

# **The Tower of London in English Renaissance Drama**

Icon of Opposition

**Kristen Deiter**

# LITERARY CRITICISM AND CULTURAL THEORY

*Edited by*  
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*For Jason*



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## Chapter One

# Introduction

## Historicizing Original Tower Play Audiences

The Tower of London's representations in English Renaissance culture turned on the hinge of historical drama. By the late-Elizabethan age, the castle's oldest and largest building, the White Tower, was about five hundred years old, and the Tower of London complex occupied a space whose history visibly dated to the Roman occupation of Britain.<sup>1</sup> The Tower had played a significant role in English culture up to Elizabeth I's reign, and its symbolic meanings, having developed and evolved over the centuries, affected how Renaissance Londoners perceived and reacted to it as an icon. Then, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, twenty-four English history plays—twenty of which were most probably first presented between 1590 and 1624—represented the Tower, revolutionizing its cultural meanings.

The twenty-four plays include Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* (1579); William Shakespeare's *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* (1H6, 1590) and *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* (2H6, c.1590); *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* [. . .] (*True Tragedie* R3, 1588–94); *The Life and Death of Iacke Straw, A Notable Rebell in England* (*Iacke Straw*, 1590–93); Shakespeare's *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth* (3H6, c.1591); George Peele's, *The Chronicle of King Edward the First, Surnamed Longshanks, with The Life of Luellen Rebel in Wales* (*Edward the First*, 1590–93); Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* (R3, 1591–92); Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second* (1591–93); Anthony Munday *et al.*'s *Sir Thomas More* (originally composed c.1592–93); Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second* (R2, 1595); Thomas Heywood's *The First Part of King Edward the Fourth* (1E4, 1592–99) and *The Second Part of King Edward the Fourth* (2E4, 1592–99); Munday, Michael Drayton, Robert Wilson, and Richard Hathway's *The First Part of the True and Honorable Historie, of the Life of Sir John Old-castle, the Good Lord Cobham* (*Old-castle*, 1599); *The Life and Death of Thomas, Lord Cromwell* (*Cromwell*, c.1599–1602); Thomas



Dekker and John Webster's *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Wyat, 1602); Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* (*When You See Me*, 1604); Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie, or The Troubles of Queene Elizabeth* (1 *If You Know Not Me*, 1604–05) and *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Body. The Second Part* (2 *If You Know Not Me*, 1604–05); *Woodstock* (c.1605–09); Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *The Life of King Henry the Eighth* (H8, 1613); Thomas Drue's *The Life of the Dutches of Suffolke* (1624); Robert Davenport's *King Iohn and Matilda, A Tragedy* (*Iohn and Matilda*, c.1628–29); and John Ford's *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck, A Strange Truth* (*Perkin Warbeck*, c.1625–34).<sup>2</sup> For brevity I refer to these works collectively as the *Tower plays*.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Tower, as a royal palace and fortress, may appear to stand for royal control in the Tower plays, the dramatic representation of that control is always compromised. *The Tower of London in English Renaissance Drama* demonstrates that while Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I were fashioning the Tower as a showplace of royal temporal and spiritual authority, magnificence, and entertainment, English history plays disrupted this meta-narrative by revealing the Tower's instability as a royal symbol and representing it, instead, as an emblem of opposition to the crown and as a bodily and spiritual icon of non-royal English identity.

The details of time and place that constructed and coincided with this “art of space as well as words” are paramount to my study of drama, as they were for Stephen Mullaney in *The Place of the Stage* (vii, 7). Places in Renaissance London, such as the marginal locations of the playhouses, were sites of multiple and emergent cultural meanings, for not until 1576, when James Burbage built London's first playhouse, the Theatre, just outside the city walls, was the early modern theater itself envisioned as a place—a building.<sup>4</sup> The Tower, another of London's marginal structures replete with cultural significance, had been the setting of many of England's defining moments, and the theaters redefined the Tower's meanings when playwrights brought that setting from London's margins to the popular stage. Because drama helped shape early modern culture and history,<sup>5</sup> its representations of the Tower are a key to understanding Renaissance England. In fact, the Tower plays, Tower history, and other cultural representations of the Tower can be read as texts that interacted to produce new cultural meanings.<sup>6</sup> As the Tower is today a familiar symbol of English national identity (*The Tower of London: The Official Guide*), so it was during the Renaissance. And because historical drama played a crucial role in the construction of English Renaissance national identity, playgoers' experiences of the Tower in history plays revolutionized their image of the Tower and of themselves in relation to

it.<sup>7</sup> I read the Tower, a landmark whose history reached back for centuries before the playhouses were constructed and which history plays represented for over fifty years, like Mullaney has read Renaissance London: as “a cultural artifact,” an emblem.<sup>8</sup>

## THE TOWER OF LONDON AS A DRAMATIC EMBLEM

By dissociating the Tower from the royal ideology that had come to define its meanings, and associating it instead with the oppositional ideology to which many disempowered, repressed, and disaffected playgoers subscribed, playwrights proved the Tower to be “quintessentially emblematic” or iconic (John Manning 27). Sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century English people of all social degrees were acutely aware of emblems—“combinations of mottoes and pictures, as well as emblematic motifs with their implied meanings.”<sup>9</sup> Emblems, being vital to English Renaissance culture, influenced almost all visual and verbal communication and adorned every domestic and public space, and anything could be potentially emblematic.<sup>10</sup> “Emblematic combinations of word and picture or emblematic designs with their implied meanings” were found in paintings, portraits, wall and ceiling decorations, carving, stained glass, and jewelry; embroidered onto cushions and bed valances; and woven into table carpets and tapestries. They were commonly used in books, triumphal arches, and Protestant and Catholic sermons, and were seen and heard in tournaments, pageants, state entries, court masques, and poetry.<sup>11</sup> Emblems were especially notable in drama, “the most emblematic of all the literary arts, combining [ . . . ] a visual experience [ . . . ] with a verbal experience” (Daly, “Emblematic Drama” 153).

Scholars attribute Renaissance drama’s emblematic qualities, especially scenic devices, to the prominence of emblem books, one of the most popular early modern literary forms (Diehl, *An Index of Icons* 3). By 1585 the emblem was “a serious, well-known genre commanding the attention of the sober literary critic” (Leisher 3). In 1589 George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* included a five-page discussion of emblematics that explained the desired effect of emblems upon their viewers: “the vse and intent [ . . . ] is to insinuat some secret, wittie, morall and braue purpose, presented to the beholder, either to recreate his eye, or please his phantasie, or examine his iudgement, or occupie his braine or to manage his will either by hope or by dread, euery of which respectes be of no little moment.”<sup>12</sup> By 1598, in *Palladis Tamia*, Francis Meres praised English emblem writers as “household names” (Daly, “England and the Emblem” 4–5). Peter M. Daly and Roy C. Strong have cited twelve such texts published in England between 1569 and 1635, eight

of which were sixteenth-century works, and many emblem books published on the Continent after 1531 were influential in England.<sup>13</sup>

Although not all playgoers took note of dramatic symbolism or emblems in plays, and Renaissance antiquaries did not write about the Tower in emblematic terms,<sup>14</sup> early modern English people were receptive to symbolism involving the Tower. Robert Greene treats *lions* emblematically in his 1590 fictional work, *Never Too Late*, deriving “from the fact that the Tower lions were a sight not to be missed.”<sup>15</sup> This synecdoche reveals two expectations Greene had of his readers: first, that they acknowledged the Tower’s status as a visitor attraction for ordinary people; and second, that a feature of the Tower, the lions in the Menagerie, could stand for the whole castle. Over the next few decades, as a result of the Tower’s appearance on the stage, it became an emblem of English subjects’ struggles with the crown and a corporeal and spiritual icon of their national identity. In the plays, the Tower not only serves as a scenic unit that localizes the action in London but is truly emblematic in that it points to meanings beyond itself, plays a major role in the action, and gives the plays new levels of interpretation (Daly, “Emblematic Drama” 174–75, 178).

Despite the Tower’s centrality in English history and culture, literary and cultural studies have not yet historicized, nor revealed in any other mode, the Tower’s emblematic meanings in early modern drama. Nor has the Tower’s role as an evolving cultural icon been treated beyond its obvious functions as a medieval royal palace and fortress.<sup>16</sup> Although the Tower’s prominent role in early modern English literature has received limited or marginal commentary in studies of Tower history or English history,<sup>17</sup> scholars have not yet explored that role in any depth or attended to it in terms of national identity. In fact, research on the Tower’s evolution into the architectural symbol of the English people and their history has centered on the Restoration period or the Victorian age, when large numbers of tourists began to visit the castle.<sup>18</sup> Such symbolism began to emerge, it appears, as early as 1579, when the Tower first appeared spatially on the early modern stage.<sup>19</sup> The Tower of London developed, I will argue, as an icon of opposition to the crown and an evolving and complex symbol of English national identity alongside its representations in twenty-two history plays from 1579 to 1624 and two more in c.1628–29 and c.1625–34.<sup>20</sup>

## PRACTICING CULTURAL HISTORICISM

Like others engaged in the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, I aim to interpret culture, specifically English Renaissance culture, by “draw[ing]

from whatever fields are necessary to produce the knowledge required" (Nelson *et al.* 2, 4). My critical practice has grown out of, and thus incorporates enduring features of, new historicism. Along with new historicists and the intellectual historian Michel Foucault, whose work on "the new history" shaped their ideas, I am interested in "discontinuity and rupture, the moments of transformation and difference"—especially moments when the Tower took on new emblematic meanings in English culture—and the power relations that surrounded those transformations (Brannigan 46, 51). In addition to Foucault's conception of new history, new historicists deploy cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz's method of thick description: analysis of how a practice or idea is "produced, perceived, and interpreted" within its own culture (Geertz 6–7). Because Geertz viewed culture as "webs of significance," he extrapolated "large conclusions from small, but densely textured facts" (5–9, 28). For new historicists, this practice involves placing a cultural text within "a network of framing intentions and cultural meanings" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 21). My critical practice follows this inductive method of analyzing tightly-woven threads of cultural evidence. Additionally, I utilize two concepts that the first and predominant new historicist, Stephen Greenblatt, has studied—self-fashioning and the theater's exchanges with the surrounding culture—to explain Renaissance monarchs' and other social groups' efforts to shape their identities through the Tower.<sup>21</sup> Another new historicist, Mullaney, first studied Renaissance drama in terms of London's cultural spaces (vii), a topic I address with specific regard to the Tower. And Emily Carroll Bartels' work on Christopher Marlowe's negative representations of alien character types "as a strategy for self-authorization and self-empowerment" in Renaissance culture (xv) has influenced my thinking of the Tower's dramatic and cultural representations.

Historicist critical practice differs from formalist literary analysis of the text alone as well as traditional historiography, which assumes that history can be known or seen objectively.<sup>22</sup> Rather, I view history itself as a construct or a text, not a background against which to understand literary works.<sup>23</sup> Because history plays were events where the Tower's cultural meanings were constructed,<sup>24</sup> I accord them an equal place with documentary history in the Tower's development as a cultural icon. Like many early modern English people did, I recognize plays as profound sources of social power, "at once shaped by and, more actively, shaping the culture" that produced them.<sup>25</sup> The Tower plays are, in fact, a source of evidence that reveals new historical knowledge about the Tower's early modern cultural meanings. Indeed, no place is better than the early modern stage to discover the formation of English national identity with the Tower, for the Tower's evolving identity as a cultural symbol

was defined there. The Tower's symbolic meanings are located not only in the plays but also in their playwrights and original audiences; thus, I attempt to read the "social energy" in texts: how playwrights represented the Tower, how Renaissance playgoers might have reacted to those representations, and how an object represented—the Tower—was affected by "its encounter with the theater."<sup>26</sup>

Although my critical practice builds upon new historicists' most compelling ideas, like other recent historicists I break from their classic methods in two important ways. First, new historicists have often relied upon Foucault's theory that forms of state power control subversion and even produce it, only to incorporate it into themselves.<sup>27</sup> This subversion/containment model has been criticized for unnecessarily totalizing cultures, despite Greenblatt's stated resistance to totalization.<sup>28</sup> While I analyze subversive cultural practices, I reject the classic new-historicist subversion/containment theory, with its *a priori* conclusion. Second, as a signature practice, classic new historicists have analyzed "marginal, odd, fragmentary" anecdotes alongside literary texts, "pull[ing] even the most canonical works off to the border of history," where literature could be reinterpreted "in opposition to history's dominant narrative discourse."<sup>29</sup> Critics of new historicism contend that the anecdotal method produces readings that are more formalist than historical and disparage it as "notorious anecdotalism with its habitual gesture toward historic specificity ('On May 13, 1542 . . .'), offering some bizarre incident as the point of generation of a cultural principle that is then discovered in a canonical text."<sup>30</sup> Thus, rather than employ anecdotes as evidence or as a license "to retotalize the culture" (Kastan 30), I attempt to amass a credible, solid base of evidence drawn from multiple cultural sources including traditionally historical texts.

Because of these weaknesses in classic new historicism, in recent decades certain historicist critics have written interventions or developed reformist practices from it,<sup>31</sup> facilitating the movement's evolution from Greenblatt's original mode, which critics have attacked as "undertheorized" and not historical, not "a genuinely historicized critical practice."<sup>32</sup> Such revisionist practitioners deploy new historicism as a springboard for their "new historicisms," each one filtering out perceived weaknesses of classic new historicism, emphasizing selected strengths, and adding innovations, thereby shaping historicist critical practice to become continuously more effective, more historical, and *new*.<sup>33</sup>

My critical practice springs from the work of two interventionists: Albert H. Tricomi, whose reformist practice of cultural historicism I adopt and enlarge, and David Scott Kastan, who, along with Tricomi,

has articulated and put into practice some of cultural historicism's salient features.<sup>34</sup> By proposing that the Tower of London's emblematic meanings are a significant way to understand English Renaissance culture, I focus upon reconstructing and understanding the past.<sup>35</sup> I emphasize interdisciplinarity and the intertextuality of historical and cultural texts of all kinds; I hold the conviction that such texts shape culture and construct history "as an ongoing cultural, not merely event-based, process"; and I acknowledge this conviction's dependency upon the affectivity of texts.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is readers and spectators who, through their reactions, give texts and history multiple meanings.<sup>37</sup> A text or performance acquires its meanings "from the discourses that circulate through it"; thus, knowledge about original readers and audiences facilitates cultural-historicist textual interpretation.<sup>38</sup>

Cultural historicism, like new historicism, being "an association of practices, whose nature is fluid and changing or changeable" (Tricomi, *Reading Tudor-Stuart Texts through Cultural Historicism* 15), my work also assimilates features of other interventionist practices, especially cultural materialism. Like cultural materialists I adopt some terminology from Raymond Williams, who treated cultural systems as having dominant, residual, and emergent elements<sup>39</sup>—terms useful for describing institutions, organizations, and cultural practices at the Tower as they waxed and waned throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods. This study also incorporates a tenet of cultural-materialist practice, demonstrating "ways in which defiance, subversion, dissidence, resistance, all forms of political opposition, [were] articulated, represented and performed" in Renaissance England.<sup>40</sup> Like the cultural materialist Catherine Belsey, I associate my critical practice with cultural history, which "records meanings" and "constructs a culture by reading its artifacts."<sup>41</sup> My practice of cultural historicism is, thus, especially intertextual and interdisciplinary: It goes beyond the interpretation of plays to analyze oppositional representations of the Tower in a broadside ballad, a portrait, and a delftware plate. This project emphasizes material culture—song lyrics, pottery, diaries, portraiture, tracts, poetry, sermons, woodcuts, speeches—as cultural artifacts, texts that can be read and that have the power to influence other texts and events.

As another key feature of my "audience-centered" practice of cultural historicism, I attempt to recover various groups of early modern readers and playgoers' responses to the Tower's cultural representations (D. Watson 2, 5). Although Andrew Gurr has documented Renaissance London's known playgoers and hundreds of quotations about plays from that period, very little documentary evidence is available regarding audience reactions to any English Renaissance plays.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, by analyzing the Tower plays'

original playgoers and their attitudes toward the crown and government, I reconstruct the probable reactions of social groups of playgoers whose socio-economic or religious persecution or ambitions “made them particularly susceptible to the influence of plays” (Cartelli, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Economy of Theatrical Experience* 62) and other cultural texts that represented resistance through the Tower. As Arthur F. Kinney argues, “Playgoing is a matter of cognition—that is, how human beings acquire and process information” (*Shakespeare and Cognition* xv). Because perceptions depend upon one’s “cultural values, practices, and conditioning,” they are “linked [. . .] with memory and experience”—both individual memories and experiences and “social, communal beliefs and experiences.”<sup>43</sup> According to Kinney, “semiosis, the making of meaning, derives from both sets of information”; therefore, “cognitive response [. . .] draw[s] on the *predispositions* of a person’s past and a person’s culture.”<sup>44</sup> Playgoers with disparate cultural backgrounds probably would have interpreted a representation of the Tower in different ways, “depending on how the raw data [was] combined with past experiences, cultural conventions, and personal memory to form the basis for meaning. Interpretations [could] vary widely” (*Shakespeare and Cognition* xiv). For these plays’ original audiences, then, the Tower’s dramatic meanings included the actual Tower’s socially-constructed meanings over the centuries and especially during playgoers’ lifetimes, but also “interactional meanings, meanings established by [every] playgoer’s current individual association with” the actual Tower, the Tower’s representation in the play, and any other Tower plays in their memories (*Shakespeare’s Webs* xxiii).

Kinney’s work on Renaissance playgoers’ interpretations of stage properties, “physical objects that contribute to signification and meaning in drama” (*Shakespeare and Cognition* xv), similarly informs my project. By merging cognitive theory with material culture, he interprets “material objects in a play by looking at those objects as they are employed (or conceived) elsewhere in the play, or in other works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries or in their contemporary cultural practices” (*Shakespeare’s Webs* ix). In this way, I extrapolate certain social groups of playgoers’ likely responses to the Tower’s dramatic representations based upon those groups’ interactions with the actual Tower and their respective monarchs, for whose authority the Tower ostensibly stood. Renaissance audiences were “crowds,” but they were also “assembl[ies] of individuals” (Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company* 47–48). Therefore, while I sometimes argue for an audience’s “collective experience” (Lopez 18), more often I consider the experiences of specific categories of playgoers. Because Renaissance England was intensely divided by social degree, and individuals within certain social groups of that time and place

had similar cultural experiences of the government and, by extension, the Tower, the memories and experiences of playgoers from those social groups predisposed them to react in certain ways to the Tower's onstage representations. Moreover, the few extant accounts of Renaissance playgoer reactions "normally focus on the level of the world of the drama" (Gras 23, 40). Since the world of the Tower plays is, for the most part, medieval or sixteenth-century London, and much is known about medieval and early modern Londoners' history with the Tower, formal evidence about specific social groups of Renaissance Londoners is a gauge for discerning these theatergoers' likely reactions to the represented Tower.

According to John J. Ratey, a cognitive scientist whose work Kinney cites, "one's emotional state at a given instant affects how the amygdala processes the emotional tag of a memory [ . . . ]. An individual who is depressed is predisposed to see a certain memory in a negative light—so it's a different kind of memory than it would have been had the person been generally happy."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, a dramatic scene's tone, from one social group's perspective, affected how playgoers from that group would have received the Tower's representation in that scene. For instance, as a playgoer received "emotionally charged information," his or her brain would have "activate[d] an immediate aggressive or defensive response."<sup>46</sup> Thus, when historicizing certain playgoers' likely response to a Tower passage, I consider those playgoers' cultural milieu as well as the scene's tone, characters, discourse, and action that takes place before, within, and after the passage, all of which affect the Tower's emotional appeal to those playgoers. For "what makes an idea subversive is [ . . . ] the context of its articulation—to whom, and to how many and in what circumstance it is said or written" (Dollimore 22).

Like other historicist critics, I also take into account, where possible, the timing of each play's production, which is vital for interpreting a play's probable meaning to its original audiences (Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation* 47). Renaissance playgoers were acutely aware of "implied analogy" between their time "and episodes from past history"; in fact, they "assumed that all history [was] contemporary history."<sup>47</sup> The dates of Tower play performances are also important for determining their cumulative effects upon theatergoers. Since "repeated *patterns* of thought over time [ . . . ] assemble data into meaningful configurations," the frequency of Tower plays collectively reinforced the Tower's oppositional "neural associations" in playgoers' minds.<sup>48</sup> Tower plays, thus, could recondition groups of playgoers' communal memory of the actual Tower, altering its meanings in English culture. Because "memories can be recalled from any number of sensory cues," even in scenes that represented the Tower verbally but not visually, "the unseen



stage property cognitively dramatized in the mind's eye" demanded playgoers' reactions.<sup>49</sup> And reactions to the Tower's representations, like the representations themselves, were often oppositional.

## EARLY MODERN OPPOSITION TO THE MONARCH

Elizabeth I, in whose reign the Tower plays made their debut, elevated herself to heavenly heights in her subjects' eyes. Throughout her reign, and especially after Pope Pius V excommunicated her in 1570, by which time the popular and essentially Catholic Corpus Christi plays were being abolished, she appropriated the cult of the virgin, specifically a Protestant adaptation of the Virgin Mary, fashioning herself as celestial and encouraging her subjects to worship her as virgin, bride, mother and protector, and queen of the church.<sup>50</sup> England's church and state supported this practice, for the nationalistic Elizabethan Englishness "was, above all, a Protestant Englishness [. . .]. Now, Protestantism and patriotism were one and the same."<sup>51</sup> After the English defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, an event "interpreted [. . .] as evidence of divine sanction for England and the European Protestant cause," festivals celebrating Elizabeth and her reign, such as Accession Day and the queen's birthday, intensified.<sup>52</sup> By the 1590s portraits represented her as a goddess: ageless, supernatural, omniscient.<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth's divine image bolstered her authority and her subjects' sometimes tenuous loyalty, for female rule remained controversial, especially for an unmarried queen whose succession was in doubt and whose reign was, in the later years, "sullied by various political tensions" (Hackett 9).

However, at the same time that many subjects worshipped Elizabeth, others considered her to be a tyrant. Subjects were cognizant of the discrepancies between their divine queen's image and the experience of life in her kingdom, especially "the asymmetries in the allocation of resources," the persecution of recusants, and the crown's expanding authority over the nobility.<sup>54</sup> Early modern England's government was religiously and municipally oppressive, for the monarchs themselves were repressive.<sup>55</sup> In fact, although in some years more antagonistic feelings were directed toward the sovereign than in other years, many English subjects endured "a repressive culture" throughout the period of Tower play production, even into the reign of Charles I.<sup>56</sup> *An Homilie Agaynst Disobedience and Wylful Rebellion*, published in 1570, 1571, and 1623, demonstrates the extent of royal repression in Elizabethan and early-Stuart England.<sup>57</sup> It names rebellion as "the first and the greatest, and the very roote of all other sinnes, and the first and principall cause both of all worldly and bodyly miseries, sorowes, diseases, sicknesses, and deathes, and

[ . . . ] the very cause of death and damnation" (A2<sup>r</sup>). Citing two New Testament scriptures, its author argues, "kings, Queenes, & other princes [ . . . ] are ordained of God, are to be obeyed & honoured of their subiectes," even if a Prince is evil, for "God (say the holye scriptures) maketh a wicked man to raigne for the sinnes of the people" (A3<sup>v</sup>, B2<sup>r</sup>).

As a result of the repression that Elizabethan subjects faced, despite Elizabeth's power, success, and popularity, "another, darker discourse" developed, a "contrasting rhetoric of dissent, criticism, and disrespect" of the queen.<sup>58</sup> This discourse coincided with sixteenth-century English and Continental reformers' "resistance theory," an emergent ideology that encouraged "social protest" and "disobedience to oppressive government," even "popular revolution" against "tyrannical magistrates."<sup>59</sup> In Catholic countries Elizabeth's enemies verbally and visually portrayed her as "the scourge of Catholic martyrs," and some demonstrated their opposition "by stabbing, burning, or otherwise destroying her image" (Strong, *Portraits* 32, 40). Pope Pius V's 1570 Bull, *Regnans in excelsis*, furthermore "excommunicated heretical monarchs and even suggested that Catholic subjects of such monarchs might be justified in assassinating them," all of which Sixtus V was believed to have reaffirmed in a second bull of excommunication, *A Declaration of the Sentence and Deposition of Elizabeth*, in 1588.<sup>60</sup> Even Elizabeth's story in the Protestant propagandist text, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, has recently been reinterpreted as implicitly critical of Elizabeth for her Catholic conformity during her 1554 imprisonment, by Mary I, in the Tower (Freeman 106–16).

While historicist critics have interpreted Jacobean and Caroline opposition drama as "a vehicle" for proliferating "the oppositionist agenda,"<sup>61</sup> more recently they have treated *Elizabethan* plays from an oppositional viewpoint.<sup>62</sup> And certain groups of London theatergoers consistently embraced themes that resisted their powerlessness or disaffection from as early as 1590, when the Tower plays entered the scene.<sup>63</sup> It is important at this point to consider the reasons why these groups "respond[ed] favorably to representations of transgressive behavior and ideas" (Cartelli, *Marlowe* 37), especially those involving the Tower. The represented Tower "simultaneously addressed itself in different ways to different constituencies"; therefore, understanding certain social groups of playgoers' "expectations and mindsets" is imperative for interpreting the Tower's role in the plays.<sup>64</sup> How a Renaissance playgoer "received and responded to" the Tower's dramatic representations depended upon that playgoer's predispositions toward the crown, the government, and the actual Tower of London—"the facts of his or her life and preoccupations"—and playwrights' representations of those facts (40, 129).

## THE AMPHITHEATER AND INN-YARD AUDIENCES

Of the twenty-one plays that represented the Tower from *c.*1590 to 1624, scholars know with reasonable certainty the provenance of seventeen, and all seventeen were performed in open-air amphitheaters—the Theatre, the Rose, the Globe, the Fortune, and the Curtain—and two inn-yards, the Boar's Head Theatre and the Red Bull.<sup>65</sup> Although “audiences were deeply divided socially” and, for the most part, geographically within each playhouse, “with the plebeians in the pit and the gentlemen in the galleries (or the other way round at the indoor theatres),” amphitheater audiences represented all degrees of English society: noble lords and ladies, gentlemen, citizens and merchants, apprentices and journeymen, whores and vagrants.<sup>66</sup> Inn-yard theaters, where playing was allowed until 1604, evidently accommodated a higher proportion of playgoers of lesser degree, for the yard of the Boar's Head, at least, where admission was less expensive than in the two-penny galleries, “had about as much room for people as that at the Fortune, but the main galleries had much less than the equivalent places at the Fortune.”<sup>67</sup> After 1599 and 1600, when hall playhouses reopened for boy companies to resume playing, and after 1608, when the King's Men acquired the Blackfriars theater, and other hall playhouses opened, the prohibitive costs of playgoing at these private venues excluded most of the populace, thereby increasing the proportion of citizens and those of lesser degree to that of gentles in the more affordable open-air theaters.<sup>68</sup>

Although the social composition of the audiences changed gradually over many years, citizens, artisans, and apprentices are believed to have composed the majority of amphitheater audiences from 1576 to 1642.<sup>69</sup> To some extent, they were also known to attend the expensive hall playhouses, such as the Cockpit, later the Phoenix, where two Tower plays were first produced in the late 1620s or early 1630s and two others were revived in *c.*1632.<sup>70</sup> Still, the public playhouses that staged Tower plays through 1624 were the only theatrical venue that most working Londoners could afford;<sup>71</sup> thus, the open-air theater playwrights must have acknowledged that citizens, artisans, craftsmen, laborers, and apprentices composed a large segment of their audiences. Renaissance performances being designed to please and elicit an instant response from “a tight grouping of people,” authors knew and aimed to satisfy their audiences.<sup>72</sup> And in Elizabethan and early-Stuart England, three groups of playgoers within the large, heterogeneous amphitheater and inn-yard audiences were especially predisposed to enjoy witnessing an oppressive royal icon's meaning becoming dislodged from royal control.

*Apprentices and Other Disadvantaged Playgoers*

By the 1590s apprentices and other Londoners below the degree of gentleman—laborers, journeymen, “servants, vagrants, [ . . . ] discharged soldiers and sailors,” and even boys, all of whom officials included in the “vague and disparaging term” *apprentices*<sup>73</sup>—had ample reasons to oppose the crown’s social and economic policies. Though scholars debate whether the scale of England’s social problems of the 1590s constituted a crisis, they tend to agree that this was the worst decade of the century for Londoners, who *perceived* that they were living through a crisis.<sup>74</sup> Four successive harvest failures, 1594–97, threw farmers out of work and led to food shortages and severe inflation of food prices.<sup>75</sup> This, in turn, along with other exorbitant living expenses, particularly rent in London, increased poverty even among laborers and craftsmen.<sup>76</sup> Demand for goods and services fell, leading to high unemployment, and wages for workmen, journeymen, hired servants, and laborers had been regulated, most recently in 1589 and 1590 for Londoners.<sup>77</sup> The years in which London’s public theaters were open, 1576–1642, were the weakest for “real purchasing power” between 1260 and 1950, real wages reaching their lowest point in those seven centuries in 1597.<sup>78</sup> “Perhaps two-fifths of [England’s] total population of four million fell below the margin of subsistence” (Guy, Introduction 10). In 1593 anti-enclosure acts were repealed, and the enclosure of commons, which benefited landowners including members of Parliament, forced many farmers who had worked that land to pay drastically increased tenant rents or become “wandering poor.”<sup>79</sup> Although England was “about 45 per cent enclosed” in 1500, and only another two percent of the country was enclosed by 1600, popular resistance to enclosures was evidently severe: The 1593 repeal “opened the flood-gates to fresh enclosures, and, following the bad harvest of 1595, panic caused [the acts] to be revived.”<sup>80</sup> Enclosures being blamed for food scarcity in Hampshire in 1586 and Oxfordshire in 1596, even John Stow in 1598 complained about illegal “inclosures” of a “common field” outside of London, “all which ought to lye open & free for all men.”<sup>81</sup>

These poor from the countryside as well as discharged and deserting soldiers and refugees from religious wars on the Continent migrated to London seeking “employment or relief,” increasing the city’s distress.<sup>82</sup> It would take years for the 1597 Poor Law to alleviate the situation in London, where “Salubrity was threatened. The Walbrook and the Fleet rivers had become sewers; waste littered the streets.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, poverty and crowded tenements exacerbated epidemic diseases, leading to sharp rises in urban mortality.<sup>84</sup> London and smaller towns fought outbreaks of plague, “influenza, typhus,