

# Renaissance English Theatre as a Political Propaganda Instrument of the English Monarchy\*

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## Abstract

Influenced from the sociocultural, religious and political changes that happened in England in the sixteenth century, English Theatre started to desert its medieval characteristics by the ascendance of Elizabeth I to the English throne in 1558. The influence of Protestantism in England was extremely high and as such, medieval plays having religious characteristics started to lose their popularity. In lieu of these plays, various kinds of classical plays, comedies, tragedies and history plays were staged in newly erected permanent theatre houses, and there emerged one of the best theatres of all times. Those newly built theatre houses were not only used for amusement, but also were used with a purpose of the political propaganda of Queen Elizabeth. So as to monitor the theatre, the most effective mass communication instrument of Renaissance England, a governmental body called the Master of the Revels maintained the duties such as licencing and censoring for play companies. This research has studied the general characteristics of the Renaissance English Theatre and the way Queen Elizabeth I employed the theatre as an instrument of her political propaganda.

**Keywords:** Elizabethan Drama, Renaissance English Theatre, Political Propaganda, Mass Communication.

## İngiltere Monarşisinin Siyasi Propaganda Aracı olarak Rönesans İngiliz Tiyatrosu

### Öz

16. yüzyılda İngiltere’de meydana gelen sosyo-kültürel, dini ve siyasi değişimlerden etkilenen İngiliz Tiyatrosu Kraliçe I. Elizabeth’in 1558 yılında tahta çıkmasıyla beraber orta çağa özgü özelliklerini terk etmeye başlamıştır. Ülkeye hakim olan Protestanlığın da etkisiyle birlikte, kilise tarafından sahnelenen dini içerikli oyunlar gözden düşmeye başlamıştır. Bunun yerine, oyun şirketleri tarafından yazılan her türlü klasik, komedi, trajedi ve tarihi oyunların sahnelendiği büyük tiyatro binaları kurulmuş ve tüm zamanların en önemli tiyatrolarından birisi ortaya çıkmıştır. Kurulan bu büyük tiyatro binaları, sadece eğlence amacıyla değil, aynı

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zamanda Kraliçe Elizabeth'in siyasi propagandasını yapmak amacıyla da kullanılmıştır. Dönemin en etkili kitle iletişim aracı olan tiyatroyu denetlemek için Kraliçe'ye bağlı olarak görev yapan Eğlence İşleri Sorumlusu (the Master of the Revels) oyun şirketlerine lisans verme ve oyunları sansürleme görevlerini yürütmüştür. Bu çalışmada, Rönesans İngiliz Tiyatrosu'nun genel özellikleri anlatılmış ve Kraliçe I. Elizabeth'in siyasi propaganda aracı olarak tiyatroyu nasıl kullandığı araştırılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Elizabeth Tiyatrosu, Rönesans İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Siyasi Propaganda, Kitle İletişim.

## Introduction

Renaissance English Theatre was an excellent period for being one of the greatest achievements of the world theatre history. In this period, the medieval conventions were left and a new style of commercialized indoor theatre emerged. Briefly stating, there was a great change in the form of the theatre. In this prolific era, English Theatre presented many valuable playwrights like Shakespeare, Marlowe, Kyd, etc., whom the audiences of Renaissance England enjoyed. Queen Elizabeth I was among the most important audiences and supporters of the play companies. Being the representative of authority in England, Elizabeth showed great interest in the theatre. Inasmuch as she was impressed with the power of the theatre as the most powerful mass communication instrument in those years, Elizabeth wanted to employ the theatre effectively in order to disseminate her political views or propagate. So as to control the play companies she established a governmental body called the Master of the Revels which read and licensed the plays. In Renaissance England the theatre was the most important mass communication organ. To that end, English Monarchy employed the theatre for its own political propaganda. Otherwise, staging the plays without the permission of this governmental office would be a great offense for the play companies. Therefore, it became mandatory for printers to secure a licence from the Elizabethan state. According to a historian, printers and pamphleteers who did not obey the rules were severely and primitively punished:

One printer will be executed under Elizabeth, and an unwise pamphleteer will lose his right hand (to a meat cleaver hammered by a croquet mallet). The deposition scene from Shakespeare's *Richard II* will be deleted from a printed version of the play – it is too incendiary (cited in Murphy, 2012, p. 194).

## 1. Renaissance English Theatre

### 1.1. General characteristics

Renaissance was a cultural and scientific revolution which started in Italy in the fourteenth century and then spread to all Europe. As the result of a great interest in classical studies and values, people started to translate and restudy the classical works and then deserted the darkness of the middle age and its conventions. Therefore, this revival of classical learning led to a rise in scientific, cultural and artistic life of Europe which then came to be called rebirth or Renaissance in Europe.

It is fact that these sociocultural, economical, religious and political changes of the Renaissance England affected the theatre and compelled it to change its medieval characteristics and style, too. Owing to the religious alteration of the society from Catholicism to Protestantism, the popular mystery or miracle plays of the Medieval England, which had religious characteristics and recounted biblical stories in pageant wagons, came to be called as heretical by the Protestants after the Reformation movement.

According to Charles Moseley (2007) these mystery or miracle plays were unique occasions for collecting significant amount of money for the purposes of the Catholic Church (p. 14). Therefore, morality plays or interludes took the place of these medieval biblical plays in the early sixteenth century which can be considered as the root of the Renaissance English Theatre. Then in the second half of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Elizabeth I, English people enjoyed one of the greatest theatres of all times. In accordance with the Renaissance and Reformation movements, English theatre changed its form from

the pageant troupes to the permanent theatre houses with box offices.

Queen Elizabeth I is considered to be the symbol of the Renaissance movement in England. It is a fact that after her coming to the throne in 1558 the Renaissance commenced in her country. As the first Protestant Queen of England, she tried to break the dominance of the Catholic Church. In the wake of the invention of the printing press, publishers had printed lots of copies of the Bible; thereafter the holy book became accessible to common people. Owing to high increase in the number of literate people who could read and understand the Bible, people started to question the practices of the Catholic Church and the Pope. As a result, the Reform movement started in the first half of the sixteenth century in Germany and then Protestantism spread through Europe. The independence of the English Church from the Papacy became a great advantage for Queen Elizabeth I in her struggle to break the dominance of Catholicism and establish a secular life-style in England. But there were strong oppositions of both Catholics and English Parliament against some royal practices over which Elizabeth I wanted to prevail during her reign. Opposing the Parliament, Catholics and Puritans Elizabeth I and James I supported theatrical activities. During her reign from 1558 to her death in 1603, Queen Elizabeth I became the major supporter of the English Theatre and her endorsement made the English Theatre one of the most prolific and productive theatres of the world theatre history. In this era, Renaissance English Theatre presented talented playwrights like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Kyd to world literature.

### 1.2. Transitional drama

Theatre in Medieval England was quite different than the Renaissance English Theatre. Renaissance England created a different style of drama which broke the conventional rules of the theatre and had an independent form according to Aristotle's ideas. Only after a year Elizabeth ascended to the throne of England in 1559, she proclaimed a prohibition of "unlicensed interludes

and plays, especially those touching upon matters of religion and policy (Montrose, 1996, p. 24). However, the effects of interludes and classically inspired plays, which were the common two types of the Medieval English Theatre, were seen in the plays written until 1585. The famous theatre historian Oscar G. Brockett (1970) explains that after this date these two different styles were melted in one pot to become a single form. He maintains that although the two types employed the same techniques and similar subjects in their plays, both were fundamentally different from each other until the university wits started to write for the public stage (p. 158).

Interludes were short morality plays mostly having historical or biblical stories and were usually performed by professional actors in front of a wide miscellany of audiences in which "the numerous bloody deeds, such as beheadings, flayings, and murders, are all shown on stage" (p. 158).

Classical drama was the product of the English Universities like Cambridge and Oxford in the early sixteenth century which performed plays of classical playwrights like Seneca and Plautus usually in Latin to students or private guests. *Ferrex and Porrex, or Gorboduc* was a good example of Classical drama. I.B. Cauthen Jr (1962) informs that two university students Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton wrote the first English tragedy, *Ferrex and Porrex, or Gorboduc* which was staged by the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple before the Queen Elizabeth I in 1561 (p. 231).

Briefly stated, the professional actors usually performed conventional interludes and the Universities wrote and performed the classically-inspired plays during the early years of Elizabethan period. Then, they were melted in a pot and contributed to the development of the Elizabethan Theatre. That is to say, the classically inspired plays and the interludes were the roots of the Elizabethan Theatre. However, the other type of medieval dramas like mystery plays or miracles which usually staged biblical and religious plays did not have the chance of surviving in the Renaissance period owing to the emergence of

Protestantism as the dominant form of Christianity and secular policy that was adopted by Elizabeth.

### 1.3. Government regulation of the theatre

As stated above, 1580s saw the end of the traditional or medieval English drama and the increase of secular public theatre. As the playwrights produced lots of plays attracting the attention of society, this new style of theatre became so popular that in this period play companies were reaching the masses through their plays. Queen Elizabeth, who wanted to control the playhouses and the content of the theatre, founded a kind of censorship mechanism in 1574. It was a governmental body called the Master of the Revels. According to Louis Montrose (1996) this office was a kind of ideological state apparatus of the Queen and “all plays for public playing were made subject to censorship, licensing and payment of fees to the Master of the Revels” (p. 99). Peter Womack (2006) explains that this pre-censorship mechanism was responsible for licensing procedures of the play companies until 1642 (p. 21). For the play companies there were both advantages and disadvantages of the Master of the Revels. It was an advantage because it was protective of the companies against the local authorities which usually did not permit the play companies to perform plays in their regions. After 1574, play companies started to acquire their permit from the central authority and it was valid for their performances anywhere in England. On the other hand, the censorship mechanism which restricted the liberty of the play companies was a great disadvantage for the companies. It is a fact that the Royal House used this governmental body for its political purposes. Thus determining and controlling the political agenda of England would be easier. Nevertheless, it is possible to state that owing to the importance of the support of the central authority to the play companies, the foundation of the Master of the Revels was a positive regulation or development for the play companies. Despite the fact that the authority of the crown was felt profoundly, “play companies had a clear legal right to perform anywhere in the kingdom” (Brockett, 1970, p. 167). However, local authorities were bothered with this

regulation and they thought that Queen Elizabeth I was usurping their authority, because the local authorities were responsible for such kind of activities prior to the governmental regulation. Nevertheless, as Brockett (1970) accounts, local authorities were usually successful in finding ways of evading the licenses held by actors by making up some artificial reasons in order to refuse the licenses, like the danger of plague, the rowdiness of crowds, and the drawing of persons from work or religious services. Therefore without the support of the crown, actors would have had little chance of survival (p. 167). Most of the time the local authorities were against the play companies and their theatrical activities. Ergo, the play companies needed the support and governmental regulations in order for their performances to survive. All things considered, both the English Monarchy and the play companies needed each other mutually. Monarchy needed to control and manipulate the play companies and their plays, and the play companies needed the Monarchy in order to survive and maintain their artistic life. As long as English rulers endorsed them, these play companies could maintain their activities.

Play companies’ obligation of acquiring a licence from a governmental body is one of the most important evidences that English Monarchy used English drama for its political purposes. “Every play had to be submitted to the Master of the Revels for licensing before performance. The principal result was the prohibition of passages thought to be morally or politically objectionable” (Brockett, 1970, p. 171). This proves that theatre plays were giving some moral and political messages to the society. Besides, we can conclude that there was no artistic freedom in Elizabethan England as the Master of the Revels censored the plays which were not in conformity with Elizabethan policy. Paul F. Grendler (2004) maintains that an “Elizabethan dramatist’s job was similar to that of a modern newspaper reporter” (p. 21). Because both the Elizabethan Theatre and the modern newspaper convey information to the society. The other point Grendler (2004) stresses is that Renaissance English Theatre created a new

type of drama: the history play. “In these plays, dramatists drew on the events of the past to shed light on their own times. Early history plays appealed to many viewers because they portrayed glorious English victories over foreign enemies” (p. 21). However, “Shakespeare’s history plays about England’s rulers posed difficult questions about the clash between politics and morality: Does a good king have to be a good man? Do national goals reflect national good, or only the ego and ambition of leaders?” (Grendler, 2004, p. 22). Final comment of Grendler (2004) summarizes the fact that “these complex views of history transformed drama from simple entertainment to food for thought” (p. 22). Because the plays could not be performed without the permission of the Master of the Revels, it is possible to claim that Queen Elizabeth principally used this new style of drama for the political messages she wanted to give to the society or to support her political position.

In his article ‘Patronage, Protestantism, and Stage Propaganda in Early Elizabethan England’ Paul Whitfield White (1991) elucidates that the licensing and censorship mechanism “was not seriously enforced, and that, indeed, Protestant stage propaganda was practised into the early 1570’s” (p. 40). He believes that after this date “growing secularism and commercialism of the theatre in London brought polemical interludes into disrepute and decline” (p. 40).

In conclusion, by the Royal Proclamation of 16 May 1559 Queen Elizabeth I controlled the theatre companies and their plays, similar to the political powers’ controlling the modern media in our age. As many people will remember the Bush administration and the Pentagon carried out a successful war campaign against Iraq in 1991. During these enormous public relations campaigns, the US politicians employed the mainstream media successfully in order to influence the perception of people all around the world. The mainstream media acted as the propaganda organ of Bush and the Pentagon. CNN was the dominant news channel of the Gulf War. CNN sent many cameras and reporters to Iraq and Israel. The US media helped the “Bush

administration to control the flow of representations and thus to manage the global media spectacle of Gulf War I” (Kellner, 2004, p. 136). Similar to the Bush Administration, Queen Elizabeth I encouraged the propaganda. The stage being the most powerful mass communication tool of those years, Queen Elizabeth I employed it in her propaganda. White (1991, p. 40) maintains that stage propaganda was encouraged by the Monarchy and all its organisations and institutions. In his article, he mentions the foreign ambassadors’ reports concerning how Catholics were satirized in the plays and how Protestantism was praised. Brockett (1970) explains the reason why Elizabeth I had to ban the performance of unlicensed works and forbid plays on religious and political subjects, making local officials responsible for all public performances in their towns as a number of steps to end religious and political divisions. He accuses the acting troupes of religious controversies: “By performing partisan plays, the troupes had also aggravated the religious controversies which had shaken England since Henry VIII’s break with Rome” (p. 167). But indeed Queen Elizabeth I just wanted to use this opportunity in order to employ her political agenda through these play companies and she wanted to control the mass communication through the theatre.

#### **1.4. Playhouses and play companies**

##### ***1.4.1 Acting troupes***

There were many acting troupes in England before the 1570’s. The number of operating troupes in England, between 1558 and 1576, was around eighty (White, 1991, p. 39). However, only about twenty of these troupes played at court in the first sixteen years of Queen Elizabeth’s reign (Brockett, 1970, p. 168). These acting troupes usually maintained their performances under the sponsorship of royal authorities or noble people. It was a kind of protection for them. For that reason they usually had names like the ‘Lord Chamberlain’s Men’, ‘Admiral’s Men’, ‘King’s Men’, etc... Otherwise it would be difficult to survive for most of those troupes. “These companies enjoyed the patronage of the monarch and her leading courtiers, including several

members of the Privy Council” (Montrose, 1996, p. 28). Brouckett accounts the ‘Earl of Leicester’s Men’ as the first important troupe which was led by James Burbage, one of the leading and most important characters of the Renaissance English Theatre. Because he built the Theatre, the first permanent playhouse in England, in 1576. This was a dramatic alteration or development in English theatre as it caused the commercialization of the theatre. He later built the Blackfriars, the first private indoor theatre in 1596 in order to access a higher audience size at a more comfortable atmosphere. After this moment, play companies earned large amounts of money. According to Brouckett the other most important troupes were the ‘Queen’s Men’, the ‘Lord Admiral’s Men’ and the ‘Lord Chamberlain’s Men’ which later was chosen to become the ‘King’s Men’, once James I became the king. The other important troupes of this period were ‘Queen Anne’s Men’ (1613-31), ‘Prince Henry’s Men’ (1603-12), ‘Palsgrave’s Men’ (1612-31), ‘Prince Charles’ Men’ (1631-42), ‘Lady Elizabeth’s Men’ (1611-32) and ‘Queen Henrietta’s Men’ (1625-42). The most eligible actors had the chance of performing at royal companies. For example the Master of the Revels chose the best twelve actors from the existing troupes in order to form the ‘Queen’s Men’. This was a political step. The relationship between the monarch and the Queen’s Men was based on mutual benefits:

The Queen’s Men performed ideological and practical work for Elizabeth when they toured widely... While it is problematic to characterize their repertory as flatly propagandistic, their plays – not surprisingly – often promote a coherent English nationalism and they celebrate a pious but moderate Protestantism (Ostovich et al., 2009, p. 15)

Similarly, Jane Milling (2004, p. 143) mentions that a recent study of McMillin and MacLean which involves a detailed discussion of the repertoire of the Queen’s Men, confirms the earlier predictions of David Bevington. He reported earlier that the political ideas of the patrons of the play companies had been effective

on the texts of the plays. The Queen’s Men were supported by the Protestants and they were busy with spreading out ideological state apparatuses in order to discourage the recusancy and radical puritanism.

If we put aside political relations, these actors performing in the royal companies were “paid a yearly retaining fee of five pounds and given allowances for food, light, and fuel” (Brouckett, 1970, p. 169). There was not a sharp division between the court and public theatres. As the plays performed for the public and the court were nearly the same, it is possible to elucidate that there was not a big difference between the court and public theatres which was the characteristic of the Italian stage. As regards to sharing plans of these companies Brouckett (1970) says:

Most of the acting companies in the years between 1558 and 1642 were organized on the sharing plan, under which financial risks and profits were divided among the members...The shareholders formed a self-governing, democratic body, selecting and producing the plays given by the company. Each shareholder probably had some specific responsibility, such as business management, supervising properties or costumes, or writing plays (p. 169).

It was very popular in Renaissance English Theatre for young boys to work as actors in lieu of women. They usually started to work at the play companies at very young ages until they became adult actors.

The company was further augmented by boys apprenticed to well established adult actors. It is normally assumed that they played all of the women’s roles, although this is by no means certain. Older women, especially the comic ones, may have been played by men (Brouckett, 1970, p. 170).

However, the conditions for the acting troupes were not easy, as they did not have a permanent home. Moreover, they were faced with lots of difficulties especially during forced closures: “Most troupes sought to acquire a permanent home, and after 1603 most succeeded in doing so.

Before that time and during forced closures, many troupes had to tour. Troupes often went bankrupt during closures..." (Brockett, 1970, p. 170). These troupes usually had problems when they went out of London to perform their plays, because there were not suitable theatre buildings outside of London.

Touring entailed many problems, for outside of London there were no permanent theatres. Thus, though a troupe might have a licence to perform, it could be denied the right to play on the grounds that there was no suitable place, that the danger of plague was too great, or for other reasons...In some cities actors were welcomed, but in others they were paid not to perform. A number of troupes went to the continent during closures, and it is from these English troupes that the Professional theatre in Germany descended (Brockett, 1970, p. 170).

It is clear from Brockett's account that English troupes went abroad to Germany. Furthermore, Harry Hoppe (1955, p. 27) underlines the fact that some English acting troupes went to Belgium and France to perform and earn money in the early seventeenth century.

#### **1.4.2 Audiences**

Theatre was the most important source of entertainment, social activity and communication in Renaissance England. Even though there were hard times for the play companies and the actors, theatregoers never deserted the stage. Brockett notifies a royal decree that in 1574 play companies had the right of performing daily. Although James I later forbade playing on Sundays, it is estimated that theatre companies used to stage about 200 days a year in the early 1600s (1970, p. 188). The most important factors decreasing the number of audiences were "plague, official mourning, religious observances, and unseasonable weather" (1970, p. 188).

According to Brockett (1970), the seating capacity of the public theatres was large. He says "contemporary estimates give 3,000 as the capacity, but modern scholars suggest 1,500 to

2,500. The private theatres probably seated about 500. Usually two or more theatres were open in London, whose population was about 160,000" (pp. 188-189). Another key point to remember is that "the theatres normally played to half-filled houses" (Brockett, 1970, p. 189). In the light of this information it is possible to calculate that during the early years of the seventeenth century, theatre companies used to perform about 214 days a year, by at least two half-filled play houses –one private 250 and one public 750– with a capacity of 1,000 people a day. This means that at least 214,000 audience members a year watched the plays at the playhouses of London, in the early 1600s. It is also possible to calculate the maximum annual number of audience tripled or quadrupled. Then it is possible to claim that yearly average number of the audience varied between 200,000 and 800,000 in those years. Given that the population of London was approximately 160,000 the total number of the audience of the theatre was more than the population of London. This is an indicator of the popularity and power of the theatre in England in Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

In regard to the way the plays were advertised, it is possible to say that lots of devices were employed in advertising plays involving posters and handbills. Brockett (1970) accounts that the theatre companies sometimes held a procession with drums and trumpets which was indeed the typical device of touring companies, and a waving flag on the roof of the theatre was the signal of the day of performance. And one of the important rituals of those play companies was that actors usually announced the coming plays from the stage (p. 188).

## **2. Queen Elizabeth and King James' Political Interest in the Theatre**

When Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne in England, she had the chance of maintaining the political ideals of her father Henry VIII and her brother Edward VI. Protestantism was spreading in all of Europe and Queen Elizabeth I was trying to make her country Protestant. In regard to dissemination of Protestantism in England, she had a vanguard role during her long term of

queenship. Elizabeth tried to control the play companies so as to make her propaganda in her fight with her adversaries. In accordance with this purpose, she legislated the controlling and censorship of the plays and play companies. Without the permission of the Queen, it would be impossible to stage a play. The plays which were not in agreement with the political interests of the Monarchy did not have any likelihood of being staged. The same system was sustained during the reign of King James I. In addition to disadvantages, there were some advantages of the system for the play companies like having the prospect of flourishing under the protection of nobles, who were in close relation with the royal family, or under direct protection of the Queen or the King. Names of the companies like ‘the Queen’s Men’, ‘the King’s Men’, ‘the Admiral’s Men’ or ‘the Lord Chamberlain’s Men’, etc. indicate this close relation between the nobles and play companies. Having ascended to the throne of England, for instance, James I became the patron of Shakespeare’s acting company ‘Lord Chamberlain’s Men’ and altered its name to ‘King’s Men’. Hence, *Macbeth* can be pondered as a good example of figuring out the political relation between King James I and Shakespeare’s Company. In his *Macbeth*, Shakespeare narrates the story of King Macbeth differently. *Macbeth* is about a rise and downfall of a Scottish king who lived in the eleventh century. Shakespeare wrote this play soon after King James I had ascended to the English throne as the king who merged England with Scotland. In reality King Duncan “was faced with revolt among the lords, particularly those led by his cousin Macbeth, mormaer (or lord) of Moray. In a skirmish at Bothgouanan Duncan was slain” (Fry and Fry, 2005, p. 48). But in Shakespeare’s account Macbeth and his wife Lady Macbeth plot to kill King Duncan during his visit to their castle. In this perspective, Henry N. Paul evinces that Shakespeare wrote and staged *Macbeth* in front of King James I for the first time in order to compliment to the new king (cited in Williams, 1982, p. 12). It is possible to deduce this conclusion for two reasons. First of all, King James was the first Scottish ruler of England and

*Macbeth* is a play about the life of a Scottish King. Secondly it is possible to affiliate the moral message of the play, divine right of kings with the result of the famous Gunpowder plot which was organized by Catholics against King James during the early years of his reign. This is a good example for the propaganda of the divine right of kings doctrine of King James I that he mentions in his *Basilikon Doron*.

As he did in *Macbeth*, in some of his history plays Shakespeare reflected some historical events differently than what had been in reality or sometimes did not mention significant events in his plays. In his *Richard III*, for instance, Shakespeare narrates a period of civil war known as the War of the Roses between the two royal houses of Lancaster and York from a Lancastrian viewpoint. On the grounds that Queen Elizabeth I was the crowned Queen of England and her ancestors descended from the house of Lancaster, Shakespeare preferred to present Richard III, the Yorkist King, as a monster and physically deformed as part of the Tudor propaganda. In the play, Shakespeare depicts Richard III with a hunchback. However, a recent scientific study conducted by Isabel Tulloch, from University College London Medical School, has made it perspicuous with incontrovertible X-ray examination evidences that Richard III was not a hunchback (2009, p. 317). With respect to *Richard II*, it is also feasible to put forth that it was one of the plays with which Shakespeare made Tudor propaganda. *Richard II* starts with a scene in which Henry Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of betraying King Richard. Without knowing the previous parts of the events, it is quite difficult to understand the events impartially. Vilifying Richard II and accounting why and how Richard II is not a good king, Shakespeare evokes the feeling that Richard II should leave the kingship in favour of a Lancastrian King. Although Elizabeth I censored the deposition scene of *Richard II* and interrogated some actors of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men after a performance of this play in relation to the Essex Rebellion, *Richard II* was mainly a part of Tudor propaganda (Henderson, 2004, p. 250). Briefly enunciated,



*Richard II* was written under the political pressure of Queen Elizabeth I and it was Tudor propaganda.

The reason noble people showed great interest in the theatre was because the theatre was the only and the most effective means of mass communication in those years. Under these conditions, as I evinced earlier, both Elizabeth I and James I saw any kind of propaganda means as a threat to their authority and attempted to control them. In his article 'Despotism, Censorship and Mirrors of Power Politics in Late Elizabethan Times' Robert P. Adams (1979) recounts intense despotism and censorship that "Englishmen experienced under Elizabeth" and tells how Elizabeth was worried by her reportedly spoken sentence: "Know you not that I am Richard II?" (p. 5).

Referring to David Bevington's work *Tudor Drama and Politics*, Suzanne Westfall (2004) says that: "Bevington's argument, that drama was naturally polemical and that patrons either chose or commissioned works that would communicate their own ideologies, has become an assumption for scholars studying patronage and player repertoires" (p. 219). Besides Westfall, Jane Milling (2004) describes the political usage of the theatre by similar words. Milling says "it is undoubtedly true that the appearance of the professional theatre company was as much a result of political forces as it was of economic ones" (p. 141). Referring to McMillin and MacLean's argument about the formation of the Queen's Men in her study, Milling (2004) underlines the fact that there were absolutely political relations and benefits between the English throne and the theatre. "The Queen's Men were 'a company designed to increase the prestige of their patron throughout the land, to harness the theatre in the service of a moderate Protestant ideology'" (p. 143).

Milling (2004), raises a question about whether the actors were political creatures or not. Then she explains this question with a case that: "Robert Shaa, along with fellow actor Ben Jonson, was imprisoned when the Privy Council took action against Pembroke's Men for presenting at the

Swan in 1597 a satirical play called *The Isle of Dogs*" (p. 150). Milling (2004) says that "the text has not survived, but it contained, in the Council's view, 'very seditious and slanderous matter'" (p. 150). Although we do not know the text of Robert Shaa and Ben Johnson today, their imprisonment gives an idea about the position of actors and playwrights of those years. It would not be realistic to call all actors and playwrights marionettes of the English Monarchy who served to their political interests. However, it is impossible to reject the fact that there was a strict relation between the Monarchy and the play companies.

### Conclusion

Renaissance English Theatre was one of the most effective and excellent achievements of the world theatre history. As a consequence of the sociocultural, religious and political changes that happened in England in the sixteenth century, there happened a great change in the form of the theatre in this period. Medieval conventions were left and a new style of commercialized indoor theatre emerged. Various kind of classical, comedy, tragedy and historical plays were staged in newly erected permanent theatre houses. In such an atmosphere many valuable playwrights like Shakespeare, Marlowe, Kyd, etc. wrote great number of important plays. Those newly built theatre houses were not only used for amusement, but also were used with the purpose of the political propaganda of the Monarchy. Monarchy employed the theatre effectively in order to disseminate their political views or propaganda. So as to monitor the theatre, the most effective mass communication instrument of Renaissance England, a governmental body called the Master of the Revels maintained the duties such as licencing and censoring for the play companies. Consequently, it is important to underline the fact that in our age there are many ways of reaching the masses like TV programmes, cinema, newspaper, internet, social media etc. In Renaissance England the theatre was the most important mass communication organ. Therefore, English Monarchy employed the theatre for its own political propaganda.

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