary problems may lie in the changes he makes to the source material. Shakespeare sets up an atmosphere which validates a rebellion and which initially aims at the correction of the Court, and the rebellion is given its just causes whereas the corruption among nobility has no basis.

²⁵² Brents Stirling, 'Shakespeare's Mob Scenes: A Reinterpretation,' *HLQ* 3, (1945): p. 236

Chapter III: Reflections of the Contemporary Political Conflicts:

In August 1942, during the Second World War, the German 6th Army under General von Paulus advanced into Stalingrad. In November, however, when Romanian forces defending the German supply route to Stalingrad were forced to retreat by the Red Army, Paulus and his 200,000-strong army were left besieged in Stalingrad. When the last cargo plane from Stalingrad airport landed in Berlin, the officers, by the commands of Adolf Hitler, confiscated the seven bags of letters written by the besieged soldiers. The aim was to prepare a documentary that would justify the war and state policies of Nazi Germany. However, the officials were faced with a big problem: the letters were not written for the Ministry of War Propaganda as expected but to fathers and mothers, friends, sons and daughters of the soldiers. Only 2 per cent of the letters were written in favour of the German War and a great majority of them were against it, so the letters were locked in the army archives. Only after the fall of Berlin, these letters became public. One soldier among many other dissenting voices questions the validity of war through such ruling class invented words as heroism, honour, nobility, patriotism and martyrdom in contrast with reality:

... You are my witness that I was always against soldiering because I was afraid of the Eastern Front and of war in general. I was never a soldier—only a civilian in uniform. What good has it done me? And are the others who did not resist and were not afraid any better off? Yet, what have we achieved? We, the supernumeraries of madness incarnate? What shall we gain from dying the hero's death? I have played Death a few dozen times on the stage, but it was only acting. The rest of you sat out there in front in plush seats and found my

acting authentic and convincing. It shocks one to realize how little that acting had to do with real death.

Death always had to be heroic, inspiring, thrilling; it had to be for a great cause and based on conviction. And what is it here, in reality? It means to perish like cattle from cold and starvation—just another biological process like eating and drinking. Men are dying like flies, and no one even takes the trouble to bury them. They are lying all around us—some without arms, legs or eyes and others with their bellies torn open. Someone ought to shoot a film of it, just to discredit the Noblest Form of Death once and for all. It's a filthy way of dying—and one of these days it will be glorified on granite pedestals in the shape of 'dying warriors' with their heads in bandages and their arm in slings. Songs of praise, odes and war novels will be sung and written, and Masses will be said in the churches. Since I have no desire to rot in a mass grave, I am not going through with it. I have written in similar terms to Prof. H. You and he will be hearing from me again. Neither of you must be surprised if it takes some time, for I have resolved to take my fate into my own hands.²⁵³

Having lost his faith in the rulers of his country and witnessing the absurdity of war and words of propaganda such as honour, courage, and heroism etc., this soldier decides to run away from the battleground in order to avoid death which seems inevitable. This is clearly not *his* war and he refuses to take part in it, as he is not convinced of the causes of this war. It is not known whether he had succeeded in taking his fate into his own hands and saving his life or had died with the thousands of others in the battleground. What is clear, however, is that the dissenting voices of war were simply ignored by the rulers. The common people, it seems, have always been appropriated by the ruling classes for their own convenience, regardless of time and place.

This German soldier's remarks about the World War II and the values set by the ruling class echo the dissenting voices of the Shakespearean stage. Like

²⁵³ Anthony G. Powell trans. *Last Letters from Stalingrad*. (London: Methuen, 1956), pp. 24-25. There are many letters similar in content, however, this particular one is chosen and quoted at length due to its strong parallelism with Shakespeare's protesting voices.

the German soldier, Falstaff too, in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, questions and criticizes the values set by the aristocracy. At Shrewsbury, King Henry IV's army and the rebels led by the earl of Northumberland are about to fight. Falstaff, however, would rather be at home in his bed than be on the battlefield. When he is reminded by prince Hal that he owed "God a death," (V. i. 126) he soliloquizes:

'Tis not due yet, I would be loath to pay him before his day—what need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter, honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on, how then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a-Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, Then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon—and so ends my catechism. (*1 Henry IV* V. i. 127-141)

Falstaff and the German soldier who is, coincidentally, an actor in his civilian life seem to have many things in common. They both challenge the conventional values of the ruling class and thus threaten the established order. Courage and honour have no practical meaning for them. "What shall we gain from dying the hero's death?" asks the German soldier to which Falstaff has the answer: "air". Are the ones who had honour and courage "any better off?" asks the German soldier. Obviously not, as Falstaff remarks when he sees Sir Walter Blunt newly slain by the earl of Douglas: "Soft! who art thou? Sir Walter Blunt: there's honour for you! (V. iii. 32-33). In the battle of Shrewsbury, Falstaff is there to challenge the military codes of war and heroism. He values feasting against fighting, carnival against chivalry because war offers nothing but "Lean famine,

quartering Steel, and climbing Fire,” (*1Henry VI* IV.ii 11). But he is not yet a real danger that can struggle against order. His action is merely a protest against the established notions of war. His preference shows it.

Shakespeare’s common men, like the women, “silenced and marginalized” by his historiographic sources, “represent a constant challenge to the mystifications of a historiographic tradition”:

Excluded, disempowered, or represented as demonic others by historiographic writing, they derive their subversive authority from the present, material reality of theatrical performance. Joan and Jack Cade have real historical prototypes, and Falstaff, the chief inheritor in the second tetralogy of Joan’s antihistorical legacy, is both literate and a knight; but all are inscribed within the same binary opposition that opposes historiographic writing to theatrical speech and present, corporeal life.²⁵⁴

For the German soldier, who, “played Death a few dozen times on stage”, there is a great contrast between mystified concepts of honourable and heroic death and reality. He demystifies the chivalric honour and death: “Men are dying like flies, and no one even takes the trouble to bury them. They are lying all around us—some without arms, legs or eyes and others with their bellies torn open.” Death in reality is so horrible, he believes, that someone should “shoot a film of it, just to discredit the Noblest Form of Death once and for all.”

²⁵⁴ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 203. Rackin argues that Renaissance historiography, because it was aristocratic, handled both women and common men alike. “Its heroic subject matter, its genealogical purpose, and its status as written text all served to exclude common men as well as women from the elite province its discourse constructed”. p. 202.

This demystification of chivalric honour recalls Joan of Arc's contemptuous description of the great English hero Talbot in *1 Henry VI*:

Here is a silly-stately style indeed!
The Turk, that two and fifty kingdoms hath,
Writes not so tedious a style as this.
Him that thou magnifiest with all these titles,
Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet.
(IV. vii. 72-76)

“The silly-stately style” is Sir William Lucy's, as he, looking for Talbot, utters eleven lines of honourable titles just to ask the whereabouts of Talbot. Joan, then, expresses her contempt for empty titles and “historical renown”. For her, material, physical life is what is real. Thus she is ready to give the dead bodies of Talbot and others to the English as “They would but stink and putrefy the air” (IV. vii. 90). Because the chivalric words of the aristocracy have no practical meanings for the common men, they will have none of it. Falstaff expresses his disbelief in the word “honour” as he responds to the noble corpse of Sir Walter Blunt at the Battle of Shrewsbury: “I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath. Give me life, which if I can save, so: if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end” (*1 Henry IV* V. iii. 58-61). To Falstaff, “honour” is meaningless because it has no physical value: it cannot “set to a leg.... Or an arm” or ease the pain of a wound. Furthermore, “honour” and “fame”, that have no practical value, do not protect one from physical death. Thus, the boy at the siege of Harfleur in *Henry V* wishes to “be in an alehouse in London!” and, he would give all his “fame for a pot of ale and safety” (III. ii. 12-13). After all, even if the common soldiers had fought with honour and courage and died, they will be counted as dead men of no “name” and as “all other men” (*Henry V* IV. viii. 106).

The dissenting voices of the past seem to have found their voice in the Shakespearean stage through Falstaff and other common soldiers. However, this does not seem to prevent them from being appropriated by the ruling class, as they will always find themselves marching off to the next battle in order to defend the established order.

The clashes between commoners and the state authorities have already been discussed in the previous chapter. With regards to commoners, a constant process of appropriation by the aristocracy seems to be prevalent in Shakespeare's all *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI* plays. However, there is a difference between the commoners that took part in the Jack Cade rebellion and the others, in terms of transforming their discontent with the ruling class into action. Although initiated as part of the plan that the Duke of York set up for his own advancement, Jack Cade and his followers did constitute a threat to the established order, whereas, others, no matter how subversive their thoughts and intentions were, always found themselves contained by the ruling class. In Shakespeare's history plays, as well as in Elizabethan England, commoners appear to be appropriated by the ruling class for their own ends. The common people are continuously scorned and exploited by the ruling class, and, the only place where they get a decent treatment seems to be the battleground, fighting to protect the interests of their superiors.

When the English forces assembled at Tilbury in 1588 to fight against the Spanish Armada²⁵⁵ sent by Philip II to invade England, Queen Elizabeth delivered a speech. Her speech mentions equality among all classes of people:

My loving people, ... I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust.²⁵⁶

This speech states that everyone is equal on the battleground. However, when the war is fought—in this case it was not, thanks to the sea—or the danger is over, the common soldiers, who were once on equal grounds with their queen, immediately fade to the background. As discharged soldiers, most of them will probably find themselves being hunted by the city authorities for being, what the Elizabethan homilies would describe as, idle men, “vagabonds, masterless men”, and “the natural enemies of social discipline”.

Like Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare's king Henry V too expresses a social idea, which appears to be a kind of “democratic nationalism” on the field of Agincourt:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.
(*King Henry V* IV. iii. 60-63)

²⁵⁵ The Spanish Armada was defeated at sea and never reached England. This “miraculous” event was generally accepted as a sign of God’s special favour to Queen Elizabeth and to England.

²⁵⁶ *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. M. H. Abrams, eds. (New York: Norton & Company Ltd., 1993), p. 999.

Once more the status of the common soldiers are raised to the same level as their monarch who promises them an everlasting fame that will ensure their place in the history: “This story shall the good man teach his son, / And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by / From this day to the ending of the world / But we in it shall be remembered” (V. iii. 56-59). However, when the battle is over, the commoners, once again, fade to the background. Neither renaissance historiographic records nor Shakespeare, who turns to Holinshed for an authoritative account of the casualties, give them a place in history. Henry, forgetting all about his promises of “everlasting fame” and of “brotherhood”, speaks the words of the written records that left out the names of the common soldiers who died at the battle of Agincourt.

Holinshed is very careful in differentiating between the soldiers of “better sort” and the “meaner sort” in his account of the casualties:

There were slaine in all of the French part to the number of ten thousand, whereof were princes and noble men bearing baners one hundred twentie and six; to these of knights, esquires, and gentlemen, so manie as made vp the number of eight thousand and four hundred (of the which fiue hundred were dubbed knights the night before the battell) so as of the meaner sort, not past sixtéene hundred. Amongst those of the nobilitie that were slaine, these were the chéefest, Charles lord de la Breth high constable of France, Iaques of Chatilon lord of Dampier admerall of France, the lord Rambures master of the crossebowes, sir Guischarde Dolphin great master of France, Iohn duke of Alanson, Anthonie duke of Brabant brother to the duke of Burgognie, Edward duke of Bar, the earle of Neuers an other brother to the duke of Burgognie, with the erles of Marle, Vaudemon, Beaumont, Grandprée, Roussie, Fauconberge, Fois and Lestrake, beside a great number of lords and barons of name.

Of Englishmen, there died at this battell, Edward duke Yorke, the earle of Suffolke, sir Richard Kikelie, and Daue Gamme esquire, and of all other not aboute five and twentie persons, as some doo report.²⁵⁷

Henry V reads the Herald's note that quotes almost verbatim from Holinshed:

Charles Delabreth, High Constable of France;
 Jacques of Chatillion, Admiral of France;
 The master of the crossbows, Lord Rambures;
 Great Master of France, the brave Sir Guichard Dauphin;
 John Duke of Alençon; Anthony, Duke of Brabant,
 The brother to the Duke of Burgundy;
 And Edward, Duke of Bar: of lusty earls,
 Grandpré and Roussi, Fauconbridge and Foix,
 Beaumont and Marle, Vaudemont and Lestrelles.
 (IV. viii. 93-101)

It appears that nobles are nobles everywhere, no matter whether they are one's enemies or friends; they find their places in the history. Henry, reading the names of the French nobles from the Herald's note, comments with awe: "Here was a royal fellowship of death" (IV. viii. 102). Neither Holinshed nor Henry cares to mention the French common soldiers who were killed. He then asks the number of the "English dead" and Herald gives him another paper that still follows Holinshed's account. Henry, reading from the Herald's note, recites the full names and titles of the nobility who died in battle. The common soldiers, however, once again, fade to the background:

Edward the Duke of York; the Earl of Suffolk;
 Sir Richard Keighley; Davy Gam, esquire;
 None else of name, and of all other men
 But five-and-twenty.
 (IV. viii. 104-107)

²⁵⁷ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1577; 2nd edition 1587; facsimile reprint New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. III, p. 83.

At the end of the war, every one within the English army resumed their previous individual social status. While the names and titles of the noblemen who were killed in battle are recited one by one with reverence, the only mention that common soldiers get is a body count as “others”. When the war is fought the previous “band of brothers” have become “names” and “no names” echoing the social structure of the Elizabethan England where the society was roughly divided into better sort and the meaner sort, “haves” and “have nots.”²⁵⁸

Falstaff’s common soldiers whom he calls “discarded unjust servingmen, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters and ostlers trade-fall’n, the cankers of a calm world and a long peace” (*1Henry IV* IV. ii. 27-30), as many homilies describe, “are the very types of Elizabethan subversion—masterless men, the natural enemies of social discipline.”²⁵⁹ In other words, they are common disposable soldiers who are “good enough to toss” as Falstaff tells Prince Hal, “food for powder, food for powder, they will fill a pit as well as better” (IV. ii. 65-66). However, the common soldiers’ status yet again rise temporarily when their existence is required for the safety of their lord, Talbot, in *1Henry VI*. Countess of Auvergne makes a plan to capture the English Lord Talbot, “the scourge of France”. When he arrives, Countess first mocks his physical appearance and then announces his capture. Talbot tells her that she only has his shadow:

²⁵⁸ See, F. J. Furnivall ed., *Harrison’s Description of England*, 6th series, No 1 (London: New Shakespeare Society, 1877), and, Keith Wrightson, “Estates, Degrees and Sorts in Tudor and Stuart England”, *History Today* 37 (1987) p. 21.

²⁵⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Invisible Bullets*, p. 30.

You are deceiv'd, my substance is not here;
 For what you see is but the smallest part
 And least proportion of humanity.
 I tell you, madam, were the whole frame here,
 It is of such a spacious lofty pitch
 Your roof were not sufficient to contain 't.
 (II. iii. 50-55)

Then he winds his horn and his soldiers enter, ready to fight for their Lord. Once again, these soldiers are raised to the same level with their master. They become Talbot's "substance, sinews, arms, and strengths, / With which he yoketh your rebellious necks, / Razeth your cities, and subverts your towns," (62-64).

Appropriation of commoners is, perhaps, best summarised by Shakespeare's King Henry VI. Having been deposed by King Edward IV, he is hiding in a chase in the north of England disguised. When the two Keepers understand who he is, they want to capture him as the enemy of their new king. Although he tries hard to persuade them that what they want to do is sinful because Henry himself is the rightful king, he does not succeed. His remarks about the two Keepers highlight the ruling class attitude towards commoners:

Ah, simple men, you know not what you swear.
 Look, as I blow this feather from my face,
 And as the air blows it to me again,
 Obeying with my wind when I do blow,
 And yielding to another when it blows,
 Commanded always by the greater gust,
 Such is the lightness of you common men.
 (3Henry VI III. I. 81-88)²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV, Part 3*, ed. by Andrew S. Cairncross, (London: Methuen, 1964; repr. London: Routledge, 1989).

First, Henry blames the two Keepers for being ignorant of the meaning of their oath they had taken when he was the king. They were sworn true subject and he expects them to keep their word and remain so because he is still alive. While Henry expects “simple men” to remain loyal to their “rightful” king, ironically, it is the nobility that desert him first. His deposition is the result of the ignorance of the nobility of the importance of their oaths. Henry’s second remark that the common men are always commanded “by the greater gust” requires further discussion. Henry’s speech not only reveals the general contempt of the nobility towards commoners, by likening them to a feather that can easily be blown to and fro, but also acknowledges the appropriation and exploitation of commoners by the ruling class. He is well aware of the fact that it is not the will of the commoners to “yield” to any “wind” that blows from any direction. As he himself acknowledges, it is the power that make them yield. In other words, it is not a matter of the fickleness of commoners but the power of the ruling class. Commoners are always “commanded” and appropriated by the aristocracy because they hold the control of the means for representing power.

Furthermore, Henry’s speech is full of contempt for the commoners. In fact, ruling class hatred of the commoners appear to be rather strong in Shakespeare’s all *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI* plays. In *2Henry VI*, when two Petitioners show their seemingly modest petitions²⁶¹ to Queen Margaret and the Duke of Suffolk, she calls them “base cullions” (I. iii. 40) tearing their supplications. Later in the same scene, the Duke of York calls one of his

²⁶¹ See, for example, I. iii.

servants, “base dunghill villain, and mechanical” (193). The Duke of Suffolk calls his captors “base slaves,” (IV. i. 104) and “paltry, servile, abject drudges” (104). His hatred for the commoners is so great that “It is impossible that I should die / By such a lowly vassal as thyself” (109-110). When he is certain that there is no escape from death, he concedes without any indulgence from his pride against the commoners: “Great men oft die by vile bezonians” (134)

While the commons who want to revenge the death of the “good” Duke Gloucester are thanked by King Henry VI “for their tender loving care” (III. ii.279), Suffolk’s response to the same multitude is: “’Tis like the commons, rude unpolish’d hinds,” (270).

The contemptuous terms that Shakespeare’s nobility uses for the common people in his history plays seem to have its contemporary analogue in the Elizabethan society. In his *Description of England*, William Harrison distinguishes between the four “degrees of people” in England. The first degree consisted of gentlemen, the second degree consisted of citizens and burgesses of England’s cities, and the third were the yeomen of the countryside. The final category consisted of day labourers, poor husbandmen, artificers and servants and these people had “neither voice nor authoritie in the common wealthe, but are to be ruled and not to rule other.”²⁶² Apparently, this grouping of the degrees of people was different during the Elizabethan period as it was down to two. The letters between the Privy Council in Westminster and the governors of the

²⁶² F. J. Furnivall ed., *Harrison’s Description of England*, p. 105

English counties refer to “richer sorte” against the “poorer sorte,” “better” over against the “meaner,” “vulgar,” “common,” “ruder” or “inferior” sorts.²⁶³

It may be argued that, in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI* plays, there are roughly two dimensions to the relations between the better sort (the ruling class) and the meaner sort (the common men): that of appropriation and debasing. The only exception is the relation between Prince Hal and Falstaff. The Prince both appropriates and debases Falstaff. When he no longer needs Falstaff’s company, he suddenly draws himself out of Falstaff’s company: “I now thee not, old man” (*2Henry IV* V. v. 47)²⁶⁴ The commoners almost always seem to be either brought under control or debased by the ruling class. When they are needed by their superiors, they are raised even to the equal level with their monarchs, as observed in the speeches of both Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare’s King Henry V. However, when they are not needed, they lose not only their status but also their names, becoming masterless men, the natural enemies of social discipline and “cankers of a calm world and a long peace” (*1Henry IV* IV. ii. 27-30).

In *2Henry VI*, Jack Cade’s men are soldiers fighting for a cause for him. For the king’s party, however, they are: “a ragged multitude / Of hinds and peasants, rude and merciless” (31-32) “thirsting after prey” (50). However, when they are persuaded by Clifford (IV. viii.) to leave him for a promised pardon by the king, Cade loses his control and power. Now it becomes his turn to call his

²⁶³ Keith Wrightson, “Estates, Degrees and Sorts in Tudor and Stuart England”, p. 21.

²⁶⁴ William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV*, Part 2, ed. by A. R. Humphreys, (London: Methuen, 1966; repr. London: Routledge, 1988).

ex-men “base peasants” (21), “you are all recreants and dastards” (28-28) Cade’s soldiers, no matter how subversive they may been when they followed him, are converted to “good subjects” who will serve as the defenders of established order just like Falstaff’s men. Only more power seems to master power.

Conclusion

In this study, parallel readings of all parts of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I and Part 2*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI Part I, Part 2 and Part 3* plays and their religious, social and political contexts are given. In line with the thesis that Shakespeare's history plays can be seen as accounts of how the Tudor State manipulated contemporary dramatic activities for the purpose of constructing and preserving the dominant ideology, these plays have been analysed in the light of the theoretical principles of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism.

The first chapter deals with *1 and 2 Henry VI* plays. It has been argued that the plays provide a deep insight into history in terms of religious conflicts. Accordingly, Shakespeare's handling of the religious issues is analysed through the study of the representation and characterisation of the clergy in the plays and their counterparts in the Elizabethan society. It is deduced that by touching the heart of the contemporary religious problems, the plays, rather than being either conservative or subversive, become a functional discourse in which the ideological conflicts and power struggles of the age would be fought out in more or less overt forms.

The second chapter focuses on Jack Cade rebellion in *2 Henry VI*. It is argued that in his version of the Jack Cade rebellion Shakespeare is reflecting upon the contemporary divisions and problems that the Elizabethans were confronted with. To illustrate this, the Jack Cade rebellion episode in the play and Shakespeare's handling of the commoners in general have been analysed with respect to their historical contexts. It is concluded that Shakespeare, in his

account of the Jack Cade rebellion, gives voice to the marginalized to address their demands which had been ignored by most of the Tudor historians. For this reason, Shakespeare's Cade may function as a vehicle of protest against practices or conditions, perhaps suggested by the various historical accounts and grievances, but certainly mediated by contemporary issues.

In the third chapter, the focus is on the appropriation of the commoners by the ruling class as depicted in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI* plays. It is argued that although the dissenting voices of the past seem to have found their voice in the Shakespearean stage through the commoners, this did not prevent them from being appropriated by the ruling class for the preservation of the dominant order. To illustrate this view, the Elizabethan conception of chivalry has been analysed with respect to its practicality for the commoners. It is contended that, no matter what the extent of the subversiveness of the commoners may have been, they will always find themselves contained by the aristocracy.

After these in-depth textual and contextual analyses of Shakespeare's history plays, *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI*, from the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist perspectives, the thesis arrives at a general conclusion that William Shakespeare, as one of the most prominent intellectuals of the Elizabethan period, could not have stayed indifferent to the political, religious and social dynamics of his age. Thus, he reflected the conflicts and problems of the Elizabethan society. While doing this he freely made changes in the source materials to adapt them to his own age. A critical reading of these reflections from the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist standpoints, may lead to the

conclusion that Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI* plays are polyvalent in meaning and thus open to further discussions for the years to come.

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