

Is *Woodstock* Shakespeare's?

Ian Robinson

Others had hinted at it, some strongly, but it was left to Ian Robinson, an English publisher and literary critic, to first argue at length that Shakespeare might indeed have written *1 Richard II* (or *Woodstock*, as he preferred to call it). Robinson was the author of eight books, including *Chaucer and the English Tradition*, *The Survival of English*, *‘Interpretation ‘ as Heresy*, and *Swift: Madness & Art*, all published by Brynmill. In 1988 he issued his 51-page study, *‘Richard II’ and ‘Woodstock,’*¹ which included ‘Is *Woodstock* Shakespeare's?’ together with a reprint of the Nottingham edition, poorly edited but the only uncopyrighted text available.²

In the text below, reproduced with permission and thanks, Robinson's line references have been standardized to my edition of the play and to *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1997). His endnotes have been converted into footnotes and appropriately renumbered. References in square brackets have been added for clarity.

Robinson's analysis is based on a close textual reading of the two Richard II dramas. He concludes that they ‘come from the same mind at different moments of its development,’³ adding,

Putting the two plays together, as they cry out to be put together, one makes best sense of the contrast between them as the author of *Richard II* seeing a deeper, more stylistically challenging way of treating that King, but a way for which there are hints in *Woodstock* itself. Both plays are achieved works of art, and neither needs any appeal to the chronicles, inexperience or inadvertence on the part of the dramatist for their substance to be intelligible. All that they need is a performance good enough to allow them to have their respective poetic lives, whether for the audience in the theater or in the mind of the reader.⁴

As this suggests, Robinson willingly confronts the nay-sayers, especially Rossiter and the Nottingham editors, on their own stylistic grounds. Their objection is that the writing in *Woodstock* is just not good enough to be Shakespeare. Robinson shows ‘on the contrary’ that it is often quite good enough, citing among many examples the young Anne a' Beame (Anne of Bohemia) at her wedding to Richard in the first act:

My sovereign lord and you true English peers,
Your all-accomplish'd honors have so tied
My senses by a magical restraint
In the sweet spells of these your fair demeanors,
That I am bound and charm'd from what I was.
My native country I no more remember
But as a tale told in my infancy,
The greatest part forgot; and that which is,
Appears to England's fair Elysium
Like brambles to the cedars, coarse to fine
Or like the wild grape to the fruitful vine.
And, having left the earth where I was bred,
And English made, let me be Englished.
They best shall please me shall me English call.

¹ Ian Robinson: *‘Richard II’ and ‘Woodstock’* (Doncaster, Brynmill Press) 1988.

² George Parfitt and Simon Shepherd (eds.): *Thomas of Woodstock* (Nottingham Drama Texts, Nottingham University Press, 1977)

³ Robinson, p. 46.

⁴ Robinson, p. 36.

My heart, great King, to you; my love to all!

—1 *Richard II*, I.iii.36-50

As Robinson rhetorically demands, who else but Shakespeare writes like this? Anne is at once caught up in the ‘magical restraint,’ and ‘sweet spells’ spun by England and its true peers. They ‘charm’ her, a neat ambivalence—winning ways and necromancy—wiping away all memories of her former self and homeland, magically transforming her into an Englishwoman. Her language itself morphs—nouns become verbs (*English to Englished* in a single line), while the tales of her childhood evaporate in a trance-like oblivion.

Underpinning everything is the transformation of Nature, from uncultivated to cultivated—brambles to cedars, wild grape to fruitful vine, etc. There’s so much going on, including perhaps a subtle anticipation of Macbeth’s tale told by an idiot, ‘But as a tale told in my infancy,’ that obviously, as Robinson concludes, only one English dramatist could have created it.

‘Is *Woodstock* Shakespeare’s?’ From ‘*Richard II*’ and ‘*Woodstock*’ (Brynmill Press, 1988) by Ian Robinson, pp. 31-46.

I cannot discuss at any length here the controversy about the authorship of the history plays of the Shakespeare *Apocrypha*. My own view, for what it’s worth, is that Shakespeare did, probably unaided, write *Edward III*, *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and all the extant versions of the *Henry VI* plays.

The general principle is that inclusion in the First Folio is very good positive evidence of Shakespeare’s authorship, but that exclusion is not such good negative evidence. The Folio is a quite careful effort on the part of Shakespeare’s theatrical partners to collect, in the latest state of the text, the plays acknowledged as his and possessed by the company. But it is in the last degree improbable that Shakespeare should not have written a number of plays earlier than the earliest in the Folio and/or contemporary with them. He was a prolific dramatist with his way to make and he most likely wrote much more to start with even than when he was established and successful. It is to me a very attractive hypothesis that Shakespeare wrote several more English history plays than got into the Folio, for I believe it was by way of history plays that he came into his own full powers. It is also quite credible that, with the odd historical chances that do preserve some texts and lose others, some of these plays may have survived, unacknowledged by the author. The historical quirks behind the copies collected in the Egerton 1994 MS are just the sort of thing that may have happened to authentic but non-Folio works by Shakespeare.

This, however, is not the place to pursue the matter beyond saying that if one is convinced by Dr Sams’s case about *Ironsides* (in an edition that does go into the necessary detail about manuscript provenance, *Ironsides* belonging to the same collection of fourteen plays that includes *Woodstock*⁵), one’s view of Shakespeare’s early development must change.

If Sams is right, Shakespeare virtually invented the English history play, Marlowe being merely an imitator. (See also Appendix II below).⁶ In any case, it is by way of the histories that Shakespeare transcended his initial bent for comedy; if he wrote *Ironsides* and *Edward III*, one has to think of an even more and remarkable and lengthy development still, by way of histories. No comparable modification of one’s view of the whole is involved in discussions of the non-history apocryphal plays, or in the hypothesis (convincing to me) that the unevenness of *Pericles* is accounted for by taking it as a very early work partly rewrit-

⁵ Eric Sams (ed): *Shakespeare’s Lost Play: Edmund Ironsides* (New York, St Martin’s Press, 1985).

⁶ Robinson’s second appendix, *Desiderata*, is not republished on this site. —MEE

ten at the end of Shakespeare's career. And *Woodstock* is the crucial problem simply because it is a very good play, and because of its important relationship with *Richard II*.⁷

Sams is right about the *sort* of argument that has force in the case of an unattributed play. There is unlikely to be one piece of knock-you-down evidence that will settle the matter; the evidence will be an accumulation of probabilities, and if it goes to confirm or deny a hunch, that is all to the good. I started these thoughts about *Woodstock* because the first time I read it (during a course of reading of little-known plays mostly of very little interest or talent) I immediately thought 'This must be by Shakespeare.' This isn't at all a bad place to start, though one has then to test the hunch as best one can and give it up if need be. One must also beware of falling into the supposition that if Shakespeare did write something that in itself confers some interest on the writing. Who cares whether or not Shakespeare wrote those very uninteresting verses about which such a splash was made the other year? Well, the center of my interest is *Richard II* and the light I believe *Woodstock* throws on the play, but I do still think Shakespeare probably wrote *Woodstock* first, and that whether he did or not it is a play worthy to be compared with Shakespeare.⁸

Rossiter was quite sure *Woodstock* is not by Shakespeare, and he is worth quoting because his remarks are of the right kind:

There is not the smallest chance that [the writer of the play] was Shakespeare: his verse too rarely rises, it is (in Dryden's phrase) too little 'pestered with figurative expressions', his mind never moves fast enough.'⁹

So too the Nottingham editors: 'It has been suggested that the play was a dummy-run [for *Richard II*] by Shakespeare, but the quality of the writing seems to exonerate him.' (p. iii.) These comments are in the right area, but (or therefore) open to challenge. The writing does not seem to me &c. On the contrary.

What strikes one immediately about *Woodstock* is the speed of movement, the interaction of the characters represented in the verbal developments—this going, too, to suggest (as I said) a view of the old nobility which is at the very least a hint Shakespeare took. We shall have a few glimpses of this scene in a moment. The Duke's colloquy with the messenger's horse, again seems to me to have that delicate life-

⁷ I am of course in general sympathy with Dr Sams, and impressed by much of the detail in his argument, but I have to say that his case has a weakness, not in his scholarship, as the expert reviewers think, but in the assumption that if Shakespeare did write *Ironsides* the fact is in itself of great importance. What matters is our view of Shakespeare, and *Ironsides* (as Everitt recognizes) is not a good enough play to make much difference, unless by showing how far Shakespeare had to go.

⁸ Cf. as well as *Ironsides* (above, n.1) E.B. Everitt, *The Young Shakespeare*, Copenhagen, 1954, and E.B. Everitt (ed.), *Six Early Plays Related to the Shakespeare Canon*, Copenhagen, 1965. The last makes the reasonable and testable claim, 'I believe that thoughtful reading of these six plays [*Leir*, *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, *Edmund Ironside*, *The Troublesome Reign [of King John]*, *Edward III*, *Woodstock*] and the associated evidence will of itself suggest a common authorship.' (p. 7) *The Young Shakespeare*, generally derided or ignored by the experts, is remarkable for its sobriety and its grasp of the worth of manuscript evidence. Everitt is emphatically *not* of the amateur-lunatic school that produced so many Shakespeares earlier this century, and he does deserve a fair crack of the whip. As a preliminary gesture I will quote the first paragraph of his 'Conspectus' from p. 252 of *The Young Shakespeare*: 'It is possible that even before *Woodstock* there was another Richard play, containing the peasants' revolt and the desertion of the Duchess of Ireland by her husband. This play would be in part superseded when the peasants' rebellion was needed and salvaged—unhistorically—for *2 Henry VI*, and the rest of the play was probably found not worth saving. Further, the exploitation of *Woodstock*'s most dramatically useful qualities in Duke Humphrey of the same *2 Henry VI*—where a protector did belong historically—seriously depleted *Woodstock* of its chief interest. If this conjecture is near the facts, there would have been a *1*, *2* and *3 Richard II*, of which *Woodstock* was part 2, and the well-known poetic drama part 3, a more likely conjecture.'

⁹ Rossiter, p. 73

language verisimilitude (soliloquy being, of course, if well done, what was later called stream-of-consciousness) that Rossiter doesn't find in the play:

Woodstock (To the horse): Well, I shall earn money to enrich me now and 'tis the first I earn'd, by the rood, this forty year. Come on, sir, you have sweat hard about this haste, yet I think you know little of the business. Why so I say? You're a very indifferent beast, you'll follow any man that will lead you. Now truly, sir, you look but e'en leanly on it. You feed not in Westminster Hall 'adays, where so many sheep and oxen are devour'd. I'm afraid they'll eat you shortly if you tarry amongst them. You're prick'd more with the spur than the provender, I see that. I think your dwelling be at Hackney when are at home, is't not? You know not the Duke neither, no more than your master, and yet I think you have as much wit as he! i'faith, say a man should steal ye and feed ye fatter, could ye run away with him lustily? Ah, your silence argues a consent, I see!

As to figurative expressions—well, *ex hypothesi*, a play we have to contrast with *Richard II*, the latter being obviously remarkable for its use of aureate language, is going to seem less 'pestered with figurative expressions,' given its hero's conscious adherence to plainness, which nothing must be allowed to out-shine. But it is still true that the sense of a very Shakespearean style can be pinned down here and there to an expression. I have read the play several times (in all the available editions), with intervals between readings, and every time I jot down a note about some of the same lines. For instance:

Princes have hearts like pointed diamonds
That will in sunder burst afore they bend,
—*1 Richard II*, V.i.18-23

And

Th'ad'st devis'd
Blank Charters to fill up our treasury,
Opening the chests of hoarding cormorants
That laugh to see their kingly sovereign lack.
—*1 Richard II*, II.i.69

It is true, however, that *Woodstock* is not iridescent with imagery like *Love's Labor's Lost*. The more strikingly Shakespearean thing is the habitual ease with the common rhetorical resources of the language. Here we do have a question of degree, and the case could only be made in wearisome detail.

There are nonetheless some noticeable felicities. To avoid tedium I will take most of the examples from the first scene.

Cheney soothes Lancaster's fears that they have all been poisoned:

That mischievous potion was as yet unserv'd.
It was a liquid bane dissolv'd in wine
Which after supper should have been carous'd
To young King Richard's health.
—*1 Richard II*, I.i.16-19

The so simple yet effective move from *bane* to *wine* is surely reminiscent of the moves we looked at in the opening speech of [*2 Richard II*].¹⁰

As for alliteration, this is quite characteristic:

A heavy charge, good Woodstock, hast thou had,

¹⁰ [*2 Richard II*, I.i.1-5], '*Richard II*' and '*Woodstock*', p. 8.

To be Protector to so wild a prince
So far degenerate from his noble father,
Whom the trembling French the Black Prince call'd,
Not of a swart and melancholy brow
(For sweet and lovely was his countenance)
But that he made so many funeral days
In mournful France.

— *1 Richard II*, I.i.29-36

This isn't quite as functional as the beauty of the first speech of *Richard II*, but is at least akin. The same character losing his temper, Hotspur-like, a few lines lower:

By the bless'd Virgin, noble Edmund York, I'm past all patience.
Poison his subjects...!

— *1 Richard II*, I.i.512

(This is in answer to 'I fear his flattering minions more than him,' [I.i.50]).

Sometimes the remarkable thing is the plainness (for want of a better word) as in the already quoted 'It was a liquid bane dissolved in wine,' or 'Who knows but steel may hit, though poison fail?' (I.i.120).

All this from just I.i (which, to be sure, I think very good). Alliteration is sometimes overdone, but that too is a fault that can be laid at the door of the early Shakespeare. For instance:

Why should our proud Protector then presume,
And we not punish him...?

— *1 Richard II*, II.i.667

Dr Eric Sams has very kindly supplied me with some notes on the Shakespearean elements in *Woodstock*. Among the most interesting points for me is the rather clear presence of the so-called Shakespearean 'blot-clusters,' (Muir, *Shakespeare as Collaborator*, 1960, on *Edward III*, 22f. and Jackson, *N&Q* (1963), 331-2. Sams writes:

on *Ironsides*...I see within *Woodstock* 166-200 *stain, blurs, king, treason, false embraces, heaven, sun, blind, eyes, flatterers*, (cf. *Richard II*, I.iii.202ff.), and I noted certain sonnet sources in addition to the canonical parallels normally cited: 33, for example, has *flatter, sovereign, eve, sun, stain* and so on, and the connexions are not all that arcane. It derives perhaps from Judas and Jesus, in a mystery play.

There are plenty of other *Ironsides* parallels of phrase and vocabulary. Nimble is very Stitchlike; there are puns and wordplay in plenty; touches of bawdry; bits of Ovid and Plutarch; compound words (high-prized etc.); words using *un (uncaput)*; the usual bestiary, serpents, eagles, elephants and nature imagery...legal references; noun-verb dis-cords (fires eats...furies falls): verbal invention...proverbs; Biblical allusions...It all sounds very early Shakespeare to me. Between *Ironsides* and *Edward III*? I reckon that *Richard II* is usually dated...too early.¹¹

Then there are the pre-echoes (if the play dates from about 1592). I will give my own list, which partly coincides with instances in the hiatuses in Dr Sams's letter.

When Tresilian, as the new Lord Chief Justice, wants to be called something grander than *Sir*, Nimble says, 'Neither Sir, nor Monsieur, nor Signor. What should I call him, trow? He's monstrously translated suddenly,' (I.ii.756). All, of course, recur in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Then there is

¹¹ Sams to Robinson, personal letter, 25 July 1986.

This house of Plashy, brother,
Stands in a sweet and pleasant air, i'faith...

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.910

The *tender/tend* pun on which Polonius plays so compulsively, and which is still in use—with attempted seriousness—in *Cymbeline*, is at [III.ii.211], *rag 'd* (of the commons here, but the use is the scarce one found in *Richard II* of colts, at [III.i.103]). The favorite Shakespeare shop-soiled *cousin/cozen* pun comes as early as [I.i.910] (appropriately enough, from mild old York, as he already is in this play).

I am not being exhaustive, though I agree with Sams that the only way to make the case here is to be exhaustive. We are looking at details any one of which could have come from writers other than Shakespeare; but the more of them there are the more they suggest Shakespeare. I am not, however, making a case just now, only dropping hints (which I believe to be an activity closer to literary criticism).

So I point to all the *Woodstock words* and turns of phrase that without being specific echoes are Shakespeare-like in one way or another. Often Latinate neologisms: 'the nonage king' [I.i.155]; unrecorded elsewhere as adj.) *terror* as a verb [V.iii.108]; *uncaput* probably a Holofernes-like joke [I.ii.81]; and *enthronished* also probably mock-heroic [II.ii.115]; 'ye do deject / Your kingly majesty' [I.iii.196] and *elate* as a grand word meaning *edified* or *built* [V.i.59].

There is also plenty of that formal imagery much more characteristic of early than of late Shakespeare and which so commonly invokes the animal and vegetable kingdoms:

You all are princes of the royal blood
Yet like great oaks ye let the ivy grow
To eat your hearts out with his false embraces.

—*I Richard II*, I.i.69-71

This provokes the reply from Woodstock:

Fruit that grows high is not securely pluck'd,
We must use ladders and by steps ascend
Till by degrees we reach the altitude.

—*I Richard II*, I.i.77-9

The favorite Shakespearean kites and eagles make their appearance:

But had he known
That kites should have enjoy'd the eagle's prize
The freight had swum unto thine enemies.

—*I Richard II*, I.iii.85-7

The bestiary sometimes becomes momentarily surprising:

What are your uncles but as elephants
That set their aged bodies to the oak?
You are the oak against whose stock they lean:

—*I Richard II*, II.i.19-21

But the rhetorically vulgar birds are commoner:

Oh, vulture England, wilt thou eat thine own?

—*I Richard II*, III.ii.84

I am even more impressed by the author of *Woodstock*'s grasp of good prose, rare indeed in Shakespeare's day. We have comic lowlife prose, reported Holinshed prose, racy minion prose, prose for the farmers and graziers; and it's all fluent and clear. Sometimes it's better than that, as:

[*Farmer*] Is there a bear broke loose i'th town, that ye make such haste from the market?

[*Grazier*] A bear? No, nor a lion baited neither. I tell ye, neighbor, I am more afraid of the bee than the bear. There's wax to be us'd today, and I have no seal about me.

—*I Richard II*, III.iii.39-43

(This is of course about the blank charters.)

At the other extreme the author of *Woodstock* is as good as Shakespeare at the formal end-stopped blank verse they both thought suitable for the scenes, which they both liked, of the weeping-queen kind (for instance [II.iii.75ff]).

Before leaving the verbal level I must mention the considerations that tell against attributing the play to Shakespeare. I only know of two. The first is that a number of the passages of blank verse have a fluency and hendecasyllabic run more characteristic of the 1600's than the date the play is usually given. It is certainly true that as far as we know Shakespeare was not capable around 1592 of writing verse like this:

A Carmelite friar, my lord, reveal'd the plot
And should have acted it, but touch'd in conscience
He came to your good brother, the Lord Protector,
And so disclos'd it; who straight sent me to you.

—*I Richard II*, I.i.236

There is rather a lot like that. But this surely counts against attributing the play to *any* English writer of 1592. What could be less Marlovian, Kyddian, Greenean, Peelean? The likeliest explanation here seems to be some rewriting in the seventeenth century, and if so there is nothing to suggest it was not by the original hand. Though such verse would be startling in the Shakespeare of 1592 it would be commonplace enough in the Shakespeare of fifteen years later.¹²

The other evidence against Shakespeare is more serious and concerns the quantity of bad rhyme. Couplets break in on the blank verse frequently and in a very Shakespearean way; but the rhymes are often imperfect. *Time / nine* [II.i.1645] *shines / times* [IV.i.1112]—would Shakespeare ever have been guilty? Well, he does have the enthroned Bolingbroke rhyme *labor* with *favor*. And we should bear in mind the possibility that (like the MS of *Ironside*, which lapses oddly often into quite unmetrical verse, the kind of halfway house most like, in the canon, parts of *Cymbeline* and *Timon of Athens*) this may represent a text less finished than those in the Folio. It is true, though, that we expect better of Shakespeare.

Positive evidence, however, ought to be more persuasive, and in the end I have to return to asking: *Who else* but Shakespeare writes like this?

Queen: My sovereign lord, and you true English peers,
Your all-accomplish'd honors have so tied
My senses by a magical restraint
In the sweet spells of these your fair demeanors,
That I am bound and charm 'd from what I was.

¹² Rossiter's opinion was that all the manuscript revisions were made or directed by the original author.

My native country I no more remember
But as a tale told in my infancy,
The greatest part forgot; and that which is,
Appears to England 's fair Elysium
Like brambles to the cedars, coarse to fine,
Or like the wild grape to the fruitful vine.
—*I Richard II*, I.iii.3646

or like this?

At Westminster shalt see my sumptuous hall,
My royal tables richly furnished
Where every day I feast ten thousand men,
To furnish out which feast I daily spend
Thirty fat oxen and three hundred sheep,
—*I Richard II*, III.i.838

Or like this (Lancaster on France)?

The soil is fat for wines, not fit for men,
—*I Richard II*, V.iii.104

or Lancaster again,

Thus princely Edward's sons, in tender care
Of wanton Richard and their father's realm,
Have toil'd to purge fair England's pleasant field
Of all those rancorous weeds that chok'd the grounds
—*I Richard II*, V.vi.14

Et cetera, I can say here: there is *much* more like this. The frequently Shakespearean turns of phrase go well with the frequently Shakespearean moments, characters, dramatic ways of going about things, and the pre-echoes.

I had better not make much of the masque because though (for all its brevity) so Shakespearean it again seems to me more like the Shakespeare of *The Tempest* than the Shakespeare of *Love's Labour's Lost*. But the argument from similarities is cumulative and, again, what other writer would have put in a masque at all?

The comic center of *Woodstock* is rather good and consists not of Tresilian (the crooked lawyer) alone, but Tresilian plus his man Nimble (rather like, in *Ironside*, Edricus and his half-brother Edrick). Tresilian gives more than a hint of what the land would have been like if Falstaff had ever been Lord Chief Justice.

Bailiff Ignorance of Dunstable is perhaps too much of a dramatic cliché to make one think in particular of Shakespeare—but he does at least belong to the tribe of Dogberry and Elbow.

The courtier whose hose toeify the knee and kneefy the toe (III.ii.207) goes two ways in *Hamlet*: into Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and also into Osric, being at the clothes moment more like the latter. He also has something of the offensively bullying servile character of Oswald in *Lear*.

Woodstock has the ghosts, the murder of a noble, the weeping-queen scene, the shouting row (at the welcome to fair Queen Anne a Beame, between the King and his uncles), the stately scenes, the battles,

that we expect in the Shakespeare histories. One or two moments so point forward to later things in the histories that one wants a word stronger than *resemblances*. In some cases there is outright continuity. I have mentioned the character of York, who is already in *Woodstock* the would-be honorable, ineffectual, attractive old buffer Shakespeare develops so beautifully. The Duchess of Gloucester in *Richard II* simply is Woodstock's wife, done out of that play not out of the chronicles (oddly enough in so well-researched a play) and the Gloucester referred to by the Bolingbroke faction throughout ('plain, well-meaning soul') is the Gloucester of *Woodstock*, not the coup-maker and powerbroker of history.

In at least one case there is a sort of leap, the *Henry IV* plays taking off from *Woodstock* rather than from *Richard II*. In the latter, the King is of course contemptuous of what he sees as Bolingbroke's court ship of the common people:

Ourselves and Bushy, [Bagot here and Green,]
Observ'd his courtship of the common people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble end familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune,
As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster wench,
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
And had the tribute of his supple knee ...

—*Richard II*, I.iv.2333

By *1 Henry IV* the new King is making very much the same charges against Richard, though, as befits, with a touch more *realpolitik* than Richard's rather unpleasant disdain:

Thus did I keep my person fresh and new,
My presence, like a robe pontifical,
Ne'er seen but wond'ring at, and so my state,
Seldom but sumptuous, show'd like a feast,
And won by rareness such solemnity.
The skipping King, he ambled up and down,
With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled and soon burnt...

—*1 Henry IV*, III.ii.5562

This is unrecognizable as a description of the King of *Richard II*, but the King in *Woodstock* equally certainly does relish vulgar display ('We'll ride through London only to be gaz'd at,' [III.i. 81]). It is here as if the later play looks back to *Woodstock* as its predecessor rather than to *Richard II*. In *Richard II* itself there are hints that some of the characters are looking back to *Woodstock* rather than the action around them. I have mentioned the Duchess of Gloucester (who never meets the King),¹³ and I think the same is true of York. York's complaints about the manners of proud Italy and the lascivious metres seem to be of the King in the other play, and similarly when he wishes his head had been cut off like Gloucester's, provided the King had not been provoked to it by his untruth (II.ii.101), there may be the hint that York is talking about the stage play *Woodstock*, though the author has in mind the well-established untruth of the historical figure.

Finally, a little bit of manuscript evidence. The (as I argued) inappropriate climax of Gaunt's outburst to York is that England is leased out like a tenement or pelting farm. The phrase is odd enough to stick in the

¹³ Not on stage perhaps, though off she does comfort him at the time of Queen Anne's death, contributing to his remorse over Gloucester's death warrant.—MEE

memory. It certainly either stuck in Shakespeare's or was economically reused by him, for the same or a very similar phrase is used in *Woodstock*. (The manuscript is not absolutely clear.) Interestingly enough, in *Woodstock* the speech in which the phrase occurs is given to the King, who prophesies, with some accuracy, what will be said about his arrangement for farming the realm:

We shall be censur'd strongly when they tell
How our great father toil'd his royal person
Spending his blood to purchase towns in France,
And we, his son, to ease our wanton youth,
Become a landlord to this warlike realm,
Rent out our kingdom like a pelting farm...

—*1 Richard II*, IV.i.1316

The remarkable thing is not just the verbal similarity, though that, at so crucial a moment of *Richard II*, is remarkable enough. (Miss Frijlinck says that 'the particular phrase *pelting farme* and the general context serve to connect the passages quite definitely, either as model or copy, with Shakespeare's line.'¹⁴ The *Woodstock* MS marks the passage for omission, and Rossiter's complicated discussion of the text makes it seem probable that this revision was made before the manuscript began its life as a prompt copy.

Two questions have to follow: why was the phrase deleted from *Woodstock*? and if it was not used in performance, how did Shakespeare know it well enough to borrow it? There are no obvious explanations of the former like the Lord Chamberlain's disapproval of blasphemy or unseemliness. No farming was going on in the 1590s serious enough to inhibit Shakespeare himself. It is a good speech, not deleted for artistic reasons (the guess reported by Miss Frijlinck, that the speech was thought to be out of character for the king, is surely, as Rossiter argues (p. 45) unconvincing, and Rossiter's own suggestions could never have occurred to anybody except as prompted by something surprising that needs explaining. The speech is part of the preparation for Richard's repentance, and quite convincing. There certainly is some sort of influence between this *Woodstock* speech and the Gaunt speech. If Shakespeare didn't hear the play performed with this passage in it, he must surely have seen a manuscript ('The closeness of the sentiments to those of Shakespeare's Gaunt...makes it plain that if this speech was 'outed' Shakespeare must have read this MS—or some earlier one from which it derives,' says Rossiter in his note on the passage); there is no reason to posit the existence of any manuscript other than the one that survives.

There are of course various ways in which Shakespeare might have come to read it; the simplest possibility is that the manuscript was made from his own foul papers and revised by him. He then realized he needed the pelting farm image for *Richard II* and excised it from *Woodstock*.

Let there be, however, a final reminder that we are not dealing here primarily with questions of factual probability but with judgment in literature. The opinion that Shakespeare wrote *Woodstock*—or that he didn't—before he wrote *Richard II* is really a mode of comparison of the two plays. The strong case for 'Shakespeare wrote *Woodstock*' is to make this opinion shorthand for perceptions and judgments of the *cooperation* (which is not too strong a word) between the two plays. They read as if they came from the same mind at different moments of its development. The inevitable comparison for me is with the poems of that other British Library manuscript, Cotton Nero A x., which have been attributed to the same author (who indeed can be found in titles and catalogues as if he were a well-attested historical personage lacking only a proper name) on grounds that can only be those of judgment in literature and which as such seem to me very flimsy. One reads *Pearl*, *Patience*, *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and

¹⁴ *Ed. cit.*, p. xxxiii

asks if they came from the same individual; to which my answer, with Mrs. Samson¹⁵, is *surely not*.

With regard to the two plays presently discussed, my opinion is *very likely*: but in both cases we are still within literary criticism, trying to perceive and judge works of art, not betaking ourselves to those so seductive, solid-looking quicksands of factual probability

¹⁵ A. R. Samson: *The Authorship of the Poems in B.M. Manuscript Cotton Nero A x*, University of Wales M.A. dissertation, 1970