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A Daring Game: The Handling of Political Issues by Tudor Playwrights

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Ever since medieval times, playwrights had been key figures in English society, endorsing religious principles and espousing the major issue of their time, namely the salvation of the soul. Plays were openly designed with one main aim upheld by all: to urge spectators onto the path of righteousness. Subsequently, during the Tudor period, although the nature of playmaking had radically changed, playwrights maintained an influential position in society, and the most prominent amongst them became involved in one of the principal concerns of the time: the politico-religious shake-up which, to all intents and purposes, dominated the sixteenth century. Such involvement was, of course, facilitated by the newly-evolving theatrical form which was Tudor Hall drama, sponsored by royal or noble patrons and adapted, by its very nature, to the expression of divergent views.

It is a well-documented fact that a number of prominent playwrights espoused the new religious—and consequently political—positions which began to emerge during Henry VIII's reign and took them firmly on board, whilst other dramatists favoured the *status quo* or, at best, wished only for minor reforms. In the case of some playwrights, their dramatic writing cannot be dissociated from their particular political and religious ideolo-

gies, and a number of them are remembered quite as much for their ideological stances as for their dramaturgical skills. However, expressing their opinions could be a perilous undertaking, and therefore the play-texts of the Tudor corpus are, to say the least, not always entirely explicit concerning their authors' views. At the time the plays were written and first performed, Tudor playwrights were on hazardous ground, and we know of only a certain number of them, such as John Bale or John Heywood, who felt strongly enough to risk the stringent sanctions which were never more than a step away. Such playwrights may have even enjoyed the exhilaration of courting danger, and a number of them played a daring allusive game, which was no doubt also entered into by contemporary spectators well practised in the art of decoding. This game has been seized upon throughout the centuries by scholars eager to seek out veiled allusions and oblique references in order to bring to light the playwrights' true design.

The first objective of this paper is to evoke the main sources of contention and the fluctuating patterns of censorship and sponsorship across the Tudor reigns through which, alternately helped and hindered, aspiring playwrights needed to weave their way carefully . Then, I shall evoke three prominent Tudor playwrights—John Bale, John Heywood and Nicholas Udall—casting a brief glance at the ideologies they were known to espouse and attempting to shed light on the extent to which they were willing to express them in their plays. I shall look at the obstacles standing in their way and consider how these could sometimes be worked around—for example, with the support of like-minded powerful nobles. The aim is to determine how far they were able to find a way (or not, according to the flavour of the day and the monarch in power) of slipping into their plays some indication of their beliefs. If overt expression of one's theories in a play could obviously not be without consequence, even covert hints were a risky business, as they might be deciphered by foes as well as friends. The final part of the paper will examine a few of the possible effects that these circumstances seem to have had on the artistic qualities of Tudor drama and consider to what extent they may have actually shaped major aspects of the Tudor dramatic corpus in general.

The contentious subjects requiring careful handling during this period obviously included primarily the royal divorce, the royal supremacy, the break with Rome and the Reformation. These necessarily involved matters of religious doctrine and practice, which included questions of transubstantiation, the celibacy of priests, the virgin birth, the worship of Mary and the authority of the Bible

or the "true word" over the rules of the Church. Also highly volatile were points of Catholic rite and practices such as the veneration of images and relics and the sale of pardons or indulgences. According to the auspices of a play and to the sympathies of the audience, players could be applauded for expressing their opinions on these subjects. However, in the wrong place and with the wrong audience, the playwright could risk his life or, at best, his career. Although there was never an attempt actually to eradicate all theatrical activity (because of its obvious value in spreading what were felt to be the "right" messages), a number of measures were put in place in order to monitor it. Initiatives were taken during each of the Tudor reigns to control players and their repertoires and to attempt to purge what was considered "seditious sentiment" (Westfall, p. 136), whereas drama flattering to the sovereign and his or her beliefs was allowed to flourish, or indeed was actively nurtured. This was therefore basically a struggle between censorship and sponsorship, which would intensify and change boundaries with each successive monarch, when, to put it simply, everybody swapped sides, so to speak.

The switch from sponsoring to censoring the same plays can be clearly observed in the case of the medieval Catholic cycle plays, which were alternately banned from performance and reinstated with each succession until their final demise during Elizabeth's reign. A similar alternation may be observed concerning the humanist revival of Greek and Latin texts. Although no measures were actively taken against the teaching of Latin, and indeed the scholarly value of the language continued to be appreciated in a general way, it did tend to be frowned on during Protestant régimes for its connections with papism and all it symbolized to Protestant reformers: the antichrist, superstition and idolatry. On the other hand, Greek, the original language of the gospels, was exalted by Protestants as the fountain of truth. Therefore, during periods of Catholic dominance, the opposite preference was espoused.

Henry's reign was a particularly hazardous time. The king's uncertainty about the Reformation is legendary, and his sudden backward steps could be tragic for Catholics and Protestants alike. His long list of victims included the playwright and printer John Rastell. The king's programme of censorship was active. By means of royal proclamations issued in 1527 and 1531, Henry clamped down on itinerant troupes by reactivating the old statute of 1285 enacted to curb vagrancy. This meant that independent strolling players could be arrested as vagrants and beaten or sold as slaves (Westfall, p. 136). Further statutes and proclamations in 1543 and 1544 banned interludes containing elements contrary to the

teachings of the Church. Even plays considered free from sedition were to be performed in certain households only (Happé, ed., Bale, p. 10). Henry also drastically curtailed amateur playmaking by reducing the number of saints' days considered as public holidays, on which plays were usually performed.

Within the framework of legislation, individual performances could be attacked, as occurred with a morality play performed at Grey's Inn during the Christmas season 1526-27, in which Cardinal Wolsey claimed he perceived a less than flattering depiction of himself. As the play-text has not survived, it is unclear as to whether or not this portrayal had been actually written into the text. It was possibly an example of a play in performance filling in the gaps left by the written text. Despite the absence of any detailed eye-witness account of this particular performance, we might conjecture that certain features common to the Tudor corpus were at work here: the visual impact, the power of theatrical delivery, intonation, gesture, facial expressions, the use of a mediating character as a link with the audience—these are all elements which would get the intended meaning across, leaving no room for doubt. In this particular case, the playmaker, John Roo, was committed to the Tower, and one of the actors fled overseas to join Tyndale (Marie Axton, ed., *Jacke Jugeler*, p. 4). Some years later, in 1537, a similar case was noted. This time a play performed during the May Game of Suffolk went flagrantly beyond what had been set down in the written text, and the whole May Game was banned when an enraged Henry ordered justices to enforce the regulations. In this particular instance, it was not the playwright but one of the actors who got the blame.

On the other hand, certain performances were actually encouraged, for, side-by-side with such measures, a full pro-Reformation programme of sponsorship was carried out under the aegis of Cromwell and Cranmer. To quote Bevington, "The Archbishop's genius for inspiring literary propaganda in the Drama was no doubt supplemented by Cromwell's genius for production and distribution" (p. 97). As part of his campaign to prepare the nation for the dissolution of the monasteries, Cromwell commissioned plays from a number of dramatists, one of whom was the fiercely and scathingly anti-papist John Bale. Bale's moralities, taken on tour by a small troupe, were designed to spread Protestant influence to a wide audience. Honoured by an invitation to stage his *King Johan* in Cranmer's house during the 1539 Christmas festivities, Bale was, however, shortly to fall out of courtly favour. After Henry VIII's reversal of policy and Cromwell's execution in 1540, Bale was forced into exile, and his work went from being officially

sponsored to being officially censored when it was condemned by proclamation on 8 July 1546. Similar changing fortunes befell *Pammachius*, Thomas Kirchmayer's fiercely anti-Catholic play, which was nonetheless written in Latin. Dedicated to Cranmer in 1538, its performance in 1545 at Christ's College, Cambridge, incurred the wrath of Bishop Gardiner, who conducted a zealous inquisition and thereafter imposed severe limits on the university's dramatic activity (Marie Axton, ed., *Jacke Jugeler*, p. 4; Happé, ed., Bale, p. 10).

Such incidents show clearly that the State had become a serious rival to the Church as censor of plays. This was formalised by an Act of Parliament in 1543, which banned interpretations of the Bible "contrary to the doctrine set forth … by the King's majesty". In 1546, the City of London joined the battle, claiming the right to control theatrical activity within the city boundaries. This municipal, parliamentary, state and church struggle was to affect the next three Tudor reigns.

Even though the doctrinal positions of Edward, then Mary, were more constant and, in this respect, less perfidious than Henry's, their measures were, if anything, even more stringent. During Edward's reign, the performance of pro-Catholic interludes was restrained, and it is to be suspected that many dramatic texts were burned, as most of the surviving interludes of the time are of Protestant inspiration. In 1548, the York mystery cycle was purged of the plays devoted to the Virgin Mary (Happé, ed., Bale, p. 5). Queen Mary's accession brought the immediate revival of any remaining Catholic plays, whilst the regime attempted to eradicate Protestant drama, which nonetheless continued surreptitiously. In August 1553 the government issued a warning against all plays and books of a seditious nature (Bevington, p. 114). The infamous burning of hundreds of heretics during Mary's reign indicates the strength of her resolve in general and must necessarily have acted as a deterrent or at least as a challenge to playwrights espousing the opposite persuasion.

Concerning sponsorship during these two periods, Protestant interludes thrived during Edward's reign, especially those, such as the anonymous play *Nice Wanton*, which concerned the education of children, whereas, as well as drama favourable to Catholicism, Mary seemed to appreciate plays devoid of polemical or doctrinal content. A champion of the cause of Latin, she particularly enjoyed those, such as Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister,* which were inspired by the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus.

As for Elizabeth, although she promoted an atmosphere of moderation and tolerance, she was extremely strict and unbending about bringing this

about and did not flinch from resorting to extreme and even violent measures. In her heart of hearts, she did not wish to persecute ordinary Catholics for their beliefs as long as they made a semblance of observing Protestant rites. She took a harsher line, however, after 1570, when she felt that Catholics were becoming too great a threat. It was during her reign that all but the most oblique politico-religious polemic was finally stamped out. For example, she issued a series of stern proclamations in April and May 1559, warning magistrates not to license performers of plays concerned with either religious or political issues. By 1572, all plays for performance were subject to the stringent control exercised by the Master of the Revels. Despite the severity and the obstinate recurrence of royal measures, passions ran high in Tudor times. The playwrights and actors closest to the political sphere were used to living dangerously and consequently found ways of circumventing the censorship. Subversive playmakers could be motivated either by a doctrinal, philosophical or political commitment, or simply by the desire to please audiences by means of topical plays "tinged with danger and perhaps sensational in their potential for slander and scandal" (Westfall, p. 137). Such plays could also, of course, prove efficient money spinners.

Noble patronage was a system of sponsorship which helped playwrights to express their ideologies whilst managing, when possible, to elude official censorship. First, on a purely practical level, the legal status acquired by players who were attached to a noble household meant that they could no longer be endangered by the vagrancy laws. Furthermore, the social standing of their patron meant that they could be invited to other noble households and thereby maintain a channel of communication, possibly with seditious intention, between the great houses of the political elite. In such private venues, it would be illusory to imagine that players performing to audiences of the same persuasion as their patron would not be tempted to flout the censorship legislation. Similar licence could also have been indulged in during plays performed at the various Inns of Court, where like-minded members of the legal profession assembled.

It is probably this system of sponsorship by noble patrons which led to the weakening of the Crown's position on censorship and to the frequent and seemingly desperate need to reiterate proclamations and reactivate statutes. Suzanne Westfall evokes the dilemma of local magistrates as to whether or not to enforce the law. Should they, for example, "tolerate the activities of a Protestant nobleman's troupe in an area of strong Protestant sentiment, risking insult and public

outcry, simply because the Queen was Catholic?" (Westfall, p. 137). Wasn't the royal wrath a more remote threat than that of the patron in question?

If the sponsors of Great Hall drama therefore seem on the whole to have provided a relatively safe haven from royal censors, it would appear logical to assume, as do a number of critics, that Hall plays would have been subject to another source of censorship: that exercised by the patron himself. For example, Steven Mullaney believes that Tudor household drama was "fully circumscribed by the structures of authority and community" (p. 48). But according to Walker, virtually the opposite was true, and the players were allowed full latitude to act as good counsellors and to confront their noble audiences "with often quite brutal criticisms, seemingly with impunity" (*Politics*, p. 1). It was in the lord's interest to accept graciously and thereby enhance his reputation as a wise ruler (p. 3).

The idea of powerful men being wise enough to accept counsel from certain knowing subordinates is suggested in Thomas Preston's play, *Cambises*. In this somewhat extreme case, once the king stops taking the proffered advice, there is nothing to halt his descent into wickedness.

This theory of Good Counsel is given further credence by two closely connected aspects of Tudor culture: the first is the Tudor playmaker's widely recognized stance as a moral teacher. This emerges clearly from the majority of interludes, the particular lessons offered by the plays often being spelled out in pedagogical tones through prologues and epilogues; the second is the great spate of literature designed to advise and, where necessary, to admonish princes and nobles. The prime example is, of course, Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour*, but the vogue for "mirror" literature also reached the Tudor stage. Plays such as *Cambises*, *Apius and Virginia*, *Virtuous and Godly Susannah* and *Jocasta* explored the nature of tyranny and defined the qualities of the ideal prince by negative example (Bevington, p. 156). In this cultural context, the theory of household players unhampered by censorship and able to go as far as to rebuke their patron is therefore perfectly credible. Throwing all caution to the wind in this way could, however, be a dangerous business when troupes performed away from home. Even if official censorship did not always have the far-reaching effects aimed at by the Tudor monarchs, it nevertheless remained a threat, a fact which a number of impudent and imprudent players chose to ignore. Lulled into a false sense of their immunity by the system of patronage, they were often tempted to overstep the mark. Such was the case when the Earl of Oxford's unruly troupe could not be deterred, either by local magistrates or by Bishop Gardiner himself, from putting

on a play on the day of Henry VIII's funeral. Gardiner was finally forced to appeal to the highest authority in the land, Protector Somerset (Westfall, p. 137).

Despite the amount of subversive material which slipped through the net, it is important to remember that we are considering a period when, far from being a mere concept, the metaphorical axe wielded by the censor could become chillingly real if transferred to the hands of the executioner. Playwrights therefore ran great risks. Certainly, the playmakers closest to the seat of power were those courting the greatest danger. Remaining in favour across the different reigns was no simple task, and the least error of judgement could be fatal. Playmakers had to gauge the fluctuating mood and to decide—according to their own priorities—just how far they could go. Between the options of blatantly expressing their own doctrinal and political position at their peril, or playing safe by being totally supportive, Tudor dramatists could choose to further their cause discreetly by being artfully subversive, and this is possibly where, theatrically speaking, they were at their most inventive and creative.

As to whether playmakers opted chiefly for self-promotion or self-preservation, we can detect varying degrees—almost a scale in fact—of a kind of self-regulated censorship. Comparing the positions, on this imaginary scale, of three major Tudor dramatists—Bale, Heywood and Udall—at degree zero we find John Bale (1495-1563), who, despite his fluctuating fortunes, as noted above, continued to take no precautions at all in his play-texts. He boldly set out to flout all forms of censorship, and to flaunt Protestant doctrine. He chose to endure periods in exile during Henry's and Mary's reigns rather than make any concessions. But far from reducing him to silence, his time abroad left him free to write prolifically. If anything, he became even more of a loose cannon and, in Walker's words, was able "to bombard the realm with polemical pamphlets" (*Plays*, p. 170). John Bale was, of course, totally frank and forthright, but his outspokenness on paper seems to be the exception rather than the rule amongst playmakers. Other Tudor playwrights had strongly marked ideologies, which, in less dangerous circumstances, would no doubt have figured more extensively and, above all, in a more apparent manner in their play-texts. But they opted for caution.

One such playwright was Nicholas Udall (1505-56), whom we may situate at the opposite end of the scale from Bale. Prudent to the last, and seemingly unwilling to brave his successive monarchs' displeasure, this discreet supporter of Protestant reform kept any incriminating polemic resolutely out of his most prominent plays. This is understandable because much of his work, whether

formally attributed to him, like *Ralph Roister Doister*, or presumed to be his, like *Jack Juggler*, *Thersites* or *Respublica*, was written to entertain the Catholic court of Queen Mary, where it would have been almost suicidal to openly promote his own beliefs.

Between these two extremes on the scale, we find John Heywood (1497-1578). If, during the periods most dangerous to him, Bale wrote his scathing polemic from a sensible distance abroad and Udall played it safe in Mary's court, Heywood took the risk of composing his complete corpus and staging his plays in the centre of the Royal Household, right under Henry VIII's nose. It is hardly surprising, then, that he could not be completely outspoken about his conservative Catholic beliefs and his reservations about the king's policy. Heywood's plays, discreetly but nonetheless daringly, defied the stepped-up censorship to express the principles for which Sir Thomas More was martyred. The ideology in his plays does not jump out from the page, but is allusive and requires careful interpretation. That he meant business in promoting his beliefs was proved by his participation in the abortive Prebendaries' Plot, in 1543, to overthrow Cranmer. But his legendary wit and humour helped him to side-step both the executioner's and the censor's axe and to maintain his privileged position at court throughout much of the century (Reed, p. 63).

If, as suggested above, patterns of sponsorship and censorship to some degree determined the type of plays featuring in the extant Tudor corpus, they also contributed to the overall shape and form, and, indeed, to the quality of the drama. For example, the decline of amateur playmaking, the rise of the common player and the intensive activity of the professional travelling troupes, which so extensively shaped Tudor theatre, can be at least partially attributed to the curtailment of religious feasts and the reinforcement of the vagrancy laws. In the same way, the alternating periods of discrimination against Latin and Greek seem to have somewhat hampered the development of classical influences on Tudor drama. As things stood, espousing the humanist trajectory became dangerous, and much playwriting talent was ploughed back into the development of traditional forms. If this entailed missing out on features such as the classical stage-set and the brilliantly intelligent and manipulative valet, it did mean that vernacular drama was allowed to thrive. In fact, even when classical elements were incorporated in plays like *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, they did not dominate the play and rather became anglicised. The global effect was that vernacular drama

was bolstered and enriched, acquiring the intrinsic Englishness for which plays of this era were renowned.

Furthermore, coping with polemic and dodging the censor must also have contributed to shaping the plays' actual contents and forging the dramaturgical skills and techniques of the playmakers. This is far too vast and complex a subject to be gone into at any length here, but some aspects can be mentioned. Direct involvement in polemic was, for example, a great stimulus for John Bale to sharpen his dramatic skills. It was certainly his driving force, and Peter Happé has observed how plot, structure, location, costume and stage properties were all carefully orchestrated to "make Protestant theology triumph" in Bale's plays (Happé, ed., Bale, pp. 4 and 7). This impetus and its attendant dangers certainly inspired Bale's personal style of invective, but also his contribution to the general characteristics of the Tudor dramatic corpus. Other playwrights who adopted a less direct stance than Bale employed techniques which were particularly honed to skirt round the censorship and which, in some cases, provided a seemingly innocent context for potentially seditious content. These include allegory, satire and transposition of time and space.

The fact that such techniques were resorted to as a coded way of expressing potentially dangerous opinions meant that they became characteristic features of the Tudor corpus, enhancing its literary value. Featuring such renowned political allegories as John Skelton's *Magnificence* and Nicholas Udall's *Respublica*, the Tudor drama is also noted for its handling of satire and innuendo. Such was John Heywood's skill in this domain that in *The Play of the Wether*, according to Richard Axton and Happé, he was able, with impunity, to prance around such volatile issues as Henry VIII's divorce. This play, performed at the royal court, daringly evokes the king's relationship with Anne Boleyn. Roberta Mullini has spoken of the way Heywood subliminally embedded his Catholic point of view in his plays and of how skillfully he used the art of innuendo.

Similarly, in the case of the transposition of time and space (that is, masking subversive intent by giving a play a historically remote setting and a pagan context), recourse to this technique for prosaic reasons led to the refinement of the theatrical poetry it could produce. In most cases, straight transposition was eschewed in favour of a technique belonging to a staging phenomenon inherited from the medieval theatre, which André Lascombes calls *diaphore*.[1] Entirely

1 See Richard Axton and Happé, eds., pp. 13 and 24-27. For an extended discussion, see Lascombes, pp. 699-735.

dependent on theatrical illusion, this particular form, which was an important means of acculturation, involves the foreshortening and distortion, or anamorphosis, of space and time. Thus the settings in plays like *Cambises* or *Apius and Virginia* are indeed foreign, yet also unmistakably English. They are not neat transpositions or simple analogies. They do not switch from one setting to the other but simply *are* intrinsically both at once. In Thomas Preston's play *Cambises*, for example, we find a sequence between two characters supposed to be Persian peasants. But in fact everything is done purposely to make them recognizable as thoroughly English rustics with the homely names of Hob and Lob. They are shown supposedly in a Persian setting but are actually plodding along to the market in York, carrying their baskets of English-sounding fare and complaining about *their* monarch, the Persian tyrant Cambises, whom Lob describes as "a zhrode lad" (l. 770). This type of anomaly is recurrent in the corpus and cannot be the result of carelessness or ignorance. Consequently, when the contemporary spectator perceived the dramatised worlds, complete with despotic rulers, featured in such plays, he also received subliminal images of his own world and his own monarch. Therefore, much more than providing a "distant and therefore safe" location for the action, this technique was a far cleverer way of filtering through the censorship than certain critics have allowed. Indeed, such transpositions are generally considered to be merely straightforward foreign-based analogies.[2] Moreover, getting the play past the censor was not the only virtue of such transpositions. This intermittent dual perception must have provided a thrilling aesthetic experience for the contemporary spectator, an enactment of the exhilarating power of the theatre. We may therefore conclude that, although politico-religious polemic was not its main *raison d'être*, its obvious advantage for such purposes may well have been one of the reasons why this particular form of *diaphore* thrived and continued to be a source of theatrical magic and aesthetic satisfaction on the Tudor stage.

As well as direct or oblique involvement in polemic, wary avoidance of it was also a factor in shaping Tudor drama. Nicholas Udall's work is surely a case in point, for although prior to Mary's accession he was a confirmed reformer, he subsequently remains silent about it in his dramatic texts. On the other hand, as Walker's analysis of *Respublica* shows, Udall's harsh and extensive critique of

2 This seems to be the opinion of Bevington, for instance, who, in such cases, puts the accent essentially on the remoteness of the setting. However, he does at least admit that there is a "lack of direct analogy" (p. 157).

the Edwardian economic policy seems perfectly sincere.[3] Still, I should like to emphasize the fact that this was criticism of a Protestant regime in a play intended for a newly instated Catholic queen. Udall was therefore risking nothing in this instance. On the contrary, this play could only increase his credit with Mary, especially as she was flatteringly represented in the allegory by the character Nemesis. Furthermore, although Udall criticizes ecclesiastic organisation from a financial point of view, he keeps entirely quiet about the issues apparently closest to his heart, namely Protestant doctrine and spirituality, preferring not to engage in such a daring game under a Catholic monarchy. Since other plays of which he is assumed to be the author—*Ralph Roister Doister* and *Jacke Jugeler*—seem devoid of any potentially polemical material, one could say that, in devoting much of his dramaturgical skill to pleasing his Catholic sponsor, Mary, Udall endowed the Tudor corpus with his rich and inventive contribution to neo-classic comedy in the vernacular. In *Jacke Jugeler,* Udall communicates very clearly through the Prologue that he believes the era is too dangerous to be able to risk engaging in polemics—the "tyme is so quesie" (l. 66)—and that priority will therefore be given to charmingly harmless "mirthe and recreacion" (l. 16). As the kind of genteel merriment this implies is distinguished from the obscene jesting to be found in the majority of Tudor plays (ll. 42-48), Udall also steers clear of another kind of censorship: the increasing attacks on the supposed immorality of Tudor drama. These, of course, were to develop into formal Puritan opposition.[4]

In conclusion, although what could almost be described as a struggle between censorship and sponsorship indubitably left its mark on pre-playhouse drama, it obviously did not totally inhibit theatrical creation. Indeed, as we have seen, it appears to have shaped at least the following three characteristics of Tudor theatre: the organisation of prolifically creative professional troupes, the development of particular dramaturgical skills and the unique English quality of the plays. Indeed, as we saw earlier, there had been some classical influences, but these had been absorbed almost seamlessly into plays such as *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, which, despite the Latin-style features mentioned earlier, stands out far more for its intrinsic English rural character. In the moral or ethical domain, censorship was largely left to the playmakers' own discretion. Even in the more sensitive politico-religious field, its attacks were sporadic—highly dangerous to

3 See Walker, *Politics*, pp. 163-93.
4 See Brockett, p. 193.

individual playmakers, but often neutralised by sponsorship and never really cohesive enough to represent a threat to the theatre as a whole.

Obviously, though, as the century wore on, this situation was to change radically. As politico-religious polemic faded into the background, the drama came increasingly under Puritan attack for its so-called bawdiness and generally immoral nature. In the battle which had been raging since the Reformation, control of the theatre was slipping inexorably from the royal grasp. In 1642 came the final surrender to Parliament, and the theatre as a whole was reduced to silence by the ultimate censorship: the closing down of the playhouses.

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