

The page is framed by a highly detailed, dark-toned border. At the top, a winged cherub holds a sword, and another cherub is positioned to the right. Below them, a central face with long hair is surrounded by swirling foliage. The sides of the border feature a large, bearded figure holding a staff or scepter, with a basket of fruit above. The bottom section shows a cherub on the left, a winged figure in the center holding a staff, and another cherub on the right. The entire border is filled with intricate scrollwork and floral motifs.

FAREWELL,
KING!



DOMINIQUE
GOY-BLANQUET

Farewell, King!

February 1613, London

All is true. The facts are on record. The motives and talks around them are my invention, heavily indebted to Shakespeare and others. DGBI

Cast of characters:

King James I (age 47)

Sir George Buck, Master of the Revels (51)

Queen Anne (39)

Princess Elizabeth (16)

Richard Burbage (40)

John Heminges (47)

Francis Bacon (52)

Francis Beaumont (29)

Thomas Campion (46)

John Webster (33)

Cyril Tourneur (38)

Shakespeare (48)

Henry Condell (37)

William Ostler (27)

Sir Walter Raleigh (59)

Fulke Greville (59)

Sir William Wade, Lieutenant of the Tower (67)

John Fletcher (34)

John Donne (40)

George Chapman (53)

Inigo Jones (40)

John Milton (4)

A page

Parts can be doubled, with beards blond, light chestnut, dark russet, or white according to age group of character, and managed by a cast of ten.

Music

John Bull, *Parthenia or the Maydenhead of the first musicke that ever was printed for the Virginalls, composed by three famous Masters William Byrd, Dr John Bull & Orlando Gibbons, Gentilmen of His Ma^{ties} most Illustrious Chappell. Ingraven by William Hole, 1611, repr. 1613 with a Dedication to Prince Frederick and his betrothed Lady Elizabeth daughter of King James I*, ed. Edward F. Rimbault in modern notation, 1847.

Gibbons's setting of Raleigh's poem

Delalande, "Les folies de Cardenio".

1. Enter **King James I** and his Master of the Revels, **Sir George Buck**, doing a nifty little *pas-de-deux* to the tune of “There’s no business like show business”, then freeze, and shift into highly formal style, stressing hierarchy.

King. Go, my Master,
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;
The pale companion is not for our pomp.
What entertainments have you devised for the wedding?
What masque, what music ?

Buck. Here is a list of those awaiting your pleasure.
Make choice of which your Highness will see first.

King. “The battle with the Centaurs, sung by a eunuch.”
We’ll none of that!
“The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals tearing Orpheus in their rage”. Hmm! Might go down well over the port, ladies excused. We’ll see.
“The nine Muses mourning for the death of learning.”
That is some satire, keen and critical, not sorting with a nuptial ceremony. Next?
“A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth”. No, they all say it’s old hat. Quite good fun, I thought, but we want modern stuff.
What else?

Buck. “*The Winter’s Tale*”.

King. Modern stuff, I said! Charming story, though, might do a repeat. And perhaps *The Tempest* on Sunday a week.

Wouldn't mind that Ariel song again, it had a dying fall. Just the thing to temper down our militant colonials, and those fiery spirits dancing still over my poor son's grave. Well, is that all? What is Shakespeare doing? What does the man think he gets paid for?

Buck. A play there is, my lord, but it is not for you. I have heard it over, and it is nothing, nothing in the world: There is not one word apt, one player fitted. You will find it a knavish piece of work. Unless you can find sport in their intents.

King. The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing. Our sport shall be to take what they mistake. What do you call this new play?

Buck. *“All is True.”*

King. Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in it?

Buck. It is extremely stretched and conned with pain To do you service.

King. I will hear that play; For never anything can be amiss When simpleness and duty tender it.

Exit, humming “Where the bee sucks, there suck I”, followed by Buck.

2. **Queen Anne** *trying on necklaces, while her tearful daughter, Princess Elizabeth, is fitted into a wedding dress made of silver cloth.*

Queen. Now, Lizzie, please, try for a little conduct. This is no way to behave on your wedding. Do you want the Elector to believe we are putting you up for martyrdom?

Princess. Frederick knows full well not he but my poor brother causes these tears. I would climb the altar steps joyfully to my husband's arms if Henry were here to share my joy. I still cannot believe he is gone. We had such hopes of Sir Walter Raleigh's cordial. The doctors were helpless but this would have saved him, I'm sure, had it been applied sooner. To think he died asking for his dear sister, and they would not let me come near.

Queen. What about me, then, good Mrs. Palsgrave? Do I weep? My grief is greater than yours. He was my first son, England's hope! and our best card at the European poker table. Now Frederick will have to step in his shoes, and it is your duty to help him.

Princess. I know, mother, I will, but why hurry so? It is but three months since Henry died. Could we not be allowed to mourn him in peace? Are you and father in such haste to send me away? And on Henry's ship, too! I cannot do it, I cannot be parted from you all so cruelly. Who knows if we'll ever meet again?

Queen. Don't be silly, with modern transport, Heidelberg can't be more than two or three weeks' journey away. You

will be back in a whiff, or we'll go visit you, though I doubt if I could stay long in that poky little palace at the back of the woods.

Princess. Henry was to come with us to ease the parting. Mother please let me stay with you another year, or at least wait until summer.

Queen. It's pointless to argue, the King will have it so, he knows what is best for us all. Now dry your tears, think of all the pleasures ahead. Nothing but frolicks, and a new dress for each party. We'll have three masques, all very jolly, and a new play Master Shakespeare wrote especially for you, I am told. You like his pretty shows, don't you? So! No more idle tears, pray, and come along, dinner is expecting us.

Voice off, singing "Verses by the Princess Elizabeth given to Lord Harington, her preceptor", *as they leave.*

Why should vain joys us transport,
 Earthly pleasures are but short,
 And are mingled in such sort,
 Grievs are greater than the sport.

3. The King's Men, *whistling* "For he's a jolly good fellow" *as Richard Burbage enters.*

All. Hail, worthy Burbage. Hail, thou delightful Proteus!

Burbage. I see you've been reading the penny press. Here is fresher news. The King has dined. Get your apparel together, good strings to your beards, new ribbons, and meet at the palace: for the short and the long is, our play is preferred. And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, we need to utter sweet breath if we want to hear them say, it is a sweet comedy. No more words. Away ! Go!

Heminges. Hey wait. Which play? You didn't tell us. How do you expect me to keep records?

Burbage. Oh, sorry, Heminges. The new one, Heavyweight the eighth. We are to do it in action before the King, then if he is pleased to give it his approval, we play for the court on Tuesday night.

Condell. But Dick, there are things in this comedy that will never please. And on a wedding, too!

Burbage. Don't I know! I've said so to Will but there is no talking sense into him. He's made up his mind this play's just the thing!

Condell. John Fletcher did his best to mellow it down, but a mild touch here and there makes no difference: it's still hot on the tastebuds.

Heminges. I have a device to make all well. Will must write us a Prologue to say we will do no harm with our words. He is sure to make everything right. He always does.

4. Enter **Sir Francis Bacon, Francis Beaumont, Thomas Champion, John Webster, Cyril Tourneur**, to the tune of Delalande's "Les Folies de Cardenio".

Bacon. Let the scenes abound with light, specially coloured and varied. The colours that show best by candle-light are white, carnation, and a kind of sea-water green.

Enter Sir George Buck, holding a scroll of paper

Beaumont. Ah, Sir George, you come most happily upon your cue to ease Bacon's mind.

Buck. I will, Mr Beaumont: here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit to play in our interludes.

Champion. You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.

Buck. The plays nominated for our Wedding Festival are:
The Twins' Tragedy. The Maid's Tragedy. Caesar's Tragedy. Much Ado About Nothing. Cardenio. Philaster. Falstaff. The Tempest. The Winter's Tale. Henry VIII. The Moor of Venice. The Nobleman. The Captain. The Alchemist. A King and No King. Love Lies a Bleeding. Knot of Fools. The Merry Devil of Edmonton. A Bad Beginning Makes a Good Ending.

Campion, count yourself lucky that Ben Jonson is away, your masque is to grace the wedding banquet, and on the morrow their Majesties will be pleased to attend the entertainment devised by the Gentlemen of the Middle Temple. Bacon and Beaumont's for Gray's Inn is deferred,

I'm afraid, but please Gentlemen, be ready in case of readjustments to the programme. If not on Wedding Week, the plays selected will all be performed at later dates in the course of the season.

Webster, I'm sorry, better luck next year.

Webster. Next wedding, you mean. Another beautiful day gone. God O God, what am I waiting for? why do I linger here?

Campion. Horny sot qui Malfi puns!

Webster. The King's Men must do my Duchess. You can't beat them. Twenty performances at court!

Tourneur. And Shakespeare all over the place, as usual. When do we get a word in?

Bacon. What are you complaining about, puppy? You have a play on, which makes you equal with Mr Jonson. Even Mr Nobody Nicholls has one, but Beaumont and I are confined to the waiting list.

Webster. Beaumont does very well for himself, though, three plays at least before the Princes sail.

Beaumont. But three halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of Shak!

Tourneur. What is so irresistible about Shakspeare's stuff?

Campion. It's stuffed with leathern rhetoric – his trademark!

Buck. And well conceived plots you all try to emulate, don't you?

Webster. None of them is original, of course.

Tourneur. Look who's talking! Ben says no more than twenty per cent of the *White Devil's* lines are truly yours.

Buck. Now, Cyril, don't tease Webster, it's mean. He's not prolific, that's all. You can't criticize some people for writing too much and mock those who write too little.

Beaumont. It's not the copying we mind, it's the marring. Shakespeare knows a good story when he sees one, but then he has to ruin it with some idle conceit. Believe you me, quibbles will prove his fatal Cleopatra.

Exit Sir George Buck. Enter a Page, carrying a batch of newspapers

Tourneur. Want to hear what the Great Cham thinks of the Great Cunt? [*Reads from a copy of The Rambler*] "The effects of Shakespeare's poetry might have been greater had he not counteracted himself. What he does best, he soon ceases to do.

Bacon, reading. "He is much more careful to please than to instruct. It is always a writer's duty to make the world better."

Beaumont, reading. "Neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor any appearance of refined manners."

Tourneur, picking up a copy of the TLS. “Many of his words and more of his phrases are scarce intelligible.”

Webster, reading. “His characters are praised as natural, though their sentiments are sometimes forced and their actions improbable.”

Beaumont. Hear hear! How could Lear be obtuse enough to trust his wicked daughters? did he never set foot in his own nursery? I bet they were little bullies, those girls, puncturing doves’ eyes and pulling Cordelia’s hair.

Campion, reading. “When he finds himself near the end of his work, he shortens the labour to snatch the profit.” Too right! That Hermione, doing her worst to look like a statue! Are we supposed to believe she slept for sixteen years?

Tourneur, mimicking a schoolmistress: “It is necessary that you awake your faith.” What does he take a play for? mass? should we kneel and give thanks for his creation?

Beaumont, with mock solemnity. Forbear to judge, for you are sinners all!

All. Amen!

They file out, heads bent and hands joined in prayer, like penitents.

5. *Enter The King's Men, singing "We will, we will rock you" ..*

Burbage. Are we all met? Pat, pat. Here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal. Beginners on stage in half an hour.

They linger around the dinner table laid for them. The older members of the company grow nostalgic as they exchange reminiscences.

Heminges. Can't play on an empty stomach, now, can we? Weddings make me cry, I need comfort food. Son Ostler! pass me that dish, please. Here, Condell, have one.

Condell. Oh, cold cuts! No, thanks, they disagree with me.

Burbage. Thrift, thrift, my dear Hal. The funeral baked meats must coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. Quite a lavish spread, though, Good Queen Bess never did us so proud, if you remember.

Heminges. She was seldom in the giving mood, may God forgive her measly soul, she was a great lady. Do you remember that last Christmas season, when we played before her? Ten years this week, it was, Candlemas, to be precise. I can see her now, pretty as gold paint in the candle glow, and those lovely pearls.

Condell. Jesus, the days that we have seen.

Ostler. You have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Condell.

Shakespeare. I wish you would stop that inane trick of quoting me on the least provocation.

He moves to front stage and launches into a halting soliloquy while the others eat and talk without paying attention

So confusing! I always wonder if they are indeed quotations, or lines stored in public memory for the next writer. The feeling harries me, again and again, of watching scenes I wrote ages ago, as if I were directing their every move. Did I dream up this mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage? And cannot command my own soul? "This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king". Could Hamlet thus force destiny, contract murder and revenge into one sentence, one character? Or did I mean every victim makes a good murderer? Each skull, my skull, a Minotaur's labyrinth... the Beasts' Jungle...

Listens to Burbage who has moved into a halo of light to deliver these lines:

Burbage. There is a history in all men's lives
Figuring the natures of the times deceased,
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim...

Shakespeare. Premonitions? postmonitions? Presumptuous! preposterous!

Pre-dictions! they raise me above myself, above my king. James truly believes he should sit next to God, but I don't, I can't, not any longer. Forgive me, heavens, I spent too many years immersed in their history, too many retroactive prophecies have disrupted my sense of chronology, as if like a crab one could go backward. I can find no orderly sequence to ordinary life, my little shell harbours differing tenses. The past is the present is the future.

Burbage.... near aim of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, who in their seeds
And weak beginning lie intreasurèd.

Shakespeare. And there the antic sits, allowing me a breath, a little scene, to monarchize, be feared, and kill with words...
Or rape time once more to beget Young from Old Elizabeth in the Palatine nest of spicery. There was I, warming up the national Phenix in the old black pot, and lo, my Winter queen comes to life. Victima victrix, mother of Kings! O my prophetic soul, won't you give us a rest? The whole realm sits within my head. I am England. Old England.

6. *Purcell's Funeral March for Queen Mary*. **Sir Walter Raleigh**, a prisoner in the Tower, *is visited by Fulke Greville*.

Raleigh. Greville! Welcome! I did not hope to be allowed visitors today.

Greville. My dear Raleigh, your jailer has toasted the Princess so heartily that he let me in for a small benevolence. With any luck, he should be drunk enough by tomorrow to have forgotten he ever saw me.

Raleigh. With any luck, I should have attended her wedding, for Prince Henry swore he'd have me released by Christmas. Now he's gone, I must be prepared to rot here another ten years.

Greville. Don't tell me the Ocean longs for Whitehall and its painted pomp. Your court in exile is far superior. Our good King Solomon thinks it best to keep the nobility and wisdom of the realm safe here behind locked doors.

Raleigh. True. Our company is of the choicest and increases everyday. I have Lady Arbella Stuart for my next Tower neighbour, the Countess of Shrewsbury, Baron Grey, and the "wizard" Earl, Harry Percy, plus learned visitors of Harriot's stamp. Percy is quite happy here as long as he can watch the stars, read, cultivate his garden and call himself king of infinite space. I need a larger world to bustle in.

Greville. Be patient. Your friends are doing their utmost to soften His Majesty's heart on your behalf, and the Queen has promised to speak for you. She was in a sunny mood this morning, literally beaming.

Raleigh. Greville, I want a full account of the ceremony. For the whole time, as you know, I was my chamber's prisoner.

Greville.

Then you lost

The view of earthly glory. Every man that stood
 Showed like a mine, all gilt. The King and Queen
 All clinquant all in gold, like heathen gods,
 Made Britain India.

Raleigh. The bride wore black, I presume.

Greville. She did at her betrothal, last December, yards and yards of black velvet. But King James has put all the family ghosts to sleep under marble. It cost him 46 shillings to have Elizabeth expelled from her grandfather's crypt, which he wants for his own use. Now Mary Queen of Scots faces her in a sumptuous monument, and Prince Henry lies in state between them. His is only a wax image, of course, but the smell of incense and candles around the hearse is enough to make Her late Majesty blow her carved effigy sky high.

Raleigh. Alas, sweet Prince, after so many brave battles for the true faith. Believe me, it was no ordinary illness, or my quintessence would have cured him.

Greville. Rumour agrees with you. King James certainly has more elbow room now. A son-in-law some two weeks' journey away from London can never be much of an imposition, no matter how Protestant his heart may be.

Raleigh. Can we bank on Elector Frederick, do you think? Did he show any sign of amity in our direction?

Greville. Frankly, no. He may be the head of the Protestant league at home, but here, he made a great point of espousing the Anglican rite.

Raleigh. There go our hopes for the new world, then. O my America, my Newfoundland! Who will dare cross the Atlantic now? What brave heart remains to uproot the Spaniards and plant good Protestant seeds in their place? No one is likely to invest a shilling in our Virginia Company now the Prince is gone.

Greville. Please refrain from smoking Virginian, and you'll find this change of course all in your favour. King James may well reconsider your Eldorado plan if he is to pay for all the revels ahead. He says the bride's coronet alone cost him a million crowns. He can't sell new earldoms every day.

Raleigh. Will money buy'em?

Greville. Aye, and make a baronet for a thousand pounds. It was Minister Cecil's bright idea. Not nearly enough to cover expenses, though. James will have to beg the Commons for subsidies when the feast is over. Imagine! New plays, pageants, fireworks every night until the couple leave for Heidelberg. We will be treated to a revival of *Philaster*. Prince Henry's special request, to tell his father straight we'll have no more Spanish marriages.

Raleigh. He nearly agreed to the match, though, but I strongly urged him to resist. Marriage between great kings is the fairest trade of betraying. Though alliance be made, yet friendship never is.

Greville. At least we won't be vexed with a Spanish Princess of Wales now.

Raleigh. Who knows? James has another son whom that oily Gondomar is courting already. Our Lieutenant here has spies all over Europe: he says the Howard faction take money from Spain, and that some of it served to commission the play *Cardenio*. He is positive the man Shakespeare is a papist.

Greville. Your Lieutenant knows more than I do, then, for the King's Men seem to enjoy the favour of young Pembroke, who hates the Howards like poison. Or perhaps Shakespeare plays a double game, just as James does, with one play in each camp.

Raleigh. Will you attend the shows? I'll expect another visit with full details if you do.

Greville. I have no inclination for merriment, least of all for mascarades, and expect nothing much from the new stars of our stage. They have all learnt to toe the line, especially in front of alien guests. The French ambassador prides himself on having prohibited a performance of *Byron*.

Raleigh. So! foreign diplomats would be our dancing masters, now!

Greville. Yes. Even Chapman is learning to mind his steps. If Ben Jonson were here, he'd raise the level to more exalted heights, perhaps, but he left Inigo Jones to run the show. Do you have news of Ben's progress in France?

Ralegh. From the scant reports I get here, I am not sure who is bear-leading the other, Ben Jonson or my son. But do you mean Chapman is part of the revelries? I thought the King would never forgive him after his slurs on the Scots.

Greville. That last caper nearly did for him, but he has reentered favour by way of the Inns. The Gentlemen of Middle Temple ordered him a masque that is scheduled for tomorrow night.

Ralegh. Every penholder in the realm seems to write masques these days. Francis Bacon told me on his last visit he was master-minding one at Gray's Inn. What is the argument of Chapman's?

Greville. Murky affair. Virginian princes, priests, and baboons meet around a gold mine to vilify "blind and deformed Plutus" – with no expenses spared, I am told. Chapman's brave charge against worldly riches cost the Gentlemen twelve hundred pounds.

Ralegh. Do these "Virginians" bear any relation with our great designs?

Greville. Maybe. It was another request of Prince Henry. Now I suppose Chapman hopes to draw the Elector in the anti-Spanish club, but whether he has chaste bankrupt Virginia in mind or your El Dorado, no one knows.

Ralegh. The masque will spell it out, I guess.

Greville. I guess not. Chapman keeps a low profile, and takes refuge behind Prince Henry's last will, for fear of irritating His Majesty.

Enter Sir Francis Bacon

Raleigh. Sir Francis is sure to know the latest news. Is it true, Francis, that the Spanish Ambassador has denied to attend the revels? Not just on account of *Philaster*, surely?

Bacon. No, of course not, but to mark his disapproval of the wedding.

Greville. Confound his impudence! Can you imagine Her late Majesty being dictated to by frogs or dagos?

Raleigh. Or contracting a shameful peace with the Spaniards? Not she, not as long as she was blessed with brave captains, Essex, Drake, and friends of Sidney's mettle. Sit them side by side with today's Cabinet, the picture will speak for itself.

Greville. The very picture I aimed to draw in *Eliza Regina*, but I was denied access to all State papers by Little Cecil, the Crown's beagle. Of course, he was your kinsman, Bacon, so peace unto his soul. Truth will out anyway. My *Mustapha* shall speak for me through a veil, darkly, as did my *Sidney*.

Raleigh. As will my *History of the World*, if I do as Francis suggests.

Bacon. Your wisest course, for whosoever shall follow truth too near the heels, it may happily strike out his teeth.

Greville. I'm sure Sir Francis is of excellent counsel. He even had the goodness to advise me once on a course of studies. But what about yourself, Bacon? did you save any salt for your own pottage? Everyone says your late unlamented cousin was the true model of your essay "On Deformity" .

Bacon. I had no respect for the man, but do not pretend to hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature, only to observe and humbly learn from it.

Raleigh. Prince Henry shared your repugnancy. Poor lad, he did not live long to rejoice over our Prime Minister's death. Has any one been appointed yet in Cecil's place?

Bacon. Howard fills the post for the interim, but Pembroke is a serious challenger, and Viscount Rochester, the new favourite, wants to keep it in his own hands.

Greville. The King makes no haste to nominate any, and threatens to execute it in person if the Council keep plaguing him with hordes of *candidati*! Of course the name of Sir Francis is on everyone's lips as the most deserving.

Bacon. But rumour has it that you, my Lord Greville, will surely be the elect

Greville. The same rumours we have about the Lord Treasurer, who alters every day. Meanwhile, the

bookmakers are putting their money on Pembroke. Sidney's nephew is their latest phœnix.

Raleigh. A consumation devoutly to be wished! I hear John Donne hopes to get some little crumb of office in the reshuffle. He must be at his wits' end, poor fellow.

Bacon. Did you know he'd offered to serve in our Virginia Company? Our ragged poet even tried for the secretaryship of Ireland!

Greville. Donne has been applying to every single post on offer since his hare-brained marriage, with no success so far. His conversion is too fresh, and smacks of opportunism.

Bacon. He is reputed a great visitor of Ladies, a great frequenter of plays, a great writer of conceited verses.

Raleigh. We brushed through many a tempest together in our green days, with no more profit to us than may fill a bookshelf. Percy keeps all our voyages lined up in his splendid library, which I have the liberty of for my great *opus*. He says you are welcome to use his collection of scientific works, Francis!

Bacon. And be tried for atheism! It is most generous of your wizard Earl, but I must beg to decline.

Raleigh. Oh nonsense! some of those books might make the bishops wince, but not a serious thinker like you, Francis. Don't tell me you believe in their Trinity.

Bacon. Say I believe in your Trinidad, then! and agree with you that religion and philosophy must be kept apart. But this is no day for dark study. I will return shortly, Sir Walter, to advance all our ventures. Your servant, my Lords.

Exit Bacon.

Greville. I too must be on my way. Now, Walter, whosoever's teeth you had in mind, I'd keep well away from Bacon's fangs, if I were you. They're long enough to tear the planks.

7. *Mendelssohn's Wedding March for The Dream. Enter Shakespeare, wearing the red livery of King James, and Heminges.*

Shakespeare. I am fed up with playing first showman in every ruddy parade. My own brother was buried but two weeks ago. I hate red, seen far too much of it, meat banquets, severed heads hanging from the bridge, bloody scaffolds. We are the King's abjects, Heminges! Mummers at his Peace Conference, pall bearers, bridesmaids, what next? I'd rather wear a coxcomb than these glad rags. Motley's the only wear. Invest me in my motley!

Heminges. Livery or motley, what's the big difference? it is still a servant's garb. This one at least got you close to the main stage. Think of those thousands massed in the streets who would have given their eyes just for a glimpse of the newly married. I would have too, I confess, to gaze on Her little Highness.

Shakespeare. God save you, sir. Where have you been broiling?

Heminges. Among the crowd round the Chapel, where a finger

Could not be wedged in more. I am stifled
With the mere rankness of their joy.

John Donne was close to me, waving a roll of paper and trying to cross the stream of lords and ladies, but to no avail, it was like swimming against the tide.

You saw the ceremony. How was it?

Shakespeare. Well worth the seeing.

Heminges.
looked.

Tell me how she

Shakespeare. O, a cherub! brave little ship off to a brave new world – so radiant she made February shine like a spring day. Or perhaps it was the sun, trying to compete with all those jewels below. I never saw so many precious stones on such small breasts. The King and Queen alone were worth the price of England. All the world is James's stage. It is said the French King has crowned him "the wisest sot in all christendom". Your quintessential oxy moron! You read his *Doron*,

"God gives not Kings the style of gods in vain,
For on his throne his scepter do they sway:"

I'm sure he'll adore my Angels. Now which is more lethal, I wonder, the City Fathers who would have none of us or

this Godly patron of the Arts? Our Father which art in Whitehall, Hallowed be thy game, Thy Kingdom's come.

Heminges. You come in for a share of the glory... and the lolly.

Shakespeare. Ay. Give us this day our daily bread. But what of tomorrow's? He swore the Revels Children would beg and starve before he let them play again, after their cheeky *Byron*.

Heminges. He will come round. Never sticks to a decision for long. He can't keep them out forever, not once he's forgiven Chapman, and even agreed to watch his masque tonight. How did you like *Campion's*, by the way? I hear it was the most elegant show ever.

Shakespeare. You should have seen their elegant crowd at the banquet, as gross and misbehaved as the last groundling, upsetting dishes, throwing food at each other, harassing the servants, all in merriment of course. It got worse and worse with the "light" entertainment. It's hard to say who drank faster or vomited more, those disguised or those watching them.

Heminges. But surely you enjoyed *Campion's* poetry! Everyone does.

Shakespeare. The words were so slurred as to be inaudible, and no great loss, if the "argument" of the masque is any indication. The young turtles sat holding hands in the middle of this mess like a pair rescued from a shipwreck,

drinking deep in each other's eyes, and totally immune, thank heaven, to the sorry sight around them.

Heminges. Are you telling me that you miss the groundlings? You used to say their foul breath was so strong you had to keep well away from the edge lest it make you give up the ghost for real.

Shakespeare. It was a straight deal. They paid a penny for the show, not for the liberty of our souls.

Heminges. Ay, pennies. But those despicable lords coughed up all the pounds that bought your property. You must be the most affluent landowner in all theatredom.

Shakespeare. I know. It was the best I could do for my children. I gave them little else, really. But to be honest with you, it's not the groundlings I miss. They're still there, aren't they? as loud and foul-mouthed as ever. At least they haven't deserted us. Others have, though. The learned Florio has vowed never to set foot again in a theatre. Our worthy poet Samuel Daniel is not above composing masques, but finds plays beneath him. My Lord Greville writes one occasionally, on condition nobody will hear it. If it weren't for Pembroke's circle, not one of the judicious would still attend. Are you aware that we haven't had one good fierce honest-to-God argument about anything worth fighting over with anyone for years?

Heminges. What would you want to argue about? Religion is a settled thing, we made our peace with Spain, and there are

no enemies standing at our gates. Why should we quarrel?
who with?

Shakespeare. All those people I used to find so irritating!
God, how I miss them! The Globe welcomed such a mixed
set in those days, I loved the colour, the variety, the
cacophony of it. All the colour has receded to Blackfriars
now, to the lords' waiscoats and our good King's red
liveries. Her late Majesty may have been a tight-fisted bully,
but she never made us feel we were lackeys. No praise is
fulsome enough, flowery enough for Great Stuart. His
show of greatness can never match hers. 'Twas in the grain,
it could endure wind and weather.

Heminges. You resented her autocracy at the time. Aren't you
making her over glamorous now?

Shakespeare. No, I know she was a pest, and smelt so. She
was just bright enough to make others' lights radiant,
instead of turning them all into glowworms.

Heminges. Good old days, dear old Queen, huh? How many
shining poets did she send to jail or the rack after one of
your good old-fashioned arguments?

Shakespeare. Poets still go to jail. Whether it's *Gulls* or *Dogs*,
this Isle is never a safe place for us inferior animals. Ask
Ben Jonson how he fared in his Majesty's dungeon.

Heminges. He is none the worse, and it makes a good story.
Oh, did you hear Condell's latest joke? It's about a girl
named Virginia. We'll call her Virgin for short. But not for

long. Good, isn't it? Even Dick laughed, and wittily replied our Eliza would have broken the record.

Shakespeare. Quite, and the joker's back too. Mind to whom you tell the story. Pitchers have ears.

8. Raleigh, *playing a viol, sings one of his poems set to music by Orlando Gibbons.*

Raleigh. What is our life? It is a play of passion.
 What is our mirth? The music of division.
 Our mothers, they the tiring houses be,
 Where we are dressed for time's short tragedy.
 Fie upon this quiet life, I want work!

Enter Sir William Wade, Lieutenant of the Tower

Ah! Lieutenant. Can no man tell of my unthrifty son?

Wade. I bring news, Sir Walter, but none that will please you. We have reports from Paris of young Wat's behaviour. He is the talk of the town, our friends tell us. You made a most unwise choice when you put him in the charge of that Ben Jonson who is no more able to lead himself than a strong-headed youngster. The last I heard, your fine poet had to be wheeled home in a cart, covered in bruises and dead drunk still after a night in the clink. As for young Wat, he nearly got himself killed fighting two French guards.

How you could pick one of those rascally actors and entrust him with a young gentleman's education is beyond me. Are you aware Jonson proclaims himself a Catholic, these days? No doubt he'll serve mass without a qualm, if it means a free drink every day.

Raleigh. That I did not know, quite the reverse, in fact. I took him for a reformed man, practising the lofty moral lessons of his plays. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions, but Ben is none, then. I am grateful for your warning, Lieutenant, and will take measures to have them return immediately. No roaming to Rome for that pair, never! all that Wat still needs to know in the way of vice he will learn at home. And Ben can go hang himself, for all I care.

Wade. The proper end for him and his sort. They should all be put on the rack, their scripts burnt to ashes, and their theatres razed down.

Raleigh. My son will have no more truck with them, I swear.

Wade. Young Wat would be better employed defending our interests in the New World, where pristine nature would teach him manhood.

Raleigh. If ever I regain my freedom, Wat will sail with me to Guiana and taste the discipline of a ship. I will not countenance bloody fights with bloody foreigners.

Wade. Your project was brought up at the last meeting of the King's Council for Virginia, and supported by several

of us. Though it may take time, your release is sure to come.

Exit Wade. Raleigh takes up his viol and finishes the madrigal

The graves that hide us from the parching sun
Are but drawn curtains till the play be done.

9. Shakespeare and Burbage

Burbage. Which of the young Pen Club would you place your money on? Any one of them going to break new ground, do you think? Who would qualify as your Nine Worthies?

Shakespeare. It's hard to tell, and I may not be the best judge. There is less in Tourneur's show of strength than meets the eye, I'm afraid. Of course he may mature, and come to a finer understanding of what the stage means in a community. The stage I have in mind, that is. He seems to have inherited Marlowe's taste for violence, and urges it on instead of channeling it. I would say Beaumont is the most gifted of the lot. He has talent, and the easy grace that comes from detachment; he is not deeply interested in the theatre as a medium.

Burbage. How can you say so? His *Knight of the Burning Pestle* proves you wrong. What more hospitable stage in all

London than this where citizens' wives sit with the gents and run the show?

Shakespeare. A palpable hit. I grant you its handsome tribute to the theatre. But what of the matter? Boy meets girl, Don Quijote meets Bottom in Bally Wood, and guess who wins. Romance may be his theme, Money is the brave horse that draws the plot.

Burbage. What of Fletcher, then?

Shakespeare. He has a good ear for a line, but he needs a post to lean on. Besides, he hates conflict. Chapman, Marston, Jonson love it, but they have taken such a beating none of them is likely to tempt the devil for a while. Webster won't either: his evil is *out there*, it is not huge and theological, as in Marlowe. He has poetic talent, but you wouldn't call him innovative.

Burbage. Ben Jonson says much the same of your own works.

Shakespeare. Ben can't tell new from old. You know well I've tried my hand recently at half a dozen new forms. "Mouldy tales", he called them, and warned me they would never catch the public's fancy.

Burbage. They did very well at the box office.

Shakespeare. There's the rub: they caught for the wrong reasons, attractive in so far as they resembled what they strove to caricature. I meant to outmasque the masque, and

failed. So much to see, such dazzling lights, it's making everyone deaf and dumb. New break may be break with the theatre and run. Leave these enchanted bowers lest you be buried under the sets. Not saying and not showing what cries to be told... it may be the best, perhaps the only way left to make oneself heard.

Burbage. We still have the Globe, even if the returns are not what they used to be.

Shakespeare. Too late, I'm afraid. The vulgar pay to be entertained, like their betters. Christ! those dreary city comedies! Even Parliament sessions must sound more exciting! Perhaps young Tourneur is right. Poets should speak once and then go. Make room for tomorrow's dramatists.

Burbage. You could never live away from the stage, no more than I could. Banish the Globe, banish all the world.

Shakespeare. I do. I will.

10. John Donne, *holding a roll tied with a large lovers' knot, which he puts in his belt.*

Donne. Hang there, my verse, till you find your way to Young Eliza's fair hand. There was no approaching the Princess in the mêlée, not with those guards watching her like the Crown Jewels. Yet I would be loath to cast away my speech, for it is excellently well penned.

Enter Bacon, holding a roll which he returns to Donne.

Bacon. I am sorry to inform you that your latest application was rejected, Mr Donne. But you seem to have another all ready made.

Donne. No, this is *An Epithalamion, or Mariage Song on the Lady Elizabeth*, which I meant to deliver in person to the lady. Had I been allowed near, I could have told her much about Heidelberg, too, for I was there but a few months ago. Everyone was discussing the succession of Emperor Rudolf, which I'm sure would interest her husband the Palsgrave.

Bacon. Their Majesties were informed of your trip to the Continent, but did not wish to trouble the Princess with politics yet. Touching your own interest, Mr Donne, would you allow me a word? You are wasting your talent and your time, applying for office in the wrong direction. The King will never make you his ambassador. It was foolish of you to even try.

Donne. Sir, I lack advancement. Must we all starve because I was raised a Catholic? Or because I married for love? This was my last hope of an honourable occupation.

Bacon. Mr. Donne, I know your education and abilities, and I know too, the contingencies that attend Court promises. Your path of advancement is in divine not secular employment. King James is so impressed with your learning in divinity that he has made up his mind you should

embrace Holy Orders: he will turn a deaf ear to all other pleas, I am afraid.

Donne. I am no fit man for the Church, my secret soul burns still with too many sins and desires.

Bacon. Do not lose Faith. Let me put it more plainly, do not lose sight of Faith. "The more incredible the divine mystery is, the nobler is the victory of faith." It could be your victory, John, if you'd agree to serve God as the King wishes. The Church would set you free from the Idols of the Market.

Donne. Sir, it cannot do. Not because I think myself too good for that calling. Some irregularities of my life have been so visible to men that, although I have made my peace with God, it will not free me from their censure.

Bacon. Then, I can perhaps secure an introduction to Viscount Rochester. He wants to marry Howard's daughter, but first she must be released from her present bond. King James hopes the bishops will grant a divorce without ado to satisfy him. Rochester has no Latin. Your learning in support of the suit would no doubt be welcome all round.

Donne. My poor study did lie that way. It may be of more serious use in this matter than an Epithalamion.

Bacon. Quite. I would also suggest you find yourself a seat in the next Parliament, which the King must inevitably call in the near future. The state of his Treasury makes it urgent.

Donne. Then am I like a monarch, in crying need of money. I thank you, Sir Francis, and beg to be remembered as your faithful servant when your own high appointment is confirmed.

11. Fletcher and Beaumont

Fletcher. Of course I felt honoured by his invitation, but co-authoring Shakespeare is tricky business. There are things in our new play that will not please.

Beaumont. Never mind, John, perhaps you won't have to expose yourselves: the King suffers from an overdose already. And should you miscarry, Bacon stands ready with our masque. In fact, he is even now drawing Sir George Buck's attention to its modest merits. Charming little affair, just right for a relaxed party after the big event, and a welcome rest from Big Mouth Chapman. Jove above, Zeus, he would correct me, they never tire of talking, these old cronies!

Fletcher. Yea, a great cry for so little wool. I quite enjoyed *Campion's*, especially the music. What did you think of it?

Beaumont. Not bad, though rather too long and involved. I heard one in the audience grumbling it was more like a play than a masque.

Fletcher. Words, words, words. Doesn't take much to wear out their capabilities of absorption.

Beaumont. Ours will hurt no one, very easy on the ear and a pleasure to the eye. Marriage of the Thames and the Rhine, in honour of which Jove has revived the Olympian Games. Inigo Jones has agreed to give us a hand with the sets and lighting. The invention in Chapman's was Inigo's, really, all Chapman did was fill in the gaps with text.

Fletcher. The man is a magician. His special effects for *Campion* were breath-taking. Those statuesque maids in clouds of fire, oh, and those aerial movements, so delicate! truly divine.

Talking of sculpture, have you been to see the Queens' marble images in the Lady Chapel? There are queues up to the bridge waiting to admire the art work. It is said they are endowed with such life of majesty that one would speak to them and stand in hope of answer.

Beaumont. Heaven forbid! I hate to think what judgment the old dears would pass on the present times.

12. Shakespeare and Heminges meet Chapman, then Inigo Jones, with *Campion* in tow carrying a schoolboy's satchel

Chapman. Pack of rising young grubbers, new wave, they call themselves! but don't expect one lifting word, strong thought, or rocking invention between the lot. Will, you saw my Virginians yesterday, didn't you? Then you heard those vulgar upstarts who insulted the dreadful dignity of ancient and authentical Poesie. Now, tell me: it wasn't you, was it, who complained aloud 'twas too long for a play?

Shakespeare. George, you know I would never speak ill of your almighty line.

Chapman. If you say so. We have to stick together, don't we? Inigo here tells me your new piece was chosen for tonight's di-ver-tis-se-mong. Is that confirmed?

Shakespeare. It is. John Fletcher is expecting me in an hour or so for final adjustments.

Jones. What have you planned for our delight, Mr Shakespeare? I hear you specialize in restoring vermoulu tales, or so our Ben tells me. Why not convert to sweeter fashions, like him? See how hard he has worked to study new gen-res, with what success. Actually I quite enjoyed your little rondelet, or should I call it a pastoralet [*affected French accent*] in *The Storm*, beg pardon, *Tempest*. Oh a masque, was it? Why! of course, how stupid, it was those dancing goddesses, you know, they looked more like upgraded yokels to me. Such thick calves!

Shakespeare. Quite! you see, they were calves dressed as spirits, standing up on their toes.

Jones. Indeed! How quaint! You hear that, Champion? What next, I wonder.

Shakespeare. You'll see, if you are around tonight. *Henry VIII*, complete with maskers, pageants and sunlights. In the meantime, I must wish you good day. Please give my regards to Goodwife Jones.

Inigo Jones, slightly taken aback, understands he has received his marching orders and leaves, followed by Campion.

Shakespeare, *fuming*, with Chapman and Heminges

Shakespeare. There's your cormorant, your hyena, raring to devour our carcasses. He and his troop of scavengers. Bloody Campion! It was MY statue!

Chapman. How do you mean, YOUR statue?

Shakespeare. The LORDS' masque, on wedding night, "was cried incomparable", wasn't it, till th'ensuing night made it a fool and beggar. It had everybody on their knees: "See, Jove is pleased, statues have life and move", all the pretty maids coming alive, so startling, so brilliant, so fresh! Where do you think they got the idea from?

Chapman. Presumably where you got it, Greene's *Pandosto*...

Shakespeare. Greene does not have a statue.

Chapman. Oh! all right! Pygmalion, Don Giovanni... Plenty of other statues to pick from, surely!

Shakespeare. Aye, to stand them all in a row like chorus girls!

Heminges. But Ben says...

Shakespeare. I know what Ben says. [*chanting*] Come Big Ben, strike again, I'll pay tuppence for your pen. Ben would

sooner feed at high table than howl or starve on Bread Street with the pack. Ben thinks he can lord it over everyone but that Inigo will gulp him down before he can shout “poet laureate”.

Chapman. No fear, Inigo needs us poets to feed him plays, he needs ME, can’t write a line himself, let alone verse.

Shakespeare. But who wants lines or verse or plays? What is the theatre still good for? can you say anything on stage today that is of any interest to any one? what urgent news are we allowed to deliver, what vital truth worth proclaiming by the town criers? Who wants to listen to a play? who wants truths about himself or anything else? Sugar, that’s what is required. Sweet Will is all their love. Ha!

Heminges. But Will, you never seemed to mind that before. Thousands of people came to hear your plays, tens of thousands. And you made them listen, no matter how heavy you were sometimes, and that more often than I dared tell you.

Chapman. Too right! If they came for sweet William, they got plenty else alongside. To think they find ME wordy! All that irrelevant stuff you kept throwing in, just to slow down the plot. Christ, those dollops of sermonizing they had to stand through. AND soliloquies. Everyone wanted to know how the twist would unscrew, of course, so they stayed put. You did say quite a lot, believe me. And not all of it pleasing in high places, I’ll bet. How you kept out of

trouble, I don't know. You always succeeded in sweet talking the censor.

Shakespeare. Not always, no, *Sir Thomas More* never made it to the stage, for one. I knew how to handle Tilney, though. He was not immune to bribes, and quite easy, once you took his point: Say whatever you wish but never be blunt. Things had to be wrapped up, that's how my syntax grew ever more twisted. What he objected to was free direct speech. Free indirect could pass mustard, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, fine! I wonder if critics will realize what major influence Tilney exercised on my style. I can see them years from now in the *Tudor Lights Supplement*, arguing themselves silly over my commitment to monarchy, did I come to praise or to bury it? But can you imagine writing *Henry V* today, and tell Kings they are naked, that they need us to wrap them up in epic, in poetic ceremony? They want none of our tongue.

Chapman. Well, my Virginian baboons made a point or two, I trust, even if no one heard a word they said. Which may be why Sir George had no complaints.

Shakespeare. Buck is no worse than Tilney, only more anxious to do well. It's not his fault, really. He's so terribly afraid to miss the least hint of seditious talk. He made no difficulty when we requested a license for *The Winter's Tale*. In fact we had quite an interesting conversation at the time about Richard III: Buck's ancestor actually fought at Bosworth, on Richard's side. My play is pure slander, he tells me, but he found it most enjoyable, and so provocative

that he is planning to write one himself to set me right. So I told him in confidence I was moving on to the Tudors with a new history play I would bring him shortly, and he turned grey on the spot.

Heminges. You know you're not supposed to meddle in politics. The King is adamant, the affairs of the commonweal are too grave matters for a poet to mell in.

Shakespeare. Unless he writes the poem himself, of course. Where does politics end? You can't even laugh as a Scotsman these days, we'll have to invent Belgian jokes soon!

Chapman. He liked your *Macbeth*, didn't he?

Shakespeare. If you can call it like. I had to lay it on with a trowel to please him, three witches, nine kings, old castles... He paid us handsomely for each of his ancestors, I must say. Remember how you fared when the French Ambassador took exception to your *Byron*.

Chapman. Well, avoid mentioning Spain or Spaniards, that's all, you should be all right.

Shakespeare. Precisely. But I mean to mention them, and a good deal besides. George Buck won't like Hermione or Perdita so much when he sees poor old Katherine of Aragon and her daughter cruelly undone.

Chapman. Christ! the repudiated wife, the “bastard” sent to a desert place away from her father’s eyes! I never spotted the parallel!

Shakespeare. You were not meant to as yet, but you will when the two plays are performed in succession, as they will this blessed week. The Lady Chapel was my first source, the irony of it! To think Elizabeth must lie through eternity with Mary Queen of Scots, and share her own tomb with Mary Tudor, the two women she most disliked in her lifetime! Poor Bloody Mary is kept well out of sight, just as I keep her off stage in my new play, but everyone knows she’s engraved there below her sister.

Purcell’s Funeral March again, this time in the broken version of Clockwork Orange.

13. Beaumont, Tourneur, Bacon, Inigo Jones, Campion, *gossiping, backbiting, and plotting while the King’s men rehearse in a nearby room*

Bacon. Now it is confirmed, *Henry VIII* is on tonight and we gentlemen of the Inn take our turn after the glover’s son, “next week perhaps”, Buck tells me.

Beaumont. They’re rehearsing even now in the Banqueting House.

Bacon. May they all be rehearsed till they rot. Play any good?

Beaumont. Some fine punch lines, I must say. “His conscience has crept too near another lady”. Who would have thought the old boy had so much nerve in him?

Bacon. Highly impertinent, if you ask me. He’s heading fast for a fall.

Campion. The old dog’s gone too far this time, he’ll have his teeth drawn out.

Tourneur. And about time, too. Let dead poets make way for the living. Action, not words, is poetry. We want to pulverise, mesmerize the audiences' sensibilities in a vortex of higher forces.

Beaumont. Somebody turn him off, please. We want to mesmerize their purses, that’s all.

Tourneur. No it’s not. I want them to squirm and writhe in an agony of experience. Be partakers in the murder. Hold the knife

Campion. And I want them up and cheering, crying for more. I want them to love me.

Tourneur. All he needs is love, all he needs is love

They leave on opposite sides, singing antiphonally, as a duet

All we need is love, love, love is all we need
 Money makes the world go round, the world go
 round

Bacon, alone. These masques are but toys, to come among such serious observations. But yet, since princes will have such things, it is better they should be graced with elegancy than daubed with cost.

14. Rehearsal of the King's Men

Shakespeare and Fletcher, seated front stage at a table covered with sheets of paper, writing, blotting lines and talking in a low voice, while the actors rehearse and argue at the back, phrases from Henry VIII wafting to the front

“Show'd like a mine”, “the madams did sweat”, “their labour a painting”, “masque incomparable”, “in censure”, “heathen gods”, “fierce vanities”

Condell comes to their table, holding a sheet of paper

Condell. They would like this speech cancelled, for 'tis sure to make the ladies faint. Burbage says the whole scene needs to be mended or cut.

Shakespeare, with an exasperated sigh, crosses out the whole page and starts writing at great speed, Fletcher reading over his shoulder as he writes. The actors dress for the Coronation pageant of IV.i.

1st Gent. They that bear the cloth of honour
Are four Barons of the Cinque Ports.

2nd Gent. Aye, and all the rest are countesses.

1st Gent. Their coronets says so. These are stars indeed –

3rd Gent. And sometimes falling ones.

2nd Gent. No more of that.

Burbage turns round to the authors' table.

Burbage. No more of that, indeed! This won't do at all. Will, do you want to get us hanged, every mother's son of us? "None durst wag his tongue in censure", but yours wags on regardless. You've set a scene here, in this very place, just to make the King sit up, I suppose,

"For since the Cardinal fell, that title's lost,
'Tis now the King's, and called Whitehall".

Shakespeare. All is true. King Henry VIII stole his palace from Wolsey, didn't he? that's history.

Burbage. Quite, and he loved masques, and disguise and show, just like this one, who just happens to live here.

Shakespeare. I can move the scene to Blackfriars, if you'd rather. Henry's divorce court and his Parliament actually met where we now perform. Great shows, both. How do you like it?

Burbage. Not at all. We're not doing *Hamlet*.

Fletcher. And this line: “his conscience crept too near another lady”. Of course it’s very neat, but what with the Howard divorce coming up for trial... Perhaps we should...

Burbage. At least you refrained from preaching catholicity. So tell me, do we need to bring Thomas More on stage? Even if you don’t spell it out, all Europe knows he died a martyr to Henry’s tyranny. Do you want to shame us in front of the Ambassadors?

Shakespeare. Perhaps I ought to leave out Queen Katherine, Anne Boleyn, Cromwell, Buckingham, and indeed the whole cast, except Henry and the baby Elizabeth. Of course she can’t speak yet, so it would have to be one long soliloquy of the King. Might get a little dull, but safe. Let’s try it, shall we?

Fletcher. Will, please, stop fooling, we only have four hours left.

Shakespeare. Your peacemakers won’t heal Europe without searching of the wound. James want us poets to doctor facts, does he not? Well, then, why be so scary of plain speaking about Henry VIII? It all happened eighty years ago.

Burbage. Because he is royalty, that’s why. The king never dies, not if he is any connection of our James.

Fletcher. And ordering the bishops to grant a divorce is precisely what he will do to please the Howards, even if we

couldn't know that when we got started. Too bad Prince Henry died.

Burbage. We have just enough time for a run through, and will take your corrections as we go.

15. Dress rehearsal, on a raised platform. The King's Men are working through Act I. **King James** enters noiselessly from the back, followed by **Sir George Buck**, and stands watching them unnoticed

Ostler, playing Katherine of Aragon. The subjects' grief
Comes through taxation...

Condell. "Through commissions".

Ostler. "Taxation" makes better sense.

Condell. He wrote "commissions", you say "commissions", right? And none of your lip.

Ostler. Yes, Mr Condell.

... through commissions, which compels
from each

The sixth part of his substance, to be levied
Without delay...

The actors see the King, freeze and bow. Queen Anne enters with Bacon, who is talking animatedly in her ear.

Bacon. Your Majesty knows me, I'm a perfect and peremptory royalist.

The royal party sit opposite the platform and are presented with gilded programs by Burbage. Near the platform, the three Gentlemen dressed in the costumes of the Coronation pageant prepare to perform opposite Katherine. Two step on stage, wearing bishops' mitres.

Katherine, to the Bishops. Is this your Christian counsel? Out upon ye.

Heaven is above all yet; there sits a judge
That no king can corrupt.

Queen Anne audibly gasps, and looks sideways at the King, who shows no reaction. The three Gentlemen put on angel's wings and vizards for the scene of Katherine's agony, IV.ii

Enter Shakespeare front stage, a sheet of paper in hand, his back to the royal party.

Shakespeare. This should do the trick. I can't lay it on any thicker

... And the words I utter,
Let none think flattery but truth [*brief pause and starts to read from paper*] for when
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phenix,
Her ashes new create another heir,
As great in admiration as herself
... Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,

That were the servants to our revered Queen
 Shall then be his ...

In rhythm with his words, the angels bow frantically to right and left, dividing curtsies between the dying Katherine and their royal audience.

King James stands up, shouting "Lights, lights!", throws his program at the angels, moves to front stage with large angry steps, followed by white-rabbit George Buck, and Bacon all smiles.

Buck. Cess of majesty... make amends... thrive to please you every day...

King. Enough! Shakespeare must be in his dotage. Bubble! babble! toil and trouble! You, Bacon, Beaumont, get your Gentle Men [*emphasis on Gentle*] ready at once, you're on immediately after dinner. Buck! Enough, I said, send me that Burbage home with a kick in the pants. We'll have *The Tempest* on saturday night, and no more of this nonsense, you hear me? I don't want any of them around tonight, except Ariel who shall serve drinks during the masque. Let them eat dirt in Bread Street till saturday.

Shakespeare, his paper in hand, finishes the speech in the same reverend tone as they leave

Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
 His honour and the greatness of his name
 Shall be, and make new nations. Our children's
 children
 Shall see this, and bless heaven.

Shakespeare, alone. You common cry of curs, I banish you! Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death, I would not buy their mercy at the price of one fair word. I'll burn my books, break my staff. The rest is silence.

Enter Donne, his poem still tucked in his belt

Shakespeare. Master John Donne! how did you get in here so early?

Donne. With a show of muscles. John Davenant's nephew delivers wine to the palace every day, so I help him roll the barrels in, and hang on behind to hear the play. I love the theatre. Watched your friends rehearse *Henry VIII* with immense interest. I thought it a remarkable companion piece to your *Winter's Tale*, but far less moving, and sadly inferior in verse, architecture, or subject-matter, though I don't suppose you care for my opinion.

Shakespeare. O but I do care, and stand in great awe of your satiric bite. Did you ever think of writing for the stage?

Donne. Forgive me, I got carried away. Of course, you could not make poor wrinkled Katherine return to life like Hermione, nor fat Harry grow into a penitent. "The King's Great Matter!" Great indeed! Divorce at home and abroad. Persecution. End of the great European family. What on earth made you think it a fit subject for nuptials? Why Henry VIII of all our blessed kings? Not an attractive hero, by any standards.

Shakespeare. He adored masques, played the lead in a romantic love affair, passed the first English law condemning treason by words, and with this law sent Thomas More to the block. What more do you want?

Donne. Are you a crypto-Catholic by any chance? One of those heretics you speak for, those that don't make the fires?

Shakespeare. They are Paulina's words, not mine, and you know she is a fearless termagant. There are more things heard in a theatre than are dreamt on in your philosophy, Master Donne. Which is why I felt we needed the stage so vitally.

Donne. It seemed more vital when you wrote *Lear*. When will you give us a vital masque?

Shakespeare. I couldn't do it for a King's ransom.

Donne. Ben Jonson does, though.

Shakespeare. He thinks he does, and uses dancing bawds and catamites to preach moral rectitude. A rather twisted but clever form of flattery: like our Ben, the King loves to toast virtue with a drink. But the court is not the best place for sermons or lectures. You can't please the eye with a show and denounce the enjoyment of it in the same sentence. My *Henry VIII* has just taught me that much.

Donne. It is a noble duty to serve the State, especially when armies retire before ambassadors. Isn't it wonderful that a

King, born and bred in a warlike nation should yet have the blessed spirit of peace in him? “No torrent of blood”: I would as willingly preach His Majesty’s creed abroad, as I would our new Authorized Version. You of all men must subscribe to the new policy. Play after play, you spoke for tolerance, peace, and the quality of mercy.

Shakespeare. “Blessed are the peacemakers” means he hates trouble of any kind. It was his proclaimed will to reconcile us all that lured me into abject submission. I even accepted a mute part in the show offered to the Constable of Castile, nine years ago, all for peace sake. We were never called on to perform or even attend the Peace Conference, just stand in the background to colour the device. And no caviare wasted on us general! our salary was set to be no higher the guards’.

Donne. Princes do but play us. All honour’s mimic; all wealth alchemy.

Shakespeare. Yet you want to be part of the act.

Donne. I would fain do something, but cannot tell what. To be no part of any body, is to be nothing. The greatest persons are but as moles for ornament, except they be so incorporated into the body of the world.

Shakespeare. And be the very button on Fortune’s cap. What is this scroll you hold so tenderly to your waist? An *Epithalamion* , well, well!

[*Reads*] “Up then fair phoenix Bride, frustrate the sun,
 Thyself from thine affection
 Takest warmth enough...

Donne. Wonderful coincidence, don't you think, that we both hit on the phoenix.

Shakespeare. Every poet in town is aiming to kill that same bird with the one stone, this week.

Up, up, faire Bride, and call,
 Thy stars, from out their severall boxes, take
 Thy rubies, pearls, and diamonds forth, and
 make
 Thyself a constellation...”

Nice jewellery!

Donne. One must eat, you know. The King is reputed a lover of poets, and a generous one at that. We are so filthily poor! I've reached the point where either he or the Church must support us!

Shakespeare. Then you must present your song to the Princess, and be invited to the King's dinner. This charming little piece should make you welcome at his table. It's suitably domestic.

Donne. You don't think the end too saucy, then?

Shake “Others near you shall whispering speak,
 And wagers lay, at which side day will break,
 And win by observing, then, whose hand it is
 That opens first a curtain, hers or his...”

Your “Flea” was far more provocative. The Church might frown, of course, but I see nothing here the Princess will object to. Her father was sitting by their bed this morning and had to be kept from drawing the curtains himself.

Donne. Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows and through curtains call on
us?

Shakespeare. Be ready to have him thus open all your soul’s curtains if you stay here. This is my last day in court.

Donne. Is it a decision you are free to make? How can you refuse the King’s invitation if he wants to hear your next play?

Shakespeare. There won’t be a next play. If he wants masques, he’ll find plenty of masquers willing enough to oblige.

Donne. Do you plan to go home, Mr Shakespeare?

Shakespeare. Warwickshire, you mean? yes, next summer, as usual. London is my home, and that little gate-house by Blackfriars.

Donne. You will be free to return to poetry.

Shakespeare. I do not know what ‘poetical’ means. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

Donne. “*What is truth?*” said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.” Why did you give up writing poems? You could again, couldn’t you?

Shakespeare. No. To raise your poem above the world, you must silence every other voice fighting yours from within, stifle every self-doubt, -remorse or -criticism. It is too late for poetic kingship, for me anyway, too many voices have taken possession of my hollow crown, and shared my fragmented thoughts between them.

Donne. “What is your substance, wherof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you
tend?”

Shakespeare. No man is an island, entire of itself. I can’t write elogues in proud loneliness. I must leave Colin Clout to the worthy Spenser.

Donne. I would have thought it a relief, after feeding actors lines and playing sycophant so many years.

Shakespeare. The King did expect me to play nymph Echo to his Narcissus. He wants a poet, all poets, for a mouthpiece, but I am not any man’s voice, no more mine than his. I am not I. I contain multitudes. They lived up to my illusions, when I thought I could offer them a stage world to inhabit, brighter and truer than the one outside they call real.

Donne. Back to the Globe, then?

Shakespeare. 'Tis rumorous as the sea, yet an empty shell now. You will have to find a new gathering place, and new words people might care to hear.

Enter Burbage and the King's Men

Burbage. Our kind friend the Earl of Pembroke did his best but could not rescue us. It is now official: *Henry VIII* is to be replaced by “better entertainment” – His Majesty’s very words, Sir George Buck informed me. In plain parlance, Bacon wins. The Gentlemen are in and we’re out. Will, believe me, I resent this as much as you do. We’ll do the play at the Globe I swear, with no emendations, and no later than next June. But you must take your place on stage saturday, we all want you with us. Let’s to the Mermaid, gentlemen. Drinks are on me.

Shakespeare turns back on their way out.

Shakespeare. What is it to be, Master Donne? Court or City? Flesh or the soul?

*Donne remains lost in thought. Inigo Jones makes a noisy entrance with **Campion** and a court of **attendants**, to the tune of “That’s entertainment”*

Donne. “Oh, to make Boardes to speake! There is a taske
Painting & Carpentrie are the Soule of Masque”.

He leaves, while Inigo’s men busy themselves.

Jones. Hurry now, we must have the sets up by six, before they come in to dinner. Tom? where's Champion hiding? Ah! Tom, I need a love song for the second interlude. Big Ben could do it in half an hour, I'm sure you won't need that long to pen something quaint. Lady's fair brow, heavenly kiss, what you will but make it snappy. Hey, you over there, mind that beam or you'll have all my pretty lamps smashed, you clumsy oaf.

Campion's own brow looks thunderous as he draws a batch of papers from his schoolboy's bag, chooses one, crosses a few words, and delivers his poem within minutes, during which Inigo Jones throws his weight about.

16. Shakespeare, Princess Elizabeth, and her Page

The Princess enters, holding Donne's and several similar rolls of paper, followed by a page who carries a pile of Quarto volumes.

Princess. I was never so berhymed since Pythagoras' time, which I can hardly remember! It gave me great pleasure to see good Queen Hermione revived, Mr Shakespeare. Your man Heminges has given me copies of your plays, and offered to send more to Heidelberg as they come from the printer's. They will be harboured in the Palatine Library. I want all Rhineland to know and enjoy them as I do.

Shakespeare. You take away all true Englishmen's hearts with them, your Highness, and our sincerest vows for your happiness.

Princess. We're leaving in April under Lord Harington's escort, stopping on our way at the Hague, Maastricht, and Worms. My father says Frederick and I must be emblems of Goodwill, Amity, Benevolence for all Europe to emulate. It will be a brave new world in deed when countries become fast friends, and Monarchs love each other as well as we do.

Exit Princess Elizabeth, followed by Shakespeare's pensive gaze.

Shakespeare. Lady, no court in Europe is too good for thee. Farewell, my Bohemian Queen, may prosperous spring crown your sad winter's tale.

17. Music, "Pump and Circumstance". Last show. King's Men with Shakespeare, facing royal audience.

*End of The Tempest, rowdy applause, actors bow.
Shakespeare, wearing Prospero's magic cloak, moves to front stage*

Shakespeare. Our revels now are ended,
And what strength I have's my own,

Which is most faint.
 As you from crimes would pardoned be,
 Let your indulgence set me free.

Epilogue

News flash, huge fire shown on a large television screen.

Speaker. Good evening, and welcome to BBC news, 29 June 1613.

The Globe burnt down to ashes today, during a performance of *Henry VIII*, William Shakespeare's new play, by the King's Players. The cause of the fire was the peal of ordnance discharged to salute the King's arrival at Wolsey's Banquet. Some of the paper came to light on the thatch, where it kindled inwardly and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very ground.

We have our correspondent Mr Peaseblossom Thatcher, speaking from the site. Now tell us, Blossom, what is the situation at your end?

Voice off. Hi, Sarah, the situation here is total havoc. The Globe went down in flames. What was left of the building has been ground to dust in the panick

Out ran the knights, out ran the lords,
 And there was great ado,
 Some lost their hats, and some their swords,
 Then out ran Burbage too.

I'll see if I can catch up with him and get a few words.
That's all for now.

Speaker. Thanks Bloss, call us when you have fresh news.
That was Peaseblossom Thatcher, Globe site. For full
coverage, stay with us, here on BBC news.

The Poet Benjamin Jonson expressed deep emotion
at this event which he feels will be a great loss to all true
Englishmen, quote "Tis all in pieces. All coherence gone.
The shadow of the king's power has destroyed the shadow
of the poet's power." Unquote.

An official announcement is expected soon from 10,
Downing Street. The newly appointed Prime Minister has
set up a special Arts Commission, and will personally
contribute £5 to rebuilding costs. Private gifts to be sent to
Globe Theatre Trust, care of John Heminges.

The Government's initiative raised angry protests in
the City, where many thank God for purging the air and
vow they will, quote "fight any attempt to rebuild a place
of debauchery". Confronted with these hostile reactions,
the PM declared that art and culture are central to our
sense of community, identity and civic pride: The new Arts
Commission is to be, quote "a National Trust for talent".
The Globe is dead. Long live the Globe.

*Shot of a phoenix . Cut to Stratford, Birthday toast by
crowned heads and diplomats to "Eternal life of
Shakespeare".*

Mix of distant voices

“The cloud capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces... the great globe itself... shall dissolve”

*On screen, a sweeping shot of the crowd watching the flames focuses on **John Donne** who stands in the elegant costume of the Newbattle Abbey portrait, holding the hand of a four-year old boy in Puritan dress.*

The child opens Milton’s “Areopagitica” and turns the pages, silently mouthing the words as a thunderous voice off reads the following extracts

A forbidden writing is a certain spark of truth that flies in the faces of them who seek to tread it out

Flames rise higher on the screen as the child reads the epigraph, a quotation from Euripides’ Suppliants, then closes the book:

This is true liberty when free-born men
Having to advise the public may speak free...

*A **Londoner** in modern bowler hat and suit. Who wrote that? Shakespeare?*

Donne. As I believe, so understand.

THE END

The characters owe much of their thoughts and lines to Shakespeare's plays and to

- Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (1938)
 Francis Bacon, *Essays* (1601). *The Advancement of Learning* (1605)
 Richard Baker, *Chronicles* (1643)
 Francis Beaumont, *The Masque of Grayes Inne and the Inner-Temple* (1613)
 Beaumont and Fletcher, *Philaster, or Love Lies a-Bleeding* (1609)
 Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (1961)
 John Bull, *The Masque of truth* (1612)
 Anthony Burgess, *Shakespeare* (1970)
 Thomas Campion, *The Lords' Masque* (1613)
 Thomas Carlyle, *Historical sketches of notable persons and events in the reigns of James I and Charles I* (1899)
 John Chamberlain, *Letters* (1597-1626)
 E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923)
 George Chapman, *De Guiana* (1599). *The Masque of the Middle Temple and Lyncolnes Inn* (1613)
 Chapman, Jonson and Marston, *Eastward Ho!* (1605)
 Samuel T. Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare* (1818)
 Charles Cornwallis, *An Account of the Baptism, Life, Death and Funeral of of the most incomparable Prince, Frederik Henry, Prince of Wales* (1613)
 Thomas L. Donaldson, *On the Present Condition of the Royal Tombs in Westminster Abbey, around the shrine of Edward the Confessor* (1852)

- John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610). *An Epithalamion, or Marriage Song on the Lady Elizabeth* (1613). *Songs and Sonnets* (1633). *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651)
- John Dryden, *Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found Too Late* (1679)
- T. S. Eliot, *Four Elizabethan Dramatists* (1924). “Whispers of Immortality” in *Selected Poems* (1934)
- Elizabeth Stuart, “Verses by the Princess Elizabeth, given to Lord Harington, of Exton, her preceptor”. *Nugae Antiquae* (1804)
- Euripides, *The Suppliants* (c. 423 BC)
- Richard Flecknoe, *Short Discourse of the English Stage* (1664)
- Christopher Frye, *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1946)
- Fulke Greville, *Eliza Regina. Life of Sir Philip Sidney* (1612). *Remains of Sir Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, being poems of Monarchy and Religion, never before printed* (1670)
- Thomas Harriot, *A Brief and True Report of New Found Land of Virginia* (1588)
- Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1605-6)
- T.B. Howell, ed., *Complete Collection of State Trials*, II (1816)
- James I, *Basilikon Doron* (1566). *Ane Schort Treatise conteining some Reulis and Cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie* (1584). *His Maiesties Poeticall Exercises at Vacant Houres* (1591)
- Samuel Johnson, *Preface and Notes to the Edition of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1765)
- Ben Jonson, *Masque of Blackness. Volpone*. “Expostulation with Inigo Jones” (1631). *Jonson’s Conversations with Drummond* (1842)
- Laurence Keymis, *A Relation of the Second Voyage to Guiana* (1596)

- Charles Lamb, *Specimens of an English Dramatic Poetry* (1808)
- John Manningham, *Diary of John Manningham, of the Middle Temple* (1602-3)
- Thomas Middleton, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611)
- John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644)
- John Nicholls, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First* (1828)
- Anthony Nixon, *Elizæes Memoriall. King Iames His Ariuall, and Rowmes Downefall* (1603)
- Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana, with a Relation of the Great and Golden Citie of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado)* (1595). *A Politique Discourse about the happiest marriage to Prince Henry* (1611). "What is our life?" (c.1612). *History of the World* (1614)
- Records of the Revels Office* (1610-13)
- "R.S. of the Inner Temple, Gentleman", *The Phoenix Nest* (1593)
- Isaak Walton, *Life of Dr John Donne* (1640)
- John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613).