



William Shakespeare, the Wars of the Roses and the Historians

Keith Dockray

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For historians of the Wars of the Roses William Shakespeare is both a curse and a blessing: a curse because he immortalized Tudor spin on fifteenth-century civil wars that helped justify Elizabeth I's occupation of the English throne; a blessing because, without Shakespeare's 8-play Plantagenet history cycle, hardly anyone beyond specialists in the history of the period would know of their existence. Moreover, no mere historian will ever paint a more compelling and dramatic picture of England's Lancastrian and Yorkist kings, and the Wars of the Roses, than William Shakespeare. The book begins with an examination of the context, content and significance of each of the plays from Richard 2nd to Richard 3rd, and then considers the contemporary, near-contemporary and Tudor sources on which Shakespeare drew; how such authors chose to present 15th Century kings, politics and society; and in what ways historians since Shakespeare have sought to reinterpret the Wars of the Roses era. The book ends with a retrospective assessment of Shakespeare's Plantagenet plays, both in performance and as a result of their impact on historical writing. The Plays: Richard II, Henry IV Parts 1 and 2, Henry V, Henry VI Parts I, 2 and 3 and Richard III.

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