TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

General Editor: Michael Scott

The series is designed to introduce sixth-form and undergraduate students to the themes, continuing vitality and performance of major dramatic works. The attention given to production aspects is an element of special importance, responding to the invigoration given to literary study by the work of leading contemporary critics.

The prime aim is to present each play as a vital experience in the mind of the reader – achieved by analysis of the text in relation to its themes and theatricality. Emphasis is accordingly placed on the relevance of the work to the modern reader and the world of today. At the same time, traditional views are presented and appraised, forming the basis from which a creative response to the text can develop.

In each volume, Part One: *Text* discusses certain key themes or problems, the reader being encouraged to gain a stronger perception both of the inherent character of the work and also of variations in interpreting it. Part Two: *Performance* examines the ways in which these themes or problems have been handled in modern productions, and the approaches and techniques employed to enhance the play's accessibility to modern audiences.

A synopsis of the play is given and an outline of its major sources, and a concluding Reading List offers guidance to the student's independent study of the work.

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RICHARD II

Text and Performance

MALCOLM PAGE

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First published 1987

Published by
Higher and Further Education Division
MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by
Wessex Typesetters
(Division of The Eastern Press Ltd)
Frome, Somerset

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Page, Malcolm

Richard II.—(Text and performance)

1. Shakespeare, William. King Richard II

I. Title II. Series

822.3'3 PR2820

ISBN 978-1-349-08146-2 ISBN 978-1-349-08144-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-08144-8

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to the Archives at the Stratford Festival, Ontario and to the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon for all their help.

To JONATHAN,
the actor

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

For many years a mutual suspicion existed between the theatre director and the literary critic of drama. Although in the first half of the century there were important exceptions, such was the rule. A radical change of attitude, however, has taken place over the last thirty years. Critics and directors now increasingly recognise the significance of each other's work and acknowledge their growing awareness of interdependence. Both interpret the same text, but do so according to their different situations and functions. Without the director, the designer and the actor, a play's existence is only partial. They revitalise the text with action, enabling the drama to live fully at each performance. The academic critic investigates the script to elucidate its textual problems, understand its conventions and discover how it operates. He may also propose his view of the work, expounding what he considers to be its significance.

Dramatic texts belong therefore to theatre and to literature. The aim of the 'Text and Performance' series is to achieve a fuller recognition of how both enhance our enjoyment of the play. Each volume follows the same basic pattern. Part One provides a critical introduction to the play under discussion, using the techniques and criteria of the literary critic in examining the manner in which the work operates through language, imagery and action. Part Two takes the enquiry further into the play's theatricality by focusing on selected productions of recent times so as to illustrate points of contrast and comparison in the interpretation of different directors and actors, and to demonstrate how the drama has worked on the modern stage. In this way the series seeks to provide a lively and informative introduction to major plays in their text and performance.

MICHAEL SCOTT

PLOT SYNOPSIS AND SOURCES

I. King Richard II listens to a quarrel between his cousin, Bolingbroke, and Mowbray and, as they cannot agree, orders them to duel. The Duchess of Gloucester tries to persuade John of Gaunt (father of Bolingbroke) to revenge the death of her husband at the hands of Mowbray. When Bolingbroke and Mowbray are about to fight, Richard instead exiles both, Bolingbroke for ten years, changed to six, and Mowbray for life.

II. Gaunt, dying, laments the decline of England during Richard's reign: as soon as he is dead, Richard seizes his wealth and leaves to suppress a rising in Ireland. The Duke of York, the King's uncle, is made Governor. Bolingbroke returns to claim his father's title. He is joined by Northumberland and several others and York submits. Lacking news from Ireland, the royal army disperses.

III. Bolingbroke executes two of Richard's favourites. Richard at last comes back and, after bursts of hope, despairs of his prospects. He confronts Bolingbroke at Flint Castle, and descends to obey Bolingbroke's summons to London. The Queen learns of her husband's fate by overhearing gardeners.

IV. Bolingbroke also faces quarrelsome nobles and the Bishop of Carlisle denounces his seizure of the throne, then is arrested. Richard is formally deposed and forced to give the crown to Bolingbroke, now Henry IV. He refuses when Northumberland demands that he read the accusations against him.

V. Richard and his Queen sadly say goodbye. Aumerle starts plotting to restore Richard to the throne, but his father, York, discovers this. Aumerle successfully pleads with King Henry for forgiveness. Richard, imprisoned in Pomfret (Pontefract) Castle, is visited by a sympathetic groom, then killed by Exton, who believes Henry ordered this. When Exton presents the corpse to Henry, he exiles him and starts mourning Richard.

SOURCES

The question of sources is both simple and complicated. The main source, as for Shakespeare's other histories, is clearly Ralph Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), accessible as *Holinshed's Chronicles as used in Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. Richard Hosley (New York, 1968) and elsewhere, and with other sources in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, vol. III (1960). Shakespeare may well have consulted several other texts, including Hall's earlier *Chronicles* and the anonymous play *Woodstock*. See, for example, Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (1977), pp. 46–66. Shakespeare may have researched with unusual care and then taken pains to harmonise his materials.