Richard III & Elizabethan Kingship

Frances Perdue

Western Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Playwriting Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/2719

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
Perdue,
Frances D.
1975
RICHARD III AND ELIZABETHAN KINGSHIP

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Frances D. Perdue
August 1975
RICHARD III AND ELIZABETHAN KINGSHIP

Recommended 10 July 1975

Director of Thesis

Nancy Davis
William McMahon

Approved July 28 1975

Dean of the Graduate College
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With gratitude I express my appreciation to the members of my committee, to Dr. Nancy Davis and Dr. William McMahon, both of whom read my early draft and made valuable suggestions which I have incorporated in this thesis. Especially do I thank Dr. Hoyt Bowen, my director, who patiently gave of his time and shared with me his expertise in writing and his extensive knowledge of Shakespeare's works. These three have made this study a rewarding and enjoyable experience.
In this study Richard III's character, motivations, and his path to the throne were examined as they affect the well-being of the country. Analyzed were the political, social, and moral philosophies of Elizabethan England and how they conflicted with Richard's Machiavellian tactics in achieving and holding the position of king. The necessity of purging Richard III from the throne was shown to be consistent with the Elizabethan concept of God's will for the good of the country. "Macbeth" and "Hamlet" revealed the idea that the health of the nation depends on the moral health of the king. In "Coriolanus," another strong but dangerous leader was shown as having qualities that were a value to the state, but he exhibited tyrannical irrationality that became an awesome threat to the country. In contrast, "Richard II" and "Henry VI" indicated that a weak king may be an even greater threat to the well-being of the nation than a tyrant like Richard III. The kings in "Henry IV" and "Henry V" were found to have qualities demanded of kingship. Henry IV's reign, however, was cursed by his participation in the deposition of God's regent on earth. Henry V is revealed as an ideal Renaissance king. He was a capable, mature man who was able to use Elizabethan policies to promote the health of England. In these examples of history plays and related
tragedies, Shakespeare seems to demonstrate an ideal pattern of kingship as it affects the good of the country. The king had to be legitimate; and in accordance with Christian tradition, he must act in the best interest of the country. Although Henry V succeeded, Richard III failed to follow the pattern. Thus it was necessary that he be purged from the English throne at Bosworth Field.
INTRODUCTION

The name Richard III strikes horror in the minds of those who have heard of the villainous acts of this notorious king of England. Shakespeare's play "Richard III" is credited with establishing this impression, since it portrays Richard as the monstrous king who indulged in deceit and murder to obtain and maintain the crown of England. Of course Shakespeare did not entirely create the dramatic character of Richard III. He used as his primary sources the works of historians such as Sir Thomas More and Raphael Holinshed. In addition, he adapted a few points from Richard Grafton's Chronicles (1543 & 1569) and from The Mirror for Magistrates (1559). More wrote, "he was malicious, wrathfull, enuious, and from afore his birth, ever forwarde." More declares that Richard "spared no mans deathe, whose life withstoode his purpose." Polydore Vergil, the Tudor historian whose work English History provided information for More's history, reported that Richard "being blinde with

---


2More, p. 8.
covetousness of raigning... "enjoyed the realm, contrary to the law of God and man."³

However, many came to Richard's defense: Sir George Buc and Horace Walpole, says Alec Myers, suggest that it was Henry VII who murdered Edward V rather than Richard; and on a serious level, Sir Clements R. Markham goes to extreme in his biography by completely vindicating Richard.⁴ And Josephine Tey's detective story Daughter of Time is, from the standpoint of literary skill, "one of the most successful, if lop-sided, defenses of Richard."⁵ The historical Richard may not have been the monster that Holinshed, More, and other writers have suggested; but few would regard him as the blameless figure that Markham has depicted. Instead, he was probably a mixture of good and evil found in every leader. However, the Tudor myth about Richard III culminated in its dramatic climax in Shakespeare's characterization of a "dazzling but incredible criminal."⁶

Shakespeare depicts Richard as a Machiavellian who achieves the throne through deceit, manipulation, and murder. Richard's personal qualities are a catalyst aiding him in his quest for the throne, a cause Richard believes to be a just


⁶Brown, 385.
one. Richard is a capable warrior; but since it is a time of peace, he is unable to exercise his physical and military prowess. He is further frustrated because his physical deformities make him unsuited for court life. Thus he compensates for these inadequacies by acquiring the throne through his vitality, intelligence, and wit. In addition, he displays his histrionic ability by effectively playing the role of the Vice, delighting in doing evil.

However, after Richard becomes King, he resorts to irrational steps to maintain his position. It is at this point that Richard is corrupted by his desire for absolute power. In his effort to realize this ambition, he is led to further manipulation and bloodshed.

Richard is not living in a vacuum, however. His actions not only affect his family, and himself, but they also affect the well-being of the country. As a result, there is a confrontation between Richard's ambitions and the political, social, and moral forces of the nation. Purging of this tyrant becomes necessary for the health of the country.

Out of an examination of Richard's path to the throne and his growing obsession to remain an absolute monarch, there emerges a picture of Shakespeare's concept of kingship. The role a king should play is suggested in each of the histories and some of the tragedies. For example, there are kings other than Richard III who have possibilities for being strong effective leaders; but through some quality in themselves, they become a potential threat to the nation.
They, too, must be purged. Macbeth, like Richard, is a capable warrior with leadership abilities. Yet when he commits irrational acts, he loses the support and loyalty of the people. Claudius also is a capable leader, but his path to the throne taints his position. He too is removed. Coriolanus, another strong leader, proves a threat to the nation because he misapplies his basic good qualities. Even though he has courage and capabilities in battle, through tyrannical irrationality he falls.

Although strong kings can prove to be a threat to a nation when they act irrationally, weak kings can be an even greater threat. Henry VI and Richard II are such kings. Henry is a weak good man, especially in the latter part of his reign. He is sincere and devout, but he is hampered because he begins his rule as a child king. Consequently, he never outgrows the predilection to let others make decisions for him. When Henry does decide on a course of action, he does not always make a wise choice. Thus his erratic child-like, and capricious actions reveal the problem of a country ruled by a babe.

Richard II's intentions are usually good, and he is sensitive and eloquent; but he is not easily moved to purposeful action. Thus he is replaced by a more promising leader--Bolingbroke. Like Henry IV, he is impressive, and is a man of action who knows when to use duplicity and when to use force. He is, however, cursed by his participation in the abdication of Richard II. As a result, he spends most
of his time putting down civil rebellion and talking about expiating his guilt in a religious crusade. He also worries about Hal's dissipation with Falstaff. In addition, he is concerned that Hal does not exhibit the courage of Hotspur. Therefore, his accomplishments fall short of his potential.

The ideal Renaissance king, by contrast, is a strong judicious person, the recognized inheritor of the throne, and as God's regent, he is able to exercise his authority. Henry V is such a king. He is a capable warrior, and a mature man who, like the true Machiavelli, has been able to effectively use Elizabethan policies, but not abuse them.

In examining Richard III and these other strong and weak kings in relation to Elizabethan ideas, a picture of Shakespeare's ideal of kingship emerges. It is what Maynard Mack describes as "not the divinity that doth hedge it, but its capacity to maintain a stable, just, and energetic order through ordinary political acumen and force." 7

Richard III, by contrast, has the personal potential to be an effective ruler. However, his path to the throne and his attempt to achieve absolute power destroy him. Thus justice is served, and the nation is purged of a tyrannical king who is a threat to the well-being of the country. Seeds of Richard's destruction are inherent in his character: qualities that bring him to the throne ironically bring about his removal.

I. RICHARD'S PATH TO THE THRONE

At the Zenith of his military career, Richard of Gloucester contemplates his future in a time of peace:

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York;
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,
Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures. 8

Now that "grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front" (I. i. 9), the York family, under the reign of Edward IV, has put away its arms, after defeating the Lancastrians, and is spending its time in peaceful pursuits, enjoying "merry meetings" and capering in ladies' chambers—rather than marching to fight military battles.

Richard is caught in a dilemma, however. No longer able to exercise his prowess as a soldier, he also lacks a handsome appearance that would enable him to participate in the life of the court. Richard has been insulted as a "foul indigested lump," "crookback," "cockatrice," and "foul misshapen stigmatic," to be avoided "as venom todes, or lizards' dreadful stings." Elsewhere he is called a dog,

"hell-hounded," the "elvish mark'd abortive rooting hog" who preys on the peaceful garden. He continues to ponder his plight:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on my own deformity. (I. i. 14-27)

From his youth, Richard had been schooled in the military arts, since he was aware and involved in the Wars of the Roses, the struggle between the Yorkists and the Lancasters. In the Temple Garden ("II Henry VI" iv), Richard's Father asserted his claim to the throne of England, and lines were drawn. Those who supported him and his family plucked the white rose, and those who supported the Lancastrian line plucked the red rose. Thus in the series of battles that followed, Richard gained prowess as a soldier. Richard was also exposed to his father's military adventures while fighting the French and suppressing uprisings in Ireland. He learned his lessons well; and for his military skill, Richard was praised for three times saving Salisbury's life by fighting his adversaries in the battle of St. Albans. Salisbury declared:

By the mass, so did we all. I thank you Richard:
And it hath pleased him [God] that three times today
You have defended me from imminent death. (V. iii. 15-19)

Not only did Richard grow in military skills, but the seeds of his Father's ambition also germinated and flourished
in him. Like his father, Richard thought that he had a legitimate claim to the throne, since York had learned from his uncle Mortimer that the Yorks were descended from King Edward III, and it was Henry IV, grandfather to Henry VI, who deposed Richard II, a York and grandson of Edward III. Richard also learned that it is wise to have an aid like the "Kingmaker," Warwick, in achieving his aim. Through Warwick's persuasion, Henry VI restored to York and his house their rightful inheritance; he then named Richard's father the Duke of York. Thus, these series of events strengthened Richard's growing ambitions.

When the Duke of York was sent to suppress the uprising in Ireland, Richard not only increased his military ability, but he also learned how his father used his army to aid his purposes at home. In addition, York planned the Cade rebellion in order to ascertain the feeling of the common people of England concerning his claim to the throne ("II Henry VI" III. i. 349, 374-375). This knowledge was invaluable to Richard as he planned his strategy for his own purposes.

Richard also saw how tenuous a king's position can be when, after the Yorkists are victorious, King Henry's supporters threatened to "pluck him down." Richard saw that it is necessary to plan an offensive move against any opposition, and he had urged his father to "tear the crown from the usurper's head" ("III Henry VI" I. i. 114). Richard tried to persuade his father, declaring
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,
Within whose circuit is Elysium
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.
Why do we linger thus? I cannot rest
Until the White Rose that I wear be dyed
Even in the lukewarm blood of Henry's heart.
(I. ii. 29-34)

Therefore, Richard's will to power began to assert itself.
And after hearing that his father and his brother Rutland
were insulted and killed by Queen Margaret and Clifford,
Richard's political ambitions gained an added element—a
determination to achieve revenge. This is partially
accomplished when Clifford dies and his head replaces that
of York's on the gate.

Richard was created Duke of Gloucester when Edward, his
brother, claimed the throne after the death of York.
Richard was not happy about this, for it had an ominous
ring to it; in addition, his goal was to become King.
There was another barrier that prevented his eminent
accomplishment: Margaret, King Henry VI's wife, furious
because Henry disinherited their son in favor of York and
his heirs, Clarence, and Ned, Edward's new son. Richard
had hoped that Edward would not produce an heir to "cross" him from "the golden time" that he looked for. But what he hoped would not come to pass had indeed occurred.

After the York family was victorious, Henry VI dead, and
Margaret and her son temporarily removed to France, another
obstacle appeared upon the scene. Earl of Richmond, whom
King Henry had prophesied would be "England's hope" was to
prove a formidable foe. However, Richard continued to dream
of sovereignty:
Like one that stands upon a promontory,
And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
Wishing his foot was equal with his eye,
And chides the sea that sunders him from thence
Saying, he'll lade it dry to have his way:
So do I wish the crown, being so far off;
And so I chide the means that keeps me from it;
And so (I say) I'll cut the causes off.
Flattering me with impossibilities. (III. 11. 134-143)

Therefore with this background, Richard declares his intentions:
. . . . since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
("Richard III" I. 1. 28-31)

Richard has established his motives for acquiring the throne. As a soldier without a battle, he is obsolete; as a courtier, lacking beauty and finesse, he is not acceptable. The inferiority of his person makes Richard seek "consolation and compensation, says Coleridge, "in the superiority of his intellect." 9 However, compensation is not his only motivation. Richard has a cause; his place in the succession to the throne was established during his father's life-time. In addition, he has the intelligence to be a strong king, not a weak one like his brother who spends his time sporting with the court. The situation demands a single mind; this he has, as he seeks to realize his goal. He combines his lust for power with the guile and intellectual astuteness of a Machiavelli.

The Renaissance political philosopher, Niccolo Machiavelli, wrote that if a prince wants to be a strong leader, he must follow some guide lines in order to achieve

that end. Since men are both men and beast, a prince should act accordingly. Especially must he be crafty like the "fox" and instill fear like the "lion." Not only does the effective prince "addle the brains of men with craft" and make men fear him, but he also will not hesitate to exercise cruelty or even inflict the penalty of death to achieve his goal. Machiavelli stressed that a prince should not rely on that changeable woman, Fortune, if he is to be a success. However, he cautioned a leader to keep his craft hidden, being a skillful pretender and dissembler. Since men, he said, are so simple, a prince can pretend liberality, but not be so with his own property. Pretending to be religious is also effective if it serves his needs.

Machiavelli conceded that a man may seem to be "compassionate, trustworthy, humane, honest, and religious," but his mind should be so trained that if it be necessary, he can skillfully choose not to practice these virtues. "A prince," he said, "needs only to conquer and to maintain his position." ¹⁻¹⁻ Thus, Shakespeare was so aware of the positive energies of Machiavellianism that he embodied them in what Wilbur Sanders calls "one of the most zestful, energetic characters of the whole canon." ¹⁻¹⁻ "All that surrounds him," declares Coleridge, "is only dear as it


¹⁻¹⁻Wilbur Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1968), p. 70.
feeds his inward sense of superiority: he is no vulgar tyrant--no Nero or Caligula: he has always an end in view, and vast fertility of means to accomplish that end.\(^{12}\)

Richard learned the craft of the Machiavel from his father and the nobles of Henry VI's court. He learned to be brutal and courageous in battle; and when York honored his oath to Henry too long, Richard told him that he would not have any qualms about breaking the oath and seizing the throne: "Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous. / Therefore, to arms!" ("III Henry VI" I. ii. 27-28). As his ambition grew, Richard acknowledged in the same play his strategy in gaining his soul's desire:

Why I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
And cry, "Content" to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.
I'll drown more sailors than the mermaids shall;
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slily than Ulysses could,
And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
I can add colors to the Chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
(III. ii. 182-93)

Thus Richard began his strategy by pragmatically killing King Henry VI. As Michael Manheim points out, when Richard stabs King Henry, he symbolically murders "pity, love, and fear" in political life by "cold, ruthless, pragmatism."\(^{13}\) Richard said that he had no brotherly love

\(^{12}\)Coleridge, pp. 136-137.

and remarked after killing Henry that his brother Clarence would be next:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;
And this word "love," which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another
And not in me: I am myself alone. (My italics)
Clarence, beware, Thou keep'st me from the light;
But I will sort a pitchy day for thee;

Clarence, thy turn is next, and then the rest,
Counting myself but bad till I be best. (V. vi. 80-91)

Early in "Richard III," to eliminate Clarence he deceitfully plots by instilling hatred between Edward and Clarence:

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

Because Clarence's name is George, Richard knows that Edward will assume that the prophesy is referring to Clarence. Richard is depending on Edward's and Clarence's simple mindedness, for the letter G also stands for Richard's official title, Duke of Gloucester. In the meantime, Richard craftily shifts the blame to Lady Jane and her faction for Clarence's plight. He pretends to be touched by Clarence's dilemma, but as Clarence leaves, he comments:

Go tread the path that thou shalt ne'er return.
Simple plain Clarence, I do love thee so
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven,
If heaven will take the present at our hands.
(I. i. 117-120)

When Richard learns that the king is ill, he responds in a colloquial idiom: "He cannot live, I hope and must not die /
Till George be packed with post horse up to heaven" (I. i. 145-146). Thus he intensifies his plot against Clarence, knowing that with both Clarence and Edward out of his path, this will leave the world for him to "bustle" in.

Richard has Clarence stabbed and drowned in a "malmsey butt"; but in the meantime he has been exercising his Machiavellian powers upon Anne, Henry VI's daughter-in-law. Richard presumptuously woos her "not all so much for love / As for another secret close intent" (I. i. 157-158). In scene two, Richard is overbearing when he interrupts Anne as she goes to bury Henry, demanding that the bearers put down Henry's hearse. His manner shocks her, and she begins accusing him of being a minister of the devil. But he does catch her interest, though; for instead of continuing on her way, Anne indulges in a battle of wits with Richard. However, he skillfully and calmly refutes all of her assertions until she has no answer. He subtly maneuvers Anne psychologically into a vulnerable position.

Flattery is one of his weapons. Richard tells Anne that she is "divine perfection," and says that her beauty has brought tears to his eyes. He then employs an oxymoron to state that her eyes kill him with a "living death" (I. ii. 152). After raising her emotion to a high peak of indignant rage, Richard switches from dissembler to candor when he unexpectedly confesses that he did kill the king (I. ii. 179). If her beauty has caused him to kill her husband, he says, it was to "help her to a better one" (I. ii. 139). Thus this seeming change of attitude weakens Anne's defenses.
Recklessly he gambles at this point when he gives her a sword and tells her to plunge it into his chest which he dramatically bares before her (I. ii. 174-178).

When Anne will not kill him nor will she tell him to kill himself, Richard is able to continue his wooing of her. Through his verbal magic, he changes Anne's condemnations into guarded acceptance: although unsure about Richard, Anne allows him to put his ring on her finger (I. ii. 201-202). Richard is also psychologically astute when he, with quick action, strategically offers to bury Henry and weep repentant tears (I. ii. 210-215). In this he is triumphant, for he has convinced Anne that he is genuinely remorseful, and she is joyful to see him become penitent. As Wolfgang Clemen points out, Richard exploits her vanity and her pride at the thought that she is "reclaiming a contrite sinner."14

In dealing with Queen Elizabeth and her court, Richard changes his tactics. He defends himself from criticism by railing against anyone who might be his enemy. When Grey asks him to whom he is speaking, Richard indicates that it is Grey and his faction who have complained to King Edward about his behavior:

Because I cannot flatter and look fair,  
Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive, and cog,  
Duck with French nods and apish courtesy,  
I must be held a rancorous enemy (I. iii. 46-50).

The result, he says, has precipitated the King's wish to bring about a reconciliation between Richard and the court.

Richard then shows that he is a master of the Machiavellian arts as he sows dissension in the court party. He criticizes the Queen because Clarence has been put in prison, shifting the blame away from himself. Furthermore, he says that he has been disgraced because promotions have been given to "ennoble those / That scarce, some two days since, were worth a noble" (I. iii. 76-81). He upbraids, scoffs, and plays on the guilt of others in order to deceive them. Richard even denies that he wants to become king (I. iii. 148-149). He thus excuses his own behavior and keeps his enemies from suspecting a greater danger. Richard reveals what he has been doing:

I do wrong, and first begin to brawl.  
The secret mischiefs that I set abroach  
I lay unto the grievous charge of others.  
Clarence, who I indeed have cast in darkness,  
I do beweep to many simple gulls,  
Namely to Derby, Hastings, Buckingham,  
And tell them 'tis the queen and her allies  
That stir the king against the duke my brother.  
Now they believe it, and withal whet me  
To be revenged on Rivers, Dorset, Grey. (I. iii. 323-32)

In the reconciliation scene, Richard hypocritically changes from a harsh accuser's role to that of one who is cheerful, friendly, and conciliatory. He pretends to desire peace, saying "Tis death to me to be at enmity; / I hate it, and desire all good men's love" (II. i. 61-62). After asking for peace from each member of the court, Richard dissembles in his response, "I thank my God for my humility" (II. i. 74). However now that his enemies are off guard, Richard takes this opportunity to announce that Clarence is dead; he exploits the situation by suggesting that the
Queen's kindred are responsible for Clarence's death. In taking advantage of the general uncertainty that prevails, Richard is able, says Clemen, to establish his own position more firmly. 15

After King Edward dies and Richard takes charge as protector, he continues his guiles; in fact, he is very politic when he asks his mother for her blessing. In addition, after Buckingham suggests that a state is in peril without a leader, Richard reassures him, saying to Rivers and Buckingham, "I hope the king made peace with all of us; / And the compact is firm and true in me" (II. ii. 132-133). Richard craftily establishes his trust. He now takes advantage of this opportunity and sends the Queen's kin--Rivers, Grey, and Vaughn--to Pomfret prison, removing by Machiavellian means three more obstructions from his path to the throne.

Even though the citizens feared these proud men at court, they also are fearful of the council of Richard, saying "O full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester" (II. iii. 27). The queen also expresses anguish over Richard's show of tyranny:

The tiger now hath seized the gentle hind;  
Insulting tyranny begins to jut  
Upon the innocent and aweless throne.  
Welcome destruction blood and massacre!  
I see, as in a map, the end of all. (II. iv. 50-54)

But Richard continues to move forward with his plans.

15Clemen, p. 98.
When his nephew, Prince Edward, arrives, Richard pretends to give him advice against false friends. But Richard sees the conversation might lead to an accusation from the Prince. He then adroitly draws attention from himself and to the Lord Mayor who has come to greet Edward (III. i. 1-17). In addition, for his purposes, Richard requests that the young Duke of York, who has fled to sanctuary, be brought to him. Buckingham insists that the Cardinal bring the young man; and when the Cardinal objects to infringing "the holy privilege / Of blessed sanctuary" (III. i. 40-42), Buckingham speciously argues that the "grossness of the age" (III. i. 46) justifies such behavior. By the morality of the Elizabethan Age, which acceded to Machiavellian ideas, the Cardinal would not be considered guilty of any injustice in bringing the young Duke from his place of refuge. Buckingham's argument, declares Clemens, is "characteristic of the fashionable contemporary morality for which Richard repeatedly stands model."

When York is brought before him, Richard recognizes in this young Duke his rhetorical equal. York verbally attacks his uncle with wit and assurance. After a duel of words Richard pragmatically and cunningly persuades the two boys to go to the tower. After Buckingham calls to Richard's attention the Prince's taunts and scorn, Richard dismisses his words by seeming to compliment York: "O, 'tis a parlous boy, / Bold quick, ingenious, forward, capable" (III. i. 154-164).
York, with these qualities, is indeed a threat to Richard's designs—but so is Buckingham.

Thus, Catesby—not Buckingham—is sent to tell Hastings about the proposed usurpation. In order to get Hastings' support, Richard plays on Hastings' human frailties. He tells Catesby to tell him that his old enemies are to be killed at Pomfret Castle. Of course, Richard knows that this information will please Hastings; but to add to the pressure, Catesby has been instructed to blackmail Hastings with suggestions about Hastings' associations with Mistress Shore (III. i. 181-185). When Buckingham asks what they will do if Hastings does not yield to their plans, Richard laconically makes the Machiavellian reply, "Chop off his head" (III. i. 193).

Even though Hastings has been warned, he still meets with the council at the Tower to decide on the coronation of a new King. Richard lulls Hastings into a false security by being very cheerful and polite to him. In the meantime, however, Richard shrewdly plans an onslaught on Hastings. He sends the Bishop of Ely after some strawberries. This gives Richard time to talk to Buckingham about Catesby's report—Hastings will die before he will be disloyal to King Edward's child (III. iv. 36-40). After eating the strawberries, Richard shows to Hastings his arm "like a blasted sapling withered up." For this rash, Richard accuses Queen Elizabeth and Mistress Shore of practicing witchcraft on him. Hastings seals his doom when he attempts to reply to Richard saying, "If they have done this deed, my noble lord— (III. iv. 72). Richard
interrupts at this point and seizes on the "If" as an expression of doubt. He uses this expression of doubt as a pretext to accuse Hastings of protecting a strumpet and acting as a traitor. He then promptly orders Hastings killed. As Hastings goes to the block, he remembers Stanley's warning and Margaret's prophesy. Thus, he laments his own fate as well as that of England (III. iv. 79-106). Richard's hypocrisy reaches a high point when he seeks to justify this first open act of violence. He dissimulates when he pretends to be shocked because of Hastings' "conversation with Shore's wife" and also because he says that Hastings covered his vice with show of virtue (III. v. 29). (Actually, Richard is describing himself and Buckingham.) Buckingham adds to the justification by telling the major that Hastings has tried to kill "my good Lord Gloucester" and himself (III. v. 39). Even though the Lord Mayor expresses doubt and apprehension, he is gullible and feebly accepts Buckingham's and Richard's explanation.

As the Lord Mayor goes to tell the citizens that Richard was justified in having Hastings killed, Richard uses his Machiavellian training in achieving yet another step toward the throne. He must be certain that the citizens are duped; consequently he slanders his brother and his mother. Richard is careful not to commit the act himself, however. Buckingham must imply that Edward's children (heirs to the throne) are illegitimate, that Edward had unjustly put a citizen to death, and that he indulged in luxury and lust (III. v. 72-84). In addition, Richard knows
that the citizens would not accept a son's slander of his mother. Buckingham commits the act, but Richard gives the instructions:

Tell them, when that my mother went with child
Of that insatiate Edward, noble York
My princely father then had wars in France,
And by true computation of the time
Found that the issue was not his begot;

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Being nothing like the noble duke my father.

(III. v. 86-92)

Even though he tells Buckingham to "touch this sparingly" because his mother is still alive, this move is despicable.

Moreover, like the Machiavellian prince, Richard does not hesitate to use religion as a convenient mask to advance his cause. He uses Biblical language to achieve his purpose: "The Royal tree hath left us royal fruit" (III. vii. 166); and he sighs, and says with a "piece of Scripture," "God bids us do good for evil" (I. iii. 333-34). He reaches the height of rhetorical dissembling as he stands, with prayer-book in hand, between two holy men, while Buckingham pleads his case to the Mayor and the citizens. Hypocritically, Richard says that even though he is "earnest in the service of God," he will consent to stop and visit with them and listen to any requests that they have (III. vii. 105-107). Richard pretends that he thought that he had "done some offense" in ignorance, and that the citizens have come to reprimand him (III. vii. 110-112).

This pious act does not entirely convince the citizens, but it does enable Buckingham to carry out Richard's plan.
Thus in assuming the role of the citizen's spokesman, Buckingham, at Richard's urging, deliberately distorts Richard's as well as Edward's image. Also using Richard's plans, he solicits Richard's aid in taking charge of the government for the sake of the country (III. vii. 129-31). Richard then adopts a humble tone and, like the wily fox, suggests that since there are obstacles in his way, he lacks the confidence needed. He also tries to make the citizens believe that he is not interested in the crown by avoiding a definite "no" and suggesting that King Edward's son will reign after he matures. Richard's counter argument and show of the humble uncle gives Buckingham a chance to compliment Richard; and at the same time point out, again, the false rumor concerning the prince used at Guildhall. But Richard again insists that he is "unfit for state and majesty" (III. vii. 204). As Clemen points out, "Richard's wily logic protects him against the misunderstanding which may ensue . . . , disposing in advance every objection."17 Buckingham caps his argument by saying that if Richard does not accept the throne, someone else will be crowned, to the disgrace of the house of York (III. vii. 216). Richard sees that the time is right for him to accede to Buckingham's pleas. Thus, he pretends to reluctantly accept the crown:

Cousin of Buckingham, and sage grave men,
Since you will buckle Fortune on my back,
To bear her burden, whe'r I will or no,
I must have patience to endure the load;
(III. vii. 226-29)

17Clemen, p. 155.
Richard craftily absolves himself of any future "scandal" or "impure blots" by saying that the burden of kingship was forced upon him. Buckingham shouts, "Long live King Richard, England's worthy king!" (III. vii. 239). After a weak "Amen" from the citizens, Richard continues to play his part well by leaving with the two bishops, returning to "holy work" again. Richard is triumphant. Through his Machiavellian schemes, he has realized his dream. Although Richard's villainous acts are not admirable, as Clarence Boyer notes, his "audacity and demoniac energy" fascinate us; our "admiration is not willing, but compelled." This engaging aspect of Richard is shown in his use of the language. In the opening scene of the play, Richard teases as he ironically mocks with high rhetoric. And in his wooing of Anne, Richard illustrates bravado in brazeness, lavishing his verbal charms upon her in order to persuade her to his point of view. In addition, Richard has skill in the use of proverbs and maxims, masking his real intentions with wise generalities.

Although he has an ironic way of addressing those about him, he is also eloquent and has an intellectual edge which can prove the impossible and make his associates believe anything. As Mark Van Doren expresses it:

His epithets may not roar, but they really cut. Margaret has art enough to call him 'a foul mis-shapen stigmatic,' 'a toad,' and 'a lizard.' He has a deadlier art to call her 'Iron of Naples,'

---

hid with English gilt ("III Henry VI" II. ii. 139)
He can crouch and lie with the smoothest smile
of irony on his face. 19

Richard does lose control of his conversation when he tests
Buckingham (IV. ii. 17-19), but his ability in modulating
the language and changing a "key and expression" is very
important in his multiple makeup, says Clemen; his mastery
of language and gesture, which he practices with a "secret,
spiteful zest, with, indeed a thoroughgoing enjoyment,"
enables him to master others. 20

Richard is persuasive and fascinating in the language
that he uses; he is also compelling as he portrays the Vice,
similar to the character used in the medieval morality plays.
The Vice twists words, uses double entendre, and inter-
sperses jests and word play as he plays his diabolical
tricks. As Max Meredith Reese also points out, Richard
shares with the Vice his jocularity. 21 Richard applauds
with glee his own skill at disguise, and his enjoyment of
his ability to cause trouble reveals the allegorical Vice. 22

Richard has a perverted gaiety when he attempts to
comfort the Duchess of York following Clarence's murder:

Duchess:
God bless thee, and put meekness in thy breast,
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty!

19 Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (New York: Double Day
20 Clemen, p. 18.
21 Max Meredith Reese, The Cease of Majesty (London:
22 Clemen, p. 125.
Richard:
Amen! And make me die a good old man!
That is the butt-end of a mother's blessing;
I marvel that her grace did leave it out.
(II. ii. 107-111)

Richard, like the Vice, is able to "manipulate the cliches of family duty"; also like the Vice, he delights in "playing with these cliches" in order to shock. For example, when he kneels for his mother's blessing, it is in "sardonic gesture," promising brotherly love to Edward and Clarence.23

And as he speaks to Prince Edward (III. i. 7-15), Richard is obviously pleased as he utters this disguised warning against himself. As Charles Norton Coe declares, Richard smiles with contempt for his victims.24 He is, says A. P. Rossiter, the "spirit of ruthless will, of daemonic pride, energy, and self-sufficiency, of devilish gusto and Schadenfreude," enjoying wickedness even when it is no advantage to him.25

It is Richard's "unholy jocularity, the readiness, sarcastic, sardonic, profane, and sometimes blasphemous wit, the demonic gusto of it all, which ... wins the audience over to accepting the Devil as hero..."26

---


Richard's verbal ability and his portrayal of the Vice utilize his skill in acting. Although Richard has less charm and easy geniality than Iago displays, he, like Iago, has a zest in his role, and is gleeful as he triumphs with his histrionic art. Richard, Robert B. Heilman says, "relishes the sense of a force emanating from himself: not only in getting what he wants, but in putting something over on others." Also in his asides, Richard's private jokes illustrate what Rossiter has called "the drama of consummate acting." Even Richard's dramatic assertions of innocence are supported by elaborate acting, such as baring his breast to Anne, requesting strawberries from Bishop of Ely, and standing, with prayer book in hand, between the two church men. Thus when Richard apes the holy man and pretends to resist the throne, he achieves a climactic demonstration of his acting ability. In this scene, Coe points out that Richard's "vitality springs from his perfect hypocrisy; or, paradoxical as it may sound, he appears real because he is so obviously--and so cleverly--playing a part."

Although Richard cannot exercise his prowess as a soldier nor "caper" as a courtier in court, he is, however, able to compensate by using his verbal and acting skills to


28 Rossiter, p. 139.

29 Coe, p. 53.
accomplish his goal. His Machiavellian virtuosity displays in him an intellectual superiority and mysterious personal fascination that is compelling. His charisma gives him another kind of attractiveness that almost dupes the reader. For a moment, his intrigues and violence are forgotten. Richard, however, is not content with acquiring the throne; realizing his goal, he must seek something more. Yet when Richard begins to deceive and murder—brutally and pointlessly—he becomes a threat to the nation; and in becoming so, he, like some of his victims, seals his own doom.
II. RICHARD'S EFFORT TO GAIN ABSOLUTE POWER

Through his intellect and burning ambition, Richard is able to realize his dream of majesty. With the shrewdness of the Machiavel, he conquers his enemies with the virtuosity of his mentor. But in the process, Richard is corrupted. His machinations used to gain power are now intensified so that he might achieve absolute power. As before, family and friends are not exempt. Richard recognizes Buckingham's assistance in gaining the throne, but he tests his loyalty by demanding Buckingham's consent to having the young princes killed (IV. ii. 1-24). Buckingham is doomed when he hesitates to commit such an act. He sees Buckingham as "too-circumspect" to be of any use to him again. Richard has exploited his aid; now he pays him, not with the promised reward for his past services, but with contempt. Buckingham leaves--fearful of his head. Thus, Richard cuts off the one who has helped him the most in realizing his dream. (Buckingham later remembers Margaret's curse as he is taken to be executed (V. i. 20-29).

In the meantime, Richard has arranged for Tyrrel to kill his nephews. When Tyrrel tells Richard that the deed is done, Richard responds cynically that he wants to hear about the process after supper. Although political expediency might excuse such an act, killing the princes, says
Boyer, is needlessly cruel and is committed without political necessity and is "heinous and unforgiveable." Yet, Richard continues to attack those who are not a serious threat to him. After Tyrrel leaves, Richard says that Anne, his wife, will be next. Furthermore, he declares that he will woo his niece, Elizabeth, because he thinks that Richmond, who looms as a threat to Richard, plans to marry her (IV. iii. 39-43). As Clemen points out, this combination of murder and marriage by which Richard plans to secure his position exhibits "a villainy so extreme as to seem almost grotesque." 

After having the princes killed, Richard still has the audacity to approach the Queen and ask for her daughter's hand in marriage. He makes a psychological appeal to her, just as he did when he wooed Anne, saying if he has killed her sons, he will see that her daughter is made queen. In addition, her son Dorset will gain favor with the King, and she shall be made mother to the king:

The loss you have is but a son being king,  
And by that loss your daughter is made queen.  

The king that calls your beauteous daughter wife  
Familiarly shall call thy Dorset brother.  
Again shall you be mother to a king.  
And all the ruins of distressful times  
Repaired with double riches of content.  

(Iv. iv. 307-319)

Richard thinks that he is successful in winning Elizabeth's consent when she tells him to write her concerning her daughter's will (IV. iv. 428-29), but Richard's scornful

\[30\] Boyer, p. 95.  
\[31\] Clemen, p. 167.
comment, "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing women!" (IV. iv. 431) shows that he is losing his ability to judge the success of his actions. Richard, says Clemen, "overrates both himself and his enemies, and so for the first time deludes himself." 32

Richard has gone too far. The man-centered morality of Machiavelli might be accepted to a point, but some traditional ideas concerning the acquisition of the throne and holding that position are not forgotten. Thus Richard's actions oppose these political, social, and moral philosophies that Elizabethans' thought necessary to maintain a stable nation. While medieval in origin, part of the intellectual life of Renaissance England still clung to the concept of divine providence as a ruling force in a well-ordered universe. Not everyone, says Reese, had the mental toughness ("cynicism, clear-sightedness, consistency, realism, or whatever one chooses to call it") of a Machiavelli. The existence of a higher power, Christian or one corresponding to the old Greek nemesis, was still generally acknowledged. 33

This keystone concept of divine providence, Irving Ribner declares, never functioned arbitrarily or capriciously in the events of history; virtue was rewarded and sins were punished in accordance with God's "beneficient and harmonious"

32 Clemen, p. 192.

The Elizabethans believed, as Hardin Craig points out, that "order or justice is the very nature of God . . . ; he is the head and ruler of all the harmonious universe."  

According to the philosophy of order, then, God has established a hierarchy in all of his works. The elements--fire, air, water, and earth--were put in an assending order, with earth being the lowest and fire the highest. E. M. Tillyard cites Sir Thomas Elyot's *Gouernor* concerning this hierarchical order:

>'Every kind of trees herbs birds beast and fishes have a peculiar disposition appropered unto them by God their creator; so that in everything is order, and without order may be nothing stable or permanent.'

There was a corresponding order in various fields of rationalization, such as religion, natural science, ethics, politics, and psychology. Also in the "great chain of being" there was a natural way of ordering political groups. As the head of man is the highest in degree with the other parts of the body, so the head of the body politic is the king. Therefore, established from this kind of thinking was a corollary giving the king absolute authority. And as

---


37Craig, p. 12.
Norman Holland says, since God gave the monarch his proper rank and title in the universe, the king is therefore responsible only to God. 38

Lily B. Campbell points out three reasons why the "cult of the authority of the king" developed so naturally: 1) since the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses, there was a natural dread of disorder; 2) exalting the king was necessary to ward off the threat of foreign intervention; 3) and under no circumstances did the subject have a right to rebel. 39

Since the Elizabethans believed in an "ideal order animating earthly order," they were, says Tillyard, in terror of any "visible tokens" of disorder. 40 Therefore, they were concerned about the legitimacy of their ruler.

A magical aura surrounded the rightful heir, and the favor of God, and preserving the line of hereditary succession, Northrop Frye declares, was "essential to a fully developed social order." 41 In his history plays, Shakespeare explores legitimacy as it relates to attaining the throne. For example, in The Life and Death of King John, Arthur, the son of John's oldest brother, Geoffrey, has rightful claim to the throne. But John is the acknowledged usurper. He

40 Tillyard, p. 16.  
is the de facto king against the king de jure. But, as
William H. Matchett points out, John proves a king incapable
of kingship and is replaced by a more capable leader.42
Richard II is the anointed king who is replaced by the
capable but usurping Henry IV. Henry V and Henry VI gain
the throne by rightful inheritance. However, Henry IV's
seizure of the crown throws a shadow over the Lancasterian
line.

Coriolanus and others indicate that in some social
contexts de jure authority can be earned as well as inherited.
However Richard III and Macbeth, says Frye, accept the de
jure argument which implies that "anyone who has any claim
to the throne at all can acquire the de jure aura by murder-
ing everybody who has a better claim."43 Thus Richard, not
contented with his station in life, succumbs to extreme
ambition, "one of the most sinful of all passions," says
Craig.44 Because of this characteristic, Richard becomes
"the foul defacer of God's handiwork" (IV. iv. 51), inter-
fering with God's order by usurpation and murder.

The citizenry express fear and foreboding because of
Richard's villainous deeds (II. iii. 38-40); but in keeping
with the philosophy that the king is responsible to God for
his sins, they decide to "leave it all to God" (II. iii. 45).
It was thought that one way God sent punishment upon a tyrant

42 William H. Matchett, "Richard's Divided Heritage in
43 Frye, p. 22.
44 Craig, p. 12.
king was to cause a rebellion. This happens to Richard. Morton, Buckingham, and Bishop Ely also flee to join Dorset in supporting Richmond (IV. iii. 46-56). Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York rebel with a stream of words:

Go with me [says the Duchess of York]  
And in the breath of bitter words let's smother  
My damned son that thy two sweet sons smothered.  
The trumpet sounds. Be copious in excliams.  
(IV. iv. 132-135)

A messenger also tells Richard that an attack by Richmond's navy is eminent, and Buckingham's men are ready to welcome them to the kingdom's western coast (IV. iv. 432-439).

All along, Richard has been thinking that providential order is a delusion (like conscience) "devised at first to keep the strong in awe" (V. iii. 310-311); thus he has taken pleasure, says Sanders, in "affirming that force which shapes its own ends, without consulting divinity."45 Devoid of any restraining moral elements, he has for a time been successful in defiance of law and order. As a result, Richard has been able to exercise his power so that everyone that proved a hindrance to him was ensnared, with no power to resist him. As Clemen points out, Margaret's speech (IV. iv), containing a catalogue of animal imagery, indicates that Richard has "sunk to the level of beast."46 He gained control by instilling fear; but because he failed to gain respect, he loses that control.

45Sanders, pp. 92-93.  
46Clemen, p. 182.
Richard's power slips through his fingers as everyone unites in opposition toward him. Confronted with this "renewed moral unanimity," says Pierce, Richard's hypocrisy is no longer so effective. A change comes over him. During all of his maneuvering, Richard has suppressed his humanity and has mocked conscience. But as the play progresses, he becomes agitated and confused. He has sleepless nights, and Anne hints at his turbulent spirit when she recalls his "timorous dreams" (IV. i. 84). Richard also tells Tyrrel that thoughts of the young princes are "foes to my rest and my sweet sleep's disturbers" (IV. ii. 72). Even in the midst of his plans to kill his young nephews, Richard speaks of being "so far in blood that sin will pluck on sin" (IV. ii. 63). Whether or not he is, as S. C. Sen Gupta asserts, suddenly awakened to sin in this passage, Richard's self-confidence is definitely shaken. Richard is a master player using, says Gupta, people as pawns; but when he loses his own "alacrity of spirit" he begins to falter as a player.

When Stanley brings the message that Richmond "makes for England, here to claim the crown" (IV. iv. 468), Richard is baffled during the ensuing conversation with Stanley. Unable to succeed with his intellectual gifts, Richard again uses force by seizing Stanley's son, George, and threatening to kill him if Stanley is not loyal (IV. iv. 469-496).

---

47 Pierce, p. 109.


49 Gupta, p. 95.
Stirred to action after a "weak piping time of peace" (I. i. 24), Richard again prepares for battle. Soon, however, he begins to show a lack of self assurance. As he prepares for sleep, Richard says, "Here will I lie tonight, / But where tomorrow" (V. iii. 7-8). Richard again shows his agitation as he gives his men rapid and confused orders for the next day's battle at Bosworth Field. He then calls for a bowl of wine to sustain himself. To Ratcliffe he orders:

Give me a bowl of wine
I have not that alacrity of spirit
Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have.
(V. iii. 72-76)

Richard's mental disturbance is further evident when in his dream all those he has killed accuse him and pronounce a curse on his actions. They all repeat, "Despair and die." The ghost of Buckingham declares: "Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death; / Fainting, despair: despairing, yield thy breath! (V. iii. 172-173). Richard awakens from his dream shaken; he hates himself for his deeds, his "conscience hath a thousand several tongues," every "tongue brings in a several tale," and every "tale condemns him for a villain" (V. iii. 194-196). Perhaps Coe is right when he says that Richard is revealed as a man whose conscience makes him aware of the enormity of his crimes.50

With the whole natural order and the supernatural marshaled against him, Richard succumbs to isolation:

There is no creature loves me;
And if I die, no soul will pity me.

50Coe, p. 50.
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself? (V. iii. 201-304)

As Pierce points out, this soliloquy throws an important light on Richard's character: "His pride of intellect temporarily suspended by the terrors of the night, he reveals how destructive his chosen isolation from human affection has been."51  His chilling words, "I fear, I fear!" (V. iii. 215) forbode the divine justice that is to overcome him through Richmond, destiny's agent.

Shakespeare does not allow Richard to go out whimpering, however; he grants him renewed vigor before he dies. After a night of terror-filled sleep, he regains his composure and delivers a stirring oration to his army. Also in a moment of magnanimity, he releases George Stanley. He leads his men forward, inspired by the courage of the ancient Saint George who fought fiery dragons. Even though Providence intervenes, and Richard's horse, White Surrey, is slain, Richard fights heroically in single combat with Richmond. He is himself alone. The order-figure must win, for "When degree is shaked, / Which is the ladder of all high designs, / The enterprise is sick" ("Troilus and Cressida" I. iii. 101-103). Yet, there is a sense of waste as this dynamic figure dies, his efforts proven futile, a tragic end for one who inspired admiration as well as fear.

51 Pierce, p. 109.
III. RICHARD III AND OTHER STRONG AND WEAK SHAKESPEAREAN KINGS

To the Elizabethans, the king, as God's appointed deputy, bore a heavy responsibility. Richard failed to carry out this charge. Although "fearless, egotistical, haughty, audacious, subtle, witty, intellectual, bold, far-sighted . . . ," and gifted with what Boyer calls "almost superhuman energy of will," Richard lacked statesmanship, the one quality in his character that would have made him a Machiavellian ideal.\(^{52}\) He indulged in indiscriminate murder and deceit, ignoring the care of the state. He, who had promised to "set the murderous Machiavel to school" ("III Henry VI" III. ii. 193), failed to educate his own emotions. Machiavelli would not have condoned Richard's later actions. As Reese astutely observes, characters such as Richard who have "no more fields to conquer," are studies in the "nemesis of individualism."\(^{53}\) Richard's tactics might be acceptable in achieving the throne, but his irrationality in retaining the throne threatened the health of the nation. A king such as he had to be purged.

A study of the rise and fall of a king in the play "Richard III" suggests Shakespeare's other works that bring

\(^{52}\)Boyer, pp. 80-81.

\(^{53}\)Reese, p. 96.
into relief the concept of kingship. "Macbeth" and "Hamlet" show leaders who have a potential value to the state, but like Richard III, exhibit a lack of moral health in their tyrannical actions. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth has been a loyal and courageous soldier fighting for the nation in its attempt to put down revolt. The captain and King Duncan speak of "brave Macbeth," "valor's minion," "O valiant cousin!" ("Macbeth" I. ii. 16, 19, 24). Yet when Macbeth appears, he is a man of uncertainty, not totally in keeping with the report of a noble hero.

Macbeth is told by the witches that he will be king (I. iii. 50), and the prophecies of the "weird sisters" stir in him latent ambitions. To add to this quickening, he is surprised at the news that the Thane of Cawdor has been relieved of his office, and Macbeth now has that position. This is an easy victory for him; through no efforts of his own, an obstacle has been removed from his path to the throne. Yet between him and his growing ambition is King Duncan.

Unlike Richard III, however, who from the beginning is "determined to prove a villain," Macbeth is revulsed at any "supernatural soliciting" to commit murder:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{I am Thane of Cawdor:} \\
&\text{If good, why do I yield to that suggestion} \\
&\text{Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair} \\
&\text{And makes my seated heart knock at my ribs} \\
&\text{Against the use of nature?} \\
&\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

Kristian Smidt perceptively discusses this quality in her article "Two Aspects of Ambition In Elizabethan Tragedy: Dr. Faustus and Macbeth," English Studies 50 (June 1969): 235-248.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, 
Shakes so my single state of man that function 
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is 
But what is not. (I. iii. 134-142)

At this point, his decision is to leave his future in the hands of fate: "If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me, / Without my stir" (I. iii. 143-144).

When Macbeth receives praise and official promotion from the king, he responds that the "service and the loyalty" that he exhibited were because of "love and honor" of the king (I. iv. 22, 27). Immediately, however, Macbeth realizes that the noble Malcolm is heir to the throne and is in the way of his "deep desires":

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. (I. iv. 48-50)

But Macbeth is unsure about killing Duncan, the immediate barrier to the throne.

Macbeth still has a moral sense that suggests the consequences of assassinating this meek, virtuous, king:

But in these cases [if assassination is successful] We still have judgement here; that we but teach Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return To plague th' ingredients of our poisoned chalice To our own lips. (I. vii. 7-12)

"Vaulting ambition" is not enough; he needs someone to spur him to action. This person he finds in Lady Macbeth, his "dearest partner." She is aware that Macbeth is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way" (I. v. 17-18) to the throne. She must add her spirit of wickedness to his natural ambitions; thus she advises him to "look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent
under't (I. v. 65-66). And when he says that they "will proceed no further in this business," she calls him a coward and less than a man. In doing this, Lady Macbeth psychologically maneuvers Macbeth into carrying out their plan to kill the king.

Although Lady Macbeth tries to allay Macbeth's fears by declaring that they are childish and that a "little water" will cleanse them of their deed (II. ii. 66), Macbeth's conscience bothers him after he has murdered the king. Macbeth remembers hearing Duncan say to him, "I have begun to plant thee, and will labor / To make the full of growing" (I. iv. 28-29). Yet, declares Sylvan Barnet, in turning against the source of his growth, Macbeth makes of himself "a rootless branch that must be desiccated." 55 As he becomes drained of his emotional vitality, Macbeth loses his fitness to rule.

When he is invested, Macbeth, like Richard III, now concludes that his position is not secure. He realizes that he will not have any heirs, and also recalls that Banquo, who the witches have prophesied would be father of kings, is to be feared (III. i. 49-51). He then plans Banquo's and Fleance's deaths. But Macbeth is partially successful. Banquo is killed; Fleance flees, the murderers losing the "best half" of their aim (III. iii. 20-21).

Macbeth, however, is not hardened by his crimes yet; a war still wages within him. His outbursts after seeing Banquo's ghost at the banquet are evidences of a man overcome with fear and lack of sleep. He is "in blood steeped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er (III. iv. 136-138). It is not until another visit with the weird sisters that Macbeth becomes confident and toughened to committing crimes. Renewing his purpose, he determines a bloodier course in planning to have Macduff's family massacred:

Seize upon Fife; give to th' edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him to his line. (IV. i. 151-153)

In this slaughter of innocents, Macbeth shows that he has become a morally sick man, a threat to himself and to his subjects:

Each new morn
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
As if it felt with Scotland and yelled out
Like syllable of dolor. (IV. iii. 4-8)

Unable to "buckle his distempered cause / Within the belt of rule" (V. ii. 15-16), Macbeth has allied himself with witches and proven a tyrant. Because he, as George Wilson Knight points out, has broken "all fetters of restraining humanity," Macbeth's sensibilities have become hardened, and he has become disillusioned with life:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

---

And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V. v. 24-28)

He, declares Eugene Waith, has "deliberately suppressed moral awareness, but his perception is still keen enough to give him a nightmare vision of emptiness and meaninglessness." 57

Macbeth may be approaching suicidal tendencies that might ultimately eliminate this unsuitable ruler, but to the Elizabethan mind, God is the avenger. Through the "grace of God," his enemies are able to dethrone this murderous usurper and replace him with Malcolm, an ideal Renaissance ruler. He is a champion of order who will perform his deeds "in measure time and place" (V. viii. 73).

Yet Shakespeare, similar to his treatment of Richard III, does not let this villain die as a weak and broken man. He "will not yield"; he will not "play the Roman fool." Choosing not to surrender, nor to take his own life, Macbeth ends his tragic course with dignity in a furiously fought clash with Macduff:

I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on Macduff;
And damned be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'
(V. viii. 32-34)

Although Shakespeare permits the order figure to prevail for the stability of the nation, he shows the tragedy of such a vital man, with such potentiality, being led into a moral vacuum because of intemperance.

Like "Richard III" and "Macbeth," the play "Hamlet" exemplifies the idea that the health of the nation depends upon the moral health of the king. At the beginning of the play, Claudius, the new king of Denmark, seems on the surface to be a capable leader. To quell young Fortinbras's effort to regain land that his father lost to the late king, Claudius diplomatically sends letters to Old Norway asking that he suppress the young man's zealous actions. He even takes time to tend to the business at court, giving counsel to Laertes, who wants to return to France, and advising his nephew, Hamlet, to gain control of his sorrow for the death of his father. He suggests to Hamlet that a certain amount of "filial obligation" is expected, but excessive mourning is absurd and shows "unmanly grief" (I. ii. 90-94) for the immediate heir to the throne to indulge in.

Although Claudius is exercising his normal function as king, he has not acquired his position in the accepted way. His ambitions to acquire the throne, like Richard and Macbeth, have resulted in his committing regicide to realize his goal. Hamlet suspects Claudius of foul play in his father's death. In addition, Claudius has married Gertrude, the late king's wife and Hamlet's mother. In doing these things, Claudius has "popped in between th' election and my [Hamlet's] hopes" (V. ii. 65). The weird happenings (specifically the appearance of the ghost) at court suggest, as Marcellus expresses it, that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I. iv. 91).
Hamlet's fears are confirmed when the ghost of his father relates that while he was sleeping in the orchard, he was killed by a serpent who "now wears the crown" (I. v. 35-40). The trauma of his father's death has been made even more painful by Hamlet's suspicion that his mother, "most seeming-virtuous queen," has been involved in the murder. Thus he is rendered incapable of decisive action when the ghost charges him to avenge his father's death and correct the situation:

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest. (I. v. 81-83)

Hamlet sees the world as an "unweeded garden" / That grows to seed" (I. ii. 135-136), but when he is instructed to avenge his father's death he cries, "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" (I. v. 188-189). Hamlet is an idealistic philosopher who hates evil, knowing that the health of the nation depends upon the moral health of the leader; but this young prince is reluctant to carry out blood revenge. He is not as easily moved to action as Richmond and Malcolm were in rescuing their country from a tyrant. They were sure of their role; Hamlet is not. It is through much thought and suffering that Hamlet is able to decide to take action toward setting things right in Denmark. In the meantime, he contemplates suicide to escape the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (III. i. 58).

Hamlet is a prince, heir apparent to the throne, but his actions reveal a man unsuitable for ruling an orderly
kingdom. He is, says Knight,

a spirit of penetrating intellect and cynicism and misery, without faith in himself or anyone else, murdering his love of Ophelia, on the brink of insanity, taking delight in cruelty, torturing Claudius, wringing his mother's heart, a poison in the midst of the healthy bustle of the court. 58

Although Knight may be exaggerating when he implies that the court is healthy, he is right in his observation that Hamlet's actions are a threat to the court. As Knight points out, Hamlet, with his thoughts centered on death, is feared and misunderstood by those around him. 59

But neither is Claudius the "good and gentle" king. He, like Richard III, has committed murder. Claudius has also married the wife of the man he killed and now, uncertain of Hamlet's motives, reaches the conclusion that the seemingly mad prince is a danger: "His liberty is full of threats to all, / To you yourself, to us, to everyone" (IV. i. 14-15).

Under the pretense of serving the best interest of the state, 60 Claudius thus makes plans to rid the court of Hamlet's presence. This seems a logical course for a strong ruler to free the court of a mad man who has killed the king's chief


59 Knight, Wheel of Fire, p. 35.

60 In The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare's History Plays (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), Moody Erasmus Prior points out that Claudius's crimes are personal and any argument suggesting that he has a political motivation is specious (pp. 243-244).
advisor. However Hamlet is a personal threat to Claudius, whose position as king is in jeopardy, since Hamlet is favored by the common people:

How dangerous it is that this man goes loose!

. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
He's loved by the distracted multitude,
Who like not in their judgement, but their eyes,
And where 'tis so, th' offender's scourge is weighed,
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even,
This sudden sending him away must seem
Deliberate pause. (IV. iii. 2-9)

Any unjustified action against Hamlet would bring to Claudius sure judgement of the people; thus Claudius proceeds to rid himself of this pesky prince by pretending that he is going to send Hamlet to England where he will be safe. Of course, Claudius fails to tell him that he is sending a letter by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that commands Hamlet's immediate death when he arrives. Claudius thinks then that he will be cured of the fever that rages within him (IV. iii. 59-69).

In the meantime Hamlet, after considering the spirit, determination, and courage of Fortinbras and his army, who fight for a small plot of land not worth "five ducats," chides himself for being too scrupulous in thought to rid his country of a man "that have a father killed, a mother stained" (IV. ii. 57). He affirms that he has a "cause, and will, and strength, and means / To do't" (IV. ii. 45-46); he therefore decides that he will turn from cowardly thoughts to honorable deeds, even if they be "bloody."

Yet Claudius is a formidable foe. Through persuasion, not unlike that Richard III uses on Anne, Claudius convinces
Laertes to also "be revenged / Most throughly" for his own Father's death (IV. v. 136-257). Claudius absolves himself of Polonius's death, saying he, the king, is not the guilty one, but he hints that he knows who is. He further appeals to emotion when he declares, "And where th' offense is, let the great ax fall" (I. v. 217). Claudius again deals psychologically with Laertes by claiming to be his friend, confiding that he who killed Laertes's father has also tried to kill Claudius (IV. vii. 1-4).

When Laertes questions him about not proceeding against "these feats / So criminal and so capital in nature" (IV. vii. 5-7), Claudius responds that he would have done so had it not been for Hamlet's mother, the queen, and the love the common people have for Hamlet (IV. vii. 10-24). Claudius knows that it is wise to keep from stirring the sentiments of the multitude against the ruler. Thus by making subtle suggestions, he quietly uses Laertes to accomplish his aim:

You shortly shall hear more.  
I loved your father, and we love ourself, 
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine.  
(IV. vii. 33-35)

But Claudius's cunning has not furnished a remedy. He learns that his attempt to have Hamlet murdered has been foiled. Hamlet has escaped and is returning to Denmark. The king must act quickly. His previous success in raising Laertes's emotions to the point of rage has thus far been a shrewd maneuver. He now tells Laertes of his plan to achieve Hamlet's death so that it will seem an accident:

I will work him  
To an exploit now ripe in my device,
Under the which he shall not choose but fall;  
And for his death no wind of blame shall breath,  
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice  
And call it accident. (IV. vii. 63-68)

Laertes agrees to be ruled by Claudius and to "be the organ" (IV. vii. 69) that carries out his plan.

Claudius tells Laertes that Hamlet envies Laertes's skill in using the rapier and can be inticed to engage in a duel with him. When Laertes questions this, Claudius accuses him and says that his sorrow for his father's death is only a pretense: "The painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart" (IV. vii. 108-109). Claudius knows that he must erase any doubts in Laertes's resolve; he, therefore, tells him to prove his love for his father, for "revenge should have no bounds" (IV. vii. 128).

After a short delay, Claudius praises Laertes with a "double varnish" concerning his excellence in fighting. Hamlet, he says, cannot resist a duel with him. However, the plan calls for a different slant. Laertes shall not be fighting with an ordinary sword. It will be anointed with poison so that with one touch of the point "It may be death" (IV. vii. 148). Claudius is determined to be rid of Hamlet, and if this plan does not succeed, then he will prepare a poisoned drink to second Laertes's failure. In the meantime, his plan is aided by Ophelia's death. Laertes is even more enraged and resolved to seek revenge.

After a near confrontation between Hamlet and Laertes at Ophelia's funeral, Claudius shrewdly tells Laertes to be patient and to remember their plans. However, Claudius's
plans ultimately fail. When Hamlet and Laertes meet, Laertes is wounded with the poisoned rapier, and Gertrude drinks the poisoned drink intended for Hamlet.

Justice is served when the poisoned chalice also becomes the death cup for Claudius. His treacherous plans become his undoing. His "deep plots" have failed because God must select the instrument of revenge. Even Hamlet is not exempt; he too must die. He realizes that no matter what an individual does to rectify a wrong, he is not a totally free agent: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V. ii. 10-11). Thus Hamlet tells Horatio that he is resigned to his fate:

> There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now; 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.
> Let be. (V. ii. 221-226)

In the context of the play, neither Hamlet nor Claudius is a capable leader. Hamlet, whose morality and idealism make him a "likely" prince, is in this situation hesitant to act. When he does, however, it is decisively. Claudius is a strong king, but morally degenerate, scheming and murdering for his personal ambitions. The struggle between these two "mighty opposites" posed a threat to the nation. Therefore, Hamlet is sacrificed; Claudius is purged and replaced by
Fortinbras, the one who will bring health to the diseased kingdom. 61

Another strong but dangerous leader is illustrated in "Coriolanus." Like Richard III, this leader has qualities that are tremendously valuable to the state--courage and capability in battle--but through tyrannical irrationality, he becomes an awesome threat to the state. Coriolanus is "worthy," "noble," and the "rarest man in the world" (IV. v. 166). In addition, he is the "flower of warriors" (I. iv. 49-52) who is always ready to use his sword in battle for his country (I. ix. 15-17). Lartius, a Roman General, extolles Coriolanus's military virtues:

> Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
> Only in strokes; but with thy grim looks and
> The thunderlike percussion of thy sounds
> Thou mad'st shine enemies shakes, as if the world
> Were feverous and did tremble. (I. iv. 57-61)

Although he has so bravely fought for his country, Coriolanus is called by the citizens the "chief enemy to the people" (I. i. 7), a "very dog to the commonalty" (I. i. 29). They accuse this proud man of caring only for his mother; and they say while the aristocracy cram their store-houses with grain, Coriolanus speaks against their plea for corn (I. i. 81-82). Menenius, Coriolanus's friend, tries to calm the people's rage. Using a parable in which he compares the state to a belly and the citizens to other parts of the

61 Based on Caroline Spurgeon's idea that the predominant metaphors in "Hamlet" are those of disease, Francis Fergusson confirms in The Idea of A Theater, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1949 the idea that Hamlet attempts to destroy the "hidden disease" of Denmark (p. 1360).
body, Menenius cautions the people concerning rebellion against the government.

The belly, Menenius says, is not rash like its accusers, but gives a logical argument for its function:

'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quote he, "That I receive the general food at first, Which you do live upon; and fit it is, Because I am the storehouse and the shop Of the whole body. But if you do remember, I send it through the rivers of your blood Even to the court, the heart, to th' seat o' th' brain; And, through the cranks and offices of man, The strongest nerves and inferior veins From me receive that natural competency Whereby they live. (I. i. 132-142)

The appeasing words of the parable clash, however, with the rude ones that Coriolanus utters when he enters:

What's the matter, you dissentious rogues
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Making yourself scabs? (I. i. 166-168)

Coriolanus's attitude toward the citizens proves to be a problem for this proud young man in his mother's ambitions for him to gain the consulship. Unlike Richard III, he refuses to dissemble to obtain this goal. Rather than flattering the people, Coriolanus shows contempt for the common folk:

... your affections are
A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
Which would increase his evil. He that depends
Upon your favors swims with fins of lead
And hews down oaks with rushes. (I. i. 179-183)

Not only does Coriolanus rebuke the citizens, he criticizes those at the capitol who praise his successes in battle:

I had rather have one scratch my head i' th' sun
... than idly sit
To hear my nothings monstered. (II. ii. 75-77)
"He had rather," says Menenius, "venture all his limbs for
honor / Than one on's ears to hear it" (II. ii. 80-81).

Coriolanus, however, does receive approval from the Senate to make him consul. Yet his achievement is not complete. He is told that he must speak to the people for final approval. Coriolanus is not the typical office seeker, but according to his proud nature, he typically remarks:

Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot
Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them,
For my wounds' sake, to give their suffrage.
(II. ii. 136-138)

Grudgingly, though, Coriolanus goes to the Forum in a gown of humility. But his words to the people do not correspond to his clothing. He says that it is not his desire to beg their approval for his position, but he does ask the "price o' th' consulship" (II. ii. 75). When told that the price is for him to ask for it "kindly," Coriolanus responds, "I pray let me ha't" (II. iii. 77). Although he makes a placating gesture, as soon as he is alone, Coriolanus is overcome with revulsion at begging of "Hob and Dick that does appear /
Their needless vouches" (II. iii. 118-126). In spite of his disgust, he says, "Custom calls me to't. / What custom wills, in all things should we do't" (II. iii. 119-120).

Then when three more citizens arrive, Coriolanus declares, "Your voices! / Indeed, I would be consul" (II. iii. 133). They respond to his request. One says to another, "He has done nobly, and cannot go without any honest man's voice" (II. iii. 134-135). He thus seems to successfully achieve his aim without sacrificing too much of
his pride. But the jealous tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, build another barrier in the path to his desires. Sowing discontent among the people, these men are able to persuade the citizens that Coriolanus is their enemy and that they must "repent in their election" of him (II. iii. 257).

The tribunes know that Coriolanus has a "noble carelessness" and will reveal his hate for the people if his pride is pressed. When they come to tell Coriolanus that the citizens have changed their minds, Coriolanus scornfully insults them. Yet they persist in telling him that the people are still in rebellion because he regrets the Senate's giving them free corn (III. i. 42-43). They test his patience further when they tell Coriolanus that if he wants to be the counsel, he must acquire a "gentler spirit" (III. i. 55) toward the citizenry.

Coriolanus argues that even though he craves the pardon of his "nobler friends," he does not flatter the crowd (III. i. 65-67). In trying to soothe the commoners, he says, rebellion, insolence, and sedition are nourished (III. i. 69-70). Giving the people "more absolute pow'r," he says, results in "The ruin of the state" (III. i. 116-118). He declares also that the people do not deserve free corn:

They ne'er did service for't . . .
Even when the navel of the state was touched [with war]
They would not thread the gates; this kind of service
Did not deserve corn gratis. (III. i. 122-125)

Coriolanus furthermore suggests that the tribunes be elim-
inated, explaining that the state should be governed by one such as he, rather than by a "blended voice."

In denying the people a voice in government, Coriolanus unwittingly provokes civil disorder. The tribunes declare Coriolanus a traitor and a danger to the state, "a disease that must be cut away" (III. i. 294). Menenius concedes that Coriolanus has a nature "too noble for the world," and "would not flatter Neptune for his trident" (III. i. 254-255), but he suggests a cure rather than surgery.

Coriolanus faces a dilemma. Like Richard III, who was inspired to brave deeds and ambition by his father, Coriolanus has been inspired by his mother, Volumnia, to be noble and to seek honor and truth. Now she comes to him trying to persuade him to act "milder." He responds to her, "Would you have me / False to my nature" (III. ii. 14-15). But Volumnia cautions him, saying that he is, at this time, "too absolute," and too extreme (III. ii. 39-41). As a solution, she suggests that it is not a dishonor for him to speak to the people in gentler words than he really feels.

Coriolanus is horrified by her remarks. He thinks that to be noble and to be politic is dissembling:

Must I
With my base tongue give to my noble heart
A lie that it must bear? (III. ii. 99-101)

He decides, however, to do it; but immediately reverses his decision when he realizes what curbing his nature would cost him:

I will not do't;
Lest I surcease to honor my own truth,
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness. (III. ii. 120-123)
In his determination not to go against his nature, Coriolanus proves a threat to his country and is banished. But Coriolanus would rather follow his "enemy in a fiery gulf / Than flatter him a bower" (III. ii. 91-92). With renewed pride, Coriolanus turns his back on Rome to seek "a world elsewhere" (III. iii. 135-136). He leaves alone, "Like a lonely dragon," seeking to stay above the common people (IV. i. 29-39). This aristocratic man, say Ribner and Kittridge, has exalted honor and public service to the point where he has alienated himself from his fellow men. 62

When Coriolanus reaches Antium, he allies with Aufidius against Rome in order to purge it. To Coriolanus, his country is "cank'red" (IV. v. 95). In the last phase of his career, Coriolanus's pride and wrath is potentially even more harmful to Rome. Not only has he rejected his country, but he turns away from his friends and family. When his "old father" Menenius pleads for mercy and pardon for Rome, Coriolanus harshly rebuffs him. He adds, "wife, mother, child, I know not" (V. ii. 97, 81). His mother attempts to appeal to his patriotism to spare Rome. But this "oak not to be wind-shaken" (V. ii. 110) breaks only when she launches a passionate and irrational personal attack, accusing him of not showing her proper love and respect:

```
Thou hast never in thy life
Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
When she (poor hen) fond of no second brood,
Has clocked thee to the wars, and safely home
Loaden with honor.  (V. iii. 160-164)
```

But it is the noble soldier, not the compassionate, repentant man, that leads the Volces away from Rome. Unlike Macbeth or Richard III, he is not troubled with conscience. When he reaches Corioli, he is boastful of the army’s accomplishments in their "bloody passage" which led them to "the gates of Rome" (V. vi. 75-76).

Coriolanus, says Knight, is a poisonous agent in the political organism, and it is Aufidius who becomes God’s means of eliminating this dangerous threat to the nation. Coriolanus is crushed because of the tragic conflict between his code of honor and the demands required in dealing with human feelings. Yet in the end, he naturally brandishes his sword and fights, like Richard III and Macbeth, bravely defying his foes. Like Hamlet, however, Coriolanus had noble qualities that made him a potentially successful leader, but his lack of self-control, pragmatism, and ability to compromise barred him from this role. And like Hamlet, he had to be sacrificed for the health of the nation.

In contrast to Shakespeare's "Richard III," "Macbeth," "Hamlet," and "Coriolanus," which illustrate strong but unacceptable kings, his plays "Richard II" and "Henry VI" indicate that a weak king may be an even greater threat to the well-being of a nation than an evil tyrant. Richard II, intelligent, sensitive, and creative, seems kingly as he takes command of a crisis at court involving a quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. He urges the two men to

63 Knight, The Imperial Theme, p. 180.
settle Bolingbroke's allegation that Mowbray has killed the Duke of Gloucester:

Wrath-kindled gentlemen be ruled by me
Let's purge this choler without letting blood:
Forget, forgive, conclude, and be agreed. (I. i. 152-126)

Richard, however, has an underlying motive other than bringing peace at court. Since it is he who has caused Gloucester's death, he seeks a scapegoat for his own crime. He thus encourages a ritual combat. In the process, Richard pretends to support Bolingbroke in the proposed duel with Mowbray: "Cousin of Hereford, as thy cause is right, / So be thy fortune in this royal flight" (I. iii. 55-56). But after raising the combatants to a fever pitch, he frustrates the tournament by stopping the fight. Calling the men to him, Richard speciously argues that their rivalry disturbs the tranquility and might lead to further civil bloodshed. In addition, he makes a horrible mistake in banishing both Bolingbroke and Mowbray (I. iii. 118-153); this rash action will result in dire consequences for Richard's position as king.

Manheim points out that this "Wanton king" is afraid of the Lancastrian faction, and he banishes its "youthful scion" before his popularity becomes a threat to his crown. He also declares that Richard's haphazard judgements are indications that he is a weak leader: Richard is, like the "breath of weak kings," resolving his problems "superficially on the spur of the moment, without bothering to give even the
One might say that Richard has made some gesture toward an appearance of judgement in consulting and receiving the approval of the nobles (including Gaunt) to banish anyone who disturbs the peace of the kingdom: "Thy son is banished upon good advice, / Where to thy tongue a party-verdict gave" (I. iii. 232-233). Richard's unjust banishment of Bolingbroke, however, reveals an insecurity that dwells within him.

Richard does not stop at this unwise action, for he is abominable in his treatment of Gaunt. When he is told of Gaunt's grave illness, Richard coldly replies that he hopes that Gaunt will soon die so that the money from Gaunt's estate can be used to aid England's cause against the Irish:

God in the physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!
The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars. (I. iv. 59-62)

When Gaunt dies, his tongue a "stringless instrument" (II. i. 149), Richard does not even pretend to mourn his death. Thinking only of himself, Richard cynically remarks that "The ripest fruit falls first" (II. i. 153). He then orders the seizure of Gaunt's property. York warns Richard that if he wrongly takes Bolingbroke's inheritance, he will "pluck a thousand dangers" (II. i. 205); and by denying Bolingbroke's right to inherit Gaunt's property, he is denying him the rights of primogeniture, the very right that has made Richard king:

---

64 Manheim, p. 56.
Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time
His charters and his customary rights,
Let not tomorrow then ensue today;
Be not thyself. For how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession
Now afore God—God forbid I say true— (II. i. 195-200)

But Richard unwisely rebukes York's advice: "Think what you
will, we seize into our hands / His plate, his goods, his
money, and his lands" (II. i. 209-210). Robbing Bolingbroke
of his legacy is a selfish, egotistical action unworthy of a
king, and is so utterly unwise it is irresponsible. Like
Richard III, he has tried to ignore the rights of inheritance.

Richard has also attached himself to favorites. Such
"violets" as Bagot and Green are only flatterers and parasites
in the court, always giving advice that does not aid Richard
in his reign. Shakespeare uses garden imagery to illustrate
this weakness in the king. Richard has not "trimmed and
dressed his land" (III. iv. 56); therefore weeds have grown
and taken over the garden of state. In addition, he has
alienated the commons by excessive taxation and the nobles by
unwise fines. Finally, he has wasted more money during times
of war (II. i. 241-255).

While he is away fighting wars in Ireland, Richard also
leaves his nation in a vulnerable position. He has left York
in charge, but this man is old and ineffectual in keeping the
country free of invaders. Bolingbroke seizes this opportunity
to claim his rights. Thus Green reports to York that Boling-
broke has arrived in armed rebellion against Richard; North-
umberland, young Percy, Lords Ross, Beaumont, and Willoughby
have gone to Bolingbroke; and the Earl of Worcester, the
king's steward, and all the servants have defected (II. ii. 49-61). All is in confusion. York does try to persuade Bolingbroke to refrain from rebellion against his "sovereign" (II. iii. 112); but like Hamlet, Bolingbroke is "sworn to weed and pluck away" those who threaten the "commonwealth" (II. iii. 165-166).

When Richard hears about the rebellion, he realizes that he is in a grave predicament. But in hope, he examines the role of king, and thinks that God will see that Bolingbroke, who "revealed in the night," will fall, "for heaven still guards the right" (III. ii. 48, 62). But heaven's revenge is reserved for Bolingbroke at another time; now it seeks out Richard for his misgovernment.

After hearing the news that all the Welshmen, thinking him dead, have "gone to Bolingbroke, dispersed and fled," Richard says, "Time has set a blot upon my pride" (III. ii. 73-74, 81). Fearing Bolingbroke's power, Richard exclaims the plight of kings (III. ii. 143-177). He is a suffering man, despairing instead of facing reality and instead of trying to overcome his predicament. Carlisle rebukes Richard for his weakness that gives strength to his foes:

My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes,  
But presently prevent the ways to wail.  
To fear the foe, since fear oppresseth strength,  
Gives in your weakness strength unto your foe.  
(III. ii. 178-181)

Richard, his "ague fit of fear overblown" (III. ii. 190), regains his will to fight. He reverses his resolve, however, when Scroop tells him that York has joined Bolingbroke, his northern castles have yielded, and the southern gentlemen
have joined arms with Bolingbroke (III. ii. 200-202). Richard goes to Flint Castle to "pine away," for he has no hope now. It is, he says, "From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day" (III. ii. 218). This knowledge is confirmed when Bolingbroke sends word to Richard that he will turn from his rebellion if Richard will repeal the banishment and restore his lands (III. iii. 110-117). Richard now comes to the realization that he has made a horrible mistake in banishing Bolingbroke and in seizing his lands, knowing that his rash act will cost him his kingdom (III. iii. 132-141).

Because Richard failed to rule well, he, like Richard III, paved the way for his removal from the throne. Defeated, this "tired majesty" resigns his office to Bolingbroke:

I will undo myself.
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sway from out my heart.
(IV. i. 202-205)

He is "bankrout of his majesty" (IV. i. 266) and his "brittle glory" is shattered. If he had, he says, remained hard and like the king of beasts, he would have remained "a happy king of men" (V. i. 35-36).

Through his experience, Richard's pride has turned to humility. In prison, he comes to realize the nature of time, confessing that he has "wasted time," and now "Time is wasting him" (V. v. 49). Richard's poetic words are interrupted by Exton and those who have come to murder him. But he does not submit to the murder with expected whining. Snatching a weapon, he, like Richard III, fights bravely, exclaiming, "Mount, mount my soul; thy seat is upon high, / Whilst my
gross flesh sinks downward here to die" (V. v. 111-112).

In spite of his self-knowledge, Richard II's weaknesses make him vulnerable to situations that he cannot cope with. "A king this fragile," says Manheim, "imposes the frightening thought that the seeming fortress of the state itself, and hence the safety and well-being of everyone, is fragile."65

The "Henry VI" plays reveal another weak leader. Henry has legitimate claim to the throne, but he is a babe of nine months when he becomes king. Although Henry has regents governing for him who still hold to the theories of kingly divinity, his position is weakened by those who are ambitious to further their own cause. Thus Henry's "tender years" make him unable to lead the nation out of "Civil dissension," the "viperous worm / That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth" ("I Henry VI" III. i. 71-73). When faced with discord this virtuous king's soul is afflicted (II. i. 108). He does make an effort to bring peace to the court, but he makes a mistake in believing that Warwick and Somerset will cease their attacks on Duke Humphrey, Henry's protector. He then gullibly listens to these men's unwise advice to restore Richard Plantagenet's title and rights of nobility (III. i. 161-162).

After this action, Henry shows a lack of political acumen when he shows himself a supporter of the Lancasterian faction. Putting on the red rose (IV. i. 152), he becomes involved in a quarrel that a wise king would have avoided.

65Manheim, p. 62.
He is gentle, honest and child-like in his trust, but these qualities make him vulnerable to anyone who desires to usurp his throne.

Henry, however, unlike Richard III, seems concerned for the good of his country. Moreover when Glouster (Humphrey) tells him that the Earl of Armagnac has offered his daughter in marriage to Henry, he responds that even though he is more inclined to his books and study than "dalliance with a paramour," he would cooperate with "any choice" that "Tends to God's glory and my country's weal" (V. i. 15-27). He succumbs to Suffolk's description of Margaret, princess of the King of Naples. "Her virtues, graced with external gifts; / Do breed love's settled passions in my heart" (V. v. 3-4). This infatuation, however, has unsettled his reason like a ship in a storm, and he again commits a grave political error.

"This sudden execution of my will," Henry says, brings him grief (V. v. 99-101). He is a king now grown, but his subjection to destructive passions culminates in his marriage to Margaret, who proves to be an evil influence in the nation's affairs. After Margaret is made queen, she persuades Henry to agree to release the duchies of Anjou and Maine to Margaret's father ("II Henry VI" I. i. 56-61). Duke Humphrey, heir apparent to the throne, is enraged, saying that the French gains for England are all undone in this "fatal" marriage (I. i. 73-101). Realizing that Humphrey is a threat to her and her party, Margaret plots with Suffolk and Winchester to join with the Cardinal in
engineering Duke Humphrey's downfall (I. iii. 96-101). Henry fails to stop the banishment of Humphrey's wife, and he further fails to stop Margaret and her supporters as they condemn Humphrey to death. By acting too late in preventing his advisor's death, Henry "throws away his crutch" (III. i. 189), the mature voice in his kingdom. After hearing the news that this horrible deed has been accomplished, Henry, for a moment, lashes out at Suffolk. Henry thinks rather than using violence in dealing with this murder, he should defend himself with a "stronger breastplate" of a "heart untainted" (III. ii. 232), adhering to justice, truth, and peace:

> Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,  
> And he but naked, though locked up in steel,  
> Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.  
> (III. ii. 233-235)

With these simple verities, this pious man is not enough to cope with his adversaries at court, nor is he able to deal effectively with the new order of rebellious men such as Jack Cade and the York faction. Henry, therefore, becomes fearful and despairing and has to flee to London to escape the violence.

Henry is severely tested in "III Henry VI." In the face of the Yorks' aggressive attempt to claim the throne, Henry advises Westmoreland to exercise patience. Although Henry has rightful claim to the throne, he realizes that his "title is weak" (I. i. 134), since his grandfather, Henry IV deposed Richard II. Thus he meekly agrees to York's demand that he confirm the crown to York and his heirs; "I here entail / The crown to thee and to thine heirs forever" (I. i.
Although Henry's immediate concern is for stopping civil disorder and righting Richard II's wrong, he makes a grave error in judgement in disinheriting his son. Like Richard III, he disregards the "rights" of primogeniture. He fails both personally and politically when he sacrifices family honor in trying to bring peace and harmony to the kingdom.

When Margaret and the prince question him about his action, Henry plays the coward and blames Warwick and York for forcing him to make such a decision (I. 1. 229). Henry also tries to avoid the issue when Margaret calls him a "trembling lamb environed with wolves" (I. 1. 242). Margaret's reaction is rage; she raises an army, subdues, and murders York and his son Rutland (I. iii. iv). Her actions provoke Richard's determination to revenge his father's and brother's death and take the crown from Henry. Warwick reminds Richard that the crown can be taken from "faint Henry's head," for Henry is not famed for war but for "mildness, peace, and prayer" (II. 1. 153-156). Henry has been maneuvered into a trap.

In the meantime, Lord Clifford chides Henry for being too lenient in giving the prince's birthright to the Yorks (II. ii. 9-35). Characteristically, Henry piously responds that he will leave his son something better than a tenuous throne that is full of care: "I'll leave my son my virtuous deeds behind; / And would my father had left me no more" (II. ii. 49-50).
Because he has lost his authority, Henry is relegated to sit dunce-like on a molehill wishing to lead the life of a shepherd rather than that of a king:

Here on this molehill will I set me down. 
To whom God will, here be the victory;

Would I were dead, if God's good will were so!
For what is in this world but grief and woe?
O God! me thinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain;
To sit upon a hill as I do now.

Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich embroidered canopy
To kings that fear their subject's treachery?

(II. v. 14-45)

As Mark Van Doren points out, Henry is indulging in self-pity, luxuriating like Richard II in thoughts of himself as other than what he really is. Had Henry ruled as his father and grandfather did, declares Clifford, he would have kept "his chair in peace" (II. v. 13-19).

Henry, returning from Scotland disguised and with prayerbook in hand, comments in a forgiving way on the usurpation of his throne: "No bending knee will call thee Caesar now" (III. i. 18). The jeweled circle that once rested on his head has been replaced by the figurative crown of contentment in his heart (III. i. 62-64). Thus when he talks with the keepers, he instructs them concerning loyalty to the rightful king. And when they force him to go to the arresting officers, Henry is compassionate toward their limitations (III. i. 72-93).

Van Doren, p. 16.
After Warwick's unsuccessful attempt to reinstate Henry as king, Edward's forces take Henry to the Tower where Richard kills him. This gentle, pious but ineffectual king, whose faint-heartedness and abuse of authority were as much a threat to the nation as the ruthlessness of his enemies, is removed by Providence in the guise of murderous Richard III. As Harold C. Goddard asserts, Henry was "simple and sincere, a morally courageous and genuinely religious man and king," but he was "frequently bewildered by the problems thrust upon him." He was no match for those who engaged in brutal tactics, and he, unlike Richard III, was not inclined to employ the same ones. Therefore, says Manheim, he failed to exploit that "ancient sense of a divinity that hedges a king."

---


68 Manheim, p. 83.
IV. RICHARD III, HENRY IV, AND THE IDEAL ELIZABETHAN KING, HENRY V

Macbeth, Claudius, and Coriolanus were strong but tyrannical kings. Macbeth and Claudius succumbed to murder to obtain their desired goal, and Coriolanus let his pride and irrationality become the tragic flaw that threatened the health of his country. Thus, like Richard III, they were removed from the throne and replaced with men who would bring order to the kingdoms. Richard II and Henry VI were not wise enough nor strong enough to rule; both failed to outwit or overpower their enemies. Immature and inexperienced, Richard was willing but unable to exercise his authority; his irresponsibility was no match for Bolingbroke's stratagem and force. And Henry's wish for "a heart untainted" ("II Henry VI" III. ii. 232) makes him ineffectual against the savagery of his enemies.

But the kings in "Henry IV" and "Henry V" reveal qualities demanded of kingship, quite unlike Richard III. Henry IV, however, is cursed by his participation in the abdication of Richard II. Henry V, in contrast to his father, is the ideal Renaissance king. Not only does he have legitimate claim to the throne, he is a capable warrior and is able to use Elizabethan policies for the betterment of England.

Henry IV, Bolingbroke when we first meet him, is assertive, authoritative, and "confident as is the falcon's
flight" ("Richard II" I. iii. 61). Banishment does not deter him from making careful plans for regaining his heritage, which leads in turn to his being crowned king. After returning from exile, he shows himself as the calculating politician, shrewdly courting the people:

Observe his courtship of the people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles

[And] off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench.
(I. iv. 24-31)

Henry then delivers a rousing political speech, takes care that his special greetings are delivered to the queen (III. i. 39), and has Carlisle, a prodding thorn, arrested. Finally he maneuvers Richard II into such a position that the King must place the crown on Henry's head. As Coleridge asserts, in Bolingbroke "the gratification of ambition is the end, and talents are the means."69

But the crown does not rest "easy" on Henry IV's head. His leadership qualities are not enough to justify his deposing of the king. His personality is kingly, but his title is faulty. Because Henry, like Richard III, obtained the crown through "bypaths and indirect crooked ways" ("II Henry IV" IV. v. 184-185), Henry's kingdom is plagued by disorder and rebellion. As Carlisle had predicted:

The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act;

Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny

69Coleridge, p. 126.
Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
("Richard II" IV. 1. 137-144)

Henry has tried to blot out the realities of the situation. But with the blood of Richard II, Henry IV has tainted his reign and "stained the king's own land" (V. v. 110). Henry, says Derek Traversi, has a genuine desire to rule with royalty; however, his murder of Richard is not only an assault against "common humanity" but it is also against the "divine foundation of order centered on the crown." Instead of a mind free to make wise decisions, Henry begins his reign with a guilty conscience. He does think, however, that he can expiate his crime by making a voyage to the Holy Land to wash the blood from his "guilty hand" (V. vi. 49-50). But civil broils cause him to change his plans to go to Jerusalem.

As the play "I Henry IV" opens, Henry is lamenting that the land is shaken and in shock because of "civil butchery" (I. i. 1-13). There are "guns and drums and wounds" and "many a good tall fellow destroyed" (I. iii. 55-61). In addition, knavery and rioting plague the land. Not only is Henry plagued with guilt and a rebellious, riotous land, he is worried about the specific actions of Hal, his son and heir. Henry IV sees Hal's escapades with Falstaff and his companions as "riot and dishonor" which "stain the brow / Of my young Harry" (I. i. 84-85). While

envying the Percys' victory and admiring Hotspur as "sweet fortune's minion and her pride" (I. i. 82), Henry thinks of his son's follies as a sign of God's punishment for his own "mistreadings" (III. ii. 4-11).

In the council chamber, however, Henry decides to be a strong king "Mighty and to be feared" rather than "soft as young down" (I. iii. 5-7). He sends Worcester away because his "presence is too bold and peremptory" (I. iii. 14-16). And although he forgives Hotspur (I. iii. 69-74), Henry demands that Hotspur send the withheld prisoners to the king (I. iii. 118-120). Henry also sends a message for Hal to return to court. When Hal arrives, Henry tells him that as Bolingbroke, he obtained the crown and won the people's loyalty and allegiance when he "dressed" himself with humility (III. ii. 50-54). Henry, therefore, goes on to advise his son that, as future king, Hal should be more solemn and majestic rather than "skipping" about and indulging in "vile participation" (III. ii. 55-87).

In contrast to Richard III, who disrupted the nation, Henry IV tries to bring order to the land. He sends a message to the rebels, saying that he remembers their "good deserts," and he will grant them absolute pardon if they will state their grievances. But Hotspur, thinking Henry a "king of smiles," a "fawning greyhound," and a "cozener" (I. iii. 244-352), rebukes the king's overtures, saying that Henry has

Broke oath on oath, committed wrong on wrong;  
And in conclusion drove us to seek out  
This head of safety, and withal to pry  
Into his title, the which we find  
Too indirect for long continuance. (IV. iii. 101-105)
At the battle of Shrewsbury, Henry again offers amnesty to the Percys. His negotiation is not successful, and the battle rages. But the king's forces are victorious; "Thus ever did rebellion find rebuke" (V. v. 1).

After "quenching the flame of bold rebellion" ("II Henry IV" I. Induct. 26), Henry is reconciled with Hal. But before peace is made between these two men, Henry is seen as a broken, melancholy king, wishing, like Richard III and Macbeth, for restful sleep, and thinking, like Hamlet, how "rank diseases grow" and threaten the kingdom (III. i. 38-39). He is also disturbed when he awakes from a fitful nap and finds that Hal has placed the crown on his own head. Thinking Hal rash and impatient, he says that fathers take care of their sons, but the sons are not grateful:

When, like the bee, culling from every flower
The virtuous sweets, our thighs packed with wax,
Our mouths with honey, we bring it to the hive,
And, like the bees, are murdered for our pains.
(IV. v. 74-77)

Henry realizes his error when Hal returns from the next room in tears. With his blessing, Henry IV crowns Hal Henry V. He then expresses the hope that his son's reign will be peaceful (IV. v. 119, 219), not like the troublesome one that Henry has experienced:

And now my death
Changes the mood, for what in me was purchased
 Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort,
So thou the garland wear'st successively.
(IV. v. 198-201)

Tragically, Henry dies in a room called Jerusalem, never having gone to the Holy Land to seek forgiveness for his sins.
But as Manheim, like Tillyard, points out, Henry IV exhibited many contradictions that made his power precarious. He was a "strong, silent, competent, blackhearted, brutal usurper whose desperately needed accession was the cause of nearly a century of division and blood shed." Although this summation may be exaggerated, through an "iron fist under a velvet glove," Henry did achieve the status of de facto king. Paradoxically, in doing so, even though it was needed, he, like Richard III, disrupted the order of accession to the throne; and this threatened the well-being of his country. Providence, therefore, prevented his exercising power and achieving glory for England during his reign.

Unlike the rebel Henry IV and Richard III, Henry V is a legitimate heir and the ideal hero king. As a warrior, he is able to successfully lead his soldiers to victory and regain English land from the French: He "made the Dolphin and the French to stoop / And seized upon their towns and provinces" ("III Henry VI" I. 1. 108-109). Although Henry IV's actions produced a disordered and "unquiet time" ("Henry V" I. 1. 4), Henry V effectively implements Elizabethan policies that produce an illusion of an ordered state. He is an authoritative king who has changed his image from Hal, the "madcap" prince of the "Henry IV" plays. In them he spent his time with Falstaff and low companions who participated in excessive eating and drinking, as well as wenching, and purse-taking.

71Manheim, p. 66.
Although his father, Henry IV, became concerned that Hal, a future king, should stain his brow with dishonor ("I Henry IV" I. 1. 84), Hal had been observing rather than fully participating, for he avoided joining Falstaff and Poins in robbing pilgrims who made their journey to Canterbury. He later suggested that through his experiences he could better understand his subjects (II. iv. 10-20). Hal also indicated in a famous soliloquy that he pretended to be a riotous prince so that he would seem more kingly when he emerged from the "foul and ugly mists" of his experience:

And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
(I. ii. 209-212)

Thus after he is crowned, Henry V is shown not as a dissipated and weak king, but as a deliberate and assured leader. His first political action seems heartless, but it is a necessary move. He banishes Falstaff, his old guide and the symbol of disorder and anarchy, and replaces him with the Lord Chief-Justice who has served with a sense of order and an "impartial spirit":

I know thee not, old man
. . . . . . . . . .
Presume not that I am the thing I was,
For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,
That I have turned away my former self.
So will I those that kept me company.
When thou dost hear I am as I have been,
Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast,
The tutor and the feeder of my riots.
Till then, I banish thee, on pain of death,
As I have done the rest of my misleaders,
Not to come near our person by ten mile.
("II Henry IV" V. v. 47-65)

In addition, Henry prepares himself intellectually and
spiritually. Bishops Canterbury and Ely declare how Henry, formerly wild and willful, consorting with "unlettered, rude and shallow" company, is reformed into a "sudden scholar" "full of grace and fair regard. / And a true lover of the holy church" ("Henry V" I. 1. 22-23, 32, 55).

Henry has studied the policies and affairs of the commonwealth and has learned procedures of war. He, unlike Richard III, has learned to avoid the role of a tyrant and play the part of a Christian king. Although Henry IV had advised him "to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels" ("II Henry IV" IV. v. 213-214), Henry V shrewdly justifies war with France on moral grounds as he consults the clergy on this matter: "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" ("Henry V" I. ii. 96).

After gaining the public support from the spiritual leaders in claiming his right to France, Henry also readily responds to the Dauphin's taunting gift of tennis balls. He sends the Dauphin a message that Henry V of England is coming to France "To venge me as I may, and to put forth / My rightful hand in a well-hallowed cause" (I. ii. 291-293). Henry, however, quickly remembers to say that he has "No thought in us but France, / Save those to God, that run before our business" (I. ii. 302-303). Along with God's aid, the "youth of England are on fire" (II. i. 1) following Henry in a national movement to regain England's lost rights:

... since we are well persuaded
We carry [says Henry] not a heart with us from hence
That grows not in a fair consent with ours,
Nor leave not one behind that doth not wish
Success and conquest to attend on us. (II. ii. 20-24)
Yet at Southampton, Henry has to deal decisively with traitors that are in his midst. With firm justice, he condemns Cambridge, Grey, and Scroop for high treason. Although they sought his death, Henry seeks no personal revenge. However, he cares for the safety of the kingdom; thus with quick action, he sends the traitors to their death:

But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
We do deliver you. Get you therefore hence
(Poor miserable wretches) to your death.
(II. ii. 175-178)

With constancy and resolution, Henry has to make more decisions affecting the nation. He spurns the French offer (in lieu of Henry's demand that the French king resign the crown and kingdom) of Princess Katherine and some "petty and unprofitable dukedoms" as dowry (III. Chos. 28-33). Wisely, he has made efforts to avoid war, but this proposal is another insult to the English king that threatens the country. Henry then urges his soldiers to fight bravely and to do their best, to "imitate the action of the tiger" and "bend up every spirit / To his full height!" (III. i. 6, 16-17).

Even though he is an effective soldier, at the gates of Harfleur, Henry tries again to persuade the French to yield to his demand and avoid the consequences of war: "Will you yield, and this avoid? / Or, guilty in defense, be thus destroyed" (III. iii. 41-43). Then when the Governor accedes to his command, Henry orders his men to "Use mercy to them all" (III. iii. 54). His mercy is extended again when he
forbids the plundering of any place through which his army marches (III. vi. 106-113).

Henry, however, is firm when the French send a message defying Henry to come further and demanding that the English compensate the French for their losses and their disgrace. Henry replies "We would not seek a battle [as weak and frail] as we are, / Nor, as we are, we say we will not shun it" (III. vi. 166-167). Before the battle of Agincourt, Henry like a thoughtful leader, walks "from tent to tent" reassuring and encouraging his men:

For forth he goes and visits all his host,
Bids them goodmorrow with a modest smile,
And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.
Upon his royal face there is no note
How dread an army hath enrounded him;

But freshly looks, and overbears attain
With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty;
That every wretch, pining and pale before,
Beholding him plucks comfort from his looks.
(IV. Chos. 32-42)

In spite of his strengths, like other kings, Henry V also philosophizes about his limitations and the cares of kingship. He says that although kings have ceremony that creates "awe and fear" in men, a king's responsibility causes him anxious moments, unlike the "wretched slave" or "lackey" who works hard, eats well, and "Sleeps in Elysium" (IV. i. 230-275). Since he has "no wings to fly from God" (IV. i. 168), Henry ends his thoughts desperately praying for aid in the coming battle with the French (IV. i. 292-306).

Henry realizes that he is human with human needs and wants; but with confidence that God is on his side, he accepts his duty as king and leader of his army. After
reaffirming his self-assurance, he gives a rousing oration to his men. Henry also refuses Montjoy's urging that he ransom himself to the French. There is, he says, a strong esprit de corps among his men in the fight for their country in this just cause (IV. iii. 90-125).

After the French violate the rules of war and slaughter the English boys who took care of the luggage, Henry orders the French prisoners killed (IV. vii. 8-10). Although Henry's action in this matter makes him seem merciless, his tactics are necessary. A weak king such as Henry VI would not have done this; but were the French to effect a rescue, the prisoners could immediately join their country men and wage a bitter and revengeful fight against the English. Thus Henry's forces are victorious. When the French herald comes to ask the king permission to bury their dead, he tells Henry that "The day is yours" (IV. vii. 70-85). Although Henry covets honor (IV. iii. 29-30), with a show of humility, he repeatedly praises God for aiding the English in their victory:

Praised be God, and not our strength for it! (IV. vii. 86)

O God, thy arm was here!
And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all! (IV. viii. 105-107)

With the signing of the treaty at Troyes, "mangled peace" changes to "gentle peace," and Henry now can woo Katherine for his wife--not on French terms, but on his own. Unlike the courtly lover who can "look greenly" and speak eloquent and "cunning in protestation," Henry demonstrates that he is the "plain, blunt soldier," virile man, and honest
king. He, therefore, speaks directly "I love you" to the French king's daughter (V. ii. 129, 145-147). With their union, there is also hope that England and France will be united, ceasing their hatred, and changing war to "Christian-like accord" (V. ii. 352-355).

As a strong king, Henry is successful in his reign. Like the Machiavellian Richard III, he is able to plan with foresight and precision and carry out these plans with efficiency and determination. He has learned to exercise the "virtue of necessity" and achieve control of himself and others. Even though he rewarded his loyal supporters, he wisely discarded those who proved a threat to the nation. As the "mirror of all Christian kings" Henry V not only gained the support of his subjects, but he also sought the approval of the church in his military ventures. He "mingles that inimitable quality of good-willed determination with that fierce control" which Traversi considers central to the play. 72 Thus as Manheim declares, Henry "carefully constructs an image for himself which will assure his being popular and feared." 73 In doing so, Henry V, with the blessing of Providence, creates an aura of order and certainty in his kingdom. Like an artist, he takes chaos and gives it shape and stability. In contrast, Richard III's violation of Christian principles brings disorder.

72Manheim, p. 172.
73Manheim, p. 4.
CONCLUSION

Chapter one examined Richard's character and his path to the throne; chapter two, Richard's character and his effort to gain absolute power; chapter three, Richard's role in comparison and contrast to other tragically strong and weak kings; chapter four, Richard's role in comparison and contrast to Henry IV and the ideal Renaissance king, Henry V.

This examination reveals that kingship was an important concept to Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. New attitudes about what constituted good leadership were replacing those prevalent during medieval times. Since the king symbolized the aspirations of the nation, many looked to him to provide an opportunity for a pleasant life in this world rather than having them wait for the good life in some glorious future. Renaissance man realized that a strong, effective ruler was necessary to achieve this end. A weak, ineffective king brought dissatisfaction and disruption, and thus was a threat to the nation's well-being.

Many times a well-meaning, weak king could not exercise proper authority because he was faint-hearted. To overcome human weakness in a king, a new political philosophy, Machiavellianism, urged a leader to be like the lion, fox, or the pelican rather than the overly pious and amiable king who shrank from the virtue of necessity. Even though
Machiavellian thought stressed self-determination of an individual, when a king followed this course without restraint, he confronted Christian doctrines still evident in Elizabethan thought. Thus each in his role as ruler, the kings in Shakespeare's history plays and related tragedies can be categorized as either overly strong, weak, or ideal.

Macbeth and Claudius, like Richard, were efficient in military tactics, and their experience in this area enabled them to be potentially strong national leaders. All three were Machiavells, which made it possible for them to control others in order to accomplish their nefarious goals. But their ambitions to gain the throne led them to commit regicide. Going beyond the bounds of necessity threatened the health of the nation; therefore, their reigns were terminated at an early stage.

Coriolanus, like Richard III, exhibited military prowess and strong leadership qualities which could have benefited his country. Richard felt that his warrior capabilities were useless in the "piping time of peace," but Coriolanus would not have hesitated to subject the civilian populace to the soldier's discipline. Unlike Richard, Coriolanus was unwilling to stoop to Machiavellian policies and court the favor of the common people to aid in realizing his mother's ambition for him to become consul. To dissemble was disgusting and degrading to Coriolanus; to Richard III, it was a delight to play the villain. Both leaders felt
confident in their own methods, but neither was able to use them to rule effectively.

Like Richard III, weak kings such as Richard II and Henry VI alienated themselves from their subjects by obstructing the process of inheritance. Although Richard III killed the heirs to the throne, Richard II banished Bolingbroke and took his inheritance from him. And Henry VI, trying to adhere strictly to Christian virtues, committed a grave mistake when he gave his son's right to the throne to the Yorks. Because of their actions, these kings were an even greater threat to the nation; thus all three were replaced by new rulers.

Henry IV, like Richard III, was a likely king. He had proven to be a courageous and able soldier, but when Henry, "whose wisdom was a mirror to the wisest," deposed God's deputy, he interfered with the working of Providence and tainted his reign. Having to contend with guilt and civil brawls, Henry IV, like Richard III, was unable to establish a well-governed state.

In contrast to Richard III, Shakespeare illustrates in Henry V the ideal Renaissance ruler. He did not play the evil Machiavell that characterized Richard's rule. He did, however, use Machiavellian-like policies, and occasionally found it necessary to use harsh judgements. But he was careful to uphold Christian restraints. Like Richard, he was alert, intelligent, and astute in seeking the approval of the church and the support of his subjects in reaching his goals. But there was a difference in their approaches.
Henry demonstrated that his cause was right; therefore, he succeeded in evoking a spirit of comradeship and patriotism among his followers. Richard played the existential individual who does not need God; Henry sought the blessings of God on his actions. He planned with foresight and executed his plans with courage and determination. Thus this "star of England," in contrast to the "crookback," "abortive rooting hog," reigned successfully, bringing honor and harmony to the nation.

Shakespeare seems to have an ideal pattern for the good of the country. The king must be legitimate, normally attaining the throne through inheritance; and once a king is crowned and anointed, he is expected to act in the best interest of the country. But in doing so, he must act in accord with Christian tradition. Henry V was eminently successful. Richard III failed. Although he was a brutally efficient ruler, Richard's path to the throne prevented his happily occupying the throne and serving the best interest of the country. The hand of Providence was also evident in his tyranny and growing madness. Richard's capabilities gave promise of a fruitful reign, but his evil action aborted their fulfillment. At Bosworth Field Richard III, in a flurry of clashing armor, was purged from the English throne.
WORKS CITED


Sanders, Wilbur. The Dramatist and the Received Idea. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1968.


