

FACT FICTION AND FACTION

A Study of *Richard II* in the light of the Historical
Sources and Conflicting Attitudes Toward
Man and his Role in the
Historical Process.

By

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ABSTRACT

A narrative description of an historical event reflects the nature of such an event as seen from a particular perspective. However, Shakespeare's History Plays equate history and drama by re-presenting the drama implicit in events that are surrounded by speculation and interpretation. The audience is thereby placed in the position of having to interpret the drama that purports to be both "dramatic" and "historical" or accept the impossibility of understanding history. Confronted with a re-presentation of a past event, the audience is thrown back upon its own attitudes towards man in the world: the drama merely reflects human nature as the observer experiences and articulates his view of the historical drama. Confounded by what I term the "tragic perspective"--a perspective that the audience is encouraged to experience--the audience's prejudices are purged, momentarily. Finally, the tragic perspective encourages the audience to adopt a paradoxical view of man in the world; despite the seemingly incontrovertible evidence that history affords as proof of the essentially "bad" nature of man, we are asked to adopt an essentially creative view that assumes that man is indeed made in the image of his Creator and basically "good". The drama draws upon a deeply rooted hope that man is at least redeemable. Shakespeare reveals the paradoxical consequences of assuming that

man is fundamentally "bad" by showing the human suffering that results from assuming the worst. The audience is, of course, free to choose; but our views of the past and the present to a large extent determine the future. This realization is characteristic of the tragic hero's retrospective wisdom--a wisdom that is attained too late. By examining *Richard II* in the light of the historical sources, I hope to reveal how the audience is left in an ambiguous state when it comes to interpreting the motives of the characters that are both fictional and historical. The Machiavellian attitude toward man, which governs *Richard III* and is tempered in *Richard II*, is often brought to bear on the drama when critics attempt to judge the motives of the main characters. In writing History Plays, Shakespeare is recreating ambiguity in the broadest sense. Mystery, as opposed to definitive history, is perhaps the true subject and conclusion of the drama.

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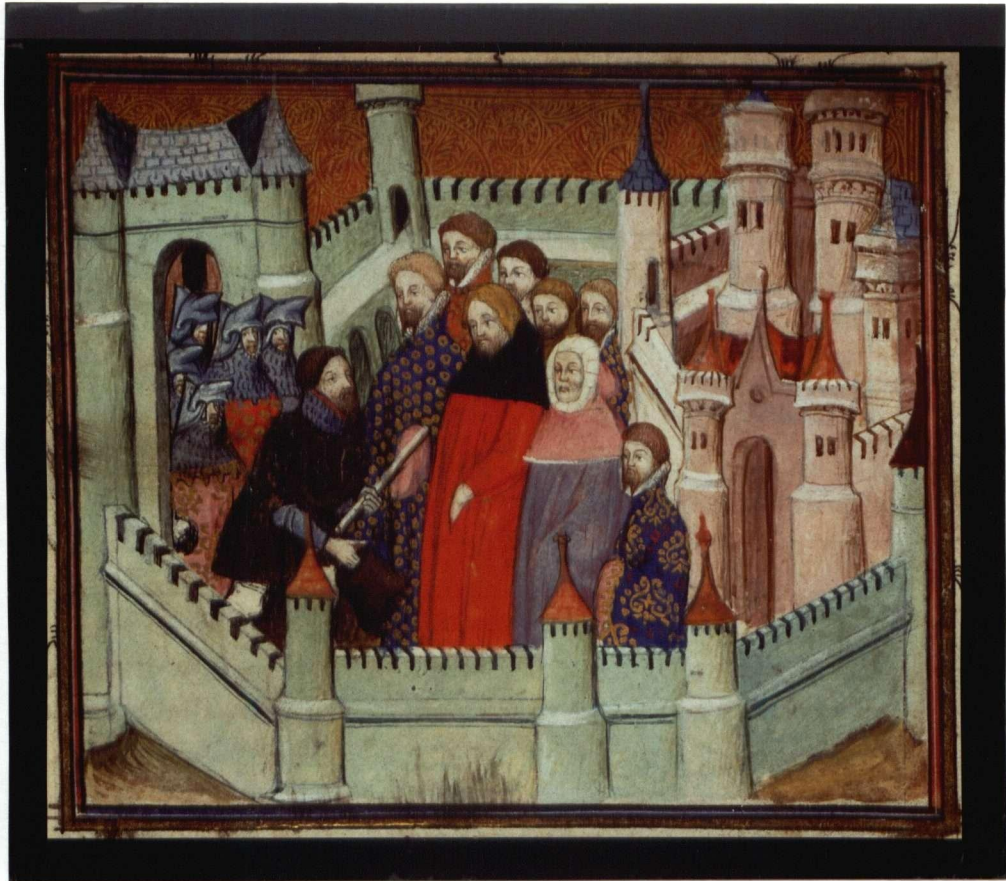
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"Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee
To make the base earth proud with kissing it.
Me rather had my heart miught feel your love,
Than my displeased eye see your courtesy."



Bolingbroke kneeling before King Richard at Flint Castle

Taken from Jean Creton's *Histoire*, and
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INTRODUCTION

... let this world no longer be a stage
To feed contention in a ling'ring act;
2 *Henry IV* I.i.155-56.

In recording historical events, the historian must select and compress the information concerning those events in order to highlight not only the major historical developments but also possible interpretations of those events within a larger frame of reference. The documentation of an event is an acknowledgement of its significance, at least in the eyes of the recorder, and the inclusion of that documented event within a narrative description of a series of events is further testament to its significance in a wider historical context. But the inclusion of an event in a narrative description of history involves an implicit interpretation of the historical process and man's role in that process.

The theatre of historical conflicts, with its characters, situations, plots and sub-plots, is interpreted by the historian in his narrative description as opposed to simply re-presented. He may select material in order to impose an order that reflects his own view of either the historical process or man's role in the shaping of the historical process, thereby extracting evidence to support a particular thesis; however, he may simply

present the drama in an attempt to define and articulate the essential nature of a particular conflict. In translating the narrative descriptions of history into dramatic action, the materials under consideration undergo a further process of selection and compression in order to turn "th' accomplishment of many years Into an hour-glass".¹ Shakespeare's "History Plays", which involve a combination of "faithfully" re-presented historical facts, facts which may be corroborated by referring to various sources, and additional theatrical fictions, which in contrast diverge significantly from the sources, reflect two very different Elizabethan attitudes towards both the historical process and man's role in that process.

The lives of King Richard II and King Richard III provide the historical frame that encompasses an era of English history that Shakespeare adapted to the limitations of his stage; just as *Richard II* and *Richard III* provide the theatrical frame that encompasses Shakespeare's two tetralogies, their lives and these two plays may be either viewed as the result and manifestation of patterns of vengeance and retribution based upon and prompted by the principles of Machiavellian *Realpolitik* or as the inconclusive result and partial manifestation of a Providential pattern that is continually evolving with time as the progressive revelation of the Word of God is effected. Although *Richard III* precedes *Richard II* in Shakespeare's chronology, the deposition of King Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke is the logical starting point for the exploration of the disintegration of the commonwealth that culminated in the deposition of the

"Machiavellian" King Richard III by the Earl of Richmond. In order to re-present the historical drama on the stage in such a way as to accommodate these two opposing views, or attitudes, towards man and his role in the historical process, Shakespeare must manipulate his sources.

Shakespeare's selection of information from the sources reflects his own particular hierarchy of significance, but when he radically diverges from the sources the drama becomes purely fictional. These moments when the action presented on the stage is significantly different from the narrative descriptions as they appear in the sources may be regarded as broadly interpretative of the action as a whole; similarly, the moments when the action presented on the stage closely resembles the historical evidence, in terms of character portrayal, words spoken, and "deeds performed", may be regarded as the central historical moments that demand interpretation--these are the moments when fiction and fact, drama and history, and intention and action become conceptually inseparable.

Just as the historian is engaged in a retrospective view of historical events, likewise the "present" audience at one of Shakespeare's "History Plays" is engaged in a retrospective view of historical events that are re-presented on the stage; the reader, however, who is permitted the retrospective analysis of the plays themselves in the light of the historical sources may discern Shakespeare's role as historian, as a "playwright-

historian", through the observation of his "act" of selection, organization, and re-presentation of historical events.

If the History Play may be seen as the re-presentation of an historical action as opposed to the interpretation of historical events, and if its objective is the marriage of intention and action, then by glimpsing Shakespeare's role as a playwright-historian through an analysis of his "act" of selection, organization, and re-presentation one may infer Shakespeare's intention. However, this approach to the interpretation of intention through the analysis of action may only be accomplished in retrospect. The History Play itself merely confronts the audience with the presentation of present actions that demand interpretation; but the interpretation of the present continually confronts man with the inadequacy of his vision, for he is denied a retrospective analysis of his own actions until they are complete. Although man must act within a historical frame that he may not be fully aware of, the audience is thereby confronted with an essentially tragic view of man's life: the thoughts, words, and deeds of a lifetime define an individual, and that definition can only be completed in death. The words and deeds of a historical figure define his character in the eyes of his public, just as the words and deeds of an actor on the stage define his character in the eyes of his audience; and yet this tragic view of man's life, this tragic perspective, in which man is nevertheless responsible for the actions that he may only be partially aware of, I would argue is the only objective view of man bound upon the wheel of history.

The actor on the stage and the King upon his throne are both torn between two worlds: the past and the future, and the present that lies between these two worlds may be either regarded as governed by a predetermined script or subject to governance by man himself. What is certain, however, is that man must act and suffer for his actions within an ultimately incomprehensible world. And yet if it were possible to "read the book of fate" and retrospectively analyze a life before it were lived, then

The happiest youth, viewing his progress through
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.²

While this cynical view of man in the world may find ample support and evidence to suggest the futility of man's life, in the light of such a tragic perspective there emerges a sort of "hopeless optimism" that is in fact born of this very destructive skepticism with regard to man and his role in the historical process. It is this essential conflict between two diametrically opposed views of man in the historical process that finds its analogue in the conflict of character in action on the stage that merely holds a mirror up to nature, an action that is itself subsumed by the historical process that encompasses it while purporting to re-present history itself as the subject matter; and this conflict that is so apparent to the audience that perceives the dramatic irony that hangs over the action in Shakespeare's History Plays is further generated and revealed in the audience's interpretations of the stage action.

The audience and its attitudes towards man and his role in the historical process therefore becomes the true subject of the

drama: he who would interpret history as a vast corroboration of a particular thesis distorts the facts to present his own particular fiction, which is in turn based upon principles that make certain assumptions about the nature of man in the world; he who would merely reflect dramatic action, whether it be "real" or "fictional", like the dramatist, sees faction itself as the reality. To define this word "faction" is perhaps analogous to beheading "the many-headed Hydra", but the dramatist seems to accept and accommodate for the notion of a sort of universal conflict in all things, and Shakespeare seems to see the world itself as some vast and universal theatre of human conflict: which, in a word, I call "faction".

While the audience is actually observing the drama, it is engaged in the act of interpreting, and in interpreting the action each member of the audience does so according to certain principles that determine what will become his description of the action. And the way in which one interprets an action is inextricably bound to one's emotional response to it. In tragedy the audience vicariously experiences an understanding of human action that at the same time confounds understanding. In Shakespeare's History Plays, the audience helplessly observes characters that come to retrospective understandings of their situations when it is too late to effect any change. The audience, by observing the actions of historical figures literally on the scaffold, experiences the "alembication", to use one of Kenneth Burke's terms, of an attitude. The purified

distillate of an attitude that informs the interpretation of the action is, as Yeats would say, "wrought to crisis."³

THE ROLE OF THE HISTORIAN

This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

As You Like It II.vii.137-39.

History is a skilled dramatist, with
dramatic irony as the main feature of
the plot.

Kenneth Burke.

The historian is engaged in what E.H. Carr calls "a process of selection in terms of historical significance"¹ that culminates in what W.H. Walsh calls "a significant record."² History is comprised of many such records, but the events themselves are lost to time. Just as a pebble sinks beneath the surface to leave the tell-tale ripples of its momentary presence, so too the acts of men are surrounded by interpretations and explanations that record their acts, the true nature of which are lost to time in the waters of oblivion. The pebble falls and sets up waves of repercussions; the historian, by observing those waves, may attempt to imaginatively reconstruct the original event, but such a reconstruction can at best be merely a distorted reflection of the reality and cannot be empirically verified because the event itself is lost to time. Even this view of the historian's role in reconstructing past events is extremely simplistic because isolated acts do not in reality occur, as all acts are interrelated to greater and lesser degrees.

Ultimately, the events that the historian deals with must be reconstructed in his imagination from the peripheral evidence that he may draw upon, and from the available evidence he tries to establish a narrative of the drama, from his perspective, with a corresponding "hierarchy of significance." However, the evidence that he must draw upon, the "facts and documents ... essential to the historian that do not by themselves constitute history,"³ is merely a collation of various perspectives with regard to a particular event or series of events. Because the description and explanation of a situation is inextricable from the author's perspective, the evidence available to the historian is comprised of selective aspects of an event, or series of events, that have been filtered through a selection of authorial perspectives. And as the problems inherent in judging past actions are connected with the problems inherent in judging the present, the reader of history as opposed to the writer of history is ultimately confronted with the subjectivity of judgments made by past historians, historians of the past, and those who attempt to prognosticate future developments based on present attitudes towards man and his role in the historical process.

To observe an event as it happens and then describe the event afterwards, whether that event is the phrase I have just written in a sentence that I am in the process of writing, or the deposition of King Richard II and its significance within the historical process, is to be engaged in a "process of selection" not unlike that of the historian. Implicit in such a process

is what Kenneth Burke terms the "sub-stance" of the perceiver, and it is this "sub-stance", with its corresponding principles, that governs the process of selection. The very observation of an event is selective; that selection is revealed in the articulation of a subjective point of view; and therefore the articulation of an event is interpretative in that it colours the original event. Thus, the interpretation of an event is reflected in its articulation, whether it is poetic, narrative, or dramatic in its form, and reveals a set of values that cannot be divorced from the "character" of the observer. In describing and interpreting an event, the observer reveals a point of view that, at the same time, reveals the nature of a particular event as seen from such a perspective. The description of an event must, to a certain extent, be a distortion of it, while revealing its nature as seen from a particular "stance".

However, despite the skeptical view of history that this argument implies, we may, as Carr hopes, learn from the experience such a study affords. We may hope to learn about the present in the light of the past and learn about the past in the light of the present:

The function of history is to promote a profounder understanding of both past and present through the interrelation between them.⁴

Thus, the observation and judgment that find completion in a sentence, in the thought made complete, are intrinsically part of the character of the observer, and it is therefore possible to learn from an objective view of the historical process that takes

into account the multiplicity of perspectives that surround an event.

Consequently, if the chronicle is a valuable and yet an unreliable source of evidence because the chronicler is prone to judgmental distortions that the observer is subject to, then the historian who would objectively observe an historical event will strive towards an imaginative reconstruction of the historical drama. In his *Philosophy of History*, Walsh states that

the historical ideal is always to get away from the stage of chronicle and attain that of history itself. What every historian seeks for is not a bare recital of unconnected facts, but a smooth narrative in which every event falls as it were into its natural place and belongs to an intelligible whole. In this respect, the ideal of the historian is in principle identical with that of the novelist or dramatist.⁶

This of course presupposes that historical events can be rationally understood as part of an "intelligible whole". But Walsh goes on to say that history is "properly concerned with human thoughts and experiences" and that "because of this, historical understanding is of a unique and immediate character."⁶

The chronicler's narrative description and the dramatist's imaginative reconstruction of the past are both selective and interpretative and also reveal the authorial point of view and the implicit set of values associated with such a view. As Carr says, "interpretation in history is ... always bound up with value judgments, and causality is bound up with interpretation."⁷

Thus, any approach to a historical figure, event, or series of events is inextricably connected with the observer's set of values; and when the historian is engaged in ascertaining personal or political motives and reasons for certain acts, he is engaged in interpretations that are subject to assumptions about human nature and the historical process that are ultimately unverifiable when they are made explicit. As Carr states,

the historian needs to penetrate into forms of human behaviour in which the will is active, to ascertain why the human beings who are the object of his study willed to act as they did. This sets up a relation ... between the observer and what is observed. The point of view of the historian enters irrevocably into every observation which he makes; history is shot through and through with relativity.⁹

Although the historian may succumb to the tendency to pass moral judgments upon the *dramatis personae* in the historical drama, just as the audience may in observing a dramatic event, Carr argues that the historian's judgmental faculties should be brought to bear on the "more profitable question of the passing of moral judgments not on individuals, but on events, institutions, or policies of the past."¹⁰ Walsh goes even further to suggest that because

every historian looks at the past from a certain point of view, historical disputes are at bottom concerned not with what is true or false, but with what is and what is not desirable and fundamental historical judgments are in consequence not strictly cognitive but "emotive".¹¹

The tendency is thus away from a purely rational understanding of history towards an emotional response that is subjectively experienced. The articulation of what the historian comprehends is ultimately a distortion of a truth that may only be

imaginatively apprehended. Not only is the nature of history itself factional in that it more often than not deals with major conflicts, but also the nature of historical interpretation is necessarily factional.

In trying to make explicit the motivating factors that the historian sees at work in a particular series of events, the historian is confronted with a further consideration--that is, if he is to attempt to be at all objective--and it is with regard to his own motivation in the act of writing about history. In interpreting history he is involved in determining motives for actions. This is a highly problematic objective, because as Burke states, in his *Permanence and Change*, a vocabulary of motivational terms is specifically designed to actually define and redefine situations according to various perspectives. He maintains that

words for motives are merely shorthand descriptions of situations. One tends to think of a duality here, to assume some kind of breach between a situation and a response. Yet the two are identical. When we wish to influence a man's response, for instance, we emphasize factors which he had understated or neglected, and minimize factors which he had laid great weight upon. This amounts to nothing other than an attempt to redefine the situation itself. In this respect, our whole vocabulary of motivation is tautological. It is not tautological if we consider it as merely an elliptical way of defining a situation. It is tautological if we consider it as though there were both situations and motives. The situation was our motive, and our word for the motive characterizes the situation.¹¹

The historian uses motivational terms to define historical

situations, and his articulation of the motives of certain individuals, institutions, or nations under certain circumstances defines and characterizes not only the situation but also the character of the historian himself and the nature of his "stance" with regard to the event, or series of events. Hence, the attitude of the historian becomes a determining factor that must be taken into consideration.

The continual redefinition of history--the motives of its historical figures and its historians--is a continual and evolutionary process: the present is continually in the process of redefining its relation to the past; but whether that evolution is ultimately regressive or progressive is uncertain. Although the historian is denied a purely objective view of the past, he may collate divergent accounts in order to reconstruct the drama at the heart of the historical evidence available to him. However, for such a reconstruction to be faithful to the original event--something that, of course, cannot be verified by any scientific observation--it must accommodate for the various possible motivations that are in fact documented in the evidence. Thus, the historian who would attempt to be objective with regard to his material must write with an acute sense of historical, or dramatic, irony. This is obviously aided by his retrospective viewpoint.

A faithful recreation and re-presentation of the original situation thereby places the onus of interpretation on the reader, or, in the case of a dramatic re-presentation of an

historical event, on the audience. The audience, in interpreting the drama is engaged in the process of interpreting both the past and the present simultaneously. The cycle is thus complete as the audience is confronted with the problems inherent in judging human action. Shakespeare's History Plays confront the audience with dramatic situations that purport to be historical on the one hand and yet are nevertheless presented within the historical process itself on the other. The audience's judgments of the present mirror the judgments made by others of the past as each judges according to his predisposition.

This fundamental paradox has a dual implication: the play itself is thereby placed within a metatheatrical frame which is the historical process and the play becomes a play within a universal drama, and while the historical content itself recedes even further into an irrecoverable and unverifiable past the audience constructs its own interpretations of the action represented on the stage in what is enigmatically called the History Play, and those interpretations reflect those of the chroniclers in the first place. Shakespeare manages to recreate history on the stage--"history" in the most ambiguous sense of the word.

By viewing the past in the guise of the present, the audience is ultimately confronted with its own prejudgments and judgments of man in the world and his role in the shaping of history, because implicit in every articulation of an event there

lies an informing ethic--that of the observer. Thus, the representation of historical characters in historical situations merely holds the mirror up to human nature, and we are left to articulate our judgments as we will. However, the image afforded by a mirror is isomeric; it is ultimately different from reality and may not be superimposed on the "original" that it purports to reflect. In this respect the History Play provides the mirror in which the audience is given the opportunity to see itself. Achilles, although failing to understand the implications of what he says, clearly articulates this idea when he says the following to Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*:

The beauty that is borne here in the face
The bearer knows not, but commends itself
To others' eyes; nor doth the eye itself,
That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,
Not going from itself; but eye to eye opposed
Salutes each other with each other's form;
For speculation turns not to itself
Till it hath travelled and is married there
Where it may see itself.¹²

THE AUDIENCE AND ITS ATTITUDES

If we be enemies to ourselves,
Whither shall we fly?

Proverb

When Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, says that the "historical spirit and the artist both want to remake the world",¹ he infers that both the historian and the artist distort reality. This recognition leads us to a careful consideration of the limits that both the historian and the artist, and by implication the audience of any event, are subject to. Any perspective with regard to the world must remain an attitude; however, attitudes held by collectives become extremely powerful forces in the shaping of the world. Burke, in *Permanence and Change*, states that "the artist ultimately appeals to an audience's attitudes, which are ultimately grounded in natural susceptibilities quite outside their role in any one specific tradition."² These natural susceptibilities may be separated into two mutually exclusive and opposing views of man in the world that find their particular expressions in different guises in different ages.

In the Renaissance the conflict between scientific observation and religious teaching and the subsequent clash of principles found expression in the writings of Machiavelli, who

merely expressed his observations with regard to man in a historical process, and the teachings of the Church, which through its ministers administered the Word of God and "commanded" faithful obedience to both secular and religious laws. The former view of man is based upon the premise that man is a political animal; the latter, that man is made in the image of his creator and that his institutions are divinely sanctioned. These two views of the world have profoundly different consequences when they are brought to bear on interpreting action.

Because neither view is ultimately verifiable in reality, each individual must, according to his belief--a belief that may be either a right belief or a mere delusion--interpret the world he perceives accordingly. The interpretation of an action is therefore an act of faith, and as all acts in the historical process have consequences I would argue that the principle is in fact the consequence because the consequence is implicit in the principle. Look at the world from a particular point of view and the world will furnish you with ample evidence to support your perspective. Because these opposing attitudes that so dominated Renaissance thought are so carefully balanced in Shakespeare's plays, and because these attitudes find expression in different ages under different guises, or different rhetorics, A.W. Schlegel could say that Shakespeare's History Plays furnish us with "examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times."³ Our present views of history may likewise be accommodated for in Shakespeare's re-presentation of

events that may appear to be far removed from contemporary situations. Although the problem of kingship is remote to us, the actions of those in search of power in the political "realm" are familiar to everyone.

In his book entitled *Attitudes Towards History*, Burke says that "in deciding why people do as they do, we get the clues that place us with relation to them. Hence a vocabulary of motives is important for the forming of both private and public relationships."⁴ This is the act of interpreting that we are all engaged in whether we are participants in a particular event, observers of that event, or a far removed audience watching an imaginative re-presentation of what has become an historical event. And the principles that inform such acts are of paramount concern to the critic who would attempt to encompass the drama within as wide a frame of reference as is possible.

The fundamental difference between Machiavellian principles and religious principles, as opposed to the "rhetoric of religion", is that the latter are concerned with universal values, while the former are concerned with essentially nationalistic "values". As Burke says, the principles of Machiavelli's

"Realpolitik" laid the foundations for the materialistic emphasis, in putting forward the cult of power as the basis of human motivation.⁵

This materialistic emphasis is by definition opposed to the transcendental, and it is this

non-transcendental theory of motives, inaugurated with Machiavelli's discourse on worldly power, [that] provided a rationalization of acts in frank accordance with criteria of material aggrandizement.⁶

Although this theory finds its most lucid advocate in Machiavelli, the principles themselves seem to be deeply rooted in the societies, institutions, and rhetorics that man establishes to impose order on the world. The implication of this thought is that man's order is supreme, but according to Machiavelli, man's history is a continual repetition of cyclical patterns that reveal the chaotic results that are in fact the consequences of such a view. Order is therefore seen to be both supreme and yet self-destructive.

Set in opposition to this view of man in the world and its consequent view of the historical process is the religious perspective based upon the paradoxical premise that man is made in the image of a God that is Good and is placed within an historical process that reveals providential patterns that reflect man's gradual evolution towards his God--an evolution that will be effected in time. The idea of progress is firmly embedded in the Christian view of man in the world. In his book entitled *Shakespeare's Eden*, B.L. Joseph states that

The doctrine of Providence asserts that when God created the world He did not withdraw His control and leave it to develop independently, but continued and continues to govern it and will do so up to its dissolution on the Day of Judgment. Providence is the way in which the divine power of control manifests itself.⁷

Thus, in such a scheme of things order is seen at the heart of the universe. What may appear to be chaotic, like political

conflicts or even the conflicts between individuals in the privacy of the home, may be seen as part of a universal "violation" of the divine order, which is of course a statement fraught with paradoxical implications. Man is a fallen creature, and it is the Fall of Man--itself prompted by the Fall of Lucifer--that is both the cause and consequence of rebellion against all order. However, the almost invisible hand of God may be perceived, it is argued, by the punctilious observer of man and his history.

Two views of man and two views of man's role in the historical process. Machiavelli would try to stamp out rebellion against the order of the state; the Church would try to accommodate for the idea of rebellion and exhort obedience. The former is prescriptive whereas the latter is proscriptive. The former would teach and propagate principles that in fact encourage factionalism, whereas the latter would teach principles that endeavour to reduce factionalism. Machiavelli sees history as nauseatingly repetitive, and the Church sees history as the progressive revelation of the Word of God to man.

Burke argues that Machiavelli's view of man is based upon a transvaluation of religious principles into the secular world, a transvaluation from universal to particular virtues, which is in effect a transference towards essentially factional principles.

The Renaissance was particularly exercised by Machiavelli because he so accurately represented the transvaluation of values involved in the rise of nationalism. A transvaluation was called for, because

religion aimed at universal virtues, whereas the virtues of nationalism would necessarily be factional, insofar as vice from the standpoint of universal religious values might readily be viewed as admirable if it helped some interests prevail over others. This twist greatly exercised Machiavelli. But though (from the universal point of view) nations confront one another as factions, from the standpoint of any one nation factionalism is conceived in a narrower sense, with nationalism itself taking over the role of the universal.⁶

According to such principles, unity is only achieved at the expense of increased factionalism, and the very idea of communion, or even communication, is thereby pre-empted. Congregation is thus achieved by segregation.

The principles of nationalism may be seen as founded upon divisive precepts: to argue for a national unity literally at the expense of another's is essentially identical in terms of motivation to the individual who would establish his virtue by means of vituperative denegration of his opponent. Such a pattern dominates the entire sweep of Shakespeare's History Plays, is particularly apparent in the Tudor view of the period of history that the plays deal with, and is unambiguously stated by King Henry IV when he says to his son,

my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels, that action thus borne out
May waste the memory of the former days.⁷

Universal values are thereby bastardized in the form of a national creed that is essentially aggressive. Shakespeare's History Plays clearly reveal a preoccupation with such factionalism, which is the stuff of drama.

Ultimately, drama is concerned with dialectic, and the dramatic form is therefore, by definition, opposed to the polemic. To be more accurate, it accommodates for the didacticism of the opposing arguments that the drama encompasses. The History Play is, by extension of the argument, opposed to the simplistic and one-sided interpretations of history that the historian is subject to. As Burke says,

In equating "dramatic" with "dialectic", we automatically have also our perspective for the analysis of history, which is a "dramatic" process, involving dialectical oppositions. And if we keep this always in mind, we are reminded that every document bequeathed us by history must be treated as a strategy for encompassing a situation.¹⁰

Edward Hall's interpretation of history; Lily B. Campbell's interpretation of Shakespeare's History Plays in the light of certain political events that were contemporaneous with the performances of the plays; and my interpretation of *Richard II* are all attempts to determine different "acts". I am approaching the act of Shakespeare as an interpreter of history in its widest possible frame, and thus the true subject of the drama is seen to be the audience's attitudes towards man himself. And because the drama is concerned with dialectic, the audience itself, and I refer to the collective as well as the individuals themselves, are confronted with

poetic meanings [that] cannot be disposed of on the true-or-false basis. Rather, they are related to one another like a set of concentric circles, of wider and wider scope. Those of wider diameter do not categorically eliminate those of narrower diameter. There is, rather, a progressive encompassment.¹¹

These are the emanations that lead us to an understanding of not

only the particular historical events but moreover of the historical process itself.

Whether the drama merely reflects values or actually engenders them is, like the chicken and the egg, uncertain, unless the conflict exists at such a depth in the human being that the conflict takes on an almost archetypal significance. But perhaps the drama reflects certain values while at the same time subtly advocating different values. As R.C. Kimberling says in his discussion of popular art,

Popular art reflects social values because it presents universal patterns of experience, patterns that the audience must recognize if it is to "understand" the work. It engenders values by presenting scenarios placing ordinary values in conflict situations, situations demanding that some hierarchy of values be established, and by stimulating audience identification with the processes of value formation.¹²

These observed "patterns of experience" are the result of certain values, and they also, to a certain extent engender similar values in others.

However, despite the self-perpetuating nature of this argument, Burke argues that the perspectives that encompass any event may be "distilled" into two opposing camps, and that the "poetic ideal would attempt to attain a full moral act by attaining a perspective atop all the conflicts of attitude."¹³ This is where the playwright-historian, who projects onto his neutral and abstract stage the characters that engage in mock-mortal combat, remains neutral because for him the battlefield

is a place that is, like Milton's Heaven and Hell, ultimately conceived and created by man; when all the battles to be fought in the external world have been fought, then the last and most tempestuous one remains within. As Burke says,

The battlefield ... which permits rival contestants to join in battle, itself "transcends" their factionalism, being "superior" to it and "neutral" to their motives, though the conditions of the terrain may happen to favor one faction. The principles of war are not themselves warlike, and are ultimately reducible to universal principles of physics and dialectic. Similarly, a poet's identification with imagery of murder or suicide, either one or the other, is, from the "neutral" point of view, merely a concern with terms for transformation in general.¹⁴

This is the point which the drama seeks to attain, and does so when the protagonist of the drama reaches that moment of retrospective wisdom. The playwright-historian, who is essentially concerned with "symbolic action", transcends the immediate concerns of his characters to see them from above, and to see the emanating "shock waves" set up by certain events.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke argues that there are three basic types of language use: "poetic language is a kind of symbolic action, of itself and in itself, ... scientific language is a preparation for action, [and] rhetorical language is inducement to action (or to attitude, attitude being incipient act)."¹⁵ Poetic language attempts to encompass an event in all its ambiguities; scientific language would examine, analyze, and define an event; and rhetorical language would endeavour to generate in the audience a particular stance. By re-presenting the past on the stage, the playwright-historian is in effect

saying that the present is a function of the past as it recedes into the past, and the attitudes that we hold in regarding the past will in turn shape the future. David Hare, a contemporary writer of history plays, said in a lecture given at King's College Cambridge in 1978 that

if you write about now, just today and nothing else, then you seem to be confronting stasis; but if you begin to describe the movement of history, if you write plays that cover passages of time, then you begin to find a sense of movement, of social change, if you like; and the facile hopelessness that comes from confronting the day and only the day, the room and only the room, begins to disappear and in its place the writer can offer a record of movement and change.¹⁶

To write about the present is to write about stasis, but to write about the past in the light of the present is to write about change and, by implication, the future. The playwright-historian, in trying to encompass an event while at the same time creating another, leaves the interpretation up to his audience; as Burke says, "if we choose to emphasize the shifting particularities, we approach human problems historically, [but] if we choose to emphasize the underlying similarities, we return through symbolism to a philosophy of being."¹⁷ The attitudes of an audience are therefore of paramount concern to the playwright, whether he is an historian or not, and an understanding of the shifting attitudes that dominated Shakespeare's time are important to an understanding of his plays.

Theodore Spenser, in his *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, states that

The conflict was this: belief in each one of the interrelated orders--cosmological, natural, and political--which ... were the frame, the basic pattern of all Elizabethan thinking, was being punctured by a doubt. Copernicus had questioned the cosmological order, Montaigne had questioned the natural order, Machiavelli had questioned the political order.¹⁶

The doubt that subsequently dominated led to the sort of skepticism that demands an ineffable solution, and as the foundations of a sustaining faith were crumbling, the various manifestations of order itself began to dwindle away.

Montaigne became the advocate of an intellectual skepticism that questioned the very nature of man's perception, and introduced the idea of absolute relativity in a world of subjectively experienced "appearances".

To judge the appearances we receive of things, we should need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument, we should need demonstration; to rectify this demonstration we should need an instrument: and here we are arguing in a circle.¹⁷

The implications of such an universal relativity are terrifying because the idea of a creed, a set of principles to which a man may say "I believe", is threatened by the ambiguity implicit in reading. The question, "What do I believe?" then becomes implicit in the statement, "I believe". This was the condition that provided Machiavelli with a receptive audience.

Machiavelli articulated a view of man in the world that is founded upon a cynicism with regard to man's nature that is as absolute and unaccommodating in its contradiction of the

principles of religion as the Church was absolute in its exhortations with regard to God and the meaning of the Word of God to man. And with the dissolution of the meaning of the Word of God came the dissolution of the meaning of a man's word, as language could be used and abused for the attainment and maintenance of political power. As Machiavelli says in *The Prince*,

a prudent ruler cannot , and must not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist. If all men were good, this precept would not be good; but because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them.²⁰

Although the Word of God must be ambiguous to man, whose understanding must remain partial, he who has faith is reassured by the assertion that at least it shall be effected in time.

Machiavelli's view of man as a political animal and Montaigne's view of man as merely part of nature and in no way superior to any other part of it merely reveal two attitudes with regard to the nature of man, depending of course on how you read those seemingly simple statements. And as I write these words I hear, like the dull and distant rumblings of some awful catastrophe, those painfully simple words of the self-righteous Hamlet, who dies the Prince of Denmark and not the King of Denmark, "I know not seems"; he learns that the world is literally patched with "seams", but, as is always the case in tragedy, he learns too late.

The study of politics is the study of man's government of man. Such a study, because it must focus on appearances is not concerned with universal virtues, and as Burke points out it is diametrically opposed to the study of genuinely Christian values, values that are basically cohesive as opposed to divisive:

insofar as a man was genuinely imbued with Christian motives, his private virtues would be traits of character which, if cultivated in the individual, would be most beneficial to mankind as a whole. But Machiavelli is concerned with a different kind of universality. He starts from the principle that men are universally at odds with one another. For this is what his stress upon predatory or warlike motives amounts to. He is concerned with motives which will protect special interests. *The Prince* is leading towards the period when the interests of a feudal ruler will be nationalistically identified, thought to represent one state as opposed to other states.²¹

This transvaluation from universal values to individualistic values, a transvaluation that dominates the rhetorical conflict between the rival advocates of Catholicism and Puritanism, has a profound effect on the realm of politics, and the division extends all the way to sexual politics. Thus, even the attempt to communicate may be regarded as an attempt to attain power.

Skepticism leads to cynicism, and cynicism leads to distrust. And, as Burke says,

if we carry the Machiavellean pattern down from political to personal relations, the individual may become related to other individuals as ruler to ruled (or at least would-be ruler to would-not-be ruled)--for here again the divisive motives treated by Machiavelli apply.²²

Machiavelli encourages the universal division that he sees at

work in the world and reads it in the pages of history; and he propagates division by prescribing actions that are designed to attain power by manipulation, which in turn leads to the consolidation of power by force. When the page in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* states that the play to be presented by the players, who are of course experts at the art of "acting", is "a kind of history", the audience is reminded that history is made by individuals, by men and women whose offspring are the fruit of their love, by people who must act on another stage where the consequences are very real. And as one would expect, the audience is invariably split between two opposing camps: those who would-be rulers, and those who would-not-be ruled. Does the drama engender, reflect, or reveal the conflict? That depends on the perspective of the perceiver, but what is certain is that a conflict exists at the heart of human nature, and I would argue that the drama presents the ever-present opportunity for the recognition of genuinely "cohesive motives" at the heart of man.

If Machiavelli's view of man is couched in a cynicism that propagates division, then the Christian view of man is confronted with the problem of defining and teaching the "cohesive motives" for action in the political, personal, and private realms. The essential problem is that true obedience cannot be commanded. Commands may be "obeyed" in the purely literal sense, but the spirit in which an "act" is performed is not apparent. Again, Montaigne's skepticism raises its ugly head. King Henry V, on

the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, realizes the inadequacy of the authority implicit in a king's word of command (and he simultaneously talks to the audience that is made up of monarchs, to a certain extent):

Canst thou, when thou command'st the beggar's knee,
Command the health of it? No, thou proud dream,
That play'st so subtly with a king's repose;²³

The authority of the Church is confronted with a similar dilemma: the interpreters of the Word of God, themselves "fallen" creatures, must strive to teach the meaning of the paradoxical nature of God's forbidding command.

The author of *"An Homilie Against disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion"* states that "neither heaven nor paradise could suffer any rebellion in them, neither be places for any rebels to remain in."²⁴ Perhaps it is because the teachings of the Church are based upon such a paradox that its ministers resort to exhortation in the interests of the appearances of social cohesion as opposed to the emphasis upon "cohesive motives". As Burke says,

this tendency towards sermon and invective [is] particularly [apparent] in the thinking of the Church, where men trained in prayer are particularly prone ... to handle all untoward issues verbally, by benediction or anathema: they would "legislate" a disorder out of existence. But the tendency is not unknown even to secular thinkers.²⁵

To exhort a man to "obedience" is a contradiction in terms and is quite different from imbuing him with Christian virtues.

The sermons and homilies that were appointed to be read in

churches in the reign of Elizabeth I provide us with historical documents that reveal how the Church contributed to the shaping of the attitudes of Shakespeare's contemporaries. In the preface to the 1623 edition, the author in no uncertain terms tells us that the sermons and homilies are "the pure declaring of God's Word, which is the pricipall guide and leader unto all godliness and vertue."²⁶ However, they were published to be read in churches in response to recent political events; in other words, they were in fact used as a political expedient.²⁷ The scriptures were interpreted in order to assert the divinely sanctioned authority of office, and obedience to one's ruler in the secular realm became synonymous with one's obedience to God in the spiritual.

In the homilie entitled "An Exhortation Concerning Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates", the author interprets the trial of Christ in the following way:

The wicked Judge Pilate, sayd to Christ,
"Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify
thee, and have power also to loose thee."
Jesus answered, "Thou could have no power at
all against me, except it were given thee from
above." Whereby Christ taught us plainly,
that even the wicked rulers have their power
and authoritie from God, and therefore it is
not lawfull for their subjects to withstand
them, although they abuse their power.²⁸

And the author goes even further to assert that a subject's fealty to his king is of greater importance than his Christian Faith! when he says, in "An Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion", that

rebels by breach of their
faith given, and the oath made to their

Prince, bee guilty of most damnable
perjurie ... the worst and most damnable of all
false witnesse bearing that may be possible.²⁹

These two homilies reveal a shift in the values supposedly propagated by the Church, as the emphasis shifted from universal values to basically nationalistic ones. The use of the scriptures to consolidate the authority of the state involved not only reinterpretations of the scriptures but also of history itself to accord with Tudor politics. In his discussion of the importance of the homilies as source material necessary to an understanding of Shakespeare's History Plays, Alfred Hart says that

These two homilies put into the form of sermons a series of simple lessons on the fundamental principles of Tudor policies, in which were expounded the logical and theological bases of the constitution of the Tudor Church and State.³⁰

Bearing this in mind, we may be justified in our skepticism in regard to the Tudor view of the historical process.

The proscriptive teaching of the Church may be seen as a rhetoric that is directed down to the subjects of the ruler, whereas the prescriptive advice of Machiavelli may be regarded as directed up to the ruler, or would-be ruler. The homilies emphasize the primacy of the social order by trying to legislate away the problem of division and conflict in its subjects; Machiavelli emphasizes the primacy of division in order to prompt the "good" ruler to act in such a way as to attain and consolidate power. Thus, in Shakespeare's England a shift from genuinely Christian motives for action was being effected in both

the institutional thought of both the politics of the Church and the State. The language of religion was gradually being secularized--hence the doctrine of the Divine Right of the monarch, while the language of the politician became invested with spiritual significance. Shakespeare could subtly satirize this shift by having the Archbishop of Canterbury praise the order of the state in *King Henry V* and the arch-Machiavel, Ulysses, praise the divine order of the universe in *Troilus and Cressida*.

As the rhetoric of Machiavelli with its "divisive motives" for action seem to dominate, I quote from his famous book on political action, *The Prince*:

Many have dreamed up republiks and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist; the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than to self-preservation.³¹

One might almost say that Machiavelli articulates the principles upon which the modern search for the self is based. He looks at history and sees corroborative evidence to support his fiction with regard to man in an historical process, but his view is merely one interpretation of history. As Burke says,

Our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally moulded) which select certain relationships as meaningful. These relationships are not realities, they are interpretations of reality--hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is.³²

Because Machiavelli's interpretation of reality is based upon a divisive view of man, his view of what he calls the "bond of love" is characteristically weak:

The bond of love is one which men, wretched creatures that they are break when it is to their advantage to do so; but fear is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective.³³

Thus, as far as Machiavelli is concerned, human action is completely explained in terms of fear and punishment; the words "fear" and "love", which are equated in the spiritual realm, are similarly equated in the political relationship between the subject and his ruler. Thus, the motives for action are explicable out of hope for reward on the one hand and fear of punishment on the other. These are not the motives for truly ethical action, as they are "self-interested" actions.

In his *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke argues that truly ethical action cannot in fact be taught because the attempt to "educate" through teaching Christian virtues is itself paradoxical. The "cohesive motives" for action that lie at the heart of a truly ethical view of the world are ultimately silent: a view that encompasses division and transcends division. Burke quotes Emmanuel Kant at length to reveal the nature of this paradox:

Love God above everything, and thy neighbour as thyself ... as a command it requires respect for a law which commands love and does not leave it to our arbitrary choice to make this our principle. Love to God, however, considered as an inclination ... is impossible, for He is not an object of the senses ... To love God means ... to like to do his His commandments; to love one's neighbour means to

like to practice all duties towards him. But the command that makes this a rule cannot command us to have this disposition in actions conformed to duty, but only to endeavour after it. For to command to like to do a thing is in itself contradictory. Because if we already know of ourselves what we are bound to do, and if further we are conscious of liking to do it, a command would be quite needless; and if we do it not willingly, but only out of respect for a law, a command that makes this respect the motive of our maxim would directly counteract the disposition commanded.³⁴

Machiavelli's order is based upon fear, whereas the social order that the Church would endeavour to teach is one of "cooperative interaction" based upon love. This idea was articulated by Sir John Cheke in *The True Subject and the Rebel*, for as he says love is the unifying motive amongst people.

Love is not the knot only of the Commonwealth, whereby diverse parts be perfectly joined together in one politic body, but also the strength and might of the same, gathering together into one small room with order, which, scattered, would else breed confusion and debate.³⁵

The power of love to strengthen and unify the commonwealth as a whole is at the heart of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Division is fundamental, but love transcends division.

However, despite the naivety of this vision, which sounds very much like the facile idealism of Gonzalo who would rule his kingdom by "contraries", Burke reveals in his book *Dramatism and Development* how the absence of just such a naive vision leads to the necessity of tragedy as a cathartic. As he says,

When working out a "cycle of terms implicit in the idea of order", I became more and more convinced of the tremendous pressures toward a

sacrificial motive which the nature of human congregation builds up. Hence the constant incentive to victimize, the dialectic of which adds up to a design that could be called "congregation by segregation."³⁶

The theatre thus provides a society that lacks unity with the sacrificial victims that are necessary within its established order. But the great difference between the theatre and the world itself is the obvious fact that the victimization is merely make-believe.

THE TRAGIC PERSPECTIVE

Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong--
Between whose endless jar justice resides--
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Troilus and Cressida I.iii.116-18.

Although I do not presume to define "tragedy" as a literary form, I would like to define what I shall refer to as the "tragic perspective". In the light of Kenneth Burke's writings, I would argue that the tragic perspective is particularly appropriate for the study of the History Plays; for, as he says, drama ultimately appeals to the audience and its attitudes:

I developed a theory of literary form designed to discuss the work of art in itself, as a set of internal relationships to be analyzed and appreciated in their own right. But in the course of considering how such principles of form and style became "individuated" in terms of the details proper to each particular case, this line of thought ended with the recognition that the artist ultimately appeals to an audience's attitudes, which are ultimately grounded in natural susceptibilities quite outside their role in any one specific artistic tradition.¹

Aware of the inadequacies of an aesthetic approach to the drama, one must take into consideration the possibility of a sort of communion at work between artist and audience. S.C. Rowan, in his Ph.D Thesis entitled *A Dancing of Attitudes*, articulates this when he says that

Aesthetic theories that suspect didacticism,
ideology, or paraphrase of any kind as
necessarily partisan distortions of experience

focus attention on the structure of a work itself as a "reconciliation of opposites" (Coleridge) or a balancing of tensions (Richard's) and not on the artist or the audience as communicating anything through the structure.²

The gulf between the perceiver and the thing perceived is bridged by experience, and the problem for the objective critic is that experience is filtered through highly subjective "terministic screens": the language of terms that we use to express our experience of what we perceive, but that fails to encompass that which is observed. An objective perspective seems to recede again. Ultimately, we are separated from even our own experience through the very articulation of the experience.

The value of this approach to drama is that we can begin to see the sort of conflicts that perhaps cannot be resolved but at least can be recognized. And perhaps the objective of the drama is to create this division in the collective audience in order that it may begin to see itself. The division is a reflection of the division inherent in man, who remains the creator of the "battlefield" and is always subject to its ravages.

The tragic perspective confronts the audience with this momentary realization that regardless of our particular views of the world, we see "the survival of all attitudes, honestly recognizing the truth of each perspective."³ This is an essentially "emotive" response, but for the playwright who takes delight in faction it is merely the result of a "parliament of attitudes" that is a fact of life. And it is on the neutral and

abstract stage that Shakespeare presents the audience with a glimpse of the tortured soul of the deposed Richard at one moment and the scarred face of England at the Battle of Bosworth at another. The tragic perspective is essentially the attainment of an understanding that involves the collapse of one's "understanding" of the world. Rowan argues that this momentous perspective is achieved in something so apparently insignificant as the pun:

The pun shows in little what Shakespeare is doing throughout a play: combining "perspectives by incongruity", arguing opposites, and including a "parliament" of attitudes on the subject he is contemplating.

A pun ... is the commonest and smallest practical manifestation of the fragility of definitions. Since a word is a definer--exists to fix quasi-physical limits to an idea--the experience of perceiving a pun is a real, though admittedly petty, experience of collapsing limits.⁴

Not only does tragedy involve a breakdown of the political order, it also is implicitly involved with the breakdown of language itself. And as we live by "linguistic concepts" that are verbally moulded, such a breakdown of language itself throws all other partial perspectives beneath the relative impartiality of the tragic perspective that is inclusive as opposed to exclusive.

As long as the sacrificial impulse in man needs to project internal conflicts out into the world, sacrificial victims will be necessary; until this need for sacrifice can be internalized so that we can die in order to be reborn each day, then the external manifestations of victimization will be enacted in reality as opposed to on the stage. In other words, the stage

will continue to reflect the reality. Through the vicarious identification with an attitude and its subsequent death, our attitudes are wrought to crisis, and we bear witness to our own subsequent death. As we are denied the tragic perspective that is relevant to our own lives, because it is essentially a retrospective wisdom, we are left to reconsider the principles upon which we base our views of the world.

The interpretation of the world is itself an act, and as it affects subsequent action, it must be an ethical act. I would argue that tragedy confronts the audience with the terrifying possibility of truly ethical action. Burke states this much when he says,

Action is fundamentally ethical, since it involves preferences. Poetry is ethical. Occupation and preoccupation are ethical. The ethical shapes our selection of means. It shapes our structures of orientation, while these in turn shape the perceptions of the individuals born within the orientation. Hence it radically affects our cooperative processes. The ethical is thus linked with the communicative.²

The tragic perspective, therefore, with its emphasis on the multiplicity of meanings that encompasses any event, encourages the audience to adopt a attitude that is essentially "superior" to those attitudes literally presented on the stage. In this sense Shakespeare's History Plays may be regarded as rhetorical. And Rowan argues that Burke's rhetoric has such an objective in mind when he says,

Central to Burke's rhetoric is his definition of man as a symbol-using animal and his definition of rhetoric as persuasion to change

through "identification" with a symbol of order. "Rhetoric", he says, "is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols."⁴

And the rhetorical function of the drama may be regarded as an attempt to induce cooperation through the objective study of human nature.

And the historian, as Walsh says, is concerned with "general judgments about human nature [that] have an important part to play in historical interpretation and explanation."⁵ Implicit in all interpretations and explanations are corresponding ethical frameworks, and

at the roots of the ethical there is tragedy. Tragedy is a complex kind of trial by jury in which the author symbolically charges himself or his characters with transgressions not necessarily considered transgressions in law, and metes out condemnation and penance by tests far deeper than any that could be codified by law.⁶

Tragedy literally goes beyond the letter of the law to examine the principles upon which action is based, and this is possible because the audience recognizes the attitudes that are symbolically presented on the stage. In the process the ground is literally taken from beneath our feet.

The tragic perspective encompasses two diametrically opposed views of man in the world: he is either a political animal that is doomed to cyclical repetitions of history; or he is capable of becoming politically humane and consequently able to shape the

evolutionary process that is history. But as Burke says, "the principle of victimage plays so essential a role, we [must] ask ourselves whether human societies could possibly cohere without symbolic victims which the individual members of the group share in common."⁹ Perhaps by internalizing the conflicts, the members of a society may maintain a social hierarchy that does not require victimization for its cohesion. The stage provides the medium through which the audience may vicariously find external scapegoats to identify with and sacrifice.

The self-reflexive device that is so self-consciously used in *Hamlet* to reflect the multiple frameworks that can be brought to bear on interpreting reality is brought to the audience's attention throughout the play. The rhetorical purpose of the play-within-the-play is to "catch the conscience of the king", and as each is a ruler of some sort, and each is ultimately monarch over his thoughts, perhaps the rhetorical purpose of the History Plays is likewise to catch the conscience of the observer. So, the History Plays may be regarded as "mirrors for magistrates" in general as opposed to "mirrors of Elizabethan policy" in particular.¹⁰ Although Campbell maintains a fundamental split between tragedy and history, saying that

Tragedy deals with an ethical world; history with a political world. In tragedy God avenges private sins--in history the King of kings avenges public sins, those of king and subject alike.¹¹

Shakespeare's History Plays narrow this gap to deal with the political world within an ethical framework; the result is that

history and tragedy become one: tragical-historical, or perhaps
historical-tragical.

King Richard II's Loss of the Crown of England

The times are always out of joint: and the weak men, strong men, good men, and bad men who try to re-articulate them are all fumblers, or so compromised that their very skill is vain.

A.P. Rossiter

Prince Hal, acutely aware of the fact that people are prone to misjudge "action", states the terrifying philosophy that a man is not only destined to be judged in the light of his life as a whole but also that his own misjudgments are beyond his own comprehension, when he says, "Let the end try the man."¹ Such a view seems to preempt all discussion. But, ironically, it is the realization of the depth of our misjudgments that is encouraged by the skillful dramatist who permits us to indulge in our "prejudices" in order to reveal them. This pattern of education is particularly dominant in the second tetralogy, and is powerfully dramatized when King Henry IV denounces his son for intentions that he thinks will lead to even more dreadful acts than the act of taking the crown; as he "foresees" the imminent dissolution of his kingdom, the audience sees the horrible truth of the situation. The complexity of the situation, in which Hal must struggle with his religious faith, his future fealty to the kingdom and the people of England, and his love for his father, confronts the audience with an intensely emotional drama in which we sympathize with both of the characters; and at the very heart

of the drama, just as at the very heart of Shakespeare's History Plays, lies the Crown of England. It is that silent and yet most eloquent symbol of authority that Hal upbraids by saying,

... thou best of gold art worst of gold.
Other, less fine in carat, is more precious,
Preserving life in med'cine potable;
But thou, most fine, most honour'd, most renown'd
Hast eat thy bearer up.²

This is a theme that runs through the entire epic sweep of the History Plays: the Crown consumes its bearers.

The authority that is bestowed upon its bearer is a burden too great for a single man to assume and maintain because his judgments, words, and deeds determine the fate of his kingdom, his subjects, and his life. The responsibility that a king inherits is enormous, and his thoughts and judgments must remain as insubstantial as the discordant sounds on Rumor's pipe:

Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,
And of so easy and so plain a stop
That the blunt monster with uncovered heads,
The still-discordant wav'ring multitude,
Can play upon it.³

The king who is set above the multitude is subject to the same misjudgments that the audience sees at play in the drama; however, the consequences of those misjudgments are much different as the king's head is uneasily "covered" with a crown, while the heads of his subjects remain "uncovered" and yet subject to the will of their king. The king is as subject to the crown that he wears as the people are to his will.

Because so much symbolic meaning is invested in the Crown of

England, the loss of what the "worn crown" means is devastating. Thus, I have entitled this chapter "King Richard II's Loss of the Crown of England". Such an historical fact is of concern to the chronicler, but whether the crown was in fact lost, given, or taken is the ambiguous stuff of drama that the playwright-historian is concerned with.

The worlds of history and drama are public, and the observer of the recorded speeches and actions that make up these worlds must always be confounded in his search for intentions. The observer, like the distracted Hamlet, is caught between the observable reality, the stage presentation (the audience's macrocosm), and the imagined reality which is conjured up in the imagination of each individual (the microcosm). As Harry Levin says,

When Hamlet cudgels his brains by putting his hands to his head and speaking of "this distracted globe", he is positing a relationship between the microcosm of man's intelligence and the macrocosm, the outer world (I.v.97). He may likewise have been suggesting ... how that disproportionate relationship might find a connecting link through the theatrical medium, and through a particular theatre known as the Globe.⁴

The audience, aware of the fact that the world of the drama is artificial, is confronted with a drama that purports to be historical. The result is that artifice is transformed into reality: history is recreated with "A Kingdom for a stage, princes to act And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!"⁵

At the beginning of *Richard II*, King Richard is seen as a

self-conscious public actor; by the time we see him in Pomfret Castle, Richard has become a private man whose thoughts are self-consciously portrayed by a public actor. Finally, he comes to the lonely and "self-conscious" perspective that is associated with the tragic hero's realization: he attains an understanding that is purely retrospective. The implication of this is that each "actor" is ultimately the judge of his actions: in a word, "conscience". The audience, however, tends to succumb to the *hybris* implicit in judging the action of another. We must ask the question whether or not Shakespeare is delicately judging the practice of having a kingdom governed by a monarch. The king himself becomes the sacrificial victim, who is literally consumed by the kingdom he governs, for the sake of his country. "He", or rather the role that is bestowed upon him, becomes the cause of conflict and the loss of his life "redeems" the conflict, temporarily.

The man who becomes a king must lose his identity in order to fulfill the demanding role of the king. He must in fact die as he casts away the flesh, his gross and imperfect body, to fill the robes of state. Thus, King Henry V must cast away the fat Falstaff to assume his new found authority on his coronation day. The supreme irony is that the audience invariably pities the very human and fallible old man, while objecting to the callous treatment he receives from the young king. The king is not a man; he is the part he plays--the king. The man who cannot play this part effectively is thus the subject of tragedy. The History Plays may in a very subtle way be criticizing the

inhumanity implicit in the idea of kingship itself.

Trial

King Richard II, as he appears in the sources and in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, is regarded as a man who fails to distinguish between "ceremonial action" and "action", and the consequences are devastating. As the symbolic head of the English legislature, he is asked to judge a conflict between two of his nobles who both swear on oath that they are faithful to their king and simultaneously accuse each other of treachery. Thus, at the very beginning of the whole epic drama that spanned the years from 1399 to 1485 as presented by Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall in their chronicles and subsequently re-presented by Shakespeare in his History Plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*, the problem of "judgment" is foremost. The role of the king is determined by ceremony, and when the personality of the man beneath the robes becomes the dominant determinant of action, then the perfect integrity of his role is jeopardized and with it, his kingdom. Thus, the poetic character of King Richard II is seen to be deposed by the "characterless" Bolingbroke and the Machiavellian King Richard III is seen to be deposed by the "characterless" Richmond. Leonard Dean suggests that

we tend to feel the presence of "character" only when personality exceeds dramatic role and that Bolingbroke seems characterless in comparison to Richard because he is perfectly functional, is only what he has to do in the play and nothing more.¹

The problem is that the king, being an "incarnate symbol" whose

every action is a "symbolic action", is destined to fail to be perfect as a king; to be perfect he would have to fail as a man in the public's regard.

In the opening exchange between King Richard and John of Gaunt, not only are we introduced to the subjects that seek arbitration from their king but also to the dramatic subject of the play. Bolingbroke and Mowbray, accusing each other of treachery while each maintaining his unfailing loyalty to his monarch by exposing the heinous crime of his adversary, stand for a conflict that is of paramount concern to any ruler: the possibility that a man's word is not in fact his bond. These are the subjects that threaten order; it is the disparity between what is said and what is done in this opening scene that reveals the weakness of the king, or rather the "character" of the king, and foreshadows the consequent disorder in the state and the subsequent mental disorder that Richard experiences at Pomfret Castle when he comes to realize the gravity of his situation: in retrospect, he understands what it is to be a king and, simultaneously, a deposed king.

Before I approach the character of King Richard, a discussion of the character of old John of Gaunt as portrayed by Shakespeare is of consequence. The highly contentious nobleman of the sources is significantly absent in Shakespeare's gaunt old man. Holinshed reminds us that King Richard aggravated many of the nobles, especially his uncles, by his irresponsible behaviour:

[In 1397] King Richard, receiving sums of money for the which the strong town of Brest was engaged to him, by evil counsel (as many thought) delivered it unto the Duke of Brittany, by reason whereof no small spark of displeasure arose betwixt the king and the Duke of Gloucester.²

This refers to the pretext that Rossiter argues is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the opening of the play and is dramatically presented in *Woodstock*. Such an argument is reductive because the opening scene of *Richard II* is, I maintain, specifically designed to prevent the audience from "knowing" the true nature of the conflict between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. The fact that there is a conflict and that Richard doesn't deal with it effectively is the point of the scene. Shakespeare's King Richard actually encourages conflict.

Hall also describes how King Richard's character was such that he fostered conflict:

Kyng Richarde ... litle or nothyng regarded the counsaill of his uncles, nor of other grave and sadde persones, but did all thyng at his pleasure, setting his will and appetite in stede of lawe and reason.³

John of Gaunt, being one of King Richard's uncles, did not approve of his conduct and was not in fact as reticent as the old man that Shakespeare presents. Shakespeare's Gaunt represents an old order that is seen to be outmoded. He is the personification of a set of values that informs an ethical code of conduct in which a subject's word is his bond of allegiance.

King Richard's formal opening speech draws our attention to this tenuous bond between monarch and subject. It is tenuous

because as we see in the following scene a subject's word is easily broken, if not seriously compromised, by what he does; this is clearly demonstrated in the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray in which two sworn subjects purport to be faithful to their king while each simultaneously swears that the other is a traitor. The opening exchange, in which order is based upon nothing more substantial than a verbal contract, is a reflection of the fragility of a king's power. The whole social fabric is flawed when words are misused. Thus, Shakespeare opens the play by having King Richard address one of his noblemen in the following way:

Richard: Old John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster,
Hast thou according to thy oath and band
Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,
Here to make good the boistrous late appeal,
Which then our leisure would not let us hear,
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?
Gaunt: I have, my liege.⁴

A man's title and his word are inextricable.

The ceremonial use of language, characteristic of the chivalric code, is however threatened in the ensuing scene. And the quarrel between the two adversaries must not be resolved by words, but by action. Robert Ornstein emphasizes this importance implicit in the use of language:

Words are of immense consequence in a feudal world, where so much depends on oaths, titles, and names, and where for the sake of a name, men will take arms against a king, as Richard learns when he tries to erase the name of Lancaster.⁵

The integrity of the king's word, and a subject's oath is in effect nothing more than his king's word, is threatened by both

Bolingbroke and Mowbray; King Richard, unaware of the gravity of the situation, does not realize the fact that the quarrel must be decided in the lists: trial by combat is the only solution when language "breaks down".⁶

The onus thus placed on the king's word is of supreme import, as revealed in the proverb, "The king's word is more than another man's oath."⁷ The drama stems from the fact that King Richard does not determine that the contestants should resolve the conflict by resorting to armed combat. Unable to arbitrate the quarrel himself, he must have recourse to a divinely sanctioned, albeit somewhat crude in its effect, form of rough justice. Thus, after much equivocation, King Richard refers the case of "Bolingbroke versus Mowbray" to trial by combat in the lists at Coventry:

There shall your swords and lances arbitrate
The swelling difference of your hate:
Since we cannot atone you, we shall see
Justice design the victor's chivalry.

Richard II I.i.200-3.

Having passed this judgment, he has committed himself to silence; to interrupt the course of events is to contradict not only himself but also a "divinely sanctioned" form of Justice.⁸

Although Shakespeare compresses the three stage development of the conflict between Bolingbroke and Mowbray into two scenes, the drama is strikingly faithful to the historical details as presented in Holinshed, Hall, and Froissart. The first stage took place at the end of the parliamentary session at Shrewsbury;

the second, at Windsor Castle; and the third, at Coventry in the lists. The historical quarrel is given prime significance by Shakespeare in his History Play, as it is by the chroniclers, by equating the dramatic re-presentation with the recorded historical drama and placing it at the beginning of *Richard II*.

In *Shakespeare's English Kings*, Peter Saccio records the stages of the drama in relation to the historical facts.

Bolingbroke charged Norfolk with treason before parliament in January 1398. Parliament then near the end of its session, set up a committee of lords and knights to deal with the charge. The second meeting ... , in April, provided Shakespeare with the opening scene of *Richard II*.⁹

The first meeting was not, as Holinshed clearly reveals, a situation charged with drama because the quarrel was not permitted to develop any further. A committee was formed--as we all know, a committee is, on the one hand a barrier designed to prevent further conflict while acknowledging that a conflict does in fact need "acting upon", and on the other an attempt to resolve the conflict either by time or action. Holinshed describes the first accusation that led to the formation of such a committee as follows:

in this parliament holden at Shrewsbury [January, 1398], Henry Duke of Hereford accused Thomas Mowbray Duke of Norfolk of certain words which he should utter in talk had betwixt them, as they rode together lately before betwixt London and Brentford, sounding highly to the King's dishonor. And for further proof thereof, he presented a supplication to the King wherein he appealed the Duke of Norfolk in field of battle for a

enemy unto the realm. This supplication was read before the Dukes, in the presence of the King.¹⁰

It was not until the subsequent proceedings that the drama began to emerge. And Holinshed draws our attention to the theatricality of them with a sense of forboding as he refers to the stage as a "scaffold":¹¹

Six weeks after [the parliament at Shrewsbury], the King [came] unto Windsor to heare and to take some order betwixt the two dukes, which had thus appealed each other. There was a great scaffold erected within the Castell of Windsor for the King to sit with the lords and prelates of his realme.¹²

The opening scene of Shakespeare's History Play equates the historical facts with his theatrical fiction as the stage of the "great scaffold" at Windsor is equated with the stage of the "great Globe itself". The stage is set; the set is both historically a fact and imaginatively a fiction--in short we are confronted with and encompassed by history as we observe and participate in it.

The characters who enter, Bolingbroke and Mowbray, are constrained by the formality of the proceedings which prevents any unbridled expression of passion. They accuse and defend each other with great verbal dexterity and control; the king, due to the nature of their conflict, is unable to arbitrate the matter. The historical King Richard and Shakespeare's fictional counterpart, however, attempt to reconcile the two contestants. But of course no reconciliation is possible because if they were to have agreed to agree then they both would have in effect broken their word to their king: to recant one's word is to

betray oneself; to recant one's word before one's king is to, at the same time, openly betray one's allegiance. Whether King Richard was actually aware of the gravity of the situation may not be known, but his action reveals a fatal ignorance in regard to the situation that he had to deal with. Hence, Ure states that his "chief act as prince is ... one which makes plain his unfitness to hold the sceptre which inheritance has bestowed upon him."¹³

Holinshed and Hall are more or less in agreement in their descriptions of the situation. Holinshed says that King Richard tried to persuade the two to come to some sort of agreement:

the king commanded the Dukes of Aumerle and Surrey ... to go unto the two Dukes, appellant and defendant, requiring them on his behalf to grow to some agreement; and, for his part, he would be ready to pardon all that had been said or done amiss betwixt them touching any harm or dishonor to him or his realm[!]. But they answered both assuredly that it was not possible to have any peace or agreement made betwixt them.¹⁴ [Exclamation mine.]

This attempt to reconcile the two fails, and Holinshed goes on to describe King Richard's second attempt:

The king ... caused them once again to be asked if they would agree and make peace together, but they both flatly answered that they would not; and, withal, the Duke of Hereford cast down his gage and the Duke of Norfolk took it up.¹⁵

Because the king continues to speak, the drama becomes more apparent. Not only is King Richard placing his trust in two men who both swear that the other is a traitor by offering them a reconciliation, but he is also permitting them, in public, to

disobey their liege to whom they have sworn fealty.

It seems to have taken King Richard some time to realize that the conflict that he was trying to arbitrate was in fact an irreconcilable one. Holinshed subsequently describes King Richard's decision:

The king, perceiving this demeanour betwixt them, swore by Saint John Baptist that he would never seek to make peace betwixt them again.¹⁶

This oath is significant in the pattern of "broken words" that emerges in both the historical sources and Shakespeare's History Play. King Richard breaks this oath.

Hall describes the situation in a slightly different way-- the king is immediately decisive.

The kyng demaunded of them if thei would agre betwene themselves, whiche thei both denied and threw doune their gages, by my truth quoth the kyng, if you of yourselves will not agre I will not study how to agre you: and then he granted them the battaill and assigned the place to be at the citee of Coventree in the moneth of August next ensuying, where he caused a sumptuous theatre and listes royal gorgeously to be prepared.¹⁷

However, Hall interprets Mowbray's action as well. And his speculation is based upon surmises that surround the "murder" of the Duke of Gloucester. This is the historical pretext that Rossiter maintains is necessary to an understanding of the quarrel and King Richard's equivocation in dealing with it. That of course assumes that Shakespeare's intention was to help his audience to understand the situation in such a pedestrian way.¹⁸

Shakespeare's King Richard seems to be as inept as the King Richard described in the chronicles. He agrees to see and hear Bolingbroke and Mowbray in his presence:

call them to our presence; face to face,
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak.

Richard II I.i.15-17.

Each one of the contestants is both "accuser and accused"; it is therefore an irreconcilable situation compounded by the fact that "High-stomach'd are they both and full of ire, In rage, deaf as the sea, hasty as fire" (I.i.18-19). Due to the extremely formal nature of the discourse, the audience that is not prejudiced by its knowledge of *Woodstock* is left unsure as to who is guilty and who is innocent of a crime that is not defined with any degree of certainty.

If, however, we see the scene as a trial with King Richard as the judge, then any evidence that is forthcoming is likely to be spurious because the two contestants are both accusing each other of betrayal. The subject of their discourse is betrayal and the subjects themselves are simultaneously "traitors". This situation pre-empts all discussion; King Richard's decision to hear them is nothing less than ludicrous. What meaning can a man's language have in this situation?

The result is that each of the contestants, in order to assert the integrity of his word, must resort to "symbolic action" when they throw down their gauntlets. King Richard, with words that ironically set the "Grand Mechanism" in motion, says:

This we prescribe, though no physician;
Deep malice makes too deep incision.
Forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed:
Our doctors say this is no month to bleed.
... let this end where it begun;

Richard II I.i.154-59.

The attempt to reconcile such adamant forces proves to be destructive. The very idea of "obedience" that is freely given is threatened; this, Shakespeare's old Gaunt is fully aware of when he says to his son:

Gaunt: Throw down, my son, the Duke of Norfolk's gauge.

Richard: And, Norfolk, throw down his.

Gaunt: When, Harry, when?

Obedience bids I should not bid again.

Richard: Norfolk, throw down we bid, there is no boot.

Richard II I.i.161-64.

Filial disobedience and fealty to one's king are clearly juxtaposed in this exchange. It is only after trying to make his subjects openly break their words before their king that King Richard finally adopts the role that he should have assumed at the beginning of the conflict, and thus the pattern of self-realization that comes too late is effected in the first scene of the play and which extends throughout the History Plays. He says to his subjects something that as a king he should never have recourse to say: "We were not born to sue, but to command" (I.i.196). A king's word is not merely hortatory, it is the law. In this sense, the king is the supreme head of the legislature, but, as Henry V realizes on the eve of Agincourt, willing obedience may not be commanded of a subject by a king. In fact, it may not be commanded of any human being by another.

Having abjured his role as judge, King Richard places judgment in the hands of God. God, being the ultimate reference

for all ethical action, sees the intention that informs all action. His perspective is ultimately supreme and ultimately retrospective, and of course is incomprehensible to man. By accepting the fact that he is unable to judge the conflict between the two contestants, King Richard does not overstep his authority as a man and as a king. Bound by his word, the utterance of which is itself an action, he must leave the combatants to fight to the death.

By interrupting the "trial by combat", King Richard assumes an authority that he is free to adopt, the consequences of which he is free to experience. But by throwing down the warder, he in fact subjects himself to the consequences of breaking his word. The historical King Richard broke his oath that "he would never seek to make peace betwixt them again,"¹⁹ and Shakespeare's King Richard breaks his vow of impartiality--a redundant vow for a judge to make--which he makes when speaking to Mowbray in the first scene of the play:

Mowbray, impartial are our eyes and ears.
Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir,
As he is but my father's brother's son,
Now by my sceptre's awe I make this vow,
Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him nor partialize
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul.
He is our subject, Mowbray; so art thou:
Free speech and fearless I to thee allow.

Richard II I.i.115-23.

This vow is plainly broken when King Richard announces his disparate sentences on the two dukes.

History and drama agree: Mowbray was, and is, banished for

life; Bolingbroke was banished for ten years, which was later reduced by four as the king, at Eltham, took his leave of him, whereas this incremental decrease is effected in one scene in *Richard II*. The drama also necessarily reduces the time between King Richard's act of throwing down the warder and the announcement of the sentences:

At Coventry, Richard stopped the proceedings immediately before battle was joined, conferred with the parliamentary committee for two hours, and issued sentences of banishment: ten years for Bolingbroke, life for Norfolk.²⁰

This time lag is significantly reduced in *Richard II*.

King Richard, at the beginning of the play, is a king in word and deed; at the end of the play he is king over his thoughts alone, and confronted with the impotence of his position as a deposed king, he suffers. Richard's final soliloquy may be regarded as a lament for a language that has been rendered useless--the language of a man who was a king. The man who could command, through word and deed, is reduced to a man whose control over his own thoughts is as weak in jail as he was as the King of England. Having misused the language that he inherits as a king, he becomes its victim as he retrospectively understands his "action".

The impotence of language, the language of the fallen world, is of central thematic concern in *Richard II*. Mowbray, upon hearing the king's sentence on his life, laments how his own language is suddenly rendered useless. And with his language

rendered useless, his life is literally out of tune. Mowbray's lament on the loss of his "native tongue's use" foreshadows Richard's lament at the end of the play when he too feels his life to be out of tune:

My language I have learnt these forty years,
My native English, now I must forego,
And now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cased up,
Or being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.

Richard II I.iii.159-65.

Mowbray's language is rendered useless by King Richard's sentence--"Such is the breath of Kings" (I.iii.214)--and Richard himself, banished to the solitary confinement of Pomfret Castle is finally killed as the consequence of King Henry IV's sighed sentence. He must suffer in the knowledge that he has literally bestowed his power onto another man.

Why Bolingbroke and Mowbray accused each other of treason, and why King Richard interrupted the inevitable combat between the two remains a mystery. Shakespeare's re-presentation of the drama, while being true to the historical evidence, recreates the mystery; an attempt to reconcile the differences is in effect an attempt to reduce the drama implicit in the situation. The audience may seek to find answers, but the evidence that Shakespeare provides is not substantial enough to make any valid interpretations of the multiple motives involved: King Richard was implicated in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, who was Bolingbroke's uncle; Bolingbroke had spoken against the king's character and actions; and Mowbray was thought to be responsible

either directly or indirectly for the "murder" of the Duke of Gloucester, who was probably murdered while under Mowbray's charge. Thus, judge, appellant, and defendant were all in some way compromised. Gloucester was almost certainly murdered, but by whom remains uncertain. As Saccio says:

Whether he was murdered at Richard's order, and if so whether Norfolk was the agent, and if so whether Norfolk obeyed the command willingly or complied with it only after conscience-stricken delay, are questions that have never been satisfactorily settled.²¹

Shakespeare provides the audience with no answers; he simply recreates the mystery.

Saccio regards the fact that King Richard "allowed the affair to drag on for nine months only to abort the duel at the last moment looks like a fondness for theatrical gesture on his part."²² The emphasis given to the theatricality of the proceedings in both the chronicles and in *Richard II* reinforces this interpretation of the character of King Richard, and also supports the contention that "character" becomes apparent when one's "act" is incommensurate with one's "role". And just as an actor cannot "act" the king--for those around him must act in such a way as to make him the king--so too, a theatrical king--a king with character-- must be a bad actor in his assigned role. In fact, anyone who is assigned a role that demands perfection must be a bad actor, and the role of king demands a perfection that is unattainable by man--and only symbolically attainable by the Son of God, the King of kings, who, because his Kingdom is of another world, must die as a man in proof of the paradoxes

implicit in the role of him who would wear an "earthly crown."

Passion

This realization that the role that has been bestowed upon him is not only one of great responsibility but also one that he is in effect fully responsible for must be prepared for. The greatness that is thrust upon him is his, regardless of his personal weakness, and he is fully responsible for his actions. By equating the king's role with that of the King of kings, the Tudor historians thereby articulated their attempt to establish a political order that was in effect divinely sanctioned; but implicit in Shakespeare's view of kingship is the idea that if man is to sanction political power by drawing upon the principles of Christianity to consolidate that power, then the monarch himself must be regarded as a sacrificial victim to that order. It is hardly surprising that the reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth, should see in the mirror of Shakespeare's *Richard II* a frightening reflection of herself. Although L.B. Campbell reads her much quoted line (and I use the theatrical term deliberately), "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" with regard to contemporary events, I read it with regard to the role that she had to assume; and I think it also reveals the acute self-consciousness of the woman who knew the role she played, and knew the consequences of not playing it effectively.¹

The trial over which King Richard presides at the beginning

of the play develops into a tragic trial of Richard himself, which culminates in his self-criticism in prison at Pomfret Castle, when he retrospectively views his deposition. The wisdom he achieves is through suffering, and as King Richard becomes Richard of Bordeaux the passion he undergoes is characteristic of a passive Christ-like figure.

The helplessness of King Richard is foreshadowed by the scene with Old John of Gaunt, who on his deathbed articulates the paradoxical situation in which King Richard finds himself as King of England. In the first scene, Gaunt stands for order and obedience, regardless of familial ties, and even in the scene with the Duchess of Gloucester, who argues that the "butchers" of the Duke of Gloucester should be punished and that "to safeguard [his] own life, The best way is to venge ... Gloucester's death" (I.ii.35-36), he maintains his stance and patience, saying that

God's is the quarrel--for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd [Gloucester's] death; the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.

Richard II I.ii.36-41.

Here, Gaunt is expressing an idea that is clearly articulated in the homilies. He who rebels against his sovereign rebels against his God. The equation is quite clearly a transvaluation of religious principles in support of earthly power.

Let no man thinke that hee can escape
unpunished, that committeth treason,
conspiracy, or rebellion against his sovereign
Lord the King, though hee commit the same
never so secretly, either in thought, word, or
deede, never so privily, in his privie chamber

by himselfe, or openly communicating, and
consulting with others. For treason will not
bee hid, treason will out at length.²

His patience, however, cannot prevent his king's folly. And even advice, to a headstrong ruler, may seem like criticism and, by implication, rebellion. Contradiction of a king may be viewed as rebellion within a highly ceremonious system of government, but contradiction is essential to communication; and a king's power is ultimately dependent upon his counsellors for their honest advice and his subjects for their honest obedience.

Gaunt does try to advise his king, but his words are misinterpreted by King Richard. It is the prophet Gaunt, or the "gaunt prophet", who equates England's "royal kings" with "the King of kings" when he eulogizes on his native land:

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed, and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son;
Richard II II.i.50-56.

The kings of England are as renowned for their deeds as is Christ for his. Thus, when Gaunt says to King Richard that he is the one who is really sick, we are visually alerted to paradoxical situations that are presented in visual metaphors on the stage.

He warns King Richard that his kingdom is his "death-bed", and that he is merely the Landlord of England. Although King Richard is physically healthy and Gaunt is physically lean, Gaunt, lying on his death-bed, is in fact the visual metaphor for

King Richard's unhealthy position as the king of England. As he says:

Thy death-bed is no lesser than thy land,
Wherein thou liest in reputation sick,
And thou, too careless patient as though art,
Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure
Of those physicians that first wounded thee:
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown,
Whose compass is no bigger than thy head,
And yet, incaged in so small a verge,
The waste is no lesser than thy land.

Richard II II.i.95-103.

Much commentary has been made with regard to the punning in this scene, but the paradoxes implicit in this punning reveal a really terrifying view of history: a view in which each speaker, each actor, lives in a "state of total and terrible uncertainty."³ King Richard, thinking he is immune to danger, mocks an aged noble who attempts to literally give his last words of advice-- words from which he cannot hope to gain any personal profit--but his king is deaf to his words and blind to his suffering. And by so doing he fails to see what he will in time become; for his fate is that he too will become as helpless and impotent before his king as his aged counsellor is before himself. This is the pattern of the History Plays: words carelessly misused lead to wounds that can't be healed. Hence King Richard is the real "patient", and he is in fact called upon to be his own physician; like the physician, although capable of saving others, when called upon to cure himself, is ultimately helpless. He may save others, but cannot save himself. King Richard's life is thereby equated with the life of Christ; his land is equated with "the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry"; and his subjects with all the people of his land, people that will become its "waste" in the

wars to ensue, and people that are of course Christians in a Christian land!

Shakespeare's Gaunt, so very different from the historical figure, is not only a personification of a system of values that is associated with a paradisaal England, "This other Eden", but is also, figuratively speaking, the symbol of "a dying breed". He is, as he lies on his bed, a picture of a sickly England.

Robert Law states as much when he says that

John of Gaunt symbolizes in a large way the love of England which he so eloquently portrays ... [and] is not the Gaunt of Holinshed and other chroniclers, but more near pictures drawn of his brother, the Duke of Gloucester. However that be, Gaunt is England.⁴

And the immediate confiscation of his lands prefigures the impending loss of his King Richard's land. The idealism that the Duke of Lancaster stands for is lost when he dies, and with his life is lost his title, house, and lands. The world in which a man's name and title are inseparable from his lands and inheritance, the world in which a man's word is his bond, and the world in which a man's integrity is reflected by the very language that is his heritage are all lost with the death of Old Gaunt.

Are we to believe any such world existed, or could exist? Shakespeare's view of the past is perhaps deliberately naive to encourage the audience to identify with a world that is ideal, a world very different from the world without the walls of the Globe Theatre, to prepare for the tragedy of King Richard. If

only the world without the walls were ideal, then King Richard's mistakes might be forgiven in this world, our mistakes might be forgiven in this world, and the Golden Age would in reality return again. But the reality is what Jan Kott calls the "Grand Mechanism" of history in which "every successive chapter, every successive act is merely a repetition:"

The flattering index of a direful pageant;
One heav'd a-high, to be hurl'd down below.⁶

These words are spoken by Margaret, the supreme advocate of an insidious desire for retribution, of what A.P. Rossiter calls "retributive reaction", a pattern that seems to dominate the History Plays of Shakespeare and the Grand Mechanism that is history.⁶ Kott argues that Shakespeare's History Plays amount to a terrifying reflection of man's absurd quest for power on the one hand and on the other the helplessness of those upon whom the vast staircase of history and its crowning throne rest. Kott says that in Shakespeare's histories "there are only kings, every one of whom is executioner, and a victim, in turn. There are also living, frightened people. They can only gaze upon the grand staircase of history ... Perhaps the greatness of Shakespeare's realism consists in his awareness of the extent to which people are involved in history."⁷

Having determined the sentences upon Bolingbroke and Mowbray, and having confiscated the Duke of Lancaster's lands-- and in using the title, the "Duke of Lancaster", we run into the problem of who in fact is the Duke of Lancaster's heir in both word and deed, or rather, "title and deed"--the language that is

preserved in tact by ceremony, at least symbolically, is fractured. This is the world as we know it, where words are broken, where actions are deceptive, and where that which is apparent does not reflect that which is not. We are in the world that Pirandello would calmly say is "reality". This is the world that King Richard comes to terms with as he gradually realizes the implications of the proverbial wisdom that Hamlet finally accepts. That there is harmony in the fragmentary discord that appears to be the stuff of life. Words become divorced from actions, titles become divorced from their rightful owners, and kings lose their crowns to usurpers. All is mere contradiction. And as Rossiter says, the "curse of usurpation is that it confuses Right, endangers all Order."⁸ This is the sort of world that the opportunist can literally cash in on and where men like Ulysses can profit from the very fact that "Degree being vizarded, The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask."⁹

By throwing down the warder and interrupting the trial by combat, King Richard acted. The consequences of that action lead him to respond in a passive role. Just as he proves unable to reconcile the conflicts of his subjects in the original trial, he also proves unable to contradict his banished subject, Henry Bolingbroke, when he returns to claim his lands. Again, an irreconcilable conflict ensues: King Richard claims that the lands are his by right as he is the King of England; Bolingbroke claims that they are his by birthright. One irreconcilable conflict leads to another, and because each adamantly maintains the absolutism of his claim no solution is possible. Regardless

of Bolingbroke's supposed intent upon returning to England, his very presence is a contradiction of his King. Thus, upon his return to Wales after the Irish wars, King Richard stands contradicted not by a subject but by a banished subject! Both are right, and yet both cannot be right in fact. One must dominate; one must suffer the ensuing subjection. King Richard, almost from the moment of his return, chooses to play the subject to Bolingbroke's authority. This emphasis upon King Richard's passivity in response to Bolingbroke's presence is alluded to in the chronicles, but is made explicit in Shakespeare's *Richard II*.

King Richard must suffer before he is deposed and finally killed. The dramatic irony in King Richard's response to Mowbray's lament over his banishment and the loss of his native tongue is much like that which is found in *Richard III*, where the characters are literally struck down as they speak. He says to his banished subject two lines the full meaning of which he has yet to experience:

It boots thee not to be compassionate;
After our sentence plaining comes too late.
Richard II I.iii.174-5.

Having spoken, having acted, the complaint comes too late. The tragic cry of the helpless victim, of the executioner who is in fact the prisoner of his profession, of the ruler who is in fact subject to his subjects, of Christ upon the cross--subject to the will of man and yet the King of kings, awaits. The tragic realization that comes with retrospective wisdom, a wisdom born of impotence, is foreshadowed in this little couplet. The

proverb, "A word spoken is an arrow let fly,"¹⁰ rings true, but in tragedy, he who pulls the bowstring is in fact the very target he aims at.

When Shakespeare has King Richard address his kingdom's soil, saying

This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones
Prove armed soldiers 'ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms.

Richard II III.ii.24-26.

we hear a frightening prognostication of not only the fate of King Richard before he finally falters beneath the pole-axe of King Henry's henchman, but also of the fate of England herself. The civil dissension that tears the country apart in the Wars of the Roses may be seen as an extension of the "battle within" that King Richard undergoes as he is reduced to his former title of Richard of Bordeaux. Confident that his power as the King of England is immutable, King Richard unrealistically maintains his passivity in the face of Bolingbroke's threat. As he says,

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord;

Richard II III.ii.54-56.

The reality is that he too is but a man. "What mould be Kings made of, but carayn clay?"¹¹ And the role of king is supposed to be played by a man, and can therefore be assumed by another. The metaphysical rhetoric of the King's Divine Right is only effective when the king has the power and the will to maintain his position.

King Richard, however, on hearing of Bolingbroke's presence in the kingdom, begins to think in terms of an impotent rhetoric that is designed to exhort obedience in a king's subjects.¹² His recourse to expressing his personal grief leads to what amounts to a passive reaction to the threat of Bolingbroke. But a king is not permitted the luxury of passivity. Ironically, King Richard seems to realize the immense responsibility that rests upon his shoulders, even seems to express his acknowledgement of the conceits that kingship somehow infuses into a mere man, but he does not act the role of king. He would prefer to

sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
... for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable;

Richard II III.ii.155-168.

And it is immediately following this acknowledgement of his mortality that he articulates the central paradox that is the dilemma implicit in the role of kingship. He says to his subjects:

Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
With solemn reverence; throw away respect,
Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty;
For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends--subjected thus,
How can you say to me, I am a king?

Richard II III.ii.171-77.

He is continually prompted by his subjects to remember the role that he is assigned, and like a forgetful actor who is prompted on the stage is too preoccupied with his own inadequacies to act

his part. Aumerle says to him, "Comfort, my liege, remember who you are", to which he replies, "I had forgot myself, am I not king?" (III.ii.82-83).

The Bishop of Carlisle clearly articulates the absolute reality of King Richard's position as the king:

My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes;
But presently prevent the ways to wail.
To fear the foe, since fear oppresseth strength,
Gives in your weakness strength unto your foe,
And so your follies fight against yourself.
Fear and be slain--no worse can come to fight;
And fight and die is death destroying death,
Where fearing dying pays death servile breath.
Richard II III.ii.178-85.

The irreconcilable situation that King Richard was called upon to adjudicate is now repeated with himself as one of the contestants, and he proves less committed to his role than his subjects. The role that he must enact is, however, a sacrificial one; this is the realization that he must come to before he is a fit tragic hero. And that is what he comes to terms with when he is alone in prison at Pomfret Castle. Stripped of all the empty ceremony that goes with kingship, he is left to express in words what comes from the heart, words that even then cannot literally express the feeling that is the "inner reality", and in the most artificial device that the theatre can provide, the soliloquy.

It is in prison that Richard's helplessness is most complete, and where his passion is most articulate; ironically, it is most articulate because he reveals the inadequacy of language to reveal that which is within the heart. It is when he

has internalized the conflicts that prove so destructive in the world outside his little prison, like the world outside the little theatre in which the actor speaks, that the world within takes on a reality of its own in which all things are in conflict, and yet in which all things are harmoniously in tune.

My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father, and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts,
And these same thoughts people this little world,
In humours like the people of this world;
For no thought is contented. The better sort,
As thoughts of things divine, are intermix'd
With scruples, and do set the word itself
Against the word.

Richard II V.v.6-14.

The deposed king's brain becomes the battleground for warring factions that he is ultimately powerless to control. His articulated thoughts are set in opposition to each other like characters in a play, and the audience that sits by and watches are simultaneously implicated in the little drama as each one interprets the action according to his predisposition. Thus, observed and observer are implicated in the drama that the audience "bears witness" to.

Thoughts tending to ambition, they do plot
Unlikely wonders: how these vain weak nails
May tear a Passage thorough the flinty ribs
Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls;
And for they cannot, die in their own pride.

Richard II V.v.18-22.

Those who would like to see the impossible are confronted with the impotence of their dreams in the face of reality. Whereas, those who would be content to merely observe the drama from a safe distance sit in the stocks flattering themselves that it is all "the way of the world".

Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves
That they are not the first of fortune's slaves,
Nor shall not be the last--like silly beggars
Who, sitting in the stocks, refuge their shame,
That many have and others must sit there;
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
Bearing their own misfortunes on the back
Of such as have before indur'd the like.

Richard II V.v.23-30.

The choice is terrifying. We either look at the world and say, "Well, that's just the way it is", or we hope for the impossible only to die unrewarded. The audience, like the deposed king, is literally torn apart. The idealism that Gaunt stands for is dead, and the world is out of tune, and yet somewhere in the heart of man there is hope that all will be well.

However, Richard resolves the conflict momentarily when he says to the audience--regardless of what he thinks himself to be and regardless of what the historical figure thought himself to be--that

whate'er I be,
Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd
With being nothing.

[The music plays.]

Music do I hear?

Richard II V.v.38-41.

The music that symbolically represents the inner harmony that Richard has attained momentarily plays. And as he checks the musician for not keeping time, he realizes "how sour sweet music is When time is broke and no proportion kept!" (V.v.42-43). But where do we draw the line between proportion and ceremony? Perhaps the word "discretion" bridges the gulf that separates the sort of considered action that King Richard fails to effect and the sort of ceremony that is mere facade.

Richard hears how "sour sweet music" is, whereas the audience hears the "sweet sour music" of his sacrifice, realizing that the impossible is impossible because politics is politics and people are not as humane in the political sphere as we would like, and that there are those who must be either placed in the stocks or sacrificed in more subtle ways. Thus, Richard's mind becomes a battlefield of thoughts and his heart undergoes the passion of his suffering, while he himself is the one who must be sacrificed for the sake of a new order. Again, this pattern is particularly dominant in Shakespeare's History Plays as a whole.

DEPOSITION

The actual deposition of King Richard is portrayed by Shakespeare with varying degrees of accuracy with regard to the historical evidence. Shakespeare's King Richard verbally gives away his crown before he actually gives away the crown to Bolingbroke. The King Richard of the chronicles is seen to act in a way that makes us suspect that the character that Shakespeare presents is, despite the liberty that the playwright-historian takes in distorting the facts, a truthful representation of the historical figure. Shakespeare is perhaps exploring the possible nature of a man who could voluntarily give away his crown and end his life in a prison cell.

Froissart includes some details about the life of Bolingbroke while in exile that Shakespeare leaves out or at least abbreviates so as to prevent the audience from sympathizing too strongly with Bolingbroke. The intended marriage between Mary of Berry and Henry Bolingbroke is reported by Froissart as being indirectly prevented by King Richard:

The moment King Richard heard that a treaty of marriage was going on between the Earl of Derby and the Lady Mary of Berry, he became much displeased thereat, and resolved to send the Earl of Salisbury to Paris, to entreat the King to be aware of allowing such an alliance to be formed, as the Earl of Derby was a traitor to his sovereign.¹

The fact that Shakespeare left this out of *Richard II*, assuming his knowledge of Froissart, may be indicative of an attempt on

Shakespeare's behalf to prevent the audience from immediately assuming, as King Richard himself does, that the historical Bolingbroke intended, and that the fictional Bolingbroke intends, to usurp King Richard from the very start. The drama is only effective if the characters involved undergo a continual process of evolution as they come to realize the gravity of their actions. To this end Shakespeare manipulates the source materials to prevent the over-simplification that makes of man a master of the historical events that he does in fact set in motion and finally falls victim to.

Many commentators on *Richard II* see the character of Bolingbroke as a manipulator in the same vein as the diabolical Duke of Gloucester that weaves and plots his way to the crown, but I think that such judgment after the fact is reductive of the drama. Coleridge maintains that "Henry Bolingbroke ... appears as a man of dauntless courage, and of ambition equal to that of Richard III."² He also says that Bolingbroke "comes home under the pretence of claiming his dukedom, and he professes that to be his object almost to the last; but, at the last, he avows his purpose to its full extent, of which he was unconscious in the earlier stages."³ Peter Ure, in his "Introduction" to the Arden Edition of *Richard II* states that he has "turned the state itself into a theatre; he has assigned his part to Northumberland, and, in the deposition scene, he has set down a part for Richard, too, to play, since, in resigning his crown before the assembled parliament and placing it in the usurper's hands, he passively does what is expected of him."⁴ And Robert Law goes so far as to

say that he is "utterly insincere in speech and behaviour on his return from banishment, asserting that he has done so only to procure his rightful inheritance."⁶ I stress these reductive interpretations of Bolingbroke's action because they lead to one-eyed views of the drama. And drama, by definition, is "two-eyed."

Froissart also records how the citizens of England held many councils while King Richard was in Ireland and decided to "request the Archbishop of Canterbury to go over to France and communicate with the earl."⁷ The citizens of London, according to Froissart, "would call him by no other title than Richard of Bordeaux [and that] the Earl of Derby was already treated as king, and he engaged to undertake the government on condition that the crown was settled on him and his heirs for ever."⁸ The discontent of the people is alluded to, but not given prominence by Shakespeare because that would make Bolingbroke's action seem justifiable in the eyes of the audience. And as my contention is that the audience is asked to consider the problem of kingship itself in the light of the specifically human problems that are implied in the very nature of a system that invests so much power in one man, I argue that Shakespeare's intention is to manipulate the sources in order to carefully weigh the forces of Bolingbroke and Richard, and I refer to them without their titles to emphasize their humanity--literally in the balance. To infer that Bolingbroke's intent was at first to take the crown and that the people of England supported his rebellion would be a gross

injustice to all concerned.

Concerning the actual deposition of King Richard by Bolingbroke, or the voluntary resignation of King Richard's office upon his subject Bolingbroke, Shakespeare's fiction is faithful to the facts insofar as the deposition takes place in stages with King Richard talking away his power as he subjects himself to his subject, Bolingbroke, and then actually giving away his power publicly. The historical King Richard did much the same.

Before King Richard returned from the Irish wars, Bolingbroke landed on the east coast of England, at Ravenspur.² The stage of England was divided between King Richard, to the west, and his rebellious subject Bolingbroke in the east. This is translated by Shakespeare into the setting sun of King Richard and the rising Bolingbroke, and is reflected in the beautiful speech that is literally King Richard's downfall. This delicate sense of balance, a balance that is disrupted by the careless use of language, is maintained by Shakespeare in the delicate balance that persists between these two central characters throughout the play. And it is important to recognize that the stage upon which the drama takes place is England herself.

Bolingbroke was at Ravenspur, as Holinshed says, "so joyfully received of the lords, knights, and gentlemen of those parts that he found means ... to assemble a great number of people that were willing to take his part, [but] he swore unto

[the Earl of Northumberland] that he would demand no more but the lands that were to him descended by inheritance from his father and in right of his wife."⁹ This is not some malicious Machiavel that is determined to usurp the throne of England, but a man who is defending his birthright and his family's lands and inheritance. This, of course, is an attempt to redefine the situation in order to balance the "drama" into two opposing camps, both of which are right. Both King Richard and Bolingbroke were evenly matched upon King Richard's return to his kingdom.

Upon his arrival at Conway Castle in North Wales, King Richard had, however, missed a rendezvous with "forty thousand men ... ready to march with the king against his enemies if he had been there himself in person."¹⁰ This was a great disappointment to King Richard, but when he heard

how his trustie counsellors had lost their heads at Bristow, he became so greatlie discomforted, that sorrowfullie lamenting his miserable state, he utterlie despaired of his own safetie, and calling his armie together, which was not small, licenced every man to depart to his home.¹¹

As King of England, this was a fatal error because by so doing he "acted a passive role" when most he needed to act with force and conviction. Instead, he in effect gave Bolingbroke the force of arms over himself by reducing his own strength. One man's strength exists correlative to the man he is pitted against, and if one plays the weak part then he gives what power might have been his to his opponent. He is therefore subject to his own

will, to a certain extent, but the role of kingship is all the more demanding because there are times when self-sacrifice are necessary despite the odds. As a king, his duty is to fight until he is beaten and not, like the "white hart, kneeling, collared and chained,"¹² give up in the knowledge that he has been subjected to another's rule.

Bolingbroke, however, does not endeavour to engage in a force of arms. Like King Richard, who tried to reconcile Mowbray and Bolingbroke in their irreconcilable conflict, Bolingbroke attempted to avoid open conflict by pursuing peaceful means; but this is a world where a man's word cannot be trusted. Bolingbroke's presence before his king is a flat contradiction of his banishment. When flat contradiction raises its ugly, but highly dramatic head, then further argument is preempted. No amount of swearing before God or King can resolve the breakdown of language, and blood must flow, and the tragedy is that those who suffer are those who are merely caught up in the dramas of "great ones" that come and go fighting the same battles over words that shift their meanings with the "ebb and flow" of the tides. Aware of the fact that he is threatening King Richard's authority, Bolingbroke must act through another man, the Earl of Northumberland, and by so doing placed his trust and therefore his fate in his hands, just as the appellants and defendants in either a trial by jury or a trial by combat must have their seconds to "speak for them". But ultimately, it is what is done that is the conclusion, although like the trial by combat the conclusion may not be a true reflection of either the truth of

the original conflict or the intent behind the act that lead to the irreconcilable conflict in the first place. The trial by combat at least "solves" a problem by killing one side of the argument! This is a pattern that recurs not only in the History Plays but also in the interpretations of the events presented, or re-presented, that are reflected in the "emotive" criticisms of critics of the characters, be they historical or fictional, that enacted, or enact, their tragic fates upon the pages of history.

King Richard, having dispersed his army, took refuge in the Castle at Conway. It was from this castle that the Earl of Northumberland persuaded the king to place his trust in Bolingbroke's word that he had returned to England to claim no more than his own lands. It is only in retrospect that the irony of his avowed intent is revealed, in that the lands he came to claim were in the Earl of Northumberland:

Richard and Salisbury were ... left in the castle at Conway with about a hundred men. There Northumberland found them. Swearing upon the sacrament, he promised Richard that, were Richard to restore the duchy of Lancaster and surrender certain advisors for trial, Bolingbroke would allow him to retain his crown and power. Thus lured from Conway, Richard was ambushed by Northumberland's troops, and taken first to Flint.¹³

Charles Kean, in the copious notes to his version of *Richard II*, hurls the sort of invective at the Earl of Northumberland that is most often reserved for the "Machiavellian" Bolingbroke when he describes his action:

Henry Percy, first Earl of Northumberland, having by base and artful persuasions, and the mockery of a solemn oath for the king's

safety, induced Richard to quit Conway Castle, rode on before, under the pretence of preparing dinner, for the purpose of placing his men in ambush in a pass between a steep rock and the sea, where he seized the person of the king, in violation of his sworn vow, and carried him a prisoner to Flint Castle.¹⁴

Bolingbroke's second, the Earl of Northumberland, places both King Richard and Bolingbroke in an irreconcilable conflict that is much like the very first scene.

Neither "accuser nor accused", or "accuser and accused", can verify their respective suspicions with absolute certainty because both are compromised by what they have said and done. King Richard, having confiscated Bolingbroke's inheritance, is untrustworthy as far as the nobles of England are concerned; the banished Bolingbroke, having returned to England, is untrustworthy as far as King Richard is concerned; and the Earl of Northumberland, a noble and therefore an interested party, proves himself untrustworthy to both parties!. Unlike the opening scene in which the conflict at least could have been resolved--albeit unsatisfactorily in terms of that awful absolute "Justice"--by trial by combat, the conflict between King Richard and Bolingbroke can only be solved by war. And that the audience, in retrospect, knows only too well.

The Earl of Northumberland captured King Richard and escorted him to Flint Castle, but by so doing he betrayed the trust that Bolingbroke placed in him, unless we oversimplify the drama by assuming that the whole was plotted beforehand--and the irony of conspiring to overthrow a king is that the conspirators

must trust each other while in the act of betraying. The dangers of such an action are clearly articulated in the sub-plot against King Henry IV, which failed because of another form of treachery; and it is important that the plot to depose King Henry is, in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, discovered by a father's distrust of his son: the Duke of York suspects that his son, Aumerle, is a traitor to King Henry while he himself is in fact a traitor to the deposed "King" Richard. By placing King Richard in the role of prisoner to Bolingbroke, the Earl of Northumberland places the two men as contestants for the crown. This is the very tenuously balanced situation that Shakespeare dramatizes in *Richard II*.

On Tuesday, 19th August 1399, Bolingbroke and his supporters surrounded Flint Castle. And it was there that Bolingbroke did the following:

as the Duke got sight of the King he showed a reverend duty as became him in bowing his knee ... [and said] "My sovereign lord and King, the cause of my coming at this present, is (your honor saved) to have againe restitution of my person, my lands and heritage, through your favorable licence." The King hereunto answered: "Deere cousine, I am readie to accomplish your will, so that ye may enjoy all that is yours, without exception."¹⁸[Emphasis mine.]

By submitting his will to another man's will, King Richard in effect talked away his crown. The king must command and not entreat. But by submitting his will to a subject's will, he placed himself beneath the "kneeling subject" before whom he stood. This verbal self-deposition of King Richard's is dramatized by Shakespeare by having the Earl of Northumberland

mediate for Bolingbroke before the Castle at Flint and removing the capture of King Richard by the Earl and his men from the action. This places all the more emphasis on King Richard and Bolingbroke and their mutual distrust of each other.

Instead of luring King Richard from the Castle at Conway, the Earl of Northumberland lures him from the walls of Flint where, as Holinshed describes the situation, "The King ... was walking on the brayes of the walls to behold the coming of the Duke."¹⁰ Northumberland is the one who brings the king down from that height to the "base court" below by means of a multiple oath which he speaks in the name of "Harry Bolingbroke":

by the honorable tomb he swears
That stands upon your royal grandshire's bones,
And by the royalties of both your bloods--
Currents that spring from one most gracious head--
And by the buried hand of warlike Gaunt,
And by the worth and honor of himself,
comprising all that may be sworn or said,
His coming hither hath no further scope
Than for his lineal royalties, and to beg
Infranchisement immediate on his knees.

Richard II III.iii.104-13

In the fallen world, the world where words may be used and interpreted as mere gestures as opposed to expressions of heartfelt truth, the must remain unsure as to what Bolingbroke, who for the most part remains silent, intends. He cannot speak for himself because he is compromised, however, he may speak through the actions of others who prove their willingness to trust his word--that is the role of the second. And it must be remembered that King Richard dismissed a whole army of seconds. Upon hearing these words, Aumerle reminds both King Richard and the audience of the danger of trusting a man's word by whispering to

his king, "let's fight with gentle words, Till time lend friends, and friends their helpful swords" (III.iii.130-31).

It is at this point that King Richard remembers the crucial misjudgment of that moment when he banished Bolingbroke and how he can't bring himself to compromise himself by breaking his word, while he forgets the oath that he swore before interrupting the proceedings. He laments the need to compromise:

O God! O God! that e'er this tongue of mine,
That laid the sentence of dread banishment
On yon proud man, should take it off again
With words of sooth! O, that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
Or that I could forget what I have been!
Or not remember what I must be now!

Richard II III.iii.132-38.

It is not till later that his heir realizes that it was King Richard's action, the act of throwing down the warder, that has such devastating consequences for both himself and England, for

Then, then
The king did throw his warder down,
His own life hung upon the staff he threw;
Then threw he down himself.¹⁷

The symbolic act of throwing down the warder is what determines his own fate and England's, it is "the ling'ring act" that merely feeds contention. The throwing down of the warder is a metaphor for not only the singular fate of King Richard but also for the lives and deaths of the Kings of England that spanned the years from 1399 to 1485. But King Richard does not take command of the situation that he is confronted with in front of Flint Castle, and he descends from the battlements to subject himself to Bolingbroke's will. The symbolic act of throwing down the warder

becomes a visual metaphor on the stage as King Richard comes down to the base court.

Before the Earl of Northumberland can return to King Richard to articulate Bolingbroke's response to the fact that "all the number of his fair demands shall be accomplished without contradiction" (III.iii.122-23), King Richard proceeds to verbally depose himself "fondly like a frantic man", saying:

What must the King do now? Must he submit?
The King shall do it. Must he be deposed?
The King shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of King? a God's name, let it go.

Richard II III.iii.142-45.

This verbal submission before Northumberland has the chance to speak is directly parallel to the historical King Richard's verbal subjection to the will of Bolingbroke. Thus he sets in motion a terrible chain of events that, like a projectile, has a momentum all of its own.

This chain of events that eventually leads to his own death is realized by King Richard even as he comes down to meet Bolingbroke. He poetically realizes, in what he says at least, that he is in the act of giving away everything that goes with kingship:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads;
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage;
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown;
My figured goblets for a dish of wood;
My scepter for a palmer's walking-staff;
My subjects for a pair of carved saints;
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave, an obscure grave.

Richard II III.iii.146-54.

And with all the trappings, the ornate things that are necessary

for the sustenance of a king's life, he is also giving away his own life, but he nevertheless proceeds to give all his power to Bolingbroke, despite Bolingbroke's statement to his king, "My gracious lord, I come but for mine own" (III.iii.196). And regardless of Bolingbroke's avowals, his actions have lead to a situation in which he too must accept what his king feels he must give to his subject.

When Richard concludes his speech, he entreats the Earl of Northumberland to tell him what he must do in the tone of a subject addressing a "mighty prince." He says to him:

What says King Bolingbroke? Will his Majesty
Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?
Richard II III.iii.172-73.

But is Bolingbroke really the embodiment of the Machiavellian "prince"? Before King Richard has finished his speech, he has already subjected himself before the "rising sun" of the House of Lancaster and Bolingbroke has become King Bolingbroke. It is both King Richard and Bolingbroke who have effected the role-reversal, and in Bolingbroke's tears the audience sees the man who will later say to his son that he had no intent of usurping the throne and crown of England from King Richard, who literally raises up his subject before the audience:

Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee
To make the base earth proud with kissing it.
Me rather had my heart might feel your love,
Than my displeased eye see your courtesy.
Up, cousin, up, your heart is up, I know,
Thus high at least, although your knee be low.
Richard II III.iii.188-93.

King Richard, like so many critics of Shakespeare's Bolingbroke,

not only thinks that Bolingbroke is ambitious for the crown but publicly states that he knows that he is. Whether or not Bolingbroke intended to usurp the crown remains uncertain, but seen through the eyes of the self-indulgent King Richard his action is clearly premeditated. Derek Traversi, apparently seeing Bolingbroke's actions in alignment with King Richard's perspective, maintains that "Bolingbroke's crime ... is not merely personal treachery and murder but the overthrow of an order divinely sanctioned in the name of inordinate ambition."¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Grand Mechanism of history remains indifferent as to who is the ruler, because whoever he is he inherits the same problems as the previous ruler: the burden of governing faction.

Having verbally subjected himself to Bolingbroke, King Richard, and now it is his title that provides the ambiguity, was escorted to the Tower of London. It was there that he officially and voluntarily renounced his kingship. On 29th September, 1399, King Richard renounced his title. While he was in prison, a parliament was called by the Duke of Lancaster in the name of King Richard in "which many heinous points of misgovernance and injurious dealings in the administration of his kingly office were laid to the charge of his noble prince King Richard."¹¹ Parliament, on the whole, deemed him worthy to be deposed. And on the 30th September, the "bill of renouncement", signed by King Richard himself, was read out in parliament.

Hall says that "Kyng Richard comoned with [the Duke] and ... the Duke of Lancaster the nexte daie declared al Kyng

Richardes hole mind to the councel."²⁰ Holinshed only says that "he renounced and voluntarily was deposed from his royal crown and kingly dignity, the Monday being the nine and twentieth day of September."²¹ Saccio states that "coerced in the Tower, Richard in fact finally set his crown upon the floor and resigned it to God, a striking and characteristic last gesture."²² One might almost say the gesture of a Christ-like figure, for in resigning his crown he in fact resigned his life.

Hall describes the actual deposition of King Richard in the following way:

[The Duke] caused a great assemble to be appointed at the Towre of London, where Kyng Richard appareled in vesture and robe royall the diadema on his head, & the scepter in his hand, [said] "I knowlege and confesse my self, not worthy longer to reigne nor to have any farther rule."²³

Costumed in all the trappings of kingship, King Richard voluntarily resigned from the authority of the office to which he was born. His last act as king is the culminating paradox: dressed as a king, he divests himself of everything that the robes stand for while he is in fact the rightful King of England. Such paradoxes, like the "wise children" that do not live long in the world of *Richard III*, cannot live long in this world. King Richard also announced "the favour ... which he bore to his cousine of Lancaster to have him his successour."²⁴ The historical King Richard deposed himself in word and deed. And on 30th September "the lords spiritual and temporal, with the commons of the said parliament, assembled at Westminster, where

[they were shown] the schedule or bill of renouncement signed with King Richard's own hand." And Holinshed goes on to add a very interesting detail: "After this, it was then declared [that] it were necessary, in avoiding of all suspicions and surmises of evil-disposed persons, to have in writing and registered the manifold crimes and defaults done by King Richard, to the end that they might first be openly declared to the people, and after to remain of record amongst other of the King's records forever."²⁵ The rewriting of history by the "winners" is clearly admitted as a motive for writing history. Each age rewrites its own history, or its own view of history.

Shakespeare brings King Richard on to the stage and actually into Westminster Hall to be deposed publicly. And he has his hero question the necessity of this act:

Alack, why am I sent for to a King,
Before I have shook off the regal thoughts
Wherewith I reigned?

Richard II IV.i.162-64.

He is brought before the parliamentary representatives of England in order to release his subjects from their vows of allegiance, "from their oath of fealty and homage, and all other deeds and privileges made unto me, and from all manner bonds of allegiance, regality, and lordship in which they were or be bounden to [him],"²⁶ and also to hear the thirty-three articles that were drawn up to indict him of his "insolent misgovernance." It is here in Westminster Hall that King Richard publicly becomes Richard and begins to realize the gravity of his actions. He begins to look at himself, into "the very book indeed, Where all

[his] sins are writ" (IV.i.273-74). At the moment of his own self-deposition he begins to look at himself and in the reflected image of his own face he sees the terrifying fragility of the man who, behind all the facade, is just a man and yet is made a king. He begins to learn too late.

As Richard verbally gives away his crown, he also physically gives the crown to Bolingbroke thereby creating the visual image of two men holding the crown of England. This image leads to Richard's articulation of the metaphor that expands upon the idea that one man may appear to be the king while another, unseen, is in fact the ruler of the land. The crown is always like a well, whoever happens to be king, and it is the people that either benefit or suffer.

Now is this golden crown like a deep well
That owes two buckets, filling one another,
The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen, and full of water.
That bucket down and full of tears am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.

Richard II IV.i.183-89.

Richard is both full of tears and grief and also the "emptier bucket" because he is the one who is in effect giving himself for the sake of his country. His sacrifice is necessary to sustain order, and therefore he must be emptied.

Having given away his crown, saying:

I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths;

Richard II IV.i.203-9.

he is asked by the Earl of Northumberland to openly read out and confess his "grievous crimes". To which he replies:

Must I do so? and must I ravel out
My weav'd-up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offences were upon record,
Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop,
To read a lecture on them? If thou would'st,
There shouldst thou find one heinous article,
Containing the deposing of a king,
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath,
Mark'd with a blot, damn'd in the book of heaven.

Richard II IV.i.228-36.

Still blind to the role he has been playing, he equates himself with Christ and his public trial:

all of you, that stand and look upon me
Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself,
Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity--yet you Pilates
Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.

Richard II IV.i.237-42.

He is a man condemned by men for faults that amount to no more than those of a man playing a role that consumes men. Like all men, he has his cross, his burden, to bear: the burden of misjudgment both of others and by others, both of oneself and by oneself.

Unable to read his own indictment for the tears in his eyes, he proceeds to read his self-indictment in the mirror that reflects the "shadow" of his face, which in turn reflects the mere shadow of his sorrows. Looking at his reflected image, just as the audience sees the fictional shadow of the historical Richard, he sees that he too is as compromised as all those he has just finished accusing of treachery. Viewing the fragile "image" of a deposed king, he begins to realize the fragile

foundations upon which a king is made a king. The man and the office are inseparable, and when one is divorced from the other "chaos is come again". On seeing this reflected in the glass, he smashes the glass upon the floor--an action that is reminiscent of the symbolic action of throwing down the warder.

A brittle glory shineth in this face,
As brittle as the glory is the face,
[Dashes the glass against the ground]
For there it is, cracked in a hundred shivers
Richard II IV.i.286-89.

It is here that King Henry teaches Richard the meaning of his action, and that the public "show" of grief is merely a shadow of the reality that is in the human heart, compromised as it is by imperfections. And it is then that Richard articulates how impossible it is to reflect that which must remain "inside" and "deep within":

my grief lies all within,
And these external manners of lament
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul.
There lies the substance.
Richard II IV.i.295-99.

This is the man whose thoughts Shakespeare explores in the final act of the play before he is murdered in the Tower.

DEATH

Before Richard comes to the sort of self-realization in which he understands, in retrospect, his role as a human actor and his role as a king and the vast difference between the consequences of the actions of the two disparate vocations, he must internalize the drama of his life by reliving his own voluntary deposition over and over and again in his mind's eye. Just as the progression of King Richard's life was from a king to a beggar, so too is the progression of the play, *Richard II*, from a player-king to a player-beggar; and as Shakespeare's Richard wastes away his time in prison, which is in fact merely the stage of the Globe itself, he relives in thought the same "ling'ring act", feeding contention within himself, and finally he momentarily comes to terms with the conflict within as he accepts responsibility for his actions--regardless of the inhuman demands that kingship lays upon a mere man.

And Richard's dilemma is reenacted by King Henry IV two scenes before we see Richard struggling with his thoughts: King Henry is confronted with a conflict between father, mother and son in which the Duke of York wants to see his son punished for conspiracy against his king; the Duchess of York wants the king to pardon her son and begs, as her son's "second", the king to do so; and their son, Aumerle, who conspired against King Henry ends up betraying not only the deposed Richard but also his fellow

conspirators. The web of compromise, so thickly laid, apparently must lead to that trial by combat that will finally let blood in the Wars of the Roses in which "loyalty" between king and subject, man and woman, and parents and children becomes as hollow as the crown itself. This scene is actually called by King Henry "The Beggar and the King" (V.iii.78). King Henry, the reigning monarch, is seen to be the beggar to his subjects, whereas the beggar, Richard, is seen to be the king over his thoughts; and in this monarchy within where what he desires is what he is, and where he plays all the parts, he attains an understanding that a sort of "terrible harmony" exists in the world that man creates.

Having articulated the conflict that is conceived through the conflict between his female brain and his male soul, Richard comes to see all things in terms of opposites, all things in balance, an universal faction with man at the centre of it all. Retrospectively reviewing the progress of his life, Richard realizes that there is no escape from the burden of conflict:

Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented. Sometimes am I king,
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am. Then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king;
Then am I king'd again, and by and by
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing. But whate'er I be,
Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd
With being nothing.

[The music plays.]

Music do I hear?

Richard II V.v.31-41.

Momentarily, harmony is restored; but to see harmony in discord

is as paradoxical as Gaunt's advise to his banished son that "All places that the eye of heaven visits Are to a wise man ports and happy havens" (I.iii.275-76). The "eye of heaven", the perspective that sees all things in conflict, seems to be humanly impossible, like holding fire in one's hand and meanwhile "thinking on the frosty Caucasus." But the music plays. And the harmony for Richard does not last long:

Ha, ha! keep time--how sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string;
But for the concord of my state and time,
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke:
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.

Richard II V.v.42-49.

If I were directing the play, I would have the music played beautifully and in tune until the moment Richard says, "This music mads me. Let it sound no more" (V.v.61). The audience would then be confronted with the incongruity of the "sour sweet music" that Richard expresses and is simultaneously surrounded by.

Immediately following this episode, the groom, one of King Richard's loyal subjects, enters. He describes how Bolingbroke rode on "roan Barbary" on his coronation day. And Richard says, using a beautifully ambivalent pronoun reference,

That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand;
This hand hath made him proud with clapping him.

Richard II V.v.85-86.

Horses are not fed with bread. But each king is sustained by the death of his predecessor. Thus, the body and the blood of Richard of Burdeaux¹ are necessary for King Henry IV to be the

King of England and the next sacrifice victim for England's crown.

The purely fictional exploration of Richard's private thoughts while in prison at Pomfret Castle, presented by Shakespeare in the most artificial medium, the soliloquy spoken by an "actor", is framed by the almost completely indisputable fact that Richard was murdered, at least as far as the chroniclers are concerned this was the case, and Shakespeare's re-presentation of those facts also provides Shakespeare's theatrical frame that surrounds the murder of Richard at Pomfret Castle.

The scene between Exton and an anonymous servant adheres very closely to the facts concerning the way in which Holinshed describes how "King Henry, sitting on a day at his table, sore sighing, said: Have I no faithful friend which will deliver me of him whose life will be my death, and whose death will be my life?"² Shakespeare has Exton repeat these words almost exactly. The servant throughout the brief scene does not agree, necessarily, with Exton's interpretation of King Henry's meaning; he merely agrees with Exton's repetition of what King Henry said literally. There is a world of difference. Exton's misjudgment of King Henry's intent provides the theatrical frame within which we see a reflection of the grief that Richard's misjudgment of Bolingbroke's intent leads to: the murder of Richard is effected by a subject's will in accord with his king's wish; but the loss

of King Richard's crown is effected by a king who subjects his will to a subject. And the irony is that neither Sir Piers Exton nor King Richard understand their respective situations until it is too late.

THE BURDEN OF FACTION

There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
Would men observingly distill it out.
Henry V IV.i.4-5.

Rossiter states that the "Order-Code-System of Tudor theory approaches history with a kind of argument that Plato called *eristic*: that is, argument aimed at the extinction of an opposite and "bad" system of beliefs."¹ And having attempted to re-examine the character of Bolingbroke with a view to questioning the nature of kingship itself, the next stage of the argument would lead to a re-examination of the character of King Richard the Third. The Duke of Gloucester establishes himself as an enemy to love from the very first soliloquy, and his naked avowal of his villainous nature intimidates people into acquiescing to his inordinate desire for power, and thus, by steps, as one person after another gives in to his will--in the knowledge of what they are doing, and justifying their actions in the name of political expediency, or "necessity"--he attains the crown of England. This Richard is regarded by most people as "evil", but what makes the drama is that he is effectively helped to the crown by more people than just the Duke of Buckingham. However, it is comforting to project the evil in the world onto a scapegoat.

The Duke of Gloucester thrives on the divisive motives that

he is fully aware of, but as King Richard III he fails to consolidate his power for the very reason that he sows division, and the subsequent lack of security drives him to distraction; King Richard II's idealism leads him to literally give away his crown, and yet Richard in prison at Pomfret Castle he is given a brief respite from the burden of faction when he is no longer a king and yet momentarily a king over his thoughts.

When Robert Grudin, in discussing *Hamlet*, states that in the play "all the characters, in one frightening sense, are the same character. The killer, the victim, and the revenger are all ourselves. Despite its violence and discord, *Hamlet* is built on a terrible unity. Its encompassing theme is the weight of our inner motives, intolerable yet incommunicable,"² he could be talking about the entire sweep of the history plays. Each king takes upon his head the crown, and with the crown the burden of faction is bestowed upon him also; the only way of releasing that burden is through death. Until man can learn to internalize the battles that he is determined to fight, then man's society will require symbolic victims, player-kings, or real victims, who are also to a certain extent player-kings.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

¹William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. J.H. Walter (New York: Methuen & Co., 1954), Prologue, 30-31.

²William Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, ed. A.R. Humphreys (New York: Methuen & Co., 1966), III.i.54-56.

³W.B. Yeats, "Lapis Lazuli", in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1939).

The Role of the Historian

¹E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1961), p.138.

²W.H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p.16.

³E.H. Carr, p.20.

⁴E.H. Carr, p.86.

⁵W.H. Walsh, p.33.

⁶W.H. Walsh, p.48.

⁷E.H. Carr, p.141.

⁸E.H. Carr, p.89-90.

⁹E.H. Carr, p.100.

¹⁰W.H. Walsh, p.21.

¹¹Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), pp.220-21.

¹²W. Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. D. Seltzer (New York: The New American Library, 1963), III.iii.103-11.

The Audience and its Attitudes

¹Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. J O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.170.

²Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (London: Univ. of California Press, 1984), p.302.

³A.W. Schlegel, quoted in Lily Campbell's *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1980), p.11.

⁴K. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (New York: The New Republic, 1937), p.219.

⁵K. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, p.28.

⁶K. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, p.175.

⁷B.L. Joseph, *Shakespeare's Eden: The Commonwealth of England 1558-1629* (London: Blandford Press, 1971), p.245.

⁸K. Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life Literature and Method* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966), pp.89-90.

⁹W. Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, IV.v.212-15.

¹⁰K. Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), p.xix.

¹¹K. Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, p.109.

¹²R.C. Kimberling, *Kenneth Burke's Dramatism*, p.84.

¹³K. Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, p.148.

¹⁴K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p.11.

¹⁵K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p.42.

¹⁶David Hare, "A Lecture Given at King's College Cambridge in 1978" in *Licking Hitler* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p.66.

¹⁷K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p.163.

¹⁸Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1942), p.29.

¹⁹Montaigne, Michel de, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. G.B. Ives (New York: The Heritage Press, 1946), vol.2, p.49.

²⁰Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. G.Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

²¹K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p.165.

²²K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p.165.

²³W. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, IV.i.262-64.

²⁴*Certain Sermons or Homilies: Appointed to be Read in Churches.* (Florida: Scholars' Facsimilies & Reprints, 1968), p.276.

²⁵K. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, p.35.

²⁶*Certain Sermons or Homilies*, preface.

²⁷Alfred Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), p.29. In this book Hart traces the history of the homilies that he argues are significant to an understanding of both Shakespeare's History Plays and the attitudes of Shakespeare's audience. He states that "Upon the death of King Henry VIII in 1547, a boy of nine years became the Supreme Head of the English Church, and the Regency, acting in his stead, advanced farther on the road to Protestantism. They prohibited the preaching of all sermons except under special license, and they sent to every parish in the kingdom a book entitled *Certain Sermons or Homilies, Appoynted by the King's Maiestie to be declared, and Redde by all Persones, Vicars, or Curates, every Sundaye in their Churches, where they have Cure.*" And that following this, in 1573, "The Queen and her Council [in response to the northern rebellion of 1569] instructed the bishops to prepare a new homily on disobedience and wilfull rebellion."

²⁸*Certain Sermons or Homilies*, p.72.

²⁹*Certain Sermons or Homilies*, p.293.

³⁰Alfred Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), p.29.

³¹Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p.91.

³²K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p.35.

³³N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp.96-97.

³⁴K. Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, p.443.

³⁵Sir John Cheke, *The True Subject and the Rebel* quoted in B.L. Joseph's *Shakespeare's Eden*, p.168.

³⁶K. Burke, *Dramatism and Development* (Mass.: Clark Univ. Press, 1972), p.29.

The Tragic Perspective

¹K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p.302.

²Stephen Rowan, "A Dancing of Attitudes" (Vancouver: Univ of British Columbia, 1986), p.11.

³S. Rowan, "A Dancing of Attitudes", p.175.

⁴S. Rowan, "A Dancing of Attitudes", pp.171-73.

⁵K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p.250.

⁶S. Rowan, "A Dancing of Attitudes", p.163.

⁷W.H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, p.21.

⁸K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p.195.

⁹K. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p.285.

¹⁰L.B. Campbell's approach to the History Plays, in her book entitled *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*, is, I think, reductive in that she reduces the plays to a commentary on Elizabethan politics in a very limited sense.

¹¹L.B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1980), p.307.

King Richard's Loss of the Crown of England

¹William Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, ed. A.R.Humphreys (London: Methuen & Co., 1985), II.iii.46.

²W. Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, IV.v.160-64.

³W. Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, Induction, 15-19.

⁴Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p.18.

⁵W. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. J.H. Walter (London: Methuen & Co., 1983), Prologue, 30-31.

¹ Leonard Dean, "From *Richard II* to *Henry V*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Richard II*, ed. P.M. Cubeta (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p.64.

² Raphael Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, ed. W.G. Boswell-Stone (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907), p.62.

³ Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), p.3.

⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Peter Ure (London: Methuen & Co., 1984), I.i.1-7. [All subsequent references made to this play are made to this text, and will be placed in parentheses within the body of my text.]

⁵ Robert Ornstein, *A Kingdom for a Stage* (Mass: Harvard Univ. Press), p.111.

⁶I would argue that, although the ceremonial use of language in the opening scene reveals an extremely disciplined use of language, in fact the audience is confronted with a language that has in fact lost its meaning, a broken and fractured system of expression that is divorced from feeling and intent. We are confronted with a hollow traditional code of conduct, in which its advocates must remain straight-jacketed.

⁷G.L. Apperson, *A Dictionary of English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1929), p.342.

⁸In Peter Ure's "Introduction" to the Arden Edition of *Richard II*, he states that the king has the right to interrupt the proceedings. This is, of course true, but the consequences of doing so are grave. Ure states that "if Shakespeare had read Froissart, he would have known that order and public safety made this last act advisable, and if Shakespeare knew anything of the ordinances of trial by combat, he would know that its termination at any stage was one of the royal umpire's allowed acts of authority." In the light of a closer examination of King Richard's "act", it appears to have been an inauspicious act for King Richard in particular and kingship in general.

⁹Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p.25.

¹⁰Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p. 67.

¹¹*A Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. L.B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938), p.94. The idea of historical figures on the "scaffold" is a recurrent trope in the *Mirror*.

¹²Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.79.

¹³Ure, "Introduction", p.lxxii.

¹⁴Holinshed, p.68.

¹⁵Holinshed, p.70.

¹⁶Holinshed, p.70.

¹⁷Hall, *The Union*, p.3.

¹⁸Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, p.24. The events that surround the death of the Duke of Gloucester remain uncertain.

¹⁹Holinshed, p.70.

²⁰Saccio, p.25.

²¹Saccio, p.24.

²²Saccio, p.26.

Passion

¹In *Shakespeare's Histories*, Campbell argues that Queen Elizabeth's statement to one of her counsellors, "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" (P.191), reveals how the play *Richard II* alludes to certain political discontents amongst some of her subjects.

²In "An Exhortation Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates" in *Certaine Sermons*.

³A.P. Rossiter, *Angel With Horns*, ed. G. Storey (London: Longman Group, 1961), p.6. In his essay entitled "The Unity of *Richard III*", he argues that the breakdown of language on the stage is perceived by an audience that is confronted with a striking pattern of "retributive justice" that strikes down, as it were, the speaker as he speaks. This pattern that is so overt in *Richard III* governs, I would argue, the dramatic irony that contributes to the "ambivalence" I see in *Richard II*.

⁴Robert Law, "Deviations from Holinshed in *Richard II*" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, XXIX (1950), p.96.

⁵Jan Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, trans. B.Taborski (London: Methuen & Co., 1965), p.9. The quotation is from *Richard III* IV.iv.85-86.

⁶A.P. Rossiter, "The Dialectic of the Histories" in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Histories: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. R.J. Dorius (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1964). Rossiter discusses the "ambivalence" that dominates the History Plays.

He defines "ambivalence" as that which confronts the audience with a drama in which "two opposed value-judgements are subsumed, and that both are valid...The whole is only fully experienced when both opposites are held and included in a "two-eyed" view; and all "one-eyed" simplifications are not only falsifications; they amount to a denial of some part of the mystery of things"(pp.6-7). This distinction between a "two-eyed" view and a "one-eyed" view of history is analogous to my distinction between the perspectives of the chronicler and the playwright-historian.

⁷J. Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, p.17.

⁸A.P. Rossiter, "The Dialectic of the Histories", p.5.

⁹W. Shakespeare, *Trailus and Cressida*, I.iii.83-84.

¹⁰*A Dictionary of English Proverbs*, p.710.

¹¹*A Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. L.B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938), p.18.

¹²A. Hart, in *Shakespeare and the Homilies*, argues that "the ascription to [Richard III] of a belief in the doctrine of the divine right of kings is historically false" (p.68), and that it was a political expedient of the Tudors in an attempt to consolidate political power by means of religious sanctions.

Deposition

¹Jean Froissart, *The Chronicles of England, France, Spain Etc...*, trans. T. Johnes (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1908), p.604.

²S.T. Coleridge, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T.M. Raysor (London: Constable & Co., 1930), vol 2, p.188.

³S.T. Coleridge, *Criticism*, vol 2, p.189. [Emphasis mine.] To assert that Bolingbroke's purpose was in fact an unconscious one sounds very much like an acknowledgment of man's involvement in an historical process that he does not comprehend even though he is necessarily subject to the consequences of the actions he takes. In other words, in retrospect the full nature of an action is revealed, but each perpetrator is like the "blind Oedipus" confronted with the "clear-sighted Tiresias"--ignorant of his position on the unstable scaffold.

⁴Peter Ure, "Introduction" to *Richard II*, p.lxxx.

⁵Robert Law, "Deviations from Holinshed in *Richard II*", p.96.

⁶J. Froissart, *The Chronicles*, p.608.

⁷J. Froissart, *The Chronicles*, p.609.

⁸W. Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. and with notes by Charles Kean (London: A facsimile by Cornmarket Press, 1970), p.41. Charles Kean's version of *Richard II* contains many footnotes regarding the historical events, and he describes how King Richard went to Ireland "with a mighty army to revenge the death of his cousin, Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, and Lieutenant of Ireland (slain by O'Brien and the Irish of Leinster) to whom he intended the crown of England, if he failed of issue." Much information is derived from Sandford's *Genealogical History of the Kings of England*, a *Chronicle of the Betrayal of Richard, King of England*, and Creton's *Metrical History* as well as the major sources.

⁹R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Chronicles*, p.77.

¹⁰R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.80.

¹¹R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.106.

¹²C. Kean states that the "principle badges and cognizances of King Richard the Second were the white hart kneeling, collared and chained, or, the sun in splendour; the pod of the *plantagenista*, or broom; and branches of rosemary (p. 11).

¹³P. Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, p.29.

¹⁴C. Kean, notes to *Richard II*, p.58

¹⁵R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.84.

¹⁶R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.83.

¹⁷W. Shakespeare, *2 King Henry IV*.i.i.120-23.

¹⁸Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: From Richard II to Henry V* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1964), p.31.

¹⁹R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.85.

²⁰E. Hall, *The Union*, p.12.

²¹P. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.86.

²²P. Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, p32.

²³E. Hall, *The Union*, p.12

²⁴R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.87.

²⁵R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.87.

²⁶R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.86.

Death

¹When Sir Piers Exton presents the body of Richard to King Henry in the final scene of the play, the body is referred to as "Thy buried fear ... Richard of Burdeaux." To which King Henry replies in the prophetic words, "thou hast wrought A deed of slander with thy fatal hand Upon my head and all this famous land" (V.vi.31-36).

²,R. Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p.96.

The Burden of Faction

¹A.P. Rossiter, *Discussions of Shakespeare's Histories*, p.14.

²R. Grudin, *Mighty Opposites: Shakespeare and Renaissance Contrariety* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p.120.

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