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A STUDY OF KINGSHIP IN SHAKESPEARE'S
HISTORY PLAYS

by

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B.A. Montana State University, 1960

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Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

In the Elizabethan Age, Shakespeare, like many of his contemporaries, was profoundly interested in the period of civil war that centered in the Wars of the Roses. This general interest is reflected in The Mirror for Magistrates (1559), in Samuel Daniel's "epic poem," The Civil Wars between the Two Houses of York and Lancaster (1545), in Michael Drayton's Mortimeriados, and in the various history plays antedating those of Shakespeare. This concern of the Elizabethans can be easily understood if one notices our parallel interest, today in the United States, in our own Civil War. From 1392, when Richard II was dethroned by Henry IV, until 1485, when Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch, defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field, the English had experienced almost continual war, either civil or foreign. Even after the ascension of Henry VII, who cemented the peace by uniting the houses of York and Lancaster through his marriage with Elizabeth of York, minor insurrections took place.

In Shakespeare's day, the refusal of Elizabeth I to marry and provide an heir to the throne was a source of anxiety to the general populace, who feared that rebellion or civil war might break out with her death. As early as 1561 Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville produced Gorboduc in the Inner Temple, in part to encourage Elizabeth to empower Parliament with the authority to name an heir, if she should not provide one through marriage. As E. M. W. Tillyard points out in his discussion of Gorboduc:

Most of the substance indeed is general, applicable to all princes; but the references to the succession are plainly directed at Elizabeth. They are gathered together in the last speech of all, when Eubulus, the king's secretary--and the counsellor who is always in the right, comments on the whole action and foretells the future course of events. The country's case is disastrous, for

No ruler rests within the regal seat;
The heir, to whom the sceptre 'longs,
unknown.

The result is anarchy....Anarchy, he [Eubulus] says,

doth grow, when, lo, unto the prince,
Whom death or sudden hap of life bereaves,
No certain heir remains, such certain heir
As not all only is the rightful heir
But to the realm is so made known to be.

Once the prince is dead, parliament lacks the authority to back up its nomination of a successor.

No, no: then parliament should have been
holden
And certain heirs appointed to the crown,
To stay the title of established right
And in the people plant obedience,
While yet the prince did live; whose name
and power
By lawful summons and authority
Might make a parliament to be of force
And might have set the state in quiet stay.¹

Because Henry VII had deposed an anointed king, he did not feel secure about his right to the crown. To strengthen his claim, therefore, he fostered two historical notions that became accepted without question during Shakespeare's lifetime. The first notion was that an organic part of history had ended happily with the union of the houses of York and Lancaster through Henry's marriage with Elizabeth of York. The second was that he had a claim to the throne through his Welsh ancestry. The first notion forms one of the themes of eight of Shakespeare's history plays.

¹E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1959), p. 95.

Although the influence of the second is not so apparent as that of the first, it, too, probably was at the back of Shakespeare's mind.

Shakespeare's English history plays are arranged in a rather curious sequence. First to be written was a tetralogy of four closely-linked plays: Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III and Richard III.² King John,³ Shakespeare's next history play, was followed by a second tetralogy of four plays which also deal with the Wars of the Roses: Richard II, Henry IV, Parts I and II, and Henry V.⁴ These plays were followed many years later by another isolated play, Henry VIII.⁵ Except for the two isolated plays, the two tetralogies make a single unit. In developing Shakespeare's idea of the nature of kingship, I shall be concerned only with this set of eight plays. I have omitted King John because of the controversy over dates and because it adds nothing to Shakespeare's view of kingship that is not dealt with in the other plays.

²The extent of Shakespeare's contribution to 1 Henry VI is still in dispute, but a growing consensus among scholars credits the entire play to him. It is usually considered his first play and is thought to have been completed between 1590 and 1591. For a more complete discussion of this play, see Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, pp. 161-162.

2 Henry VI is quite generally considered as written by Shakespeare. The accepted date is 1591-1592; see E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare, A Study of Facts and Problems (Oxford, 1930), I, p. 270.

3 Henry VI is also considered to be Shakespeare's own. The accepted date of composition is 1592-1593 (Chambers, p. 270).

³At the present time controversy is raging over the dating of King John. Dates range from 1591 to 1598. For full bibliographical data the recently revised Arden edition, edited by E. A. Honigman (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1954), pp. xliii-lviii, should be consulted.

⁴Chambers, p. 270, dates them as follows: Richard II, 1595-1596; 1 Henry IV, 1597-1598; 2 Henry IV, 1597-1598; and Henry V, 1598-1599.

⁵Chambers gives 1612 as the probable date of Henry VIII.

I have also omitted Henry VIII for the same reasons.

In his history plays Shakespeare is much concerned with political issues, among them the problems of rebellion and the nature of kingship. In the Henry VI plays rebellion is primarily a plot device. As Mark Van Doren points out, every action is explicit:

The spring of every action is exposed; each person tells the audience at the top of his voice both what he privately intends and what he means publicly to be understood as intending. Enmities are confessed and clear. Conflicts are obvious, as of large bodies moved up to each other and palpably colliding on an open field. There is no mystery or ambiguity of purpose, there are no uninterpretable acts.⁶

These plays are primarily melodrama, as is Richard III. Not until he wrote Richard II did Shakespeare bring to his history plays characterizations in any depth, nor did he probe very far into the complexities implicit in the concept of kingship.

In the history plays there is, nevertheless, an evolution from the study of kingship, which focuses in the first tetralogy primarily on the office itself, to the study of human reactions and flaws in the kings and rulers in the second tetralogy. Richard III is the first character in these plays to achieve purposeful movement controlled from within, and with him begins Shakespeare's real exploration of rebellion. While the long list of woes of Henry VI is not fully explored, the audience sees Richard III plan his usurpation step by step until he attains total power.

One can assume that by the time Shakespeare had written Richard III (in 1592-1593), he had become so seriously interested in the Wars of the

⁶Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (Garden City, New York, 1939), p. 10.

Roses that he went back to their first causes and wrote Richard II in 1595.⁷ By that time he was a mature enough playwright so that he could exploit the potential ideas which lie nascent in Henry VI and Richard III. Thus Richard II is the climax of the theme of rebellion. In the Henry IV plays Shakespeare shows what qualities a usurper needs to maintain a throne after he has achieved it. Henry V marks the climax of the two tetralogies, for it is in this play that Shakespeare gives his summary of how a true king should act.

In this thesis I wish to consider Shakespeare's two tetralogies primarily as studies in the nature of kingship and secondarily as studies in the causes of rebellion. I hope to trace the development of his use of rebellion as a plot device to hold the Henry VI plays together through to the last play. At the same time I hope to show how Shakespeare takes issues lying dormant in the first tetralogy, such as the necessity of both moral and physical might, and examines their ramifications in the second tetralogy. Other themes, such as the character of subordinate figures, will be mentioned here only as they are relevant to the general theme of the nature of kingship.

⁷Tillyard in Shakespeare's History Plays has established beyond reasonable doubt that Shakespeare wrote the two tetralogies as a series.

CHAPTER I

SUMMARY OF THE HENRY VI PLAYS

Since the Henry VI plays are not well known, seldom read, hardly ever produced, and complicated in plot, I have included in this thesis a plot summary.

1 Henry VI opens with all England mourning the death of the great warrior king, Henry V, who died at the height of his glory. During the funeral procession the apparently long-standing quarrel between Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, breaks out again over the coffin of Henry. The quarrel is interrupted by the news that many of the French possessions gained by Henry's sword have been lost to the French, that Talbot, the commander of the English army and the saviour of England, has been captured, and that the Dauphin Charles has been crowned at Rheims. All three of these catastrophes have been caused by disunity and quarreling among the English nobles.

In England the child king, Henry VI, is surrounded by his ambitious uncles: Gloucester, Protector of the Realm, and Winchester, who take advantage of their regency to advance their own interests and to neglect the affairs of the nation. Even in the streets of London is shown the dissension between Winchester and Gloucester as their servants pelt each other's pates with rocks.

Meanwhile, in France, Talbot, who has been exchanged for a French prisoner, and Salisbury have been defending Orleans valiantly, but without supplies or support from England. Unfortunately, aid comes for the French

in the person of Joan la Pucelle, a shepherd maid who proclaims herself inspired by God. She shortly wins the esteem and respect of the Dauphin and raises the seige of Orleans. Unfortunately also, a French gunner kills Salisbury, Talbot's chief aid. In a bit of comedy, the British scorn the powers of Joan and retake the city at night, putting the French to flight clad only in their night shirts.

While the French and English are battling in France, the English nobles are still quarreling in London. At the Temple Gardens, Richard Plantagenet, heir to the House of York, opposes John Beaufort, Earl of Somerset, head of the Lancastrian house. Those siding with Richard pick white roses, while those who favor Somerset's cause pick red roses. Thus with bitter taunts the War of the Roses has its origin. Shortly, Richard is told by Edmund Mortimer, on the latter's deathbed, that his father, the late Earl of Cambridge, had been executed by Henry V, was not a traitor, as his enemies have insisted, and that Richard himself is the true heir of Richard II.

When Richard goes to Parliament to claim his inheritance, he finds Winchester and Gloucester fighting. Warwick, who later becomes king-maker, both settles the dispute and puts York's petition before Henry. Instead of raising York to his rightful place by blood descent, Henry restores his entire patrimony and creates him Duke of York. The court then leaves for France for Henry's coronation in Paris.

In France Joan, disguised as a peasant selling corn, leads four soldiers into Rouen and admits the French troops, who expell the English; but Talbot rallies his soldiers and retakes the city. While in retreat, the French meet the brave and powerful Duke of Burgundy, one of Talbot's

most reliable supporters. Joan wins the Duke over to the French side by appealing to his nationalism and by convincing him that Talbot is using him. Henry rewards Talbot for his valiant service by making him Earl of Shrewsbury.

Disorder between the York and Lancaster factions manifests itself even at the coronation of Henry. In an attempt to reconcile these two families, Henry appoints York regent of France, places him in charge of the infantry, and places Somerset in charge of the cavalry. Because these two nobles will not co-operate, Talbot and his son are defeated by the Dauphin's superior force.

Overtures of peace are made to the English by the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and the Pope. Peace is to be sealed by the marriage of the young king to the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac, who would bring with her a large dowry. The Bishop of Winchester, who through bribery has become a Cardinal, is appointed ambassador to conclude the peace and bring the bride back to England. Meanwhile, in the battle of Angiers, Joan la Pucelle is taken prisoner by York. Forsaken by the fiends who had helped her, she is burned at the stake as a witch.¹ During the same time the Earl of Suffolk takes captive Margaret of Anjou, daughter of Regnier, titular King of Naples, and falls in love with her. Since he is already married, Suffolk decides to marry her to Henry so that he can gain control over the weak king through her. Peace is declared between England and France to the disgust of York, with Charles as viceroy under

¹Shakespeare reflects the views of his age when he represents Joan of Arc as a witch. To an Elizabethan she was not a saint, and France was a land of instability and political intrigue.

Henry. In the meantime, Suffolk's description of Margaret so pleases the young king that, contrary to the wishes of Gloucester and Exeter, he breaks his contract to the daughter of Armagnac and agrees to Regnier's terms of marriage. Suffolk is dispatched to bring Margaret to England.

2 Henry VI opens with the arrival of Margaret of Anjou in England. The disgraceful terms of the marriage treaty signed by the Earl of Suffolk are disclosed: the surrender of the duchies of Anjou and Maine, the omission of a dowry, and the cost of transportation of the bride to be paid by Henry. Gloucester reads the conditions with utter dismay, but since Henry is delighted with his new wife, he accepts the terms, raises Suffolk to the rank of Duke, and relieves York of his regency in France.

Shortly, the Lancastrian party begins to rally around the queen, who has become jealous of Gloucester's wife. Each leading member of the court except the Nevils, Warwick, and Salisbury, for one selfish reason or another, becomes determined to oust Gloucester from his post as Protector of the Realm. Knowing the desire of Eleanor, Gloucester's wife, to be queen, Winchester, now Cardinal Beaufort, York, and Suffolk plot to involve her with witches and conjurers. While the Duchess and her associates are at their sorceries, York and Buckingham break into the garden and arrest them all as traitors. But before she is arrested, Eleanor has heard a prophecy that the Duke yet lives who will depose King Henry, that the Duke of Suffolk shall die by water, and that the Duke of Somerset should avoid castles. Later she is tried for sorcery and banished to the Isle of Man, while Gloucester, in disgrace, begs to be relieved from his post. But before this happens Gloucester proves

his value as a counselor when he shows up a bogus miracle which had duped the highly religious king. Gloucester has also lost the support of the Nevils because he changed his support from York to Somerset when he heard York accused of desiring the throne.

York then convinces Salisbury and Warwick that he is the rightful heir to the throne and gets their promise of help whenever he attempts to get the throne. Shortly after Gloucester is relieved of his staff of office, he is summoned to Parliament. The queen, Suffolk, Cardinal Beaufort, and York all accuse him of various types of treason and try to poison the king's mind against him. Even though Henry knows him to be innocent of all the charges, he is coerced into imprisoning Gloucester in the tower. Knowing Gloucester's popularity with both the king and the commons, the cabal plans to have him murdered.

Meanwhile, the old feud between the two houses of York and Lancaster breaks out again. A rebellion also breaks out in Ireland. In order to get rid of their rival, York, the Cardinal and Suffolk, assuming royal authority, send York to squelch it. York, delighted at the prospect of raising an army, encourages Jack Cade, a laborer, to take the name of John Mortimer and stir up trouble while the duke is in Ireland.

With their leader, Gloucester, gone, the commons revolt. Selecting the Nevils as their spokesmen, they demand the banishment of Suffolk for his part in the murder of Gloucester. The king agrees, and Suffolk bids farewell to the queen, who confesses her love for him and promises to try to follow him. Simultaneously, a sudden illness strikes the Cardinal, who dies cursing both man and God. Suffolk is later captured by pirates off the coast of Kent and is beheaded. Thus the first

prophecy of the Duchess of Gloucester is fulfilled as Suffolk dies by water.

Meanwhile, Jack Cade, followed by the rabble, begins his rebellion. After a few successes he and his men reach London and capture London Bridge. He then lays claim to the city, defeats a royal force, and beheads Lord Say. Chaos becomes more apparent when Cade's followers ride triumphantly through the streets of London with their victims' heads on posts. Luckily, Lord Clifford is able to stop the rebellion by persuading the mob to turn against their leader. Later Cade is killed by a Kentish squire.

This rebellion gives York his excuse to return to England with a fully equipped army. Henry sends Buckingham to appease York and promises that Somerset will be confined in the Tower. At first York is conciliatory, but when he sees Somerset walking about with the queen, he becomes furious. He then declares his own right to the throne and begins open rebellion. Clifford and his son side with the king; Warwick, Salisbury, and York form the opposition. Later, at St. Albans, the houses of York and Lancaster come into conflict. York is victorious, and his crook-back son Richard distinguishes himself by killing Somerset near the Castle Inn. Thus the second prophecy of Eleanor comes to pass. Hearing that the king and queen have fled, York hastens to London to prevent the king from calling Parliament.

3 Henry VI opens with Henry and his followers arriving in London, only to find York seated on the throne, surrounded by his sons and followers and supported in his demand for the throne by Warwick. Henry and York each argues that he is the rightful king. Henry feels that

since his father and grandfather were kings he is the rightful king. Not only that, he has already been anointed. To counter this argument, York claims that since Henry IV was a usurper, his descendants are also unlawful kings. He then points out through a rather complicated genealogical history that he is a member of the third branch of Edward III's line, while Henry is descended from the fourth branch.

Each contends that the other must yield, but neither does until Warwick signals for armed troops to enter by stamping his foot. Henry then surrenders, but begs to keep the throne through his own lifetime. By disinheriting his own son, he promises the succession to York and York's heirs. He even proposes to make York Protector of the Realm and Warwick chancellor. On hearing the king make such concessions, his followers denounce him and leave him to face his queen by himself. When Margaret hears of this disgrace, she also denounces her timorous husband and vows to raise an army against the usurpers.

Just as York is yielding to his sons' ambitions that he should take the throne at once, word comes that Margaret is approaching with an army. In a battle fought near Wakefield, the queen is victorious. York and his son Rutland, a boy of about twelve, are both slain.

Warwick, whose forces have been defeated near St. Albans, joins Edward and Richard, sons of York. Together they decide to fight to the finish. While Clifford and Margaret are waiting for the fray to begin, they try to instill some manhood into Henry, but have no success. Henry feels guilty about his right to retain the crown and mourns over the loss of English blood, especially that of York, resulting from the conflict.

The king is then told to sit on a mole hill so that his presence will not demoralize the troops.

After a parley of mutual defiance and threats, the two armies fight again. While the king sits helplessly on the mole hill wishing he were dead or were born a shepherd so that he could live quietly, he sees a father kill a son and a son kill a father. In this battle the Yorkist forces triumph. Clifford is killed, the queen escapes to France, and Henry escapes to Scotland. York is crowned Edward IV. Warwick is sent to France to obtain the hand of Bona, the sister-in-law of Louis XI. York's brother George is made Duke of Clarence, and his brother Richard is made Duke of Gloucester.

Soon afterwards Henry VI steals back from Scotland for a sight of his former kingdom and is recognized by two gamekeepers. He is sent to London and put in the Tower. Meanwhile, Edward IV falls in love with Lady Elizabeth Grey when she appears before him to beg for the rights of her fatherless children. Since she will not consider a dishonorable union, he marries her. While these events are occurring in London, Warwick arrives at the French court of Louis XI. Margaret, already there, denounces Warwick and pleads with Charles for aid in recovering the throne. In spite of Margaret, Warwick obtains the consent of Bona and Louis to the marriage and alliance. Just as negotiations are being completed, word arrives of Edward's marriage to Lady Grey. Incensed at this breach of honor and the insult to himself, Warwick denounces Edward and joins forces with Margaret and Louis to place Henry on the throne again. As a pledge of his good faith, Warwick offers his eldest daughter to the young prince Edward in marriage.

Back in England the three brothers have fallen into dissension. Gloucester supports Edward; Clarence joins Warwick and is betrothed to Warwick's second daughter. The invading forces are successful. Edward is captured and deposed, and Henry regains the throne. Henry, however, resigns the government to Warwick and Clarence. He plans to lead henceforth a simple swain's life.

Escaping to Burgundy through Gloucester's aid, York raises an army and soon returns. He recovers his estates in Yorkshire and shortly marches on London. Henry is imprisoned in the Tower; Edward resumes the crown and sets out for Coventry to meet Warwick. Just before the battle begins, Clarence changes sides and returns to Edward. As the fierce battle rages, Warwick is slain. Prince Edward is captured and stabbed by the three York brothers. Margaret, bringing up reinforcements, is also defeated at Tewkesberry. Later she is ransomed to her father. Gloucester kills Henry in the Tower. York retains control of the throne.

CHAPTER II

KING HENRY VI

1 Henry VI is the work of a talented young playwright who had psychological insight enough to note the different roles forced upon a young king by his society, but who as yet was without the skill to integrate the various aspects of that king's personality into a unified characterization. While Shakespeare is able to characterize Henry as a child in one part of a scene and as a king in another part, he is not able to combine the two roles successfully. Thus, because the characterization varies from scene to scene without credible motivation, Henry seems a puppet moved by an external force. The young ruler is only an embryonic character whom Shakespeare was unable to supply with a complete personality.

As a man, Henry is characterized only by youth and saintliness. He exudes Christian virtue, but is not a good king. In fact, his strengths as a man lead to his chief faults as a king. Because of his simplicity and sincerity, his blindness to the treachery and evil in those around him, he lacks understanding of the political situation and as a result often acts foolishly. Throughout the play he is the only one who believes in Christian ethics and metaphysics. But although his attitude is Christian, it is not Christlike, because he continually refuses to take any direct physical action against the evil and corruption of the court. While even Christ chased the money lenders out of the temple, Henry is almost never moved to action. In fact, his bookish set of ethics and

his passive Christian attitude seem a substitute for action. But by not acting and by often ignoring evil, Henry does more harm than he might do through any kind of action. On the other hand, when he does act, the result is usually ineffective or harmful to the realm and to himself because he operates in almost complete ignorance of the situation.

Ethically, Henry has a wider perspective than those around him. But his ethic fails because he is no judge of character and cannot distinguish between what men say and what they do. For him words are a reality in themselves. If the other characters in the play had accepted the same Christian values he has accepted, Henry might have been able to rule successfully. While the young king sees the need for moral force, yet neglects the need of physical force, everyone else sees the need for physical force and neglects moral force. An efficient ruler needs both moral and physical force.

As king, one finds it is hard to determine whether Henry is acting on his own behalf or simply following someone else's decisions. Only in the last scene is it certain that he acts on his own. Here he seems to be an entirely different person from what he is in the rest of the play. The only characteristic the youthful monarch shows which is in keeping with the earlier picture of him is his overevaluation of words.

Henry is a good man born into a position he is not suited to fill. He was only nine months old when he came to the throne. During his "tender years," the court is dominated by the Lord Protector of the Realm, his uncle Gloucester. But Gloucester is not in complete control; several powerful nobles stand in opposition to him. Foremost among them is the young ruler's other uncle, the Bishop of Winchester. Since Henry's uncles

are continually quarreling, the entire privy council is divided, and the realm is in disorder. Throughout the play, with the exception of Gloucester, everyone in the court tries to further his own gain at the expense of the public good.

Almost as dangerous to Henry's precarious position is the dormant dynastic struggle between the descendants of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the third son of Edward III, and the descendants of John of Gaunt, Henry VI's great-grandfather and the fourth son of Edward III. The political situation is compounded because Henry is a mere child, yet a child who wants to see justice done. Accordingly, in an attempt to alleviate the crime done against the Duke of York's father, Henry restores York's patrimony to him. With the wealth and position that he has been given, York begins a plot to overthrow Henry that reduces the entire realm to civil war.

The political climate of self-seeking lords surrounding Henry VI leads to the French victories in France. With the factious lords quarreling, Guiene, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans, Paris, Guysors, and Poitiers have been recaptured by the French. When asked by what treachery these towns have all been lost, the messenger replies:

No treachery; but want of men and money.
Amongst the soldiers this is muttered,
That here you maintain several factions,
And whilst a field should be dispatch'd and fought,
You are disputing of your generals:
One would have lingering wars with little cost;
Another would fly swift, but wanteth wings;
A third thinks, without expense at all,
By guileful fair words peace may be obtain'd....
Let not sloth dim your honours new-begot:

(I.H. VI, I, i, 68-80)¹

¹The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed. William Aldis Wright, (Garden City, New York, 1936). All quotations in this thesis are taken from this book.

Already England has lost much of France because disorder in the English court has spread to France, has seeped down through the commanders in the field, and has demoralized the common soldiers. This dissension among the peers has prevented needed men from reaching the armies in France. Indecision at home has prevented the generals from planning long-range strategy.

In Part I, the blame for Henry's actions is not completely his. He does not really enter into the action of the play until Act III. Because he is a youth of "tender years" (about ten years old), the Lord Protector of the Realm, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and the other peers rule the kingdom.² Henry himself says, "When Gloucester says the word, King Henry goes" (III, i, 181).

Although young, Henry does see the danger inherent in the quarrel of his uncles. But since he is under their guardianship, all the youthful monarch can do is to resort to words:

Uncles of Gloucester and of Winchester,
The special watchmen of our English weal,
I would prevail, if prayers might prevail,
To join your hearts in love and amity.

²In 1 Henry VI, Henry's age is impossible to determine from the play. Since periodic reference is made to his "tender years," it can be assumed that in the early part of the play Shakespeare meant for him to be considered a young boy, but just how young is hard to tell. Historical dates do not help to settle this question because Shakespeare takes great liberties with history. For example, in this play, after Henry is crowned in Paris, he sends Talbot out to chastise Burgundy. Talbot is killed in the ensuing battle. According to T. F. Tout, An Advanced History of Great Britain (London, 1914), pp. 175-178, Talbot is killed in 1453 at the Battle of Catillon. Henry, however, was crowned in Paris in 1431. Historically, then, there is thirty-one years difference between the two events, although in 1 Henry VI they happen almost concurrently. Henry appears as an adolescent when he marries Margaret of Anjou, but according to Tout, the marriage took place in 1455 when Henry was a young man of twenty-three. He was born in 1422.

O, what a scandal is it to our crown,
That two such noble peers as ye should jar!
Believe me, lords, my tender years can tell
Civil dissension is a viperous worm
That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth.
(III, i, 65-73)

Henry sees that moral force is necessary to an orderly realm. He recognizes the danger of civil dissension, but resorts only to prayers and requests. Even by this point in his reign, physical power is all that counts. Somerset, when asked on what his argument lies, replies, "Here in my scabbard, meditating that/ Shall dye your white rose in a bloody red" (II, iv, 60-61).

In contrast to the secular and personal ambitions of others in the court, Henry shows an altruistic and religious personality. With the possible exception of Gloucester and Exeter, who is more a choric commentator than a personality, Henry is the only character who really desires order and peace.

O, how this discord doth afflict my soul!
Can you, my Lord of Winchester, behold
My sighs and tears and will not relent?
Who should be pitiful, if you be not?
Or who should study to prefer a peace,
If holy churchmen take delight in broils?
(III, i, 105-110)

Thus Henry tries to act the peacemaker, but he does not inherit the earth according to Christ's dictum in the Sermon on the Mount.

In his attempt to mediate the quarrel between his uncles, Henry appears more mature ethically than they. The young king has a right to reprimand Beaufort, the Cardinal of Winchester, for not following what he preaches:

Fie, uncle Beaufort! I have heard you preach
That malice was a great and grievous sin;
And will not you maintain the thing you teach,
But prove a chief offender in the same?
(III, i, 126-129)

Henry is especially shocked when a member of the clergy shows malice. Henry is the only member of the court who is not contaminated in some manner, but he is not able to see the evil that goes on around him.

Because he is honest himself, he feels that those around him are also.

When his uncles verbally make peace (in an aside Winchester says he does not mean to keep it), Henry says happily:

How joyful am I made by this contract!
Away, my masters! trouble us no more;
But join in friendship, as your lords have done.
(III, i, 140-142)

A more succinct comment upon the situation is made by Exeter as choric commentator:

This late dissension grown betwixt the peers
Burns under feigned ashes of forged love,
And will at last break out into a flame;
As fester'd members rot but by degree,
Till bones and flesh and sinews fall away,
So will this base and envious discord breed.
And now I fear that fatal prophecy
Which in the time of Henry named the Fifth
Was in the mouth of every sucking babe;
That Henry born at Monmouth should win all
And Henry born at Windsor lose all:...
(III, i, 186-196)

When Henry is taken to France to be crowned in Paris, he does try to act the part of king, but his youth and inexperience prevent him. After he learns of the Burgundian change of alliance, he is unconcerned. "Lord Talbot there shall talk with him,/And give him chastisement for this abuse" (IV, i, 69-70). He orders Talbot to:

...gather strength, and march unto him straight:
Let him perceive how ill we brook this treason,
And what offence it is to flout his friends.
(IV, i, 74-76)

Henry does not realize the consequences of Burgundy's revolt. Because of the defection of Burgundy and the disunity spread by the English court on coming to France, Talbot, the last bulwark of order in France, goes down to defeat.

Nevertheless the main reason for Talbot's downfall is Henry's vacillation. When Somerset and York come to Henry to settle their dispute, they ask for trial by combat. Here Henry demonstrates a saner and more mature attitude than the nobles:

Good Lord, what madness rules in brainsick men,
When for so slight and frivolous a cause
Such factious emulations shall arise!
Good cousins both, of York and Somerset,
Quiet yourselves, I pray, and be at peace.
(IV, i, 112-116)

Henry's attitude is sane, but he foolishly believes a strong hatred can be erased by a simple request. In his attempt to reconcile York and Somerset, he is again forced to rely on empty words when he beseeches them:

Come hither, you that would be combatants:
Henceforth I charge you, as you love our favour,
Quite to forget this quarrel and the cause.
(IV, i, 135-137)

But words mean nothing to these two. Somerset has already told York that his argument lies in his scabbard. Henry then reminds them:

...remember where we are;
In France, amongst a fickle wavering nation:
If they perceive dissension in our looks
And that within ourselves we disagree,
How will their grudging stomachs be provoked
To wilful disobedience, and rebel!

Beside, what infamy will there arise,
When foreign princes shall be certified
That for a toy, a thing of no regard,
King Henry's peers and chief nobility
Destroy'd themselves, and lost the realm of France!
O, think upon the conquest of my father,
My tender years, and let us not forgo
That for a trifle that was bought with blood!
(IV, i, 138-151)

Here Henry shows a wider perspective than the rest of the court, but at the same time he lacks understanding of the ugliness of the situation. He is right in believing that it is foolish for the English lords to fight and destroy themselves and in this manner lose France because of a quarrel about the color of a rose--yet, ironically, that is what happens. Every major character, including Talbot, who appears in this scene, is killed as a result of this squabble over the color of a flower.

Henry further shows his lack of understanding of the situation when he asks Somerset and York to

Let me be umpire in this doubtful strife.
I see no reason, if I wear this rose,
That anyone should therefore be suspicious
I more incline to Somerset than York;
(IV, i, 152-155)

Henry acts here in complete ignorance of the situation. Unwittingly, by picking the red rose, he has chosen the Lancastrian faction and alienated himself from the Yorkists. If Henry were no more inclined to Somerset than to York, he should not have chosen either rose.

Again, Henry gets into trouble because he is the only one who accepts a Christian set of ethics. When he tells York and Somerset:

Both are my kinsmen, and I love them both:
As well they may upbraid me with my crown,
Because, forsooth, the king of Scots is crown'd.
But your discretions better can persuade
Than I am able to instruct or teach:
And therefore, as we hither came in peace,
So let us still continue peace and love.

(IV, i, 156-162)

Here Henry expresses Christian values: one should love one's kinsmen, but in the world of power politics it is hard, if not impossible, to love anyone and not lose out. Henry tells York and Somerset what they should do to "continue peace and love," but no one is interested in his instructions. Each is interested only in his personal desires; the result is civil chaos.

Because of his religious attitude, Henry commits one of his biggest blunders by dividing the command of the English army:

Cousin of York, we institute your grace
To be our regent in these parts of France:
And, good my Lord of Somerset, unite
Your troops of horsemen with his bands of foot;
And, like true subjects, sons of your progenitors,
Go cheerfully together and digest
Your angry choler on your enemies.

(IV, i, 163-169)

Neither Somerset nor York has told Henry that he would be friendly with the other. As a result of their enmity, Talbot goes down to defeat. Neither York nor Somerset will come to his aid because of fear and jealousy of the other.

After Henry has tried to patch up the quarrel between York and Somerset, Exeter, the choric commentator, warns the audience of future strife:

Well didst thou, Richard, to suppress thy voice;
For, had the passions of thy heart burst out,
I fear we should have seen decipher'd there
More rancorous spite, more furious raging broils,

Than yet can be imagined or supposed.
But howsoever, no simple man that sees
This jarring discord of nobility,
This shouldering of each other in the court,
This factious bandying of their favourites,
But that it doth presage some ill event.
'Tis much when sceptres are in children's hands;
But more when envy breeds unkind division;
There comes the ruin, there begins confusion.
(IV, i, 183-195)

Exeter believes there are three reasons for expecting a rebellion. The first is the ambition of York; the second is the weakness of a child-king; but the most important is the envy and jealousy of the lords of the realm and their division into factions.

In his desire for peace with France, Henry agrees to marry the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac. He always thought:

It was both impious and unnatural
That such immanity and bloody strife
Should reign among professors of one faith.
(V, i, 12-14)

Here in a preview of Part II, Henry again shows a personality that is basically religious.

In his next speech, Henry further demonstrates his other-worldliness.

Marriage, uncle! alas, my years are young!
And fitter is my study and my books
Than wanton dalliance with a paramour.
Yet call the ambassadors; and, as you please,
So let them have their answers every one:
I shall be content with any choice
Tends to God's glory and my country's weal.
(V, i, 21-27)

Although Henry is more interested in books and study than in love and marriage, he will marry to further God's glory and his country's welfare.

In the last scene of Part I, Henry has grown to manhood. Although not enough time has elapsed for Beaufort to return from France with

Henry's betrothed, the young king has matured enough to fall in love and marry. Here again he gets into trouble by confusing the word with the deed. To be convinced completely by words is typical of Henry. Without even seeing her, he falls in love with Margaret of Anjou because of Suffolk's description. He tells Suffolk:

Your wondrous rare description, noble earl,
Of beauteous Margaret hath astonish'd me:
Her virtues grace with external gifts
Do breed love's settled passions in my heart:
And like as rigour of tempestuous gusts
Provokes the mightiest hulk against the tide,
So am I driven by breath of her renown,
Either to suffer shipwreck or arrive
Where I may have fruition of her love.

(V, v, 1-9)

Typically, Henry makes no attempt to investigate or to look into the consequences of his action.

Only in this scene does Henry display any real passion for anything that is secular. He seems out of character when he asks Gloucester to give his consent to the marriage. The latter will not

...give consent to flatter sin.
You know, my lord, your highness is betroth'd
Unto another lady of esteem:
How shall we then dispense with that contract,
And not deface your honour with reproach?

(V, v, 25-29)

In this scene Gloucester shows himself the only trustworthy adviser Henry has. He is concerned with maintaining peace and preserving Henry's honor, but is unable to do so.

In his argument with Gloucester, Suffolk shows that words have become meaningless among members of the nobility when he says that Henry's contract with Armagnac may be broken:

As doth a ruler with unlawful oaths;
Or one that, at a triumph having vow'd
To try his strength, forsaketh yet the lists
By reason of his adversary's odds:
A poor earl's daughter is unequal odds,
And therefore may be broke without offence.
(V, v, 30-35)

Once this precedent is established, no oaths need be honored, because they are dependent only upon who has the most might.³

Only in the last scene does Henry put his personal desires above the good of the kingdom. But even here it is not desire for power or wealth that influences him. He is not interested in a dowry and agrees with Suffolk when the latter says:

A dower, my lords! disgrace not so your king,
That he should be so abject, base and poor,
To choose for wealth and not for perfect love.
Henry is able to enrich his queen,
And not to seek a queen to make him rich:
So worthless peasants bargain for their wives,
As market-men for oxen, sheep or horse.
(V, v, 48-54)

Henry should, however, have secured a dowry because continual wars with France had drained the treasury.

While he does seem older in this scene, Henry still shows his youth, especially in his last speech:

³In 3 H. VI York's son makes a similar speech:

An oath is of no moment, being not took
Before a true and lawful magistrate,
That hath authority over him that swears:
Henry had none, but did usurp the place;
Then, seeing 'twas he that made you to depose,
Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.
(3 H. VI, I, ii, 22-27)

Whether it be through force of your report,
My noble Lord of Suffolk, or for that
My tender youth was never yet attain'd
With any passion of inflaming love,
I cannot tell; but this I am assured,
I feel....Such fierce alarms both of hope and fear,
As I am sick with working of my thoughts.
Take, therefore, shipping; post, my lord, to France;
Agree to any covenants, and procure
That Lady Margaret do vouchsafe to come
To cross the seas to England, and be crown'd
King Henry's faithful and anointed queen:
(V, v, 79-91)

The young king is having his first love affair, and as in the case of many youths, it has robbed him of his reason. His fervor for Margaret can be called nothing but infatuation.

So great is Henry's desire for Margaret that for the first time he asserts his will against that of Gloucester, although he does it in an apologetic way:

And you, good uncle, banish all offence:
If you do censure me by what you were,
Not what you are, I know it will excuse
This sudden execution of my will.
(V, v, 96-99)

Unfortunately, Henry has neither the understanding nor the prudence to rule. Instead of the cold-hearted self-interest needed for success in power politics, he is compassionate and forgiving by nature.

1 Henry VI does not really resolve any issues. In the play only time has passed. The play ends as it begins, with Henry still a pawn in a power struggle between older and more experienced men. But by now these men are more powerful, ruthless, and ambitious than Gloucester. The last speech in the play depicts what the future holds for Henry when Suffolk says, "Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king;/ But I will rule both her, the king and realm" (V, v, 107-108).

PART II

In 2 Henry VI Shakespeare failed to focus on one or two characters whose actions are significant, almost as if he did not clearly recognize what the central issues are. As a result, he created a shot-gun effect which scatters attention and interest over so many characters and events that all are blurred because of inadequate treatment. Thus one gets the impression that all of the people in the play are cast in minor or supporting roles with no main character to provide a center of interest.

Nor does any one event seem particularly important. What issues Shakespeare was trying to explore in this play are not definitely apparent, but judging from the title, The Second Part of Henry VI, one may consider it likely that he wanted to explore the personality of Henry. On the surface Henry again has all the accepted Christian virtues, yet as a king he is a failure. Considering the age in which he lived and the attitude towards Christianity he expresses in his later plays, one is inclined to doubt that Shakespeare was trying to deride Christian principles. Yet Henry deserves to lose his throne. When he loses the Battle of St. Albans, Henry is a piteous character, but he arouses in the spectator more contempt for his weakness than pity for his misfortunes.

Henry is in many ways a complete fool. He understands little of what is going on about him and is confused even by his religious values. For him Christianity is a passive way of life that provides an easy escape from the intrigues and corruption of the royal court. Virtue to

him amounts to unawareness of evil, not a rejection of evil nor a struggle against it. His holiness becomes an excuse for cowardice, a negation of responsibility in an adult world. Thus Henry does not really represent Christian life in a secular society. Only as an anchorite could he have lived what for him would be a successful life.

While Henry follows Christian tenets literally and blindly, he never sees the ramifications of his actions--or too often, his lack of action--because he always stays on the surface. He loves everyone and never willingly harms anyone. But by not injuring anyone nor hindering the actions of evil and ambitious men, he does great harm to the kingdom. Not even his religious views are solid, for by the end of Part II they drive him to the point of fatalism and despair, the great sin of the Renaissance; despair signifies dissatisfaction with God's ordering of the universe.

Guided by surface impressions alone, Henry never learns from experience and never understands his environment. Every important person around him except Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and Lord Protector of the Realm, is obsessed by ambition and is attempting to gain at least a share in the control of the kingdom. Although various quarrels break out in his presence, Henry does not see their significance, or at least fails to act, with the result that the realm is on the verge of chaos.

In trying to create a successful character whose chief personality traits are an unworldly saintliness and a refusal to act, Shakespeare fails to give a rounded picture of Henry, who is seen only as a static individual caught in a web of evil. Since he undergoes no enlightenment during the course of the play, no psychological or moral development of

his character can take place. Most of the action revolves around Henry because of his central position in the court, but he is so inactive that he is hardly missed or considered when off-stage.

Worse yet, Henry's actions do not always follow his nature. Rather than speak like a king, too often he sounds like a priest reading a sermon which has little or nothing to do with the subject at hand. At other times, for no ostensible reason, he appears quite different. At one time he tells the court to forgive the rabble who follow Jack Cade in his revolt against the crown. A little later he praises God for removing a troublemaker when Cade's head is brought into court.

Since Henry shows no genuine internal conflict, his speeches often bring the action of the play to a standstill or cause it to move along monotonously. As a result, Shakespeare is forced to present nearly all of the action on a physical plane. Because Henry's principles are those expressed in sermons and because he takes no definite stand on pertinent issues, he seems to lack intellectual honesty. Throughout the play he maintains a child-like kind of innocence and naïveté that is unconvincing.

Even this early in his career Shakespeare appeared to recognize that many different traits exist within an individual's personality, but he had not yet learned to portray them interacting upon one another. In 2 Henry VI¹ the inconsistencies that exist in the characterization of Henry are fewer than those found in 1 Henry VI. But he still lacks any internal motivation. He appears to be moved by an external force as a pawn is

¹Like E. M. W. Tillyard I am assuming that 1 H. VI. was written before 2 H. VI. Those interested in this question should consult his Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 161.

moved from square to square by a chess player. Part of the problem is that Shakespeare was unable to handle more than one aspect of Henry's character at a time. Each scene reveals a part of Henry's personality, but does not show any evolution of character or suggest other aspects of his character.

In 2 Henry VI, Henry is noted for his saintliness just as in 1 Henry VI. Although in Part II no mention is made of "his tender years," he still behaves like a child in his refusal to shoulder responsibility, in his lack of interest in governmental matters, in his lack of insight into the courtly environment, and in his surface acceptance of his surroundings. At one point only in Part II does he develop some insight into his own character when he realizes that he does not have the ability to be a successful ruler. He confesses, "For yet may England curse my wretched reign" (IV, ix, 49).

As a man Henry's chief characteristics are his over-concern with religion, his desire to be a peacemaker, his poor judgment, his failure to fight for his beliefs, and his physical cowardice. Because of his religious nature, he lives within a closed system of values. On every side in his corrupt world, he sees signs of God. The fake miracle at St. Albans, immediately proved bogus by Gloucester, Henry accepts blindly as an example of God's mercy and goodness. The defeat of the drunken armorer, Horner, by his apprentice, Peter, and the defeat of Jack Cade by the royal forces, he believes are revelations of God's justice. Blind to the evil, treachery, and ambition about him, Henry naïvely ignores his obligation to maintain order in the realm because he believes God will do it. Thus, by his refusal to rule, he himself is ruled by

the various quarreling factions within his court.

Not only is Henry blind to what goes on about him; he is immaturely impressionable, blindly open to suggestion. He becomes enamored of Margaret in Part I before he has seen her, influenced solely by Suffolk's glowing description of her charms. Part II opens with Suffolk introducing her to Henry. Careless of the consequences of a marriage contract that costs him the provinces of Maine and Anjou, Henry accepts her and insists that she be crowned as queen.

He proves himself pitiably impotent as a ruler when he fails to support Gloucester. He knows Gloucester has faithfully served the realm, but he lacks courage to assert his kingly authority in his defense. Protesting feebly that the Lord Protector is a loyal subject who is innocent of any crime, Henry does not restrain Suffolk from arresting Gloucester in the king's name, although he suspects, in his uncertain manner, that Gloucester will be murdered. With the fall of Gloucester, Henry is surrounded completely by powerful, covetous, selfish nobles.

Another of Henry's personality weaknesses is evidenced by the interrelation between his religious attitude and the value he places upon words. His religion is not practiced but verbalized. From his Christian frame of reference, he can interpret the smallest incident, such as the performance of a falcon at St. Albans, as a reminder of the working of God's will.

But what a point, my lord, your falcon made,
And what a pitch she flew above the rest!
To see how God in all His creatures works!
Yea, man and birds are fain of climbing high.
(II, i, 5-8)

In contrast to Henry's religiosity is the secular attitude of the rest of the court, exemplified by Beaufort when he accuses Gloucester:

Thy heaven is on earth; thine eyes and
thoughts
Beat on a crown, the treasure of thy
heart;

(II, i, 19-20)

Thus, while Henry is contemplating the wonders of God, others are scheming to get the crown.

In his attempt to uphold Christian ethics, Henry professes to love everyone. When he dismisses Gloucester from his office of Lord Protector of the Realm, he tells him, "...go in peace, Humphrey, no less beloved/Than when thou were protector to the king" (II, iii, 26-27). Henry never finds fault with anyone. Even at the death bed of the remorseful Cardinal Beaufort, palpably one of those guilty in the murder of Gloucester, Henry admonishes Salisbury and Warwick to "Forbear to judge for we are sinners all" (III, iii, 30). Christian and saintly as this admonition may be, such an attitude is not likely to lead to the punishment of those involved in the murder, and unpunished political murder can lead to social chaos.

But while Henry is Christian, he is not Christlike. He differs from Christ in that he refuses, in a sense, to admit that evil exists. He expresses his value system when he says:

What stronger breastplate than a heart
untainted!
Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.
(III, ii, 232-235)

Uttered shortly after the murder of Gloucester, one of the most virtuous of men, the above speech seems ludicrous and naïve.

In his saintly way Henry would also be a peacemaker:

I prithee, peace, good queen,
And whet not on these furious peers;
For blessed are the peacemakers on earth.
(II, i, 34-36)

But as a peacemaker he proves ineffectual too. As usual he insists on talking, yet refuses to take any decisive action to maintain peace and order, because he is afraid of committing evil. When Warwick demands justice for Humphrey's death, Henry prays:

O Thou that judgest all things, stay my thoughts,
My thoughts, that labour to persuade my soul
Some violent hands were laid on Humphrey's life!
If my suspect be false, forgive me, God....
(III, ii, 136-139)

Since Henry is God's viceroy on earth, he is expected to enforce justice in the realm. Instead of praying to God for forgiveness in case his suspicions are wrong, he should have investigated the crime.

Henry is willing to uphold justice only when the responsibility is not his. Thus he believes in ordeal by battle: God decides who is right and who is wrong. When the armorer is defeated by Peter, the apprentice, Henry says:

Go, take hence that traitor from our sight;
For by his death we do perceive his guilt:
And God in justice hath reveal'd to us
The truth and innocence of this poor fellow....
(II, iii, 95-98)

Convinced by the outcome of the trial-by-combat that Peter is innocent and Horner is guilty, Henry pays no attention to the nature of the crime. The armorer had committed treason by saying that York is the rightful king. Thus the question of Henry's right to the throne has diffused through the realm until even the common people are involved. Yet after this fact has been brought to Henry's attention, he does nothing to remove York from power.

Henry's passive nature is shown when he lets Suffolk arrest Gloucester. Since the Lord Protector has answered the first group of charges brought against him, Suffolk arrests him because of unspecified ones when he says:

My lord, these faults are easy, quickly
answer'd:
But mightier crimes are laid unto your charge,
Whereof you cannot easily purge yourself.
I do arrest you in his highness' name;
And here commit you to my lord cardinal
To keep until your further time of trial.
(III, i, 133-138)

Even though his "conscience tells me you [Gloucester] are innocent" (III, i, 141), Henry allows Gloucester to be arrested on vague charges. Continually, Henry refuses to stand up for what he believes.

As a ruler, Henry does not take enough interest in government. When the lords debate the question of sending Somerset or York as regent to France, Henry displays no genuine concern: "For my part, noble lords, I care not which;/Or Somerset or York, all's one to me" (I, iii, 99-100). Even after Henry has removed Gloucester from the Protectorship, he refuses to take the responsibility of ruling. Immediately following Humphrey's arrest, he tells the same peers who have falsely accused Gloucester, "My lords, what to your wisdom seemeth best,/Do or undo, as if ourself were here" (III, i, 193-194). Then he leaves the court because:

...my heart is drown'd with grief,
Whose flood begins to flow within mine eyes,
My body round engirt with misery,
For what's more miserable than discontentment?
Ah, uncle Humphrey! in thy face I see
The map of honour, truth and loyalty:
And yet, good Humphrey, is the hour to come
That e'er I proved thee false or fear'd thy
faith.

What louring star now envies thy estate,
That these great lords and Margaret our queen
Do seek subversion of thy harmless life?
Thou never didst them wrong nor no man wrong....
(III, i, 196-207)

Whenever problems arise requiring violent methods for quelling violence, Henry's self pity and lack of pluck appear. In such cases, he wishes he were not a king, especially a king who was crowned at nine months of age:

Was ever king that joy'd an earthly throne,
And could command no more content than I?
No sooner was I crept out of my cradle
But I was made a king, at nine months old.
Was never subject long'd to be a king
As I do long and wish to be a subject.
(IV, ix, 1-6)

After the defeat at St. Albans (V, ii) because of his reliance upon God's direction, Henry does not even want to run away, for, he says, "Can we outrun the heavens? good Margaret, stay" (V, ii, 73). He leaves only after she upbraids him:

What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor
fly:
Now is it manhood, wisdom and defence,
To give the enemy way, and to secure us
By what we can, which can no more but fly.
If you be ta'en, we then should see the bottom
Of all our fortunes: but if we haply scape,
As well we may, if not through your neglect,
We shall to London get, where you are loved,
And where this breach now in our fortunes
made
May readily be stopp'd.
(V, ii, 74-83)

Here Margaret sums up much of Henry's character in Part II. She knows her husband's weakness and realizes he prefers to sit rather than to commit himself to action. Very early in the play she begins to think that he lacks wisdom, will, and manhood. Soon after she comes to

England, she mentions to Suffolk:

...all his mind is bent to holiness,
To number Ave-Maries on his beads;
His champions are the prophets and apostles,
His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,
His study is his tilt-yard, and his loves
Are brazen images of canonized saints.
(I, iii, 52-57)

Thus, while Henry sees the necessity of moral force, he constantly fails to recognize the existence of physical force. On the other hand, the rest of the court fails to recognize the existence of moral force. While physical force is easier to demonstrate, the effect of moral force is just as important. During Henry's reign the realm is in chaos because he lives in a world full of treacherous, ambitious, and opportunistic men, to whom moral claims are meaningless.

In considering the relationship between moral order and physical force, Michael Quin points out that the fate of the wicked is comprehensible on moral grounds as punishment for sin.² Although Shakespeare evidently meant the audience to recognize the futility of reliance upon God to the extent that it inhibits intelligent action, he does not deny the possibility of arbitrary intervention. He could scarcely have done so and retained a belief in an omnipotent God. The deaths of Winchester and Suffolk are sufficient warning God can, when He wills, strike without warning. But God's normal mode of working is to allow the wicked to be caught in the mechanism of general providence which ensures that dissension breeds murder, revenge, civil war, and, ultimately, tyranny, and that this process includes the punishment of the wicked.

²Michael Quin, "Providence in Shakespeare's Yorkist Plays," Shakespeare Quarterly (1959), X, 50.

PART III

As a play, 3 Henry VI shows no advance over its predecessor. The issues presented and explored in 2 Henry VI now come to a head, but Shakespeare cannot resolve them until he writes the last play of the tetralogy, Richard III, because according to the Tudor theory of history these questions were not resolved until Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, ascended the throne as Henry VII and united the houses of York and Lancaster. The dynastic problem and the power problem in 3 Henry VI intensify into a chaotic, apparently meaningless situation. By the end of the play, a fragile order exists with Henry VI dead and Edward IV securely on the throne. The House of York has won the crown, and the direct male line of the House of Lancaster is exterminated; but Richard, Duke of Gloucester--Richard Crookback--is waiting to smash such order as exists and seize the crown. Nevertheless, owing to Shakespeare's inept handling of this theme, such as it is, the play seems almost meaningless, although when performed it can be enjoyable because enough colorful action takes place in the battle scenes to make it exciting.¹

¹Sir Barry Jackson expresses the opinion that Part II and Part III of Henry VI made two of the strongest impressions of all the history plays when he saw them produced in 1906. He admits that this is probably due to the frame of mind he was in at the time. He further states that when they were revived by his Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1952 and 1953 they were considered quite successful. 3 Henry VI was even taken to the Old Vic. He feels "that the work is ill-shaped, lacking the cohesion brought of practice, a spate of events viewed from a wide angle may be added cause for neglect, but there is little doubt in my mind that the basic reason [for their neglect] is the omission of one or two star roles and the inclusion of a number of interesting ones." ("On Producing Henry VI," Shakespeare Survey, VI, (1953), p. 50.

About what issues Shakespeare was trying to explore in this play, there is no consensus among the critics. E. M. W. Tillyard suggests chaos as the theme and believes that for this reason Shakespeare did not want to cast the play into a pattern, feeling that "formlessness of a sort was as necessary to his purposes here as the wide scattered geography of Antony and Cleopatra was to the imperial setting of that play."² Tillyard feels that Shakespeare "had a great mass of chronicle matter to deal with and he failed to control it; or rather in paring it to manageable length he fails to make it significant."³

The material Shakespeare is working with is certainly episodic by nature, and he is able to develop each scene so that it has dramatic unity, but the play as a whole lacks unity because he is not able to integrate the scenes. He failed to control his material, not because he was too inexperienced as when he wrote 1 Henry VI, but because he was experimenting with a different type of structure in 3 Henry VI. He no longer seems interested in simple plot development. As in his later plays, he includes scenes which do not further the plot but that comment upon pertinent issues.⁴ Henry's famous shepherd speech (II, v, 1-54) is an example. On a plot level it contributes little or nothing, but on a thematic level it is essential because it summarizes Henry's attitude toward the political

²Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 190.

³Ibid.

⁴On a strictly plot level, neither the garden scene in Richard II nor the bedroom scene in Hamlet contribute anything to the plot. In a stage production either scene could be left out of its respective play without hindering the audience from following the action. But both scenes are essential to thematic development.

situation and toward the ordered life which he is unable to live.

This scene takes on additional importance when it is compared to the long soliloquy of Richard Crookback in III, ii, in which Richard expresses his political ambitions, his cynical view of life, and his Machiavellian attitude toward politics, which is the direct antithesis of Henry's. One might argue then that 3 Henry VI is organized, in general, upon the contrast between the values of Henry and Richard. These two soliloquies form the structural pillars of the play.

In the shepherd speech, Henry shows a surprising amount of insight into the political situation:

This battle fares like to the morning's war,
When dying clouds contend with growing light,
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day nor night.
Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea
Forced by the tide to combat with the wind....
Sometime the flood prevails, and then the wind;
Now one the better, then another best;
Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror nor conquered:
So is the equal poise of this fell war.
Here on this molehill will I sit me down.
(II, v, 1-14)

By comparing one faction to the wind and the other to the sea, both unstable elements, Henry points out how neither the Lancastrian nor the Yorkist forces has a steady foundation on which to rest its case. Not only the battle but also the question of who should rule has been in sway from the beginning of the play. The wind and the tide metaphor also shows the futility of the recurring battles that have been taking place. Henry, sitting on a molehill, brings to mind the tragic end of the Duke of York, who was murdered on a molehill in I, iv.

Henry alone recognizes that "to whom God will, there be the victory" (II, v, 15). He has been driven from the battlefield,

For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,
Have chid me from the battle; swearing both
They prosper best of all when I am thence.
(II, v, 16-18)

At first this speech makes Henry seem a weakling, but when the characters of Margaret and Clifford are examined, he is seen to hold a better attitude than theirs. Both Clifford and Margaret are after total revenge. Neither God's will, tolerance, nor patience ever enters into the mind of either. Clifford is so concerned with avenging his father's death that he even kills Rutland, the twelve-year-old son of Richard, Duke of York. Margaret's thirst for vengeance is just as violent. When the Duke of York is captured, she delays his murder until after she has taunted him by handing him a handkerchief, soaked in Rutland's blood, with which to wipe his eyes.

Henry's plight is described by William Baldwin in the title of his tragedy, "How king Henry the syxt a vertuous prince, was after many other miseries cruelly murdred in the Tower of London," in The Mirror for Magistrates (1559):

Such doltish heades as dreame that all thinges
drive by haps,
Count lack of former care for cause of after-
claps.
Attributing to man a power fro God bereft,
Abusing vs, and robbing him, through their
most wicked theft.

But god doth gide the world, and every hap
by skylle.
Our wit and willing power are paysted by his
will:
What wyt most wisely wardes, and wil most
deadly vrkes,

Though al our power would presse it downe,
doth dash our warest wurkes.

Than destiny, our sinne, Gods wil, or els
his wreake,
Do wurke our wretched woes, for humours to
be weake:
Except we take them so, as they provoke to
sinne,
For through our lust by humours fed, al
vicious dedes beginne.⁵

Here Henry recognizes the futility of fighting because God will work things out at His own convenience. Henry sees lust for power initiating an endless cycle of vicious deeds all around him. The "rightness" of his passive attitude towards the battle is emphasized in 3 Henry VI in the scene in which he watches a father kill his son and a son kill his father-- a scene that symbolizes the ultimate evil in civil war.

To return to the shepherd scene: Henry sees the hopelessness of England's political situation and wishes he were a shepherd:

O God! methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain;
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run,
How many make the hour full complete;
How many hours bring about the day;
How many days will finish up the year;
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the times:
So many hours must I tend my flock;
So many hours must I take my rest;
So many hours must I contemplate;
So many hours must I sport myself;
So many days my ewes have been with young;
So many weeks ere the poor fools will ean;
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece:

⁵The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. from the original texts by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 213-214. Those who wish to pursue the subject of Shakespeare's acquaintance with The Mirror for Magistrates should consult Tillyard's Shakespeare's History Plays.

So minutes, hours, days, months, and years,
Pass'd over to the end they were created;
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!
(II, v, 21-41)

What Henry is longing for is an ordered life, but he cannot enjoy one because he failed to drive away the courtly wolves before they banded together and formed a pack too large for the royal forces to handle. Because he has spent too many hours in contemplation, he now spends most of his time mourning. But he has developed a great deal of insight into both the political situation and his own character. Henry is a virtuous man, but at the same time, he is, by temperament, unfit for the crown. He now begins to realize this weakness more fully and by the end of the play resigns the rule to Warwick and Clarence because he feels their leadership will be better for the realm.

In contrast to Henry's benevolent attitude towards the realm, Richard Crookback wants to be king at any cost and is in torment until he can get the crown. He states this desire in a soliloquy which shows a Machiavellian push for power that depends upon controlled violence. (Richard III opens with a modified version of this speech.) Richard has just been witnessing Edward IV's courtship of Lady Grey, and the pangs of jealousy it arouses suggests how he has finally become the personification of evil. He opens the soliloquy with a wish that Edward

...were wasted, marrow, bones and all,
That from his loins no hopeful branch may
spring,
To cross me from the golden time I look for!
(III, ii, 125-127)

He then bemoans the dynastic fact that

...between my soul's desire and me--
The lustful Edward's title buried--
Is Clarence, Henry, and his son young Edward,
And all the unlook'd for issue of their bodies,
To take their rooms, ere I can place myself.
(III, ii, 128-132)

Richard wants the throne badly enough to decide to "cut the causes"
(142) that separate him from the throne. His is premeditated evil. He
wants the crown

...since this earth affords no joy to me,
But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
As are of better person than myself,
I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
And, whiles I live, to account this world but hell,
Until my mis-shaped trunk that bears this head
Be round impaled with a glorious crown.
(III, ii, 165-171)

His desire for the crown has eclipsed everything else in his mind.
Because of his "mis-shaped body," he feels he can never be a lover:
it would be easier "to accomplish twenty golden crowns" (152) than win
the heart of a lady:

Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb
And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,
She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe,
To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub;
To make an envious mountain on my back,
Where sits deformity to mock my body;
To shape my legs of an unequal size;
To disproportion me in every part,
Like to a chaos....
And am I then a man to be beloved?
O monstrous fault, to harbour such a thought!
(III, ii, 153-163)

Thus Richard's deformed body and diseased mind help to warp each other.
In fact, his physical deformity symbolizes his moral deformity.

His monomania becomes so strong that he is willing to do anything
to achieve the crown:

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk....
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
(III, ii, 186-194)

The soliloquy ends with a note of determination: "Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?/Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down" (III, ii, 195-196). For the remainder of 3 Henry VI, he follows the plan laid down in this soliloquy. Primarily through his machinations both Henry and his son, Prince Edward, are killed.

Actually, if one notes how Shakespeare has blocked out the action of each act of 3 Henry VI, it is noticeable that Henry and Richard Crookback are being compared from the beginning. Shakespeare sets up this comparison in the first scene when Richard throws the head of Somerset at the foot of his father, Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, and says, "Thus do I hope to shake King Henry's head" (I, i, 20). Richard's importance in the play is further emphasized by his early appearance in each act. Throughout the play Richard is the one who always urges, "For God's sake, lords, give signal to the fight" (II, ii, 100), for through civil strife he hopes eventually to achieve his goal, the crown.

Early in the play, Henry disinherits his son in order to stop civil war. He tells the Duke of York:

....I here entail
The crown to thee and to thine heirs forever;
Conditionally, that here thou take an oath
To cease this civil war....
(I, i, 195-198)

Although Shakespeare does not make the issue clear, Henry's action is not just cowardice. While it is shameful and Henry abhors it, he prefers peace and the general welfare of England to "honor." In Shakespeare's

England, Henry was thought to have been a king who tried to rule for the good of his country. In The Mirror for Magistrates, for instance, Baldwin portrays Henry as a man not interested in worldly honor:

The eye that searcheth all, and seeth every
thought
Doth know how sore I hated sinne, and after
vertue sought.

The solace of the soule my chiefest pleasure
was,
Of worldly pompe, of fame, or game, I did not
pas:

My kingdomes nor my crowne I prised not a
crum:
In heaven wey⁶ my rytches heapt, to which I sought
to cum.

Contrariwise, Richard's ambition and warlike nature are shown in the scene in which he answers his father's question, that his quarrel is "about that which concerns your grace and us;/The crown of England, father, which is yours" (I, ii, 8-9). Early in the play Richard demonstrates his Machiavellian attitude when he explains:

An oath is of no moment, being not took
Before a true and lawful magistrate,
That hath authority over him that swears:
Henry had none, but did usurp the place;
Then, seeing 'twas he that made you to depose,
Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.
(I, ii, 22-27)

Throughout, Richard uses sophistry to make the better cause appear the worst. But the real reason he wants his father to renege on his oath is that he "cannot rest,/Until the white rose that I wear be dyed/
Even in the luke warm blood of Henry's heart" (I, ii, 32-34).

⁶Ibid., pp. 214-215.

The biggest difference between Richard and Henry lies in their ability to love. While Richard loves no one but himself, Henry apparently loves everyone, even his enemies. But although their attitudes toward love are antithetical, actually both fall into trouble primarily because of love. Because Richard feels he will be rejected by any woman owing to his deformed body, he turns his ambitions toward Machiavellian politics. Most of Henry's troubles stem from his marriage with Margaret of Anjou. As Edward, Duke of York (later Edward IV), says:

Hadst thou [Margaret] been meek, our title
still had slept;
And we, in pity of the gentle king,
Had slipp'd our claim until another age.
(II, ii, 160-162)

The conclusion that Henry's marriage induced most of his troubles was fairly well accepted in Elizabethan England. In The Mirror for Magistrates, Baldwin portrays Henry himself as blaming his troubles on his marriage:

....through a mad contract I made with Rayners
daughter,
I gave and lost all Normandy, the cause of
many a slaughter.

First of mine Uncle Humfrey, abhorring sore
this acte,
Because I therby brake a better precontracte;
Than of the flattring duke that first the
mariage made,
The iust rewarde of such as dare their princes
yll perswade.

And I poore sely wretche abode the brunt of all:
My mariage lust so swete was mist with bitter
gall.

My wife was wise and good had she bene rightly
sought,
But our vnlawful getting it, may make a good thing
nought.⁷

Henry then points out how all his misfortunes trebled after his marriage.

Although the contrast of character between Richard Crookback and Henry supplies a certain unifying element to the play, Shakespeare had not yet learned how to unify a play by writing scenes showing enough different perspectives of the same event. A major reason for this failure is that he does not consistently present the main conflict between Henry, representing the forces of tradition, virtue, and order, and Richard, representing the forces of revolution, evil, and chaos, until nearly the middle of the play.

The play shows further lack of unity in that too often inadequate information prevents the reader from forming consistent judgment upon Henry's role as king and the nature of kingship. When Warwick brings troops into Parliament, the lords abuse Henry for not wanting to fight York. But it might be futile to fight, the decision depending upon how many troops Warwick has. If the number be too few, Henry would not be at fault; he would only be a scapegoat for the anger of the lords. On the other hand, if Henry and his allies could defeat the Yorkists, including Warwick and his soldiers, the lords would be right in cursing Henry.

⁷The Mirror for Magistrates, p. 216.

In 3 Henry VI, Tillyard points out, Shakespeare "entirely omits one of his master-themes in the previous play: the character of the good king."⁸ Thus any analysis of Henry's character is almost meaningless because Shakespeare apparently had not decided what to do with him. Henry's actions are not only inconsistent from scene to scene, but often, for no apparent reason, antithetical. In his attempt to portray Henry as king, father, and Christian, Shakespeare has again created a trichotomous character who appears to be almost three different people. Part of the time Henry is the epitome of Christian ethics. He wants to return good for evil, scorns violence, and rebukes Margaret and Clifford for putting the head of York on the gate to the city of York for revolting. To an Elizabethan used to seeing people hanging from London Bridge for stealing, Henry must have seemed pitiful and weak.

Unfortunately, Shakespeare was not able to resolve the dilemma of what Henry should do and what Henry has to do. Thus Henry's actions as a Christian are often antithetical to his actions as a king and father. In later plays Shakespeare handles this problem by portraying the turmoil that goes on in his characters' minds. But because in this play he fails for the most part to examine Henry's mind, the audience is not prepared for his various changes in mood and, in some cases, personality. Another reason that Henry is not better understood is that, as in Part I and Part II, Shakespeare fails to focus on essential characters in the play. As a result, he creates a shotgun effect which scatters attention and interest over so many characters that all of them are blurred because

⁸Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 190.

of inadequate emphasis.

Henry's first speech in 3 Henry VI is the kind that a king would be expected to deliver:

My lords, look where the sturdy rebel sits,
Even in the chair of state: belike he means,
Back'd by the power of Warwick, that false peer,
To aspire unto the crown and reign as king.
Earl of Northumberland, he slew thy father,
And thine, Lord Clifford; and you both have
vow'd revenge
On him, his sons, his favourites and his friends.
(I, i, 50-56)

In this speech Henry does not sound like the fatalistic, despairing king in 2 Henry VI who after the defeat at St. Albans had to be urged by Margaret to return to London. For the first time in the trilogy, he makes a direct accusation when he censures York for sitting on the throne in Parliament House and Warwick for supporting him. Henry even reminds Lord Clifford and the Earl of Northumberland that they have vowed revenge on his behalf, an act which seems to incite murder and is out of keeping with Henry's previous character.

But in his next speech Henry reverts to the same Christian virtue he had shown earlier. He prevents Westmoreland and Exeter from dragging York from the throne by telling them:

Far be the thought of this from Henry's heart,
To make a shambles of the parliament-house!
Cousin of Exeter, frowns, words and threats
Shall be the war that Henry means to use.
(I, i, 70-73)

By this time words are of no value. Warwick shows that only physical force matters when he reminds Henry's followers that he has complete control:

....You forget
That we are those which chased you from the
field,
And slew your fathers, and with colours spread
March'd through the city to the palace gates.
(I, i, 89-92)

From this point on the realm is ruled by whoever has the most physical force. No one, except Henry, any longer thinks of moral force as a cohesive agent to keep the realm together.

Not only has Henry lost the physical power necessary to rule; he has given up his moral and dynastic right to rule. In an aside, he admits, "my title's weak" (I, i, 133). He had inherited the throne from his father, Henry V, who had inherited it from his father, Henry IV, who had usurped it from Richard II. By deposing Richard, Henry IV had loosed the potential chaos that is contingent upon the overthrow of an established government. Both Henry's father and his grandfather had been able to maintain order because they were prudent enough to recognize the signs of incipient rebellion in time to prevent its success. Tillyard points to "An Homily against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion," published in 1569, to show the Elizabethan attitude against rebellion. In this homily the writer explains

the dangers attached to the condonation of rebellion, however bad the ruler may be. Who, first, are subjects that they can judge if he is bad? They may easily mistake, for there are always wicked men around, very ready to take advantage of a prince vulnerable whether through too great kindness, or the wrong sex, or too few years. And there will always be difference of opinion; so that if rebellion is once allowed against a bad prince, how can it in the end be prevented against a good? Moreover it is not blind chance but God who sends a bad prince, and he does it to

punish a people's sins. To revolt is to add new sin to sin not yet expiated. The proper acts are to pray for the prince's amendment and to live better lives that God may forgive us and remove the scourge.⁹

On a moral level, Henry VI exemplifies the theme of this homily.

Since Henry IV's usurpation, there had been revolts to seat Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, upon the throne. Richard II had named him as his successor because of his descent from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, third son of Edward III. Henry IV was the son of John of Gaunt, the fourth son. Shakespeare stresses this lineal question by mentioning it in each part of the trilogy. York's claim is stronger than that of Henry because he is descended from "the rightful" branch of Edward III, and Edmund Mortimer had named him his successor. The moral question of who is rightful king comes to a climax in 3 Henry VI when Henry agrees to York as his successor if he himself may be permitted to reign the rest of his life.

In the first scene (3 H. VI. I, 1), York bases his argument on the fact that Henry IV had forced Richard II to abdicate. Ironically, he is doing the same thing to Henry. Thus the irony of the situation is that only Henry is really concerned in a moral way about his legitimate claim to the throne. The Yorkists are only after power. This situation demonstrates the chaos surrounding the question of the right to the crown. If Henry is the rightful monarch, his son should rule after him; if York is the rightful king, he should begin to rule immediately. On a strictly moral and legal basis, there is no way that Henry can adopt York as his

⁹Ibid., p. 67.

heir. As Exeter says, "He could not so resign his crown/But that the next heir should succeed and reign" (I, i, 144-145). Thus earlier Richard II could not resign without Mortimer becoming king, nor can Henry now resign without Edward, his son, becoming king. This confusion has been compounding since the time of Richard II's abdication, and on moral and dynastic grounds it had to explode sooner or later.

Henry has always leaned too heavily on moral right to be king and has not given enough attention to the need for physical force and direct political action against incipient rebellion. In 1 Henry VI and 2 Henry VI, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, had been able to maintain a semblance of order in the realm, but after he lost Henry's support, the realm had no real leader, and chaos took over. In removing Gloucester, Henry became susceptible to flatterers, a weakness Machiavelli specifically warns against in The Prince:

...there is no other way to bee secure from flattery, but to let men know, that they displease thee not in telling thee truth; but when every one hath this leave, thou lovest thy reverence.

Therefore ought a wise Prince take a third course, making choyce of some understanding men in his State, and give only to them a free liberty of speaking to him the truth: and touching those things only which hee inquires of, and nothing else; but hee ought to be inquisitive of every thing, and heare their opinions, and then afterwards advise himselfe after his owne manner, and in these deliberations, and with every one of them so carry himselfe, that they all know, that the more freely they shall speake, the better they shall be lik'd of: and besides those, not give eare to any one, and thus pursue the thing resolvd on, and thence continue obstinate in the resolution taken. Hee who does other wise, either falls upon flatterers, or often changes upon the varying of opinions,

from whence proceeds it that men conceive
but slightly of him.¹⁰

Unfortunately for England, Henry is susceptible to flatterers even when they are obviously interested only in their own gain. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, alone had shown that he put the good of the realm before personal gain.

In The Prince, Machiavelli mentions certain rules of conduct a prince should follow. He should exterminate all members of the former ruling house and all other claimants to the throne. Both Henry's father and his grandfather had kept Mortimer in prison, and Henry V had executed Richard, Duke of York's father, for his part in rebellion. By prudent rule, the two predecessors of Henry VI had maintained order and reduced sedition to a minimum. On the other hand, Henry VI indirectly encourages revolution by re-instating York to the court and by returning his patrimony, an act of Christian justice. Later, through Henry's carelessness, York is sent to Ireland with an army, so that when he returns, he has the force by means of which he is able to defeat Henry at St. Albans.

¹⁰ Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, in Three Renaissance Classics, trans. Edward Dacres (1640), intro. and notes by Burton A. Miligan (New York, 1953), p. 89. I refer in this paper to Machiavelli simply to supply a suitable frame of reference to measure the political actions of Henry VI. I do not mean to imply that Shakespeare had read either the French translation of The Prince nor the Italian original, but his use of "Machiavel" (III, ii, 194) indicates he probably had some familiarity with the work of Machiavelli either by hear-say or by direct contact. Those interested in the influence of Machiavelli on Elizabethan literature should consult Mario Praz, "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans," Annual Italian Lecture of the British Academy, 1928, from the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. XIII (London, 1928), or Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, the Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare (New York and London, 1927).

Machiavelli also recommends that a successful ruler either treat people well or crush them. Half-measures are to be avoided. But Henry acts only in half-measures when he acts at all. Throughout the trilogy, he shows no real interest in government. In his attempt to be just, he treats all men equally, refusing to be cruel, as Machiavelli advises. Machiavelli argues that cruelty is necessary because it is better to be feared than loved. But a prince must not be a sadist; he must employ cruelty judiciously, in a paradoxical manner, almost humanely--for example, to discourage or prevent disorder in the state that would be harmful to the majority of the people. Henry does nothing to punish the murderers of Gloucester until the Nevils and the commons threaten to take matters into their own hands in 3 Henry VI. When York's head is put up on a gate post as a warning to rebels, Henry wails and prays to God not to hold him responsible for the actions of Clifford and Margaret.

Machiavelli's Prince must fight, followed by a united people. Not only does Henry refuse to fight, but he so demoralizes the troops in 3 Henry VI that Clifford sends him to a mole hill so that the soldiers will not see his unmanly conduct. Machiavelli constantly stresses that a Prince cannot be morally perfect in an imperfect world without effecting his own destruction. Henry, in an attempt to be morally perfect, refuses time and again to act when it is imperative that he do so. By depending upon God to maintain order and justice, he neglects his duty as God's vice-regent.

But Shakespeare does not adopt so hard-boiled a view as Machiavelli. While he recognizes that violence is often necessary to maintain order, he also recognizes the need to combine physical force with moral force.

He demonstrates the need for this amalgamation in the reign of Edward IV. Edward has all the necessary physical force needed to maintain order, but he lacks moral character. Because of his lust for Lady Elizabeth Grey, whom he marries when she refuses to become his mistress, he isolates himself from Warwick, Louis XI of France, and his own brother Clarence. Immediately after Edward's coronation, Warwick is sent to France to cement relations between the two countries by obtaining for Edward the hand of Bona, the sister of Louis. In Warwick's absence, Edward marries Lady Grey. As a result, Warwick and Clarence renounce allegiance to Edward and join forces with Louis and Margaret to restore Henry to the throne. They are successful, and Edward is forced to flee. He regains his throne only through the machinations of his brother, Richard Crookback.

As has been pointed out, in 3 Henry VI Henry loses control over the political situation because of his inactivity and his moral scruples. Justice in the human world in which he lives involves not only forgiveness but also retribution. If an overbalance of forgiveness obstructs retribution, justice is inhibited; but an overbalance of revenge also inhibits justice. In 3 Henry VI, Clifford shows what happens when a strict code of revenge is adopted. Never considering moral right, he practices a violent form of retributive justice that is even more chaotic than Henry's non-violence. Clifford even sins against the future by killing Rutland, the twelve-year-old son of York. Until Richmond, later Henry VII, deposes Richard III, justice cannot prevail because there are too many violent, seditious, and corrupt lords in England.

CHAPTER III

RICHARD III

Richard III is Shakespeare's first successfully unified play. While the Henry VI plays are held together primarily by external interest, Richard III is unified by the characterization of Richard and by the theme of divine vengeance. It is the first play in which Shakespeare develops the importance of inner action to a point where it begins to determine outward action. Events and characters have, at the same time, become more specific and concrete and also more meaningful and significant.

Even so, Richard III is not a completely successful play. In writing it, Shakespeare sacrificed content for technical mastery. Perhaps because of an underlying influence derived from the early mystery plays, he wrote on the level of grand guignol. As a result, Richard fails to be a tragic character. He is only a pasteboard figure of evil, or more exactly an evil schemer. A murderer by nature, Richard is too much of a monster and not enough of a human to evoke either sympathy or empathy. He is fascinating chiefly because of his ability to manipulate others. Richard III fails further because the play is repetitious. Because Richard's actions are almost always the same, his character develops no undercurrents until Act IV, and by then it is too late to begin developing a rounded character. As a result, Shakespeare says very little in a positive way about the nature of kingship in Richard III. In fact, he actually says more in the Henry VI plays.

Richard III inevitably suffers as a detached unit because it summarizes and completes past events. As A. P. Rossiter indicates:

We need to know who Margaret is; how Lancaster has been utterly defeated, and King Henry and his son murdered; how Clarence betrayed his king and returned to the Yorkists; how Richard, his younger brother, has already marked him as his immediate obstruction on his intended way to the crown. We need to know too that the duchess of York is mother to the unrewarding trio, Edward IV, Clarence, Gloucester; that Edward IV has married an aspiring commoner, Elizabeth Grey (nee Woodville); and that she has jacked up her relations into nobility.¹

But even more important than a knowledge of the Henry VI plays is an understanding of

the overriding principle derived from the Tudor Historians: that England rests under a chronic curse--the curse of faction, civil dissension and fundamental anarchy, resulting from the deposition and murder of the Lord's Anointed (Richard II) and the usurpation of the House of Lancaster. The savageries of the Wars of the Roses follow logically (almost theologically) from that....It is a world of absolute and hereditary moral ill, in which everyone (till the appearance of Richmond Tudor in Act V) is tainted with treacheries, the blood and barbarities of civil strife, and internally blasted with the curse of moral anarchy which leaves but three human genera: the strong in evil, the feebly wicked, and the helplessly guilt-tainted.²

When the Tudor theory of history is understood, it becomes apparent that the greatest bond uniting the plays of the first tetralogy

¹A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures, ed. Graham Storey (New York, 1961), p. 6.

²Ibid., p. 6.

is the political theme and its moral implications. This theme involves retribution for crime through God's slow moving justice and the belief that history works itself out according to God's preconceived plans. Ironically, in this divine scheme of events, Richard has the dominant role. As E. M. W. Tillyard explains:

...it is through his dominance that he is able to be the instrument of God's ends. Whereas the sins of other men had merely bred more sins, Richard's are so vast that they are absorptive, not contagious. He is the great ulcer of the body politic into which all its impurity is drained and against which all the members of the body politic are united. It is no longer a case of limb fighting limb but of the war of the whole organism against an ill which has now ceased to be organic.³

Furthermore, in Richard III Shakespeare leaves no loose ends in structure as he does in the Henry VI plays. Each motive, each character, and each detail is connected with a major issue. In particular, Richard III gains deeper significance by the centrality achieved through focusing on Richard as a bad king who, ironically, serves as God's agent. Because of Richard's intellectual superiority to the other characters, his diabolical will, and his simple Machiavellian politics, all the action eventually stems from his plans and actions. As Clemen shows:

It is Richard who secretly and cunningly watches the movements and actions of his enemies to weave them into his spider's web before they are aware of it and then to wait for the advantageous moment before he can overcome them. Thus the movements and indeed

³Shakespeare's History Plays, pp. 208-209.

even the words and thoughts of Richard's victims are made use of by him for his diabolical interests, are integrated into his plans.⁴

Richard III opens with a soliloquy by Richard remarkably similar to the one he delivers in 3 Henry VI (III, ii, 124-196). In the earlier play, he states his desire to be king by means of a Machiavellian push for power that depends upon controlled violence. Watching Edward's courtship of Lady Elizabeth Grey arouses in Richard pangs of jealousy that suggest how he will finally become the personification of evil. He opens the soliloquy with a wish that Edward

...were wasted, marrow, bones and all,
That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring,
To cross me from the golden time I look for!
(3 H. VI, III, ii, 125-127)

He then bemoans the dynastic fact that

...between my soul's desire and me--
The lustful Edward's title buried--
Is Clarence, Henry, and his son young Edward,
And all the unlook'd for issue of their bodies,
To take their rooms, ere I can place myself.
(3 H. VI, III, ii, 128-132)

Richard wants the throne badly enough to decide to "cut the causes" (3 H. VI, III, ii, 142) that separate him from the throne. This desire has eclipsed everything else in his mind. Because of his "mis-shaped body," he feels he can never be a lover: it would be easier "to accomplish twenty golden crowns" (3 H. VI, III, ii, 152) than win the heart of a lady. His deformed body and diseased mind help to warp each other; in fact, his physical deformity symbolizes his moral depravity.

⁴Wolfgang H. Clemen, "Tradition and Originality in Shakespeare's Richard III," Shakespeare Quarterly, V, No. 3 (Summer, 1954), 249.

To accomplish his desire, Richard decides to become deliberately evil:

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk....
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shape with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.

(3 H. VI, III, ii, 186-194)

For the remainder of 3 Henry VI, he follows the plan laid down in this soliloquy. Primarily through his machinations, both Henry and his son, Prince Edward, are killed.

In Richard III Shakespeare presents the same character whose ambition for the crown has eclipsed everything else in his mind. Although the House of York has completely defeated the House of Lancaster, Richard is, as he states in the opening soliloquy, dejected because:

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths....
Grim-visaged war hath smooth'd his wrinkled
front....

He [war] capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks....
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on my own deformity.

(R. III, I, i, 5-27)

Victory does not satisfy Richard because his greatest pleasure in life comes from violence and disorder. He prefers battle armor to victory wreaths and combat to merry meetings with friends. But most of all he hates to see warriors transplanted from the battlefield to ladies' chambers, where he feels himself at a disadvantage. With his misshapen body he is not suited for games with the ladies, and so he rejects close human relationships, especially with women. For Richard, peace is a "weak piping time" because all he can do is watch his own shadow and think about his

deformity. Because he is physically malformed, he rejects order, love, and companionship and chooses instead chaos and evil:

...since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
(I, i, 28-31)

Having decided upon his course, he wastes no time:

Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the king
In deadly hate the one against the other:
And if King Edward be as true and just
As I am subtle, false and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up,
About a prophecy, which says that G
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.
(I, i, 32-40)

He rejects normal human values because they make no sense to him.

Throughout the play, Richard is called "devil" and "minister of Hell;" like Satan he prefers disorder to order and is innately evil. From the beginning of the play, he is the personification of evil, and he appears more evil as the play progresses because his veneer of hypocrisy bit by bit loses its power to hide his motives. Ironically, he succeeds in his drive for the crown because he understands physical power better than do those about him. The others--Clarence, for example--have used force when they were able and have been merciless at times, turning to God to ask for vengeance only when they feel they have no other alternative. Richard never turns to God for help, almost as if he believes that God helps those who help themselves.

Living as he has during the Wars of the Roses, Richard has never experienced or observed the effective use of moral power so that he does not understand it. He has noticed that respect, honor, and privilege

always go to whoever has won physical power, and so physical power has become his god. But because he does not see the far-reaching consequences of the power-drive, he becomes entangled in his own spider-web of evil by alienating himself from his allies and forcing them to give their allegiance to Richmond.

From early life, he has been treacherous and has shown a Satanic disposition. His mother, the Duchess of York, describes him thus:

Thou came'st on earth to make the earth my
hell.
A grievous burthen was thy birth to me;
Tetchy and wayward was thy infancy;
Thy school-days frightful, desperate, wild
and furious,
Thy prime of manhood daring, bold, and
venturous,
Thy age confirm'd, proud, subtle, bloody,
treacherous;
More mild, but yet more harmful, kind in hatred:
What comfortable hour canst thou name,
That ever graced me in thy company?
(IV, iv, 165-174)

Although from the first he has been inhuman and unnatural, at the same time he has a curious magnetic force that leads people to submit to him. His unique ability to use words seductively is demonstrated when he interrupts the funeral procession of Henry VI to convince Lady Anne that all for love of her he killed her father, Warwick; her husband, Prince Edward, son of Henry VI; and her king, Henry VI.

Richard takes sadistic pleasure in his power to sway those whom he considers stupid, weak, and virtuous. Upon first seeing him, Lady Anne curses him:

Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and trouble
us not;
For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclams.
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries....

Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity;
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins, where no blood dwells;
Thy deed, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.
O God, which this blood madest, revenge his
death!
O earth, which this blood drink'st, revenge his
death!

(I, ii, 51-63)

Nevertheless, Richard woos her with assurance because he is sure of her vanity. Since she is proud of her beauty, he is able to convince her she is the reason he killed both King Henry and Prince Edward:

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty, which did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom.
(I, ii, 121-124)

When he is sure of his control over her, he takes one step further in his delight in debasing her. He lends her his sword, kneels, offers her his naked breast, and tells her:

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry,
But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabb'd young
Edward,
But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.
Take up the sword again, or take up me.
(I, ii, 179-183)

To complete her humiliation he takes the sword and swears he will kill himself at her bidding. Anne's will snaps, and she becomes his prey. Helplessly she acknowledges his victory:

With all my heart; and much it joys me too,
To see you are become so penitent.
(I, ii, 219-220)

Richard's subsequent soliloquy shows how malicious he is.

Exultantly, he says:

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her; but I will not keep her long.
What! I, that kill'd her husband and his father,
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of her hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars
 against me,
And I nothing to back my suit at all,
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
Ha!

(I, ii, 227-238)

Anne's degradation at his hands gives Richard a cheerful pride in his own misshapen self. As he is incapable of caring for others, he finds sport in binding others to him. After marrying Anne, he continues to torment her. When she is no longer of political use to him, he has her killed.⁵

Richard delights in hypocrisy. After giving a long oration about Clarence, he plans and executes his murder. He continues to maintain complete control over himself until after he obtains the crown, constantly turning situations to his own advantage, as when he sympathizes with Queen Margaret for the anguish his crimes have brought her. So effective is his hypocrisy that Earl Rivers, ironically, describes his actions as "A virtuous and a Christian-like conclusion;/To pray for them that have done scathe to us" (I, iii, 316-317). But Richard reveals the true purpose behind his persona of piety when he tells himself, "Had I cursed [Margaret] now, I had cursed myself" (I, iii, 318-319). He states his personal philosophy a moment later in the following soliloquy:

⁵The whole episode of Richard's courtship of Anne is unrealistic and incredible.

I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl.
The secret mischiefs that I set abroad
I lay unto the grievous charge of others.
Clarence, whom I, indeed, have laid in
darkness,
I do bewep to many simple gulls;
Namely, to Hastings, Derby, Buckingham;
And say it is the queen and her allies
That stir the king against the duke my brother.
Now, they believe it; and withal whet me
To be revenged on Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey;
But then I sigh; and, with a piece of
scripture,
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:
And thus I clothe my naked villany
With old odd ends stolen out of holy writ;
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.
(I, iii, 323-338)

Thus, by accusing others of the crimes he commits, Richard averts suspicion from himself and directs it towards others, attributing, in this case, the murder of George, Duke of Clarence, to Queen Elizabeth and her relatives. And to strengthen further his accusations, he, like many villains in Shakespeare, clothes his "naked villany/With old odd ends stolen out of holy writ" (I, iii, 336-337). In thus accusing Elizabeth and her followers of his own crimes, he demonstrates his keen psychological insight, not only throwing suspicion away from himself but also winning over Hastings, Derby, and Buckingham as allies. These men show themselves to be no better than Richard himself when they urge him to revenge himself on Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey.

As he proceeds towards his goal, the crown, Richard becomes more openly treacherous and vicious. When he learns Lord Hastings will not help him in his plot to usurp the throne from his nephew Edward, he promises Buckingham:

Chop off his head, man; somewhat we will do:
And, look, when I am king, claim thou of me

The earldom of Hereford, and the moveables
Whereof the king my brother stood possess'd.
(III, i, 192-195)

Hoping to obtain the earldom, Buckingham helps Richard dispose of the Lords Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, and Hastings. Because he knows Buckingham is covetous, Richard is also able to persuade him to

Infer the bastardy of Edward [IV] 's children;
Tell them how Edward put to death a citizen,
Only for saying he would make his son
Heir to the crown....
Moreover, urge his hateful luxury
And bestial appetite in change of lust;
Which stretched to their servants, daughters,
wives,
Even where his lustful eye or savage heart,
Without control, listed to make his prey.
(III, v, 73-82)

Following Richard's instructions, Buckingham convinces the Lord Mayor and the city council of London that Richard should be king.

Richard accomplishes his biggest hoax by pretending to the Lord Mayor that he has a religious nature and that he does not want the crown. As a player king Richard is very successful. He himself often performs what he asks Buckingham to do:

Come, cousin, canst thou quake, and change
thy colour,
Murder thy breath in middle of a word,
And then begin again, and stop again,
As if thou wert distraught and mad with terror?
(III, v, 1-4)

By acting as if he were in extreme peril when the Lord Mayor comes, Richard avoids suspicion. When Lovel presents him with the head of Hastings,

Richard laments:

So dear I loved the man, that I must weep.
I took him for the plainest harmless creature
That breathed upon this earth a Christian;
Made him my book, wherein my soul recorded
The history of all her secret thoughts:

So smooth he daub'd his vice with show of
virtue
That, his apparent open guilt omitted,
I mean, his conversation with Shore's wife,
He lived from all attainder of suspect.
(III, v, 23-31)

In this speech he says that Hastings was a friend and a Christian while insinuating that he was a complete lecher.

Buckingham supports Richard's pretense of being a virtuous savior of England when he harshly condemns Lord Hastings:

Well, well, he was the covertest shelter'd
traitor
That ever lived.
Would you imagine, or almost believe,
Were't not that, by great preservation,
We live to tell it you, the subtle traitor
This day had plotted, in the council-house
To murder me and my good Lord of Gloucester?
(III, v, 32-38)

By influencing Buckingham to make such a strong accusation, Richard, who has been gentle in his accusation of Hastings, seems pious by comparison.

Richard completely convinces the Lord Mayor that Hastings was in the wrong when he asks him:

What, think you we are Turks or infidels?
Or that we would, against the form of law,
Proceed thus rashly to the villain's death,
But that the extreme peril of the case,
The peace of England and our persons' safety,
Enforced us to this execution?
(III, v, 40-45)

Here Richard spouts the values that Christians profess and says that he would not put aside due process of law unless it were for the good of England. He states the necessity of his action in such a flurry of words and so forcefully that the Lord Mayor does not dare to question him.

So completely does Richard's ruse work that after Buckingham has inferred the bastardy of Edward IV's children, the Lord Mayor offers

Richard the crown. Again Richard's actions are a premeditated veneer of piety. He enters the presence of the Lord Mayor and Buckingham with two bishops at his side and asks them:

I rather do beseech you pardon me,
Who, earnest in the service of my God,
Neglect the visitation of my friends.
(III, vii, 105-107)

Offered the crown, he feigns surprise and modestly refuses it. His guile is successful, for the Lord Mayor, acting out of terror, insists he accept the crown.

After becoming king, Richard requests one last favor of Buckingham:

O bitter consequence,
That Edward still should live true noble prince!
Cousin, thou wert not wont to be so dull:
Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead....
(IV, ii, 15-18)

Because Buckingham refuses to kill the young princes, Richard is "not in the giving vein today" and fails to keep his promise to give Hereford to Buckingham. He loses his only ally because of this broken promise. Since Buckingham will not do the bloody deed, Richard bribes Sir James Tyrrel to murder the princes.

Once Richard gains the crown, he does not know what to do. Uninterested in the good of England, he is simply an energetic man with no goal to pursue, and the meaninglessness of his life begins to manifest itself. He has been so intent upon getting the crown that he has not given any attention to the consequences of his evil actions and is not prepared for their reverberations. Since the young princes have a stronger dynastic claim to the throne than he, Richard has them murdered. This act proves his downfall because it unites the kingdom against him.

The disorder created by Richard climaxes the disorder already existing in the realm. When Richard III opens, the country is in the final state of disorder brought on by the Wars of the Roses. During this time chaos has grown because everyone in power (except Henry VI) has relied on physical force. Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, in the role of choric commentator, summarizes the troubled times that have existed in England since the days of Henry IV:

Accursed and unquiet wrangling days,
How many of you have mine eyes beheld!
My husband lost his life to get the crown;
And often up and down my sons were toss'd,
For me to joy and weep their gain and loss:
And being seated, and domestic broils
Clean over-blown, themselves, the conquerors,
Make war upon themselves; blood against blood
Self against self: O, preposterous
And frantic outrage, and thy damned spleen;
Or let me die, to look on death no more!
(II, iv, 54-64)

The violation of the laws of blood descent has led to civil war and the needless spilling of costly English blood. Until Edward IV ascended the throne, the Houses of Lancaster and York had fought continually over the crown. Even after the House of York has won the crown and exterminated the male line of Lancaster, order is not restored. Edward IV, on his deathbed, wants to feel that peace will last after he is gone:

Why, so: now have I done a good day's work:
You peers, continue this united league:
I every day expect an embassy
From my Redeemer to redeem me hence;
And now in peace my soul shall part to heaven,
Since I have set my friends at peace on earth.
(II, i, 1-8)

But Edward's attempt to unify the court fails. Earlier (in 3 Henry VI) he had declared: "But for a kingdom any oath may be broken:/I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year" (3 H. VI, I, ii, 16-17).

The members of his court, especially Richard, have expressed the same value system, and, following Edward's example, they break their word at will so that sin upon sin is committed. A loose social system such as feudalism is dependent upon the honoring of oaths; chaos results when these oaths are broken.

In his attempt to build a solid foundation for his rule so that he can maintain peace and order, Edward tries to re-establish the theory of the divine right of kings:

Take heed you dally not before your king;
Lest he that is the supreme King of kings
Confound your hidden falsehood, and award
Either of you [the Earl of Rivers and Lord
Hastings] to be the other's end.

(R. III, II, i, 11-14)

Here, as later when he learns of the death of his brother George, Duke of Clarence, Edward expresses the same Christian attitude toward God's justice as Henry VI had earlier in the tetralogy. Throughout Richard III this attitude is expressed by almost everyone, yet no one abides by it or seeks God until all other means of aid have failed. Edward IV, always interested only in his own welfare, shows this hypocrisy when he learns of Clarence's death. He warns his court: "O God, I fear thy justice will take hold/On me, and you, and mine, and yours for this!" (II, i, 131-132).

Through his characterization of Edward, Shakespeare points out that the life of a king influences the life of his subjects and that the evil a usurper commits to attain the crown remains to haunt him after he is king. One of Edward's greatest sins is failure to abide by his promises. After he had been crowned, he sent the Earl of Warwick, one of his staunchest supporters, to France to arrange a marriage contract with

the Lady Bona, sister to King Louis of France. Before Warwick can return, Edward lusts for Lady Elizabeth Grey; and since she refuses an illicit relationship, he marries her. Richard later puts emphasis upon this broken marriage contract to demonstrate the illegitimacy of his nephews' claim to the throne.

Richard, wishing to avoid the dynastic mistake made by his brother Edward, desires a marriage which will insure political security. Therefore, a match with his niece, the daughter of the former king, would be most advantageous. When he urges Queen Elizabeth to help him in his courtship, he swears by his Garter that he loves her daughter; but she interrupts him, telling him:

...this is no oath:
The George, profaned, hath lost his holy honour;
The garter, blemish'd, pawn'd his knightly virtue;
The crown, usurp'd, disgraced his kingly glory.
If something thou wilt swear to be believed,
Swear then by something that thou hast not wrong'd.
(IV, iv, 367-372)

He has wronged the world, she tells him, dishonored himself, and wronged God most of all by usurping the crown.

Ironically, Richard plays a major role in God's plan for the redemption of England. He turns the realm into a slaughterhouse and makes life a living hell. As Queen Elizabeth tells her son, the Marquis of Dorset:

If thou wilt outstrip death, go cross the seas,
And live with Richmond, from the reach of hell:
Go, hie thee, hie thee from this slaughter-house.
(IV, i, 42-44)

By murdering all who have rebelled against Henry VI, Richard acts as the scourge of God. After he has cleansed England of the tainted nobles, excluding himself, God, through Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, destroys

him and England is finally purified.

Typical of the men Richard murders is his brother Clarence. Although in Richard III the character of Clarence seems unblemished, in Henry VI he sinned in several ways: he rebelled against his king, Henry, he broke oaths, and he rebelled against his brother Edward after Edward had been crowned. When confronted by the murderers Richard has sent to kill him, he confesses that evil only compounds evil until it is entirely eradicated.

Clarence states how the wicked should be punished in a kingdom that is properly ruled:

If God will be revenged for this deed,
O, know you yet, he doth it publicly:
Take not the quarrel from his powerful arm;
He needs no indirect nor lawless course
To cut off those that have offended him.
(I, iv, 205-209)

But in a kingdom as evil and corrupt as England has become through nearly a hundred years of intermittent civil war, his system of ethics will not work. England cannot be cleansed without somebody getting dirty. Clarence warns the assassins that

...the great King of kings
Hath in the tables of his law commanded
That thou shalt do no murder: and wilt thou
then
Spurn at his edict, and fulfil a man's?
Take heed; for he holds vengeance in his hands,
To hurl upon their heads that break his law.
(I, iv, 184-189)

Although here he argues against violence, he has at other times completely ignored God's commandments. In his ambition and desire for personal power, he has committed murder and has several times broken his oath. The Second Murderer reminds him:

And that same vengeance doth he hurl on thee,
For false forswearing, and for murder too:
Thou didst receive the holy sacrament,
To fight in quarrel of the house of Lancaster.
(I, iv, 190-193)

The First Murderer adds:

And, like a traitor to the name of God,
Didst break that vow; and with thy treacherous
blade
Unript'dst the bowels of thy sovereign's son.
(I, iv, 194-196)

Again he challenges Clarence:

How canst thou urge God's dreadful law to us
When thou hast broke it in so dear degree?
(I, iv, 198-199)

Clarence cannot give a suitable answer.

Thus Shakespeare hints at divine purpose in the mass vengeance that forms the substance of the play. While in 3 Henry VI, Richard, Duke of York, Clifford, and Warwick all die defiantly, cursing their opponents, in Richard III the victims of Richard Crookback die, like Clarence, admitting their guilt. With each new victim, Richard takes on added guilt until he has absorbed all the guilt of the past rebellion against Henry.

Of Richard's victims, only his nephews, Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, are guiltless. Appropriately, the double murder of these two unites the kingdom against Richard so that an internal quarrel no longer exists. Even Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, turns against him. The last words she speaks to her son demonstrate the hatred he has generated in his countrymen:

Either thou wilt die, by God's just ordinance,
Ere from this war thou turn a conqueror,
Or I with grief and extreme age will perish
And never look upon thy face again.
Therefore take with thee my most heavy curse;
Which, in the day of battle, tire thee more

Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st!
My prayers on the adverse party fight;
And there the little souls of Edward's children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies,
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end;
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend.
(IV, iv, 183-195)

By this time Richard is on his way to fight Richmond at Bosworth Field; everyone is cursing him, and those nobles who can join Richmond..

The result of Richard's crimes becomes apparent in the scene in which his victims appear to curse him and encourage Richmond. All of the ghosts echo the thought of the Duchess of York, "Let me sit heavy on thy head," and all tell him to "despair and die." A summary of the ghosts' speeches is given by the specters of the young princes and the Duke of Buckingham. The princes tell Richard:

Dream on thy cousins smothered in the Tower:
Let us be lead within thy bosom, Richard,
And weigh thee down to ruin, shame, and death!
Thy nephews' souls bid thee despair and die!
(V, iii, 151-154)

Buckingham tells him:

The first was I that help'd thee to the crown;
The last was I that felt thy tyranny:
O, in the battle think on Buckingham,
And die in terror of thy guiltiness!
Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death:
Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath!
(V, iii, 167-172)

All Richard's ghostly victims enumerate his crimes and tyrannies and tell him to be heavy with his sins and die, and all the ghosts praise and encourage Richmond. The ghosts of the princes tell him:

Sleep, Richmond, sleep in peace, and wake in joy;
Good angels guard thee from the boar's annoy!
Live, and beget a happy race of kings!
(V, iii, 155-157)

And the ghost of Buckingham says:

I died for hope ere I could lend thee aid:
But cheer thy heart, and be thou not dismay'd:
God and good angels fight on Richmond's side;
And Richard falls, in height of all his pride.
(V, iii, 173-176)

After the appearance of the ghosts, Shakespeare's characterization of Richard falls apart. Before, Richard has completely devoted his life to self-interest and evil. In fact, the reason that Richard does not appear as a true tragic hero is that no genuine internal conflict occurs within him. A true tragic hero should be a better-than-average man at the same time that he is worse than the average. Richard never seems human; he is in the last analysis only a pasteboard figure of evil who finds his sole delight in his ability to sway simple gulls to his will. But as the play progresses the terror accelerates until Richard is no longer able to assert his innocence. He still maintains a mask of piety, but no one is fooled. Those who remain silent, such as the Lord Mayor, do so through fear, not ignorance.

Until the ghosts appear, Richard shows no conscience. The only previous hint of his being troubled by his conscience is indicated when Anne says:

For never yet one hour in his bed
Have I enjoy'd the golden dew of sleep,
But have been waked by his timorous dreams.
(IV, i, 83-85)

Now, with the ghosts' appearance, he suddenly exclaims:

O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict
me!...
What do I fear? myself? there's none else by:
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
Then fly. What, from myself?....

I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself!
(V, iii, 180-190)

Whereas previously Richard has always demonstrated a quick and alert mind, now he seems on the verge of a mental breakdown.

In Macbeth Shakespeare is able to portray the disintegration of his hero-villain in a believable manner because he prepares his audience for each step in Macbeth's deterioration. But in Richard III there is not enough preparation for this sudden change in Richard. Until after he has been visited by the ghosts, Richard never questions whether his choice to be a villain is worthwhile. In Act V he seems a different character when he cries:

And every tale condemns me for villain.
Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree;
All several sins, all used in each degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all 'Guilty! guilty!'
I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
And if I die, no soul will pity me:
(V, iii, 195-201)

Instead of a strong, defiant villain, Richard appears here a weakling full of self-pity.

As a king Richard is the antithesis of Henry VI. Henry relies solely on moral force and completely neglects physical force; Richard depends on physical force and mocks traditional morality by cynically making use of it. Each has only half the qualities necessary for a successful king. While Henry is lethargic and does little or nothing because he is afraid of committing evil, Richard is energetic and accomplishes what he sets out to do. Unfortunately, Richard's only motivation is self-interest. In usurping the crown, his set of ethics is similar to

the rules set down by Machiavelli in The Prince.⁶

Machiavelli argues that a ruler should exterminate all members of the former ruling house and all claimants to the throne. Instead of suppressing Richard, Duke of York, Henry indirectly encourages revolution by re-instating York to the court and by returning his patrimony, an act of Christian justice. Later, through Henry's lack of interest in governing, York is sent to Ireland with an army, so that when he returns, he has the force which enables him to defeat Henry at St. Albans. Richard, on the other hand, engineers the execution of all who refuse to help him or who stand in his way. He becomes so steeped in murder that the whole kingdom rises in arms against him when he kills the two little princes.

Machiavelli also recommends that a successful ruler either treat people well or crush them. Half-measures are to be avoided. He argues that cruelty is necessary because it is better to be feared than to be loved. But he also warns that a prince must not be a sadist; he must employ cruelty judiciously--in a paradoxical manner, almost humanely--for example, to discourage or prevent disorder in the state that would be harmful to the majority of the people. While Henry acts only by half-measures, when he acts at all, and has no interest in government, Richard resorts to double measures and can think of nothing but usurping the crown. In his attempt to be just, Henry treats all men equally, refusing to be cruel and to enforce order. He does nothing to punish the murderers of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, until the Nevils and the commons threaten to take matters into their own hands. Richard, contrariwise, enjoys

⁶See footnote 9 in Chap. 3, 3 Henry VI.

sadism and taunts his victims at every opportunity. He is concerned neither with maintaining order nor with the good of the people.

Machiavelli's prince must fight, followed by a united people. Henry not only refuses to fight, but so demoralizes the troops in 3 Henry VI that Clifford sends him to a mole hill so that the soldiers will not see his passive conduct. Richard fights, but without a united people behind him. Even those in his army who fight against Richmond hope that Richard will be defeated.

Machiavelli constantly stresses that a prince cannot be morally perfect in an imperfect world without effecting his own destruction. Henry, in an attempt to be morally perfect, refuses time and again to act when it is imperative that he do so. By depending upon God to maintain order and justice, he neglects his duty to God as vice-regent. In contrast, Richard is so morally imperfect that, like an ulcer, he absorbs all the evil in the kingdom and, ironically, works as God's agent of vengeance. Without Richard's elimination of the tainted lords, Richmond would have been forced to destroy them and would have contaminated himself in the process.

Thus, while Shakespeare demonstrates in the first tetralogy that violence is often necessary to maintain order, he also recognizes the need to combine physical force with moral force. Richmond shows that he can amalgamate these two forces when he justifies his cause in a speech to his soldiers before the Battle of Bosworth:

God and our good cause fight upon our side;
The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls,
Like high-rear'd bulwarks, stand before our faces.
Richard except, those whom we fight against
Had rather have us win than him they follow;
For what is he they follow? truly, gentlemen,

A bloody tyrant and a homicide;
One raised in blood, and one in blood
 establish'd.....
Then, if you fight against God's enemy,
God will in justice ward you as his soldiers;
If you do sweat to put a tyrant down,
You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain....
 (V, iii, 237-252)

Because Richard is a tyrant, a murderer, and God's enemy, it is permissible for Richmond to rebel against him.

After the Battle of Bosworth Field and Richard's death, Richmond knows he has won by uniting moral and physical force. He tells his men, "God and your arms be praised" (V, v, 1). His last speech shows that order, mercy, and justice have returned to England:

Inter their bodies as becomes their births:
Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled,
That in submission will return to us....
 (V, v, 15-17)

He shows his interest in upholding God's commandments and in maintaining peace and order in the realm:

And then, as we have ta'en the sacrament,
We will unite the white rose and the red.
Smile heaven upon this fair conjunction,....
What traitor hears me, and says not amen?
England hath long been mad, and scarr'd herself;
The brother blindly shed the brother's blood,
The father rashly slaughter'd his own son,
The son, compell'd, been butcher to the sire:
All this divided York and Lancaster,
Divided in their dire division,
O, now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!
And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
With smiling plenty and fair prosperous days!
 (V, v, 18-34)

Thus Richmond voices his determination to end the civil war as he prays for God's help to maintain peace and order. By marrying Elizabeth, the

daughter of Edward IV, he unites the houses of York and Lancaster. For the first time in the tetralogy, a ruler marries an equal. The good of England is taken into consideration, and no broken marriage contracts are involved.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD II

Richard II is the first history play in which Shakespeare explores character as well as the nature of kingship.¹ In the second tetralogy an evolution takes place, a shift from the study of kingship as it focuses on the office itself and only secondarily on the character of the king, to the study of kingship as it focuses squarely on the character of the king himself. In the first tetralogy Henry VI is the embodiment of Christian virtues, but his virtues as a man, which are sketched in only haphazardly, paradoxically amount to his faults as a king. As a result of his blindness to the faults of others, he becomes a pawn in the political game who is continually ruled by those around him. In a manner similar to that of Henry VI, Richard II refuses to accept a king's responsibilities, and consequently he also loses his authority. But in Richard II there is exploration of character as well as exploration of the nature of kingship.

By 1595-6 when he wrote Richard II,² Shakespeare was mature enough as a playwright to exploit the ideas nascent in Henry VI. In Richard II Shakespeare dramatizes the causality implicit in the theme of rebellion. Both the deposed king, Richard, and the usurper, Bolingbroke, are explored both as kings and men; the reasons for their success

¹King John is not treated in this paper because the play shows no genuine advance either in content or in technique over the first tetralogy.

²Following the dating of Chambers, p. 270.

and failure are carefully examined.

In structure Richard II is quite different from the Henry VI plays which are episodic by nature. By the time he wrote Richard II, Shakespeare had learned how to sift out extraneous material. The result is a play in which scenes are not only solid units in themselves, as in 3 Henry VI, but cohere into a unified whole. In all these plays there are also scenes that contribute nothing on a plot level, but that comment on or summarize pertinent issues.³ In plot Richard II is similar to 2 Henry VI. Both plays depict the rise of one king at the expense of another, but 2 Henry VI lacks dramatic unity. Shakespeare makes Richard II an integral whole because he concentrates on Richard and provides an excellent contrast to Richard in Bolingbroke. By presenting in Act I the seemingly best side of Richard so that he appears to be a good king who conducts an orderly court, a king who seems concerned with maintaining order and justice and the welfare of his kingdom, Shakespeare evokes sympathy in the reader for Richard's plight. At the same time Shakespeare provides depth of character through a cross-current which suggests Richard's deficiencies as a king.

Richard II is actually a character who develops out of Henry VI. Both are kings born into roles for which they are not suited. Richard could have been a successful minor poet,⁴ and Henry could have been an excellent monk or recluse, but neither is a good king. Both are too

³See the garden scene in Richard II and the shepherd scene in 3 Henry VI.

⁴Those interested in pursuing the subject of Richard II as a poet should consult Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (Garden City, New York), pp. 68-79.

passive by nature. Henry is not willing to shoulder any responsibility because he might commit a sin in the process. Justice is maintained in his court only if he feels God is the judge, as when the apprentice armorer, Jack Horner, proves his master guilty in a judicial duel. Richard is even more foolishly passive in expecting God to help him directly by sending down angelic hosts.

In spite of his expectations of divine intervention, Richard lacks the religious personality of Henry. Richard is par excellence a man play-acting the role of king. Words and ceremony are the only things at which he is adept. Just as Henry's passive, religious nature makes him a virtuous man but a poor king, Richard's passive, poetic nature makes him a good artist but a poor king. Richard becomes so obsessed by words and sees the world so symbolically that to him form and ceremony become ends in themselves.

Both Henry and Richard fail to distinguish between words and reality and both are convinced by words without investigation. Both resort to prayers and requests, but in different ways. Richard wants God to avenge him and help him keep his kingdom; Henry wants God to help him rule better.

Neither Henry or Richard understands his situation, and as a result each acts foolishly. Thus Henry does not recognize the danger of returning York's patrimony, and Richard does not foresee the consequences of confiscating Bolingbroke's patrimony. In both cases they ignore indications of a rebellion. Richard is warned that if he takes John of Gaunt's property he brings down a thousand troubles upon his head. When Horner is defeated by his apprentice, the master admits he is guilty, but Henry

does not examine or remember that Horner is guilty of treason because he said Richard, Duke of York, was the rightful king.

Henry has the good sense most of the time to realize his limitations and let his simplicity, honesty, moral bravery, and piety have what effect they may. He wants to see justice done and is interested in the welfare of the realm. But because he loves everyone and wants to harm no one, even to enforce justice, his attitude proves ineffective. However, with the upheaval that exists in the kingdom during his reign, nothing Henry can do will help. On the other hand, Richard fools himself into thinking that since he was born king, he is infallible. Because he is basically interested in himself and not the realm, he fails as a ruler.

For a modern audience, Richard II first appears as a good king because he has a gift for pageantry. He uses words well and acts very well the role of king in public. Yet "for Shakespeare's audience, Richard was a bad king whose deposition was perhaps inevitable...but whose murder was avenged only by a half-century of civil war."⁵ The title of the tragedy describing his actions in The Mirror for Magistrates demonstrates the Elizabethan attitude towards him: "Howe kyng Richarde the seconde was for his euyll gouernaunce deposed from his seat, and miserably murdred in prison."⁶ Richard is described as:

⁵K. F. Thompson, "Richard II, Martyr," Shakespeare Quarterly, VIII (1957), 160.

⁶The Mirror for Magistrates, p. 111.

...a Kyng that ruled all by lust,
That forced not of vertue, ryght, or lawe,
But alway put false Flatterers most in trust,
Ensuing such as could my [Richard's] vices clawe:
By faythful counsayle passing not a strawe....

For mayntenaunce whereof, my realme I polde
Through subsidies, sore fines, loanes, many a
 prest,
Blanke charters, othes, & shiftes not knownen of
 olde,
For Whych my Subiectes did me sore detest.⁷

Shakespeare takes up the same theme, stressing that Richard maintained too large a court, and that he put more trust in flatterers than in good advisers. Because of excessive taxes, subsidies, and blank charters, he alienates his subjects.⁸

Richard's weakness as a man stems, at least partially, from his narrow interpretation of the Tudor conception of the divine right of kings. He believes that he has derived his right to rule by birth alone-- a right based upon the laws of God and of nature. He feels his authority was transmitted to him from his ancestors, who were appointed as rulers by God. But Richard makes the mistake of believing that he is not responsible to those he governs and that his right to do as he pleases cannot be questioned. He makes an unbelievably bad ruler, whose almost every action is a mistake. He proves himself ineffectual and capricious by the way he handles the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. By confiscating his uncle Gaunt's estates, Richard alienates himself from the powerful nobles who possess estates and gives Bolingbroke a lawful

⁷Ibid., "Tragedy 5," p. 113.

⁸Shakespeare does not use The Mirror for Magistrates as his sole source for Richard II. He takes much of his information from the Holinshed and Hall Chronicles.

grievance so that he can return to England. Richard then leaves England for Ireland in time of crisis and returns to find his land in rebellion.

Only a thin veneer of decorum shields the nascent disorder in the court when Richard II opens. Because Richard has not maintained justice in the realm and is responsible for the murder of his uncle, Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, Bolingbroke is taking the law into his own hands. He accuses Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, of the murder of Gloucester. In handling this case, Richard sounds like a king when he tells Mowbray:

....impartial are our eyes and ears:
Were he Bolingbroke my brother, nay, my king-
dom's heir....
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.
(R. II, I, i, 115-123)

Here Richard demonstrates a knowledge of justice. A king should be impartial; unfortunately Richard is not. His handling of the judicial duel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke shows his injustice.

Richard does demonstrate his knowledge of the principle of order when he tells the angry Mowbray and Bolingbroke, "We were not born to sue, but to command" (I, i, 197). But he lacks the inner force necessary to rule and concedes:

...since we can not do to make you friends,
Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,...
Since we can not atone you, we shall see
Justice design the victor's chivalry.
(I, i, 198-203)

Thus in the first scene the principle of order is violated by both Bolingbroke and Mowbray as well as by Richard. Social disintegration is

taking place because Richard is not capable of enforcing order. While he is at fault for not doing so, Mowbray and Bolingbroke are at fault for not obeying him.

Richard knows the rules of courtly procedure and follows them beautifully. Because he knows how a king should act in public, he is able to use kingly form to his advantage. Instead of letting justice work itself out in the lists, he goes through all the pomp and ceremony of a judicial duel only to throw his warder down and call off the combat just when it is to begin. Then he banishes Mowbray for life and Bolingbroke for ten years--later he changes Bolingbroke's sentence to six years. This miscarriage of justice harms both the innocent and the guilty. Richard commits this act of injustice because he cannot afford to let either remain in England. Since he was responsible for his uncle Gloucester's death, he cannot afford to let Mowbray talk, and he did not want Bolingbroke in England because Bolingbroke was becoming too popular with both the nobles and the commoners.

Richard's guilt in the murder of Gloucester is revealed when Gaunt tells the Duchess of Gloucester that he will not avenge his brother's death because:

God's quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death: the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.

(I, ii, 36-40)

Here Gaunt expresses his opinion about the main problem of the play: what to do with a king who is not fit to rule? Gaunt adopts the traditional view (in fact, the Tudor view) that since Richard is God's substitute, God would mete out justice. A subject should never raise

an angry arm against his king.

As the play progresses, however, the necessity of deposing Richard becomes more evident and the question of what to do becomes more complex. Richard cares nothing about the welfare of his subjects. In making preparations for the Irish wars, he decides:

...for our coffers, with too great a court
And liberal largess, are grown somewhat light,
We are inforced to farm our royal realm;
The revenue whereof shall furnish us
For our affairs in hand; if that come short,
Our substitutes at home shall have blank charters;
Whereto, when they shall know what men are rich,
They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold....
(I, iv, 43-50)

Thus, because of his liberality, Richard is forced to rob the poor and overtax the rich by farming out the realm. The king was expected to support himself, his court, and any wars he carried on by the income from his own vast lands and possessions. The English nobles and the commons did not approve of Richard's kind of liberality.

Machiavelli in The Prince explains why a ruler should be careful about financial matters and not concern himself with being "liberal":

And therefore for one to hold the name of liberall among men, it were needfull not to omit any sumptuous quality, insomuch that a Prince alwayes so disposed, shall waste all his revenues, and at the end shall be forc'd, if he will still maintaine that reputation of liberality, heavily to burthen his subjects, and become a great exactour; and put in practise all those things, that can be done to get mony. Which begins to make him hatefull to his subjects,⁸ and fall into every ones contempt....

⁸Machiavelli, p. 59.

In Richard II Shakespeare depicts a situation similar to the one Machiavelli warns against.

Gaunt feels that his duty to God, England, and Richard comes before personal aggrandizement or personal desire. This sense of duty shines forth when he bemoans the banishment of Bolingbroke, and Richard reminds him:

Thy son is banish'd upon good advice,
Whereto thy tongue a party-verdict gave:
Why at our justice seem'st thou then to lour?
(I, iii, 233-235)

Gaunt shows his loyalty by answering:

Things sweet to taste prove in digestion sour.
You urged me as a judge; but I had rather
You would have bid me argue like a father.
(I, iii, 236-238)

This loyalty to Richard is emphasized further, when on his deathbed Gaunt questions York: "Will the king come, that I may breathe my last/ In wholesome counsel to his unstaid youth?" (II, i, 1-2). York replies: "In vain comes counsel to his [Richard's] ear" (II, i, 4).

In Act II, scene 1, Richard's deliberate misrule is exposed. York tells Gaunt that Richard will not listen to his advice because his ear

...is stopp'd with other flattering sounds,
As praises, of whose taste the wise are fond,
Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound
The open ear of youth doth always listen;
Report of fashions in proud Italy,
Whose manners still our tardy apish nation
Limps after in base imitation.
Where doth the world thrust forth a vanity--
So it be new, there's no respect how vile--
That is not quickly buzz'd into his ears?
Then all too late comes counsel to be heard,
Where will doth mutiny with wit's regard.
Direct not him whose way himself will choose....
(II, i, 17-29)

All Richard wants to hear is praise, and his will has so usurped the function of reason that he cares only about licentious living and the latest fashions from Italy. (In Shakespeare's time, mention of Italian fashions carried a connotation of effeminate and femininity.)

Nevertheless when Richard comes, Gaunt upbraids him:

Thy death-bed is no lesser than thy land,
Wherein thou liest in reputation sick;
And thou, too careless patient as thou 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 whit lesser than thy land.
O, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye,
Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons,
From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,
Deposing thee before thou wert possess'd,
Which art possess'd now to depose thyself.
Why, cousin, wert thou regent of the world,
It were a shame to let this land by lease;
But, for thy world enjoying but this land,
Is it not more than shame to shame it so?
Landlord of England art thou now, not king:
The state of law is bondsman to the law.

(II, i, 95-114)

Gaunt penetrates to the core of Richard's situation when he tells his nephew he has lost his reputation. By consorting with flatterers, Richard compounds his vices because he spurns good advice and acts on bad advice. Worst of all, Richard's actions have made him landlord of England rather than its king.

But Richard will not listen and calls his uncle "a lunatic lean-witted fool, / Presuming on an ague's privilege" (II, i, 115-116). Richard then shows his callous lack of human feeling when he tells Gaunt that he would be beheaded if he were not already on his deathbed. Richard further shows his lack of love when he tells York, just after Gaunt's death,

"The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he;/His time is spent,
our pilgrimage must be" (II, i, 154-155).

Richard does not wait for Gaunt to be buried before he confiscates his property, Bolingbroke's inheritance. Horrified at what Richard is doing, York warns:

Seek you to seize and gripe into your hands
The royalties and rights of banish'd Hereford?
Is not Gaunt dead, and doth not Hereford live?
Was not Gaunt just, and is not Harry true?
Did not the one deserve to have an heir?
Is not his heir a well-deserving son?
Take Hereford's rights away, and take from time
His charters and his customary rights;
Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day;
Be not thyself; for how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession?
Now, afore God--God forbid I say true!--
If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights....
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts....
(II, i, 191-207)

If Richard ignores the laws of inheritance and does not give Bolingbroke his rightful property, York points out, the whole feudal order will be undermined. By ignoring the laws of inheritance, Richard is setting up a dangerous precedent. He himself is king by inheritance, and if he ignores these laws, others will have excuse to ignore them also and rebel against him. York warns Richard that his action is bound to cost him the support of the nobles, but Richard ignores the warning.

Already many of the nobles are ready to leave Richard. Even York, one of his staunchest supporters and the last of "noble Edward's sons," wonders:

How long shall I be patient? ah, how long
Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?
Not Gloucester's death, nor Hereford's banishment.
Not Gaunt's rebukes, nor England's private wrongs,
Nor the prevention of poor Bolingbroke

About his marriage, nor my own disgrace,
Have ever made me sour my patient cheek,
Or bend one wrinkle on my sovereign's face.
(II, i, 164-171)

Most of the landed nobility are like the Earl of Northumberland, who urges rebellion:

If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke,
Imp out our drooping country's broken wing,
Redeem from broking pawn the blemish'd crown,
Wipe off the dust that hides our sceptre's gilt,
And make high majesty look like itself,
Away with me in post to Ravenspurgh....
(II, i, 290-295)

On a practical level the nobles want a king who enforces justice, maintains order in the realm, and does not squander money. Richard fulfills none of these criteria. Furthermore, because of the influence the court favorites exert over Richard, the powerful landowners are beginning to worry that they may be disposed of one by one. To prevent the influence of the favorites from prevailing, the nobles band together to purge the kingdom of parasites.

Before the rebellion the dissident nobles emphasize that they will "redeem the crown," not change rulers. Even Bolingbroke, although he is obviously after the crown from the beginning, is careful to maintain the pretense that he returns only to claim his rightful inheritance. The emphasis is upon redeeming the crown because the rebels are caught in a moral dilemma: Richard is a bad king but he is not a tyrant. All of the crimes he commits could be cured by legislation. Since he is not a tyrant, outright rebellion against him is a sin against God. The Bishop of Carlyle states the orthodox Elizabethan attitude when he rebukes the rebels during the deposition scene:

What subject can give sentence on the king?
And who sits here that is not Richard's subject....
And shall the figure of God's majesty,
His captain, steward, deputy elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judged by subject and inferior breath....
O, forfend it, God,
That in a Christian climate souls refined
Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed!
I speak to subjects, and a subject speaks,
Stirr'd up by God, thus boldly for his king.
My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king.....
(IV, i, 121-135)

Carlyle's speech takes on added significance because as bishop he is a representative of God. He is reminding the members of Parliament and Bolingbroke that they have no right to depose or even judge Richard because they are his subjects and inferiors. Since God selects the king to represent Him on earth, only He has the right to depose Richard. To rebel against Richard, therefore, is tantamount to rebellion against God.

On the other hand, Shakespeare demonstrates how Richard is not fit to rule. Thus the nobles are caught in an insoluble dilemma: if they rebel against Richard, they are sinning against God, and if they do not rebel, they will have to live under oppression and in fear of losing their land.

According to the Tudor doctrine of kingship, when a bad king is on the throne, his subject should pray that he will mend his ways. God has probably sent him to punish the realm. If the subjects rebel against a bad king, they are only adding new sins to old sins that have not yet been expiated. Carlyle warns the nobles:

And if you crown him [Bolingbroke], let me
prophecy;
The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act....

O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woofullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
(IV, i, 136-147)

This speech predicts the coming Wars of the Roses and the struggle between the Houses of Lancaster and York.

Before writing Richard II, Shakespeare had already exploited this conflict in the Henry VI plays and in Richard III. In these plays, also, the usurpation of Bolingbroke is considered the chief cause of the civil wars, for the deposition of Richard not only sets up a precedent for rebellion, but also leaves in doubt the question of the succession. Previous to the rebellion, Richard had named Edmund Mortimer his successor, because Mortimer was descended from George, Duke of Clarence, the third son of Edward III. Bolingbroke is descended from John of Gaunt, the fourth son of Edward III. But while Bolingbroke has neither the legal nor the moral right to succeed Richard, he does have the physical might necessary to bring about Richard's overthrow and to enforce his rule after he has been crowned.

Shakespeare demonstrates how a successful king needs both moral and physical force. Richard was born with both, but because of his misrule, he loses moral force, and when he goes to the Irish wars, he loses physical force. But although Bolingbroke gains control of the country through physical might, Richard cannot be dispossessed of his moral right to be king. Bolingbroke wins the physical power necessary to rule, but there is no way in which he can obtain the traditional moral sanction needed to strengthen his position.

York serves as the touchstone for the feelings of the nobles towards the rebellion when he says:

...Both are my kinsmen:
The one is my sovereign, whom both my oath
And duty bids defend; the other again
Is my kinsman, whom the king hath wrong'd,
Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right.
(II, ii, 111-115)

Duty places him on Richard's side, but conscience places him on Bolingbroke's side.

To justify his return to England after banishment, Bolingbroke uses a semantic argument as a cover-up:

As I was banish'd, I was banish'd Hereford;
But as I come, I come for Lancaster....
Will you [York] permit that I shall stand con-
demn'd
A wandering vagabond; my rights and royalties
Pluck'd from my arms perforce and given away
To upstart unthrifths? Wherefore was I born?
If that my cousin king be King of England,
It must be granted I am Duke of Lancaster....
What would you have me do? I am a subject,
And I challenge law: attorneys are denied me;
And therefore personally I lay my claim
To my inheritance of free descent.
(II, iii, 113-136)

In this speech, Bolingbroke both excuses his action and emphasizes that Richard has deprived him of his legal inheritance. Thus he has a legitimate claim against Richard (but no right to rebel), because tradition and law have made him heir to his father's estate.

Almost immediately after landing in England, Bolingbroke begins to take on the role of king and starts ridding the kingdom of parasites. He is careful to protect himself from blame when he executes Bushy and Green by justifying his actions:

...to wash your blood
From off my hands, here in the view of men
I will unfold some causes of your deaths.
(III, i, 5-7)

He accuses them of giving poor counsel to the king and of separating the king and the queen, neither of these actions being a capital offense. But the main motivating force behind Bolingbroke is a desire for personal revenge. He had been:

Near to the king in blood, and near in love
Till you did make him misinterpret me,
Have stoop'd my neck under your injuries,...
Whilst you have fed upon my signories,
 ...leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman.
(III, i, 17-27)

Nevertheless, Bolingbroke has no right to enforce his own private justice.

From this time on Bolingbroke is in complete control of the kingdom. Richard has lost control because he does not understand the nature of kingship. The forms and pageantry surrounding his office are more important to him than the duties implicit with his office. He arrives from Ireland with all the pomp and ceremony due a king returning home, but he has taken so long returning that twelve thousand Welsh troops have deserted the previous day. His concern with prestige, glory, and power, and his lack of judgment cause his downfall.

When he returns, Richard greets Aumerle:

 ...I weep for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again.
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horses'
 hoofs:
As a long-parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,
So, weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands.
(III, ii, 4-11)

Richard acts as if he were doing England a favor by returning, and shows his over-dependence upon the theory of the divine right of kings by

imploring his land: "Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king/ Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms" (III, ii, 25-26). In an attempt to bring Richard back to reality and force him to realize that he must make preparation to fend off Bolingbroke if he is to retain his kingdom, the Bishop of Carlyle tells him:

Fear not, my lord: that Power that made you
king
Hath power to keep you king in spite of all.
The means that heaven yields must be embraced,
And not neglected; else, if heaven would,
And we will not, heaven's offer we refuse,
The proffer'd means of succour and redress.
(III, ii, 27-32)

In other words, "God helps him who helps himself." If Richard acts vigorously to keep the kingdom, God will help him, but Richard must take advantage of any help that comes his way.

Richard's folly is his belief that right alone makes might. He very shortly learns that it does not. By the end of Act III, Richard no longer has any physical power to back up his authority. However, once he loses his power, he begins to appear more kingly. He appears every inch a Plantagenet but his action is only a show when he addresses Northumberland from the wall of Flint Castle:

We are amazed; and thus long have we stood
To watch the fearful bending of thy knee,
Because we thought ourself thy lawful king:
And if we be, how dare thy joints forget
To pay their awful duty to our presence?
If we be not, show us the hand of God
That hath dismiss'd us from our stewardship;
For well we know, no hand of blood and bone
Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre,
Unless he do profane, steal, or usurp.
(III,iii, 72-81)

Here Richard speaks with the moral force and dignity that should characterize a king.

Once he realizes he is going to lose the crown, Richard's self-consciousness, always typical of his public behavior, becomes more evident:

We do debase ourselves, cousin, do we not,
To look so poorly and to speak so fair?
Shall we call back Northumberland, and send
Defiance to the traitor, and so die?
(III, iii, 127-130)

For the first time in the play Richard realizes that he is not always able to follow his whim of the moment. But at the same time he refuses to take any direct physical action and is still obsessed with words:

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? o' God's name, let it go....
...I'll be buried in the king's highway,
Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head.
(III, iii, 143-157)

But while Richard is full of self-pity, he realizes that much of what he says is a pose: "Well, well, I see/I talk but idly, and you laugh at me" (III, iii, 170-171).

Richard thoroughly enjoys wallowing in self-pity. When Bolingbroke asks him, in the deposition scene, whether he is willing to resign the crown, he answers:

My crown I am; but still my griefs are mine:
You may my glories and my state depose,
But not my griefs; still am I king of those.
(IV, i, 191-193)

When Bolingbroke pushes the question of his abdication, Richard answers:

Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be;
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now mark me, how I will undo myself:
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....
(IV, i, 201-206)

All his life Richard has teetered between yes and no. Now, when there is no longer a choice, he still wavers.

Richard makes every accusation he can against Bolingbroke:

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 duty's rites....
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep all vows unbroke that swear to thee!
(IV, i, 207-215)

By emphasizing washing away the balm, giving away the crown, denying his sacred state, and releasing all of duty's rites, Richard is directly accusing the rebels of treachery and emphasizing the wrongs they have done to him. He also shows how meaningless words can be when he asks God to pardon all broken oaths, a direct reminder to the rebels that their word is worthless.

When Northumberland asks him to read a list of his crimes so that the commons will know he has been worthily deposed, Richard completely turns the tables:

....Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offences were upon record,
Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop
To read a lecture of them? If thou wouldst,
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....
(IV, i, 230-236)

Here Richard shows a quick mind and an acute ability to act the role of king as he turns every situation to his advantage. He goes on to point out:

I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
To undeck the pompous body of a king;

Made glory base and sovereignty a slave,
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant.
(IV, i, 248-252)

So well does Richard divert the purpose of Parliament from showing how he deserved to be deposed to pointing out how the nobles had no right to rebel against him that Bolingbroke is forced to say, "Urge it [Richard's reading a prepared list of the reasons why he should be deposed] no more, my Lord Northumberland" (IV, i, 271).

However, Richard reverts back to his vain self when he looks into a mirror:

No deeper wrinkles yet? hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face of mine,
And made no deeper wounds?
(IV, i, 277-279)

He feels that his inward sorrow should be mirrored on his face so that the world will feel he is being persecuted. Because the looking glass does not show what he thinks it should, he accuses it of being a

...flattering glass,
Like to my followers in prosperity,
Thou dost beguile me! Was this the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men? was this the face
That, like the sun, did make beholders wink?
Was this the face that faced so many follies,
And was at last out-faced by Bolingbroke?
(IV, i, 279-286)

Richard acknowledges that he has been misled by flatterers, that he kept too many men in his court, and that he has committed too many follies. He is now beginning to understand himself and to realize the dichotomy that often exists between words and deeds. At the same time he demonstrates his mental weakness and his inability to concentrate for any length of time.

In his final scene, Richard acknowledges that he has caused the disorder in the realm:

...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 disorder'd 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....
(V, v, 42-49)

Here he admits that he has lost his crown and the power to make personal choices because he has misused his life both as king and as man.

Although in the end he gains some insight into his own character, in the final analysis Richard is not a tragic character because he never gets outside himself; he does not recognize, as do all genuine tragic characters, that all humans suffer, and he does not examine the questions directly connected with the suffering that typifies human predicament. Neither does he associate himself with the suffering of the rest of humanity. Suffering for him is not a great experience that helps him transcend his mistakes. Instead, it degenerates into an enjoyable self-pity. If he has any triumph in the play, it is only a verbal one. Death for him is the final fury of a man who fights back like a caged animal.

As a man, Richard is essentially a poet who is overemotional, but not passionate. He has a passive personality and is not inclined to action, and when he does act, his actions are usually mistakes. His temperament is not suitable for kingship; he is impractical and tends to see life in symbol and allegory. Although he is highly imaginative in his discourse, he does not understand what is going on around him and is indecisive in times of crisis. Only at the end of the play when he kills

two of his assassins does he rise to any physical action.

On the other hand, Bolingbroke is not a perfect king either. He is an improvement over Richard in that he has a complete understanding of power politics. He is a smooth talker and is able to befuddle the issue of his right to return to England from exile. By making vague promises of favors while not committing himself to any specific action, he is able to keep the support of the powerful nobles, but he shows moral hypocrisy, however, when he assumes authority of kingship before he is crowned. Because his actions are covered with a slick veneer of hypocrisy, they do not arouse suspicion. After he has gained control of the kingdom, he gives Richard an appearance of respect and pretends to be merciful, but by this time he has the power of the kingdom in his hands and is planning to get rid of Richard.⁹

In Richard II Shakespeare summarizes his ideas on kingship in two places. The first is expounded in York's description of Edward III:

In war was never lion raged more fierce,
In peace was never gentle lamb more mild,
Than was that young and princely gentleman.
His face thou hast, for even so look'd he,
Accomplish'd with the number of thy hours;
But when he frown'd, it was against the French
And not against his friends; his noble hand
Did win what he did spend, and spent not that
Which his triumphant father's hand had won;
His hands were guilty of no kindred blood,
But bloody with the enemies of his kin.

(II, i, 174-184)

From this we learn that the ideal king should be fierce in war and gentle in peace. He should make war upon his enemies, not upon his friends (as

⁹Because Bolingbroke as king is discussed later in this thesis in the chapter on Henry IV, he is not discussed here in detail.

Richard has been doing). Rather than live in a lascivious manner and spend more than the revenues derived from his own land as Richard does, Edward III spent no more than the royal holdings brought in.

The second place where Shakespeare summarizes his ideas of kingship is in the famous garden scene. Here he uses the garden to represent England and the gardener to represent the ideal king. The gardener is acting as Richard should have acted when he tells his assistant to:

Go, bind thou up yon dangling apricocks,
Which, like unruly children, make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight:
Give some supportance to the bending twigs.
Go thou, and like an executioner,
Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
All must be even in our government.
You thus employ'd, I will go root away
The noisome weeds, which without profit suck
The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.

(III, iv, 29-39)

The emphasis is upon keeping "law and form and due proportion" (III, iv, 40). The gardener does so by combining right purpose with suitable action. Just as the gardener has the proper regard for his garden, so Richard should have had proper regard for his kingdom and safeguarded its moral and physical welfare.

The gardener weeded his garden and cut off the heads of "too fast growing sprays." Richard continued to give power to his favorites until the productive members of the realm began to fear they would be executed. Although Richard wanted the throne, he was not willing to weed out the dangerous elements in the realm. By refusing to take responsibility and failing to use the judgment that was necessary if he were to maintain power, he lost the prestige that went with kingship. Because he ignored the customary rights of others, they neglected the customary rights owed him as sovereign.

CHAPTER V

HENRY IV

Since Henry IV is not the protagonist of any of the history plays and only a major character in two of them, Richard II and 1 Henry IV (in 2 Henry IV he does not appear until Act III and then only in three small scenes), it seems best to study his character as a whole in the three plays in which he appears. The starting point for the study of him is, therefore, Richard II. In some respects this play stands apart from the two parts of Henry IV, but Shakespeare makes enough cross-references to suggest they were written as a unit.¹

Henry IV, or Bolingbroke as he is called before he usurps the throne, is quite different in character from Richard III. In many respects Henry, as a character, is a development from--and a decided improvement upon--Richard. Both are usurpers, but Richard is an egomaniac interested only in achieving the crown, while in spite of his duplicity, Henry from the beginning shows concern for England. Even before he is banished, Henry shows he is trying to bring justice to England when he accuses Sir Thomas Mowbray of the murder of Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester:

...Mowbray hath received eight thousand nobles
In name of lendings for your highness' soldiers,
The which he hath detain'd for lewd employments,
Like a false traitor and injurious villain....
Further I say, and further will maintain
Upon his bad life to make all this good,

¹These cross-references have been dealt with so exhaustively by E. M. W. Tillyard in Shakespeare's History Plays that it does not seem necessary to cover them here.

That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death,...
Sluiced out his innocent soul through streams of
blood:
Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth....
(R. II, I, i, 88-105)

But Henry is already in essential rebellion when he makes this accusation, for he is trying to take justice into his own hands. Since Richard II refuses to enforce justice in the realm, someone must. Henry has the right attitude towards justice, but he has the wrong method. Already for him the means justify the end.

In contrast to Henry, who never reveals his plans in a soliloquy, Richard III soliloquizes frequently about his plans "to cut the causes" (3 Henry VI, III, ii, 142) that separate him from the crown. Desire for the crown has eclipsed everything else, although he does not know what he will do when he attains the throne. While Henry is pleasant and handsome, Richard is diseased both physically and mentally. Accordingly, Richard decides he cannot be a lover, so he declares, "I am determined to prove a villain" (R. III, I, i, 30). For him pleasure amounts to disorder and violence: unlike Henry he prefers battle to peace.

Richard III and Henry IV are alike in that both recognize that while words are not substitutes for action they can be misused to advantage. After he has been banished and his father, John of Gaunt, attempts to console him, Henry says:

O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hunger edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?...
O, no! the apprehension of the good
Gives but the greater feeling to the worse:
Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more
Than when he bites, but lanceth not the sore.
(R. II, I, iii, 294-303)

Here Henry argues that thought is not a substitute for concrete reality, nor imagination a substitute for fact.

Later in the play, however, Henry uses words more adeptly when he learns that Richard II is in Flint Castle. His political acumen, as well as his hypocrisy is apparent when he tells his followers:

Noble lords,....
 Through brazen trumpet send the breath of parley
 Into his [Richard's] ruin'd ears, and thus
 deliver:
 Henry Bolingbroke
 On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand
 And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
 To his most royal person; hither come
 Even at his feet to lay my arms and power,
 Provided that my banishment repeal'd
 And lands restored again be freely granted:
 If not, I'll use the advantage of my power....
 (III, iii, 31-42)

Henry knows that he has Richard completely in control because he has just learned that Richard has arrived too late from Ireland to retain his twelve thousand Welsh troops. Yet he does not openly mention this control. On the surface he maintains he is seeking only the return of his rightful inheritance, but on the sub-surface level his emphasis is that if Richard does not grant his desires, he will use force. This speech suggests that Henry proposes the eventual overthrow of Richard II.

Richard III states more frankly than Henry his belief that words can be used advantageously:

I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl.
 The secret mischeifs that I set abroad
 I lay unto the grievous charge of others....
 Now, they believe it; and withal whet me
 To be revenged on Rivers, Vaughan, Grey:
 But then I sigh; and, with a piece of Scrip-
 ture,
 Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:

And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With old odd ends stolen out of holy writ;
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.
(R. III, I, iii, 324-338)

By accusing others of the crimes he commits, Richard averts suspicion from himself and directs it towards others. To further strengthen his accusations, he, like many of the villains in Shakespeare, clothes his "naked villainy/With old odd ends stolen out of holy writ" (I, iii, 336-337).

As he proceeds towards the crown, Richard becomes more openly treacherous and vicious. When he learns that Lord Hastings will not help him usurp the throne from his nephew Edward, he promises Buckingham:

Chop off his head, man; somewhat we will do:
And, look, when I am king, claim thou of me
The earldom of Hereford, and the moveables
Whereof the king my brother stood possess'd.
(III, i, 192-195)

Because he knows Buckingham is covetous, Richard is able to persuade him to do the dirty work.

Henry also makes promises to his followers in return for support, but he is too acute to make Richard's mistake of offering specific prizes. Nor does Henry make the error of being openly vicious and treacherous. On his road to power he is careful to justify every action as plausibly as possible. Although he begins to assume the role of king before he is crowned by "weeding out the garden" of England, he does it in a manner that arouses neither the anger nor the suspicion of his allies:

Bushy and Green, I will not vex your souls--
Since presently your souls must part your
bodies=...
For 'twere no charity; yet, to wash your blood
From off my hands, here in the view of men
I will unfold some causes of your deaths.
(R. II, III, i, 2-7)

He then accuses them of misleading Richard II, of divorcing Richard from his queen, and, most of all, of influencing Richard against Henry himself:

Myself, a prince by fortune of my birth,
Near to the king in blood, and near in love
Till you did make him misinterpret me,
Have stoop'd my neck under your injuries,...
Whilst you have fed upon my signories,
...leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman.

(III, i, 16-27)

Although the most serious grievance Henry has against Bushy and Green is personal, he manages to generalize about their crimes and not arouse the kingdom against him.

While Henry desires to be a good ruler and begins to assume the responsibilities of ruling even before he is crowned, Richard III's only concern is the acquisition of the crown. Richard has no interest in the welfare of the realm. While Henry becomes an efficient ruler, Richard, once he has usurped the throne, is merely energetic and conniving with no real political objectives to occupy him after he has achieved his ambition, so that the meaninglessness of his life begins to assert itself.

Thus Richard III and Henry IV, despite certain superficial similarities, are really quite different. Richard, although he is called "devil," is not an evil man in the sense Iago is, for example, for he lacks the qualities that would make him truly human. For this reason, he amounts, in the end, only to a type of stage villain, too completely evil to be entirely plausible, a schemer and a shallow study of wickedness. Henry, on the other hand, is an excellent portrayal of an effective usurper. Since he is a mixture of good and evil, he is far more credible

as a human being than Richard. He is not remorseless. He makes many of his opportunities, as Richard III does also, but he does so in a believable manner, usually by seizing every advantage that presents itself.

Stauffer points out:

Bolingbroke, the usurping Henry IV, never makes a mistake on his march to power. He knows when to be bold or cautious, ruthless or forgiving. Though he may be cold and politic, he is politic enough to know honesty is the best policy, and he is not without a conscience. He is an admirably efficient ruler.²

But, it should be emphasized, Henry IV is more than merely an efficient ruler: he is also a proficient ruler, because he has a strong interest in his people. A lack of interest in the welfare of their countrymen is what finally brings about the downfall of both Richard II and Richard III.

From the beginning of Richard II, Henry woos the common people, as Richard II is aware. After Henry's banishment, Richard describes his departure:

...he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune,
As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well
And had the tribute of his supple knee,
With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving
 friends;'
As were our England in reversion his,
And he our subjects' next degree in hope.
 (I, iv, 25-36)

Thus, in contrast to the two Richards, Henry realizes the necessity of

²Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images, The Development of His Moral Ideas (New York, 1949), p. 89.

of commanding the good will of the commons. Surely a high degree of self-interest is obvious in Henry's playing up to the commons; he shows a sense of "politic" behavior that would do credit to a modern politician. His calculated bid for popular favor is in sharp contrast to the aristocratic contempt of Richard II for "slaves," "draymen," "oyster-wenches," and "poor carftsmen." In Henry the virtues of "familiar courtesy" with the commons and humility in their presence are transformed into "crafty smiles" because he realizes popularity is a means to power. As a result of his attention to the commons, they desert Richard and flock to him after he lands at Ravenspurgh on his return from exile.

Henry also evinces his crafty nature when he returns from banishment by the semantic argument that he left England as Hereford and has returned as Lancaster. Although his return is necessary if the foundations of order are to be restored to the kingdom, this return is no unmixed blessing for his countrymen. By returning without permission, he expresses a rebellious selfishness that foretells disorder because of the dubious nature of his claim to the throne.

Henry's progress to the crown is as cautious as it is sure. Even Henry Percy, the Hotspur of 1 Henry IV, who is too young for battle and who cannot remember having seen Henry before he was banished, is treated with respect and offered vague promises of reward:

As in a soul remembering my good friends;
And, as my fortune ripens with thy love,
It shall be still thy true love's recompense:
My heart this covenant makes, my hand thus
seals it.

(II, iii, 47-50)

By emphasizing the dependency of his future fortunes on the aid of his friends, Henry allows them to infer that the "fortune" he achieves will be shared.

Henry is neither deceived by the flatterers who seek his good graces nor impressed by the fence-sitters who are unwilling to choose between Richard and him. Henry knows he has the physical power necessary to gain the crown, and he is able to use it discreetly. When York reprimands Northumberland for omitting Richard's title, Henry warns him, "Mistake not, uncle, further than you should" (III, iii, 15). But while Henry recognizes the need for physical might, he does not forget the need of moral right. When York reminds him of the continuing jurisdiction of heaven, Henry replies, "I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself against their will" (III, iii, 17-18). Even at this point in his rise to power, Henry realizes that an appearance of moral justification for his cause is necessary. Throughout the three plays in which he appears, Henry never forgets that he is a usurper. He is forced to capitalize on his essential hypocrisy so that he can maintain a veneer of moral justification for his position.

Henry IV knows that he was able to depose Richard II because Richard had lost moral and physical power through misrule. Even though he is an efficient ruler, Henry is troubled because he lacks the moral right to the throne. As a result, once he ascends the throne, England's problems are by no means solved; in fact, the disorder is increased. When Richard commands the kingdom, only Bolingbroke and Mowbray are fighting over the question of who killed Gloucester. In the first Parliament of Henry's reign, the same question, who killed Gloucester? arises. This time the quarrel involves six instead of three persons. Lords Fitzwater, Percy, Bagot, and an anonymous lord accuse Aumerle, a former courtier of Richard, of the murder. Only Lord Surrey affirms Aumerle's innocence. Shakespeare

uses this device to show the continuing state of disorder in the kingdom. Much of this disorder arises because Henry himself represents disorder as a usurper.

A reign of terror is ushered in with Henry's rise to power. The change in court policy forced upon the nobles is verbalized by Fitzwater: "As I intend to thrive in this new world,/Aumerle is guilty of my true appeal" (IV, i, 78-79, my italics). This terror permeates the whole kingdom even up to the level of the royal family. York becomes so frightened of Henry that he informs on his own son and pleads to Henry:

Fear, and not love, begets his penitence:
Forget to pity him, lest thy pity prove
A serpent that will sting thee to the heart.
(V, iii, 56-58)

In a prudent action Henry pardons Aumerle, primarily to help solidify his position. Mercy, to Henry, amounts more to what is politically expedient than to moral commitment.

H In the Henry IV plays, Henry's desire to rule well is constantly affected by his dubious claim to the throne. His usurpation breeds rebellion in those who, in order to reap personal benefit, aided him in his rise to power. Thus his reign inevitably resolves itself into an inconclusive struggle against the selfish interests which he himself had encouraged in his efforts to gain the throne.

As a ruler Henry IV possesses many of the qualities necessary for success. He is both strong and popular. He tries to be just; not even the rebellious Percies mention any specific actions of his which are unjust. Hotspur states their grievances:

In short time after, he deposed the king;
Soon after that, deprived him of his life;
...suffer'd his kinsman March [Mortimer],
Who is, if every owner were well placed,
Indeed his king, to be engaged in Wales,
There without ransom to lie forfeited....

(1 H. IV, IV, iii, 90-96)

But most of all Hotspur is in rebellion because Henry, Hotspur claims:

Disgraced me in my happy victories,
Sought to entrap me by intelligence;
Rated mine uncle from the council-board;
In rage dismiss'd my father from the court....

(IV, iii, 97-100)

The only charge of injustice advanced by the Percies against Henry is his deposition of Richard, an act in support of which they were his staunchest allies. All their complaints are grounded on what they consider blights on their personal honor.

TV. 1 Henry IV opens with a speech which shows Henry weighted down by thoughts of anarchy and rebellion. The opening line, "So shaken as we are, so wan with care" (I, i, 1), shows his concern about the constant threat of internal wars and rebellion. In effect, he is to a high degree a player king when he begins his speech as though there were a "close [to] civil butchery" (I, ii, 13), for he knows that Glendower is already in rebellion.

As a man Henry wants to appease his conscience by undertaking a crusade to the Holy Land. Going to the Holy Land would be advantageous for him in other ways. Derek Traversi points out that:

As crowned king he genuinely wished to unite his subjects in a worthy and religious enterprise; but as usurper he hopes, in words used by him at a later stage, to 'busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels,'

and so distract attention from the way
in which he came to the throne.³

But while Henry proclaims a desire to go to the Holy Land, he has no intention of leaving at once. His opening speech is only a ruse for gaining the support of the nobles. This ruse becomes apparent when he asks the Lord of Westmoreland what the council had decided the previous night. Since Henry as king presides over the council meetings, he knows what has taken place. Westmoreland answers:

...yesternight...there came
A post from Wales loaden with heavy news;
Whose worst was, that the noble Mortimer,
Leading the men of Herefordshire to fight
Against the irregular and wild Glendower,
Was by the rude hands of that Welshman
taken....

(I, i, 36-41)

By acknowledging that internal struggles still exist in England, Henry relieves himself of the obligation of going on a crusade: "It seems then that the tidings of this broil/Brake off our business for the Holy Land" (I, i, 47-48).

Henry's precarious position is further demonstrated in his meeting with Henry Percy, Hotspur; Hotspur's father, Henry Percy; and his uncle, Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester. These three lords were among the first to meet him at Ravenspurgh on his return from exile. Henry fully understands his position and does not dare make any concessions, warning the Percies:

My blood hath been too cold and temperate,
Unapt to stir at these indignities,

³Derek Traversi, Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V (Stanford, California, 1957), p. 51.

And you have found me; for accordingly
You tread upon my patience: but be sure
I will from henceforth rather be myself,
Mighty and to be fear'd, than my condition;
Which hath been smooth as oil, soft as young
 down,
And therefore lost that title of respect
Which the proud soul ne'er pays but to the
 proud.

(I, iii, 1-9)

In other words, he has made all the concessions he is going to make to the Percies. Because he had not entrenched himself strongly enough on the throne earlier, Henry had been forced to be lenient. Now, he says, "I will from henceforth rather be myself" (I, iii, 5).

But if Henry's kingship is politically sterile because of the circumstances through which he obtained it, a similar frustration typifies the Percies. Worcester reminds Henry in a manner that has the intonation of a threat that they had helped him to the throne:

Our house, my sovereign liege, little deserves
The scourge of greatness to be used on it;
And that same greatness too which our own hands
Have help to make so portly.

(I, iii, 10-13)

The desire for power which prompted the Percies to help Henry now brings on a clash between the usurper and his former allies.

Aware that he is a usurper, Henry is naturally suspicious of those who helped him depose Richard, for he knows they might try to do the same to him. Worcester understands that Henry must think in this way. Therefore the Percies know they can never be totally safe. The result is mutual distrust, which finally leads to civil war.

Henry, for his part, must stand up to every threat and he tells Worcester so:

...get thee gone; for I do see
Danger and disobedience in thine eye:
O, sir, your presence is too bold and
peremptory,
And majesty might never yet endure
The moody frontier of a servant brow.
(I, iii, 15-19)

Henry knows that if he is to retain the respect and support of his nobles, he must be careful how he acts the role of king.

Sensing the coming rebellion, he remains insistent that Hotspur's prisoners be turned over to him:

Why, yet he [Hotspur] doth deny his
prisoners,
But with proviso and exception,
That we at our own charge shall ransom
straight,
His brother-in-law, the foolish Mortimer...
(I, iii, 77-80)

Henry wants the prisoners because the revenue from their ransoms will provide troops. Furthermore he does not want Mortimer ransomed because Mortimer could become a figure around whom rebellious nobles could rally, Mortimer having been named next of kin and heir to the throne by Richard II.

As a father and as a king, Henry is worried about Prince Hal, heir-apparent to the throne. From the beginning of his reign Henry has been concerned that the dissolute reputation Hal is getting will affect his own reputation: "If any plague hang over us, 'tis he" (R. II, V, ii, 3). In 1 Henry IV, Henry rebukes Hal in a way that suggests his own character. He really cares for his son, but he works on him to further his own political ends:

God pardon thee!...
Thy place in council thou hast rudely lost,
Which by thy younger brother is supplied,
And art almost an alien to the hearts
Of all the court and princes of my blood:

The hope and expectation of thy time
Is ruin'd, and the soul of every man
Prophetically doth forethink thy fall.

(1 H. IV, III, ii, 29-37)

Here Henry delivers a sermon that reveals something of his own opportunistic philosophy. First, he feels the heir-apparent should be familiar with the upper class so that he may be sure of their support. He fears that Hal has failed to become familiar enough with the lords. He also believes Hal should be getting experience in the council. On the other hand, he warns his son not to become too intimate with the lower classes, for with them familiarity breeds contempt. He constantly emphasizes his concern with appearance:

...being seldom seen, I could not stir
But like a comet I was wonder'd at...

(III, ii, 46-47)

To illustrate his point, Henry describes his own behavior before the deposition of Richard II:

...stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dress'd myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's
 hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their
 mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king.

(III, ii, 50-54)

Here Henry, in effect, admits that he feels hypocrisy is necessary for securing the good will of the people. He "plucked allegiance from men's hearts," not because of personal valor, but because he "dressed" himself in humility. His constant use of such words as "eyes," "opinion," and "dressed" demonstrates his concern with giving the right impression. If a king does not retain the high opinion of his subjects, he may very well have to contend with rebellion or at least with political dissatisfaction

which will hamper his rule.

Henry finally brings up the reason why he demanded a conference with his son when he tells Hal:

As thou art to this hour was Richard then
When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh,
And even as I was then is Percy now.
Now, by my sceptre and my soul to boot,
He hath more worthy interest to the state
Than thou the shadow of succession;
For of no right, nor colour like to right,
He doth fill fields with harness in the
 realm,...
And, being no more in debt to years than
 thou,
Leads ancient lords and reverend bishops on
To bloody battles and to bruising arms.
What never-dying honour hath he got
Against renowned Douglas!

(III, ii, 94-107)

Here Henry shows his concern for Hal's reputation because he is afraid that Hotspur has a greater one. Because his own reputation helped him defeat Richard, Henry is afraid Hotspur's reputation will hurt Hal. Since Henry is fooled by appearances, he feels Hotspur has a greater interest in the state than does Hal. For Henry, honor is largely a matter of physical courage on the battlefield, and Hotspur has become a renowned soldier with his victories over Douglas. Hal, his father feels, suffers by comparison. However, Henry is undoubtedly exaggerating his comparison, for he wants to shame his son into improving his conduct. His comparison of Hal with Richard II is inexact. Because Hal is a truant from court and carouses with commoners, Henry describes Richard's actions to match those of Hal:

The skipping king [Richard II] , he ambled
 up and down,
With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled and soon burnt; carded his
 state,

Mingled his royalty with capering fools,
Had his great name profaned with their
scorns....
Enfeoff'd himself to popularity;
That, being daily swallow'd by men's eyes,
They surfeited with honey and began
To loathe the taste of sweetness, whereof
a little
More than a little is by much too much.
(III, ii, 60-73)

Actually, Hal is more like his father than like Richard in his attitude towards the commons. Both Hal and his father endear themselves to the commons, Hal by rioting with them in the taverns and Henry by courting them on his way to Ravenspurgh. Richard held only aristocratic contempt for them.

Because his judgment is influenced by exterior impressions, Henry is fooled by Hal's apparent frivolity, just as he himself has fooled others by his appearance. But Henry's pragmatic philosophy does have its merit. He wins the Battle of Shrewsbury by means of a ruse when he disguises several of his soldiers as "counterfeit" kings. (His dissimulation shows he is character "counterfeiting" throughout 2 Henry IV.)

In 2 Henry IV Henry suffers from an inability to sleep:

...O sleep, O gentle sleep,
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
(2 H. IV, III, i, 5-8)

This is part of the price Henry pays for the crown. Concern for the welfare of the kingdom has taken up much of his time and energy. Even when sick, he expresses his concern for the state of England to Westmoreland:

Then you perceive the body of our kingdom
How foul it is; what rank diseases grow,
And with what danger, near the heart of it.
(III, i, 38-40)

Henry realizes that the crimes he has committed are "near the heart of" England, and as a result that the kingdom is diseased.

In his sleeplessness his mind wanders back to his early career, and he becomes obsessed by his memories of the past:

'Tis not ten years gone
Since Richard and Northumberland, great friends,
Did feast together, and in two years after
Were they at wars: it is but eight years since
This Percy was the man nearest my soul;
Who like a brother toil'd in my affairs,
And laid his love and life under my foot....
(III, i, 57-63)

Here he bemoans the fact that in the world of power politics close friendships seldom last; he has come to realize that being a king has privileges and responsibilities, but also has disadvantages, such as lack of friendly relations with others. The eminence of kingship is a lonely peak, and dwelling there shuts out close friendships and intimacies. Henry has worked hard and successfully to secure and maintain his eminence, but nearing his end he has moments of disillusionment.

Even on his deathbed Henry is concerned about the future welfare of England and of his family. Since he does not feel that Hal will be a reputable ruler, he gives Thomas, Duke of Clarence, advice on how to influence his elder brother, Hal. In what would be good advice to any courtier, Henry tells Clarence to keep Hal's love and not to appear cold or careless of his will. Hal is gracious, says Henry, if he is obeyed and if attention is paid to him, but he has so quick a temper that one should be careful about chiding his faults. If Hal is moody, one should stay away from him. Henry wants Clarence to learn to treat Hal diplomatically in order to protect the rest of the court.

In his final words of counsel to Hal, Henry confesses that he stole the crown:

Come hither, Harry, sit thou by my bed;
And hear, I think, the very latest counsel
That ever I shall breathe. God knows, my
son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown; and I myself know well
How troublesome it sat upon my head.
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation;
For all the soil of the achievement goes
With me into the earth.

(IV, v, 181-190)

From the beginning of his reign, Henry has been conscience stricken because of the dubious methods he used to acquire the throne. The crown has always sat heavily upon his head. His instinct to act justly has often been at war with his personal desires and the demands of the political situation. As early as the last act of Richard II, when he exiles Exton for murdering Richard, he describes the paradoxical nature of his position:

They love not poison that do poison need,
Nor do I thee: though I did wish him dead,
I hate the murderer, love him murdered....
Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe,
That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow:
Come, mourn with me for that I do lament,
And put on sullen black incontinent:
I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand....

(R. II, V, vi, 38-50)

Henry's uneasy conscience has not been helped by the way he has been forced to bottle up his inner feelings, although at times they show forth as in the quotation above. Although he loves Richard dead because his death gives Henry a firmer foundation for his claim to the crown, yet he cannot sanction murder and must punish the murderer to maintain a veneer of justice and order. His soul is full of woe because he has had to

sprinkle blood to usurp the crown and more blood to retain it. Throughout his reign Henry has professed a desire to go on a crusade to the Holy Land to wash the blood of Richard II from his hands, but he neither goes nor succeeds in washing the blood-guilt from his uneasy conscience.

So the crown has rested troublesomely upon the head of Henry IV. Hal, he hopes, will assume it more legitimately because Hal will inherit from an anointed king and should not have to face all the problems his father faced. Nevertheless, Henry remains prudential and pragmatic to the end. His advice to Hal is thoroughly opportunistic:

Yet, though thou stand'st more sure than I
could do,
Thou art not firm enough, since griefs are
green;
And all my friends, which thou must make
thy friends,
Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out;
By whose fell working I was first advanced
And by whose power I well might lodge a fear
To be again displaced: which to avoid,
I cut them off; and had a purpose now
To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence
borne out,
May waste the memory of the former days.
(2 H. IV, IV, v, 201-215)

Henry's advice, however duplicitous, turns out to be sound: his former friends do not revolt against his son, but they do revolt against his grandson, Henry VI.

Between the time Shakespeare describes the usurper Richard III (in 3 Henry VI and Richard III) and the usurper Henry IV (in Richard II and 1 and 2 Henry IV), he matured greatly as a writer. In Richard III

Shakespeare presents a pageant in which the scenes tend to repeat the same aspect of Richard, his uncontrollable ambition, rather than to enlarge upon his personality. As a result, Richard III amounts to only a stage villain, or a pasteboard figure who is unbelievable. He lacks tragic dimension because he is incarnate evil. A genuinely tragic hero should be an essentially good man who has weaknesses. Richard lacks all normal human qualities and is completely amoral. In the final analysis he lacks even the magnificent evil of Macbeth, for he is only a schemer and a plotter.

In contrast, Shakespeare in treating Henry IV enlarges upon his character in every scene in which he appears. As a result, all of Henry's actions stem from what could be called his innate human qualities, which amount to a subtle combination of good and evil. While he is not a tragic hero, he has tragic characteristics. He is an essentially good man who has given in to a desire for power and, when the opportunity presents itself, usurps the throne.

The difference in Shakespeare's handling of Richard III and Henry IV is characterized by his presentation of their inability to sleep. Previous to his sudden pangs of conscience (R. III, IV, iv), Richard always has demonstrated a completely unscrupulous nature. Now he suddenly cannot sleep, and his quick, alert, witty mind goes completely to pieces; indeed he appears to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. His action in this scene is completely unbelievable because of lack of preparation. Before, he has always been strong, selfish, defiant, unscrupulous, villainous; now Richard becomes a sudden weakling full of self-pity. Unfortunately Shakespeare had failed to dramatize any weakness or self-pity before this

scene, and by now Richard's character is too frozen to change.

Conversely, Henry IV's first appearance in 2 Henry IV (III, i) presents his inability to sleep in a completely credible manner. Old age, disease, and death are basic image patterns throughout the play, and all three fit Henry's character. He is old, sick, dying. As far back as when he learned of Richard II's death, Henry has wanted to remove the guilt of Richard's blood from his hand. (Redemption is another recurrent image in 2 Henry IV.)

But Henry's insomnia results from more than a guilty conscience. Much of his troubled state is the result of disillusionment. He has virtually worn himself out trying to maintain order in the realm. Even at the time he is suffering from lack of sleep, his armies are quelling a rebellion.

Henry possesses many of the qualities necessary for a good king. He is interested in the welfare of England and follows suitable action. He maintains justice and has regard for the rights of his subjects. Upholding and defending the dignity and the crown, he still does not overburden the people with taxes; nor is he wasteful nor sensual. In fact, on one level, he is an example of self-discipline and sound judgment. His great lack is a legitimate claim to the throne, and thus his reign is filled with trouble.

As a man, Henry is very pragmatic, but in Henry Shakespeare shows there is a necessary place for pragmatism in kingship. He shows himself an able general, winning the battle of Shrewsbury by a ruse. He is able to solve his major problems as a king when he defeats the rebels, and he is able to solve his problem as a father when Hal is led to show concern

for the welfare of the kingdom. What he is not able to solve is his problem as a Christian man. He has committed sacrilege when he deposes his rightful king, and as a result he is never able to salve his guilty conscience.

CHAPTER VI

HENRY V

Henry V was apparently considered by Shakespeare to be among the best of English kings long before he concluded the second tetralogy with Henry V in 1598-9.¹ 1 Henry VI opens with the court mourning the death of Henry V. The Duke of Bedford, one of the nobles loyal to Henry VI, describes the dead king: "King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long! / England ne'er lost a king of so much worth" (1 H. VI, I, i, 6-7). The Duke of Gloucester, Lord Protector of the Realm, says of him:

England ne'er had a king until his time.
Virtue he had, deserving to command:
His brandish'd sword did blind men with his beams:
His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings;
His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,
More dazzled and drove back his enemies
Than mid-day sun fierce bent against their faces.
What should I say? his deeds exceed all speech:
He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered.
(1 H. VI, I, i, 8-16)

By the time Shakespeare wrote the second tetralogy, he had presumably matured enough to realize that an ideal king, by definition, could never exist on earth; at the same time he pictured Henry V as the epitome of what an earthly king should be. Like his father Henry V is brave in war and popular with his subjects. But although Henry IV was an excellent politician, he was only an improviser who took advantage of every opportunity that presented itself. His son has the added ability of seeing

¹Dating of E. K. Chambers, p. 270.

beneath the surface of every situation so that he can prepare far in advance to meet any opposition. In addition to political shrewdness, Henry has two advantages over his father. Since Henry IV was successful in retaining the throne, Henry V enjoys the advantage of a legitimate heir and has a moral right to rule. Henry V also ascends the throne at a fortunate time, for his father's enemies are by now either powerless or dead so that the dynastic struggle between the descendents of John of Gaunt, the fourth son of Edward III, and Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the third son of Edward III, lies dormant.

The brief mention of Hal, as Henry V is called before he becomes king, in Act V of Richard II is clearly introductory to the Hal found in 1 Henry IV. In Richard II Hal shows little promise of becoming a potentially good ruler, and his father shows much concern about the effect of Hal's actions:

Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?
'Tis full three months since I did see him last:
If any plague hang over us, 'tis he.
I would to God, my lords, he might be found:
Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,
For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,
With unrestrained loose companions,
Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes,
And beat our watch, and rob our passengers;
Which he, young wanton and effeminate boy,
Takes on the point of honour to support
So dissolute a crew.

(R. II, V, iii, 1-12)

Hal appears to have no interest in affairs of state. Indeed he parodies his father's actions, but he does demonstrate a keen insight into the moral questions facing his father. Hal's actions imply that just as much honor is involved in supporting a dissolute crew of highway robbers

as is involved in supporting a group of greedy nobles who steal a kingdom.

Hal displays further insight into the nature of politics when he realizes that surface values and words are misleading. Just as his father mocks ceremony and tradition by paying lip service to Richard while he puts the former king into the Tower, so Hal mocks the courtly tradition:

...He would unto the stews,
And from the common'st creature pluck a glove,
And wear it as a favour; and with that
He would unhorse the lustiest challenger.

(R. II, V, iii, 16-19)

Instead of the former courtly tournaments in which victory is celebrated by knights jousting for the hand of a maid of honor, Hal celebrates his father's victory over the would-be assassins at Oxford by taking a prostitute's glove as his mark of honor, symbolizing how his father has prostituted his honor. But it is in 1 Henry IV that the honor theme comes into its own.

In order to understand the complex nature of Hal in 1 Henry IV, one must realize that Shakespeare unified this play through a series of contrasts between Hal and Hotspur, Hal and Falstaff, and, to a smaller degree, Hal and Henry IV. Consequently, the personality traits of the other three characters must be understood if one is to understand Hal. The dominant theme running through the play has to do with satisfactorily defining honor; therefore the attitudes of Hotspur, Falstaff, and Henry IV toward honor must be examined.

For Hotspur honor is closely related to physical courage and personal glory. He lives in the world of the eternal adolescent, and, like the modern football player, finds his chief delight in winning honor through

prohess in battle. For him war is just a game in which to win fame. When Henry IV demands Hotspur's prisoners and refuses to ransom Edmund Mortimer, Hotspur's brother-in-law, Hotspur becomes indignant:

An if the devil come and roar for them,
I will not send them [his prisoners] : I will after
straight
And tell him so; for I will ease my heart
Albeit I make a hazard of my head.

(1 H. IV, I, iii, 125-128)

In his juvenile impetuosity brought about by injured pride, Hotspur is willing to rebel against Henry.

Hotspur, hurrying to redeem his sullied honor as he sees it, is careless and impetuous when he plans the rebellion. (He actually prepares less carefully for the rebellion against Henry than Hal and Poins do for the Gadshill robbery.) This lack of foresight is demonstrated when he reads the letter from the anonymous lord who rejects his offer of alliance because

'The purpose you undertake is dangerous; the friends
you have named uncertain; the time itself unsorted;
and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise
of so great an opposition.'

(II, iii, 9-12)

Hotspur's immediate reaction is to call the writer "a shallow cowardly kind" (II, iii, 15). Although the lord's reasons for rejecting the offer are sound and point out the folly of rebellion against Henry IV, Hotspur gives no attention to the warning.

Since the mainspring of Hotspur's character is a desire for honor, not power, Henry's larger and better equipped army does not daunt his spirit. He feels he can win more honor in victory and less ignominy in defeat by fighting against heavy odds. However, Hotspur would have been willing to call off the battle (Worcester thinks) had

he been aware of Henry's offer to arbitrate.

If Hotspur is the eternal adolescent, Falstaff is the eternal child. Honor has no glorious meaning for him. In fact, he refuses to take any responsibility. He lives entirely in the self-centered child's world of pleasure and has the endless child-like quality of blurring the distinctions between right and wrong. He is a comfortable materialist, who thinks bravery is the result of drinking and war an occasion for making corpses and mutilated beggars. His personal justification for war is that it is an opportunity to improve his personal fortune. This attitude and his lack of responsibility towards the state are ironically expressed: "Well, God be thankful for these rebels, they offend none but the virtuous: I laud them, I praise them" (III, iii, 188-189).

He misuses the "king's press damnably" (IV, ii, 12) to make what money he can. In the process of earning three hundred pounds, he allows men who have enough money to buy their way out of the king's service. As a result, he marches to war with such a ragged company of soldiers that even he is ashamed of them.

But if Falstaff represents the world at play, Henry IV represents the world at work. While Falstaff never accepts responsibility, Henry never plays. He is an efficient ruler and politician, but he is too obsessed with his own formula for success--that it is better to appear virtuous and just than to be virtuous and just. From Henry's pragmatic point of view, honor is simply what works. He leaves nothing to chance and plans every move well in advance. He has had to be prudent to maintain the crown.

In general, Hal has, or develops, the best qualities of Hotspur, Falstaff, and Henry. Like Hotspur he has a desire for glory and is brave in battle. Like Falstaff he is able to see the vanity of the pomp and ceremony of court life and has a magnetic quality that holds the loyalty of his followers. But most important as a ruler, Hal has inherited from his father a sense of responsibility, self-discipline, and power to act prudently.

The first time Hal appears in 1 Henry IV, he is among his "loose" companions. Immediately his fun-loving nature is brought out when he agrees to participate in a highway robbery with Falstaff, only to mock his fat friend. This whole scene (I, ii) with its air of frivolity emphasizes the Falstaffian element in Hal by its contrast to the solemn court scenes. While Hal enjoys teasing Falstaff, at the same time he maintains a certain amount of detachment. He will not go so far as joining his fat friend in the robbery. He agrees to participate in the Gadshill escapade only after Poins explains to him that for a joke they should rob Falstaff, Peto, and Gadshill of the spoils as soon as the robbery is effected. Even in this mock holdup Hal does not go against the law of the land; he later arranges for the money to be returned.

But this scene brings out more than Hal's frivolous nature; it also shows his practicality. After he agrees to join Poins, he worries:

Yea, but 'tis like that they [Falstaff, Gadshill, Bardolph,
and Peto] will know us by our horses, by our habits, and
by every other appointment, to be ourselves.

(I, ii, 167-169)

Typical of Hal are his foresight and careful preparation, even when at play, to make his plan succeed.

Hal's thorough understanding of his companions and the life he is leading with them is indicated in his first soliloquy:

I know you all, and will a while uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness:
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
(I, ii, 188-196)

Hal enjoys his adventures in Eastcheap thoroughly, but he is ready to put aside the fun he is enjoying there when necessary. Operating on a political level, he sees through all the pretenses of the disorganized humor and idleness involved in evading the work-a-day world of the adult. Yet even at risk to his reputation he enjoys his associations with his base companions, because he knows, somewhat hypocritically perhaps, that he will appear to be a better king if he governs well when everyone expects the worst from him.

Already Hal is considering the time when he will have to rule and realizes that once he accepts the duties of kingship he will have little time to play. Beneficial to him after he begins to rule is the knowledge he has gained of the various levels of society:

I have sounded the very basestring of humility,
Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers;
and can call them all by their christen names, as
Tom, Dick, and Francis. They take it already
upon their salvation, that though I be but Prince
of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy; and tell
me flatly I am no proud Jack, like Falstaff, but
a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy, by
the Lord, so they call me, and when I am king of
England, I shall command all the good lads in
Eastcheap.

(II, iv, 5-15, my italics)

The temporary nature of Hal's attachment to Eastcheap and the loyalty he commands in his friends there are stressed in these lines. He is perfectly capable of meeting lower classes of people on their own level, but at the same time he shows a degree of condescension when he uses such words as "leash of drawers."

Hal is quite proud--in fact, a little vain--about his ability to understand people on their own level:

...I am so good a proficient in one quarter
of an hour, that I can drink with any tinker
in his own language....

(II, iv, 17-19)

To prove to himself and Poins the loyalty he has generated among the drawers in a quarter of an hour, he decides to play a joke on Francis. When Poins leaves the room and calls for service, Hal questions the little drawer about his gift to Hal of a penny's worth of sugar. Francis demonstrates his affection for Hal by wishing "I would it [the penny's worth of sugar] had been two!" (II, iv, 60). Yet Hal shows a trace of cruelty when, after he is satisfied with Francis's answer, he rebukes him with "Away, you rogue! dost thou not hear them call?" (II, iv, 78). And he shows also his power to corrupt when he tempts Francis, however jokingly, to run away from the man to whom he is apprenticed.

In his first interview in the play with his father (1 H. IV, II, ii), Hal shows possibilities for growth and a sense of shame for the bad repute of his past life:

...God forgive them that so much have sway'd
Your majesty's good thoughts away from me!
I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
And in the closing of some glorious day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son;

When I will wear a garment all of blood,
And stain my favours in a bloody mask,
Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it:
And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,
That this same child of honour and renown,
This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,
And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.
(III, ii, 130-141)

Like all successful politicians Hal tries to place as much of the blame as possible for his defaced honor on others, but at the same time he admits he is at fault. While he promises to do better in the future and redeem himself "on Percy's head," Hal shows himself to be both patient and a master of the art of timing by his willingness to wait until the most advantageous moment to redeem his honor.

Hal shows, too, a thorough understanding of his father and uses this understanding to his advantage:

...the time will come,
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities.
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;
And I will call him to so strict account,
That he shall render every glory up,
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart.
(III, ii, 144-152, my italics)

He impresses his father with his shrewd, materialistic mind, demonstrated by his constant use of business terms (note the italicized words). He talks about redeeming his honor from Hotspur as if he were planning to collect a debt.

Hal's total personality is best defined by the comparison of his conduct to that of his foils: Hotspur, Falstaff, and Henry IV. Hotspur is the epitome of aggressive masculinity, but he has a total lack of discretion and is victimized by others, especially Worcester.

His boyish love of adventure merges into foolhardiness when he insists on fighting at Shrewsbury before reinforcements arrive. In the final analysis, Hotspur victimizes himself because he fails to understand the nature of honor.

Falstaff defines honor (V, i) as just a word. In spite of this verbalism, however, he continually seeks honor of a sort. He refuses to take any responsibility for the leadership of his troops, and because he does not want to be associated with them refuses to march through Coventry. He stabs the dead Hotspur to claim the reward for the honor of having killed him. Falstaff's view of honor is even more shallow than Hotspur's. Falstaff implies that length of life is the only value (V, iv). Hotspur stresses that only the quality of life is important; length of life is of little consequence.

Hal's attitude towards honor lies between the attitudes of Hotspur and Falstaff. When Hal meets Hotspur on the battlefield at Shrewsbury, he proves his courage. Even before the battle, he begins to redeem his honor. Although his father will not permit him to engage in single combat with Hotspur to determine the outcome of the rebellion, Hal does make the challenge. Later Henry IV is forced to compliment his son for saving his life by driving off Douglas:

Stay, and breathe a while:
Thou hast redeem'd thy lost opinion,
And show'd thou makest some tender of my life,
In this fair rescue thou hast brought to me.
(V, iv, 47-50)

Hal finally wins honor when he meets Hotspur at Shrewsbury. Tired of sharing honor with his rival, he claims it all for himself:

I am the Prince of Wales; and think not, Percy,
To share with me in glory any more:

Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere;
Nor can one England brook a double reign,
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales.
(V, iv, 64-68)

Thus Hal demonstrates Hotspur's own attitude when he feels that he can take honor away from Hotspur by killing him. But when he kills Hotspur, Hal lets Falstaff take the honor. So, by the end of 1 Henry IV, Hal's worth is already beginning to show through the clouds that had obscured it. He has proved himself a brave warrior and a competent military leader, and in 2 Henry IV he proves himself fit to govern.

Hal completes his self-conquest in 2 Henry IV with his rejection of Falstaff and his retention of the Lord Chief Justice as one of his principal advisers. By the time of his final reconciliation with his father, he has put aside his wilder impulses and is ready to assume the responsibilities of kingship.

Hal's first lines in 2 Henry IV, "Before God, I am exceeding weary" (II, ii, 1), indicate that he is beginning to find tavern life tiresome. At this stage he is torn between the world of the tavern and the world of the court. As he tells Poins:

Belike then my appetite was not princely got;
for, by my troth, I do not now remember the poor
creature, small beer. But, indeed, these humble
considerations make me out of love with my
greatness. What a disgrace is it to me to
remember thy name! or to know thy face to-morrow!
(2 H. IV, II, ii, 10-15)

He is very much aware of the responsibilities that await him, once he is crowned, and realizes that he will not be able to continue much longer his life at the Boar's Head Tavern. At the same time, he has a desire for greatness. He does not wish to be just another king, for he has ambition for lasting fame and glory. From the first he has recognized the necessity of understanding the common people if he is

to be a successful ruler; but now that he understands them, he is ready to forget them as individuals. Already he is developing a detachment and a necessary toughness which is the prerequisite of a strong ruler.

As the death of his father approaches and his responsibilities as king become imminent, Hal becomes more concerned about his reputation. From the earliest mention of him in Richard II, he has recognized the discrepancy between appearances and reality and has always been careful not to appear a hypocrite, even in his wildest antics. Even so, the consequences of his former life begin to catch up with him. Although he has affection for his father, he cannot show it publicly:

...I tell thee, my heart bleeds inwardly
that my father is so sick: and keeping
such vile company as thou art hath in
reason taken from me all ostentation of
sorrow.

(II, ii, 45-48)

Because everyone would think him a hypocrite, he dare not mourn outwardly the sickness of his father.

His conversation with Poins at the Boar's Head Tavern shows that Hal is learning to disguise his inner feelings by the use of irony. Before that time he usually demonstrated them openly as he did in the early part of his father's reign, when he ridiculed Falstaff at the tavern. He continues to learn to disguise his inner feelings by outward actions until, by the time he assumes the crown, he is able to leave his intimate feelings entirely uncommitted so that he can make decisions on state matters in a detached fashion.

Once he is alone with his sick father, Hal's first thoughts are about the cares of ruling:

Why doth the crown lie there upon his pillow,
Being so troublesome a bedfellow?
O polish'd perturbation! golden care!
That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide
To many a watchful night! sleep with it now!
Yet not so sound and half so deeply sweet
As he whose brow with homely biggen bound
Snores out the watch of night.

(IV, v, 21-28)

Fully recognizing both the cares and the privileges of ruling, he realizes that after he is king the responsibilities of command will often prevent him from sleep, while those under him who are free from the cares of state will sleep soundly.

Hal expresses a thorough understanding of order and degree when he speaks to what he thinks is the corpse of his father:

...My gracious lord! my father!
This sleep is sound indeed; this is a sleep,
That from this golden rigol hath divorced
So many English kings. Thy due from me
Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
Which nature, love, and filial tenderness,
Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously:
My due from thee is this imperial crown,
Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
Derives itself to me.

(IV, v, 34-43)

Because of the stress on "due," Hal would seem to lack any deep feeling of personal sorrow for the loss of his father, but since he owes a show of mourning, he will pay Henry IV "plenteously" with tears. In return for this show of affection, Hal feels his due is the crown. In his eagerness to possess it and to remove his father's greatest burden, he takes the crown into another room. Most of Hal's actions at this time are the result of mixed feelings; he does love his father and hates to see him die, but at the same time he would like the crown. After he learns his father still lives, they become reconciled. However, Hal

is not any more demonstrative in his grief when his father does die (Hal comes back into the death chamber with tears on his cheeks) because he is concerned with thoughts of ruling. His last words to his father concern the crown:

My gracious liege,
You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me;
Then plain and right must my possession be:
Which I with more than with a common pain
'Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain.
(IV, v, 220-224)

Here Hal declares his determination to maintain the principle of lineage derived from his usurping father. From this point on he is in word and action the future King Henry V.

The first act of Henry V as king is to choose his father's Lord Chief Justice as his adviser because, as he says:

...You did commit me:
For which, I do commit into your hand
The unstained sword that you have used to bear;
With this remembrance, that you use the same
With the like bold, just, and impartial spirit
As you have done 'gainst me. There is my hand.
You shall be as a father to my youth:
My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear,
And I will stoop and humble my intents
To your well-practiced wise directions.
(V, ii, 112-121)

In two ways this action strengthens Henry's position: it provides him with an adviser of integrity, who in the past had not feared to take action against the Prince of Wales, and it inspires the members of his father's court with confidence that Hal will rule wisely.

Wisely, too, he cuts himself off from his former disreputable companions, including Falstaff, to whom he says:

I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers;
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!

I have long dream'd of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;
But, being awaked, I do despise my dream...
For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,
That I have turn'd away my former self;
So will I those that kept me company.

(V, v, 48-60)

Being king, Hal knows he can no longer inhabit the land of eternal children where responsibility is non-existent. He has learned all that the world of Falstaff can teach him about the nature of the commons. The rejection of Falstaff is inevitable once Henry is crowned. Falstaff has proved his lack of responsibility at Shrewsbury, where he carried a bottle of sack instead of a pistol. Now that Henry is king, Falstaff forces him to choose between the Lord Chief Justice of England and himself, expecting the king to lock up the Chief Justice and put all the laws at his (Falstaff's) disposal. If Henry did not reject Falstaff, therefore, the realm would degenerate into a state of chaos.

Although he rejects Falstaff, Henry is generous enough to his former friend to provide means of support:

For competence of life I will allow you,
That lack of means enforce you not to evil:
And, as we hear you do reform yourselves,
We will, according to your strengths and qualities,
Give you advancement.

(V, v, 67-71)

While this action proves helpful to Falstaff, it is also helpful to Henry because it shows the court his sense of justice. The king's brother, John of Lancaster, tells the Lord Chief Justice:

I like this fair proceeding of the king's:
He hath intent his wonted followers
Shall all be very well provided for;
But all are banish'd till their conversations
Appear more wise and modest to the world.

(V, v, 97-101)

In Henry V, the king, in order to be the virtuous ruler he desires to be, must maintain the detached attitude he exhibited in his rejection of Falstaff. No human feeling must be allowed to prejudice him in matters of state policy. Henry is careful in public to obtain moral sanction for every important decision so that no trace of selfishness nor human frailty will appear in his character.

Before embarking on the war with France, he is careful to ask the advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury:

My learned lord, we pray you to proceed
And justly and religiously unfold
Why the law Salique that they have in France
Or should, or should not, bar us in our claim....
(H. V., I, ii, 9-12)

In reality, of course, Henry like his father is not looking for advice but for a public statement justifying the coming war. Before he calls his first Parliament, John of Lancaster, his brother, is aware there will be war:

I will lay odds that, ere this year expire,
We bear our civil swords and native fire
As far as France: I heard a bird so sing,
Whose music, to my thinking, pleased the king.
(2 H. IV., V, v, 106-109)

Henry shows a knack of sharing responsibility for his actions with others. He demands to know, "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" (H. V., I, ii, 95). He manages to force the Archbishop of Canterbury to accept the moral responsibility for the war with France. To his king's query, the Archbishop replies:

The sin upon my head, dread sovereign!
For in the book of Numbers is it writ,
When the man dies, let the inheritance
Descend unto the daughter. Gracious lord,
Stand for your own; unwind your bloody flag;
Look back into your mighty ancestors:

Go, my dread lord, to your great-grandsire's
tomb,
From whom you claim....

(I, ii, 96-103)

Henry's claim to the French throne rests upon his descent from a great-great-great-grandmother who was a daughter of Philip IV of France.² His claim is not legitimate, for the Salic Law, which governed succession to the French throne, denied succession through the female line. By means of casuistry, however, the Archbishop is able to justify Henry's specious claim and deny the validity of the Salic Law.

The situation itself seems ironical. To prove that Henry will not be a usurper for taking the French throne, Canterbury cites three kings who inherited through the female line: King Pippin, who deposed Childeric; Hugh Capet, who usurped the crown of Charles of Lorraine; and Louis X, who was the sole heir of the usurping Capet and who was so uneasy about his title he could not "keep quiet his conscience" (I, ii, 797). After citing these three usurpers, Canterbury declares that since French kings have inherited through the female line, Henry is justified in his own claim.

Immediately after receiving religious sanction for his proposed attack upon France, Henry turns to practical matters. He realizes he will have to make preparations to defend England against the Scots, who will probably invade England while the English are fighting in France. He warns:

²Shakespeare's dynastic facts are not correct because his principal source, Holingshed's Chronicles, is faulty.

For you shall read that my great-grandfather
Never went with his forces into France,
But that the Scot on his unfurnish'd kingdom
Came pouring, like the tide into a breach...
Girding with grievous siege castles and towns....
(I, ii, 146-152)

As justification for his father's usurpation of the English crown, Henry always emphasizes that God is on his side. When the French ambassadors deliver the Dauphin's tennis balls to him, signifying that he is regarded as merely a playboy, Henry tells them he is coming to France with God's sanction:

But this lies all within the will of God,
To whom I do appeal; and in whose name
Tell you the Dauphin I am coming on,
To venge me as I may and to put forth
My rightful hand in a well-hallow'd cause.
(I, ii, 289-293)

Throughout the play--for example, after the Battle of Agincourt--he argues that he is winning because God is giving him aid.

In like manner Henry justifies the execution of the three would-be assassins: Lord Scroop, Sir Thomas Grey, and the Earl of Cambridge. Although he probably planned to execute them from the first, he tricks them into pronouncing the death penalty for themselves. Earlier, when he had wanted to free a man who had railed against him, they protested his mercy and declared he should execute the man. Because they had declared against mercy in this case, Henry is able to tell them:

The mercy that was quick in us but late,
By your own counsel is suppress'd and kill'd:
You must not dare, for shame, to talk of mercy;
For your own reasons turn into your bosoms....
(II, ii, 88-91)

By means of this ruse Henry is able to appear just and merciful even

while having them beheaded. Also, when he condemns the three errant nobles, he emphasizes that their crime is against the state. To maintain his public image, he stresses that he does not want personal revenge, but since these rebels threaten the safety of the state, the death penalty is imperative.

Henry is always careful to present a good public image. As he realizes,

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of a tiger....
(III, i, 2-5)

These divergent attitudes towards peace and war account for much of what seems paradoxical in Henry's nature and represent qualities he inherited from Henry IV. If he appears humble and modest in court when he asks the Archbishop for advice, on the battlefield he can be merciless. His threat to the citizens of Harfleur is witness to the "tiger" in him:

If I begin the battery once again,
I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she lie buried.
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh-fair virgins and your flowering infants.
(III, iii, 7-14)

In giving this ultimatum, Henry has a hard time controlling his temper, as he always does when someone crosses his will. If the city fathers do not surrender, Henry will turn his soldiers loose to rape and pillage. He constantly asserts that he will show no mercy to those who fight against him.

Henry is careful, however, to maintain discipline in his army. Learning that Bardolph has robbed a church, he shows no mercy in having his former companion executed. This execution enforces Henry's command to his soldiers to take nothing from the villagers without paying for it and to abuse them in no manner. It is a politic king who speaks the following words after Bardolph has been sentenced:

We would have all such offenders so cut off:
and we give express charge, that in our marches
through the country, there be nothing compelled
from the villages, nothing taken but paid for,
none of the French upbraided or abused in
disdainful language; for when lenity and cruelty
play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the
soonest winner.

(III, vi, 107-114)

By not molesting the French people, Henry undoubtedly hopes to make them either friends or impartial bystanders in the war, and he is looking forward to making them contented subjects in the future.

In his dealings with the French people and with his troops, Henry is making use of what he learned at Eastcheap. Having met the common man on his own ground, Henry is able to disguise himself the night before the Battle of Agincourt and wander undetected among his troops to study their morale. In his wanderings, he converses with several of the soldiers about the king, pointing out that the king is a man with the same feelings as theirs:

...I think the king is but a man, as I am...in
his nakedness he appears but a man; and though
his affections are higher mounted than ours,
yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like
wing. Therefore when he sees reason of fears,
as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the
same relish as ours are: yet, in reason, no
man should possess him with any appearance of
fear, lest he, by showing it, should dis-
hearten his army.

(IV, i, 97-104)

In his conversation with the soldiers, Henry expresses his views of kingship. The king, he says, is not responsible for the particular end of his soldiers, for the ruler "purpose not their death when [he] purpose their service" (IV, i, 155). Besides, even though his own cause is not tainted with sin, that of some of the soldiers will be. He goes so far as to say that God uses war as his beadle to punish men who have escaped punishment in the courts. "Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own" (IV, i, 175-176). The soldiers appear to agree with him and to be inspired to fight. Bates tells him, "I do not desire he [the king] should answer for me; and yet I determine to fight lustily for him" (IV, i, 188-189). Bates feels the duty of the subject is to follow his ruler. If the ruler's action is wrong, the blame is with the ruler.

After talking with his soldiers during the night before Agincourt, Henry continues his way through the camp. The responsibilities of ruling and worry about the coming battle weigh so heavily upon his mind that he cannot sleep. He is disturbed by feeling a curse has resulted because of his father's deposition of Richard II and prays God will not wreak revenge at Agincourt:

...Not to-day, O Lord,
O, not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
(IV, i, 293-295)

To ward off the curse, Henry has had Richard's body:

...interred new;
And on it have bestow'd more contrite tears
Than from it issued forced drops of blood:
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
Who twice a-day their wither'd hands hold up
Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built

Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard's soul.

(IV, i, 296-303)

Although he is a religious king, Henry is not always merciful and can be ruthless. After the English have defeated the first charge of the French, he orders his soldiers to kill all prisoners, for the French are regrouping for a fresh assault. Apparently his army approves, for one soldier, Gower, expresses the opinion that "...the king most worthily, hath caused every soldier to cut his prisoner's throat. O, 'tis a gallant king!" (IV, vii, 7-9). No contradictory opinion is expressed or inferred by anyone in the play. The valor of Henry on the battlefield has generated in his troops an intense loyalty so that they tend to approve all his actions. Even the traditionally rebellious Welsh, symbolized by Fluellen, declare their loyalty. Fluellen tells him:

By Jeshu, I am your majesty's countryman, I
care not who know it; I will confess it to
all the 'orld: I need not be ashamed of your
majesty, praised be God, so long as your
majesty is an honest man.

(IV, vii, 112-115)

After his victory at Agincourt Henry appears modest, humble, and pious. He stresses that he is victor only through God's help:

...O God, thy arm was here::
And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all!

(IV, viii, 104-106)

Typical of Henry is this manner of emphasizing that God is on the side of the English. By doing so, he is able to appear pious while inferring his cause is right and just without appearing belligerent or proud. When everyone knows he has done an act of bravery, he enhances his modesty by giving credit to someone else.

Although he is modest before his troops, Henry is decisive and business-like in dealing with the enemy. During the peace talks, he says:

If, Duke of Burgundy, you would the peace,
Whose want gives growth to the imperfections
Which you have cited, you must buy that peace
With full accord to all our just demands....
(V, ii, 68-71)

His emphasis that the French must buy the peace by acceding to all his demands shows that he will use his power to the hilt if his demands are not met.

At the peace conference, Henry seems to consider Katherine of France part of the spoils. At the same time he seems to enjoy her company. For the first time since he has been crowned, the Falstaffian playful quality in him comes out, and he displays the same shrewd wit he displayed in the tavern scenes with Falstaff in Henry IV:

...in loving me, you should love the friend
of France; for I love France so well that
I will not part with a village of it; I
will have it all mine: and, Kate, when
France is mine and I am yours, then yours
is France and you are mine.
(V, ii, 171-175)

Here Henry demonstrates his affectionate feeling for Katherine by speaking to her when they are alone, except for Alice, in informal prose. He further demonstrates his enjoyment of her company and his feeling completely at ease in her presence in the following speech:

If I could win a lady at leapfrog, or by
vaulting into the saddle with my armour
on my back, under the correction of
bragging be it spoken, I should quickly
leap into a wife.
(V, ii, 147-150)

Henry's main reason for marrying Katherine, as are all his reasons for serious action after he is crowned, is bound up with political expediency. Marriage with her will both cement the peace treaty and provide a stronger claim for his children to the throne of France. Also, by ending the play with a happy marriage, Shakespeare shows a return to order in the political situation.

If, in the first tetralogy, Shakespeare evinced signs of apprenticeship to his art, in the second tetralogy he shows he has reached maturity. He realized that an ideal, by definition, can never exist on earth. Nevertheless, Henry V is his vision of what a good king can be—even if Henry, as a man, is not ideal in every way. In the previous plays of both tetralogies, each ruler lacks one or more essential characteristics necessary for a successful ruler.

Henry VI's fatal flaw is weakness; he is not strong enough to compel those who are unjust to act justly. Throughout the Henry VI trilogy he shows no real capacity for government. In his attempt to be just he treats all men equally, refusing to punish criminals. He does not, for example, punish the murderers of Gloucester until the Nevils and the commons threaten to take matters into their own hands. When York's head is displayed on a gate post as a warning to rebels, Henry wails and prays that God will not hold him responsible for the actions of Clifford and Margaret, his queen. Weakness in a ruler is the worst sin of all because under a weak king the realm falls into general chaos. Even a cruel and unjust king like Richard III is preferable to a saintly one like Henry VI. Under Henry men like Suffolk and Clifford are cruel

and unjust because they know they will not be punished, but under Richard III only Richard himself dares to be cruel and unjust. The injustice of one is less evil, in a social sense, than the injustice of many, a situation which leads to anarchy.

Of the kings in the history plays, Richard III is the most vile. Much of his ugliness of character is due to an incomplete characterization. When he wrote Richard III, Shakespeare was not yet able to portray a rounded personality so that Richard is only a cardboard figure whose principal evil quality is a mania for power. As a study in kingship, therefore, Richard III is unrewarding except in a negative sense. He begins as a ruthless rebel and dies a tyrant who has found life meaningless.

In the two tetralogies, Richard II has the most legitimate claim to the throne, but he also is heir to the greatest number of faults. He does not appear as evil as Richard III because he is seen as a total personality whose good characteristics are balanced against his bad judgment. His blunders are fewer but more various than those of Richard III. For him kingship consists of the pomp and ceremony surrounding the office. He is not interested in what is just and what is unjust. Because he is not concerned with the duties of a ruler, he follows his own inclinations and the advice of flatterers, and because he keeps too lavish a court, he has to over-tax both the commons and the nobles. Worse yet, he confiscates the rightful inheritance of Bolingbroke. He is not only unjust, but mocks justice, as when he stops the trial by combat of Bolingbroke and Mowbray and banishes both. He is also a weak ruler who cannot maintain order among the nobles nor command the loyalty of his Welsh troops, who desert his cause the day before he returns from Ireland.

Henry IV is the first efficient king in the tetralogy. Not only is he strong enough to enforce justice, but he is politic enough to make himself popular with both the commons and the nobles. But in yielding to the temptation of deposing his lawful king, he commits an act of injustice which he cannot expiate. Throughout both tetralogies Shakespeare demonstrates that Henry was wrong in deposing Richard, even though Richard deserved it and Henry proved to be much the better ruler. Shakespeare seems to have felt that, since all kings are mortal and only some are poor rulers, subjects should endure the injustice of a legitimate ruler rather than allow a usurper to take his place and bring confusion and rebellion to the realm. If the precedent of rebellion is once established, potential usurpers can always find excuses for disloyalty.

However, once Richard is murdered, the rule of Henry IV is better than any alternative. Although Mortimer has a better claim to the throne, the meeting of the rebels (Hotspur, Worcester, Mortimer, and Glendower) at Bangor proves that Henry's victory over them is beneficial to England. The rebels have no interest in the welfare of the kingdom. Their plan to carve England into three states demonstrates that they seek only to further their own interests.

In characterizing Henry V as what a king can be, Shakespeare is careful not to incorporate the worst flaws of the other rulers in the two tetralogies into Henry's personality, although he is careful to give Henry traits similar to those of his father--particularly a strong streak of prudence bordering on hypocrisy. Henry V differs from his son because he is a strong ruler who punishes the guilty and compels

those who would be unjust to be just. But while he does not fail to behead anyone in the name of justice, such as Bardolph for robbing a French church, he often tempers justice with mercy. He does not become a tyrant like Richard III.

In contrast to Richard II, Henry V, like his father, regards kingship as a serious business. He is not interested in the showmanship of pomp and ceremonies of court procedure except as they are necessary to maintain an orderly court. He avoids poor counselors, as demonstrated by his rejection of Falstaff, and seeks good counselors, as demonstrated by his reinstatement in office of his father's Lord Chief Justice. Apparently he is frugal because no mention is made of his overtaxing of either the rich or the poor. In fact, he shows regard for the people when he is in France by preventing his soldiers from stealing or pilfering from the French households. Because of his strong rule and his sense of justice, Henry maintains order and commands the loyalty of the commons.

Shakespeare realized that the qualities that make a good friend do not make a good king. Henry is forced with respect to Falstaff to be brutal, politic, and ruthless to maintain order. When forced to choose between a friend and the welfare of his country, a king should alienate himself from his friend. Henry, once he is king, is forced to require discipline in others, but he also maintains discipline in himself. Above all, Henry has an overwhelming sense of his own responsibility. He is always practical and efficient in matters that concern England. Thus, for the only time in the two tetralogies, a king maintains harmony between physical and moral force--not in any ideal balance, but

as close to it as Shakespeare apparently thought possible in an all too human world.

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