

## ‘Woodstock Studies’: 150 Years of Critical Debate

**T**homas of Woodstock, or *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second, Part One*, is an anonymous and incomplete Elizabethan drama of some 51 pages and 2989 lines, owned by the British Library, London. The hand-written MS lacks front and back covers and therefore title, author, list of *dramatis personae*, and part of the final scene. If the lost cover and back page were a single folded sheet, perhaps four MS pages are missing, which seems about right for what remains to be accomplished.<sup>1</sup>

Purchased from the estate of Lord Charlemont in 1865, the battered manuscript is one of 15 anonymous plays in a hand-bound volume catalogued as BL Egerton 1994, fols.161-185.<sup>2</sup> Following Chambers, most scholars believe that in the 17th century Eg. 1994 belonged to William Cartwright the younger, an actor and book seller, who bequeathed it to Dulwich College. After that it passed into the possession of Lord Charlemont, perhaps by theft.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing certain is known of the play’s origins and early stage history, though inferences can and have been drawn from the action and the MS’s extensive editings and marginalia, which suggest that over the years it served both as the director/stage-manager’s master script and the prompt’s copy during performances. Wolfgang Keller, the manuscript’s second editor (1899), thought that what he titled *Richard II, Part One* might be earlier than the rest of Egerton 1994, since its leaves were independently numbered, trimmed and mounted two to a page.

### A Touring Play

The inclusion of a live horse and rider clip-clopping into the play area in III.ii supports Frijlinck’s speculation that this unusual and inventive drama was designed or adapted to be played outdoors, in fields or marketplaces—in other words, on the provincial tour.<sup>4</sup> No known contemporary theater could possibly handle a live horse, never mind one with a mounted rider. Entrances to a raised stage were typically about seven feet high and accessed from below and/or behind by steps. This was fine for people but obviously impossible for horses, especially one whose rider, as the text suggests, sports a courtly hat topped by a two-cubit feather. The spectacular final battle, involving almost the entire cast of 25, seems also to take advantage of unrestricted space as two unusually large stage armies simultaneously ‘march about’ noisily with drums and colors flying, before falling ferociously upon one another. C. Walter Hodges’s beautiful ‘conjectural’ illustrations make it quite clear that a real horse was inconceivable on any Elizabethan stage, indeed, on most modern ones. Just getting it on and off would be a major problem.<sup>5</sup>

No director/stage manager would consider dealing with difficulties of this sort without a big dramatic payoff. But of course there is one. Woodstock and the horse indulge in a richly comic dialogue made up of neighs, headshakes and the duke’s ironic comments on them. I would venture that in any given performance the horse steals the show, especially if it relieves itself at the right moment. In other words, onstage it’s a disaster, but in a field or market square it’s a theatrical masterstroke.

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael Egan: *The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One: An Acting Edition with Notes and a Short History of the Text* (Westshore Press, 2017), for a computer-aided transcription from the MS, and an original conclusion in the Elizabethan manner. Online version available elsewhere on this site.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to *Woodstock/1 Richard II*, the anthology includes *Edmund Ironside*, ascribed to Shakespeare in Eric Sams (ed.) *Shakespeare’s Lost Play Edmund Ironside* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Chambers, *William Shakespeare I*, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> ‘...the play belonged to the repertory of the touring company which in 1635 visited Norwich,’ Frijlinck, Introduction, p. xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> C. Walter Hodges: *Enter the Whole Army: A Pictorial Study of Shakespearean Staging 1576-1616* (Cambridge U.P. 2000) p.25, fig. 10.

The implication here—that we have a rare example of an actual Elizabethan touring play from whose features implicit and explicit we can learn much—has unfortunately been overlooked by scholars distracted by the manuscript’s authorship issues. In fact, the one resolves the other.

### **The Critical Heritage**

Among the remarkable features of *Woodstock/1Richard II* is that it sustains critical analysis beyond its current reputation—an uninteresting pastiche of Shakespearean scraps by perhaps Samuel Rowley. Apart from Keller’s German Introduction, translated here for the first time, we have Rossiter’s challenging commentaries in *Woodstock, a Moral History*, Edgar Schell’s fine discussion of its intellectual politics in *Strangers and Pilgrims* (cited by Charles Forker in his Arden edition of *Richard II*), Alzada J. Tipton’s study of the play’s grasp and exposition of Elizabethan law, Janet Stavropoulos’s discerning look at the masque and its centrality to the story, and historian Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies*, with a well-known chapter on *Richard II* later picked up and elaborated on by Marie Axton in *The Queen’s Two Bodies*.<sup>6</sup>

Taken with the analyses included on this site and elsewhere, these articles and book chapters reveal an extraordinarily intelligent and skillfully executed drama that warrants more than the patronizing dismissal it usually receives.

### **Discovery and Recovery**

Two or three years after its 1865 acquisition, the Victorian scholar, J.O. Halliwell, also known as J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps, stumbled upon Egerton 1994 in an unopened box in the stacks of the old British Museum library, to which he had privileged access. As he pored through the battered, leather-bound anthology of 15 lost plays and masques, Halliwell slowly recognized the superior literary quality of one drama in particular, resolving to share it with the world.

*A Tragedy of King Richard the Second, Concluding with the Murder of the Duke of Gloucester at Calais* was published in 1870. The oddly misleading title Halliwell assigned, stylishly printed in Gothic to suggest an ancient authentic text, might be considered the play’s first critical comment. The story actually concludes not with Woodstock’s murder but the baronial uprising it provoked, Richard’s defeat at the battle of Radcot Bridge in 1387, and—almost certainly the reason the final pages were removed—his brief deposition over Christmas that same year. As we later discover in *2 Richard II*, i.e., he has been uneasily restored, true to the historical record.

Indeed, *Richard II, Part Two*, as I believe it should properly be called, picks up the narrative seamlessly after the conclusion of Part One. Remarkably enough, Shakespeare assumes that everyone on stage knows of the details of Gloucester’s assassination and Richard’s ambiguous role in it, the deteriorating relationship between the royal houses of Lancaster and York, and of course where the whole thing was ultimately going.

Halliwell might also have mentioned the narrative’s affinities with *2 Henry VI*, which are almost as strong as those with *Richard II*. That he did not has left its mark on the play’s critical legacy. Objectively, the plot is a skilled integration of both plays, suggesting either plagiarism at the highest level, or (given more

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<sup>6</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton U.P., 1957), Marie Axton: *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), passim A.P. Rossiter: *Woodstock, a Moral History* (London: Chatto & Windus, London, 1946), passim; Edgar Schell: *Strangers and Pilgrims: From The Castle of Perseverance to King Lear* (The University of Chicago Press, 1983) pp. 77-112; Charles R. Forker (ed.): *King Richard II* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), pp. 144-152; Janet C. Stavropoulos: ‘“A masque is treason’s license”: the Design of *Woodstock*,’ *The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* (Summer, 1988) pp. 1-12; Alzada J. Tipton: ‘“The Meanest Man...shall be permitted freely to accuse”: The Commoners in *Woodstock*,’ (*Comparative Drama*, Vol. 32, 1998), pp. 117-145).

exciting possibilities) the creative hand of the original author.

As his oddly inaccurate title implies, Halliwell felt ambivalent about his discovery, authorizing only eleven anonymously edited copies but then signing, dating and numbering each one, the BM's last. The following year he published a letter in *The Athenaeum*, calling attention to his 'curious' find, and again hinting suggestively that it was 'written with no small ability.' He also added, sparking a debate still unresolved these 150 years:

Knowing how readily anything of the kind can be satisfactorily proved to be a modern forgery, that few things are more certain than that Lord Bacon wrote the plays of Shakspeare [*sic*], &c., it was rather with amusement than surprise that I have received an elaborate argument demonstrating that it is 'a very clever imitation of an old drama, but not the old drama itself.'<sup>7</sup>

I doubt there were more than half-a-dozen scholarly gentlemen in Victorian England who might have furnished Halliwell with his now-lost 'elaborate demonstration,' certainly someone with access to Halliwell's limited edition. The allusion to Bacon aside, Halliwell's correspondent came close to at least one 21<sup>st</sup> Century view: that the MS might indeed be a revised version of a lost original written ca. 1592, a 'simplified Shakespeare,' as A.P. Rossiter put it in 1946.<sup>8</sup>

Still in two minds, Halliwell retrieved his BM copy in 1871 and on its flyleaf referenced for posterity his *Atheneum* letter.

### **Bullen's *Old English Plays***

Halliwell's eleven-copy edition of course went virtually unnoticed, despite his teasing *Atheneum* announcement. About 12 years later, however, A.H. Bullen glancingly referred to it in an appendix to his compendious four-volume anthology of forgotten dramas, *A Collection of Old English Plays*, noting inaccurately, thanks probably to Halliwell's title, that

Much of the play is taken up with *Greene* and *Baggott*; but the playwright has chiefly exerted himself in representing the murder of *Woodstock* at Calais.<sup>9</sup>

Bullen's mischaracterizations suggest a skimming read at best. Since all his references are to the murder scene, it appears that it was he rather than Anon who mostly exerted himself with V.i. Nevertheless, his notice was of some historic significance, not least because it caught the eye of the play's next editor, Wolfgang Keller, whose strongly edited 1899 text, with detailed notes and a long introduction in German, stirred the professionals into taking a second look.

### **Authorship and Attribution**

As Halliwell implies, it's impossible to come away from *Woodstock/1 Richard II* without an overwhelming sense of Shakespeare's presence—one way or another. Alternatives include: he influenced it, he stole from it, Anon stole from him, he wrote it. A.L. Rowse's curiosity is typical:

Who can have written it? How much we should like to know! For it has something of Shakespeare's grasp of historical situation and political sense, a plain homely realism and a sense of humour taking after the Jack Cade scenes in *2 Henry VI*...Thomas of Woodstock [is] an idealised 'good Duke Humphrey' standing for plain, honest dealing and the good of the country as against both favourites and factions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Athenaeum*, April, 1871, 6

<sup>8</sup> This hypothesis is supported by recent stylometrical analyses in the *New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion* (2017), though *Woodstock* itself is not discussed.

<sup>9</sup> Bullen, *A Collection of Old English Plays*, Vol. I, Appendix 1, (London, Wyman & Sons, 1882–89) 427–8.

<sup>10</sup> A.L. Rowse: *Bosworth Field: From Medieval to Tudor England* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966) p. 271.

Rowse's teasing hint that Shakespeare might indeed be the author is also characteristic of critical reactions to the drama. Who after all did write it? It is the question around which all commentary inevitably revolves and will continue to revolve until it is settled.

The matter was first mooted in April, 1885, when F.A. Marshall, alerted by Bullen's reference, read a paper to the New Shakespeare Society, London, now unfortunately lost, describing the contents of Halliwell's edition. Members thought it was a goodish play but not possibly by Shakespeare, and was most likely written around 1625.<sup>11</sup> Marshall later added: 'There is nothing, so far as I can ascertain at present, to indicate its authorship.'<sup>12</sup>

### **Bold Speculations**

Nearly 30 years after Halliwell, Wolfgang Keller, a well-known German Shakespeare scholar, published a strongly edited and annotated edition of the MS, to which he gave the German title, *Richard II. Erster Teil. Ein Drama Aus Shakepeares Zeit*.<sup>13</sup> With a challenging introduction also in German, but extensive English footnotes accompanying the text, Keller's edition transformed and even founded what we might call Woodstock Studies. His version introduced clearly numbered scenes and lines, though not the ones that prevail today, corrected words and phrases, supplied enduring emendations and a quantity of informative and descriptive commentary. While retaining most of the MS's antique spellings, Keller freely punctuated its almost unpunctuated text and corrected or completed misplaced and/or missing lines, reconstructed fragmented scenes, and generally made visible the play's political coherence, skilled construction and dark humor.

Keller also provided a scholarly introduction, discussing the work in explicitly Shakespearean terms, including what was at the time an astonishing catalogue of more than a dozen striking phrasal parallels with Shakespeare.<sup>14</sup> The inviting title he provided, *Richard II, Part One, A Drama from Shakespeare's Time*, almost begged for scholarly consummation, though in the end he faint-heartedly called it off with the single cryptic comment: 'Nothing is known about the author, and I consider bold speculations to be completely worthless.'<sup>15</sup> Yet Keller's entire edition—title, introduction, footnotes and critical observations—scintillates with speculative boldness.

### **The Twentieth Century**

Keller's ground-breaking edition and notes revealed a work technically so accomplished that the revived academic interest it provoked, still hesitating to boldly identify Shakespeare as its author, inclined towards the next best, Marlowe. In 1908, Ashleigh Thorndike published a positive assessment hinting that the Canterbury playwright might well have written what he preferred to call *The Tragedy of Woodstock*, a drama 'not unworthy' of his abilities.<sup>16</sup>

Based on Keller's edition, Thorndike argued that *1 Richard II* 'apparently' preceded *2 Richard II*, displaying a 'skillful' integration of the 'tragic and comic, action and counsel, force and counter-force.'

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<sup>11</sup> *New Shakespeare Society's Transactions, 1880-6* (London: Tubner & Co., n.d.), pp. 144-5. Marshall later recollected a verdict of 'probably as late as 1630.' (*The Works of William Shakespeare*, Vol. II, p. 396.)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Richard II. Erster Teil. Ein Drama Aus Shakepeares Zeit* in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gessellschaft XXXV*, Berlin, 1899. Founded in 1865, the *JDSG* was renamed *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* in 1925.

<sup>14</sup> Successive editors have continued Keller's search for collocations, now numbering several hundred. For a referenced list by play, see my *The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One* (2006).

<sup>15</sup> Keller, p. 42. In the same paragraph however, Keller notes the author's familiarity with 'Layton Bussard [*sic*] perhaps Leyton in Essex, a mile from Stratford.'

<sup>16</sup> Ashley H. Thorndike: *Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1908) p. 109.

Thorndike added that the characterization was also ‘remarkably well individualized.’<sup>17</sup>

Six years later D.W. Briggs published a similar consideration, calling the play both *Richard II, Part I* and *Thomas of Woodstock*. In his view, the anonymous author’s ‘handling of material is elevated noticeably above the usual level of the chronicle history.’ If it were not by Marlowe himself, it was profoundly influenced by his *Edward II*.<sup>18</sup>

In 1921, the Australian scholar, John Le Gay Brereton, supplemented Keller’s work on the verbal parallels between *1* and *2 Richard II*, identifying a number of additional parallel Shakespearean lines and phrases his predecessor had overlooked.<sup>19</sup>

### **F.S. Boas**

Professional opinion had cautiously accepted most of the foregoing, so the terrain was well prepared for the play’s first major critical study in English, F.S. Boas’s *Shakespeare and the Universities* (1923). In a widely read and well-received book, Boas expressed high regard for the dramatist’s skill, especially his comic scenes, but adamantly opposed any suggestion of Shakespeare’s authorship, the question everyone was dancing around. Even Halliwell’s and Keller’s titles, *A Tragedy of King Richard the Second* and *Richard II, Part One*, were, Boas felt, too suggestive of a close literary relationship. He insisted rather on *Thomas of Woodstock*, and by way of emphasis titled his essay, ‘A Non-Shakespearean *Richard II*,’ thus instantly evoking the very relationship he deplored. Boas’s discretion, however, seemed to Shakespeareans in the universities the better part of professional valor after all. *Woodstock* became again a vaguely interesting literary curiosity, no more.

### **Reyher’s Notes**

Early in the next year a long and extremely thorough article by the French scholar, Paul Reyher, investigated the literary and historic sources of *Richard II*, including among them ‘*Thomas Woodstock*,’ as he titled the play.<sup>20</sup>

Reyher’s still untranslated discussion is worth reviewing for several reasons, among them his discovery of further new and previously unrecorded collocations with Shakespeare. The total was now impressive, again catching the eye of academic scholars. Reyher also placed a fresh emphasis on tandem ideas and concepts, what Wilson Knight later called ‘thought-parallels.’<sup>21</sup> Third, and in a sense fatally, ‘*Notes sur les sources de Richard II*’ declared that the evidence made it almost certain that Shakespeare was indeed *Thomas Woodstock*’s true author. Reyher summed up:

The affinities between *Richard II* and *Woodstock* are too many and, with two exceptions, are all found in the first two acts of *Richard II*, developing and completing events originating in the first play. Chief among them of course is the murder of Woodstock and its consequences, though we also meet again the Duke’s widow, his brothers Gaunt and York, and are reminded of the famous dead, Edward III and the Black Prince. With the deaths of Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester in the second act, a whole generation, an entire epoch, disappears. York alone remains, aware of Richard’s crimes but exhausted, weakened by age, and of no further political consequence. The action passes to the new generation; the decisive phase of the rivalry, which is the true subject of the tragedy, begins in Act III.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. The debate over what to call the play remains unresolved. I use *1 Richard II, Woodstock, 1 Richard II/ Woodstock* and occasionally *2 Richard II* for clarity.

<sup>18</sup> William Dinsmore Briggs (ed.): *Marlowe’s Edward II* (David Nutt, 1914) p. cxii.

<sup>19</sup> John Le Gay Brereton: ‘Some Notes on *Richard II*’ (*Australian Modern Language Review*, N.S., Vol. 1, 1921) pp. 7-10.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Reyher: ‘Notes sur les sources de *Richard II*’ (*Revue de l’enseignement des langues vivantes*, Paris, January-March, 1924), pp. 1-169.

<sup>21</sup> G. Wilson Knight: ‘Lyly,’ in R.J. Kaufmann (ed.): *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Oxford U.P., 1961) p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Reyher, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-5. Translated by Michael Egan.

Reyher noted too that the mild and honest Woodstock referred to in 2 *Richard II*, II.i.128, so different from his portrayal in Holinshed, cannot have been derived from any other source than 1 *Richard II*, I.i.99-104, 108-9, 208, I.iii.16, and V.iii.4-9, etc. Equally, the rounded portrait of his Duchess, also not found in Holinshed or any other chronicle, is strongly paralleled in 1 *Richard II*, II.iii, IV.ii and V.iii, etc. Similar echoes, pre-echoes and suggestive analogies may be found amongst all the major characters.

In 1939 Dover Wilson drew heavily on Reyher's research for his New Cambridge edition of *King Richard II*,<sup>23</sup> and a few years later so did Rossiter in *Woodstock, a Moral History*. In 1955 Matthew Black acknowledged some of the parallels Reyher had catalogued,<sup>24</sup> as did G. Lambrechts in 1967 and MacDonald Jackson in 2001.<sup>25</sup> Yet none of these writers mention Reyher's bold speculation about the author, not even by way of rebuttal or rejection.

### **W.P. Frijlinck's 'Type Facsimile'**

*The first part of the reign of King Richard the Second; or, Thomas of Woodstock*, ed. W.P. Frijlinck (1929), is a 'type facsimile' in the Malone Society Reprint series, that is, a reproduction of the MS using print conventions like **bold** and *italic* to indicate cuts, marginal comments and the various hands at work on a very busy text. It is an editorial *tour de force* for which all drama scholars should be grateful.

Helped by an early camera called a Rotograph,<sup>26</sup> and checked for accuracy by W.W. Greg, Frijlinck's edition includes brief but descriptive footnotes, and lists of the minor errors she found in Halliwell and Keller. It is the single most useful tool for students of the play wishing to work directly from the unedited and hard-to-read original.<sup>27</sup>

Frijlinck also provided a long and functional introduction describing the manuscript, its various hands and inks, and speculating about possible dates of composition. Her view is that as a work of art 1 *Richard II* 'marks a great advance towards historical tragedy after [Shakespeare's] chronicle plays,' and that 'the lively exposition has special merit.' It is successfully humorous where it needs to be, delineating and differentiating character well, while 'certain passages, especially Woodstock's speeches, possess some poetic power.' The play is unquestionably 'a forerunner to Shakespeare's *Richard II*.'<sup>28</sup>

### **The War Years**

Protégé of the formidable E.M.W. Tillyard of Jesus College, Cambridge, and a rising star in the university's English faculty in his own right, A.P. Rossiter undertook *Woodstock, a Moral History* (1946) during the war years. His goals included rescuing the play from the Teutonic Keller, whom he took time to vilify, and settling once and for all the drama's outstanding questions, especially the nagging authorship matter. Still generally the best-known and most widely read edition, Rossiter's flawed version is nonetheless thoroughly researched, equipped with two sets of small-print endnotes (*Text* and *General*), several appendices, and a comprehensive introduction. His long-anticipated conclusion was unequivocal and capitalized, almost like a defiant shout:

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<sup>23</sup> Wilson erroneously gives June, 1923, as the date for Reyher's article.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew W. Black (ed.): *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second* (New Variorum Edition, Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott, 1955).

<sup>25</sup> G. Lambrechts, 'Sur Deux Prétendues de Richard II,' *Etudes Anglaises*, 20 (1967), pp. 118-39; MacD. P. Jackson: 'Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the Anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*,' in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, Volume 14 (2001).

<sup>26</sup> First used in 1899, a Rotograph produced a white-on-black print on bromide paper. Frijlinck reports it was not always helpful, often confusing specks with letters, etc.

<sup>27</sup> Frijlinck's transcription includes a few minor errors I was able to discover using modern computer software on the original MS, noted in my Acting Edition (2017).

<sup>28</sup> Frijlinck, *ed. cit.* pp. xxiv-xxv.

There is not the smallest chance that he [the writer] was Shakespeare...his verse too rarely rises...his mind never moves fast enough...I must leave him as I found him, a quiet ghost among the great majority who must, for all the troublings of their lives and labours, rest ANON.<sup>29</sup>

This however was followed, at what level of consciousness I cannot say, by several pages decisively proving the reverse. 'Yet there is something of a simplified Shakespeare in him,' Rossiter immediately concedes, noting among other things that Anon characteristically

tries to see History in a big way...has a marked sense of humour of an unusually unbawdy kind: and an interest in human pride of gesture in dramatic situations: much in politics and in the common people—of whom he is not afraid. He knows something of the law and can turn a point with legal jargon; so perhaps he was an Inns of Court man. He recognizes twisty law as a social plague, though he makes rogue-comedy of it; and he can read up a long story and make a case of it.<sup>30</sup>

Rossiter also grants that in addition to these emphases, abilities and talents, Anon has a strong sense of social justice. In his feeling for the common man, 'the author stands a little apart from his times.'<sup>31</sup> He views Simon Ignorance, Dunstable's bloviant mayor and arguably the original of Dogberry, with a kind of amused detestation,<sup>32</sup> while understanding that he is 'a small tyrant swollen to a danger by toadying to a large.'<sup>33</sup> Anon has a much more humane and moral mind than Marlowe, and gives the impression that the world would go very well if only people would be a little more reasonable, moderate and responsible. Above all, he was an accomplished dramatist who 'knew how a plot should run, beginning, middle and end,' and could skillfully render an effective scene:

Each part—and he mainly planned the play in determinate parts—hangs together and leads to his point. The high spots come off in themselves, and also fit the argument of the whole. Neither in structure nor in the passing episode nor in the detail of touches of 'character' and wry humour did the man write like a hack...His scenes and acts are well diversified by change of tone, but almost all his variations bear on his theme.<sup>34</sup>

This isn't simplified Shakespeare; this is Shakespeare. Rossiter adds that Anon was discerning enough to resist making stage-villains out of Woodstock's murderers,<sup>35</sup> and used farce seriously, recalling Hamlet/Shakespeare's admonition to the clowns:

In all these cases the farce has a function. It is not there merely as funny (skilled clownery is that, whether relevant or not) but to throw a twisted pattern across the serious theme...In nearly all the comical or farcical matter so skillfully blended in *Woodstock* there is a suggestion of that frightening inclusiveness of the Elizabethan mind which attains its full scope only in Shakespeare...Its maker, whoever he was, had gone quite as far as Shakespeare in showing what subtleties could be worked on his rather unpromising frame.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, pp. 73, 76. I discuss Rossiter's flawed edition in more detail in Egan (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 73. We may note that Shakespeare's knowledge of the law has often been commented upon.

<sup>31</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 31. Cf. for example *Lear*: 'Take physic, pomp, / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them and show the heavens more just.' (III.iv.33-6); 'So distribution should undo excess, / And each man have enough.' (IV.i.70-1).

<sup>32</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, pp. 42, 224, 225. The Dogberry/Bailiff equation was first made by Boas in 1923 (*Shakespeare and the Universities*, pp. 151, 153) repeated in 1931 by Millett (*The Date and Literary Relations of 'Woodstock'*, p. 9) and by almost everyone else since.

<sup>33</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 74

<sup>34</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, pp. 74-5, 33

<sup>35</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, p. 74

<sup>36</sup> Rossiter, *Woodstock*, pp. 35-7.

‘Quite as far as Shakespeare’ is a phrase that goes quite as far as my broader argument requires, for Shakespeare alone among Elizabethan playwrights can be said to have brought together farce and tragedy ‘in ways so frighteningly inclusive.’ Who else but he could have conceived the Porter scene in *Macbeth* and the grim political humor in the Dunstable episode in *1 Richard II*? It’s the combination of politics and gallows humor that is unique to Shakespeare and quite unlike anything else in Elizabethan drama.

### A.C Partridge and Stratification

Rossiter’s shouted conclusion, backed as it were by Tillyard and the entire Cambridge English faculty, confirmed Boas’s atheism, sweeping the authorship question off the table for another generation. While the play was occasionally anthologized in Rossiter’s version, warts and all, it was the manuscript and its extensive edits in several hands, including possibly the author’s, which now drew serious academic attention.

In 1964, the South African scholar A.C. Partridge published a detailed analysis of the MS’s complex and often contradictory orthography. Partridge agreed with Rossiter and Frijlinck that the drama had likely been composed 1591-4, confirmed by the text’s abundant proclitics, enclitics, and other verbal features, but decisively argued that the manuscript itself must have been edited and prepared by a copyist ‘no earlier than 1607.’<sup>37</sup> The result was what Partridge called orthographic ‘stratification,’ a geological analogy, describing ‘a grammar based on the theory that language consists of a series of hierarchically related strata linked together by representational rules.’<sup>38</sup> This insight became the basis for the modern view that the play is both *Woodstock* and *Richard II, Part One*, a Jacobean edit of an Elizabethan original.

In support of his case for the manuscript’s early-1600s date, confirming Boas’s sense that the language often has a Jacobean ‘ring’ to it, Partridge records contractions such as *th’are* (they are) and ‘Jonsonian’ elisions like *we’had*. On the other hand, many ‘old fashioned’ usages and spellings, such as *tother* (t’other, the other) *bith* (by the) *oth* (of the), *ith* (in the) and *h’as* (he has), ‘belong to the last decade of the sixteenth century,’ i.e., the 1590s, and are ‘almost certainly the author’s.’<sup>39</sup>

Partridge’s analysis showed clearly that there are temporal and stylistic ‘contradictions’ between the MS.’s Elizabethan and Jacobean usages.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the play was likely copied and edited some time after its original composition. The extant text, he concluded, is an early 17th-century version of an older, lost play, exemplifying orthographic strata where

earlier contraction types would be overlaid by later ones, and especially by a different orthography and more precise use of the apostrophe. Thus, in *Woodstock*, *shalls*, *th’are*, *hang um* and *I’me* are probably later than the other contractions, and so are the forms *has* and *does* for the author’s *hath* and *doth*.<sup>41</sup>

Partridge’s analysis is supported by other Shakespeare plays, among them, the roughly contemporaneous *King John*, whose First Folio irregularities closely resemble those in the *Woodstock* manuscript. Dover Wilson, for example, notes that *John*’s inconsistencies also reveal ‘two textual strata,’ deriving either from the author’s revision of an existing prompt book (like Eg. 1994), or ‘interference’ with the author’s

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<sup>37</sup> Partridge, *Orthography in Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama*, pp. 34-42. ‘The terms *proclitic* and *enclitic* are derived from Greek Grammar. *Proclitic* is applied to any combination of two words in which the first is so reduced as to have no independent accent, but in pronunciation is attached to the following stressed word, e.g. *’tis*. *Enclitic* is applied to the combination in which the *second* is so unemphatic as to be heard in pronunciation as part of the preceding word, e.g. *is’t*.’ (Partridge, *op. cit.*, p. 14.)

<sup>38</sup> Webster. The first recorded use of ‘stratification’ is 1962.

<sup>39</sup> Partridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Partridge, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Partridge, *op. cit.*, p. 41.



‘foul papers by a Jacobean printer, or both.’<sup>42</sup>

Partridge’s meticulous data flatly contradict the claims of more recent scholars, principally Lake and Jackson, who not only ignore or lightly dismiss his work, but argue, on the basis of the MS’s 17th-century word usages alone, that *Woodstock* is a light-weight drama by a forgotten Jacobean third-rater plagiarizing outrageously from Shakespeare, thus accounting for the text’s myriad collocations, references and echoes.

### Ian Robinson on Shakespeare’s Authorship

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). In 1988 Brynmill Press issued his 51-page study, ‘*Richard II*’ and ‘*Woodstock*,’<sup>43</sup> along with a reprint of the Nottingham edition, poorly edited but the only one available.<sup>44</sup> Robinson’s conclusion, based on a close textual analysis of the two Richard II dramas, is that they ‘come from the same mind at different moments of its development.’<sup>45</sup> He adds:

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.<sup>46</sup>

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

—*1 Richard II*, I.iii.36-50

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<sup>42</sup> J.D. Wilson (ed.): *King John* (Cambridge U.P., 1936), pp. 91-4; E.A.J. Honigmann (ed.): *King John* (London: Methuen & Co., 1954, repr. 1973), p. xxxvi. Honigmann finds additional evidence in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (p. xxxvii). See also Egan, *King John* (2021).

<sup>43</sup> Ian Robinson: ‘*Richard II*’ and ‘*Woodstock*’ (Doncaster, Brynmill Press) 1988.

<sup>44</sup> George Parfitt and Simon Shepherd (eds.): *Thomas of Woodstock* (Nottingham Drama Texts, Nottingham University Press, 1977)

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, p. 36.

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 pre-echo of Macbeth’s tale told by an idiot, that obviously only one English dramatist could have created it.

### **Eric Sams on *Woodstock’s* Language**

Eric Sams was the author of more than one hundred articles, essays and books on dating and identifying Shakespeare’s plays, especially the apocryphal or disregarded. His work includes the pioneering *Shakespeare’s Edward III: An Early Play Restored to the Canon* (Yale, 1996), for which he has received insufficient credit. *Shakespeare’s Lost Play: Edmund Ironside* (St Martin’s Press, 1985), and *The Real Shakespeare: Retrieving the Early Years 1564-1594* (Yale, 1995) also deserve wider recognition.

‘Shakespeare’s Language and *1 Richard II*’, completed shortly before Sams’ death in 2004, is a scrupulously researched and referenced comparison of the play’s phrases and usages compared with Shakespeare’s, especially in *Richard II*, *2 Henry VI* and *Edward III*. Sams’ conclusion is that

Such resemblances, in such profusion, lead to another explanation for the supposed ‘dependence’ of *1 Richard II* upon *2 Henry VI* (Rossiter, 66-71). It is that both of those plays, the latter in the form of *The Contention 1594*, were written by Shakespeare in his twenties.

### **Jackson and the Case for Rowley**

Macdonald P. Jackson is a well-known New Zealand scholar of Elizabethan and Jacobean texts, especially in the fields of stylometrical dating and authorial attribution. His most recent work as a contributor to the *New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion* (2017), supports the growing scholarly consensus that many Shakespeare plays, as we now have them, are the result of what is broadly called ‘collaboration,’ or the product of many hands. It’s not clear in any particular case whether the collaborating hand or hands were contemporaneous or subsequent. This obviously has some bearing on the *Woodstock* MS, an Elizabethan play mis- or over-dated, as it were, by its subsequent Jacobean edits.<sup>47</sup>

The commanding statement of this currently popular view is McD. Jackson’s ‘Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and the Anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* (*Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 14 (2001), 17-65, a detailed stylometrical analysis based on Frijlinck’s and Rossiter’s texts. The presence of Jacobean words and phrases allows Jackson to propose and then assert that both the play and MS are of the early- to mid-1600s and likely by Samuel Rowley, author of *When You See Me You Know Me* (1605). The multiple Shakespeare collocations are bare-faced plagiarism. Jackson’s essay is included here with his permission and my thanks.

Six years later, responding to *The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One* (2006), Jackson published ‘The Date and Authorship of *Thomas of Woodstock*: Evidence and its Interpretation’ (*Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 46 (2007), 67-100.

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<sup>47</sup> For further discussion see my *Shakespeare’s Hand in The Troublesome Raigne of King John of England / And Why He Wasn’t Arrested in 1601* (Westshore Press, 2021)

**The Case for Shakespeare**

In the same year, Michael Egan published a rebuttal of Jackson, 'Woodstock's Golden Metamorphosis', reproduced elsewhere on this site.