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Politicis, Drama and Theatre in Sixteenth Century England

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Abstract

It is widely known that the theatre underwent a great transformation in its function and practice from the time of Henry VIII to that of James I. While on the one hand it continued to be an institution of public entertainment, on the other, it turned into a political means by which the religious policies and practices of the state were promoted. During this period, the theatre companies found themselves in the middle of a power struggle between the Church, the City authorities and the Court. Consequently, this theatre as a metropolitan organization, for all the forcefulness and vitality it displayed, was essentially conformist in its tone since it helped to reinforce the dominant order reflecting the values of the state.

Keywords: Drama, theatres, Protestantism, Catholicism, sixteenth century England, religion, politics, Reformation.

Özet

16. yüzyıl İngiltere'sinde VIII. Henry döneminden I. James dönemine kadar olan süreç içerisinde tiyatronun fonksiyon ve kullanılış yönünden büyük bir değişim geçirdiği bir gerçektir. Bu dönem içerisinde tiyatro bir eğlence kurumu kimliğini sürdürmesinin yanı sıra devletin din politikasını yaymak için kullandığı politik bir araç haline de gelmiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu dönemde tiyatro grupları kendilerini kilise, şehir otoriteleri ve saray üçgeninde geçen bir güç savaşının ortasında bulmuşlardır. Bunun sonucu olarak da, bir anakent organizasyonu olan tiyatro, sahip olduğu bütün canlılığa rağmen, egemen düzeni koruyup devletin değerlerini yansıtmasından dolayı egemen düzene itaatkâr bir içeriğe sahip olmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tiyatro, tiyatro grupları, Protestan kilise, Katolik kilise, 16. yüzyılda İngiltere, din, politika, dini reformlar.

The effects in England of the Reformation were not confined to the reform of the English Church alone but were also to be seen in the radical social and political changes from Henry VIII's time onwards. Among these important changes were the re-affirmation of the legislative power of parliament which passed a number of acts such as the Act of Supremacy and the acts concerning the reduction of priestly powers, dissolution of monasteries and chantries, the abolition of mass and introduction of Protestant worship (Haigh, 1993:13). However, these changes were not fully coordinated and universal but, one may suggest, fragmentary. There was a long tradition of dissidence with the established church in England going back to the

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fourteenth century in the form of Lollardy (Haigh, 1993:14). 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'. Lollards advocated that Christianity should be closely based on the Bible; that everyone should have access to a vernacular Bible; and that everyone should be allowed to infer its meaning for himself (Rex, 2002:1-26). This posed a threat at the time because the Church was the sole authority on the Bible, and it was usually its interpretation of the Bible that spread through the society. 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 Henry VIII. In the sixteenth century, there was a twenty-year gap between the first attack on the juridical powers of the Catholic Church in 1532 and the first Protestant church service in 1552. During this transitional period of the reformatory measures introduced by Henry VIII and followed up by Edward VI, the establishment of full protestant worship was relatively achieved. Yet, these reformatory measures were, as Haigh has put it,

> 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. (1993:13)

Haigh has further argued that "English Reformations were about changing minds as well as changing laws, but it was the changing of laws which made the changing of minds possible" (1993:20). He uses the term "reformations" here with reference to the diversity of the English reformatory activities and processes that were more than just imports of Lutheran religious ideas flourishing on the Continent. Indeed, as he has stated, "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'" (1993:14). One may argue that this complexity was mainly due to the convergence of the traditional anti-ecclesiastical discourses and movements in England on the one hand and the import from the Continent of the Lutheran discourse of the Reformation on the other. Yet, it was with the involvement of the political authority, essentially motivated by political, economic and legal considerations, in the reformatory act that the ultimate reinstitution of the Anglican Church could be finalized.

The promotion of Prostestantism in England from Henry VIII onwards was achieved through various ways. One of them was the printed word. As J.A. Sharpe has argued:

> 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 the Bible itself. (1987:234)

Many tracts and books written at the time, in which Catholicism was constantly defamed, were extensively illustrated since the state authority regarded them as indispensable tools of propaganda by which especially the undereducated could be reached, and protestant ideas disseminated among them. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) gave the most famous account of the persecutions of the Protestants. This work was the source of the popular Elizabethan perception of the Roman Catholics in England, although some of the descriptions which it contained of the Protestant martyrs were not considered to be accurate, and their accuracy was harshly criticized. So, in the face of public reactions and criticisms, Foxe was compelled to make corrections in his text which was published as the second edition in 1570. The Anglican Convocation which met in the same year ordered this edition to be placed in every collegiate church in England. According to Boris Ford, the aim of the book was to "expose the persecutions and 'horrible troubles … wrought by the Romish prelates'" (1992:257). 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 signalled his name and religion.

Another medium by which Protestantism was promoted in England was preaching: the Protestant notion of a preaching ministry was central to the dissemination of Protestant ideas among the populace. After the 1570s, when it became apparent even to the 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 means of instructing especially the young in true religion, and a much less risky method of bringing people to the true light than the reading of the Bible. Disciplining the people was also emphasized, especially through the ecclesiastical and secular courts (Ford, 1993:257).

The establishment of Protestantism in England during and after Henry VIII's time naturally had its impact on the literary environment, especially on drama, which was regarded as an effective means of doctrinal publicity. Hence, the aim of this paper is to investigate how the state authorities appropriated drama in general and the dramatic activities for the promotion of Protestantism against Catholicism.

It was during the reign of Henry VIII that the government took first steps to control religious drama. Since the twelfth century when the church in England had

begun to use drama for didactic purposes through the dramatization of biblical stories, the clergy were primarily responsible for the use of drama as such and the early dramatic performances were usually presented within the confines of the church. So, the plays to be presented were under the control of the church and subject to the approval of the church authorities. Thus, as Norman Sanders has pointed out, the plays were disciplined by the Church whenever necessary (1980:6-7). The Bishop of Hereford's proclamation of an order in 1348 illustrates the disciplining of the plays by the Church:

> Where as 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. (Wickham, 1963b:55)

However, from thirteenth century onwards when miracle and mystery plays began to be performed outside the church premises they became subject to secular as well as ecclesiastical authority as illustrated in the banns 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 unlaufulf wepons whitin the precynct of the said Citie during the thyme of the 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. (Wickham, 1963a:343)

There was a gradual increase of governmental pressure on the producers of religious drama right down to Henry VIII's time. For instance, a playlet about the Assumption of the Virgin was suppressed at Chester probably as early as 1515; also, all the plays at Ipswich were 'laid aside' in 1518, 1519 and 1521. Moreover, 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 (Sanders, 1980:8). These records, Sanders claims, "bear witness not only to the government's reformist attitudes but also to the continuing centralizing tendency of Henry's reign" (1980:8-9). By 1531 Henry VIII, having substituted his own authority for that of the Pope, had also assumed "complete rather than merely secular control of the cycles" (Sanders, 1980:9). He was

excommunicated in July 1533, and his authority as the supreme head of the Church of England was confirmed by the Act of Supremacy 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 in England. In 1532 the town clerk of Chester made alterations to the document used annually for advertising the local Cycle of Miracle Plays. He 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'" (Sanders, 1980:9).[1]

As for the use of drama for doctrinal dissemination and for the promotion of Protestant ideas, under Henry VIII's rule, reformers such as Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and politicians such as the Lord Chancellor Thomas Cromwell were fully aware of the power of drama for the realization of this purpose. As Sanders has further pointed out, Henry himself had "enormously enjoyed dramatic representations of his defiance of the Pope" (1980:15). 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" (qtd. in Sanders, 1980:16). As E. K. Chambers explains, Henry VIII secretly encouraged the questionings of papal authority while openly condemning them (1903:220). 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*,[2] in which the Antichrist character was identified with the Pope. When *Pammachius* was performed by the students of Christ's College at Cambridge University in 1537, Bishop Gardiner, the Chancellor of the university found some parts of the play "so pestiferous as were intolerable" (Chambers, 1903:220). However, the government directed a full-scale theatrical attack on papistry following Cromwell's employment of John Bale. Bale, as an actor-playwright,

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1 For further information see also G. Wickham, *Early English* vol. 2, p. 15, vol. 1, p. 342-343.

2 *Pammachius* was an example of Antichrist plays the tradition of which goes back to the twelfth 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 (Potter, 1980:182).

> 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.[3] (Sanders, 1980:16)

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 Sedition, a political figure, who uses the disguise and aid 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 (Potter, 1980:183-184). 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" (1993:27). In an account of a trial after one of the performances of *King John*, John Alforde, who had seen the play, was so much 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 said, "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" (Brewer, 1862-1918:22-23). 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. However, Infidelity, as the representation of the vice, and his two assistants corrupt each of the three Laws until God finally punishes the 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 (Potter, 1980:183).

The plays of this kind, often commissioned by the government, reflected the official view of the English 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 drama's role in the English Reformation seems obvious from the indications that John Bale even designed a Protestant mystery cycle to

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3 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, p. 403.

replace its Catholic counterparts. The surviving fragments of it such as *God's Promises*, *John the Baptist* and *The Temptation of Our Lord* "suggest that the main emphasis was to be on the personal virtue of Christ and salvation through faith" (Sanders, 1980:17).

Government-oriented propagandist drama of the period came to an end with Henry's reversal of his religious policy in 1540.[4] 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 (Sanders, 1980:17). Cromwell's execution resulted in the disbanding of Bale's troupe and the playwright's exile. With the accession of Edward VI to the 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.[5] This repeal gave a great opportunity to Protestant propagandist playwrights to criticize in their performances the Mass and the Eucharist. Bale returned to England and performed his refurbished *King John* to welcome the arrival of "the young royal prophet who would restore God's laws to the realm" (Sanders, 1980:18). 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" (Sanders, 1980:18). 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" (qtd. in Sanders, 1980:18).

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4 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 Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (233-234).

5 For more information about the Act of Parliament (1543) 'for the advancement of true religion and for the abolishment of the contrary', see Wickham, 1963b:59, 249).

The state support and use of propagandist drama to promote Protestantism continued during Edward VI's reign, but 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 realization 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 vnhappie rebellion, tooke occasion by the assembling of such numbers of people as resorted thither to see that plaie, to enter further into their wicked enterprise. (Holinshed, 1965:963-964)

The uprising was initially a revolt against enclosures, but, as A. G. Dickens has pointed out, 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. (1964:246)

This incident, which demonstrated the abuse of drama for an unlawful deed such as a rebellion led the government to take immediate action: a government proclamation prohibited all English plays on 6th August 1549 for two months (Wickham, 1963b:67). Two years after this Proclamation, the government took another step to extend the 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" (Sanders, 1980:18).

With the accession of Mary Tudor to the English throne, there appeared a revival of mystery cycles, which had been suppressed during Edward VI's reign. Catholic-biased polemical interludes such as *Respublica*, "if not positively encouraged, were at least admitted under written license" (Wickham, 1963b:70). The continuation of the Protestant interludes under the Catholic government resulted in a government proclamation on 18th August 1553, which indicated the government's attitude towards such plays:

> … Her highnes therfore strayghtly chargeth and commaundeth all and every her sayde subiectes … that none of them presume henceforth to preache … or to interprete or teache any scriptures, or any maner poyntes of doctryne concernynge religion. (Hazlitt, 1869:15)

This was a general proclamation banning all ordinary citizens and the protestant clergy from any kind of talk related to religion. Neither were these people allowed

> … to prynte any bookes, matter, ballet, ryme, interlude, processe or treatyse, nor to playe any interlude, except they haue her graces speciall licence in writynge for the same, upon payne to incurre her highnesse indignation and displeasure. …forasmuche also as it is well knowen, that sedition and false rumours hauve bene nouryshed and maynteyned in this realm … by …playinge of Interludes and pryntynge false fonde bookes … concernynge doctryne in matters now in question and controuersye… . (Hazlitt, 1869:15-16)

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 writynge'. 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 the 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" (Sanders, 1980:20).

With Elizabeth's accession in 1558 to the throne, anti-papal theatrical performances started to reappear. During the first year of her reign, Queen Elizabeth witnessed a mumming of "crows in the habits of Cardinals, of asses habited as Bishops, and of wolves representing Abbots" (qtd. in Bevington, 1968:127). 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. (Calendar, Spanish, 1860: 62)

Furthermore, the Venetian Ambassador Paulo Tiepolo's report in 1559 claimed that 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. (Calendar, Venetian, 1860: 80-81)

Partly because of the international complaints and pressures and partly because she did not want any splits among her subjects, Elizabeth issued the Proclamation of 1559 which banned all performances without licences. 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 aucthoritie, learning and wisedome, nor to be handled before any audience, but of graue and discreete persons. (Chambers, 1923:263)

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.[6]

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 towardes 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 abroade and have not lycense of two Justices of the Peace at the leaste, whereof one to be of the Quorum, when and in what Shier they shall happen to wander … shallbee taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggers… . (Chambers, 1923:269-271)

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 (Wickham, 1963b:80). This may be true for the immediate effects of the Act.

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

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 centralization of power, since, as a result of this Act, the Master of Revels was given the power to license plays.

One can suggest that 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 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.[7] 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" (Chambers, 1923:296-297).[8] These public performances were supposed to furnish and set adequate standards for acting and presentation at Court.

In 1589, as a result of the Martin Marprelate controversies a commission was set up giving both the 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 organization. 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 about allowing playwrights and players the freedom to deal with religious matters in a satiric manner. 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

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7 For a chronological list of the play restraints between 1576 and 1613, see J. Leeds Barroll, "The Social and Literary Context." Barroll et. al. 34-35).

8 The Secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham's letter to the Lord Mayor, on December 1st, 1583. see, Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 296-297.

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" (Bacon, 1857-1874:77). 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" (Nashe, 1958:59). 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 November 1589 that gave the Church equal rights with the City and the 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" (Chambers, 1923:306-307). 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 (Chambers, 1923:18-19). According to Janet Clare 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" (1990:25).

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 Divinytie and of State unfitt to be suffred" (Chambers, 1923:18-19*)*. 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 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 Cyttie of London, and they to geve allowance of suche as they shall thincke meete to be plaied and to forbydd the rest. (Chambers, 1923:18-19)

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. As Greg has shown, Philip Henslowe's papers indicate that he was paying Tilney for licensing the performance of plays at his own theatre, the Rose, in 1592; again in 1596 he paid another fee for the licensing of his theatre itself as well as of the plays performed in it; finally in 1600 another fee was paid by him for the licensing of the Fortune (1908:116-118). The commission, set up by the Star

Chamber decree, was short-lived.[9] By 1592, the Master of Revels was the undisputed licenser 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 the throne. Within the first few years of his coronation James I "appropriated into his own hands control of players, plays, playmakers and theatres" (Wickham, 1963b:90). The actors known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, including Shakespeare, became members of the Royal Household in May 1603 with the rank of Grooms of the Chamber, and they were given the title "The King's Men." The Admiral's Men 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 authorized 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 (Chambers, 1923:335, 338). 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 publicklie to Exercise ther Plaies in ther severall and vsual howses" (Chambers, 1923:336).

In conclusion, it may be argued that, the English theatre underwent a great transformation in its function and practice from the time of Henry VIII to that of James I. While on the one hand it continued to be an institution of public entertainment, on the other, it turned into a political means by which the religious policies and practices

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9 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, Wickham, pp. 88-89, and for the correspondences between the Lord Mayor of London, Archbishop Whitgift and the Master of Revels, see, Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, pp. 307-309.

of the state were promoted (Tennenhouse, 1994:118-119). In other words, the English theatre and the dramatic activities were appropriated by the Tudor state authorities for the promotion of Protestantism against Catholicism. Moreover, from being an occasional national pastime organized as a component part of all festive celebrations, towards the end of the Tudor period, the theatre became a commercial metropolitan organization designed for leisure and recreation for those who supported it (Tennenhouse, 1994:119-120). This theatre as a metropolitan organization, 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 the state and the commercial supporters (Sharpe, 1987:290).

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