

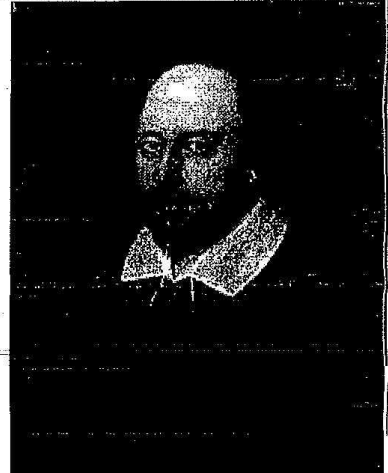
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# SHAKESPEARE CLEARED OF ALL CHARGES



• **CLEARED:** The Chandos portrait, believed to depict William Shakespeare

## Shakespeare found innocent of contravention of censorship

**YESTERDAY** William Shakespeare, celebrated playwright and poet, was cleared of all charges in The Old Bailey after a week's trial.

Shakespeare, born 1564, pleaded not guilty to counts of contravention of censorship laws after writing *Henry V*, a politically suggestive play.

Allegedly, Shakespeare's characters in *Henry V* were based on political leaders. In the play, Shakespeare highlights the immorality of war.

Adam Hamilton, prosecuting, said: "the defendant blatantly based his production on the contemporary Irish war. Throughout the performance he insinuated that the war was immoral.

"His play should be censored, with parts like 'I have made an offer to his majesty...which I have opened...as touching France' (Ii, 75) which clearly suggests corruption. Suggestions of this kind were illegal.

"He also based several characters on political figures of that period, for example Henry was based partly on Queen Elizabeth and on Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex."

"This is obvious when the chorus mentions 'as...were now the General of our gracious Empress', a direct comparison of Henry and Devereux." (V:chorus, 30)

The first witness for the prosecution was John Thompson, a peasant who was in the first audience of the play:

"I knew immediately that the play meant that the Irish war was wrong. It was obvious that the French war represented it, and he [Shakespeare] made it

obvious that it was immoral. He meant against the monarch. He meant that Elizabeth was a bad queen."

Gina Simpson saw the 1989 film adaptation, by Kenneth Branagh. "In the film, Henry made lots of immoral decisions. He waged war for poor reasons."

"I also noticed his similarity to Devereux. He had a similar attitude to war as Henry in the play. However I feel he didn't necessarily do wrong, he used the context to make his play more relevant."

However, Judge Cowling decided to acquit Shakespeare because at the present time it is not illegal to present such opinions in plays.

"Although what he did was wrong, it would be counter-productive and wrong to sentence a man by a principle which is no longer applied by society: The Divine Right of Kings."

"Society no longer sees the monarch as God's representative on Earth, thus the audience of today has no problem with false representation and allegations

against the monarch."

Tim Daniels, defence barrister, said: "There is no case against Shakespeare. He showed English prosperity: we won the war. How could anyone suggest he was being anti-nationalistic?"

Colonel George Tyler saw Laurence Olivier's film adaptation when it was shown to his regiment in 1944. He described the film as "completely patriotic" and "can't understand why Shakespeare is being treated this way. "'Tis wonderful!" (IV:viii, 111) shows the patriotism in the play.

"*Henry V* won us the war: after it was shown to my company, there was a roar of enthusiasm. Without it, we would not have been motivated to beat Germany."

Daniels later released the following statement: "Shakespeare wrote the play with the least possible suggestion of the immorality of the Irish war. Having greatly contributed to England's culture, the jury decided to free him."

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