King Richard II Study Guide

King Richard II by William Shakespeare

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

It is generally believed that Shakespeare wrote during the mid-1590s Many scholars maintain that the play could not have been written before late 1594 or early 1595, Since It was not until this time that a poem thought to be one of Shakespeare's primary sources was listed in the Stationers' Register. (The Stationers' Company was an association of manufacturers and sellers of books. They kept a register of the tides of works to be printed and published.) The poem was an epic Written by Samuel Daniel entitled *The Civil Wars Richard II* Itself was not listed in the Stationers' Register until August 29, 1597.

In addition to Samuel Daniel's poem, in which there are many parallels to *Richard II,* Shakespearean scholars Identify several other works from which Shakespeare may have drawn in writing *Richard II* Viewed as the most significant of these sources is Raphael Hollnshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (1587). Holinshed offers an account of the historical Richard II's reign, deposition, and assassination. Shakespeare freely appropriated this source material in many ways, including in the area of characterization. Gaunt, for example, is depicted by Holinshed as greedy and ruthless, whereas Shakespeare portrays him as a Wise and patriotic nobleman. For the plot sequence, Shakespeare adapted Edward Hall's *The victim of the two noble and IIlustre families of Lancastre and York* Additionally, scholars suggest that Shakespeare's sympathetic or pitying attitude toward Richard may have been derived from several French sources

Richard II earned a reputation among Elizabethan audiences as a politically subversive play In 1601, supporters of the Earl of Essex, who would the next day (February 7) mount an unsuccessful rebellion against Queen Elizabeth, paid Shakespeare's company to put on a special performance of the play. Queen Elizabeth was compared to Richard, because of her lack of an heir and due to what some subjects viewed as her inclination toward heavy taxation and indulgence of her favorites Sixteenth-century critics often viewed the play as a politically dangerous commentary on the monarchy, and It was not until the eighteenth century that the play began to generate literary, rather than political, interest.

The main Issues in the play are all rather inter-related and focus on the nature of kingship; whether Richard is deposed by Bolingbroke or deposes himself; and the characterization *of* Richard and Bolingbroke The play examines the conflict between the legal and divine right to rule, and the effectiveness *of* the ruler. Richard is believed to be the legal, rightful ruler *of* England, ordained by God Yet he is also shown to be a weak and ineffective king who focuses more upon the appearances, rather than the responsibilities, *of* kingship, Bolingbroke acts decIsIvely, and arguably, with moral Justification. He also is backed by the support *of* the people It is unclear whether or not Shakespeare favored Richard and the dIvine right to rule over Bolingbroke and the effective use *of* political power, wielded with the consent *of* the people Similar debate surrounds the Issue *of* Richard's deposition Does Bolingbroke truly force Richard to give up the crown, and has he been plotting to do so all along? Or does Richard timidly and

without much cause surrender the kingship to Bolingbroke? The questions are debated by critics who find support for both arguments within the play.

A related Issue is the characterization *of* both Richard and Bolingbroke Some find Richard's weakness sympathetic, others find It despicable Those who pity Richard's weakness maintain that he may be weak, but he is not evil. He is, however, influenced by evil advisors who offer bad counsel Richard's supporters also point out that he is, in fact, the rightful king Others contend that Richard's weakness and ineffectiveness are harmful to England, a fact to which Richard is oblivious Richard is often accused *of* being overly concerned with himself, his personal gain, and the luxuries he enjoys as king. Additional counts against Richard include his role in the death *of* Gloucester, the banishment *of* Bolingbroke, and the confiscation *of* Gaunt's estate. Critical estimation *of* Bolingbroke is likewise divided. He is viewed as a traitor and usurper by some. Others maintain that his actions are justified and in fact save England from ruin. While he Illegally returns to England after he has been banished, he has in fact been illegally disinherited by Richard. For most *of* the play, he is silent about his own motivations, and It is alternatively argued that he is driven by political ambition or by noble intentions.

Plot Summary

King Richard presides over a conflict between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. Bolingbroke has accused Mowbray of misappropriation of funds and of murdering the Duke of Gloucester. Richard and Gaunt advise the men to settle their affairs peacefully, but they refuse, and Richard sets a date for trial by combat. Meanwhile, the Duchess of Gloucester pleads with Gaunt to avenge her husband's death, but Gaunt refuses, claiming that Richard himself ordered the assassination. When the trial by combat is about to ensue, Richard halts the proceedings and instead banishes Mowbray for life, and Bolingbroke for ten years. When Richard *sees* Gaunt's distress at the sentence, he reduces Bolingbroke's banishment to six years. Richard tells Aumerle that he dislikes that Bolingbroke is popular with the commoners. The king's advisor, Green, counsels Richard to attend to a possible uprising in Ireland. To raise money for the trip, Richard plans to lease royal lands. At the end of the act, Richard is called to the bedside of Gaunt, who is dying.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk and Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, come before King Richard II to accuse each other of treason. The two men throw accusations and then their gauntlets at each other, challenging the other to a physical combat. Each man takes up the other's gauntlet, i.e. accepts the challenge, in order to prove his innocence of the charges brought against him, and to protect his honor.

Richard asks to hear Bolingbroke's accusations against Mowbray. Bolingbroke claims that Mowbray received 8000 pieces of gold from the king that he kept for himself. Bolingbroke also claims Mowbray killed the Duke of Gloucester, Richard's uncle and Gaunt's brother, whom he was supposed to be guarding. Mowbray answers Bolingbroke's accusations by claiming that he paid the army with the money given to him by the king, as he was supposed to, and kept the rest for himself because the king owed that money to him. Mowbray goes on to say that he did not kill Gloucester, but did fail in his duty of guarding him. He also admits to having schemed, in the past, to kill Gaunt, but is sorry for it.

King Richard does not want the men to fight and asks that they forgive each other. He asks John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father, to get his son to forget his accusation against Mowbray. Gaunt does so, but Bolingbroke will not listen. Neither will Mowbray. Both men feel that to give up the challenge would be to forfeit their honor. Richard yields to their demands, and orders the duel set for Saint Lambert's day.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The opening scene of Richard II is polished and ritualistic. The characters' speech is formal, poetic and often rhyming. Lines 41-46 end like this: "sky, fly, note, throat, move, prove." Men formally address the king, who mediates between them without favoritism. Each accuses the other of treason, and claims his only objective is to protect the throne and his personal honor. This ritualizing of scenes will appear throughout the play, specifically in scene three.

This scene also hints at Richard's eventual overthrow by Bolingbroke. Although Richard mediates the opening scene, he cannot control it, as he should be able to. The two men refuse to "Forget, forgive; conclude and be agreed" as Richard tells them to. Each claims that he cannot back down because his honor will be hurt; nonetheless, they both directly disobey Richard's order. Richard says he was "not born to sue [ask/beg] but to command," which is true. However, he follows that statement with, "but since we cannot do…" In other words, "but since I cannot seem to command you, the duel will be allowed." Richard gives in to Bolingbroke's demands to be allowed to fight Mowbray.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

The Duchess of Gloucester, wife of the deceased Duke of Gloucester asks Gaunt why he does not agree with her that her husband's death should be avenged. Gaunt tells us that it is not man's duty to dispense justice, but God's duty. He also says that "God's substitute, / His deputy anointed in His sight" (i.e. King Richard) is the one who has caused the Duke's death, and if he was wrong to do it, then heaven will punish him.

The Duchess tells Gaunt he should have more feeling about his brother's death, and she hopes Bolingbroke will win the duel and kill Mowbray. Gaunt leaves for Coventry where the duel is to be held.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

In this scene, we learn that Richard may have been the cause of Gloucester's death, which throws the previous scene into a completely new light. This new knowledge comes from Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father, suggesting that Bolingbroke knew of it when he accused Mowbray of Gloucester's death. Bolingbroke was indirectly accusing the king, but could not do so openly. Mowbray's resentment at being called a traitor is understandable, since he was most likely just following the king's orders by killing Gloucester, but cannot say so openly.

Gloucester's seeming lack of care concerning his brother's murder may seem surprising, but is explained by Gaunt's belief that the murder was ordered by Richard. In sixteenth century England, the king was considered, as Gaunt points out, God's substitute on earth, and thus, not to be questioned or challenged. Because of this belief, only God can punish the king. Therefore, it is not that Gaunt does not care about his brother's murder, as the Duchess suggests, but that he has faith in God's ability to dispense justice.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Bolingbroke and Mowbray are ready to fight, but wait on Richard's arrival. When he has arrived, they are asked to state their reasons for being there that day. Mowbray answers he is there to prove his loyalty to his king, and to prove Bolingbroke is a traitor. Bolingbroke answers he is present to prove Mowbray is a traitor and a danger to the king. Both are prepared to die, and say farewell to the king. Bolingbroke also takes leave of his friends and father.

As the charge is sounded and the men are about to fight, Richard throws down his staff, which is a signal to stop the fight. Richard states that the kingdom should not be stained by "civil wounds," by which he means fighting between fellow countrymen. As a resolution to the problem, Richard banishes Bolingbroke for ten years and Mowbray for life. Both men swear to obey his decree. Richard later reduces Bolingbroke's banishment to six years when he sees how upset Gaunt is. Gaunt believes he will die before his son returns. Richard does not understand Gaunt's reaction, since he voted on the banishment earlier and agreed to it. Gaunt says he regrets voting the way he did.

Both Bolingbroke and Mowbray meet Richard's announcement not with happiness, but with acceptance. However, Bolingbroke becomes increasingly depressed about the banishment the more he thinks about it. His father tries to cheer him up, telling him he should view the six years not as banishment, but as a long and enjoyable trip. Bolingbroke is inconsolable.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

As in the first scene, this one is full of ceremony and formality. The role of language, which will run throughout the play, also becomes more apparent here. Richard believes in the power of language or speech; more specifically, he believes in the power of his own speech. When he reduces Bolingbroke's sentence by four years, he points out that "Four lagging winters and four wanton springs/ End in a word; such is the breath of kings." In other words, Bolingbroke has four years of his life back simply because of the words Richard utters. Bolingbroke, however, is more pragmatic than Richard is, and does not view language in the same way. Gaunt attempts to cheer Richard up about having to be absent from his country for six years by telling him to imagine he is traveling to escape a pestilence in the land, or pretend he is visiting some place he has always wanted to go. However, Bolingbroke answers his father's well-intentioned attempts by saying that you cannot get rid of hunger by imagining a feast. Bolingbroke only believes in what is physically real.

This scene also begins the parallelism between Richard and Bolingbroke that runs throughout the play. For example, we will see that as Richard's fortunes fall,

Bolingbroke's rise. This future occurrence is hinted at when Richard comes down from his throne to "enfold him in our arms." Later, Richard will be forced to descend the throne, while Bolingbroke ascends it. The image of Richard descending is repeated a number of times until he is literally brought down.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

King Richard speaks with his favorite courtiers. Aumerle enters and Richard asks him about Bolingbroke's departure because Aumerle rode with him part of the way. He claims neither of them shed any tears at parting, but Bolingbroke wished Aumerle farewell, and Aumerle pretended to be overcome with grief.

Richard talks about how Bolingbroke 'courts' the common people. He lowers himself to smiling and waving at them, even greeting them—all things beneath a nobleman, and far beneath Richard, who would never do such things. He believes Bolingbroke is dangerous for being so popular with the common people.

Richard and his courtiers then talk about the rebels in Ireland. Richard decides he will go to Ireland himself to oversee the war. However, he needs more money to fund it, and so, plans to sell the right of collecting taxes to whichever courtier bids highest for the right. They will then be able to extort the general populace as they wish.

While discussing the war, Bushy, another of Richard's courtiers, enters and informs everyone that John of Gaunt is seriously ill and has asked Richard to come visit him. Richard is happy to hear of Gaunt's illness, and hopes he will die soon so he can seize Gaunt's lands, which should really go to Bolingbroke.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

Richard's mismanagement of his kingdom becomes apparent in this scene. He plans to "farm our royal realm," in order to finance a war in Ireland. In other words, he plans to let courtiers tax his subjects as much as they please in exchange for the immediate cash he needs. He also plans to seize Gaunt's estate, which should rightly go to Bolingbroke. Richard violates the idea of inheritance, which is what the social system of England, and indeed, Richard's very right to kingship, are based on.

We can also see the opposite parallelism between Richard and Bolingbroke continued from the previous scene. Bolingbroke has no qualms about 'lowering' himself to mingling with the common people, whereas Richard insists on maintaining his position above them.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Gaunt is ill, and waiting with York for the king to arrive. Gaunt asks York if he thinks the king will listen to what he has to say. York does not think so because the king listens only to his flatterers. Gaunt argues that the words of dying men always hold more weight because they have no reason not to be truthful. He makes a prophecy that if Richard continues behaving as he has, he will not live long: "His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last."

King Richard finally arrives and Gaunt tries to warn Richard against some of the things he has been doing, such as giving his right to tax to his courtiers, and urges him to reform himself. Richard becomes angry at Gaunt, and says he would have Gaunt executed if he was not already dying.

Gaunt dies and York tries to talk Richard out of seizing the estate, arguing that he would be violating the very principals his kingship is based on. However, Richard refuses to listen, and plans to leave for Ireland the following day.

The Duke of Northumberland, Lord Ross and Lord Willoughby discuss Richard's behavior, and lament Bolingbroke's loss of his rightful estate. They wonder how long it will be before the king's flatterers turn him against themselves for no reason. They also point out that Richard has spent more money during peace than his predecessors spent in times of war. Northumberland then informs Ross and Willoughby that Bolingbroke is returning to England with an army to support him, and is only waiting for Richard to leave for Ireland. Northumberland believes Bolingbroke's revolt will restore England to her former glory. He asks Ross and Willoughby to join him, but if they cannot, then to keep the secret.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The idea of Richard as a bad leader is developed more fully here. He not only mismanages money, but his flatterers rule his decisions, and he seems to lack any compassion, even for members of his family. Richard is arrogant because of his station in life, which he believes puts him above any law. He sees himself as God's regent on earth, which validates any decision he makes, and puts it past questioning. York has a good point when he tells Richard that by seizing Gaunt's estate he invalidates his own reason for being king. It seems Richard does not hear anything York says.

In this scene, Gaunt gives one of the more famous speeches of the play, in which he describes the majesty of England: "This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle / this earth of majesty, this seat of Mars / This other Eden, demi-paradise…This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England...." The speech goes on for some time describing the glory of England, but then shifts to explain that it has been corrupted; it is not what it

once was. England "is now leased out…like to a tenant or pelting farm…with inky blots and rotten parchment bonds. / That England was wont to conquer others/ Hath made a shameful conquest of itself." This imagery, especially of England as a corrupted Eden, will run throughout the play as a metaphor for its corruption by its rulers.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Richard's wife, the Queen is disconsolate because she fears something bad is going to happen. Bushy, one of Richard's flatterers, tries to cheer her up by telling her she has no reason to feel as she does. Just then, Green, another flatterer, enters and tells them that Bolingbroke has arrived with an army at Ravenspurgh. Northumberland, Ross, Beaumont, Willoughby, all powerful lords, support him. In addition, the Earl of Worcester, who was acting as steward for Richard in his absence, has also gone to support Bolingbroke.

The Duke of York is one of the only lords left who stands with the king, and only tediously. He has mixed feelings within himself as to what he should do. Both men are his kinsmen, and his conscience urges him to stand against Richard for the wrongs he has done to his family. However, Richard is his king, which in itself demands his loyalty. He attempts to organize a resistance to Bolingbroke's army. He tries to find funds to pay for the battle, and sends Bushy and Green to find some men to fight for their side.

Bushy, Green and Bagot, Richard's three flatterers discuss what they should do. They realize that if Richard is brought down, they will suffer also. In order to save themselves, Green and Bushy decide to flee to Bristol Castle and take refuge there, while Bagot decides to try to get to the king in Ireland.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene conveys a sense of chaos and disorder, and is the beginning of Richard's fall from the throne. The king is absent and most of the nobles support the intruder. There is no one left to defend the country but York, who does not feel suited to the task due to his age. His age is also part of why he is the only one who has not deserted Richard. York ascribes to an older way of thinking than the younger nobles do. For York, and Gaunt before he died, one did not turn against his king. In fifteenth and sixteenth century England, the king was believed to be God's regent on earth. To question the king's authority was to question God's authority. This idea is illustrated when in Act I Scene II, Gaunt is arguing with the Duchess of Gloucester about avenging his brother's death. Gaunt says "God's is the 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." In other words, he cannot avenge his brother's death because the person who murdered him is God's "anointed," i.e. Richard. As a result, God must do the avenging because Gaunt can do nothing about it.

This same reasoning keeps York from joining Bolingbroke, and causes him at least to try to defend the country no matter how futile an attempt it may be. The other nobles have no problem defecting to Bolingbroke because they are of a younger generation

that does not seem to subscribe to the beliefs of its elders. They believe that incompetence is justification for replacement. However, it should also be noted that Northumberland, Ross and Willoughby's actions are also self-motivated. In the previous scene, they all worried that Richard's flatterers would turn him against them.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Bolingbroke travels with Northumberland and his forces to Berkley Castle where York is stationed with three hundred men. Lord Harry Percy, Northumberland's son arrives with the news that the Earl of Worcester gave up his office as Richard's steward because Northumberland has been proclaimed a traitor. Percy is then introduced to Bolingbroke to whom he swears his allegiance. Soon after, Ross and Willoughby arrive.

Lord Berkley emerges from the castle to find out what Bolingbroke's purpose is in returning to England with an army. Bolingbroke is offended because Berkley addressed him as "Lord Hereford" when he should now be "Lord Lancaster" now that his father is dead. York enters, angry with Bolingbroke for his actions, and refuses to be swayed by Bolingbroke's friendly words. He tells Bolingbroke that he is a traitor for returning before his banishment has ended, and for bringing an army with him. Bolingbroke asks York if he thinks it was fair to banish him in the first place. He points out that Richard has wronged him, and no lawful options have been left open to him.

York admits that he knows Richard wronged Bolingbroke, and says he has been doing everything in his power to help him, but York cannot endorse Bolingbroke's rebellion against the king. Northumberland says that Bolingbroke is not there to try to depose Richard, only to take back his inheritance, which rightly belongs to him.

York admits that he does not have enough manpower to stop them from doing as they please, but still refuses to join them; he will remain neutral. He invites them to stay in the castle, an offer that Bolingbroke accepts. Afterwards, he plans to travel to Bristol to "weed and pluck away" Bushy and Bagot, the "caterpillars of the commonwealth" who presently reside there.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

In this scene, we learn, through Northumberland that Bolingbroke does not plan to depose the king, but has come for what is his, the estate of Lancaster. However, it is evident that such a claim is an empty one. We have already seen Richard banish Mowbray and Bolingbroke for no apparent reason other than that each accuses the other of treason. Mowbray does not even state any reasons for calling Bolingbroke a traitor, but Bolingbroke is banished anyway. Now he has blatantly disobeyed the king, and brought an army with him. It is not likely that Richard will forgive and forget such actions. Bolingbroke has also managed to rally most of the nobles to his side against Richard, making him a truly dangerous adversary. In effect, Bolingbroke has already challenged the king.

At the end of the scene, Bolingbroke tells us that he plans to "weed and pluck away" Bushy and Bagot. In other words, he plans to kill them. If Bolingbroke's intention were

only to regain his inheritance, he would not murder two of the king's favorite courtiers. The imagery in those few lines is related to the motif of England as a second Eden, which runs throughout the play. Bolingbroke sees Bushy and Bagot as "caterpillars" feeding off England, and poisoning it.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

A Welsh captain has been waiting for ten days for Richard with his army so they can attack Ireland. He tells the Earl of Salisbury, one of Richard's lords, that he will wait no longer and plans to return to Wales. Salisbury asks the Captain to wait one more day because Richard's hopes of victory lay on him and his army. The captain replies that there have been signs in nature and in the cosmos that suggest Richard is dead. As a result, many of the men have fled, not wanting to be seen supporting Richard if he has been deposed.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

In many of Shakespeare's plays, nature reflects the state of the world. Here, it reflects the state of England. The Welsh captain tells us that the Bay trees are "all withered." If England is supposed to be a second Eden, it is obviously diseased. Its trees wither; it is infested with caterpillars. All of this has been brought about by Richard's failure to lead: he has misspent England's money, overtaxed the common people and caused rebellion among his nobles.

We know, from this scene that Richard will be overthrown. Not only is it prophesied by the cosmos, as told by the Welsh captain, but Salisbury also foreshadows Richard's downfall. The sun is traditionally associated with the king of England, and Shakespeare incorporates that into the play. At the end of the scene, Salisbury says of Richard, "Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly west." The sun is setting; Richard will be brought low.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Bolingbroke addresses Bushy and Bagot, who are about to be executed. He tells them they are being executed for misleading Richard, and causing Richard to banish him. Bushy replies that he is happier to meet death than to see Bolingbroke in England. Northumberland leads them away to be executed. Bolingbroke asks York to send a message to the Queen telling her that Bolingbroke has only kind intentions towards her.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

By assuming the authority to order an execution, especially the execution of two men loyal to King Richard, Bolingbroke far oversteps his bounds. However, he claims to do it as a favor to the king. Bolingbroke places the blame for Richard's behavior and mismanagement, even his own banishment, on Bushy and Bagot. Bolingbroke seems to suggest that by removing the flatterers, the king will be able to rule properly. However, the reader must wonder if Bolingbroke truly believes this, or if he only tries to validate his actions by presenting them as doing his duty to the king.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Richard arrives at Wales and is happy to be back in his kingdom again. He touches the ground and urges it to turn against rebels who would invade it, namely Bolingbroke and his followers. Carlisle tells Richard not to worry: God made him king and God has the power to protect his kingship. Richard agrees and says that although thieves and robbers may do their deeds while the eye of heaven is not looking, they are destroyed when it does see them. Richard claims there is no force on earth that can bring down God's anointed.

Salisbury then tells Richard that the Welsh army of 12,000 men has defected to Bolingbroke. Hearing this news, Richard becomes pale and upset. Aumerle urges Richard to remember who he is. Richard recovers quickly from his shock, and has faith that York will be able to help him against Bolingbroke.

Sir Scroop, another of Richard's supporters, arrives. He has confidence that those who side with Bolingbroke are boys and old men. When Richard asks where Bushy, Bagot and Green are, Scroop tells him Bolingbroke has executed them. Richard becomes dejected at this news and believes all is lost. He says they should stop talking of getting rid of Bolingbroke and talk of death instead since that is all that is left to them. Carlisle tries to reassure the king, telling him that giving into his fears only makes the enemy stronger. Aumerle joins in, telling Richard to look to his father, the Duke of York for support. Richard is again revitalized until Scroop tells him that York has "joined with Bolingbroke," and yielded all of his northern castles to him. At this point, Richard loses any remaining hope he had. He plans to give in to Bolingbroke, and orders his followers dismissed "From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day."

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

As Richard receives bad news from his men, he needs more and more reassurance from them. He is unable to maintain his own confidence in his ability to overpower Bolingbroke.

When he first arrives, Richard conveys his confidence in his ability to punish Bolingbroke when he talks about "the searching eye of heaven," the sun, searching out and destroying the thieves and robbers that did as they pleased while the sun was hidden behind the globe. As discussed in an earlier scene analysis, the sun is an emblem for Richard. He is saying that while he was gone, criminals have done as they wanted, but now that he has returned, he will find and punish the criminals. However, by the end of the scene, Richard associates himself with night and Bolingbroke with day, i.e. the sun. In other words, Richard's power has passed from himself to Bolingbroke.

High imagery and low imagery is prevalent in the scene also. During an instance of confidence, Richard says of himself, "Look not to the ground, / Ye favorites of the king. Are we not high?" Again, nearing the end of the scene Richard believes that the only thing left for him is death, and he speaks of the grave, and of worms. He says, "let us sit upon the ground/ And tell sad stories of the death of kings." By this point, one must look to the ground to see Richard, because he has been brought down.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Bolingbroke speaks with Northumberland and York. They have learned that the Welsh army has dispersed and Northumberland tells us "Richard hath hid his head." York berates Northumberland for leaving out Richard's title when speaking about him.

They arrive at Flint castle and Percy informs them that King Richard is in the castle along with Salisbury, Scroop, Aumerle and a clergyman. Bolingbroke asks Northumberland to take a message that he "sends allegiance and true faith of heart" to Richard, and that he will lay down his arms (dismiss his troops) if Richard will lift his banishment and restore his inheritance. If Richard will not, Bolingbroke will "use the advantage of [his] power" against Richard.

Bolingbroke and his troops march before the walls of the castle; but Bolingbroke tells them not to beat the drums—he does not want to seem threatening. Richard comes to walls, and is very angry. He chastises Bolingbroke and his men for not kneeling to him as they should, and asks what "hand of God" has dismissed him from his role as king. He mocks the confidence they have in their numbers and informs them that if they raise a hand against him, God will strike them and their families down with pestilence (illness).

Northumberland, speaking for Bolingbroke, says they would not think of doing harm to the king, and that Bolingbroke "doth humbly kiss [Richard's] hand," and is only there to beg that he be freed from his banishment. Richard says that Bolingbroke is welcome back. While Northumberland leaves to speak with Bolingbroke, Richard asks Aumerle if he should have resisted Bolingbroke and died instead of giving in to his demands. Aumerle says no, "let's fight with gentle words." Richard is horrified that he must indulge the requests of a traitor, but claims he will submit to whatever he must. When Northumberland returns he asks, "What says King Bolingbroke?" Northumberland tells Richard that Bolingbroke wants to speak with him in the lower court of the castle. Richard complies saying "Down, down I come, like glistering Phaethon…down court! Down king!"

Bolingbroke kneels to Richard, and tells everyone else to do the same. Richard tells him to stand up, "Up cousin up!" because he knows that even though Bolingbroke lowers his knee, he does not lower his heart; in other words, Bolingbroke is not sincere in kneeling to Richard. Richard offers to give up the throne, "for do we must what force will have us do."

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

One of the first things to notice in this scene is that each side has different information. Richard believes his chances against Bolingbroke are worse than they really are

because he thinks that York has joined with him, as have the Welsh army. However, according to Bolingbroke, the Welsh army is scattered, and we saw earlier that York has declared himself neutral. Richard is also told that Bushy, Green and Bagot are all dead, but Bolingbroke has only executed Bushy and Green. Bagot is still alive.

Bolingbroke's message to Richard is meant to be humble. However, it is far more threatening than humble since Bolingbroke plans to attack Richard if he refuses his demands. It is also ironic that while professing allegiance and faithfulness to Richard, Bolingbroke marches outside the castle walls with an army. His claim that he only wants what is his proves to be empty since when Richard does not put up a fight, Bolingbroke takes the kingship from him. The conflict should have ended when Richard dismissed Bolingbroke from his banishment.

The imagery discussed earlier is seen here again. Richard likens himself to Phaethon, the son of Helios the sun god, who steals his father's chariot and tries to drive it across the sky. Phaethon cannot control the horses, causes destruction as he races across the sky and burns the ground when he gets too close to it. Richard is unable to control his unruly nobles, and is now being brought down for it. The association with the sun is something that should be recognized by this point.

In addition, while Bolingbroke asks that Richard comes "down down" to speak with him, Bolingbroke is told by Richard "Up cousin up!" Again, the two men are parallel opposites. As Richard has been brought down from the throne, Bolingbroke has now ascended it.

Act 3, Scene 4

Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

The Queen and her ladies sit in the garden trying to think of something to take their minds off their grief. When the gardener and his two assistants enter, the Queen and her ladies hide in order to hear what the men say, because they "will talk of state" and the Queen wants to know what is going on.

One of the assistants asks why they should keep this garden orderly when their "sea-walled garden" (England) is full of weeds and caterpillars, and let run to waste. The gardener says that things are no longer so bad because the person who caused such conditions in England, Richard, has been brought down by Bolingbroke and his flatterers with him. The gardener laments that Richard did not tend England with as much care as he and his assistants tend their garden.

The Queen is overcome with emotion when the gardener reports that Richard has been deposed. She cannot believe it is true, but the gardener assures her he is telling the truth, and informs her that they are marching to London as they speak.

Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene further develops the idea of England as an Eden, a garden. The gardeners speak of England as if it is a garden. Richard did not tend his garden properly. His "broad-spreading leaves" helped the weeds (Bushy, Bagot and Green) to grow, and thus, feed on him. He failed to wound the bark of his fruit trees (the nobles), allowing them to become too proud and overthrow him. He should have cut off the branches that did not produce fruit, which would have helped those branches that did produce to live. Instead, those fruit-bearing branches (Gloucester for example) were allowed to die. The gardener says that Richard was idle in his duty towards his garden, and that has cost him his position.

Act 4, Scene 1

Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

Back in London, Bolingbroke asks Bagot what he knows of Gloucester's death. Bagot accuses Aumerle of having a hand in the murder. Aumerle is insulted at the accusation, and refutes it, issuing a challenge to Bagot. The scene is very similar to the opening scene between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. Fitzwater, one of Bolingbroke's supporters, issues a challenge also, claiming he heard Aumerle bragging that he killed Gloucester. Aumerle takes up Fitzwater's gauntlet. Percy and another lord throw their gauntlets against Aumerle, which Aumerle also takes up. Surrey claims Fitzwater is lying, and throws his gauntlet at him, which Fitzwater takes up. Bolingbroke stops the arguing, saying that everything will have to wait until Mowbray is brought back from exile. He plans to return Mowbray's lands to him, even though he is Bolingbroke's enemy. The Bishop of Carlisle informs them that Mowbray died in Italy. Bolingbroke decides that he will assign all of the men a trial day.

York enters and tells Bolingbroke that Richard has named Bolingbroke his heir. Bishop Carlisle is horrified that a subject would pass judgment on his king. He names Bolingbroke a traitor, and prophesies that if he is crowned, England will become a place of "tumultuous wars" rather than the "seat of peace" it has been. Carlisle is arrested as a traitor for his speech and led away.

Richard enters, having been called for to surrender his crown in front of the people. Northumberland also wants him to read a list of his crimes, for which he is being deposed. Richard refuses to comply because their crimes are far worse than his are. Bolingbroke decides that he will not make Richard read the list, which Northumberland objects to because otherwise the common people will not be satisfied that Richard was rightfully deposed.

Richard calls for a mirror, in which he examines his face to see if he looks different now that he is not king. He claims that his sorrow has disfigured his face and breaks the mirror. Richard is led away to the tower and Bolingbroke sets his coronation day for the following Wednesday.

Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

The beginning of the scene repeats the opening of the play in which Bolingbroke and Mowbray accuse each other of treason. There seems to be a lack of control, as there was in the first scene; however, Bolingbroke does not try to control the men as Richard did. When Bolingbroke finally does speak, the bickering stops and a trial day is to be set. In contrast, Richard made demands of Mowbray and Bolingbroke that they refused to follow. Bolingbroke, in the same situation, does not come across as powerless as Richard did.

Although Richard is being deposed here, he maintains a regal persona in comparison to the men around him, who seem common next to him. Bolingbroke barely speaks at all, while Richard makes long, eloquent speeches in rhymed blank verse. He also controls what goes on the scene, while everyone else watches. Richard's power is not taken from him, he gives it up: "Mark me how I undo myself: / I give this heavy weight from off my head/ And this unwieldy scepter from my hand." Richard maintains a power with words and ceremony that Bolingbroke has never had. However, Richard's words, which were once truly powerful and could banish a man from the country, are now empty of that power though they maintain their eloquence.

Richard's choice of words suggests he parallels himself with Christ. He chastises those present that do not feel that they are playing a major role in what is going on, and are therefore, innocent of what is being done to Richard. He says to them "Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands, / showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates/ Have here delivered me to my sour cross." Also, when he is first brought before Bolingbroke, Richard looks at the men assembled there and compares their betrayal of him to Judas's betrayal of Christ: "Were they not mine?/ Did they not sometime cry, "All hail!" to me?/ So Judas did to Christ."

Act 5, Scene 1

Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Richard's Queen waits in the street for Richard who is being led to the tower to be imprisoned. When Richard arrives, he tells her to go to France and find a convent to live in. He says they must both now earn crowns in heaven, for there is none on earth for them anymore.

Northumberland enters and tells them he has orders from Bolingbroke to take Richard to Pomfret (a castle in Yorkshire) and for the Queen to leave for France. Richard warns Northumberland that Bolingbroke will turn against him, fearing that because he has helped depose one king, he can do it again. Northumberland ignores the warning. The Queen begs that she and Richard be allowed to be together. She asks if he can be banished to France with her, or she with him to Pomfret. Northumberland says such a request cannot be granted because it would be an unsafe move for Bolingbroke. They each leave for their appointed destinations.

Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

In this scene, we see Richard's devotion to his Queen, and she to him. Neither laments his or her fall from royalty, only the separation they both must endure as a result. This presentation of Richard has to do with Shakespeare's development of him as a complex character that the reader cannot entirely dislike. Although he has mismanaged his country, and shown himself to be arrogant, when Richard is finally brought down the reader is not satisfied. His devotion to his wife, his royal presence, his command of speech and his arguments against Bolingbroke and his followers make it difficult to revel in his eventual downfall.

Act 5, Scene 2

Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

The Duke of York, at his home, tells his wife about Bolingbroke's ride through London with Richard as a prisoner. The people praised Bolingbroke, while throwing dirt at Richard. York and his wife lament Richard's treatment, but York must obey Bolingbroke now because he is the new king.

Their son, Aumerle enters, who York tells us must be called Rutland now because the new king has taken his dukedom from him for being a supporter of Richard's. Aumerle is carrying a document and York wants to see it. Aumerle tries to prevent his father from seeing it, but fails. The document details a plan to assassinate Bolingbroke. York is furious and plans to ride to warn Bolingbroke. His wife pleads with York to keep it to himself because she does not want her only son executed. York insists he must do his duty to his king. The Duchess tells her son to ride to Bolingbroke ahead of his father, admit everything and plead for mercy. She will follow behind and beg Bolingbroke for mercy. They all leave.

Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

Through York's narration, we see how completely Richard and Bolingbroke's fortunes have changed. The people of London praise Bolingbroke, while Richard has dirt thrown at him.

York's belief system, that a subject is bound to obey his king without exception, which kept him loyal to Richard, now binds him to Bolingbroke. He felt badly for Richard's treatment of Bolingbroke, but he would not turn on his king even though Bolingbroke was his nephew. In this scene, we see the extreme of York's loyalty to his new king when he is willing to turn in his own son for treason, who will most likely be executed.

Act 5, Scene 3

Act 5, Scene 3 Summary

Bolingbroke, now known as King Henry, asks his nobles if any of them have seen his son. Percy says he has seen the king's son, who was planning to celebrate his father's kingship at a brothel. Henry knows his son is a "wanton" youth, but hopes that with age, his son will grow to be more responsible.

Aumerle enters and after asking that everyone else leave, begs for forgiveness. Before he can say what he begs forgiveness for, Aumerle asks permission to lock the door because he knows his father will be there soon. Henry gives permission, but before Aumerle can say anything, York bangs on the door and yells for the king to beware for he is alone with a traitor. Henry draws his sword and unlocks the door. York enters and gives Henry the letter he took from Aumerle. Then, Aumerle's mother, the Duchess of York, demands to be let in. She is let in, and begs on her knees for her son to be pardoned, and will not get up until he has been pardoned. The Duke of York on the other hand, begs that his son not be pardoned because he is a traitor, and may rebel again in the future. Henry pardons Aumerle, but orders the other men involved in the plot against his life to be executed.

Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis

Richard's overthrow was justified, in the view of Bolingbroke's supporters, because of the effect his bad judgment was having on the country. Aumerle's treason reveals that not everything has been fixed by appointing a new king. In the previous scene, The Duchess of York questions her son, as to who the new favorites are at court, showing that much remains the same, despite the new ruler. Bolingbroke's pardon of Aumerle, however, suggests that he may be a more merciful ruler than Richard, who seemed to banish and have murdered the people around him as he wished, is.

The most striking aspect of this scene is York's request that his son not be pardoned. He says that by letting his dishonorable son live, his own honor is killed, but even this excuse is weak. It is possible that York is obsessed with proving his loyalty to his new king, since he failed his previous king when appointed as steward in Richard's absence. Nonetheless, his actions in this scene are difficult to understand.

Act 5, Scene 4

Act 5, Scene 4 Summary

Sir Pierce of Exton, one of Henry's supporters tells one of his men that Henry wished he had a friend that would rid him "this living fear," Richard. Exton believes Henry was inadvertently asking him to ease his worries by killing Richard. Exton says he will be a friend to Henry and kill Richard.

Act 5, Scene 4 Analysis

It is impossible to know if Exton is right that Henry was hinting that he would like Richard killed. The juxtaposition of this conversation with the previous scene in which Henry pardons a man who confessed to planning to kill him, suggests that Exton is wrong.

This scene also reintroduces Richard who, until this point, had disappeared from the play.

Act 5, Scene 5

Act 5, Scene 5 Summary

Richard sits in a dungeon in Pomfret Castle talking to himself. He has been trying to imagine that he is not in a dungeon, but out in the world. However, he cannot do it because the world has people in it, while the dungeon does not. He laments that he wasted his time in the world, and now times wastes him away.

A groom enters, who served Richard when he was king. He tells Richard he is sorry for the state he has been brought to, and grieved when he saw Bolingbroke riding Richard's horse, Barbary. The groom leaves, and the dungeon keeper enters to give Richard his meal, but will not taste it first as he usually does because he has been commanded by Exton not to do so. Richard becomes angry and starts beating the man. Exton and his men rush in, and Richard manages to kill two of them before Exton kills him. Exton feels guilt for killing Richard who was "as full of valor as of royal blood." Exton plans to bring Richard's body to Henry.

Act 5, Scene 5 Analysis

By this point, Richard is completely powerless. However, he retains his power with language. He is given a long soliloquy in this scene, which is one of his most eloquent. It seems that as Richard's actual power decreases, his talent with words increases. Once Richard boasted that with a few words from his mouth, he could give a man back four years of his life (referring to his decreasing Bolingbroke's banishment from 10 years to 6). Now, Richard tries to "people" his prison cell with thoughts, and convince himself that he is more than one person. However, Richard's words cannot make any of his ideas become reality.

In Act III scene III when Bolingbroke demanded his inheritance be restored to him, or he would use force to take it back, Richard chose to "fight with gentle words" rather than with physical force. Richard has relied on words throughout the play. In this scene, Richard finally abandons words in favor of physical force. He attacks his murderers, managing to kill two of them before he is killed himself. His abandonment of words is so complete that he says very little before he dies, which is unusual for dying kings in Shakespeare plays; they usually recite a long soliloquy before dying. Richard only curses Exton to hell for what he has done before he dies.

Act 5, Scene 6

Act 5, Scene 6 Summary

King Henry receives reports from his nobles as to what is going on throughout England. Northumberland reports that lords Salisbury, Spencer, Blunt and Kent have all been executed. Fitzwater reports that two other traitors have been executed. Lord Percy tells Henry that the Abbot of Westminster has also been executed for his part in the plot against Henry's life, but he has brought Bishop Carlisle with him to be sentenced by Henry. Henry, having seen honor in Carlisle, allows him to live, but he must go far from London and never return.

As this sentence is pronounced, Exton enters with his attendants carrying the coffin containing Richard's body. Exton tells Henry what he has done. Henry is angry because Exton has given the people reason to slander him. He says he did not want Richard murdered because the deed would adversely affect his reputation with the public, who at present love him. However, he also admits he is glad to have the burden removed from his mind. Henry hates Exton for what he has done and orders him to "wander through the shades of night" in guilt, and never to come into his presence again. Henry orders a solemn funeral for Richard, and plans a trip to the holy land to wash the guilt of Richard's murder from him.

Act 5, Scene 6 Analysis

It is difficult to know what to make of Henry's reaction to Richard's murder. Again, we have just seen him show mercy to a known traitor: he has just allowed Carlisle to live. Therefore, it is difficult to think that Henry would have wanted Richard dead, especially since he is not known for fighting back. Also, when Henry first ascends the throne, he goes to a great deal of trouble to show the public that Richard has ceded the throne to him willingly, and that Henry himself has not committed treason to gain the throne for himself. Now that Richard is dead, Henry, if guilty of the crime, is guilty of treason.

Henry's final speech of the play makes it difficult for the reader to know what to think about Henry's intentions, since it is full of ambiguous language. He says he "hate[s] the murderer" but "loves [Richard] murdered." In one of the final lines, he says that he will journey to Jerusalem to "wash this blood off from [his] guilty hand," suggesting that he did indeed order the murder, and must atone for the crime. The play ends in the middle of the action, and does not provide a true conclusion. The story will continue into the plays: Henry IV and Henry V.

Characters

Abbot of Westminster:

See Westminster

Attendants:

In this play about kings, noblemen, and battle, there are numerous lords, officers, soldiers, servants, and other unnamed attendants—many with out speaking parts—who fill out the scenes and contribute to the play's royal and martial atmosphere.

Aumerle (Duke of Aumerle, afterwards, Earl of Rutland):

He is the duke of York's son as well as a cousin of Bullingbrook and King Richard. He first appears in I.iii to confirm Bullingbrook's entry into the lists (arena) for combat against Thomas Mowbray, and remains cordial to Bullingbrook throughout this scene. However, in I.iv, Aumerle tells Richard that his dislike for his banished cousin is so strong that he had difficulty pretending he was sorry to see him leave England.

Aumerle is staunchly loyal to King Richard, and tries to bolster Richard's spirits after word is sent that Bullingbrook has invaded England with the support of several noblemen and the approval of the people. "Comfort, my liege, remember who you are," he tells the king (III.ii.82). The fact that ultimately, Richard bitterly rejects Aumerle's comfort—"He does me double wrong / That wounds me with the flatteries of his tongue" (III.ii.215- 16)—serves to reveal Richard's weakness in a crisis.

Aumerle runs into trouble in IV.i when he is accused before parliament and a newly ascendant Bullingbrook of conspiring to kill his uncle Thomas of Woodstock, the duke of Gloucester; IV.i is also the scene in which Richard is deposed, and at its close, Aumerle angrily plots with the abbot of Westminster and the bishop, of Carlisle to have Bullingbrook assassinated.

Aumerle's plot ends abruptly once it is discovered in V.ii by his outraged father, the duke of York. In this scene, Aumerle is stripped of his status as duke for his alleged involvement in the murder of Gloucester. He retains the title of earl of Rutland, however. What follows in V.iii is a bit of comic relief as Aumerle, his mother, and his father each rush to Windsor Castle and clamor for the attention of the recently crowned King Henry IV—York wanting to unmask his son's treachery; Aumerle and his mother hoping to win the new king's pardon. Comic relief is a humorous speech, episode, or scene which is meant to alleviate the tension that precedes it in a serious play and to heighten the solemnity that follows it. The chaos which occurs as the duchess, Aumerle, and York fall

to their knees in front of the bemused king—who is then obliged to pardon Aumerle more than once to reassure the duchess—offers a respite from the earlier scenes of plotting, deposition, and imprisonment even as it intensifies the grimness of Richard's assassination scene which occurs not long afterward.

Bagot (Sir John Bagot):

Like Bushy and Green, Sir John Bagot is another of the king's hangers-on, but unlike them he is not executed by Bullingbrook but is instead taken before parliament where he accuses Lord Aumerle of conspiring to kill Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester. Bullingbrook describes Bagot and the other favorites as destructive "caterpillars of the commonwealth" (II.iii.166).

Berkeley (Lord Berkeley):

He is sent by the duke of York (who is acting as regent while Richard is away in Ireland) to ask Bullingbrook why he has defied banishment and returned to England. Berkeley angers Bullingbrook by calling him by his old title, the duke of Herford, rather than referring to him as the duke of Lancaster— the title Bullingbrook rightfully inherited with the death of his father, John of Gaunt (II.iii.69-80)

Bishop of Carlisle:

See Carlisle

Bullingbrook (Henry Bullingbrook [Bolingbroke], Duke of Herford, afterwards King Henry IV of England):

Bullingbrook is John of Gaunt's son and King Richard's cousin. With the death of his father, Bullingbrook is supposed to inherit Gaunt's title— the duke of Lancaster. By V.iii he has become King Henry IV.

In the play, the defining moments for Bullingbrook are his banishment by the king in I.iii, followed by Richard's expropriation of his inheritance in II.i— for Richard's taking of his property and the revocation of his new title (Duke of Lancaster) provoke Bullingbrook to defy banishment and return to England as an outlaw and possible usurper. As Richard's opponent, Bullingbrook is frequently compared to the king concerning his temperament and his potential to govern well. While Richard has been described as imaginative and theatrical with a poetic sensitivity to language, Bullingbrook has been called practical and taciturn. Indeed, after he is banished, Bullingbrook is chided by his father for saying nothing in response to his friends' farewells (I.iii.253-54). And when Gaunt suggests that his son pretend he is on vacation rather than in exile, Bullingbrook replies that imagining things cannot make them real:

O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?
(I.iii.294-97)

While many critics describe Richard as being more interested in regal ceremony than in political reality, they refer by contrast to Bullingbrook as a political pragmatist who knows how to turn circumstances to his advantage. They note that Bullingbrook waits until Richard is away in Ireland before returning to England to reclaim his father's legacy, and that he has made himself popular with noblemen and commoners alike. King Richard fears his cousin's popularity; he complains that Bullingbrook purposely lowers himself to the people's level, flattering common merchants and "wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles," calling all of them "'my countrymen, my loving friends,'" as though he expects to be the next king of England (I.iv.28, 34).

Whether or not Bullingbrook does in fact plan to be king has been a source of critical debate. Bullingbrook himself insists that he has returned to England simply to reclaim the inheritance and title that are rightfully his. When Lord Berkeley addresses him as Herford and asks him why he has defied banishment, Bullingbrook sternly reminds him that he should now be called Lancaster, and that he has "come to seek that name in England" (II.iii.71). A short time later, he tells his uncle York virtually the same thing, adding only that he also intends to "weed and pluck away" the king's favorites□Bushy, Bagot, and Green□whom he claims are bad influences over the king (II.iii.167). In III.iii, he comes face to face with Richard, who flatly accuses him of wanting to be king. On his knees before his cousin, Bullingbrook insists once more, "My gracious lord, I come but for mine own" (Ill.iii. 196). Nevertheless, Bullingbrook's return to England is bolstered by an army which outnumbers the king's, and by the close of Ill.iii, he has taken Richard into custody. Back in London (IV.i), when Richard sends word that he is willing to "yield" his crown to his cousin, Bullingbrook promptly replies: "In God's name I'll ascend the regal throne" (IV.i.113).

The ensuing "deposition scene" brings up another contentious issue: Does Bullingbrook de pose Richard, or does Richard depose himself? As early as III.ii, even before he has directly encountered Bullingbrook and his army, Richard is in despair, calls himself deposed, and discharges his troops. In Ill.iii. 143-45, after speaking to Northumberland and before meeting with his cousin, Richard asserts that he is willing to be deposed, and in IV.i he officially relinquishes his crown. Be that as it may, at the close of IV.i Bullingbrook still feels it necessary to imprison Richard rather than merely send him away.

Act V looks ahead to King Henry IV s troublesome reign and to the next three plays in what is now considered a tetralogy of Shakespearean history plays. The tone in V.iii.1-22 is upbeat as 'King Henry grumbles about his "unthrifty" and "dissolute " son Prince Hal (who plays a key role in *Henry IV, Part One* and *Two* and the title role in *King Henry V),* but predicts that Hal will improve with age. In the V.vi, the tone turns ominous as

Henry, with his new government plagued by rebellions and overshadowed by Richard's murder, vows to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Bushy (Sir John Bushy):

Along with Sir Henry Green and Sir John Bagot, Bushy is an advisor and favorite of King Richard, and during the play's first two acts, the three of them frequently accompany the king onstage, often bringing out the worst in him as well as giving poor advice. Bushy's announcement in I.iv, for example, that John of Gaunt is seriously ill leads Richard to hope that his uncle will die soon so that he can use Gaunt's money to finance his war in Ireland. In II.ii, no sooner does Bushy chide the queen for her feelings of foreboding than Green appears with the news that Bullingbrook has invaded England. Realizing that the king is likely to be deposed, Bushy and Green flee to save themselves, but are captured and executed by Bullingbrook. In the garden scene both Bushy and Green are described as parasitical weeds which feed on Richard until they "are pluck'd up root and all by Bullingbrook" (III.iv.52).

Captain:

He is the leader of King Richard's troops in Wales, and Richard depends on his help to defeat Bullingbrook. In II.iv, he tells the earl of Salisbury that with no word from the king and after rumors of the king's death and ill omens occurring around the country he and his men have decided not to stay and fight. His bad news in itself portends Richard's fall.

Carlisle (Bishop of Carlisle):

He is a loyal supporter of Richard II and a firm believer in the divine right of kings. In III.ii, he chastises the king for losing faith and despairing about his chances against Bullingbrook. At the start of the deposition scene, Carlisle objects to Bullingbrook's willingness to replace Richard (IV.i.113-49), arguing that no subject "can give sentence on his king," and accurately predicting that civil war will be part of England's future if Richard (ancestor of the Yorkists) is deposed by Lancastrian Bullingbrook. (For further discussion on the Yorkist and Lancastrian civil war known as the Wars of the Roses, see the entries for *Richard III* and for *Henry VI, Part One, Two,* and *Three).* For his protestations, Carlisle is arrested by Northumberland. Although afterward he conspires with the abbot of Westminster and the duke of Aumerle to assassinate Henry IV, Carlisle is regarded by the new king as an honorable opponent and thus receives a relatively light sentence (V.vi.24-29).

Duchess of Gloucester:

See Gloucester

Duchess of York:

See York

Exton (Sir Pierce of Exton):

He assassinates Richard, believing that Bullingbrook (now King Henry IV) wishes him to do so, as indicated by his lines in V.iv. In this scene Exton quotes Richard as asking," 'Have I no friend that will rid me of this living fear?' " (V.iv.2). At the end of the brief scene, Exton concludes "I am the King's friend, and will rid his foe" (V.iv. 11). Far from rewarding him, Henry condemns Exton for the "deed of slander" (V.vi.35), and vows to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to atone for his part in Richard's death.

Fitzwater (Lord Fitzwaier):

He is one of several noblemen in parliament who support Sir John Bagot's accusation that the duke of Aumerle is responsible for the murder of the duke of Gloucester (IV.i.33-40). In V.vi, he is rewarded by Henry IV for his part in rounding up and executing the new king's enemies. King Henry's praise for Fitzwater and others who have eliminated threats to his rule is in marked contrast to his condemnation of Sir Pierce of Exton for murdering the former King Richard II.

Gardeners:

In the famous garden scene (III.iv), a gardener and his assistant are overheard by the queen defining the qualities of good government and discussing the condition of England under Richard II. They describe England as a "sea-walled garden" that is choked by weeds and infested with caterpillars in the form of unscrupulous courtiers such as Bushy, Bagot, and Green who have poorly advised the king. Critics have pointed out that the garden imagery which fills this scene occurs throughout the play, particularly in John of Gaunt's speech in II.i.40-68, and in Bullingbrook's description of the king's favorites as "caterpillars of the commonwealth" (II.iii.166).

Gaunt (John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster):

He is the brother of Edmund of Langley (duke of York), uncle to King Richard, and father of Henry Bullingbrook. Like his brother York, Gaunt is fervently loyal to his king and country, but nevertheless critical of Richard's extravagances and misgovernment. Also like York, Gaunt finds that his duty to his king often conflicts with his concerns for his own family. Acting as Richard's advisor in I.iii, Gaunt agrees that his son Bullingbrook should be banished; however as a father, Gaunt expresses his sorrow at the thought of losing his son and heir for even six years. Conflict between familial feeling and duty to his king also occurs in I.ii when Gaunt refuses to avenge the death of his brother

Thomas Woodstock (Duke of Gloucester) on grounds that Gloucester had been assassinated on orders from King Richard.

Gaunt dies in II.i, but not before delivering his famous patriotic speech describing England as a "sceptred isle" and "demi-paradise" which has been "leas'd out" and "bound in with shame" as the result of Richard's constant search for money to finance his luxurious habits. Characteristically, Rich ard ignores Gaunt's dying advice, and confiscates his wealth after he has died (II.i.153-62).

Gloucester (Duchess of Gloucester):

She is the widow of the murdered Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, who was uncle to King Richard and brother to both the duke of York and to John of Gaunt. In I.ii, the duchess implores her brother-in-law Gaunt to avenge Woodstock's death. Gaunt refuses, professing knowledge that King Richard ordered Mowbray to assassinate Woodstock, and suggests that instead the duchess turn to God for revenge. Overwhelmed with grief, the duchess bids farewell to Gaunt and prays that Bullingbrook will defeat Mowbray in their trial by combat and thus prove Mowbray (and by extension King Richard) guilty of the murder. She achieves her revenge indirectly in II.ii, when York announces that he will borrow money from her to defend King Richard from Bullingbrook, and is told that she has died. The duchess of Gloucester's interview with Gaunt is significant because it offers insight into Richard's behavior in I.i and I.iii. Since Richard is apparently responsible for Gloucester's death, Bullingbrook's accusations and Mowbray's presence seem inconvenient and embarrassing to the king.

Green (Sir Henry Green):

He is an advisor to the king as well as one of his favorites at court. In I.iv, he counsels Richard that quick action must be taken against a rebellion in Ireland. As a result, the king decides to travel to Ireland himself to suppress the insurrection, leaving England unprotected against Bullingbrook's return. In II.ii, Green reverses himself, declaring that it would have been better after all if the king had not departed for Ireland with his army, since Bullingbrook has just invaded England. Green and Sir John Bushy, another of the king's favorites, are executed by Bullingbrook in III.i, who accuses them of corrupt ing the king and thus causing a rift between him and the queen, of having turned the king against Bullingbrook, and, finally, of having taken and misused Bullingbrook's lands and looted his household while he was in exile.

Groom:

He worked in the royal stables when Richard was king. He visits Richard in prison to pay his respects and recounts how the new king, Henry IV, rode Richard's favorite horse on the day of his coronation (V.v.67-83). His visit emphasizes Richard's isolation in prison and provokes the former king to describe himself as a beast of burden "Spurr'd, gall'd, and tir'd by jauncing Bullingbrook" (V.v.94).

Heralds:

They are minor officials who preside at tournaments of arms. At the trial by combat in I.iii, there are two heralds, one for Bullingbrook and one for Mowbray; they ritualistically identify, and announce the intentions of, the two prospective combatants.

Herford (Henry Bullingbrook, Duke of Herford, afterwards King Henry IV of England):

See Bullingbrook

Hotspur (Henry Percy, also known as Harry Percy):

See Percy

Keeper:

He is the keeper of the prison at Pomfret castle where Richard is sent after being deposed. In V.v he brings the former king food poisoned by Sir Pierce of Exton, and Richard, shouting "The devil take Henry of Lancaster and thee!" (V.v. 102), proceeds to beat the Keeper.

Lady:

She is one of the queen's attendants. In the garden scene (III.iv), she helps to set the increasingly somber tone of the play when she suggests various forms of entertainment to the queen, who, missing the king, sorrowfully rejects each one.

Lancaster (John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster):

See Gaunt

Langley (Edmund of Langley, Duke of York):

See York

Lords:

In this play about kings, noblemen, and battle, there are numerous lords, officers, soldiers, servants, and other unnamed attendants□many without speaking parts□who fill out the scenes and contribute to the play's royal and martial atmosphere.

Marshal (Lord Marshal):

He administers the highly ritualized trial by combat between Bullingbrook and Mowbray in I.iii. After Richard calls off the trial and banishes the two participants, the marshal declares his wish to ride with Bullingbrook and see him off on his departure from England.

Mowbray (Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk):

He appears as early as Li, when Bullingbrook accuses him of embezzlement and of murdering Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester. Mowbray and Bullingbrook are so incensed with each other that they ignore King Richard's commands to solve their differences peacefully. His next and final appearance is in I.iii when Richard convenes a trial by combat between him and Bullingbrook, only to call it off and banish them both. In IV.i, we are told that Mowbray has died in exile.

Mowbray's presence in the play is brief but revealing with regard to King Richard's personality and motives. When his calls for a peaceful resolution go unheeded by Mowbray and Bullingbrook, Richard asserts that "We were not born to sue, but to command," yet orders the two men to settle their quarrel by combat and, in effect, follow their own wishes rather than his commands (Li. 196-205). When Richard subsequently stops the battle and banishes both men, it is significant that he sends Mowbray away for life: Mowbray has in fact killed Richard's uncle Gloucester on orders from Richard. Dutiful as Mowbray has been, it is therefore embarrassing and undiplomatic for the king to have him close by.

Mowbray's reaction to banishment is bitter. He feels that the king owes him thanks rather than punishment for following orders, and tells him so: A heavy sentence, my most sovereign liege, And all unlook'd for from your Highness' mouth. A dearer merit, not so deep a maim As to be cast forth in the common air, Have I deserved at your Highness' hands. (I.iii.154-58)

Before departing, Mowbray accurately predicts that King Richard will suffer at the hands of Bullingbrook.

Norfolk (Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk):

See Mowbray

Northumberland (Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland):

See Percy

Officers:

In this play about kings, noblemen, and battle, there are numerous lords, officers, soldiers, servants, and other unnamed attendants□many without speaking parts□who fill out the scenes and contribute to the play's royal and martial atmosphere.

Percy (Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland):

Hotspur's father, this Percy is usually referred to as Northumberland.'He is a supporter of Bullingbrook, helping him to regain his inheritance and ultimately the crown. In II.i, Northumberland meets with two other of Bullingbrook's sympathizers, Lord Willoughby and Lord Ross, to complain about the banished duke's mistreatment by King Richard and to criticize Richard for relying on his corrupt favorites, for overtaxing both rich and poor, and for misgoverning the country in general. It is from Northumberland that we first learn of Bullingbrook's decision to return and claim his inheritance.

Throughout most of the play, Northumberland is unique in showing open disrespect for King Richard. In III.iii.7-8, the duke of York reproaches him for referring to the king simply as "Richard." In III.iii.72-76, Northumberland fails to kneel before the king as is required by law and custom. During the deposition scene it is Northumberland who repeatedly insists that King Richard read out loud his list of crimes, provoking Richard to call him a "Fiend" and a "haught insulting man" (IV.i.270, 254). Northumberland also rushes Richard through his final meeting with his queen before sending him to his new prison in Pomfret castle. Calling him the "ladder wherewithal / The mounting Bullingbrook ascends my throne" (V.i.55-56), the former king predicts that soon Northumberland and King Henry IV will become enemies, and that does in fact occur in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part One* and *Two.*

Percy (Henry Percy, also known as Harry Percy or Hotspur):

This Percy is usually called Hotspur and is the son of Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland. Hotpur's role in the play is a small one and differs greatly from his appearance in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part One,* where he becomes a fierce enemy of the king and his son, Prince Henry.

Queen:

She is the wife of King Richard II. Although her role in the play is peripheral, it serves to foreshadow and convey information about Richard's personality as well as his fate, and contributes to the somber tone of the play. When Richard leaves for Ireland, the queen feels a foreboding that goes beyond simply missing her husband, and worries that "Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb / Is coming towards me" (II.i.10-11). Shortly afterward, Green arrives with news that Bullingbrook has invaded England. In

III.iv, she overhears a pair of gardeners discuss the king's fall from power, and in the next scene (IV.i) Richard is in fact deposed. In her final appearance, the queen reproaches her husband for surrendering meekly to imprisonment, and argues that Richard should have the self-respect to remain a king in spirit even though he is no longer one in fact. Comparing him to the "king of beasts" she asserts that' The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw, / And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage / To be o'erpow'r'd" (V.i.29-31).

Richard (King Richard II of England):

He is the ruler of England and the title character. Early in the play it becomes clear that Richard's view of himself and his office differs markedly from the view held by his subjects. Richard governs according to the divine right of kings□a precept which argues that God determines who should rule. In keeping with this doctrine, a monarch is sprinkled or "anointed" with consecrated oil on the day of his coronation as a symbol of his election by God. In the play, Richard's government runs into trouble because he passionately believes that his decrees are sacred and that, as he explains it,

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord;
(III.ii.54-57)

Thus King Richard rewards his favorites and levies harsh taxes to pay for his expenses, secure in his conviction that he has a divine right to do so. His subjects on the other hand believe that a divinely appointed king is meant to govern fairly and well. Thus Richard's allies remind him of his responsibility to follow good rather than bad advice and to work conscientiously to succeed as king, while the populace, hoping to see in him a model for their own behavior, lament to find instead a "wasteful King" (III.iv.55). Meanwhile, Richard's enemies complain that he has become a "most degenerate king" and decide to take action to turn the monarchy back into what they think it should be: to "make high majesty look like itself" and to restore to health the country as well as their own fortunes (II.i.262, 291-95).

Critics have remarked that Richard's great failing is his preference for the ceremonies involved in being a king over the day-to-day business of governing the country. Alternatively, it has been noted that the king's sensitivity to language and the eloquent and powerful speeches he makes as a result transform him into a sympathetic character in spite of his poor leadership.

Richard's character has been the focus not only for a discussion of the nature of good government, but also for an examination of personal identity. Richard was born and raised to be king; are he and the monarchy therefore one and the same, or does Richard have a personality and a life of his own? Questions regarding the king's identity occur repeatedly in the play. In II.i.241-42 after Richard has disinherited Bullingbrook,

Northumberland declares that "The King is not himself, but basely led / By flatterers" who turn him against the country's noblemen. In III.ii.82-83, when Richard begins to despair because Bullingbrook's troops outnumber his, Aumerle counsels him to remember who he is, and Richard replies, "I had forgot myself, am I not king?"

The most dramatic expressions of Richard's dilemma concerning his identity occur during the deposition scene. Once he has relinquished his crown to Bullingbrook, Richard describes himself as "unking'd" and as "nothing," yet considers himself king of his own griefs (IV.i.220, 201, 193). He calls himself a traitor for agreeing "T'undeck the pompous body of a king" (IV.i.250), and when Northumberland refers to him as "lord," Richard cries,

No lord of thine,...
Nor no man's lord. I have no name, no title,
No, not that name was given me at the font, But 'tis usurp'd. Alack the heavy day,
That I have worn so many winters out
And know not now what name to call myself!
(IV.i.254-59)

In a final gesture indicating the connection he has felt between the kingship and himself, the deposed Richard calls for a "glass" or mirror and smashes it after looking at his face (IV.i.276-91). Alone in his prison cell Richard continues to question his identity. In an elaborate metaphor (a metaphor explains or describes one thing by imaginatively comparing it to another□for example, the lion is the king of beasts), he compares his prison to the world and his thoughts to the people of that world, so that, as he puts it, "Thus play I in one person many people" (V.v.31). During the course of this game, he tries out several different identities□a saint, a beggar, a king□only to conclude that no man is or ever will be contented "till he be eas'd / With being nothing" (V.v.40-41).

A source of critical debate has been whether or not Richard learns from his suffering and becomes a better person by the close of the play. Most critics agree that Richard starts out as self-occupied and theatrical, and that his love for melodrama and ceremony hinders him from dealing sensibly with the practical realities of government. But while some assert that his attitude and level of incompetence remain much the same throughout the play, others refer to the remarks on music and time in his prison soliloquy as proof that he has come to recognize the responsibility he bears for his fall from power: "I wasted time," Richard, now a former king, observes, "and now doth time waste me" (V.v.49).

Lastly, some critics point to Richard's struggle with his murderers (V.v.102-12) as ultimate proof that he has developed through suffering into someone better than he once was.

Ross (Lord Ross):

He is a supporter of Bullingbrook and a coconspirator with the earl of Northumberland and Lord Willoughby for Bullingbrook's return to England so that he can reclaim his inheritance and reform the king's government. He is also concerned that his lands and wealth are in danger of being taken by the king and his favorites just as Bullingbrook's have been.

Rutland (Duke of Aumerle, afterwards Earl of Rutland):

See Aumerle

Salisbury (Earl of Salisbury):

A supporter of Richard II, he tries unsuccessfully I I . i v to convince the Welsh Captain and his troops not to desert the king, and afterward he predicts Richard's fall. In V.vi.8, Northumberland announces that Salisbury has been killed while rebelling against newly crowned Henry IV.

Scroop (Sir Stephen Scroop):

He is Richard's ally and, in III.ii, the bearer of bad news: he informs the king that the populace has turned against him, that Bushy and Green have been executed, and that York has sided with Bullingbrook. Richard's response is to dismiss his own troops in despair.

Servants:

In this play about kings, noblemen, and battle, there are numerous lords, officers, soldiers, servants, and other unnamed attendants□many without speaking parts□who fill out the scenes and contribute to the play's royal and martial atmosphere.

Servingman:

He is a servant to Edmund of Langley, duke of York, and a bearer of bad news. In II.ii, as the duke is trying to muster forces and money to defend King Richard against Bullingbrook, the serving-man informs him that his son Aumerle is away in Ireland fighting alongside the king and that the duchess of Gloucester□a possible source of funds□has died.

Soldiers:

In this play about kings, noblemen, and battle, there are numerous lords, officers, soldiers, servants, and other unnamed attendants—many with out speaking parts—who fill out the scenes and contribute to the play's royal and martial atmosphere.

Surrey (Duke of Surrey):

In IV.i.60-71, he sides with the duke of Aumerle when Aumerle is accused by Lord Fitzwater of murdering the duke of Gloucester. Gloucester's murder and the identity of his killers is a recurrent source of recrimination and conflict in the play.

Westminster (Abbot of Westminster):

He is present at King Richard's deposition in IV.i. 107-334, and is told by the earl of Northumberland to take custody of the bishop of Carlisle after Carlisle challenges Bullingbrook's right to become king. However, at the close of IV.i, he conspires with Carlisle and Aumerle to assassinate Bullingbrook. In V.vi. 19-21, Harry Percy (Hotspur) reports that the abbot has died of a guilty conscience.

Willoughby (Lord Willoughby):

Along with Lord Ross and the earl of Northumberland, Willoughby conspires to bring about the return of Bullingbrook to England and to his inheritance. Like Ross and Northumberland, Willoughby is worried about losing his own properties to pay for the king's excesses.

York (Edmund of Langley, Duke of York):

He is uncle to King Richard and Henry Bullingbrook, brother of John of Gaunt, and father of the duke of Aumerle. During much of the play York is torn between his sense of what is dutiful and what is just as he struggles to maintain fairness and order within his large royal family.

York's first appearance in the play is at the deathbed of his brother John of Gaunt, and his first remarks—which have to do with the king—are not complimentary. He warns Gaunt not to waste his dying breath by giving advice to Richard, "For all in vain comes counsel to his ear" (II.i.4). When Richard confiscates from Gaunt's estate the inheritance that should have gone to Gaunt's banished son, Bullingbrook, York cries out in dismay at such an injustice: "How long shall I be patient? ah, how long / Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong? (II.i.l63-64).

Nevertheless, while York condemns Richard for poor government and even for theft, he insists that as king, Richard is entitled to loyalty and respect from all of his subjects. Thus when Bullingbrook defies Richard and returns to England, York□who has been assigned as regent or "lord governor" in Richard's absence□calls him a traitor to his "anointed King" (II.iii.88-96), and declares that he would arrest Bullingbrook if his own forces were not outnumbered by his rebellious nephew's. After Richard is deposed, York's sense of duty shifts to the newly crowned Henry IV. He weeps as he tells his wife how "rude misgoverned hands from windows' tops / Threw dust and rubbish on King Richard's head" as the humiliated former king followed the triumphant new king into London (V.ii.5-6). But when he discovers that his own son, Aumerle, is involved in a plot to assassinate Henry, York shouts "Treason, foul treason!" and rushes off in horror to warn his king (V.ii.72).

York (Duchess of York):

She is the wife of Edmund of Langley, duke of York, and the mother of the duke of Aumerle. Her zealous efforts in V.iii to protect her son from punishment for treason result in comic relief. (Comic relief is a humorous speech, episode, or scene which lessens the tension that precedes it in a serious play and heightens the solemnity that fol lows it.) The arrival of the duchess at King Henry IV's door as he is confronting her son (the potential assassin) and her husband (the accuser) transforms a deadly political crisis into a comical family affair, or as the king puts it: "Our scene is alt'red from a serious thing, / And now chang'd to 'The Beggar and the King' " (V.iii.79-80).

Character Studies

Richard

Critical assessments of King Richard II vary widely, ranging from condemnation of Richard for betraying his royal office to sympathy for a weak but rightful ruler. Some critics have commented that while Richard views himself in a sentimental manner, it would be wrong for the audience to do so as well. They maintain that although Bolingbroke's rebellion is illegal, kingship is both sacred as well as a heavy burden that one must earn the right to endure. Richard's character is unsympathetically reviewed by commentators for transgressions both large and small. The king is thought by many characters to have ordered the death of Gloucester. Additionally, Richard orders both Mowbray and Bolingbroke to be banished, and then proceeds to confiscate the estate of Bolingbroke's father Gaunt after Gaunt's death. Legally, the estate and title belong to Bolingbroke. Also noted is Richard's rather sarcastic, flippant treatment of Bolingbroke and Mowbray and his insolent attitude displayed to his uncles, York and Gaunt. Accused of being more concerned with the appearance and ceremonies of kingship than with his responsibilities, Richard creates chaos in his kingdom as a result of both negligence and abuse of power, some critics maintain. They also contend that Richard deposes himself. He is often seen as self-absorbed and self-deluded into thinking that because he is legally and divinely ordained as king, he is not subject to human frailty, that he is above the law.

On the other hand, Richard is viewed much more sympathetically by other commentators. They maintain that while Richard is weak, he is not evil. Rather, in his weakness he is influenced by the evil counsel of his advisors, Bushy, Bagot, and Green. Although he is not an effective ruler, he is nevertheless the rightful ruler, sanctioned by both the law and God. Some critics also assert that after Richard is no longer king, he realizes the gulf that exists between the name "King" and the authority that the name represents. He is also finally moved to act rather than simply talk about what has happened to him: when his assassins arrive, he manages to kill two of them before he himself is slain. Some have compared him. to King Lear, arguing that in his final moments he comprehends the extent of his own responsibility for the events that have occurred.

Bolingbroke

Like Richard, Bolingbroke is viewed with alternatively sympathetic and unsympathetic eyes. He is seen. either as a traitor and a usurper, or as morally justified in taking the crown from an ineffective king. Some note that Just as Richard falls politically but experiences a spiritual rise, Bolingbroke rises politically but undergoes a spiritual decline when he seizes the crown belonging to Richard. Bolingbroke is sometimes viewed as a manipulative opportunist, a true politician with a clear sense of his goals.

Often Bolingbroke is accused of engineering Richard's downfall and forcing his abdication.

Despite being charged by some critics with rebellious ambition, Bolingbroke is defended by others. Some say he is silent regarding his motivations; we never know what he intends. Others suggest that Bolingbroke makes his illegal return from exile either to reclaim his father's estate and title, or to claim his right as a subject to be ruled by a responsible king. The same critics also give moral justification to Bolingbroke's execution of Richard's advisors, stating that his actions are directed toward the good of the commonwealth, whereas Richard's have always been directed toward his own self-interest. Bolingbroke is often seen as a man of action, compared to Richard who is prone to self-pitying reflection. Many acknowledge Bolingbroke to be a pragmatic, realistic man, better equipped to rule than Richard. In the opinion of many commentators, Richard deposes himself and is not strong-armed into surrender by a ruthless Bolingbroke.

Conclusion

Richard II is a play filled with political controversy. The conflict between Richard and Bolingbroke and all they represent remains unresolved in more than one sense. Critics will continue to debate whether Richard is weak or evil, overthrown or self-deposed, and whether Bolingbroke's motivations are political or personal and whether he 15 a usurper or the man who saved England from ruin. Similarly, the conflict lives on within Shakespeare's tetralogy, for although Richard dies at the end of *Richard II,* his prophesy that under Bolingbroke's rule civil unrest will plague England is made manifest in *Henry IV, Parts One* and *Two.* The tensions are only temporarily laid to rest in *Henry V.*

Themes

Kingship

Shakespeare's examination of kingship in *Richard II* focuses mainly on the conflict between the legal and divine right to rule, and the effectiveness of the ruler.

Many critics agree that in *Richard II,* King Richard is legally the rightful king; that he is commonly recognized by other characters in the playas having die divine right to rule; and that despite these rights, King Richard does not show himself to be an effective ruler. It is this opposition between Richard's right to rule and his failure to do so effectively that is the subject of much critical debate. In addition to examining this conflict within the play, some critics conjecture that the way in which Shakespeare presents these issues reflects his thoughts on the rule of the monarch who served during Shakespeare's lifetime: Queen Elizabeth. It has been noted that Bolingbroke and Richard both represent aspects of kingship which can be related to Queen Elizabeth: Bolingbroke acts like a ruler and has the popular support of the people, whereas Richard holds the right to rule. Additionally, the historical Richard II was often compared to Queen Elizabeth in the later years of her reign, as she, like Richard, had no heirs and the problem of succession was on the minds of the people. Due to the similarities between both Bolingbroke and Richard to Queen Elizabeth, some feel that Shakespeare felt compelled to render both Bolingbroke and Richard in a sympathetic manner. The audience is drawn to Bolingbroke's power and kingly air, and has a sense that he has been unjustly banished and disinherited. At the same time, we may feel pity or sympathy for Richard. He is viewed by many to be weak, but not evil, and he receives bad counsel from corrupt advisors. Additionally, he *is* the rightful king, even though it is argued that he deludes himself into thinking that having the noble appearance and rights of a king override his responsibility to his people. Some critical commentary suggests that Shakespeare did not favor either view of kingship, and that he presented both Bolingbroke and Richard in an ambiguous manner so as to explore both sides of the issue.

Just as critics have debated the question of whether or not Shakespeare advocates the rights of the king over the king's effectiveness, others have questioned whether the divine right overrides the sovereign's legal obligations. Is Richard above the law, since he and many other characters believe he has been ordained by God to be king? Some critics have noted that even while characters such as Gaunt and York acknowledge Richard's divine right to rule, the same characters also recognize that Richard has failed to act like a king. The play cites several instances where Richard breaks the law: he is implicated in the death of Gloucester, and he breaks the inheritance laws by confiscating Gaunt's estate rather than allowing the transfer of Gaunt's money, land, and title to his son Bolingbroke. It has been suggested that while the commonwealth may have held that its king is sanctioned by God *am* the law, the people had no procedure for compelling a king to abide by the law. The result of Richard's disobeyance of the law, despite the fact that he is not legally punished, is that he loses the support of

his people, and he gives his subjects the license to break the law themselves. Bolingbroke does just that when he returns illegally from exile. The nature of king ship is further examined when a king (Bolingbroke) ascends the throne with the support of the people but without legal or divine sanction.

Language, Imagery, and Symbolism

Often examined as a way of highlighting important themes in *Richard II,* the language, images, and symbolism used in the play are all complex and rich in meaning. Some critics have noted the way these elements reflect the theme of Richard's fall, and Bolingbroke's corresponding rise. Words and images that evoke the sense of rising and falling are used heavily throughout the play, in word pairs- such as "ascend" and" descend," "high" and "low," and "sky" and "earth"-and in images such as ladders, scales, and buckets ill a well, one rising and one falling. Another set of images used includes those related to the elements of nature: fire, water, earth, and air. Richard is initially associated, as the sun-king, with fire and Bolingbroke with water, as a flood, until their fortunes are reversed. The shift in the elemental imagery underscores the transfer of power from Richard to Bolingbroke. Other critics have shown that images related to growth and vegetation similarly emphasize the passage of power from the old and sterile ruler (Richard) to the young and fertile Bolingbroke. Additionally, commentators have noticed Biblical images and parallels that suggest the fall of humanity in the characters of both Richard and Bolingbroke.

Other critics have focused specifically on the play's language. A common observation among critics is that in many ways, such as the contrast in the play between formal, rhymed verse and blank verse, the play emphasizes that a distance exists between words themselves and their true meaning. Others suggest that this discrepancy between language and reality is dramatized through the character of Richard, who loses his faith in the power of language and learns that words do not express fact, but only desires or wishes, that the word "king" itself does not give the one who bears that name the authority of king.

Ceremony and Play-Acting

Richard II's emphasis on ceremony and role-playing has been examined by a number of critics. Richard seems to be *playing* the role of king, more concerned with the nobility of his appearance than with the reality and responsibilities of kingship. Some critics have argued that the play suggests that kingship itself is a sham, that a great gulf exists between the appearance of royal authority and the reality of political power. Others contend that the play is *about* playing, that Richard and Bolingbroke both produce or set the scenes in which they appear. Another critic examines the effect of the somewhat comic, farcical scenes- in which Aumerle's plot against Bolingbroke is discovered and announced to Bolingbroke- on the rest of the play's treatment of ceremony and play-acting. It is argued that rather than mocking the seriousness and gravity of the play, this

comic interlude forces the audience to rethink and more deeply value the ceremonial displays of kingship which surrounds the interlude.

The way many characters in the play use ceremonies or theatricality as a mask to conceal their true nature and intentions is also another area of study. It has been observed that Richard, for example, makes use of theatrical antics and language as a diversionary tactic in order to avoid going through with "unkinging" himself and to continue to deny the reality of what is happening. He refuses to read the charges against him as Northumberland demands (in Act IV, scene i), claiming that his eyes are filled with tears, he is blinded by them. He seems to be evading the truth about his crimes against the state, but at the same time, he says he sees in himself a traitor.

Modern Connections

At first glance, the world of *Richard II* appears to have little in common with ours. The play itself is written entirely in formal, often rhyming, lines of poetic verse rather than in the prose which today's audiences are used to hearing. Also unfamiliar to modern audiences is Richard's preoccupation with divine right, a doctrine which holds that a king's fitness to rule is determined by God only and not by the people. As Richard puts it when he feels his authority as ruler is being questioned:

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.77-81)
(As king□whether divinely appointed or not□ Richard speaks for the nation as a whole, and that is why he refers to himself in the first-person plural: "show *us* the hand of God," "for well *we* know," etc.)

There are, however, other issues in *Richard II* which remain relevant today. One example is the conflict that occurs between family members and between generations. Most of the principal characters in the play are related to one another. Richard's grandfather was King Edward III. Richard's father (who died before he could become king) was Ed ward, prince of Wales (also known as the "Black Prince"). The prince of Wales was the oldest brother of John of Gaunt (also known as the duke of Lancaster), Edmund of Langley (also known as the duke of York), and Thomas of Woodstock (the murdered duke of Gloucester). Thus Gaunt, York, and Gloucester are King Richard's uncles, and Gaunt's son Henry Bullingbrook, as well as York's son Aumerle, are the king's cousins.

In the play, Richard's grandfather, Edward III; and his father, the Black Prince, are fondly remembered and deeply admired by Richard's uncles, Gaunt and York. In their opinion, Richard never measures up to his grandfather's and father's formidable reputations and is too preoccupied with luxurious living and with the latest fashions to listen to sound advice (II.i.19-26). Further, they are shocked that Richard was capable of having his uncle Gloucester□his own flesh and blood and the son of his royal grandfather□assassinated.

Richard, on the other hand, is tired of listening to the advice and complaints of "sullen" old men like his uncles (II.i. 139), and wishes that they would respect his own "royal blood" and treat him as they should treat a king (II.i. 118).

Another timely issue in the play is taxation. Richard admits that he spends lavishly just to maintain his own extravagances and a large court of followers (I.iv.43-44); nevertheless, when his treasury is empty and he wants to finance a war in Ireland,

rather than economize he leases portions of his kingdom for ready cash, and imposes open-ended taxes or "charters" on the wealthy people of the nation (I.iv.43-52). Neither of these actions makes Richard II a popular king.

Good government is a significant issue in *Rich ard II,* as it is today. Richard ignores his subjects' discontentment. By contrast, Bullingbrook is well-loved by the people of England and□according to Richard□actively seeks out their affection by "div[ing] into their hearts / With humble and familiar courtesy" (I.iv.25-26). Thus when Bullingbrook defies his sentence of exile and re turns to England to reclaim his inheritance, he is supported by the populace, and after Richard is deposed, the people rejoice when Bullingbrook becomes King Henry IV.

Today, taxation and the size and quality of government are the source of much debate and can win or lose an election for politicians. In Shakespeare's time, these topics could be dangerous. On February 7, 1601, supporters of the ambitious earl of Essex commissioned the theatrical company to which Shakespeare belonged to give a special performance *of Richard II,* thereby hoping to incite the populace against Queen Elizabeth, who, like Richard, was resented for levying heavy taxes and for indulging favorites at court. The following day, Essex led an unsuccessful rebellion against the queen, and he was later executed for treason. Shakespeare's acting troupe was questioned regarding their part in the rebellion, but was absolved of any wrongdoing.

Overviews

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
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- Critical Essay #9

Critical Essay #1

Source: "Who Deposed Richard the Second?," in *Essays in Criticism,* Vol. XVII, No.4, October, 1967, Pl'. 411-33.

[In the essay that follow;, French analyzes the characters and structure of Richard II *, maintaining that the play presents an inconsistent rendering of one of the key events in the play- the deposition of Richard French states that in the first half of the play, there is little to indicate that the king will be deposed, but in the second half of the play, other characters dearly view Richard as having been deposed]*

A couple of years ago I saw a competent amateur performance of *Richard II As* it happened I had not read the play for some time, and I naturally approached it with certain assumptions in mind- assumptions derived ultimately, no doubt, from scholars such as Tillyard. But as I watched, I first felt puzzled, then irritated, and finally astonished. The play was not mak ing sense in the only way in which (I had thought) it *could* make sense; nor did it seem to be making sense in any other way. Afterwards, I re-read the piece, to see where I or the actors had been stupid; but to my further surprise I found that the puzzlement I had felt was quite justified. The blur was not in the performance and not in my mind, but in Shakespeare's play. The present article is an attempt to describe this blur.

The assumptions we take to *Richard II* are, I have said, derived from Tillyard and others. The most important one is that Richard was deposed by Henry Bolingbroke, who by his action involved England in a century of unrest and civil war which was only brought to an end at last by Henry VII. This is in fact the interpretation not only of *Richard II* but also of the eight main Histories that Tillyard proposed over twenty years ago; and it has dominated scholars' and critics' thinking ever since. It is still current. In 1963, for example, Kenneth Muir remarked that 'we are warned over and over again that Richard's deposition is a sin which will be punished by the horrors of civil war' (introduction to Signet Classics ed., p. xxix); while in 1964 Andrew Cairncross repeated that in Henry VI's time the 'original crime- the deposition and murder of Richard II by Henry IV-was still unexpiated' (introduction to Arden ed. of 3 *Henry VI,* p. 1). Now, there is no particular reason why this account of Histories should be wrong: if Tillyard found it in Edward Hall's Chronicle, Shakespeare could have found it there too; and since it is a nice neat account, he may well have made useof it. Indeed, in History plays apart from *Richard II,* Shakespeare more than once refers to Richard's deposition. In 2 *Henry VI,* for example, Richard Duke of York tries to convince Salisbury and Warwick of his title to the throne, and in the course of his argument refers to Richard II Who, after Edward the Third's death, reigned as king till Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster, The eldest son and heir of John of Gaunt,

Crowned by the name of Henry the Fourth, Seized on the realm, deposed the rightful king, Sent his poor queen to France, from whence
she came,
And him to Pomfret, where as all you know, Harmless Richard was murdered

traitorously.
(2HVl, II. *ii.* 20-27)

Here it is assumed as a fact that Richard was deposed; though whether it is as *important* an assumption as E. M. W. Tillyard made out is another question entirely. The Henry VI plays were written before *Richard II;* but in 1 *Henry IV,* written after it, the charge that Richard was 'deposed' is repeated- by the very Northumberland who, in *Richard II,* helped to procure the crown for Bolingbroke. He talks of the time when the unhappy King

Whose wrongs in us God pardon!- did set forth Upon his Irish expedition;
From whence he intercepted did return
To be deposed, and shortly murdered.
(1HIV, 1. iii. 148-152)

And in *Richard II* itself, Richard makes the same accusation. When in the 'deposition scene' Northumberland tries to make him sign a confession of his 'grievous crimes', Richard retorts that if Northumberland's own crimes were 'upon record', he would

find one heinous article,
Containing the deposing of a king.
(IV. i. 233-234)

When Richard bids farewell to his queen, he asks her to 'tell the lamentable tale of me', the result of which will be that

some will mourn in ashes, some coal. black,
For the deposing of a rightful king.
(V. i. 49-50)

Nevertheless, the assumption that, in *Richard II,* the King is deposed by Henry Bolingbroke is, in my view, not wholly borne out by the text of the play. You may ask: if that is the case, how comes it that almost everyone takes away from the piece the impression that this is what in fact happens? The answer to this question will (I hope) emerge from my critical scrutiny of the text; and we shall be led right into the imaginative blur in the play- a blur that seems to me far more crucial than the oddities which commonly worry critics (e.g. Woodstock's murder, or Richard's blanks and benevolences). The business of the deposition is of course connected with the puzzle about Bolingbroke's motivation: so I shall discuss both issues, and shall proceed more or less chronologically.

Our difficulties begin towards the end of II. i. After Richard has departed for Ireland, Northumberland, Ross and Willoughby are left by themselves, and begin a diatribe against Richard's rule (he has just confiscated Gaunt's estates). England is going to the dogs, and they wonder what they can do to save her. Total wreck is unavoidable, says Ross. Not so, says Northumberland, arrestingly if obscurely

Not so, even through the hollow eyes of
death I spy life peering; but I dare not say How near the tidings of our comfort is.
(II. i. 270-272)

Ross and Willoughby understandably ask what he means, and he replies that he has just heard that Bolingbroke and many others have set sail from Brittany and mean to land in the north. He goes on:

If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke, Imp out our drooping country's broken wing,
Redeem from broking pawn the blemished
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.
(291-296)

Asked to comment on the kind of metaphors we find here, we would probably say, disparagingly, that they are simple, conventional, emblematic- typical, in short, of the young Shakespeare and the early 1590s. True enough, as long as we add that, in the given context, the metaphors are very obscure indeed. The phrase 'shake of our slavish yoke' suggests getting rid of the king, but it is not clear whether 'imp out' means *'engraft* new feathers' (i.e. strengthen England by removing the people who are misleading Richard), or 'engraft *new* feathers' (i.e. substitute someone else for Richard). The same sort of difficulty arises over 'redeem' and 'wipe off'-nor are we sure in the latter case whether the gilt! guilt pun is a hit at Richard's (?assumed) complicity m Woodstock's murder. The penultimate line could mean either that they must make Richard 'look' more kingly, or else that they must put another, more kingly, monarch in his place. Northumberland, in fact, is talking in riddles so far as the audience is concerned, though his fellow lords seem to be quite satisfied with his meaning. We do not know whether he means to seat Bolingbroke on the throne, or whether he only wants to use him to force Richard to reform- and, as a matter of historical fact (which Shakespeare could have found in Holinshed) Richard had been restrained in this way before, by the so-called 'appellants' between 1387 and 1389.

The difficulties continue in the next scene, which brings the news of Bolingbroke's arrival and the desertion of the people to him. At line 40 Greene comes in and tells the Queen, Bushy and Bagot what has happened; he refers to Bolingbroke as an 'enemy', says he comes 'with uplifted arms', and reveals that many powerful lords have 'fled to him'. When York enters (at 72) he says that Bolingbroke and his followers have come to make Richard 'lose at home', repeats that many nobles have deserted, and adds that 'the commons [are] cold' and may revolt. At line 104 he is wondering how he can get 'money for these wars', and a moment later asks the favourites to go and muster men. Thus the impression we have at this point is that Bolingbroke has come back to get, by force of arms if need be, something- but what? The favourites, too, to wards the end of the scene (122 *ad fin),* are full of foreboding, and clearly expect a conflict; but at no Junc ture do we gather what they think Bolingbroke is after.

The opening of the next scene looks as though it might be going to give us an answer, but our expectations are raised only to be disappointed. We see Bolingbroke come in with Northumberland, and we probably expect- reasonably enough- that their words will reveal something of their plans and intentions. Not a bit of it: they pass the first few moments of the scene in mutual compliment, Northumberland spending seventeen lines congratulating Bolingbroke on the excellence of his conversation. We never learn what this 'fair discourse' was about. Vital information is withheld in a way that seems capricious; and as a result when Bolingbroke and Northumberland confront Richard in the third Act, we remain ignorant whether they have concerted their plans, or even whether they have any plans. It is curious that, if Shakespeare was the Tudor propagandist he is alleged to be, he should have missed this very easy opportunity of showing his Tudor audience how wicked Bolingbroke was. It is odder still that, as a competent dramatist, he should have missed his chance to suggest at least *something* about the working of Bolingbroke's mind.

At line 70 Bolingbroke says for the first time why he has come back: when Berkeley addresses him as 'My Lord of Hereford', he retorts that his name is Lancaster,

And I am come to seek that name *in*
England.

This is his story, and he sticks to it with dogged pertinacity right up to the point in Act IV where, *after* York has told him that Richard has adopted him heir 'with willing soul', he exclaims 'In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne' (IV. i. 113). At no point before this does Bolingbroke give the least hint that he is aiming at the crown. We may conjecture that this was what was 'really' in his mind all along, but that is a kind of guesswork irrelevant to the highly conventional art of which Shakespeare was a master; such speculations would probably never have crossed an Elizabethan's mind. But the fact that in *Richard II,* forewarned though we are, some such questions do persistently occur to us, suggests that Shakespeare may be misusing his conventions rather than using them.

To return to II. iii. York comes in at line 80, and implies that Bolingbroke is a traitor ('I am no traitor's uncle'). It turns out (89 f.) that 'traitor' indicates only that Bolingbroke has come back from banishment without permission and, moreover, in arms. A little later York repeats the charge:

Thou art a banished man, and here art come, Before the expiration of thy time,
In braving arms against thy sovereign.
(II. iii. 109-111)

When we see this in the theatre it is especially noticeable that York, who at this point does not know why Bolingbroke has returned, obviously assumes it is only to reclaim his rights. Not till York has finished his speech does Bolingbroke tell him that

As I was banished, I was banished Hereford;
But as I come, I come for Lancaster.
(112-113)

And Bolingbroke goes on to give a passionately reasoned account of his wrongs which has the ring of profound conviction, in the sense that we feel the man's whole being is engaged, that he is not dissembling or being politic. If Shakespeare had meant us here to suspect that Bolingbroke was being disingenuous he could easily have suggested it. He does not. Bolingbroke is unique among Shakespeare's ambitious men (if he *is* an ambitious man) in that he is never given an opportunity to open his mind to us; long before Shakespeare wrote this play he let the go-getting Lords in *Henry VI* disclose their ambitions- Suffolk and York, for instance. But so strong is Bolingbroke's feeling in the speech we have discussed (and in his later words at III. i. 16-27) that we arguably have what is in effect a self-revelation. York takes his nephew's words at face value; so do we. Northumberland now chimes in:

The noble Duke hath sworn his coming is But for his own; and for the right of that We all have strongly sworn to give him aid. And let him ne'er see joy that breaks that oath!
(147-150)

What is interesting here is that 'but' in the second line, the implication being that someone might suspect, or does suspect, that Bolingbroke is concerned with much more than 'his own'; perhaps Northumberland is voicing what he conceives to be York's unspoken fear, only, of course, in order to allay it. Yet this is such a small point that it goes unnoticed in the theatre; and even in the study it is far too small for us to be able to argue that Northumberland had already thought of getting rid of Richard. Bolingbroke finally asks his uncle to accompany him to Bristow castle, which is held by the favourites (the 'caterpillars of the commonwealth'), and York replies:

It may be I will go with you; but yet I'll
pause
For I am loath to break our country's laws.
(167-168)

What does York mean by breaking the 'country's laws'? Does he refer to the illegal execution of the favourites (whom Bolingbroke has 'sworn to weed and pluck away'), or does he mean the mere act of keeping company with a traitor? This is again a trifling matter, but again we cannot be sure. At least we note that York seemingly does not object to Bolingbroke's high-handed action over the favourites, any more than he does in the scene where they are about to be executed (III. i); so it seems dubious for Peter Ure to call the execution an 'act of quasi-regal authority' (Arden ed., p. lxvii). If it was meant to be seen as anything so decisive, York would surely have been allowed to make a fuss.

I pass now to the first of the three crucial scenes which bring together my two themes- Bolingbroke's motives and the nature of Richard's fall. The scenes are III. ii, III. iii and IV. i.

Returning from Ireland, where he has heard from Bagot of Bolingbroke's expedition, Richard talks about 'rebels', 'treacherous feet', 'usurping steps' and 'foul rebellion', referring to Bolingbroke as the 'sovereign's foe'. In his second long speech (III. ii. 36 f.) he says that when the sun is hidden

Then thieves and robbers range abroad
unseen
In murthers and in outrage boldly here,
but when the sun comes out,
Then murthers, treasons, and detested sins . . .
Stand bare and naked, trembling at them
selves.

He goes on to identify Bolingbroke as 'this thief, this traitor'. It is not clear at first how far we are meant to identify the emblematic robbers and murderers with Bolingbroke; but the last phrase clinches the matter. Richard is suggesting- the first time anyone definitely does so- that Bolingbroke is after the crown. This interpretation of his admittedly oblique words is confirmed by his explicit use, a few lines later, of the verb 'depose':

The breath of worldly men cannot depose The deputy elected by the Lord.
(56-57)

The idea has now entered his head, and we note that it has done so *before* he hears the disastrous tidings brought by Salisbury and Scroope- that is, he does not yet know that his own forces are weak. When he learns that the Welshmen have dispersed, he asks 'is my kingdom lost?' and, a moment later, 'strives Bolingbroke to be as great as we?' In the long speech provoked by the news of the favourites' death, he says:

Let's choose executors and talk of wills.
And yet not so- for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
(148-150)

This use of 'deposed' (which, standing alone, could arguably mean just 'laid aside': *QE.D.,* S.v. 'depose', 2a) links up with the 'sad stories of the death of kings', because some kings 'have been deposed' (156-7). By the end of the scene Richard has convinced himself that he is about to be supplanted by Bolingbroke. He goes so far as to discharge his remaining followers, and with these words:

let them hence away,
From Richard's night, to Bolingbroke's fair
day.
(217-218)

Thus, so far as the audience are concerned, it is Richard himself who first expresses the idea that his crown is at stake.

In the next scene Bolingbroke and Richard finally meet, though at first through Northumberland. At the start York rebukes Northumberland for not saying *'King* Richard', and a bout of punning follows:

North. Your grace mistakes; only to be brief,
Left I his title out.
Yom The time hath been,
Would you have been so brief with him, he would
Have been so brief with you to shorten you,
For taking so the head, your whole head's length.
Bo/. Mistake not, uncle, further than you should.
York Take not, good cousin, further than you should,
Lest you mistake: the heavens are o'er our heads.
'Bo/. I know it, uncle; and oppose not myself
Against their will.
(III. iii. 10-19)

The suggestion is that York suspects Bolingbroke wants to take wrongly something beyond what he has declared; possibly the crown. But it is no more than a suspicion on York's part, and in any case Richard knows nothing of this suspicion either now or later. Moreover if 'take not' is intended as advice to Bolingbroke, it is advice which he unswervingly follows. The whole exchange, dominated as it is by York's hideously unamusing puns, has an uncertain tone and a debatable effect. Likewise, it is hard for the actor who plays Bolingbroke to know what tone to take in his long speech (31 f.): should the fivefold repetition of 'King Richard' be sarcastic or not? It is a problem for the reader too, since the tone of the speech could well reveal what is 'in' Bolingbroke's mind over and above what he chooses to say. And yet so far as one can see no irony is intended: the manner is ceremonially flat, recalling the sort of verse we find in Act I. Only once does any strong feeling show through. Bolingbroke has asked Northumberland to tell Richard that he returns from exile with no object beyond recovering his rights, but if they are not granted

If not, I'll use the advantage of my power
And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood
Rained from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen
The which, how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke
It is such crimson tempest should bedrench The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's land, My stooping duty tenderly shall show.
(42-48)

Bolingbroke feels a positive delight in making the threat, but checks himself immediately; moreover when Northumberland later repeats to Richard the substance of what Bolingbroke has said (103 f.) he leaves out the threat. Bolingbroke goes on:

Be he [Richard] the fi.re, I'll be the yielding
water; The rage be *his,* whilst on the earth I rain My waters- on the earth, and not on him.
(58-60)

At first it sounds as though he intends to p lay a passive role; but there seems to be a pun on rain reign (noted by Muir but not by Ure or Dover Wilson) which makes us think again. Shakespeare has built in two contradictory pointers as to Bolingbroke's intentions, and leaves us wondering whether he can be said to have a coherent state of mind at all. We are again pulled up short a little further on:

See, see, King Richard doth himself appear, As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the East,
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent To dim *his* glory and to stain the track
Of his bright passage to the occident.
(62-67)

We have met this problem before: what is the relation between metaphor and fact? Bolingbroke is comparing Richard to the sun and himself to the clouds; but what does 'dim' mean in terms of political actuality? It could be translated either as 'make less' or as 'extinguish altogether'- a slight distinction, but one that makes all the difference between correction and deposition ('stain' seems to imply the former alone). Is the uncertainty Bolingbroke's or Shakespeare's? Since there is no evidence elsewhere that Bolingbroke has any intention of removing the king, we must conclude, tentatively, that it is Shakespeare's. The uncertainty is pervasive throughout this scene, even in minor details: for example, York's reply to Bolingbroke's lines quoted above begins 'Yet looks he like a king. . . . ' It would be fruitless to try and decide whether 'yet' refers purely to time or whether it means 'nevertheless'; in other words, whether or not York is now half-admitting that in some minds there is the idea that Richard may not be king for much longer.

At any rate, Richard now shows just how kingly he can be; in the long speech to Northumberland, Bolingbroke's emissary, he is genuinely *regal* for the first and only time in the play. Despite the firmness and dignity of his words, however, his mind is full of thoughts of deposition; he says

show us the hand of God
That hath dismissed us from our steward
ship;
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.
(77-81)

He accuses the rebels of lifting 'vassal hands against my head' and threatening the 'glory of my precious crown', and ends with a vivid evocation of the horrors of the civil war which will take place in the future as aresultofBolingbroke'spresentactions.

Northumberland, in his reply, goes to great pains to quash Richard's notion that Bolingbroke is after the throne, or that there will be civil war, now or later. He reports Bolingbroke as swearing by all he holds sacred that

His coming hither hath no further scope Than for his meal royalties, and to beg Infranchisement immediate on *his* knees, Which on thy royal party granted once, His glittering arms he will commend to rust, His barbed steeds to stables, and his heart To faithful service of your Majesty.
This, swears he as he is a prince, is just; And, as I am a gentleman, I credit him.
(112-120)

As with much of the play's verse, the tone of this is hard to disengage: the verse is so flat, and frankly so undistinguished, that an actor could extract from it almost any tone of voice he liked. He could make Northumberland sound sincere, or sarcastic, or cautious- for instance he could say 'lineal royalties' neutrally, or else emphasise the 'lineal', thus conceding Richard's fears only to pooh-pooh them. It is not merely that Shakespeare is asking us to work hard and pay close attention; he is also (it seems) asking us to make up his mind for him.

Richard, at all events, takes Northumberland's words at their face value, and his reply has an unmistakable note of relief:

Northumberland, say thus the king returns:
His noble cousin is right welcome hither, And all the number of his fair demands Shall be accomplished without contradiction; With all the gracious utterance that thou hast Speak to his gentle hearing kind commends.
(121-126)

It sounds as though his fears, which have been building up since the beginning of III. ii, have been allayed. And though he at once turns to Aumerle, hating himself for his self-abasement, it seems that what he has in mind is the repeal of Bolingbroke's banishment rather than anything more radical:

0 God! 0 God! that e'er this tongue of
mine,
That laid the sentence of dread banishment
On you proud man, should take it off again
With words of sooth!
(133-136)
Yet he still has forebodings, though he expresses them obliquely:
0 that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
Or that I could forget what I have been!

Or not remember what I must be now!
(136-139)

The last 'what': is he 'now' going to be a king whose royal prerogatives have been circumscribed, or is he going to cease being a king at all? Again we have the feeling that the words spoken correspond only approximately to what is 'in the character's mind', and that we do not quite know how to take them. Perhaps the safest explanation here is that Richard has a strong streak of the masochist in him, and that he gets positive pleasure from making his plight appear worse than it really is- though we do not even know what it 'really' is, since we have no idea what is in Bolingbroke's mind and his motives remain utterly obscure. It is *hindsight* that makes us guess he wanted the crown.

Northumberland now returns from Bolingbroke but, *before* he has a chance to report Bolingbroke's reply, Richard bursts out:

What must the king do now? Must he
submit?
The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?
The king shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of king? a God's name, let it go.
(143-146)

His pendulum has swung to the extreme of self-abasement; but it has done so without the slightest provocation from external events. His outburst could, I suppose, be triggered off by a particularly bellicose demonstration from the soldiers whom Bolingbroke (49-53) ordered to march up and down. Yet there is no stage-direction to this effect in the Quartos or the Folio; whereas in a comparable scene in 3 *Henry VI* the Folio has the very explicit direc tion 'He stamps with his foot, and the Soldiers show themselves' (I. i. 169). From our text of *Richard II,* we can only suppose that Richard's outburst is the culmination of the hysteria which has been mounting ever since line 133 (nor would a threatening demonstration accord with Bolingbroke's habitual caution). *As* far as Richard is concerned, the situation remains just as it was seventy lines before, when he made that dignified speech to Northumberland, who returned the conciliatory reply quoted in part above. Yet when he addresses Northumberland, who has come back from Bolingbroke, he talks about 'King Bolingbroke' (173), and adds 'Down, court! down, king!' (182).

Up to this point, then, there is little evidence to suggest that the Bolingbroke faction have ever given a thought to deposing Richard: Shakespeare puts all the talk about deposition into Richard's own mouth. Indeed, it would not be fantastic to wonder whether Shakespeare did not intend us to see Richard as suggesting the idea to Bolingbroke. At all events, that is a more tenable theory than that Bolingbroke forces it on Richard.

When the King finally meets his cousin face to face, it is still Richard who keeps harping on the crown. Bolingbroke kneels to him, but Richard, pointing to his crown, says

Up, cousin, up; your heart is up, I know, Thus high at least, although your knee be low.
(194-195)

He twists Bolingbroke's protestation that 'I come but for mine own', retorting 'Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all'. Bolingbroke again protests:

So far be mine, my most redoubted lord,
As my true service shall deserve your love,
and again Richard plays on the words:
Well you deserve. They well deserve to have
That know the strong'st and surest way to get.
(196-201)

Finally Richard acknowledges, or half-acknowledges, Bolingbroke as his 'heir', and adds

What you will have, I'll give, and willing too,
For do we must what force will have us do.
(206-207)

He has capitulated; capitulated not to force (as he says) nor to persuasion, not to York or Northumberland or Bolingbroke, but to himself. No 'force' is necessary. This is not the case in Holinshed, where Northumberland, solemnly promising Richard safe-conduct, ambushes him and takes him prisoner (Holinshed, 500/2/13; quoted *by* Bullough, *Narrative & Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare,* III, 402-3). For Shakespeare's Richard the mere *show* of force, mounted (so far as the audience know) to gain a strictly limited objective, is more than enough. Thus he has precisely fulfilled the prophecy made by the dying John of Gaunt:

0, 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 possessed, Which art possessed now *to depose thyself*'
(II. i. 104- 108)

Richard has done just that: at no-one's prompting but his own, he has deposed himself.

The reason why people have accepted without question the view that Richard was deposed by Bolingbroke is, perhaps, that it is Richard's own view. We have, in fact, a case rather like that of *Othello,* where (as Dr. Leavis pointed out long ago) the traditional view of Othello has been much the same as Othello's. Yet the case here is more difficult; for as the quotations from other Histories at the beginning of this essay show, Richard's view of himself is the one which, elsewhere, Shakespeare apparently accepts. Moreover in 2 *Henry IV,* Henrythe fonner Bolingbroke- says to his son:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways

I met this crown. . . .
(2HIV, IV. v. 184- 186)

It is easy enough, armed with Richard's remarks about himself and with references to him in other Histories, to read back into *Richard II* the notion that Bolingbroke was the guilty party and that Richard, though not blameless (over favourites, finances, and Woodstock), was deprived of his office by force. This is in fact the assumption that critics have habitually started from. What I question is whether it represents a true and accurate response to Shakespeare's play- never mind about the other Histories, the Tudor Myth, and the National Epic. Bearing in mind such doubts, let us go on to look at the 'deposition scene'.

After the bitter quarrel in which four men accuse Aumerle of having caused Woodstock's death (an episode which adds a further touch of confusion to the already vague attitude the play has taken to Richard's complicity therein), York enters with news from Richard:

Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee From plume-plucked Richard, who with willing soul
Adopts thee heir, and his high sceptre yields To the possession of thy royal hand.
Ascend his throne, descending now from him,
And long live Henry, fourth of that name!
(IV. i. 107-112)

One incidental detail of the message is intriguing: how are we supposed to take 'with *willing* soul'? Those who want to share Richard's view of things must turn York into a sycophant, which he is surely too honest to be. If, on the other hand, my reading is correct, we must take the phrase quite literally, and after all Richard, at the end of III. iii, *was* 'willing'.

The Bishop of Carlisle now breaks in with an impassioned objection to the whole proceeding. What is remarkable about this well-known speech is that it contains no reference to the *deposing* of Richard (though it does mention the dire consequences of crowning Bolingbroke); its emphasis is rather *on judging* him:

Would God that any in this noble presence
Were enough noble to be upright *judge*
Of noble Richard! then true noblesse would
Learn him forbearance from so foul a wrong.
What subject can *give sentence* on his king?
And who sits here that is not Richard's subject? Thieves are not *judged* but they are by to hear, Although apparent guilt be seen in them,
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,

And he himself not present?
(117-129)

This is a baffling speech, because at this stage no-one has proposed to judge Richard. Nobody has publicly suggested that he is unfit to reign; no-one but himself has proposed he should step down. It is not till nearly one hundred lines later that Northumberland tries to get him to sign a schedule of his 'grievous crimes' that is the first we learn of his being formally accused of anything, and consequently, in terms of this play, the first occasion on which he could possibly be 'judged'. Commentators do not seem to notice this: the Arden editor, for instance, compiles a note on Elizabethan beliefs about the right of a subject to judge his king, without ever asking himself what Carlisle is talking about. The only explanation for the oddity must lie *outside* the play- in an Old Play, or the Chronicles. In fact there is a perfectly good explanation in Holinshed (512/2/29; Bullough, op. cit., III, 410-11), but Shakespeare chose not to use it. One can of course argue that 'the audience knew their history inside out' (thus several critics); but if they did, why did Shakespeare elsewhere go to such pains to explain legal and constitutional issues- as he does for example in the hundred line disquisition on the Salic Law in *Henry V* (I. ii), or in Richard Duke of York's lengthy statement of his claim to the throne in 2 *Henry VI,* previously mentioned, a claim which has already been expounded at tedious length by Mortimer in 1 *Henry VI* (II. v)? We must conclude that when he wrote *Richard II* Shakespeare was not quite sure what he was trying to do.

When Richard comes in he starts play-acting, and in response to one of his fantasies Bolingbroke, with some impatience, says

I thought you had been willing to resign.
('Willing' picks up York's use of the word at 108.)

Richard replies:

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.
(190-193)

Perhaps it is the familiarity of this dying fall that blinds us to the fact that Richard is engaging in double-think: he admits he is 'willing' to resign his 'crown', but at once charges Bolingbroke with having 'deposed' him! And, as we saw earlier, he charges Northumberland too with 'deposing' him (234). In reply to another reminder from Bolingbroke, Richard equivocates:

Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be.
Therefore no 'no', for I resign to thee.
(201-202)

He is having his cake and eating it: extracting the maximum pleasure from seeing himself in the *role* of a deposed king, and also from protesting that he should never have been deposed in the first place. And it is in this self-regarding role that he throws out the account of what has happened which has become the official version. He now

resigns the office of king with deliberate and knife-twisting formality (203-222). Northumberland asks him to read and sign the list of his crimes,

That, by confessing them, the souls of men May deem that you are worthily deposed. (226- 227)

The surprising thing here is that Northumberland has fallen into Richard's own terminology and view of the situation- a view which Northumberland has not held before, which only Richard has ever put forward (but see my comment on the Garden scene, below). I do not think that Shakespeare is being subtle, though it would be attractive to argue that Richard has hypnotised the tough Earl as well as many willing critics. Two other explanations are possible. One is that Shakespeare simply nodded- which is not an explanation at all. The other is that he suddenly realised, at this late stage, that he could not write the sort of play he had set out to write, that it was a practical impossibility for him to present on the Elizabethan stage a Richard so much at odds with the official one (who was political dynamite anyway). He therefore started to make the play's 'truth' correspond with Richard's personal 'truth', and scattered hints of the Ricardian view throughout the play. Unfortunately he did not go back and remove the non-Richardian view which holds good till nearly the end of Act III. I do not pretend to know why he started to write about a Richard who abdicated rather than being deposed. Perhaps he was genuinely confused about the deposition business- and it *is* terribly confusing, whether you go to Holinshed or to modem historians *(see,* for example: Anthony Steele, *Richard II* [1941], 1962, Pl'. 263-85; May McKisach, *The Fourteenth Century* [Oxford History of England, vol. V], 1959, Pl'. 492-6; E. F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century* [O.HE., vol. VI], 1961, Pl"

10-17). If professional historians who have access to all surviving documents dealing with the events of 1399 make heavy weather of them, we shall not perhaps be surprised if Shakespeare did too.

At all events Shakespeare's change of mind comes out almost disarmingly in the Garden scene (III. iv). It intervenes between the Flint Castle scene and the 'deposition scene', and prepares the way for the latter in a manner that has apparently gone unnoticed. The gardener, his 'man' and the Queen all refer to deposition. The gardener's mate asks

What, think you the king shall be deposed?
and the gardener answers
Depressed he is already, and deposed
'Tis doubt he will be.
(III.iv.67-69)

The Queen breaks in and demands

Why dost thou say King Richard is deposed?

This exchange follows on from the long analogy between the commonwealth and a garden- an analogy which it is reasonable to call choric and conventional. The trouble is

that the personae are then used to give an apparently disinterested (because choric) account of Richard's fall in terms of his *being* deposed- the gardener's use of the passive voice very subtly slips in the Ricardian view where we might expect such a commentator to take the play's view. This is not dramatic craftsmanship, it is dramatic craft- sleight of hand. And it is this legerdemain [trickery] which has ensured that readers take away from *Richard II* a view which is largely confined to the latter part of the play and which is completely inconsistent with what has gone before. Shakespeare has to work increasingly hard as the play progresses to attract the audience's emotional regard to Richard and repel it from Bolingbroke; readers have proved curiously eager to sentimentalise Richard in the way that Richard sentimentalizes himself (again we are reminded of *Othello).* Self-dramatising self-pity can always attract sympathy, of course; but whereas Othello's self-regard is skillfully 'placed', in *Richard II* Shakespeare, having left so late his effort to put Richard in a favourable light, simply cannot afford to qualify our sympathy. Hence, no doubt, the sugared poignancies of the exchanges between Richard and his Queen 01. i), the words of York to his wife 01. ii. 23 f.), and the grotesque elaboration of Richard's soliloquy in prison (V. v).

Now there were, even for the most orthodox Elizabethan, two quite different ways of looking at Richard's fall. As it happens Shakespeare dramatised them elsewhere. In 3 *Henry VI* there is a bitter debate between the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions about Henry VI's title to the throne. Part of it runs as follows:

Henry Tell me, may not a king adopt an heir? *Yark* What then?
Henry An if he may, then am I lawful King; For Richard, in the view of many lords, Resigned the crown to Henry the Fourth, Whose heir my father was, and I am his. *Yark* He rose against him, being his sovereign,
And made him to resign his crown perforce.
(3HVI, 1. i. 135-142)

Each man here naturally takes the line that serves his own interests: Henry wants to prove his title good, York the reverse. Nevertheless the episode does suggest that there could be genuine doubt in an Elizabethan mind about Richard's fall. (It further suggests, incidentally, that long before *Richard II* Shakespeare could and did stage a deposition scene in which the participants thrashed out the complex issues thoroughly- the debate goes on for about 140 lines.)

But the fact that there *could* be genuine doubt does not, I think, exculpate Shakespeare in *Richard II.* The trouble is not that he merely dramatises the doubt, for this could imply that however many subjective 'truths' there are, the playas a whole comprehends them, organises them, *sees* them from a coherent point of view. This happens in *Othello* where, although there are as many 'truths' as there are personae, the play gives us a truth which transcends any single character's truth. No, the trouble with *Richard II* is that it suffers from what we might call double vision, giving us one truth in one place, and another in another, with apparently equal weight and conviction. It leaves us to settle matters, but does not contain within itself the evidence by which alone we could do so.

Some critics have found *Richard II* unsatisfactory in this general way, but for other reasons: A P. Rossiter, for example (in *Angel with Horns),* thinks that Richard's financial misdemeanors and his hinted complicity in Woodstock's murder are left very obscure, and that the York-Aumerle scenes in Act V are incoherent. With some reservations I agree; but Rossiter still does not seem to me to put his finger on the play's central weakness, for the shortcomings he lists do not, perhaps, amount to a very formidable indictment; and they certainly do not in themselves explain why the overall impression produced by an attentive reading or witnessing of the piece is one of bafflement and irritation at the way our sympathies are tampered with. If we concentrate on the question which forms the title of this essay, we can at least give a more cogent account of this impression- an account which ties in, as we have seen, with Shakespeare's uncertain handling of Bolingbroke, and indeed with the worries that Rossiter felt without being able to organise fully.

But such an account calls into question more than the merits or demerits of *Richard II.* It also casts the gravest possible doubt on the orthodox reading of the eight main Histories as demonstrating God's punishment for England's sin of deposing her lawful King. I have elsewhere shown that in the earlier tetralogy (i.e. 1, 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III)* Shakespeare makes only passing reference to the fate of Richard II, and that the 'sin' which England is expiating is no single or simple thing. We can now add that the later tetralogy *(Richard II* to *Henry V)* presents what is historically the first term in the whole series, *Richard II,* in a fundamentally confused way. So we are perhaps entitled to ask whether Shakespeare really is the Celebrator of the Tudor Myth. Surely, at least in the best Histories- *Richard III* and *Henry IV-he* is a very great deal more than that; so much so that to talk in terms of the Tudor Myth is merely reductive. In any case, it is about time that we started to read the plays Shakespeare actually wrote, rather than the ones written for him by historical critics. To read *Richard II* is, at all events, what I have been attempting to do. If it has turned out to be a lesser thing than orthodox taste has made it (examining bodies never tire of setting it), the blame will, I hope, be laid where it belongs: on the capable shoulders of William Shakespeare.

Critical Essay #2

Source: "Richard II," in *All if Shakespeare,* 1993, Pl"

160-69.

[In the following essay, Charney briefly discusses the content of the plays in the Henriad tetralogy. The Henriad tetraogy is a series of four plays: Richard II *;* Henry IV *, Part One;* Henry IV *, Part Two; and* Henry V *. Charney then explores the primary themes and characters in Richard II and comments on the relevancy of key scenes to events occurring in hakespeare's England]*

Richard II is the first play of the Major Tetralogy, followed by the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V.* Shakespeare learned a great deal from writing the four plays of the Minor Tetralogy (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III),* which were probably completed in 1592 or 1593. *King John,* which was probably written just before *Richard II,* has many stylistic affinities with it, both plays make important use of the divine right of kings. We can date *Richard II* fairly confidently to 1595, and the other three plays of the Major Tetralogy follow in the next three or four years.

It is curious that the events of the Major Tetralogy exactly precede those of the Minor Tetralogy, which begins with the death of Henry V in 1422 and covers the Wars of the Roses to its conclusion at Bosworth Field in 1485. It looks as if Shakespeare wanted first to establish the origins of the Tudor line and the way that Henry, Duke of Richmond (later Henry VII), providentially ends the Wars of the Roses and unites the houses of York and Lancaster. The Major Tetralogy is much more concentrated historically, beginning with the quarrel of Bolingbroke and Mowbray in 1398 and ending with the triumph of Henry V over France and his marriage to Katherine, daughter of the French king and queen, in 1420. The Major Tetralogy is more elf-consciously a four-part unit than the Minor Tetralogy, with many more interconnections, echoes, and anticipations.

The events in *Richard II* are compressed into only two years, from 1398 to 1400, which helps give the playa feeling of tragedy, by concentrating so strongly on Richard's fall and creating the sense of a quick-moving and almost fateful action. Richard's hubris, insolence, presumption, and perhaps just foolishness make his fall inevitable, but once it is clear that he can no longer remain king, the play unleashes a tremendous flood of feeling for Richard in adversity. This is Shakespeare's first history play to invoke so powerfully the analogy between the fallen king and Christ in extremis. This sense of sorrow for Richard evokes tragic feelings of sympathy and compassion. We forget whatever Richard has done to bring his fate upon himself and think only of his torment and his sufferings.

More than any other Shakespeare history play, *Richard II* goes to great lengths to invoke the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which was popular in the Tudor program of homilies to be read aloud in churches. The heinous sin of Richard's deposition and murder and the ascent of Bolingbroke to the throne as Henry IV are not really resolved

until the Wars of the Roses end in the victory of the Earl of Richmond in 1485, who comes to the throne as Henry VII, the first Tudor. . . .

It is necessary to insist so strongly on the divine right of kings in *Richard II* in order to appreciate the magnitude of Henry IV's transgression. The Bishop of Carlisle's prophetic speech right before Richard's deposition looks forward to the bloody events of both tetralogies and is a forecast of English history in the fifteenth century:

And if you crown him [Bolingbroke], let me
prophesy
The blood of English shall manure the
ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act. . .
(4.1.136-38)

Bolingbroke as "subject" cannot "give sentence on his king" (121), since the king is the anointed of God. As God's scourge, Bolingbroke is sure to bring an evil doom on himself and on England, which will "be called! The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls" (143-44).

The argument of divine right is all that Richard can offer to defend himself, and the conflict is lost before it ever begins. When Richard returns from Ireland to safeguard his kingdom against Bolingbroke, who has landed at Ravenspurgh, he speaks largely in "divine right"rhetoric, which his followers see as a counsel of despair:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed
king,
The breath of wordly men cannot depose The deputy elected by the Lord.
(3.2.54-57)

Richard's sense of the forces of Nature being marshaled against the enemy of God seems ludicrous to his troops. He protests: "Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords" (23), but the King's approach to impending danger is entirely wrong.

Richard's invocation to "my gentle earth" (3.2.12) is unmilitary in the extreme: "But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom, / And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way' (14-15). To this Richard continues to add supposedly baleful images: "Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies" (18). It is this "conjuration" of senseless things that his lords are mocking, and Carlisle tells him gently:

"The means that heavens yield must be embraced / And not neglected" (29-30). The army of Bolingbroke is unlikely to be defeated by venomous spiders, heavygaited toads, and stinging nettles.

According to the Renaissance doctrine of the King's two bodies, the king as a public figure has a sacred body identified with the body politic, but as a private man his body is fragile and vulnerable. Richard argues on both sides of the divine right paradox. When

he considers himself as a person, he is subject to all the weaknesses of mortal man, and he is far from having the invulnerable image of a king:

I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends- subjected thus, How can you say to me, I am a king?
(3.2.175-77)

In the pun on *subjected*- "made a subject" and "subjected to,"_ or "liable" -lies the heart of the paradox. Richard is moving to an acute awareness of his loss of identity, by giving up the kingship he surrenders the essence of his being and he declines to anonymity and nothingness. The issue of identity becomes of crucial importance in Shakespeare's later tragedies, such as *Othello,* when Othello declares that his "occupation's gone" (3.3.354) or *Antony and Cleapatra,* when Antony "cannot hold this visible shape" (4. 14. 14).

The important theme of Richard's identity reaches its climax in the deposition scene, when he understands that by giving up his kingship he is giving up everything, including his sense of self:

I have no name, no title,
No, not that name was given me at the font
But 'tis usurped.
(4. 1. 254-56)

He seeks total annihilation in his wish-fulfillment imagery:

0, that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water drops!
(259-61)

This scene anticipates Hamlet in many places, especially Hamlet's first soliloquy:

0 that this too too solid [as in Folio] flesh
would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew. . .
(Hamlet 1. 2. 129-30)

Some lines later, after Richard sends for a mirror and throws it down in disgust, he exclaims:

My grief lies all within,
And these external manners of laments
Me merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured soul.
(4. 1. 294-97)

These lines clearly anticipate Hamlet's sense of isolation in the Danish court in the same context I quoted before: "But I have that within which passes show; / These but the trappings and the suits of woe" *(Hamlet* 1. 2. 85-86). Both Richard and Hamlet feel a painful contrast between outward seeming and inward reality. They are both courting the annihilation of self.

Richard's contemplating his face in the mirror is like Hamlet's contemplating mortality in the skull of Yorick, the king's jester. It is interesting that Richard parodies Doctor Faustus's famous invocation of Helen of Troy in Marlowe's play (1592):

Was this face 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?
(4.1.280-83)

He rejects the image of his face by shattering the looking glass, thus seeking the anonymity he has been flirting with from the beginning of his griefs.

At the end of the play before he is murdered at Pomfret Castle, Richard has a long soliloquy meditating on themes of time, life and death, and his own identity. He takes up again the "nothing" theme that echoes throughout the play, as it does in *King Lear,* and that here signifies the king's awareness of his own impending death. He imagines himself as an actor, coping with a difficult reality by moving quickly between different identities: "Thus play I in one person many people, / And none contented" (5.5.31-32). Shifting between king and beggar, Richard is finally "unkinged by Bolingbroke, / And straight am nothing" (37-38). From here it is only a quick move to the final step of the reasoning: that no man "With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased / With being nothing" (40-41). Despite the urgency of death, Richard cannot resist the pleasing cadence of the internal rhyme ("pleased-eased"), he also manages to kill two of his executioners.

The critical question whether Richard is a poet manque [unsuccessful, unfulfilled] or an actor manqué is a deceptive one because Richard is poetical ana histrionic [dramatic] in playing his part as a king, especially a deposed king. Hamlet seems actually to be a friend of the traveling players, which Richard is not. Nor has Richard written at least a dozen or sixteen lines to be inserted into the *Mousetrap* play, nor does he declaim with bravado the Dido and Aeneas playas Hamlet does. But Richard poetizes actively throughout his play and indulges in elaborately ingenious poetic figures called "conceits."

Something grotesque in these excessively worked out images mingles with Richard's grief to create a sense of hysteria, as in the following:

Or shall we play the wantons with our woes, And make some pretty match with shedding
tears,

As thus, to drop them still upon one place, Till they have fretted us a pair of graves
Within the earth, and, therein laid, "there lies Two kinsmen digged their graves with weeping eyes",
Would not this ill do well?
(3.3.163-69)

The image is extremely literal in its visual requirements, which are uncomfortably specific. That is why, once again, the imagery misfires and the onlookers think it ridiculous: "Well, well, I see / I talk but idly, and you laugh at me" (169-70). In Elizabethan parlance, *idly* means both lazily and foolishly. Richard is mocking his own poetical style in the manner of Touchstone in *As You Like It,* who lays it down as gospel that "the truest poetry is the most feigning" (3.3.18-19).

Henry Bolingbroke, the son of John of Gaunt, becomes the model for Shakespeare's political figures: the unheroic, practical man who manages to survive, while more committed and more ideological persons all are doomed to an early death. Bolingbroke is neither poetical nor histironic, but Richard envies him his ability to win political favor easily and spontaneously. Even before his return to England, Richard fears "his courtship to the common people" (1.4.24). Bolingbroke is essentially a political creature with no natural eloquence like Richard, but with an uncanny sense of the right gesture:

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. . .
(31-33)

Unlike Tamburlaine or Richard III, Bolingbroke has no grandiose visions of kingship, and he proceeds step by step without revealing, even to himself, his ultimate objective. We have to believe that when he returns to England from exile he comes only to claim his rightful inheritance from his dead father, Gaunt, and not to depose Richard and be king himself. Yet events move with incredible swiftness and inevitability, and when Bolingbroke condemns Bushy and Green, two of "The caterpillars of the commonwealth" (2.3.166), in act 3, scene 1, he is already acting like the king, who doesn't need any specific legal warrant. Bolingbroke prepares us remarkably for Claudius ill *Hamlet* and perhaps also for Macbeth.

In the final scene of the play Bolingbroke resembles Macbeth remarkably in the equivocation he practices with himself. To Exton, who murders Richard II at Pomfret, Bolingbroke speaks only the ambiguous words of guilt:

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.
(5.6.38-40)

This is essentially the Henry IV of the next two plays in the tetralogy: crafty, ineloquent, guilty, and well meaning. If Henry weren't so troubled in spirit, we would think him a

gross hypocrite for making pronouncements like the following: "Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe, / That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow" (45-46).

But Henry does nothing to prevent blood from sprinkling him and he does nothing to conceal his open complicity. He vows here what he vows time and again in the two later plays: to "make a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand" (5.6.49-50), but we are sure that he has not the slightest intention to make this voyage of contrition and expiation. This is not part of his style. He moums over the "untimely bier" (52) of Richard II, even though it was he himself who had him murdered. Unlike Richard III Bolingbroke is not sardonic, but his sincerity is suspect as a public pronouncement, not a personal commitment.

His avalanche of couplets in his final scene reminds us that *Richard II* was written right around the time of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* both of which it resembles in its lyric extravagance and its use of set pieces of eloquence. The dying Gaunt's vision of England is presented as an antithesis to the corruption and decay of England under Richard's misrule. Gaunt, expiring, speaks like a "prophet new inspired" (2.1.31) of "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England" (50). It is an extraordinary patriotic effusion, but England is "now leased out. . . / Like to a tenement or pelting farm" (59-60). *Farm* is a derogatory word used three times in this play to indicate Richard's outrageous financial exactions. To "farm" the realm is to sell for cash the right to collect royal taxes, such as on crown lands and on customs. This is combined with "blank charters" (1.4.48), ill which favorites of the king could write in whatever sum they pleased as an exaction on the nobles, and "benevolences" (2.1.250), or forced loans, to create Richard's "rash fierce blaze of riot" (33). Like a tragic protagonist, Richard is preparing his own fall.

The Garden Scene (3, 4) has often been discussed as an internal, choral commentary on the play, but its literal, allegorical quality allies it with early Shakespeare. Later, Shakespeare will embody his meanings much more intrinsically in the dramatic action rather than in symbolic set pieces. The Gardener lectures his servants pedantically about the analogy between the garden commonwealth and the body politic. With the Queen and her Ladies as audience, the Gardener expatiates on the political implications of gardening:

0, what pity is it
That he bad not so trimmed and dressed his land
As we this garden!
(3.4.55-57)

This scene is easy to teach but it doesn't represent Shakespeare at his best.

At the end of the scene, however, the Gardener speaks a touching soliloquy in couplets:

Here did she fall a tear; here in this place
I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace;
Rue even for ruth here shortly shall be seen,

In the remembrance of a weeping queen.
(3.4.104-7)

We are reminded inevitably, as by so much else in this play, of *Hamlet,* particularly the mad Ophelia's distribution of flowers: "There's rue for you, here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace 0' Sundays. 0, you must wear your rue with a difference" *(Hamlet* 4.5.18183).

One incident that hangs over *Richard II* and is mentioned repeatedly in the play is the murder of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester and Richard's uncle, in 1397. These events are treated in the anonymous play *Woodstock* (sometimes called the first part of *Richard II* since it deals with the period 1382 to 1397, before Shakespeare's play opens), which was probably written before Shakespeare's play. *Richard II* begins in 1398 with the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk, who was clearly implicated in Gloucester's death at Calais, probably under orders from Richard. The scene between Bolingbroke and Mowbray is confusing, since the men trade accusations that seem equally powerful. Bolingbroke claims that Mowbray sluiced out Gloucester's innocent soul through streams of blood; Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries

Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth To me for justice and rough chastisement. . .
(1.1.103-6)

We never learn for sure about Mowbrays ro1e in this murder, but we are never allowed to forget Richard's complicity.

In the next scene, the Duchess of Gloucester asks Gaunt to take revenge for his brother's murder, but Gaunt refuses. This is the first we hear of the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which is so important in the play. Gaunt says directly that the King,

God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his [Gloucester's] death. . .
(1.2.37-39)

He adds that "God's is the quarrel" (37), for Gaunt as a subject "may never lift / An angry arm against His minister" (40-41). This makes the issue of Gloucester's murder explicit in the play. Before his death Gaunt accuses Richard directly of murdering his uncle:

That blood already like the pelican
Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused:
My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning
soul. . ..
(126-28)

This is almost at the end of Gaunt's long and prophetic death speech, in which he seems to curse Richard: "Live in thy shame" (135).

The issue of Gloucester's death comes up again in act 4, scene I, when Bagot specifically accuses Aumerle, the son of the Duke of York (Gaunt's brother), of having killed Gloucester on orders from Richard. Bagot is joined in his accusations by Fitzwater, Percy, and others, but what is important is that this is the beginning of the deposition scene and the accusations of murder provide a context for the judgment of Richard by Bolingbroke. Richard is not such an innocent as he makes himself out to be. In his grief he makes no effort at all to defend himself, but merely expatiates on his tragic and alienated condition. The fallen king appears powerfully as a suffering individual, lyric, meditative, and philosophical in adversity.

Richard II is one of the most politically explosive of Shakespeare's plays. The Deposition Scene (most of act 4, scene 1), in which Richard abdicates the throne, was never printed during Queen Elizabeth's lifetime and first. appeared in the Fourth Quarto of 1608. This is potentially seditious material for which one could be summoned before the Star Chamber. We know that the Essex conspirators got Shakespeare's company to put on a special performance of *Richard II* on the eve of their totally disastrous rebellion on February 8, 1601. Presumably, they thought that the Deposition Scene would be good propaganda for the overthrow of Elizabeth, who thought of herself as Richard II: "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?" (E. K.. Chambers, *Wil liam Shakespeare,* voL 2, p. 326). Bolingbroke is clearly labeled as a dangerous usurper in this play and in both parts of *Henry IV,* constantly amious about his cloudy tide to the throne. His son, Prince Hal, who becomes Henry V, continues these perturbations, and the issue is settled definitively only at the end of *Richard III,* when the Earl of Richmond defeats Richard at Bosworth Field and becomes Henry VII. *As* part of the royal myth, the Tudors take the stain off me English throne.

Critical Essay #3

Richard II presents several aspects of kingship, including the notions of the legal right to rule as king, the divine right to rule, and the effectiveness of one's rule as king. The "divine right" of kings refers to the notion that the right to rule is ordained by God, not by the popular consent of the people. Lewis J. Owen observes that the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke each represent an important aspect of kingship in relation to Queen Elizabeth. Richard stands for the divine right to rule and Bolingbroke represents effective, "kingly"_ leadership. Owen argues that Shakespeare takes care in the play to treat both Richard's and Bolingbroke's claim to the throne sympathetically. Our sympathy for Richard is generated by three factors, Owen states. The first is the fact that Richard is surrounded by "evil" advisors. Owen notes that while to modern readers this may seem like a flimsy excuse, Elizabethans would have been more likely to judge a monarch less harshly than we would if that monarch made poor decisions based on the advisement of corrupt counselors. Another factor Owen cites is Richard's own personal weakness. Again, Owen observes that Elizabethans would have been more sympathetic to a ruler who was weak, rather than one who was evil. The final factor that Owen believes draws the audience's sympathy to Richard is that he is in fact the rightful king. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, is shown to be a king by his deeds, Owen comments.

Similarly, Donna B. Hamilton analyzes the issues of Richard's legal and divine right to rule. Hamilton questions whether or not the king is above the law because he is ordained by God. In discussing the scenes in which Richard fails to abide by the laws of the commonwealth, Hamilton observes that Richard is believed by other characters to be implicated in the death of Gloucester, and that Richard breaks the laws of inheritance when he seizes Gaunt's estate. Legally, Gaunt's money, land, and title belong to his son, Bolingbroke, whom Richard banishes. Hamilton maintains that as king, Richard has the responsibility to obey the laws, and his failure to do so harms the people, results in the loss of popular support, and gives his subjects the license to similarly ignore the law. With Bolingbroke's ascension to the throne, Hamilton shows, another aspect of kingship is brought forth: that of the threat to the commonwealth when the king (Bolingbroke) bears no legal or God-given right to the throne.

Source: "Richard II," in *Lectures onFourofShakespeare's History Plays,* Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1953, Pl'. 3-18.

[In this essay, Owen examines the conflict between Richard's legal and divine right to be king and his failure to act as kin/} Owen also reviews the relevance to the play of Elizabethan views on kingship. A dditionally, Owen highlights the several factors related to Richard's kingship that draw the audience's sympathy to Richard]

There are, among others, two immediately apparent ways in which to understand and evaluate any literary work One is to apply to its form and content some absolute critical standards, independent of time and place; the other is to accept the particular conventions or standards within which the work was conceived and to judge it, so to

speak, on its own terms. The extent to which either of these two approaches becomes applicable depends, of course, upon the nature of the work being considered; and it is certainly true that a work usually becomes what has loosely been called "great literature" to the extent that it transcends its own particular circumstances and arrives at some aspect of universal human truth. But neither approach, it seems to me, can be entirely complete without the other. As long as a work of literature is conceived by a particular person of a particular time and place, it will never be completely free of the conventions within which its author lived. It may seek to approach universal truth, but it can never do so except through particular circumstances.

This dependence for final meaning upon an understanding of particular circumstances is especially true of dramatic art, which by its very nature- its dependence upon special actors and a special audience becomes more entangled with the conventions of its own times- its manners, its language, its popular beliefs- than does any other literary form. No other has to rely for its final presentation upon so unpredictable a middle man as the actor; no other makes so direct and immediate appeal to a contemporary audience.

To the extent that this kind of understanding is, in some degree, essential for any play, it becomes especially so for the plays of Shakespeare, separated from us as he is by some 350 years. And just as this understanding is generally necessary for all of his plays, it becomes particularly so for some. All his plays, for instance, pose for most of us certain problems of language. The nature and structural conventions of Elizabethan blank verse, as well as the particular words and idioms involved, require from us more attention than the perfectly familiar language of, say, Bernard Shaw or Arthur Miller. The references to mythology and even to the Bible are often unfamiliar. Often the terms of moral responsibility, though we accept the notion of moral responsibility itself, are hard to understand. In short, there are in all his plays certain things which have become, through the passage of years, unfamiliar to us but which we must understand as he and his audience understood them before the plays can have for us their full meaning. Perhaps those plays are the greatest which, admitting some dependence, depend the least upon "qualifying conventions" for their total meaning. If this be so, then Shakespeare's histories cannot rank with his tragedies, whose backgrounds and issues are eternal. For, as Mr. Dover Wilson remarks, in all ten of Shakespeare's English histories, both dramatist and audience are less concerned with the fortune of the principal characters than with the sanity and health of the whole state of England. The characters are seen and appraised in relation to a political background and political issues which were still actual for the Elizabethan spectators. It is hardly necessary to observe that these backgrounds and issues are not still actual for us today, and herein lies the bar to any easy understanding of Shakespeare's histories.

This is not to say that nothing is to be got out of these plays without intimate knowledge of the Elizabethan period and heritage. Shakespeare was too great a writer to depend entirely upon such particulars. Without knowing anything of the period it is possible to be both entertained and instructed by them. But from my own experience I am convinced that some knowledge of the sort makes the entertainment more entertaining and the instruction more meaningful. Hence,... I should like to preface my discussion of

Richard II with a brief consideration of why Shakespeare turned to English history and then selected the particular area of that history which he did.

Shakespeare came to London from Stratford about 1590, just two years after the English fleet had defeated the Spanish Armada. This sea victory produced a tide of English nationalism which has probably never been surpassed. The fifteenth century had been tom with civil strife, as the two noble houses, Lancaster and York, fought for possession of the throne of England. Lancaster had won the war at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, and a Lancastrian, Henry the Seventh, had ascended the throne. But since he took for his wife a woman from the House of York, the civil war seemed to be healed by something stronger and more lasting than simply a military victory. And so it proved, for from these two, Henry of Lancaster and Elizabeth of York, sprang the Tudors- of whom the most famous were Henry the Eighth and his daughter, Queen Elizabeth herself. Once again the English had a lasting dynasty of monarchs, and under their steadying influence there began to grow a solidifying national unity and national pride, whose high p oint was the defeat of the Armada in 1588. England had achieved a national awareness and a taste for international power; and it was natural that the writers of the time should look more eagerly than ever to English history for their subjects.

It was also natural that Shakespeare, a newcomer to the London stage, should turn, along with his contemporaries, to a subject so currently popular. The first assurance of immediate success is always the selection of a popular theme; no one, as I have suggested, depends more upon immediate success than a writer for the stage; and no playwright is less able to flaunt the importance of popular success than the indigent newcomer. It is not hard to understand why a great part of Shakespeare's early plays are English histories.

The four plays with which we will be dealing in these talks have, however, a more special significance than simply the fact that they all are drawn from English history. First, there is a tight chronological sequence which binds them together; one leads directly into the next, and in each there are. passages which anticipate the plays to come or recall the ones already over. Secondly, the nature of this chronological unity is the rise of the House of Lancaster, as Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster, seizes the throne from Richard the Second, becomes in turn Henry the Fourth, and then passes the crown to his son, Henry the Fifth. This action immediately precedes the war between Lancaster and York, of which I have already spoken, and it was more than a haphazard selection from English history; for it was from these Lancastrians that the Tudors were descended. Thus, for the Elizabethan audience, the plays had a more particular significance than even the glorification of England, for they pointed to Queen Elizabeth herself.

The glorification of Elizabeth's ancestors, then, was the first reason that Shakespeare turned for his subject matter to this particular period of English history. But such a topic, though it could have provided chronicle history, could not have provided the stuff of dramatic history without a second reason, different from but not unrelated to the first. The English, at the same time that they were proud of England's past, were concerned

about England's future. By the time that Shakespeare was writing his history plays, Elizabeth had already been on the throne for thirty-five years. Unlike some women, she could not be expected to last forever, and never having married, she had provided no heir to the throne. Her subjects saw an imminent end to the relative tranquility of the Tudor line. The question of succession haunted them, for it was this very question which had led to the bloodshed of the civil wars between York and Lancaster just a little more than a century before.

And with the succession in doubt, they turned beyond that question to the subject of kingship itself. Who, first of all, had the right to be king, and once a king was rightly and justly crowned, could he do wrong? There were of course conventional answers to this possible paradox; but to Shakespeare it suggested a source of dramatic conflict which was both timely and, to the Elizabethan world at least, universal. Within the context of Elizabeth's ancestry he could study the delicate problem of the ruler who must forget neither his divine right nor his temporal obligations. *Just* as the chronological sequence of events provides a physical unity in these plays, so this study of kingship provides a spiritual unity. The last three plays of this tetralogy are studies of kings who try to compensate by means of kingly actions for an absence of real divine right to the throne. *Richard II* is the study of a king who believes that his right to be a king relieves him of the responsibility of acting like one.

It has been traditional to affirm that Shakespeare's history plays have little meaning for a modem audience because they deal with a problem that is so specifically Elizabethan. But just as our understanding of the background and issues of the plays will help us better to understand the plays on their own terms, so it should make it possible for us to begin to abstract from them some universal truth, some meaning that is as real for us now as it was for the Elizabethans. The implications of kingship are not so far removed from our own lives as we might think. Its specific terms are, of course, very different. From medieval times, through the reign of Elizabeth, and well into the seventeenth century, there persisted the notion that kings were ordained by God, and that their subjects owed them the absolute obedience due to what amounted to a series of Christs on earth. Richard, indeed, continually compares his betrayal to that of Christ; he refers to his apparently treacherous friends as Judases and to his judges as Pilates. But remove the idea of divine ordination and substitute for it any higher moral right, and in its larger sense the Elizabethan problem of kingship becomes the quite universal problem of keeping the delicate balance between obligations to any conflicting powers. A similar problem in modem times might be, I suppose, the conflicting obligations of a public servant to the party which put him in power and to the people whom he is supposed to serve. The level of the issue has been lowered, but its essence has not really changed. To make the drama of Richard the Second come alive we need only to accept, in the same way that we accept the idea of Fate in Greek tragedy, the idea of divine sanction of kings. From that point on the tragedy of Richard can become meaningful beyond its own terms.

Richard the Second is a king who has the greatest theoretical but the least practical claim to his throne. It is through the discrepancy between these two claims that the dramatic conflict is established, first, within the character of Richard himself, and

second, between Richard and Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster, who represents most strongly those qualities of kingly nature which Richard lacks.

To make this conflict effective, it was first necessary to establish very thoroughly Richard's divine right to the throne. Historically hiS claim could not be doubted, and the Elizabethans were well aware of this. From the time of William the Conqueror, the line of inheritance had been unchallenged. Richard was the grandson of Edward the Third by Edward's eldest son, and not even his most active enemies would accuse him of holding the throne unlawfully. Throughout the play this right is consistently underscored by Richard himself and by others: by Richard to remind his enemies that he cannot be deposed, or even opposed, and by his advisors to remind him that as a divinely ordained king he should more properly understand the duties of the king. Early in the play, the Duchess of Gloucester is urging her brother-in-law, old John of Gaunt (the father of Bolingbroke), to take some action against King Richard, who has been largely responsible for the murder of her husband. But Gaunt, although he is Richard's uncle and recognizes besides how just her accusations against the King are, will not strike out against God's anointed, even to avenge a murdered brother.

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute, His deputy anointed ill His sight,
Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully, Let Heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.
(I, ii, 37-41)

Similarly, at the end of Act II, the Duke of York, another of Richard's uncles, refuses to join the group of nobles who are determined to oppose Richard's will and force him to return to Bolingbroke those lands which he confiscated at the time of Gaunt's death.

My lords of England, let me tell you this:
I have had feeling of my cousin's wrongs And labour'd all I could to do him right; But in this kind to come, ill braving arms, Be his own carver and cut out his way,
To find out right with wrong- it may not
be;
And you that do abet him in this kind Cherish rebellion and are rebels all.
(II, iii, 140-147)

These references to Richard's divine ordination can be vastly multiplied by even a cursory reading of the play. They appear on every hand and come from every mouth.

But the statements by John of Gaunt and the Duke of York are particularly significant. These two old men, Richard's uncles and the last of Edward's sons, represent the old order, an order whose kings were kingly in fact as well as theory. Their position thus served a double function; it made them acutely conscious of their duty to the King, while at the same time, by immediate contrast with their own father, it made them more painfully aware of Richard's own shortcomings. It also gave them a license to speak which was not officially shared by the younger members of the court. Hence, we hear from those same two who most clearly acknowledge the divinity of Richard's right, the sharpest rebukes for his failure properly to fulfill the obligation which goes WIth that

right. Although he will not act against Richard, York will speak most strongly against him to his face, when he confiscates the dead Gaunt's property to support his own ruinous Irish Wars. He lists the King's injustices, and enforces them with an exceedingly unflattering comparison with his own father, Edward the Third.

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.
0 Richard! York 15 too far gone with grief, Or else he never would compare between.
(II, i, 176-185)

But even stronger than York's rebuke is that of Gaunt, who, on his sick bed, has the sanction not only of rank and age, but the license of one who is about to die. And for the Elizabethans- perhaps even for us- his statement has besides its inherent force the prophetic ring of a last confession; it partakes of that mythical ability to see most clearly just before all vision, all sense of sight is lost; and, following hard upon what is perhaps the greatest national panegyric ever written, it points out finally, completely, the vast discrepancy between Richard's duty and his performance, and underlines it by emphasizing the nobility of the country which through his incompetence is being so neglected.

It is the beginning of the second act of the play. Gaunt, who in the first act has refused to lift his hand or voice against the King for either the banishment of his son or the murder of his brother, will no longer stifle his urgent feelings about England or about the King.

Methinks I am a prophet new inspir'd
And thus expiring do foretell of him:
His rash fierce blaze of riot Cannot last,
For violent fires soon bum out themselves. . .
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear
land,
Dear for her reputation through the world, Is now leas'd out, I die pronouncing it,
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
England, bound in with the triumphant sea, Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with
shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds. That England, that was wont to conquer others, Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
(II, i, 31-34, 57-66)

And when Richard comes to see him, secretly hoping that Gaunt will die so that he can seize his lands, Gaunt speaks no less pointedly to him. Richard, he says, and not he, is the one who is dying:

Now He that made me knows I see thee ill; ill in myself to *see,* and in thee seeing ill.
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.
(II, i, 93-99)

These statements by characters in the play, most particularly those by Gaunt and York, thus establish explicitly both Richard's divine right of office and his failure to act like a king. But this idea, which is so important if we are going to understand, first, Richard's personal tragedy, and second, the terrible problems of Bolingbroke as he tries to establish himself and his heirs on the throne, is emphasized by Shakespeare in two other ways: by the nature of his imagery, and by the nature and actions of Richard himself.

The Elizabethans were always quick to see a parallel between the world of men and the world of nature. They first of all believed that there was a connection between the affairs of men and the affairs of nature that tranquility or turbulence in one would be reflected in the other. Hence the storm on the heath to match the storm in Lear's soul, and the strange perturbations of nature after the murder of Duncan by Macbeth. They believed, too, that natural phenomena could p rophesy as well as reflect happenings in the world 0 men, as in the strange portents in *J ulius Caesar,* or the fatal conjunction of the stars in *Romeo and Juliet.* And finally, they saw very readily a parallel between the hierarchy of nature and that of men. It is this last parallel which is used most particularly in *Richard II,* and while its purpose is the same as that served by Gaunt and York, its method is often different. The statements of the two Dukes were always explicit; the suggestions of the natural imagery are, more often than not, implicit; and the effect of the irony is usually more powerful than the blunt directness of the Dukes. The comparisons are to both animate and inanimate nature; Richard is compared both to the lion and to the sun. The comparison or contrast is sometimes, of course, quite straightforward, as when the Queen chides the deposed Richard for not acting like the lion who, even dying, thrusts forth his paw

And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with
rage
To be o'erpower'd; and wilt thou, pupil
like,
Take the correction, mildly kiss the rod,
And fawn on rage with base humility,
Which art a lion and the king of beasts?
(V, i, 30-34)

Similarly explicit is Salisbury's brief speech about Richard's return from Ireland:

Ah, Richard, WIth the eyes of heavy mind
I see thy glory like a shooting star
Fall to the base earth from the firmament. Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly west,
Witnessing storms to come, woe, and unrest.
(II, iv, 18-22)

This foreshadows almost exactly Richard's coming down to the base court of Flint Castle to parley with Bolingbroke. In these two instances can be clearly seen the distinction between what Richard should be like and what he is. It is in moments when the distinction between the substance and the show is not so clearly perceived that the subtle irony acts most powerfully. The unwillingness of those about him to see what is so obvious to us suggests the immeasurably strong influence of Richard's divine protection. York reluctantly admits the difference when Richard appears on the battlements of Flint Castle to open the parley with Bolingbroke:

Yet looks he like a king! Behold, his eye, *As* bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth
Controlling majesty. Alack, alack, for woe, That any harm should stain so fair a show!
(III, iii, 68-71)

Even now, when all is almost lost, York clings to the hope that the show will carry Richard through. And just before this speech of York's, Bolingbroke himself has said:

See, *see,* King Richard doth himself appear, *As* doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the east,
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent To dim IDS glory and to stain the track
Of ills bright passage to the occident.
(III, iii, 62-67)

But just as York has hinted that Richard's was a seeming show, so Bolingbroke's image very quickly suggests that this sun has passed its zenith and is moving to the occident, "to set weeping in the lowly west." It remains for Richard himself to be the only one completely deceived by the nobility of his appearance. It is this fair seeming which has been the be-all of his court life up to the time of his deposition; it is the absence of this gorgeous show and the contrasting bleakness of his prison domain which most preoccupies him when he is no longer king.

This very naivete, this absence of any real perception, deplorable as it may seem, first establishes for him the sympathy necessary to his tragedy. The strength of this negative quality in eliciting sympathy is based on two very unusual phenomena. First, the Elizabethan audience, anyway, could not wholly reject a man whose belief, however naive and unrealistic, was essentially Just. Weak in action as he was, Richard's claims to being the lion, to being the sun, could not be refuted. They were given to him by God. But this singular situation was not in itself enough. The audience could have had little sympathy for a man who failed to live up to the obligations of his divine right if they had felt that he was conscious of the discrepancy between the two and was willfully refusing to do anything about it. They could tolerate his weakness only because it was in terms that they could sympathize with, because his naiveté was genuine, not pretended. But if

he had been a poor king without being naive, or had been naive in a belief that was groundless, Richard could not have become a sympathetic, and hence not a tragic, figure.

It is clear, I think, how important an appreciation of the Elizabethan notion of kingship becomes. For it explains, first of all, the great issues and tensions which form the fabric of the play, and it makes understandable and meaningful the particular pattern of Richard's life within this fabric. Without the strange admixture of truth and delusion, his naiveté would become ridiculous, and his weakness and inadequacy would become criminal. The fact that neither possibility is ever quite realized explains whatever stature Richard has as a protagonist; but the consistently implied imminence of these possibilities provides a dramatic tension and a dramatic ambiguity which are essential to a play having in effect- and particularly in the eyes of an Elizabethan audience- two protagonists: Richard, who represents the divinely ordained king, and Bolingbroke, who represents the first in a line of monarchs that leads directly to Elizabeth. Thus the fall of Richard must not seem so unjust as to condemn the legitimacy of Elizabeth's claim to the throne, nor must the rise of Bolingbroke seem so just as to set at naught the notion that kings are ordained by God and cannot be deposed by men. Richard and Bolingbroke, in short, each represented an aspect of kingship which was essential to Elizabeth. Richard was king by God, and Bolingbroke became a king by deed. The right of the latter had indirectly placed her on the throne; but it was the right of the former that kept her there. We thus have two protagonists, neither of whom must lose his stature at the expense of the other; and Shakespeare accomplishes this ambiguity of sympathy by the clever contrasting of two themes- public and private lives.

The political fall of Richard is accompanied by a corresponding growth in his personal stature; the political rise of Bolingbroke, on the other hand, is marked by a deterioration of his personal stature. In neither case does the change in personal character match in extent the reversal of public fortune; but it is sufficiently strong to modify the conclusions about the political change which must have been reached had they not been counter-pointed by considerations of personal character. It would be wrong, of course, to expect that these changes in character should take place except in terms of the personalities of the two men as they have been established during the early part of the play. To have done otherwise, Shakespeare would have had to sacrifice truth to device. But accepting the restricted limitations within which it was reasonable that the character of the two men might change during the year between Richard's deposition and his death, a considerable change, it seems to me, can be discerned.

Richard, as we have seen, is a curious admixture of weakness and naivete; his uncertain nature is perhaps best illustrated by his actions at the beginning of the play, when he tries to reconcile the hot-blooded Bolingbroke and Mowbray, who have come before him with countercharges of disloyalty to the King. Richard, who will do anything, who will even compromise honor, in order to avoid strife, seeks to reconcile them, quoting his own doctors who say that "this is no month to bleed." He orders them to throw down the gages, which each has accepted from the other as a challenge to public combat. Both Bolingbroke and Mowbray refuse; and Richard attempts to be firm:

Rage must be withstood;
Give me his gage. Lions make leopards tame.
(I, i, 173-174)

That he is a lion in imagination only, he himself almost immediately admits, as he inadvertently acknowledges his own impotence:

We were not born to sue, but to command;
Which since we cannot do to make you
friends,
Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,
At Coventry, upon Saint Lambert's day.
There shall your swords and lances arbitrate
The swelling difference of your sertled hate.
(I, i, 196-201)

But the King is inconstant even in this decision. Just as the two are about to meet in the lists, he changes his mind again, throws down his warder to stop the combat, and banishes both Bolingbroke and Mowbray in order, as he says, not

To wake our peace, which in our country's cradle Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep.
(I, iii, 132-133)

Obviously unable to cope with the spirited nobles of his realm, Richard withdraws from this vital element of English life, and surrounds himself with obsequious [servile] sycophants [self-seeking flatterers]. But bad as their influence is for Richard and for England, they do in a large measure draw the blame for the misrule away from the King and attach it to themselves. It was customary in medieval and Tudor times to side-step any direct censure of a divine king by simply saying that he had been misled by evil advisors. Thus the king became guilty not of evil actions, but of poor judgment and choice. A modem audience will, of course, accept this evasion of responsibility much less readily than the Elizabethans; but knowledge of the tradition may modify somewhat our attitude toward Richard. Gaunt and York are the two ministers whose advice he should have followed; instead, he associated with "the caterpillars of the commonwealth," Bagot, Bushy, and Green, whose evil influence ate at the fair flower of the realm. Because of them, Richard's flaw, according to those about him, was weakness rather than evil. Taking advantage of his weakness, his flatterers led him to the series of unscrupulous acts which we have already heard listed by Gaunt and York For us, this juggling of responsibility does not completely exonerate Richard, but for those who were quick to catch at any way by which to avoid direct censure of the King, this consideration greatly softened their attitude toward him.

This was the attitude of others toward Richard. His attitude toward himself and his position sprang directly from the two characteristics I have mentioned. His naivete was

a combination of unwillingness and inability to distinguish between illusion and reality. He exaggerated the essential right of his position and closed his eyes to the dishonesty and unscrupulousness of his acts. His court was full of pageantry, but either his weakness forestalled action, or his unscrupulousness prompted wicked action.

We have seen how the others, like York and Bolingbroke, saw or at least hinted at the irony in the comparison of Richard to the king of beasts or the lord of the heavens. But it was Richard himself who indulged in the most extensive of these comparisons, and yet it was he alone who never suspected that fair show and seeming were not enough. The irony of his situation reaches its climax in Act III when, bereft of his power, he still fancies that his divine presence alone will put to flight the rebellious nobles.

Discomfortable cousin! know'st thou not That when the searching eye of heaven is hid Behind the globe, that lights the lower world, Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen
In murders and in outrage boldly here;
But when from under this terrestrial ball
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines And darts his light through every guilty hole, Then murders, treasons, and detested sins, The cloak of night being pluck'd from off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves? So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke, Who all this while hath revell'd in the night Whilst we were wand'ring with the antipodes, Shall see us rising in our throne, the east, His treasons will sit blushing in his face, Not able to endure the sight of day,
But, self-affrighted, tremble at his sin.
Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed
king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose The deputy elected by the Lord.
For evety man that Bolingbroke hath press'd To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown, God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel; then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for Heaven still guards the right.
(III, ii, 36-62)

But this is pitiful, not bitter irony. For Richard's notion was true, no matter how unrealistic. And in the light of the essential truth of his belief, his self-indulgence and self-pity become more understandable than they ever could be if they were based on a completely absurd or unsympathetic notion of his own right.

These three factors, his evil advisors, his own weakness, and his essential right to the crown, hold in partial abeyance any direct antagonism to Richard while he is on the throne; once he is deposed, once his weakness no longer has the power to allow evil actions, they become positive forces which draw sympathy to him. His right to rule seems all the stronger when he no longer wears the crown. Stature which was impossible for him as king becomes possible for him as a man. Thus Richard, who has never completely lost sympathy, achieves a temporary dignity in his last minutes when,

moved to action at last, he kills two of the men come to murder him, before he 15 struck down. The dramatic force of this last act, however brief, cannot be overestimated.

Richard's stature as a tragic figure is thus maintained, despite an extended overindulgence in self-pity, which would ordinarily alienate the sympathy of the audience. For his reflections on his own state have the substance of truth, and are, besides, ennobled and heightened by Shakespeare's poetry; his evil actions are attributable not entirely to evil intentions but partly to limited perceptions and to misuse of a power which is truly his; his misuse of power is, in turn, more the fault of wicked friends who have taken advantage of his weakness and egoism; and his own actions at the end give momentary evidence of a nobility which until then has been lacking. This is not to say that Richard can match the greatness or dignity of Hamlet or Lear; but in terms which the Elizabethans would accept, he achieves a tragic stature.

This explanation cannot, however, obscure the fact that Richard was not a good king. His seizure of Gaunt's land was manifestly unjust, and the injustice became the means by which Bolingbroke, at the outset of the play, achieved the sympathy of a rising protagonist. And as long as Bolingbroke merely opposed the illegal acts of the King, and not the King himself, he could keep the sympathy of the nobles and of the audience. That was his original aim when he returned with an army from exile. Go, he says, and thus deliver to the King:

Harry 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 anus and power, Provided that my banishment repeal'd
And lands restor'd again be freely granted.
(III, iii, 35-41)

But Richard himself immediately perceives the truth. "Your heart,"_ he says to the kneeling Bolingbroke, "is up, I know, thus high at least,"' and he touches his own head. Not content with the restoration of his property, Bolingbroke reaches for the crown as well. At this p oint both the public and private fortunes of Richard and Bolingbroke cross. Politically, Richard's fall is matched with Bolingbroke's rise; but privately their fortunes are reversed. Bolingbroke's hands are no longer clean; he is guilty of the Greek *hybris,* the sin of pride and ambition; and Richard, in becoming the unjustly deposed king, plucks to himself the sympathy which until then has lain largely with Bolingbroke. If Richard gains both sympathy and a semblance of dignity at the end of the play, Bolingbroke, in taking the crown, has taken unto himself and to his heirs the curse so vehemently pronounced by the Bishop of Carlisle:

What subject can give sentence on his king? And who sits here that is not Richard's subject? . . .
My Lord *bf* Hereford here, whom you call
king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king; And if you crown him, let me prophesy, The

blood of English shall manure the
ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act.
(IV, 1, 121-122, 134-138)

So we come to the strangely ambivalent conclusion to this play, and the ambivalence was possible only because the primary concern was not for any single human being, but for the whole realm of England. Both Richard and Bolingbroke were in a measure innocent, and in a measure guilty. Richard was a legitimate king, but his rule was ruining England. If England was to live, he must be destroyed; but, paradoxically, this necessary destruction of God's divine instrument must then be punished. Thus, the ensuing plays about Henry the Fourth and Henry the Fifth become, among other things, a study of the suffering and expiation of the House of Lancaster. The civil wars and filial troubles of Henry the Fourth, constantly referred to as punishments for his sin, are gradually worked out; and When Henry the Fifth, like his great-grandfather Edward the Third, turns away from civil wars to wars of conquest in France, he prays before his great battle finally to be absolved from the sins of his family.

0, not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
I Richard's body have interred new,
And on it have bestow'd more contrite tears, Than from it issu'd forced drops of blood. . .
More will I do;
Though all that I can do is nothing worth Since that my penitence comes after all,
Imploring pardon.
(Henry V, IV, i, 310-314, 319-322)

His victory at Agincourt seems pretty clearly to be God's answer.

Critical Essay #4

Source: "The State of Law in Richard II," *Shakespeare* Quarterly, Vol. 34, No.1, Spring, 1983, Pl" 5-17.

[In the essay that follows, Hamilton studies the concept if a "law centered kingship" in Richard II *, suggesting that despite Richard's divine right to rule, he is not above the law Never theless, Hamilton demonstrates, in many ways Richard acts as if he is free from having to answer fur his own illegal action In conclusion. Hamilton observes that when Bolingbroke becomes king amber issue if kingship is raised, as Bolingbroke pos sesses only popular support, not the kgJ or divine right to rule]*

Near the end of the speeches of warning and instruction that Gaunt delivers on his deathbed to the wayward Richard II, one encounters the passage,

Landlord of England an thou now, not king, Thy state of law is bondslave to the law. (II.i.113-14)

[All references to Shakespeare's plays are from the *A rden Shakespeare* editions, including Peter Ure, ed., *King Richard II* (London: Methuen, 1956) and A. R Humphreys, ed., *The Second Part of King Henry IV* (London: Methuen, 1967)]

Although it is evident that Gaunt is expressing displeasure with Richard, the substance of his complaint has not always been clear. A P. Rossiter, for example, has described the passage as "hopelessly obscure." At issue is the relationship between king and law. To understand Gaunt's speech one must sort out the distinction the old man is drawing between landlord and king.

When this passage is glossed ill modem editions of the play, the readings nearly always suggest that the second line stands in apposition to the first, presumably repeating in different words what the first line says. A consequence of this assumption is the interpretation that Gaunt is accusing Richard, as J. Dover Wilson says, of having "diminish[ed] the royal prerogative." Citing J. C. Smith, Wilson offers the following paraphrase of the second line: "Your legal status as king ('in all causes supreme') is now amenable to the common law like that of any other mortgagee." Similarly G. L. Kittredge, basing his reading on the glosses of Samuel Johnson and Edmund Malone, writes, "Your legal status is no longer that of supreme King of England by divine right; for you are now as subject to the law in regard to the whole realm as any landlord is with reference to his private estate when he has given a lease of it." The Arden, Pelican, and Riverside editions of the play all offer essentially the same explanation.

These glosses raise problems because their phrasing, particularly the references to supremacy, seem incompatible with certain notions about kingship to which recent historians have drawn our attention. These notions include the recognition that a king who ruled by divine right was also, in theory and in practice, subject to the law; he was to rule according CO the law, and his power derived from the law. Glosses that derive

their authority from nineteenth-century scholarship proceed on the assumption that the king is not subject to the law; they suggest, therefore, that the lines in question present Richard as having declined from a condition of supremacy to one in which he is subject to the law.

What I wish to show in the following pages is that, on the issue of king and law, *Richard II* reflects the views of the playwright's own time, as historians now understand those views.

I

To arrive at a better reading of Gaunt's speech, it is necessary to recognize at the outset that the relationship of the lines to each other is not that of apposition. Rather, they express a paradox: a king who acts like a landlord instead of a king becomes in some sense a slave.

Some of the best help for these lines is available in that storehouse of political thought, *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), by Thomas Smith. Smith's definition of commonwealth has as its core a statement about the proper relationship between a king and his people. In his de scription of what that relationship *should* be, Smith includes a comment about what it should *not* be, namely the kind of relationship that existed between a Roman landlord and his slaves:

A common wealth is called a society or common doing of a multitude of free men collected together and united by common accord & covenauntes among themselves, for the conservation of themselves as well in peace as in warre. . '. And if one man had as some of the olde Romanes had. . . . V. thousande or L. thousande bondmen whom he ruled well. . . yet that were no common wealth: for the bondman hath no communion with his master, the wealth of the Lord is onely sought for, and not the profit of the slave or bondman. For as they who write of these things have defined, a bondman or a slave is as it were . . . but the instrument of his Lord, as . . . the saw, the chessyll and gowge is of the charpenter. Truth it is the charpenter looketh diligently to save, correct and amend all these: but it is for his own profit, and in consideration of him selfe, not for the instruments sake: . . and there is no mutuall societie or portion, no law or pleading betweene thone and thother.

For Smith, the keystone of a commonwealth is not the king's royal prerogative [an exclusive right or privilege], his power, or his supremacy, but the well-being of those he rules. By contrast, a landlord *sees* his people as slaves, as the means by which he enlarges himself; they exist only to increase his wealth and profit. Their well-being is of concern only in the sense that they must be kept in good condition, like tools, if they are to function efficiently in fulfilling the tasks he has for them. And because they have no value except insofar as they are useful to him, they can make no demands upon him, can claim no rights: "There is no mutuall societie or portion, no law or pleading betweene thone and thother."

Just as it is clear in Smith's discussion that this relationship between landlord and people is antithetical to the Idea of a commonwealth, so is it clear in the line by Gaunt- "Landlord of England art thou now, not king"that he would prefer to see Richard behave like a king, not a landlord. Significantly, the issue for Gaunt is not the matter of the king's royal prerogative, but the well-being of those the king rules. *As* Gaunt has told York before Richard enters the scene, Richard's "insatiate . . . consuming" rule poses a grave threat to all that England is and represents, both at home and abroad. In overtaxing the commons, in using blank charters to gather larger revenues, Richard has managed to reduce a demi-Paradise "to a tenement or pelting farm" The profit of the ruler, not that of the people, is being advanced. For Richard to act like a landlord is not to diminish the royal prerogative, then, but to act as though the royal prerogative allows a king to do anything he wishes.

For an interpretation of the monarchy of Richard II which coincides with this point of view Shakespeare need have gone no farther than *The Mirror for Magistrates,* Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles,* or the anonymous *Woodstock,* if in deed that play preceded Shakespeare's. . . .

III

In Shakespeare's *Richard II,* the view that Richard's activities are bad because they harm the commonwealth is nearly everywhere present. In addition to Gaunt's references to Richar as landlord, there are regular references to the rights and desires of the commons. Such references furnish a significant background against which to consider a king who speaks of his people as "slaves" deserving no respect, no "reverence" (I.iv.27), a king who taxes his subjects beyond their means and who disregards the laws and customs of inheritance when he determines to "Take Herford's right away" (II.i.195). In this atmosphere of neglect and abuse Northumberland's announcement that he and others are launching an effort to "shake off our slavish yoke" (II.i.291) sounds less like the language of an ambitious nobleman and more like the protest of a subject concerned about violations of his rights.

If Richard's failure at rule has consequences for the people, it also has consequences for Richard. One is his loss of popular support. How significant that loss is seems clear from the response Richard makes to the news that the Welsh have deserted him. Richard explains to Aumerle why he has suddenly grown "so pale":

But now the blood of twenty thousand men
Did triumph in my face, and they are fled;
And till so much blood thither come again,
Have I not reason to look pale and dead?
(III.ii.76-79)

In equating the blood of twenty thousand men with the blood that should be in his face, Richard is acknowledging that in a very important sense a king is, or should be, one with the people- mystically joined to them and, indeed, comprised of them. This emphasis is one not usually associated with Shakespeare's plays, and particularly not

with *Richard II,* a history play which has sometimes been thought of as a storehouse of materials on divine-right theory. It may be instructive, then, to note that such ideas are also available in so standard and respectable a source as *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* (1470) by John Fortescue. Comparing the body politic and the natural body, Fortescue explains that Just as the heart and blood give life to the natural body, "sembably in a bodye politike the intent of the people is the first lively thing, having within it bloud, that is to say, politike provision for the utilitie and wealth of the same people, which it dealeth furth & imparteth as wel to the head as to al the members of the same body wherby the body is nourished & maintained." The lifeblood that flows to the king from the people also flows from them to the laws, which, according to Fortescue, comprise "byndyng" sinews that allow the body to function properly (sig. Dviiiv). Because the people are the heart and blood of the commonwealth, the source both for laws and for the king, Fortescue says that ultimately the king, the head of the body politic, receives a measure of his "power of the people," a situation that makes it possible to "measure the power, which the king thereof may exercise over the lawe and subjectes of the same" (sig. Ei').

This understanding of the composition of the body politic extends the implications of *Richard II's* many references to the people who are leaving Richard. *As* they depart from him, the life in his body diminishes. The twenty-thousand Welshmen are but a small wound compared to the paleness and death that come over Richard's kingship when the politic body's other mem bers, the white-beards... boys. . . beads men . . . distaff-women. . . young and old" (III.ii.112-19), withdraw their support. The new recipient of that support is, of course, Bolingbroke, whom Richard had once mocked for giving himself over to the people's "hearts" (I.iv.25). Misconceiving the consequences of Bolingbroke's favor with the people, Richard has failed to recognize that the "reverence" he thought Bolingbroke uselessly "did throwaway on slaves" was in reality a gesture that added life, first, to Bolingbroke's legal cause and, later, to his growing political power.

The idea that Richard's failure to rule properly has drained the lifeblood from his rule is similar to the notion implicit in the "bondslave" line. *As* we have seen, the line preceding- "Landlord of England art thou now, not king" - defines the nature of Richard's fail ure. This line- "Thy state of law is bondslave to the law" - states the consequences of that failure, the paradox that a king who treats others as slaves will eventually lose his power over them, not augment it.

IV

To understand how this may be so, it is necessary to examine the notion current in Shakespeare's time, but with roots that sixteenth-century lawyers understood to reach back to Henry of Bracton, that the law makes the king. This notion is important to bear in mind when one considers either Richard II or Bolingbroke- Henry IV, because both are kings whose right to rule comes under question. The concept comes into *Richard II* most explicitly when York, following Richard's announcement that he plans to seize the deceased Gaunt's "plate, his goods, his money, and his lands," warns the king that failing to heed the laws of inheritance is akin to undermining the very laws upon which his right to the throne depends: "Take Herford's rights away, and take from time / His

charters, and his customary rights. . . For how art thou a king / But by fair sequence and succession?" (II.i.195-99). Through this reminder that the law makes Richard king, York is warning Richard that royal disregard for the law gives license for subjects to disobey the law. Even worse, York says, Richard's disobedience puts him in the precarious position of a ruler acting in the absence of any authority- separating himself from that which gives him power in the first place. In delivering such a warning, York takes a position similar to that expressed by Richard's contemporary, John Gower. In his discourse on the education of kings, in the seventh book of *Confessio Amantis,* Gower says:

What Kinge of lawe taketh no kepe
By lawe he may no royalme kepe. Do lawe away, what is a kynge? Where is the right of any thynge
If that there be no lawe in londe?

The most influential English legal authority to define the king in this manner was Bracton, upon whom Gower, Fortescue, and many of their successors, including Richard Hooker and Francis Bacon, relied. As Bracton had written in his thirteenth-centuty treatise *De Legibus et Cansuetudinibus Angliae,* "law makes the king. Let him therefore bestow upon the law what the law bestows upon him, namely rule and power. For there is no *roc* where will rules rather than *lex."* These are complicated sentences open to various application and interpretation. What is of first importance to this essay is that here is a set of ideas all mutually dependent on one another, inseparable from one another. The law makes the king; the law makes the king powerful; and the king is to rule by law.

In *De Laudibus,* after declaring that the king "at the time of his coronation. . . is bound by an othe to the observaunce and keeping of his owne lawe," John Fortescue explains that to rule by law "is no yoke, but liberty and greate securitie not onely to the subjectes, but also to the kinge" (sig. Kvii'). If the king does not rule by law, does he become more powerful? No, Fortescue says; he trades what liberty and security he has for the yoke of impotence. Ironically, he puts himself in a position analogous to that of a slave, one who has in effect no ability to plead to the law or make the law plead for him. *As* Quintilian had observed, "A slave cannot acquire his freedom without the consent of his master; a man assigned for debt can acquire it by paying his debt without the consent of his master being necessary. A slave is outside the law; a man assigned for debt is under the law." Defined by law and made powerful by law, a king forfeits his very freedom if he attempts to function "outside the law." If he thinks that abuse of law, which amounts to abuse of the relationship between king and people, will make him more powerful, he is deceived. To abuse the law is, in effect, to unavail himself of his authority; if he acts outside the law he soon finds that his relationship to the law deteriorates to that of a bonds law.

All of this Bracton knew. And this is what Gaunt means in *Richard II* when he defines Richard's situation as that of a landlord and a bondslave.

V

I should like now to consider the opening three scenes of the play, examining one issue central to those scenes to show how they prepare for the moment when Gaunt assesses Richard as a landlord- bondslave.

In the opening scenes of the play, where Richard is king and Bolingbroke is subject, the issue that might be said to provide the conceptual basis for the action is the inviolability the Crown enjoys by virtue of the royal prerogative. By illustrating the power a king can wield if he chooses, the scenes also reflect some of the relationships between the concept of the king as an official made by law and under the law and the concept, more often used as a by-word for discussions of *Rich. ard II,* that the king derives his power from God and is under God. For our purposes, the most important elements in that relationship are suggested by the sentences immediately preceding Bracton's assertion that "law makes the king." They include the famous Brac tonian explanation that the king is *"non. . . sub homine sed sub deo et sub lege."* According to Bracton, "The king has no equal within his realm. Subjects cannot be the equals of the ruler, because he would thereby lose his rule . . . because he would then be subjected to those subjected to him. The king must not be under man but under God and under the law, because law makes the kin g.

In making clear that the king is more powerful than the subject, Bracton's compact phrases helped future generations in their efforts to establish, among other things, a legal basis for the king's possession of extraordinary powers- his power to dispense with law, for example, and to determine cases according to equity. These provisions gave the king a degree of authority thought necessary to ensure that a condition of justice and well-being was maintained in the state. Power to dispense with the law or, through equity, to correct the law, was given so that the king could better fulfill the ultimate intention of the law, which was to protect and preserve the commonwealth. By virtue of his being clearly defined as above his subjects, moreover, the king had the advantage of increased security. His superiority was of a sort that made it impossible for him to be brought to trial; he could not be sued. Or, as is often said, he was not amenable to the law.

Despite these prerogatives, however, the king was still to be regarded as under the law. It was by law that he possessed prerogatives, and it was presumed that, in his use of these special powers, he would always exercise the kind of self-restraint that would keep his rule in the interest of the common-wealth and within the intention of the law. Just a few lines after declaring the king *"non sub homine,»* Bracton goes on to say that the king must will "himself to be subjected to the law" even as had Jesus Christ, "lest his power remain unbridled." . . .

A problem that could develop under such principles is the one dramatized in the three opening scenes of *Richard II* For the royal prerogative of immunity from prosecution could result in a situation whereby a king guilty of an illegal act would be free of having to answer for it. The commonwealth had no institution or procedure to compel a king to act in conformity with the law or to punish him for violating it.

In the first scene of the play, then, when Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of treason, he is taking the only action he can against a king who is guilty of having ordered the murder of Gloucester, but whose prerogative renders him immune from trial. With Richard occupying such an invulnerable position, the most Bolingbroke could accomplish would be to bring to trial the subordinate who exercised Richard's will in the matter. Hence Bolingbroke's action against Mowbray.

In the second scene of the play this context sheds light on Gaunt's reply to the angry and despairing Duchess of Gloucester, who wants satisfaction for her husband's murder. Gaunt is as aware as Bolingbroke that no legal action can be taken against the King. If Richard is ever to be punished, that punishment must come from God:

God's is the quarrel- for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in his sight,
Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully, Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.
(I.ii.37-41)

In reminding the Duchess that the King's authority derives ultimately from God and that the King is above his subjects, Gaunt is reflecting an understanding of the royal power and royal prerogative which coincides with the Bractonian assumptions we have been considering.

In the third scene Richard exercises his royal prerogative by halting the trial by combat and sentencing the combatants himself. The reason he gives for his action is that he wishes to avoid bloodshed. But the sentencing is also convenient for Richard, allowing him to get rid of both the man who played henchman for him and the man who sought to expose the King and his henchman.

While there is a sense in which the king's prerogative can be described as being provided by law to place the king above the law, his being always also under the law makes it possible for him to be judged according to the law. The opening scenes of *Richard II* call for the audience to render a judgment against Richard not only because he is implicated in a murder, but also because in both his scenes of confrontation with Bolingbroke and Mowbray (and most obviously in the second), Richard can be viewed as exercising the royal prerogative for his own self-interest rather than for the good of the commonwealth. Even though the prerogative that keeps Richard from being brought to trial makes him punishable by God alone, then, it is nevertheless true that Richard is still susceptible to criticism for not having bridled himself, as Bracton would have insisted, so that all his acts, including his use of the royal prerogative, would be in conformity with the law. Instead of accepting his responsibility to serve and execute the law, Richard has become "unstaid" (II.i.2). *As* a king "wanting the manage" of himself (III.iii.179), he has created conditions that promote the unruliness of others.

VI

A similar judgment of Richard will be offered in the garden scene (the scene immediately preceding the deposition), another place in the play where the responsibilities of a God-given and a law-made kingship are set forth. This scene provides an occasion for recalling that one whose authority is stronger because it is from God as well as from the law not only accepts the advantages of great power when he accedes to the throne; he also assumes responsibility for fulfilling the demands of both God and the law. The king is empowered, but he is also obligated- to trim and dress the land, to "Keep law and form and due proportion" (III.iv.41). And just as Adam, whom God had "set to dress" another garden, was cast out from that paradisal setting when he sought to satisfy his own desires instead of God's commands, so Richard's failure in stewardship to God and the law presages his expulsion from the sea-walled garden that is John of Gaunt's "other Eden."

Following the display, in Act I, of the ways in which Richard abuses his power, much of the rest of the play points, as does the garden scene, to the consequences of those abuses- consequences which nearly always involve Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke's re-entry into England is one of the first. That return must be judged illegal because it defies the order of banishment. But it also serves as a reminder that Richard has furnished his subjects with a precedent for side-stepping the law. Moreover, because some of Richard's abuses have been particularly at Bolingbroke's expense, the latter's return directs attention quite specifically to the consequences of Richard's disregard of a subject's rights under the law. Before leaving England, as York has reminded Richard, Bolingbroke had hired attorneys to secure his inheritance in the event of his father's death. When access to legal aid is denied him and the right to his inheritance is threatened, the banished Bolingbroke enters the country to maintain that which he believes to be his, according to his status under the law: "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.132-35). By refusing to buckle under as someone with no right to plead for justIce under the law, Bolingbroke is expressing much the same sentiment as that of Northumberland's determination to "shake off our slavish yoke." For a commonwealth to exist, there must be, as Smith said, "a mutual societie" with "law or pleading between thone and thother."

VII

As Bolingbroke's status in the realm changes from that of subject to that of king, *Richard II* prompts an audience to think of yet other aspects of kingship. The central issue for Bolingbroke's rule, and one to which every play in the rest of the second tetralogy will return, is the threat to the realm when the king is not legally titled. Historically, great care was taken by Bolingbroke and his supporters to make Richard II's deposition and Henry IV's accession appear legal. Technically, Richard's power was given, not taken away; he deposed himself publicly in the presence of Parliament, a detail whose significant p resence in *Richard II* Ernest Talbert has emphasize ill his analysis of references to Parliament in the stage directions for the deposition scene. Nevertheless, because the deposition is an interruption of the tradition of legal succession, Bolingbroke's power exists without the clear sanction of either the law or God, a point the Bishop of Carlisle addresses when he declares,

And shall the figure of God's majesty
His captain, steward, deputy elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judg'd by subject and inferior breath. . . . My Lord of Herford here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Herford's king.
(IV.i.125-28, 134-35)

Bacon, in the Case of the Post-Nati, explains that "toward the king himself the law doth a double office. . . the first is to entitle the king. . .. The second is . . . to make the ordinary power of the king more definite and regular" (p. 646). Richard's transgressions are against the latter provision of the law, Bolingbroke's against the former. Conse quently; Bolingbroke's power rests almost solely on public support, an element so sorely lacking in Richard that the authority which God and law had given him was undermined. Richard himself describes the precariousness of Bolingbrook's reign in his prophecy to Northumberland:

thou shalt think.
Though he divIde the realm and give thee half, It is too little, helping him to all;
He shall think that thou, which knowest the way To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again. . . To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.
(V .i.5 9- 65)

Bolingbroke is in the one position that Bracton said a ruler could least afford: "Subjects cannot be the equals of the ruler, because he would thereby lose his rule. . .. The king must not be under man."

It is, then, with a certain sad irony that one observes Bolingbroke demonstrating his capacity for rule. He announces his intention of returning Norfolk's lands to him, and he exercises the royal prerogative in a manner that benefits a subject when he acquits Aumerle of treason. The presence of some qualifications for kingship is not always sufficient compensation, however, for the absence of others. Thus it seems fitting that a play which begins with scenes recalling the murder Richard ordered should end with scenes referring to the murder of Richard. Unwilling to accept those aspects of kingship in which law is sovereign, both Richard and Bolingbroke separate themselves from that which makes the power of kings secure. Fortescue's conclusion that the kIng who refuses to rule by law thereby loses his freedom (sig. K vii') is thus aptly illustrated by the fates of both Richard and Bolingbroke. In their closing scenes (V.ii and V.iii), both kings are prisoners of guilt.

VIII

The concepts of law that define king and commonwealth in *Richard II* and guide the audience's assessment of Richard's reign are the same standards that many of Shakespeare's contemporaries used to assess their own monarch and society. The presence of such concepts in *Richard II* would seem, then, to be incompatible with interpretations that consider the play to be about the passing of a period with a less

modem kingship than that of the Renaissance, or interpretations that consider the play to be about the destruction of an era characterized by a kind and degree of order that could never be recreated. On the contrary, the presence of these ideas about law and commonwealth in *Richard II* suggests that the dramatist saw in Richard's story an example of something that had happened once in England, and might happen again. Richard's story was a meaningful one for Shakespeare's own time, and the dramatist enacted it in a manner that allowed it to reflect the social and political ideals his own time revered.

Realizing that the concept of a law-centered kingship is central to *Richard II* has implications both for the way one interprets this play and for the way one assesses its place in the second tetralogy. The political ideals that many of Shakespeare's contemporaries upheld appear in *Richard II* primarily through a succession of negative examples. In the English history plays that follow, the same assumptions prove pertinent, prompting an audience to apply the same standards in 1 and 2 *Henry IV* and in *Henry V* as it assesses the degree to which the commonwealth is presented in terms of an ideal state of law. When the tetralogy is looked at from this point of view, a most important moment is the one in 2 *Henry IV* when Hal, making his first entry as Henry V, announces to the Lord Chief Justice that he now takes him as his "father." That gesture indicates that Hal correctly comprehends what a king is and what a commonwealth should be:

You shall be as 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-practis'd wise directions.
(V.ii.118-21)

In acknowledging that he is under the law and in promising to act accordingly- and then in proceeding to banish the lawless Falstaff and summon Parliament- Hal offers assurance that his rule will be a responsible one and that he will always consider himself to be "busy for the commonwealth" (V.ii.76). Obviously Falstaff is wrong when he assumes, upon hearing that Hal is king, that "the laws of England are at my commandment" (V.iii.132-33). Rather, the laws will now be sovereign over king and subject alike. The days of having a landlord for a king, or a subject with as much power as the king, are finally past.

Critical Essay #5

The language of *Richard II* and the images and symbols it contains can help illuminate the significance of the play's themes. Arthur Suzman and Andrew Gurr both examine the ways in which the imagery highlights important themes and supports the action of the play. Suzman argues that the play is primarily concerned with the fall of Richard and the rise of Bolingbroke. A parallel theme, Suzman states, is the spiritual rise of Richard, which follows his political fall, and the spiritual fall of Bolingbroke, precipitated by his political rise. The imagery of the play reflects this theme of rise and fall. The action of the playas well, Suzman notes, is closely linked with this imagery. In almost every scene, the imagery of rise and fall is used, Suzman explains. Word pairs such as "ascend" and "descend" or "sky" and "earth" are often employed to emphasize rising and falling, and images such as ladders or "two buckets in a well" are used for the same purpose. Suzman traces the usage of such language and imagery from the play's beginning to end, noting that one of the scenes where this language and imagery is powerfully employed is Act III, scene iii, when Richard, standing high on the battlements, looks down on Northumberland and Bolingbroke below. Richard has told Bolingbroke that he shall acquiesce to his demands. Richard then descends from the battlements to Bolingbroke's "base court" (III.iii.180). Bolingbroke kneels before Richard, but Richard replies, "Up, cousin up- your heart is up, I know. . ." (III.iii.194). Suzman notes that with these and the next several lines, the "climax of the play has passed."

Gurr studies the imagery of the play in a different way, observing that the images used in *Richard II* are related to the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Richard as king, for example, is associated with the sun and fire, Bolingbroke with a flood, or water, until Bolingbroke becomes king and takes over the sun imagery. Gurr emphasizes that as the play progresses, the shifting of these elemental images makes clear that the balance of power has shifted from Richard to Bolingbroke. Gurr also analyzes the language of the play, specifically focusing on the use of formal, rhymed verse compared to the usage of blank verse. The contrast between blank verse and the formality of rhymed verse, Gurr argues, represents the play's concern with the gulf between the words used and the meaning they represent.

Source: "Imagery and Symbolism in Richard II," in *Shakespeare Quarterly,* Vol. VII, No.3, Summer, 1956, Pl'. 357-70.

[In the following essay, Suzman argues that the main theme of Richard II *is the political fall of Richard and the rise of Bolingbroke. This them!, Suzman states, is paralleled by Richard's spiritual rise and Bolingbroke's spiritual fall. The play's imagery and symbolism are used as a method of presenting this "dual theme of rise and fall," Suzman maintains. Suzman closely analyzes the play's language imagery, and symbolism to show that the action of the play is tightly linked with its imagery.]*

The fall of Richard and the rise of Bolingbroke provide the central theme of Shakespeare's tragedy, *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second.* As William Hazlitt observes: "The steps by which Bolingbroke mounts the throne are those by

which Richard sinks into the grave.» Spiritually, one might add, as Richard rises, so Bolingbroke declines. This dual theme of rise and fall provides in turn the dominant imagery and symbolism of the play, indeed, it may justly be described as its *leitmotif* a theme associated throughout a drama with a particular idea or person].

Perhaps in no other of Shakespeare's plays do imagery and action so closely correspond. The recurrent imagery of rise and fall goes far beyond a purpose of mere description. Throughout, it has a significance beyond its immediate context and bears a striking relationship to the central dramatic theme.

The imagery, in the language of Wolfgang Clemen *(The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery)* is functional and organic and plays a decisive pan both in expressing the dramatic theme and in characterization.

This close relationship in *Richard II* between the action of the play and its iterative imagery appears somehow to have escaped attention in the numerous writings on Shakespearian imagery. Even Richard D. Altick, in his detailed study, *"Symphonic Imagery in Richard II" (PMLA,* LXII) makes no specific mention of the repeated use throughout the play of the imagery and symbolism of rise and fall, or of its constant relationship to the underlying theme of the tragedy.

E. M. W. Tillyard, in his *"Shakespeare's History Plays"* (1946) emphasizes the marked ceremonial character of *Richard II;* indeed, he describes it as the most formal and ceremonial of all Shakespeare's plays and points out that the very actions tend to be symbolic rather than real and the language that of ceremony rather than of passion. "In *Richard II",* he writes, "with all the emphasis and the point taken out of the action, we are invited again and again, to dwell on the sheer ceremony of the various situations."

Almost throughout, however, the very ceremony itself, no less than the elaborate poetic language in which it is clothed, is symbolic or suggestive of this central theme of rise and fall.

This ceremonial, expressed in varying forms, but always with the same underlying symbolic motif, occurs in the play on four significant occasions: firstly, in the opening scene, at Windsor Castle, when Bolingbroke and Mowbray throw down their gages; next, before the lists at Coventry (I.iii), when the King throws down his warder- "His own life hung upon the staff he threw"; thirdly, at Flint Castle (III.iii), when the King, surrendering to Bolingbroke, descends to the "base court" from the castle walls; and, finally, in the deposition scene at Westminster Hall (IV.i), when Richard hands his crown to Bolingbroke and later, at the close of the scene, when he dashes the mirror to the ground where it lies" crack' d in a hundred shivers".

There is scarcely a scene in the play where the imagery of rise and fall does not occur. The dual imagery is achieved usually by means of antitheses- contrasting ideas of rise and fall being expressed by the use of pairs of words such as: "ascend", "descend"; "up", "down"; "high", "low"; "sky", "earth". Occasionall ,the mere subject matter itself, such as "scale", "ladder", "two buckets in a well", suggests the two-fold imagery.

Pregnant phrases, such as "jauncing Bolingbroke" and "plume-pluck'd Richard", convey in a word the changing fortunes- ascending or descending- of the characters.

The play is rich in colorful metaphor suggestive of the images of the rising Bolingbroke and the falling Richard. Thus, of Bolingbroke- "How high a pitch his resolution soars"; "The eagle-wing'd pride of sky aspiring and ambitious thoughts"; "How far brought you high Hereford on his way?"; "Great Bolingbroke, mounted upon a hot and fiery steed, which his aspiring rider seemed to know". And, of Richard-"I see thy glory like a shooting star fall to the base earth from the firmament. Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly west"; "Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon."

The thesis that Shakespeare secures the unity of each of his greatest plays not only by the plot, by linkage of characters, by the sweep of Nemesis, by the use of irony and by appropriateness of style, but by deliberate repetition through the play of at least one set of words or ideas in harmony with the plot, is propounded by F. C Kolbe *(Shakespeare's Way: A Psychological Study).* "It is like the effect of the dominant note in a melody", writes Kolbe. "In some of the plays there are two such sets of ideas and then one is seen to be the dominant and the other the tonic."

Writing of *Richard II,* Kolbe states there are in the play four inter-woven strains, Sorrow, Life-blood, Inheritance, and England, and that the leading idea in the play is "England's Heritage of Blood and Woe". This, he adds, is in reality the key chord of the whole octave of plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III.*

A review of the imagery and symbolism in *Richard II* strikingly supports Kolbe's general thesis, for it reveals a deliberate repetition throughout the play of one set of words or ideas in harmony with the plot, namely, the dual theme of rise and fall, reflecting the conflict between the two protagonists, Richard of Bordeaux and Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster.

The play opens, it will be recalled, at Windsor Castle where Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford (son of "old John of Gaunt, time-honour'd Lancaster"_) and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, both "highstomach'd and full of ire", have been summoned before the King "to appeal each other of high treason". In the opening scene, as already mentioned, the imagery of rise and fall is expressed symbolically. Bolingbroke hurls his gauntlet at Mowbray's feet, challenging him to stoop and take it up. Mowbray takes up the gage and duly throws down his, which Bolingbroke, in turn, takes up. This ceremonial, accompanied by language appropriate to the symbolism, provides, as it were, an overture to the central theme of rise and fall.

Thus, Bolingbroke, answering Mowbray's charge:

Pale trembling coward there I *throw* my gage,
Disclaiming here the kindred of the king,
And lay aside my *high* blood's royalty,
Which fear, not reverence, makes thee to
accept....

If guilty dread have left thee so much strength, As to *take up* mine honour's pawn, then *stoop.*
(I.i.69ff.) [All textual references are to the Cambridge Shakespeare *Richard II,* edited by John Dover Wilson (1939). The italics are my own.

Mowbray replies:

I take It *up,* and by that sword I swear, Which gently laid my knighthood on my shoulder,
I'll answer thee in any fair degree,
Or chivalrous design of knightly trial: And when I *mount* alive may I not *light,* If I be traitor or unjustly fight!

When Bolingbroke returns to the charge, accusing Mow bray of plotting the death of the Duke of Gloucester whose blood, he says, cries to him for "justice and rough chastisement", the King significantly exclaims: "How *high a pitch* his resolution *soars!"* (I.i.l09). Richard, calling upon Mowbray to answer the charge, proclaims his impartiality. "Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood", he vows,

Should nothing privilege him nor partialize The *unstooping* firmness of my *upright* soul.
(I.i.120-121)

Ineffectually, the King seeks to reconcile his quarrelsome subjects, and then calls on John of Gaunt:

Good uncle, let this end where it begun,
We'll calm the Duke of Norlolk, you your
son.
(I.i.158-159)

The theme continues:

Gaunt. To be a make-peace shall become my
age,
Throw down, my son, the Duke of Norlolk's
gage.
K Richard And, Norlolk, *throw down* his.
Gaunt. When, Harry? when?
Obedience bIds I should not bid again.
K Richard. Norfolk, *throw* down we bid,
there is no boot.
M oubray. Myself I *throw,* dread sovereign, at
thy *foot.*
My life thou shalt command, but not my
shame.
(I.i.160 ff.)

The combatants remain unmoved. Richard, addressing Bolingbroke, again commands:

Cousin, *throw up* your
gage, do you begin", and Bolingbroke replies:
0 God defend my soul from such *deep* sin! Shall I seem *crestfallen* in my father's sight?
Or with pale beggar-fear impeach my *height* Before this out-dared dastard) ere my tongue
Shall wound my honour with such feeble
wrong,
Or sound so *base* a parle, my teeth shall
tear
The slavish motive of recanting fear,
And spit it bleeding in his *high* disgrace, Where shame doth harbour, even in Mowbray's face.
(I.i.187 ff.)

The same symbolism recurs- but with deeper significance- when Bolingbroke and Mowbray next appear, as commanded, on Saint Lambert's Day before the Lists at Coventry, their swords and lances "there to arbitrate the swelling difference of their settled hate".

Bolingbroke approaches the Lord Marshal, exclaiming: "Lord marshal, let me kiss my sovereign's hand, And *haw my knee* before his majesty." The King descends from his throne and ironically proclaims: "We will *descend* and fold him in our arms. Cousin of Hereford, as thy cause is right, So be thy fortune in this royal fight."

Bolingbroke replies:

As confident as is the *falron's fllght*
Against a bird, do I with Mowbray fight. (I.iii.61-62)

Turning to his father, John of Gaunt, he adds:

0 thou, the earthly author of my blood, Whose youthful spirit in me regenerate Doth with a twofold vigour *lift* me *up*
To reach at Victory *above my head.* . . .
Add proof unto mine armour with thy prayers. . .

The heralds announce their respective combatants; the Lord Marshal commands, "Sound, trumpets; and set forward, combatants." A charge is sounded. As the combatants are about to join battle, the Lord Marshal cries out, "Stay, stay, the kIng hath thrown his warder down!'

This dramatic moment presages the fall and death of Richard. In the later play of 2 *Henry IV* the incident is thus recounted, in the same symbolic language, by Thomas Mowbray's son:

Then, then, when there was nothing could
have stayed
My father from the breast of Bolingbroke . . .
0, when the King did *throw* Ius warder *down,* (His own life hung upon the staff he threw!)
Then *threw* he *down* himself and all their lives That by indIctment and by dint of sword
Have since miscarried under Bolingbroke.
(IV.i.123 ff.)

Bolingbroke and Mowbray are banished. John of Gaunt dies, foretelling that Richard's "rash fierce blaze of riot" cannot last. Richard, to replenish his coffers for his Irish wars, seizes Gaunt's possessions, thereby, as the Duke of York prophesies, "plucking a thousand dangers on his head and losing a thousand well-disposed hearts."

The King departs for his Irish wars. The King gone, Bolingbroke returns to England from banishment. The vety news of Bolingbroke's return is expressed in language which heightens the image of his rising fortunes. Thus, Northumberland announces he has received intelligence that Harry, Duke of Hereford and others "With eight *tall* ships, three thousand men of war Are making hither . . ." (II.i.286). Green thus informs the Queen: "The banish'd Bolingbroke repeals himself, And with *uplifted* arms is safe arriv'd, At Ravenspurgh" (II.ii.49 ff.). The tidings are thus brought by Scroop to the King:

Like an unseasonable stormy day,
Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores,
As if the world were all dissolved to tears;
So *high* above his limits *swells* the rage
Of Bolingbroke, covering your fearful land
With hard bright steel.
(III.ii.106 ff.)

The image of the sagging fortunes of the King is portrayed by York (himself tom between conflicting loyalties) when he complains:

Here am I left to *underprop* his land.
(II.ii.82)
. .. all is
Uneven,
And everything is left at six and seven.
(II.ii.123)

Richard's followers, meanwhile, having heard no tidings from their King, would disperse, but Salisbury begs them stay but another day. In the Captain's reply, the theme of the fall and doom of Richard is now given out in a minor key of foreboding:

Tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay. The bay-trees in our country are all withered,
And *meteors* fright the fixed stars of heaven,
The palefaced moon looks bloody on the earth, And lean-looked prophets whisper

fearful change, Rich men look sad, and roffuans dance and leapThe one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
The other to enjoy by rage and war:
These signs forerun the death or *fall* of kings . . . Farewell. Our countrymen are gone and fled, As well assured Richard their king is dead. (II.iv.7 ff.)

Salisbury takes up this theme and soliloquizes:

Ah, Richard! with the eyes of heavy mind
I see thy glory like a *shooting star*
Fall to the *base* earth from the firmament.
Thy sun *sets* weeping in the *lowly* west,
Witnessing storms to come, woe, and unrest.
Thy friends are fled to wait upon thy foes,
And crossly to thy good all fortune goes.

Richard returns to England. *As* he sets foot on his native soil, symbolically he stoops to touch the earthto do it favor with his royal hands. "I weep for joy", he says,

To stand upon my kingdom once again:
Dear *earth,* I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horse's
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 favour with my royal hands. (III.ii.5 ff.)
Tills earth shall have a feeling, and these stones Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king Shall *falter* under foul rebellion's arms. (III.ii.24 ff.)

Richard fondly believes that when the traitor Bolingbroke

Shall see us *ruing* in our throne, the east, His treasons will *sit* blushing in his face
Not able to endure the sight of day,
For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed To *lift* shrewd steel against our golden crown, God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel; then, if angels fight,
Weak men must *fall,* for heaven still guards the right.
(III.ii.50 ff.)

Richard's mood of self-confidence is but short-lived. When Salisbury tells him he has returned a day too late, that his Welsh followers "Are gone to Bolingbroke, dispers'd, and fled", he pales. Aumerle has but to remind him he is king- "Comfort, my liege, remember who you are", and Richard's self-confidence is restored; dejection gives way to elation and he exclaims:

I had forgot myself, am I not king?
. . . Look not to the *ground,*
Ye favourites of a king, are we not *high? High* be our thoughts. I know my uncle York
Hath power enough to serve our turn. . . . (III.ii.83 ff.)

Yet no sooner is he told of the execution of Bushy, Green, and the Earl of Wiltshire than he once again falls into a mood of deep dejection. His plaintive outburst of self-pity re-echoes, but now in inversion, the theme of his earlier words- "Look not to the ground, Ye favourites of a king, are we not high?":

. . . Of comfort no man speak:
Let's talk of *graves,* of worms, and epitaphs, Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the *earth* . . . Let's choose executors and talk of wills: And yet not so, for what can we bequeath, Save our *deposed* bodies to the *ground?*
Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's, And nothing can we call our own, but death; And that small model of the barren *earth,* Which serves as paste and cover to our bones. For God's sake, let us *sit* upon the *ground,* And tell sad stories of the death of kings how some have been deposed, some slam In war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have
deposed,...
Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and
blood
With solemn reverence, throwaway respect, Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
For you have but mistook me all this while: I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends- subjected thus, How can you say to me, I am a king?
(III.ii.144 ff.)

When Richard hears that York has "joined with Bolingbroke and all his northern castles yielded up", he discharges his followers and with Aumerle seeks refuge in Flint Castle.

In the following scene, Bolingbroke, York, Northumberland, and their forces appear on the plain before the Castle. Bolingbroke bids Northumberland go to the "rude ribs" of the ancient castle and "thus deliver" to the King:

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 antis and power; Provided that my banishment repealed
And lands restored again be freely granted;
If not, I'll use the advantage of my power, And *lay* the summer's dust with showers of blood,
Rained from the wounds of slaughtered
Englishmen,
The which, how far off from the mind of
Bolingbroke
It is, such crimson tempest should be drench The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's

land, My *stooping* duty tenderly shall show.
(III. iii. 35 ff.)

A parley is sounded. King Richard appears on the battlements. Northumberland stands below. Richard looks down, waiting, in vain, for obeisance to his royal person. Addressing Northumberland, he says:

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? (III. iii. 72 ff.)

"Tell Bolingbroke", he says,

That every stride he makes upon my land
Is dangerous treason: he is come to open The purple testament of bleeding war.
(III. iii. 92 ff.)

Richard's mood of defiance soon gives way to one of resignation, and he bids Northumberland tell Bolingbroke that "all the number of his fair demands shall be accomplished."

As Northumberland retires, Richard again vacillates and asks of Aumerle:

We do *debase* ourself, 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 ff.)

"Let's fight with gentle words", counsels Aumerle, "Till time lend friends, and friends their helpful swords." Richard, conscious of his deep humiliation, exclaims:

0 God! 0 God! that e'er this tongue of
mine,
That *lard* the sentence of dread banishment
On you proud man, should *take it* off again
With words of sooth! 0, that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
(III. iii. 133 ff.)

As Northumberland returns from Bolingbroke, Richard in a flood of pathetic self-pity and helplessness, delivers those poignant lines, which yet again re-echo the theme of the earth and of graves. The imagery again matches his mood of utter dejection.

What must the king do now? must he
submit?
The king shall do it: must he be deposed? The king shall be contented: must he lose
The name of king: a God's name let it go: I'll give my jewels for a set of beads:
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage:

My gay apparel for an almsman's gown:
My figured goblets for a dish of wood:
My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff:
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little *grave,*
A little little *grave,* an obscure *grave,*
Or 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;* For on my heart they tread now whilst I live: And *buried* once, why not upon my *head.?* Aumerle, thou weep'st (my tender-hearted
cousin!) ,
We'll make foul weather with despised tears; Our sighs and they shall *lodge* the summer com, And make a dearth in this revolting land: Or shall we play the wantons with our woes, And make some pretty match with shedding
tears?
As thus to drop them still upon one place, Till they have fretted us a pair of *graves*
Within the *earth,* and therein laid. . . there lies Two kinsmen digged their *graves* with weeping
eyes!
Would not this ill do well? Well, well, I see I talk but idly and you laugh at me. . . . Most mighty prince, my Lord
Northumberland,
What says King Bolingbroke? will his
majesty Give Richard leave to live till Richard die? You *make* a *leg* and Bolingbroke says 'ay'.
(III. iii. 143 ff.)

Throughout the scene, Richard's alternating moods of defiance and dejection, hope and despair, provide a rhythmic undertone to the imagery of rise and fall which now reaches a climax. The very setting heightens the imagery. Richard stands aloft on the battlements, looking down; Northumberland and Bolingbroke stand below, looking up.

In the following lines the word "down" is repeated no fewer than six times, and the word "base" recurs five times:

Northumberland. My lord, in the *base* court he
doth attend,
To speak with you, may it please you to
come *down?*
K. Richard Down, down I come, like glist'ring
Phaethon:
Wanting the manage of unruly jades. . . .
In the *base* court? *Base* court, where kings
grow *base,*
To come at traitors' calls, and do them grace.
In the *base* court? Come *down?? Down* court!

down king!
For night-owls shriek where *mounting* larks
should sing
(III. iii. 178 ff.)

As the King descends, Bolingbroke kneels. The theme is resumed, but in lighter and sarcastic vein:

Fair cousin, you *debase* your princely *knee,*
To make the *base* earth proud with kissing it:
Me rather had my heart might feel your love,
Than my unpleased eye see your *courtesy:*
Up, cousin, *up*- your heart is *up,* I know,
Thus *high* at least, although your knee be *law*
(III. iii. 190 ff.)

"My gracious lord, I come but for mine own', retorts Bolingbroke; and Richard replies:

Your own is yours, and I am yours and all.
What you will have, I'll give, and willing too, For do we must what fate will have us do. . .
Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?
(III. in. 197 ff.)

"Yea, my good Lord", answers Bolingbroke; and Richard ends: "Then I must not say no."

The struggle is over. The climax of the play has passed. The imagery of rise and fall now takes on a new note.

The scene changes to the Duke of York's garden at Langley. In the interchanges between the Queen and her ladies and the gardener and his men, the whole tempo is slowed down; the iterative imagery is now more measured, more elaborate and is in allegorical form. Thus the gardener to his two men:

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 commonwealthAll must be *even* in our government.
(III. iv. 29 ff.)

Again, referring to the King, he says:

He that hath suffered this disordered spring Hath now himself met with the *fall* of leaf:
The weeds that his broad-spreading leaves did
shelter,
That seemed in eating him to *hold* him *up,*

Are plucked up root and all by Bolingbroke.
(III.iv.48 ff.)

The conversation between the gardener and his men continues thus:

First Servant. What, think you then the king
shall be deposed?
Gardener. Depressed he is already, and deposed
'Tis doubt he will be. . . .

The Queen, overhearing their conversation, comes forth and addresses her gardener in words which continue the imagery, again in allegorical form:

What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee
To make a second *fall* of cursed man?
Why dost thou say King Richard is deposed? Dar'st thou, thou little better thing than earth,
Divine his *downfall?*

The gardener, in his reply, uses the metaphor of Bolingbroke, in the one scale, weighing down Richard, in the other, pointing the declining fortunes of the one and the ascending fortunes of the other. The idiom changes but the imagery persists:

King Richard, he is in the mighty hold of Bolingbroke: their fortunes both are *weighed:* In your lord's *scale* is nothing but himself, And some few vanities that make him *light;* But in the balance of great Bolingbroke, Besides himself, are all the English peers, And with that odds he weighs King Richard *down*

Act IV opens with the historic deposition scene at Westminster Hall where Bolingbroke, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and the Commons are assembled. York's announcement of the King's abdication stresses in almost every line the two-fold imagery of rise and fall:

Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee
From *plume-pluck'd* Richard, who with willing
soul
Adopts thee heir, and his *hiFP* sceptre yields
To the possession of thy royal hand:
Ascend his throne, *descending* now from him;
And long live Henry, of that name the
fourth!
(IV. i. 107 ff.)

Proudly Bolingbroke exclaims: "In God's name, I'll *asrend* the regal throne."

From this moment, as Richard grows in spiritual stature, so Bolingbroke declines, and the imagery now reflects this spiritual transformation in the two central characters of the play.

The Bishop of Carlisle, alone of those assembled, raises his voice in protest, calls Bolingbroke a foul traitor and prophesies that if they crown him

0, if you *raise* this house against this house,
It will the woe fullest division prove
That ever *fell* upon this cursed earth.
(IV. i. 145 ff.)

For his pains, Northumberland orders Carlisle's arrest for capital treason. "Fetch hither Richard", orders Bolingbroke, "that in common view he may surrender."

York returns with Richard, guarded and stripped of his royal robes; officers follow, bearing the crown and sceptre. "Alack," cries Richard,

Why am I sent for to a king,
Before I have *shook iff* the regal thoughts Wherewith I reigned? I hardly yet have learned
To insinuate, flatter, boo; and *bend* my knee: Give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me
To this submission.
(IV. i. 162 ff.)

As Richard takes the crown, he calls on Bolingbroke:

Here, Cousin, seize the crown;
Here, cousin,
On this side, my hand, and on that side, thine.
(IV. i. 181 ff.)

Victor and vanquished stand face to face, each holding the crown; Richard about to be unkinged, Bolingbroke soon to be enthroned. The poetic imagery of rise and fall- accentuated by the tenseness of the drama- now reaches sublime heights as Richard exclaims:

Now is this golden crown like a *deep well*
That owes two buckets, filling one another,
The emptier ever *dancing* in the air,
The other *down,* unseen, and full of water:
That bucket *down,* and full of tears, am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you *mount up on high.*
(IV. i. 184 ff.)

"I thought you had been willing to resign", protests Bolingbroke, and grief-stricken Richard replies:

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.

As the dialogue proceeds, the theme of rise and fall recurs, contrapuntally, as it were:

Bolingbroke. Part of your cares you give me
with your crown.
Richard. Your cares *set up* do not *pluck* my
cares down.
My care is loss of care, by old care done,
Your care is gain of care, by new care won:
The cares I give, I have, though given away,
They tend the crown, yet still with me they
stay.
Bolingbroke. Are you contented to resign the
crown?
K Richard. 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 weiFPt* from off my *head,*
And tills unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous
oaths:
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues, I forgo;
My acts, decrees, and statutes, I deny:
Long mayst thou live in Richard's *seat* to sit,
And soon *lie* Richard in an *earthy* pit. . . .
God save King Henry, unkinged Richard says,
And send him many years of sunshine
days. . . .
What more remains?
(IV. i. 194 ff.)

Northumberland demands that Richard read out the accusations against himself,

That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily deposed.
(IV. i. 226-227)

Richard protests:

Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot *see:*
And yet salt water blinds them not so much,
But they can see a sart of traitors here.

Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest:
For I have given here my soul's consent
T' *undeck* the pompous body of a king;
Made gloty *base;* and sovereignty, a slave;
Proud majesty, a subject; state, a peasant.

Northumberland intervenes, "My Lord,-" and Richard retorts:

No lord of thine, thou *haught,* insulting man, Nor no man's lord; I have no name, no title;
No, not that name was given me at the font, But 'tis *usurped:* alack the heavy day,
That I have worn so many winters out,
And know not now what name to call
myself!
0, that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To *melt* myself away in water-drops!

Richard commands a mirror, "That it may show me what a face I have, Since it is bankrupt of his majesty" (IV. i. 266-267). He gazes in it and laments:

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

As Richard dashes the mirror to the ground he exclaims:

A brittle glory shineth in this face,
As brittle as the glory is the face,
For there it is, cracked in a hundred shivers. . . .
Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport,
How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my
face.

Richard's final dramatic gesture in the deposition scene strikingly symbolizes his own disintegration.

Walter Pater, in his essay, *"Shakespeare's English Kings"* (1889) likens the scene in which Richard divests himself of his crown and sceptre to "an inverted rite, a rite of degradation, a long agonising ceremony in which the order of the coronation is reversed." The imagery and ceremonial symbolism of the scene reflect this inversion.

As the dramatic deposition scene draws to a close, Richard begs leave to go. "Whither?" asks Bolingbroke, and Richard tauntingly replies, "Whither you will, so were I from your sights." On Bolingbroke's curt command: "Go, some of you convey him to the Tower", Richard is led away. With Richard's parting thrust, the imagery takes on a sardonic twist:

0, good! convey? conveyers are you all,
That *rise* thus nimbly by a true king's *fall*
(IV.i.317-318)

As Richard is led through the streets of London, we see the final meeting and parting with his Queen, who sadly awaits him on his way to "Julius Caesar's ill-erected tower". At his approach, she tenderly exclaims :

But soft, but see, or rather do not *see,*
My fair rose wither. . . .
. . . Thou most beauteous
inn,
Why should hard-favoured grief be lodged in
thee,
When triumph is become an alehouse guest?
(V.i.7 ff.)

Richard, still the absorbed spectator of his own tragedy- to borrow a phrase from John Palmer's *Political Characters of Shakespeare*- replies:

Join not with grief, fair woman, do not so,
To make my end too sudden. Learn, good
soul,
To think our former state a happy dream,
From which awaked, the truth of what we are Shows us but this: I am sworn brother,
sweet,
To grim Necessity, and he and I
Will keep a league till death. . .. Hie thee
to France,
And cloister thee in some religious house. Our holy lives must win a new world's crown,
Which our profane hours here have *thrown down.*

The Queen retorts:

What, is my Richard both in shape and mind Transformed and weak'ned? hath
Bolingbroke *deposed*
Thine intellect?

Northumberland appears on the scene. "My lord, the mind of Bolingbroke is chang'd", hc tells Richard, "You must to Pomfret, not unto the Tower." Richard, addressing himself to Northumberland, *uses* yet another vivid metaphor to point the imagery, not merely of the mounting Bolingbroke, but of Northumberland, the means whereby Bolingbroke ascends the throne:

Northumberland, thou *!adder* wherewithal
The mounting Bolingbroke *ascends* my throne, The time shall not be many hours of age
More than it is, ere foul sin *F¥thering head* Shall break into corruption.
(V.i.55 ff.)

Northumberland is unmoved. "My guilt be on my head, and there an end. Take leave and part, for you must part forthwith." 'The Queen pleads with Northumberland: "Banish us both and send the king with me." "That were some love, but little policy- " is Northumberland's curt retort.

In the subsequent play of 2 *Henry IV,* Richard's prophetic admonition is recalled by Bolingbroke, now King Henry IV:

. . .. But which of you was by
You, cousin Nevil, as I may rememberWhen Richard, with his eye brimful of tears, Then checked and rated by Northumberland, Did speak these words, now prov'd a prophecy? 'Northumberland, thou *ladder* by the which My cousin Bolingbroke *ascends* my throne' (Though then, God knows, I had no such
intent,
But that necessity so *bow'd* the state,
That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss): 'The time shall come', thus did he follow it, 'The time will come, that foul sin, *gathering*
head,
Shall break into corruption': so went on, Foretelling this same time's condition,
And the division of our amity.
(III.i.65 ff.)

We finally see Richard, in solitude, in the dungeon of Pomfret Castle. His poignant soliloquy, "studying how he may compare the prison where he lives unto the world", is interrupted by the entry of his former Groom. Even in this brief interlude, which momentarily seems to bring the light of the outside world into the gloom of the dungeon, the imagery of rise and fall, now charged with pathos, recurs. The Groom recounts how it yearned his heart when he beheld, in London streets, on coronation day, Bolingbroke mounted on "roan Barbary", Richard's fiery steed. "Rode he on Barbary?" asked Richard; "Tell me, gentle friend", he asks pathetically, "How went he under him?" And the Groom replies, "So proudly as if he disdained the ground", and Richard exclaims:

So proud that Bolingbroke was on his back. . . Would he not *stumble?* Would he not *fall down,*
Since pride must have a *fall,* and break the
neck,
Of that *proud* man that did *usurp* his back? Forgiveness, horse! why do I rail on thee, Since thou, created to be awed by man,
Was born to *bear?* I was not made a horse, And yet I *bear* a *burthen* like an ass, Spurred, galled and tired by *jauncing* Bolingbroke.
(V.v.84 ff.)

The tragedy draws to a close. The Groom departs and Richard's Keeper brings in his food. "Taste of it first", bids Richard, "as thou art wont to do." The Keeper declines: "My lord, I dare not. Sir Pierce of Exton commands the contrary." Striking his Keeper, Richard exclaims: "The devil take Henry of Lancaster and thee! Patience is stale, and I am weary of it."

Exton and his men, who have come to rid Bolingbroke of his "living fear", rush in. Richard is struck down. In his dying words, Richard gives expression to a final image, that of his own apotheosis:

Mount, mount, my soul! thy seat is up on *high,*
Whilst my gross flesh *Sinks downward,* here to
die.
(V.v.111-112).

Critical Essay #6

King Richard has met mixed reviews from audiences and critics. His character has generated pity and sympathy as well as disdain and condemnation. In an essay reprinted in the Overview section, A L. French observes that Shakespeare seems to treat Richard in two different ways in the play. In the first half of the play, there is little indication that Richard will be deposed by Bolingbroke, French argues, but in the second half of the play, other characters seem to be of the opinion that Richard has in fact been deposed. Yet Richard deposes himself, French stresses. French states that it is as if Shakespeare presents two different truths in the play (that Richard will not be and has not been forcefully deposed by Bolingbroke, and that he has indeed been unjustly deposed), rather than presenting a consistent truth throughout.

To others, Richard appears to be presented more consistently. Lewis J. Owen, in an essay reprinted in the Kingship section, examines the ways in which Shakespeare's characterization of Richard drew, if not the sympathy of modem audiences, at least that of Elizabethan audiences. Owen observes that Richard is shown to be a weak king who falls prey to evil advisors but is nevertheless the rightful ruler. Owen also states that although Richard falls politically, he grows personally, and that the opposite happens to Bolingbroke. As some evidence of Richard's growth, Owen points to the fact that Richard is finally moved to act when he kills two of the men that have come to assassinate him, before he is murdered himself.

Other critics offer a different interpretation of Richard. Lois Potter maintains that while Richard is often viewed as a virtuous character, especially toward the play's end, he in fact displays both irony and duplicity throughout the entire play. These traits are more obvious in the play's first half, for example when it is suggested that despite the short sentence Richard has placed on Bolingbroke's banishment, the king might not allow him to return at all. Later in the play, in Act IV, scene i, when Bolingbroke is attempting to conduct a ceremony designed to emphasize the legality of the transfer of power from Richard to himself, Richard thwarts the proceedings through irony and ambiguous statements. Potter notes for example that when Northumberland tries to get Richard to read the charges against him, Richard "in a well-timed burst of hysteria, avoids having to read the articles." Richard says he will read his sins from a mirror, where he can see his transgressions written on his face. But Richard smashes the mirror, Potter explains, because it lies: he *sees* no sins, only the face 0 a king. Potter's examples stress that Richard is not the poor, weakling king many have made him out to be, but rather a clever, duplicitous, and defiant king who is unresigned to giving up his crown.

Jack R. Sublette presents yet another view of Richard. Sublette traces Richard's systematic abuse of power throughout the play. Focusing on Richard's role in Gloucester's murder, and on Richard's banishment of Bolingbroke and subsequent confiscation of Gaunt's estate, Sublette emphasizes that through such abuses of power, Richard creates the disorder that pervades the rest of the play. Richard's most significant abuse of power is his abdication of the crown, Sublette notes. Not only does Richard disrupt the natural order of inheritance in doing so, but he prophesies that if

Bolingbroke becomes king, generations of Englishmen will suffer as a result; and still he relinquishes the crown to Bolingbroke.

Source: "The Antic Disposition of Richard II," III

Shakespeare Studies, Vol. 27, 1974, Pl'. 33-41.

[In this essay, Potter asserts that Richard is often viewed as a sympathetic, virtuous character by the end of the play, despite his misdeeds. Potter argues, however, that Richard is in fact consistently ironic and duplicitous throughout the entire play. Potter supports this contention through an analysis of the play's language, showing haw certain types of language correspond with the respective weakness or power that Richard or other charac ters possess at a given point in the play.]

Many critical studies of *Richard II,* and a surprising number of productions, start from a furious assumption: that Shakespeare wrote, and asked his leading actor to star in, a long play dominated by a character whose main effect on the audience was to be one of boredom, embarrassment, or at best contemptuous pity. If Richard's part is not a good one, the play is simply not worth seeing; and 'good', in theatrical terms, means not necessarily virtuous but interesting. I want to argue that Richard is in fact rather less virtuous than has often been thought, and, just for that reason, a 'better' dramatic character.

Much of our difficulty with the play is a difficulty of knowing what moral connotations to attach to its highly rhetorical language. It is useful to be reminded by R. F. Hill that 'apparently self-conscious control of language does not, of itself, indicate dispassion and triviality in character', especially since he goes on to show that self-conscious language is by no means confined to Richard. Yet there is no doubt that elaborate language is used as a substitute for action and, to that extent, is a symbol of weakness. 'Give losers leave to talk' is an Elizabethan proverb, and in the first two acts of the play the long speeches do in fact belong to the 'losers'-Mowbray, Gaunt, York, the Duchess of Gloucester, *and* Bolingbroke. They all talk too much, seldom content with one simile where three or four will do (even Bolingbroke's rejection of the consolations of language is itself couched in a series of rhetorical repetitions); they all become despondent in adversity, rejecting all attempts to comfort them; and three of them (the Duchess of Gloucester, Mowbray, Gaunt) prophesy, correctly, that they are soon to die. This is the style which, in the second half of the play, is associated with the defeated king and his supporters. It is foreshadowed, even before Richard's return from Ireland, by the fanciful dialogue of the Queen and the favourites as well as by the Welshmen's prophecies of death and disaster.

Yet, though such language may be a sign of weakness in those who speak it, it is itself extremely powerful. This is largely because of its evocation of patriotic and religious sentiments, on which most of the emotional and poetic force of the first two acts depends. It may be disregarded by the other characters but it works on the audience, and the same is true when Richard starts speaking this language halfway through the play.

The other kind of power, later associated with the 'silent king' Bolingbroke, is at first displayed only by Richard. He declares in the opening scene that 'We are not born to sue but to command' (1, i, 196), [References are to the Arden edition of the play, ed. Peter Ure (London, 1956)] and his reactions to the eloquence of others are either impatient- 'It boots thee not to be compassionate' (I, ill, 174); 'Can sick men play so nicely with their names?' (II, i, 84)- or deflationary, as when he asks 'Why, uncle, what's the matter?' after York has spent twenty-two lines trying to tell him (II, i, 186). His few long speeches, such as the description of Bolingbroke's behaviour to the common people and the formal banishment of the two appellants, are almost the only ones in this part of the play that do not make the director reach for his blue pencil. The banishment speech, indeed, may look at first as if it needs shortening, but in performance its rhetoric has an obvious dramatic effect; Richard keeps the two men in suspense during fifteen lines of sonorous clauses- 'For that', 'and for', 'and for'- and then drops his bombshell in the simple phrase 'Therefore we banish you our territories' (I, iii, 139). His shorter utterances, too, are very like the language which, when it appears in connection with Bolingbroke, we associate with confidence, efficiency and power. His reception of Gaunt's death

The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he;
His time is spent, our pilgrimage must be;
So much for that
(II, i, 153- 5)

- can be compared with Bolingbroke's reaction to Mowbray's, when, as Kenneth Muir has pointed out, he also 'changes the subject in the middle of a line'. Similarly, Richard's flippant-sounding jingle,

Think what you will, we seize into our hands
His plate, his goods, his money and his
lands,
(II, i, 209-10)

falls into the same rhythm as Northumberland's couplet in the final scene:

The next news is, I have to London sent
The heads of Salisbury, Spencer, Blunt, and
Kent.
(1, vi, 7-8)

The change which Richard undergoes in the second half of the play may be explained in terms of language and decorum, but this is not much help to the actor who has somehow to reconcile the two halves. The commonest solution is to play the first two acts in the light of the other three. A foppish or wicked Richard may spend the first scene eating sweetmeats, talking with his favourites, or making clear that he is the real murderer of Gloucester, while a more pathetically conceived Richard may appear in Christlike make-up, looking frail and helpless among the brawny peers who will obviously be making mincemeat of him within the hour. It has even been argued that

such interpretations are necessary: as one reviewer of the 1964 Stratford production put it, in the first part of the play 'Shakespeare only does half the job, and, unless he is helped, we listen amazed at old Gaunt's dying protest about the king's "rash, fierce blaze of riot". What riot?'

Nicholas Brooke has rightly objected to actors trying too hard to establish Richard's personality before Shakespeare lets it emerge in I, iv. His description of this personality- 'a cold politician with atheistic tenden cies . . . cheap however witty'- seems to me fair enough, except perhaps that it underrates the effectiveness of cheap wit in a formal setting and audience readiness to sympathise with the character who uses it (compare Shakespeare's *other* King Richard). Professor Brooke feels that our awareness of the real Richard confuses our response to the cosmic and political themes which he embodies and expresses; I should prefer to say that the interest of Richard's character lies in his ability to *use,* and not simply to embody, the emotional associations of these themes. This use only gradually becomes conscious and, like Hamlet's antic disposition, co-exists with a capacity for emotional involvement. But irony and a suggestion of duplicity are present in Richard throughout the play.

For the point about Richard's terse style in the opening scenes is that it is also enigmatic; his carefully balanced speeches to Mowbray and Bolingbroke do not, unless slanted by the production, help the audience to decide which of the challengers is right (indeed, we never know). Hence, the difference in their punishments seems not retributive but arbitrary, especially when, simply because Gaunt looks unhappy, four years are casually lopped off Bolingbroke's exile. The latter's response,

How long a time lies in one little word! Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
End in a word- such is the breath of kings,
(I, iii, 213-15)

introduces the themes, which Gaunt will take up at more length, of time, breath, and the destructive power of kings. But, taken on its own, it suggests rather oddly that Richard has not restored but killed four yeats of life. A darker purpose is in fact confirmed by the next scene, where the king's first 'private, words express a doubt,

When time shall call him home from banishment,
Whether our kinsman come to see his
friends.
(I, iv, 21-2)

In other words, he may never repeal Bolingbroke after all. Perhaps the 'hopeless word of "never to return"', which Richard breathes against Mowbray (I, iii, 152), is likewise *only* a word, another sign that the breath of kings can blow hot and cold.

Evidence of duplicity in Richard's character could have been provided for Shakespeare by Holinshed, who lists among the thirty-three articles alleged against him the charge

that his letters were written in a style 'so subtill and darke that none other prince once beleeued him, nor yet his owne subiects'. Equivocation- setting the word against the word- is a common practice of the Machiavellian ruler in drama (compare Mortimer's use of the 'unpointed' message in *Edward II),* and in the later scenes of the play Bolingbroke himself is not free from a suspicion of it. Hence his almost comic difficulty in finding a form of words which will convince the Duchess of York that he really has pardoned Aumerle. Her nervousness is understandable, since her husband has just made the helpful suggestion, 'Speak it in French, king, say "pardonne moy"' (V, iii, 117). But in fact I get the impression throughout the play that Bolingbroke is genuinely trying to say what he means. There is, for "instance, a vast difference between his sharp words to his peers,

Little are we beholding to your love,
And little look'd for at your helping hands,
(IV, i, 160-1)

and Richard's way of putting the same thing, when York has insisted that both Gaunt and Herford love him well:

Right, you say true; as Herford's love, so Ius; *As* theirs, so mine; and all be as It is.
(II, 1, 145-6)

This kind of irony reveals rather than conceals the speaker's emotions, which is why it is often taken as a sign of weakness. But it also enables him to avoid stating his intentions, and thus, as we shall *see,* to give a great deal of trouble to Bolingbroke.

The transitional scene at Barkloughly Castle is unusual in its lack of this irony. Richard not only takes over the emotionally charged rhetoric which has hitherto been associated chiefly with his opponents, he also takes on their role as spokesman for England and the Church. From the moment when he greets the English earth, it is he alone who embodies the spirit of Mowbray's lament for his native tongue, Bolingbroke's 'English ground, farewell', and Gaunt's famous purple passage. At the same time the presence of Carlisle reminds us that Richard consistently has the support of the Church, something which his successor never gets. This is unhistorical- Holinshed describes the prominent part taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury on Bolingbroke's behalf- and seems to be deliberate. In the early part of the play the values of Church and State are united in frequent evocations of the figure of the Crusader in the Holy Land and the warrior upholding the truth in single combat. Our last vision of this kind of harmony, now already in the past, comes in Carlisle's account of the death of Mowbray who has fought under the colours of 'his captain Christ' (IV, i, 99). Henry IV will never make his intended Crusade, churchmen are frequently involved in rebellions against him, and it is not until the reign of Henry V that Shakespeare again shows Church and State reconciled.

But their values cannot be reconciled in any case. Richard's behaviour at Barkloughly Castle is often taken as an undignified oscillation between two equally reprehensible states of mind, futile rage and morbid despair. It seems to me rather a bringing out into the open of a conflict between the equally valid but contradictory roles of king and

Christian. Richard's moods of defeatism, though Carlisle condemns them, can be interpreted as an attempt to achieve that Christian resignation which, in the *Mirror for Magistrates* view, is the only refuge for the victim of Fortune's wheel. Reviewing the 'sad stories of the death of kings', he describes them as 'all murthered' (III, ii, 155-60), because no death can ever be 'natural' for men who have been led to think of themselves as immortal. The failure to bear in mind their own mortality is the chief crime of which the speakers in the *Mirror* accuse themselves; it is also the only sin which Richard lays to his own charge. Hence the special sense given to 'flattery' in the play: Bolingbroke actually receives much grosser adulation than Richard (especially in II, iii), but the latter says, that he is being flattered even when the mirror shows him a beauty that is really his, because it fails to show the ultimate truth about the transitoriness of that beauty. Similarly, at the end of the Barkloughly scene, he seems to equate all forms of comfort with flattery. *As* York said earlier, 'Comfort's in heaven, and we are on the earth' (II, ii, 78), and 'that sweet way I was in to despair' (III, ii, 205) may be sweet because, in one sense, it is the way to salvation.

On the other hand, as the exchanges of defiances, gages, and insults throughout the play remind us, the concepts of nobility and kingliness are not necessarily Christian. Mowbray and Bolingbroke refuse to accept counsels of patience in I, i, while Gaunt, in the scene that follows, opposes Christian patience to his sister-in-law's exhortations to think of family honour and revenge. Her response

Call it not patience, Gaunt, it is despair. . .
That which in mean men we intitle patience
Is pale cold cowardice in noble breasts.
(I, ii, 29-34)

- is similar to what the Queen says to Richard at their parting:

The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw
And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with
rage
To be o'erpow'r'd, and wilt thou, pupil-like,
Take the correction mildly, kiss the rod,
And fawn on rage with base humility,
Which art a lion and the kIng of beasts?
(v, i, 29-34)

The Barkloughly castle scene is difficult to play because the Lion King and the Christian are juxtaposed too often and too abruptly. But this is not to say that the roles are not sincerely played. They have to be, if the scene is to work at all. The reason why Richard is unironic here is that he believes, although we know otherwise, that effective action is still possible; his responses are real responses. To say that Richard is an actor giving a performance is irrelevant: all good dramatic parts allow actors to behave like actors. But to ask an actor to play the part of an actor giving an unconvincing performance is theatrical suicide. No one can possibly take any interest in the future history of a

character shown to be as hollow as his crown. Fops are minor figures in drama, and rightly so.

It is when Richard is completely cut off from the possibility of effective action that he begins to make use of the roles of king and Christian for his own purposes; their contradictions no longer matter, because he is concerned only with their effect. The Lion King makes his last gesture when he asks,

Shall we call back Northumberland and send Defiance to the traitor, and so die?
(III, iii, 129-30)

But he chooses instead to follow the advice of Aumerle:

No, good my lord, let's fight with gentle
words,
Till time lend friends, and friends their
helpful swords.
(III, iii, 131-2)

As has been pointed out, this is 'an intention of plain duplicity'. Words are a weapon for Richard, as well as a form of emotional release, and a closer look at his confrontations with Bolingbroke will show that he does in fact fight very skilfully with them.

In the first of these scenes, III, iii, Richard first makes an impressive speech in the kingly style, then sends a 'fair' (and, as he at once indicates, a lying) message to Bolingbroke, then (possibly for Northumberland's ears as well as Aumerle's) indulges in a fantasy of despair which plays 'idly', as he says, with traditional Christian symbols. To Northumberland, the sarcastic speeches which follow seem the words of 'a frantic man'. Yet when Richard re-enters the 'base court' he does not sound frantic. He picks up his own words, 'Down, down I come' and 'In the base court?' as he addresses Bolingbroke:

Fair cousin, you *debase* your princely knee
To make the *base* earth proud with kissing it . . .
Up, cousin, *up* . . .
(III, iii, 190-1, 194)

Bolingbroke and the rest treat him gently because he seems so helpless; he is then able to show up their gentleness as hypocrisy by hinting that he knows what they are really after. It is possible to argue that his anticipation of Bolingbroke's intentions makes Richard an accomplice in his own destruction; it is possible similarly, to say that Lear makes his daughters into monsters by treating them as such before they have done anything more unfilial than complaining about his hundred knights. But this seems to me too 'psychological' an approach to the plays. Richard does not, like a predestinating God, make things happen because he foresees them. He foresees them because they are going to happen, and because his awareness of the situation is both a convenient dramatic shorthand (if an event is accepted as inevitable, Shakespeare does not have to explain the precise practical means by which it comes about) and a means by which he can dominate the action.

Typical of the way in which he uses words to transform weakness into strength is his exploitation, at Flint Castle and in Westminster Hall, of conceits on tears. We dislike this sort of language nowadays, so it is tempt ing to describe as mere self-indulgence Richard's images of making 'foul weather with despised tears' (III, iii, 161), digging a pair of graves with them (III, iii, 165-9), being weighed down with them like a bucket in a well (IV, i, 184-9), and washing away his royal balm in them (IV, i, 207). What all these fantasies emphasise is the power of something which is normally taken to be a symbol of helplessness. The comparison of himself and Bolingbroke to two buckets in a well derives, in its rising-falling pattern, from the idea of Fortune's wheel and the 'Down, down I come' and 'Up, cousin, up' of III, iii. But in his insistence that he outweighs his cousin, who is able to rise so high only because he is essentially hollow, Richard also echoes and reverses the 'balance' image which the Gardener had used to the Queen:

Their fortunes both are weigh'd;
In your lord's scale is nothing but himself,
And some few vanities that make him light.
But in the balance of great Bolingbroke,
Besides himself, are all the English peers,
And with that odds he weighs King Richard
down.
(III, iv, 84-9)

What we see throughout the deposition scene is that Richard alone, in his potently symbolic role as the Man of Sorrows, can in fact outweigh Bolingbroke and the peers .

The chief irony of this scene is one of which Richard himself is quite well aware: only a king can judge a king, and therefore it is he who must depose himself, yet the very fact that he is in this humiliating position is also a proof of his kingship which nothing can eradicate. He makes as much capital as possible from this two-edged predicament. Bolingbroke, in response apparently to Carlisle's plea, sends for Richard to perform in public what (according to York) he has already agreed to in private. The intention is, first, that the king should be seen to abdicate voluntarily and thus free his successor from the guilt of usurpation, and, second, that he should prove that he is 'worthily deposed' by reading out the articles which contain the charges against him. Richard does neither of these things.

Instead, he continues to employ the technique which we first saw at the end of the Flint Castle scene, that of giving with one hand and taking back with the other:

Well you deserve. They well deserve to have
That know the strong'st and surest way to
get.
(III, iii, 200-1)
What you will have, I'll give, and willing too, For do we must what force will have us do.
(III, iii, 206-7)

His first speech in Westminster Hall shows the same teasing ambiguity:

God save the king! although I be not he;
And yet, amen, if heaven do think him me.
(IV, 1, 174-5)

Urged to resign the crown, he invites Bolingbroke to 'seize' it. The series of quibbles which follows has a serious purpose. By claiming, for instance, that he is willing to resign his crown but not the cares that go with it he is transforming a sacramental object into a piece of metal, a 'heavy weight from off my head' (IV, i, 204). He may formally 'undo' himself, in language that seems as thorough as Bolingbroke could wish, but his very exaggeration is suspicious. The renunciation culminates in his insistence that by losing the crown he loses his life since the one is so completely identified with the other. Later he virtually takes everything back when he condemns himself and everyone else as traitors for their part in the ritual undoing. The stress throughout has been on the unalterable fact of his kingliness.

He also, by a well-timed burst of hysteria, avoids having to read the articles. He promises to read his sins, not from the paper Northumberland is brandishing, but from the mirror where he can see them written on his face. But the mirror shows him no sins; it reveals the face of a king. He smashes it because it lies about his situation, the true situation of all men, even kings. Thus, in drawing Bolingbroke's attention to 'the moral of this sport', he may be offering a warning as well as a further statement of the power of sorrow (IV, i, 290-1).

His last gesture is a trick, and apparently a rather pointless one. He will, he says,

beg one boon,
And then be gone, and trouble you no more.
(IV, i, 302-3)

But what he begs in fact is permission to be gone. The request is a further move in the power-struggle, both because Richard is able to leave without having read the articles and because he forces Bolingbroke to show his intentions at last by sending him to the Tower. In his parting shot

0, good! Convey! Conveyers are you all, That rise thus nimbly by a true king's fall.
(IV, i, 317-18)

- he seizes on the unfortunately chosen word 'convey' (which was slang for 'steal') and adds, I think, a characteristic pun on 'true king' (a 'true man' was the opposite of a thief). It is a good exit, but what he wins is not simply a moral victory; by making it clear that he is not willing to resign the crown and still considers himself the rightful king, he has opened the way for just such a conspiracy as we see taking shape at the end of the scene.

Stanley Wells has pointed out the parallel between the ending of the deposition scene and that of II, i. There, too, mere words- those of the dying Gaunt and York seem to have no effect, yet the scene ends with three onlookers deciding to take action on behalf of an apparently hopeless cause. Richard's pun on 'convey' Jinks the two still

further, since it was his own theft of Gaunt's lands which started the rebellion against him. That the rebellion against Bolingbroke is later discovered and crushed does not alter the effect of the rebels' words, coming as they do immediately after the 'woeful pageant'. It is too simple to treat the deposition scene as a triumph of silent, powerful Bolingbroke over verbose, weak Richard. Language *is* a source of power in the play, even though there is also an awareness of its inadequacy. Though Richard's rhetoric successfully appeals to the spectators' reverence for the symbol of England and the Church, the nobles and churchmen who rally to his cause are defeated in a way that is clearly providential: Aumerle has no sooner said that he intends to be in Oxford 'If God prevent it not' (V, ii, 55) than York notices the seal hanging out of his son's doublet. And the less admirable motives which make the old man gallop away to reveal the plot do not detract from his conviction that Bolingbroke's usurpation, however shocking, must somehow be part of a divine plan.

Shakespeare does not attempt to explain this paradox, but he continues to explore it in the last act of the play, largely through the opposing kinds of language he gives to Richard. On the one hand, the deposed king becomes more formal and rhetorical than ever before. Mter the ceremonial unkinging, which he later describes as a divorce between him and his crown (V, i, 71-2), comes his equally ritualistic parting with the Queen, when he 'unkisses' his contract with her in an exchange of hearts which is also a marriage with sorrow. Even his dying words are formal, a divorce of soul from body:

Exton, thy fierce hand
Hath with the king's blood stain'd the king's
own land.
Mount, mount, my soul! thy seat is up on
high,
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here
to die.
(V, v, 109-12)

The speech echoes and unites several dominant images of the play: the rising-falling pattern, the sacrificial blood watering the earth, and the stain which cannot be washed away. Richard shows complete certainty both of his kingly status and of his own salvation; Exton, similarly, accepts the view that he himself is damned forever. We have seen the death of a symbol, not a human being.

But alongside this ritualistic King of Sorrows Shakespeare also gives us intriguing glimpses of the other Richard: sharp-tongued, self-mocking and quite unresigned. The pointed realism of his words to Northumberland in V, i, is fully in keeping with his constant anticipation of Bolingbroke's moves, and I am sure the Quartos are right to give him, and not Northumberland, the cynical reply to the Queen's request that the two of them be banished together: 'That were some love, but little policy' (V, i, 84). The symbolic representative of England has little discernible affection for his people ('A king of beasts indeed' [V, i, 35]), and, as the prison soliloquy shows us, God's representative on earth is unsure of his own salvation. Unlike the saintly Henry VI with his crown of content, Richard finds that 'no thought is contented' 01, v, 11) and he now sees death

not as the way to 'a new world's crown' (V, i, 24) but as 'being nothing' (V, v, 41). The images in which he personifies his own thoughts all tend irresistibly toward the grotesque, whether they are quibbling over scriptural contradictions, plotting an impossible escape, or, like beg gars in the stocks (not Stoic philosophers, or even the hermit that he once imagined himself), trying to resign themselves to fate. His playing with words, far from providing a consoling substitute for reality, nearly drives him mad. Yet, despite the desire for human love which comes through at the end of the soliloquy, his immediate reaction to die unexpected appearance of the Groom is a stale pun on 'royal' and 'noble'. The familiar tone of this little episode is almost immediately followed by the outbursts against the keeper and the murderers, in which the dominant note seems one of relief that he at last has an object on which to release his pent-up energies. There is relief for the audience as well, not only in the violent action which follows five acts of fighting with words alone, but also in the sheer arrogance of Richard's reaction: 'How now! what means death in this *rude* assault?' (V, v, 105). Nevertheless, one can see why his dying speech had to be modulated into a different tone.

The formality of that speech, and its rhyming couplets, are taken up at once by Exton, establishing the simplified, symbolic view of Richard ('As full of valour as of royal blood' [V, v, 113]) which 15 to prevail in the final scene. However uninspired poetically, the alternation of speeches reporting the downfall of Henry's enemies with bathetic thank-you couplets from Henry is dramatically effective in that it prepares the entry of Exton, whom the king emphatically does *not* thank. Moreover, Henry's forgiveness of Carlisle, which ought to be the climax of the scene, is immediately and ironically nullified by the appearance of the coffin which, though it contains 'the mightiest of thy greatest enemies' (V, vi, 32), is a source not of triumph but of consternation to him. 'A god on earth thou art', was the Duchess of York's phrase after he pardoned Aumerle (V, iii, 134), but Exton's act has identified him irrevocably with Pilate, wishing in vain both to pardon his victim and to wash the blood off his hands. As Reese has pointed out, 'thy burled fear' (V, vi, 31) has a double meaning, indicating not only an end to fears but a permanent source of them in the coffin of the murdered king. The presence of that coffin lends dignity and resonance even to the stiff couplets of Henry and Exton; in particular, the phrase 'Richard of Burdeaux' has a shock effect which is curiously moving in the theatre. Henry's last speech calls upon the familiar national and religious symbols and attempts to channel potentially dangerous emotions into the ritual of court mourning and the promise of a Crusade. But it is fitting that irony and ambiguity should hang over this solemn ending and that the 'silent king' in the coffin should still present a threat. Richard dominates the scene in his silence as he had dominated it before with words.

Critical Essay #7

Source: "Order and Power in Richard n," in *Ball State University* Forum, Vol, XXII, No.1, Winter, 1981, pp. 42-51.

[In the following essay, Sublette contends that Richard abuses his power and as a result creates the disorder that occurs in the play. Sublette demonstrates that in the play's opening scenes "ordered, disorder" exists under Richard's command, but after Richard seizes Gaunt's estate, events follaw that cause the apparent order to clearly become disorder, and this disorder dominates the rest of the play.]

Much of the disorder represented in William Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the subsequent plays in the *Henriad*- 1 *Henry IV,* 2 *Henry IV,* and *Henry V* occurs as a direct result of Richard's violation of the natural cycle of tune. *Richard II* dramatizes a sequence of events in which the natural order of time and succession is violated and in which men then struggle to restore order. Through struggling in an existence framed with time, King Richard acquires self-knowledge. Theodore Spencer writes that the violation and subsequent restoration of order are common dramatic themes:

Such is the general plan of all Shakespeare's historical plays, as it was . . . of all drama that has deep roots in the beliefs and conventions of its time. An existing order is violated, the consequent conflict and turmoil are portrayed, and order is restored by the destruction of the force or forces that originally violated it.

Because of the political setting in *Richard II,* the concepts of order and power are closely connected as Shakespeare explores human activities and values. This paper examines the imagery in *Richard II* which reflects Shakespeare's treatment of order and power at the various levels of life- in the individual, the family, the social and political groups, the state, and the universe.

Richard II begins with a paradox of ordered disorder in the quarrel between the contending British lords, Mowbray and Bolingbroke, who come before the King to present their charges and counter-charges of guilt. The fact that the King is present to hear the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke suggests that an orderly system of justice exists in the kingdom. However, Richard fails to fulfill his role of arbiter. Bolingbroke's accusations against Mowbray for misappropriating military funds and plotting the death of the Duke of Gloucester emphasize the seriousness of the present conflict and the extent of the disorder which plagues the kingdom. Stressing the need for revenge, Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of murdering the Duke of Gloucester: ". . . blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries / Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth / To me for justice and rough chastisement" (I. i. 104-106).

Historically appropriate, this image alludes to the archetypical example of a brother's murdering his own brother, for as actual history assens and as John of Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester are about to testify, King Richard, not Mowbray, is responsible for the murder of his own uncle. In history, Gloucester and his supponers, known as the

Lords Appellant, who included both Bolingbroke and Mowbray, had earlier secured the execution or exile of several of Richard's friends. In personifying the grave of Gloucester, this initial image suggests both the disorder of the land in which "tongueless caverns" speak and the continuity and cyclical nature of human life in which death does not represent the finality of one's existence. Although Gloucester is dead and although the act of killing him is past, the voice of Gloucester, the need for justice, and the reality of the murder still exist. The King who should settle this quarrel between two of his subjects simply complicates, probably because of his own guilt, the existing disorder. To Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Richard entreats:

Let's purge this choler without letting blood. This we prescribe, though no physician.
Deep malice makes too deep incision. Forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed.

Our doctors say this is no month to bleed. (I. i. 153-57)

This image, drawn from medicine, shows Richard's distorted view of his own role. As king, Richard should be the physician to his kingdom, but his interpretation of his "sacred blood" and of his role as monarch by divine right concentrates on the privileges rather than the obligations and responsibilities of kingship. The accepted method to purge the choler-infected land would be to let blood, but because Richard suffers from a similar infection, he foolishly refuses to accept the monarchical responsibilities that would bring about the necessary healing of his state. The King's professional negligence is confirmed in the "garden scene." A physician, a gardener, and a king have a similar obligation to provide the necessary services for the patient, the garden, and the kingdom. These caretakers are responsible for bodies which are subject to change, growth, disease, and excesses. Paradoxically, physicians, gardeners, and kings must sometimes destroy pan of what they care for in order to maintain order and health and to effect a cure. Impotent to create health with the prescription of his commands, the King decides to allow Bolingbroke and Mowbray to lance their own boil of contention: "There shall your swords and lances arbitrate / The swelling difference of your settled hate" (I. i. 200-01). Richard has unknowingly delegated his own authority. Ironically, although Richard thinks that this is no time for blood-letting, both his previous action and his current behavior effect deadly blood-letting for him and his kingdom.

Shakespeare intensifies the disorder which Gloucester's murder and Richard's inept behavior have revealed with the Duchess of Gloucester's hyperbolic prayer for more disorder, which she feels will bring about revenge on Mowbray for his part in her husband's death:

Oh, sit my husband's wrongs on Hereford's
spear,
That It may enter butcher Mowbray's breast! Or if misfortune miss the first career,
Be Mowbray's sins so heavy in his bosom That they may break his foarming courser's back
And throw the rider headlong ill the lists, A caitiff recreant to my cousin Hereford!
(I. ii. 47-53)

Because Richard does not allow the actual combat between Bolingbroke and Mowbray to occur, the Duchess of Gloucester's hopes for Mowbray's misfortunes have no opportunity to materialize. Her picture of the heaviness of guilt from an individual's sin anticipates the mood of the reign of Richard II. In fact, Shakespeare depicts characters throughout the *Henriad* who suffer from guilt. The feeling of guilt sits very heavily in the mind of Henry IV. In addition to the Duchess, Richard II, Henry IV, and Falstaff all end their lives with grief. The *Henriad* dramatizes life in a kingdom where several principal characters find their old age rewarded not with a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction but with sorrow and grief.

Ironically, as Mowbray prepares for the tournament with Bolingbroke which he will not be permitted to pursue, he describes his inner mood and feeling:

Never did captive with a freer heart
Cast off his chains of bondage, and embrace His golden uncontrolled enfranchisement,
More than my dancing soul doth celebrate This feast of battle with mine adversary.
(I. iii. 88-92)

Actually, Mowbray is about to replace his freedom with external banishment. The image in the last line of the passage above also foreshadows a time when feasting will become supplanted with battles. At no time in the *Henriad* does the reader see the characters preparing for a happy and joyous feast. The image intensifies the lack of genuine mirth and festivity throughout the *Henriad* Even in the *Henry IV* plays, the scenes with Falstaff suggest a distorted humor. Mowbray's preparation for single combat, which sets a kind of mood and pace for the remainder of the *Henriad,* anticipates oth ers like Prince Hal and later King Henry V, King Henry IV, and the Percys who plan and equip themselves for war.

The proposed joust between Mowbray and Bolingbroke represents a kind of ordered ceremony, but it is disrupted and prevented from being completed. Even though Richard prevents the combat between his two subjects, his reasons for doing so suggest rather specious thinking stemming from the idea of disturbing the peace. The King fears that strife between Mowbray and Bolingbroke will awaken peace:

. . . peace, which our country's cradle Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleepWhich so roused up with boisterous untuned
drums,
With harsh-resounding trumpets' dreadful
bray,
And grating shock of wrathful iron arms, Might from our quiet confines fright fair peace,
And make us wade even in our kindred's blood.
(I. iii. 132-38)

To keep peace sleeping, the King banishes Mowbray forever and Bolingbroke for ten years, a sentence which he soon reduces to six years. Harold Goddard insists that a careful examination of this speech renders it very damaging to Richard's character.

According to Goddard, Richard is linguistically skillful enough to disguise the lack of meaningful content in his words:

The central figure is that of Peace, an infant, asleep in its cradle, England. But why should a professed lover of tranquility like Richard wish to keep peace asleep? Obviously, when peace sleeps, war and domestic turmoil have their chance. Don't awaken peace, says Richard, lest she frighten out of our land . . . [sic] and to our logical consternation we dis cover that what this aroused infant peace is to scare into exile is, of all things, peace itself.

In Goddard's view, Richard's idea of peace as a being which is subject to both waking and sleeping makes no sense. Goddard's assessment is severe, but the speech does give an accurate picture of Richard's idea of peace. To Richard, peace is simply the absence of war. Real peace represents much more; actual peace exists not when peace lies asleep but when it is awake with all of the activity in the kingdom designed not only to perpetuate the absence of war but to create a climate of healthy growth, vitality, honesty, and justice. Richard's kingdom in which he has effected his uncle's execution and seemingly avoided civil disruption by employing the powerful "breath of kings" is a peaceful, ordered country only superficially and temporarily.

Richard's banishment of Mowbray, the one who has perhaps carried out the King's commands, anticipates the exile of Exton by Henry IV at the end of the play. In an attempt to establish a superficial order, both Richard and Henry IV punish men who have followed the wishes of their superiors. The severity and impropriety of the banishments soon become clear in the words of those affected. Because he must abandon his native language, Mowbray feels that his tongue cannot function properly:

And now my tongue's use is to me no more Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cased up
Or, being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.
(I. iii. 161-65)

This poignant image depicts the feelings of a man who has been loyal to his king, the same king who claims to desire peace and order. In the language of a pragmatic idealist, John of Gaunt advises his banished son to assuage the grief of his exile by imagining that he is the king, that he flees a pestilence, and, in general, that exile is a desirable fate (I. iii. 279-91). In addition to foreshadowing the day when Bolingbroke will return to become king and to speaking truthfully about the infected kingdom, Gaunt counsels his son that in order to be able to tolerate his life, he must view the world from a completely unrealistic perspective, one which totally reverses the actual situation. Although Bolingbroke explicitly denies the usefulness and expediency of his father's advice, the effects of Bolingbroke's banishment confirm Gaunt's counsel. In a land which is farmed out because of the King's excesses and in a country ruled by a king who prays for physicians to kill rather than heal so that this same kIng can illegally confiscate an inheritance, life is so disordered that it is difficult to distinguish between

idealism and realism. In fact, what seems to be the most unlikely- for example, Bolingbroke's becoming king- often becomes fact.

John of Gaunt mentions another reversal in his famous description of England under the rule of Richard. To Gaunt, Richard has destroyed the essence of the British kingdom:

This land of such dear souls, this dear dear
land,
Dear for her reputation through the world, Is now leased out, I die pronouncing it, Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
(II. 1. 57-60)

Gaunt's words, in contrast to the present, look back to the days of his father, Edward III, and perhaps to the time of his own regency. In one sense, this speech merely represents Gaunt's lament for his own lost youth and the passage of time. But his image of the blighted and blotted England leased out proves to be more than an old man's mourning for the loss of a former time. His depiction of the corrupted kingdom has already been partially verified by Richard's immoral greed and will be confirmed by Richard's action upon Gaunt's death. In addition to characterizing England as a leased out farm, Gaunt's words identify the debasement and corruption in the position and role of kingship itself. In an image which recalls Richard's comment about Gaunt's physician, Gaunt reminds Richard that he, being a sick ruler, commits his "anointed body to the cure / Of those physicians that first wounded thee" (II. i. 9899). Under the command of Richard, England is a land in which the physicians kill, the King is a landlord subject to the laws, and the royal family is reduced to a pelican-like existence in which the young spill the blood of their elders in order to strengthen their own positions. In Richard's kingdom, those like Mowbray and Gaunt who threaten his seemingly secure, divine right position become either "an unstringed viol" or "a stringless instrument" (II. i. 149). In terms of the imagery, Mowbray and Gaunt represent silent men like unstringed or stringless instruments, which cannot be played upon.

Very little time passes before the apparent order displayed in the beginning of *Richard II* dissolves into open disorder. Upon Richard's seizing Bolingbroke's inheritance and leaving for Ireland, Northumberland advocates to Willoughby and Ross a course of insurrection to remedy the troubled kingdom:

. . . we shall shake off our slavish yoke,
Imp out our drooping country's broken
wing,
Redeem from broking pawn the blemished
crown,
Wipe off the dust that hides our scepter's
gilt,
And make high majesty look like Itself[.]
(II. i. 291-95)

Because of the chaotic nature of Richard's kingdom, the rebels ironically substitute one "slavish yoke" for another which is equally enslaving and a "blemished crown" for another one which they have helped stain. Besides being an apt description of England, Northumberland's conception of the country as a broken wing predicts the kind of images Shakespeare will use to portray the people who inhabit the kingdom of Henry IV and Henry V. Many of the subjects living in the disordered kingdom become less like human beings and more like animals as the imagery in the *Henriad* shows.

With the King having gone to Ireland, Bolingbroke having returned to England, and some of Richard's chief supporters having fled to Bolingbroke, the Duke of York, feeling that the time itself is sick (a symbol of disorder), expresses his feeling about the nature of life on earth: "Comfort's in Heaven, and we are on the earth, / Where nothing lives but crosses, cares, and grief" (II. ii. 78-79). York's pessimistic view of life on earth is a direct result of Richard's effect on his kingdom. York is right to differentiate between life on earth and life in a more orderly existence beyond earth. In doing so, he exemplifies man's search for order in a world of change, flux, and confusion. However, this belief that man's earthly existence is composed exclusively of "crosses, cares, and grief" substantially distorts life. York generalizes about life from his own position: he is saddened by one brother murdered, by another newly dead, by a nephew banished, and by the death of the Duchess of Gloucester; he is commanded by another nephew, who is also his king, to be Lord Governor of England; he is deprived of the support of the Percys and Lords Ross, Beaumond, and Willoughby and of financial assistance; and, he is weakened by his own age. York's "crosses, cares, and grief" are, indeed, "a tide of woes / [that] Comes rushing on the woeful land at once" (II. ii. 98-99).

York's affliction and distress cause him to be confused. He finds himself in a position which he has not effected but with which he must contend:

If I know how or which way to order these
affairs
Thus thrust disorderly into my hands, Never believe me. 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
wronged,
Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right.
(II. ii. 109-15)

This speech focuses on one of the basic conflicts of the play- opposing loyalties- and also anticipates York's loyalty at the end of the play to the new King in conflict with his own son's opposition to Henry. York's situation indicates his position on the wheel of fortune. The confusion which is almost overpowering in York's life and the disorder which prevails in the English kingdom occur because both York and Bolingbroke act irresponsibly, illegally, and immorally and because human life is subject to the ever-turning wheels of fortune and time. Even if man's task on earth amounts to "numbering sands and drinking oceans dry" (II. ii. 146), his worth and his character as a human

being are determined by the use of his moral capacities in his actions, no matter how insuperable his task may seem.

Under York's regency, Richard's kingdom continues to be a land infected by "caterpillars" like Bushy, Bagot, and Green. The extent of Richard's disordered rule is shown in the Welsh Captain's report of omens which have caused the Welsh forces to desert Richard:

The bay trees in our country are all withered,
And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven.
The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the
earth,
And lean-looked prophets whisper fearful
change.
Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and
leap,
The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
The other to enjoy by rage and war.
(II. iv. 8-14)

The Captain's words indicate the presence of a cosmic turmoil which parallels and which is the direct result of man's life on earth. This image depicts the nature of man's earthly existence on a macrocosmic scale. The accuracy of the omens materializes when Bolingbroke sentences Bushy and Green to execution. In order to counteract Bolingbroke's cleansing actions, Richard, upon his return from Ireland, exhorts his native soil to come alive, to starve the rebels, and to function as a part of his army:

But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom, And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet Which with usurping steps do trample thee.
Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies,
And when they from thy bosom pluck a
flower,
Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder, Whose double tongue may with a mortal touch Throw death upon thy sovereign's enemies.
(III. ii. 14-22)

These are the words from a King who has proclaimed his love of peace. The picture of England which Richard portrays in this speech actually suggests an exact description of the country as it now exists. Richard has already become the "lurking adder" with a "double tongue" in an unhealthy kingdom which is full of spiders, toads, and p oison. In a land functioning with an orderly system 0 succession by which the eldest son inherits his father's title, land, and wealth, Richard, who is supposedly the protector and defender of the country's laws, has usurped Bolingbroke's rightful inheritance. His entreaty for the total transformation of a kingdom into a poisonous menagerie ironically works for his own downfall. The King might have been less severe in his desire for the defeat of one who returns, albeit illegally, from exile to claim his inheritance.

Richard's rash and irresponsible mode of thinking and acting is further exemplified when he calls Bushy, Green, and the Earl of Wiltshire villains, vipers, dogs, snakes, and three Judases and when he commands "Terrible Hell [to] make war / Upon their spotted souls for this offense" (III. ii. 133-34). Although these men are misleaders of a king, they have been faithful to their king. Perhaps their souls are spotted but not for the offense which Richard claims. Richard's kingdom is so disordered that even he as its leader cannot distinguish faithful caterpillars from disloyal dogs and Judases. In fact, Richard's allusion to Judas in describing his followers indirectly implies a comparison between himself and Christ, an analogy so inappropriate and improper that it accentuates the chaotic state of the English kingdom under Richard's rule. Later, when brought before Bolingbroke to read the list of crimes and accusations, Richard compares his subjects to Judas and himself to Christ. This time the comparison seems more realistic and more *effective* than his earlier mention of Judas in arousing the reader's *pity* for him. After York acquiesces to the "tide of woes," Richard finds himself in the same swift metaphorical stream. He, too, succumbs: "A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey" (III. *ii.* 210). The image of woe as a stream *is* appropriate not only for the suggestion of the comparison with the traditional stream of *time* but also for the realistic depiction of the powerful forces which affect man in the various roles which he plays, particularly in the role of king.

Even though Richard prophesies that if Bolingbroke takes the crown, many Englishmen will die for genera *tions* to come, he further *inverts* and perverts the order of his kingdom by agreeing to exchange his role of king for that of a peasant:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
My scepter for a palmer's walking-staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little little grave, an obscure grave.
(III. *iii.* 147-54)

Rather than simply giving to Bolingbroke what *is* his, Richard irresponsibly assents to surrender the crown. Ironically, Shakespeare suggests that until Richard recognizes that he *is* only a human being, just a peasant, he will never be able to assume the role of king.

In Pomfret Castle, he will finally come to this realization. He has become king without becoming a man; therefore, he loses his crown. In his symbolic descent from the balcony of Flint Castle to the court below to meet Bolingbroke, Richard acknowledges the inappropriateness of his action:

Down, down I come, like glistering Phaeton, Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
In the base court? Base court, where kings
grow base,

To come at traitors' calls and do them grace. In the base court? Come down? Down, court'
Down, King!
For night owls shriek where mounting larks
should sing.
(III. *iii.* 178-83)

Despite the accurate description in this image of Richard's act, the words emphasize the inappropriate behavior of the King. Richard, who should have taken the role of Phoebus, not Phaethon, once had had the power to manage the kingdom so that both the owls and the larks could sing their respective songs at the proper times. Because he misused that power, he has lost *it.* Like the jewels, palace, gay apparel, goblets, scepter, subjects, and kingdom which Richard catalogues as being physical and material *possessions* of the king, power *is* also a part of the royal entourage, an abstract part which, when not properly exercised, becomes as easy to lose as the crown itself. Richard's assessment of power politics makes this point: "They well deserve to have / That know the strong'st and surest way to get" (III. *iii.* 200-01). Even though this political philosophy accurately depicts the action of the remainder of the *Henriad, it* ignores the established and orderly system of rightful and legal *succession.* Perhaps knowing the strongest and surest way to achieve power, as Bolingbroke and his son obviously do, establishes one's *possession* of *it* in one sense, but Shakespeare, in contrast to Richard, seems to suggest that there *is* more to acquiring power than political and military knowledge. Richard's failure to recognize a higher principle of order than political shrewdness and power and, consequently, his violation of that higher order brings chaos to his kingdom. Without realizing the seriousness of his act, Richard surrenders, indicating his recognition of a force which he cannot control. For Bolingbroke, the acceptance of the crown indicates a lack of understanding of his role. Richard, Bolingbroke and York yield to what seems, *vis-a-vis* the powerful forces confronting them, the most natural course of action. The actions of men, Richard, weakened by his misuse of power and loss of military support; Bolingbroke, weakened by growing greed; and York, weakened by old age- inflict further disorder on the English kingdom.

At the end of Act III, the gardener and the two servants in the Duke of York's garden delineate in careful detail and on a microcosmic scale, in contrast to the Welsh Captain's depiction on a larger scale, the extent of Richard's neglect of his kingdom and the consequential harm and destruction. The gardener explains to the two workmen that a gardener's job *is* to tend the garden. Symbolically, in losing control of his garden-kingdom, Richard allowed those subjects who seemed to support him to destroy him. The "other Eden, demiParadise" of which John of Gaunt proudly spoke had become a garden full of weeds:

. . . our sea- walled garden the whole land,
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges
ruined,
Her knots disordered, and her wholesome

herbs
Swarming With catterpillars[.]
(III. iv. 43-47)

In addition to affirming the lack of needed order in the state, this image identifies Richard with the disordered kingdom and identifies him as a man, an identity which Richard himself does not fully realize until his imprisonment in Pomfret Castle. Shakespeare includes this identification in this earlier scene of political allegory.

As they did after the conflict between Bolingbroke and Mowbray at the beginning of the play, civil bickering and disruption continue in the English kingdom after Bolingbroke assumes power. Even before Richard is officially deposed and Henry IV crowned, several British subjects in the presence of Bolingbroke accuse each other of lies and guilty acts (IV. i. 1-85): Aumerle is opposed by and opposes Bagot, Fitzwater, Hotspur, and a Lord; Surrey and Fitzwater oppose each other. Like Richard, Bolingbroke defers the settlement of the opposing claims to a later time. The Bishop of Carlisle warns Bolingbroke about the woeful nature of a future time if Bolingbroke takes the crown:

Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind con
found.
Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
(IV. i. 139-44)

For his truthful words, Carlisle is arrested for treason.

With Carlisle's arrest, disorder, horror, and fear already inhabit England in the space of very little time; mutiny will occur before very much more time passes. The actions of Richard and Bolingbroke are, as the Abbot of Westminster proclaims, "A woeful pageant" (IV. i. 321).

After Richard's formal deposition, his Queen reproves him for the manner in which he accepts his new position without a struggle. The Queen suggests that Richard should imitate the dying lion:

The lion dying thrusteth his paw
And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with
rage
To be o'erpowered. And wilt thou, pupil-like, Take thy correction mildly, kiss the rod, And fawn on rage with base humility, Which art a lion and a king of beasts?
(1. i. 29-34)

Neither the Queen nor Richard yet fully realizes that Richard has already severely wounded the earth, for which both Richard and his kingdom now suffer. Richard's reply to his wife, "A king of beasts, indeed. If aught but beasts, / I had been still a happy king

of men" 01. i. 35-36), indicates that he does not fully comprehend the reasons for the loss of the crown and power. Having apparently forgotten his remark that "Lions make leopards tame" (I. i. 174), Richard blames his subjects for being animals. In addition to the traditional symbol of the lion as the English king, the image of Richard as the king of beasts tacitly suggests his kinship with those whom he rules. A "happy king of men" should recognize that he, as well as his subjects, is just a man. Ironically and unfortunately for Richard and his kingdom, Richard has become a beast who is a king of beasts without first becoming a man and a king of men. When he comes to this realization, he has already lost his kingdom.

Part of the disorder in the realm has occurred because of Richard's faulty vision. Throughout his reign, he was both short-and thick-sighted. With the crown removed from his head, his vision begins to sharpen and to clear. On his way to Pomfret Castle, Richard looks into the future and accurately predicts the destiny of the English kingdom. Specifically, he warns Northumberland about his future relationship with the new King:

Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
The time shall not be many hours of age More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head
Shall break into corruption. Thou shalt think, It is too little, helping him to all.
And he shall think that thou, winch know'st
the way
To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again, Being ne'er so little urged, another way
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.
(1. i. 55-65)

Later when Henry wonders how Richard was able to be accurate in his prediction, the Earl of Warwick says simply that because Richard was a careful observer of human nature, he was able to forecast one subject's behavior on the basis of his past actions. Warwick is correct in his assertion, but Richard has not always been a careful observer of human nature. Richard's accurate prediction about disorder in the English kingdom represents a healthy change in his vision and a growing sense of order in his own mind. Had Richard been able to observe and to think clearly earlier, he would still be king in fact as well as in name. Tragically and realistically, this knowledge comes to Richard only with very painful experience. Even though order comes to the mind and sight of England's former king, disorder increases in the land ruled by the usurper. Later, when Richard is imprisoned at Pomfret Castle, he will be able to look back and view his past clearly.

Immediately following Henry's coronation, disorder in the kingdom surfaces at a very basic level. York finds that his son Aumerle is a member of a conspiracy planning to murder the new king. Upon this discovery, York, despite his wife's contrary protests, decides to inform King Henry of Aumerle's plan and guilt. Turmoil exists also in the royal family. To the news of his father's triumph, the new king's oldest son irreverently responds that he would unto the stews" 01. iii. 16). Perhaps with thoughts of his own son in mind, Henry pardons Aumerle, the son of another apparently honorable man. The point is that his reign begins with fathers and sons opposing each other. In addition to

the appearance of familial disorder at the end of *Richard II,* Henry sees his power growing as it feeds on the human blood of Oxford, Salisbury, Blunt, Kent, Brocas, Seely, the Abbot of Westminster, and King Richard II. A kingdom fertilized with the blood of its own subjects and its own king perpetuates a woeful pageant.

The imagery of order and power in *Richard II* illustrates the fact that the *Henriad* represents more than simply a dramatized presentation of political philosophy. In addition to a continual relationship with time, man seeks an ordered existence which he believes parallels the nature of the universe. *Richard II* explores in detail one man's use of power and his loss of it with the attendant growth of disorder. Because of chance and the orderly process of succession, Richard finds himself heir to the English throne, a position which allows him certain privileges, which provides him an inordinate amount of power, and which lays certain responsibilities and obligations on him. As king, Richard neglects his responsibilities; he wastes and abuses his power. He fails to recognize the true source of his power and its limitations. *As* a result of his irresponsible acts, he loses his royal power and finally his life, but not before he acquires some knowledge of his identity. His knowledge arrives too late to mitigate the growing disorder in the kingdom. Because of chance and because of his own political competence, Bolingbroke assumes Richard's p ower, but he fails to restore the lost order because 0 his illegal usurpation. Despite the fact that Henry effects an appearance of order with the official deposition of Richard, and with his own coronation processional, and with the king established as commander of the royal army, England under his rule becomes a land of pretense, counterfeit, and disease. Shakespeare uses the role of monarch as the central dramatic position for the exploration of order and power. He portrays both Richard II and Henry IV as kings who fail to acknowledge their identity as human beings before they assume the role of king. Richard selfishly abuses the royal power and allows the entire kingdom to become disordered. *As* a result of Richard's inappropriate actions, he loses his power, but he does gain a realistic sense of his own identity before he dies.

Critical Essay #8

Although Bolingbroke accepts a crown that legally belongs to Richard, Bolingbroke is often seen in a heroic light, as the man who rescues the kingship and the commonwealth from Richard's weak and ineffective hands. Critics such as Lewis J. Owen (whose essay appears in the Kingship section) and Arthur Suzman (whose essay appears ill the Language, Imagery, and Symbolism section) argue that despite Bolingbroke's political rise, he experiences a personal or spiritual decline. Owen explains that Bolingbroke loses dignity when he takes the crown which is rightfully Richard's.

Barbara J. Baines argues that while some critics have attacked Bolingbroke, Shakespeare presents him in a favorable, sympathetic manner. The play itself does present both sides of Bolingbroke, Baines notes, that of Bolingbroke who acts the king through his deeds, and that of Bolingbroke the traitor. Baines suggests that the former, sympathetic attitude is given more weight in the play. Baines argues that Richard loses the crown (in fact deposes himself) as a result of his disregard for the laws of the commonwealth, that he disinherits himself through his role in Gloucester's death and his confiscation of Gaunt's estate. Although some critics feel that Bolingbroke does not make his motivations known, Baines argues that he returns not to regain his inheritance (his father Gaunt' s estate) but to claim his right as a subject to be ruled by a responsible king. Bolingbroke's actions, such as the execution of Richard's advisors as well as Bolingbroke's desire to journey to the Holy Land to at one for Richard's death, are all informed by his sense of moral responsibility, Baines asserts.

C. G. Thayer, on the other hand, focuses on Bolingbroke's silence. In many instances, Thayer observes, the audience is left to make assumptions about Bolingbroke's actions, but we are not told what he is thinking or what his plans are. Thayer suggests that since the historical Richard II was often compared with Queen Elizabeth in the later years of her rule, perhaps Shakespeare was being cautious by not making Bolingbroke's motivations more explicit, by not suggesting that his actions were justified or that Richard's downfall was God's will.

Source: Kingship of the Silent King: A Study of Shakespeare's Bolingbroke," in *English Studies,* Vol. 61, No.1, February, 1980, pp. 24-31.

[In the essay that follows, Baines analyzes what she identifies as Shakespeare's sympathetic portrayal of Bolingbroke, stressing that the dominant theme of the play is not Bolingbrook's ambition, but Richard's incompetence. Baines traces Bolingbrook's actions throughout the play, demonstrating the moral Justifica tion for his decisions and activities.]

Few, if any, characters in the Shakespeare canon evoke such diverse and strong emotional response as the key figures of the second tetralogy: Richard II, Bolingbroke, and Hal. They are of *course* fascinating psychological portraits, but their special appeal derives from the political and moral issues which they dramatize. Together they present

Shakespeare's courageous exploration of the controversial subject, kingship: the right to reign, the use and abuse of power, and the reciprocal responsibility of sovereign and subject. In these three kings whose fortunes and identities are inextricably linked, the playwright dramatizes the formidable conflict between political necessity and Christian morality. This conflict, which gives the plays their singular vitality, is part of what Michael Manheim has defined as the 'weak-king dilemma' and what Moody Prior, relying on Friedrich Meinecke, has called the dilemma of *raison d'etat.* That Bolingbroke's behavior often demonstrates Machiavelli's precepts of political necessity has been irrefutably demonstrated in the past and again recently. But the significance of this behavior in the minds of Bolingbroke and his creator has never been satisfactorily resolved. The complexity of the political-moral issues of the tetralogy is, therefore, most evident in this ambiguous, keystone figure who, like his heir, demonstrates the cardinal virtues requisite of a king. Bolingbroke's triumph, through the glory of his heir, is made possible by a pragmatic acceptance of the tenuous balance between the claims of political necessity and Christian ethics. I hope to demonstrate that Shakespeare's attitude toward Bolingbroke is much *more* sympathetic than critics have been willing to acknowledge and that this sympathy underscores the playwright's very realistic attitude toward kingship.

We know of course that the Tudor establishment, like Richard, expounded the theory of the divide right of kings and the incontestability or virtual infallibility of the king body politic. The Tudor concept of kingship and the subject's obedience is so pervasive and eloquently expressed that, as G. R Elton notes, 'theories of kingship which stressed the rights of subjects and the dominance of law have tended to be overlooked in the dazzling light of God-granted authority'. But the fact remains that these conflicting theories did exist, and it is not likely that Shakespeare would have overlooked them. The struggle between Richard and Bolingbroke for the crown shows clearly that he did not. *Richard II* presents both the Lancastrian sympathetic interpretation of Bolingbroke's motives and actions and the Yorkist view of Bolingbroke as hypocrite and despicable traitor. Robert Ornstein has recently pointed out that Holinshed, Shakespeare's primary source, presents essentially a Yorkist view, one that stresses the principle of legitimacy too strongly to have been much comfort to the Tudor monarchs and thus had to be qualified or balanced by the playwright with the Lancastrian view. *For* many readers the fascination and pathos evoked by Richard in the last two acts tend to overshadow the Lancastrian argument. I would like to argue here that the justification of Richard's deposition, if we consider the entire tetralogy and give adequate attention to the first three acts of *Richard II,* is *more* important to an accurate assessment of the political statement of the plays than the tragic suffering of Richard. In light of the complexity of conflicting ideas about kingship, the singular nature of Bolingbrokethe morally accountable Machiavellian prince- takes on new significance.

How Bolingbroke acquires the crown is of course a crucial issue in any assessment of the character. Richard II loses the crown because he denies the principle and laws upon which his right to the crown rests. York, who, along with Gaunt, supports the theory of the divIDe right of kings, points out that Richard denies his own legal right when he denies Bolingbroke's rightful Inheritance. The destruction of the hereditary order in the duchy of Lancaster prefigures the destruction of the hereditary order in larger England.

It is Richard, not Bolingbroke, who causes this destruction. Richard has disturbed the old order of possession by insisting that possession of the crown means possession of Gaunt's estate. Ironically enough, he discovers that he must live by the new order of possession which he has himself created and sanctioned. The crown and the Lancastrian estate do in fact go hand-in-hand-not because Bolingbroke is a usurper but because Richard has inadvertently disInherited himself through a series of crimes. Disregard for royal blood, for the offspring of King Edward, has already become a practice before the action of the play begins, in the cruel murder of Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester. The strongest condemnation of Richard, 'Landlord of England art thou now, not king, / Thy state of law is bondslave to the law', calls to mind the worst of his sins as they are depicted in the anonymous Woodstock. Accordingly, Richard's fate and the justice of that fate are clearly prophesied by the dying Gaunt:

0, 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 possessed, Which art possessed now to depose thyself.
(II.i.l04-8)

What Gaunt is describing here is not usurpation but self-deposition. Moreover, he considers the act already accomplished ('Landlord of England art thou now, not king') before Bolingbroke's return from exile. Richard's crimes, not Bolingbroke's, dictate Gaunt's final address to Richard not as king but as 'my brother Edward's son' (II.i.124).

Bolingbroke receives the crown as a result of his morally sanctioned demand for his Inheritance. The first crucial question, then, in an evaluation of Bolingbroke's policy and ethics is whether or not he has a right to return to England to claim and defend his inheritance. Even as a loyal supporter of the establishment, York reveals that he is tom between too loyalties: one to the state, the other to his conscience:

. . . Both are my kinsmen.
Th'one is my sovereign, whom both my oath And duty bids defend; t'other again
Is my kinsman, whom the king hath
wronged,
Whom conscience and kindred bids of right.
(II.ii.1l1-15)

What is significant here is that duty and oath of office (aspects of political necessity) speak for Richard, whereas conscience speaks for Bolingbroke. To York's blustering accusations (II.iii.87-111) Bolingbroke appeals to the obligation of kinship, but what is more important, he asserts his right by law.

I am denied to sue my livery here,
And yet my letters patents give me leave. My father's goods are all distrained and sold;
And these, and all, are all amiss employed. What would you have me do? I am a subject, And I challenge law. Attomeys are denied me, And therefore personally I lay

claim
To my inheritance of free descent.
(II.iii.129-35)

But the rigidly idealistic York insists that the end, however justifiable, will nO[in this case justify the means. He will not exonerate Bolingbroke's attempt 'to find out right with wrong'. At the same rime, York can offer no viable alternative to Bolingbroke's action; to the pragmatic question, 'What would you have me do?' he has no answer. This failure best explains York's impotence and the metaphoric appropriateness of his intention to remain 'neuter' (1. 159). The impotence of York (who is, after all, the King's Regent) underscores the necessity of the course taken by Bolingbroke.

Although Bolingbroke's action is morally justified, his motives and intentions remain a mystery; he never confides in the audience or in another character. There is ample evidence that Bolingbroke, from the beginning, anticipates the necessity of restricting drastically or else abolishing altogether Richard's authority. The idea of merely reforming or limiting Richard's power would hardly seem feasible to the realistic Bolingbroke. He knows that Richard is an absolutist and that any form of resistance or criticism would not be tolerated. The fact that Richard is responsible for the death of Gloucester is from the beginning no secret in the Lancaster household. Bolingbroke knows, therefore, that his challenge to Richard's faithful servant Mowbray is, in fact, a challenge to Richard himself. Richard evidently recognizes the thinly disguised challenge when he accuses Bolingbroke of 'sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts' *(I.iii.130).* The only easy way out is the unjust banishment of both men. The sudden, dramatic, and unjust decision to banish both lords *is,* in Bolingbroke's consciousness, sufficient example of Richard's intolerable abuse of absolute power. Compromise and reconciliation, therefore, could hardly seem a likelihood in Bolingbroke's mind when he returns from France.

It is highly probable, then, that the silent Bolingbroke at this early point- that is, before Richard confiscates the Lancaster estate- already intends a final confrontation with Richard. The time sequence of Act II, scene i, *is* deliberately ambiguous. It *is* impossible to tell whether Bolingbroke has had time to receive the news of the confiscation of his inheritance before he sets sail from Brittany with the eight tall ships. The confiscation of the Lancaster estate may not be the primary cause for Bolingbroke's return, but certainly it is a primary factor in Richard's self-deposition. Bolingbroke's defense of his refusal to accept banishment (II.iii.113-36) is fundamentally an accusation of Richard rather than an explanation of his own motives.

Part of the ambiguity of Bolingbroke's motives and intentions derives from the role of resistance which he has chosen. From the beginning he prepares for what he knows will be Richard's ultimate mistake; the eight tall ships are waiting. Whether or not they actually sailed before Bolingbroke received news that Richard had confiscated the Lancastrian estate *is* ultimately of little importance. Bolingbroke has already been denied justice at the moment of his banishment, and he knows that Richard will continue, *in* some form or other, the pattern of injustice. When he returns to claim his rights, he *is* claiming more than his title and property. He *is* claiming the right which,

according to one theory of kingship, every Englishman has- the right to be governed by a responsible king.

Bolingbroke does not reveal his plans because he still *is* not certain how far his confrontation will have to go or should go; a great deal depends upon how Richard behaves. There *is* no reason to believe that Bolingbroke *is* being hypocritical when he assures York that he does not intend to oppose himself against the will of heaven (III.iii.18-19). He does not define at this point what he thinks the will of heaven *is* because he does not know; Richard's behavior will, to a great extent, clarify the question. In the crucial confrontation scene (III.iii), Bolingbroke quickly kneels before Richard and declares, 'My gracious lord, I come but for mine own'. But Richard recognizes (as we should by now) that what Bolingbroke's 'own' is has not been defined by Bolingbroke; certainly among other things it includes the right to just government. Richard answers, 'Your own *is* yours, and I am yours, and all'. The reality of the situation *is* ultimately shaped by the mind of Richard, not by the action of Bolingbroke. Richard's followers have tried to direct his mind away from the madness of despair toward constructive action against Bolingbroke. But the prophecy of old John of Gaunt, who described Richard as one 'which art possessed now to depose thyself', proves to be an accurate statement of the will of heaven.

Another crucial matter to be dealt with *in* any evalua *tion* of Bolingbroke *is* his execution of those 'caterpillars of the commonwealth', Bushy and Greene. This action has been interpreted as Machiavellian political necessity to assure the capitulation of Richard (Ribner, pp. 181-2). One certainly cannot help recalling this execution scene when much later Bolingbroke on his deathbed alludes to the 'by-paths and indirect crooked ways' to the throne (2 *Henry IV,* IV.v.184). But if we look closely at the situation *in Richard II* we see that the playwright has created ample grounds to justify Bolingbroke's behavior. By their own admission Bushy and Greene have emptied the purses of the commons (II.ii.129-32) and eamed their hatred. The straightforward nature of Bolingbroke's statement of intention 'to weed and pluck away' the King's parasites and the as sumption that he will have the Regent's authority sup porting him (II.iii.162-6) imply a strong moral justification for his judgment and execution of the King's men. York certainly voices no objection to the idea that these men deserve to be executed. His reluctance apparently again concerns Bolingbroke's methods: 'It may be I will go with you; but yet I'll pause, / For I am loath to break our country's laws' (II.iii.168-9). York freely chooses to go with Bolingbroke because he realizes that although Bolingbroke's methods may be questionable, the end result, the good of the commonwealth, is not.

More important than York's response to Bolingbroke's ministration of justice *is* that of his gardener *in* the emblematic garden scene (III.iv). The gardener's man asks:

Why should we, in the compass of a pale, Keep law and form and due proportion, Showing, as in a model, our firm estate, When our sea-walled garden, the whole land, Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up, Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
Her knots disordered, and her wholesome
herbs

Swarming with caterpillars?
(40-7)

This question does more than simply define the emblematic correspondences; it suggests that order on a secondary or personal level (within 'the compass of a pale') has little meaning when there *is* no order on the primary or national level (within 'the sea-walled garden'). The question implies that there *is* very little motivation to achieve moral order on the personal level when none exists on a national level. The gardener *is* able to satisfy this complaint and affirm the necessity for private order because Bolingbroke has acted to restore national order. It may well be that on his deathbed Bolingbroke still has the blood of Bushy and Greene on his hands, but their execution *is* clearly a part of the establishment of order and justice *in* the kingdom, without which the sea-walled garden would go to ruin.

Bolingbroke's ministration of justice continues with an effort to identify those involved *in* the murder of Gloucester (IV.i). This scene, which parallels the opening scene of the play *in* which Richard presides over the challenge brought by Bolingbroke against Mowbray, dramatizes Bolingbroke's sincere desire for the truth but even more clearly reveals that Bolingbroke already wields the power of arbitrator and judge, the power of *de facto* king. Bolingbroke's willingness to hear and weigh all evidence and his willingness to repeal Mowbray's banishment sharply contrast with the whimsical, capricious behavior of Richard *in* the earlier comparable situation. The disruptive intrusion by York to announce that Richard has abdicated and declared Bolingbroke his heir suggests clearly that the right to power goes hand-in-hand with the ability to use it properly. This point is made again through Bolingbroke by the gratitude and respect shown York, the mercy shown Aumerle (V.iii.59-66), and the tolerance shown Carlisle (V.vi.24-29). Thus the dominant theme of *Richard II* is the incompetence of Richard, not the ambition of Bolingbroke. We sympathize with Richard, the man, in Acts IV and V, but earlier in the play we see Richard, the King, in the cold light of his incompetence and crimes. The comparison which Richard draws between himself and 'glistering Phaeton' (III.iii.178-79) is intended as a criticism of 'unruly jades'-those who challenge the king's authority. The comparison, however, turns ironically on Richard, since in the myth it is Phaeton's presumption and incompetence which threaten the cosmic order. Richard discovers that he is but a mortal- that he is neither sun-god nor Christ. In the mirror episode (IV.i) the myths which Richard has created fade in the harsh light of truth. He sees in the mirror not the image of the king body politic but the image of a simple man. The image in the mirror is a much more accurate reflection of Richard's sins than any confession which Northumberland could draw up. The recognition of his mortal face forces an acknowledgment that Richard has unfortunately never made during his reign. The history he reads in the glass is one of folly: 'Was this the face that faced so many follies / And was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke?' (IV.i.285-86). In this moment of truth Richard does not use the word 'usurped' or 'deposed' but instead uses the word, 'outfaced', which is an accurate description of Bolingbroke's behavior and an important indicator of the author's attitudes toward both characters.

Richard's incompetence is stressed also by Shakespeare's deviation from his main source. In Holinshed's account of Richard's fall, Northumberland captures Richard by

tricking him into an ambush. Richard is then firmly persuaded by advisors to agree to a peaceful abdication. In Shakespeare's play Richard rejects the course of resistance offered by Aumerle and Carlisle and retires to Flint Castle, where he quickly and without advice acknowledges Bolingbroke as king. Shakespeare's Richard clearly has an alternative to abdication. The alternative would require that he acknowledge the injustice of some of his decisions. But Richard, obsessed with the idea of his divine right and virtual infallibility, cannot bend to such a compromise. Since Richard will not change, his abdication is essential to the well-being of the nation. Its strategic location between Richard's surrender at Flint Castle and Bolingbroke's acceptance of the crown at Westminster makes the emblematic garden scene again crucial. The gardener may be sympathetic with the fallen king, but his main point and the point of the scene is that the garden must be tended. Bolingbroke understands this fundamental principle of kingship; Richard does not- at least not in time to save his crown.

Bolingbroke's competence as it contrasts with Richard's incompetence does not go unnoticed by the conservative York. As he observes the unfolding of events, York moves from suspicion and censure, to ambivalence, finally to complete acceptance of Bolingbroke as rightful sovereign. He can with good conscience shift his allegiance from Richard to Bolingbroke because Richard 'with willing soul' has adopted Bolingbroke as his heir (IV.i.IO8). York is willing to accept Bolingbroke as king for still another and perhaps more important reason. He realizes that fortune favors Bolingbroke; he has the support of the lords and the parliament and has found no positive resistance in Richard. Circumstances therefore indicate to York that Bolingbroke truly has not opposed the will of heaven. Since in Act V, scene ii, York is alone in his own home with his wife, he has no reason for saying something which he does not truly believe. He describes the joyous reception of Bolingbroke and the public contempt for Richard. Moved to compassion by Richard's suffering, he nevertheless concludes

That, had not God for some strong purpose
steeled
The hearts of men, they must perforce have
melted,
And barbarism itself have pitied him.
But heaven hath a hand ill these events,
To whose high will we bOund our calm
contents.
To Bolingbroke are we sworn subjects now, Whose state and honour I for aye allow.
(V.ii,34-40)

York's loyalty to Bolingbroke- a loyalty which York considers divinely sanctioned- is put to the supreme test by Aumerle's involvement in the conspiracy to murder Bolingbroke.

York's providential view of Richard's fall and Bolingbroke's rise is reinforced years later by Bolingbroke's interpretation of the events and his motives for accepting the crown:

Though then, God knows, I had no such
intent But that necessity so bowed the state That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss

. . .
(2 *Henry IV,* III.i.72-74)

Compelling necessity was his motive, not ambition. When Henry IV contemplates Northumberland's treachery, he remembers that Richard accurately predicted the situation. Warwick explains that Richard foresaw Northumberland's treachery, not because he had any supernatural perception or influence, but because he comprehended an easily discernible pattern in Northumberland's nature. The disorder which Bolingbroke faces as king is a result of a constant principle in human nature. Necessity cries out in the case of Northumberland's treachery, as it did in the case of Richard's incompetence, and Bolingbroke prepares himself once more to meet that political necessity (2 *Henry IV,* III.i.92-94). The point of Northumberland's rebellion is not that rebellion begets rebellion, but that a king proves his competence and thus his right to rule by his capacity to deal with rebellion.

But with all of his competence, Bolingbroke is still a human being, subject to weakness and sin, even in his role as king. In a moment of weakness he voices his wish for Richard's death. Exton, who makes the wish a reality, reminds Bolingbroke, 'From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed' *(Richard II,* V.vi.37). Bolingbroke does not deny this assertion, nor does he try to justify Richard's murder on the grounds of political necessity. *As* amorally responsible individual, Bolingbroke acknowledges his guilt and promises expiation: 'I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand' (V.vi.49-50). Unlike Machiavelli's model prince, Bolingbroke acknowledges the importance of reconciling political necessity with Christian morality. That he hopes to achieve expiation and at the same time 'busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels' does not imply religious hypocrisy, but a pragmatism consistent with the nature of this character. What is important is his refusal to dismiss the moral issue altogether and his awareness that all of his actions will be judged by the failure or success of his reign and by his capacity to perpetuate his reign through his heir. . . .

Critical Essay #9

Source: "The Silent King: Providential Intervention, Fair Sequence and Succession," in *Shakespearean Politics: Government and* Misgovernment *in the Great Histories,* Ohio University Press, 1983, pp. 62-70.

[In the following excerpt, Thayer examines Bolingbroke's silence regarding the motivations far his actions. Thayer suggests several reasons why Shakespeare omitted sum crucial information and suggests that the result if sum omissions is *that Shakespeare "cleans up" the image if the historical Bolingbroke.]*

One of the most striking facts about the Bolingbroke of *Richard II* is that at critical points he does not tell us what he is thinking about or what he plans to do. He takes important actions that must certainly have been based on hard decisions- or so it would seem; but the decisions we hear him utter are almost redundant: "In God's name I'll ascend the regal throne" (IV.i.113); "On Wednesday next we solemnly set down/Our coronation" (IV.i.249-250). But he has been acting king since act III, scene i at least (the sentencing of Bushy and Greene). He has no soliloquies and no confidants in *Richard II* (and only one real soliloquy and two confidants in *Henry IV,* Warwick and Westmoreland, with whom he mainly discusses his son, not affairs of state). Unique among the great Shakespearean, Jonsonian, and Marlovian conspirators, tragic or comic, he keeps his motives and decisions to himself, so much so that we might be justified in asking to what extent he is actively engaged in a conspiracy at all. It would be unreasonable to require stage conspirators to confide in their victims, but they all confide in audiences in soliloquies or inform them through talk with their fellow conspirators or, like Caudius in *Hamlet,* reflect on their crimes and on what they have gained or lost by them. Shakespeare obviously found political conspiracy of more than routine interest, and he represented some fascinating ones on the stage; but Bolingbroke seems almost to be engaged in a private conspiracy of silence.

We assume that Bolingbroke has something definite in mind when, in the first scene of *Richard II,* he accuses Mowbray of a staggering array of treasons, the murder of Gloucester being the most important. No doubt we can safely assume that he is somehow getting at Richard, who bears the major guilt in Gloucester's death; and we naturally assume that Bolingbroke knows about Richard's guilt, since everyone else seems to. But these are merely assumptions based on hindsight: Bolingbroke himself says nothing about Richard's responsibility until act IV. To most of us it is simply inconceivable that Bolingbroke's charges are directed solely against Mowbray, but nothing in the play's opening scene tells us anything else. We are, perhaps, invited to guess at what he actually has in mind when he makes his accusation; but he doesn't talk about it, not even with his father, before going into exile, even though, in view of what has been happening, Gaunt might have expressed some curiosity about what his son has been up to. Gaunt was conspicuously present when the charges were made ("Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster"I.i.1), yet when father and son part for the last time (at the end of I.iii), the talk is about the sorrows of exile and how to lighten them. These facts are particularly striking in view of the substance of act I, scene ii- the

absolute necessity of passive obedience. Presumably, Gaunt has not perceived what his son has been up to, and we should therefore be cautious in making our own assumptions.

It is important to remember that the King's responsibility for Gloucester's death was so clearly established in the chronicles and in *Woodstock* (an understandably anonymous play much more openly emphatic than Shakespeare's play in its condemnation of Richard) that it can hardly have been a mystery to many people watching the play.

Again, and even more important, at the end of act II, scene i when we learn from Northumberland that the just-disinherited Bolingbroke is returning from exile equipped for an invasion ("eight tall ships, three thousand men of war" [II.i.286]), it does not require great subtlety of mind to see that he must have decided to do what in fact he does. Both Hall and Holinshed describe widespread hatred of Richard and a movement to recall Bolingbroke, a movement so vast as to suggest something more like a popular mandate than a plot. Yet in the play, all, or almost all, is silence. We don't know when Bolingbroke decided to return or the details of his decision, in spite of that decision's overwhelming importance. Shakespeare maintains silence on the subject when anyone who could read might well have known the story and might well have been puzzled by the omissions. The conditions of Bolingbroke's decision should be of consuming interest, and that interest is systematically frustrated. One may argue that actions speak louder than words, but on this subject some words would clarify something that we must assume Shakespeare did not want to clarify. A major part of the action of four plays arises from a decision, made in Brirtany, by a principal character; and about the circumstances of that decision, as opposed to its outcome, we really know nothing- hence all the guesswork, some of it demonstrably bad.

In fact, we don't know when he made his decision before or after his father's death and his own disinheriting- although it is possible that on this matter we can make something like a passable assumption. The problem is familiar: we learn that Bolingbroke is on his way home at the end of the same scene (II.i.277 f.) that contains the death of Gaunt and the disinheriting of the man who was his rightful heir "by fair sequence and succession." We are shown a good reason for Bolingbroke to return, and then we learn that he has embarked before (presumably) that reason existed. At least that's the way it looks to most readers, and perhaps that is the way it sounded to contemporary audiences. But Shakespeare's chronological games are notorious, like those of most of his fellow playwrights, and I do not think it is self-evident that Shakespeare intends his audience to see Bolingbroke jumping the gun: at this point, it is almost a relief to know that he is on his way. Perhaps this is why Shakespeare has Northumberland specify "eight tall ships, three thousand men of war." Holinshed, in his amiable way, repeats conflicting reports: "fifteen lances" or "not past threescore persons" or the force specified by Northumberland (Hosley, pp. 76-77). In view of the outrage just perpetrated by Richard, eight tall ships and three thousand men of war seem appropriate. Bolingbroke's return with fifteen or thirty chums would be less likely to raise the spirits. It is certainly possible that "Shakespeare's strategy makes Bolingbroke's return morally ambiguous," but I suspect that an audience is less likely going to be troubled by the chronology and what it implies than is the curious reader. One other odd detail: when Bolingbroke arrives, the

text does not give us the impression that he has an army with him; he *appears* to have arrived more or less alone, although we must no doubt assume that he didn't. Then, as in Holinshed, his friends begin to gather- not all of them the sort of friends one would choose if the choice were wider. The information that he is coming with an army indicates that Richard will have his work cut out for him; if we then get the impression that Bolingbroke arrives alone, there will be a clear contrast with Richard on his return from Ireland, with Richard's friends forsaking him as rapidly as Bolingbroke's assemble. (The most specific statement about a popular uprising comes, briefly, from Scroope, III.ii.104-120. It's interesting to hear about, but we don't see It- one of many instances of Shakespeare's version of show-and-tell, not-show-and-tell, show-and-not-tell.)

Even if we assume, however, that Bolingbroke has embarked for England before hearing of his father's death and his own disinheriting, there is on the face of it nothing particularly surprising about his return (unless surprise must spring from violations of Tudor notions of obedience), just as there was nothing notably just about his banishment- Richard's alternative to a duel that would have actually settled something. The banishment was no doubt legal enough, but in King Richard's England, under the circumstances associated with his notions of kingship, legality and justice aren't necessarily the same, just as positive laws generally have no necessary and automatic connection with considerations of right and wrong. At worst, Richard's grand larceny provides a *post* hoc justification for Bolingbroke's deci sion to return home Gust as the Dauphin's providential tennis balls provided King Harry the fifth with a legitimate reason to go to war with France-they are a challenge to a duel and as such are a good deal more convincing a motive than is Canterbury's exposition of the Salic Law, which may justify a claim on the French throne but not a war to make the claim good). Everyone has seen that Bolingbroke has extraordinary luck at key points on his way to the crown (e.g., Richard's proximity, in Flint Castle). Whatever his original intentions in returning from exile with a small army and navy, Richard or God or providence provided a nearly unanswerable argument. If he intended to return as a rebel with ambitions for the crown, Richard, by his unadvised violation of fair sequence and succession, has made him a rebel with a cause, a cause WIth which almost anyone else can easily sympathize.

It is precisely when Richard casually, and with some lack of sensitivity, disinherits his cousin and ignores York's instructive protests that one is likely to run definitively out of patience with him. And it is in that scene that we learn just how serious his situation is likely to become, just how swift and condign [well deserved] the retribution is likely to be. Shakespeare has made it easy for any member of an audience to regard Northumberland's good news as providential just as both Hall and Holinshed thought they saw the hand of providence at work in the rise of Bolingbroke and the fall of Richard (Hosley, p. 81). However we interpret the timing of events ill act II, scene i, it is clear enough that Richard has misbehaved prodigiously and that hot vengeance is on the way, and that point, I think, is underscored by Bolingbroke's silence. We can guess all we want about his specific reasons for returning, but Shakespeare makes such guessing more or less irrelevant. It would have been another matter if he had shown the Archbishop of Canterbury negotiating a coup with Bolingbroke (as historically he did) or Bolingbroke sitting down to discuss strategy with the Duke of Brittany or Sir Thomas Erpingham, but that is exactly what he does not show us. Bolingbroke does not even

discuss strategy with Northumberland; when the time comes, he simply sends him to Richard with an unanswerable ultimatum.

We may ask why Shakespeare is so reticent about specifying the idea of providential intervention since Hall and Holinshed have already led the way. But they were not writing a tendentious play about the justifiable deposition of a rightful king. And after giving us an almost interminable list of Richard's shortcomings as king, Holinshed can say, with his characteristic lovable idiocy, that Richard "was a prince the most unthankfully used of his subjects of anyone of whom ye shall lightly read" (Hosley, p.89). Perhaps Holinshed thought such a *pro forma* protestation was necessary, although it certainly doesn't amount to much; but in any case, he was writing an enormous and not wholly exciting chronicle in rather soporific prose, not a play for the public stage, about a king who was compared with Elizabeth during the later years of her reign. Some of Bolingbroke's silences are probably Shakespeare's as well (and, as we know, the deposition scene was omitted from the first two quartos of the play), understandable and discreet silences. If people are comparing Elizabeth with Richard, one had better not specify that Richard's fall was providential.

There is another possible reason for considerable caution on this subject. As we have seen, Robert Persons paid his negative compliments to the idea of the King's Two Bodies in *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Craun of England* (1594). In the same work, he describes how providence manifests itself through rebellion against tyrannical or incompetent rulers and then often provides better rulers than those deposed. In all Christian realms, princes have been deposed for just causes, and . . . God hath concurred and assisted wonderfully the same, sending them commonly very good kings after those that were deprived, and in no country more than in England it selfe, yea in the very lyne and familye of this king Richard, whose noble grandfather king Edward the third was exalted to the crowne by a most solemne deposition of his predecessor kIng Edward the second, wherefore in this point there can be little controversie. [p. 62]

And I know not whether every man here have considered the same, to wit that God hath wonderfully concurred for the most part, with such judicial acts of the commonwealth agaynst their cruel Princes, not only in prospering the same, but by giving them also commonly some notable successor in place of the deposed, thereby to justify the fact, and to remedy the faulte of him that went before. . . . God disposeth of kingdomes and worketh his wil in Princes affayres as he pleaseth. [pp. 33-34]

It seems to me that Shakespeare takes the same view, differing perhaps on a very minor point: God sent a king as good as a king could be under the circumstances and that king was succeeded by one of Persons's and Shakespeare's "very good kings," a wonderful concurrence and assistance in a judicial act of the commonwealth. I assume that Shakespeare was familiar with some of Persons's work (it certainly caused a sensation when it appeared in England), but he needn't have gone to Persons for the view that the first two Lancastrian kings were superior to Richard II.

But Shakespeare is not wholly silent on the subject of providential intervention: he does raise it once, in York's familiar account of Bolingbroke's and Richard's riding into London. The crowd received Bolingbroke with cheers, but not Richard:

No man cried "God save him!"
No Joyful tongue gave him his welcome
home,
But dust was thrown upon his sacred head;
Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,
His face still combating with tears and smiles,
The badges of his grief and patience,
That had not God for some strong purpose
steel'd
The hearts of men, they must perforce have
melted,
And barbarism itself have pitied him.
But heaven hath a hand in these events,
To Bolingbroke are we sworn subjects now,
Whose state and honor I for aye allow.
(V.ii.28-40)

This passage, with its seemingly perfunctory concluding couplet, is often attributed simply to York's weakness, but since he has been established throughout the play as a kind of reflector for audience responses to both Richard and Bolingbroke, I see no reason why he should be deprived of that function now, even though he is shortly to be involved in a spectacle of low comedy. Richard is an object of pity, but God had "some strong purpose," and "heaven hath a hand in these events." If we can believe York here, we can easily enough believe that the same agencies, under the general rubric of providence, had also been at work earlier, all along, since all those other events prepared the way for this sad but necessary sight. To pity Richard is not to wish him to resume his throne.

Another silence is rather different from the ones just discussed. The so-called Doncaster oath was to be of some importance historically. Holinshed tells us, in his engaging way, that when Bolingbroke returned from exile he swore (at Doncaster) to Northumberland, Sir Henry Percy (Hotspur), and Westmoreland "that he would demand no more but the lands that were to him descended by inheritance from his father and in right of his wife" (Hosley, p. 77). "Moreover, he undertook to cause the payment of taxes and tallages to be laid down, and to bring the King to good government" (p. 77). One detects a certain mconsistency here. More important, this account follows one in which the same historian describes how" divers of the nobility, as well prelates as other, and likewise many of the magistrates and rulers of the cities, towns, and commonalty. . . devised, with great deliberation and considerate advice, to send and signify unto Duke Henry [Bolingbroke], . . . requiring him with all convenient speed to convey himself into England; promising him all their aid, power, and assistance if he, expelling King Richard as a man not meet for the office he bore, would take upon him the scepter, rule, and diadem of his native land and region" (Hosley, p. 76). After *that,* the Doncaster oath

doesn't amount to much, and in 1 *Henry IV* it is used against the King only by men who might be described as having interested motives.

Maybe it was politically discreet for the historical Bolingbroke to swear his oath in public to the magnates who were to help him to the throne. It was even more discreet for Shakespeare's Bolingbroke to do nothing of the sort. :His only comment on that subject is to York: "As I was banish'd, I was banish'd Herford; / But as I come, I come for Lancaster" (II.iii.112-113) an ambiguous statement, perhaps, but no oath, and since the founder of the Tudor dynasty claimed, not with total candor, to be of Lancastrian (as well as Arthurian) descent, and therefore to be restoring the house of Lancaster to the throne, a statement like "I come for Lancaster" could have its own peculiar and complex resonances. The Doncaster oath put the historical Bolingbroke in the wrong smce it is well known that all politicians must and do keep their promises. For Shakespeare's Bolingbroke, such an oath would be not only untrue but also superfluous: you don't mvade your native country without some notion of putting yourself in charge. Shakespeare, therefore, has Northumberland allude to the oath, with no great precision of language, at II.iii.147-150 and III.iii.103-120, and Northumberland is a notable liar, here and in the two plays that follow. (For Bolingbroke he'is a useful liar but a liar anyhow.) Shifting the blame to Northumberland is another way in which Shakespeare cleans up the historical Bolingbroke. In *Richard II* and 1 *Henry IV* the Doncaster oath becomes a fiction of Northumberland's, not a lie of Bolingbroke's. The whole business is worth some reflection: Shakespeare cleans up Bolingbroke, but he is to be seen, obviously enough, in the context of human political standards, not of impossible moral absolutes. As with his son, the measure by which he 15 to be judged is human, nothing else. There are, of course, different kinds of politicians Richard and Bolingbroke, for example.

Adaptations

King Richard the Second, BBC, 1978.

Directed by David Giles and starring Derek Jacobi, John Gielgud, Jon Finch, and Wendy Hiller. 157 minutes.

Richard II, Bard Productions, 1982.

Directed by William Woodman. Videotape distributed by Shakespeare Video Society. 172 minutes.

Further Study

Literary Commentary

Baker, Herschel. *"Richard II."* In *The Riverside Shakespeare,* edited by G. Blakemore Evans, pp. 800-04. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974.

Discusses the sources Shakespeare used to write *Richard II* and offers a brief introduction to the play's plot, main themes, and characters.

Black, James. "The Interlude of the Beggar and the King in *Richard II"* In *Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theater,* edited by DavId M. Bergeron, pp. 104-13. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985.

Maintains that the cornic interlude in which Aumerle's plot against Bolingbroke is discovered does not undercut the play's seriousness but rather emphasizes that seriousness through contrast.

Clare, Janet. "The Censorship of the Deposition Scene in *Richard II." Review of English Studies* XLI, No. 161 (February 1990): 89-94.

Examines the evidence supporting the theory that the deposition scene was censored out of contemporary productIons of *Richard II for* its political subversiveness.

Cohen, Derek. "The Containment of Monarchy: *RichardII."* In *Shakespeare's Culture of Violence,* pp. 10-29. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Explores the effect on the monarchy of the assassinations and revolution m *Richard II.*

Friedman, Donald M. "John of Gaunt and the Rhetoric of Frustration." *ELH* 43, No.3 (Fall 1976): 279-99.

Challenges the traditional reading of Gaunt's deathbed speech, which is typically viewed as a patriotic set-piece that supports orthodox Tudor political doctrine.

Frye, Northrop "The Bolingbroke Plays *(Richard II, Henry IV)."* In *Northrop Fry:: on Shakespeare,* edited by Robert Sandler, pp. 51-81. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Offers a brief discussion of the image of those English monarchs relevant to *Richard II* and the rest of the tetralogy. Frye then examines Shakespeare's presentation of the claims to the throne of the houses of York and Lancaster, and the legitimacy of the Tudor line. Frye emphasizes that Shakespeare's concern in *Richard II* is not really history, but rather the "personal actions and interactions of the people at the top of the social order."

Gurr, Andrew. Introduction to *King Richard II,* by William Shakespeare, pp. 1-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Provides a detailed overview of the play, including discussion of the date of composition of the play; the influence of and references to contemporary history; the sources from which Shakespeare drew; the play's structure, imagery, and language; and staging issues.

Hunter, Edwin. R "Shakespeare's Intentions Regarding King Richard II." In *Shakespeare and Common Sense,* pp. 31-48. Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1954.

Examines Shakespeare's characterization of Richard II, arguing that Shakespeare intended Richard's dominant characteristics to be "a bent for self-dramatization" and "a theatrical habit of mind," which, in several scenes "comes dangerously near to the grotesque."

Jensen, Pamela K. "Beggars and Kings: Cowardice and Courage in Shakespeare's *Richard II." Interpretations* 18, No. 1 (Fall1990): 111-43.

Focuses on Richard's fall and Bolingbroke's rise to power, charging that Richard's abuse of power "provokes Bolingbroke's challenge," and that Richard gives in to Bolingbroke without attempting to defend himself.

Kehler, Dorothea. "King of Tears: Mortality in *Richard II." Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 39, No.1 (1985): 7-18.

Studies the "death-centered world" of Richard, arguing that our own fears of death often prevent us from thoroughly examining the sympathy Richard draws.

MacIsaac, Warren J. "The Three Cousins in *Richard II." Shakespeare Quarterly* XXII, No.2 (Spring 1971): 137-46.

Analyzes the relationships and power struggles among Richard and his cousins, Aumerle and Bolingbroke.

Maus, Katharine Eisaman. *"Richard II."* In *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition,* edited by Stephen Greenblatt, pp. 943-51. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

Offers an overview of the play, discussing Shakespeare's sources, the play's relation to Elizabethan history and views, and the play's plot, themes, and characters.

Moore, Jeanie Grant. "Queen of Sorrow, King of Grief: Reflections and Perspectives in *Richard II."* In *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama,* edited by Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker, pp. 19-35. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991.

Studies the significance of Queen Isabel in *Richard II,* examining the way in which she both emphasizes important issues in the drama and serves as a "mirror of Richard." Moore maintains that through Isabel, we are allowed a new understanding of Richard's experience.

Palmer, John. "Richard of Bordeaux." In *Political Characters of Shakespeare,* pp. 118-79 London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1945.

Analyzes the political significance and ramifications of *Richard II,* maintaining that the political aspects of the play are often overlooked, as the drama is often seen as Richard's personal tragedy.

Pye, Christopher. "The Betrayal of the Gaze: *Richard II."* In *The Regad Phantasm Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle,* pp. 82-105. London: Routledge, 1990.

Explores the relationship in *RichardII* between the power of the kingship and theatricality, examining in particular the uses Richard makes of theatrical speeches and antics.

Rackin, Phyllis. "The Role of the Audience in Shakespeare's *Richard II." Shakespeare Quarterly* 36, No.3 (Autumn 1985): 262-81.

Contends that the audience perceives the action of the play in two different ways. They are sometimes required to take a "long, historical view of the action" and are sometimes encouraged to see the action as "insistent, present reality."

Reese, M. M. *"Richard II."* In *The cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's HIStory Plays,* pp. 225-60. London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1961.

Examines the kingship and character of Richard, as well as the plot of the play. Reese also presents a brief analysis of other characters in the play.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

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The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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