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A Paradox of Self-Image: William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Richard II* in Hitler's Germany

A Thesis Presented for

The Master of Arts Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Bradley Michael Blair

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DEDICATION

To Erin Elizabeth Read

Your patience, empathy and personal knowledge of my faculty and fellow students made the bad days bearable and the good days all the better. The words, “thank you,” are truly insufficient in your case, but for all, I thank you anyway.

Brad Blair

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the connection between the cultural authorities of the Third Reich and the works of William Shakespeare. Nazi cultural authorities utilized theater as a milieu of representation wherein the Third Reich showcased its underlying ideological principles. However, Shakespeare's works, because of his humanist concern for the problems of the individual, create numerous difficulties that arise with any effort to align his works as a whole with a single set of ideological principles. *The Merchant of Venice,* Shakespeare's most famously Jewish play, appears on the surface to present the Nazi cultural authorities with a prime opportunity to showcase anti-Semitic values; however, the play presents numerous interpretative difficulties that make a purely anti-Semitic interpretation difficult to stage. Among those difficulties are the hints of sympathy for Shylock and Jessica's marriage to the Christian Lorenzo, an act of miscegenation illegal in the Third Reich.

King Richard II is an English history play that presents problems of identity and power for Nazi Cultural Authorities. To a regime that struggled to align Shakespeare with the German-born classical writers, Goethe and Schiller, a drama that dealt with English history served as a reminder of Shakespeare's essential foreignness. Finally, this play depicts a subject overthrowing his monarch and suffering no punishment for the act. The figure of King Richard, an indecisive and ineffective leader, falls because he lacks either the cunning or the brute force needed to suppress Henry Bolingbroke. Thus, the Third Reich's cultural authorities could not simply accept a play that featured both a weak leader and a rebellious subject who succeeds in toppling his king. These plays serve as representative examples of Shakespeare's lack of suitability as regards aligning his works with Nazi principles. I conclude that the Third Reich's cultural guardians, by

refusing to ban Shakespeare from their literary canon, created an insoluble paradox that plagued Nazi Germany until the end of the Third Reich.

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CHAPTER 1

Shakespeare and Germany: An Unlikely Connection

If you were to stroll through the historic park on the banks of Weimar's River Ilm, you would see, as you would expect, numerous buildings and monuments commemorating the lives and works of Germany's two most renowned classical writers, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller. Your tour might lead you to Goethe's Borkenhäuschen, constructed as Goethe's tribute to the Duchess Luise, and if you happened to glance up above the Borkenhäuschen, you would see a particularly interesting statue. The statue holds a scroll in its right hand and a rose in its left, and at its feet are sculpted a skull and dagger along with a foolscap. The statue is of William Shakespeare. Constructed from drafts made by professor Otto Lessing, it was unveiled on April 23, 1904 in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft.

Why is it here? Why would the Germans build a statue of an English poet and playwright in the same city where the two classical figures of German literature lived and worked? The answer to this question forms the starting point for this thesis. German thinkers and writers have long considered Shakespeare "German" and thus deserving of a place in the literary canon. The Nazi period in particular showcased one of the most substantial efforts since Germany's formation as a nation state to bring Shakespeare into line with ideals of Germany and Germanness. At its heart, this thesis focuses on the troubled relationship between the Nazi cultural authorities and William Shakespeare, a figure whose English heritage, and more often whose humanist concern with the struggles of the individual, make his work seem, on one level, incompatible with Nazi ideology.

Shakespeare enjoys a long history in the German language. Christoph Martin Wieland's translations of twenty-two Shakespearean plays, with twenty-one appearing as literal prose renderings, appeared from 1762-1766 and represent the first effort to translate a substantial portion of Shakespeare's work into German. Prior to this time, his work was appreciated either in English or French translation. Andreas Gryphius's 1663 comedy *Herr Peter Squentz oder absurda comica,* for example, owes its existence in part to the story of Pyramus and Thisbe found in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, the translation efforts, beginning with Wieland, represent a desire to elevate Shakespeare from the status of a respected foreign author and show him as both an appropriate model for and as belonging to the emergent German literary culture. As Lessing's "Literaturbrief No. 17" explains, the acceptance and veneration of Shakespeare at this level stems from the perception of English identity as closely related to that of the Germans, and therefore, Shakespeare's works found an adopted home in Germany, whose dramaturgs were willing to overlook his birthplace in favor of his Germanic identity.

In the late eighteenth-century Germany was only a cultural concept and national unification still almost a century in the future. Thus, defining oneself or one's ideas as "German" was difficult. But therein lay Shakespeare's value. As theater, and more importantly dramaturgy, spread throughout the German-speaking realm, the debate arose concerning which cultural model of theater was more worthy of emulation, the French or the English. In his "Literaturbrief No. 17," dated February 16, 1759, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing took up this debate. He focused on the merits of Shakespeare versus those of seventeenth-century French dramatists like Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine. Lessing describes Shakespeare for example as, "ein weit größerer tragischer Dichter als *Corneille"* (Lessing 501). And he continues the discussion by contrasting

the two playwrights with this accusation of Corneille a sentence later, "*Corneille* kömmt ihnen [ihnen most likely refers to the conventions of tragedy, of which Corneille, according to Lessing, achieves only a mechanical or structural understanding, B.B.] in der mechanischen Einrichtung, und *Shakespear* in dem Wesentlichen neher" (Lessing 501).

Yet this letter was meant to do more than argue one dramatist over another. To Lessing, this was not merely a discussion of Corneille versus Shakespeare, but of the French theater as a whole versus the English. The stakes in the debate were the future of German theater. Will German tragedies, for example, resemble the French middle class tragedies, or the more traditional and hence more violent English tragic tradition? Ultimately Lessing and his supporters triumphed in their view that the English theatrical tradition was more appropriate for the German stage than the French, which Lessing regarded as an inferior imitation of the English (Lessing 501). This favorable view of English theater led, for Lessing, to a favorable view of Shakespeare, a view that grew more prevalent as the eighteenth-century drew to a close.

Today, the German Shakespeare translation most widely used both on stage and in the classroom goes under the misleading name 'Schlegel-Tieck.' Kenneth E. Larson investigates this most famous of German Shakespeare translation projects in "The Origins of the 'Schlegel-Tieck' Shakespeare in the 1820s," an article appearing in the Winter 1984 issue of *The German Quarterly*. August Wilhelm von Schlegel began translating Shakespeare in 1797 and completed seventeen verse translations, including the two works featured in this project, before moving on to other projects that consumed the remainder of his life's work[1]. Despite the vigorous urgings of

[1] According to the 1891 edition of *Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke*, Schlegel is explicitly credited with seventeen of the thirty-six works included in the work. The remaining plays, which are not credited to a specific translator, are presumably those translated under Tieck's direction. Schlegel is credited with the following translations: *König Johann*, *König Heinrich der Vierte* (Teile 1-2), *König Heinrich der Fünfte*, *König Heinrich der Sechste* (Teile 1-3),

his publisher, Georg Reimer, Schlegel never returned to Shakespeare translation (Larson 19-20). The final product appeared in 1833, consisting of all seventeen of Schlegel's translations plus those rendered by Ludwig Tieck, Dorothea Tieck and Wolf Heinrich Graf von Baudissin (1789-1878) (Larson 30).

It is this translation that the Nazis held up as the model of Shakespeare in German. Why? The connection between the Nazi cultural authorities and the Romantic period derives from the Third Reich's desire to mythologize what it means to be German. The Romantic period corresponds to the height of German idealism, when terms such as "German" came to symbolize an essential quality that was more than the language or geographical area. Thomas Eicher discusses this question of the privileging of the Schlegel-Tieck translation in *Theater im "Dritten Reich": Theaterpolitik, Spielplanstruktur, NS-Dramatik*:

> Bis Mitte der dreißiger Jahre gab es eine Auseinandersetzung um die Frage, in welcher Übersetzung Shakespeares Werke auf der Bühne inszeniert werden sollten. Von den NS-Ideologen, vor allem von den Mitarbeitern des Amtes Rosenberg, wurden die Übertragungen von Schlegel-Tieck bevorzugt, weil sie nach ihrer Meinung, im Gegensatz zu den zeitgenössischen Übersetzungen, das „Heldenhafte" der Dichtung Shakespeares besser zum Ausdruck brächten. (Eicher 315)

As the Reichskulturkammer, (hereafter refered to as the RKK) and propaganda ministry worked to create and project a newly-formed German self-image, they culled and sifted the literature for

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König Richard der Zweite, *König Richard der Dritte*, *Der Kaufmann von Venedig*, *Romeo und Julia*, *Ein Sommernachtstraum*, *Julius Cäsar*, *Was Ihr Wollt*, *Der Sturm*, *Hamlet*, and *Wie Es Euch Gefällt*.

authors whose writings either corresponded to Nazi ideology or whose works could be reinterpreted to appear so.

This thesis examines the connection between Shakespeare and the Nazi cultural authorities' efforts to project Shakespeare as German in spite of his English heritage and Germany's war with that nation. I explore two plays, one a highly popular comedy and the other a lesser known history play, to tease out many different aspects of Shakespeare's works that resisted Nazi reshaping. Some of those elements involve race and ethnicity, such as in *The Merchant of Venice*. Others are political and involve not only the nature of power but the subject's proper relationship with the state, such as in *King Richard II*. In both cases Shakespeare's work would seem anathema to Nazi ideals. The Nazis, like many others who manipulated literature and art to validate their ideological principles, needed an author whose works were more suited to a single time and place. In his April 22, 1988 lecture, "Not of an Age, but for All Time: A Shakespearean's Thoughts on Shakespeare's Permanence," which was reproduced in *The Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Roland Frye argues that Shakespeare, by contrast, transcends time and space, because he composed referential works with universal applications. Shakespeare wrote characters who portrayed a whole range of human attitudes, some supportive of one particular point-of-view, and others diametrically opposed to it: "He wrote plays consisting of different plots in different genres, peopled with different characters thinking their own thoughts" (Frye 230). Thus, in this reading, Shakespeare's work as a whole cannot definitively be aligned with any one belief system, be it Nazism or any other.

Chapter 2 discusses those principles of Nazi thought most relevant to the theater and the plays under consideration. It begins with an overview of the problems that surround the search

for the Third Reich's ideological principles. Of particular interest for this discussion of Shakespearean are the Nazi views on Jews, state power, and the role of the individual as subservient to the state. Specifically, I investigate the ways Shakespeare's works clash with the views and policies of the Third Reich. Because it is difficult to identify with certainty just what those principles were, the theater becomes, for the purpose of my argument, a milieu of representation, where directors and actors attempt to remain in line with the state's wishes. More important than any clearly identifiable principles, therefore, is the question: what did people believe to be the state's paramount ideological principles, and what was done in response to these real or perceived principles on and behind the stage? The responses of theater directors and actors offer answers. Some self-censored when they either failed to perform certain plays, refused to stage others, or when they interpreted still others in favorable ways. In any of its forms, self-censorship was considered the wisest response and to that end I investigate the reasons for the formation of The RKK as well as the apologetics of self-censorship on the part of The Third Reich's directors and actors (Steinweis 445). Specifically, I examine and refute the claim of many postwar apologists such as Hans Lehmann that the theaters of the Third Reich stood as a bastion of civilization in a barbarous society (Symington 255-58)[2]. Actually the widespread censorship at the local level shows that theaters collaborated with, or at least complied with the government rather than resist: "Es finden sich kaum Hinweise darauf, daß ein Theater versuchte, das Werk eines mißliebig gewordenen Autors zu inszenieren. Vom Februar 1933 an waren die Spielpläne faktisch „gleichgeschaltet"; dabei spielte die NS-Presse und die

[2] The supposition that the world of the theater under the Nazis remained depoliticized or was in other respects a refuge from the politics and violence of the Third Reich, exists on the level of common knowledge or a widely-held belief. For discussion of the flaws inherent in this view of theater, see John London, Theater Under The Nazis. Alternatively, See Alan E. Steinweis' discussion of the function of the "apolitical artist" in "The Professional, Social, and Economic Dimensions of Nazi Cultural Policy: The Case of the Reich Theater Chamber."

lokalen und regionalen NS-Machthaber die Aufpasserrolle - und die Anpassung der Theaterleute an die „neue Zeit“ (Eicher 290).

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Shakespeare’s comedies, tragedies and histories in The Third Reich. The comedies were regarded as “safe” non-controversial plays, because they contained no material offensive to Nazi sensibilities, although *The Merchant of Venice* proved an uncomfortable exception because of the problems that surrounded the representation of Jews and their relationships in the play, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 3. By and large, the tragedies remained untouched in Nazi Germany, enjoying the same overall success as they had prior to 1933. For their part, the history plays suffered from two problems. First, the history plays never have been among Shakespeare’s most widely performed works, and this was true in the Third Reich as well. More importantly, however, is the fact that the history plays, more than any other, accentuate the historically English heritage of the author at a time when his “German” identity was most crucial to the promotion of Shakespeare in The Third Reich. *King Richard II*, while not as widely performed as *The Merchant of Venice*, also evidences its lack of suitability for the Third Reich, because it is unquestionably an English history play that concerns itself solely with the problems and struggles unique to that nation’s monarchy. Thus, this play drives home the fact that Shakespeare was not “German,” and makes his wholesale adoption as a German more difficult.

Chapter 3 discusses *The Merchant of Venice*. This play, which features a Jewish moneylender as one of its central figures, looks on its face like a prime opportunity for The Third Reich to discredit the Jews on stage. As the chapter shows, however, it was not that easy. At issue are the difficulties faced in interpreting Shylock and the marriage of Jessica to a Christian. The chapter begins, therefore, with a discussion of this play’s interpretation in The Third Reich.

How should Shylock be portrayed? Is he a greedy Jewish stereotype? Is he, in fact, a victim of gentile abuses? Of particular interest are the attempts made to alter the text by cutting out lines that show Shylock in a favorable light. The text suffered alterations because of Jessica's marriage to a Christian as well, an act illegal in Nazi Germany. It is also noteworthy that Joseph Goebbels got personally involved in the Berlin productions of this play and attempted to manage the productions of the play in that city (Symington 243-44). These examples suggest that the Nazi regime did not simply exploit the play as a piece of anti-Semitic propaganda, as one might expect. Rather, cultural officials struggled with its nuances and complexity. For example, in light of The Third Reich's laws against Jewish miscegenation, what could theater directors do with Jessica's romance with and marriage to Lorenzo? One answer was to make her a Christian and thence Shylock's foster daughter. Another response was to cut the marriage and romance altogether. As with the reinterpretation of Shylock, either response requires textual alterations on a large scale, making the play difficult to recognize as belonging to Shakespeare.

Chapter 4 discusses Shakespeare's *King Richard II*. As a lesser known play, it saw fewer productions. Two productions stand out as noteworthy, however, because they foreground the problem of how to interpret the figure of King Richard. I discuss Jürgen Fehling's 1939 production, which was criticized for its portrayal of King Richard as a homosexual deviant who is manipulated by those around him, as well as Heinz Hilpert's 1940 production, which attempted to show Richard as a heroic figure who suffers betrayal by his intimates. The remainder of this chapter treats the problems of Nazi interpretation. I argue that no production ever reinterpreted this character to the Nazis' satisfaction largely because of the difficulties in knowing, let alone following, any precisely-formulated standards of Nazi ideology. It was difficult to know how to interpret this character in an acceptable manner. Shakespeare portrays

Richard as a weak and impotent leader who is unable to control his kingdom. The king is indecisive, easily influenced by his flatterers. In connection with weakness, Richard is a cowardly figure, who, rather than falling in battle as the theater critics of The Third Reich might wish, lives to voluntarily surrender his crown to his rival. Even Richard's death could be viewed as offensive to Nazi sensibilities, if we accept the premise that the death should occur in a heroic manner as in *Richard IIII*. Thus, Richard's death constitutes the second element of my discussion. Richard dies, but his murder, whether or not it was ordered by the newly ascended King Henry IV, comes as an anticlimax. By positioning Richard's death in the play not at the moment of failure, but rather as an afterthought toward the end, Shakespeare makes Richard's death ignoble and thus unworthy of a leader in the Nazi conception of strong leadership and heroic endings. The final element of my analysis is justice. In all other Shakespearean plays that feature a usurper grabbing monarchical power, the usurper is killed in the end, avenging the deposition of the rightful monarch and leaving the audience satisfied that all is again well. Macbeth and Richard III, in tragedies named for these two protagonists, are killed by Macduff and Richmond respectively. Similarly, the usurper Claudius pays for the murder of Hamlet's father, the men who assassinate Caesar answer for their crime, and the daughters of Lear are punished for their misdeeds. If justice in Shakespeare equals the punishment and death of the usurper, then there is no justice in Richard II. There is no punishment for Henry Bolingbroke, who becomes King Henry IV. Hence, The Third Reich could not find any justice in retribution against those who would usurp proper government in Richard II. Theft of subjects' property, King Richard's chief sin, is not problematic for Third Reich critics, if we accept the argument that the needs of the state supersede those of the individual. Rather, the RKK could not simply write off a play in which a character overthrows a government.

I conclude that the Nazis failed to co-opt Shakespeare as a whole, and that it would have been wiser for the state, both in terms of propaganda and in its portrayal of the theater as a central proponent of Nazi ideals, to reject Shakespeare entirely. However, Shakespeare's inclusion in the canon created an insoluble paradox for the RKK and ultimately for the Third Reich itself.

CHAPTER 2

Theater Under the Nazis

During my preparation for this project I asked friends both inside and outside the academy where they would look if they wanted to find a concise statement of Nazi principles. Ideally, this manifesto of Nazism would include material about the centrality of the theater and the treatment of certain authors like Shakespeare. In nearly every case people said they would consult Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. When I asked them to explain this choice, the explanations I heard centered around Hitler's leadership of Nazi Germany, the implicit assumption being that this book must be a blueprint of how the Third Reich was managed and what its people believed. The other underlying assumption, which stemmed from Hitler's leadership role, holds that Third Reich ideology began with and was derived from Hitler's personal beliefs. These are understandable, if flawed, assumptions, however, and any discussion of The Third Reich's state ideology must necessarily begin by correcting or at least nuancing these misperceptions.

Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* nearly a decade prior to becoming chancellor, at a time when few thought the Nazi party would ever control the government. Thus, the most that one can say of *Mein Kampf* is that it states Hitler's beliefs and goals for a new Germany. It does not give specifics about how to develop and implement policies, particularly with regards to theater. The fact that Hitler subsequently rose to power is incidental to the writing of the book. Hitler's importance lies ultimately not in anything he said or did, but rather in the larger-than-life nature of his image and the ways the Nazi government managed it (Kershaw 3). Public perception of

this image motivated theater directors and other artists to act literally and figuratively in certain ways.

Because the theater was still a driving force in the arts during this time, Nazi cultural authorities took great pains to project what they perceived as the proper image to the world. Today one easily underestimates theater's impact in the 1930's. Television and the internet have largely supplanted theater's role as an entertainment venue and an arena for disseminating propaganda. However, in the 1930's widespread television viewing was still two decades away, and radio was only beginning to be exploited. As a result, theater was, just as in Shakespeare's time, a highly valued social institution. It is not surprising, therefore, that the cultural authorities of the Third Reich regarded the theater as a tool with which to highlight the German culture and as such, they attempted to regulate the image of Germany it projected (Steinweis 443-45). The theater served as an excellent milieu of representation, where the German state endeavored to communicate its cultural values as it perceived them. Therefore, the correct question is not, "What books do we consult in search of Nazi ideological principles?" but rather, "How did the state ultimately choose to represent itself and its underlying ideological principles in the theater?" Moreover, how does Shakespeare fit in with this representative endeavor?

Alan Steinweis connects the Jewish question and the theater in his discussion of the formation of the RKK in his 1990 article "The Professional, Social, and Economic Dimensions of Nazi Cultural Policy: The Case of The Reich Theater Chamber." As the Gleichschaltung went into effect, Jews in the arts found themselves summarily dismissed as the RKK sought to insure that even the arts portrayed the proper Aryan image to the world (Steinweis 443). As a result, a play like *The Merchant of Venice* required careful deliberation before it saw stage time. The drama itself required careful attention, and it was also necessary to employ directors and actors

who would, at the very least, not actively resist the racial aims of Nazi policy as exemplified by the Gleichschaltung and the RKK. Thus, directors, producers and actors walked a fine line between artistic license and integrity on the one hand and keeping out of trouble with the state on the other.

The state regulation of the theater began with The Reichstheaterkammer, the national association of theater directors and actors, of which most theater performers and stagehands were members. This smallest of bodies was itself a subdivision of the larger RKK. In turn, the RKK fell under the direct supervision of the propaganda ministry and its director, Joseph Goebbels. Steinweis describes the role of the RKK as a regulatory body, whose primary function was to insure the "proper" representation of Germany in music, in the visual arts and in theater (Steinweis 442-45). Thus, whenever conflicts arose over whose works should be staged and how those works should appear on stage, the chamber of culture became, for local actors and directors, the final authority in any dispute. Ultimately, Goebbels himself, through his authority as propaganda minister, used his authority to occasionally direct the actions of the RKK in matters of stage production, including Shakespearean drama, and this explains why Goebbels name is often found in connection with discussions of Shakespeare's production in The Third Reich.[3] Goebbels was the final authority on propaganda and, at least in one sense, the final authority on Shakespeare in Nazi Germany. However, even though the government bodies were perfectly capable of making top-down command decisions about which of Shakespeare's works

[3] For a discussion of Goebbels' involvement in theater productions of the Third Reich, see Wardetzky's discussion on page 42 of her text or Symington's discussion of Goebbels' role in the Berlin productions of *The Merchant of Venice* on pages 242-44 of his work.

to select and how to alter them, it is surprising at first glance to discover that such decision-making was rarely needed.

Does this mean that actors and directors were generally supportive of Nazi ideals and required little supervision? This is a difficult question to answer because fear often influenced theatrical decision-making at the local level. As a result, self-censorship became the safest course. Rodney Symington discusses the attitude of fear and the practice of censorship extensively in *The Nazi Appropriation of Shakespeare: Cultural Politics in the Third Reich*. The censorship, rather than being government-mandated, actually stemmed from a grassroots caution on the part of local directors and actors: "the theaters knew which way the wind was blowing and exercised self-censorship, and only very rarely would a theater seriously contemplate producing a play by an author known not to be liked by the government" (Symington 32). The case of the theaters' self-censorship illustrates the effective hold the Nazi regime maintained. It does not matter whether or not any actual consequences would have been forthcoming. It sufficed that people believed that consequences were possible, and because those consequences might have ranged in severity from mere dismissal to an unscheduled trip to the nearest concentration camp, caution remained the order of the day.

Together with the discussion of self-censorship comes the need to dismantle any illusions about an apolitical or culturally non-partisan theater. Any assumption that the theater of the Third Reich was disinterested in political awareness or political adherence is demonstrably wrong. Symington treats this topic in his study, but Jutta Wardetzky offers a more thorough discussion of the theater's political underpinnings in *Theaterpolitik im faschistischen Deutschland: Studien und Dokumente*. Both authors devote several pages each to an alarming trend in postwar thought that portrays the Third Reich's theaters as being apolitical in their

activities and as being a form of cultural refuge from what otherwise was a barbarous society. Wardetzky devotes four pages to the Theatergesetz, the law enacted shortly after Hitler's assumption of the chancellorship. This law reorganized the cultural organs of The Third Reich into a consolidated subordinate relationship to the RKK and the propaganda ministry (Wardetzky 42-46). Wardetzky's analysis makes it abundantly clear that first and foremost, political reliability on the part of a director or theater manager was necessary and that those who were deemed unreliable either failed to be appointed or could be dismissed at Goebbels' sole discretion (Wardetzky 43). Furthermore, Wardetzky explains that even the rank and file members of the theater, actors, stagehands and so on, not only held active membership in the state-run RKK, but also witnessed examples of what befell those deemed unreliable or subversive, "[a]ls alle Schaffenden der darstellenden Kunst innerhalb ihrer Verbände in die Fachschaft Bühne überführt wurden, waren sie ihren eigenen Satzungen entfremdet, ihre Funktionäre davon gejagt oder in die Konzentrationslager verschleppt" (Wardetzky 42). Based on these practices and the organizational structure, the theater became a tool of the state. The ideologies of some and the fear of others combined and manifested in self-censorship and general caution as the path of least resistance. Finally, not only did the members of the theater participate in the Third Reich's control over artistic and theatrical expression, they did so consciously and with full knowledge of what they were, or in the case of theater, were not doing at the time.

This cautious behavior on the part of theater directors and actors applies especially to Shakespeare, and it manifests itself in the success or failure of Shakespeare's works in The Third Reich. To clarify the discussion of the fate of Shakespeare's plays in Nazi Germany, it is appropriate to deal with them categorically before moving on to individual plays. Shakespeare's

dramas fall into three general categories: the tragedies, the comedies and the histories, which may or may not contain tragic elements, but which mainly deal with English history. Each of these three categories of plays saw varying degrees of success or failure in Nazi Germany, and even through this broader analysis, the preferences and struggles of the propaganda ministry and the RKK become apparent.

The Comedies

Of these three categories of Shakespearean dramas, the comedies were the most successful in the Third Reich, in that they enjoyed the highest production figures of all the categories of Shakespearean plays. According to both Symington and Thomas Eicher, the three Shakespearean plays that enjoyed the greatest overall success in Nazi Germany in terms of numbers of productions were *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It* and *The Comedy of Errors*. By contrast, the comedies performed least were *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice*. In the case of the former, both Eicher and Symington cite the ban of Felix Mendelssohn's musical score and the subsequent difficulties in obtaining suitable music as the cause of *Midsummer*'s decline. The RKK took exception to Mendelssohn's music, not surprisingly, because Mendelssohn was Jewish and thus his music fell victim to the *Gleichschaltung* (Eicher 303-04). The Third Reich's troubled relationship with *The Merchant of Venice*, on the other hand, focuses much more on the play itself. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

The comedies' overall success stems from the perception of these plays on the part of the propaganda ministry as being what Symington calls "safe," and what Goebbels, ever concerned

with the mood of the populace, called “harmless entertainment” (Symington 219). Goebbels’ assessment of the comedies as “harmless” implies both that he considered them politically non-controversial, and also that he, quite correctly, considered others to be anything but politically non-controversial and harmless to the aims of the Nazi state. I find this division of Shakespeare’s dramas into harmless and otherwise to be yet another indicator that those at the top, in particular Goebbels, knew that Shakespeare as a whole was problematic for The Third Reich. Even so, they still desired desperately to transform him into a less problematic more ideologically acceptable figure.

The Tragedies and Histories

If the comedies flourished under the Third Reich’s auspices, and if the histories suffered, Shakespeare’s tragedies enjoyed the middle ground. Some tragedies saw an increase in production, while others saw modest reductions in production figures. *Hamlet* became the third most produced Shakespearean play during the period, with ninety-four productions altogether (Eicher 309). The success of this particular tragedy stems from the German reinterpretation of Hamlet as a calculating Nordic hero, and since Hamlet is Danish in Shakespeare’s work, this is a credible step (Anders qtd. in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch 71*, 183). On the other hand, *Othello* suffered a drop in productions, owing to the racial problems inherent in a Black African Moor’s marriage to a white Italian. This did not become nearly the problem that Jessica’s marriage to Lorenzo became in *The Merchant of Venice*, primarily because Othello could be played as a light-skinned Arab without the drastic textual alterations needed in Jessica’s case. Still, the anti-miscegenation laws made some form of circumvention necessary. Overall though, according to the

comprehensive production statistics chart assembled by Eicher on page 302 of his study, the production figures for the tragedies varied little during the 1933-1944 period from those figures that represent numbers of productions during the 1929-1933 period, a fact that suggests that the Third Reich's cultural authorities desired neither to embrace nor to suppress the tragedies in Nazi Germany's theaters (Eicher 302).

Of the three categories of plays, the histories saw the least stage time. These plays have been comparatively unpopular over the centuries, and this trend continued in the Third Reich. The most successful histories during this time were *Henry IV* and *Richard III*. The success of the latter play doubtless stems from its depiction of a ruthless leader who meets a heroic death in battle. By contrast, *King John* and *Richard II* enjoyed the least success of the English history plays. Reflecting on the reasons for the history plays' lack of success in The Third Reich, Ernst Leopold Stahl, a member of the board of directors of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft during the period, cited audiences' interest in their own history as opposed to that of England as well as their desire for more relevant, i.e., more contemporary or non-historical material: "Das Interesse der Allgemeinheit scheint sich demnach begreiflicherweise zunächst auf das Stoffgebiet der eigenen vaterländischen Geschichte zu konzentrieren oder doch auf solche Themen, die in die Augen springende Parallelen zum eigenen Zeit- oder Geschichtserlebnis darbieten" (Stahl qtd. in Eicher 311). Certain elements of Stahl's analysis suggest a commonly held view that these plays exemplified Shakespeare's historically English heritage and that Third Reich audiences considered such works as too remote from their time and interests. Specifically, Stahl's assertion that contemporary audiences preferred to focus their attention on, "das Stoffgebiet der eigenen vaterländischen Geschichte," signifies audiences' recognition of and discomfort with Shakespeare's true origins. If Stahl's comments accurately reflect commonly

held sentiments of German audiences, then this sort of sentiment among the common people deals a serious blow to Goebbels' efforts to project Shakespeare's image as wholly German, whatever his birthplace. In fact, it reduces Shakespeare once again to the role of a highly respected but essentially foreign i.e. non-German author. This perception of Shakespeare's foreignness is, however, one of the least of the problems that confronted The Third Reich. Nevertheless, this problem, like the others presented in the forthcoming chapters, never found a satisfactory resolution in Hitler's Germany.

CHAPTER 3

Shakespeare and The Jewish Question

If there is one single aspect of Nazi rule about which almost everyone seems to know something, it is the German-Jewish connection. With this in mind, I told a few selected friends that I am writing a thesis that treats Shakespeare's connection to Nazi Germany, and I asked these students, all Shakespeare enthusiasts, to think of a Shakespearean play that would appeal to Nazi cultural authorities for any conceivable reason. Half refused to believe that they would find any play appealing and even demanded a copy when this work is finished. But those who took the question seriously provided me with several possibilities, and in every case, Shakespeare's most famously "Jewish" play, *The Merchant of Venice*, made the list.

If there is a play whose relationship with Nazi Germany is most easily misunderstood, it is this one. It looks, on its face, like a work the Nazis would welcome, because a prime opportunity to spin it for anti-Semitic propaganda appears to be at hand. After all, it features a Jewish money lender who requires a pound of flesh as forfeiture of his bond. However, close examination of the play and the history of its reception itself reveals otherwise. *The Merchant of Venice* was one of the most troubling of Shakespearean plays for both the directors who produced it as well as the members of government who wanted very much to see it as an anti-Semitic work (Symington 239-40). Unfortunately for The Third Reich chamber of culture and the propaganda ministry, the character of Shylock presents substantial interpretative difficulties. This character lends himself to multiple interpretations, some of which would have reflected poorly on Nazi Germany. For example, if the audience were permitted to sympathize with this Jewish character, as a Jew who suffers at the hands of Christians, it could cause people to

consider the status of Jews in contemporary Germany. The play also features a marriage between a Christian and a Jew, and because such a marriage was actually illegal in the Third Reich, directors had to provide the RKK with an acceptable alternative. Either one of these problems might have triggered efforts to restructure this play, but the presence of both problems insured it. The most drastic attempts to clean up this play include versions of it with dozens of lines cut from the text and others added. Thomas Eicher records some of these changes, and comparing them with the original, postulates a belief among those cutting the text that the play in its original form portrays a Jewish protagonist in a favorable light. Moreover it demonstrates, through the marriage of Shylock's daughter to a Christian, an acceptance of Jews that was utterly opposed to the philosophical and legal position of the Third Reich. Thus, in so far as it caused several substantial problems for Nazi cultural authorities, this play had precisely the opposite affect on Nazi Germany's cultural guardians than otherwise might seem to be the case.

Interpretative Difficulties of the Drama

The first problem of interpretation with *The Merchant of Venice* is a matter of pure dramatics and not of ideological principle. What sort of man is Shylock? Is he, for example, merely a spiteful old Jewish money lender who hates Christians and lacks any compassion for their misfortunes? Some of his asides as well as his behavior in court in Act IV support this interpretation. He refers to his hatred for Christians and to his intention to see the bond fulfilled despite all pleas to the contrary and despite third parties' offers to pay the sum of the bond in lieu of the pound of flesh. Shylock comes across as vengeful, caustic and wholly unsympathetic to the merchant Antonio's shipwrecks at sea, which result in his default on the loan. Such attitudes

make Shylock a sort of rebel against Christian Europe and set him up as a possible villain character. In fact, D. M. Cohen discusses precisely this vilification of Shylock in "The Jew and Shylock," an article that appeared in the Spring 1980 issue of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Cohen is troubled by an author who appears to acknowledge Jews as human beings, but who nevertheless, "has been willing to use the cruel stereotypes of that ideology for mercenary and artistic purposes" (Cohen 63).

Alternatively, Paul Gaudet rejects critics' efforts to schematize the play within what he believes are narrowly-defined intellectual formula. In "Lorenzo's Infidel: The Staging of Difference in The Merchant of Venice" Gaudet argues the deconstructionist position that no one interpretation satisfies all the moments of discontinuity or disturbance in the play, and that the performer will perforce take advantage of this textual uncertainty on the stage: "There are numerous gaps or holes or indeterminate moments that allow variant possibilities, but simultaneously require filling in or resolution in performance" (Gaudet 275). Regardless of whether or not we agree with Gaudet's claim or Cohen's conclusion, the presence of both of these perspectives illustrates the point that this play presents interpretative problems for any examiner, and the Nazis, if they wished to utilize this work in their anti-Semitic campaign, were as obligated to struggle with the problem of interpretation as anyone else.

Among the multifarious interpretations that exist, there is room to see Shylock in a compassionate light, which, judging by the textual alterations, the RKK feared most of all. This play is a comedy, but not for Shylock. His asides, as well as the way his case is disposed of in court, lend support for a more sympathetic view of Shylock and his behavior. He refers, both in asides and in direct speech, to Antonio's verbal abuse of him, his people and his money-lending practices. The word dog even comes up once or twice, and it is obvious Antonio wasn't referring

to Shylock's pets. These men are not friends, and the play evinces a long-standing history of ill-will between them that Antonio's anti-Jewish sentiments perpetuate. Finally, the disposal of Shylock's case by the Christians in the court of Venice reveals their intent to circumvent the bond in any way possible. Ultimately, Shylock is forced both to convert to Christianity and to will all his property to his daughter and her Christian husband upon his death. Therefore, Shylock becomes the target of Christian spite and a character with whom the audience could sympathize.

Aside from having to work with a play that lends itself to different dramatic interpretations, directors in Nazi Germany faced two problems with direct ideological implications. First there was the problem of Jessica, Shylock's daughter. What should be done with a Jewish girl who runs away and marries a Christian? Miscegenation among Jewish and non-Jewish persons was prohibited by law in the Third Reich, and it would have been completely unacceptable to show it on stage (Symington 240). The second problem, in so far as an anti-Semitic regime was concerned, stemmed from a number of lines in the play that unambiguously praise Shylock or portray him in an overtly sympathetic manner. Such an overtly sympathetic portrayal of a Jew on the stage could lead to audience members' consideration of Jews' plights in contemporary Germany.

These two problematic figures, Jessica and Shylock, both resist easy solution, but some solution to both was necessary before the RKK could regard the play as palatable. In Jessica's case, directors attempted two solutions. First, her character could be rewritten to make her a Christian, a move that would redefine her as Shylock's foster daughter. More importantly, this reinterpretation sidestepped contemporary anti-miscegenation statutes. Alternatively, Jessica's attitude toward her father could be reinterpreted, so that, instead of running off with Lorenzo, she

stays to aid her father in his struggle. This second reinterpretation also requires drastic textual alteration, but it too sidesteps the uncomfortable situation of a Jew marrying a Christian: "Beim ‚Kaufmann von Venedig' lag der Anstoß in der am Schluß stattfindenden Verbindung des Venezianers Lorenzo mit Shylocks Tochter Jessica, weil auf der Bühne nicht sein durfte, was in der Realität verboten war" (Eicher 304).

The sympathetic portrayal of Shylock was a more difficult problem to solve. Generally speaking, reinterpretations of Shylock's character required altering some lines, cutting others and inventing still others ex nihilo, "Gestrichen oder abgeändert wurden alle Passagen, die das Bild des ‚Juden' Shylock positiv erscheinen lassen konnten oder die dazu angetan waren, mit seiner Situation und der des jüdischen Volkes Mitleid oder Verständnis zu empfinden" (Eicher 305). In 1936 the author and translator Hermann Kroepelin presented a revised translation of *The Merchant of Venice* to the RKK that contained his ideas for appropriate revisions (Eicher 304). In this case, "revision" or "alteration" more accurately describes what Kroepelin did, because his work amounts to a bastardization of the extant Schlegel translation[4]. Kroepelin justified his alterations to the text by claiming that his work constituted only minor textual changes, but that it remained faithful to Shakespeare's intent (Symington 69). To discuss Kroepelin's alterations in greater detail, I have provided below a sample from the Schlegel translation of the play, followed by Kroepelin's alteration, some samples of which are preserved in Eicher's study (Eicher 315-17). I elect here to work with the German text, because critiquing Kroepelin is more a matter of examining his alterations to a German-language text than evaluating his skill in English to German translation.

[4] The Kroepelin text is reproduced, in part, in the Thomas Eicher volume, pages 305-08. Eicher, in the introduction to his volume indicates that this text is available from the Bundesarchiv Potsdam (Eicher 285).

Schlegel Version

Salarino.

Nun, ich bin sicher, wenn er verfällt, so wirst du sein Fleisch nicht nehmen: wozu wär es gut?

Shylock.

Fische mit zu ködern. Sättigt es sonst niemanden, so sättigt es doch meine Rache. Er hat mich beschimpft, mir 'ne halbe Million gehindert; meinen Verlust belacht, meinen Gewinn bespottet, mein Volk geschmäht, meinen Handel gekreuzt, meine Freunde verleitet, meine Feinde gehetzt. Und was hat er für Grund! Ich bin ein Jude. Hat nicht ein Jude Augen? Hat nicht ein Jude Hände, Gliedmaßen, Werkzeuge, Sinne, Neigungen, Leidenschaften? Mit derselben Speise genährt, mit denselben Waffen verletzt, denselben Krankheiten unterworfen, mit denselben Mitteln geheilt, gewärmt und gekältet von eben dem Winter und Sommer als ein Christ? Wenn ihr uns stecht, bluten wir nicht? Wenn ihr uns kitzelt, lachen wir nicht? Wenn ihr uns vergiftet, sterben wir nicht? Und wenn ihr uns beleidigt, sollen wir uns nicht rächen? Sind wir euch in allen Dingen ähnlich, so wollen wir's euch auch darin gleich tun. Wenn ein Jude einen Christen beleidigt, was ist seine Demut? Rache. Wenn ein Christ einen Juden beleidigt, was muß seine Geduld sein nach christlichem Vorbild? Nu, Rache. Die Bosheit, die ihr mich lehrt, die will ich ausüben, und es muß schlimm hergehen, oder ich will es meinen Meistern zuvortun.

(**Ein Bedienter kommt.)**

Bedienter.

Edle Herren, Antonio, mein Herr, ist zu Hause und wünscht euch zu sprechen.

Salarino.

Wir haben ihn allenthalben gesucht.

(**Tubal kommt.)**

Solanio.

Hier kommt ein anderer von seinem Stamm; der dritte Mann ist nicht aufzutreiben, der Teufel selbst müßte denn Jude werden.

Kroepelin‘s Alterations (Eicher 305-08)

Salarino.

Nun, ich bin sicher, wenn er verfällt, so wirst du sein Fleisch nicht nehmen: wozu wär es gut?

Shylock.

Sättigt es sonst niemanden, so sättigt es doch meine Rache.

Solanio.

Hier kommt ein anderer von seinem Stamm; der dritte Mann ist nicht aufzutreiben, der Teufel selbst müßte denn Jude werden.

Here, Kroepelin has deleted the majority of Shylock's speech along with a couple of subsequent lines, while leaving the speech's beginning, Salarino's preceding line, and Solanio's concluding remark intact. Why? The monologue above is probably the most famous part of the whole play. Certainly, it is indispensable for understanding Shylock's motivations. Deleting everything after the line about revenge eliminates the cause of Shylock's anger and leaves only the anger behind. With the monologue intact, it is possible to sympathize with Shylock, a Jew who cites a long string of abuses at the hands of Christians as the reason for his rage. By excising these lines, and by preserving too Solanio's comparison of the devil and a Jew, the altered version retains the Christians' anti-Semitic slurs, while the rest is reduced to little more than a verbal spat. More importantly, the cause of Shylock's rage is removed, and with it, any opportunity the audience might have had for understanding him and sympathizing with him. The intent here is to make the Jewish character over into a one-dimensional villain, and in so doing, reduce him to a caricature the propaganda ministry and the RKK could exploit in their anti-Semitic campaign.

Performing the Play

Despite the great lengths some went to fashion an acceptable version of *The Merchant of Venice*, the play never achieved high value as an anti-Semitic work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was one of the least successful Shakespearean comedies in the Third Reich. Production statistics indicate a sharp decline in the number of productions from 36 in the period

1929-1933, to 33 productions during the following period 1933-1944 (Eicher 302).[5] This decline is most probably due to the ambiguities and textual difficulties previously discussed: "Without there being clear agreement on the meaning of the play, would-be directors were entering uncharted territory. In the Third Reich the play was clearly too hot of a potato for most theater directors to handle -so they simply left it alone" (Symington 240).

This play was more than merely "left alone," however. Interestingly, in one of the few moments of governmental intervention, the play was briefly blacklisted in 1938, and not approved for some time thereafter for performance in Berlin (Symington 240). A memorandum from Reichsdramaturg Rainer Schlösser to Goebbels, written in July 1940, seeks permission to stage a production of the play with Kroepelin's alterations at Berlin's Rose Theater.[6] The text of the memo evidences both the lengths to which writers went to transform *The Merchant of Venice* into a politically acceptable work and the importance the Nazi cultural authorities as a whole placed on Berlin as the showcase of the Third Reich. As the text makes clear, experimentation might be tolerated to an extent in provincial theaters, but to pass muster in Berlin, the play's political dimensions had to accord with the RKK's outlook on such matters as Jews and their place in Nazi-dominated society:

> Da diese Änderungen nicht umfangreich sind, bei der Textüberlieferung der Shakespeare-Stücke auch keine philologische Sünde darstellen und Jessica von den deutschen Schauspielerinnen nie als Jüdin gespielt wurde, sähe ich keine Bedenken, das

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[5] Eicher has assembled a comprehensive statistical chart, showing the numbers of productions both in the pre-1933 era and the era of the Third Reich itself. This table was constructed by Eicher as a representative portrait of statistical data drawn both from the contemporary issues of the Shakespeare Jahrbuch and other sources from the Bundesarchiv Potsdam. Therefore, for purposes of citing statistical data in this project, I shall make references based on this chart.

[6] The memorandum is reprinted in full on page 308 of the Eicher volume.

klassische Werk, das überdies bei geschickter Darstellung eine Unterstützung unseres antijüdischen Kampfes bedeuten kann, auch in Berlin wieder zuzulassen. (Eicher 308)

Goebbels consented, and the play ran for fifty performances starting in September 1942 (Symington 244). For reasons unknown, and despite its conformity to political expectations, this one production did not result in a marked increase in productions of the drama overall. Nor did it result in future productions being regarded as truly anti-Semitic in nature. Curiously, the only production of *The Merchant of Venice* that was ever hailed as unambiguously anti-Semitic propaganda occurred in Vienna in 1943.

Apparently, the success of this one production in Vienna's Burgtheater owes more to the caricatured portrayal of Shylock by lead actor Werner Krauss than to any textual modifications to the drama. Theater critic Richard Biederzynski observed the performance and commented on the effect of Krauss's improvisations:

> Bis mit einem Schlage und mit einem spukhaften Schattenzug etwas widerlich Fremdes, verblüffend Abschreckendes über die Bühne schleift, im schwarzen Rocklor mit einem grellgelben Synagogenschal eine dukatenklimpernde Marionette - der Shylock von Werner Krauss. (Eicher 309)

Although it was pulled after thirty-two performances on the personal orders of Vienna Gauleiter Baldur von Schirach, this production of *The Merchant of Venice* enjoyed the highest approval of any production of this work. The propaganda ministry even planned a film version of this adaptation, to be directed by Veit Harlan, the director of the notorious *Jud Süss*. But as of 1944 the script had still to be approved by Goebbels, and the film never came to pass (Symington 244).

All of this agonizing over *The Merchant of Venice* on the part of the Third Reich's cultural guardians, all the textual modifications, all the memos, all the talk of race politics and just whose daughter Jessica is supposed to be, supports the counterintuitive conclusion that this play failed as a rallying point for the anti-Semites of Hitler's Germany. If Shakespeare had, in fact, been a Nordic writer who felt the same way about other races and cultures as the Nazis did, why was all this concern about this play so necessary? The cultural authorities of the time were most acutely aware of the dangers inherent to productions of this drama, as well as its tendency to clash with the philosophies, and even the laws, of the Third Reich. Finally, it cannot even be argued that *The Merchant of Venice* was an exception. There were other issues, and there were other plays. As the forthcoming chapter demonstrates, race and marriage were not the only problems raised by Shakespeare with which Nazi cultural authorities struggled.

CHAPTER 4

Strong Subjects, Weak Leaders and *King Richard II*

The investigation of Shakespeare's *King Richard II* in Nazi Germany presents the researcher with an interesting challenge. Unlike *The Merchant of Venice*, very little has been said about this play in the context of the Third Reich. Symington devotes less than a page to it in his study, and Eicher's treatment of it runs for a paragraph. The primary sources yield little more. The *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, in the dozen or more volumes that cover the period of the Third Reich, contains relatively few mentions of the work and no reviews in the thousands of pages it devotes to Shakespeare in Nazi Germany.

Based on the scarcity of commentary and combined with the low performance statistics found in both Symington's and Eicher's studies, one might be tempted to conclude that this history play was unimportant to The Third Reich. It was certainly not popular and not frequently performed. That is irrefutable; however, any claim that it is irrelevant to Nazi Germany's cultural image confuses two separate issues, popularity and significance. Despite its relatively low ranking in popularity and production, the existing evidence, together with the thematic elements of the play itself, combine to suggest that this drama, despite outward appearances, was just as troubling a case for the Third Reich in its own way as *The Merchant of Venice*.

The Figure of King Richard

The first difficulty with *Richard* is Richard himself. Both his life and death present a

problematic picture for anyone attempting to align this play with Nazi conceptions of leaders and leadership. First, Richard is indecisive. Once he makes a decision, he is unable to stick to it. For example, in Act I, Richard assigns Thomas Mowbray and Henry Bolingbroke their date for ritual trial by combat. Each contestant accuses the other of treason against the crown, and the duel is the designated means for settling the matter. Then, just as the combat is about to begin, Richard halts the contest and summarily banishes both men. In the case of one, the length of the banishment is reduced after it is pronounced, seemingly out of pity for Bolingbroke's father, the aged John of Gaunt. An indecisive leader is, by definition, weak. Moreover, Richard recognizes this fatal flaw within himself and admits it: "thus play I in one person many people, and none contented" (V; 5. 2560). When it becomes evident that Bolingbroke has returned to claim his estate, which was seized by the king as revenue in Bolingbroke's absence, Richard cannot prevent defections by his nobles and desertions by many of his common soldiers. He lacks any ability to persuade or command his military forces. Thus, Richard's loss of his kingdom occurs not because of overwhelming odds on the battlefield, such as in *Richard III*, but rather because he cannot retain the obedience, let alone the loyalty of his subjects.

Richard's greatest moment of weakness occurs at his deposition. His only resistance to the loss of his crown is his tears. The deposition scene consists largely of long monologues from Richard about misfortune and the sorry fate that has befallen him. Weeping, bemoaning his fate and bad luck, Richard hands over the crown and allows himself to be escorted to prison, where he is murdered near the end of the play. Even Richard's death weakens his character. In contrast to the death of Richard III, who dies in battle, Richard II's death occurs as an afterthought. From the text it is unclear whether the newly crowned Henry IV orders the murder, but in any event, Richard's death lacks any sense of nobility or purpose, such as might be found in that of Richard

III or Hamlet. In that, Richard's death is consistent with his life.

It must be understood that Richard's inexcusable deed, in so far as Nazi cultural authorities would have seen it, is not his theft of subjects' property, the trigger that brings Bolingbroke back to England and starts Richard down the path to his deposition. If the Third Reich's government saw some piece of land as necessary to the state, it appropriated it. Richard's chief sin is his lack of ruthlessness. He lacks the cunning and the brute force necessary either to pacify Bolingbroke with assurances and promises or to crush his forces outright. With a leader who can both persuade and force, one or both of these options is often decisive, as Hitler himself proved in Czechoslovakia and Poland respectively. However, because Richard does neither, he is doomed to be deposed.

Justice in the Drama

The most significant challenge to Nazi conceptions of government and citizenship concerns Henry Bolingbroke's successful deposition of the reigning king. In every other Shakespearean play that features a usurper grabbing monarchical power, a counterforce arises in the course of the play that ultimately brings down the usurper and his regime, replacing him with an acceptable monarch and leaving the audience satisfied that all is again well. Macbeth and Richard III, in tragedies named for these two antagonists, are killed by Macduff and Richmond respectively. Similarly, the usurper Claudius pays for the murder of Hamlet's father, the men who assassinate Caesar answer for their crime, and the daughters of Lear are punished for their misdeeds. If justice in Shakespeare equals the punishment and death of the usurper, then it follows that there is no justice in *Richard II*. There is no punishment for Henry

Bolingbroke, who becomes King Henry IV.

The series of events in *King Richard II* is antithetical to order and subjects' subordination to the state. Thus, the Third Reich's cultural authorities could not hold up this Shakespearean play as an example of Shakespeare's Germanness. Nor could they praise Richard II as a respectable leader, because Richard II is the antithesis of the strong and ruthless hero archetype. As a result, the RKK could not simply accept a play in which both the protagonist and antagonist act wholly outside the accepted norms of leadership and citizenship respectively.

Staging the Play

By late November of 1940, World War II was more than a year old in Europe. Poland had long ago fallen as the first victim of Blitzkrieg strategy, Admiral Eric Rader's U-boats were sending British shipping to the bottom of the world's oceans at a shocking rate, and the image of German soldiers goose-stepping in triumph down Paris's Champs Elysees had faded to a mere memory of the summer just past. However, I speculate that none of these things occupied the thoughts of those who filed to their seats in Berlin's premier Deutsches Theater on the final day of November for the sold out Saturday evening performance of Heinz Hilpert's production of Shakespeare's *King Richard II*.[7]

The aging film actor and stage performer Rudolf Forster played the lead role of King Richard, and the play presented a musical score culled from Wagner as well as stage design by Caspar Neher. In all likelihood, this is the most well-known, or at least best-documented,

[7] King Richard II, directed by Heinzs Hilpert. Performance date: November 30, 1940. Deutsches Theater Berlin.

performance of this history play in the Third Reich. It is the only one that gained the grudging approval of the propaganda ministry and theater chamber, possibly owing to the Wagner score and the critics' portrayal of the performance. Prominent Reichsdramaturg Rainer Schlösser attended the performance and provides these details in a memorandum to Goebbels dated December 3, 1940[8]. Aside from an ungenerous remark about the accent of Forster's German, Schlösser praises Hilpert's production as one of the greatest achievements of the Deutsches Theater: "Unerachtet dieser meiner Anmerkungen darf ich aber die Gesamtwirkung als eine unbedingt auf der Ebene der Höchstleistungen des Deutschen Theaters liegende bezeichen" (Schlösser qtd. in Wardetzky 307). This is an interesting observation on Schlösser's part, because the play was an English history play. Schlösser was aware of this incongruity, however, and attempted to explain it away with a vague reference to Hilpert's portrayal of English government in this production: "Auch das Problem, ob im Kriege die Königshistorien besonders opportun seien, kam meinem Gefühl nach gar nicht auf, weil Hilpert künstlerisch vertretbare Lichter aufsetzte, die das Ganze zu einer Art Charakteristik der angelsächsisch-plutokratischen Führungsschicht machten" (Schlösser qtd. in Wardetzky 307). The most significant problem with Schlösser's comment is its vagueness. His memo provides neither contextual background nor further explanation of this statement. Furthermore, the governmental structures portrayed in *Richard II* reflect more the medieval manifestation of English government rather than that against which Germany struggled in 1940. Schlösser's statement serves, finally, as a reflection of my basic premise. This play is yet another example of a Shakespearean work that caused problems for those wishing to align Shakespeare with Germany in general and the Nazis in particular.

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[8] This memorandum is the same document elsewhere cited in Wardetzky 307. The full text of the memo is reproduced in Jutta Wardetzky's book.

Schlösser knows that showing English history plays during the present conflict is problematic, and the statement here attempts, unsuccessfully, to provide a justification for this production that sidesteps the appearance of a double standard, wherein England is lauded through dramatic representation while Germany fights a war against that same country.

If the 1940 production was uncomfortable for the regime's image, Jürgen Fehling's production of May 5, 1939, at the Prussian State Theater portrays Richard in a manner completely antithetical to the prevailing standards of strong leadership. Fehling, in light of his March 1937 production of *King Richard III*, in which Richard's henchmen appear dressed in clothing suspiciously similar to that of the contemporary SS, was one of the few directors to ever attempt any form of overt artistic resistance to Nazi cultural authorities. Fehling did not continuously oppose the RKK. Otherwise he may well have been dismissed but in his three noted Shakespeare productions, Fehling displayed a streak of artistic independence from the wishes of the RKK and the propaganda ministry (Symington 208-09). In his production of *Richard II*, Fehling portrays Richard as a homosexual antiheroic figure. He is a cynical figure, who both loathes and ignores the political cadre that surrounds him. Ultimately, abandoned and isolated on the throne, the impotent king is easily deposed by those whose menace he fails ever to recognize (Symington 210). Unfortunately, this production left only isolated comments by critics in its wake. Both Symington and Wardetzky refer to only one contemporary document that makes any reference to this production of the play. In the same memorandum quoted above, Rainer Schlösser begins by comparing the recent Hilpert production with Fehling's production from a year and a half before: "Hinsichtlich der regielichen Führung, der glücklichen Bühnenbilder von Caspar Neher und einer entsprechenden Bühnenmusik von Wagner-Regeny stach die Leistung des Deutschen Theaters aufs vorteilhafteste von dem fast kulturbolschewistischen Versuch Fehlings

und Traugott Müllers ab“ (Schlösser qtd. in Wardetzky 307). Schlösser never explains his reference to Fehling’s production as cultural bolshevism. However, Schlösser explicitly mentions the Wagner score and Neher’s stagecraft as the elements he found exceptionally well-done in contrast to Fehling’s production. Of interest is that Schlösser focuses on the production and says not one word about the content of this play, neither under Fehling’s nor under Hilpert’s direction. After all, had he addressed its content, Schlösser would have then been obligated to satisfactorily explain away Richard’s character as a leader, as well as to account for Richard’s successful deposition. He could never have done so in a way that would have left the RKK and Goebbels sanguine about the play.

CHAPTER 5

A Dilemma of Their Own Making

While Germany's connection to Shakespeare is a long-standing matter, the Nazi cultural authorities took this connection one step too far. It would have sufficed, for example, to allow Shakespeare to remain a respected, if foreign, author on the German stage. There were others after all. George Bernard Shaw is one noted example of an author whose works were produced and respected in The Third Reich without the need to make him "German" (Eicher 439). Alternatively, officially banning Shakespeare altogether would have been possible, if more problematic, because he was widely accepted in Germany already at the time Hitler assumed the chancellorship. In all likelihood, any official ban of Shakespeare would have been a partial ban. Certain plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, could have been banned by the propaganda ministry as not being conducive to German ideals or damaging to public morale. To be sure, the propaganda ministry could have spun some form of limited ban successfully. The fact that no such official bans were issued indicates a reluctance on the part of the Nazi cultural authorities to admit openly that Shakespeare's humanist concern for the individual, regardless of race as in *Othello* or of religion such as in *The Merchant of Venice*, failed to fit neatly into a world view that saw the Aryan race as supreme and the needs of the state as more important than those of the individual. On the other hand, the extensive practice of self-censorship by directors at the local level serves as a tacit admission of Shakespeare's problematic nature.

Either of the first two options has the advantage of leaving the Nazi cultural authorities free to manipulate their public image as it relates to Shakespeare without fear of contradicting themselves. The worst thing they could have done was what they did, in fact, do. Aligning

Shakespeare with the Nazi definition of Germany and Germanness created numerous problems for those in charge of safeguarding the state's ideology. In many cases, those at the top were fully aware of these problems. Why else did Goebbels take so personal an interest in the minutiae of *The Merchant of Venice's* Berlin production? Why would the text have required such substantial alteration? The only logical answer is that the cultural authorities of Nazi Germany knew that the play, as Shakespeare wrote it, presented a Jew in a sympathetic light. Such sympathy for the mistreatment of a Jew on the stage might cause the audience to sympathize with Jews in present-day Germany and to question measures like the modern 'Gleichschaltung.'

In the case of *Richard II*, what good can really be said by a totalitarian regime about a play whose subjects successfully depose their leader without reprisal? It is possible some authorities saw a potential catalyst in the play for the disaffected in Germany. Furthermore, Richard possesses no admirable qualities as a leader. He is indecisive, cowardly and pitiful in the play, and even his death cannot be praised as heroic or worthy of a strong leader. Finally, Henry Bolingbroke not only gets away with toppling his leader, but, depending on one's interpretation, gets away with murdering him as well.

These two plays are not the only two Shakespearean dramas that caused discomfiture within the government of the Third Reich. However, each serves in its own way as a representative example of both Shakespeare's wide-ranging concerns and the ways that Nazi cultural authorities attempted to alter or circumvent the questions Shakespeare raises. Though I contend that they failed in their efforts, it remains open to some interpretation whether or not the cultural authorities of Hitler's Germany succeeded or failed. However, the Nazi cultural authorities' relationship with Shakespeare, from the local theater directors up to Goebbels

himself, remained troubled and in need of careful scrutiny even to the end of the Third Reich.

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