

foundation for success in business and the professions, and not least because it thought the Bible should be available to all believers. Above all, its Protestant ethic called for discipline, both self-discipline in work and re-investment, and the discipline of others, like women and workers and, of course, children in school. Small boys, for the good of their souls and their success in this life, which indicated their chances in the next, should spend long hours in hard learning with serious moral content: the great classical authors.

What became a sea change in education – a vital contribution to the Miracle – caught up the author of the Shakespeare plays. As portrayed by tradition and orthodox academic opinion, he was a child of the Grammar School revival that was at the heart of the change in English society sweeping through the second half of the sixteenth century. But was he? In an attempt to answer this question, or at least shed some light on it, we shall look in more detail at the Tudor Grammar Schools and what they achieved. In doing so we shall return to the question of the making of the Miracle by way of an enduring puzzlement over the identity of the man who was its greatest literary figure before the unquestionably Puritan John Milton (a Grammar School product himself). The place to start is with the reign of England's first modern monarch, the decline of the aristocracy, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the mysterious absence of a »Shakespeare« play about Henry VII.

### Why is there no *Henry VII*?

Shakespeare wrote a play for Henry IV (two parts), Henry V (one part), Henry VI (three parts), and even Henry VIII. Why did he not write one for Henry VII? The man who was to become Henry VII appears at the end of *Richard III* as Henry Tudor, Duke of Richmond, the Lancastrian candidate for the throne, who beat the evil Yorkist Richard at the battle of Bosworth in 1485. This ended the Wars of the Roses and started the brilliant Tudor dynasty. So



Henry VII as a Young Man  
From the *Receuil d'Arras*

why didn't Henry Tudor merit a play of his own? The author clearly had deep Lancastrian sympathies and his portrayal of Richard III is about as biased as a dramatic portrait can get. It would seem he had an agenda to promote the Lancastrian and Tudor cause, so why not celebrate the glorious reign of the first Tudor with at least a one-part drama? It could be of course that he did and it has been lost, but there may be good reasons to think the omission was deliberate.

Shakespeare's source for the history plays, Ralph Holinshed's *Chronicles of the History of England*, in the 1587 edition that he used, covers Henry's reign adequately. Bernard André, the blind tutor of Henry's son Prince Arthur, had written a life of his master, which started the stream of anti-Yorkist Tudor propaganda. Polydore Vergil in his *Anglica Historia* in 1534 produced what became the official pro-Tudor history, very flattering to Henry. Shakespeare's contemporary, Francis Bacon, in 1622 published the first great biography of an English king, his *History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh*. The material was there, the public demand for history plays was there, the general urge to write pro-Tudor dramatic propaganda was there, but for some reason the bard skipped this king in the chronological sequence of Henrys.

We cannot get inside God's memory so we can only conjecture the reasons for the omission. The writer of the Shakespeare plays was a monarchical romantic with a decidedly feudal view of the divine right of kings, and of the rightfulness of the feudal order of

society. His history plays are about kings and nobles and their ladies and their courts, and their dynastic quarrels and personal love affairs. Even in the comedies, the social hierarchy remains intact. The trading or middle classes do not play any part in the affairs of state and, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, they are fit only for comedy. His merchants in Venice are the grandees of the Venetian city-state. Othello is a prince and a general. The Jewish moneylender Shylock may (or may not) be sympathetically portrayed, but he remains an outsider: the Doge and his grandees rule Venice.

Shakespeare's is a rigidly hierarchical world where the old aristocracy runs things and plays its games of government and power interspersed with wit and romance. His kings, of whom Henry V is the epitome, should be just and wise and rule fairly, but they also should rule absolutely. The lower orders are universally buffoons and are in there for light relief or downright villainy. They may sometimes be generously portrayed, like the common soldiers in *Henry V*, but they are never even remotely in command or ever shown to be capable of anything but supporting roles and slapstick. In the comedies, those below stairs can outwit the upstairs characters, as with Maria in *Twelfth Night* for example, but this does not touch on the ordering of society; Malvolio is nothing more than a steward, and the Duke still rules in Illyria.

The kings in particular are warriors and power brokers, and it is their exploits in these departments that are his subject matter. Henry V seems to have exhausted, for him, the possibilities of a hero king in England. Henry VI was a pawn and went mad. His play is about the Wars of the Roses, with its cast of power hungry noblemen seeking to control the crown, and the villainous rebels like Jack Cade, who sought to usurp royal power, but even then only by falsely claiming royal descent. Evil rulers can be driven from power, but by the responsible among the nobility and those with legitimate claims, not by upstart commoners trying to pass as

royalty. *Richard III* was a continuation of this theme, and as far as the author was concerned, with Richard's death the matter ended. Henry Tudor's victory was hailed as a rightful triumph for the House of Lancaster, and then left to rest.

Henry Tudor, as king, was not the stuff to excite a playwright like the author of the histories. Henry was so efficient and capable that apart from two minor rebellions he ruled without challenge. He married Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the warring houses, and married his daughter to James IV of Scotland, setting the scene for the eventual union of the kingdoms. He lives in popular memory almost wholly for his compassionate treatment of the rebel Lambert Simnel. Henry recognized that the boy was simply a tool, and having defeated the rebellion, he pardoned him and put him to work as a spit turner in the royal kitchen.

He cleverly managed Parliament and taxation and filled the chronically empty royal coffers, which left his surviving son, Henry VIII, a very rich boy indeed. He expanded the system of Justices of the Peace, which persists to this day, and which put the administration of justice into the hands of volunteer gentry responsible to the Crown. He reorganized the royal household as the basis of administration, and some of their titles are still used for ministers of the crown. He preferred royal marriages to royal wars and dealt brilliant diplomatic deals with the Pope, the Emperor and the continental powers, which brought peace and prosperity to England after years of failure and devastation. As the common verdict has it, he may not have been a great king, but he was an astonishingly successful one.

I would even like to claim him as the first truly modern king: a realist and a pragmatist. He had to change a country run by rival mafia families (after the Wars of the Roses and the failure of feudalism had brutalized them) into a country of citizens responsible to a central bureaucracy under the king and his

appointed ministers. He preferred that these ministers not be nobles, or only nobles that he created, and drew from the ranks of burghers and lawyers, and churchmen that he favored. The old formula we learned in school was accurate: »King and Town versus Castle.« Tudor towns and their tradesmen expanded round churches and cathedrals with their attached Grammar Schools. Castles fell into disuse and were domesticated into residences or were replaced by country houses. Efficiency, and direct dependence on the monarch, became more important than nobility in the governance of England.

Bureaucratic efficiency is not, however, the stuff of which great and especially tragic drama is made. Henry had a colorful sex life, and while being a good husband and father (feeling deeply the loss of his eldest son, Arthur, and his wife) he is said to have slept with three hundred women, getting two hundred seventy-three of them pregnant. These may have been Yorkist slanders, but slander never stopped Shakespeare in the other cases. However, it was not good material for a pro-Tudor propagandist.

Despite the possibly scandalous tidbits, Henry was a sober, private king, concerned with the details of government. He kept in fact a quite cultivated and lively court as befitted a Renaissance prince, but he was not given to public appearances and pandering to the people. There were no royal »progressions« around the country as with Elizabeth. In this he pushed further than did any of his predecessors the use of »new men« who were, unlike the old aristocrats, loyal directly to him and owed their livelihoods and advancement to him. Such men included Richard Fox (no known relative), the son of a humble yeoman who rose to be Bishop of Winchester, Lord Privy Seal, founder of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and godfather to the future Henry VIII. In 1497 he had been master at the school of the Guild of the Holy Cross in Stratford on Avon.

This I think is the crux of the neglect by Shakespeare. Henry made it his goal to curb and restrict the power of the old nobility and did it supremely well. We had to wait until Louis XIV in France to see such another successful attempt. He pushed laws through Parliament to restrict the use of liveried retainers – in effect abolishing the private armies the nobles had routinely kept in the past. He let them keep their titles and high-sounding offices («Lord Great Chamberlain» etc.), but he hemmed them in with taxes and required of them bonds that ruthlessly penalized disloyalty. A measure of his success is that his son succeeded him without challenge, something unheard of in the past. But in all this he represented the wave of the future, of the dominance of the rule of law and the centrality of trade that spelled the beginning of the end of feudal society, with its rigid hierarchies and its familial loyalties.

The old order lingered, but a new order was taking over that meant the emergence of a new class eager for its share of governance. Sean Cunningham (2007), in his excellent history of Henry VII, shows in detail how this worked. Henry had been isolated from the English aristocracy during his years in exile, and he tended therefore to rely less on the noble courtiers, many of whom were of suspect loyalty, and more and more on the new men. He ruled through the royal council and around it gathered »managing committees« that constituted »a core of executives and common lawyers gathered permanently at Westminster.« He created very few new titles of nobility, but knighted many commoners like Empson, Poynings and Bray, who became his closest advisers. These new men foreshadowed Wolsey, Cecil, Cromwell and Walsingham, and Henry made their fortunes entirely dependent on himself in what Cunningham describes as »a purely professional relationship created to streamline policy, and one that made Henry's new men more accountable and easier to supervise.« He created, in effect, an efficient, central, meritocratic bureaucracy, and in doing so reduced the powers of the

aristocracy, which continued to »shine at court« but was less likely to try to usurp royal power.

The newly authenticated play of *Richard II, Part One*, formerly known as *Thomas of Woodstock*, (Egan 2007) is overtly concerned with exactly this issue: the use by the king of the new men of the educated middle class, and the usurpation by them of the power of the old nobility. There is not a shadow of a question where the author's sympathies lie. Again his portrait of the new men is a caricature of greed and villainy, and is contrasted with the sense of duty and obligation of the old nobility. This theme carries over into *Richard II* proper with Bagot, Bushy and Green – the »caterpillars of the commonwealth.«

Cunningham cites an interesting play promoted by Cardinal John Morton. Morton was Henry VII's Wolsey, and among other things raised Thomas More whose *History of King Richard III* (1557) was a deep influence on the Shakespeare play. The play here in question was Henry Medwall's *Fulgus and Lucrece*, »performed before courtiers« in 1497. Medwall (another new man) was Morton's chaplain, and his plot turns on the struggle between a nobleman and a commoner for the hand of an heiress. In the end, says Cunningham, it is the hard-working commoner rather than the shallow and arrogant nobleman who gets the girl. This deserves further study, and I can think of no such conflict or outcome in any Shakespeare play.

Lawrence Stone (1965) has shown the aristocracy to have been »in crisis« during the Tudor period. Its power was being eroded; its lands were being sold to the tradesmen. In the end, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford's Grammar School at Earls Colne passed to a grocer, and Stone uses him as the prime example among the aristocracy of the loss of land to the traders and townsmen. Oxford's sale of land to the Harlackenden family in East Colne – and the lengthy lawsuits that followed deep into the seventeenth century, is almost a

textbook case of the decline of aristocratic landholding and the growing influence of the bourgeoisie (Pearson 2005). Shakespeare looked eternally backwards to the feudal society that was his ideal of governance; but he saw what was coming. So he just kept silent about the man who more than anyone helped to usher in the new world order: the order of pragmatism, efficiency, bureaucracy, meritocracy and contract: the modern world as we know it. He did not write *Henry VII*. Yet Shakespeare was caught in a trap here because he was himself an almost prototypical part of that new world.

If he was indeed the Grammar School boy from Stratford-on-Avon that is claimed, then he was an end product of the process that was geared to the production of the new men he seemed to despise. He was not an aristocrat but a meritocrat; he *was* one of the new men who made his own way to success. He was a son of the trading classes aspiring to a coat of arms and the ranks of the gentry. He should have reveled in the memory of Henry VII. Above all, he would have been a product of the Grammar School system that was itself a conscious product of the policy of educating these new men. This conscious state policy was a confluence of the twin influences of the Renaissance revival of classical learning, and the Protestant Reformation that brought the Bible to all believers and the Calvinist work ethic to life in general. These two powerful forces were crossed with rising nationalism and the desire to have a literate middle class to increase the national wealth and power. How did a child of this surge of modernization come to have the obvious reactionary political and cultural biases we see in the Shakespeare plays?

The matter is complicated, or perhaps, as is the case with so many authorship puzzles, simplified, by the »mysterious nobleman« theory, which would have Shakespeare as a front man for Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. One relevant matter for our immediate purposes is that Oxford's ancestor, the 13th Earl, was

Henry Tudor's main supporter and appears as such at the end of *Richard III*. In his campaign against the power of the nobles, Henry VII is said to have turned on his supporter, the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl, and levied a huge fine against him for having more liveried retainers than the king himself. This, according to the story, started the decline in the fortunes of the Oxford earldom.

Some observers, like Charlton Ogburn (1984), think this is a very good reason why there is no play of *Henry VII*. The omission was Oxford's revenge for the attack on the finances of his lineage! This whole story originated with Francis Bacon, and Cunningham finds no other reference to it and thinks there is no basis for it. Henry needed these loyal noblemen as much as he needed the new men, but the promotion of the latter, and their central part in all future forms of government, certainly undermined the privileges of the former. As Cunningham puts it: »Something deeply important to the long-term development of England's ruling structures occurred during Henry VII's reign.« This disruption of the feudal order was obviously something that the author of the plays seemed to feel personally and disliked at some profound level. It could well have been the basis for the Earl of Oxford's reluctance to grant the first Tudor monarch his own play.

## What Education?

There has been a checkered history of attitudes to Shakespeare's possible education. There is no record of his having attended either school or university. At one extreme, then, those who take Ben Jonson's words from his enigmatic eulogy in the First Folio (1623) literally have credited the author with »smalle Latine and lesse Greeke.« In other words, they prefer to think that Shakespeare had no education worth considering, and was an untutored natural genius. In the charming words of Milton's sonnet about him, he was »warbling his native woodnotes wild.«